



# Teaching Crossroads

Edited by

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# Nine months of winter, three of scorching hell<sup>1</sup> – Portuguese meteorological adages throughout the year

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## Abstract

This paper intends to discuss the topic of fixed language from a linguistic standpoint, namely resorting to concepts of phraseology and paremiology. These will enable us to approach the problematic issue of word combinations, which are traditionally divided into free combinations and restricted combinations, and also consider their main characteristics, mainly lexicalisation, non-compositionality, syntactic irregularity (or frozenness) and semantic irregularity (or idiomaticity). The latter combinations comprise, for example, collocations, idiomatic expressions and proverbs, which account for the major output of human speakers – people speak in set phrases, as Melčuk (1998) upholds.

However, restricted word combinations are culturally-bound and, as such, should be understood within the history and culture that produced them. One such case concerns the use of meteorological adages in Portugal, an extremely productive collection of popular sayings which aim at summarising weather observation made by consecutive generations and concluding about their influence and effect on farming throughout the year.

**Keywords:** *compositionality, idiomaticity, frozenness, meteorological adages.*

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to approach phraseology from a linguistic point of view. According to Jorge (2009, p. 120), phraseology is a hyperonym that encompasses numerous subsets of phrases or fixed structures that have either an idiomatic or a moralising value. Therefore, both the concept and the area of study of phraseology allow us to distinguish between free combinations, on the one hand, and restricted or set combinations, on the other.

Set combinations, set phrases or fixed expressions are some of the many terms attributed to this linguistic phenomenon that share several features, such as lexicalisation, non-compositionality, syntactic irregularity (or frozenness) and semantic irregularity (or idiomaticity). The fact that people mainly speak in set phrases, as Melčuk (1998) maintains make it a highly appealing subject of study.

The first part of this paper shall focus on the explanation of the principle of compositionality (or rather its absence in set phrases), the perspective on this issue of several authors, such as Zgusta (1971), Fernando (1996), Melčuk (1995, 1998) or Iriarte Sanromán (2001), and the characteristics that bind idiomatic expressions or full phrasemes, collocations or semi-phrasemes and proverbs or pragmathemes together in the same group.

However, set combinations are culturally-bound and must be understood within the history and culture that observed their creation. The particular case we chose to discuss refers to Portuguese meteorological adages, a remarkably productive collection of paremiological<sup>2</sup> data which have attempted to summarise weather observations made throughout numerous generations, ultimately enriching a nation's cultural heritage. The adages selected are concerned with the influence weather conditions pose upon farming and with advice about farming activities, especially those which include the names of the months of the year. These reflections shall occupy the second and third parts of the paper.

### Word combinations: free combinations and set phrases

A feature that must be taken into account when discussing language, either figurative or literal, is the canon of compositionality, according to which the meaning of phrases and sentences result from the sum of their separate units. The global meaning of a linguistic expression is the result of the sum of the meanings of each of the elements that make up this same expression, thus its sense being compositional.

Contrary to this, figurative language is viewed as special, because of the impossibility of imposing a process of compositionality upon the words that make up their expressions. Proverbs and idioms are examples of a non-compositional meaning (Hoffman & Honeck, 1980, pp. 8-9).

As a means of demonstrating the unpredictability of any natural language, the German philosopher and logicist Frege (cit. Fromkin, 2000) mentioned that:

It is astonishing what language can do. With a few syllables it can express an incalculable number of thoughts, so that even a thought grasped by a terrestrial being for the very first time can be put into a form of words which will be understood by someone to whom the thought is entirely new. This would be impossible, were we not able to distinguish parts in the thought corresponding to the parts of a sentence, so that the structure of the sentence serves as an image of the thought. (pp. 374-375)

According to Frege (cit. Fromkin 2000, p. 375), the understanding of a sentence takes place from the comprehension of its parts and their combination within the structure of a sentence, enabling to recognise the meaning of the familiar elements and the usual ways of combining them in sentences that have never been read or heard before.

Therefore, the principle of semantic compositionality consists of the process of progressive construction of meanings from the morpheme to the sentence itself and of the relationship that these meanings establish among themselves. However, this principle is not always respected in all linguistic constructions realised by speakers, as in the case of collocations, idiomatic expressions or proverbs, since their interpretation may not depend on the meaning of their parts. These expressions are hardly ever compositional, because their constituents are not real semantic elements, they are not relevant for the global meaning of the expression or their meaning cannot be inferred through a compositional process (Curse, 1999, p. 74).

