

Phraseologism and Linguistic Taboo in Denominations for *Diabo* in the Northeast of Brazil

Geisa Borges da COSTA¹
Marcela Moura Torres PAIM²

¹ Doctoral Degree in Language and Culture from the Universidade Federal da Bahia - UFBA (2016). Associate Professor IV of Portuguese Language from the Universidade Federal da Bahia - UFBA. Contact: gbdcosta@ufba.br

² Doctoral Degree in Letters from the Universidade Federal da Bahia - UFBA (2007). Associate Professor of Portuguese Language from the Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco - UFRPE. Permanent Professor of the Postgraduate Programme of Language and Culture (PPGLinC) from the Universidade Federal da Bahia - UFBA and Postgraduate Programme of Language Studies (PROGEL) from the Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco - UFRPE. Contact: marcela.paim@ufrpe.br

Abstract:

This article analyzes phraseological units and linguistic taboos present in the linguistic repertoire of Portuguese language speakers from the Northeast of Brazil when naming the lexical item *diabo* (devil). The informants were equally distributed between both sexes in two age groups, a selection made in accordance to the criteria of Contemporary Dialectology. Data were collected from surveys of the Linguistic Atlas of Brazil (*Atlas Linguístico do Brasil - ALiB*) project in cities in three states of the Northeast of Brazil: Alagoas, Pernambuco and Maranhão. Based on the theoretical-methodological assumptions of Multidimensional Geolinguistics, the first question of the Semantic-Lexical Questionnaire concerning the semantic area of religion and beliefs was investigated in order to verify the phraseological units and linguistic taboos present in the responses of the informants, such as: *anjo mau* (evil angel), *besta fera* (wild beast), *bicho preto* (black beast), *bicho ruim* (evil beast), *coisa ruim* (evil creature), *inimigo atentado* (mischievous enemy), *príncipe do céu* (prince of heaven). The study has shown the presence of phraseologisms and linguistic taboos that could be related to myths and superstitions arising from the religious beliefs of the speakers.

Keywords:

Phraseologisms. Linguistic taboos. Project Linguistic Atlas of Brazil.

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INTRODUCTION

To contemplate the research on lexical variation in the semantic field of religion and beliefs in the database of the Brazilian Linguistic Atlas (*Atlas Linguístico do Brasil* - ALiB) project, it is essential to underline the different ways in which it can be studied, as Costa (2021) suggests. In this article, it is discussed a new perspective on the data of the ALiB Project, in honor of Professor Carlota Ferreira. First, we cover a brief theoretical review of the phraseological investigations from the French perspective and the linguistic taboos contained in the lexical data. Subsequently, we approach methodological concerns and the corpus of analysis collected from question 147 of the semantic-lexical questionnaire of the ALiB Project (COMITÊ NACIONAL DO PROJETO ALIB, 2001, p. 33). Thus, our purpose is to highlight the lexical diversity in the spoken Portuguese language observed through the data present in the linguistic repertoire of informants from three states of the Brazilian Northeast (Alagoas, Pernambuco and Maranhão) contemplated in this research.

1. PHRASEOLOGICAL STUDIES AND LINGUISTIC TABOOS

Depending on the theoretical current adopted, the Phraseology can be studied from different perspectives. There are two major strands of researchers who are dedicated to phraseological research: the Spanish, which prioritizes the study of proverbs and their constitution, as well as their use and understanding by users of a given language, and the French one, used by Salah Mejri, which expands the object of study of Phraseology far beyond proverbs, choosing polylexicality as a primary criterion for the consideration of an element such as the Phraseological Unit (PU).

In 1931, with Polivánov, the first conceptualizations of Phraseology emerged and, in the 1940s, it acquired the status of linguistic subject. From that moment on, researchers, in their investigations, started to demonstrate that the particularities of a language and the way of thinking of a community could be revealed through phraseology, since the PU could project the relationship between identity and culture, as well as the communicative situations motivating its use.

Within the scope of the French theoretical current, Mejri (2012) conceptualizes phraseology as a linguistic phenomenon common to all living languages, which is accomplished through recurrent syntagmatic associations. As the researcher explains, the process of figement (fixation, crystallization), from which the phraseologisms result, is observed in this phenomenon. These phraseologisms display distinct degrees of fixation, polylexicality, congruence and idiomaticity, as shown in the following examples, present in the corpus of the ALiB Project: *bicho preto* (black beast), *inimigo atentado* (mischievous enemy), *príncipe do céu* (prince of heaven).

From this perspective, Phraseology is conceived as

[...] a linguistic phenomenon that is expressed through recurrent syntagmatic associations; fixation would then be the process by which the syntagmatic associations take place. It is a universal process specific to living languages that is inscribed in time, is carried out independently of the will of the speakers, acts as a systematic factor in the functioning of languages at all levels of their components (lexicon, morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, prosodic, etc.). It puts the

syntagmatic at the service of the lexical, making each syntagma a potential candidate to become a polylexical unit (MEJRI, 2012, p. 141)³.

The contribution of this viewpoint to linguistic studies is fundamental, because Mejri reveals the existence of a third articulation of language that, like the double articulation proposed by Martinet, also supports the language economy. For Mejri (2018), the fixed sequences (nomenclature adopted by him to refer to the PU) constitute another articulation that is structured with elements of the first and second articulations, giving the system

[...] a new dimension that does not appear in the units of the two other articulations and provides pertinence to the system, with possibilities that the lower units (phoneme and morpheme) are unable to secure by themselves;
- this type of unit should encompass all possible configurations (monolexicality and polylexicality) responding to empirically verifiable criteria;
- the units of the third articulation must be distinguished by functions that are not provided by the units of the other articulations; which guarantees methodological pertinence and added value (MEJRI, 2018, p. 14)⁴.

