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## *Culture change — language change: missionaries and moribund varieties of Kilivila*

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Παντα ρει και ουδεν μενει  
Ηρακλειτος

### 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

When I first set foot on Trobriand Islands' soil in 1982 to start my first fifteen months of field research there I had the quite romantic feeling that it was like stepping right into the picture so vividly presented in Bronislaw Malinowski's ethnographic masterpieces published in the first quarter of the last century. However, by the time of my second period of field research in 1989 the situation had completely changed. During my various fieldtrips over the last 22 years I have noticed that the culture of the Trobriand Islanders has been changing rather dramatically, and it is an old and trivial insight that culture change must affect language and must itself be reflected in some way or other in the language of the speech community undergoing this change. After having returned from my second field trip to the Trobriands I described the changes I observed in 1989 with respect to the Trobriand Islanders' language and culture (see Senft 1992) — and, unfortunately and sadly, the pessimistic predictions I made then have proven to be right by now. But is 'language change' not one of the most important constitutive and defining features of every natural language? And what have ordinary and general dynamic processes of language change and their results to do with the topics of 'endangered languages' and 'language death'? These questions are central for this paper. In what follows I will first report on the general status of Kilivila with respect to levels of its endangerment (see Crystal 2000:19ff.). Then I will present two registers or language varieties of Kilivila that are moribund by now and explain how and why they have to be classified as being doomed

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on by now more than three years of field research on the Trobriand Islands in 1982/83, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2003, and 2004. I want to thank the German Research Society and especially the Max Planck Society for their support in realizing my field research. I thank the National and Provincial Governments in Papua New Guinea, the Institute for PNG Studies, especially Don Niles, and the National Research Institute, especially Jim Robins, for their assistance with, and permission for, my research projects. Last but not least I express my great gratitude to the people of the Trobriand Islands, especially to the inhabitants of Tauwema; I thank them for their hospitality, friendship, and patient cooperation.

to die. The paper ends with a general discussion of the two general questions raised above and an attempt to assess the observed and reported changes with respect to their impact on the language and culture of the Trobriand Islanders as a whole.

## 2 Kilivila and its level of endangerment<sup>2</sup>

Kilivila, the language of the Trobriand Islanders, is one of 40 Austronesian languages spoken in the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea.<sup>3</sup> It is an agglutinative language and its general word order pattern is VOS (Senft 1986). The Austronesian languages spoken in Milne Bay Province<sup>4</sup> are grouped into twelve language families, one of them labeled Kilivila. The Kilivila language family encompasses the languages Budibud (or Nada, with about 200 speakers), Muyuw (or Murua, with about 4000 speakers) and Kilivila (or Kiriwina, Boyowa, with about 28,000 speakers). Kilivila is spoken on the islands Kiriwina, Vakuta, Kitava, Kaile'una, Kuiuwa, Munuwata and Simsim. The languages Muyuw and Kilivila are each split into mutually understandable local dialects. Typologically, Kilivila is classified as a Western Melanesian Oceanic language belonging to the 'Papuan-Tip-Cluster' group (Capell 1976:6, 9; Ross 1988:25, 190ff.; Senft 1986:6).

The Trobriand Islanders have become famous, even outside of anthropology, because of the ethnographic masterpieces on their culture published by the famous anthropologist Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski, who did field research there between 1916 and 1920 (see Senft 1999, 2005b, 2006). The Trobrianders belong to the ethnic group called 'Northern Massim'. They are gardeners, doing slash and burn cultivation of the bush; their most important crop is yams. Moreover, they are also famous for being excellent canoe builders, carvers, and navigators, especially in connection with the ritualized 'Kula' trade, an exchange of shell valuables that covers a wide area of the Melanesian part of the Pacific (see Malinowski 1922; Leach and Leach 1983; Persson 1999; Campbell 2002). The society is matrilinear but virilocal.

Kilivila is of special interest to linguists for various reasons.<sup>5</sup> It is a language with VOS word order as its unmarked word order pattern, it has rather complex serial verb constructions (see Senft 1986:39–42, 2004a:50), its marking of tense/aspect/mood is complex and difficult to describe without access to detailed contextual information (see Senft 1994a), and it seems that the terms 'transitive' and 'intransitive' are basically inadequate for describing the verbal expression and the argument structure of Kilivila (see Senft 1996a; Mosel and Hovdhaugen 1992:720ff.).

<sup>2</sup> The first part of this section draws on Senft (2005a:207–208).

<sup>3</sup> Today 869 languages are still spoken in Papua New Guinea; however, most of these languages (but not Kilivila — see below) are highly endangered.

<sup>4</sup> In Milne Bay we also find 'at least eight non-Austronesian languages' (Lithgow 1976:446).

<sup>5</sup> Besides my own research on the language of the Trobriand Islanders (see: <http://www.mpi.nl/Members/GunterSenft/Publications>) the following other publications on — or in — Kilivila are available: Fellows' (1901); Baldwin (n.d., 1945, 1950); Malinowski (1920, 1935, 1936); McGhee and Dwyer (1949a, b); Cunningham (1990); Lawton (1979, 1984, 1997, 1993 (see Senft 1996a); 1995 (see Senft 1996c)); Hutchins (1980); Kasaipwalova (1978); Kasaipwalova and Beier (1978a, b); Leach (1981); and Scoditti (1990, 1996 (see also Senft 1993)). For further references to publications on the language and culture of the Trobriand Islanders see Persson (1999) and Senft (1986:155–157, 163–173, 1996b:355–369). After Malinowski's pioneering research on the Trobriands the most important anthropological contributions are Powell (1957) and Weiner (1976, 1988).

Moreover, Kilivila has a fourfold series of possessive pronouns, partly realized as free possessive pronominal pronouns, partly realized as possessive pronominal affixes. One of these series is only produced in a specific semantic context, referring to food only. The other three series are used to distinguish different degrees of possession; one series marks inalienable possession, two series mark alienable possession of inedible things (Senft 1986:47–54). These possessive pronominal forms classify the Kilivila noun. Finally, Kilivila is probably most interesting for linguists because it is a classifier language with a complex system of nominal classification that consists of quantifiers, repeaters and noun classifiers proper. I refer to all these formatives within this sophisticated system with the general term Malinowski coined for them ‘classificatory particles’ (see Senft 1996b).

With respect to levels of endangerment Kilivila can still be classified as a viable but relatively small language: it is ‘spoken in [a community] that [is relatively] isolated [and] with a strong internal organization, and aware of the way [its] language is a marker of identity’ (Crystal 2000:20).

The Trobriand Islanders are extremely proud of their language. This pride almost comes up to arrogance (which is, of course, an absolutely positive quality from the point of view of language endangerment and language maintenance). Among other things this pride is made manifest by the fact that the Islanders do not speak Tok Pisin on the Trobriands. Government officials working in Losuia, the governmental centre of the Islands, are expected to learn Kilivila if they come from other parts and language communities of Papua New Guinea.<sup>6</sup>

Kilivila is still the mother tongue of all the children born on the Trobriands. A number of older people can also speak Motu, the old coastal lingua franca of Papua New Guinea (see Dutton 1985); however, they hardly ever do so and the young generation does not learn Motu any more. English is taught at the missionary and government schools on the islands and has acquired the status of the second language especially of the educated youth who use it to communicate with tourists and Papua New Guineans.

Another issue that supports my (maybe too optimistic) classification of Kilivila as a language that is not endangered is the Trobriand Islanders’ metalinguistic awareness that is documented in their extremely rich metalinguistic vocabulary. The speakers of Kilivila differentiate and metalinguistically label eight what I have called situational-intentional varieties. As I have pointed out elsewhere (see Senft 1986:124ff., 1991) I use this label to refer to registers or varieties of Kilivila that are used in a given special situation and produced to pursue (a) certain intention(s). These registers are constituted by a number of genres that are metalinguistically labeled as well. I managed to document all these registers and (almost) all of their constitutive genres during the various periods of my field research on the Trobriands (see Senft 2004b).

Two of these situational-intentional varieties, the *biga megwa*, the ‘language of magic’, and the *biga baloma*, the ‘language of the spirits of the dead’, are highly endangered and actually moribund these days. These two registers are the focus of the following two sections, which describe, characterize and illustrate these varieties together with their constitutive genres.

