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“A MAN IS A MAN AND A WOMAN IS A WOMAN”: TRANSPHOBIA AND METONYMY ON X¹

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A man is a man and a woman is a woman - that's just common sense” stated Rishi Sunak during the 2023 Tory Party Conference (Leeson 2023). This statement caused a stir on X. The far-right along with other groups supported Sunak and demonstrated that, as stated by previous scholars (Kennedy 2022, 77), these reactionary movements are often joined by their transphobic views, as illustrated by their shared use of certain widely spread metonymies. Following a combination of quantitative tools of corpus linguistics with the qualitative framework of critical discourse studies and cognitive linguistics, this case study examines, in a corpus of 798 posts, the metonymies used by X lay users in their representation of trans people; the relation between these metonymies and stereotypes surrounding this

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community, and their effect in the position on LGBTQ+ rights of X lay users. Within the sample of metonymies retrieved around the keyword “trans,” “property for person,” “person for property,” and “process for result” metonymies were the most common instances. These metonymies displayed a variety of effects, although they mostly served the purpose of dehumanizing and curtailing the existence of trans people.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics; metonymy; corpus linguistics; critical discourse studies.

1. Introduction

On October 4th, 2023, towards the closure of the Tory Party Conference, Rishi Sunak, the prime minister of the United Kingdom and leader of the Tory party, sentenced: “A man is a man and a woman is a woman - that’s just common sense,” which was taken as an endorsement of the traditional gender dichotomy, and a rejection of any gender identity that fell outside this binarism (Leeson 2023). Sunak’s words stirred an avalanche of responses on social media. Among these platforms stood X, where the far-right along with other groups (e.g., trans-exclusionary radical feminists) supported Sunak and proved that transphobia was the cohesive glue that joined together various reactionary groups (Armitage 2020, 21; Kennedy 2022, 97). At the core of this ideological antithesis lies a common discursive ground, materialized in a net of metonymies whose generalized use makes them invisible (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 37; Cienki 2013, 299) and bestows an ever-growing reach on them (Henderson 2022, 234).

The choice of metonymy as the object of study was inspired by Sunak’s very statement, which gathers one potential metonymy. In cognitive linguistics, metonymy alludes to a mental process through which the speaker accesses (i.e., understands and conceptualizes) a target domain by means of a vehicle domain, within the same domain matrix (Croft 1993, 340; Kövecses 2010, 191). The strong reaction on social media to these words pointed in the direction of this alternative interpretation, in which “men” and “women” refer to not only two types of people but also function as

the metonymic vehicle through which thousands of X users accessed various targets – for instance, specific parts of human anatomy (which would constitute a “person for property” metonymy). Consequently, in the aftermath of the declaration of Sunak, metonymy revealed itself embedded at the heart of transphobic discourse.

Thus, this study follows a mixed-methods approach combining corpus linguistics with critical discourse studies and cognitive linguistics, to examine three research questions: i. which metonymies do X lay users² employ to characterize trans and nonbinary people? ii. which is the relation between these metonymies and preconceived ideas surrounding these collectives? and iii. how do these metonymies reflect the position on LGBTQ+ rights of X lay users? This paper is organized as follows: the second section provides an overview of the main theoretical aspects concerning this work; the third section discusses in depth the corpus on which this study is based and the method of analysis; the fourth section dives into the details of the quantitative and the qualitative analyses, and the fifth section concludes with a summary of the final remarks from the results.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Metonymy

Supported by corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics provides the framework of this study. Cognitive linguistics proposes the insoluble union between language and mind and presents grammar as a symbolic system that

² According to X’s terms (X Corps. 2019), a “lay user” would be the opposite of a user of “public interest” – i.e., any verified X account which amasses over 100000 followers and is involved in politics. Thus, those unverified accounts with less than 100000 followers would be considered lay users.

shapes the conceptualization and comprehension of the speaker's world (Langacker 2002, 61-62).

