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Actes des journées scientifiques de la Faculté des Lettres,
des Langues et des Sciences du Langage (FLSL)

tenues les 13 et 14 janvier 2026 sise à Kabala



Thème : Langues africaines et mutations sociales :

Dynamique de résilience, d'innovation et de justice sociale



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The journal publishes only quality articles that have not been published or submitted for publication in any other journals. Each article is subjected to a double blind reading. The quality and originality of the articles are the only criteria for publication.



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*Sur le thème : LANGUES
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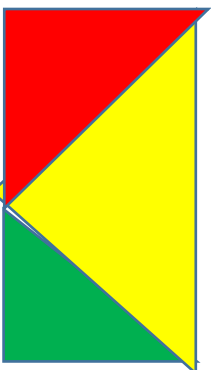
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Argumentaire de l'appel à communication des journées scientifiques de la FLSL

Dans un contexte africain en constante mutation – marqué par des transitions politiques, des crises sécuritaires, des mobilités internes croissantes, ainsi que des revendications identitaires et sociales – les langues africaines s'imposent comme des vecteurs centraux de médiation, d'innovation et d'adaptation. Elles ne sont pas seulement des instruments de communication, mais des marqueurs identitaires (Bamgbose, 1991; Touré, 2023), des outils de résistance, de développement (Touré et al., 2022), et des leviers de transformation sociale. Face à la pluralité des usages et des situations de communication, il devient impératif de repenser le rôle des langues dans les dynamiques sociales en Afrique, en particulier dans l'espace sahélien et dans l'espace AES (Alliance des États du Sahel). Les Journées scientifiques de la FLSL entendent interroger les multiples fonctions des langues africaines à l'aune des défis contemporains, dans une perspective à la fois critique et prospective.

Comment les langues africaines, dans toute leur diversité et leur historicité, participent-elles à la recomposition des sociétés africaines en proie à des transformations majeures ? Dans quelle mesure ces langues deviennent-elles des ressources de résilience face aux crises (Ballo, 2024; Minkailou et al., 2023), de revendication face aux marginalisations, et d'innovation dans les champs de la médiation, de la gouvernance, de l'éducation (Nounta, 2015; Nouta et Touré, 2024;) ou encore du genre ? À travers quelles politiques linguistiques, quelles pratiques sociales, et quelles représentations culturelles se redéfinit leur place dans les processus de construction sociale ? Autant de questions qui invitent à une analyse pluridisciplinaire, ancrée dans les réalités sociolinguistiques africaines.

Le cadre théorique de ces journées scientifiques s'inscrit dans une approche pluridisciplinaire, à la croisée de la sociolinguistique critique (Calvet, 1999), de la linguistique anthropologique (Gumperz, 1982), de la sociologie du langage (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), de l'enrichissement terminologique des langues africaines (Diki-Kidiri, 2008 ; Ligan 2022) des études postcoloniales et des théories du développement linguistique (Kirmayer, 2009). Il s'agit de considérer les langues africaines non pas comme de simples instruments de communication, mais comme des systèmes socio-symboliques imbriqués dans des logiques de pouvoir, (Lakoff, 1975 ; Cameron, 1992), de résistance, de négociation identitaire et d'innovation sociale (Blommaert, 2010).

Ces perspectives permettent d'interroger les langues non seulement comme outils de communication, mais comme ressources sociales façonnées par le pouvoir, les idéologies et les dynamiques identitaires (Agouzoum, 2025).

Ces Journées scientifiques visent à ouvrir un espace de réflexion interdisciplinaire sur les fonctions sociales et politiques des langues africaines face aux mutations contemporaines. Elles ambitionnent de contribuer à une revalorisation des langues africaines, non seulement comme patrimoine culturel, mais comme leviers d'innovation sociale, d'équité et de résilience communautaire (Lezou Koffi, 2024). À travers les contributions attendues, il s'agit également de formuler des recommandations concrètes en matière d'aménagement linguistique, de politiques publiques, et de recherche-action.

Axes de communication

AXE 1 : Politiques linguistiques et migrations internes au Mali et dans l'espace AES

Les mobilités internes au Mali – qu'elles soient volontaires (urbanisation, emploi, scolarisation) ou contraintes (déplacement forcé, insécurité) – recomposent les cartographies linguistiques locales. Dans un tel contexte, les langues majoritaires comme le bamanankan ou le songhay se

redéployent dans de nouveaux espaces, tandis que d'autres langues jouent un rôle de relais ou de médiation.

