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Metaphors of *coming out* in Polish: A cognitive linguistic approach

Tomasz Dyrmo*
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland

Abstract

The following qualitative study focuses on the metaphors of coming out in the Polish language. Native Polish speakers were asked to define coming out and then describe their coming out experiences. Data from 94 participants were analysed. The results from the analysis show that, consistently with the previous study on English data (Dyrmo, 2022b), coming out metaphors are based on several different conceptual structures and meaning foci, for example the image schema of FORCE and CONTAINER, the concept of openness and visibility, the domain of MOVEMENT and TRANSFER, the frame of SHARING AN OBJECT and two discursively oriented metaphorical scenarios: COMING OUT IS MAKING YOUR ORIENTATION VISIBLE TO OTHERS and COMING OUT IS SHIFTING A HEAVY OBJECT OFF YOUR SHOULDERS. The present analysis lays ground for further multimodal analyses of coming out metaphors.

Key words

coming out, conceptual metaphor, Polish, meaning focus, conceptualization

1 Introduction

Coming out (of the closet, PL 'wyjście z szafy') has been broadly understood as "the moment of recognising and asserting (…) gayness" (Chirrey, 2003, p.24). Interestingly enough, the metaphoricity of the phrase is sometimes actively drawn upon by researchers when defining the concept: "coming out is popularly perceived as a 'movement' of LGB sexuality from inside to outside, where self-realisation leads to verbally telling others about one's non-normative sexual identification" (Lovelock, 2017: 3, but see also Manning, 2014). This shows, in turn, that coming out is understood and used in discourse as a metaphor – and is sometimes perhaps used deliberately – that structures the experience of revealing one's sexual orientation or gender identity in terms of movement in space, recruiting a host of different conceptual structures at various levels of schematicity (e.g. Kövecses, 2017; 2020, Dyrmo, 2022a, b). In this article, I aim to present a qualitative analysis of possible conceptual structures that participate in the metaphoricity of the COMING OUT[2] metaphor in the Polish language. In what follows, I present the materials and procedure, a necessarily cursory look at the coming out metaphor in previous research, and the analysis of the collected material divided into three subsections: KNOWING IS SEEING, COMMUNICATION IS TRANSFER and SECRETS ARE HEAVY OBJECTS.

My findings show that coming out – as understood by native Polish speakers – is conceptualized by means of several generic metaphors, which seems to be consistent with earlier findings (e.g. Chirrey,

*Address for correspondence: Tomasz Dyrmo, Adam Mickiewicz University, Faculty of English, ul. Grunwaldzka 6, 60-780 Poznań, Poland, e-mail: tomdyr1@amu.edu.pl

[2] *Coming out* is understood here as an abstract concept, hence its position in the metaphorical mapping. Also, coming out is often used as a borrowing from English when speakers of Polish talk about their experiences of revealing their sexual orientation and this is assumed here.

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2020). Yet, in contrary to what has been shown in a similar analysis of English data (Dyrmo, 2022b), not all the image schematic components that English speakers use to conceptualize their coming out experiences are reflected in the Polish dataset (see Discussion).

2 Materials and procedures

2.1 Materials

All the material that is analysed here was collected via an anonymous survey in Polish, distributed through social media and other public outlets for LGBT+ individuals. 97 individuals took part in the survey and 3 needed to be disregarded from the data because their answers were not relevant to the questions. 94 participants answered the questions about whether they have come out, their age, sexual orientation and gender identity, which were followed by two descriptive questions: (1) How do you understand the term 'coming out' and (2) 'If you came out, please tell your story'. These questions were partly inspired by the English language website entitled "whenicameout.com", in which internet users share their stories of coming out. As, to the best of my knowledge, there are no such existing sources for the Polish language, I elicited the data through the questionnaire. The questions about sexual orientation and gender identity were included to prompt respondents to focus on coming out and exclude the possibility that some other concept will be described. The data from these two questions are analysed in the later part of the article. The corpora sizes are presented in Table 1. below:

Table 1. Corpora sizes

Question	Size of the corpus (words)
1. How do you understand the term 'coming out'?	1,689
2. If you came out, please tell your story'.	6,695
Overall	**8,384**

2.2 Participants

Participants were asked to indicate their sexual orientation, declared sex, and gender identity in a series of open-ended questions to allow as much freedom as possible for their answers. They also indicated their age and whether they have already come out or not. The distribution of the answers is presented in the table below. Following Queer Cognitive Linguistics (Dyrmo, 2022c), proposing a more inclusive approach to research practice, the table below shows how diverse the LGBT+ community actually is.

