

AESTHETICS AND STYLISTICS OF SIGNATURE TUNES IN ÌYÈRÈ-IFÁ

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Abstract

This study examines the aesthetic and stylistic functions of signature tunes in Ìyèrè-Ifá chant, a Yorùbá oral poetry derived from Ifá verses. Signature tunes are conceptualised as recurrent, distinctive lyrical expressions that function as identity markers for performers, genres, and performance contexts. While earlier Yorùbá stylistic studies have variously described such expressions as introductory formulae, call tones, homage, or ì-fì-ara-èni-hàn (self-introduction), they have not been systematically theorised as autonomous stylistic features. Drawing on Yorùbá oral performance criticism, stylistics, and insights from Russian Formalism, particularly Boris Eichenbaum's notion of literaturnost, this study positions signature tunes as a core component of oral texts alongside text, intra-text, and extra-text. Using purposively selected samples of Ìyèrè-Ifá performances from ritual, ceremonial, festive and burial contexts, the study employs qualitative stylistic and contextual analysis to identify and classify patterns of signature tunes. Findings reveal that signature tunes in Ìyèrè-Ifá are indispensable aesthetic devices that perform multiple communicative roles, including performer identification, audience engagement, contextual signalling, emotional stimulation, transition management, and affirmation of artistic competence. Contrary to the prevailing view that such features are restricted to performance openings, the study demonstrates that signature tunes occur fluidly at initial, medial, and terminal stages of performance. The study further establishes that signature tunes are shaped by situational context such as festivals, funerals, ilékú rites, and competitive performances and may be personalised or communal, fixed or adaptive. Ultimately, the article argues that signature tunes constitute a defining

stylistic criterion for distinguishing Ìyèrè-Ifá from Ifá recitation and other Yorùbá chants and also to establish another critical paradigm for appraising Yorùbá orature beyond Ìyèrè-Ifá. By foregrounding individuality, branding, and aesthetic innovation in oral performance, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of stylistic identity in Yorùbá orature and expands the analytical tools available for African oral literature studies.

Keywords: Aesthetic, Chants, Ìyèrè-Ifá, Orature, Performance, Signature Tunes

Introduction

Signature tunes may be understood as distinctive and recurring lyrical expressions that function as identifying markers for artists, performers, presenters, or communicators. They represent a recognisable verbal or lyrical stamp that distinguishes an individual's style from others within the same artistic or communicative tradition. Typically brief in form, these lyrical units recur persistently across performances or works, thereby serving as symbolic representations of identity. Although references to such stylistic features exist in various scholarly discussions, a comprehensive stylistic investigation of their forms, typologies, structural positions and communicative functions remains largely underdeveloped.

Within Yorùbá stylistics, scholars have examined proverbs, institutional oral materials, and other rhetorical devices as indices of linguistic creativity and stylistic competence (Olátúnjí, 1982, 1984; Ajíbádé, 2009; Òjó, 2013; Olátéjú, 2016). These studies have foregrounded collective stylistic practices rather than individualistic stylistic ownership. However, the present focus on signature tunes extends beyond these earlier approaches by foregrounding stylistic individuality and recurring identity, aligning closely with the concept of literaturnost as articulated in Russian Formalism by Boris Eichenbaum (1927). From this

perspective, signature tunes function as autonomous stylistic features that help to dismantle the assumption that all oral artists merely recycle identical content in different expressive forms.

Signature tunes therefore emerge as integral elements of artistic production and branding. They establish a lyrical identity that differentiates one performer or work from another, countering the long-held view that oral artists of similar genres express essentially the same ideas. This individuality underscores the creative agency of oral performers and highlights signature tunes as defining stylistic resources.

The notion of signature identity transcends music, literature, and media studies. In broader cultural discourse, the term “signature” is commonly used to denote habitual and distinctive ways of doing things. For example, a person’s consistent manner of dressing may be described as a signature style; a unique haircut or hairdo becomes a signature haircut; a peculiar dance movement may be referred to as a signature dance; and a distinctive culinary practice is often labelled a signature cuisine (Bello, 2020).

In literary production, recurring ideological patterns within an author’s work are described as signature ideology or idiolect. This is evident in the films of Tundé Kèlání, which are widely recognised for their thematic preoccupation with cultural renaissance and the tension between conservatism and progressivism (Ọyágbénjo and Òjó, 2025). Scholars such as Òjó (2005) and Ọlátéjú (2016) describe this phenomenon as the idiosyncratic ability of writers or artists. Within the context of the present study, such recurring lyrical identities within oral or performative genres are conceptualised as signature tunes.

Signature tunes are also prominent in religious practices, where they serve as identity markers for clerics and religious leaders. In Christian worship, Pastor E. A. Adébóyè, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), is famously associated with the

phrase “Let somebody shout Hallelujah.” This utterance has become his signature tune, functioning both as a stylistic hallmark and a performative strategy that energises congregations. Its emotional effectiveness has led many followers to imitate and adopt it.

Similarly, in Islamic preaching, Sheik Buhari Musa is popularly recognised by the phrase “subhanah kalilinah” (Glory be to you, O God). This expression operates as a memorable branding device that inscribes his identity in the minds of listeners. Traditional religious practitioners in Yorùbá land also employ signature tunes. Chief Yémi Èlèbùfón, for instance, is known for the expression below after all his morning prayer on radio and other prayer contexts:

Ọṣẹ́ ló ní kó ẹ,	The soap says it should come to
pass	
Osùn ló ní kó má sùnà,	Osun commands it never to be
delayed	
Awíyàrè kì í wí tirẹ́ kó má ẹ	Whatever Awíyàrè says shall
come to pass.	

Whenever such figures speak without first deploying their signature tunes, audiences often anticipate them, suggesting that the performance feels incomplete without these stylistic markers. This phenomenon demonstrates that signature tunes establish emotional connections between speakers and audiences, fostering loyalty and affinity (MacInnis & Park, 1991).

This study investigates the signature tunes in *Ìyèrè-Ìfà* as another critical paradigm for stylistic appraisal. This will expand horizon of knowledge about style and stylistics of orature in Yorùbá. The position of signature tunes initial, media and genre-final are also explored in this study to expunge the earlier stance by extant scholarship that see them as homage, introductory formulaic, introduction or slogan.

