'DOING IT WITH STYLE': AN ETHNOPOETIC STUDY OF IMPROVISATION AND VARIATION IN SOUTHERN EWE DRUM LANGUAGE CONVERSATIONS[1]

by

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Introduction

In southern Eweland acts of individual artistic expression are called *atsiã* (style), a polysemous term whose aspects form the core of indigenous aesthetic discourse. For example, when evaluating an artistic work like a dress, a painting, or the performance of a song or dance sequence, one might hear comments like, "*édo atsiã ɖe me*" (s/he put some style inside), to describe the way the artist has idiosyncratically rendered the work based upon its known model. Since it involves tampering with recognized thematic materials, doing something with *atsiã* is always an audacious act that is bound to attract both favorable and unfavorable reactions. When said with a negative tone, *atsiã* can be used as an insult – "*<tsk> atsiã ko do wòle*" (S/he is just showing off!). Therefore, to facilitate writing about *atsiã* in English I have devised a lexicon for describing the active process of putting in style, *atsiãdodo*, including styling, shining, or in a negative sense showing off or bluffing. Within the realm of drumming, the primary context for the display of atsiã is during the playing of drum language conversations, *vugbe* (pl. *vugbewo*), between the lead and response drums, whose themes can be embellished, varied, or replaced with spontaneous improvisation. When drummers consciously alter the accepted form of a *vugbe*, they are said to be playing the conversation with style. Many Ewe drummers have told me that it is through atsiã that one may distinguish the hand of a great drummer, *azagunɔgã*.

Like other aspects of Ewe music, variation and improvisation have received quite a bit of attention in Ewe music scholarship, beginning with the work of A.M. Jones, whose collaborative research with Ewe *azagunɔ* (chief drummer, lead drummer) Desmond Tay set a precedent for analyzing African music with the input of cultural exponents, culminating in a two-volume set of extensively annotated transcriptions of several Ewe dance-drumming genres (Jones 1959). Limitations of the era meant that Jones was only able to make single-track recordings of Tay's drumming, without the accompaniment of the drum ensemble or singers. Combined with the fact that Jones

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was not able to learn to drum himself and was not conversant in the Ewe language, the process of theme, variation and improvisation largely eluded him. Subsequent collaborative work by Hewitt Pantaleoni (with Kobla Ladzekpo) and David Locke (with Gideon Foli Alorwoyie and Godwin Agbeli) increased our understanding of atsiã considerably by analyzing recordings of the full music ensemble as well as by taking the crucial step of learning to drum, which enabled them to present more detailed and accurate representations of Ewe music forms. Pantaleoni was the first western academic to grasp the dynamics of style within the drum language dialogues, unfortunately, he became overly concerned with issues of notation and rhythmic perception, which limited the discussion of improvisation within his writings.[2] Nevertheless, Pantaleoni does present some variations for certain drum language themes in the dances Atsia and Takada, including a series of variations for one *atsimevu* conversation in the Atsia dance (Pantaleoni and Ladzekpo 1970; 1972b: 79–80). While he outlines four techniques to account for what he calls the "decorative play" of the *atsimevu* conversation, including expansion and syncopation, the notation system and lack of audio examples obscure the presence of these techniques in the variations he is attempting to analyze, making them difficult to adopt by other scholars and students of Ewe drumming. Locke's subsequent work, written in standard notation, has been much more informative and illuminating as its clarity allows even general readers the opportunity to use the detailed transcriptions and annotated descriptions of the drumming as listening guides to the actual recorded examples that he publishes together with the text.[3] Clearly Locke was able to learn to improvise, and used this experience to expand on Pantaleoni's work by introducing a set of prescriptive techniques that could be used to generate successful bouts of stylistic drumming. I am certainly indebted to many of his ideas and will refer to them (and stylize them) throughout this paper.

Although Locke and Pantaleoni's increasingly accurate descriptions of the technical aspects of atsiã certainly have been beneficial to understanding the products of atsiã, i.e. the transcribed examples under review, they do not adequately describe the cognitive process of atsiã, namely, the mental effort by which drummers must temper their feelings of inspiration and artistic energy to the shared aesthetic sensibilities of the community. In other words, given the Ewe rhythmic background outlined below, an experienced drummer in any tradition could employ a given set of techniques to craft variations to a *vugbe* conversation that might demonstrate an awareness of Ewe rhythm and drum technique but which, nevertheless, would not sound idiomatic nor would conform to local musical and cultural values. In contrast, the work of John Chernoff outlines a semantic model of style derived from discourse with Dagomba drummer

[2]   Pantaleoni uses a horizontal tablature for notating Ewe drumming based on the notes of the bell (1970, 1972a, 1972b) that he devised along with Moses Serwadda (1968). It is very difficult to read, and was never adopted by other researchers. I had to retranscribe the patterns in standard notation before I could follow the analysis in the text.

[3]   Especially informative are Locke (1987), Locke (1992), and Alorwoyie and Locke (2007).

Ibrahim Abdulai and Ewe drummer Gideon Foli Alorwoye that emphasizes the process of creating style within the relatively conservative environment of local communal values and tastes, resulting in ideas like space, gentleness, and the integration of individual lines into an ensemble texture (Chernoff 1979). The Ewe also have a concept that corresponds to the idea of a shared sense of stylistic taste – it is merely another facet of the term *atsiā*. A major contribution of this essay will be to argue that *vugbe* patterns have an inherent dialogical quality that connects them to other forms of verbal art; successfully adding *atsiā* to a drum language theme requires both an appreciation for phraseology, the ability to construct well-formed phrases, as well as an awareness of the semiotics of Ewe musical expression.

In order to appreciate and ultimately represent the particularities of atsiā in Ewe drumming I have therefore adopted a model from linguistic anthropology and semiotics, ethnopoesis, which uses the vocabulary of structural linguistics and transformational grammar to describe the process of creative production in the performing arts (Nattiez 1996; Hymes 2003; Foley 1988). This body of work grew out of a scholarly movement that sought to prove that Homer's Odyssey and Iliad were originally oral compositions, based upon the repetition of certain formulae, with predictable variations (Lord 1960). Hymes (2003) and Foley (1995) have adapted this approach to other oral traditions including Native American storytelling, Serbian spells, and Anglo-Saxon hagiography, whose arts are also based upon spontaneous renditions of known formulae using a discernable set of stylistic processes that successfully negotiate local artistic and cultural sentiments.[4] Fortuitously, the nature of Ewe drum language shares many features with verbal performance. For example Agawu (1995: 32) directly connects the creation and performance of drum conversations and dance sequences with the structural logic of Ewe verbal traditions, such as storytelling and the pouring of a libation.[5] There is also a performative side to atsiā, manifested in displays of showmanship and provocation, which is dependent upon a shared aesthetic, or local sense of taste, which shapes, recognizes and in some cases rejects the products of performance.

Ethnopoetic analysis must be grounded in direct experience of the tradition under review, and researchers have established a high level of competency based not only on participating as an observer, but on eventually being able to produce a story, song, or dance that satisfies local tastes.[6] Over the course of the past fifteen years I have learned a great deal about atsiā through extended periods of study and performance with a group of traditional drummers headed by the Tagborlo family in the town of Dzodze, southeastern Ghana. During this process I learned to play the lead drum and direct the

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[4]   Ethnomusicological studies of improvisation have also equated it with the process of composition, which is similarly subject to local social and aesthetic constraints. See for example Nettl (1974), Groesbeck (1994), and Susilo (1987).

[5]   See Anyidoho (1986, 1997).

[6]   Apart from Locke's work, cited above, other notable ethnomusicological studies that have proceeded from this method include Feld (1988) and Kippen (1988).

ensemble during important funeral and ritual music forms. Through observation and critical discussion, I learned to speak the language of the drums, and was able to use the grammar of drumming to construct my own original phrases that satisfied local tastes. Additionally, I become fluent in the Ewe language, hence, I was able to discuss the subject of *atsiã* in Ewe with my teacher, Kwadzo Tagborlo, as well as other noted drummers during the course of my residences in Eweland. This study attempts to distill these musical and verbal discussions into a model that recognizes the structure and performance of *vugbe*, and which localizes the practice of stylizing *vugbe* dialogues by considering musical and social factors that serve as boundaries to the expression of style. Beginning with an introduction of the concept of atsiã in Ewe arts, I will then describe the structure and performance practice of Ewe drum language conversations, derived from a detailed analysis of 128 *vugbewo* drawn from ten dance-drumming genres. Next, I will discuss how an *azagunɔ* is limited in the use and alteration of *vugbe* by the performance context, and how they develop certain habits and strategies based upon both musical and culture limits. In the second half of this paper I will use this framework to analyze eight *vugbe*wo drawn from several genres of music, which were performed by four drummers from different parts of southern Eweland. I will examine how each drummer negotiates the structure of the *vugbe* using the processes and strategies previously defined, before drawing some general conclusions about the stylistic process in southern Ewe drumming.

The concept of *atsiã* within Ewe performing arts

Ewe music-making is a communal activity, therefore during a music event even general participants are able to display their style in minute but nevertheless personally satisfying ways, as long as they do not interfere with the sentiment and flow of the event. General stylistic practices might include the manner of wrapping one's cloth, one's particular hairstyle, the way one dances, the look of concentration on a one's face, or injecting a spontaneous yell like "nye ma" (that's it!). Very few, however, have the skill and the opportunity to display their style in one of the more visible acts of the music event like drumming, solo dancing, and lead singing. As I will demonstrate below, each *vugbe* conversation is comprised of one or more core phrases that have a basic, unstylized form which I will call the theme. Although drummers are generally accorded local esteem by the ways in which they are able to develop and stylize the theme of each *vugbe* pattern in performance, within Ewe music communities there is also a disdain for gratuitous displays of virtuosity or technical skill, which might invite the comment, "*eglo*" (it is too much). Even talented artists may push the boundaries of local tastes by showing off too much, at the expense of the sentiment of the particular event. Prospective stylists also have to contend with public reactions against their interpretation of a particular musical item, a sentiment that might be unmagnanimously expressed by comments like, "*amea, ménya naneke o*" (this person, s/he does not know anything!). Another common critique leveled at displays of style is "*emɔ ko dom wòle*"

(s/he is just bluffing), usually given in response to an overly enthusiastic participant who tries to add style to something in a manner that is beyond their skill level. Given the thoughtful compositional structure of Ewe *vugbe* phrases, the theme of each phrase becomes embedded in the collective memory over time, such that any alteration of it – adding or taking some element away – seizes the focus of the musicians and attentive participants. Within this collectively produced artistic moment, even an unexpected silence impacts the musical texture as much as embellishment or improvisation.

Atsiã forms the basis of the creative arts in Eweland including speechmaking, giving introductions, telling stories, and weaving cloth. All of these artistic forms are based upon the idea of a recognized theme that becomes the starting point for stylization. This places atsiã within the larger cultural area of Pan-African expression, where style is a measure of artistic and even physical achievement in acts ranging from delivering a rhyme to slamming a basketball.[7] Among the Dan of Liberia, for example, the eminent scholar of African arts, Robert Farris Thompson heard a similar term, nyaa ka, which he translates as "moving with flair," noting that by the practice of nyaa ka "I have added something to my dance or walking, to show my beauty to attract the attention of all those around me even if they should be thinking of something else" (Thompson 1974: 16). Indeed, the provocative nature of one's individual style, as it pushes and occasionally transgresses boundaries of accepted tastes as well as challenges the abilities of rival artists, is something instantly recognizable in a wide range of African and Diasporic expressive cultures (Caponi 1999). Throughout this cultural area, individual artists become known for the style in which they deliver the expected themes and components of their respective forms, yet another facet of the word atsiã.

