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## QUEER LANGUAGE: CREATING NEW SPACES FOR IDENTITY IN MUSIC

*The article examines the usage of queer language in music, focusing on the creation of new spaces of identity in contemporary music. By analyzing the work of leading queer singers, such as RuPall, Lady Gaga, Sam Smith, and others, the study reveals linguistic and performative strategies that challenge traditional gender and sexual norms.*

*The article also offers a comprehensive analysis of queer language in music, drawing on Ukrainian and international scholarship. It analyzes how musical performers use queer language as a tool for constructing identity, resistance, and self-expression. The research corpus uses an interdisciplinary methodological approach, integrating corpus analysis, quantitative analysis, and comparative analysis. The discourse analysis was used to study the pragmatic functions of queer vocabulary in musical discourse. The ethnographic approach allowed us to analyze field research in queer culture communities (bol culture, drag queens) and explore the contexts of everyday use of queer vocabulary.*

*The key results highlight the transformative power of queer language in musical spaces, demonstrating how contemporary performers use linguistic innovation to create alternative spaces of belonging and representation. The article critically analyses the intersection of language, performance, and identity, revealing how musical expression becomes a powerful means of challenging heteronormative discourses and expanding understanding of gender and sexual diversity.*

*Through a synthesis of theoretical material and practical analysis, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on queer linguistics, musical performance, and identity politics, offering insights into the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of queer expression in contemporary music.*

**Key words:** *queer language, queer linguistics, heterogeneity, musical space, identity.*

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## **КВІР-МОВА: СТВОРЕННЯ НОВИХ ПРОСТОРІВ ДЛЯ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ У МУЗИЦІ**

*У статті розглянуті взаємозв'язки між квір-мовою та музичною експресією, фокусуючи увагу на створенні нових просторів ідентичності в сучасній музиці. Шляхом аналізу творчості провідних квір-виконавців, а саме RuPaul, Lady Gaga, Sam Smith та інших, дослідження розкриває лінгвістичні та перформативні стратегії, що кидають виклик традиційним гендерним та сексуальним нормам.*

*У роботі наголошено, що ця тема становить інтерес для соціолінгвістичних досліджень, оскільки демонструє складні процеси взаємодії субкультурних і домінуючих мовних практик та відображає ширші тенденції трансформації соціальних ієрархій, конструювання ідентичності та легітимації маргінальних дискурсів. Аналіз лексичних, семантичних та прагматичних особливостей квір-мови в музичному контексті дозволяє краще зрозуміти механізми її функціонування та поширення, а також осмислити її соціокультурне значення.*

*У статті також запропонований комплексний аналіз квір-мови в музиці, спираючись на українські та міжнародні наукові дослідження. Проаналізовано, як музичні виконавці використовують квір мову як інструмент конструювання ідентичності, спротиву та самовираження. Дослідницький корпус застосовує міждисциплінарний методологічний підхід, інтегруючи корпусний та кількісний аналізи, а також порівняльний аналіз. Дискурс-аналіз використовувався для вивчення прагматичних функцій квір-лексики в музичному дискурсі. Етнографічний підхід дозволив проаналізувати особливості вживання квір-лексики в спільнотах квір-культури.*

*Результати підкреслюють трансформаційну силу квір-мови в музиці, демонструючи, як сучасні виконавці використовують лінгвістичні інновації для створення альтернативних просторів приналежності та репрезентації. Стаття критично аналізує перетин мови, перформансу та ідентичності, розкриваючи, як музичне вираження стає потужним засобом оскарження гетеронормативних дискурсів та розширення розуміння гендерної та сексуальної різноманітності.*

*Шляхом синтезу теоретичного матеріалу та практичного аналізу дослідження робить внесок у зростаючий корпус знань про квір-лінгвістику, музичне виконання та політику ідентичності, пропонуючи заглибитися у динамічну та гетерогенну природу квір-експресії в сучасному музичному просторі.*

**Ключові слова:** квір-мова, квір-лінгвістика, гетерогенність, музичний простір, ідентичність.

**Relevance.** The relevance of the researches about queer language in the musical space is due to several key factors. Firstly, music as an art form uniquely creates alternative spaces for identity expression, where traditional linguistic and social restrictions can be reinterpreted and transformed. Secondly, the contemporary music industry demonstrates a growing openness to diverse forms of expression, which creates favorable conditions for the development and dissemination of queer narratives.