Theoretical Framework Formalism

Formalism has its origin in Russia in 1910s to 1930s. It is also known as new criticism or Russian formalism. It includes the works of numbers of highly influential Russian and Soviet Union scholars such as Viktor Skylovsky, Yuri Tyniaov, Vladmir Propp, Boris Eichenbaum, Roman Jacobson, Tomashevsky, Gregory Gukovsky, whose literary criticism between 1914 and 1930s by establishing the specificity and autonomy of poetic language and literature. "Formalism" derives from one of the central tenets of Formalist's thoughts: "That the form of a work of literature is inherently a part of its content. The attempt to separate the two is fallacious".

By focusing on literary form and excluding superfluous contexts, formalists believe that it would be possible to trace the evolution and development of literary forms, and thus, literature itself. The importance of text is reduced or defamiliarised from usual contents, historical, biographical and cultural context. They are thus shift from moral approach to scientific approach of what they called literariness or *literatunost*. It is only when defamiliarisation is achieved in literature that we can have autonomous science of literature called *literatunost*, while defamiliarisation itself entails presenting something familiar such as signature tune in an unfamiliar thing in order to gain appreciation of the said object, phenomenon or text.

Boris Eichenbaum's and Viktor Skylovsky critical writing were one of the prominent works on formalism. Viktor Skylovsky bases his work on developing scientific techniques of art which writer employs upon defamiliarisation. Boris Eichenbaum's quest for literariness/literatunost in his approach to formalism strikes us most and it is actually the motivation to search for signature tunes which is the main preoccupation in this study.

Formalism refers to critical approaches to evaluate, analyse and appraise literary features in a text. In formalism, the individualism is given upper priority over collectivism in that, the grammar, metre, rhythm and figurative devices are prioritised while collectivism aims to identify the peculiar identity of work in general approaches.

Underpinning Tenets and Relevant Jargons in Formalism

Form: The form of a literary work has to do with the way it is chronologically arranged. To formalists, form is way more important than content. Therefore, literary critics should always embrace and be interested in how something is said rather than the contents. In fact, the form is contents. With this, the form of texts is placed above contents, social background and contextual modification just like the form of signature tunes helps in analysing the role they play in their respective contexts and domains.

Literariness is the true essence of literary work. It implies the intrinsic features or autonomous science of literature that makes it different from others. In formalism, literariness is deducible from defamiliarisation which occurs when something common is made unfamiliar in order to bring out its true essence. In Yorùbá textual analysis, signature tune is negligible, less discussed and commonised but our effort here is to deem it intrinsic and inherent features that stands work out of others.

Defamiliarisation This occurs when a writer or literary artist makes the familiar seems unfamiliar, it is called defamiliarisation because what looks similar is now made unfamiliar. Formalists love this because it shows you what form can do. The main essence of defamiliarisation is to gain the essence for its appreciation in literature. Practically, all the Yorùbá oral critics are aware of a unique tone and tunes that introduces the text, artist or situation, but this study adopts the principle of defamiliarisation to conceptualise its effects and functionality in verbal arts.

Theoretical Positioning of Signature Tunes in Yorùbá Oral Performance

Despite their widespread usage, signature tunes have often been treated merely as introductory formulae, call tones, or *ì-fì-ara-ẹ̀ni-hàn* (self-introduction). However, their recognition as distinct stylistic phenomena, particularly with respect to their positions, typologies, and linguistic composition, remains insufficiently theorised. Traditional Yorùbá oral performance criticism frequently assumes that oral artists within the same genre share identical lyrical content, differing only in performance style.

The position signature tunes occupy in Yorùbá oratures remains one of the contradicting issues in its appraisal. Going by the definitions of Babalolá (1966, p. 23), Àjùwòn (1981, p. 4), Mustapha (1989, p. 43), Ajíbádé and Rájí (2011, p. 49) and Adélékè (2022), signature tunes occur only at the beginning and sparingly end of the oral renditions. This is the reason why many of them refer to them as mere introduction or *introductory formulaic*. This hitherto constraint limits the conceptualisation of signature tunes because they do not capture all forms of signature tunes this study discovers. It caters for artistic and textual but fails to cater for other forms of signature tunes that will later be discussed in the subsequent chapter. In this segment of the work, the study justifies that signature tunes occur genre-initial, genre-medial and genre-final if contextual, transitional and geographical signature tunes are put into consideration. This positioning of S.T. is discussed herein:

From cognitive and communication perspectives, research indicates that signature tunes are processed differently in the human brain compared to ordinary speech (Hecker, 1989). Their simplicity, wit, and rhythmic quality make them more memorable (Kellaris, 2008). They evoke nostalgia, happiness, and emotionally charged memories (Grewal et al.,v

2017), thereby reinforcing emotional bonds between performers and audiences.

Furthermore, signature tunes function as sonic logos that strengthen brand identity and differentiation (O'Connell, 2017). They may also carry cultural significance, representing particular historical moments, genres, or stylistic traditions (Taylor, 2012). These insights are particularly relevant to Yorùbá oral genres, where identity, geography, context, and performance history are encoded within recurring lyrical expressions.

Research Methodology

The data for this study were obtained through interviews, participant's observation and recording of texts of *Iyèrè-Ifá* called Ifá Tonal Chant by Èlèbùibon (1999). The texts were collected during rounds of trip to field including Ifá festivals, burial, initiation rite and most importantly, 2024 annual *Alé Iyèrè Contest* in Òşogbo. The data were obtained mainly in Èjìgbò, Òşogbo, Èdẹ, Ìşoko and Másiḡà all in Òşun State. After rounds of recordings, the researcher had one-on-one conversations with key Ifá icons/priests, totalling six in number to ascertain the validity of texts and explanation of the processes. The researcher sought the consent of the performers and approval to use their voice, image and information for research purpose. The voice of *Iyèrè-Ifá* recorded were transcribed using 1974 Yorùbá autography. The texts are then subjected to formalist precepts where only foregrounded elements are analysed.