Cet axe interroge :

- Les langues de la mobilité : quelles langues sont utilisées dans les processus de migration intra- ou interrégionale ?
- Les dispositifs ou absences d'aménagement linguistique interrégional dans l'espace AES : peut-on envisager une politique linguistique concertée entre pays membres ?
- Le statut des langues dans les lieux d'accueil (écoles, services publics, espaces marchands) : entre intégration et invisibilisation des langues des déplacés.

AXE 2 : Langues minoritaires et résilience culturelle en contexte de crise

En période de conflit ou d'instabilité, les langues minoritaires jouent souvent un rôle central dans le maintien de la cohésion communautaire, la transmission des savoirs endogènes, et la reconstruction identitaire. La résilience passe ici par des formes de créativité discursive, de ritualisation linguistique ou de réinvestissement symbolique.

Cet axe propose de questionner :

- Les usages communautaires des langues minoritaires dans les zones de crise : contes, proverbes, chants, etc.
- Les pratiques de transmission des valeurs et des mémoires collectives en situation de rupture sociale.
- Les stratégies linguistiques d'adaptation et de préservation : traduction orale, codes partagés, lexiques de résistance.
- La dimension politique de la résilience linguistique : une affirmation identitaire face aux logiques d'homogénéisation culturelle.

AXE 3 : Langues africaines et justice sociale (accès aux services publics)

L'accès aux services publics demeure fortement conditionné par la langue utilisée. Dans des contextes multilingues, le recours exclusif aux langues officielles, souvent exogènes, crée des inégalités linguistiques majeures, notamment dans les domaines de la santé, de la justice, et de l'éducation.

Les communications attendues dans cet axe pourront traiter :

- Des obstacles linguistiques à l'accès équitable aux services de base.
- Des expériences d'interprétariat communautaire, de traduction institutionnelle, ou de matérialisation des langues nationales dans les services publics.
- Des enjeux de littératie plurilingue dans la prise de parole citoyenne.
- Des propositions d'ingénierie linguistique sociale : chartes linguistiques, labellisations inclusives, etc.

AXE 4 : Plurilinguisme, conflictualité et médiation

Le plurilinguisme, loin d'être une simple donnée descriptive, peut générer des tensions linguistiques, mais aussi des opportunités de médiation. Dans les espaces de négociation (famille, chefferies, instances coutumières, commissions de paix), les langues africaines sont utilisées comme outils d'apaisement ou d'assertion.

Les contributions de cet axe pourront explorer :

- Les rôles des langues locales dans les processus traditionnels de gestion des conflits.
- Les pratiques plurilingues dans les forums sociaux, les dialogues intercommunautaires ou interreligieux.
- Les enjeux liés à la neutralité linguistique dans les médiations : quelle langue pour quelle légitimité ?
- Les médiateurs linguistiques : griots, sages, traducteurs coutumiers, etc.

AXE 5 : Langues, genre et représentations sociales

Les langues participent à la (re)production des rapports sociaux de sexe à travers des pratiques discursives qui peuvent être discriminantes, stigmatisantes ou libératrices. Cet axe se propose d'aborder les interactions entre langage, genre et pouvoir.

Il s'agit d'interroger :

- Les formes de sexisme linguistique : stéréotypes dans les proverbes, insultes genrées, invisibilisation grammaticale.
- Les rapports d'autorité et de silence dans les interactions sociales et politiques.
- Les transformations linguistiques dans les mouvements féministes africains (néologismes, requalifications, contre-discours).
- Les enjeux du langage inclusif en langues africaines : entre tradition et modernité.

AXE 6 : Langues africaines et littérature

La littérature en langues africaines participe aux dynamiques de résilience, d'innovation et de justice sociale dans les sociétés africaines contemporaines en mutation. Cet axe explore en quoi l'écriture littéraire en langues africaines contribue à la sauvegarde et à la revitalisation du patrimoine linguistique et culturel africain. Il interroge:

- Comment les écrivains utilisent-ils les langues africaines pour résister à l'homogénéisation culturelle et linguistique mondiale ?
- Quelles formes nouvelles de création littéraire (orature numérique, poésie urbaine, slam, etc.) émergent à partir des langues africaines ?
- Comment les écrivains négocient-ils entre l'héritage oral et les exigences de l'écriture moderne pour inventer de nouvelles esthétiques littéraires ?
- Comment les choix linguistiques dans les œuvres littéraires traduisent-ils des positionnements politiques ou éthiques face aux inégalités sociales et aux questions de justice ?