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<sup>6</sup> During the first months of their stay they usually communicate with the Islanders in English, typically with a younger Trobriand Islander as an interpreter.

### 3 The *biga baloma* ‘language of the spirits of the dead’ and its level of endangerment

The *biga baloma*, ‘language of the spirits of the dead’, is also called *biga tommwaya*, ‘old people’s language’. It is an archaic variety of Kilivila that has always been very rarely used in everyday discourse and conversation. If words or phrases that are characteristic for this register are used in everyday interaction, they serve the function of sociolinguistic variables<sup>7</sup> which indicate high status of the speaker. In general, this situational-intentional variety is only used in highly ritualized contexts. The register is constituted by specific songs, subsumed under the specific genre label *wosi milamala*, ‘songs of the harvest festival’. They are sung during the harvest festivals, after the death of a Trobriander, and during the first mourning ceremonies. The majority of these songs describe the carefree ‘life’ of the spirits of the dead in their ‘underworld paradise’ on Tuma Island (Malinowski 1916; Baldwin 1945, 1950).

The Trobriand Islanders believe in an immortal ‘spirit’ — the *baloma*. After the death of a person the *baloma* — together with another ‘spirit’ called *kosi* — stays at her or his village until the dead body is buried. The *kosi* monitors the first mourning ceremonies; if the deceased is bewailed appropriately, this spirit also dies; however, if the *kosi* finds some fault with the mourning ceremonies, the spirit will become immortal and punish the responsible people by playing nasty tricks on them or by even frightening them to death. After the burial the *baloma* spirit — who resembles the deceased as an adolescent — has to leave her or his former village. The *baloma* then swims to Tuma Island, following a route that is specific for the island where s/he lived. These routes come together at a relatively high coral reef at the southern tip of Tuma, where they can be seen as breaks in the coral cliff. The routes end at a hole (with a diameter of approximately 25 cm), and this hole is the entrance to the Tuma underworld. The entrance is guarded by Topileta. Malinowski (1974:121, 156) characterizes Topileta as a ‘culture hero’ and as ‘the headman of the villages of the dead’. According to my consultant Tokunupei, Topileta is one of the four children of the primordial father Tudava and his wife Moyetukwa. Every *baloma* has to meet Topileta, who will take her or him to a nearby coral stone that looks like a stalagmite. This stone is called *gilela va sopi*. There is a tiny mould on top of this stone which is always filled with a little bit of water. Topileta wets his finger with this water and wipes his wet finger over the eyes of the *baloma*, who then can see the Tuma underworld and may enter it. However, Topileta first asks for a small gift, usually a betel-nut (that is put under the tongue of every deceased before the burial); if the guardian deals with a very beautiful female *baloma*, he may also ask her for some sexual favours. The *baloma* enjoy a carefree ‘life’ in eternal youth; in the Tuma underworld food is available in abundance — the *baloma* do not have to work for it; like unmarried young people the *baloma* enjoy an extremely free sexual life, always ready, willing and able to have a new love affair (see Malinowski 1929). Moreover, the male *baloma* also engage in Kula expeditions where they ritually exchange Kula-valuables — like the living Trobriand Islanders do (see

<sup>7</sup> Labov (1972:237) states, ‘We may define a *sociolinguistic variable* as one which is correlated with some nonlinguistic variable of the social context: of the speaker, the addressee, the audience, the setting, etc. Some linguistic features (which we will call *indicators*) show a regular distribution over socioeconomic, ethnic, or age groups, but are used by each individual in more or less the same way in any context. If the social contexts concerned can be ordered in some kind of hierarchy (like socioeconomic or age groups), these indicators can be said to be stratified. More highly developed sociolinguistic variables (which we will call *markers*) not only show social distribution, but also stylistic differentiation’.

Malinowski 1922). If a *baloma* is bored with this kind of living, he or she may swim back to the Trobriand Islands and enter the body of a carelessly bathing clans-woman who will give birth to the child she conceived in this way.<sup>8</sup> The *baloma* speak their own language variety, the *biga baloma* or *biga tommwaya*. Magical formulae also represent many features of the *biga baloma/biga tommwaya* register. However, because other features are also constitutive for these formulae, the Trobriand Islanders classify them as constituting a variety of their own, namely the *biga megwa* — the ‘magic speech’ register (see below). Both magical formulae and songs have been passed on from generation to generation with the immanent claim to preserve their linguistic form. The majority of the people citing these magical formulae and singing these songs do not or no longer understand their semantic content.

During the last few years the number of people who actually understand the *wosi milamala*, the songs that are constitutive for this register, has decreased dramatically. In the village Tauwema on Kaile’una Island, my place of residence on the Trobriands, there are only eight people left who still have this competence. Thus, this genre is highly in danger of getting completely lost in — and for — the Trobriand culture. Actually, I am convinced that the *wosi milamala* and with them the *biga baloma/biga tommwaya* register have to be classified as moribund!

For the Trobriand Islanders, the most important event in the course of the year is still the period of the harvest festivals that were first described by Malinowski (1935; see also Senft 1996d:385ff.). This period is called *milamala* and, according to my observations on Kaile’una Island up to the mid 1990s, it may last for almost three months. Until then, the actual time in which the Trobriand Islanders celebrated the *milamala*-period differed in four geographical districts. The *milamala* was first celebrated on Kitava Island, then — one month later each — in the Northern part of Kiriwina Island, then in the Southern half of Kiriwina and the outlying islands, and finally on Vakuta Island. However, since the mid 1990s the *milamala* harvest festival has been reduced by the local Kiriwina Community Council (in cooperation with the churches and the Milne Bay Provincial Government) to just one day (and one night) only!<sup>9</sup>

After getting in the yam harvest, the Trobriand Islanders open the *milamala* period of harvest festivals with a cycle of festive dances accompanied by drums and songs — the *wosi milamala*.

Based on the decision of the village chief, the important garden magicians, and the expert dancing instructor, the villagers — in a food distribution called *katukaula* — formally present yams, taro, sweet potatoes, fish, sugarcane, and betel-nuts to the *baloma*, the ‘spirits of the dead’ (Malinowski 1916) just before sunrise. They believe that the *baloma* leave their ‘underworld paradise’ on Tuma Island at this time and visit their former villages.

<sup>8</sup> For a different account of the *baloma* and the role of Topileta see Malinowski (1974); for the discussion of the ‘virgin birth’ controversy see Senft (1999:15ff., 2006).

<sup>9</sup> This may have had economical reasons. During the *milamala* festival huge amounts of food were offered and consumed by the village communities and their visiting guests. By about 1996 the population on the Trobriands had increased to such a degree that the Islanders were forced to cultivate the bush every three or even every two years instead of letting former gardens lie fallow for at least five years. Thus, food had become scarce; however, food — especially yams — still implies status on the Islands. Thus, it was probably a wise political decision to save food and at the same time to also save face for the yam gardeners who simply could not have the huge amounts of food at their disposal as they used to have before.

Then most men and some girls dress up carefully in their traditional clothes. The girls wear their so-called ‘grass-skirts’ (*doba*) that are made out of fibres of banana leaves. The men wear their traditional loin-cloth (*mwebua*), made out of the bark of the betel-palm; in addition they also wear ‘grass-skirts’ which were given to them by the female kinsmen of their wives. Although the men in this matrilinear culture are not related whatsoever with these persons, they wear the skirts to honour this group and to show that their marriage has created a bond with these people. Thus, this skirt can also be understood as a sign indicating the good marital relationships between the respective men and their wives — as a woman’s ability to contribute bundles and skirts to every exchange during a certain mourning ritual is a public statement of her husband’s support and wealth (Weiner 1976:198) — because the ‘major responsibility of a man to his wife is to provision her with additional wealth’ in *doba* (Weiner 1976:197).

