

A PRAGMA-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF VEHICLE INSCRIPTIONS IN NIAMEY

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Abstract

Notwithstanding the fact that vehicle inscriptions are gaining prominence in our contemporary times as medium of communication, becoming a very peculiar way people in urban societies use language to communicate, the phenomenon is still uncommon in Niger. In this regard, the research investigates the meaning that inscriptions on vehicles convey, the language use, themes, and the communicative import as well as the overall effects of these inscriptions on the behaviour of the target population. To this end, data were collected based on observation and structured interview. Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis approach, and Ogbulogo's (2005) Usage Theory of Meaning were adopted to account for the data thematically and (socio)linguistically. Data were analysed based on the concept of presupposition and inference.

Findings depicted the inscriptions on the vehicles under study are in French despite the low levels of literacy of both the writers and decoders in the so mentioned (official) language. Moreover, our study also portrayed the use of vehicle inscriptions to give insights in how people use language to serve their communication purposes regardless of the sociocultural and linguistic context of situations. Further, analysis showed that the usage of pictures appears to improve the expressivity/ understanding and smooths transmission of messages on vehicles. Furthermore, vehicle inscriptions were found to becoming slowly but steady an excellent communicative tool, a valuable, persuasive medium of communication to spur people to action within socio-cultural context.

Keywords: *vehicle inscriptions, language use, thematic analysis, pragma-semantic, presupposition and inference, semiotics*

Résumé

En dépit du fait qu'ils gagnent en notoriété, et très usités dans les sociétés contemporaines les messages via les véhicules de transport devenus aujourd'hui un moyen de communication très particulier, se révèlent un phénomène rarissime au Niger. Aussi, cette étude a pour but d'analyser les messages transmis via ce canal dans leur teneur en termes de communication, l'utilisation faite de la langue, aussi bien que l'impact sur la population cible. Pour ce faire, observation and interview ont servi d'instruments de collecte de données. Les approches prônées par Braun and Clarke (2006) et Ogbulogo (2005) nous ont servi de cadre théorique. Pour l'analyse socio pragmatique, les notions de présupposition et inférence ont été utilisées. Pour résultat, les messages sont formulés en Français en dépit du faible taux d'alphabétisation du public cible. Les des résultats ont par ailleurs présenté les images accompagnant la majorité des textes d'un

apport dans l'interprétation et la compréhension des messages. En outre, ce moyen de communication est en train de gagner du terrain, lentement mais sûrement. Enfin c'est un moyen utilisé à but d'interaction sociale dans la perspective d'impacter sur la décision de l'autre.

Introduction

Man's primary means of communication that a society cannot do without, language is "one indispensable vehicle that helps man to achieve effective communication, as it mirrors the mind in deep and significant ways" Akmajian et al., (2012:11). Hence, Man utilises language in various forms, in varied context of situations to communicate his experiences, feelings, ideologies, among others, for various reasons which may include to educate, persuade, manipulate others, etc. Mgbemena (2013:529). The oil that lubricates activities within any human society "communication is an event. It is an act involving persons, instruments, symbols, and abstraction. It is an event between persons with psychological background and purposefulness" Mukalel (2011:29).

While the internet, mobile phone, and the print media (though involving a substantial amount of money) are the commonly known means of communication, in recent times however, the advent of vehicles as a means of transportation has served as a springboard where owners and drivers of mostly commercial vehicles (...) seek to express their beliefs and experiences on their vehicles Asangba and Agoswin (2015:1128). As they put it "in as much as vehicles serve as a medium of transportation, they also serve an important function as vehicles for communicating or expressing knowledge, interests, attitudes, opinions, feelings and ideas". (1126)

As a matter of fact, nowadays, inscriptions on automobiles reveal an interesting and important means of social communication through language in contemporary urban societies. Besides, Nwagbara (2008:2) sees vehicle inscriptions to refer to 'written texts, drawings, images, messages, paintings, and photographs, among others, which are inscribed on the panel of vehicles'; the uses of which have assumed a significant and global phenomenon.

