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**THE EVOLUTION AND OBSOLESCENCE OF YOUTH SLANG IN  
FILMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF “MEAN GIRLS” AND  
“CLUELESS”**

Bachelor’s thesis

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## PREFACE

As noted in a report by Statista (2024), watching movies is still a favoured activity across the world. Furthermore, Bloomberg (2020) states that the majority of movies and shows are produced in English as it is the most spoken language in the world. Slang, as mentioned by Coleman (2012) and Mattiello (2008), constitutes an effective instrument that can illustrate the ever-shifting cultural and social dynamics of the younger generation. Through the lens of media and especially cinema, slang demonstrates the most informal and evolving versions of language over time.

The research examines two culturally iconic teen films, *Clueless* (1995) and *Mean Girls* (2004). The two films are close to each other in showcasing the imagination and fluidity of contemporary youth, revolving around language and the captivating features of their speech. The slang featured in these movies continues to be used by teenagers, and therefore, its influence remains active.

The research in this paper focuses on the role of youth slang. It further elaborates on this phenomenon by presenting the results of a linguistic analysis conducted on *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*. In this study, major emphasis is placed on the recognition and description of slang expressions taken from the two films. In addition, it analyzes their semantic and contextual functions as well as their relevance and use over the years. The study also explores the reasons behind the disappearance of some words from the slang vocabulary. It reveals that language changes often reflect changes in society, too. The descriptive-qualitative method was used as the research method.

The study has several aims: to examine the concept of slang and its portrayal in youth-oriented television content; to compare and contrast the use of slang in two different teenage films from different time periods; to identify the development of slang in individual films; to elucidate the occasions where slang has undergone some change or when it has lost its ability to be used; and to provide insight into the cultural effects of these changes. By reaching these goals, this analysis adds value to the knowledge of slang as a fleeting yet powerful language and cultural element.

The present bachelor's thesis includes an introduction, two main chapters, and a conclusion. The thesis is structured as follows: the introductory section gives the background and reasons

for the study. Chapter I delves into theoretical studies of slang and its function in film communication. Chapter II presents a comparative analysis of slang in *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*. The final part of the paper gives the conclusion of the major findings, and it also discusses the relevance of those findings. The results of this research may potentially serve as guidelines for teachers, translators, and media scholars interested in learning about youth slang development and its presence in popular culture.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential element of human culture that evolves with time and reflects the development of society (Purba, 2020). This idea is supported by Price (2007), who states that when society goes through changes, the language changes as well. This is evident in youth-oriented films, which portray the changing identity of youth in response to various societal, technological, and cultural changes occurring.

Crystal (2003) asserts that the quick changes happening in youth culture are a marker of its fluidity. Moreover, Wills (1995) argues that youth, who are in constant pursuit of something more exciting to express their ideas more vividly and impressively, are more likely to use slang as a vehicle for linguistic creativity and self-expression. Slang offers an informal alternative to standard language. Roth-Gordon (2020) expands on this perspective, stating that young people see slang as a more preferable form of communication than standard English. He emphasizes that slang, as a type of language, reflects different social classes as well as age groups. This introduction offers a theoretical overview of slang, its sociocultural functions, and its transformation in films as a reflection of youth identity.

### **The Role of Linguistic Style in Language Use**

Understanding slang in everyday communication is difficult because it requires a broader understanding of language style. Generally, people learn how to choose words based on their intentions, the current situation, and with whom they are talking. Consideration of language style as a concept comes when analyzing different forms of both spoken and written English. Joos (1961) states that there are five different language styles: consultative, casual, intimate, frozen, and formal. Each of these tends to be divided into vocabulary, grammar, and context. As the *Cambridge Online Dictionary* (n.d.) explains, language may be formal or informal, and the differences between them should be recognized, as they serve as a means for expressing and creating social identities.

As suggested by Coupland (2007), individuals use various forms of language for different purposes. Achieving understanding, obtaining information, or ensuring certainty are important objectives. This indicates a wider sociolinguistic viewpoint where language is fluid and changes with the context and social factors in it.

Sociolinguists such as Labov (1972) and Hymes (1974) argue that language is dynamic and constantly evolving. They disagree with the idea of full standardization, emphasizing instead that practically all linguistic variation is natural and vital to human communication. Language is a standard way of exchanging information, and it also plays a key role in establishing social relationships.

Speaking the standard language is generally appropriate in formal situations. However, informal words such as slang are widely used in verbal communication. Language standards are covered by Mattiello (2008), who says that a language has a specific or ideal form that also serves as a formal version of that language. The form of English, in terms of the writing system, grammar, and vocabulary, is standardized, and it is an official language. In most cases, standard speech is associated with a high social class. This standard language is used in educational institutions, mass media, and official settings.

Additionally, as Mattiello (2008) notes, it is evident that the language most used in non-standard slang is informal and is usually based on more creative reasons. Slang is often associated with youth and informal social settings, as it reflects a more playful and relatively humorous nature and style; however, it is important to note that it can spread to wider social circles. Slang, as Coleman (2012) states, is often used in wordplay, which allows speakers to change the meaning of something, come up with new terms for actions, and create original, stylish, and fashionable words.

### **Slang as Part of Everyday Language**

Abu Syahdeh (2004) claims that English slang is mainly used by teenagers in everyday communication. It represents the creativity and adaptability of a language. According to Boase-Beier (2006), some slang terms are brought into the common language, and in some instances, they are even considered part of the standard language. According to Sunny (2017), who cites the work of Partridge (1950), people employ slang for various reasons: for pleasure, the play of wit, and self-expression; to draw attention; to enhance the richness of their spoken language, confirm its authenticity, and mystery; also, to exclude strangers, strengthen group identity, encourage closeness, improve social relations, create informality, and conceal serious issues.

Green (2011) states that slang enables emotions and impulses. Partridge (1950) describes slang as a linguistic phenomenon that defiles the codification of language. In contrast to standard language, which is limited by grammar rules, slang is free from the restrictions of lexical or grammatical elements. Green (2011) thinks its meaning can change according to the context.

Beyond casual conversation, slang also serves other significant social purposes. According to Coleman (2012), slang is not only a linguistic tool but also a cultural and societal linguistic device that conveys cultural beliefs, builds group identity, and at the same time, challenges traditional norms. Similarly, Mattiello (2008) believes that not only humor, rebellion, and exclusivity, but also slang are key markers of youth identity. This particular phenomenon, how people use slang as a symbol to be distinct and find their place in the social hierarchy, makes slang an effective factor of change in society.

Even though slang is informal, it is still influential. Dumas & Lighter (1978) emphasize that slang is an informal, non-official variety of speech, limited to one or several small social groups, just among friends, and within the family. Nevertheless, a social function like slang usage still extends beyond casual communication. Thus, it is claimed by Andersson and Trudgill (1992) that slang connects the members of the group by allowing them to express belonging to the same social group. The *Online Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.) is also supportive of this view as it explains that slang is a tool which enables compatible people to openly talk about their circle of interest and at the same time, not to be disturbed “by other people” who cannot find a common language due to the difference in their interests.

Adams (2009) points out that the reason linguists and lexicographers have been frequently criticizing slang is that it was usually connected with very exaggerated behavior. As Zanettin (2008) argues, slang is often not perceived as formal, but rather as vulgar, impolite, or rude. However, most slang words and expressions, in terms of meaning, sound, or appearance, are not offensive or inappropriate. Moreover, rather than presenting evidence of language decline, slang is the natural process of language evolution. Every slang expression has its characteristics and significance. As a result, it is considered a basic element of every daily conversation.



## **The Emergence of Slang**

Slang appeared many centuries ago and has a rich and interesting history. While the first period slang words and phrases entered written records took place in the 1800s, their use goes back to the Middle Ages in the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. During this time, it was mainly spoken by outcasts and people from lower social classes as a way to maintain group cohesion (Coleman, 2014). Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the ‘cant’ language developed, which was a language spoken by thieves. Sorensen (2004) writes of a well-developed language that was mainly spoken by robbers and criminals in London. For example, words such as “cove” were used in the ‘cant’ language to represent man. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century, slang grew rapidly as urban areas in England expanded. The growth of slang further expanded with the growth of other urban areas in America. Slang became predominant among the working class, and it began to feature in entertainment and literature with the growth of print media.

