

## Dramatization and argumentation in African oral societies

### Dramatización y argumentación en sociedades orales africanas

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#### Abstract

African traditional societies are oral societies. Orality, in these societies, is the effect as much as the cause of the particular mode of social being of the African man (Aguessy 1979). An African man is socially configured by orality. It is therefore a cultural formatting whose main issue is preservation and transmission, from age to age, of traditions, social norms and practices that determine the relationship of man of orality with the world. Moreover, according to Diagne (2005), the process by which this cultural formatting, specific to traditional African societies is carried out, is the “dramatization”. Dramatization is the ruse of oral reason (Diagne 2005). The aim of this paper is to grasp, through the process of dramatization, cultural particularities of argumentation in traditional African societies. In order to do so, the analysis focuses on the discursive practices through which dramatization is revealed. More precisely, the study of proverbs in eve society allows pointing out the specificities of dramatized argumentation in an oral society. The epistemological issue animating this paper is to present a different way of grasping argumentative functions of image and metaphor.

**Keywords:** African oral societies, argumentation, dramatization, eve community, proverbs, orality.



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## Resumen

Las sociedades tradicionales africanas son sociedades orales. La oralidad es el efecto tanto como la causa de cierto modo de ser social del hombre africano (Aguessy 1979). Un africano está socialmente configurado por la oralidad. Se trata, pues, de un formato cultural cuyo objetivo es la conservación y la transmisión, de edad en edad, de la tradición de las normas y prácticas sociales que determinan la relación del hombre con la realidad. Y según Diagne (2005) el proceso por el cual este formato cultural específico de las sociedades tradicionales africanas se realiza la «dramatización». La dramatización es la astucia de la razón oral (Diagne 2005). El objetivo de este texto es captar, a través del proceso de dramatización, las particularidades de la argumentación en las sociedades tradicionales africanas. En este sentido, el análisis se centra en las prácticas discursivas por las cuales la dramatización se manifiesta. Más precisamente, el estudio de los proverbios ebe permite mostrar las especificidades de la argumentación dramatizada en una sociedad oral. El desafío epistemológico será una nueva manera de comprender las funciones argumentales de la imagen y de la metáfora.

**Palabras claves:** sociedades orales africanas, argumentación, dramatización, comunidad ebe, proverbios, oralidad.

## 1. Introduction

African traditional societies are oral societies. Orality, in these societies, is the effect as much as the cause of the particular mode of social being of the African man (Aguessy 1979, 103). African man is socially configured by orality. It is therefore a cultural formatting whose main issue is preservation and transmission, from age to age, of traditions, social norms and practices that determine the relationship of the man of orality with the world. Moreover, according to Diagne (2005), the process by which this cultural formatting, specific to traditional African societies is carried out, is “dramatization”. Dramatization is the ruse of oral reason (Diagne 2005). It is the discursive play of oral reason with itself to counter the threat of time. And such a discursive game manifests itself concretely by “facts of discursivity”, revealing of the “interdiscursive dialogism” by which the man of orality “narrates and argues” himself (Angenot 2008, 418). So, we can say that orality in traditional African societies is effectively articulated as a particular system of argumentation. But then how is this argumentative particularity manifested? More specifically, what is the argumentative process of dramatization specific to oral cultures in Africa? And how does it efficiently manifest in discursive practices of orality? The epistemological issue of these questions lies in a representation of the argumentation that allows us to grasp, one might say in another way, the argumentative functions of image and metaphor handling.

## 2. The logic of orality, an argumentative logic

### 2.1. The need to argue

Nowadays, it is trivial to state that negro traditional African societies are oral societies. But, in reality, the triviality of this statement comes mainly from the comparative approach from which it results. Indeed, the oral specificity of African societies is affirmed and understood only in comparison and in contrast with (so-called) writing societies – see for example Horton (1967). Actually, W. Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (1982) can be considered as the most representative work in which comparison and opposition between orality and literacy are clearly established. The aim of W. Ong's works, under the label of the Great Divide, is to show "the differences (...) between the ways of managing knowledge and verbalization in primary oral cultures (cultures with no knowledge at all of writing) and in cultures deeply affected by the use of writing" (Ong 1982, 1). Therefore, orality is negatively characterized by all traits that show its incapacity to produce rational or scientific knowledge.