Furthermore, Hudson (1999, pp. 273-276) presents another approach to compositionality, which encompasses linear compositionality, non-linear compositionality and non-compositionality. The first type of compositionality occurs in literal constructions, as stated above. The second refers to the cases in which the elements of the phrases are discontinuous, i.e. these are separated ones from the others by other words or phrases. An example would be: "O meu irmão, que foi para Erasmus na semana passada, perguntou por ti" [My brother, who went on Erasmus last week, asked for you.], in which the relative pronoun violates the compositional meaning of the sentence, because it interferes in the information conveyed and prevents understanding. Finally, non-compositionality is typically represented by figurative expressions, whose meaning cannot be reached from the sum of the signifiers of their parts.

Vilela (1994, pp. 9-11) upholds that the lexical knowledge of a language implies not only the knowledge of morphemes, simple and compound words and their respective meanings, but also of a number of fixed or set phrases, which are non-compositional. Their importance derives from the fact that they are extremely common in any natural language and represent their wealth, paradoxically more

metaphorical and figurative than literal, surpassing what native speakers believe their languages to be.

Generally speaking, these expressions tend to reach a certain degree of frozenness or syntactic irregularity, not normally allowing other combinations and preventing the order of their parts from being changed. Additionally, they frequently break the combination rules derived from semantic proprieties, possessing syntactic and semantic features of their own. Therefore, they must be understood as whole units with specific meanings and restrictions to their occurrence. (Fromkin & Rodman, 1993, pp. 197-198)

These features will inevitably bring about problems of polysemy (as well as difficulties for learners of foreign languages), because the different meanings of a word will be dependent on the senses it acquires when combined with other words. Consider the following examples of the Portuguese figurative use of colours: “tapete vermelho” [red carpet], meaning to give someone a special treatment due to social status; “período negro” [black time], which means a time filled with difficulties; “fumo branco” [white smoke], which represents a moment for peace or when a decision has been made; “vida cor de rosa” [pink life] that denotes that someone has lived a perfect life, out of the real world. Some of the significances acquired by the colours are definitely culturally-bound, whereas others will be non-conventional uses that do not represent visual attributes, but rather random and arbitrary lexical associations (Freitas, Santos & Silva, 2011, p. 3).

Although the existence of a certain degree of frozenness in language is a common characteristic of phraseological expressions, it does not necessarily imply idiomaticity. In the words of Iriarte Sanromán (2001, p. 25), the more or less fixed expressions of a language are generally known as phrases and they correspond to specific sequences learnt by heart, lexicalised phrases or lexical combinatory patterns. This range of combinations is then understood by speakers as words, including everything in the spectrum from collocations to idiomatic expressions (idem, p. 28)

It is striking what Melčuk (1998) upholds that “PEOPLE SPEAK IN SET PHRASES – rather than in separate words; hence the importance of set phrases” (p. 23), which is emphasised further by the fact that phrases in any language “outnumber words roughly ten to one” (p. 24).

Lexical combinatorics or lexical co-occurrence consists of the capacity for lexical units to combine themselves into phrases, i.e. syntactic and lexical expressions, and to convey a certain meaning, based on the principle of structuralist linguistics, according to which linguistic units never work as separate phenomena, but rather establish a relation of interdependence within a whole which is called a structure. This co-occurrence may be free or restricted: it is free when this combination is done following the grammatical rules of a language (free phrases), whereas it is restricted when the combination occurs with two or three lexemes in accordance

with semantic and syntactic rules and some kind of purely lexical restriction (set phrases or phrasemes) (Iriarte Sanromán, 2001, p. 117).

For Melčuk (1995, p. 175), a free phrase can be replaced by another synonymic lexical expression and its signifier is understood out of the sum of all the signifiers. On the other hand, restricted lexical combinations can be divided into pragmatic phrasemes or pragmathemes and semantic phrasemes, the latter also encompassing full phrasemes or idiomatic expressions, semi-phrasemes or collocations and quasi-phrasemes, which we shall develop further below.

Zgusta (1971, pp. 142-151) also discusses the issue of restricted combinations, presenting a number of criteria for distinguishing them from free combinations: in the former phrases substitution is impossible, as well as the addition of other words in most cases; the meaning of the whole is non-compositional (not deriving from the meaning of the single constituent parts); a synonym or near-synonym may exist, consisting of only one word; a small group of expressions may be related and have an analogous status; a one-word equivalent in a foreign language may suggest that it is a multiword lexical word; and they may show special formal and grammatical properties, like the absence of articles. Nevertheless, even conforming to most of these criteria, there are still combinations of words that are not set phrases, because they do not perform the same syntactic and onomasiological function as a morphologically simple unit at both syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels.

