
Word-Formation as Stylistic Resource in Rap Music Lyrics: Evidence from Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* (1991)

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ABSTRACT

Rap lyrics creatively express identity and culture through unique word choices, yet few studies have examined how word formation shapes their rhythm and social meaning. This study explores how Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album reflects identity, culture, and resistance through creative word formation. This study aims to identify and analyze the word formation processes in Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album and to explain how these processes shape meaning and reflect cultural expression. The research used a qualitative descriptive method and Yule's (2019) theory of word formation processes as the analytical framework. The data were taken from official lyrics of three songs in Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album such as *Steady Mobbin'*, *True to the Game*, and *No Vaseline* and analyzed using document and content analysis techniques. The findings showed that clipping and compounding were the most common word formation processes in Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album, while borrowing, blending, acronyms, coinage, and derivation were used less often. The frequent use of clipping shows that Ice Cube likes to make his words shorter to match the rhythm and sound more natural in everyday speech, especially in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Compounding helps Ice Cube create strong and meaningful words like *motherfucker* and *homeboys* that show identity, culture, and closeness in his community. The other word formation types appear less often, but still make the lyrics more creative and give deeper meaning to the songs. These results indicate that Ice Cube intentionally used word formation to strengthen his artistic style, cultural identity, and social commentary, showing that rap lyrics are not only entertainment but also a rich form of linguistic and cultural expression.

INTRODUCTION

O'Shea Jackson Sr., better known as Ice Cube, is one of the most influential figures in hip-hop in United States. Beginning his career with the group N.W.A., he quickly gained a reputation for his sharp lyricism and bold social commentary. After leaving N.W.A., he launched a solo career that combined aggressive storytelling with politically charged themes. Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* (1991) is one of his most influential and controversial albums. The albums stand out not only for its political and social commentary on racial tension, police brutality, and African American identity, but also for the richness of its linguistic creativity. The albums stand out not only for their political and social commentary on racial tension, police brutality, and African American identity, but also for the richness of their linguistic creativity. This is supported by Time Magazine (2015), which describes Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly* as "a searing meditation on race, survival, and self-love... a cultural statement on police brutality and systemic racism." Similarly, the Library of Congress acknowledges N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* as an album that "gave voice to the rage and frustration of young Black men facing police brutality and racial profiling." Beyond their political force, Bradley, (2017) argue that rap should be read as modern

poetry, highlighting its complex metaphors, wordplay, and rhythmic innovation. Ice cube's lyricism is not only powerful in terms of content but also in the way he played with language, slang, and creative word choices.

Language in rap music is often marked by creativity and innovation. One of the main language features in rap is word formation, which means the way new words are made or old words are changed into new forms. According to Sulistyawati & Bram (2021), word formation is a process used to form a word by taking, omitting, adding, eliminating, or even changing the structure of a word. This means that word formation can happen in many ways, and it is common both in literature and in daily language use. Word formation is very important in rap music because it allows rappers to be creative and flexible with their language. One main function of word formation, such as clipping (like 'em from *them*) and blending (like *homie* from *home* + *boy*), is to help rappers keep the rhythm and rhyme so the lyrics flow smoothly with the beat Haspo & Rosa (2018). Word formation is also connected to African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which is often used in rap to show cultural identity and to reflect the everyday speech of the community El-malti (2022). This creative use of language not only helps rappers adjust their words to fit the music but also allows them to express strong emotions, personal attitudes, and even social criticism Ramos (2020). In this way, word formation makes rap more than just music, it becomes a cultural expression. Studying it gives us a better understanding of how language, music, and culture work together, especially in African American communities.

Word formation is an important phenomenon in language, including in the language of rap music. According to Yule (2019), there are ten main processes of word formation: coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, back formation, conversion, acronyms, derivation, and multiple processes. Each process has its own function in communication. For instance, coinage introduces completely new words that often become part of popular slang, while borrowing enriches vocabulary through cultural contact. Compounding combines two words to create more specific meanings, and blending produces shorter and often playful forms. Clipping makes words shorter and more casual, while back formation simplifies longer forms into new words. Conversion changes the function of a word without changing its form, and acronyms make long expressions shorter and more memorable. Derivation expands vocabulary by adding affixes, and multiple processes show how different strategies can appear in one word.

In rap music, word formations are frequently used to create a strong identity, express social messages, and connect with listeners. To build a strong identity, he frequently uses clipped forms and slang, such as 'em (from *them*) in *No Vaseline*, which makes his delivery more direct and reflects his identity as a West Coast rapper who speaks in the language of his community. To express social messages, Ice Cube reshapes words through derivation and compounding, as in *True to the Game*, where he criticizes rappers who abandon their cultural roots for commercial success, turning language itself into a form of resistance. Finally, to connect with listeners, he uses familiar acronyms, blends, and compounds, such as *gangsta rap* in *Steady Mobbin'*, which resonates with his audience because it reflects their shared lifestyle and cultural identity. In this way, Ice Cube's use of word formation is not random but a conscious strategy to strengthen his identity, deliver social commentary, and maintain a close bond with his listeners.

