Semiotic Study of Idioms Related to the Royal Court of Danxome in Benin Republic (ex Dahomey)

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Abstract

This paper undertook a semiotic analysis and interpretation of idiomatic expressions that were used in the former royal court of Danxome in Republic of Benin (Ex Dahomey). The qualitative analysis based on the Saussurian and Piercian views on semiotics was applied on a corpus of idioms collected from primary sources with close links with descendants of the kingdom. The results achieved were forceful in disclosing three main patterns of the analyzed idioms. First, they uncovered the presence of culturally loaded idiomatic centers that represent the keys to unlocking the intended meanings therein contained. Secondly, the very phrasing of some of the idioms displayed the hierarchical organization that was intrinsic to the royal court. Thirdly, a further investigation into their intended content disclosed an association of both spoken and sign language in the delivery of the message conveyed through some specific idiomatic expressions of the royal court of Danxome. These results led to the conclusion that the idioms used in this royal court were more than mere language for daily ordinary interactions. Rather, they represented real artifacts, encapsulating the culture, the history and the social relationships that best represent and portray such a restricted social and linguistic community.

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1 Introduction

Viewed from the lens of the meaning content of spoken words in the mind of the speaker, the universal phenomenon of language is a very influential and intrinsic factor in the identity of linguistic communities. The natural language used by each socio-cultural group lends itself to various utilities as far as being the carrier/vehicle of the intimate thought, spirit, and culture of each community (Deely, 1984). As Fromkin & Rodman (1988); Sweet (1964), point out, language thus presents itself as the outward manifestation of people's minds in a socio-semiotic context (Halliday, 2002; Halliday & Hasan, 2002). Their language is their mind, and their mind is their language, it is difficult to imagine two more identical things. Idioms, seen as linguistic units that cannot be analyzed according to a general rule of language given the strong anchoring of cultural codification, are a typical example of identity speaking. It is with this character of the vehicle of the intangible cultural identity substrate of the linguistic communities (Edwards, 1985), that this work proposes to undertake a semiotic study of the idioms linked to the court of Agbome in the kingdom of Danxome located in the contemporary Republic of Benin. It is appropriate from the outset of this work, to discern language [Parole according to De Saussure (2011)], as being the focal point of the present study and to distinguish it from the concept of language. Language is in fact understood here as a system of vocal signs [phonemes] or graphics [graphemes] specific to a community as tools of communication [Langue according to De Saussure (2011)]; it belongs to the domain of traditional linguistics.

The primary reason that motivated this research work is the combined observation of the linguist and the historian on the use of language in a very particular way within the kingdom of Danxome in the current Republic of Benin on the West African coast. It is indeed a coded speech that makes use of common linguistic signs in the Fongbé language [the local language across the kingdom], but whose denotative interpretation does not allow to decipher the intended message of the speaker. Access to this message is thus not possible, unless through a semiotic analysis and interpretation within the framework of the Saussurean approach of the signifier-signified. This necessity falls in line with Martin & Ringham (2000), standpoint as they posit that semiotic analysis becomes, then, a discovery method and is clearly an invaluable tool for all those engaged in original research.

In this perspective, the general objective of this research work is to carry out an in-depth semiotic study of the ultimate message [signified] transmitted by linguistic signs [meaning] as used in the kingdom of Danxomè through idioms. The efficient achievement of this general objective requires its distribution into two specific sub-objectives namely: the representation of the message through a transliterated version and a translated version on the one hand and the use of the code of linguistic significance and the socio-cultural code for full decoding of the hidden content of each idiom, on the other hand (Nenonen & Niemi, 1999; Errington, 1985; Silverstein, 2003). How then does language reflect the distinctive cultural and historical features of the specific linguistic community of the royal court of Agbome? For a scientifically rigorous reply to this critical main query, these authors decide to break it into two sub-questions as follows: on the one hand, how does court speech convey the sacred pattern of the king's personality, the absolute secrecy attached to certain court events and the particularly significant feature of class hierarchy? And on the other, how does one succeed in decoding the message embedded in these identity speeches? (Ervin-Tripp, 1969; Bolander & Locher, 2014; Makoni, 2011).

2 Materials and Methods

This part of the study sets a particular emphasis first on a definitional and illustrative approach to the concepts of semiotics and idioms. These two notions are all part of the general context of sociolinguistics seen through the relationship between language, culture, and society. Secondly, this section presents the methodological approach implemented to achieve the above-specified objectives.

