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Epistemic, Interpersonal, and Moral Stances in the Construction of Us and Them in CM lyrics

Abstract

Religious groupings and subcultures both tend to have well-articulated interests, aims, and values that unite certain people but also distinguish from them people who do not share their interests. The case is then made for the construction of difference between 'us' and 'them'. This paper examines the construction of such a group boundary in the previously little studied context of the Christian metal (CM) music subculture. The focus of analysis is on the kinds of stances that are taken and attributed to 'us' and 'them' in the English lyrics of Finnish CM groups. The particular types of stance are related to questions of epistemology, interpersonal, and morality. The paper shows that the borderlines between CM and its Other is drawn on the basis of stance on being right/wrong, heading for heaven/hell, and having a better/worse divinity as an object of worship. The use of binary opposites, together with the practice of elevating 'us' and devaluing 'them', constructs CM as a categorical movement which relies on conservative Christian values. CM can thus be seen as a counterattack against the general religio-cultural trend of abandoning Christianity in Western societies.

Keywords: Christian metal, stance, othering

Introduction

For centuries, religion has united but – and because of that – also separated people from each other. In today's increasingly secular Western world (Bruce 2002), forms of spirituality and religiosity exist that also follow this practice. As all types of identities, religious ones are also to a large extent based on difference – on what one is *not* (e.g. Woodward 1997). This paper discusses the construction of difference in Christian metal (CM) music, which has been largely neglected thus far in research (but see Bossius 2003, Moberg 2009). However, already using the term 'Christian metal' causes anxiety over what it is all about; Christians and metallers, plus people outside these groups, are troubled by the union of contrasting values and beliefs. Part of the anxiety might also be due to the fact that both Christianity and metal music have traditionally been uncompromising to start with, meaning that they have been categorical about what they are like and what they are not (cf. Moberg *ibid.*: 134). Setting such group boundaries are shown, for example, in the casting out of certain thought styles from the Christian church (e.g. movements that deny the divinity of *Jesus*) as well as in the on-going subcultural

discussions on what counts as *proper* metal music. Consequently, Christian metallers have been marginalized, *othered*, by both Christians and metal musicians. Against such a backdrop, CM is certainly interesting in terms of how it constructs itself by differentiating from what it is not. In this paper, this will be studied with a special focus on the epistemic, interpersonal and moral stances attributed to CM and its Other in Finnish CM groups' song lyrics.

Background

The origins of CM go back to the early 1980s in California, USA. *Stryper*, the pioneer of the scene, started producing plausible metal sounds with manifest Christian beliefs and values, as indicated for example by the name of their most successful album (which sold over two million copies), *To Hell with the Devil* (1986). In Walser's (1993: 55) words:

Stryper appropriates and reinterprets the codes of heavy metal, using metal's means to produce different meanings. Metal's noisiness might seem incompatible with a Christian agenda, but Stryper exploits just that subversive aura to make more appealing what would otherwise seem a wholly institutional message.

Manifest Christianity, i.e. the Christian agenda to which Walser refers, points to what is generally perceived as a conservative interpretation of the Christian doctrine; it gives a lot of authority to the Bible and worships the trinity of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Manifest Christianity also refers to CM bands' bold and unashamed attitude of bringing these central points of belief to the fore despite the decreased general interest and respect towards them (cf. Bruce 2002). Like Walser argues, the Christian agenda is not enough for CM, but it is combined with the sounds, codes and means of *metal music*, including its "noisiness".

That Christians and rock music go together has been difficult to accept for many (especially older-generation) conservative Christians, despite the fact that evangelical Christianity in particular embraces contemporary channels through which to spread the gospel, including popular music. For example, Häger (2001) describes how some Christian writers have deemed rock music as incompatible with Christianity (see below) while others have accepted it as compatible with the Christian religion through the *incorporation* of some of its features within the symbolic universe of Christianity. This was the idea

around which CM was born, as shown in Stryper's case discussed above. (Interestingly, Häger (2000: 167) shows that Stryper was among the groups against which some of the harshest anti-rock criticism was targeted.)