AXE 7 : Langues africaines à l'ère de l'IA

L'intelligence artificielle (IA) ouvre des perspectives inédites pour la valorisation, la documentation et la diffusion des langues africaines. Toutefois, ces technologies restent largement dominées par les langues hégémoniques, reproduisant des inégalités linguistiques dans l'espace numérique. Ce sixième axe propose d'interroger:

- Les enjeux de l'inclusion linguistique africaine dans les systèmes d'IA, qu'il s'agisse de reconnaissance vocale, de traduction automatique, d'archivage sonore ou de modélisation sémantique.
- Les initiatives locales et panafricaines visant à entraîner des corpus en langues africaines, à intégrer ces langues dans les assistants virtuels, ou à concevoir des bases de données linguistiques ouvertes.

- La gouvernance linguistique des technologies de l'IA, les risques de standardisation ou de folklorisation numérique, et les stratégies d'appropriation communautaire des outils d'IA dans une perspective de souveraineté technolinguistique.

AXE 8 : Axe libre

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Exploring the Symbolism of the Height of the *Toguna* in the Dogon Society

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Abstract

Toguna is among the identity elements of the Dogon people. Its architecture is not fortuitous; it is full of messages for the community. In general, it is low; symbolising social values essential for them. Today, many locals know the *Toguna*, but very few of them understand the hidden messages of its height. There is not enough documentation about the topic. Elderly people who can explain the symbolism cannot write for the majority. The *Toguna* is of significant importance for the community. Thus, the main objective is to explain the hidden messages of the structure. As for the theoretical framework, semiotics theory is used in analysing the collected data. The semiotics theory is about the interpretation of signs, symbols in general, to decipher the meaning of artworks for a better understanding. This study is qualitative, because it interprets the collected data, which are not numerical. Semi-structured interview helps in gathering information from fieldwork. Purposive sampling has been used to select a sample to conduct interviews. The transcription of the collected data provides information to develop the topic. Moreover, some books have been used to get some complementary information. As a result, it appears that the low height stands for equality, humility, respect and security in the Dogon society. It is a kind of standard as far as the construction of *Toguna* is concerned. The architecture obliges everyone to bend, whatever your social position. It shows equality under the *Toguna*; consequently, they must find a fair solution to problems they debate there.

Key words: Dogon society; Height; Symbolism; *Toguna*; Values

Résumé

Le *Toguna* fait partie des éléments identitaires des Dogons. Son architecture n'est pas fortuite; car elle regorge de messages destinés à la communauté. En général, elle est basse; cette taille symbolise les valeurs sociales qui sont chères à la communauté dogon. De nos jours, beaucoup de gens connaissent le *Toguna*, mais très peu d'entre eux comprennent les messages cachés de sa taille. Il n'existe pas suffisamment de documentation sur ce sujet. Les personnes âgées capables d'expliquer ce symbolisme ne savent pas écrire pour la plupart. Le *Toguna* occupe une place très importante dans la société dogon. Ainsi, l'objectif principal est donc d'expliquer les messages cachés de sa taille. C'est ainsi que la sémiotique est utilisée comme théorie pour analyser les données. La sémiotique porte sur l'interprétation des signes et des symboles en général. Dans le cadre de cette étude, on déchiffre la signification d'un hangar afin d'en améliorer la compréhension. Cette étude est qualitative, car elle porte sur l'interprétation de données non numériques. Des entretiens semi-structurés ont permis de recueillir des informations sur le terrain. Un échantillonnage raisonné a été utilisé pour sélectionner les personnes ressources. La transcription des données recueillies fournit des informations permettant d'approfondir le sujet. De plus, certains ouvrages ont été consultés afin d'obtenir des informations complémentaires. Il en résulte que la taille du *Toguna* symbolise, en plus de la prévention de conflits, l'égalité, l'humilité, le respect et la sécurité au sein de la société dogon. C'est en quelque sorte une norme en matière de construction du *Toguna*. Cette taille oblige chacun à se baisser, quelle que soit sa position sociale. Cela montre que tous sont égaux sous le *Toguna*; par conséquent, ils doivent trouver des solutions équitables aux problèmes dont ils y débattent.

