

# STREET LANGUAGE IN *DÙNDÚN* DRUM LANGUAGE: A MUSICO-LINGUAL PERSPECTIVE ON STREET CULTURES IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** *Dùndún* drum language is a practice of speech surrogacy employed by *dùndún* drummers in Yoruba culture. The *dùndún* drummers play sequences of melo-rhythmic patterns; a form of communication that employs musical and linguistic elements, comprehensible to listeners knowledgeable in the Yoruba language. Although these sequenced patterns are sourced from Yoruba everyday sentences and oral genres (proverbs, poetry, praise-chants, and idiomatic phrases), the drummers also embrace other social narratives. These include the popular linguistic expressions in public spaces referred to as “street language.” This is because the streets serve as spaces for social life, musical and cultural imaginaries, musical and language expressions, and identity. This street language, referred to as “*ohùn igboro*” in Yoruba, include slang (*saje*), slurs (*òtè*), neologies (*èná*), satire (*èfè*), dance-drum patterns (*àlùjò*), and socio-political slogans (*àtúnlò-èdè*). This article explores the influence of street language on *dùndún* music. This article follows an ethnographic model, with an analysis of the content of the *dùndún* music and its associated texts. The article’s findings include the extent to which the two cultures have overlapped, and the various socio-cultural benefits of adopting the language of each other’s cultural practices. In the process, the article contributes to the debate on authenticity and social structure in Yoruba culture. The article emphasises the need for an integrated research approach of music and language and their interrelationship to street cultures in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** creativity, culture, drum language, *Dùndún*, ethnographic, melo-rhythm, Nigeria, street language, Yoruba

## Introduction

Street language can be described, in general terms, as a common way of speaking, engaged by the people in their day-to-day activities in public spaces, and on the streets.<sup>1</sup> Street language includes the various slangs, phrases, songs and adapted oral genres used by the people in their different activities. These expressions are commonly referred to as *ohùn igboro* (street talk) in the Yoruba language. Ross (2018) describes such language use and their associated ideologies and activities as a street culture. He defines street culture as the “ideologies, informal rules, practices, styles...adopted by individuals... that spend a disproportionate amount of time on the streets” (ibid. 7–8). By street culture, this article refers to the common practices and social expressions proliferating

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on the streets which may be seen as a public expression and demonstration of social freedom. By social freedom, we refer to street activities that the people freely engage in. These activities may constitute a form of expression (recreation), publicity (goods, beliefs) or group activism (protest). Social freedom is usually manifested through informal means, and with an attempt at self-liberation from either formal political or institutional structures, or both. These activities include street carnivals, political demonstrations, street-conflicts, evangelism, hawking, newspaper stand activism, street sports, street-parties, music, and day-to-day interactions. The combined musical and lingual influence on these activities in the street are characteristic elements of each city, community, or public space. This is because, on one hand, the “streets serve as the only locus of collective expression for, but by no means limited to, those who generally lack an institutional setting to express discontent”, to express themselves on the street through their common language (Bayat 2013:52). On the other hand, “music was so crucial for getting people passionate about resistance because of the deep emotional semiotic effects it has with each individual listener...where music affects politics and politics affect music” (Eprile 2017:5). Other scholars who have corroborated Eprile’s submission on the role of music in the socio-political activities of a community include Bayat (2013), Kerr (2017), and Ross (2018), among others. In discussing how the streets serve as an historical archive of a community, in his narratives on the historical and creative imagination of the streets in the Yoruba city of Lagos, Whiteman (2014: 281) states unequivocally that “the history of Lagos is on its streets.”

Congruent with these street cultures, but on the other side of the divide in terms of tradition, are the Yoruba institutional culture. “Yoruba institutional culture” refers to customary, religious and non-religious practices that constitute the cultural identity of the Yoruba people. These identities manifest in the sacred (deity, cult, masquerade), the political world (kingship, leadership), the economy (profession, commerce), educational, and other secular (kinship, life-cycle, profession, sports, rallies, information dissemination, festivals) institutions (Johnson, 2017; Falola and Akinyemi, 2017). These social experiences inevitably employ the oral genres of Yoruba language. According to Euba (1990), Vidal (2012), Omofoyewa (2107), Dasylya (2017) and Adeeko (2019), these oral genres include proverbs (*òwe*), poetry (*ewi*), praise-chants (*oriki*), and idiomatic phrases (*àkànlò-èdè*). Many of these oral genres engage unique musical practices, such as instrumental music, panegyric chants, dances, and commemorations for ritual, possession, coronation, celebration, and festival activities, using traditional instruments such as drums, gongs, and shakers, among others. In Yoruba culture, the drums are the most popular instruments, with the *dùndún* drum the most common Yoruba talking drum. The *dùndún* drum is the most efficient drum used for communicating, hence the reference to “*dùndún* drum language.” The *dùndún* drum is played either as a solo instrument, or in combination with other Yoruba talking drums. In such a case, the instruments are referred to as the *dùndún* drum ensemble (Oludare 2020).

The *dùndún* drum ensemble is made up of at least 5 instruments, with the instruments belonging to three sub-families. The first is the *iyáàlù* sub-family, which are double-headed, hourglass-shaped, tension drums. It consists of the *iyáàlù*—the “mother drum”, leader of the ensemble, as well as the *kerikeri*, *isáájú*, and *ikehin*. An *èjin*, a secondary *iyáàlù* drum, might sometimes be used in the ensemble, to provide a two-tone, bass, melo-rhythmic effect. The second sub-family is the *gáangan*, which are also double-headed, hourglass-shaped, tension drums. The family consists of the *gáangan*, *àdàmò*, and *kàràngó*. The third sub-family is the *gúdúgúdú*, consisting of only the *gúdúgúdú*, a pot (also called kettle)-shaped, non-tension drum. Although the *iyáàlù*, *gudugudu*, *kerikeri*, *isáájú*, and *ikehin* are the standard drum members of the *dùndún* ensemble, the ensemble may include all or any of the *gáangan*, *àdàmò*, and *kàràngó* drum(s). When included, these *gáangan* sub-family of drums often duplicate any of the *kerikeri*, *isáájú*, and *ikehin*, depending on the occasion. It is important to note that the traditional name, “*gáangan*”, is now being used interchangeably by modern day Yoruba drummers for two different drums. The *àdàmò* is now referred to as the *gáangan*, which is ubiquitous in urban settings, favoured by the young and street drummers, and mostly adopted in popular and gospel music. The *dùndún* drum language draws its lexical repertoire from regular Yoruba speech and a corpus of oral literature (Euba 1990, Olaniyan 2008, Villepastour 2010, Osunyemi 2015, Samuel 2018, Gonzalez and Oludare, forthcoming).

