

“‘Kwai’ is not an appropriate expression of God”: Stancetaking on Kaaps gospel music

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Abstract

The release of the song *Die Here is Kwai* (The Lord is Cool) by South African gospel singer Neville D in 2019 sparked debate about whether Kaaps is an authentic language for worship and praise and whether it ultimately is relevant for the textualization of gospel music in general. Although many would easily agree in the positive, we submit this paper to highlight how scriptural purity and standard language ideologies are some of the main drivers to the textualized performance of Kaaps gospel music. In this paper, we set out to analyze the various stances toward the song *Die Here is Kwai*. Data was drawn from a larger, longitudinal qualitative study that investigates the recontextualization of South African gospel music as a Kaaps-infused genre of music. We argue that Kaaps gospel music maximizes the genre potential of South African gospel music and highlights the diversity of voices in South African church discourses. We demonstrate the affective, epistemic, evaluative, and sacrificial stancetaking of gospel artists and commenters who align, disalign, and react against the publication of *Die Here is Kwai* (the stance-object), mediatized on a variety of digital communication platforms. Our analysis reveals stances from conservative traditional-religious voices and liberal religious voices expressing views on the production of Kaaps gospel music as text and performance. We argue that Neville D’s Kaaps gospel music challenges religious-linguistic views that attempt to reframe the sonic and spiritual life of Kaaps-speaking worshippers as ‘disrespectful’ and contrary to Christian ideologies that are steeped in scriptural discourses of purity and standard language ideologies.

Keywords: Kaaps, gospel music, Pinkster kerk, stancetaking, entextualization, performance

1. Introduction

The study of language and religion is important to the understanding of the sociology of language, as language styles and varieties shape the theological/biblical codes and texts that are performed in churches and various religious platforms. In a pioneering study, Omoniyi and

Fishman (2006) demonstrate how religion shapes language and how language shapes religion as well as advances literacy in religion. Across the world, language and religious practices intersect importantly in the maintenance, spread, and shift of heritage and historically marginalized languages (Pandharipande, David & Ebsworth 2019; Ding & Goh 2020; Krylova & Renkovskaya 2020). Gender, sexuality, culture, economy, and genres of religious performances have shaped important diachronic and synchronic research in the Global North and South (Cramer 2013; Fatah 2022). The languages of religion have, in turn, made important contributions to the debate of language problems and planning in multilingual contexts (Kouega 2008; Obiri-Yeboah 2019), including the mediatization of language and religion across social media and video-sharing platforms (Al-Azami 2016).

In South Africa, studies on language and religion have advanced research on translations and the use of marginalized language practices in Pentecostal churches, reflecting the significant transformations observed in institutional, sociocultural, political, and religious spaces (Lombaard & Naude 2007; Goodness 2023). Yet, little focus has been on the artful, textual, and linguistic performances of South African gospel music (compare Malembe 2005). Since 1994, many artists and styles of music have emerged, and what has been prevalent are genres of music being transformed by previously marginalized languages (Malembe 2005). In gospel music, for example, you can hear the use of historically marginalized languages linked to the staging and textualization of new religious practices, reflecting diversity in the gospel soundscape of South Africa (Malembe 2005).

It is in this regard that we report on a study investigating the performance and stancetaking of Kaaps gospel music,¹ specifically the Kaaps gospel music produced by artist Neville D. Kaaps, a historically marginalized language, has long been associated with Christianity. Writers such as Adam Small wrote poetically in Kaaps (e.g., Small's poems in "Kitaar my Kruis" (1962) and poems such as *Doemanie en Black Bronze en Beautiful* in "Kô, lat ons sing"), furthering a sort of poetry of prayer and faith previously penned by Kaaps creative writers or writers using Kaaps (e.g., S.V. Petersen). This poetic-textualization has also found its way into the Kaaps translation of parts of the Bible (Coetzee 2020). Although there have been a few studies on the complexities of religion and identity expressed through Kaaps, for example in the *Pinkster Kerk* (Pentecostal Church) (Jodamus 2022) and the unfinished, erased stories of the use of Afrikaans as a liturgical language in the Roman Catholic Church (De Vries 2022), no study to date has focused exclusively on the performance and reaction to Kaaps gospel music. An exemplary performance of this genre is in the gospel music of Neville D. Below we illustrate and argue that Neville D's Kaaps gospel music challenges religious-linguistic views that attempt to reframe the sonic and spiritual life of Kaaps-speaking worshippers as disrespectful and contrary to Christian ideologies that are steeped in scriptural discourses of purity and standard language ideologies.

2. Gospel music and Kaaps

Gospel music has its roots in African American culture. The foundation of gospel music was laid during the first two decades of the twentieth century in churches in the American North and South (Burnim 1980). Although the United States of America is no longer segregated by law, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, its history of segregation was still apparent in

¹ Kaaps gospel music is defined here as the composition of lyrics, styles, beats and sonic rhythms that are entextualized and performed in Kaaps.

churches (Cusic 2002). Attendees of some churches are nearly all, if not all, African American, while other churches are attended predominantly by White people. Differences are also seen in the church’s music. Gospel music is a term used to describe the religious music of African Americans, while Christian music is used to describe the religious pop music created for predominantly White audiences (Cusic 2002). In the 1920s, gospel music gained popularity and respectability among Black people living in the United States of America (Burnim 1980). American gospel music and American Christian music have both become popular in South Africa, although we postulate that Kaaps religious music has been influenced largely by gospel music, hence the phrase ‘Kaaps gospel music’.

