

Article

A “Sloppy Wet Kiss”? Intralingual Translation and Meaning-Making in Contemporary Congregational Songs

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Abstract: Translation as a form of music localization does not only occur in diverse cultural or lingual contexts, it also occurs within an ostensibly homogenous culture and language. The global genre of contemporary congregational songs (CCS) is written and performed through a variety of theological lenses. Sometimes a theological position conveyed in, or ascribed to, CCS can be problematic for certain local expressions of the Christian faith to replicate without needing to alter lyrics, and/or musical content, or at least reinterpret those lyrics in a way which aligns with their theological understanding. This article explores popular CCS, as measured by Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) which have been either accepted, rejected, reinterpreted, or otherwise altered in order to play their part in defining local (English-speaking) church worship and identity. Translation studies and music semiology are applied to selected CCS to demonstrate this nuanced interpretation of “translation” in the localizing of religious musical practice

Keywords: contemporary congregational songs; localization; intralingual translation; music semiology; CCLI



Citation: Thornton, Daniel. 2021. A “Sloppy Wet Kiss”? Intralingual Translation and Meaning-Making in Contemporary Congregational Songs. *Religions* 12: 874. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12100874>

Academic Editors: John MacInnis and Jeremy Perigo

Received: 24 September 2021

Accepted: 9 October 2021

Published: 13 October 2021

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1. Introduction

The theme of this special issue of *Religions* Journal is “Language Translation in Localizing Religious Musical Practice.” Translation proper is understood as requiring a change in language between the source text and the target text, which I expect the bulk of the articles contributing to this special issue will address. However, even within the same language, a form of translation can be necessary. Anyone who has travelled widely would have experienced that the same words in English may convey subtly or substantially different meanings in different settings or cultures or depending upon who, or with whom one is communicating (Brower 2013, p. 3). It is this issue, of intralingual translation and meaning-making with which this paper is concerned.

Some English-language contemporary congregational songs have required either translation or reinterpretation in order to be meaningful and useful within the English-speaking context of a local Christian community’s worship. Such communities may engage in intralingual translation, although more common is an internal process of what music semiology terms as ‘esthetic’ meaning-making. The relationship between these two forms of semiotics will be discussed in the methodology section.

These processes of localization are particularly noticeable in contemporary congregational songs (CCS) that contain controversial lyrics, or distinct musical stylings. While this is the case for the examples analyzed in this paper, it should also be noted that more broadly, translation of songs for worship has been driven by missional effectiveness and theological accuracy rather than controversial lyrics. This lens of translation and esthetic meaning-making regarding English-language CCS within English-speaking churches brings a unique and important contribution to this issue by questioning some of the presuppositions we may have about the difference in localization practices between contexts with an ostensibly homogeneous language/culture and those with different languages/cultures.

2. Literature Review and Methodology

Intralingual translation has had a complicated history within translation studies, often being excluded or ignored. However, recent scholarship has begun to re-engage with this facet of translation (Korning Zethsen and Hill-Madsen 2016, p. 693). Korning Zethsen (2009) argues that, "... the difference in strategies between intralingual and interlingual translation is a *question of degree and motivation rather than kind*" (original emphasis), further stating that "comprehension is a central aim in both kinds of translation" (pp. 808–9). The problem with including intralingual translation within translation studies has been in the definition of translation itself. Korning Zethsen and Hill-Madsen (2016) propose that a concrete but not limiting definition of translation comprises a "source text", a "target text" derived from the source text, and a resulting relationship of "relevant similarity" (p. 705). Such a definition can be applied to the contemporary congregational songs examined below. This definition could even extend to musical alterations in localization practices; however, non-lingual source texts (such as music) are not considered a part of the field of translation studies. It should be noted however that Jakobson's (2004) description of intersemiotic translation does provide for translation from a lingual text to some other form, which could be musical.

Lim and Ruth's (2017) work on the history of contemporary worship notes that one of its defining qualities is "using contemporary, nonarchaic English" (p. 2). Often, that was about creating new texts for liturgical use. However, it was also about a form of intralingual translation, between older, more formal forms of liturgical language and the vernacular forms embedded in the evolution of contemporary congregational songs. While methods relating to intralingual translation frame the initial section of this article, we proceed to a situation where the "target text" is never externalized. In other words, the translation (or perhaps more accurately, the proto-translation) is done internally by the individual or community and does not result in a tangible, or realized derivation of the source text. This is where the field of translation studies is no longer useful. An internal (proto-)translation or interpretation is a meaning-making process and is therefore better connected to the larger field of semiotics.