From the standpoint of Zgusta (1971, pp. 154-155), the absence of articles is of crucial importance to distinguish between multiword lexical units (mostly idiomatic expressions) from other set groups of words, such as proverbs, sayings, quotations, and similar fossilised or petrified expressions. Moreover, there are different degrees of setness or of restrictions that can be extremely useful when comparing examples such as “caixa leve” [light box] or “jantar leve” [light supper], since, in the latter, the combinatory possibilities are more restricted, not to mention also metaphorical. Thus, the more severe the restrictions imposed on word combinations are, the more “set” (frozen or fossilised) these combinations are.

Returning to the concept of semantic phrasemes by Melčuk (1995, p. 181), these are the combination of two or more lexemes, in which the overall meaning is different from the sum of their meanings, thus non-compositional. The meaning in a semantic phraseme is freely chosen, because it is not imposed by the situation, contrary to what occurs with pragmatic phrasemes. The lexical selection of their meaning is partially or totally limited, even if it may be a regular construction in morphological and syntactic terms.

Semantic phrasemes are subdivided into full phrasemes or idiomatic expressions, semi-phrasemes or collocations and quasi-phrasemes. According to Alonso Ramos (1993, p. 182), full phrasemes are characterised by a group of features: they are semantically non-compositional and coherent (their elements are mutually required); they resist formal variation; they can be ambiguous and bring about problems

when they are to be approached in light of linguistic models. The meaning of full phrasemes is represented as 'AB' = 'C', in accordance with Mel'čuk's terminology.

The meaning of semi-phrasemes or collocations, for Mel'čuk (1995, p. 46), does not match the sum of the meanings of their elements, which are not freely selected. Because of this, they are not free combinations of lexemes, but frequent, probable, preferential or usual combinations of lexemes (namely [noun + adjective] or [verb + noun]), as well as apparently free combinations created according to the rules of a language where some type of lexical restriction determined by these rules is to be found.

Nevertheless, frequency should be neither the only nor the most important criterion for the identification of collocations, others should also be considered. Examples of Portuguese collocations are as follows: "colocar/ pôr uma questão" [ask/ pose a question]; "dar/pedir desculpas" [provide an excuse/ apologise]; "ódio mortal" [blind hatred]; "apertar o casaco" [button up one's jacket] (Iriarte Sanromán, 2001, pp. 17-18). The meaning of collocations thus corresponds to the equation 'AB' = 'AC'.

The third type consists of quasi-phrasemes which preserve the meaning of the lexemes that make them up, plus an additional sense that is not deduced from the sum of their elements, thus creating a lexicalised whole in the same way idiomatic expressions do – e.g. "começar uma família" (start a family); "dar o peito" (give the breast). Their meaning amounts to the 'AB' = 'ABC' (Mel'čuk, 1995, p. 46).

Finally, pragmatic phrasemes or pragmathemes are structures in which "the choice of meaning is reduced to one possibility (or a few) and so is the choice of form" (Mel'čuk, 1995, p. 178), i.e. their meaning cannot be replaced by any other meaning. Their meaning is transparent and their form regular, but no equivalent or synonym can be used: "consumir de preferência antes de" [best before + date] for yoghurt cartons cannot be replaced by "\*a ser consumido antes" [to be consumed before] or "\*não usar depois de" [do not use after], because it is simply not the way it is used and it would not sound native or idiomatic.

Pragmatic phrasemes comprise sayings, proverbs and speech formulae. The most important type are routine formulae, also known as conversational formulae or those used to realise speech acts, which are viewed as units for habitual and stereotypical social interaction that accomplish specific functions in ritualised situations. These formulae include: discourse formulae, such as those for opening and closing conversations or for turn-taking; and psycho-social formulae that comprehend attitudinal-expressive, attitudinal-commissive, attitudinal-directive, assertive, ritual and miscellaneous formulae (Corpas Pastor, 1995, pp. 354-378)

Table 1 attempts to systematise the several types of phrasemes or set phrases, according to Mel'čuk's terminology.

Type of phraseme		Features
1. Pragmatic phrasemes or pragmathemes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transparent meaning</li> <li>• regular and restricted form (one form or very few)</li> <li>• no equivalent or synonym, but paraphrase is possible</li> </ul>
2. Semantic phrasemes	• Full phraseme or idiom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• semantic phraseme</li> <li>• semantically non-compositional</li> <li>• do not allow lexical variation</li> <li>• ambiguous</li> </ul>
	• Semi-phraseme or collocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• semantic phraseme</li> <li>• non-compositional meaning</li> <li>• not free combinations of lexemes</li> <li>• frequent, probable, preferential or usual combinations of lexemes</li> </ul>
	• Quasi-phraseme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• semantic phraseme</li> <li>• compositional meaning</li> <li>• additional meaning deduced from the whole</li> </ul>

Table 1: Mel'čuk's classification of phrasemes.

