

From Olympus to the Streets: Morphological Language Deviation as Identity Marker in Bad Boys: Rides or Die

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Abstract

Films are often used as a communication medium to convey views and values regarding the existence of certain entities. The language performed in film dialogue is frequently based on realities in real life to make it more natural and acceptable for the audiences. This study explores morphological language deviations occurring in the dialogues of action-comedy film *Bad Boys: Rides or Die* (2024). It is descriptive qualitative research examining language deviation phenomena in media. The data are dialogue among the main characters taken from the film. The technique to analyze data based on theory developed by Spradley (2016) consisting domain, taxonomy, componential and cultural theme analysis. The collected data were classified to types of morphological deviation and interpreted based on their communicative functions. The types of morphological deviation found are clipping/informal contraction, neologism, and slang. The findings indicate that morphological deviations play an important role in the film and serve to develop solidarity, emphasize urban masculinity, and convey humour. The study contributes to understanding how current media normalize and share informal language practices. Furthermore, in the context of film industry, this type of language deviation is designed to attract more audiences.

Keywords: language deviation, morphology, film dialogue, identity

INTRODUCTION

Film is a functioned communication medium for disseminating knowledge and understanding the culture of a particular community. Without leaving its primary function as entertainment, film often used as a medium for disseminating social identity (Orifjonovich, 2023). Through its narratives, characterizations, and linguistic practices, film creates a version of reality that reflects and often emphasizes norms, values, and power structures within a society (Hodkinson, 2024). There are many different film genres, but some of the most common are action, adventure, comedy, drama, horror, romance, science fiction, and thriller. Each genre has different characteristic and functioned as different purposes as well.

Bad Boys: Rides or Die (2024), a film well-known for consistently representing urban masculinity and law enforcement, provides an opportunity to examine how

informal and morphological language deviation is used as a strategy in constructing social identity. Characters in the film, Mike and Marcus, frequently perform nonstandard linguistic forms that deviate from standard grammatical norms, particularly in morphology. These deviations are not accidental or purely stylistic; but they send social meanings, expressing group affiliations, and challenge dominant ideologies of linguistic norms (Kroskrity, 2022). Mike and Marcus represent the real identities offered by this film. They frequently use language deviations from formal language, especially at the morphological level, such as "ain't," "gonna," "yo," and plural or tense forms that different from the standard English, not just casual speech styles. This is part of identity construction: identity as street people or society, as a representation of urban culture that exists in the real situation. This morphological deviation is not something that arises without context. It refers to strong sociolinguistic roots related to dialect variations, social positions, and resistance to standard linguistic norms which are often identified with certain powers. (Buchstaller, 2014).

From a sociolinguistics perspective, the language used in this film frequently violates formal grammar, such as morphological deviation and taboo expressions. The main characters speaking in deviant morphological forms is often associated with African American Vernacular English or other urban dialects, they contribute in a process that reclaims informal speech as a special way of self-representation. Spoken language is differentiated from standard grammatical and morphological rules in written form. It has intonation and context of situation to send the meaning of their utterances that is why some language deviation comes from direct communication. Such deviations contribute to a sense of legitimacy, intimacy, and cultural positioning (Bednarek, 2018). Particularly in action-comedy films, characters performed informal and non-standard language to show specific social identities and enhance narrative coherence brought in the film.

Previous studies have examined lexical and syntactic deviation in television series (Tagliamonte & Roberts, 2005), but less concerned to morphological deviation in today's film genres. Moreover, morphological processes such as clipping (*gonna*, *tryna*), neologisms (*banger*, *cap*), and informal contractions (*ain't*, *lemme*) have become increasingly dominant in this decade, influenced by social media and urban vernacular

(Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou, 2022). This study aims at filling this research gap by analysing morphological language deviation in the film *Bad Boys: Rides or Die* (2024). Specifically, it examines what forms of deviation occur and how they function in constructing character identity and social meaning.