Apart from the cognitive ability to generate fresh ideas (susu), Ewe drummers must also sublimate their expression of style to local musical sensibilities, which regulate the amount of style appropriate for each genre, which drums are permitted to play variations, and the amount of space open for improvisation. In the performance of a shrine dance, for example, the sacred nature of the occasion carries a notion that styling (shining), be kept within certain limits in order to prevent drawing too much attention to the drumming, which is meant to accompany the singing and dancing.[8] I recall an occasion when I was practicing adding style to a new *vugbe* dialogue I was learning for the *Afɔtui* dance of the *Yeve* shrine, when suddenly my teacher Kwadzo Tagborlo exclaimed, "ee James! Ne *míayiɖe ʋufofe a, ne nefoe neneme a, Vedzua áva le wò*" (James, if we go to a music event and you play that way, the spirit will catch you!). During a *Yeve* dance-drumming event, the focus is meant to be on the *Yevesi* (*Yeve* shrine members), who are performing as a service to the divine sprits. Moreover,

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7   See Gates (1988: 64–88) for a discussion of *signifyin'*, a process of African (American) verbal play that could be translated in Ewe as *atsiã*. For a discussion of the personal style of black athletes, see Dyson (1994) and Greenfield (1975).

8   Berliner also notes a similar practice among Shona *mbira* players, who show restraint when improvising on certain pieces. (Berliner 1981: 95).

as divine muses themselves the *Yevesi* are also anxious to display and test their own artistic and supernatural powers, so musicians must take great care not to show off or appear to be boastful, lest they attract envy or annoyance. Still, it would not be musically appropriate to simply play the *Yeve* drum language without injecting some artistic spark. Hence, it takes years of experience to be able to appreciate the appropriate aesthetic for each music genre.

Figure 1. The stylization continuum.

There is no tolerance for uncultivated displays of style in Ewe drum performance; rather there exists a highly structured process for personalizing the theme phrases that make up the collection of drum language conversations used to choreograph each dance. Ewe musicians use the term atsiã for any type of deviation from the theme. Nevertheless, in analyzing the results of atsiã praxis we can broadly distinguish between embellishing notes of the theme, playing recognized variations of the theme, and extemporaneous improvisation within the confines of the theme's overall design. Since embellishments tend to recur regularly in individual realizations of a *vugbe*, along a continuum one might broadly distinguish two endpoints, the use of recognized variations and spontaneous improvisation.[9] As I will demonstrate below, for every *vugbe* theme there exists a repertory of standard variations that are learned when the pattern is taught or introduced. In Ewe musical discourse playing a variation or embellishment is still considered atsiã because it is reflective of a selection process by the musician – it involves knowing when, where, and for how long to play the variation before moving on, and as we will find out, playing recognized variations often sets up moments of improvisation. For the sake of clarity I will confine the use of the term improvisation to spontaneously generated phrases that may not occur again during subsequent repetitions of the pattern.

I have diagrammed this distinction between modes of style in Figure 1 using a continuum rather than bounded boxes to show that there is a spectrum of possibility between the two extremes, and sometimes without the commentary of the musician it is difficult to distinguish variation from improvisation. Hence these terms are meant to represent distinct musical strategies for adding style to a recognized model. Like kindred musicians worldwide, in order to be able to put style into a song or drum language phrase effectively, Ewe drummers tend to develop their own method of stylizing each

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9   This distinction is also noted by Nettl in his discussion of improvisation in world music traditions in general (Nettl 1974: 4–5) and also by Locke in reference to Ewe drumming (Locke 2010: note 27).

theme based upon the sum total of their experience in improvising on it, in addition to the use of certain formulae that have proven to be successful (Nettl 1974: 18). Since the analysis of style in the *vugbe* dialogues below builds on an appreciation of this stylistic process, which is normally formed over a period of many years of enculturation in Ewe music, an analytical framework that distinguishes between the use of known variations and improvisation is helpful in describing the process of atsiã. The first step is therefore to describe how drum language themes are introduced in performance.

The drum language conversation

In Ewe dance-drumming variation and improvisation occur within recognized drum language dialogues, *vugbe* (pl. *vugbewo*), a process generally described in Ewe as, "*vugã bia nya hafi asivui do nu*" (the lead drum asks a question before the response drum answers). Every genre of music is associated with a particular set of conversations, ranging from as few as two or three dialogues up to several hundred (twenty would probably be a typical average), which occasionally may be supplemented in performance with *vugbe* borrowed from other dance-drumming genres. Ʋugbe dialogues are integral to the structure of the dancing, as they cue dancers through a rendition of the dance sequence, breaking up a potentially long period of uninterrupted music into subsections of solo and group dancing. Considering the published studies of Ewe drumming cited in this study as well as my own research, I would argue that it is the drum language conversations between the lead and response drums which represent the essence of southern Ewe dance-drumming.

The term *vugbe* is made up of the words *v*u (drum) and gbe (language, words, or voice) so *vugbe* could be translated as drum language, drum voice, or drum words. Ʋugbe presents one of the most interesting connections between music and language in world music traditions. First, regardless of whether they have an actual text in the Ewe language, the composition, performance, and stylization of *vugbe* share significant linkages with other Ewe verbal forms including poetry (hakpanya), song (ha), proverbs (lododo), and drinking names (*ahanɔnkɔ*). These are all constructed from a set of themes (phrase building blocks) using a culturally bound phraseology to create extended utterances that are based on both cognitive (structural) and expressive (aesthetic, poetic) factors – even the lexicon of *vugbe* praxis is permeated with linguistic references such as question (*nyabiabia*), statement (*nya gblɔm*), and calling/invoking (*yɔ*). Second, as musical objects they also contain certain unique elements of a purely musical nature. For example, according to published studies and my own research, it seems that even for *vugbe* which have verbal texts associated with them (the majority do not), when they are stylized in performance they may deviate from the text to introduce non-lexical phrases or variations.[10] For these reasons, I would argue

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[10] Based on a survey of published studies including Jones (1959), Pantaleoni (1972b), Pantaleoni and Ladzekpo (1970), Locke (1979, 1987, 1992, 2010), Pressing (1983) and Alorwoyie and Locke (2007).

that *vugbe* are introduced and stylized using the structure of a verbal dialogue, but without the constant limit of discrete words, comparable to a jazz singer putting aside the lyrics during improvisation in order to be able to focus on creating new melodic phrases. Moreover, even *vugbe* with texts are not always commonly understood by general participants, who nevertheless are able to react to their musical features. In this sense, *vugbe* are structured like a spoken language, but are not limited by having to communicate a specific message – when a drummer is putting in style, the drum speaks using its own voice, free from the constraints of referential meaning, but still within the realm of social meaning. Drum language dialogues are generally initiated by two types of lead drum, *sogo* and *vugā,* each with its own playing technique, tonal materials, and vocabulary. Ewe drummers generally distinguish between strokes that are bounced off the drum skin (*fo*) and strokes that are pressed into the skin (*mi*), using a set of mnemonic syllables to distinguish between each stroke as indicated in the notation guides for the various drums.[11] I have taken the liberty of referring to the center bounce stroke as a bass stroke, as it serves as a convenient abbreviation. Since my notation system indicates both the relative pitch and timbre of each stroke, I have broken with the convention established by earlier researchers like Jones, Pantaleoni, and Locke, who include the mnemonic drum stroke syllables with their transcriptions of the parts in staff notation. While I acknowledge their efforts to include this culturally derived notation, I feel that it is more suitable for oral teaching and learning than written transcription. Within the collective sound produced by the entire Ewe drum ensemble, response drummers and lead drummers have to limit the duration of each bounce stroke to a time value of approximately an eighth note, or these notes will ring out and muddle up the texture. For the *sogo* drum this is accomplished by letting the fingers come to rest on the skin after each bounce stroke. On *vugā* bounced stick strokes are dampened by the left fingers, a process which is vocalized by adding an 'n' to the end of the bounced stroke: te–n (see Figure 3).[12] For the response drums, bounced strokes are simply muted by press strokes.
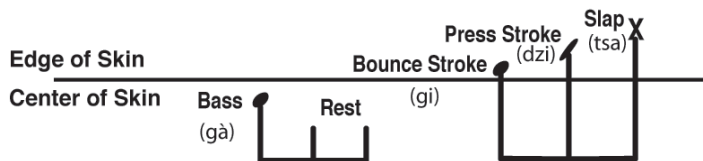

Figure 2. *Sogo* notation guide

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[11]   Jones (1959: 66–7) translates these as free and muted beats, Pantaleoni classifies these as shots and muted shots (1972b: 66–71), while Locke (1987: 40, 70–3) uses the terms bounced and pressed strokes, which I continue herein.

[12]   While this practice was first noted by Ewe drummer Seth Cudjoe (1958), Pantaleoni was the first to represent it in his notation (Pantaleoni 1972b).

The *sogo* (*agbobli*) is a low-pitched drum with multiple potential roles within the Ewe ensemble – here we shall consider its role as a lead drum played with the hands. As shown in Figure 2, the instrument produces four sounds with the left and right hands: a bass tone in the center region of the drum skin (*gà*), a bounced hand stroke (*gi*), a pressed hand stroke (*dzí*), and a slap stroke on the outer edge of the skin (*tsa*). Despite its apparent similarities with other hand drums like the Afro-Cuban conga and the Mande djembe, the *sogo*'s tuning and design limit its tonal vocabulary in performance. Hence, *vugbe* dialogues and stylings on the *sogo* tend to emphasize the more resonant bass and pressed strokes, with bounced strokes occurring as rolls or connecting figures. A typical *sogo vugbe* conversation is composed of a series of bass and bounced strokes leading to one or more press strokes, which often coincide with the bounce strokes of the response drums. The slap stroke on the *sogo* is not as penetrating as those produced on other hand drums, and it is mainly used to keep time between phrases.

The second southern Ewe lead drum, *vugā*, contains a few subtypes including *atsimevu* and y*evevu*, both of which describe tall drums that are leaned on a stand and are played using two different stick/hand configurations. This allows them to produce a much wider range of sounds than *sogo*, as shown in the notation guide in Figure 3. In the first configuration, *vugā* is played using a drumstick in the right hand and the bare left hand. The left hand can thus produce all of the hand strokes of *sogo* and the right hand can draw from a palette of stick strokes including bounced (tè), pressed (tsí), and stopped strokes (tó) as well as strokes to the side of the drum shell (kpà). Most *vugbe* patterns composed for *vugā* are intoned in this configuration, typically beginning with a figure that alternates between bounced stick and hand strokes – sometimes preceded by one or more bass strokes – and ending in one or more press strokes, which like the *sogo* often coincide with the bounce strokes of the response drums.
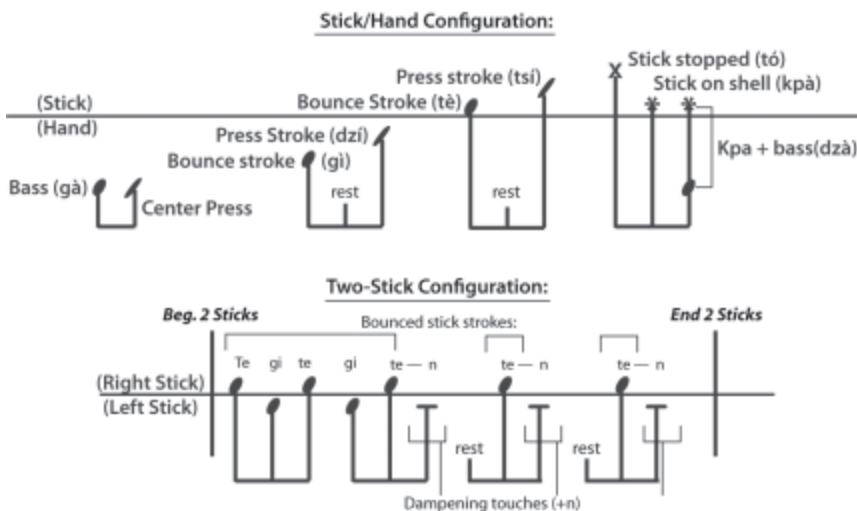

Figure 3. *Vugā* notation guide.

