



---

# **Universidad de Valladolid**

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS  
DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA  
Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

“Gender Identity in Drag Culture: A Transitivity Analysis of  
the Discourse of Drag Queens”

Elisa Alonso Engelmo

Tutora: Laura Filardo Llamas

2017-2018



*“Drag is a livin, breathing piece of art. It pokes fun at social norms. Drag has no gender, no age and no one colour. It challenges ideals and stereotypes. It is only limited by your own imagination.”*

Hannah Conda, 2018

**Disclaimer:** the queer community is very diverse, and the gender and sexuality spectrums are wide and complicated. Making assumptions about the gender of a person is not correct, so I apologize in advance for any wrong statement I might write.



## ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the analysis of the discourse of a group of drag performers, analysing their use of language using Halliday's transitivity theory, and this way determining if their gender identity affects the way in which they communicate. My work can be divided into two main parts: a theoretical part, which compiles various works about drag queens and about the theory of transitivity, and a practical part in which there is analysed, using Halliday's transitivity theory, an interview to a group of drag queens of different genders and sexualities. By writing this dissertation I intend to give more visibility to the most underrated collectives of the drag community, women and transgenders people, to contribute to gender equality in the LGBT+ collective.

**Keywords:** transitivity, discourse, gender identity, drag, women, transgender

## RESUMEN

Este trabajo de fin de grado se centra en el análisis del discurso de un grupo de artistas drag, analizando su uso del lenguaje mediante la teoría de la transitividad de Halliday y determinando de esta manera si su identidad de género afecta la forma en la que se comunican. Mi trabajo se puede dividir en dos partes principales: una parte teórica, que recopila varios trabajos sobre drag queens y sobre la teoría de la transitividad, y una parte práctica en la que se encuentra analizada, usando la transitividad de Halliday, una entrevista a un grupo de drag queens de diferentes géneros y sexualidades. Con la realización de este trabajo pretendo dar más visibilidad a los colectivos infravalorados de la comunidad drag, las mujeres y las personas transgénero, para contribuir a la igualdad de género dentro del colectivo LGBT+.

**Palabras clave:** transitividad, discurso, identidad de género, drag, mujeres, transgénero



## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	9
<b>2. Literature review: drag queens in academic studies</b>	11
<b>3. Theoretical framework</b>	
3.1. Halliday's notion of transitivity	15
3.2. Transitivity and identity	18
<b>4. Methodology</b>	19
<b>5. Analysis of results</b>	21
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	28





## 1. Introduction

Language is the physical representation of what is in our minds, and therefore it is the way we present ourselves to the world. Through language we express our ideologies, which Van Dijk (2006) defines as being the set of moral values and beliefs each person has and their ideas about certain aspects of society, such as politics, religion, economy and social life. All these characteristics shape our personality and perception of reality, which affect our behaviour and therefore our way of talking. From this we understand that each person has different speech characteristics (idiolect), but there are also common characteristics of speech in social classes, groups, and communities. These are what we call “speech communities”, and Rusty Barrett, a relevant linguist nowadays, defines drag queens as a unique speech community (Barrett, 2017).

Moreover, into the drag queen speech community we find different types of actors, classified by sexualities, races, ages and, most importantly, genders. The stereotypical drag queen, or what the general population considers as a drag queen, is “a man who ostentatiously dresses up in women's clothes” (Oxford dictionary, 2014). Nonetheless, in the past few decades, drag queen culture has become more mainstream, causing more people to join the community, and therefore widening the meaning of “drag queen”. Moreover, this has also made more people get interested in the culture of drag queens. This means that the general population nowadays knows more about drag queens than 20 years ago. However, there are still many common mistakes that people when they are asked what a drag queen is. One of the most common mistakes is comparing a drag queen to a transgender woman. A transgender woman is a woman who was biologically born as a male, but who does not identify as one. She lives and identifies as a female and may or may not decide to get surgery to look like a woman (Moncrieff and Lienard, 2017). Drag Queens differ from this in that they are, again, historically, gay men who dress up in female clothing to perform in front of audiences (Moncrieff and Lienard, 2017; Rupp et al., 2010). The aim of these performers is usually to entertain, but they are also a very important device to fight gender stereotypes (Moncrieff and Lienard, 2017) and to enrich and support queer culture.

Nonetheless, even though a drag queen is not the same as a transgender woman, “drag queens tend to engage in gender transition early in life and come to drag in part as a resolution of gender identity issues.” (Rupp et. al, 2010), which means that there are many transgender

female drag queens who discovered their identity by performing femininity through drag, or who used drag as a getaway to express their gender identity. Either way this means that drag is not only for gay men, there are also many women in the drag community. In fact, a growing part of drag queen culture nowadays are female drag performers. They are most commonly known as drag kings and can be either transgender or cisgender<sup>1</sup> women that perform as men or as women, the latter being most commonly known as ‘bio queens’ or ‘faux-queens’<sup>2</sup> (Rupp et al., 2010), although they prefer to be referred as ‘drag queens’ too. This is because the term ‘bio-queen’ excludes trans women because of the prefix ‘bio’, and the term ‘faux-queens’ is disrespectful, because ‘faux’ means fake in French. This is a remarkable instance of how women that do drag are unappreciated and disrespected.

One of the main reasons for this subordination is the patriarchal society. And since queer women have been and continue to be marginalized in queer spaces, they have had to create their own. As Danielle C. Bauer expresses, “because women experience the world via patriarchal oppressions, the politics of drag for women exists in unique ways that male drag performers do not experience.” (Bauer, 2013:12). Furthermore, Robin Lakoff created in 1975 the term “women’s language”, which she defined as a marked register resulting from the subordinate status that women have in patriarchal societies.