In cognitive linguistics, metonymy is a mental process within the same “domain matrix” (i.e., a combination of different related domains) (Croft 1993, 340) through which the speaker accesses one concept – the target – by means of another concept – the vehicle (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 39; Kövecses 2010, 176). In metonymy, the link between the two involved concepts is inferential and rather direct and often entails “physical or causal associations” leading to the generic formula of metonymy: “X for Y” (Lakoff and Johnson 1989, 39). Domains – also known as idealized cognitive models (ICM) (Cienki 2012, 176) – are abstracted systems of knowledge influenced by experience (Langacker 2002, 4). The general process of conceptualization involves the activation of different domains – “as a preassembled whole” – which such a concept evokes (Langacker 2002, 15). Some scholars (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 267; Panther 2005, 358) argue that metonymy involves only one domain, of which the vehicle and the target are part, while others (Barcelona 2005, 314; Cienki 2012, 183) claim that metonymy relies on two intersecting and related domains found in a domain matrix³. Independent of their view on the structure of metonymy, most authors agree that the primary function of metonymy is reference. The vehicle points at the target, whose meaning is inferred through an expansion of the semantic scope of the vehicle (Croft 1993, 345; Panther 2005, 370).

Often overlooked in favor of metaphor, metonymy is nevertheless a force to be reckoned with (Croft 1993 347; Cienki 2013, 299), and some authors claim metonymy as the root of metaphoric thinking (Kövecses and Radden 1998, 62). Its pervasiveness in everyday language renders it almost invisible, yet metonymy equally and inadvertently shapes the world view of the speaker (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 37; Cienki 2013, 300). The vehicle chosen as an entrance point to the domain will affect the understanding and the conceptualization of the target (Kövecses and

³ This paper, however, does not intend to contribute to the debate around the internal organization of metonymy, as it is beyond its scope.

Radden 1998, 40). As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 39) explain, metonymy is rooted in "direct, physical or causal" relations between the vehicle and the target, which bestows an almost "automatic nature" on such an association and triggers "strong, emotional" connections in the mind of the speaker (Cienki 2013, 300). Consequently, metonymy serves as a tool to profile certain conceptual features while backgrounding other elements from the same domain, which will condition the emotional and affective response from the interlocutor.

Briefly, this affective facet of metonymy will serve as the basis of this analysis of the characterization of trans people by X users, as metonymy sometimes reflects the speaker's sentiments and opinions.

2.2. Social media and identity: The case of the trans community

The ubiquitous and multimodal social media platforms, the undeniable protagonists of Web 2.0, has come to shape the identity and relationships of its users (Locher 2015, 129; Herring 2019, 34). Social media has bestowed a "searchable" property on language and has transformed the way communities are built in online contexts. As Zappavigna (2011, 800-801) explains, most users relate and bond through ambient affiliation – i.e., without any prior nor future direct interaction among users, they still feel a sense of group. Inherently linked to this notion stands the idea of identity, as identity is always to some degree socially constructed (de Fina and Bamberg 2011, 267; Koller 2017, 152). Thus, one "is not" an identity, but rather "does" and "performs" various identities which are enacted through different means – among them, language – to which the individual turns to present, and to be recognized as, a particular identity (Butler 1999, 33; Bamberg and de Fina 2011, 269). Moreover, this process of identification(s) is not permanent nor stable, as it changes and evolves depending on the sociocultural and historical circumstances surrounding the subject (van Leeuwen 2022, 6).

In the last decades, social media has provided a magnifying glass for analysing the construal of identity, often in association with the constitution of online communities (Zappavigna 2012, 6). One

such community is the trans community (Zimman 2021, 425). About this collective, some works have focused on the characterization of trans people and the discussion of trans experiences by people who do not belong to the trans community, and others have delved into the construction and negotiation of trans identities by trans people (i.e., their self-characterization) (Zottola 2021, 22). As an instance of the former, in the field of corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, Baker (2017) discusses the recurrent transphobic portrayal of trans people in the British press. This account is endorsed by Zottola (2021), who illustrates the pervasiveness of transphobia in the British press, in comparison to the Canadian press. Within the latter group, Horak (2014) analyses the genre of transition videos and other vlogs on YouTube and demonstrates how these videos constitute “a form of political action, in that they allow trans youth to author their bodies and selves” and how certain repeated conventions in these videos generate a sense of community (Horak 2014, 574). Following again the principles of corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, Jacobsen, Devor and Hodge (2022) focus on Tumblr and examine posts uploaded by trans users to study the negotiation of what it means to be trans. Thus, this study intends to contribute to the ever-growing body of research on the conversation around trans people on social media (Sánchez-Sánchez et al. 2024, 222), applying the lenses of cognitive linguistics and metonymy theory.