The main objective of this article is to examine the interaction between traditional culture and street culture among Yoruba drummers and their followers. This objective is realised in the contemporaneous appropriation and recontextualisation of the musical and language elements in each cultural practice, despite their apparent boundaries. I describe the extent to which these two cultures have overlapped, the various socio-cultural benefits of adopting the language of each other’s cultural practice, and how these contribute to the debate on authenticity, and social structure in Yoruba culture. This is the new knowledge that this article aims to produce in Yoruba studies.

With regard to the apparent boundaries between the two performance experiences, the article argues that whereas the Yoruba culture has values that guide and structure their organisation, such as in language, music, and traditional events, the activities of the street cultures are often spontaneous, unorganised, free-for-all and contingent. This article describes the many ways in which songs are used by both the performers (musicians) and non-performers (supporters and general audience) in traditional and street contexts, as well as the audience’s perceptions of these practices. For example, in traditional practices, the songs used for deity (sacred) or life cycle (secular) celebrations employ languages with moral messages, are performed for specific sacred or secular occasions, and at dedicated locations. On the other hand, songs of street cultures most often than not employ “uncultured” languages, sometimes with vulgar or non-moral contexts, and are performed at social events. The general practice among the fans of both cultural and street music performances, while enjoying the cross-fertilisation of both, was an adoption of the language and practice from each other, to broaden their

musical and language vocabulary, as well as to enrich the entertainment features of their practices.

Interactions between traditional practices and street cultures occurred over time. These interactions resulted in the use of sacred songs, oral genres, and narratives employed on the streets in several institutional practices. This is corroborated by scholars such as Waterman (1990), Omojola (2012), Whiteman (2014), Adedeji (2017) and Adeeko (2019), all of whom wrote on the socio-political history, identity, and interactions of popular culture among the Yoruba in recent times. Consequently, due to the socialisation and modernisation of Yoruba traditions, many of the cultural practices began to appropriate characteristics of the street cultures. For example, the drum language of the *dùndún*, through which the drums function as speech surrogates, historically had the language confined to such ethical norms of the Yoruba culture within which it was employed. However, with the current milieu of the *dùndún* drum's engagement in social scenes and public spaces on the streets, the drummers have been adopting and infusing some street language in their *dùndún* drum language. These street languages include slang (*saje*), slurs (*òtè*), neologies (*èná*), satire (*èfè*), dance-drum patterns (*àlùjò*) and socio-political slogans (*àtúnlò-èdè*), some of which are sourced from Yoruba oral genres. These elements of the street language are inherent characteristics of the street culture. Bayat (2013) thus surmises that the streets serve as a public space of expression and contention for those excluded from the institutions of culture. Through the narrative of those excluded from the institutions of culture, and the desire of the traditional *dùndún* drummers not to be excluded from the street culture, this article explores how the language of both the institutional and street cultures overlapped.

### **Methodology**

This research followed an ethnographic method, with a content analysis of the *dùndún* music and its linguistic context. Primary data were elicited from interlocutors, consisting of *dùndún* drummers representing the institutional culture (drummers for kings, chiefs, masquerades, poetry, chants, sacred and cultural events), those who perform on the streets (such as at street-parties, street-jams, political, contemporary social events), as well as the followers of these cultural and street-influenced activities. Data were collected in Ibadan, Oyo state, and in Mushin, Lagos state, with each of the interlocutors providing information on their musical practices, and their musical and cultural experiences in the last 20 to 50 years. Our principal informants included Mr. Ayanlere Alajede (master *dùndún* drummer from Osun, traditional palace-court musician, former president of the association of professional drummers of Nigeria), Mr. Eburnlomo Abiodun (master *dùndún* drummer from Oyo, traditional palace-court musician), Mr. Kangan Bamidele (*dùndún* and *gáangan* drummer from Ogun, a gospel musician, and street drummer), Mr. Olusegun Joseph (*dùndún* and *gáangan* drummer from Ogun, a street *jùjú* musician in Lagos), and Mr. Ayankunle Olaoluwa (*dùndún* and *gáangan* drummer from Lagos, band director and producer of gospel and secular music,

and music organiser for political, street, and business events). All our interlocutors are practicing musicians. They are active and popular in the social space of Yoruba drum music and they have a thriving music business either in the Yoruba or street culture.

This article further explores the musical and linguistic creative process and performative influences of the Yoruba traditional oral genres on the socio-political expressions of the streets. The article reflects on how the performers (musicians) and non-performers (supporters and general audience) produced and received these practices. The article examined the sources of the *dùndún* drum language, which includes the traditional oral genres and street languages, and analysed their linguistic function in the *dùndún* drum language. The oral genres include proverbs (*òwe*), poetry (*ewi*), praise-chants (*oriki*) and idiomatic phrases (*àkànlò-èdè*), while the street languages include slang (*saje*), slurs (*òtè*), neologies (*ènà*), satire (*èfè*), dance-drum patterns (*àlùjò*) and socio-political slogans (*àtúnlò-èdè*).

### Conceptual framework

There has been a call among African scholars in recent times for an African-centric theoretical framework in academic discourse and the development of African studies through African, knowledge-based perspectives. This is important because, in the discussions on Africa, it is significant that it should be the “African voices” that are loudest in driving this narrative towards the process of decolonising educational, historical, and identity perspectives on Africa. The march towards African-centric theoretical frameworks and Yoruba-centric epistemologies, should be championed by the people who own and practice these epistemologies. This Africanist clamour is succinctly captured in the Yoruba proverb, “*nkan eni ni nkan eni*” (what is mine is mine), which expresses the need for the rights, views, and the voice of the owner to be prioritised and acknowledged.