Table 2. Socio-demographic data of the respondents

Sexual orientation	bisexual – 32 gay – 20 lesbian – 10 heterosexual – 19 asexual – 8 pansexual – 7 queer – 3 polysexual – 1 non-straight – 1 not sure – 1 doesn't identify – 1 didn't give an answer – 1
Declared sex	women – 59 men – 28 non-binary – 4 non-binary woman – 1 doesn't identify – 1 didn't give – 1

Gender identity	woman – 52 man – 20 non-binary – 5 transgender man – 2 transgender woman – 1 agenderflux – 1 asexual – 1 demisexual – 1 gay – 1 non-binary towards man – 1 non-binary transgender man – 1 non-binary woman – 2 queer – 1 transgender female – 1 woman/non-binary – 1 woman-like 1 doesn't identify – 1
Age	18-28 – **69** 26-35 – **25** 36-50 – **1**
Coming out status	**28** – NO **66** – YES

2.3 Procedure

To identify the metaphors, the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP, Pragglejaz Group, 2007) was used. First, I read the analysed text and checked whether it fulfilled the criteria of basic meaning, as described by MIP (more concrete, related to the body, more precise, and historically older) and checked the meaning against the contextualized meaning in a given text. If the lexical item expressed a contextually different meaning, it was marked as metaphorical. Analysed were only those items that were connected to the notion of coming out and were central to the narrative. Metaphors related to other topics, e.g. to family relations (e.g. *close family*) or social relations (e.g. *social bonds*), were not taken into account in the analysis. Having identified the metaphorical items in the corpus, two independent raters named the metaphors at two different levels of schematicity:

1. For the generic level, the name of the metaphor e.g. KNOWING IS SEEING, ACTION IS FORWARD MOTION), was established according to the convention by Lakoff and Johnson (1999; 2003) and expressed in terms of conceptual domains.
2. For the discourse level, e.g. COMING OUT IS SHOWING AN OBJECT, COMING OUT IS SHARING INFORMATION) the name was established following Cameron's Discourse Dynamic Approach to metaphor (Cameron, 2007; Cameron et al., 2009), which is akin in the naming convention to Musolff's (2016) metaphorical scenarios.

After two raters completed their rounds for the first time, inter-rater agreement was calculated. Raters met and resolved conflicting examples via discussion. The inter-rater agreement is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Inter-rater agreement in identifying metaphors

	question	identified metaphors	metaphors agreed upon	difference	% of agreement
Inter-rater agreement	Q1	**59**	45	14	**75**
	Q2	**37**	22	15	**58**
	Overall	**96**	67	29	**69**

3 Coming out in linguistic research

One of the first non-cognitive, but surprisingly cognitively oriented, descriptions of the COMING OUT metaphor is offered by Brown (2000). Brown makes note of how the closet metaphor operates on the notion of power: "(…) the closet is a *spatial* metaphor: a way of talking about power that makes sense because of a geographic epistemology that is largely taken for granted" (2000, p.1). Within this interpretation, following Brown's argument, being put in the closet is being marginalized, whereas coming out means liberation (2000, p.2). Moreover, he notices that the closet metaphor signifies how space is discursively managed to make certain people more or less visible. The closet becomes the metaphor of collective oppression that is conceptualized in terms of "everyday kind of space" (2000, p.8).

Chirrey (2003) analyses coming out as kind of speech act. In particular, coming out is seen as a perlocutionary act, which changes the reality for the recipients of the message. This perlocutionary act of coming out may take different forms: some people may just firmly deny that any act of coming out has ever taken place, some may just reveal in front of a small group of people that they do not conform to the norms of heternormativity (2003, p.33). In concluding her considerations of coming out, Chirrey makes an important point: creating "a new reality" (2003, p.35) is a joint action of all participants in the coming-out act and cannot happen in separation from them. This aspect of coming out will be reflected on in the analytical part of the paper.