Mots clés: Société Dogon; Symbolisme; Taille; *Toguna*; Valeurs

Introduction

Dogon people are one of the ethnic groups living mainly in Mali. They are for the majority in the central part of the country. People refer to their place as “le pays dogon” (meaning Dogonland). The main regions where we can find them are: Bandiagara and Douentza. The escarpment of Bandiagara is among the sites, which has attracted tourists from all over the world. Their accommodation and artworks made them more popular across the world. They use those artworks to promote their culture and teach the community at the same time. In her work about Dogon arts, Ezra (1988) argued: “The Dogon place wood figures depicting men and women on many different kinds of altars, most of which are dedicated to ancestors, either real or mythical” (p.21). They sculpture their representations on woods, in villages where wood is available. Those sculptures can be human beings, animals and religious symbols. It favours the transmission of knowledge in the society. In order to understand that information, one should be part of the concerned community. It is also possible to investigate and get information from the elders.

Besides, artworks are very important in African societies in general. The way they build houses and sculpt things bears messages for the community. To support that statement, developing African art, Adewumi and Faida (2017) advocated: “In African art, the signs and symbols embedded in the art forms serve as a form of coded instruction or manual to be perused and understood to determine the specific function these art forms were intended to perform” (p.5). The symbols and signs can represent ancestors or totemic animals. It helps the new generation to understand their society, through the explanations of elders. Most of the representations have a specific meaning for them. It is a form of communication for them.

Among the constructions in the Dogon villages, we have a shed called *Toguna*. To that vein, visiting the Dogonland for the first time, a tourist stated: “Then, the big shed discovered the first day is the *Toguna*, men’s shed. It is located in the same place as the first hut of the village” (Walter, 2002, p. 82). It was the first time that the author had visited a Dogon village. Most of the tourists were more attracted to Sangha. It is among the first Dogon villages that tourists have published more. The *Toguna* is part of their main constructions. It has symbolic values for them.

It is a multifunctional shed because of its multiple functions. Besides the functions, the architecture is full of teachings necessary for the community. Exploring the Dogon society, Douyon (2010) thinks that it is not common to see a *Toguna* more than 150 cm high. The height obliges everyone to bend before getting under it. It shows that they are equal and have the same height. The fact that they sit together shows that they have agreed to conform to their tradition. Understanding those values can help a community in the management of misunderstandings. Besides, some authors tackle the architecture of the *Toguna*, developing a widespread explanation. Most people explain the fact that it prevents quarrels during debates. Among them, Helf (2005), referring to the *Toguna*, elucidated that the height prevent angry people from fighting. It is a general explanation concerning that topic. The majority of works do not give further information. It is therefore necessary to conduct fieldwork and try to understand more about the reasons that motivated the structure.

The problem is that there are many documents about the Dogon people, but very few of them explore the *Toguna* in general. Many people defended that the height of the *Toguna* prevents people from fighting during debates. To exemplify, Claerhout (2015) thinks that the *Toguna* is generally low to avoid people during problem settlements to stand, because their head will hit the beam violently. Besides those statements, many values are not well developed. There are very few explanations concerning the symbolism of the low construction. In addition, the world is changing thanks to the evolution of new technologies. Every community should be aware and try to undertake actions to protect their traditional values. It is the reason that impels Somboro (2023) to elucidate that the world is being connected to one another due to the evolution of technology. Traditional societies are

changing with the impact of external values. Learning about other societies can have an impact on the local ones.

As every research topic has a specific objective, the main objective of this study is to decipher the symbolism of the height of the *Toguna*. In addition to that, the work seeks to teach those values to the young generation. There are many messages behind the height; understanding them allows for a deeper comprehension of Dogon culture.

In order to have plausible information about the topic, there are two questions. Firstly, what is the symbolic meaning of the low height of the *Toguna* ? Secondly, what is the importance of that study for the community? Answering those two questions can provide helpful information to develop the work.

In order to analyse the collected data, semiotics theory is the one suitable for the paper. In every society, in every society, symbols convey specific meanings for locals. Explaining that theory, Behera (2024) said: “We can comprehend how symbols and signs take on meaning and affect how we see the outside world through the study of semiotics” (p.77). The theory permits to analyse data about the arts of a society. The height of the *Toguna* provides messages to the community. It is essential to be part of that community in order to be able to understand those messages. In addition to that, any researcher conversing with Dogon elders can get some information. Semiotics theory enables the interpretation of the signs that exist in a given society. Some elders of the community can give the right messages embedded in the architecture. Thanks to semiotics, we can decipher non-verbal languages.

This paper is composed of an introduction, which explains the context and justification of the topic. In addition to that, we have the objectives, the research questions, and the theoretical framework. The methodology section, which explains the approach, the design, followed by the sampling procedure. Furthermore, we explain the techniques used to analyse the collected data. There is also the interpretation of the results, based on the research questions. Then, there is the discussion, which contrasts and compares ideas from interviews and those from documents. Finally, the concluding part summarizes the study.

