

Tomasz Dyrmo

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

Abstract

People vary in the way they think and express their thoughts both in language and gesture. With the assumption that people with different bodies and different body experiences conceptualise the world in demonstrably different, sometimes non-normative ways (see e.g., Casasanto 2011), it is now important to reflect on these differences in scholarly practise. Following the focus on non-normative cognitions and populations postulated in Queer Cognitive Linguistics (Dyrmo 2022a), the presented studies show how coming out is expressed multimodally, via language and gesture. A sample pronoun analysis of LGBT+ people in Dyrmo (2022a) makes a case for a more inclusive approach to social categories of sex and gender orientations and identities, postulating, at the same time, the inclusion of non-normative categories into research practise. In Dyrmo (2022b), it has been demonstrated how people who talk about coming out conceptualise their diverse experiences of revealing their sexual orientation and gender identity. A multilevel cognitive model of coming out shows that a variety of different conceptual structures is recruited to linguistically express coming out experiences: from the image schematic concepts of ITERATION, CONTAINER, and FORCE, through the domains of MOVEMENT and TRANSFER, and the general frame of COMING OUT, to the most specific metaphorical scenarios of COMING OUT OF THE BOUNDED SPACE IS REVEALING A SEXUAL ORIENTATION and COMING OUT IS SHIFTING A HEAVY OBJECT OFF ONE'S SHOULDERS. In Dyrmo (2022b) it has been demonstrated that the multilevel model of metaphor can be successfully applied to the coming out discourse, and, potentially, to many different domains of social experience.

In Dyrmo (2022c), it has been shown how conceptualisations of coming out are manifested in gesture, all underpinned by a generic metaphor of KNOWING IS SEEING. This generic metaphor is the starting point for the more elaborate conceptualisations of coming out, which surface in such metaphors as SECRET IS AN OBJECT and PERSON WITH AN UNDISCLOSED IDENTITY IS A PERSON IN A CONTAINER. These metaphors, in turn, have their respective entailments: COMING OUT IS SHOWING AN OBJECT and COMING OUT IS REVEALING A PERSON. Moreover, in Dyrmo (2022c) it has been shown that the notion of a metaphorical scenario can be extended into gesture. It has been proposed that, while lexical metaphorical scenarios are expressed via lexical items and potentially more controlled, gestural metaphorical scenarios emerge from recurrent gesture forms and are arguably less controlled than their lexical equivalents. All in all, the presented research embraces a more inclusive focus on non-normative populations, showing how coming out can be expressed multimodally. It also contributes to the development of metaphor scholarship more generally, extending one existing and highly influential concept of a metaphorical scenario, and validates a recent proposal of a multilevel approach to metaphor, applying it to coming out.