The sound 'to' [pronounced 'toe'] is produced by pressing the drum skin with the fingers of the left hand while striking the skin with the right stick, and typically is used to introduce phrases or in some cases as a substitute for a bass stroke. In the second playing configuration the left hand also uses a stick, and the drummer is then able to play extended rolling phrases that improvise on the response, a process called *vuyɔyrɔ*, invoking the drum.[13] In this mode drummers may also use the pinky and ring fingers of the left hand to stop the resonation of strokes or to stop the skin for a 'to' stroke. Also note that in some contexts *sogo* may be played in the manner of *vugā*, using the same two playing configurations.
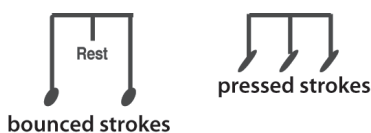
Figure 4. Response drum notation guide.

When a *vugbe* conversation is initiated by one of the lead drums it will be answered by one or more response drums, which will also establish their theme for the conversation. The most common response drum is *kidi* (*asivui, kpetsi*), a medium-sized barrel drum that is played with two sticks. As shown in Figure 4, *kidi* players draw from only two sounds, a bounce stroke and a press stroke. Within the context of a live music event the pressed strokes are inaudible; thus it is generally the open tones that form the relevant portion of the response while the press strokes are used to dampen the open tones or to keep time between phrases. *Sogo* can also function as a response drum – in this case it will be played with two sticks in the exact manner of *kidi*, but at a lower pitch level. When there are multiple response drums, the higher pitched drums tend to stay close to the theme, while the *sogo* or low-pitched *kidi* will have more freedom to add style, following a general Ewe aesthetic for variability in the lower frequency range and predictability in the higher frequency range.
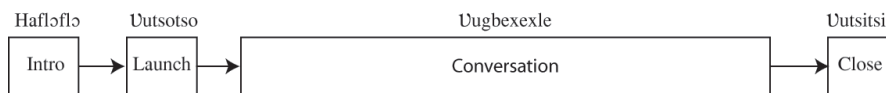

Figure 5. Progression of a typical dance-drumming event.

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[13]   Pantaleoni calls this "decorative play," but describes essentially the same process (Pantaleoni and Ladzekpo 1972b: 77–9).

When evaluating the statement and stylization of a *vugbe* conversation, it is important to remember that they are part of a structured music event, which regulates the temporal and stylistic choices made by all of the participant/performers at the occasion. In Ewe, a dance-drumming genre is called a *ʋu* (drum), which is a metonym for a complete artistic event, including drumming, dancing, singing, speech-making, prayers, and fashion; and an exposition of a *vu* occurs at a *vuƒoƒe* (drum beating place), a public music event that usually occurs in a community space or shrine. At some of the larger funerals, there may be multiple *vuƒoƒe* throughout the funeral grounds featuring different genres of music that cater to the different tastes of the funeral participants. The performance of a *vu* follows a basic progression, (see Figure 5), usually beginning with an introductory song intoned *a capella* by the song leader, *henɔ*, a process called *haflɔflɔ* (ascending the song). When the song text returns back to the beginning, the *azagunɔ* will launch the drums and support instruments in alignment with the singers using a recognized entrance call, a process called *vutsotso* (lifting up the drums) in Ewe. Once the drums have entered the *vu* will progress to the conversation stage, which may last from a little as a few minutes to over an hour, where the drummers, singers, and dancers engage in a mutually supporting series of musical dialogues. During this time, the *henɔ* and *haxeviwo* (chorus) will progress through one or more songs in call and response fashion, while individual dancers or spontaneous groups of dancers enter the drum ring or carve out a bubble within the crowd to dance the appropriate dance sequence. Concurrently, the *azagunɔ* and response drummers will introduce *vugbe* conversations in synchronization with the progression of the song and dance sequences. At his own discretion, or by signal from the *henɔ*, group officer, or host, the *azagunɔ* will bring the *vu* to a close by intoning the closing phrase or sequence (*vutsitsi*).
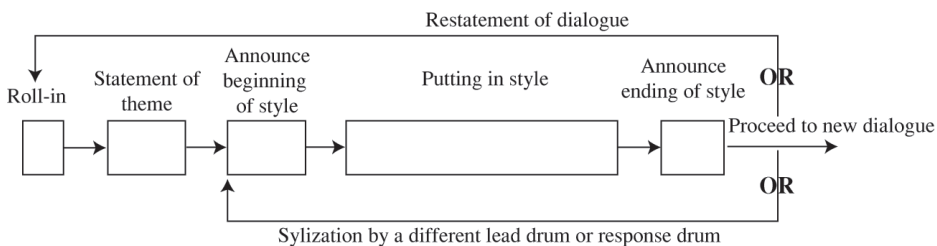
Figure 6. Progression of a typical *vugbe* sequence.

In order to produce a well-formed *vugbe* conversation, the lead and response drums introduce and stylize their parts according to an implicit structural format that guides the progression of each dialogue from its opening statement and stylization, to its

eventual restatement or progression to a new pattern.[14] As illustrated in Figure 6, a *vugbe* dialogue is first introduced by one of the lead drums using a drum roll, designated the roll-in, drawn from a recognized set of changing phrases. The roll-in also alerts the dancers, who will be in the waiting portion of the dance sequence (*adasasam*), to prepare to begin the dance sequence (*ɣeɖuɖu, wɔɖuɖu*). At the appropriate place in the bell cycle the *azagunɔ* will bring out a *vugbe* conversation (*édo vugbe ɖa*) using little or no ornamentation to the theme in order to clearly signal the pattern to the response drums, so they may also enter with their parts. Once the conversation has begun the expectation is that the theme will repeat once or twice before transitioning to a vamp section, where the lead and response drums can actively stylize on a repeated portion or variation of the original theme. During this time the dancers will reach the end of their dance sequence, and finish it with a closing gesture that coincides with beat 1 of the timeline, a process called quenching the dance or putting down the dance (*wɔtsitsi, ewɔ kɔ ɖi*). By that point another group of dancers will have entered the dance space to begin their waiting steps, and eventually another roll-in will signal the beginning of a new conversation, and the entire sequence, which may have lasted from thirty seconds to a few minutes, will begin anew.
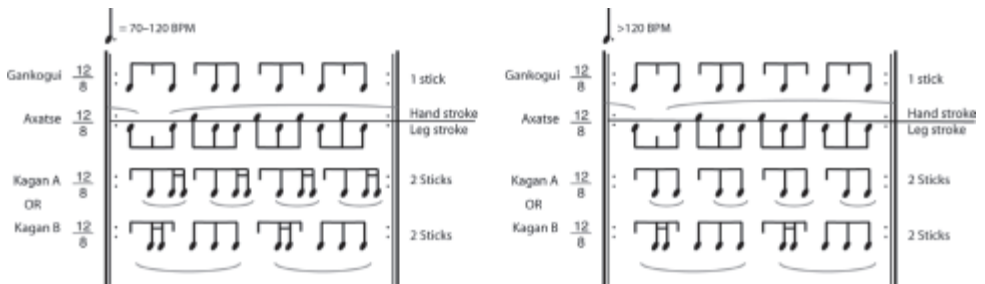
Figure 7. Common rhythmic backgrounds for *vugbe* dialogues.

Having discussed the place of *vugbe* within the performance of a dance-drumming genre and also a typical *vugbe* sequence, it will be helpful in the discussions of atsiã below to understand the larger rhythmic background where they are composed and performed. All of the examples in this study occur within a regular compound quadruple meter, (see Figure 7), which is outlined by three instruments: *gankogui* (double-bell), *axatse* (gourd shaker), and *kagan* (alto drum).[15] In this arrangement the parts of *gankogui*

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[14] See Alorwoyie and Locke (2007) for a similar discussion of the progression of a typical *vugbe* pattern.

[15] I will refer to the main beats as beat 1, beat 2 etc. When specifying a specific time point within a main beat, I will separate the component eighth note pulses with a period: '1.3' indicates beat one, pulse three, and '3.2' indicates beat three, pulse two etc, following a convention established by Locke (2010, 2011).

and *axatse* outline a time cycle based upon the length of their repeating phrases, and the kagan part defines the rhythmic density and shape of each main beat. As the time cycle essentially consists of four beats of three pulses each, I have chosen to notate the parts using 12/8 meter. At faster tempos the *kagan* drum part simplifies its 'A' figure to two eighth notes, hence in the analyses below I refer to them simply as the slow and fast rhythmic backgrounds. Since the focus of this study is on the stylization of the lead and response drums, I have chosen not to notate the *axatse* and *kagan* parts in the transcriptions below, but they will still be audible on the accompanying recordings and I have labeled the relevant background at the top of each transcription.

Dance / Type	Takada	Nyayito	Akpoka	Agbadza	Togo Atsia	Akpoka	Afa	Afotui	Sonu	Dzigbordi	Sogbadze	Total
SSP	3	2	6	9	7	4	4	1	3	8	0	47
DSP	0	0	2	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	7
SAP	3	0	4	9	5	4	2	2	2	10	1	42
DAP	1	0	3	6	3	3	3	4	5	1	3	32
Total	**7**	**2**	**15**	**25**	**15**	**13**	**9**	**8**	**11**	**19**	**4**	**128**

Figure 8. Summary of common *vugbe* types.

After a thorough analysis of 128 different *vugbe* patterns composed within the rhythmic backgrounds outlined above, I have discovered a set of four basic compositional structures, based upon temporal space (bell cycles/measures) and internal phrase structure (symmetrical, asymmetrical): the *single-measure symmetrical pattern* (SSP), the *dual-measure symmetrical pattern* (DSP), the *single-measure asymmetrical pattern* (SAP), and the *dual-measure asymmetrical pattern* (DAP).[16] Perhaps the most significant of these characteristics for our examination of *atsiā* is the internal structure of the component lead and response phrases, which I will argue actually determines

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[16]   The data from the chart in Figure 8 was gathered from my own analyses of 128 *vugbewo* drawn from the following dances transcribed in these published and unpublished studies: Takaɖa dance (Pantaleoni and Ladzekpo 1970); Nyayito dance (Jones 1959 Volume II: 11–40, 166–218); Agbadza-Akpoka (Pressing 1983); Agbadza (Alorwoyie and Locke 2007); Agbadza-Akpoka (Ciccotelli 2004); and Togo Atsia, Afa, Afotui, Sogbadze, Sonu, Dzigbordi (Burns 2008). Most of the *vugbe* were of only one section (theme), but when *vugbe* with multiple themes were encountered, I considered each theme separately.

the use of musical space within the conversation. The most common *vugbe* structure is the single-measure symmetrical pattern. Symmetrical *vugbe* are comprised of a single phrase block repeated two or more times, with each iteration occurring on a different time point and often with a different relationship to the main beats. Some examples of SSP's have been transcribed in Figure 9. All four *vugbe* in the figure divide the twelve pulses into repeating phrase blocks of various lengths, resulting in a series of mathematical sets, based upon all of the possible permutations of equal groupings of notes (Anku 2000). The dotted lines in the figure highlight the span of each motif within the total bell cycle. The response phrases for each conversation are also rather dense, which will affect how lead drummers craft variations and improvisation. In rare cases longer phrase blocks divide two bell cycles into symmetrical groups, often three blocks of eight pulses. I have classified these *vugbe* as dual-measure symmetrical patterns because an entire sequence occupies the space of two complete bell cycles.

