

Zoological metaphors and analogies in the conceptual construction of border subjects and practices

Metáforas y analogías zoológicas en la construcción conceptual de sujetos y prácticas fronterizas

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Abstract

The objective is to problematize analogies and metaphors used to refer to artifacts, phenomena, practices and subjects linked to Latin American interstate borders, on different timescales. It seeks to describe and analyze the different expressive and argumentative uses of these resources valued for their usefulness to focus attention on certain attributes or features of the object of knowledge that is being constructed, granting familiarity and proximity. However, these are subtleties that often contribute to crystallize stereotyped, stigmatizing images and reduce the critical potential of investigations. Through its use, a potential risk of analytical simplification and transfer of meanings associated with ideological biases is generated. To develop the work, a corpus made up of press articles, reports and academic papers, referring to Latin American interstate borders, is systematized, where the focus is on the use given to three words: mules, coyotes, ants.

Keywords: metaphors, Latin American borders, mules, coyotes, ants.

Resumen

El objetivo es problematizar analogías y metáforas utilizadas para hacer referencia a artefactos, fenómenos, prácticas y sujetos vinculados a las fronteras interestatales latinoamericanas, en diferentes escalas temporales. Busca describir y analizar los diferentes usos expresivos y argumentativos de estos recursos



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valorados por su utilidad para concentrar la atención sobre ciertos atributos o rasgos del objeto de conocimiento que se está construyendo, lo que otorga familiaridad y proximidad. Sin embargo, se trata de artilugios que muchas veces colaboran en cristalizar imágenes estereotipadas, estigmatizantes y restan potencial crítico a las investigaciones. A través de su empleo se genera un potencial riesgo de simplificación analítica y transferencia de sentidos asociados a sesgos ideológicos. Para desarrollar el trabajo se sistematiza un corpus conformado por artículos de prensa, informes y *publicaciones* académicas, referidos a fronteras interestatales latinoamericanas, donde se centra la mirada en el uso dado a tres palabras: mulas, coyotes y hormigas.

Palabras clave: metáforas, fronteras latinoamericanas, mulas, coyotes, hormigas.

Introduction

Studies on borders have made use of various style resources to identify the artifacts, phenomena, practices and subjects that are concentrated there and to determine their specificity. There is a diversity of instruments used in discursive production, including comparisons, allegories, analogies, metaphors, parallels, metonymies and synecdoches. Their use is not restricted only to written communication but also includes language produced by audiovisual media, such as television, radio and various digital platforms. The predominance of these figures of speech is usually an indicator of the inductive nature of the transmitted message (Guerra, 2014).

Borders represent a fertile field for the use of metaphors and analogies to the point that currently some terms are associated with concepts with some level of development. An example of this is expressions such as *porous* or *dynamic* borders, which evoke physics concepts to account for the degree of openness or absence of state control, in the first case, and of activity or mobility, in the second. Other common references come from biology, such as *twin cities*, which are used to identify urban pairs on either side of the international boundary, or *epidermis* and *dismemberment*, which are used to describe the processes of territorial differentiation between national states.

The aim of this work is, first, to identify linguistic stylistic resources, in particular analogies and metaphors, that are frequently used to refer to artifacts, phenomena, practices and subjects linked to borders, focusing attention on the literal and rhetorical senses that they transmit. A second aim of this study is to advance the description and analysis of different expressive and argumentative uses of such resources and the meaningful effects generated by their use in different fields interested in borders, such as academia, journalism and the government.

Three words are analyzed herein: mules, coyotes and ants. These terms, which do not exhaust the universe of analogies and metaphors associated with borders, represent some of the most commonly used in Latin America. These expressions are present in designation processes that refer to artifacts, phenomena, practices and subjects linked to the mobility and circulation of people and goods. Their uses and meanings have different depths and spatiotemporal coordinates, have circulated through various disciplines and, depending on the case, have enjoyed greater or lesser popularity among native populations. In addition, they affect assessments that are especially influential in the orientation of public policies that affect borders. This study focuses, specifically, on the expressions and metaphorical constructions and their semantic

field and contextual relationships, thus making visible the marks that impose the production conditions of the addressed discourses.

This article is divided into four sections. The first focuses on the description of the analytical approach and the documentary corpus used herein. The second section presents the three key concepts of the article: metaphor, analogy and metonymy. The third section offers the empirical development focused on zoological metaphors in general and is divided into three sections in which the following are taken as the main linguistic resources: mules, coyotes and ants. The fourth section provides conclusions.

The analytical approach and formation of the corpus

The corpus of analysis is composed of academic texts, particularly from the social sciences, and media texts, from the digital press and television, gathered for a thematic analysis (Zoppi-Fontana, 2005). This methodological option consists of relating statements produced in different places, times and genres and by different enunciators. It is a reading device that works as a thread and allows grouping diverse textual materials in the construction of the corpus.

The selection of documents focuses on recovering the functions and meanings of metaphors in discourses that have a great impact on public opinion and the governmental sphere. The corpus thus brings together a heterogeneous set of texts, both for their symbolic materiality (videos, news, and articles) and for their institutional registration and social circulation (academic articles on anthropology, law and criminology; news, reports and chronicles of the digital press and television).

The analytical approach does not prioritize a lexicographic approach, although it takes certain elements for a description of the use of metaphors and their derivations in the discourses and contexts analyzed. In general, the methodological perspective recovers contributions from discourse analysis, especially from the French line (Angenot, 2003; Pêcheux, 1990) and from the Russian school of the Bakhtin circle (Bajtín, 1985, 1989). Productive categories and concepts are taken for the analysis of the selected metaphors, with the aim of recognizing certain discursive functions that intervene in the symbolic construction of images, narratives and imaginaries about the border.

In agreement with Puccinelli Orlandi (1998), the processes of signification move in the tension between paraphrase (stabilization) and polysemy (dissemination). Indeed, the attribution of meanings to a text can vary between what is called “paraphrastic reading”, which is characterized by the recognition (reproduction) of a meaning that is supposed to be given by the author, and “polysemic reading”, which is defined by the attribution of multiple senses of the text. The paraphrastic process allows the production of meaning in various forms and produces a tension between the identical and the different that constitutes the variety of inherent instances of language.

From this perspective and from the analysis of metaphors and analogies, it is asked how the various meanings conveyed in these linguistic forms account for ideological positions and ways of conceiving the artifacts, phenomena, subjects and practices of interstate borders. For this purpose, different meanings or components of each metaphorical field are identified, and there is a focus on the statements whose discursive marks refer to processes of designation, nominalization or definition around the

selected metaphors. It is sought to identify the relations of dominance, sedimentation, destabilization or silencing of meanings, established between the various discursive processes that intervene in the symbolic construction of certain artifacts, phenomena, subjects and practices of interstate borders that are alluded to using the linguistic expressions under study.

