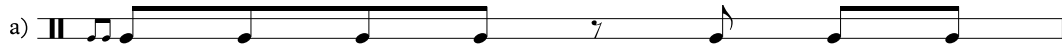


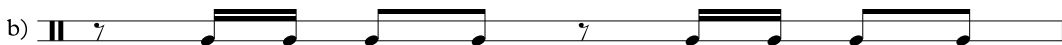
## THE LANGUAGE OF IMPROVISATION

*Rumberos* have always referred to their phrasing as a language. Whenever Manny ROquendo spoke about soloing he always insisted that it was not just music: it was a form of speech. The dilemma that every improviser faces is how to create original phrases within the language of each respective genre and instrument.

Certainly a soloist does not create his/her own voice solely through the use of distinctive vocabulary. One of the ways we can identify a specific player is how they *organize* their phrases. Ray Barretto and Mongo Santamaria frequently used the same rhythms and ideas in their solos, but they arranged them in uniquely identifiable ways. Nevertheless, there is unquestionably a common “grammar and syntax” in this music, and to be an accomplished Latin percussionist you must learn the language!

Here is a small list of common licks and phrases that you will find throughout each artist’s vocabulary. They can be found in almost every solo in this book.

a) 

b) 

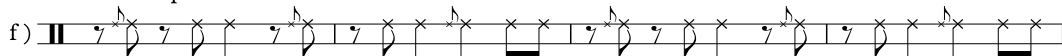
c) 

d) 

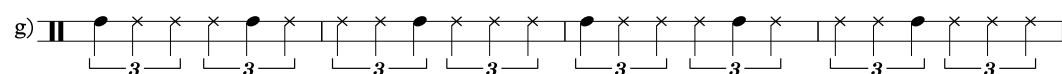
Not "reset" phrase

e) 

"Reset" phrase

f) 

Melodic hemiola (two voices)

g) 

Melodic hemiola (three voices)

h) 

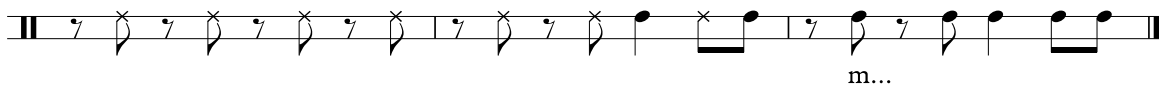
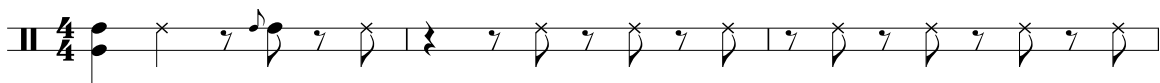
## THE LANGUAGE OF IMPROVISATION

There are of course other shared figures throughout the transcriptions, and it would be very worthwhile to identify and extract them as you go along. Nevertheless, these are some of the most popular vocabulary essential to becoming a successful improviser in Latin music. Each artist in this book has employed these phrases in their own distinctive way, and they remain the foundation for modern improvisation.

Here are a few examples where the masters used a common rhythm in different ways. First let's look at example C from above. Take a look at the passage below from Manny Oquendo's transcription "Corta el Bonche," (m. 14 – 17). He enters the phrase with a common upbeat figure on the *hembra* that allows him to seamlessly transition into example C. Manny ends the rhythm with a rim shot on the *macho* to create musical tension and then chooses to close the phrase and release the tension with the rhythm found in measure 17.



Now we look at Mongo Santamaria's transcription "Este Mambo," (m. 63 – 68), where he enters the rhythm without any upbeat rhythm to aid the transition. He plays two downbeat quarter notes and then simply begins the phrase. His exit from this rhythm is also different from Manny in that he chooses to continue the phrase beyond our rhythm rather than close it. The tension-release is still however intact. Mongo plays all slaps in the example rhythm and then releases the tension with an open tone on beat 3 of measure 67.



Let's look at a different phrase, example B. The passage below comes from Tito Puente's transcription of "Mon-Ti," (m. 37 – 41). Notice the entrance to the lick. The only note he plays is a single pick up beat into the lick; there is no rhythm used to directly transition in. Similarly to Manny, Tito decides to close the phrase rather than extend it beyond the example lick.