



Ke Mopitori: A sociolinguistic analysis of slang expressions among the youth of Pretoria

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ABSTRACT

Slang, as a predominant form of informal language, has been widely used in Mabopane society for decades. This study investigates the sociolinguistics of slang among the youth of Mabopane, Pretoria, with a particular focus on the slang expressions they use, the reasons for their use, and the social contexts in which these expressions occur. Although slang plays a significant role in everyday communication and identity formation among young people, it remains an underexplored area in Sociolinguistics. Therefore, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions on language variation, youth identity, and informal language practices in South African communities. A qualitative and quantitative research approach was used using questionnaires distributed through purposive sampling to youth participants in Mabopane. Of the 100 questionnaires distributed, 83 were completed and returned. A total of 349 slang expressions were collected and analysed thematically and sociolinguistically. The findings reveal that Mabopane youth use slang extensively to describe people, activities, emotions, social behaviours, and everyday experiences. Slang was found to serve various functions, including identity construction, group solidarity, secrecy, creativity, and social belonging. However, the study also found that excessive use of slang may negatively affect learners' academic language proficiency and formal communication skills. The study recommends further research on the linguistic and structural features of Mabopane slang, broader documentation of slang expressions, and the compilation of a Mabopane Slang Dictionary. The study contributes to scholarship by expanding knowledge on youth language practices and highlighting the sociocultural significance of slang within South African township communities.

Keywords: Slang, Communication, Language, Identity, Sociolinguistics, Society, Youth, Informal Language

INTRODUCTION

Slang is one of the most vibrant and creative aspects of language, reflecting not only the linguistic innovation of its speakers but also the social realities in which it emerges. It is typically understood as an informal, nonstandard variety of language, often associated with youth and subcultures, and is used to mark in-group solidarity while differentiating members from outsiders.¹ Although slang is often

¹ Connie C. Eble, *Slang & Sociability: In-Group Language among College Students* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 1996); J. Coleman, *The Life of Slang*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 2014).

dismissed as ephemeral or marginal, its study provides important insights into how people negotiate identity, build relationships, and adapt language to suit dynamic communicative needs.²

In South Africa, slang plays a particularly significant role due to the country's complex multilingual environment and sociocultural history of the country. Urban youth have long drawn from multiple linguistic resources—English, Afrikaans, and indigenous languages—to create hybrid forms of expression that reflect their lived realities. For example, Tsotsitaal has been studied as a township language that embodies street culture, creativity, and youth identity.³ These hybrid slangs not only provide a platform for innovation but also reflect broader sociolinguistic processes such as code-switching, borrowing, and semantic shift.⁴

Mabopane, a township located north of Pretoria, is a site of rich linguistic interaction where slang is deeply embedded in youth culture. For decades, young people in Mabopane have used slang not only for communication and information-sharing but also to construct and negotiate social identities, to foster cohesion, and to express creativity. Their use of slang extends beyond face-to-face conversations to digital platforms such as text messaging and social media, thereby reinforcing its role in shaping both oral and written discourse. Importantly, the use of slang in Mabopane reflects wider social trends while also remaining unique to the local community.

Despite its social significance, slang remains underexplored in sociolinguistic scholarship. Mainstream textbooks either overlook slang or treat it only tangentially, focusing instead on more established topics like dialect variation, code-switching, and language attitudes.⁵ Similarly, while African urban slangs such as Sheng in Kenya and Tsotsitaal in South Africa have received some attention, localized varieties such as Mabopane slang remain undocumented.⁶ This gap underscores the importance of research that captures community-specific slang practices, not only for linguistic scholarship but also for cultural preservation.

This paper, therefore, aims to contribute to the continuity and development of slang research by investigating the sociolinguistics of slang among the youth of Mabopane. Specifically, it examines (1) the commonly used slang expressions, (2) the motivations behind their use, and (3) the communicative situations in which slang is used. By focusing on Mabopane youth, this study provides fresh insights into the interplay between language, society, and identity, while also highlighting the implications of slang for education and academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Slang

Slang has been notoriously difficult to define, in part because of its fluidity and constant evolution. Dumas and Lighter argue that slang is best understood as a variety of informal language used to establish group identity and signal nonconformity to standard norms.⁷ Similarly, Eble describes slang as “an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group.”⁸ Slang is therefore not only about vocabulary but also about the social meanings it conveys.

