

DECODING EXPERIENTIAL MEANINGS IN SELECTED REMARKS ON THE RESTITUTION OF THE LOOTED ROYAL TREASURES TO BENIN BY FRANCE

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Abstract

Drawing on Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics theory of transitivity, this research work examines nineteen selected remarks on the restitution of the looted royal treasures to Benin by France in order to decode experiential meanings. The study aims to identify, analyse and interpret the transitivity patterns namely processes, participants and circumstances in order to decode experiential meaning. The selected remarks deserve scrutiny as they are produced in a highly emotive and historical context by Beninese political authorities, traditional leaders and other citizens on the one hand. On the other hand, the looted royal treasures are considered as sacred artworks enabling connections back with Beninese ancestors. On the basis of a mixed method, the transitivity patterns have been identified, analysed and interpreted following their frequency distribution. The study reveals a predominance of mental processes 23.13% followed by material 20.14% and verbal 19.40%. Relational intensive processes represent 15.67% whereas relational circumstantial processes represent 11.94%. Behavioural and existential processes represent each 03.73% whereas relational possessive represent 02.23%. The predominance of mental processes suggests the high involvement of Beninese citizens in reactions of cognition, emotion, perception and desideration towards the restitution of the royal treasures due not only to the high emotive and historical context of the event but also to the cultural, social and spiritual values attributed to these precious artworks.

Keywords: *artworks, context, royal treasures, transitivity.*

Résumé

Se basant sur la théorie de la linguistique systémique fonctionnelle de Halliday, ce travail de recherche examine dix-neuf remarques portant sur la restitution au Bénin des trésors royaux pillés par la France en vue de décoder des sens expérientiels. L'étude vise à identifier, analyser et interpréter les modèles de la transitivité notamment les procès, participants et circonstances en vue de décoder le sens expérientiel. Les remarques sélectionnées méritent un examen minutieux étant donné qu'elles ont été produites par des autorités politiques, des chefs traditionnels et autres citoyens béninois dans un contexte hautement émotif et historique d'une part. D'autre part, les trésors royaux pillés sont considérés comme des œuvres d'art sacrées permettant de rétablir les connexions avec les ancêtres Béninois. Suivant l'approche méthodologique mixte, les modèles de la transitivité ont été identifiés, analysés et interprétés conformément à leurs proportions d'occurrence. L'étude a révélé la prédominance des procès mentaux 23,13% suivis par les procès matériels 20,14% et verbaux 19,40%. Les procès relationnel intensifs représentent 15,67% tandis que les procès relationnels circonstanciels représentent 11,94%. Les procès comportementaux et

existentiels représentent chacun 03,73% tandis que les procès relationnel possessifs représentent 02,23%. La prédominance des procès mentaux suggère la forte implication des citoyens Béninois dans les réactions cognitives, affectives, perceptives et de convenance envers la restitution des trésors royaux du fait non seulement du contexte hautement émotif et historique de l'événement mais aussi et surtout du fait des valeurs culturelles, sociales et spirituelles attribuées à ces précieuses œuvres d'art.

Mots clés : *œuvres d'art, contexte, trésors royaux, transitivité.*

Introduction

Dahomey is one of African kingdoms that opposed harsh resistance to France in the 19th century. Unfortunately, due to many reasons including the betrayal of King Behanzin by his close fellows and the technological superiority of the invaders' weapons, France finally defeated Dahomey Kingdom during a second Franco-Dahomean war from 1892 to 1894. At the occasion of violence, many properties namely totem statues, throne, sceptres, doors of the royal palace of Dahomey were looted by French. Parts of the looted royal objects are exhibited at Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, located in Paris, France.

Many years later, some Beninese writers have started claiming the restitution of the looted artworks after the independence in 1960. In 2016, the newly elect President Patrice Talon considers the claim of the restitution of the looted artworks as one of his priorities. He thus engages formal negotiations which finally lead to the restitution of 26 royal treasures and works to Benin by France in November 2021.

The return of the artworks has given rise to the mobilisation of thousands and thousands of people seeking to witness this historical event. Considering the high interest of Beninese in this event, this paper seeks to examine nineteen selected remarks made spontaneously by eleven Beninese at the occasion of the restitution of the looted artworks for the purpose of decoding experiential meaning. In this perspective, this study aims to identify, analyse and interpret transitivity patterns namely process, participants and circumstances in order to decode experiential meaning.

The selected remarks deserve scrutiny as they are produced in a highly emotive and historical context by Beninese political authorities, traditional leaders and other citizens. It is thus relevant to investigate the reasons that underpin this high interest of Beninese. Considering Beninese citizens' attachment to their culture, tradition and religions, their high interest in the restitution of the looted artworks may be due to

the cultural, social and spiritual values that they attribute to the looted royal treasures considered as sacred artworks enabling connections back with their ancestors.

1. Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have helped carry out the transitivity analysis of the nineteen selected remarks made spontaneously by 11 Benin citizens at the occasion of the arrival of the looted artworks at the International Airport Cardinal Bernadin Gantin and their transport to the presidency Palais de la Marina. The selected remarks are made by President Patrice Talon, minister of culture Jean Michel Abimbola, a traditional queen Kpodjito nan Zognidi, President, Consortium Touristes Par Millions Au Benin (CTM) Dine Bouraima, one of the exhibition guides Theo Atrokpo, Ousmane Agbegbindin, a resident of northern Benin Martine Vignon Agoli-Agbo, France 24's reporter Clovis Casali, a French-Benin artist Laeila Adjovi, a traditional leader Dah Adohouannon, France 24's reporter Julien Sauvaget. On the basis of the quantitative method the different process types have been identified and analysed and their frequency distribution has been determined as well. Following the qualitative research method principles, the statistical proportions of the different process types have been interpreted.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinning

2.1. Literature Review

The application of linguistic theories to the description, analysis and interpretation of literary works and political discourses helps efficiently to decode different types of meanings necessary for a deep understanding of the messages conveyed through these works. Systemic functional linguistic is one of the approaches used by many scholars to study language and its functions.

In this perspective, Dadjo (2020) dealt with mood and modality analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The description of linguistic features which connote interpersonal meaning in the selected novel has helped him determine how social relationships and culture influence participants' use of language. The study has revealed valuable findings: in both selected samples of texts, statements, questions and commands

are identified and the declarative moods are predominant with 92.94% and 84.33% respectively in Texts 1 and 2. The results have also shown that interrogative moods are not only used for asking for information as noticed in Text 2 but are also used to express submission and inclination. Imperative moods are used to give order functioning as command. The have led him to contend that the social position as well as the culture of a given society highly influence the mood choices of the interactants testifying thus their respect to their customs and traditions.

In the same line, Dadjo and Hakibou (2021) applied linguistic theories to describe ideational meaning in two extracts from Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *A Meeting in the Dark*. The exploration of the ideational meaning has helped them contend that the deep messages conveyed through the selected short story concern Christianity and its impacts on African family lives. In other words, the short story has dealt with the various transformations that occurred in Africa in general and in African family lives with the arrival of Christian missionaries in particular.

Still in the same perspective, Dadjo, and Hakibou, (2021) investigated Tenor Variable and Interpersonal Meaning in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid*. The analysis of linguistic features connoting interpersonal meaning in three selected extracts has enabled them to describe how participants establish and maintain social relationships between themselves. The study reveals that Darko overtly identifies herself as a spokeswoman for defenceless women by choosing women as protagonists. They conclude that the demolition of men's domination over women, the feminism in Africa and African women's difficult life conditions are the major messages conveyed through *The Housemaid*.

Dadjo (2022) also worked on Experiential Meaning in Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana's Daughter*. An Exploration of Linguistic Contributions to Social Cohesions for a Sustainable Development of African Countries. The statistical results of the study have led him to observe that Jagua Nana and her daughter Liza as well as Auntie Kate and her flat mate Sister Heide are not only the most active and talkative participants but also the most mentally, physiologically and psychologically involved in the different issues discussed in the selected extracts. He contends that Cyprien Ekwensi has depicted through his novel the importance of children for social cohesions in African countries as well as heinous practices namely lie with fake pieces of evidence such as a fake death certificate and a fake grave, betrayal, prostitution and corruption that

affect negatively social cohesions and consequently the development of African countries. He concludes that the preservation of social cohesions, stability and peace necessary for a sustainable development of African countries requires fight against and even work to banish from African societies, the heinous practices denounced by the author.

As for Hakibou & Dadjo (2022), they focused on Experiential Meaning in *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie. The exploration of language management in the selected novel has enabled them to describe the transitivity patterns through an extract to show how the author's choices reflect beyond the characters', her own experience and vision of life in post-independence Africa in general via the Nigerian case. The analysis has been conducted on the basis of the process type distribution in an extract selected in the context of the study and led to the conclusion that Adichie's handling of the language, though full of subtlety, helps the reader to decode the Nigerian post-colonial realities through the actions, events, happenings and doings by the protagonists of the extract. A particular stress is put on the expression of violence through the character of Papa Achike.

In line with the works reviewed thus far, this paper examines nineteen selected remarks on the restitution of looted royal treasures to Benin by France in order to decode experiential meanings. It thus relevant to account for the theory that underpins this work.

