CULTURA, LENGUAJE Y REPRESENTACIÓN / *CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND REPRESENTATION* · ISSN 1697-7750 · VOL VII \ 2009, pp. 77-100
REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS CULTURALES DE LA UNIVERSITAT JAUME I / *CULTURAL STUDIES JOURNAL OF UNIVERSITAT JAUME I*

Of Women, Bitches, Chickens and Vixens: Animal Metaphors for Women in English and Spanish

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ABSTRACT: Speakers of English and Spanish often understand gender differences in terms of animal imagery. It is quite common in both languages to come across metaphors presenting women in the guise of chickens, bitches or vixens. Given the cognitive and social force of metaphor in our understanding of the world and of ourselves, such animal images offer a window on the role given to women in our society. In fact, whether in the form of pets, livestock or wild animals, women tend to be seen as inferior and subordinated to men.

Keywords: animal metaphors, gender, women, sexism, English and Spanish languages.

RESUMEN: Los hablantes de lengua inglesa y española usan a menudo la imaginería animal con el fin de comprender diferencias de género. En ambas lenguas es bastante frecuente encontrar metáforas que presentan a la mujer en la forma de pollitos, perras y zorras. Dada la fuerza social y cognitiva de la metáfora en nuestro entendimiento del mundo y de los seres humanos, dichas imágenes animales reflejan el papel otorgado a la mujer en nuestra sociedad. De hecho, ya sea bajo la apariencia de mascotas, ganado o animales salvajes, existe una tendencia a representar a las mujeres como inferiores y subordinadas al hombre.

Palabras clave: metáforas animales, género, mujeres, sexismo, idiomas inglés y español.

From the start, the gods made women different.
One type is from a pig—a hairy sow
Whose house is like a rolling heap of filth;
And she herself, unbathed, in unwashed clothes,
Reposes on the shit-pile growing fat.
Another type the gods made from a fox:
Pure evil, and aware of everything.
This woman misses nothing: good or bad,
She notices, considers, and declares
That good is bad and bad is good. Her mood
Changes from one moment to the next.
One type is from a dog—a no-good bitch,
A mother through and through; she wants to hear
Everything, know everything, go everywhere,
And stick her nose in everything, and bark
Whether she sees anyone or not.
(Semonides of Amorgos, *Iamb on Women*)

1. Introduction

Metaphor is one of the main mechanisms that contribute to the diffusion and ingraining of folk beliefs. Through metaphors people express a picture of reality or a world view. In fact, most metaphors are not neutral in their evaluative stance (Nunberg, Sag & Watson, 1994; Moon, 1998), but are charged with an ideological or attitudinal component (Fernando, 1996) which reflects a bias on the part of a speech community towards other groups of peoples, mores, situations and events. The attitudes conveyed by means of metaphors originate in what is known as general or universal knowledge, in other words, conventional views attached to the cultural values held by a community (Deignan, 2003; Maalej, 2004; Talebinejad & Dastejerdi, 2005). This communal voice condensed by metaphors is frequently used by speakers as arguments of authority to validate or sanction particular behaviors (Drew & Holt, 1998; Moon, 1998). Seen in this light, metaphors may become covert means of transmitting and perpetuating certain norms for the benefit of a particular speech community (MacArthur, 2005).

Metaphors offer a window on the construction of social identities. Being channels of folk beliefs, many metaphors convey biases in favor of particular social groups that are considered as the normative in detriment to those individuals who do not conform to this group. In the forging of social identity dualisms seem to play a pivotal role and the use of metaphors tends to reinforce the dichotomy between "the self" and "the other" (Lerner & Kaloff, 1999; Coviello & Borgerson,

2004). Speech communities frequently resort to metaphors as a form of showing group alliance but also as a means of linguistic ostracism. Obviously, the role played by language in maintaining group cohesiveness and group solidarity is responsible for the acquisition and use of particular patterns of speech (Labov, 1963). There is indeed a direct correlation between the strength of group membership and conformity in linguistic habits. The institutional and communal voice echoed in a great number of metaphors functions as a centripetal force that keeps the community together in detriment of marginal groups (Berstein, 1977; Mills, 1995).

Certain metaphors, then, act like a signal that discloses someone's status to those privy to the code, increasing this gap between "the self" and "the other", for, to put it in Altman's (1990: 504) words,

> metaphors […] are part of a power structure (or struggle), part of the way in-groups of various sorts delineate their discursive boundaries, name and expel the Other, express and reinforce their bonds, their sense of being "at home" with each other.

Given the nature of the dominant ideology and social ethos of our society, "the self" is represented by the male white heterosexual, leaving other groups such as women, homosexuals, blacks or people of different races in the category of "the other" (*cf* Baker, 1981; Baider & Gesuato, 2005). Reinforcement of this social division is frequently marked via language and a dominant social group may recur to metaphor in order to oppress and belittle "the other", imposing their ideology through linguistic means.

One conventional way of categorizing otherness is through animal metaphors. Figurative expressions drawing on the source domain of animals abound in both English and Spanish. The equation human-animal usually goes hand in hand with negative connotations. Obviously, within the hierarchical organization of the Great Chain of Being (*cf* Lakoff & Turner, 1989) humans stand above animals, and, therefore, by conceptualizing people as animals, the former are attributed with the instinctual qualities of the latter. In fact, animal metaphors are always at hand to disparage marginal groups such as homosexuals, women and immigrants (i.e. "the other"). Gay men, for instance, are commonly referred to as *birds*, *pussycats*, *pájaros* (birds) or *mariposas* (butterflies) whereas the social degradation of women finds its way into language through the figurative usages of *cow*, *bitch*, *zorra* (vixen) or *foca* (seal), in English and Spanish respectively. In like manner, animal metaphors mark ethnic boundaries and the dominance of the white race is preserved in language. The desire to mock or belittle foreigners can be gleaned in several animal names (*cf* Santa Ana, 1999). Examples of linguistic xenophobia include *frogs*, the name given by the British to the French; *pequeño pony* (little pony), the derogatory term used by the Spaniards in reference to the

South-Americans or *mulatto*, denoting a person with one black and one white parent, but whose origin stems from the Portuguese and Spanish diminutive form of the animal name *mula* (mule) (*cf* Carbonell, 1997; Hughes, 2000).

