EUPHEMISTIC AND DYSPHEMISTIC LANGUAGE IN *FIFTY SHADES OF GREY* TRILOGY*

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Abstract

The popularity of *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy is beyond doubt. This great impact has also been reflected on academic literature dealing with the novel from different perspectives. However, while there is substantial research on the novels, little attention has been paid to the author's usage of language. Bearing in mind that erotic stories are a common euphemistic and dysphemistic ground, the aim of this paper is to explore euphemism, dysphemism and x-phemism (quasieuphemism and quasidysphemism) in a corpus which consists of the three books of the mentioned trilogy so as to observe if the use of these devices depends on sexes and how these phenomena merge with metaphorical or metonymical devices to avoid a possible loss of face or highlight a taboo. The conclusions will show that the male and female main characters in the novels use language differently and employ these verbal devices with several intentions.

Keywords: *euphemism, dysphemism, x-phemism, sex language, Fifty shades of Grey.*

EL LENGUAJE EUFEMÍSTICO Y DISFEMÍSTICO EN LA TRILOGÍA DE *CINCUENTA SOMBRAS DE GREY*

Resumen

El impacto de la trilogía *Cincuenta sombras de Grey* ha trascendido la popularidad de las masas y ha ocupado la atención de la academia. Esto se ha evidenciado en investigaciones que abordan la obra desde diferentes perspectivas. Sin embargo, aunque las novelas han sido estudiadas con cierta profundidad, no se ha prestado demasiada atención a su uso del lenguaje. Considerando que las historias eróticas son un campo donde el eufemismo y el disfemismo proliferan, este artículo analiza el uso de ambos recursos así como el del x-femismo (cuasieufemismo y cuasidisfemismo) en un corpus conformado por los libros de la mencionada trilogía. El presente estudio tiene dos propósitos: el primero, observar si el uso de estos mecanismos depende del género; el segundo, analizar cómo estos fenómenos se valen de la metáfora y la metonimia para evitar mostrar una imagen negativa o, por el contrario, destacar un tabú. Las conclusiones demuestran que los protagonistas masculino y femenino emplean un lenguaje diferente y utilizan estos mecanismos verbales con diversas intenciones.

Palabras clave: *eufemismo, disfemismo, x-femismo, lenguaje del sexo, Cincuenta sombras de Grey.*

A LINGUAGEM EUFEMÍSTICA É DISFEMÍSTICA DA TRILOGIA *CINQUENTA SOMBRAS DE GREY*

Resumo

O impacto da trilogia *Cinquenta sombras de Grey* tem transcendido a popularidade das massas e ocupado a atenção da academia; isso tem sido evidenciado em pesquisas que abordam a obra a partir de diferentes perspectivas. Contudo, embora os romances tenham sido estudados com certa profundidade, não se tem enfocado no uso da linguagem. Considerando que as histórias eróticas são um campo em que o eufemismo e o disfemismo proliferam, este artigo analisa o uso de ambos os recursos, bem como o do x-femismo (quase eufemismo e quase disfemismo) num corpus conformado pelos livros da mencionada trilogia. Este estudo tem dois propósitos: observar se o uso desses mecanismos depende do gênero e analisar como esses fenômenos se valem da metáfora e da metonímia para evitar mostrar uma imagem negativa ou, ao contrário, destacar um tabu. As conclusões demonstram que os protagonistas masculino e feminino empregam uma linguagem diferente e utilizam esses mecanismos verbais com diversas intenções.

Palavras-chave: *eufemismo, disfemismo, x-femismo, linguagem do sexo, Cinquenta sombras de Grey.*

Introduction

Having been both praised and criticised, *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy has not gone unnoticed to its readers. The great impact of the novel is beyond doubt and proven by millions of comments on the internet, its presence on television and fans' reactions, who have even created new versions of the novels (*fanfics*) and teaser trailers or films. In fact, as a *fanfic* itself from the *Twilight* series, it has also inspired many other fan-made novels both in English and Spanish, such as *The Crossfire Series* by Day (2012a, 2012b, 2013) or the *Crash* series by Williams (2012a, 2012b, 2013) and the novel by Álvarez (2013), among others.

