The Use of Spanish Identity Metaphors in Personal Ads on the Internet to Perform Gender and Transmit Ideologies about Heterosexuality

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Abstract:

Identity metaphors are those in which people assign an identity label to themselves or their objects of desire in personal ads in Spanish. These metaphors might come from fictional genres, such as fairy tales (Prince Charming), individual fictional worlds (Barbie), among others. This analysis shows how identity metaphors are essential to create and distribute ideologies about gender, love, and relationships in the heterosexual market. In the case of the data analyzed here, the rejection of or subscription to certain metaphors illustrates posters' ideologies about their ideal relationship, their beauty standards, and their social values. These ideologies include their views about traditional gender roles, and their support or rejection to traditional narratives about romance. These identity metaphors allow people to make reference to ideologies that might seem conservative without mentioning them directly. Additionally, they might contribute to the circulation of new ideologies and the introduction of changes in a group's ideologies.

Keywords: Metaphors, online dating, gender, heterosexuality, critical metaphor analysis.

1. Introduction

Identity metaphors are those in which people assign an identity label to themselves or their objects of desire. These metaphors might come from fictional genres, such as fairy tales (*Príncipe Azul*), individual fictional worlds (*Barbie*), or public figures (*Brad Pitt*). The identity metaphors analyzed here come from personal ads found on the Internet, posted by heterosexual ad posters (women looking to meet men, and vice versa). These metaphors label people or give them a set of characteristics, which allow them to interact with potential readers: they add to the general description characteristics that are to be interpreted as nonliteral labels in these contexts. The next example illustrates an identity metaphor:

(1) Sigo buscando a mi *príncipe azul*[1] y no me conformo con otro color. ¡*Abstenerse ranas*!!!. (W. S.)

I am still looking for my *Blue Prince*[2] and I will not settle for a different color. *Frogs need not apply*!

The metaphor in the last sentence is the poster's description of her ideal partner and the source of the metaphor is a fairy tale, this particular reference contributes to completing her message about the

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[1] Metaphorical expressions are indicated in italics in the examples.

[2] This expression is the Spanish version of Prince Charming. From now on, it will be translated as Prince Charming.

characteristics she desires in a potential partner. The purpose of this analysis is to determine how these identity metaphors contribute to the production and support of ideologies about gender, heterosexuality, and heteronormativity. Using Critical Metaphors Analysis theory, I analyze 95 identity metaphors collected from 2,000 personal ads posted by heterosexuals on a dating web site in Spanish, CyberCupido.com, with the purpose of demonstrating how everyday discourse practices, such as the use of metaphors in personal ads, are used to support and spread ideologies shared by a group of speakers, in this case, ad posters.

It is a common belief that metaphors belong to the literary world, but this ignores the fact that numerous expressions that we use in everyday language are metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) called attention to how one's way of conceiving, talking about and experiencing a situation is metaphorically structured, and that one understands a specific experience in terms of another. This process of understanding uses a relatively more concrete concept, such as a journey, to explain a more abstract one, life. In this way "metaphors work by projecting one relatively well-understood set of ideas onto a domain that is problematic, rather than by simply expressing a pre-existing and objective similarity" (Chilton, 1996, p. 106). In the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, does not necessarily depend on objective similarities between life and journeys, but rather on the possibility of associating life with ideas such as time, moving forward, moving to different places, and so forth.

The fact that these expressions are fixed in the lexicon of a language does not make them dead metaphors (meaning that they have not lost their meaning); they are reflections of "systematic metaphorical concepts that structure our actions and thoughts" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.55). The repetition of these metaphorical expressions affects the way people perceive certain experiences, even if they are not aware of the origin of the expressions. Furthermore, the fact that metaphors are frequently used expressions, part of everyday language, makes them more effective in discourse: "it is precisely because they are conventionalized that they may achieve the power to subconsciously affect our thinking, without our being aware of it" (Goatly, 2007, p. 22).

Metaphors perform a significant role in determining what is real for a group of speakers given that much of our social reality is understood in metaphorical terms, and our conception of the physical world is partly metaphorical. However, "what is at issue is not the truth or falsity of a metaphor but the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 158). The acceptance of a metaphor forces us to focus on only some aspects of the experience, and to view the boundaries and consequences of the metaphors as true.

Within this perspective, one can see how metaphors contribute to creating a reality and also provide a new way of understanding a pre-existing reality. This is possible because metaphors structure people's conceptual system, as well as their everyday activities. "It is reasonable enough to assume words alone don't change reality. But changes in our conceptual system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 146). One's conception of physical reality is affected by one's social reality, which is determined by one's culture.