What distinguishes slang from other informal registers is its markedness: it is intentionally innovative, playful, and often ephemeral. Coleman emphasizes that slang thrives on creativity and novelty, with expressions often arising and fading quickly, depending on the social group.⁹ While

² Elisa Mattiello, *An Introduction to English Slang: A Description of Its Morphology, Semantics and Sociology*, vol. 2 (Polimetrica-International Scientific Publisher, 2008); Bethany K Dumas and Jonathan Lighter, “Is Slang a Word for Linguists?,” *American Speech* 53, no. 1 (1978): 5–17.

³ Sarah Slabbert and Carol Myers-Scotton, “The Structure of Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho: Code Switching and in-Group Identity in South African Townships,” 1997; D. Ntshangase, “Isicamtho: The Youth Language of Soweto,” in *Language and Social History: Studies in South African Sociolinguistics*, ed. R. Mesthrie (Ed.) (David Philip, 1995), 75–92.

⁴ Dennis Papi Makhudu, “An Introduction to Flaaitaal (or Tsotsitaal),” in *Language in South Africa*, ed. Rajend Mesthrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 398–406.

⁵ Ronald Wardhaugh and Janet M Fuller, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (John Wiley & Sons, 2021); Janet Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315833057>.

⁶ Alamin M Mazrui, “Slang and Code-Switching: The Case of Sheng in Kenya,” *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere: Schriftenreihe Des Kölner Instituts Für Afrikanistik*, no. 42 (1995): 168–79.

⁷ Dumas and Lighter, “Is Slang a Word for Linguists?”

⁸ Eble, *Slang & Sociability: In-Group Language among College Students*.

⁹ Coleman, *The Life of Slang*.

standard definitions of slang often stress its informal nature, Mattiello highlights its sociological role: slang is a mechanism for social bonding, identity construction, and symbolic resistance.¹⁰

Functions of Slang

Scholars agree that slang serves multiple social and psychological functions. Eble identifies key roles such as establishing solidarity, creating in-group identity, and excluding outsiders.¹¹ Slang also contributes to humor, playfulness, and stylistic innovation.¹² Among Mabopane youth, these functions are evident in the expressions they use daily. For example, the term “skhothane” (a stylish person who flaunts wealth or fashion) functions as a marker of identity and a way of excluding those who do not belong to the same youth subculture. Expressions such as “Ma’hurry up” (people who have money or who are respected for what they do or money) and “grootman” (an older or respected male figure) establish solidarity and hierarchy within peer groups. Others, such as “vaya” (to leave) or “jys mal” /wa gafa (you’re crazy, often used humorously), contribute to humor and create a relaxed communicative atmosphere. These examples align with the broader sociolinguistic observation that slang allows youth to express belonging, be creative and resist formality.

Slang in the African Context

Slang has received increased attention in African sociolinguistics due to its role in multilingual urban settings. In Kenya, Sheng emerged as a youth language that blends Swahili, English, and local languages, functioning as a marker of urban youth identity and innovation.¹³ Similarly, in South Africa, Tsotsitaal and its successor Isicamtho have been studied as urban township slangs rooted in multilingualism and sociocultural transformation.¹⁴

The situation in Mabopane mirrors these patterns. Local slang blends Setswana, Sepedi, English, and Afrikaans, reflecting the township’s multilingual character. Expressions such as “haai man” (an exclamation of disbelief) and “o tla mbora” (you will bore us/you’re being boring) illustrate code-switching and semantic shifts similar to those observed in Sheng and Isicamtho. Likewise, the use of terms such as “dolla” (money) or “spana” (work) reveals how Mabopane slang incorporates and redefines lexical items, keeping them dynamic and contextually meaningful.