The drive for an African-centric form of theorisation is encapsulated in Toyin Falola’s theory of “pluriversalism.” Pluriversalism is an “African academic orientation as well as practices that create their own distinctive methodologies and epistemologies, both driven by Africa’s own clearly-defined agenda to attain an intellectual autonomy” (2016:265). Falola’s theory aligns with other African scholars, such as Agbebi (cited in Falola, 2018), Nkrumah (1973), Sengor (cited in Irele, 1977), Diop (cited in Falola, 2018), Uchendu (1988) and Agawu (2016), in a call for “an African epistemology” that “must be clearly distinctive, creating its own protocols, methodologies, and provenance” (Falola, 2016:266). He provides an example of such an African-centric epistemology in Yoruba culture to include oral genres such as proverbs, poetry, and parables.

In the attempt to achieve this African-centric goal, this article adopts a popular Yoruba proverb for its conceptual framework. The proverb states: *L’òwe l’òwe là lùlù ògídígbo. Ológbón lón jo, àwon òmòràn ló mo itúnmo rè* (The *ògídígbo* is drummed in proverbs. The wise dance to it. Only the knowledgeable understands its meaning). In the proverb’s interpretation and performative application, it refers to the use of proverbs and oral genres such as poetry and folktales, in Yoruba drum language. The proverb

also reveals that the knowledge of Yoruba language is not sufficient, but that one must be familiar with these oral genres and their sociolinguistic functions to decode the drum language, be it in the confines of cultural institutions or in public spaces.

This conceptual framework (proverb), a Yoruba indigenous knowledge system, is germane to this article because of its tripartite suitability in Yoruba culture. First, the proverb makes a direct reference to the *ògídìgbo*, a war drum belonging to the Yoruba talking drum family, much like the *dùndún* being examined in this article (Ruskin, 2013). Secondly, it corroborates the use of oral genres (*òwe*, *ewi*, *oriki*, and *àkànlò-èdè*) not only in Yoruba speech, but as a means of linguistic communication (speech surrogacy) in Yoruba drum language when the drums are played either in institutional contexts or in street cultures. Finally, in addition to the proverb validating the existence of the *dùndún* drum language, it explains how to understand the drum language. The proverb authenticates the application of such a corpus of oral genres as valid theories of knowledge and methodology in the academic study of Yoruba and other African arts.

### **The interaction between Yoruba culture and street culture**

Generally, Yoruba street culture was born out of the need and desire for a socio-political, public medium of expression by the people in the public spaces within the Yoruba societies. It is considered as an alternative to the traditional or institutional culture (Bayat, 2013; Eprile, 2017; Kerr, 2017). According to these scholars, the factors that engendered street culture are socio-political reactions to traditional elements and practices of the Yoruba culture. While these cultural practices constitute the core of the Yoruba sacred and secular world; the street cultures are complementary social and political practices. This is because the latter are driven by the needs of financial and social life, freedom of expression and political protest. The former exhibit an organised structure, in terms of the medium, occasion and location in which they are performed. For example, the institutions of Yoruba traditional music include the professional *àyàn* (*dùndún*, *bàtá*) drummers, praise-chant (*ijálá*, *ràrá*, *oriki*, *ewi*) singers, and traditional (*àpàlà*, *sákàrà*, *fújì*, and *jùjú*) musicians. Those who do not perform these expressions, create alternative practices and expressions, usually in public spaces where it constitutes a street culture.

At street parties, rallies, and social gatherings, the amateur musicians who are not members of the traditional music culture, may not be paid nor invited by patrons to perform at special events. According to Mr. Kangan Bamidele and Mr. Olusegun Joseph, the amateur musicians and their audience created their own occasions and venues for performances, as a means of self-actualisation and for musical expression and entertainment (Bamidele & Joseph, personal communication, 26 January 2019). This musical practice is commonly referred to on the streets as a “jump”, an English word developed among the street musicians and their fans and used as a colloquial term for musical performances in open spaces. According to Mr. Ayankunle Olaoluwa, the street music performers perceive these street music cultures as not restricted by any traditional norms. They do not require much in terms of finance, musicians, and



performance venue. The performers only need a free space on the streets, one or two singers, a few instruments (usually traditional drums), and a social occasion needing musical entertainment. The musicians employ street languages and unrestricted musical performance styles much to the delight of their listeners and fans, making such musical practice attain the status as a street culture (Olaoluwa, personal communication, 26 January 2019). It is these somewhat spontaneous public-accessibility, and street talk that made the public receive and enjoy the musical street cultures.

Over time, as many of the traditional cultures began to be employed in social activities and members of the traditional institutions joined in the street cultures, there emerged an interaction between the Yoruba traditional cultures and the street cultures. While the traditional drummers were motivated by the social engagement and economic benefits of their participation in the street music through their knowledge and use of the street languages, the street drummers adopted the drum languages to attain a sense of legitimacy and Yoruba-ness in their music and language. This resulted in the adoption of the languages (oral and musical expressions) previously common in the traditional culture, in the street language and the other way around. The streets became the melting pot of both traditional and street cultures. For example, Mr. Ayanlere Alajede stated that the *dùndún* drummers, which belong to the Yoruba traditional culture, started performing with the street drummers, as well as adopting some of the street languages in their performance (Alajede, personal communication, 25 January 2019). These developments facilitated the incorporation of the *dùndún* drum language in the street language, and the street cultures provided additional musico-lingual materials for the Yoruba cultures.

