


The importance of understanding and making sense of Zulu traditional hymns as a symbol of expressing worship: Cognitive hermeneutics and hermeneutics of hymnody theories

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Singing and understanding Zulu traditional hymns among charismatic churches and gospel groups have become a fundamental worship tool. Zulu traditional hymns are at the centre of Christian lives in South Africa. Singing Zulu traditional hymns (*iCilongo Levangeli*) is predominant for many South African musicians and gospel groups using modern musical styles. However, contemporary churches, musicians and gospel groups tend not to understand the authenticity of these hymns. The issue of Zulu traditional hymns in the modern gospel industry is a matter of great concern. Therefore, this article addresses and discusses the importance of understanding and making sense of Zulu traditional hymns as a symbol of expressing worship. Data were collected for a research practice using a hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm to obtain a precise understanding and the original meaning of the prominent Zulu traditional hymns. The study reveals that there are Zulu traditional hymns that were misinterpreted and misunderstood. The misinterpretation of Zulu traditional hymns is partly attributable to the ignorance of the underlying true meaning, emotions, state and purpose of the original composer.

Contribution: This study recommends that contemporary gospel musicians sing Zulu traditional hymns in the original text to ensure that they do not misinterpret the hymns.

Keywords: churches; gospel groups; musicians; worship; Zulu traditional hymns.

Introduction

Singing parts of the liturgy is vital in the Christian society as they help believers pray, confess their sins and proclaim the grace of God. It is prudent to foreground this study by mentioning that the author is from a background of charismatic Christianity that emphasises the work of God, the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts and modern-day true signs and miracles as an everyday part of believers' lives. Since the establishment of charismatic Christianity, the hymnbook was a fundamental key to shaping the worship and faith of Christian churches. This article focuses on contemporary gospel groups and musicians who always fail to sing traditional hymns in strophic form. Many contemporary gospel groups and musicians use a unitary form that shortens the hymns and weakens the hymns' message and purpose.

In this study, the term 'hymns' is broad and covers many Christian hymnody activities, including hymns of praise and psalms, among others. In this article, hymns will refer to Zulu traditional hymns. In this article, Zulu traditional hymns will also be referred to as the hymns found in *iCilongo Levangeli* that are composed and translated from Zulu melody. Thus, contemporary Zulu traditional hymns are typically identified as Christian gospel music and attract many believers. Historically, there is a far greater belief that traditional hymns of all South African tribes are the backbone and cornerstone of authentic worship and modern gospel music (Kloppers 2020; Tönsing 2017; Van de Laar 2000).

It is not within the scope of this article to discuss the historical details and the publication dates of the hymnbooks that undermine the message and purpose of traditional hymns. However, the researcher believes that a good starting point is to discuss the growing problem in traditional hymns. In 1930, the *Amahubo Evangeli* (gospel hymns) series of hymnbooks were co-authored by clergymen G. Wilkstrom, D. Eriksson, R. Wilson and Swedish missionaries and compiled and published by the Alliance Church in South Africa (TACSA). The hymnbooks were very popular and quickly sold out.

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Long before hymns were historically documented, they were sung in ceremonies such as funerals and church worship. However, there is an ongoing concern about gospel groups and musicians who continuously fail to grasp or deliberately ignore the traditional hymns' original meaning and purpose. Many scholars have documented that musicians should sing and place traditional hymns within the context of their underlying meaning and express authentic emotions that are essential to understanding the hymns' profound meaning and spirituality (Tönsing, Wepener & Vos 2015; Tshabalala & Patel 2010). Various historical, demographic, theological, economic and technological shifts influence how contemporary gospel groups and musicians interpret their music (Davies & Thate 2017; Ngema 2020). As a result, some contemporary gospel worshippers and musicians pay little attention to the contextual meaning of the song and in particular the contextual meaning of traditional hymns (Abiolu 2019; Davies & Thate 2017; Wild-Wood & Wood 2004).

