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Language, Power and Collective Identity in the Enthronement Speech of Alikaou Sissoko

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Abstract

This article examines the enthronement address delivered to Alikaou Sissoko, the chief of Logo Sabouciré in Mali where traditional institutions and modern administrative structures coexist. Chieftaincy retains a functional role in the rural communities of Logo: it regulates relations, arbitrates disputes and preserves the values held by the collective. However, the speeches that install a chief have received little attention from researchers. What does language accomplish during an enthronement? How does it build authority, and how does it negotiate collective identity? The study sets out to answer these questions, drawing on interactional sociolinguistics and speech act theory, both of which see discourse as a social practice that produces meaning, legitimacy and authority. The approach is qualitative. The corpus is the recorded enthronement address, supplemented by participant observation and informal interviews carried out in Logo Sabouciré. In the speech, ritual formulas, genealogical references, multilingual resources and marks of social solidarity are all put to strategic use. Through them, authority is regulated, collective identity is reaffirmed and the chief's legitimacy is consolidated. The enthronement address thus works as a performative act. It legitimizes traditional authority and reinforces social cohesion, which is one reason oral traditions matter for research on local governance and intangible cultural heritage.

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Introduction

In traditional African societies, speech works as a social institution with strong symbolic value, and communication is only one of its functions: it regulates relations, carries collective knowledge and confers legitimacy on authority. The enthronement of a traditional chief shows this with particular clarity, since the speech delivered on that occasion is what publicly recognizes the new holder of power.

In plain terms, as Hampâté Bâ (1972) puts it, speech in Africa is sacred and binds whoever speaks. Words thus carry moral social weight, and to speak in this setting is to accept a responsibility towards the community. Logo Sabouciré lies in a Mandinka cultural area where several languages are in use, and its chieftaincy is still a central institution of social mediation and local governance. Oral tradition is both a collective memory and a way of legitimizing social and political structures (Vansina 1985).

The *mansaya* can be read in that light: a traditional form of political authority and governance within the Mandinka kingdom, whose legitimacy rested on lineage, on the wisdom of the ruler, on community recognition and on ancestral beliefs. Power was at once political, social and symbolic. This study examines the *mansaya* mainly in its sociopolitical and cultural sense, in relation to traditional authority and its legitimation.

Recent scholarship has shown that traditional authorities continue to matter for local governance, social regulation and community identity across Africa, despite their interaction with modern state institutions (Marrengane *et al.,* 2021; Myles *et al.,* 2022). African oral traditions likewise remain important resources for transmitting cultural knowledge, collective memory and identity (Manyane, 2024; Osei-Tutu, 2023).

The enthronement of a chief belongs to a set of ritual practices in which speech, genealogical references and symbols of power all count. Several studies have shown that language carries symbolic power and reproduces the social order. Bourdieu (1991) argues that "symbolic power is a power to construct reality" (p. 34). Discourse therefore does not simply reflect the social world; it produces it and makes it legitimate in the eyes of community members.

Austin (1962), for whom "to speak is to do" (p. 12), drew attention to the performative dimension of language. In an enthronement speech, the act of enunciation itself takes part in the investiture of the chief. An authority already established is not what the speech announces. The speech is itself one of the acts by which that authority gets publicly instituted, which is why the approach suits traditional ceremonies where ritual speech has a recognized social efficacy.

What multilingual practices do in the construction of collective identities has also been shown in sociolinguistic research. Languages, for Calvet (1999), are markers of social identity as much as means of communication. In Logo Sabouciré, the use of Bambara, Fulani or French during the ceremony may therefore signal different social affiliations, power relations or symbolic functions.

Traditional African institutions have received growing attention, but enthronement speeches have been studied from a historical, anthropological or political point of view rather than from a sociolinguistic one. Few studies have looked at how linguistic choices, discursive processes and ceremonial interaction build authority and collective identity in the Malian context. That gap is what the present research addresses. The main objective of this research is to analyze the sociolinguistic mechanisms through which the enthronement discourse legitimizes power and supports community cohesion. Three specific objectives follow. The first is to identify the discursive strategies the enthronement puts to work. The second is to examine how language builds traditional authority and makes it legitimate. The third is to bring out what these language practices do symbolically, socially and politically.

