THE TOXIC MOTHER UNDER A LINGUISTIC-DISCURSIVE AND COGNITIVIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This text, under a linguistic-discursive and cognitive approach (LAKOFF, 1987; GEE, 1999; LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980/2000; FAIRCLOUGH, 2001, CHARTERIS-BLACK, 2004; VEREZA, 2010; SPERANDIO, 2010, among others), aims to analyze the "toxic mother" metaphor concerning social family practices, as it differs from the archetypal form of mother, consolidated in common sense as the housewife, of unconditional love and unrestrained conduct (SCAVONI, 2001; CARMO, 2020). For this, we take as a starting point the metonymic and metaphorical cognitive models linked to the MOTHER, from which we then problematize socio-cultural issues and tensions surrounding the theme in an attempt to contribute both socially and theoretically to a broader understanding of the various elements involved when there is a breach of expectations and a rupture of naturalized models, perpetuated with no critical posture towards them.

INTRODUCTION

The varied issues related to gender and sexuality not only constitute a social taboo but carry a history of multiple biases as suffering, exclusion, prejudice, and various episodes of violence of all kinds. This makes the topic of extreme social, cultural, and theoretical relevance in the search for problematization and solution for many daily questions of violence of all kinds. This makes the topic of extreme social, cultural, and theoretical relevance in the search for problematization and solution for many daily questions of historical roots that underlie practices contrary to healthy coexistence in society, the promotion of the common good, a respectful and better world for all in the construction of an empathetic and compassionate society. However, this is not the case in general, demonstrating that what we expose in this text moves towards an approach of resistance to everything that promotes tensions, conflicts, and socio-cultural unhealthiness in interpersonal relationships, and narrowly in intra-family relationships. The central theme to be addressed is toxic motherhood, seen as a metaphor for a figure who has been promoted and grown in the wake of something sublimated as the idealized maternal figure, bringing in its center a parasitic, ill, harmful identity for the institutions considered not only the first of which we are a part

but sacred, as well as for all its components. Bearing this in mind, in our work, to better comprehend the conceptual framework of a toxic mother, through research based on the qualitative and bibliographic method, we seek assistance in theories that span cognitive, discursive, and ideological areas. Thus, our analyses aim to understand how this so far little studied concept of mother is cognitively and discursively constructed. The importance of our research is based on the need to direct our attention more attentively to the conceptual construction of this type of mother since there is a growing report of maternal relationships utterly opposing the traditionally constructed model of mother; i.e. much is heard and read of children who have troubled relationships with the female figure called mother. Therefore, in this current context, with new demands, a new concept of mother emerges. We hence need to know how this new model is built, as not only will our language and thinking be affected by it, but also our actions. For this, we divided the text into two sections so arranged: *(1) Mother, mothers: is every mother a mother?* — a conversation starter, which brings the initial elements for the reflections to be undertaken; (2) *Concept of MOTHER through cognition*, in which we look at a cognitive perspective of understanding the concept of mother; (3) *Linguistic-discursive aspects of the metaphor: building an interface*; in which we seek an interface with discourse studies as a

social practice broadening the comprehension of the mother concept, facing social transformations protecting a type of mother that presents herself as pernicious and against the concept of theideal and romanticized mother from which it left.

Mother, mothers: is every mother a mother? – a conversations tarter: In this study, in general, the reflections revolve around metaphors constructed to represent the mother figure, with special attention to one that is little studied: the toxic mother. Therefore, we will make a reflection starting from the ideal mother to other possibilities metaphorically represented. To this end, we will constitute an apparatus from the metaphors built around the ideal mother, romanticized as the *queen of the home* (cf. SCAVONE, 2001), endowed with predicates considered unparalleled and represented in a tautological structure that takes itself as the main self-explanatory property: a *mother is a mothe*r (cf. CARMO, 2020).

On the other hand, mothers who deviate from this ideal pattern have placed themselves under this 'protective cover' and obtained advantages from it in the form of monetary values (usually pensions or child support, overvalued in disputes with parents or other family members), family overprotection, exacerbated rights over children, fame, etc. In this sense, negative aspects have not taken due attention, such as the numerous cases of abandoning children (including in dumpsters), literal or metaphorical sale of children, aggression and sexual exploitation, among others which go unnoticed in the form of manipulation, gain advantages; both children and other family members are ultimately harmed and sometimes emotionally shaken, with the aggravating fact that many problems cannot be solved in any way (e.g. time can never be returned to coexistence with the child in the case of the injuredparty). These negative characteristics create and materialize toxic mothers. Our concern is they cause damage difficult to repair. However, similarly, we are not saying that these problems cannot come from other family members. The question that arises has to do with the fact that merely breeding does not turn a woman into a mother, since not having given birth does not prevent someone from becoming a mother, as in the case of foster or adoptive mothers.