Since women and men in drag have grown apart for so long, we find many differences in their approach to drag, which several scholars, such as Leila Rupp (2005; 2010; 2015), Verta Taylor (2015) and Eve Ilana Saphiro (2007; 2010), have studied. However, these authors have concentrated on the socio-cultural aspects of their behaviour rather than their discourse and language use. Therefore, in order to compare these groups of different actors in the drag queen community, I have decided to analyse their language use.

First, I will mention previous studies made about drag queens and drag kings, and I will explain the most remarkable information in them. Then I will briefly explain Halliday’s transitivity theory and I will also name some other works which have used transitivity to do a gender identity analysis, as well as a couple of works which have used transitivity to analyse political speeches, because I used them as references too. After this I will analyse the results

---

<sup>1</sup> A person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex. (source: oxforddictionaries.com)

<sup>2</sup>A performance artist whose sex is biologically female but who performs in the exaggerated style and dress of a male drag queen. (Source: idioms.thefreedictionary.com)

of my analysis, represented in eight different tables. Finally, I will make a conclusion based on what I have read and my own results.

My hypothesis is that male drag queens and female or transgender drag queens will have different discourse characteristics, due to the facts that I have found in the following readings.

## **2. Literature review: Drag queens in academic studies**

Many scholars have studied the lives, behaviour, discourse, and social relationships of drag queens over the years. However, in most cases these studies focus on of male drag queens. Judith Butler, for example, has used drag queens as an example to illustrate her theories. We have as an example her remarkable book *Gender Trouble* (1990). In this work Butler develops her theory of gender performativity, which analyses the social phenomenon that makes us associate the genitals of a person (biological sex) with their gender (social construct that associates biological sex with a certain kind of social behaviour). In other words, gender performativity is what makes us assume the behaviour and role in society of a person based on their genitals. Thus, what is perceived as masculinity or femininity is determined by actions, dress code, speech code and overall behaviour. To illustrate this, she uses the example of drag queens. She wonders if drag is simply about men dressed as women, or about how femininity can also be found in a male's body. These questions make Butler doubt about the stability between sex and gender, because if a biological male can be feminine, then what does "femininity" mean? Butler says that drag presents gender as a cultural code that can be imitated and parodied, showing that it lacks from an essential, natural truth. That is why she considers drag as a very important way to resist and fight gender conventions, because it shows that, since there is no basis to gender identity, it can be resisted, broken and altered, thus causing some "gender trouble". All in all, it is remarkable how she uses the example of only male drag queens to illustrate her theory of gender performativity, which talks about the binary gender. And what is even more remarkable is that she uses drag queens as an instance of the breaking with gender performativity, when in the drag queen communities biological gender is still very much considered. (Bauer, 2013; Rupp et al., 2010)

Moreover, Butler also uses the queer community to illustrate her theories in "Critically Queer" (1993). In this article she discusses the performative function and authority of speech acts, using the term "queer" as an example of how speech acts are

attached to a history that conditions their use and interpretation. Butler also includes the question “how, if at all, is the notion of discursive resignification linked to the notion of gender parody or impersonation?” (Butler, 1993:21). Again, Butler uses the example of male drag queens to show how gender can be imitated and performed, but also emphasising that this does not mean that gender is something that you can choose. She also argues that discourse creates gender constraints that condition how we act, and this means that gender performativity is not a choice, but a set of norms already established by society. This is important to know in determining why the discourse of male and female drag queens is different.

Also worth mentioning is Rusty Barrett’s latest work: *From Drag Queens to Leathermen: Language, Gender, and Gay Male Subcultures* (2017), which analyses the way in which different gay male “subcultures” use gender in language. Among these he includes drag queens. In his study he pays special attention to the linguistic patterns and how they vary depending on the level of masculinity and femininity. In each case, speakers combine linguistic forms in ways that challenge normative assumptions about gender and sexuality. He also theorises that gay and straight forms of masculinity can be differentiated through language. Finally, he concludes that in all of these subcultures the construction of gender identity involves combining linguistic forms that are not usually seen together. These abnormal combinations are the foundation for the different subcultural expressions of gay men identity. In short, this book is another instance of the lack of research and appreciation of women in drag and queer communities, only analysing how queer men use gender in language.

Another instance of an analysis of queer men communication is “Speaking like a Queen in RuPaul’s Drag Race: towards a speech code of American drag queens” (2014), an article by scholar in communication studies Nathaniel Simmons. In his work he analysed the speech code (Carbaugh, 2005; Philipsen, 1997; Philipsen et al., 2005) of drag queens using as reference the 4th season of the reality TV show *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (Logo, 2009). He presented a series of sayings, values and ways of behaving of the queens, which he obtained by analysing the transcripts for each episode of the season. He concludes that drag queens’ speech codes, or “speaking like a queen”, makes them create a “sisterhood”, a family, and therefore respect and support each other. This shows how male drag queens have created

their own queer community, which is like a family, with its own specific speech code, vocabulary and behaviour.