LITERARY REVIEWS

Language deviation means differentiating from the usual or standard ways of speaking or writing. Leech (2014) describes it creates something different with language on purpose, often to be creative, expressive, or to get a certain reaction from others. In media, this kind of deviation could make characters feel more real and relatable since it is everyday communication (Culpeper, 2001). Recent study has shown that movies, TV shows, and social media are good places where non-standard language spreads and accepted by common people. Androutsopoulos (2016) claims this as mediated innovation, where new ways of speaking used by wider audiences in real life setting. Bednarek (2018) also points out that modern scripts often mix in these deviations to sound more natural and closer to how people talk in daily life.

Morphology deals with how words are formed and how their parts fit together. Katamba (2015) lists several main processes in forming words, some of them are inflection, derivation, compounding, blending, clipping, neologism, and coinage. Clipping means shortening words like *gonna* or *wanna* and commonly used in casual interaction or non-academic setting. Blending means combining of two separate forms to produce a single new term like *bromance* or *banger* (Yule, 2022). Research on this aspect have been done by Tagliamonte and Denis (2014) who found younger people tend to use these shortened forms in their daily life to make communication more effective and to be the part of the society or community. Buchstaller (2014) adds that expressions like *be like* or *go* (as in "he was like...") have become totally normal in many English varieties now. Moreover, Meyerhoff and Schlee (2020) have shown how these forms connect to identity, age, and community. To be accepted in a society, many younger adapt and imitate the language or the way that society communicate and interact. In short, this case indicates that the language deviation performed in real setting used as social identity or as a marker of the part of this community.

RESEARCH METHOD

This is descriptive qualitative research focusing on morphological deviation practiced in an action-comedy film. The research data are dialogues between the main characters, Mike and Marcus. The data source is the official transcript of *Bad Boys: Rides or Die* (2024). The data analysis steps use a taxonomy developed by Spradley (2016), domain analysis, taxonomy, componential, and cultural themes analysis. Domain analysis is carried out by distinguishing data from non-data, followed by identification and classification the data into morphological deviations using Katamba's theory (1993). Next, the interpretation of functions is based on a sociolinguistic perspective with the theories of Trudgill (2000) and Androutsopoulos (2016). The final step is to find the relationship between the patterns of morphological deviation types and communicative and ideological functions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of morphological deviation

a) Clipping/informal contraction

Clipping is the process of shortening words. In informal spoken contexts, clipping is often used for efficiency or a relaxed impression. In films, this form is common for imitating everyday speech. Data example 1 used to make the speaker more relaxed than going to; shows confidence and assertiveness meanwhile example 2 the speaker demonstrates urban and resistant identity. They also used to show informality and closeness between the characters to strengthen urban and masculine style of language.

- 1). Sir, I'm **gonna** need you to calm down”.
- 2). I **ain't** no damn scientist.

b) Neologisms

Neologism is a new word that appears in a particular language community. In modern films, these often originate from social media and popular culture. Datum 1 has the meaning of accusing someone of lying and this confirms social position in dialogue and

forming group relationships (in-group language). Datum 2 means expression of praise/admiration and displays familiarity & teenage style.

- 1). You calling **cap** on me?
- 2). That move was straight-up **lit**, bro.

c) Slang

This type includes non-standard informal words that do not originate from formal morphology but have a high social function. In this film, there are many cases in this type. Example 1 and 2 showing friendly greetings and building connection and strengthening group solidarity

- 1). **Bruh**, did you see that?
- 2). **Yo**, we got this, bro.

The findings show total data analysed is 67 consisting of clipping/informal contraction, neologism, and slang. These findings are in line with Bednarek's (2018) claim that scripted dialogues, such as in film, tend to imitate real speech in daily conversation. The frequency of clipping and neologisms in *Bad Boys* suggests a intentionally strategy to construct reality and engage audiences familiar with urban vernacular and use as promotional media of a culture. The use of *ain't* and *gonna* reflects solidarity and informality (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2014). Neologisms such as *banger* and *cap* indicate mediated lexical innovation, as described by Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou (2022). Moreover, the distribution of these forms of language deviation can be interpreted as ideological, projecting a particular masculinity and cultural identity associated with African American and urban youth speech (Jones & Hall, 2020).