### ***Dùndún* drum language in street language.**

*Dùndún* drum language is the indigenous practice of communication, created and employed by *dùndún* drummers of the *àyàn* family in Yoruba culture (Olusoji 2013, Oludare 2021). The drummers play sequences of encoded melo-rhythmic patterns of Yoruba words, which can only be decoded by listeners knowledgeable in Yoruba language and culture. These patterns are attained through the imitation of the three Yoruba tones—*ohùn isàlè* (low), *àárín* (middle), and *òkè* (high). In traditional *dùndún* drumming, these sequenced, melo-rhythmic patterns are tonemic (speech melody) and metrical (speech rhythm) imitations of the Yoruba language. The *dùndún* drum language is a surrogate language which is comprehensible through its language-based music. The drum language draws their contextual repertoire from both the day-to-day sentences and the oral literature of Yoruba (Gomez and Oludare, forthcoming). According to Olaniyan (cited in Samuel 2020), the “literature” includes genres such as *oriki* (descriptive poetry), *òwe* (proverbs), *itàn ibíle* (folk history), *orin ibíle* (folksongs including chants, poetry, and rhymes), *àfójúínúwò* (imagination or seeing things through the “inner eye”), *àfiwé ohùn* (imitation of sound-onomatopoeic), *írírí ojú eré* (contextual occurrence), *àlùjò* (rhythm for dance gesture), and *ohun tó nlò* (current affairs).

As the *dùndún* drumming tradition enjoyed supplementary social engagements, *dùndún* music also began to embrace more social narratives. These include the popular linguistic expressions in public spaces used commonly by the people on the streets. These modes of verbal communication, referred to as street language, are characteristic of street cultures. This is because the streets serve as cultural spaces for social life, performance, and identity formations for both the artists and the public at large. The *dùndún* drummers achieve a musical and linguistic competency by combining the musical styles of the Yoruba culture with street cultures and by borrowing some of the street language in their drum language. According to Mr. Ayanlere Alajede and Mr. Ebulomo Abiodun, as the fans (supporters and non-performers) of the *dùndún* drum music followed the drummers to these street “jumps”, the fans of both parties consequently became receptive to each other’s musical and language expressions. This led to the street performers and supporters appropriating some of the *dùndún* drum languages in their street music and activities (Alajede & Abiodun, personal communication, 25 January 2019).

Mr. Kangan Bamidele, Mr. Olusegun Joseph, and Mr. Ayankunle Olaoluwa (personal communication, 26 January 2019), as well as other respondents, who are aficionados of “jumps”, observed that the street performers and fans found the use of the Yoruba language intriguing, as it added more validation to their street culture and vocabulary. These perspectives from the non-performers on the streets, give credence to why some words, phrases, and expressions quickly stuck with the people for whom it became “street talk.” They used street talk as a means of communication and political protest. In addition, Mr. Kangan Bamidele revealed that the street drummers craved status, respect, and entitlement as enjoyed by their counterparts in the institutional culture. Mr. Ayankunle Olaoluwa and Mr. Olusegun Joseph explained that they sought the incorporation of institutional content in their street performances, as a means of ameliorating the inequality they felt between themselves and their counterparts in traditional contexts (ibid.).

### **Street language in *Dùndún* drum language**

Although the development of the street language (*ohùn igboro*) is predicated on socio-political factors and characteristics of street cultures, some of its linguistic expressions are sourced from traditional Yoruba oral genres. In other words, while some of the slangs, slurs, and slogans were influenced and created on the streets, others were contemporary adaptations of proverbs, poetry, praise chants, and idiomatic phrases. The *dùndún* drum employs a surrogate language, using these oral genres and common expressions, in its communication. It was thus convenient for any *dùndún* drummer to incorporate these oral expressions while performing on the streets. This is because most Yoruba drummers, whether playing in a traditional context or street culture, acquire the knowledge of these oral genres as they learn to play the traditional drums (Euba 1990, Villepastour 2010, Osundina 2015).



The sources of the street languages used in *dùndún* drum language are either from the adaptation of the traditional oral literature or those formulated on the streets through socio-political encounters. According to all our informants (the traditional and street drummers, as well as fans of both drum cultures), as the *dùndún* drummers started receiving more invitations to perform at social events, they observed a new trend (Alajede, Abiodun, Bamidele, Joseph, & Olaoluwa, personal communication, 25–26 January 2019). They observed that, the more they incorporated the street languages in their drum music, the more they received accolades and invitations from their hosts, audiences, and sponsors. Moreover, Mr. Ayanlere Alajede revealed that a traditional drummer's class and social hierarchy within their ensemble, received significant improvement, because the traditional drummer who could incorporate the street culture in their performance received more patronage (Personal communication, 25 January 2019).

The traditional drummers were receptive to these street music cultures, thereby learning and making more use of the street languages in their *dùndún* performances. As a result of this development, their *dùndún* drum language was influenced with the incorporation of some of the street languages. Explaining the fluidity and ease of accepting a linguistic expression as street talk, our interlocutors clarified that, in some cases, only a phrase or section of an oral genre is adapted for street use. This is because the slang or slogan must be short, catchy, and poetic for it to be fanciful, memorable, and easily articulated for diverse occasions.

### Analysis of street languages adapted from traditional oral literature

The musical notation in Transcription 1 shows the melody (tonal center of F) and rhythm of the vocal and drum parts and the drum intonation (on a 3-line staff) of the oral genres. The drum part reflects how the *dùndún* drums employs the low (L), middle (M) and high (H) phonemic tones in imitating the speech melody and speech rhythm of the Yoruba language.

#### 1. Proverbs (*Òwe*)

- i. *B'oba kan kò bá kú, oba míràn kò lè je* (If the king does not die, another king cannot be installed).

Speech

B'ó ba kan kò bá kú, o ba mí ràn kò lè je.

Drums

H M M L H H M M H L L L M

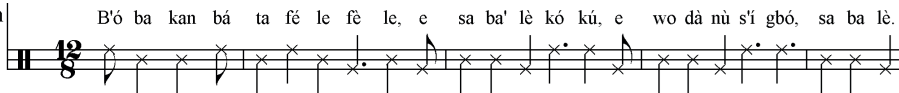
Transcription 1. Speech and drum intonation of *B'oba kan kò bá kú, oba míràn kò lè je*.  
Transcription by Author.