Over the past decades, there has been an increase in the popularity and visibility of the LGBTQ+ community in popular culture. This process is accompanied by the active integration of a specific linguistic repertoire formed within queer subcultures into the dominant cultural space. The presence of queer dialect in the discourse of contemporary music is particularly noticeable – from slang inclusions in lyrics to the conscious cultivation of their own linguistic identity by performers.

This topic is of considerable interest for sociolinguistic researches, as it demonstrates the complex interaction processes between subcultural and dominant language practices and reflects broader trends in the transformation of social hierarchies, identity construction, and legitimation of marginalized discourses. The analysis of lexical, semantic, and pragmatic features of the queer language in the musical context allows us to understand better the mechanisms of its functioning and spread, as well as to comprehend its socio-cultural significance.

The proposed article aims to provide a comprehensive sociolinguistic analysis of the use of queer language in contemporary music. First of all, the theoretical basis of the queer language phenomenon, its historical formation, and its socio-cultural functions will be considered. Then, based on a detailed study of specific examples from song lyrics of performers, an in-depth study of the morphological, semantic, and pragmatic

aspects of queer vocabulary will be conducted. So, we should expand the sociolinguistic researching of this phenomenon, including its role in legitimizing marginalized personalities and facilitating language change and intercultural communication.

A thorough approach that combine the methods of corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, and ethnographic research will allow us to comprehensively highlight the role of queer language in contemporary music discourse and its socio-cultural significance.

#### **Research Objectives and Research Methods.**

This study will allow us to comprehensively highlight the role of queer language in contemporary music discourse and its socio-cultural significance. It employs a range of methods combining quantitative, qualitative, and ethnographic approaches, which help us to study the linguistic, social, and cultural aspects of the use of queer language in musical discourse. Specifically, the corpus analysis made it possible to create a specialized corpus of song lyrics using queer vocabulary, quantitative analysis of the frequency, distribution, and collocations of essential lexical items, and comparative analysis of the use of queer vocabulary in different musical compositions. The discourse analysis was used to study the pragmatic functions of queer vocabulary in musical discourse, to investigate discursive strategies for constructing identity and solidarity, and to analyze the role of queer vocabulary in the processes of legitimation and standardization. The ethnographic approach made it possible to analyze field research in queer culture communities (bol-culture, drag communities) and to explore the contexts of everyday use of queer vocabulary. In turn, the diachronic analysis allowed us to trace and study the history of the formation and spread of the queer dialect, analyze changes in the semantics and pragmatics of critical units, and identify technological changes (social media) in the spread of queer vocabulary.

**Analysis of the Latest Research and Publications.** The appearance of queer theory in the early 1990s was some kind of challenge due to the significant changes in the American LGBTQ movement, often accompanied by internal controversies and debates. Mainstream activists sought to achieve full integration into society through legislative guarantees of equal rights and overcoming prejudice against homosexuality.

Their key goals were to ensure the rights of gays and lesbians to marry, to have free access to goods and services, and to serve in the military. These people dreamed that homosexual people could step back from political struggle and live ordinary middle-class lives.

However, this approach did not suit some activists, who imagined a much broader path to freedom. They emphasised that the very social institutions that the LGBTQ mainstream seeks to join create and maintain various forms of discrimination. They pointed out that marriage as an institution reinforces standards of privacy and monogamy that impede the struggle for sexual rights and marginalise people who choose non-monogamous relationships. In their view, the capitalist system generates economic inequality and exploitation of workers. In addition, military service as a manifestation of patriotism leads to social division and violence.

In the United States, two parallel processes were developing: the emergence of a new social movement and the formation of a new academic field focused on the study of sexuality. Queer theory grew out of several sources: American sociological research on the social nature of sexuality, gay and lesbian studies, women's studies, and French philosophical thought that emerged after structuralism.

According to Mariia Teteriuk, one of the leading researchers of queer theory in contemporary academic discourse, "queer theory is not a clear explanatory structure. It is rather a set of common questions, ideas and statements that a certain group of scholars works with" (Teteriuk, 2017).

Let us talk about influential foreign researchers who have studied the peculiarities of the emergence and development of queer language and queer theory. First of all, we should name Judith Butler ("Gender Trouble" (Butler, 1990), "Bodies That Matter" (Butler, 1993)), who focused on the study of the performativity of gender and language. No less significant is the figure of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and her work "Epistemology of the Closet" (Sedgwick, 1990), which developed queer theory and analyzed language practices. William Lee ("Word's Out: Gay Men's English" (Lee, 1996) and David Halperin ("How to Do the History of Homosexuality" (Halperin, 2002) are also prominent researchers in this field.