Metaphors, analogies and metonymy

A metaphor consists of a translation of the right sense of a voice to another figurative one by virtue of a tacit comparison (Real Academia Española & Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española [RAE & Asale], n. d.-b). Its use is very frequent in poetic language but also extends to everyday and academic language. Among its most widespread functions is giving meaning, based on familiarity, to unknown or indeterminate ideas or situations. In short, the essence of a metaphor is to describe a novel or unexplored item in terms of another known item (Lakoff & Johnson, 2001). From this perspective, metaphors are more than an event of language since the processes of human thought are metaphorical in their operation, as well as the conceptual system that gives them coherence and therefore guides the way in which people perceive and act.

This linguistic resource is common in studies involving borders. For example, migrants are often represented as constant threats to the labor market, national culture and even the lives of citizens. To present this phenomenon, warlike, biological or criminal metaphors convey a security and xenophobic conception of the phenomenon. Expressions such as *malón* (surprise attack), *alluvium* or *avalanche* to refer to migrants are usually accompanied by the terms *porosity* or *penetration* to refer to the crossing of borders by nonauthorized individuals, along with others that appeal to groups of animals to refer to people as *herds*. These terms contribute to promoting concern among citizens in the face of a phenomenon that is presented as threatening, resulting in a desire for greater control and surveillance of borders (Benedetti & Renoldi, 2020).

An analogy is both a relationship of similarity between different things and reasoning based on the existence of similar attributes in different beings or things (RAE & Asale, n. d.-a). This linguistic resource is common not only in border studies but also at border sites themselves, where it is used to identify and describe many constituent elements. The most representative example comes from biological and physical analogies, whose origin goes back to the geopolitical discourse of the late nineteenth century, based on organicist-mechanistic assumptions and recognized ideological biases (Salizzi, 2020).

Analogies are fundamentally similar to metaphors because they consist of the transfer of knowledge from a known domain to a new domain, increasing understanding. This approach appears in a wide variety of cognitive activities, such as problem solving, argumentation or teaching. From this point of view, analogies imply at least two differentiated processes: the recovery of the analog (basic sense) and the translation of certain relevant information. The correspondence that is established is called extrapolation and consists of transferring the source domain to the target domain. When the compared situations belong to distant semantic realms and the objects that are put in correspondence do not have obvious similarities, they are interdomain analogies. Through analogous references, appealing to imagination and creativity, something unknown can

be made intelligible; therefore, the value of analogies is both heuristic and pedagogical (Pérez Bernal, 2007). Frequently, analogies have contributed to the construction and communication of scientific knowledge, thereby acquiring a fundamental role in the teaching-learning process of science (Fernández González et al., 2004).

Balduzzi (2009) affirms that the potential of an analogy is given by the comparison, where a notion in the process of formulation benefits from the expressiveness of another. The recourse to analogy thus represents not only a kind of intellectual economy but also an undisputed procedure of invention. The use of metaphors is justified with a similar argument because they function as bridges that extend meanings established in a certain context to provide clarity in another context.

From the perspective of discourse analysis, the choice of the metaphorical field, which exceeds the generic laws of analogy, can appear as an ideological symptom or as a failed act revealing imperfectly assumed presuppositions. Herein, we address the zoological metaphors that allude to the subjects and practices of the border because they account for certain evaluations and representations. This perspective allows us to identify the argumentative workings of metaphors, that is, implicit homologies and concretization processes, as will be seen in the analyzed corpus. The analysis shows that their use as argumentative figures is more frequent in social science texts (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1989). A figure is argumentative if its use that causes a change in perspective seems normal with respect to the suggested situation.

Another linguistic resource that is often used in border studies is metonymy, which, like metaphors, consists of a trope: the use of a word in a different sense from that which it properly possesses but that has some connection, correspondence or resemblance with it. In its most common sense, metonymy consists of designating something with the name of something else, taking the effect for the cause or vice versa (RAE & Asale, n. d.-c). In the case of borders, metonymy is generally used to refer to people through the mention of some of the artifacts that they use to carry out subsistence activities framed in transnational value chains under conditions of informality. Examples include *mesiteros* and *mesiteras*, who market their merchandise on tables (*mesas*) located in the public thoroughfare. Metonymic procedures generally operate through the use of compound nouns, for example, from the formant *narco*, such as *narcomenudeo* (narcoretail) or *narco-state*. These expressions are frequently used in media and government discourse and have stigmatizing effects on generic subjects and geographical areas (Renoldi & Millán, 2021). This type of linguistic resource constitutes incriminating discursive operations and favors criminal subjection processes (Millán, 2019; Misse, 2017).

In the discourse of everyday life on the border, metaphors, analogies and metonymies are usually accepted and deemed appropriate by the subjects themselves. They are used, recovered and revalued in the narratives that the border population constructs to ascribe to certain areas of belonging (Vila, 2000). Simultaneously, they are part of the terminology used in scientific and media discourse to describe and define complex phenomena.

The use of metaphors as a concept and as a model also abounds in academia. An enormous number of metaphors and analogies are registered in all scientific areas; therefore, their use constitutes a rule and not the exception, which is confirmed in border studies (Palma, 2015). Likewise, very often, metaphors become the usual, and sometimes unique, way in which certain ideas are expressed or reference is made to

what one is wanting to know; in this way, they end up forming ordering concepts within the discursive framework of certain disciplines and public bodies.

However, these resources, which at first represent useful support to facilitate the rapid and safe understanding of a certain subject, can also hinder the advancement of knowledge, oversimplify certain phenomena or even cover up political-ideological positions. Thus, although they are useful linguistic resources for the transfer of knowledge, it is risky if their scope and limitations are not specified (Martínez Frontera, 2012). In all scientific disciplines, metaphors and analogies have been used, perhaps in abusive ways. This occurs, for example, with anthropomorphism. Although anthropomorphic metaphors may have been helpful for emerging social theories, keeping their extrapolations active carries a risk of analytical simplification and the transfer of meanings associated with ideological biases.