The influence of American gospel music on South African music can be traced back to the nineteenth century and attributed to the Americans who moved to South Africa during that period (Cockrell 1987). American and Black South African musical cultures were merged in different contexts, including minstrel shows, the jubilee choir, and gospel hymns. Evidence suggests that by the latter part of the twentieth century, Black South Africans were singing gospel hymns. American gospel hymns were familiar to Black and White South Africans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Cockrell 1987). In this article, we argue that American gospel music has and continues to influence Kaaps gospel music.

According to Thompson (2015), most of the influential gospel music artists in South Africa in the 1990s and 2000s were American. Their music was prevalent in many working-class and middle-class households in Cape Town. The album *Lift Him Up* by African American gospel music singer Ron Kenoly, released in 1992, was one of the most popular and widely distributed albums in South Africa. As a result of its popularity in South Africa, local artists use elements of American, specifically African American, gospel music in their music.

Chitando (2002: 7), who investigates the influence of music on the construction of religious and other identities in Zimbabwe, defines gospel music as “music drawing on Christian salvation history.” Gospel music puts “emphasis on salvation wrought by Jesus of Nazareth, his imminent return, the need for righteousness in the last of days, and the power of God in overcoming disease and restoring hope” (Chitando 2002: 7). The purpose of gospel music is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ using music as the vehicle. While some African gospel musicians use English in their music as a means of reaching a wider audience, others believe that singing in one’s own vernacular is just as powerful in spreading the message of salvation (Chitando 2002). Furthermore, minority languages have had an increase in status in Zimbabwe due to their presence in gospel music. In the same way, we argue that Kaaps gospel music can elevate the status of Kaaps in South Africa as fit for worship and spreading the Gospel.

2.1 Kaaps gospel music online

In recent years, the internet and social media specifically have been used as main platforms for publishing music. We were interested in the presence of gospel music in online spaces. For this reason, we approached the study of Kaaps gospel music through the lens of digital religion. Digital religion is an approach to the study of religion in an internet-driven world (Campbell & Bellar 2023), and it explores how digital technologies are shaping religious groups and practices, and vice versa (Tsuria & Campbell 2022). Digital religion seeks to establish how this field is impacting scholars’ “understanding of how religion is defined, lived out, and interacted with in a global networked society” (Tsuria & Campbell 2022: 2). It is used to describe “a

distinct approach to the study of religion as expressed through internet platforms or other digital technologies” (Campbell & Bellar 2023: 5). Digital religion also “seeks to describe how religion is increasingly being influenced or interpreted through traits of digital culture and its encounters with varied forms of the internet” (Campbell & Bellar 2023: 5).

Digital culture has aided in the fusion of religion and popular culture (Kiamu & Musa 2021). Furthermore, “digital culture is pushing religion from the folk to the popular culture sphere” (Kiamu & Musa 2021: 142). However, not only does religion play a central role in popular culture, but the opposite is also said to be true (Kiamu & Musa 2021). The use of digital media technologies for religious reasons has gained popularity in Africa. According to Kiamu and Musa (2021: 149), the reasons for this popularity are that it “is entertaining and enjoyable, it provides a sense of belonging to a translocal community, it offers hope, it is glitzy, it is easy to consume, it is formulaic, it offers the same narrative dramatized in different ways, and it transcends bounds.” In this respect, we were interested in demonstrating that social media is utilized as a space where religious and other identities are negotiated and performed.

To contribute to this literature, we sought to design a study to expand and evaluate the online and offline presence of Kaaps, a historically marginalized language, in South African gospel music and how a sub-genre, Kaaps gospel music, is gaining popularity. Gospel music is considered part of popular culture in South Africa (Malembe 2017), and it takes on many styles in different cultures. Coplan (2001: 116) notes that in South Africa, Black music genres such as jazz, kwaito, and gospel appropriate African American styles whilst “retaining and developing a local cultural stylistic character,” thus creating unique sounds within these genres. This project considered these studies and investigated gospel music in Cape Town to determine the extent of the use of Kaaps in gospel music and the influence this has on Cape Coloured identity.

While Kaaps does not yet enjoy official language status in South Africa, its existence, use, and entextualization in popular cultural performances, practices, and music in the Western Cape and beyond is widespread. Popular culture research on Kaaps has been conducted in local clubs (Williams 2017), not excluding its use in stage plays and education (le Cordeur 2016), in newspapers (Blignaut 2014; Matthews 2009; de Vries 2016), food cultures (Roman 2019), and so on. A large focus has been on the use of Kaaps (also known as Afrikaaps) in South African Hip Hop music (see Haupt 1995, 2008; Warner 2007; Williams 2023).