In the vein of script formulation theory (SFT), Chirrey (2012) has taken a closer look at advice texts written for people who are thinking about coming out. She has identified a number of different scripts, each of them highlighting different aspects of this process: coming out is good, coming out requires preparation, coming out happens in stages, coming out is an announcement, coming out is hard, coming out is risky and coming out needs to be worked out (2012, p.35). Although she explicitly states that "this study is not suggesting that coming out scripts exist as a mentally encoded entity in individuals' mind" (2012, p.39), it makes sense to tentatively suggest that these scripts may be collectively shared, much as frames and scenarios (e.g. Musolff, 2016; Dyrmo, 2022b). She later admits that the metaphor of COMING OUT IS STAGES is a discursively realized sub-metaphor of LIFE IS A JOURNEY (2012, p.45). These cognitively oriented considerations are returned to in Chirrey (2020), where she further systematically analyses coming out advice texts found online. She postulates that coming out can be understood as a "manifestation of the Event Structure Metaphor", namely CHANGE IS MOTION. (2020, p.14). She identifies a number of conceptual metaphors that feed into the concept of coming out, ordering them from the most to the least frequent. In the majority of cases, coming out is understood as MOVEMENT (COMING OUT IS A JOURNEY, 66%); in less than 20% of cases, coming out is also conceptualized in terms of CONFLICT; then in terms of a GAMBLING GAME (6%); WORK (5%); BUILDING (3%); and DEVELOPMENT (2%) (2020, p.16). The frequency of the movement metaphor is directly underpinned by the "embodied experience of movement from containment to freedom" (Chirrey, 2020, p.17) and reflects how people reveal what had been previously concealed.

Interestingly, the multimodal analysis by Lederer (2019) has offered similar conclusions. Lederer found that for transgender individuals coming out (and gender transition) is also understood in terms of JOURNEY, and crossing a certain boundary (2019, pp.40-41). It may often be motivated by the CONFLICT metaphor, but in a slightly different context: transgender individuals seem to be divided into two different categories: the gender they were assigned at birth and the felt gender they identify with now. They show this division both in speech, when they use such words as *mismatch* or *disconnected*, and in the management of gestural space, where gestural space is used contrastively to represent the mismatch and disconnection. In yet another multimodal analysis, Dyrmo (2022a) suggests that coming out can be analysed at the level of gestural metaphorical scenarios. This analysis has shown that coming out is motivated by the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL image schema, which is an underlying schema for the metaphor of JOURNEY (2022a, p.31). Dyrmo's analysis has also pointed to the generic metaphor of KNOWING IS SEEING that underpins such metaphors as PERSON WITH UNDISCLOSED IDENTITY IS A PERSON IN A CONTAINER and COMING OUT IS REVEALING A PERSON, both of which are consistent with Chirrey's analyses of advice texts.

From this cursory look at how coming out is conceptualized, it appears that the coming out metaphor works at two different levels: at the level of discourse as underlying oppression in the sense of establishing a normative worldview on sexuality (Brown, 2000, Seidman, 2002), and at the level of

individual experiences in language and gesture, which are in turn motivated by common conceptual structures in the mind.

4 Metaphors of coming out in Polish

In this subsection, selected examples from the corpus are presented to show the various ways in which coming out is metaphorically conceptualized. The examples are presented following the most generic metaphor, but the discourse-oriented counterpart is elaborated upon when necessary for exposition purposes. Moreover, these generic metaphors are also discussed in terms of what has been termed *main meaning* foci (e.g. Kövecses, 2005; 2020), which are defined as "the profiled aspects of culturally imbued complex conceptual metaphors (…), closely linked to the primary metaphors that make up complex ones in the sense that the main meaning foci reveal which primary metaphors constitute a complex metaphor" (Kövecses, 2020, p.91). Here, primary metaphors are used to mean those metaphors that emerge from "the correlations in experience" (Grady, 2005, p. 1600), for example MORE IS UP or BAD IS DOWN. This approach to conceptual metaphor allows us to consider the concepts of VISIBILITY, OPENING, CONTAINER, FORCE, SHARING and BURDEN as the main meaning foci of particular generic metaphors that are discursively elaborated and give rise to more complex metaphors.

4.1 KNOWING IS SEEING

The metaphor of KNOWING IS SEEING in coming out narratives draws from three meaning foci: VISIBILITY, OPENING and CONTAINER.

4.1.1 VISIBILITY

One of the respondents defined coming out in the following way:

(1) **ujawnienie** przed osobami w moim otoczeniu mojej orientacji seksualnej i/lub związku z osobą tej samej płci
revealing *to people from your environment your sexual orientation or a same-sex relationship*