2.2. Theoretical Underpinning

Systemic functional linguistics is the theory that underpins this research work. This theory views the study of language as involving three functional labels: experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings. The present study emphasizes experiential metafunction. This metafunction involves the system of transitivity. It must be stressed that Halliday (1985)'s model of transitivity developed by Eggins (2004) is used to carry out this study. It is relevant to note that the description and analysis of the system of transitivity help uncover meanings about the world, about experience, about how people perceive what is going on. This description involves process types, participants and circumstances that are recapitulated with their corresponding meanings in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Process Types and their Corresponding Participants for Meaning Realisation

Process types	Meanings	Participants directly involved	Participants indirectly involved
Material process <i>(action and event)</i>	Doing, happening	Actor, goal,	range, recipient, client, scope, attribute
Mental process <i>(Perception, cognition, desideration, emotion)</i>	sensing, seeing, thinking, wanting, feeling	Senser, phenomenon	inducer
Behavioural	behaving	behavior	behaviour
Verbal	Saying,	Sayer, target	Receiver, verbiage
Relational <i>(attribution, identification)</i>	Being, attributing, identifying, possessing	Carrier, attribute, identified, identifier, possessor, possessed, token, value	Attributor, beneficiary, assigner
Existential	existing	Existent	-

Source: *Adapted from Halliday and Matthiesen (2004, 201-240)*

As mentioned above, this paper seeks to identify, analyse and interpret the transitivity patterns recapitulated in Table 1 above in the eleven selected remarks on the restitution of the looted royal treasures. It is relevant to carry out this study so as to uncover meanings about Beninese citizens' actions and reactions related to the precious artworks. It is in this perspective that Halliday (1971) observes that 'it is through the experiential function that the speaker or writer embodies in language his experience of phenomena of the real world; and this includes his experience of the internal world of his own consciousness.' This corroborates the significance of the present study.

3. Data Analysis

This section deals with the transitivity analysis of the selected remarks. As mentioned in the methodology above, the selected remarks are made spontaneously by 11 Benin citizens at the occasion of the arrival and exhibition of the looted artworks at Palais de la Marina. A clause-by-clause transitivity analysis of the selected remarks has been carried out following the key provided below.

Transitivity Analyses of the Selected Remarks

Keys:

P = process, Pm = material, Pme = mental, Pv =verbal, Pb = behavioural, Pe = existential, Pi = intensive, Pcc = circumstantial, Pp = possessive, Pc = causative, A = Actor, G = Goal, B = Beneficiary, R = Range, R =Recipient, Ct=Client, S=Senser, Ph = Phenomenon, Sy = Sayer, Rv = Receiver, Vb = Verbiage, Be = Behaver, Bh = Behaviour, X = Existent, T = Token, V = Value, Cr = Carrier, At = Attribute, Pr = possessor, Pd = possessed, C = Circumstance, Cl = location, Cx = extent, Cm = manner, Cc = cause, Ca = accompaniment, Cma = matter, Co = role, Ag = Agent.

3.1 Material Processes

- **Remarks by President Talon**

- (1) I (A) **continued (Pm)** with the request(G) again (Cl)
- (2) We (A) **took (Pm)** actions through educated people, associations, non-governmental organisations (G)
- (3) that we (A) **are able to achieve (Pm)** this restitution through cooperation (G)
- (4) We (A) **'re not going (Pm)** [to ask for everything to be returned] (G)
- (5) that the restitution of 26 artworks we (A) **are celebrating (Pm)**

- **Remarks by Benin's minister of culture, Jean-Michel Abimbola**

- (6) "We (A) **have launched (Pm)** a massive nation-wide campaign (G), in the seventy-seven municipalities (Cl)
- (7) that **make up (Pm)** Benin, communicating in each of the local languages to reach the entire population (G)

- (8) **to visit (Pm)** the contemporary Beninese artists (G)
 (9) you (A) **wouldn't have come (Pm)**,
 (10) which (A) **gives (Pm)** us an opportunity to create a culture of museums (G).
 (11) France (A) **started (Pm)** this restitution process with these 26 works (G)
 (12) That (A) **will not stop (Pm)** any time soon (Cl)

- **Remarks by Kpodjito nan Zognidi, a traditional queen**

- (13) **was taken (Pm)** away by the colonizer (Cc)
- **Remarks by Dine Bouraima, President, Consortium Touristes Par Millions Au Benin (CTM)**
- (14) and **came (Pm)** to finalise African nations' independence (G)
 (15) The artwork (A) **would help (Pm)** in tourism development (G).
 (16) The country (A) **is trying to make (Pm)** tourism number one (G).
 (17) **to make (Pm)** Benin Republic the number one tourism destination in Africa (G).