Old discourses and ideologies still in force which have not taken socio-cultural movements and transformations into account are subsumed. Thoughts are still assumed based on old discourses and old ideologies that persist to the extent that they still perpetuate the ideas of father who is nothing but a provider, an idealized and almost perfect mother, and the traditional family as one that should be compulsorily placed as a goal. As in all other cases that constitute family poles, mother is not an essential identity, but a role arising from ideologically sustaining social representations in society by means of language in social practices throughout the various circulating discourses. When talking about the *invention of motherhood*, Giddens (1993) explains it originatedin the 19th century as the strict idea of romantic love, in the creation of the home and in the modification of the relations between parents and children. In this sense, Scavone (2001) highlights that, in the 19th century, there was a decline of patriarchal power, which brought about greater control of women over the raising of children, shifting from patriarchal authority to maternal affection. This consolidates the idea of the exaltation of the natural role of women as mothers along with the assignment of duties and obligations for the upbringing ofchildren. Heading to the idea of the toxic mother, we can highlight some aspects of Argentine psychoanalyst Alba Flesler's (2012) thinking, based on Lacan, explaining what is called *the desire of parents*, bringing two senses: (1) the one addressed to children with varying characteristics from both the father and the mother, and (2) that of parents themselves as a couple. According to Flesler, the desire of (or for) the child in the mother arises as aconsequence of a feeling of lack, which leads her to want to have it and also to the illusion of being able to obtain it. In this sense, we can point out that it brings a feeling of possession prior to the child's own existence and, conversely, there is an anticipation of the child's presence and of the subject's own existence before it truly becomes a livingbeing. This brings us back to a metaphorical concept of mother produced by Jacques Lacan that is linked to their own desire to be a mother: "the

desire of the mother is not something that can be endured, so that they are indifferent. It always carries damage. A large crocodile in whose mouth you are — mother it is", Lacan (1992:105). In this scenario, according to Campos (2015), there is a kind of *hesitation of the father figure*, which we interpret as the element that brings out a new mother paradigm: the *toxic mother*. Farias (2016, p. 11) also takes up the metaphorical concept of mother proposed by Lacan and, specifically, conceptualizes the toxic mother as a kind of new mother crocodile, who intoxicates with his words and acts the relations with his children, stimulates psychic dependence and brings all kinds of impasses so that there is a symbolic separation, Farias (2016:11). Flesler (2012) notes that the father needs to be so named in order to really be a father. This highlights the constructed notion of motherhood itself is invested with power relations within the family, which implies that, depending on the mother's view, the father figure constitutes a restriction or obstacle to the relationship established in the mother-child vector. Therefore, toxic motherhood can be understood as the most effective way of producing the so-called *parental alienation* (cf. GARDNER, 2002; BRASIL, 2010; BRENDLER; WAINER, 2019), in view of the female protagonism within society when it comes to the institution of the family. In order to contribute to this discussion, which is general, and to show that mother is a plural and multifaceted entity, we will make an analysis of some metaphors created around the concept MOTHER, especially the toxic mother, through the cognitive point of view, then moving toward a discursive perspective in an attempt to explain some nuances coming from the sociocultural context and the power relations engendered around the mother figure.

Conceptualizing "mother" through the cognitive point of view: If we turn to cognitive studies, we can find in Lakoff's (1987) work on Idealized Cognitive Models some helpful explanations to guide our research for the characterization of the term "toxic mother". We focus more specifically on the research dedicated to the Metonymic and Metaphoric Models. As a starting point, we bring to our discussion the Metonymic Cognitive Model to demonstrate how this model works in the construction of the concept of "mother". Before we get into the analysis, though, we will present briefly how this model is conceived by the author in question. Metonymic Cognitive Models build meaning by being indirectly supported by concrete experiences. These models occur in a single conceptual domain in which there are two elements, A and B, where B can "stand for" A. In this model, "[we] take one well-understood or easy-to- perceive aspect of something and use it to stand either for the thing as a whole or for some other aspect or part of it", Lakoff (1987: 77). Therefore, we have a concept A that must be understood in a conceptual structure that contains both A and another concept B, the latter being either part of A or associated with it in the structure. The choice of B will determine A in this structure, as B, in comparison with A, is either easy to understand, or easier to be remembered, recognized, or immediately useful for the given purpose in a given context. Thus, the metonymic model exemplifies how A and B are reported in a conceptual structure in which the relationship is specified by the function of B for A (SPERANDIO, 2010). The structure of these models is produced in terms of "container" and "source-path-goal" schemes. Lakoff (1987) points out that this model is one of the richest sources of prototype effects, due to it being essentially structured based on a member of a certain category, subcategory, or submodel considered to be representative of the category or model as a whole.
To develop this model, Lakoff (1987) employs the word mother as an example. He indicates how this concept is composed of a complex cognitive structure, built by various individual cognitive models which combine to form what the researcher describes as a "cluster" of models. As a way to better exemplify this issue, we list below the models he enumerated in this organization, LAKOFF (1987:74):

- **The birth model:** The one who gave birth to thechild.
- **The genetic model:** The female who contributes the genetic material is themother.
- **The nurturance model:** The female adult who nurtures and raises a child is the mother of that child.
- **The marital model:** The wife of the father is themother.