While the mixing of rock with Christianity has caused a fierce debate among outsiders, the case is not completely different within the transnational CM scene, since not all scene members share a fixed and homogeneous understanding of the nature of CM. In his analysis of the discursive construction of the CM scene both in Finland and transnationally, Moberg (2009) points out that scene members have disparate views on how similar or how distinct the scene should remain from the secular metal scene. While many CM members see CM as a positive alternative to secular metal, drawing a clear boundary between the two, many others make it clear that they do not refrain from listening to secular metal either, except in the case of the most extreme and explicit anti-Christianity (Ibid.: 222–5, 253–8). These differences of opinion within the scene show that CM continues to negotiate its position among other music subcultures, worldviews and thought styles – in short, to further distinguish 'us Christian metallers' from 'them who do not share our ideology'.

A typical discourse strategy in Christian anti-rock discourse is *devaluing* ('devaluing'). In Häger's words (2001: 24, my translation):

Devaluing includes the condemnation of what is experienced as threatening by giving it an "inferior ontological status"... What is alien for one's own symbolic universe is defined as belonging to another, lower category. It is explained as completely different and not "real" at all – it does not belong to the orderly cosmos but to chaos.

The act of "condemnation of the threatening" brings to mind Said's (1978) description of the colonial construction of the 'East' as a subordinate 'place' for the 'West', its Other, where the Other was often a purposefully negative representation of an object. While the use of binary opposites (e.g. day/night) is a natural act of conceptualising reality, it may indeed also work as an ideological exercise of evaluation between One and the Other (for more recent uses of the term, see e.g. Coupland 1999, Duszak 2002, Shi-xu et al. 2005), such as Us/Them, white/black, and man/woman. The use of such binaries reflects a dualistic worldview based on dichotomies while also contributing to that kind of thinking (Häger

2000: 156, Hall 1997). It is in this way that difference is constructed in discourse, which makes it a concept open to critical review instead of merely accepting its prevalence in discourse as given. A questioning impetus of this kind unites the present paper to critical studies of discourse, many of which perceive othering as a key concern. However, while they have tended to focus on questions of age (e.g. Coupland and Ylänne-McEwen 2006), ethnicity (e.g. Pietikäinen 2003, Wodak 2008), and gender (e.g. Lassen 2009), religion, music and song lyrics have received less attention (but see Omoniyi 2006: 26–7; 2010; Paganoni 2006).

The practice of devaluing the Other is always carried out from a certain perspective or stance. The sociolinguistic approach on stance (Jaffe 2009a, Du Bois 2007) is neither a wholly unified theoretical project nor a simple one to make sense of in the network of intertwined, often interchangeable concepts. Du Bois' (2007) definition is generally considered an apt summary of what is meant by 'stance' in (socio-) linguistic literature:

stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field. (Ibid.: 163.)

Relatedly, Englebretson (2007: 15–20) describes stance research as covering questions of subjectivity, evaluation and interaction. From a sociolinguistic point of view, Jaffe (2009b) stresses the positionality involved in stancetaking. This paper addresses mainly evaluation (self and others), but positioning is, indeed, a key aspect of it, as Du Bois makes evident.

'Stance' is a useful venture exactly in that it offers common ground for researchers interested in the connections between linguistic instances and socio-cultural realities. Jaffe (ibid.: 3), for one, sees sociolinguists as having a lot to offer stance research as language users make "sociolinguistically inflected choices and display orientations to the sociolinguistic meanings" associated with certain linguistic forms. Bucholtz (2009: 165), secondly, sees stance as becoming "a critical mediating concept" in the study of "linguistic construction of social identity", which is the ultimate question this paper addresses. Along the lines set by Jaworski and Thurlow (2009), finally, stance and ideology are closely knit

in that stancetaking indexes ideological positioning and produces difference in texts. This view will be described in more detail in the next section.

