

A sociolinguistic study of taboo expressions in Spanish from Spain: usage and attitudes

Un estudio sociolingüístico de las expresiones tabú en español de España: uso y actitudes

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Abstract: *The present study investigates the sociolinguistic variation of genitalia-related taboo expressions across gender, age and level of education with the purpose of unveiling how these variables affect the use of and attitudes towards said expressions. To tackle this issue, a questionnaire examining the usage, frequency of use and attitudes towards a selection of genitalia-related taboo expressions was distributed in a sample of 227 participants. Findings reveal that men, people aged 18-30 and people who have completed Bachillerato used more taboo expressions more frequently. Additionally, the results show that it is the same groups that feel the most comfortable using taboo expressions. However, the groups that displayed negative attitudes were women, participants between 18-30 and people who have completed Bachillerato, BA and MA. This paper builds upon previous research on the field of sociolinguistic variation of taboo language.*

Keywords: taboo expressions; sociolinguistic variation; linguistic attitudes

Resumen: *El presente estudio investiga la variación sociolingüística de expresiones tabú relacionadas con los genitales en función del género, edad y nivel de educación, con el objetivo de desvelar cómo estas variables influyen en el uso y las actitudes hacia dichas expresiones. Para ello, una encuesta fue distribuida (N=227) a fin de examinar la frecuencia, el uso y las actitudes hacia una selección de expresiones tabú. Los resultados revelan que los hombres, el grupo de 18-30 años y las personas que han completado Bachillerato usan más expresiones tabú y con mayor frecuencia, asimismo se sienten más cómodos usándolas. Sin embargo, los grupos que mostraron una actitud negativa son las mujeres, participantes entre 18-30 años y personas que han completado Bachillerato, Grado y Máster. Este artículo, por tanto, concluye que el género, la edad y el nivel de educación son factores que influyen la variación sociolingüística de las expresiones tabú.*

Palabras clave: expresiones tabú; variación sociolingüística; actitudes lingüísticas

1. Introduction

Taboo expressions make part of everyone's everyday language in a colloquial register despite their indiscrete nature. Most of the time, taboo expressions have to do with sex, genitalia or eschatological phenomena, which are socially perceived as belonging to the private or intimate sphere of life. Given the heterogeneity of our society, the use and the purpose of these expressions vary considerably and so do the social attitudes towards them. Therefore, taboo expressions are found to be an interesting subject for the study of sociolinguistic variation in different languages.

In this respect, and focusing on the Spanish language, several experimental studies have examined the variation of sex-related and genitalia-related terms (López Morales, 2005; Calvo Shadid, 2008; Martínez Valdueza, 1995) while corpus-based studies have adopted a more holistic approach (Cestero Mancera, 2018; Jiménez Morales, 2016). Along these lines, this study intends to contribute to the literature by taking a sociolinguistic experimental approach to the analysis of sex-related taboo language by focusing on fixed expressions rather than isolated words in the Spanish context.

The purpose of the study is, then, to analyse the use and the attitudes towards a series of selected taboo expressions (dependent variables) across the independent variables of age, gender, and level of education. In order to guide the investigation, the following research questions were formulated:

1. In what ways do age, gender and level of education affect the use of taboo expressions in Spanish? How does the frequency of use vary?
2. What are the attitudes towards taboo expressions across age, gender and level of education? How are usage and attitudes correlated?

To answer these research questions, the data gathered from a questionnaire assessing the use and attitudes regarding taboo expressions (see Section 3) will be analysed. The analysis intends to verify the following hypotheses: Given the behavioral differences across genders, age groups, and educational levels, it is expected that these parameters will have an effect on the extent to which people use taboo expressions, as well as on the attitudes towards them. The expected implications are the following:

1. Male participants use taboo expressions to a larger extent and have a more positive attitude than female participants.
2. Younger participants (18-30) use taboo expressions to a larger extent and have a more positive attitude than older participants.
3. Participants with a lower level of education (ESO/EGB and Grado or Licenciatura) use taboo expressions to a larger extent and have more positive attitudes than participants with a higher level of education.

The structure of the paper will continue as follows: first, in the theoretical background, we will go through previous studies on taboo language and its sociolinguistic variation. Second, in the methodology section, the questionnaire and the methodological approach will be addressed. Next, the results will be presented and explored. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn and some limitations and guidelines for future research will be discussed.