- **Remark by Theo Atrokpo, one of the exhibition guides**

- (18) It (A) **brings (Pm)** back part of our soul (G)
 (19) and **connects (Pm)** with our history (G)

- **Remark by Ousmane Agbegbindin**

- (20) I (A) **came (Pm)** to convince myself (G)
 (21) That (At) these artefacts(A) really (Cm) **returned (Pm)** to the country (G)
 (22) where the works (A) will be transported (**Pm**) by truck (Cc)

- **Remarks Martine Vignon Agoli-Agbo, a resident of northern Benin**

- (23) Martine Vignon Agoli-Agbo (A), a resident of northern Benin, **travelled (Pm)** with her two daughters more than 500 kilometres (310 miles) to witness the moment. (G/Cl)

- **Remarks by Clovis Casali, France 24 reporter**

- (24) In the first room of the exhibition, immense black walls (A) **offer (Pm)** solemnity for a display of the thrones of Dahomey,

- including the wood and metal sculpture throne of king Ghezo.
(G)
- (25) “Hundreds, if not thousands” of people (A) **had gathered (Pm)** on the city’s streets to mark the historic restitution (G)
- (26) When (Cl) the artefacts (A) **were carefully unloaded (Pm)** from the trucks (G)
- (27) who(A) **had negotiated (Pm)** their return (G)

3.2Mental Processes

- **Remarks by President Talon**

- (1) I (S) **think (Pme)** since 1965 (Cl/Ph)
- (2) May our ancestors (S) **bless (Pme)** the French President and the people of France in general (Ph)
- (3) For people who(S) **know (Pme)** their history (Ph)
- (4) so that the world(S) **sees (Pme)** the greatness of Benin (Ph)
- (5) In the original palaces of Abomey, traditional leaders(S) **hope (Pme)to see (Pme)** them returned(Ph).
- (6) a testimony to what we(S) **have known (Pme)**
- (7) You(S) **'ll agree (Pme)** with me (Ph)
- (8) and **expressed (Pme)** his country’s gratitude to Macron (Ph)
- (9) How (Cm) can you(S) **expect (Pme)** my enthusiasm to be complete(Ph)

- **Remarks by Benin’s minister of culture, Jean-Michel Abimbola**

- (10) And with this impetus, we (S) can also **show (Pme)** contemporary works (Ph),
- (11) we **believe (Pme)**
- (12) At the press preview, Benin’s Culture Minister Jean-Michel Abimbola(S) **remarked (Pme)** on the exhibition’s significance (Ph)

- **Remarks by Kpodjito nan Zognidi, a traditional queen**

- (13) I (S) **would like (Pme)** all these to be returned too(Ph)

- **Remarks by Dine Bouraima, President, Consortium Touristes Par Millions Au Benin (CTM))**

- (14) In fact, we (S) **want (Pme)**

(15) I (S) **want (Pme)**

(16) I (S) **hope (Pme)** other artifacts are returned (Ph).

- **Remark by Theo Atrokpo, one of the exhibition guides**

(17) I (S) **haven't stopped** contemplating **(Pme)** it (Ph),

(18) I (S) **had** already (Cx) **seen (Pme)** it in the Quai Branly museum in France (Ph),

(19) but **to see (Pme)** it here (Ph), home with us (Cl),

- **Remarks by Laeila Adjovi, a French-Benin artist**

(20) But I (S) never **imagined (Pme)**

- **Remarks by Dah Adohouannon**

(21) at the prospect of being able **to see (Pme)** these royal treasures up close particularly (Cm) our ancestors' thrones.

(22) 96- once I (S) **have seen (Pme)** them (Ph),

- **Remarks by Ousmane Agbegbindin**

(23) We (S) **cannot see (Pme)** the objects (Ph),

(24) that I (S) **cannot describe (Pme)**

- **Remarks Martine Vignon Agoli-Agbo, a resident of northern Benin**

(25) It (S) **is so moving (Pme)**,

(26) I (S) **did not want (Pme)** to be told about this moment (Ph/Cl).

- **Remarks by Clovis Casali, France 24 reporter**

(27) He (S) **described (Pme)** “an emotional moment” (Ph)

(28) noting that the leader(S) **had described (Pme)** the artwork as “heritage-defining” (Ph).

- **Remarks by Clovis Casali and Julien Sauvaget, France 24 reporters**

(29) They (S) **had only seen (Pme)** pictures of these artefacts in their school books (Ph) before (Cl),

(30) and that soon (Cl) they (S) would be able **to see (Pme)** these pieces with their own eyes (Ph).