While in Nigeria (Mgbemena, 2013; Olusegun et al., 2019; Faniran, 2019), Ghana (Asangba & Agoswin, 2015; Date-Bah, 1980); Egypt (El-Nashar & Nayef, 2016); Kuwait (Abdulmohsen, 2017); Jordan (Ibrahim & Rafat, 2019), it is common to find inscriptions on different parts of all

kinds of vehicles particularly commercial, it is uncommon in Niger to come across vehicles bedecked with an array of inscriptions. Hence, in contemporary Niger, inscriptions on the body of vehicles appear to be an interesting form of communication, worth exploring that calls for scholarly attention for, vehicle writings are somehow strikingly 'usually cryptic and enigmatic' in such a way that their meanings may not appear decipherable and interpretable to casual readers or those who lack semantic competencies Ademowo & Balogun (2014, quoting Fasiku, 2006)

This is, "meaning is to be constructed in a manner that is socially acceptable" (Oyeleye, 2004:74), because the expressions are likely to contain real life issues and facts. Else, "There is a social and contextual dimension to every naturally occurring use of language and it is always the social factors that determine the choice and form of what is written or said or understood" as supposed by Schmitt (2010:150) To this end, this study seeks to explore the themes of such inscriptions and sort out the rationale behind the used expressions, the choice of language mainly the intended messages sought to be conveyed, how do users decipher meaning as well as the possible effect on their behaviour.

The study draws on the Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic analysis approach and Ogbulogo's (2005) Usage Theory of Meaning to account for the thematic and functions that these inscriptions on vehicles achieve in the varying contexts. However, to the best knowledge of the researcher, in Niger, studies to investigate such a sociolinguistic phenomenon have not been academically addressed. The present analysis, it is hoped may offer a valued source of data to the field and bridge the research gap left open.

The Concept of Graffiti VS Inscriptions and Other Insignia

Scholars hold different attitudes and view graffiti from different angles. Linguists like Gross et al (1997); Mwangi (2012) view graffiti as a "linguistic phenomenon" that involves both "form and content and uses discourse to mean something other than itself. Overall, graffiti serve as means of communication that infer a message and offer the chance to others to respond or stimulate them to take an action Alhafeez (2021:540). Moreover, scholars from diverse disciplines use a variety of terms to refer to this phenomenon: Bumper stickers, vehicle stickers,

Bumper truck graffiti, car written manuscripts or vehicles inscriptions, lettering, slogans, pictorial exhibition among others. However, they all end up by researching into the language used on vehicles Abdulmohsen (2017).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher has opted for the term of vehicles inscriptions instead of graffiti or stickers or any other insignia because none of the above-mentioned terms has yet gained popularity in the Nigerian context.

Semantics

In its simplest definition, Semantics is the study of meaning which definition suggests that meaning is paramount to any form of communication whether written or spoken, and that is why it not surprising many linguists put forward the proposition that every language is expected to communicate meaning to an individual, an audience or members of a particular speech community Paul *et al.* (2019:221). As to Goddard (2011:1) Semantics, “stands at the centre of the linguistic quest to understand the nature of language and human language abilities”; this is, because the meanings of words and sentences and other forms of linguistic expressions cannot be studied or examined independently from real life situations as they occur in everyday speech because real life speech provides the raw data for semantics Paul *et al.* (ibid:222).

In fact, as Saeed (2003:7) posits: “theories differ on the details of the relationship between semantics and other levels of analysis like syntax and morphology, but all seem to agree that linguistic analysis is incomplete without semantics”.

Semiotics

Semiotics is a way of analysing meanings by looking at the signs (like words, pictures, symbols etc.) which communicate meaning. (Bignell, 2002:1-3). It is the study of signs and signifying practices where ‘Signifying practices simply refer to how, rather than what, meaning is produced’ (Potts, 1996). A sign can be defined, principally, as any entity (words, images, objects.) that refers to something else. Semiotics studies how these referring results from previously established social convention (Eco, 1976). Besides, Scholars such as Ferdinand de Saussure (1974 cited

in Saeed 2003:5) have posited that “the study of meaning is a part of this general study (significance n) of the use of sign, system and this general study is called semiotics”. Hence, to use de Saussure’s terminology, the concern of semiotics is to investigate the relationship between a signifier and its signified or, else, between the sign and the object it represents.