Lakoff and Johnson's initial approach to metaphors greatly opened our perception of discourse practices that are assumed as common, therefore almost meaningless or irrelevant. However, their cognitive approach confines the use of metaphor mostly to a cognitive and semantic role. Charteris-Black (2004) highlights the pragmatic role of metaphors by arguing that speakers can use metaphors as a stylistic resource to convey specific evaluations in very specific contexts. Accordingly, the study of metaphor would strongly benefit from a pragmatic approach. Metaphor is commonly used in discourse because it has the potential to persuade hearers, a common goal among speakers. The information provided in metaphors can influence others since "it represents a novel way of viewing the world that offers some fresh insight" (Charteris-Black,

2004, p. 7). In the contexts where metaphors might appear, in this case personal ads, they have a specific role; to consider only their cognitive characteristics is to miss their role in a particular discourse.

A pragmatic approach to the analysis of metaphors allows the researcher to see that the choice of a particular metaphor is in fact influenced by individual resources, such as thoughts, feelings and bodily experience, but also by social resources such as ideological outlook (primarily political or religious viewpoint), and historical and cultural knowledge. In the case of identity metaphors in personal ads, "they share the common function of enabling the writer to use a ready-made identity from a familiar intertextual source as an economical means of projecting identities for self and desired other in this spatially constrained genre" (Marley, 2008a, pp. 559-60). All these resources play a role in people's choices of metaphors, because they are aiming for particular communication goal in a particular communicational context.

One of the communication goals of metaphors in discourse is persuasion; this pragmatic role of metaphors is related to the capacity that they have to transmit ideologies. Metaphor is a powerful tool for reinforcing views that are broadly accepted in a community, and it fashions these views as part of a naturalized discourse. The analysis of metaphors in a particular kind of discourse allow access to the ideologies that underlie speakers' conception of their world, and access to how these metaphors may contest and oppose these reigning ideologies (Charteris-Black, 2004). Analyzing metaphors used in personal advertisements on the Internet, more specifically identity metaphors, allows access to how they are used to spread, create, support, and/or oppose ideologies about gender and heterosexuality.

Personal ads or dating advertisements in newspapers or magazines are a well-established genre in which people search for potential partners (Coupland, 1996). This genre seeks to individualize mass communication; they attempt to communicate with that special someone, despite the fact that an essential part of personal ads requires users to bring private matters to a public space. As public representations, these advertisements hardly represent 'real' people; they represent what people think they are expected to be, and the ideas that people have about their potential partners. For that reason, personal ads are an excellent resource for determining a group's beliefs and their ideologies related to gender, heteronormativity, the heterosexual market, gender roles, and so forth.

According to Cameron and Kulick (2003), personal ads are a good source to study how sexual identity and sexuality are enacted linguistically. They argue that linguistic studies related to gender should question not only how people do sexuality but also how they represent it, because "representations are a resource that people draw on —arguably, indeed, are compelled to draw on— in constructing their own identities and ways of doing things" (p. 12). Posters of personal ads represent themselves with the resources available to them from this genre and from their community to create ideal identities for themselves and their objects of desire.

Besides being a source of how sexuality is linguistically articulated, personal ads also show how desire gets articulated within a society. They work as sociological maps that show how people's most intimate desires are highly structured by power (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). This can be observed in the way that most ads share many similar features and make similar claims. In addition, ad posters often claim to be looking for the same things that everybody else is looking for, or being somebody that might be appealing to any "normal" person. Closer inspection of personal ads allows us to see how people have clear ideas about not only their own desires but also those of others. Essentially, ad posters express not only the characteristics desired in other people, but also their desire to be liked and be part of the desirable group. As a consequence, all personal ads present a certain level of tension; posters want to be seen as "normal" or part of the community, while at the same time they want to show characteristics that separate them from the rest, make them special, and worthy of being chosen.

The genre of personal ads is fairly structured. Usually, ads have a structure given by the media that publish them (e.g. newspapers, web pages), but even so, the way people use this resource vary according to different factors, such as gender, sexuality, and sexual desire, among others. The structure of personal ads in newspapers and magazines has elements derived from other forms of advertisements, for example ads that sell cars and pets (Coupland, 1996). Most of the texts tend to be organized in the following six sequential elements: 1. Advertiser, 2. Seeks, 3. Target, 4. Goals, 5. Comment, and 6. Reference. It is not necessary the case that all of these sections appear in every personal ad. However, components 1, 2 and 3 are required to complete a successful ad. The following example illustrates how these sections function in a newspaper ad (taken from Marley, 2000):

Camomile seeks Earl Grey, I am NW, 30's, prof. woman. UR caring, intell. prof. RU my cup of tea? ML20625[3]

This example illustrates how posters of personal ads try to express individuality, as shown in the use of the tea metaphor, while at the same time their characterizations are fairly predictable. To please the market, the text conforms to the discursive norms of marketing genres. Dating advertisements reduce the first stages of dating, labeling and constructing the self and the potential partner, as products in a catalogue in the dating-market (Coupland, 1996).

