





## AN ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS AND CAUTIONARY INSCRIPTION AND STICKER TEXTS IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

The high dominance of sticker texts, inscriptions and writings on vehicles or automobiles has attracted the attention of some researchers. However, none has discussed inscription and sticker texts with reference to social, political and economic vices that are prevalent in Nigeria. In this paper, we discuss religious and cautionary sticker texts, inscriptions and writings on vehicles or automobiles in relation to social, political and economic vices that are prevalent in Nigeria. Our data were drawn from the different major motor parks that constitute the nucleus of an assemblage of intra-city, inter-city and inter-regional vehicles of different brands as well as a variety of diverse messages conveyed by the vehicles across the south-western part of Nigeria. We also gathered some data from discarded automobiles which still carry faint and weather-beaten inscriptions on their mangled bodies at some mechanics' workshops. Other data used include information from previous works that discussed religion and ethics and religion and governance as well as Nigerian dailies that recorded political, religious, economic and criminal activities. We submit that despite the religious prayers that adorn the bodies of several automobiles, the incidence of moral decadence and all forms of criminal activities is alarmingly on the increase in Nigeria and that the religious prayers with reference to avoidable deaths on Nigerian roads seem unanswered in most cases in view of the daily reports of carnage on Nigerian roads. We argue further that beneath the aesthetic function of vehicle insignia is the profound communicative value inherent in the mobile emblems.

**Keywords:** Caution, inscriptions, insecurity, prayers, vehicles.

### 1. Introduction

Scholarship has examined a wide range of social interactions on all spheres of human endeavours, using language as a rich means of such social interactions. The growing upsurge in new discourse genres, in recent times, has attracted the interest of language scholars to the role of language as a vehicle of communicating social and cultural issues ranging from politics, telecommunications and religion to aspects of cultural ethos like greetings and

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proverbs (see Lawal et al. 1997; Ajíléyẹ and Ajíléyẹ, 1997; Awónùsì, 2004; Àlàbí, 2010; Dàda, 2010; Múrànà, 2011; Esimaje, 2001 and Òkánlàwón, 2011). Other scholarly works that have also gained prominence in recent times, apart from the works cited above, include discourse strategies on text messaging, the global system of communication (GSM), slogans of Telecoms Companies and other aspects of the social media (see Esimaje, 2001; Awónùsì, 2004 and Dada, 2010). However, a somewhat unique and contemporary discourse in the area of media communication which has attracted engaging intellectual attention in recent times are stickers and inscriptions on vehicles where owners and drivers of both private and commercial vehicles construct their beliefs and philosophies in a variety of ways. Before now, some attempts have been made by some scholars to investigate the uses and characteristics of sticker and inscription texts both within and outside Nigeria. For example, Àjàní's (1999) stylistic analysis of car stickers in Òyó state takes a linguistic look into the lexical, syntactic, graphological and phonological devices that are used in creating meaning and making car stickers 'vehicles of communication' (Ajani, 1999. p.25). While drawing insights from semiotics, he argues that signs, symbols and colours of car stickers are all veritable signifiers of meaning. The overall preoccupation of Ajani's (ibid) study is an examination of the stylistic analysis of sticker texts used by vehicle operators in Òyó state.

In the area of Critical Discourse Analysis, Nwagbara's (2008) study of vehicle writings discusses the typology of the vehicle insignia. The study focuses particularly on those writings and stickers which are rendered in conventional genres such as jokes or witty statements, philosophical statements and messages. Nwagbara (ibid) argues too that his research endeavour of vehicle inscriptions and writings centres specifically on those areas that tend to address issues of public concern. According to him, the study is directed towards generating reactions from members of the public about the contents of some of the sticker texts under study. He argues in the study that although vehicle writings communicate direct messages decipherable from the meanings of the component words, 'they equally express deeper meanings dependent on the contextual features and elements of the usage of the utterances and the various forms of inferences that could be drawn from the utterances, in addition to what the words convey on their own' (p. 7.). Similarly, Baker's (2011) survey study on bumper stickers is an etymological documentary on the history, identification and preservation of the emblems. He traces the evolution of the use of bumper stickers to the late 1940s in America, delineating on some of the characteristics of the adhesive emblems and how they can be preserved. In all of the above studies, however, none has discussed inscription and sticker texts with reference to social, political and economic vices that are prevalent in Nigeria. In this paper, we are interested in religious and cautionary domains of language use with reference to the use of inscription and sticker texts in Nigeria. We show that despite the frequent use of religious stickers, social, political, economic and all other forms of vices are regular occurrences. We also show that despite the use of cautionary inscription and sticker texts, the incident of carnage on the Nigerian roads is on the increase or has not abated.

