

CHICKEN OR HEN?:
DOMESTIC FOWL METAPHORS DENOTING HUMAN BEINGS

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ABSTRACT

The native Anglo-Saxon vocabulary related to domestic animals denominations has been increased throughout the centuries and enriched with borrowings from different languages, like French, but also with loanwords from other languages. This work discusses some of the reasons that have traditionally been adduced to explain word loss and semantic change, and see how they can be applied to the field of generic denominations of fowl. It also investigates the various ways in which the introduction of new items has an influence on the recipient language and to what extent native words are affected. In the first section of the paper, we will basically deal with the straight meanings and the ways in which the field was stratified in the formative centuries, while in the second section we will discuss how some of these terms are applied to human beings in a figurative sense to denote a quality shared by humans and animals or rather a characteristic which does not seem to be present in the animal, but it is attributed to it, as there is a tendency to understand human behaviour in terms of human features. Thus, we attempt at providing a panoramic overview of the field concentrating on the most frequently used units and especially on those that underwent a metaphorization process.

1. Introduction: Objectives and methodology

According to cognitive linguistics “a metaphor is a mapping of the structure of a source model onto a target model” (Ungerer – Schmid 1996: 120), as the target domain is understood in terms of the source domain. In other words, metaphor is a fundamental element in our categorization of the world and our thinking process and a sign of creative thinking. Apart from acquiring knowledge about the surrounding world, metaphor is also essential to understand language development and structure.

From ancient times people have been compared to animals, thus PEOPLE

ARE ANIMALS is a well-structured metaphor. Following this view, the present research has been focused on two main aspects: Firstly, we basically deal with the straight meanings and the ways in which the field of the domestic fowl animals was stratified in the formative centuries, while secondly we discuss how some of these terms are applied to human beings in a figurative sense to denote a quality shared by humans and animals or rather a characteristic which does not seem to be present in the animal, but it is attributed to it.

The analysis has been concentrated on domestic fowl animals, that is, those that are bred, reared, or kept to serve a useful end or object as distinct from purposes of beauty, display, show, etc., usually the ones reared as barn-door fowls. First of all, the species were structured hierarchically into hyperonyms and hyponyms with the help of the Modern English dictionaries mentioned below. Bearing such a wide area of meaning, the lexical field has been previously restricted mainly to nouns denoting (1) domestic name species (*chicken/hen, goose, duck, turkey, pigeon/dove*); (2) the adults, either male or female, (e.g. *cock-hen, gander-geese, drake-duck, cock-turkey* vs. *hen-turkey, pigeon/dove*) and (3) the offspring or the young one (*chicken/chick, cockerel, pullet/pullen, gosling, duckling, squab*). Thus, names implying breed, colour or other function not being the usual one at a yard have been disregarded. We have mainly taken into consideration the physical features which have to do with generic denominations for gender or age. However, on some particular occasions, it seems suitable to refer to specific characteristics regarding the aspects mentioned above to complete the information provided in a given respect.

For the Old English period, we have taken Roberts and Kay's *A thesaurus of Old English* as a starting point and for the Middle English period we have based our research on the data provided by the ongoing *Historical thesaurus of English*¹ from the University of Glasgow and the online version of the *Middle English dictionary* (hereafter, *MED*). All these data were completed with the information contained in the *Oxford English dictionary* and the *Helsinki corpus of English texts*. Whenever there is little information available about an item, we have made use of other sources, e.g. Buck's, Clark Hall's or Stratmann's dictionaries. For the Modern English period we have consulted the entries in *Collins COBUILD English dictionary*, *Longman dictionary of contemporary English*, *The new Penguin English dictionary* and *Semi-bilingual dictionary of euphemisms and dysphemisms in English erotica*, but most of our assumptions are based on the information provided by the *Oxford English dictionary* (hereafter, *OED*).