Several earlier studies have explored word formation in song lyrics, but each differs in focus and scope. Adhani & Fitrawati (2023) analyzed slang in Rich Brian's album 1999, using Yule's theory to identify word formation processes; their study highlighted how contemporary Indonesian rappers use slang creatively to shape identity, yet it did not link language use to socio-political messaging in lyrics. Raodhatul & Ardi (2019) examined word formation of slang in songs by Indonesian rapper Young Lex, also employing Yule's framework; their findings focused on identifying common slang characteristics, but lacked discussion of cultural identity or lyrical message beyond form. More globally, Anjelia & Ramdhani (2024) investigated word formation processes in Megan Thee Stallion's *Traumazine* album, reporting that clipping is dominant among multiple processes, and interpreting how word formation conveys emotions and personal narrative; however, their analysis does not engage with collective identity or deeper cultural critique in the way Ice Cube's lyrics do. In contrast, this study focused specifically on word formation in selected songs (*Steady Mobbin'*, *True to the Game*, *No Vaseline*) from Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album, tying each linguistic process directly to identity construction, social commentary, and listener engagement. By analyzing selected songs from Ice Cube's *Death Certificate*

album, this study highlights how different word formation processes described by Yule (2019) appear in the lyrics and contribute to their unique style. The combination of Yule's linguistic framework with the cultural and social context of rap provides a fresh angle, showing not only how words are formed but also why these forms are chosen by the artist.

The main aim of this study is to identify which word formation processes are most frequently used in the lyrics and to explain their functions in shaping meaning, style, and cultural expression. More specifically, this research aims to reveal how Ice Cube uses word formation not only as a linguistic strategy but also as a medium of creativity, identity, and social commentary. By doing so, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language and culture in rap music.

Morphology

Morphology is the study of how words are formed and structured. It looks at the smallest units of meaning, called morphemes, and how these combine to create new words or alter existing ones. Aronoff and Fudeman (2022) explain that morphology deals with both inflectional processes, which adjust a word's grammatical role (e.g., walk → walked), and derivational processes, which create entirely new words (e.g., happy → happiness). Lieber (2021) emphasizes that morphology is central not only to grammar but also to creativity in language use, since speakers often manipulate word forms for stylistic or expressive purposes. Booij (2019) adds that morphology also reflects cultural practices, as communities may develop unique word forms to mark identity and belonging. In relation to this study, morphology provides the basis for understanding how Ice Cube's lyrics in *Death Certificate* make use of word formation as a linguistic strategy. By identifying processes such as clipping, compounding, or derivation, we can see how new word forms shape the style and rhythm of the songs, while also carrying cultural and political meanings. For instance, the clipped form 'em in *No Vaseline* is not only a shortened structure but also a deliberate stylistic choice that strengthens directness and rhythm. Similarly, compounds like *gangsta rap* in *Steady Mobbin'* show how morphology constructs cultural identity through language. Thus, morphology is not treated here as an abstract theory but as a practical tool to analyze the linguistic creativity and social messages in Ice Cube's lyrics.

Word Formation

Word formation refers to the ways in which new words are created or existing ones are modified to suit communicative purposes. According to Yule (2019), there are ten main processes of word formation, namely coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, back formation, conversion, acronyms, derivation, and multiple processes. These categories provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how new words are formed and how existing words are reshaped in language use. Plag (2018) also highlights similar processes, particularly derivation, compounding, clipping, and blending, which enrich vocabulary and contribute to linguistic creativity. By combining Yule's classification with Plag's elaboration, this study applies a clear framework to examine the word formation strategies found in Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album. Each process serves a different function in language use. For example, derivation attaches affixes to create new words, as in *unhappy* or *ruthless*. Compounding combines two roots into one lexical item, such as *newspaper* or *hip-hop*. Clipping shortens longer words, such as *ad* from *advertisement*, while blending merges two words into a compact form, such as *brunch* from *breakfast* and *lunch*. Acronyms, like *NASA* or *ASAP*, are used to condense longer expressions into more memorable forms. These processes illustrate how morphology contributes not only to linguistic economy but also to creativity in everyday and artistic contexts, including song lyrics.

In Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album, word formation processes appear as conscious strategies to shape meaning, rhythm, and cultural resonance. For instance, in *No Vaseline*, the clipped form 'em (from *them*) strengthens the flow and emphasizes a colloquial style that resonates with his community. In *Steady Mobbin'*, the compound *gangsta rap* merges identity (*gangsta*) with music (*rap*), producing a powerful cultural label that defines a genre and lifestyle. Derivation also occurs in *True to the Game* through the use of *sellout*, where the addition of the affix *-out* changes the base verb into a noun that carries negative social meaning, criticizing those who abandon cultural roots. These examples demonstrate how word formation is not merely a mechanical linguistic process but an artistic device to

convey critique, identity, and authenticity in rap music. As Bauer (2020) notes, such linguistic innovations are particularly effective in lyrics, where wordplay and rhythm interact closely with cultural commentary.

Another crucial aspect of word formation in Ice Cube's lyrics is its connection to African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Recent studies emphasize that AAVE involves unique morphological features such as clipped endings (*runnin'* instead of *running*), the habitual use of *be* (e.g., *he be workin'*), and innovative blends like *homie* (from *homeboy*) that reflect cultural belonging (Green, 2020; Rickford, 2019). In rap, these forms are strategically used to mark identity and solidarity within African American communities. In *Death Certificate*, Ice Cube's frequent use of clipping, compounding, and AAVE-based innovations highlights his cultural authenticity while resisting dominant linguistic norms. As Green (2020) notes, the presence of AAVE in music is not only a stylistic choice but also a form of linguistic pride and resistance. Similarly, Rickford (2019) argues that such linguistic creativity expresses both individuality and collective identity. Thus, word formation in AAVE strengthens the socio-political messages of Ice Cube's music by embedding them in the language of his community.

Artistic Style in Rap Music

Rap music is one of the main elements of hip hop culture. It is not only used for entertainment but also serves as a way to express social and political realities. The lyrics often reflect problems such as inequality, racism, and daily struggles that happen in society (Park et al., 2024). As part of hip hop culture, rappers also bring the identity of their communities into their performances. The artistic style of rap usually combines language, rhythm, vocal delivery, and stage persona, which together form the unique image of each rapper. Through slang, vernacular, and figurative language such as metaphors, similes, and punchlines, rappers can show creativity while also building closeness with their listeners. This use of wordplay sometimes creates new terms that later spread into popular culture (Subekti et al., 2023).

