

**THE YORUBA LANGUAGE AS THE ORIGIN OF FOLKSONGS IN ILE-IFE: A CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, AND MUSICAL EXAMINATION**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the Yoruba language as the basis of folksongs in Ile-Ife, analysing how these songs convey moral values, strengthen social cohesion, and safeguard cultural heritage. Utilising an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates cultural studies, linguistics, and ethnomusicology, the research investigates the tonal, semantic, and aesthetic aspects of the Yoruba language and their influence on the invention, performance, and transmission of folk songs. Data were gathered by participant observation, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews with local artists, elders, and educators, utilising a qualitative ethnographic methodology. This study utilises two Yoruba proverbs as its conceptual framework: “*Orin la fi n gbé itàn lẹ*” (“It is through song that history are transmitted”), which underscores the role of songs in preserving cultural memory, and “*Eni tí kò mọ orin, kò mọ itàn*” (“He who does not know song does not know the history”), which emphasises the intrinsic connection between musical expression and cultural knowledge. The results indicate that the Yoruba language serves as both a repository of cultural memory and a generative medium that preserves cultural legacy and performance traditions. The research illustrates that Yoruba folk songs in Ile-Ife encapsulate educational, ethical, and communal principles. The study concludes that Yoruba folksongs are critical for the preservation of the Yoruba language as a valuable cultural asset and advocates for systematic documentation, digital archiving, and curricular integration to conserve this oral heritage for future generations.

**Keywords:** Yoruba language, traditional songs, Ile-Ife, folksongs, cultural proverbs.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Yoruba language, which is spoken by more than 40 million people mostly in southern Nigeria, Benin, and Togo, is an important part of how the Yoruba people keep and pass on their cultural heritage (Akintoye, 2010; Yoruba language, 2023; Yoruba people, 2023<sup>1</sup>). This story is mostly about Ile-Ife, which is commonly thought of as the birthplace of Yoruba civilisation and the historical capital of the ancient Yoruba empire. Yoruba is a tonal language with a lot of oral traditions. It not only makes communication easier, but it also puts philosophical, moral, and social ideas into artistic forms like folk music. These folksongs, which are an important part of Yoruba oral literature, help keep the culture alive, teach morals, and build a sense of community. This article looks at the Yoruba language as the main source of folk songs in Ile-Ife. It does this by looking at the language's historical roots, grammatical rules, and social and cultural functions through an analysis of some traditions and academic research. Language is a cultural system that stores the memories, tastes, and ways of seeing the world of a group of people. For the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria, language is not just a means of communication; it's also a way to store culture, full of metaphors, tonal changes, and oral methods. People think of Ile-Ife as the birthplace of Yoruba culture. It is a unique place where language and oral art forms come together to keep cultural identity alive.

Folksongs are an important part of this cultural environment. They serve as tools for teaching, ways to exhibit beauty, and moral guidance, and they help strengthen community ties. The Yoruba language is a tonal system, which makes it easy for speech and song to go together. Researchers of African oral literature contend that the interconnectedness of speech and song highlights the profundity of Yoruba oral traditions (Adegbite, 2016; Olatunji, 2020).

Many young Yoruba people now read, write, and think more in English than in Yoruba. This weakens the everyday use of proverbs, praise poetry, and folksongs, since these forms rely on rich, idiomatic Yoruba that is

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<sup>1</sup>Yoruba language. (2023). Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia Yoruba people. (2023). Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia

hard to translate. Traditionally, folksongs and histories were learned by listening to elders at home, at festivals, and in the community. Today, busy urban lifestyles, migration, and less intergenerational contact mean fewer opportunities for children to sit, listen, and learn songs and stories directly from elders. Radio, TV, streaming platforms, and social media expose people to global pop music and Western genres. These often displace local folk repertoires, making traditional songs seem old-fashioned or less attractive to younger listeners, even in Yoruba speaking areas. Many folksongs were tied to specific activities (farming, trading, rituals, initiation rites, festivals). As these traditional practices decline or change, the songs lose their original setting and practical function, which makes them easier to forget or drop from daily life. Even when people speak Yoruba, they may not know deep Yoruba the proverbs, archaic terms, praise names, and ritual vocabulary that appear in folksongs and *oriki*. This makes the texts harder to understand and reduces their impact, because listeners cannot fully grasp the meanings or references. Yoruba language and culture are often treated as minor subjects in schools, and folksongs are not consistently used as teaching tools. Without strong curricular support, children learn about Western music and literature more than the songs and stories of their own people. In Ile-Ife, folksongs are integrated into rituals, folktales, festivals, and daily life, mirroring the community's lived experiences and cosmological beliefs. The primary inquiry of this study is: How does the Yoruba language serve as the foundation for folk music in Ile-Ife, and what cultural and linguistic mechanisms perpetuate this tradition?

