

## THE NAMES FOR DRAGONFLY IN THE LINGUISTIC ATLAS OF BRAZIL: A STUDY ON THE MOTIVATION OF SIGNS

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- **ABSTRACT:** The names attributed to the libélula (dragonfly) – long, thin body insect, with four transparent wings, which flies and hits the rear in the water –, Question 85 of the semantic-lexical questionnaire (QSL in Portuguese) of the Linguistic Atlas of Brazil, exemplify the complex variational system of the lexicon of Brazilian Portuguese (BP), reflecting facts from the socio-history of each region and, even, each location and each individual. The variants registered in ALiB, in the state capitals, suggest that the insect's name is, in general, of metaphorical basis, motivated by its physical aspect, sound, movements and, equally, through mental associations/analogies with similar ones, resulting, in most cases, in transparent signs. In order to ratify or, perhaps, rectify the results of the capitals, in this work, we analyzed the data collected through the country's hinterlands from 900 informants, totaling 225 locations. With the support of this corpus, guided by the theoretical and methodological principles of Lexicography and Semantics, we aim to: (i) verify the dictionary entries of the forms obtained; (ii) describe the variants in terms of morphological aspects; and (iii) analyze these denominations from the perspective of motivational semantics.
- **KEYWORDS:** Linguistic Atlas of Brazil; brazilian hinterlands; lexical variation; dragonfly.

Among the insects whose aspect has most impressed the imagination of the peoples, one cannot fail to mention the dragonflies, with elegant flight, agile body, nervous and brilliantly colored, like precious stones, with delicate, transparent wings, such as the finest gauze, through whose ribs the daylight becomes iridescent (LENKO; PAPAVERO, 1996).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original: “entre os insetos cujo aspecto mais tem impressionado a imaginação dos povos, não se pode deixar de citar as libélulas, de voo elegante, de corpo ágil, nervoso e colorido brilhantemente, como as pedras preciosas, de asas delicadas, transparentes, como a mais fina gaze, através de cujas nervuras a luz do dia se irisa” (LENKO; PAPAVERO, 1996).

## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

The dragonfly, feared by some, admired by others, and studied by many, belongs to the group of *Odonates*, an order of primitive pterygote insects that have a narrow body, four elongated wings and large compound eyes. The word *odonate*, coined by the Danish naturalist and economist Johan Christian Fabricius, in 1792, comes from the contraction of the Greek terms *odontos* (tooth) and *gnathos* (jaw), in reference to the structure of the insect's mouth, since the jaws of these predators contain a type of sugar (chitin) which, when toothed, has the appearance of sharp teeth.

If today the wingspan of this insect is impressive, being able to measure from 1.8 to 12 cm, fossil records prove that in their prehistoric ancestors they could reach 75 cm. According to experts, it is the largest insect that ever existed, and its species would have preceded the dinosaurs, approximately 300 million years ago.

Their morphology makes them voracious predators: their eyes have up to 30 thousand facets, which gives them a 360 degree range of vision; its jaws are very powerful; two pairs of wings come out of its thorax that can flap simultaneously and, in some species, reach up to 80 km/h, guaranteeing them a precise flight and a correct landing, making it the fastest insect that exists; they also have six strong legs with spines that help them to hold the food. Their usual prey are flies, mosquitoes (including *Aedes Aegypti*), moths, ants, bees, wasps, and also some amphibians and small fish; they can eat, in a single day, the equivalent of 14% of their weight.

Another feature that draws the attention of the dragonfly is its metamorphosis, because, as a larva, it lives in water for a period that can reach five years. After this long aquatic life, dragonflies crawl to the stem of a tree and wait until their bodies are ready for terrestrial life. Then, they break their exoskeleton by the back, releasing the head and abdomen; after their wings have dried completely, they go in search of food and a partner. After being adults, they live between eight and 60 days.

There are more than 6,000 species of dragonflies in the world, approximately 130 in Europe and, of this amount, 77 in the Iberian Peninsula. The greatest concentration of these insects occurs in tropical regions, as they need heat to keep the body warm and move. In addition, they always seek clean water for the deposit of eggs and for the development of the larvae. It is worth mentioning that they are very demanding in relation to water quality, they do not inhabit rivers or lakes with chemical changes or with signs of pollution. For this reason, they are considered excellent bioindicators.

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<sup>2</sup> To carry out this topic, we used data from the following electronic addresses, on Dec. 11, 2017:

- i) <http://www.nationalgeographic.com.es>;
- ii) <http://www.libelulapedia.com>;
- iii) <http://www.libellulasman.com>;
- iv) <http://www.portaldosanima.com.br>;
- v) <http://www.elmundo.es/larevista/num158/textos/libe.html>;
- vi) <https://www.dicionariodesimbolos.com.br>;
- vii) <http://www.etnolingustica.org/biblio:maregrave-1648-historia>.

Also interesting is the symbolism that covers the figure of the dragonfly. Their meanings vary in each culture and are mainly linked to renewal, positive strength, and the power of life in general. For Native Americans, for example, it is the symbol of abandoned souls; the Vietnamese believed that the flight of the dragonflies would be associated with the forecast of rain; in Japan, which is also called “Dragonfly Island” (Akitsu-shima), this insect is an imperial symbol that reflects courage, strength and happiness; already, according to the ancient Chinese culture (Feng Shui), the presence of the dragonfly in the house or in the gardens means good luck, especially in the area of work and business, so it recommends that people have a picture or some pendant in the shape of dragonfly.

As can be seen, its characteristics and symbolism are very peculiar, instigating, and sharpens the imagination of the human being, generating myths and motivating denominations based on a wide spectrum of popular creation.

In order to ratify or, perhaps, rectify the results obtained in the capitals (CARDOSO *et al.*, 2014) and taking advantage of the data collected in the different regions, object of previous studies (AGUILERA, 2005, 2010; RAMOS *et al.*, 2012; AGUILERA; ROMANO, in press), we analyzed, in this work, the data from Brazil’s hinterlands on the names of this insect, obtained from 900 informants, making a total of 225 locations whose planning covers the whole Brazil, from Oiapoque to Chuí. With the support of this corpus of 103 variants, guided by the theoretical-methodological principles of Lexicography and Semantics, we aim to: (i) verify in the dictionary the forms obtained; (ii) describe the variants in terms of morphological aspects; and (iii) analyze these denominations from the perspective of motivational semantics (SAUSSURE, 1971; ULLMANN, 1964; GUIRAUD, 1976; ALINEI, 1995, 1997, 2002; CONTINI, 2009, 2012).

### **Popular names for *libélula* (dragonfly) in Brazil’s hinterlands in data from the ALiB**

Brazilian atlases of various ranges: local (ROMANO, 2012), state (ROSSI, 1963; DOIRON, 2017), regional (ALTENHOFEN; KLASSMANN, 2011) or the national (CARDOSO *et al.*, 2014), have shown that, in certain semantic fields, some referents, such as everyday objects, parts of the human body, elements of flora (fruits, vegetables, legumes) do not present much variation, unlike others that take on a multiplicity of popular forms.

As an example, in volume 2 of the Linguistic Atlas of Brasil (ALiB), published in 2014 by Cardoso *et al.*, Letter L08 brings only three lexical variants ‘for the white brown bark root that is cooked to be eaten’: *mandioca*, *aipim* e *macaxeira* (cassava, manioc and yuca). The Wikipedia website<sup>3</sup>, in addition to these three, lists: *mandioca-doce* (sweet cassava), *mandioca-mansa* (soft cassava), *aipi*, *uaipi*, *castelinha*, *pão-de-pobre*

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandioca>. Acesso em 08 de agosto de 2017.