The identities created in personal ads offer an excellent opportunity to analyze the constructive function of linguistic labeling and categorization. The categories and labels created in personal ads reveal women's and men's desires, as well as the ideologies of a given time period. The identities constructed represent the ideals and fantasies of a particular group. Thus, by analyzing these constructions it is possible to determine a community's ideologies of gender. These constructed identities are not homogenous, but they reveal a general pattern of how people construct their gendered identity in a given period of time.

In the genre of personal ads, identity metaphors are a useful tool to project, in a few words, a series of features associated to a character (Marley, 2007, 2008a). These metaphors are frequently references to popular culture characters, for example Snow White. These resources at first might look like common expressions that do not characterize or describe an individual. However, ad posters introduce additional elements that belong to the same semantic field of these characters, in doing so, "they return to even institutionalized metaphors a small measure of their original complexity, and revive at least an element of creativity" (Marley, 2007, p.62). These identity metaphors are considered intertextual metaphors, since they are formed from experiences related to cultural experiences, i.e. literature and movies, rather than from bodily experiences, like the case of conceptual metaphors whose origins are connected to more abstract domains (i.e. LIFE IS A JOURNEY). The metaphors are functioning in a process of interaction, where one needs certain cultural experiences to understand their messages, and they usually appear in tandem with another metaphorical expression to complete their communicative aim.

In personal ads, these metaphors are very effective communicative tools. First, they offer the possibility of conveying a large amount of information with one expression (the characteristics associated with the character mentioned), and second, they narrow the pool of potential interlocutors, since only those who are familiar with the characters evoked will grasp the whole message of the ad. Marley (2008a) considers that these metaphors involve a large extent of interaction between readers and writers since "the cleverness of the word play that is involved in constructing these metaphorical intertextual identities seems calculated to display a certain level of linguistic sophistication and wit, as part of the writer's identity" (Marley, 2008a, p. 567), which would be lost in the case that the reader is unaware of the reference.

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[3] The example here is transcribed as it appears in the original article.

Understanding these metaphors is a more obvious process when the metaphors come from popular fictional genres, such as fairy tales, or they belong to individual fictional worlds, such as those of Snow White, Mr. Darcy and so forth. However, Marley (2008a) explains that the use of metaphorical identities is not that simple. This case is better illustrated with the following example:

Pumpkin (dark, attract., creative) seeks honey bunny for passionate romance & restaurant holdups. Essex. (Marley, 2008a, p. 564)

At first the metaphorical expression "*Pumpkin*" and "*honey bunny*" here look quite straightforward: the first one belongs to the conceptual metaphor in which the object of desire is food, and the second one to the object of desire is a small animal. Besides that, "*honey bunny*" seems to be a common way to address a loved one in Britain, and "*Pumpkin*" is more common in the United States, but is not completely unknown to British speakers (Marley, 2008a). However, a closer look to this ad, and to the other references in it, especially the "*restaurant hold up*", makes us understand that the writer is using very specific reference. "*Pumpkin*" and "*honey bunny*" are the terms of affection used by a couple that carries out a restaurant holdup in the opening scene of the film Pulp Fiction (1994). This specific reference triggers a decoding process that targets a very specific audience; not only does the reader need to be familiar with the movie, but she also needs to, up to a certain level, approve (or at least find amusing) the couple's behavior in the movie. All these elements create a communicative act in which "the amount of deciphering that they require of the reader might be seen as a way of filtering out potential respondents who are not equally sophisticated and skillful in their decoding of the metaphor" (Marley, 2008a, p. 567). Additionally, in these identity metaphors writers seek to activate certain features of the reference and not others; and it is the readers' job to interpret which elements are activated. This decoding is more successful when writers and readers share similar ideologies and experiences.

The readers' moment of recognition indicates that the metaphors have been successful, felicitous acts, and have created a connection between readers, and in the specific case of personal ads, between potential partners (Marley, 2008a). The potential of metaphors as linguistic resources that create stronger bonds between hearers and speakers was also pointed out by Charteris-Black (2004), since "like many other features of language— such as a shared regional accent, shared access to a genre or other involvement in a discourse community— metaphor bonds people in a joint act of meaning creation" (p. 12)

Since metaphors contribute to the creation of connections among different discourses, and since these metaphors carry the ideologies of the community, this study analyses identity metaphors used in personal ads from the Internet, written in Spanish, to determine the ideologies supported or produced by the use of these metaphors, and what these ideologies reveal about ad posters' performance of heterosexuality.

2. Methodology

The analysis of these label metaphors was guided by Critical Metaphors Analysis theory (CMA) (Charteris-Black, 2004). CMA is a theoretical approach to the study of metaphors, shaped by Critical Discourse Analysis' notions of how the study of language should increase people's awareness of social relations, and how language use contribute to forge and maintain these relations, in order to change them.

