

***Wosi tauwau topaisewa* – songs about migrant workers from the Trobriand Islands**

... the embedding of linguistic activity in everyday life is not only a rational, purposive activity, it also obeys subconscious drives and drifts and interacts strongly with face-to-face dynamics in social situations.

WOLFGANG WILDGEN (1994: 239)

1. Introduction

Nowadays it seems to be taken for granted in Western societies that people (have to) migrate from rural homes to foreign countries to find work in the big cities not only to make a living but also to help their relatives at home. The so-called ‘public opinion’ obviously takes this situation as a ‘globalization’ effect of relatively minor importance: it does not make the headlines any more. This was completely different when the third wave of immigrating workers hit Germany in the mid 50s and early 60s of the last century (see *Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt “Pidgin-Deutsch”* 1975: 17-24). In those days the fact that the German government actually recruited workers in Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Portugal and (then) Yugoslavia, the consequences that these recruitments and the actual immigration of foreign workers into the Federal Republic of Germany will or may have and actually had for Germans and their country, and the situation and living conditions of the foreign workers in Germany, were hotly debated political issues that were widely covered in the media – not only during the rising phase, but also at the heights of the West-German *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic wonder). The kind and the quality of this coverage varied enormously, of course. However, the fact that this topic was indeed of public interest – first in Germany, and later in the whole of Western Europe – was ultimately responsible for the funding of a number of research projects – mostly within sociology and linguistics – which looked at various aspects of the life, the living conditions, the contact situation, and the language problems of immigrant workers. One of the early linguistic

research projects was the *Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt "Pidgin-Deutsch" spanischer und italienischer Arbeiter in der Bundesrepublik – Untersuchungen zum Spracherwerb* sponsored by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (German Research Society) and directed by WOLFGANG KLEIN. When WOLFGANG WILDGEN left this project at the end of 1975, his position was transformed into a number of student assistant positions. And with one of these positions I began my career as a linguist in January 1976.

Six and a half years later, after I learned firsthand how to acquire a language without any guidance as a foreign worker in the Netherlands (I held a PhD fellowship at the then Max-Planck Project Group for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen from 1978 to 1981), I started my field research on the language and culture of the Trobriand Islanders in Papua New Guinea (PNG). After another – and more successful – period of learning a language without guidance I was rather astonished realizing during my first 15 months of field research that the Trobriand Islanders sang songs that dealt with the situation of Trobrianders who left their islands to work in cities like Alotau, Madang, Lae and Port Moresby, the capital of PNG, on the main island of New Guinea. These songs did not remind me so much of politically critical songs like *Tonio Schiavo* which was composed and sung by DEGENHARDT in 1966 (see DEGENHARDT 1979) but rather of schmaltzy songs like *Zwei kleine Italiener* ("Two little Italians") – a song sung by CONNY FROBOES (music by CHRISTIAN BRUHN and lyrics by GEORG BUSCHOR) as the German contribution to the Eurovision song contest in Luxemburg (18.03.1962) which (unbelievably!) ended up as a respectable number 6 of 16 contributions (for further information and for lyrics see, e.g., <http://www.ecgermany.de/archiv/dv1962.htm>). In this paper I will present and briefly comment on some of the songs which the Trobriand Islanders call

"wosi tauwau topaisewa"

wosi tauwau to-paisewa

song men classifier.male-work

'songs (about) workers.'

2. *Wosi tauwau topaisewa* – songs about migrant workers

Native speakers of Kilivila differentiate and metalinguistically label a number of genres that also constitute metalinguistically labelled situational intentional varieties of this language. As I have pointed out elsewhere (see SENFT 1986: 6-19, 124-26; 2003) this