(“poor man’s bread”), *maniva e maniveira*,<sup>4</sup> which are not part of the ALiB corpus constituted with data from the capitals. It is likely that, in places far from the capitals, some of these forms have been elicited.

Likewise, *traffic lights*, in this Atlas, received no more than half a dozen names: *sinaleiro* (“signaller”), *sinaleira* (“signaller”), *sinal* (“signal”), *farol* (“headlight”) e *luminoso* (“luminous”), in addition to *semáforo* (traffic lights).<sup>5</sup> The names of the organs of the human body also seem less susceptible to a significant number of popular variants, as attested by some state atlases, such as those of Paraná (AGUILERA, 1994), of Sergipe (FERREIRA *et al.*, 1987), of Paraíba (ARAGÃO; MENEZES, 1984) and of Bahia (ROSSI, 1963).

Other objects, instruments or apparatuses, less known to man and with which they have little familiarity, can stimulate creativity and arouse the most diverse associations in the act of naming. As an example, the study by Aguilera and Silva (2012) on the *light switch*<sup>6</sup> (interruptor), with ALiB data in the capitals, shows that, in addition to this name, the following were registered: *tomada* (outlet), *suíte* (switch), *apagador* (“device for turning the light off”), *acendedor* (“device for turning the light on”), *chave* (“key”), *bocal*, *botão* (“button”), *soquete* (socket), *disjuntor* (disconnecter), *start*, *crique* (from *clique*) (“click”), *pera* (“pear”) e *espelho* (“mirror”).

Another study by Aguilera (2016), still on the light *light switch* variants in the speech of informants from Southern hinterlands of Brazil, confirms the polymorphism that had already been registered in the capitals. The author confirms that none of the variants collected in this Brazilian region is the result of arbitrary creation in the act of naming the object, but all of them attest to the creativity of the speaker who, in the face of a new object, whose name is unknown or strange, makes use of metaphors, metonymies or onomatopoeia to designate it.

When it comes to the field of fauna, the lack of knowledge of the form considered cultured can lead to the attribution of the most different names that, sometimes are limited to a small community of speech, and sometimes spread through one or more states and regions. This is the case with the lexical variants for the *dragonfly*, whose names portray the multiple and rich variational system of the Brazilian Portuguese lexicon, which may reveal facts about the socio-history of each region and, even, each location and the family history of each individual.

To illustrate, the letters L12 (a, b, c, d, e) of the Linguistic Atlas of Brazil (CARDOSO *et al.*, 2014), which deal with the variants for this concept in the country’s capitals, reveal that, next to the *dragonfly* variant, representing the cultured norm, dozens of others coexist that correspond to popular norms. Some of them are restricted to a specific region, such as *jacinta* (North Region), *zigue-zigue* (“zig-zig”) (Northeast Region) and others are present in two or more regions, such as *helicóptero* (helicopter) (North, Northeast,

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<sup>4</sup> Other names are: *balinghoy*, *mogo*, *mandioca*, *kamoteng kahoy*, *tapioca*.

<sup>5</sup> Other names are: *traffic signals*, *stoplights*.

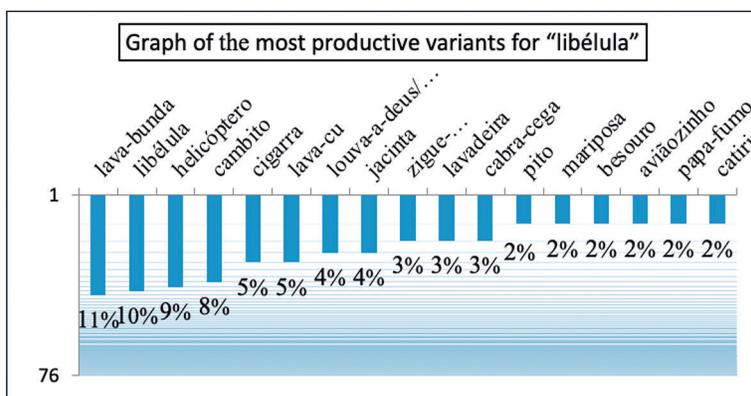
<sup>6</sup> Other names are: *interruptor*, *interrupter*, *cutout*.

Midwest and South Region), *bate-bunda/lava-bunda/lava-cu* (“butt-beater”/“butt-washer”/“ass-washer”) (Northeast, Southeast, South and Midwest Regions) and *cigarra* (“cicada”)<sup>7</sup> (North, Southeast and South Regions).

If, in the 25 capitals investigated, 30 different names were collected in the speech of 200 informants (AGUILERA; ROMANO, in press), this number increases significantly when analyzing the data from the hinterlands with a collection of 103 variants, whose occurrence rates fluctuate between one (*miguel-seco, pito-de-saci, João-de-deus*) (“dry-michael”, “saci’s pipe”, “John-of-God”) and 75 records (*lava-bunda*) (“butt-washer”). The cultured variant *libélula* was elicited by 68 informants, corresponding to 10% of the data.

Graph 1 shows the productivity of the most frequent variants, which corresponds to 76%<sup>8</sup> of the corpus of this work. For the elaboration of the graph, we took into account the records that presented, at least, 11 occurrences, that is, slightly less than 2% of the total (680) responses obtained.

**Graph 1** – Productivity of the most frequent variants for *libélula* (*dragonfly*), in data from the Brazil’s hinterlands.



**Source:** Elaboration by the authors based on the ALiB corpus.

The data obtained in the hinterlands from 900 informants, stratified according to sex and age (Range I, between 18 and 30 years; range II, between 50 and 65 years), add up to 680 records, distributed along 103 different denominations. This means that 76% of the answers were considered valid while 24% of the informants declared that they did not remember the name or did not know it, or even did not know the insect. Out of this amount, only *libélula* (dragonfly) and *cigarra* (cicada) were selected in all

<sup>7</sup> This and other variants were evaluated by researchers from ALiB to confirm the veracity of the existence of that form. It should be clarified that a form was considered valid if it was mentioned in the speech of more than one informant in the locality or region. To activate the informant’s memory and facilitate the elicitation of the local or regional variant, in the field research, concomitantly with the question, the interviewer presented the figure of the insect.

<sup>8</sup> Data has been rounded up to one decimal place.

regions; *lava-bunda* (“butt-washer”), *lava-cu* (“ass-washer”), *helicóptero* (helicopter), *cambito* (longlegs), *louva/lava-deus* (“god-praiser/god-washer”) e *mariposa* (“moth”) were registered in three of them. The largest contingent of variants received from one to three registers, which demonstrates the strength of popular creation, because, in the absence of the name considered standard or cult, the forces of creativity act based on various motivations: some aspect of the insect, names of other known insects and/or animals, beliefs and taboos, as shown in Chart 1.

**Table 1** – The variants and their possible semantic motivations

<b>Variants/Number of occurrences</b>	<b>Possible Semantic Motivation</b>
aguacil (03) aleluia (03) (“hallelujah”) andorin(h)a (01) (“swallow”) aruá (01) avó-de-peixe (02) (“fish-grandmother”) besouro (14) (“beetle”) bicho-d’água (02) (“water-bug”) birro (01) borboleta (02) (“butterfly”) cachimbal (04) canzilo <sup>9</sup> (01) cavalinho (06) (“little horse”) cavalinho-de-deus (01) (“god-horse”) cavalo-de-água (02) (“water-horse”) cavalo-de-pau (01) (“wooden-horse”) cavalo-do-cão (06) (“beast’s horse”) cavalo-do-capeta (06) (devil’s horse) cavalo-do-judeu/judeu (05) (“Jewish’s horse/ Jewish horse”) cavalo-marinho (03) (“seahorse”) cobra-cega (01) (“blind-snake”) cabra-cega (21) (“blind-goat”) formiga-de-asa (01) (“winged-ant”) gafanhoto (01) (“grasshopper”) jacinta (24) louva-a-deus (26) (“praying mantis”) macaco-seco (02) (“dry-monkey”) macaquinho (05) (“little monkey”) mãe-de-peixe (01) (“mother-of-fish”) mariposa (14) (“moth”) morceguinho (01) (“little bat”) mosquito (07) (“mosquito”) mutuca (01) (“horsefly”) olho-de-peixe (01) (“fisheye”)	Fauna / extension of meaning due to physical characteristics, and the habitat of other animals and insects and, even, to the confusion that is made between the different species of the latter.