Historically, Kaaps has been seen as a resistant “language variety” of Afrikaans (Hendricks 2016). We argue that Kaaps should be defined as a language formed through complex language contact situations managed by the Khoi and San, Dutch officials, Free Boers, and Indonesian, Indian, Angolan, Madagascan, Mozambican, and Muslim-born slaves at the inception of colonialism in South Africa. We know that Kaaps emerged first as a pidgin and was later creolized in the 1800s following the abolition of slavery and the establishment of the union of South Africa (van Rensburg 2016: 36; see also Davids 2011; van der Wouden 2012; Deumert 2004; Williams, in progress; Williams, Alim, Haupt & Jansen, in progress). For much of colonialism and apartheid, it remained a marginalized speech form, and Kaaps speakers became increasingly racialized across all domains in South Africa (compare van Rensburg 2017, 2018). Yet, throughout the days of apartheid, philosopher, poet, and playwright Adam Small and others attempted to restore Kaaps to the status of a language worthy of intellectualization and use in all domains of control. In 1981, Adam Small put it as follows:

Kaaps is a language in the sense that it carries the full fate and destiny of the people who speak it: their entire life, “with everything contained in it”; a language in the sense that the people who speak it, give their first cry in life in this language, conduct all their business in their life in this language, expectorate in the throes of death in this language. Kaaps is not funny or comical but a language.

(Translated by Cloete 2012: 127)

Today, we are moving one step closer towards intellectualization. On the one hand, linguists are paying close attention to the language status and linguistic structure of Kaaps in post-apartheid South Africa. With the Trilingual Dictionary of Kaaps in development, significant attention is focused on the linguistic structures of ‘regional varieties’ of Kaaps, such as Swartland Kaaps (Arendse 2020), Manenberg Kaaps (van Rooi 2022), and Paarl Kaaps (see, importantly, the SecoKa project by Dr. Erin Pretorius at UWC). On the other hand, in popular culture literature, research demonstrates how Kaaps expresses the lived experiences of Kaaps speakers and communities (e.g., Carstens & le Cordeur 2016). In our consideration of the key debates around Kaaps gospel music, our project aimed to expand on existing research on Kaaps by investigating its performance (Bauman 2011) and entextualization (Bauman & Briggs 1990) in gospel music spaces (online and offline) across a range of modalities.

3. Kaaps gospel music: A stancetaking analysis of *Die Here is Kwai*

Kaaps gospel music is maximizing the genre-potential of South African gospel music and highlighting the diversity of voices in Pinkster (Pentecostal) church discourses. The release of South African gospel singer Neville D’s song *Die Here is Kwai* (The Lord is Cool) in 2019 highlighted that Kaaps has largely been received as an authentic language of worship and praise and is fit for gospel music performances. Nevertheless, standard language ideologies and linguistic stereotypes of Kaaps pervade gospel music spaces (online and offline) and oppose the belief that Kaaps is worthy and fit for the genre of gospel music and religion. Despite this contention, worship and gospel music platforms that represent Kaaps gospel music have started to emerge (e.g., Figure 1).



Figure 1. Alive in Kaaps’ “Psalms soes os praat”.

In this section, we analyze the various linguistic and non-linguistic stances to the publication of *Die Here is Kwai*. We draw on a larger, longitudinal qualitative study that investigates the recontextualization of South African gospel music as a Kaaps-infused genre. The data sets of the study comprise an archive of interview transcripts, media publications, texts, performances, and social media posts. Here we analyze first the stances and then the entextualization of Kaaps gospel music in the local South African gospel soundscape. We demonstrate the affective (emotive), epistemic, evaluative, and sacrificial stancetaking of authors (creators) and commenters who aligned, disaligned, and reacted against the publication of *Die Here is Kwai* (the stance-object) mediatized in the news and published on social media platforms. Our analysis reveals stances from conservative, traditional-religious voices and liberal, Pinkster religious voices expressing views on the entextualization of standardized gospel music with Kaaps lexical-grammatical lyrics in the creation of Kaaps gospel music as text and performance. We demonstrate how the stances toward the song challenge standard Afrikaans language ideologies that reduce Kaaps to a language variety status still not fit for expressing faith in God.

3.1 Stancetaking and digging digitally

The questions we asked in this project about the publication of *Die Here is Kwai*, and Kaaps gospel music in general, are in response to the various stances social media writers penned, including the stance taken by the artist, Neville D. We asked (1) what are the religious and linguistic resources that comprise Kaaps gospel music as a performance? (as a sociolinguist of performance studies would ask; see Bauman, 2011), and (2) what impact does the use of Kaaps and the musical style of Kaaps gospel music have on an individual's scriptural and linguistic frame of reference? We demonstrate the analytical value of a stance analysis to show not only the evaluation of a respondent towards the stance-object (Jaffe 2009) (the song initially posted on Facebook and YouTube), but also the linguistic and semiotic representations of Kaaps in the song and the stances towards these two aspects of the song.

Stance (and the verb stancetaking) is a useful notion to shed light on the differences in language ideologies and the linguistic commitment made by speakers engaging in interactional contexts. In our research and data analysis of Kaaps gospel music, we have found that though the concept's utility helps us illuminate the latter dynamics, the various definitions that abound, from Du Bois (2007) to Kiesling (2022), suggest stance to be a slippery notion to define. We surmise that stances are context-dependent and variable in communicative contexts. Stance (in its singular form) in one instance concerns "the speaker's subjective attitudes towards something" while in another it could refer to either "a dialogical and intersubjective activity" (Haddington 2004: 101) or "an activity that organizes (inter)action" (Sterphone 2022: 3). Du Bois puts it this way:

Stance is "...a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of value in the sociocultural field".