label refers to varieties or registers of Kilivila used in a given special situation and produced to pursue (a) certain intention(s). Songs – *wosi* – are differentiated as a genre that co-constitutes the “*biga sopa* variety” – the ‘joking (also: lying or indirect) language’. The most popular *wosi* that co-constitute this variety are the *wosi gugwadi* – ‘the songs of the children’, which are also called *wosi gita* – ‘songs (accompanied by) guitars’. These songs and their lyrics are composed by young men in the villages and sung and accompanied by the villages’ guitar groups during evenings at the village centers. Sooner or later they attract unmarried men and women who dance to their rhythms. Most of these songs are absolutely schmaltzy and sentimental love songs. The *wosi tauwau topaisewa* constitute a subgenre of the *wosi gita*. In what follows I will first present two texts of these songs that were sung by young men living in Tauwema village on Kaile’una Island, my place of residence during my field research for the last 21 years. I collected these lyrics in 1982 and 1983. Then I document two of the professional musician TOKWEBASI’S *wosi tauwau topaisewa* that are published on a MC under the title *Tears of the Island*, and finally I present two songs from the *Komwa Komwa* stringband that were published on a CD by CHRISTOPHER ROBERTS (1996) under the title *Betel Nuts* (see SENFT 2001). I present the lyrics of the first song in a morpheme-interlinearized transcription to give the reader at least a brief impression of the structure of Kilivila. For the other songs I just provide the Kilivila text together with a (not too) free translation.

2.1. *wosi tauwau topaisewa* documented in *Tauwema*

The following two songs illustrate the *wosi tauwau topaisewa* that are composed by amateur musicians on the Trobriands (for other examples see SENFT 1999). According to my consultants the first song that I present here was composed by a man called EMSI. He lived in Losuia on Kiriwina Island, then went to Port Moresby, worked in the Highlands of PNG as a miner and later settled down in Alotau, the capital of Milne Bay Province, as a medical doctor. The song consists of one long stanza which is usually repeated by the stringband of Tauwema when it is performing this song.

Akowana odaba koya,
a-kowana odaba(la) koya
1.-look.up on.top.of mountain
'I look up at the top of the mountain,'

akululu agisi kibwaula ula valu.

a-kululu a-gisi kibwaula ula valu
1.-look.down 1.-see vaguely my village

'I look down I see my village vaguely.'bigskip

Nanogu iomwau oyo.

nano-gu i-omwau oyo
mind-my 3.-heavy oh

'My mind it is sad oh.'

Kapisisi sedayasi oi oi,

ka-pisi-si se-daya-si oi oi
1.excl-feel.sorry-Pl friend-our-Pl oh oh

'We feel sorry for our friends oh oh,'

kapisisi sedayasi o pilatala.

ka-pisi-si se-daya-si o pilatala
1.excl-feel.sorry-Pl friend-our-Pl Locative other.side

'we feel sorry for our friends at the other side.'

Volola tamayaisi -

volola ta-mayai-si
long.ago 1.incl-bring-Pl

'Too long ago we brought (them something)' –

migisi itamwau.

migi-si i-tamwau
face-their 3.-get.lost

'their faces he loses them.'

Ginigini sena bwena –

ginigini sena bwema
writing very good

'Writing is very good –'

kala bwoina davalusi –

kala bwoina da-valu-si
very good our-village-Pl

'very good is our village –'

ilagoki o mapula – iomwau sainela.

i-la-goki o mapula i-omwau sainela

3.-go-only Locative payment 3.-heavy very

‘he only went there for money – he feels sad so very much’

This text expresses the feelings of the Trobriander who left his island. Living in the Highlands he imagines he can see his home vaguely in the haze. He is sad that he has not seen his friends and relatives for a long time and that he could not bring or send them any gifts. He has difficulties remembering their faces -- all he can do is write letters to them. In the last two lines he points out that he had to leave his nice village only for the sake of money. It is interesting to note how the composer of the lyrics changes the narrator’s involvement in the text from 1st person singular to 1st person plural exclusive – a politeness device – and finally to the impersonal 3rd person singular in which he comments in a highly detached way on his very own situation.

The second song is quite remarkable. The lyrics elaborate on one of the oldest and most important myths of the Trobriand Islanders – the myth of Imdeduya, a beautiful girl who later turns into the moon, and Yolina, a handsome young man who later turns into the sun. In 1983 I documented this myth on tape – its narration lasted for 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours. The only part of the song that literally quotes the myth is the refrain. All singers of the following wosi did not know this myth any more; however, they already managed to compose the first stanza of the song in English – with the exception of just one line! As an aside I would like to point out here that this is an interesting language contact phenomenon (see BECHERT & WILDGEN 1991); it also shows that Tok Pisin, the second national language of PNG besides English, does not play any role whatsoever on the Trobriand Islands. But back to the *wosi tauwau topaisewa*.

