FROM *SEX AND THE CITY* TO *SEX EDUCATION*: SEX-RELATED METAPHORS IN TV SERIES

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Abstract: This paper focuses on sex-related metaphors in two TV series, *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) and *Sex Education* (2019-2023). Although there are major differences between the two series, both are popular and successful TV series and were, at the time they were released, considered as transgressive and progressive when tackling the taboo topic of sex. Although it has been receding, it nevertheless remains a partially taboo topic that characters speak of by means of X-phemisms (Allan and Burridge 1991; 2006). After a brief study of the use of literal language (using WMatrix5, Rayson 2009), this paper focuses on metaphorical X-phemisms, as metaphor arguably is the most prominent mechanism of lexical semantic change and is a particularly productive tool when creating new euphemisms to mention taboo topics (Crespo Fernández 2006a; 2008; 2015). The study seeks to determine whether the conceptual sex metaphors in *Sex and the City* and *Sex Education* reflect the perceived differences in the conceptualisation of sex in the two series, since *Sex Education* has been argued to be more inclusive. 66 occurrences were collected in the first two seasons of *Sex and the City* and 68 in the first two seasons of *Sex Education* (MIP, see Pragglejaz group 2007. The metaphorical expressions were then classified according to the source domain with which the correspondences are established (CMT, see Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The results are similar in the two TV series. The main conclusions that can be drawn are that even if there is some evolution in the language of sex in general, the source domains used for sex-related conceptual metaphors are so deeply anchored in our cognitive systems that dysphemistic, violent, dehumanising metaphors undergo very slow change.

Keywords: dysphemism; euphemism; metaphor; *Sex and the City*; *Sex Education*; sex-related metaphor; taboo; TV series.

1. Introduction[1]

Sex and the City (1998-2004) is an American TV series created by Darren Star and broadcast on HBO, while *Sex Education* (2019-2023) is a British TV series created by Laurie Nunn and available on Netflix. Although there are major differences between the two series – such as their countries, networks and years of origin, the number of episodes, or the age of the protagonists – both are popular and successful comedies and were, at the time they were released, considered as transgressive and progressive when tackling the taboo of sex. In both of them, sex is the central topic, often treated humorously, and the main character is considered as a sex expert: in *Sex and the City*, Carrie writes a column entitled "Sex and the City" in a fictitious newspaper, the *New York Star*, while in *Sex Education*, Otis gives sex advice to his classmates in exchange for money.

Sex and the City is argued to have largely contributed to normalising the use of frank, derogatory sexual language on television and more generally paved the way for sex to be addressed unreservedly on television (Brey 2016). Nevertheless, from a contemporary point of view, the series can be criticised for its stereotypical, cisgender representations and its lack of diversity, among other aspects. On the other hand, *Sex Education* displays much diversity and inclusiveness and addresses different topics, including LGBTQIA+ sexuality, a topic that was merely superficially tackled in *Sex and the City*.

Although sex is nowadays extensively represented and mentioned on TV, it nevertheless remains a (partially) taboo topic that characters speak about by means of X-phemisms (words and expressions that are used to refer to taboo topics, ranging from euphemisms to dysphemisms, their negative counterpart (Allan and Burridge 1991; 2006). This paper focuses on metaphorical X-phemisms, as metaphor is arguably the most prominent mechanism of lexical semantic change and is a particularly productive tool when creating new euphemisms to mention taboo topics (Crespo Fernández 2015). Do the conceptual sex metaphors in the first two seasons of *Sex and the City* and *Sex Education* reflect the perceived differences in the conceptualization of sex in the two series? Can any conclusions regarding sex-related metaphors be drawn from that? These are the two questions I will attempt to answer after having expounded the theoretical framework and methodology.

2. Sex metaphors: in between euphemism and dysphemism

Sex is generally defined as a societal and linguistic taboo (Allan and Burridge 1991; 2006; Crespo Fernández 2015). The origins of the taboo dimension of the domain can be accounted for by several factors (Terry 2019a: 95), including the fact that sex is linked to the naked body, which is tabooed in most religions, including the Judeo-Christian tradition as well as Islam. Religions have imposed restrictions over sexual relations for centuries, for example forbidding sexual

relations out of wedlock. This has had a considerable impact on the conceptualisation of sex and the censorship surrounding its public mention. Additionally, sex is connected to the notion of bodily effluvia, which are tabooed as well and considered "revolting to all our senses" (Allan and Burridge 1991: 52). Taboo domains tend to be spoken of euphemistically, and sex is diachronically one of the first taboo topics that required resorting to euphemisms (Epstein 1985: 56), but also the one that arguably gave birth to the highest number of euphemisms. Keyes (2010: 57) stated that "[s]exual activity could be the all-time most popular inspiration for euphemisms" and underlined their remarkable creativity, while Allan and Burridge (1991: 96) argued that as a consequence of the proliferation of sex-related euphemisms, "[t]he degree of synonymy for genitalia and copulation has no parallel elsewhere in the English lexicon".

In contemporary Western societies, however, "the censorship surrounding sex has progressively relaxed since the 1960s" (Crespo Fernández 2015: 3), as is evidenced from the existence of TV series such as *Sex and the City* and *Sex Education*, and sex has progressively lost part of its tabooness. Nevertheless, it has left an imprint (Santaemilia 2005; Crespo Fernández 2015) which is still linguistically present in the high degree of synonymy (Allan and Burridge 1991: 96). The extensive lexicon related to sex in the English language is an indicator of what remains of its taboo nature. Additionally, sexuality still constitutes an intimate subject and although discussing it with close acquaintances is socially acceptable, mentioning it in public or to strangers can constitute a face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson 1987)[2], which may explain why the subject is still sometimes avoided or spoken of figuratively. Consequently, the language of sex abounds with ad-hoc creations, lexical and semantic neologisms which coexist with lexicalised figurative language and literal language.