<sup>9</sup> In the third sense, Ferreira (2004) brings: Braz. Zool. See. *libélula* (dragonfly) (3). In Aulete digital: 4. Braz. Ent. See *libélula* (dragonfly).

peixe-seco (01) (“dry-fish”) pernilongo (do banhado) (01) (“mosquito from the swamp”) pica-fumo <sup>10</sup> (02) (“woodpecker”) vespa (02) (“wasp”) zangão (02) (“drone”)	
assa-peixe (01) (“fish-baker”)	Flora / extension of meaning
aeroplano (01) (airplane) alfinete (01) (“pin”) aviãozinho (13) (“little plane”) badalo (01) (“clapper”) banha-bunda (01) (“butt-bather”) bate-bunda (05) (“butt-beater”) bebe-água (02) (“water-drinker”) bunda-d’água (01) (“water-butt”) cachimbo (03) (“[smoking]pipe”) cambito (55) (longlegs) canutilho (01) (“bugle”) cavaleta (01) (“easel”) cigarra (37) (“cicada”) cu-d’água (01) (“water-ass”) hélice (01) (“propeller”) helicóptero (58) (helicopter) lambe-água (02) (“water-licker”) lambe-cu (01) (“ass-licker”) lambe-flor (01) (“flower-licker”) lambe-lambe (01) (“lick-lick”) lava-bunda (75) (“butt-washer”) lava-cu (35) (“ass-washer”) lavadeira (21) (“washerwoman”) lava-o-rabo (01) (“tail-washer”) palito (03) (“pick”) papa-fumo (12) (“tobacco-eater”) papa-mosquito (03) (“mosquito-eater”) pescador (01) (“fisher”) pito (16) (“pipe”) pito-de-saci (01) (“saci’s pipe”) quiquinho <sup>11</sup> (01) (“little gypsy”) rabo-judeu (01) (“Jewish tail”) rodo (01) (“squeegee”) telescópio (01) (“telescope”) vagabunda (01) (“slut”)	Extension of meaning due to morphological characteristics and movement of the insect

<sup>10</sup> Ferreira (2004) defines *pica-fumo* as: 1. Bras. Uncomfortable and irregular walking horse; 3. Braz. Noun. Canivete (penknife).

<sup>11</sup> We find in Ferreira (2004), in the entry *quico*: Bras. Center of MG and SP. See. *Gypsy*. In the case of the registered variant, we would have a diminutive with the sense of *little gypsy*.

apito (01) (“whistle”) biu-biu (01) tchibum (01) (“splash”) tombom (01) vim-vim (01) zigue-zague (23) (“zig-zag”) zingo-zingo (01) zum-zum (01) (“buzz-buzz”)	Sound of insect flight
catirina <sup>12</sup> (11) mãe-d’água (01) (“water-mother”) mãe-de-ouro (01) (“golden mother”) saci (01) zumbi (02) (“zombie”)	Folklore
joão-bobo (01) (“silly-john”) joão-de-deus (01) (“john-of-god”) joão-mago (01) (“john-wizard”) mané-cachimbo (02) (“mané-pipe”) mané-magro (04) (“thin-mané”) maria-cega (04) (“blind-mary”) miguel-seco (01) (“dry-miguel”) guilherme (01)	Proper names
capacete (01) (“helmet”) dona (01) (odonato reduction?) “mistress” tesoureiro (01) (“treasurer”) tintureira (01) (“dyer” analogy with lavadeira (“laundress”))	Undetermined

**Source:** Elaboration by the authors based on the ALiB corpus.

The collected variants suggest that the insect’s name is, in general, of metaphorical basis, motivated by its physical aspect, sound and movements in flight and, equally, by mental associations/analogies with similar ones, resulting, in most cases, in transparent signs<sup>13</sup> (SAUSSURE, 1971; ULLMANN, 1964; GUIRAUD, 1976; ALINEI, 1995, 1997, 2002; CONTINI, 2009, 2012).

Due to the extension of the corpus, we analyzed three aspects related to the variants:

- (i) dictionary definition;
- (ii) word formation and
- (iii) motivation.

<sup>12</sup> Probable allusion to Catirina, folk character of bumba-meu-boi.

<sup>13</sup> For Ullmann (1964), words can be opaque or transparent: these are the words related to the referents they name, that is, between the name (signifier) and the sense (concept). Those with no correlation between sound and sense would be opaque.

## Dictionarizing of popular *libélula* (dragonfly) variants collected in the hinterlands of Brazil

Before consulting the two main Brazilian lexicographers about the variants included in the dictionaries, we looked for the etymology of the lexical item *libélula* (dragonfly) in works by foreign authors. Bloch and Wartburg (1996), on the dating of the dragonfly form, they record the year 1792 and describe it as a form borrowed from the Latin of the naturalists *libellula* and derived from the classic Latin, *libella* “level”, a name created by allusion to the planned flight of the dragonfly. In Dauzat, Dubois and Miterrand (1964), in turn, it appears as dated 1803 and comes from the Latin *libella*, “level”, which gave rise to *libellula*, also due to the insect’s flight. Corominas (2006), on the other hand, records that it comes from the scientific Latin *libellula*, from the Latin *libra*, “libra de pezo”, “balanza” (“pound of weight”, “scale”), but puts it as a starting date 1884. According to this lexicographer, it is the diminutive of *libella* “balanza” (“scale”) because stays in balance in the air. As we have seen, there is no uniformity in either the dating or the etymology of the word.

To check the dictionarizing of the variants collected in 225 locations in the Brazilian hinterlands, we consulted the dictionaries of Aulete, in their physical (1964) and digital<sup>14</sup> version, and Ferreira (2004).

In the first, *libélula* (dragonfly) is defined as follows:

LIBÉLULA (dragonfly). Fem. noun scientific name of the *libelinha* or *donzelinha* (damsel): Dragonflies hovered above water ... wet the tips of their wings, then fleeing. (Coelho Neto, *Água de Juventa*, p. 78, ed. 1921.) || Scient. Lat. *Libellula*, perhaps from *libella* (level), due to the horizontality of the outstretched wings. (AULETE, 1964). Digital version: sf. 1. Ent. Common name to insects of the order of odonates, with four long and transparent wings, narrow and long abdomen, and which feed on insects and other organisms; WASHERWOMAN. [Fem.: From fr. *libellule*, from scient. Lat. *libellula*.]<sup>15</sup>

In the entry, as a reference, there are only the three variants, *libelinha*, *donzelinha* and *lavadeira* (dragonfly, damsel and “washerwoman”), but, looking in this dictionary the other forms registered by ALiB in the hinterlands, we find that they are also on it in the same sense:<sup>16</sup> *cabra-cega* (“blind-goat”) as a Brazilianism of the state of

<sup>14</sup> Available at: <https://aulete.com.br/index.php>.

