

Women's stuff:**The effect of embodiment in the sociolinguistic variation of sexed concepts**

Andrea Pizarro Pedraza

Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas & KU Leuven

Background and research question: Menstruation or women's genitalia are considered widespread taboos that surpass cultural boundaries (Douglas 1966). In the general theory of linguistic taboo, that would imply that in some situations speakers would avoid those concepts, or convey their meanings through euphemisms (Allan and Burridge 1991; 2006). "Now, taking an experiential view of meaning" (Geeraerts and Kristiansen 2012), it seems pertinent to reflect on the effects of the speakers' gender on the semantic variation of those concepts in use. Our hypothesis is that embodiment thwarts the effect of taboo, which is reflected on the onomasiological variation of sexed concepts across genders (probably in interaction with other variables –age, education, district, stances...– as gender is socio-culturally constructed).

Empirical data: We work with a corpus of 54 face-to-face recorded interviews in Spanish, which was designed to indirectly elicit sexual concepts. It was collected ad hoc in two districts of Madrid, controlling for the social background of the speakers (gender, age, education, etc.), in order to account as accurately as possible for the sociolinguistic reality of sexual expressions. For this study, we have manually extracted a subset of expressions referring to concepts belonging to men and women's biological specificities (body parts, physiological processes).

Analytic methods: Assuming the importance of semantic vagueness as a euphemistic strategy (Grondelaers and Geeraerts 1998), we propose to work on the taxonomic level in order to elucidate whether gender (and other social variables) influences the (under)specification of the concepts. A data matrix has been built where each token is coded considering the level of specification, and the social background of the speaker.

Preliminary results: An initial analysis shows variation across genders. For example, expressions like *bleed* ("sangrar") for *menstruate* or *belly* ("barriga"/ "tripa") for *pregnancy* are mostly used by women in our data. The qualitative approach will be complemented with a quantitative analysis in order to measure whether gender is affecting significantly taxonomic shifts related to an embodied relation of the speakers towards particular realities.

Keywords: cognitive sociolinguistics, onomasiological variation, taboo and euphemism, sexed concepts, embodiment.

References

- Allan, Keith and Burridge, Kate (1991), *Euphemism and Dysphemism. Language Used as Shield and Weapon* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Allan, Keith and Burridge, Kate (2006), *Forbidden words* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
- Douglas, Mary (1966), *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger).
- Geeraerts, Dirk and Kristiansen, Gitte (2012), 'Cognitive Linguistics and Language Variation', in Jeanette Littlemore and John Taylor (eds.), *Companion to Cognitive Linguistics*. (Draft version.)
- Grondelaers, S. and Geeraerts, Dirk (1998), 'Vagueness as a euphemistic strategy', in A. Athanasiadou and E. Tabakowska (eds.), *Speaking of emotions: conceptualisation and expression* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter), 357-74.