Traditional use: This is a political, historical, and socially-themed proverb, used to reflect on the Yoruba kingship structure and to promote the moral value of social order in leadership. The *dùndún* drummers play this proverb when communicating

verbal contexts of kingship and history, leadership, order, and related moral values. As explained earlier, these drum texts are only intelligible to anyone who speaks and understands the Yoruba language. It is understood by those who know the cultural and philosophical uses of Yoruba oral genres, and those who are conversant with the speech surrogacy functions of the Yoruba talking drum.

Street version: *B'oba kan bá ta félefele, e sha ba'lè k'ó kú, e wo dànù s'ígbó, sha ba'lè* (If a king misbehaves, we will kill him and discard his corpse.)

Speech | B'ó ba kan bá ta fé le fè le, e sa ba' lè kó kú, e wo dà nù sí gbó, sa ba lè.



Drum | H M M H M H M L M L M M L H H L M M L H H M M L

Transcription 2. Speech and drum intonation of *B'oba kan bá ta félefele, e sha ba'lè k'ó kú, e wo dànù s'ígbó, sha ba'lè*. Transcription by Author.

This “proverb-song” is played and sung by the drummers, fans, and social groups to taunt or threaten each other. As a political slogan, it is played by the drummers and sung by the supporters of rival political parties during street rallies and political protests. The Yoruba word, *oba*, is used as a metaphorical expression on the street for the leader of any band, group, association, or party. Other Yoruba words incorporated as street expressions in the proverb include *ta félefele* (misbehave), *sha ba'lè* (eliminate) and *wo dànù* (dispose).

ii. *Yíó f'enu rè ho'su je, eni t'ó pé t'ògún ò sí, yíó f'enu rè ho'su je* (Anyone that dishonours *ogun* will peel and eat raw yam with his mouth.)

Speech | Yíó f'e nu rè ho 'su je, e ni t'ó pé t'ò gún ò sí, yíó f'e nu rè ho 'su je.



Drum | H M M L M M M M M H H H L H L H H M M L M M M

Transcription 3. Speech and drum intonation of *Yíó f'enu rè ho'su je, eni t'ó pé t'ògún ò sí, yíó f'enu rè ho'su je*. Transcription by Author.

Traditional use: This proverb has sacred, historical, political, and social implications. As a drum language, the *dùndún* drummers play this proverb when communicating on the history and reverence of the deities, religious leaders, parents, and when they are reprimanding excessive pride.

Street version: *Ení bá gbé mú a jè'ya. A kii yiri è, ení bá yiri è, á jè'ya, á jèwé iyá*  
(Anyone that exhibits arrogance and dissent will suffer a dire consequence.)

Speech: E ni bá gbé mú á jè 'ya. A kii yiri è. E ni bá yiri è á jè 'ya. á j'e wé i yá.

Drum: M H H H H L L L H M M L M H H M M L H L L H M H M H

Transcription 4. Speech and drum intonation of *Ení bá gbé mú a jè'ya. A kii yiri è, ení bá yiri è, á jè'ya, á jèwé iyá*. Transcription by Author.

As a form of slang, this street song is used during disputes between rival drummers, musicians, and social groups, during street fights, and to deride one another. As a political slogan, the song is played by drummers and verbalised by fans and supporters during electioneering campaigns and street rallies as a threat to opposing parties. The expression, “jè'ya” (to be punished), is slang used to imitate the Yoruba metaphor, “*fenu hoşu je*”, which is an expression of a form of punishment. Other Yoruba words adopted as a street language in this proverb include “*gbé mú*” (arrogance, dissent), “*yiri*” (uncover/intrusion) and “*jèwé iyá*” (word play for double punishment).

## 2. Idiomatic phrases (*Àkànlò-èdè*)

- i. *Àwa l'àgbà, adiye funfun l'àgbà adiye, àwa l'àgbà* (We are the elders; we are superior to everyone else, just like the white fowl is superior to other fowls.)

Speech: À wa l'á gbà, a di ye fun fun l'á gbà a di ye. À wa l'á gbà.

Drum: L M L L M L M M M L L M L M L M L L

Transcription 5. Speech and drum intonation of *Àwa l'àgbà, adiye funfun l'àgbà adiye, àwa l'àgbà*. Transcription by Author.

Traditional use: This sacred, political, and socially-themed proverb reflects the perceived, spiritual superiority or reverence, and social hierarchy associated with the colour of white in Yoruba culture. An example is the sacred institution of the “Yoruba white-costume”, as in the adorning of white by chief priests and elders. The white fowl is used as a figurative expression for elitist, political and social class or headship. As a drum language, the *dùndún* drummers play this proverb when communicating verbal contexts for the Yoruba sacred, political, and social structure and the association of the colour, white, with leadership.

Street version: *Àwa l'àgbà. Àwa lá mú'gboro dùn a tún dé, àwa l'àgbà* (We are the leaders. We are the best entertainers, and we are the favourites.)

Speech | À wa l' à gbà. À wa la mú 'gbo ro dùn, a tún dé. À wa l' à gbà.

Drum | L M L L M L L H M M L M H H L M L L

Transcription 6. Speech and drum intonation of *Àwa l'àgbà. Àwa lá mú'gboro dùn a tún dé, àwa l'àgbà*.  
Transcription by Author.

This street expression imitates the traditional idiomatic phrase, by adopting a reference to the cultural use of the words, “*àwa l'àgbà*”, without reference to the “implied” sacred words, “*adiye funfun*”, which is creatively replaced with the street’s secular words, “*àwa lá mú'gboro dùn.*” As a slang and slogan, it is played and sung by rival drummers, musicians, political and social groups as proof of their perceived superiority. It is also used to smear the opposition, by singing of their own popularity and acceptance among the populace. The Yoruba word adapted as a street language in the idiomatic phrase is, “*mú'gboro dùn*”, a figure of speech for public entertainment, popularity, or preference.

- ii. *Eégun j'èégun lo, òrìsá ju òrìsà lo* (All masquerades are not equal. Deities are greater than one another.)

Speech | É é gún j'è é gún lo, ò rì sá j'ò sà lo.

Drum | H H M H H M L L M L L M

Transcription 7. Speech and drum intonation of *Eégun j'èégun lo, òrìsá ju òrìsà lo*.  
Transcription by Author.

