Chick Lit, Chick Magnet, Biker Chick, Hippie Chick: Metaphorical Uses of *Chick* in Contemporary American English

Chick Lit, Chick Magnet, Biker Chick, Hippie Chick: Usos Metafóricos de *Chick* no Inglês Americano Contemporâneo

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Abstract: *Metaphors are not just a poetic or rhetorical tool, they are part of our conceptual system (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). They allow us to understand one aspect of a concept in terms of another. This paper aims at unraveling how the lexeme chick can be used to refer to the female universe. I first review some literature on metaphors, then, check how the domain of animals can be used to better explain human behavior. Next, I present some data collected in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) for identifying and interpreting some metaphors of the lexeme chick through a corpus-based analysis. In each subcorpus of COCA, the first 100 random concordance lines were analysed in context in order to check whether the search word was used in its metaphorical or in its literal meaning. The non-literal occurrences were better examined, in order to find out the metaphorical use they represent, to determine the positions the lexeme may occupy in a sentence, and to verify its strongest collocations. The results show that chick is a productive metaphor used either as a noun or as an adjective. Besides, the occurrences of chick in its metaphorical sense outnumber the occurrences in its literal sense.*

Key words: *metaphors; conceptual metaphors; chick; women; Corpus Linguistics.*

Resumo: *Metáforas não são apenas uma ferramenta poética ou retórica, mas fazem parte do nosso sistema conceptual (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) e nos permitem entender determinado aspecto de um conceito em termos de outro. Este artigo tem o objetivo de desvendar como o lexema chick pode ser usado para referir ao universo feminino. Primeiramente, apresento uma revisão bibliográfica sobre metáforas e, então, verifico como o domínio de animais pode ser usado para melhor explicar o comportamento humano. Em seguida, apresento dados coletados no Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) para identificar e interpretar algumas metáforas de chick através de uma análise baseada em corpus. Em cada subcorpus do COCA, as primeiras 100 linhas de concordâncias aleatórias foram analisadas em contexto a fim de verificar as ocorrências dos usos metafóricos e dos usos literais da palavra de busca. As ocorrências não literais foram examinadas com maior cuidado com o objetivo de verificar o uso metafórico por elas representado, determinar a posição que o lexema pode ocupar em uma*

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frase e verificar que palavras são fortes colocadas de chick. Os resultados mostram que chick é uma metáfora produtiva, usada tanto como substantivo quanto como adjetivo. Além disso, as ocorrências de chick em seu sentido metafórico excedem suas ocorrências em sentido literal.

Palavras-chave: *metáforas; metáforas conceptuais; "chick"; mulheres; Linguística de Corpus.*

1 Introduction

Metaphors are all around us: newspapers, magazines, television, everyday conversations, internet, books, and so on. One of the most important achievements in metaphor theory in the last years is that it is not just a poetic or rhetorical tool, it is part of our conceptual system, of the way we think and act (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). It allows us to understand one aspect of a concept in terms of another. However, metaphors can sometimes be confusing and, therefore, not easily understandable for learners of a foreign language. As the interpretation of the metaphorical expressions depends on the active participation of the receiver, he/she has to be actively involved in order to be able to realize the meaning behind the expression. Nevertheless, sometimes, even though the receiver is attentive, establishing the appropriate meaning and sense of metaphorical expressions may be difficult.

This paper aims at unraveling how the lexeme *chick* can be used to refer to women and to the female universe. I set the scene by addressing some of the basics of conceptual metaphor. I will first briefly review some literature on conceptual metaphors, then, check how the domain of animals can be used to better explain human behavior. Then, I will present some data collected in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) for identifying and interpreting some metaphors of the lexeme *chick* through a corpus-based analysis.