Methodology

This section of the study explained how the data has been collected. It is a qualitative study because we interpret and illustrate non-numerical data. In his explanation about research methodology, Taherdoost (2022) thinks that the qualitative approach scrupulously explores the living conditions or facts of a given society. It better explains those problems with texts when numbers are not suitable for the purpose. For some information to be more understood by a community, one has to give full details with texts. It enables to get more information, because some of the information cannot be understood through numbers. For example, people can better understand explanations about the height of the *Toguna* through words than numbers.

This study is exploratory; the topic needs further investigation. Only a few studies exist about the *Toguna* in general and its symbolic features in particular. For that reason, we find it necessary to adopt an exploratory study. To that vein, explaining exploratory, Leavy explains as follows:

When we have a new or relatively underresearched topic, exploratory research is a way of learning about that topic. Exploratory research can help us fill a gap in our knowledge about a new or underresearched topic, or approach the topic from a different perspective to generate new and emerging insights. (Leavy, 2023, p.5)

We can use the exploratory study with topics that have little documentation. It permits the researcher to lay the ground for further studies. The study of the *Toguna* is an example. There are

many books about the Dogon people and their masks. In opposite, we can hardly find documents developing the *Toguna* in depth. During the review of the literature, we can notice that some authors give a brief description of it. Those who tackle the symbolic features give short explanations. The exploratory study allows the researcher to give their point of view about a given topic. We apply it to the study, because there is not enough works that develop the features of the *Toguna*.

In order to get the answer to the research questions, it is necessary to select some authoritative participants to provide the appropriate answers. To that vein, we have to select a sample among those who master the Dogon culture. Then, purposive sampling is the one used to get better information by going to key contacts. It is also called judgment sampling because the researcher knows the capacity of those to be interviewed. In fact, we can understand that: “Purposive sampling, one of the most common sampling strategies, groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question” (Family Health International, 2005, p.3). The purposive sampling can help the researcher to collect data on time. It is better with a topic that the researcher has already explored. Based on the capacity of the selected people, the researcher can get accurate information. They are cultural actors and former touristic guides. They are active in the Dogon cultural events. All of them provide answers that permit to get further understanding of the topic.

Thus, ten men have participated in the data collection. Men are the main concern because the study explores a place where men gather and govern. It does not mean that women are not important. In the mentality of the Dogon people, both men and women have their respective tasks. They are complementary in the community. The study being about the Dogon community, the first people to ask are the Dogon people. The sample is composed of Dogon elders living in Bamako and some during their stay who master questions related to the *Toguna*. They have provided many useful information without wasting time. They get more information about the topic. In order to show their importance, Sagara said that: “Elders generally meet under the *Toguna*, they constitute the council of Elders who manage the material and immaterial patrimony of their group. Those elders holding traditional wisdom are respected by the youngest” (Sagara, 2024, p.101). The participants are from the Dogonland, but they are living in Bamako because of their respective occupations. Some young men (artisans and former touristic guides) have participated as well. They have been selected based on their participation in the promotion of the Dogon culture. They are for the majority cultural actors known by the Dogon community.

In order to collect data, interviews of thirty minutes maximum enable to exchange with them for better understanding. We find semi-structured interview the most appropriate. This type of interview allows more interactions between the researcher and the participant. Sometimes, the answer of a participant can lead to another question for a better understanding of the topic. It is important for this topic, because one can ask questions about the unexplored themes. Face-to-face semi-structured interview is the most suitable. To support those explanations : “In qualitative interviews, the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with the participants; telephone interviews, or engages in a focus group interview with six to eight interviewees in each group” (Creswell, 2014, p.190). Once conducting face-to-face interview, we can convince the participants about the importance of developing the study. It is not easy to get good information if the participant does not feel at ease with the researcher. The face-to-face interview can sometimes help the researcher to understand more than his expectation about the research topic. It is important in qualitative study.

In the conduct of the study, all of the participants consent to participate. They do their best to share their mind about the architecture of the *Toguna*. They have accepted to be recorded with a smartphone. The participants agree to display their identity, to enable other researchers to be in touch with them. The record of the interviews have been transcribed. Thematic analysis helps to analyse the collected data. This type of analysis requires dividing the data into different themes and developing them. The participants have their point of view about the topics. We try to put together answer dealing with the same theme to provide concise results.

In order to show the results and interpret them, thematic analysis permits to get themes from different data. After collecting data, we try to see the themes in accordance with the objectives of the study. The development of those themes are in the results section. The next point of the study explains the results collected from fieldwork. It also shows the similarity or differences with the existed data about the topic.