In conclusion, as shown above, most authors consider it complex to distinguish between the different levels of setness of frozenness, despite some degree of agreement on the following:

- set phrases break lexical combination rules;
- they have their own semantic and syntactic properties;
- they function as whole, complete units of meaning;
- and they present restrictions in their occurrence.

Apart from setness, there is another important feature that defines set phrases – idiomaticity. There are different levels of idiomaticity that are not considered as such by all groups of scholars, as the case of sayings, proverbs, phrasal and prepositional verbs, tournure idioms, binomials, frozen similes, ungrammatical, but generally accepted expressions, logical connective prepositional phrases, phrasal compounds, incorporating verb idioms, and formula expressions (Strässler, 1982, pp. 11, 15-16).

By approaching idioms from a pragmatic standpoint, Strässler (cit. Fernando, 1996) refers to the social implications of their use, which depends on a considerable number of social variables, such as social status, age, education and profession of their users. "When using an idiom, the speaker conveys more information than its semantic content (...) [establishing] a social hierarchy or [testing] the hearer's opinion in this matter" (p. 14), because s/he makes use of idioms in a deictic manner.

Their deictic use comprises first person idioms, second person idioms and third person idioms. The first and second person idioms are usually marked; they are the social deixis, because they allow for the establishment of social relationships – the first person idioms are used among people of the same social status, but avoided

by dominant speakers, and the second person idioms are only accepted among peers. Finally, the third person idioms are described as being non-marked and neutral and bear no restrictions to speakers of different social status. (Strässler cit. Fernando, 1996, pp. 14-15)

Therefore, idioms work as status markers and their use in conversation consists of a way of showing membership – this is another difference of idioms towards their literal counterparts, which don't convey this pragmatic role (Strässler cit. Fernando, 1996, pp. 14-15). The same occurs with pragmatic phrasemes, in which proverbs and sayings are included, since they perform a social function dependent on habitual and stereotypical interaction, as mentioned above.

In conclusion, the presentation of these several linguistic approaches to word combinations emphasise the complexity of this issue and the terminological inconsistency.

Nevertheless, the following features can be summed up:

- set phrases have at least two lexical independent elements;
- they bear a high degree of semantic opacity, i.e. they are non-compositional by nature;
- they are non-literal and often metaphorical and idiomatic, i.e. showing semantic irregularity;
- they enable the creation of mental images;
- they function as complete, unbreakable units;
- they are fixed, frozen or crystallised sequences, i.e. they bear syntactic irregularity;
- they are exocentric and demotivated constructions;
- they are institutionalised;
- they have a limited extension.

### A note on proverbs, adages and similar expressions

According to Pinto (1999, pp. 160-161), common sense consists of an ordinary way of thinking that comprises a body of shared maxims and beliefs, which may be more relativist or more universalist, and is explicitly articulated with proverbs, dicta, maxims, allegories and fables. The beliefs they convey can incorporate guidelines for behaviour, causal generalisations, but most demonstrate such broad knowledge that they cannot guide specific situations.

Costa Alves (2006, p. 20) declares that proverbs are expressions that reveal the numerous synonyms a natural language possess and a means to postulate the ancient practice of synthesising centuries of phenomena and behaviour observations. These are stereotypical expressions that represent a certain moment in the history of a language, the so-called paremiological shared knowledge of a community that

turned into one of the basis for discursive reasoning, i.e. for argumentative purposes and the reaching of a conclusion (Anscombe, 1997, p. 46).

According to Funk & Funk (2009, p. 43), proverbs are typically made up of several words, building a full autonomous sentence as well as brief and context-independent. The fact that proverbs correspond to a sentence becomes one of the features that allow for the distinction between proverbs and idiomatic expressions, which do not share the same semantic and syntactic characteristics, even though they are both instances of fixed language. Following up on this issue, Anscombe (1997, p. 46) highlights that most proverbs are neither idiomatic (and thus not always metaphorical) nor fixed phrases, but rather encoded expressions that enable the identification of their function.

Nonetheless, Jorge (2009, pp. 120, 124) points out that both idiomatic expressions and proverbs share common features, namely lexicality, distributional restrictions, syntactic restrictions, non-compositional interpretation and anonymous nature. Lexicality is part of all structures that are comprised by the term 'expressions', but their degree of lexicalisation may vary from the semantic and syntactic standpoints. Similarly to idiomatic expressions, proverbs possess formal and textual components, as well as a strong degree of fixedness, prohibiting the moving, substitution or insertion of elements. Their expressive strength arises from the fact that it translates oral tradition of a community and holds its cultural heritage.