2 Metaphors

This section of the article presents the theoretical framework of conceptual metaphor. According to Lakoff (1987, p. 416), *it is common for a single word to have more than one meaning.* The adjective *cool*, for example, appears to have multiple senses. At the same time that it has the same meaning as calm, e.g. *The accused tried to remain cool during the trail*; it can also mean *not friendly*, e.g. *John acted cool towards his ex-girlfriend;* and be used to say that you approve of or like something, e.g. *The Two and a Half Men episode I watched last night was really cool*[3]. Such cases can be described as cases of polysemy. Another example of polysemy is the one given by Fillmore and mentioned by Lakoff (1982): the word *long* has a temporal sense and a spatial sense. *The spatial sense is generally taken to be more central, or*

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[3] The three sentences with the lexeme *cool* were created by me.

prototypical, and the temporal sense is related to it via metaphor (Lakoff, 1987, p. 416-417). Polysemy, then, opens the door to metaphors.

Most people consider metaphors a mere poetic or rhetorical tool which allows for the description of something/somebody through a word or phrase in a context that is different from its normal context of use in order to show that the two things have the same qualities. Nonetheless, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) contend that it is intrinsically connected to thought and action. In this way, metaphors are not just a matter of language itself, but they are closely associated with our conceptual system, with the way we see the world, perform actions, and relate to other people, events and things. Thus, if *our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor* (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 3). If what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphors, metaphors are, then, very much a matter of thought. Besides being embodied, i.e. based on body experience, thought is imaginative, i.e. the concepts that cannot be directly based on experience *employ metaphor, metonymy, and mental imagery – all which go beyond the literal mirroring, or representation of external reality. It is this imaginative capacity that allows for "abstract" thought and takes the mind beyond what we can see and feel* (Lakoff, 1987, p. xiv). It means that we use metaphors to conceptualize and understand the things we do not have conditions to comprehend literally.

In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphors are described as consisting of two conceptual domains, in which the first is understood in terms of the second. The first one is the target domain and the second, the one which is used as a way of defining the other, is the source domain. We can say, for instance, that LIFE IS A JOURNEY. In this metaphor, JOURNEY is the domain used to better describe the concept of LIFE. Thus, JOURNEY is the source domain and LIFE is the target domain (Kövecses, 2010). *After university Lucy was at a crossroads, and she didn't know which way to go; You may find some problems along the road;* and *He's following his dad's footsteps*, for example, are metaphorical expressions which represent the way people understand life in terms of a journey.

The cognitive models built between the source and the target domains are, in many situations, so strong that *we have a natural tendency to attribute real existence to the categories in those cognitive models* (Lakoff, 1987, p. 209). Lakoff mentions the example TIME IS MONEY. He explains that it is not a universal way of conceptualizing the source domain TIME, however, it is so omnipresent in American culture that people tend to *lose sight of its metaphorical character and take it as part of an objective characterization of what time "really is"* (Lakoff, 1987, p. 209). The same metaphor also seems to be very productive in Brazilian Portuguese. It is so embedded in our culture that we do not need any effort to interpret it.

Another important characteristic of conceptual metaphor is that it is not a linguistic phenomenon. According to Lakoff (1993, p. 208), *what constitutes a metaphor is not any*

particular word or expression. It is the ontological mapping across conceptual domains. However, it is mainly through language that metaphors take shape[4]. The manifestation of conceptual metaphors materialize through metaphorical expressions, which are linguistic representations of the mappings between the source and the target domains. As this paper aims at exploring the metaphorical uses of *chick*, a brief overview of animal metaphors will be presented.

2.1 Animal metaphors

The domain of animals is an extremely productive domain. Human beings are especially frequently understood in terms of (assumed) properties of animals (Kövecses, 2010, p. 19). Therefore, it is possible to understand human behavior through animal behavior. ANIMAL BEHAVIOR is the source domain in terms of which the target domain HUMAN BEHAVIOR can be understood. In this way, HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR. Kövecses gives some examples:

a. *She bitched about Dan, but I knew she was devoted to him.*

b. *His mother was catty and loud.*

c. *This is a research site. Not the best place for a couple of boys to be horsing around.*

(Kövecses, 2010, p. 152)

Concerning the examples above, the author highlights that it is not hard do perceive that *animals do not "complain" as suggested by bitch; they are not "impertinent" as suggested by catty, and they do not "behave foolishly" as suggested by horse around* (Kövecses, 2010, p. 152). How then these words related to animals such as *bitch, catty,* and *horse around* acquire their metaphorical meaning? The researcher suggests that the only reasonable explanation to it is that firstly, humans described animals in terms of human characteristics which were later reapplied to human. However, it is not just human behavior that can be understood in terms of animal behavior. Humans themselves can also be described in terms of animals. In this way, we have the metaphor PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, in which the target domain PEOPLE is understood in terms of the source domain ANIMALS (Kövecses, 2010), as in the examples d, e, and f.