Zoological references

The use of metaphors and biological analogies is widespread in scientific thought. For example, engineering uses the concepts of *genetic algorithms*, *swarm intelligence* and *simulated annealing* (Orjuela Méndez, 2016). In urban planning, *the circulatory system* and *arterial system* refer to the set of streets that organize an agglomeration (Giménez et al., 2013). Telegraph lines have been called the *nerves of society* and *hearts* or *nerve centers* to cities themselves (Santoro, 2015). Classic geopoliticians, for example, proposed an analysis of power relations and territories on a global scale based on the expression *continental heart* (Cf. Mackinder, 1904). Biological and medical metaphors are also common in certain reactionary ideological fields, such as right-wing and fascist thinking, with anti-Semitic expressions such as *Hebraic virus* and *Jewish leprosy* (Angenot, 1982).

Within the broad spectrum of metaphors and biological analogies are those that pertain to animals, especially by evoking their traits, behaviors and, on occasion, their endemic condition in the geographic area of reference. Frontier studies have resorted to terms that belong to the field of zoology. However, the way these expressions circulated and entered border studies did not derive from them but from other narratives.

The use of animals to talk about people is widely used in popular language. When a person is called an *animal* or a *beast*, one can connote that he or she is stupid, brute or lacking in reason. Animals are often referenced to denigrate and highlight the negative traits of a person: a *whale* is a fat person, a *chicken* is a cowardly person, and a *bitch* is a lewd person (Oroz, 1932).

By means of metaphors, comparative linguistic productions are constructed between the visible aspects, food and actions of animals and people. These lexical constructions constitute zoonymic metaphors (Llerena, 2015), that is, metaphorical or allegorical allusions to refer to a behavior or an animal characteristic that is attributed to a person. This type of metaphor is present in insults that seek to emphasize irrationality (Suárez, 2015) or question the capabilities and physical appearance of a person, totally or partially. Ultimately, they represent a strategy that enables, to some extent, to put the human condition on trial, with humans becoming beings devoid of rationality and able to be dominated.

Mules, *coyotes* and *ants* represent metaphors, analogies and metonymies that are derived to describe and understand artifacts, phenomena, practices and subjects linked to interstate borders. The selected metaphors are frequently used in designation

processes. Two of them (*mules* and *coyotes*) are used as names to refer to border subjects and describe complex phenomena within the framework of the semantic subfields of migration and drug trafficking. Such designations have, in general, very important roles that are not reduced to indicating the existence of something somewhere or as a label for something. A name, by designating, functions as an element of the social relations that it helps to build and of which it becomes a part (Guimarães, 2002). The third term (*ant*) usually appears as a noun phrase to refer to practices linked to the semantic subfield of cross-border trade. Finally, all of the terms are inscribed in the semantic field of illegalism, characterized by a tense and paradoxical relationship with the law and state as a normative agent.



Mules

A mule is a hybrid animal that arises from the crossing of a mare and a donkey. Mules are long-lived, rustic animals capable of adapting to extreme environmental conditions (Correa Garza & Losinno, 2020). Their reproduction and breeding have been practiced since at least 3 000 B. C., and they have preferentially been used as pack animals (Babb, n. d.). According to the RAE-Asale, the word mule comes from the Latin *mulus*, and the feminine form comes from the Latin *mula*. The first meaning indicates the masculine form but feminine name of the offspring of a donkey and mare, which are almost always sterile. Furthermore, another meaning of a mule is someone associated with the transport of drugs: “4. Jargonistic feminine name Argentina, Ecuador, Guatemala and Honduras. Smuggler of drugs in small quantities” (RAE & Asale, n. d.-d). In popular speech, mules appear in ambivalent references, and sometimes it is positive. In the *Dictionary of the Spanish language*, “2. The male and female names are colloquial. Strong and vigorous person”. Other times, the term is negative. A popular saying is “meter la mula” (“put the mule in”), which translates to cheating or lying.

Mules were introduced in America after the Spanish conquest and were of great importance for development, especially in Andean areas. In various colonial areas, many uses of mules were described, especially facilitating the transport of goods (cf. Bustamante Carlos, 1942). Due to their physical characteristics, mules adapt better than oxen and horses to mountainous terrain, long distances and heavy loads.

In historiographic studies on borders of the nineteenth century, references to mules are recurrent because they fostered circuits of exchange in the extensive Peruvian colonial space. Until the end of the 20th century, mules continued to provide similar services to the Andean people, which attracted the attention of regional academics. Mules became recognized together with muleteers as prominent agents in the construction of Andean interstate borders (cf. Cipolletti, 1984; Lacoste, 2009; Sica, 2010).

More recently, the use of *mules* has become much more noticeable in social studies, not in a literal sense but in an analogical sense. The term *mule* is used in Spanish-speaking countries to refer to people who traffic illegal products, usually narcotic substances, in small quantities. The transport of the aforementioned elements is generally carried out on the body, or even within it, posing great physical and health risks. This appropriation is manifested, above all, in studies that address drug trafficking,

although it also extends to studies that addresses problems related to violence against women and insecurity at borders. Other animals used as synonyms for *mules* to identify individuals performing similar activity are *camels* and *donkeys*. Similarly, it is common to use, by metonymy, the part of the body used to transport substances, such as *vagineras* (Anitua & Picco, 2017). Other common expressions are *mensajeras/os* and *capsuleras/os* or, in English, *body packers*, *swallowers* and *internal carriers*.

The literature that focuses on the phenomena related to drug trafficking and its links with borders usually uses the term *mule* as a notional expression, sometimes in quotation marks and sometimes in italics. Sometimes these graphic resources indicate a distance at the time of the enunciation of the senses that the analogy conveys, or they highlight the native origin or common use of the term. Generally, such graphic resources are used to indicate that the word is taken from local slang and does not represent a critical act.

In the analyzed corpus, an interesting academic definition of the *mule* denominator, which integrates the aforementioned senses, is provided by Ribas Mateos and Martínez, who affirm that this term is used to identify the following:

(...) people who transport drugs on their body or in their luggage. They are part of the last link in the drug trafficking chain, and in most cases, they are used as a decoy to confuse the authorities and be able to pass a larger shipment of drugs. The name is of Colombian origin and refers to the pack animal. There is also the figure of the muleteer, the person responsible for contacting, co-opting, preparing and taking the people with the shipment to the destination. (Ribas Mateos & Martínez, 2003, p. 71)

In other texts, such as that by Edwards, the term is also restricted to referring to women and is circumscribed to the sphere of marginality, poverty and conditions of vulnerability.

