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# As lost as a pun in a corpus: an investigation into noncanonical phraseological occurrences in large corpora and translation

Mais perdido que trocadilho num *corpus*: estudo de ocorrências fraseológicas não-canônicas em grandes corpora e tradução

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**Abstract:** Although it might appear contradictory to investigate noncanonical phraseological combinations in corpora, corpus linguistics research has revealed that they exceed canonical forms in number (PHILIP 2008). This paper intends to discuss the idea of fixedness by analyzing variant forms of idioms, and if they qualify as wordplay. The Web, our data source, is employed for collecting such noncanonical occurrences in both English and Portuguese using keywords on the Google Search Engine. Our discussion mainly draws on studies relating to fixed phrases (KJELLMER 1991; GRANGER & PAQUOT 2008; TAGNIN 2013); phraseological skeletons (RENOUF & SINCLAIR 1991; PHILIP 2008), and idiom transformations (VEISBERGS 1997; BARTA 2005). Due attention is also given to search queries of nonstandard forms of fixed expressions in corpora (PHILIP 2008), and the translation of idiom-based wordplay (VEISBERGS 1997; BREZOLIN 2020).

**Keywords:** Corpus Linguistics; Non-canonical phraseology; Wordplay; Translation.

**Resumo:** Embora possa parecer contraditório investigar combinações fraseológicas não-canônicas em *corpora*, pesquisas baseadas em linguística de *corpus* revelam que formas não-padrão excedem as formas canônicas (PHILIP 2008). Este artigo discute a ideia de fixidez, analisando variações de unidades fraseológicas, e se resultam em jogos de palavras. A Web é usada para a recolha de tais ocorrências não-canônicas em inglês e português por intermédio de palavras-chave no Motor de Busca Google. Nossa discussão nutre-se principalmente de estudos relacionados a expressões fixas (KJELLMER 1991; GRANGER & PAQUOT 2008; TAGNIN 2013); esqueletos fraseológicos (RENOUF & SINCLAIR 1991; PHILIP 2008), e transformações fraseológicas (VEISBERGS 1997; BARTA 2005). Procedimentos de busca de formas não-canônicas em corpora e a tradução de jogos de palavras fraseológicos (VEISBERGS 1997; BREZOLIN 2020) também receberão a devida atenção.

**Palavras-chave:** Linguística de *corpus*; Fraseologia não-canônica; Jogo de palavras; Tradução.

# 1. Introduction

Investigating noncanonical phraseological occurrences in corpora might at first appear contradictory since phraseology has put in a great deal of effort into identifying canonical forms, and corpus linguistics has sought to encounter regularity and consistency of fixed, recurrent combinations (PHILIP 2008); however, “corpus linguists have consistently noticed that canonical forms are not particularly common in language corpora and, crucially, they tend to be outnumbered by noncanonical variants and exploitations” (PHILIP 2008: 95). Besides, it is widely accepted that patterns governing idiom transformations are unpredictable, and normally encountered by chance, making their retrieval a hard task, unless they happen to appear “in newspaper and advertising language” (VEISBERGS 1997: 95), in very conspicuous ways.

PHILIP (1998: 106), however, seems to be more optimistic by stating that, although variant forms of fixed expressions are unpredictable, they “can be found in corpora by following quite simple procedures”, discussed further on. Based on such enticing prospects, this paper intends to verify if certain search queries can retrieve variant forms of fixed expressions, in English and Portuguese, on the Web. Occurrences will be analyzed in reference to studies on fixed phrases (KJELLMER 1991; GRANGER; PAQUOT 2008; TAGNIN 2013); phraseological skeletons (RENOUF; SINCLAIR 1991; PHILIP 2008), and idiom transformations (VEISBERGS 1997). Special attention is given to structural idiom transformations to verify if they constitute wordplay, and how they can be translated.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Before going into the aspects involved in generating wordplay, it is important to define phraseologism, and Gries’ definition is a useful starting point:

the co-occurrence of a form or a lemma of a lexical item and one or more additional linguistic elements of various kinds which functions as one semantic unit in a clause or a sentence and whose frequency

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of co-occurrence are larger than expected on the basis of chance (2008: 3).

It can be inferred, then, that phraseologisms refer to diverse linguistic phenomena comprising a wide range of combinations that are fixed and idiomatic. According to Kjellmer:

A large part of our mental lexicon consists of combinations of words that customarily co-occur. The occurrence of one of the words in such a combination can be said to predict the occurrence of the other(s). (1991: 112)

Accordingly, this implies that, in the real world, speakers of a language tend to “arrange words in groups” and “use the same arrangement whenever the need arises rather than to rearrange the words or to choose alternative ways of expression” (1991: 114), and this tendency of making “use of chunks of prefabricated matter” allows speakers of a language “to move swiftly through the discourse, and [...] as listeners we expect other speakers to behave in the same way” (KJELLMER 1991: 123). To a certain extent, this holds true since users of a language can resort to different types of “fixed” combinations, or phrasemes (GRANGER; PAQUOT 2008), or consecrated expressions (TAGNIN 2013).

Thus, first impressions might suggest that such arrangements of words or phraseologisms are quite fixed, implying regularity and recurrence. SINCLAIR, however, by providing evidence from corpus data, demonstrates that the “so-called ‘fixed phrases’ are not in fact fixed” (1996 apud PHILIP 2008: 96, emphasis in original).

Philip (2008) agrees by adding that “canonical forms often include grammatical elements which inflect in text, and they may also have alternative lexical realizations”, and illustrates this with the generic term *phraseological skeletons*. To Philip, the “core components of a phraseological unit constitute its skeleton, which is fleshed out by elements with a less central role in creating and maintaining the structure of a phraseological form” (p. 97). This means that, although certain combinations, at first sight, appear to be unalterable, they are in fact susceptible to different types and degrees of variation.