2. Theoretical background: taboo language, attitudes and variation

The study of linguistic variation has been extensive and thorough in the field of linguistics (see Coates, 2013; Eckert, 1988; Labov, 1963). Similarly, a large body of studies from subdisciplines like sociolinguistics, identity studies and intercultural studies have profusely investigated (linguistic) attitudes, which emerge in a social context that influences the individual psyche (see Baker, 1992; Cargile & Giles, 1997).

In order to carry out an attitudinal analysis, we find the need to define the concept in advance. According to Oppenheim (1982), attitudes are “an inner component of mental life which expresses itself [...] through [...] stereotypes, beliefs, verbal statements or reactions” (p. 39). Thus, McKenzie (2010) notes that attitudes are underlying “hypothetical constructs” that need to be inferred and that involve an affective component, two qualities which detach this term from that of opinion (pp. 19-20). Garret, Coupland and Williams (2003), argue that attitudes consist of three components: the cognitive, the affective and the behavioral. Attitudes are cognitive since they encompass beliefs about the world, they are affective for they contain feelings about an attitude object, and they are behavioral in that they influence our way of acting (p. 3). This threefold structure of attitudes is by no means nonconcurrent, for each component intersects one another.

Although several studies have provided thoughtful insights into the study of language attitudes towards linguistic diversity (cf. McKenzie, 2015; Todd and Pojanapunya, 2009), they have not addressed speakers' attitudes towards expressions loaded with taboo connotations. For this reason, this study will attempt to overcome this lacuna by examining Spanish native speakers' attitudes towards genitalia-related taboo expressions.

Taboo words and expressions are present in every language as part of colloquial speech. They usually function as intensifiers or to express intense emotions. The adjective “taboo” is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “banned on grounds of morality or taste”. Due to these characteristics, the sociolinguistic variation of these items is of special interest. For example, Hashamdar and Rafi (2018) study the use of taboo words in relation to the variables of gender and educational level. They conclude that, in an angry mood, male characters, regardless of their social identity, use taboo words much more frequently than female characters. Moreover, their results show that participants without a university degree in that situation use taboo words to a

larger extent than those with a university degree. These are some of the variables that will be taken into consideration for the present research.

The interest of the present study is limited to taboo expressions that contain sex-related words, specifically signaling genitalia. In this regard, Pizarro (2013) argues for the interest of linguistic research upon the phenomenon of tabooization of sexually-related topics. Moreover, she suggests that, due to this tabooization, there is a problem regarding the gathering of data for linguistic studies (2013, p 109). This problem lies in the fact that naturally occurring oral data that contains sex-related taboo expressions is difficult to collect. Possible solutions to the problem are gathering the data from internet interactions, or using questionnaires to elicit the use of the taboo expression researched upon. Due to the nature of the present paper, this last option was selected and a questionnaire was distributed as will be explained in section 3.

In regard to the selection of expressions for this study, we based it on two main factors: previous studies and current use. As mentioned in the introduction, studies such as the ones carried out by López Morales (2005), Calvo Shadid (2008), and Martínez Valdueza (1995) focus on sex-related terms. Some of these words are applicable in our study since they give way to derived expressions currently used in the Spanish context: *cojones* (López Morales, 2005), *polla* (Martínez Valdueza, 1995), and *huevos* (Calvo Shadid, 2008). However, these studies did not include the word *coñazo*, which use has been increasing over the past years. Moreover, Aquilar and Gavilanes (2018) provide a glossary of Madrid's juvenile slang or argot, which was consulted for the selection of items. They include, for instance, the expressions *ser algo la polla* or *coñazo* as a synonym for *ser un rollo* meaning that something is boring. As a result of these findings and in combination with existing knowledge on sex-related taboo expressions currently used in Spain, the following expressions constitute the list of selected items for the analysis: (1) *Es la polla* (to be awesome), (2) *Está cojonudo* (to be awesome), (3) *Tener los cojones cuadrados* (got a nerve, to be shameless), (4) *Tener un par de huevos* (to be brave), (5) *Tiene huevos la cosa* (something outrageous), (6) *Manda huevos* (something outrageous), (7) *Tocar los huevos* (to be annoying), (8) *Es un coñazo* (to be boring), and (9) *Dar el coñazo* (to be annoying). Expressions 1 to 7 refer to male genitalia, while expressions 8 and 9 refer to female genitalia. The formulation of the lexical units under analysis was decided on the grounds of their general use regarding tense and conjugation. Hence, expressions 3, 4, 7, and 9 are formulated in the infinitive as they contain transitive verbs that require a subject, who is designated by the speaker. In contrast, expressions like 1, 2, and 8 are evaluative predicates that always take the same form, as they attribute certain characteristics to the subject. Finally, expressions 5 and 6 are fixed expressions that are never changed in tense, person or mood in natural language use.