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on African oral traditions has underscored the interaction among language, performance, and culture (Finnegan, 2012; Barber, 1991). For the Yorubas, language is intricately connected to oral literature, encompassing proverbs (*òwe*), praise poetry (*oriki*), chants (*ofò*), and folk music. Scholars like Falola (2021) and Ojo (2019) stress that Yoruba oral traditions are closely linked to the language's own grammatical features, especially tone, rhythm, and repetition. In the setting of Ile-Ife, folk songs have been examined as instruments of cultural continuity and spiritual invocation (Falola & Genova, 2006). Moonlight play songs (*èrè itàn*) have been acknowledged for their educational function in imparting moral teachings to younger generation (Babatunde, 2018).

Festival songs, particularly those linked to the Olojo festival, function as ritualised invocations of deities such as Ogun, Orunmila, and Oduduwa. Lullabies (*orin omò*) represent maternal love and incorporate moral and spiritual safeguarding through Yoruba expressions (Adediran, 2017). *Oriki* (praise poetry) holds a crucial role in Yoruba oral traditions as a vocal art form that honors individuals, lineages, locales, and even deities. The word *oriki* comes from the words *ori* (head or destiny) and *ki* (to laud). It is basically a type of discourse that honors identity, heritage, and character (Barber, 1991). In Yoruba cosmology, the head (*ori*) signifies fate and individuality; hence, reciting *oriki* serves to evoke and assert a person's fundamental identity. This technique exemplifies the Yoruba conception of language as performative, possessing the ability to affirm, reinforce, or alter social and spiritual realities (Olatunji, 2020). Nevertheless, a deficiency persists in academic research that explicitly connects the language characteristics of Yoruba to the structural logic of folk music. This research aims to fill that vacuum by emphasising the Yoruba language as the origin of folksongs in Ile-Ife.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case study combines ethnographic observation, folk song recordings, semi-structured interviews, and secondary sources such as songbooks, archives and prior Yoruba studies from Ile-Ife, and cross-checked with relevant scholarly literature. Folk songs are purposively sampled across ritual, social and children's contexts. Data are transcribed in standard Yoruba with English translations, then analysed linguistically, musically and thematically to show how language shapes form, function and meaning over time. Ethical approval, informed consent, confidentiality, respect for cultural protocols, and secure data storage guide all interactions with participants and indigenous knowledge

## 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Exploring the Yoruba language and its connection to Ile-Ife folksongs reveals the integration of language, culture, and music. As the heart of Yoruba civilisation, Ile-Ife underscores music as a key medium for cultural transmission and historical storytelling. Yoruba folksongs, characterised by the tonal and rhythmic aspects of the language, embody oral traditions that define community identity. The analysis explores cultural, linguistic, and musical dimensions, demonstrating how language shapes music, preserves culture, and enhances social communication.

### (i.) Song I – *Oridami si le Ife*

This song is significant because it pays tribute to Ile-Ife, recognized as the spiritual and historical heart of the Yoruba people. The phrase "*Oridami si Ile-Ife*" (Destiny has brought me to Ile-Ife) expresses a deep connection to the land and the sacredness of the Yoruba homeland. The song evokes pride and a sense of ancestral belonging, reminding the community of its origins and spiritual heritage. Through songs like this, a collective

identity and sense of belonging are reinforced, ensuring that the story of Yoruba civilization is not forgotten but continually celebrated and passed down through music.

## 5. DISCUSSION OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Yoruba sayings "Orin la fi n gbé itàn ló" ("It is through song that stories are transmitted") and "Eni tí kò mó orin, kò mó itàn" ("He who does not know the song does not know the story") show how important music is for keeping and passing on cultural history, identity, and knowledge in Yoruba society. These sayings imply that songs serve as both artistic manifestations and conduits of cultural memory.