It would be inadequate to discuss Zulu traditional hymns without mentioning that the Lutheran Church and Anglican Church of Southern Africa significantly influenced the composition of Zulu traditional hymns (Abiolu 2019; eds. Ingalls, Landau & Wagner 2016). Thus, many hymns are examples of African traditional-style music combined with Western music (Nkomazana & Setume 2016:35). It is also prudent to acknowledge and consider that oral history and the preceding literature reveal that the arrival of European missionaries played a vital role in establishing the Christian society in South Africa (Masondo 2018; Nkomazana & Setume 2016). Masondo (2018) highlighted that:

When the Europeans arrived in Southern Africa, Africans had been practising their religion from time immemorial. Religion had sustained Africans and their way of life, and they could build communities and political systems. The history of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa is full of ironies. (p. 210)

The missionaries arrived in South Africa early in 1844, just before the outbreak of the Anglo-Zulu war in 1879 (Abiolu 2019; Masondo 2018; Mzondi 2018). Mzondi's (2018:41–42) study highlighted that hymn music played a vital role in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Traditional hymns were popular in the places such as the Cape, Transvaal and Natal (Chitando 2007; Nkomazana & Setume 2016). In addition, hymns reflect the socio-economic, religious and political state of society.

Zulu traditional hymns are believed to have a powerful ability to move people emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Thus, hymns have a distinct role in expressing emotion and worship (Mzondi 2018; Tönsing et al. 2015). Scholars agree that in the era of missionaries in South Africa, large social groups were not privileged enough to understand and read the Bible as it was written in foreign languages (English and Dutch) (Nkomazana & Setume 2016:48). During this time, traditional hymns were a primary source and way Christians mediate with God (Mzondi 2018; Nkomazana & Setume 2016). Thus, hymns are crucial that the new generation musicians must not taint the authenticity and originality of traditional hymns because of the role hymns play as a

medium of expressing worship and as mediation with God (Reagan 2015). The traditional hymns are also known as spiritual poetry of remarkable beauty and praise to God.

Although there is extensive literature on African traditional hymns (Masondo 2018; Mzondi 2018; Nkomazana & Setume 2016; Tönsing et al. 2015), the existing literature only focuses on the history, content and structural approach to these traditional hymns. Furthermore, limited attention is given to addressing and discussing the importance of understanding and making sense of Zulu traditional hymns as a form of expressing worship. It is inevitable that this may lead to a risk of these hymns being misinterpreted and misunderstood.

This study is motivated by the limited attention paid to the fundamental meaning of Zulu traditional hymns. Like other hymns, Zulu traditional hymns make a unique contribution in worship. However, gospel groups and musicians misunderstand the meaning of these hymns. Thus, it is easy for them to sing only a few parts of these hymns and ignore other parts. Zulu traditional hymns are directed to God (Shange 2013; Tönsing 2017) and contemporary Christianity compromises worship and interpretation of hymns. This article focuses on contemporary musical styles and addresses and discusses the importance of understanding and making sense of Zulu traditional hymns as a symbol of expressing worship. The study is premised on observations and revelations of the issue of poor expression of the original meaning and purpose of Zulu traditional hymns as sung by many modern gospel musicians.

It is prudent to highlight some background of traditional hymns in this article. Zulu traditional hymns were sung in various settings and on various occasions. However, the main setting for traditional hymns was for the worship service. In the past, traditional hymns were sung when a denomination met to pray, worship, praise and listen to the Word of God (Odewole 2018:2). As these traditional hymns are part of the collection in the *iCilongo Levangeli* hymnbook, it was difficult to attain clear biographical details of the authors. This lack of information about hymn authorship is attributed to the history of this period in southern Africa. However, some indicators point to a widely spread *iCilongo Levangeli* hymnbook composed and published by the missionary G. Wikstrom and a Swedish alliance of missionaries who translated the songs into the Zulu language.

In this study, the researcher is particularly interested in three major Zulu traditional hymns, which are as follows:

1. *iCilongo Levangeli* number 80 (Umzuzu noJesus)
2. *iCilongo Levangeli* number 60 (Hlengiwe–Limnandi lelizwi)
3. *iCilongo Levangeli* number 215 (Ungumhlobo wam'uJesus).

The primary reason for selecting these hymns for this article is that these hymns are often sung in the modern gospel industry with incomplete verses. For instance, *Ungumhlobo wam'uJesus* is rarely sung in its entirety.

Thus, the main purpose of this study is to address and discuss the importance of understanding and making sense of Zulu traditional hymns as symbols of expressing worship. In this context, scholars point out that traditional hymns were deemed a fundamental form of worship and must be interpreted and understood well by musicians (Dickie 2017; Lebaka 2019). In addition to this, without the component of lyrics, musicians tend to miss the underlying meaning, purpose and authenticity of these hymns (Mzondi 2018; Tönsing 2017; Williams 2018).