There are three stages in CMA's methodology: metaphor identification, interpretation and explanation. Metaphor identification establishes the tension between the literal meaning of the metaphoric source and the meaning in the metaphoric target. Metaphor interpretation recognizes the type of relations constructed by metaphors, and conceptual metaphors are identified.

In metaphor explanation, the roles of the identified and interpreted metaphors are analyzed in the particular discourse in which they appeared, particularly to explain how and why these metaphors contribute

to forge and maintain ideologies. This stage allows "identifying the discourse function of metaphors that permit us to establish their ideological and rhetorical motivation" (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 37). This explanation is supported by evidence from the corpus analyzed, considering the contexts of appearance. The explanation stage facilitates understanding the role of metaphors in a particular discourse, and identification and analysis, are tools that support this understanding.

The corpus for this study was created from 2,000 personal ads from an Internet Dating Web site: CyberCupido.com. The web-page administrators determine the structure of the ads, and the service is anonymous, private, and free. Ad posters, people who post ads, must be Latinos or speak Spanish, be between 18 and 99 years old and have an e-mail address. The site layout allows users to provide their sex, age, profession or occupation, and other personal characteristics.

The information about their potential partner (man or woman) and the kind of relationship they are looking for (i.e. friendship, long-term relationship, etc.) is requested. Besides their basic personal information, users are asked to provide a definition of themselves (*Así se define*), their favorite leisure activities (*Sus gustos*), and a description of the kind of person they expect to meet (*Lo que busca*). The amount of information in these sections diverges among different ads.

Since this study focuses on heterosexuals, only ads of women looking to date men, and men looking to date women were collected. I collected 1000 ads for both women and men for a total of 2000 ads. The criteria for the inclusion of a particular personal ad in the corpus were: ads had to be from a claimed heterosexual poster, in Spanish, all the sections needed to be complete, and the posters had to be between 20 and 45 years old.

After collecting the personal ads, the identity metaphors used by ad posters were identified. After the identification, it was labeled according to the following criteria:

A) Ad posters' sex: W = woman, M = man.

B) Section in the ad where it was found: D= definition (*Así se define*), S = search (*Lo que busca*).

The process of identifying candidate metaphors was guided first by my native-speaker intuition, and second by applying CMA's metaphor identification stage, which has two steps: first, identifying candidate metaphors, and second, selecting the metaphor keywords, i.e. the words used in a metaphorical sense. In the case of detecting identity metaphors, the CMA's criteria was expanded to include expressions in which, in the specific contexts of dating ads, the use of certain expressions (i.e. Prince Charming) are to be taken as non- literal labels (Marley, 2007). Using metaphor identification, I was able to obtain 578 metaphors from the 2,000 ads; using metaphor interpretation, I established 12 conceptual metaphors, and the category identity metaphors. This study focuses solely on identity metaphors, which included 95 metaphors. The metaphor explanation stage determines the discourse functions of metaphors in the forging and transmission of ideologies. The notions obtained from the metaphor explanation stage are supported by the results of the metaphor interpretation stage and discussed in the next section.

3. Identity Metaphors

The term identity metaphors refer to those expressions used by posters to assign themselves or their partners a particular set of characteristics. These expressions are part of the groups' cultural shared knowledge; they come from movies or TV characters, from fairy tales, famous people, and so on. These metaphors convey a series of characteristics associated with a particular character, and therefore they aim for specific people who can understand the meanings evoked. They are expected to be recognized by ad readers; once the readers recognize the label they know what characteristics the poster is invoking.

Within the identity metaphors category, there are metaphors that range from fairy tale characters, such as Prince Charming, to characters from classic literature such as *Don Juan*. Posters also use the names

of famous people or references to beauty queens to express something about their personality, describe the way they look, or explain what they expect from their potential partners. Some examples included in this category are:

(2) Sigo buscando a mi *príncipe azul* y no me conformo con otro color. ¡*Abstenerse ranas*!!! (W.S.)

I am still looking for my *Blue Prince* and I will not settle for a different color. *Frogs need not to apply*!

(3) No hay *princesa* sin *príncipe azul*. En dónde estás? (W.S.)

There is no *Princess* without *Prince Charming*. Where are you?

(4) Soy un poco tímido, no soy un *Don Juan*. (M.S.)

I am a little shy; I am not a *Don Juan*

(5) bueno tampoco un *Adonis*, ni un *Cuasimodo* [4](W. S.)