### (a.) *Songs as a Way to Remember Culture*

In Yoruba culture, music is an important part of oral traditions that carry on history and stories from one generation to the next. The Yoruba concept that songs keep cultural knowledge is in line with the view that oral traditions are the basis for cultural continuity. In this way, songs are more than just fun; they represent repositories of cultural values, histories, and community knowledge. The lyrics and music of the songs tell stories of ancestors, gods, customs, victories, and defeats that shape the Yoruba way of thinking. The Yoruba proverbs "Orin la fi n gbé itàn ló" ("Histories are transmitted through songs") and "Eni tí kò mó orin, kò mó itàn" ("He who does not understand songs does not understand histories") highlight the strong connection between music and memory in Yoruba culture. Music acts as a powerful mnemonic tool, helping communities remember and transmit their history, especially when written records are scarce or unavailable. By embedding stories in songs, these narratives become easier to memorise, repeat, and share across generations. This process of oral transmission is vital for preserving Yoruba culture, as it ensures that the community's history and identity endure, even in the face of change or external influences.

### (b.) *The Sheet Music of Songs: Music as a vehicle for cultural preservation*

The sheet music for songs such as "Asa Ibile," "Oridami si Ile-Ife," and "Ife Ooye" illustrate how traditional Yoruba music plays a vital role in preserving cultural memory. These songs reflect key aspects of Yoruba heritage, including deep respect for Ile-Ife, the birthplace of Yoruba civilization, and the enduring traditional values cherished by the Yoruba people.

#### (i.) *Song II- Asa Ibile (Our Culture)*

The song emphasises the importance of embracing one's cultural heritage and identity. The repeated phrase "A sa ibi le," meaning "Our culture," reinforces the idea that understanding one's place in the Yoruba community relies on preserving cultural traditions. By passing down the history and values of the Yoruba people from one generation to the next, the song serves as a bridge between the past and the present, helping to ensure that cultural norms and traditions remain vibrant and alive.

#### (iii.) *Song III - Ife Ooye*

The song underscores the importance of Ife as the wellspring of Yoruba wisdom, with the repeated phrase "Ife Ooye" symbolizing the city's glory and grandeur. Through its music, the song expresses deep spiritual reverence for this sacred place, helping to preserve the history and myths surrounding the origins of the Yoruba people. In doing so, it reinforces the idea that cultural identity is deeply rooted in the community's historical and mythological narratives.

### (c.) *Linguistic and Musical Examination*

The tonal nature of the Yoruba language is fundamental in shaping the musical qualities of Yoruba folksongs. The tones in Yoruba speech directly influence the melody and rhythm of these songs, making them both musical and linguistic tools for storytelling. In Yoruba folk music, language and melody are closely intertwined, with the tonal and rhythmic patterns of the lyrics reflecting their meaning. For example, the call-and-response style found in the sheet music encourages communal participation, engaging every member of the community in the storytelling process. This song structure supports oral transmission, making it easier for people to memorize and share these stories across generations. Musically, these songs serve as educational tools within the culture. Their melodic patterns, rhythmic cycles, and tonal variations are closely aligned with the tonal features of the Yoruba language, reinforcing the meaning of the lyrics. Each song functions not only as a musical composition but also as a cultural record, preserving both the history and musical traditions of the Yoruba people.

### (d.) *Language as a source of folk song*

Folk music is deeply connected to spoken language through its oral tradition, with language serving as a culturally embedded lexicon shared among local communities. Unlike formal music education, folk music is primarily learned by listening rather than reading, making it an effective way to introduce children to the cultural values of their country from an early age.

Folk songs are often tied to specific places or cultures and serve as a means of remembering both personal and historical events. Similarly, folk speech reflects the linguistic practices of small groups, shaped by their cultural context. It may include elements such as toasts, tongue twisters, nicknames, and choruses. Informal language reveals the values and worldview of a particular community at a given time.

Both folk songs and folk language are passed down across generations, evolving with each transmission. Variations emerge between artists, communities, and regions, so that distinct places often develop unique ways of performing the same song, each version carrying its own cultural significance.