This popularity has also been reflected on academic literature as there are many recent studies dealing with the novel from different perspectives. Some of them focus on specific aspects, such as the concept of *consent* depicted in the novels (Barker, 2013), the erotica that has captured the sexual imaginations of so many women (Comella, 2013) and even the influence of self-esteem to sexual behaviour portrayed in *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Halla Fanani, 2014). Other scholars analyse the trilogy with the aim of examining disputes about the 'rights' and 'wrongs' of the storyline from a curious viewpoint and of reflecting on the advantages for disabled people seeking support with creating spaces and opportunities for intimacy (Hollomotz, 2013); or with the aim of analysing how a technology enhanced form of leisure, that is, reading sexually explicit material, can liberate or constrain women's sexuality (Parry & Light, 2014). Nilson (2013) explains how the author of the trilogy has based her novels on well known and established romance traits such as "bodice-rippers" and chick lit.

Therefore, whilst there is a substantial body of research on the novels, to the best of my knowledge no attention has been paid to the author's usage of language. Considering that and bearing in mind that erotic stories are a common euphemistic and dysphemistic ground, it is the aim of this paper to explore euphemism, dysphemism and x-phemism in a corpus which consists of the three books of the mentioned trilogy so as to observe if their usage depends on sexes and how these phenomena merge with metaphorical or metonymical devices to avoid a possible loss of face or highlight a taboo.

Theoretical framework

Crespo-Fernández (2008) defines *euphemism* as "the semantic or formal process by which the taboo[1] is stripped of its most explicit or obscene overtones" (p. 96),

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1   This author (2008, p. 96) makes a distinction between *taboo*, the prohibition of particular

that is, an alternative to a dispreferred expression in order to reduce conflict and hostility in interpersonal interaction or to avoid a possible loss of face (Goffmann, 1967) or damaging somebody's public self-image (Allan & Burridge, 1991, p. 11); whereas *dysphemism* is the process whereby the most pejorative traits of the taboo are highlighted with an offensive aim to the addressee or the audience, or to the concept itself or *denotatum*. Nonetheless, as Chamizo Domínguez (2004, p. 45) states, sometimes the boundaries between euphemism and dysphemism are fuzzy and so a euphemism can become a dysphemism and vice versa (Kröll, 1984, p. 12); that is why Pfaff, Gibbs and Johnson (1997, pp. 61-62) describe these phenomena as *x-phemism*. As a matter of fact, a word or phrase can be euphemistic from the viewpoint of locution but underlie a dysphemistic intention and vice versa. Casas Gómez (1986, pp. 93-96) and Allan and Burridge (1991, p. 7) call these twofold dimensions, *euphemistic dysphemism* and *dysphemistic euphemism*. However, I will adopt Crespo-Fernández's (2007, p. 47) terms —and his understanding of them—, that is, *quasieuphemism* if the device has a euphemistic intention regardless of its form, frequent within informal and close relationships (Burgen, 1996, pp. 30-31); and *quasidysphemism* if, despite a tactful or mitigating form, the intention is dysphemistic. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that only through the analysis of the discursive context and the relationship between the interlocutors, a word or phrase can be interpreted as a euphemism, a dysphemism or a mixed process (Crespo-Fernández, 2006a, p. 75).

> This ambivalence towards taboo seems to be especially noteworthy in the case of sex, an area of interdiction particularly fruitful in lexical generation. Indeed, sex is pervasive in everyday life, which, as could not be otherwise, is reflected in the tremendously high degree of synonymy in the English vocabulary for genitalia and copulation. (Crespo-Fernández, 2008, p. 96)

Moreover, these phenomena are close to metaphorisation, since it is one of the most —if not the most— prolific linguistic device of lexical creativity, to which writers and speakers resort in order to cope with the realm of sex. Therefore, metaphor, and by extension metonymy, play an essential role in the manipulation of

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types of behaviour or objects believed to be harmful either for moral, religious or social reasons, and *linguistic taboo*, a word or phrase to be avoided in public discourse due to the restrictions imposed by taboos.

the taboo referent since it is the writer or the speaker who models the distasteful concept to present it either without its pejorative overtones or with an intensification of its most unacceptable conceptual traits (Crespo-Fernández, 2008, p. 96). Despite the close links between metaphors and x-phemism, "euphemism and dysphemism can be accurately and insightfully described in terms of cognitive abilities" (Crespo-Fernández, 2011, p. 55). Casas Gómez (2009) defines these two phenomena as the "cognitive process of conceptualization of a forbidden reality, which […] enables the speaker, in a certain 'context' or in a specific pragmatic situation, to attenuate, or, on the contrary, to reinforce a certain forbidden concept or reality" (p. 738). Therefore, from the close connection between metaphor and the verbal mechanisms of mitigation and offence, it seems evident that conceptual metaphor, and by extension metonymy, plays a crucial role in the way humans manage taboo topics (Crespo-Fernández, 2011, p. 56).