Research questions

In this article, two primary questions emerged and provided a clear understanding of the ongoing issue:

- What causes modern gospel vocalists to sing incomplete traditional hymns?
- What are the implications caused by singing incomplete traditional hymns?

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored within the cognitive hermeneutics and hermeneutics of hymnody theories. The cognitive hermeneutics theory was framed within the larger question of the importance of understanding and making sense of traditional hymns as a symbol of expressing worship (Tepe 2011; Tönsing et al. 2015). George (2020) stated that:

Theoretically, hermeneutic is commonly concerned with the meaning of interpretation, its basic nature, scope, and validity, and its place within and implications for human existence; and it treats interpretation in the context of fundamental philosophical questions about being and knowing language and history, art and aesthetic experience, and practical life. (p. 1)

As previously outlined, it is important to understand and make sense of traditional hymns as a symbol of expressing worship. In this article, the cognitive hermeneutics theory was adopted to argue that the selected Zulu traditional hymns must be approached and interpreted within a unique cognitive framework to bring value to worship (Tönsing et al. 2015). George (2020) highlighted that cognitive hermeneutics theory is grounded 'on the distinction between two different ways of approaching and interpreting text'. Hermeneutic theory is classified under the social subjectivist theory where meaning is intersubjectively conceived in a distinct way from the pragmatic cosmos of expected systematic practicality and realism (George 2020).

The hermeneutics of hymnody theory was employed in this article to assist musicians in knowing how hymns may successfully be used in worship (Gray 2015). Gray (2015) stated that:

Those who write hymns, compose hymn tunes, study hymns, compile hymnals, select hymns and tunes for the ministries of the church, and those who read and sing hymns can benefit from a keener sensitivity to and a deeper understanding of how these facets are vitally interrelated in fine hymnody from various times and traditions. (p. 2)

The cognitive hermeneutics and hermeneutics of hymnody theories are useful for theologians and musicians in interpreting texts regarding the original context and linguistic meaning of a representation or symbol. Furthermore, these theories are necessary for interpreting hymns because hymns have a deep meaning that should not be misinterpreted. Against this background, this article employs the cognitive hermeneutics and hermeneutics of hymnody theories to scrutinise the importance of musicians fully understanding traditional hymns.

Methodology

Hermeneutics plays a fundamental role in various disciplines, including theology (biblical studies), humanities, medicine, social sciences, law and human sciences (Laverty 2003). George (2020) defined hermeneutics as a study that seeks to interpret and explain a text from its original perspective. Hermeneutical phenomenology is applied to this study because the nature of this study is to describe and discourse regarding the importance of understanding and making sense of and to conduct an inquiry into prominent Zulu traditional hymns as a symbol of expressing worship. In addition, selecting a hermeneutical phenomenology research design helped the researcher to have an in-depth insight, accurate understanding of the meaning of the texts and a direct interpretation of the selected hymns. The design was considered appropriate for a rich understanding of the importance of the gospel interpreting any hymn from its original meaning and purpose (Plager 1994). The hermeneutic analysis helped to yield an in-depth understanding through the systematic interpretation method (eds. Friesen, Henriksson & Saevi 2012). Hermeneutic analysis plays a vital role in interpreting meanings such as human practices, culture, works of art and texts (Moules 2002).

The researcher identified three significant Zulu traditional hymns commonly misinterpreted or misunderstood and disassociated from their original contexts. As a result, most of these hymns tend to lose their original purpose and meaning. Therefore, a hermeneutic analysis and hermeneutic phenomenology technique was deemed appropriate and essential to interpreting the findings of this research.

Limitation of this study

The study was limited to the hermeneutic interpretation using three primary Zulu traditional hymns to yield trustworthy findings. Limiting this study to hermeneutic phenomenology helped the researcher to have a focused collection and find meaningful data. A study should be carried out in a broader spectrum employing other research methodologies, such as interviews.

Findings

The three Zulu traditional hymns examined are well known in the gospel industry. Many gospel musicians use traditional hymns for business purposes rather than praising and

worshipping God. Nevertheless, this does not mean that gospel musicians do not use hymns for worship. Many contemporary gospel musicians were influenced by the diversity that contributes to how they sing and view hymns (Tönsing et al. 2015; Williams 2018). In so doing, many hymns shifted from the truth and the original purpose of the composers' intention was lost (Kloppers 2017).