According to Veisbergs, some variations of phraseological units<sup>1</sup> can be understood as manipulations carried out by an author “to produce stylistic effect by creating a contrast with the ‘normal’ reading of the idiom in its unchanged form and so defeating the reader’s or the listener’s expectation” (1997: 157, emphasis in original). The motivated and expressive intention of modifying the standard form of an idiom normally implies creating wordplay, producing an effect of surprise (KJELLMER 1991), of irony and humor (PHILIP 2008), as well as of humor and criticism (BREZOLIN 2020), for instance.

In this paper, two types of phraseologisms, a simile and an idiom, in English and their counterparts in Portuguese, have been chosen for analysis (Figure 1):

Figure 1. Phraseologisms in English and Portuguese selected for analysis

	English	Portuguese
Simile	(1) as lost as a duck in the desert	(2) <i>mais perdido que cego em tiroteio</i> (as lost as a blind man in a shoot-out) <sup>2</sup>
Idiom	(3) to kill two birds with one stone	(4) <i>matar dois coelhos de/com uma cajadada só</i> (to kill two rabbits with only one blow)

According to Granger & Paquot (2008: 43):

similes are “sequences of words that function as stereotyped comparisons. They typically consist of sequences following the frames ‘as ADJ as (DET) NOUN’ and ‘VERB like a NOUN’. Examples: *as old as the hills*, *to swear like a trooper*”, and

idioms refer to “phrasemes that are constructed around a verbal nucleus. Idioms are characterized by their semantic non-compositionality, which can be the result of a metaphorical process. Lack of flexibility and marked syntax are further indications of their idiomatic status. Examples: *to spill the beans*, *to let the cat out of the bag*, *to bark up the wrong tree*”.

<sup>1</sup> In the literature of phraseology, terms related to phraseological units abound such as collocations, idiomatic constructions, idioms, phrasemes, phraseological constructions, phraseologisms, set expressions, among others.

<sup>2</sup> From now on, examples in Portuguese are literally translated into English.

Each of the phraseologisms in one language represents its pragmatic correspondent in the other, used figuratively as, “to be deeply distracted, or to have lost focus on or attention of what is happening or what is being said”, and “to succeed in achieving two goals in a single action”; respectively. From the structural point of view, this selection reflects the intention of analyzing distinct constructions (within languages), and, from the semantic point of view, combinations with different degrees of idiomaticity: similes usually exhibit a more transparent meaning; idioms, on the other hand, have a more opaque meaning.

It is important to mention that, although phraseologism (1), as lost as a duck in the desert, was only found on the Web; phraseologism (2), *mais perdido que cego em tiroteio*, was only found in specialist dictionaries (BREZOLIN, ALLEGRO & MOBAID 2002, 2006), and phraseologisms (3), to kill two birds with one stone, and (4), *matar dois coelhos de com/uma cajadada só*, were found in both general and specialist dictionaries: THE FREE DICTIONARY (2020); MERRIAM-WEBSTER (2020), and THE COLLINS COBUILD DICTIONARY OF IDIOMS (1995); as well as AULETE (2020); MICHAELIS (2020), and CAMARGO & STEINBERG (1987); respectively, we have taken for granted that these phraseological occurrences represent canonical forms.

Thus, considering the selected phraseologisms as potential candidates for manipulations, we intend to verify how structures with differences within the language and with similarities across the languages behave in terms of variation and if transformed occurrences constitute wordplay.

We now return to wordplay. For Delabastita (1996: 128):

Wordplay is the general name for the various textual phenomenon in which structural features of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistics structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings.

Differently from most definitions, this does not include humor as the intended effect of a deviated use of language. For Veisbergs (1997: 159), however, “(t)he function of most wordplay is to create a comic effect and

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attract the attention of the reader or listener to a specific point in the text”. MOON (1998: 170), in a less emphatic manner, shares the idea that “the stylistic manipulation of the lexis (and semantics)” of fixed expressions and idioms is “perhaps to provide some sort of defamiliarization, and typically providing humour”. A similar opinion is shared by Arnaud, Maniez & Renner, who define wordplay as “the clever manipulation of the form of a language string or the use of polysemy resulting in an amusing effect” (2015: 136).

Although we are in line with them, we believe that any type of manipulation of the conventionalized use of a linguistic structure, which results in wordplay, is not primarily intended for causing a comic effect, but an initial effect of surprise, due to a construction that defeats the expectation of readers/listeners. It is this initial effect, then, that can trigger subsequent effects of humor, criticism, and so on, depending on extra processing of the phraseological units and their environments.

Regardless of their effect(s), wordplay operate on a cline, revealing that their creation involves mechanisms based on lexical, grammatical, idiomatic, pragmatic aspects, just to mention a few (DELABASTITA 1996; GIORGADZE 2014; TAGNIN 2015a). According to Arnaud, Maniez & Renner (2015: 139), “(m)any publications include taxonomies of phraseological modifications”, like Barta (2005, 2006), whose categories comprise metaplasms; metasemes, and metalogisms, and other subcategories. However, in this paper, our analyses and categorization of idiom modifications will be based on Veisbergs’s structural<sup>3</sup> transformations (addition, insertion, allusion, ellipsis, or substitution) (1997: 158), as well as on Arnaud, Maniez & Renner’s types of modifications (modality, polarity, among others) (2015: 141). Examples will be presented along with our analyses.

When it comes to the extraction of manipulated phraseologisms in language corpora, as already mentioned here, there seems to be “a degree of incompatibility between a methodology which favors the identification of recurrent patterns, and the search for non-recurring variants”. Aware of the

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<sup>3</sup> VIÉGAS-FARIA (2004), DORE (2010), and BREZOLIN (2020), for instance, have investigated wordplay based on semantic idiom transformations.

fact that users of a languages can transform phraseological structures in different ways and for different purposes, “how can one search for something without knowing what that something is?” (PHILIP 2008: 96-97).

According to Philip (2008: 100), one way is to focus on the key components of the phraseological unit, that is, on “the most salient elements”, which may be syntactic or lexical. Based on the examples of idiom retrieval she demonstrated, and in our experience, it can be inferred that there is no ready-made formula for extraction, and language researchers will have to adopt a trial and error approach in search of effective routines; especially when carrying out queries in a large corpus, as we have done here.