- **The genealogical model:** The closest female ancestor is themother.

Therefore, the mother considered prototypical in our society would be the one who gathers all these models mentioned above, with all their characteristics, i.e. the one who provides the genes, gives birth, stays at home full-time, is married to the father, is one generation older, and is the legal guardian of the child. However, Lakoff states that, as these are experiential models, new scientific advancements bring new criteria for the definition of this category, which makes it even more complex. With that, Lakoff (1987) states it is not possible to define what a mother really is,since there is no single model we could classify definitively as the right one. But what does this experiential factor mean to the construction of these models? To better understand this matter, we must stick to Lakoff's (1987) postulates about his cognitive/experiential semantics inwhichmeanings are conceived as the result of our embodiment and experiences. We emphasize that, for the author, the experiential encompasses the sensory-motor, emotional, and social experiences, and innate abilities. Therefore, the conceptual construction comes to be seen not as a mere internal representation of external reality, but as a cognitive construction in which our physical and cultural experiences play a role. In view of this proposition, the author brings us to the radial nature of the "mother" concept, which is based on many types of mothers, as a result of the different relationships between the models in the cluster (previously presented):
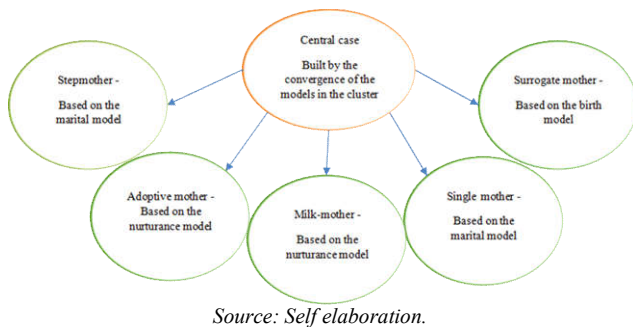
Source: Self elaboration.

Figure 1. Radial nature of the "mother" concept

However, the author claims that there is another source of prototype effects, those denominated social stereotypes. As an example, he points out to us the fact that, although there is no singular item in the lexicon to express it, "the housewife-mother subcategory, thought unnamed, exists. It defines cultural expectations about what a mother is supposed to be" Lakoff (1987:79-80). Therefore, for the author, the metonymic model of social stereotype acts on one of the models in the cluster, in this case on the nurturance model. With this, culturally, the best mother, the prototypical mother, is the one who stays at home to raise her children. To prove this situation, Lakoff (1987) proposes what we can call the "but-test". In this test, the adversative conjunction is used to highlight a situation that goes against some model that serves as a norm. In this case, we can verify the normal (stereotypical) model of "mother" through a linguistic construction containing an adversative structure. Thus, we have:

She is a mother, *but* she isn't a housewife.

Thus, the normal case is responsible for the cultural definition of mother: the one who raises her child full-time. For the author, the following expression sounds strange: She is a mother, *but* she is a housewife. In addition, Lakoff (1987) also presents that this stereotype, "housewife-mother", is source for the creation of another subcategory, namely, "working mother", with opposing properties: "She is a mother, but she has a job" (normal), contrasts with "She is a mother, but she doesn't have a job" (strange). When we focus our attention on the concept of mother we took as the study object of this research, namely, "toxic mother", we assume that the possibility of its creation stems from the fact, as mentioned above, that we are dealing with experiential models, i.e. models that are created through various experiences, with these experiences changing through the years due to

newer social demands. Thus, a concept as "toxic mother", perhaps not considered or experienced previously, now becomes part of the life and experience of many children, adolescents and families. Therefore, with this new demand, which implies a new conceptualization, we can add a new noun phrase to the metonymic model proposed by Lakoff (1987): "toxic mother" (existing alongside stepmother, single mother, adoptive mother, milk-mother, and surrogate mother) even if this phrase is not representative of the general model. It is interesting to note that this new concept also has features, characteristics, from the models used by the author to construct his cluster: the toxic mother can be the one who nurtures and educates (based on the nurturing model), often the ex-wife or partner of the child's father (marital model), and/or the ancestor, the female closest to the child (genealogical model). This analysis allows us to observe the fact that, despite containing many characteristicsof the models presented by Lakoff (1987) for the construction of the cluster, the concept of a toxic mother goes totally against the stereotypical concept of mother that permeated and still permeates our social context, something that can be proved through the "but-test". Thus, based on some characteristics of this type of mother, wehave:

She is a mother, but she is depreciative. She is a mother, but she is absent. She is a mother, but she is manipulative and plays the victim. She is a mother, but she is a profiteer.