<sup>15</sup> Original: “LIBÉLULA. s.f. nome científico da libelinha ou donzelinha: Libéluas pairavam acima de água... molhavam as pontas das asas, logo fugindo. (Coelho Neto, *Água de Juventa*, p. 78, ed. 1921.) || F. lat. cient. *Libellula*, talvez de *libella* (nivel), por alusão à horizontalidade das asas estendidas. (AULETE, 1964). Versão digital: sf. 1. Ent. Nome comum aos insetos da ordem dos odonatos, de quatro asas longas e transparentes, abdome estreito e comprido, e que se alimentam de insetos e outros organismos; LAVADEIRA. [F.: Do fr. *libellule*, do lat. cient. *libellula*.]”

<sup>16</sup> We emphasize that in the most recent version, that is, the online dictionary of AULETE, the entries *cambito* and *cabra-cega* (“blind-goat”) are known to be in dictionary entries with other meanings; *jacina* and *zigue-zigue* are not dictionaryized.

Piauí; *cambito* (longlegs), in the Northern region, common name for a certain kind of dragonfly; *cavalinho-de-judeu e cavalo judeu* (“Jewish’s horse/Jewish horse”), variants of the Northern region; *jacina*, braz., also known as *lavadeira* (“washerwoman”) or *lavadeira* (“laundress”); *lava-bunda* (“butt-washer”), pop. Braz.; *macaquinho-de-bambá* (“bambá little monkey”), braz.; *papa-fumo* (“tobacco-eater”), braz. common name of the dragonfly; *zigue-zigue* (“zig-zig”), braz. NE, esp. of *libélula*; exclusively in digital version, *pito* (“pipe”), Ent. from the state of Minas Gerais (MG). The same as *libélula* [Fem.: from obscure origin] and *canzil*. Braz. Ent. See *libélula* [Pl.: -is.] [F.: From posv. origin of canga.]. [Fem.: From obscure origin].

Thus, out of the 103 variants collected in the points of the hinterlands of Brazil, in addition to *libélula*, only eight were registered by Caldas Aulete (1964 and online) with this meaning. The others either are not dictionaryed: *avó-de-peixe* (“fish-grandmother”), *bate-bunda* (“butts-beater”), *biu-biu*, *cavalo-do-cão* (“beast’s horse”), *cavalo-do-capeta* (devil’s horse), *lambe-água* (“water-licker”), *mãe-de-peixe* (“mother-of-fish”), *maria-cega* (“blind-mary”), *miguel-seco* (“dry-miguel”), *quiquinho* (“little gypsy”), *tibum* (“splash”) and *zingo-zingo*, among others, or they are entries with other meanings: *aguacil*,<sup>17</sup> *aleluia* (“hallelujah”),<sup>18</sup> *alfinete* (“pin”), *aruá*, *assa-peixe* (“fish-baker”), *besouro* (“beetle”), *birro*, *canutilo* (de *canutilho*), *cavaleta*, *cavalinho* (“little horse”), *cigana* (“gypsy woman”), *cigarra* (“cicada”), *guilherme*, *helicóptero* (helicopter), *mané-magro* (“thin-mané”), for example.

In the *libélula* entry, Ferreira (2004) describes:

Libélula (dragonfly). [From Fr. *libellule* < scient. Lat. *libellula* < classic Lat. *libella*, ‘level’, alluding to the glided flight of this insect.] Fem. noun. Zool. 1. A genus of odonata insects, with a narrow body, endowed with two pairs of membranous, transparent wings, generally brightly colored, whose larvae, carnivorous and voracious, develop in running, stagnant, or even in the interior of bromeliads. (...) [Syn. *cambito*, *canzil*, *cavalinho-de-judeu*, *cavalinho-do diabo*, *cavalo-de-judeu*, *cavalo-judeu*, *donzelinha*, *jacina*, *jacinta*, *lava-bunda*, *lavadeira*, *lavadeira*, *libelinha*, *odonata*, *macaquinho-de-bambá*, *pito*, *ziguezigue*.]<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> In Aulete *aguacil* is not dictionaryed.

<sup>18</sup> Although the online Aulete brings the entry *hallelujah* as: Zool. Common name of several esp. of termite and insects of ephemeral life. [Fem: From Hebr. Halelu Ia ‘Praise the Lord’, through Lat. aleluia], it does not mention directly the insects of the order of the Odonates, of which *libélula* is a part.

<sup>19</sup> Original: “*Libélula*. [Do fr. *libellule* < lat. cient. *libellula* < lat. cláss. *libella*, ‘nivel’, por alusão ao voo planado deste inseto.] S.f. Zool. 1. Gênero de insetos odonatos, de corpo estreito, dotados de dois pares de asas membranas, transparentes, em geral brilhantemente coloridas, cujas larvas, carnívoras e voracíssimas, se desenvolvem nas águas correntes, nas estagnadas, ou mesmo no interior das bromeliáceas. (...) [Sin. *cambito*, *canzil*, *cavalinho-de-judeu*, *cavalinho-do diabo*, *cavalo-de-judeu*, *cavalo-judeu*, *donzelinha*, *jacina*, *jacinta*, *lava-bunda*, *lavadeira*, *lavadeira*, *libelinha*, *odonata*, *macaquinho-de-bambá*, *pito*, *ziguezigue*.]”

Ferreira (2004) registers a greater number of popular variants than Aulete (1964), but still much smaller than that registered by ALiB. On the other hand, some variants by Ferreira (2004) do not appear in the corpus of this atlas: *cavalinho-do-diabo* (“devil’s little horse”), *donzelinha* (“damsel/fly”), *lavadeira* (“laundress”), *libelinha* and *odonata* (“odonate”). Or rather, they appear with minor lexical, morphological or phonetic alterations: *cavalo-do-diabo* (devil’s horse), *cavalo-do-capeta* (“satan’s horse”), *cavalo-do-judeu* (“Jewish’s horse”) e *lavadeira* (“washerwoman”).

Ferreira (2004) also records a significant number of other forms similar to those of the *libélula* corpus in ALiB, but with different meanings, that is, referring to other referents: *aeroplano* (airplane), *aviãozinho* (“little airplane”), *badalo* (“clapper”), *borboleta* (“butterfly”), *cachimbo* (“pipe”), *cavalo-de-água* (“water-horse”), *hélice* (“propeller”), *joão-bobo* (“silly-john”), *judeu* (“Jewish”), *lambe-lambe* (“lick-lick”), among others.

Regarding the classification of variants as Brazilianisms, we elaborated Table 2, which shows the data recorded in the dictionaries in comparison with those of ALiB.

**Table 2** – Registration of variants in the dictionaries (AULETE and FERREIRA) and ALiB (inland)

<b>Variant</b>	<b>Aulete (1964 and digital)</b>	<b>Ferreira (2004)</b>	<b>ALiB (unpublished corpus)</b>
<i>cabra-cega</i> (“blind-goat”)	Brazilianism from Piauí	Brazilianism from Pará	Registered in locations in Piauí, Ceará and Pernambuco, as well as <i>cabra-cega</i> , in the first two.
<i>Cambito</i> (longlegs)	Brazilianism from Northern region	Brazilianism from Northeastern region.	In the Northeast, it was elicited in Maranhão, Piauí and Bahia; in the Northern Region, in Pará and Tocantins; and, although with low frequency, in Minas Gerais (Southeast), Mato Grosso and Goiás (Mid-West).
<i>Canzilo</i>	Other meanings that do not refer to <i>libélula</i> . Digital version: refers to the entry <i>libélula</i> , but without reference to the region of usage	Brazilianism without specifying the region of usage.	Registered in Goiás, with only one occurrence, therefore in process of archaization.
<i>jacina/jacinta</i>	Brazilianism without reference to the region of usage.	Brazilianism from Amazonas	Besides Amazonas, Amapá e Pará.

