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Keywords

male, homosexuality, speech patterns, camp, sexual stereotypes

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Male Homosexual Speech Patterns In Spontaneous Conversation

by Amy Leuchtman

Introduction: Detail for the purpose of creating involvement in conversation

Detail in conversation occurs in a variety of forms—listing, naming, dialogue, paraphrasing, use of descriptors such as adjectives and adverbs—to name a few. Regardless of presentation, detail serves the recurrent function of creating involvement. According to Tannen, involvement is achieved because "details create images, images create scenes, and scenes spark emotions," making involvement possible (1989: 135). The images created by detail in conversation can be especially powerful linguistic devices when they cause internal evaluation by the hearer (the hearer creates an image inside their mind, thus, performing internal evaluation). Internal evaluation is more persuasive than external evaluation (Labov 1972) because it requires more involvement (more work) from the hearer (Tannen 1989: 138). What must be remembered is that this involvement is created through the *emotional* response of the hearer, and that emotional responses can be negative as well as positive. When details are used in a fashion divergent from the verbal habits of the audience (i.e. when detail is used that is considered too specific, displaying unwanted intimacy, etc.) the reaction of the hearers can range from mild shock to so upset that they withdraw from conversation. It is this spectrum of reactions that many male homosexuals sometimes face when they utilize "verbal camping" as a conversational involvement strategy in the presence of straight American listeners. Because camping involves imitation of what are held to be "feminine" speech patterns (i.e. use of descriptive detail [Tannen 1989: 148]) and attention to certain types of detail considered "feminine," its use by gay males in conversation is sometimes interpreted as inappropriate in a society which strictly defines and adheres to its created gender roles for both men and women (Karr 73).

"Camping"

Camp, as defined by Webster's Collegiate

Dictionary, is a term of unknown origin used to describe "exaggerated effeminate mannerisms exhibited especially by homosexuals, or, something so outrageously artificial, affected, inappropriate, or out-of-dale as to be considered amusing" (1989). The second half of this definition implies that camping is used with at least some degree of intention as a social device, since its usage requires applying knowledge of what is both "out" and "outrageous" to be effective. The element of conscious in this definition of *verbal camping* works against stereotypes of gay males which purport effeminate, exaggerated speech patterns as a constantly present means of identifying homosexual males (i.e. a dialect.) Yet this is the nature of stereotyping—to present a "standardize mental picture that is held in common by members of a group [in this case, a large percentage of American society] and that represents an oversimplified opinion...or uncritical judgment" (Webster's 1989). The data analyzed in this paper suggests that the "exaggerated, effeminate speech patterns" involved in camping behavior are not a constantly present speech pattern unconsciously used by all homosexual males, but rather, a learned linguistic device (a type of detail which makes up a register, though as yet widely undocumented) used by some homosexual men to create involvement in conversation.

"Women's Language"

Since verbal camping is usually understood to be "effeminate" in nature, we must at least briefly consider the topic of "women's language." Whether or not women's language or effeminate speech patterns exist [as opposed to normative English, which some (i.e. Julia Penelope, 1990) claim might as well be dubbed "men's language"] is a long-standing debate among linguists. What has been verified is that our culture holds a bias towards particular attributes in speech that are considered feminine—that is, certain phenomena in the English language are stereotyped as being typical of (and therefore only appropriate to) female speakers. As with most instances of stereotyping, the problem is that the different is considered deviant, which

results in a disadvantaged position for those speakers who employ the "nonstandard" variety of the language (Coates 155-62). Consider again the position of gay males who employ "feminine speech patterns in the form of camping as an involvement device—not only are they utilizing a strategy considered by most to be inappropriate in context due to gender constraints, but they are using devices which, even when used "appropriately" (by female speakers), are perceived as deviant (from the [male] norm).

Table 1 is a compilation of generalizations typical of women who use feminine speech patterns drawn from Penelope (1990), Tannen (1990), and Coates (1986):

Table 1: Generalizations Typical of Women who use Feminine Speech Patterns

No.	Description
1.	Women speak at a higher pitch than men.
2.	Women hesitate and pause more frequently than men.
3.	Women use rising intonations (usually reserved for questions) to mark statements more often than men.
4.	Women use emphatic intonation more often than men.
5.	Women speak more carefully/formally than men (i.e. pronouncing the /r/ as opposed to just /n/ at the end of words like "playing").
6.	Women's vocabulary reflects stereotypical feminine interests such as fashion, domestics, and emotional issues—in aid of some of these interests women make finer distinctions about and have more words for colors than men.
7.	Women use more (often complimentary or denigrative) adjectives (i.e. divine, disgusting, etc.) than men.
8.	Women use more modals (i.e. could, might) indicating tentativeness than do men.
9.	Women's speech contains more hedges (i.e. "well," sort of," etc.) than does the speech of men.
10.	Women use more intensifiers (i.e. so, such, quite) than men.
11.	Women use fewer imperatives and more polite forms than men.
12.	Women use more tag-questions than men which is indicative of their need for approval.
13.	Women in conversation tend to be supportive in an effort to create community and rapport, while men tend to seek conversational control and dominance.