Jack Goody (1987) has indeed criticized this ethnocentric dichotomy between orality and literacy. However, he admitted that orality and literacy must be opposed as different modes of communication. For, according to him, "differences in the means of communication are of sufficient importance to warrant an exploration of their implications for developments in human thought; and, in particular, to see whether they can give us a better account of observed differences than the dichotomies" he has rejected (Goody 1977, 10). As we can see, even with J. Goody, orality is merely understood as non-literacy.

However, much research has now admitted that traditional African societies must not be characterized as non-literacy societies or as societies without writing. As R. Finnegan (2012, 3) so aptly states, "Africa possesses both written and unwritten traditions". So, to say that African societies are civilizations of orality means, as Aguessy (1979, 103) says, to recognize the "predominantly oral mode of communication" that characterizes them and not the "exclusively oral communication arising from a hypothetical incapacity for writing". Thus, in African oral societies, writing itself bears the marks of orality. Thought, in these societies, is conceived, developed and transmitted outside of writing. It does not comply with the standards of writing, but is structured according to oral procedures.

The result, according to Agblemagnon (1969), Aguessy (1979) and Diagne (2005), is the need to get a positive understanding of orality. In other words, it is important to grasp orality as it efficiently unfolds in traditional African societies, and not to define orality on the basis of what it is not (writing). Consequently, by what typical features does orality unfold and for what purpose does it unfold through its own typical features? (Akue Adotevi 2015, 133).

The answer to this question consists in saying that orality is manifested by the discursive practices of the tale, proverb, riddle, enigma, epic... with the aim of preserving

and transmitting meaning and knowledge. Such an answer allows us to grasp the need to argue inherent in these discursive practices. These are practices whose challenge is the memory, for the purpose of conservation and transmission. Because, as Breton (2006, 23) puts it so well, argumentation serves “to revive the memory”.

Thus, for the man of orality, to argue is a vital necessity. He does not argue just for the fun of it. He argues to preserve himself as a cultural identity beyond his immediate cultural space-time. Either he argues, or he disappears. He does not have a choice. And this is what justifies the use of particular discursive practices.

According to Diagne (2005, 55), just as there is a “logic of writing” (Goody), so there is a “logic of orality”. This logic of orality structures discursive practices by which “the oral logos is verbally uttered in a performance situation”<sup>1</sup>. There is an essential feature of orality: the oral logos is not only uttered for the benefit of others, but it is produced in the presence and with the effective participation of others. Oral discourse is necessarily a co-discourse, a discourse co-constructed and co-produced by interlocutors in an effective and dynamic situation of dialogue. It is “a speech with” and not merely “a speech to” (Diagne 2005, 167).

This dialogical characteristic of oral discourse is not simply presupposed. It can be seen in practical experience. Because tale, proverb, riddle or enigma effectively occurs in playful contexts or in the contexts strongly marked by game. The context of the palaver tree, for example, allows grasping the playful and dialogical nature of oral discursive practices. The work of Dango and Rahman (2019) shows the dialogical and argumentative process of the debates under the *Palaver Tree*, by pointing out the use of proverbs as a rational game for the constitution of meaning and knowledge.

Another more significant context is the one of the game *Adi* (Eve), *Awalé* (Baule) or *Wure* and *Yoté* (Wolof). We do note the use of proverbs or riddles at each move of the game. And everything happens as if a physical game is the occasion or the social support of an agonistic discursive game. (Niang 1981, Diagne 2005).