Studying the language of sex and its euphemisms is a means of improving our understanding of the changing taboo nature of sex as it constitutes "[a]n excellent way to determine what we find embarrassing" and "[w]hat topics we consider taboo" (Keyes 2010: 4). As metaphor has been argued to be the most prominent mechanism of lexical semantic change and to be a particularly productive tool to create new euphemisms to mention taboo topics (Crespo Fernández 2015), this paper focuses on sex-related metaphors. It should however by no means be assumed that metaphor is the only productive tool for the creation of new sex euphemisms, as many other semantic, lexical, morphosyntactic and paralinguistic word-formation processes can be resorted to (Terry 2019a: 143-167).

A few studies have focused on sex-related metaphors and sex-related language, even if, as pointed out by Crespo Fernández (2019: 1) in the introduction to his volume on sex-related metaphors, "from a purely linguistic viewpoint, taboo-induced lexical variation is a topic that, curiously enough, has received little attention in scholarly literature". Casas Gómez (2009), Chamizo Domínguez (2005), Calvo (2005), Santaemilia (2005) also worked on (sex-related) euphemisms without specifically focusing on metaphors. Crespo

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[2] For the negative face of the co-speaker and the positive and negative face of the speaker.

Fernández (2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2011, 2015) is, to the best of my knowledge, the most prolific author on the subject and has mostly focused on the links between sex-related metaphors and euphemisms. Several studies focusing on languages other than English have also been published (Lee 2011, Gatambuki and Ndungu 2011). Haste (1993) and Murphy (2001) focused on the role of sex-related metaphors in the construction of gender binarity. More recently, Prazmo (2020) and Koller (2022) analysed dehumanising metaphors used by "incels" and the "manosphere" while López Maestre (2020) focused on women as the source of the hunt in sex metaphors.

However, very few studies have been conducted on sex-related metaphors and language in the context of TV series except for Brey (2016) and my own contributions (Terry 2019a; 2019b). A few elements regarding the genre of TV series should be kept in mind. Firstly, "indecency" is banned from television in the US, except from subscription services[3] like HBO or Netflix. The use of frank, derogatory sexual language in *Sex and the City* and *Sex Education* is prohibited in TV series which are broadcast on public channels, which means that these series have a special status in the TV landscape and that the linguistic taboo still exists, even if it is not as strong as it used to be. Secondly, even if some studies have proven that the language in TV series is fairly similar to that of naturally occurring conversation (Quaglio 2009), including taboo-induced metaphors (Terry 2019b), it should be noted that it is "both similar and different to spontaneous speech", that it is "innovative and contains non-codified language" and that it "fulfills a range of functions relating to the audience" (Bednarek 2018: 5-6).

Following Crespo Fernández (2015: 5), I will try to show that in the corpus "euphemistic and dysphemistic references to [sex] are based on underlying metaphor systems" within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (henceforth CMT) that was first established by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and later further developed and improved by other scholars (see for example Kövecses 2002; Sweetser 1990; Gibbs and Steen 1997; Barcelona 2000; Ortony 1993; Giora 1997 and Gibbs 1994, to name a few). In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is defined as a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system in which a conceptual domain (the target domain) is understood in terms of another conceptual domain (the source domain). In that view, CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN (A) is SEX, while CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN (B) is any source domain that is used to create various metaphorical expressions stemming from the same conceptual metaphor (Kövecses 2002). The many correspondences which are established between the two domains construct a complex mapping between the target domain, SEX, and the source domain. Each conceptual metaphor is the source of many linguistic metaphors, some of which are conventional, some of which are semi-lexicalised, and some of which are creative[4] (Crespo Fernández 2008: 98). Resorting to one

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[3] https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/obscene-indecent-and-profane-broadcasts
[4] Conventional metaphors are metaphorical occurrences which are completely lexicalised and may no longer be perceived as metaphorical by speakers. Semi-lexicalised metaphors are non-lexicalised metaphorical occurrences which stem from existing, well-known conceptual metaphors. Creative metaphors are new metaphorical occurrences which rely on a new association. See Crespo Fernández (2008: 98). Please note that this is not the only classification, but the most relevant in the context of taboo-induced metaphors.

source domain or another can allow speakers to highlight or hide some aspects of the target domain, as pointed out by Kövecses (2002: 80). Highlighting and hiding "presuppose each other", as one cannot exist without the other. The nature of the source domain, CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN (B), is therefore significant because it is one of the criteria that have to be taken into account to determine the X-phemistic potential of sex metaphors, along with the form of the locution (that is to say, the degree of lexicalisation of the X-phemism), the intention of the speaker, and the interpretation that the co-speaker makes of the utterance (Terry 2019a: 458).

"X-phemisms" are "the union set of […] 'phemisms" (Burridge 2012: 66); in other words, "X-phemism" is a hypernym for "euphemism", "dysphemism", and everything in-between, including "orthophemism", the supposedly neutral term for a taboo concept, as the categories are not always clear-cut. "Euphemism" and "dysphemism", the opposite ends of the scale, are defined as follows by Crespo Fernández (2008: 96):

> This power of taboo keeps language users from avoiding the forbidden concept and compels them to preserve or violate it. To this end, they resort respectively either to euphemism (i.e. the semantic or formal process by which the taboo is stripped of its most explicit or obscene overtones) or to dysphemism (i.e. the process whereby the most pejorative traits of the taboo are highlighted with an offensive aim to the addressee or to the concept itself).

Allan and Burridge (1991: 31) rightly emphasize the fact that euphemisms and dysphemisms are not limited to the functions mentioned above, but that "they may function as ingroup identity markers and even to amuse the audience". Burridge (2012: 66) adds that "[T]here is never 'Everyman's euphemism' or 'Everyman's dysphemism'", meaning that the same locution – or the same metaphorical expression, in this study – will not always be interpreted identically in different contexts. This is what led me to argue that metaphorical expressions should be ascribed an "X-phemistic potential", following the four criteria mentioned above, rather than being strictly categorised (Terry 2019a). Determining the X-phemistic potential of a corpus of sex metaphors enables us to comprehend how the taboo is represented. In the two TV series under scrutiny, the sex metaphors that are potentially dysphemistic never fully reach their dysphemistic potential as the context does not permit it: the interactants are most of the time friends or sexual partners, so the X-phemisms function as "in-group identity markers" and they first and foremost have a humorous aim, that is to say that they are used to amuse the viewers. A humorous interpretation of X-phemisms is favoured when there is a "breach of norms" or "taboo content" and when the situation is "perceived to be safe, playful, nonserious, or, in other words, benign" (McGraw and Warren 2010: 1142). In other words, the offensive aim of dysphemisms is lessened by the hypothetical psychological distance (McGraw et al. 2013: 567) that separates the characters from the viewers. Nevertheless, studying the dysphemistic potential – and more specifically, the characteristics that are projected from the source domain onto the target domain

of sex – exposes conceptualisations that are deeply anchored in our cognitive systems.