When we first started this research we drew the data from the CD-Rom ver-

¹ We are indebted to Dr Christian Kay who generously allowed us to use materials from the ongoing *Historical Thesaurus of English*.

sion of the *OED*. We have now contrasted our corpus with the results retrieved from the ongoing version online finding that there are some divergences between the 1989 version and the one in progress, as the information is enlarged periodically. Nevertheless, the fact that some specific entries have been changed through the new additions does not invalidate the study, in our opinion. The original results from the 1989 version have been maintained, since it would be impossible to update the data as the additions are being done, because that would imply to keep on working on this article as long as the revision of the *OED* is being carried out. On some occasions, the number of tokens found varies because one of the entries has been deleted from the latest version. For instance, in the case of *gander* the word is mentioned in thirteen different entries in the 1989 version: *gander* (noun), *gander* (verb), *gandir/gandre*, *ganer/ganet(te*, *gaundre*, *giddy*, *gonder*, *goose*, *goosey*, *sauce*, *shoe*, *steg* and *suckling*. In the ongoing version, four of these occurrences have been omitted: *gandir/gandre*, *ganer/ganet(te* and *gaundre*, because they were obsolete forms for *gander*, and *gonder* as a variant of *gander*. Nonetheless, even if the modifications affect the total number of instances found, they do not alter the final outcomes significantly, as we are dealing with general denominations and we do not try to account for all possible variants or terms that were once in use. On the contrary, we attempt at providing a panoramic overview of the field concentrating on the most frequently used units and especially on those that underwent a metaphorization process.

The corpus was obtained with the *definition* option, as that would give us evidence not only of the superordinate terms but also of the different hyponyms. The *full text* option was avoided, since that would include quotations that are just checked to make clear a particular meaning or to date the beginning and end in the use of a given word. Approximately 2,000 hints have been revised, but not all of them were valid for the research.

By making a query for the different most widespread generic denominations, we get a great number of occurrences of the words *fowl* (282 instances) and *poultry* (123 instances) in the definition of a lexical entry. The hyponyms within this field are searched as well with the following results: *cock* 427 results, *hen* 257, *chicken* 123. We have also searched for possible synonyms like *rooster*, or other not so widespread denominations such as *cockerel*, *chick*, *pullet* or *pullen*, even if their frequency is not so high as in the previous cases. The other sets are grouped into the following categories: *duck* with 290 instances, which refer to both the generic and the female; *drake* with 33 occurrences and *duckling* with just 3. The *goose* species obtains 233 occurrences of *goose*, 13 of *gander* and 17 of *gosling*. In the case of *turkey* we get 160 instances. We hesitated about the inclusion of *pigeons* in the field, as, even if they are not probably part of the diet

any longer, they used to be.² The most frequently found term is *pigeon* with 229 instances, followed by *dove* with 100, *turtle* 94 and finally we have *culver* with 9 occurrences, *squab* 7 and *turtur* with just 2. There are some other items, such as *dovelet* or *doveling*, that do not appear in the definition section, but in the lemma, and were incorporated thanks to the revision of other entries and by cross-checking the data provided by the *OED* with those retrieved from the other lexicographic works, such as *A thesaurus of Old English* and the *MED* mainly.

Despite the huge amount of occurrences, this does not mean that there is such a great number of elements to be taken into account, since the item may appear more than once in the definition; two or three of the selected lexical units are mentioned in the same definition (e.g. *Buff Cochin* is defined in the *OED* as a ‘variety of the Cochin fowl, in which both cock and hen...’), inasmuch as the same information is read twice or thrice; in addition, there are plenty of cases of homonymy or polysemy (e.g. *cock of a gun*, *drake* as synonym of *dragon*, *duck* as a verb, *turtle* denoting ‘a tortoise’) or the word may imply: colour (e.g. *Buff Cochin*, *Isabel* or *tobacco-dove*) or breed (e.g. *Andalusian*, *Cochin-China*, *gannet*, *light Sussex*, *cropper*); or maybe the animal was used for a specific purpose (e.g. *brooder*, *carrier*); or it may have a special quality (e.g. *crower*, *grig*), the word is dialectal (e.g. *fugie*, *mick*, *stag*, *steg*, *turkle*) or slang (e.g. *ginger*, *stoolie*, *stool-pigeon*). Finally, there are a few loanwords which have not been anglicised according to the *OED* (e.g. *poule*). It is also common to find nouns to define the action of a verb or a quality expressed by an adjective related to the field, so these entries are disregarded as well.

