

## The Wassu-Cocal narratives: the identity of an ethnic group that goes against the meanings of BR-101

### ARTICLE

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#### Abstract

This research investigates the role of oral narratives in the maintenance of the cultural identity of Wassu-Cocal indigenous ethnicity from Alagoas. Through Pecheutian Discourse Analysis, the study examines three traditional narratives and discusses how they express symbolic and historical values that challenge the dominant view associating Wassu-Cocal identity with the accidents and incidents of the BR-101, the highway that crosses its territory. Throughout the study, we seek to understand how the stories told by the elders are fundamental for the transmission of knowledge and the cultural resistance of these people, constituting both material and symbolic wealth of their sacred territory. Finally, it is concluded that the integration of these narratives into the indigenous school curriculum can be an important cultural literacy strategy aimed at affirming the identity of this ethnic group and the consequent resistance to the ongoing process of colonization that still affects the indigenous peoples of Brazil today.

**Keywords:** Wassu-Cocal. Oral Narratives. Cultural Identity. Portuguese Language Teaching.

#### As narrativas Wassu-Cocal: a identidade de uma etnia na contramão dos sentidos da BR-101

#### Resumo

Esta pesquisa investiga o papel das narrativas orais na manutenção da identidade cultural da etnia indígena alagoana Wassu-Cocal. Por meio da Análise do Discurso pecheutiana, o estudo examina três narrativas tradicionais e discute como elas expressam valores simbólicos e históricos que confrontam a visão dominante que associa a identidade Wassu-Cocal aos acidentes e incidentes da BR-101, rodovia que corta seu território. Ao longo do estudo, busca-se compreender como as histórias contadas pelos anciãos são fundamentais para a transmissão de saberes e a resistência cultural desse povo, constituindo-se em riqueza material e simbólica de seu território sagrado. Por fim, conclui-se que a integração dessas narrativas ao currículo escolar indígena pode ser uma importante estratégia de letramento cultural voltado à afirmação da identidade dessa etnia e a consequente resistência ao processo contínuo de colonização que atinge ainda hoje os povos indígenas do Brasil.

**Palavras-chave:** Wassu-Cocal. Narrativas Orais. Identidade Cultural. Ensino de Língua Portuguesa.

## 1 Introduction

The Wassu-Cocal ethnic group, located in the *zona da mata* region of Alagoas, is an Indigenous people whose identity and territory are deeply rooted in ancestral narratives that traverse the sacred and the everyday. Therefore, this study aims to explore how the stories told by the elders—often associated with sacred places within this territory and with significant events that have occurred there—are essential for maintaining the culture and identity of the Wassu people. Inhabiting fertile lands bathed by the Camaragibe River and filled with sacred sites such as mountains, waterfalls, and rock formations, yet crossed by the BR-101 highway, the community experiences a reality in which this federal road, while connecting different regions of Brazil, simultaneously imposes challenges on the preservation of their territorial, cultural, and ethnic identity.

Amid these tensions, mythical and historical narratives play a crucial role in constructing and maintaining collective memory, transmitting knowledge, and reaffirming the Indigenous Wassu-Cocal identity. Throughout this paper—focusing on their symbolic, spiritual, and material dimensions—three significant narratives from this culture will be analyzed in order to understand how the Wassu Indigenous people relate to these dimensions and the importance of such narratives for their community. For this theoretical-analytical approach, we draw on the framework of French *discourse analysis* (DA), as developed by Michel Pêcheux (2014), which, according to Orlandi (2007, p. 26), “aims to understand how a symbolic object produces meaning, how it is invested with significance for and by subjects.” It is worth noting that “[...] from a discursive perspective, language is language because it makes sense. And it only makes sense because it is inscribed in history” (Orlandi, 2007, p. 25).

Grounded in the historical inscription of this people’s narratives, this study seeks to analyze to what extent such narratives function as mechanisms of cultural resistance in

the face of the socio-historical processes of colonization that remain ongoing in the twenty-first century, as well as the social, environmental, economic, and cultural impacts caused by the passage of the BR-101 through their territory. Another aim of this research is to understand the effects of meaning these stories produce regarding the identity of the Wassu-Cocal people and their relationship with their land.

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It is important to highlight that many of the narratives circulating among these Indigenous people make reference to sacred sites within the Wassu-Cocal Indigenous Land, and there is no narrative that refers directly to the BR-101. This issue will be discussed later in the text; however, it is important to anticipate that this fact challenges the dominant discourse that associates the identity of this group exclusively with the accidents and incidents that occurred along the section of the BR-101 crossing their land—thus reinforcing, in the collective imagination of the Alagoas population, an image of this people tied to truck overturns and lootings in the cocal.