<i>lava-bunda</i> (“butts-washer”)	Brazilianism without reference to the region of usage.	Brazilianism without reference to the region of usage.	Maranhão, Pernambuco and Bahia, in Northeastern region; in Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul and Goiás, in Mid-Western region; in the four states of Southeastern region: Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo and São Paulo; in Southern region, mainly in Paraná, with few records in Santa Catarina.
<i>papa-fumo</i> (“tobacco-eater”)	Brazilianism without reference to the region of usage.	Another meaning.	Registered only in Rio de Janeiro.
<i>Pito</i> (“pipe”)	Other meanings. Digital version: defines it as the same as <i>libélula</i> and indicates Minas Gerais as region of occurrence.	Popular designation of <i>libélula</i> in Minas Gerais.	Hinterlands of São Paulo, where it alternates with <i>pita</i> , having obtained only one record in Mato Grosso and two in Minas Gerais.
<i>zigue-zigue</i> (“zig-zig”)	Brazilianism from Northeastern region	Brazilianism without reference to the region of usage.	Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba and Pernambuco and with <i>zigue-zague</i> in these states, besides Alagoas and Bahia.

**Source:** Authors’ elaboration.

As can be seen, the atlas, given its nature and specificity, expands the geographical area of the distribution of the variants. In addition, it rectifies some lexicographic records, as in the case of the *pito* (“pipe”) variant whose concentration occurs in São Paulo, but it is not very productive in the data of ALiB in Minas Gerais, although Ferreira (2004) places it only as a Brazilianism of this State. Another function of the atlas is to fill geographic gaps, such as the cases of *lava-bunda* (“butt-washer”), *jacina* and *papa-fumo* (“tobacco-eater”), presented in Table 2.

### **Word formation processes: the popular names of *libélula***

The gathered collection shows a relatively favorable distribution for the compound words (57) to the detriment of the simple ones (46). Among the primitive simple words, we have: *aguacil*, *aleluia*, *alfinete*, *andorinha*, *apito* (from *pito*?), *aruá*, *badalo*, *besouro*, *birro*, *borboleta*, *cambito*, *canzilo* (from *canzil*), *capacete*, *catirina*, *cigana*, *dona*, *gafanhoto*, *guilherme*, *hélíce*, *jacinta*, *judeu*, *mariposa*, *mutuca*, *pito*, *rodo*, *saci*, *vagabunda*, *vespa*, *zangão* and *zumbi*. Among the derived words formed, mainly, by the addition of diminutive suffixes, we register *aviãozinho*, *canutilo* (from *canutilho*),

*besourico, besourito, cavaleta, cavalinho, ciganinha, macaquinho, morceguinho, mosquito, palito and quiquinho*. The suffixes *-eiro(a)* and *-dor (-er)*, indicative of profession, activity, are also present in: *lavadeira, pescador, tesoureiro* and *tintureira* (“washerwoman, fisherman, scissors man, and dyer”). We registered only two variants formed by an augmentative suffix: *mosquitão* and *pitão* (“big fly” and “big pipe”).

As for the erudite compound words, we highlight: airplane (Fr. *aéropiane*), helicopter (Fr. *hélicoptère*), and telescope (Fr. *télescope*), noting that the forming elements *aêr, helix, pterón, têtê, scopein* come from Greek (BLOCH; WARTBURG, 1996).

The words composed by juxtaposition sometimes have, as a first element, a verb: *assa-peixe, banha-bunda, bate-bunda, bebe-água, cata-vento, lambe-água, lambe-cu, lambe-flor, lambe-lambe, lava-bunda, lava-cu, lava-deus, lava-o-rabo, louva-deus, papa-fumo, papa-mosquito* and *pica-fumo*; sometimes a noun: *avó-de-peixe, bicho-d'água, bunda-d'água, cabra-cega, cavalinho-de-deus, cavalo-de-água, cavalo-de-pau, cavalo-do-cão, cavalo-do-capeta, cavalo-do-judeu, cavalo-marinho, cobra-cega, cu-d'água, formiga de asa, João-bobo, João-de-deus, João-mago, macaco-seco, mãe-d'água, mãe-de-ouro, mãe-de-peixe, mané-cachimbo, mané-magro, maria-cega, miguel-seco, olho-de-peixe, peixe-seco, pernilongo do banhado, pito-de-saci, rabo-judeu*.

Regarding the verb, in the first element, the more frequent are: *banhar, bater, lamber, lavar* and *papar* (*bathe, beat, lick, wash* and *eat*), associated with the act of the dragonfly rubbing the water with the tail. The most recurrent nouns, in the first or second element, are: *água, bunda, cu, cavalo, deus, mãe, rabo* and *peixe* (*water, butt, ass, horse, god, mother, tail* and *fish*) that bind, except *cavalo, deus, mãe* (*horse, god and mother*), to the liquid medium where it spawns and feeds, but also the part of the insect's body that touches the water.

We add to these two lists the onomatopoeic ones with repeated forms, the same or similar: *biu-biu, tibum* (“*splash*”), *tom-bom, vim-vim, zigue-zague* (*zig-zag*), *zigue-zigue* (“*zig-zig*”), *zingo-zingo* and *zum-zum* (“*buzz-buzz*”).

In the formation of words to designate the libélula, it is common to resort to proper names, the most frequent of which is João (John), an anthroponym that links to various classes of words to form different designations, in Brazilian Portuguese, in the field of toys, plants, animals, places and objects. Other anthroponyms forming popular names for the dragonfly: Mané (Manuel), Maria (Mary) and Miguel (Michael), always accompanied by some adjective or adjective phrase: *bobo, cego, mago, magro, seco e de-deus* (*silly; blind, wizard, thin, dry and of god*). Guilherme is the only simple anthroponomic form on record.

## Motivational semantics and the popular names of libélula in Brazil

According to Ullmann (1964), speculation about the origin of words was already reflected in the reflections of primitive Greek philosophy, in Plato's dialogues in

*Cratylus*, therefore about 2,500 years ago. The philosopher was engaged in discussing the two rival schools of thought: that of naturalists, whose belief was based on the intrinsic connection between sound and meaning, and that of conventionalists, who supported the purely arbitrary connection. As it is possible to infer, the germ of the Saussurean dichotomy was already present in that context.

Apparently, such a subject has long appeared to have a prominent place in the reflections of anthropologists, philosophers, philologists, and linguists, but we believe that, throughout 19th century, speculation intensified, leading to theories of all kinds: physiological, psychological, romantic, or animistic, innate, and even religious. Understanding that this question seemed inaccessible to methodological approaches and seeing even bizarre hypotheses, the Linguistic Society of Paris banned, in 1886, any discussion about the origin of language, considering it as an unanswered problem (STAM, 1976).

The question of the origin of language necessarily involves the theme of the creation of the lexicon, that is, the sign, and Saussure's discussions. The Genevan master, when dealing with the immutability of the sign, defends that, in relation to the linguistic community in which he belongs, the sign is not free, but imposed on that community. And he adds:

No individual, even if he willed it, could modify in any way at all the choice that has been made; and what is more, the community itself cannot control so much as a single word; it is bound to the existing language (SAUSSURE, 1971, p. 85).

We agree that the language always represents a legacy from the previous era, or, in the words of Saussure (1971, p. 76), it is a product inherited from previous generations and that must be received as such. The linguist warns, however, that "one might point to the fact that succeeding generations are not superimposed on one another like the drawers of a piece of furniture, but fuse and interpenetrate, each generation embracing individuals of all ages – with the result that modifications of language are not tied to the succession of generations." At this point in the discussion, Saussure (1971, p. 88) uses the arbitrary character of the sign, concluding that "Because the sign is arbitrary, it follows no law other than that of tradition, and because it is based on tradition, it is arbitrary."