All the dancers decorate their faces with asymmetrical ornaments in red, white and black colours which are made out of betel-nuts, chalk and charcoal respectively. They anoint their bodies with coconut oil and an essence made out of fragrant herbs and afterwards sprinkle their torsos with yellow leaves taken from the blossoms of a certain tree. They all wear white feathers of cockatoos in their carefully combed hair and armlets made of natural fibres on their upper arms which emphasize the men’s muscles and frame the girls’ breasts — thus increasing the physical beauty of the persons. Some of the dancers also wear necklaces (the so-called *bagi* made out of the red parts of the spondylus shell), tortoise-shell earrings (*paya*), and boars’ tusks (*doga*). Moreover, some men also wear belts made of small white cowrie-shells around their waists, knees and/or ankles (*bunadoga*, *luluboda*, *kwepitapatila*). Most of these adornments do not only mark the wealth of their bearers but also their status within the highly stratified Trobriand society with its clans and subclans (see Weiner 1976:237ff.).

After some final magical rites, where the dancers’ relatives or the dance master of the village whisper magical spells on their bodies to make them dance more gracefully, the dancers gather at the centre of the village, where in the meantime a group of mostly elderly men, some with drums and some with long sticks, has gathered. As soon as this group starts to sing and drum, the dancers start dancing in circles around them. The *wosi milamala* are intoned and ended in a very specific way. They consist of verses with two to nine lines each; they are repeated *ad libitum* and they have a very characteristic melody. The singing and dancing may last for more than three hours. As already mentioned above, the *milama* songs are sung in the language of the *baloma* (which represents the speech of the ancestors, the ‘old people’) as a salute to the ‘spirits of the dead’ and to honour and celebrate them (see Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Senft 1991; Senft 2003). The songs are a verbal manifestation of the Trobrianders’ belief in the *baloma*. The songs very poetically and quite erotically describe the ‘life’ of the spirits of the dead in their Tuma Island paradise. As stated above, the Trobriand Islanders believe that these spirits can be reborn; moreover, they can also visit their former villages, and they all do this regularly during the *milamala* period. During these visits the *baloma* see whether the villagers living there now still know how to garden, how to celebrate a good harvest, and how to behave even while celebrating exuberantly. ‘Depending on whether or not they are pleased with what they see, the spirits enhance or hinder the next year’s production’ of yams (Damon 1982:231).

Together with the above mentioned *katukaula* food distribution for the spirits of the dead, the *wosi milamala* and the song-accompanying dances mark the official beginning of the *milamala* period of harvest festivals.

However, till the mid 1990s the *wosi milamala* were not only sung to open the harvest festivals, but were also sung in the late evenings, and sometimes formed the transition from one day to the other in the course of the (traditional, that is pre-mid 1990s) *milamala* period. This period was characterized by conviviality, flirtation and amorous adventures. During such festive periods, social norms, rules and regulations were interpreted in a more liberal and generous way than otherwise. This may have led to jealousy and rivalry that — in escalation — may even have threatened the community. However, as my consultants told me, the *wosi milamala* served the function to prevent such a development. The songs reminded the Trobrianders of the presence of the *baloma* and of the social norms that are valid even for the spirits of the dead in their paradise. Thus the guardians of the norms of the past are present, checking whether this past is still present in their former villages. The *baloma* must not be offended by unseemly and indecent behaviour, and this includes, for example, jealousy amongst bachelors. Keeping this in mind, the Trobrianders must control their behaviour — especially their emotions, because nobody would dare to offend the spirits of the dead. Thus, the ‘past’ is present during the *milamala* period, and the ‘present’ during this period is deeply anchored in, and needs to be similar to, the ‘past’. The singing of the *wosi milamala* assures the community that there is a virtually transcendental regulative authority controlling its members’ behaviour and thus warding off developments that may turn out to be dangerous for the community. I have elsewhere defined ‘ritual communication’ as a type of strategic action that serves the functions of social bonding and of blocking aggression, and that can ban elements of danger which may affect the community’s social harmony — within the verbal domain, at least — just by verbalizing these elements of danger more or less explicitly and by bringing them up for discussion (Senft 1991:246). In this sense, these songs can be regarded — from an etic point of view, of course, — as a special form of ritual communication.

The important function of the *wosi milamala* with respect to rituals in the Trobriand society becomes evident if we take into consideration that they are also sung — without the accompanying drumming, though — after the death of a Trobriander and during the first mourning ceremonies (see Weiner 1976; Senft 1985a). As mentioned above, the Trobriand Islanders believe that the *baloma* of dead persons stay with their relatives until the burial of the corpse, after which they go to Tuma Island. This eschatological ‘fact’ is the link between mourning ritual and harvest festival. On the basis of this belief the function of these songs in the mourning ritual can be interpreted as follows: the songs — especially those songs that describe the carefree ‘life’ of the spirits of the dead in their Tuma ‘paradise’ — may ease the *baloma*’s grief of parting; moreover, the songs should also console the bereaved, reminding them of the fact that dying is just a ‘rite de passage’ (van Gennep 1909), a transition from one form of existence to another. Here the songs remind the Trobriand Islanders that the present as well as the future is anchored in the past; moreover, for the *baloma*, the spirit of a dead person, the future is not at all different from the past. Life in the Tuma underworld is always the same. There is just a present. After a few days in the Tuma underworld the *baloma* forget their past; and it is only when the *baloma* get tired of their carefree life in Tuma and think of getting reborn that a future opens up for them.

Referring to this common knowledge coded in the community’s religious superstructure, the songs sung in the *biga baloma* variety of Kilivila contribute to channel and control emotions during the mourning ceremonies and to maintain the bonds between members of the bereaved community, because they permit a ‘distanced reenactment of

situations of emotional distress' (Scheff 1977:488). (This last quote summarizes Scheff's attempt to define the concept 'ritual', by the way.) We can summarize that the *wosi milamala* are not only sung at extraordinary occasions, but that they themselves can also be regarded as an extraordinary form of ritual communication which secures the construction of the society's social reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966) on the basis of its norm-controlling and bonding functions. Moreover, this form of ritual communication also preserves in a very specific way culture in oral tradition.

Before I present one cycle of these songs, I just want to finish the description of the *milamala* festival with a brief remark on how the end of this period is still officially and publicly marked. As to my observations of the complete *milamala* period in Tauwema village on Kaile'una Island the festivals end with the villagers, especially the youngsters, chasing back the spirits of the dead to their Tuma underworld by throwing stones, sand, and even rotten coconuts and yams towards the invisible *baloma*. The 'past' which was present up till then in the conscience, in the life, of the Trobriand Islanders is thus chased away. This rite that finishes the festive *milamala* period (or rather, the festive *milamala* day and night these days) clearly signifies that ordinary time with its clear separation between 'past', 'present' and 'future' will take over again.

In my corpus of Kilivila data I have documented fourteen song cycles comprising 127 stanzas (including cycles with as few as two and as many as seventeen stanzas). Till the middle of the 1960s the Trobriand Islanders also used this genre to communicate news to their deceased. However, as mentioned above, most of these songs describe the 'life' of the spirit of the dead in the Tuma underworld. The following *wosi milamala* cycle illustrates this genre. In the example given here I have ordered the stanzas in such a way that the story told in the cycle emerges. With the exception of one occasion when a few days after the death of the respected elder, Mwasei, my consultants Bulasa, Bwetadou, Mobiliuya, Mokivola, Kalivabu and Kapatu came to my house in Tauwema in June 1997 to sing *wosi milamala* for me, I never heard *wosi milamala* cycles sung with ordered stanzas — especially not during the actual period of the *milamala* festival. The fact that the informed Trobriander immediately assigns a story to a stanza belonging to a specific *wosi milamala* cycle further highlights the aspect of 'insider knowledge' that is intertwined with this genre.

I will illustrate the genre (and the register) with the song cycle called *Wosi Onegava* — 'The songs of the canoe *Onegava*':<sup>10</sup>

<i>Wosi Onegava</i>	Songs of the canoe <i>Onegava</i>
<i>Setoyegu inagu,</i> <i>ilamgu Bweyova,</i> <i>laveyami gukwauya.</i>	'I wish my mother was here, I cry for Boyowa (= Kiriwina Island), you decorated my basket.
<i>Sana unumwedudu</i> <i>venu – magubweyava –</i> <i>yobu nitugwai.</i>	Pointing to tobacco and <i>venu</i> -herbs – my belongings – and caring for my child.