Charteris-Black (2004) defines *metaphor* as a way of creating, organising and understanding reality beyond establishing a comparison between two realities; thus, humans employ metaphorical associations derived from personal experience to conceptualise their thought. In this regard, Kövecses (2010, p. 206) adds that the selection of the metaphors somebody uses may depend on who they are, i.e., what their personal history is or what their long-lasting concerns or interests are. It is because of this cognitive and culturally rooted role that metaphors are important in influencing emotional responses; that is, metaphors provoke affective responses since they draw on value systems —culturally or universally associated with positive or negative experiences— by exploiting the associative power of language (Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 44). Franke (2000, p. 151) clarifies that metaphors serve the vital function of creating meaning for concepts where no other avenues of reference are available and even constitute a tool to name the unnamable. On the other hand, a *conceptual metaphor* represents a set of ontological correspondences between two semantic fields or domains, since —as Lakoff (1987, p. 276) indicates— each metaphorical expression has a source domain belonging to a close and particular reality (a common-sense or the literal meaning), a target domain (the concept to be delimited and reified) and a source-to-target mapping.

Methodology

To categorise euphemism, dysphemism and the mixed processes or x-phemism, I have used Taboada and Grieve's (2004, pp. 159-161) appraisal method, which is employed to classify texts based on their subjective content or sentiment. This is,

at the same time, based on Martin's Appraisal (2000) and Martin and White's *Appraisal Theory* (2005), which is a linguistic classification of subjectivity. Taboada and Grieve's method (2004) does not only use the positive or negative semantic orientation of the word to classify the excerpted examples but also takes into account text structure; thus, in case of ambiguity, context and pragmatic elements are considered to assign one category or the other. These polarities are important within the analysis since they help determine if a unit is a euphemism, dysphemism or x-phemism by evaluating the opinions expressed and attitudes of the characters in relation to their context, personality and characteristics. This methodology is implemented in two phases: the first step is to determine whether a word or phrase is of positive or negative orientation; and then, to establish the degree to which a word or phrase expresses appreciation (a comment on a thing), judgement (a comment on a person) and affect (a comment on one's self).

In order to understand the framework in which Taboada and Grieve's approach (2004) is embedded, the *Appraisal Theory* proposed by Martin (1992, 2000, 2003) and Martin and White (2005) must be explained. This is a particular approach employed to explore, describe and explain the way language is used to evaluate, to adopt stances, to construct textual personas and to manage interpersonal positioning and relationships. Therefore, its main aim is to analyse

> how speakers and writers pass judgements on people generally, other writers/speakers and their utterances, material objects, happenings and states of affairs and thereby form alliances with those who share these views and distance themselves from those who don't. It explores how attitudes, judgements and emotive responses are explicitly presented in texts and how they may be more indirectly implied, presupposed or assumed. As well, it explores how the expression of such attitudes and judgements is, in many instances, carefully managed so as to take into account the ever-present possibility of challenge or contradiction from those who hold differing views. (White, 2012)

This theory assists in the interpretation and understanding of linguistic resources, since it enables us to investigate the linguistic basis of differences in the writer's or speaker's style by which they may present themselves (e. g. more or less deferential, dominating, authoritative, etc.), how different genres and text types may conventionally employ different evaluative and other rhetorical strategies and the underlying value systems which shape and are disseminated by a writer's

or speaker's utterances, among many others. In the current study, I focus on one particular domain of this theory: attitude or attitudinal positioning. This domain is concerned with feelings —including emotional reactions—, judgements of behaviour and meanings by which writers or speakers indicate either a positive or negative assessment of people, places, things, happenings and states of affairs (White, 2012). Attitudinal meanings can be divided into three sub-categories: *affect* or *emotion*, evaluation indicating the emotional inclination to a person, thing, happening or state of affairs; *judgement* or *ethics*, normative assessments of human behaviour typically according to the rules or conventions of behaviour; and *appreciation* or *aesthetics*, assessments of human artefacts and natural objects as well as human individuals by reference to the ways in which they are valued or not in a given field (Martin & White, 2005, pp. 42-43). Moreover, this theory permits drawing conclusions about the usage of language regarding male and female roles in terms of attitude.