According to Coleman (2012) from the 1900s, slang saw increased usage in the US due to the growth of jazz and youth culture. Recorded music, film, and radio also contributed to the widespread adoption of the language. After the Second World War, the youth culture led to the growth of slang leading to the creation of many slang terms and phrases buoyed by movements such as the Hippies and rock and roll music. However, from the 1980s onwards, Coleman (2012) reckons that slang saw explosive growth because of the internet, media, and technology. Movies, television shows, and music facilitated the spread of slang across the United States. Once considered taboo, certain slang words and have become widely accepted and are now used in both daily life and the workplace, despite originally being part of a secret code (Troepertova, 2022).

## **The Role of Culture and Language in Films**

The main reason why watching films is important is that it allows individuals to get a more comprehensive understanding of the culture of a different country through language. Bhugra (2018) points out that people who are not particularly interested in the different cultural experiences and are exposed to a film, can learn about the lifestyles, traditions and even the language of other countries while enjoying the story which is the most important element. Old movies, on the one hand, give invaluable insights into the past culture. On the other hand, modern movies could equally be considered reflections on current societal problems.

Sreeja (2024) states that the concept of the language used in the movies involves the visual, spoken, sound, and musical elements for the movie to be completely produced. Language is not restricted to being only the provider of information; it serves to convey emotions and, on a level, to enhance those emotions. The focus is on the audience being involved through impactful dialogues. This makes it easy to remember the characters and their iconic lines.

Media, particularly films, are powerful vehicles for recording and spreading slang; Jakob (2018) suggests that films act as linguistic time capsules, preserving the slang of their era while influencing everyday language use. Tiarna (2015), also notes that films shape language habits, especially among younger audiences who are most receptive to new ways of speaking. This synergistic relationship between the media and language stresses the role of movies in the evolution of both culture and language.

Television series and films are considered a key tool for improving English language skills, and television dialogues can serve as a model in language learning (Mittmann, 2006, Bleichenbacher 2008, cited in Troepstova, 2022). However, the specific and informal nature of slang can make it difficult for English learners to understand. Learning slang, however, can be helpful for language students who aim to be proficient communicators; watching foreign movies and TV shows can be an effective, and at the same time, entertaining way to learn English slang vocabulary.

According to Bahar (n.d), a lack of knowledge of slang expressions can limit a person's ability to participate in a conversation and leave them feeling out of place in the company of people who regularly use colloquial speech. Slang can help a person adapt more easily to the surrounding community. In addition to its linguistic benefits, picking up slang from movies as well as its linguistic benefits will provide an insight into the culture of the language speakers.

Furthermore, Sreeja (2024) emphasizes that an audience can read the personality, the background, and the reasons for the character through the depiction of their word choice, tone, and manner of speech. Dialogue may reveal the social status of the individual, the education, and the internal struggles that the character may have. In this case, the films *Clueless* (1995) and *Mean Girls* (2004) are the perfect examples of youth expressions of the time and their language. Both films dealt with the issues of the time, therefore introducing and popularizing some slang expressions. By looking at the slang

of those movies, the researcher will learn and understand the cultural factors that affected the language.

### **The Evolution and Obsolescence of Slang**

One of the most important characteristics of slang structure is its ephemeral nature. According to Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005), a slang phrase tends to be quickly adopted and recognized, but its popularity will only be sustained for a short period. Also, Suslak (2009) believes that slang and colloquialisms, just like pop culture, are part of words that lose significance as their meanings grow. Another factor contributing to slang's obsolescence is the change of means of communication, especially social media, memes, and internationalized pop culture. Mattiello (2006), on the other hand, describes slang as the most dynamic part of language that not only is the primary source of social trends but also shows how cultural and social changes can cause certain lexical items to become obsolete or, on the contrary, be adopted once again. New phrases arise and disseminate quickly, making older phrases obsolete at a more accelerated rate. Mattiello (2008) referred to this as the "viral turnover effect". Some slang phrases tend to lose relevancy in a couple of years or even months. With time, slang may become "outdated" and less relevant in the sense that it is no longer used. It may even completely disappear.

The movies *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* are exemplary examples when it comes to the evolution of youth slang. Despite being made almost ten years apart, the films not only represent two separate eras of the young generation. They are also a reflection of how slang as a concept may reflect and lead to social changes in society.

One example from the iconic movie *Clueless* (1995) is the use of "Betty" and "Baldwin". The fashion movie was the appropriate tool to illustrate the dual themes of personal liberation, individualism, and materialism during the 1990s. A novelty captured in the language used at the time was the desire to reach the top of the social hierarchy through fashion. It also captured the role it played in society. The expressions that represented the slang of the time used by the young became so popular that they were helpful indicators of societal progression. These expressions mainly referred to "popularity" and "social mobility".

*Mean Girls* (2004) presents a broader, more complex, and insightful view of teenage social lives. Phrases such as “Fetch” and “Queen Bee” are the appropriate labels to describe the characteristics of the early 2000s. This is when the popular girls or the “cool girls”, as they were referred to, determined the social hierarchy in high school. Through slang, it is possible to observe the shift in social dynamics and the switch in a teenager's priority from appearance to societal ranking and manipulation. A comparison of the two films illustrates how much slang is like an indicator that captures the changes in youth culture.

Many studies have been conducted about slang and its sociolinguistic significance, but only limited research is available about the way media, particularly movies, capture and shape the evolution of youth slang. The majority of linguistic studies focus on the formal and semantic aspects of slang and neglect its relevance and cultural significance. This study is aimed at comparing and contrasting the use of slang in *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* to trace the evolution of teenage slang and provide insight into its cultural significance.

# CHAPTER I. APPROACHES TO SLANG IN FILM COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

## 1.1 The Role of Slang in Communication

In his book *Slang: The People's Poetry*, Adams (2009) analyzes the different functions of slang in communication. He argues that slang is the poetry of everyday speech because it demonstrates the creativity that people have with a language. Furthermore, he underlines that slang adds new perspectives when people try to communicate through different creative expressions. This linguistic directness shows human language's potential.

Apart from adding value to communication, slang serves certain social purposes. As Zhang (2023) observes, different social groups have their reasons for communicating with slang. Grandparents plan to use it to talk effortlessly with their grandchildren, a particular peer group prefers using slang in private settings to feel relaxed, and adolescents want to use slang in order to keep up with the latest trends. In confirmation of this, Sunny (2015) claims that slang is employed to create belonging, to defy conventional language, and to promote friendly informality.

Brienne (2012) notes that slang permits the discussion of topics that are viewed as inappropriate not only in public but also in polite society. Moreover, most young people utilize slang to speak to make it impossible for outsiders to understand the conversation (Guzman, 2017; Zhou & Fan, 2013). A similar thought is also revealed by Blake (2010); he notes that slang functions as a kind of collective secret language that protects from judgmental overhearing while discussing sensitive issues.

Adams (2009) stresses that slang poses as an informal language, yet is still quite agile in its application and crucial in the life of a human being. As a matter of fact, slang serves an integral part in human emotion and social interaction. All of these approaches combined demonstrate slang's dual purposes, both as a means of expression and as an indicator of belonging within groups.

## 1.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Slang

According to Matiello (2008), slang can be analyzed from three perspectives: sociological, stylistic, and linguistic. The sociological perspective views slang as a tool for group identity,

while the stylistic approach focuses on distinguishing slang from other language variations (Eble 1996; Quirk et al. 1985; Stenstöm et al. 2002, cited in Matiello, 2008). It is also worth mentioning that, from a linguistic point of view, slang contributes to the development of language by bringing change and vibrancy to it (Dundes & Schonhorn 1963; Mencken 1967, cited in Matiello, 2008). To some extent, by examining these aspects, the author aims to offer explanations of why slang is an integral part of language. Examining slang through sociological, linguistic, and stylistic frameworks is critical in understanding its function in a community.

### **1.2.1 Sociological, Linguistic, and Stylistic Perspectives on Slang**

Within the sociological approach, the purpose of slang is to keep insiders together and outsiders out. Eble (1996) emphasizes the social function of slang to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesion within a group. Accordingly, the use of the same slang vocabulary helps both to gain acceptance within the group and to maintain group solidarity (Munro 1997, cited in Fathonah, 2018). As Matiello (2008) summarizes, slang is a sociocultural practice used for social purposes such as being on the same level of speech as one's audience, facilitating social interaction, and inducing friendliness or intimacy. However, slang performs not only social, but also antisocial functions in communication. Matiello (2008) explains that in an antisocial sense, slang can be used to challenge authority or to conceal information and inappropriate behavior (Franklin, 1961; Andersson and Trudgill, 1990; Stenstrom et al., 2002). Furthermore, Matiello (2008) concludes that slang allows certain social subgroups, such as criminals or drug addicts, to keep their conversations confidential, while teenagers and college students use it to distance themselves from older generations. It is not unreasonable to assume that while it can be playful and entertaining, it can also be used to shock an audience or even convey aggression (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990).