Another important element of rap is flow and delivery. Flow refers to how lyrics are arranged rhythmically, including rhyme, tempo, and stress patterns that fit with the beat. This makes each rapper have a distinctive style, since they often use complex techniques like internal rhyme or multisyllabic rhyme (Adams, 2009). Voice, intonation, and expression are all part of delivery during a performance. According to Komaniecki (2020), vocal pitch is a crucial component of rap flow since variations in tone and emotion give the performance greater depth and vitality. When flow and delivery are combined, rap becomes more than just words, it is also about how those words are performed on stage. According to Weiner (2014), rappers must be perceived as authentic in order to retain credibility, even though they may develop certain identities. Visual components such as clothes, gestures, and symbols enrich the performance, yet industry expectations often drive artists to change their style in order to achieve commercial success. Rap as an art form is still being shaped by this conflict between authenticity and commercialization.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative descriptive method. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is applied to explore and understand meanings from people, groups, or texts, focusing on interpretation rather than numbers. Similarly, Lambert (2012) explains that descriptive research is intended to describe a phenomenon in detail without changing or controlling it. In this study, the qualitative method was combined with a document analysis, since the main data were taken from written song lyrics. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents (both printed and electronic) with the purpose of interpreting meaning, gaining understanding, and developing empirical knowledge." This approach was suitable because the study focused on analyzing the lyrics of Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album as documents in order to identify and interpret the word formation processes contained in them. Document analysis was applied to collect and examine the lyrics as textual data, while content analysis was used to identify, categorize, and interpret the word formation processes found in the texts. This approach was considered the most suitable because it allowed the researcher to connect the linguistic forms in Ice Cube's lyrics with their stylistic, cultural, and social functions.

The primary data of this study were taken from three songs in Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* (1991) album: *Steady Mobbin'*, *True to the Game*, and *No Vaseline*. These songs were chosen because they

highlight the main themes of the album and contain clear examples of word formation processes. At the same time, there were other reasons behind their selection. *No Vaseline* was included because it is not only one of the most popular tracks in the album but also one of the most talked-about diss tracks in hip-hop history, which makes it highly relevant for both cultural and linguistic analysis. *Steady Mobbin'* was selected because it reflects Ice Cube's lifestyle themes and remains one of the most frequently played songs from the album, showing that it still connects with listeners today. Finally, *True to the Game* may not be as commercially popular as the other two, but it carries one of the strongest social messages, where Ice Cube criticizes rappers who give up their identity for fame. Together, these three songs represent different sides of the album popular appeal, ongoing listener interest, and powerful social critique making them a well-rounded set of data for this study. The lyrics were obtained from Genius Lyrics and checked against the original recordings on Spotify to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Limiting the data to three songs kept the research focused and allowed for a deeper analysis of the linguistic features. The secondary data came from books, journal articles, and previous studies on morphology, word formation, and rap music. This time frame was chosen to make sure the references were current and relevant to recent discussions in linguistics. Only sources that directly supported the research objectives were included, so the study remained specific and did not rely on outdated or unrelated works.

The data were collected using documentation and note-taking techniques. The documentation technique was applied by obtaining the official lyrics of the selected songs from Genius Lyrics and cross-checking them with the original recordings on Spotify to ensure accuracy. Meanwhile, the note-taking technique was used to identify and record specific words and expressions that demonstrated word formation processes. After that, the collection process went through several steps. First, the researcher downloaded and read the lyrics of the selected songs carefully. Second, the words and expressions that showed word formation processes were underlined and listed. Third, the data were classified based on Yule's (2019) ten types of word formation, such as clipping, compounding, blending, acronyms, and derivation. The data were then organized into categories to make them ready for analysis. This process made it possible to connect the linguistic forms in the lyrics with their functions in Ice Cube's style, identity, and social commentary.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Elo & Kyngäs (2008) explained that content analysis was a method to describe text data by making categories. According to Elo and Kyngäs (2008), qualitative content analysis consists of three main phases: preparation, organizing, and reporting. In this study, the process followed these steps. The first step is Preparation Phase. In this stage, the unit of analysis was determined. The data of this research were the lyrics of three selected songs from Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album (*Steady Mobbin'*, *True to the Game*, and *No Vaseline*). The researcher carefully read the lyrics several times to gain a full understanding of the content. The unit of analysis was decided to be words and phrases that showed word formation processes. Since the study aimed to describe linguistic features visible in the text, the focus was on the manifest content rather than hidden meaning. Second step is Organizing Phase. In the organizing phase. This study applied the deductive content analysis approach, because the categories were already defined based on Yule's (2019) framework of ten-word formation processes such as coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, back formation, conversion, acronyms, derivation, and multiple processes. A categorization matrix was created using these ten categories. Each word or phrase identified in the lyrics was then coded according to the predetermined category. Through this step, the data were systematically grouped and interpreted according to the linguistic framework. Third is Reporting Phase. In the final stage, the findings were presented by describing the word formation processes identified in the lyrics. Each category was explained with examples from the data to show how Ice Cube used word formation in his songs. The analysis also explained the meaning and function of these forms in relation to his style, identity, and social commentary. Finally, the most dominant word formation processes were summarized to highlight their role in rap language and culture.

FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album, several types of word formation were identified in the selected songs. The processes that appeared include clipping, compounding, blending, borrowing, acronyms, coinage, and derivation. According to Yule's (2019) theory conducting word

formation process, there are 10 types of the word formation process, they were: coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, back formation, conversion, acronyms, derivation, and multiple processes. The detailed results can be seen in the following table.