The study is guided by a central question: what does the enthronement discourse contribute to the construction of power and of collective identity in Logo Sabouciré? For its theoretical framework, the study turns first to Gumperz's (1982) interactional sociolinguistics. Gumperz treats discourse as social practice situated in context, and pays close attention to the contextual cues that participants exchange. It also draws on Austin's (1962) speech act theory, according to which certain utterances accomplish a social action at the very moment they are spoken, and on Bourdieu's (1991) notion of symbolic power, which helps account for the social conditions under which authority comes to be recognized. Hymes's (1974) work on communicative competence completes the framework by describing the social rules that govern the legitimate use of speech during ritual ceremonies.

Hymes's (1974) work on communicative competence completes the framework. Such a competence describes the social rules that govern the legitimate use of speech during ritual ceremonies. The methodology section sets out the research design and the data collection and analysis procedures. The results section presents the main findings, and the discussion interprets them against the theoretical framework and the relevant literature. The article closes on what the study implies for local governance, traditional authority and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

Methodology

This study is qualitative and examines the enthronement speech of Alikaou Sissoko, village chief of Logo Sabouciré, from a sociolinguistic perspective. It concerns the way language, cultural references and discourse practices express and legitimize traditional power, and the way the speech builds and reinforces a sense of collective identity within the community.

Area of Investigation

Fieldwork took place in Logo Sabouciré, a rural community in Mali where traditional chieftaincy remains an important institution of social organization and community life. The main corpus is the speech delivered when Alikaou Sissoko was installed as village chief. It was selected because it is the central ceremonial address through which a new chief is publicly recognized and his authority formally established.

Research Design

The design is qualitative, descriptive and interpretive. Data came from participant observation, semi-structured interviews and recordings of ritual speeches during the enthronement ceremony. These methods give access to the communicative practices observed during the ceremony and to the meanings local participants attach to them. The analysis follows a sociolinguistic perspective, with attention to linguistic choices, discursive forms and the social functions of language.

Population and Samples

The study population was made up of local stakeholders involved in the organization of traditional enthronement ceremonies. They included traditional leaders, elders, ceremony organizers, ritual speakers, and other knowledgeable participants. They were selected purposively because of their direct involvement in the cultural and linguistic practices surrounding enthronement ceremonies or their knowledge of these practices.

Data Collection Procedure

The enthronement ceremony in Logo Sabouciré lasted one day. The data were collected during and after the enthronement ceremony through three complementary techniques. Observation during the enthronement ceremony documented the communicative practices, the participants, the speech contexts and the sociocultural dimensions of the events. Semi-structured interviews with selected local stakeholders gathered information on the meanings, functions and cultural interpretations of the speeches and of the linguistic practices attached to them. Ritual speeches delivered in Khassonke language were audio-recorded where permission was granted, so as to constitute an authentic linguistic corpus. The speeches were transcribed in French and then translated into English for analysis and presentation. Culturally and linguistically significant expressions were preserved wherever possible, and particular attention went to cultural expressions, ritual formulas, proverbs, genealogical references and forms of address.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed qualitatively through sociolinguistic discourse analysis, along three dimensions: (i) linguistic choices, that is forms of address, lexical choices, repetitions, honorific expressions and culturally marked expressions; (ii) discursive forms, that is narrative structures, praise, exhortations, declarations, metaphors and other rhetorical devices; and (iii) the social functions of language, mainly the way authority, solidarity, identity, legitimacy and social cohesion are built, and the way the traditional leader and the community relate to each other. The transcribed recordings were compared with the interview data and the observations, so that recurring patterns could be identified, their sociocultural meanings interpreted, and the connections established between linguistic practices and the social context in which they occur.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and took part on the basis of informed consent. Permission was sought before any ceremony or interview was recorded, and participants were told they could refuse to take part or withdraw at any point. Confidentiality and anonymity were respected, and the data were used for academic purposes only. Care was also taken to respect local cultural norms, traditional authorities and the sensitive nature of ritual discourse.

Results and Discussion

Discursive Strategies

The speech relies on a set of linguistic choices that publicly establish Alikaou Sissoko as the new village chief and remind him of the responsibilities attached to the position. The direct address «te voici à ton tour» (here you are, it is now your turn) places Alikaou immediately within a line of succession. «À ton tour» carries continuity: whatever he is about to undertake, his predecessors have already done. «Accomplir ce que tes ancêtres ont accompli» (to accomplish what your ancestors accomplished) states this outright.