Within the linguistic approach, slang is seen as either a common word used in an unusual way or an uncommon word used in a familiar context (Yust, 1950, cited in Troepestova, 2022), and as Jespersen (1922, cited in Troepestova, 2022) stated, slang both introduces new words and gives existing words additional meanings.

According to Matiello (2008), within the stylistic approach, slang is often described as a level of usage with a vague definition. Early studies, such as Partridge (1950), described slang as “the quintessence of colloquial speech”, while Flexner (1960) noted that it is “not accepted by most people as good, formal usage” (Fasola, 2021, p. 3). Slang is usually associated with informal, relaxed speech and is considered below the neutral stylistic level (Allen, 1998; Stenström et al., 2002). Moreover, slang is not equivalent to dialect, register, or other non-standard varieties such as cant, argot, or jargon (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990; Eble, 1996). It is often perceived as an ephemeral vocabulary that is likely to either disappear or become standardized, as seen with words like ‘gay’ (Matiello, 2008).

### **1.2.2 Sociolinguistic Approach**

It seems reasonable to suggest that slang is an essential part of language that cannot be separated from its social origin and social environment. In sociolinguistics, which studies the connection between language and society, slang represents a linguistic variety with significant social meaning (Dittmar 1997). Moreover, according to Hudson (1996), languages and their social contexts are the focus of sociolinguistics. It might be reasonable to use the sociolinguistic approach for this study, as it, according to Figueroa (2014), explores the relationship between society and language. In addition to that, Wardhaugh (2006) notes that understanding the sociolinguistic structure helps better understand how language functions in everyday communication. This is because language differences are due to social factors such as gender, social status, socioeconomic background, age, culture, etc.

This study can advance knowledge on how a specific age group contributes to having a different language variation, how the specific age group uses language, and how the language evolves. In other words, from a sociolinguistic approach, the research analyses how language is used in society by means of a scientific framework.

In sociolinguistics, social factors explain how different groups of people speak the same language differently and also why people do not speak a language in the same manner at all times (Guzman, 2017). Importantly, the choice of language reflects a number of factors. The first is the characteristics such as ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, and age of an individual. These factors can impact the use of language in a variety of ways, such as differences in socioeconomic status can lead to diverse vocabulary and pronunciation

(Figueroa, 2014; Guzman, 2017). The physical and social environment where language is spoken can include a classroom, family, workplace, or social places. The setting can impact the use of language through making accommodations to code switching, using proper slang, or influencing the level of formality (Hazen, 2009). Function can also decide the choice of language. Specifically, according to Zhou and Fan (2013), it accounts for why people are interacting or communicating. In essence, individuals can change or adjust their use of language depending on their goals; i.e., people may speak or adopt different language depending on whether they are attempting to build a social connection, inform, or persuade others.

The sociocultural evolution alongside the use of slang becomes more sophisticated. Understanding slang is imperative to understanding the culture and society.

### **1.3 Definition, Characteristics, and Evolution of Slang**

After reviewing different approaches to slang, it is important to consider some basic characteristics of slang. Slang shows how a society and a culture are always evolving (Fasola, n.d.). Eventually, despite slang's popularity, there is no explicit, reliable way to classify it. Lighter and Dumas (1978) remark on the fact that though everyone can identify slang, providing a precise definition of it still poses a challenge. Slang is still a debatable subject as its definitions, classifications, and reasons for its existence as a means of communication are ongoing disputes (Matiello, 2008). The absence of a precise definition of slang arises as a matter of its many and differing approaches to its existence, character, and essence. Further discussion on the issue of categorizing slang is advanced by Matiello (2008). Matiello (2008) explains how slang differs from these other linguistic forms in several key ways: slang is not jargon, as it lacks the specialized, formal nature of professional vocabulary. Unlike cant, which is secretive and used by criminals, slang is more open and is used by different social groups for identity or solidarity. Lastly, it is not a dialect because it does not have the restriction of a certain region. Slang also differs from an accent as it pays more attention to semantics rather than phonetics. Moreover, as Matiello (2008) pointed out, slang is less formal, more humorous, or even offensive than colloquial speech.



As Prgomet (2024) mentioned, slang has undergone some remarkable changes over the years, with these phrases being a part of daily conversations. It is worth noting that the key point to stress is how strongly the mass media have affected these changes. Social media, as evidenced by Farzand (2023), appears to have played a major role. It has created a wave of new terms for people to see trending on social media. They tend to adopt and use such terms in informal settings. In terms of internet communication, “LOL,” “BRB,” etc., are the types of abbreviations and acronyms that are employed by users for rapid interaction.

Moreover, phrases and expressions are adopted in memes, cited in movies, TV shows, songs, and even by celebrities and influencers. This results in a change in slang based on pop culture. The development of slang during the past hundred years has been incentivised by social and technological aspects that have led to language change.

### **1.3.1 Defining Slang and Its Key Characteristics**

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2010) defines slang as highly casual words and phrases that are primarily used in conversation, particularly by specific groups of individuals, such as kids, criminals, musicians, etc. Eble (1996) defines slang as colloquial vocabulary that creates solidarity within a social group or associates speakers with a particular trend in society. Simpson (2003) surmised that slang marks the identity of youth based on their style of conversation and their choice of words when communicating with their peers. However, slang continues to pose a challenge in dictionary compilation.

Not every spoken word with a modification is slang. Svartvik and Leech (2006) outline that for a word or expression to be considered slang, group members must widely accept or adopt the word. According to Svartvik and Leech (2006), slang words or phrases do not have an objective test or descriptions because standard words can be used in specific ways to denote slang. For example, ‘screw’ in standard English is a metal piece for holding equipment together. However, currently, as a slang word, it means taking advantage of someone. A similar viewpoint is supported by Andersson and Trudgill (1992), who note that the creation of slang phrases happens in the same manner as standard language, and they can include different figures of speech, such as similes or metaphors. Slang can also be words that are newly coined, current words that are given innovative meanings, or fringe meanings of words that become mainstream. Importantly, for slang words to be acknowledged, they must be widely adopted among the group.

As Kemmer (n.d.) defines it, slang tends to be unwritten, more spoken and informal, often including taboo subjects like sex, violence, bodily functions, etc., and is characterized by expressiveness. In vocabulary, slang is often metaphorical, hyperbolic, and emphatic. Phrases such as “shit faced” or “dickhead” show a strong tendency for vivid, sometimes offensive expression (Kemmer, n.d.).

As noted by Sunny (2015), slang tends to form multiple synonyms for a single word, as in the case of “babe”, “baby cakes”, “sweetie-pie” for a partner, or “kooky”, “schizo”, “loco” for “crazy.” The flexibility of meanings is one of the greatest testimonies to the invention and flexibility of slang. Another characteristic of slang is the joining of two words to form one new word, a process which results in the formation of flippant words (Jakob, 2018). For instance, a couch potato is a lazy person who occupies a couch and watches television all day. Imitation is the act of using a regular word while changing its meaning by fusing it with another word to form a new one. “Wanna” is a good example since it is derived from “want” and “a” meaning want to. Acronymic expression is also a feature of slang. Precisely, in a phrase, slang acronyms take each word’s first letter and combine them to form a new word (Jakob, 2018). For instance, the word “lol” is a slang term for the phrase “laugh out loud”. Yet another type of slang is created when words are shortened; for example, the word “chilling” is shortened to “chillin”.

Additionally, Zhang (2023) indicates that American slang is ever captivated by euphony phrases where the listener's attention is captured. Phrases such as “chit-chat”, “kiss-ass” and “hobnob” exemplify vivid and rhythmic language due to redundancy and rhyming. Phonetic characteristics of slang accentuate the enjoyment of catchy and humorous phrases. Euphemism serves the purpose of sugar coating uncomfortable social issues so efficiently that it's ever so popular. “Six feet under” refers to death, and “go to the ladies’ room” is used to refer to the toilet (Zhang, 2023).

### **1.3.2 The Evolution of Slang in Language**

The period from the 1920s onward has seen the English language changing continuously, with new phrases gaining popularity in different historical periods. An English slang term that was popular some years back is now considered rude or old-fashioned, and slang terms that used to exist have been replaced with more recent vocabulary that corresponds with society’s changes, trends, and movements.

All examples in this paragraph are based solely on the article *The Evolution of English Slang* by Language Trainers (2025). It demonstrates how English slang has changed over the past century and illustrates the adaptability and dynamism of the English language.