**(i.) Song III – Ife Ooye**

Whereas the detailed study of verbal language often attracts a relatively small group of specialists, musical sound is widely enjoyed across cultures and appears in every known human society, appealing even to listeners who do not share a spoken language (Mehr et al., 2019; Trehub, Becker, & Morley, 2015). When he was 58, the great composer Franz Joseph Haydn decided to visit other European nations. His friend Mozart told him that they might have problems because they didn't speak the same language. Haydn gave a good answer when he said, "My language is understood all over the world." This story makes us think that music is a universal language or the real lingua franca (Kivy, 2007). So far, scientists have uncovered several aspects that music and words have in common. Mithen (2006) asserts that language and music are "combinatorial systems" comprising sound components such as words and melodies. Words and songs make up melodies and statements. Language and music are certainly not the same, yet they do share several aspects, such as symbols, syntax, and the way they send information (Mithen, 2006). People often think that music and grammar are quite different; however, there are moments when music may assist you learn a language. Chomsky thinks it's difficult for youngsters to acquire a language the same way they learn to draw, play an instrument, or ride a bike. They make up their own terms since they can't understand grammar rules from the language they hear around them. People who examine this call it "the poverty of the stimuli."

**(e.) Tonal Language and Musicality**

The tonal system of Yoruba is the most significant linguistic feature shaping folksongs. Words such as owo ("money," "hand," or "respect") change meaning depending on tone. When sung, tonal patterns translate into melody. In Ile-Ife, folksongs like farmers' work chants *káre ò, káre ò, káre ò* (Well done, well done, well done) employ tonal repetition that merges encouragement with rhythm. Here, tonality ensures both intelligibility and musicality (Adegbite, 2016). The Yoruba language is characterized by three-level tones, high (´), mid (unmarked), and low (˘), which are phonemic, meaning that the pitch on a syllable determines lexical meaning (Olatunji, 1984). For instance, *ọkọ* can mean "husband," "hoe," or "vehicle," depending on tone. This inherent tonal structure establishes a direct relationship between speech and song: melodies must generally respect tonal contours to preserve intelligibility. Ethnomusicologists such as Euba (1990) and Nketia (1974) have shown that in tonal languages, melodies are often "tone-bound."

**(f.) Oríkì as The Poetry of Praise**

In Yoruba Oral Tradition, *Oríkì* (praise poetry) occupies a central position in Yoruba oral traditions as a verbal art form that commemorates individuals, lineages, places, and even deities. Derived from the words *ori* (head/destiny) and *ki* (to praise), *oríkì* is essentially a speech genre that celebrates identity, heritage, and character (Barber, 1991). Within Yoruba cosmology, the head (*orí*) is associated with destiny and selfhood; thus, to recite *oríkì* is to invoke and affirm a person's essential identity. This practice illustrates the Yoruba understanding of language as performative, capable of affirming, strengthening, or transforming social and spiritual realities (Olatunji, 2020). *Oríkì* is characterized by dense metaphors, elliptical references, and repetition. Olatunji (1984) notes stylistic elements such as parallelism, ideophones, and the incorporation of natural imagery.

The praise language frequently likens individuals to natural elements, such as rivers, mountains, or animals, to emphasize desired attributes. For instance, a warrior may be referred to as *kiniún* (lion), symbolizing bravery and dominance. From a musical standpoint, *oríkì* holds a distinctive position due to the tonal nature of the Yoruba language. The high, mid, and low pitch system inherent in Yoruba speech seamlessly translates into melodic lines when chanted or drummed (Adegbite, 2016). Performers frequently elongate tonal inflections or incorporate rhythmic stresses to synchronize with drumming patterns, rendering *oríkì* both linguistically coherent and musically expressive. Performance aesthetics are also very important. Barber (1991) says that *oríkì* is performative and that delivery involves vocal modulation, rhythm, and gesture.