Women are exceptionally vulnerable to the microcommercialization of drugs. They play a role at the lowest level of the drug trade, usually as “mules” or small-time traffickers. Women are more vulnerable to becoming drug “mules” and/or microdealers not only due to unemployment rates and economic responsibility for their children but also because they are easy prey for their husbands, lovers or exploiters, who force them, physically or verbally, to do this “one favor”. (Edwards, 2010, p. 57)

In the media, the word *mule* is frequently used in a great variety of journalistic genres (police chronicles, essays, news, and reports), as in this journalistic essay:

Mules, human couriers, suitcases, *vagineras*, camels, donkeys, *aguacateras*. The Tumbero language finds infinite synonyms for animals and objects to name girls, such as Miriam Natalie Alencar da Silva, a young Brazilian who died on a street in Devoto after ingesting more than 80 capsules of cocaine. They are rarely spoken of for what they are: victims of trafficking, a survival strategy that grows faster among women, when their bodies are only containers. (Alcaraz, 2017)

Among the main meanings attributed to the people identified through analogy with mules is the ability to move items in a sacrificial, orderly and efficient way; the roughness of the work done; the dangers faced by such individuals; the brutality of the entire transportation scheme; and the significant presence of women. Another of the senses involves a strong negative connotation, which associates the attributes of a pack animal (stubbornness and brutality) with the intellectual characteristics of people, given that their role is exempt from greater responsibilities (Sturla Lompré, 2020). This analogy reflects the nature and qualities required for the trafficking of illegal products and accounts for the subordinate position in which these subjects are located within the network of relationships that are established around trafficking operations (Anitua & Picco, 2017). The role assigned to them, in addition, is the one that is most exposed and easy to replace, granting an additional condition related to their possible dispensation or dismissal.

The definition of a mule, in addition to transmitting the aforementioned senses, has a deep sexist foundation. The gender of the people who transport substances is usually generalized as feminine, although men also participate (Rodríguez González, 1999). Additionally, the use of the animal analogy serves to hide the situation in which the people involved in these informality circuits find themselves, who are also victims of labor and sexual exploitation. For example, in Torres Angarita (2008), the image of the *mule* woman is clearly indicated as a new player in the international drug market, which is rapidly proliferating in the common imagination.

Few uses of quotation marks are recorded in the revised texts in relation to this term, which marks the degree of integration of the word as a collective and institutionalized voice. Its use as a metaphor appears strongly linked to the semantic subfields of migration, controls, traffic and trade.

Although the phenomenon of people who transport illegal substances across borders is not exclusive to women, every year, many women are detained. This aspect is highlighted by phrases that specify the gender of the person who acts as a human vehicle for the transport of these substances. Such terms integrate processes of designation of a group characterized by its social, gender and geographical conditions through nominal constructions (*mule women*), paraphrastic reformulations (*the visible face of drug trafficking*, *human couriers* and *drug messengers*), object complement in descriptive paraphrases (*women who entered the drug trade as mules*; *women who serve as couriers or mules for transportation*) and generalizing nominalizations (*the phenomenon of mules*). In these texts, one goes from designations as delocutives in descriptive sequences to generalizable constructions of nominal groups in defining sequences. The displacement indicated, from metaphor as a designative form to definition, implies differentiated functions: appellative challenges and designations, while the definition typifies and stabilizes the meaning. This movement identified in the corpus is conditioned by the place assigned to the voices of the subjects of the border and by the weight and relationship of the administrative legal discourse with the voice of the author himself or herself and his or her disciplinary field.

Meanwhile, Law 108 remains in force, and prisons continue to be filled with micromarkers and “mules”. After almost two decades of implementing Law 108, the Ecuadorian police, judges and military continued to consider anyone involved in drug trafficking seasoned criminals. (Edwards, 2010, p. 57)

In general terms, it is possible to affirm that the situations of coercion in which the “mules” are victims allow us to glimpse, in a more or less clear way, the presence of several of the constituent elements of the state of exculpating necessity, even, in certain cases, of the receipt. (Anitua & Picco, 2017, p. 236)

(...) the recruitment, transport and reception, as well as the deception and abuse of a situation of vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation concur, above all, in cases of smuggling that involve foreign women. The situation of material helplessness in which individuals find themselves in their countries of origin makes them easy targets for people to recruit them and persuades them to carry out illegal activities as drug couriers. (Iglesias Skulj, 2019, p. 22)

It is here that the full absorption of gender norms becomes more evident, offering a possible window to understand and explain the phenomenon of mules. (Torres Angarita, 2008, p. 11)

They also use “mules”, people who carry backpacks with 25 kilos of marijuana through the desert or who dissolve cocaine in baby bottles, hide it in their clothes or carry it inside their stomach. (Nájar, 2015)

Recurrent forms in which the term mule is used were recorded: when it appears as a nominal subject (*mule* women and *mules*), when it functions as a direct object or in complement to the predicate (*behavior of mules* and *becoming a mule*) and in nominal reformulations (*seasoned criminal*). In turn, different voices orchestrated in an asymmetric way were identified in the scientific texts: the voices of people referred to as *mules*; the voice of the state or the law; the voices of the scientific community; and the voice of the author enunciator. The operations that were recorded in the sociological and anthropological texts reify the reference to *mule* women through metonymic processes (when descriptive sequences associated with poverty, marginalization and gender conditions continue). However, in the texts of the field of law, reification is fixed to the criminal nature of the practice. The metaphor presupposes a process of incrimination: whether the mule is presented as a victim or as a culprit.

The meanings of the metaphor oscillate between the defining phrases that indicate a social and gender profile in conditions of vulnerability, marginalization and exclusion and others that indicate a practice and a set of behaviors classified as crimes. When the metaphor appears to be associated with the condition of the victim, the designation processes merge to construct a definition of “mule women”, based on a polyphonic elaboration (Bajtín, 1985), that is, based on the recovery of the voices of women sentenced for drug trafficking; of the *doxa* or common sense; or of the subjects living on the border. Thus, different emphases are produced for the metaphor for the purposes of denunciation or controversy or to emphasize and characterize processes

of “feminization” of said practice. New argumentative orientations are also registered in the processes of concretization to indicate stratifications in the structures linked to the activity. When the metaphor is linked to criminal offenses, it usually appears as a predicate and direct object and no longer designates the subjects of the action but typifies behavior based on a single type of discourse, the legal one.

In other statements, the expression is part of nominalizations that take up the preconstructed meanings that circulate in common sense compared to those elaborated by the author of the text. Technically, preconstructed refers to “a previous, exterior construction, in any case independent, as opposed to what is ‘built’ by the statement” (Pêcheux, 1995, p. 89). That is, the object is presented as external to thought (as an existence).