The theoretical framework of the study

This research work is part of the specific theoretical framework of the study and interpretation of linguistic signs in the particular social environment of a royal court and the structures and institutions associated with it.

Definition of the concept of semiotics

According to Eco (1976), who gives a broad definition, semiotics includes everything that can be considered a sign or a symbol that lends itself to interpretation. The sign/symbol [signifier] is therefore the bearer, the receptacle of the message [signified] that it transmits. The sign can thus take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects so that the semiotician finds himself studying the way in which messages [meanings] are worded and the way in which social facts are represented (Chandler, 2007). The ability of the sign to carry and transmit an unambiguous message depends intrinsically on the existence of codes that are specific to each sociolinguistic and cultural context as Culler (1981); Sebeok (1989/1994), indicate. As pointed out by Chandler (2007), the conventions of codes represent a social dimension in semiotics: a code is a set of practices familiar to users of the media operating within a broad cultural framework. Understanding these codes, their relationships and the contexts in which they are appropriate, is part of what it means to be a member of a specific culture. The typology of semiotic codes distinguishes, among others, three major types of codes, namely: social codes, textual codes, and interpretative codes. The specificity of this study is to pay particular attention to the social codes which consist of: verbal language (phonological, syntactic, lexical, prosodic aspects and paralinguistic sub-codes), body codes (body contact, proximity, orientation, physical appearance, facial expression, gaze, nods, gestures, and postures), trick codes (fashion, clothing), behavioral codes (protocols, rituals, role play) (Salliyanti et al., 2021; Ino et al., 2017; Zelinger, 1979).

Definition of the concept of idiom

According to Crystal (2011), "an idiom is a sequence of words that is semantically and often syntactically restricted, whose meanings of individual words cannot be added together to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole". The idiom is thus presented as a linguistic construction that is specific to a cultural identity and literally untranslatable into another language. In other words, idioms constitute the set of means of expression of a community that corresponds to a specific way of thinking. In their grammar essay, Damourette & Pichon (1927), indicate that the major common feature of a community men speaking the same idiom is that they all carry within them, in a rather mostly unconscious way, the same system of notions according to which all thoughts are organized that they come to formulate in language.

Methodology of the Study

This research work addresses a social question motivated by the observation of the way language is used in an exclusive linguistic community. It is therefore a question of insightfully studying non-numerical data with some respondents' and personal views. This essential feature guided the choice of the qualitative method both in the collection and analysis of data as well as the discussion of the achieved results. The data contained in the corpus of this work were collected from primary sources, namely an associate university lecturer with close ties to the Abomey royal court, as well as two royal court dignitaries interviewed in Abomey who has not been named for ethical purposes. The data thus collected are composed of 13 idiomatic expressions with cultural and historical links with the royal court of Agbome. The analysis of each of the thirteen idiomatic expressions comprises its written version in fongbé language (the local language of the palace) together with the transliteration of the idiom into English (Silverstein, 2010; Swann & Deumert, 2018; Campbell-Kibler, 2012). The analysis then proceeds through the specification of the social context wherein the idiom was used. This step informs of the sociocultural patterns that are indispensable for deciphering of the message that is contained in each idiom. The subsequent semiotic analysis has singled out the hidden meaning-loaded signs (the idiomatic nucleus) with an uncovering of their connotative content. The ultimate step of the analytical process has been the identification of the signification (the decoded meaning) of the selected idioms. The discussion carried out follows on from the aforementioned steps. It has been instrumental in the presentation of a recapitulative table on the analyzed idioms, the idiomatic centers and their literal meanings together with the linguistic codification device that was used. The discussion extends on the culturally-packed and historically-grounded features of language (Keller, 1994), as contained in the selected idioms.

Figure 1. Uncovered ruins of the palace of Dàdà (king) Akaba of Danxomè (1680-1708), representing one of the physical contexts where the studied language craft is used (Photograph: Datondji & Effiboley, October 2021)

Semiotic analysis of some selected idioms of Danxome royal court

This part of the study selects and analyses some idioms from the collected corpus. The analyzed idioms are numbered from 1 to 6, each of them transliterated, interpreted semiotically, and eventually converted into the intended meaning.