Traditional use: As a drum language, the *dùndún* drummers play this proverb when communicating reverence for the deities, religious leaders, parents, and to reprimand excessive pride.

Street version: *Omó j'omo lo, omó n'omo pa* (All children are not equal, strong men conquer the weak.)

Speech | O mó j'o mo lo, o mó n'o mo pa.

Drum | M H M M M M H M M M

Transcription 8. Speech and drum intonation of *Omó j'omo lo, omó n'omo pa*.  
Transcription by Author.

As a street slang, this line is used by drummers, musicians, fans, and social groups as satire and as a slur between competing groups. As a political slogan, it is played by

drummers and verbalised by fans and supporters during street campaigns and rallies. The slang, “*omó na omo pa*”, is used as an idiomatic expression to mean, “the best over the bad”, “the strong over the weak”, “the conqueror over the vanquished”, and so on.

### 3. Praise chants (*Oríki*)

- i. *A l’ówó l’ówó bíi şèkèrè, bí iyanrin òkun* (Someone having money as much as the şèkèrè beads, and as much as the beach sand.)

Speech | A l’ó wó l’ó wó bí i sè kè rè, bí i yan rin ò kun.

Drum | M H H H H H M L L L H M M L L M

Transcription 9. Speech and drum intonation of *A l’ówó l’ówó bíi şèkèrè, bí iyanrin òkun*.  
Transcription by Author.

Traditional use: Used in traditional drum language to communicate verbal contexts in the eulogy of a wealthy person and the metaphorical comparison between *owó* (wealth), the *şèkèrè* (shaker) instrument and *iyarin* (sand).

Street version: *A l’ówó l’ówó bí erù, ó pòpòpò, ó rèpètè* (A person loaded with money, which is uncountable, inexhaustible.)

Speech | A l’ó wó l’ó wó bí e ru, ó pò pò pò, ó rè pè tè.

Drum | M H H H H H M L H L L L H L L L

Transcription 10. Speech and drum intonation of *A l’ówó l’ówó bí erù, ó pòpòpò, ó rèpètè*.  
Transcription by Author.

This line is used as a street language slang and slogan by drummers, musicians, and supporters to eulogise a wealthy individual. The Yoruba slangs, “*erù*”, “*pòpòpò*” and “*rèpètè*”, are street expressions for wealth, or something aplenty, excessive, or innumerable. These are almost direct equivalents of the metaphorical use of the traditional words, *owó*, *şèkèrè*, and *iyarin*.

- ii. *Kábiyèsí, aláyéluwà, igbákèjì òrìşà* (Hail king, ruler of the world, next to the gods.)

Speech | Ká bí yè sí, a lá yé lú wà, i gbá k’e jì ò rí sà.

Drum | H H L H M H H H L M H M L L L L

Transcription 11. Speech and drum intonation of *Kábiyèsí, aláyéluwà, igbákèjì òrìşà*.  
Transcription by Author.

Traditional use: Used in traditional drum language to salute and pay homage to the kings, and the sacred status of Yoruba kingship. The word, “*àgbà*”, is a truncation of

“àgbàlagbà” (elderly), which is used to show respect to an adult, and old person, and a revered elder.

Street version: *Twale, alayé, àgbàfìrìyoyo, àgbà òrìṣà* (Hail master, the great leader, a supreme god.)

Transcription 12. Speech and drum intonation of *Twale, alayé, àgbàfìrìyoyo, àgbà òrìṣà*.

Transcription by Author.

This is used as a street language and slogan by the drummers, fans, and supporters of a rich and iconic personality or a publicly revered or feared individual. The slangs, “*twàlè*”, “*alayé*”, “*àgbàfìrìyoyo*”, and “*àgbà òrìṣà*”, are street expressions for salutations and reverence. According to Mr. Olusegun Joseph, Mr. Kangan Bamidele, and Mr. Ayankunle Olaoluwa, the street slang, “*alayé*”, was created by the linguistic truncation of the Yoruba kingship word, “*aláyélúwà*.” The slang, “*àgbà*”, is used as a mark of respect and as an “exonerating” prefix to qualify any adjoining word, and “*òrìṣà*” is used to describe someone who commands a lot of respect, fear, and authority in society, especially among the common people on the streets. In addition, “*twàlè*”, which is not a “real” Yoruba word, but an onomatopoeic word, is used as a term or mark of respect for anyone occupying a high position within the social structure ( Joseph, Bamidele, & Olaoluwa, personal communication, 26 January 2019).

#### 4. *Satire (Èfè)*

- i. *Yokolú, yokolú, kò wa tán bí, iyàwó gb'òko sán 'lè, okó yo 'ké yokolú* (It is all over, the wife wrestled down the husband, he develops a hunch-back.)

Transcription 13. Speech and drum intonation of *Yokolú, yokolú, kò wa tán bí, iyàwó gb'òko sán 'lè, okó yo 'ké*. Transcription by Author.

Traditional use: A satire of male—female gender relations in Yoruba kinship structure, which is predominantly patriarchal. The song mocks any man who loses his authority to a woman. It is also used as a traditional song to mock a loser during any form of power struggle or challenge between rival competitors.



Street version: *Yokolú, yokolú, kò wa tán bí, iyàwó t'ojú oko m'òlè, ojú yo bó yokolú, yokolú* (It is all over, the wife disgraced the husband. He becomes ashamed.)

Speech | Yo ko lú, yo ko lú, kò wa tán bí, i yà wó t'o jú o ko mó 'lè, o jú yo bó.

Drum | M M H M M H L M H H L L H M H M M H L M H M H

Transcription 14. Speech and drum intonation of *Yokolú, yokolú, kò wa tán bí, iyàwó t'ojú oko m'òlè, ojú yo bó*. Transcription by Author.

This is a slang used between rivalling individuals, musicians or social groups, to either mock or insult the losing challenger. It is a political slogan used to cast aspersions on the rival party. The satirical phrases in the slang, when used as a street language, include “*te’ju mo’le*” (ridicule) and “*oju yo bo*” (embarrassed).

- ii. *Ài tètè m'òlè, olè m'òlòko* (When a thief is not quickly accused, the thief will accuse the owner.)