Aims, Approach and Data

In CM lyrics, othering raises questions related to epistemology, interpersonality and morality. Drawing on concepts and methods provided by discourse studies and sociolinguistics (Blommaert 2005, Jaffe 2009, Jaworski and Thurlow 2009), the foci of analysing stance in this paper are thus three-fold: *epistemic stance* refers to the position one takes in relation to knowledge on a certain issue. Importantly here, epistemic stance is displayed through claims about having the 'right' versus 'wrong' knowledge. Epistemic stance is related to *interpersonal stance* in that taking a stance of being right, for example, strives to make One superior, wiser, better than the Other (who, in being "wrong", is devalued as inferior in such respects). Interpersonal stance is thus the attitude the author adopts towards other actors. *Moral stance*, finally, points to questions of what is perceived as good, desired and valuable, and what is seen as evil, undesired and worthless. Again, this is related to the interpersonal stance in that viewing something or someone as evil also elevates that viewer as morally superior to the object. An analysis of these three types of stances in CM lyrics will help to illustrate how difference is constructed between different subjects.

Du Bois' definition of stance discussed above suggests a triangular model of analysing stance. Put simply, this model focuses on the evaluation of an object, the positioning of subjects and the alignment between subjects (see Du Bois 2007: 163). However, while Du Bois stresses the dialogical nature of overt interaction between subjects, his model is not applicable as such for analysing the present data. This is not to dismiss the question of dialogicality in CM (which is, in fact, a fundamental one and needs more attention in future research) but to take better into consideration the specific nature of the song lyrics presented here: they are monologues by one author who on the one hand takes stance and on the other hand also attributes stance to others. Consequently, the analysis focuses on how the author evaluates the addressees and thereby positions him-/herself.

In analyzing the construction of difference between an elitist and non-elitist stance, Jaworski and Thurlow (2009) pay attention to thematic and lexico-grammatical features in the evaluation of objects (things, people, ideas, etc.). For example, they show how social distinction between elite and mass tourism is constructed in text with reference to ways of dressing on vacation (e.g. *thinking they might actually look chic in a batik*) and ways of photographing (e.g. mass tourists as not *really* seeing things but *just* snapshotting and returning to their coach). In many cases, readers are invited to co-construct the actual meaning of the author's implicit, understated, and hedged negative evaluations of mass tourists.

The present paper modifies Jaworski and Thurlow's approach in that it looks not only at the thematic and lexical, but also at deictic aspects of the data, while analysing stance in the terms described above, and discusses the ideological consequences of these linguistic and discursive choices. Thus, the research questions of this paper are:

- 1) *How are personal pronouns and binary opposites used to categorize different actors in CM lyrics?*
- 2) *What kinds of epistemic, interpersonal and moral stances are attributed to different actors and how is this achieved?*
- 3) *How do stance-taking and stance attribution contribute to the ideological construction of difference?*

Unlike the majority of sociolinguists of stance, I will not employ the term 'evaluation' in the analysis but follow Häger (2000) in using 'devaluing'. This is because evaluation in CM lyrics is essentially about *not* valuing what is different. (In fact, Jaworski and Thurlow (ibid.: 201) also report that, in their data, stance-taking builds on positive self-presentation and *negative* other-presentation.)