2. Analysis of the data and discussion

If we focus on the title of the present article where the item *fowl* is mentioned, as in other areas, during the Middle English period the vocabulary of this specific field was richly enlarged with French adoptions. To begin with, the whole denomination of the domain seems to be known as *fowl* or *poultry* in some parts. The former being an Old English word meaning originally ‘bird’, which specialized into the present meaning throughout the centuries. In the Middle English period it already had the two meanings 1) ‘bird’ and 2) ‘a domesticated

² We have consulted several British native speakers whether they would consider this animal as part of a farm, where it is reared in order to make use of its flesh or eggs. All of them agree that it was used in post-war times or at other times in the history of the country when food was scarce. We ignore whether the animal was eaten in Old English or Middle English times on a regular basis, but Blank (1999: 13) comments on the fact that *pigeon* had first the original meaning from French ‘pigeon raised for eating’ and gradually was extended in English to designate ‘any kind of pigeon’.

fowl'. The latter was introduced from French along with other synonyms which are now scarcely used, such as *pollaile*, *pullain*, *pullai*, *polaille*, *pullerī* and other similar forms.

Regarding the generic denomination, Buck (1988: 176) points out that *poultry* is used for domestic fowls, 'but not limited to the genus *Gallus*', as, in the USA at least, it includes ducks, geese, etc. The same idea is shared by the *OED*, which made us think at some point in our research that the proper generic term should be *poultry*, as it is more specific than *fowl*.³ American dictionaries tend to include all these families within the denomination 'domestic fowl'; however, under a British perspective the expression is sometimes applied exclusively to the gallinaceous family. Nonetheless, *The new Penguin dictionary* includes chicken and turkey and the *Collins COBUILD English dictionary* gives as an example of *fowl*, chicken and duck. Thus, we consider domestic *fowl* would cover exactly the meaning area we are dealing with. As it has just been mentioned, the fowl denomination serves as a name for several orders of birds (ANSERIFORMES and GALLIFORMES, among others), which are subdivided into families and species.

In order to clarify how the different subfields were configured and gradually altered by the passing of time, some tables have been introduced in order to help the reader understand the changes undergone through the centuries. It is obvious that they should be taken as tentative and as a visual aid to follow the explanation, but they cannot represent the reality in its whole complexity. We refer to the usual periods established for the study of the history of the English language, that is, Old English, Middle English and Modern English. Thus, the terms are inserted in boxes, but lines cannot be taken as strict and unmovable frontiers, as language is a continuum that is fragmented for methodological purposes. That means that sometimes a lexical unit is documented in one period and gradually disappears from the system, but usually it is hard to fix the exact date when the term stopped being used, so the drawn lines do not mark the real moment when it was ousted.

Likewise, although the study tries to be as comprehensible as possible, it cannot give account of every single item that was used at a specific period of the language. Obsolete terms are provided, at least the most current ones, but there is always a chance of having overseen one.⁴ Finally, in a period like Middle English that is characterized by the diversity of written forms, this is not the

³ As far as the bird flu crisis is concerned, both terms seem to be used indistinctively by the media.

⁴ In fact many of the obsolete units in the field can be retrieved by accessing the 1989 version, but not the latest one. For instance: *coliver*, *colyver*, *colver(e)*, *colveryr*, *colverin*, for *culver*; *peion*, *pioun*, *peione* or *pide* for *pigeon*; *gandir*, *gandre*, *ganer*, *ganette* or *gaundre* for *gander*; *polete*, *polette*, *poulle*, *pouillet*, *poullie* for *pullet*, etc.

place to record every single written instance. An extreme example could be the word *pigeon* that is documented in the *MED* with the following spellings: *pi-joun* but also *pijon*, *-gion*, *-geon*, *-geoun*, *-gin*, *-gon*, *-goun*, *-gun*, *-chon*, *pejoun*, *-jon*, *-jun*, *-geon*, *-gion*, *-gen*, *-gon*. Therefore, the most common graphic variants are given, but others can be found as well.