Signature Tunes Reviewed

Several Yorùbá scholars have indirectly acknowledged signature tunes, albeit under varying terminologies. Babalolá (1966) introduces the concept of introductory formulaic expressions, while Mustapha (1989) refers to call tones in èsà-Egúngún recitals. Ajíbádé and Rájí (2011)

describe them as *ì-fi-ara-èni-hàn* (self-introduction) and Adélékè (2022) interprets them as homage or obeisance.

However, this study challenges the restrictive view that signature tunes occur only at the beginning of performances. Àjùwòn (1981) acknowledges distinctive features in *Ìrèmòjé*, noting that some expressions occur at the beginning, middle, or end of performances. His observation that individual chanters possess unique tones recognisable even without visual contact clearly aligns with the concept of signature tunes, although he does not explicitly name them.

Mustapha's (1989) assertion that signature tunes merely function as call tones is also problematised. While attention-calling is one function, signature tunes serve broader communicative, aesthetic, and identity-building purposes across performances.

The notion of idiosyncratic ability, as discussed by Òjò (2005) and Olátéjú (2016), reinforces the argument that stylistic uniqueness defines artistic identity. While these discussions often focus on written literature, their implications extend naturally to oral performance. Signature tunes represent the projection of an artist's personality and creative identity on stage, sustaining interaction between performer and audience.

Adélékè (2022) and Oládùnké (2024) further suggest that such recurring stylistic devices enhance performance confidence, memorisation, and creativity. Thus, signature tunes are not only identity markers but also strategic performance tools.

In sum, signature tunes constitute a fundamental stylistic phenomenon that cuts across oral performance, media, religion, and everyday communication. They operate as markers of identity, tools of memory, and vehicles of emotional engagement. While previous scholarship has acknowledged their existence under various terminologies, their comprehensive theorisation within Yorùbá stylistics remains limited.

This study therefore positions signature tunes as a critical analytical category for understanding individuality, branding, and stylistic distinction in Yorùbá oral genres and beyond.

The Place of *Iyèrè-Ifá* in Yorùbá Oratures

Iyèrè-Ifá is a variant of Ifá verses where tonal modulation and rhythmical pattern are instrumental for creating aesthetic masterpiece. Since Beier and Gbàdàmòsí (1959) none of the scholars who have classified Yorùbá oral poetry has disputed that *Iyèrè-Ifá* is a chant that requires rhythm and tonal counterpoint, including repetition (Elébuìbòn (1991). Many scholars also agree that *Iyèrè-Ifá* is a religious poetry that has now being used as ceremonial poetry sometimes among the initiates during ritual and occasions (Adesèyè, Olúfúnwá and Aríremákò 2021, p. 349).

Firstly, the scholars who have worked on *Iyèrè-Ifá* are Aṛoye (1980), Olátúnjí (1984), Òpádòtun (1967, 1994, 2002, and 2003) and it is clearly stated in their submissions that *Iyèrè-Ifá*, a variant of Ifá poetry is a chant. However, part of the reason many works are not available on *Iyèrè-Ifá* is that it is a genre derived from Ifá verses which is a recitation. Once someone is versed in Ifá recitation, he/she just needs a bit of creativity and gift of voice modulation and rhythm for presentation of *Iyèrè-Ifá*. While *Ifá-kíkì* (recitation of Ifá) is a recital, *Iyèrè-Ifá* (*Ifá tonal poetry*) is a chant that people, diviners and their apprentices use during burial, Ifá festival, ritual, naming, initiation and chieftaincy installation. To the adherents of *Ifá*, there is no occasion where *Iyèrè-Ifá* is not suitable contrary to Olátúnjí's (1984) claim that it is purely a religious poetry. It used to be purely religious poetry but it has been metamorphosed into multipurpose poetry (Òpádòtun, 2002). Homage is an integral aspect of *Iyèrè-Ifá*, especially in a gathering that involves the presence of many Ifá priests. Aside from this, in the homage during chanting of *Iyèrè-Ifá*, the rendition is laced great deal of *signature tunes*

because, the chanter must identify himself, his trainer(s) and of course his lineage. And all these are rendered with aesthetics signature tunes which is our major pre-occupation in this study.

More importantly, it is expedient at this point in time to say that *Iyèrè-Ifá* as popularly held by many scholars and the Ifá priest originated from the dirge of *Ọ̀rúnmilá's* son, *iyèrè*¹, who died untimely in the course of a journey that *Iyèrè* was meant for mourning in the hypothetical beginning of the genre. The chant of *Iyèrè-Ifá* was used to mourn his death hence *sunyèrè*, “(weep *Iyèrè*)” and became a taboo that *Awo kì í sunkún òkú; iyèrè ni èkún awo* (Diviners (initiates) do not weep for one's death: *iyèrè* is the crying of the initiates). This happens because *Ọ̀rúnmilá* refused to weep, instead he chanted *iyèrè* for the death of his son. It was even clearly stated in *Ọ̀núáretẹ̀* that it was not only *Ọ̀rúnmilá's* son but also *Èlè, Orò's* son and *Ijálá, Ọ̀gún's* son, that passed on (*şòşùn*) but the death of *Ọ̀rúnmilá's* son is the one that was occasioned with *Iyèrè-Ifá*. No wonder, *Iyèrè* is popular anytime the Ifá priests are mourning the death of any member of theirs. This is not to deny the fact that, *Iyèrè-Ifá* is used for other occasions, such as house warming, naming ceremony, chieftaincy ceremony, among others.

Areoye (1980) explains the importance of *Iyèrè-Ifá* in the burial rites of the Ifá diviners. He observes that *Iyèrè-Ifá* is the main orature that dominates the rite and the chant is supported by songs at regular interval. The diviners gather at night after some rituals to chant *Iyèrè-Ifá* in honour of the late diviner whose spirit they must placate to leave the league of worldly diviners to join them in the world of spirits. Areoye (1980) reiteration is therefore not quite different from the takes of our respondents who are experts Ifá priests that lent their voices to the definition of *Iyèrè-Ifá* in this study. However, the genre has

¹ This ensued in a personal conversation with *Àare asùnyèrè àgbáyé*, Chief Fálówò Fákáyòdé

metamorphosed and evolved beyond its usual enclave. It is being used by the chanters in the various settings in modern time. It is used in naming ceremonies, festivals, carnivals among others where *babaláwos* are seated as the major audience.

