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AN ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN SLANG IN “DOPE” MOVIE

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Abstract: Slang has been extensively examined as a sociolinguistic phenomenon and as a feature of informal communication. However, research focusing on how American slang is employed by a main character in contemporary films to construct identity and communicative meaning remains limited. This study analyzes the types and communicative functions of American slang used by the main character, Malcolm, in the film *Dope* (2015). Qualitative descriptive method was applied in this study. The framework used was Allan and Burrige's (2006). It identified and classified 157 slangs. The findings reveal that the use of slangs is distributed across five primary types: Fresh and Creative, Flippant, Imitative, Clipping, and Acronym, respectively. The slangs serve several key communicative functions, including building solidarity, expressing emotions (such as anger and frustration), insulting, initiating casual conversation, creating intimacy, and conveying vivid impressions. The analysis demonstrates that Malcolm's predominant use of Fresh and Creative and Flippant slang reflects his identity as an urban teenager navigating complex social environments, while also enhancing the film's narrative authenticity and socio-cultural realism. This study concludes that slang is not merely a linguistic feature but a crucial pragmatic tool for character development and socio-cultural representation in cinematic discourse.

Keywords: American slang, clipping, English literature, fresh and creative, imitative

INTRODUCTION

Language is not a monolithic entity (Koziol et al., 2015). It is a dynamic system comprised of various forms and functions. One of the most vibrant forms is slang which can function to identify a membership of specific social group (Larasati, 2018). This is also the key characteristic of slang that is the exclusive use for specific social groups (Damirjian, 2025). These groups are identified by such similarity as age, interest, hobbies, or other particular social group. It is predominantly used in casual, in-group

communication to show solidarity, express identity, generate humor, and convey emotions or attitudes with greater force than standard language (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

According to Zhou and Fan (2013), slang is also known for its vulgarity and rudeness. It reflects an impoliteness in society. Slang is an informal language variety characterized by a non-standard, often newly coined or repurposed vocabulary (Eble, 1996, as cited in Arista et al., 2023). It is usually used in spoken rather than written language. It occasionally refers to particular words and meanings but can include longer expressions and idioms. Mostly signified by different vocabularies, slang is used between people who belong to the same social group and who know each other well (Ayubi et al., 2024; Munthe et al., 2023). Slang can sometimes offend people when used to communicate with other people or a non-member of social group (Afrito & Isnaini, 2024). Therefore, linguistically, slang is prohibited in use in society when formality becomes the communicative function.

In the context of the United States of America, slang has become an integral part of its rich and diverse linguistic landscape, mirroring constantly shifting social and cultural dynamics (Putra, 2024). Since its early appearance, American slang has continuously developed, influenced by various factors such as social changes, the evolution of music and entertainment, and interactions between different cultural groups. This phenomenon then found a powerful amplification medium in the film industry, where language becomes not only a narrative tool but also a crucial element in building realism and characterization.

A movie has now become a powerful medium for disseminating and popularizing slang. A movie illustrates how slang is used in today's media (Ghassani et al., 2025), which not only reflects everyday language use but also has the potential to introduce new terms and phrases to a wider audience. It uniquely reflects how people speak in real life and, at the same time, popularizes these informal language varieties to a wider audience, making it an authentic reflection of a community's linguistic identity (Frumuselu et al., 2015).

As a result, the study of slang in films is not merely a linguistic inquiry but also a sociocultural analysis of how language indexes power, identity, and belonging. Through cinematic dialogue, slang becomes a marker of social positioning (Agha, 2015) and cultural affiliation to particular communities (Saputra et al., 2023) that audiences can easily recognize and interpret. Analysing slang in movies, therefore, allows researchers to observe how informal language is strategically employed to construct believable characters and realistic social interactions. Moreover, film-based analysis provides contextualized data that captures slang in naturalistic use rather than isolated lexical forms. This makes movies a valuable corpus for understanding contemporary slang usage and its communicative purposes within specific social settings.

This research chooses slang to serve as the narrative realism and character portrayal, giving the film's world and its people authentic voices. Hence, it can allow the research to explore how a movie both uses and potentially influences everyday speech. The research aims to provide an analysis of the American slang used by a movie main character of *Dope*, Malcolm Adekanbi.

The selection of this particular movie for slang analysis was based on two main reasons. First, the movie offers unique qualities that directly serve the research objectives such as high density and authenticity of slang. Second, the "Dope" is widely known for its naturalistic dialogue, which displays a very high density of contemporary

American slang. This provides abundant and authentic data for analysis, ensuring that this study captures a realistic representation of current slang usage, unlike films that may use slang sparingly or anachronistically.

