

## DOING PRAGMATICS: AN ILLOCUTIONARY ACT ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' GRAFFITI INSCRIPTIONS IN ABIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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### Abstract

This study is an analysis of the illocutionary acts performed by students of the Abia State University, Uturu in their use of graffiti as a medium of communication. The study adopts a qualitative approach. Corpus for the study was gathered by taking still pictures of graffiti on walls and buildings in public spaces in and around Abia State University. This study adopts the speech acts theory, with emphasis on the illocutionary act, as the theoretical framework. 75 graffiti inscriptions constitute the corpus for this study. The inscriptions are classified into six thematic categories that portray the issues – namely, students' politics/unionism, education/academics, faith/religion, nicknaming, and street philosophy - for which the users inscribed the graffiti. The themes provide the needed contextual foreground in analyzing the speech acts performed by the communication. The study shows that the graffiti inscriptions in Abia State University perform the five illocutionary speech acts (assertive, directive, declarative, commissive, and expressive) according to John Searle (1969). It is also obvious that the language of graffiti inscriptions in Abia State University is influenced by the language of the immediate Igbo socio-cultural milieu.

**Keywords:** graffiti, illocutionary acts, pragmatics, speech acts and common ground theory.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Graffiti design is an evolving form of artistic expression in Nigeria. It creates an interesting brand of communication research because of the enormity of the value it portends both to the artist and to the target audience. Although some scholars are of the view that graffiti writing or design is an unhealthy activity because it defaces public buildings and other social spaces. It is also noteworthy that owners of leisure parks and public social spots see graffiti differently as they have engaged the services of graffiti designers to make paintings on their walls for the purpose of achieving beautification of their business places and draw attention to their business. So, for the business owner, graffiti functions both as an aesthetic and a communication tool.

For others, graffiti is more than a tool for aesthetics. It is a verbal form of conveying meaning and intention to an audience. As Mensah and Nyong (2022) put it, "it is used by young people to express desires, emotions, and attitudes, as well as exhibit resistance identities as evidence of artistic pleasure, fun, and linguistic playfulness by young people" (p.2). This suggests that the graffiti art culture is predominantly practised by young people in creating discourses of public importance, showing solidarity, and serving as a means of setting social agenda.

Also, graffiti is culture-oriented. Graffiti images and inscriptions have cultural attachments and most of the time reflect the culture of the designer and that of his target audience. Graffiti is a public communication system in which information is coded and decoded based on a social, cultural and spatial context (Forgione, 2012).

Based on the above background, our preoccupation is to examine how graffiti mean and communicate, using insights from the illocutionary act subcomponent of the speech act theory. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- a. identify the different graffiti used in Abia State University;
- b. examine the themes projected by the graffiti used in the University; and,
- c. examine the speech acts performed in using the particular graffiti.

### 1.1 Research methodology

This study adopts the qualitative research design. The corpus is content analyzed using the speech acts theory. This study is limited to the analysis of the illocutionary acts performed in graffiti found on the Uturu campus of Abia State University. The university domain is chosen relying on the rationale that graffiti inscriptions are uniquely characterized by the use of

language as is typical of young people. The university is replete with student-informed language style and use. On corpus collection, the researchers concerned themselves particularly with

graffiti inscription that are found on the outer walls of the hostels, faculty buildings, lodges, walkways and public spaces. The researchers also adopted participant observations, semi-structured key informant interviews and informal conversations as measures for ethnographic data collection. Participant observations allowed the researchers to gain close and intimate familiarity with participants and their practices through intensive involvement in their natural environment (Spradley 1980 cited in Mensah & Nyong, 2022). The semi-structured key informant interviews afforded the researchers the opportunity to interact with students and young residents of the different lodges and buildings where these graffiti were seen and also, understand the rationale and motivations, history and cultural/societal peculiarities behind the different graffiti inscriptions and images.

## 1.2 Review of concepts

This section provides the conceptual understanding of the key constructs used in this study. These are semiotics, graffiti and domain of language use. The discussions on these concepts are based on reviewed literature.

### 1.2.1 Pragmatics

People use language to make meaning and communicate ideas, intentions, views and so on. Most of the time, without contextual information, language in use may mean without communicating. The role context plays in determining communication intent is the concern of pragmatics. According to Mey (2001), “pragmatics is the study of the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of the society” (p.6).