Animal metaphors, therefore, appear to hold a prominent place in the intersection of the heteronormative and the marginal (Hughes, 1991; Nesi, 1995; Baider & Gesuato, 2003). Community views about the inferiority of homosexuals, women and immigrants are verbally rendered by means of metaphor, having acquired a subsumed traditional force. Metaphorical identifications of marginal groups with animals may help express and perpetuate collective evaluations about their role in society, reinforcing stereotypes and, ultimately, pigeonholing people into the normative binary set of "the self" and "the other".

Bearing in mind this social force of metaphor in marking social grouping, this paper tries to explore perceptions of womanhood through animal metaphors. For this purpose, the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor (Lakoff & Turner, 1989) along with ethnobiological (Wierbizcka, 1996; Martsa, 1999, 2003), anthropological (Leach, 1979) and cultural classifications of animals (Harris, 1985) will be used as a framework in comparing figurative uses of animal names applied to females in both English and Spanish.

2. The PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor

Human beings use their knowledge of the natural world in constructing a meaningful social existence and the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor is good proof of it. In fact, animal metaphors are part and parcel of English and Spanish, and people are commonly described as animals of some sort. The straightforward transfer of a name from an animal to a person includes *fox* (someone who is crafty), *pavo* (literally: *turkey*, a clumsy person), *pig* (someone who is dirty) or *cabra* (literally: *goat*, a person who behaves in a crazy way). Similarly, human behavior is frequently understood in terms of animal behavior (Kövecses, 2000; Echevarría, 2003; Kehinde Yusuf, 2005). Such is the case of *wolf down* (to eat greedily), *tener malas pulgas* (literally: *to have bad fleas*, to be bad tempered), *to bark at sb*. (to speak in a sharp angry tone) or *empollar* (literally: *to hatch*, to cram).

As can be inferred from the previous examples, in general terms, the associations of people with animals tend to convey negative evaluations. This can be explained taking into account the folk conception of the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING (Lovejoy, 1936; Tillyard, 1959; Lakoff & Turner, 1989) whose main purpose is to assign a place for everything in the universe in a strict hierarchical system, which is pictured as a chain vertically extended. So, at the bottom stand various types of inanimate objects such as metals, stones and the four elements.

Higher up are various members of the vegetative class, like flowers and plants. Then come animals; then, human beings and, finally, celestial creatures. Finally, at the very top is God. Within each level there are sub-levels defined by different degrees of complexity and power in relation to each other (e.g. within the animal realm the lion is above the rabbit, which, in turn, is above the worm). The Great Chain of Being, thus, presupposes that the natural order of the cosmos is that higher forms of existence dominate lower forms of existence.

This hierarchical organization seems to have important linguistic and conceptual repercussions since when people are equated with animals, they are being degraded and, therefore, the animal-related metaphor is likely to become a vehicle to express undesirable human characteristics (Talebinejad & Dastjerdi, 2005). So in both English and Spanish when a person fails to perform a task which is supposed to be within the human intellectual capacity animal metaphors are always at hand: *goosey*, *burro* (donkey), *ass* or *bestia* (beast) are just a few examples. Likewise, extreme behavior is castigated by degrading the human to the animal realm. Thus, a person who cannot control his appetite becomes a *pig* or *cerdo*; someone who cannot reduce his anger becomes a *beast* or *bestia*, and a person who cannot refrain his sexual urge turns into a *tiger* or *tigre*.

The notion of control, or rather, lack of control seems to be the basis of the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor. The rationale for such a metaphoric theme is that within the binary opposition human/animal what distinguishes the former from the latter is his rational capacity, in other words, his ability to control his behavior. According to this dichotomy, there is an animal inside each person and civilized people are expected to restrain their animal instincts, letting their rational side rule over them. The metaphors HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR (Kövecses, 1988), ANGER IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR (Nayak & Gibbs, 1990), PASSIONS ARE BEASTS INSIDE US (Kövecses, 1988), A LUSTFUL PERSON IS AN ANIMAL (Lakoff, 1987) or CONTROL OF AN UNPREDICTABLE/UNDESIRABLE FORCE IS A RIDER'S CONTROL OF A HORSE (MacArthur, 2005) conceptualize extreme behavior and, therefore, lack of control, by resorting to a common scenario: the animal kingdom.

Nevertheless, although being a lower form of life, animal names are suitable vehicles for describing undesirable habits and attributes. A closer look at metaphorical animal identifications can show that this is not always the case, for certain animal metaphors do capture the positive characteristics of people. Conspicuous examples of animal terms loaded with favorable associations include *toro* (literally: *bull*, a strong virile man), *lion* (a brave person) and *lince* (literally: *lynx*, someone clever), among many others (*cf* Leach, 1964; Deignan, 2003; Echevarría, 2003). The positive import attached to these animal names seems to reflect cultural views. Indeed, the attitudes held by the members of a community towards particular animals may be responsible for endowing the animal name with either positive or negative implications. Needless to say,

cultural values attached to specific animals will vary in time and space, and the same animal can be regarded as good for one culture and harmful for another (Harris, 1985). The privileged position traditionally assigned to bullfighting in the Spanish-speaking world might account for the positive associations conveyed by the metaphoric use of *toro*. By the same token, the good connotations derived from the figurative uses of *lion* and *lince*, in all likelihood, bear witness to the high rank these animals have within the animal kingdom as well as to their physical appearance (i.e. both animals are of a considerable size), living conditions (i.e. these animals are not subject to man's control, for they live in the wild) and behavior (i.e. both animals are ferocious and predators).