These narratives, therefore, while helping the Indigenous community adapt to the social, political, and environmental transformations they face daily, also play a crucial role in preserving the traditions, values, and practices that ground the worldview and identity of the Wassu-Cocal people. Another issue addressed in this research concerns the importance of integrating such narratives into the Indigenous school curriculum as a strategy to reconcile orality and writing and to promote cultural literacy, thereby connecting new generations to their ancestral roots and strengthening the Wassu Indigenous identity and the cultural resistance of this people.

In this sense, we seek to problematize how, within the context of Indigenous education among the Wassu-Cocal, these narratives can contribute to an urgent and necessary demand in Brazil—namely, as stated by Santos (2024, p. 14), “[...] the promotion of Portuguese language teaching [that] is based on anthropological, historical, and social issues.”

Thus, by considering the narratives of the Wassu-Cocal people as a meaningful textual genre within the teaching of Portuguese Language in the context of Indigenous schooling, this study aims to understand how they may contribute to the preservation and

appreciation of the ethnic identity of this people, as well as to a process of linguistic teaching and learning that enables students to engage more deeply with the world around them.

## 2 The Wassu-Cocal ethnic group and its narratives: preserving the identity of a people

The Wassu-Cocal people live in the *zona da mata* region of Alagoas, near the municipality of Joaquim Gomes, along the main route connecting Maceió and Recife. Their Indigenous land is bordered by the Camaragibe River and intersected by the BR-101 highway, which stretches from the state of Rio Grande do Norte to Rio Grande do Sul. The Wassu-Cocal territory (from Tupi, meaning “large coconut grove”) is composed of several small population centers that once served as the headquarters of rural estates.

This ethnic group is widely known for protests and for the frequent truck overturns and accidents that occur along the section of the BR-101 crossing their territory. We consider that the passage of this federal highway through Wassu-Cocal lands brings challenges of various kinds, since the territory of an Indigenous people is not merely a physical space but also—and most importantly—a symbolic space open to ancestral traditions, cultural practices, and the strengthening of Indigenous identity. Among the many issues raised by the presence of the BR-101, one of the most significant concerns the identity of the Wassu-Cocal Indigenous group. In Alagoas, to speak of the *povo do Cocal* is often to refer to accidents and incidents occurring along the Joaquim Gomes section, meaning that the identity of the Wassu people has become intrinsically associated with the ban on the duplication of the highway, as well as with car crashes, truck overturns, and lootings that have taken place in that area.

It can be said that, in the collective imagination of Alagoas society, the territory and identity of the Wassu-Cocal people have been shaped by narratives of looting, death, accidents, and selfishness. To confront this perception, we will present a set of narratives that, rich in meanings about the territory and identity of this ethnic group, circulate in the

daily life of the Wassu people. Among the Wassu-Cocal community, it is customary for the elders to tell the younger generations about events, episodes, and remarkable stories connected to the sacred places within their Indigenous land, which is continually affected by the passage of the BR-101.

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In this study, we present some of these narratives, which were retextualized by students of the Intercultural Indigenous Teacher Education Program in Pedagogy (*Licenciatura Intercultural Indígena em Pedagogia*) at the Universidade Estadual de Alagoas (Uneal), as part of the project *Meus anciões contavam* (*My Elders Used to Tell*) (Silva et al., 2022, in press). From the narratives documented by the project, three have been selected for our analysis. The main selection criterion was that each narrative refers to spaces and/or events regarded as sacred within Wassu-Cocal culture. The selected narratives are presented below:

### Narrativa 1: A Pedra da Torre

*Contam os mais velhos que na pedra da torre todo mês de dezembro abre-se uma janela à meia-noite de onde sai uma nuvem de nove pássaros brancos que voam da pedra da torre para a serra da Mariquita e que além desses pássaros na meia-noite de Natal saía à mesma hora uma carruagem branca encantada de dentro da mesma, essa carruagem se dirigia à serra da janela e era escoltada por vários cavalos e guiada por dois velhinhos e que transportava um tesouro que era levado de uma serra para outra todo ano.*

*Dizem que sempre nessa hora se escutavam muitas risadas e sons de instrumentos musicais como zabumba, triângulo e pife.*

Our translation:

Narrative 1: **A Pedra da Torre** [*The Stone of the Tower*]

*The elders tell that every December, at midnight, a window opens in the Stone of the Tower, from which a cloud of nine white birds emerges, flying from the Stone of the Tower toward the Mariquita Mountain. In addition to the birds, on Christmas Eve at*