Word Formation in *Steady Mobbin's Song*

Steady Mobbin' is one of the songs in Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album that portrays the lifestyle and struggles of the streets. The lyrics are filled with informal expressions, slang, and creative word use that give the song its strong rhythm and identity. The table below presents the data of word formation processes found in the song.

Table 1. Types of word formation process contained in song *Steady Mobbin'*

No	Word in Sentence (Lyric)	Type of Word Formation	Meaning in Context
1	The bigger the cap, the bigger the <i>peelin'</i>	Clipping	Shortened from <i>peeling</i> , meaning shooting or attacking.
2	And when <i>dealin'</i> with Da Lench Mob you gots to know steady mobbin' is not just the name of this jam	Clipping	From <i>dealing</i> , refers to handling business or selling drugs.
3	Bound together by <i>motherfuckers</i> that's known to break em' off something	Compounding	Combination of <i>mother + fuckers</i> , insult term for people.
4	Bound together by <i>motherfuckers</i> that's known to break em' off something	Clipping	Shortened from <i>them</i> .
5	There goes the <i>neighborhood</i>	Compounding	<i>neighbor + hood</i> , refers to community area.
6	Four or five <i>niggas</i> in a <i>mothership</i>	Clipping	From <i>niggers</i> , slang for Black men (re-appropriated in rap).
7	Four or five niggas in a <i>mothership</i>	Compounding	<i>mother + ship</i> , big car or vehicle in slang.
8	<i>Tryin'</i> to get our hands on some dollars and cents	Clipping	From <i>trying</i> .
9	Every chance we get, we <i>hittin'</i> up the rollers	Clipping	From <i>hitting</i> , meaning attacking or striking.
10	<i>Comin'</i> up short of the green guys	Clipping	From <i>coming</i> .
11	And I might start <i>slangin'</i> bean pies	Clipping	From <i>slanging</i> , refers to selling (usually drugs).
12	'Cause life ain't nothin' but money and fuck a bitch	Clipping	Shortened from <i>because</i> .
13	'Cause life ain't <i>nothin'</i> but money and fuck a bitch	Clipping	From <i>nothing</i> .
14	And if you didn't know, Ice Cube got drama, <i>hoes</i>	Clipping	From <i>whores</i> , slang for women.
15	So after the <i>screwin'</i>	Clipping	From <i>screwing</i> , refers to having sex.
16	<i>Bustin'</i> caps in the mix	Clipping	From <i>busting</i> , meaning shooting.
17	'Cause I'm <i>gettin'</i> major	Clipping	From <i>getting</i> .
18	<i>Fuck PacTel, move to Sky Pager</i>	Borrowing	Borrowed from Middle Dutch (<i>fokken</i>), vulgar term for sex/insult.
19	<i>Fuck PacTel, move to Sky Pager</i>	Compounding	From <i>Pacific + Telephone</i> , company name.
20	Don't drink 8-Ball 'cause <i>St. Ides</i> is givin ends	Coinage	Brand name of malt liquor, used directly in rap slang.
21	Niggas get mad, tempers are <i>flarin'</i>	Clipping	From <i>flaring</i> , meaning tempers rising.
22	'Cause they got a few bitches <i>starin'</i>	Clipping	From <i>staring</i> .
23	But <i>scandalous</i> bitches make for happy feds	Derivation	From <i>scandal + -ous</i> , meaning immoral.
24	But <i>scandalous</i> bitches make for happy <i>feds</i>	Clipping	From <i>federal agents</i> , police.
25	And if you tell on me I'm <i>bombin'</i> on Betty	Clipping	From <i>bombing</i> , meaning attacking.
26	Since <i>one-time</i> so hot	Compounding	Slang compound for "police."

27	Got me a stash spot in my hooptie for the <i>Glock</i>	Coinage	Brand name of Austrian pistol.
28	Eating soul food, <i>neckbones</i> from M&M's	Compounding	From <i>neck + bones</i> , traditional food item.
29	Eating soul food, neckbones from <i>M&M's</i>	Acronym	From <i>Mars & Murrie</i> , brand of candy.
30	<i>Grubbin'</i> like a motherfucker	Clipping	From <i>grubbing</i> , meaning eating.
31	Greasy-ass lips, now I gots to take a shit	Compounding	Compound insult/adjective, "very greasy."
32	When I hit a left on Ruthelen, "What up, <i>loc</i> ?"	Borrowing	From Spanish <i>loco</i> , meaning crazy.
33	Went to mom's house and dropped a load in the <i>bathroom</i>	Compounding	<i>bath + room</i> , toilet.
34	Jumped back in my <i>lowrider</i>	Compounding	<i>low + rider</i> , customized car.
35	Comin' out <i>feelin'</i> about ten pounds lighter	Clipping	From <i>feeling</i> .
36	Lench Mob <i>ain't</i> nothin' but tramps	Clipping	From <i>am not/is not/are not</i> .
37	For hoes <i>lickin'</i> nuts like stamps	Clipping	From <i>licking</i> , refers to oral sex.
38	One fool <i>bumpin'</i> music for the yamps	Clipping	From <i>bumping</i> , playing loud music.
39	<i>Gimme</i> the nappy and make me happy	Blending	From <i>give me</i> .
40	The <i>ho</i> said, "Pappy, could you slap me	Clipping	From <i>whore</i> , slang for woman.
41	Without <i>puttin'</i> on the latex"	Clipping	From <i>putting</i> .