In fact, along with cultural attitudes, ethnobiological classifications of animals could help the interpretation of the figurative senses of animal names. These taxonomies usually rely upon five basic parameters, namely, habitat, size, appearance, behavior and relation of the animal to people (Wierbizcka, 1985, 1996; Martsa, 2003). These factors could be informative in understanding the figurative senses of animal names. For instance, returning to the examples with which this paper was introduced, of animal terms applied to immigrants, it is interesting to notice how the aforementioned parameters are key for the encoding of the metaphor. The name *pequeño pony* granted to the South-Americans working in Spain is probably motivated by the size of the animal (i.e. South-Americans tend to be shorter than Spaniards and, obviously, a pony is a small horse) as well as on the relation of the animal to people (i.e. because South-Americans tend to do the work most Spaniards do not want to do, a beast of burden seems appropriate). The reference to the French as *frogs* presumably derives from the relation with the animal as well as with cultural views, since the Britons find this traditional French dish revulsive (*cf* Leach, 1964). Finally, in the case of *mulatto*, its originary sense of *small mule*, also a beast of burden which is a half-breed of a male ass and a female horse, encapsulates the idea that a mulatto is a descendant of a white and a black couple who usually worked as slaves (Hughes, 2000).

3. Metaphorical uses of animal names applied to women

Metaphorical expressions that use animal names as their source domain applicable to people abound in both English and Spanish. Man and woman are often conceptualized as animals of some sort. Men are frequently referred to as *studs*, *bucks*, *wolves*, *toros* (bulls), *zorros* (foxes) and *linces* (lynxes) whereas women are referred to with such metaphors as *chick*, *bird*, *kitten*, *pollita* (chicken) or *gatita* (kitten). In the encoding of the metaphor, the choice of the animal name does not seem arbitrary, but, on the contrary, may shed some light

onto the expectations and beliefs society holds about males and females (Nilsen, 1994). Actually, most animal metaphors used predominantly with men are usually based on the size (big), strength and habitat of the animal (wilderness). Such are the cases of *wolf* and *toro* (bull). Women, by contrast, are seen as small domestic animals such as *hen* or *periquita* (parakeet). These metaphorical identifications might certainly be motivated on physical grounds because, after all, men are generally bigger and stronger than women. Yet, the implications of such metaphors may transcend the solely physical and hint at stereotypical views of manhood and womanhood (Baker, 1981; Nilsen, 1994, 1996; Hines, 1999). In other words, being wild animals, men need freedom and no restraint; however, the fact that women are presented as domestic or livestock animals might suggest that a woman's place should be confined to the domestic arena.

Hence, because metaphors are not divorced from the world of our perceptions and conceptions, but very firmly rooted in it, the study of the underlying assumptions that motivate the mapping of common animal metaphors used in the conceptualization of women may provide a good insight into the role attributed to females by society. In English and Spanish, women are often conceptualized in the guise of *bitches*/*perras*, *chickens*/*pollitas* and *vixens*/*zorras*. These animal images roughly correspond with the three main categories with which women are identified, namely, pets, farmyard and wild animals.

3.1. Women as pets

Within the animal world, pets enjoy a privileged position. In fact, pets are not conceived of as beasts of burden nor are they killed for their meat or skin. On the contrary, pets share the same roof as their owners and their main function is to keep people company. This benevolent attitude towards pets finds its way into the English language, for the very word *pet* is used as a term of endearment.[1]

Perhaps, the most obvious case of prototypical pet is the dog. Also known as "man's best friend", dogs have a reputation for being noble and reliable. Yet, this characteristic of faithfulness does not always hold up since the figurative sense of dog when applied to a female conveys negative connotations, implying ugliness and promiscuity. In fact, the very word *dog* to refer to a woman means *ugly female* or *prostitute* (Eble, 1996). Similar considerations apply to its Spanish equivalent *perro*, which is also used to denote *an ugly female* (Carbonell, 1997).

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1. *Pet* is defined as *a term of endearment for a person* (OED) and as *a person who is treated with unusual kindness or consideration (Webster*).

By the same token, negative traits also prevail in the figurative usage of *cat* and *gata*. In folk understanding cats have a reputation for being independent and even treacherous. These negative connotations might prompt its figurative senses, for in English *cat* denotes *a malicious woman*, *a loose woman* and a *prostitute,* whereas in Spanish *gata* refers to *a surly woman*, *a servant* and *a prostitute* (Partridge, 1970; Carbonell, 1997; *DJHH*[2]).

This awkward correspondence between the most beloved pets and women can be understood in terms of Leach's (1964) link between animal terms and taboo. Leach's categorization of animals rests on two parameters: social distance and edibility. According to him, there exist structural correspondences between the way women are classified as potential sexual partners and the way animals are classified as edible. The taxonomy of women depending on their sexual availability renders the following cline:

1. very close (true sisters): due to culture as well as genetics, sexual relationships within the members of the same family are forbidden (incestuous)
2. Kin but not very close: potential sexual partners
3. Neighbors: highly desirable sexual partners
4. Distant stranger: no social relation is possible and, thus, any kind of sexual relation is non-existent

The above classification finds a set of equivalents with the relation humans have with animals as regards closeness and edibility.

1. Pets: very close and inedible (e.g. dog, cat)
2. Farm animals: although tame, not as close as pets, and sometimes inedible (e.g. hen, cow)
3. Game/field: not tame, but edible (e.g. quail)
4. Wild animals: remote, not subject to human control and, therefore, inedible (e.g. wolf)

The merging of the two classifications can explain the pejorative import attached to dogs and cats. In fact, pets are not classed as potential food in the English- and Spanish-speaking world, and because they are close to man no sexual relationship can be approved of. The fact that *dog* and *cat* serve to refer to women who are either promiscuous or prostitutes may well hint at the idea of illicit sex for, after all, having sex with a prostitute falls outside what is considered moral or correct behavior.

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2. *DJHH* stands for *Diccionario de la Jerga de Habla Hispana*.