Therefore, we can understand why the concept of toxic mother is perceived as strange through this test, since, despite the existence of this new concept of mother, their attitudes completely oppose what is socially and culturally expected from a person who assumes the role of mother. As it is a concept constructed in a metaphorical way, we may now begin to discuss the Metaphoric Cognitive Model also proposed and developed by Lakoff (1987). The Conceptual Metaphor Theory was proposed and developed by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980. In this study proposal, the authors state that the understanding of the world is attached to the concept of metaphor, since a large part of our basic concepts, such as time, quantity, state, and action, in addition to emotional concepts, such as anger and love, are understood metaphorically, which shows the major role of metaphor in understanding the world, culture, and ourselves. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) establish that, as we think and act automatically in most cases, one of the ways to discover the workings of this system is through language, since our communication is based on the same system that we use to think and act. Therefore, Lakoff and Johnson (2000) examine linguistic expressions in order to find evidence of the pervasiveness of metaphor in our conceptual system and identify metaphors that structure our way of acting, thinking, and perceiving, thus establishing this category as a way to understand and experience something in terms of another. In this context, the linguist and the philosopher propose a systematic mapping of two domains: the source domain, which is the source of inferences, and the target domain, the location, upon which the inferences will be applied.

Thus, in the Metaphoric Model we have:

- A well-structured conceptual domain A, called the source domain;
- A conceptual domain B that needs a structure to be understood, called the target domain;
- A mapping responsible for linking these two domains, called metaphorical projection;
- The metaphorical projection from A to B that is naturally motivated by a regular structural correlation that associates A and B;
- The mapping details are motivated by this structural correlation, with the relationship being specified from A to B (SPERANDIO,2010).

Through this model, it becomes possible to better understand how certain conceptualizations, related to the mother domain, are constructed, such as the lioness mother, owl mother, crocodile mother, and toxic mother conceptualizations. Being our target of study, we will focus on the metaphorical construction of the "toxic

mother" concept. For this, our first step is to understand the two domains that compose it, namely, the mother domain and the toxic domain. We start with the domain that serves as a target for the construction of this metaphor: mother. What do we mean by mother? Mother, in our social and cultural context, is seen as the progenitor who gave birth and raised her children, offering care, protection, and affection; a woman who raises and educates, even without having provided the genes and given birth, but maintaining maternal ties and who may be attached by legal ties. These are some characteristics that we find when working with the conceptual domain "mother", many of which are in line with the metonymic prototype model presented by Lakoff (1987). In other words, many of the characteristics pointed out in the mother domain fit the elements presented above in the construction of the cluster, pointed out by Lakoff (1987), used in the construction of the stereotypical metonymic model of "mother". On the other hand, the source domain "toxic" is understood in Brazilian society as a male adjective in the Portuguese language; as that which poisons, which harms the organism; a dangerous substance that causes harmful effects. Therefore, the toxic mother metaphor is constructed through these two domains, with the systematic mapping of some characteristics from the source domain to the target domain. Thus, we have:
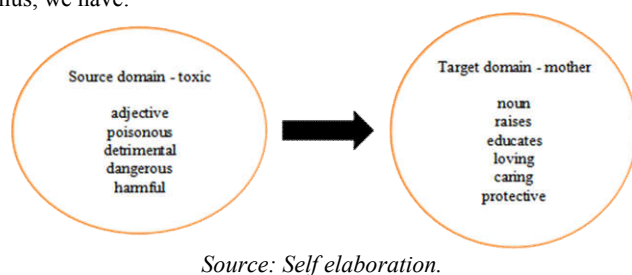

Source: Self elaboration.

Figure 3. Google search for "mother is mother

Consequently, through this metaphor, the inferences produced in the source domain are mapped to the target domain, making our experiences with the mothers who have the characteristics of the source domain differing from those of the target domain. For this reason, toxic mothers are conceived as those who poison their children, who are overprotective, controlling, depreciative, competitive, manipulative, who pose themselves as victims and obtain advantages from it. All of these concepts are the result of the negative experience that we had directly or indirectly with the "toxic" concept and that we transferred to this type of mother.

In this way, the conceptual metaphor toxic mother is confirmed by linguistic expressions such as those exemplified below[1]:

"My mother is very manipulative. In her records there is blackmail (she blackmailed me to cover up her lies, threatening to tell my grandmother and my aunt about me losing my virginity); lies (among other things, she spread to our neighbors that my middle sister and I had hit her, when actually I got beaten with a piece of bamboo of some sort, and my sister was trying to stop her)" (Y.D., 19 years old, Natal, RN).