Apart from the word proverb, there are others worth mentioning, which are often thought of as synonymous, though several authors clearly distinguish among them. These are, for example, adage (which comes from the Latin "adagium", meaning to say or to speak), dictum, aphorism, refrain or saying that Anscombe (1997, p. 45) defines as being cases of autonomous expressions with no known author. On the one hand, proverbs are universal, because of being public and part of the heritage of the community, though more prestigious, whereas adages and refrains are popular for being typical of the elderly and villains. However, it is not our intention to discuss this issue in-depth, since it is not the focus of this paper. It shall be referred to whenever considered necessary.

Generally speaking, Costa Alves (2006, pp. 17-18) considers the bulk of these expressions attract much prejudice and contempt, based on the artificial dichotomy between popular knowledge and aureate knowledge, as if adages were to be restricted to pre-historical periods. However, the accuracy of the syntheses provided by centuries of observations and orally registered come out as the most elegant and beautiful words reflecting human actions. Batalha (cit. Costa Alves 2006, p. 20) emphasises this idea, referring to the fact that proverbs are classical sentences, sanctioned by use or antiquity and often gathered from religious and philosophical collections.

The first collections of Portuguese popular sayings were carried out by Fathers Bento Pereira and António Delicado in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but invariably focused

on proverbs of national use, which meant that those of local or regional use were systematically neglected by missionary efforts. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, almanacs were of the utmost importance for the dissemination of proverbs. Although these almanacs were considered a minor genre, because they were a manifestation of oral literature, they expressed themselves in a non-traditional way, which was the written form, contributing to their lexicalisation. In terms of weather prediction, the “lunários” or “folhinhas de lua” (lunar calendars) maintained their ubiquitous presence until quite recently: “Homens fazem o almanaque e Deus manda o tempo” [men make the almanacs, God sends the weather] (Costa Alves 2006, p. 21).

Costa Alves (2006, pp. 22, 25) states that proverb collections are an open book of dozens of generations that introduced their remarks and experiences resulting from social change into these sayings, in the way Galileo upheld: by means of observation and deduction. In proverbs and adages, the metaphor of the weather is also the metaphor of history.

In the view of Peixoto (in Costa Alves, 2006, p. 12), proverbs are a manifestation of acculturation and of the observation of the real world and of human actions; they are a synthesis of the accumulation and sedimentation of intelligence, which was able to reflect upon the phenomenology of reality, by filtering its essence, and upon the attitudes of man, by enabling its characterisation.

For Peixoto (in Costa Alves, 2006, pp. 12-13), meteorological adages or dicta are a particular type of pragmatic phrase(me)s that humankind devised and gathered due to the inevitability of having to fight against weather conditions to survive. Man had to observe nature in a much more intense way than nowadays. The experiences and experiments they went through for centuries materialised into adages. With the advent of scientific positivism, meteorology developed into a science with the application of the laws of physics and chemistry to the natural system, as well as its mathematisation, and weather observations turned into measurements by means of advanced technological equipment. The wisdom contained in proverbs was thereafter logically and quantitatively justified.

According to Anscombe (1997, p. 45), meteorological adages are different from most sayings, because they do not represent a doctrine or a moral philosophy treaty; they teach a technique, know-how based on wide experience. They are dicta that comprise either weather observations, and thus enable weather prediction, or rules of action. Due to the fact that they are stereotypical and habitual expressions, they become maxims and provide objective and deductive rules to apply to social interaction and to which there are no alternatives.

### Portuguese meteorological adages

The proverb in the title of this paper, “Nove meses de inverno e três de inferno”<sup>1</sup> [nine months of winter, three of scorching hell], is representative of a climatic anomaly that occurred between 1550 and 1700 at the north hemispheric scale, named the

Little Ice Age. Various authors alternatively put forth the period from 1430 to 1850, defending that this ice age also spread to the rest of the planet. Evidence of this ice age is, for example, the Brueghel’s paintings of frozen rivers in the harsh winter of 1564-1565 in Flanders, the fact that the Thames froze for eleven times during the 17th century, or that the Greenland was blocked for several summers, 1,000 years after it had been called the “green land” by the Vikings when another climatic anomaly was under way, the Little Climatic Optimum (Costa Alves, 2006, p. 32).

The effects of this little ice age should be investigated in inland Portugal, namely in mountainous regions such as Trás-os-Montes and Beira Interior, where long and harsh winters were documented, as well as scorching hot summers. The winters would have resulted from the many and long situations of blocking anticyclones (or blocking highs) in Central Europe, and the summers from frequent situations of instability in the circulation at the low levels of troposphere in the Peninsula. Therefore, it is believed that the Portuguese proverb was originated due to this phenomenon, as well as the Spanish equivalents “Castilla, ocho meses de invierno y cuatro de inferno” and “En Madrid, nueve meses de invierno y tres de inferno”. There are also two other noteworthy adages related to this Little Ice Age, which is “Pelos Santos, neve pelos cantos” [At the Saints (1st November), snow in all corners] and “Pelo Santo André, neve nos pés” [At Saint Andrew (30th November), snow at your feet] (Costa Alves, p. 33).