d. *You are putting the men down, and they don't like it; they think you are being a bitch.*

e. *All I could hear was the producer screaming, "What the hell does the silly cow think she is doing?"*

f. *I've had my eye on her. Stupid cow, she thinks I don't know what goes on.*

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[4] According to Kövecses (2010), besides speaking or writing, other modes *that a metaphor can be manifested in are pictures, sound, music, and gesture, and perhaps even smell, touch, and taste* (p. 72).

Bearing the constant use of metaphors in everyday language in mind and the way it helps to conceptualize and apprehend a domain in terms of another, and to see and better understand the world, this paper aims at exploring how the word *chick* is used with figurative meanings for describing female human beings. In this direction, dictionary entries for "chick" will now be presented.

2.2 Women as chicks

The *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (2005) attributes two meanings to the word *chick* as a simple term. It can refer either to a baby bird, especially a baby chicken, or to a young woman. When used to refer to a young woman, it can, sometimes, be considered offensive.

Figure 1 Definition of *chick – Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*

Besides *chick,* the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (2005) also brings definitions to two more entries in which *chick* is used together with the nouns *flick,* and *lit.*

Figure 2 Definition of *chick flick* - *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*
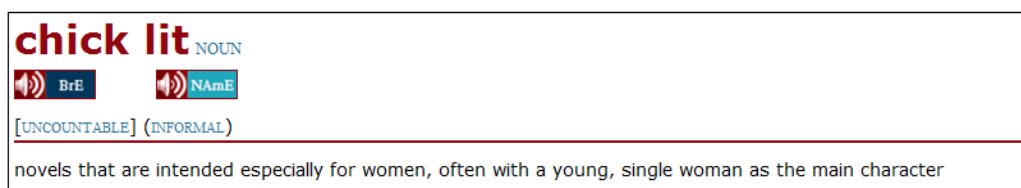

Figure 3 Definition of *chick lit* - *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*

3 Data and Method

The *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) was used in this research. COCA contains a 410 million[5] words collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources. The corpus contains texts in the five varieties of spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and academic English, which were collected between 1990 and 2010.

Conceptual metaphors are intrinsically connected to thought and, in this way, they are an abstract phenomena. Being mental representations, how can Corpus Linguistics reach metaphors? Although being born in thought, metaphors shape up through linguistic metaphorical expressions, as mentioned above. Another fact that makes conceptual metaphors reachable by electronic corpora is the fact that they are conventional and, therefore, recurrent in language. However, there is still a problem: to find out whether recurrent expressions in the language are metaphorical or not.

Berber Sardinha (2007) presents four options for analysing metaphors in corpora: (i) reading the corpus; (ii) carrying out a search based on intuition and previous knowledge; (iii) carrying out a search based on wordlists, and (iv) using a software which identifies metaphors. For this research, I used the first option, as I collected the data electronically, and my analysis was done manually.

After defining the search word, chosen for its high metaphorical potential, I first searched for the main collocate terms (one position to the left and one position to the right) of the lexeme *chick,* in order to observe if the meanings were figurative or not. Next, from the total number of occurrences of the search word, I checked the distribution of *chick* among the five subcorpora, aiming at investigating in which language variety of COCA the lexeme appears more frequently. Subsequently, by using the KWIC (Key Word in Context) concordance format, the first 100 random concordance lines in each subcorpus were read and carefully examined, in order to determine whether the lexeme was used in its literal or metaphorical sense. The non-literal occurrences were observed in more detail aiming at finding out the underlying metaphorical use they represent. Afterwards, I investigated all the figurative occurrences, so that I could determine the positions the lexeme may occupy in a sentence, i.e. if *chick* was used as a noun or as an adjective, and to verify its strongest collocations.

4 Results/findings

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[5] When this research was conducted, the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* was composed of about 410 million words. However, nowadays, it contains a 425 million words collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources.