The title of the song is *Imdeduya*. Her lover Yolina here has turned into a worker who lives far away from the Trobriands in another part of PNG but hopes to fly back one day to see his sweetheart again. The song consists of 4 stanzas and a refrain which is repeated after every stanza.

Imdeduya

1.)

*When the moon rises from the east
I had a dream of you my love:
labi gibobwaili,
please remember me!
Take me down to Vau,
let me travel along the coast,
come along with me tonight
before you change your mind.*

Imdeduya

I speak words of love

Refrain (repeated after every stanza):

*Imdeduyo Imdeduyo,
Kwanvedi, bakenu.
Yegu Yolina.
Levavegu kesa 'i,
nemtamata vovogu.
Imdeduyo, Imdeduyo
Kwanvedi, bakenu*

Imdeduyo, Imdeduyo,
move a bit, I will lie down.
I am Yolina.
They hit me the waves,
tiredness (is in) my body.
Imdeduyo, Imdeduyo.
Move a bit, I will lie down

2.)

*Kalasia isalili –
niva 'ila wa idamu.
Ikebobu ula simla –
deli wala kayoyugu.*

The sun goes down –
calm sea only smooth sea
It is calm (not windy) my island –
with (me there's) only my sorrow

3.)

*Tubukona iyuvola
mapilana obomatu.
Madagila visigala –
iomau ninamaisi.*

The moon rises
at this side from the east
very nice it shines –
it is sad (for) their minds.

4.)

<i>Yum yam wiki wiki</i>	Day (after) day week (after) week
<i>tubukona – taitu taitu.</i>	month – year (after) year.
<i>Akayoyu ulo valu –</i>	I fly to my village –
<i>avaituta bagisi?</i>	when will I see you (again)?

2.2. JUSTIN TOKWEBASI'S *wosi tauwau topaisewa*

The quality of the songs and lyrics composed by professional musicians from the Trobriand Islands hardly differs at all from the songs composed by the members of the amateur string bands of the various villages on the Trobriands. The following two schmaltzy *wosi tauwau topaisewa* can be found on the album published by the professional musician JUSTIN TOKWEBASI from Obweria village on Kiriwina Island in 1995. The album titled *Tears of the Island* does not come with a transcription and a translation of the lyrics. I have transcribed and translated these songs together with my consultants on the Trobriands in 1997. The first song presented here is called *Miyawena ulo leta* – ‘That letter there, my letter’. It describes the feelings of a worker far away from his relatives and friends on the Trobriand Islands, his loneliness and his grief that is even enforced by the fact that he wrote a farewell letter to all his beloved ones. This letter is the only remaining bond he has with his friends and relatives. *Miyawena ulo leta* is the 6th song on side A of the tape; it consists of six stanzas, each of which is repeated once. It runs as follows:

<i>Miyawena – ulo leta</i>	That letter there – my letter
<i>Miyawena – ulo leti lavitale</i>	That letter there – my letter I sent it,
<i>ulo taloi baisa yokome</i>	my bye-bye here for you.
(repeat)	
<i>Ibuse – e – mitilagigwe,</i>	It drops – yes – my tear,
<i>gala teyurwegu, bipilaisaigwe,</i>	no one with me, they will not help me,
(repeat)	
<i>paila bogwa laboda mwawe:</i>	because already I met my heavy (fate):
<i>gala bagisaimi weyagwa!</i>	I will not see you, my relatives!
(repeat)	
<i>Igipisi muyala, imuyaiigwe</i>	It starts the wind, it blows me away

<i>alai nanogu – ikuse.</i>	I throw my mind – it will not reach (you)
(repeat)	
<i>Ibuse – e – mitilagigwe,</i>	It drops – yes – my tear,
<i>gala teyruwegu, bipilasaigwe</i>	no one with me, they will not help me
(repeat)	
<i>Miyawena – ulo leti lavitale</i>	That letter there – my letter I sent it
<i>ulo taloi baisa yokomi!</i>	my bye-bye here for you!
(repeat)	

