

## Exploring the Social Identity of Vanellope Von Schweetz Through Language Slang Used in *Wreck-It Ralph* Movie

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### Abstract

This study investigates the role of slang in shaping the social identity of Vanellope Von Schweetz, a central character in the animated film *Wreck-It Ralph*. Slang, as a linguistic phenomenon, functions not only as informal speech but also as a symbolic tool to negotiate identity and establish position within a community. This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through documentation of selected film scenes that capture Vanellope's use of slang expressions. The analysis applies Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory, which emphasizes three interrelated processes: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Findings reveal that Vanellope's slang is closely tied to the evolution of her social identity within her gaming environment. In the first stage, social categorization, Vanellope is stigmatized as a "glitch" and excluded by her peers, a label that defines her initial outsider status. During the stage of social identification, she begins to internalize and reclaim this marginalized identity, adopting the slang of her community as a marker of belonging. Finally, in the stage of social comparison, Vanellope utilizes slang creatively to highlight her uniqueness and assert her distinction from others, turning what was once a deficit into a source of empowerment. The study concludes that Vanellope's use of slang extends beyond casual dialogue; it becomes a performative act through which she negotiates acceptance, challenges exclusion, and affirms her individuality. Thus, slang emerges as a critical linguistic strategy for constructing and expressing social identity within digital and communal contexts.

**Keywords:** Social identity; Slang; Sociolinguistics

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### INTRODUCTION

Language variation has long been recognized as a central factor in shaping social identity, as different ways of speaking serve both to express individuality and to establish belonging within particular groups. Sociolinguistics highlights this dynamic by situating language in its social context. As Holmes (2013) explains, variation in language is not random but systematically tied to dimensions such as class, age, gender, and community membership. Through such variations, individuals construct social meaning, signal group allegiance, and negotiate power relations. Among the many forms of language variation, slang has drawn special attention for its distinctive role in informal expression. Unlike formal registers, slang is often marked by creativity, fluidity, and resistance to standard norms. Chapman (2007) emphasizes that slang is more than playful vocabulary; it enables individuals to voice attitudes, emotions, and even rebellion against prevailing conventions.

This makes slang particularly powerful for understanding how identity is performed, contested, and reshaped in both real and fictional contexts. Within this broader sociolinguistic landscape, Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory provides a productive framework to analyze language choices, as it focuses on how individuals situate themselves through processes of social categorization, identification, and comparison with others.

The importance of studying slang is magnified in media contexts, where fictional characters often embody real social struggles. Animated films, while commonly targeted at younger audiences, offer layered portrayals of identity and belonging that resonate with wider cultural concerns. Characters' speech styles, including their use of slang, are not arbitrary but deliberately constructed to communicate social position, group affiliation, or resistance to exclusion. In this way, slang in animated films adds authenticity to characters while functioning as a symbolic marker of their place within imagined communities. For marginalized characters in particular, slang may operate as a defensive strategy, enabling them to resist stigmatization and project a sense of agency. This is evident in the case of Vanellope von Schweetz from the Disney film *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012). Initially branded as a "glitch" and ostracized within the racing world of Sugar Rush, Vanellope navigates her outsider status by adopting a playful yet assertive use of slang. Her language choices both reflect her marginal position and serve as tools to negotiate recognition, acceptance, and self-definition. Analyzing Vanellope's slang thus provides insight into how identity is represented and contested in fictional narratives, particularly when framed through Social Identity Theory.

Despite growing interest in the sociolinguistics of media, prior scholarship on slang and identity has tended to concentrate on collective patterns rather than individual trajectories. Studies such as Larasati (2018), who examined slang in comedy shows, or Salsabila (2021), who analyzed slang in reality television, illuminate how slang operates across categories like age, gender, or community identity. However, these works focus primarily on broad sociolinguistic patterns, offering less attention to the personal dimension of how a single individual's social identity evolves over time through language use. In fictional media, where narratives are structured around characters' transformations, this gap becomes especially striking. Animated films in particular provide fertile ground for studying such processes, as characters often undergo dramatic journeys of exclusion, self-discovery, and empowerment. Yet few studies have addressed how slang mediates these shifts in individual identity, leaving a valuable area of sociolinguistic inquiry underexplored.