Michael Moncrieff and Pierre Lienard also contribute to the research of male drag queen communication in their article “A natural history of the drag queen phenomenon” (2017), which uses signalling theory to analyse the communicative aspect of the behaviour of drag queens on and offstage by relying on a survey distributed to members of the gay community (excluding drag queens and bisexuals) and also to the general public (straight males and females). Straight and gay participants showed different response patterns, proving that the gay community knows better how the drag queen phenomenon works, which indicates that the gay community is the main target of the drag queen signalling. However, these authors do acknowledge women in drag, but outline that they will not analyse their communicative behaviour because they are “part of a recent phenomenon with specific features and rationale that differ from its male counterpart.” (Moncrieff and Lienard, 2017:2; Rupp et. al, 2010)

Nevertheless, there have been scholars who have mentioned women when writing about drag. One of the most remarkable instances of this is Esther Newton who is considered the pioneer of lesbian and gay communities studies. Her most remarkable work is *Mother Camp* (1979), which explores the lives and behaviour of drag queens in some cities of the USA. Newton studied the lives of drag queens for more than two years, living like them and making interviews. In her work, she explores the nightclubs they frequent, the different kind of performers there are, and their social organization. More importantly, she also talks about the difference gender makes in queer communities, stating that “men far outnumber women in the gay life” (Newton, 1979:27) and also that “the males considered as a group have a much more elaborate subculture and contribute disproportionately to distinctively homosexual concepts, styles, and terminology” (Newton, 1979:27). In other words, she outlines the lack of participation and representation of queer women in queer spaces as a result of patriarchal dominance.

Other two important scholars that have studied drag queen culture are Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor. Their best-known work is *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret* (2003), which explores the world of drag queens through interviews to the performers at the 801 Cabaret in Key West, Florida. They do not add female drag queens to their interviews, but what is

interesting about this book is the introduction of the term “drag-queenness”, which is defined as a gender category that derives from the performances of those who “transform femininity and heterosexuality into something else” (Rupp & Taylor, 2003:116). In other words, “drag-queenness” is a gender category that makes space to those who do not fit into the gender binary category. This gender category exclusive for drag queens would solve the gender distinctions in the drag community, letting men and women participate as equals, no matter their biological sex.

Moreover, Rupp and Taylor made a collaboration with Eve Ilana Shapiro to write *Drag Queens and Drag Kings: the difference gender makes* (2010). This article has inspired my dissertation, since it makes a systematic comparison of the differences between the performances and behaviour of male and female drag queens. To do this, the authors study two groups of drag performers: one of drag queens (“The 801 girls”) and another of drag kings and bio-queens (“DBT”). To make this comparison they argue that “the transgressive personal gender and sexual identities of drag queens and drag kings influence and are influenced by the performance of drag and are key to understanding the boundary – and identity – deconstructive potential of drag” (Rupp et. al, 2010:278). This is to say that the gender and sexuality of drag queens affect their view and interpretation of drag and therefore their performances. Some of the things they ascertain are that most gender impersonators in the queer community are men and that “drag kinging”<sup>3</sup> is a recent phenomenon. As a result, based on interviews to the main members of each group and to some audience members, they concluded that both collectives shared the same aim but had a different approach to it. While drag kings and bio-queens are more political and present issues about race, feminism, or transsexuality, drag queens are less politically correct, and focus more on comedy and entertainment.

Another work that highly inspired this dissertation was Danielle C. Bauner’s *Kings, Queens, and In-Betweens: exploring gender and power through drag performances* (2013). This thesis analyses, from a feminist point of view, how the heteropatriarchal society affects drag and gender identity. Bauner’s thesis focuses mainly on women that do drag, and in the female artists in popular culture that have influenced the art of drag. She also talks about

---

<sup>3</sup> Includes drag kings and faux queens or bio-queens. (Rupp et al., 2010)

“cyberdrag”<sup>4</sup>, showcasing a performance by Lady Gaga’s drag persona (Jo Calderone), and “using discourse analysis to explore how meaning is constructed around drag in popular culture and analyse the sources that create the stories about Calderone’s performance.” (Bauner, 2013).

Overall, there have been many studies about the lives and behaviour of male drag queens, but very few that are about women and transgender drag performers. Moreover, the studies that talk about these collectives are complemented with comparisons to male drag queens, never concentrating solely on female and transgender drag. Besides that, all these comparisons of female and male drag focus on their performances and behaviour, never analysing their possible differences in discourse. That is why I have chosen this topic for my dissertation.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

#### **3.1. Halliday’s notion of transitivity**

This project uses M.A.K Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) as a theoretical framework. This is called “systemic” to indicate that individuals produce language using alternative methods. This is to say, each individual creates a different text or utterance to describe or tell something, even if it is the same thing in the real world. This is because grammar provides users a variety of choices in language, such as choices of vocabulary and sentence structure. Moreover, grammar theory is labelled as “functional” because of the many functions (purposes) that language has. Furthermore, Halliday divides language into different dimensions (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014: 21). The first is the social context, with its three variables of field, tenor, and mode. It then goes to the semantics dimension. Here, meaning is divided into figure (quantum flow of events), message (quantum of information) and move (quantum of interaction). Lastly, we have the lexico-grammar level, related to systems of transitivity, mood, and theme. Halliday also identifies three dimensions in the clause, which he defines as a “multifunctional construct consisting of three metafunctional lines of meaning” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:211). This means that a clause has three metafunctions in the communicative context. These metafunctions are the interpersonal function, the textual function, and the ideational function (Halliday, 1971). The

---

<sup>4</sup> A new form of drag that has been affected and transformed by the new technologies and the internet (Bauer, 2013)

interpersonal metafunction is the capacity of the speaker to communicate socially; the capacity of the speaker to maintain a conversation. The textual metafunction refers to the capacity of language to create coherent texts out of random words and sentences. Lastly, the ideational metafunction is the function of language that allows us to express our experience of the real world, including our consciousness, our internal world. This function is used for the interchange of new information among speakers. This metafunction is related to transitivity.