Music semiology, as conceived by Nattiez (1990), is a three-part dialogical analytical framework. The three meaning-making centers are those of the production milieu (the "poetic" perspective), the texts themselves (recorded, written, and/or performed), and the individuals who engage with the music as an audience or in this case, congregation (the "esthetic" perspective) (see Thornton 2021, pp. 15–19). It is the esthetic sphere of meaning-making which might be described as a form of internalized intralingual translation. It is this component of Nattiez' semiological framework that is the focus of the second part of this research, although the other two centers are given some attention. Such an approach is a demonstrable contradiction to Salgar's (2016) assertion that "assessing the poetic or aesthetic levels (of meaning-making) is practically impossible". People, in this case Christians, listen to and/or sing the poetic lyrics of CCS and internally process their meaning according to their own presuppositions, history, education, culture, community and experience in such a way as to arrive at the song's purported theological position. If asked to create a target text, or to externalize their 'translation', there would be a variety of renderings based on multifarious factors feeding into the meaning-making process. Nevertheless, investigation would still be possible.

Among both scholars and popular authors, CCS lyrics have often been negatively evaluated. Two of the most common critiques are that CCS are too 'me-focused' (Dawn 1995, p. 109), and that many of them fall into the category of 'Jesus is my boyfriend' songs (Hussey 2019; Dueck 2017). Empirical analysis of CCS lyrics, however, indicates that over 80% of CCS lyrics contain more references to God than to the worshiper (Thornton 2021, p. 165), and only half the most popular CCS utilize only first-person singular pronouns (I, me, my) (ibid., p. 162), while the other half use either first-person plural pronouns (we, us, our) or a combination. Furthermore, 59% of popular CCS are in the category of Praise/Thanksgiving and 22% are primarily Prophetic/Declarative (ibid., p. 161), neither of

which are oriented towards romantic or intimate lyrics. However, such empirical analysis is irrelevant to a local congregation who instinctively react positively or negatively to a particular lyric or song. The inferred motive or theological frame projected upon the CCS producer from the performer's/congregation's (esthetic) perspective has a greater impact than the poetic intent of the writer/producer, at least in terms of whether the song is meaningful and useful for congregational worship in a local context.

Thus, two facets of translation are explored in relation to CCS below; the externalized intralingual translation (translation studies), and the internalized esthetic meaning-making (music semiology). These are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the esthetic process always precedes any external or formal translation. Before we can utilize alternative language to explain an original text, we must determine what the original text means. Furthermore, when applied to CCS, if a meaning can be established through internal processes that satisfies the theological orientation of the local worship context, then no external translation is required. In other words, the lyrics can remain unchanged. We will commence, however, with the clearest expression of translation, altered lyrics.

3. Intralingual Translation of CCS Lyrics

One of the highest profile examples of a CCS that underwent an intralingual translation is "How He Loves", written and recorded by John Mark McMillan in 2005, and released on his album, *The Song Inside the Sounds of Breaking Down* (2005). It is worth tracing the history and public discussion surrounding this song to demonstrate the ways in which CCS might ultimately warrant such a translation. In addition, from a semiological perspective, it provides insight into the poetic forces at work in the creation and adaptation of the song.

The original recording contained a final verse, referencing the sudden death of McMillan's friend (Stephen), in which McMillan breaks down in tears which is purposefully captured in the recording. Such publicized vulnerability on a studio sound recording is rare. Normally, the artist would keep re-recording until the vocal is as close to 'perfect' as possible. This is more typical of the capture of a live performance, but even then, it is rare for an experienced performer to break down in tears while singing; so noteworthy, that it became the subject of a Reddit thread (Leahmerone 2017). It was possibly this heart-breaking vulnerability that first engendered the song to the worship band, Jesus Culture, who have celebrated and fostered emotional responses in their worship recordings. McMillan's original recording is the only version which includes the final verse. All future recordings, by Jesus Culture, the David Crowder Band and even McMillan himself, did not contain this very personal, and certainly not congregational-friendly verse.