The present study responds to this gap by examining slang not merely as a static marker of group belonging but as a dynamic tool that participates in the reconstruction of personal identity. Vanellope von Schweetz provides an ideal case study because her character arc is explicitly tied to questions of marginalization, social acceptance, and self-redefinition. By tracing her use of slang throughout the film, this research highlights how language both reflects and enables her transformation. Unlike earlier works that treat slang as a collective symbol of in-group cohesion, this study demonstrates how it can function as an individual resource for negotiating stigma and asserting uniqueness. In doing so, it advances a character-based approach to sociolinguistic analysis, one that foregrounds the intersection between narrative development and linguistic practice.

The theoretical foundation for this inquiry lies in Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory, which offers three interrelated mechanisms through which identity is constructed. First, social categorization involves labeling individuals according to group distinctions, often producing hierarchies of belonging. Vanellope's categorization as a "glitch" exemplifies this stage, as it marks her as an outsider unworthy of inclusion. Second, social identification refers to the process by which individuals internalize group

membership, aligning their self-concept with particular labels or communities. Vanellope's adoption of slang characteristic of her marginalized position illustrates how she incorporates this identity into her sense of self. Finally, social comparison involves evaluating one's group relative to others, often emphasizing distinctiveness or superiority. Here, Vanellope's playful use of slang enables her to assert uniqueness and challenge the legitimacy of dominant groups within her community. This framework provides a systematic lens to interpret how her linguistic practices map onto stages of identity negotiation.

This research also builds on broader debates within sociolinguistics and media studies about how fictional language use contributes to cultural meaning. Scholars have long recognized that media not only reflects but also shapes perceptions of social identity. Animated films in particular are powerful cultural artifacts, as they translate complex social issues into accessible narratives for diverse audiences. By focusing on slang, this study contributes to ongoing conversations about how marginalized voices can be represented and reimagined in popular culture. Furthermore, it demonstrates how linguistic analysis can illuminate dimensions of character development often overlooked in narrative studies, thereby bridging the gap between sociolinguistics and film analysis.

The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on the evolving relationship between slang and personal identity within a fictional narrative. Unlike previous works that examine slang as a group-level phenomenon, this research foregrounds the micro-level processes of identity transformation, showing how slang actively participates in Vanellope's journey from exclusion to empowerment. By situating the analysis within Social Identity Theory, the study offers a systematic account of how linguistic practices reflect and shape the stages of categorization, identification, and comparison. This not only expands the application of sociolinguistic theory to new contexts but also enriches our understanding of how language functions in storytelling.

The objectives of this research are twofold: first, to analyze how Vanellope's slang expressions illustrate the processes of social categorization, identification, and comparison as outlined in Social Identity Theory; and second, to demonstrate how slang operates as a meaningful tool for negotiating belonging, resisting exclusion, and reconstructing self-concepts within fictional narratives. To guide this investigation, the research is framed by the following questions:

1. What are the meaning and context of various slang used by Vanellope Von Schweetz in *Wreck-It Ralph* movie?
2. What does the slang used by Vanellope Von Schweetz have to do with the transformation of her social identity?

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, which is well suited to analyze the use of slang in *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012) due to its ability to provide a detailed and context-rich examination of narrative dialogue and character interactions. The descriptive method allows for a comprehensive exploration of how slang reflects the transformation of social identity in the character of Vanellope von Schweetz, through a careful analysis of the spoken language, tone, and interpersonal dynamics in the movie. The subject of this study is the movie *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012), produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios, while the object of study focuses on Vanellope's use of slang and how it relates to the processes of social categorization, social identification, and social comparison, as conceptualized in Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory. Slang expressions were selected based on clear criteria through they had to be informal, contextually relevant to the expression of identity, and directly spoken by Vanellope in the