3. Methodology and results

The corpus under scrutiny is composed of the first two seasons of *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) and the first two seasons of *Sex Education* (2019-…), for a total of thirty 25-30-minute episodes for *Sex and the City* (SATC) and of sixteen 50-55-minute episodes for *Sex Education* (SE). The total airing time is similar for both series (about 15 hours), even though the number of episodes and their length vary. The scripts were retrieved from the Internet[5] and compiled; the SATC corpus contains 87,332 words, while the SE corpus contains 78,370 words, which was a sufficient size for the purpose of this study. A preliminary study was conducted on WMatrix5 (Rayson 2009) prior to the analysis of the metaphorical source domains used to conceptualise the domain of SEX.

3.1. Preliminary analysis

The preliminary comparative study was conducted so as to identify the main semantic features of the language used in each series. Both corpora were tagged and compared to the BNC_spoken corpus[6]. The semantic frequency list for each corpus is in the two tables below (only the first 30 results were retained).

		Item	O1	%1	O2	%2		LL	LogRatio	
1	List1 | Concordance	Z99	3826	4.54	5684	0.58	+	7540.31	2.97	Unmatched
2	List1 | Concordance	S3.2	505	0.60	549	0.06	+	1194.73	3.42	Relationship: Intimacy and sex
3	List1 | Concordance	S3.1	465	0.55	752	0.08	+	865.60	2.85	Personal relationship: General
4	List1 | Concordance	S2.2	524	0.62	1829	0.19	+	465.60	1.74	People: Male
5	List1 | Concordance	Z1	1484	1.76	9430	0.96	+	407.32	0.88	Personal names
6	List1 | Concordance	L1+	113	0.13	51	0.01	+	378.73	4.69	Alive
7	List1 | Concordance	S2.1	304	0.36	875	0.09	+	341.38	2.02	People: Female
8	List1 | Concordance	N5---	82	0.10	20	0.00	+	318.61	5.58	Quantities: little
9	List1 | Concordance	T1.1	86	0.10	35	0.00	+	296.79	4.84	Time: General
10	List1 | Concordance	O4.2+	398	0.47	1717	0.17	+	257.58	1.43	Judgement of appearance: Positive
11	List1 | Concordance	B1	651	0.77	3703	0.38	+	240.69	1.04	Anatomy and physiology
12	List1 | Concordance	A5.1+++	164	0.19	428	0.04	+	204.30	2.16	Evaluation: Good
13	List1 | Concordance	A13.3	818	0.97	5457	0.56	+	193.14	0.81	Degree: Boosters
14	List1 | Concordance	E2+	409	0.49	2255	0.23	+	162.94	1.08	Like
15	List1 | Concordance	S1.2.4+	76	0.09	103	0.01	+	158.72	3.10	Polite
16	List1 | Concordance	N3.2+	240	0.28	1046	0.11	+	152.66	1.42	Size: Big
17	List1 | Concordance	T4--	90	0.11	175	0.02	+	146.08	2.58	Time: Late
18	List1 | Concordance	S1.2	44	0.05	22	0.00	+	142.97	4.54	Personality traits
19	List1 | Concordance	F2	226	0.27	1022	0.10	+	134.81	1.37	Drinks and alcohol
20	List1 | Concordance	A13	26	0.03	0	0.00	+	131.99	9.24	Degree
21	List1 | Concordance	E4.1+	186	0.22	782	0.08	+	125.63	1.47	Happy
22	List1 | Concordance	W2	24	0.03	0	0.00	+	121.84	9.13	Light
23	List1 | Concordance	T1.3	908	1.08	7171	0.73	+	110.57	0.56	Time: Period
24	List1 | Concordance	X2.6-	42	0.05	39	0.00	+	107.46	3.65	Unexpected
25	List1 | Concordance	A5.3-	113	0.13	401	0.04	+	98.20	1.72	Evaluation: Inaccurate
26	List1 | Concordance	S9	208	0.25	1106	0.11	+	89.98	1.13	Religion and the supernatural
27	List1 | Concordance	A3+	4325	5.13	43253	4.40	+	88.69	0.22	Existing
28	List1 | Concordance	F3	53	0.06	119	0.01	+	76.19	2.38	Smoking and non-medical drugs
29	List1 | Concordance	T3	167	0.20	868	0.09	+	75.91	1.17	Time: Old, new and young; age
30	List1 | Concordance	A5.2-	63	0.07	180	0.02	+	71.32	2.03	Evaluation: False

Figure 1. Frequency list – SATC corpus.