Umzuzu nay'uJesu

Zulu word	English translation
<i>Umzuzu nay'uJesu</i>	A moment with Jesus
<i>Uyaguqula njalo</i>	He is always changing
<i>Usizi nenkathazo</i>	Grief and suffering
<i>Uyawuxosh' uvalo</i>	You drive away the fear
<i>Ngingenwa ukwethaba</i>	I am overjoyed
<i>Noma ngimbheka-ke</i>	Or I look at him then
<i>Ubuhle balomhlaba</i>	The beauty of this world
<i>Ngishay'indiva nje.</i>	I count if meaningless.
<i>Umzuzu nay'uJesu</i>	A moment with Jesus
<i>Khangel uthand' analo</i>	Find out the kind of love He has
<i>Ngilethe njalo kuye</i>	I always brought it to him
<i>Usizi nemithwalo</i>	Grief and burdens
<i>Noma ngidinw'indlela</i>	Or I get weary along the way
<i>Aphel'amandla nya</i>	I run out of energy
<i>Kuyongisiz'impela</i>	It will really help me
<i>Umzuzu naye la.</i>	A moment with him here
<i>Sengathi ngibe-nawo</i>	I wish I had it
<i>'Mihleni yonke yami</i>	'Every day of mine
<i>Umzuzu nay' uJesu</i>	A moment with Jesus
<i>Ekuhambeni kwami</i>	In my Journey
<i>'Kufisa kwami konke</i>	It is my desire for everything
<i>Impela yikho-ke</i>	That's precisely right
<i>Kuze kube-phakade</i>	'Till forever
<i>Ngihlale naye le.</i>	I dwell with Him.

When looking carefully at the first and second verses of this hymn, notice that this hymn has a unique language of communication that most contemporary gospel musicians do not express. These two verses reveal the composer's situation at the time of composition and contemporary gospel musicians rarely sing this section. Most Zulu and Xhosa traditional hymns speak about the composers (Masondo 2018; Nkomazana & Setume 2016). Many hymn composers express their state of sadness or happiness when penning hymns. Looking at the last verse of this hymn, the composer makes a vow to Jesus regarding a vow to travel forever on the journey despite the cares of this world. The composer deliberates about the challenges and problems along the journey.

The following phrase is popular and always sung:

<i>Kufisa kwami konke</i>	It is my desire for everything
<i>Impela yikho-ke</i>	That's precisely right
<i>Kuze kube-phakade</i>	'Till forever
<i>Ngihlale naye le.</i>	I dwell with Him.

The hymn further reveals the moments of pain and agony that the composer went through when this hymn was composed. Drawing from the given analysis, composers used hymns to express their sorrow and unhappiness. This hymn was also significant when worshipping God as a form of dedication and expressing a feeling of love to God.

This hymn would have come to the mind and spirit of the composer after experiencing many challenges. However, most contemporary gospel musicians ignore the first two verses of this hymn. Thus, the hymn should be sung in the full version (Redman 2002). The whole rhythm and text of this hymn are neglected and misunderstood by many contemporary gospel musicians. The broader scope of this hymn is misinterpreted by the contemporary gospel musicians who sing this hymn. Contemporary gospel musicians should understand the position of the composer when writing the hymn and not shorten the hymn. Hence, Scott (2015) highlighted that hemeurtics hymnody is critical for musicians to be able to analyse hymns according to their original background. On the given hymn, contemporary musicians sing only the following section and ignore the opening:

<i>Kuze kube-phakade</i>	'Till forever
<i>Ngihlale naye le.</i>	I dwell with Him.

Hlengiwe-Limnandi LeLizwi

This hymn is a personal hymn that reflects a newly converted believer. The composer wrote this hymn after their conviction. This hymn has five verses that depict the state of the composer.