Table 1. GALLINACEAN: *Chicken* and *hen*

	Generic	Male	Female	Offspring
Old English	<i>hāmheml</i> <i>henna</i>	<i>carlfugoll</i> <i>hanalcooc</i> <i>capon</i>	<i>cwenfugoll</i> <i>henn/henn-</i> <i>fugol</i>	<i>cicen</i>
Middle English	<i>hen/chiken</i> [chico(u)n, cheke(n)]	<i>cok</i> <i>capoun</i> [capen, kapo(u)n, cawpon, chapo(u)n]	<i>hen</i> [henne, hene, han]	<i>chiken</i> [chike, chico(u)n, cheke(n)] <i>cockerel</i> [cockrel] <i>polet</i> [polette, pollet, polete, pullet, pult(e)] <i>pullen</i>
Modern English	<i>chicken/hen</i>	<i>cock/rooster</i> <i>capon</i>	<i>hen</i>	chicken/chick (cockerel) pullet/pullen/poult

First of all, if we have a look at the terms provided by Roberts and Kay (1995) for the Old English period we find that the generic of the main family is either *hāmhem*, now disappeared, or *henna*, which shares this status with *chicken* nowadays. In this period *chicken* meant ‘the young of the domestic fowl and its flesh’. It is in the 19th century when it was first used to denote ‘a domestic fowl of any age’. The female fowl could be referred to either as *cwenfugol*, *hennfugol* or simply *henn*.

In the case of the male fowl, the denominations were *carlfugol*, *cooc* or *hana* which corresponds to German *Hahn*. However, this form hardly survived into Middle English. Likewise *cock* is going to experience some survival problems some centuries later. Even if Lass (1997: 22) has suggested that this is refutable and not tenable because of the amount of homonymic items which co-exist with their reproachful and disagreeable counterparts, traditionally it has been considered that speakers tend to avoid those terms which have a pejorative meaning; for this reason, some words are no longer used and are replaced by others. A clear example of this is the replacement of *cock* by *rooster* in American English. The dates in this case seem to agree, as *cock* acquired the new meaning from the 17th century onwards (since 1618 according to the *OED*), while *rooster*

is first attested in 1772. However, Lass (1997: 24) points out that it is still used to refer to the male of some birds as in *cock pheasant*.

The form *capun* is found for ‘table bird’ already in Old English, according to Roberts and Kay (1995), while Clark Hall (1931) gives ‘capon’ as the only explanation, taken from Latin *caponem*, which is documented as ‘a castrated cock’ since Aelfric’s times, according to the *OED*. Besides the Middle English period underwent the introduction of significant terms such as *poult*, *pullet* and *pullen* for a young chicken, or *cockerel* for a young cock, now considered archaic or dialectal with this meaning.

Table 2. ANATIDAE: *Duck*

	Generic	Male	Female	Offspring
Old English	<i>dūcelened</i> [ende]			
Middle English	<i>dōke</i> [dok, duk(e), douke, dukke] <i>malarde</i> [mallard, mallerde, mallerd, mallart, maulard(e)]	drake		duckling
Modern English	duck	drake	duck	duckling

The second family (ANATIDAE) includes *duck* and *goose*. *Duck* was referred to as *dūce* and *ened* or *ende* (this form is provided by Clark Hall and *OED*). The latter, being an obvious cognate of Latin *anas-anatis*, is documented until Late Middle English. The male, *drake*, is not found until Middle English corresponding to the northern and central German dialectal *draak*, *drake*, *drache* with the same sense. Some other terms were attested in this period but not much longer. *Mallard*, restricted now to a wild duck or drake, also meant a tame duck used for food, according to the *MED*, which records quotations from 1381 to 1500. The *Historical thesaurus of English* adds that it fell out of use from 1657 onwards. *Duckling* is a coinage from Middle English that is preserved until now.

Table 3. ANATIDAE: *Goose*

	Generic	Male	Female	Offspring
Old English	<i>gōsfugol</i>	<i>gandra</i>	<i>gōs</i>	
Middle English	<i>gōs</i> [gōse, goce, ghose, guos, gosi, gous, gus(e)]	<i>gander</i> [gander, ganer, gōn-der]	<i>gōs</i> [gōsse, goce, ghose, guos, gosi, gous, gus(e)]	gosling
Modern English	goose	gander	goose	gosling

When referring to the *goose*, both the female and male words are already attested in Old English, while the creation of new formations such as *gosling* was recorded during the Middle English period according to the consulted sources.

Specially within the first two families (GALLINACEANS and ANATIDAE), even if there may be another item, the feminine denomination tends to be the generic as well, probably because females are most highly valued, as they lay eggs and hatch the young.