As my aim was to unravel the metaphorical uses of the lexeme *chick*, I first decided to search for its main collocates (one position to the left and one position to the right) in order to find the first fifteen words the search word collocates with. In this way, I could observe the co-occurrences of the lexeme *chick,* as showed in Table 1

	Collocates (one position to the left and one position to the right)	**TOT** (The total frequency in the corpus)	**%** (The percentage of all occurrences of the word with *chick*)	**MI** (The Mutual Information score for the collocates)
1	Flick	56	3.13	11.56
2	Corea	38	41.76	15.29
3	Flicks	34	3.56	11.74
4	Hot	29	0.05	5.67
5	Peas	28	0.75	9.49
6	Harrity	25	100.00	16.55
7	Lit	25	0.26	7.98
8	Biker	23	2.86	11.43
9	Smith	20	0.04	5.42
10	Hippie	17	1.63	10.62
11	Baby	17	0.03	4.79
12	Magnet	16	0.59	9.15
13	Webb	16	0.42	8.66
14	Embryos	14	0.72	9.43
15	College	13	0.01	3.74

Table 1 Collocates of *chick*

In Table 1, the second column shows the first fifteen collocates of the word *chick* one position to the left and one position to the right of the search word. The third column indicates the total frequency of the combination of the word with the search word in all sections in the corpus, e.g. the word *flick* collocates with the search word *chick* 56 times in the whole corpus. The next column presents the percentage of all occurrences of the word with the search word, e.g. 3.13% of all occurrences of *flick* are with the search word *chick*. The last column shows the mutual information score for the collocates.

The mutual information score between any given pair of words… compares the probability that two items occur together as a joint event (i.e. because they belong together) with the probability that they occur individually and that their co-occurrences are simply a result of chance … The more strongly connected two items are, the higher will be the mutual information score.

(Mc Enery and Wilson, 2004, p. 86)

In this way, except for the proper names, *flicks* is the collocate in Table 1 that has the highest probability to occur together with the search word *chick,* their mutual information score is 11.74.

Analysing the collocations in context, I could notice that the main collocations bring the search word in its metaphorical sense, as it can be observed in table 2. From the first fifteen collocates, nine (09) of them seem to collocate with the search word in its metaphorical sense, three (03) of them in its literal sense, and four (04) appear as a proper name. Some examples are provided in Table 2.

	Collocates	Examples of the collocates in context
1	Flick	Later she and her mom, Bridgette, went to the movies, and caught " 27 Dresses, " a **chick flick** they both enjoyed.
2	Corea	**Chick Corea** was playing electric piano.
3	Flicks	Dirk hated grocery shopping nearly as much as he hated watching soap operas and **chick flicks**...
4	Hot	The whole point of all of our books are all women are **hot chicks**...
5	Peas	The " guacamole " was a vegetable melange made up of a perfect dice of ...chunks of eggplant, **chick peas**...
6	Harrity	Colin Powell briefs members of Congress, **CHICK HARRITY** - USN &WR; # Picture, Sticker shock.
7	Lit	The author of 1999's runaway best-seller ... inadvertently helped popularize the " **chick lit** " genre ...
8	Biker	Mary Osborn, 57, executive assistant; married: I'm the **biker chick**. I ride a Harley.
9	Smith	A brilliant, charismatic man, **Chick Smith** exerted nearly absolute control over his family and many employees.
10	Hippie	A young **hippie chick** came to the table to flirt with me.
11	Baby	There was a newborn **baby chick** they told her she could keep as her pet.
12	Magnet	" When I was that age, I only could wish for a' **chick magnet**' car like that. "
13	Webb	Benny Goodman leads his troupe in a battle of the bands against **Chick Webb**, New York, 1937.
14	Embryos	Already in Israel, researchers have put human embryonic stem cells into **chick embryos**.
15	College	The **College Chick**'s eyes flutter in disbelief. She tries to keep her cool -- but can barely restrain her laughter.