"I developed depression, anxiety, I was always withdrawn, like a shy animal, not to mention the fears that she put in me" (B.S., 26 years old, preferred not to reveal their hometown).

"My mother used to take the money I earned saying that I had to help her because my father did not pay child support. She also loves to call me an irresponsible child, saying that I don't have a say inside her house and that I have to do what she says" (Female, 19 years old, preferred not to reveal herhometown)

Linguistic-discursive aspects of metaphor: constituting aninterface

Neveu (2007:201) explains the metaphor is from greek meaning "transposition". For the author, a metaphor and an analogue linguistic

process in which "an annunciator refers to a note α by means of a statement that is credited to refer to a note β, α and β being linked by properties presumed common to the enunciator and valued in the enunciated". Explicit in the cognitive terms in the previous section, properties of "elements" different (domains) need to be presumably common to what encodes and decodes or metaphorical statements or which is not verified, in advance, in a mother-toxic relationship. It is interesting to point out the fact that, as advocated by Vereza (2010), the locus of metaphor has changed over the years. In its initial phase, metaphor had its place demarcated at the level of language. Therefore, in these traditional studies, this trope was conceived simply as a figure of speech, a superfluous resource, used in the ornamentation of poetic and rhetorical discourses. At a later time, there is the locus of metaphor located in thought. This issue was widespread after the 19080s with Lakoff and Johnson's works. In proposing the Theory of Conceptual Metaphor (TMC), these authors demonstrated the purpose that metaphor has in the organization of our daily thinking, in organizing our knowledge, our categorization of the world around us. It is in this context that there is the concept of metaphor widely used by researchers in the field. Thus, metaphor comes to be seen as a way of understanding and conceptualizing one term through another. For researchers, there is a systematic mapping between two concepts: the source domain (source of inference) and the target domain (place of application of these inferences).

One of the examples pointed out by the authors is the metaphor TIME IS MONEY. According to the researchers, we understand this metaphor because we have systematically organized knowledge about money. As Vereza points out (2010:14):

The conceptual metaphor, therefore, would not be "owned" by an individual. She would be part of a "collective cognitive unconscious", maintaining a relationship of mutual determination with culture and language. Uses of metaphorical language would almost always be "licensed" by conceptual metaphors. What was previously seen as a metaphor at the level of the language in use, came to be approached as an evidence or linguistic mark of an underlying conceptual metaphor.

We find a similar idea in Bloor and Bloor (2007:69), for example. As the authors explain, the metaphor, in a literary context, has been described especially when there is a comparison that transfers the name from one thing to another. This means that it has been seenas a tool to represent one entity or event in place of the other. However, for the authors, it is an extra source offered by language for the construction of meanings. For this reason, it is above all a source for the production of different meanings in social and discursive practices. Carter et al. (2006:84) observe that a metaphor occurs from the moment when a word or phrase establishes a comparison or analogy between an object or idea and another, corresponding to an expansion of meaning, by linking elements that normally not be connected; This seems to be the case of lion mother, crocodile mother, and owl mother, for example.

Cabral (2000:53), in turn, states that the metaphor is the result of a cognitive process through which the writer, when referring to an element X, uses the name of element Y. Thus, the metaphor is seen, above all, from the point of view of production. But we believe that one should look for ways to work from the consumer's point of view, since they depend on the reader/consumer to effectively make sense, i.e. they are co-constructed in the discourse by the producers and consumers of the messages therein contained. This cognitive effort to co-construct the metaphor is that it has in its core a function that focuses on the interpersonal component and moves to the semantics via the construction of the statement that must be understood taking into account the socio-cultural context performing semantically and semiotically in society. In the words of Cabral (2000), metaphors are different because have an interpersonal function which would invite the interlocutor to a game of make-believe, in which "we will imagine" that X is Y, or ideational in which, in addition, I would try to convey/express a concept. This is a view anchored in Halliday's (1985) Metafunctional view from which language would always exhibit three Metafunctions: Ideational to express and transfer

experiences and concepts; Interpersonal, to conceive human interaction; and Textual, to allow the organization of the message and intratextual cohesion. The union of domains from which connections are made by mapping, as explained in the previous section, allows one to infer the necessary ramifications to understand the metaphor. Discursively, nevertheless, recontextualization of discourses in discursive practices is also a key point to comprehend it, because, Fairclough (2001) explained, discursive practices are analyzed in terms of the processes of production, distribution and consumption of texts.

Recontextualization, in turn, must be understood as the "relationship between different (networks of) social practices, the question of how the elements of one social practice are appropriated and reallocated in the context of another.", FAIRCLOUGH (2003:222). This last position meets the third phase of the metaphor, as pointed out by Vereza (2010), in which it would be located in the discourse. At this moment, differing from the cognitive proposal, in which we sought to analyze pre-existing metaphors in a given society and culture, we have the search for metaphors active in the construction of authentic, real texts. Thus, opposing the Theory of Conceptual Metaphor, in which the examples presented were seen out of context, in a corpus, in this new moment, figurativeness in textual genres is investigated in order to identify in their underlying metaphors. This, for Vereza (2010), demonstrates the return of language to metaphorical studies.

