

**A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF LANGUAGE
TO THE SUCCESS OF BENIN REPUBLIC'S 1990
NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

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Abstract: This article uses the sociopolitical fact of Benin Republic's National Conference of the Living Forces of February 1990 to analyze the contribution of language from a pragmatic perspective. The analysis carried out for this purpose fits both in the theoretical framework of Austin's (1962) work related to the conditions of performativity of speech acts and aspects of interpersonal relations. The corpus of this study is composed of excerpts from the closing addresses of the conference as delivered by General Mathieu Kérékou, Bishop Isidore de SOUZA, and the general reporter Albert TEVOEDJRE. The study highlighted the social reality channel and the meaning encoding power of language through a pragmatic analysis. The analyzes and interpretations carried out thus made it possible to arrive at three major results, namely: ¹the weakening of Benin political authority due to speech acts non-performance, ²the feature of durability attached to the establishment as well as the recognition of authority and ³the usefulness of the evocation of a supreme being in situations of confidence crisis affecting the achievement of speech acts.

Keywords: pragmatics, national conference, conditions of performativity, authority.

**ÉTUDE PRAGMATIQUE DE LA CONTRIBUTION DU LANGAGE AU
SUCCÈS DE LA CONFÉRENCE NATIONALE DE 1990 EN RÉPUBLIQUE DU
BÉNIN**

Résumé : Cet article utilise le fait sociopolitique qu'est la conférence des forces vives de la nation de février 1990 du Bénin pour analyser la contribution du langage sous un aspect pragmatique. L'analyse effectuée à cet effet s'inscrit à la fois dans le cadre théorique des travaux de Austin (1962) sur les conditions de performativité des actes de parole et à l'aspect des relations interpersonnelles. La présente étude s'est servie de divers extraits des allocutions de clôture du Général Mathieu Kérékou, de Mgr Isidore de SOUZA, et du rapporteur général Albert TEVOEDJRE pour examiner la contribution du langage au succès de la conférence. Elle a mis en évidence les traits caractéristiques de vecteur de la réalité sociale et du pouvoir d'encodage du langage à travers une analyse pragmatique. Les analyses et interprétations effectuées ont ainsi permis d'aboutir à trois résultats majeurs à savoir : ⁽¹⁾l'affaiblissement de l'autorité politique du Bénin du fait du non accomplissement de ses actes de parole, ⁽²⁾le caractère de la durabilité lié à l'établissement et la reconnaissance de l'autorité, et ⁽³⁾l'utilité de l'évocation d'un être suprême dans les situations de crise de confiance touchant à l'accomplissement des actes du langage.

Mots-clés : pragmatique, conférence nationale, conditions de performativité, autorité.

Introduction

Language is a complex semiotic system of social interactions. It is thus used on a daily basis as a communication tool to share points of view and moods, seek help, and give orders. Based on this social reality feature of language, this research work proposes to explore its contribution to the success of the conference of the living forces of the nation in February 1990 in Benin Republic (West Africa). National conferences during the 1990s in Africa were round tables during which the non-democratic political authority allowed the citizenry's contribution in political debate under the constraint of socio-political and economic crises. From then on, it becomes thought-prompting for the linguist to examine what remains of the illocutionary force and the perlocutionary stand of the political authority during such periods of trouble (Hunston & Thompson, 2000). It becomes similarly worthy to investigate the motivations that justify the need to call on resource persons outside the state political system for solution finding. Indeed, when Austin (1962) explores the power of speech in his book *"When Saying is Doing"*, he highlights a threefold linguistic process that gets enacted when a speaker takes the floor, namely: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act. The ultimate component of the speech act process [the perlocutionary act] is the one that focuses the researcher's attention in this study. Actually, in pragmatic linguistics, the perlocutionary function refers to the psychological influence that the utterance produces on the receiver depending on the latter's recognition of or resistance to the speaker's authority (Yule, 1996).