Figure 9. Single-measure *vugbe* patterns with symmetrical phrasing (SSP).

Vugbe that are not based upon symmetrical phrasing have a much different sound, as they interact with the total bell cycle as opposed to dividing it into sections, conjuring up a sense of poetry or song. Indeed, some *vugbe* of this type are composed to accompany the lyrics of songs, with the strokes of the drums following their melodic contour (Locke and Agbeli 1980). The response phrases in asymmetrical patterns also tend to

be much sparser than patterns with symmetrical phrasing, and are punctuated by large gaps of space between groups of bounce strokes. Of the *vugbe* patterns I surveyed, a slightly greater number contained phrases that occupy a single bell cycle, which I have classified as single-measure asymmetrical patterns, SAP. There were also many patterns with component phrases that occupied two bell cycles, which I have termed dual-measure asymmetrical patterns, DAP. An example of a DAP has been notated in Figure 10 from the *Sonu* dance, a genre of funeral music generally patronized by elderly women. In this *vugbe* dialogue *atsimevu* is the lead drum, and it is accompanied by the slow rhythmic background from Figure 7, *kagan* pattern A. The conversation is comprised of three phrases of differing lengths and stroke combinations, which occupy the space of two bell cycles. There is also an entire beat of empty space during beat 1 of measure 1. As described above, *kidi's* response basically follows the press strokes of *atsimevu*, in this case doubling each press stroke. In contrast to symmetrical patterns, stylizing this pattern will entail working with uneven response groups, and therefore will require a different approach to putting in style.

Figure 10. Dual-Measure Asymmetrical Pattern (DAP).

The structural features of *vugbe* described above, including their performance practice and internal design, provide important limits to the expression of style in drum performance. Within each drum language sequence, for example, there are moments when the drummers play the theme and moments when they introduce variation and improvisation. Looking deeper into the design of *vugbe* conversations drawn from a range of studies, there are important structural aspects of each phrase that will naturally shape the creation of variations and original bouts of stylized drumming. Apart from these factors inherent to the structure of Ewe *vugbe* dialogues, there are other important performance related factors that affect the stylistic process, which now bear some consideration.

Boundaries to the expression of style
Outside of drumming lessons and performances I learned a great deal about *atsiã*

during the course of several formal and informal discussions with my teacher Kwadzo Tagborlo, which I have edited into a series of statements and commentaries below.[17] Most of these conversations began as musical discussions, as I sought to evaluate recordings of my drumming or the drumming of others. Instead of focusing on specific notes or using the mnemonic syllables to illustrate a point, however, Mr. Tagborlo would often speak about how the drumming did not fulfill certain cultural sensibilities, with comments such as, "*ema, mevivina nam o*" (this is not sweet for me), or "*amea, évu fom sɛsɛɖa akpa*" (this person, they are playing with too much force). Interestingly, Mr. Tagborlo's commentaries bear a great resemblance to those of Dagomba drummer Ibrahim Abdulai in his conversations with Chernoff, which also emphasize the appropriateness of style, advocating the ideal of gentle (*baalim*) versus "rough" drumming or dancing (*golsigu*) (Chernoff 1979: 59–64, 108–9). As I will discuss below, most of the technical/musical aspects of *atsiã* were demonstrated by Mr. Tagborlo in lessons or performance – when I would try and verbally discuss techniques for adding style to a *vugbe* theme using the drum syllables for illustration, however, he would just shake his head in affirmation or refutation, and then shift the conversation to a discussion of how the larger performance environment, particularly the singing and dancing, affects one's ability and opportunity to play with style. During performance, for example, dancers expect the *azagunɔ* to change the drum language frequently in order to be able to initiate a dance sequence, giving the drum soloist just a few bell cycles to make their statement before starting a new cycle. The overarching point of his commentaries, therefore, was to highlight the challenges of adding style within the confines of the entire performance activities at the music event, as well as to describe how *atsiã* must conform to local aesthetics and values.

   "*Ame sia ame hã be yedo atsiã ɖe me*" (Everyone else wants to put their style in too). First and foremost, Ewe drummers interact with a number of other potential style makers from the various performance domains, including the *henɔ* (song leader), *haxeviwo* (chorus) and *atsiãwɔlawo* (solo dancers). In local musical discourse, the drumming is meant to accompany the dancing and the singing, described in Ewe as *evuwo, wokplɔ eha/ewɔ ɖo*; hence, song and dance leaders are given greater space for style than the *azagunɔ*. Since the *azagunɔ* must always maintain the flow of the dancing and singing, in the process of introducing and stylizing a *vugbe* conversation he must also mentally maintain the sequence of the song, with its alternating phrases between the *henɔ* and *haxeviwo*, as well as the progression of the dance sequences. For example, within the relationship between the drum language and the songs, there is a preference for having the roll-in to a new *vugbe* conversation align with the beginning of the song or with the beginning of a new section in a longer song composition.[18] In addition to

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[17]   Primarily two recorded interviews: May 5, 2004 and June 6, 2010, and one non-recorded discussion on October 15, 2009.

[18]   See examples in Burns (2009), and also observe Mr. Alorwoyie's negotiation of the various drum language sequences for the Agbadza dance in Alorwoyie and Locke (2007).

the aforementioned need to curtail the stylization of each dialogue out of recognition for the pacing of the dance sequences, the *azagunɔ* will occasionally be required to play drum language phrases to cue special solo dance sequences, also called *atsiā*. These segments limit the *azagunɔ's* expression of style even further, often to no more than simple embellishments to the theme.

"*Azagunɔwo hā, wodzi tsim be wo ha wofo nane*" (All of the lead drummers are rushing to play their *vugbe*). During performance, there will be several potential soloists vying for a chance to play the next *vugbe* conversation, so if one *azagunɔ* gets long-winded in their style, another drummer will cut them off with a roll-in to a new *vugbe* pattern. The roll-in is also the means by which a potential lead drummer announces their intent to speak – in order to draw the response drummers away from the dialogue of one soloist and begin following their own *vugbe* conversation, the *azagunɔ* must play their roll-in louder than, or before the others. This was perhaps Mr. Tagborlo's most consistent critique during my early years, that I become too transfixed by the moment, so that the more experienced soloists around me kept beating me to the draw, bringing out their *vugbe* before I could introduce mine. Although my hesitancy limited my own moments of style, even a great *azagunɔ* must integrate what they do into the complete performance.

"*Ménye vuwo katā dona atsiā ɖe me o*" (It's not all of the drums that put style inside). The drums have different responsibilities and roles within the drum ensemble.[19] Certain instruments including gankogui, axatse, and kagan are essential to the rhythmic background of the dance, and therefore are expected to vary little, if at all, during a music event. Musicians playing these parts must restrict their creative impulses for the benefit of the dance, but can still indulge their artistic sensibilities by the way they smile, or by suddenly shouting a vote of encouragement. Once in a while the bell player might throw in a flourish or an axatse player might suddenly stop the pattern and shake it rapidly like a rattle, but these are rare and of brief duration. The response drums have more freedom to play with style, and may often embellish notes in their pattern by doubling open tones or replacing them with press strokes. In larger ensembles one of the response drums, usually sogo or a low-pitched kidi, may also add style between statements of the lead drum. Nevertheless, it is primarily the lead drum that is given the most space for adding style to the music.

"*Méle be nanɔ vu fom giɖigiɖi o, aw, ne nèfoe viɖa nàkɔ vu ɖi, nèfoe viɖa nàkɔ vu ɖi*" (You do not have to be playing too forcefully, play small and then put the drum(ing) down, play small and then put the drum(ing) down). Outside of the limited temporal and performance space for *atsiā*, stylization of a *vugbe* pattern is also shaped by an aesthetic preference for bursts of dense notes followed (or preceded) by moments of relative silence. Displays of style in Ewe drumming are not based on lengthy, flashy

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19   Abdulai also tells Chernoff that in Dagomba music, "Different drums may have more or less freedom within a particular dance, and in different dances the music may call for more or less embellishment of the beat" (Chernoff 1979: 59).

solos but rather on making concise statements that resolve into moments of sparse rhythmic activity, so that other drummers may now add their *atsiã*. As we will observe in the transcribed examples below, actual moments of improvised playing usually amount to only one or two brief phrases per *vugbe* dialogue. In contrast we will also see an even greater amount of time devoted to playing recognized variations that reduce the strokes of the *vugbe* theme to a few representative notes. This common aesthetic of contrasting density with sparseness in African arts is described by Thompson as "vividness cast into equilibrium," where moments of vigorous dancing, drumming, painting, or carving resolve into moments of delicacy and balance. In his discussions with Chernoff, Mr. Abdulai also emphasizes the correct use of space, which Chernoff summarizes in the comment, "the African drummer concerns himself as much with the notes he does not play as with the accents he delivers" (Chernoff 1979, 60). Hence, I would argue that the art of adding style in Ewe drumming is based on creating space as much as filling it, and that musical interest comes from the appropriate use of contrasting densities and dynamics rather than rhythmic devices like syncopation and cross-rhythm, which I have argued are not part of Ewe musical discourse.[20]

"*Ne nebe nado atsiã ɖe me, éle be ésɔ kple asiviwo*" (If you want to add style, make sure that it maintains the correct alignment with the response drums). Recall that in the introductory *vugbe* patterns examined above, the single-measure symmetrical patterns contained equally spaced groups of response phrases, giving a natural opening between each group that could be free for putting in style. With the asymmetrical pattern, there was a larger gap between onsets of the response, which will encourage the formulation of longer improvised phrases that can lead-in to the response. In all of these cases the flow of stylization is bound by the shape of the response, and an *azagunɔ* would not converse with the bell cycle as if it were simply an unstructured time span of four beats; instead, drummers construct phrases that interact with both the overall shape of the timeline as well as the second-order designs of the response drums. This means that a drummer must absorb and devise specific variations and improvisational fragments for every *vugbe* conversation, based upon the unique shape it creates with the rhythmic background.