Du Bois (2007: 169)

A stance reveals the process by which a speaker takes a position against an utterance, statement, idea, or position, or aligns (positively or neutrally) with a position (Snell 2018), rather than it

being just a resource for meaning-making in a narrative exposition or a performance (for example) (cf. Kockelman 2004). According to Snell (2018: 670), stance refers to “the processes through which speakers use language (along with other semiotic resources) to position themselves and others, draw social boundaries, and lay claim to particular statuses, knowledge, and authority in ongoing interaction.” Comparatively, Kockelman (2004: 142) emphasizes the semiotic potential of stance, going on to define it as (in the plural) “semiotically indicated modes of evaluative and intentional commitment that speakers take toward states of affairs, from epistemic possibility and necessity to deontic permission and obligation, from fear and desire to memory and disgust.” Whatsoever the definition, stances are a phenomenon articulated through spoken and written language, across many modes, that are almost always “the creation of relationship of animator (speaker) to some discursive figure (human or otherwise),” according to Kiesling (2020: 4).

Stance, then, is a useful notion for analyzing how bilingual and multilingual speakers negotiate language use and culturally or (in our case) religious-based meaning-making practices. When a speaker takes a stance, it will be to align or to oppose a stance-object (Jaffe 2009);² this is otherwise known as stancetaking, assuming a position “in terms of politeness, certainty, or affect/emotion” (Kiesling 2022: 410). Stancetaking can be about or against cis-gender practices (see Holmes-Elliott & Levon 2017; Kiesling 2018), identity (in general), knowledge, memory, senses, narratives (Stivers 2008), politics (Sterphone 2022), and, of course, language use. In this paper, our concern is about stances on religious identity, knowledge, and language use in support of and against Kaaps gospel music.

To illustrate the various stances aligned and disaligned with the stance-object (song) *Die Here is Kwai*, we designed a virtual linguistic ethnography study to build a corpus of Kaaps gospel music videos and audio files posted on various radio and social media sharing platforms. The corpus comprises media clippings about reactions to the stance-object, radio recordings of interviews with the artists, and YouTube and Facebook video postings and comments (further informed by the research of Lee 2017; Hine 2000; Kelly-Holmes 2015). Firstly, we collected interviews on Kaaps gospel music and musicians from Cape Town-based Christian radio stations (Radio Tygerberg, Cape Community FM (CCFM), Radio Pulpit, and Radio Cape Pulpit) to determine which songs are played, whether they play gospel music containing Kaaps lyrics, the frequency these songs are played, as well as the popularity of these songs among the listeners.

Secondly, we compiled a physical and digital corpus of gospel music albums, audiograms, and podcasts through the practice of crate digging. Crate digging refers to the practice of ‘digging’ through crates of vinyl records, typically found within the gospel music scene in America (Vályi 2010). This practice is usually used by individuals looking to add to their personal music collection and by DJs who download from vinyl beats to produce and remix music (Vályi 2010). In our project, we assumed the role of digital and physical copy crate diggers to compile a corpus of gospel music from gospel music spaces: business districts, flea markets, festivals, and other gospel soundscape spaces (drawing inspiration from studies by Ahmed, Benford & Crabtree 2012; Welburn 2013; Maalsen 2019). Crate digging is closely associated with popular culture. The process (physical or digital) involves the act of searching for and discovering music, and

² Studies on stance focus on interactions, performances and discursive formations or engagement and often concern how speakers use language (verbal or non-verbal) to negotiate positions and relational proximity (Snell 2018). Stance can be a performance (Jaffe 2015) and be entextualized or enregistered (Lempert 2008).

being sensitive to the nuances of South African *gospelscapes* represented in various gospel music collections and archives. It requires dedication to the method, patience, focus, and developing relationships within crate-digging communities of gospel music (Ahmed et al. 2012: 2).

3.2 The 9th of August, 2019: This is the day the Lord became *Kwai*

Released on 9 August 2019 on YouTube, as of 28 August 2023, the *Die Here is Kwai* video by Neville D and Jesmé Swartz had attracted 395,162 views, 4.6k likes, 155 dislikes, and 201 comments.³ The song is produced at 90 beats per minute, and the voices of the singers are overlaid with autotune. It is presented as a celebration of the coolness of our Lord sung not in standard Afrikaans or even standard English but in Kaaps. As an artful gospel text, it uses Kaaps phonological, lexical, and grammatical forms in a way that adds a unique linguistic dimension to the performance of gospel music in South Africa.

To test a wider reception of the song amongst gospel music fans, Neville D posted a preview of the song on Facebook – a short snippet – on 8 August 2019. The title of the post was “‘Die Here is Kwai’ – it’s about to go down y’all.” To date, the preview video has garnered 235,000 views, 5,900 likes, and 352 comments. On Facebook, the video has garnered 89,000 views, 2,100 likes, and 291 comments. On YouTube, the lyric video has garnered 379,000 views, 4,500 likes, and 199 comments.

The initial response to the Facebook post must have come as a surprise to the artists, as many of the comments were positive, with reactions expressing elation at the music, celebrating the coolness of their monotheistic god, and their Christianity. However, it must have been equally surprising, even unexpected, when a few of the commenters began to negate the video, in particular the use of Kaaps as the linguistic vehicle by which to express praise and worship for God. These posts were evaluative and attitudinal. The latter comments railed against the song evaluating it as a mockery (“n spotting”) with some expressing disagreement (“a no frm me”). A few comments identified and aligned the Kaaps language used by the artists with gangsterism, Coloured people, and the Cape Flats (resurfacing racial stereotypes introduced during colonialism and apartheid). Specifically, some comments likened the use of Kaaps to “*tsotsi taal*” (gangster language); it was “*sleng*” (slang), and referring to the word *kwai*, the “people on the flats use that word.” Moreover, the artists singing in Kaaps were considered “*tsotsies*”, “coloured *mense* [who] sing[s] *enige ding*” (Coloured people who sing anything) and as people who took God “... out his kingdom ND put him in the hoods.”