Throughout the speech the speaker uses the second person («tu», «ton», «tes»), which binds him directly to the new chief. With the possessives the effect goes further. Phrases such as «tes ancêtres», «tes forgerons», «tes esclaves» and «ton pouvoir» tie Alikaou, through language, to the social and historical structures of traditional leadership. Behind them lies a culturally familiar principle, which is that a new chief is expected to carry on the work and the values of those who came before him. In this way the past sets expectations for the present and for the future.

The lexical choices belong to power, succession and responsibility. «Ancêtres», «cérémonie d'intronisation», «sabre royal», «gouverner», «pouvoir» and «poids» form a semantic field of traditional authority. The phrase «sabre royal» (royal sword) matters particularly, giving as it does a material and visible form to the authority being transferred. As an object, the sword carries meaning well beyond the ceremony, symbolizing the continuity of the chief's power and the duty attached to it. The verb «gouverner» works along the same lines and casts authority as an active responsibility towards the community. Besides, the phrases «tes » alludes to social groups traditionally associated with the chief and brings them into the ritual act of recognition. The collective voice of the griots publicly confirms the chief's position.

Another metaphor matters: «ne pas te défaire de ce poids» (not to rid yourself of this burden). Power is traditionally viewed as a weight the chief must carry. The metaphor works against any idea of authority as a privilege its holder enjoys, since power becomes an obligation to be assumed and sustained. The formulation gains strength from the following «nous sommes déjà soumis à ton pouvoir» (we are already subject to your power). The speech thus balances the community's recognition of the chief's authority against his responsibility towards those who submit to it. Repetition and pronoun choice strengthen the relationship further. The possessive forms referring to the chief and the repeated «nous» set the holder of authority against the community that recognizes him.

The sequence «te demandent», «nous sommes déjà soumis», «nous te demandons» is worth looking at more closely. The community recognizes Alikaou as its ruler, declares itself already submitted to his authority, and then puts a request to him about how that authority is to be exercised. Submission in this case is not unconditional obedience: it arrives with a condition attached, which is that leadership be responsible. The speech is ritualized throughout, and its opening reference to «cette cérémonie d'intronisation» sets the utterance inside a formal moment of political and social transition.

The announcement «C'est le jour de te remettre le sabre royal» (this is the day to hand you the royal sword) accompanies the symbolic transfer of authority from the community and tradition to the new chief. Words, ritual objects and the ceremonial setting work together to make the change of status publicly recognizable. The speech grounds Alikaou Sissoko's authority in succession and ancestral legitimacy. It also draws on symbolic objects, on social recognition and on the idea of responsibility. With the repeated «nous», and with the declaration «nous sommes déjà soumis à ton pouvoir», the community appears as an active participant in the enthronement. The speech does not merely announce the arrival of a new but the relationship between that chief and his community: power is recognized and accepted, and it is presented at the same time as a burden to be carried in continuity with the ancestors and for the benefit of those over whom the chief exercises authority.

Sociolinguistic Scope of Discursive Strategies

Beyond announcing the accession of Alikaou Sissoko to power, the enthronement speech legitimizes his authority and defines how that authority should be exercised. The metaphor «tata protectrice» (protective rampart) casts the chief as guardian of the community. «Il ne faut pas nous décevoir» (you must not disappoint us) and «il ne faut pas nous tyranniser» (you must not tyrannize or oppress us) press the expectation further and draw a moral boundary around his power: he holds authority, and he is expected to hold it without oppressing anyone.

Ancestral reference strengthens the legitimacy. «Tes ancêtres ont gouverné» (your ancestors ruled) ties Alikaou to a history of traditional leadership, while «ils n'ont jamais versé nos larmes» (they never made us suffer) turns his predecessors into a moral benchmark. «Toi aussi à ton tour» (you too, in your turn) hands that benchmark to the new chief.

From now on, his conduct will be judged by the standard his ancestors set. The phrase «Le village t'est confié» (the village is entrusted to you) comes back several times. The choice of «confier» matters, because it makes leadership something held in trust rather than something owned. The phrases «tes esclaves, tes forgerons, tes griots, tes cordonniers et tes finas» (your slaves, your blacksmiths, your griots, your shoemakers and your

finas) point the same way. In naming these traditional caste groups, the speaker lists the people for whom the chief is now most directly responsible. The possessive «tes» marks the relationship between the chief and these groups, while «est confié» carries the trust attached to his position.