		Item	O1	%1	O2	%2		LL	LogRatio	
1	List1 | Concordance	Z99	3934	5.46	5684	0.58	+	8903.85	3.24	Unmatched
2	List1 | Concordance	S3.2	420	0.58	549	0.06	+	1005.62	3.38	Relationship: Intimacy and sex
3	List1 | Concordance	B1	768	1.07	3703	0.38	+	544.22	1.50	Anatomy and physiology
4	List1 | Concordance	E4.1+	226	0.31	782	0.08	+	250.69	1.98	Happy
5	List1 | Concordance	S1.2.4+	89	0.12	103	0.01	+	227.07	3.56	Polite
6	List1 | Concordance	S3.1	203	0.28	752	0.08	+	207.77	1.88	Personal relationship: General
7	List1 | Concordance	Z8	14354	19.91	172345	17.54	+	206.45	0.18	Pronouns
8	List1 | Concordance	L1+	65	0.09	51	0.01	+	196.94	4.12	Alive
9	List1 | Concordance	E2+	365	0.51	2255	0.23	+	162.59	1.14	Like
10	List1 | Concordance	T1.1	49	0.07	35	0.00	+	153.82	4.25	Time: General
11	List1 | Concordance	Z1	1058	1.47	9430	0.96	+	153.59	0.61	Personal names
12	List1 | Concordance	A5.3-	118	0.16	401	0.04	+	133.59	2.00	Evaluation: Inaccurate
13	List1 | Concordance	A2.2	297	0.41	1891	0.19	+	123.64	1.10	Cause&Effect/Connection
14	List1 | Concordance	S2	376	0.52	2728	0.28	+	112.19	0.91	People
15	List1 | Concordance	P1	288	0.40	1928	0.20	+	106.37	1.03	Education in general
16	List1 | Concordance	S4	464	0.64	3699	0.38	+	103.40	0.77	Kin
17	List1 | Concordance	A3+	3778	5.24	43253	4.40	+	100.97	0.25	Existing
18	List1 | Concordance	O4.6-	80	0.11	247	0.03	+	100.43	2.14	Temperature: Cold
19	List1 | Concordance	A6.2-	79	0.11	242	0.02	+	99.98	2.15	Comparing: Unusual
20	List1 | Concordance	A5.1+	1042	1.45	10112	1.03	+	99.63	0.49	Evaluation: Good
21	List1 | Concordance	Z6	1875	2.60	19932	2.03	+	99.11	0.36	Negative
22	List1 | Concordance	K2	128	0.18	586	0.06	+	98.32	1.57	Music and related activities
23	List1 | Concordance	S1.2	31	0.04	22	0.00	+	97.54	4.26	Personality traits
24	List1 | Concordance	W2	17	0.02	0	0.00	+	91.23	8.86	Light
25	List1 | Concordance	S2.2	261	0.36	1829	0.19	+	85.69	0.96	People: Male
26	List1 | Concordance	S2.1	155	0.22	875	0.09	+	83.19	1.27	People: Female
27	List1 | Concordance	Q2.2	633	0.88	5794	0.59	+	81.49	0.57	Speech acts
28	List1 | Concordance	K1	190	0.26	1201	0.12	+	80.42	1.11	Entertainment generally
29	List1 | Concordance	B2-	159	0.22	959	0.10	+	74.60	1.18	Disease
30	List1 | Concordance	X9.2-	63	0.09	207	0.02	+	74.04	2.05	Failure

Figure 2. Frequency list – SE corpus.

A log-likelihood score above 150 indicates that the word is statistically more frequently used in the corpus under scrutiny than in the reference corpus (BNC_spoken). Several conclusions can be drawn from these preliminary results. Firstly, in both corpora, the semantic domain "Relationship:_Intimacy_and_sex" is the most salient domain[7] as compared to the reference corpus (SATC corpus: LL 1194.76; 505 occurrences; SE corpus: LL 1005.62; 420 occurrences). Nevertheless, a closer examination of the occurrences revealed that a majority of them was semantically related to the domain of "love" and not to that of "sex". Surprisingly, the word "sex" does not appear in the list of occurrences under "Relationship: Intimacy_and_sex". A second search, on the lemma "sex", showed a total frequency of 264 in the SATC corpus and 250 in the SE corpus. This is not surprising as these are the main topics of the series; it also shows that the domain is frequently spoken of explicitly and not through "implicit allusions" or "indirect references" (Crespo Fernández 2015: 4), which is indicative of the changing status of sex as a taboo.

The second conclusion that can be drawn is that although the semantic domain "Anatomy and physiology" is more salient in both corpora than in the reference corpus, there was a significant evolution between the two series (LL: 544.22 in the SE corpus, against 240.69 in the SATC corpus). Nouns referring to genitals notably rank higher in the SE corpus than in the SATC corpus. This might also be indicative of the changing status of the taboo of sex, as body parts are, in the words of Keyes (2010: 101), "doubly difficult to discuss" because they are used "both for sex and secretion."

The last element that should be highlighted is that the changing perception of socio-cultural attitudes to gender stereotypes is partly reflected in the semantic frequency lists: in the SATC corpus, the categories "People: Male" and "People:

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[7] The first category, "Unmatched", contains typography mistakes, symbols, etc. Their high frequency can easily be explained by the fact that the corpora were collected on Internet websites, which inevitably contain mistakes.

Female" respectively have a log-likelihood score of 465.6 and 341.38. By contrast, they only score 85.69 and 83.19 in the SE corpus. This suggests that gender normativity is linguistically not as marked in *Sex Education* (2019-2020) as it was in *Sex and the City* (1998-1999), which reflects both viewer perception and socio-cultural evolution.

3.2. Identification of the metaphors

Sex-related metaphorical expressions do not appear in the category "Relationship:_Intimacy_and_sex" in the semantic frequency list; they were identified in the corpora following the Metaphor Identification Procedure defined by the Pragglejaz group (2007: 3):

> The MIP is as follows:
> 1. Read the entire text–discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning.
> 2. Determine the lexical units in the text–discourse
> 3. (a) For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit.
> (b) For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be
> —More concrete; what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste.
> —Related to bodily action.
> —More precise (as opposed to vague)
> —Historically older.
> Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit.
> (c) If the lexical unit has a more basic current–contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.
> 4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical.

One additional criterion was taken into account: the metaphors retained for the study had to belong to the target domain of sex, or to the connected conceptual domains of seduction or sexual partners. A total of 66 occurrences was collected for *Sex and the City*[8] and 68 for *Sex Education*. The occurrences were then organised according to the source domains with which the correspondences were established. The methodology used was reproduced from Terry (2019b). The Pragglejaz group calculated that one major pitfall of assigning a source domain to a metaphorical expression was that the methodology lacked objectivity and was hardly replicable. In order to mitigate this issue, I relied on previous studies (notably Crespo Fernandez 2015) and when possible, assigned conceptual

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[8] Please note that the *Sex and the City* corpus is the corpus that was used in Terry (2019a, 2019b).

domains whose existence had been acknowledged and discussed in previous studies. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Total number of occurrences per source domain and per TV series.