It is the third articulation of language that enables and ensures lexical renewal, because “phraseology intervenes at the level of this last articulation. The polylexical units that it has share the same functions with the other lexical units: they name, predict and structure the utterances.” (MARQUES; MEJRI, 2018, p. 13).

The proposal of the third articulation presented by Mejri (2018), as examined, aspires to integrate the phraseological units to the status of units of this articulation. This characterizes an important advance for the inventions of phraseological nature, for it would solve the theoretical problem of the notion of word, allowing its analysis in both its monolexical and polylexical aspects.

The meaning of this phraseological unit is not only characterized by the sum of the particular meaning of the elements that make up the complex structure, but rather by a sense of global unity, of the whole and its idiomatic character, even though not exclusively. Phraseology is connected to all levels of language (from the phonetic-phonological to the discursive-pragmatic level). Its objective is to investigate the combinations of stable lexical units and with a certain degree of idiomaticity. These combinations also should have the characteristic of polylexicality, that is, be formed by more than one item, and constitute the discursive competence of the speakers. Therefore, this phenomenon is characterized by processes of syntagmatic solidarity, building a block whose internal syntax is disparate from the corresponding free phrase.

With regard to the characteristics of phraseologisms, Mejri (2012), for example, presents the notion of continuum for specific properties such as fixity and congruence. According to the author, fixation is a parameter to explain the phraseological phenomenon and to describe the crystallization mechanism through which syntagmatic solidarity appropriates the rules of the combinatorial syntagmatic, at syntactic and semantic levels.

In this theoretical approach, Mejri (1997) expanded the object of study of Phraseology far beyond proverbs, evidencing polylexicality as a primary criterion for the consideration of an element such as the

³ Original quotation: “[...] au phénomène linguistique que s’exprime à travers des associations syntagmatiques récurrents; le figement serait alors le processus par lequel les associations syntagmatiques se réalisent. Il s’agit d’un processus universel propre aux langues vivantes qui s’inscrit dans le temps, se réalise en dehors de la volonté des locuteurs, agit comme facteur systémique sur le fonctionnement des langues à tous les niveaux de leurs composantes (lexique, morphologie, syntaxe, sémantique, pragmatique, prosodie, etc.). Il met le syntagmatique au service du lexical faisant de chaque syntagme un candidat potentiel pour devenir une unité polylexicale.” (our translation).

⁴ Original quotation: “[...] une nouvelle dimension qui ne figure pas dans les unités des deux autres articulations et don la pertinence fournit au système des possibilités que les unités inférieures (phonème et morphème) sont incapables d’assurer à elles seules;
- ce type d’unité doit englober toutes les configurations possibles (monolexicalité et polylexicalité) tout en répondant à des critères empiriquement vérifiables;
- les unités de la troisième articulation doivent se distinguer par des fonctions non assurées par les unités des autres articulations; ce qui em garantit la pertinence et la plus-value méthodologiques.” (our translation).

Phraseological Unit (PU). In that sense, he invested several years of research to investigate the process of fixation of these units. He explains that

The fixation process is, in effect, important: it manifests itself at all levels of the linguistic system (phonetics, syntax, morphology, prosody, semantics, etc.). A sequence [...], commonly used in daily conversations, perfectly illustrates the intertwining of all levels we have just mentioned (MEJRI, 1997, p. 23)⁵.

The different phraseological units utilized by language users in the most diverse communicative contexts help the development and functioning of language. In speech, the speaker has varied discursive resources in order to make communication happen as effectively as possible. Thus, depending on the most different intentions, the speaker goes in search of the structures prefabricated, sets of words, new words and meanings, which are structured as phraseological units usable in various communicative situations.

Such units are termed lexical sequences, which may be more or less fixed, composed of two or more words, or even whole sentences, whose meaning, in general, is understood by the set of elements that compose a certain phraseological structure. Hence, Mejrí (1997, p. 23) draws attention to the fact that the meaning of the total of a phraseological unit cannot always correspond to the addition of the meaning of the parts that constitute it.

As Mejrí (1997, p. 24) clarifies, there are five fundamental characteristics for considering a combination of words as a phraseological unit: to be constituted by more than one word; to be institutionalized, that is, made conventional due to frequent use; to have stability, as its components can remain in a certain specific order; to have some semantic or syntactic particularities; to be susceptible to changes in the elements that integrate them.

As stated by the same author, the fixed sequence is considered crystallized if it has a total or partial fixation of rules of the syntagmatic combination and paradigmatic commuting. This is justified by the fact that fixation is the process by which the syntagmatic formations have, as a whole, internal syntax correlated with the global meaning. In other words, it is not possible to study a phraseological unit through its elements in isolation, but all united, as if they compound a single structure. This characteristic, followed by polylexicality, provides guidance for expressions to be investigated and conceived as phraseologisms.

Next, a sample of phraseologisms related to devil denominations will be presented in three states of northeastern Brazil. Thus, the phraseological units collected from the linguistic repertoire of speakers are exhibited, based on what documents the data of the ALiB Project. It is, fundamentally, a linguistic project, because it aims to document, describe and interpret the reality of the spoken Brazilian Portuguese.

2. LINGUISTIC TABOOS IN THE LEXICON OF RELIGION AND BELIEFS

The way the individual relates to the world, culture and religion goes through various processes of transformation throughout the history of human civilizations. The diversity of cultural and religious values and traditions dates back to ancient times, in which different peoples reconstitute beliefs, superstitions, rites and knowledge of their ancestors according to the cultural affiliation of each one of them.

From a linguistic standpoint, the symbolic universe of religions is, itself, a very relevant theme. Through religious thinking, the subject builds his interaction with the world and develops different ways of reasoning, feeling, acting and relating to words.