Slang in South Africa

In the South African context, slang reflects the country’s unique history of apartheid, urbanization, and multilingualism. Tsotsitaal, for instance, emerged in the mid-20th century as a “gangster language” but has since been appropriated more widely as a marker of township identity and solidarity.¹⁵ Isicamtho has continued this tradition, functioning as a fluid and dynamic urban youth code.¹⁶

Mabopane slang can be understood as part of this continuum of South African urban youth languages. However, unlike Tsotsitaal or Isicamtho, Mabopane slang has received little scholarly attention. Expressions such as “dala what you must” (do what you must do) and “kasi vibe” (township lifestyle or feeling) capture uniquely local experiences and identities that are not fully reflected in more generalized accounts of South African slang. By examining Mabopane slang, this study documents the diversity of township languages beyond the better-known varieties.

Research Gaps

While the literature establishes slang as a key sociolinguistic phenomenon, three main gaps can be identified:

¹⁰ Mattiello, *An Introduction to English Slang: A Description of Its Morphology, Semantics and Sociology*.

¹¹ Eble, *Slang & Sociability: In-Group Language among College Students*.

¹² Mattiello, *An Introduction to English Slang: A Description of Its Morphology, Semantics and Sociology*.

¹³ Ali A Mazrui, “The Black Woman and the Problem of Gender: An African Perspective,” *Research in African Literatures* 24, no. 1 (1993): 87–104.

¹⁴ Slabbert and Myers-Scotton, “The Structure of Tsotsitaal and Isicamtho: Code Switching and in-Group Identity in South African Townships”; Ntshangase, “Isicamtho: The Youth Language of Soweto.”

¹⁵ Slabbert and Myers-Scotton, “The Structure of Tsotsitaal and Isicamtho: Code Switching and in-Group Identity in South African Townships.”

¹⁶ Ntshangase, “Isicamtho: The Youth Language of Soweto.”

Limited dedicated scholarship: Slang is often overlooked in sociolinguistic textbooks and research compared to topics such as code-switching, language contact, or language attitudes.¹⁷

African youth slangs are underdocumented: Although Sheng, Tsotsitaal, and Isicamtho have received attention, localized slangs like Mabopane slang remain undocumented, despite their richness and vitality.

Educational implications unexplored: Few studies address the impact of slang use on formal education, academic performance, and literacy practices, even though participants in this study reported that excessive slang use negatively influences school language practices.

This study seeks to address these gaps by systematically documenting Mabopane youth slang, analyzing its functions, and situating it within the broader African and global sociolinguistic scholarship on informal varieties.

Table 1: Sample of Mabopane Slang Expressions, Meanings, and Functions

Slang Expression	Meaning / Translation	Main Function
Skhothane	Stylish person, show-off	Identity, group membership
Spoti	To chill/relax with friends	Solidarity, leisure
Grootman	Older/respected male figure	Respect, hierarchy
Vaya	To leave/go	Everyday communication
Jy mal	You are crazy	Humor, playfulness
Haai man	Expression of disbelief	Exclamation, emphasis
O tla mbora	You will bore us / boring	Criticism, exclusion
Dola	Money	Material culture, identity
Spana	Work/job	Practical, everyday reference
Dala what you must	Do what you have to do	Resistance, self-assertion
Kasi vibe	Township lifestyle/feeling	Identity, community belonging
Mara wena	“But you!” (playful criticism)	Humor, teasing
Sharp	Okay / cool	Agreement, affirmation
Vibe	Atmosphere/energy	Social cohesion, atmosphere
Zozo	Informal shack/structure	Localized identity, urban experience

This table provides an initial snapshot of the creativity and functions of Mabopane slang, demonstrating how expressions simultaneously reflect identity, humor, solidarity, and localized experience. A fuller categorization and analysis of the 349 collected expressions is presented in the Findings session.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative-quantitative design, intending to investigate the sociolinguistic functions of slang among the youth of Pretoria, specifically in Mabopane. The descriptive approach was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to identify, record, and analyse slang expressions while also providing insights into the social motivations and communicative contexts in which slang is used. The quantitative element of the design was useful in tabulating and categorising the slang expressions collected for frequency and pattern analysis.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of young people residing in Mabopane, Pretoria. Given the centrality of youth in the creation and circulation of slang, they were deemed the most appropriate participants. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that respondents were active users of slang in their daily communication. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to participants, with 83 completed copies successfully collected and returned, yielding a response rate of 83%.