## **2. Literature Review**

Previous research studies have focused on religion and religious stickers that are of interest to our present study (see Ejiofor 1974; Jemiriye 2004; Chiluya, 2008). Religion, according to Wikipedia, 'is a set of beliefs that is passionately held by a group of people that is reflected in a world view and in expected beliefs and actions (which are often ritualized)'. Buttressing this definition is Ejiofor (1974, p.63). According to him, '... religion is one major drive behind human behaviour'. He maintains also that 'religion has had an important disciplinary effect on the whole of social order in any given civilization.' Ejiofor's (ibid) statement underscores the fact that it is the consciousness of every individual in the Supreme Being that constantly puts check on the behavioural patterns of man. Jemiriye (2004, p.38) too

claims that religion is the 'moment-by-moment consciousness of any person that is rooted in the belief in a Supreme Being, God, resulting in the totality of that person's action, behaviour, and utterances.' He concludes that it is 'the human quest for God'. From Jemiriye's (ibid) definition, it is crystal clear that religion is a system of faith and worship in some personality or some object that is held with reverence and absolute devotion. It plays a tremendous role in the lives of the people as it guides, checkmates and shapes their actions, utterances and activities in general.

Chiluwa's (2008) study is another research endeavour that studies the religious value of vehicle inscriptions. His study primarily discusses vehicle stickers as a medium for communicating religious beliefs. The study takes a critical look at vehicle stickers as they are used to construct individual and group identities, people's religious belief, faith, and social vision in the context of religious assumptions and practices in Nigeria. While discussing the discourse context of religious stickers on selected commercial vehicles in Nigeria, Chiluwa (2008) observes that religious vehicle stickers are used to express social vision, individual group identity as well as a means of re-affirming faith by religious adherents. In the study, he argues that individuals using the stickers that construct social vision do experience in real life some hard times, but are made to believe that operating in the tradition of the popular positive confession would change their social conditions for the better. In the study, too, he remarks that religious stickers are used as a 'quest for self-identity' as adherents of certain religious groups in Nigeria procure car stickers for the purpose of identification. By sticking the insignia on their vehicles, individual church members can identify one another and, consequently, are likely to offer assistance to any of the members in need of help. However, his assertion that 'members who do not use stickers because they do not own cars are insulated from assistance as they are often neglected or mistakenly ill-treated by their fellow brothers or sisters' may not be a completely valid statement in that stickers have become so ubiquitous and widespread nowadays that they are not restricted to vehicles alone. Besides Church members who either do not own vehicles or just decide not to use the sticker emblems of their denominations may still receive favour either in their Churches or elsewhere. Therefore, whether they are used on vehicles or not does not necessarily insulate the users from possible assistance from their fellow brethren. This implies that members of a religious faith who do not own cars on which they can post the stickers can, as well, decide to fix the insignia on their bags, Bible or Quran as the case may be while the purpose of group/individual identification can still be maintained or achieved.

Similarly, while we may agree with Chikuwa's (ibid) argument that stickers communicate the religious affiliation of group/individual of the users, we also want to argue that vehicle inscriptions or stickers provide a rich platform for other domains of discourse than group/individual identity. As a matter of fact, there are quite a lot of other domains in which vehicle writings can serve communicative purpose. However, in our opinion, in spite of man's consciousness in the sanctity of religion and the immanent and transcendental nature of a Supreme Being, God, the world is not totally free from evil as a state of Utopia is hardly attainable in a crisis-ridden society in which we live. This is why crimes and criminal activities around the globe that are at variance with the teachings or tenets of Islam and Christianity have consistently become an albatross all over the nations, especially countries where the two religions are practised. The Islamic and Christian teachings which have been flagrantly and intentionally disobeyed in some countries like Nigeria include: 'Thou shall not steal', 'Thou shall not kill' and 'Thou shall love your neighbour as yourself' among others. In this paper, we are interested in two domains of language use in vehicle stickers and inscriptions. The domains are: religious vehicle writings, stickers and inscriptions and those that construct cautionary messages on the bodies of automobiles. The two domains have