As Ducrot (1993) indicates, with a back-up from Hunston and Thompson (2000), the illocutionary value of the utterance constitutes a legal characterization of the utterance, a stated claim aimed at granting it such or such power depending on the institutional legitimacy of the speaker to utter a given utterance. The linguistic unit of semantic meaning that is the utterance per se thus finds itself insufficient to bring the speech act to fulfilment. Consequently, one thus understands that the success of any speech act requires, in addition to the linguistic aspect, some extra-linguistic conditions which fit in the linguistic reality in the real context of customs and conventions that are specific to each society (Flahault, 1978; Sweet, 1964). Among these conditions of performativity termed as felicity conditions in pragmatics, one is particularly relevant in this research work. It is the preparatory condition relating to the authority of the speaker and the circumstances of the elocution on which depends the success of the speech act (Austin 1962:18; Oishi 2006:7). This condition which determines the perlocutionary evaluation that a receiver makes of the locutionary and illocutionary acts of a speaker makes it necessary to refer to Brown's and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness with regard to the social relations that exist between the participants to a speech act. An evaluation of the hierarchical distance between the interlocutors, the presence of a close or distant relationship (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013), the acceptance or rejection of the legitimacy of an authority for many different reasons are all significant patterns which condition the success or failure of a speech act.

General and specific research questions

How is the political authority's perlocutionary stand affected during periods of sociopolitical crises, and in which manner can the consideration of spiritual beings lead to favourable felicity conditions? A scientific and efficient reply to this general query requires it to be distributed into two specific research questions.⁽¹⁾ How is the political authority's perlocutionary stand affected during periods of socio-political crises arising from non-achieved better conditions promises speech acts and ⁽²⁾ under what conditions is authority best established for favourable felicity conditions?

General and specific objectives

The general objective of this research work is firstly to point out the negative influence of the political authority's non-achieved promise speech acts on its perlocutionary stand and secondly to show that successful felicity conditions exist only when authority sustainably sticks to its words. This general objective may be achieved in the following two specific objectives: on the one hand, this paper seeks to foreground the binding necessity for the political authority to achieve its promise speech acts if its authority is to remain; on the other hand, this work aims at showing the durability pattern attached to authority establishment for successful felicity conditions as well as the usefulness of the evocation of spiritual beings in order to enhance the authority's sincerity.

Research Hypothesis

As a tentative answer to the research questions of this work, this paper sets the hypothesis that unachieved promise speech acts may weaken the political authority's perlocutionary stand and generate a crisis. In such circumstances, favourable pragmatic conditions may be restored through durably and word-bound established authority. The subsequent parts of this research work develop through the sections of the theoretical framework and the definitional approach, the material and the method used, an overview of political authority shifts in Benin (ex-Dahomey), a pragmatic analysis of the selected corpus, the discussion and interpretation of the findings as well as the conclusion which closes this paper.

1. Theoretical framework and definitional approach

1.1 *The theoretical framework*

This research work is based on pragmatics with a special focus on the conditions of performativity of speech acts based on Austin's (1956) approach. In his seminal work entitled *How to do Things with Words*, Austin (idem) addresses the ultimate goal of all linguistic interaction, which is the transmission of a message. He thus founded the Speech Acts Theory which indicates that each time a speaker takes the floor, s/he offers himself/herself an opportunity to act on his environment while seeking to inform, incite, ask, convince or promise by means of language. Each speech act is thus divided into three components, namely the locutionary act [the speech itself], the illocutionary act [the act accomplished through the speech such as a promise, an order, an affirmation, a threat, etc.] and the perlocutionary act [the psychological impact created on the interlocutor such as obedience, resistance, fear, etc.] (Bernicot, 1992). The importance of the perlocutionary act involves, among the

conditions of felicity, the preparatory condition which integrates the legitimacy/authority of the speaker to utter this or that statement in order to hope for the success of his/her speech act. The necessity thus noted of an extralinguistic condition for the success of the speech act makes it a social act which integrates the relational axis between the speaker and his/her interlocutor (Halliday, 1985). This aspect of the performativity is more specifically related to the preparatory condition on which depends the success or failure of a speech act. By definition, it requires that the speech act be performed in a context that is conventionally recognized either by social practice or by legal provision. Among the constituent elements of this context is the recognition of the social status or authority of the speaker performing the locutionary speech act. This approach to the study makes it necessary to integrate a definitional approach including the concepts of authority and power

