



Speaking In Color: A Qualitative Study on the Use of Gay Lingo in Interactions Among Senior High School Friend Groups

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Abstract

Gay lingo, a vibrant linguistic variation that originated from the Filipino LGBTQ+ community, has spread widely as a common mode of communication among senior high school students. Despite its prominence in schools and on digital platforms, few studies have examined how students personally experience and perceive their use in peer interactions. This study examines how senior high school students at Tanjay City Science High School used gay lingo during the 2025–2026 school year. The research employed a qualitative phenomenological design, focusing on students' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct experience and willingness to participate. Methodological rigor was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability using validated instruments, consistent procedures, and thorough documentation. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and presentation of findings. The results indicate that gay lingo provides more than just playful slang; it serves as a significant linguistic tool that strengthens friendships, fosters solidarity, and creates a safe space for self-expression. Students reported that its humor and creativity enhance social interaction, while its coded nature promotes privacy and exclusivity within peer groups. Furthermore, gay lingo enhances emotional expression and reinforces group identity, making it an essential component of adolescent communication in educational settings. The study concludes that gay lingo significantly influences the social and emotional experiences of Filipino youth, functioning both as a marker of cultural identity and a means of belonging, and highlights the importance of informal linguistic forms in identity formation and peer interaction in school environments.

Keywords: Gay lingo, LGBTQ+ community, senior high school students, Tanjay City Science High School

Introduction



Language is essential for the development of a student's identity and their ability in interpersonal relationships. One such example is gay lingo, also referred to as swardspeak, a dynamic and evolving style of expression that has emerged within the LGBTQ+ community. Catacutan (2013) observed that this particular language form has expanded beyond its original users, gaining wider acceptance as a result of media influence and socioeconomic factors. It was initially developed as a means of discreet interaction in response to discrimination, particularly during the Martial Law era in the Philippines. Since then, this trend has gained significant popularity among Filipino teenagers, particularly those in their senior year of high school. Rosales and Careterro (2019) suggest that these unique speech patterns contribute to the formation of groups, which in turn influence identity and promote a sense of unity. Furthermore, its rapid advancement, which is driven by humor, modern social trends, and common experiences, emphasizes its prominence in daily communication and its appeal to younger generations (Papua et al., n.d.).

Recent studies indicate that the language associated with the gay community serves a purpose beyond mere entertainment, such as the development of social bonds and expressing emotions. Garcia et al. (2025) and Abulog et al. (2023) observed that students use this vernacular to cultivate humor, affection, and communicative ease, thereby establishing it as an important component of peer interactions. This linguistic style functions as a type of "social armor" (Casabal, 2008), enabling individuals to communicate in environments that are both secure and welcoming. Furthermore, the findings of Fulgencio and Sedayon (2021) suggest that it contributes to the development of a sense of group identity and belonging among senior high school students. Concurrently, expanded study on youth slang (Alimov & Qodirova, 2023) highlights its capacity to cultivate social connections, particularly in informal and digital settings. In contrast, there is a lack of research on the viewpoints of students regarding its effects, despite its widespread use. Consequently, the objective of this study is to examine the impact of the use of gay lingo on the self-expression and interactions of senior high school students at Tanjay City Science High School during the 2025–2026 academic year.

Given these viewpoints, this study examines the different ways of how senior high school students use and understand gay lingo, with an emphasis on its benefits to the development of friendships, the expression of identity, and the growth of social acceptance. In the context of daily school life, the research emphasizes the communication tool that informal language serves as, which affects social boundaries, emotional expression, and group behaviors. The operational roles of this concept within the domains of humor, the act of concealment, and the processes by which individuals construct their identities are also examined in this investigation. This also brings into consideration its influence on the dynamics of intergroup relationships, the development of social bonds, and the formation of friendships. This investigation also explores the impact of school culture, peer groups, and online platforms on the spread and broad adoption of gay lingo. It highlights the overall social and psychological significance of this language as a means for individuals to express themselves to find acceptance.

Consequently, language is acknowledged as a fundamental element in adolescent communication, the development of identity, and social interaction. Swardspeak, a linguistic form originating within the LGBTQ+ community, has evolved into a prevalent and adaptable mode of expression among students. This form of communication fulfills various functions, encompassing the articulation of emotions, the generation of humor, and the cultivation of group cohesion. Despite its widespread use, there's a lack of research specifically looking at how it directly affects high school seniors, particularly regarding self-expression and interactions with friends. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring students' views, experiences, and emotional uses of gay lingo in casual conversations. It will also examine its impact on communication, humor, and social bonds within their peer groups.