Oftentimes, the concepts of pragmatics and semantics are erroneously applied interchangeably. This explains why Mey (2001, p.7) further clarifies that “semantics and pragmatics complement each other, but are otherwise independent areas of research.” Also, Huang & Snedeker (2009) in differentiating the concepts of semantics and pragmatics state that while “semantics *refers* to the aspects of the interpretation that can be directly calculated from the meanings of words and the structural relationships between them ... pragmatics refers to the aspects of interpretation that are inferred through an analysis of the context and the communicator’s goals” (p. 3).

We have adopted the definition of Emezue (2016) who avers that “pragmatics examines meaning and the communicative function of utterances from the perspective of the language user in consideration of situated contexts” (p.33). In analyzing language in communication,

pragmatists concern themselves with what communicators do with word consciously or unconsciously, rather than focus on the structural correctness of sentences.

### 1.2.2 Speech Acts

A speech act is an action performed by means of language. People perform speech acts when they offer an apology, a greeting, a request, a complaint, an invitation, a compliment or a refusal (Austin, 1962). Griffiths (2006) defines speech acts as the basic units of linguistic interaction while for Osisanwo (2003), “an utterance is a speech act.” However, for Cohen (1996), a speech act is a minimal functional unit in human communication. This is because in any utterance a person makes, an act is performed. Acts performed include but are not restricted to the following: stating a fact, an opinion, confirming or denying something, making a prediction or a request, issuing an order, asking a question and so on. Speech acts is explained further in 1.4 of this paper.

### 1.2.3 Graffiti

Graffiti, coined from an Italian word “Graffio” meaning “a scratch,” is used mainly in the context of art history to describe a method of decoration by incising, as well as writing or drawing on a wall.

There are two major schools of thought often projected in the study of graffiti. The first school of thought views graffiti as illegal paintings, inscriptions and drawings on walls. For example, Nwoye (1993) defines graffiti as an undesirable annoyance, a sign of rebellion against societal authorities, and an utter manifestation of destruction that must be mended. However, the second school of thought views graffiti as a form of creative expression often used to provoke thought or communicate the idea and feeling of a person or group of persons to a wider audience. This viewed is exemplified in Philippakos (2015) who views graffiti as a visual communication system where words and images work together to convey a message, and, Sheivandi et al. (2015) who aver that graffiti is a map of a genuine representation of reality as well as an evolutionary means that has made people reflect on their cultural identity using artistic and social modes of expressions.

Modern graffiti as a form of artistic expression has taken new perspectives and different dimensions. Most graffiti convey ideas that are meant to ridicule or criticize a person or an idea. Graffiti serves as an outlet for expressing one’s feeling, dissatisfaction, threat, acceptance, and also, it is being adopted as a tool for social identity creation and labeling, highlighting social

injustices, and making political statements. Graffiti in modern arts is also used to ignite public reaction and dialogue around important sociopolitical and economic issues. The choice of words and tone used in most graffiti vary. It may be sarcastic, crude, humorous or simplistic, depending on the issue being discussed.

In this study, the authors adopt the definition of graffiti by Mensah & Nyong (2022) who see graffiti as “artistic expressions that have the ability to create and appropriate contextual materials and have them appreciated (or condemned) by people based on their subjective judgement” (p.3). In Abia State University, graffiti artists use various visual and graphic elements to express their opinions, beliefs and ideas. Analyzing the various elements of the art work, including the visual imagery, linguistic features and content in which is produced helps provides an understanding of the message being conveyed.

### 1.3 Theoretical framework

#### 1.3.1 Searle’s Speech Acts Theory

The speech act theory is concerned with the ways in which language can be used and the theory aims to justify the assertion that people communicate more than what their words ordinarily encode. Austin (1962) notes three kinds of act that may be separately or simultaneously performed. They are:

- a. **Locutionary act:** A speech act is seen as a locutionary act with particular reference to the actual utterance and its ostensible meaning. Here, we are concerned with the actual words spoken (phonetic), the physical properties (phatic); that is, tone, volume, etc. and the ordinary meaning of the words used (rhetic). It is simply saying.
- b. **Illocutionary act:** The illocutionary act is performed in saying something such as declaring, requesting, warning, and so on. It is therefore concerned with performing an action.
- c. **Perlocutionary act:** A perlocutionary act is one in which the speaker causes an effect on the recipient or influences them in a particular way. It is the impact of the words conveyed by the speaker to the listener. In order words, it is achieving some effect.

It is important to state that the illocutionary act occupies a middle ground position between locutionary and perlocutionary acts. It is the proper domain of pragmatics and the central focus of the speech act theory as it centres on the speaker and what s/he intends to achieve in producing an utterance which is evident in the illocutionary force of that utterance.