The data discussed in this paper come from an archive compiled for my doctoral project, consisting of roughly 90 written song lyrics by Finnish CM groups performing in English. Their language choice is by no means exceptional as a lot of Finnish secular metal also makes frequent use of English as the language of lyrics and official websites (whereas for live performances group members strongly rely on Finnish, their mother tongue, in the speeches they give between songs). CM lyrics form an especially good source of data to study stance and othering because they are at the core of what makes CM *Christian* metal

(cf. Moberg 2009: 125, 224). There is indeed a significant contrast between the lyrics of CM and the lyrics of other metal genres; for example, Harju (2001) demonstrates that black metal lyrics attack societal norms and Christian values in a way that is alien to CM. Conversely, while CM introduces evangelical contents into metal lyrics it also adds to Christian music the imagery of metal. In fact, a great amount of metal's imagery originates in the Judeo-Christian tradition but has annihilated it; CM works for the restoration of this imagery. (See also Luhr 2005.) In practice, terms that match with Christian values such as *God, light, heaven, true, and good* also find good currency in CM. By contrast, expressions such as *hell, darkness, rotting and death*, for example, that are of high value in metal lyrics generally, are devalued in the context of CM *yet* utilized to a great extent – and this, in addition to the musical dimension, is what makes the lyrics Christian *metal*.

The establishment of a national CM scene in Finland was most likely aided by the fact that secular metal music had already gained a strong foothold in the country by the turn of the millennium. During the recent years, CM has become increasingly popular in Finland, especially among young/young adult Christians. On a general level, Finnish CM remains a fairly distinct genre from secular metal, although individual group members cross the line. CM has not generally taken been very well known among Finns but has recently been acknowledged by secular metal media (e.g. Juntunen 2009, Silvast 2007). The increased interest in the scene shows in the increased professionalism among the artists and in the fact that (trans-)national record labels are more willing than before to publish CM music. Moreover, festivals, radio programs, and fanzines have been born around CM. Finally, since 2006, CM has been welcomed by the Lutheran State Church in the form of a specific mass (for its origins, see Metallimessun alkutekijät 2010). This does not, however, suggest that all CM members adhere to the State Church; instead, they come from various Protestant Christian backgrounds.

Analysis

In general, the ideological construction of difference takes place in CM lyrics through binary opposites and presuppositions. In many instances, it is the description of one that also produces the other; i.e. depictions of 'good' carry with them implications of 'evil', and

vice versa. As implied above, it seems that in CM, the practice of devaluing the Other is more common than explicit elevations of oneself. In many CM songs, moreover, it is the author, i.e. the narrating 'I', who continuously keeps the floor, rendering 'them' silent recipients who listen when the more powerful authority figure delivers his/her message. (For this reason, therefore, the author acts both as the one who takes stance as well as the one who attributes stance to others.)

In categorising people into different groups, CM lyrics typically resort to the pronouns *us* and *you/ them*. Below, I describe three thematic distinctions made between Us and Them in CM lyrics: 1) "we are right, they are wrong", 2) "we are going to heaven, they are going to hell", 3) "our God is better than your god". Of course, the distinction between these categories is by no means crystal-clear as the themes overlap in many songs, but this typology is helpful in describing the recurring main topics around which epistemic, interpersonal and moral stances are taken and attributed in the lyrics. The three themes do not go hand-in-hand with the three types of stance, although they correspond to each other in part. For example, the first theme of being right/wrong matches seamlessly with epistemic stance, but so does the second theme of heaven/hell as it also deals with *knowing* about these destinations. Moreover, interpersonal stance is strongly related to both epistemic and moral stances as it is embedded in them, which is why it is no use trying to analyse that as a separate theme. Thus, the three types of stance are analyzed under each thematic section to the extent relevant.

We are right, they are wrong

In this section, I show how the construction of difference between Us and Them in a CM song is achieved partly through the epistemic stance the author takes vis-à-vis the stance s/he attributes to his/her addressees. The parenthetical remark that follows each example points out the group's name, the title of the song, the album in which the song was first included, and the year of the album's publication.