As it is read in Costa (2021), religious names are undoubtedly a great source of taboos, because, in the most varied cultures, there is a belief that the simple pronunciation of certain words can attract all sorts

⁵ Original quotation: “Le figement est en effet important à plus d’une titre: il engage toutes les dimensions du système linguistique (phonétique, syntaxe, morphologie, prosodie, sémantique, etc.). Une séquence [...], couramment employée dans la conversation de tous les jours, illustre parfaitement l’imbrication de tous les niveaux que nous venons de mentionner.” (our translation).

of evil. Some passages of the Holy Bible are categorical, when they say, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that shall take the name of the Lord his God in vain” (BÍBLIA, 1969a, Deut 5, 11).

Many religionists assume this passage is an explicit order not to pronounce the name of God, and so they do, considering the consequence mentioned at the end of the verse. On that account, the Christian religion has created a culture in which a name considered sacred, powerful and feared should not be uttered.

The author argues that linguistic taboos are terms filled with symbolic burdens, which lead to a prohibition or ban of the word, to the point that people believe that their use can bring harm or punishment. Many taboo expressions are also stigmatized by society, and it can be reflected in the social evaluation of the speaker who uses it.

These lexical items are often avoided by speakers, who do not customarily use them in their active vocabulary. In this sense, certain linguistic elements are targets of social censorship and can be replaced by other words considered less aggressive or offensive. Thereupon, the substitution of the cursed name generates a diversity of euphemistic, metaphorical, metonymic terms. Besides, it results in the creation of new words.

Monteiro (1986), in the article *The forbidden words*, states that the prohibition or fear of using a given expression always departs from the belief that language hides a power capable of subjugating individuals. Ergo, the speakers use some devices to replace the taboo lexeme, such as:

- **Phonetic “adulteration”:** the so-called swear words are usually altered by some people who forge a phonetic change in the word for being fearful of the negative evaluation that society can make or uncomfortable with speaking certain words considered despicable, ugly or dishonorable.
- **Use of synonyms:** the meanings and referents of the words are not the justification for the belief in the harmful effects of linguistic taboos. Otherwise, synonyms would produce the same consequences or reactions. It is observed that the synonymous words of taboos do not produce many negative reactions or evaluations, being effective in softening or even dispelling the negative effect of the taboo word. For Monteiro (1986), perhaps this is the reason for the existence of so many synonyms for the word devil. This word has a highly negative effect on society, which judges and condemns those who say it, as it is seen as sinful, anti-Christian, and profane. People, then, are inclined to replace it with other terms to escape the use of the taboo lexeme.
- **Substitution by gestures:** gestures are often used to replace the word that suffers linguistic prohibition, as it is considered inappropriate to be said in certain environments for the sake of avoiding causing disgust or aversion. In such cases, speakers can use gestures to escape the pronunciation of the taboo term.
- **Use of deictic signs:** a very common way to avoid some term considered unpleasant or aggressive is the deixis, like the use of pronouns (he, this, that) to refer to the word or expression that is not to be named. In the Northeast of Brazil, for example, it is very common to use deixis to indicate certain highly stigmatized diseases, such as epilepsy, leprosy, and cancer. Thus, the speaker might say: “that disease”, “what itches” or “what makes one fall”. Deictic references to when one wants to avoid the name of some foe, in which one uses “*o dito cujo*” (meaning “said person”), or when someone is narrating a fact related to danger, as a serious disease, and says “*lá ele*” (meaning “perish the thought” or “God forbid”), as if the mere fact of illustrating the situation could cause them that same problem.
- **Change in the tone of voice:** often, fear or respect for certain names causes people to change their tone of voice, whispering the taboo word. This occurs with names of deceased people, diseases, and swear words. In short, the change of tone happens with terms to which some kind

of power or magic is attributed, or even for fear that someone will hear it and make a negative assessment or judgment of those who uttered it.

- **Substitution by euphemism:** euphemism is one of the main strategies used by individuals to mitigate the pejorative charge, negative connotation or social disapproval of some words considered inconvenient or immoral. The superstition or fear that some words provoke in individuals can also lead to euphemistic substitutions, which would lessen the impact made by the dreaded lexical unit. Thus, linguistic taboos are strong conditioners of the use of euphemisms, since, to avoid the use of the taboo lexeme, many people appropriate euphemisms, such as “with a bun in the oven” instead of “pregnant”, “Angel of Darkness” to “devil”, among others.
- **Substitution by dysphemism:** one of the most convincing proofs that the vocabulary prohibition of some words has no direct relation to their meaning is the fact that, often, these words are replaced by others whose tone is even more aggressive, e.g.: the use of the term *chifrudo* (horned one) or *malvado* (malevolent) rather than the word *diabo* (devil).
- **Circumlocution:** the social restriction related to the use of some words can lead to the use of circumlocutions, replacing taboo expressions with more courteous terms that show rules of etiquette or good manners codes are being followed.

The cultural diversification that stems from the diversity of peoples and beliefs departing from the most varied spaces and cultures in the Brazilian territory was a motivating factor for the creation of a multifaceted vision about mythical and religious entities. It has also influenced the profusion of lexical items employed by the speakers to name the linguistic-cultural element *diabo* (devil), both in popular and in religious, erudite cultures.

On the one hand, the cultural symbols contributed to represent the image of the devil in the imaginary and popular tradition and, on the other hand, to foster the diversity of linguistic forms used by the speakers to refer to the magical-religious figure of the being who lives in hell.

The religious culture of Brazilian society is responsible for perpetuating beliefs and enriching the imagination of individuals with images and forms assumed by the devil throughout history. The linguistic expressions used to name this being are, too, reflections of religious orientation and sociocultural relations based on magical elements of popular religiosity.

The study of taboo offers privileged means to understand different cultures, languages and world views of the most diverse social groups. It may reveal the close relationship that exists between language and culture, seeing that taboos present in human language constitute not only linguistic practices, but, also, cultural practices to the extent that, as Preti (1984, p. 286)⁶ explains, “in the name of a prevailing ethics, words are banned or freed, judgments of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ terms are made, appropriate or inappropriate to the most varied contexts. And linguistic taboos appear as a result of social taboos.”