For the extraction of manipulated phraseologisms, we used the Web, as our data source, and Google, as our search engine. By using the Web and Google, searches can be conducted in several languages, and different settings and filters can be applied. In all searches, the top menu was adjusted at “News”. This decision reflects the idea that idiom manipulations occur in literary works, in advertisements, and “particularly” in journalistic texts (KJELLMER 1991; PHILIP 2008). As to the languages and regions, English/United States and Brazilian Portuguese/Brazil were selected.

Philip had already drawn attention to the fact that “simple key-word searches” had proved to be “impossible to edit manually”, so she had to formulate a series of searches, at the same time, “inclusive of all potentially relevant data” and “restrictive enough to exclude as much ‘noise’ as possible” (2008: 102, emphasis in original).

### 3. Data analysis and results

Bearing that in mind, we devised and experimented different types of search queries. Table 1 shows the search queries used to extract standard and manipulated forms of the phraseologisms on Google News.



Table 1: Search query for the extraction of standard and nonstandard phraseological units

phraseologisms	search query
(1) as lost as a duck in the desert	1a. “as lost as” + a duck 1b. “as lost as” + desert 1c. “as lost as”
(2) <i>mais perdido que cego em tiroteio</i>	2a. “mais perdido que” + cego 2b. “mais perdido que” + em 2c. “mais perdido que” + tiroteio
(3) to kill two birds with one stone	3a. “kill two birds” + with 3b. “kill” + with one stone
(4) <i>matar dois coelhos de/com uma cajadada só</i>	4a. “matar dois coelhos” + de 4b. “matar” + coelhos 4c. “cajadada” + matar

All the search queries adopted here, as expected, included constituents of the phraseologisms. Quotation marks were used around either single words or phrases (key elements) to ensure that the exact match would be retrieved by the search engine. Additionally, to the right of these “keywords”, the symbol “+” was added for the extraction of possible collocates. For example, 3a implies the occurrence of an idiom variation in which only “one stone” represents the variable slot; 3b, however, implies that “two birds” may be modified, and “one stone” may remain unchanged. It can be observed that the same logic was also applied to extract possible collocates for different elements of the other phraseologisms under investigation. The idea underlying the formulation of these search queries is that manipulated forms are recognizably related to the canonical form (PHILIP 1998).

As expected, some of the routines returned occurrences that had to be left out: a. occurrences in which the selected words appeared separately in different parts of the text (resulting in non-phraseological units); b. occurrences in disagreement with the adjusted settings (extracts in British English or European Portuguese, for example), and occurrences that required subscribing to the newspaper containing the searched routine.

After removing noise and redundant hits, the results (extracts as long as four sentences, in general) from each search were copied, pasted into a .txt

file, and run through with the AntConc concordance tool (ANTHONY 2020)<sup>4</sup>; examples can be seen in the Appendix. It is worth mentioning that, even after excluding interferences; inevitably, much of the analysis had to be carried out manually. As observed, all search queries were deliberately devised to retrieve standard and manipulated forms of the phraseologisms selected for analysis, to verify if both forms occurred in newspaper texts. With reference to the occurrences, they were analyzed only after the results of successive related searches were combined, as PHILIP (1998) stresses. As in any other empirical research, our retrieval procedures invite further refinement, though they have served our purposes successfully.

In Table 2, we can find the total number of occurrences for each idiom. Interestingly, the number of occurrences were inversely proportional when comparing each pair of phraseologism in the two languages.

Table 2: Number of occurrences and percentages of canonical forms for each phraseologism in English and Portuguese

	number of occurrences	number of canonical forms	percentage of canonical forms
1. as lost as a duck in the desert	14	1	7.1%
2. <i>mais perdido que cego em tiroteio</i>	112	91	81.2%
3. to kill two birds with one stone	355	338	95.2%
4. <i>matar dois coelhos de/com uma cajadada (só)</i>	57	46	80.7%
All	538	476	88.5%

Although phraseologisms 1, 2, 3 and 4 were obtained in their entirety (Table 2), only phraseologisms 2, 3, and 4 showed percentages over 80% of all occurrences. The high frequency of canonical forms seems to contradict the idea that they exceed noncanonical variations in number (PHILIP 2008). Conversely, phraseologism 1, which showed a very low frequency, only one

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, KWIC Google - Google search results formatter (CEPRIL, PUC-SP, Brazil), a tool we had used elsewhere (BREZOLIN 2006), which made internet data retrieval much easier, is no longer available.

occurrence, leads us to guess it may not be a canonical form. This will be discussed further down.

Tables 3 and 4 present the occurrences retrieved based on phraseologisms 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 3: Occurrences based on *as lost as a duck in the desert* extracted on Google News

Phraseologism 1		number of occurrences
	<b>as lost as a duck in the desert</b>	<b>1</b>
1A	as lost as a donkey with its head in a hole	1
1B	as lost as a little boy in a crowded mall	1
1C	as lost as a toddler in a supermarket	1
1D	as lost as an economics professor in an ethics class	1
1E	as lost as a hitchhiker from Timbuktu with severe amnesia	1
1F	as lost as a seven-day-old puppy released into the wild	1
1G	as lost as a toothbrush at a redneck convention	1
1H	as lost as a townie at the tailgate party	1
1I	as lost as Alice down a rabbit hole	1
1J	as lost as a nun on honeymoon	1
1K	as lost as a newborn baby bird	1
1L	as lost as a tenderfoot	1
1M	as lost as the City of Atlantis	1
	All	14

Table 4: Occurrences based on *mais perdido que cego em tiroteio* extracted on Google News