Analyzing Saussure's words and confronting them with the lexical collection of more than a hundred *libélula* denominations in the Brazil's hinterlands, some reflections must be made:

(i) to what extents to variants such as *alfinete*, *aruá*, *assa-peixe*, *birro*, *biu-biu*, *canutilo* (de *canutilho*), *cavaleta*, *lambe-flor*, *mãe-de-peixe*, *miguel-seco*, *quiquinho*, *tibum* e *zingo-zingo*, *cavalinho-de-deus* and *guilherme*, among others, with a single occurrence each, represent an imposition of the language or the speaking community to which the informant belongs?

(ii) what leads the informant to ‘create’, with the resources available in the language, and to use this and not another variant? In our view, these are popular creations made from the resources and knowledge of the world of each speaker;

(iii) wouldn’t it be more appropriate to consider each of these forms as a complex manifestation that we are still unable to fully elucidate?

We understand that these reflections must be deepened, but, given the impossibility of, for the time being, finding a methodological and scientific apparatus that can give more reliable clues about these popular creations, we will limit ourselves to the more descriptive approach from the synchronic point of view, supporting it in the principles of sign motivation proposed by Saussure (1971), Ullmann (1964), Guiraud (1976), Alinei (1995, 1997, 2002) and Contini (2009, 2012).

Although Saussure (1971, p. 152-153) advocated the sign arbitrariness thesis, he recognized the principle of *relative motivation*, formulated as follows:

The fundamental principle of the arbitrariness of the sign does not prevent our singling out in each language what is radically arbitrary, i.e. unmotivated, and what is only relatively arbitrary. Some signs are absolutely arbitrary; in others we note, not its complete absence, but the presence of degrees of arbitrariness: the sign may be *relatively motivated*. (...) The notion of relative motivation implies: (1) analysis of a given term, hence a syntagmatic relation; and (2) the summoning of one or more other terms, hence an associative relation.

When analyzing the assumptions of the Genevan master, Guiraud (1976, p. 29) concludes that Saussure had in mind, above all, the theory of an onomatopoeic origin of sounds, without excluding the notion of motivation in other planes. Therefore, for the author, there are three fundamental notions: arbitrariness, motivation, and convention:

*Arbitrary* is opposed to motivation and has as a *conventional* corollary, since in the absence of any motivation, only the convention bases the significance. But *conventional* does not exclude *motivation*. On the other hand, the essence of the linguistic sign is conventionality and not the arbitrary, conventionality that *tends* to demotivate the sign and therefore to arbitrariness, but which does not exclude motivation; simply, in this case, motivation constitutes a secondary characteristic, not immediately necessary and that for this reason tends to alter, to darken and often to be erased.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Original: “Arbitrario se opone a motivado y tiene como corolario convencional, dado que en ausencia de toda motivación únicamente la convención fundamenta la significación. Pero lo convencional no excluye al motivado. Por otra parte, la esencia del signo lingüístico es la convencionalidad y no lo arbitrario, convencionalidad que tiende a la desmotivación del signo y por lo mismo a la arbitrariedad, pero que no excluye la motivación; simplemente, en este

Guiraud (1976, p. 30-32) further asserts that “at the beginning, all words are motivated and continue to be so for some time. Motivation constitutes, therefore, one of the fundamental characteristics of the linguistic sign”<sup>21</sup>. However, it is worth mentioning that this motivation, over time, is erased and, after this process, the sign becomes arbitrary. In this way, the meaning of words is permeated by two complementary and interdependent processes whose effect results in the creation and spontaneous evolution of the language, that is, the first consists of a creative, conscious act, of individual and discontinuous origin; the second, on the other hand, is unconscious, collective, and progressive.

As is known, the language has several means for the creation of words, among them onomatopoeia, loan, derivation and composition and, finally, the migration or transfer of meanings. The latter, according to the author, are the starting point for the further displacement of the basic sense, thus playing an important role in stylistic designation.

Ullmann (1964), when dealing with transparent and opaque words, understands that many of them are entirely opaque and non-analyzable and, for that, exposes three arguments: the descriptive, the historical, and the comparative. As for the first, he argues that “if there were a necessary connection between the name and the meaning, one would expect that the same sounds would always mean the same thing, and vice versa, that is, the same thing would always be denoted by the same sounds.” These are homonymous or polysemic words, as some theorists understand. In the corpus of ALiB, we have, for example, the variant *alfinete* (*pin*) for libélula, which, in addition to designating this insect, names the [straight] pointed object, metal or plastic, which serves to join pieces of fabric or paper; it also represents the safety pin, which is a pin bent back on itself to form a spring, with a guard to cover the point; moreover, it also names plant and jewel types.

The second argument, the historical one, concerns the fact that both elements – the name and the sound – remain unchanged. This is not what etymology and historical linguistics have demonstrated: the names and sounds that comprise them are subject to change over time, according to the speaker, the space, and the historical-social context. We can verify that the Portuguese form *alfinete* (*pin*) is originated from *al-ḥilāl*, from Arabic, which, in Spanish, became *alfiler*.

The third argument states that the different languages have entirely different words for the same object. In the case of the libélula, we find that, in European Portuguese, the most common forms are *são tira-olhos*, *libelinha*, *azeiteiro*, *cicada*, *alfaiate*, *zangão* (*zangão-de-água*, *zangões*), *bate-cu* (*bate-cus*, *bate-cuses*), *cavalo-do-diabo*, *avião/aviões*, contained in the collections of the *Linguistic-Ethnographic Atlas of Portugal*

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*caso, la motivación, constituye una característica secundaria, no necesaria inmediatamente y que por lo mismo tiende a alterarse, a oscurecerse y a menuda a borrarse” (GUIRAUD, 1976, p.29).*

<sup>21</sup> Original: “*al principio, todas las palabras son motivadas y continúan siéndolo durante algún tiempo. La motivación constituye, pues, una de las características fundamentales del signo lingüístico” (GUIRAUD, 1976, p.30-32).*

and Galicia (ALEPG)<sup>22</sup>, while the *Galician Linguistic Atlas – ALGa* brings *cabalín*, *caballito*, *caballo* and *cabalo* followed by *demo*, *diablo*, *rio*, *cobra*, *auga*, *quiobra*, *dios*, or *inferno*.

Comparing the most recurrent variants in ALiB, ALEPG and ALGa, we observed that there are few coincidences between the three. We emphasize that only *cavalo-do-diabo* (*devil's horse*) is common to the three atlases, while *cigarra* (“cicada”) appears in ALPEG and ALiB. Looking, however, at the totality of forms registered in each of these atlases, we find that there are unproductive variants, but still resist in the speech of the informants of these three works, such as: *cavalo-do-diabo*, *avião*, *zangão*, *bate-cu*, *cavalinho-de-deus* and *cavalo-d'água* (*devil's horse*, *airplane*, “*drone*”, “*beat-ass*”, “*god's little horse*” and “*water-horse*”).

In the words of Ullmann (1964, p. 93), “although many words are entirely conventional, others are motivated in various ways.” This motivation can be related to the sounds, or to the morphological structure of the word, or even to its semantic background. According to Guiraud (1976), motivation can take four forms: phonetic, metasemic, morphological and paronymic, the first two being external and the last two being internal. The internal ones are characterized by the *exoglotic* motivation, that is, when there is a relation between the thing signified and the form significant, outside the linguistic system, as occurs, for example, with most of the variants obtained for dragonfly: *biu-biu*, *tibum*, *tombom*, *vim-vim*, *zigue-zague*, *zigue-zigue*, *ziguidão*, *zingo-zingo*, *zum-zum*, in which the speaker assigns a name to the insect from their personal observation and interpretation of the noises that libélula makes when flying and also when touching the water surface. The multiplicity of denominations demonstrates that, at this point, despite the sound being one, the reception of that sound varies from observer to observer. From this list of onomatopoeias, except *zum-zum*, a unique occurrence in a point in the Northeastern region, *zigue-zague* and *zigue-zigue* and the morphological variants *zigue*, *ziguidão* and *zingo-zingo* that are distributed by Northeastern locations, composing an isolexical area, the rest being unique occurrences recorded at different points in the Southeastern Region.