Searle (1969) developed five illocutionary speech acts; namely, commissives, expressives, directives, assertives and declaratives. An overview of the Searle's illocutionary speech acts is presented below:

- i. Expressive: This class of illocutionary act expresses a psychological state, which includes, but not limited to, thanking, apologizing, congratulating, welcoming and greeting.
- ii. Commissive: This group of illocutions tends to commit the speaker to some future course of action. Paradigm cases include promising, threatening, offering and swearing to do something.
- iii. Directives: These acts are attempts by the addresser to get the addressee to do something; they tend to bring an effect through the action of the hearer. They include ordering, requesting, begging and questioning. Directive is the type of speech act that aims to get listener to do something (Sembiring & Ambalegin, 2019). The functions of directive acts is commanding, requesting, inviting, forbidding, and suggesting.
- iv. Assertive: This class of illocutionary act is also called representatives and it commits a speaker to the truth of the same propositions. They are statements that describe a state of affairs in the world, which could be true or false (Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere 2012). They include stating, claiming, reporting and announcing.
- v. Declarative: This class effects immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and tends to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions such as excommunicating, marrying, firing from employment, declaring a war and so on. Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) posit that "they are used to say something and make it so." Other examples of declarative acts include resigning, sentencing, dismissing and christening.

We have adopted Searle's illocutionary speech acts as theoretical basis for the pragmatic analysis of the graffiti inscriptions on the campus of Abia State University.

#### 1.4 Previous studies

Al-khawaldeh and Bani-khair (2017) in their “An exploration of graffiti on university’s walls” explore graffiti features in classrooms and walls in the the University of Jordan and the Hashemite university. Their study analyses the content and communicative features of graffiti found on the classrooms, walls, corridors and washrooms of the two universities, and their relation to the socio-cultural values of the society in order to ascertain how students use them to voice their attitudes and thoughts. The linguistic features that characterize these writings were also examined. Graffiti writings which were collected from the two universities were coded and analyzed using the thematic content analysis technique and critical discourse analysis. The analysis of their data showed that graffiti serve different communicative functions related to

personal, social, national, political and taboo matters. The most salient linguistic features of these graffiti are simplicity and variation. Al-khawaldeh and Bani-khair’s (2017) study explores graffiti in classrooms and walls found on universities and also express how this helps students voice their thoughts and communicate. Their work studies the content of these graffiti using the critical discourse analysis approach

Kigen, Bartoo and Wathika (2019) in their study titled “an analysis of graffiti as a communicative strategy in selected public boarding secondary schools” investigate graffiti written by secondary school students on the walls of school buildings and top of desks. This study aims to describe the types of graffiti used by students in public boarding secondary schools in Baringo central sub-country. The study is guided by critical discourse analysis as its theoretical framework. They adopted descriptive survey design.

Jupri’s (2022) study “analysis of graffiti in state university of Malangi, East Java Indonesia” aimed at finding out the categories of graffiti that the researcher found in state university of Malang and also sought the classification and information contained in the graffiti. The study applied ethnography research in observing and interacting with the research participants in their real-life environment. The research was focused on analyzing the graffiti found in the area of state university of Malang, ten participants from the university (undergraduates). Interviews and observation were utilized in collecting the data. The study found that the graffiti in the surrounding of the state university of Malang (UM) are categorized into; tags graffiti, latrinallia graffiti, humors graffiti. The study did not categorize the graffiti into public graffiti because they are not written on public spaces and sites, they were only addressed for undergraduate students in state university of Malang. The study also found that men in charge seem to be no problem for them and likely to allow these groups of students to be creative in releasing their ego through graffiti. Our study is somewhat similar to Jupri’s in the sense both study graffiti in a

tertiary education setting. But whereas his data source is the University of Malangi, Indonesia, ours is the Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria.

Mensah and Nyong (2022) analyzed automobile graffiti as inscribed on heavy-duty trucks in Calabar metropolis. Their study adopts the visual semiotics theory, which deals with the ability of visual images to make meaning, from the perspective of the signifier and the signified. Their study demonstrates that automobile graffiti serves visual semiotic functions within participants' community of practice such as; providing platforms for affiliating with people's religious identity, indirect modes of communication, channels for talking back to people, outlets for propagating life's core lessons, safety campaign mechanisms, windows to enact sexist ideologies and hegemonic masculinity, promote value categories, and, acceptable social behavior.