This can be illustrated by a famous well-known episode in the Wolof culture. It is the one in which Kothie Brama invites his eldest son to play *Yôté*, after the latter announced to him of his expectations to start a family (Diagne 2005). Here is the unfolding of the game:

- Kothie Barma (moving a pawn): “Wife”
- The son (moving a pawn in his turn): “In-laws”
- Kothie Barma (after a moment’s reflection): “You won”

<sup>1</sup> My translation of: «le logos oral est proféré de vive voix, en situation de performance».

A month later, Kothie Barma invites his son back to the game:

- Kothie Barma (moving a pawn): “Why”
- The son (moving a pawn in his turn): “Misunderstandings”
- Kothie Barma (after a moment of silence, his eyes fixed on the squares of the game): “You won the game”.

After that moment, the son understood that his father had just given him his consent through a game of *Yôté*. Not only has the son proved his skills in *Yôté*, but also his social maturity. Thus, the whole cultural memory of the society concerning marriage is restored through a gameplay.

Another well-known episode is the one in which Kothie Barma invited his young daughter to the *Yôté* game (Diagne 2005):

- Kothie Barma (moving a pawn): “Anything that has a tail wags it”
- The daughter (moving a pawn in her turn): “Except the bowl my mom uses in the kitchen”
- Kothie Barma (moving a pawn): “anything that is roundish gambols”
- The daughter (moving a pawn in her turn): “Except the watermelon!”
- Kothie Barma (moving a pawn): “Really, it is the frog that can swim in water”
- The daughter (moving a pawn in her turn): “Provided the water is not boiling”

Then the daughter won the game.

Thus, the “ludic” is constitutive of oral societies. It is the main way of playing or replaying the cultural memory. For the *Yôté* (or *Wure*, *Adi*, *Awalé*), being a learned game, it is not possible to master the rules or how to play it without, *ipso facto*, knowing the ancestral tradition hidden in the proverbs and riddles. Just as a move is like a resume of a certain set of game rules, a riddle or a proverb is a compendium of traditional wisdom.

Therefore, an invitation to a gameplay of *Wuré* or *Yôté* is really an invitation to participate in an argumentative social interaction through which oral societies ensure the conservation along with the transmission of tradition that has been inherited from the ancestors. The need to argue is then manifested by the need to play. The ludic component strengthens the argumentative feature. Which allows the preservation and dynamic role of argumentation to be coupled with ludic features that initiates participation in a game that combines cooperative with competitive features in order to ensure the storage and the transmission of the tradition.

As pointed out by Niang (1981), one could say that Huizinga's words about primitive cultures are valid, in every respect, for oral cultures in Africa: « civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come from play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises in and as play, and never leaves it" (Huizinga 1949, 173).

Thus, for the man of orality, "to talk is to play" (Diagne 2005, 173). To produce a word is to play a move or to move a pawn in a game that reveals itself in the deployment of discursive practices that configure orality. Such practices are therefore not only discourses with *argumentative dimension*, but especially discourses with *argumentative aim* (Amossy 2000). And this is clearly manifested in the process of dramatization.

## 2.2. Dramatization, an argumentative process

As pointed out above, the fundamental problem of orality is its semantic fragility, the instability of meaning. Temporality is a formidable threat for "verbomotor cultures" (Ong 1982) like those of Africa. And the challenge is to fix the message orally conveyed, to remove it from ordinary mutability, but also from unjustified contestation. The use of argumentative discursive practices is therefore justified by the need not only to fix the meaning played but also to replay it as soon as circumstances require. Consequently, the argumentative structure of discursive practices of orality is such that it must include the reasons, the justifications for their utterance. A proverb is always stated, in the context of orality, as a metaphorical and symbolic compressed word whose meaning is a story, a tale, an argumentative narrative that aims at constructing or reconstructing the proof of the idea of which it is the compressed word.