Speech | Ài tètè tètè m'ó lè, o lè m'ó l'ó ko.

Drum | L L L H L M L H H M

Transcription 15. Speech and drum intonation of *Ài tètè m'òlè, olè m'òlòko*. Transcription by Author.

Traditional use: A phrase used to warn of the dire consequence of the delay or reluctance to pass judgement on a culprit; as well as a satirical reference to when the culprit accuses the accuser to defend himself.

- Street version: *Ài tètè m'òlè, olè n sá lo* (When a thief is not quickly arrested, the thief will run away.)

Speech | Ài tètè tètè m'ó lè, o lè n sá lo.

Drum | L L L H L M L H H M

Transcription 16. Speech and drum intonation of *Ài tètè m'òlè, olè n sá lo*. Transcription by Author.

This is a slang used to express the irony in the lack of accountability among individuals and within society. The slang’s replacement of “*olè m'òlòko*” with “*olè n sá lo*” is a creative expression of the streets, to either humour a culprit’s “street-wise” opportunity to escape punishment for a committed crime, to mock an injustice, or ridicule a faulty or biased justice system.

### 5. Poetry (Ewi)

*Orí l'ónise èdà l'áyé. B'òrí bá'n gbèni á ma r'ògbón dá* (One needs a fortunate destiny to be successful in life.)

Speech | O ri l'o ni se è dá l'á yé. B'ó ri bá'n gb'e ni á ma r'ó gbón dá.

Drum | M H M H M L H H H H H H M M H M H H H

Transcription 17. Music and drum intonation of *Orí l'ónise èdà l'áyé. B'òrí bá'n gbèni á ma r'ògbón dá*.  
Transcription by Author.

This is traditional Yoruba oral poetry used generally in institutional and street cultures. It is employed in *dùndún* drum language and as a street language to communicate verbal contexts on divine favour, destiny, success, and philosophical matters. While the poetry is played as a drum pattern by the drummers and sung by the singers, it is also used on the streets as a slogan in all social and public activities. The term, “*orí*”, is used both in a traditional context and as a reference to destiny, luck, and opportunity.

During our personal communication with our interlocutors (25–26 January 2019), they were asked how most of the above Yoruba cultural and street versions of proverbs, idiomatic phrases, praise chants, satires, and poetry were created; and which version could have served as the source for creating the other. They submitted that the street versions adopted the cultural versions for its inspiration and creation. They explained that, on the one hand, the musicians and followers of the street culture were first of all, mostly Yoruba indigenes, who must have been raised in the Yoruba culture and knew most of the oral genres as performed by exclusive members of the traditional culture. This is because membership is an exclusive privilege for only those born into the “*Ayan*” family. Scholars such as Euba (1990), Waterman (1990), Omojola (2012), Olusoji (2013), Osundina (2015), Johnson (2017), and Samuel (2018), have corroborated this submission on the Yoruba *Ayan* family’s musical and cultural lineage. On the other hand, all of the proverbs, idiomatic phrases, praise chants, satires, and poetry belong to the very rich and diverse, ancient musical and linguistic repertoires of Yoruba oral genre. The street versions came into existence after the traditional versions. Specifically, Mr. Ayanlere Alajede, who was the most elderly, experienced, and knowledgeable among all our interlocutors, explained that a closer look at the musical and linguistic structure of all the lists provided in this article will show that the contemporary street versions almost take the same form in their imitation of the ancient, traditional versions (personal communication, 25 January 2019).

Consequently, in tandem with the analysis of street languages adapted from traditional oral literature, this article observed the following analytical details about how the structural (musical and textual phrasing) forms of the street version, “*àwa làgbà. Àwa lá mú'gboro dùn a tún dé, àwa làgbà*”, directly imitates the traditional idiomatic phrase, “*àwa làgbà, adiyè funfun làgbà adiyè, àwa làgbà*”, among others. The street

version exhibits a mirror image of the traditional version, by using the same poetic phrasing, and same word duplications at the beginning and end, and linguistic rhythm. The street version uses the same syllabic meter (number of syllables) of “4.10.4” as in the traditional version, with the same musical measures of “4 bars” and musical meter of “quadruple timing”, although the traditional version is in simple  $\frac{4}{4}$  time and the street version in compound  $\frac{12}{8}$  time (see Transcriptions 5 and 6). This structural analysis holds true for all the other oral genres of the traditional versions and their street version counterparts, albeit with some differences according to the varied musical (rhythm) and textual (lyric) structure of each oral genre. These developments allude to the fact that the traditional version which has long existed in the body of Yoruba oral literature is the source of the street version which came into use among the street musicians and fans in contemporary times.

Table 1 further shows a contextual analysis of selected linguistic expressions that have been formulated on the streets and adopted in *dùndún* drum language.

Below are some examples of the dance-drum dialogues (*èdè àlùjò*) listed in Table 1, which are used as drum music and texts in the performance of both traditional Yoruba culture and street culture.

- i. *Ó y’Ólórún, bí mo s’én dà gòjogòjo (gòjogòjo). Ó y’Ólórún. Surplus igbádùn* (God knows why I am excited and hyper-active. I enjoy surplus benefits.)

Transcription 18. Music and drum intonation of *Ó y’Ólórún, bí mo s’én dà gòjogòjo. Ó y’Ólórún. Surplus igbádùn*. Transcription by Author.

- ii. *Gúdúgúdú kan, iyá ilù kan, iyá ilù kan.* (The *gúdúgúdú* and *iyá ilù* are unique master drums.)

Transcription 19. Music and drum intonation of *Gúdúgúdú kan, iyá ilù kan, iyá ilù kan*. Transcription by Author.

The street languages and their contextual meanings listed in the table above are linguistic expressions formulated by the people and commonly used in public spaces and street activities. These street languages are used variously as slang, slurs, slogans, neologies, and musical dialogues, and have been adopted in contemporary times by *dùndún* drummers.

Table 1. Contextual analysis of street languages adopted in *dùndún* drum language.