<sup>10</sup> The *biga baloma/biga tommwaya* variety is so different from the Kilivila spoken these days that I cannot give morpheme-interlinearized transcriptions of the texts. The English translations presented here are the result of working together with consultants who sang these songs and those who still knew their meaning. They provided me with modern Kilivila paraphrases for each and every songline — and my English translations are based on these paraphrases (see also Senft 2003).

*Iyogibu tamagu,  
bavadara gubua,  
okasana bomatu.*

*Masaguma vana,  
okeoli nemya.*

*Vana –  
bivoli vom.*

*Bavasaki gubwuita,  
egaega bomatu,  
vavoligu vivila.*

*Bwerara – magubwuita –  
bweyava o kunugu,  
bwenisi vivinai.*

*Iva'oli vivina,  
ivarara bomatu,  
ivatusi vagana.*

*Kominegu, tamagu,  
mivetupa – unata –  
veyumegu nubegu.*

*Venubegu Voli,  
inubegu Voli!*

*Kasabava mwana –  
migina ya'uverara.*

*Varara – To'unata –  
bikasa o migim.  
Bwenisi – kegayobu.*

*Rabige'utu bwadagu,  
rabigebwena rivana –  
bigideyobu – nuagu.*

*Bikamapu tabugu,  
bikatoi varam,  
vasanegu bponu.*

*Ulivorigu bwena,  
m'kwegamya wosi.*

*Kegamya vivina,  
keganena vatova,  
nemvemya guwosi.*

*Kegamya Vevara,  
kegimwedudu bomatu.*

He is sad my father,  
I stroll around with my betel-nut,  
We will reunite in the North.

I put them in my armband, the herbs,  
The *keoli*-herbs in the *nemya*-armband.

*Vana*-herbs –  
They will touch your body.

I pick my wreath of flowers,  
the earth quakes in the North,  
my wife – a girl.

Blossoming soon – my wreath of flowers –  
he puts it on my head,  
they like him the girls.

He goes to her, to the girl,  
she hides in the North  
he knows her at the beach.

I quarrel with my fate, my father,  
unrequited love – this man –  
he comes back with my girl-friend.

My friend Voli,  
my friend Voli!

Get in rows for the dance, for the game –  
faces – pandanus-leaves flutter in the wind.

She is hiding – To'unata –  
in the row with the others he will appear before you.  
He is beautiful – good words.

His speech my brother,  
his well chosen words –  
they will hurt me – I know.

We two will be one my friend,  
her crying continues,  
he gives me the betel-nut.

My body is beautiful,  
you are humming a song.

Humming girl,  
the air begins,  
she is practicing my song.

Humming in Vevara,  
whispering in the North.

*Mikevana Verara,  
mikamya bomatu –  
bukweganisa va baku.*

*Mikevana – vivina –  
mikamya – varam –  
kweganisa gu 'osi.*

*Mikeyobu vina,  
kumisa wosi,  
yamwemya vana.*

*Inekudu – ineoli,  
titavagu – buva –  
banagisa Tuma!*

*Bigideoli tau.  
Bigidemapu – vana.*

*Veyobu – kagu kauya –  
vadudu vivina,  
vetaki o migim!  
Kuvadunu – tuagu –  
vasanegu kiyaya –  
bavetaki vamwana!*

*Butula Onegova.  
M'yegu. Bonokum  
toden, ivina 'i  
tokasa okwadeva.*

*Basila o negova,  
bakipu keurata,  
bakau akwemya!*

*Vatoa kagu kauya –  
vadudu agu mwali –  
yevata o kwadeva.*

Your singing in Vevara,  
your humming in the North –  
they will not like it in the midst of their village.

Your singing – girl –  
your humming – tears –  
they did not like my song.

You carry the children, you girls,  
you practice singing the songs,  
you sway your hips, herbs are in your armbands.

To bind the bunch of herbs – they are moved,  
I long for her – my betel-nut –  
I will go there and see: Tuma!

She longs for him, for the man.  
He wants her – sweet smelling herbs in the armband.

Veyobu – my little basket –  
walking with the girls,  
playing the game, your face is so beautiful!  
Come you two – you friends –  
I give what I have –  
I like playing this game!

This is the song of the canoe *Onegava*.  
The wind blows. With herbs in their armbands,  
there they are standing, the girls,  
in a row they are standing at the beach.

I will sit in the canoe,  
I will count the crew,  
I will dare it and I hum my song!

Putting down my basket –  
they come for my *mwali*-shells –  
they watch them there at the beach.'

This song cycle describes the carefree, festive and erotic life of the *baloma* in the Tuma underworld paradise and mentions a Kula expedition. I do not want to further interpret this *wosi milamala* cycle. I want to emphasize though, that every native speaker of Kilivila hearing these songs (or reading a text like this one with the lyrics transcribed) will immediately recognize that these songs are sung in the *biga baloma/biga tommwaya* register of Kilivila — despite the fact that most of the native speakers can no longer understand what is said in these songs (as pointed out above).

To conclude this section I want to emphasize once more that the *wosi milamala* and with them the *biga baloma/biga tommwaya* register of Kilivila as a whole is highly endangered — if not already moribund. I would also like to point out that only the anthropological-linguistic reconstruction of the knowledge codified and narrated in a very

specific register opens up the Trobriand Islanders' collective religious knowledge and their *weltanschauung* for any outside observer. Trobriand eschatology is codified in the specific register called *biga tommwaya/bigaloma*; the insider with a true interest in and knowledge of the register constituting the genre *wosi milamala* will learn much more about the mythic and timeless connections that constitute the Trobriand meaning of life than someone who may have heard as a child about the existence of the *baloma* and their life in the Tuma underworld but otherwise may be indifferent with respect to these eschatological matters.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4 The *biga megwa* 'language of magic' and its level of endangerment

As mentioned above, the *biga megwa*, 'the language of magic', is very similar and closely related to the *biga tommwaya/bigaloma* variety. The variety not only encompasses archaic words and syntactic constructions, but also so-called magical words and loan words from other Austronesian languages, the meaning of which is unknown to the layman (and sometimes even to the magician); there are also many words and expressions the semantics of which are only known to the owners of these formulae (see Malinowski 1935 vol. II; Senft 1985b, 1997a, 2001). Malinowski contrasts this variety, which he calls *megwa la biga* ('magic its speech') with ordinary speech, which he calls *livala la biga* ('speech its language, spoken (everyday) language'; see Malinowski 1935 vol. II:225). This variety is highly situation dependent, of course, and the magical formulae, *megwa*, that constitute this register are characterized by a number of stylistic features and devices such as alliteration, anaphora, rhyme, repetition, metaphor, allegro rules, onomatopoeic words, and by a very special rhythm of their own. Trobrianders differentiate between various forms of magic. All these specific forms of magic have their special magical formulae. Although these formulae quite often also have specific names, they are all subsumed under the genre label *megwa*.

The expression *megwa* or its more archaic variant *migavela* can be glossed as 'magic, magical formula, spell'. There is another archaic noun, *kema*, that can also be glossed as 'magic, spell'. The Trobrianders differentiate between various forms of magic; they know weather magic, black magic, healing magic, garden magic, fishing magic, dance magic, beauty magic, love magic, sailing and canoe magic, and magic against earthquakes, witches and sharks. Most of the various forms of magic and most magical formulae have special labels in Kilivila, for example, the death magic *tiginuvayu*, the love magical formulae *kasina*, *koivaga*, *sulumveyuva*, the smoke magic *kegau*, the carving magic *kwegiva'elu*, the magic to prevent the theft of betel-nuts *silami*, the counter magic against sickness *yuvisa*, and the health magic *kaikakaya*.