The traditional approach to transitivity in grammar is the classification of verbs into two categories: transitive, which take a direct object, and intransitive, which do not take a direct object. However, Halliday defines transitivity as “the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his experience of the process of the external world of his consciousness, together with the participants in these processes and their attendant circumstances” (Halliday, 1971:359). This means that Halliday’s analysis concentrates in the identification of three main elements in the clause (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014):

- (i) a process; an action
- (ii) the participants involved in the process
- (iii) circumstances associated with the process

The process and the participants are essential to every clause, but circumstances are optional. This is because “the nature of participants will thus vary according to the type of process [...] and we can say that the configuration of process + participants constitutes the experiential centre of the clause.” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:221) On the other hand, circumstantial elements develop this “experiential centre”, but they are still not strictly necessary in the clause and they are not directly involved in the process. So going back to what Halliday’s denominates the “centre of the clause” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014), we should now develop the elements that constitute it. There are six different types of processes that automatically determine the type of participants we are dealing with in the clause. These processes are the material, the mental, the relational, the behavioural, the verbal, and the existential (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:213-215).

First, the material process, which refers to a verb that describes the process of ‘doing’ or ‘happening’. There can be one or more participants in this process, and there are different types of participants: directly involved participants, who are directly affected by the action,



and obliquely involved participants, who are affected by the action in an indirect way. As directly involved participants we find the actor, performer of the action, and the goal, affected by the action, and as obliquely involved participants we have the recipient, that receives something from the actor, and the client, for whom the action is done.

Another very common transitivity process is the relational, which serves to identify or qualify something. Two participants are involved in this: the carrier and the attributor, and some common verbs are “to be” and “to identify (as)”.

The behavioural process, which usually involves two participants: the behavior and the behaviour. This process describes an action that is physical and mental at the same time, such as yawning, sneezing, laughing, dreaming.

The mental process classifies clauses concerned with the world of consciousness. Common verbs are “remember”, “feel”, “think”, “want”. The participants in this process are the experiencer and the phenomenon (the experience).

The next process that Halliday describes is the verbal one. It involves all the clauses that have an instance of indirect speech. Common verbs are say and tell, and it usually involves as participants a sayer, the one that produces the message, and a receiver, the subject involved in the report or quote.

Finally, the existential process, which only includes one participant, called the existent. The most commonly used verb is to be, but in the sense of existing, not in the sense of being.

Moreover, Halliday and Matthiessen add that the three components of transitivity (process, participants, and circumstances) are “semantic categories that explain in the most general way how phenomena of our experience of the world are construed as linguistic structures.” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:224). With this they attempt to relate language to social structure and human experiences, arguing that the kind of linguistic elements we choose and the way in which we arrange them in the sentence determines our view on the object or the experience we are describing. These linguistic decisions we make are at the same time conditioned by the social context around us, which can be our city, our friends, our family, or our social circle in general. This means that Halliday and Matthiessen approach language as a social semiotic system, a tool that depends on semiotics to be able to function. As they express it, “a given language is thus interpreted by reference to its semiotic habitat.”

(Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:32). This is another reason I chose to make a transitivity analysis for my study, because drag queen discourse is an oral sociolect that evolves around popular culture and therefore it is affected by its semiotic habitat.

### 3.2. Transitivity and identity

As we have learned, transitivity reflects the conscious and subconscious mind of the speaker (Halliday, 1971) allowing us to analyse the set of values and inner thoughts that a person has. This set of values includes gender identity as a social construct.

There are several works that study gender identity through transitivity analysis. Bárbara Cristina Gallardo published in 2006 *Why can't Women Talk like a Man: an Investigation of Gender in the Play Pygmalion by Bernard Shaw*, in which she examines the use of language of the different male and female characters in the play *Pygmalion* (Bernard Shaw, 1913) using Halliday's transitivity analysis. Another author that uses this theory is Sanna Larinkoski in her thesis *Diagnosing Gender: transitivity analysis on the diagnostic category of gender dysphoria in DSM-5* (2014) dedicated her thesis to the analysis of the construction of gender based on the hypothesis of gender dysphoria as a mental disorder. She analysed a set of utterances using Halliday's transitivity theory to obtain her results. Another study worth-mentioning is Guiyu Dai's "Constituting Gender Roles through the Transitivity Choice in Commodity Advertising - A Critical Discourse Approach" (2015), which uses the three-dimensional model of CDA created by Fairclough to explore the construction of gender roles in a mobile phone advertisement.

Moreover, transitivity analysis is also commonly used in the analysis of the speeches of different political leaders, mostly with the aim of finding their true individual social and political intentions. Since drag is not only a performance art, but also a political statement in support of the queer community (Bauer, 2013; Moncrieff and Lienard, 2017; Rupp et al., 2010), I decided to also search for analysis of transitivity made on political discourses.

One example of this is an article called "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Barack Obama's speeches" (2010), by a Chinese student named Junling Wang. In this text, Wang analyses the relationships between language, ideology and power of two Barack Obama speeches by using Halliday's Systematic Functional Grammar, and therefore including a transitivity analysis. This transitivity analysis helps her determine the intentions of the

speeches, that contain mostly material, relational and mental processes, which are used to establish a close relationship between speaker and listener. Scholar Wellman Kondowe also analysed political discourse in her article “Presidents and Ideologies: A Transitivity analysis of Bingu wa Mutharika’s inaugural address (2014). This text determines that the choice of actors and processes used in the speech foreground the supposedly democratic president as having fascist ideologies. These studies show us how political leaders can manipulate language to achieve certain purposes. Drag queens do this too, as we can see, for example, in Elizabeth Kaminski’s *Listening to Drag: music, performance and the construction of oppositional culture* (2003), which analyses how drag queens use music to transmit different messages in their shows. She noticed how there were three types of songs: the ones that were used to build solidarity towards the gay community, the ones that expressed rage against the dominant gender and sexuality conventions, and the songs that presented empowered women and demonstrated the ability of drag queens to portray women outside gender and sexual constraints.