Street Language	Functional Translation	Contextual meaning
	<b>Slangs (<i>Sàfè</i>)</b>	
Owó méjì lókè; <i>Şé kó wáńlè, şé kó dáró sòkè</i>	I raise two hands to salute you; My hands are still raised for you	Used to salute or praise a prominent individual (musician, celebrity, politician)
Ori e fò ká s'ibè; Ori e wà n'ibè; O lènu pa	You are correct. You are valuable. You are influential	Used to show the importance, significance, or influence of an individual or group
Jeun lo; Gbé won rin; Má go na e; Páró lo; Má wójú Uche; Má sòró jù	You have total control, freedom or right. Do not be distracted or equivocal	Used to motivate, encourage, or give liberty to people
Gbèsè sòkè kó ma lo; Má ná gèrè; Má sùn; Gbé bódí undecisive	Rise up and move. Do not be lazy, lethargic or undecided	Used to spur people into action and discourage inaction or procrastination
	<b>Slurs (<i>Òtè</i>)</b>	
Ení bá gbé mú á j'èyá; E ti wón sí kònga; Má sàya bi èyin	You will be punished if you intrude. You will be incarcerated. Do not be overconfident	Used to deter a rival action and to warn of dire consequences
Da padà; o fè gbé mi móra; Fun l'òhùn; Ohùn yen niyen	I reject it. You want to deceive me. I voice my anger and displeasure	Used during altercations to show rejection and disapproval
Sòfè f'apò mi ya; Má mu owó lo bè	Do you want to extort me? Control your hands, do not act that way	Used for public disgrace or to condemn a vice or action
E te'jú è mó'lè, e d'ótí è, e gba'na ojú è, e já'ràwò è, e p'ogò òròbò lé won l'òrì	Disgrace them, beat them up, discredit them, demote them. Rain insults or hit objects on their head	Used to deride rivals or threaten an action in a social or political contention
	<b>Socio-political slogans (<i>Àtúnib-èdè</i>)</b>	
Áwa l'áwa r'ra wa, olog'ini rómo ekun	This is a meeting of friends, like the cat meeting a lion cub	A social and political slogan used by ally musical, social and political groups
Eni tó yò'kùn ni e díbò fún	Vote for the wealthy looking candidate	A political slogan used for electioneering
A ju 'ra wa lo; Elégbé m'gbé è; Fífilè fun	We are the best. We are not equal mates. Do not contend with him	Used to show class and superiority between rival social and political groups

*continued on next page*

Table 1 (continued). Contextual analysis of street languages adopted in *dundun* drum language

Street Language	Functional Translation	Contextual meaning
	<b>Neologies (Èná)</b>	
Fògèsolè	Àgbàlagbà (elderly)	Used for a leader, champion, dignitary
Mo ti kálégi ti dán	Mo ti gbó bi e ti wí (I've heard, I agree)	Used for affirmation
Tirifi ni fájá fi	Onílú ni bàbá mi (my dad is a drummer)	Neology used by the Ayan (drummers)
Tifi ikáti	Ekú igbádùn (keep enjoying yourself)	Neology for felicitation
Tiráti fífi	Aláwò funfun (white skin)	Neology for foreigners with bright skin
	<b>Dance-drum dialogues (Èdè Àlújò)</b>	
Olórun f'énikan ju enikan lo. Igara chicken	God loves some people (me) more than others (you). Proud like a frozen chicken	A drum pattern used to communicate favouritism, with a street terminology
Ó y'Olórun, bí mo s'én dá gójogòjo (gójogòjo). Ó y'Olórun. Surplus igbádùn	God knows why I am excited and hyper-active. I enjoy surplus benefits	A drum pattern used for dance and entertainment, with a street terminology
Dansaki oba, ojojómó l'ore rè sími, Dansaki oba.	Your majesty, I enjoy your blessing everyday	A drum pattern used to eulogise the king or God
Áwa làán lù'lù, ilù dákun má'lù wá	We are drummers, the drum can't harm us.	A drum pattern that celebrates the drum profession
Gúdúgúdú kan, iyá ilù kan, iyá ilù kan.	The gúdúgúdú and iyá ilù are unique master drums	A drum pattern that commemorates the gúdúgúdú and iyá ilù drums as unique drum members of the <i>dundun</i> ensemble

## Conclusion and recommendations

This article has engaged in a discourse analysis of the *dùndún* drum tradition. It examined the dual influence of the Yoruba cultures and street cultures on the drum practice of the *dùndún*. While the historical details of the time when the interactions between the two cultures started is outside the purview of this article, it discussed how their language content overlapped and diffused into each other. The article also addressed how the musicians and followers of each culture have mutually influenced each other's musical and language repertoires, with the ancient Yoruba oral genres being the source from which the language of the street cultures emerged. Similar to verbal communication, the *dùndún* drum employs the traditional oral genres of the Yoruba language for its drum language. These oral genres are often used as linguistic and artistic expressions. However, in contemporary times, many of these oral genres were either adapted as street languages of expression or newly created, and used as slang (*saje*), slurs (*òtè*), neologies (*èrà*), satire (*èfè*), dance-drum patterns (*àlùjò*) and socio-political slogans (*àtúnlò-èdè*). These linguistic developments in institutional and street cultures are predicated on the fact that oral literature or verbal art function as the performative medium of expression in Yoruba language.

Oral literature serves as the principal medium through which the people communicate their folklore, be it in speech or music, either in their cultural practices or in public spaces and street activities. In other words, the Yoruba people source the content of the oral genres of their institutional and street cultures in the verbal arts. Hence, the *dùndún* drummers play these oral genres in their drum patterns as a language when communicating verbal contexts through their drum patterns, thereby making the drums serve as speech surrogates. The non-performers (fans and general audience) also adopt relevant and resourceful expressions from the oral literature as a means of communication. This study revealed the musical and linguistic creativity of the performers (drummers) and non-performers (followers), as well as how the street culture has contributed to the drum language. This article described how the influence of the traditional Yoruba culture on modern street culture contributed to the question of authenticity, the social and class hierarchy in Yoruba musical and social structure, as well as the new knowledge in the study and understanding of performance cultures in one particular African society.

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