In many respects, we imagine that Neville D and Jesmé Swartz would have been taken aback by the comments that asserted an epistemic and standard language ideological stance. The commenters taking an epistemic stance, for example, asserted the authenticity and authority of the Bible, with one user writing that “*Die laaste dae Openbaring praat hiervan*” (The last days Revelation talks about this) and another writing “Lord please. The time would be now.” Both comments allude to prophecies in the Bible, though in a sinister way, they malign the use of Kaaps in the song as the source of conflict over which language is suitable to represent the knowledge of God sonically. Other commenters took a standard language stance, highlighting translation issues with the Kaaps word “*kwai*” (cool): “I keep on hearing THAT GOD IS ANGRY WITH ME... 😏”; and another writing in all caps, “*GOD IS NIE KWAI NIE HY IS*

³ See the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2j6DHyhzZAg> (accessed: 4th September 2023)

GOED, IEMAND WAT KWAI IS, IS N BAD PERSOON, GOD IS GOED” (God is not *kwai* he is good, someone who is *kwai* is a bad person, God is good).

Our initial reaction to stances expressed towards the Facebook posting above raised the following (additional) question: Was *Die Here is Kwai* that provocative in its lyrical content and use of Kaaps to elicit such disalignments? In the sub-section below, we take a closer look at the song by analysing the lyrical content of the song and the typical phonological, lexical, and syntactic elements that structurally define Kaaps. We also pay attention to what makes it an important Kaaps gospel song. We specifically analyze the stancetaking on YouTube and dig deeper into Neville D’s reaction to the negative stances.

3.2.1 The song

Die Here is Kwai is a Kaaps gospel song. The video of the song, uploaded on the platforms mentioned in the previous sub-sections, visualizes the artists in adjacent recording booths. The lyrics of the song are subtitled in the video and written in cursive and graffiti-style font (providing an extra layer of Hip Hop culture coolness). While all the words are subtitled accurately to reflect the lyrics being performed, the words “*soe*”, “*vi*” and “*daa*” (in Kaaps) that the artists perform are written in standard Afrikaans.⁴ The song opens (Extract 1) with a melodic refrain followed by lyrics that celebrate our Lord as saviour and protector:

Extract 1: *Die Here is ‘soe’ kwai ‘vi’ my*

1. *Die Here is kwai* (The Lord is cool)
2. *Kwai* (Cool)

3. *Hy is kwai soe kwai* (He is cool so cool)
4. *Favour is altyd daa* (Favour is always there)
5. *Sy genade het my gedra* (His grace has carried me)
6. *Die Here is kwai* (The Lord is cool)
- Come on
7. *Kwai* (Cool)

8. *Hy is kwai soe kwai* (He is cool so cool)
9. *Die Here is kwai vi my* (The Lord is cool to me)
10. *Ja die Here is kwai vi my* (Yes the Lord is cool to me)
11. *Hy’s my herder* (He’s my shepherd)
- Hy is kwai* (He is cool)
12. *My verlosser* (My saviour)
- Hy is kwai* (He is cool)
13. *Hy’t al my sonde weg gewas* (He washed away all my sins)
- Die Here is kwai vi my* (The Lord is cool to me)
14. *Hy gee my vrede* (He gives me peace)
- Hy is kwai* (He is cool)

⁴ Our assumption of these subtitle choices is that Neville D wants to reach a wider listening audience than just Kaaps gospel music fans. In sub-section 3.2.2 we analyze his reaction towards the song and what it means to produce Kaaps gospel music for religious, cultural, and identity practices. We also highlight what we term his sacrificial stance against racist stances that disaligned against the use of Kaaps in South African Gospel music.

15. *Want Hy bewaar my* (Because he protects me)
Hy is kwai (He is cool)
 16. *En ooh ek mean nie om te brag nie* (And oh I do not mean to brag)
 17. *Ma die Here is kwai vi my* (But the Lord is cool to me)

In this first extract, the message of the song celebrates the coolness of our Lord through the performance of lyrics in Kaaps. The refrain of the song, *Die Here is Kwai*, opens with a message that the Lord's favour and grace are always available and accessible. He is the shepherd, the one who is the saviour that will wash away all sins and bring peace and provide protection. This is a universal Christian, Pinkster-like message, textualized in the lyrics. In lines 16-17, for example, Jesmé boasts about the *kwai*-ness (coolness) of our Lord. In fact, in these opening performance lines (1 to 17), the artists entextualize a celebratory stance of our Lord lexicalized in the word *kwai* (cool) and go further to state that what makes the Lord cool is His protection, grace, and the peace He offers.