SOURCE DOMAIN	*SATC*	*SE*
FOOD AND DRINKS	14	13
MACHINE / OBJECT	11	8
ANIMALS	5	5
SPORTS	4	2
GAME / LEISURE / PLAYING	4	5
JOURNEY / TRAVEL	6	10
BUSINESS / WORK	6	5
HUNTING / FISHING	1	5
RELIGION / SPIRITUALITY	3	1
TEACHING / STUDYING	2	
SHOW	4	2
WAR	2	2
POLITICS	2	
DRUGS	2	2
DISEASE / INJURY		3
PERSONIFICATION		3
MISCELLANEOUS		2
TOTAL	**66**	**68**

The total number of metaphorical occurrences is by far inferior to that of direct mentions of sex, and several factors may account for that discrepancy. Firstly, metaphors are not always achieved through one single lexical unit and are often extended. The metaphorical occurrences in Table 1 include extended metaphors, not the lexical units. Secondly, the study only focuses on metaphor, not on other types of figurative language, which means that there might be other types of figurative language in the series. Finally, it must be acknowledged that there might be fewer metaphorical occurrences than explicit references simply because sex is no longer the taboo it once was and because it is purposedly mentioned directly in the corpus.

4. Analysis of the metaphorical source domains

The source domains that are used to conceptualise SEX are oddly similar in the metaphorical occurrences of the two TV series: not only are the total numbers of metaphorical occurrences in the two corpora almost identical, but source domains and the numbers of metaphorical occurrences relying on each source domain are also very much alike. This assessment is further discussed in section 4.2.

The occurrences that are analysed in section 4.1. are drawn from the most productive conceptual metaphors – in other words, from conventional and semi-

lexicalised metaphors – as creative metaphors are "highly specific, even one-shot occurrences of figurative thought and therefore are not representative of the way people conceptualize reality" (Crespo Fernández 2015: 7). Studying widespread conceptual metaphors is a means to understand how sex is euphemistically and dysphemistically conceptualised, even though sex is not as taboo as it used to be and even though there might comparatively be fewer occurrences of figurative language than there once were. As explained in Terry (2019a: 384), the metaphors which have euphemistic potential are generally those in which the correspondences established between the characteristics of the two domains are few and vague. On the other hand, the metaphors which have dysphemistic potential tend to be those in which the correspondences between the characteristics of the source domain and those of the target domain are clearly identifiable or those which resort to a dysphemistic source domain, that is to say those in which one of the partners is dehumanized, or in which the sexual relationship is presented as a game of domination and violence.

4.1. Productive conceptual metaphors in the corpus

4.1.1. HAVING SEX IS HAVING FOOD / DRINKS

This is the most productive conceptual metaphor in the corpus (14 occurrences in *Sex and the City*, 13 in *Sex Education*), which is not unanticipated as SEX and FOOD are closely associated because the two domains share many characteristics (Allan and Burridge 2006: 190; Crespo Fernández 2015: 153), such as their links with different senses and the notion of pleasure. Crespo Fernández (2015: 156) found that these metaphors are usually dysphemistic and sexist because they tend to conceptualise women as food that can satisfy men's appetite, and because this conceptualisation conveys a portrayal of the male having a dominant role over his sexual partner. Although this conclusion can be applied to some occurrences in the corpus, it should be nuanced as men are quite often also conceptualised as FOOD as well in the corpus. In *Sex and the City* in particular, in which the four main characters are heterosexual women[9], men or male body parts tend to be conceptualised as FOOD more often than women (9 out of 14 occurrences). The same conclusions can be drawn about *Sex Education,* in which 10 of the 13 occurrences are related to men or male body parts. This does not mean that those metaphors are not dysphemistic, but rather that men are not consistently portrayed as having a dominant role over their sexual partners in those metaphors. Additionally, the X-phemistic potential of those metaphors mostly depends on the characteristics that are projected onto the target domain. If the correspondences are vague ("Well, it's not my favorite thing on the **menu**, but I'll **order** it from time to time" *SATC 1x07)* or highlight the notion of pleasure, the occurrence will tend to be rather euphemistic in the series as the taboo characteristics will be hidden; if the cross-domain mapping entails precise, mental-picture generating correspondences, the occurrence will tend to be

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[9] In the original series; in the sequel, Miranda is in a queer relationship with a non-binary character, Che.

dysphemistic because it highlights the most tabooed features of the taboo domain instead of hiding them. This occurs mainly when the underlying conceptual metaphor is GENITALIA IS FOOD rather that a SEXUAL PARTNER IS FOOD. Consider the following examples:

(1) Carrie: "But I like him".
Samantha: "That's swell, but it doesn't **get the cream in the cupcake**".
(SATC 2x15)

(2) Aimee: "Yeah. But he, like..."
Maeve: "**Slipped and dropped the yogurt**?"
Aimee: "No, I wish. He faked it".
(SE 1x01)

These two occurrences have dysphemistic potential because they create a vivid mental picture, which was not necessarily required in that context. However, given the context of the occurrence, the aim of the speaker is not to shock or offend the audience, but rather to amuse the other characters or the viewers, as with the vast majority of HAVING SEX IS HAVING FOOD metaphors in TV series. This conceptual metaphor is very productive as the metaphorical occurrences in both corpora are, for many of them, creative, unlexicalised occurrences. In this respect, there has been little evolution in the twenty years that separate the two shows: FOOD is still a playful, creative means of mentioning SEX, and gender roles were already reversed in those occurrences in *Sex and the City*.