The "Dope" was directed by Rick Famuyiwa in 2015). It displays a narrative about a unique high school student living in Inglewood, California, an environment with a strong urban cultural influence. The movie is known for its vibrant dialogue and the distinctive use of American slang characteristic of its depicted social and cultural context. The use of slang in "Dope" not only adds authenticity to the characters and setting but also functions to build identity, convey social dynamics, and create comedic effects.

Specifically, this movie aims to identify and classify the types of slang employed by Malcolm Adekanbi in the movie, and then analyze their primary communicative functions within the movie. The result offers insights into how the use of slang shapes character identity and cultural representation in the Dope movie.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Slang as A Language Variety

Language variety refers to specific forms of a language used by particular individuals or groups within a linguistic community. Rather than being a uniform entity, language is inherently diverse, and these differences are not random but systematic. These variations can be observed at various levels of linguistic analysis: from how the sounds are produced, the words are formed, how the sentences are constructed, how the vocabulary are chosen to how language is used in social situations.

Sociolinguists identify several key factors that shape these variations. First, the dialectal influences from neighbouring areas or places where the speaker may have lived, worked or operated. In every country, language varies by region. The regional variations of an official language are called geolects or dialects (Guillén-Nieto & Stein, 2025). Second, social factors impact dialect use. For example, younger generations may utilize different dialects than older generations, men and women may speak differently based on roles and expectations, and individuals from different classes may speak differently to signal status (Hamed, 2023). Third is situational or contextual factors, the level of formality in an interaction, the topic of discussion, the communicative purpose, and the medium (spoken or written) trigger language adaptations, known as registers or styles (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). In addition, language variety teaches us that no single pure or correct language exists used by everyone, but rather a broad spectrum of linguistic forms dynamically adapted to meet the communication and identity needs within ever changing social contexts.

The language variety framework provides a lens to examine why characters choose to use specific slang. This is not merely about conveying literal meaning, but also about fulfilling social functions like building solidarity, indicating status, expressing emotion, or creating humour all hallmarks of how language varieties are used in social interaction. Last reasons is explaining cinematic realism in movie. The authentic use of language varieties, including slang, is vital for establishing narrative realism and character depth. By understanding language variety, this research can explain how Dope convincingly replicates the speech patterns of a specific community, making the characters and the movie's world feel more real and believable to the audience. So, the language variety framework not only aids in classifying slang but also provides an analytical tool for interpreting its meaning and function within the movie's dialogue, as

well as explaining how slang contributes to social and cultural representation in cinematic narratives.

Slang is one of the language varieties used by the teenagers to express themselves in using language and developed to the need of communication. While Wentworth and Flexner (1975), focusing on American slang, describes it as very informal language, often newly coined, or used in a new sense, usually by or within a particular group. He emphasizes its continuous evolution as a cultural reflection. While according to Jonathon Green (2010), In his comprehensive slang dictionary, views slang as language used by a particular group or community of people and characterized by informality, innovation, and often a defiance of standard linguistic conventions. He also stresses its creativity and tendency to change. According to Mattiello (2008), slang has a propensity towards a sociological view of the phenomena, the view is embraced among others, and ultimately considers slang as a means of social identity and unity within a society.

Based on these definitions, slang can be clarified through its two main characteristics, informality and nonstandard nature. Using particular slang can indicate membership or understanding of that group's unwritten norms, while simultaneously setting them apart from outsiders. Dynamism and transience, slang tends to be highly dynamic, frequently coined or having its meaning altered rapidly. Many slang terms are temporary and can become obsolete quickly, though some may endure and even integrate into standard language. From the linguistic creativity, slang is a rich source of linguistic innovation. It is often created through imaginative processes like metaphor, metonymy, clipping, acronyms, or inventive semantic shifts, which makes it vibrant and expressive. Expressive and emotive function, beyond conveying meaning, slang is often used to express emotions, attitudes, or judgments more powerfully and directly than standard language. It's also frequently employed for humorous effect.