Linguistic taboos are part of all human cultures and can be caused by social and linguistic assessments. People often make a value judgment when they hear certain words considered ugly, aggressive, cursed, profane, which also results in a negative evaluation of the speakers. Thus, it is evident the performance of extralinguistic factors and cultural components in the linguistic behavior of individuals.

Along these lines, the lexicon of religion and beliefs is a fruitful area for the manifestation of taboos in the field of language, since the individuals’ lexical realization is strongly influenced by their social, cultural and religious experiences and, through the lexical component, it is possible to learn about the sociocultural values of certain communities.

⁶ Original quotation: “em nome de uma ética vigente, proíbem-se ou liberam-se palavras, processam-se julgamentos de ‘bons’ ou ‘maus’ termos, apropriados ou inadequados aos mais variados contextos. E tabus linguísticos aparecem em decorrência de tabus sociais.” (our translation).

3. METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES OF THE ALiB PROJECT

The ALiB Project⁷, a national endeavor with the participation of different universities distributed in the five Brazilian regions, is characterized by two implications: first, its conception is rooted in the plurality of knowledge, factor that inspires the project; second it benefits a broad spectrum of the sciences in contemporary time with the results provided by its research.

Regarding the first implication, the design of the Project led to the use of different areas of expertise. This use is detected, for example, in the definition of the network of points for data collection, seeing that the process requires specific knowledge of historical, anthropological, demographic, geographic, cultural, economic, social, political and religious features of each locality. On the account, the selection of localities reveals not only the linguistic interest, but also the socio-historical profile of the mapped areas. It is an important indicator of the view of language, as well as it is able to reveal a relevant bundle of social, historical and cultural correlations.

Dealing with the selection of informants, it was necessary to study the Brazilian demographic formation, the constitution of society, the sociological and anthropological aspects that characterize the composition of the Brazilian population, to which is added an awareness of the social background in which the interviewees are included. This led us to try to harmonize social variables of different natures – such as age group, gender, level of education – in order to obtain a linguistic sample that could be representative of the reality of Brazil from a dialectical point of view.

The stratification of the informant profile that collaborated on the speech data for the formation of the corpus of the ALiB Project established the methodological decision to contemplate social dimensions – diassexual, diagenational and diastratic – as parameter, alongside the diatopic. In such a way, four informants at each location, except in state capitals, where eight informants were interviewed, were equally distributed among the two sexes in each place, a total of 550 men and 550 women, enabling the analysis of diassexual variation.

Concerning the diagenational variation, informants belong to two age groups: age group 1, 18 to 30 years, and age group 2, from 50 to 65 years. As to the diastratic variation, informants of two levels of education were included in the state capitals: four with incomplete elementary schooling – as in the other localities of the countryside – and four with university schooling level.

The informants, who total 1,100 throughout the country, are locals and children of people born in the same linguistic area who have not been away from the locality for very long and continuous periods. These periods of absence, if any, should not coincide with the first years of life of the individual (language acquisition phase), nor with the years immediately preceding that in which the interview was conducted, according to the rules in research of geolinguistic nature.

After completing the data collection stage of the scheduled network of localities, some initial considerations can already be made about Brazilian dialect areas. The product immediately expected from the ALiB Project is, of course, the preparation of the atlas itself, whose initial volumes, *Introdução* (CARDOSO, 2014a) and *Cartas Linguísticas I* (CARDOSO, 2014b), were published eight years ago. Moreover, the ALiB Project database, with its multidimensional methodology, enables different kinds of investigations, including the ones with qualitative scope, seeking, in the corpus, the documentation and analysis of phraseological units based on oral data of geolinguistic nature.

4. WHAT DOES THE LEXICAL DATA FROM THE BRAZILIAN LINGUISTIC ATLAS PROJECT REVEAL ABOUT LINGUISTIC TABOOS?

The first question of the semantic field Religion and Beliefs in Questionário Semântico-Lexical do Projeto ALiB (COMITÊ NACIONAL DO PROJETO ALiB, 2001, p. 33), instrument that provides a

⁷ After the passing of the beloved former President-Director of the ALiB Project, Suzana Alice Marcelino Cardoso, the National Committee was thus constituted: President-Director Jacyra Andrade Mota, Executive Director Silvana Soares Costa Ribeiro, and Scientific Directors Abdelhak Razky, Aparecida Negri Isquerdo, Conceição Maria de Araujo Ramos, Fabiane Cristina Altino, Felício

questionnaire used for the collection of linguistic data, targets the apprehension of the denominations given by the speakers to the lexeme *diabo*, through the question: “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”⁸.

The analysis of linguistic taboos collected in this question will be based on the responses of the informants from cities located in the states of Pernambuco, Alagoas and Maranhão.

In Pernambuco, language surveys were conducted in 12 cities, namely: Exu, Salgueiro, Limoeiro, Olinda, Afrânio, Cabrobó, Arcoverde, Caruaru, Recife, Floresta, Garanhuns and Petrolina. The data reveal a range of variants to name the devil: *cão* (hound, 28 occurrences), *satanás* (Satan, 26 occurrences), *diabo* (devil, 19 occurrences), *demônio* (demon, 9 occurrences), *capeta* (fiend, 4 occurrences), *inimigo* (enemy, 4 occurrences), *bicho ruim* (evil beast, 2 occurrences), *lúcifer* (Lucifer, 2 occurrences), *anjo mau*, *besta-fera*, *cramunhão*, *encardido*, *o cão* (evil angel, wild beast, imp, grimy, and the hound, respectively, single occurrences)⁹.