Elébùibon (1999) did the compilation and exposition of *Iyèrè-Ifá* tonal poetry. His exposition is a revelation about the true nature and features of *Iyèrè-Ifá* that distinguishes it from Ifá recitations and other poetry. The tone modulation is massive, the rhythmical patterns of the tone is on the high and homage is a sin qua non when it comes to the chanting of Ifá tonal poetry referred to as *Iyèrè-Ifá*. It is very suitable for ceremonial and ritual and *Iyere-ifa* can be a host to other feature types like *oriki*(panegyrics), *òwe* (proverbs), *àyájó* (incantation), *orin* (songs) among others while they become the intertexts.

Òjó (2005) also ventured into the burial rites of *babaláwo* and how they employ *Iyèrè-Ifá* as their main means of conveying their griefs, their prayers, and farewell messages to the deceased. To him, *Iyèrè-Ifá* is not just chanted for a deceased but chanted after carefully choosing the appropriate verses of Ifá that are fitting into the contexts. He cited some verses of *Ifá* that are appropriate for burial at each level of rites and reiterates that the verses of *Ifá* used during *Iyèrè-Ifá* performance cannot be used in other contexts where mourning, lamentations and griefs are not needed.

Fáníyì (2013) also has opinion that high-tone that rarely starts Yorùbá words, except in loan words normally starts *Iyèrè Ifá*. While this may not be totally accepted as general but it is part of rhythm that characterise chanting as sub-genres of oral poetries in Yorùbá.

Adésèyẹ, Olúfúnwá and Aríremákò (2021, p. 349) investigate the entertainment and educational of *iyèrè-Ifá*. They analyse how tonal counterpoint, parallelism and repetition aid the aesthetic ornamentation of

Ifá verses that is the pillar of Ìyèrè-Ifá. The only shortcoming is their inability to distinguish between Ifá verses and Ìyèrè-Ifá as thus:

Ifá poems are best sourced in eṣe Ifá (Ifá verses) usually chanted during Ifá divination exercises. The rituals that accompany Ifá divinations carry with them veritable dramaturge and these we hope to explore for entertainment and education.

Ìyèrè-Ifá chanting actually occurs during the ritual and other occasions but the entertainment aspect of Ifá poem they have in mind is contained in Ìyèrè-Ifá and its during this Ìyèrè-Ifá chanting that dramaturgy and sonority of voice attain aesthetic peak. So, educative and entertainment contained in Ìyèrè-Ifá are mainly vocalised through tonal modulation, tonal counterpoint, parallelism and rhythmical pattern. The three typologies of Yorùbá poetry through mode of production are obtainable in Ifá poems. Eṣe-Ifá (Ifá verse) is recited, orin Ifá is sung while Ìyèrè-Ifá which is one of our selected oratures in this study is chanted not recited. Referring to all of them as Ifá poem is to be oblivious of the distinction and contextual usage of the three.

Patterns of Signature Tunes in Ìyèrè Ifá

Ìyèrè-Ifá is one of the oral genres where the chanters employ tonal modification of eṣe-Ifá for aesthetic performance. It is a non-solitary chant that requires response *hin-in* or *hen-en* depending on the geographical location, while the lead chanter chants his Ìyèrè-Ifá. It is both a ceremonial-religious poetry, popular among the adherents of Ifá. The difference between Ifá verses and Ìyèrè-Ifá is the tone modulation and contextual usages of languages. In this section of the work, effort is made to conceptualise signature tune in Ìyèrè-Ifá. As would be later revealed,

signature tune in Ìyèrè-Ifá is *sin qua non* and it's one of the major delineation criteria that distinguishes Ìyèrè-Ifá from Ifá verses. While Ifá verses as modified constitute the textual component in Ìyèrè-Ifá other contextual, identification and language choice constitute what we termed signature tune in Ìyèrè-Ifá. Dominant among them is contextual signature tune where the lead chanter employs language from *paradigmatic axis* to communicate their intents in the course of the said oral performance. If we say Ìyèrè-Ifá is just a tonal modified Ifá-verses, it is questionably logical to ask where other components come from. Intra-text might be there or might not be there, especially when the context is burial, contextual influence is there and aside from all these, the remaining elements that complement Ifá-verses to form Ìyèrè-Ifá are signature tunes and these are what this study sets to examine here.

Signature Tunes Used in Genre-Initial

In Yorùbá oral genres, the use of signature tunes is common in the beginning of the chanting. Occurrence and the frequency of having signature tunes at the initial stage is higher than other phases or segment of the oral rendition. This is the reason why some scholars mistake it for *introductory formulaic* or homage because they occur at the same spatial context. The survey of Ìyèrè-Ifá from the samples collected from *Ilékú* (burial rite of Ifá priests), reveals that the chanters usually start their chanting with some signature tunes that are neither traceable to any Ifá verse nor established intra-texts. Without mincing words, such aesthetic use of language in a special way is restricted to Ìyèrè-Ifá though the case of inter-genre conformity cannot be ruled out (Oyágbénjò, 2024). Example genre-initial signature tune in Ìyèrè-Ifá is given below:

Mo ní bẹẹ ni o
indeed like that
Írá írá mi ìṣòwò òpẹ
Òpẹ's worshipping

Call: I said its
My people in

Irá irá mi ìṣòwò èdú
worship of Èdú
Ègbè: Hin in
Lílè: Ifá kí yín meréntélú
from Meréntélú
Òpè Òpè yin yin o
you
Mèsèlarè oo
Mèsèlarè
Òrunmilà kí yín omọ ará ikeyìn
salutes you, the one from Ikeyìn
Omọ Ajagunra ni
from Ajagunra)

My fellow in
Hin in
Call: Ifá greet you
Òpè praises
From
Òrúmilà
He hailed

Lílè: È sún mọ ibí ẹ wáá wò mí ooo
Eyín mi ò pakaṣo
Erigì mi ò ṣe mọ̀ndẹ
Ojú tí mo fí n wòran ò fọ
watch
Come closer to watch me
My teeth are not clustered
My gums are not decayed
The eyes with which I
are not blind.