Zulu word	English translation
<i>Hlengiwe – Limnandi leLizwi</i>	Redeemed – Beautiful is this Word
<i>Hlengiwe ngegazi leMvana</i>	Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb
<i>Hlengiwe ngomusa nothando</i>	Redeemed by grace and love
<i>Ngenziwe sengaba umntwana.</i>	I was made to be a child.
<i>Chorus</i>	Chorus
<i>Hlengiwe, hlengiwe</i>	Redeemed, redeemed
<i>Hlengiwe ngegazi leMvana</i>	Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb
<i>Hlengiwe hlengiwe</i>	Redeemed redeemed
<i>Ngenziwe sengaba umntwana.</i>	I was made to be a child.
<i>Hlengiwe – O yek'intokozo</i>	Redeemed – O how happy!
<i>Ulimi lungephumisele</i>	The language is not pronounced
<i>Lokh'engikuzwayo enhlizweni</i>	That's what I feel in my heart
<i>Kumnandi, kumnandi, Ingcwele!</i>	Sweet, sweet, Holy!
<i>Chorus</i>	Chorus
<i>Ngimkhumbul' uJesu umhlengi</i>	I remember Jesus the Redeemer
<i>Ngimkhumbul' amalanga onke</i>	I miss him every day

<i>Ngihuba ngihamb'endleleni</i>	I sing as I travel along the way
<i>Ihubo lezinsuku zonke.</i>	A daily hymn.
<i>Chorus</i>	Chorus
<i>Ngiyazi ngombona masinya</i>	I know I shall see him soon
<i>Ishilo kanjalo iNkosi</i>	Thus saith the Lord
<i>Nxa eselilanda ibandla</i>	When he picks up the church
<i>O'yek'ubukhul' ubukhosi.</i>	O 'great is the Kingdom.
<i>Chorus</i>	Chorus
<i>Ngiyazi ikhona nem'qhele</i>	I know there is a crown
<i>Eyibekele abayo</i>	He has set it for his own
<i>Izovaqhela amaqhawe</i>	It will alienate the heroes
<i>Ngosuk'olukhul' oluzayo.</i>	For the great day to come.

Here is another example of a hymn that is always incompletely sung by contemporary gospel musicians. Most contemporary gospel musicians sing only one portion of the hymn.

<i>Hlengiwe – Limnandi lelizwi</i>	Redeemed – The voice is beautiful
<i>Hlengiwe ngegazi leMvana</i>	Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb
<i>Hlengiwe ngomusa nothando</i>	Redeemed by grace and love
<i>Ngenziwe sengaba umntwana.</i>	I was made to be a child.
<i>Chorus</i>	Chorus
<i>Hlengiwe, hlengiwe</i>	Redeemed, redeemed
<i>Hlengiwe ngegazi leMvana</i>	Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb
<i>Hlengiwe hlengiwe</i>	Redeemed redeemed
<i>Ngenziwe sengaba umntwana.</i>	I was made to be a child.
<i>Hlengiwe – O yek'intokozo</i>	Redeemed – O how happy!
<i>Ulimi lungephumisele</i>	The language is not pronounced
<i>Lokh'engikuzwayo enhlizweni</i>	That's what I feel in my heart
<i>Kumnandi, kumnandi, Ingcwele!</i>	Sweet, sweet, Holy!

Using the cognitive hermeneutics and hermeneutics of hymnody theories is important when considering the context in which this hymn was penned and sung. These theories ensure that the hymn is well interpreted and understood as cognition relates to behaviour regarding response to music. These theories in music help individuals to express their emotions to God. It is clear that singing of hymns remains a significant level of worship that goes to the heart, soul and spirit of Christianity. Hence, it is worth and critical for contemporary musicians to select hymns very well to successfully interpret the heart of the composer. This will assist musicians to be able to express heart and personal faith to God. This is a powerful cognitive method of worship.

Like many hymns, this hymn was composed after the salvation of the composer, as revealed by the following chorus verse:

<i>Ngiyazi ngombona masinya</i>	I know I shall see Him soon
<i>Ishilo kanjalo iNkosi</i>	Thus saith the Lord
<i>Nxa eselilanda ibandla</i>	When he picks up the church
<i>O'yek'ubukhul' ubukhosi.</i>	O 'great is the Kingdom.

The composer expresses the joy of being redeemed to the new Kingdom entered. Furthermore, the composer reveals the assurance held, saying that 'I know I shall see Him (the Lord) soon, thus saith the Lord'. According to oral history and literature, hymns were the main source of hope and belief that Africa would persist, resist, endure and conquer during the apartheid era (Mzondi 2018; Shange 2013; Tönsing, 2017):

<i>Ngimkhumbul' uJesu umhlengi</i>	I remember Jesus the Redeemer
<i>Ngimkhumbul' amalanga onke</i>	I miss him every day
<i>Ngihuba ngihamb'endleleni</i>	I sing as I travel along the way
<i>Ihubo lezinsuku zonke.</i>	A daily hymn.