TOKWEBASI'S second *wosi tauwau topaisewa* is called *kapisila – ula valu* – 'I am sorry, my village'. It is the 5th song on side B of the tape. It consists of two stanzas – with the first stanza repeated after the second stanza. Again, the song bewails the fate of a worker who lives far away from the Trobriand Islands. However, he has made up his mind to return home to his mother and his father (as soon as he can find his way, i.e., as soon as he has managed to earn enough money to give up his job), and he imagines the joy he and his relatives will experience when they reunite in their village. However, the verbal expression *tamwasawasi* – 'we (1st person plural inclusive) play' also has an erotic connotation: this verbal expression also refers to 'love play'. Thus, TOKWEBASI uses the ambiguity of this verb to hint rather tactfully at the sexual problems and the sexual longings of Trobriand workers who left their girlfriends, too – and thus are not only longing to see their parents at home again. The song runs as follows:

<i>Kapisila ulo valu</i>	I am sorry my village
<i>O kapisila - ulo valu lasilavi,</i>	Oh I am sorry - my village I left (it),
<i>lama baisa.</i>	I came here.
<i>Bane'i ulo keda bake'ita</i>	I will find my way I will come back
<i>baloki inagu tamagu</i>	I will go to my mother and my father
<i>o mavaluse.</i>	in my village.
(repeat)	
<i>Baisatuta lakamaisi bitamwasawase,</i>	Now we came we (all) will play,
<i>iyomwasali nona kumwaidodasi -</i>	it makes the minds of us all happy -
<i>mamasila ninadasi – tamwasawasi.</i>	happiness (on) our mind – we play.

<i>O kapisila - ulo valu lasilavi,</i>	O I am sorry - my village I left (it),
<i>lama baisa.</i>	I came here.
<i>Bane 'i ulo keda bake 'ita</i>	I will find my way I will come back
<i>baloki inagu tamagu</i>	I will go to my mother and my father
<i>o mavaluse.</i>	in my village.
(first repeat last two lines, then repeat last two stanzas)	

2.3. wosi tauwau topaisewa composed by the 'Komwa Komwa' stringband

The last two songs that illustrate the subgenre of the *wosi tauwau topaisewa* are songs composed by the professional *Komwa Komwa* stringband from Obweria village on Kiriwina Island. The members of this band are JUSTIN TOKWEBASI, GREGORY TOGUWAW, THOMAS UNIWENI, and ISRAEL and ALANI KAIDOGA. As mentioned above, these songs were published on a CD by CHRISTOPHER ROBERTS (1996) under the title *Betel Nuts* (see SENFT 2001). ROBERTS translates the name of the stringband – *komwa komwa* as “truly inside” - my consultants told me that *komwa* refers to the wooden part of an adze that keeps the blade in place, however they also told me - with a broad grin on their faces - that *komwa komwa* indeed refers to “something inside”, to “something inside a girl” – namely, the hymen. It seems that the members of the stringband played their typical Trobriand tricks with ROBERTS too. The first song presented is called *kwetala bogi* – ‘one night’; it was composed by TOKWEBASI and again deals with sexual problems of Trobriand workers living away from home. The song is about a worker who dreamt of his sweetheart, woke up and now – unlike his colleagues in the compound who are all deeply asleep – cannot sleep any more because he is longing so much for his girlfriend.

<i>Kwetala bogi</i>	One night
<i>Kwetala bogi lamimi kidamwa</i>	One night I dreamt that
<i>yoku yaigu kaditeyu wa.</i>	you and I the two of us only
	(were together).
<i>Kam nanamsa</i>	You – thinking (of you)

<i>o nanogwe ikoigase.</i>	in my mind really attracts me.
<i>Tubukona o la salili,</i>	(The) moon going down (to the sea),
<i>lumalama isiligaga</i>	the moonshine gets brighter,
<i>niwavila idam</i>	calm, it is quiet,
<i>tommota idagusi wala.</i>	(all) people are asleep, indeed.
<i>Yegu, atokaiye aninanamsa</i>	(But) I, I am awake I remember
<i>mimi saina isepulokai</i>	the dream very much - it tricks me:
<i>kam nanamsa o nanogwe</i>	you – thinking of you in my mind
<i>ikoigase.</i>	really attracts me.
<i>Tuta kumwedona ogu lilola,</i>	All the time my (thoughts) wander,
<i>nanogu saina iyeluyelu</i>	my mind really streams out to you:
<i>kam nanamsa o nanogwe</i>	you- thinking of you in my mind
<i>ikoigase.</i>	really attracts me.
(the last 6 lines are repeated once)	

The last song to be presented here, *waupu odabala* – ‘on (top of) the whorf’, is a composition by ISRAEL KALIDOGA and GREGORY TOGUWAWU. It describes a parting scene between a worker on his way to a town on the main island of New Guinea and his girlfriend and how the worker remembers this scene when his ship – on the passage to New Guinea – is anchored over night near Wagifa, a village in the mountains south of Goode-nough Island.