In addition to this, the behavior of cats might also prompt its figurative usage (Partridge, 1993). Indeed, cats are animals typically associated with the night. Hence, because they are nocturnal creatures the associations with prostitution might be established. Moreover, in Spanish, one of the figurative senses of *cat* denotes a female servant.[3] This usage may be based on the movement cats make. The process of crawling is linguistically instantiated in the Spanish metaphorical verb *gatear*, which derives from the animal name *gato*. Certainly, this crawling movement of the cat resembles the position servants have to adopt when cleaning (i.e. crouching when cleaning the floors).

In the case of English, another hypothesis for the relationship between these two pets with prostitutes and ugly women arises from historical causes. During the witchcraft trials in 17th-century England witches were credited with supernatural powers that allowed them to assume the form of different animals, the most common ones being toads, but also cats and dogs (*cf* Leach, 1964; Sax, 2001). From this belief might stem the associations of dogs and cats with unpleasant females.

Within the generic terms *cat*/*gata* and *dog*/*perro* there are subcategories of linguistic relevance. Sex discrimination is also made among pets. A dog has its counterpart in the largely taboo *bitch*/*perra* whereas *cat* is assumed to be female in English, its male equivalent being *tomcat*. *Bitch* is, in all probability, one of the most common terms of opprobrium for a woman, condensing the senses of malicious, spiteful and bossy (Hughes, 1991). The masculine *tomcat*, however, presents no figurative usage and in actual fact the term is falling out of use, being replaced by *male cat* when sex distinction is needed. As regards Spanish, the masculine term *gato* (male cat) does not apply to women whereas the female dog *perra* denotes *a despicable woman* and *a prostitute* (*DRAE*[4]).

More striking, however, is the fact that even the infant words *puppy*/*perrita* and *gatita* (kitten) as well as the baby language *bow-wow* and *pussy* are used as terms of abuse for a woman. Pertaining to the dog family, *a bowser*, *bow-wow* and *mud-puppy* are used in American college slang for an ugly woman (Eble, 1996) whereas the female baby dog *perrita* also refers to *a promiscuous young girl* or *a prostitute* (*DJHH*). In the same line, *kitten* and *gatita* are applied to *sexy young women* and *promiscuous women*, whereas *pussy* falls into the language of obscenity, denoting the female genitalia. The former seems to be motivated by the stereotypical image of the baby animal playing with a ball of wool, which might hint at the idea of playfulness, therefore, reducing women to the category

3. This sense of *cat* as servant is not found in Peninsular Spanish, but in some varieties of South-American Spanish (*cf Diccionario de la Jerga de Habla Hispana*).
4. *DRAE* stands for *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*.

of sexual playthings, whereas the latter seems to be based on visual grounds, since the fur of the cat resembles the female pubic hair (*cf* Baker, 1981; Chamizo & Sánchez, 2000).

Another animal commonly kept as a pet is the bird. Common species of domestic birds include the canary and the parakeet. Like the previous pet names analyzed, these bird metaphors also concentrate the senses of small size, youth, domesticity and entertainment. In English, the very word *bird* is defined as *a girl* or *a young woman* (*Webster*). The metaphor is usually charged with affective connotations, being commonly used as a term of endearment. This positive evaluation appears to have its roots in the amorous disposition of the animal as well as in the folk tradition that associates birds with symbols of love (*cf* Talebinejad & Dastejerdi, 2005). In fact, the state of being in love of a couple is metaphorically instantiated by resorting to bird names such as *lovebirds* or *tortolitos* (turtledoves) in both English and Spanish. Yet, in spite of this, the Spanish equivalent of *bird*, that is, *pájara* does not hold any hint of affection, since the term is applied to *a cunning woman* and even to *a prostitute* (Carbonell, 1997). Such a reversal might respond to a long cultural tradition that associates sex with bird imagery. Already in the Classical world, the Romans referred to the lips of the vulva as *wings* and the feathers of the bird were a common metaphor for the phallus, which reminds one that the Spanish word for *penis* is *pene*, which comes from the Latin name of a long feather *pena*. Besides, there seems to be a connection between sexual intercourse and flying, presumably motivated by the physical appearance of the penis when erected. Actually, in German the verb *vögeln* (to fuck) stems from *vogel*, meaning *bird* (*cf* Flórez, 1969; MacGrady, 1984).

Within the generic bird species, canary and parakeet/periquita are also used metaphorically in the conceptualization of women. *Canary* denotes a young woman, being also used in US college slang to refer to a female student, particularly in the collocation *canary dorm* to denote a female student residence. Similar considerations apply to *parakeet* and its Spanish equivalent *periquita*, whose figurative senses are also used as practically synonymous with young women (Eble, 1996; Carbonell, 1997). The notion of deprivation of individuality seems to underlie such metaphorical identifications, especially noticeable in the case of *canary dorm*. In fact, by presenting a female student residence as a place full of birds, women are being robbed of their individuality. Actually, the notions of lack of individuality and unimportance very often find their way in language through bird names. Suffice it to consider idiomatic expressions of the type *for the birds*, meaning worthless. In addition, the twittering and chattering sounds made by birds might also hint at the stereotypical view of women as chatterboxes. Indeed, confusing and non-sensical talk are frequently channeled by means of bird names such as *hablar como un loro* (literally: *to talk like a parrot*) or *to talk*

like a magpie. Curiously, both English and Spanish resort to *parakeet*/*periquita* in the representation of women. Within the bird species, the parakeet belongs to the parrot family and, needless to say, the parrot is the clearest epitome of bird associated with non-sensical talk, because parrots, without knowing what they say, are able to mimic people's words (*cf* Sommer & Weiss, 1996).