3. Methodology

The present experimental investigation employed a quantitative approach, which served to analyse and describe the use of and attitudes towards taboo expressions across gender, age and level of education and the exploration of a correlation between both.

The data collection was carried out through a questionnaire which was distributed among a stratified sample of participants taking into account the three variables of gender, age, and level of education. All the participants were Spanish, being nationality a controlled variable. The questionnaire was anonymous and remained open for fourteen days, from the 8th to the 22nd of January 2021. At the end of the two weeks, the questionnaire was answered by a total of 230 respondents, from which 3 responses were discarded due to incongruencies. The final number of participants under study is 227 (N=227), distributed as follows: Gender: 80 (M) and 147 (W); age: 125 (18-30), 58 (31-50), and 44 (51-70); level of education: 16 (ESO), 80 (Bach), 85 (BA), 42 (MA), and 4 (PhD). The questionnaire was created with Google Forms and distributed by sharing a link through the social network WhatsApp. It was piloted before its distribution in order to ensure that there were no major problems in understanding the questions and that the data were distributed normally.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section served to collect personal data from the participants. The second section aimed to observe the use of taboo expressions by the participants. In this section, there were nine given colloquial contexts that could elicit the use of one of the expressions under study; participants were asked to choose between various options containing the selected taboo expression along with lighter equivalent expressions (e.g. “manda narices” as an alternative for “manda huevos”). The third section had the purpose of measuring the frequency of use of the selected items. Thus, participants were directly asked what their frequency of use of each of the selected items was through a Likert scale where 1 corresponded to never, 2 to sometimes, 3 to frequently and 4 to very frequently. Lastly, the objective of the fourth section was to evaluate the attitudes that participants displayed towards the use of the expressions. This was again done by means of a Likert scale in which participants totally disagreed (1), disagreed (2), agreed (3) or completely agreed (4) with different statements such as “I find myself comfortable when using the expression [es la polla]” or “I consider the expressions [es un coñazo] and [dar el coñazo] to be sexist”. As a final note, participants agreed to the use of the data provided in order to develop the present study. The questionnaire was designed following this structure to avoid a priming effect and the social desirability effect since it was not until the third section that respondents were able to guess the real object of the study, namely, the selected taboo expressions.

Regarding the methodological approach, the data were classified in an Excel sheet in order to observe their distribution along the independent

variables. As a second step, the percentages of each expression according to each sub-category were obtained, thus illustrating the use of the selected taboo expressions and their frequency of use. To test the reliability of the results, chi-square tests were used. Moreover, the attitudes towards the selected expressions were examined and differences were established between expressions referring to male genitalia and female genitalia.

4. Results

This section aims to present the findings obtained from the analysis. For a better understanding of the data, the results will be separated following the order of the research questions: usage, frequency of use, and attitudes.

4.1. Usage

Figures 1, 2, and 3 present the use of the expressions across the variables of gender, age, and level of education respectively. Chi-square tests were performed concluding that these differences are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.00001$, $p = 0.00004$, and $p = 0.00001$).

Regarding the results presented in Figure 1, men seem to have a higher tendency to use the selected expressions than women, as argued by Cestero Mancera (2018) and Hashamdar and Rafi (2018). However, we find some exceptions in the cases of “tener un par de huevos” and “tener los cojones cuadrados”. These two expressions are structurally similar but have different meanings, while the first one is used to express someone’s bravery, the second one is used to refer to someone that is shameless. Moreover, these two expressions are the ones that show lower usage in comparison to the rest. In contrast, the expression “manda huevos” (which meaning is similar to “tener los cojones cuadrados”) is the one that shows a higher percentage of usage and a lower difference between genders. Lastly, the expression which presents the highest difference between men’s and women’s usage is “está cojonudo”, which is used to appraise something.