The word *revealing*[3] [PL 'ujawnienie'] refers to disclosing something that had been previously hidden and now is made visible. Interestingly, *ujawnienie* in Polish in this example is followed by the preposition *przed*, [ENG lit. 'in front of'] which encodes the meaning of *frontness* (being in front of somebody or something). This entails that when we disclose something, then we are located in front of the recipient of the message so that they can see directly what we are disclosing to them. At the discourse level, the generic metaphor of KNOWING IS SEEING is thus elaborated into COMING OUT IS MAKING YOUR ORIENTATION/RELATIONSHIP VISIBLE FOR OTHERS. It might be argued that these metaphors are all distant subtypes of the MIND-AS-BODY metaphor, described by Sweetser (1990). She says that this metaphor is "very probably motivated by correlations between our external experience and our internal emotional and cognitive states" (1990, p.30). This is why the bodily action of moving the body of out a container is conceptualized as revealing one's sexual orientation to others. This metaphorical movement does likely influence one's emotional and cognitive states, contributing to the betterment of one's life.
The next example draws attention to the social character of coming out:

(2) Społeczne **pokazanie** kim [my] jesteśmy naprawdę.
Showing *socially who we really are.*

In this example, the aspect of visibility is encoded in the word *pokazanie* (ENG 'showing'), which has a distinct meaning from the previously analysed *ujawnianie* (ENG 'disclosing'). Showing, in this context, has a much more neutral meaning, pertaining only to the act of showcasing an element of somebody's identity to the wider public (hence the word *socially*). Notably, this definition of coming

[3] Bruckner's Etymological Dictionary (accessed from https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Słownik_etymologiczny_języka_polskiego/jaw) says that the word *ujawninie* in the Polish version derives from the word *abawiti*, meaning 'ukazać' (ENG 'show').

out is more community-oriented, as it uses the pronoun *my* (ENG we), indicated by the inflected form of the verb *to be* [PL 'być'] – [my] jesteśmy [we are]. This metaphor makes use of the image schema of OBJECT to discursively conceptualize coming out as COMING OUT IS SHOWING YOUR IDENTITY.

(3) **Jawne** powiedzenie o swojej orientacji.
Explicitly *saying about your orientation.*

In the Polish language, the adjective *jawne* pertains to the phrase *wychodzić na jaw*, meaning *to become visible after being purposefully hidden*. This is an adjectival use of the obsolete Polish word *zjawa* (ENG 'apparition'), related to *objawienie* (ENG 'revelation'). *Jawne*, thus, currently expresses the meaning of informing somebody about something openly and without hesitation. In this example, the word *jawne* is a *metaphorical adjective* (Deignan, 2005, p. 147), meaning that the metaphorical meaning is carried altogether with the word *powiedzenie* (ENG 'saying'), but the phrase does not constitute a stable collocation in other contexts. Notably, a search in the National Corpus of the Polish Language returns only one such collocation ('Toż to już **jawne powiedzenie** światu, że bardziej dbamy o interesy Izreala niż o własne!' ENG 'It's **explicitly saying** to the world that we are more concerned with Israel's business than our own!').

The fragment of one of the coming out stories draws upon the phrase *wyszło na jaw*, discussed above:

(4) Gdy już **wyszło na jaw**, że jestem homoseksualistą przytulił mnie płacząc i powiedział, że muszę wyjechać z Polski, bo tu nie będę miał życia.
When it ***came to light*** *that I'm a homosexual, [he] hugged me crying and said that I had to leave Poland because I would have no life here.*

In this fragment, the respondent talks about the reaction of a family member to their coming out. It is worth stressing here the passive character of the coming out process. In the phrase *wyszło na jaw*, there is no mention of an agent that actively comes out of the closet, which is reflected in the English translation – the pronoun *it* does not carry any agentive meaning, and serves only a grammatical function as the subject of the sentence. The phrase reflects the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING, but also the more discursively elaborated metaphor COMING OUT IS MAKING YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION VISIBLE TO OTHERS.

Altogether, it seems that both the adjectival use of *jawne* and the use of the phrase *wyszło na jaw* draw upon the same meaning focus, VISIBILITY, to highlight the aspect knowing. The next meaning focus, OPENING, operates on the same metaphorical conceptualization, but in a different way.

4.1.2 OPENING

The meaning focus of opening seems to be one of the metaphorical entailments of the COMING OUT metaphor in general.

(5) Bycie **otwartym** ze swoją orientacją, niekoniecznie zainicjowane jakimś mniej czy bardziej hucznym ogłoszeniem tej prawdy o nas światu.
To be ***open*** *about your orientation, not necessarily starting with a less-or-more loud announcement of this truth to the world.*

From this definition of coming out provided by a respondent, we can learn that it can be conceptualized as *bycie otwartym* (literally 'being open'), exemplifying the metaphor COMING OUT IS OPENING UP TO OTHERS. Interestingly enough, this short definition draws from the domain of TRUTH, which entails that being open about something means also being truthful or sincere, and suggesting a more evaluative metaphor of BEING OPEN IS BEING TRUTHFUL. In a slightly different context, Ritchie and Cameron (2014) comment on the positive associations with the "openness frame", as they call it: "being closed feels negative and the new *open* state of understanding feels free and positive" (2014, p. 210), which seems to highlight the more general character of the concept of OPENNESS.