The research also emphasizes the significance of gay lingo as a significant linguistic instrument, which affects the self-perception, communicative approaches, and peer interactions of students. It shows how language creates a sense of belonging, allows the expression of emotions, and strengthens group unity, while also reflecting the fundamental social and cultural forces. These findings are relevant to school administrators who are in charge for establishing policies that promote inclusive and culturally sensitive pedagogies, educators who are making efforts to establish inclusive and respectful environments, and students who are interested in understanding the relationship between language and identity. Furthermore, these discoveries can be employed by youth organizations to create appropriate initiatives, while the LGBTQ+ community benefits from the recognition of gay lingo as a respectable and empowering form of expression that promotes inclusivity and challenges existing stereotypes.



Finally, the study focuses on the use of gay lingo in the interactions of senior high school students in the friend group at Tanjay City Science High School during the 2025–2026 academic year. The investigation explores the impact of language on communication style, self-expression, and feelings of belonging. The study uses purposive sampling to include students who already know the language. Nevertheless, the investigation is limited to informal conversations among friends and does not include formal academic environments. Therefore, the results are limited to the institution where the study was conducted and cannot be generalized to other institutions. Additionally, the dataset, which is based on information that individuals provide, reveals linguistic trends from a particular era. The objective of this investigation is to resolve inadequacies in the existing body of research, with a particular emphasis on the absence of studies that concentrate on particular educational environments and locations. It provides culturally relevant insights into the use of gay lingo among Filipino adolescents, as well as its impact on their self-image, communication styles, and interactions with peers.

Literature Review

Language plays a significant role in the formation of our identities, communication with others, and affiliation with groups, particularly during the teenage years. Currently, it is crucial to engage in daily conversations with others regarding your emotions and friendships. In this context, gay lingo, which is also referred to as "swardspeak" in the Philippines, has evolved into a lively mode of communication. It is utilized by a significant number of young individuals, not exclusively LGBTQ+ individuals. Research has demonstrated that gay slang is not merely a form of humor; it can be employed to communicate one's sense of belonging, express emotions, and occasionally maintain confidentiality.

According to researchers, gay lingo is a language that is highly creative and dynamic, characterized by phonological shifts, affixation, clipping, borrowing, semantic change, and code-switching. In the Philippines, Quimosing-Ocay and Ocampo (2024) discovered that students employ swardspeak in public, in texts, and on social media to establish relationships, conceal information, and express themselves. Rubiales (2020) also demonstrated that swardspeak is a critical social tool for students and has distinct linguistic structures. These observations indicate that gay lingo is not arbitrary or merely humorous; rather, it is a systematic and socially cohesive form of expression.

Gay lingo has been described by academics as a form of anti-language that is used by marginalized communities to maintain privacy, promote solidarity, and challenge established norms. Shi and Li (2017) contended that anti-language serves critical social functions, including the promotion of resistance, the preservation of confidentiality, and the development of identity. In the context of local academic discourse, Grengia (2025) also recognized the essential sociolinguistic functions of gay lingo within LGBTQ+ communities, including concealment, identification, and revelation. These viewpoints suggest that gay slang serves as both a public assertion of identity and a safeguard, depending on the target audience and the specific context.

The literature demonstrates that language is essential for the enactment of identity. The importance of linguistic choices in indicating gender, sexuality, affiliation, and social status is underscored by sociolinguistic studies. Huffaker and Calvert (2017) observed a substantial correlation between identity formation and adolescent linguistic practices, particularly in online settings. In contrast, Zrike (2025) emphasized language as a critical indicator of belonging in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Romero (2019) investigated gay lingo and discovered that Filipino adolescents employ it not only as a substitute for conventional vocabulary but also as a means of articulating their social identity and group membership. This discovery corroborates the notion that gay lingo serves as a symbolic instrument that assists individuals in addressing concerns regarding identity and belonging.

The literature also demonstrates that gay lingo can be employed in a variety of contexts. Language is frequently employed through code-switching and code-mixing. They demonstrate how individuals alternate between standard language and gay slang depending on the context and the individual they are conversing with. Quimosing-Ocay and Ocampo (2024) discovered that swardspeak frequently integrates elements from a variety of languages. Maranan et al. (2025) proposed that these linguistic transitions indicate sociolinguistic proficiency and a comprehension of social dynamics associated with inclusion and exclusion. As a result, these results indicate that the utilization of gay jargon is not consistent. Rather, speakers intentionally alter their communication style to align with specific social groups and achieve specific communication objectives.