¹⁷ Wardhaugh and Fuller, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*; Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to elicit:

- Common slang expressions used by the youth of Mabopane.
- The motivations behind the use of this slang.
- The communicative contexts or situations in which slang is used.

The questionnaire contained both open-ended and closed-ended items. Open-ended items allowed participants to provide examples of slang expressions in their own words, while closed-ended items guided them to reflect on reasons for usage and social functions.

Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to participants in different social settings where youth often gather, including schools, recreational spaces, and community centres in Mabopane. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Slang expressions were collected directly from their responses without modification to preserve authenticity.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 349 slang expressions were gathered from the returned questionnaires. These were subsequently analysed using a thematic categorisation method, where slang expressions were grouped based on their semantic domains (e.g., greetings, insults, friendship terms, lifestyle expressions). Frequencies of occurrence were calculated, and results were presented in simple tables to aid interpretation. Then, each category of slang was subjected to sociolinguistic analysis to determine its function, usage contexts, and impact on youth communication practices.

Table 2: Sex/Sexuality Related Slang Expressions

Slang Term	Meaning	Function
Smash	To have sex	Euphemism; normalizing casual sex
Chop	To have sex	Peer-group secrecy
Hit	Casual sex, often male bragging	Peer identity, masculinity
Score	Sexual success	Humor; reducing taboo
Mdavazo	Oral sex	Euphemism, secrecy
Ride	Woman-on-top sex	Euphemism, metaphor
Burn	Contracting an STI	Humor, warning
Chesa	“Hot” sex or STI	Metaphor, playfulness
Mavoso	Money after sex or spending a night together	Objectifying, peer humor
Fede	Greeting with a sexual undertone	Code-switching, secrecy
Drop pants	Invitation to sex	Directness, humor
Nkalakatha	Big man, sexual potency	Hyper-masculinity
G-string	Revealing underwear	Objectification
1 not	Hit and run	Euphemism
Chillaz	Casual hangout implying sex	Euphemism, secrecy
Cream	Orgasm	Euphemism
Lit	Good sexual performance	Peer admiration
Tap	To sleep with someone	Euphemism
Smash and pass	Casual sex, then moving on	Peer-group values
Body count	Number of sexual partners	Peer bragging, identity

Example in context

“Ntwana, ke bethile ngwana ola wa TUT 1not.” (Bro, I had sex with that girl from TUT and I’m moving on.)

“Ba mo jele afterparty.” (They slept with her at the afterparty.)

“Wena o rata chillaz fela ka diweekend.” (You always want casual hangouts on weekends.)

The sexual slang of Pretoria youth is marked by creativity, metaphor, and playfulness, reflecting both linguistic innovation and social dynamics. Much of the vocabulary relies on metaphorical euphemisms drawn from everyday domains such as food (*chesa nyama*, *skhaftin*, *banana*), technology (*download/upload*, *remote*, *screen munch*), and work (*kea spana*, *cheque*). These metaphors provide a means of discussing sexual topics in ways that obscure their explicitness while making them accessible and humorous within peer groups. In this way, slang reduces the taboo associated with sexual discourse and normalizes sex as a topic of casual conversation, a process consistent with Crystal’s observation that slang functions to innovate expression while masking sensitive content.¹⁸

Humor and exaggeration further characterize this lexicon, with terms such as *dipetlele* (hospital after rough sex) and *rasa* (to scream during sex) serving as playful dramatizations. Such expressions allow youth to approach sensitive subjects with levity, lowering social tension and reinforcing group solidarity. This resonates with Ndlovu’s findings that township slang operates as a space where young people negotiate taboo topics through joking and creativity.¹⁹ In this sense, slang functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a form of social bonding and boundary marking,²⁰ enabling peers to joke, tease, and mock one another while maintaining discretion from outsiders, particularly adults.