(31) So they (S) **were delighted (Pme)**,

3.3 Verbal Processes

- **Remarks by President Talon**

- (1) Some writers from Dahomey (current Benin) (Sy) **have started asking (Pv)** for the return of those artifices (Vb)
- (2) Talon (Sy) **said (Pv)** in February 2022(Cl), at an exhibition in Cotonou (Vb)
- (3) Talon (Sy) **said (Pv)**
- (4) Talon (Sy) **said (Pv)**
- (5) (Talon) **speaking (Pv)** to French President Emmanuel Macron (Vb)
after a signing ceremony at the Elysee Palace (Cl)
- (6) but he (Sy) also **said (Pv)**
- (7) He (Sy) **added (Pv)**

- **Remarks by Benin's minister of culture, Jean-Michel Abimbola**

- (8) **said (Pv)** Benin's minister of culture, Jean-Michel Abimbola (Vb)
- (9) and I(Sy) **told (Pv)** you (Rv)
- (10) Abimbola (Sy) **said (Pv)**.
- (11) At the press preview, Benin's Culture Minister Jean-Michel Abimbola **remarked (Pme)** on the exhibition's significance.....
- (12) **said (Pv)** Culture and Tourism Minister Jean Michel Abimbola (Vb) .

- **Remarks by Kpodjito nan Zognidi, a traditional queen**

- (13) **Said (Pv)** Kpodjito nan Zognidi, a traditional queen (Vb)

- **Remarks by Dine Bouraima, President, Consortium Touristes Par Millions Au Benin (CTM)**

- (14) In an interview, President, Consortium Touristes Par Millions Au Benin (CTM), Mr. Dine Bouraima (Sy), **disclosed (Pv)**

- **Remark by Theo Atrokpo, one of the exhibition guides**

- (15) **said (Pv)** Theo Atrokpo, one of the exhibition guides (Vb).

- **Remarks by Laeila Adjovi, a French-Benin artist**
 (16) **said (Pv)** Laeila Adjovi, a French-Benin artist (Vb)
- **Remarks by Dah Adohouannon**
 (17) an elder of the Dah Adohouannon community (Sy), **told (Pv)** AFP news agency (Rv).
 (18) the elder (Sy) **added (Pv)**.
- **Remarks by Ousmane Agbegbindin**
 (19) **said (Pv)** Ousmane Agbegbindin (Vb) on the road between the airport and the presidency,
 (20) he (Sy) **added (Pv)**.
- **Remarks Martine Vignon Agoli-Agbo, a resident of northern Benin**
 (21) They (Sy) will be able to **tell (Pv)** their own children(Rv)
 (22) she (Sy) **told (Pv)** AFP (Rv).
- **Remarks by Clovis Casali, France 24 reporter**
 (23) Reporting from Cotonou, France 24's Clovis Casali (Sy) **said (Pv)**
 (24) Casali (Sy) **said (Pv)**
- **Remarks by Clovis Casali and Julien Sauvaget, France 24 reporters**
 (25) Earlier in the day (Cl), Casali and France 24's Julien Sauvaget(Sy) **spoke (Pv)** to local residents about the importance of the restitution(Rv).
 (26) Casali(Sy) **said (Pv)**.
 (27) "And for the older generations they (Sy) **said (Pv)**

3.4 Behavioural Processes

- **Remarks by Benin's minister of culture, Jean-Michel Abimbola**
 (1) **Look, (Pb)**

- **Remark by Kpodjito nan Zognidi, a traditional queen**
- (2) Who (Be) **lost (Pb)** their lives fighting against the French (Bh)
- **Remarks by Dah Adohouannon**
- (3) I(Be) **get** goose bumps (**Pb**)
- (4) At 72 years, I(Be) **can die (Pb)** in peace (Bh),
- **Remarks by Ousmane Agbegbindin**
- (5) I (Be) **am moved (Pb)** to tears,” (Bh)

3.5 Existential Processes

- **Remarks by President Talon**
- (1) a testimony that we **existed (Pe)** before (Cl)
- **Remarks by Benin’s minister of culture, Jean-Michel Abimbola**
- (2) if there **weren’t (Pe)** the twenty-six [restituted] works(X)
- **Remarks by Kpodjito nan Zognidi, a traditional queen**
- (3) but there **are (Pe)** still many objects to be recovered, like those of the amazon women(X)
- **Remarks by Clovis Casali, France 24 reporter**
- (4) “There **was (Pe)** silence. Long minutes of silence.” (X)
- **Remarks by Clovis Casali and Julien Sauvaget, France 24 reporters**
- (5) “There **were (Pe)** young people telling us(X)

3.6 Relational Intensive Processes

- **Remarks by President Talon**
- (1) From 2016 when (Cl) I (Cr) **became (Pi)** President (At)
- (2) I (Cr) **am (Pi)** happy(At)
- (3) and not wars as it (Cr) **is used to happen (Pi)** before between nations, people, kingdoms and communities (At)