Nominalization is a typical operation of intra- and interdiscursive reformulations. Scientific discourse tends toward generalization and abstraction; to do this, it resorts to nominalization processes that take up and synthesize segments of a statement. Nominalizations, such as “the phenomenon of mules”, function as categorizing anaphoras of previously enunciated concepts. As a vehicle for preconstructed points of view in the discourse in which they appear or in other discourses (for example, in the ethnographic account of women and direct and indirect quotations), nominalizations move from the level of what is correct to that of what is implicit, and in these forms, the negative evaluations associated with both common sense and the point of view of the state are presupposed, confronted with those of the actors whom the enunciator recovers and uses for the formulation of his or her own idea. In the example of the penultimate sequence, the nominalization synthesizes the different aspects of the practice and gives rise to the description of the characteristics of the defined subject (they are female *victims*), the modalities of the practices (by *coercion*) and the causes that explain them (“state of need”). The place of enunciation assimilated to a collective voice is also made explicit, presented as preconstructed in the previous discourse and in other discourses (of feminism and of law).

In the texts that correspond to the field of law, the separation between subject and crime operates as a necessary presupposition that conditions the argument. The metaphor assumes an argumentative character through operations of concretization (Angenot, 1982), which are necessary to highlight the criticism of the implicit biases in the actions of justice. Therefore, although it is a criticism of the legal field, as a supportive effect, an interpretive gesture is made with reifying and simplifying effects because it forces the recurrent association between a sociological profile that fits with the criminal classification. According to Pêcheux (1995), the support effect, also called articulation or support, refers to a discursive mechanism that links the thought evoked laterally as a support for the thought contained in a proposition through the implication of two properties (in the examples analyzed: pack animal = transport of substances in human bodies). This articulation can be characterized as the “return of knowledge in thought”, which tells people what to think of a term or property. In these cases, the criminal code supports the author’s argument. The voice of the legal discourse has greater hierarchy and authority, determining the voice of the enunciating subject.

Coyotes

Coyotes are generalist carnivorous mammals with a varied diet that includes mammals, reptiles, birds, fruits and seeds (Martínez-Vázquez et al., 2010). Although the distribution of this canid covered a good part of the current Mexican territory by the fifteenth century, environmental changes caused by the expansion of the agricultural frontier and urban centers expanded its habitat to the south and north. Coyotes are currently distributed from Alaska to central Panama, covering western and central Canada and the United States (Ramírez-Albores & León-Paniagua, 2015). Two of their main characteristics are their great capacity for displacement and adaptability to tropical, temperate and arid ecosystems.

Coyotes are also common mythological characters in many native cultures of North America. They have been incorporated into the Mexican collective imagination due to their presence in paintings and sculptures, literary manifestations and as the protagonist of myths, legends, stories, songs, corridos, sayings and spells (Rodríguez Valle, 2013). In pre-Hispanic times, the zoomorphic Huehucóyotl, the old coyote or coyote god, a deity of dance and music, was prominent. With this, the fundamental concepts of pleasure and lust are expressed. With the conquest and arrival of a new cultural tradition, interpretations of the Western world were imposed on coyotes, a process that is typical for other canine predators, such as the wolf and the fox. Coyotes were related to dark and demonic forces. In this framework, coyotes acquired a changing presence in Mexican literature: at times, they are characters that are deceived, tortured and murdered and, for that reason, ridiculed; at other times, they are represented as being grateful, generous and supportive, not deserving a tragic end; and at other times, coyotes are portrayed as deceptive. This animal is also present in Mexican toponymy, in towns named El Coyote or Los Coyotes; in other cases, there are adaptations of the Nahuatl word *Coyotl*, as is the case for Coyoacán, in Mexico City.

The term coyote was generalized to refer to subjects who are dedicated to facilitating the crossing of other people across borders and to the trafficking of illegal products, usually narcotics. This analogy is used primarily on the United States-Mexico interstate border and usually refers to a male figure. The expression also has a stronger presence in popular culture than mules and ants do. It is also used as an allusion to a series of practices and behaviors, which are collected by the RAE: *coyotear*, *coyoteo* and *coyotaje*.

When considering the corpus of scientific texts, *coyote* is widely used in the social sciences, especially in literature of Mexican origin, in a complementary way with another expression: *polleros*. People identified as *coyotes* are those who guide and help other people to cross a border, who become unregistered immigrants in the destination country, usually the United States. In that scenario, these people are identified as *pollos* (chickens). Once the *pollo* arrives at the other side of the border, the *levantones* appear, who have the task of being drivers who take the people in migrant situations to a *clavadero*, a house where they are offered protection after having crossed.

According to Blancornelas, the term *pollos* being assigned to migrants arose from an event that occurred on the United States-Mexico border in the 1960s:

(...) Mexican customs officers from Tijuana found chickens completely scorched by the heat from the engine of the car of a smuggler. After that, at the same sentry location two years later, a long pick-up truck was searched. The watchman discovered a false bottom. Nearly ten Mexicans were crammed together within the compartment. The US Immigration and Naturalization Service did not let them out or move the vehicle. Journalists on both sides of the border were called. Photographers and videographers captured the packed and frustrated undocumented people. Someone said “they look like chickens”, remembering the little Chevrolet with scorched birds. (Blancornelas, 2000, cited in Jáuregui Díaz & Ávila Sánchez, 2017, p. 154)

In addition, the coyote-chicken link, as a villain-victim link, is a common event at poultry farms in the area, where coyotes are the main predators of these animals.

Individuals referred to as *coyotes* are almost indispensable agents with regard to border crossing due to the operations and measures implemented by U.S. authorities since the 1990s (Cornelius, 2001). Greater control over that border, aimed at preventing the flow of undocumented migrants through traditional access routes, has led to new, dangerous and isolated routes in deserts and mountains (Jáuregui Díaz & Ávila Sánchez, 2017), only known by this relevant social actor.