With regard to Alagoas, due to the small territorial extension of the state, only four cities (União dos Palmares, Santana do Ipanema, Arapiraca and Maceió) were examined as linguistic points of the ALiB project. The answers obtained for question 147 in Alagoas were: *satanás* (14 occurrences), *cão* (11 occurrences), *diabo* (10 occurrences), *capeta* (4 occurrences), *lúcifer* (4 occurrences), *demônio* (3 occurrences), *inimigo* (2 occurrences), *chifrudo*, *coisa ruim*, *inimigo atentado*, *enxofre*, *sujo*, *troço* (horned one, evil creature, mischievous enemy, sulfur, and trifle, respectively, single occurrences).

Finally, in Maranhão, language surveys were conducted in nine cities (Turiaçu, São Luís, Brejo, Bacabal, Imperatriz, Tuntum, São José dos Patos, Balsas and Alto Parnaíba) and the data revealed the following variants to name the referent *diabo*: *diabo* (20 occurrences), *cão* (10 occurrences), *demônio* (8 occurrences), *satanás* (6 occurrences), *capeta* (4 occurrences), *sujo* (2 occurrences), *anjo mau*, *bicho ruim*, *o chifrudo*, *coisa*, *o cão*, *príncipe do céu* (evil angel, evil beast, the horned one, it, the hound, prince of the heaven, respectively, single occurrences).

The linguistic data referring to the studied localities revealed some linguistic resources used by the informants to avoid the use of taboo-lexeme, such as:

- phonetic variation: *cramunhão* (expression that replaces the word *cramulhano*, meaning “imp”);
- euphemisms: *inimigo*, *lúcifer*;
- dysphemisms: *cão*, *chifrudo*;
- qualifying lexical replacements: *bicho ruim*, *coisa ruim*, *encardido*;
- deixis: *o cão*, *o chifrudo*;
- metonymy: *chifrudo*, *encardido*, *sujo*;
- change in tone of voice: many informants lowered the tone of their voice to pronounce the word *diabo*.

The lexical choices of the speakers from the countryside of Pernambuco, Alagoas and Maranhão demonstrate that the variation in spoken language has an intrinsic relationship with sociocultural factors. After all, the lexicon of a language shows not only the eminently linguistic elements, but also people’s way of life, the social networks that involve them, the value system that governs certain human groups and societies and which often guide the individuals’ linguistic realization.

The semantic field of religion and beliefs has revealed important mythical and folkloric aspects of Brazilian popular culture, such as feelings of anguish, fear and rejection that some names, considered cursed, trigger in the speakers.

In his thesis, defended in the postgraduate program on language and literature of the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA), Costa (2016) analyzed the lexical units provided by the informants of the 25 capitals

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⁸ Original quotation: “Deus está no céu e no inferno está...?” (our translation).

⁹ In the variants preceded by an article, it was assumed that the speaker meant to reinforce the idea of power related to certain religious entities or to the supernatural. The religious term studied in the research (*diabo*) originates several figures of speech, including personification.

of Brazil for the referent *diabo* and found that the sociocultural implications produced by the lexicon are easily verified in the field of religions and beliefs, because words commonly undergo very strict value judgments in the religious environment.

In such a way, words that can or cannot be spoken are determined at the expense of leading men to punishment and burden. The moral and religious perspective creates some type of interdiction on lexical items. Thus, the uttering of some terms considered coarse, vulgar or cursed is avoided, making them a linguistic taboo.

The lexical data on the answers to question 147 of the QSL, “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”, reveal indications of linguistic taboos expressed by the informants of the cities in Pernambuco, Alagoas and Maranhão, as seen in some excerpts of the interviews conducted by the ALiB researchers.

(1) INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell?

INF.: The *diabo*.

INQ.: What are the names that exist here in Olinda for this, that you know about?

INQ.: *Satanás, diabo, anjo mau, bicho preto* (laughs).

INQ.: Funny. Has anyone seen his color?

INF.: Right? (laughs). Here, we say ‘watch out for the *bicho preto*’, which you already know is the *diabo*, don’t you? (laughs).

(Olinda-PE, woman, age group 2, elementary level).¹⁰

In example number 1, it is observed that, in addition to the two lexemes considered a source of taboo (*satanás* and *diabo*), the informant mentions two other euphemistic variants to answer question 147: *anjo mau* and *bicho preto*.

Cunha (2010) clarifies the etymology of the word *anjo* (angel) as being derived from the Ecclesiastical Latin *angelus*, that is, messenger between God and men, spiritual being. The Latin term comes from the Greek *angelos*, or (God’s) messenger, which translates the Hebrew word *malak*. The use of the expression *anjo mau* to refer to the devil takes into account the Christian beliefs that the devil would have been an angel created by God, who, wishing to be like his creator, rebelled against him. He becomes God’s main enemy and incites men to do evil. The biblical book of Ezekiel contains some references used by Christians to associate the devil with a rebellious angel:

You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: carnelian, chrysolite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared.

You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones.

You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So, I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones (BÍBLIA, 1969b, Eze 28, 13-16).

The term *anjo mau* represents a euphemistic form to replace the *diabo* lexeme, expressing a religious connotation imposed by the speaker to the referent.

As for the *bicho preto* variant, used by the informant to name the lexical item *diabo*, it is clear the prejudiced association between black and wickedness, perversity, and pollution. This imagery representation of the devil dates back to medieval times, when many of the pagan gods were depicted as black.

¹⁰ Original transcription: “INQ.: Deus está no céu e no inferno está?

INF.: O *diabo*.

INQ.: Quais são os nomes que existem aqui em Olinda para isso, que a senhora conhece, né?

INQ.: *Satanás, diabo, anjo mau, bicho preto* (risos).

INQ.: Engraçado. Será que alguém já viu a cor?