Diagne (2005) calls dramatization or "theatricalization" the process by which meaning and knowledge in an oral society are symbolically compressed and conserved. More precisely, dramatization is the staging and the animation of meaning or knowledge. Dramatization, "reveals the game of hide and seek that knowledge plays with itself, that is to say the various ruses"<sup>2</sup> which presides over its conception, its transmission and its conservation (Diagne 2005, 59). By dramatizing knowledge, the man of orality thus gives himself the effective possibility not only to play the knowledge, but above all to replay it as soon as the opportunity arises.

Therefore, for the oral speaker, to dramatize is to stage an idea, it is to theatricalize it. In oral cultures, expressing an idea is always done by the detour through a game of metaphorization, consisting in the handling of the image. It is not only a question of using the image to wrap the idea, but more to include the image in a dynamic by constructing it as the *negative* of the idea.

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<sup>2</sup> My translation of: «donne à lire le jeu de cache-cache que le savoir joue avec lui-même, c'est-à-dire les diverses ruses».

The concept of negative is used here in a Hegelian sense. But we can understand it more in a sense very close to the one usually known in photography. The negative is a phototype which represents either in black and white, the reverse of the luminosities of the subject, or in colour, the complementary colours to those of the subject; and it is used to print positive rushes<sup>3</sup> (Akue Adotevi 2014, 197).

This can be illustrated by the use of proverbs in oral societies. A proverb works as a kind of negative because it is a cliché in which oral societies store their traditional wisdom through metaphors and images. Consider the following example: “*Bukki, bu dadee ponkkal, ca doxi wa la*”, a Wolof proverb (Diagne 2005, 79). It means: “If the hyena catches a strong man, it is because of the gait of the latter”.

And Diagne (2005, 82) comments: the meaning of this proverb would be really explicit if only we consider the hyena and the strong man as characters of a scenario that might be interpreted as a way of gaining access to the knowledge hidden through metaphors in the proverb.

The interpretation of this proverb could be the following: the hyena remains equal to itself: a fearful and poltroon animal. But the strong man is betrayed by his staggering gait; his feeble manner does not reflect his physical presence. In conclusion, this proverb teaches a lesson of doing your best to be who you are; otherwise anyone, even the most cowardly will overcome you.

Thus, just as the negative photo makes it possible to produce several good prints, so the dramatization makes it possible to archive the original idea in order to unfold its meaning whenever the occasion requires it. This is the way to deal with the constitution temporality of the oral.

In this sense, handling the image is precisely to represent the idea that we want to express by means of metaphor which allows the idea to be drawn in all its clarity. In other words, the oral speaker, by expressing an idea, creates, *ipso facto*, a pictorial atmosphere where the idea is played through “elementary sequences which contain nuclei of meaning”<sup>4</sup> (Diagne 2005, 119). These nuclei of meaning therefore function as undulations of a single movement, a dialectical self-process of the idea, at the end of which it manifests itself fully. Thus, in orality, an idea is revealed and communicated effectively if and only if it is dramatized or theatricalized. Expressing an idea is then creating a stage and mounting an argumentative scenario through and at the end of which the idea reveals and communicates itself effectively, and is preserved as such.

<sup>3</sup> My translation of: «Le concept de négatif est ici utilisé dans un sens hégélien. Mais on peut davantage le comprendre dans un sens très proche de celui qu’on lui connaît ordinairement en photographie. Le négatif est un phototype qui représente soit en noir et blanc, l’inverse des luminosités du sujet, soit en couleur, les couleurs complémentaires à celles du sujet ; et il sert au tirage des épreuves positives».

<sup>4</sup> My translation of: «séquences élémentaires qui renferment des noyaux de sens».

