

Eliecer Crespo-Fernández. 2015. *Sex in Language. Euphemistic and Dysphemistic Metaphors in Internet Forums*. London: Bloomsbury. 248 pp. ISBN: 978-14-725-9652-9

ANDREA PIZARRO PEDRAZA

Université catholique de Louvain

andrea.pizarro@uclouvain.be

Sex in Language. Euphemistic and Dysphemistic Metaphors in Internet Forums addresses the ever-fascinating topic of the expression of sexual concepts. Crespo-Fernández bases his study on data from Internet forums written in English and applies concepts from Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Relevance Theory and Appraisal Theory, among others. This combination reflects his interest in analyzing the different source domains used for expressing sexual concepts, in order to explain their ideological value within Western culture, and their communicative functions. The book has two parts: one theoretical (“Metaphor, Euphemism and Dysphemism”) and one empirical (“Sex-Related Metaphors in Internet Forums”). They are preceded by a foreword by taboo-expert Keith Allan and by a preface and an introduction by the author stating background, goals, data and methods. The main concepts are sketched out in the “Introduction” (1-19), although their application will only be fully understood in the following parts.

Part one, “Metaphor, Euphemism and Dysphemism,” is an explanation of the author’s terminological and theoretical standpoint. Chapter one, “Cognitive and Pragmatic Issues” (21-44), reviews the basic concepts in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980): the principle of unidirectionality, the embodied nature of metaphor, the importance of physical space for existing image-schemas and previous classifications of metaphors. Crucial to the author’s analysis is the fact that metaphorical conceptualization is always partial, since only certain aspects of the source domain are highlighted. The author follows Gerard Steen’s three-dimensional model of metaphor (2011), which includes linguistic and conceptual aspects, as well as communicative functions that link metaphor with types of discourse and extra-linguistic reality. This is consistent with a key notion followed by the author: that cultural variation has an impact on conceptualization (Shariffian 2011), which, in his view, is particularly well reflected in metaphor. In this vein, Kövecses’s notions of *main meaning focus*, *central mapping* and *differential experiential focus* are essential for the analysis of the connections between source and target, and its cultural motivations (2005, 2010). The author also

applies Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986) to metaphor interpretation. In Crespo-Fernández's view, the addressee's interpretation of the addresser's meaning is mediated by the construction of *ad hoc* concepts derived from the particular metaphorical expression, without much cognitive effort. This is motivated by expectations of relevance and contextual aspects (Carston 1997).

Chapter two presents the "Cognitive Dimension of Euphemism and Dysphemism" (45-70). The x-phemistic phenomena are connected to politeness: their use is intended to save the face of the participants—through euphemism, or orthophemism—or to threaten it—dysphemism (Allan and Burridge 2006). Nonetheless, empirical analyses mentioned by the author reveal the fuzziness of these gradual categories, which can perform unexpected functions—quasi-dysphemism, quasi-euphemism (Casas Gómez 2012). The author considers dysphemism as "the only source of face-threatening expressions" (Crespo-Fernández 2015, 47), while the functions of the rest of the x-phemisms are varied and can be protective, consolatory, provocative, etc. The role of metaphor in the creation of x-phemisms is crucial, because metaphorical construal creates a particular perspective on the taboo concept. The author underlines the cognitive dimension of metaphorical x-phemisms, which rely on *contrast* of meanings, *neutralization* of certain semantic aspects and *displacement*. According to their degree of lexicalization, x-phemistic metaphors can be *lexicalized* (dead), *semi-lexicalized* (conventional) or *creative* (novel and artful) (Chamizo Domínguez 1998). As exemplified by the author, some of these different metaphors can challenge the "euphemistic treadmill" and the unidirectionality of metaphor. X-phemistic metaphors have a strong persuasive and evaluative potential, especially evident when the meaning transfer—from source to target—intently seeks a change in the addressee's perspective, for belief manipulation or deligitimization among other reasons. In the author's view, from a cognitive perspective, the correct interpretation of an x-phemistic metaphor is an inferential process where the hearer plays an active role. It depends on her/his world knowledge and on her/his capacity to recognize the intentional ambiguity in meaning of the x-phemistic metaphor and to resolve it by virtue of her/his relevance expectations. An action which is determined by the context.

In part two, "Sex-related Metaphors in Internet Forums," the author applies the theories detailed in part one to his data. He analyses 240 (mostly conventional) sexual metaphors found in an admittedly restricted corpus of 188 postings in forums in the period 2011-2013. The author pre-classifies the metaphors into two large groups: euphemistic and dysphemistic—chapters three and four respectively. Each chapter is in turn subdivided into sections according to source domain. For each source, the author provides a description of the conceptual metaphor(s), the main meaning foci and an illustration from the corpus. Furthermore, the author gives his interpretation of the world knowledge that allows for the metaphor and the values it entails in the representation of the target concept. When relevant, the author relates the sources

with broader generic-level metaphors, basic image-schemas and other interplaying semantic mechanisms, like hyperbole and metonymy. The diachronic origin of the metaphor is sometimes provided.

