

Metafore u 'gayspeak'-u

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Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2015

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-04-25**



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Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku

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Preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti

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Conceptual Metaphors in Gayspeak

Završni rad

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Osijek, rujan 2015.

Summary

Gayspeak is full of metaphors.

With gays being more visible, the language they use also becomes more visible to linguists. Starting with the secret language Polari, the thesis elaborates the (in)visibility of gays and language they create and use due to marginalization. Metaphorical linguistic expressions are abundant in Gayspeak and the thesis is a direct attempt to conceptualize some of them.

The thesis is structured as follows. First, the data about Gayspeak – conceptual metaphor, mapping, and motivation – was collected. Second, the same data was explained in general so a reader can understand the final stage, which is the applicability of the characteristics of a conceptual metaphor to words in Gayspeak to determine how conceptual metaphors are created and thought of, and to suggest several conceptual metaphors in Gayspeak.

Due to the specific limits of the thesis, it is important to mention that the thesis is by necessity concise in presenting the linguistic area of conceptual metaphor.

Key words: conceptual metaphor, Gayspeak, mapping, metonymy, motivation

Acknowledgements

I would like to express thanks to my supervisor who introduced me to the metaphorical idea in Gayspeak and who had patience with me for an extra year.

My gratitude also goes to Irish friends who helped me with Gayspeak on an English-speaking territory and to a Polish friend whom I constantly shared motivation with during prolonged writing of our theses.

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Introduction

The epitome of the research and metaphorical explanation of this thesis is Paul Baker's *Fantabulosa: A Dictionary of Polari and Gay Slang*. This *pièce de résistance* of Lavender Linguistics is divided into two sections, as its name says. Since Polari, the language ancestor of Gayspeak, is assumed it is linguistically dead, the focus will be on the gay slang part, meaning that the definitions of the selected words and terms will be Baker's definitions. The words in the dictionary were created and influenced by the gay way of life of the 20th century, some of them even before, but also by societal, economic, and political changes happening in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The implementation of the words in conceptual metaphors will try to be as objective as possible while plunging into social domains of gay life and see them as lexical domains, upon which it will describe conceptual metaphor, mapping, motivation, and metonymy.

The main objective of the thesis is to suggest some of the conceptual metaphors and metonymies motivating figurative expressions in Gayspeak.

1. Gayspeak and Its Origins

Gayspeak is a term to describe “overly careful pronunciation, a wide pitch range, high and rapidly changing pitch, breathy tone, lengthened fricative sounds... Also ritual insults, irony, sarcasm, use of sexual and erotic reference, and women-related imagery and metaphor... slang and other new words, mostly relating to aspects of gay and lesbian culture” (Sims, 2004, p. 1). There are many other expressions that define the same: LGBT speak, LGBT slang, Queerspeak, Gay slang, Homosexual slang, Gay language, etc. Additionally, in the terms of studying the language of LGBT (hereinafter: gay) speakers, Professor William Leap coined the term “Lavender Linguistics” (Bobeda, 2012). It concerns the language of non-heterosexual speakers, hence the adjective *lavender* and not a specific adjectival word for the sexual orientation of the speakers. In parallel, the term “lavender lads” is used repeatedly in 1950s by American Senator Everett Dirksen as a synonymic metaphor for a homosexual (Bailey, 2014).

Since gays were marginalized more than today, at least in the developed countries, it was crucial for them to create a language which an outsider will not know about. “Secret languages emerge from situations in which a community feels the need to conceal the content of their utterances from the outside world” and that community is “threatened by other communities” (Taylor, 2007, p. 8). The language ancestor of modern Gayspeak is Polari, the underground language, or to be exact, a jargon and a secret vocabulary used not only by homosexuals, but also showmen, criminals, gypsies, men serving in the navy, etc. Since homosexuals were, and still are, but with more equal rights than ever in history, insecure about their lives, especially during the World War II and afterwards, they felt the need to speak in a manner of the “overall structure of a larger language, with a coded lexicon” (Taylor, 2007, p. 8) to feel more-or-less equal to everyone else, to pass vital information incognito, and, ultimately, to start to feel more human.

