

Austronesian traditional vocal music

The goal of this presentation is to study some key structural melodic features of unaccompanied traditional vocal music of West Papua. Our data consists of vocal music from Yapen Island collected and recorded in 2010 by Helena Palma and Alfons Arsai. It includes some 25 songs with lyrics in Pom (ISO 639-3) and Serewen (ISO 639-3: pmo) performed *a capella* by Hendrik Arwam (tenor) (1-8) and Obaja Tarami (baritone) (9-10), who was also the composer of some of the songs. Although in real performance such songs would be sung by a soloist and a learners-choir (in heterophonic style), and accompanied by tifa drums, we decided not to include accompaniment in our corpus so we could concentrate on the vocal technique of solo skillful singers who would bring out the artistic features of the music. The following features appear illustrated in our corpus:

Scales: tetratonic (d-e-g-a; e-g-a-b) and pentatonic (minor: a-c-d-e-g; and major: c-d-f-g-a; c-d-e-g-a). We did not find in our corpus equal tone pentatonic scale: c-d-e-f#-g#.

Intervals: major 2nd (1 tone), minor 3rd (1 1/2 tone), descending perfect 4th and 5th, 8ve. Smaller intervals are used in ornaments. Smaller intervals could be aleatory passing notes in between larger intervals (8ve, 4th, 5th), or a pitch phenomenon secondary to a decrease in the intensity of the dynamics.

Harmony: melodies seem to be structured by major and minor triads built on the basic tone and on the tone of a descending minor 3rd (C-E-G; A-C-E), producing a harmonic contrast. Songs have no modulating sections.

Melodic structure: most songs have a bi-phrasal structure (1). Others are built on some motive (2, 3, 8). Melodic contour patterns: Descending line: It could result from: Unmarked utterance at a cadence marking the end of a phrase (1). Exclamative utterance: a motive at the beginning (5). Lament like phrase or motive. Repetition of notes articulate the text (2, 4, 5, 9, 10), similar to archaic plain chant technique. Ornaments: Microtonal vibrato, appoggiaturas, acciaccaturas and glissandi. Melodic range of the songs: a 5th, an octave. Singing the core melody in tune is easy and can be done by untrained people. However, singing the ornaments demands for a skillful singer.

Rhythm: binary. Also chant like (9) free rhythm.

Relation words-music: In our corpus, the melody does not seem to be influenced by the words of the lyrics. The same melody can be used for different words (ex.). Probably, such a melody is felt as a characteristic melodic contour of traditional music. However, there are prosodic features which seem to be shared by both vocal music and language -- exclamative intonation (5); descending end of unmarked musical phrase and of sentences (1).

(1) Dadu ro ayam

♩ = 140
Phase-κ Phrase- ρ cadence- ς

(2) Ayama

♩ = 140
motive-ξ motive-ζ

(3) Foribune

♩ = 100
rhythmic motive-γ

(4) Worsa

♩ = 140

(5) Wo nayro

♩ = 140

(6) Yatoriso

♩ = 100

(7) Ay aye yasobaye

♩ = 100

(8) Sensemo yasemo

♩ = 100

(9) Butan arau babo

♩ = 100

(10) Woro

♩ = 100

(11) Scales

tetratonic tetratonic pentatonic major pentatonic major pentatonic minor