1.2 A definitional approach to the concepts of Authority and Power

The Latin etymological meaning of "auctoritas" itself derives its root from the verb "augeo" meaning "to bring into being, increase, produce into existence", which makes it to be approached as a quality of divine origin. In this perspective, Bilheran (2016) emphasizes that each authority must integrate that there are rules that must be respected in order to participate in the community of humans, and that everyone carries within them the form of the universal condition of humanity. As a result, authority does not impose itself, it speaks itself into being through words and gains legitimacy and respect from its ability to produce utility to the community. The same author emphasizes the fact that the authority must necessarily abide by its own words, at the risk of emptying itself of what constitutes its consubstantial essence. This approach to authority is supported by Tévoédjrè (1990) who defines authority as a concept based on reason, as being "Auctoritas", that is to say taking charge of others to make them grow. As far as Power (Potestas) is concerned, in the Roman mindset of hierarchical social organization, it designates the fact for a natural or legal person to be capable, to have an aptitude to affect others, more particularly in the political arena. This specificity of the plural social context attached to the concept of power makes it appear in the social imagination as the collective capacity to act which is materialized in the law. From this originates the idea of the legislative power that the sovereign people confer by delegation to the Members of Parliament in modern democracies. The "potestas", power, is thus distinguished from "the auctoritas", authority.

2. Material and method

This research work was essentially inspired by the fact that several political and social actors in Benin Republic and elsewhere recognize the major role of Bishop Isidore de Souza in the success of the 1990 conference of the living forces without often supporting their opinions through scientific argumentation, especially concerning the linguistic aspect. This study which seeks to shed light on the performativity conditions of speech acts (Austin, 1962; Banks, 2001) aims to achieve such a purpose. On this theoretical basis, and considering its social feature, the study has carried out a qualitative analysis of the variations observed in the shifts of

political authority in Benin (formerly Dahomey) from 1972 to 1990. The study has included a tentative evaluation of the spiritual and moral authority as well as the service-based leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Benin which was instrumental in Bishop Isidore de Souza's authority as the president of the presidium. This preliminary analysis has served as a reference frame for the pragmatic evaluation of extracts from the closing speeches of the conference by Bishop Isidore de Souza and General Mathieu Kérékou together with an analysis of an extract from the general reporter Albert Tévoédjrè. For the purpose of this research work, the speeches by the three selected personalities have been broken into units of pragmatic meaning (Vanderveken, 1990) and translated into English. The corresponding original French version of each extract is displayed in the appendix to this paper. The following step in the analysis process has been the coding of each contributor's speech extract as follows: *Ext_MGR_* (extract from Bishop Isidore de Souza's speech); *Ext_AT_* (extract from General reporter Albert Tévoédjrè's speech); *Ext_PK_* (extract from President Kérékou's speech). Subsequently, the elements of pragmatic analysis have been singled out from each coded extract and interpreted in Table_1, Table_2 and Table_3 for the identification of the plausible hidden meaning of Face Threatening Acts and Face Saving Acts (Yule, 1996), the rhetorical pressures and strategies geared toward the success of the conference. The key linguistic patterns thus unveiled (Searle, 1979) have served as the substratum for the discussion session that culminated in three major results in this paper.