Results and Discussion

This section is about the information obtained from the research. It presents the answers of the research questions. Interviewees give their different opinions about the *Toguna*. Consequently, studying the Dogon mythology, Claerhout (2015) explained that Dogon people believe that nature is full of messages that human being should try to decipher. It is the reason why they can interpret their environment. Their works are generally meaningful. It is not common to see a Dogon village where there is no *Toguna*. We interpret them to make more understandable to provide new knowledge. It is followed by the discussion section, which compare interviews data from the existing data. It permits to know the development of the topic.

Results

In the Dogon society, they believe that, in order to express wisely, one has to sit down. When someone sits, he can feel at ease and deliver his speech. From that point of view, they develop other purposes dealing with the respect of cultural values. Among those values, there are respect, humility and wisdom. Those values are among the most important for the community. They are part of the traditional education. The height also symbolizes security and a correctional tool as well.

The Low Structure Promoting Traditional Education

Traditional education is a process of transmitting knowledge or values to the younger generation. In the Dogon society, they teach good manners to children since their young age. They have values that they find essential in the life and development of a human being. The techniques they use to teach those values are specific to their community. They can use symbols, conversations and deeds. For instance, when a person invites you for exchanging about a topic, the person is going to be at ease if you sit and listen to him. They make the *Toguna* very low to oblige everyone to sit down. Whether you are rich or poor, you have to respect elders and ancestors. The fact of accepting to sit means that you respect the ancestors. Everyone can take his chair to come and sit, but they sit on the same woods. The social status is not important there. In order to respect the community, they should comply with the traditions of the village. For example, nobody can stand and talk to the elders under the *Toguna*. The shed obliges to sit; it teaches the young men how to behave during debates with elders.

In addition to that, the choice of this architectural constraint shows that they care for elders. Respecting elders, they decide to make the *Toguna* in a way that they can get under easily. Most of the elderly people walk with stick. To support the argument, a traditional healer, advocated: "It is first of all for elders and once they come there, most of them bend on walking. So, they sometimes walk with sticks, once in the *Toguna*, it is easy to get under" (A.Togo, personal communication, January 28th, 2024). Elders are those in charge of the management of the *Toguna*, and they are given priority. Once they come there with their sticks, they put it down and sit immediately. It means that people must think about the future in whatever they do. Old age is the future of those who live a long life. It is to show to young men that they will one day walk with sticks. They will be obliged to bend one day to walk.

Furthermore, young people willing to learn from the elders sit with them for conversation. In majority, a young person can stand for hours without sitting, but that is difficult for an old man. Despite that physical difference, the respect of elders impels young people to sit like elders. The

application of the semiotics theory helps the researcher to understand the connection between the height and respect. There is no image or representation, which can explain it. From the explanation of the participants, we can say that they use the architecture to promote values like respect. It is not visible, but the explanations of those who master the place can be essential in providing more comments.

Moreover, it shows humility in the society. Whoever you are, whatever your position, you are obliged to bend your head before getting under the *Toguna*. It shows that in the community, people are equal. As the Dogon people used to say: 'We are same mother, same father'. It means that they should always behave like a single family. They are from the same ancestors. They represent that mentality through the height of the *Toguna*. Everyone is paying tribute to elders by lowering the heads. It is a kind of salutation and respect. When you are greeting someone that you respect a lot, some people tend to bow the head. It is a sign of obedience and respect. In addition to that, once exchanging about a problem, elders defended that the fact of sitting during conversation is wiser and a sign of respect as well.

For most of the participants, the height of the *Toguna* is teaching lesson to the community. Among different groups of people, some are hot-tempered. Some of them can even fight very easily. In order to avoid such kind of situations, Dogon people make the *Toguna* low. Even if the person is angry, it is not possible for him to stand. For the locals, it is forbidden to fight under there. Everyone has to respect the decisions of the community. Those who are insolent are the first to learn lessons from the *Toguna*. Talking about insolent people, Sagara argued: "When we talk to them under the *Toguna*, they get angry and stand, without respecting the elders in front of them" (A. Sagara, personal communication, December 29th, 2024). Respecting elders is one of the most important values in the community. Like most of the African societies, old age symbolises wisdom in general. We should respect elders, because they are the custodians of the tradition. The elders sit and speak quietly. Young men should learn that attitude. The *Toguna* teaches young men that, those sitting were as strong as they are. Today, they are weak and wise. It means that people must be humble and wise in life. They must respect the decisions of the community.

