

## Illocutive Force of Songs in the Communication of the Xoy Seereer

Daouda Ngom\*

Doctor in language sciences, Specialty: Discourse Analysis, Department of Linguistics and Language Sciences, UCAD / FLHS

### Review Article

#### \*Corresponding author

Daouda Ngom

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to examine how songs are associated with discursive and communicative activities in the traditional xoy ceremony in Seereer country. It proposes a reflection on the coupling between the verbal communication and the singing communication to demonstrate their complementarities and then to analyze the influence of the one on the other with respect to the functional process of the communicational exchanges. The article also emphasizes the multiplicity of communicative functions that songs play in the interactive device set up in the framework of a highly cultural and ritualized ceremony, during which the right to speak is not given to everyone; and the strategies of triggering and linking exchanges are done by the use of songs to give a new orientation to the speeches. All this is done and expressed by and in the communicative value of the songs, a value molded by an illocutive force that easily reaches and stimulates the target hearers.

**Keywords:** Illocution, ritual, communication, xoy, seereer, initiatory song.

### INTRODUCTION

The expression of Seereer culture is always illustrated by the organization and progress of the pre-winter divination ceremony called xoy. The xoy seereer as a socially solemn and culturally symbolic ceremony is a setting for expression of occult knowledge, of black magic, in short of the science of the night of the seereer people.

This ceremony is so important from the cultural point of view that it is "now inscribed as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO" [1]. It remains an almost ritual encounter, because of its high mystical, fanatical representation: xoy on wintering, xoy on the scheduled death of a member of society, xoy on the imminent arrival of an epidemic, etc. If the Saltigi and other seereer diviners and healers compete fiercely in the prediction of the future, their interactive exchanges are usually conditioned by the emotions or emotional feelings brought about by the production of the songs. The saying implicitly associates with the emotional. Singing is a strategy that aims to excite the pride of one and the other, by its occult and illocutive force that stimulates and arouses spontaneous reactions.

It is well to notice that the circumstances of production of the songs during the ritual exchanges of the xoy are particular and astonishing. These are moments of break or long break of the exchanges following the evocation or the announcement of

terrifying news, that is to say at times when there is no intervention of the participants. The songs intervene in moments of incomprehensible muteness presupposing a refusal to clarify a prediction or catastrophic divinatory declaration which deserves a clarification. The songs are produced when the speakers remain deliberately voiceless. Procrastinations, hesitations and undecided positions on a serious revelation are generally at the origin of the sung communicative productions: the songs.

It would be relevant to examine for this purpose the relationship between songs and ritual exchanges in an attempt to highlight their impact on the development and functioning of the discourse activities of the xoy. In this work, we will try to show the impact or the influence of the songs on the language behaviors of the participants during this traditional ceremony where they play a plurality of roles. Songs, thanks to their qualities of description, denigration, their expressiveness and symbolism, of their role of support to the functioning of the ritual exchanges, remain an almost essential element in the speeches of the verbal exchanges of the xoy.

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<sup>1</sup> Faye A, Ndiaye R et (2016). *Voyages en pays Seereer, le Sine-Saloum (Sénégal) des patrimoines en partage*, Edition Brochée, p1. (translation mine)

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In the present state of research in the sciences of language, works devoted to ritual exchanges in the traditional ceremony of the xoy seereer are not many; a fortiori, studies that are articulated on the songs of the xoy and that analyze the occult force which they denote in terms of communication; a doping and toning force. The decryption of the sung interactive interventions of the village assembly (called *mal*) during the ritual exchanges of the xoy requires, in fact, a mastery of the coding of the initiatory communication and knowledge of the mystical realities which, on the one hand, undermine the physical setting and, on the other hand, enameled the ceremony, from beginning to end. This mastery and knowledge are acquired by undergoing the traditional education and initiation during the circumcision (the man's box) in seereer country: the ndut initiation. According to DIAW, A M *et al.*, SARR, D [2], the ndut initiation called man's box is losing in value in because of the Muslim religion and the Christian one. However, it is still organized and its communication is done through encoded signs and songs messages.

One could say that the meticulousness and the interpretative calculus required for the semantic and discursive exploitation of the xoy songs deserve a particular attention of researchers.

If singing is by definition a musical sound broadcast by the human voice; technique, art of vocal music, generally for fun, didactic, etc. the singing of the xoy relieves itself of all these functions and is part of a situation of precise and spontaneous communication, a situation which attributes to it its full meaning. We are indeed dealing with an initiatory value song in the sense that the message it conveys is encoded; and its decoding requires a prior learning of the teachings at ndut. Through the singing of the xoy, the performers (singers) of this one propose a cognitive and discursive activity to the target hearers a particular fact to clarify, a question to be debated, to take a position in relation to the thing which is at the origin of the song, etc. From then on, the song denotes an illocutive character, in communicational pragmatics, the illocution is the intention of the speaker (here the performer of songs). The singing of the xoy, by its symbolism, exerts several communicative functions that we will attempt to analyze in this article.