Influenced by research which dives into the construction of trans identity by trans people, this work focuses on social media and its effects in shaping and defining trans identities, hence its choice of X as the source for the data. Guided by the methodology of some of the studies which examine the characterization of trans people by outgroups, this article implements the corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis of Baker (2017, 213) and Zottola (2021, 9), as explained in the next section, with the added layer of cognitive linguistics.

3. Corpus and methodology

3.1. Data selection and extraction

This study is based on a manually compiled corpus which comprises over seven hundred public posts from English-speaking X lay users. Often under a pseudonym and without the pressure of the public eye, lay users are more likely to turn to a more inhibited and sometimes violent discourse (Yar 2018, 14), where metonymy might become a useful inferential tool. The posts were published between October 4th and November 4th, 2023. The key term "Rishi Sunak trans" was chosen to establish a rather descriptive point of access to the data, as the study is focused on the comments "Rishi Sunak" made on "trans" people. For each week the first thirty "top" posts were manually extracted, as well as the comments each post elicited with the help of the web scraper *Export Comments* (n.d.). The goal behind the choice of thirty "top" posts per week was the creation of a representative ad-hoc corpus which could be, nonetheless, thoroughly manually examined. Thus, 120 posts and over 600 comments were compiled over two days (November 6th – 7th). The extraction of comments alongside their posts aimed to analyze not only the statements of X users in relation to Sunak's remarks, but also their intertextual interaction with other posts and other users, which sometimes generated more responses on topics which were not even part of Sunak's speech in the first place.

The extraction of each of the 120 posts followed these steps. First, the body of the post was copied and pasted into a text file in UTF-8 format to ensure the preservation of non-textual elements (e.g., emojis) and to facilitate its later analysis in the corpus-management software *LancsBox 6.0*. (Brezina et al. 2021). Applying the ethical standard procedures of most linguistic studies involving social media (D'Arcy and Young 2012, 533), users were anonymized, and posts were assigned an identifying code: "RSUK" ("*Rishi Sunak United Kingdom*") plus a number indicating the position of the post in relation to other posts in the corpus. For example, the tenth collected post is labelled "RSUK_010." Next, a screenshot of the post was taken, to prevent the future loss of any content. Finally, an Excel database gathered information linked to

the post's metadata – such as its user, and engagement statistics (e.g., number of retweets, likes, and views) – along with the body of the post.

The process of comment extraction involved only two steps. First each post's entire thread of comments was downloaded in an Excel file with the web scraper *Export Comment* (n.d.). Each Excel file with the comments was named after the post which originated those responses. For instance, the comments to the post “RSUK_010” are saved in an Excel file under the name “RSUK_010_C,” the last letter indicating the nature of the content of the file (“comments.”) Then, the text attribute of all the comments from one post was copied and pasted in another txt file, organized in paragraphs. This txt file shares the same name as the Excel file from *Export Comment*. It seems worth noting that not all of the top posts generated comments – only 84. Thus, the final corpus on which the forthcoming analysis is based contains 120 text files, one per top post, and 84 extra text files, one per comment thread, all of which amount to 18500 words – or, in corpus linguistic terms, tokens.

3.2. Methodology

The analysis of data followed a mixed-methods approach, combining the quantitative techniques and tools of corpus linguistics and the qualitative strategies of critical discourse studies and cognitive linguistics. This methodological combination has already proved to be successful, for corpus linguistics provides an overview of greater volumes of data and points towards possible linguistic patterns of interest, while critical discourse studies grant context and a greater degree of detail to the initial quantitative analysis of corpus linguistics (Baker et al. 2008, 297; Mautner 2016, 176). Consequently, the analysis of the data comprises two different steps – a preliminary quantitative analysis with the corpus-management software *LancsBox 6.0*. (Brezina et al. 2021). and a subsequent manual qualitative analysis complemented by the input of the semantic tagger *UCREL* (Rayson 2008).

First, the quantitative analysis follows the methodological proposal of Baker (2017, 217-218) and Zottola (2021, 22), who, through the collocations of terms such as "transgender" and the concordance lines in which those words are found, qualitatively examine the characterization of trans people in the British press. Thus, a preliminary step entailed the elaboration of a list of candidate search terms, related to gender identities outside cisnormativity, which could serve as entrance points to the data of the corpus. Then, the RSUK corpus was uploaded in *LancsBox* (Brezina et al. 2021), and, with the tool *KWIC* (Key Word in Context), the hypothetical search terms ("trans," "transgender" and "non-binary") were introduced and searched. Only "trans" turned out to be fruitful, with 238 instances. Next, the collocates of "trans" were retrieved with the tool *GraphColl*, limiting the search to all nominal collocations within a span of five words to the left and the right of the key word, and with a minimum frequency of three instances. This search was facilitated by the prior, automatic POS tagging of the software.

