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MacInnis, J. (2022). Introduction to Special Issue “Language Translation in Localizing Religious Musical Practice”. *Religions, 13* (9), 787. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090787

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Introduction to Special Issue “Language Translation in Localizing Religious Musical Practice”

Abstract

The inspiration and starting place for this Special Issue was the book *Making Congregational Music Local in Christian Communities Worldwide* (Routledge 2018), edited by Monique Ingalls, Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg, and Zoe Sherinian.

Keywords

musical localization, translating and interpreting, musical style, congregational churches

Disciplines

Christianity | Music

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Editorial

Introduction to Special Issue "Language Translation in Localizing Religious Musical Practice"

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The inspiration and starting place for this Special Issue was the book *Making Congregational Music Local in Christian Communities Worldwide* (Routledge 2018), edited by Monique Ingalls, Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg, and Zoe Sherinian. In their introduction, the editors present the concept of "musical localization" in this way:

> "Musical localization is the process by which Christian communities take a variety of musical practices—some considered 'indigenous,' some 'foreign,' some shared across spatial and cultural divides; some linked to past practice, some innovative—and make them locally meaningful and useful in the construction of Christian beliefs, theology, practice, and identity." (Ingalls et al. 2018, p. 3)

Described thusly, the concept of localization acknowledges that one's practices, especially musical practices, contribute to how one constructs what it means to be Christian and the living out of that vision in a local context.

Ingalls et al. theorize musical localization to offer something different from related concepts like inculturation, contextualization, and indigenization. At heart, each of these terms, including localization, seeks to describe divergent local realities for Christians worldwide and to safeguard room for these differences to exist. In addition to preserving space for Christians to practice their faith differently, these terms also variously encourage the development of local distinctions.

Inculturation is a concept that has been employed within Roman Catholicism, especially in the late-twentieth century. With inculturation, some of the established and authoritative practices of the Church are translated for a local context and some are left untranslated, considered to be timeless and universal. Here, the local is considered a potential container or vehicle for the Gospel, which is itself gradually transformed by the Gospel message.

Contextualization is a similar concept that was popular among confessional Protestants, in the late-twentieth century, to describe the expression of Christian beliefs in a local context. With contextualization, the authority which judges what elements of a local culture are worthy to express Christian beliefs is not an institutional church, but the Christian scriptures. In both these concepts, inculturation and contextualization, there is an essential Christian core, an orthodoxy, which is assumed and which both transcends and transforms the local.

Indigenization is a term used in the discipline of Anthropology to describe the adoption of beliefs and practices once considered foreign into a local context. If inculturation and contextualization can be considered a sort of translation, then, using a different metaphor, indigenization can be considered as grafting.

Each of these terms offers something helpful in understanding how local Christians borrow from and share with other believers, but there can be great complexity to how these things happen, especially when considering musical practices. Ingalls and her colleagues make a case for localization as a descriptive and comparative theoretical tool because it purposely avoids ethnocentrism and because it privileges the agency of the local.

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Citation: MacInnis, John. 2022. Introduction to Special Issue "Language Translation in Localizing Religious Musical Practice". *Religions* 13: 787. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090787

Received: 11 July 2022
Accepted: 24 August 2022
Published: 26 August 2022

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In relation to Ingalls' book, which sets forth the idea of localization with a wide-ranging set of case studies, this Special Issue develops the concept of musical localization in one specific area, language translation. That is, the articles collected here each explore aspects of musical localization that involve the translation of language, the words that are sung in worship by a congregation.

Remarkably, language translation has remained central to Christianity, from its beginning. By the Spirit's power, in Acts 2, the wonders of God were declared broadly, and a norm was instituted: The faith is translated so that others may know it. From Jerome to Luther to Eugene Peterson, the Bible has been profitably translated in every era. Likewise, from John Mason Neal and Catherine Winkworth to I-to Loh, Christian songs have been translated out to other cultures, as gifts to share, and translated in, as gifts received. Umberto Eco is popularly understood to have once said, "The language of Europe is translation." (See Cassin 2017) Be that as it may, the diverse articles collected here demonstrate that translation is, indeed, the language of Christianity.

The topics explored in these articles show the balance of translation priorities that local congregations can weigh as they work: between externally prescribed guidelines, as with Roman Catholicism (see the instruction *Liturgiam authenticam*), and exclusively local realities; between translations more oriented to the source language and culture, making that reality more plain, or to the recipients, ensuring that the meaning is adequately transferred to a new context; between even the decision to translate or not, perhaps choosing to sing the songs of another culture and language as they are, while risking appropriation.

To add more complexity to these concerns, Jorge Luis Borges' satirical short story "On the Exactitude of Science" suggests a further caution for all translators within the traditions of Christianity (Hurley 1999). The story's narrator describes a culture so obsessed with cartography that their maps eventually grow to a 1:1 scale. The map of an Empire was the size of the Empire, and, understandably, succeeding generations were not impressed with this inheritance and abandoned it. In like manner, the culture and mores of a source language could be translated and then imposed on the recipients. A translation can become a burden.