Idiom 1: Aza tɛnmɛtɛnmɛ ewá fí lɛ̌ (The various hats that have come here)
   Social context: life in the kingdom is strictly ranked into a hierarchical status from the king on the most-top to the captive at the lowest limit.
   Semiotic analysis: The lexical sign "Aza" which literally means "hat" is first of all used metaphorically instead of "authority". Semiotically, considering that the hat is placed on top of a person (on the head), the sign "aza" is analogically meant to represent each person's pedigree or level of authority.
   Signification (decoded meaning): The authorities in this place in their distinctive ranks
Idiom 2: N' déko (I take off the sand)
   Social context: the king legitimately has right to life and death over everybody and everything in the kingdom and this is shown in the way people greet him with utmost deference.
   Semiotic analysis: The cluster of signs "N' déko" is always associated with a body bend, a genuflexion or a prostration of the greeting interlocutor. The sign "ko" represents the sand, in analogy, with the smallest worth any subject can be in the king's presence.
   Signification (decoded meaning): I prostrate myself in from of your majesty in reverence, I am nothing but dust in your presence
Idiom 3: Axɔ́vína nɔ ɖu gbɔ́dɔ ǎ (there are arenas of lower class where dignitaries are not to be found)
   Social context: the members of the royal court of Danxome are on top of the social hierarchy. The ethics of authority and protection of their dignity thus recommend that they refrain from having certain attitudes, uttering some words or showing up in certain low-class places.
   Semiotic analysis: this culturally molded expression has two idiomatic centers that are used to build a sociolinguistic contrastive parallel. "Axɔ́vína" (the princess) is the linguistic sign representing the high level of the social hierarchy. As such, at a semantic direct interpretation level, she should be offered the more honorable part of the game but not the viscera which is the less prized part and thus semiotically represents the low class. In a pragmatic interpretation, the sign "Axɔ́vína" (the queen) represents the people of the high society while "gbɔ́dɔ" (the viscus)is set to infer all such doings that are not attune to the people of the royal arena.
   Signification (decoded meaning): the people of the royal court are not to be associated with certain doings.
Idiom 4: Alixo (There is traffic jam)
   Social context: the king is a superhuman being. It should not be said that he too sleeps like ordinary people
   Semiotic analysis: The sign cluster "ali xo" is actually a full sentence composed of "ali" meaning the pathway and "xo" meaning congested or not available or busy. The sign "ali" is thus used to represent the king while the participial element "xo" is used metaphorically to mean that the king is not reachable at a specific moment.
   Signification (decoded meaning): The king is sleeping

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Idiom 5: Dada yì dukwí (the king has taken a handkerchief)

    Social context: the king is a superhuman strong being. It should not be said that he too cries like ordinary people

    Semiotic analysis:"Dada" literally means "the king". The sign "dukwí'' which literally means cloth is used first as a metonymy instead of the tears shed by the king in the occurrence of a particularly serious situation which make the king to shed tears, which should never happen; and actually the king uses that piece of cloth to clean his face.

    Signification (decoded meaning): The king cried

Idiom 6: Dadaḍò kánú wà wὲ(the king is doing the thing of the plate)

    Social context: the king is a superhuman being. It should not be said that he too eats like ordinary people

    Semiotic analysis: "Dada" literally means the king. 'kánú'is rhetorically used as a metonymy whereby the content (the food) is designated by the container (the dish)

    Signification (decoded meaning): the king is eating.

Idiom 7: Ayì kúyὲ (the earth is without shade)

    Social context: the king is a superhuman and the place which serves as the headquarters of his reign enjoys the same deference and distinction from other common places.

    Semiotic analysis:« Ayi » which could be denotatively translated as ''nature'' or "the earth'' is the sign that expresses the palace. ''kúyὲ'' is the setting of the sun which is used both like a euphemism and a metaphor to mean that it is night in the palace.

    Signification (decoded meaning): It is night in the palace.

Idiom 8: Avivɔ̀ ḍò hɔ̀nmɛ (There is fever in the palace)

    Social context: the palace is the best place in the kingdom where everybody should always be in bliss.

    *Semiotic analysis:*Avivɔ̀ is a lexical item that represents an uneasy health condition of fever. It describes an anxious condition inside the palace where good health is nowhere to be found. That good health analogically represents the king, the one who is solution to all and to everything and who has now been snatched from his subjects' affection

    Signification (decoded meaning): The king has passed on.

Idiom 9: Zankú ḍò hɔ̀nmὲ (The night has fallen on the palace)

    Social context: Literally, the linguistic sign ''zankú'' means nightfall, which is symbolically antinomic to the ever-blissful place that the palace represents.