The choice of nouns as a word class to restrict the search emerged from the need to rid the results of noise, such as the presence of determiners or conjunctions. As Mautner (2016, 159) elaborates, functional words such as "and" or "with," are empty in terms of meaning, despite their frequency. Consequently, in order to bring to the fore semantically loaded units, like nouns, these functional words are often rescinded from the preliminary quantitative analysis. Furthermore, considering that "trans" often stands as an adjective (especially if one wishes to be respectful to trans people) (Baker 2017, 220) and that this study focuses on the characterization of trans people as social actors (van Leeuwen 2008, 25), nouns rose as the more convenient category to approach the topic, for it is also the class more likely to emerge after "trans." After this, with the tool *Text*, the co-text (i.e., the concordance lines) of each of the five most frequent collocates of the term "trans" was extracted and saved in an Excel file for the qualitative analysis. Here, with the occasional aid of further context and successive concordance lines, possible metonymic uses were identified and categorized according to their type and target entities (Kövecses and Radden 1998, 53). Lastly, *USAS* (UCREL Semantic Analysis

System) (Rayson 2008) determined the semantic domains of the linguistic vehicle of the metonymies.

In brief, this work encompasses two analytic processes: a first corpus-based approach to the collocations of the key term “trans,” expected to appear as an adjective, and a later qualitative examination of these collocations in their respective co-text. While the former step highlights the most repeated patterns in relation to the characterization of trans people, the second step allow us to further explore how such identity is conceptualized via the metonymic profiling of specific properties.

4. Analysis

4.1. Quantitative analysis

The five most frequent collocates of “trans” in the RSUK corpus are “people” (with 125 instances), “woman” (with 39 instances), “child” (with 28 instances), “right” (with 22 instances), and “man” (with 19 instances). These five terms encompass both their singular and plural forms. As expected, all these terms were found at the right side of “trans,” which initially hints at the function of “trans” as a premodifier of all these nouns and appears to follow the most respectful use of trans as an adjective, instead of as a noun (Baker 2017, 220; Zottola 2021, 71). This does not necessarily mean that all the posts from the RSUK corpus respected and treated trans people with dignity, as will be seen in the qualitative analysis.

The concordance lines of these collocates were extracted and saved in an Excel file. To avoid repetition and noise, the concordance lines were examined and filtered. This step was necessary as sometimes tweets from the same thread featured independently, which led to the same thread being downloaded twice when extracting the surrounding co-text of the tweets. After erasing those which were repeated, the Excel file was left with a total sum of 145 concordance lines – 87 for “people,” 19 for “woman,” 17 for “child,” 11 for “right,” and 11 for “man.” Within those concordance lines, 50 potential metonymic uses were

identified. Out of all these possible metonymies, 45 aimed to characterize trans people. As illustrated in more specific terms in Table 1, fifteen metonymies were gathered in the concordance lines of "people," of which all were connected to trans people. Nine metonymies were found in the surroundings of the collocate "woman," of which six pointed at trans women, two at trans people in general terms, and one at trans men. Seven metonymies emerged in the concordance lines of "children," of which four referred to trans children, and three to Corei Hall, a trans teen who committed suicide in 2023 due to transphobic harassment (James 2023). There were six metonymies related to the collocate "right," all of which targeted trans people. Finally, in the proximity of "men" eight metonymies were retrieved, most of which (7) were linked to trans women, and only one instance was associated with trans men. These latter figures show a worrying, transphobic pattern in which trans women sometimes appear in textual contiguity with men, leading to hateful portrayals as the qualitative analysis develops.