Pragmatics

Scholars have defined pragmatics variously. According to Ogbulogo (2005), pragmatics is concerned with the pairing of sentences with their appropriate contexts. Mey (2001) echoed this viewpoint and examines Pragmatics in relation to social context and stipulates that Pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the condition of the society. Kempson (1986), on his part, describes pragmatics as the study of the general cognitive principles involved in the retrieval of information from an utterance. While Leech (1983) saw pragmatics as “the study of meaning in relation to speech situations” Wales (1989: 386) considered it basically as the “study of language use”. According to the new lexicon Webster's encyclopedia dictionary of the English language (1993: 197), pragmatics is “the science of relationship between symbols, their interpretation and, users”. Yule (1996:127) describes Pragmatics as the study of invisible meaning and that interlocutor must depend on shared assumptions and expectations which should provide some insights into how more gets communicated than said. Here, emphasis is on implicature. In the same vein, Adegbija (1999) posited that: “pragmatics takes cognizance from the message being communicated and the speech act being performed, the participants involved, their interpretation, knowledge of the world and the impacts of these on their interaction, what they have taken for granted as a part of the context (or the presuppositions), the deductions they make on the basis of the context, what is implied by what is said or left unsaid, the impacts of the non-verbal aspects of interaction on meaning”.

Other stances include that of Yule (1996:1) who further posited that pragmatics is “concerned with the study of meaning communicated by the speaker, (or writer) and interpreted by listener (or hearer)” in this he makes the users pivotal to the context(social) or situation in which the communication takes place; we also go along with Mey (2001: 6) who ‘believes that a genuine pragmatic account has to deal with the language

users in their social context; it cannot confine itself to those grammatically encoded aspects of context'(p.6).

Semantic Presupposition and Pragmatic Presupposition

Presupposition is the piece of information which the speaker assumes that the listener already knows which also means that the speaker and the listener share a certain form of background information thus whatever interpretation given to the speaker's utterance by the listener, it is based on the assumed shared background (Ogbulogo, 2005: 34-35). Furthermore, Mey (2001:184) makes a distinction between semantic and pragmatic presupposition as follows: «The notion of presupposition was originally developed in a semantic environment; as such, it does not hold up to our pragmatic expectations. For one thing, semantic presuppositions deal with truth or falsity: they are defined as holding (that is being true), even if the sentence containing the presupposition is false». One may, from the statement above, come to deduce that semantic presupposition is based on truth condition whereas a pragmatic one is not.

For a better linguistic analysis of the content of the inscriptions on vehicles a combination of the core assumptions of both Semantic and pragmatic presuppositions is seen very apposite while a context, both pragmatic and semiotic will be central to this investigation.

1. Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts insights from different models beginning with Braun and Clarke's (2006, p.6) Thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data". The Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative method used to analyse data. It is appropriate and beneficial when the researcher aims to examine the data to determine common themes and thoughts from more than one participant so as to gain a clear logical understanding of the participants' thoughts and experiences Crawford *et al.* (2008). Qualitative research also enables the researcher to study "things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln,1994; Mugenda &

Mugenda 2003) as meaning is dynamically created in the course of employing language Verschueren (1999: 11).

Another relevant model for the study is the Usage Theory of Meaning and Inference, a context dependent theory advocated by Ogbulogo (2005): “The Usage Theory of Meaning is also known as Contextual or Operational Theory of Meaning.... According to the theory, the meaning of an expression is determined by the context of its use. It is the effect created by a linguistic unit within a given context that expresses its full meaning”. (p27)

Furthermore, Leech (1983:7) states that meaning should be observed from both a semantic and pragmatic perspective and not independently. Thus, to analyse vehicle inscriptions in the Nigerien context, arguing in the same line as Paul *et al*es (2019) we opt for the pragma-semantic relationship in which the study of pragmatics and semantics are woven together. In the same vein, as inscriptions on vehicles are mostly accompanied by signs that serve to foreground the message conveyed a complementary context dependent approach is also adopted represented as Semiotics, Bignell (2002:1-3) described as “a way of analysing meanings by looking at the signs (like words, pictures, symbols etc.) which communicate meaning” and Potts (1996) views as “the study of signs and signifying practices where ‘Signifying practices simply refer to how, rather than what, meaning is produced’.

2. Method of Data Collection and Analysis

2.1. Data Collection and Procedure

In Niger, vehicle inscriptions take two main forms: Pictorial and written. For the purpose of this study, the researcher considers the two forms. Vehicles under investigation are intra- and inter-city vehicles serving as privately-owned means of public transportations. There are 10200 taxis, 700 Faba-Faba (12-seater buses that operate intra city), and 14 highway buses. It is worth noting that none of the 10200 taxis, 700 Faba-Faba in addition to 3 of the highway buses carry inscriptions on their body. Hence, the purview of this study is confined to the messages constructed and inscribed on a total of 11 vehicles(buses) for commercial purpose from the Niamey governorate where they are established and from where they are found to ply the length and breadth of the country on a daily basis to facilitate the mobility of material and human resources. We

decide to limit to Niamey as it constitutes the melting-pot for intra- and inter-city vehicles that transport these inscriptions. The researcher selected all the eleven buses and cars because it is a small population. Data were collected based on observation and experience. The study also employed structured interviews to derive information from writers about their purposes of communication on vehicles. The samples messages were gathered from inscriptions on buses written at the front, at the back and on each side of the vehicles.