However, it is important to notice here that if the dramatization process is a ruse of oral reason, a game of oral knowledge with itself, then we can deduce that its place of expression cannot be ordinary communication, even if this the latter necessarily bears its marks. In oral societies, ordinary communication has the same status as Greeks' *doxa*. Indeed, according to Aristotle, the *doxa* is not the natural place of knowledge, but the place where knowledge is in potency, moving towards its actuation in the *logos*. Likewise, in oral societies, ordinary communication is the place where oral knowledge, the dramatized knowledge is in potency, not in act. It is revealed as such only in reserved discursive practices, that is to say discursive practices whose invocation obeys the double requirement of effective communication and conservation of knowledge. These discursive practices are proverbs, tales, riddles and enigmas, and the initiation story. These are discourses whose argumentative articulation consists in concealing knowledge under the folds of non-knowledge to divert the layman (Diagne 2005). In other words, oral discourse comes as a statement (often proverbial statement) whose semantic content is an idea staged through a precise scenario whose function is to establish its relevance (its socio-cultural deep-rootedness) and its domain of social validity.

Thus, in African oral societies, argumentation consists in putting the idea in pictures. It is a pictorial argumentation, considered as necessary for efficient communication, for the successful transmission of the message. The Oral man argues to better preserve and transmit the message.

### 3. Argumentation by proverb in African oral societies

The aim here being to show how dramatization operates as an argumentative process in orality, the example of the proverb seems sufficiently suggestive. Because the proverb has this peculiarity of being present in other oral discursive practices: it is often found in the form of an enigma or riddle; it usually presents itself as the condensed form of an idea of which the tale is a theatrical deployment; it structures the initiation story by constituting its nodes of meaning. Then « proverbs are a rich source of imagery and succinct expression on which more elaborate forms can draw » (Finnegan 2012, 379).

In traditional Africa, the use of proverbs is common. They are found in ordinary communication, where they are mentioned to convey collective wisdom. Their evocation in the context of the palaver tree is also well known. At the palaver tree, proverbs punctuate the debates, while ensuring the role of principles of control and of peaceful orientation. They are therefore *pearls of wisdom* (Agblemagnon, 1969). We can therefore say, like Cauvin (1980, 18) about the *minyanka* man, that oral man says and makes his society by proverbs.

However, it is important to point out that, beyond the classifications relating to their social functions, proverbs, in African oral societies, can be classified into two major groups:



ordinary proverbs that are found in everyday communication, and erudite proverbs, put aside, in the places of knowledge (Akakpo, 2013), and whose access is subject to an initiatory course. In fact, in oral societies, proverbs are considered as nodes of wisdom, out-of-reach of uninitiated people, and used to keep in the secret of uses and traditions, ancestral knowledge or the wisdom of the Ancients. R. Finnegan (2012, 380) points out this aspect when she notices that, in *Fulani* people, a proverb “is especially used when there is some deep hidden meaning (...) different from the obvious one”. And this, related to its dramatizing mode of construction and expression “serve to some degree to set [it] apart from everyday speech” (Finnegan 2012, 384).

However, in modern Africa, proverbs are subjected to a process of laicization (Agblemagnon 1969, 113). This process of laicization can explain the migration of proverbs from the places of knowledge to the common places, such as *Palaver Tree*. But whatever its category, proverbs, in African oral societies, stand out as the discursive practice whose argumentative potential lies in its recognized power of persuasion.

Therefore, in order to grasp the argumentative use of the proverbs in African oral cultures, the focus here is on the use of proverbs in *eve* society<sup>5</sup>. The *eve* term for proverb is “*lododo*”. Its etymology indicates that it is constituted by:

- a nominal syntagma “*lo*”, i.e. *unusual, surprising, unsuspected, shocking or even scandalous thought or thing*; and
- a verbal syntagma “*do*”, i.e. *to plant, to sow*.

Putting both together, we obtain “*do lo*” i.e. *to plant an unusual or unsuspected thing or thought*. And when we say “*do lo*”, it means “*to say a proverb*” or “*to say an ancient thought*” (Agblemagnon 1969, 98).