I am looking for neither an *Adonis* nor a *Quasimodo*

In example 2, the poster indicates how she still wants to find her "Prince Charming". Her reference indicates that she still believes in an ideal man – the prince portrayed in fairy tales. Her use of the verbal phrases *sigo buscando*, (I am still looking for), and *no me conformo*, (I will not settle for), indicates that the fairy tale character might not be very common and popular these days, or that most women have renounced the idea of finding him. However, this poster still wants to find this ideal "Blue Prince"[5], not another color, and she has no desire for another frog in her life, probably implying that she will not date anymore men who are not her ideal, or who are unfit to be good partners. Even thought, the poster uses a well-known image, Prince Charming, she revitalizes the metaphors adding innovative elements that belong to the same semantic field: "Frogs need not to apply". Other examples show more conventional uses of the metaphor, in example 3, the poster also wants to find "Prince Charming"; her desire to find him is based not only on an interest in finding a partner, but also on her desire to be a "Princess". The poster shows willingness to participate in the fairy tale imagery; her use of these characters drafts a series of images associated with them, and allows her to target a potential partner who wants to participate in this imagery too. In addition, her need to find a prince who can make her a princess illustrates a notion found in other examples. That is, people look to their partners as a way to define themselves; they look for contrasts and similarities with these special mates who complete them.

Another popular character taken from classical literature and used in identity metaphors is "*Don Juan*". In example 4, the poster considers himself a shy person; therefore he cannot be a "*Don Juan*". This character brings a series of characteristics that people quickly recognize; a man considered a "*Don Juan*" is a person who can easily seduce women, he is probably polygamous or promiscuous, and he likes to play with women's feelings. The image of "*Don Juan*" is commonly used to express what posters do not want in their partners, or as in example 4, to express that the person is not a seducer, and he is probably trustworthy as a partner.

In example 5, the poster uses two well-known characters to describe the physical characteristics wanted in her potential partners. This poster describes her desired potential partner as neither an "*Adonis*" nor a "*Quasimodo*" – two characters considered to be at opposite ends in the beauty scale. In Greek

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[4] As spelled in the original.
[5] See note 2

mythology Adonis is considered the perfect representation of male beauty, while Quasimodo – also known as the Hunchback of Notre Dame – is the complete opposite of Adonis. The ad poster wants somebody in the middle of this beauty scale, which is a subtle way to say that physical beauty is somehow important for her. These characters can be used to easily express this idea even if ad readers have not read Victor Hugo's novel or do not know the complete myth of Adonis. People can use these common labels to avoid saying directly that they do not want to date an unattractive man, or that they do not have traditional beauty. Also, these metaphors do bring to the readers attention some features associated to the characters, in this case physical appearance, which can be relevant to this context (Marley, 2008a). Other features that one might associate to these characters, i.e. Quasimodo's place of origin, are not the ones evoked by the metaphor.

It seems that popular characters are very useful resources to talk about physical qualities; the following lexical units illustrate this affirmation further:

> (6) No soy una *Barbie* de presentación (W. S.)
> I am not a showroom *Barbie*

> (7) con respecto a su físico no busco a una *miss Venezuela* pero si esta chica es más bien lo que un hombre no pueda rechazar bienvenida es (M. S.)
> About the physical part, I am not looking for a *Miss Venezuela*, but if she looks like somebody who no man will reject, she is welcome

These metaphors illustrate how popular imagery is used in identity metaphors to express physical and beauty standards. In example 6, the poster clarifies that she does not look like a *"Barbie"*, implying probably that her beauty is not ideal by popular standards; it is just a regular beauty. This formula can also be used to express characteristics desired in potential partners. In example 7, the poster affirms he is not looking for a *"Miss Venezuela",* a beauty pageant queen, but he is open to the idea of finding one. Using the beauty queen reference has a strong implication of perfect physical beauty. Those who read the ads most likely are familiar with all these labels; therefore they will understand the message in a few words.

Physical characteristics are also introduced with references to famous movie actors or actresses, as shown in the following examples:

> (8) No busco un *Brad Pitt…* Pero si un hombre súper tierno (W. S.)
> I am not looking for a *Brad Pitt*, but I am looking for a really sweet man

> (9) Una chica que me quiera por mis sentimientos y mi forma de pensar no por lo físico tampoco soy de las personas que busca a una *Jennifer López* sólo una que me quiera (M. S.)
> I am looking for a woman who loves me for my feelings and my way of thinking not because of physical appearance; I am not the kind of person who is looking for a *Jennifer Lopez*, only a woman who loves me.

In example 8, the poster explains that she is not looking for a *"Brad Pitt"*, a reference to the famous American actor known for his good looks, implying that physical beauty is not a major consideration for her. This poster is more concerned with her potential partner's personality and the way he treats her (she is looking for a sweet man). The poster in example 9, who says he hopes to find a potential partner who would love him for his personality and not his looks, makes a similar claim. This request does not sound

outrageous since physical beauty does not appear to be central for him. The poster reaffirms this by saying that he is not looking for a "Jennifer Lopez", a popular artist also known for her beauty.