Another prevalent subject in contemporary research is the influence of popular culture, media, and digital spaces on the dissemination of gay slang. The spread and eventual acceptance of gay language beyond LGBTQ+ communities have been influenced by television shows, movies, famous individuals, and social media. Pascual (2016) and Gregorio et al. (2022) proposed that the consistent exposure of gay lingo to mainstream youth through entertainment and online platforms facilitates its integration into their linguistic repertoire. This diffusion may account for the increasing prevalence of gay lingo in the daily interactions of non-LGBTQ+ speakers and women, as well as LGBTQ+ individuals.

These local findings are further supported by international studies, which demonstrate that queer sociolects across cultures serve comparable functions. In Brazil, Turkey, South Africa, and Indonesia, Nogueira (2024) examined the role of queer language varieties in fostering identity, solidarity, and secure communication. In Bali, Susandi et al. (2018) discovered that gay language communicates social connection, humor, concealment, and belonging. In the meantime, Istighfarna and Setiawan (2023) have shown that queer-specific language in online contexts enables the communication of meanings that are recognized within the community while navigating heteronormative environments. Despite the differences in their cultural and linguistic contexts, these studies consistently illustrate that queer language varieties are socially significant, adaptive, and promote community growth. The significance of examining gay lingo in the context of Filipino senior high school students is emphasized by these cross-cultural trends.

In spite of the current research, there are still certain areas that require further investigation. Initially, the majority of contemporary research concentrates on general LGBTQ+ groups, adult users, online platforms, or college students, rather than friendship groups in senior high schools. Secondly, certain studies concentrate on the language of gay lingo, including its structure and the formation of words, rather than the social implications it has in daily interactions among peers. Third, while previous research has identified functions such as concealment, identity expression, and solidarity, there is a dearth of studies that closely examine the role of these functions in the daily conversations of adolescents within specific school-based friend groups. The generalizability of current findings is also diminished by the limited sample sizes and narrow settings, as previously noted.

The current investigation is focused on the use of gay lingo within the friendship networks of senior high school students, in light of the identified lacunae. The investigation aims to clarify the manners in which this specific linguistic phenomenon enables the articulation of identity, emotional exchange, peer affiliation, and routine interactions within the school environment. This research enhances the existing sociolinguistic scholarship on gay lingo by prioritizing the lived experiences of adolescents, rather than solely focusing on structural linguistic analysis. Consequently, it fosters a more nuanced understanding of language, friendship dynamics, and the sense of belonging among Filipino youth.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative, structured methodology to analyze the lived experiences of senior high school students in peer interactions involving gay language. It outlined the research context, participant selection, data collection instruments, and procedures to ensure ethical, reliable, and comprehensive gathering of perspectives, while ensuring dependability and trustworthiness through systematic data organization and analysis. Utilizing a phenomenological research design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016; Sandelowski, 2000), the study focused primarily on participants' perceptions, emotions, and interpretations rather than quantitative metrics, thereby allowing for a thorough understanding of how LGBT slang affects identity, humor, self-expression, and peer relationships within the natural school setting.

Consequently, the investigation was undertaken within a genuine school setting, facilitating the unobtrusive observation of students' routine interactions. Senior high school students from Tanjay City Science High School, who regularly employed gay lingo, were chosen through purposive sampling, predicated on pertinent criteria encompassing direct experience and a willingness to engage. Ethical protocols, encompassing informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were meticulously upheld to guarantee responsible data acquisition (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Etikan et al., 2016).



The research mainly used a validated semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions to gather comprehensive responses regarding students' emotions, experiences, and viewpoints. Expert validation confirmed the instrument's reliability, validity, and clarity, while its adaptable structure allowed for questioning and clarification during interviews, providing comprehensive data on the role of gay lingo in social interaction, humor, and group cohesion (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Patton, 2015). Methodological rigor was further enhanced through the establishment of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, achieved using validated instruments, comprehensive contextual descriptions, consistent methodologies, and meticulous documentation, ensuring that findings were grounded in participants' actual responses and reducing researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). Data collection occurred in three phases: before, during, and after interviews. This process involved obtaining permissions, validating instruments, securing informed consent, conducting interviews while meticulously documenting both verbal and nonverbal data, and subsequently transcribing, organizing, and clarifying responses to ensure accuracy and help in the identification of primary themes.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was implemented to analyze the data, thus enabling the systematic identification and interpretation of recurring patterns in the participants' responses. The analytical process comprised six primary steps: familiarization of the data, coding, developing themes, reviewing the themes, defining the themes, and ending in the presentation of the findings. Themes such as identity expression, belonging, humor, and social interaction were identified through the data analysis, which demonstrated the various ways in which students integrated gay lingo into their daily dialogue. Consequently, this methodological approach guaranteed that the study's findings were well-supported by evidence, coherent, and directly related to the research objective of elucidating the social and emotional functions of gay language among senior high school students.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Gay Language as Identity Expression and Authentic Belonging