Each of these researchers gives their own definition of queer linguistics and queer language and approaches to its perception and use in general. For example, William Leap in his work “Language and Sexuality: Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice” argues that “queer linguistics explores the ways in which language is used to construct and reproduce sexual identities, and how normative ideas about gender and sexuality are manifested, challenged, and transformed through language” (Leap, 2002). Rusty Barrett in the research “From Drag Queens to Leathermen: Language, Gender, and Gay Male Subcultures” suggests that “a queer approach to language recognises that linguistic practices not only reflect but actively create social categories and identities. Language is an instrument of both normalisation and resistance” (Barrett, 2017). In turn, Lal Zimman (“Transgender Language Reform: Some Challenges and Strategies for Promoting Trans-Affirming, Gender-Inclusive Language”) believes that “queer communities often create their own linguistic innovations and practices as a way of expressing identity and building solidarity. These linguistic practices can include both redefining existing words and creating new terminology” (Zimman, 2017). Lucy Jones (“Language and Sexual Identity”) thinks that “it is important to understand that queer language is not monolithic – it varies depending on the context, community and individual needs of speakers. It is a dynamic system that is constantly evolving” (Jones, 2018).

In the context of Ukrainian studies, Maria Maierchyk, co-founder and director of the Centre for Cultural and Anthropological Studies, who actively studies LGBTQ+ movements in Ukraine and their language practices, works in the field of queer language and queer theory. Olha Plakhotnyk is a scholar engaged in research in the field of feminist and queer theory (“Queer as a Riddle: The Development of Queer Theory Outside the Western Context” (Plakhotnyk, 2019)). Dr. Tamara Martseniuk studies the language of inclusion and non-discrimination, also focusing on gender issues of the LGBTQ + community (“Gender for All. Challenging Stereotypes” (Martseniuk, 2017)).

However, the contemporary scientific space lacks studies of queer language in the musical context. At the same time, this area is also undergoing significant transformations related

to the rethinking of traditional forms of gender and sexual identity expression. Queer language in music is becoming not only a means of self-expression for performers but also a powerful tool for shaping new cultural codes and social narratives. This topic is especially relevant in the context of global changes in the understanding of gender, sexuality, and identity, where music is a universal language of communication and a platform for articulating queer experiences.

Musical space is becoming a critical field for the study of queer language, as it combines verbal and non-verbal means of communication. Song lyrics, visual images, performative practices, and musical compositions create a multidimensional space for the articulation of queer identity. This allows us to consider queer language in music not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a complex system of cultural codes and symbols.

It is of particular importance to study how queer language in music influences the formation of public discourse on gender and sexuality. Musical artists who openly articulate queer identity through their work not only create new language practices but also contribute to the visibility and normalization of the LGBTQ+ community in public space. This is essential for developing a more inclusive and diverse cultural landscape.

The history of the emergence of the *musical queer language* began in the 1960s and 1970s, when glam rock emerged in the musical space, challenging all existing gender roles. The compositions of David Bowie, considered a pioneer of non-conformity in rock music, became extremely popular. Many subsequent artists, such as Queen and Freddie Mercury, supported his views and continued to do so in their work. In the next century, musicians became bolder. They openly positioned themselves as LGBTQ performers with their lyrics about gay culture (Boy George and the Culture Club, Elton John, Pet Shop Boys). However, the real heyday of queer music began in the 1990s. For example, k.d. lang was an openly lesbian in country music, the band Bronski Beat promoted LGBTQ themes in their music, and RuPaul became a representative of the so-called drag culture in pop music. That time also marked the beginning of the queer punk movement in contemporary music.

Thus, in the contemporary queer music space, such important topics for the queer community as self-perception and coming out, the fight against



gender discrimination, equal romantic relationships, gender identity, social equality, and justice have begun to be raised. This has also had a significant impact on the development of the modern music industry, which has seen a change in approaches to personality representation, the expansion of thematic contexts, the creation of platforms for LGBTQ performers, and a significant impact on the visual aesthetics of music videos.

**Main Research Material.** In our research we focus on the use of queer-language, specifically in the musical sphere, as more and more musicians are beginning to incorporate it into the lyrics of their works. Contemporary singers like RuPaul, Sam Smith, Lil Nas X, Lady Gaga, and Todrick Hall use and implement queer linguistic practices not only as a means of self-expression but also to create new cultural narratives that impact public perceptions of gender and sexuality.