According to Allan and Burridge (2006), slang has 5 different types. They are fresh and creative, clipping or shortening, flippant, imitative, and acronym. Fresh and creative slang is new words that have emerged that did not exist before and were formed as a result of imagination, creativity, and informal forms. Clipping or shortening involves shortening a longer word or phrase while retaining its core meaning, often for brevity or informality. Flippant is used to refer to the use of words that are casual or slang made up of two or more words, that have nothing to do with the meaning. Imitative is slang formed from imitating specific sounds. Last, acronym is a type of slang that is abbreviations that begin with the first letter of the word, it is pronounced by naming each individual letter. The pronunciation of the word uses the first letter of the word.

The concept of language variety serves as a fundamental theoretical underpinning for this research on American slang in the *Dope* movie due to several crucial reasons such as first, identifying slang as a sociolect, this research understands the slang used in *Dope* as a sociolect a language variety specifically employed by a particular social group or subculture (in this case, the urban community and hip-hop subculture in Inglewood). The framework of language variety allows the study not only to note the presence of slang but also to place it within a broader social context, linking its use to the characters' group identity, age, and ethnicity. Second, analyzing slang as an informal register. The *Dope* movie portrays diverse situations, ranging from casual peer interactions to formal interviews. An understanding of registers enables this research to analyze how slang predominantly appears in informal settings and how characters might code-switch or style shift between slang and more formal registers depending on whom they are speaking to and in what context. This reveals the characters communicative competence

and the pragmatic functions of their slang use. Third, understanding slang's communicative functions.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method. The primary data source was the dialogue of the main character, Malcolm, in the Dope (Famuyiwa, 2015) movie, accessed via the film's audio and English subtitles to ensure accuracy. The data were collected through a meticulous process of transcribing instances of slang from Malcolm's dialogue and observing the movie through multiple viewings. Each identified term was examined against established linguistic definitions of slang (informal, group-specific, dynamic, non-standard).

Data analysis was conducted through content analysis, guided by Allan and Burrige's (2006) framework. The steps were as follows: first, each slang word was categorized into one of the predefined types (fresh and creative, clipping or shortening, flippant, imitative, and acronym). Next, the context of each slang term's use was analyzed to determine its communicative function (e.g., building solidarity, expressing anger). Last, the specific, nuanced meaning of each slang term was interpreted within the movie's narrative, considering character relationships and the socio-cultural setting.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings aligned with the research objectives, integrating discussion to interpret the results.

Types of American Slang in Malcolm's Dialogue

The analysis identified 152 instances of slang in Malcolm's dialogue. The distribution based on Allan and Burrige's (2006) typology is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of American slang in Malcom's

No	Types of Slang	Amount	Percentage
1	Fresh and Creative	56	35.13%
2	Flippant	46	31.08%
3	Imitative	33	22.29%
4	Clipping	17	11.48%
	Total	152	100%

The classification has brought Fresh and Creative slang as the most prevalent (see Table 2). For instance, *go ghost* (to become invisible/untraceable) and *slippery slope* (a metaphor for a risky situation). This prevalence highlights Malcolm's intelligence and linguistic creativity, allowing him to navigate his complex environment with expressive nuance.

Table 2. Fresh and creative slangs used by Malcom Adekanbi

Type of Slang	Examples	Meaning	Remarks
Fresh & Creative	Go ghost	Disappear/ become untraceable	Malcolm uses this when he wants to avoid being tracked on the dark web.
	Dig	Understand/	A creative semantic shift

Type of Slang	Examples	Meaning	Remarks
	Dope	approve Ecstasy/ molly	meaning "Do you get it?" A creative redefinition from "stupid" → "drugs" → "excellent."
	Steel-faced bobblehead	Nickname for Jib	Creative metaphor to describe a stoic but enthusiastic bass player.
	Son of a bitch	Anger expression	Dysphemistic creative idiom used for emotional intensity.

The analysis of Malcolm Adekanbi's selected slang expressions – *go ghost*, *dig*, *dope*, *steel-faced bobblehead*, and *son of a bitch*—demonstrates how slang functions simultaneously as a linguistic variety and a literary device, thereby enriching both the sociolinguistic and narrative dimensions of *Dope*. The slangs operate as a dynamic and creative informal language variety used by specific social groups or subcultures to construct and express identity. This explains how Malcolm's language indexes his complex social positioning: a Black teenager navigating between the sociolect of Inglewood youth culture and the expectations of elite educational spaces.

Expressions such as *go ghost* and *dig* exemplify what Allan and Burridge categorize as fresh and creative slang, where meaning emerges through metaphor and semantic shift. *Go ghost*—meaning to disappear or remain untraceable—illustrates the imaginative word-formation processes originating from imagination, creativity, and informal forms. From the view of sociolinguistics, the emerged expressions marks Malcolm as digitally literate and socially cautious, reflecting the youth culture's orientation toward anonymity and survival. Literarily, they operate as a concise metaphor that reveals character psychology and contributes to narrative tension.