As pointed out elsewhere (Senft 1997a), the Trobriand Islanders have always been famous for being great magicians (see for example, Malinowski 1922, 1935, 1974; Powell 1957, 1960; Weiner 1976, 1983, 1988). Until recently all Trobriand Islanders used magical formulae to reach certain aims with the firm conviction that they can thus influence and control nature and the course of, and events in, their lives. The magical formula is the most important part of the magical rite(s). Besides the knowledge of how to perform the magical rite, the possession of the magical formulae guarantees that the desired effect of the magic

<sup>11</sup> For further examples of *wosi milamala* see Baldwin (1945, 1950); Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Senft (1991).

will come true.<sup>12</sup> There are specialists for certain kinds of magic. All magic is regarded as personal property. There is a basic belief that magic came to the Trobriand Islands together with the first ancestors of the four clans. In the matrilineal Trobriand society individuals inherit magic from their matrilineal relatives, from their fathers, or from specialists. In general, experts, such as master-carvers, weavers, canoe-builders, sail-makers, healers, etc., accept apprentices and pass their skills on to these apprentices together with the magic that goes or may go with their special skills. The Trobriand Islanders differentiate between:

- magicians in general, the *tomegwa* 'male magician', *namegwa* 'female magician', *towosi* 'male chanter of magic' or *nawosi* 'female chanter of magic';
- sorcerers, the *bwagau* or *tobubwagau/nabubwagau* male/female sorcerers, the experts in 'black magic' in general, and
- the flying witches, the *munukwaua*, the experts in 'black magic' in particular.

The following phrases refer to the activities of magicians:

<i>epaisewa megwa</i>	's/he is working (with her/his) magic',
<i>emegwa</i>	's/he is doing magic',
<i>ekasilam/ekapekwani/emigai megwa</i>	's/he is whispering magic',
<i>ekauke'ula megwa</i>	's/he is carrying/wielding magic'.

The first two phrases refer to the magical ritual as a whole and in general, and the last two phrases refer to the recitation of the magical formula in particular. Moreover, there are a number of expressions that refer to how the magicians and sorcerers perform their magic. Among other things, they can:

- put a spell on someone or something *emigamegwa yokwa*  
's/he puts a spell on you';
- bewitch someone or something *ebugwau yokwa*  
's/he bewitches you';
- foretell things *ekebigibogi yowai*  
's/he foretells war';
- speak their magical formulae over leaves *eyopoi megwa*  
's/he speaks magic over leaves';
- put a spell on a canoe whipping it with a string to make it faster *elepa waga*  
's/he puts a spell on a canoe';
- perform wind magic spitting *epulapula yagila*  
's/he spits wind magic';
- heal with their magic *ekatumova*,  
's/he heals with magic',  
*evigikwalem*  
's/he tries healing magic on you';
- pick leaves for health magic and then perform the magical rite with them *eyoudali*  
's/he performs healing magic with leaves'.

<sup>12</sup> I want to note here that this is completely in accord with what Malinowski (1974) and Cassirer say about magic (see for example, Cassirer 1923:65; 1925:253, 265; see also 1929:79, 127, 142). For a discussion of Malinowski's understanding of magic see Kippenberg (1987:23–31). See also Tambiah (1985:33f.).

While reciting — or rather whispering and murmuring — magical formulae, the magician's accentuation of the words and phrases creates a special and characteristic rhythm. The short but clearly audible pauses the magician makes while reciting the formulae can be interpreted as text formation signals. Malinowski (1935:213) and Weiner (1983:703) rightly praised the phonetic, rhythmic, alliterative, onomatopoeic and metaphorical effects, the various repetitions and the thus prosodically unique characteristics of the language of magic. It is especially the phonetic, suprasegmental and poetic characteristics that mark the special status of magical formulae as a genre of its own. Moreover, as pointed out above, with the majority of these formulae we find so-called magical words (magical and not 'sacred' words as Tambiah (1985:25) refers to them in a strange mixing up of 'paradigms'), names (of the formula or its former owners), things (like feathers and spears) and references (to the moon, to animals, to rivers, and taboos) the meanings of which are completely unknown even to the magicians themselves. This is the reason why Malinowski pointed out the 'two-fold character' of the language of magic characterized by 'the coefficients of weirdness and intelligibility' (Malinowski 1974:231). Thus Tambiah's (1985:35) claim that 'Trobriand magical language is intelligible language' has to be refuted as only partly true (see also Malinowski 1935 vol. II:224; Schmitz 1975:97f.).<sup>13</sup> It is true that there are parts in a magical formula that are easy to understand; however, this does not hold for the magical formula as a whole. This observation, the specific formal and stylistic characteristics of the magical formulae mentioned so far and the fact that the Trobrianders themselves differentiate the *biga megwa* register from other situational-intentional varieties settles the issue of 'whether magical speech [...] is a different genre from ordinary speech' as it was raised by Tambiah (1990:80). For the Trobriand Islanders the *biga megwa* is certainly different from ordinary speech, otherwise they would not mark it explicitly in their metalanguage. Moreover, this concept also proves what Tambiah (1985:34) attempts to deny so vigorously, namely that 'the primitive has [...] the magical attitude to words'. Malinowski rightly 'affirmed the truth of this classical assertion' — and both linguistic and ethnographic facts here confirm Malinowski's insights and contradict once more one of so many theories that aim to criticize the findings of the great pioneer of ethnography.<sup>14</sup>

Expert magicians perform their rites on request and they expect betel-nuts, yams, tobacco, and nowadays money for their services. Usually, magicians have to observe food taboos for at least a day before they start their rites and while they perform them. They get

<sup>13</sup> If the magical language reads intelligibly for someone who is not familiar with Kilivila and therefore only reads and relies on the field researcher's glosses, it is the merit of the field researcher and his or her familiarity with the language and his or her cooperation with the consultants that made it possible to come up with intelligible glosses.

<sup>14</sup> Tambiah's argument that I am refuting here runs as follows: 'The basic fallacy of linguists and philosophers who search for the origins of the magical attitude to words is their prior assumption and acceptance that the primitive has in fact such an attitude. This axiom they have derived principally from Frazer, and indeed from Malinowski, who had affirmed the truth of this classical assertion on the basis of his fieldwork' (Tambiah 1985:34). I cannot refrain from thinking that here, as well as with his rather unqualified statement quoted and already refuted above that 'Trobriand magical language is intelligible language' (Tambiah 1985:35), Tambiah sounds like an 'armchair' anthropologist who tries to criticize the fieldworker on the basis of an assumed better theory. Although we all know that this famous anthropologist can look back to long periods of field research in various and different fields and has contributed widely to anthropological theory, it remains a mystery to me why he — like so many outstanding anthropologists — tries to find faults with Malinowski by all means and at any costs. The master may have interpreted this as a kind of Freudian patricide...

their compensation after they have finished their rituals. The fame of a magician depends on his or her success, of course. And this success is believed to basically depend on the magicians' strict observance of taboos that go with their magic — the magical rites have to follow and obey clearly defined conventions and rules — and on the correct reciting of the respective formula which has to be stereotypically recalled, remembered, and verbally reproduced by the acting magicians. The formulae inherited from the powerful ancestors will not have the desired effect if the magician does not always recite them in the same unchanged wording in which they were passed to the Islanders by their first ancestors. The only other possible and acceptable explanation for a magician's failure is the fact that he or she may have worked unknowingly in competition with another magician's more powerful magic. Thus, the effect of the formulae are based on the power and the will of the magician and his or her magical formula. Most formulae emphasize these powers explicitly. The magicians control the powers of nature by their own magical power and expertise which are manifest in the magical formulae they inherited from their ancestors. With respect to magic on the Trobriands Tambiah's (1985:81) statement that it 'is inappropriate to subject these performative rites to verification' is completely off the point. The work of magicians, especially when they perform their magical rites for the community or for an individual, are minutely monitored — and the status, prestige, and 'face' of magicians are solely dependent on their success.

The magicians direct all magical formulae towards specific addressees. Among these addressees are things, natural powers, substances, spirits, and animals, for example, water, magical stones, whet-stones, bodies, clouds, yam seedlings and plants, sweet potatoes, teeth of animals, pieces of wood, spirits, crocodiles, wild pigs, and wild dogs (see Senft 1997a). All these addressees are personalized in the respective formulae. Some of these addressees are mediating substances (Tambiah 1985:41) that — like go-betweens — take up the verbal assertions of the formulae and convey them to the final recipient of the magic.