In this verse, the composer's point of view shifts from the general to the personal, revealing a sense of self that is separated for Jesus. Unfortunately, contemporary gospel musicians tend to miss the whole context of this hymn and sing only a portion of the hymn. Contemporary gospel musicians may choose to shorten these hymns they miss the original meaning and because the hymns are too long. However, considering the hermeneutics of hymnody theory that helps a musician to have a deeper insight about the importance of understanding hymns in various times and traditions. Hence, this article argues that contemporary musicians should read and sing traditional hymns according to their original text.

Ungumhlobo wam' uJesu

Here is another perfect example of the hymn that is personified yet misunderstood by contemporary musicians. The composer expresses the love and devotion they have for Jesus.

Zulu word	English translation
<i>Ungumhlobo wam' uJesu</i>	Jesus is my friend
<i>Uphi ongangaye na?</i>	Who can be equated to Him?
<i>Abaningi bayamshiya</i>	Many leave Him
<i>Ngohlubuka nami na?</i>	Will I forsake Him too?
<i>Angisoze ngahlukana</i>	I will never depart
<i>Nongithanda kangaka</i>	From someone who loves me so much
<i>Njalo sothandana naye</i>	We will always love each other
<i>Khona LA nakhona le.</i>	From here and even there.
<i>Uma ngimethemba uJesu</i>	If I trust Jesus
<i>Ngingahlulwa yini na?</i>	Can I be defeated?
<i>Qha nakufa, nakuhamba</i>	Not even death, even walk
<i>Naw' amandla okubi.</i>	Even the power of evil
<i>Ngisho nayo ingelosi</i>	Even an angel
<i>Nay' omubi uqobo</i>	Even the wicked oneself
<i>Ngizohamba ngokwethaba</i>	I will walk happily
<i>Ngingowayo iNkosi.</i>	I belong to the Lord.

Most of the time, these two verses are sung by contemporary gospel musicians:

<i>Ungumhlobo wam' uJesu</i>	Jesus is my friend
<i>Uphi ongangaye na?</i>	Who can be equated to Him?
<i>Abaningi bayamshiya</i>	Many leave Him
<i>Ngohlubuka nami na?</i>	Will I forsake Him too?
<i>Angisoze ngahlukana</i>	I will never depart
<i>Nongithanda kangaka</i>	From someone who loves me so much
<i>Njalo sothandana naye</i>	We will always love each other
<i>Khona LA nakhona le.</i>	From here and even there.

The third and fourth verses of this hymn reveal that the composer has faith in Jesus. This hymn speaks about the spiritual wellness of the composer that the composer could not describe in a narrative. The composer opens the third verse by posing a question: *Uma ngimethemba uJesu, Ngingahlulwa yini na?* This hymn demonstrates that the composer's personal experience is expressed – that most people desert Jesus. However, the composer expresses that he cannot leave the Lord. Indeed, the third and fourth verses reveal several facets of the composer's feelings: joy, comfort and commitment. Thus, when missing these verses, the hymn loses its underlying meaning and purpose.

<i>Uma ngimethemba uJesu</i>	If I trust Jesus
<i>Ngingahlulwa yini na?</i>	Can I be defeated?
<i>Qha nakufa, nakuhamba</i>	Not even death, even walk
<i>Naw' amandla okubi.</i>	Even the power of evil
<i>Ngisho nayo ingelosi</i>	Even an angel
<i>Nay' omubi uqobo</i>	Even the wicked oneself
<i>Ngizohamba ngokwethaba</i>	I will walk happily
<i>Ngingowayo iNkosi.</i>	I belong to the Lord.

Unfortunately, these three Zulu traditional hymns are misinterpreted and misunderstood by contemporary gospel musicians as they do not sing them completely. The issue of misinterpreting and misunderstanding Zulu traditional hymns is partly attributable to the original contemporary musicians' ignorance of the underlying true meaning, emotions, state and purpose (Ngema 2020; Thebe 2020).

Hymns were composed and sung in specific situations. Therefore, contemporary gospel musicians should carefully translate hymns and not lose the authentic original meaning of the hymn (Tönsing 2017; Van de Laar 2000). Thus, careful interpretation requires an understanding of the original hymn and the conditions in which the composer penned it. Based on the given analysis, this research reveals that the incompleteness of these hymns plays a major part in weakening the gravitas of these hymns.