### *English Slang in the 1920s*

People were enjoying newfound freedom after the end of World War I. These great changes could not help but be reflected in the slang used. Some popular slang terms of the 1920s include:

- **The Big One / The Big Sleep—Death**
- **Canary** — A woman singer
- **Daisy** — Pejorative slang of the 1920s man to refer to a man that is not very masculine.
- **To be dizzy in love with a dame** — To be madly in love with a girl or woman.
- **Hack** — Taxi
- **A half** — 50 cents
- **Head doctor** — Psychiatrist
- **Horn** — Slang of the 1920s for telephone
- **In stir** — In prison
- **Kisser** — Mouth
- **Have a smell from the barrel** — Have a drink

### *English Slang of the 1950s*

The 1950s were a time of prosperity after World War II, when new technologies and cultural developments shaped society. These are some examples of basic slang from the 1950s:

- **An ankle biter** —A mischievous child
- **Cool cat** — A person who is considered cool or fashionable.
- **Cruisin' for a bruisin'** — Looking for trouble
- **Greaser** — A young person that belonged to a subculture characterized by a slicked-back hairstyle
- **Turkey** — A stupid or useless person

### *English Slang of the 1980s*

The 1980s were a time of great social and cultural change. It was an era when technology was rapidly advancing, bold fashion trends were being set, and people from all walks of life had more opportunities than ever before. The decade also saw the introduction of MTV, the rise of hip-hop music, and the emergence of video games as a popular form of entertainment. A list of new slang words that entered everyday language in the 80s and have remained for many years:

- **Big whoop** — Big deal (used ironically)
- **Eat my shorts!** — A not-very-polite phrase to tell someone to stop bothering you or leave you alone.
- **Rad** — Short for “radical,” meaning something or someone that is cool, impressive, or exciting.
- **Homeboy, homegirl, homie, etc:** — Slang of the 80s (still used today) to talk about a person who grew up in the same place as you.
- **Take a Chill Pill:** Relax! (This phrase originated on college campuses in the early ‘80s.)
- **Vegging out:** Relaxing and doing nothing

#### *English Slang of the 1990s.*

Pop culture had a huge impact on life in the 90s. Technology also began to play an increasingly important role in everyday life, with many people owning home computers for both work and leisure, such as playing games or chatting with friends, which was reflected in the use of language. Some popular slang terms from the 1990s include:

- **As if** — An expression of disbelief or skepticism.
- **Buzzkill** — Someone or something that damps the mood.
- **My bad** — A term used to acknowledge you did something wrong.
- **Phat** — A term used to describe something as cool or impressive.
- **So sue me!** — A phrase said in a defiant manner, implying that you don’t care about the consequences of your actions.
- **Talk to the hand!** — An expression meaning “I’m not listening”.
- **Trippin’** — Slang of the 90s to talk about someone who goes over the top or acts crazy.
- **Whatever!** — Used to express indifference or dismissiveness.

The 1990s were a great decade and a time of great creativity in Hollywood. Quotes from 1990s movies that became popular slang terms and are still used today:

- **“Hasta la vista, baby!”** — Spoken by Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, this phrase became a way of saying goodbye.
- **“Hakuna Matata”** — A phrase from *The Lion King* meaning “no worries”.
- **“I’m the king of the world!”** — Spoken by Leonardo DiCaprio in *Titanic*, this phrase became a way of expressing joy or pride.
- **“The first rule of Fight Club is: you do not talk about Fight Club.”** — Spoken by Brad Pitt in *Fight Club*, this phrase became a way of saying “you must keep something secret”.

### *21st Century: English Slang Today*

The 2000s saw the rise of social media, smartphones, and an emphasis on self-expression. One of the main characteristics of society is its multiculturalism, as well as a growing awareness of social justice and inclusivity, and movements and discussions around race, gender, and sexual orientation are becoming increasingly prominent. Some popular slang terms from this era include:

- **Bae** — A significant other or a crush.
- **Extra** — Means over-the-top or excessive.
- **FOMO** — Stands for “fear of missing out,” which means the anxiety or unease caused by the idea of missing out on something.
- **Ghosting** — The act of abruptly ending communication with someone without explanation or notice.
- **Gaslighting** — To manipulate another person into doubting their own judgment or understanding of events
- **Lit** — Refers to something that is exciting or cool.
- **On fleek** — Something is perfect or flawless.
- **Queer** — Someone who identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community, or to something that is non-conforming or outside the norm.
- **Squad** — Refers to a close group of friends or associates.
- **Sus** — short for “suspicious,” referring to something that seems questionable or sketchy.
- **Swag** — A sense of style, confidence, or attitude.

- **Thirsty** — Someone who is desperate or eager for attention, validation, or affection.
- **Troll** — Someone who deliberately posts provocative or offensive comments online to elicit strong reactions from others.
- **YOLO** — Stands for “you only live once,” which is a way of saying that you should make the most of life because it is short.

English slang has changed incredibly quickly in the last century, especially because it now adapts to the cultural and social events of each time period. While some phrases or words tend to go out of usage, others begin to be accepted into everyday English slang (Language Trainers, 2025). Additionally, it cannot be overstated how movies and culture have defined the slang of the 90s and 2000s, and even the 2020s. Therefore, it is not only logical to assert that language and slang go through changes over time; rather, it is clear that these changes are deeply rooted sociologically and culturally.

#### **1.4 Slang in Films**

The use of slang in movies reflects the youth cultures of its time. Several studies have explored the use of youth slang in movies, with many of these emphasizing how it reflects the sociological landscape. As Lippi-Green (2012, cited in Troepstova 2022) states, television is considered one of the media tools that, in his opinion, greatly influences the sociolinguistic environment, including language formation. Referring to Jimmy (2014), slang, in all forms of media, including television, films, and song lyrics, is used to depict emotions in dialogue. Personal relationships between characters are revealed through dialogues that are characterized by social and linguistic naturalness (Mandala 2007, cited in Troepstova, 2022). In other words, a film is a work of art that reflects social characteristics such as culture and the history of human existence and is communicated to the public through media such as theatre, television, and the Internet.

Movies serve as an integral component of culture, especially among the younger demographics. In the same manner, movies define contemporary culture the way we know it. According to Bahar (n.d.), cinema aids in the understanding of the modern language, and movies are as powerful a tool in shaping languages and cultures as are books. Danesi (2010) argues that teenage movies that integrate the widespread use of slang in the script do so to portray social hierarchies.

Buddisystems Inc. (2025) claim that movies often offer daily communication with innovative causal sentences. The use of informal language instead of standard English phrases has been observed in the case of ‘catchy phrases’ featured in popular films. As Buddisystems Inc. (2025) further explain that some movie slang phrases outlive for several years, which is further propagated with more and more movies. *Star Wars* are known for coining a large set of phrases, including “May the force be with you” otherwise used in a large number of other scenarios. The *Godfather* (1972) famous quote, “I’m gonna make him an offer he can’t refuse”, demonstrates the powerful influence slang has had on culture.

Zhou and Fan’s (2013) work, titled *A Sociolinguistic Study of American Slang* explores how language relates to social status, in particular how the youth of American society use slang as a way to identify group boundaries and resist authority. The study by Zhou and Fan (2013) is important and can be used to analyze the use of slang in *Mean Girls* and *Clueless* as a way of gaining distinction and rebelling against mainstream culture.

Schilling-Estes’ (2001) study investigates the linguistic differences in high school students. The outcome of the study provided important perspectives into the social hierarchies caused by slang. The author’s work on the burnouts and jocks identifies how using different types of slang can delineate social groups. As a result, it provides a template that can be used to evaluate the movies *Mean Girls* and *Clueless*, in particular, how the speech patterns of different characters in the movies align with their different social groups. In essence, the work can provide a basis to analyze how youth slang in movies represents the group identity and personality of actors. Similarly, the study by Silalahi et al. (2024) investigates the social dynamics in the *Barbie* film: the slang used by characters and how this impacts their social interactions and bonds. The authors establish that, beyond enriching the narrative, the slang used in *Barbie* represents many social hierarchies in the film.

Tagliamonte and Roberts’ (2005) study lends credence to the claim that the forms of language used in the media reflect the broader society’s use and evolution of language and may even lead the way for language innovation. The research shows how popular culture, through TV and cinema, can introduce innovative language words and phrases. Moreover, the study reflects on the analysis of slang use in *Mean Girls* and *Clueless*, where some words and phrases become markers of the characters’ identities and spread into youth culture more generally.

## 1.5 The Obsolescence of Slang in Youth Culture

A key defining feature of slang is its transient nature, a characteristic of the flexibility of youth communication. Consequently, younger users of the language discard them in favour of new turn of phrases that uphold social divisions. As a result, words that are in widespread use after a certain period become outdated, and new trends appear (Mattiello, 2008). Obsolescence is an important phenomenon when exploring how media reflects youth culture.