(1) little do you, the children of darkness
know the authority of true Lord
you, who dare to rise against Him
God through the ages, Creator of all

think you've chosen your part
as enemies of my God

but the fallen nature of sin
makes every man His enemy

Lord our God, holy and righteous
cannot stand the filthy and impure
only chance to avoid His wrath
blood of Christ, for our sins

we do not fight against you
you are not our enemies

we're asking you to break through
deceiving darkness disease

foreseen the end of your journey
not understanding to be afraid
how pathetic that the sentenced
think they're marching towards victory

(Deuteronomium: DDD, *Here to Stay* 1999)

From the first line onwards, the extract from the song *DDD* very explicitly sets up a binary contrast between *me* and *you*, plus between *us* and *them*. In verse one, *Little do you... know* puts particular weight on the low level of the addressees' sophistication by foregrounding *little*. Verse two continues to belittle 'their' awareness in a similar vein in *think you... but*, where the use of the coordinator *but* gives the author a chance to show what s/he perceives as a better, correct understanding of things whereas 'they' have a wrong interpretation. A similar kind of practice is found in verse five, where the author claims to possess prophetic, *foreseen* knowledge about 'their' future. S/he also expresses that if they knew what awaited them, they would be afraid (which they now *do not understand*). The author deems the addressees to hold incorrect information about where 'they' are heading, as s/he deems it *pathetic that 'they' think* the way 'they' do. The author thus quite explicitly devalues 'them' as epistemically deficient.

In these lyrics, then, the author is constructed as the one who has the right knowledge and the addressees as those who do not. Devaluing the Other thus constructs an unequal relationship between the author and 'them'; 'they' are constructed as inferior in relation to what 'they' *know* about their future prospects. In general, verses two and five represent a moderate way of devaluing the Other in CM lyrics. Despite the offensive flavour they bear, there are CM lyrics which are even more out-spoken in devaluing the Other. For example, the fact that the author "foresees" 'their' future is a kind way of implying that 'they' themselves are blind to it. 'Blind' is, indeed, a term that is recurrently attributed to Them in many other CM lyrics, as is the term 'fool' – also only implied in verse five. However, devaluing the Other with such labels as 'blind' and 'foolish' is not only characteristic of CM discourse but germane to biblical discourse, too.

Despite the sharp distinction made between me (us) and you (them) in example (1), the author denies the existence of such a boundary in *we do not fight against you/ you are not our enemies* (v. 4). In other words, although the others are explicitly devalued, they are still invited to join the in-group of 'us' by abandoning their faith in their (wrong) god. This (perhaps) unpredicted shift in the interpersonal stance of the author could be interpreted as an attempt to construct 'us' as good Samaritans who are only after 'their' best in asking 'them' *to break through/ deceiving darkness disease* (v. 4). Similarly, in verse three, a passing of the binary distinction happens when the author uses the expression *our sins*, which brings along equality between Us and Them before 'Lord our God'. The author thus admits to also being – or, at least, having been, like *every man*, such an *enemy* (v. 2) of God; in other words, having had an incorrect epistemic stance him-/herself. What now differentiates the author from the addressees is that s/he now feels safe from God's anger because of having accepted the *blood of Christ, for our sins* (also v. 3), which also entitles him/her to epistemic superiority with the "right" kind of epistemic stance. However, the transgression of the binary fence might not be as surprising as it first seems: reaching out in this way accords with the traditional Christian teaching of loving one's neighbor (see e.g. Matthew 22: 39 in the Bible), as it does with the history of CM where bands became popularly known as "metal missionaries" (see e.g. Luhr 2005). In this respect, these verses can be interpreted as the author also taking the "right" kind of a moral stance for *Christian metal* – one that shows concern for other people's "wrong sort of" epistemic and spiritual stance.

In sum, the construction of epistemic difference in example (1) happens, on the one hand, through the author taking a stance of epistemic superiority, showing a higher level of knowledge and an ability to see what the others do not see, and, on the other hand, through the author's attribution of epistemic inferiority with a low level of knowledge and wisdom to Them.