(6) Później poszły kolejne coming outy do bliższych znajomych, bardziej **otwartych**.
*Later there were other coming outs, to closer, more **open** friends.*

In the above example, the world *otwartych* (literally 'open') pertains not to the person coming out, but rather to a group of friends to whom an LGBT person comes out. This, in turn, creates a reciprocal relationship between the openness of the person coming out (informing about sexual orientation/gender identity) and being open (accepting) as a recipient of the disclosure (cf. Chirrey, 2003, p.33 above on the joint action of all the participants of a coming out act). This example shows, although only tentatively, that meaning foci may be activated differently but still pertain to the same general idea in a given discourse.

(7) Może to być **otworzenie się jednej osobie**, lub grupie (np. rodzinie/miejscu pracy/nauki), może być face to face, lub w komunikacji internetowej.
*It may be **opening up to one person** or a group of people (e.g., family / your work place / your school), may be face-to-face or via the Internet.*

This is yet another example of COMING OUT IS OPENING UP TO OTHERS, but this time the phrase is a deverbal noun, which in English is marked with the *-ing* ending. Interestingly, this fragment also draws on the metonymic use of the lexeme *face*, which indirectly implies the concept of PROXIMITY. Notably, the phrase *otworzenie się jednej osobie* (ENG 'opening up to one person') uses the dative case (*osobie*), which may be an example of what Dąbrowska (1997) calls a "beneficiary dative". In constructions with a beneficiary dative, in English often marked with the preposition *to*, "beneficiaries are expressed in the dative because the agent's actions increase their potency either by enabling them to do something or by bringing about a desirable state of affairs" (1997, p. 35). In this case, "a desirable state of affairs" may be that of coming out being accepted by the recipient of the message.

4.1.3 CONTAINER

Another meaning focus, the image schema of CONTAINER, is often found in coming out narratives:

(8) Przez pierwszy rok po **wyjściu z szafy** czułam niezrozumienie całej siebie, doszły do tego aspekty zinternalizowanej homofobii.
*Within the first year after having **come out of the closet**, I felt confused about myself, including some aspects of internalized homophobia.*
(9) Nawet jeśli wiedziałam, iż moje **wyjście z szafy** zostanie odebrane pozytywnie (…)
*Even though I knew that me **coming out of the closet** would be appreciated.*
(10) Przybyło mi pewności siebie i asertywności od kiedy **wyszłam z szafy** (…)
*I have become more self-confident and assertive after I **came out of the closet**.*

This meaning focus does not offer much linguistic variability but it does nonetheless show an underlying conceptual metaphor, namely COMING OUT IS COMING OUT OF A CONTAINER, directly underpinned by the generic metaphor of KNOWING IS SEEING. Interestingly enough, the aspect of containment in coming out has received some prior treatment in the context of "euphemistic metaphor" (Crespo-Fernández, 2015). It has been noted that "the notion of closet derives from the idea of privacy (…). In this metaphor, the parts that make up a container are used to talk about social issues and attitudes towards homosexuality: the inside and the outside of the container conceptually represent the conventional and non-conventional society respectively" (Crespo-Fernández, 2015, p. 107). This treatment of the closet metaphor highlights, once again, its social and (non)normative character. This is perhaps why one of the respondents said in (9) that 'even if I knew that their coming out of the closet would be taken positively', expressing insecurity and/or uncertainty of the outcome of their coming out.

4.2 COMMUNICATION IS TRANSFER

4.2.1 FORCE

Force-dynamic relations have been acknowledged in coming out conceptualizations at the image schematic level (Dyrmo, 2022b). More generally, according to Johnson (2017), "we are subjected to forces that move us, change our bodily states and constrain our actions, and all these force characteristics have patterns and qualities" (2017, p. 82). These "patterns and qualities" are also evident in the fragments of coming out narratives, as presented below:

(11) Uważam, że pojęcie coming out zostało poniekąd **narzucone** przez heteronormatywne społeczeństwo jako wymóg ujawniania swoich preferencji seksualnych.
*I think that the notion of coming out has been to some extent **forced upon** [LGBT individuals] by the heteronormative society as a perquisite to disclosing your sexual preferences.*

Here, the image schema of FORCE (with its constraining nature) is used to conceptualize coming out in terms of the generic metaphor PSYCHOLOGICAL FORCE IS PHYSICAL FORCE. One entailment of this conceptualization is that coming out is understood as an object (in the sense of ontological metaphor), which can be then manipulated (imposed) on the recipient of the action, which is in accordance with the metaphor ABSTRACT CONCEPTS ARE PHYSICAL OBJECTS (e.g. Yu and Huang, 2019; also Szwedek, 2014) and these objects can be forcefully acted upon.

