

## The lexicon of Amazonian cuisine in favor of literacy in the Education of Young Adults and the Elderly - EJAI

### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

The regional cuisine of Pará presents traces of the traditional Amazonian identity that are revealed in the lexicon. In this sense, the objective of the present study is to extract and catalog the lexicon of Pará cuisine present in the EJAI Notebook (Picanço; Pantoja, 2023), in order to analyze the pedagogical principle of the language used in its preparation. The research is based on the perspective of Antunes (2012) and Biderman (2019). In addition to these authors, Fusa, Ohuschi and Menegassi (2011) and Freire (1989, 2002) regarding teaching. The investigation is documentary in nature and follows a qualitative approach. The corpus of the study was extracted from two electronic books from the EJAI Sabores e Saberes collection (Picanço; Pantoja, 2023). The analyzed results show the use of the lexicon as a tool that enables the appropriation of the reading and writing code based on practices of reading the world and the social, cultural and identity context.

**Keywords:** Lexicon. Pará cuisine. Amazon Identity. Language.

### O léxico da culinária amazônica em prol do letramento da Educação de Jovens Adultos e Idosos - EJAI

### Resumo

A culinária regional paraense apresenta traços da identidade tradicional amazônica que se revelam no léxico. Neste sentido, o objetivo do presente estudo é extrair e catalogar o léxico da culinária paraense presente no Caderno do EJAI (Picanço; Pantoja, 2023), com vistas a analisar o princípio pedagógico da linguagem utilizada em sua confecção. A pesquisa fundamenta-se na perspectiva de Antunes (2012) e Biderman (2019). Além dessas autoras, Fusa, Ohuschi e Menegassi (2011) e Freire (1989, 2002) no que tange ao ensino. A investigação é de natureza documental e segue a abordagem qualitativa. O corpus da investigação foi extraído do volume I do livro eletrônico da coleção Sabores e Saberes da EJAI (Picanço; Pantoja, 2023). Os resultados analisados evidenciam o uso do léxico como ferramenta que viabiliza a apropriação do código de leitura e escrita a partir das práticas de leitura de mundo e do contexto social, cultural e identitário.

**Palavras-chave:** Léxico. Culinária paraense. Identidade Amazônica. Linguagem.

## 1 Introduction

The biodiversity of flavors in Pará is made up of various ingredients that give rise to dishes usually only seen in the Amazon region. Therefore, in order to create these typically local dishes, they carry an encyclopedia of traditional and cultural teachings that relate to the identity of a people. In this context, the Coordination of Education for Young People, Adults and the Elderly (COEJAI), of the Belém/PA Municipal Department of Education (SEMEC), launched the collection "*Alfabetização à Mesa: Sabores e Saberes na/da EJAI*" (Literacy at the Table: Flavors and Knowledge in the EJAI) during the II Ongoing Training. The collection, inspired by Amazonian and caboclo foods, presents the cuisine as the identity of the people of Pará, describing details of the trajectory of life, memory and ancestry in this region. The aim of the work is to encompass curricular content with the intention of providing interdisciplinarity in the construction of critical literacy for students enrolled in the EJAI.

In addition, the variety of delicacies presented in volume I of the e-book "*Sabores e Saberes da EJAI - Comidas, memórias e afetos*" (Flavors and Knowledge of the EJAI - Food, memories and affections) (Belém, 2023) provides the reader with a strategic perception of the Pará lexicon, used as a mechanism to accelerate learning in the mother tongue. To this end, the use of this method is applied as a means of literacy for young people, adults and the elderly, following the idea of one of its organizers, Miguel Picanço, a COEJAI employee. In his speech, he highlights the importance of using the food culture of the Amazon region of Pará, favoring the establishment of a dialogue between anthropology, food culture and the pedagogical principles highlighted by Freire (2002), consolidating a symbolic and emblematic approach to the construction of activities applied in the classroom.

The work proposed by Picanço and Pantoja (2023) provides a social link to the students' experiences by using their knowledge of the regional lexicon of these students, who, in certain situations, work selling delicacies and producing food. In the training provided by COEJAI, teachers were instructed to work with language not just in the sense

of decoding words. In other words, the perspective adopted should go beyond teaching grammar or just spelling. Another factor observed was the perspective of working on literacy with a view to social reflection, an identity mechanism, valuing knowledge and one's own culture.