Overall, we can see how Halliday’s transitivity analysis can be used to analyse gender identity in discourse. Moreover, it can be used to analyse the discourse of a person to determine his intentions and social values. These two uses of the transitivity analysis are valuable for this dissertation.

#### **4. Methodology**

To write this work I first decided to inform myself further about the drag queen community by watching movies and TV shows about it, because this type of media is where there are more instances of drag queen discourse, since it only exists in oral speech (Moncrieff and Lienard, 2017). This led me to start watching *Rupaul’s Drag Race* (Logo, 2009), a TV reality show in which 14 drag queens from all over the USA compete to become “America’s next drag superstar”. It was from watching this TV show that I realized that drag queens have a unique lexicon and communicative behaviour. Moreover, when reading about the history of drag queens and the previous studies made about them (point 2), I noticed a lack of information about women doing drag. These two discoveries inspired me to do a gender identity in discourse analysis, to give women in drag them more visibility.

Overall, after educating myself about drag queen culture, I started to look for interviews in which I could find instances of discourse of male and female drag queens. An interview article called “Drag Is Not About Genitals: Australian Queens Respond To The RuPaul Controversy” was the one I chose. It was published in the online Australian magazine *Junkee* on march 9th of 2018. This article gathers a set of three questions: ‘Why do you identify as a drag queen/artist?’, ‘Do you believe RuPaul’s comments<sup>5</sup> were damaging to the drag and LGBTQI communities?’, ‘How do you define “drag”?’’, and it includes the answers of five Australian drag queens of different ages, sexualities, genders, and backgrounds. The first is Hannah Conda, a 26-year-old drag queen who identifies as a gay cisgender man. We know his gender and sexual identity from the first thing he says “I am a gay man” (Campbell, 2018). This is the archetype of a drag queen, a gay man dressing in woman’s clothing, so I hypothesized that this would make his discourse different from the other participants. Next, we have Penta Gramme, a 32-year-old bisexual and queer<sup>6</sup> woman. Since she defines herself as “queer” we cannot determine her exact gender or sexuality, but we know that her biological sex is female because she claims to “struggle with labels like bio queen, faux queen” (Campbell, 2018), and she also says that “sometimes people assume that I’m a man dressed as a woman and I’m absolutely fine with that” (Campbell, 2018). She is the only biological female (born with female sexual organs) in the interview, which may affect her discourse, since her experience in the drag community is very different. As Danielle C. Bauer states in her thesis “being female changes the approach, reception, and politics behind drag performance” (Bauer, 2013:12). The third drag queen in the interview is Maxi Shield, a 44-year-old gay person who identifies in the trans spectrum. This interviewee was difficult to label, so I decided to not give them<sup>7</sup> any labels and see if their discourse is different from the other participants. Maya Soul is the fourth queen interviewed. She is a 21-year-old trans woman, therefore her young age and gender may mark differences in her speech. Lastly, we have Etcetera Etcetera, a 20-year-old gay and genderqueer person. Genderqueer is such a

---

<sup>5</sup> On March 5th, 2018, drag queen celebrity RuPaul made a series of transphobic comments on an interview and on his personal Twitter account. (Source: nydailynews.com)

<sup>6</sup> Denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms. (Source: oxforddictionaries.com)

<sup>7</sup> Non-binary gender pronoun used to refer to someone whose gender is non-defined or unknown. (Source: Merriam-webster.com)

wide spectrum that I decided to consider them as a male drag queen, because their biological gender is male and for research purposes.

Moreover, this article includes a discussion about the level of acceptance of drag queens in the community depending on their gender identity (question 2), which is also important to the topic.

To do this analysis I first created three documents, each one for each question and its respective answers. Then I manually analysed them, paying special attention to processes, but also analysing their respective participants and circumstances in order to help me determine the kind of processes. Finally, I transferred the results into tables, also adding percentages for a more visual reference.

Now I will proceed to analyse the results based on what I have read about drag queen culture and the difference that gender identity makes in the community. Moreover, since this is the first transitivity analysis of drag queen discourse, this will also include my personal understanding on the subject.

## **5. Analysis of results**

The first question of the interview is “Why do you identify as a drag queen/artist?”. As we can see in table 1, the highest number of processes was uttered by Penta Gramme (2), and the lowest number of processes was uttered by one of the two male participants (5). This may be because gay men have never had to justify their presence in the drag queen community, so they have fewer things to say. On the other hand, cis-women are still marginalized in many cases inside the community. This is because drag discourse has typically been studied in terms of sexuality, being limited to gay men, instead of in terms of gender oppression, which would include women in drag (Bauer, 2013). In other words, “women in drag” is still a relatively new concept and many people are still not accepting of it. We can see an instance of this in the interview, when Penta Gramme labels as “lucky” the fact that in Sydney and Melbourne most drag queen shows are inclusive and allow anyone to perform, no matter their gender. (Campbell, 2018)

**Table 1. “Why do you identify as a drag queen/artist?”: general findings**

Participants	Words	Sentences	Processes
1 gay	57	3	8
2 bisexual/queer	79	4	<b>10</b>
3 gay/trans	58	4	5
4 trans	38	3	7
5 gay/ gender queer	25	1	<b>4</b>

**Table 2. “Why do you identify as a drag queen/artist?”: processes**

Participants/ processes		Total	Material	Behavioural	Mental	Verbal	Relational	Existential
1 gay	No.	8	4	1	0	0	3	0
	%		<b>50</b>	12,5	0	0	37,5	0
2 bisexual/queer	No.	10	2	0	2	0	5	1
	%		20	0	20	0	<b>50</b>	10
3 gay/trans	No.	6	3	0	0	0	1	2
	%		<b>50</b>	0	0	0	16,6	33,3
4 trans	No.	7	1	2	1	0	3	0
	%		14,3	28,6	14,3	0	<b>42,8</b>	0
5 gay/ gender queer	No.	4	1	1	1	0	1	0
	%		25	25	25		25	

Since this is a personal question of self-reflection and self-definition we would expect the speakers to use mostly mental, behavioural, and relational processes, because they are most related to personal experiences rather than descriptions of the external world (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Queens number 2 and 4 fulfil this hypothesis, using mostly relational processes (50% and 42,8% respectively), followed by mental and material processes in the case of participant 2, and behavioural processes in the case of participant 4. Participant 2 probably uses more mental processes because female queens tend to put more thought into

their performances. They tend to explore a wide scope of gender identities representing the whole LGBT+ spectrum by being consistent with queer theory (Rupp et. al, 2010:286), which means that their performances are based on socio-political and academic matters.