It is the use of Kaaps that textualizes and characterizes the song as a Kaaps gospel song. From a Kaaps linguistic perspective, we see several Kaaps phonological, lexical, and grammatical forms performed that are not stereotypical of Kaaps language use but demonstrate the organization of lyrical content in the performance of such gospel music: that is, the use of the lexical item 'soe' (/su:/) with phonological additions (Afrikaans: /swə/; English: so /səʊ/) (lines 3 and 8); the deletion of the final rhotic /r/ in words such as 'daa' /da:/ (Afrikaans: *daar* /da:r/; English: there /ðe:/) (line 4) and 'vi' /fə/ (Afrikaans: *vir* /fər/; English: for /fə:/) (lines 9, 10, 17).

Die Here is Kwai is an important song in the corpus of Kaaps gospel music because, apart from its use of Kaaps, it offers a unique textual praise of God. The lyrics refer to God as the alpha and the omega, the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet, a biblical text often used in gospel music performances. It also describes God as the only constant (the beginning and the end). But specifically, it is a gospel song because the artists artfully perform a call-and-response that is typically associated with the performance of Gospel music (similar to the call-and-response characteristic of rap performances). Moreover, the song can be classified, artfully, as Kaaps gospel rap, as Extract 2 below demonstrates a transition from melodic singing of lyrics to rapping lyrics. In these lyrics, the cadence (rhythm) and style shift from the typical gospel to the characteristically rap style, first performed by Neville D and then by Jesmé Swartz, who recites the same words.

Extract 2: Rapping 'Die Here is Kwai'

1. Okay
2. *Kom os het 'n bietjie fun* (Let us have a bit of fun)
3. *Amal sê* (Everybody say)
4. *Hy's kwai* (He's cool)
Hy's kwai (He's cool)
5. *Vi my* (To me)
Vi my (To me)
6. *Hy's kwai* (He's cool)
Hy's kwai (He's cool)
7. *Verby* (More than)

Verby (More than)

8. *Daar is niemand soe kwai soes Hy* (There is no one as cool as Him)

Daar is niemand so kwai soes Hy (There is no one as cool as Him)

9. *Die Here is kwai vi my* (The Lord is cool to me)

Oe ja die Here is kwai vi my (Oh yes the Lord is cool to me)

The lyrics above qualify the performance as gospel rap, as they introduce verbal cues and ad-libs that are typically associated with rap music performances. It is entextualized in this Kaaps gospel music song as partly a gospel rap genre, at least for nine lines of lyrics, which is formed out of the sampling of rap’s rhythm and combined with Neville D’s and Jesmé’s cadence. This musical production entextualizes a remixing of sounds, tempo, and Kaaps that constitutes a remixed performance of Kaaps gospel music (e.g., Williams 2017). Firstly, the lyrics in the extract above are all overlaid with autotune, a musical feature that manipulates the cadence, pitch, and instrumentals of a song. Secondly, from lines 1 to 7, Neville D performs a call-and-response by inviting the listening audience to participate. Thirdly, he slows down his cadence, urges the listeners to have fun in line 2, and then shifts his performance role from gospel singer to gospel Hip Hop emcee. The phrase “*Almal sê*” (Everybody say) in line 3 initiates the call-and-response. This performance act maximizes the genre of Kaaps gospel music, specifically, and South African gospel music more generally.

Despite the gospel genre’s contribution in expanding South African gospel music through Kaaps gospel music and using Kaaps in religious informed lyrics, as poets such as Adam Small and others have, stances taken by Facebook users following the publication of the song’s preview were similar to the comments on the YouTube publication of the full song with a few distinctions. The YouTube stances reinforced religious ideologies of purity and standard language ideologies. While many of the comments were largely positive, others attempted to reinforce a standard language ideology. These comments raised the issue that pure religious discourse, for example, should not include the use of gangster language (Commenter 1), should not describe the Lord as being *kwai* (Commenter 2), and that the song should rather have “good, sound theological lyrics” (Commenter 3):

- Commenter 1: “*Daai is eintlik skolie taal maar okay*” (That is actually gangster language but okay)
- Commenter 2: “*Die Here is kwai wat is dit?jy kan n mooi kar vergelyk met kwai of n mooi huis of n mooi paar skoene ons praat hier van die God wat die aarde geskep het en die hemele uitgesprei het met sy regterhand kwai is nie eers n woord om God te beskryf nie gelowiges waar is die respek en ontsag vir Jesus christus*” (The Lord is *kwai* what is that? You can compare a beautiful car or a beautiful house or a pair of beautiful shoes. We are talking about the God who created the Earth and who spread out the heavens with His right hand. *Kwai* is not even a word to describe God. Believers, where is the respect and awe for Jesus Christ)
- Commenter 3: “What happened to good sound, theological lyrics:(Songs that add value and teach about God, not just the same old cliches that pastors shout from the pulpit to hype people up. A good beat at the expense of value.”

In the above comments, the purity and standard language ideology stances against the song (the stance-object) attempt to reinforce the notion that the use of Kaaps in the song is gangster language (*skollie taal*) and, therefore, inappropriate in a religious context. The first stance

suggests that a sinister and long-held view of Afrikaans language purists: Kaaps speakers are gangsters. While this is a stereotype often used by standard language purists to malign and marginalize Kaaps speakers in post-apartheid South Africa, there is a deeper, religious meaning in the context of our analysis of Kaaps gospel music. Kaaps is closely associated with the Pinkster Kerk as a site of Black religious identity (Jodamus 2022). The Pinkster Kerk is closely associated with the Cape Flats, which is widely burdened by gangsterism and a myriad of social and economic ills. The association of Kaaps as a gangster language is not new but within the context of Pinkster religious worship and practices as it forms part the vocal, musical, and identity-project space created to accommodate the voice and agency of the gangster (*skollie*) and the everyday Pinkster Kerk adherent; both are likely to speak, praise, and pray in Kaaps. Yet, the stance that the user takes attempts to further erase such voices from South African gospel music, which Neville D attempts to represent in his version of Kaaps gospel music.