Table 2 Main collocates of *chick* in context

In a sample of 410 million words, the search word *chick* occurs 2318 times. The 2318 tokens are divided into five subcorpora: spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic.
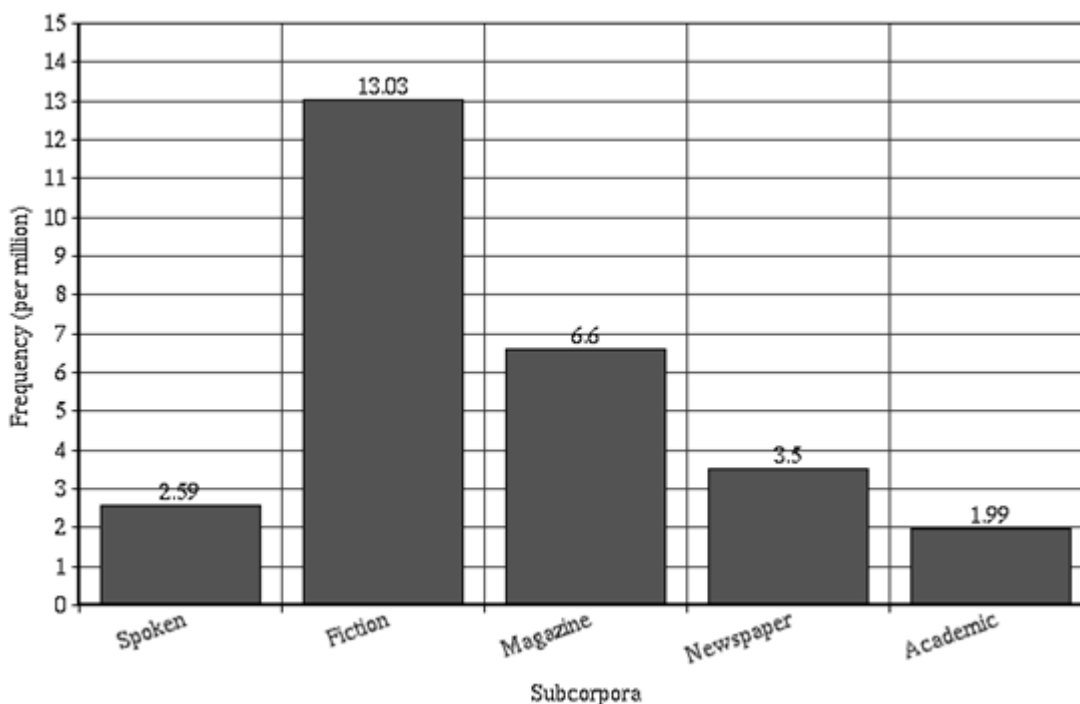
Graph 1 The frequency of *chick* in the five varieties of COCA

In Graph 1, it is possible to observe the distribution of the 2318 occurrences among the five subcorpora. The results are presented according to their frequency per million words. When analysing the relative frequency in each of the varieties, it is observable that the word *chick* is most frequently used in fictional language (13.03 per mil[6]) and magazines (6.6 per mil). Fictional and magazine varieties are followed by newspaper (3.5 per mil), spoken (2.59 per mil), and academic language (1.99 per mil).

In each subcorpora, the first 100 random concordance lines were analysed. The aim was to find out whether the search word was used in its metaphorical or in its literal meaning. Below, it is possible to see the occurrences of the word *chick* in its metaphorical sense in the five varieties of spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and academic English.