### Presentation of the xoy and Saltigi

The xoy is a traditional ceremony of divination organized most often at the approach of each wintering.

<sup>2</sup> DIAW, A M et SARR, D. 2014. « Le rituel du « ndut » en pays sérère : la case de l'homme perd de sa valeur », dans le journal *Le Soleil* du 27 octobre 2014, Dakar, Sénégal

During the xoy, the Saltigi compete fiercely in the prediction of the future. Converted into meteorologists and doctors, the Saltigi and traditional healers announce the climatic conditions of the next rainy season and the natural or supernatural tragedies that could befall the people and recommend measures in this direction or to escape any disease that would appear. It is important to remember that the organization of the xoy is not fixed to a single period of the year; the xoy can be organized whenever it is necessary. For example, when a mysterious snake of a witch bites someone, the xoy is immediately organized, whatever the time and the moment. Access to the xoy ceremony is only reserved for men who have made the man's box, in other words, to the initiates. The participation of initiated women to the xoy is not very frequent, however it is well authorized.

Saltigi is a person with a proven mystical knowledge. Like in the ritual exchanges in the International Conferences, where there is what CALI C [3] called "ritual dispositive" set up for the functioning of ritual exchanges, Saltigi represents the backbone of the ritual exchanges in the xoy., All the ritual dispositive focuses on his character. For more details on the variants and functioning of the speeches in the international conferences, consult CALI C., CHEVAL M., ZABARDI A [4].

The Saltigi is someone to him that people resort in case of difficulties. According to Crétois [5], the Saltigi is leader of the people and commands "badoole". At the time, it was the Saltigi who protected the king. When the king was in danger, he summoned the people to the sound of the tamtam and stole his help. The Saltigi is a man of experiences and mystical knowledge and power. He is also a real diviner.

According to Kooro Maak Faye, the current Saltigi seereer in the region of Fatick, the Saltigi is the one whose prayers and wishes are always granted, that's why the seereer say *oxe na sala ta jeg* (the one whose prayers and wishes are always realized or fulfilled). Saltigi comes from the seereer verb *sal* (to wish) and the adverb *tigi* which means (certainly, really, really).

<sup>3</sup> CALI C. (2000) : "Les échanges rituels dans le discours des conférences internationales : de la célébration des valeurs-totems de l'organisation au travail de la face des délégués", à par. Dans les Carnets du Cediscor 7, n° sur les interactions en situation professionnelle, Paris, Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, p 3.

<sup>4</sup> CALI C., CHEVAL M., ZABARDI A. 1995. *La conférence internationale et ses variantes*, Paris, Hachette

<sup>5</sup> CRETOIS, Léon. 1976. *Dictionnaire seereer-français (différents dialectes)*, Tome 5, CLAD/UCAD

Combined, they give the expression o saasal tigi (a true "prior"). Thus, the name Saltigi comes from composition or simple morphological evolution.

### **The spatio-temporal framework of ritual exchanges**

The xoy takes place in a public place called guur. The guur is a place chosen by the dignitaries and sages of the village to host this traditional ceremony of divination. It is most often next to a fetish tree or not far from the place of residence of the pangool [6] of the village or in the njoc. The njoc is a small forest not far from the village where some pangool of some lineages reside. This choice of guur is not a coincidence. Firstly, it is to hide from prying eyes. Secondly, it is correlative to the nature of the speeches pronounced there and to the statutes of those who emit them. It is a place of expression of the secrets and the collective strength of the people. The guur is a very dangerous place at night. It is not advisable to walk there at certain times of the night. According to tradition, it is a place frequented by wandering souls from sunset until dawn.

From the verb guur (to clean a field before sowing), the guur implies semantically that the period of the holding of the xoy is by predilection with the approach of the wintering. Being landowners whose main activity source of income is agriculture, the seereer give a considerable importance to the wintering and suddenly they try to diagnose it mystically by knowing in anticipation how it goes to happen so that they prepare themselves accordingly. This is one of the main reasons for organizing this ceremony each time wintering gets close or approaches.

The xoy takes place at night. The mystery surrounding this choice to organize the xoy at night is very complex and kept secret. However, it is said that sometimes a xoy is organized during the day. In this case, it is a critical situation, a delicate one to which people must find a solution. For example, when a njamboñ [7] bites a person and the person does not die on the spot, his family calls the Assembly of the village called in seereer "mal ne" using the tam-tam beat by the leader of the griots (paar ne) of the village symbolizing that a person is infected or attacked mystically by a witch. This kind of xoy is special, both in the organization and functioning. It is an accidental or circumstantial xoy.