We have to respect the levels of understanding that learners - no matter who they are - are having of their own reality. To impose our understanding on them in the name of their liberation is to accept authoritarian solutions as paths to freedom (Freire, 1989, p. 17).

According to the quote, the way in which content and dynamics are presented in the classroom highlights the role of the educator. The author also stresses the importance of exploring students' previous knowledge of their mother tongue and practical skills, which helps them to add new information.

When talking about traditions, pedagogical practice is approached based on family heritage or individuals from the same regionality who share knowledge, which can be used in critical and reflective literacy with the lexicon of Pará. Furthermore, when we look back in history to find the origin of this knowledge about Pará cuisine, we see a compilation of lessons that have been influenced by indigenous and African peoples, thus forming the origin of a cuisine rich in taste memories that contribute to the construction of Amazonian identity. These traditions are especially popular on local commemorative dates such as the Círio de Nazaré (religious festival), the São Benedito festival and açaí festivals, etc.

Nowadays, with the access to information made possible by the internet, the cuisine of the state of Pará has also received national prominence, since this segment shows the identity traits of a people. In this food scenario, one of the most representative dishes of the North, *tacacá* - a broth made from tucupi (a yellow watery solution extracted from cassava), jambu (a regional Amazonian herb that makes your mouth feel numb) and dried shrimp - has recently become well-known. The spread of this delicacy was due to the success of the song *Voando pro Pará*, broadcast in different media.

In this sense, the general objective of this work is to extract and catalog lexical units that refer to the regional context of Pará. To this end, it specifically proposes the selection of words present in the EJAI collection, volume I. Based on these considerations,

this study presents an introductory section, with subtopics dealing with the lexicon, identity and teaching, as well as literacy in the EJA context. The next section deals with the methodology adopted in the investigation. The results section summarizes the information obtained and the discussion on the topic. The text ends with final considerations and a list of references used in the research.

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## 2 Lexicon, identity and teaching

Antunes (2012, p. 27) explains that the lexicon, "in a more general definition, can be seen as the broad repertoire of words in a language or the set of items available to speakers to meet their communication needs". The author attributes to the lexicon the role of making it possible to name something that belongs to a place, be it regional or foreign. Because of this, when approaching the specificities of a language with the intention of particularizing a region, it can be seen that the culture of Pará brings with it traces of indigenous and African culture, thus generating similarities between these cuisines. Based on the structure of the social context, bringing the lexicon into the classroom would enable greater interaction.

Regarding the definition of lexicon and how it is acquired, Biderman (1987) points out that

The formal models of linguistic signs therefore pre-exist the individual. In their individual process of understanding reality, the speaker incorporates the vocabulary that names the realities they understand together with the formal models that shape the lexical system (Biderman, 1987, p. 83).

Considering the definitions mentioned by the authors, approaching the lexicon in the classroom, based on its close relationship with society, would enable EJA students to become agents of the educational process, since they would be taking into account the previous references of their own reality.

Still on the role of lexical units in a social context, Antunes (2012) states that

If the lexicon of a language can be seen as a kind of "memory" representing the "cognitive matrices" it has constructed, it is also true that it is a dynamic memory,

in constant movement, which is reformulated step by step, just like the cultural manifestations it expresses (Antunes, 2012, p. 28).

From the author's words, it can be seen that the lexicon represented in the book *Sabores e Saberes da EJAI - Comidas, memórias e afetos* (Belém, 2023), explores aspects related to affective memories in Amazonian cuisine, which are seen as identifiable and passed down from generation to generation, often built by family tradition. Thus, the preparation of these notebooks takes into account elements related to the language in use and the experiences of students in this type of education.

In addition, as the author points out, just as there are changes in society due to globalization, language is also impacted by changes due to the influence of speakers, whether they come from different places or age groups and/or through their level of education. In other words, all these variables influence the dynamics of language. Thus, in the field of Pará's linguistic variety, it can be seen that regionalisms are inherited, in part, from the indigenous lexicon, which is particularly true of the nomenclature of typical foods, since the indigenous people used and still use local knowledge and ingredients to prepare their culinary dishes.