Phraseologism 2		number of occurrences
	<b><i>mais perdido que cego em tiroteio</i></b>	<b>91</b>
2A	<i>mais perdido que bolacha em boca de banguela</i> (as lost as a cookie in a toothless mouth)	1
2B	<i>mais perdido que cachorro de mudança</i> (as lost as a moving dog)	1
2C	<i>mais perdido que cachorro em dia de mudança</i> (as lost as a dog on a moving day)	6
2D	<i>mais perdido que cachorro que caiu do caminhão de mudança</i> (as lost as a dog that fell off the moving truck)	1
2E	<i>mais perdido que cachorro cego em tiroteio</i> (as lost as a blind dog in a shoot-out)	1
2F	<i>mais perdido que charuto em boca de banguela</i> (as lost as a cigar in a toothless mouth)	1
2G	<i>mais perdido que chave em bolsa de mulher</i> (as lost as a key in a woman's handbag)	1

2H	<i>mais perdido que cusco em tiroteio</i> (as lost as a dog in a shootout)	2
2I	<i>mais perdido que dinheiro em brecha de sofá</i> (as lost as money between the couch cushions)	1
2J	<i>mais perdido que motorista sem carteira</i> (as lost as a driver without a driver's license)	1
2K	<i>mais perdido que palhaço em dia de finados</i> (as lost as a clown on All Saints' Day)	1
2L	<i>mais perdido que peru bêbado</i> (as lost as a drunk turkey)	1
2M	<i>mais perdido que Bolsonaro na presidência</i> (as lost as Bolsonaro in presidency)	1
2N	<i>mais perdido que Bolsonaro tentando entender como governar o Brasil</i> (as lost as Bolsonaro trying to rule Brazil)	1
2O	<i>mais perdido que chinelo de bêbado na crise dos incêndios na Amazônia</i> (as lost as a drunkard's shoes in the crisis of Amazonian bush fires)	1
	All	112

According to Moon, “similes are essentially frames with fossilized lexis: their function is emphasis”; and, as they “serve to intensify adjectives, it is unsurprising that certain common adjectives, or commonly intensified adjectives, occur in frames with varying nouns” (1998: 150). Based on Tables 3 and 4, we can split the idiom into two frames in both languages:

[frame 1] = [AS LOST AS] and [MAIS PERDIDO QUE]

[frame 2] = [a PERSON/an ANIMAL/an OBJECT in/at an either IMPROBABLE or DANGEROUS PLACE]

Frame 1 functions as an adjective and remains unaltered in all occurrences. Frame 2, however, functions as an intensifier, realized through a series of similar combinations based on common attributes or conceptual parameters, a patterning that is systematically reproduced in both languages.

Based on these results, the occurrence *as lost as a duck in the desert*, which was initially considered as canonical (Table 2), now seems to represent an “established alternative form” (PHILIP 1998: 95). To our understanding, certain linguistic combinations that share similar frames simply co-exist with no reference to a canonical form that could have originated them. As such, they are not context-dependent and can be used interchangeably.

In Portuguese, the situation is almost the same with the difference that there is a canonical form: *mais perdido que cego em tiroteio*. Similarly, all the

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other occurrences, 2A to 2L, are also alternative forms and, then, can be used interchangeably. We call attention to occurrences 2E (*mais perdido que cachorro cego em tiroteio*) and 2H (*mais perdido que cusco em tiroteio*), which are manipulations of the canonical form by means of substitution, when one or more substrings are replaced with others (ARNAUD, MANIEZ & RENNER: 2015). The word *cego* (blind man) was substituted by *cachorro cego* (blind dog), in 2E, and by *cusco* (dog), in 2H.

Though the use of unpredictable words associated with highly creative situations produces many humorous combinations, not all the occurrences above could qualify as wordplay, but 2E and 2H. We may attribute this to the fact that, as the components of the canonical form *mais perdido* and *em tiroteio* are semantically very strong and normally associated with *cego*, different strings defeat the reader's or the listener's expectation, thus creating wordplay.

Three other occurrences in Portuguese deserve our attention:

(2M) *mais perdido que Bolsonaro na presidência* (as lost as Bolsonaro in presidency);

(2N) *mais perdido que Bolsonaro tentando entender como governar o Brasil* (as lost as Bolsonaro trying to rule Brazil), and

(2O) *mais perdido que chinelo de bêbado na crise dos incêndios na Amazônia* (as lost as a drunkard's shoes in the crisis of Amazonian bush fires).

All of them are clearly related to the occurrences in Table 4, but differently, their constructions are context-oriented, based on aspects that reflect Brazil's current political and environmental scenery, so, to our understanding, they are seen as "occasional instantiations associated with an idiom base structure", and do not constitute wordplay.

Comparing how phraseologisms 1 and 2 behaved, we must admit that we were initially inclined to categorize all the occurrences for *as lost as duck in the desert* (Table 3) into occasional variants, as a consequence of their low frequency in our data; however, due to the diversity of semantically-unrelated words in 1A to 1M, alternative forms (with no canonical form) seemed to be a more suitable interpretation. The occurrences for *mais perdido que cego em*

*tiroteio* (Table 4) also posed a similar dilemma, but, based on its higher frequency, we decided to confirm its status as canonical. The other types of occurrences were subdivided into three groups: noncanonical forms, 2E and 2H, which exhibit substrings of the canonical form; alternative forms, 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2F, 2G, 2I, 2J, 2K, 2L, which exhibit the same structure, but semantically-unrelated words, and occasional instantiations associated with an idiom base structure, 2M, 2N and 2O, which resemble the canonical form, but are highly dependent on specific circumstances.

Next, the occurrences obtained for phraseologisms 3 (*kill two birds with one stone*) and 4 (*matar dois coelhos de/com uma cajadada só*) will also be analyzed in reference to the type of modification they have undergone: structural transformations (addition, insertion, allusion, ellipsis, or substitution) (VEISBERGS: 1997) as well as modal and polarity modifications (ARNAUD, MANIEZ & RENNER: 2015).

In Tables 5 and 6, we present the occurrences for phraseologisms 3 and 4 with the most frequent types of modifications: substitution and addition.