Polari started dying out in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to gays having no more need to live secretive, inverted, and shameful way of life.¹ Gay liberation movement and Stonewall² events unintentionally killed the language. To be more equal to the others, gays (sub)consciously started to see Polari as a disguise of homosexuality, which contradicted the sole idea of being visible. Polari nowadays can be traced pretty much only to gay community’s older members and although there are

¹ Personal view of an Irish friend who lived in London through the period of rise and fall of Polari.

² On the night of 28 July 1969 a group of gays, lesbians, and transsexuals stood up against the police raid and thus, for the first time in history, stood up for themselves rising a violent riot that was since a symbol of every gay pride.

remnants of Polari in the modern English language, this thesis will be focusing on “newer items... widely known by younger people belonging to the scene or who have frequent contact with members from it” (Cox, Fay, 1994, p. 8).

1.1. The Ways to Create a Secret Language

Although Polari’s primary borrowing language was English, it contains many words borrowed from other languages, such as Italian (*parlare* ‘to speak’, thus Polari) or Romani, so direct or indirect borrowing is the number one method for enriching a secret language. Cryptolalic³ language formation, another way of adding vocabulary material in the secret language, takes as basis the internal resources of a language, such as *backslang* (pronouncing words backwards, e.g. *ecaf* instead of *face*), productive suffixing (adding specific suffixes to create new types of words, e.g. diminutives), figurative and camouflaged words, and metaphorical compounding (Taylor, 2007, p. 10). Metaphorical (or metonymic) compounding is the most important one for this thesis since it is dealing with metaphor (and metonymy). Specifically, compounding in Gayspeak has an inclination of depicting subgroups within gay culture. For example, a construction ‘noun plus boy’ provides more details about a typically young gay guy; a *lady boy* is “usually a young East Asian male-to-female transsexual”, a *pony boy* is “a bottom during animal training role-play”, a *rent boy* is “a male prostitute” (Baker, 2004, 155, 178, 186, respectively).

1.2. Lexical Domains of Gayspeak

As can be seen in the examples above, Gayspeak is characterized by an abundance of sex-themed expressions and expressions for physical appearance, as well as intimacy of relationship, rank and eccentricities within the subculture (Hayes, 1976, p. 259). It was important for gays to keep the language hidden from the majority which resulted in “over-lexicalization of terms for sex, body parts, people” (Taylor, 2007, p. 20) and are direct reflections of abstract thoughts based on literal ones. Today, with gays being more and more accepted in society, the domains of interest or, in this case, lexical domains, are easier to understand and because of that it is possible to conduct a metaphorical conceptualization.

³ A reference to a form of secret speech. (English Encyclopedia. 2015. Web. August 2015.
<http://www.encyclo.co.uk/meaning-of-cryptolalic>)

2. Metaphor and Conceptual Metaphor GAYS ARE ANIMALS

In their first sentence of their work *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003, p. 4) say that “metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language.” They found that the majority of the words and sentences we think of, speak, and write, are metaphorical. Contrary to knowledge that the main feature of metaphor is to consciously show similarity between two (linguistic) units that are compared, that it is used to create a rhetorical or artistic effect while trying to maintain a witty and eloquent communication, and having a possibility to be omitted from a conversation, Lakoff and Johnson are opposing the concept of metaphor whose functions do not have to be based on similarity, nor they need to have a purpose other than to understand concepts better. It is considered to be “an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning” (Kövecses, 2002, p. VIII).

Cognitive linguistics introduces the term of conceptual metaphor to capture the notion of understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another. Kövecses provide the formula common of conceptual metaphor in cognitive linguistics: CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A is CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B. This kind of mental mapping constructs a meaning which serves as a junction connecting two conceptual domains: *source domain* and *target domain*. *Source domain* is “from which we draw metaphorical [linguistic] expressions to understand another conceptual domain” (Kovecses, 2002, p. 4) – *target domain*. Duality is the main trait of conceptual metaphor. On the one hand, the domains can be connected in a way to create a new conceptual situation. On the other hand, a constant use of the connections between the same domains leads to the stabilization of the connections (Werkmann, 2010, p. 36). As an example in Gayspeak, we will use a conceptual metaphor GAYS ARE ANIMALS. In the sentence with a conceptual situation *I would really like that bear to hug me*, the word *bear* is reflecting the metaphorical ability to describe “a gay man who generally possesses... a hairy body, beard and/or moustache, large or tubby build, muscular development, masculine behavior” (Baker, 2004, p. 79) and not an animal (source domain). The same word has become conventionalized for that type of a gay man (target domain) so it is safe to say it has become an established and unconscious knowledge for what we want to say. Gays are understood in terms of animals, which is one of the common, established ways we conceptualize humans in general.