Discussion

Zulu traditional hymns are sung for various purposes, including pleading, comfort, inspiring hope, confirming faith, expressing gratitude to God, worshipping and celebrating life. Traditional hymns play a vital role in worshipping and communicating with God.

The article sought to address and discuss the importance of understanding and making sense of Zulu traditional hymns as a symbol of expressing worship. The Zulu traditional hymns discussed in this study reveal the importance of understanding the underlying meaning of the hymn. For instance, the hymn *Ungumhlobo wam' uJesu*, reveals a deep expression to God of the composer's worship and dedication. The researcher argues that many contemporary gospel musicians misinterpret this hymn as they sing it incompletely.

Consistent with the previous studies (Kloppers 2020; Ngema 2020), the findings of this study reveal that singing an incomplete hymn eradicates the original meaning and purpose of the hymn. The researcher found that although contemporary gospel musicians are inspired by Zulu traditional hymns *iCilongo Levangeli*, the musicians must examine the context to understand the hymns. The study's findings show that contemporary gospel musicians should research and ensure that they sing traditional hymns accurately. Most scholars who have traditional hymns emphasise that traditional hymns are regarded as sacred and should not be misinterpreted (Kloppers 2020; Mzondi 2018; Roberts 1989).

In addition, the findings of this study reveal that the three hymns studied are regarded as common hymns and are typical of hymns sung by many contemporary gospel musicians. In this case, the hymns have an imperative role in worshipping God instead of performing the hymns as a business. The composers used these hymns for praising and worshipping God and expressing their commitment and dedication to God. This finding regarding the context of the composition of the hymns is in line with cognitive hermeneutics theory that promotes the importance of interpreting the text in its original language and within its historical context, artistic and aesthetic experiences and practical life (George 2020; Tönsing 2017). This finding corroborated the results of Osei-Bonsu (2013) and Kloppers (2020). The researchers found that understanding and singing hymns from the composers' perspective are essential because hymns are devoted to God and dedicated to the Supreme Being. The findings of this study show that contemporary gospel musicians have a limited understanding of the history of these hymns (Fritz 2017). The findings also found that traditional hymns are a prayer to God for mercy, intervention and blessing upon the believers. Some hymns are a plea to God for the remission of sin.

Conclusion and recommendations

The researcher addressed and discussed the importance of understanding and making sense of Zulu traditional hymns as a symbol of expressing worship. Specific focus was placed on three Zulu traditional hymns that are always sung in an incomplete form or misinterpreted by contemporary gospel musicians. The researcher looked broadly at the fundamental role played by traditional hymns. The study recognised that

hymns play a vital role in worshipping God. The study points out that contemporary gospel musicians tend to miss the meaning behind these hymns. The researcher acknowledges that these traditional hymns may seem long. However, the researcher argues that the selected traditional hymns have crucial verses that should not be left out, as this causes the hymn to lose its meaning.

Using a framework provided by cognitive hermeneutics theory that demands interpretation of texts regarding its original contexts, this study analysed the importance of understanding and making sense of Zulu traditional hymns as a symbol of expressing worship. In so doing, the researcher argued and revealed that understanding and interpreting hymns from their original texts play a vital role in expressing feelings of God. Furthermore, the analysis in this article was informed by what the researcher views as a relationship that is fundamental to gospel music between a musician and the music.

Based on the results and analysis of this study, the researcher recommends that contemporary gospel musicians sing the original hymn text to ensure that they do not misinterpret the hymns. Firstly, this understanding of the hymns can only happen when the musicians have a deep insight and search for the original meaning of the composer. Secondly, the musicians should study the historical context of the hymns to understand the situation in which the composers penned the hymns.

Zulu traditional hymns have undergone numerous changes during contemporary times. Nevertheless, Zulu traditional hymns are fundamental in the present context and should be sung in literary texts in full to ensure that the hymns' meanings are not distorted. In conclusion, it is prudent that contemporary gospel musicians maintain a clear understanding and principles of these hymns. The researcher contends that although the new singing style sounds effective, traditional hymns should be sung in full as shortening those hymns affect the liturgical and ecclesiastical functions and purpose. The selected hymns play a significant role in worship in many pentecostal churches and should not be shortened. In conclusion, this article contends that there should be a clear equilibrium between the cognitive and hymnody in hymns. For musicians to sustain such an equilibrium, musicians should have a strong background and deep understanding about the hymns.

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Author's contributions

S.J.Y. is the sole author of this article.

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