*midnight, an enchanted white carriage would also appear, leaving from the same stone. This carriage, escorted by several horses and guided by two old men, carried a treasure that was taken each year from one mountain to another. It is said that at that hour, one could always hear laughter and the sound of musical instruments such as the zabumba drum, triangle, and fife.*

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## Narrativa 2: A Pedra Sagrada

*É contado pelos mais velhos que o símbolo da Aldeia Wassu-Cocal (A Pedra Sagrada) é um ponto religioso e que, na mesma, também existe uma janela, onde costumava aparecer duas moças sempre vestidas de branco e que isso até hoje é um mistério!*

*É dito pelos mais velhos que, há muitos e muitos anos, esse símbolo também servia de cemitério e que só poderiam ser sepultados ali crianças e moças virgens.*

*É que a Pedra Sagrada é um símbolo de respeito, pois nela existem mistérios valiosíssimos que fazem parte da história do povo Wassu e que trazem consigo proteção e força.*

Our translation:

## Narrative 2: A Pedra Sagrada [The Sacred Stone]

*The elders say that the symbol of the Wassu-Cocal Village (the Sacred Stone) is a religious site, and that within it there is also a window where two young women dressed in white used to appear — a mystery that remains unsolved to this day! The elders tell that, many years ago, this sacred place also served as a cemetery, where only children and virgin girls could be buried. The Sacred Stone is therefore a symbol of deep respect, for within it lie priceless mysteries that form part of the history of the Wassu people, carrying protection and strength.*

### Narrativa 3: As luzes da Pedra da Torre e Serra da Janela

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*Conta um morador antigo da aldeia Wassu-Cocal (Antônio Roque) que certo dia em que foi trabalhar no pé da serra, onde fica localizada a Pedra Sagrada da aldeia, junto com seu compadre (Pedro Honório), às 12h em ponto, seu compadre avistou algo diferente no alto da pedra e chamou rapidamente Seu Antônio Roque, e lhe mostrou o que havia encontrado.*

*Era algo com uma beleza inexplicável, algo nunca visto por eles. Era uma luz que parecia uma estrela brilhando e refletindo em direção à serra da janela, onde brilhava outra luz da mesma forma e com a mesma intensidade, refletindo para a Pedra da Torre.*

*As luzes brilhavam de uma serra para outra e foi uma coisa muito rápida, mas Seu Antônio Roque afirma que foi a coisa mais linda que ele havia presenciado e nunca mais irá esquecer aquele momento.*

Our translation:

**Narrative 3: As luzes da Pedra da Torre e Serra da Janela** [*The Lights of the Stone of the Tower and Serra da Janela*]

*An old resident of the Wassu-Cocal village, Antônio Roque, tells that one day, while working at the foot of the mountain where the Sacred Stone of the village is located, together with his friend Pedro Honório, exactly at noon, his friend noticed something unusual at the top of the stone and quickly called Mr. Antônio Roque to show him what he had seen. It was something of indescribable beauty, something they had never witnessed before: a light that looked like a shining star, reflecting toward the Serra da Janela, where another light shone in the same way and with the same intensity, reflecting back to the Stone of the Tower. The lights gleamed from one mountain to another, and though it lasted only a moment, Mr. Antônio Roque says it was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen and that he will never forget that moment.*

The brief length of the stories told, their connection with the sacred, the presence of nature in its solid, liquid, and gaseous forms, as well as the recurring figure of a notable elder of the village, are constant features of the narratives found within Wassu culture. For a person who belongs to the Wassu-Cocal people, listening to or telling these narratives goes beyond the mechanical act of reproducing a story belonging to a particular textual genre—it is a cultural practice through which each individual identifies and constitutes themselves as a member of this community.

This movement leads us to the concept of ideology, one of the fundamental theoretical categories of Discourse Analysis (DA), since, from this perspective, individuals are transformed into subjects when they are interpellated by a set of ideas, values, feelings, and/or interests with which they identify (Pêcheux; Fuchs, 2014). In other words, listening to and telling these narratives about their origin, culture, and identity serves an ideological function: to produce, in the memory of each Wassu individual, a sense of identification and belonging to this ethnic group—regardless of whether, as Lukács (2013) reminds us, this set of feelings, beliefs, values, and knowledge with which one identifies is gnoseologically true or false.

Thus, understanding discourse as the historical inscription of language and the subject within culture and society, the practices of telling and listening to these narratives set in motion a discursive process of subjectivation and production of meaning within the discursive field—one that goes beyond the enunciative act of narration itself.

In this sense, we argue that it is not merely a matter of information transmission. In the functioning of language which relates subjects and meanings affected by both language and history there is a complex process of subject formation and meaning production, rather than the simple transmission of information. These are processes of identification, argumentation, subjectivation, and construction of reality, among others. (Orlandi, 2007, p. 21).