For the cases when euphemistic, dysphemistic and x-phemistic phenomena merged with metaphor or metonymy I have employed the *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, originated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and later modified in Johnson (1987), Lakoff (1987, 1993, 2002), Lakoff and Johnson (1999) and Lakoff and Turner (1989). The main aim of this theory is to reveal the intentions of metaphor and metonymy, their meaning and ideologies underlying language use through their analysis, since conceptual metaphors are normally initiated in human bodily experiences of any kind —as thought evolves out of the sensory and motor systems to create metaphorical expressions (Johnson, 1987) and to conceptualise abstract concepts— and in knowledge of the value attached to source domains in particular cultural practices (Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 59). As for the methodology employed in these cases, this approach divides the metaphor —and, by extension, metonymy— analysis into three stages: first, metaphors are identified; second, they are interpreted; and finally, they are explained. This enables us to identify *which* metaphors or metonymies were chosen and to explain *why* these were chosen by illustrating *how* they contribute to their purpose (Charteris-Black, 2011, pp. 26, 47). However, metaphor and metonymy are not the main focus of this paper.

Before presenting the analysis, there are two factors that must be considered. First, the problem that arises when analysing language in use; that is, due to the fuzzy boundaries between the devices studied, sometimes it was difficult to decide how to classify them since more than one device merged in the same example. When this happened, if their main intention was to mitigate the potential dangers

of certain taboo words or expressions or, on the contrary, highlight them, they were classified as euphemism and dysphemism respectively, or their mixed processes. Second, as Gibbs (2011, p. 533) found out, it is not clear that different scholars have used the same criteria —of the *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*— when classifying conceptual metaphors because the analysis is somehow intuitive and individual as the chosen linguistic expressions may not accurately reflect what ordinary speakers unconsciously do when using metaphoric language (*cf.* Gibbs, 2006). That is why the receiver's role must not be underestimated in the conceptualisation process of understanding the metaphorical substitute of the euphemistic or dysphemistic choice, since the associative links between the metaphorical item and the taboo require the active participation of the receiver, who is expected to identify the alternative —the euphemism must necessarily be ambiguous to carry out its communicative function— and decode the writer's or speaker's intention to be respectful or offensive (Crespo-Fernández, 2008, p. 105).

The author and the books

In her books, Erika Leonard James (1963) is described as a TV executive, wife, and mother of two, based in West London, who, since early childhood, dreamt of writing stories that readers would fall in love with, but put those dreams on hold to focus on her family and her career. She finally plucked up the courage to write her first novel, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (James, 2011a) and the other two sequels completing her adult romance *Fifty Shades* trilogy.

The trilogy consists of three books —*Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Fifty Shades Darker* (James, 2011b) and *Fifty Shades Freed* (James, 2012)— and was developed from a *Twilight* fan fiction series originally titled *Master of the Universe* and published episodically on fan-fiction websites under the pen name "Snowqueen's Icedragon". The series begins with the story of a college student, Anastasia Steel, who starts a relationship with a 27-year-old, successful, powerful and wealthy businessman, Christian Grey, after interviewing him for the WSU newspaper. Despite Anastasia's inexperience, Christian wants her to sign a contract permitting him enter a purely sexual relationship of dominance and submission. The first novel plays tension over the nature of their relationship, showing Anastasia's reticence to it, and the possibility of romance and love while her exploring the newly discovered world of sex. The second novel deepens the process of knowing each other, especially when revealing Christian's background, as their relationship begins to turn serious and ends with his proposal. In the third novel, after becoming Mrs Grey and a wonder-

ful honeymoon, Anastasia has to both adapt to her new lifestyle and return to work. As Christian tries to overprotect Anastasia by taking over the company where she works and offering the position of lead editor and owner, she starts feeling suffocated, which eventually affects their personal relationship. After overcoming three major obstacles (the attempt on Christian's life, Anastasia's getting unexpectedly pregnant and being blackmailed, kidnapped and beaten by her former boss), they strengthen their relationship by trusting each other as they open up to each other, especially when Christian goes deeper into his past.