Gay Language as Identity Expression and Authentic Belonging is the term given to the process by which gay language functions as an evolving means of identity expression and authentic belonging in social communities. Language is not only seen as an instrument of communication but also as an instrument through which identity is expressed, emotions are articulated, and social relationships are constructed (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Through the creative use of code words, the speaker is able to convey their unique identity and personality, which is an aspect of individuality and authentic self-expression (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). Gay language is also an instrument through which emotional and cognitive articulation is made possible. Through the use of metaphors, the speaker is able to convey humor, attitudes, and emotions, which cannot be articulated through the use of straight language. The use of metaphors is an effective means of articulating emotions and attitudes, which are often difficult to express through the use of straight language. Furthermore, the use of gay language enables the speaker to experience authentic belonging and social bonding. Through the use of the same language, the speaker is able to experience belonging and bonding with the social group. This is an effective means of creating social cohesion and enhancing relationships. Through the use of the same language, the speaker is able to experience authentic belonging and bonding with the social group. This is an effective means of creating social cohesion and enhancing relationships. Through the use of the same language, the speaker is able to experience authentic belonging and bonding with the social group. This is an effective means of creating social cohesion and enhancing relationships.

Participant 4 added,

"My reason for using gay language is to communicate with my fellow LGBT friends, and other people."

Participant 6 added,

"I really feel included and understood because we often use it, and we have fun talking in that specific language"



Participant 8 answered,

"Gay lingo helps me feel that I belong to a particular circle of friends. Since we all use the same language, it makes communication easier because it is common among us."

Gay language is an important sociolinguistic tool through which an individual creates, conveys, and reinforces their identity in a given social and cultural context. Language is not just an instrument of communication; instead, it is employed as an instrument of identity creation and positioning vis-à-vis others. Hence, language is an essential component through which an individual articulates their identity in the process of social interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). From this understanding, gay language is an instrument of self-expression through which an individual articulates their personality, creativity, humor, and experiences in ways that cannot be fully expressed through the dominant linguistic code (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). The use of unique words, metaphors, and humor enables an individual to express themselves in the most authentic manner, transforming communication into an instrument of self-expression and cultural articulation.

At the same time, gay language promotes a strong sense of belonging and bonding among users of the language. The shared language has been cited to function as a "marker of in-group membership," whereby users of the language are able to identify themselves and each other, thus creating a sense of belonging among themselves (Leap, 1996). The shared language, therefore, promotes a sense of belonging among users, thus creating a strong bond among them, thereby enhancing interpersonal relations and a language environment characterized by trust, familiarity, and identity. In addition, the use of gay language promotes psychological comfort and confidence among users of the language. Gay language, being embedded in the culture of the gay community, promotes a sense of belonging among users, thus creating a platform for self-expression, whereby users of the language feel comfortable and confident in their interaction, since they feel accepted and understood by other users of the language. Therefore, the use of gay language promotes a sense of belonging among users, thus creating a strong bond among them, thereby enhancing interpersonal relations and a language environment characterized by trust, familiarity, and identity.

In this context, gay language can thus be viewed as a significant language of identity expression and belonging, whereby users of the language are able to connect themselves to the language, thus creating a sense of belonging among themselves, thereby enhancing interpersonal relations and a language environment characterized by trust, familiarity, and identity, as suggested in other language studies, whereby language has been cited to function as a "tool for navigating peer-group relations, affirming identity, and creating community ties," (Mendoza-Denton, 2021).