We will return to this issue of the processes of subject and meaning constitution in the next section of this study. However, beyond this discussion, as we approached these narratives—often heard in the daily life of the Wassu-Cocal village—we began to question whether they should be classified as *legends* or *tales*.

In an attempt to better understand our object of study (the Wassu-Cocal narratives), we consulted several dictionaries for the entries “lenda” (legend) and “conto” (tale) to determine which textual genre classification would best fit them. This movement toward dictionary-based linguistic elements, far from representing a departure from Discourse Analysis (DA) as a theoretical and methodological framework, is, in fact, consistent with Pêcheux’s (2014) understanding of DA as a method of reading and interpretation that does not exclude linguistic analysis but rather operates precisely on what it considers insufficiently addressed by it: the connection between language and history as social practices of subjects shaped by ideology and the unconscious.

Orlandi (2007, p. 69), when analyzing the relationship between textuality and discursivity, points out that “[...] since materiality matters, a written text and an oral text certainly mean in ways that are specific to their material properties.” In this sense, we understand that the genre through which a text materializes cannot be disregarded in the analysis of meaning-making processes. Although such processes are not reducible to textuality or to the linguistic dimension, they also cannot ignore it as one of their constitutive materialities.

During this process of approximation to our object of study, it was interesting to observe that, beyond defining which genre we would work with, we also noticed several dictionary-based or school-based types of heroes, renowned figures, and legendary people and events in our national history. Below, we present the definitions of the entries we consulted in several dictionaries.

Let us begin with the definition of *conto* (tale) presented in the *Dicionário de Língua Portuguesa* by Evanildo Bechara: “[...] n. 1. Lit. A literary genre of fictional prose of short length, generally shorter than a novella and much shorter than a novel; a short story. 2. A false or deliberately misleading story; a lie” (Conto, 2011a, p. 448).

Now, the definition of *conto* (tale) presented in the *Novíssimo Aulete: Dicionário Contemporâneo de Língua Portuguesa*, organized by Paulo Geiger:

[...] n. 1. Lit. A spoken or written narrative, brief and concise, shorter than a novel, generally involving a single action, with a small number of characters and focused

on one or few incidents. 2. A false and deceptive account; a lie told to someone; trick, deceit (Conto, 2011b, p. 391).

Finally, the definition of this entry found in the *Dicionário Escolar da Língua Portuguesa* by Domingos Paschoal Cegalla:

[...] *n.* 1. Written or oral narrative: The class read a short story by Machado de Assis. 2. Deceit; fraud: I will never fall for that story again. 3. A thousand réis; one million réis: At that time, he sold a horse for two million réis. *Conto da carochinha*: a traditional children's folktale (Conto, 2008, p.236).

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Let us now present the definitions of *lenda* (legend) found in the same dictionaries in which we researched the entry *conto* (tale). We begin with the definition from the *Dicionário de Língua Portuguesa* by Evanildo Bechara: “[...] *n.* 1. Narrative of the life of a historical figure (saint, warrior, etc.) that has been modified over generations, eventually acquiring fantastic or implausible traits; legend. 2. *Figurative*: A famous or legendary person. 3. *Figurative*: Lie” (Lenda, 2011a, p. 777).

Next, the definition of *lenda* (legend) presented in the *Novíssimo Aulete: Dicionário Contemporâneo de Língua Portuguesa*, organized by Paulo Geiger:

*n.* 1. Fantastical story about exemplary characters or supernatural beings, forming part of a people's tradition (legend of Saci-Pererê). 2. Narrative of actions performed by saints or heroes in which historical facts take on a fantastic character through interpretations shaped by popular imagination; legend. 3. Figurative, by extension: Fantastical story about a famous person, created by popular imagination or media speculation: legend has it that Renato Russo hated singing in public. 4. By extension: Popular tradition. 5. Legendary figure: Garrincha is a football legend. 6. Figurative: Trick, tall tale, lie. 7. Figurative: Monotonous and tedious narrative; *ladrinha*; *lenga-lenga* (Lenda, 2011b, 848).

Finally, and equally relevant to the purposes of this study, the definition of this entry in the *Dicionário Escolar da Língua Portuguesa* by Domingos Paschoal Cegalla:

[...] *n.* 1. Narrative of a marvelous nature in which events related to popular heroes are reshaped by popular imagination or poetic invention. 2. Story of popular tradition whose authenticity has not been proven: It is said in the legend that the Saci braids the horse's mane. 3. Popular myth: That politician became a legend. 4. Fraud; deceit; lie: The public works that the mayor claims to have carried out are pure legend (Lenda, 2008, p. 535).