Camping in Conversation

The conversation analyzed here takes place

among six friends—four heterosexual females and two homosexual males—all between the ages of nineteen and twenty-one. Use of language strategies by speakers can be affected by an almost infinite variety of factors (i.e. topic, audience, mode, etc.). This particular conversation was chosen for analysis due to its wide range of topics (i.e. dating, homework, sex, travel, television, domestic issues—to name a few) and the comfortable setting in which it occurred (a relaxed conversation), in the hope that it's a fairly representative (unconstrained) sample of speech in a mixed group of homosexual and heterosexual friends. (Future research will determine whether the absence of heterosexual males may or may not prove an important factor.) In approximately forty-five minutes of talk, thirty-three instances of speech that could be considered marked as feminine were produced by the two homosexual speakers. These thirty-three instances occurred within 231 speaking turns between the two males—that is, in only about fourteen percent of the turns. Judging the number of occurrences of camping was difficult because, though a prevalent stereotype exists, I was unable to find any research on homosexual speech patterns in ordinary conversation, or a definition of what I was analyzing that was any more concrete than that provided previously for camping (i.e. Hayes 1976). I therefore take the characteristics of "feminine speech" already noted by Coates, Penelope, and Tannen as definitive of camping behavior. What follows is an analysis of how some of these norms constitute a "camping register" when used by homosexual men. I will show that the camping register creates involvement of the three types identified by Chafe: self involvement of the speaker, involvement of the speaker with the topic, and interpersonal involvement between the speaker and the hearer (116). A clearer, though certainly not exhaustive explanation of the forms and functions of camping will be produced.

For quick reference, Table 2 displays the frequency of usage of women's language strategies nos. 1-13 in the data analyzed:

Table 2: Women's Language Strategies: Frequency of Usage

Strategy No.	Percentage of Use
1. Higher Pitch	12% (4/33)
2. Hesitate/Pause	3% (1/33)
3. Rising Intonation	6% (2/33)
4. Emphatic Intonation	39% (13/33)
5. Careful Pronunciation	9% (3/33)
6. Feminine Vocabulary	55% (18/33)
7. Adjectives	27% (9/33)
8. Modals	0% (0/33)
9. Hedges	0% (0/33)

10. Intensifiers	12% (4/33)
11. Imperatives	0% (0/33)
12. Tag-questions	0% (0/33)
13. Support/Rapport	65% (150/231)

Camping and use of Women's Language

As explained earlier (Table 1), the list of thirteen characteristics which define women's language will serve as a list of verbal camping behavior. Verbal camping occurred most often through exploitation of characteristic number six—talk about women's topics [often using women's vocabulary to do so (i.e. color terms)]. Fifty-five percent (18 out of 33) of the verbal camping occurrences dealt with the following "feminine" topics: fashion, the physical attractiveness of another male, emotional issues involving the family, emotional issues involving the self, and interior decorating. In the following segment, for example, Scott describes to John, who has just entered the room, his (invented) version of what Martha's date was wearing on one of her "worst" dates:

- (1) 1 MARTHA I'm telling about o- one of my worst dates
 2 AMY Her date's name was \ ANDy Hair || and he drove
 3 a \ HEARSE
 4 SCOTT That had pictures of naked women in the \ BACK
 5 AMY And shag \ CARpet || whoo / OO!
 6 SCOTT And he came in a \ VELvet j-(laughter)
 |
 7 JOHN Sounds \ GREAT
 |
 8 SCOTT \ VELvet || \ SPORT coat
 9 MARTHA So anyway, we're at this race-track, and / I am
 10 feeling ,, starting to feel \ REALLY
 11 uncomfortable || ...all of a \ SUDden || before
 12 I knew it I'm \ TACKled in the bushes || and
 13 he's trying to kiss me and I just popped him
 14 ,, (laughter) ,, I got \ LEFT at the racetrack
 |
 15 JOHN Was he / CUTE?
 16 MARTHA \ NO || (laughter) || John wants to-
 17 JOHN I wanted to know if he was \ CUTE at least!
 18 SCOTT He drove a \ HEARSE || \ BUT I tell you ,, he
 19 was \ HOT!
 20 AMY & JOHN /"HELP!"