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[6] *Per mil* is the abbreviation for *per million*.
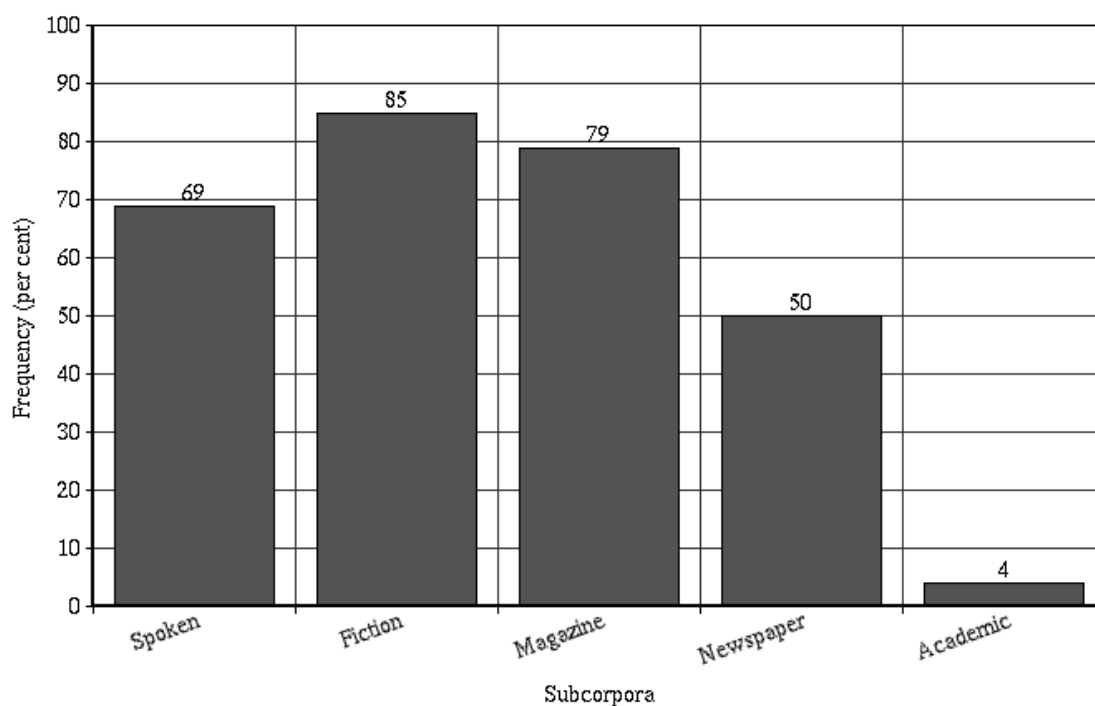
Graph 2 Distribution of the word *chick* in its metaphorical sense in the five varieties of COCA

Concerning spoken language, from the 100 concordance lines analysed, 69 present the word *chick* in its metaphorical sense, 17 present its literal meaning, and in 14 occurrences *chick* appears as a proper name.

Sense	Number of occurrences	Examples
Metaphorical	69	▪ Here weve got some truly novel ideas, everything from the hot-new ■ blockbusters to some **chick** literature. ■ She was a bit of a modern day flower child, a hippie **chick** who loved ▪ going to bars, listening to music and hanging out with her many… ■ When a man says hot **chick**, what does he mean by that?
Literal	17	■ You can see a **chick** lying dead in a nest, nearby eggs that have been ▪ crushed. ■ The bald eagle **chick** is four or five inches long and weighs just a few ▪ ounces.
Proper name	14	▪ That comment came from a reclusive evangelical Christian publisher ■ named Jack **Chick**.

Table 3 Senses of *chick* in spoken language

In terms of fictional language, the variety where *chick* is most frequent, the use of *chick* in its metaphorical sense outnumbers its occurrences in spoken language. Thus, the number of

occurrences of the word *chick* used to describe a baby bird is, consequently, lower (9 occurrences in 100).

Sense	Number of occurrences	Examples
Metaphorical	85	■ So, seeing a hot **chick** in need of aid, I did what any normal guy would have done. ■ Maybe he was simply complaining that he had to work when there was some hot **chick** still in his bed. ■ She dreams of being an author and unlike Darla, she loves a good " **chick** ■ flick! "
Literal	9	■ She cracked open an egg, but instead of a yolk, a bloody **chick** embryo ■ fell into the bowl.
Proper name	6	■ Rickard tells him that he borrowed it from a man named **Chick** Harper.

Table 4 Senses of *chick* in fiction language

With respect to the language used in magazines, the number of times the word *chick* was used metaphorically is still high (79 occurrences in 100). The word is used in its literal sense in 13% of the cases.

Sense	Number of occurrences	Examples
Metaphorical	79	■ I understand why finding some **chick**'s clothes at your guy's place would ■ be both annoying and upsetting… ■ You've just found out your best friend's guy is sleeping with another **chick**. ■ When we turned onto a particular street, we spotted this superhot **chick** ■ walking her dog. ■ On our sixth date, this **chick** took me to an Italian restaurant.
Literal	13	■ Badyaev calculates that this pattern cuts **chick** death some 10 to 20 ■ percent from what it would be if birds produced sons… ■ Researchers have found that eggs are loaded with hormones and other ■ factors that affect a **chick**'s development and later characteristics.
Proper name	8	■ "There is enough money," says **Chick**.