By examining the definitions of these entries and analyzing the elements present in the narratives we selected for this study, we found ourselves leaning toward the idea of *legend* rather than that of *tale*. Beyond the definitions of the textual genres themselves, the dictionary explanations drew our attention to the question of what—or which elements—are considered or presented as legendary, famous, or heroic within Brazilian culture.

When one seeks to exemplify the idea of a warrior or a legendary figure, it is common to refer to football players, famous singers, or other figures of popular culture. This tendency reveals how much of the knowledge historically institutionalized in schooling—such as that found in dictionaries available in school libraries—distances us from the ancestral heroes and legendary figures who fought, and still fight today, in the form of those resisting the ongoing project of colonization. This resistance persists through the survival of our Indigenous peoples, the preservation of their cultures, cosmologies, narratives, and territories—in short, through the affirmation of our true national roots.

This distancing produces a meaning effect within our collective imagination, reinforcing the idea that Brazil is the country of football, rock, and samba, among others, and that our legendary figures are the players and artists who earn millions through their art. We are not opposing music or football, but rather problematizing the discourse established by the dictionary, which contributes to the construction of a *discursive memory*—understood here, following Pêcheux (2015, p. 44), “[...] not in the directly psychological sense of individual memory, but in the intersecting senses of mythical memory, social memory inscribed in practices, and the historian’s constructed memory”—a discourse that silences Brazil’s true cultural roots by erasing the mythology, cosmology, and ancestral customs of our Indigenous peoples.

In this regard, it is important to consider Orlandi’s (2008, p. 55) reflection on discourse, civilization, and culture:

Our objective is not to speak of the “constitution of identity,” but rather of the imaginary that is constructed to give meaning to the Brazilian. What is the conception of “Brazilian” [...] and how does this conception of the Brazilian work both to exclude and to fix certain meanings—effects of meaning that produce an imaginary that places upon the Brazilian a birthmark that will operate throughout

his entire history: the colonialist discourse. [...] A discourse that functions as an ahistorical and essential mark (Orlandi, 2008, p.55)

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It is also important to highlight, as Santos (2024, p. 8) observes from his reading of *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma* by Lima Barreto, that “[...] the creativity, intelligence, and emancipation of a people depend on their linguistic practices.” In Brazil, more broadly, there exist many Indigenous communities with a vast repertoire of narratives rich in culture and tradition that must be brought to light in order to create another collective imaginary of Brazil, of the Brazilian, and of the elements that constitute our *brasilidade* (Brazilianess). The same is true in the Wassu-Cocal village, where there is a diversity of legends told by its elders who, even when no longer among us, have left through oral tradition an important legacy for the preservation of Wassu culture.

For the Wassu-Cocal people, these narratives are not limited to the linguistic features of the textual genre *legend*, which, according to the aforementioned dictionaries, include imaginary events, fantastical stories, and heroes—stories of popular tradition whose authenticity is unverified. In the context we refer to here, the stories told find their foundation in the ancestry of events, in the sense of cultural and ethnic belonging that emanates from the sacred spaces renewed and re-signified within the *discursive memory* activated by these narratives. Here, we refer to the discursive memory which, as stated by Pêcheux (2015, p. 44), produces its effects “[...] in the intersecting senses of mythical memory, social memory inscribed in practices, and the historian’s constructed memory.”

### 3 Against the meanings of the BR-101: analyzing the discourse of the Wassu-Cocal people’s legends

In an effort to move even closer to our object of study, this section seeks to conduct a discursive analysis of the three narratives of the Wassu-Cocal people presented above. Following Orlandi (2008), and considering the notion of a new discourse of confrontation—or a particular updating of this discourse—we may affirm that these narratives, in general, produce a meaning effect suggesting that the true identity of the Wassu-Cocal ethnic group

does not reside in the BR-101 highway that crosses their territory, but rather in the sacred places of their Indigenous land.

The legends that refer to the *serras* (mountains)—sacred spaces of identification and meaning-making for the Wassu-Cocal people—enact a movement of *paraphrase*, understood in Discourse Analysis (DA) as the establishment of a *paraphrastic process* around the *Pedra Sagrada* (Sacred Stone) and the *Serra da Janela* (Window Mountain). Before proceeding with the analysis, let us present what we understand by *paraphrase/paraphrastic process*:

Paraphrastic processes are those through which, in every utterance, there is always something that remains, that is, what can be said the memory. *Paraphrase* thus represents a return to the same spaces of saying. Different formulations of the same sedimented saying are produced. *Paraphrase* stands on the side of stabilization (Orlandi, 2007, p. 36).