All formulae pursue certain aims which they will reach either by ordering and commanding their addressees to do or change something, or by foretelling changes, processes, and developments that are necessary for reaching these aims, or by just describing the conditions and effects at which the formulae aim. Malinowski (1974:74) characterized this aspect of magic as: 'the use of words which invoke, state, or command the desired aim'. About 60 years later Tambiah (1985:60, 78) connected this observation with Austin's speech act theory (Austin 1962) and rightly called these verbal acts 'illocutionary' or 'performative' acts.

The speech situation in which magicians on the Trobriand Islands find themselves engaged is special, indeed. According to my consultants and to all the magicians that presented me with, or sold me, their formulae, the act of 'whispering, carrying, or saying the magic' (see above) is not a monological activity. On the contrary, the magicians engage in a kind of conversation with their addressee(s). For the Trobriand magicians the addressees of their formulae have to behave like partners in a conversation (see Senft 1985b:88), at least they have to take over the function of listeners — because the power of the magical words forces them to do this. Thus, all formulae personalize their addressees. According to my Trobriand consultants the interactants in the communicative situation of magic are the magician on the one side and the intermediate and/or mediate addressees of the magical formula on the other side. The magicians address their interlocutor verbally — and the addressees then have to react nonverbally. That is to say: the addressees of the

formulae either have to support and fulfill the orders they hear in the formula and see that the described aims will be reached, or they will not react to the magician's formula because the addressees either have to obey the power and will of another magician's stronger and more powerful formula or because the magician has broken a taboo or made a mistake in reciting the formula and therefore cannot force the power of his or her magic on the respective addressees. Thus, whether the communication between the magicians and their addressees is successful or not — from the point of view of the magician — is completely dependent on the nonverbal reaction of the verbally addressed. From the Trobrianders', the emic, point of view, the performance of magic is always a communicative event characterized by a verbal-nonverbal conversation between magician and personalized addressee (regardless of whether the addressee is animate or inanimate). To summarize this emic view once more: the Trobriand magician talks to an addressee, the addressee listens and reacts, and therefore both are engaged in a special type of conversation.

When I first came to the Trobriand Islands in 1982, magic still played a dominant role and the power of magicians and their magical formulae clearly pervaded everyday life on the Trobriands. In 1983 the chief of Tauwema, Kilagola, gave me parts of his canoe magic as a present, when he adopted me as one of his sons. His brother Weyei made me a similar present consisting of five formulae of his weather magic as a sign of his friendship (see Senft 1985b). And Vaka'ila, one of the oldest men of the village, presented me with a number of formulae of his garden magic because I reminded him of his late brother Keyalabwala. These three men were the only persons who offered me such personal and secret information — and I was rather proud of being honoured by these men in this way.

In 1989, however, more than twelve women and men approached my wife and me and offered to sell magical formulae for money and tobacco. We felt as if we were in the middle of a big closing-down sale for magic. This is clear evidence for the fact that the magical formulae have lost their importance for the majority of Trobriand Islanders. This is certainly the result of a more than century-long fight between traditional magicians and Christian missionaries (see below). In 1983 Trobriand Islands Christians still lived in an interesting form of syncretism that combined traditional belief in magic and Trobriand eschatology (Malinowski 1974) with Christian ideas. In 1989 these syncretic features of Trobriand Islands Christianity had already decreased dramatically. The magicians, both female or male, were increasingly losing influence in the society, and accordingly the estimation and appreciation of their magical skills and their knowledge of magical formulae decreased. Thus, magical formulae had started to not only lose their societal and political value but also their value as personal property. Therefore, many Trobrianders thought that there was no need any more to bequeath the formulae to the members of the younger generation. In turn, the younger generation hardly saw any sense any more in learning these formulae in a number of long and tiresome lessons their elder (matrilineal) relatives, their fathers, or some experts used to teach them. This decrease in the importance of magic will most probably result in the loss of the genre and the situational-intentional variety constituted by the magical formulae. Thus, *megwa* and the *biga megwa* will most probably share the fate of the *wosi milamala* and the *biga baloma/biga tommwaya*.

In what follows I present a magical formula that was donated to me by one of my fellow villagers in Tauwema. The magical formula represents healing magic (see Senft 1997a:371–373). I got this magic from Kasilasila, a man of about 65 years of age, in July 1989. Kasilasila lived in Tauwema; he was a member of the Lukwasisiga clan. The name of the magic is *kemakoda* or *koda* magic. The health magician is obliged to always observe

certain food taboos, so that he can immediately act whenever his services are necessary and requested. The *koda* magic works for lacerations, stab wounds (especially if inflicted by a spear), cuts and shark-bites. The formula is first recited over the water with which the healer cleans the wound. This water is called *lalakwa*. Then the healer takes a special stone called *dakwadakuna* which is his (or her) personal property, whispers the magic on this stone, wraps leaves around it and then places the wrapped stone for a certain amount of time he (or she) thinks to be adequate on various areas below and above the wounded person's heart (for the role of stones in magic see Frazer 1922:43). The person with the wound(s) that have to be cured also has to sleep (at least) a night on this stone. If the wound does not close and heal fast enough, the rite will be performed so long until the magic shows the desired effect. I recorded the formula in Tauwema on July 29<sup>th</sup> 1989. It runs as follows:

	<i>Matala dakwadakwa</i>	'Its eye <i>dakwadakwa</i> -stone
	<i>matala matala</i>	its eye its eye
	<i>lalakwa matala</i>	<i>lalakwa</i> -water its eye
	<i>keidauta matala</i>	<i>kaidauta</i> -feather its eye
5	<i>kemakoda kemakoda</i>	<i>kemakoda</i> magic <i>kemakoda</i>
	<i>kagu pwolala</i>	my scab
	<i>seidididididi aleipatu</i>	<i>seidididididi</i> I close
	<i>yatala o la kemakoda</i>	one in its <i>kemakoda</i> magic
	<i>yegula Kasilasila</i>	I <i>kasilasila</i>
10	<i>kanai</i>	<i>kanai</i> -fish
	<i>sigulu</i>	dry banana-leaf
	<i>beba bouna bouna</i>	butterfly good good
	<i>bouna bouna</i>	good good
	<i>sikeda</i>	their road
15	<i>sikeda</i>	their road
	<i>sikedava</i>	their new road
	<i>sikeda</i>	their road
	<i>sikeda</i>	their road
	<i>sikedamugwa</i>	their old road
20	<i>atem</i>	I cut you
	<i>buyai itamatem</i>	blood it cures you
	<i>buyai itasuvalem</i>	blood it stops
	<i>buyai takadem</i>	blood we clot
	<i>buyai tagayem</i>	blood we do not hurt you
25	<i>buyai kagu pwalala</i>	blood my scab
	<i>seididididididi</i>	<i>seididididididi</i>
	<i>mguvala</i>	your well-being
	<i>bigogova</i>	it will get well
	<i>bibwipam</i>	blood will run through your body

30	<i>mguvala</i>	your well-being
	<i>bigogova</i>	it will get well
	<i>e'ulitaboda</i>	the wound closes
	<i>mguvala</i>	your well-being
	<i>bigogwa</i>	it will get well
35	<i>epokonikani</i>	it hurts
	<i>mguvala</i>	your well-being
	<i>bigogova</i>	it will get well
	<i>e i yoku mguvala</i>	eh ih you your well-being
	<i>bigogova</i>	it will get well
40	<i>kalusimalisi</i>	we put a spell on you
	<i>mguvala</i>	your well-being
	<i>bigogova</i>	it will get well
	<i>matala siyakaila</i>	tip of the <i>siyakaila</i> -wood
	<i>matala kasiyakaila</i>	tip of the <i>kasiyakaila</i> -spear
45	<i>mguvala</i>	your well-being
	<i>bigogova</i>	it will get well
	<i>matala emiliukotu</i>	tip of the <i>emiliukotu</i> -spear
	<i>mguvala</i>	your well-being
	<i>bigogova</i>	it will get well
50	<i>matala kemwayaka</i>	tip of the <i>kemwayaka</i> -wood
	<i>mguvala</i>	your well-being
	<i>bigogova</i>	it will get well
	<i>bouna bouna</i>	good, good
	<i>sikeda sikeda</i>	their road, their road
55	<i>sikedavau</i>	their new road
	<i>sikeda sikeda</i>	their road, their road
	<i>sikedamugwa</i>	their old road
	<i>atem</i>	I cut you
	<i>buyai tamatam</i>	blood, we heal you
60	<i>buyai tamatam</i>	blood, we heal you
	<i>buyai itasuvalem</i>	blood it stops
	<i>buyai</i>	blood
	<i>kagu pwalala</i>	my scab
	<i>seididididididi</i>	<i>seididididididi</i>
65	<i>kanaiy</i>	(fast like) <i>kanaya</i> -fish
	<i>akipatuma</i>	I hold it tight
	<i>yegula Kasilasila</i>	I myself Kasilasila
	<i>o lu kemakoda</i>	in its <i>kemakoda</i> magic
	<i>kanai</i>	<i>kanai</i> -fish

70	<i>sigilubu</i>	dry banana leaf
	<i>beba</i>	butterfly
	<i>gala mwolisala</i>	no pain
	<i>gala kwasala</i>	nothing remains
	<i>iputu iyausa</i>	it closes, it stops
75	<i>tchchchch eee</i>	tchchchch eee'

The whispered recitation of this formula in its specific rhythm lasts for one minute and 26 seconds.

