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Artist's cognitive level and the style and form trails in graffiti: an analysis of graffiti from selected Bikita-Matsai secondary schools

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Abstract: This work is an exploration of the influence of cognitive levels in graffiti writing with special reference to content, style and form. Basing the narrative on the analysis of graffiti by learners from selected Bikita-Matsai secondary schools and guided by historical-philological semantics, this study investigates the idea that different situations and cognitive levels influence the topics, choice of words and presentation of graffiti. Triangulation was used to analyse the data. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in data-gathering. The findings point to the fact that graffiti analysis needs to be done taking into consideration two vital aspects: the graffiti producer's situation and their cognitive level.

Introduction

The study is an in-depth analysis of graffiti from selected secondary schools in Matsai, an area in the southern part of Bikita district in Zimbabwe. The study was motivated by the presence of a considerable number of unexamined graffiti in the vicinity of secondary schools in Bikita-Matsai. Graffiti, as defined by Zakareviciute (2014), refers to intentional scratching that appears on various surfaces. In as much as graffiti may be viewed as art and/or a means of communication (Žuvela 2013), the study takes the view that graffiti is art. This study investigates issues around the need to study graffiti to uncover the link between the inscriptions and the cognitive levels of the producers, in this case learners. Zakareviciute (2014) and Mwangi (2012) posit that learners communicate through graffiti. In most cases, the communication will be targeted. Targeted communication aims at achieving certain goals. From a Dadaist perspective, the aim of such communication is to resist. Ngugi (1998) and Amuta (1989) concur that art is a mirror of society; consequently, this paper uses this mirror (graffiti) and looks into the deep emotional and cognitive connotations that it expresses. This work focuses on graffiti found in five secondary schools in the Bikita-Matsai area to elucidate the relationship between an individual's cognitive level and the use of words and/or illustrations. The study focuses on graffiti created by learners, as many learner graffiti artists are hesitant to express their opinions in person with school authorities or fellow learners. The study is significant in establishing a potential basis for comprehending the concealed emotions of learners, which might prove challenging to uncover through direct conversations.

Myllylä (2020) posits that, like other works of art, graffiti can evoke different aesthetic emotions in its audiences. This work, however, focuses on the emotions of the graffiti artist, rather than the audience.

Graffiti is functional wherever it is and in whatever form it appears (Mangeya 2014; Rahn 2002). It is not just vandalism per se; there is a reason that motivates the author to inscribe words or drawings. There is ample evidence from the study by van Loon (2014) that graffiti is as old as humankind. The history of graffiti proves that it is a part of human life that warrants thorough study to elucidate important aspects around its use. It is imperative to focus on this valuable human act to try and understand the relationship between the emotional makeup and cognition that causes a person to write on surfaces. It is therefore vital to move from the functional aspect of graffiti to looking at the source that causes people to write different words on walls 'without permission' (Rahn 2002). Myllylä (2018) posits that graffiti producers act as narrators of their mental states. For this reason, this research analyses this type of text to try to explain the complexities of graffiti in relation to the

graffiti producer's academic level, and the different issues and emotions affecting the graffiti producer at various life stages. To this end, this study explores the difference in style, form and lexical choices evident in the graffiti of senior and junior secondary school learners.

Theoretical framework

This study is premised on historical-philological semantics, Dadaism and the ontological and epistemological approach to human identity and behaviour. There are many branches of historical-philological semantics theory; however, this study is guided by the psychologically oriented historical-philological semantics theory. Hecht (1888) argued that historical-philological semantics theory views the conception of meaning as psychological. Bréal (1897) had a similar view, arguing that in terms of this theory, 'the linguistic phenomena under study are seen as revealing characteristics of the human mind' (Bréal 1897: 44). These two arguments maintain that words are creations of the human mind, and as a result their study must be based on their link to the mind as well as the social context. It can therefore be said that language use is linked to cognitive capacity. Thus, in this research, the psychologically oriented historical-philological semantics theory is used to understand the meaning of graffiti. The meanings that are attached to different words found in the vicinities of the schools might also differ from their general meanings, depending on the cognitive and emotional state of the person using the words, in line with Hecht's argument. In a word, the theory mentioned above enables researchers to comprehensively study graffiti in relation to the artist's context and cognitive abilities. Furthermore, according to Cartwright (2002), cognitive flexibility – the ability to consider multiple aspects of stimuli simultaneously – develops over the elementary school years. Therefore, the researchers anticipate that graffiti found near the schools will show notable differences, since the learner artists are different ages.

