Review: Coming out as a multimodal metaphor: Perspectives from gesture and language

Tomasz Dominik Dyrmo

Reviewed by Sarah Turner

It is my great pleasure to provide a review of the above-indicated PhD thesis, *Coming out as multimodal metaphor: Perspectives from gesture and language*, by Tomasz Dyrmo.

Introduction: Centrality of the research problem, clarity of aims, methodology

The Introduction chapter effectively sets the scene for the three articles that follow. It begins with clear definitions of the main concepts to be considered, and introduces the main topic of coming out stories. A clear attempt is made to justify the choice of coming out stories as the choice of text. This justification focuses primarily on why such texts might be interesting from a (cognitive) linguistic perspective, situating an analysis of coming out narratives within previous research on coming out in other ocontexts. I was surprised not to see more of a social focus at this point; as is made clear elsewhere in the dissertation, metaphor and gesture both reflect cognitive structures, and an analysis of both can give insights into how their users are understanding, experiencing and conceptualising the topics under consideration. It seems that an analysis of metaphor and gesture in coming out narratives could be especially fruitful in reaching a better understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, and could contribute towards breaking down some of the enduring taboos around non-normative sexual and gender identities.

The Introduction chapter primarily constitutes a literature review, surveying previous research on coming out as a social, linguistic and metaphorical phenomenon, before moving into a discussion of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, multimodality, and gesture. This literature review is impressively thorough and broad in its scope. However, there is a sense as the Introduction progresses that we lose sight of the broader context. What was needed as a thread throughout this literature review section, I would suggest, was a clearer indication of how the topics under discussion would contribute to and shape the research presented in the articles that follow. Rather than being an overview of the ways the fields of study have developed, this section would have been more effective serving to clearly contextualise the articles that are to follow. One way of doing this would have been to focus more clearly on how the research you introduce has shaped your thinking and contributes to the methodology of your own studies. The reader is not left with a clear sense of how your own research will sit within the very broad overview of the field that you have given, and because of this, is left wondering why some of the studies introduced are relevant to your research. As another minor comment, it is not always clear how the different studies being introduced relate to and build on each other, and at times this section reads more like a list of articles rather than a critical review. There are some slightly unusual

language and structure choices; the first two paragraphs of Section 1.2.2 do not appear to relate to metaphor as indicated in the section subheading, and there are some areas where the language used may somewhat misrepresent what is being expressed. 'Coming out' is not in itself a *conceptual* metaphor (although it may very well be the linguistic instantiation of one!), so to say it has been analysed as such (on p.4) is rather inaccurate. On p. 6, 'comprehendere/seize' seems to be given as an example of UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, but seizing relates to the act of grasping something in the hand, not of sight, and I'm not sure you can claim that the vast field of discourse analysis is 'in the vein of CMT' (p. 7).

Despite these slight misgivings, the Introduction chapter does provide a clear and thorough overview of the field, as well as setting out the aims and scope of the research. The research aims and objectives are pertinent and constitute a significant contribution to metaphor studies in particular and cognitive linguistics more broadly.

Article 1

The first article, *Do we need Queer Cognitive Linguistics?,* provides a strong theoretical standpoint from which the other articles are to proceed. It makes a clear case for taking a more inclusive perspective in (cognitive) linguistic research, supported by confident and critical handling of a broad range of literature. I was particularly impressed here by the way in which cognitive linguistic theories are brought in to support the call for inclusivity and non-binarity. I was unconvinced by the apparent assumption that fluidity and fuzziness could be treated synonymously (p. 250), but do not consider this assumption to weaken the overall conclusions of the piece. I would have liked to see a little more explanation and contextualisation for the case study on pronoun use, tying it in more closely to cognitive linguistic concerns.

Overall, this article represents an important contribution to the field of cognitive linguistics, and is to be applauded for its call for a more inclusive approach, both in terms of communities studied and methodologies used. However, I did find myself wondering how the theoretical developments proposed in this article would be operationalised in Articles 2 and 3; a more explicit explanation of *how* these articles grew out of this theoretical standpoint, and were shaped by it, would have been beneficial, and could have been done in the Introduction to the dissertation.

Article 2

The second article, *A multilevel cognitive model of coming out*, applies Kovecses' 2017 model to coming out narratives, demonstrating how more schematic cognitive processes underpin the more individual narratives. This article clearly addresses the research problem laid out in the Introduction, and does so very effectively. In demonstrating how the narratives draw on these schematic cognitive processes, the article constitutes a strong contribution to metaphor research, and provides a model that could be applied to similar research in other contexts. As mentioned above, this article could have been more clearly situated in the context laid out in the first article, but this is a minor concern.

Article 3

The third article, *Gestural metaphorical scenarios and coming out narratives,* brings a focus on gesture, thus fulfilling the research aims stated in the Introduction. It raises interesting questions about what gestures can reveal about how their users are contextualising and understanding the topics under consideration.

At this point, I was surprised not to see more citations back to the previous articles. It seems that the three articles build upon each other effectively and come together to form a cohesive whole. They consistently address the research problem, but the thread running through each piece of work is not made apparent.

On a similar point, I think more could be done to justify your use of coming out narratives as data in this article. Without a consistent focus on metaphorical *meaning* and its entailments, i.e., what the use of these metaphors might reveal about how LGBTQ+ people are experiencing the world and the implications this may have, it isn't clear what makes coming out narratives particularly suited to answering the questions you pose in this article. I appreciate that in using this data, you were seeking to fulfil the aims of queer cognitive linguistics as outlined in Article 1, but this could have been clarified and strengthened still further here. On p. 41, you note that the article 'offers insights into thinking, gesture and language of LGBT+ individuals', but a greater emphasis on why this is important and needed, and what implications it could have for breaking down social barriers and lessening discrimination, would further strengthen the research.

Overall contribution of dissertation

This dissertation makes a significant contribution to cognitive linguistics, specifically metaphor and gesture studies. It also aims to give a voice to previously marginalised groups, by investigating the communication of LGBTQ+ people; in so doing, it calls for cognitive linguists and researchers in similar fields to do the same. This is a very meritable goal and is to be applauded.

So far, the work seems largely to make a theoretical contribution. As will be elaborated below, the work could be developed to have wider-reaching implications beyond linguistics, and shed light on the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people in coming out. The contribution of the dissertation thus has great potential for extension, and could be developed to have a positive impact on the lived experiences of the communities under consideration. The results also suggest interesting avenues for future research within cognitive linguistics.

Advice for future research projects

The research presented in this dissertation proposes numerous avenues for future research. As I alluded to in my discussion of the Introduction, I think there would be great utility in taking more of a 'social' angle here. The work presented here constitutes an excellent theoretical contribution, but has great potential to contribute to sociological understandings too. Linguistic metaphor analysis alone would provide interesting insights into the experiences of coming out,

which including a gestural focus would only heighten. This has the potential for impact beyond academia.

Many of the suggestions I would make for future research projects have already been proposed in the dissertation itself. I agree that exploring how speakers of different languages might use metaphor and gesture differently would be very interesting. As you rightly point out, YouTube video data and the gestures you find in it may not constitute the most 'natural' form of communication, so future research that explores metaphor in gesture in naturalistic contexts would be welcome.

Conclusion

This was a very strong dissertation, with important and socially relevant research aims, which makes a significant contribution to the field of (queer) cognitive linguistics. The three articles that make it up demonstrate a strong developing research trajectory, with great potential for future development. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to read such excellent work.

I am therefore pleased to confirm that this dissertation receives a very positive assessment from me, and the PhD candidate can proceed to the final stages towards earning a PhD title.

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