



## Semiotic Analysis on Gay Lingo Expressions

Ivy F. Amante

Mindanao State University Buug Campus, Datu Panas, Buug, Zamboanga Sibugay, Philippines.

Email: [ivy.amante@msubuang.edu.ph](mailto:ivy.amante@msubuang.edu.ph)

### ABSTRACT

This study involves discovering the linguistic characteristic of gay lingo expressions. The goal is to show the most common terms used by gays and the meanings underlying these expressions and their morphological structures. To address these aspects, the nature of the gay language was studied relying on the theory of lavender linguistics which explains that language alone provides the true identity of the gay community. The present study shows that there are various expressions self-created by gays that serve to define their lifestyle and culture.

**Keywords :** Gay Lingo; Semiotics; Expressions

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Gay language has finally gained respect from the society and attracted undeniable attentions in the field of research.

Considering that this is “a linguistic phenomenon”, Baker (2002) stated that the ways gays use their language is an insightful construction of their identity across multiple contexts. The gay crowd has created gay lingo, purposely for their own consumption. It’s a secret language which is not supposed to be understood by outsiders. There are already various literature that focused on the society’s adoption of these gay expressions.

Gay lingo. Red (1999, p.41) defines gay language is a type of code used in the gay community for the purpose of preventing people from outside the group (herein refers to heterosexuals) making sense of it and helping link them in “their own discourse”. This definition calls our attention to “anti-language” by Halliday (1976, p.570) which is “a special form of language generated by some kind of anti-society”. This anti language uses words and expressions with additions and alterations in meaning aiming at creating and retaining its identity (Cage, 2003, p.25).

Baker (2005, p.174) conducted a research on the language of gay men and lesbians and found that gay men’s language is informal, non-standard and often impolite, whereas lesbians’ language is more polite, more affectionate and more standardized. It was found out that gay men use informal language not only in spoken discourse but also in written discourse.

Like any other languages, gay lingo has developed since it has a number of functions. For example, Halliday (1973, cited in Marasigan, 1983, p.58) suggests some functions of language in general in oral conversation that language serves to express social and personal relations (interpersonal), to represent an experience, to impart factual information, to control the behavior of others (regulatory), to get involved in fantasies, and to show one one’s identity (personal). However, gay language is also considered “anti-language”, and it serves more different and special functions:

**CONCEALMENT.** As we know, homosexuals still receive discrimination and condemnation in several countries in the world although people have a more open-minded attitude towards them today.

For this reason, gay language functions as a form of “defense mechanism” against homophobic society (Baytan, 2002, p. 260).

The Filipino gay community began coining words that can be associated with the original word, either by its literal meaning or denotation, or by using other shades of meaning or connotation. Gays may also play with words until they become neutralized, gradually transformed and socially accepted as gay expressions.

**IDENTIFICATION.** The use of gay language gives member of a group a means to identify with one another, as well as with the group. Speaking gay language is demonstrating overtly that one belongs to a certain group. That is to say, not only does the use of gay language function to foster a sense of belonging to a community but it also has an intrapersonal function in that the language forms part of the gay man’s identity and allows him to show his identity and self-image (Oetomo, 2001, p.67; Cage, 2003, p.36).

**REVELATION.** The revelation function allows gay people to reveal overtly that they are gay and are candidates to be included in a

particular social set (Cage, 2003, p.36). In a more open society today, this function helps gay people affirm their identity in the gay world and the heterosexual world.

This rapid development in lexicon also indicates that gayspeak appears to be more of a 'fashion' or a 'fad' that easily changes over a period of time. Yet this may also be considered a unique characteristic of gayspeak. On the other hand, gays in the lower class strata have gay lexicons that are mostly determined by phonological resonance, or sometimes influenced by their jobs. In addition, one's profession or field specialization also contributes to how gay language develops and varies.

The results of the present study wish to contribute importance to the society and to the country. It will give a clear idea on considering gay language as a strong point of discussion for its influence and its fast expansion and evolution in the Philippines. The output will give a back-up explanation to some intelligent assumptions facing it as form of communication used by the people of the third sex, and come up with a clear concept about its meaning. This study will also provide a sense of awareness to all of how a language evolves since Filipino gay lingo started out with replacing certain words with another term.