These harsh winters were also accompanied by thick layers of frost, called “geada” in Portuguese, which started as early as September and continued up to May and of which farmers were terrified. This weather feature is still present in Trás-os-Montes and other regions in Portugal nowadays, being responsible for the destruction of many crops, which is shown by two other popular sayings: “Novembro à porta, geada na horta” [November at the door, frost in the vegetable garden] and “Frio de abril come renovas aos mil” [Cold in April eats seedlings at the thousands] (Costa Alves, p. 48).

According to Costa Alves (2006, pp. 49-50), it is striking the equivalence between snow and frost as far as popular sayings are concerned, since they appear interchangeably in several: “Inverno com nevão, ano de pão” [winter with snow, year with bread] or “Ano geado, pão dobrado” [frosted year, double the bread] or “Folga o trigo debaixo da neve como a ovelha debaixo da pele” [wheat rests under the snow as the sheep under their wool].

The above-mentioned adages are mainly related to weather prediction in view of agricultural works. They tend to summarise information gathered from previous generations, condensing what is to be known in terms of the protection of crops, what should and should not be done in specific periods of the year in terms of farming and what is to be expected in each of the months of the year, as shall be demonstrated below.<sup>3</sup>

Beginning with January, there are many combinations of February or March with the first month of the year; however, some adages have been found containing advice about January, such as the following “Bom ano de janeiro faz o ano galhofeiro” [a good year in January makes the year a walk in the park]; “Água de janeiro traz azeite ao olival, vinho ao lagar e palha ao palheiro” [water in January brings olive oil to the olive grove, wine to the wine press and fodder to the barn]; “Chuva de janeiro, cada gota vale dinheiro” [rain in January, each drop is worth money]. But if no rain falls and the sun comes out, then popular wisdom foresees that a hot January will bring the devil in its womb – “Janeiro quente traz o diabo no ventre”.

Concerning February, this month is considered as a crucial month for the success of the remaining year, plenty of agricultural and cattle-related tasks: “A decrua em fevereiro faz o dono cavalheiro” [ploughing in February makes the owner a gentleman]. Despite being the shortest month of the year, it is usually a stormy month – “Eu sou o mês dos temporais, destruo casas e rebento portais” [I am the month of storms, I destroy houses and blow up gateways] – and rain as well as snow should be expected and welcome – “Neve que em fevereiro cai das serras, poupa um carro de estrume às vossas terras” [snow that in February falls from the mountains will spare a cart of manure to your lands]; “Quando não chove em Fevereiro, nem bom prado, nem bom lameiro, nem bom corno de carneiro” [when it does not rain in February, neither good grassland/pasture, nor good wetland, nor good ram’s horn]; “Ao fevereiro e ao rapaz perdoa-se tudo quanto faz, contanto que o fevereiro não seja secalhão e o rapaz ladrão” [one forgives everything to February and to the boy, as long as the former is not dry and the latter is not a thief].

February is also closely connected to January for they are the keys for a good or bad year – “Os bons dias de janeiro vêm-se a pagar em fevereiro” [the good days of January will be paid for in February] and “Se o inverno não faz o seu dever em janeiro, fa-lo-á em fevereiro” [If winter does not do its job in January, it will do so in February] – and if February does not perform what is expected, there is still the hopeful March – “Aí vem o meu irmão março que fará o que eu não faço” [there comes my brother March that shall do what I have not done] or “Lá vem o meu irmão março que não deixará ovelha sem farrapo, nem o pastor se for fraco” [there comes my brother March that shall not leave any sheep without a rag nor the shepherd weak].

This last brother of February’s tends to be an unpredictable month and one of the keys for a good farming year. Costa Alves (2006, p. 83) states that it should not be taken seriously for it has many faces, it is simply “Março, marçagão”, in which the second word is March, to which a nasal diphthong was added as a suffix, with the meaning of big. “Março, marçagão” thus means big March, and will be the basis for the rhymes in the following adages. There are many variants of this proverb, some of which we selected: “Em março, de manhã pinga a telha e à tarde sai a abelha” [in March, a drop from the roof during the morning and the bee comes out

in the afternoon]; “Março, marçagão, de manhã inverno, de tarde verão” [March, big March, in the morning winter, in the afternoon summer]; “Março, marçagão, de manhã cara de cão, ao meio dia cara de rainha, à tarde cara de fuinha e à noite corta como a foicinha” (Fernandes & Parafita, 2007), [March, big March, in the morning face like a dog, at noon the face of a queen, in the afternoon the face of a weasel and at night it cuts like a sickle]; “Março virado de rabo é pior que o diabo” [March with its bottom up is worse than the devil]. Also in March, farmers are supposed to work the fields, as shown in the proverb “Em março, espetam-se as rocas e sacham-se as hortas” [in March, put down the spindle and plough the vegetable gardens].

