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If Blink-182 went country
Genre convention and stylization in cover songs

Popular music singers often style shift by singing with linguistic features not present in their spoken variety, even when singing in their native language (Trudgill 1983; Simpson 1999). Sociolinguistic research into such performances has thus far focused on original work by artists (Gibson 2010). In this paper, we expand upon this research tradition by examining cover songs by Alex Melton, a popular YouTuber. Melton performs two kinds of cover songs on his channel: a) reworkings of pop-punk songs as country, and b) reworkings of non-pop-punk songs as pop-punk. Because he performs in two genres, an analysis of his performance is able to shed light both on the link between genre and specific linguistic features (cf. Duncan 2017) and on which linguistic features tend to be used for stylization more generally.

Melton uses the PRICE vowel stylistically in both genres. He nearly categorically uses a monophthongal PRICE in his country performance (cf. Duncan 2017). In contrast, he favors a diphthongal vowel in his pop-punk performance, including variable use of an extremely backed variant (in some respects, but not all, an overt imitation of Blink-182). In addition, Melton uses features of the Southern Vowel Shift in his country performance and features of the California Vowel Shift in his pop-punk work. Country performances may involve lexical replacement of lyrics while pop-punk performances never do. This latter observation suggests that the stylization involved in covering another's work is a complex creative practice rather than simply conforming to the conventions of a particular genre.

References

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