Identity metaphors are not only used to describe physical characteristics of posters and their potential partners; they are also used to describe personalities:

(10) Una mujer que acaricie el alma, capaz de serenar y atolondrar el espíritu. *Mitad serpiente. Mitad golondrina* (W. D.)

I am woman, who can caress the soul, capable of calming and agitating the spirit. *Half snake. Half swallow.*

(11) Quisiera conocer a una mujer sincera, sencilla […] *un ángel con unas gotitas de diablesa....* (M. S.)

I would like to meet an honest, simple woman […] *an angel with some drops of devil.*

(12) de carácter fuerte (*no soy Hulk*, pero sí tengo lo mío) (W. S.)

(I have a) strong character. I am not *Hulk* but I have my moments

(13) soy una *cajita de Pandora*...... Mil y un cosas por conocer.... (M.D.)

(I) am a *little Pandora box* …..a thousand and more things to get to know…

In example 10, the poster describes herself as woman who is half dangerous and half sweet, not only using identity metaphors, but also adding a description with the features associated to the metaphors (calming /agitating). Using animals to label her personality allows this poster to create this metaphor and communicate the notion of having a complex personality. In the same fashion, the poster in example 11 uses a different metaphor to describe a similar notion. Using the "angel" vs. "devil*"* comparison, the poster creates this metaphor to label his potential partner as a complex person who has a good side and a mischievous side. In example 12, the poster uses the comic book character "Hulk" to talk about her personality. This woman claims to have a strong character, probably a bad temper; however, her temper cannot be compared to Hulk's – who is associated with having an uncontrollable and emotional personality, activating certain features associated to this popular character. In example 14, the use of the Pandora's box myth allows the poster to express the complexity of his personality, evoking the myth's features with surprising and unknown difficulties.

Other identity metaphors give general characteristics of a poster's qualities or particularities through references to well-known figures, as shown in the following examples:

(14) Que sea soñadora ya que yo soy acuario y soy un *Picasso*. (M. S.)

(I am looking for a woman) who is a dreamer since I am an Aquarius and a *Picasso*

In addition to using zodiacal references to create a personality type, in example 14, the poster says that he is a Picasso. Using the label of this famous painter, the poster wants to create an image associate with an artistic personality.

In other metaphors, posters use popular expressions or idioms to help explain their personalities, as shown in the following examples:

(15) yo soy sólo yo una tipa con unas horas de vuelo que no es *mosca muerta* que está más que clara en la vida (W. D.)

I am only a woman with *some hours of flight*, who is not *a dead fly*, who really knows what she wants in life.

(16) Soy una mujer *todo terreno*. (W. D.)

I am an *all-terrain* woman

(17) no soy precisamente un *dulce en almíbar*, pues tengo un carácter que va desde lo más *sublime* hasta un *huracán*. (W.D.)

I am not quite a *fruit in syrup*, because I have a character that goes from *sublime* to a *hurricane*

In example 15, the poster defines herself as having many "flight hours", using a popular expression to assert she has experience in life. To complete her description of her personality, she uses an identity metaphor when she claims not to be a "dead fly". This is a popular phrase used to describe a person who is naïve or silly. The combination of the popular expression with this metaphor labels her as a strong and experienced woman; therefore, she knows what she wants in life. A similar situation is presented in example 16, in this identity metaphor; the poster uses the expression "all-terrain", to describe herself, an expression used to describe vehicles such as SUVs. When the poster uses this expression, she's labeling herself as a strong person who can endure a lot of difficult situations. The poster in example 17 defines herself as a person who is not "fruit in syrup", and who can become a "hurricane", using these identity metaphors to associate certain features to her personality.

As shown in the previous examples, a variety of labels are used to describe personalities. When the poster claims to be shy and not a "*Don Juan*", his personality and his attitude toward women is described by the invocation of this classic character. The use of labels from a comic character, "Hulk*"*, to illustrate somebody's personality describes very clearly what that person is or is not like. The same occurs with the use of the expression "all-terrain*"*, which describes a strong car and therefore a strong woman in this case. In example 17, the poster claims not to be a "fruit in syrup"; this expression is commonly used to describe a person who is very agreeable and/or is passive. Therefore, she claims that since she is not a sweet lady and sometimes she can be a "hurricane*"*. In example 11, the invocation of the "angel" vs." devil*"* contrast serves the poster's intentions and desires well; the woman that he desires cannot be a saint but neither an "easy girl," just a combination of both.