Based on the lexicon as a factor of linguistic identity, it can be seen that the regional language becomes particularized in relation to other regions, not only on a phonetic level, but also on a lexical level. Excerpts from the notebook analyzed show lexical items such as "jambu", "pai-d'-égua", "avoado" and "macaxeira", elements that are part of Pará culture.

In this way, the lexical variety, especially that which refers to the culinary domain, present in the analyzed book (Belém, 2023), in addition to exploring memories, affectivity and regional history, serves as the basis for teaching practices that highlight the interdisciplinary use with the disciplines of History, Science and Portuguese Language.

In this context, adapting teaching activities that include the use of the local lexical variety encourages reflection on the use of language in the daily interactions of these students. The next section addresses topics that deal with how literacy in the EJAI modality can occur through the lexicon.

## 3 EJAI Literacy

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In legal terms, Youth and Adult Education (EJA) was instituted in Brazil under the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB) - 9394/96, with the aim of guaranteeing students who did not have access to the appropriate schooling process the right to attend primary and secondary school after the age of 15.

Subject to advances and setbacks over the years, it is possible to see how the EJA has been linked to the idea that the training offered to students in this modality is only aimed at the job market. However, this would not be true, since students with age-year distortion are also allocated to these classes, precisely because they are over the age limit in regular primary and secondary school classes.

Arroyo (2018, p. 29) highlights the fact that the EJA represents the "intertwining of the right to education and basic human rights". For this intertwining to take place, public policies are needed that guarantee the rights of students and strengthen the training of educators/teachers, so that the practices developed in the classroom favor the learning and criticality of the EJA public.

Against this backdrop of mobilization to expand the minimum rights to education, the EJA began to include the elderly as well, which broadened its scope to Youth, Adult and Elderly Education (EJAI).

With regard to the initial literacy process, especially for young people, adults and the elderly, Freire (1989) highlights his vision of the theme involving the use of the lexicon as a support for this process. In the author's words

I have always insisted that the words used to organize the literacy program should come from the vocabulary of the popular groups, expressing their real language, their desires, their concerns, their demands, their dreams. They should come loaded with the meaning of their existential experience (Freire, 1989, p. 13).

For the author, the literacy process must include lexical units that are part of the students' daily lives. This requires collecting words from different domains, whether they come from work, leisure, family interactions or the school world. This perspective takes into

account the linking of notions of cultural identity to teaching and seeks to engage students in the classroom.

Thus, Freire's (1989) precursor technique implies the practice of literacy, in which the individual's need is seen in the lack of knowledge of subjects that circulate outside their sociocultural sphere. With this in mind, the educator has the possibility of proposing methods based on previous knowledge that will help to shape the citizen. In this way, the textbook analyzed dialogues with the method proposed by Freire (1989) and highlights the culture of Pará, through the lexical items used in the food, the method of preparation (how the food is cooked) and the cultural heritage described and rescued.

In this scenario of valuing a local culture, it is also necessary to survey the linguistic variety present in the different texts that make up the sample analyzed. Regarding the teaching of the Portuguese language linked to the appreciation of linguistic varieties, as well as the use of the lexical level as a parameter, it should be noted that

The teaching of grammar and linguistic variation in the Portuguese language subject should allow students to learn about the phenomena that permeate their mother tongue, providing greater interaction between the subject, language and society, so that understanding of the Portuguese language is contextualized and accessible to all (Santos; Lira; Silva; Salvador, 2021, p. 2).

According to the authors, understanding language cannot be based solely on grammatical factors. The teaching perspective should guide teachers towards making the classroom a place for interaction, use and appreciation of language and culture. This set of actions makes it possible to share, collectively, the experience that EJA students use in their daily activities.

In expanding the literacy and literacy process, the notion of literacy has been continually highlighted, especially due to the awareness of social factors linked to technological contexts. The constant exposure to communication that takes place on different levels, i.e. with writing, the visual, the semiotic and the inclusive, brings into focus the use of innovative methods so that students can grasp new content.