Some authors in the corpus examined for this article use the term coyote without quotation marks and as its explicit meaning. Others use quotation marks to distance themselves but without offering an alternative expression. Its use is very widespread:

(...) For undocumented immigrants, crossing the border became even more difficult after the events of 9/11. The costs of pollero and coyote services increased by more than 500 percent. Tijuana ceased to be the favorite crossing point, which led to immigrants moving to more depopulated and high-risk areas. (Hernández H., 2020, p. 106)

It is a sinister region of domination and terror and, at the same time, the habitat of ‘coyotes’, that is, of those who are dedicated to transporting illegal immigrants, businessmen for whom the border constitutes a commercial asset. [...] Kearney reminds us that in Mexico and the United States, the ‘coyote’ is also a ‘surprisingly ambiguous and contradictory figure, artist and cultural hero at the same time’ and, thus, approaches the most metaphorical border areas of Rosaldo, defined more by its poets than by its police, and perhaps found anywhere in North America where Latin America finds itself. (Hanerz, 2010, p. 221)

Finally, its use in the press is also widespread:

Hugo Castro of Mexican origin and director of “SOSMigrante”, based in California, warned of how coyotes are boldly advertised on Facebook, with promises of safe travel. However, for organized crime, “generally they are an extension of some drug trafficking cell and the order they have, depending on how the group is made up, is that they hand them over before reaching the border —northern Mexico—. If the group has young men and women, it

is a treasure; they will be perfect mules to cross drugs, and they could end up raped or worse, in a human trafficking group”. (Impreso, 2022)

In the corpus, there are many more negative evaluations associated with this expression, both in the descriptive and explanatory sequences. Unlike the other metaphors, no nominalization processes were recorded for this expression. The term always occupies the function of appellation and is used as a descriptor in defining phrases. The paraphrastic processes, sometimes by way of comments and nominal and adjectival groups, abound. The paraphrastic field of the metaphor is quite wide and reveals the valuations and perspectives legitimized in the different defining statements (*guide, necessary evil, intermediary, service, migrant smugglers, instrument or means, swindler and hero*).

When the discourse of the different social actors is heard on the *edge* or border, these two terms appear to be well descriptive of the social actors involved and the forms of involvement: the *coyote* and the *chicken*.

Very often, it happens that the one who helps people cross the border—the coyote—has begun his experience as an undocumented immigrant himself—the *chicken*. This is its effective training base. Once the United States has denied a visa, the *coyote* represents, for most immigrants, a kind of necessary evil. (...) The guide or coyote is the one who specifically facilitates the crossing of immigrants. (Del Acebo Ibáñez, 2013, p. 136)

In paraphrastic reformulations, the term tends to evoke the meanings of different voices. The polyphonic enunciation oscillates between the voice of the subjects that inhabit the borders (*guide, necessary evil, and service*) with the terms and categories created by the State (*human traffickers*), the voice of the State, the voices of experts from the scientific community, and the voice of the person who enunciates and has authorship of the text, who assumes different relationships with those voices (of alliance or opposition). Thus, in certain texts, a greater polysemic amplitude is registered, with a focus on the discourse of the voices of others. In the fields of law and criminology, there is a trend toward stabilization of the term and a lesser polyphonic amplitude (less reference to the discourse of others and a predominance of the state point of view). The difference is that the voice of the State, which represents the strongest normative and moral perspective associated with the metaphor, is not explicit in the syntagmatic constructions. In general, academic texts take for granted and somehow “naturalize” this view of subjects characterized as *coyotes*. The use of a free indirect style predominates, precisely allowing this voice of the State to be assimilated to that of the author. However, in the reformulations of the other’s discourse, typical of the ethnographic genre, such as those that can be recognized in the last sequences, polyphonic orchestration in complement to the predicate tends to make explicit and legitimize the perspective of migrants and border dwellers.

In the media texts, there are many negative evaluations in the predicates associated with the term (“they are brazenly advertised by Facebook”). In these cases, the voice of the media enunciator also adheres to and incorporates the discursive *ethos* of the state and makes explicit a damning judgment on coyotes and what they do. Once again, the effects of preconstructions that take for granted the demoralizing character of the *coyotes* are recorded in the corpus.

Ants

Ants are social insects that live in colonies characterized by a pattern of behavior based on mutual collaboration. They display complex behaviors and perform difficult tasks from an individual point of view. For example, many species of ants have the ability to find the shortest paths between their anthill and food sources (Alonso et al., 2004). Likewise, they overcome obstacles to achieve food gathering that ensures the subsistence of the colony.

Ants are everywhere, even in the most extreme environments. They are only absent from regions with permanent glaciers or other bodies of water. Due to their abundance, they exert an important influence on many environments, controlling the population growth of other arthropods, removing and aerating large amounts of soil in forests and grasslands and circulating essential nutrients for other forms of life (López Riquelme & Fidel, 2010). They are tiny insects that are generally hidden by foliage or lost in the vastness of the landscape.

This insect entered the narrative through the fable of the *ant* and the *cicada*, representing a series of values associated with a specific spatial and temporal context. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, this fable was used as praise for the accumulation of wealth through a series of qualities attributed to the *ant* as a result of work: effort, persistence and foresight. In contrast, the life of the *cicada* was presented as incautious, hedonistic and deviant from the norm (Marreiros Monteiro et al., 2010).

Ants, as a term used in social studies, particularly those interested in interstate borders, serves as a descriptor or adjective of certain practices, although in some way, and identifies the subjects who perform them. The main practice that is associated with *ants* is commercial exchange not registered by state agencies, considered contraband, and illegal. The use of the *ant*-based analogy points to two central axes. On the one hand, the image the use of the term seeks to evoke stands out. The term serves as a pictorial and landscape reference that refers to equating a common fact in nature with what happens in certain sectors of borders: the concentration of individuals who come and go transporting objects. On the other hand, it refers to a series of values associated with the practice in question, linked to effort and persistence. Likewise, the reference to functioning as a society is present, which highlights a strictly collective practice based on cooperation.

In addition, it describes the form of spatial implantation that ants carry out for their survival, characterizing a commercial typology. This analogy uses the observation of the work carried out by a group of ants, which are in a line carrying plant remains to their anthill, to describe a fraction of the commercial activity between border cities, with products of little relevance and individual price but that, as a whole, can be considered important capital. Under that depersonalized gaze, those who carry out the activity are like many ants that travel in a line.

In this way, ants become a descriptor or adjective of a way of carrying out commercial exchanges: many people (*colony of ants*) who demonstrate diligence (the *ants* continue with their work beyond the obstacles that may arise) present a pattern and spatial arrangement (characteristic form that the movement developed by the group of people adopts), and they carry out a joint activity where the sum of individual efforts, which would be insufficient if performed by isolated individuals, allows them

to achieve an important objective (each individual moves little, but together, they move much more).

Is the *ant* trade a commercial typology or a characteristic phenomenon of many borders? This practice linked to trade can occur in any informal market where many people carry and bring small amounts of materials. In this context, reference to *ant* smuggling is common. However, the analogy in question does not apply in other contexts where both the conglomeration of people and the practice of smuggling occur, such as airports. In this case, one might wonder if there is a class sanction regarding those who can be transmuted into *ants*.