Knowing that people cannot stand and fight, one of the reasons of the height is the prevention of fighting. The height of the *Toguna* does not allow people to raise their hands. They are obliged to sit and listen to one another. The fact of making this way is one of the great intelligence of the Dogon ancestors. They forsake the future, knowing that people are getting less and less tolerant in the world. As far as the construction of the *Toguna* is concerned, Dogon people keep the same height almost everywhere in their community.

The Low Architecture Symbolizing Protection

In the Dogon community, they think that a short construction of this type can last for many years. The height makes it safer. They do their best to make it as safe as possible, because it is the regulator of the society. The real size of the pillar can be up to three meters. Half of the size goes underground to make it more resistant. The load on the roof can be higher than the pillars. They are of two types: wooden and stony. They pile up stones before putting the millet stalks on top. It is safer to make it low, it last many years. In opposite, if the pillar is high, it can collapse easily. In the construction, they do not add cement or other materials. They just use stones, which is available in the stony places of the Dogonland. As far as the villages of the plain is concerned, they use the trunks of trees. The most resistant trees, like *prosopis africana* (*kirè or kilè*) are the most used. Despite the quality of the wood, they decide to keep the low architecture like standards of construction. The height permits the wood to be more resistant and safer for the community.

Furthermore, elders take into account the shadow and the protection that are under the *Toguna*. The height prevents the sunlight and rain from getting under the shed. Elders can have their rest even in the rain or sun. There is always shadow there. It is the right place for them to hold their meetings

and make decisions concerning the community. Some elders think that, if the *Toguna* is high, it is not going to be very resistant. They believe that the height has security functions. Taking into account the different symbolism behind the height of the *Toguna*, we can understand that nothing is fortuitous in the Dogonland. It permits to keep the place cool at any season, cool or hot.

In fact, elders explain that in the past, people used to go in the Dogonland for foray. At that time, they could easily catch children and go with them. Some participants assert that the *Toguna* is a very safe place, because forayers used to come with horses. From the back of their horses, they could take a child and continue directly. Once the person is under the *Toguna*, the height does not make the task easy for the forayer. He cannot catch someone sitting there easily. This special architecture, unique in the Dogon constructions can be used as a protection.

The Height Symbolizing a Correctional Tool

Most of the participant think that the *Toguna* by itself is an advisor. Some insolent people can be corrected without any single word. To illustrate, a participant (A. Sagara, personal communication, December 29th, 2024) stated: “We cannot walk under the *Toguna*, you must bend and move inside it. You cannot stand, if you force, it will correct you. It is a correction tool”. The height gives lesson to the young people. In fact, a person not respecting that decision receives correction from the roof of the *Toguna*. Sometimes, during debates, some of them try to stand and react. The person who abruptly stands, his head hits the roof of the *Toguna*. The pain of that action itself is a lesson. It shows that they must calm down. It also symbolizes the past and the future. The elderly people sitting there were as strong as those young men were, but today they are the wisest. It means that a person should be humble whatever your strength. It is not possible for a person to stand under the *Toguna*. Those who forget that values are going to experience the pain from the heavy roof.

In addition, an artisan said that we must respect, keep quiet under the *Toguna*. It gives a natural piece of advice to people. “You must always calm down and speak; you must not act with your heart. You must be quiet to talk with elders” (A. Dolo, personal communication, January 29th, 2025). The architecture of the *Toguna* by itself can be considered as an advisor. When someone does not listen to the words of the elders, his reaction can be punished by the shed itself. His explanations show that besides preventing fight, it can also be a messenger. Another participant has confirmed the previous one. When someone tries to stand because of his temper, the *Toguna* itself tells him to calm down (P. Guindo, personal communication, December 20th, 2023). Once someone look at it, he can understand that the place is for humble people. Dogon people for the majority think that the height of the *Toguna* is a standard during the construction. Once the height is not respected, the shed may lose some of its values.

Discussion

The review of the existing literature enables to show the similarities and differences about the topic. In the explored works, we notice that they do not give a thorough explanation concerning the height of the *Toguna*. Despite, we can get the main points and compare with those obtained from the fieldwork.

First, the height symbolizes respect in the Dogon community. One of the interviewees, Mr. Togo, a traditional healer, said that the *Toguna* belong to the elders and once they come there, most of them bend on walking. Therefore, they sometimes walk with sticks, once in the *Toguna*, it is easy to get under (A. Togo, personal communication, January 28th, 2024). He emphasizes the fact that most of the time; elders are the main actors there. The architecture permits them to go under the *Toguna* directly. Elders in general walk bending and it is easy for them go under the shed. Dogon people want to show that the most important people in the community are elders. They are the custodians of traditional values. It is compulsory to respect them.