4.1.2. *A SEXUAL PARTNER / A SEXUAL ORGAN IS A MACHINE / AN OBJECT*

These metaphors, which are present in similar proportions in both corpora as well (11 in *Sex and the City*, 8 in *Sex Education*), emphasise a dehumanisation of sexual relationships and are therefore frequently – but not necessarily – dysphemistic (Murphy 2001: 17; Crespo Fernández 2015: 168). They are also very often creative metaphors that need to be extended to be understood, as in example (3), or that are context dependent, as in example (4):

(3) Girl: "It's got to the point where when I think about touching Ruthie, I get really panicked, because I know it's gonna be really bad. **Like when you put together a bookshelf from IKEA and you realize you don't have the right screw and the whole thing was a waste of time and then you just hate everything about Sweden.**"
(SE 1x04)

(4) Charlotte: "If I could get him to show at the gallery, it would be an incredible coup. But what if he wants me to, you know..."
Samantha: "**Hold his brush**?"
(SATC 1x05)

In (3), although the metaphor is extended, the exact correspondences are not easy to retrieve. It could be argued that having a sexual relation is conceptualised as assembling a piece of furniture from IKEA and skills are conceptualised as the

right screw. However, since the correspondences are not very precise, the metaphor is rather euphemistic. In (4), Charlotte has a meeting with a painter, which justifies Samantha's choice for "his brush". However, the metaphor is more dysphemistic because the correspondences between GENITALIA and "brush" are more explicitly retrievable and because the relationship would not be consensual.

The dysphemistic potential is also higher when the tool is conceptualised as inflicting violence (5 & 6):

> (5) Ellen: "I get fifteen guys like you every week. Jerks who just want to meet vulnerable women, **nail** them, and never call them again."
> *(SATC 1x07)*

> (6) Barkley: "It's easier to **screw** a model than a regular girl because that's what they do all the time."
> *(SATC 1x01)*

In addition, metaphorical occurrences similar to (5) and (6), which include the verbs "nail" or "screw", are lexicalised metaphors, which might also explain why they tend to be more dysphemistic. By way of example, according to *Etymonline*, "the slang meaning "to copulate" [for "screw"] dates from at least 1725". Over time, X-phemisms tend to become dysphemistic because of the phenomenon of "euphemism treadmill" (Pinker 1994): as pointed out by Allan and Burridge (2006: 46), "a euphemism often degenerates into a dysphemism through contamination by the taboo topic". In this case, the conventionality of the metaphorical occurrence can influence the X-phemistic interpretation.

Finally, dehumanisation is particularly salient and can give way to a dysphemistic interpretation when the partner or the partner's body is conceptualised as a broken object that cannot be repaired (7):

> (7) Miranda: "Is it too much to ask that he not be, I don't know, **used**?"
> [...] Miranda: "Before it goes any further, make sure his parts are **still under warranty**". [...]
> Carrie: "As for me, rather than **sort through the half-off bin**, I was dating someone **brand-spanking new**".
> *(SATC 2x15)*

However, occurrences in which BODY PARTS are conceptualised as BROKEN OBJECTS tend to be more euphemistic when they are creative (10) than when they are lexicalised (8 & 9) but they are equally present in *Sex Education* and *Sex and the City*:

> (8) Otis: "I think I'm addicted to wanking, 'cause I've only just started, but I can't seem to stop, and I think I might have **broken my penis** because I do it too much. That's why it wasn't **working**".
> *(SE 2x01)*

> (9) Miranda: "I think I **broke** my vagina".
> *(SATC 1x09)*

(10) Lady: "Oh, yes, I was wondering… if **your bike has been sitting in the garden for six years, it's probably going to be quite rusty**, isn't it?"
Jean: "Is the **bike** in question your **vagina**?"
Lady: "Yes" […]
Jean: "Come and see me afterwards. I've got something that may help… you **to get back on your bike**".
(SE 2x05)

Finally, to establish another comparison between the two series, metaphors that highlight the violence or used state of a sexual partner are slightly more frequent in *Sex and the City* than in *Sex Education,* and those used in *Sex Education* are not always dysphemistic, especially when the correspondences between two domains are negated or criticised (11):

(11) Jean: "Sex doesn't make us **whole**. And so, how could you ever be **broken**?" *(SE 2x04)*

This is one major difference between the two series that shall be further developed in section 4.2.

4.1.3. *A SEXUAL PARTNER IS AN ANIMAL*

Crespo Fernández (2015: 136) defines ANIMALS as a dysphemistic sex-related domain:

> The association of people with animals and with animal behaviour and instincts is a potent source of disrespect and offense. The ontological metaphor PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS puts in correspondence human and animal attributes which are mostly behavioural. This conceptualization is grounded in people's knowledge and perception of the natural world, which is figuratively employed to refer disparagingly to human beings.

These metaphors are dehumanising, and they are also frequently combined with SEDUCTION IS HUNTING / FISHING METAPHORS, which are less numerous in *Sex and the City* (1 occurrence) than in *Sex Education* (5 occurrences), in which the FOOD CHAIN metaphor is regularly resorted to:

(11) Eric: "This is a new frontier, my sexually repressed friend. Our chance to finally **move up the social food chain. We shall transform from lowly caterpillars into… awesome killer whales**".
(SE 1x01)

(12) Eric: "Aww. Listen, who needs her, anyway? There's **plenty more hot, scary fish in the sea**. Okay?"
(SE 1x02)

This might partly be explained by the fact that the characters are teenagers and that high school is frequently conceptualised as a place in which the different species in the food chain stand for the different social groups. These metaphors

nevertheless tend to be dysphemistic because they highlight the violence in the relationship and suggest that one partner dominates the other – usually males in heterosexual relationships – and they are used by male characters (Eric and Otis) rather than by women (only one female character, Lily, uses them in *Sex Education*). These occurrences suggest that metaphors are not less dysphemistic in *Sex Education* than in *Sex and the City*.

4.1.4. HAVING SEX IS PLAYING A GAME / LEISURE

In both corpora, HAVING SEX IS PLAYING A GAME / LEISURE metaphors tend to be lexicalised and therefore, some occurrences are almost identical; for example, "cheat" is used in both *SATC 2x02* and *SE 2x05* for "be unfaithful", and "balls" is used in *SATC 2x12* and *SE 1x06* for "testicles." Although they are not properly euphemistic, these lexicalised metaphors are unlikely to be interpreted as dysphemisms in their context of utterance. Moreover, the correspondences established between the two domains suggest that the partners both take part in a game, which participates in the euphemistic-orthophemistic interpretation. As these metaphorical expressions are lexicalised, it is not surprising that they should be found in both corpora in similar proportions (4 in *Sex and the City*, 5 in *Sex Education*).