Within the *exoglotic* classification, there is a *metasemic* motivation when changes in meaning occur. As an example, we can mention the variants *avião*, *helicóptero*, *hélice* (*airplane*, *helicopter*, “*propeller*”), among other constituents of the corpus of this research. In these cases, there is “a double system of signs, the primary meaning, which constitutes a secondary signifier, and between signified and secondary meaning the same semantic problems of motivation and its subsequent obscuration are found again”<sup>23</sup> (GUIRAUD, 1976, p. 31).

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<sup>22</sup> The data presented from the *Atlas Lingüístico-Etnográfico de Portugal e da Galiza* e do *Atlas Lingüístico Galego* are unpublished and were kindly provided to us by their respective directors.

<sup>23</sup> Original: “*Un doble sistema de signos, el significado primario, que constituye un significante secundario, y entre significado y significante secundario se vuelve a encontrar los mismos problemas semánticos de la motivación y de su oscurecimiento subsiguiente*”. (GUIRAUD, 1976, p. 31).

The endoglotic motivation, on the other hand, originates within the linguistic system itself and can be morphologically or morphematically originated, based mainly on composition and derivation, when there is transparency between the forming elements and their relationship with the new sign, as we can see in: *banha-bunda*, *bate-bunda*, *bate-vento*, *bebe-água*, *bunda-d'água*, *cu-d'água*, *formiga-de-asa*, *lambe-água*, *lambe-cu*, *lambe-lambe*, *lava-bunda*, *lava-cauda*, *lava-cu*, *lavandeira*, *lavadeira*, *pescador*, and *papa-mosquito* (“butt-bather”, “butt-beater”, “beat-face”, “drink-water”, “water-butt”, “water-ass”, “winged ant”, “lick-water”, “lick-ass”, “lick-lick”, “butts-washer”, “tail-washer”, “ass-washer”, “laundress”, “washerwoman”, “fisherman”, and “fly-eater”), among others. Any Brazilian Portuguese speaker will be able to intuit, with relative ease, the meaning of each one of them. Another endoglotic case consists of paronymic motivation, according to the author, which is less regular and more accidental, which covers comparison or confusion in identical (homonymous) or similar (paronymous) forms, for example, the *lavadeira*>*lavandeira* (“washerwoman>laundress”).

In many cases, however, the connection between the two elements can be remote and obscure, requiring the user to activate memory and knowledge to understand the process that gave rise to the new sign. From the corpus, we highlight: *avó-de-peixe*, *cavalinho-de-deus*, *cavalo-d'água*, *cavalo-de-judeu*, *cavalo-de-pau*, *cavalo-do-cão*, *cavalo-do-capeta*, *cavalo-do-diabo*, *joão-de-deus*, *joão-bobo*, *joão-mago (magro)*, *macaco-seco*, and *vagabunda*.

The motivation based on semantic factors, according to Ullmann (1964), occurs due to the similarity or the association that is established between the motivating element and the current form. As examples of the corpus, we register: *alfinete*, *avião*, *aviãozinho*, *helicóptero*, *badalo*, *borboleta*, *cabra-cega*, *canutilo (canutilho)*, *cigana*, *pito*, and its feminine form, *pita*.

Contini (2009, p. 77), following the passages of Alinei (1995, 2002), on the motivational principles in the creation of the sign, explains:

We can admit the existence of three kinds of motivations: onomatopoeic, phonosymbolic and iconic. The last one, by far the most productive, defines a referent in relation to salient features: the name of an animal, for example, can refer to one of its physical characteristics, to its activity, to its relation to the man or to the cultural universe of men at a time in their history. Onomatopoeic formations could be considered as ‘primary’ creations of this same category: a bird can be designated by phonic productions supposed to imitate its song. On the other hand, phonosymbolic motivation differs from the previous ones, insofar as it assumes that the sounds of the language are themselves carriers of semantic information or capable of symbolically evoking extra-acoustic realities.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Original: “On peut admettre l’existence de trois sortes de motivations: onomatopéique, phonosymbolique et iconique. La dernière, de loin la plus productive, définit un référent par rapport à des traits saillants: le nom d’un animal, par exemple, peut renvoyer à l’une de ses caractéristiques physiques, à son activité, à sa relation à l’homme ou à l’univers

These observations provided the necessary support for the analysis of the entire corpus collected by ALiB, in the hinterlands of Brazil, regarding the designations for *libélula*.

Phonosymbolic motivation, on the other hand, presupposes that the sounds of language are, in themselves, carriers of semantic information or capable of symbolically evoking extra-acoustic realities. In the examples of onomatopoeic motivation, already mentioned, we find that the recurrence of the phoneme /z/ and the nasal (-im and -um) evokes the characteristic humming of the insect when flying.

Doiron (JESPERSEN, 1976; JAKOBSON; WAUGH, 1980; CONTINI, 2007 *apud* DOIRON, 2017, p. 158) comments that some linguists sought to analyze

[...] the sounds of language within human groupings, sounds that aim to reproduce, separately or regrouped, not only sound images, but also dimensions, distances, movements, levels of sensation and chromatic variations.

Thus, following the thinking of these authors, we could include in the list of signs based on phonosymbolic motivation, only the variant *lambe-lambe* (“lick-lick”).

The iconic motivation, considered the most productive, defines the referent in relation to the most salient traits, be it their physical characteristics, their activity, their relationship with man or with the cultural universe of men at a moment in their history (CONTINI, 2009). From the corpus, we extract: *cabra-cega*, *avó-de-peixe*, *cavalinho-de-deus*, *cavalo-d'água*, *cavalo-de-judeu*, *cavalo-de-pau*, *cavalo-do-cão*, *cavalo-do-capeta*, *cavalo-do-diabo*, *joão-de-deus*, *joão-bobo*, *joão-mago (magro)*, *macaco-seco*, and *vagabunda*, among others.

Besides anthroponyms, Alinei (1997) also considers, as the most frequent in the formation of motivated lexical items, zoonyms, animal names as announcers of death and time; the witch, the devil and the religious names related mainly to the saints. We add to this list of Alinei (1997), the recurrences to *judeu*, *deus*, *capeta*, *cão*, *diabo* to name the dragonfly in the Brazilian Portuguese lexicon.

To conclude this topic, we quote Guiraud (1976, p. 34-35), who seems to translate the motivational diversity of the lexicon of this corpus:

The word is always originally motivated, whether there is a natural relationship between the acoustic form and the thing signified (onomatopoeia, exclamations), or an *endoglottic* relationship between the words and the interior of the language, a relationship that can be of

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*culturel des hommes à un moment de leur histoire. Les formations onomatopéiques pourraient être considérées comme des créations 'primaires' de cette même catégorie: un oiseau peut être désigné par des productions phoniques censées imiter son chant. La motivation phonosymbolique se différencie en revanche des précédentes, dans la mesure où elle suppose que les sons du langage soient porteurs, eux-mêmes, d'information sémantique ou capables d'évoquer, symboliquement, des réalités extra-acoustiques.” (CONTINI, 2009, p. 77).*

a *morphological* order (derivation, composition) or semantic (change of meaning). But this etymological motivation, which is one of the creative forces of language, continues to be contingent: the creator of a word is always free to choose between the different modes of creative motivation. On the other hand, it is neither essential nor semantically decisive and tends to be obscured and erased in benefit of conventional association, which is the only one that accredits meaning.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusions

The study of the popular variants for *libélula* in the hinterlands of Brazil, in 225 locations, represented by four informants in each of them, with fundamental level of education and stratified according to sex and age group, demonstrated that:

(i) the number of variants exceeds a hundred forms, noting that most of them (85%) were registered by less than ten informants;

(ii) although they are frequent in regional or local speech, most of these variants are not dictionary-based. As we have seen, of the more than one hundred denominations, only eight are in Ferreira (2004) and Caldas Aulete (1964 and online). On the other hand, Ferreira (2004) attributes two other synonyms for *libélula*: *donzelinha* and *libelinha*, which were not registered in the speech of any of our informants;

(iii) lexical creation occurs in the form of simple names as well as compound names;

(iv) in the absence, or lack of knowledge of the name *libélula*, conveyed as corresponding to the cultured norm, the speaker assigns names created under the most diverse motivations: onomatopoeic, phonosymbolic, iconic based on the physical aspect, function, mental associations or analogies with other animals or similar objects, which leads to transparent or motivated signs.