The «sabre royal» gives this authority a concrete ritual symbol. In «Les vieux m'ont chargé de te transmettre le sabre royal» (the elders entrusted me with the task of handing over the royal sword to you), the elders appear as custodians and intermediaries of traditional authority, and the sword stands for the transmission of leadership from one generation to the next. A blessing closes the speech, «Que ce pouvoir te soit bénéfique» (may this power be beneficial to you), and it places the exercise of authority within a moral and collective framework.

The power the speech attributes to the chief is therefore inherited, publicly recognized, symbolically transmitted and constrained by morality. Through ancestral references, metaphors, repetition and ritual expressions, it establishes a relationship in which authority comes with responsibility: language serves to recognize Alikaou's position and to define what is expected of his leadership.

Discourse Analysis

The speech delivered during the enthronement of Alikaou Sissoko is not merely a ceremonial statement. It is a socially meaningful act through which the community publicly recognizes the new chief, recalls the history of the chieftaincy and defines the responsibilities attached to his position. It is performative in Austin's (1962) sense: the words spoken during the ceremony bring about a change in social status. The presentation of the «sabre royal», together with the accompanying speech, marks Alikaou's passage from successor to recognized holder of traditional authority.

Power as an Ancestral and Collective Heritage

The speech presents the power of the chief as an inherited responsibility rather than a personal possession. The references to the ancestors quoted above connect Alikaou's enthronement to an established history of leadership, so that his authority rests on continuity and not only on his personal qualities. The appeal to the past also gives the community grounds for judging the new chief. By recalling how earlier rulers are held to have behaved, «ils n'ont jamais versé nos larmes» implicitly requires Alikaou to meet the same standard. Ancestral memory thus serves a practical purpose: it offers a model of leadership against which his conduct can be measured. In this respect the speech illustrates the role Halbwachs (1992) assigns to collective memory, where shared representations of the past maintain social continuity and group identity. The chief is custodian of an inherited institution, then, rather than its sole owner. «Le village t'est confié» makes the idea particularly clear, since «confier» carries an obligation towards those over whom authority is exercised.

The Construction of Collective Identity through Discourse

A collective orientation comes from the repeated «nous» (we/us). Alikaou is not addressed solely as an individual receiving a status; the speaker utters on behalf of the community as a whole. «Nous sommes déjà soumis à ton pouvoir» and «il ne faut pas nous décevoir» establish a direct relationship between the chief and the people he is supposed to govern. The contrast between «nous» and «tu/ton/tes» (you/your) is especially telling. The forms addressed to the chief mark the position he has just been granted, while «nous» gives voice to the community as a collective body. In this way the speech weighs two things against each other, the community's recognition of the chief's authority and the chief's responsibility towards those who submit to it. The bond is tightened further by repetition and by the choice of pronouns.

Unlimited domination is therefore not what the relationship amounts to. The warning «il ne faut pas nous tyranniser» sets a clear limit on the exercise of power. The community accepts the chief's authority and reminds him at the same time of the conduct expected of him. Power is therefore relational: recognized by the community, and accompanied by duties towards it. The enumeration of social groups quoted earlier situates the chief within the social organization of the village. Rather than making the enthronement a purely individual event, the speech recalls the different social groups connected to the chieftaincy. Naming them gives the ceremony a concrete social dimension, and it shows that the chief's authority operates inside a network of established relationships. Ancestral continuity, collective recognition, ritual symbolism and social responsibility are what the discourse builds Alikaou Sissoko's authority from, and the community figures throughout as an active participant in legitimizing it. Language recognizes that authority through pronouns, ancestral references, warnings, social categories and ritual expressions, and in

the same movement reminds its recipient of the obligations attached to it.

Traditional Legitimation and the Moral Regulation of Authority

Alikaou Sissoko's authority appears in the discourse as traditionally legitimized. Traditional authority, in Weber's (1978) typology, draws its legitimacy from an established belief in the sanctity of inherited customs and long-standing social arrangements. Here the chief's authority comes neither from an election nor, in the main, from bureaucratic appointment. It rests on lineage, on ancestral continuity and on recognition by the community. References to his ancestors, and the ceremonial transmission of the « sabre royal», place his accession to power within an established system of traditional leadership.

Besides conferring authority on the new chief, the speech spells out what is expected of him when he exercises it. The two injunctions quoted above place moral constraints on him, and they show that accepting a chief's authority also means accepting a set of expectations: protection, restraint and conduct for which he can be held to account. The obligations are mutual.

The community accepts his authority, and he is expected in turn to govern by inherited norms and by what the group expects of him. From this angle, authority appears as a social responsibility whose limits are set by tradition. The enthronement involves the recognition of power and, at the same time, a public statement of the obligations attached to it.