However, subjects 1 and 3 showcase a different linguistic behaviour. Their most used process is the material (50%). In the case of Hannah Conda (1) this may be because she is a gay male, and gay men have a more “careless” approach to drag. Rupp et. al describe the behaviour of some male drag queens in the following way: “They announce from the start that they are gay men, they talk in men’s voices, they make jokes about their large clitorises and ‘manginas’, and they interact with audience members in an aggressively sexual way that is more masculine than feminine.” (Rupp et. al, 2010:286). This is to say, drag queens make political and social statements by acting a certain way and “doing” certain actions. They play with gender in a more explicit way, telling their own personal histories and opinions, rather than reflecting upon the gender issues and social problems in the queer community. On the other hand, drag kings are very conscious about queer theory and deal with issues in a more thoughtful and generalized way. For instance, instead of announcing their gender in their performances, like drag queens often do, they prefer to make their audiences confused, making them question if they are watching a man, a woman, or neither of those, and this way causing them a feeling of confusion about what does gender really mean. (Bauer, 2013)

The second question of the interview is “Do you believe RuPaul’s comments were damaging to the drag and LGBTQI communities?”. To analyse the answers to this question we need a little of context. On March of this year, the famous drag queen RuPaul made a series of transphobic and misogynist comments in an interview to *The Guardian*. When he was asked if he would let biological women compete in *RuPaul’s drag race* he said no, because it would not be fair for the rest of the competitors and it would also loose “its sense of danger and its sense of irony once it’s not men doing it, because at its core it’s a social statement and a big f-you to male-dominated culture. So for men to do it, it’s really punk rock, because it’s a real rejection of masculinity.” (*The Guardian*, 2018). He was asked the same about trans women and he answered that he would not let them compete if they had already transitioned (changed their sexual organs from male to female), because of the same reasons as biological women. This is a very retrograde view on drag and many drag queens called him out from his comments, including the interviewees in this essay.

Having in mind this, we would first hypothesize that the queer and trans participants are the ones that have the most to say about this. Nevertheless, the most words were uttered by the gay male participant (1) and he also uttered the most processes, tying in number with female participant (2).

**Table 3. “Do you believe RuPaul’s comments were damaging to the drag and LGBTQI communities?”: general findings**

Participants	Words	Sentences	Processes
1 gay	122	5	<b>17</b>
2 bisexual/queer	103	5	<b>17</b>
3 gay/trans	76	5	10
4 trans	68	4	13
5 gay/gender queer	104	6	16

**Table 4. “Do you believe RuPaul’s comments were damaging to the drag and LGBTQI communities?”: processes**

Participants/ processes		Total	Material	Behavioural	Mental	Verbal	Relational	Existential
1 gay	No.	16	3	3	0	2	6	2
	%		18,7	18,7	0	12,5	<b>37,5</b>	12,5
2 bisexual/queer	No.	17	4	4	3	1	5	0
	%		23,5	23,5	17,6	5,9	<b>29,4</b>	0
3 gay/trans	No.	10	4	1	1	1	3	0
	%		<b>40</b>	10	10	10	30	0
4 trans	No.	13	4	1	3	3	2	0
	%		<b>30,8</b>	7,7	23,0	23,0	15,4	0
5 gay/ gender queer	No.	16	1	0	6	1	8	0
	%		6,2	0	37,5	6,2	<b>50</b>	0



Here we do not see a difference between male and female drag queens. Instead, what we can see is a clear differentiation in the processes used by the two trans participants (3 and 4) and the ones used by the cis-gender and genderqueer participants (1,2 and 5). The trans participants use material processes the most, probably because material clauses “construe figures of ‘doing-&-happening’”. They express the notion that some entity ‘does’ something” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:227), which means that the actors that use these processes have previously experienced what they are talking about. In contrast, non-trans participants use relational processes the most since they concentrate more on describing their thoughts on the matter than on their personal experiences.

The last question is “How do you define drag?”. This question is interesting because, as I have stated before, drag is commonly identified as gay men dressed in woman’s clothing. Therefore, we would expect male drag queens to give that definition. Nonetheless, from what we have seen so far, drag goes beyond this notion, and that is what we would expect to be said by the female and trans drag interviewees in order to support their own participation. This is probably the reason why Penta Gramme (2) uses the highest number of words. What is remarkable, though, is that she is followed in number of words by participant 5, the gay and gender queer male, who was expected to give a more basic and to-the-point opinion. Moreover, he uttered the highest number of processes.