Wittgenstein's (1953) 'language game' is the philosophical notion that the meanings of words and language are grounded in the social practice where they are used, which supports the idea that language productions must be studied in the context in which they are found. For this study, Dadaism was also used as a point of departure from which graffiti from the selected secondary schools was analysed. Ball (1996) and Shireen (2021) hold that Dadaism concerns the idea that art need not take any form or convention. The artist, faced with challenges, will deploy the available resources at their disposal for self-rescue, making Dada resistance art. Dadaism can therefore be used to analyse the graffiti art of learners who do not have access to proper channels of communication due to oppressive administrative rules at the schools.

Research methodology

Qualitative and quantitative research methods were combined to enable the researchers to gather and critically analyse data in a way that produced authentic information. Patten (2017) states that qualitative research is not based on the measurement of the amount; instead, it is focused on describing phenomena. According to Patten (2017) the method does not involve numbers, is descriptive, applies to reason and uses words. The major aim is to get the meaning and feeling of situations and to describe them. The qualitative method is the most appropriate for this study as it deals with feelings, and since the emotions of the learners cannot be quantified, the qualitative method was appropriate. However, quantities were also used on total samples and quantifying the responses.

The research used random systematic sampling in choosing the sample from the population. Bernard (2006) explains that random systematic sampling involves selecting the starting point randomly and then following a systematic order in choosing the rest of the sample. The researchers selected the first respondent at random and picked the tenth member of the population they came across. Learners were divided into male and female groups and then the samples were selected from these groups to address gender balance. Fifty learners were selected, and they were asked different questions through interviews. Ten teachers were also given questionnaires. However, the research mainly used face-to-face interviews and participatory research as the main data-gathering methods, since interviews are more comprehensive. Awoniyi (2006) defines an interview as a synchronous communication of time and asynchronous communication of place. This allows communication to

occur in real-time, even when the participants are in different locations. For this reason, face-to-face interviews allowed the researchers to investigate issues in depth and to discover how individuals think and feel about the topic and why they hold certain opinions. Furthermore, face-to-face interviews were instrumental in obtaining authentic responses from the research participants, because they allowed the respondents to express their feelings, which were then captured by the interviewer. The ability to probe for more information made possible by interviews also helped in this study as learners were asked to explain their answers, since they tend to modulate their answers when asked about something they think will lead to victimisation.

During the interview, the respondents' own words were recorded, allowing ambiguities to be cleared up and incomplete answers to be followed up. Guba and Lincoln (1980) maintain that qualitative interviewing techniques help researchers to observe and record subjects' unique perspectives or experiences as they relate to a particular issue. As a result, the approach gave the subjects an opportunity to provide first-hand, first-person accounts. In this way, the researchers gained insight rather than getting 'yes' or 'no' answers, which provide incomplete feedback.

Participatory observations were also used in this research. As the researchers participated in this community, to ensure comprehensive analysis, the researcher utilized a camera to capture photographs. Participant observation is in some ways the most natural qualitative data collection method. It connects the researcher to the most basic of human experiences (Bernard 2006). Spradley (1980) also argues that the advantage of using participatory research is that you become part of the community, thereby allowing for the natural production of data, since the participants do not regard the researcher as an intruder. For this reason, participatory observation helps a researcher to gather data in its most natural form, since the participants will not be modulating their behaviour because of the presence of an 'outsider'. This instrument helped in the gathering of relevant pictures for robust data analysis and subsequent discussion. The researchers were part of the community and the artists were comfortable talking to them.

The data collected in this study were analysed using the thematic analysis method. Patten (2017) and Belotto (2018) explain that thematic analysis entails the grouping of recurring patterns or themes to come up with logical conclusions. Responses and pictures were grouped according to various themes. Similar responses were coded and grouped into various categories that helped to generate themes. The themes were then developed into arguments and conclusions were then drawn from these themes.