Table 4. MELEAGRIDIDAE: *Peacock and turkey*

	Generic	Male	Female	Offspring
Old English	<i>pāwa</i>		<i>pāwe/pēa</i>	
Middle English	<i>pō cock</i> [po cock]			
Modern English	<i>peacock</i> <i>turkey</i> <i>peafowl</i> <i>guinea-hen/guinea-fowl</i>	<i>cock-</i> <i>turkey/turkey-</i> <i>cock</i> <i>tom-turkey</i> <i>gobbler</i>	<i>peahen</i> <i>hen-</i> <i>turkey/turkey-</i> <i>hen</i> <i>guinea-hen</i>	<i>poult</i>

A different development is that of the *turkey* family (MELEAGRIDIDAE), which includes two species. The *peacock* is referred to as *pāwa*, which comes from Latin *pavo*. For the female both *pāwe* and *pēa* are attested. Nowadays *peacock* means ‘the male bird of any species of the genus *Pavo* or peafowl, especially of the common species *P. cristatus*, a native of India, now everywhere domesticated, and well known as the most imposing and magnificent of birds; from this and its strutting gait it is treated as a type of ostentatious display and vainglory’ (OED). A modern formation is *peafowl* to designate ‘a bird of the genus *Pavo*; a peacock or peahen’, not coined until the 19th century. The modern *turkey* did not make its way into the language until it was found domesti-

cated in Mexico in 1518. It seems as if the former was originally eaten in Europe before the latter was introduced from America.

In the 16th century, there seemed to be a confusion between the turkey and another species, the *Guinea-cock* or *Guinea-fowl*, an African bird known to the ancients. The American bird was at first treated as a species of this African bird, as it is explained in the *OED*:

The African bird is believed to have been so called as originally imported through the Turkish dominions; it was called *Guinea-fowl* when brought by the Portuguese from Guinea in West Africa. After the two birds were distinguished and the names differentiated, *turkey* was erroneously retained for the American bird, instead of the African. From the same imperfect knowledge and confusion *Meleagris*, the ancient name of the African fowl, was unfortunately adopted by Linnæus as the generic name of the American bird.

As a present synonym for *turkey-cock* we find *gobbler* (1737). This noun derives from the agent of the verb *to gobble* that means ‘to swallow hurriedly in large mouthfuls’. Although there seems to be no widespread generic denomination for the offspring, *poult* is used not only for a young chicken, but also for the young turkey.

Table 5. COLUMBIDÆ: *Dove* and *pigeon*

	Generic	Male	Female	Offspring
Old English	<i>culfer</i> <i>turtur</i> (*dufe)	<i>turtla</i>	<i>turtle</i> <i>turture</i>	
Middle English	<i>colombe</i> [<i>columbe</i>] <i>culuer</i> <i>doue</i> <i>turtur</i> [<i>turture</i> , <i>turtour</i> , <i>turtir</i> , <i>turtre</i> , <i>tortor</i>]		<i>dovess</i> , <i>doves(s)e</i>	<i>pigeon</i> [<i>pijon</i> , - <i>gion</i> , - <i>geon</i> , - <i>geoun</i> , - <i>gin</i> , - <i>gon</i> , - <i>goun</i> , - <i>gun</i> , - <i>chon</i> , <i>pejoun</i> , - <i>jon</i> , - <i>jun</i> , - <i>geon</i> , - <i>gion</i> , - <i>gen</i> , - <i>gon</i>] <i>culuer brydd</i> <i>douve-bird</i> , - <i>brid</i>
Modern English	(<i>culver</i>) <i>dove</i> <i>pigeon</i> (<i>turtle</i>)			<i>pigeon</i> [<i>pidgeon</i>] <i>squab</i> <i>peeper</i> <i>piper</i> <i>dovelet</i> <i>doveling</i>

Regarding the COLUMBIDÆ family the main distinction that can be observed is the fact that there seems to have been some shifts in the denominations both

for the generic and the gender specific terms as well as for the young one.

A glance at the generic denominations will show that *culver*, which appears as the hyperonym in Old English, is now considered rare or archaic. *Turtur* was in use not only during Old English but also in Middle English, as even if the *OED* last record goes back to the year 1400, the *MED* registers quotations for the year 1500. *Colombe* goes back to French or Latin and is just documented in the second half of the 15th century.

The most widespread terms are *dove* and *pigeon*. The former is registered with multiple variants in Middle English (*doufe*, *douife*, *dūve*, *dōfel/dove*, *dofel/duf(fe)*, *dof(fe)dou(e)*, *dowe*). It is supposed to go back to OE **dufe*, although this form is not found, unless as first element in *dūfe-doppa*.