For this song to have eventually featured so strongly in congregational worship, according to the Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) charts, is confirmation of the porous boundaries between Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) and CCS (Mall 2012, pp. 13–14; Nekola 2009, p. 327). CCM has traditionally been defined as performance-oriented songs in contrast to congregationally oriented songs. Additionally, while various CCM artists have created worship albums, such as Newboys' *God's Not Dead* (2011), these have been acknowledged as a form of genre-crossing, rather than a typical output of the artist/band. That being said, the increasing presence of CCS on Christian (CCM) radio over the past couple of decades has created a conflation of the terms in some recent scholarship (MacLachlan et al. 2021). This is problematic, as it dissolves the distinction between songs intended for enjoyment and engagement by an audience (CCM), and songs which from their outset are intended for co-performance by the congregation (CCS) (Thornton 2021, p. 32). The Christian Music Industry has traditionally maintained these distinctions, signing CCM artists to different labels than worship music producers. However, the distinction is increasingly blurring with more and more artists, like John Mark MacMillan, writing both CCM and CCS, or recording songs that could possibly sit in either or both genres.

Jesus Culture, the worship music band that emerged from the youth ministry of Bethel Church, Redding, California, in the mid-2000s, released their second live worship album in

2007, *We Cry Out*. “How He Loves” led by Kim Walker-Smith, was the seventh track on that album and contained McMillan’s original “sloppy wet kiss” lyric (but, as mentioned above, not the final verse). This was the recording that initially popularized the song across many Pentecostal-charismatic churches. It was also the very first video Jesus Culture released on their official YouTube, uploaded on 5 April 2008 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoC1ec-lyps>, accessed on 15 September 2021). YouTube was only beginning to gain a substantial audience by this time, and the early upload of worship songs, especially recordings of the ‘live’ worship context, to YouTube cannot be underestimated. This video remains one of their highest-viewed songs at 24 million. “Your Love Never Fails”, uploaded almost a year later, eclipsed it with almost 40 million views, and “Rooftops”, uploaded a couple of years after that, hit 30 million.¹ Nothing they have uploaded in the last 10 years, among scores of videos, has achieved anywhere near this level of interaction. The point to be made here is how significant “How He Loves” was for Jesus Culture as a worship ministry, and how their rendition of the song gave it exposure to a much larger audience than McMillan’s fan base at the time, while still containing the controversial lyric.

Despite the popularity of Jesus Culture’s cover, “How He Loves” did not appear in the CCLI Top 25 (Church Copyright License) charts of the USA, however, until 2010. It reached its highest position of No. 13 in 2012. It was evidently the David Crowder Band (DCB) version recorded in 2009, with a revised lyric, or intralingual translation, from “sloppy wet kiss” to “unforeseen kiss” that finally brought the song to its broadest Christian audience. It is this version, with the translated lyric that is recorded in SongSelect, CCLI’s sheet music and lyric repository of represented songs, and thus, the version that is officially licensed to local churches for inclusion in their musical worship.

DCB’s ninth studio album *Church Music* (2009), which included “How He Loves”, reached No. 1 on the Billboard Christian Album Charts. “How He Loves” was also the first single released from that album. It ascended to No. 8 on the Billboard Christian Song Charts in 2009 and was nominated for Rock/Contemporary Recorded Song of the Year at the 41st GMA Dove Awards. Additionally, it was uploaded to DCB’s official YouTube channel on 14 October 2009, and reached 12 million views (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCunuL58odQ>, accessed on 15 September 2021). Note that that is still only half the views of Jesus Culture’s version. Nevertheless, with the translated lyric, not from one language to another, but from one expression of Christianity to another, the song found a new audience representing a larger portion of CCLI license holders.

In a video interview entitled “David Crowder Explains Why He Changed ‘Sloppy Wet Kiss’ in ‘How He Loves’” (C-Pop Clips 2017), Crowder says he did not change the lyric, but rather asked McMillan to consider changing it from “sloppy wet kiss” to “unforeseen kiss”. Crowder’s rationale was that, “I want to sing this song at my church”, the implication being that with the existing lyric, he could not. He posited that the original lyric caused people to think about a dog’s ‘kiss’ or a baby’s kiss, with the inference that for some Christians these have undesirable connotations for worship. Crowder recalls that McMillan did not want to change it at first. The song was already circulating in churches for three years before this translation was mooted. Crowder did not blame McMillan for a ‘limiting’ original lyric, pointing out that McMillan did not originally write it as a congregational song (but as CCM).