Journeys to Heaven and Hell

As discussed above, the author in example (1) is portrayed as the one with a prophetic ability to see things (the right state of affairs, to the future, etc.). In many CM songs, part of this future vision includes the idea of there being definite endpoints for Us and Them,

respectively. Unlike in example (1) where the epistemic stance was manifestly enunciated, the examples studied in this thematic subsection are concerned with epistemic, interpersonal as well as with moral stances, with a particular focus on questions of after-life.

Example (1) withdraws from using exact names for the places people go after death and only implies the existence of these. The author takes 'their' fate as a frightening sentence and defeat in *not understanding to be afraid/ how pathetic that the sentenced/ think they're marching towards victory* (v. 5), while the implication is that a triumphant future awaits the author him-/herself (see the last thematic subsection). In the context of *Christian metal*, it is legitimate to take these destinations as corresponding to hell and heaven respectively, and these are the terms that many, if not all, CM lyrics employ. In example (1), the author's moral stance is that the former is evil while the latter is good. The same stance shows in examples two and three:

- (2) Why keep digging down deep into the pain
Walking among the living dead
Dwelling in the supremacy of sorrow
Corrosion of emotions
No escape when redemption is lost
Why decline eternal life
Repent
Or you'll find yourself swimming in the Lake of Fire

(Renascent: Corrosion of emotions, *Through Darkness* 2005)

Example (2) contrasts *eternal life* with *the Lake of Fire*, terms that in Christian discourse correspond to heaven and hell. The song also attaches *redemption* to heaven and claims that no such thing exists in hell from where there is *no escape*. The author wonders *why* his/her addressees should *decline eternal life*, which shows the author's moral stance on the issue: s/he favors heaven over hell. The negative view of hell is further strengthened by seeing it as beginning already in this world. The author does this at the beginning of this verse by describing life on earth as hell: life without spiritual remorse includes *pain, living dead, sorrow* and a *corrosion of emotions*. That the author presents him-/herself as one who knows that the addressee needs to *repent* positions the author as epistemically superior. Moreover, it positions the author as a moral and interpersonal superior who has the moral entitlement and interpersonal power to act as such a mediator of information. The

addressee, on the other hand, is positioned as heading for the bad place of hell with a downgraded moral stance.

In the following example, the author stands yet again higher up in the epistemic hierarchy than the addressee:

- (3) The armies of heaven and hell
are marching around you, can't you tell?
Will you pick up your sword, join the good fight?
Or will you be cast out by the evil might?
(---)
You have been invited to join the immortals
Now you can receive your second chance
New life within, you no longer feel thin
Your powerful ally can not be deceived

(Venia: *The Path, In Our Weakness* 2005)

In example (3), the author describes how heavenly and hellish troops are after the addressee, trying to make him/her join one of them. That it is the author who tells this to the addressee again positions the author as epistemically superior who, indeed, asks the addressee if s/he has not noticed the presence of the troops (*can't you tell?*). The author further prompts action from the addressee, either to take up arms for the good (*Will you pick up your sword, join the good fight?*) or to *be cast out by the evil*. The author's moral stance is clear in the way that s/he offers two contrasting identity categories for the addressee – a fighter or an outcast loser. These choices are not equal, however, because they are of different moral value to the author: picking up a sword and waging war for 'the good side' is worthy, while not doing so is not. In other words, if the addressee does not join (what the author deems as) good, s/he will be (according to the author) rightly cast out as morally deficient.

In the second part of example (3), the author continues the unequal list of binary opposites related to the different troops. S/he attaches various positive attributes to the good side of the battle to attract the addressee to join it, while also presupposing some negative characteristics on the evil side. These include: immortality/mortality; second chance/game over; new life/dry, "dead" life; and no longer thin/thin. It is now between all the good and all the evil that the author asks the addressee to take his/her epistemic

and moral stance, and s/he does this by taking an authoritative interpersonal stance towards the addressee.

