

*Abstract submitted for the
Workshop on the Languages of Papua 4
23–26 January 2017
Manokwari, West Papua, Indonesia*

**“Incomprehensibility in Traditional Song Texts in the New Guinea Area:
Towards Understanding Nonsense”**

**Don Niles
Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies**

References to untranslatable words, meaningless text, or nonsense syllables in traditional songs in the New Guinea area have been frequent for over a century. While perhaps lacking a semantic role comparable to utterances more readily identifiable as lexical items, these untranslatable texts are just as much an essential part of performance as the translatable text and melody. Incomprehensibility also has different uses in different traditions, or may be lacking completely from songs.

My paper will consider the many different types of incomprehensibility found in song texts in the New Guinea area and attempt a typology of them. Examples will be drawn from different musical traditions throughout the region.

Equipment required: Computer with Powerpoint, data projector, and speakers

Prof. Don Niles, PhD
Acting Director & Senior Ethnomusicologist
Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies
Box 1432
Boroko 111
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Vice President
International Council for Traditional Music

tel.: +675 325-4644
fax: +675 325-0531
email: dniles.ipngs@gmail.com