Their study also reveals that "automobile graffiti is a category of mobile graffiti that has become a platform for truck drivers and lorry owners in Nigeria to express themselves freely on personal and socio-cultural issues affecting them and the society" (p.28).

Mangila's (2023) study, "When walls become silent battlegrounds: deciphering college student's graffiti writings on school campus walls," explores graffiti in different contexts, particularly in higher education institutions. This study examines the common themes and the lexical and syntactic features of college in Zamboanya del sur, Mindanao, Phillipines. Employing thematic analysis, the study reveals that student's graffiti writing contain a variety of themes such as love, discrimination, self and group identities, hatred, sex, faith, religion, management, education and fanaticism with love and discrimination as the most prevailing social themes. The data gathered and analyzed consist of 164 students' graffiti writing that were found on the walls of classrooms, offices, halls and comfort rooms. A qualitative method was used to analyze and interpret the data students graffiti writings also exemplify distinct lexical features as loan and swear words, taboo words/expressions abbreviations, ironies acronyms, repetitions and compound words. His study found that graffiti contain a variety of themes such as religion, love, faith, sex, education etc., which students often use brief or terse statements to clearly express their thoughts and feeling to the public. Mangilas's study is different from the present study in the sense that the present study applies the thematic categories to exploring the speech acts performed by the students in their use of graffiti on the walls of Abia State University.

### **1.5 Corpus presentation and analysis**



The graffiti inscriptions around Abia State University that form the corpus of this study can be broadly classified into six thematic areas. The thematic categorizations capture the major predications upon which young people relate to one another within the university environment. The thematic categorizations of the graffiti inscriptions are presented below, applying the speech act theory presented in this study.

### 1.5.1 Students' politics/unionism

Politics/student unionism is a dominant theme featured in student graffiti in Abia State University. The students use graffiti to express their political intentions, perspectives and biases, especially ones they cannot publicly declare for the fear of being trailed and punished. For them, the wall is a veritable place for 'speaking up'. In our study, 16% (12 inscriptions) of the corpus gathered are categorized under the students' politics/unionism theme as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Illocutionary acts and types in Students' politics/unionism graffiti inscriptions

| Thematic category           | Inscriptions                       | Illocutionary act / Type  |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Students' politics/unionism | -one ikenga, one vote              | Directive / ordering      |
|                             | -leadership by principle           | Declarative/ christening  |
|                             | -aluta continua...victoria ascerta | Commissive/promising      |
|                             | -make way for democracy            | Directive/ ordering       |
|                             | - ABSU students, SORO SOKE         | Directive / ordering      |
|                             | -no joy, politicians keep off!!!   | Directive/ ordering       |
|                             | -Biafra must survive!!!            | Assertive / announcing    |
|                             | -say no to tribal politics         | Directive / ordering      |
|                             | -Power thirsty vampires            | Declarative / christening |
|                             | -Woe to SUG                        | Commissive / threatening  |
|                             | -Power to DEAD People PDP.         | Declarative / christening |

|  |                                    |                      |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------------|
|  | -PARK Up! SUG no be ur PAPA House! | Directive / ordering |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------------|

In the inscriptions, we observe that in some expressions are lexical items that are borrowed and blended into their conversations. The term *aluta continua...victoria ascerta* which means *the struggle continues... Victory is certain* is a popular term on Nigerian campuses. It has been adopted by virtually all Students' Union Governments as their slogan. The term, *soro soke*, is Yoruba term for 'speak up'. It was included into the ENDSars lexicon and has since been used by young Nigerians as "a wake-up call to the silence as well as nonchalant attitude displayed by some people of the younger generation...It calls out to members of the public to lend their voices to the clamour for freedom from suppression and oppression" (Patrick and Emezue, 2021, p.150).



Fig 1&2: students' politics/unionism themed graffiti

The above graffiti has the illocutionary force of act performed by students under the students' politics/unionism thematic category above shows that directives (ordering) constituting 50% of the inscriptions are used in the graffiti of students' political messages. This further establishes the fact that the language used in students' politics and unionism expresses authoritative demands because the students believe that it is their right to demand dividends of leadership

from their leaders, and also, hold leaders accountable when the need arises. They also use the directive commands to state their dissatisfaction, support or agreement to political ideologies and activities.