The second stance above argues that the song reduces the purity of the notion of God or our Lord to an object of impurity. The commenter laments that calling the Lord *kwai* is akin to transforming that which is abstract (in meaning and practice) to a material state. Objects that are *kwai*, such as a house, a car, and shoes, cannot accurately represent the supernatural content of God, the creator of heaven and earth. Here, the commenter takes an epistemic stance by reasserting the purity of religious thought to insist that believers in God should have respect and awe for such a being.

The last stance is also critical of the sound and lyrical content (i.e., it does not have enough theology in it, and it simply repeats “the same old cliches that pastors shout from the pulpit to hype people up”). Though the commenter is familiar with the “good beat,” they find no value in the song as it does not elaborate on the teachings of God. Going by the sad face emoji to substantiate the commenter’s disappointment in the lyrics, beat, and sound, it is striking that they assert the stance of purity of theology while also recognizing subliminally that this Kaaps gospel song belongs to the religious practice of the Pinkster Kerk where “pastors shout from the pulpit” (We should not overlook the fact that shouting from the pulpit is not a vocal practice exclusive to the Pinkster Kerk.).

3.2.2 Neville D’s sacrificial stance

Overall, the reception to the song took Neville D by surprise, and he felt maligned and marginalized. In a newspaper article published in *The Daily Voice* on 31 July 2019 titled “Gospel singer crucified for 'kwai' song”, Neville D is portrayed as someone who was “crucified.”⁵ In addition to its title, the article also states that “The shocked father of four and Grammy-nominated artist says people are crucifying him for using the word kwai”. The article included some of the Facebook comments where the song was first previewed, including posts such as “Nea los ma, reguit hel toe” (No, forget it, straight to hell), which condemned the singer’s vocabulary and use of Kaaps in the song.

As the journalist states, Neville D felt crucified. By positioning himself as someone who was crucified (by the commenters), Neville D assumed a sacrificial stance toward the negative

⁵ Crucifixion is an important notion among Christians who believe that Jesus Christ was crucified (i.e., killed by being nailed to a cross and left to hang) for the sins of everyone. Jesus’ crucifixion is famously depicted in churches and on jewelry. The word ‘crucified’ has also become a common way among Christians of describing someone who has become the object of scorn.

comments made about the song and his identity as a gospel singer. For example, in an interview published on YouTube titled ‘Neville D & Elton Jansen (*Wil Djy* - Behind the Song)’,⁶ fellow South African gospel singer Elton Jansen praises Neville D for his sacrifice in the making of *Die Here is Kwai* but also reflects on his use of Kaaps and how it inspired their new song, *Wil Djy* (Will you).

Extract 3: The sacrificed man

1. Elton Jansen: *Kla gesing dan ‘djy’ en ‘djou’ ôs wee toe check ek hoe gan it lyk, hoe gan it klink as ôs ‘n song sing soes ôs praat. En so daai is hoe die rearrangement van – van ‘wil jy met my saamgaan’ na ‘wil DJY’. Dit het da vandaan af – en toe obviously toe djy mos nou speel ‘Die Here is Kwai’ en al haai – shame da moet altyd ‘n man wies wat die pak vat* (Finished singing then we ‘djy’ and ‘djou’ again so I thought what would it look like if we sang a song the way we speak. And that is how the rearrangement of ‘wil jy met my saamgaan’ to ‘wil DJY’. From then onwards – and obviously when you played ‘Die Here is Kwai’ and all that – shame there must always be someone who takes the punch).
2. Neville D: *Die pak vat!* (Take the punch!)
3. EJ: Ha!
4. Both: [laughter]
5. EJ: *Toe djy nou die pak vat met ‘Die Here is Kwai’, toe – toe encourage djy mos nou vi my. “Kom ôs doen die song”.* (When you took the punch with ‘Die Here is Kwai’, it encouraged me. “Let us do the song”.)
6. ND: Uh, uh
7. EJ: “*Kom ôs doen die song*”. And that’s how we ended up with ‘*Wil Djy*’ (“Let us do the song”). And that’s how we ended up with ‘*Wil Djy*’)
8. ND: Yes, yes
9. EJ: *Ek dink ha moet altyd ‘n man wies wat die way pave* (I think there must always be someone who paves the way)
10. ND: **Sacrifice**
11. EJ: **Sacrifice**
12. ND: *Die sacrifice maak. ‘n Man wat opgeoffer word* (Makes the sacrifice. A man who is sacrificed)

In the extract above, Neville D is affirmed by Jansen for the contribution he has made to elevate Kaaps gospel music in the soundscape of South African gospel music. Jansen also expresses sympathy towards Neville D for the backlash he received, but praises him for creating a gospel song in Kaaps. In particular, he points to the importance of using lexical items such as “*djy*” and “*djou*” (line 1), specifically the semantic value of such words for the representation of Kaaps speaker voices. Jansen also acknowledged that Neville D was sacrificed, adding that there is always the person who did it first, who went commercial and then took a metaphorical beating (“*da moet altyd ‘n man wies wat die pak vat*”, line 1).