Findings regarding the influence of an individual's environment and cognitive level on graffiti

This section presents the data that were gathered from the secondary schools in the Bikita-Matsai district, namely the graffiti, taking into consideration the different grade levels of the learners who produced it. Zimbabwean secondary schools comprise six grades: Form 1 to 6. The entry point in secondary schools is Form 1, and learners have to complete two levels, namely the ordinary level (Form 4), which is completed after four years, and the advanced level (Form 6), which is completed after six years. In this research, grades (class levels) were grouped into three categories: forms 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 5 and 6. These groups were investigated to gather authentic information on the content, style and form of graffiti associated with each category.

The observation that was made at all five schools is that graffiti from forms 1 and 2 is mostly drawings without any writing. The drawings range in their composition from those that discuss academic issues to those that talk about social life, including love. Furthermore, the drawings are mostly caricatures that do not show much artistic complexity and creativity. Figure 1 is one such drawing. It is an illustration of people kissing, with no caption.

Figure 2 is a drawing that was found in a Form 2 class at School D. In the diagram, there is a drawing, characteristic of junior classes, and a caption in the local language. The caption reads '*Ndomanyira AKWA vakomana mbuya vangu vachembera saka vanosvika nyemba dzapera*' ('I am rushing to the AKWA food distribution centre guys my grandmother is too old to walk fast she will reach the centre when there are no more beans'). The caption talks about food rations that the community received from a donor operating in the area. The writer is mocking a peer who always

Figure 1: Drawing in a Form 1 class

asks for permission to fetch food handouts on behalf of the family, because the grandmother is now too old to do so. Just like Figure 1, the drawing is more of a caricature, similar to those found in children's cartoons.

There is also the finding that the senior grades (forms 5 and 6) – who have completed the ordinary level and are now focusing on the advanced level – produce graffiti that is different from that of junior classes (the ordinary level) in that it confronts figures of authority. Graffiti from senior classes is direct in its attack and opposition to general orders from school authorities.

A common place to find graffiti is in public toilets. There are different toilets for different grades at School B, with a lot of graffiti on their walls. There is however a notable difference between graffiti on the toilet walls of forms 1 and 2 and those used by learners in forms 4 to 6. No notable difference was found in the nature of the graffiti found in boys' toilets and that found in girls' toilets, in line with the observation by Mangeya (2018). Mangeya (2018) noticed that there were obscenities in both the boys' and girls' toilets, and this was also reflected in the data collected during the research. In this research, the only difference was that of the quantity of graffiti found; the girls' toilets had fewer inscriptions. In one of the toilets, the researcher found the following words: '*Zidzoro rahead rinemvura'* (direct translation: 'The head of the school has water in his head', meaning 'The head of this school does not think straight'). These insults were frequent in senior learners' toilets. The data showed that learners from all classes wrote on surfaces in the vicinities of the schools. There was graffiti on the roof trusses in almost all classrooms. However, as mentioned above, there was a difference in the content of the graffiti, as substantiated by the following comment by Participant F: 'Graffiti is found in all the classrooms, however, I normally see letters addressed to the authorities in those classrooms used by brilliant students'.

Certain messages, like the one in Figure 3 ('Catch dem young'), are associated with senior classes. The writer, who is in a senior class, is talking about 'catching' girls when they are still young. The picture was taken at a senior class at School C. Sixty per cent of the graffiti inscriptions found in senior secondary classes entailed issues related to relationships. The graffiti by boys from these