- (4) those artifices (Cr) **are (Pi)** mosaic for ancient or old kingdoms(At)
- (5) Beninese works (Cr) **must remain (Pi)** in museums around the world
- (6) This return (Cr) **is (Pi)** a testimony (At)
- (7) to what we (Cr) **have been (Pi)**,
- (8) today (Cl) **is (Pi)** only a step in the ambitious process of equity and of restitution of heritage extorted from the territory of the Benin kingdom (At) by France (Cc)
- (9) the return of the 26 artefacts (Cr) **was (Pi)** “just the first stage (At)

- **Remark by Dah Adohouannon**

- (10) It (Cr)’s **(Pi)** unbelievable (At)

- **Remarks by Benin’s minister of culture, Jean-Michel Abimbola**

- (11) that the event (Cr) **was (Pi)** “free and open to all (At)
- (12) I (Cr) **am (Pi)** sure (At)
- (13) and we (Cr) **are (Pi)** sure (At)
- (14) this **is (Pi)** a movement (At)

- **Remarks by Kpodjito nan Zognidi, a traditional queen**

- (15) "I (Cr) **am (Pi)** happy (At)
- (16) Beninese authorities (Cr) **are (Pi)** hopeful (At)

- **Remarks by Dine Bouraima, President, Consortium Touristes Par Millions Au Benin (CTM))**

- (17) that the restitution (Cr) **was (Pi)** historical (At)

- **Remarks by Laeila Adjovi, a French-Benin artist**

- (18) It (Cr)’s **(Pi)** very emotional (At) **to be (Pi)** in front of this throne (At)

- **Remark by Ousmane Agbegbindin)**

- (19) but the mere fact of knowing that the thrones of our ancestors, their shoes, racks and other objects are in these trucks **has (Pi)** an effect on me (At)

- **Remarks by Clovis Casali and Julien Sauvaget, France 24 reporters**

(20) In Benin's capital Cotonou, the return of the prized works (Cr) **was (Pi)** hotly anticipated (At).

(21) It (Cr) **was (Pi)** a dream coming true (At).

3.7 Relational Possessive Processes

- **Remarks by Benin's minister of culture, Jean-Michel Abimbola**

(1) But through these twenty-six works, we (Pr) **have (Pp)** an impetus (Pd)

- **Remark by Kpodjito nan Zognidi, a traditional queen**

(2) What (Pr) **belonged (Pp)** to them (Pd)

- **Remarks by Dine Bouraima, President, Consortium Touristes Par Millions Au Benin (CTM)**

(3) That (Pr) **has (Pp)** the courage to ask about the artifacts (Pd).

3.8 Relational Circumstantial Processes

- **Remarks by President Talon**

(1) That **included (Pc)** returned works (At)

(2) Before (Cl) an audience (Cr) that (**included (Pc)**) representatives of Benin's royal families (At)

(3) Patrice Talon (Cr), Benin's president, **was (Pc)** in Paris to witness the hand over (At)

(4) When (Cl) works such as the god Gou and the Fâ divination tablet (Cr) **are still held (Pc)** here in France, to the detriment of their real owners?" (At)

- **Remarks by Benin's minister of culture, Jean-Michel Abimbola**

(5) With this exhibition, we (Cr) are **returning (Pc)** to the Beninese people part of their soul, part of their history and their dignity (At)

(6) that this (Cr) **is (Pc)** just the beginning (At)

- **Remarks by Kpodjito nan Zognidi, a traditional queen**
- (7) the return of the 26 artworks (Cr) **is (Pc)** only the beginning in a long process of restitution (At)
- **Remark by Theo Atrokpo, one of the exhibition guides**
- (8) Since (Cl) it (Cr) **was installed (Pc)**
- **Remarks by Laeila Adjovi, a French-Benin artist**
- (9) **to be (Pc)** in front of this throne (At)
- (10) it (Cr) **would be (Pc)** so large (At)
- (11) whose work (Cr) **is also being (Pc)** displayed.
- **Remarks Martine Vignon Agoli-Agbo, a resident of northern Benin**
- (12) We (Cr) **have been (Pc)** in Cotonou for 24 hours (Cx), just to experience the arrival of these treasures (At).
- (13) And if my children (Cr) **are (Pc)** with me (At),
- (14) it (Cr) **is (Pc)** so that (At) one day (Cl)
- **Remarks by Clovis Casali, France 24 reporter**
- (15) which (Cr) **included (Pc)** the throne of a former Benin king (At),
- (16) the restitution (Cr) **marked (Pc)** a “day of victory” for President Talon (At)