Table 5: Occurrences of *kill two birds with one stone*, cases of substitution and addition

Phraseologism 3		number of occurrences
	<b>kill two birds with one stone</b>	<b>338</b>
3A	kill two birds <b>in</b> one stone	1
3B	kill two birds with one <b>act</b>	1
3C	kill two birds with one <b>ancient spiritual practice</b>	1
3D	kill two birds with one <b>high-speed stone</b>	1
3E	kill two birds with one <b>Nazi salute</b>	1
3F	kill two birds with one <b>phone</b>	1
3G	kill two birds with one <b>proverbial stone</b>	1
3H	kill two birds with one <b>shot</b>	1
3I	kill two birds with one <b>tariff</b>	1
3J	kill two birds with one <b>update</b>	1
3K	kill two <b>three</b> birds with one stone	3
3L	kill two <b>four</b> birds with one stone (3)	3
3M	kill <b>many</b> birds with one stone	1
	All	355

Table 6: Occurrences based on *matar dois coelhos de/com uma só cajadada*, cases of substitution and addition

Phraseologism 4		Number of occurrences
	<i>matar dois coelhos de/com uma só cajadada</i>	46
4A	<i>matar dois coelhos de uma cacetada</i>	1
4B	<i>matar dois coelhos com uma chibatada só</i>	1
4C	<i>matar dois coelhos em uma paulada</i>	1
4D	<i>matar dois coelhos com uma pedra</i>	1
4E	<i>matar dois coelhos com uma porretada só</i>	1
4F	<i>matar dois coelhos com uma obra só</i>	1
4G	<i>matar dois coelhos com um golpe</i>	1
4H	<i>matar dois coelhos com um tiro de canhão</i>	1
4I	<i>matar três coelhos com só tomahawk</i>	1
4J	<i>matar cinco coelhos com uma só cajadada</i>	1
4K	<i>matar duas lebres de uma só cajadada</i>	1
	All	57

Analyzing and comparing the above, we can observe similar occurrences in terms of substitution, in both languages, the same frames [*kill two birds*] [*with one stone*] and [*matar dois coelhos*] [*de/com uma só cajadada*] showed variation.

For instance, in examples 3K, 3L, 3M (in English), and 4I and 4J (in Portuguese), in which *two/dois* is replaced by other numerals (*three, four, five*), this strategy seems to indicate an exaggeration of what “one single action” can perform. Probably, a way of maximizing the value of a product or place.

Components of the second frame in both languages were the most modified. In English, *stone* was replaced for highly semantically-unrelated words (*act, ancient spiritual practice, Nazi salute, phone, shot, tariff, update, bone*), whereas in Portuguese, *cajadada* (blow with a rod) was mostly substituted by semantically-related words, or a series of co-hyponyms: *cacetada* (blow with a stick); *chibatada* (blow with a whip); *paulada* (blow with a piece of wood), *porretada* (blow with a billy club), and *golpe* (a single blow).

We should note that many of them are also phonologically related. We believe that this may be attributable to the fact that some language users, considering that a fixed expression may have acquired a cliché-like character, try to avoid it by replacing a very salient word with co-hyponyms.

In English, phonologically-related words were also used, for example, *stone* is substituted by *phone* in 3F. This manipulation is intended for appellative purposes, it is about a telephone advertisement.

In Portuguese, one occurrence is worth mentioning. Example 4K is a creative manipulation, in which *coelho* (rabbit) is replaced with a synonymy *lebre* (hare), generating, this way, wordplay through reliteralization. According to COULMAS, reliteralization is a process in which “the expression is stripped of its idiomatic meaning” (1979: 145). Also known as remotivation (TAGNIN 2015b) and decrystallization (CARNEIRO 2017), this mechanism is explained by the fact that “a literal meaning of one of the components must be invented in order to achieve the desired effect” (COULMAS 1979: 145), in this case, *lebre* (hare) is interpreted literally, but combined with the other frames, the figurativeness of the expression is preserved.

Additions, also context-oriented, are usually carried out by modifiers of different word-classes, mainly adjectives and adjectival phrases (*high-speed/proverbial stone*).

As far as wordplay is concerned, all the occurrences in Tables 3 and 4 can be classified as such, since at least one substring of the canonical form was manipulated, defeating the reader’s expectation, as already mentioned. Certainly, some resultant wordplay can be considered more effective than others, *matar duas lebres de uma só cajadada* is illustrative of this.

Tables 7 and 8 show hybrid cases, combining addition, allusion, deletion, insertion, inversion, modality, polarity, substitution, or single cases of inversion, modality or polarity.



Table 7: Other types and hybrid cases of modification based on *kill two birds ...*

		category	number of occurrences
3N	kill <b>three</b> birds with one stone <b>with this Bluetooth speaker</b>	substitution + insertion	1
3O	RBI <b>can</b> kill <b>three</b> birds with one stone by cutting it ...	modality + substitution	1
3P	Amazon <b>Could</b> Kill Many Birds with This Single Stone	modality + addition	1
3Q	A \$10 billion overseas IPO <b>could</b> kill many birds with one stone.	modality	1
3R	It's like we're using <b>one stone to kill two birds.</b>	inversion	1
3S	Why not kill <b>three love</b> birds with one stone and <b>with an edible bouquet for dinner and dessert?</b>	substitution + addition + polarity + insertion	1
3T	We prefer Ricky's version to the original, not only because it's presumably a lot easier <b>to get two birds stoned</b> than it is to kill two birds with one stone, but because why would you even want <b>to kill one bird, let alone two?</b>	passivization + substitution + allusion	1
	All		7

Some of these categories are self-explanatory: insertion, a new string is positioned, usually, at a final position (3N, 3S); no initial position was found in our data; inversion, one substring occupies the place of another (3R); modality refers to cases in which a modal verb is added to the expression (3O, 3P, 3Q); polarity indicates shifts in the way the expression is constructed (affirmatively, negatively or interrogatively); 3S, which contains other types of modification, is an illustrative case of the procedure. Example 3T is by far the most creative, it contains an unusual modification in a central element, *two* is replaced by *one*; the verb *to kill* is alluded in the final question, and passivization, reasonably infrequent in some idioms (MOON 1998), occurs by means of *stone* as a verb.