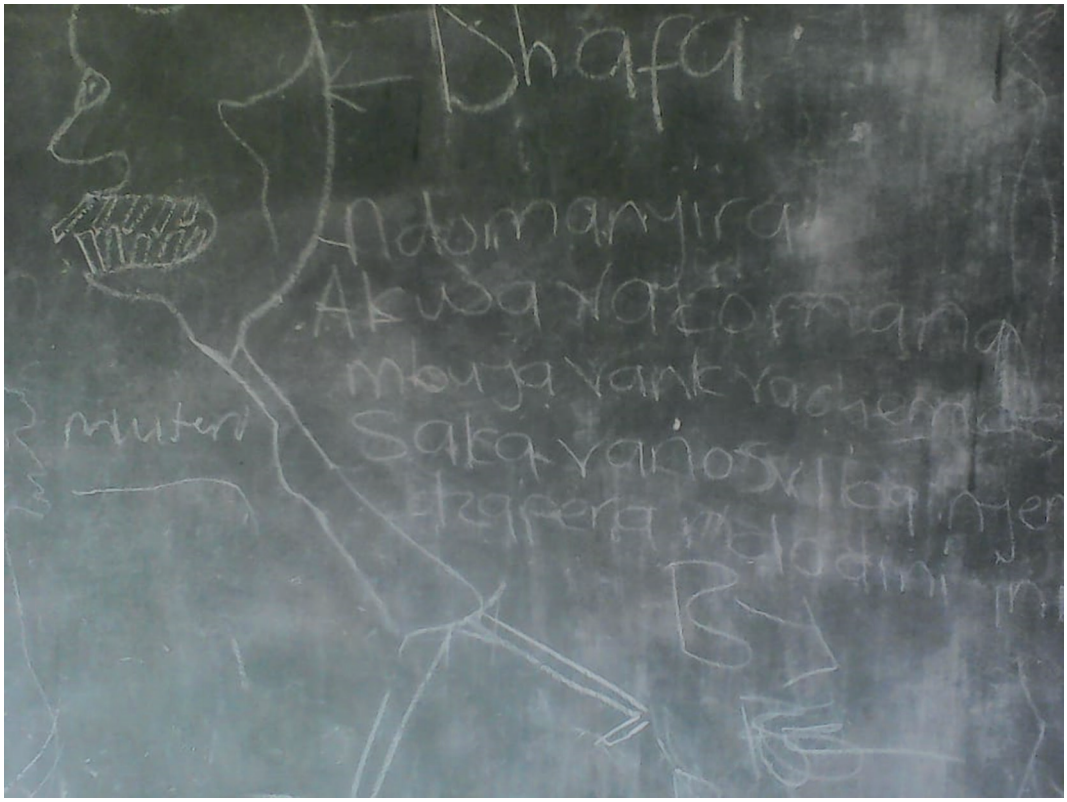

Figure 2: Graffiti directed at other learners

classes often entailed proposing love to girls younger than themselves, like in Figure 3. There were also messages in which the girls in the same classes were warning the junior class girls against visiting their base rooms unceremoniously. In Zimbabwe, each grade and class has a designated room, commonly referred to as a 'base room'. School authorities assign specific rooms to each class. Consequently, senior girls often prevent junior girls from entering their base rooms. This behaviour is influenced by cultural beliefs in Zimbabwe, where it is common for older men to marry younger girls. If junior girls visit the senior boys' rooms, it could attract the boys' attention away from their classmates. The researchers found that the messages were serious warnings. One graffiti inscription read as follows: '*Form two's girls remember you have tails. If you continue coming here we will cut your tails*'. This was a strong warning against junior girls continuing to visit senior classes.

The research also found that learners write on roof trusses. Figure 4 is one such example. A person who only identified themself as ETD is asking the whole school to remember them. This type of graffiti was found mainly in senior secondary school classes. Most often, the graffiti was on the first truss in front of the class above the chalkboard.

Discussion of findings

Figure 1 is a drawing from a Form 1 class at School A illustrating that graffiti from junior classes is mostly drawings, suggesting that drawings found in the junior-grade base rooms show that the producers are still cognitively developing and they have not mastered certain linguistic concepts that are seen in senior-grade graffiti. This type of graffiti does not need complicated skills; the graffiti artist implements art skills which are taught at primary school. Even the drawing shows a type of simplicity commonly associated with primary school learners. The educational level