Differently, exploring the *Toguna*, Douyon (2010) explained that it is not common to see it more than one meter and a half-centimeter high. That construction symbolizes humility, showing that everyone is equal there. Those who sit with elders have to show that they are humble. The way they speak and act should be in accordance with the values extolled by those elders. Being old or young, they all have to bend before sitting under the *Toguna*.

In the same vein, some of the participants supported what we get from existing documents. Thus, referring to the connotation of the height of the *Toguna*, Sagara explained that it is willingly done to impose respect. To show that a person is nothing without his siblings. A person comes from dust and will return in the hand of a person. Nobody is better than the other. Human is human (A. Sagara, personal communication, December 29th, 2024). More than the fact of respecting, it also shows equality in the society. Under the *Toguna* they all have to sit, it is an evidence that they have to cultivate respect in the society. People should understand that it is willingly done. Though they have long trees that they can use as pillars, they decide to keep a low architecture.

Moreover, the most spread symbolic feature of the height of the *Toguna* is to prevent conflicts. For instance, another work stated that: “the roof prevents people from standing during debates. No one can stand and fight” (Drachousof, 2010, p.50). His statements are similar to what one of the participant defend. Then, Niangaly thinks that the purpose of the height is to remind people of the values of *Toguna*. It is the reason why they decide to keep that height. Sometimes, people may be willing to stand and beat someone. Knowing that it is low, he can even not raise his hand to move the stick. The crossbeams prevents him from making movement with his stick (S. Niangaly, personal communication, December 30th, 2024). Both the fieldwork and the existing information give the same explanations. It is an important symbolic value of the *Toguna*. Whatever the temper of a person, once there, he has to conform to the values taught by elders sitting there.

In the Dogon society, they defended that it is not polite to stand by an old person and speak. They refer to those sitting under the *Toguna*. Once you want to address them, you have to sit and speak. It is also a sign of respect. The low height reinforces that belief; it shows that the sitting position is the wisest one. It is a place where they debate serious matters. Consequently, people have to sit in order to feel at ease and speak with their mind. As for the sitting position under the *Toguna*, Martinez-Constantin (2002) thinks that it allows those under the *Toguna* to make their voice understood by God. He insisted on the fact that the sitting position is the right manner to communicate with God. Although the height does not allow people to stand, it is symbolic as well.

Similarly, some one of the participant emphasizes the importance of the sitting position during debates. It has symbolic meaning, explaining the invisible messages of the height, he said: “Secondly, for Dogon people, to have your entire mind, you must sit. We cannot stand under the *Toguna*; whatever is the situation, you must sit down. All the sentences, the decisions are sacred (A.I. Dolo, personal communication, January 29th, 2025). Knowing that the *Toguna* is a sacred place, people should think twice before speaking. Every single speech during debates is important. They think that what they say must be true. For them, the sacredness of the place obliges people to tell the truth. Refusing to do so can have a severe consequence for the person. They believe that someone can die because of false statements. It is therefore a form of contact with God. Once the person does not tell the truth, God can punish him. This is the mentality of the Dogon people under the *Toguna*.

Then, we can say that Dogon people have adopted such a construction to oblige everyone to sit during debates. Knowing that it is not possible to stand, everyone is going to accept and converse calmly. Despite the temper of a person, whatever your social status, they all sit on the woods under the *Toguna*. The height teaches lesson to the community.

Conclusion

The architecture of the *Toguna* contains messages, which can be useful for the community. We can assert that the low height is not meaningless. It is also not there for decorative purpose. In reality, there are many lessons to get from its symbolism. It shows the community that people have to be respectful and humble. Respect and humility are essential for the development of every society. People who sit under the *Toguna* and participate to debates acquire experience in the management of their community. Among the symbolic meaning, we have equality as well. It obliges everyone to bend before going under it. Besides, nobody can stand, they all have to sit. It has educational symbol, because the quoted values are very important for the community.

In addition to that, young people who attend debates will also learn more about the values of their community. Under the *Toguna*, old and young sit together whenever they have to debate about a problem concerning their community. The height obliges even the strongest person of the society to follow the requirements of the place. Once someone tries to get angry and stands, his head beats the roof for sure. One of the symbolic meaning is that the *Toguna* is a shed that gives lessons to insolent people by itself. Learning its representations is very important in promoting social values. It permits to understand the sacredness and values of such a cultural place of the Dogon people.

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