(12) Nie trzeba każdemu tej informacji **wciskać**, ale też nie powinno się jej ukrywać.
*One doesn't need **to thrust this information into (people)**, but it should not be hidden either.*

On the other hand, as shown in the above example, some metaphorical objects are not only imposed but the person who comes out may also forcefully give this object to other people, which reflects the metaphor COMING OUT IS FORCEFULLY GIVING AN OBJECT TO A PERSON, and, at the lower level of schematicity, PSYCHOLOGICAL FORCE IS PHYSICAL FORCE. It is worth noting here that in example (11), the recipient of the force was the non-heteronormative person, while in (12), the non-heteronormative person is the generator of force, applied to the metaphorical object and given to the recipient of the message.

(13) Potem najgorsza część, czyli trzeba było w końcu to **z siebie wyrzucić**, chociaż początkowo „rozrzucanie podpowiedzi" wystarczało.
*Then the worst part came, I needed to **get it out of myself**, although at the beginning "dropping [lit. spreading] hints" was enough.*

In the above example, the image schema of force is used in yet another way. In this conceptualization, again underpinned by PSYCHOLOGICAL FORCE IS PHYSICAL FORCE, the recipient of force is also the generator of force. The force, thus, originates inside the person and is needed to get the metaphorical object (the information about one's non-normativity) out of the speaker. Interestingly enough, the aspect of objectification is elaborated upon later in the narrative by introducing the element of "dropping hints", which is also a subtype of force-related objectification of sexual and gender identity. We may risk an interpretation that because "dropping hints" was not enough at the beginning of the coming out process, then what was left for the person was to "get it out", meaning the metaphorical object that could potentially be noticed by the recipient of the message.

4.2.2 SHARING

In Reddy's words (1979), "language functions like a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another" (1979, p. 290). Coming out can also be understood in this way – people who talk about their coming out, metaphorically "share" the information with their interlocutors. The above examples reflect the conduit metaphor COMMUNICATION IS OBJECT TRANSFER, and specifically, in the coming out context, COMING OUT IS SHARING AN OBJECT. Let us take a closer look at the examples:

(14) [Coming out to] **podzielenie się** informacją na temat swojej orientacji seksualnej przed najbliższymi (rodziną i przyjaciółmi).
[Coming out means] sharing information about your sexual orientation with your close ones (family and friends).

(15) **Podzielenie się** z innymi na temat tego jakiej jestem orientacji.
Sharing with others on the topic of what my orientation is.

Examples (14) and (15) share the same conceptual metaphor: COMING OUT IS SHARING AN OBJECT. Notably, although the metaphor is the same, the contextual information is different: in (14) the person specifies the target audience of coming out (family and friends), whereas in (15) the audience is rather general (others).

(16) Wydaje mi się, że coming out można by **podzielić** na ten autopersonalny (gdy uświadam sobie, że nie jestem osobą cis heteronormatywną) oraz ten, gdzie postanawiamy **podzielić** się tym faktem z innymi ludźmi
*It seems to me that coming out can be **divided** into the autopersonal (when I realize myself that I am not a cis heteronormative person) and the one where we want to **share** this fact with other people.*

In the above fragment, the word *podzielić* (ENG 'divide/share') appears two times, each time with a different meaning. When it means *divide*, it refers to the process of making two things out of one, implying a mathematical operation. When it means *share*, then the underlying meaning is different – it implies transfer of objects, and, consequently, reflects the metaphor of COMING OUT IS SHARING AN OBJECT. This kind of polysemy of meaning may not be random – it might be the case that the underlying conceptual metaphor of COMING OUT IS SHARING AN OBJECT activated the meaning of *divide* contextually, which may be an example of what Freeman (2017) calls "contextual contamination" (2017, p. 63).