Table 5 Senses of *chick* in magazine language

The results presented so far show a high number of occurrences of the lexeme *chick* in its metaphorical sense (always higher than 69%). However, when it comes to the language used in newspapers, the context starts to change. The search word is used metaphorically in 50% of the occurrences analysed. In 41% it is used as a proper name, and in 9% in its non-metaphorical meaning. Still, it is important to point out that chick is not a frequent word in the variety of the corpus, being the second least frequent one.

Sense	Number of occurrences	Examples
Metaphorical	50	■ These days, Myers jokes about his artificial leg being a " **chick** magnet " and brags about being a volunteer firefighter.

		▪ The term **chick** lit reminds me of the Victorian era, when there were
		▪ so-called ladies' books.
Literal	9	▪ Already in Israel, researchers have put human embryonic stem cells
		▪ into **chick** embryos.
Proper name	41	▪ He invited Texans offensive coordinator Chris Palmer, running backs coach **Chick** Harris and receivers coach Kippy Brown to play cameo roles.

Table 6 Results of the analysis of 100 concordance lines of *chick* in newspaper language

If the situation starts to change when considering newspapers, it is possible to say that it changes radically when it comes to academic texts. The occurrences in which the lexeme is used metaphorically are just four. The cases in which its literal meaning appears is higher than in the other four varieties, in 39% of the concordance lines analysed, the word *chick* is used literally. The number of times the search word is used as a proper name is also high (57%). This result is not surprising since academic texts tend to be more formal and less metaphorical than other language varieties.

Sense	Number of occurrences	Examples
Metaphorical	4	▪ I knew that if I went over to the **chick**'s house and raped her that I would ▪ have to kill her because she would…
Literal	39	▪ … egg is formed, what its different parts and functions are, and how a **chick** embryo develops and hatches. ▪ Amazingly, female finches utilize this simple and predictable relationship between hatching order and **chick** growth to produce ▪ offspring that match the local environment. ▪ … penguin went more than 350 km, it had almost no chance of raising a **chick**.
Proper name	57	▪ And why, by the same token, Ravelstein has chosen **Chick** as his biographer.

Table 7 Senses of *chick* in academic language

5 Analysis and discussion of results/findings

In this section, I present the meanings of the lexeme *chick* in its metaphorical sense by considering its position in the sentence as well as its strong collocates. In the subsections 5.1 and 5.2, I will analyse the use of *chick* as a metaphorical adjective and the use of *chick* as a metaphorical noun separately.

5.1 *Chick* **as a metaphorical adjective**

After analysing 500 concordance lines, 100 in each subcorpora of COCA, it was possible to observe that *chick* is used in its metaphorical sense (young woman) in 57,4% of the

cases. In absolute numbers it corresponds to 287 occurrences in which the lexeme occurs either as a noun or as an adjective. From the 287 metaphorical occurrences, in 101 the search word appears as an adjective, and in most of these cases it modifies nouns as the ones that follow:

⇒ flick;

⇒ lit;

⇒ magnet.

Chick collocates with *flick* in order to describe a film about relationships, romance and other subjects that attract mainly women. Besides, this kind of movies usually deals with female characters and is designed to appeal to a female target audience. Observing the sentences below, which were extracted from COCA, it is very clear how the pair *chick flick* relates to a totally female universe.

⇒ *There's only one justifiable reason a guy should even see a <u>chick flick</u>, is to understand how women think so you can use it against them…*

⇒ *Dirk hated grocery shopping nearly as much as he hated watching soap operas and <u>chick flicks</u> or listening to " female prattle. "*

The same happens with the pair *chick lit.*

⇒ *And those <u>chick lit</u> books are great, like you said, great beach books, great reading…*

⇒ *The term <u>chick lit</u> reminds me of the Victorian era, when there were so-called ladies' books.*

Differently from the collocations just mentioned, the pair *chick magnet* refers more to the male than to the female universe. As it is possible to observe in the examples that follow, *chick magnet* can describe either an object or a person. When designating an object, it means something like a car, for example, which attracts good-looking women to a man. It is also used to refer to a man who possesses features that are able to attract women in the same way a magnet attracts iron.