Finally and as mentioned in the introduction, despite the great popularity of James's novels, the critical reception of the trilogy has been mixed to negative, since most reviews noted poor literary qualities of her work (Irvine, 2012; Kornbluth, 2012). However, it has also been praised for being more enjoyable than other literary erotic books (Colgan, 2012) and has garnered some accolades in different categories in the UK National Book Awards.

Analysis

Prior to explaining the cases in detail, it must be noted that all euphemistic, dysphemistic and x-phemistic examples from the three books of the trilogy were excerpted and considered. However, due to the limited scope of the paper and the logical space limitations, I have selected the most representative cases; therefore, the analysis is mainly qualitative.

Euphemism

Positive euphemism is the ground where most of the expressions are classified, because all the sexual scenes happen between a couple in love even though the male partner does not recognise it at first. Thus, the negative intention of the characters is not latent or frequent on purpose.

This positively oriented type of euphemism offers alternatives to mitigate the potential danger of taboo words or expressions employed for bodily parts, desire and excitation, fluids, masturbation, orgasm, relationships, sexual play and sexual variants. Thus, bodily parts are usually substituted by another lexical choice, as examples (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6) and (7) show:

(1)   He pulls me up and into his arms so I can feel the <u>length</u>[2] of his body against mine, this swift action taking me by surprise. (James, 2011a, p. 80)

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2   These expressions were not underlined in the original, but have been underlined to highlight the euphemistic, dysphemistic and x-phemistic examples.

(2) Turning to face him, I'm shocked to find he has his <u>erection</u> firmly in his grasp. (James, 2011a, p. 97)

(3) I crawl up the bed and sit astride him to undo his jeans, sliding my fingers under the waistband, feeling the hair in his oh so <u>happy trail</u>. (James, 2011a, p. 187)

(4) He leans forward, running his nose up the <u>apex between my thighs</u>. (James, 2011a, p. 82)

(5) He murmurs as he positions the head of his erection at the entrance of <u>my sex</u>. (James, 2011a, p. 84)

(7) My legs are pinioned by his to the side of the bath, holding me prisoner, giving him easy access to <u>this most private part of myself</u>. (James, 2011a, p. 97)

(8) He flicks the crop and it hits <u>my sweet spot</u> with a sharp slap, and I come, gloriously, shouting my release (James, 2011a, p. 163)

Parts of speech are employed for the same purpose; that is, adverbs become nouns like in examples (8), (9) and (10):

(8) One hand remains in my hair, the other travels down my spine to my waist and down to <u>my behind</u>. (James, 2011a, p. 82)

(9) I can't wait to be <u>inside you</u>. (James, 2011a, p. 82)

(10) He's going to kiss me <u>*there*</u>! (James, 2011a, p. 100)

Furthermore, metonymy is also employed to avoid the taboo of genitalia, especially the *penis*, through the usage of pronouns like *him* or *himself*. By way of illustration take example (11):

(11) I reach forward and place one of my hands around <u>him</u>, mirroring how he's holding <u>himself</u>. (James, 2011a, p. 97)

Orientation is also used to avoid the taboo words for female genitalia as in the following example:

(12) <u>Everything south of my waistline</u> clenches. (James, 2012, p. 47)

There are two areas closely related: desire and excitation, and fluids. On the one hand, sexual desire is represented by the verb 'want', which avoids mentioning 'having sex' (James, 2011a, p. 59). This last expression is also mitigated by phrases like wanting "to be in Christian's bed" (James, 2011a, p. 68). On the other hand, desire —and its climax— materialises in the form of human fluids produced by the body (lexicalised euphemism); thus, 'warm, salty liquid' is employed instead

of 'sperm' and "being wet", "soaking" or "damp" is the female equivalent of 'being sexually aroused or excited', as shown in examples (13), (14), (15) and (16):

(13) He cries out and stills, and I can feel <u>warm, salty liquid</u> oozing down my throat. (James, 2011a, p. 98)

(14) I love that <u>you're so wet</u> for me. (James, 2011a, p. 101)

(14) <u>You're soaking</u> just for me. (James, 2011a, p. 193)

(15) I'm already <u>damp</u> between my legs (James, 2011b, p. 341)

The allusion to sexual excitation is also symbolised in a liquid state in the following examples:

(17) Everything south of my navel <u>liquefies</u>. (James, 2011b, p. 222)

(18) I'm a quivering, <u>moist mess</u>, and he hasn't even touched me. (James, 2011a, p. 55)

These examples belong to explicit euphemism as they refer to the taboo referent they stand for. As Crespo-Fernández (2011) states, explicit euphemism "reached the last stages in the process of lexicalization of metaphorical units, after which the lexical unit is deprived of its capacity to refer figuratively to the taboo due to its close association —not to say identification— with the sexual concept that it names" (p. 63), in this case *being aroused*. This leads to polysemy whereby the taboo and non-taboo senses coexist.

Masturbation and orgasm are also two areas were taboos are mitigated by other lexical alternatives. The former case, as Crespo-Fernández (2006b, p. 20) noted, is referred to as an onanistic action and so is described as "pleasure oneself" (James, 2011a, pp. 82-83). The latter case is metaphorical too, since having an orgasm is compared to "convulsing and shattering into a thousand pieces" (James, 2011a, p. 83), "exploding" (James, 2011a, p. 101) and "enduring an intense climax" (James, 2012, p. 36). These are cases of conventional euphemism where the metaphorical reference is accepted by the majority of language users, though the euphemistic unit has not been yet fully lexicalised and maintains its literal sense coexisting with the figurative one for euphemistic reference (Crespo-Fernández, 2011, p. 61). In this way, expressions like *exploding* and its synonyms to refer to the act of having an orgasm offer an alternative way of comprehending reality by virtue of the conceptualization SEX IS FIRE. In this vein, Crespo-Fernández (2006b, p. 17) argues that there are pre-existing metaphorical associations —that is, *sex weapons*— deriving from sex-as-violence conceptual metaphors which form part of the receiver's cognitive system (see Beneke, 1982; Lakoff, 1993, p. 210). Crespo-Fernández (2008, p. 103) also states that the taboo

'copulate' is subject to several conceptualisations via metaphorical equations such as SEX IS WAR, presenting different sets of ontological correspondences as a result of using the knowledge we have about war to talk about sex. Therefore, having an orgasm is euphemistically represented with expressions such as "a merciless assault" or "conceding defeat", as shown in (19) and (20):

(19) My body is singing, singing from his <u>merciless assault</u>. (James, 2011a, p. 193)

(20) He groans in <u>defeat</u> as his mouth finds mine. (James, 2012, p. 486)

Although Christian's opinions vary as the story develops, both his and Anastasia's visions of romantic relationships are clearly different. While, Anastasia always speaks about love and making love —even when Christian makes it clear and explicitly that he fucks—, Christian always talks about sex and separates from his life anything to do with love by using euphemistic expressions applied to romantic relationships such as "I don't do the girlfriend thing" (James, 2011a, p. 41).

Regarding sexual play, the act itself is named by Christian as 'to mess with her' (James, 2011b, p. 57) while Anastasia prefers a more poetic —and euphemistic— name: 'erotic dance' (James, 2011a, p. 58). Finally, with respect to sexual variants, when Christian tries to persuade Anastasia to offer her virginity to him, he clearly uses euphemistic expressions to avoid "having sex" or "fuck", as he usually refers to these actions; thus, he employs sentences like "making love" (James, 2011a, p. 80), "going to bed" (James, 2011a, p. 80) or "spending the night with him" (James, 2011a, p. 80). He also resorts to euphemistic expressions when he wants to try something new in order to prevent her from being afraid; therefore, he talks about "oral skills", i.e. oral intercourse, (James, 2011a, p. 93) and "starting to play" (James, 2011a, p. 191), i.e. BDSM scenarios. However, Anastasia also employs euphemistic expressions especially when she wants to know about his sexual "predilection" (James, 2011a, p. 95) or the kind of relationship he wants —"That's a Dom/sub thing" (James, 2011a, p. 156); note that, as Keyes (2010, p. 20) states, clipping is another euphemistic strategy.