As the different process types are identified and analysed above, it is now relevant to determine their frequency distribution. In this perspective, Table 2 recapitulates the frequency distribution as well as the percentage of each process type as follows:

Table 2: Statistics of Process Types in the Selected Remarks

Process type		Frequency	Percentage
Material		27	20.14
Mental		31	23.13
Verbal		26	19.40
Behavioural		05	03.73
Existential		05	03.73
Relational	Intensive	21 (15.67)	29.85
	Circumstantial	16 (11.94)	
	Possessive	03 (02.23)	
Total		134	100

(Source : Dadjo, 2023)

In the perspective of having a clearcut idea of who has done what to whom, how, when, where and why, Table 3 has been designed to recapitulate the 11 selected Benin Citizens' actions and reactions as follows:

Table 3: Statistics of the Selected Benin Citizens' Actions and Reactions

Benin Citizens	Processes					
	Material	Mental	Verbal	Behavioural	Existential	Relational
1. President Talon	05 [18.51%]	9 [29.03%]	07 [26.92%]	00 [00%]	01 [20%]	Intensive 09 [42.85%]
						Circumstantial 04 [25%]
						Possessive [00%]
2. Jean-Michel Abimbola	07 [25.92%]	02 [06.45%]	04 [15.38%]	01 [20%]	01 [20%]	Intensive 04 [19.04%]
						Circumstantial 02 [12.5%]
						Possessive 01 [33.33%]
3. Kpodjitanan Zognidi	01[03.7%]	01 [03.22%]	01 [03.84%]	01 [20%]	01 [20%]	Intensive 02 [09.52%]
						Circumstantial 01 [06.25%]
						Possessive 01 [33.33%]
4. Dine Bouraima	04 [14.81%]	03 [09.67%]	01 [03.84%]	00 [00%]	00 [00%]	Intensive 01 [04.76%]
						Circumstantial [00%]

						Possessive 01 [33.33%]
5. Theo Atrokpo	02 [07.4%]	03 [09.67%]	01 [03.84%]	00 [00%]	00 [00%]	Intensive [00%]
						Circumstantial 01 [06.25%]
						Possessive [00%]
6. Ousmane Agbegbindin	03 [11.11%]	02 [06.45%]	02 [07.69%]	01 [20%]	00 [00%]	Intensive 01 [04.76%]
						Circumstantial [00%]
						Possessive [00%]
7. Martine Vignon Agoli-Agbo	01 [03.7%]	02 [06.45%]	02 [07.69%]	00 [00%]	00 [00%]	Intensive [00%]
						Circumstantial 03 [18.75%]
						Possessive [00%]
8. Clovis Casali	04 [14.81%]	02 [06.45%]	02 [07.69%]	00 [00%]	01 [20%]	Intensive [00%]
						Circumstantial 02 [12.5%]
						Possessive [00%]
9. Lacila Adjovi	00 [00%]	01 [03.22%]	01 [03.84%]	00 [00%]	00 [00%]	Intensive 01 [04.76%]
						Circumstantial 03 [18.75%]
						Possessive [00%]
10. Dah Adohouannon	00 [00%]	02 [06.45%]	02 [07.69%]	02 [40%]	00 [00%]	Intensive 01 [04.76%]
						Circumstantial [00%]
						Possessive [00%]
11. Clovis Casali and Julien Sauvaget	00 [00%]	03 [09.67%]	03 [11.53%]	00 [00%]	01 [20%]	Intensive 01 [04.76%]
						Circumstantial [00%]
						Possessive [00%]

(Source : Dadjo, 2023)

4. Discussion of the Findings

The results presented above show the predominance of mental processes over all the other processes. Indeed, mental processes represent 23.13%. This confirms the high emotive context of the restitution of the looted artworks. It is important to note that all four categories of mental processes namely cognition, emotion, perception and desideration are identified in the selected remarks. A closer attention reveals that president Patrice Talon has been involved in mental reactions with the highest proportion of 29.03%. This indicates his high attachment to the royal treasures. In the same line the minister of culture, Jean Michel Abimbola has also been involved in mental reactions. His involvement, though low (06.45%), confirms also his attachment to the treasures.

The study also shows a high proportion of material processes (20.14%) suggesting that some tangible and concrete actions have been performed to make the event a reality. A deeper scrutiny reveals that the minister of culture, Jean Michel Abimbola is the most active participant as he has performed the highest proportion of actions (25.92%). He is followed by President Talon who has also performed important proportion of actions (18.51%). This high proportion of tangible and concrete actions performed by both Jean Michel Abimbola and President Talon confirms the key roles they have played altogether in the organisation of this event respectively as minister of culture and president.