Theme 2: Gay Language as a Source of Confidence and Emotional Comfort

This theme focuses on the significance of the use of common linguistic expressions in building an encouraging communicative environment that can positively impact emotional comfort and confidence. Language practices in close-knit social groups have been observed to have an affirmative influence on the development of identity, as they offer speakers an opportunity to feel recognized and validated as individuals (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The use of gay language, therefore, enables one to express himself/herself in an environment where he/she feels comfortable, as they are able to use common cultural expressions, humor, and creativity in order to convey their meaning. This is particularly important, as it eliminates the anxiety and nervousness often experienced in mainstream communicative environments (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). The use of gay language, therefore, allows speakers to feel emotionally comfortable, as they engage in conversations where they feel they can be themselves. The repeated experience of engaging in affirmative communicative environments further enhances the development of confidence, as speakers feel empowered to engage in the development of confidence promoted by language, as they find an opportunity to express themselves and have a voice through linguistic expressions that affirm their experiences and identities (Norton, 2013). The use of linguistic diversity has further been observed to promote emotional security and confidence, as it allows marginalized speakers to feel empowered and included, thus enhancing a sense of belonging and dignity (Piller, 2016). The use of linguistic practices by peers, therefore, demonstrates that the use of common linguistic expressions can promote confidence and trust, as it allows speakers to feel comfortable and confident as they engage in social interactions, thus enhancing the development of self-confidence as they interact with each other (Mendoza-Denton, 2021). The use of gay language, therefore, is not just an expression of communication but an empowering tool that promotes emotional comfort and confidence.



Participant 2 answered,

“As an icebreaker, especially if I don’t really know the person well, and I’m also more comfortable using it when talking with my friends”

Participant 1 adds,

“More comfortable and safer because not everyone can understand what we are talking about.”

Participant 3 shared,

“It makes me feel comfortable and I could also express my thoughts and opinion because we can understand each other.”

Participant 4 also shared the same thought,

“It makes me feel comfortable and I could also express my thoughts and opinion because we can understand each other.”

Gay language is an effective means of ensuring emotional well-being and boosting personal confidence in social and peer circles. It is an effective platform for communication through which an individual can freely express themselves without the risk of being misconstrued. This is in line with the argument by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) that language practices are central in the identity formation and emotional lives of marginalized social groups. Through the use of playful and coded language, an individual attains psychological peace and comfort, as communication through gay language reduces anxiety and promotes feelings of belonging (Cameron & Kulick, 2003).

In addition, gay language is an effective means of ensuring the development of confidence through language. Through the use of shared language practices, an individual becomes empowered to participate actively in communication processes, assert themselves, and interact socially with confidence (Norton, 2013). The feeling of being understood through the use of shared language practices promotes feelings of confidence and enables an individual to participate actively in communication processes. Furthermore, the use of inclusive language practices, such as those found in gay language, enables an individual to interact socially and negotiate identity, which promotes emotional comfort and confidence (Piller, 2016; Mendoza-Denton, 2021). Thus, gay language is not just an alternative means of communication; it is an empowering language practice through which an individual can freely express themselves and boost their confidence in communication processes.

Theme 3: Gay Language as a Humorous and Dynamic Tool for Informal, Gossip-Based Social Communication

Gay language is an effective way of creating humor and liveliness while communicating during gossip-based social interactions. It demonstrates humor and playfulness through the use of exaggerated, witty expressions while communicating with others. Due to this feature of gay language, there is an improvement in the flow and energy of conversations, which makes them interesting and entertaining by avoiding boring and serious tones while communicating with others. It helps individuals dramatize situations and respond to them creatively, making conversations more interesting and spontaneous. Additionally, there is an emphasis on gossip as a function of this language, which helps create friendships by making gossip a central theme of communication while highlighting its role in creating friendships and socializing with others. The humor and playfulness of this language, the improved flow and energy of conversations, and gossip as a function of this language are demonstrated by the statements of the participants.

Participant 1 shared,

“One of my main reasons for using gay language is that it is fun and adds spice to conversations. It makes our chats more lively and prevents them from becoming boring.”



Participant 6 further explained,

“Using a lingo term to make a code name for someone we gossiped about was so fun because one of our friends couldn’t really understand what we were saying.”

Participant 4 noted,

“They usually reply by using more gay language back, and we just have fun doing chit-chat.”

This theme aims to explore gay language as a humorous and dynamic means of communication in gossip-based communication. Based on the responses of the participants, gay language is seen to bring humor, dynamism, and interactivity to gossip-based communication. Gay language is used spontaneously within informal communication where the participants engage in playful interactions and gossip. The use of gay language is essential within communication to add humor and liveliness to communication. Within gossip-based communication, gay language acts as a stylistic tool. Martin (2007) explains that humor plays a crucial role in enhancing social relationships. Within this context, the humorous nature of gay language adds a lively atmosphere to gossip-based communication. Dunbar (2004) explains that gossip plays a crucial role within social relationships. Within this context, gay language adds to the social function of gossip by adding interactivity to gossip-based communication. Holmes (2000) explains that informal language practices are essential within the formation of solidarity within peer groups. Coates (2015) argues that gossip adds to the feeling of membership within a social group, while Tannen (1990) explains that the co-construction of meanings takes place through shared styles of communication within informal communication. In this context, gay language acts as a humorous and lively tool that enhances connections and fosters informal, gossip-based communication.