Table 1 presents a classification of the types of metonymy which were found in the immediate co-text of the five most frequent collocates of "trans." The second column lists the formula of the metonymy – "X for Y" – using generic terms to describe both vehicle and target, as seen in "process for result" or "property for person." In the same column, an example of the said metonymy is also provided. Thus, in the first row, "trans-identifying" would be the process replacing the result – the culmination of the transition process. The third column indicates the target of the example from the second column. Returning to the example from the first row, "trans people" would be the target, who is inferred from the direct allusion to one step within transitioning – the identification of one's own gender. Lastly, the fourth column quantifies the number of times the "process for result" metonymy emerged in the proximity of the collocate "people."

collocate	metonymy vehicle (examples)	metonymy target	total sum
"people"	"trans-identifying people" (<i>process for result</i>)	trans people	15
"woman"	"this "transwoman"" (<i>property for person</i>)	trans women	6
	"no matter how they trans themselves" (<i>process for result</i>)	trans people	2
	"men" (<i>person for property</i>)	trans women	1
"children"	"a child that asked for help and you're going to end up sterilising them" (<i>process for result</i>)	trans children	4
	"a trans child dies by suicide" (<i>property for person</i>)	Corei Hall	3
"right"	"trans rights" (<i>property for person</i>), "the same group of 30 odd trans individuals" (<i>members for group</i>)	trans people	6
"men"	"trans identified men" (<i>process for result</i>)	trans women	7
	"a threat to no-one" (<i>action for actor</i>)	trans men	1

Table 1. Number of metonymies and their targets according to their collocate

Lastly, the metonymies were classified according to their vehicle and their target, which were assigned broad, general labels such as “actor” or “result,” following the model of Kövecses and Radden (1998, 53). As illustrated in Table 2, the most frequent metonymy was “property for person,” i.e., one aspect or trait of the person was highlighted and used to refer to the individual. The next most frequent metonymies were “person for property” and “process for result.” In “person for property” metonymies, the allusion to one

individual or subject activated a distinctive trait which was previously associated with them, thus facilitating referring to the said property without having to explicitly state it, a technique particularly useful when it came to topics that were considered taboo or sensitive. In “process for result” metonymies, specific processes (mostly related to gender transition) were broken down into their different steps, which the speaker mentioned instead of the resulting state. Rarer types of metonymies were “idea for entity,” “action for actor” and “group for members” metonymies, as well as “member for group” metonymies. “Group for members” and “members for group” metonymies were two sides of the same coin. The former used a general reference – the allusion to an entire community – to access information of members within that group, while the latter took specific individuals, often referred to by name and surname, as entrance points to the domain. “Idea for entity” metonymies limited trans people to the ontological realm of concepts that exist. Finally, “action for actor” metonymies were retrieved in nominals connected to actions which hinted at their perpetrators through possessive determiners – e.g., “their narcissistic sex abuse” with “their” going back to trans women in the same tweet (RSUK_008_S). Moreover, most of these nominalized actions belonged to the field of “crime, law and order” (Rayson 2008).

type of metonymy	collocate	instances	total sum
action for actor	"people"	1	3
	"man"	1	
	"woman"	1	
group for members	"people"	3	3
idea for entity	"people"	4	4
person for property	"people"	1	9
	"woman"	3	
	"children"	1	
	"man"	4	

process for result	"people"	2	9
	"woman"	2	
	"children"	3	
	"man"	2	
property for person	"people"	4	15
	"woman"	2	
	"children"	3	
	"man"	1	
	"right"	5	
member for group	"woman"	1	2
	"right"	1	

Table 2. Number of types of metonymies based on their vehicle and their target, according to their collocate

To sum up, the manual analysis of the concordance lines of the most frequent nominal collocations of “trans” facilitated spotting common metonymies (e.g., “property for person” or “process for result”), as well as less frequent metonymies (e.g., “action for actor”) in the characterization of trans people, trans women, and (to a lesser degree) trans men. The possible causes and implications of these metonymies will be developed in the next subsection.

4.2. Qualitative analysis

Due to space constraints, the qualitative analysis will follow the most frequent instances of metonymy: “property for person,” “person for property,” and “process for result”. As illustrated in Table 2, the type of metonymy which gathered more instances was “property for person.” Out of those sixteen cases, nine examples were found in contiguity with the collocates “people” or “right(s)” and, predictably, targeted trans people in general. Considering these X posts emerged in response to the statement of Sunak, it comes as no surprise that the five instances of “property for person” metonymy retrieved in proximity to “right(s)” were supportive of trans people. (1) encapsulates the most repeated clause (“trans rights

are human rights”) in which this metonymy occurred, highlighting one property or quality of trans people as subjects of the law – their rights – and resting on other ethical presumptions such as the inviolability and sanctity of human rights. This ethical aspect was also present in the semantic tagging, with terms such as “human rights” in (1) or “legally” labelled as part of the semantic field “government and public domain” in which one finds “politics” and “crime, law, and order” (Rayson 2008). At the same time, (1) also emphasizes the humanity of any trans person: Regardless of their gender identity, they are first and foremost human beings and as such deserve the same rights as anyone else. On the contrary, when the “property for person” metonymy appeared near the collocate “people,” trans people were sometimes reduced to their gender identity, as the term “trans” was used as a noun. While (2) could be interpreted as rejecting the words of Sunak, the position of the user behind (3) is not so clear, besides an overtly Islamophobic attitude.