To further understand the poietic processes we turn to McMillan’s Blog Post entitled “How He Loves, David Crowder, and Sloppy Wet Kisses . . . ” (McMillan 2009). McMillan opens by stating “I honestly kind of hate that I even have to write this blog.” He goes on to say, “I’m sorry if I let you down by allowing the words to be changed in David’s version”. In corroboration of Crowder’s version of the story, McMillan recalls, “David contacted me and very sincerely asked if it would be cool to change a couple words in his version, because he knew that there are literally thousands of people who would never hear the song the way it was.” In other words, the original lyrics required intralingual translation for a large portion of English-speaking Christians to understand and accept the song. Further on, he acknowledges that, “I knew it was only a matter of time before

someone recorded a version with a different line, and honestly, I was glad for David to be the one to do it". The rest of the blog post focuses on how incensed he is that this one line—"Heaven meets earth like a sloppy wet kiss"—would need to be changed in the first place. His final line states, "I applaud David for changing the line to serve his people, and at the same time I boo the machinery that would cause him to have to do so." This is a common catchcry of the 'authentic' rock artist, "let me write the songs I want to write, with the lyrics I choose". There is, of course, an irony in this as the very machinery that such artists eschew is the same machinery that allows them to make a living from their craft and reach their audience. McMillan would have made more royalties from "How He Loves" than any of his other songs, and a good deal of that is due to the "machinery" that brought about this translated version. Furthermore, had he been requested to consent to the song being translated into a foreign language, I doubt it would come with any of the angst associated with this intralingual translation.

McMillan also released his own 'song story' video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6wl3uqfbYQ>, accessed on 15 September 2021), produced eight years after the original writing (although before Crowder's interview documented above). McMillan's video makes no mention of the controversial lyric at all. Rather, he tries to re-orient the song around its initial impetus, the sudden loss of his good friend, and the need for an ongoing fresh revelation of "Love". This video was also released after Jesus Culture and Crowder's cover versions. As mentioned, McMillan additionally released his own official YouTube version of the song on 23 January 2013, maintaining the original "sloppy wet kiss" lyric, although it still did not include the final verse from his initial 2005 audio release. Interestingly, it is also the first video to be uploaded to his YouTube Channel, followed by the "song story" video, clearly acknowledging the significance of this song in his repertoire as a writer and artist, and the public interest in its origins and evolution.

As mentioned, "How He Loves" in its various iterations only ever ascended to the rank of No. 13 on the CCLI charts, which is undoubtedly still a significant achievement. However, it was always unlikely to go much higher, given its emotive and highly poetic language, even ignoring the "sloppy wet kiss" lyric. Furthermore, it never mentions any of the Godhead by name, only the divine "He" and "You". This approach to CCS lyric writing tends to have a limited scope of adoption compared to those that more explicitly acknowledge one or more of the Godhead with common terms such as "God", "Lord", and "Jesus". In fact, only very rarely have songs that do not use some name of the Godhead, entered the Top 25. The only other example of this in recent times has been "One Thing Remains" (Johnson et al. 2010), also popularized by Jesus Culture (Thornton 2021, p. 151).

4. Proto-Translation in Esthetic Meaning-Making

Controversial lyrics, per se, do not preclude a song from ranking even higher on the CCLI charts than "How He Loves". "Reckless Love", composed by Caleb Culver, Cory Asbury, and Ran Jackson in 2017 reached all the way to No. 1. In Andre Henry's article for Relevant Magazine (Henry 2018), he explicitly links these songs, stating, "Reckless Love" is "2018's *How He Loves*". The controversial lyric this time is in the title itself and appears in the song's Chorus, "Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God". The most-viewed version of this song on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xx0d3R2LoU>, with 52 million views, accessed on 15 September 2021), posted on Bethel Music's official channel, comes from a live worship recording during their "Heaven Come Conference" in 2017. Asbury, towards the end of leading this song, stops to talk about this particular lyric, clearly in response to comments that had been made regarding its (non-)orthodoxy. While he makes the point that he was not calling God reckless, or even God's love reckless, but rather observing that God's love might look reckless from a human standpoint, the lyric itself does not make that distinction. The influence of the Bethel platform to promote CCS has been growing over the past decade, with at least seven of the current Top 25 songs on the USA CCL charts promoted from that stable. It should perhaps come as no surprise that a potentially controversial song would be promoted from this

platform. As mentioned, it was Jesus Culture who brought the “sloppy wet kiss” lyric to congregational worship.