Similarly, *dig* demonstrates how semantic innovation enables slang to become an index of group membership. Its metaphorical extension from physical action to cognitive understanding, the slang embodies linguistic creativity and semantic shifts. In terms of character voice, *dig* situates Malcolm within a linguistic tradition rooted in African American Vernacular English and hip-hop culture, thereby enhancing what cinematic dialogue scholars describe as the authentic representation of character identity.

The term *dope*, used to denote ecstasy, further illustrates slang's dynamic evolution within specific cultural contexts. This emphasizes that American slang continuously developed, influenced by social changes and interactions between different cultural groups. As a recurring lexical item, *dope* functions in the film as both denotative slang and symbolic motif, encapsulating the environmental pressures Malcolm faces and foregrounding the central conflict between ambition and circumstance.

Steel-faced bobblehead shows how slang becomes an instrument of humor, ideological stance, and interpersonal dynamics. As a vividly metaphorical nickname, it exemplifies that slang adds humor and vividly conveys strong impressions. This nickname crystallizes group camaraderie, marking Malcolm as a narrator capable of witty, observational language. From a literary standpoint, such creative constructions contribute to stylization, giving Malcolm a distinctive voice that deepens viewers' emotional and interpretive engagement.

Finally, the dysphemistic expression *son of a bitch* illustrates slang's capacity to intensify emotional expression conveying sarcasm, disbelief, or provocation. From the view of sociolinguistics, such expressions indicate how taboo language functions within

youth sociolects to articulate frustration, assert toughness, and regulate social boundaries. In literary terms, dysphemisms heighten dramatic moments and contribute to the film’s tonal realism.

Taken together, these examples reveal that Malcolm’s slang is not ornamental but structurally meaningful. It exemplifies language variety as sociolect and register – reflecting identity, solidarity, and context-dependent style-shifting – and simultaneously performs narrative functions central to English literature, including characterization, world-building, thematic reinforcement, and tone management. It is asserted that slang in movies enriches characterization, anchors the narrative in a believable reality, and serves as a subtle yet powerful vehicle for conveying thematic messages. Malcolm’s language thus becomes a site where sociolinguistic reality and literary artistry converge: a linguistic portrait of a young man negotiating the cultural, academic, and moral landscapes that shape his coming-of-age journey.

The slang expressions used by Malcolm – such as *shit*, *feminine wiles*, *bullshit*, *nigga*, and *fucked* – represent the flippant and emotionally charged forms identified (see Table 3). These expressions are marked by informality, semantic non-literality, and taboo intensification. The flippant slangs consist of multi-word expressions that have nothing to do with the literal meaning and function to convey attitude rather than denotation.

Table 3. Flippant slangs used by used by Malcom Adekanbi

Type of Slang	Examples	Meaning	Remarks
Flippant	Shit	Stuff / drugs	Used casually to refer to objects, especially molly/ecstasy.
	Feminine wiles	Seductive manipulation	Used ironically to criticize a character’s tactics.
	Bullshit	Nonsense	Dismisses fake emotions and lies.
	Nigga	Man / person (in-group)	A reclaimed in-group address within Black youth culture.
	Fucked	Ruined	Intensifies frustration about consequences Malcolm faces.

Words like *shit* and *bullshit* operate as general dismissive terms, *feminine wiles* delivers sarcasm through ironic phrasing, *nigga* functions as an in-group address, and *fucked* expresses extreme anxiety or ruin. Together, these forms illustrate broader view of slang as a dynamic and creative informal language variety used by specific social groups or subcultures to construct and express identity.

Viewed through the lens of language variety, these slang items form part of a sociolect indexing Malcolm’s belonging to urban Black youth culture. This type of slang strengthens group identity, internal solidarity, and emotional expression, and Malcolm’s usage demonstrates this social function clearly. *Nigga* signals shared cultural identity, *shit* and *bullshit* normalize informal talk within peer networks, while *fucked* heightens emotional stance in high-stress contexts. Each expression reflects the principles of identity performance and register shifting which states that speakers adapt their language based on the level of formal communicative purpose, and social context. Thus, Malcolm’s slang is a linguistic marker of solidarity, authenticity, and youth social positioning – an essential feature of the language variety that defines his environment.