    Semiotic analysis: Semiotically speaking, zankú ḍò hɔ̀nmὲ (there is nightfall in the palace) occurs subsequently to Avivɔ̀ ḍò hɔ̀nmɛ (there is fever in the palace) and means that the fever which is an uneasy health individual condition and that can still be hidden has outgrown this level and has now become a sad situation that is known to everybody in the palace and beyond (because no one can hide nightfall). The ''zankú'' linguistic sign is associated with a sad event because symbolically, the gloomy state of nightfall is generally paralleled with the forces of evil.

    Signification (decoded meaning): The king has passed on and the funerals are in progress

Idiom 10: Ayì hɔ́n (It is daytime)

    Social context: the presence of the king in the midst of his people is considered as bliss associated with the light of daytime, a state of affairs where the king provides security and joy to everyone. Contrariwise, his absence (death) is associated with sorrow which is paralleled with the gloom of night.

    Semiotic analysis: "ayì hɔ́n" literally means it is daytime again after nightfall. The specific social context of the palace sees "ayì hɔ́n" as occurring after the previously interpreted ''zankú''. Denotatively, "ayi" means the earth while "hɔ́n" refers to the verbal form ''appears'' paralleling with joy, freedom, the absence of anxiety. This linguistic sign thus represents the coming back of joy in the palace after it has suffered the gloom of the night.

    Signification (decoded meaning): A new king is enthroned

Idiom11: Dadá ḍò e niná alolyán émi (the king requires to be handed everyone's residue of vegetable brush)

    Social context: the king is at the top head of the kingdom and has full right to call for meetings anytime, anywhere.

    Semiotic analysis: the linguistic sign "alolyán" literally means "residue of vegetable brush" which is known to be used very early in the morning to clean the teeth. The use of this sign by the king thus represents an invitation with two specific features: first the invitation is sent to one or several subject(s) of the kingdom and secondly at the time when the vegetable brush is used, that is early in the morning.

    Signification (decoded meaning): the king invites one or several subject(s) of the kingdom for a meeting very early in the morning.

Idiom 12: É ná kplakpɔ̀n(to come with the hammock)

    Social context: in the socio-historical context of the court, there is a procession that goes along with the king who is carried in a hammock when he has to move for various purposes.

    Semiotic analysis: the idiomatic centre in this idiom is the "kpɔ̀n" which is used metonymically as the hammock is paradigmatically associated with the king.

    Signification (decoded meaning): to move in a procession to a given place with the king who is transported in a hammock.

Idiom 13: É ná ɖó ká zànjí (to put the plate on the floor mat

    Social context: the socio-historical context of this idiom is a traditional one where food is served to the king in plates on a floor mat because there was no table and the modern dishes of the modern times.

    Semiotic analysis: this idiom is built around the linguistically coded sign "ká" used as a metonymy for the king's food.

    Signification (decoded meaning): Make the food ready on the floor mat.

3 Results and Discussions

This part of the study discusses the results obtained from the above semiotic analysis as a way of answering the research questions and achieving the objectives that form the scientific construct and structure of this work. In each and all the idioms that have been scrutinized, one linguistic aspect is blindingly obvious: there is a sign playing the most important role in the encoding of the hidden information which these researchers term idiomatic Centre. That major linguistic sign embeds the hidden meaning and at the same time serves as a critical tool in the unfolding of the hierarchical, historical or cultural key in the decoding of the hidden meaning contained in each idiom.