In the first two lines Kasilasila refers to the 'eye' of his magical *dakwadakwa* stone with which he performs his health magic. *Dakwadakwa* is the magical name of the stone Kasilasila refers to as *dakwadakuna* in profane contexts. The very first lines reveal that this stone has a special status: it has an eye with which it sees the wounds it is used to close. However, the attention of the stone's eye is also directed to the *lalakwa* water with which the healer first cleaned the wound and over which he also recited this magical formula. In line 4 Kasilasila also mentions a feather called *keidauta* — however, the magician does not use this feather in his ritual and he himself does not know the meaning of this feather and its specific importance for the magic as a whole. In lines 5–9 Kasilasila first mentions the name of the magic twice and then foretells what he, Kasilasila, is going to do. He refers to his 'scab' with which he will quickly close something flexible and open (*ya-tala*, 'flexible-one') which is not specified but must be the wound. The scab is in the *kemakoda* magic that Kasilasila has put on the *dakwadakwa* stone. The onomatopoeic expression *seidididididi* indicates the swiftness of this action — in profane contexts it is generally used by children to describe a fast surf from the border of the reef to the beach. In line 9 Kasilasila mentions his own name and thus explicitly refers to his power that he has transferred to the magical stone. In lines 10–12 the formula refers to a fish, a butterfly and a dry banana-leaf — two animals and a material that are small, light and swift and quickly driven away by a strong current or a fresh gale. This is another means to emphasize the speed of the healing process — and lines 12 and 13 point out four times that everything will be good again, soon.

In lines 14–19 the magician refers to the blood stream (the roads of blood), pretending in line 20 that he is cutting his patient (implied here is that he does this cutting with his magical stone). In lines 21–26 the formula expresses that this causes a new stream of blood that cures the patient and lets the blood of his or her wound stop and clot. However, this new 'cutting' does not hurt; on the contrary, Kasilasila's scab put on the stone with the spell will quickly close the wound. Again, the expression *seidididididi* indicates swiftness of the action.

In the lines 27–53 the formula conjures the healing of the wound: the addressing of the patient's well-being (*mguvala*) and the statement that 'it will get well' (*bigogova* or *bigogwa*) is repeated nine times. In lines 43, 44, 47, and 50 three spears are mentioned. Kasilasila only knows that *Emiliukotu* was the name of his father's spear — however, the magician again does not know anything about the meaning of mentioning these spears and about their specific importance for and in this magical rite. This part of the formula ends with line 53 that (like the lines 12 and 13 above) point out twice that everything will be good again.

Lines 54–65 repeat almost identically the part of the formula that was already recited in the lines 14–26. The only difference here is that the curing, the clotting of the blood, and

the pain-free treatment is not mentioned again. What is mentioned here twice, however, is the fact that Kasilasila and his spell (he put on the water and the magical stone) will heal the wounded person. Moreover, this part of the formula emphasizes not only with the onomatopoeic *seidididididi* expression but also with the additional mentioning of the quick and swift *kanaya*-fish (a small reef-fish I cannot determine biologically) the swiftness of the healing process.

In lines 66–68 the magician again explicitly refers to himself and to the *kemakoda* magic which he is holding tight in the magical stone. Mentioning the fish, the dry banana-leaf and the butterfly in lines 69–71 conjures the swiftness of the healing process once more, lines 72–74 assure the wounded person that there will be no pain and no permanent damage to his or her health and that the wound will close and stop bleeding.

The formula ends with onomatopoeic sounds that seem to resemble the transition of the spoken magical word into the water and the magical stone — the intermediate addressees of this magical formula — and from there into the wound and the patient’s body — the immediate and direct addressees of the *kemakoda* magic.

If we look at the formula as a whole again, we can summarize its text formation as follows:

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Part A:  | The magic, its components and the magician’s action<br>Lines 1–13  |
| Part B:  | The bleeding will be stopped swiftly<br>Lines 14–26  |
| Part C:  | The healing of the wound is conjured<br>Lines 27–53  |
| Part B’: | The bleeding will be stopped swiftly<br>Lines 54–65  |
| Part D:  | The magician’s power and the effect of his magic:<br>wounds will close and heal swiftly and completely<br>Lines 66–75. <sup>15</sup> |

To conclude this section I want to emphasize once more that I am convinced that this genre and with it the *biga megwa* register of Kilivila as a whole is highly endangered — if not already moribund. In the next section I will discuss why the two situational-intentional varieties of Kilivila, the *biga baloma/biga tommwaya* and the *biga megwa* — are doomed to die on the Trobriand Islands.

## 5 Why have the *biga megwa* and the *biga baloma* become moribund language varieties of Kilivila?

The Overseas Mission Department of the Methodist Church commenced work in the Trobriand Islands as early as 1894 (see Senft 1992, 1994b, 1997b).

In 1935 Roman Catholic Missionaries (M.S.C.) from Australia began their work on the Trobriands. Up to 1988 the Roman Catholic Church was represented by two Australian priests from the Mission of the Sacred Heart. Then the bishop of the Massim diocese allowed the Italian P.I.M.E. mission to start their work on the Trobriands, and moved the

<sup>15</sup> For further examples of *megwa* see Malinowski (1935 vol. II); Senft (1985b, 1997a:).

two M.S.C. missionaries to Alotau and to a small island in the Louisiade Archipelago. At present there is one priest from Itlay based on Kiriwina Island.

In the late seventies the church of the Seventh Day Adventists started to perform their missionary work in a few villages on the Trobriand Islands. However, so far they have only played a marginal role there.

The Church encompassing most believers is the Methodist Church. Today all Methodist priests on the Trobriand Islands are Papua New Guineans, and every village with a Methodist church has at least one local village priest, the so-called *misinari*. The Catholics took over this policy of the Methodists and established a network of local catechists in the villages with Catholic inhabitants; these catechists are also called *misinari*.

In general, the Methodist *misinari* are individuals with highly motivated social upward mobility in the Trobriand society, which is stratified according to a strict hierarchy (see Malinowski 1929, 1935; Powell 1957; Weiner 1976, 1988). They undergo a few months training at a mission school where they learn to master English (to a certain degree), to write, and especially to read, interpret and expound the Gospels that have been translated into (a slightly Dobu-based variety of) Kilivila (Lawton 1997). The *misinari* gain prestige as specially trained lay-priests, catechists or deacons associated with the influential mission.

As Robert Louis Stevenson had already noted in 1896, with respect to the South Seas there 'is but one source of power and the one ground of dignity — rank' (Stevenson 1896:282). This holds true for the Trobriand society, too: Trobriand society is highly stratified. The most important means of access to political power is membership in the highest ranking subclans. There are some other means to acquire status within the society, such as being a versatile rhetorician, a master-carver, an expert magician, etc. However, compared to the political significance of in-born rank, these alternatives for achieving status are of secondary importance. In former times, individuals belonging to the two lowest ranking clans of the four main Trobriand clans had little chance of gaining status or exercising any kind of political influence.