3. An overview of the shifts of political authority in Benin and the influence of the Catholic Church

3.1 *An overview of the shifts of political authority in Benin*

As soon as the independence of Dahomey was proclaimed on August 1st, 1960, the country entered a series of political turbulence with five successive coups d'état in the timespan of a decade. The latest one which occurred on October 26th, 1972, brought Commander Mathieu Kérékou to the head of the country with a military-Marxist regime. The new regime got settled through bold actions that quickly led to a profound change not only of the socio-political and cultural environment of the country, but also of the daily lives of citizens, mainly in terms of constrained freedom of thought and speech. A fearful atmosphere thus developed with recurrent attempts from the political authorities to silence the press and the citizenry. "Les trois glorieuses" [the three outstanding dates], as it was called, was one of its remarkable imprints. In fact, firstly, on Thursday, November 30th, 1972, the keynote address entitled « Discours programme de politique nationale et d'indépendance nationale » "National policy and national independence keynote speech" was delivered with an approach centered on the new paradigm of "counting on our own strength". Secondly, on Saturday, November 30th, 1974, the military regime made the political option of scientific socialism as the approach to development together with Marxism-Leninism as the philosophical guide for a society where it will be good to live for every Dahomey citizen. Thirdly, on November 30th, 1975, a speech was delivered as a herald of the change of name of the country from the Republic of Dahomey to the People's Republic of Benin (RPB), together with the creation of the Party of the People's Republic of Benin (PRPB) and the change of the flag.

The period from 1972 to 1982 thus saw an outstanding activism by the state political system aimed at establishing the new political doctrine and gaining popular support with forced steps. The country's economy suffered an unprecedented decrease with the drastic drop in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which fell from 45.9% in 1972 to 40.9% in 1975 (Mensah, 2011). The forced method *modus operandi* led to mass arrests and the exile of a large number of students and executives (*idem*). The massive nationalizations of production units and biased management led the country into bankruptcy with months of unpaid wages from 1988, salary cutbacks, the liquidation of bankrupt banks, which is contrary to the promise of a society where it will be good to live. There followed generalized strikes, layoffs in the form of resistance to the political authority. The year 1989 saw the paroxysm of an open economic crisis with the obvious signs of a pending general social explosion. The non-performance of political obligations and promises has largely undermined the climate of trust between the political power and the social masses, as the above-mentioned demonstrations show.

3.2 The influence of the Catholic Church in Benin

The presence of the Catholic Church in Benin first started with Portuguese chaplains on the coasts of West Africa as early as the 15th century as part of the Spanish expansionist policy. The creation of the seminary of Ouidah in 1914 was both the sign of an effective establishment of the church at the same time as it launched the prospect of its rooting. The Saint Galle seminary in Ouidah will serve, in addition to its main vocation, for the training of some lay people who have become political leaders and involved in the process of democratic transition. By virtue of its social doctrine, the church had a say in all aspects of social life, namely teaching, healthcare and education, the professional training of young girls and boys and all aspects of social life that was meaningful for human development (Mensah, 2011). The activities of the Catholic Church increased through the creation of charitable associations devoted to providing support to vulnerable groups irrespective of religious beliefs. The social influence of the Church in Benin thus comes essentially from its focus on supportive social oriented actions and the moral quality of its leaders. This image of the Catholic Church played a major role in the authority recognized and the credibility bestowed on Bishop Isidore de Souza.

4. A pragmatic analysis of the corpus

The context and circumstances of the organization of national conferences are those of a weakening of political authority and massive socio-economic crisis. The convoking of the conference thus reads as an initiative of the political authority aimed at involving the sovereign people for an honorable way out of the crisis. Bishop Isidore de Souza, President of the Presidium, an emblematic authority of the Catholic Church anchored in a long-standing social doctrine, enjoyed a thoroughly confirmed confidence and enjoyed a strong spiritual, moral and social authority. The following linguistic analysis of speech excerpts aims to highlight the contribution of the pragmatic patterns of language in the management of a state of political and socio-economic affair as subtle as that of the conference.

4.1 Extracts from Bishop Isidore de Souza’s address

[Ext_MGR_1] Mr. President of the Republic, Head of State

[Ext_MGR_2]...you welcomed us on February 19th as respected, expected guests, invited to join you in harmony in a frank but tolerant and respectful dialogue to save our country from an inevitable chaos, in case this conference would fail.

[Ext_MGR_3] We still remain your guests and you remain our host.