Conceptual metaphor recognizes *mapping*, a correspondence between two domains that depends on our knowledge about what is mapped onto what. In the example above, characteristics of an animal, which is a more concrete domain, are mapped to a gay man with the same or very similar body build, which is a more abstract domain related to the word bear and the underlying concept. In Gayspeak, physical appearance is described by a range of animal possibilities. To show more closely how a conceptual metaphor GAYS ARE ANIMALS is created by mapping, the following examples will be of service:

- *He needs to find himself a bitch in heat.*⁴ A *bitch in heat* is “a gay man who is always desperate to have sex” (Baker, 2004, p. 83).
- *I get a panic attack when bug-brothers are near me.* *Bug-brothers* is “a group of HIV positive men” (Baker, 2004, p. 90).
- *Paris is a place to be for a frog queen like me.* A *frog queen* is “a gay man who is attracted to French men” (Baker, 2004, p. 128).
- *We have a lamb to the slaughter in the house!* A *lamb to the slaughter* is “a nickname for someone new to the gay scene who becomes romantically involved with a predatory, experienced gay man, whose prime objectives are sexual conquest and validation” (Baker, 2004, p 155.)
- *You’re becoming a polar bear, old friend.* A *polar bear* is “a mature *bear* with greying or white hair” (Baker, 2004, p. 177).
- *Sex pig looking for a dom.* A *sex pig* is “usually a male submissive bottom in rough BDSM sex” (Baker, 2004, p. 191).

As shown, the metaphor GAYS ARE ANIMALS is a shorter way of denoting a group of mappings from the source domain, animal, to the target domain, a gay man. The wordier version would be that female dogs are prone to having more frequent copulation when in heat, some bugs carry bacteria or viruses which cause diseases in humans, frogs are a French cuisine specialty, lambs get killed by wolves, white fur is a physical attribute of a polar bear that everybody sees, and pigs tend to be inert, but also enjoy wobbling in dirt. Because we want to avoid suffering of language data when it is restricted to language (Fauconnier, 1997, p. 7), it is important to have rich and coherent knowledge about the elements in the source domain that helps to provide conclusions about

⁴ All the sentences are made up by the author.

individual aspects of the target domain – *metaphorical entailments* (Kovecses, 2002, p. 93). All of the expressions, i.e. mappings, of a conceptual metaphor GAYS ARE ANIMALS, are labels for different types of what gay men look like and what are their preferences, all based on different kinds of animals and, linguistically, metaphorical compounding.

2.1. Motivation

Some conceptual metaphors, “are motivated by tight correlations in” abstract or concrete “experience rather than by features shared between source and target” (Grady, 2005, p. 1600). Grady calls them *primary* or *correspondence-based metaphors* (HAPPY IS UP, TIME IS MOTION, KNOWING IS SEEING, to name a few). The other type, *similarity-based metaphors*, are “limited only by what humans can perceive or construct as similar in some respect and can thus be coined relatively freely,” (Maeder, Fischer, Herlofsky, 2005, p. 49) meaning that it is not possible to prove experiential correlation. Simply put, experience vs. similarity.