Theme 4: Gay Language as an In-Group Code and Boundary-Making Tool

Gay language as an in-group code and boundary-making tool refers to the strategic use of queer linguistic features for the purpose of establishing solidarity, reinforcing social identity, and creating a sense of difference between members of the LGBTQ+ community and outsiders. Gay Language, as an in-group code, can be used as a symbol for establishing membership, allowing members to recognize one another and promoting social cohesion (Rodrigo Borba, 2018). This theme can be classified as an adaptive communication strategy, which requires the speaker to change the form of communication based on the social context, the audience, and the recognized level of safety. Gay Language can also be classified as a context-aware and conscientious communication strategy, which requires the individual to control the use of gay language based on the known level of acceptance in the environment. Gay Language can be used as a protective and indirect communication strategy, which allows individuals to communicate sensitive information subtly, avoiding discrimination and negative stigma (William L Leap, 2017). Gay Language, therefore, can be used as a strategic communication tool for self-expression and establishing identity, while at the same time navigating the boundaries between the LGBTQ+ community and outsiders.

Participant 1 said,

“I use gay language especially when we have conversations, like private conversations, so that other people won’t understand us.”

Participant 2 answered,

“Every friend group has moments when they talk about others. Sometimes we use gay language as a code so that people around us will not understand what we are saying. For example, we use specific terms or codes that only our friend group understands.”

This theme, Gay Language as an In-Group Code and Boundary-Making Tool is a term used to describe the strategic use of queer linguistic forms to create solidarity and reinforce group identity while creating a boundary between LGBTQ+ individuals and others. As an in-group code, gay language is used as a symbolic group identity marker to



create a sense of belonging and recognition between individuals within the group while creating a boundary between those who are not part of the group (Rodrigo Borba, 2018).

The theme is also an example of adaptive communication strategies used by individuals to adjust their communication according to the social context and the audience. It is an example of context-aware and conscientious communication strategies used by individuals to regulate the use of gay language according to the context and the audience. Gay language is used as an example of protective and indirect communication used by individuals to communicate sensitive information without exposing themselves to discrimination and other forms of negative consequences (William L Leap, 2017).

Theme 5: Gay Language as an Integrated and Normalized Linguistic Practice

Gay language is now a normal part of how students talk to each other every day, showing how deeply it has become a part of modern language use. Based on the participants' responses, its use is no longer limited to a particular group but is widely present in casual conversations, peer interactions, and routine exchanges. The category normalization of language use highlights how with gay lingo being normalized and present in everyday use, it shows how students employ gay lingo spontaneously in daily interactions, showing that it functions as an ordinary linguistic resource rather than an exclusive code. Its consistent presence across different settings suggests broad acceptance and reduced stigma within its social environment. Meanwhile, since the language is already deeply integrated into students' speech patterns, its usage often feels like second nature and habitual, which tells the absence of distinctive memorability. Lastly, since students do not associate using gay lingo with criticism or negative reactions, it shows the absence of negative experience and further reinforces its status as a socially accepted and normalized form of expression.

Participant 3 said,

"Gay lingo has somehow already been incorporated into our language among friends. It's not really something we can explain how we use, because we actually use it all the time—it's already part of our conversations."

Participant 6 added,

"Before, I usually spoke purely in Bisaya. However, over time, gay lingo became naturally included in the way I speak. It has gradually become part of my everyday language."

The theme gay language as an integrated and normalized linguistic practice, demonstrates the ways in which gay slang has become part of the everyday lives of the students. This normalization and usage in everyday life can be identified from the ways in which the students described gay slang as "already part of our conversations," and that they used it "all the time." This can be compared with the findings of research on SwardSpeak, which shows the ways in which gay slang has spread from the LGBTQ+ community to the general youth population in the Philippines (Quimosing-Ocay & Ocampo, 2024). This can also be supported by the findings of Garcia et al. (2025), which reports the ways in which gay slang has integrated into the everyday lives of the Filipino people, having gone from being a "secret code" to having become mainstream, having been spread throughout social and digital media. The way participant 6 describes how gay slang has gradually become embedded in the Bisaya language, shows how linguistic practices evolve through continuous social interaction and exposure (Ulla et al., 2024). In addition, studies indicate that both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ students use gay lingo in casual conversation, indicating the level of acceptance of the language among groups (Romero, 2019). The fact that the students were not able to remember instances of the use of gay slang in their communication indicates the level of integration of the language in their daily conversation. This supports the idea that frequent use of gay lingo in daily interactions makes the language feel natural, as suggested in the study by Damaso (2020). Furthermore, the absence of negative experience present in the responses of the participants, as none of them answered or shared any negative experiences in the use of gay lingo. This is similar to the study by Quimosing-Ocay and Ocampo (2024) indicating that students commonly make use of SwardSpeak without any negative sanctions, indicating a level of integration of the language among the students. When a language