The artist seems to be arousing the audience's interest in how good-looking he is, while also prompting them to be attentive to his beautiful performance. One who has good attributes, to them, will surely have confidence and a sonorous voice to entertain and enliven the audience. Another example of self-adulation termed artistic signature tune later in the work is:

Lílè: Mo ní bó bá di ibi iyán
È yára maa jẹ ẹ ooo
È sì maa bükèlè ràndù
Ṣùgbón béré bá deré òpè
Béré bá deré Àgbònirègún
È má rán ẹlẹ̀ṣẹ̀ wá
Èlẹ̀sin ni ẹ maa rán sí irú wá
When it comes to eating pounded Yam
Go on and eat it Bó bá dibi àmàlà
When it comes to eating àmàlà
Continue even with your big bolus
But when it comes to Ifá performance
When it comes to the performance of Àgbònirègún
Send not those that trek
You should rather send people on horseback.

The artistic and creative manipulation of language is aimed at declaring one's interest in *iyèrè* than even eating pounded yam or *àmàlà*. His postulation here shows that he is a dexterous *iyèrè* chanter because he inherited it from his father, hence, he becomes so competent in it that people cannot just send invite to him through a random person but through a dignified person who

The impression projected here is that the performer is introducing the performance to them at the same time excites the audience in preparation for the sonorous and dexterous oral performance. To the earlier scholars like Babalolá (1966), the above rendering is *introductory formulaic* or Ajibádé and Rájí (2011) *ì-fi-ara-ẹni-hàn* (self-introduction). Contrary to theirs, the tune cannot be said to be mere introduction because it does much more than introduction. Besides, it can occur at any stage of the performance, unlike what the acknowledged scholars led us to believe.

Similarly, the artistes in *iyèrè-Ifá* cultivate the habit of making their identity known using diverse manipulative skills, and what A uses in this case will surely be different from B. This is what the advocates of formalism, most especially the aspect of *literatunost* where style is referred to an identity of man. Because of this, the role projected will be that of addresser who seeks to exert his influence on the audience in such a way that they give him maximum attention, having displayed a bit of his artistic prowess. An example of such is:

dazzles on the horse, being the most honourable means of communication in Yorùbá history.

During *Ìyèrè-Ifá* presentation in the programme *Alé Ìyèrè (night of ìyèrè)*,² the performances of the artists were replete with series of signature tunes that we cannot even exhaustively explore in this work. Example of such is given below:

Ìwòyí àná oooo Èmi Olódùmarè la jò n fapá ewuré jiyán	By this time yesterday, Olódùmarè and I were eating pounded yam with goat's arm Hin-in-in
Hin-in-in Ìwòyí àná an an an Èmi Olódùmarè la jò n tayò lódèdè ooo	By this time yesterday, Olódùmarè and I were playing games in my household It is a great banging It is a great bang
Òpìnpin mi òpìnpin Òpìnpin mi Ìfá wá kanrí òtá mọgi oooo	Ìfá will bang enemy's head against the tree.

This is not a text though it looks like it but a signature tunes that the artist adopts for himself as his habitual character. This kind of signature tune prepare the audience for what they will enjoy as the as performance progresses. The use of language above is an exaggeration, a kind of comical way to give oneself aggrandisement and adulation among others. I think the reason why this chanter uses this is due to how far he has gone in the mastery of *Ìyèrè-Ifá*. He won the global *Ìyèrè* competition organised by a particular body about 25 years ago. This gave him the name Àarẹ Asùnyèrẹ, the president of

² Alé ìyèrè is an annual ìyèrè competition organised by Àarẹ Asùnyèrẹ Awo Àgbáyé, Chief Fákáyòdé Fálówò

Ìyèrè chanter. Therefore, he is trying to justify his nickname using the above signature tunes as he is seen in the photo below where he chanted during *alé Ìyèrè* contest in Oşogbo:



Photo of Chief Ifákáyòdé Fálówò, Àarẹ Asùnyèrẹ Àgbáyé During Ìyèrè Session in Oşogbo December 2024 (Photo Taken by Research Assistant)

To further cement his name as a competent chanter of *Ìyèrè-Ifá*, Chief Fákáyòdé Fálówò goes further to say:

Yeeeeeeee !
Hun un un un
Bí n bá kún sí inú

Yeeeeeeee !
Hun un un un
If I grumble within

Kí ní òhún ò dáa actually not good	That the thing is
Awọ ajá ò dára ní mósáláásí befitting of mosque	Dog's skin is not
Awọ elédè wọn ò şeé gbààyè oo not good for fasting	The hide of pig is
Tí n bá ní kò dáa	If I say it's not good
Kò dáa	It's actually not good
Kò dáa náà nú-un	It is not good indeed
Kò dáa ká máa bá obìnrin sùn having intimacy with woman	It is not good to be
Kó máa só farting.	And such woman is
Èmi o lè sùnnyèrè n gbọn pipi and be shaky in confidence	I cannot chant Ìyèrè
Ohun a bá bini bí kì í hunni inherited cannot hurt someone.	Whatever one

The chanter craves for attention because the attention of the audience is very important in the course of *ìyèrè* due to the necessity of response that boost the confidence of the performer. That is why the chanter comically arouse the attention and indulgence of the audience as seen above.

There seems to be usage of this type of signature tunes frequently in *Ìyèrè Ifá* because almost all the artists use at least one to praise themselves and to tell the audience of their capability as a chanter. Therefore, its in tandem with the principle of literatunost embedded in Formalism. Another example goes thus:

Tó bá di olúgbóngbó oooo and seek	Once it come to hide
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Kò sẹyẹ tó le ba bí àparò hibernate like bush-fowl	No bird can
Bí àparò, bí àparò nínú oko the bush	Like bush-fowl in
Tó bá dólùwẹ n wẹ swimming	When it comes to
Kò sẹyẹ tó le wẹ bí kàrò lódò ooo perfect as kàrò in the river	No bird can swim as
Torí gbígbìn la gbingèdè tree is planted	Because the plantain
Liló la ló kòkó mọre transplanted my brethren.	While cocoa is

No bird can hide like bush-fowl in the farm, just like no bird can swim like *kàrò* bird in the river. The poet stylistically calls himself these birds to show that he has mastery of what he does just like those two birds has great mastery of what they do. This makes us to see the kind of person he is as far as chanting of *Ìyèrè* is concerned because he is planted like a cocoa plant not transplanted like sugarcane. This is a use of personification because in Yorùbá worldview, whoever is *ògbìn* (planted) is original because the root is strong while *èlọ* (transplanted) is newly introduced plant like one done through transplant whose natural habitat is not where it is transferred to.