2.2. Data Presentation and Analysis

Though inscriptions are not common in Niger, owners of particularly commercial vehicles like buses are seen to verbalise their thoughts and philosophies, beliefs and experiences, ideologies on the bodies of vehicles with a view to achieve their purpose.

The thematic analysis to account for the different themes revealed strong positive inclination on the themes of identity and philosophical expressions including pride in self and esteem with messages mostly revolving around the subthemes of contentment, motivation, experience, hope which in most cases reveal the experience, thoughts and worldviews of the owners, personal philosophies, and their source of inspirations as well as aspirations.

Our data depicted one noticeable (external) factor as evinced by the connectedness of the inscriptions to the physical conditions of the vehicles on which they are written. As a matter of fact, owners of new and, or beautiful vehicles tend to put inscriptions which seek to draw attention to the aesthetic properties of their vehicle; that is the case with: “l'Élegance du voyage” (Salim) while others point to performance in terms of engine capacity, sturdy vehicles as in the case of, “Le Roi de la route” (RIMBO); still others point to the modernity of their buses, “Une Nouvelle Façon de Voyager” (STM Ténéré) and “Voyager Autrement” (Al'izza), etc. To argue in the same line as Asangba Taluah and Agoswin Musah (2015) therefore, it can be assumed that the prevailing structural features of the vehicle determine the kind of inscription it gets in such a way owners of these vehicles thereby promote their businesses with their respective strong points.

Findings revealed inscriptions on vehicles to come in forms of short catchy names made of acronyms RIMBO, STM, SONEF, SALIM; abbreviations: Sonitrav, ATV and lexicals: Nijma, Al'izza, Azawad etc.

For effective communication they are all written in bold at the front and the back and on each side of the vehicle as particular attention getters to serve the purpose of self identification as vehicles are almost always in motion. Then inscriptions come in form of thought-provoking clauses written mostly on each side of the vehicle to make the messages readily visible. These forms are also found to be written (though in some cases) at the front and or the back as well.

This brings us to the core of this paper; the pragma semantic analysis of these inscriptions, the functions they achieve, the impacts of the non-verbal aspects of interaction on meaning and the probable impact on the target population.

Therefore, this section presents the results obtained from the analysis of the data used for our study where the content of each inscription and joint picture is analysed based on presupposition (“the assumption a speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge” Osisanwo (2003)) and inference (“the general notion used to describe the process which the reader (hearer) must go through to get the literal meaning of what is written (or said) to what the writer (speaker) is intended to convey” Brown and Yule (1998)).

Inscription1: SONEF, *voyager dans le confort optimal. Le Plaisir de Voyager* (Theme: Business / Leisure)

Presupposition:

The inscription together with the accompanying picture seems to suggest that travelling and leisure go hand in hand. Travel should likely be all fun and games and this is a typical example of factive presupposition. Hence, there is a strong emphasis on leisure, comfort, and responsibility.

Inference:

The inscription, it seems, suggests travelling to be an excursion worth experiencing. Hence, it can also be imagined that the accompanying picture (a camel) is not there for only the aesthetic but also as value added that points not only to the beauty but also to performance and duties in terms of driving habits and does also appeal to the discerning minds to change their mode of travelling.

Inscription2: RIMBO, *le Roi de la route.* (Theme: Business / Self identity / Pride)

Presupposition:

The content of the inscription portrays the psychological state of mind of the speaker. Based on the factive presupposition, a sentiment of power, self-confidence, pride, making the exception is alluded to by the context of this inscription. It is an expression of self esteem, priding oneself. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis to performance, in terms of engine capacity, driving habits, on experience, duties, and time conscious all of which can be deduced from the inscription in question and the subsequent accompanying picture. The owners of these vehicles thereby promote their businesses with their respective above-mentioned strong points.