[Ext_MGR_4]but you like us, we are all invited by Someone who is currently invisible, Someone very discreet, so discreet that some doubt his existence and his reality.If usually He is invisible, if usually He is discreet, we have felt, in this room, during these last days, His almost visible and sensitive presence. (ovation).we cannot be invited by them and not achieve a result that is not the peace and prosperity of our country.

Extract code	Elements of pragmatic analysis	Pragmatic interpretation
Ext_MGR_1	<i>Mr. President of the Republic, Head of State</i>	Face Threatening Act toward President Kérékou because of the Absence of the attribute of “head of the government” which will fall to a Prime Minister.
Ext_MGR_2	<i>.....respected, expected guests, invited to join you in harmony ...</i>	Face Saving Act in favour of the delegate to foreground the importance of their decision and a Face Threatening Act toward President Kérékou because the delegates are presented as authorized people whom he should consider as such.
	<i>.....to save our country from an inevitable chaos, in case this conference would fail.....</i>	Face Threatening Act toward President Kérékou aimed at showing the reality of the pending danger in case of a rejection of the delegates’ decision by his authority.
Ext_MGR_3	<i>We still remain your guests and you remain our host.</i>	Face Saving Act in favour of President Kérékou as a pragmatic softener to recognise that he is still in command.
Ext_MGR_4	<i>- Someone who is currently invisible - almost visible and sensitive presence</i>	Evocation of the Supreme being in order to indicate that everyone and most importantly the head of state has to make hats off to Him by making the conference a success.

Table I: Pragmatic interpretation from Bishop Isidore de Souza’s speech

4.2 - Extracts from the general reporter, Albert Tévoédjrè’s address

[Ext_AT_1]President Mathieu Kérékou by taking the initiative of this gathering hasin any case been the architect of a major event: the birth of a new Republic. Mr. President of the Republic, know that the whole Nation is grateful to you for this act of political courage.

[Ext_AT_2] “He who reigns in the heavens....., to whom alone belongs glory, majesty, independence, is also the only one who prides himself on laying down the law to kings and teaching them great and terrible lessons when he pleases., not only through speeches and words, but also by signs and examples”:

[Ext_AT_3] It was under your chairmanship, Bishop Isidore de Souza, that this Conference took place. In the name of your faith, of your profound availability for this People, you conducted our sessions with unparalleled skill, with an impartiality that was never caught failing, with such patience of which you alone were capable.

[Ext_AT_4]if the President of the Republic is willing to accept the conclusions of our sessions

Extract code	Elements of pragmatic analysis	Pragmatic interpretation
Ext_AT_1	-the architect of a major event -the birth of a new Republic -the whole Nation is grateful -act of political courage	A Face Saving Act in favour of the head of state in the form of a praise that shows his qualities of courageous nation builder who deserves the gratitude of the country
Ext_AT_2	-He who reigns in the heavens -laying down the law to kings and teaching them great and terrible lessons when he pleases	A rhetorical pressure and a Face Threatening Act toward President Kérékou; a vibrant call to recognise that in spite of all, in actual fact, a head of state does not have the final say.
Ext_AT_3with unparalleled skill, with an impartiality that was never caught failing, with such patience of which you alone were capable	Praise and Face Saving Act of the general reporter to Bishop Isidore de Souza for his qualities in the management of the conference
Ext_AT_4is willing to accept the conclusions of our sessions	A Face Saving Act to the head of state to show that he has the final decision

Table 2: Pragmatic interpretation from general reporter Albert Tévoedjrè's speech