However, with this new approach, language is seen not only as a source of data, but as a place of pragmatic and cognitive articulation.

> [...] an attempt is made to create systematic articulations between cognition and discourse, emphasizing the inseparability of these two instances. The metaphor is both linguistic and (socio) cognitive in nature, and the discourse promotes and enables this articulation and, at the same time, depends on it. In this way, the locus of the metaphor becomes the discourse, if we understand this concept as the space in which socio- cognitive and linguistic aspects (if this separation can be made) meet to weave figurativeness, among other ways of creating meanings (VEREZA, 2010:208).

When we think about this relationship, from the cognitive to the discursive, we can bring to our debate the perspective of the so-called Critical Discourse Analysis, as proposed by Fairclough (2001, 2003), who observes that a relevant part of the study of metaphor is found when we turn to the analysis of vocabulary, paying attention to the political and ideological implications underlying them. According to Fairclough (2001:241), although metaphors are traditionally studied as an aspect of literary language, they penetrate all types of language anddiscourse and are not "superficial stylistic decorations", as they have the ability to shape our thoughts and actions, our systems of knowledge and belief, building our reality in one way and not another. This seems to be the case with regard to the metaphors linked to the mother concept and its implications, especially in relations of power within the family institution and in society in general.

Thus, with the aforementioned position, we can observe the possibility not only of the metaphorical approach being carried over to discursive studies, but also of considering the ideological-political aspect in the figurativeness field, a question postulated and worked on by Charteris-Black (2004). For this researcher, the metaphor must be analyzed through the semantic, cognitive and pragmatic dimensions. With this approach, the metaphor is analyzed both by cognitive and ideological and persuasive bias. In his research, Charteris-Black (2004) develops a study based on three discursive dimensions: persuasion (it concerns the effectiveness of the metaphor in realizing the underlying objective of persuasion of the message sender); emotion (persuasion occurs due to the metaphor's potential to move us) and evaluation (the role of metaphor in conveying the speaker's values, views and feelings). To this end, Charteris-Black (2004) proposes that the persuasive role of metaphor is found as it evokes emotional impact responses, causing the receiver to interpret reality in one direction and not the other.

One way of conducting this interpretation is through the underlying evaluation transmitted through the choice of certain phrases, in the case of metaphor, certain source and target domains, or even certain metaphors and not others, in the reality conceptualization. The author alerts us to the fact that the same notion can be conveyed by adifferent metaphor or the same metaphor can be used in different ways, according to an ideological perspective.

We can observe this relationship established between cognition and discourse in the metaphorical construction in the following excerpt[2]:
My mother was always extremely rude to me, except for a few "bouts" of kindness, which were rare. Ever since I was a child, I was beaten up for everything. I didn't make the bed? Beating. I didn't put the glass in the sink? Beating. I remember once we had chicken for lunch, then I ate and forgot to put the bones in the trash, she took me by the hair, rubbed my face on the dirty plate and gave me a nice beating that left me full of bruises for days. I grew up and didn't understand why I was angry with her; man, mom is perfect, mom is sacred and these things that people tell us... When she found out that I got a boyfriend and lost my virginity (very early), instead of advising me she cursed me too much, called me a prostitute, my life has turned to hell. Every day she cursed me for it.

When I was about 16 years old I started dating my current boyfriend, she hated him, hated seeing me happy, I spent the weekend with him and when she showed up at home it was a war, she made scandals saying she was "giving me away too easy" (*ID, 21 years old, São Paulo, SP*).

The text presented above has its semantic network built through the toxic mother metaphor. However, this metaphor goes beyond merely acting in a cognitive way, as it leads us, as readers, to a certain argumentative direction, to build reality in a certain way and not another. Thus, we find the three discursive dimensions pointed out by Charteris-Black (2004): persuasion (with the efficacy of the toxic mother metaphor in persuading, through the highlighted and mapped elements from the source domain to the target), emotion (both in the emitter and in the receiver, when this metaphor moves us in a negative way, due to the way in which the daughter was treated by her mother) and the evaluation (in the case of the speaker, when evaluating the treatment given by the mother to her daughter). Therefore, the argumentative conduct is made through the ideological aspect constructed by the conceptual metaphor of the toxic mother.
In addition, reading the above speech takes us to another important factor in the conceptual construction of this metaphor under analysis: the cultural factor, which can be recovered in the aforementioned speech from the following expression: "man, mother is perfect, mother is sacred and these things that people tell us..." In other words, the image of the mother presented above is utterly contrary to the idealized model of a socially and culturally constructed mother (model presented in the second section of our article), which leads us, henceforth, to discuss a little more about this relationship between culture and metaphor.