In April, the length of the days is longer than the nights and the average rainfall remains high especially in northern coastal Portugal, which accounts for the understanding that “Não há mês mais irritado do que abril zangado” [there is no angrier month than belligerent April], as well as the many variations of the proverb “Abril, águas mil” [April, a thousand waters], an example being “Abril, águas mil que caibam num barril ou coadas por um funil” [April, a thousand waters that fit a barrel or are sieved by a funnel]. For instance, in Oporto the average number of rainy days in April is 14, when compared to the ones in Algarve, which are only 6. This rainfall is precious for agriculture, because “Águas que no verão hão-de regar, em abril hão-de ficar” [water that in the summer will water in April have fallen]. Therefore, the piece of advice that states that “Sol de abril, abre a mão e deixa-o ir” [April’s sun, open your hand and let it go]; otherwise, “Nódoa de abril não há mês que a tire” [stain in April there is no month that can take out], that is the harm done in April for lack of water no other month can prevent.

An interesting fact that Costa Alves (p. 86) mentions is that rain has began to be faced by urban people as a burden, especially that which falls in the spring, despite the saying that goes “Nunca passou por mau tempo a chuva de primavera” [spring rain has never understood as bad weather], because after all “Abril frio e molhado enche o celeiro e farta o gado” [cold and rainy April will fill up the barn and fed the cattle], “Abril chuvoso, maio ventoso, fazem o ano formoso” [rainy April and windy May make the year gay], “Abril e maio são as chaves de todo o ano” [April and May are the keys to the whole year] and also “Do pão te hei-de contar, que em abril não há-de estar nascido nem por semear” [let me give you a word about bread that shall not be born in April nor unsowed].

As stated above, May is yet another of the keys of the farming year, mainly because it brings rain and this enables the development of crops, especially grain: “Maio chuvoso torna o ano formoso” [rainy May makes the year gay]; “Maio faz o pão e agosto o milho” [May makes the bread and August the corn fields]; “Maio frio, junho quente, bom pão, vinho valente” [cold May and hot June, good bread and strong wine]; Maio hortelão, muita palha e pouco pão [May with vegetables, much fodder and little bread].

In June, farmers should anticipate good weather and enough heat to develop their crops: “Junho quente, julho ardente” [hot June, boiling July] and “Quem em Junho não descansa, enche a bolsa e farta a pança” [those who do not rest in June shall fill up their purses and their bellies]. Rain is the worst that can happen in this month and adages clearly show it: “Água de S. João tira o vinho e não dá pão” [water in Saint John (23rd June) takes the wine away and yields no bread]; “Chuva em Junho, mordedura de víbora” [rain in June, snake’s bite].

July is the month of hard work in terms of agriculture, because “Em julho tudo farás, só o teu verde não ceifarás” [in July you shall do everything, except reaping your grains].

Both August and September are expected to be hot months, according to the proverb “Corra o ano como for, haja em agosto e setembro calor” [be that as it may, let there be heat in August and September]. An interesting proverb worth mentioning is “Couves em agosto, tumba à porta” [cabbages in August, tomb at the door] or “Quem quer ver um homem morto, dê-lhe berças em agosto” [those who want to see a man dead give him cabbages in August], meaning that cabbages are not supposed to be harvested in August, because they are not good enough.

Regarding September, popular wisdom states that it is a scorching hot month, sometimes exceeding the temperature of June “Setembro ou seca as fontes, ou leva açudes e pontes” [September either dries the springs or takes the dykes and bridges away] and “Em setembro ardem os montes e secam as fontes” [In September, hills will burn and springs will dry up]. The heat in September often continues throughout the beginning of October, giving rise to the adages “Em agosto secam os montes, em setembro as fontes e em outubro seca tudo” [in August the hills dry up, in September the springs and in October everything withers] or “Agosto madura, setembro derruba e outubro seca tudo” [August ripens, September throws down and October dries everything]. However, September is a highly important month for farming chores: “Em setembro, planta, colhe e cava” [in September, sow, harvest and dig up], because “Setembro é o maio do outono” [September is the May of autumn].

When October arrives, sensibility is requested as shown in “Em outubro, não fies só lã; recolhe o teu milho e o teu feijão, senão de inverno tens a barriga em vão” [in October, do not only spin wool, gather your corn and your beans; otherwise, in winter your tummy will be empty] and in “Em outubro sê prudente; guarda pão, guarda semente” [in October, be prudent; save your bread and save your seed].