The specialization between the masculine and the feminine seems to have been lost as no distinction can be traced during the Middle English period. In fact, the replacement for the feminine comes from the French etymon *dove* by adding a French suffix (-*ess*).

As for the offspring, no evidence can be found that there was a term to designate the young of the species in Old English, it is in Middle English when the French word *pigeon* was used for it along with *culver-brid* that only appears in different quotations from c. 1200 to 1500. The *MED* also records *brauncher* as a possible synonym for *squab*. Nonetheless, the *OED* does not register this sense for the word. Not so common are *peeper*, *piper*, *dovelet* and *doveling*. The first two are echoic forms emulating the sound produced by a pigeon, while the last ones are derivatives from the French stem *dove* plus different suffixes: the French one *-let* and the Germanic one *-ling*.

3. Metaphorization

In the widest sense of the term, the animal field is one of the richest metaphorical sources in English and other languages. Animal metaphors are present in languages and, as several authors have pointed out (Martsa, 2000; Kovecses, 2003; Talebinejad – Dastjerdi 2005), these metaphors are not only cognitively motivated but also culturally motivated. Many animal metaphors reflect cultural models and, therefore, can be similar or different in different languages,⁵ because “although in some cases, animals have similar images across cultures ... animal metaphors are representative of culture-specific concepts (Talebinejad – Dastjerdi (2005: 138). Nevertheless, the percentage of similarity seems to be higher maybe because “they allude to knowledge that is still shared as part of our cultural repository,

⁵ For more information on cultural influences on metaphors see, for example, Deignan, 2003; Gibbs (1999); Kovecses (1999, 2002, 2003); Littlemore (2003); Martsa (2000); Talebinejad – Dastjerdi (2005).

but no longer directly experienced (Deignan, 2003: 270).

Thus, we tend to understand animal behaviour and attributes in terms of human features. We assign characteristics such as cleverness, loyalty, violence, courage and rudeness to animals. We consider animals as powerful symbols of certain qualities we admire or despise, inasmuch as we often use animal references or imagery in describing human behaviour and feelings. But animals behave the way they do out of instinct, not because they possess moral values which prepare them to distinguish between, for example, what is a loyal behaviour and a non-loyal one. In fact, according to Kövecses (2002: 124), “much of human behavior seems to be metaphorically understood in terms of animal behavior. That is, animals as metaphors for our fears, aspirations and desires, and our physical, emotional and spiritual connections with the animal world”. The framework in which we can explain these figurative uses is the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor proposed by Lakoff – Turner (1989). The aim of this metaphor is to understand general human character traits in terms of nonhuman attributes. Kövecses (2002: 124-125) points out two conceptual metaphors depending on the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor: HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR and PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.

Nonetheless, when comparisons between people and animals are established, not all the features present in the source domain will be transferred to the target domain, rather “we use a metaphor to map certain aspects of the source domain onto the target domain” (Lakoff – Turner 1989: 38-39).

Lakoff and Turner (1989: 195-198) point out that, after establishing the previously explained metaphorical schema, it is very common to apply the metaphors of animals in order to refer to human character. They illustrate their explanation with the example: “Achilles is a lion” because

in our schema of ‘lion’, certain of a lion’s instinctive traits are understood metaphorically in terms of human character traits, such as courage. The expression ‘Achilles is a lion’ invites us to understand the character of Achilles in terms of a certain instinctive trait of lions, a trait which is already metaphorically understood in terms of a character trait of humans (Lakoff – Turner, 1989: 195).

In the first place, we understand nonhuman features in terms of human characteristics; in the second place, we compare and explain human behaviour in terms of animal behaviour, that is, through these nonhuman features we have described before. Kövecses (2002: 125) explains that

the only way these meanings can have emerged is that humans attributed human characteristics to animals and then reapplied these characteristics to humans. That is, animals were personified first, and then the ‘human-based animal characteristics’ were used to understand human behavior.

Unfortunately, the lexicographic works on old stages of the language do not give any clues about the metaphorization process of the terms. In fact, the data obtained from the consulted Old English dictionaries and *The Helsinki corpus* provide no information on metaphors at all. However, through the *MED* we learn that some of the terms designating domestic fowls are beginning to be applied to humans during the Middle English period and continue being used in Present-Day English. Nonetheless, we rely on the *OED* as the most trustworthy and comprehensible work and, although others are consulted and can be seen in the reference section, our assumptions are usually based on this source.