4.1.5. HAVING SEX IS A JOURNEY / TRAVEL / TOURISM

The metaphors deriving from this conceptual metaphor are slightly more numerous in *Sex Education* than in *Sex and the City*, but almost all of them are lexicalised, as in the following two examples:

> (13) Samantha: "Have you ever been with a man and he's doing everything and it feels good but somehow you just can't manage to **come**?"
> *(SATC 1x09)*

> (14) Aimee: "He can't come. So, the other night, we're, like, goin' and goin'. And I'm losin' my shit. And I, you know…"
> Maeve: "**Reached the summit**".
> *(SE 1x01)*

As argued in Terry (2019a: 259), the SEX IS A JOURNEY metaphor enables the conceptualisation of a sexual relationship as an event with a starting point, an unfolding, and an end. From this metaphor derives the conceptual metaphor AN ORGASM IS THE END OF THE JOURNEY, which is based on the primary metaphor PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS (Crespo Fernández 2015: 97). The linguistic metaphors that stem from this primary metaphor tend to be euphemistic or orthophemistic and are often lexicalised.

On the other hand, although it also relies on a SOURCE – PATH – GOAL image-schema, the SEX IS TRAVEL metaphor gives birth to more extended, creative metaphors and it seems difficult to predict where the metaphorical expressions that derive from it will be on the X-phemistic scale. Consider the following examples:

(15) Charlotte: "Is your vagina in **the New York City guidebooks**? It should be, it's **the hottest spot in town**! It's **always open**!"
(SATC 2x15)

(16) Colin: "I heard on the grapevine that you deal with matters of the heart. And I'm desperate for some advice. Thing is, I have a friend **who speaks Spanish and I can't understand her at all. She says things like, "Hola... and... all I can hear is... Shakira, Shakira**".
Otis: "I don't speak Spanish, sir".
Colin: "I can't do dirty talk. I find it mortifying".
Otis: "Oh... Well, uh... sometimes when **we learn new skills**, we can feel exposed. Right? And **you wouldn't go to a foreign country without some basic understanding of the language**. So why don't **you write a script** for yourself and **practice speaking the words** until they feel more comfortable? It's about making an effort to take little steps to meet her halfway. Does that make sense?"
Colin: "Yes. Muchas gracias, maestro".
(SE 2x02)

While the occurrence taken from *Sex and the City* (15) is obviously dysphemistic because Charlotte's aim is to hurt Samantha, the occurrence from *Sex Education* arguably is a euphemism. One possible explanation to this relative instability of the SEX IS TRAVEL metaphor might be the fact that contrary to SEX IS A JOURNEY metaphors, SEX IS TRAVEL metaphors resort to much more complex, creative correspondences between the source domain and the target domain; the corresponding metaphor can therefore be euphemistic or dysphemistic depending on the elements which are highlighted and those which are hidden. In the occurrence from *Sex and the City*, Charlotte lays emphasis on the number of partners Samantha has had and purposely shames her, which partly accounts for the dysphemistic interpretation. However, these occurrences are not numerous enough to draw conclusions on the evolution of the metaphorical representation of the SEX IS TRAVEL metaphor.

4.1.6. HAVING SEX IS DOING BUSINESS / WORKING

All the metaphorical occurrences in *Sex Education* are lexicalised "handjob" or "blowjob". This absence of semantic creativity may partially be explained by the fact that HAVING SEX IS DOING BUSINESS / WORKING is "a resemblance metaphor which is culturally, rather than experientially, motivated" (Crespo Fernández 2015: 72); the characters in *Sex and the City*, who are all adult working women, are therefore more likely to use such metaphors than the teenagers in *Sex Education*, who evolve in the cultural environment of high school, as in this context-based occurrence (17):

(17) Carrie *(off-screen)*: "Richard Cranwell, senior partner at Bear Sterns philanthropist, playboy. His specialty was hostile takeovers".
Samantha: "Flattery will get you everywhere, Mr. Cranwell".
Mr. Cranwell: "Please, call me Dick".
Samantha: "Dick".

> Carrie *(off-screen)*: "In Samantha's case, it was more like **a friendly merger**".
> *(SATC 2x05)*

The remaining source domains are much less represented in the corpus and will therefore not be tackled. Some source domains only appear in one of the two corpora, but no conclusions regarding the conceptualisation of the target domain can be drawn from this assessment as there are not enough occurrences.

4.2. The (lack of) evolution of the metaphorical language between *Sex and the City* and *Sex Education*

A few modest conclusions on sex-related metaphors can be drawn from these results, although most of them would need to be confirmed, developed or disproved in studies on larger corpora.

Firstly, the conceptual metaphors of SEX and the distribution of metaphorical expressions according to the source domain have experienced little evolution between the two series, which seems to point to the fact that the X-phemistic metaphorical language of sex evolves slowly, or rather, that it can be very creative and that although new X-phemisms are probably created every day, older X-phemisms do not disappear. This observation had already been made by Keyes (2010: 13):

> Euphemisms are like a verbal carousel: some words hop on, others jump off, still others stay put for the entire ride and sometimes lose their euphemistic status in the process. Those that do their job capably, with minimal fuss, slip easily into vernacular and stay there.

To this, we could add that the fact that the new metaphorical X-phemisms which are created derive from existing conceptual metaphors and that no new conceptual metaphors emerged, and none disappeared, which limits the potential evolution of sex-related language. The presence of both lexicalised metaphorical expressions and of creative metaphors stemming from the same conceptual metaphors in both corpora seems to confirm this hypothesis.