In this case, however, the popularity of the song despite or perhaps because of its controversy meant that Asbury never needed to consider an intralingual translation of the equivocal lyric. As established, “How He Loves” did not rate in the Top 25 CCLI charts until after David Crowder had released the alternative lyric recording four years after the original. “Reckless Love”, on the other hand, debuted at No. 17 in the October, 2017 report, and then surged to No. 1 in the following (April, 2018) report. Churches choosing to localize this song into their worship had to engage in a meaning-making process which resulted in an acceptable theological interpretation of the lyrics.

There are still local congregations who have changed the Chorus lyric, in other words engaged in an intralingual translation of the lyric. A recent Reddit thread included a number of respondents describing various song lyrics they had ‘quietly’ changed for their local context, including this one (Datxako 2019). Some of the alterations included changing first-person singular pronouns (I, me, my) to first-person plural pronouns (We, us, our). Others were about leaving words out, such as the “yet” at the end of the phrase “For You have never failed me yet” from Elevation Church’s “Do It Again” (Brown et al. 2017).

Whether CCS are accepted, rejected, or altered, it is perhaps controversial lyrics that are sometimes most helpful to a Christian community (or individual) to force them to consider and then articulate their theology. Well-worn Christian tropes and re-used worship lyrics, or even sometimes lyrics lifted easily from scripture, may well be meaningful to Christians, but they can also be unreflective. If they sound ‘orthodox’ then they might be accepted with little further consideration. However, controversial lyrics while initially engendering a possibly negative gut reaction from the congregational singer, also then have the chance to be considered, wrestled with, debated, and ultimately rejected or accepted, or translated, not because they were immediately ‘orthodox’, but because they were thoughtfully and personally theologically resonant/dissonant.

Of course, it is not only controversial lyrics that might require internal or external translation. It may simply be theologically ambiguous lyrics that require an esthetic meaning-making process to determine if they will be accepted, rejected or translated within a local context.

“Blessed Be Your Name” (Redman and Redman 2002), has been one of the most enduring CCS among churches globally, and staying in the Top 25 of the USA CCLI (Church Copyright License) charts for over 15 years. However, while I was on the advisory council of CCLI Asia Pacific, I had access to denominational reports which indicated “Blessed Be Your Name” had not featured in the Top Songs lists for Pentecostal churches. This was consistent with my own experience as a worship pastor in an Assemblies of God (now Australia Christian Churches) church during this same period where “Blessed Be Your Name” was expressly resisted by senior leadership because of the Bridge lyric “You give and take away”. The lyrics are centered around Job 1:21, with the idea of worshipping God through the various circumstances, good and bad, of life. While the Bridge lyric is a direct adaptation of the verse “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away” (NKJV), the theological implications of God ‘taking away’ was difficult for many Pentecostal churches to reconcile. In many Pentecostal circles it was felt that this lyrical quote from the Old Testament was without due reference to the ‘finished work of Christ’. Critics would quote such scriptures as, ‘in Christ all of God’s promises are Yes, and Amen’ (2 Cor 1:20); or that ‘whatever we ask in His name, He will do’ (John 14:13). For such congregations, the option was either to reject the song, translate the lyrics, or theologically reinterpret the lyrics to align with their beliefs.

In a recent forum post, Phil Williams questions the changing of CCS lyrics, citing two examples (Williams n.d.). One example is the one just discussed, where some churches changed “You give and take away” to “You give and bless the day”. The other, is the change of “Heaven meets earth like a sloppy wet kiss” to “Heaven meets earth like an unforeseen kiss” as we have discussed earlier in this paper. Of course, there is one substantial difference

between these two examples, the first was never approved by the song writer, the second, was.²