movie. The boundaries of the analysis were set by focusing only on scenes where Vanellope engages in conversations that indicate her group membership, her emotional state, or her changing social position.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection in this study was conducted through a qualitative approach using observation and documentation techniques. The researcher closely observed key scenes in the movie *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012) to identify moments when Vanellope von Schweetz used slang expressions. These expressions were then documented along with the context of the scene and her interactions with other characters. As this research is based solely on a film and does not involve any interaction with human subjects, no human participants were involved. This qualifies the study as a non-participant textual analysis, where the primary source of data is the scripted content and visual performance within the film. The data consisted of slang spoken by Vanellope, which was then transcribed, categorized, and analyzed based on its relevance to social identity theory. Transcription was done manually by watching the movie repeatedly, and following simplified linguistic transcription conventions for clarity and consistency, focusing on proper word choice, tone markers and phrasing. Slang identification was done using a combination of linguistic markers of informality, creativity, deviation from standard English and dictionary validation using Collins Dictionary or Urban Dictionary for slang meanings.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected was systematically analyzed through meaning and context and Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (1986), which divides social identity into three components: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. This analysis followed a structured process for each component. First, it identified the slang used by Vanellope in the *Wreck-It Ralph* movie, including the meaning and context of the dialogue as well as the characters to whom the slang was directed. Next, the analysis examined how the slang reflected Vanellope's social position within social categorization, determining whether she belonged to the in-group or out-group. Finally, it related and analyzed how the slang represented the processes of social identification and social comparison, exploring how Vanellope perceives herself and how she is compared to other characters in the story. To ensure thematic consistency and interpretive credibility, the analysis utilized thematic coding and clustering, and the selected interpretations were reexamined across scenes to verify alignment with the social development of the characters. By applying a qualitative descriptive method, this analysis seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of how Vanellope's social identity is constructed, challenged, and ultimately transformed through the use of slang in the movie.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section aims to describe how Vanellope von Schweetz's use of slang in the movie *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012) reflects her social identity. This analysis explains the meaning and context of each slang and is divided into three categories based on Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1986): social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Each category highlights how the slang spoken by Vanellope contributes to the construction and transformation of her identity throughout the movie. The results of this study not only show which slang terms are used and in which contexts, but more importantly, it reveals how these expressions signify Vanellope's dynamic construction of identity in a society that initially ostracizes her. The scholarly contribution of this study lies in its finding that slang is not just a linguistic color, but also functions as a psychosocial marker of identity, resistance, and self-assertion.

Table.1 The Use of Slang in the Movie Wreck-It Ralph

No	Slang	Dialogue	Meaning	Context
1.	Glitch	"I'm not a glitch, Taffyta."	a fault or defect in a system or machine	Vanellope defends herself when the other racers exclude her and treat her as broken.
2.	Pixslexia	"I've just got Pixslexia, okay?"	Fake excuse for glitch	Tried to defend himself with a new title from the discriminatory treatment he received for being disabled.
3.	Pal	"Ah come on, pal"	A friend; a mate	Vanellope uses it to persuade Ralph during a disagreement.
4.	Son of a gun	"You son of a gun"	A person, especially a man, regarded as coarse, mischievous, or likeable in a rough way	Vanellope uses it to reassure again during a disagreement with Ralph.
5.	Buttload	"Now frosting. A buttload of frosting!"	A large amount	Vanellope describes how much frosting was used on a track obstacle.
6..	Glitching	"I was here. I was there. I was glitching through the walls. I'm not giving that up."	A fault or defect in a system or machine	She proudly explains how she won the race using her glitch ability

Vanellope is initially positioned as an out-group member. The film constructs her as othered through visual and narrative cues, but more importantly, this social status is reflected in the slang she uses and is subjected to. The following slang reinforce her marginalization. In one of the key scenes of Wreck-It Ralph, Vanellope responds to Taffyta's statement. The moment clearly shows how Vanellope is positioned as part of the out-group. The label glitch is used by other characters to limit Vanellope's social access to a space that should only be owned by a certain group of official racers. By calling her a glitch, Taffyta repeats and reinforces the already established social hierarchy that glitch means unworthy and not part of the main group. This finding aligns with previous research by Alawiyah et al. (2021), who found that slang terms often function as markers of exclusion in social groups, reinforcing boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Even when Vanellope was already on the participant list, her social status was still denied.

A reflection of the process of social identification, in which Vanellope begins to define herself not as a broken or defective person, but as an individual worthy of respect and acceptance. By rejecting the glitch label, she wants to break away from the social identity imposed by the dominant group. This shows how her personal identity begins to take shape through reflection and rejection of the stereotypes that exist in her environment. Similar conclusions were drawn by Sani, Hassan, and Husin (2024) in their study on identity formation through language, which emphasizes that rejecting imposed labels is a critical step in identity negotiation and self-assertion. At the same time, her statements and actions also illustrate the process of social comparison. Vanellope realizes that she is positioned lower than the other racers due to her status as a glitch. By comparing her position with the elite group like Taffyta and the other Sugar Rush racers, Vanellope begins to realize the social inequality that occurs in their world.