Table 1
Semiotic decoding recapitulation

No	Idiom	Idiomatic centre and literal meaning	Codification device used
1	Aza tɛnmɛtɛnmɛ e wá fí lě	Aza (hat)	*Metaphor and analogy* whereby the different levels and hierarchies present in a place are likened to the imaginary hats on their heads. In the African social context of a kingdom, this sign of "hat" may also be paralleled with the crown that is put on the head of someone who is appointed.
2	N' déko (I take off sand)	Ko (sand)	There is *Analogy*here between the sign "ko" meaning "sand" to convey the message of nothingness of all the subjects of the kingdom before the king
3	axɔ́vínanɔɖugbɔ́dɔ ǎ	axɔ́vína (Queen) gbɔ́dɔ (the viscus)	There is an *imagery* that foregrounds the contrast between the high status of a queen and the unworthiness and discrediting feature of the viscus
4	alixo	Xo (jam)	Metaphor whereby the unavailability of the king is figuratively paralleled to the obstruction of a road.
5	Dada yì dukwí	Dukwí (handkerchief)	*Synecdoche* and *euphemism*: the use of "take a handkerchief" instead of "to shed tear", the use of an indirect and softer representation instead of the harsher one.
6	Dàá ɖò kánú wà wɛ̀	kánú	*Synecdoche*: the use of kánú (the thing of the plate) instead of the food the king is eating
7	ayì kúyɛ̀	ayì(earth) kúyɛ̀(death of shade)	Metaphor whereby the "ayì" (the earth) is used to designate the palace where is sun set (kúyɛ̀)
8	Avivɔ̀ ɖò hɔ̀nmɛ	Avivɔ̀ (fever)	*Metonymy* (the use of a sickness in association with the unease caused by the death of the king).

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https://doi.org/10.21744/ijllc.v9n1.2169

9	zankú ɖò hɔ̀nmɛ̀	zankú (night)	*Euphemism* : the use of a mild or indirect word (fever) substituted for another one considered to be harsh or blunt (death)
			Metonymy (the use of the darkness of the night in association with the mourning caused by the death of the king).
			Euphemism : the use of a mild or indirect word (the night) substituted for another one considered to be harsh or blunt (death)
10	ayì hɔ́n	hɔ́n (sun rise)	*Metonymy*: the use of daytime appearance in association with the enthroning of a new king)
11	Dadá ɖɔ̀ e niná alolyánémi	alolyán (residue of vegetable brush)	*Synecdoche*: the use of the sign "alolyán" (residue of vegetable toothbrush) instead of the king's subjects themselves
			Analogy: the toothbrush is used in the morning in analogy with the very early time when the king needs everyone to be at his place
12	É ná kplakpɔ̀n	kpɔ̀n hammock)	*Synecdoche* (the use of the container for the contained)
13	É ná ɖó ká zànjí (to put the plate on the floor mat)	Ká (plate)	*Synecdoche*: The use of "plate" instead of the food it contains

From the semiotic analysis that has been carried out, these idiomatic centres represent the signifying codes that are known to the members of the restricted social and linguistic community of the royal court. They are the social and linguistic references, the cultural encyclopedias heaped up over generations, that encapsulate the keys to unlocking the secret of palace language. This basic and critical pattern of the idioms of the royal is a well-carved illustration of the words of Chandler (2007), when he writes that the conventions of codes represent a social dimension in semiotics because indeed a code is a set of practices familiar to users of the medium operating within a broad cultural framework. As a matter of fact, as Hall (1972), stresses the point, 'there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code'. Following the view of chandler and Hall on the importance of codes in making idioms legible, one has to add the preliminary condition of the context in which such idioms are worded and used. As one could guess, in the case of the reading of these specific idioms, context operates here as a two-layered social pattern. First, there is the major of the king being above everyone [Dada (the all-powerful king)] and owning everything [Dɔ̀kunnɔ̀ / Jɛxɔ́sú / (the owner of wealth, the owner of pearl). Secondly, every single idiom being birthed within much specific circumstances draws from this basic context to form the semantic and pragmatic framework within which it is to be understood.

The linguistic analyses and interpretations undertaken so far have been useful in displaying three distinctive observations that are critical in the semantic decoding of idioms. First, the selected idioms are completely unintelligible not only to non-speakers of fongbé language but to the native of this language too who are unaware of the ways and manners of speaking of the kingdom of Agbomè. This allows inferring that the idioms are culturally loaded in such a way that they express the values of the communities, clans or nation to which they belong. This culturally encrypted feature of idioms makes it compulsory for anyone willing to decode them to seek for knowledge related the environment, life, history and culture background of the native speakers. As Shigemoto (1997), holistically puts it so skillfully as he points out that:

> A language is the culmination of thousands of years of a people's experience and wisdom. Moreover, it is the vehicle that transmits and perpetuates that wisdom. When a language is lost, much more than the sound and the structure of that language are gone. Each language is inextricably tied up with a unique view of the world, belief system, and literature, regardless of whether the literature is written or not. (p. 2)