Secondly, even though it should be noted that the source domain is not the only element that plays a part in the interpretation of an X-phemism, other conclusions can be drawn from the fact that there is no clear evolution in the source domains resorted to in potentially dysphemistic conceptual metaphors in *Sex Education* and in *Sex and the City*. This suggests that the conceptual SEX metaphors in the first two seasons of *Sex and the City* and *Sex Education* do not always reflect the perceived differences in the overall conceptualisation of SEX in the two series and that characteristics such as violence are projected onto the target domain in both series. Although *Sex Education* lays more emphasis on mutual respect than *Sex and the City* does according to viewer perception, merely identifying the source domains in the corpus does not allow us to shed light on this evolution. However, inclusivity regarding non-heteronormative relationships is partly reflected in the lexicon (see semantic frequency lists extracted in WMatrix5 (Rayson 2009), section 3.1.) as well as in the

metaphorical occurrences; the metaphors used to conceptualise heterosexual relationships are increasingly used to conceptualise non-heteronormative sexual relationships. One example is HAVING SEX IS EATING FOOD, used by an asexual character, Florence:

(18) Jean: "Why don't you start by telling me how you feel when you think about having sex?"
Florence: "I don't feel anything. I have no connection to it. It's sort of like... I'm surrounded by **a huge feast with everything I could want to eat, but... I'm not hungry**".
(SE 2x04)

Thirdly, this confirms (if need be) the cognitive view on metaphor according to which conceptual metaphors – and the conceptual metaphors of SEX – are deeply anchored in our cognitive systems (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Although there has been growing awareness about sexual and sexist violence and its pervasiveness in society and language, similar correspondences highlighting violence are established between SEX on the one hand and source domains such as WAR or HUNTING / FISHING on the other hand. Likewise, dehumanisation of sexual partners by conceptualising them as ANIMALS or OBJECTS / MACHINES occurs as frequently in the *Sex Education* corpus as it occurs in the *Sex and the City* corpus. However, this needs to be nuanced as these conceptualisations are occasionally criticised in *Sex Education*, as in examples (19) and (20):

(19) Ola: "But... Did you and Maeve, like, date or something? I'm picking up a vibe".
Otis: "No. Maeve is not the sort of person who would, you know, date me".
Ola: "What does that mean?"
Otis: "Well, um... Maeve is considerably **higher up on the food chain than I am**. You know, I'm like **a kangaroo or an armadillo**. Whereas Maeve's like **a panther, or a lion**, even".
Ola: "So **what am I on the food chain**?"
Otis: "You could be like... You know **those goats that stand on really steep cliffs and just kind of stick**?"
Ola: "I'm **a goat**?"
Otis: "No! I mean, you don't look like a goat. You could be, like, **a house cat**, if you don't like goats. You know, **the skinny ones that just stare at you**".
Ola: "Okay, **I'm a skinny house cat, and she's a lion**".
Otis: "Oh, no. Maeve is unattainable, and you're..."
Ola: "**You're not a kangaroo**, Otis. You're an arsehole".
(SE 1x07)

In this first example, Ola interprets Otis's extended metaphor as dysphemistic for several possible reasons; one of them probably is the fact that the SEXUAL PARTNERS ARE ANIMALS metaphor is dehumanising, but it also pertains to the kind of animal used for the conceptualisation. "Panther" and "lion" are flattering conceptualisations and the correspondences that are established are positive, although not necessarily euphemistic. On the contrary, "goat" and "house cat"

are interpreted as less majestic, negative conceptualisations, all the more so as they are elaborated in unflattering terms ("kind of stick" / "just stare at you"). The comparison between Ola (Otis's girlfriend) and Maeve as well as the entire FOOD CHAIN metaphor are interpreted as dysphemistic and offensive, and they are criticised by the female character. The second occurrence, an occurrence of the conceptual metaphor A SEXUAL PARTNER IS AN OBJECT / A MACHINE, is quite similar although it is criticised by a male character:

(20)   Jackson: "Maeve is such a head-fuck, man. **Like a Rubik's Cube.** She says one thing and then does something else. And I can't keep up. Know what I mean?"
Otis: "Not really. But here you go".
Jackson: "We'll have crazy amazing sex, yeah? I'm talking, like, transcendental-level shagging".
Otis: "Okay, stop! Aaah!"
Jackson: "And then she ignores me for days. But then, she wants to do it again and round and round we go. She's **like some sexy merry-go-round, and I can't get off**".
Otis: "She's **not an object**!"
Jackson: "Uh..."
Otis: "I said she's **not an object**. You keep **describing her as inanimate objects**, but she is a person".
(SE 1X04)

Otis explicitly criticises the conceptual metaphor A SEXUAL PARTNER IS AN OBJECT that Jackson resorts to in order to talk about Maeve by arguing it is dehumanising and by negating the metaphor ("she's not an object"). These occurrences tend to be rarer in *Sex and the City*: the conceptual metaphors and the correspondences established between source domains and the target domain sex are not explicitly criticised. The progressive aspect of the metaphors in *Sex and the City* pertains to the fact that they are mostly used by women, which reverses traditional gender roles. In *Sex Education,* these metaphors are sometimes explicitly criticised by the characters and they are also increasingly resorted to by LGBTGIA+ characters, thus further challenging traditional gender norms and sexualities.

Finally, it should be noted that few of these occurrences are actually interpreted as dysphemisms, no matter how potentially dysphemistic the source domain, because the aim in both TV series is to amuse the audience since both of them are comedies. Humour rises from the discrepancy between the source domain and the target domain, as well as from the salient creativity of metaphors (see Dynel 2009 for the links between metaphor and humour). Humorous interpretation is possible thanks to the psychological distance that separates the viewers from the characters. This might also partly explain why metaphorical language has not evolved much.

5. Concluding remarks

Changing representations and showing more inclusivity in TV series when it comes to the taboo domain of SEX is possible, and the evolution between *Sex and the City*, in which Carrie declared that she did not believe bisexuality existed, and *Sex Education*, in which characters who are not cisgender and heterosexual are given much more visibility, is blatant. Nevertheless, little evolution can be noticed in the source domains that are used to metaphorically conceptualise SEX in the corpus. The main conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the source domains in sex-related conceptual metaphors are so deeply anchored in our cognitive systems that changing dysphemistic, violent, dehumanising metaphors to transform society (as Sontag (1979; 1988) suggested to do for WAR metaphors used to conceptualise the "fight" against cancer and AIDS) seems to be a complicated thing to do, as their use remains pervasive. Nevertheless, the fact that those metaphors should be more systematically criticised and that they should undergo reappropriation by minority groups constitutes an evolution in the conceptualisation of the taboo domain of SEX. Finally, it should be added that one possible limitation of the study is that both TV series belong to the genre of comedy, and slightly different results might be found if the research was extended to other genres and corpora.

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