As far as verbal processes are concerned, President Talon and Jean Michel Abimbola are the most highly involved respectively with 26.92% and 15.38%. This high proportion of verbal reactions suggests that both President Talon and Jean Michel Abimbola have played highly important roles in giving and exchanging information necessary for the organisation of the event. In addition, this high proportion suggests the degree of necessity of giving and exchanging information for the successful organisation of this emotive and historical event. More importantly, the presence of verbal processes confirms that no human activity can be organized without the need of giving and exchanging information.

Behavioural processes are very low in proportion as they represent only 03.73%. The mere presence of these processes confirms the purely human characteristics of the organization of this highly emotive and historical event since these are typical physiological and psychological processes. It is important to note that the royal treasures have been

looted since 1892. This means that after 129 years (at the moment of the restitution in November 2021), Beninese people not only remember these artworks but also show a very high degree of attachments to them. The following illustrative remarks confirm this: **(3) 'I get goose bumps (Pb)'** (4) 'At 72 years, I **can die (Pb)** in peace,' said Dah Adohouannon, a traditional leader. **(5) 'I am moved (Pb)** to tears' a remark by a Beninese citizen, Ousmane Agbegbindin.

Similarly, existential processes also are very low in proportion as they represent only 03.73%. Here too, their mere presence is significant as they constitute pieces of evidence of Beninese citizens' existence on the one hand and the real-life situation of the event of the restitution on the other hand. The following illustrative remark by President Talon confirms this: (1) 'a testimony that we **existed (Pe)** before'

The study also reveals an almost high proportion of relational intensive processes representing 15.67%. As these processes are considered as processes of being and relating participants to their identity and description, their almost high proportion is significant. Indeed, these processes have enabled the identification and description of the event of the restitution of the precious artworks. This also constitutes pieces of evidence of the existence of the artworks as well as the event of their restitution. In the same sense, the almost important proportion of relational circumstantial processes (11.94%) is significant as these processes have helped described the circumstances namely the moment, the manner, the place to mention but these cases, when, how where the event of the restitution takes place. As for the relational possessive processes, they are almost non-existent representing only 02.23%. nevertheless, their presence confirms Benin ownership of the looted artworks and reinforces the right to claim the restitution.

As overall interpretation of the findings, it is relevant to note that the highest proportions of mental processes and the relatively high proportions of material and verbal processes confirm the highly emotive and historical context of the restitution of the looted artworks on the one hand and the precious cultural, social and spiritual values attributed to them on the other hand. More importantly, all this confirms the high attachment of Beninese citizens to the looted artworks as they are considered as sacred artworks enabling connections back with Beninese ancestors. Indeed, in Africa, it is believed that the dead are not dead forever. Beninese people share this view of Diop (1997) who claims that:

The dead are not gone forever,
They are in the paling shadows,
And in the darkening shadows.
The dead are not beneath the ground,
They are in the rustling tree,
In the murmuring wood,
In the flowing water,
In the still water,
In the lonely place,
in the crowd:
The dead are not dead.

In line with the quotation above, the royal treasures including King Behanzin's Throne, the totem statues depicting King Glèlè and King Behanzin and many other artworks are considered as highly precious and sacred by Beninese due to the cultural, social and spiritual values attributed to them.

As for the other processes, the mere presence of behavioural processes constitutes pieces of evidence of the purely human characteristics of the event. Moreover, the presence of existential and relational processes reinforces the pieces of evidence of the existence of not only Beninese citizens but also their artistic talents or abilities to produce valuable and sophisticated artworks capable of resisting over centuries.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to decode experiential meaning in eleven selected remarks on the restitution of the looted royal artworks to Benin by France in November 2021. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have helped carry out a clause by clause transitivity analysis of the 19 selected remarks. The study has revealed a predominance of mental processes over all the other processes confirming the high emotive context of the restitution of the looted artworks. The study has also shown a high proportion of material processes suggesting that some tangible and concrete actions have been performed to make the event a reality. This high proportion of verbal reactions suggests the highly important roles played particularly by both Jean Michel Abimbola and President Talon in giving and exchanging information necessary for the the successful organisation of the emotive and historical event. More importantly, the presence of verbal processes confirms that no human

activity can be organized without the need of giving and exchanging information. The mere presence of behavioural processes confirms the purely human characteristics of the organization of this highly emotive and historical event. In similar way, the mere presence of existential processes constitutes pieces of evidence of Beninese citizens' existence on the one hand and the real-life situation of the event of the restitution on the other hand. The almost high proportion of relational intensive as well as circumstantial processes constitutes pieces of evidence of the existence of the artworks as they have enabled their identification and the description of the circumstances in which the event of the restitution took place. It has thus been contended that the study has helped reveal the high attachment of Beninese citizens to the looted artworks as they are considered as sacred artworks enabling connections back with their ancestors.

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