- (1) Trans rights are human rights. That's non negotiable. (RSUK_012)
- (2) Trans, the new refugee hate train!! (RSUK_001_C)
- (3) British citizens don't commit acts of terrorism (usually) we don't bomb buildings and behead people and throw gays and trans off roof tops. The loonie left support all the things muslims won't tolerate. (RSUK_076)

Other “property for person” metonymies were linked to trans women and signalled the beginning of a transphobic trend, which later consolidated in another metonymy, “process for result.” Alongside this metonymy, the term “man” or “men” occurred in the co-textual vicinity of “trans women” revealing a hateful and violent pattern against trans women (Kennedy 2022, 95). An original post in defense of trans women, whose presence in women’s spaces is often questioned (Pearce et al. 2020, 680) – “raise your hand if @RishiSunak (a cis man) makes you feel more unsafe than a trans woman ever has 🏳️♀️” — was met with the answer displayed in (4). “A man in a dress” highlights two properties of trans women: first, the gender they were assigned at birth (“man”), which at the same time hints at their hypothetical genitalia (a significant concern in TERF discourse, which Henderson (2022, 216) gathers within the

category of “transphobic talk”) (Armitage 2020, 16; Pearce et al. 2020, 679); and second, their clothing.

- (4) A man in a dress is a man in a dress. If you feel threatened by men (which would be fair enough) you should also feel threatened by men disguised as women. (RSUK_009_C)

With nine instances each, the next two most frequent types of metonymies were “process for result,” and “person for property.” Most examples of “process for result” metonymies focused on the transition process, which they undid by foregrounding the earliest point of the process, before the person starts to live as the gender they identify with. A part of the process – often related to the mental operation of identification, hence the premodifying construction “trans identifying (or identified)” preceding a noun – replaced the goal and result of the process – the recognition and acceptance of the gender the person currently is. Thus, these metonymies often misgendered trans women, who again rose as the target of these transphobic attacks, and misrepresented the reality behind gender transitioning.

- (5) How many examples of trans identifying males threatening women (for daring to think that sex-based legal rights matter) do you need [...]? (RSUK_009_C)

Unlike what (5) seems to be suggesting, a person may identify as a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth, and, therefore, they will be trans, non-binary, or the label that best suits their situation, not the other way round (National Center for Transgender Equality n.d.). Consequently, considering that transitioning is a unique process that varies from individual to individual (Pearce et al. 2020, 687), alluding to the gender assigned at birth to refer to the person (as (5) does with “males”) shows an unwillingness to treat other people as they are. As indicated by the code “_C,” (5) is another response to the previously described post (RSUK_009). The relentless demonization of trans women who are usually referred to as “men” or “males” – two other social actors who, according to these posts, are inherently violent or dangerous (hence the use of processes such as “threatening”) to cis women – and the omission or avoidance of trans men and other collectives

again echo the biological, deterministic pillars of TERF ideology (Pearce et al. 2020, 689; Armitage 2020, 14; Kennedy 2022, 89).

"Person for property" metonymies also presented pervasive transphobia, despite a few posts in favor of the trans community. Most posts talking about "trans people" or "trans women" hid at their core the debate around the "classification" of the gender identity of trans people, i.e., whether, for instance, trans women and cis women belong to the same gender category – women. On this topic Armitage (2020, 16) provides an overview of its origins and its consequences in the British public context. Thus, when some X users typed the phrase "trans women" they activated an arrange of traits transphobia stereotypically assigns to trans women – i.e., their supposedly aggressive nature and their allegedly physical superiority, reinforced through its surrounding co-text. As an example of this characterization, (6) explicitly points to the gender assigned at birth of the hypothetical trans woman, working as a nurse or doctor, and links it with specific anatomical features (as present in "male"). Again, the allusion to "man" hints at the possibility that, despite using the term "transwomen," the speaker is talking about something else, about a specific aspect of trans women – their sex assigned at birth. Nevertheless, there was one instance (7) in which a "person for property" metonymy served to uplift trans women. However, in (7), "woman" does not refer to the property of sex assigned at birth, but to gender, thus making trans women and cis women equal.