4.3 - Extracts from President Mathieu Kérékou's closing address

- [Ext_PK_1] ...Firmly committed to assume the unavoidable demands of the new history of our young nation, and to promote a true democratic renewal
- [Ext_PK_2] We would also and above all like to congratulate our presidium and more particularly the godly man who presided over your work, (ovation) His Excellency Bishop Isidore de Souza in this place. ...We pay him a vibrant tribute for his courage, patience, sensitivity and steadfastness, and above all for his rationality and sound mind, all qualities rare in ordinary people, qualities with which he succeeded in managing all the contradictions melted within the conference (ovations):
- [Ext_PK_3] The democratic system that has just been consecrated by the conference opens the way to a new legitimacy in our country, Benin. (long ovation):
- [Ext_PK_4] Today, Wednesday, February 28, 1990, we take the entire people of Benin as witness by solemnly affirming our commitment to implement in a realistic manner all the decisions resulting from the work of the national conference of the living forces of the nation (long ovation)

Extract code	Elements of pragmatic analysis	Pragmatic interpretation
Ext_PK_1	<i>-Firmly committed to assume... .. to promote a true democratic renewal</i>	Commitment of the head of state in favour of the democratic renewal
Ext_PK_2	<i>-We congratulate our presidium and more particularly the godly man / We pay him a vibrant tribute /all qualities rare in ordinary people</i>	Congratulations and praise from the head of state to Bishop Isidore de Souza, the president of the presidium for his matchless qualities.
Ext_PK_3	<i>The democratic system that has just been consecrated by the conference</i>	Assertive speech act for the recognition of the decisions of the conference for the birth of a democratic system
Ext_PK_4	<i>solemnly affirming our commitment to implement in a realistic manner all the decisions resulting from the work of the national conference</i>	A commissive speech act whereby the head of state grants his full agreement to have all the decisions of the conference implemented.

Table 3: Pragmatic interpretation from President Kérékou's speech

5. Discussion of the findings

In speech act terms, the utterance conveyed by a speaker cannot be successful if the latter is not entrusted with the necessary authority or if the receiver does not recognize the legitimacy of the authority. The preparatory condition of speech acts is the feature that embodies this necessity. As soon as the military regime took power with the coup d'état of October 26th, 1972, it took on an authority hegemony by imposing itself on the people by carrying out a series of political, institutional and social reforms. The authority thus seized and the official representatives of the military power disseminated nationwide led to an acceptance by the masses, more because of forced steps than by real compliance. The political authority collapse generated by the non-respect of social commitments thus caused a wave of mistrust which has largely negatively impacted the confidence / recognition of the people. The delegates at the conference were quite aware of such a state of affairs and decided to act upon it as a herald of a new political era. By way of illustration, in *Ext_MGR_1*, Bishop de Souza addresses President Kérékou as *Mr. President of the Republic, Head of State*, without adding the "head of the government attribute. Actually, a Prime Minister had been identified to take over this position. Allusion was permanently made to the reality of the weakening political authority as one can see in *Ext_MGR_2* [*.....to save our country from an inevitable chaos, in case this conference would fail.....*]. The same is seen most noticeably in *Ext_AT_2* [*He who reigns in the heavens....laying down the law to kings and teaching them great and terrible lessons when he pleases*] in which the head of state is allegorically referred to as a disgraced king, with an end-of-reign atmosphere. In a pragmatic perspective and as a way of pointing out how skillfully language was used, these Face Threatening Acts were not aimed at defiling the image of the head of state. Much rather, they were used to compel him to see that there was no other peaceful solution than for him to accept the decisions of the conference. For this purpose, almost each Face Threatening Act was preceded or followed by a Face Saving Act in the form of a pragmatic softener (Brown P. and Levinson S., 1979) as one can see in *Ext_MGR_3* [*We still remain your guests and you remain our host*], in *Ext_AT_1* [*.....the architect of a major event.....the birth of a new Republicthe whole Nation is gratefulact of political courage*] and *Ext_AT_4* [*.....is willing to accept the*

conclusions of our sessions] in which President Kérékou was praised for the lifesaving initiative of the conference and made to understand that he still had the final decision.

