


Exploring Language Attitudes through Street Art

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ARTICLE INFO	Abstract
<p>Keywords: <i>Street Art, Language Attitudes, Ideologies, Multimodal Discourse.</i></p> <p>©2025 Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International</p> 	<p><i>The study was carried out to explore language attitudes through street art. More insights into language attitudes and their representation in street art were provided. The awareness of the role of street art in shaping language attitudes and ideologies was also carried out in the study. Multimodal discourse was adopted to analyze street art images. Language use and attitudes were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Street art images in some popular streets in Awka urban areas were explored. The study revealed how street art reflects and challenges language ideologies and can be used as a powerful tool for language activism and social change. To maintain language revitalization and promotion of linguistic diversity, consistent and meaningful use of street art as a powerful tool for social change and means of information dissemination should be encouraged in our various institutions and society. This study can contribute to a deeper understanding of language attitudes and their representation in street art, highlighting the complex relationships between language, culture, and power.</i></p>

Introduction

Graffiti as marker for language identity and multilingualism language can be expressed in both oral and written form and can be both public and private. Gade (2003), when written language is used in the public domain, its objective is to alert, promote, or proclaim. One example of urban scriptural language is graffiti. “Graffiti is ubiquitous feature of the urban language commonly perceived to be a symptom of disorder, deprivation and violence”. The nature of graffiti is that it is illegal “unabashed self-expression” that gives normally marginalized members of the community a voice (Jeffrey 2016).

What is street art? Street art is a unique sort of outdoor art that, as the name suggests, is found on the streets. Many did not identify this artwork as art, and often associate it with vandalism. It’s fair to say that some street art is legally viewed as vandalism, but that does not answer the question on whether it can also be art. Street art encompasses a variety of works such as graffiti art, sticker art, stencil graffiti, street poster art, urban knitting and wheat pasting, to name a few Grody (2007).

It is the association with graffiti and tagging in particular that makes it difficult for some people to define street art as a visual art form. (Eden Gallery). Street art can also involve murals, sculptures or other form of public artwork. Street art is designed to be seen by the public, often in urban environment. One of the main purposes of street art is that is allows anyone and everyone freedom of expression and creativity. Through street art, anyone can convey his ideas, express their feelings, and connect to everyday people through art.

Konstantinos and Myrto (2016) distinguished street art based on these characteristics below;

- Intent; Street art, like a mural commissioned by a city to brighten up a drab area, aims to enhance the environment.
- Social standing; street art is increasingly accepted and even celebrated, with many cities having designated areas for it or commissioning artists for public projects.
- Execution; street art often involves a high level of skill and detail, with artists using various techniques like stencils, stickers, or yarn bombing to create large-scale pieces.

-Image based; the elaborate imagery of street art is often what makes it more appreciable in the eyes of businesses and community organization and their images are legally commissioned artistic expression.

-Street artists are often well known artists commissioned to design and produce something the public will appreciate.

Elder (2016), street artists like to be known for their work and sign their own names to gain recognition. The street arts are looked on as more cultured and a form of artistic expression.

Research Questions

1. How do street artists use language to convey messages and attitudes?
2. What language attitudes are reflected in street art, and how do they relate to broader social contexts?
3. How does street art challenge or reinforce dominant language ideologies?

Method

In this study, purposive sampling technique was used to select art pieces from Awka city, which is the capital of Anambra state, located within the Awka south local government area (LGA) of 6.21N and longitude 7.07E. Awka has an estimated population of 301,657. (Wikipedia). Qualitative and Multimodal were survey designs used for exploring naturally the language attitudes and images on the street of Awka city. Pictures of art pieces; sculptures, murals, flexes, banners were taken and documented for analysis.

The researcher utilized various ways in analyzing the street artists' use of language to communicate.

-Visual Language:

- Imagery; street artists use images, symbols, and icons to represent concepts, ideas and emotions. For example, a dove might symbolize peace, while a clenched fist could represent resistance. (Davis 2008).
- Typography; the style, size, and placement of text are crucial. Artists might use bold, eye catching fonts to emphasize a message, or employ a more stylized, almost illegible font to convey a sense of rebellion or illegitimacy (Illiana, 2022).
- Colour and Composition; colour palettes and the arrangement of elements on the support can evoke specific moods and attitudes. Bright colours might suggest optimism and excitement, while darker tones could suggest sadness or unease (Illiana, 2022).

-Verbal Language:

- Slogans and Phrases; Street artists frequently use short, memorable phrases or slogans that capture their message in a concise and impactful way (Gastman, 2006).
- Written text; more elaborate texts can be used to explain complete ideas, offer commentary on social issues, or share personal narratives (Gastman, 2006).
- Language Play; Artists might use wordplay, puns, or even misspellings to create visual puns or engage in a subversive critique of standard language.

- Combining Visual and Verbal:

- Integrating text into imagery; Artists often combine text directly with their imagery, creating a seamless and verbal message (Gastman, 2006).

- Thematic content: (Grody, 2007).

- Social Commentary; street art frequently addresses social and political issues, using language to critique power structures, challenge norms and raise awareness about injustices.

- Personal Expression: some artists use street art as a means of self expression, sharing personal stories, emotions and experiences with the public.
- Subversive Language; street artists often employ language that can challenge or undermines established systems of communication, creating a sense counter-culture and subversion.