	Expressions	Men	Women
1	Es la polla.	17.50%	6.80%
2	Está cojonudo.	37.50%	8.84%
3	Tener un par de huevos.	7.50%	8.84%
4	Es un coñazo.	61.25%	52.38%
5	Manda huevos.	41.25%	38.78%
6	Dar el coñazo.	46.25%	25.17%
7	Tener los cojones cuadrados.	11.25%	15.65%
8	Tocar los huevos.	48.75%	13.61%
9	Tener huevos la cosa.	48.75%	28.57%

Fig. 1: Use of the expressions across the gender variable.

The influence of the age of the participants on the use of sex-related taboo expressions is illustrated in Figure 2. As can be observed, the tendency of the majority of expressions is gradual from the younger group, with a higher tendency to use them, to the older group, who generally use the expressions to a lesser extent. These results generally align with previous research (see Cestero Mancera, 2018). Nevertheless, there are some cases in which this tendency changes or is even reversed (in bold). As aforementioned in relation to the variable of gender, the expressions “tener un par de huevos” and “tener los cojones cuadrados” appear to have a higher tendency of use in the 51-70 age group than in the two others. Moreover, in the case of “dar el coñazo” which is used to refer to someone who is being annoying, the results show a balanced use between the age groups of 18-30 and 51-70 (39.20% and 40.91% respectively), opposite to the 12.07% of use from the 31-50 age group.

	Expressions	18-30	31-50	51-70
1	Es la polla.	15.20%	6.90%	2.27%
2	Está cojonudo.	20.00%	20.69%	13.64%
3	Tener un par de huevos.	4.00%	8.62%	20.45%
4	Es un coñazo.	63.20%	50.00%	40.91%
5	Manda huevos.	46.40%	32.76%	29.55%
6	Dar el coñazo.	39.20%	12.07%	40.91%
7	Tener los cojones cuadrados.	12.00%	15.52%	18.18%
8	Tocar los huevos.	36.00%	15.52%	11.36%
9	Tiene huevos la cosa.	36.80%	41.38%	25.00%

Fig. 2: Use of the expressions across the age variable.

Addressing the differences in use across the variable of level of education, Figure 3 illustrates that respondents who have completed secondary education (ESO) and pre-university studies (Bachillerato) have a higher tendency to use of sex-related expressions than those who have completed a BA, MA, or PhD, who gradually show lower usage. These results are similar to the ones shared by Cestero Mancera (2018) but contradict those from Jiménez Morales (2016) in her study based in Granada.

	Expressions	ESO	Bach	BA	MA	PhD
1	Es la polla.	18.75%	7.50%	15.29%	4.76%	0.00%
2	Está cojonudo.	0.00%	27.50%	11.76%	26.19%	0.00%
3	Tener un par de huevos.	18.75%	10.00%	8.24%	2.38%	0.00%
4	Es un coñazo.	37.50%	65.00%	57.65%	42.86%	25.00%
5	Manda huevos.	50.00%	41.25%	38.82%	35.71%	25.00%
6	Dar el coñazo.	25.00%	43.75%	27.06%	26.19%	25.00%
7	Tener los cojones cuadrados.	31.25%	15.00%	14.12%	7.14%	0.00%
8	Tocar los huevos.	25.00%	37.50%	24.71%	9.52%	0.00%
9	Tiene huevos la cosa.	31.25%	50.00%	23.53%	38.10%	0.00%

Fig. 3: Use of the expressions across the level of education variable.

As presented in Figure 3 in bold, on the one hand, the ESO and Bachillerato groups show the highest values of usage. A noticeable difference can be observed regarding the expressions “es un coñazo” and “dar el coñazo” which are more used in the Bachillerato group. On the other hand, among the BA and MA groups, in most of the expressions, the usage appears to be higher in the BA. However, in the cases of “está cojonudo” and “tiene huevos la cosa” the MA group shows more usage than the BA group. As for the PhD group, the results show little or low usage of all the expressions in comparison to the other levels of education.

In order to contrast the use of the expression across the three groups, Figure 4 was created. This figure illustrates the percentages of usage of the variables in combination (gender > age > level of education).