This allows inferring the very first result of this research work: any authority, in this case the political one, is bound by the performance of its speech acts which constitute the social contract whereby it gains the capacity to lead. Actually, even in a military regime, force alone cannot maintain authority over a long period of time. With this notice of the weakened political authority, the conference of the living forces happened to be the necessary interface. Fortunately, the President of the presidium happened to be Bishop Isidore de Souza, a representative personality, clothed with the credibility of the Roman Catholic Church and endowed with a rather skillful and balanced language command (Burton 1981). In a very useful way, such a presence helped avoid or undermine linguistic vulnerability" or "verbal assault" as Bultler (1997) designates some "wounding ways" of using language. Actually, the success of each speech act depends on whether or not the authority of the speaker is recognized. Indeed, the locutionary act alone (linguistic aspect) is not enough. Conventions and the context in which the act is performed as well as authority relations (extralinguistic aspect) play a key role in it. The personality of the Bishop presiding over the conference was first of all that of an ecclesiastical institution enjoying unanimous social confidence and neutrality, both from the political power and from the people. Indeed, through its social doctrine, the Roman Catholic Church has invested itself, irrespective of religious considerations, in various charitable acts relating to the daily lives of the populations. The moral status of the prelate and the large-scale spiritual authority of the Catholic Church also contributed to induce credibility with the political class. The laudatory remarks in the extracts from the closing remarks of the Head of state and the general reporter are quite illustrative in this respect in favour of Bishop de Souza. Such recognizing and praising words are expressed in Ext_PK_2 [*We congratulate our presidium and more particularly the godly man... We pay him a vibrant tribute for his courage, patience, sensitivity and steadfastness, and above all for his rationality and sound mind, all qualities rare in ordinary people*] and in Ext_AT_4 "[...] *with unparalleled skill, with an impartiality that was never caught failing, with such patience of which you alone were capable*". This undisputed recognition of the Bishop's qualities by the civil society and the political class gave him de facto an authority which consequently led to the success of his speech acts to "*manage all the contradictions concentrated within the conference* [Ext_PK_2] as General Mathieu Kérékou publicly acknowledged in his closing remarks. Based on the social aspect of speech acts, it is to be deduced, that an authority's stand must not be an ad hoc and isolated quality, but rather constituted over time (durability) through social agreement or by legal provision, which is the second result of this paper. Complying with this necessity provides favourable felicity conditions for successful perlocutionary force as Bilheran's (2016) indicates. In addition to the above mentioned favourable conditions to the success of the conference, the strong allusion to the Supreme Being, in corroboration with Smith (1991) sounded as a call to submission from all, including the head of state. The Bishop's rhetoric strategy achieved through lexical choices (Coulmas, 2005; Halliday

& Hasan, 2002) went further in an attempt to make this Being visible in the imagination of the audience as he declared in [Ext_MGR_4] "*If usually He is invisible, if usually He is discreet, we felt, in this room, along the past few days, his almost visible and sensitive presence*". In his desire to include all the religious beliefs of the country in his statement, the Bishop uses a series of various appellations for the convenience of everyone: God, Christ, providence, Allah, chance, nature, voduns, the ghosts of our ancestors. This allows disclosing the third result of this paper, as Smith (1991) suggests, that recourse to a sacred being generally serves to reinforce the sincerity of the speaker in a particularly solemn speech act. In the particular case of the conference, the sensitive situation of a political authority in crisis but still holding power made this evocation highly instrumental. The use of pragmatic elements of Face management has also made it possible to establish a rhetorical strategy that takes this state of affairs into account.

Conclusion

This research work focused on the importance of language and its significant contribution in the success of the conference of the living forces in February 1990 in Benin Republic. Based on a pragmatic analysis centered on a qualitative method, this article has explored the weakening of the political authority in a context of amplified socio-political crisis and its negative impact on such authority's speech acts. The qualitative analysis applied in this study finds its justification in the social patterns of the investigation and the critical importance of subjective views from the stakeholders of the conference. Actually, the social fact of crises, unrest and layoffs is to be read in pragmatic terms as a resistance to the authority's perlocutionary stand. The involvement of the living forces of the nation, under the leadership of a prelate enjoying tacit recognition of spiritual, moral and social authority both from the political class and the people, created trust and effective intermediation. The impact created by the unanimous recognition of this authority served as an anchor point for the enhancement and success of his speech acts, which resulted in the success of the conference. The investigations and interpretations carried out thus made it possible to arrive at three major results, namely: the weakening of authority due to the non-performance of its social and political speech acts, the time-length pattern linked to the establishment and the recognition of any authority, and the usefulness of the evocation of a supreme being in situations of confidence crisis affecting speech acts. These different results make it possible to deduce the importance of language in its linguistic and extralinguistic aspects in the success of the conference. These results also inspire to reconsider language, not just as a simple means of communication, but rather as a real tool for managing and preserving peace.