The analysis by Coleman (2014) identifies that slang words and phrases rapidly become obsolete because one of their primary uses is to signal group exclusivity and group identity. In other words, when specific words are widely adopted by a generation, the next youthful generation comes along and discards the old slang words and introduces new terms to maintain their linguistic uniqueness. Similarly, the analysis by Zhou and Fan (2013) underscores how the transient nature of slang is connected to the functional aspects of youth identity. Particularly, the authors reveal that once slang becomes too mainstream, it ceases to serve its purpose as a marker of social distinction and falls into disuse.

Another cause of obsolescence is connected to the cultural shifts among the youth population. Indeed, slang is motivated by the economic, political, and social activities of the era. Such conditions change over time, which can also affect the slang words that were connected to them. Phrases that used to be lighthearted or benign can shift to become unacceptable, giving rise to public discontent or a conscious refusal to utilize them. These informal expressions may become the target of informal or formal censorship in educational, professional or media contexts which propels their decline. The reassertion of standard language policies in schools or the media suppresses the use of volatile informal speech, thus reducing the lifespan of slang. In the study by Suslak (2009), the author outlines that language borrows many of its forms from the social world. This means that slang is heavily impacted by its cultural environment, and this changes over time with new cultural shifts.

Slang disappears and evolves much faster in the digital age, but old phrases tend to come back with different meanings because language tends to recycle itself. Fasola (n.d.), as mentioned above, noted that older slang often disappears or gets absorbed into everyday speech, losing its original essence. One example that proves this slang evolution is the word



“gay”. It was used as a slang word to describe a man who is homosexual, and now it is widely accepted as a standard term.

## CHAPTER II. ANALYSIS OF SLANG WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS IN THE FILMS “CLUELESS” AND “MEAN GIRLS”

Following the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter, this part focuses on the empirical study. It gives a detailed analysis of youth slang as portrayed in the teen films *Clueless* (1995) and *Mean Girls* (2004).

The choice to study *Clueless* (1995) and *Mean Girls* (2004) is guided by the fact that these are iconic teen films that, due to their connection to youth culture, have shaped and significantly influenced the development of youth language. Both films are often cited in academic and non-academic works due to their influence, as well as the presence of distinctive youth slang and their rich vocabulary.

In addition, these two films mark a specific turning point in the chronology of the youth media world, i.e., from the pre-digital era (1990s) to the dawn of the Internet era (2000s). This makes them particularly useful for comparative analysis studies, as they cover not only the evolution of language, but also the changing culture and lifestyle of young people due to technology. *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* allow for retrospective analysis because these films provide an opportunity to observe the use and non-use of certain slang over time.

The study is primarily focused on the identification of slang expressions that characterise the language use of teenagers, as well as the functions that they serve in communication. In addition, this chapter also studies socio-cultural aspects that might have influenced slang or its relevance in the current linguistic context. This study analyses how youth slang is represented and developed in the narratives of *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*. The main goal of this study is to gain a more meaningful connection with the dynamics of the relationship between language, media, and culture.

The primary objectives of the study are:

- to identify and classify the slang expressions used in the movies *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*;
- to explore meanings and functions of slang in the context of the films;
- to examine the development of slang in both films;

- to identify the occasions where slang has undergone some change or when it has lost its ability to be used;
- to provide insight into the sociocultural factors influencing the development of youth slang and its obsolescence.

This study is based on the following research questions:

1. What slang expressions are most commonly used by the characters in *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*?
2. What is the communication function and context of using youth slang in each film?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the meaning of the slang words between *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*?
4. What social and cultural factors contribute to the spread and the disappearance of youth slang?

## 2.1 Research Methodology

The data sample used for the study consists of two iconic American teen films: *Clueless*, released in 1995, and *Mean Girls*, released in 2004. Both movies provided rich linguistic and cultural material that allows the collection of data and the analysis of the evolution of youth slang in film by comparing the two. The research design adopted for this study is a descriptive qualitative method, which, according to Seliger and Shohamy (1989), is suitable because it is used to prove the reality of events through clear descriptions. This approach was most appropriate to analyze the conversations between different characters in the movie. As Taguchi (2018) notes, descriptive qualitative research is appropriate when gathering qualitative data and then interpreting the data. It involved gathering, organizing, and classifying the data.

The data collection and analysis process followed the following steps:

1. The process began by watching the two films, *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*, with English subtitles. This way, the researcher could collect accurate information about the slang words and phrases used in the two movies.
2. Each slang word and phrase was recorded in tables, and the frequency of their use was noted.

3. To ensure no slang words and phrases were missed, the researcher watched the two movies two more times, each time recording slang words and phrases.
4. The researcher also downloaded the scripts for the two movies to confirm if the slang words recorded are present.
5. A search was conducted for information on the stylistic marking of the collected words and phrases to determine whether they belong to the informal register or slang.
6. For each of the slang words and phrases, the researcher searched for their definitions in the *Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang* and *Urban Dictionary*.
7. The context of each slang word and phrase was identified. The context included aggressive requests, friendly requests, offensive talk, sexual talk, drug talk, reacting to a situation, describing a situation, friendly address, offensive naming, offensive addressing, and threat (informed by Troeperstova's (2022) study)
8. Slang words and expressions used in both films were then compared and contrasted.

The choice of *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* is justified because the content of both films deals with school social hierarchy, self-identity, peer pressure, and teenage relationships, and develops in a similar way. These films offer a detailed overview that enables the researcher to examine how slang reflects and shapes social behavior and youth culture.

### **Clueless (1995)**

*Clueless* was released in 1995 and has a rating of 6.9 out of 10 on IMDb (IMDb, 2022). The movie follows Cher Horowitz (Alicia Silverstone), a wealthy and posh high school student from Beverly Hills. Together with her friend, she is busy finding love and changing people's social image. Cher decides to help the new girl, Tai Frasier, fit in and become a popular girl. However, Tai is attracted to skater Travis Birkenstock instead of a rich boy named Elton. Cher ultimately goes through the process of personal development, makes up with her friends, and concentrates on charity work as her purpose in life. While bringing the audience a comic view on the matter of materialism and the vanity of teenagers, *Clueless*, noted by Gartenberg (2020), is at the same time a movie that became a cult classic from the '90s for its fashion, slang, and cleverness.

### **Mean Girls (2004)**

*Mean Girls* was released in 2004 and is an American teen comedy film that has a 7.1/10 rating on IMDb movie database (IMDb, 2022). The film is about Cady Heron, played by Lindsay Lohan. Cady is a 16-year-old girl who has just moved from Africa to Chicago and attends a public school for the first time. She becomes friends with outcasts Janis Ian and Damian Lee. They introduce her to the Plastics, the school's most popular group, led by the manipulative Regina George (Rachel McAdams) and her two friends. Cady decides to join the Plastics to take revenge. However, she gets herself involved in their toxic behavior gradually, especially after she has started dating Regina's ex-boyfriend. The centerpiece of her social success caused betrayal and chaos, in which she then recognizes the mistakes of her actions, apologizes to her friends, and becomes a key player in breaking down the rigid social hierarchy of the school. *Mean Girls* addresses the problems of bullying, peer pressure, female rivalry, and self-identity through sharp satire and humor. Truitt (2024) says that together with the film's delightful dialogue, cultural references, and remarkable lines, the film has a cult status among the teenage movie genres in a long-lasting manner.

Both *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* criticise the structure of teen social hierarchy, self-identity, and materialism. Even though the films came out nine years apart, they have not lost their influence and are still very loved by the audience.

## 2.2 Results

Tables 1 and 2 show the slang words identified in each movie, their meanings, and the number of times they are used. To identify both formal and informal meanings, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* and *Urban Dictionary* were used.

Several categories of slang were found, and they are listed below. These are banned words and expressions, obscene and vulgar slang, generic slang that verges on colloquial speech, and slang words that have varying definitions and stylistic markings depending on the dictionary.

*Clueless* and *Mean Girls* showcase the slang typical for young people during their respective periods and within specific subcultures. In *Clueless*, characters speak in the "Valley Girl" style, which is characterised by the excessive use of filler words like "like" and "whatever". In contrast, the dialogues in *Mean Girls* reflect the speech patterns of teenagers who entered the 2000s, shaped by the increasing influence of technology and the Internet.