Despite these examples, most local congregations approach CCS lyrics with a generous hermeneutic, interpreting them to suit their theological leanings, without having to change the lyrics themselves. This position is further justified because before a song enters the repertoire of a local church, someone, with authority to do so, has already made the initial decision to accept or reject the song based on its musical and/or lyrical content, or perhaps also sometimes based on its origins. An example of the latter would be congregations who refuse to sing anything by Hillsong (Malm 2014; Aigner 2016; Pastor Explains Why after Researching, He No Longer Allows Hillsong, Bethel, or Elevation Music in His Church 2020). As Ingalls et al. (2018) affirm, musical positioning can take the form of “outright rejection of the musical practices of various Others” (p. 4). If rejection is a primary response to localization, satisfactory internal interpretation is a secondary level of localization, with translation through the alteration of song lyrics being a tertiary, or final, level of localization, if required.

5. Further Poietic Perspective

While individual song writers may sometimes want to use lyrics that are more ambiguous, poetic, or even controversial, in order to make a particular point, or express an old idea in a new way, it is not the practice of most CCS producers to intentionally include controversial lyrics. There are often vetting systems in place to ensure a contemporary congregational song will reach the widest audience possible (Thornton 2021, pp. 79–80). Some of these ‘theological gatekeepers’ are officially designated, as Hillsong have done so for Robert and Amanda Fergusson. Others are brought about by the natural production pathways that exist before a song is finally released to the public. Mia Fieldes, a prolific CCS writer with Hillsong, who has also co-written with many of the key CCS writers internationally, noted that before her songs were ever recorded, they had been through myriad vetting channels including other writers, worship leaders, pastors, publishers, and producers (ibid., p. 80). Darlene Zschech, the famous former Hillsong worship leader/pastor, and writer of “Shout To The Lord” (1993), in the same research notes that testing with the local church is the ultimate arbiter of whether a song moves forward into production and broader release (ibid., p. 64).

Ben Fielding, writer of some of the most popular CCS emerging from Hillsong, recalls a story regarding a change in the lyrics of “Mighty to Save” before it was released. He says the original opening lyric was, “Everyone needs compassion, more than just religion”. Additionally, he says “Reuben [Morgan] and I thought it was brilliant, it was genius!”. However, when presented to Robert Fergusson, he said “I understand what you’re saying, but not everyone’s going to understand it. And you potentially limit the scope of the song” (ibid., p. 79). The writers relented, and rewrote the lyric as, “Everyone needs compassion, the kindness of a Saviour”. Would this extremely popular CCS have been hampered by an opening lyric that said, people need “more than just religion”? We will never know. Certainly, within the context of the contemporary Pentecostal-charismatic church that Hillsong is, the phrase would be clearly understood. In fact, Fielding and Morgan did not invent this language. The idea that ‘religion is not what people need’ is commonly articulated in such churches. The parallel idea is that only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is what makes the difference in an individual’s life, in other words, not the adherence to a code or set of rules or beliefs (as religion is defined in that setting). In that sense, a lyric that states that people need more than religion is deeply meaningful to the Hillsong congregation. It is a positive lyric, encouraging people to a personal and vital faith. However, it may not have been interpreted in that same way by Christians in other places and contexts and was therefore changed before it could become a ‘controversial’ lyric that churches might reject or alter.

6. Music Requiring Translation

Intralingual translation of lyrics, or esthetic meaning-making practices relating to lyrics are not the only form of (proto-)translation in the localizing of musical worship practices. Musical elements are also translated to be meaningful and useful to local congregations. This is most notable with faster CCS. Recent research found that the average tempo for the top CCS was 75 bpm (Thornton 2021, p. 138). In contrast, secular songs charting on Billboard over the past six decades have had an average tempo of 120 bpm (Minardi 2011). Why should substantially slower songs be charting in church's musical worship? Faster CCS often have more defining musical characteristics than slower CCS. For example, the drums of a faster song are likely to be core to its 'sound' and, hence, reproduction. A faster song with no drums, does not sound like it did in the recording. It may no longer have the energy or, for example, capture the essence of the riff that defines the song. Due to these elements, faster songs are also potentially more marginalizing to congregations with diverse ages.