The metaphor x cultural modelrelation: Gee (1999) brings an important discussion by clarifying that it is not uncommon for cultural models to be signaled by metaphors, since sometimes they are connected to "master models", which can be related to the social stereotypes connected to many source domains, by organizing a number of significant domains for a particular culture or social group. In the author's words, "metaphors are a rich source of cultural models, though, of course, most cultural models are not signaled by metaphors." (GEE, 1999:69). These cultural models can then be accessed by us through metaphorical constructions that need to "pick up", reallocate and recontextualize elements from different socio-discursive domains and practices to a third space in which they are not seen as discrepant or unrelated, which could explain the case of the "toxic mother" metaphor.

Addressing this issue, we share with Gibbs (1999) the idea that the concepts we build metaphorically involve significant aspects of our cultural experience, many of which are closely related to our

embodied behavior. Thus, with this proposition in mind, there would be no need to draw a strict distinction between cultural and conceptual metaphor. In addition, the author also proposes that "public, cultural representations of conceptual metaphors have an indispensable cognitive function that allows people to carry less of a mental burden during everyday thought and language use" (GIBBS, 1999:146). With this, we come to infer that the metaphors that populate our thinking and language are constructs both of our culture and of mental entities internalized in the minds of the subjects. Thus, the metaphor, seen from the perspective of embodiment, is not produced within the individual's body and represented in their mind, but emerges from bodily interactions that are, in large part, defined by the cultural world. In this context, "metaphor is as much a species of perceptually guided adaptive action in a particular cultural situation as it is a specific language device or some internally represented structure in the mind of individuals." (GIBBS, 1999:171) This is a question we can observe in the "toxic mother" metaphor: we have a source domain composed of the toxic one, which is activated from our direct or indirect experience with the elements that compose it. Take an example: many of us have already directly experienced a toxic substance that resulted in some type of harm to our body, e.g. the excessive ingestion of medications that can cause some type of poisoning to the body. From this domain, grasped in an embodied way, we develop the mapping to the "mother" target domain, an abstract domain. Furthermore, this bodily interaction is defined by our cultural context. This means that, as Kövecses (1999) points out, the metaphor not only reflects cultural models, but constitutes them. This implies our abstract concepts are motivated through an experiential basis. It is interesting to point out that, in the case of the toxic mother, the cultural model used in its conceptual construction is the idealized model of mother, which is opposed to this metaphor. In other words, the cultural model of mother we have is that of the woman who desires motherhood, who loves her child above all, who has a loving and positive relationship with the child's father, who takes excellent care of her child's education and nourishment. For this reason, it ends up being a taboo in our society the fact that some women do not want motherhood, that some mothers are negligent in the education of their children, that there are mothers who are competitive, who verbally or physically abuse their kids, who vent their frustrations on their offspring, who use their children to obtain different types of socioeconomic advantages. From the theoretical perspectives presented, we can picture the interface between cognitive and discursive studies of metaphor, as each domain brings different discourses to a third space that will be created discursively. Interdiscursively, several discourses originating in different domains of experience will be recontextualized and reallocated to compose this new locus (CARMO, 2011).

For Lakoff and Johnson (2000:71), the fundamental values of a culture will be consistent with the metaphorical structure of the fundamental concepts of the represented culture. Thus, we can assume that it should be consistent with cultural models and, therefore, with the inherent discursive and cultural practices, even if to "erase" or make possible tensions opaque. Berber-Sardinha (2007:33) clarifies that "they [the metaphors] reflect the ideology and the way of seeing the world of a group of people built in a given culture." Thus, to the extent that metaphors are cultural and are part of the human conceptual system, we can infer that metaphorical expressions and structures are motivated by them, which originate in domains that are often extremely different. This also implies relating them to the speeches that are part of these domains and to the different discursive practices that give them flow, i.e. that they can anchor and, through social dynamics, generate action through the use of language. As they are, above all, cultural, it is lawful and productive to connect their study from a cognitive point of view to textually oriented discursive perspectives and concerned with the linguistic constructions that give them a body and therefore a voice and time in society. Structuring something metaphorically is not just using expressions so-called metaphorical, but building worldviews, forms of thought and belief, forms of social action through language. Although our perspective is not entirely the same, we believe it is important to emphasize the concept of linguistic metaphor, according

to Berber-Sardinha (2007:40): "a unity of meaning (clause, in writing, or enunciation, in speech) used metaphorically". So, if we have X = Y in C, that is, if an element X becomes designated by Y in a given context, due to common features, discursively, it is possible to be used as a technology of speech to cover up features of distinction, dissension, tension, and conflict as in the case of a toxic mother.