Tradition as a Mechanism for the Regulation of Authority

A further dimension of the discourse concerns how tradition regulates the power of the chief and his relation to the community. Alikaou receives an authority whose exercise is immediately framed by references to his predecessors: «Tes ancêtres ont gouverné» and the reminder that «ils n'ont jamais versé nos larmes» set a model of conduct he is expected to emulate. This does not necessarily mean that the chief is «dominated» by tradition in the same sense that he governs his subjects. The discourse places both positions within one inherited normative order. The community accepts the chief's authority; the chief is expected to conform to the values of the institution he inherits. Power is constrained from within, then, by the very tradition that legitimizes it.

This interpretation can be related cautiously to Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, which operates through meanings, classifications and forms of recognition that make a particular social order appear legitimate and intelligible to those who take part in it (Bourdieu, 1991). The enthronement speech contributes to such a process by presenting ancestral authority, social hierarchy and the obligations of leadership as meaningful elements of the community's established order. The available data do not, however, justify describing the entire ceremony as an instance of symbolic violence. They show instead how tradition provides a framework within which authority is recognized, reproduced and morally regulated.

Polyphony and the Representation of Collective Voices

The speech is also strongly collective because the speaker does not present himself as the sole source of the message. His words invoke several social voices and positions: the elders, the community, and the social groups associated with the chieftaincy. «Les vieux m'ont chargé de te transmettre le sabre royal» makes this particularly visible, since the speaker presents himself as an intermediary in charge of transmitting an authority that precedes him.

The pronoun «nous» reinforces that collective dimension. In «nous sommes déjà soumis à ton pouvoir» and «il ne faut pas nous décevoir», the speaker adopts a collective voice rather than speaking as an individual, and the discourse brings together his voice and that of the community he represents. This polyphony adds to the legitimacy of the speech, since the enthronement becomes a collective act of recognition and not a private statement. The speaker's authority to address the new chief comes, at least partly, from his role as mediator between the elders, the community and the new leader.

Social Categories and the Representation of Community Order

The list of caste groups gives the speech a clear social dimension. It is not a simple description. Naming these groups places the chief within a network of social relations and recalls the groups historically linked to the chieftaincy. The same enumeration represents the village as a socially differentiated community. Each category is brought linguistically into the scene of the enthronement, and the ceremony thereby becomes a public recognition of the relationships surrounding the chief. The repeated

possessive «tes» marks the relationship between Alikaou and these groups, though understanding it automatically as evidence of personal ownership would be a mistake. Within the speech it points more directly to his place inside an inherited system of social relations. The list is not a census. Whole groups and social positions go unnamed in it, and the omission is worth noticing, since ceremonial discourse does not set out to reproduce everyday social organization in all its complexity. It picks the categories that matter to the institution being enacted and leaves the rest aside.

The Royal Sword as a Symbol of Continuity and Legitimacy

The «sabre royal» is the central material symbol of the enthronement ceremony. Its significance should not be reduced to its possible historical origins, nor to broader interpretations about encounters between cultural or political spaces. From a sociolinguistic perspective, what counts more immediately is the meaning attributed to the object within the present ritual context. The sentence quoting the elders ties the object straight to the transfer of authority. The sword is not decoration: within the discourse it is where the continuity between previous chiefs, the elders and the newly enthroned leader becomes visible, at a moment when everything else about that authority exists only in words and in recognition.

The symbolic meaning of the sword is produced through the interaction between the object, the speech and the ritual context. Its significance lies in what the community recognizes it to represent: continuity of the chieftaincy, ancestral heritage, legitimate authority and responsibility. The final blessing, «Que ce pouvoir te soit bénéfique», places the authority the sword represents within a moral framework, and the ceremony thus ties the material symbol of the power of the chief to the values that should guide its exercise.

Tension between Symbolic Royalty and Administrative Leadership

The speech brings out a tension between traditional representations of authority and the contemporary administrative organization of the territory. On one hand, the community refers to the «sabre royal», an expression bound up with royalty, inherited authority and historical sovereignty. On the other, the territory Alikaou governs is repeatedly called the «village». The coexistence of these two registers is sociolinguistically significant, since they denote two different political divisions.