The previous metaphors illustrate how using labels and references to popular characters contribute easily and indirectly to the transmission of a series of characteristics. However, these characteristics convey a series of values and ideologies. When a poster claims to be looking for a combination of an "angel*"* and the "devil*"* he reveals, indirectly, that he desires a woman who is probably open to having sexual relations but not with everybody. The labels allow him to reveal a double standard, or fear, that a woman should be sexual (a "devil") but in a monogamous way. Posters use identity metaphors to express how they share traditional ideologies of romance and dating. Invoking popular characters from fairy tales, like in examples 2 and 3, allows them to construct and label who they want to be in a relationship.

Also, the use of "Prince Charming*"* as a reference states that these women, and the men who might reply to them, still might believe in the fairy tale love story. They believe in the concept of an ideal love, in which there is a "hero*"* who can save them and that the story will have a happy ending. In addition, they are expressing that they will not lower their standards regarding the men they would like to date*,* as in example 2 (reference to "frogs*"*); they have to be a "prince*"*. In other references to "Prince Charming*"*, as in example

3, the poster is not only claiming her desire for a "Prince Charming*"*, she also expresses that she will become a "princess*"* when she finds him. Her desire shows the necessity of people to be recognized by the "other" — the idea that a person becomes who he or she is in the presence of the "other," who is the person's opposite.

It is possible to see that posters create these identity metaphors in a variety of manners, from romantic references to everyday life expressions. Another side of these metaphors is that they can be used to negate and reject the images they evoke:

> (18) No espero un *príncipe* pero si un hombre de carne y hueso que quiera conquistarme y hacerme feliz... (W. S.)
> I do not expect a *prince* but a man in the flesh that wants to conquer me and make me happy.

> (19) no creo en cuentos ni *príncipes azules* (W. S.)
> I do not believe in fairy tales or *prince charming*

> (20) También tengo que decir que no creo en las *princesitas de cuento...* Je jeje (M. D.)
> I also have to say that I do not believe in *little fairy tale princesses*

> (21) Descubrí que no soy una *princesa de cuentos de hadas*, descubrí que soy un ser humano (W. D.)
> I discovered that I am not a *fairy tale princess*, I discovered that I am a human being

In these examples, posters reject features associated with fairy tales, and claimed their lack of desire to participate in this kind of romantic narrative. In example 18, the poster wants a man in the flesh, not a fantasy character such as "Prince Charming*"*. In examples 19 and 20, the posters declare that they do not believe in "fairy tales*", "*princes*",* or *"*princesses*"*. Furthermore, the poster in example 21 claims her realization of not being a princess as a discovery. These declarations of rejection probably imply that these people look at romances and relationships from a more realistic perspective. Additionally, ad poster can insert features and descriptions that belong to the fairy tale imaginary to elaborate their description, as can be seen in the following example:

> (22) Definitivamente no a un *príncipe azul o héroe mítico* que piense por mí, me resuelva los problemas o me rescate de qué sé yo cuál situación desgraciada (W. S.)
> (I am definitely not looking for) a *Prince Charming* or a *mythical hero* who wants to think for me, solve my problems, or rescue me from an unknown terrible situation.

When this poster expresses that she does not expect to find a "hero*"* who can save her, she uses features associated to the prince metaphor to reject it, therefore revitalizing the metaphor (as previously seen in example 2). The following examples illustrate further this rejection:

> (23) Alguien como yo, sin más aspiraciones, que no crea tampoco en *principitos azules...* (M.S.)
> (I am looking for) somebody like me, without more aspirations, who also does not believe in *little princes charming*

(24) que le resulten más atractivos los hombres cultos que los borrachos, machistas, busca broncas, o *musculosos animales de granja* (M.S.)

(I am looking for a woman) who is more attracted to educated men than to drunks, chauvinists, troublemakers, or *muscular farm animals*.

(25) la mujer perfecta sólo existe en los *cuentos de hadas y en las telenovelas mexicanas...* (M.S.)
The perfect woman only exists in *fairy tales* and *Mexican soap operas*

The poster in example 23 claims that he does not believe in "fairy tales", and probably he expects to find a person who shares his feelings. Not only the fairy tale imaginary can be rejected, in example 24, the poster wants to find a woman who does not like "*musculosos animales de granja*", "muscular farm animals". With the use of this label (and drunks, chauvinists, and trouble makers), one can see that the poster rejects extreme characteristics associated with traditional masculinity, and expects to find somebody who thinks in a similar way. In the case of the poster in 24, he claims his disbelief in the perfect woman by rejecting the characterization of women in "fairy tales" and "Mexican soap operas", adding to the case that these posters use elements of the conventional metaphors to reject the ideologies evoked by these metaphors.

4. Discussion

Identity metaphors are essential to create and distribute ideologies about gender, love, and relationships in the heterosexual market. In the case of my data, the rejection or subscription to the "Prince Charming" metaphor, the use of labels such as "Brad Pitt" and "Jennifer Lopez", illustrate posters' ideologies about their ideal relationship, their beauty standards, their social values, as well as their way to update conventional metaphors.