From a literary perspective, these slang expressions function as stylistic devices that create character realism, emotional tone, and thematic depth. The expressions emphasizes that slang in films anchors the narrative in a believable reality and enriches characterization, and Malcolm’s slang enacts this by giving him a distinctive, culturally grounded voice. His use of *feminine wiles* reveals irony and suspicion; *bullshit* conveys frustration and distrust; *fucked* dramatizes fear and urgency. These choices deepen the audience’s understanding of his internal struggle—between surviving the pressures of Inglewood and aspiring toward academic success. In literary terms, his slang enhances the narrative’s authenticity, reinforces themes of identity conflict and socioeconomic constraint, and contributes to the textured representation of contemporary youth culture. Through these expressions, Malcolm becomes not only a linguistic subject but also a fully realized literary character shaped by the cultural forces around him.

The imitative slang expressions used by Malcolm—*yeah*, *what the fuck!*, *get up!*, *yeah, you’re right*, and the exclamatory *what?!*—are characterized by their reliance on sound symbolism, emotional immediacy, and spontaneous vocal reactions (see Table 4). The expressions were identified as imitative slang as the forms “created from imitating the sound of something or mimicking natural patterns of speech to convey quick responses or emotional force. This category captures expressions that emerge from instinctive vocalization rather than deliberate word formation, which explains why these items function as instantaneous emotional markers. *Yeah* signals ease and casual alignment with peers; *what the fuck!* and *what?!* vocalize shock, fear, or disbelief; and *get up!* reflects urgency through its abrupt phonetic delivery. These expressions embody slang’s ability to express sarcasm, disbelief, or provocation and deliver feeling more strongly than standard language. Thus, imitative forms operate as raw acoustic reflections of Malcolm’s emotional landscape.

Table 4. Imitative slangs used by Malcom Adekanbi

Type of Slang	Examples	Meaning	Remarks
Imitative	Yeah	Yes	Mimics natural speech sound of casual agreement.
	What the fuck!	Shock / anger	Phonetic expression mimicking sudden emotional outburst.
	Get up!	Wake up	Urgent, sharp command shaped by its sound.
	Yeah, you’re right	Agreement	Another repeated imitative agreement marker.
	What?! (implied in dialogue structure)	Expresses disbelief	Functions as a sound-like emotional reaction.

Viewed from a sociolinguistic perspective, these imitative slang items illustrate a youth-based, informal register used to maintain group solidarity and convey immediacy in communication. The perspective explains that slang supports identity construction by reinforcing internal bonds and signalling shared cultural norms among peers. Malcolm’s repeated use of *yeah* and *yeah, you’re right* demonstrate conversational alignment within his friendship circle, while more charged forms like *what the fuck!* mark moments of heightened emotional tension typical in urban youth sociolects. From a literary viewpoint, these expressions enhance authentic characterization, narrative realism, and

dramatic tone. Slang in movie anchors the narrative in a believable reality and enriches characterization, and Malcolm’s imitative slang reflects his vulnerability, spontaneity, and fluctuating emotional states. The sharpness of *get up!* and the explosive shock of *what?!* function as auditory cues within the narrative, shaping both pacing and mood. Together, these imitative forms reveal how slang in *Dope* operates not only as informal language variety but also as a literary tool that deepens character voice and amplifies the film’s thematic exploration of pressure, danger, and youthful resilience.

The clipping slang used by Malcolm – *bro*, *gonna*, *mom*, *kids*, and *anon* – illustrates how shortened linguistic forms function as efficient markers of informality, intimacy, and in-group identity within youth sociolects (see Table 5). The slangs often serve to strengthen the bond between speakers who share a close relationship and operate as a linguistic shortcut that reflects casual, spontaneous interaction. In this sense, *bro* signals solidarity and fraternal closeness, *gonna* represents phonological reduction typical of rapid, conversational speech, while *mom* and *kids* highlight emotional familiarity through simplified terms for family members. *Anon*, on the other hand, reveals Malcolm’s immersion in digital culture, where clipped forms are used for speed and secrecy, especially in discussions involving dark-web activity. From the perspective of language variety, these forms demonstrate how slang indexes social belonging, informality, and shared cultural norms, supporting the claim that slang is a dynamic and creative informal language variety used by specific social groups or subcultures to construct and express identity. In English literature, these clipped expressions enrich characterization by grounding Malcolm’s voice in authentic contemporary speech, helping achieve what described as a believable portrayal of characters and their environments in cinematic dialogue. Through these concise forms, the film communicates Malcolm’s youthfulness, cultural positioning, and shifting social roles, making clipping not only a linguistic feature but also a narrative device that enhances thematic depth and realism.