Apart from telling me to pay attention to the response drums, Mr. Tagborlo would often say, "*Ne azagunɔ nenyea, ne nebe nafoe nane, ele be evuwo kata anɔ susu me*" (If you are a lead drummer, and if you want to play something, you need to keep all of the drums in your thoughts). A lead drummer cannot be shortsighted – one must consider the shape of the parts at any given moment and also be aware of the larger progression

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[20]   Many scholars of Ewe music have argued that rhythmic tension and resolution function in Ewe music as they do in Western music, i.e. to create and sustain musical excitement, including Jones (1959, 21–2), Pantaleoni (1972b, 75) and Locke (1982, 2010, 2011). In contrast, I have demonstrated that these rhythmic devices are in fact present in a variety African and Diasporic musics, and can be found both within constant support parts as well as lead phrases; thus, their ubiquity refutes the idea that they carry any local notions of tension, ambiguity, or confusion (Burns 2010).

of musical ideas within the interconnected performance domains of the song and dance sequences. Drumming always occurs within a mosaic tapestry of motion and sound that incorporates both vertical (rhythmic background) and horizontal (phrase) dimensions.[21] This is one important difference between my work and that of the late Dr. Anku, who conceptualized variation and improvisation as a series of interacting circles, implying a series of point-to-point connections with the rhythmic background rather than a constant field of rhythmic gravity, where larger thematic shapes like the timeline and specific response patterns influence the creation of new phrases (Anku 2005). Therefore, rather than a series of connected circles, which touch only at discrete points, a more apt metaphor for this relationship would be a piece of kente cloth, woven on a fixed grid but containing larger blocks of designs (Burns 2010). Tellingly, Anku's model was only able to account for didactic examples of drumming played out of context, rather than the more flowing lines of a talented drummer in performance. Ewe drummers must always think in linear terms, including the progression of the dance, individual *vugbe* dialogues, and specific moments of style.

Acquired habits of style

When playing a *vugbe* dialogue in performance the lead and response drums alternate between playing the theme, playing recognized variations or embellishments of the theme, and playing new phrases that are spontaneously generated to suit the musical moment. In contrast to the verbal discussions with Mr. Tagborlo presented above, these acquired habits for negotiating specific *vugbe* sequences were not generally discussed with me in abstract form, but were rather demonstrated during the learning process, *nusɔsrɔ*, a term that basically means to imitate. This is another important connection between the Ewe drum and spoken languages, in both cases native speakers learn through imitating what adults say, and then eventually develop their own manner of speaking. Ewe drummers think like a verbal artist, using the vocabulary of drum sounds to state and manipulate the themes. It should not be a surprise that in replicating a speaking, signifying device like the voice, variations and improvisations created on *sogo* and *atimevu* should also follow a discernable set of stylistic techniques. In his ethnopoetic analysis of Chinook storytelling, for example, Hymes (2003: 110-1) defines five devices by which the artist may "elaborate" on the story, including *itemization*, where a statement like "he got up and went to breakfast," would be elaborated as "he got up from bed, the floor was cold so he put on his slippers, he looked at his scrubby face in the mirror (and so on)," in addition to a process called *cataloguing,* where the speaker adds lists of names or items to a expand a basic action sequence in the story. These processes serve to personalize the story, thereby demonstrating the style and skill of the storyteller. In this section I would like to similarly describe some stylistic devices

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21   The concept of mosaic time was first proposed by Ruth Stone (1985), but has also been adapted by Nzewi (1997, 40) and the present author (Burns 2010). Thompson also emphasizes the interplay of elements and designs in African art in general (1973: 22).

used by Ewe drummers to elaborate on the theme of a *vugbe* conversation.

The most detailed and informative discussion of these stylistic techniques has been in the work of David Locke, who has spent many years performing, analyzing, and teaching southern Ewe music, particularly in his ethnographically based instructional books for the dances *Gahu* and *Kpegisu*, which he produced in collaboration with the Ewe drummer Godwin Agbeli (Locke 1987: 74–5; 1992: 127–31). Locke has rather carefully distilled the results of years of this collaborative work into a set of discrete techniques for adding style to the various themes he introduces. For example, one of the most basic stylistic techniques described by Locke for both the lead and response drums involves what I called *rhythmic variation*, where thematic notes are played using a slightly different rhythmic figure.[22] As shown in Figure 11, there are three basic types of rhythmic variation: *doubling*, where two sixteenth notes substitute for a single eighth note; *swing*, where a dotted eighth note block replaces a group of two eighth notes, and *substitution*, where a four stroke block replaces an eighth note block.
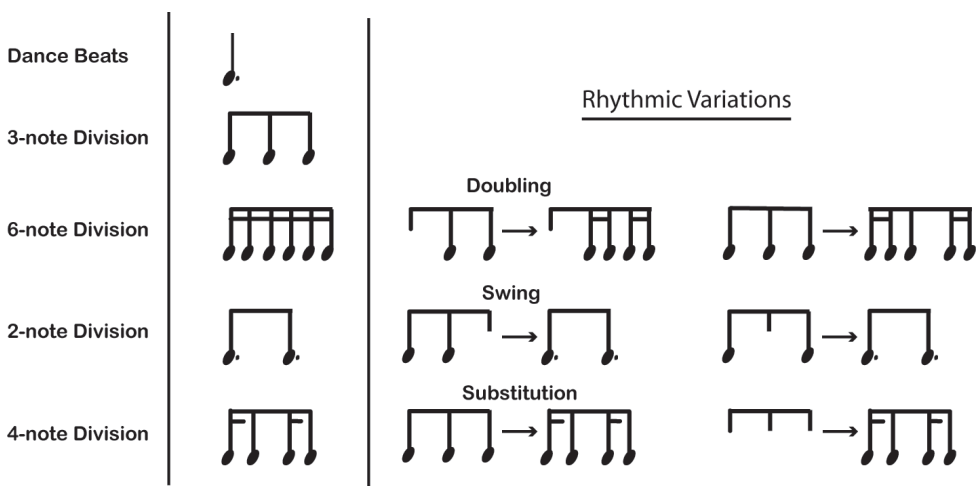
Figure 11. *Vugbe* phrase building blocks and substitutions.

Another basic stylistic technique noted by Locke is what I would like to term *embellishment* (Locke uses ornamentation), where a player decorates a thematic note with one of the following types of stroke combinations, notated in Figure 12: a bounced roll with the stick, labeled phrase 'a' in measure 1, which leads into a left hand stroke; a single-note hand flam, labeled phrase 'b' in measure 2, where the left hand inserts a stroke immediately before a structural note that is to be played with the right stick

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[22] Locke uses several terms for this process including time displacement, syncopation, metric modulation, and idea substitution (Locke 1987: 74–5; 1992: 127–31).

or right hand; and lastly, when playing in the 2-stick configuration on *vugã*, one may embellish a right hand stick stroke with a press roll, labeled 'c', that leads into a left hand stick stroke.

Figure 12. Examples of common embellishments.

The practices of rhythmic variation and embellishment are generally used to construct basic variations based on notes of the theme, but these practices by themselves will not produce a well-formed dialogue, which requires specific types of variations at certain places within the *vugbe* sequence illustrated in Figure 6. In order to demonstrate this process clearly, let us consider two complete *vugbe* sequences, a single-measure symmetrical pattern (SSP) and a dual-measure asymmetrical pattern (DAP) transcribed in Figure 13 [CD track 1] and Figure 14 [CD track 2]. For each example I have notated the *vugbe* theme and then some possible variations and improvisations. The first place that is available for stylization is during the initial roll-in to the conversation, which is embellished in Figure 14 using the technique described in measure 2 of Figure 12, labeled 'a' in the transcription. When stating the *vugbe* theme, the *azagunɔ* may also embellish one or more of its structural notes, demonstrated in measure 3 of Figure 14 using the technique from measure 1 of Figure 12, labeled 'b' in the figure. The lead drummer may also use a rhythmic variation, but this is generally kept to a minimum so that the *vugbe* can be stated clearly. The response drums may stylize the theme at anytime by doubling strokes of the theme, described above in Figure 11, especially

isolated single notes at the beginning of phrases, and groups of single notes at the ends of phrases. An example of this, labeled 'a', occurs in measure 5 of Figure In order to move to the vamp section, the *azagunɔ* will often employ another type of recognized variation that I call the *reduction variation*, which reduces notes of the *vugbe* theme into an abbreviated version, opening up the musical space.[23] Reduction variations reduce thematic notes to a skeletal phrase that highlights the shape of the response. In SSP patterns, the reduction variation is often built using stroke substitution, as shown in measure 4 of Figure 13, where bounce strokes are replaced with a lesser number of press strokes. In DAP patterns, the entire first part of the phrase may be omitted in the reduction variation or it may be replaced by slap strokes or press strokes – an example of this occurs in measure 5 of Figure 14. By simplifying the lead pattern, the *azagunɔ* is able to fill the resultant space with new phrases, which now stand out from the main theme.

During the vamp section, where the lead and response drums have the greatest freedom to improvise, I have observed different strategies for negotiating the call and response based upon whether the theme's phrases are symmetrical or asymmetrical. With SSP patterns, the main challenge faced by the lead drummer is that the response phrases tend to be quite dense, leaving little open space for improvisation. Once the reduction variation has been established, one common strategy is to fill these brief gaps between response phrases with contrasting notes, usually bass or open tones.

The better improvisers are able to work out a series of new phrases that cleverly play on the response, a process I would like to call riffing, defined as the use of improvised phrases that fill in the brief spaces between successive response phrases in a drum dialogue with symmetrical phrasing.[24] *Riffing* is another connection between drum language and other modes of verbal patterning drawn from spoken and sung texts – it captures the image of an Ewe formal greeting or the pouring of libation, where the speaker will begin to probe deeper into their line of questioning/reasoning while the chorus continues to sustain the overall forward motion of the dialogue with its persistent response.

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[23]   Locke speaks about reduction as a general improvisational strategy, not as a specific type of variation with structural features (Locke 1987: 74–5; 1992: 127–31).

[24]   Lomax's cantometrics defines this practice as *simple litany with a high degree of variation* (Lomax 1968, 58–9).

Figure 13. Basic strategies for stylizing an SSP *vugbe*.

Figure 14. Basic strategies for stylizing a DAP *vugbe*.

Riffing is also used by the henɔ in certain Ewe songs that have a vamp section consisting of a short response with space for improvised passages. Below is an example of this drawn from a song from the Afa shrine. The form of the song is divided into two sections, A and B, with section A serving as the regular verse, and section B serving as the vamp section. After singing section A for a few repeats, the henɔ will transition to section B, where he may insert multiple variations of text while the chorus maintains its response pattern. In this example the leader is able to employ two different variations – "Ewui ha" and "Edae ha".

Section A	*L: Avugbe lolo ne aɖela wui hã kɔla méli o.*	A large antelope, if the hunter kills it, there will be no one to help him carry it.
	R: Avugbe lolo ee aɖela wui hã kɔla méli o.	A large antelope, if the hunter kills it, there will be no one to help him carry it
Section B	*L: Ewui hã,*	If he should kill it,
	R: Kɔla méli o.	There will be no one to carry it.
	L: Edae hã,	If he should shoot it,
	R: Kɔla méli o.	There will be no one to carry it.
	L: Ewui hã,	If he should kill it,
	R: Kɔla méli o.	There will be no one to carry it.
	L: Edae hã,	If he should shoot it,
	R: Kɔla méli o.	There will be no one to carry it.

Figure 15. Example of riffing in an *Afa* song.

I might add that these types of riffs are an important Pan-African method for doing it with style – Floyd notes that the practice of riffing is central to African and African-American music; among the latter population he theorizes that it was nurtured in the sermons of Black churches before it became the foundation for modern African-American music (Floyd 1995). Consider the popular James Brown song, "Soul Power," where Brown riffs with the chorus, who like the response drums in Ewe music provide a steady counterpoint to the stylizations of the leader:[25]

    Brown: What we need–
    Chorus: SOUL POWER!
    Brown: What we want–
    Chorus: SOUL POWER!

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[25]   Transcribed from Brown (1990), track 3, from 2:20–2:30.