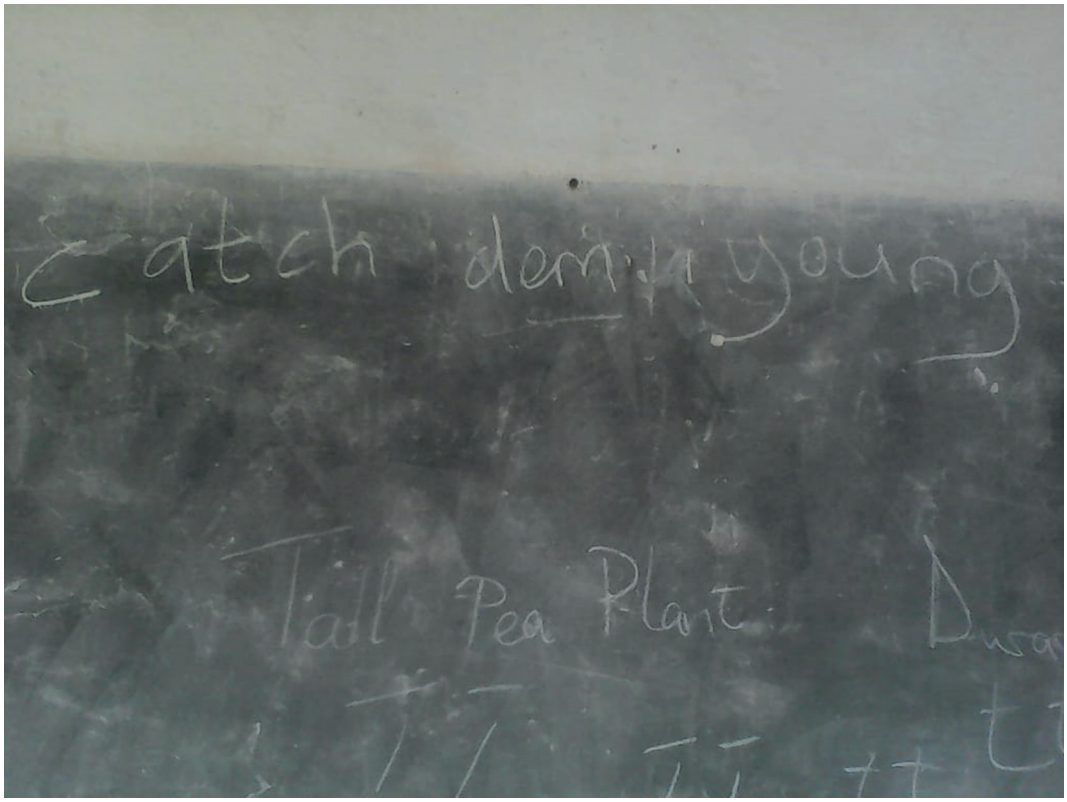

Figure 3: A photo showing the graffiti inscription '*Catch dem young*'

and cognitive development only allow the learners to produce art that conveys information in an unsophisticated manner associated with their age. This supports Myllylä and Saariluoma's (2022) assertion that consciousness has information content or mental content. The mental content of the junior secondary school learners in Bikita-Matsai resembles caricatures that are found in the vicinity of primary schools.

The drawings found on classroom chalkboards were mostly directed at fellow learners. Figure 2 is one such example. Learners were teasing each other about social events in the community. The findings point to the fact that learners communicate amongst themselves through graffiti. In the Shona community, where the graffiti was found, there are cultural and linguistic taboos. Learners are aware of these cultural aspects and know there are certain issues that they cannot openly talk about. Consequently, the learners use graffiti as a way of conveying messages related to issues they may be thinking of. When asked about any other comment on graffiti, Participant E said that chalkboards are used as public spheres because every morning after entering the classroom, the first thing a learner does is to look at the chalkboard. This, according to the participant, makes the chalkboard a convenient surface for graffiti targeted at other learners. According to this participant, those who write on chalkboards do not expect their messages to last long, since these messages are erased in the morning when the first lesson commences. However, the impact would have been made; the graffiti will influence the thinking of other learners. Hence, as mentioned earlier, graffiti on chalkboards in forms 1 and 2 is mostly aimed at other learners and is not meant to last long, as opposed to graffiti on the roof trusses of classrooms. Despite how short-lived it is, graffiti on chalkboards aims to influence how other learners perceive a certain phenomenon (van Loon 2014). Figure 1 depicts two individuals kissing. When asked about the meaning of this work, Participant B reiterated the fact that there was

Figure 4: An inscription with the words '*Remember pastor ETD'*

an individual in their class who was in love with a senior student, and most of the girls in the class were jealous and wanted to humiliate her so that she would stop the relationship. This shows that the emotion jealousy is a theme in the graffiti in junior secondary grades. The above finding indicates that the author or artist's emotions are involved in graffiti writing.