From the table above, it can be seen that the dominance of clipping in *Steady Mobbin'* shows that Ice Cube uses shortened word forms to match the rhythm and flow of his rap performance. Words like *peelin'*, *dealin'*, and *comin'* make the lyrics sound more dynamic and natural, reflecting the spoken style of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). This process not only keeps the beat smooth but also gives the lyrics an informal and direct tone that connects with listeners. The frequent use of clipping indicates that rhythm and sound are central to Ice Cube's artistic choices, showing how language form supports musical performance. Compounding, seen in words such as *motherfuckers*, *neighborhood*, and *lowrider*, also strengthens meaning by combining ideas into single, powerful terms that add intensity and clarity to his message.

From a cultural perspective, these word formation patterns reflect the identity and values of Ice Cube's community. The use of slang and compounds expresses pride in African American speech and street culture, turning everyday language into a form of cultural expression. Words like *motherfucker* and *lowrider* are more than slang; they represent solidarity, resistance, and authenticity. Coinage and borrowing, such as *Glock*, *St. Ides*, and *loc*, connect the lyrics to real-life objects and social contexts familiar to the audience, grounding the songs in the lived experiences of urban Black communities. Even though blending, derivation, and acronyms appear less often, they add variety and creativity, showing Ice Cube's skill in shaping language that is both artistic and socially meaningful.

Word Formation in *True to the Game's Song*

True to the Game is a song where Ice Cube criticizes rappers who abandon their community and culture in pursuit of mainstream success. The lyrics emphasize loyalty, authenticity, and resistance to assimilation. The table below shows word formation processes found in the lyrics.

Table 2. Types of word formation process contained in song *True to the Game*

No	Word in Sentence (Lyric)	Type of Word Formation	Meaning in Context
1	Yeah, you, <i>motherfucker</i>	Compounding	Combination of <i>mother + fucker</i> , vulgar insult.
2	Yeah, you that motherfucker that betrayed your <i>homeboys</i> and you <i>ain't</i> shit	Compounding	<i>home + boys</i> , close friends from the same neighborhood.
3	Yeah, you that motherfucker that betrayed your <i>homeboys</i> and you <i>ain't</i> shit	Clipping	From <i>am not/is not/are not</i> , used in informal speech.
4	Yeah, you about to get your motherfucking <i>ghetto</i> pass revoked, <i>motherfucker</i>	Borrowing	From Italian <i>ghetto</i> , refers to poor urban area.
5	Punk-ass mark, bitch-made	Compounding	<i>punk + ass</i> , insulting expression.

	<i>Punk-ass</i> trick in a basket		
6	It's the <i>nigga</i> you love to hate with a new song	Clipping	From <i>nigger</i> , reclaimed slang term for Black man.
7	Nothing but a <i>come-up</i> , but ain't that a bitch?	Compounding	Slang for profit or success, <i>come + up</i> .
8	'Cause I can't move to the snow	Clipping	Shortened from <i>because</i> .
9	'Cause soon as <i>y'all</i> get some dough	Blending	From <i>you + all</i> , means "you all."
10	Moving out your <i>neighborhood</i>	Compounding	<i>neighbor + hood</i> , refers to community area.
11	"Nigga, go home" spray-painted on your house	Compounding	<i>spray + painted</i> , act of painting with spray.
12	Trying to be white or a Jew	Borrowing	From Old French/Latin, refers to Jewish person.
13	Stop being an Uncle Tom, you little <i>sell-out</i>	Compounding	<i>sell + out</i> , someone who betrays their community.
14	You was <i>hardcore</i> hip-hop	Compounding	<i>hard + core</i> , extreme, authentic style.
15	You was hardcore <i>hip-hop</i>	Compounding	<i>hip + hop</i> , music/cultural movement.
16	Now look at yourself, boy, you done <i>flip-flopped</i>	Compounding	Reduplicated form, meaning change of opinion/style.
17	Giving our music away to the <i>mainstream</i>	Compounding	<i>main + stream</i> , refers to popular culture.
18	On <i>MTV</i> , but they don't care	Acronym	Stands for <i>Music Television</i> , TV channel.
19	Stop <i>sellin'</i> out your race	Clipping	From <i>selling</i> .
20	Now <i>I'ma</i> be brief, be true to the game	Blending	From <i>I am going to</i> , slang contraction.
21	Find a mirror and take a look, G	Clipping	From <i>gangster/gangsta</i> , used as slang address.
22	You wanna be the big fish, you little <i>guppy</i>	Coinage	From surname of naturalist Guppy, name of small fish.
23	Black man can't be no Black man can't be no <i>yuppie</i>	Blending	From <i>young + urban + professional</i> , slang for career-oriented person.

From the table, many compounds in *True to the Game* show that Ice Cube often joins two words to make stronger and more meaningful expressions. Words like *motherfucker*, *homeboys*, *neighborhood*, and *hip-hop* are not just combinations of words, this show friendship, identity, and culture. For example, *homeboys* means close friends who come from the same area and share the same background. *Hip-hop* and *hardcore* show the artist's loyalty to his culture and his fight to stay true to real rap, not commercial trends. By using compounding, Ice Cube gives clear pictures of his world and makes his message more powerful. This word formation process also helps build rhythm and emotion in the lyrics, making them sound natural and expressive.

From a cultural and stylistic, the song *True to the Game* shows Ice Cube's message about staying loyal to one's roots and not forgetting one's culture. The use of clipping like *ain't*, *sellin'*, and *G* and blending like *y'all* and *I'ma* makes the lyrics sound like real everyday speech in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Borrowed words such as *ghetto* and *Jew* help him talk about race, inequality, and discrimination. Other forms like coinage (*guppy*) and acronyms (*MTV*) also make the lyrics richer and more modern. These different word formation processes show that Ice Cube carefully chooses his words to express pride, resistance, and truth. His language is not only artistic but also a voice of his community and culture.