Analysis of some captured street arts using multimodal discourse

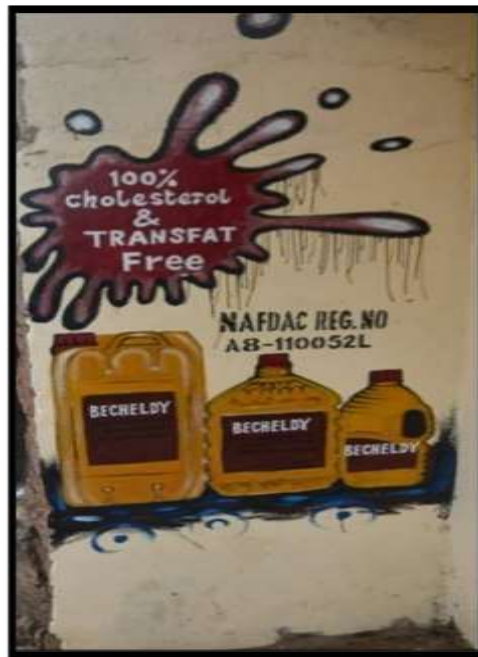


Plate 1: Becheldy

This picture was taken at Ezeudu Street, Awka. The artist used this piece to interact with the audience who cook with vegetable oil and disseminate information about Becheldy oil. Typographic analysis of (Plate No1); the street artist employed simple bold, eye-catching fonts to emphasize his message for easy interaction with the myopic and hyperopic audiences. Philosophical Analysis of the Imagery; the composition showcased icons of different sizes of cans of becheldy oil which conveys the message that the oil is affordable for all. The use of three different sizes of cans simply signify the three classes of income earners in our society, high, middle and the low. Either one can afford the biggest can of the oil or medium size, or go for the smallest can of becheldy oil.

Combination of Verbal and Visual Languages; the artist properly arranged the cans and text on those cans of oil in the piece picture statically. The audiences who are not educated also interacted with art through the icons of those cans of oil in the piece.

The picture in Plate 2 was taken at Kwata junction flyover in Awka city. The wall of the flyover featured the portrait of Anambra state governor and other visual elements. The general public was targeted for creative interaction through the visual language used by the street artist; the governor's portrait was fixedly painted while other features were dynamically rendered.

Philosophical analysis; the street artist used that piece to interact visually with the public presenting Prof. Soludo as the present governor and chief in charge of Anambra state. The wall painting at the flyover completely changed the visual aesthetic of that area. A location of concrete grey buildings is transformed with colour and light with the addition of art. Those beautiful features on the wall help to reduce dull, dirty environment instead of feeling irritated, the colours spark feeling of excitement to the audience. The piece lack linguistic elements



Plate 2: Wall Painting at Kwata Junction Flyover



Plate 3: Bet9ja.

The above picture bet9ja was snapped at Ziks Avenue, Awka. The street artist used linguistic elements only in executing this piece. The artist targeted the youths which led in coining two different words “Bet” and “Nigeria” as “bet9ja” a popular slogan Nigerian youths use in their daily interaction. The bet9ja is used as an advertising display to the potential customers. The artist employed more of linguistic elements and a football icon which is symbolically rendered as a dot on top of letter “j”.

Philosophical Analysis; the coined word “bet9ja” is derived from the pronunciation sound of our country Nigeria, has the same sound with the short form of Nigeria, “Niger”. The artist used this short slogan to capture the message in a concise and impactful way to the targeted audience which is our youths who are always seen in such offices/stores where the prediction of which football club wins usually takes place. Older audience may find it difficult interacting with the piece considering the linguistic elements the artist used in his creative approach. The incorporation of the elaborate, concise large fonts in disseminating the message made it to be more accessible and eye-catching. An icon of football employed in the picture signifies the prediction of the European football clubs by the youths; the predictors bet who wins with some money and the accurate predictor wins and goes home with some huge amount of money.



Plate 4: Two Statues.

The picture in Plate 4 was captured at the front of Federal Government Technical and Science College, situated along Ziks Avenue in Awka. The sculptural statues were mounted right in front of the school accompanied with other visual elements. No trace of linguistic element featured in the art piece. The street artist targeted the students, and parents whose children are still at secondary school ages.

Philosophical Analysis: The piece is positioned at a strategic place that can easily capture attention of the passersby either by car or foot. The college is a mixed school which the artist represented with two figures signifying a female student and a male student, the blacksmith tools incorporated symbolically mean that the school equips students with skills that will graft them into becoming technocrats. The roped pot signifies the famous icon that is attached to south eastern art culled from Igbo Isaiah archeological findings at Igboukwu which simply portrayed the geographical zone the school is situated.



Plate 5: Nursery/Primary School Wall Painting.

The picture in plate No 5 was snapped at Udeke Street in Awka city. The wall painting was executed on the wall of Tender Touch Nursery/Primary School, Awka. The street artist combined visual and linguistic elements to express his creative concept. The artist incorporated Mickey Mouse holding balloons that had alphabets A-Z boldly written on each of the balloons.

Philosophical Analysis; Culturally, the painting in Plate No 5 is usually done on the walls of schools specifically for nursery/primary school buildings. The concept of Mickey Mouse used in this painting in Plate 5 indicates that the artist targeted audience is children of nursery/primary school ages who can easily interact with the visual elements employed in the art work. The artist visual language is culled from the famous cartoons children of that age watch on television which makes it easier for their interaction with the piece.

Conclusion/Recommendation

The study confirms that street art is an effective tool for information dissemination and language activism. The integration of street images in our communication has not only aligned with the contemporary practices of skilled artists showcasing their ingenuity on every corners of our environment. Through a comprehensive analysis, several valuable key insights have been provided into language attitudes through street images. Street arts were underscored as crucial component in today's public communication through verbal and visual languages. There is need for continuous street art exploration. It is pertinent therefore to, not only encourage street artists whose creative ingenuity improves our environmental aesthetic.

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