The findings of study may also give insights in terms of the dynamic nature of language as an identity or social prestige since Filipino gays are able to resist the dominant culture of their area and create a space of their own. The theoretical basis of the study is anchored with Hjelmslev (1931) who developed a structural theory of language which he called glossematics, which developed the semiotic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. This theory is characterized by a high degree of formalism and is interested in the characteristics of language, and has a high degree of logical rigour. Husserl (1990) also suggested his theory in the "meaning endowing act". It gives life to the triad order of semiosis from sign vehicle (expression) – sense (meaning) – referent (thing). The present study is also anchored with the Queer theory (Norton, 2011) which focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. Queer has been associated most prominently with bisexual, lesbian and gay subjects, and is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities that are not heterosexual or not cisgender. Norton (2011) suggests that the existence of queer language is believed to have evolved from the imposing of structures and labels from an external mainstream culture.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Site

This study was conducted at the Mindanao State University – Buug Campus in Buug, Zamboanga Sibugay. It is one of the autonomous campuses of the Mindanao State University System. MSU-Buug Campus is about 750 meters from the commercial center of the Municipality of Buug and about 700 meters from the national highway. The school campus is connected to other parts of the Poblacion through the municipality road networks. It offers both collegiate courses and secondary education. It has five colleges, namely, College of Education, Arts & Sciences; Forestry & Environmental Studies; Agriculture; and Fisheries.

### 2.2 Respondents and Sampling Procedure

This study involved 20 gay students who were selected purposively.

Paper ID: AJAMR032021003

The researcher had the profiling of the respondents then an interview was conducted with regular students who are overt gays, wellversed, and actually using gay lingo in their everyday conversations with members of their group and even with their straight classmates and friends.

**2.3 Research Design and Data Gathering Procedure** The study employed a survey design in gathering all the data needed. To observe the proper protocol, the gays were requested to provide necessary information being asked in a structured interviewing. The researcher carried out structured interviews with 20 gay men in order to further investigate the common gay lingo expressions among the Cebuano speakers. All the interviews was conducted in Cebuano language to ensure their understanding of the questions.

### 2.4 Research Instrument

A self-constructed questionnaire yet inspired by the study of Lunzaga (2011) was used in the study. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part I is to identify the demographic profile of the respondents which include their age, civil status, and year level. The Part II provides two columns. In the 1st column the respondents wrote the gay lingo expressions that they frequently use in the everyday interaction, and the corresponding meanings of each was written in the 2nd column.

### 2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected are primarily qualitative and was subjected to syntactic and semantic analysis. The expressions of the gays was examined in terms of their structure and meaning and the reasons why they creatively incorporate their expressions or replace Cebuano terms with their language.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

With the researcher-constructed questionnaire, the list of expressions commonly used by gays of Mindanao State University - Buug was derived. Table 1 contains the words/phrases embodied in the terminologies used by the gays as expressions.

TABLE 1  
SOME COMMONLY USED EXPRESSIONS BY GAYS

GAY EXPRESSIONS	CEBUANO TERMS	MEANING	GAY EXPRESSIONS	CEBUANO TERMS	MEANING
Aida na jukaw?	Gi AIDS ka?	Do you have AIDS?	Yupak	Kapuy	Tired
Laps na	Kaon na	Eat	Gul dita	Maldita	Mean, rude
Judy Am2x/ Shudi	Dili	Don't	Chaka jukaw	Maot ka	You're ugly
Halerr	Helo	Hello	Id's na	Ayaw na	Never mind
Cricklet/ Chaka na Ebis	Maot nga babayi	Ugly girl	Taylo na	Patay na	Dead
Ids bas/ Shudi abas	Ayaw saba	Don't tell	Kilab ra oks	Balik rako	I'll be back
Was layds	Dili joke	Not a joke	Aw na	Wa na	No more
Bes	best	Best friend	Kringga	Abnormal	Abnormal
Ibis nga juntis	Baying buros	Pregnant lady	Joross	Buros	Pregnant
Yuya joya	Bayot siya	He's gay	Mers joya	Mirise nimu	Good for you (sarcastic)

GAY EXPRESSIONS	CEBUANO TERMS	MEANING	GAY EXPRESSIONS	CEBUANO TERMS	MEANING
Anyar na sis	Humana sis	It'd done, friend	Jigaon na jukaw	Bigaon ka	You're flirt
Jumega na oks	Amiga na ta	We're now friends	Motugs na juayoms	Gutom nako	I'm hungry
Yeko ar	Okey ra	It's okay	Pepahers juayoms	Gwapa kaayo ko	I'm so beautiful
Emal nga keks	Lami nga lalaki	Yummy/ Handsome guy	Aw ogil	Way ligo	Untidy
Imbyema na oks	Gisapot ko	I'm already mad	Tini bels juayoms	Iganga oi	It's so hot
Emal pod sis	Lami siya sis	He's yummy friend	Ohab che	Bahoa oi	It's stinky
Chika	Storya ra	Lie	Abasan	Sabaan	Noisy
Bola kayo	Maayo	Good	Hilokitty	Nahiloan	Poisoned

Table 1 contains the words/phrases embodied in the terminologies used by the gays as expressions.

**3.1 Morphological Structures of Gay Lingo Expressions** Gay lingo as an adaption of some mainstream languages like Cebuano has been observably used in the society. In most cases, it makes the conversation lively in the purpose of conveying messages and expressing themselves without being understood. Thus leads them in the creation of different terminologies.