### 1.5.2 Education/Academics

Being an academic environment, the we expected to find more education/academic related graffiti, but we discover that education/academic is the least projected subject in the graffiti inscriptions found around the environs of Abia State University. Probing the reason for this, the researchers interviewed Peace (2024, personal communication) who states that “all the advice one needs to survive academically is always reiterated in classes, fellowships, seminars etc. the other important aspects of students life is what is therefore covered in the students’ graffiti”. Also, Justinzartz, an artist avers that “academic inscriptions are not catchy except you invest a lot of time and money to create beautiful images to accompany them, but vulgar expressions are catchy and do not need much painting for them to capture the audience” (personal communication, 2024). Furthermore, Joy (2024, personal communication) notes that the reason for a lesser education/academic graffiti in Abia State university is the “difficulty of creating and infusing humor in academic-

centered inscriptions” as it always conveys a serious message which may be compromised when presented with humor. Therefore, students limit themselves to expressions that portray their personal biases with the usual humour.

Table 2: Illocutionary acts and types in education/academics graffiti inscriptions

| Thematic category   | Inscriptions                                         | Illocutionary act / Type |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Education/Academics | -Even brainbox need teacher                          | Assertive / stating      |
|                     | -First class no concern me                           | Assertive / claiming     |
|                     | -Shine ya eyes, akwukwọ dī<br>(book is) hard         | Directive / ordering     |
|                     | -lectures are for the Weak,<br>Mgbo is for the Brave | Assertive / stating      |
|                     | - Welcome to the Land of<br>books                    | Expressive / welcoming   |

|  |                                                             |                                                                            |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | -Build ur CGPA today<br>-ASUU BIKO<br>- Readers are leaders | Directive / ordering<br><br>Directive / begging<br><br>Assertive / stating |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|

A further analysis shows that 3 illocutionary acts are performed by the use of the inscriptions. They are; assertive (4), directive (3), and expressive (1). By asserting, the addressers convey what they believe to be true of the academic world. These assertions are usually products of their experiences as students in the university. As can be deduced from the inscriptions presented in table 2, the addressers call their attention of their audience to the peculiarities of the academic world..



Fig 3: Educational/ academic graffiti

### Faith/Religion

From our study, faith/religion is the highest thematic category constituting 22.67% of the corpus. The students and dwellers in and around Abia State University are predominantly Christians, thus making Christianity the religion of the majority of residents on campus. As at the time of this study, there is no physical meeting place for other religions on the ABSU campus. We also observe that all the inscriptions collated are of the Christian religion.



Table 3: Illocutionary acts and types in faith/religion graffiti inscriptions

| Thematic category | Inscriptions                               | Illocutionary act / Type  |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Faith/Religion    | -Kill Christ                               | declarative / christening |
|                   | -Forgiveness Is Undeserved                 | assertive / stating       |
|                   | -God Wore My Shoes                         | assertive / stating       |
|                   | -Prison Break                              | declarative / christening |
|                   | - Healing praiz                            | declarative / christening |
|                   | -Rapha Praiz                               | declarative / christening |
|                   | -Tehilla                                   | declarative / christening |
|                   | -salvation na free but bible dey expensive | assertive / announcing    |
|                   | -repent or perish                          | directive / ordering      |

|  |                                      |                         |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
|  | -where will you spend your eternity? | directive / questioning |
|  | -JESUS saves!                        | assertive / stating     |
|  | -Have you read you bible today?      | directive / questioning |
|  | -heaven and hell no be fairy tale    | assertive / announcing  |
|  | -Angels on guard!!!                  | assertive / announcing  |
|  | -the LORD is my shepherd             | assertive / stating     |
|  | -Ave Maria (Hail Mary)               | directive / ordering    |
|  | -Help us LORD                        | directive / begging     |

On the illocutionary acts performed, five inscriptions which include; *Kill Christ*, *Rapha Praiz*, *Healing Praiz*, *Prison break* and *Tehilla* are used as declaratives. They are christened (name) events organized by students' Christian fellowships on campus. These inscriptions are used as a means of advertising special programs organized by students' fellowships. When the leaders of these fellowships were asked their reason for painting inscriptions of the programs on walls and walkways around the university, they outlined durability, reach and cost effectiveness as their aims. John (2024, oral interaction) notes that "when flex banners and other publicity means are used, it does not last long, and they are either stolen or damaged by human or natural agents such as wind and heavy rainfall. Also, a graffiti producer has this to say, "We have found out that producing handbills for our events don't yield the needed results because we finally do not reach a wider set of people. So, we adopt painting to reach wider people who use the walkways everyday" (Prisca, 2024, oral interaction).