The repertoire of metaphors designating women as pets reveals a clear imbalance in favor of terms of abuse. Indeed, with the exception of *pet*, *bird* and in certain contexts *kitten*/*gatita*, all the aforementioned metaphors analyzed convey negative evaluations. Moreover, interestingly, even within the favorable animal terms, only *kitten*/*gatita* is restricted to females, since *bird* and *pet* are ambisexual in nature.[5] In the conceptualization of women as pets, youth and small size appear to play a determinant role in the encoding of the metaphor, implying immaturity (the lack of age involves inexperience) and helplessness (unlike other animals, pets need to be looked after by people). Furthermore, the physical surroundings of pets, whose whole life spins around the house, might imply the idea of domesticity. This confinement to the domestic arena is particularly remarkable in the case of bird names, since birds are kept in cages.

3.2. Women as farmyard animals

Animals are bred for utility, sport, pleasure or research, and farm animals, no doubt, fall in the first category. Unlike pets, whose main function is to entertain and provide company, livestock animals exist to be exploited and eaten. They render service to man, either by helping in farm labor or by producing foods (e.g. milk, eggs, and meat). These two characteristics yield the factors of servitude and edibility, factors which will be central to the metaphoric identifications of women with farm animals.

As far as servitude is concerned, there appears to be a strong link between the female role in reproduction and factory farmed animals. On using farmyard animals, women are depicted as creatures that perform the strictly animal functions of producing and rearing offspring (Shanklin, 1985; Brennan, 2005). Due to biological functions women are likely to be viewed as *cow*/*vaca*, *heifer*/*vaquilla*, *mare*/*yegua, mule*/*mula*, *filly*/*jaca*, *sow*/*cerda*, *nag* and *rabbit*/*coneja*. Except for *rabbit*, all the terms listed refer to big mammals. Size indeed seems to be a key component in crediting the animal name with positive or negative connotations and, in general terms, the names of small animals tend to comprise

5. *Pet* denotes *an indulged and usually spoiled child* and *a term of endearment for a person* (OED), whereas *bird* is applied to *a young person of either sex*, *a maiden*, *a girl*, and *a man* (OED).

a more condescending attitude than those of a considerable size (Hines, 1999; Halupka-Rešetar, 2003). The names of big animals usually imply fatness and ugliness, as observed in the figurative usages of *cow*/*vaca* (an ugly fat woman), *heifer*/*vaquilla* (ugly female), *mare*/*yegua* (ugly female), *mule*/*mula* (a stubborn or ugly female), *jaca* (an ugly man-like woman) and *nag* (*an old woman who habitually complains*). The only exception is found in *filly* (a lively young girl). A young female horse, *filly* commingles the senses of big size and youth. However, it seems that the age factor has a heavier clout than the size, for *filly* denotes a young woman with no connotations of fatness or ugliness (*OED*; *DRAE*; *DJHH*; *María Moliner*; Carbonell, 1997).

Furthermore, the figurative senses of *heifer*/*vaquilla*, *mare*/*yegua*, *jaca* and *nag* may also convey sexual innuendoes, since they may well refer to *a prostitute*, *a promiscuous woman* or *a woman with whom sexual intercourse is wanted* (*OED*; *DJHH*; Baker, 1981; Carbonell, 1997; Coviello & Borgerson, 2004). Certainly, the fact that these animals can be ridden by people might evoke the image of mounting or getting upon a coital partner, therefore, hinting at the metaphor SEX IS RIDING (Chamizo & Sánchez, 2000), which portrays the man in the role of the *rider* that *mounts*, *rides* or *straddles* the woman.

The case of rabbit differs from the previous ones in the sense that rabbits are of a small size and, therefore, the animal name is likely to be charged with positive connotations. Being known for their reproductive capacity, the animal term *rabbit* is used to refer to a woman who has given birth to many children. In Spanish the same definition applies to the figurative sense of the female rabbit *coneja*, for its male counterpart *conejo* denotes the female genitalia, probably because of the resemblance between this furry animal and the salience of pubic hair (*cf* Chamizo & Sánchez, 2000). This strong sexual component is especially noticeable in the baby name *bunny*/*conejita*, which denotes an attractive young woman (*Webster*; *María Moliner*; Carbonell, 1997).

Another animal used in the representation of women is the pig. In both English and Spanish *pig* and its female counterpart *sow*/*cerda* are metaphorically used as terms of opprobrium for a woman, implying fatness, dirtiness, ugliness and even promiscuity (*OED*; *DJHH*). To explain this evaluative stance, it is pertinent to recall Leach's (1964) discussion of animal terms and verbal abuse, and its relation to taboo. According to Leach, certain animals that do not fit easily into categories such as pets, farmyard, field or wild animals become suitable candidates for verbal abuse and, therefore, the use of their name for a person constitutes a serious insult or offence. In this sense, in both English and Spanish *sow*/*cerda* and its male counterpart *pig* are clear cases of uneasy category membership because the pig and sow are fed with the same food as people, but they end up on the table. Besides, the physical appearance of the animal (i.e. fat) as well as its habitat (i.e. pigs live in a pigsty and like mud) may account for

the associations with fatness and dirtiness. Finally, the idea of promiscuity may derive from the symbolism which associates cleanliness with purity and dirtiness with immorality (*cf* Crystal, 1995; Cacciari et al., 2004).

Within the farmyard ambience, bird names are also a rich source for metaphors: *chicken*/*pollita*, *biddy*, *hen*/*gallina*, *quail*, *pigeon*/*paloma*, *pichón* (baby pigeon) and *pava* (female turkey) are just a few examples used figuratively in the conceptualization of women (*cf* Cruz & Tejedor, 2006). Judging these animals on the basis of appearance and relation to people, one soon discovers that apart from being of a small size, all these animals are mainly reared for consumption. Certainly, these birds constitute a common source of nourishment and, as already mentioned, edibility appears to be a significant factor in the encoding of animal metaphors (*cf* Leach, 1964; Lang, 1887). In fact, there seems to be a correlation between eating and human desire vertebrating the metaphor DESIRE IS HUNGER (Lakoff, 1987; Kövecses, 2002; Gibbs et al., 2004), by means of which desire is understood as hunger for food and, consequently, the object of desire is represented as food. Speakers of both English and Spanish frequently structure their experiences of desire in terms of hunger, and feeling hungry and eating are frequently used to express sexual desire, sexual satisfaction and to evaluate the potential of a sexual partner (*cf* Emanatian, 1995; Gibbs et al., 2004; Baider & Gesuato, 2005).