Gibbs (2011, p. 542) claims people usually see GOOD IS WHITE and BAD IS BLACK, which explains why people are faster in evaluating words when presented in font colours consistent with the embodied metaphors of good-white and bad-black, because the association of brightness with affect is ubiquitous in popular culture. Then, more broadly, darkness is often associated with evil and death, whereas light is often associated with goodness and life. Take the following examples from the

Bible where Jesus is the "light of the world" and Satan is the "prince of darkness" (Meier, Robinson & Clore, 2004, p. 82). In this regard, the most outstanding euphemistic metaphor is the one after which the books are named: *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which clearly represents the twofold character of the protagonist and deals with his internal struggle between either choosing light or the world Anastasia brings to him or darkness or his sadomasochism lifestyle. Thus, due to its pragmatic nature, this euphemistic expression can be considered either positively or negatively oriented.

On the contrary, negative euphemism is employed by Christian in one of the clauses of the contract to express that he would not perform any "acts involving urination or defecation and the products thereof" (James, 2011a, p. 78) and also by Anastasia to refer to Christian's sexual activities or "scary vices" (James, 2011a, p. 248) and "his usual, wicked coping mechanism" (James, 2012, p. 203), that is "kinky fuckery" or the way he has sex (BDSM).

Dysphemism

As the main aim of dysphemism —as I understand it in this paper— is offending, it is odd that it occurs with a positive intention[3]. However, I consider a positive expression the way Christian defines his brother, "Elliot Manwhore Grey" (James, 2012, p. 265), since it is not a quasieuphemism (an expression with a euphemistic intention regardless of its form) but it does not have a purposely direct offensive intention either. The same happens with Anastasia's first vision about Christian's sexual preferences, which she describes as "a shit load of ideas", as in example (21):

(21) He's just given me a shit load of ideas to process and now this. (James, 2011a, p. 158)

On the contrary, negative dysphemism appears after Anastasia's first disappointment with Christian and Kate refers to him as "that bastard" and, in a second occasion, as "that obscenely rich fucker", examples (22) and (23):

(22) What did that bastard do to you? (James, 2011a, p. 40)

(23) Has that obscenely rich fucker upset you again? (James, 2011a, p. 196)

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3   I remind here that I consider dysphemism as a process with purely an offensive aim. The phenomena known as *insults with praised-centred intentionality* (Mateo & Yus, 2000, pp. 122-124), *ritual put-downs* (Montgomery, 1995) and *friendly banter* (Allan & Burridge, 1991), *limericks* (Sánchez Benedito, 1998) or *cut-down puns* (Lillo Buades, 2006), among others are considered within quasieuphemism.

Anastasia also uses explicit dysphemism —which adopts the form of a direct insult— to refer to Mrs. Lincoln, who she calls the "evil bitch", "the bitch-troll" and "Mrs. Elena Bitch Troll Robinson", examples (24), (25) and (26):

(24) I am away for two days, and he runs off to that <u>evil bitch</u>. (James, 2011a, p. 288)

(25) I ignore the mention of the <u>bitch-troll</u>. (James, 2011b, p. 163)

(26) It's from her. Mrs. Elena <u>Bitch Troll</u> Robinson. Shit. That's where he went. (James, 2012, p. 394)

The mixed processes (quasieuphemism and quasidysphemism) or x-phemism

Quasieuphemism is only positively oriented in the novels and it refers to sexual appeal, sexual play, sexual status and sexual variety. Then, regarding the first one, it only applies to Christian, considered "a good-looking son of a bitch" (James, 2011a, p. 18), an expression which has a clear positive intention despite the choice of words which emphasises more his beauty. Even though Christian employs the word "fuck" every time he has sex, the development of events proved it to be a quasieuphemism, since it did not have any offensive traits; in fact, in some occasions it is considered as *bedroom language* with the intention of sexual excitation (Bullough & Bullough, 1994). At the beginning, after seeing Christian's playroom —a euphemistic term for it employed by himself—, Anastasia refers to it as the "Red Room of Pain" (James, 2011a, p. 91); however, after being there, she changes the name for the "Red Room of Pleasure", mitigating then her first impression. Regarding their sexual status, they are completely opposite; while Anastasia is a virgin, a word that Christian considers really dirty at first by their own admission (James, 2011a, p. 79), he is considered to be a "sexy beast" (James, 2011b, p. 96), something which might be thought of as a dysphemistic phrase, especially due to its bond with depersonification (Kövecses, 2002, pp. 122-215) and the *Great Chain of Being* (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, pp. 166-181), but is not because of its positive intention. Finally, as far as sexual variants are concerned, quasieuphemism occurs when Christian refers to the sexual act as "fuck… hard" (James, 2011a, p. 70) and other activities such as "claiming her ass" (James, 2011a, p. 180), i.e. anal intercourse. Although in the end Anastasia recognises that she likes some of Christian's scenarios, she refers to him as a "freaky sadist or masochist", "a monster who possesses whips and chains in a special room" or "King Misfit" not with an offensive intention though, as shown in examples (27), (28) and (29):