Though we can qualify them as wordplay due to the manipulation criterion, 3R, 3S and 3T seem to be the most effective ones. In 3T, the wordplay is intensified by the double reading of *stoned*, “attacked/killed with a stone” or “under the influence of alcohol or drugs”.

Table 8: Other types and hybrid cases of modification based on *matar dois pássaros* ...

		category	number of occurrences
4L	<i>Matar dois coelhos de uma cajadada só?</i> (Kill two rabbits with only one blow?)	polarity	1
4M	<i>Será que o presienciável está querendo matar dois coelhos, com uma chibatada só?</i> (Is the presidential candidate wishing to kill two rabbits in only one blow with a whip?)	substitution + polarity	1
4N	<i>Bolsonaro, cajadada em 3 coelhos: desassossego de Moro</i> (Bolsonaro, a blow with a rod in 3 rabbits: Moro's uneasiness)	allusion + substitution + inversion	1
	All		3

In Portuguese, 4L and 4M are cases in which the idiom is used in the interrogative form (polarity), 4N is by far a very interesting occurrence, it substitutes number *two* by *three*, symbol, and inverts the position of *cajadada*.

Two other occurrences (one in English and one in Portuguese) caught our attention: *feed two birds with one scone*, and *alimentar dois coelhos com uma só cenoura* (feed two rabbits with only one carrot). First impressions might suggest interpreting them as cases of reliteralization (remotivation or decrystallization) as discussed above; however, we have chosen to classify them as cases of “idiom revitalization”<sup>5</sup>.

Like in instances of reliteralization in which “a literal meaning of one of the components must be invented in order to achieve the desired effect” (COULMAS 1979: 145), instances of revitalization preserve the overall phraseological skeleton, making use of “reinvented” components of the canonical form. However, differently from reliteralized forms, in which the same underlying conceit, in this case, “achieving two goals in one single action”, is maintained following the same allusion (“putting animals to death”); in revitalized idioms, there is a different perception of this idea. There occurs a shift in orientation – from a negative to a positive circumstance –, it also alludes to animals, which are no longer “killed/(-)”, but “fed/(+)”. The two

<sup>5</sup> It should not be confused with the expression “idiomatic revitalization”, “language revitalization”, “language revival”, or “reversing language shift”, an attempt to halt or reverse the decline of a language or to revive an extinct one.

expressions are the result of campaigns recently launched by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, USA), and PAN (People, Animals and Nature, Portugal), recommending that derogatory animal-related idioms should be replaced with animal-friendly expressions. In line with this initiative, *pregar dois pregos de uma martelada só*<sup>6</sup> (to drive in two nails with only one hammer hit) was also found in European Portuguese.

The difference in the behavior of idioms, in terms of variation, “could be explained by general rules that are derived mainly from the properties of the semantic structure of idioms”, and “(s)uch rules may help understand why certain types of variation occur with certain idioms but not with others”. (ABDOU 2012: 103)

As far as the translation of canonical, noncanonical and alternative forms is concerned, we suggest that the translator can resort to corresponding pragmatic structures in the other language.

Tables 9 and 10 show the translation possibilities considering phraseologisms 1 and 2.

Table 9: Phraseologism 1: “canonical” and alternative forms

Phraseologism 1 - English	
Canonical form	∅
Alternative forms	as lost as ... a duck in the desert a little boy in a crowded mall a toddler in a supermarket an economics professor in an ethics class a toothbrush at a redneck convention as lost as a townie at the tailgate party Alice down a rabbit hole a nun on honeymoon a newborn baby bird a tenderfoot the City of Atlantis

<sup>6</sup> It was found while our results were being edited for interferences; however, it became a useful combination to justify some of our interpretations and suggestions.

Table 10: Phraseologism 2: canonical, noncanonical and alternative forms

Phraseologism 2 - Portuguese	
Canonical form	<i>mais perdido que cego em tiroteio</i>
Noncanonical forms	<i>mais perdido que ...</i> <i>cachorro cego em tiroteio</i> <i>cusco em tiroteio</i>
Alternative forms	<i>mais perdido que ...</i> <i>bolacha em boca de banguela</i> <i>cachorro em dia de mudança</i> <i>charuto em boca de banguela</i> <i>chave em bolsa de mulher</i> <i>dinheiro em brecha de sofá</i> <i>motorista sem carteira</i> <i>que palhaço em dia de finados</i>

In Table 11, the translation possibilities considering phraseologisms 3 and 4 are presented.

Table 11: Phraseologisms 3 and 4: canonical and noncanonical forms

	Phraseologism 3 - English	Phraseologism 4 - Portuguese
Canonical form	to kill two birds with one stone	<i>matar dois coelhos de uma cajadada (só)</i>
Noncanonical forms		<i>matar dois coelhos de uma cacetada (só)</i> <i>matar dois coelhos de uma paulada (só)</i> <i>matar dois coelhos de uma porretada (só)</i>
	to feed two birds with one scone	<i>alimentar dois coelhos com uma só cenoura</i> <i>pregar dois pregos de uma martelada só</i>

In practical terms, this means that such phraseologisms have both intralingual and interlingual analogs. An analog is to be understood as a variant form which exhibits similar or comparable elements to one or more components of another form in general or in some specific feature.

When occasional instantiations associated with an idiom base structure are found in a text, translators, as expected, should consider the context, which will probably force them to render the combination literally and pragmatically. For example, *kill two birds with one phone* (advertisement)

would result in *mate dois coelhos com um telefone*. From the pragmatic point of view, *birds* will become *rabbits*, since the Portuguese fixed expression alludes to such animal. The other part, which refers to the device, will be translated in a literal fashion, the device (*phone/telefone*) must remain.