Bearing this caveat in mind, we will analyse the lexicographical definitions of the chosen items in this study in order to point out the metaphorical relations between animals and humans. First of all, we notice not all the words in the field are used to describe people.

Some of terms are gender biased, as cannot be applied to any human being. Thus, *chicken* and *pullen/poult* refer mainly to young children, although the former can also designate a woman in the same way *chick*, *pigeon* and *hen* do. The origin of the metaphor in which a woman is compared with a hen⁶ cannot easily be traced back. It could be related to the fact that hens are almost constantly producing a sound similar to the one produced by several women talking. Even if this misconception seems to be banned, it has a long history, since in King Alfred's proverbs women are characterized as being unable to control their tongue and being *word-wod* 'word-mad' or 'word-senseless' (Angart 1955: 102). Chaucer describes the wife of Bath "and of my tongue a verray jangleresse" (Benson 1988: 113, El. 638). This stereotype is still present in the English language in expressions such as *Thrang as a woman's tongue* or *Deeds are men, words are women*. Proverbs even establish a relationship between women's verbosity and some animals' facts: *Many women, many words; many geese, many turds*. Silence has since long been considered an essential element in a discreet woman and one of her main virtues (Bailey 1992: 249-66).

Goose is attested in the *Semi-bilingual dictionary of euphemisms and dysphemisms in English erotica* meaning 'a prostitute' (Sánchez Benedito 1998:186), sense that only appears recorded in the *OED*, but not in the other dictionaries consulted.⁷

Finally, *cock* and *cockerel* are just used for men as adult and young, respectively. The former is especially associated to the idea of LEADERSHIP, the attitude adopted by a man showing a ruling role, similar to the behaviour of a

⁶ Sommer and Weiss (1996: 194) point out that "the use of hens for gossips is very common. The world, here, seems to be a female gossip.

⁷ *Poule* is considered a Gallicism by the *OED* and was disregarded for the analysis, as it is not properly anglicized, but also has this meaning of 'prostitute'.

cock in a henhouse. Hence the expressions *cock of the school* and *cock of the walk*. This is the main idea, although another figurative sense not so frequent as the previous one is documented by the *OED* ‘one who arouses slumberers, a watchman of the night; applied to ministers of religion’. Curiously *gander* is recorded in the *OED* as ‘a married man’ and *capon* appears in 1300 with the sense of ‘a eunuch’. This meaning seemed to be in use till the 17th century, but is obsolete nowadays, as it is indicated in the mentioned dictionary. In fact, the term has not been found in any of the other dictionaries consulted.

Appellation to PHYSICAL APPEARANCE seems to be the common feature found in different items, more specifically: ‘short and fat’ in *squab* and ‘clumsy and unattractive’ in *duckling*. The latter obviously goes back to Hans Christian Andersen’s character that was hatched with a brood of ducklings, but grew into a swan. Hence the *OED* explains it refers to ‘the unpromising child in a family who turns out the most brilliant of all’.

The idea of YOUTH AND INEXPERIENCE is present in *chick*, *pigeon* and *gosling*. The last two terms have also attached a sense of STUPIDITY, which is also shared by *goose*, *gander*, *turkey* and *capon*. Within this group, *goose* is worth mentioning as it is recorded with the meaning ‘a fool’ since 1450 in the *MED*. Obviously we cannot assume that *geese* behave in a stupid way. We probably relate the way the animal moves, eats, etc., with human characteristics, but it cannot be denied that it constitutes a well-established metaphor, found in other members of the family like *gander*, but also in *turkey*. Lehrer (1985: 289) explains that the following terms denoting birds, *goose*, *cuckoo*, *pigeon*, *coot*, and *turkey*, “have a current metaphorical meaning of ‘foolish’”.

This sense is not so common in *capon* that is recorded since 1542 in the *OED*, being used with the meaning ‘a type of dullness, and a term of reproach’ that refers to human beings. There is no indication of this sense being obsolete, but it has not been found in the other dictionaries consulted.