Inference:

The message conveyed by this inscription and the picture (lion), it can be deduced, is security, comfort, and reliability. The underlying meaning, however, is that it corroborates Epstein (1998) quest for identity (...) where the need to be someone is greater, and popularity among peers is fundamental. This expression together with the picture tells the public that they are a group of serious people who do not joke or play with their business and can meet with a client's timing.

Inscription3: *AZAWAD, le voyage par Vocation.*

(Theme: Business/Vocation/ Commitment)

Presupposition:

The content of the inscription conveys a sense of vocation/commitment, as a precondition toward one's business, hence, a sense of responsibility, duty, and work. The underlying principle behind this thematic preoccupation is that patience, resilience is also a necessary ingredient needed to confront and overcome difficulties staring people in the face when running travel business.

Inference:

The words on the inscription seem to suggest that vocation. is a requisite to be part of the business. It also promotes the concept of time minded attitude easily identified through the accompanying picture (antelope known to be swift and constantly on move) showing the swiftness with which they can drive to meet with, among others, a client's timing and can beat deadlines in their work.

Inscription4: *AFRICA ASSALAM, le Messager de la Paix.*

(Theme: Peace/Patience/Security)

Presupposition:

The intended message seems to draw the attention of the reader to one of the fundamentals of human beings in general that is peace. Hence, security and piece as a common human need is emphasised. In the same way, it also means to convey the sense of hope, the virtue of patience, the philosophy of resilience and endurance.

Inference:

It can be inferred from the inscription and subsequently from the picture (dove symbol of peace and hope) that other thematic preoccupation being promoted seem to be patience, confidence, and security, but also wishing to meet with a client's timing safely. The concept of wisdom, hope is stressed and conveyed by the content of the inscription. Other likely deduction to be made is a generally held belief that there is no other easy way to enduring success than through exceeding resilience, patience and hope before one can achieve success.

Inscription 5: *STM TENERE, Une Nouvelle Façon de Voyager.*

(Theme: Business / Pride)

Presupposition

The content of the inscription seems to suggest a break with the tradition in the world of transportation/travelling, that the latter is contemporarily something worth experiencing with STM Tenere. Other thing, the inscription seems to persuade even to force the reader to carry out certain actions.

Inference

It can be inferred from the content of the inscription that the concept of innovation, comfort, security, and reliability are highlighted. A likely deduction to be made from this inscription seems to be a radical departure from the usual way of travelling. It also can be inferred the owners to pride themselves as being innovative and adapt to modernity. Moreover, the underlying message is that it appeals implicitly to “the discerning minds to change their mode of travelling. In other words, the purpose of the writings is to impact positively on the minds of the readers by giving them a sense of direction on how to experience a decent and meaningful trip”.

Inscription 6: *3SVT, le Voyage Parfait.*

(Theme: Business)

Presupposition:

Presupposition here, is both factive and non-factive as there may be circumstances where the presupposition is true; it is true view from the

assertion ‘practice makes perfect’ but if we consider the saying that ‘Only God is perfect’ then it can be said to be a non-factive presupposition and therefore untrue.

Inference:

The content of the inscription portrays the psychological state of mind of the speaker, and it seems, calls for reliability. The underlying message goes in line with the saying stipulating that ‘practice makes perfect’ in the sense of experience, performance, and responsibilities. As a matter of fact, this expression calls for sober reflection and consideration.

Inscription7: NIJIMA, *l'Etoile du Transport au Niger*.

(Theme: Business/ Personal identification)

Presupposition:

Everyone can run a business base on a factive presupposition. The content inscription can be factive and non-factive. The message conveyed seems to describe the company as a reference. Based on the factive presupposition, a sentiment of self-identity, pride is alluded to by the context of this inscription.

Inference:

The content of the inscription like the ones in 6, portrays the psychological state of mind of the speaker. What can be inferred from this is a kind of priding oneself. Both the inscription and the picture (a star) may thus seek to draw attention to the aesthetic properties of the vehicle expressing thereby their source of inspirations as well as aspirations.

Inscription8: SONITRAV, *le Transporteur du 3e Millénaire*.

(Theme: Self-identity / Professionalism)

Presupposition:

Based on the factive presupposition, a sentiment of self-confidence, pride, hard work, exception is alluded to by the context of this inscription. It seems to admonish their reader to cultivate the spirit of hard-work if they want to be part of the moving world and to attain the desired height of greatness hereby verbalising the fundamental doctrine of hard-work.