Fuza, Ohuschi and Menegassi (2011) point out that in the literacy process, the proficient student-reader has characteristics that guide the teacher's work in the sense that

The competent reader produces meanings and doesn't just extract them from the text. By realizing the incompleteness of what is on paper, the subject acts actively, bringing their knowledge to the text and using the other person's words to formulate their own, producing a link between what has already been said and what is new. The construction of knowledge is then carried out through social relations, through dialogue between the reader, the text, the author and the reading objectives (Fuza; Ohuschi; Menegassi, 2011, p. 495).

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Thus, it is understood that dialogic construction occurs through reading, writing and the use of orality, since this set of practices guides more effective and efficient communication. Furthermore, students' prior knowledge does not depend exclusively on strictly linguistic factors, but also on sociocultural factors.

Therefore, when designing their lessons, teachers can look for material that suits their students' communicative needs, both written and oral. When this work involves lexical attributions, the source used can be material produced within the linguistic community itself, as is the case with the material analyzed here.

The next section deals with the choice of sample composition.

## 4 Methodology

This section deals with the methodological aspects of the study. The approach that underpins the composition of the sample is of a documentary nature, since it chooses the EJA1 textbook (Belém, 2023) as its basic element. According to Gil (2017), the documentary study is based on the collection of text from a document that has not been previously analyzed. This type of research makes it possible to collect information on a particular topic, with a view to gaining a greater understanding of a primary source. In addition, research of this nature allows for a qualitative analysis of the *corpus*.

Thus, the intended methodological analytical design is anchored in a production aimed at teaching the Portuguese language through a collection that explores lexical elements present in Pará culture.

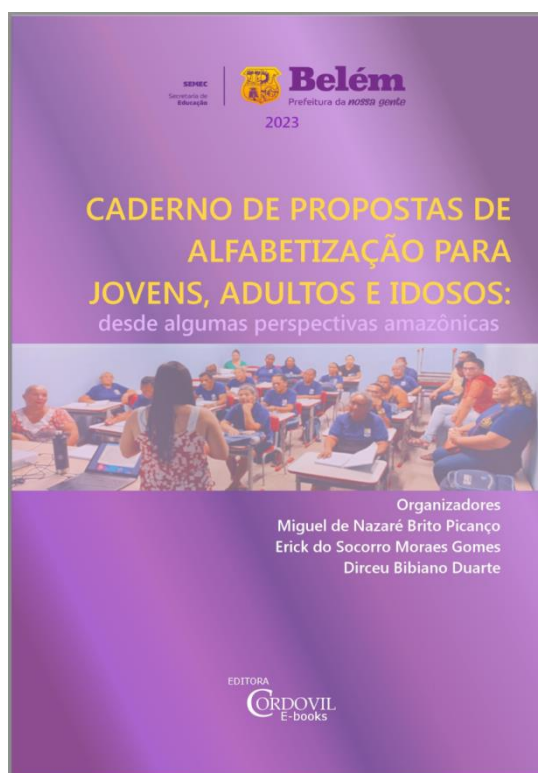


To this end, the authors of the basic texts present lexical items related to the cuisine of the state of Pará through poems, legends and, above all, excerpts from songs. In addition, the content of the book is adapted to the literacy process at the EJA level.

The book under analysis is organized into three main sections: *Weaving dialogues about life stories in the education of young people, adults and the elderly*; *Singing and literacy in the education of young people, adults and the elderly*; and *Literacy at the table*. The focus of this analysis is on the third section, precisely because it deals with cooking.

Figure 1 illustrates the cover of the material analyzed.

Figure 1 - EJA Booklet



Source: Extracted from the corpus.

The *Alfabetização à mesa* section was chosen because the largest number of regionally-based lexical items were found in the excerpts from the texts presented in this topic. For the arrangement of the section, the author used compositions by artists from

Pará such as Nilson chaves, Joelma and Dona Onete. These singers are represented in the sample with the songs: *Sabor açai*, *Voando pro Pará* and *Banzeiro*.

In all three songs it is possible to find lexical units that are productive in the discourse of the people from Pará who live in the capital. Examples include: "tacacá", "farinha d'água", "tapioca", "marajoara", among others.