(27) What is the appropriate response to finding out a potential lover is a complete <u>freaky sadist or masochist</u>? (James, 2011a, p. 72)

(28) Kind, caring Christian, who rescues me from inebriation and holds me gently while I'm throwing up into the azaleas, and the <u>monster who possesses whips and chains</u> in a special room. (James, 2011a, p. 74)

(29) I have an indecent proposal to consider from <u>King Misfit</u> himself. (James, 2011a, p. 92)

On the one hand, positive quasidysphemism is used within the sexual field by both Christian and Anastasia with a humorous intention or to light up their spirits, since they usually do not mitigate taboo words or phrases, especially Christian, when talking about sex. So their sexual relationship is equivalent to knowing each other in the "biblical sense" (James, 2011a, p. 135) and his offer to her is "his indecent proposal" (James, 2011a, p. 139).

On the other hand, negative quasidysphemism is employed exclusively to deal with matters concerning romantic relationships. Thus, Christian's past, first as a submissive and then as a dominant, is labelled as his 'baggage' (James, 2011a, p. 209). As Chamizo Domínguez (2005) claims: "euphemisms can be studied in the way metaphors have been studied" (p. 12), so we can refer to someone's past in terms of travelling: Past is baggage. However, this device has Elena Lincoln, an older woman who sexually abused Christian in his adolescence, as its main target. Anastasia avoids using any other —explicit dysphemistic— expressions at first by renaming her as Mrs. Robinson, sometimes Mrs. R.; but then Anastasia adds adjectives to this name as her anger rises, "evil Mrs. Robinson" and then she moves to a more offensive, but not too much due to its clipped nature, name describing what she did: "Mrs. Paedo", finally turning: "Mrs. *Paedo* Robinson" and also using the explicit dysphemism mentioned before. Examples (30), (31), (32), (33) and (34) illustrate this:

(30) <u>Mrs. Robinson</u> was part of that lifestyle. (James, 2011a, p. 140)

(31) Or perhaps he would have found his way there anyway in spite of <u>Mrs. R.</u> (James, 2011a, p. 235)

(32) A young man deprived of his adolescence, sexually abused by some <u>evil Mrs. Robinson</u> figure. (James, 2011a, p. 116)

(33) And you take advice from <u>Mrs. Paedo</u>? (James, 2011a, p. 301)

(34) But even worse, <u>Mrs. *Paedo* Robinson</u>, I cannot wrap my head around her, and I don't want to. (James, 2011b, p. 92).

Concluding remarks

Despite the above-mentioned poor literary quality of James's work, the popularity of her *Fifty Shades* trilogy is irrefutable. Furthermore, her usage of language has demonstrated the two hypotheses posed at the beginning of this paper, related to the two objectives of this study. In relation to the first objective, even though the author of the novels is a woman, there are substantial differences between the language employed by the male main character, Christian Grey, and the female one, Anastasia Steele. On the one hand, Mr. Grey uses direct and clear language even if it involves dysphemism; however, the female touch is observed when he uses phrases and sentences to reassure his female counterpart. On the other hand, Miss Steele is more self-restrained about taboos and that is why she normally resorts to quasidysphemism, instead of direct dysphemism, and euphemism, maybe due to social conventions since women are supposed to be less coarse.

Regarding the second objective of the paper, quasieuphemism and positive dysphemism are usually employed to sexually excite or arouse their partners through more or less sexual references which contribute to set the appropriate scenario, which is known as *bedroom talk* or *dirty talk*. On the other hand, positive euphemism is the most common device in the realm of sex, especially positively oriented since, between lovers, negative intentions are odd. Apart from lexical alternatives, adverbs, pronouns instead of nouns and clipping are effective euphemistic strategies as well as metonymy. However, it can also be seen that there is a more permissive attitude towards taboo words and expressions in relation to sex, which shows the increasing acceptance of sexual topics, even publicly, in today's society.

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