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Appendix: Original French versions of the extracts from closing addresses

[Ext_MGR_1] Monsieur le Président de la République, Chef de l'Etat

[Ext_MGR_2]...vous nous avez accueillis le 19 février dernier en hôtes respectés, attendus, invités à s'unir à vous dans la concorde dans un dialogue franc mais tolérant et respectueux pour sauver notre pays d'un chaos inévitable, au cas où cette conférence ne réussirait pas.

[Ext_MGR_3] Nous demeurons toujours vos invités et vous restez notre hôte.

[Ext_MGR_4] [...] mais vous comme nous, nous sommes tous invités par quelqu'un qui actuellement est invisible, quelqu'un de très discret, tellement discret que certains doutent de son existence et de sa réalité. [...] Si habituellement il est invisible, si habituellement il est discret, nous avons senti, dans cette salle, au cours de ces derniers jours, sa présence presque visible et sensible. (Acclamations). [...] nous ne pouvons pas être conviés par eux et ne pas aboutir à un résultat qui ne soit pas la paix et la prospérité de notre pays.

[Ext_AT_1] [...] le Président Mathieu Kérékou en prenant l'initiative de ce rassemblement a [...] de toute façon été l'artisan d'un événement majeur : la naissance d'une nouvelle République. Monsieur le Président de la République, sachez que la Nation entière vous est reconnaissante pour cet acte de courage politique.

[Ext_AT_2] « Celui qui règne dans les cieux [...], à qui seul appartient la gloire, la majesté, l'indépendance, est aussi le seul qui se glorifie de faire la loi aux Rois et de leur donner quand il lui plaît de grandes et de terribles leçons [...], non seulement par des discours et des paroles, mais encore par des effets et par des exemples »

[Ext_AT_3] C'est sous votre présidence, Mgr Isidore de Souza, que cette Conférence s'est déroulée. [...] Au nom de votre foi, de votre disponibilité profonde pour ce Peuple, vous avez conduit nos travaux avec une compétence sans égale, avec une impartialité jamais prise à défaut, avec une patience dont vous seul étiez capable.

[Ext_AT_4] [...] si le Président de la République veut bien accepter les conclusions de nos travaux

[Ext_PK_1] Fermement résolu à assumer les exigences incontournables de l'histoire nouvelle de notre jeune nation, et à promouvoir un véritable renouveau démocratique.

[Ext_PK_2] Nous tenons également et surtout à féliciter notre présidium et plus particulièrement l'homme de piété qui a présidé vos travaux, (acclamations) Son Excellence Mgr Isidore de Souza ici présent. [...] Nous lui rendons un vibrant

hommage pour son courage, sa patience, sa sensibilité et sa fermeté, et surtout pour sa lucidité et sa clairvoyance, toutes qualités rares chez le commun des mortels, qualités avec lesquelles il a réussi à gérer toutes les contradictions concentrées au sein de la conférence (acclamations).

[Ext_PK_3] Le renouveau démocratique qui vient d'être consacré au niveau de la conférence ouvre la voie d'une nouvelle légitimité dans notre pays, le Bénin. (longues acclamations).

[Ext_PK_4] Aujourd'hui mercredi 28 février 1990, nous prenons à témoin le peuple béninois tout entier en affirmant solennellement notre engagement à faire mettre en œuvre de manière réaliste toutes les décisions issues des travaux de la conférence nationale des forces vives de la nation (longue acclamations).