Hence, in so far as they are food, the figurative use of the previous bird names may hide sexual appetite or desirability. Such are the cases of *chicken*/*pollita*, *quail*, *pigeon*/*paloma* and *pichón* (baby pigeon), which denote women who are young and usually attractive. Yet, the opposite can be said of *biddy*, *hen*/*gallina* and *pava* (female turkey), which do not hold any hint of physical beauty, but, by contrast, suggest old and middle-aged women who are ugly, fussy or clumsy. This reversal might be explained in relation to edibility and age. Indeed, the youth of an animal is likely to prompt positive figurative usages of the animal name, presumably because of the connotations of helplessness and care attached to offspring (*cf* Hines, 1999; Halupka-Rešetar, 2003). Actually, several couples of animal metaphors bear witness to the negative views on old women. Compare, for instance, *old nag* as opposed to *filly*, *chicken*/*pollita* as opposed to *hen*/*gallina* and *kitten*/*gatita* as opposed to *cat*/*gata* (Nilsen, 1994). Furthermore, from the point of view of edibility, the younger the animal, the tender its flesh, and bearing in mind that the desired person is frequently conceptualized in the guise of food, the names of young animals, in all likelihood, will be endowed with favorable overtones.

Phonetic considerations might also play a major role in the choice of bird names in the conceptualization of women in English (Leach, 1964). Owing to associations in their phonetic vicinity, certain animal names are likely to evoke obscene words. The fact that several bird names used to refer to a woman are

fowl might hint at its homophone *foul*, meaning *filthy*. This idea of dirt might resonate in certain bird names, which could explain that during the 17th century fowl names were common for prostitutes. Such was the case of *partridge*, *pheasant*, and *quail*. Although their figurative sense of *prostitute* has fallen out of use, *quail* is still used as slang in The States to denote a woman who is still a minor and whose seduction may involve going to prison (Evans & Evans, 1957; Partridge, 1949, 1970).

The representation of women in the guise of livestock animals also shows a clear dichotomy in terms of praise and abuse. On the one hand, one encounters a host of terms ridiculing women who are not beautiful (e.g. *mare*/*yegua*), slim (e.g. *cow*/*vaca*) or young (e.g.: *hen*/*gallina*) and, on the other hand, there is a series of animal names presenting women as sexually attractive (e.g. *filly*, *chick*/*pollita*). Size and age seem determinant variables for prompting positive figurative usages, and whereas youth and small size usually go hand in hand with positive associations (e.g.: *filly*), getting older and fatter is usually cause of derision (e.g. *nag*). Servitude and edibility appear to be at the core of these animal metaphors. In fact, the majority of farmyard animals are exploited for man's advantage, either as beasts of burden (e.g. *mule*/*mula*) or as a source of nourishment (e.g. *sow*/*cerda*, *chicken*/*pollita*). Whatever their function, however, there seems to be a conflation of food and bearing burdens with sexual desire reinforced by the co-occurrence of the metaphors SEX IS RIDING and DESIRE IS HUNGER (e.g. *jaca*, *chick*, *pichón*).

3.3. Women as wild animals

Unlike pets and farmyard animals, which largely depend on man for their survival, wild animals enjoy complete freedom. They are not subject to man's control, nor do they need him for food, shelter or protection. On the contrary, wild animals are independent, able to survive on their own and very often pose a threat to man.

As has been seen, the set of animal images used for women usually present them as small and helpless animals, in need of care and protection and whose main function is to provide entertainment, service or food. The conceptualization of women with wild animals, however, does not adjust to this pattern. In fact, instead of cats, dogs, chicks, hens or cows, wild animals turn the tables for no longer are they the lovable or useful animals that provide company or can be exploited for man's advantage; but they are menacing, that is, dangerous.

A wild animal often employed for a female in English is "coyote". Physically, coyotes stand out for their ugliness, a trait which remains in its metaphoric use for women. In fact, *coyote* usually appears in the collocation *coyote ugly* to refer

to an unattractive female (*UD*[6]). Besides, when caught in a trap, coyotes usually chew their leg in order to escape, a behavior which motivates the metaphorical expression *coyote date*. Hence, *coyote date* commingles the senses of ugliness and need to escape, referring to "a woman who is so ugly that when her companion for the night wakes up the next morning and she is asleep on his arm he would rather chew off his arm than wake her up" (Eble, 1996: 100).

The fox is also a clear epitome of wild animal. Apart from being relatively big and predators, foxes stand out for their artfulness and smartness, as old sayings bear witness to (e.g. *as cunning as a fox*/*tan astuto como un zorro*). Indeed, foxes are paradigms of intelligence and slyness. Yet, none of these qualities are retained in its metaphorical usage, for, when applied to a female, *fox* means *an attractive young woman* (*OED*). Such figurative use can be explained within Leach's (1964) link between taboo and animal names. In fact, like in the previous case of the pig, the fox is one of those animals difficult to classify because, although wild, it is also treated as game. In fact, the fox is both predator and prey for, although it preys on other animals, foxes are also hunted. Casting foxes on the role of the prey might make sense within the generic metaphor of the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING in which people, being higher forms of life, have complete control over animals. Seen in this light, then, the portrayal of women as foxes seems to echo the image of fox-hunting for, according to Baker (1981: 169), "[t]he fox is an animal that men chase, and hunt, and kill for sport. If women are conceived of as foxes, then they are conceived of as prey that is fun to hunt". Besides, the sexual component encapsulated under the metaphoric *fox* seems to be the off-shoot of the more generic metaphor SEX IS HUNTING (Chamizo & Sánchez, 2000) by means of which sex is concealed in terms of hunting. In fact, it is not uncommon to find animal metaphors that confer women a passive role as regards sexual matters, and, as already seen, from the SEX IS RIDING metaphor the figurative usages of *heifer*/*vaquilla*, *mare*/*yegua* or *jaca* also presented women as the one to be mounted. Similarly, with the SEX IS HUNTING metaphor the man is *the hunter* who hunts the *prey* (i.e. the woman). The man *goes hunting* whereas the woman waits to *be hunted* or *shot*.