The gays' spoken discourse is composed of words or phrases coined or formed following different linguistic morphological processes. One of the common process is the simple reversal of letters within the expression like *yupak* which means *tired* from the Cebuano term *kapuy*. There is also this syllabic reversal of the existing words that is employed by gays in their expressions like the expression *ngulob* which means *burial* from the Cebuano term *lubong*. Third, there are terminologies that are created in the process of simple reversal with affixes attached like *ikals* which means *guy* from the Cebuano term *laki* + suffix *s*. Another pattern in morphological construction is clipping with affixation. New terms are derived from the existing words by cutting and adding affixes like the expression *tom jones* which means *hungry* by clipping the Cebuano word *gutom* into *tom* + suffix *jones*. Though there is no common pattern seen, these additions projects gays' creativity which gave the word a different sound. Gay terms are also created by using word straight with affixation. Some gay terms are derived by straightly using the existing terms but with affixes attached. Words as 'shudi' and 'gorabels' are some of the words employing this process. Gays were creative enough to express themselves in a different way such that other people could not comprehend, gays used existing terms that resembles the image of the meaning they want to express like *chaka* which means *ugly*, an expression that is shortened from a movie character who is *Chaka Doll*. Gay language has become a source of laughter and carry certain underlying connotations much so whenever they incorporate names of famous personalities, places, and other common nouns shielding the meanings of the terms through alike sounds of the existing ones like the expression *hilokitty* which means *poison* formed from the Cebuano term *hilo*.

The findings further revealed that The gays in the Philippines speak a common tongue. It is their code, their very sword. It is their way of communicating without letting the straight world understand the drift of their words. This dynamic nature in the use of gay language expression refuses to cement itself in a single culture and allows for more freedom of expression among the gay speakers.

Gay people who speak the language almost exclusively are humorously using it for expressions. Their language is so colorful and dynamic to the point that they invent new expressions for entertainment adding glow to the conversations. Wit and humor characterize these gay lingo expressions. Another defining trait of gay lingo expression is that it more often than not immediately identifies the speaker as homosexual, making it easy for people of that orientation to recognize each other. This creates an exclusive group among the gays and helps them resist cultural assimilation since Filipino gays are able to resist the dominant culture of their area and create a space of their own.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

As proven in this study, there are lots of words/phrases used by Cebuano gays as expressions. The formulation of these expressions followed morphological processes such as simple reversal, syllabic reversal, simple reversal with affixation, clipping with affixation, straight word with affixation, connotation through images and connotation through alike sounds. From the analysis of the various terms, it was found out that an expression may be used in more than a single context depending on the usage. In addition, synonymous words are also classified in the gay lingo world.

With the rampant use of gay lingo expressions, speakers are able to resist the dominant culture of their area and create a space of their own. The constant change of language, old phrases are becoming obsolete and new ones are now found in the everyday usage, reflecting changes in their culture and identity. Words and phrases as expressions were also created out of reaction to popular trends and create alternatives to a strictly defined lifestyle. Gays speak to each other using a colorful language that they invented. The use of gay lingo expressions has become useful to avoid having other people hear or understand what the gays are talking about, this is also a means of defying the cultural norms and creating an identity of their own. This language defines the Philippine gay characters, and it would probably be a trend for a while.

## REFERENCES

- Baker, P. (2002). "Polari-the Lost Language of Gay Men". New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Baitan, R. (2002). "Language, Sex, and Insults: Notes on Garcia and Remoto's The Gay Dict." Ruptures and Departures: Language and Culture in Southeast Asia. Ed. Corazon D. Villareal, Liliy Rose R. Tope, and Patricia May B. Jurilla. Quezon City. Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of the Philippines. 260-84
- Cage, K. (2003). "Gayle: the Language of Kinks and Queens-a history and dictionary of gay Language in South Africa". Jacana Media: South Africa.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1976). "Anti-Languages". American Anthropologist 78 (3) pp. 570—584.

- Lunzaga, A.B (2011). "Morphological Analysis of Gay's Spoken Discourse" [PDF]. Southern Leyte State University Philippines. National Peer Reviewed Journal.
- Oetomo, D. (1996). "Bahasa Indonesia dan Kelas Menengah Indonesia (Indonesia and the Indonesian Middle Class)". Bandung: Mizan.1996
- Red, M. (1996). "Gayspeak in the Nineties." *Ladlad 2: An Anthology of Philippine Gay Writing*, 2nd ed. Ed. Neil C. Garcia and Danton Remoto. Pasig: Anvil, 40-48
- Remoto, D. (2008). "On Philippine Gay Lingo." Retrieved from <http://www.absbnnews.com/storypage.aspx?StorID=117223>.

AJAMR Accepted Manuscript