Brown: Got' ta have–
Chorus: SOUL POWER!
Brown: What we want–
Chorus: SOUL POWER!
Brown: What we missin'–
Chorus: SOUL POWER!

Returning to the stylization of the *vugbe* in Figure 13, I have composed four riffs, labeled 'a–c', to fill in the space between response phrases. For the purpose of demonstration, I created these riffs using a single rhythmic variation, labeled 'a' in the pick-up to measure 5, which is able to generate multiple phrases using the principle of *stroke substitution*, where a stroke from the original model is replaced with a different stroke type (Locke 1987: 74; 1992: 129). The original riff, 'a', returns back to the reduction variation, 'rv¹', prefacing it with a short bounce stroke figure. The second riff, 'b', substitutes press strokes for the second bounce stroke and the last bass stroke; also, it does not lead back to the reduction variation, but rather stays between the response groups. Riff 'c' substitutes a bass stroke for the third bounce stroke, and in this case returns back to the reduction variation in measure 7.

When playing an SSP, the short spaces in between the response phrases can become quite limiting, so another strategy for adding style to an SSP is to create a phrase that plays over one of the response phrases before eventually resolving back to the reduction variation or the theme at the beginning of the following phrase. I will term these phrases, which are typically improvised, as *resolving substitutions* because they always resolve back to a recognized phrase – particularly to a phrase that begins on or immediately after beat 1. An example of a resolving substitution can be found in phrase 'd' of measure 7, where the lead drum plays an improvised phrase that covers the response on beats 2 and 3 and then resolves back to the reduction variation on beat 1 of measure 8.

During the vamp section of asymmetrical *vugbe* patterns, there is usually a prolonged moment of space between response phrases, which gives the soloist an opportunity to create improvised figures that *lead-in* to the beginning of the response. This is represented in Figure 14 at the beginning of measure 5, where the *atsimevu* transitions to the reduction variation (rv) by reducing sub-phrase 't¹' to a series of press strokes (compare with measure 3). This type of reduction variation is quite typical of asymmetrically phrased *vugbe*, where the *azagunɔ* will break from the theme by substituting slap strokes or stick strokes to the side of the drum shell for dense thematic figures. This sets up a situation where the 't¹' phrase can now be replaced by a series of improvised phrases that lead-in to phrase 't²', which remains constant. Following this practice, in measure 7 the *atsimevu* plays a lead-in, labeled 'a', which prefaces the entrance of the response in measure 8. Later we will encounter an asymmetrical *vugbe* pattern with a long response phrase followed by a series of shorter phrases, here the soloist will combine lead-in's to the longer phrase with the type of riffs used in SSPs

for the shorter phrases. Compare this excerpt with the stylization of an asymmetrical pattern from the *Atsiā* dance by Kobla Ladzekpo, analyzed by Pantaleoni, which also features a series of lead-in's to the response, constructed in the exact same manner as the pattern above (Pantaleoni and Ladzekpo 1972b: 78–82).

Summarizing the two examples presented above, we can state that putting style into a symmetrical *vugbe* dialogue generally follows a progression from an initial moment of synchronization between the lead and response phrases in the theme to a contrasting section where the response continues its dense stream of notes which now become a target for the oblique phrasings of the lead drum. Longer phrases can be constructed by playing over one of the response phrases with a resolving substitution. In asymmetrical patterns the progression leads from a relatively more dense thematic section to a noticeably more sparse reduction variation, which opens up a relatively large portion of musical space to create phrases that lead-in to the response.

Music example 1: stylization of the opening vugbe themes in the Afa dance

We begin our detailed analysis of *atsiādodo* by noted Ewe *azagunɔwo* with the styling of a set of two *vugbe* themes used to launch the *Afa* dance by Kwadzo Tagborlo, transcribed below in Figure 17 [CD track 3]. *Afa*, a sacred dance from the shrine of divination, features *sogo* as the lead drum and the fast rhythmic background from Figure 7, *kagan* pattern A. The two opening themes, transcribed in Figure 16, consist of an asymmetrical phrase that anticipates the response on beat 1 and a symmetrical phrase repeated twice per cycle (6x2). The response consists of a resultant melody between the low and high *kidi* drums, notated on the right side of Figure 16 along with their common stylistic variations, which I will comment on below.

Figure 16. Opening *vugbe* themes in the *Afa* dance.

Following the opening haflɔflɔ by the henɔ, the transcription begins with the entrance call by *sogo*, which cues the entrance of the drum ensemble. Most of the notated segment is based upon theme 'a', which is played unadorned in measures 12–14 (theme 'b' is only played in measure 8). Recall that with an SAP, the main strategy is to construct phrases that lead-in to the theme, which in this example begins on beat 4 of every cycle. Accordingly, Mr. Tagborlo begins to add style in measure 2 with a lead-in of two press strokes that prefaces the theme on beat 4. Mr. Tagborlo demonstrated this technique in our lessons by showing me how he extrapolates backwards from the theme to think of phrases of appropriate length. Measures 4, 6, 9, 10, 13, 15, 17, and 19 all contain further examples of lead-in's to theme 'a'. Some of these examples preface the response by one beat (mm. 2, 13, 17), and some examples preface the theme by two beats (mm. 4, 6, 9, 15, 19). Apart from these lead-in phrases, Mr. Tagborlo also creates an original resolving substitution in measure 7 that plays over the theme on beat 4 before returning to the theme in the next cycle (he repeats this phrase in measures 11 and 16). Looking closely at measure 16, the repetition of the resolving substitution is slightly different from the other two examples, in this case it switches the bass and press strokes in beat 4 using the principle of stroke substitution. Thus, a new phrase can also become the seed for further stylistic alteration. In measure 1, Mr. Tagborlo also uses a combination of rhythmic variation and stroke substitution to replace theme 'a' with a four-note block on beat 4, which also uses press strokes instead of the expected bass strokes (see Figure 11). Later in measure 10, Mr. Tagborlo uses a lead-in that also brings back this combination in place of theme 'a'. Looking over the excerpt as a whole, note that the sequence of improvisations is such that it conforms to the aesthetic of space described above, as Mr. Tagborlo essentially alternates between a measure of open space, or theme 'a', contrasted with a measure of improvisation created by either a lead-in or a resolving substitution.

Turning now to the two *kidi* parts, once they enter with their themes in measure 1, they continue to alternate between the theme and two types of recognized variation (see Figure 16). The high *kidi*'s variation, labeled 'a' in the figure, was created by stroke substitution, in this case its second bounce stroke is replaced with a press stroke, slightly changing the contour of the pattern. Note that this variation is only used with the first grouping in each cycle, never on the last grouping. The stylings of the low *kidi*, which have a greater sonic impact in the lower end of the spectrum, maintain a dialogic relationship with the stylings of the *sogo* part. For example, when there is a section of dense improvisation by *sogo*, as occurs during measures 6–11, the low *kidi* basically lays back in its accompaniment role, playing its theme without variation. However when the *sogo* part finishes its moment of shining and drops back in measure 12, the low *kidi* begins to add style using the resolving substitutions 'a' and 'a1' throughout the next few measures (see Figure 16). These substitutions on the low *kidi* are comprised of new phrases that play over the expected response (two eighth note bounce tones) on beat 3 before resolving back to the original theme on beat 1 of

Figure 17. Stylization of the opening themes in the *Afa* dance.

Figure 17 (continued).

Music example 2: stylization of an SSP in the *Afa* dance

Continuing with the *Afa* dance for a moment, after an opening sequence such as the previous music example, it then enters the conversation section (see Figure 5) where the *sogo* and *kidi* drums progress through the set of *Afa vugbe* dialogues. In next example, transcribed in Figure 18, I have chosen a *vugbe* from this section played by a different *azaguno*, noted performer, scholar, and teacher Gideon Foli Alorwoyie from a self–produced studio recording featuring his hometown group from Ghana [CD track 4].[26] The conversation is an SSP, similar in design to the *vugbe* we examined earlier in Figure 13. It is played at nearly the same tempo as the previous example and the rhythmic background is also similar, save for the *kagan* part, which plays the part of the high-

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[26]   Transcribed from the recording *Special Rhythms of Africa* by Gideon Foli Alorwoyie and his Afrikania Cultural Troupe (2003), track 1 from 5:00–5:25.

pitched *kidi* in the previous example. In this figure I have marked thematic notes using regular phrase markers and stylized phrases using phrase markers with the labels 'a–d'.

During the roll-in Mr. Alorwoyie embellishes the notes of the phrase with a series of hand flams, labeled 'a', a common variation to roll-in phrases (see Figure 12). Then the theme is introduced in measure 2, and continues through measure 4. In measure 5, Mr. Alorwoyie introduces the reduction variation, which continues through the beginning of measure 7, where he rolls back to the beginning of the *vugbe* in conjunction with the beginning of the song text using a one and a half measure drum roll comprised of two six-pulse blocks, labeled 'b'. The roll proceeds directly into the reduction variation at measure 9, where the stylization begins to heat up as Mr. Alorwoyie uses the reduction variation as a springboard for improvisation. Beginning with the second repetition of this variation in measure 9, for example, Alorwoyie adds a series of bass strokes on beat 4 to turn the variation into a longer resolving substitution, labeled 'c' in the figure. This same resolving substitution recurs between measures 11–12 and measures 14–15, starting on time point 3.2 of the first measure and then playing over the response on beats 3–4 before finally ending on beat 1 of the following measure in synchronization with the beginning of the response. This usage follows the aesthetic for resolving substitutions described above, where a phrase is constructed to play over one part of the symmetrical response and then resolve back into the theme or reduction variation. In the second half of measure 10, Alorwoyie introduces another resolving substitution, labeled 'd', which again plays over the response on beats 3–4, and resolves back on beat 1 of measure 11. This phrase is repeated between measures 12–13 with an added bass stroke, and in exactly the same combination between measures 13–14. Summarizing the construction of style in this example, we could say that Mr. Alorwoyie uses the reduction variation to set up a series of resolving substitutions. Moreover in conjunction with the song text, which is only a single line by the leader and a single line by the chorus, he times the utterance and stylization of the *vugbe* dialogue to last no more than five or six bell cycles at a time. This accords with his own discussion of his playing style in his collaborative work with Locke (Alorwoyie and Locke 2007).

Figure 18. Stylization of an SSP from the *Afa* dance.

Unlike the drummers in the previous example, the *kidi* player does not stylize its pattern at all in the selection. On the other hand, the *kagan* player alternates between two phrases, its theme, comprised of four bounce strokes, and a variation 'a', which substitutes a press stroke for the second bounce stroke beginning in measure 3. Looking at the entire excerpt, the *kagan* player follows a discernable poetic structure in the alternation between parts – one or two measures of variation, then returning briefly to the theme after the onset of the next timeline cycle before resuming the variation in the second-half of the same cycle. These intangible aspects of drumming are not often verbalized, but returning to the theme from the variation out of sequence would not sound appropriate. Also note that save for the press strokes, which are not normally played on *kagan*, the playing and stylization of this part resembles that of the high-pitched *kidi* in Figure 17.