For instance, RuPaul is a figure that is, in general, considered quite influential both within and beyond of the queer community. He gives us many examples of such use. In his composition “Sissy That Walk” (Spotify) in the line “Better beware, ain’t no tea, ain’t no shade”, “no tea” comes from “Spilling the T”: “T” stands for truth, and spilling it means sharing the hot gossip or revealing the juicy details (Spotify). So, “ain’t no tea, ain’t no shade” means “there’s no gossip, there’s no criticism”. Or in “Call me Mother” (Spotify) in the line “I keeps it tight, now they call... me... Mother...”. “Mother” is derived from the Black and Latino L.G.B.T.Q. ballroom scene, a queer subculture in which members are organized into houses and led by a “mother”. In the second line the word “cunty” (or sometimes just “cunt”) can have many meanings, but it is an adjective generally associated and used in gay society. “To be cunt” is to appear with such hyper femininity, i.e. it is the art of transformation, when every detail of the image embodies glamour: from an elegant dress to flawless make-up, from a perfect hairstyle to luxurious eyelashes, creating an impressive portrait of extraordinary femininity. And “hunty” is essentially a modification of the previous word, a combination of “honey” and “cunt”, ‘Hunty’ is most commonly used as a more ramped up version of a best friend, but can also be used to mean an over the top version of sickening.

A vivid example of queer identification in music is Sam Smith’s song “Stay with Me”: “Oh, won’t

you stay with me? Cause you’re all I need” (Spotify). In this line, the popular non-binary singer openly discusses vulnerability and the desire for emotional support. At the first glance the song may seem romantic, its context reflects the difficulties faced by many queer individuals. Smith speaks directly to the listener in the first person, creating an intimate atmosphere. Another quote from the song “How Do You Sleep?”: “I’m done hatin’ myself for feelin’ / I’m done cryin’ myself awake” (Spotify) illustrates how the artist uses lyrics to convey the pain of unrequited feelings and the path to acceptance of his emotions. This statement ‘stop hating yourself for feeling’ underlines and highlights the intrinsic struggle with self-acceptance and social expectations that queer people often face. This phrase reflects a broader trend in the queer community: acceptance of one’s own identity and confrontation with negative stereotypes. Sam Smith also avoids using gendered pronouns, which makes the lyrics universal, allowing listeners of any gender or orientation to find personal meaning in it.

In Lil Nas X’s song “Montero (Call Me By Your Name),” the line “Call me by your name, tell me you love me in private” (Spotify) becomes a powerful symbol not only of romantic attachment but also of self-acceptance. This phrase reflects the dual nature of queer experience, both finding intimacy with another person and espousing the person’s identity. The whole song underlines the significance of public recognition and self-acceptance, empowering recipients who may face similar struggles. There are lots of visual elements in music video that further amplify this message, using queer aesthetics to highlight the value of self-expression. Another line from the song, “You live in the dark, boy, I cannot pretend,” (Spotify) features a direct address to the male gender (“boy”) as a means of expressing romantic attraction. This is particularly significant within the queer community, where explicitly addressing same-sex attraction has historically been avoided in popular songs.

Sincerely admitting his affection towards another man, a famous singer tries to destroy traditional norms, offering a bold declaration of identity and sexuality. The song is a brave assertion of his queerness and invites listeners to embrace their authentic selves without yielding to societal prejudice. The fact that Lil Nas X uses his real name, “Montero,” makes the song very personal,

challenging heteronormativity within the music industry and crafting a new narrative where love and affection for a man are essential parts of his real self.

The next bright example is Lady Gaga's lyrics. In her song "Born This Way," Lady Gaga uses the line "I'm beautiful in my way 'cause God makes no mistakes. I'm on the right track, baby, I was born this way" (Spotify). This powerful phrase has made the song an anthem for the LGBTQ+ community, thanks to its impactful message of self-acceptance and identity affirmation. The fullness and richness of Gaga's song language is inspiring and supportive, highlighting the principles of the uniqueness of each person. Touching on the topic of queer identity, the song emphasizes the right of all people to be genuine. "Born This Way" encourages listeners to fully accept themselves and reject social pressure to be appropriate to its standards.