⇒ *Jesse Halling was so good-looking, friends called him a " <u>chick magnet</u>. "*

⇒ *" When I was that age, I only could wish for a' <u>chick magnet'</u> car like that. "*

5.2 Chick as a metaphorical noun

From the 287 metaphorical occurrences, in 186 the search word appears as a noun, and in most of these cases it frequently collocates with:

⇒ biker;

⇒ hippie.

Biker collocates with *chick* to designate a woman who rides a motorcycle. As it is possible to observe in the examples that follow, biker chicks ride their own motorcycles.

⇒ *Mary Osborn, 57, executive assistant; married: I'm the <u>biker chick</u>. I ride a Harley.*

⇒ *The time she met D, she liked to think of herself as a <u>biker chick.</u> She had a Honda.*

When collocated, *hippie* and *chick* refer to the kind of woman belonging to the hippie movement. Besides having their beliefs and philosophy, *hippie chicks* usually have a characteristic look and style, often having long hair and wearing brightly colored clothes.

⇒ *She was a bit of a modern day-flower child, a <u>hippie chick</u> who loved going to bars, listening to music and hanging out with her many friends.*

⇒ *Hey, there's no telling what this blowsily dressed neo-soul <u>hippie chick </u>with a reputed fondness for hallucinogens is gonna pull out of her pocket stash...*

6 Conclusions

Metaphors are everywhere. They allow us to understand one aspect of a concept in terms of another, and are a way of conceptualizing and better comprehending the world. Such process is the result of mappings made between two different domains and is what makes metaphorical expressions come up. The first, the target domain, is understood in terms of the second, the source domain, used as a way of defining the other. *Chick* (source domain), the lexeme I chose as search word of my research, is used to refer to women and to the female universe (target domain).

The main collocates of *chick* (one position to the right and one position to the left) gave, in one of the first steps of my research, some clues of what would be later concluded. It was possible to notice how metaphorical the search word is in the very first beginning of the investigation. This is also anticipated by the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (2005), which includes both literal and metaphorical senses of the lexeme.

Concerning the five varieties of spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and academic English in COCA, the metaphorical sense of *chick* showed to be highly frequent in fiction (85% of the occurrences are metaphorical), followed by popular magazines (79%), and

spoken language (69%). This seems to happen due to the informality of these varieties. Of course that the level of informality changes according to the situation, but the varieties in which *chick* is highly used metaphorically to refer to a young woman are, undoubtedly, more informal than newspaper and academic language, in which the word is used metaphorically in 50% and 4% of the occurrences respectively.

With regard to the search word *chick* in its metaphorical sense, it is possible to conclude that:

⇒ it is used to refer to women and to other things that make part of the female universe;

⇒ the target domain WOMEN is understood in terms of the source domain CHICK;

⇒ it is very frequent in informal situations, especially in spoken, fiction and popular magazines subcorpora;

⇒ it is not very frequent in the newspaper subcorpus;

⇒ it is rare in academic language;

⇒ it is used either as a noun or as an adjective;

⇒ as a noun, it produces the collocations *biker chick* and *hippie chick*;

⇒ as an adjective, it produces the collocations *chick flick*, *chick lit*, and *chick magnet*;

⇒ the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (2005) brings just two of the collocations revealed by COCA (*chick flick* and *chick lit);*

⇒ it is a productive metaphor;

⇒ the occurrences of *chick* in its metaphorical sense outnumber the occurrences in its literal sense.

Without electronic corpora, it would be very difficult to get to these conclusions. Although Corpus Linguistics has developed a lot in the last years, when concerning metaphors researches, there are still some data which are not reachable through corpora and software.

Chick, the search word of my research, is an example of how potentially metaphorical a lexeme can be and the data collected in COCA confirm its omnipresence in our day by day and the importance of teaching metaphors in a foreign language learning context, since they make part of real English.

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