The examples above have shown that CM lyrics construct a categorical picture of what happens after death: some go to heaven and the others to hell. In painting such a dichotomous future prospect, CM lyrics resemble religious/revivalist discourse as well as political rhetoric; for example, Dunmire (2005) has described how political discourse also strives to manifest a certain future vision to justify political decisions at present. In CM, the mutual exclusiveness of the two endpoints constructs for the author a dualistic thought style, as it does for Christian metallers more generally, too. Such a straightforward view might be interpreted here as Christian metallers' objection to the increasingly liberal Lutheran State Church in Finland, where many wish to expel thoughts of anyone going to hell (see e.g. Eskola 2006). Therefore, the lyrics can also be read as CM's wish to more clearly define the boundaries of 'Christianity', 'Christian faith', and 'Christian doctrine'. (Cf. Moberg 2009: 261-3, 278, 285.)

Some CM lyrics talk about heaven and hell as endpoints, whereas in some songs those places are seen as already beginning in the here and now of this world. In example (1), it seems at first that the former is the case as the author talks about *the end of your journey*, as if 'they' were on their way, indeed, marching, towards the end. However, the author continues by describing 'them' as *sentenced*, which suggests that 'they' are already condemned at the present. But again, as 'they' (according to the author incorrectly) expect a forthcoming *victory*, the implication is that there is something ahead, as well. Examples (2) and (3) also pointed towards other-worldly forces being present in this world already, as well as in the after-life. As regards the religio-cultural context, both kinds of thinking prevail within Christianity. Evangelical Christianity, for one, is known for celebrating the life-changing power of salvation which, for instance, aids one in fighting addictions. By contrast, Finnish pietism is a famous example of a movement that wishes to maintain uncertainty about whether one is saved into heaven or not, categorizing that as God's business. In this spirit, addictions such as smoking are a question of individual choice rather than a sign of spiritual growth.

In conclusion, CM lyrics also categorize actors on the basis of their postmortem address. Epistemic and moral superiority is constructed for those heading for heaven, which results in casting epistemic, moral, and interpersonal inferiority to those heading for hell. In this way, othering works as a powerful tool for constructing an ideologically loaded difference between different people.

Our God is better than your god

In this subsection, the focus is on how different divinities are distinguished from each other. As in the previous subsection, the stance at hand is not of one single type, but a mix of epistemic, interpersonal and moral stances.

Example (1), firstly, draws a sharp line between the *true Lord* and *darkness* (v. 1). In doing so, the lyrics also categorize the followers of these divinities into opposite groups. These opponents are referred to as *the sentenced* (v. 5) *children of darkness* (v. 1) who suffer from *deceiving darkness disease* [sic] (v. 4). 'Their' god is not specified by any other name but is implied by the word *darkness*. As regards the moral stance, the author thus perceives 'their' god as evil, which becomes even clearer when this *god* is compared to the author's good *God* with a capital 'G' - a feature which in itself subordinates other divine beings.

The author's object of respect is the eternal and creative God (v. 1-2) who has given *His life* for the author through the *blood of Christ* (v. 3). A further description of God is in verse three with *Lord our God, holy and righteous/ cannot stand the filthy and impure*. This positions the holy God of the author's in-group as honorable and honest - all good - in contrast with the immoral god of the unclean. The contrasting of the gods culminates towards the end of the song *DDD* (verse seven reproduced here individually):

- (4) my Lord gave His life for me
your lord is taking yours
my God took the victory
your god has lost the war

(Deuteronomium: DDD, *Here to Stay* 1999)

The simple structural variation between the elevation of *my Lord* and devaluation of *your lord* in example (4) captures the point of this analytical section: the different gods are made into each others' opposites in relation to giving/taking life and winning/losing a battle. As pointed out earlier, the followers of these gods are then also constructed as opponents to each other in the conflict between the gods. This is important from the perspective of interpersonal stance as different actors are constructed as each others' enemies (although the author ambiguously also denies that explicitly in example (1), verse four, as discussed in the first analytical section).