Whether the occurrences retrieved and analyzed here are canonical forms, noncanonical forms, alternative forms or occasional instantiations associated with an idiom base structure, they have been originated from considerably transparent combinations, those that hardly pose comprehension problems for language users. Similarly, when they are transformed, especially by means of substitution, addition, insertion and allusion, and result in wordplays, these are also more easily perceived. Consequently, if translators detect them, find possible analogs in the other language and can produce similar transformations, the same pragmatic effect will probably be achieved as well.

Comparing the overall results of the four phraseologisms, it is interesting to observe that, in the idioms, both slots [*kill two birds*]+[*with one stone*] and [*matar dois coelhos*]+[*de/com uma só cajadada*] underwent more variation, whereas, in the similes, the slots [*as lost as*] and [*mais perdido que*] remained unchanged. In our understanding, this is due to fact that [*as lost as*] and [*mais perdido que*] are more literal than the whole chunk of the idiom, and, according to ARNAUD, MANIEZ & RENNER (2015: 140), metaphorical structures are more open to modifications. Investigating other types of similes and how variations of more opaque idioms behave in large corpora is a subject of speculation.

As mentioned before, the selection of the phraseologisms in this investigation was made on the hypothesis that they represented canonical forms, in both languages, that they were promising, potential candidates for manipulations, and that our searches would retrieve noncanonical forms, resulting in wordplay. From the results obtained and further analyses, we have now somewhat different views:

First, our searches could retrieve not only noncanonical forms, but also alternative forms of idioms, and occasional instantiations associated with an

idiom base structure, proving that the phraseologisms selected are susceptible to some kind of variation or exploitation;

Second, phraseologism 1, *as lost as a duck in the desert*, is unlikely to be a canonical form, but is probably simply an alternative form among similar structures (1A to 1N) available in the language;

Third, phraseologism 2, *mais perdido que cego em tiroteio*, can be considered a canonical form (highly frequent and found in specialist dictionaries); 2E and 2H can be considered noncanonical forms, and the others, alternative forms;

Fourth, the canonical form for phraseologism 3 appears to be *kill two birds with one stone*, all the other occurrences are occasional instantiations associated with an idiom base structure, resulting from creative context-motivated constructions, except *feed two birds with one scone*, which seems to be its real noncanonical form; and

Fifth, phraseologism 4, *matar dois coelhos de/com uma cajadada só*, is a canonical form, and instances, like *matar dois coelhos de uma cacetada/paulada/porretada só*, can be considered noncanonical forms as well as *alimentar dois coelhos com uma só cenoura* and *pregar dois pregos de uma martelada só*; others than these are occasional instantiations resulting from creative context-motivated constructions.

Considering occasional instantiations associated with canonical forms, it seems that readers/listeners analyze the combinations both non-compositionally and compositionally. Based on the context, they decide which elements should be interpreted metaphorically, mainly the ones related to the canonical form, and then, they decide which part refers to an external element, in general, non-symbolic. For example, *kill two birds with one phone* (advertisement for a cellular phone); evidently, “no fowl is killed with the device” (reference to the canonical form versus reference to an external element). The new combination is equally interpreted as figurative by readers/listeners, who recognize it as relating to the canonical form.

## 4. Concluding remarks

As we have observed, not all the occurrences collected and analyzed here can qualify as wordplay. However, both noncanonical forms and occasional instantiations associated with a base idiom structure can constitute wordplay if they exhibit manipulated elements of the standard form. We reinforce the idea that any type of manipulation of the conventionalized use of a linguistic structure, which results in wordplay, is not primarily intended for causing a comic effect, but an effect of surprise, resulting from a construction contrary to expectation. It serves as an initial effect that can trigger subsequent effects of humor, criticism, and so on.

After encountering and analyzing idiom-based phraseologisms in large corpora, our contribution seems to have helped destroy the myth that they can only be retrieved by accident. It also confirms that nonstandard forms are indeed typical of journalism (highly frequent in sports and politics sections) and advertisement, in both languages; and that there is no ready-made formula for extracting such deviant forms, several search queries will have to be tried and combined, considering, above all, the keyness degree of each constituent of the combination.

In conclusion, if wordplay is lost in the jungle of words, the appropriate approaches, the proper tools and the right procedures will help researchers rescue them safe and sound.

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## Appendix I

### AntConc concordance lines of “kill two birds with one stone” occurrences

ogramme? The Food Bank programme actually aims to kill two birds with one stone. See Also. Uncategorized ...  
 ... As much as it would be simple to kill two birds with one stone and reveal ... Why  
 : As much as it would be simple to kill two birds with one stone and reveal Jamal  
 that the campaign, which runs for 30 days, will kill two birds with one stone, bolstering ad revenue  
 driving ... Wireless earbuds are a great way to kill two birds with one stone. Whether you're  
 ation, administration thought it would be wise to kill two birds with one stone and move up  
 ume and destination reshuffle, the Saudis look to kill two birds with one stone. One goal is  
 onversational Commerce businesses will be able to kill 'two birds with one stone' by keeping customers  
 ... With the new vehicle, the carmaker plans to kill two birds with one stone and launch a  
 . With this initiative the UP Police aims to kill two birds with one stone, spread awareness about  
 museum in Camp Ripley were looking to kill two birds with one stone. Yahoo Entertainment-Nov 17, 2019  
 out of the ... Rip took the moment to kill two birds with one stone and ask Walker ...  
 h ... Yes, he completely annihilates the classic "kill two birds with one stone" saying, but the  
 general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff would love to kill two birds with one proverbial stone in either  
 attempts to take advantage of Shiny Chaining to kill two birds with one stone. You Can Go  
 sprinkle is in the garden, so you could kill two birds with one stone by waiting until  
 jute or hemp. It's extraordinary what ... Denver: Kill two birds with one stone. Ingrid: Yes. It'  
 : Yes. It's: Feed two ... You get to kill two birds with one stone here. You have  
 way to the airport or you want to kill two birds with one stone and get a  
 you may as well run that first to kill two birds with one stone. Run your activity