<i>Waupu odabala</i>	On the whorf
<i>wa'upu odabala egisi elubaila -</i>	On the whorf he sees his friend –
<i>iyomwa we nanola sainela</i>	it is heavy – ah – his mind indeed
	(= he is very sad).
(repeated once)	
<i>Boda saina kwaiveaka,</i>	(The) group (of people was) very big,
<i>waga bogwa lekasewa.</i>	the boat was full already.
<i>Sori wale kukwa'ita</i>	Sorry you (have to) go back
<i>o duale.</i>	to our village.
(repeated once)	

<i>Kalasiya isalili koya</i>	(The) sun goes down (at the) mountains,
<i>veaka ikebobu</i>	the big ones, it is (on) level (with the sea)
<i>we</i>	oh:
<i>ananamsa kammwaleta lubai 'igwe.</i>	I think only of you my friend.
(repeated once)	

<i>Wagifa olopolo tubukona iyuwola</i>	In Wagifa village (the) moon is rising,
<i>we</i>	oh:
<i>ananamsa kammwaleta lubai 'igwe</i>	I think only of you my friend
(repeated once, with the last line then being repeated once more)	

3. Socioeconomic change, political consciousness and the problem of work migration in Papua New Guinea

The problem of migrant workers may be a relatively new phenomenon for the Trobriand Islanders, but for the rest of the Pacific – including PNG – this is nothing new at all. Pacific Islanders have been becoming more and more aware of this problem – and the growing political consciousness with respect to this phenomenon is well documented in publications like, for example *The Contemporary Pacific – A Journal of Island Affairs* published by the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai'i. What makes the Trobriand case so interesting, however, is the fact that the islanders have been confronted with socioeconomic changes over the last 20 years or so that by now have completely transformed a society whose economy was based on barter and exchange into a(n early) capitalist society. The Trobrianders are aware of these changes – and the *wosi tauwau topaisewa* can be taken as a first linguistic expression of this awareness. The Kilivila lyrics may not yet topicalize the situation as critical as political songs that were composed in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, however, a brief glance at song collections like, e.g. MOSSMANN and SCHLEURING (1978), PALMER (1974), and STEINITZ (1979) reveals that these songs of social change also had their schmalzty precursors. Anyway, I take the *wosi tauwau topaisewa* as another piece of sociolinguistic evidence that every speech community reacts to the dynamic changes it observes in its general social

and especially in its socioeconomic situation in a specific verbal way. The *wosi tauwau topaisewa* represent just one specific form of such a verbal reaction, and I am sure that the embedding of this specific “linguistic activity in everyday life is not only a rational, purposive activity, it also obeys subconscious drives and drifts” (WILDGEN 1994: 239). As pointed out above, the songs about migrant workers from the Trobriand Islands are proof that the Trobrianders are absolutely aware of this problem. However, the fact that they – like many other Papua New Guineans – leave their homes to find work in the cities does not only create personal problems like the ones topicalized in the songs presented here – and this is something that the Trobriand Islanders do not seem to be aware of yet. Most of the migrant workers leave their rural homes for the cities just with the hope of finding work and earning money there. This creates severe problems for the big cities because the majority of these migrant workers end up as unemployed squatters who are more or less forced to become criminal in order to make their living. Thus, any form of work migration from rural areas to the big cities of PNG needs to be controlled and regulated – otherwise the social problems – especially the security problems – in the big cities will become insuperable. It may well be that solutions for this problem can only be found at the “grassroot level”. Therefore one can only hope that the rational awareness and the subconscious drives that made the Trobrianders compose their *wosi tauwau topaisewa* will country-wide develop into collective dynamic political processes that contribute to finally solving the many personal, social and political problems of migrant workers and work migration in Papua New Guinea.

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GUNTER SENFT
Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics
PB 310
NL-6500 AH Nijmegen, THE NETHERLANDS
e-mail: gunter@mpi.nl