The same sexual nuances are seen at work in some of the metaphorical usages of the female counterpart of the fox in English, for *vixen* is also defined as *a flirty woman and an attractive woman* (*UD*). Once again, the metaphorical conceptualization of women as vixens places women in the role of the prey that men hunt. Less favorable overtones are also registered for another figurative use of *vixen* and its Spanish equivalent *zorra*. V*ixen* denotes *an ill-tempered quarrelsome woman* (*OED*) whereas its Spanish equivalent *zorra* means *a*

6. *UD* stands for *Urban Dictionary*.

cunning woman, a promiscuous woman and even *a prostitute* (*DRAE*, *DJHH*). These negative traits seem to be based on the main underlying assumption motivating the broad metaphor PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, that is, the notion of control. Indeed, unlike the previous images of pets and livestock animals, which present women as domesticated and tamed, that is, as animals subject to man's control, vixens and wild animals in general enjoy complete freedom. Interestingly, this idea of being able to survive without man's aid is charged with a negative import for, in the case of English, strong and dominant women are labeled as *vixens* whereas reversing the submissive role of the prey traditionally assigned to females in the sexual arena is linguistically castigated by the negative associations attached to the metaphorical *zorra* in Spanish (*cf* Fernández & Jiménez, 2003).

As a matter of fact, the names of predatory animals are frequently employed to refer to females who take the reins as far as relationships are concerned. Consider, for instance, the animal names *lioness*/*leona*, *tigress*/*tigresa* and *loba* (a she-wolf) whose figurative senses apply to *sexually active women*, *promiscuous women* and even *prostitutes* (*UD*, *DJHH*). Relationships are often conceptualised in terms of hunting and, as seen, most animal terms metaphorically portray the man in the role of the hunter, whereas the woman assumes the passive role of the prey. In the encoding of animal metaphors, it appears that the event and its participants are almost always presented as the agent that performs whereas the female adopts the role of recipient, patient, senser or marginal agent (Halliday, 1985). The transitivity analysis of many metaphorical expressions likening animals with women present the latter as the one to be tamed, domesticated or hunted and, as is well attested, in the different networks of euphemisms that conceal sexual intercourse in terms of hunting, and riding, the woman is traditionally the passive one (*cf* Chamizo & Sánchez, 2000). Nonetheless, when the roles are reversed, that is, the woman takes on the active role of the man, she is portrayed as a menacing animal, as though implying the inappropriateness of such power.

Within the wild category, birds also provide a prolific source of metaphors. *Crow*/*cuervo*, *magpie*/*urraca* and *parrot*/*cotorra-loro* are used metaphorically to refer to females. Judging these animals on the basis of appearance, one soon discovers that none of the terms listed are birds associated with intelligence (as is the owl) or nobility (as are the hawk or the eagle); neither are they standards of beauty (as is the case of the swan). On the contrary, the bird names used in the conceptualization of women stand out for their ugliness and chatter. In English *crow* is defined as *a girl or a woman who is old or ugly*, *a promiscuous woman* and even *a prostitute* (*OED*; *UD*) whereas its Spanish equivalent *cuervo* also refers to *an ugly and usually old female* (Carbonell, 1997). The physical traits of the animal certainly map onto unattractive females whereas the idea of being old and prostitution might stem from the connotations of darkness attached to this bird. Indeed, in the folklore tradition crows are seen as portents or harbingers of doom

or death because of their dark plumage, unnerving calls and their tendency to eat carrion (*cf* Dorson, 1972). Besides, the dark plumage of the crow might also evoke the color of the clothes of old women, especially due to mourning. The sense of prostitution, on the other hand, might have its origin in cultural views linking immorality to darkness. In fact, as seen with one of the figurative senses of *cat*/*gata*, nocturnal creatures are common vehicles to refer to prostitutes. Also of the crow family, the magpie is a dark-feathered bird frequently associated with death, which might account for one of its metaphorical senses, for in both English and Spanish *magpie* and *urraca* denote *an ugly old woman* (*OED*; *DJHH*). Furthermore, magpies, like parrots, are well-known for their noisy chattering, which explains their metaphorical use in English and Spanish since *magpie*/*urraca* and *parrot*/*cotorra-loro* refer to women who engage in idle talk or talk too much (*OED*; *DJHH; María Moliner*).

Reinforcement of this stereotypical view of women as idle talkers is also achieved by means of the figurative use of the animal name *hyena*/*hiena*. Apart from their unpleasant physical appearance, hyenas are known for a chirping, birdlike bark that resembles the sound of hysterical human laughter. These two characteristics of ugliness and strident speech are transferred in their metaphorical uses, for in English and Spanish alike *hyena* and *hiena* denote *ugly* and *vociferous women* (*UD*; *DJHH*).

Several metaphors used in the representation of women originate in sea animals. Some of them include *seal*/*foca*, *whale*/*ballena* and *whalrus*/*morsa*, whose metaphorical senses are applied to ugly fat women (*UD*; *DJHH*). From the point of view of appearance, all these animals stand out for their big size, which makes them suitable candidates for becoming derogatory terms. Indeed, as seen before, the size of the animal seems responsible for endowing the animal name with favorable or unfavorable overtones, and, whereas small animals tend to arouse feelings of protection and affection, creatures of a considerable size are usually charged with negative connotations, probably because of man's difficulty to exercise control over them due to their superior strength. Weakness in an animal, then, appears to be a positive trait for endowing the animal name with favorable overtones. Obviously, the smaller the size and the lesser the strength of the animal give man a decided advantage in the successful application of physical force.