We would basically have the following structures:

- Mother = lioness — in the context of protection
- Mother = crocodile — in a context of domination
- Mother = owl — in the context of "pampering" and overprotection
- Mother = toxic — in the context of dullness of healthy intra-family social relationships

But when one thinks of the idealized mother pattern, we perceive a tautological construct structurally produced as **a *mother is a mother*** in which the identified element is valid for itself by being equivalent to its own identifier, that is, mother = mother - in an ideal context:

Scheme 1. Tautological structure of the ideal mother

Identified ➡ Identifying Relational Process ⬅ Identifier

Mother ➡ is ⬅ Mother

Mother = Mother
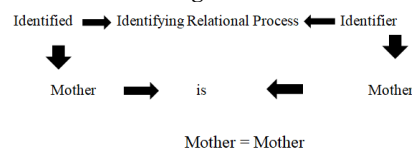
Source: Self elaboration.

This construct can be seen clearly in quantitative terms when searching the term in a search engine such as Google, reaching around 2 billion results in just 0.73 seconds.
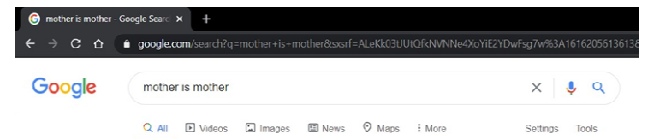
Source: Screen from the search performed by the authors.

Figure 3. Google search for "mother is mother"

In contrast, the same search for a toxic mother results in eleven times fewer results: 200 million in 0.95 seconds.
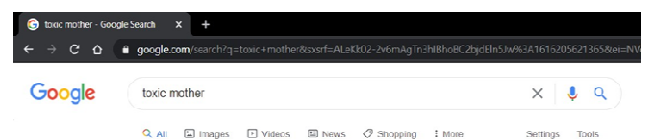
Source: Screen from the search performed by the authors.

Figure 4. Google search for "toxic mother.

The analyst's role, in this sense, is to seek then the effects of meaning constructed in and by the discourse, through a certain linguistic structure that could not and should not be understood literally, but only in the exchange of experiences and characteristics both from different domains and from t different cultural models supporting and recontextualized in the relationship between producers and consumers of certain discourses and concepts. Initially, different elements are assumed, sometimes belonging to different spheres of the same social and cultural structure, or even elements from other societies and cultures that have been contacted, however, the sociocultural and linguistic dynamics representative of the intricate metaphorical process puts in scene metonymic constructions in the foreground when parts of a whole stand out or even challenge relational possibilities. The metaphor in the case of a toxic mother can be understood as a form of recontextualization of domain practices that were originally unrelated, even conflicting, as demeaning an idealized and crystallized representation of the mother concept, by highlighting one of the harmful possibilities of the mother figure and pointing to a space of disharmony precisely because it denounces a little studied but

growing behavior of certain mothers, an important figure in the family institution with which negative attitudes would not match. When we take this question, the approach constituted here is shown as an effort to create a critical perspective from which individuals could be made aware so as to stop being alienated in the face of certain social constructions and representations, enabling them to deconstruct or to understand the cognitive and discursive functioning of certain metaphors, i.e. the way in which metaphor can be used as a technology of speech.

Final Considerations

The toxic mother metaphor articulates elements from different and conflicting domains and highlights socio-cultural transformations that cannot be neglected, since mother models, as well as other prototypical models, and society itself, are in constant movement, which makes it possible and necessary to build cognitive models hitherto unthought. This fact is corroborated by the proposition that these models are not only based on our cognition, but also on our experiences. Therefore, metaphors, in addition to the cognitive and linguistic component, articulate social, cultural, human and experiential elements that are put into operation through discourse in everyday social practices, maintaining, articulating, rearticulating, denouncing, transforming and changing identities, forms of thought, beliefs, and, hence, our actions in the face of these new constructions. It is in the face of this new reality that the analysis of the toxic mother metaphor becomes possible, as a technology of discourse, which discloses a representation of a mother that does not match the socio-culturally idealized and crystallized representation, highlighting one ofthe pernicious possibilities of the mother figure from a growing harmful behavior still in need of further studies. In view of everything exposed in this research, we believe that our proposal, in addition to being necessary in view of this new reality that imposes itself in this new framework of mother, demonstrates a productive way of working with metaphor, by seeking interfaces that enhance the different shades of production, distribution and consumption of the metaphor, by focusing both on the conceptualization of the operated world and on the discursive and ideological effects of this resource in language, both in the immediate situation of its use and in the culture and society that semantics and semiotics it, as an important mechanism for the construction of realities and social representations.

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Footnotes

[1] The expressions presented were taken and translated from the website: https://www.buzzfeed.com/br/clarissapassos/maes-toxicas-relatos.

[2] Expressions taken from https://www.buzzfeed.com/br/ clarissapassos/ maes-toxicas-relatos.

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