Beyond humor, the lexicon reveals insights into broader social and gendered dynamics. Expressions such as *grootman benefits* and *blessor* highlight the prevalence of transactional sexual relationships, often tied to socio-economic inequalities—a trend also noted by Leclerc-Madlala in her work on “blesser-blessee” relationships among South African youth.²¹ Similarly, terms like *cheri wa di stocko* (girl known for casual sex) illustrate the stigmatization of female sexuality in contrast to the celebratory framing of male promiscuity, echoing Eckert’s argument that youth language often reflects and reinforces gender ideologies. At the same time, place-based expressions such as *Pitori service* and *kasi Netflix* demonstrate how sexual slang is used to mark local identity, distinguishing Pretoria youth from other urban communities.²² Taken together, these features show that Pretoria’s youth sexual slang is more than playful language; it is a linguistic reflection of social realities, identity construction, and cultural commentary.

Table 3: Money-Related Slang Expressions

Slang Term	Meaning	Function
Chankura	Money (general)	Township identity marker
Matlakala a go ithabisa	Cash (from friend)	Solidarity, peer ties
Maphepha	Banknotes ('papers')	Metaphor, secrecy
Pinkies	R50 notes (pink color)	Humor, specificity
Jaket	R10 notes (blue)	Code for small money
Clipa	R100 note	Peer code
Bona masepa	Broke/no money	Humor, exaggeration
S'khwama	Big money/wallet	Prestige
2 bob	Small coins	Humor, belittling
Lekopi	R5 coin	Township pride
Chelete	Money (Sesotho)	Multilingual borrowing
Tao	R1,000	Peer prestige
Moolah	Money	Global borrowing
Kontant	Cash hand-to-hand	Secrecy
Hustle	Ways of getting money	Peer identity

¹⁸ D. Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* Blackwell. , 2008.

¹⁹ Ndlovu N., “Township Slang and the Negotiation of Identity among South African Youth.,” *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 31, no. 2 (2013): 203–16.

²⁰ S. Makoni and U. H. Meinhof, *African Languages and Identities* (Routledge., 2004).

²¹ Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, “Transactional Sex and the Pursuit of Modernity,” *Social Dynamics* 29, no. 2 (December 2003): 213–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533950308628681>.

²² P. Eckert, *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice: The Linguistic Construction of Identity in Belten High*. (Blackwell, 2000).

Ga oje selo	You are broke / don't have money	Humor, teasing
Spana	Money from hard work	Peer solidarity
Drop	Payment, salary	Euphemism
Madibas	R200 notes (Mandela's face)	Respect, metaphor
Ching-ching	Sound of coins	Humor, secrecy

Example in Context

“Re nyaka nyuku gore ro groover.” (We need cash to go to the party.)

“Ke setse ka pinkies go tswa mo payday.” (I'm carrying a R50 note from payday.)

“Ga gona chankura mo kasi vandag.” (There's no money in the township today.)

Pretoria township youth draw heavily on multilingual resources (Setswana, Sepedi, Nguni, English, and global hip-hop slang) to create a vibrant money-related lexicon. Much of the slang is metaphorical, drawing from colors (blue, green, pinkies), objects (maphepha, stack, s'dudla), and personification (Madibas). These metaphors make money-talk playful, help mask economic realities, and enable discreet in-group communication. This aligns with Crystal's observation that slang often develops as a coded language for discussing sensitive or socially marked topics.²³

Another striking feature is the local adaptation to global influences. Terms like guap, moolah, and boss life are borrowed from international hip-hop but integrated with local forms such as chankura, chelete, and mshika-shika money. This blending reflects what Eckert describes as the role of youth language in constructing cosmopolitan yet localized identities,²⁴ and also aligns with Makoni and Meinhof's findings on the fluid, hybrid nature of African urban linguistic practices.²⁵

Finally, the slang reflects socio-economic commentary. Expressions such as blesser cheque and grootman's hand highlight transactional relationships shaped by inequality, echoing Leclerc-Madlala's work on “blesser-blessee” dynamics in South Africa.²⁶ Meanwhile, terms such as skipa and plug money emphasize the informal hustles central to youth survival, consistent with Ndlovu's argument that township slang often encodes the lived realities of young people.²⁷ As such, money slang functions not only as a playful linguistic code but also as a mirror of youth creativity, social struggles, and aspirations.