### Figs 4&5: Religion/faith graffiti

Another major illocutionary act performed in this thematic category is the assertive. The addressers perform assertive acts by stating what they personally think of their relationship with God, arising from their experiences and encounters with God. The inscription *forgiveness is undeserved* in fig 7 below, talks about the concept of forgiveness as an act of compassion, generosity and mercy. The addresser acknowledges that everyone who is forgiven never deserved forgiveness. Therefore, the inscription agrees with the biblical teaching that God only forgives us as humans for the sake of the death of Jesus Christ, and not necessarily because we deserve to be forgiven.



### Figs 6&7: Religion/faith themed graffiti (contd.)

*God wore my shoes* depicts a personal experience and dealing of the addresser with God. Taking cue from the saying, "he who wears the shoe knows where it hurts", we can decipher that the shoes here does not refer to a physical footwear, but represents the situation of the addresser. The inscription encourages the readers to keep faith and hope alive, reckoning that whatever they are facing, God has been there and can guide them through.

#### 1.5.4 Sex/Romance

Sex and romance constitute another theme that was observed to be projected by the graffiti inscriptions by students in Abia State University. Graffiti, being an evolving culture amongst the youth bears characteristic features of the everyday conversations which includes the issues

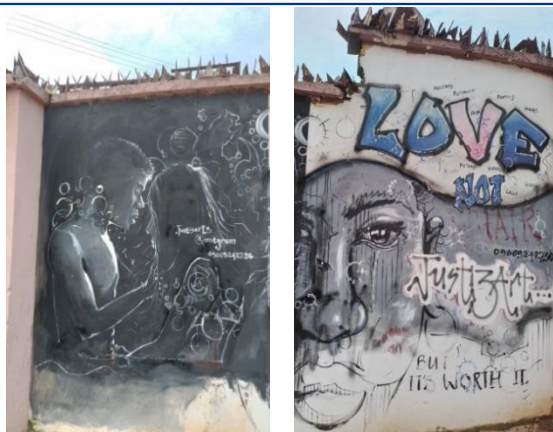
around sex and romantic relationships. From our corpus, 11(14.67%) inscriptions were found to express the ideas and perspectives of sex and romance. They are presented below.

Table 4: Illocutionary acts and types in sex/romance graffiti inscriptions

| Thematic category | Inscriptions                                      | Illocutionary act / Type                        |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Sex/Romance       | -Love's Not Fair, But It's Worth It               | Assertive / stating                             |
|                   | - All man go chop Breakfast (heartbreak)          | Assertive / stating                             |
|                   | -make me horny, give me honey                     | Directive / requesting                          |
|                   | -kpekus (vagina) no be food                       | Assertive / stating                             |
|                   | -touching body don cost                           | Assertive / announcing                          |
|                   | -Konji (desire for sex) respects no man           | Assertive / stating                             |
|                   | -the fear of sleepover is the beginning of wisdom | Assertive / stating                             |
|                   | -no money, no f*ck (sex)                          |                                                 |
|                   | -gbola (pennis) or cucumber?                      | Assertive / announcing                          |
|                   | -fuck off!                                        | Directive / questioning                         |
|                   | -foreplay or fuckplay?                            | Directive / ordering<br>Directive / questioning |

In fig 8 below, the lady is stabbed the male with a knife and the following inscription is made; *all man go still chop breakfast* meaning *everybody will have their share of the heartbreak*. *Breakfast* is a slang term used by young people to refer to heart break The graffiti speaks to the audience, stating the fact the writer believes to be true for every youthful relationship.





Figs 8&9: Sex/romance graffiti

The inscription on fig 9 is *love is not fair, but it is worth it*. It is an expression that recognizes that love, relationships are complicated and the need to persevere in order for it to succeed. On the same fig. 9, the following illegible inscriptions are made- Holidays. Romance, -Hugs, - PERKS, - Kisses, pictures, calls, videos, Gifts, -Sleepovers - how was your day? -hearts, -sex. These inscriptions point to the activities that characterize youthful relationships, for which the writer believes that whatever the unfair treatment gotten from a past lover, love is worth going through any pain for.

The illocutionary acts performed in the sex/romance thematic category includes assertives (stating and announcing), directive (questioning, ordering and requesting). Here, the writer states

their view of the peculiarities of sex and romance within the university, and also adopts directives to question the preferences of the reader of the inscriptions.

### 1.5.5 Nicknames

Based on our study, nicknames are a prominently featured in graffiti inscriptions in Abia State University. The 14 nicknames gathered constitute 18.67% of the corpus used in this study. Nicknames ranks the second in the hierarchy of most used inscriptions in our study, after faith/religion.