- 21 SCOTT "I'm trapped in a hearse with \ WITH Hair!"
 22 AMY /?/ A man in / WHAT did you say he had on?
 23 SCOTT Red \ VELvet sportcoat
 24 AMY Red velvet \ SPORT coat! || (laughter)

Note Scott's attention to the feminine topic of fashion in lines 6, 8 and 23. In line 23, he even adds an extra detail, the color term red, to his description. Note also that Scott is not simply describing "reality as he saw it" (he was not present during the date), but has taken the time to construct/invent the details he is offering.

Strategy six is the most often used for the purpose of verbal camping because it is probably the easiest, clearest ways of displaying the outrageous (the campy). That is, for a male speaker to have a discussion about a female topic like fashion it is easier both to learn (as a verbal camping device) and to notice (as the hearer) as a violation of male norms than, for example, using modals to indicate tentativeness, and thus, feminine speech patterns (verbal camping).

The next most frequently used characteristic is number four—emphatic intonation. Thirty-nine percent (13 out of 33) of the verbal camping occurrences employed emphatic and eighty-five percent (11 out of 13) of that thirty-six percent simultaneously employed strategy six. One example occurs when Scott again comments on the physical attractiveness of Martha's male date (a typically female interest): ([1] Lines 18-19) "He drove a \ HEARSE ,, \ BUT I tell you ,, he was \ HOT!" (emphatic intonation on the term hot). Another example occurs when John comments on the stereotypical feminine topic of his personal emotions: (not included in [1]) "Hey, I'm a happy person okay?" (emphatic intonation on the words hey, happy, person, and okay). It would seem that strategy four is often coupled with strategy six to increase the campy effect of the statement. The more norms violated at once, the more outrageous a statement it becomes (as explained earlier, a large part of camping is exploitation of the outrageous). The more outrageous the statement, the more attention it will attract, which, in turn, creates involvement—the main purpose of verbal camping.

The third most frequently used strategy for verbal camping among the two male speakers is number seven—the use of adjectives. Twenty-seven percent (9 out of 33) of the instances of verbal camping which occurred used adjectives, fifty-six percent (5 out of 9) of which simultaneously employed strategy number six. Note the example given earlier for emphatic intonation where Scott talks about the attractiveness of Martha's date: ([1] Lines 18-19) "He drove a \ HEARSE '|| \ BUT I tell you|| he was \ HOT!" The term hot is a

complimentary adjective stated with emphatic intonation about a typically feminine topic. Once again, the strategies are being used in consort to increase the campy effect.

The thirteenth characteristic of women's language is the attempt to create support, solidarity, community, and rapport through verbal means, rather than try to achieve conversational control and dominance—said to be typical of male speakers (Tannen 1990). It is interesting to note that around sixty-five percent (150 out of 231) of the total turns taken by the male homosexual speakers fit Tannen's definition of creating/maintaining community and rapport. Perhaps this is another way in which male homosexuals perform verbal camping—by taking on the female characteristic of building involvement in conversation through such techniques as supportive interactions (i.e. "uh-huh," "yes, yes," "I'm sure," etc.), asking questions, sharing similar experiences, etc. in segment (1), every comment that Scott makes (Lines 4, 6, 8, 18, 19, 21, and 23) can be construed as an effort to create rapport because he is constantly adding more detail to the story, demonstrating both his support of and attention to the speaker. In segment (2) Line 4 (reproduced below), Scott volunteers the supportive interjection "\ RIGHT || \ RIGHT" to my comment about owning your own home.

Camping and Involvement

Of the 33 occurrences of verbal camping, one-hundred percent fit into Chafe's category of interpersonal involvement. This is due to the fact that verbal camping seems to function as a form of detail (which will be explained thoroughly below). The primary goal in using verbal camping detail is to attract attention because to utilize it, the speaker must employ "feminine" linguistic strategies out of "normal heterosexual" context (the speaker is male). This violation of norms draws the attention of hearers, which, in turn, creates their involvement.