As learners are taught new concepts and develop language skills in secondary school, they start combining drawings with words. Figure 2 is one such example. Watzlawik (2014) notes that graffiti producers' abilities and different developmental trajectories can be observed in their productions, leading to noticeable differences in the graffiti of different age groups. During the study, the researchers established that the cognitive development of a graffiti producer allows them to add some words to the drawing (van Loon 2014), but the mastery of the Shona language and English as the medium of instruction is still low. The only English word is 'By'. This shows that the learner is linguistically and cognitively developing, and their level of development is predicted by the level of the class in which the graffiti was found. The photo in Figure 2 was taken in a junior secondary class; therefore it can be argued that the graffiti producer's language skills are still developing. This is supported by the fact that at this level, the Zimbabwean English language syllabus prescribes teaching simple introductory second-language skills.

The graffiti producer in Figure 2 is responding to current affairs in the local community, where a donor was donating food to vulnerable families. The writer was telling his friends that a learner who depended on these donations was rushing to the ward centre where food was being distributed. The learner is portrayed as anxious because his grandmother was too old to walk quickly, meaning she would reach the centre late and miss the rations, leaving the family without food. The graffiti is sarcastic in the sense that those who received food from donors in this community were often

ridiculed by their fellow learners as the poor members of the community. The drawing of a big head, teeth and a slim body of the person in the graffiti depicts that the producer of this graffiti wanted to mock the person in question. The body structure is associated with those children suffering from kwashiorkor. However, responses obtained from Participant D point to the idea that those who received food might also boast about their receiving food as a sign that their parents are clever. Be that as it may, in this graffiti, the author was mocking learners who asked to leave early to receive donations. When asked what the trigger was for such graffiti, Participant A argues that it is caused by pride in those who view their families as not depending on handouts by donors. Participant A added that belittling and bullying other learners based on their background occurs frequently in junior classes because the learners' academic skills have not yet developed fully. In senior secondary classes, the theme of bullying seemed to subside, and the comments became more centred on love affairs and academic performance. Ribes-Iñesta (2006) argues that language is an instrument. With this in mind, Figure 2 may be said to be an instrument through which the writer achieves their intended goal. The content of the graffiti discussed above also illustrates the naivety of the producer. In most cases, forms 1 and 2 (junior secondary school learners) are in their early teens, and no 'important' topics are discussed in this group; graffiti is mostly used for teasing and bullying. The style and form also show that the artist has not yet developed the writing skills associated with advanced secondary school. Sentences begin with lower case and the punctuation is incorrect. The graffiti has an unclear caption that is a simplified insult which is easily understood. The graffiti producer wrote on the chalkboard, and the art would have been erased as soon as a teacher arrived, but the target audience would already have read the message.

Differences in the complexity of graffiti are also influenced by the academic aptitude of learners (Zimuto et al. 2023). With this in mind, figures 1 and 2 also illustrate that the content of the graffiti differed in line with the ability of learners in different classes. The way the dialogue is presented shows the reasoning capabilities of the producers who, at this stage, are referred to as dialogue producers. In every text, there is the dialogical and trajectory aspect across space (Ferris and Banda 2019. This implies graffiti acts as a means of communication to affect others. As mentioned, the form and style of the dialogue differ according to the cognitive ability of the dialogue producer. There is what is called 'screening' in Bikita-Matsai secondary schools. In Form 1 (the class for beginners of secondary school) learners are grouped according to ability using their primary school results. Thus, graffiti from those classes with learners who would have performed poorly in their grade seven examinations is mostly in the form of caricatures. Figure 1 is one such example. A teacher participant from Bikita-Matsai comments on the many drawings they find in classes of less academically gifted students. To them, the drawings show less complexity in the writer's cognitive abilities. The fact that graffiti found in Form 1's less academically developed classes consist mainly of drawings, may be because learners find it difficult to express themselves in English, the official language of communication and instruction in Zimbabwean schools. Thus, graffiti from different locations can be matched to the classes that produced it by looking at the content and the complexity (style and structure) of each work of graffiti.