GAYS ARE ANIMALS is proving that motivation in the conceptual metaphor is evoked by both experience and similarity: physical characteristics of a bear are similar⁵ to physical characteristics of a muscular and hairy gay guy; a gay man has to have knowledge about a female dog leaning towards recurrent copulation when in heat and that is directly applied to a gay man with a high libido; both *bug-brothers* and bugs carrying viruses are similar exactly in a way that they carry viruses that are potentially harmful for them and others they sting; experience is a key factor in knowing that French eat frogs; otherwise, an outsider could think a *frog queen* is a person obsessed with (eating) frogs, while in reality it is a gay man stereotypically obsessed with French men who maybe do not even eat frogs; there is an old Aesop’s fable about the lamb and the wolf⁶, who devoured the lamb without acknowledging any lamb’s excuse, which motivated gay society to replicate the situation in the term *lamb to the slaughter*; white hair of a gay man and white fur of a polar bear obviously show the similarity motivated by a physical feature; a gay man playing dirty in bed equals a pig playing dirty in mud. All these metaphorical entailments aim to describe a target domain and since, for example, a gay man can be a *bear* and a *frog queen* at the same time, but maybe not a *sex pig*, it feels impossible to classify a conceptual metaphor GAYS ARE ANIMALS as either a correspondence- or a similarity-based one, but that is not crucial for the thesis.

⁵ Differs from culture to culture, but the author is relying on both his personal experience and the Baker’s definition.

⁶ Aesop’s Fables. *The Wolf and the Lamb*. Web. 19 August 2015. <http://www.taleswithmorals.com/aesop-fable-the-wolf-and-the-lamb.htm>

2.2. Personification Metaphors and Metonymy

When something non-human is specified as a person, we talk about *personification*. A personified non-human object conveys “different aspects of a person or way of looking at a person” (Lakoff, Johnson, 2003, p. 35) and one can understand an occurrence in nature by their personal motivations, acts, and characteristics, but it is not referring to a human being. Although it can seem personification exists in Gayspeak at first sight, the vast majority of expressions, such as animals, are precisely pointed towards describing a person. It is worth of mentioning so as not to make a confusion between personification metaphors and metonymy.

Metonymy appears in words that use “one conceptual entity to refer to another that is related to it” (Lakoff, Johnson, 2003, p. 36). Perhaps the most widespread is PART FOR WHOLE, but there are also mappings WHOLE FOR PART and PART FOR PART. Specifically in Gayspeak, *fresh meat* – “a new person (usually young and/or attractive) on the gay scene (Baker, 2004, p. 124) – can be used as an example of that conceptual metonymy. Humans are made of flesh, which is meat in a slightly cannibalistic sense since we mostly use that expression for talking about food. And so a referential function of metonymy has been fulfilled – a part of the human body is used as a material to portray the whole physical gist of a deliciously attractive gay man that is made of that material.

One should note that conceptual metaphor and metonymy often interact when it comes to conceptual motivation of linguistic expressions. It is exactly what is expected to also be the case in expression in Gayspeak.

3. Analysis

This thesis has already sown the seeds of the next conceptual metaphor by mentioning one food expression in the metonymy section. This section will complete it and suggest two more conceptual metaphors.

3.1. GAY SEX IS FOOD

- *Biscuit game tonight at my place!* A *biscuit game* is “a game played among all-male groups (usually consisting of heterosexual (or closeted) men or youths), the object being to masturbate in a circle over a biscuit. Everyone is required to shoot their cum onto the biscuit and the last person to do this has to eat it” (Baker, 2004, 83).
- *He took me to the men’s room and we made a milk run.* *Make a milk run* is “to go to a public convenience for the purposes of sex” (Baker, 2004, 160).
- *I went interracial with the two black guys; we had an Oreo sex.* *Oreo sex* is “a threesome involving two black men and a white man... Derived from the Oreo snack: a creamy-coloured filling sandwiched between two dark pieces of biscuit” (Baker, 2004, p. 171-172).
- *Are you having enough salt in your diet while on a cruise?* *Salt in your diet* is “to have sex with sailors” (Baker, 2004, p. 189)
- *And while being in Oreo, I got spit roasted.* *Spit roast* is “to be the passive partner in simultaneous oral and anal sex with two other men” (Baker, 2004, p. 197).
- *He stripped his clothes off, pushed me on the bed and tea bagged me as a foreplay.* *Tea bag* is “the act of ‘dipping’ the testicles onto someone’s face or forehead, usually while performing an erotic dance” (Baker, 2004, p. 201).
- *Toss me some salad, baby!* *Tossed salad* is “the act of *rimming* – to lick, tongue, kiss and penetrate the anus with the tongue” (Baker, 2004, p. 204, 186, respectively).