Chapter three presents “Euphemistic Metaphors” (71-134). In his data, the metaphors used with euphemistic intention are based on thirteen source domains: WORK (e.g., *blowjob*) HEAT AND FIRE (*light one’s fire*), GAMES AND SPORTS (*play doctor*), JOURNEYS (*reach the destination*), ADVENTURES (*adventurous*), CONTAINERS (*backdoor*), PHYSICAL FORCES (*electric shocks*), NATURAL PHENOMENA (*torrent of passion*), FIREWORKS (*bright lights*), ILLNESS AND INSANITY (*insane passion*), HEALTH (*sick*), DIRT (*filthy*) and FALLING (*head over heels*). The author acknowledges that some of these sources are not euphemistic, but rather provocative, ludic or quasi-dysphemistic, proving the subtleties of taboo. Crespo-Fernández ends the chapter by re-examining how the intended euphemistic meaning is reached by illustrating the different steps in the inferential process leading to euphemistic interpretation through the mediation of *ad hoc* inferred meanings.

Chapter four analyzes “Dysphemistic Metaphors” (135-186), which intentionally highlight the offensive traits of a concept. Metaphor proves to be extremely suitable for dysphemistic creation. The author finds the following seven domains for dysphemistic metaphor in his data: ANIMAL, such as SMALL FURRY ANIMALS (e.g., *bunny*), BIRDS (*chick*) and WILD ANIMALS (*foxy*); HUNTING AND RIDING (*prey*), FOOD AND EATING (*starved*), WAR AND VIOLENCE (*battle*), PLAYTHINGS (*doll*), TOOLS AND MACHINES (*screw*) and FLOWERS (*pansy*). The author again exemplifies the inferential process leading to the interpretation of dysphemistic meaning. In this chapter, though, he adds a section to underline the evaluative function of dysphemistic metaphors, based on the premise that the choice of source domain is ideological (Deignan 2010, 361-362). The author builds on heteronormative discourse studies (Cameron and Kulick 2006; Coates 2013) to explain that most of the dysphemistic source domains in the data adhere to a conceptualization of sexuality in terms of violence and dominance, related to hegemonic masculinity. The universes of women’s sexuality and male homosexuality are negatively evaluated, as shown by the dysphemistic metaphors. Through them, the people posting take a belief-based ideological stance and try to persuade their target audience into what they consider to be appropriate social behavior.

In chapter 5, “Conclusions and Final Remarks” (187-192), the author concludes that metaphorical sexual language implies a general view about sexuality as an intense and irrational experience. The highlighting/hiding of particular semantic components determines the x-phemistic function of metaphors, but all those studied are evaluative and persuasive and imply particular entailments. In the context of sexual forums, the interpretation of sexual metaphors is cognitively effortless, because the metaphorical meanings are highly relevant. Finally, the author suggests further lines of research: the cross-linguistic study of sexual metaphors, a focus on sexual metaphor in gay and lesbian communities and the differences between men and women. At the end,

the book also provides two appendices of euphemistic and dysphemistic metaphors classified alphabetically by source domain, subdivided by source concept, linguistic realization, target concept and number of posting.

Overall, Crespo-Fernández's book is an interesting contribution to the field of linguistic taboo and conceptual metaphor and has insightful reflections at the semantic, pragmatic and cultural levels. From the "Introduction" onward, there is a marked interest for contextualizing linguistic use, and the domain of sex in particular, within a broader cultural reality, which gives depth to the analysis. The author often enriches his synchronic analysis with diachronic information. Despite the density of the theoretical notions, the author makes an enormous effort in terms of synthesis and clarification, making the topic accessible even for non-specialized readers. The combination of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Relevance Theory and Appraisal Theory is pertinent and sufficiently justified for his analysis. In spite of the difficulties of his fine-grained source analysis, the author manages to interpret the ideological implications of his data. He takes a critical stance against heteronormativity, going back on various occasions to works on Language and Sexuality that study the creation of heteronormative male dominance through discourse. Thus, even with only modest data collection, the author shows the potential harmfulness of established ideological structures.

I would like to comment briefly on some minor problems. On the theoretical level, the author's focus on metaphor sometimes leads one to think that some general aspects of meaning are exclusively features of metaphor, such as the fact of being perspectival (49). Moreover, following Chamizo Domínguez (2004, 9), he considers x-phemisms as a kind of metaphor, mixing, in my view, different levels—pragmatic and semantic—and generalizing a particular meaning construal to all x-phemistic expressions. There is evidence that other semantic strategies are more productive for x-phemistic expression in some contexts than metaphor—especially, for euphemism—as has been demonstrated in previous studies—such as vagueness, in Grondelaers and Geeraerts (1998), or metonymy, in Pizarro Pedraza (2013). On the interpretative level, apart from some debatable classifications (*adult films* or *sex worker* seem to me rather metonymical), the categorical division of sources into euphemistic or dysphemistic becomes occasionally problematic for the author, who recurs to quasi-dysphemism and quasi-euphemism, when particular cases do not fit the initial classification of the source domain. A confirmatory quantitative analysis on a larger data set would help in reconsidering certain fuzzy cases and in calibrating the relevance of different source domains in sexual conceptualization. Furthermore, it would establish quantitatively the correlation between the sex of the message poster and the preferred source domain, which is currently only qualitatively perceived.