can be used openly and comfortably, it indicates not only integration but also a level of acceptance of the language in a community of practice. Therefore, the study has illustrated the level of integration of the language in the community of practice, indicating the naturalization of the language in the community of practice.

Theme 6: Environmental and Peer Factors in Language Learning

The theme environmental and peer factors in language learning highlights how students' use and understanding of gay lingo are shaped by the people and environments around them. Based on the interviews, the experiences of the participants reveal that the influence of their peers, particularly those from the LGBTQ+ community, contribute significantly to the learning and use of gay lingo by the students, which is evident from the theme of LGBTQ+ Peer Influence. The influence of the overall environment on the learning and use of gay lingo by the students is evident from the theme of Environmental and Community Exposure. The constant interaction with the overall environment helps the students get accustomed to the use of gay lingo by interacting with their peers, which helps them learn and use this form of language naturally. The constant exposure to this environment helps the students learn this form of language without any conscious effort on their part, which reveals the normalization of this form of language by them.

Moreover, participant 2 added,

"I usually learn or hear it from gay friends who use it, or from media like TV and online content."

Participant 7 said,

"I became aware of gay lingo by hearing it from people who are already fluent or experienced in using it. You can easily recognize it because the words are unusual compared to normal language."

Participant 6 added,

"Through my environment, friends, and some other people that I know."

The theme of environmental and peer factors in language learning reveals that the acquisition and use of gay lingo by the students are largely subject to influence by environmental and peer factors. The LGBTQ+ Peer Influence is an aspect of gay lingo acquisition and use, as most of the participants have cited that the influence of LGBTQ+ peers is one of the most dominant factors that influence the acquisition and use of gay lingo. For instance, Participant 8 stated that the constant interaction with LGBTQ+ friends, along with exposure to gay lingo on social media, helped them to naturally adapt to the language, whereas Participant 1 cited that they acquired gay lingo during early adolescence by imitating the speech and jargon of peers. This is supported by the fact that it is observed that young people tend to acquire linguistic features through social interactions and engagements with peers, as opposed to receiving formal instruction (Quimosing-Ocay & Ocampo, 2024; Eckert, 2012). The Environmental and Community Exposure section highlights the broader social and digital contexts in which students encounter gay lingo. Participants 3 and 7 stated that exposure to gay lingo through their peers, online environments, and widely disseminated media has influenced their familiarity with the language. Participant 4 said, "Even straight people use gay lingo," emphasizing the point that gay lingo has penetrated all settings, not only in the LGBTQ+ community, as Romero (2019) argued. Social media platforms also influence the normalization of gay lingo, as shown in a study that found TikTok to be instrumental in the normalization and mainstreaming of gay lingo, making it readily available to students, as suggested by Garcia et al. From the answers, it is clear that learning gay lingo is a socially mediated learning process, where constant exposure to peers in a variety of environments, including the physical and online environments, has enabled students to learn the language naturally, without any deliberate attempt to do so. Therefore, the quotes demonstrate the importance of the social environment in facilitating the normalization, adoption, and integration of gay lingo into the students' linguistic practices, thus transforming it from a language of the few to a widely accepted language of communication.

Theme 7. Gay Language as a Dynamic and Evolving Linguistic System



Language is always evolving, and this is reflected in the changes that occur as a result of the identities of the speakers, the social reality, and the artistic expression. Gay language in the LGBTQ+ community is an ever-changing and flexible language that is influenced by linguistic enhancement, linguistic complexity and interpretive skills, and linguistic creativity and evolution. It enables the speakers to convey various meanings in a subtle way, recreate words playfully, and add meaning to communication through humor and emotional expression. It is not only a style of speaking but a style of expressing identity. Through its use, ordinary conversations become more lively, meaningful, and entertaining. Gay language assists individuals in establishing social norms in relation to others (the way that people perceive one another) and creating a common sense of group belongingness while utilizing a certain level of flexibility and creativity in the way they share their ideas. In this way, the playful and imaginative character of the language encourages speakers to be attentive, interpretative and reflexive, thus creating a more socially engaging and enriching experience when interacting within the context of conversation. Furthermore, due to these operating characteristics, gay language can be used as a significant tool for creating and maintaining relationships, forming community, and reaffirming identity of individuals using it.