Inference:

The content of the inscription, like inscription2, has similar interpretation and implication in the sense it corroborates Epstein (1998) quest for identity (...) where the need to be someone is greater, and popularity among peers is fundamental. This expression together with the picture (a horse) seem to suggest that they reached height of greatness

in the business. The underlying message is that it appeals implicitly to “the discerning minds to modify their means of travelling. In other words, “the purpose of the writings is to impact positively on the minds of the readers giving them a sense of direction on how to experience meaningful trip that cope with the modern world.

Inscription9: *SALIM, l'Élégance du Voyage.*

(Theme: Business/Beauty / Luxury)

Presupposition:

The inscription, it can be deduced, is anchored on the principle of the beauty. It seems to suggest that travelling and beauty, comfort, luxury go together. Hence, there is a strong emphasis on pleasure. The message conveyed is also to spur readers into action.

Inference:

Leisure is strongly alluded to, and as such it admonishes one to travel with the proposed travel “scheme” to well relax during trip. The slogan literally associates travel with comfort, leisure, and aesthetics.

Inscription10: *Al IZZA, Voyager Autrement.*

(Theme: Business / Pride)

Presupposition:

Like the content of the inscription5, it can be deduced, the content of the inscription seems to suggest a break with the tradition in the world of transportation/travelling. The inscription seems to induce, to persuade the reader to make certain decisions as to how to make one’s trip from now on. Also, the content of the inscription seems to present itself as the one to be discovered.

Inference:

It can be inferred from the content of the inscription that the concept of innovation, comfort, and security, perseverance (panther) is highlighted. A likely deduction to be made from this inscription is that it seems to suggest a radical departure from the usual way of travelling. The underlying message is that it also appeals implicitly to the discerning minds to modify their mode of travelling. In other words, the purpose of the writings is to impact positively on the minds of the readers by giving them a sense of direction on how to experience a decent and meaningful trip within a context riddled with competition.

Inscription11: *EMA, Votre Satisfaction Notre Engagement.*

(Theme: Commitment/ Duty)

Presupposition:

Based on the context of business, the inscription seems to suggest a level of commitment, vocation to show how resilient and hardworking the writer is to ensure client satisfaction. The slogan also depicts confidence and determination to achieve the desired goals: client satisfaction as the writer activity is client centered. There is a strong emphasis on commitment, work, duties, and responsibilities. This is, their doggedness in carrying out their duties cannot be compromised for anything. This expression tells the public and their colleagues that they do not joke or play with their business.

Inference:

It can be inferred from the inscription that commitment, giving satisfaction, awareness is of the essence and the user is at the center of the business; therefore, the human need for satisfaction is strongly alluded to. It calls for a serious-minded attitude to care, satisfaction, duties, and the likes towards readers, but as to whether the writer can guarantee that is another matter altogether. The purpose of the writings is to impact positively on the minds of the reader.

3. Findings and Discussions

Inscriptions, as to Oduro-Frimpong (2013) are embedded in human interpersonal relationships and on careful reflection, in personal social experience' which means owners of the vehicles really meant what they wrote, what sometimes emanated from some deep sub-conscious desires. Therefore, to interpret the meaning the inscriptions conveyed the researcher engaged in evaluating the message critically to identify the nuances and the direction of the texts. Since a message conveyed is not necessarily the message received certain inferences were made by implication regarding the context and content of the inscriptions and other hidden meanings that may not be conspicuous.

Furthermore, language constitutes the main factor that conspire to make inscriptions on public means of transportation important communicative tools. Hence, the choice of language revealed essential.

As stated earlier, in Niamey, inscriptions on vehicles are not common. However, it appears that the ones found and that constitute the samples of the present study are all written in French whereas meaning itself differs from person to person depending not only on some sociocultural situations but also on the semantic competencies of the decoders.