Sacrifice and the recognition of pain by worshippers have always been textualized by gospel music across the world (see Adedeji 2012 for an analysis in the Nigerian gospel music context). In this context, Neville D’s sacrificial stance is interpreted by Jansen as a catalyst, inspiration, and ‘encouragement’ (line 5) to further expand the genre of Kaaps gospel with the song *Wil*

⁶ See the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0tbGSJFSHQ&t=740s>

Djy. Moreover, *Die Here is Kwai* needed to be produced and released so that other Kaaps gospel music artists could improve on the genre and future entextualization of Kaaps gospel music. In this regard, Neville D made the sacrifice once and for all so that others could also produce Kaaps gospel music (line 12).

4. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we analyzed the different stances towards the stance-object *Die Here is Kwai* to highlight the linguistic and genre contributions the artist Neville D has made to the expansion of Kaaps gospel music. We view our analysis as a form of intervention in the debate on the role and status of Kaaps in various contexts and modalities, and specifically on the performance of Kaaps gospel music as a unique genre of music in multilingual South Africa. At the same time, we hope to expand the sociolinguistic study of Kaaps in religious contexts, continually highlighting the importance of such a focus so that other researchers can expand the conceptual toolkit we have drawn on (i.e., stance, stancetaking, and entextualization). Even though Kaaps is still a marginalized language in South Africa, the growing popularity and use of the language (nevertheless) in a genre such as Kaaps gospel music is part of a broader attempt to empower Kaaps speakers and centre the religious experiences of such speakers in South African gospel music (in general). The paper, in this respect, attempted to provide a snapshot of some of the Kaaps linguistic challenges and issues raised by this song.

The study is based on a larger investigation of Kaaps gospel music. Our goal with this paper has been to break into scholarship on the linguistic performance of Kaaps gospel music as well as further studies on this performance genre, building on previous poetic-textualizations and scriptural, liturgical representations of Black identity and language in religious contexts (e.g., Nadar & Jodamus 2019; Jodamus 2022). We argued that a focus on Kaaps gospel music is multi-vocalic as a gospel genre, but also that the listening audience is diverse and not necessarily tied to the Pinkster Kerk (even though it is uniquely Pinkster). Additionally, our goal was to challenge, in the description and analysis of Neville D's Kaaps gospel music, the continued discourses of purity and standards that reinforce the weak characteristics and stereotypes of Kaaps speakers who are fans of Kaaps gospel music and religious worshippers in and beyond the Pinkster Kerk.

The reaction that *Die Here is Kwai* evoked could be classified as unfair. But as we have demonstrated, from a stancetaking analysis point of view, the song is productive in the way it not only presents Kaaps but textualizes in performance Kaaps gospel music. Our concern in the analysis was to demonstrate the various forms of stancetaking taken up by commenters and Neville D himself to the stance-object (the song). In the previous sections and sub-sections, our analysis highlights how Facebook and YouTube users took up an affective (emotive), epistemic, evaluative, and sacrificial stance to align, disalign, and generally react to hearing Kaaps in a gospel song. In this respect, not only did we highlight the voices that took a stance against the song and the voices that supported the song, but we also demonstrated the genre contribution of the song as a production of centering historically marginalized voices. Importantly, the way the artist entextualized Kaaps gospel music as a performance genre that can easily remix gospel Hip Hop melodic styles and cadence allowed for a meaningful engagement with listeners who appreciated the way coolness (or *kwai*-ness) was inserted in South African gospel music (generally).

So, where do our stancetaking analysis and the discussions above take the study of Kaaps gospel music? Since this is an under-researched area of language and religion in South Africa, we suggest several ways in which sociolinguists can design research studies on Kaaps gospel music in South Africa.

Kaaps gospel music is not an isolated religious phenomenon. It is performed in a sonic environment where many languages (verbal and non-verbal) are used to perform gospel music. While the focus of this study was limited to a few variables, there is (1) a need to document live performances of Kaaps gospel music to describe the embodied performances of such music inside and outside church spaces. There is (2) a need to focus on the processes of commodification and commercialization and why, in some cases, some Kaaps gospel artists start out producing and performing Kaaps gospel music but then later switch to the performance of English gospel music. Is this due to commercial market pressures? Or the need to sell gospel music to make a living? There may be many more variables to focus on and discover that can teach us about Kaaps social life and the genre of Kaaps gospel music. Then, there is (3) the need to document multilingual gospel music that demonstrates the rich genre and linguistic repertoires of artists and how they represent multilinguality in religious spaces and places. Finally, (4) there is a need to study in greater depth how languages in South Africa are used to move gospel music into digital spaces.

Apart from the foci above, we would also like to suggest that sociolinguists consider the following methodological consideration: One of the limitations in this paper is that we have not yet personally interviewed the gospel artist Neville D. We hope to do so soon. Future studies on Kaaps gospel music should conduct interviews with gospel artists to understand the process of such sound productions and also their views, ideologies, and practices of language and religion. Here, an emic, ethnographic approach (with a mixture of online and offline methods) would be well suited for the combined study of language, religion, and multilingual gospel music in South Africa.

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