When identity metaphors include references to modern forms of storytelling: "Brad Pitt", "Mexican soap operas" characters, "beauty queens", "Jennifer Lopez", "Barbie", and a comic character like the "Hulk", ad posters are creating modern versions of princes, princesses, and ogres. Instead of using "Adonis" as a standard of male beauty, they use "Brad Pitt"; instead of using "Quasimodo", they use the "Hulk" as the modern version of an ogre.

Posters are renewing and revitalizing these metaphors, and they have the potential of gradually becoming conventionalized ones. They are conventional since a reference to a famous beautiful actress implies a series of concepts that everybody, at least in the posters' world, is familiar with. The use of them does not necessarily show a change in ideologies, as much as a renovation of prototypical models of femininity and masculinity. These identity metaphors are essential in the construction of posters' images and the images of their objects of desire, and they are essential for the transmission of their ideologies about gender and relationships. As said by Charteris-Black (2004), "the advantage of using metaphors — especially those that have become the conventional ways of expressing certain points of views — is that this taps into an accepted communal system of values. This has the effect of making a particular value system more acceptable because it exists within a socially accepted framework," (p. 12). Using references such as Jennifer Lopez expresses a certain point of view, and it is acceptable since her beauty is "common knowledge." In personal ads, the use of conventional metaphors is frequent since "normally, the goal of advertisers is not to challenge people's world-views, but rather to rely on their existing knowledge in order to affect their behaviour as consumers"(Semino, 2008, p. 174). As a consequence, the genre of personal ads, as a subgenre of advertising, might not be the ideal space to introduce novel metaphors.

The metaphors used in these personal ads are circulating and producing ideologies about gender, heterosexuality, and romantic relationships. These ideologies include the support or rejection of traditional

gender roles, and the support or rejection of traditional narratives about romance. These metaphors allow people to reference ideologies that might seem conservative without mentioning them directly. Additionally, they might contribute to the circulation of new ideologies and the introduction of changes in a social group's ideologies.

After analyzing metaphors used in personal ads, especially those that refer to love, relationships, romance and gender, it is possible to see how they are helping ad posters to convey their personal expectations and desires within a frame of reference shared by potential readers of the ads. All these uses evidence that in the personal ads genre, "the construction of discoursal selves is fundamentally collaborative: while the writer may make possibilities for self-hood available, it can only be the reader who actually ascribes them" (Marley, 2008b, p. 145).

Also, posters can express through these metaphors their ideologies about romance and gender, regardless of how acceptable they might be. The metaphors used by these posters contribute to narrow their search for potential partners, and offer the possibility to understand the ideologies and belief of the members of the community who participate in this exchange, more specifically their ideologies about gender and heterosexuality.

5. Conclusion

The identity metaphors category included the expressions used by ad posters to label themselves or their potential partners. The use of these expressions conveyed a set of characteristics known by the group through popular culture, and for this reason they are considered to be metaphorical. They assigned a series of characteristics that contribute to the creation of the individual's self-image and label him/her as a member of a certain group. These identity metaphors are spaces that reveal the ideologies shared by the community that uses and recognizes them.

The support of and resistance to traditional ideologies can be seen in the use of identity metaphors. The metaphors used by ad posters showed how some of them share some beliefs about love and relationships. Posters use identity metaphors such as "Prince Charming" and "princesses" to label themselves and their objects of desire. In general, invoking fairy tale characters, characters from classical literature, and current famous actors or actresses, was a resource used to assign a set of physical characteristics and personality traits. Some posters seem to support traditional models of romance when they claim to be looking for a "Prince Charming". On the other hand, some posters might be rejecting these ideologies, claiming that they did not believe in that kind of romance.

The ideologies supported or rejected here by ad posters belong to this very specific context, the personal ads genre. Ad posters created here an image on how they wanted to be perceived as potential partners, and created an image about how they conceived their potential partners using identity metaphors. However, these claims have to be considered temporary and related to this very specific context, since subjects can always reposition their ideologies in other contexts.

Additionally, this study showed how posters revitalize and update metaphors to label themselves and their partners with the use of current famous people. These metaphors are gradually becoming conventional ones, since the evocation of these famous people conveys a series of characteristics known by their community. They do not necessarily bring change in ideologies about prototypical models of femininity and masculinity. However, these metaphors are creating the new princes and princesses. The modern prince charming can be similar to Brad Pitt or some other famous character, since these citizens without nobility might have a series of qualities desired in a partner that might be different from the ones of the fairy tale character. This reflects the fact that language users have the capacity of revitalizing metaphors. Additionally, in the context of metaphors about love, relationships, desire, and gender, there is the potential

of creating ideologies that can restructure the concept of heterosexuality and change the ideologies supported by heteronormativity.

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