**Table 5: Illocutionary acts and types in nicknames themed graffiti inscriptions**

| Thematic category | Inscriptions | Illocutionary act / Type |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
|                   |              |                          |

|           |                                      |                           |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Nicknames | -Ikenga                              | Declarative / christening |
|           | -ezendiara (king of mad people)      | Declarative / christening |
|           | -loverboy                            | Declarative / christening |
|           | -Ezemmuo (traditional chief priest)  |                           |
|           | -obidients (supporters of Peter Obi) | Declarative / christening |
|           | -Macho man                           | Declarative / christening |
|           | -marlians republic                   | Declarative / christening |
|           | -Oyibo (a fair complexioned person)  | Declarative / christening |
|           | -ekelebe (slang for a police man)    | Declarative / christening |
|           | -mamiwota (mermaid)                  |                           |
|           | -Acada (slang for a studious person) | Declarative / christening |
|           |                                      | Declarative / christening |
|           | -king of boys                        | Declarative / christening |
|           | -Sodom and Gomora                    | Declarative / christening |
|           | -Jew man (slang for a neophyte)      | Declarative / christening |

The only illocutionary act performed in this thematic category is the declarative act, primarily the christening type. The use of nicknames can refer to individual people (*Ikenga, ezendiara, ezemmuo, machoman, oyibo, ekelebe, mamiwota, king of boys, jew man*), group of people (*obidients, marlians republic*), or places (*Sodom and gomora*). Students use their nicknames as marks of identification and unique labelling. These nicknames have also become modes of address especially in student-student social relationships and contexts. Generally, participants believe that the use of nicknames in graffiti is an easy way of gaining popularity for themselves or the places they stay in the university community.



Fig 10: Ikenga: Nickname graffiti

*Ikenga* is an Igbo concept. According to Wikipedia it refers to a personal god or spirit believed to embody a person's achievements, success and accomplishments. *Ikenga* is a personal embodiment of human endeavor, achievement, success and victory. This word is used to represent the desire for academic success or personal achievement. It is a call for personal empowerment and the belief in one's ability to achieve success and academic excellence through hard work and determination.

In Abia State University, the word *Ikenga* functions as a nickname for the male students of the university while *Ikengress* refers to the female ones, just as it is the practice in other tertiary institutions; for instance, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka refers to their male students as lions

and female ones as lionesses. The artist by creating that graffiti associates with the word *Ikenga* as a social label for any male student of Abia State university.

### 1.5.6 Street philosophy

According to Mensah & Nyong (2022), street philosophy captures “intuitive judgments that may or may not be reasonably accurate. They are principles that participants have explored to shape and guide life” (p.23). In our study, students are noted to have devised the use of graffiti inscriptions to promote personal but accepted philosophies within the academic environment. From the corpus, 13 inscriptions that depict street philosophy constitute about 17.33%.

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Table 6: Illocutionary acts and types in street philosophy graffiti inscriptions

| Thematic category | Inscriptions                         | Illocutionary act / Type |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Street philosophy | -all fingers are not equal           | Assertive / stating      |
|                   | -man must not live by bread alone    | Assertive / stating      |
|                   | -Winners are not Quitters            | Assertive / stating      |
|                   | -half bread is better than kulikuli  | Assertive / stating      |
|                   | -no pain no gain                     | Assertive / stating      |
|                   | -go hard or go home                  | Directive / ordering     |
|                   | -gentility no be stupidity           | Assertive / announcing   |
|                   | -with life there is hope             | Assertive / stating      |
|                   | -you reap what you sow               | Assertive / stating      |
|                   | -bear bear no be wisdom              | Assertive / stating      |
|                   | -Start TODAY, 2MORO fit no reach you | Directive / ordering     |
|                   | -Hardwork pays                       | Assertive / stating      |
|                   | -nothing lasts forever               | Assertive / stating      |
|                   |                                      | Assertive / stating      |