**Table 1.** Slang words and expressions in “Clueless”,

<b>Slang word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
As if	Expressing disbelief or disdain	Reacting to a situation	9
I’m Audi	Refers to leaving	Reacting to a situation, describing a situation	1
Whatever	Being indifferent	Reacting to a situation	6
Baldwin	An attractive male	Reacting to a situation, describing a situation	3
Stems Nice stems.	Good looking and attractive legs	Reacting to a situation	1
Betty	A beautiful woman	Friendly address	4
Buzz	Rumor	Reacting a situation	1
Toe-up Look at her, she’s a “toe up.	Someone who is disorganized	Offensive addressing, describing a situation	1
Sucky	Something that is unpleasant	Reacting to the situation	5
Monet	Something or someone that is goodlooking from a distance	Reacting to the situation, describing to a situation	1
Choked	To poorly execute a task	Describing a situation	3
Hymenally-challenged	Referring to a virgin	Reacting to the situation, offensive talk	1
Bugging	To pester or annoy a person	Offensive talk, reacting to a situation	11
Cake boy Your man is a cake boy	Referring to a homosexual person	Offensive talk, offensive naming	1
Digits	To ask someone for their phone contacts	Friendly request, reacting to a situation	2

Surf the crimson wave	Experiencing monthly periods	Reaction to the Situation, describing the situation	3
Phat	Great music	Describing the situation, reacting to a situation	2
Hagsville	Someone who is unattractive	Offensive talk	1
Chin pubes	Facial hair (goatee)	Describing a situation, offensive talk	1
Kato You are a kato.	Referring to someone who is a freeloader	Offensive naming	1
Postal	Losing one's mind	Describing the situation	3
Oinker	A derogatory word to describe a police officer.	Offensive naming	2
Wiggin	Pestering or bothering someone	Reacting to a situation, offensive talk	4
Slide	Dancing	Describing a situation	2
Loadie	Someone who is drunk	Describing the situation, offensive talk, drug talk	1
Boinkfest He needs a good healthy boinkfest.	Referring to having sexual intercourse	Sexual talk	1
Jeepin You been jeepin' around	Having sexual intercourse inside a vehicle (Cheating)	Sexual talk, reacting to a situation	2
Clambakes I thought maybe you had an in on the heavy clambakes.	A popular person	Describing the situation	1
Rationed	Too busy	Reacting to a situation, describing a situation	1

Couch commando	Taking control of the TV	Offensive naming	1
Outie	I'm leaving	Describing a situation	2
Doobie	Marijuana	Drug talk	1
Herbal refreshment	Describing marijuana	Drug talk	2
In the bag	Achieving	Describing a situation	1
Pool	Make a bet	Reacting to a situation	4
What the hell	What is going on	Reacting to a situation	8
Messiah	A generous person	Friendly request/friendly address	1
Fin	Money	Friendly request/reacting to a situation	8
Killer	An attractive woman	Reacting to a situation	5
Bailing	Out doing something	Describing a situation	1
Go Bump	Talk	Friendly request	5
Chill Out	Relax	Friendly request	7
Playing footsie	Flirting	Sexual talk	3
Barneys	Stupid people	Offensive addressing	2

*Table 2. Slang words and expressions in "Mean Girls"*

<b>Slang word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Fetch That's so fetch.	Something that is cool and impressive.	Reacting to a situation, describing a situation	2
Cherry popped Is your cherry popped?	Breaking virginity	Sexual talk, offensive talk	2
Queen Bee	The leader of a group	Describing a situation, reacting to a situation	8
Mathlete	A student who takes part in math contests	Friendly addressing	1
Kidding	Joking	Describing a situation, reacting to a situation	5



New meat	A new student	Friendly addressing, offensive naming	2
Cool jams	Good music	Reacting to a situation, describing a situation	6
Gucci Hootchie She's a little Gucci Hootchie.	Someone who spends money on fake luxury items	Offensive talk, describing a situation	1
Shit She's rich as shit	Something with value.	Describing the situation, reacting to a situation	13
Grool	Something that is impressive	Describing a situation, reacting to a situation	1
Plastic They're plastic.	A teenage group that is famous in a school.	Describing the situation, reacting to a situation	7
Holy shit.	Suprise	Reacting to a situation	5
Burn book	A journal	Describing a situation, offensive talk	2
Skeeze	Acting strange and weird	Reacting to a situation, offensive talk	4
Word vomit	Saying unpleasant words unexpectedly	Offensive talk, reacting to a situation	1
Boob job.	Breast augmentation.	Describing a situation	2
Man candy	A handsome man	Friendly addressing, reacting to a situation	3
Crush	Romantically like another person	Describing a situation, reacting to a situation	2
Sick I have plans for some sick parties.	Something impressive.	Describing a situation, reacting to a situation	1
Drama queen You're such a drama queen!	Getting upset over minor issues.	Offensive addressing, reacting to a situation	4

Fugly	A vulgar way to tell someone they are ugly or unattractive	Offensive addressing, offensive talk	1
Motherfucker	An insult	Offensive addressing, offensive talk	7
Rad Totally rad.	Very good	Describing a situation, reacting to a situation	1
Bitch/bitchy She was pretty bitchy.	Malicious, spiteful, or arrogant behavior.	Offensive addressing, offensive talk, reacting to a situation	13

### 2.3 Analysis

Tables 1 and 2 show that slang routinely features in films about teenage life. Taken together, the two tables answer the first and second research questions, which sought to establish the slang words and phrases used in the movies *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* by the main characters. There are several slang words used in the two films. For example, in the movie *Clueless*, slang words and their meanings included: I'm audi (I'm leaving), betty (beautiful woman), Baldwin (an attractive male), cake boy (a gay man), chin pubes (facial hair), loadie (drunk), couch commando (taking over the TV set), playing footsie (flirting), doobie (marijuana), oinker (police cruiser), and many more words specified in table 1. In the movie *Mean Girls*, the slang words and their meanings that were identified from the movie included: fetch (something impressive), cherry popped (breaking virginity), new meat (new student), Gucci hootchie (buying fake luxury products), queen bee (leader of a female group), grool (impressive), skeeze (acting strange and weird), word vomit (unpleasant words), man candy (an attractive male), bitch (arrogant behavior) amongst many other slang words as outlined in Table 2.

#### 2.3.1 The Most Popular Slang Words and Phrases in Each Movie

Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that both films frequently use informal language. The calculations show that *Clueless* had 44 slang words and expressions, while *Mean Girls* had 24. In *Clueless*, one of the most frequently used slang terms was *bugging*, appearing 11 times. The second most common expression was *as if*, which occurred 9 times, followed by *what the hell* and *fin*, both of which appeared 8 times. Other notable slang expressions,

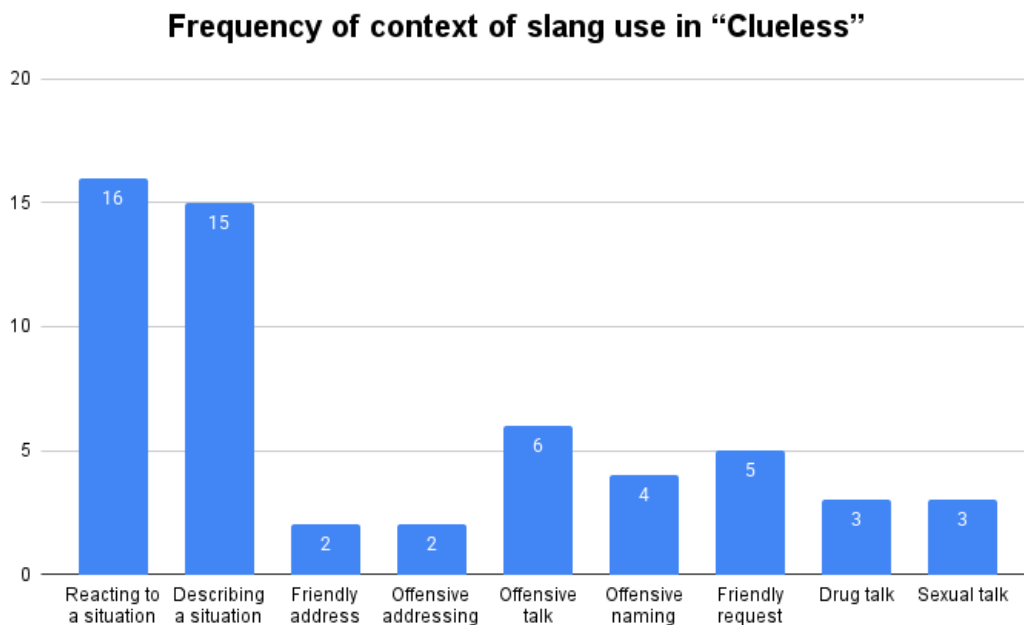
though less frequent, included *chill out* (7 times), *whatever* (6 times), and *sucky, killer*, and *go bump* (5 times each). Additionally, terms like *betty*, *wigging*, and *pool* each appeared 4 times.