This cultural aspect embedded in the idioms of the royal court of Danxome can be identified for example in Idiom 1: Aza tɛnmɛtɛnmɛ e wá fí lě (The various hats that have come here). Culturally and historically, this idom informs on the existence of artwork that produces hats, the very probable existence of dry seasons which makes people to cover their heads for protection against the sun. Furthermore, the figurative metaphorical meaning encoded in Aza tɛnmɛtɛnmɛ [the various hats], which represent the various levels of authority, shows the presence of a well-known

social stratification. Humboldt, cited in Salzmann (1998), pinpoints this reciprocally embedded and interwoven relationship between language and culture in a rather catching manner as he straightforwardly writes that:

> The spiritual traits and the structure of the language of a people are so intimately blended that, given either of the two, one should be able to derive the other from it to the fullest extent…. Language is the outward manifestation of the spirit of people: their language is their spirit, and their spirit is their language, it is difficult to imagine any two things more identical (p. 39).

Apart from the cultural imprint contained in the make-up and wording of idioms, there is the more specific pattern of hierarchical organisation that shows through the intention behind them. Actually, the first three selected idioms [1]*Aza tɛnmɛtɛnmɛ e wá fí lě*, [2]*N' déko* (I take off sand), [3]*Axɔ́vína nɔɖugbɔ́dɔ ă*, there is an obvious mention of an environment where not everybody is seated in the same chairs. With such a pattern, one is allowed to infer that language as it is used in idioms appears to be more than a means of communication. Rather, it is by and in itself, a social practice (Rickford, 2016), thatbears the stigma of social life in all it has been over decades and centuries. In this specific case of a coded language, a sociolect that is characteristic of the royal court of Danxome, one can notice that it bears the notion of classes, of levels of authority and places as well as practices that are antinomic with certain social positions in the kingdom. Besides these patterns that reveal some specific features of idiomatic language, a further exploration of its content, reveals some possibilities of an intrinsic paring of both spoken and sign language in some idiomatic expressions. By way of illustration, the idiomatic expression N' déko (I take off sand) which is the reverent greeting of a low rank citizen to a high rank authority is consubstantial with a gestural move both behaviorally and physically as a way of displaying the manifestation of the words that are pronounced. Leach (1976), mentions this important aspect of non-verbal way to convey meaning as he indicates that:

> All the various non-verbal dimensions of culture, such as styles in cooking, village lay-out, architecture, furniture, food, cooking, music, physical gesture, postural attitudes and so on are organized in patterned sets so as to incorporate coded information in a manner analogous to the sounds and words and sentences of a natural language . . . It is just as meaningful to talk about the grammatical rules which govern the wearing of clothes as it is to talk about the grammatical rules which govern speech utterances. (p. 10)

Idioms thus appear as perfectly well-designed vessels to host, shelter and perpetuate the knowledge, manners, ways, feelings, ideologies, practices, the does and don'ts, tangible and intangible, physical, spiritual, vocal, gestural, in short, the very soul and souvenirs of a community. This is where Chateaubriand's (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9moires_d%27outre-tombe) words come along at just the right time as he convincingly declares

> En vain vous croyez posséder à fond un idiome étranger, le lait de la nourrice vous manque, ainsi que les premières paroles qu'elle vous apprit à son sein et dans vos langes ; certains accents ne sont que de la patrie

> In vain do you think you possess a foreign idiom; you miss the nurse's milk, as well as the first words she taught you at her bosom and in your diapers; some accents are only from the homeland. [Translated version]

Actually, ''when studying cultural practices, semioticians treat as signs any objects or actions which have meaning to members of the cultural group, seeking to identify the rules or conventions of the codes which underlie the production of meanings within that culture (Chandler, 2007).

4 Conclusion

This article has dealt with the semiotic study of idioms related to the royal court of Danxome in the Republic of Benin (Ex Dahomey). In this study, the court of Danxome is approached in its aspect of select linguistic community with its specific way of using language to convey meaning. It is considered in its aspect of a high place where some ways and manners of linguistic interaction are coded because of the sacred feature of everything related to the person of the king and the activities of the palace. The necessity of undertaking this strictly social study with subjective inputs has oriented to the choice of a qualitative method of analysis for the scrutiny of non-numerical data. The

analysis thus carried out has unveiled the historical and cultural load embedded in the thirteen idioms that were selected as the corpus of this study. With the impossibility of reaching the meaning of these idioms through the denotative channel, a threefold decoding process including their social context, semiotic analysis and ultimate signification has been used in order to access their hidden message. This allows inferring that language is not just a repository of linguistic signs for social interactions, but also a repository of the cultural and historical journey of those who speak it.

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