This conceptual metaphor communicates a lexical domain of SEX, which is drawn from a source domain, food, and a target domain, gay sex. Mappings and motivations are individual for every expression: in *biscuit game*, *game* is still a game and *biscuit* is still a biscuit, so the characteristics of both are mapped onto a sexual game also called a *circle jerk*, which serves as an experiential motivation for the expression; *make a milk run* gets its motivation from similarity in color between milk and semen, and the verb *make run* has its roots in milking domestic animals, which is, accordingly, mapped onto an ejaculating penis; the similarity is pretty much obvious from

the description of an *Oreo sex* in which the two gay men or color represent the dark pieces of biscuit and the white man is the middle filling, thus showing a direct mapping on the characteristics of a biscuit to an act of interracial threesome; considering that sailors spend a lot of their life out at sea, motivation comes from the salinity of it which is then mapped onto sailors that a gay man likes to have sex with, and the sex part is motivated by eating that can be seen mapped in the part of the expression *in diet*; spit roasting of an animal is in straight line mapped onto the sexual position and the motivation is in the physical similarity of the acts; sexual *tea bagging* maps similarity from the action of making tea by dipping a tea bag in the hot water as many time as one want their tea to be strong; motivation for *tossed salad* possibly came from mixing ingredients for a salad and tossing⁷ some kind of a dressing on it, while in a sexual act, a lubricant or a kind of a sweet liquid can be used to perform it, thus getting mapping.

Baker's *Dictionary* is a sea of words and expressions minding food. The motivation stems from human knowledge, namely it is a metaphor making people edible by comparing them – and also the acts they do – to food.

3.2. GAY SEX IS A TOPONYM

- *I'm going to Australia to experience Australian sex at its best. Australian sex* is “sex involving licking, kissing and tonguing various parts of the body in the following order: the back of the neck and shoulders, down and up the spine, the back of neck and shoulders, the side of neck, mouth, bottom of spine, anus and beyond” (Baker, 2004, p. 74).
- *It's too much for me, I'd try New Zealand sex better. New Zealand sex* is “a form of *Australian sex* which does not include rimming” (Baker, 2004, p. 168).
- *He made my whole body a French embassy while we were hooking up. French embassy* is “the act of French kissing non-traditional holes of the body” named that way “because you bring a little bit of France to that body part.”⁸
- *Change your bedsheet, you left a map of Africa on it. Map of Africa* is “a semen stain made on the bed-sheets after sex” (Baker, 2004, p. 161).

⁷ All Recipes. *Classic Tossed Salad*. 2015. Web. 21 August 2015. <http://allrecipes.com/recipe/classic-tossed-salad/>

⁸ Urban Dictionary. *French Embassy*. 4 Nov 2011. Web. 9 Sep 2015.

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=French+Embassy&defid=6184391>

Baker's definition (2004, p. 123): “any place where gay sex is easily available, especially a gym...” Not used because it is very hard to find the motivation which makes the expression useless for the thesis.

- *I've found out I'm HIV positive after participating in my friend's Russian roulette party.* *Russian roulette party* is “a sex party without condoms where HIV positive and HIV negative men are present. Negative men take their chances that they will or won't be infected by having sex. The participants may or may not know the HIV status of any of the other participants in advance” (Baker, 2004, p. 187).

Once again, a lexical domain of SEX is deliberately chosen and described through a conceptual metaphor, showing that it is a very important point of interest in Gayspeak. A target domain in the conceptual metaphor GAY SEX IS A TOPONYM is gay sex and a source domain is a toponymical expression; in this case it is either a country or a continent. A name for the whole nation is used for a part of what nation does – this conceptual involves metonymy. Of course, that particular nation does not have to do anything with the expression as it can be ascribed to a nation because some of its cultural characteristics. Since there is no written evidence available to me to explain *Australian sex*, I can only assume that the motivation stems from the Australian way of life, which I am also not familiar enough with. However, New Zealand is, correspondingly, considered to be a clean(er) country so that can be considered as a motivation for omitting rimming from the whole intercourse described with *New Zealand sex*. *French embassy* finds its motivation in another metaphor – French kissing. The features of that type of kissing (using tongue) are mapped onto the more sexual actions. *Map of Africa* is a perfect similarity-based metaphor by the mere fact that someone saw a semen stain looked like Africa. *Russian roulette party* falls a motivational victim to a real Russian roulette where a person does not know if the next trigger holds a bullet in the gun that is pointed to the person's own head. In Gayspeak sense, the trigger is an ejaculation and the bullet is HIV-infected semen. The underlying metaphor is probably SEX IS A HAZARDOUS GAME, a variant of the ubiquitous LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME (Kövecses, 2002), in this case by engaging in a life-threatening game, i.e. practice.