Participant 6 said,

"Gay language is dynamic and creative, constantly evolving, which makes sharing or just having a simple chit-chat with friends more relatable and fun at the same time."

Participant 8 added,

"Yeah, because it gives extra meaning to a word when we use gay language, but there's a certain degree to it."

This theme describes how gay language serves as a socially relevant tool that shapes the relationships and interactions of LGBTQ+ speakers. As Quimosing-Ocay and Ocampo (2024) state, it allows users to convey sensitive social messages, negotiate relationships, and express emotions that may not be conveyed in regular language. Moreover, research studies on gay slang show that these language practices are often used as tools for creating social identities, promoting unity, and creating a common cultural space among speakers (Grenia, 2025). The creativity, interpretative requirements, and expressive nuances of gay slang make it a powerful tool for identity construction and cultural engagement, underscoring its use as something other than playful language. By using gay language, speakers can also create moments of playfulness and humor that strengthen bonds and make social interactions more enjoyable. It enables individuals to manage complex social dynamics while at the same time experiencing a sense of belonging and understanding with their community.

Theme 8. Social Tensions and Differences in Gay Language Usage

Gay language is a creative and expressive form of communication that fosters identity, laughter, and camaraderie within LGBTQ+ communities. However, not everyone experiences it the same way. While some find it encouraging, others face challenges due to social reactions and different environments, showing how language connects to issues of acceptance and inclusion. The emotional discomfort that creates challenges for some of these themes is often directly related to how the audience responds. Some speakers may have difficulty with their use of gay terminology, especially if they face judgment from their peers or others in authority. In addition, the responses of strangers or peers will determine whether speakers feel safe being themselves.

Another issue closely related to emotional discomfort is social fatigue; it can take a lot of effort to constantly alter one's communication style based on the group being addressed, deciding what types of language or slang to use, and when to use them. Also, people have different experiences; those who are discriminatory or fail to understand gay culture will make it difficult for those who are accepted in the community to experience the same level of acceptance as someone who is discriminated against, while others are faced with problems of equality or discrimination by the community and will therefore receive no support or acceptance at all. Finally, there are various situations where the speaker has not received any negative consequence, such as an inclusive environment where gay terminology is accepted and/or celebrated, thus allowing for the free exchange of ideas and language.



Participant 2 said,

“Some people know this language exists but don’t understand it. Sometimes when we talk, they think we’re gossiping about them, so they watch. I feel a bit weird about others’ reactions. But it’s fine; it doesn’t involve them. They don’t know me, they don’t know what we’re talking about.”

This theme illustrates that differences in experiencing gay language are subject to a great deal of influence from audience perception. Sociolinguistic studies indicate that LGBTQ+ language usage plays a crucial role in shaping identity and a sense of belonging to a community; however, it is also subject to a degree of influence from power relations, attitudes, and levels of acceptance in society, thus explaining why some people might feel uncomfortable while others might not (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Moreover, it has also been indicated that people use context-dependent language style modifications to gauge how they are judged in society and to fit in with certain norms by using or avoiding certain forms of gay language (Jones, 2021). These findings align with the varied experiences described by participants, highlighting how social reactions and different environments influence whether gay language feels empowering, fully accepted, or exhausting.

Conclusion

This research examined the role of gay language within the self-expression and social dynamics of high school seniors, demonstrating its evolution beyond simple amusement into a crucial and socially embedded linguistic phenomenon. Gay language serves not only as a vehicle for informal communication among students but also as a means of identity formation, friendship cultivation, and peer group interaction. Its pervasive utilization underscores its communicative importance and its integration into everyday student exchanges, shaped by shared experiences and prevailing social environments. The findings underscore that gay language significantly influences students' self-identity, sense of belonging, and engagement within their social environment.

The study also shows how important it is to encourage language use that is respectful and open to everyone in schools. Acknowledging gay language as a valid mode of expression can assist educators in facilitating students' identity formation and social participation, while promoting awareness of audience and context in communication. Schools can make safe places that cut down on discrimination and encourage meaningful interaction by valuing linguistic diversity and putting in place policies that include everyone. Youth organizations and the larger community also play an important role in promoting acceptance and creating safe places for people to express themselves and feel like they belong. Subsequent research should investigate diverse contexts and utilize varied methodologies to further analyze the dynamic role of language in influencing identity, relationships, and social experience

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