Graffiti found in toilets is often insulting and abusive (Ferris and Banda 2019). In this study, the graffiti inscription '*zidzoro rahead rinemvura*' (direct translation: 'the head of the school has water in their head', meaning 'the head of this school does not think straight'), found in the senior secondary grade toilets, was an insult in the form of a metaphor. The figurative language in the sentence shows that the producer is proficient in the language and has knowledge of stylistic devices. The language is not literal, instead comprising deep meaning that requires a degree of intellectual maturity to understand. First language speakers will be familiar with the figurative meaning. There is a surface meaning and a deeper meaning in the sentence, hence the need for the reader to infer the correct meaning of the insult. This complexity is not found in the graffiti of the junior secondary classes. As mentioned earlier, the insults by senior classes are directed at school authorities, often commenting on their health. The contents of the graffiti in the toilets shows that senior-class learners are not selective in the words they use to attack the administrators. This Dada form of art does not follow any guided rules in its attack on the administration, which is seen as the oppressor. Learners choose aspects they think are the most hurtful when used as insults. The researchers argue that these

insults may be linked to a Shona register called *kunemerana* (literally 'jeering'), a form of popular ridicule and an aspect of language in Shona communities. During jeerings, participants tell each other the truth about their shortcomings in a joking manner. There is nothing that people cannot talk about during *kunemerana*. Almost every aspect of a person's life is used to score points during this language game.

In terms of gender, there seems to be very little distinction in the graffiti found in boys' toilets and girls' toilets. The graffiti has words that show that senior classes write on toilet walls whenever they get the chance. Through graffiti, they also express their anger. Principals often make decisions that affect the learners without consulting them, hence the reference to the head teacher as someone who does not think straight. The learners show their disgruntlement in an anonymous way that eliminates the possibility of victimisation. The art has no rules, and learners choose whatever means they deem necessary to attack the status quo.

Participant F mentioned that the graffiti aimed at figures of authority in senior secondary classes that the participant usually sees is written instead of drawn. This supports the idea that those who can use English as a language of communication find it easy to use writing in their graffiti. Learners who are not yet very familiar with the language cannot write it, and so will try to express themselves using drawings. Drawings are mostly associated with junior classes and those classes with introverts, while writing is associated with extroverts and senior secondary classes. Figure 3 is a message in the form of a soliloquy. The artist is encouraging their fellows to declare love to younger girls to build lasting relationships with them while they are still young. The writer does not direct the message to anyone in particular, but the writing evokes emotions and at the same time tells a story about the notions and emotions regarding love that the graffiti producer has. The researchers found that the idea comes from the African practice in which men are supposed to marry younger women (Adeola 2016). Graffiti from senior classes points to the fact that they are fond of declaring love to junior girls. Learners from senior grades are older and can talk about love with marriage in mind. Marrying young women agrees with the practices of the community in the area where the research was carried out. This indicates that graffiti artists in senior classes produce graffiti related to more mature topics, including love.

In addition to form, the location of graffiti is also significant. Graffiti is cleaned from surfaces that are easy to reach by teachers and authority figures at the beginning of the school term, but new graffiti soon appears. In addition, learners will try to prevent the removal of graffiti by producing it in places that are hard to reach, such as roof trusses. Participant B indicated that graffiti is found on trusses because they are difficult to reach to erase it. The researchers observed that graffiti produced on trusses is mostly the names of learners. Figure 4 shows a case of such graffiti. The study concludes that learners write their names on trusses to 'immortalise' their names in the history of the school. This shows that the use of roof trusses is a calculated move to make the message last longer and is egotistic in nature. When asked why learners wrote on roof trusses, Participant D replied as follows: '*ndipo pasinga svikiri vanhu kudzima zvinhu zvangu*' ('That is a surface where people will not easily reach to erase my art'). To support the issue of personal immortalisation, 90% of the picture collection shows that most of the graffiti on trusses contains 'legendary' names. (The names of those who think they were great individuals during their school days). The study therefore concludes that because learners are at an emotionally volatile stage characterised by mood swings, they write to make their feelings known. It is very difficult to make their emotions known to school authorities, because these authorities consider learners as minors who cannot make responsible decisions. This conclusion is supported by the observation that at the beginning of every term, school authorities instruct learners to erase the graffiti without considering the messages it contains. Faced with oppression and unable to express their emotions directly, learners resort to writing graffiti on places like trusses to avoid having to take responsibility for their work. There are no rules for graffiti, making it a convenient public sphere in which learners share ideas that influence the thinking of their peers (Myllylä 2020). The researchers also conclude that there is a relationship between this need for recognition in graffiti and contemporary Zimbabwean dance hall music where popular pseudo-titles like '*Chibaba*' ('The greatest of them all') are used by artists to boast about their musical skills. This boasting type of graffiti was found in senior secondary classes. At this level, most learners will

have a sense of achievement as they would have completed the ordinary level. In this way, graffiti becomes a contemporary way to boast in the community of the Bikita-Matsai schools.