COWARDICE is the most salient feature found in *chicken*. This metaphor is clearly related to the behaviour of the animal that tends to run away when it feels someone or something is getting closer. In fact, the term has been recorded since 1330 in the *MED* applied to human beings with the sense of ‘rascal’ and ‘coward’. Thus, the most widespread denomination in contemporary English is *chicken-hearted*, although there are other expressions, such as *pigeon-hearted* or *hen-hearted*, recorded in the *MED* since 1450 with this meaning of ‘a chicken-hearted person’. Both *OED* and Lehrer (1985: 290) also point out the metaphorical meaning ‘coward’ for *pigeon*, but it is now obsolete.

The main metaphorical extensions can be seen in Table 6:

Table 6. Metaphorical mappings

	PHYSICAL APPEA- RANCE	YOUTH AND INEXPE- RIENCE	STUPIDITY	LEADER- SHIP	COWARD- ICE
capon			+		
chick		+			
chicken					+
cock				+	
duckling	+				
gander			+		
goose			+		
gosling		+	+		
hen					+
pigeon		+	+		(+)
squab	+				
turkey			+		

Apart from *duck* and *ducky/duckie* that must also be added to this group, terms of affection or endearment seem to be most firmly associated to the pigeon family, since *culver*, *dove*, *dovey*, *doveling* and *turtle* are documented with this meaning. Some of them even from Middle English times, such as *culver*, as early as c. 1230 in *Acrene Wisse* where it can be read “Cum to me, mi leofmon, mi culure, mi feire” (*MED*).

Dove is also linked to the idea of innocence, apart from the association with peace, which acquired as a symbol for the Holy Spirit. Hence the recent opposition between a *dove* for ‘a politician who advocates dialogue and negotiation’ versus a *hawk* or ‘politician who is in favour of using more belligerent methods’ may have sprung from this ancient link.

Finally, we have some lexical units that fell out of use, such a *columbine* that used to mean ‘dove-like’. Even if it is recorded from Middle English as an adjective, it is attested as a noun in a single quotation from 1647 [1816], where it is applied to a man (*OED*).

This innocent Columbine, he,
That was the marke of rage before,
O cannot now admired be,
But still admired, still needs more (Hall 1816, *Poem* 72: 31-34).

Several authors (Kövecses 2002: 125; Talebinejad – Dastjerdi 2005: 137) have pointed out that most animal metaphors express the negative characteris-

tics of human beings. Martsa (2000: 123) raises the following question:

If domestic animals are really indispensable as they are from the point of view of maintenance of human life, then how is it that their names, especially when they are applied to people, almost always generate negative emotions? ... Is it because in the long process of domestication people developed the feeling of superiority and dominance over cows, dogs, pigs, etc., and consequently it became a (verbal) assault if people were ascribed the features of creatures that were inferior to them?

4. Conclusions

In the light of the data we have studied, one can conclude that metaphor infiltrates many aspects of everyday speech. Obviously, the metaphors analysed here concentrate on ordinary ways of addressing people. In fact, we have been dealing with terms of domestic animals which were living with people who created the metaphor at some point in the history of the language, that is, they interpreted the relationship between the animal or its behaviour and human beings according to their expectations and intuitions.

Besides, we agree with Gibbs (1999a: 46) on the idea that “doing research on metaphor requires scholars to think carefully about the limitations of their linguistic materials and the methodologies they use, before drawing any theoretical claims about the nature of metaphor, or about how metaphor is applied in different linguistic, cognitive and social context. As this study is mainly based on dictionaries and reference works, we also need to highlight the necessity to improve the lexicographical studies about some past periods in order to make them more inclusive, especially when dealing with figurative and metaphorical meanings. Although not only the lexicographic details but also bibliography dealing with metaphorization of animal terms in the Old English period are scarce, we can conclude from analysis of the data that the major processes of metaphorization within this field took place from the Middle English period onwards.

Likewise, it would be an important complement to this study a corpus-based investigation of concordances of the mentioned terms in order to establish the frequency of occurrences of their metaphorical senses. In this way, it would be possible to quantify the real use of this kind of metaphors by speakers of the language and potential changes of the metaphorical relations, although we are also aware of the limitations of a corpus-based approach and of some criticism that this method has received (Deignan 1999: 196-199). Finally, as we have pointed out before, these figurative senses were coined due to the close human contact with animals. However, it would be revealing to see to what extent these metaphors are still alive.

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