Some examples of its use as a metaphor can be found in the following excerpts:

(...) I found that except for ant smuggling, trade and economic integration is minimal. (Podestá Arzubíaga, 2005, p. 6)

There are three types of smuggling: massive smuggling, ant smuggling, and technical smuggling, which are customs frauds. [...] Ant-type smuggling is characterized by transporting a small amount of merchandise, usually up to \$3 500; if that value is exceeded, according to the COIP, it is considered smuggling. (Soriano, 2015, p. 9)

The expression “ant smuggling” associates the classification of a crime, a legal definition, with the qualities of an insect. Its use is so common that it is a catachresis, a metaphor that is not perceived as such in everyday speech in the border regions where the term is used. Thus, the metaphor alludes to the small scale of the smuggling activity, sustained by the continuity, with the abundance not perceived at first glance.

In Argentina, the press is adept at transmitting sensational news, which serves as a benchmark for negatively assessing practices of commercialization and transit of merchandise across borders. Frequently, allusions to *ant smuggling*, *ants on the border* or *army of ants* are used, focused on negative, risky, dangerous and morally questionable aspects of the activity. It is common to observe that the media discourse pejoratively refers to *ant smuggling*, without looking for the causes, linkages and context in which it occurs (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). They tend to present themselves as external agents that try to trespass and corrupt the limits of the State and its sovereignty.

Figure 1. Treatment of the ant trade in the digital press in Buenos Aires

INFOBAE

Armados y a plena luz del día: así operan los "contrabandistas hormiga" en la triple frontera

Un grupo de "paseros" respondió con armas de fuego al ser descubierto cruzando de Paraguay a la Argentina



Por **Alejo Santander**
6 de Mayo de 2018
asantander@infobae.com

Source: Santander, 2018

Figure 2. Television coverage of the ant trade



Source: Todo Noticias (2022)

In media texts, expressions have different valences according to the enunciator who uses them. From the perspective of the national media, in Argentina, borders are seen as something exotic, where evils that threaten the territory proliferate. When such media outlets refer to “ant smuggling”, they encompass different illicit activities. Thus, they refer to the crossing of illegal substances through references to drug trafficking, such as the circulation of electronic objects, textiles, or basic necessities, such as food. The moral burden associated with the prohibition of illegal substances is shifted and homologated in the discourse of the national media toward other types of markets whose use in border contexts does not have the same moral value because it is related to the conditions for subsistence, in addition to being rooted in cultural practices and preexisting memories of the State. In contrast, in the media that respond to local audiences, the expressions about ant smuggling do not refer to drug transport practices but to the informal trade of various goods. In Figure 3 and Figure 4, smuggling is described as a subsistence task (“a changa”, that is, an occasional minor task), a show (“boat show”) or a source of knowledge (“they sharpen the ingenuity to carry fuel”). Although the illegal nature of the practice is not denied, the main difference is that media located near borders do not accentuate the devaluing burden of criminalization on the term.

Figure 3. Coverage of the ant trade in the digital press in Misiones

POLICIALES JUDICIALES POLICIALES

Video | Misiones: la diferencia cambiaria potencia el contrabando que ofrece un verdadero show de lanchas surcando el Alto Paraná con mercaderías

De mora Leandro 21 de January de 2022, 23:22

La mercadería ingresa desde Paraguay se vende a la luz del día, desde tienda y mercados de las localidades ribereñas, ubicadas sobre la ruta 12. En Eldorado, Puerto Rico y Jardín América, por ejemplo, pueden encontrarse, electrónicos y cubiertas importadas, ofrecidas a plena luz del día, y antes los ojos de todos.

Es inevitable e imposible, no verlos. Sucede todos los días, entre el atardecer y la noche y son decenas de lanchas, botes y canoas cruzando el Río Paraná de un lado a otro, tanto, que en algunos lugares casi se convierte en un atractivo turístico más. La escena es tan tremenda que por momentos, el observador de semejante espectáculo, puede hasta asustarse ante la inminente colisión entre dos o más de esas embarcaciones, algo que hasta el momento, y casi por azar, felizmente no ocurrió.

Source: De Mora, 2022

Figure 4. Coverage of the ant trade in the digital press in Misiones

Policiales

Paraguayos agudizan el ingenio para llevar combustible de contrabando

Una camioneta con bidones escondidos en la parte inferior del chasis fue descubierta por funcionarios de la aduana paraguaya cuando intentaban ingresar al país.

jueves 28 de julio de 2022 | 17:52hs.

Desde noviembre del año pasado, uno de los principales motivos del cruce desde Encarnación a Posadas es para la compra de combustibles, no sólo para llenar los tanques de los vehículos sino también para la venta informal en suelo paraguayo, en el afán de obtener rédito económico. “Una changa”, en términos coloquiales. La diferencia cambiaria actual motiva el paso y la demanda, ya que resulta más barato que comprar en Paraguay, y despertó un negocio que hoy gana terreno en el vecino país. Para conocer más de este temá lee esta nota de El Territorio:

<https://www.eltterritorio.com.ar/noticias/2022/04/08/743629-desde-adentro-la-venta-informal-de-naftas-que-provoco-en-encarnacion-crisis-en-los-surtidores>

Source: “Paraguayos agudizan el ingenio”, 2022

Finally, the analogy that evokes *ants* can be framed in what Lois (2017) defines as a spectacle frontier. Under this idea, the artifacts, phenomena, subjects and practices of the interstate borders, in addition to entering the agenda of concerns linked to the security narrative, become a spectacle, something that entertains and summons

audiences that are threatened or surprised by what happens in those places. As seen in the examples, it is an issue that the press has sought to exploit as a means of attracting the attention of the public, using satellite images, drones and thermal cameras that allow capturing such activities in the dark.

In the texts within academia, different uses of the metaphor can be recognized for argumentative purposes in reformulations that reverse the meaning suggested from the voice of the State, which prints a negative charge on the activity referred to by the expression through the metaphorical criminal classification. It is an expression that is rarely used as an appellation but is generally used as a compound noun. That is, it is used as a nominalized construction. “Ant smuggling is carried out by residents of neighboring towns and consists of carrying and bringing limited quantities of merchandise destined for trade, taking advantage of their border status” (Grimson, 2000, p. 3). “(...) it is called an entrepreneurial spirit, established by small and large merchants, which gave rise to a fine line between legality and illegality for the products and merchandise they circulate” (Hernández H., 2020, p. 38).