In the previous section, example (3) was shown to include many binary opposites related to heaven and hell. The song also makes a distinction between the different gods who reign in these two places. The song describes the author's heavenly God as a *powerful ally who can not be deceived*. Here, the presupposition is that the evil god who reigns "on the other side" is an enemy who is neither trustworthy nor influential. Comparison between the two gods continues in the following way in this song:

- (5) Wretches of evil and forces of dim
Can not break past the one that lives within
He never sleeps, never ceases to watch
Over His children to the close of the age

(Venia: The Path, *In Our Weakness* 2005)

The moral stance the author takes on *wretches of evil and forces of dim* is that they are evil while s/he views *the one that lives within* as more powerful and honorable. The evil god is constructed as a gloomy, unclear figure in contrast to the omnipresent good God who is constantly watching over *His children* (i.e. the good God is constructed as a good father also).

The descriptions in these lyrics of a spiritual rivalry between good and evil resonates with CM and metal lyrics more generally, too, in that they are shown to often make use of this lyrical theme (see e.g. Bossius 2003, Luhr 2005, Moberg 2009, Walser 1993). It also resonates with biblical accounts of warfare between God and Satan (see e.g. 2. Timothy 2: 3–4; see also Moberg 2009: 151–3). Considering the contrasting of divinities in the ideological context of *Christian* metal music, the characteristics of *Lord our God* fit the

characteristics of the Christians' God more generally in that they both use language that elevates their object of devotion. In a similar vein, the practice of devaluing 'their god' in these lyrics matches the view that (conservative) Christianity has of the Devil. In fact, the message of CM lyrics is that there is only one true divine being, *God*. This is the God of the Judeo-Christian Bible. From this follows that CM devalues other gods as false (thus the small initial), as "alien" to its symbolic universe. This represents an uncompromising view in today's world where nearly everything is subjected to the idea of relativism, according to which there is no such thing as a universal truth shared by all people on the earth. In such a world, religion has, popularly taken, become like a supermarket of beliefs where one can make up his/her own system of belief by putting pieces together from different thought styles. According to Percy (in Moberg 2009: 160), this even happens *within* Christianity where the charismatic movement has become for many Christians "a resource pool to dip into". Similarly, in spite of embracing a conservative Christian view of God, CM transforms the religious practice by dipping into the semiotic resource pool of metal by making use of its verbal, visual and musical dimension (Moberg *ibid.*).

Conclusion

The analysis in this paper has shown that categorization of actors into Us/Them, me/you, and God/god is a central feature in CM lyrics and that the difference between each of these pairs stems from the contrasted stances attributed to them. The in-group author in CM lyrics devalues the Other as inferior on epistemic – lacking in wisdom and knowledge, interpersonal – being of a lower rank that listens when the one with authority and power speaks, and moral – being evil – grounds. Thus, the CM stance, represented by the author, is constructed as that of superiority. Together, these two poles contribute to a dichotomous ideology that privileges One and devalues the Other. What this implies about the CM stance is that it is rather uncompromising and aggressive – an attitude that some call "turn or burn" (Moberg 2009: 134). The paper illustrates thus how stance analysis helps to understand the discursive construction of social, subcultural, and religious identities.

CM does not, of course, stand alone in being as categorical as the analysis has shown. On the one hand, CM draws on the codes of metal, which partly involves rebellious stance-taking. On the other hand, CM also remains loyal to religious discourse more generally, as well, and specifically to biblical discourse, for example in using 'blind' and 'foolish' to describe and devalue Them. The general cultural tendency in the 20th century West towards secularization has decreased the authority given to the Bible in many Christian congregations, and therefore a regular sermon in the increasingly liberal Finnish Lutheran church would most likely be objected by many if it made such a strong, categorical distinction between 'Us Christians' and 'Them non-Christians' as the CM lyrics analyzed in this paper do. However, secularization is not a uniform process leading to a total abandonment of Christianity but seems to give rise to such fused religious subcultures as CM.

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