Fifty-five percent (18 out of 33) of the verbal camping occurrences also display the speaker's involvement with the topic. Topic involvement occurs when other types of detail are embedded in the verbal camping. For example, Scott gives the following description of his future home:

- (2) 1 AMY I cannot \ WAIT || to have my own \ HOUSE and like || \ DECORATE it the way I want to || 'cause that
 2 would feel like your \ OWN ,, \ SPACE
 3 SCOTT \ RIGHT || \ RIGHT.
 4 MARTHA It would feel like your \ OWN house

- 6 SCOTT 'Cause it \ WOULD be... || I'm gonna have like a \ DIFFERENT design in each room || I'm gonna have
 7 like a \ JAPANESE style in one room || and like an
 8 \ AMERICAN one room || all \ DIFFERENT designs ||
 9 and then the the \ MIDDLE areas will be \ NEUTRAL
 10 || so that they \ FLOW into each room || as not to
 11 be \ GAUDY
 12 AMY Um || If you \ CAN't find anyone to live with... ||
 13 (laughter)

Scott's statement is campy (feminine) with respect to topic (interior decorating), attention to color (neutral), attention to detail (Japanese style one room, etc.), use of a denigrative adjective (gaudy), and use of emphatic intonation (with the terms neutral, flow, gaudy, and others). Involvement with the topic (interior decoration) is evident in the specificity (Japanese style, American style, neutral middle areas which "flow," the avoidance of looking "gaudy"), and the details (including and aside from those which create the camping affect) which Scott gives in his reply.

Forty-eight percent (16 out of 33) of the occurrences of verbal camping display involvement of the speaker with himself. This type of involvement, like involvement with the topic, occurs when other types of detail—often evaluatory details—are embedded within the verbal camping. The example cited shows involvement of the speaker with the topic and also displays involvement of the speaker with himself. Scott is expressing his personal desires to his hearers. He is displaying for them what is obviously a carefully drawn picture pulled from his private thoughts. Another example occurs when John asks: ([1] Lines 18 and 21) "Was he / CUTE?... I wanted to know if he was \ CUTE at least!" John is requesting more detailed information about a date Martha has been describing. His request is campy in that it uses the complimentary adjective cute and involves the usual feminine interest area of another male's physical attractiveness. It displays John's involvement with himself in that he is expressing his desire to create a clear picture for himself of Martha's date.

Defining Verbal Camping

Each of the 33 instances of verbal camping that occur are aimed at creating involvement. This is true even when there is no detail in the usual sense of the term (i.e. color words, specific description, evaluation, etc.) included in the verbal

act. For example, John answers "Oh \YES!" when asked if living with Scott is what makes him happy. The reply is campy because it uses very emphatic (feminine) intonation. It also seems to be aimed at involving his hearers because it employs a verbal tool (emphatic pronunciation) out of "normal" context (he is male), drawing attention to himself and what he is saying. This attention creates involvement, even though what John has said uses no "details." It is from examples such as this that I draw the conclusion that verbal camping is itself a type of detail, as are color terms, specific description, etc. It often, though not always (as demonstrated), involves the use of other details within its occurrences.

In looking for a way to define verbal camping, I have been drawn to the term register. Registers, as defined by Wardhaugh, "are sets of vocabulary items associated with discrete occupational or social groups" (1986: 48). As evidenced, verbal camping involves more than knowledge of a specialized vocabulary. Montgomery (1986) uses a more elaborate definition of register, dividing it into the sub-sections of field, tenor, and mode. Field refers to an activity and the specialized vocabulary associated with it; as previously stated, verbal camping, while it does involve vocabulary, is more complex than that. Tenor corresponds to the type of social relationships within which communication is occurring. To determine if and how verbal camping changes according to this context, I would have to have some other data occurring in a different social context with which to compare the conversation I use here. At present, I have not collected such data. Mode involves the channel through which communication is occurring. The primary distinction made by Montgomery is between writing and speaking. This data presents us with spoken material only. Determining how camping behavior varies due to mode would require gathering written data, perhaps personal letters. Though verbal camping involves more than field (and this analysis presents insufficient data to examine mode and tenor) I still feel that register is the best way to characterize verbal camping. The term register implies a learned pattern/type of speech used by a social group. Registers are not constant like dialects, but can be slipped in and out of at will. With further analysis and documentation, I feel verbal camping will prove itself a register.