### AntConc concordance lines of “as lost as” occurrences

... "The first 31 years of my life, I was as lost as a duck in the desert," Sadowski  
 together ... of the first book, you may feel as lost as a townie at the tailgate party. ...  
 anyone else. ... you begin to feel you are as lost as a white fella can be in  
 have dropped five straight and nine of 10, look as lost as a seven-day-old puppy released  
 Lewton at the Stanford Theatre CBR Cejudo looked as lost as a newborn baby bird. Stuck at  
 lost as Brandon Weeden that ... I'm just as lost as a lot of people. I got  
 been a little bit hectic. I'm just as lost as a lot of people. I got  
 been a little bit hectic. I'm just as lost as a lot of people. I got  
 our last two matches our beloved team looks as lost as a Hitch Hiker from Timbuktu with  
 for dessert. ... yourself konuya Frans?z kald?m, "as lost as a French person," as the old  
 not pick up the fact that you are as lost as a toddler in a ... Kentucky Completes  
 -subtle way of saying that you're just as lost as a donkey with its head in  
 than that though, the team has looked about as lost as a toothbrush at a redneck convention  
 a podium finish in 2014, he has sometimes looked as lost as a deer in headlights under ... Mother  
 but is not billed and is further considered as lost as a results of leaks or illegal ...  
 y in swipes at the government: "Conservatives are as lost as a ... Outside Magazine-Aug 21, 2013 Outside Magazin  
 that allows pet owners to list an animal as "lost" as a safeguard. Jones says she doesn'  
 ' The first 31 years of my life, I was as lost as a duck in the desert, Sadowski  
 he lost his first six starts, sometimes looked as lost as a little boy in a crowded  
 as someone else ... When it did, I was as lost as a tenderfoot. Like Randy, who had

## AntConc concordance lines of “matar dois coelhos ...” occurrences

que bandidos e corruptos se destruam, matando **dois coelhos com uma** cajadada só, como sugere  
 , “a administração de Trump está tentando matar **dois coelhos com uma** cajadada: chegar a um  
 que mais engordam, então é como matar **dois coelhos com uma** cajadada só. ... libertas de  
 pelo Universo Marvel comum. Nada como matar **dois coelhos com uma** martelada ... .. matar o boleto  
 os, interior de ... .. o município poderia matar **dois coelhos com uma** cajadada só e encorajar  
 Esteves), que armará uma arapuca para matar **dois coelhos com uma** só cajadada em Segundo  
 e percebe que essa situação pode matar **dois coelhos com uma** cajadada só. ... possa prevenir o  
 com a língua de Shakespeare e matar **dois coelhos com uma** cajadada só. ... que pode  
 . ... que pode fazer a humanidade matar esses **dois coelhos com uma** cajadada só: o ambiente  
 débito automático? Isso seria igual a matar **dois coelhos com uma** cajadada só (não mate  
 do Paços tinham a expectativa de matar **dois coelhos com uma** cajadada. ... RECURSOS PARA FÃS  
 MAUÁ E SANTO ANDRÉ. ELE TENTA MATAR **DOIS COELHOS COM UMA** CAJADADA SÓ. ... Sadako Vs  
 , cheguei a especular que você poderia matar **dois coelhos com uma** só cajadada e mandar  
 Paloma (Grazi ... da moça para tentar eliminar **dois coelhos com uma** cajadada só. ... seus especialistas  
 para a estrada de Mangabeira para matar **dois coelhos com uma** obra só. Tanta demolição,  
 academia e, pelo visto, aproveitou para matar **dois coelhos com uma** saída só. Deixou a  
 de coelho ... A Casa Branca quer matar **dois coelhos com uma** só paulada. A suposta  
 novos testes, ... A China está tentando matar **dois coelhos com uma** só cajadada transformando resíduos  
 janeiro, ... A fome bateu e para matar **dois coelhos com uma** só cajadada, siga rumo

## AntConc concordance lines of “mais perdido que” occurrences

que tentou ser técnico e viu tava **mais perdido que cego** e tiroteio e acabou  
 primeiros dias de governo, Bolsonaro mostrou-se **mais perdido que charuto** na boca de banguela.  
 e vira piada nas redes Galvão Bueno **mais perdido que chave** em bolsa de mulher  
 mília, ... O presidente Jair Bolsonaro (PSL) está **mais perdido que chinelo** de bêbado na crise  
 ser cego. Voto Positivo00Voto ... Vc está **mais perdido que cusco** em tiroteio Macri não  
 de poço" - com 15,98% dos votos -, seguido por " **mais perdido que cusco** em tiroteio" ... O ser  
 Notícias (Blogue)-9 de abr. de 2019 Vc está **mais perdido que cusco** em tiroteio Macri não  
 . Kkk pic.twitter.com/UQvXa4w1ux. **Mais perdido que dinheiro** em brecha de sofá (@  
 quer começar com a arte, mas está **mais perdido que Drek**Thar em tiroteio. ... muito  
 ma têm reencontro dramático com Marcos ... Bonner **mais perdido que eu** quando levei a bandeja  
 todo lado ..Kd a assistência social?não ... **Mais perdido que eu**, escreveu um no Twitter.  
 que esclarecer as questões de quem está **mais perdido que eu** lamentou Fuenti. A inspeção ...  
 muito , e o restante do grupo está **mais perdido que motorista** sem carteira. ... impeachment de  
 i O não gostei O. Responder. Esse governador esta **mais perdido que nem** cego em tiroteio, primeiro  
 ja estaria ruim, agora ... Esse governador esta **mais perdido que nem** cego em tiroteio, primeiro  
 para estimular as vendas ... O governo ta **mais perdido que nunca** pra mim esta reforma  
 irmãos numa "road trip" pela ... "Eu tô **mais perdido que o** Bolsonaro na presidência", ironizou  
 você ainda não preencheu o bolão? Está **mais perdido que o** pessoal de Black Mirror ...  
 sociais para acertar os relógios. Eu tô **mais perdido que o** Bolsonaro na presidência, ironizou