When done well, though, translated songs share the best, most crucial aspects of what it means to know God in one place, time, and language with people in another, so that those who hear may find new wisdom to live the truth, beauty, and goodness of the Christian faith in their own way, as themselves. That is, songs of faith from fellow believers, can bring to us a spiritual understanding, even an ontology, and we may be the richer for it. The translators of the King James Bible put it well, long ago:

> "Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water . . . ." (Smith 1935)

This project has been blessed by the many authors who have participated. These scholars together show forth a rich diversity, in terms of where they are from and the work they do. Likewise, this Special Issue showcases a diversity of localities, languages, and Christian traditions.

Glenn Stallsmith's article "Protestant Congregational Song in the Philippines: Localization through Translation and Hybridization" presents three case studies, which explore the development of local musical practices in worship that reflect the complicated history of colonialism in the Philippines by Spain and then the United States.

Marcell Silva Steuernagel's article "Transnational and Translational Aspects of Global Christian Congregational Musicking" explores what happens when congregational songs travel along transnational networks and are transformed in localization processes. He shows how language translation is taken as an opportunity to reinterpret theology. His primary example is the Australian song "Mighty to Save" which is translated and localized for Brazilian churches.

Aminta Arrington's article "Translated or Transformed: The Use of Western Hymns in the Evangelization of the Lisu of Southwest China" presents her research among the Lisu people of southwest China. Lisu churches are completely independent of Western influence and support, and, yet, because of activity in their region by China Inland Missions, in the 1920s and 30s, one of the primary ways the Lisu practice their faith is in singing translated Western Protestant hymns, a cappella in four-part harmony. Dr. Arrington explains how, in translation, the sense of many of these hymns shifts from abstract theology to concrete physical realities of local believers.

Matt Connor and Matt Menger collaborated on their article "Strengthening Christian Identity through Scripture Songwriting in Indonesia." Their article relays how their work translating the Bible has influenced the development of local musical practices in congregational worship. Together they have hosted thirty-nine scripture songwriting workshops over the last six years. In these workshops, local songwriters use the translated scriptures to create new locally meaningful songs for congregational worship. Their article highlights the role of local agency, the importance of fusion genres, and the creation of unique Christian identities through the localization of music.

Daniel Thornton's article "A 'Sloppy Wet Kiss'? Intralingual Translation and Meaning-Making in Contemporary Congregational Songs" explores the translation that happens within an ostensibly homogeneous language and culture. In a study of popular contemporary congregational songs listed by CCLI, he shows how lyrics are altered and reinterpreted to define local church worship and identity. Drawing upon semiology, he shows how the same lyrics can be sung in different English contexts, with different meanings, and sometimes necessitating lyric changes in a local context, what he calls intralingual translation.

Jeremy Perigo, co-editor for this Special Issue, contributed the article "Beyond Translated vs. Indigenous: Turkish Protestant Christian Hymnody as Global and Local Identity." In it, he explains a debate among Turkish Christians between some who preferred singing contemporary songs in current Western styles and those who favored singing with traditional Turkish styles. He draws upon his research among Turkish Protestants in eighteen churches to describe the cultural and musical environment of contemporary Turkish Protestant worship.

Eun Young Cho, Hayoung Wong, and Zong Woo Geem contributed "The Liturgical Usage of Translated Gregorian Chant in the Korean Catholic Church." In this article, the authors explore how Korean Catholics, from the nineteenth century through today, navigate both the instructions for the use of Latin Gregorian Chant in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, one of the constitutions of Vatican II, and their general preference for singing the historic repertoire of Gregorian Chants in local translation.

Eric Sarwar's article "Sur-Sangam and Punjabi Zabur (Psalms 24: 7–10): Messianic and Missiological Perspective in the Indian Subcontinent" explores how Psalm 24 resonates with Pakistani people worldwide, especially when it is translated into the Punjabi vernacular and sung with a traditional raga-based musical system. He explains how the singing of Psalms can serve to establish interfaith connections between Christians and followers of Islam.

Maria Monteiro's article, "Singing the Wondrous Story in Portuguese: The First Official Brazilian Baptist Hymnal, *Cantor Cristão*" shares the history of *Cantor Cristão*, published in 1891, and reveals important aspects of the development of Protestant hymnody in Brazil. She describes a web of long-distance linguistic and cultural connections that include English speaking Baptists in the US and the work of Solomon Ginsburg, the primary translator, a converted Baptist with roots in Poland. She shares how singing a specific repertoire of songs has been held to as a definitive faith practice for local Brazilian believers for over a hundred years.

Adán Alejándro Fernández's article "Liberationist Perspectives on the *Misa Criolla* by Ariél Ramírez" examines the *Misa Criolla* by Ariél Ramírez as a musical and liturgical symbol of liberation theology in South America. Written between 1963–1964, the *Misa Criolla* became popular around the world and helped bring attention to the indigenous

poor of South America through its distinct presentation of the Roman Catholic Mass text after the Second Vatican Council. From a liberationist perspective, it represents a compromise between the liturgical and theological openness of Vatican II and more conservative movements afterwards, through the localization of the Catholic Mass liturgy.

It has been a distinct privilege to work with all these scholars. As followers of Jesus, our family truly spans the globe, and it has been a joy in this work to learn more about brothers and sisters around the world, how they live and worship. Indeed, the team of editors at *Religions* deserve special thanks for their patience, professionalism, and care for this project, from start to finish. May this Special Issue provide a helpful resource for all who read it.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

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

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