In *Mean Girls*, the most frequent slang terms were *bitch/bitchy*, as well as *shit*, each appearing 13 times. Following closely were expressions like *queen bee* (8 times), *plastic* (7 times), and *motherfucker* (7 times). Other notable slang terms included *cool jam* (6 times), *kidding* (5 times), and *holy shit* (5 times). Less frequently, but still notable, were terms like *skeeze* and *drama queen*, both occurring 4 times. Interestingly, it appears that *Mean Girls* includes more vulgar / taboo expressions than *Clueless*.

### 2.3.2 The Most Common Context of Slang Use in Each Movie

Contexts for the use of these terms are as important as quantitative indicators of term frequency. The different contexts in which slang appeared were noticed when watching *Clueless*. As indicated in Figure 1, slang was used in various situations, and the frequency of slang usage in each of them is compared.

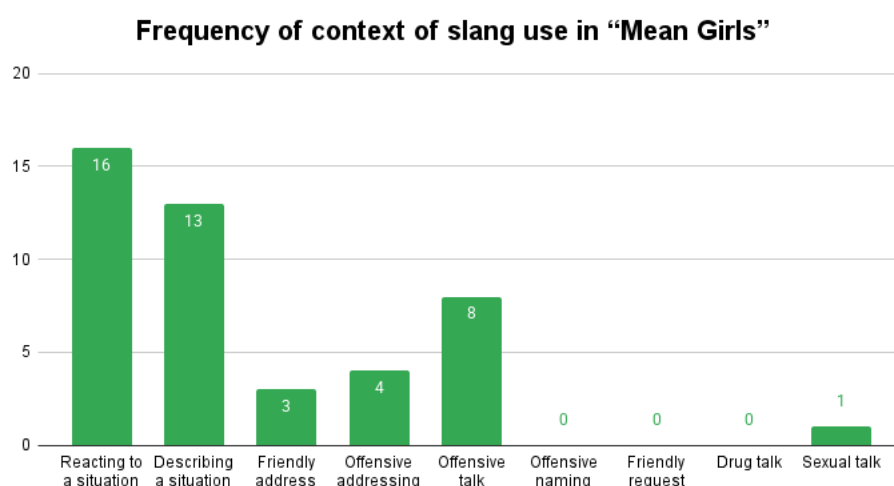
Figure 1 demonstrates the results of the context of slang use identified in *Clueless*.



**Figure 1.** Frequency of context of slang use in "Clueless"

As the diagram demonstrates, the most common contexts for slang in *Clueless* were reacting to a situation (16 times) and describing a situation (15 times), showing how the characters interact with their environment. For instance, Cher uses the slang *Ugh, as if!* to distance herself from something that is not appealing to her. These phrases demonstrate to what extent slang can be considered the reflection of emotions, social identity, and group belonging, supporting the theories discussed in Chapter I. *Clueless* uses offensive talk (6 times) and offensive naming (4 times), highlighting the use of slang to judge characters, often based on their appearance or social status. For example, comments like *She's a full-on Monet* are an indirect way of making fun of someone. Sex talk (3 times) and drug talk (3 times) were also found in the movie. This fits into Hudson's (1996) theoretical framework that social context is the main aspect that influences language choice.

Figure 2 demonstrates the results of the context of slang use identified in *Mean Girls*.



**Figure 2.** Frequency of context of slang use in “Mean Girls”

In *Mean Girls*, slang is used most commonly in response to a situation (16 times) and in the description of a situation (13 times). These illustrate how the characters respond and how they characterize the environment in a witty way. This is consistent with the view of Sreeja (2024), who notes that slang acts as a powerful tool in preserving the characters' presence in the audience's mind. Friendly address (3) and offensive terms (4) are slightly less common in *Mean Girls* as compared to the other contexts. This is similar to Zhou and Fan's (2013) idea that slang denotes group identity, as seen in *Mean Girls*, where expressions such as *so fetch* are used to reinforce social stratification within the “cool”

group. Offensive talk (4) and offensive naming (4) are ways to establish social positions in the group. This is illustrated by a character like Regina George, who uses sarcasm to make fun of others. This also reveals, as described by Danesi (2010), that the powerful aspect of slang is its social and cultural role, where it shapes the communication between different cultural or social groups. Nonetheless, themes of sex talk (1) and drug talk (0) are less frequent in the film *Mean Girls*.

To summarize, although both films use slang in a way that exposes youth culture and social dynamics, *Clueless* contained more varied contexts, especially in offensive and drug-related talk, compared to *Mean Girls*. Nevertheless, both films use slang to create social signs, either for fun, to construct identity, or to mark social boundaries. As Zhou and Fan (2013) argue, slang in film mirrors the transformations in youth culture and thus can be seen as a window through which the audience can observe the linguistic style adopted by the characters to play their roles and establish their relationships.

### **2.3.3 Similarities and Differences in Slang Usage and Meanings**

Both films contain large slang lexicons, but there are notable resemblances and distinctions in how the language is used. Regarding the third research question, focused on the similarities and differences in the meaning of the slang words between these two movies, *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*, and what it reveals about the evolution and obsolescence of slang in youth language, several interesting insights were established. It also reveals that youth language has changed over time, reflecting the sociocultural changes.

Both films utilize slang as a significant tool for character development and social signaling. Regarding attractive persons, the two movies have used unique terms. For example, in *Clueless*, *Betty* and *Baldwin* refer to an attractive woman and man, respectively, while in *Mean Girls*, *man candy* refers to a handsome man. In youth culture, describing looks using slang reflects on the group focus on social desirability among peers (Coleman, 2012). Additionally, both movies depict slang usage to embody social hierarchy. Specifically, in *Clueless*, the words *loadie* and *cake boy* signify orientation, and in *Mean Girls*, the words *Plastics* and *queen bee* refer to an elite group and its leader, respectively. Indeed, according to Guzman (2017), slang as a language shapes the social groups among the youth. Both movies also present how slang has developed terms to express admiration and greatness. Slang words, including *sick*, *fetch*, or *rad* in *Mean Girls* and *killer*, *phat*, or *stem* in *Clueless*,

collectively communicate approval or admiration. In other words, specific usage of slang remains the same even if certain words are no longer used after a certain duration. A key characteristic of slang, according to Andersson and Trudgill (1992) is slang as an informal language. In both *Mean Girls* and *Clueless*, slang facilitates informal interactions. Such an informal use of slang defines the casual characteristic of youth language, allowing for easy communication among the youth.

Despite being nearly a decade apart, both *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* exhibit notable similarities in their use of slang. Both films utilize slang as a means of defining group membership and reinforcing social hierarchies. Cher's clique in *Clueless* and *the Plastics* in *Mean Girls* rely on distinctive language to create an in-group, marking their social standing and reinforcing their dominance within their respective peer groups. Additionally, female characters are the primary users of slang in both films, reflecting a broader cultural emphasis on femininity as performance. Speech, in this context, plays a crucial role in social navigation, where language helps shape identity and belonging. Furthermore, mastery of slang is closely tied to social status in both films. Characters who are fluent in the dominant vernacular, such as Cher or Regina, hold cultural capital and wield power within their social circles, using slang to affirm their influence and position.

From analysing the difference in slang meanings in the two movies, contextual evolution emerges as a key factor, reflecting the changing cultural landscape. Specifically, *Clueless* being a 1990s film had words such as *hymenally-challenged*, which mean a virgin, and *Surf the crimson wave* to denote menstruation. These words may not well be understood by the current youth audiences compared to words in words present in the *Mean Girls* script, such as *Cherry popped* to reference virginity and *fetch* to mean something great. These may show a change towards a more direct language in contemporary youthful populations.

There is a significant difference in tone and the presence of profane words between the two movies. In *Clueless*, the writers used a softer style of language with slang words such as *toe up* to mean someone who is disorganized and *sucky* for something that is unpleasant. On the other hand the *Mean Girls* movie has direct and profane words including *motherfucker*, *bitchy*, and *fugly*. It could mean that in cinema, the 2000s were characterized by increased media tolerance as compared to the 1990s.