*I've just got Pixslexia, okay?*

By saying this Vanellope does not fight the label glitch directly, but masks the label with a made-up term that sounds funnier and less threatening. This shows that she still feels the need to move away from the label that makes her different, and it reinforces her

position as an out-group in Sugar Rush's social structure. This slang is a form of social identification, where Vanellope tries to negotiate the meaning of her identity in order to be more accepted by the social group she wants to join. This behavior is supported by findings from Yamjirin, Yustanto, and Yulianti (2024), who argue that playful language strategies can serve as coping mechanisms to soften stigma and facilitate social integration. By comparing Vanellope to herself in the engineered scenario, Taffyta reinforces the superiority of her group and humiliates Vanellope in front of others. Jubileena's reaction to pretending to have a glitch shows that the social pressure to keep Vanellope at a distance is strong.

*Ah come on, pal*

In terms of social categorization, Vanellope's use of the word *pal* does not actually reflect a sense of togetherness or recognition that Ralph is part of the group. Instead, it shows that Ralph is still considered part of the out-group in the social dynamics between them. The use of the word *pal* here is not an expression of real affection or emotional closeness, but rather a language strategy used by Vanellope to try to gain sympathy or advantage from Ralph. The process of social identification is highly visible through the way Vanellope tries to rebuild the relationship with Ralph after the previous conflict by using slang *pal*. In terms of social comparison, the use of slang creates a contrast between the previous tension-filled relationship and the new, more harmonious relationship. Vanellope no longer feels rejected, instead she actively breaks the ice and takes the initiative to repair the relationship. These dynamics resonate with social identity research by Salsabila (2021), who highlighted how language can be used as a strategic tool to manage social relationships and group boundaries.

*You son of a gun*

From the perspective of Social Identity theory, specifically the social categorization component, the use of *son of a gun* shows Vanellope's attempt to form a social perception that Ralph belongs to her social circle (in-group). But in reality, objectively, Ralph shows no signs that he accepts or recognizes this social status. Therefore, theoretically, Ralph was still categorized as part of Vanellope's out-group at the time. Thus, Vanellope's use of slang can be considered as an attempt to build social relationships, but since there is no clear recognition or attachment from Ralph, this relationship is still classified as an interaction with the out-group. The choice of this slang shows Vanellope's attempt to build social identification as someone who is equal and familiar with Ralph. By referring to Ralph as a friend and companion, she places herself in a position of friendship and equality, not as a weak child or someone who asks for help. In terms of social comparison, this also reverses the position comparison with Vanellope being the more emotionally mature figure for being able to forgive and build a relationship, while Ralph still refuses to call her a friend. This finding adds nuance to the understanding of language use in group dynamics, as noted by Larasati (2018), who pointed out that language can signal aspirational identity even when social acceptance is not yet fully achieved.

*Now frosting.*

*A buttload of frosting*

The use of slang indicates that Ralph is no longer considered an out-group as he was at the beginning of their meeting. Instead, he is starting to be included in the in-group that is closer to Vanellope, which is the group of people that she can work with and trust. In other words, *buttload* slang not only functions as an expression of quantity, but also as a marker that Ralph is now in a closer social category and accepted by Vanellope. Vanellope's use of *buttload* slang in this scene shows that she feels comfortable being part

of a new group with Ralph, and more importantly, she feels in control of the situation. Vanellope begins to express herself freely, and her way of speaking reflects the social identity she is building as a bold, fun and quirky racer. From a social comparison point of view, this moment also shows a shift in Vanellope's position. In the past, she was often considered a burden by the Sugar Rush community, but now, she is the one giving orders to Ralph, a powerful and influential character from outside the game. This shift is consistent with the observations of Sufi Alawiyah, Zuriyati, and Lustyantie (2021), who emphasized how changes in language use mirror changes in social power and group belonging.