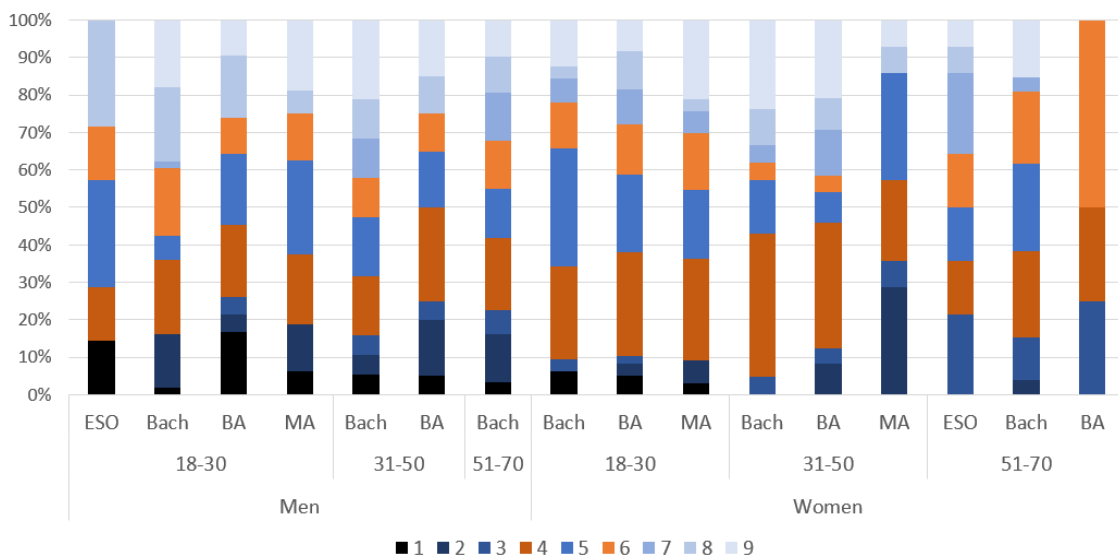


Fig. 4: Usage of the expressions combining the three variables.

The results which appear to be more surprising in relation to what has been previously discussed are related to younger and older men as well as older women. First, in the age range of 51-70, women showed a higher tendency in the use of all expressions except for “es la polla” (1) and “está cojonudo” (2). Second, women in the age range of 51-70 show again a higher tendency of use than women 18-50, specifically taking into account the ESO and Bachillerato levels of education. The greatest difference can be observed upon the expressions “tener un par de huevos” (3), “tener los cojones cuadrados” (7), and “dar el coñazo” (6). However, the general differences previously settled are still present, the groups composed of men, 18-30, and Bachillerato respondents are the ones who have a higher tendency towards the usage of taboo expressions containing sex-related words in the Spanish context.

Moreover, looking at the general data it can be observed that the three expressions which are used to a higher extent are “es un coñazo” (4), “manda huevos” (5), and “dar el coñazo” (6). The groups that show higher usage of

these expressions are men 18-30 with a Bachillerato and MA level of education, and women 18-30 with a BA and 31-50 with a Bachillerato level of education. Therefore, it could be argued that expressions involving female genitalia are more popular in general, and specifically among these groups, than the expressions involving male genitalia.

The phenomena described in this section partially verify the hypotheses settled, but will be further analysed taking into account their frequency of use of the expressions and the attitudes towards them across the variables.

4.2. Frequency of use

This subsection presents, on the one hand, the differences in the frequency of use of taboo expressions across the independent variables and, on the other hand, the differences between the expressions that make reference to male and female genitalia.

Figure 5 illustrates the frequency of use of the taboo expressions across gender, age and level of education. These differences were proved to be statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ after having performed two chi-square tests and one Fisher Exact test ($p = 0.0001$; $p = 0.00001$; $p = 0.00001$).

	High frequency <-----> Low frequency			
Men	17.08%	28.19%	29.58%	25.00%
Women	11.94%	23.73%	32.50%	31.75%
18-30	17.96%	26.22%	26.58%	29.24%
31-50	10.34%	27.39%	35.82%	26.25%
51-70	6.31%	19.95%	39.65%	33.84%
ESO	15.28%	19.44%	42.36%	22.92%
Bach	16.25%	29.31%	32.08%	22.22%
BA	12.68%	24.58%	29.80%	32.81%
MA	11.90%	23.81%	29.89%	34.39%
PhD	0.00%	0.00%	27.78%	72.22%

Fig. 5: Frequency of the expressions across the independent variables.