INF.: Né isso? (risos). Aqui diz ‘cuidado com o *bicho preto*’, que já se sabe que é o *diabo*, né? (risos)” (our translation).

According to Menon (2008, p. 225), the relationship that Christianity establishes between the color black and malignancy is, partially, because of the assumption that everything that was pagan came from the devil.

This construction of the devil's image, as traditionally presented in Western culture, has brought irreversible damage to an entire black population that commonly has its attitudes and actions associated with wickedness, tyranny, demonic and animalistic traits.

Let us analyze another example of the ALiB investigations, in which the informant avoided uttering the required term:

(2) INQ: We say that God rules heaven. But who rules hell?

INF: Look, in hell, I don't know who's the ruler. I know God's in heaven and everywhere we summon him, isn't he?

INQ: I know, but in hell, who's there?

INQ: It's the utmost.

INQ: Um. And who's the utmost?

INF: *Inimigo*.

INQ: And how do you name it here?

INF: There is *o cão*, *satanás* (laughing), there's *inimigo atentado* (laughing).

(Santana do Ipanema-AL, woman, age group 2, elementary level).¹¹

(3) INQ: God rules heaven, but who rules hell?

INF: *O troço*, isn't it? *O cão*, right?

INQ: What other names do you say?

INF: *Cão*, *coisa ruim*, it's *enxofre*, there's plenty of names for him, there isn't a lack of names (laughs).

(Macció, woman, age group 1, elementary level).¹²

In many parts of the ALiB surveys, as example 2, there seems to be resistance from informants, not only in uttering the term *diabo*, but also other variants representing the "evil being". The word carries a load of negative values present in people's imaginations, especially those who may have heard about many stories and episodes of the destructive power of this "cursed entity". Some excerpts from the ALiB interviews show that certain interviewees avoid uttering existing names to identify "the being who rules hell."

In example 3, the informant accentuates a profusion of variants to name the lexical item studied, but there seems to be a resistance to articulate the ones considered taboos. Thus, to answer question 147, she uses a series of words with euphemistic and dysphemistic character.

Religious beliefs are responsible for the manifestation of a range of taboos in the language field. Many words from the religious arena are believed to be impure and cause harm.

This idea is mainly disseminated by Christian religions and leads the speaker to avoid the use of taboo terms, replacing them with other lexical items created through various linguistic resources, such as metaphors, metonymies and euphemisms. This phenomenon was evidenced in the answers to question 147, in which the informants used several figures of speech to name the devil, as in the following examples on the next page:

¹¹ Original transcription: "INQ: A gente diz que Deus está no céu e no inferno quem é que está?

INF: Olha, no inferno, eu não sei quem tá. Sei que Deus está no céu e em todo lugar que a gente chamar ele, né?

INQ: Sei, mas no inferno, quem está lá?

INQ: É o maioral.

INQ: Hum. E quem é o maioral?

INF: *Inimigo*.

INQ: E que nomes dão ao inimigo aqui?

INF: Tem *o cão*, *satanás* (rindo), tem o *inimigo atentado* (rindo)." (our translation).

¹² Original transcription: "INQ: Deus está no céu e no inferno está?

INF: *O troço*, né? *O cão*, né?

INQ: Quais os outros nomes que diz?

INF: *Cão*, *coisa ruim*, é *enxofre*, tem um monte de coisa pra ele, o que não falta é nome pra ele (risos)." (our translation).

(4) INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell?
 INF.: The *diabo*.
 INQ.: Are there other names?
 INF.: The *bicho ruim* (laughs).
 (Salgueiro-PE, woman, age group 2, elementary level).¹³

Most of the lexical choices made by the speakers to name the devil come from the religious field. This is indicated in the analysis of the lexicon used by informants, as it coincides with the denominations to designate the being who is considered God's adversary and synonymy of evil in the books of the Old and New Testaments.

(5) INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell?
 INF.: The *diabo*, *demônio*, *o cão*, *capeta*, *coisa ruim*.
 INQ.: Are there other names?
 INQ.: There are other names, but they are not the most common ones, as *príncipe do céu*. It is *diabo*, *capeta*.
 (São Luís-MA, man, age group 1, university level).¹⁴

(6) INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell?
 INF.: *O cão*.
 INQ.: Are there other names?
 INQ.: *Demônio*.
 INQ.: Um. Any others?
 INF.: The *besta-fera* (laughs).
 (Floresta-PE, man, age group 1, elementary level).

The subject of manifestation of taboos in language still lacks a significant amount of research, being a very productive field for linguistic studies that take into account the influence of culture on the linguistic realization of individuals. In this study, we argue that language, especially at the lexicon level, is strongly influenced by the cultural experiences of the speakers, who reveal, through their linguistic choices, the sociocultural values of the community to which they belong.

Linguistic taboos are a topic of great interest to dialectology, as they lead the speaker to use a range of linguistic variants to replace the taboo word. This linguistic diversity, result of the sanction of a word, is intrinsically associated with sociocultural factors, such as the age group and gender of the individual, the region of origin of the informant, schooling, and participation in religious groups, for instance. In short, it is related to extralinguistic matters that may reveal the influence of culture on the use of language.

5. PHRASEOLOGICAL FINDINGS FROM THE DATA OF THE ALiB PROJECT

During the realization of the VALEXTRA Project¹⁵, a collection of examples was assembled in order to document the phraseologisms registered in the capital cities of the ALiB Project. It was intended to researchers of the Portuguese language and its variations, as well as to those interested in the Brazilian linguistic

¹³ Original transcription: "INQ.: Deus está no céu e no inferno está?
 INF.: O *diabo*."

INQ.: Tem outros nomes?
 INF.: *O bicho ruim* (risos)." (our translation)

¹⁴ Original transcription: "INQ.: Deus está no céu e no inferno está?"

INF.: *O diabo*, *demônio*, *o cão*, *capeta*, *coisa ruim*.
 INQ.: Tem outros nomes?