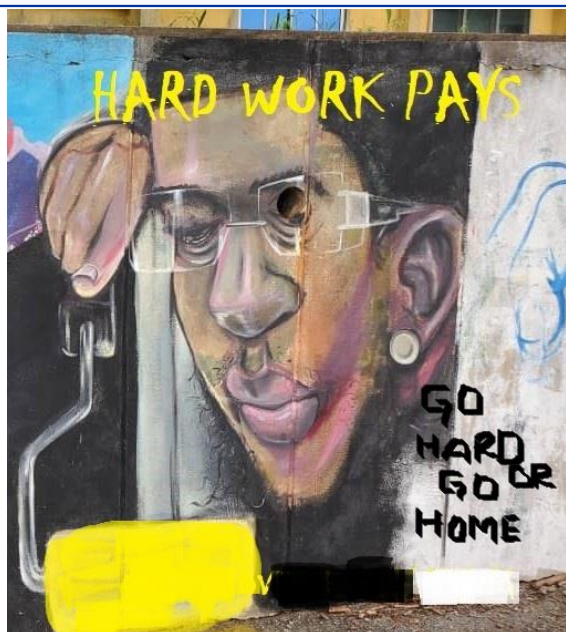


Fig 11: (a) *Hard work pays*, (b) *go hard or go home*: Nickname graffiti

Again, there are more assertive illocutionary acts performed in the nickname thematic category. With 10 of the 13 inscriptions belonging to the stating type of the assertive illocutionary act. This further shows that the students employ the use of these street philosophies to state their view of the world, which sometimes is a derivative of their personal experiences. The inscriptions are majorly positive as the messages they bear are usually for encouragements, advice, caution and son on.

### 1.6 Motivations for the use of Graffiti in Abia State University

From the analysis and discussions, the researchers observe four primary motivations for the involvement of Abia State University students in graffiti design. Firstly, they engage in graffiti designs for aesthetic purposes. Our analysis and discussions of the data on graffiti reveals that –

- i. the writing of graffiti is recognized for its aesthetic values, showcasing a variety of styles, colours and techniques that contribute to the visual appeal of the particular public space;
- ii. graffiti serve as a means of communication among students as it allows for expressions of personal opinions, prayers, thoughts, feelings, perspectives and biases of the signifier about the goings on, on campus or about a given public discourse. It is

- iii. also a means of purveying narratives, experiences, aspirations and ideas of the signifier. Students also employ graffiti as a means of either cautioning and warning fellow students against identified social vices, or encouraging them to be of good behaviour, academically, socially and religiously;
- iv. graffiti in Abia state University perform is the publicity function. It is used by student politicians and campus fellowships to advertise their political aspirations and mantra, and special fellowship programs respectively. As a means of advertisement, graffiti provide an unconventional, attention-grabbing, and cheaper platform to promote events and reach wider audience; and,
- v. graffiti can be used for labeling and construction of social identities/affiliations. The name-tag thematic category exemplifies this function. The addresser paints or inscribes a name that offers the audience to associate referentially to the addresser or place inscribed by the name. With this, the addresser has constructed a label of themselves or environment.

### 1.7 Summary and conclusion

The culture of graffiti is a relatively new practice amongst the students of Abia State University. However, students anonymously engage in it to communicate, beautify and advertise, because it is seen as something that defaces the walls and therefore not encouraged by the authorities of the university.

It is deducible from our data that the language of graffiti inscriptions in Abia State University is greatly influenced by the language (Igbo) of the immediate linguistic and socio-academic environment. The culture and social dynamics of the predominantly Igbo student population largely affects the language used in graffiti design. This is exemplified by the use of slang expressions in the inscriptions. It is noteworthy to point out that the messages conveyed through graffiti in Abia State University are largely centred on youth-centric language use in terms of contents, interests, desires and viewpoints of young people.

From our study, the illocutionary speech acts performed in the graffiti inscriptions of Abia State University students. Of the 75 inscriptions collated, the breakdown of the illocutionary acts and their specific types are as follows;

**Table 7: Frequency and percentage of occurrence of illocutionary acts and types in graffiti inscriptions in Abia State University.**

| Illocutionary act | Type        | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Directive         | Questioning | 4         | 5.33       |
|                   | Requesting  | 1         | 1.33       |
|                   | Ordering    | 13        | 17.33      |
|                   | Begging     | 2         | 2.70       |
| Declarative       | Christening | 22        | 29.33      |
| Commissive        | Promising   | 1         | 1.33       |
|                   | Threatening | 1         | 1.33       |
| Expressive        | Welcoming   | 1         | 1.33       |
| Assertive         | Announcing  | 7         | 9.33       |
|                   | Stating     | 22        | 29.33      |
|                   | Claiming    | 1         | 1.33       |
|                   |             | <b>75</b> | <b>100</b> |

From the above tabulation, it is deducible that the students perform more assertive illocutionary acts in their inscriptions, as they mainly use the graffiti inscriptions to state their view on what they believe to be true of the realistic world around them.

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