**Table 5. “How do you define drag?”: general findings**

Participants	Words	Sentences	Processes
1 gay	37	5	5
2 bisexual/queer	<b>55</b>	4	8
3 gay/trans	23	2	3
4 trans	29	3	4
5 gay/gender queer	<b>44</b>	4	<b>9</b>

**Table 6. “How do you define drag?”: processes**

Participants/ processes	Total	Material	Behavioural	Mental	Verbal	Relational	Existential
1 gay	No. 5	1	0	1	0	3	0
	%	20	0	20	0	<b>60</b>	0
2 bisexual/queer	No. 8	2	1	0	0	5	0
	%	25	12,5	0	0	<b>62,5</b>	0
3 gay/trans	No. 3	0	0	2	0	1	0
	%	0	0	<b>66,6</b>		33,3	0
4 trans	No. 4	0	1	1	0	2	0
	%	0	25	25		<b>50</b>	0
5 gay/ gender queer	No. 9	5	1	1	0	2	0
	%	<b>55,5</b>	11,1	11,1	0	22,2	0

The process that is most commonly expected to be found in questions that ask for a definition is the relational process, since its function is “identifying and classifying” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:214). Participants 1, 2 and 4 fulfil this hypothesis, but participant 3, for example, uses more mental processes. They use constructions and verbs that indicate that they are expressing a personal opinion (“I don’t think”, “I believe”) rather than just giving a definition, which is what the ones that used relational clauses did. This comes to show the level of confidence that each drag queen has on the matter. That is to say, participants that used more relational processes show a higher level of confidence about what is drag, while interviewee 3 may be more open minded about new definitions of drag, expressing his own thoughts but not denying others’.

Furthermore, Etcetera Etcetera (5) takes a whole different approach to the question, using mostly material clauses, expressing his direct experience in drag with verbs like “(I) activate”, “(I) change” and “(I) create”.

This last question does not show nothing remarkable in terms of the differences in discourse depending on gender, since there is not a pattern that subjects from the same gender

group follow. This comes to show how diverse is the view on drag depending on the individual. And since personal interpretation is one of the main characteristics of contemporary art, this demonstrates that drag is, overall, an art form.

**Table 7. General summary of findings**

	Total words	Total sentences	Total processes
1 gay	216	13	30
2 bisexual/ queer	<b>237</b>	13	<b>35</b>
3 gay/ trans	157	11	18
4 trans	135	10	24
5 gay/gender queer	173	11	29

**Table 8. Total processes**

Participants/ processes	Total	Material	Behavioural	Mental	Verbal	Relational	Existential
1 gay	No. 29	8	4	1	2	12	2
	%	27,6	13,8	3,4	6,9	<b>41,4</b>	6,9
2 bisexual/queer	No. 35	8	5	5	1	15	1
	%	22,8	14,3	14,3	2,8	<b>42,8</b>	2,8
3 gay/trans	No. 19	7	1	3	1	5	2
	%	<b>36,8</b>	5,3	15,8	5,3	26,3	10,5
4 trans	No. 24	5	4	5	3	7	0
	%	20,8	16,7	20,8	12,5	<b>29,2</b>	0
5 gay/ gender queer	No. 29	7	2	8	1	11	0
	%	24,1	6,9	27,6	3,4	<b>37,9</b>	0

As we can see in these two tables, the highest number of words and processes were uttered by Penta Gramme (2), the biological female, with 35 processes in total, of which 42,8% were relational. She is also the one who uses relational clauses the most, probably due

to the fact that, as I have stated before, women consider drag in a more “academic” way, based on queer culture studies, and therefore use more definitions and facts to talk about drag. However, I also mentioned that male drag queens based their performances in actions and behaviour, but as we can see in the table above participants 1 and 5 use mostly relational clauses too. This refutes my theory that male and female drag queens have very different discourse characteristics. Nevertheless, there is still a slight difference in the percentage of use of material and relational clauses between male and female drag artists. Participants 1 and 5 used a higher percentage of material clauses (27,6% and 24,1%) than the female participant (22,8%), who at the same time used more relational clauses than the males. Other differences between these two groups are that the gay males (1 and 5) used more verbal clauses than the biological female, meaning that the males tend to use external references, things that other people have said (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014), to formulate ideas; meanwhile, the female performer formulates and develops her own ideas. Another remarkable difference is the contrast in use of mental clauses. While participants 2 and 5 use a fair amount of mental processes (14,3% and 27,6%), the gay cisgender male (1) only used 3,4% (1 mental process). This might be because participant 5 is, besides gay and male, also genderqueer, which makes him reflect more about drag and its meaning in queer communities.

## 6. Conclusion

This analysis shows that the use of language (discourse) differs depending on the gender of each drag performer, mostly when we are dealing with the notion of “identity” (tables 1 and 2). This coincides with what we have seen in the literature review: very often, drag artists differ in their interpretation of drag and their drag identity based on their gender. However, some similitudes have also been found, like the fact that all the participants, except for Maxi Shield (3), used mostly relational processes. Furthermore, the ones who used relational processes the most were the two cisgender subjects, Hannah Conda (1) and Penta Gramme (2), whilst the transgender and gender queer subjects used a more diverse range of processes. This may be because the trans and gender queer subjects have experienced more layers of the gender spectrum, not limiting themselves just to the gender binary. Therefore, their notion of drag is more varied and diversified, which makes their discourse be more diverse too.

Overall, Drag queens have been a recurrent example for gender and queer theorists, using them as an example for the development different theories, like gender performativity (Butler, 1990;1993), or simply studying their lives and behaviour to understand the notions of masculinity and femininity better (Newton, 1972; Rupp, 2005; Rupp et al., 2010; Rupp and Taylor, 2015; Barret, 2017). On the other hand, drag kings have been left in the shadows for many years. There is no doubt that the queer community has always been dominated by gay men (Newton, 1972), and their dominance is still very present nowadays. Moreover, we have seen how male and female drag queens perform different types of drag. Male drag queens tend to interact more with audiences and be more explicit about their gender identity, sexuality and sexual organs, whilst female drag artists (drag kings/bio-queens/trans women) usually create performances based on queer theory, hiding their gender and making audiences wonder about it. Nevertheless, both groups perform with a common aim: fighting gender stereotypes and making audiences question their sexuality and gender, helping them reflect about those aspects of their lives that they might never have thought about before (Rupp et al. 2010), and therefore opening people's minds and helping them know themselves better. Furthermore, the results of this analysis show more similitudes than differences in the speech of male and female drag queens, implying that, even though we still have a long road ahead of us until we achieve gender equality, we may be finally starting to advance.