Musical accompaniment, especially by the talking drum (*dùndún*), turns *oríkì* into a full musical event. The *dùndún* can reproduce Yoruba speech tones, which means that drummers can "recite" *oríkì* musically. At festivals in Ile-Ife, drummers may render a lineage's *oríkì* before singers start chanting, creating an antiphonal texture between drum and voice. Other instruments, like the *bàtá* drum, are also used in ritual contexts, especially when *oríkì* is directed toward deities. The rhythmic complexity of these instruments reinforces the poetic rhythm, and their timbres evoke specific spiritual atmospheres. The alternation between soloist and chorus in *oríkì* chanting is similar to the Yoruba call-and-response form that is common in folksongs, blending poetry with music to create communal performance. Oral Aesthetics: Repetition, Proverbs, and Call-and-Response Yoruba oral aesthetics emphasize repetition and parallelism, ensuring mnemonic retention and communal participation. A common children's song in Ile-Ife goes: *Ìjàpá, ìjàpá ló n'şeré, ìjàpá ló n'şeré* ("The tortoise, the tortoise is playing, the tortoise is playing"). This refrain draws on narrative traditions of the tortoise as a trickster, reinforcing cultural memory through repetition (Ojo, 2019).

Proverbs embedded in songs further highlight Yoruba pedagogical aesthetics. A lullaby may incorporate the proverb: *Àgbàlagbà kii wà l'òjúgbà kí orí omọ tuntun wọ kilẹ* ("An elder cannot be present and allow a child's head to tilt wrongly"). The proverb, when sung, becomes both a moral guide and a melodic line. Folklore and the Origins of Folksongs in Ile-Ife Folksongs often come from folktales (*àlò*) or religious ceremonies. For example, during festivals, people sing the story of Oduduwa's descent to create the earth as a refrain. Praise poetry (*oriki*) can also turn into song. For example, when the *oriki* of Ile-Ife lineages is sung, it turns ancestral history into a living performance (Falola, 2021).

**(g.) Problems with Preservation**

Modernization, globalization, and the spread of English threaten the Yoruba language and folksongs. In Ile-Ife, younger generations are less interested in Yoruba oral traditions, which could lead to cultural loss (Adediran, 2017). To protect these traditions, it is important to document them, store them digitally, and include them in school curricula. Community theatre and university programs in Yoruba studies are good starts, but more organized efforts are needed.

**(h.) Final Thoughts**

The Yoruba language serves as the foundational source of folksongs in Ile-Ife, shaping their tonal patterns, semantic depth, and aesthetic qualities. These folksongs, in turn, function as vessels of historical memory, moral instruction, and communal identity, making them vital to the continuity of Yoruba cultural life. Recognizing Yoruba as both a linguistic system and a cultural archive highlights the urgent need to preserve it amid growing contemporary pressures.

**6. MUSICAL ANALYSIS**

**(a.) Song I - "ASA IBILE" (Our Culture)**

**ASA IBILE**  
Our Culture

The song follows a repetitive melodic structure, with the solo part introducing the main melodic phrase, followed by the chorus echoing the same melodic motifs. This repetition in the melody serves as a mnemonic device, reinforcing the importance of the cultural message being conveyed.

The use of simple intervallic structures (mainly stepwise motion and small intervals) suggests a focus on accessibility and ease of memorization. This is consistent with the song's role in cultural preservation, where simple, memorable melodies help embed cultural knowledge. The piece is in 4/4 time with a moderately slow tempo, which is characteristic of traditional Yoruba folk songs. This meter allows for both rhythmic flexibility and clear articulation of the lyrical content. The rhythm is highly syncopated in places, particularly in the chorus, which provides a rhythmic interplay between the solo and the chorus sections. This is typical in Yoruba music, where rhythm serves to create a dialogue between the performer and the community (or audience). The lyrics, "A sa bi le", meaning "our culture," are repeated in the chorus. This phrase is musically emphasized, aligning with the Yoruba cultural belief that music serves as a preserver of identity.

(b.) Song II - "Oridami si Ile-Ife"

Oridami si le Ife

The musical score for "Oridami si le Ife" is presented in 4/4 time. It features a Solo part in the treble clef and a Chorus part in the bass clef. The Solo part consists of three lines of music, with lyrics "O ri da mi si le i fe" under the first and third lines. The Chorus part consists of three lines of music, with lyrics "O ri da mi si bi re re" under the first and second lines. The melody is characterized by longer, flowing phrases with diatonic intervals and occasional leaps.