Signature Tunes Used Genre-medial

Using signature tunes medially is the rarest of the three possibilities, yet, there are several instances of occurrence of signature tunes in the midst of the performances. The commonest of this signature tunes are contextual signature tunes where the chanter or orator will like to match his context with a fitting language possibility. So, he chooses

from pool of possibilities that (Halliday, 1994) called selection from *network of options* in the example from *Iyèrè-Ifá* below: Let us see another example of signature tune below:

Eni bá jémi ní hin-in a lógún ẹrú	Whoever answers me hin-in in will have 20 slaves
Èyàn tó jé mi ní hin-in	Whoever answers me hin in-in
A lógbòn níwòfà ooo	Will have 30 pawns
Èyàn tí ò gbé iyèrè òpè	Whoever decides not to respond to iyèrè òpè,
Bó bá n bóbínrin sùn, kò ní í damira	If he copulates with a woman, he will not ejaculate
Kò ní damira ooo	He will not ejaculate
Èyàn tí ò gbe iyèrè òpè	Whoever decides not to respond to iyèrè òpè
Tó bá n bóbínrin sùn	If he copulates with a woman
Kò ní damira ooo	He will not ejaculate...

He systematically prays for the people who give him attention to respond and berates those that are not paying attention to his performance, that they will not perform well sexually if they do not respond to his chanting as a competent chanter. This kind of language brings about laughter and after laughter, the audience are duty bound to give him attention.

Signature Tunes at Used Genre-final

Investigation in this study reveals that the occurrence of signature tunes genre-final has the second highest frequency. This occurrence captures part of the conventional definition of signature tunes that, it does occur at the end of the performance

for winding up or closing the phase of performance. When one finishes his performance and wants to leave the stage, he calls another chanter with the tune:

Lílé: Ọ̀wẹ̀ tí yóó wẹ̀dò	The swimmer that wants to swim)
Kó bọ sómi	Should dive into the river
Ègbè: kó bọ sómi ooo	He should dive into the river
Ọ̀wẹ̀ tí yóó wẹ̀dò	The swimmer that is ready to swim
Kó bọ sómi ooo	Should dive into the river.

(Iyèrè-Ifá I, ll 95-100)

Ọ̀wẹ̀ tí yóó wẹ̀dò, kó bọ sómi (The swimmer that wants to swim should dive into the river) is an attempt to link his performance to another chanter's performance and the trend continues like that till they finish the performance for the day. Ọ̀wẹ̀ (swimmer) is incoming chanter while ẹri (river) is the mantle of performing in public.

To justify the fact that *iyèrè-Ifá* performance is also influenced by the situation, we discover another signature tune that illuminates the motive behind the performance. It goes thus:

Ọ̀dún jọ oo	The festival has
Àmọ̀dún lerè ọ̀dún jọ o	Our next year is here
Àmọ̀dún lerè, ọ̀dún jọ	Our next year is here

come
again
again.

There is obvious stylistic indication that what motivates the gathering and of course the performance is the festival which might be Ifá festival, Ọ̀sun festival or any kind of festival that warrants their gathering. This is not the same thing the chanter will utter when it comes to burial, naming ceremony or chieftaincy ceremony. In other words, this kind of

signature tune can only occur during the festivals not during the burial, naming or other occasions. This implies that the context determines the choice of signature tune which is exactly what stylistics upholds. Another chanter in the same performance sphere may opt for:

Bó bá dàmódún a ó sì tún ríra shall still see one another	By next year, We
A ó sì tún ríra ooo	We shall see again
Ègbè: Bó bá dàmódún, a ó sì tún ríra ooo shall still see one another	By next year, We
Bó bá dàmódún year we shall still meet	By this time next
A ó sì tún ríra. again.	We shall still meet

This also signifies festivity but expressing the same emotional wishes. While the first expresses the joyous mood, the second one, amount to prayers for the entire congregation. In contrast, the wishes and prayer depicted by signature tune in the burial type of *iyèrè-Ifá* is quite different because the context and situation have come to play. The kinds of wishes they have influenced the choice of words and by extension choice of signature tune.

In the sample below, which is also meant for burial, the case is different because the intention is to lay the corpse to rest not to lament or grief again. Throughout their chanting at the grave side all they end their chanting with is:

Lílè: Ìbò lonilé káà yíí wa lọ?	Call: Where is the owner of this house?
Ègbè: Ìbo lonilé káà yíí wa lọ ooo?	Res: Where is the owner of this house?

Ìbo lonilé káà yíí wa lọ?

Where is the owner of this house?

Ìbo lonilé káà yíí wa lọ?

Where is the owner of this house? The owner of the compound is being asked after, knowing quite well that he cannot answer them because he has no more. But the question is just to show futility of life. They ask; *Ibo lonilé káà yíí wa lọ?* (Where did the owner of this compound go?) with the expectation of no reply from anyone. The expression is a common expression made unfamiliar as it is in the Boris Eichenbaum principle of defamiliarisation in poetic language. This only happens during the burial at the grave side. During the open burial service, they use different signature tunes. We call them signature tunes because they mark a situation, the context and become the style they use in that particular time and space; hence, it becomes their style and signature tune. During the funeral rites of the deceased Ifá priest or adherent of traditional religion, they adopt another signature tune that is quite different from the one above or its variants. All these sociological interpretations are not possible without the help of precepts of Formalism where the sociological interpretation of meaning is gotten through formal intrinsic setting of the texts because languages and their social interpretations are very deep. During the *ilékú* (Ifá priests funeral rites), after the opening signature tunes, the text or may be intra-text or extratext, the usual signature tunes is:

Okú tó lómọ nílẹ̀ ló ládabọ oo	The deceased that leaves children has assurance of ritual
Òkú tó lómọ nílẹ̀ ló ládabọ	The deceased who leaves children has assurance of ritual
Òòwẹ̀ tí ó wẹ̀dò kó bó sẹ̀rí	The next swimmer so dive into the river
Kó bó sẹ̀rí ooo	He should dive into the river

Òòwẹ̀ tí ó wẹ̀dò kó bọ̀ sẹ̀rì The next swimmer so dive into the river

The deceased that died and left behind children has provided the ingredients for rites is to buttress Yorùbá view that children are the legacy Africans value the most. *Ilékú* (rite of passage of Ifá priests) is a very rigorous rite among the priests. If one of them dies, and such leaves no child, it is difficult for siblings or outsiders to shoulder the responsibility, only the children of the deceased can have the sense of responsibility to do it. Hence, the rite of passage in question is assured once the children are available. This is the reason for this excerpt and many more that are in that class during the burial rites. The chanters during the rites use this signature tunes and its variants stylistically in the sense that they turn it to habitual language. Another variant of the one mentioned above is:

Ònà rere níbí tí bàbá bá lọ	Good path is
where your father is heading	
Ònà rere níbí tí bàbá bá lọ ooo	Good path is
where your father is heading	
Òòwẹ̀ tí ó wẹ̀dò kó bọ̀ sẹ̀rì	The next swimmer
should dive into the river	
Kó bọ̀ sẹ̀rì ooo	He should dive
into the river	
Òòwẹ̀ tí ó wẹ̀dò kó bọ̀ sẹ̀rì	The next
swimmer should dive into the river	

The language of this signature tune attest to Yorùbá worldview about life after death. They believe that the dead priest is living somewhere in the world beyond and pray that it is a good path, not the rough one that the dead initiate is taking. The rough one is a world of agony called *òrun àpáàdì*, while the good path is called *òrun rere*, the

paradise. It stems from the belief that whoever does good shall reap it here and hereafter. The second phase of signature tune is talking about the transition from one chanter to another one. When an excerpt or text defines a person, individual, context, text like this, what is entailed is *literatunost*. In the *Ilékú* rites, the performance or chanting is not for only one person or priest. They come to the stage one after the other. And since the signature tunes, we are talking about usually appear in the final stage of the performance, they stylistically call the next chanter with another signature tune as follows:

Òòwẹ̀ tí ó wẹ̀dò kó bọ̀ sẹ̀rì	The next swimmer
should dive into the river	
Kó bọ̀ sẹ̀rì ooo	He should dive into
the river	
Òòwẹ̀ tí ó wẹ̀dò kó bọ̀ sẹ̀rì	The next swimmer
should dive into the river	

This is what we referred to as transitional signature tune that signal the desire to end the performance and call on the next person to come on stage. Before the response from the chorus that accompany the lead chanter ends, the next chanter is already on the stage to start his own performance. This shows that signature tunes during *iyèrè Ifá* performance is a *sin qua non* because it is a must they adopt one or general one when the situation demands for it. Using appropriate language in each situation requires the languages that are generally accepted by everyone in the gathering. The usage of such language determines whether the chanter is competent or not.³ Of course, we also have some personalised signature tunes that chanters adopt personally for themselves. Their occurrence is usually multi-phased at both the

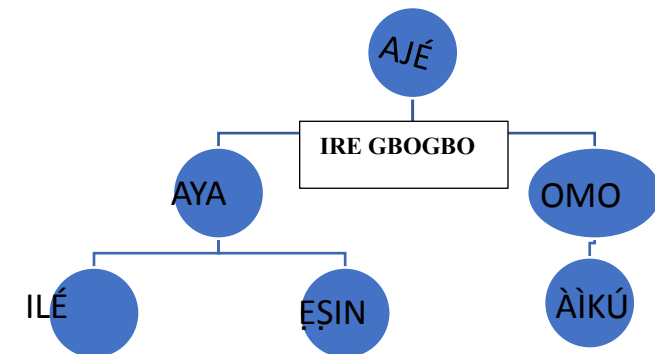
³ In my personal conversation with Dr Olúșèyí, he said it that language use of the chanter determines how vibrant and competent they are and their language either thrill or dissuade the listeners

beginning, final and terminating stages. This is only applicable to when there is exchange of voice in the performance, that is when we have chanters lined up for performance during post-burial rite called *ilékú*, festival or competition.

They are stylistically used consistently and repetition hardly eludes them in this scenario just to show lay emphasis on the desire and the message. While chanting *Iyèrè*, if the verse the chanter renders forbids evil, he uses:

Òkèrèfèfè ni ibí dì goes the evil	Distant foreign land
Ibi máa yáa lọ finally	Evil shall quickly go
Ègbè: Ibi máa yáa lọ ooo Òkèrèfèfè nibí dì goes the evil	Res: Evil shall quicky go Distant foreign land
Ibi máa yáa lọ ooo Òkèrèfèfè nibí dì goes the evil	Evil shall surely go Distant foreign land
Ibi má yáa lọ finally	Evil shall quickly go

It is a prayer and signature tune at the same time because it is habitually used in this manner to ensure the motif of the verse rendered is completed. This cannot be used when the motif of the chanter in the verse is abundant wealth or ride, because we have different wishes that the chanter or reciter of Ifá verse or *Iyèrè* target. It might be, *Ire ajé*, *aya*, *omọ*, *esin*, *ilé*, *àikú* (wealth, wives, children, house, death aversion) among others. While *ire àikú* (long life) is the father of them all because they believe that it is only when you are alive you can attain others because of the affirmation of health is wealth, *Ajé* is usually the first one in ascending order as thus:



The chart showing the good wishes and desires, targets of Ifá verse or Chanter (Author's Idea)

Ajé (wealth), *aya* (wife), *omọ* (child), *ilé* (house), *esin* (ride/horse), *àikú* (immortality) are the good wishes above are seen as benevolent spirits in Abimbólá (1976). All of them together are referred to as *ire gbogbo* (all fortunes). Their occurrence determines the kind of signature tune that will occur at the end of the *Iyèrè*. Just as we have benevolent spirits, we also have malevolent spirits that the chanter focuses of Ifá verses on. He rebukes, condemns and cast them ways or forbid them for chanter himself or the audience. The malevolent spirits are; *Ikú*, *àrùn*, *òfò*, *ègbà*, *èse*, *òràn*, *àdánù* (death, sickness, loss, deprivation, spell, crime, affliction, crime and forfeiture) among others. Misuse or abuse of the signature tune appropriate is an indication that the chanter is still a newbie.