As stated by Pêcheux and Fuchs (2014, pp. 166–167): “[...] the production of meaning is strictly inseparable from the relation of *paraphrase* among sequences, such that the *paraphrastic family* of these sequences constitutes what could be called the ‘matrix of meaning.’” In this sense, we understand with Santos (2020, p. 139) that the *matrix of meaning* is what remains, what persists, “[...] or rather, the meaning that stabilizes among utterances or discursive sequences that establish a relation of *paraphrase* within a given discursive formation.”

From the narratives in question—*A Pedra da Torre* (*The Stone of the Tower*), *A Pedra Sagrada* (*The Sacred Stone*), and *A Serra da Janela* (*The Window Mountain*)—we highlight, respectively, the following discursive sequences (DS):

**DS1:** [...] that carriage headed toward the *Serra da Janela*, escorted by several horses and guided by two old men, carrying a treasure that was taken from one mountain to another every year.

**DS2:** *The Sacred Stone is a symbol of respect, for within it lie priceless mysteries that form part of the history of the Wassu people and bring with them protection and strength.*

**DS3:** *It was something of indescribable beauty, something they had never seen before. It was a light that looked like a shining star, reflecting toward the *Serra da**

*Janela, where another light shone in the same way and with the same intensity, reflecting back to the Stone of the Tower.*

Understanding with Orlandi (2007, p. 177) that paraphrase points to “[...] the stability of meaning, the permanence of its content,” the statements expressed in the highlighted discursive sequences establish the sense that the wealth, protection, and light meant to guide the Wassu-Cocal people do not reside in the traffic of the BR-101 highway or in the headlights of its cars and trucks, but rather in the ancestry of their sacred places.

In contrast to the discourse that reduces the Wassu Indigenous people to the events surrounding the stretch of the highway that crosses the municipality of Joaquim Gomes, Alagoas, these narratives produce a confrontational effect, revealing that the constitution of the Wassu-Cocal Indigenous subject does not take place in the space of the BR-101—with its accidents, overturns, and lootings—but rather within the sacred spaces of this ethnic group’s territory. It is important to note that none of the narratives contain any episode related to the BR-101. None of them, not only those presented in this study but all others as well, make reference to that highway; instead, they point to the sacred spaces located within the Wassu-Cocal territory.

If we were to conduct a survey in this Indigenous community asking what it means for each person to be a Wassu-Cocal, we would likely receive diverse answers—and perhaps even some who would not know how to respond. However, if we asked about a symbol that represents the Wassu-Cocal people, the response would be unanimous: *the Pedra Sagrada* (Sacred Stone) or *the Pedra da Torre* (Stone of the Tower), two distinct names referring to the same sacred place.

It is by gazing upon the Stone of the Tower and feeling the protection and secrets emanating from its window that the sense of belonging and identification of this ethnic group arises. At the foot of the jackfruit tree, dancing the *Toré*—protected by the Sacred Stone—the individuals constitute themselves as Indigenous subjects of the Wassu-Cocal ethnicity, finding their true identity and connecting with their ancestry. As we pointed out in the previous section, in this regard, we may draw an analogy between the Sacred Stone and the concept of ideology in Discourse Analysis (DA), which, as postulated by Pêcheux

(2014, p. 145, author's emphasis), performs “[...] the process of interpellation-identification that **produces** the subject.”

The narratives of the Wassu-Cocal people, when examined theoretically and analytically through the lens of Discourse Analysis (DA), reveal a functioning of language that goes beyond the mechanical transmission of information. In these narratives, we find the evocation of events and sacred spaces that set in motion individuals, history, culture, and all their material and symbolic dimensions thus constituting the subjects of the Wassu-Cocal people and producing meanings for and about them. In this regard, as previously highlighted in this study, it is important to recall Orlandi's statement (1996, pp. 36–37) that Discourse Analysis

[...] works with the materiality of language, considering it in its dual aspect: the linguistic and the historical, which are inseparable in the process of producing the subject of discourse and the meanings that signify (him/her). This allows me to say that the subject is a place of meaning historically constituted (Orlandi, 1996, p.36-37).

Thus, we consider the narratives of the Wassu-Cocal people not only in their linguistic aspect but also in their historical dimension, understanding that such narratives are fundamental for the preservation and promotion of our people's culture. In the linguistic practice of telling and listening to stories, values, beliefs, and knowledge are transmitted from generation to generation, playing an essential role in the daily life of the Wassu community by helping to renew, preserve, and promote collective memory, traditions, and stories.