The operation of the ritual exchanges during this xoy is diametrically opposed to that of the xoy at the approach of the wintering which is the object of our study. When there is an accidental xoy, only the members of the victim's family have the right to speak. However, they are assisted in this regard by the village

assembly whose main concern during this xoy is to mystically delay the death of the person bitten or save him / her. This xoy is commonly called njambir, from the seereer verb jamb (to accuse) associated with the suffix -ir designating the reciprocity, njambir means to accuse one by the other.

The main interaction of this accidental xoy is with the "mysterious pestle". It involves passing all the relevant members of the victim's family into the enclosure of the village's members. The latter will try to touch the "mysterious pestle" held standing in the middle of the enclosure. Anyone involved in the case will be unveiled by the "mysterious pestle". The pestle falls to the ground when an involved person approaches it to touch it. Thus will be sorted all present individuals involved in the case. The keynote speaker at this special session is the "Mysterious Pestle".

Whenever a problem that can cause a death of man occurs, the xoy is organized on the spot. This xoy is therefore circumstantial or accidental in the sense that its organization is not desired because resulting from a socially abominable, at least undesirable fact. Another highlight of this kind of xoy is that it is not organized at the guur but rather in front of the portal of the home of the victim or at least in front of a house of his family. At this time, there is no question of making divinatory declarations but of finding a mystical solution to the salient problem, that is, to save the victim as quickly as possible.

### **Song for depreciation and / or minimization**

In the interactive communication of the xoy, such songs are meant to be a questioning of the "humanity" of the participants, in other words, their "man's status". The performers of such a song skillfully seek to make them understand if they are real men. They wonder if there are really men worthy of name who are illustrated in the mutism following an unbearable divination declaration which clashes the conscience of the ordinary participants (fuung we), that is to say those who do not have no mystical power. The perlocutive act of singing consists in creating effects of pride in the targets: the soothsayers so that they pronounce themselves on the subject evoked at the moment. The song triggered in the sequence given as an example below results from the silence observed by the audience following an interpellation on a question of life at risk.

*Goor waa yee and koor o paax refee na nuunee*

Translation: *Men, a real man is not among you* (sung in chorus by the audience one after the other)

These types of songs are sounded after the intervention of a speaker who reports a prediction of enormous gravity, the audience melts in a surprising

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<sup>6</sup> Traditional gods or protectors for seereer people.

<sup>7</sup> Mystical snake used by the witch to kill his/her target

silence while it is a life of person in danger. As this is not an international conference where the chairman has all the prerogatives to give the floor to the speakers, that is to say to the representatives of the States or Organizations, here, the Saltigi, can not involve the participants only with the help of a song like the one indicated by the bold statement. He is supported in this exercise by blind participants.

From a semantic point of view, the utterances in this song are considered shocking to the diviner participants (yaal nqoox ake). In the popular seereer conception, the virility of man is sacred and preserved; to call it into question immediately is to invade it, to question the essence of its existence. Through this song, they are described as "non-men". This shocking description consisting of drawing up a blackboard to the diviners creates a sort of frustration, of pride that pushes them to intervene quickly on the subject mentioned or pending.

In this exchange, the song creates feelings of pride or states of mind, sensitivity consecutive to the current situation. Wanting to wash this verbal affront, the soothsayers (yaal xoox) oblige themselves to intervene. The interruption of a song during the exchanges of the xoy is often done by the sudden intervention of participants. As long as there is no intervention, the performers of the song will continue to sing.

By intervening in the ritual exchanges, the song constitutes another complementary mode of treatment and denigration of the silent behavior of the Saltigi. It creates emotion that warms the atmosphere of the exchanges of the ceremony to boost the speakers. In this case, the song is not a musical element. It completely loses its hallmark of entertaining, in this case. It constitutes a trigger of reactions following moments of uncomfortable silence.

The selfish of Saltigi feels targeted and touched by minimizing as shown by the italicized phrase in the statement *Goorwa yee o koor o paax refenanuinee (Men, a real man is not among you)*. It is the most important element of this song, it is the psychological element driving the content of the song. This is the basic idea that vocal performers seek to convey to supposed participants to intervene. Not being a real man is frowned upon by seereer morality. This aggressive, "minimizing" statement addressed directly to the individuals supposed to intervene allows exchanges to evolve with clarity and fluidity, hence its illocutive force.

The diversity of the roles of the songs during the ritual exchanges during the xoy ceremony, makes it a crucial means used by the audience to better attract

the attention of the diviners, to collect their opinions and reactions on a given situation or fact. For this purpose, singing is a technique of prolonging exchanges on a fact of extreme gravity. In this respect, singing is also an integral part of the ritual exchanges during this interactive ritual.