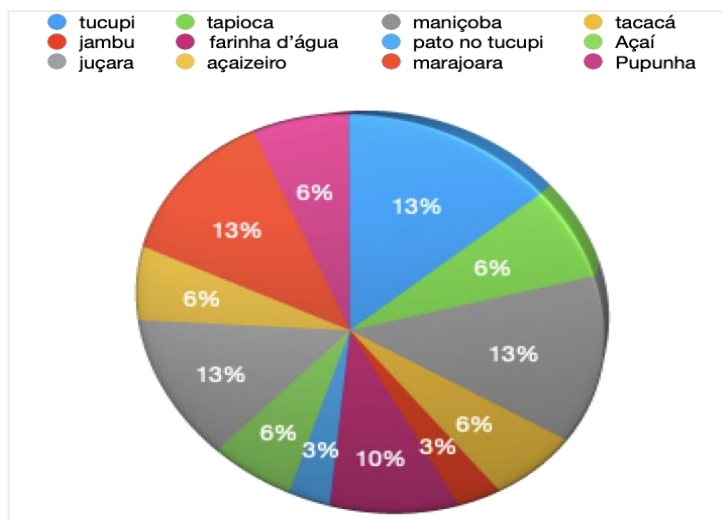
The results of the data collection and discussion are presented in the next section.

## 5 Results and Discussion

After collecting the units, we found 13 examples of lexical units that are frequently used in the communicative interactions of the people of Pará. These lexical items belong to the culinary domain.

Graph 1 illustrates the percentage found for each of the words.

**Graph 1 - Pará's lexicon**



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The information in Graph 1 shows that of the 13 units found, the words *juçara*, *tucupi*, *maniçoba* and *pupunha* were the most productive, each with 13%. This was followed by *farinha d'água* with 10% of the occurrences. The units *açai*, *açazeiro*, *tacacá*

and *tapioca* appeared with 6% each. Lastly, *jambu* and *pato no tucupi* have the equivalent of 3% each. This result demonstrates the use of the lexicon present in the songs extracted from the manual proposed by the Belém Department of Education and also demonstrates the adaptation of the teaching activities proposed for Portuguese language classes in an interdisciplinary context.

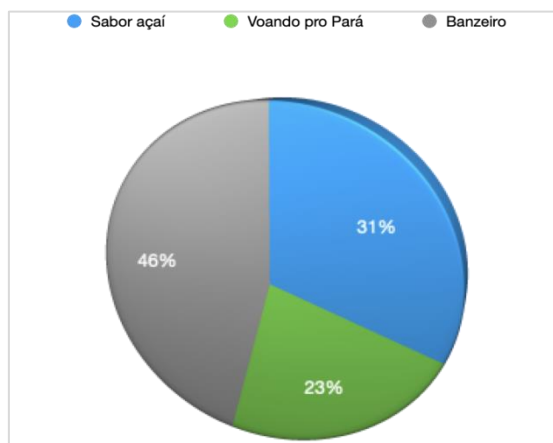
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In short, in the activities based on the music genre (Picanço; Pantoja, 2023, p. 29), the authors explore, in addition to *sambas*, *forrós* and raps, the musical styles *carimbó* and *brega*, both of which are very present in Pará culture. The generative questions proposed for the lessons deal with these styles and address both the written and oral modality. Following the topics of presentation and comprehension of the texts proposed in the material in this section, in the slicing of the songs, lexical issues are addressed through requests that indicate the creation of a glossary, the formation of words and word games (p. 31).

Still with regard to the items shown in Graph 1, in the song *Sabor Açaí* by Nilson Chaves, in verses 25, 26, 27 and 31, it is possible to see the use of the units "juçara", "tapioca", "farinha d'água" and "marajoara". The first is a reference to the açaí fruit; the second is a white Styrofoam-like flour; the third is a yellowish flour produced from manioc; and the last is a characteristic of those who come from Marajó, an archipelago in Pará. Thus, all the units are drawn from local experience, configuring the connection highlighted by Freire (1989) on the approach to the lexicon originating from the social practices of individuals.