Word Formation in *No Vaseline's* Song

No Vaseline is one of Ice Cube's most famous diss tracks, directed at his former group N.W.A. The song is full of insults, street slang, and cultural references, making it a powerful example of how language can be used for confrontation. The table below shows word formation processes found in the lyrics.

Table 3. Types of word formation process contained in song *No Vaseline*

No	Word in Sentence (Lyric)	Type of Word Formation	Meaning in Context
1	Forgot to do <i>somethin'</i> , let me see, uh	Clipping	From <i>something</i> , informal pronunciation.

2	The <i>motherfuckin'</i> saga continue	Compounding	Combination of <i>mother</i> + <i>fuckin'</i> , vulgar insult.
3	Y'all motherfuckers ready for N.W.A? Well, get the fuck up	Blending	From <i>you</i> + <i>all</i> , means "you all."
4	Y'all motherfuckers ready for <i>N.W.A</i> ? Well, get the fuck up	Acronym	<i>Niggas With Attitudes</i> , rap group name.
5	But now, since he stepped the <i>fuck</i> off	Borrowing	Borrowed from Middle Dutch (<i>fokken</i>), vulgar term for sex/insult.
6	It was once said by a man who couldn't quit, <i>dope</i> —	Borrowing	From Dutch <i>doop</i> , slang for drugs or cool.
7	Cube was <i>suckin'</i> so much New York dick	Clipping	From <i>sucking</i> .
8	Real <i>niggas</i> ? Them <i>niggas</i> Dre and Yella used to wear lipstick and lace	Clipping	From <i>nigger</i> , slang for Black men.
9	Half pint bitch, <i>fuckin</i> your homeboys, you little maggot	Clipping	From <i>fuckin</i> .
10	Bend over for the <i>goddamn</i> cracker	Compounding	<i>God</i> + <i>damn</i> , strong expletive.
11	First you was down with the <i>AK</i>	Acronym	From <i>Avtomat Kalashnikova</i> , type of rifle.
12	And kept on <i>stompin'</i>	Clipping	From <i>stomping</i> , meaning stepping hard.
13	The Niggas With Attitudes? Who you <i>foolin'</i> ?	Clipping	From <i>fooling</i> .
14	Y'all niggas just <i>phony</i>	Clipping	From <i>phonograph</i> → <i>phony</i> , meaning fake.
15	I put that on my mama and my dead <i>homies</i>	Clipping	From <i>homeboys</i> , close friends.
16	With the <i>L-E-N-C-H M-O-B</i>	Acronym	Stylized acronym for Ice Cube's group.
17	And y'all disgrace the <i>C-P-T</i>	Acronym	Abbreviation of <i>Compton</i> , hometown.
18	Who gives a fuck about a <i>punk-ass</i> villain?	Compounding	<i>punk</i> + <i>ass</i> , insulting phrase.
19	But Willie D told me to let a <i>ho</i> be a <i>ho</i> , so	Clipping	From <i>whore</i> , slang for woman.
20	Tried to <i>diss</i> Ice Cube, it wasn't worth it	Clipping	From <i>disrespect</i> , insult.
21	'Cause the <i>broomstick</i> fit your ass so perfect	Compounding	<i>broom</i> + <i>stick</i> , used metaphorically.
22	Cut my hair? <i>Nah</i> , cut them balls	Clipping	Informal form of <i>no</i> .
23	<i>Gang-banged</i> by your manager, <i>fella</i>	Compounding	<i>gang</i> + <i>bang</i> , violent sexual act or attack.
24	Now they got The Villain with a purse and <i>high-heels</i>	Compounding	<i>high</i> + <i>heels</i> , type of shoes.
25	'Cause you know I'm the one that flow	Clipping	From <i>because</i> .
26	'Cause you let a Jew break up my crew	Borrowing	From Old French/Latin, refers to Jewish person.
27	Now I <i>gotta</i> play The Silence of the Lambs	Blending	From <i>got to</i> , meaning obligation.
28	Eazy-E turned <i>faggot</i>	Borrowing	From Old French <i>fagot</i> , derogatory term.
29	With your manager, <i>fella</i>	Clipping	From <i>fellow</i> , informal.
30	'Til that Jheri curl is gone	Clipping	From <i>until</i> .
31	Dumb nigga, what you thinking 'bout	Clipping	From <i>about</i> .
32	<i>Tryin'</i> to fuck me, but I'd rather fuck you	Clipping	From <i>trying</i> .
33	Punk, always into something, <i>gettin'</i> fucked at night	Clipping	From <i>getting</i> .
34	Motherfuckin' nosejob <i>havin'</i> -ass	Compounding	<i>havin</i> + <i>ass</i> , insulting phrase.
35	Motherfuckin' nosejob <i>havin'</i> -ass	Compounding	<i>nose</i> + <i>job</i> , plastic surgery.