- (6) The right to privacy – aka no one can ask whether a trans identifying man is male. If I require same sex hospital care I am not allowed to ask a transwoman nurse or doctor (aka a man). (RSUK_103_C)
- (7) Trans women are women (RSUK_117)

Lastly, in (8), the biological concerns present in most transphobic posts and exemplified in (6) are cemented in the use of the noun "transwoman" (or its plural form, "transwomen"), which is occasionally inserted between quotation marks. The employment of quotation marks signals the concept (i.e., the notion) rather than the entity from reality to which it refers and seems to question its very existence, which pushes trans women to the theoretical realm of ideas. Fragment (8) is answering to the post RSUK_008: "Members

of Parliament are more likely to be accused of sexual harassment than trans women. Yet Rishi Sunak singles out one of the most vulnerable groups in our society [...],” and joins the adjective “trans” and the noun “woman” to form a new compound. As already explained, the nominalization of “trans” triggers the dehumanization and essentialization of the subject it refers to since it reduces them to a single trait (Baker 2017, 220) through a “property for person” metonymy. Hence, (8) does not only dismiss the existence of trans women but also curtails their reality to the fact that they are trans in a similar fashion as (2) and (3). Furthermore, once again, the vehicle “trans women” in this example transphobically activates the male sex and all the purportedly “masculine” features that have already been enumerated, as well as their assumed genitalia, for it is in proximity to terms such as “sexual harassment.”

- (8) The sex of those almost always accused of sexual harassment?
Male. In both cases. MPs and “transwomen”. (RSUK_008_C)

In brief, the metonymies gathered from the most common collocates of the term “trans” in the corpus RSUK showcase an array of reactions, whose nature seems to be linked to the type of metonymy next to which they feature. Several posts supporting the trans community or raging against the statement of Sunak contain the “property for person” metonymy, while those posts attacking and criticizing (mostly) trans women turn to the “process for result” or “person for property” metonymies.

5. Conclusions

The manual, qualitative analysis of the five most frequent collocates of the term “trans” and their concordance lines from the corpus *RSUK*, a compilation of over seven hundred X posts related to the speech offered by Sunak on October 4th, 2023, uncovers several metonymic patterns which have also helped to answer the research questions.

As for the first research question on the types of metonymies used in the characterization of trans people, seven categories

emerge: "property for person", "process for result", "person for property", "action for actor", "member for group", "idea for entity", and "group for member." The target of most of these metonymies were trans people, in general terms, or trans women. On the second research question about the stereotypes and preconceived ideas underlying these metonymies, those metonymies focusing on physical aspects of (mainly) trans women, such as "property for person" or "person for property", only humiliated and attacked the target of the metonymy, tying their existence to their genitalia or to the gender they were assigned at birth. Likewise, many "process for result" metonymies aimed at reverting the transition steps and pushing the target back to the initial stage before they came out. Finally, answering the third question on the position of these users in relation to LGBTQ+ rights, most users supporting the trans community often turned to the "property for person" (to defend their rights as human beings) and, very rarely, "person for property" (to support their place in society as their gender identity) metonymies. The other metonymies, with some exceptions, were irregularly scattered across the previously described transphobic posts.

These results are not a general analysis of transphobia on X; they are framed within a case study, based on a relatively small yet sufficient corpus. In this case, the amount of collected data is deemed sufficient as it granted access to a variety of examples of the phenomenon under study: metonymy. Nevertheless, in the future, a bigger data sample would certainly help to uncover more metonymic patterns in the discussion of trans people. This constitutes one of the weaknesses of this paper, as it does not guarantee the recollection of every single nuance of the online conversation triggered by Sunak's statement. Moreover, the exact mechanisms underlying X's top posts section remain largely unknown. However, it has allowed for a thorough examination of the most common metonymic mechanisms of the two perspectives within the conflict, showing that sometimes even well-intentioned X users may hold some unintentional transphobic bias. Of course, albeit harmful, this characterization does not come close to the hatred and the violence present in other "person for property" metonymies and all "process for results" metonymies, in which trans people suffer the essentialization of their gender identity, and

the intrusive inspection of their bodies from transphobic users. It would certainly be enlightening for future works to study the metonymic characterization of other groups outside cishnormativity and to dive into other social media sites, as well as other forms of content (i.e., image or video).

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