In the *eve* community, proverbs are conceived, above all, as the means of protecting the culture and the ancient knowledge against aliens. And the following proverb expresses clearly this idea: “*Àmèdzro sè gbè mesèna àdāgàna o*”. *Àmèdzro* is the word for alien; and *àdāgàna* is etymologically constituted with *àdā* i.e. *fury, violence* and *àgàna* i.e. *crab*, but the one which is very aggressive when it is touched. So, this proverb means, through this metaphor, that an alien, even if he/she understands the *eve* language, cannot understand the powerful-expressions (proverbs) of the *eve* culture. For, proverbs are originally used as the esoteric expressions of the *eve* culture, as the archetypal way to demonstrate the deep-rootedness in *eve* culture (Nordjoe 2015, 21-22).

Aside from this fundamental role:

The *eve* proverb appears as:  $\alpha$ . A condensed experience in formulas, in words;  $\beta$ . A strictly regulated word, which can only be used in specific cases;  $\gamma$ . A word,

<sup>5</sup> The *eve*-people can be found today in the southern area of Togo, but also in Benin and in Ghana.

a formula whose purpose is action; δ. A word that defines itself in relation to a very ancient order of which it claims to be the picture; ε. A word that introduces to knowledge in the broad sense; ζ. A formula that condenses, sums up, explains, comments on the wisdom of the Ancients; η. A formula defining social structures, stereotypical social types, social behaviours<sup>6</sup> (Agblemagnon 1969, 99).

This characterization of the *eve* proverb clearly shows that it plays a highly argumentative role when brought forward during a speech or a debate.

The argumentative use of the proverbs in the *eve* community can be really apprehended first through its insertion mode into the speech. Usually, in *eve* society, proverbs are evoked to ensure the authenticity and the veracity of the speech in which they are inserted. During a debate, *eve* proverbs have, as Dango and Rahman (2019) say, “the main role of impartial witness, to which each of the contenders can apply as a reason that justify their claims”.

Nevertheless, one can recall a proverb to give rise to or to direct the thought of his hearer. The proverb thus opens the mind of the hearer onto new facts or new understanding of the facts. This role, *eve* proverbs ensure it because of its metaphorical and symbolic constitution. As we see, *eve* proverb not only condenses the wisdom of the Ancients, but also comments on it, and introduces to new knowledge, to new insights.

Furthermore, *eve* people, in some circumstances, choose to strengthen these pragmatic effects by using argumentative marks or formulas: “*Tsitsiawo gblɔ̀nà be*” (*The Ancients used to say*); “*Tɔ̀gbuiwo gblɔ̀nà be*” (*The ancestors used to say*); “*Wogblɔ̀nà be*” (*People used to say*): “*Wo doa lo be*” (*People used to say the proverb*) (Nordjoe 2015, 310).

These argumentative marks show clearly the claim of the proverb to be a dramatized picture of a very ancient order of *eve* culture. The argumentative effect of these marks is that they are used by the utterer not only to distinguish himself/herself from the proverb, but also and especially to invite the audience to be ready to welcome a higher word, an incontestable word from the ancestors of the *eve* community (Nordjoe 2015, 311). And even if the formulas “*Wogblɔ̀nà be*” and “*Wo doa lo be*” do not refer to ancestors, they are used to indicate that the utterer is not the author of the proverb, and that it comes from the whole *eve* community. That means the *eve* community is called by the utterer as the

<sup>6</sup> My translation of: «Le proverbe *eve* apparaît comme: α. Une expérience condensée en formules, en paroles ; β. Une parole strictement réglée, ne pouvant être utilisée que dans des cas précis ; γ. Une parole, une formule dont le but est l’action ; δ. Une parole qui se définit elle-même par rapport à un ordre très ancien dont elle se veut l’image ; ε. Une parole qui introduit à la connaissance au sens large ; ζ. Une formule qui condense, résume, explique, commente la sagesse des Anciens ; η. Une formule définissant des structures sociales, des types sociaux stéréotypés, des comportements sociaux».

moral, spiritual and legal guarantor of the proverb, and consequently of the speech in which it is inserted. Another argumentative mark, such as “*Nyàe be*” (*You must know that or You must recognize that*), are also used to call out the rational belief of the audience.