These narratives also have an educational function, conveying moral and ethical lessons through themes such as courage, love, strength, justice, friendship, and respect, as well as teachings about the relationship between human beings, nature, and the spiritual world. They transmit knowledge about medicinal herbs, hunting and fishing techniques, and agriculture, along with moral and ethical values.

The sharing of stories within the community strengthens social bonds and cultural coexistence, as they are told in conversation circles, in classrooms, and on occasions when elders are invited to dialogue with younger Indigenous students.

The act of narrating, in itself, constitutes a form of cultural and historical resistance that reinforces the identity and spirituality of the Wassu-Cocal people in the face of ongoing colonial processes that seek to silence and erase the traces of a culture that—resisting—remains alive and vibrant. These narratives are more than mere stories: they serve as vehicles of wisdom, strength, connection with the land, and cultural resistance. For this reason, we understand that they should be integrated into the formal process of Indigenous school education, functioning as instruments for the consolidation, preservation, and promotion of the true identity of the Wassu-Cocal people, understood not as an immutable essence, but as a shared cultural core that connects individuals of this ethnicity and confronts the external imaginary that still labels them as looters of overturned truck cargoes within their territory.

## 4 Texts, their genres, culture, and teaching: paths toward the consolidation, preservation, and promotion of the Wassu-Cocal identity

Understanding textual genres is of fundamental importance for developing the skills necessary to make communication effective. Within the educational context, Luiz Antônio Marcuschi, a key reference in this field, illuminates a possible theoretical path for a more integrated and functional approach to the teaching of Portuguese Language (PL) in Brazil. In his book *Produção textual, análise de gêneros e compreensão* (Text Production, Genre Analysis, and Comprehension), Marcuschi (2008) not only defines what textual genres are but also explores their relevance within a process of PL teaching and learning that must necessarily be socially and historically contextualized.

Textual genres are socio-discursive entities that guide communicative interaction in different spheres of social life. They are shaped by cultural and historical conventions, reflecting the communicative needs and practices of a society. In the cultural context of our people, legends influence, to some extent, the life of our Indigenous community by bringing with them a historical context, a spirituality, and a way of establishing relationships with the sacred, with nature, and with others.

The re-signification of legends is a highly productive field for understanding cultural and identity dynamics. We emphasize here that the legends in the Wassu-Cocal territory are influenced by the traditions, beliefs, and cultural practices of this people, reflecting their worldview, values, and customs. These narratives, as cultural elements, are not static; rather, they change over time. As the Indigenous community faces social, political, and environmental transformations, the legends adapt but never lose the essence of the culture and the ancestry preserved and transmitted by the elders.

Within the context of Indigenous school education among the Wassu-Cocal people, working with such narratives—particularly in the teaching of PL—ensures that these legends reach the ears of younger generations. This contributes not only to a model of PL education that respects the students' social, cultural, and economic realities but also to the consolidation, preservation, and promotion of the Wassu-Cocal identity.

By integrating these narratives into PL teaching based on the specificities of their textual genres, one adopts an understanding of education that goes beyond grammatical formalism and moves toward promoting communicative competence. Such competence empowers students to participate actively in various spheres of communication, which, as Valentin Volóchinov explains, are materialized in the field of signs that permeate human activity, each field “[...] having its specific function within the unity of social life” (Volóchinov, 2018, p. 94).

Thus, we agree with Santos (2024, p. 14) that linguistic utterances “[...] do not have their meaning closed within themselves, but rather in their openness to history, to ideology, and, ultimately, to the conditions of production and reproduction of human social life, as producers and maintainers of these utterances.” In this way, as Marcuschi (2008) states, genres should not be seen as mere formal structures but as living language practices that allow, within the school context, students to engage critically and creatively with the world around them.

We also emphasize, with Marcuschi (2008, p. 149), that

[...] genre analysis encompasses both text and discourse analysis and a description of language and the view of society. It also seeks to answer sociocultural questions

related to language use in general. The treatment of genres concerns the treatment of language in its everyday use in its most diverse forms. [...] In this sense, there is much to discuss and attempt to distinguish the ideas that genre is: a cultural category, a cognitive schema, a form of social action, a textual structure, a form of social organization, a rhetorical action (Marcuschi, 2008, p.149).

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We believe that this provocation by Marcuschi (2008) is essential for the developments of what we propose regarding the use of the aforementioned narratives in the classroom, that is, as a genre whose function and operability go beyond the sharing of stories and characters, constituting instead a cultural category and a form of social action.