With regard to the catalog of songs found, Graph 2 illustrates the distribution of units according to the selection made by the authors of the material analyzed.

**Graph 2 - Distribution of units by song**



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

According to Graph 2, the song with the most lexical units that refer to the linguistic context of Pará is *Banzeiro*, with 46% of the words found. This was followed by *Sabor açaí* with 31% and *Voando para o Pará* with 23%. In the culinary domain, the lexical set found refers to words that designate foods that belong to the daily life of the people of Pará in meals that include breakfast/afternoon snacks (pupunha), small snacks (tapioca, tacacá), side dishes (farinha d'água), ingredients (jambu, tucupi) and typical dishes (maniçoba, pato no tucupi).

As Fuza, Ohuschi and Menegassi (2011) point out, the presence of these words can be explored by the teacher during the students' textual production. To make effective use of these lexical items, the following activities are suggested: the creation of a dictionary, a puzzle, a memory game, the production of drawings that capture features of Pará culture and cuisine, and a memory game in which synonymic factors are explored.

In one of the excerpts from the song *Sabor açaí*, it is possible to see the lexical productivity of the Pará variety in the highlighted words. In the same fragment, there is a reference between "açaizeiro" and "juçara", two different names for the same object. The first variant is more productive in Pará, while the second is related to the Maranhão context. In this case, the teacher can explore lexical variation.

Uns te chamam **açaizeiro**  
Outros te chamam **juçara...**  
Põe **tapioca**  
Põe **farinha d'água**  
Põe açúcar  
Não põe nada (Sabor açaí)<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the interdisciplinary aspect, the material analyzed shows a dialogue between the Portuguese language syllabus and the Arts, Science, Geography and History subjects, in order to build a relationship with the syllabus of these subjects. This affinity can be seen, for example, in the excerpt from the song:

Ou me bebe como um suco  
Que eu sou muito mais que um fruto  
Sou **sabor marajoara**  
Sou **sabor marajoara**<sup>2</sup>

The chorus of the song refers to the Marajoara flavor. In this case, the teacher can relate the content to the geographical location of the Marajoara people and their culture. The suitability of the content favours contextualization with the environment in which the students live, provoking their affective memories of cooking, since the lexical mentions in the song deal with recipes that capture memories of life trajectories and family recipes. In other words, the pedagogical process is re-signified in its curricular and affective structures through the proposal launched in the material.

In this way, the items found in the songs analyzed show a connection with the situation in the Amazon region of Pará, made possible by the arrangement of the words selected by the authors of each song, which signals the importance of lexical studies as a source for the relationship with teaching and cultural appreciation.

## 4 Conclusions

<sup>1</sup> Some call you açaizeiro/Others call you juçara.../Put tapioca/Put water flour/Put sugar/Put nothing (Sabor açaí)

<sup>2</sup> Or drink me like a juice/ Because I'm much more than a fruit/ I'm a Marajoara flavor /I'm a Marajoara flavor

As we have seen, the purpose of this research was to verify the presence of words that circulate in Pará by analyzing the document presented by the Belém/PA Municipal Department of Education for the context of literacy for young people, adults and the elderly. According to Freire (1989), the suitability of teaching materials for this type of education must be based on knowledge of the universe experienced by the agents of the educational process, in this case, the students.

After collecting the units, we noticed the use of units that refer to the field of gastronomy in Pará, as well as regional culture. These units reflect commemorative dates such as the Círio de Nazaré, Holy Week, the Marujada period and also tourism. The use of these words promotes the appreciation of regional development and the historical maintenance of the state of Pará, since it uses local elements, which can also be addressed effectively in critical literacy in the teaching of Brazilian Portuguese.

In this way, the book analyzed presents language from a dialogical perspective, with pedagogical material that, through the Pará lexicon, seeks to bring the EJA group closer together in its literacy and literacy process.

Finally, the organization of the material leads students to reflect on the tradition of Pará, their affective memories and how to make interdisciplinarity in the context of getting students to reflect on history, Portuguese and science. The production of the material promotes the adequacy of students as agents of their own literacy process, as well as encouraging reflection on language using the lexicon of Pará and its local characteristics, thus making it possible to perceive the nuances of language.

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