As can be seen in Figure 5, regarding gender, men tend to use the selected taboo expressions more frequently than women, with 17.08% of men participants reporting high frequency versus 11.94% of women. Despite this difference, it is noteworthy that the expression that is most frequently used by the two genders is “es un coñazo”, which seems to be a pervasive expression in both groups’ colloquial language. On the contrary, it is interesting to note that the opposite of the previous expression, “es la polla”, was more frequently used by men (50% reporting using it very frequently or quite frequently) than by women, of whom only 21.09% reported using it (highly) frequently. This suggests that the expression “es un coñazo” is more common in the speech of both men and women, with a great number of men using it frequently. In

contrast, women do not seem to feel so inclined to use “es la polla”. Possible reasons accounting for this pattern will be elucidated in the attitudes section.

Concerning age, we may observe that the age group that uses the selected taboo expressions most frequently is that of 18-30. Conversely, the participants from 51 to 70 are the ones that use them the least frequently, with 33.84% reporting that they never use them and 39.65% using them sometimes. These percentages account for more than half of the total responses. The middle group, 31-50, falls in between the other two categories, using taboo expressions with higher frequency than the participants of 51-70 but lower than the ones of 18-30. These results, similar to the ones shared by Cestero Mancera (2018), point to a decreasing pattern of use from the younger to the older generations.

Lastly, in terms of level of education, the participants that reported using taboo expressions with higher frequency were those having completed Bachillerato. Of all responses, 16.25% of the Bachillerato group responses stated that they use the selected taboo expressions very frequently and 29.31% quite frequently. Despite the reverse pattern between the participants having completed the ESO and Bachillerato, from BA studies onwards, the frequency of use decreases to the point that 72.22% of the PhD respondents reported never using the selected taboo expressions. Besides, of all groups, the expression that is most frequently used is “es un coñazo”, followed by “dar el coñazo”, both expressions having to do with female genitalia.

Additionally, we will explore the frequency of use of the taboo expressions differentiating between those containing female genitalia from those containing male genitalia. As Figure 6 illustrates, expressions containing female genitalia are used more frequently on a general basis. Regarding gender, men use the two types of taboo expressions more frequently and both men and women use the expressions containing female genitalia more frequently than those containing male genitalia. This is especially so for women, whose frequency of use of male-genitalia-related expressions is very low. As was aforementioned, the most frequently used expression containing female genitalia was “es un coñazo”, but the most frequently used expression of male genitalia is “tocar los huevos” in both male and female responses.

	Men	Women	18-30	31-50	51-70	ESO	Bach	BA	MA	PhD
Expressions containing male genitalia										
Frequently	12.14%	7.97%	12.23%	7.39%	4.22%	15.18%	11.07%	9.41%	5.10%	0.00%
-----	26.96%	19.24%	24.11%	21.43%	16.56%	14.29%	27.32%	19.83%	21.09%	0.00%
Not frequently	32.32%	35.08%	29.26%	39.66%	40.58%	47.32%	35.71%	31.60%	32.65%	17.86%
-----	28.39%	37.61%	34.40%	31.28%	38.31%	23.21%	25.71%	38.99%	41.16%	82.14%
Expressions containing female genitalia										
Frequently	34.38%	25.85%	38.00%	20.69%	13.64%	15.63%	34.38%	24.12%	35.71%	0.00%
-----	32.50%	39.46%	33.60%	48.28%	31.82%	37.50%	36.25%	41.18%	33.33%	0.00%
Not frequently	20.00%	23.47%	17.20%	22.41%	36.36%	25.00%	19.38%	23.53%	20.24%	62.50%
-----	13.13%	11.22%	11.20%	8.62%	18.18%	21.88%	10.00%	11.18%	10.71%	37.50%

Fig. 6: Frequencies of use discerning between taboo expressions containing male and female genitalia.

Moreover, the results of the age groups confirm previous patterns as well as the results from studies (see Cestero Mancera, 2018): 18-30 respondents are the ones that use taboo expressions most frequently, especially female-genitalia related. On the opposite side, the participants ranging from 51 to 70 are the ones that use taboo expressions the least, especially those containing male genitalia – 38.31% never use them and 40.58% use them with low frequency. Furthermore, it should be noted that the most frequently used female-genitalia-related expression across the three age groups is “es un coñazo”. On the other hand, the male-genitalia-related expression that was found to be more frequently used among the 18-30 and 31-50 participants is “tocar los huevos”, whereas the most frequently used among the 51-70 participants is “tiene huevos la cosa”, which has a softer tint.