Finally, the description and analysis of the data from a diatopic and lexical-semantic point of view allowed us to draw some generalizations. It is known that every language consists of a series of “arbitrary and opaque words, without any connection between sound and meaning, and others that, at least to some degree, are motivated and transparent” (ULLMANN, 1964, p. 169).

Thus, we found that, among the several popular names for *libélula*, the names assigned, regardless of being simple, compound or derivative, in most cases, can be considered transparent and the origin of many of them may have different motivations. Some, from the action of the insect hitting the backside in the water, such as *bate-bunda*,

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<sup>25</sup> Original: “La palabra siempre está originalmente motivada, sea que haya una relación natural entre la forma acústica y la cosa significada (onomatopeya, exclamaciones), o una relación endoglótica entre las palabras y el interior de la lengua, relación que puede ser de orden morfológico (derivación, composición) o semántico (cambio de sentido). Pero esta motivación etimológica, que es una de las fuerzas creadoras del lenguaje, continúa siendo contingente: el creador de una palabra queda siempre en libertad de elegir entre los diferentes modos de motivación creadora. Por otra parte tampoco es esencial, ni semánticamente determinante y tiende a oscurecerse y a borrarse en provecho de la asociación convencional, que es la única que acredita el sentido.” (GUIRAUD, 1976, p. 34-35).

*banha-bunda, lavadeira, lava-bunda, lava-cu, lava-deus* (popular form of *louva-deus* (*praying mantis*) (“butt-beater”, “butt-bather”, washerwoman, “butt-washer”, “ass-washer”, “eye-washer”, “god-washer”); others, by reference to the water world, its habitat for the multiplication of the species, and to which it is continually related: *cavalo-d’água, mãe-d’água, mãe-de-peixe, maria-d’água, mosquito-d’água, olho-de-peixe, assa-peixe*; others inspired by the insect’s morphology – long and thin body – as in a *cigarra*,<sup>26</sup> *mané-magro*; still others, coming from the sound it emits, such as *zigue-zigue* (“zig-zig”)<sup>27</sup> that clearly expresses the sound produced by the insect when flying and *zigue-zague* that, in addition to the sound, indicates the sinuous movement of the flight, a movement that may also have motivated the *cabra-cega* variant, referring to the children’s game of looking for other children with blindfolds; and, finally, some names may have arisen from the euphoric or dysphoric connotation that the speaker attributes to it, as in *louva-deus, cavalo-do-cão* (“mantis”, “beast’s horse”), and other designations in diminutive form: *macaquinho, besourito, canutilo* (“little monkey”, “little beetle”, “straw”).

In this line of reasoning, the scientific name itself is a transparent and motivated sign, as Houaiss and Villar (2001), Ferreira (2004) and Cunha (1999) record that *libélula* is an adaptation of the French *libellule*, from the Latin of the naturalists *libellula, libella*, diminutive of *libra* ‘scales’, an allusion to the flight of the insect, which remains in balance in the air, hovering.

Some denominations, however, are the extension of the meaning of other words, such as *besouro, louva-deus, mariposa, macaquinho* (“beetle, praying mantis, moth, little monkey”), with which they maintain some common semantic trait: the sound of flight, morphology, grace, lightness, agility.

In the case of some variants, perhaps because the standard form did not occur, but a form that was changed phonetically, it was not possible to have a safe analysis, only a hypothetical one. It is the case of *cachimbal*,<sup>28</sup> not dictionarized, whose closest form is *cachimbó*, meaning bird that frequents wetland. In Costa (1976, p. 224-225), there is an entrance to *catimbau* or *catimbó*, defined as “witchcraft, sorcery, sortilege (...)”. As the most remote point in the use of this variant, we find the name of the freshwater fish, Pirá catimbáo (...).<sup>29</sup> In this case, would it be an extension of the bird’s meaning for the insect, which also prefers wetlands? Or was it linked to the name of the fish or the appearance of the insect, with a long, thin body, reminiscent of cigarettes, pipe?

We conclude, quoting Dalbera (2006 *apud* DOIRON, 2017, p. 163):

<sup>26</sup> Ferreira (2004), among the popular names for *libélula*, registers *pito* that, like brazilianism, also means cachimbo, cigarro (“pipe, cigarette”).

<sup>27</sup> Costa (1976, p.807), in the entry *zig-zig*, defines the term as “natty, stilted walk; jaunty, full of quaver movement. With the name of Zigzig it appeared in a newspaper in 1893.”

<sup>28</sup> Cachimbal also evokes the primitive form *cachimbo* (“pipe”).

<sup>29</sup> Original: “*mandinga, feitiçaria, sortilégio (...). Como ponto mais remoto do emprego desta variante, encontramos o nome do peixe de água doce, Pirá catimbáo (...)*” (COSTA, 1976, p. 224-225).

Adopted by the linguistic community, the lexical designations listed keep the motivation transparent, that is, it is still possible to find in each of them the reason for having been named as such. What happens is that these lexical creations evolve naturally, since they reflect sociocultural structures of the past or the present, and, exposed to internal (within the same language) or external (in contact with other languages or dialects, or exposed to contexts of socio-cultural or geographic order), these changes, when significant, may cover the initial motivation. Faced with this hypothetical scenario, there is, then, the loss of the initial motivation, and, in this case, the lexical designation becomes arbitrary.

AGUILERA, V.; SILVA, H. As denominações para libélula, no Atlas linguístico do Brasil: um estudo sobre a motivação dos signos. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v.65, 2021.

- *RESUMO: As denominações atribuídas à libélula, – inseto de corpo comprido e fino, com quatro asas transparentes, que voa e bate a traseira na água – Questão 85 do QSL do Atlas Linguístico do Brasil, representam exemplarmente o complexo sistema variacional do léxico do português brasileiro (PB), refletindo fatos da sócio-história de cada região e, até mesmo, de cada localidade e de cada indivíduo. As variantes registradas no ALiB, publicado em 2014, com os dados das capitais, sugerem que a denominação do inseto é, em geral, de base metafórica, motivada pelo seu aspecto físico, som, movimentos e, igualmente, por associações mentais/analogias com outros semelhantes, resultando, na maioria dos casos, em signos transparentes. A fim de ratificar ou, talvez, retificar os resultados das capitais, analisamos, neste trabalho, os dados coletados no interior do país junto a 900 informantes, perfazendo o total de 225 localidades. Com o apoio desse corpus, norteadas pelos princípios teórico-metodológicos da Lexicografia e da Semântica, objetivamos: (i) verificar a dicionarização das formas obtidas; (ii) descrever as variantes quanto aos aspectos morfológicos; e (iii) analisar essas denominações sob a ótica da semântica motivacional.*
- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Atlas Linguístico do Brasil; interior brasileiro; variação lexical; libélula.*

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