The work of the Paraguayan *pasera* is commonly described as “ant smuggling” because it consists of entering the country with undeclared merchandise in small quantities—arguing that they are for “personal use”—in order not to pay taxes, a characteristic practice of the border areas. They have the possibility, in some cases, to protect their strategy legally through different customs and immigration regimes. (Linares, 2015, p. 59)

Opposing discursive workings of the metaphor are identifiable. In those texts that correspond to the social sciences, metaphor is integrated into defining enunciators, argumentative and descriptive sequences that confront the negative meanings associated with the term. Quotation marks are usually used to indicate nonattachment to the meaning derived from other discourses, such as the legal discourse, and from other voices, such as that of the state or the formalized commercial sector, which are alien to the perspective of the speaker. The argumentative use of the metaphor is recognized as having greater polysemic and polyphonic amplitude in the texts of the social sciences, which oscillates between processes of concretization and distancing with respect to adverse discourses, especially in the paraphrastic reformulations of the term *ant* trade or *informal trade* of goods. In these uses, the noun that alludes to a criminal type (smuggling) is replaced by another that designates the type of interaction (trade), thus avoiding the illocutionary force associated with incrimination processes at the level of enunciation. On the other hand, in those texts linked to the field of criminology, there is less polysemic amplitude, and the expression is used to stabilize meanings associated with the state and a punitive perspective. These uses allow the reification of the reference, as was also seen in the case of the other metaphors.

Conclusions

Metaphors, analogies and metonyms make it possible to focus attention on certain attributes or traits that are being built from the object of knowledge to refer to artifacts, social subjects, phenomena or practices that are to be highlighted. This strategy can be considered a potentiality because, in their use for simplification, they highlight a

single image that is easy to understand. However, they constitute, above all, a weakness (or a trap) because they oversimplify the objects being discussed.

Analogies (and other tropes) are not right or wrong in and of themselves. What corresponds, as an attitude of epistemological vigilance, is alerting people to what extent a problem needs to be solved, breaking with the notions of common sense and clearing obstacles to achieve greater proximity to the complexity of the reality studied. For this, it is essential to recognize what resources are used, identify the meanings that are transmitted and highlight the traits and relationships to establish or avoid.

In the cases of the three metaphors, processes of reification of the reference were identified with opposing effects of meaning, fundamentally determined by the disciplinary discourse in which each text is inscribed, the ideological positioning of the voice of those who have the authorship of the text and the argumentative purpose in the uses of the metaphors studied. In all cases, rankings of the different voices and perspectives were also recorded. The analysis tried to demonstrate different tendencies in the polyphonic elaboration of the texts: greater and lesser polyphonic and polysemic amplitude according to the positioning of the people who have authorship and the hierarchy assigned to the different voices: the state, the scientific community and those who inhabit the border.

In the case of certain academic texts, the expression *mule* is related to reification processes that anchor the metaphor to the condition of women, victims and states of vulnerability and domination. The argumentative purpose is oriented toward denunciation; however, by fixing the meanings of the metaphor, what is produced is a reification, which stabilizes the reference and makes it impossible to problematize the relationships that make this practice possible. Thus, the metaphor is associated only with the female gender, and the agency capacity is subtracted from the designated subject by emphasizing the condition of the victim (under the effects of coercion or domination). In other cases, the reification process is linked to the definition by assigning a legal aspect. Typing is another discursive procedure analyzed in the corpus, especially in academic texts in the field of law and in media texts. This mechanism tends to stabilize meaning through the effects of support based on the legal discourse and the state perspective. What both processes have in common is that the metaphor always cuts down qualities that are transferred to the legal order: the docility of the *mule* is linked to the condition of the victim by deception and coercion, while the charging function is associated with the crime type (drug trafficking). In other words, in the uses studied, the metaphor is always built from the definition of the legal order (either to criticize it or to reaffirm it). Finally, this metaphorical expression presents a greater polysemic amplitude in the analyzed corpus because argumentative uses were recorded that seek to polemicize with and differentiate themselves from the different voices and previous discourses in which this expression circulates. Thus, the *mule* woman is a symbol that denounces vulnerability, and the absence of the rule of law is a triggering factor that leads to illegal practices. However, it is also a typified behavior associated with a sociological profile: the female gender, the social condition of vulnerability and geographical belonging. Therefore, mules are also synonymous with women, poor people and the border.

Negative evaluations predominate in the metaphor of the *coyote*. The stabilization of meaning tends to prioritize the perspective of the State and the legal domain. The reification process is registered mainly by mimetic contiguity and in paraphrastic processes that tend to assimilate the state point of view, that is, legal, with the point of view

of whoever has the authorship of the text. In these cases, the relationships among the different voices and perspectives summarized in the processes of referencing, designation and definition tend to reinforce a negative sense: the coyote is a frightening but necessary figure in the voices of those who inhabit interstate borders (a necessary evil) and a criminal profile in the voice of the State (human smuggler and swindler). Unlike the mule, it is always associated with the male figure. The analysis showed that, in the case of the metaphor of the *coyote*, the reification of the reference points in the same direction, and the voice of the state tends to be assimilated as *ethos*, that is, as an enunciating body to which the authors ascribe to justify their point of view. Assimilation occurs especially through recourse to indirect style, the effect of which consists precisely of confusing or assimilating the voice of the State with that of the enunciator.

In the metaphor of the *ant*, concretization processes were identified for argumentative purposes. The metaphor is used to indicate the uniqueness of certain activities typical of border areas. Two opposing tendencies were registered: toward stabilization in the cases of the defining statements that associate the metaphor with a criminal type (small-scale smuggling) and toward polysemic openness in the case of paraphrastic reformulations that associate the metaphor with commercial exchange.

Finally, the moral order and domain of law condition the effects of meaning associated with the metaphors under study. The voice of the subject of enunciation is oriented according to the hierarchy and weight assigned to these orders: either to reaffirm them or to destabilize or question them. The zoological metaphors recover attributes linked to the referred animals (cunning, ferocious, docile, large workforce, orderly, persistent and adaptive) that are resignified based on the relationship that the subject of the enunciation establishes with the legal order and in accordance with the institutional determination of the texts. Thus, media texts underscore and highlight the moral character of the subjects and practices referred to through metaphors, while academic texts emphasize the legal order that delimits and defines the same subjects and practices. Throughout the article, an attempt was made to show how these metaphors are used to characterize the phenomena of borders based on different hierarchical relationships between text and voices, and rectifying tendencies were identified that simplify and stabilize the references even when the purpose is argumentative.

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