As for the variable of education level, the results show that the participants that completed the ESO level reported using these taboo expressions with moderate frequency and, in general, the participants having completed Bachillerato are the ones that most frequently use genitalia-related taboo expressions, either frequently or very frequently. Conversely, it is interesting to notice the difference in the use of expressions containing female genitalia versus male genitalia in the PhD group. When it comes to the expressions containing male genitalia, 82.14% of the participants reported never using them. However, this rate lowers to 37.50% when it comes to the expressions containing female genitalia. Thus, although the participants of this group do not seem to use either type of expression frequently, the female-genitalia-related ones are used with lower frequency in most cases as opposed to male genitalia ones. These findings contribute to the verification of the first, second and third hypotheses.

4.3. Attitudes

In this subsection, the results regarding participants’ attitudes towards the selected expressions are discussed. The results are presented in tables

corresponding to answers of the Likert scales across the variables, separating the attitudes towards expressions containing male and female genitalia. Chi-square tests were performed concluding that these differences are statistically significant at $p. < 0.05$ ($p. = 0.00054$), $p. = 0.00001$, and $p. = 0.00001$).

	Very comfortable <-----> Not comfortable			
Men	27.64%	35.97%	18.33%	18.06%
Women	13.00%	28.80%	28.57%	29.63%
18-30	22.67%	31.11%	22.22%	24.00%
31-50	14.56%	36.02%	23.18%	26.25%
51-70	10.10%	25.76%	35.10%	29.04%
ESO	25.00%	27.08%	32.64%	15.28%
Bach	22.78%	35.42%	25.28%	16.53%
BA	16.34%	31.63%	23.53%	28.50%
MA	12.17%	27.51%	24.07%	36.24%
PhD	0.00%	0.00%	27.78%	72.22%

Fig. 7: Comfortability concerning the expressions across the variables.

In the first place, Figure 7 presents the general attitudes regarding the comfortability of the participants when using the selected expressions. Looking at the gender variable, as expected, men tend to feel more comfortable than women when formulating the expressions. As for the variable of age, the difference seems to be gradual, a larger percentage of the participants 18-30 feel very comfortable when using the expressions, closely followed by participants 31-50. The largest difference lies between these two groups and the 51-70 group, who tend to feel rather uncomfortable. Furthermore, the result of the level of education variable suggests that the group with a higher level of comfortability is the Bachillerato group, followed by the ESO group and the BA and MA groups. A significant difference is encountered when it comes to the PhD group, who do not feel comfortable at all, and 72.22% express high discomfort.

Additionally, in order to discuss the previous results thoroughly, Figure 8 presents the findings of the comfortability scales differentiating between the expressions containing male genitalia and those containing female genitalia.

	Men	Women	18-30	31-50	51-70	ESO	Bach	BA	MA	PhD
Expressions containing male genitalia										
Comfortable	27.86%	9.43%	21.26%	9.85%	8.77%	23.21%	22.50%	13.45%	7.14%	0.00%
-----	33.57%	27.60%	29.83%	34.48%	23.05%	25.89%	32.32%	30.59%	27.21%	0.00%
Not comfortable	19.29%	29.93%	22.97%	26.11%	35.39%	32.14%	27.14%	24.87%	25.17%	21.43%
-----	19.29%	33.04%	25.94%	29.56%	32.79%	18.75%	18.04%	31.09%	40.48%	78.57%
Expressions containing female genitalia										
Comfortable	26.88%	25.51%	27.60%	31.03%	14.77%	31.25%	23.75%	26.47%	29.76%	0.00%
-----	44.38%	32.99%	35.60%	41.38%	35.23%	31.25%	46.25%	35.29%	28.57%	0.00%
Not comfortable	15.00%	23.81%	19.60%	12.93%	34.09%	34.38%	18.75%	18.82%	20.24%	50.00%
-----	13.75%	17.69%	17.20%	14.66%	15.91%	3.13%	11.25%	19.41%	21.43%	50.00%

Fig. 8: Comfortability differentiating between male and female genitalia-related expressions.

As can be observed, some noticeable differences are found between the two types of expressions. While the numbers analysed in Figure 8 remain similar in expressions containing male genitalia, the results from the level of comfortability when uttering expressions containing female genitalia change drastically. In the case of gender and age, the percentages show a similar proportion of all the participants from each variable, being all of them comfortable when using the expressions “es un coñazo” or “dar el coñazo” and less so with “es la polla”. This explains the aforementioned pattern of frequency regarding the differences between “es la polla” and “es un coñazo”. Inside these variables, the groups that show a higher comfortability are male participants and 31-50 participants. Regarding level of education, the differences between male and female genitalia expressions are not that remarkable except for the case of the MA group. Inside this group, 7.14% of participants express comfortability and 40.48% high discomfort when using male genitalia expressions, in contrast to the 29.76% who express comfortability when using expressions containing female genitalia, and 21.45% expressing discomfort. The differences observed suggest that there is a significant difference between the attitudes towards the expression containing male and female genitalia.