4.3 SECRETS ARE HEAVY OBJECTS

4.3.1 BURDEN

The metaphors of burden have been shown to be cognitively and psychologically real. For example, in a study by Slepin et al. (2012), it has been demonstrated that people who think of secrets "feel physically burdened" (Slepin, et al., 2012, p. 622), and this sense of burden extends to the hiding of one's sexual orientation and coming out. Littlemore (2019) comments on this finding in this way: "[t]he more burdensome the secret and the more thought devoted to it, the more perception and action were influenced in a manner similar to carrying physical weight" (2019, p. 155). This seems to be the case in coming out narratives, too:

(17) Rozumiem to [coming out] jako zakończenie udawania kogoś kim się nie jest i **zrzucenie z siebie ogromnego ciężaru**.
*I understand it [coming out] as giving up pretending to be somebody else and **pushing this weight off oneself**.*

Example (17) shows that coming out is conceptualized in terms of pretending and the difficulty of pretending is understood as a heavy object (burden). This reflects the metaphor of SECRETS ARE HEAVY OBJECTS, and COMING OUT IS LETTING A HEAVY OBJECT OFF. Interestingly, similar conceptualizations have been also observed in gestures. For example, in Dyrmo (2022a) people who were talking about their coming out gestured as if they wanted to shrug an object off their shoulders, also revealing

the conceptualization based on the metaphor PSYCHOLOGICAL BURDEN IS PHYSICAL BURDEN. In the study by Ryzhova et al. (2019), three types of situations involving manipulation of a heavy object were described: (1) lifting, (2) shifting, and (3) weighting. It is interesting to see that coming out involves only the first type of manipulation, which involves, as Ryzhova et al. (2019) say: "displac[ing] the whole object".

(18) Nie potępiła mnie za to bezpośrednio, chociaż jej wiadomość nie była wolna od **obarczania mnie poczuciem winy**.
*She didn't condemn me directly, although her message was not devoid of **putting guilt on me**.*

This fragment of a coming out narrative offers a different perspective on the metaphor PSYCHOLOGICAL BURDEN IS PHYSICAL BURDEN. Here, it is not the secret that is conceptualized in terms of an object, but the sense of guilt, giving rise to the metaphor GUILT IS HEAVINESS, which is a sub-metaphor of DIFFICULT IS HEAVY, evidenced in such phrases like *heavy workload* (Grady, 2005, p. 1600). The metaphor has been explored experimentally in the context of morality. It has been reported, for instance, that people who committed immoral deeds felt that their body was heavier than people who did not do anything unethical. Also, people who recalled having done something unethical judged a physical activity to be more effortful than people who recalled ethical events (Day and Bobocel, 2013).

5 Discussion

The above analysis reveals that coming out can be metaphorically conceptualized via several foci of meaning. These foci, although abstract and apparently consonant with the current analyses of coming out in English (see Chirrey, 2020, Dyrmo, 2022b), cannot be said to function universally. They are rather culture-specific. Within the framework proposed by Sharifian (2017), cognition is situated culturally, with all its cultural conceptualizations, including cultural schemas, categories and metaphors being reflected in language use. Following Bernardez in his warning on "assigning universality to any one conceptualisation" (Bernardez, 2013, p. 10), it is important to note that metaphors that LGBT individuals use in more accepting cultures (in which heteronormativity is not the dominant model of sexuality) will likely be different from those used in more heteronormative-oriented cultures. Coming out metaphors, although reflecting schematic elements of conceptualization, such as FORCE or CONTAINER, actually show variability in language structure. An isolated yet telling example is that of the Polish dative case in example (7), which reflects "the sphere of influence" (Dąbrowska, 1997, p. 18). Because this is the only example of such a construction in the dataset, a further, possibly corpus-based quantitative analysis should be carried out to investigate if grammar tells us anything about how people talk about secrets.

In Dyrmo (2022b) it has been noted that coming out may be analysed at various levels of schematicity, from image schemas, through complex image schemas, domains and frames, to metaphorical scenarios. The below table presents a short comparison of the conceptual structures found to play a role in coming out metaphors across English, taken from the abovementioned study, and Polish speakers, analysed in this paper. I follow here a revised hierarchy of schematicity offered in Dyrmo (2022b), in which image schemas are the most schematic elements of the conceptual structure, whereas scenarios are the least. In this understanding, image schemas are considered to feed conceptual content into complex image schemas, which, in turn, feed into domains. Domains contribute to frames, which, when elaborated with evaluative content, become metaphorical scenarios. Scenarios, which Kövecses considers to be at the same level of schematicity as mental spaces (see Kövecses, 2017, p. 9), are treated here as dissimilar from mental spaces. Mental spaces, according to the definition from Fauconnier (1994) are created online, whereas metaphorical scenarios are culturally embedded frame-like structures that constitute the sum of accumulated experiences and are culture-dependent (see Musolff, 2021).