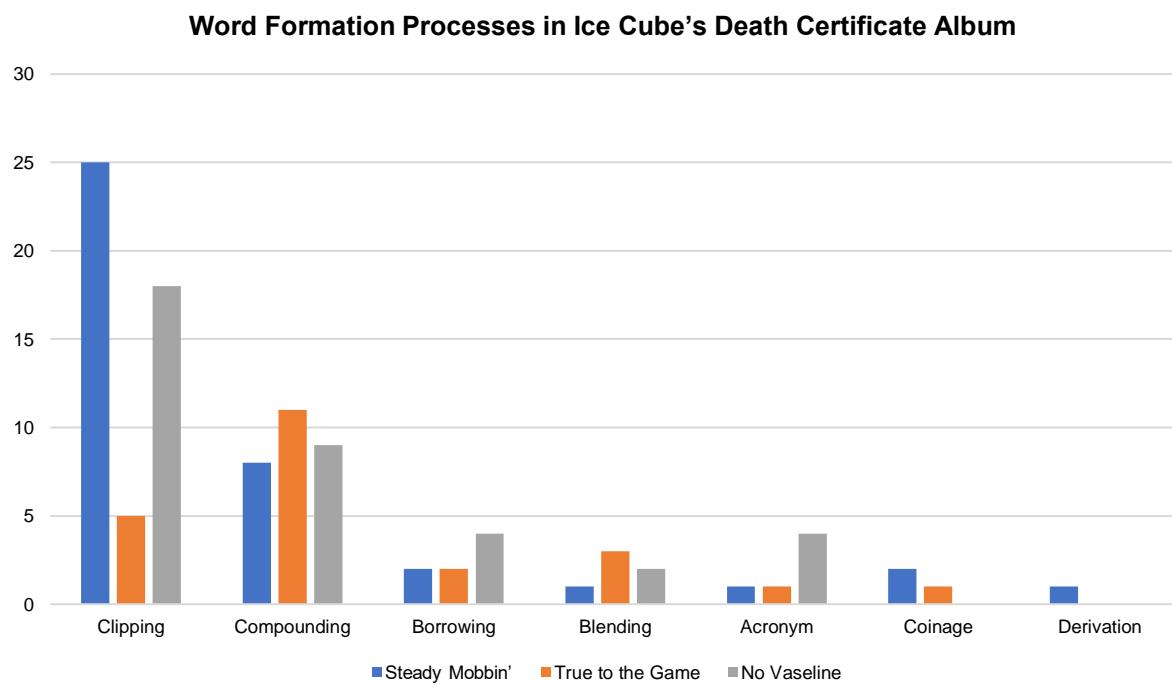
The dominance of clipping in *No Vaseline* shows that Ice Cube uses shortened forms to create a fast rhythm that fits the strong and emotional tone of the song. Words such as *somethin'*, *suckin'*, and *tryin'* make the lyrics sound natural and close to daily speech in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). This language choice helps to express anger and confidence directly, giving the track a powerful and

realistic voice. The frequent use of compounding, as in *motherfuckin'*, *punk-ass*, and *high-heels*, adds energy and creativity to the lyrics. Each compound combines two words to give stronger meaning and vivid images, which makes the insults more expressive. These word formations help to connect rhythm, emotion, and meaning in a way that fits the performance style of rap.

From a cultural and social point of view, *No Vaseline* presents Ice Cube's response to betrayal, injustice, and control within the music industry. The song expresses resistance and pride through its choice of words. Acronyms such as *N.W.A*, *AK*, and *CPT* link the lyrics to real places, groups, and cultural identities in African American life. Borrowed words such as *fuck*, *dope*, and *Jew* show the historical layers of English vocabulary and the influence of street language in rap. The presence of blending in forms like *y'all* and *gotta* keeps the lyrics close to spoken communication and community speech. All of these linguistic patterns demonstrate Ice Cube's skill in shaping words to express emotion, identity, and protest in a creative and meaningful way.

Word Formation in Album Ice Cube's Death Certificate album: *Steady Mobbin'*, *True to the Game*, and *No Vaseline*

To provide a comprehensive overview of the data, the results from the three songs such as *Steady Mobbin'*, *True to the Game*, and *No Vaseline* are combined and presented in the following chart. While the previous tables showed the occurrences of word formation processes in each song individually, the chart summarizes these findings in a comparative form. This visualization highlights which processes appear most frequently across the album and illustrates the overall tendency of Ice Cube's linguistic choices.



Graph 1. Frequency of Word Formation Processes in Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* Album (*Steady Mobbin'*, *True to the Game*, and *No Vaseline*)

The chart above showed the result of word formation processes that were identified in the three selected songs of Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album: *Steady Mobbin'*, *True to the Game*, and *No Vaseline*. From the figure, it was clear that clipping was the most dominant process. It appeared 25 times in *Steady Mobbin'*, 5 times in *True to the Game*, and 18 times in *No Vaseline*. This indicated that Ice Cube preferred to shorten words by dropping one or more sounds, for example *peelin'* (peeling) or *comin'* (coming). The frequent use of clipping made the lyrics sound more informal, rhythmic, and closer to everyday African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

The second most common type of word formation was compounding, which occurred 8 times in *Steady Mobbin'*, 11 times in *True to the Game*, and 9 times in *No Vaseline*. This process combined two or more words to create new meanings, as seen in examples such as *motherfucker*, *homeboys*, or

bathroom, and reflected Ice Cube's creativity in producing powerful and expressive terms that represented street culture and rap identity. Other processes, although less frequent, also appeared in the lyrics. Borrowing, for instance, introduced words from other languages or cultures, including *ghetto* and *loc*. Blending was identified in forms such as *gimme* (give + me) and *y'all* (you + all), while acronyms like *N.W.A.* and *MTV* represented the names of groups and institutions. Coinage was also used, as in *Glock* (a gun brand) and *St. Ides* (a beer brand), and derivation appeared rarely, with *scandalous* serving as an example of affixation to create new words.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study show that clipping and compounding were the most dominant word formation processes in Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album, with clipping appearing most frequently across the three selected songs. According to Yule (2019), "clipping occurs when a word of more than one syllable is reduced to a shorter form". It means that means speakers make the word shorter and more casual, but the meaning stays the same. This pattern is consistent with African American Vernacular English (AAVE), where shortened forms such as *ain't* or *somethin'* are widely used in everyday speech and carry cultural identity (Sun, 2025). In rap, clipping not only helps the lyrics follow the beat but also shows authenticity and solidarity with the community ((Panduwati & Hilman, 2025). Compounding is also very common, creating strong and culture-related words such as *motherfucker* or *homeboys*. As Yule (2019) explains, "compounding is the joining of two separate words to produce a single form". In Ice Cube's lyrics, compounding is used as a tool to build identity, send powerful messages, and reflect the life of street culture.