Table 5. Clipping slangs used by Malcom Adekanbi

Type of Slang	Examples	Meaning	Remarks
Clipping	Bro	Brother/ friend	Expresses closeness and solidarity.
	Gonna	Going to	Informal phonological reduction.
	Mom	Mother	Clipped, intimate form.
	Kids	Children	Informal, conversational clipping
	Anon	Anonymous	Used when discussing dark-web selling of drugs.

The acronym slang used by Malcolm – *SAT*, *DEA*, *FBI*, *LOL*, and *FYI* – illustrates how shortened, initial-based forms operate both as linguistic tools for brevity and as markers of the multiple social worlds he occupies (see Table 6). The acronyms are defined as a slang type formed from initials that function as efficient, informal shorthand within specific communities, showing how slang develops through creativity, social need, and cultural influence. In Malcolm’s case, *SAT* reflects his academic aspirations, while *DEA* and *FBI* signal his entanglement in criminal danger – revealing

the contrast between who he is and what he is forced into. Meanwhile, *LOL* and *FYI* represent digital-culture slang, illustrating his identity as a tech-savvy youth who communicates through quick, globally recognized abbreviations. From a sociolinguistic perspective, these acronyms highlight how slang encodes identity, enabling Malcolm to shift registers between school, street, and online spaces, supporting the claim that slang strengthens group belonging and reflects communicative purpose. In English literature, these acronyms enrich characterization and narrative realism by grounding Malcolm in contemporary youth culture and by showing how institutional power (DEA, FBI) and personal ambition (SAT) shape the thematic tension of the film.

Table 6. Acronym slangs used by Malcom Adekanbi

Type of Slang	Examples	Meaning	Remarks
Acronym	SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test	Academic context, used in Malcolm’s school discussions.
	DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration	Refers to drug-related danger of getting traced.
	FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation	Government threat mentioned by characters.
	LOL	Laugh out loud	Listed in the theoretical examples of slang (Acronym category explanation).
	FYI	For your information	Also provided in the acronym explanation section

CONCLUSION

Dope portrays Malcolm’s struggle to define himself amid societal expectations. He does not want to be trapped in the stereotype of a hood kid who either becomes a gangster or an athlete, but he is also not fully accepted in the elite world he dreams of entering. Ultimately, Malcolm learns that sometimes you have to play dirty to escape a dirty system, but he does it in his own clever and unique way.

The analysis of Malcolm Adekanbi’s slang in *Dope* demonstrates that slang functions as both a linguistic variety shaped by social identity and a literary device that structures characterization and narrative meaning. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the types of slang used reveal how Malcolm navigates multiple overlapping identities: the sociolect of Black urban youth, the aspirational register of an academically driven student, and the technologically informed discourse of a digital-native generation. his makes Malcolm’s language not merely a stylistic preference but a critical marker of his cultural positioning within Inglewood and his attempts to survive within its social dynamics.

From a literary standpoint, slang functions as a key mechanism for achieving realism and thematic depth. Slang in film anchors the narrative in a believable reality and enriches characterization. Malcolm’s voice—shaped by highly figurative expressions like *go ghost* and playful nicknames like *steel-faced bobblehead*—provides an authentic linguistic texture that aligns with his environment and supports the film’s exploration of identity conflict, danger, aspiration, and resilience. Recurrent terms such as *dope* operate symbolically as well as linguistically, reinforcing the central tension

between Malcolm's academic ambitions and the violent systems that entangle him. Dysphemistic expressions like *son of a bitch* further intensify emotional stakes, revealing the psychological pressure and immediacy of the challenges he faces.

Ultimately, the integration of slang into Malcolm's dialogue demonstrates the profound interdependence between language variety and literary construction. Slang is not incidental; it is a core element through which the film communicates cultural authenticity, builds complex character identities, and structures its thematic commentary on youth, race, and socioeconomic constraint. The use of slangs in *Dope* contributes not only to narrative authenticity but also to the representation of cultural realities within cinematic discourse. Malcolm's linguistic repertoire thus stands as a compelling example of how informal language varieties can operate simultaneously as sociolinguistic evidence and as powerful literary tools that deepen audience understanding and enhance narrative resonance.

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