3.3. BODY PARTS FOR GAY MAN

- *Run, that corpse will eat me alive!* *Corpse* is “a very old man who pesters much younger guys for sex” (Baker, 2004, p. 103).
- *Try to walk like a man, happy hips!* *Happy hips* is “a gay man who swishes his hips from side to side as he walks” (Baker, 2004, p. 142).

- *My type of men are skins. Skin or skinhead* is “mostly heterosexual, working-class youth in the UK who wore Doc Marten boots, drainpipe denim jeans and check or polo shirts as well as shaving their heads. Since then, gay men who were into an ultra straight-acting look, or interested in BDSM have adopted this style” (Baker, 2004, p. 193).
- *Is this twinkle toes a boy or a girl? Twinkle toes* is “a young, effeminate gay man” (Baker, 2004, p. 207).

Physical appearance of a person is transferred to a conceptual metonymy BODY PARTS FOR GAY MAN. It has a function as a target domain, while a source domain is body parts or, in the first expression, the whole body. *Corpse* draws physical and experiential motivation from a dead person, assuming it is old and not pleasant to be around it, to establish a similarity. *Happy hips* finds its motivation in vigorous movements a person does when feeling happiness. Those movements are mapped onto hips and all together onto a gay man who has lady-like movements. *Skin* has pretty much been described by Baker. The fit-clothed heterosexuals become a similarity-based social construct that some gays mapped onto themselves while adding rough sex play into that description. *Twinkle toes* could draw motivation from colorful shoes designed for young girls.⁹ Toes are then part of the girls’ shoes, which is then mapped onto a young gay man who has physical characteristics similar to that of a woman. All three expressions (*corpse*, *skin*, and *twinkle toes*) involve a part of the body to describe a physical appearance of a gay man by emphasizing, either derogatively or complementarily, one of his body features.

When describing conceptual metaphors, it is unavoidable to be as graphic as possible to give the most precise meaning of the conceptual metaphor suggested. What happens during that process is that metaphor and metonymy interact conceptually. It is important to know where motivation comes from and what is mapped onto what, as well as to include whether a metaphor or a metonymy is based on experience or similarity. By doing all that, the thesis suggested four of them in Gayspeak: GAYS ARE ANIMALS, GAY SEX IS FOOD, GAY SEX IS A TOPONYM, and BODY PARTS FOR GAY MAN.

⁹ Skechers. 2015. Web. 9 Sep 2015. <http://www.skechers.com/girls/styles/twinkle-toes>

Conclusion

Modern Gayspeak originates from Polari, the secret language of marginalized groups of people. Because of that, it was not possible to linguistically explore it until it became more visible to society during and after sociopolitical and economic changes.

By combining metaphorical compounding with lexical domains of Gayspeak, we get metaphors characterized by gratification of sex and body. Upon that, the thesis suggested four particularly productive conceptual metaphors: GAYS ARE ANIMALS, GAY SEX IS FOOD, GAY SEX IS A TOPONYM, and BODY PARTS FOR GAY MAN. Rich knowledge is an imperative in understanding conceptual metaphors, especially those that are not conventionalized or, if they are, are difficult to get to because of the exclusiveness of a subculture. Since the expressions were taken from a published dictionary, the exclusiveness became slightly eradicated and became a linguistic convention, at least within the subculture.

The thesis also tried to help conventionalize some of the suggested conceptual metaphors since many new doors open with creating gender and sexual equality in the world. The analysis suggested a common and strong interaction between conceptual metaphor and metonymy regarding the underlying conceptual motivation of coined figurative linguistic expressions. The thesis will, therefore, be helpful in suggesting and elucidating on more conceptual metaphors at work in Gayspeak in future analyses.

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