The melody in this song is characterized by longer, flowing phrases, which emphasize the solemnity and reverence associated with the lyrical content ("Oridami si Ile-Ife" — "I have arrived in Ife," referring to the sacred Yoruba city). The melody features diatonic intervals with occasional leaps, which contribute to its spiritual and celebratory feel. These leaps could represent the elevation of Ife as a place of origin and reverence. The song is in 4/4 time with a moderate tempo, suggesting that the rhythm is intended to complement the contemplative nature of the lyrics. The rhythm is straightforward with no heavy syncopation, which allows the dignity and majesty of the message to come through clearly. It uses even, regular beats, aligning with the reverence expressed in the lyrics for the city of Ife. The use of the word "Oridami" in the title, which signifies arrival or recognition, implies a cultural link between the individual and the communal identity.

(c.) Song III - "Ife Ooye"

Ife Ooye

The musical score for "Ife Ooye" is presented in 4/4 time. It features a Solo part in the treble clef and a Chorus part in the bass clef. The Solo part consists of three lines of music, with lyrics "I fe Oo ye o lo ri a ye gbo gbo" under the first line. The Chorus part consists of three lines of music, with lyrics "I fe Oo ye I fe Oo ye o" under the first line, "lo ri a ye gbo gbo" under the second line, and "I fe" under the third line. The melody is highly ornamental, characterized by short, fragmented phrases with rapid alternation between solo and chorus sections.

The melody in "Ife Ooye" is highly ornamental, characterized by short, fragmented phrases that contribute to the song's energetic and celebratory tone. Rapid alternation between solo and chorus sections amplifies its dynamic quality, echoing the call-and-response structure typical of Yoruba performance traditions. Melodic intervals range from conjunct (stepwise motion) to disjunct (larger leaps), creating a sense of dramatic movement and emotional transformation that mirrors the reverence for the city of Ife.

Set in a 4/4 time signature, the song employs syncopated rhythms in the chorus, a hallmark of Yoruba folk music. This syncopation introduces rhythmic tension and release, enhancing the song's expressive power. The rhythmic structure also reflects Yoruba percussion traditions, where drums and other instruments underscore the music's layered, syncopated nature. These rhythmic elements complement the lyrics, which celebrate the sacred and historical significance of Ife. The recurring phrase "Ife Ooye" (translated as "Great Ife" or "Ife is glorious") reinforces the city's spiritual and cultural importance.

Across the songs analyzed in this study, distinct musical traits rooted in Yoruba tradition emerge. Tonality, rhythm, and melodic structure are deeply interwoven with cultural expression, demonstrating how music and language function as a unified system of meaning. Oral literature and musicality work in tandem to transmit

cultural values, historical narratives, and communal identity. Each song serves as a living archive of Yoruba cultural memory, using tonal language patterns, cyclical rhythms, and participatory performance to sustain cultural continuity and reinforce collective belonging.

## 7. FINDINGS

This study set out to understand how the Yoruba language shapes and gives life to folksongs in Ile-Ife, using cultural, linguistic, and musical perspectives. Drawing on proverbs, song texts, sheet music, and oral traditions, the key findings are outlined below.

### (a.) *Songs as living repositories of history and memory*

The proverbs “*Orin la fi n gbé itàn lọ*” (“It is through song that stories are transmitted”) and “*Eni tí kò mọ orin, kò mọ itàn*” (“He who does not know the song does not know the story”) turned out to be true in practice, not just in theory. The study shows that songs act as small but powerful “archives” of the community’s past: they carry stories about ancestors, deities, customs, victories, and losses. In a setting where written records have often been limited, music works like a memory aid, helping people remember and pass on their history, values, and identity from one generation to the next.

### (b.) *Case-study songs as sonic maps of Yoruba identity and Ile-Ife*

The songs “*Asa Ibile*,” “*Oridami si Ile-Ife*,” and “*Ife Ooye*” clearly show how music maps out who the Yoruba are and what Ile-Ife represents:

- i. “*Asa Ibile*” (“Our Culture”) centres culture as the foundation of personhood and belonging. It suggests that to know yourself, you must know your culture and your place in the community.
- ii. “*Oridami si Ile-Ife*” (“My destiny has brought me to Ile-Ife”) expresses a strong sense of attachment to Ile-Ife as spiritual and historical home.
- iii. “*Ife Ooye*” presents Ife as a source of glory and wisdom, keeping alive origin myths and the sacred status of the city.