**Bibliography**

- Barrett, Rusty. *From Drag Queens to Leathermen: Language, Gender, and Gay Male*. (*Studies in Language, Gender and Sexuality*). Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Bauer, Danielle C. *Kings, Queens, and In-Betweens: Exploring Gender and Power through Drag Performances*. Thesis, San Diego State University, 2013.
- Berkowitz, Dana, and Linda Liska Belgrave. “‘She Works Hard for the Money’: Drag Queens and the Management of Their Contradictory Status of Celebrity and Marginality.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2010, pp. 159–86.
- Berkowitz, Dana, et al. “The Interaction of Drag Queens and Gay Men in Public and Private Spaces.” *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 52, no. 3–4, 2007, pp. 11–32.
- Butler, Judith. “Critically Queer.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 1, 1993, pp. 17–32, doi:10.1215/10642684-1-1-17.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge Press, 1999.
- Cameron, Deborah. “Language, Gender, and Sexuality: Current Issues and New Directions.” *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2005, pp. 482–502.
- Campbell, Patrick. “‘Drag is not about Genitals’: Australian Queens Respond to the RuPaul Controversy.” *Junkee*, 2018. Web.
- Dai, Guiyu. “Constituting Gender Roles through the Transitivity Choice in Commodity Advertising - A Critical Discourse Approach.” *Asian Social Science*, vol. 11, no. 28, 2015, pp. 58–64.

- Gallardo, Bárbara C. *Why can't Women Talk like a Man: an Investigation of Gender in the Play Pygmalion by Bernard Shaw*. Thesis, Universidade Federal Do Acre – UFAC, 2006.
- Halliday, M. A. K. "Notes on Transitivity in English - Part 1." *Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 3, no. 1, Cambridge University Press, Apr. 1967, pp. 37–81.
- Halliday, M. A. K. "Notes on Transitivity and Theme in English - Part 2." *Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 3, no. 02, Cambridge University Press, Oct. 1967, p. 199.
- Halliday, M. A. K. "Notes on Transitivity in English - Part 1." *Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 3, no. 1, Cambridge University Press, Sept. 1967, pp. 37–81.
- Halliday, M.A.K. "Linguistic function and literary style: an enquiry into the language of William Golding's 'The Inheritors'". *Literary Style: a symposium*. Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Halliday, M. A. K. and C. M. I. M Matthiessen. *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Routledge, 2014, doi:10.4324/9780203431269.
- Heller, Meredith. "Is She He? Drag Discourse and Drag Logic in Online Media Reports of Gender Variance." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3, Routledge, 2016, pp. 445–59.
- Hopper, Paul J., and Sandra A. Thompson. "Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse." *Language*, vol. 56, no. 2, 1980, p. 251.
- Kaminski, Elizabeth. "Listening to drag: music, performance, and the construction of oppositional culture." Electronic Thesis, Ohio State University, 2003. *OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center*.
- Koller, Veronika. "How to Analyse Collective Identity in Discourse." *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines*, vol. 5 (2), no. ISSN: 1752-3079, 2012, pp. 19 – 38.

- Koller, Veronika. "Analysing Collective Identity in Discourse: Social Actors and Contexts." *Semen*, vol. 27, 2009, pp. 1–20.
- Kondowe, Wellman. "Presidents and Ideologies: A Transitivity Analysis of Bingu Wa Mutharika's Inaugural Address." *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2014, p. 174.
- Lakoff, Robin. "Language and Woman's Place." *Language in Society*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1973, pp. 45–80.
- Larinkoski, Sanna. *Diagnosing Gender: Transitivity Analysis on the Diagnostic Category of Gender Dysphoria In DSM-5*. Thesis, University of Turku, 2014.
- Levon, Erez. "Sexuality in Context: Variation and the Sociolinguistic Perception of Identity." *Language in Society*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2007, pp. 533–54.
- Litosseliti, Lia, and Jane Sunderland. *Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis*. John Benjamins Publishing, 2002.
- Moncrieff, Michael, and Pierre Lienard. "A Natural History of the Drag Queen Phenomenon." *Evolutionary Psychology*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1–14.
- Newton, Esther. *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- Rupp, L. J. "The 801 Girls Talk about Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret." *Sexualities*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2005, pp. 99–106.
- Rupp, Leila J., and Verta A. Taylor. *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Rupp, Leila J., et al. "Drag Queens and Drag Kings: The Difference Gender Makes." *Sexualities*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2010, pp. 275–94.



- Shapiro, Eve. "Drag Kinging and the Transformation of Gender Identities." *Gender & Society*, vol. 21, no. 2, Sage Publications, Inc., 2007, pp. 250–71.
- Simmons, Nathaniel. "Speaking Like a Queen in RuPaul's Drag Race: Towards a Speech Code of American Drag Queens." *Sexuality and Culture*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2014, pp. 630–48.
- Taylor, Verta, and Leila J. Rupp. "Learning from Drag Queens." *Contexts*, vol. 5, no. 3, SAGE PublicationsSage CA: Los Angeles, CA, Aug. 2006, pp. 12–17.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. *Politics, Ideology, and Discourse*. 2006, pp. 728–40.
- Wang, Junling. "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Barack Obama's Speeches." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2010, pp. 254–61.