Despite these minor shortcomings, the monograph is a valuable addition to the increasingly productive research trend of studying linguistic taboo from a cognitive perspective (Chamizo Domínguez 2004; Crespo Fernández 2008; Casas Gómez 2009), especially for conceptual metaphor. The author eloquently connects his fine-grained

analysis of source domains with their axiological implications, which establishes a useful starting point for corpus studies on the social indexicalities of linguistic taboo (Christie 2013; Pizarro Pedraza 2015), a perspective that needs urgent attention. What the underlying ideologies of different sexual realities are and who—within a community—uses which sexual metaphor are of course, crucial questions for our time. In line with studies on sexist gender metaphors—such as Koller (2004) or Velasco Sacristán (2005)—Crespo-Fernández's analyses provide critical insights into heteronormative discourses present in metaphorical expressions. If we believe in the power of metaphor as a cognitive device, these results could contribute to understanding gender conflicts, which makes *Sex in Language* a recommendable read both inside and outside of the academic community.

WORKS CITED

- ALLAN, Keith and Kate Burridge. 2006. *Forbidden words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP.
- CAMERON, Deborah and Don Kulick. 2006. "Heteronorms." In *The Language and Sexuality Reader*, edited by Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick, 165-168. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- CARSTON, Roby. 1997. "Enrichment and loosening: complementary processes in deriving the proposition expressed?" *Linguistische Berichte* 8: 103-127.
- CASAS GÓMEZ, Miguel. 2009. "Towards a New Approach to the Linguistic Definition of Euphemism." *Language Sciences* 31 (6): 725-739.
- . 2012. "The expressive creativity of euphemism and dysphemism." *Lexis: E-Journal in English Lexicology* 7: 43-64.
- CHAMIZO DOMÍNGUEZ, Pedro J. 1998. *Metáfora y conocimiento*. Málaga: Analecta Malacitana / U. de Málaga.
- . 2004. "La función social y cognitiva del eufemismo y del disfemismo." *Panace@: Revista de Medicina, Lenguaje y Traducción* 5 (15): 45-51.
- COATES, Jennifer. 2013. "The discursive production of everyday heterosexualities." *Discourse and Society* 24 (5): 536-552.
- CRESPO FERNÁNDEZ, Eliecer. 2008. "Sex-related Euphemism and Dysphemism: An analysis in Terms of Conceptual Metaphor." *Atlantis. Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies* 30 (2): 95-110.
- DEIGNAN, Alice. 2010. "The evaluative properties of metaphors." In *Researching and applying metaphor in the real world*, edited by Graham Low et al., 357-374. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- GRONDELAERS, Stefan and Dirk Geeraerts. 1998. "Vagueness as a euphemistic strategy." In *Speaking of Emotions: Conceptualisation and Expression*, edited by Angeliki Athanasiadou and Elzbieta Tabakowska, 357-374. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

- KOLLER, Veronika. 2004. *Metaphor and Gender in Business Media Discourse. A Critical Cognitive Study*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- KÖVECSES, Zoltan. 2005. *Metaphor in Culture. Universality and Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- . 2010. "Metaphor and Culture." *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*, 2 (2): 197-220.
- LAKOFF, George and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- PIZARRO PEDRAZA, Andrea. 2013. "Tabú y eufemismo en la ciudad de Madrid. Estudio sociolingüístico-cognitivo de los conceptos sexuales." PhD diss., U Complutense of Madrid.
- . 2015. "Who Said Abortion? Semantic Variation and Ideology in Spanish Newspapers' Online Discussions." *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 35 (1): 53-75.
- SHARIFFIAN, Farzad. 2011. *Cultural Conceptualizations and Language*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- SPERBER, Dan and Deirdre Wilson. 1986. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- STEEN, Gerard J. 2011. "The contemporary theory of metaphor: Now new and improved." *Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 9 (1): 26-64.
- VELASCO SACRISTÁN, María Sol. 2005. "A critical cognitive-pragmatic approach to advertising gender metaphors." *Intercultural Pragmatics* 2 (3): 219-252.

Received 7 March 2016

Revised version accepted 20 July 2016

Andrea Pizarro Pedraza holds a post-doctoral scholarship (Move-In) at the Université catholique de Louvain (Belgium). Her area of expertise is the linguistic expression of sexual taboo in Spanish and, more broadly, the interpretation of meaning variation in speech and social networks. She has authored papers on the variation of sexual concepts and has collected the *Madrilenian Spoken Corpus of Sexuality (MadSex)*.

Address: Faculté de Philosophie, Arts et Lettres. Place Blaise Pascal, 1 bte L3.03.33. B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium. Tel.: +32 010474973.