INQ.: Tem outros nomes, mas não são os mais comuns, *príncipe do céu*, *é diabo*, *capeta*." (our translation).

¹⁵ The "Lexical Variation: Theories, Resources and Applications: From Lexical Conditioning to Pragmatic Constructions" (*Variação lexical: teorias, recursos e aplicações: do condicionamento lexical às construções pragmáticas* - VALEXTRA) project was funded by CAPES-

reality, represented here by the phraseological units of speakers of Brazilian capitals, along with students of Elementary, Secondary and University Education.

To facilitate the examination of the material, the entries were organized alphabetically, presenting the phraseological units indicated in the corpus of the ALiB Project as polylexical answers to the questions of the semantic-lexical questionnaire. The collection of examples was based on the corpus of geolinguistic data compiled in Brazilian capitals in the first decade of the 2000s and designed to contribute with information that could strengthen the expansion of lexical studies. It would also subsidize the teaching and learning of the Portuguese language, as it provides a lexical repertoire of the informants interviewed.

In this text, following the model of Paim, Sfar e Mejri (2018) with adaptations, the lexical repertoire was systematized as follows:

- 1 = Phraseological unit (presented in alphabetical order).
- 2 = Grammatical information - classification of syntagma (nominal or verbal) as well as its composition (noun + noun; verb + noun, among other possible structures).
- 3 = Definition (information on the phraseological unit in question through defining text).
- 4 = Location(s) (following the pattern city/state).
- 5 = Reference source (mentioning the reproduction of the formulation of the question).
- 6 = Context (example extracted from the corpus of the ALiB Project. Here, the abbreviations INQ, which means inquirer, that is, the interviewer, and INF, which refers to the informant who was interviewed, were used).

The following phraseological units are examples of the work developed:

Anjo mau (evil angel). Grammatical category: noun phrase (noun + adjective). Way of referring to the evil supernatural entity of the Christian tradition. Locations: Olinda/Pernambuco; São Luís/Maranhão. Reference source: semantic-lexical questionnaire/ALiB/question 147/semantic field: religion and beliefs: “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?” Context: INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: The *diabo*. INQ.: What are the names that exist here in Olinda for this, that you know about? INQ.: *Satanás, diabo, anjo mau, bicho preto* (laughs). INQ.: Funny. Has anyone seen his color? INF.: Right? (laughs). Here, we say ‘watch out for the *bicho preto*’, which you already know is the *diabo*, don’t you? (laughs) (Olinda, woman, age group 2, elementary level).

Besta-fera (wild beast). Grammatical category: noun phrase (noun + noun). Way of referring to the evil supernatural entity of the Christian tradition. Location: Floresta/Pernambuco. Reference source: semantic-lexical questionnaire/ALiB/question 147/semantic field: religion and beliefs: “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”. Context: INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: *O cão*. INQ.: Are there other names? INQ.: *Demônio*. INQ.: Um. Any others? INF.: The *besta-fera* (laughs) (Floresta, man, age group 1, elementary level).

Bicho preto (black beast). Grammatical category: noun phrase (noun + adjective). Way of referring to the evil supernatural entity of the Christian tradition. Location: Olinda/Pernambuco. Reference source: semantic-lexical questionnaire/ALiB/question 147/semantic field: religion and beliefs: “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”. Context: INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: The *diabo*. INQ.: What are the names that exist here in Olinda for this, that you know about? INQ.: *Satanás, diabo, anjo mau, bicho preto* (laughs). INQ.: Funny. Has anyone seen his color? INF.: Right? (laughs). Here, we say ‘watch out for the *bicho preto*’, which you already know is the *diabo*, don’t you? (laughs) (Olinda, woman, age group 2, elementary level).

Bicho ruim (evil beast). Grammatical category: noun phrase (noun + adjective). Way of referring to the evil supernatural entity of the Christian tradition. Locations: Salgueiro/Pernambuco; Petrolina/Pernambuco; Imperatriz/Maranhão. Reference source: semantic-lexical questionnaire/ALiB/question 147/semantic field: religion and beliefs:

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“God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”. Context: INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: The *diabo*. INQ.: Are there other names? INF.: The *bicho ruim* (laughs). (Salgueiro, woman, age group 2, elementary level); INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: The *satanás, o cão* (laughs). INQ.: What else? INF.: *Demônio, diabo* (laughs) INQ.: What else? INF.: *Bicho ruim* (laughs). (Petrolina, woman, age group 1, elementary level)¹⁶; INQ.: We say God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: *O capeta, o diabo*. INQ.: Are there any other names? INF.: We call it *bicho ruim, satanás*, and move on. (Imperatriz, man, age group 1, elementary level)¹⁷.

Coisa ruim (evil creature). Grammatical category: noun phrase (noun + adjective). Way of referring to the evil supernatural entity of the Christian tradition. Locations: Maceió/Alagoas; São Luís/Maranhão. Reference source: semantic-lexical questionnaire/ALiB/question 147/semantic field: religion and beliefs: “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”. Context: INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: *O troço*, isn’t it? *O cão*, right? INQ.: What other names do you say? INF.: *Cão, coisa ruim*, it’s *enxofre*, there’s plenty of names for him, there isn’t a lack of names (laughs) (Maceió, woman, age group 1, elementary level); INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: The *diabo, demônio, o cão, capeta, coisa ruim*. INQ.: Are there other names? INQ.: There are other names, but they are not the most common ones, as *príncipe do céu*. It is *diabo, capeta* (São Luís, man, age group 1, university level).