One example of this is with Hillsong Young and Free's (Y&F) CCS. Hillsong Y&F are the third generation of Hillsong worship, preceded by Hillsong United, and the initial Hillsong worship with which the brand was popularized. Y&F's first album *We Are Young And Free* (2013) contained CCS influenced by EDM (Electronic Dance Music). Drum/percussion loops and electronic textures dominated the soundscape. However, despite the album debuting on the US Billboard Christian Albums charts at No. 1, only one song from the album ever made it to the CCLI Top 25 charts, "Alive" (Pappas and King 2012), which reached a high of only No. 23 in October 2014. Admittedly, Hillsong Y&F were not initially attempting to create songs for mass appeal and reproduction in local church contexts. Nevertheless, Hillsong's long history of providing congregational songs to the global church meant many local churches did attempt to reproduce these songs congregationally. However, the ability of a local church to reproduce the sound of "Alive" either required a sophisticated setup of synths and loop machines, or some sort of DAW (digital audio workstation), or pre-recorded multitracks. Indeed, the practice of using multitracks within live worship has increased in recent times, and many churches now utilize an app to playback whatever elements (such as loops and unique electronic sounds) from the original version of songs that they are unable to produce live. In this way, the sonic signature of the song is maintained, even if the worship setting is much smaller or less resourced than the environment in which the song was produced. Such activities are not examples of musical translation.

However, as a result of the disconnect between an album's popularity, and its uptake in the worship of local congregations, Hillsong Y&F began producing acoustic versions of their songs (for example, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjQwXC30WAsFI4xjoPUdcDBfPexOeAxCK>, accessed on 15 September 2021) in addition to the fully produced (EDM) originals. In other words, Hillsong created their own musical translations of these songs involving only a few instruments and minimal drums/percussion. Is an arrangement always a musical translation? According to the definition established earlier, there needs to be a source text, in this case an original authorized version of the song, a target text, in this case the musical version performed in the local context, and a "relevant similarity", which is clearly evident. The implicit element in this process is the idea that the change has been made to make the 'text' more comprehensible to its audience. Such arrangements are, by that definition, musical translations.

The principle of faster CCS often requiring some form of musical translation occurs well beyond Hillsong Y&F. The six songs over 75bpm in my previous research (including songs such as, "This is Amazing Grace" (Riddle et al. 2012), "Blessed Be Your Name" (Redman and Redman 2002), "The Lion And The Lamb" (Brian et al. 2015), and "Raise A Hallelujah" (Stevens et al. 2018) had full band versions initially released. However, they also had numerous renditions with just an acoustic guitar or paired-back ensemble. The adaptability of these not-too-fast faster songs allowed them to be accepted via a minimal process of musical translation in a variety of local congregation's worship practices.

I consider this kind of translatability and flexibility in CCS to be a form of vernacular music (Thornton 2021, p. 59). While songs in popular music genres may well be re-arranged and re-recorded in acoustic settings, or with paired-back musical forces, such practices are still oriented towards engagement with an audience. Whereas CCS, en masse, are written from the outset to be co-performed by congregations in a wide variety of contexts, containing different musical forces, different levels of musicianship, different cultural inflections, maintaining only the necessary or desirable core elements. It is this vernacular quality that implies permission for local congregations to make musical translations of the songs. While sometimes in tension with the authorized version, or ‘preferred rendering’, of the song from the perspective of the producer, in this case, the producers had ‘authorized’ versions (or pre-translated the songs) that made the songs meaningful and useful to local churches.

7. Conclusions

While translation in CCS is typically understood as the localizing of CCS into a language different from the original version of the song, this research has presented an analysis of CCS that demonstrates that at least a form of translation (musical and lyrical) is at work within English-speaking churches regarding English-lyric songs. The meaning-making processes that result in acceptance, rejection, interpretation, translation, adaptation, or alteration of contemporary congregational songs are all a part of a local congregation defining and articulating their faith, both to the world around them and in alignment with or contrast to other expressions of the Christian faith.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: CCLI Top Songs charts are available from: <https://songselect.ccli.com/search/results?List=top100>.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ A justification for utilizing YouTube as the primary text for analyzing CCS can be found in *Meaning-Making in the Contemporary Congregational Song Genre* (Thornton 2021).
- ² Among other protections, Western copyright laws require individuals to gain permission from the song owner(s) in order to change lyrics and/or the melody/harmony. Arrangements also require permission, although in practice, local churches are expected to adapt CCS to their musical contexts, as long as fundamental elements are unchanged, and therefore permission is very rarely sought or expected from song owners.

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