Table 4. Levels of schematicity in the coming out metaphor

level of schematicity	English data (Dyrmo 2022b)	Polish data
image schema	container force object	container force object
complex image schema	Iteration	----------
domain	movement, transfer	knowing seeing transfer transfer (sharing)
frame	volitional coming out outing / being forced to come out coming out as sharing a secret	coming out is sharing an object (secret)
scenario	coming out of a bounded space is revealing sexual orientation/gender identity coming out is shifting a heavy object off your shoulders	coming out is making your orientation visible to others coming out is shifting a heavy object off your shoulders

From the above comparison, we see that conceptualizations of coming out in English and in Polish are quite similar. For example, all the image schematic concepts that were found in the analysis of the English data are also reflected in the Polish data. As for the complex image schema, no such schema has been found in the Polish dataset. As far as frames are concerned, one is cross-linguistically shared: COMING OUT IS SHARING AN OBJECT (SECRET). At the least schematic level – scenarios – there are different conceptualizations of coming out: in English, coming out is understood as coming out of bounded space, but in Polish, the aspect of visibility is more pronounced. Interestingly, the object-oriented scenario is present in both languages, which may lend some support to the idea put forward by Szwedek, namely that objectification is one of the most frequent and basic cognitive operations (e.g. Szwedek, 2014). Some lexical items indicating iteration were presented in the dataset, for example the lexeme *raz* (‘one time’), but their meanings were only literal.

Some representatives of Queer Linguistics may oppose the generalizations offered in this study by saying that “the notion of sexuality may serve as the basis of an essentialist identity category which ignores the intersectionality of sexuality (…)” (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013, p. 520). The rejection of essentialism is well argued and indeed necessary to capture the diversity of human cognition (e.g. Littlemore, 2019, also Dyrmo, 2022c), yet the goal of cognitive linguistic analyses is to provide evidence for possibly generalizable cognitive processes (e.g. Croft and Cruise, 2004). It has to be acknowledged however, in the context of coming out stories, that lived experiences will surely differ from group to group and from person to person. Zimman, for example, rightly alerts us to the fact that coming out narratives of transgender individuals are of “the other kind” (2009), meaning that “(…) communities produce understandings of their experiences and identities in <u>different</u> ways, which leaves the coming out narrative to function as a venue for the enactment of <u>local</u> forms of identity work” (2009, p. 71, underlined by the author).

Some of the researchers supporting the notion of metaphor activation (e.g. Müller, 2008) would suggest that the use of quotation marks in (13) indicates some level of activation of metaphoricity – a sleeping metaphor has been woken up. A similar conclusion could be drawn by the proponents of Deliberate Metaphor Theory, which suggest that some metaphors are used deliberately, primarily for rhetorical purposes (e.g. Steen, 2017). This study does not provide an answer to the question whether or not metaphoricity is activated or metaphors are used deliberately yet points out to the fact that some

respondents could be aware of the metaphorical character of the phrase *coming out*, just because they were asked to define what coming out means to them. This, however, requires further research.

6 Conclusions

The present study has offered a qualitative analysis of coming out narratives in the Polish language. The analysis shows that coming out operates on several meaning foci, some of them being related, for example by the common frame, such as an object-manipulation frame. It's been shown that people who talk about their coming out experiences conceptualize them using three metaphors: KNOWING IS SEEING, COMMUNICATION IS TRANSFER and SECRETS ARE HEAVY OBJECTS. The main meaning foci of the KNOWING IS SEEING metaphor are VISIBILITY, OPENING and CONTAINER; for COMMUNICATION IS TRANSFER, the main meaning foci include FORCE and SHARING, and for SECRETS ARE HEAVY OBJECTS – BURDEN. These generic metaphors have their contextually sensitive counterparts, for example: COMING OUT IS SHOWING AN OBJECT or COMING OUT IS LEAVING A BOUNDED SPACE.

For future research, it remains to be seen, for example, whether and if yes, how, grammatical patterns reflect individualized experiences, e.g. in transgender or agender individuals. A further analysis of how different kinds of metaphors, not necessarily pertaining directly to coming out, but those that relate to social status or family relations, would possibly shed some more light on how coming out is constructed socially. Moreover, it would be informative to see, in further research, whether there are any differences between the metaphors used by people who have already come out to someone, and those who are still in the closet. Finally, following the growing interest in multimodal metaphor (e.g. Górska, 2020), a study on how coming out is represented visually would make a case for potentially cross-modal, recurring patterns in the human conceptual systems.

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