Its acceptability, in other words, its ability to attract the reactions of the audience makes it an indisputable stimulus in the functioning of ritual exchanges during this traditional ceremony seereer by its power to tame the silent participants. In these cases, songs are a key element intended to draw the attention of the soothsayers and seers present in the audience to a given fact and to arouse their immediate interventions.

The song, according to the message expressed, has an occult force (constitutes a strong stimulus, a seducer, a tamer) giving rise to personal reactions prompt rather than collective according to the offensive degree, of denigration of the message it conveys.. Singing is here a discursive medium of the communicative device that directly involves the participants supposed to intervene. These represent an "instant audience", that is to say all the speakers affected by the seductive or offensive effect produced by singing. This seduction or offense drives them to react immediately. This stimulating force of song makes it a crucial and inherent tool in the ritual exchanges of this ceremony.

Considering the moments of its production, singing can be considered here as a kind of galvanizing mode of the speakers by the fact that it touches their sensitivity, their inner heart, because of a real danger announced. By the songs, the audience aims at the promptitude, the reactionary spontaneity of those who presage or predict: Saltigi and other diviners

Accompanied by a drumming rhythm by griot drummer, the songs are intended only for the seers who are silent or who refuse to pronounce on a catastrophic revelation. According to the circumstances of production of a song during the ritual exchanges of this traditional ceremony, it can be considered as the teaser of communication, that is to say the means used to attract, to excite the attention of the speakers and hearers.

Because of their striking and concise content, the songs naturally have an impact on the language behavior of those who listen to them, that is to say, those for whom they are intended. Their influence on trade results partly from their style. This is their formal content that has a satirical function because the song emphasizes denunciation, denigration, aggression, etc. The song during the ritual exchanges of this ceremony is a verbal seduction while predisposing in favor of

what it denounces. The force of the song lies partly in its satirical character.

The illocutive force providing reactions that song has in these circumstances of communication is not only with the striking contents that create frustration, gene, and so on. If the songs impact the inappropriate attitudes of the participants (on the audience), it is because they lead them to reveal implicit meanings that are based on common knowledge and shared beliefs. Like the songs and poems of the ndut, the songs during the exchanges of the xoy, in their brevity, draw their strength to react, of persuasion in what they denounce.

### **The song of protestation or contestation**

On the other hand, if the recipient of the song is known, that is to say specified, it is up to him to intervene as a response to the audience who calls him directly and explicitly. For example, when the song is addressed directly to the saltigi, chairman of the meeting, his responsibility is engaged. The performers of the song engage him frontally through the message of the song. This is the case of the following song: *saltik ee o koor jambaar tig a naabeel oo* :: (

Translation: *Saltik, a man must have courage, somethin is being caressed* (sung in chorus by the audience the ones after the others).

This kind of singing has a specific destination. They are addressed to the Saltigi so as to affect him psychologically. By this song, the audience explicitly denounces the irresponsible behavior of the saltigi and expresses at the same time all its concern about the fact mentioned. The illocutive force of this song is the phrase *o koor jambaar* which literally means that a man must be brave or equitably means *man = courage*. Courage is one of the instrumental personal values so much sought after by seereer. This value, inseparable from the Saltigi's status, is also questioned by the audience, who explicitly accuses the saltigi of pretending to ignore a serious fact, hence the use of the verb *naab* (to caress). Faced with the current situation, the audience directly calls the Saltigi to take all its responsibility in pronouncing on the present situation. It is uncomfortable for him to take a stand on the outstanding case.

This interpellation obliges him to take the floor to pronounce on the fact in question. It is now a real turn-taking of the saltigi. The saltigi thought himself obliged to pronounce without seeming to give way since the audience through the song depreciates his posture of being silent in the face of a real danger noted in his village. This type of songs in this kind of communication situation is a strong alert to the Saltigi. And it is up to the latter to intervene immediately

during the production of this kind of song. These are warning songs that warn the Saltigi so that they make clear the fact mentioned or in question. In short, singing is an essential trigger of reactions in the functional process of exchanges during the social rite of xoy.

### **CONCLUSION**

At the end of this article, we have seen that the adaptation and integration of songs into the ritual language of the xoy ceremony is part of a very precise communication dynamic. The use of songs is dependent on mixed communication circumstances where verbal communication weakens and needs to be triggered by appropriate strategies such as singing. Singing is an effective method of influence and has a striking force that elicits reactions from both sides. The initiatory or enigmatic singing of the xoy delivers a very strong message that moves the emotions and creates moods and egos that are too big for the soothsayers to come out of their silence. We think that in the moral representations of seereer people, there are songs that dishonor; it is the case of the songs of the xoy. However, the songs in the ritual exchanges of the xoy implicitly or explicitly express natural feelings such as fear, hesitation, ignorance that animate man according to particular situations of communication of life.