With the growing influence of the Christian churches on the Trobriands members of these two lowest ranking clans involved themselves in these new institutions of political impact. With the increase of the churches' power, being a *misinari* implies being a woman or a man of rank. Most of the Trobriand *misinari* nowadays belong to the lower two of the four Trobriand clans. People who are matrilineally born into these two lower clans have almost no chance to gain political influence (if they do not inherit knowledge of special magical formulae). The fact that the *misinari* — still a relatively young group of social climbers — have achieved political influence within the villages is documented by the ritualized greeting formula that is used to start important public speeches: in this formula the *misinari* are addressed immediately after the chief(s).<sup>16</sup>

This indicates that the *misinari* — at least with respect to official acknowledgement — displaced the magicians, traditionally the second most important representatives of social power and control, following in rank immediately after the chief. According to Malinowski (1926:93):

[magic] invariably ranges itself on the side of the powerful, wealthy and influential, sorcery remains a support of vested interest [...] in the long run, of law and order. It is always a conservative force, and it furnishes really the main source of the

<sup>16</sup> The formula runs: *Agutoki kweguyau, agutoki misinari, agutoki tommota ...*; it can be translated as 'Honorable chiefs, dear village church leaders, people from/of (name of the respective village)'.

wholesome fear of punishment and retribution indispensable in any orderly society. There is hardly anything more pernicious, therefore, in the many European ways of interference with savage peoples, than the bitter animosity with which Missionary, Planter, and Official alike pursue the sorcerer. The rash, haphazard, unscientific application of our morals, laws, and customs to native societies, and the destruction of native law, quasi-legal machinery and instruments of power leads only to anarchy and moral atrophy and in the long run to the extinction of culture and race.

Malinowski was completely aware of the processes of culture change the missionaries had to induce in Trobriand society to achieve rank — and thus power. The missionaries had to fight first and foremost the magicians, their *weltanschauung*, and the model of culture they represented and guarded. Because the magicians were too powerful, the missionaries could not start directly to fight their ‘natural enemy’, the ‘sorcerer’, who stands for conservatism, the old tribal order, the old beliefs and appointment of power (see Malinowski 1926:93). Therefore, they had to fight first against the standards and values the Trobriand magicians represented. Belief in magic was not denounced directly as something ‘heathenistic’. Instead, the strategy pursued to fight these ‘pagan’ customs — according to the village priests’ judgment — has been much more subtle: the local village priests and catechist, the *misinari*, argue that there are two ways to live one’s life. One way is the old, traditional way which includes magic and the eschatological belief in the immortal spirits of the dead living in the underground paradise on Tuma island. The other way is the new Christian way of life with its specific Christian beliefs and its own eschatological ideas. Both ways are mutually exclusive, or, to say it in the local priests’ words: ‘one can either walk on the way of the ancestors or on the Christian way together with *Jesu Keriso*, the Lord Jesus Christ’. If people want to ensure a good yam harvest, if they need rain or want to have more sunny days, they are told to pray for it in the church. By now there are even some special public prayers for good harvests. Women especially accept this more recent way of Christian preaching and self-presentation, and the clear and simple alternatives — the traditional magicians with their formulae and rites on the one hand and the *misinari* and their prayers on the other hand — cause much tension in families where the husbands of pious wives are expert magicians. As mentioned above, magicians, both female and male, have gradually lost influence in the society, and accordingly the estimation of their magical skills and their knowledge of magical formulae has decreased. As mentioned above, many Trobrianders think that there is actually no need any more to bequeath the formulae to the members of the younger generation, and in turn, the younger generation these days hardly sees any sense in learning these formulae. I want to point out that the Trobriand Islanders’ belief in the magical power of words included their conviction in magic as a means of controlling nature as well as the incidents affecting their personal lives. Once this conviction is lost a political and ritual power vacuum remains — and *misinari* and missionaries use this vacuum for their own means and ends. The magician’s ritual and political power has been replaced by the priest’s ritual and political power in Trobriand society.

Thus, the increasing influence of Christian belief and the growth of the local village priests’ status and political power is responsible for the loss of the text category ‘magical formula’ and thus for the moribund state of the situational-intentional variety constituted by the magical formulae, the *biga megwa*.

However, the changes in the Trobriand Islanders’ evaluation of the concepts ‘magic’ and ‘religion’ do not only affect the *biga megwa*. The Christian religion and its specific eschatology is also gradually replacing the indigenous Trobriand eschatology. As pointed

out above Trobriand eschatological knowledge is codified in the *wosi milamala* — and with the religious changes induced by the missionaries and *misinari* these songs also lose their meaning and significance for the society. As mentioned above, they are still sung to preserve some part of the ritual aspect of the harvest festival and of the respective mourning ceremony, but the singers of these songs no longer know what they are singing about. Many of the *wosi milamala* are already forgotten, and I am convinced that in a few years the *biga baloma* variety will have died.

The loss of the *biga baloma* and the *biga megwa* varieties of Kilivila affect indigenous forms of ritual language. In general we can regard ritual language as the recognized culmination of the learning of knowledge which is basic and fundamental for the social construction of a society's reality. This reality, in turn, fosters its stability with the help of the relative stability of ritual language. As I have outlined above, the changes that affect these language varieties are induced by cultural change. However, such language changes, once induced, have severe consequences for the organization and construction of the culture of the respective society in turn because it escalates the dynamics of change.

The *misinari* have finally been very successful in changing the society they infiltrated and which they have been indoctrinating for more than a hundred years. The induced changes have affected the indigenous belief system of the Trobriand Islanders. Necessarily, these changes resulted also in new European and Christian biased systems of social and religious values and beliefs. And that these profound changes are also reflected in the language of the Trobriand Islanders is only natural: the processes of change influenced the language which in turn served to foster these changes! The missionaries have managed to replace the indigenous Trobriand magic, science, and eschatological belief system by Christian 'magic', 'science' and religion.

## 6 Everything flows, nothing stands still

I am completely aware of the fact that '[it] is easy to blame the missionary. But it is his business to make changes' (Stevenson 1896:41). In the preceding sections I described how culture change induced by missionaries is responsible for the fact that two situational-intentional varieties of Kilivila are doomed to die. I started this paper with the remark that it is a trivial insight that culture change also results in language change and I pointed out that language change is one of the most important constitutive and defining features of every natural language. Everything flows — as Heraclitus is said to have said. So why lament the loss of these language varieties, especially given the fact that the Kilivila language as a whole is far from being endangered?

If we look at various specific varieties in Western-European languages we realize, for example, that former magical formulae and the language variety in which they were written have also died out — I refer to the two famous Old High German *Merseburger Zaubersprüche* (see Schlosser 1970). However, there is one big difference here: Many of these archaic texts of European languages that illustrate various levels of their historical development were written and therefore could be preserved up to our times. They are documented and thus everybody interested in these texts has access to them. And this is not the case for the varieties of Kilivila described and illustrated in this paper!

It is true that cultures as well as languages are dynamic phenomena — that's the way it is — but our primary task as scientists is to describe and document these dynamics. On a secondary level of our research we may more or less subjectively evaluate these dynamics and their results. It is on a completely different and much more political than scientific

level, however, that we have the chance to influence the directions of these dynamics — on the basis of our scientific insights, of course. But as to the scientific level of our argumentation, the facts force us to accept that in all cultures and in all languages we observe dynamic processes that result in cultural and linguistic change. I am determined to observe and describe these dynamic processes that affect the Trobriand Islanders' language and culture in the years to come; however, I also feel obliged to document as many aspects as possible of endangered cultural knowledge that are encoded and manifest in the Trobriand Islanders language in general and in their oral tradition in particular.

I think the great merit of the 'Endangered Languages Debate' is that it has been raising the awareness of the linguistic peer group that we have to document these languages that are dying or doomed to die as comprehensively as possible if we do not want to lose important parts of human knowledge and proofs for the incredible diversity and flexibility of human cognition. Thus, I agree with Dixon that the 'most important task in linguistics today indeed, the only really important task — is to get out in the field and describe languages while this can still be done' (Dixon 1997:144). However, I would like to add that these descriptions of languages must also include the descriptions of the cultures of their speakers, because — as we have learned from Malinowski (1920:78) — 'linguistics without ethnography would fare as badly as ethnography without the light thrown in it by language'!

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