The ritual discourse portrays Alikaou as more than an administrative village chief. References to the royal sword, to his ancestors and to the transmission of power place him within a historical representation of leadership that extends beyond the administrative status of the village. By connecting present authority to an inherited political past, the vocabulary of the ceremony gives his position symbolic depth. None of which means that the ritual establishes a form of political sovereignty independent of the modern state. It shows how traditional authority continues to be represented and valued through language within a contemporary administrative framework. The enthronement ceremony provides a space in which historical notions of leadership can be publicly expressed and maintained alongside officially recognized local institutions.

The speech works, then, as a mechanism of social and cultural reproduction. Through ancestral references, ritual formulas, social categories and symbolic objects, ideas about what makes leadership legitimate, and about the duties it carries, are passed on from one chief to the next. The ceremony has a part in collective identity too, since it calls up a shared history and states once more how chief and community stand towards each other.

The authority attributed to Alikaou means something because it is publicly recognized and set within a body of inherited values. The speech therefore functions as a vehicle of collective memory, legitimation and social cohesion. Royal symbolism, ancestral references and contemporary references to the village together allow the community to negotiate continuity between its historical understanding of leadership and its present social and administrative reality.

The findings indicate that the enthronement speech of Alikaou Sissoko is a sociolinguistic practice through which authority, social relations and collective identity are publicly negotiated, and not a ceremonial formality. On the first objective, identifying the discursive strategies employed during the enthronement, the analysis brings out several complementary resources: ancestral references, repetition, collective pronouns, enumeration of social categories, metaphor, ritual formulas and symbolic references to the «sabre royal».

«Tes ancêtres ont gouverné» and «toi aussi à ton tour» set up the continuity between the new chief and the

generations before him. The recurring «le village t'est confié» keeps responsibility in view, while the «nous» running through the speech makes the speaker a collective rather than an individual. No single rhetorical device carries the speech: its force comes from linguistic, ritual and cultural resources working together. The second objective was to examine how language builds and legitimizes traditional authority. The findings agree with Weber's (1978) concept of traditional authority, since Alikaou's legitimacy rests on lineage, ancestral continuity, customary recognition and ritual transmission rather than on electoral or bureaucratic procedures. The sentence in which the elderly persons charge the speaker to hand over the sword matters particularly, since it presents them as custodians of an inherited authority. The speech thus makes Alikaou's new status publicly recognizable, which supports Austin's (1962) notion of performative language: under the appropriate ritual and social conditions, speech does not describe a change of status but takes part in bringing it about. The discourse also places limits on the exercise of power. The two injunctions show that legitimate authority goes with protection, restraint and responsibility.

Therefore, the chief is given his legitimacy and told how he is expected to behave. The third objective dealt with the symbolic, social and political functions of these language practices, and each of them can be traced in the speech. In symbolic terms, the royal sword gives material form to the continuity of the chief's authority and links community members to their ancestors. On the social side, the recurring «nous» and the list of caste groups place the chief within a network of inherited relations. The political function lies in the public definition of what binds chief and community, since the people recognize his authority and he is expected to govern by established moral values. This reciprocity matters for the argument. Power, in the speech, is a responsibility entrusted to one person on behalf of the community, and nothing in it suggests unlimited domination.

These findings can also be interpreted in light of Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power, especially with regard to the way ritual language makes a given social order recognizable and legitimate. Nothing in the data licenses calling the ceremony an instance of symbolic violence. What the data do show is the part discourse plays in the recognition, reproduction and regulation of traditional authority. Three-time frames meet in the enthronement speech; the past supplies the model of legitimate leadership, the present ceremony recognizes Alikaou as chief, and the future arrives as expectation. That is protection, solidarity and governance someone can be held to. To that end, language legitimizes authority and passes on cultural memory, and it also organizes social relations and reaffirms collective identity.

In Conclusion, this study has closely examined at the speech addressed to Alikaou Sissoko at his enthronement, treating it as a sociolinguistic practice. Through it, traditional authority is publicly acknowledged, legitimized, transmitted, and regulated. Ancestral references, collective pronouns, repetition, enumeration, metaphor, ritual formulas and symbolic objects such as the «sabre royal» belong to the substance of the ceremony. It is through them that the relationship between the chief and his community is defined, along with the terms on which power is to be exercised. The social importance of such a speech lies in the way it reaffirms belonging, passes on cultural memory, maintains social cohesion and puts forward a model of leadership based on responsibility, protection and accountability. The case also suggests how traditional institutions find their place in contemporary social life, by combining inherited forms of authority with the present expectations of the community.

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