As to the motivation behind communicating by inscriptions on vehicles using French, vehicle owners argued that French is the language of mass communication in Niger. However, it would have been better and more convincing for them to put forward the users as good as their own low levels of literacy in national languages. In fact, thanks to colonisation, French becomes the official and socially prestigious language used for whatever purpose. Hence, they adopt it for them to reach a greater number of the target audience. That is the weak point. Indeed, in a previous study, the researcher came to notice that Members of Parliament also conduct the business of the House in French where the debates are public. In both cases, it is worth noting that this happen while only 22% of the total population of Niger are literate in western education (Nana Aichatou,2021). In our sense, this reveals to be the classic case of complex syndrome in such a way to sound elitist it is a must for you to stick to French for whatever purpose. Besides, one can postulate that the preference for French points to the status accorded to this language (official, language of prestige and a status marker) in Niger and the users may thus aim to associate with. Therefore, the grievances seem identical and raise the same issue: how can the masses and the less educated in western education for both cases be able to follow the business being transacted on their behalf when debate is being held in French on the one hand or get the full import of the inscriptions and interpret and make meaning of the messages being conveyed on the other; especially when it is presumed that the level of literacy of the receivers predominantly determined the way the message is received and interpreted. But, just as code-switching/code-mixing was resorted to in the case of the National Assembly by some MPs, vehicles owners also make use of some communicative strategies consciously or unconsciously through linguistic (language forms) and semiotic (accompanying pictures) which put together provide some insights into how more gets communicated than said. Besides, “meaning is to be constructed in a manner that is socially acceptable” (Oyeleye, 2004:74) Whence, as inscriptions appear as puzzles like acronyms difficult to decode or clauses likely to bring ambiguity in such a way they may not appear decipherable and interpretable to casual readers or those who lack semantic competencies owners were found to make conscious choices on how to express themselves. Thus, the analysis of the samples presented as data in this study clearly revealed inscriptions in varied

forms wishing to achieve effective communication as follow: directives as in “Voyager Autrement”; commissive as in “Le voyage parfait” and “Voyager dans le Confort Optimal. Le Plaisir de Voyager”; representatives as in “L’Autre façon de voyager”; expressive as in “L’Étoile du voyage au Niger” and “Le Messenger de la Paix”; declaratives as in “Le voyage par vocation” and “Votre satisfaction Notre engagement” and verdictives as in “Le Roi de la route” and “le Transporteur du 3em Millenaire”.

Moreover, analysis portrayed pictures to smooth the transmission of messages via vehicles. Pictures appear to improve the expressivity/understanding of the intended message in that inscription that says, for instance, ‘Nijma’ l’Étoile du Transport au Niger has a picture of a star embossed at the back and on each side of the vehicle; ‘Assalam’ Le Messenger de la Paix with a dove as juxtaposed to the inscriptions. ‘Azawad’, Le Voyage par Vocation is visually represented by an antelope and ‘Sonef’ Le Plaisir de Voyager is coupled with a pictorial representation of a camel, ‘Al’izza’ and ‘Sonitrav’ physically represented respectively by a panther and a horse, etc. In all, the semiotic aspect allows for those who lack semantic competencies to have a hint on what and to which extent information/message is being conveyed.

At this level, it is assumed that pictorial representation and written text (in its different forms) complete and serve to ease decipher and interpret the message conveyed to the extent vehicle owners can believe the intended message is actually conveyed to the target population.

Finally, our findings conform to those of Mgbemena (2013), Assangba and Agoswim (2015), Ifeanyi & Mary (2020), Paul *et al.* (2019) that inscriptions are not just for aesthetic/ ornamental purposes nor the accompanying signs but offer an excellent potential for communication in context and social situations and become indeed a useful communicative tool. ‘Travelling Thoughts, Trailing Texts’ as described by Nwagbara (2008), they additionally constitute a veritable platform of advertising and one of the most visually striking ways in which vehicles owners sell themselves. This is, because, the branded vehicles move from one place to another, covering far and distant places, ‘selling’ face to the generality of the public. Overall, the study reveals the artistry of inscriptions on vehicles together with the accompanying picture and the forms of the language combine to significantly convey the message and spur the potential clients to action.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the pragma-semantic analysis gives a point of how man despite the context -social, linguistic and literacy - has been able to imprint his thoughts, world view and experience through a channel namely pictorial and written inscription to provide “insights into some of the greatest pragmatic context and competence which those who read them from the bodies of automobiles have to invoke and deploy to interpret them appropriately” Faniran (2019). Further, using presupposition and inference, this paper also shows how, communicating by inscriptions on vehicles, the intended message can be understood an interpreted within a particular socio-cultural context. The study also reveals that interpretations are shaped by people level of language cognizance as inscriptions are depicted in non native language. It could be concluded therefore that vehicle owners use inscriptions through their moving vehicles to voice and share their beliefs, opinions and worldviews thereby achieve their purpose. Vehicle inscriptions, veritable means of meaning generating are seen to becoming an unpredictable communicative tool.

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