The findings of this study highlight that morphological deviation is a common case and intended feature in the dialogues of *Bad Boys: Rides or Die* (2024). This section discusses how these forms function within the film's narrative and what they reveal about broader sociolinguistic patterns. First, the dominance of clipping and informal contractions, such as *gonna*, *wanna*, *ain't*, and *y'all*, reveals a strong orientation toward

spoken register reality in real setting. These forms appear across different contexts: casual joking, tense action sequences, and moments of humour. For example, expressions like *You gonna respect my time* and *Ain't nobody gonna stop us* convey assertiveness and friendship while maintaining an informal tone. This supports Bednarek's (2018) claim that contemporary screenwriters increasingly adopt features of spontaneous conversation to make dialogues sound natural and relatable.

Second, the occurrence of neologisms and slang indicates the film intentionally engaged with current digital and youth culture. Terms like *cap* (meaning "lie" or "nonsense") have spread rapidly via social media platforms such as TikTok and Twitter. It is in line with the result of the research done by Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou (2022). They describe this phenomenon as *mediated lexical innovation*, where words performed in online communities used in real setting. This neologism and slang in *Bad Boys* indicate screenwriters put the film within contemporary cultural trends, especially to younger viewers familiar with these expressions. Third, the frequency and consistency of these morphological deviations also have an ideological aspect. As Jones and Hall (2020) argue, the incorporation of features from African American Vernacular English (AAVE), such as *ain't* and *y'all*, not only used as signals informality but also create specific cultural identities. In this case, the language choices are in line with the film's urban, multi-ethnic setting and develop characters as members of the community.

Fourth, the functions of these language deviations go beyond stylistic aspect. The language deviation contributes to character development, for example by showing the contrast between Marcus, who often uses clippings and slang, and Mike, who sometimes uses fewer informal expressions. This contrast develops their personalities and emphasizes the comedic tension between them. As Bednarek (2018) notes, morphological deviation can be a powerful resource for building character identity and conveying social dynamics in real setting. Finally, the data analysis strengthens the idea that film dialogues are a possible place of linguistic change. Earlier studies of TV shows like *Friends* (Tagliamonte & Roberts, 2005) reported widespread informal contractions (*gonna*, *kinda*), but *Bad Boys* reveals how newer slang and more varied forms of clipping have become common thing in action-comedy genres as well. This trend reflects both broader

changes in English and the influence of online discourse. Finally, the study's findings are consistent with previous research (Meyerhoff & Schlee, 2020; Tagg & Seargeant, 2022), confirming that morphological deviation in media is not peripheral but central to how stories are told and how characters are made naturally. The occurrence of these forms in *Bad Boys* (2024) highlights the film's effort to balance humour, realism, and cultural relevance.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals how morphological deviations are employed in the film *Bad Boys: Rides or Die* (2024), with a focus on identifying their forms and exploring their sociolinguistic functions. The analysis reveals that the deviations are not only stylistic choices, but are the central part the film's dialogue. The most frequent deviations found were clipping / informal contractions. This type becomes the most dominant aspect contributing to a conversational tone in the interactions between characters seems spontaneous and relevant. The study also found that morphological deviation can function as an important marker of social identity. For instance, the use of AAVE style like *ain't* and *y'all* contributes to developing an urban, multicultural ethos that in line with the film's themes and target audience. Finally, the findings confirm that morphological deviation is a powerful resource for character development, humour, and audience engagement. The film *Bad Boys: Rides or Die* (2024) shows how informal language deviation and slang become normalized in action-comedy genres. Implications for future research can be comparative studies across genres and languages to examine whether similar patterns of morphological deviation appear in other audio-visual product. It would also be challenging to investigate how audiences perceive these linguistic choices and whether the deviation influence audiences' attitudes toward non-standard varieties.

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