Inimigo atentado (mischievous enemy). Grammatical category: noun phrase (noun + adjective). Way of referring to the evil supernatural entity of the Christian tradition. Location: Santana do Ipanema/Alagoas. Reference source: semantic-lexical questionnaire/ALiB/question 147/semantic field: religion and beliefs: “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”. Context: INQ.: We say that God rules heaven. But who rules hell? INF.: Look, in hell, I don’t know who’s the ruler. I know God’s in heaven and everywhere we summon him, isn’t he? INQ.: I know, but in hell, who’s there? INQ.: It’s the utmost. INQ.: Um. And who’s the utmost? INF.: *Inimigo*. INQ.: And how do you name it here? INF.: There is *o cão, satanás* (laughing), there’s *inimigo atentado* (laughing). (Santana do Ipanema, woman, age group 2, elementary level).

O cão (the hound). Grammatical category: noun phrase (article + noun). Way of referring to the evil supernatural entity of the Christian tradition. Locations: Floresta/Pernambuco; Maceió/Alagoas; São Luís/Maranhão. Reference source: semantic-lexical questionnaire/ALiB/question 147/semantic field: religion and beliefs: “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”. Context: INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: *O cão*. INQ.: Are there other names? INQ.: *Demônio*. INQ.: Um. Any others? INF.: The *besta-fera* (laughs) (Floresta-PE, man, age group 1, elementary level); INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: *O troço*, isn’t it? *O cão*, right? INQ.: What other names do you say? INF.: *Cão, coisa ruim*, it’s *enxofre*, there’s plenty of names for him, there isn’t a lack of names (laughs) (Maceió, woman, age group 1, elementary level); INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: The *diabo, demônio, o cão, capeta, coisa ruim*. INQ.: Are there other names? INQ.: There are other names, but they are not the most common ones, as *príncipe do céu*. It is *diabo, capeta* (São Luís, man, age group 1, university level); INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: *O cão, diabo, satanás, capeta, o chifrudo*. (São Luís, woman, age group 2, university level)¹⁸.

O chifrudo (the horned one). Grammatical category: noun phrase (article + noun). Way of referring to the evil supernatural entity of the Christian tradition. Location: São Luís/Maranhão. Reference source: semantic-lexical questionnaire/ALiB/question 147/semantic field: religion and beliefs: “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”. Context: INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: *O cão, diabo, satanás, capeta, o chifrudo*. (São Luís, woman, age group 2, university level).

O troço (the trifle). Grammatical category: noun phrase (article + noun). Way of referring to the evil supernatural entity of the Christian tradition. Location: Maceió/Alagoas. Reference source: semantic-lexical questionnaire/ALiB/

¹⁶ Original transcription: “INQ.: Deus está no céu e no inferno está?

INF.: *O satanás, o cão* (risos).

INQ.: Que mais?.

INF.: *Demônio, diabo* (risos)

INQ.: Que mais? INF.: *Bicho ruim* (risos).” (our translation).

¹⁷ Original transcription: “INQ.: A gente diz que Deus está no céu e no inferno está?

INF.: *O capeta, o diabo*. INQ.: Tem mais algum nome? INF.: A gente chama o *bicho ruim, satanás*, e *taca pra gente*.” (our translation).

¹⁸ Original transcription: “INQ.: Deus está no céu e no inferno está? INF.: *O cão, diabo, satanás, capeta, o chifrudo*.” (our translation).

question 147/semantic field: religion and beliefs: “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”. Context: INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: *O troço*, isn’t it? *O cão*, right? INQ.: What other names do you say? INF.: *Cão*, *coisa ruim*, it’s *enxofre*, there’s plenty of names for him, there isn’t a lack of names (laughs) (Maceió, woman, age group 1, elementary level).

Príncipe do céu (prince of heaven). Grammatical category: noun phrase (noun + prepositional phrase = noun + preposition + article + noun). Way of referring to the evil supernatural entity of the Christian tradition. Location: São Luís/Maranhão. Reference source: semantic-lexical questionnaire/ALiB/question 147/semantic field: religion and beliefs: “God rules heaven, but who rules hell?”. Context: INQ.: God rules heaven, but who rules hell? INF.: The *diabo*, *demônio*, *o cão*, *capeta*, *coisa ruim*. INQ.: Are there other names? INQ.: There are other names, but they are not the most common ones, as *príncipe do céu*. It is *diabo*, *capeta* (São Luís, man, age group 1, university level).

The documented phraseological units that refer to the devil in Alagoas, Pernambuco and Maranhão supports the establishment of a work forum to maintain and develop research in the fields of Dialectology, Phraseology and Linguistic Taboos, besides to stimulate discussions regarding the methodology of dialectical and phraseological studies.

CONCLUSION

The data investigated establishes a sample of the phraseological array of the Portuguese language. The interaction with the cultural reality of the area in which the denominations are inserted indicates the explicit relationship between man and the medium. Thus, the research of the phraseological units in Pernambuco, Alagoas and Maranhão allowed us to verify that the phraseological units, collected through the interviews conducted, contemplate polylexicality and reveal the stability in the sense elucidated by Mejeri (1997) of such close relationship between the elements that leads them to lose the primary meaning to have a new meaning.

The study facilitated the understanding of important linguistic and social elements manifested in the semantic field of religions and beliefs. The cultural imprints of speakers from Pernambuco, Alagoas and Maranhão are stamped on the lexical elements used to name “the being who rules hell”.

The recorded variants proved that the term *diabo* is a taboo lexical unit, since the informants, when answering to the question, used many metaphorical, metonymic and euphemistic forms to replace it, such as: *bicho ruim* (evil beast), *coisa ruim* (evil creature), *chifrado* (horned one), *encardido* (grimy), *sujo* (dirty one), *inimigo* (enemy), *lúcifer* (Lucifer).

This research aimed to contribute to the understanding of aspects of the regional lexicon and popular culture through the examination of lexical units and phraseologisms that evidence some myths and religious superstitions of the speakers of the states of Pernambuco, Alagoas and Maranhão.

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