The Problem of Genre

As stated at the beginning of this analysis, many factors can affect the use of language strategies by a speaker. One factor that showed up in my data was that of genre; verbal camping behavior appeared more frequently in dialogic sections of the

conversation than it did in narratologic (monologic?) sections. Only twelve percent (4 instances out of 33) of the verbal camping occurred during three short narratives (under two minutes each) told by the two male speakers. This rate is surprisingly low because the amount of spoken input by a single speaker during a narrative is much greater than that given by a speaker who is making a comment, asking a question, etc. in the context of a dialogue with other speakers. Another pattern noted in the context of narrative was that the instances of verbal camping that occurred were much more subtle. For example, in a narrative about being a Japanese exchange student, Scott states: "I had to ride my \ Bicycle to school..." (emphatic intonation on bicycle). He then continues to use the term bicycle four more times in his short narrative, instead of switching to the less formal bike. While this could be considered an exploitation of women's language according to strategy five—women speak more carefully/formally than men—it is obviously much less marked than the strategies noted earlier as appearing in the dialogic sections of speech. One possible reason for this—though it is purely a conjecture on my part—is that since verbal camping seems to serve mainly as an attention-attracting device, perhaps the speakers did not feel as much of a need to resort to verbal camping in narrative situations where they were already holding the floor with a monologue. Another possible explanation is that afforded by Labov when he asserts that internal evaluation (detail) is used less often by middle class speakers (1972). John and Scott are both middle class males.

Conclusion

Any strategy used by speakers will be affected in its usage and occurrence by a great number of factors. The phenomenon examined here—male homosexual speech patterns—was studied in hope of providing a clearer definition of its forms and functions. The conversation analyzed was chosen because I believe it provides a relatively unconstrained sample. Though the speakers are all friends only two of them (the two homosexual males) are members of the "in-group" when it comes to verbal camping behavior. Had this conversation occurred in an all in-group setting (i.e. among six male homosexuals), it is highly possible that the verbal camping occurrences would have differed in both form and frequency.

Another factor affecting usage of verbal camping is the attitude of the speakers themselves toward the behavior. In a 1976 article entitled "Gayspeak," Joseph Hayes points out that there are three settings/attitudes inhabited by homosexual men: the secret, the social, and The radical-activist. Hayes argues that when living under the setting/mindset of the secret, "gayspeak" (verbal-

camping) is kept to a minimum, if used at all. These speakers, for whatever reason, do not want to be identified as homosexual. Speakers living within the social setting/mindset will use gayspeak to express themselves "both within and outside the subculture" (47). It is this group, claims Hayes, which has introduced verbal camping to the dominant culture, and whose linguistic behavior has since become the butt of many jokes and evolved into the stereotype of the gay male speaker. Hayes divides radical-activists into two groups. The "radical-right" wishes to avoid any specialized language behavior at all in the belief that language determines social attitudes and that through the use of the linguistically deviant and pejorative gays are confining themselves to a deviant and pejorative social rank. The "radical-left" wishes to take current linguistic practices and turn them on their heads, intentionally using the linguistically deviant as a symbol of defiance of the dominant culture. Into which of these three groups the two gay male speakers would place themselves is undetermined, though the data most likely includes them among the "social" group.

The following conclusions have been drawn from this data: (1) In this mixed group setting, verbal camping shows up about fourteen percent of the time (in 33 out of 231 speaking turns). It appears as a type of attention getting (involvement creating) detail, which, though not verifiable from this data, probably forms a register. (2) In its formation, verbal camping most often utilizes Women's Language strategies numbers 13, 6, 4, and 7. Strategy 6--using women's topics and women's vocabulary--is probably prevalent because it is one of the most easily exploitable, most noticeable strategies. The other strategies often simultaneously employ strategy 6 to increase their campy effect. (3) Verbal camping is always aimed at interpersonal involvement. This is because it functions as a type of detail in conversation. Around fifty percent of the time it is also aimed at topical and/or self involvement. This occurs when other details (in the typical sense of the term) are embedded in the verbal camping. (4) Differences in verbal camping due to genre appear in this data. Those instances of verbal camping which occur during three brief narratives are less marked and appear at a lower rate than expected. This may be due to what Labov cites as the lack of skill of middle class narrators when it comes to using internal evaluation (detail). It also may be connected to the fact that verbal camping serves as an attention getting device, and narrators delivering a monologue already hold the audience's attention.

Innumerable questions remain to be answered: how does verbal camping change in form and frequency due to context of the conversation, topic, mode, genre, tenor, etc.? Does it form a register rather than a dialect as the stereotype

would imply? In what ways are homosexual men discriminated against/ignored because they are employing already deviant strategies out of context in order to attract attention and create involvement in conversation? Though the data and its analysis in this paper are not extensive enough to answer these questions, they provide a much clearer definition of the form and function of verbal camping behavior than currently exists in linguistic literature on the subject.

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