Table 4: Drugs/Social Related Slang Expressions

Slang Term	Meaning	Function
Nyaope / Whoonga	Township drug mix (heroin, ARVs, dagga)	Identity, local reference
Blou	Crystal meth	Euphemism
Kat	Methcathinone	Peer secrecy
Line	Cocaine dose	Discretion
Pipi / Pipe	Homemade smoking pipe	Euphemism
Tsa felo	Marijuana (dagga)	Neutral slang
Zol	Joint	Township slang
Staff	Strong weed strain	Differentiation
Ntjaka	Cigarette laced with dagga	Peer secrecy
Lean	Cough syrup + soda	Global borrowing
Cheese	Glue sniffing	Euphemism
Caps	Ecstasy	Party culture
Pills	Ecstasy tablets	Euphemism
Ice	Crystal meth	Borrowed code
Mandrax / Buttons	Sedative tablets	Township slang
High school	Being intoxicated	Humor, metaphor

²³ Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* Blackwell. .

²⁴ Eckert, *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice: The Linguistic Construction of Identity in Belten High*.

²⁵ Makoni and Meinhof, *African Languages and Identities*.

²⁶ Leclerc-Madlala, “Transactional Sex and the Pursuit of Modernity.”

²⁷ Ndlovu N., “Township Slang and the Negotiation of Identity among South African Youth.”

Grootman's petrol	Alcohol for courage	Social commentary
Hustle juice	Substances used while hustling	Peer bonding
Di-balloons	Nitrous oxide at parties	Secrecy

Drug-related slang in Pretoria township youth culture reflects creativity, secrecy, and identity formation. Much of the lexicon is metaphorical (*skop*, *high school*, *grootman's petrol*), which allows youth to disguise their talk from outsiders and reduce the stigma associated with drug use. As Crystal notes, slang often operates as a covert code, enabling taboo subjects to be discussed indirectly.²⁸

The vocabulary also highlights peer-group solidarity and humor. Terms like *cheese* (glue sniffing) and *di-balloons* (nitrous oxide) trivialize risky practices, making them sound light-hearted and less threatening. This supports Ndlovu's argument that township slang provides young people with a linguistic tool to normalize and negotiate socially sensitive practices.²⁹

Another important aspect is identity and global influence. Borrowings like *lean*, *ice*, and *caps* come from U.S. hip-hop and global party culture but are recontextualized in Pretoria township settings. This resonates with Eckert's work on youth language as a marker of youthful, cosmopolitan identity.³⁰ At the same time, highly localized forms such as *nyaope* and *stoko* root the lexicon in township lived realities, often reflecting economic precarity and local struggles.

Finally, slang encodes social commentary. Phrases such as *grootman se snack* or *grootman's petrol* reflect dynamics of peer initiation, age hierarchies, and transactional access to substances, echoing Makoni and Meinhof's point that African urban varieties often encode social inequalities and power dynamics.³¹ Thus, Pretoria youth drug slang functions as both a shield for secrecy and a mirror of social life.

Examples in Context

1. **"Ntwana, o tshwere zol? Re nyaka go phola ka weekend."**
Bro, do you have a joint? We want to chill this weekend.
2. **"Ba ntse ba nwa *lean* mo monateng, dintwana tsa kasi."**
They were drinking lean at the party, the township kids.
3. **"O kgonne go mpontsha *line* ya *pashpash*?"**
Can you hook me up with that line of crystal meth?
4. **"Ke tlo dira *ntjaka* ka mor'a di-class."**
I'll smoke a laced cigarette after class.
5. **"Wena o rata high ya tsa *felo*"**
You like the high you get from strong weed.
6. **"Aowa, lona le *high school* fela vandag."**
Nah, you're all just too high today.
7. **"Grootman o ba file *snack*, ba setse ba dronkega da."**
An older man gave them drugs—they're already drooling.
8. **"Re tsena ka *caps* mo di-VIP, boshio bo bo tla baba."**
We're going into VIP with ecstasy tonight; it's going to be wild.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations are made. Policymakers should avoid dismissing slang as merely "incorrect" or "corrupt" language. Instead, they should recognize it as an

²⁸ Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* Blackwell. .