Music example 3: stylization of a DSP from the Akpoka dance
The next example, transcribed in Figure 19, is a dual-measure symmetrical *vugbe* from the *Akpoka* sub-genre of *Agbadza* , with Kwadzo Tagborlo again playing *sogo* as the lead drum using the slow rhythmic background, *kagan* pattern B [CD track 5].[27] The theme, outlined in measures 1–2, is comprised of a phrase of eight pulses repeated three times over two bell cycles, with the start of each phrase block occurring on a different sub-division of the main beat: i.e. beginning on time points 1.2, then 4.1, and finally 2.3 of the following measure. The final two notes of each phrase block coincide with the open tones of the response drum, which alternates between playing its theme, comprised of an eighth note followed by two sixteenth notes (measure 1, beat 3), and a rhythmic variation (doubling) of four sixteenth notes (measure 2, beats 2–3). I have marked and numbered the phrases of the theme to show the durations of each of the three figures, in order to appreciate the way that Mr. Tagborlo stylizes them during the segment. With the symmetrical phrase structure, Mr. Tagborlo chooses to structure his improvisation by riffing on the theme, a process described above in Figure 13. Since the response takes up two pulses plus an extra pulse for spacing, that leaves one and a half beats (5 pulses) for improvisation, with the final lead note either anticipating the response or synchronizing with the response. Given these limits, let us now see how he chooses to fill these sonic spaces.

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27 Transcribed from the recording *Field Recordings Tape I* by the Apeyeme Drumming Ensemble (2000), track 1 from 3:00–3:29.

Figure 19. Stylization of a DSP from the *Akpoka* dance.

After the initial roll-in (not transcribed) the *v*ugbe is played through one complete cycle and then through the beginning of a new cycle before Mr. Tagborlo begins to put some style inside of the second phrase (measure 3, beat 4) with a brilliant riff that synchronizes with the first note of the response (measure 4, beat 1). Then he closes the progression abruptly with a bass press stroke in the middle of beat 2. Recalling Mr. Tagborlo's comments regarding the rhythmic density of style, the buildup of improvisation and then sudden cut off here is quite typical of this aesthetic. When playing the final bass press stroke in performance, a common practice is to first extend the right arm into the air and then to drive the fist or heel of the palm into the center of the drum skin (represented by an 'x' in the transcription). This gesture is often executed with a bit of visual showmanship, another aspect of atsiã, using an exaggerated motion to slam the palm forcefully into the skin, creating an audible 'thud'.[28] Mr. Tagborlo repeats this exact phrase between measures 7–8 at the end of another series of riffs. The momentary cessation of the lead drum often cues the response drums to stylize their parts. Notice that after the second occurrence of this phrase in measure 8, kidi takes the cue from sogo and begins improvising on its theme beginning on beat 3 and continuing through measures 9–10. Again, these exchanges conform to the dynamics of rhythmic density – building up the intensity of one's atsiã to a climax and then dropping off, creating an opening in the musical mosaic for another artist to shine through.

Returning to measure 4, after the resolving substitution Mr. Tagborlo introduces a set of riffs which occupy the next five bell cycles. Each riff cleverly signifies on the response – compare the phrases played during measures 3–4, 5–6, 7–8, and 9–10 with the *v*ugbe theme introduced in measures 1–2. I have labeled these riffs in Figure 19 with the letters 'a–h'. In creating these new phrases, Mr. Tagborlo conforms to the space designated for the original lead drum theme, and the final note of each riff either synchronizes or anticipates the response. For example, the phrases 'a', 'b', 'e', and 'f' all synchronize their last note(s) with the beginning of a response phrase block. Phrases 'b' and 'e' are nearly similar, both extrapolating backwards from the response group on beat 4. Phrase 'f' in measure 7 is a beautifully constructed piece of extemporaneous drum poetry that replaces the theme phrase with a new phrase that also resolves into the response. This burst of notes resolves with a repetition of riff 'a', which again cuts off the flow of improvisation. Other phrases like 'c' and 'd' anticipate the response, where the phrases are timed to end right before the response comes in, creating a forward movement towards the response. Note that phrases 'a' and 'd' are repeated between other new phrases, sometimes a clever phrase may be worthy of repetition later in the bout of improvisation. Additionally, with the longer spaces between response phrases there is no need for a longer resolving substitution.

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28   On *vugã* this same practice is accomplished by using the bare left hand to strike the centre of the skin in a similarly affected fashion.

Music example 4: stylization of an SAP by the Nobody dance club

Turning now to some asymmetrical patterns, the next example is an SAP composed for atsime*v*u, transcribed in Figure 20, which originates from a dance club music called Nobody. Clubs like Nobody exist throughout Eweland, and this is the primary music form for atsime*v*u soloists [CD track 6].[29] All of these clubs feature multiple azagunɔwo, and may even allow guest artists to come and play, so there will be no shortage of potential style makers. Again due to the rapid pace of the dance sequence, lead drummers have little space to improvise before starting another conversation. The Nobody group has multiple dance-drumming accompaniment styles depending on the progression of the event. This example comes from the *v*ulolo, an introductory section, recorded live at a funeral in Anyako.[30] During the *v*ulolo the *kidi* and *sogo* play the same response throughout, while the atsime*v*u introduces conversations on its own. In between atsime*v*u dialogues, the *sogo* may diverge from playing the response and begin to riff off of the *kidi* part. The *v*ugbe theme, stated in measure 4, consists of a short phrase that fits into the middle of the bell cycle, leaving a little room at the beginning and end for adding some stylThe azagunɔ introduces the pattern with an extended roll-in comprised of three phrases, labeled 'a–c'. The first phrase is symmetrically constructed and consists of four pulses (bass, tone, tone, rest) repeated three times within the 12-pulse bell cycle, similar to the example given earlier in Figure 9. Here, the atsime*v*u player embellishes this part with a hand flam, one of the embellishments demonstrated in Figure 12. The next phrase, 'b', is a variation of the first phrase, created by stroke substitution, where thematic notes are replaced with other strokes. Here, the three strokes from the original phrase, bass, tone, tone, are altered to tone, bass, bass. These first two parts of the roll-in signal to the other drummers that a new soloist is about to introduce a drum conversation. When ready, the azagunɔ proceeds to the beginning of the *vugbe* using the last roll-in phrase at the start of measure 3. The theme is then stated in measures 4–5, before the azagunɔ starts to add style at the end of measure 5 with a lead-in to the next repetition of the theme in measure 6. In measure 7, the soloist plays a resolving substitution that plays across the space of the original conversation before resolving back to the theme for a final repetition in measure 8. Showing true appreciation of the art of style, the azagunɔ closes his improvisation with a final 'to' stroke at the end of beat 4, delivered during the performance with an accented raising of the stick, and the smile of self-assurance.

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[29]   Descriptions of these clubs may be found in Jones (1959), Ladzekpo (1971), Locke (1979), and Burns (2009).

[30]   Transcribed from the recording *Field Recordings Tape 6* by the Nobody Haborbor (2009), from 30:10–30:31.

Figure 20. Stylization of an SAP from the Nobody dance club.

Music example 5: stylization of a DAP from the *Agbadza* dance

The next example, transcribed in Figure 21, presents a dual-measure asymmetrical pattern from a historic recording of the *Agbadza* funeral dance by the Anlo-Afiadenyigba *Agbadza* Group featuring the *azaguno* Lavi Fiamavle [CD track 7].[31] This was one of the first widely distributed recordings of *Agbadza* locally, and bootleg cassette recordings have spread throughout Togo and Benin. It uses the slow Ewe rhythmic background, *kagan* pattern B. The *vugbe* theme is outlined in measures 1–2, which I have subdivided into two sub-phrases, 'a' and 'b', to facilitate analysis. Sub-phrase 'a' leads into the downbeat, with the response, played on *kidi*, doubling its single press stroke. Sub-phrase 'b' begins on beat 2 of the following measure, and ends on the last pulse of beat 4 in synchronization with the last note of the timeline, creating a strong anticipation of beat 1 in the following measure. The response drums also follow *sogo's* press strokes with bounce strokes. Between subsequent iterations of the phrase, for example in measure 3, one may observe that there is a relatively long period of silence – three beats with no strokes from *sogo* or *kidi*. These open spaces are typical of asymmetrical patterns, and obviously it is from this space that Lavi will cut his phrases, using the method of lead-in substitutions.

Lavi's improvisation, beginning in measure 5, resolves around a series of phrases that are substituted for sub-phrase 'a', and which lead-in to sub-phrase 'b'. The first lead-in begins on beat 3 of measure 5, taking over an entire beat of empty space with a quick flourish that realigns with the theme at time point 4.3. In measure 7, Lavi introduces a brief lead-in that extrapolates backwards by only one pulse. The *kidi* player responds to this by adding a bounce tone on beat 2 of measure 8, again drawn from the common practice of doubling notes of the response. Compared with the later audio recording and book of *Agbadza vugbe* by Alorwoyie, which features more extensive stylization, the improvisation on this recording is quite minimal, and perhaps reflects the original style of *Agbadza* music, which evolved out of more serious war dances that likely would have tolerated only minor stylistic injections from the *azaguno*, following the aesthetic described above for the performance of sacred shrine dances (Alorwoyie and Locke 2007).

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[31] Transcribed from the recording *Mano woyo me* by the Anlo-Afiadenyigba Agbadza Group (1978), Side A from 12:53–13:11.

Figure 21. Stylization of a DAP from the *Agbadza* dance.

Music example 6: stylization of a DAP from the *Sogbadze* dance

Let us now consider a DAP from the *Sogbadze* dance of the *Yeve* shrine, transcribed in Figure 22, in order to continue our observation of how drummers improvise within the more restricted musical space of a sacred dance [CD track 8].[32] This selection uses the fast Ewe rhythmic background, *kagan* pattern A, however the bell itself was missing for the recording session so its part is played by *axatse*. Additionally, the recording was made outside of a ceremony, so the *Yevevu* drum was not used, instead its part is played on a *sogo* drum, and *sogo's* regular response part is played on a low-pitched *kidi*. The theme of this *vugbe* consists of a brief rhythmic tag beginning at the end of beat 3 that progresses to a series of press strokes beginning on beat 1 of the next measure, all of which correspond with bounce notes on the *kidi*. Again, this is very typical of Ewe *vugbe* construction, moreover the pattern also ends on the last note of the bell, similar to the *Agbadza* pattern examined in Figure 21. The two supporting drums in *Sogbadze* are structured like the *Afa* dance examined earlier, with a high-pitched *kidi* that does not respond to the drum language dialogues and a second drum, normally *sogo* or a low-pitched *kidi*, which responds to the drum language calls by the *azagunɔ*.

Analyzing the stylizations of drums during the excerpt transcribed in Figure 22, one notices a clever but brief interplay of style between the three drummers. As discussed above, Mr. Tagborlo has often told me that one should keep improvisation to a minimum in *Yeve* music because of the sacred nature of the dance. In particular, the more extended displays of *atsiā* like those found in secular funeral musics like *Agbadza* and Kinka, for example, are stylistically and ritualistically inappropriate. During the *Sogbadze* dance, groups of *Yevesi* (*Yeve* shrine members) will line up at one end of the dance space to await the roll-in that cues them to begin their dance across the performance space. At some point in their dance sequence the dancers will briefly stop to dance in place, stylizing their dance movements briefly before resuming their progress to the end of the dance space. Thus, the *azagunɔ* must carefully time the *vugbe* dialogue, playing the theme while the dancers begin their progression across the floor, and then playing a brief flourish before resting on the reduction variation while the dancers stop and then move off. Mr. Tagborlo does exactly this, playing the theme through two complete cycles before playing an improvised lead-in phrase, 'a', in measure 5 that returns to the reduction variation, 'rv'. The reduction variation then continues to the end of the sequence.

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[32]   Transcribed from the recording *Field Recordings Tape I* by the Apeyeme Drumming Ensemble (2000), track 4 from 1:05–1:28

Figure 22. Stylization of a DAP pattern from the *Sogbadze* dance.