Together, these songs show that Yoruba folksongs do more than decorate culture. They name important places, recall origins, and help organise communal memory.

### (c.) *Interdependence of tonal language and musical structure*

The study confirms that the tonal nature of Yoruba is central to how melodies are shaped. Many Yoruba words (such as *owo* or *ọkọ*) change meaning depending on tone. When these words are sung, the melody usually has to follow the tonal pattern so that the words still make sense. Farmers’ work songs like “*káre ò, káre ò, káre ò*” (“Well done, well done, well done”) show how repeated tones can blend encouragement, meaning, and rhythm into one powerful experience. In line with ethnomusicological work, the Ile-Ife material demonstrates that musical composition in Yoruba is “tone-bound”: language and melody are tightly linked and shape each other.

### (d.) *Language as the generative source of folksong*

The findings also show that Yoruba is not just the language used in the lyrics; it is the **source** from which folksongs grow. In Ile-Ife, people usually learn folk music by listening, observing, and joining in, rather than by reading notation. This learning process depends heavily on a shared oral vocabulary, everyday speech, and informal expressions. Folk songs and folk speech are closely tied to specific places and communities. As songs are passed on and performed in different neighbourhoods, small changes appear—new nicknames, playful twists of language, or slightly different choruses. These variations show that folk language and folk song form one living, flexible system, with language constantly feeding and reshaping the song tradition.

### (e.) *Oríkì and oral aesthetics as extensions of song-based memory*

The study’s look at *oríkì* (praise poetry) further supports the main argument. *Oríkì*, which comes from *orí* (head/destiny) and *kì* (to praise), is a verbal art that celebrates people, lineages, places, and deities. Its rich use of metaphor, repetition, parallelism, and vivid imagery mirrors many features found in folksongs. Musically, *oríkì* performances make full use of Yoruba’s three-level tonal system, especially when chanted or played on talking drums such as the *dùndún* and *bàtá*. These drums imitate speech tones, so drummers can “speak” *oríkì* through music. Children’s songs that rely on repetition and call-and-response, like “*Ìjápá, ìjápá ló n ń sẹré...*”, show that the same oral aesthetics—repetition, proverb use, audience participation—support both *oríkì* and folksong, strengthening memory and drawing the community into the performance.

### (f.) *Music–language continuum and the broad appeal of musical language*

Finally, the study places the Yoruba case within wider discussions about language and music. Research suggests that while the close analysis of verbal language tends to be a specialist activity, music is widely enjoyed and can be meaningful even to people who do not share a spoken language. The Yoruba material supports the idea that language and music are related systems that both combine smaller units (like words or notes) into larger structures with meaning.

Taken together, these findings show that in Ile-Ife, the Yoruba language is both the origin and the framework of folksongs. It provides the tones, words, images, and stories that make the songs meaningful. The songs, in turn, protect and project the language as cultural memory. Language, song, and history support each other in a tightly woven system that offers a strong model for understanding and safeguarding Yoruba oral heritage.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Yoruba belief that “It is through song that stories are transmitted” encapsulates the essence of Yoruba music as a dynamic repository of cultural history. Songs such as "ASA IBILE", "Oridami si Ile-Ife", and "Ife Ooye" are vital expressions of Yoruba cultural memory, linking music, language, and history. Through these songs, the Yoruba community not only remembers its past but also continuously renews its connection to its identity, values, and ancestors, echoing wider evidence that folk songs promote cultural values, social interaction, and moral education (Akande, 2023; Adesoji, Ajewole, & Paul, 2024). As the proverbs suggest, those who do not know the song “do not know the history,” and it is through the transmission of these songs that Yoruba culture remains vibrant, resilient, and preserved. These folk songs are much more than art forms; they are tools of cultural preservation, ensuring that Yoruba history, wisdom, and identity are transmitted and preserved for generations to come. This paper contributes to scholarship by foregrounding the intrinsic link between language and folksong, and by calling for deeper academic study, community-based initiatives, and supportive policy frameworks that protect and promote Yoruba oral heritage.

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