Proverbs can also be used without argumentative marks, to end a debate. More precisely, *eve* people used to evocate proverb, in the context of a debate during which no proverb is initially brought, to conclude, to stop the verbosity of the interlocutor. In this case, the proverb is used as a hefty argument. The hefty argument could be seen as a kind of the “*Magister dixit*” of the Middle Ages. One could also see, precautions being observed, this particular use of proverbs as a kind of “*Daïmon*” in the framework of Ludics (Lecomte & Quatrini 2010, Lecomte 2011).

Another interesting argumentative use of the proverbs is clearly noticed in the case of a particular kind of debate. Indeed, in the *eve* community, there is a kind of debate which unfolds in the form of verbal jousting. But in the context of the *eve* culture, we must really call it “*proverbial jousting*”. For, it is the case in which the debate is only constituted by the use of proverbs. This proverbial jousting occurs between two contenders who want to show each other that everyone is an expert in *eve* culture, i.e. a possessor of the wisdom of the *eve* ancestors. That is why proverbial jousting occurs especially in the case of social conflict. In oral societies, this kind of proverbial interchange can be observed at a palaver tree, as Dango and Rahman (2019) point it out.

But in *eve* culture, one can also notice this proverbial jousting in the framework of the mathematical game *Adi*. As mentioned above, during the game *Adi*, there is a crucial moment in which the physical game is coupled with a discursive game. And everything happens as if the physical game becomes the opportunity or the means to resolve a social conflict. It is often the case that, in *eve* community, when two persons are in conflict, they invite each other to play *adi* to solve the problem.

Following Niang (1981, 24), we can say that for the *eve* player, to play is to speak, to move a pawn during *adi* game is to move a word. For example, the following proverbs can be brought forward during the *adi* game:

- Player A (when playing): àhlɔɛ be melè lòlò me ò, tsì vivi mèè wolè  
(the doe says: adiposity is not necessary, but succulence)
- Player B (when playing on his turn): àhlɔɛ medoà nyì fòkpà ò  
(the doe does not put on the beef’s hooves)

This proverbial exchange can continue until the end of the game in progress. And the winner will be the one whose skill at the game coincides with his thorough knowledge of proverbs. However, the material game can be suspended when one player has no response to the other’s proverbial attack. In this case, he abandons the game and admits his defeat.

Eve people used to say, in such a situation, “*mé teŋ fle loa ò*” i.e. *he could not buy the proverb*. To buy a proverb, in a proverbial exchange situation, is to evoke a proverb which, according to eve culture, can serve as an appropriate response.

Nevertheless, it also happens that a player who is unable to really buy a proverb, utters another proverb to not only recognize his defeat, but also to signify that he does not deserve, and that the game may continue soon. The following proverb is often evoked in such a case: *mà kpɔ fle mé tsia asime ò* i.e. *The one who does not find anything to buy, does not stay in the market*.

#### 4. Conclusion

In order to grasp cultural particularities of argumentation in traditional African societies, we have tried to follow, in this paper, the process of dramatization inherent in the discursive practices through which orality is revealed as such, not as an opposite of writing, but as a specific mode of communication. This allowed to show how metaphor handling constitutes the *sine qua non* condition of the successful issue of argumentation in oral societies. More precisely, the analysis focused on the use of proverbs in the *eve* society to point out the specificities of dramatized argumentation in an oral society. Nevertheless, this study could have concerned the other discursive practices such as tale. For, if proverbs are conceived, in *eve* community, as the truths received from ancestors, then tales are considered as the process through which the oral man recalls and constructs the proofs of those truths.

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