November experiences what is called in Portugal, Spain and France the summer of Saint Martin, although in the case of the British this phenomenon occurs around the 18th October, known as St Luke’s Little Summer. Therefore, “Novembro é quente no começo e frio no fim” [November is hot at the beginning and cold at the end] and “No dia de S. Martinho, lume, castanhas e vinho” [on Saint Martin’s Day, bonfires, chestnuts and wine].

Costa Alves (pp. 94-95) refers that the meteorological explanation for this late summer is the temporary migration of the Azores High in the direction of the northeast of the Peninsula and part of France, thus establishing a block to the circulation from the west. Due to this similarity of weather conditions, some French and Spanish adages should be also mentioned: “À la Toussaint commence l’été de la Saint-Martin”; “Pour la Saint-Martin, tue ton porc et goûte ton vin”; “Por San Martino, el invierno viene de camino; si le dicen detente, llega por San Clemente; y aunque venga retrasado, por San Andrés ya ha llegado”. In spite of this hot spell, November is portrayed as indispensable for later farming success: “Cava fundo em novembro para plantares em janeiro” [Dig deep in November to sow in January].

The last month of the year is for farmers to rest, so as to recover strengths for what is to come after the beginning of the new year: “Em dezembro descansa, em janeiro trabalha” [in December rest, in January work]; “Dezembro diz: olha que o governo está na boca do saco; até Janeiro, qualquer burro passa o regueiro mas para a frente tem de ser forte e valente. Se não tens governo, depois arreganhas o dente” [December says: beware that make do is at the mouth of the bag; until January any donkey passes by the trench, but after that one has to be strong and brave; if you have make do, then you shall grin your teeth].

With a view to summarising the main tasks for each month of the year, one last proverb will be presented: “Janeiro gear, fevereiro chover, março encanar, abril espigar, maio engrandecer, junho aceifar, julho debulhar, agosto engravelar, setembro vindimar, outubro revolver, novembro semear, dezembro nasceu Deus para nos salvar” [January frosting, February raining, March channelling, April growing, May developing, June reaping, July threshing, August storing, September harvesting the grapes, October ploughing, November sowing, December God was born to save us].

## Conclusion

The presentation of a selection of Portuguese meteorological adages, which function as guidelines for farming activities developed throughout the year, allowed us to present not only the main characteristics that are common to various instances of fixed language, but also demonstrate how important these shared maxims and beliefs become for the cultural heritage of a community, despite the traditional prejudice towards oral traditions.

Paremiological knowledge includes proverbs, adages, dicta, refrains, sayings and the like that share with other set phrases a group of features, namely lexicalisation, non-compositionality, frozenness and often idiomaticity, and an autonomous nature. Based on Mel’uk’s classification, idiomatic expressions or collocations are examples of semantic phrasemes, whose meaning is freely-chosen, and proverbs and adages are pragmatic phrasemes, because their meaning is demanded by the particular communicative situation. Despite various (often) contradictory approaches to these multiword lexical units, we uphold that these instances of fixed language are part

of the same group and have varying degrees of frozenness and idiomaticity: ones being more idiomatic, whereas others are more literal; and some are characterised by the existence of variants, while others do not allow any variation.

Furthermore, the set expressions we focused on throughout this paper are part of a group of sayings used in habitual stereotypical social interaction, which can encompass guidelines for behaviour (be it religious or philosophical) or causal generalisations, enabling discursive reasoning. On the one hand, proverbs are said to be more public and universal and also more prestigious, whereas, on the other, adages and refrains are believed to be more popular and subject to a less wide use by the several groups of a community. This distinction is important for the group of classical sentences we chose to approach, since meteorological adages are typical of rural contexts and are especially used among older people. These adages are the result of centuries of weather observation and subsequent deductions that were summarised and condensed in the shape of maxims. Their purpose was to fight adverse weather conditions and thus enable communities to survive by teaching them how to interpret the weather and adapt agriculture accordingly, as well as teach future generations the necessary farming techniques. With a view to disseminating this knowledge, almanacs and lunar calendar broke the chains of traditional oral transmission and adopted the written form, allowing for this knowledge to disseminate among communities.

#### Endnotes

- 1) All Portuguese adages will be literally translated into English.
- 2) "Paremia" is the Greek word for the Latin "proverbium", thus having led to the creation of the name paremiology to mean the study of proverbs and paremiography to refer to the collecting of proverbs.
- 3) From this point onwards, all adages presented were taken from Costa Alves (2006), as well as and their explanations, unless stated.

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