Like in Figure 4, 80% of the written graffiti appears in capital letters and in the front of the classrooms. The form of the graffiti is not accidental. Participant C thinks that the capitalisation of words may be linked to the need by the authors to make their graffiti visible, since they are seeking recognition and visibility and want to have an impact on readers. The location of these capitalised words also shows that the writer wants the graffiti readers to see their work as soon as they enter the classroom. Capitalisation may also be linked to the importance of the message to the writer (Zimuto et al. 2023). The writer may have a high regard for their views. The fact that most of the capitalisations were found in senior secondary classes may be linked to the notion that the writer will be happy that they will soon be leaving the school. As most of the schools do not have farewell parties for school leavers, the graffiti artist tries to make their excitement known to fellow learners while simultaneously asking them not to forget their youthful exploits. The artist uses an unmoderated platform to influence other learners' way of thinking. Participant F, on the question of why there is a recurring presence of capitalised words, indicated that by capitalising words, the writer is illustrating that the information in the graffiti is of the utmost importance. It is the habit of most teachers in the region to capitalise topics and important subheadings when writing notes on chalkboards. This emphasis afforded by the use of capital letters is the same effect that graffiti authors want to imitate, since graffiti artists attach much value to their work.

The writing of names shows how creative learners can be in trying to make themselves remembered in school and their community even long after they have left school. The issues written on trusses are rarely academic messages or complaints, which shows that the trusses act like the nameboards in a 'hall of fame'. In schools there are wooden nameboards on which the names of former head teachers, prefects and outstanding academic performers are inscribed. These nameboards are there for everyone to see and remember and to emulate the esteemed deeds of those whose names have been inscribed. Those who fail to have their names remembered through the 'proper' channel create their own nameboards in the form of graffiti on roof trusses. Many learners feel left out, prompting them to create graffiti as an attention-seeking strategy (Zimuto et al. 2023). These learners also have their own strengths, and they want the school authorities to realise and recognise them and those regarded as gifted. The learners creatively develop their own nameboards running parallel to the official ones, with the same effect. The graffiti on roof trusses will be remembered for a long time in the history of the school, just like the names on nameboards. Roof trusses in Bikita-Matsai thus create a contrasting image of the official nameboards in the 'hall of fame'.

Recommendations

In light of the discussion, the researchers wish to propose recommendations that could serve as a foundation for developing policies for handling graffiti in schools. The researchers recommend that schools consider analysing graffiti for counselling purposes and problem diagnosis. This is because the graffiti reflects the different cognitive levels and emotions of learners in each academic category. The visibility of learners in schools is threatened by the unbalanced Zimbabwean education culture inherited from colonial forces. Teachers and responsible authorities view learners and their perspectives on education, and life in general, through their own lenses. There is a top-down approach to the implementation of strategies in schools. Learners are not consulted on matters that affect their day-to-day lives. Inferring emotions from graffiti will therefore democratise school environments and give voice to more learners. Learners in the Bikita-Matsai district seem to be facing numerous behavioural challenges that stem from inadequate management of counselling processes by school authorities. For this reason, this study recommends the establishment of playfield blackboards that will act as a mirror of the lives of learners and help counsellors determine the emotions embedded in the graffiti. The analysis of graffiti according to different categories will help school authorities to tailor counselling sessions that target each group's needs, as shown in their graffiti. The establishment of graffiti zones in the school vicinity may also help alleviate destructive graffiti. In most cases, graffiti becomes vandalism if the author feels compelled to express something but has no place to do so. Establishing graffiti zones recognises the existence of the graffiti artists and their creations.

This will help them to realise that school authorities are keen to hear what they have to say. In this way, learners can express their emotions in a legitimate way. Through these zones, the two way relationship between graffiti and cognitive states will be harnessed for good.

Conclusion

This study has explored the idea that different levels of cognitive development of graffiti producers affect the content, style and form of graffiti. Each individual produces graffiti that is in line with their cognitive development. Those from junior secondary grades produce fairly simple graffiti, while those from senior secondary grades produce graffiti that shows both complexity and directedness characteristic of many years of desensitisation at educational institutions. The findings illustrate that graffiti, like other art forms, is closely linked to the mind of its producer.

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