Another prominent representative of the LGBTQ+ community in the music space is Todrick Hall, who is called a conductor of queer identity in music culture. In his work, he consciously integrates elements of queer language into the mainstream music space. He is an open representative of the LGBTQ+ community who boldly and openly uses specific vocabulary and basic tenets of queer culture to create his artistic identity and promote the values of marginalized groups in the media space. The analysis of his musical compositions makes it possible to identify and analyze several linguistic phenomena related to queer language.

For example, in his song "Nails, Hair, Hips, Heels" (Spotify), we can see the use of such lexemes as "nails", "hair", "hips", and "heels", which are bright markers of hyper-femininity and semantic associations with the attributes of the so-called "drag queen" culture, emphasizing his gender presentation. The title of this song became very popular immediately after its release, as it fully reflects the image of full confidence and presentation of oneself with style and glamour, which is typical of queer and drag culture. In the composition "Gag Award" (Spotify), the lexeme "gag" is a semantic extension of the words "to strangle" or "to be stunned", which perform a pragmatic function, namely indexing the reaction of admiration and surprise. In the musical piece "Femuline" (Spotify), the word innovation or neologism of the author is the word

title – "female", which combines two words – "feminine" and "masculine", which is a semantic manifestation of gender fluidity, blurring of binary categories.

Another song demonstrates a human personality who openly shows confidence and lifestyle through an energetic dance or walk: "I don't dance, I werk" (Spotify). Here, Todrick Hall consciously uses the queer term "werk" (instead of "work") to demonstrate himself as a person. In the title of the song "Serving Face" (Spotify), which is part of the artist's album "FEMULINE", an expression from drag culture was also deliberately used, which means the demonstration of a specific facial expression, often glamorous or dramatic, to attract attention. Another title of this artist's popular song "Shante, You Stay" is a quote from the famous American reality show RuPaul's Drag Race. This phrase has become a symbol of success and, at the same time, a popular meme, thanks to Judge Shante. This means that the show's participants stay in it but continue competing. In the song's context, this phrase reinforces the connection with drag culture and supports the image of a bold personality and an atmosphere of confidence.

Todrick Hall's "I Like Boys" (Spotify) is undoubtedly a landmark in the context of queer culture. The artist's use of wordplay is typical, and the phrase "He got hips like honey" is also a typical pun and metaphor to emphasize the attractiveness of boys with unconventional masculine features. In another line of the song, "He's my queen and I'm his king," Hall tries to "play" with gender roles, replacing traditional relationships with more fluid and inclusive ones, which reflects the spirit of queer culture. In the song "Attention" (Spotify), there is a line "Living in my truth, take a look in my mirror", in which the phrase "living in my truth" is very common in the queer space and is often used to describe the acceptance of one's identity. The word "snatch" also means to look great in this song. In drag culture, "snatched" can also mean people who skilfully combine their images. In the song "Wrong Bitch" (Spotify), with the phrase "I ain't no dumb blonde," the performer emphasizes the stereotypical perception of blonde women by society while at the same time leaving his message of rejection of stereotypes and labels that are attached to queer people.

Therefore, we can conclude that the use of queer language in Todrick Hall's songs carries

a significant socio-cultural load, performing essential pragmatic functions in the context of personal construction and solidarity of LGBTQ+ culture, such as legalizing queer people in the mainstream space, spreading their cultural practices, expanding their vocabulary repertoire and encouraging linguistic changes, as well as creating platforms for self-realization and self-expression of such subcultures.

**Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research.** In the context of globalization and the digitalization of the music industry, queer language is taking on new forms and meanings. Social media and streaming platforms create new opportunities for the dissemination of alternative narratives and the formation of transnational queer communities through music. This makes the study of queer language in the music space particularly relevant for understanding contemporary processes of cultural transformation. Queer music continues to develop and influence popular culture, creating

space for diversity and inclusivity in the music industry.

The use of queer dialect in contemporary English songs reflects changes in socio-cultural norms and expands the boundaries of linguistic expression. This dialect not only contributes to the recognition and visibility of the LGBTQ+ community but also creates new opportunities for self-identification and creative expression. Through the influence of queer dialect, music becomes a platform for discussing issues of gender and sexual identity, broadening the understanding of language and its social role in the modern world.

Thus, the study of queer language in the creation of new spaces for identity in music is an essential area of contemporary cultural and sociolinguistic research. It allows us to understand better the mechanisms of formation and transformation of cultural identities in the modern globalized world, as well as the role of music in creating a more inclusive and diverse social space.

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