In the second place, concerning attitudinal behaviours and perceptions across the variables, the participants were asked whether they considered the expressions sexist or disrespectful. The results are presented in Figure 9.

	Negative <-----> Positive			
Men	26.25%	15.00%	26.56%	32.19%
Women	40.99%	25.85%	18.71%	14.46%
18-30	39.80%	19.60%	23.00%	17.60%
31-50	32.33%	25.43%	18.10%	24.14%
51-70	28.98%	24.43%	21.59%	25.00%
ESO	34.38%	17.19%	27.81%	20.63%
Bach	34.38%	17.19%	27.81%	20.63%
BA	38.82%	23.53%	17.94%	19.71%
MA	41.07%	28.57%	13.10%	17.26%
PhD	50.00%	31.25%	12.50%	6.25%

Fig. 9: Attitudes towards the expressions across the variables.

The results illustrated in Figure 9 present a remarkable difference in the variable of gender; women tend to have a negative attitude towards the expressions while men have a positive one, not considering the expressions sexist or disrespectful. Moreover, opposite to the results discussed in the usage and frequency sections, the younger group has a more negative attitude towards the use of the expressions than the middle and the older groups. This suggests that, even if the tendency and frequency of use are higher in the 18-30 group, they realize the negative perspectives of these expressions considering them more sexist or disrespectful than the other groups. Lastly, the variable of level of education presents attitudinal results in accordance with the usage of the expressions.

5. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to shed light on the sociolinguistic variation of genitalia-related taboo expressions across the variables of gender, age and level of education due to the social differences that exist between the members of these groups. The purpose of the study was to examine the use and the attitudes towards a series of selected taboo expressions across the independent variables. As presented in the introduction, the first research question aimed at examining the usage and frequency of use of the expressions across the variables. The second focused on the attitudes of the different groups regarding the genitalia-related expressions. To answer these questions, a questionnaire was created and distributed through a stratified sample of participants.

Regarding the first research question, quantitative results show that, aligning with previous studies (Cestero Mancera, 2018; Hashamdar and Rafi, 2018), men, people between 18-30 and people who have completed Bachillerato used more genitalia-related taboo expressions and used them more frequently. These findings verify to a large extent the usage part of the hypotheses.

As for the attitudes expressed by the participants, the findings suggest that, as expected, male, 18-50, and less educated participants tend to feel more comfortable when using the selected expressions than female, 51-70, or PhD participants. Nevertheless, the results show that there is a significant difference between male and female genitalia-related expressions. This translates into expressions containing female attributes being used comfortably in comparison with male-genitalia-related expressions by female, 51-70, and MA participants. Moreover, the results concerning the conceptualization of the expressions as negative are surprising since they seem to be in some cases opposite to previous studies and the results obtained from the usage, frequency, and comfortability analysis. The findings show that 18-30, and Bachillerato, BA, and MA respondents conceive the taboo expressions as negative, sexist and disrespectful, but still make a high usage of them. This could be attributed to the increasing awareness of young people towards sexism. Therefore, these findings verify the hypotheses to some extent, taking into account the difference between the two types of genitalia and the unexpected results on perceptions.

Additionally, this study has a number of limitations that need to be addressed. First, the number of taboo expressions containing male and female genitalia was not equal, having more male-genitalia-related expressions. Second, the sample was not balanced, as there were more participants from certain categories than from others. Lastly, this study did not consider other variables or individual differences of the respondents such as cultural background or socio-economic differences which could have had an impact on the results. Therefore, this study encourages further research; subsequent works could make a more profound qualitative examination of the reasons behind the social variation of these expressions. Furthermore, future studies could address the differences between the use and attitudes towards expressions containing male and female genitalia in depth.

As closing remarks, the results of this study lead to the conclusion that the variables of gender, age and level of education have an effect on the use of and attitudes towards genitalia-related taboo expressions. This paper, thus, contributes and adds to the existing academic literature on the sociolinguistic variation of taboo expressions and the attitudes towards them.

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