To assess the impact of slang on the audience, its popularity and longevity were also analysed. Various social and cultural factors greatly influence how young people's language spreads, as clearly demonstrated in the movies *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*. One significant factor, which was also mentioned in Chapter I, is group identity. Slang assists teenagers in being part of a community and, at the same time, sets their individuality. Both films show how slang is used by inner circles, such as Cher and The Plastics, to reveal who is accepted and who is not. Another factor would be cultural status: being knowledgeable about a group's dominant slang provides the individual with social status and some privileges, as shown by such characters as Tai and Cady, who quickly adjust their language to be part of it.

Cultural movements influence, change, or create these factors. While *Clueless* was an example of the 1990s covered with materialism and a focus on appearance, slang flaunted the image and status of the individual. The movie *Mean Girls*, which presents the era of the 2000s metaphorical shift, shows how digital media and self-culture, where the form of language is more talkative, come into existence. Furthermore, changing attitudes regarding gender, media, and language also play a role in transforming youth slang usage. Whereas the language used in *Clueless* was characterized by manners, *Mean Girls* represents a series of direct and vulgar expressions, thus demonstrating how the social values of the past have been transformed by media influences. In summary, peer group dynamics, cultural values, media influence, and changing social norms are all elements in the process of youth slang formation and transmission.

### **2.3.4 The Obsolescence of Slang in *Clueless* and *Mean Girls***

The study also addresses the gradual disappearance of certain slang expressions over the years. Slang obsolescence is a well-known phenomenon, as youth are always affected by social changes, cultural shifts, and technology (Tagliamonte & Roberts, 2005). Terms that characterize the enthusiasm of young people become outdated and irrelevant as new generations come along due to changing habits in terminology.

According to Suslak (2009), slang indicates the values and identity of youth at a particular time. These values will change, as will the language, causing old phrases to become obsolete.

A qualitative method was used to examine the obsolescence of slang in *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*. Although no formal study was conducted, the analysis was based on contextual

observations and informal discussions with young people who were born between approximately 1997 and 2012. Most respondents did not understand the terms “Baldwin” (an attractive man) and “cake boy” (a derogatory slang term for a homosexual man). This suggests that these terms have lost their relevance in modern culture because they are no longer part of the modern lexicon.

In the movie *Clueless*, phrases like “I’m an Audi” and “Baldwin” represented the carefree California youth of the 1990s. The social dynamics unique to that era are well described by these terms. Today, very few people use such terms, which suggests that they are outdated because, for example, “Baldwin” is now rarely used and has been replaced by phrases like “bae” or “man crush”, which are more appropriate in today’s times. Another example, slang term *phat* once used to express admiration in the 90s, slung around without context but has been largely replaced with “lit”, “fire,” and “slay” which resonate more strongly with the youth.

Obsolescence is also quite clearly indicated by a decrease in usage over time. Tagliamonte (2005) argues that slang is inherently fleeting and goes through what is called a “life cycle”, becoming popular and then becoming obsolete. To explore a more contemporary approach, the researcher examined TikTok, YouTube, Twitter (X), and recently released films and television series aimed at teenagers. The focus was on analyzing the assumption that slang from *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* has been incorporated into modern English. For example, “fetch” from *Mean Girls* is still culturally significant, but is now used mostly in a humorous manner rather than as authentic slang. This is the contradiction, the phrase seems to have lost its youthful appeal.

To support these observations, several contemporary slang dictionaries were consulted, including *Urban Dictionary*, *The Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang*, and *Green’s Dictionary of Slang*. Any term marked as obsolete or presented only in historical context in contemporary slang dictionaries was considered no longer in use. For example, expressions such as “toe-up” (meaning disheveled or unattractive) and “loadie” (referring to a drunk person) were found to be either absent from current slang databases or marked as obsolete, further confirming their obsolescence.

*Clueless* features more examples of outdated slang including “digits,” “toe-up,” and “surf the crimson wave.” Some terms, like “cake boy,” would now be considered offensive or



inappropriate due to changing norms around representation and inclusion, which also contributes to their demise. On the other hand, *Mean Girls* features slang expressions like “cool” and “sick,” which have since been adopted as slang phrases used by people of all ages in a more relaxed manner. This suggests that not all slang goes out of style forever — in some cases, phrases lose their distinct youthful identity and become commonplace.

Ultimately, as youth culture changes, influenced by media, technology, and evolving values, language changes, too. What spreads quickly through peer groups and pop culture can disappear just as quickly, replaced by new forms that reflect the identity and concerns of the next generation.

## CONCLUSION

The rapid development of slang has had an impact on the development of the English language as a whole. The analysis of slang as a tool of social interaction reveals the fundamental importance of slang in young people's lives. This shows that slang is strongly involved in the way people communicate their feelings, move through the social world, and reflect on their cultural space.

This study examines the relationship between language, culture, and identity through youth slang in *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*. The study identifies and compares the slang words and phrases used in the movies *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* by the main characters. The research has revealed that slang is a feature of its time: the slang words spoken in the movies were varied. In *Clueless*, the slang words like *Betty* and *bugging* signify the 1990s, which were dominated by aspects of materialism, the appearance of a person, and the issue of being different. On the other hand, *Mean Girls* revealed an era of digital media, and that aspect of social marketing with the help of words such as *fetch* and *burn book* that were rather reflecting an ironic and performative approach to teenage life. Slang is seen in both movies as an indicator of being part of a certain group. However, essentially, it strengthens the barriers and separates rather than unites. This is in line with the fact that slang is not just about communicating, but identity and power are also involved.

The crucial point of the study was the investigation of obsolescence. There are changes in the culture, which, therefore, lead to changes in the language. What was popular then is no longer popular today, yet that very shift reveals the issues that were relevant to young people at that particular time. Movies like *Clueless* and *Mean Girls* have helped introduce the audience to the language of American youth, sometimes even determining the way of speaking of a specific generation.

A qualitative, comparative approach was useful not only for extracting words but also for extracting the social values that lie beneath these words. The discourse of the cultural context, the uncovering of the identity narrative, and the changes over the years, facilitated the examination of the development of slang. Slang is a dynamic reflection of the youth culture and identity.

## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Kiire slängi areng on avaldanud mõju inglise keele arengule tervikuna. Käesolev uurimus käsitleb keele, kultuuri ja identiteedi vahelist seost noorte slängi kaudu filmides «Clueless» ja «Mean Girls». Uurimus tuvastas ja võrdles peamiste tegelaste kasutatud slängisõnad ja -väljendid.

Slängi kui sotsiaalse suhtluse vahendi ja mitteametliku kõne analüüs näitab, kui oluline on see nähtus noorte elus. See tõestab, et släng mängib olulist rolli tunnete väljendamises, sotsiaalses liikumises ja kultuuriruumi peegeldamises.

Filmide analüüs näitas, et släng on oma aja peegeldus. Konkreetsemalt väljendasid filmide slängisõnad oma ajastu noortekultuuri. Filmis «Clueless» viitasid slängisõnad nagu Betty ja bugging 1990ndatele, mil tähtsal kohal olid materialism, välimus ja erinevuse probleemid. «Mean Girls» peegeldas digitaalse meedia ajastut, kus sõnad nagu fetch ja burn book väljendasid pigem ironilist ja performatiivset suhtumist teismeliste ellu. Mõlemas filmis nähakse slängi grupikuuluvuse näitajana. Siiski tugevdab see pigem piire ja loob eraldatust kui ühendab. See näitab, et släng ei ole ainult suhtlemise viis, vaid selles peegelduvad ka identiteet ja võimusuhteid.

Uurimistööl oluline osa oli keele vananemise nähtuse uurimine. Kultuurimuutused viivad keele muutumiseni. Mis oli kunagi populaarne, ei pruugi täna enam olla, kuid just see muutus toob esile teemad, mis olid sel ajal noorte jaoks aktuaalsed. Filmid nagu «Clueless» ja «Mean Girls» on aidanud tutvustada publikule igapäevast ameerika noorte keelekasutust ning mõnel juhul isegi kujundanud terve põlvkonna kõnemaneeeri. Kvalitatiivne, võrdlev lähenemine võimaldas mitte ainult sõnu koguda, vaid ka nende taga peituvaid sotsiaalseid väärtusi mõista. Kultuurikonteksti diskursuse, identiteedinarratiivi ja aastate jooksul toimunud muutuste analüüs hõlbustas slängi dünaamika põhjalikku uurimist. Samuti käsitles see slängi seotud sotsiaalseid teemasid terviklikult.

Uuringu järeldusena võib öelda, et släng on dünaamiline keeleline element, mida pidevalt mõjutavad identiteedi kujunemine, kultuurimuutused ja loominguuline eneseväljendus. Släng ei ole lihtsalt mitteametlik keel, vaid tõeline peegeldus elavast noortekultuurist ja identiteedist.

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