²⁹ Ndlovu N., "Township Slang and the Negotiation of Identity among South African Youth."

³⁰ Eckert, *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice: The Linguistic Construction of Identity in Belten High*.

³¹ Makoni and Meinhof, *African Languages and Identities*.

important component of young people's communicative resources. Language policy in South Africa often emphasizes the development of indigenous languages in formal registers (e.g., Setswana, Sepedi, isiZulu), but the informal registers used by youth are just as vital for cultural continuity and linguistic innovation. Recognizing slang as part of the linguistic ecology could inform more inclusive policies that value youth voices. This shift would not only validate young people's linguistic practices but also support the preservation of local linguistic creativity in the face of globalization and English dominance.

Teachers and educators can harness slang as a pedagogical resource, rather than treating it as a hindrance to learning. For instance, in classrooms, youth slang can serve as a bridge between formal and informal registers, allowing educators to connect with students' lived experiences. By critically examining slang expressions in subjects such as language studies or life orientation, teachers can promote metalinguistic awareness and encourage learners to reflect on issues of identity, power, and society. This approach affirms student identities while equipping them to code-switch effectively between informal and academic registers. Such validation can foster greater classroom engagement, particularly among learners who may feel alienated by purely formal modes of instruction.

Public health campaigns aimed at addressing issues such as drug use, sexual health, and HIV/AIDS prevention can be made more effective by integrating the slang that young people use. For example, prevention messages that reference terms such as *nyaope* or *stoko* are more likely to resonate with township youth than abstract or formal terminology. Similarly, campaigns for safe sex could incorporate the euphemisms and metaphors youth use to discuss sexual activity. Using youth linguistic codes not only ensures message clarity but also demonstrates cultural sensitivity, which is crucial for trust-building. Ultimately, incorporating slang into health communication can increase the relevance and impact of interventions, bridging the gap between policy language and youth realities.

Future research should investigate how Pretoria youth slang varies across dimensions such as class, gender, and educational background. Although this study highlights the functions of slang in township spaces, the forms and uses likely differ between school-going youth, university students, and unemployed young people. Similarly, young women may use slang differently from young men, particularly in domains like sexual discourse where power dynamics and cultural taboos intersect. By mapping these differences, sociolinguists can develop a more nuanced picture of how youth language reflects both social stratification and shared generational identity. Comparative studies across regions, such as Pretoria versus Johannesburg, or Gauteng versus Limpopo, would further illuminate how local and regional dynamics shape youth linguistic repertoires.

CONCLUSION

The datasets confirm that the youth in Pretoria township employ slang as a dynamic linguistic resource to navigate socially sensitive domains such as sex and drug use, while simultaneously addressing material realities associated with money and economic survival. These lexical innovations are not simply playful or deviant expressions; rather, they reflect the creativity and resilience of young people as they negotiate identity, belonging, and agency within complex socio-economic and cultural contexts. Slang functions on multiple levels. At a pragmatic level, it allows secrecy, humor, and euphemism, allowing youth to openly discuss taboo topics without attracting external judgment. At a social level, it fosters solidarity, peer-group cohesion, and differentiation from older generations and institutional authority. At an ideological level, the use of township slang represents a form of resistance to linguistic hierarchies that privilege standard or "formal" varieties, thereby affirming youth linguistic practices as valid markers of cultural identity. Importantly, the findings reveal the hybrid nature of youth identities. Pretoria township slang incorporates local innovations (e.g., *nyaope*, *maphepha*, *stoko*) rooted in township lived realities, and global borrowings (e.g., *lean*, *caps*, *moolah*) influenced by hip-hop, media, and international youth cultures. This duality demonstrates how global cultural flows and the immediate socio-economic environment of the township shape youth language practices. In this way, slang becomes a powerful lens for understanding broader processes of globalization, localization, and identity construction. Overall, slang among Pretoria youth serves as both a shield of secrecy, protecting young speakers from adult scrutiny and a mirror of social life, reflecting the challenges, aspirations, and everyday realities of township existence. It illustrates how language functions not only as a

communicative tool but also as a symbolic resource to negotiate power, identity, and belonging in a rapidly changing society.

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