

# ABSTRACT

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Title of the thesis: Fictional Gay Men and Gayspeak in Twenty-First Century British Drama

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This research lies in the field of Language and Sexuality Studies, and examines how playwrights have characterised fictional gay men in 21<sup>st</sup> century British drama. It analyses a corpus of 61 plays staged between 2000 and 2020, portraying 187 gay male characters. This work explores the corpus from three different perspectives and in the light of methodological triangulation, proceeding from the general to the particular.

It starts with a brief excursus on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century British drama portraying gay characters, considering stage censorship and the laws regulating gay rights in the UK. General trends in the representation of homosexuality in 21<sup>st</sup> century British drama are traced diachronically.

The second section investigates how the 187 fictional gay men in the corpus are characterised in present-day British drama. The gay characters are classified using variables common to all sociolinguistic studies – e.g. age, social class, linguistic variety – but also variables specific to Language and Sexuality Studies, such as the level of secrecy/*out-of-the-closetedness* and their own version of gayspeak.

The final section takes an eclectic approach, and provides a multi-faceted picture of the fictional gayspeak included in the corpus. The variety is analysed both manually and taking a corpus-assisted approach using the software #LancsBox. Based on previous research, a linguistic framework for analysing present-day fictional gayspeak is presented. The main aim of this section is to assess whether the features of gayspeak examined in past studies (see Sonenschein, 1969; Stanley, 1970; Lakoff, 1975; Hayes, 1976; Zwicky, 1997; Harvey, 1998, 2000, 2002, to name a few) are still found in the corpus.

This thesis contributes to the existing literature for at least three reasons:

- (a) to my knowledge and belief, there is no academic research on British drama that deals exclusively with the portrayal of gay characters in the last twenty years;
- (b) there are, to my knowledge, no recent academic studies reassessing the purely linguistic features of gayspeak;

(c) thirdly, this study intends to contribute to the field of Language and Sexuality Studies by applying also the methodologies of Corpus Linguistics, which is still relatively rare in this field of research.

**Keywords:** gayspeak; Language and Sexuality Studies; Contemporary British drama; fictolinguistics; characterisation.