On the other hand, other processes such as coinage, derivation, and acronyms were found less frequently, while conversion and back-formation did not appear at all in the data. This can be explained by the style and culture of rap lyrics and AAVE. Coinage is the invention of completely new words (Yule, 2019), but Ice Cube prefers to use slang and cultural terms that already exist, such as *Glock* or *St. Ides*, instead of inventing new words. Derivation, which adds affixes to make new words, is also rare because longer and more complex forms do not fit well with the fast rhythm and oral style of rap (Manjavacas et al., 2019). Furthermore, conversion and back-formation were not found in the data, which indicates that these processes are less compatible with the style and rhythm required in rap lyrics. Overall, Ice Cube's frequent use of clipping and compounding matches the speech patterns of AAVE, making his lyrics sound authentic, meaningful for his culture, and rhythmically strong.

The word formation processes that Ice Cube used also played an important role in shaping the artistic elements of his lyrics. Clipping made the words shorter, which helped him match the beat and gave his lines a sharper and faster rhythm. Compounding and blending added creativity by joining words into strong expressions, such as *motherfucker*, *homeboys*, or *gangsta rap*, which carried cultural and emotional meanings beyond their literal sense. Coinage, such as *Glock* or *St. Ides*, gave authenticity by naming real products that were part of street life, making the lyrics feel more realistic. Acronyms like *N.W.A* or *CPT* created a sense of identity and belonging, while borrowing words such as *loc* or *ghetto* showed cultural diversity and connection to wider language use. Even derivation, though rare, added variation by turning words into more descriptive forms like *scandalous*. All of these processes worked together not only to build meaning but also to shape rhythm, intensity, and imagery in the songs. In this way, word formation was part of Ice Cube's artistry, giving his rap both musical strength and cultural depth.

This study showed some similarities with previous studies. For example, like Anjelia and Ramdhani's (2024) study of Megan Thee Stallion's *Traumazine* album, it found that clipping was the most dominant word formation process. Clipping was also frequent in Adhani and Fitrawati's (2023) research on Rich Brian's album, which suggests that shortening words is common across rap music because it matches the fast rhythm and informal style of the genre. This shows that clipping was not only Ice Cube's stylistic choice but also a broader feature of rap lyrics in general. At the same time, this study offered a new perspective by showing that compounding was almost as important as clipping in Ice Cube's songs. This contrasts with Raodhatul and Ardi's (2019) study on Young Lex, which mostly described slang features without pointing out compounding as a dominant process. In Ice Cube's case, compounds such as *homeboys* and *motherfucker* carried strong cultural meanings, helping to represent street identity and collective solidarity. This indicates that compounding played a key role in shaping meaning beyond individual expression.

Another important difference is that while most previous studies only focused on identifying word formation processes, this research also connected them to African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and the socio-political themes in Ice Cube's music. For instance, Adhani and Fitrawati's (2023) analysis

of Rich Brian's 1999 album and Anjelia and Ramdhani's (2024) work on Traumazine both emphasized clipping as the main process, but they did not discuss its cultural or political function. By linking word formation to AAVE, this study showed how Ice Cube's use of language reinforced authenticity, cultural identity, and resistance to mainstream norms. In this way, the findings not only confirmed what earlier studies had found about clipping but also expanded the discussion by showing how word formation worked as a tool for identity and social commentary in rap.

This study has several limitations. First, the data were limited to only three songs from Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* album. Because of this, the results may not fully represent all the word formation strategies in his entire body of work or in rap music in general. Second, the analysis was based only on Yule's (2019) classification of word formation and did not use other morphological frameworks that might provide different views. Third, the study focused mostly on word-level processes and did not include syntactic or pragmatic aspects of AAVE, which could give a broader understanding of linguistic creativity in rap lyrics. Considering these limitations, future research is suggested to analyze more songs or albums, compare different artists, and apply other frameworks such as Bauer or Plag to make the analysis richer. It would also be useful for researchers to combine qualitative interpretation with corpus-based methods to measure frequency more systematically, and to extend the analysis beyond words to larger language structures. So, future studies can offer deeper insights into how rap reflects both creativity and cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be concluded that Ice Cube intentionally used word formation strategies in his lyrics to reflect his artistic style and cultural identity. The data from *Steady Mobbin'*, *True to the Game*, and *No Vaseline* in the *Death Certificate* album show various types of word formation processes, with clipping and compounding appearing as the most dominant. Clipping appeared most often, showing Ice Cube's preference for short and informal words that match African American Vernacular English (AAVE). This process helped keep the rhythm and rhyme in his lyrics and made his language sound real and close to his community. Compounding was used to create strong, culture-based words such as *motherfucker*, *homeboys*, and *gangsta rap*, reflecting his identity and the social reality around him. Other processes like borrowing, blending, acronyms, coinage, and derivation appeared less often but still added variety and cultural meaning to the lyrics. These results show that Ice Cube's word choices were intentional and used as a linguistic strategy to support his artistic, cultural, and political messages. Through these word formations, he expressed social resistance, built his identity as an African American artist, and emotionally connected with his audience. In conclusion, word formation plays an important role in shaping both the creativity and cultural meaning of rap lyrics. Ice Cube's use of different word forms shows that morphology can be a powerful tool for artistic expression and social commentary. This proves that rap is not only entertainment but also a valuable form of language and culture that deserves academic study. Future research can explore more songs, artists, or comparisons to better understand how language, identity, and culture work together in hip-hop.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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