Considering these elements within the teaching and learning process of Portuguese Language (PL) in the Indigenous school context involves continuous work that integrates orality, reading, writing, and linguistic analysis, always historically, socially, and culturally contextualized. In this way, students do not merely learn to identify the distinctive characteristics of different genres or adapt their language to meet the demands of each communicative situation but also engage in a form of *cultural literacy* that connects Indigenous children and youth to their past while strengthening and continuing their community's cultural identity into the future.

Building upon Marcuschi (2008), we return to the central idea that textual genres are powerful tools for the effective participation of individuals in social life. By embracing this perspective, educators and students can transcend the traditional formalist view of PL teaching as a set of rules to be memorized, instead assuming the teaching and learning process of this curricular component as a dynamic and transformative social practice.

This shift in perspective requires us to recognize that textual genres are not mere formal theoretical abstractions, but mechanisms through which society regulates and organizes communication, linguistic behavior, and the reproduction of collective imaginaries.

In the formal process of teaching and learning Portuguese Language that occurs in the school environment, it is possible to observe that textual genres, or at least the way they are approached, are often treated from a structuralist perspective, which shapes

expectations of response according to the meanings produced by the text in relation to the student-reader, to writing, to speech, and to other aspects of language use.

In this context, we also problematize that the textual genres addressed in Indigenous school education, as well as their possible pedagogical approaches, must open space for creativity and for the construction of the identity of subjects belonging to Brazil's Indigenous peoples. Such approaches should contribute to building a collective imaginary of these peoples different from those imposed by the colonization process. Likewise, the types of linguistic and social behavior presented as socially acceptable or desirable within the Indigenous educational context must respect the idiosyncrasies of the Indigenous territory in question.

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## 5 Final considerations

Throughout this research, we sought to understand, within the cultural context of the Wassu-Cocal people, how the narratives told by the elders play a fundamental role in the maintenance, consolidation, and promotion of the cultural identity of this ethnic group. These narratives, which move between the sacred and the everyday, not only strengthen the bond of the Wassu Indigenous people with their sacred and ancestral spaces but also serve as forms of resistance against the imposition of an external discourse that attempts to reduce them to their relationship with the BR-101 highway, based on a stereotype linked to accidents, vehicle overturns, and looting.

Unlike the meanings produced by this representation of Wassu identity, limited to incidents and accidents on the BR-101, the narratives analyzed here emphasize that the true identity of this people is deeply rooted in their sacred spaces and cultural practices, such as the *Toré*, and not in the negative events associated with the highway.

For the Wassu-Cocal people, symbols such as the *Pedra da Torre* (Stone of the Tower) and the Sacred Jackfruit Tree are more than physical landmarks; they are elements filled with spiritual and identity meaning, representing the essence of belonging and connection with their ancestors. The analysis presented in this study therefore shows how

these narratives, by referring to sacred places and traditions, reaffirm the cultural resistance of this ethnic group and challenge the external and reductionist view of its identity.

By recalling events from the past, these narratives transmit ancestral knowledge, reflecting values, cultural and spiritual practices that are central to the preservation of Indigenous identity.

The legends discussed in this research consolidate the idea that the history, identity, and wealth of the Wassu-Cocal people are found in the sacred spaces within their territory, and not in the BR-101 highway that crosses and violates this land. In this sense, we understand in a contextualized way the expression *the future is ancestral*, which circulates today in different contexts referring to Indigenous peoples in general.

Perhaps this is the most important result of this study: the argument that the future of the Wassu-Cocal people, as well as that of other Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, is ancestral. In the case of the Wassu people, it is necessary to turn symbolically to the sacred and ancestral places of their territory and to understand that their future lies in the material and spiritual richness of their land, not in the apparent progress or civilization represented by the asphalt of the BR-101 and the vehicles that travel along it.

Wealth does not lie only in the economic activities related to that highway, whether in the sale of jackfruit and corn, in the overturning of trucks, or in the possibility of traveling beyond Wassu territory. It lies mainly in their land, in its material and symbolic fertility.

Another important result of this research is that one of the ways to maintain and promote the Wassu-Cocal identity, in contrast to the collective imagination that associates this people's identity with the BR-101, is to integrate their various narratives into the process of teaching and learning Portuguese Language in the context of Indigenous education in this territory. When incorporated into the teaching and learning of Portuguese Language in the Indigenous schools of the Wassu-Cocal territory, these narratives become a powerful tool for cultural literacy. This literacy not only enhances students' communicative competence but also ensures that language and educational practices remain

contextualized, respecting traditions and strengthening the identity of the ethnic group studied.

Thus, the narratives and the teaching of textual genres, far from being isolated elements, contribute to the ideological formation, in the sense discussed here, of critical and conscious subjects who are aware of their cultural heritage and of the social dynamics in which they are situated within their community.

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