The set of animal images portraying women as wild creatures shows a clear imbalance towards terms of abuse. In fact, nearly all the wild animals with which women are metaphorically identified convey negative evaluations. It appears that in the encoding of the metaphor the physical traits of these animals (i.e. ugliness and fatness) as well as their relation to people (i.e. they are not subject to man's control and may pose a threat) seem to be highlighted whereas other

positive qualities such as power, independence, intelligence or craftiness are not transferred in the figurative use.

4. Conclusion

Our most common wisdom often comes from the animal kingdom, from which we have been drawing instructive metaphors throughout history. *Perro ladrador, poco mordedor*, *A perro flaco todo son pulgas*, *The early bird catches the worm* or *Birds of a feather flock together* are just a few examples of the way in which we understand ourselves from just two species.[7] In fact, people have often resorted to animals as a way of explaining human behavior, human feelings and even human relations (Kövecses, 2000).

Animal metaphors not only have a cognitive basis, but are also culturally motivated, that is, they reflect the attitudes and beliefs held by a particular community towards certain animal species, and, therefore, may vary from culture to culture, in time and space (Deignam, 2003). This cultural dimension of animal metaphors makes them suitable vehicles for the transmission and perpetuation of social beliefs for the benefit of a particular speech community. Certainly, within the folk conception of the Great Chain of Being, humans stand above animals, and what distinguishes the former from the latter is that people are governed by rationality and, therefore, are able to control their impulses. This issue of control is, no doubt, one of the main pillars of a community, because, for any given society to work, there must be rules and regulations which safeguard the rights and interests of its members. Hence, because animals behave out of instinct, the metaphorical usage of animal names proves very effective to inform the necessity of restraining certain types of conduct which, unless regulated, may be harmful to group interests (MacArthur, 2005).

Animal metaphors, then, offer glimpses of social practices. Drawing a clear boundary between the rational human and the instinctual beast, animal metaphors are often used in English and Spanish to degrade particular social groups that are regarded as inferior or marginal. Obviously, taking into account that within the English- and Spanish-speaking world, the male white heterosexual is assumed to be the norm, that is, "the self", any other social group deviating from this, such as women, homosexuals or immigrants will fall into the category of "the other".

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7. In Spanish *perro ladrador, poco mordedor* (literally: a barking dog does not usually bite) may translate as *his bark is worse than his bite,* whereas *a perro flaco todo son pulgas* (literally: a thin dog only has fleas) might correspond with *it never rains but it pours*.

Belittlement of such "other", as has been seen, is often carried out via animal metaphors, as though implying the inappropriateness of their behavior.

As far as the conceptualization of women is concerned, speakers of English and Spanish seem to understand and experience gender differences through animal imagery. In fact, portrayals of women in the guise of animals are part and parcel of both languages. Underlying these metaphorical identifications is the notion of control. Indeed, whether in the form of pets, livestock or wild animals, women are seen as in dire need of subjugation, domestication and tight control. This notion of control ultimately hints at stereotypical views of womanhood, implying the idea that some kind of restraint needs to be exercized upon women. Indeed, as pointed out, weakness in an animal appears to be a favorable trait for crediting the animal name with positive connotations (e.g: *chicken*/*pollita*) whereas the names of strong animals are loaded with negative associations (e.g.: *vixen*/*zorra*). Certainly, one might think that such correspondence could be based on physical traits, since, when compared to men, women are usually weaker. Actually, several animal metaphors may bear witness to the physical differences between the female and male bodies, since small size is another factor usually taken as positive for the prompting of animal metaphors for women, as opposed to animals of a considerable size, which seem to convey pejorative evaluations (e.g.: *kitten-gatita*/*cow-vaca*).

Yet, after examining several animal names used in the conceptualization of females, it appears that, more often than not, animal metaphors do reinforce the stereotypical view of the female sex. Actually, as these pages have tried to show, youth, slenderness and beauty are the most desirable qualities in a woman and, thus, the names of offspring, weak, small and nice animals are usually charged with positive connotations (e.g. *kitten*/*gatita*, *chicken*/*pollita*, *bird*). On the other hand, getting older, fatter and uglier are cause of derision in the case of women, which might explain the negative import attached to the names of animals of a considerable size which are not paradigms of beauty (e.g.: *mare*/*yegua*). Besides, in terms of their habitat, it appears that, whereas the names of certain pet and farmyard animals carry positive connotations, all the animals within the wild category transmit undesirable associations. Obviously, from the human perspective, pet and farmyard animals are domesticated and tamed, depend on man for their survival and do not pose any threat. Wild animals, by contrast, are not subject to man's control and are menacing. Hence, by portraying women in the guise of pets and farm animals, the idea of domesticity is being highlighted, evoking the patriarchal view that a woman's place should be confined to the domestic arena. Leaving their designated domestic sphere, however, is linguistically castigated by endowing the names of wild animals with negative associations. Finally, as far as the social role is concerned, pet and farm animals stress the idea that women are conceived to entertain and provide company, in

the case of the former, and to render service to man either by providing food or begetting children, in the case of the latter.

The animal metaphors analyzed do offer a window on the construction of social identities as well as paving the way for gendered discourse. In fact, as Vygotsky (1978) stated, our sense of identity is forged from our interaction with others and it is in this exchange of metaphors or social etiquettes that individuals receive their social categories from which they will fashion their identities. Indeed, the entrenchment of these linguistic metaphors could be attributed to the status or power that the dominant social group represented by the white heterosexual male has held in the course of history in the two speech communities under study. As sociolinguists like Labov (1963) and Milroy (1987) have found, the introduction, maintenance and perpetuation of linguistic forms seems to respond to the power exercised by the privileged position a particular social group has within the community. In this regard, because, borrowing MacArthur's (2005) metaphor, THE SELF IS RELEVANT OTHERS, the members of a speech community will conform to the behavior and mores of their peers, adapting themselves linguistically to the speech of their relevant others. Therefore, through these animal metaphors, people are linguistically socialized and led to accept patriarchal views about the role of women.

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