Once the reduction variation is established, the response drums are able to emerge and shine out within the collective musical texture. Their combined stylizations are interesting in that they must be mindful of taking up too much space from the lead drum and also of taking up each other's space. Like the *Afa* examples with two support drums, the high-pitched *kidi* alternates between its theme and a recognized variation, 'a', which fills in notes between the two phrase blocks beginning in measure 3. Up to now the stylization of the high *kidi* part in all of the *vugbe* we have examined has been limited to embellishing notes from its established theme. In the present example, however, the high *kidi* adds additional notes that occupy a greater space within the timeline, pushing the boundaries of its domain. This kind of stylizing must therefore be limited to a few measures, as is the case here, otherwise it might interfere with the exposition of the *vugbe* between the lead drum and the low-pitched *kidi*. The low-pitched *kidi* also adds style to its pattern, but is further limited by having to maintain the response part. It basically employs some recognized variations to the first phrase of its theme, beginning with variation 'a' in measure 2. This variation is essentially an embellishment of its theme phrase (compare with its unadorned theme in measure 8) similar to doubling, but instead of sixteenth notes an extra eighth note is added. This variation is repeated in measure 6. Another variation, 'b', is played in measure 4, which substitutes a press stroke for the expected bounce stroke on time point 2.1. Subsequently, in measure 7 the *kidi* player adds two bounce strokes, 'c', inside of the empty conversational space where the lead drum would normally begin the *vugbe* dialogue. This subtle variation is very effective due to the scarcity of rhythmic activity that occurs during that part of the cycle. Comparing this measure with measure 5, which has denser rhythmic activity, and measure 9, with no rhythmic activity, one notices that even a few added notes nicely fill the large amount of open space, concurring with the aesthetic of unobtrusive improvisation in *Yeve* shrine dances.

Music example 7: stylization of a DAP with verbal text

Although the previous *v*ugbe examples have followed the structure of a verbal dialogue, they did not have actual texts associated with them, so let us now consider a DAP with an Ewe-language text from the Akpoka dance, transcribed in Figure 23, with Kwadzo Tagborlo on *sogo* [CD track 9].[33] The drum text, written and translated below, is a humorous commentary about a beautiful lady at a music event, who is wearing glistening earrings – i.e. she is dressed with style. Apart from humor, Ewe *v*ugbe texts comprise a wide assortment of verbal forms including proverbs, historical events, social commentary, ancestral praise names, children's rhymes, political slogans, and provocative humor. As discussed above, song texts may also be played on the drums, sometimes in combination with the singers (Locke and Agbeli 1980).

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[33] Transcribed from the recording *Field Recordings Tape I* by the Apeyeme Drumming Ensemble (2000), track 2 from 0:50–1:23.

Drum Text:

Tugbe davi kpɔ kple zā.	Look at the beautiful girl with everything.
Gavi le to me,	With an earring in her ear,
Gavi ŋɔŋlɔ le to me.	A shining earring in her ear.

I have outlined the *vugbe* theme along with the verbal text in the first two measures of Figure 23. The beginning of the first *kidi* response in measure 1 has been put in parenthesis because in the recorded example the musician does not immediately enter with his part, nevertheless, I have represented what the response should play according to the design of the pattern. While stating the theme during measures 1–4, Mr. Tagborlo adds a bit of style by embellishing notes of the theme: in measures 2 and 4 he doubles the first bass note on beat 1, labeled 'a', and in measure 4 he doubles the press stroke on time point 3.3, labeled 'b'. Mr. Tagborlo repeats embellishment 'a' again in measure 10, and introduces another embellishment, 'c', in the second half of the phrase in measure 6, on time point 4.1. Apart from these simple alterations to the theme, this pattern presents a bit of difficulty in crafting deeper levels of style, due to the preeminence of the response, which plays a fairly iconic group of phrases derived from the drum text, giving the lead drum little space to improvise. Moreover, in keeping with the general phrasing of the drum text, the lead drummer cannot add too many strokes between the phrases or he will pass over the original text.

Within this drum ensemble the strategy for adding style beyond these alterations to the theme is to first introduce the reduction variation, which reduces the first half of the conversation to three press strokes and maintains the second half, and then to embellish and occasionally improvise substitutions for various strokes in these two phrases. Because this process has become so familiar for the group, when Mr. Tagborlo introduces the reduction variation, 'rv', in measure 5 the *kidi* player immediately follows him by switching to his own 'rv' phrase, which doubles each press stroke of *sogo*. Later in measure 7 the lead and response drums play a recognized embellishment of the reduction variation, 'rv[1]', together in unison. Up to this point all of the style that has been put into the *vugbe* conversation has been quite routine, although brilliantly executed. Suddenly in measure 8, however, Mr. Tagborlo crafts a series of extraordinary phrases, displaying his remarkable talent as a stylist. First he riffs with the response on beats 1 and 2, substituting two press strokes, 'd', for each bass tone, thus changing the tonal resultant of the conversation. By pushing *sogo's* voice up the scale into *kidi's* range their tones are now at an interval of approximately a fourth between the two drums, so the two low tones followed immediately by two high tones creates a pleasant resultant sound. Then during beats 2–3 of measure 8 Mr. Tagborlo improvises a brilliant lead-in, 'e', that realigns with the theme on beat 4. Finally, in measure 10, Mr. Tagborlo closes his moment of style by playing a final bass note on beat 3, labeled 'f', giving *kidi* space to play the last part of the phrase alone.

Figure 23. Stylization of a DAP from the Akpoka dance.

Although in this case the presence of a spoken text might seem to have restricted Mr. Tagborlo's injection of style, this is not necessarily due to the text, but rather reflects the dense structure of the original theme. In this regard, the work of Alorwoyie and Locke (2007) can be commended for providing twenty-five drum texts from the *Agbadza* dance with their extended presentation and stylization on the accompanying audio recording. In the accompanying text Alorwoyie confides, "I don't want people to lose the language, but I don't want the language to be boring either. I play music around it and then bring the language back so that people can feel it. I don't play the language all the time." This certainly is born out in the transcriptions of each drum language text, where his improvisations follow essentially the same theme and variation approach as the examples presented above.

Music example 8: *vuyɔyrɔ* in a DSP from the *Dzigbordi* dance club
The final example demonstrates another stylization mode on atsimevu called invoking the drum, *vuyɔyrɔ*, a process by which the azagunɔ takes up sticks in both hands and riffs on the response to a particular *vugbe* theme [CD track 10]. Generally the *vugbe* will first be stated using the hand/stick combination, and then will lead to the reduction variation. At this point the soloist (or in some cases a drummer playing on a different atsimevu drum) will take up the second stick, stored in the waistband of their cloth or between the ring and pinky fingers of the right hand, and then improvise a series of riffs on the conversation that has been established. After a period of time the moment of style will close, and one of the lead drummers will announce a new dialogue using the original stick/hand combination.

The example of *vuyɔyrɔ* transcribed in Figure 24 comes from a DSP used by the *Dzigbordi* dance-drumming club, again featuring *azagunɔ* Kwadzo Tagborlo on *atsimevu*.[34] The *Dzigbordi* rhythmic background is similar to the slow Ewe rhythmic background with *kagan* pattern B, however the *axatse* parts are different. The dialogue consists of a 6-pulse phrase repeated twice per bell cycle. There are two different types of response drums in *Dzigbordi* music, the *kidi*, which generally plays an unstylized response to the drum cues of *atsimevu*, and the *gboba*, a large open-bottomed bass drum that depending on the particular *vugbe* can play the same response as *kidi*, with a different set of strokes, or as is the case here it can play a different response that integrates with the response of *kidi*. The *gboba* is the lowest-tuned drum in the ensemble, and is played with the hands to produce two basic tones, a bounced stroke near the rim and a bass note in the center. Within the realm of stylistic space allotted to the drummers, the *gboba* player is the next in line to improvise after *atsimevu*.

At the end of measure 3, he brings the statement of the theme to an abrupt close by embellishing the last stick stroke, turning it into a sixteenth note combination with the

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[34]   Transcribed from the recording *Field Recordings Tape I* by the Dzigbordi Haborbor (2002), track 1 from 0:59–1:21.

Figure 24. Transcription of *ʋuyɔyrɔ* in a DSP from the *Dzigbordi* dance club.

hand and stick, labeled 'a'. This opens up the musical space, like a reduction variation, which for this particular *ʋugbe* simply consists of recognized phrases like this phrase and the subsequent phrase, 'b', which also resolves into the downbeat of a new cycle, leaving a few beats open for style. With this opening of space in measure 5, *gboba* takes over the lead position and begins to stylize its pattern, first with a lead-in to its theme, labeled 'a', and then with a series of resolving substitutions, 'b, c, and d', each of which plays over the space allotted to its theme on beats 3 and 4 and then resolves back to the theme on beat 1 of the following cycle.

In measure 6, Mr. Tagborlo begins the *ʋuyɔyrɔ* using the two stick playing combination, announcing his presence with one of the *Dzigbordi* roll-in patterns, an SSP based on a phrase of four pulses repeated thrice, labeled 'c' in the figure. The roll-in continues through measure 7, and then transitions to the riff section with a resolving

substitution, 'd', which ends on beat 1 of measure 8. The first two riffs, 'e', simply play a single stick stroke on the beats, which prefaces the sound of the *kidi* response. Then Mr. Tagborlo finishes the *vuyɔyrɔ* with an improvised resolving substitution, 'f', which again ends on beat 1 of the new bell cycle. The introduction and stylization of this *vugbe*, although brief, captures the actual dynamics of drum language usage in performance, where each soloist has only a short amount of time for the statement of a drum conversation and the addition of style before another soloist jumps in.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that displays of *atsiā* are shaped by the shared musical aesthetic of Ewe dance-drumming, which limits the vocabulary and audacity of style, as well as by the performance context, which limits the duration of individual displays of style and defines a range of appropriate behaviour depending on the purpose of the event. Within a highly regulated musical system like Ewe dance-drumming, which maintains strict timing between hundreds of artists including singers, dancers, and drummers, any change to the expected norm is noticed and shines a spotlight, visual or aural, on the actor and their subsequent actions. Due to close attention of the participants, I have argued that not playing an expected note (silence) makes as much of an impression on the collective musical texture as improvising extra notes.

Drummers display their artistry during the statement of drum language dialogues, which follow a discernable structural progression from the initial roll-in to the final notes of the lead drum, and are introduced and stylized in the same manner as verbal art forms. Drawing on a methodology developed by scholars of oral literature to describe the dynamics of improvised arts such as poetry and storytelling, which are enacted by drawing on a set of known themes that can be creatively altered on the spot using specific stylistic devices, it was possible to distinguish between recognized variations that helped to start a sequence of improvisation and actual bouts of extemporaneous improvisation. Likewise, the process of crafting improvisations was assisted by the use of some basic techniques, such as leading in to a phrase or riffing off of a constant response phrase. Furthermore, the internal phrase structure of Ewe *vugbe*, symmetrical or asymmetrical, shaped the strategy for adding style based upon the placement of the response within the timeline.

Drawn from a wide range of southern Ewe dance-drumming forms, social and spiritual, the process of stylization of the eight *vugbewo* analyzed in this study followed the same dialogical structure, albeit with different degrees of tolerance for showing off. This conversational model of variation and improvisation should prove useful to other studies of African art forms, building on a growing body of scholarship on African aesthetics to outline the process of individual creativity within a local artistic system.

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