*I was here.  
I was there.  
I was glitching through the walls  
I'm not giving that up*

In this scene, Vanellope finally fully accepts who she is. After the conflict with King Candy ends, the whole game system returns to normal and the people of Sugar Rush begin to recall their true memories that Vanellope is the princess who was once erased from their history due to King Candy's manipulation. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, especially social categorization, Vanellope clearly belongs to the in-group. Through social identification, she actively regains her identity by rejecting the princess label and returning to her racing clothes, declaring, "This is who I am", this action signifies that Vanellope has fully accepted her uniqueness as the center of herself. In terms of social comparison, she challenges traditional ideals by proposing a democratic system and calling herself "President Vanellope", there is a clear comparison of values. Instead of glorifying traditional power structures such as monarchy, she chooses a democratic system that reflects the values of freedom, equality and direct involvement, things that are very much in line with her new identity. This finding corroborates the argument of Yamjirin et al. (2024), who suggested that identity transformation through language is tied closely to shifts in social values and power relations.

The findings of this study show that Vanellope von Schweetz's use of slang in Wreck-It Ralph reflects a dynamic and evolving process of social identity construction. Through selected expressions such as glitch, pixlexia, pal, son of a gun, butload, and glitching, Vanellope's language reveals her journey from being socially categorized as an out-group member to developing a stronger sense of confidence and ultimately asserting her distinct identity. In the early stages, her slang reflects marginalization and exclusion, while later, it becomes a tool to build personal bonds and express pride in her uniqueness. These linguistic choices serve not only as a medium to express personality, but also as a strategic response to social pressure and identity conflict. Overall, this analysis supports Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory framework, which illustrates that identities are not fixed, but rather continuously negotiated through social interactions, language and comparisons with others.

## CONCLUSION

The slang used by Vanellope von Schweetz in the movie Wreck-It Ralph reflects her social identity, based on the Social Identity Theory framework proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1986). The main objective is to analyze how the chosen slang can reveal the processes of social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Through a careful linguistic and contextual analysis of the slang, it was found that language serves not only as a medium of communication, but also as a powerful mechanism for navigating personal and social identities.

Vanellope's experience as a marginalized character in her social environment is central to these findings. Her use of slang in her childhood demonstrates her awareness of being categorized as a "glitch", an identity imposed on her by others. As the narrative progresses, the same language becomes a form of self-expression that helps him challenge those labels and assert a new identity that he defines for himself. This research shows that slang can carry symbolic weight, especially when used in moments of resistance, negotiation or transformation.

Rather than depicting slang simply as informal speech, this analysis highlights its function as a linguistic response to power dynamics, social rejection and identity formation. Vanellope's journey reflects a broader pattern in which language becomes a strategy for resisting ostracization and forming a self-concept that aligns with one's values and experiences. These insights make a meaningful contribution to how informal language is interpreted in character analysis, especially in digitally animated films targeting younger audiences.

These findings support the idea that identities in fictional narratives are not static, but are constructed, challenged and reshaped through the use of language. Vanellope's use of slang illustrates the psychological and social stages of identity development in a way that is consistent with Social Identity Theory. By focusing on how language operates within these stages, this research confirms that slang is not trivial. It is intimately connected to how characters, and thus individuals, express who they are in relation to others. Furthermore, while this analysis focuses on a fictional character, the findings can also resonate beyond the cinematic context. The ways in which Vanellope uses slang to assert identity, resist exclusion and build a sense of belonging reflect the real-life experiences of individuals especially young people who use informal language as a means to navigate their social reality. This suggests that slang, both on screen and in everyday life, plays an important role in shaping and expressing personal and group identities.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on these findings, future research is recommended to investigate similar linguistic patterns in other characters or movies to determine whether the use of slang consistently reflects identity processes. Expanding the scope of analysis across genres, age groups, or cultural backgrounds may provide a broader understanding of how identity is shaped by informal language use in popular media. Researchers are also encouraged to include audience perceptions of slang and identity to enrich the data with interpretive insights.

This study faced limitations in terms of the availability and quantity of slang used by the main characters, which required focused selection for depth of analysis. In addition, the meaning of slang is often highly dependent on tone, delivery and visual context, making it susceptible to subjective interpretation. These constraints point to the need for multimodal analysis in future studies, which can combine visual, textual and reception-based methods to increase the reliability and depth of findings.

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