Fig.11: Showing the good wishes and desires, targets of Ifá verse or Chanter by Olúwo Adèrè mí Ifáòlepín⁴ accessed on Instagram on 12th November, 2024.
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DFFSUOfMW34/?iash=YzljYk10Dq3Zq>

(illness), òfò (loss), òràn (crime), ikú (death), ejó (cases), ijà (fight), èsè (spell), ègbà (tribulation)

That is, someone who dies and leaves children behind has assured himself of befitting burial and rites that will transits him or her to the world of the ancestor because they belief in life after death orchestrated the burial rites of diverse variance in Yorùbá land in the first place. So, they adopt that signature tune or any of its variant to ascertain that. They can also use:

Gàngàn gógó lawó di awo	With heavy load bored by
Awó ti lọ	He has finally gone
Awo ti lo ooo!	Awo has gone !
Gàngàn gógó lawó di awo	With heavy load bored by
Awo ti lo ooo!	Awo has gone !
Gàngàn gógó lawó di awo	With heavy load bored by
Awo ti lo ooo!	Awo has gone!

This is a lamentation that *awo* (initiate) has finally gone with a lot of loads, spiritually or otherwise because when someone dies, he dies with his wisdom, knowledge and his sins if at all he sinned. That is what they lament that brings about the one above. There are variants of these and sometimes the variation may occur depending on the artists, or the geographical location where *Iyèrè* is being chanted or where the chanter comes from. Most importantly, they occur at the end of the verse of Ifa chanted by the artist.

In the similar vein, during the graveyard service of the Ifá priests, they use different signature tune at the end of each chanting of *Ifá* verse. They chant Òfúnbàrà. And after each verse of this Ifa text, they end with:

Lilé: Ìbò lonilé kàà yí wa lọ? Call: Where is the owner of this

However, during the burial ceremonies of a priest or any of their member, the signature tunes that are used in the end are quite different. For example, during the open burial service, they use:

Okú tó lómọ nílẹ̀ ló ládabọ oo	The deceased that leaves children has assurance of ritual
Òkú tó lómọ nílẹ̀ ló ládabọ	The deceased that leaves child has assurance of ritual
Òòwẹ̀ tí ó wẹ̀dò kó bọ sẹ̀rí	The next swimmer so dive into the river
Kó bọ sẹ̀rí ooo	He should dive into the river
Òòwẹ̀ tí ó wẹ̀dò kó bọ sẹ̀rí	The next swimmer should dive into the river

⁴ Author sought the veteran Ifa Priest Olúwo Adèrè mí Ifáòlepín's Consent and explanation of the concepts.

Ègbè: Ìbo lonílé káà yí wa lọ ooo? House gone?
 Res: Where has the owner of this House gone?
 Ìbo lonílé káà yí wa lọ? Where is the owner of this House gone?
 Ìbo lonílé káà yí wa lọ? Where is the owner of this House gone?

The question here is not meant to be answered by anyone but an attempt to lament the vanity of life that, the owner of the house (grave) has gone somewhere but nobody knows where he goes because when someone dies, his whereabouts is not known. Therefore, the signature tune is used all the time they finish a verse of Ifá at the graveyard and want to take another one. One unique attribute of signature tune during all the contexts of Ìyèrè we mentioned is that, they can be used initially to show aesthetic dexterity contrary to what we have in other genres aside from unstructured genre. That is, the chanter coming to the front to chant Ìyèrè during festival, burial or graveyard service if the deceased may opt for signature tunes that is meant for final performance in the beginning to show how dexterous he is. In fact, one of our informants made it known that, when someone becomes so comfortable and competent in Ìyèrè-Ifá, his ability to start off his performance from behind the stage is commendable. What they use to do this in all these contexts is signature tunes used terminally.

Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that signature tunes in Ìyèrè-Ifá are indispensable aesthetic devices that perform multiple communicative roles, including performer identification, audience engagement, contextual signaling, emotional stimulation, transition management, and affirmation of artistic competence. Contrary to the prevailing view that such features are restricted to performance openings, the study demonstrates that signature tunes occur fluidly at initial, medial, and

terminal stages of performance. The study further establishes that signature tunes are shaped by situational context, such as festivals, funerals, *ilékú* rites, and competitive performances, and may be personalised or communal, fixed or adaptive. Ultimately, the article argues that signature tunes constitute a defining stylistic criterion for distinguishing *Ìyèrè-Ifá* from *Ifá* recitation and other Yorùbá chants and also to establish another critical paradigm for appraising Yorùbá orature beyond *Ìyèrè-Ifá*. By foregrounding individuality, branding, and aesthetic innovation in oral performance, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of stylistic identity in Yorùbá orature and expands the analytical tools available for African oral literature studies.

APPENDIX: NAMES AND DETAILS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

S/N	NAME	AGE	LOCATION	STATUS	DATE OF CONTACT
1.	Nínálowó Abéré-Ifá	53	Máşifá	Ifá Priest	17th April, 2024
2.	Babaawo Ifákáyòdé Oyèdiran	78	Èjìgbò	Ifá Priest	September 10th, 2024
3.	Ifáyòdé Awo Òyó	49	Ìşoko	Ifá Priest	13th September, 2023
4.	Ààrẹ Asùnyèrè Awo Àgbáyé, Chief Fákáyòdé Fálówò	50	Òşogbo	Ifá Priest	13th December, 2024
5.	Ìdówú Ogúnłowò	23	Èdẹ	Student/Chanter	6th June, 2024
6.	Àtándá Olúşèyí	61	Ilésà	Ifá Priest /Doctor	6th June, 2023

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