similar things in common; for, while religion is the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a Supreme God or gods, individuals are believed to be under the dictates of their respective religions, with the belief that the teachings/tenets of religion and cautionary messages will assist the individuals, the government and the different government agencies to do the needful so as to reduce the rising cases of armed banditry, killing, kidnapping, stealing, bad governance,, all forms of lawlessness and ballot box snatching as well as carnage on Nigerian roads to the barest minimum.

### **3. Data Collection**

The research is descriptive. Some of the data used for this paper comprised vehicle inscriptions from two major sources. Data that made up the first source were drawn from different major motor parks across the south-western part of Nigeria. The decision to use major motor parks was not unconnected with the fact that those motor parks constitute the nucleus of an assemblage of intra-city, inter-city and inter-regional vehicles of different brands as well as a variety of diverse messages conveyed by the vehicles. Motor mechanics' workshops formed the second source of data for the research. The reason for using mechanics' workshops to collect data is mainly to establish the fact that the practice of writing inscriptions on the bodies of vehicles has had a fairly long history. Some of the workshops, especially the long-established ones, serve as dumping grounds for discarded automobiles which still carry faint and weather-beaten inscriptions on their mangled bodies. The vehicles were abandoned in mechanics' workshops and serve either as tool kits or make-shift sheds to keep tools or recline respectively.

Similarly, other data used in this paper included information from previous research studies and some Nigerian newspapers as well as some online news repository that recorded political, religious, economic and criminal activities in the country. Such previous research works discussed religion and ethics as well as religion and governance. The works include: Osagbemi and Adepetu (1999), Ogunkan and Fawole (2001), Omoṣoṣo, (2001), Ogunkan (2011), Ikotun and Balogun (2016). The Nigerian dailies and the online news repository consulted in the course of our study are as follows: Daily Independent (2015), The Daily Trust (2016), The Nation (2016), The Punch (2016, 2018), The Guardian (2021), Vanguard (2018, 2021), Sahara Reporters (2021), Premium Times (2021), and BBC online (2021).

In addition, only forty-one (41) vehicle texts that cut across the two domains of our discourse were collected for our study, however, only twenty (20) of the total data were used for the analysis. We strongly felt that deploying the entire corpus for our analysis for this paper would have been rather too unwieldy and cumbersome. Moreover, since some of the data were almost similar in content and meaning, although different in their linguistic structures, we decided that those that would yield unique interpretations among the pairs should be considered for analysis. It is believed that applying this method will not only eliminate repetition, but also make the data handy for analysis. The data that construct religious messages on vehicles record a higher percentage than the second domain. The reasons for the preponderance of religious vehicle writings over the second discourse domain are not far-fetched. Existing research studies have shown that Nigeria is no doubt, the most religious country in the world (see Idowu, 1996; BBC, 2004; Emenyonu, 2007; Chilwa, 2008; and Akiti, 2013). Therefore, it is assumed that crimes and criminal activities that are at variance with the teachings or tenets of Islam and Christianity should not have been mentioned or have occurred or have been occurring in Nigeria. It is also assumed that the issue of religions, especially in Nigeria, is all encompassing as it cuts across the other domain in our study. This is because the reasons that serve as the bases of our findings under the religious domain can also serve as the bases for our discussion under the other domain.

We have adopted a theoretical framework that allows the linguistic means by which a text is constructed to communicate meanings far beyond the contextual sphere. Consequently, we have decided to adopt Yule's (1996) theoretical framework of pragmatics. Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics which investigates the techniques by which language is used for communication purposes. In meaning negotiation, different situations are bound to attract different interpretations or meanings from the same utterance. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the scholar of pragmatics to identify the situation or context of an utterance before giving a valid conclusion on what the language user has used it for and the meaning expected to be generated from the message. The choice of Yule's (1996) theoretical construct is found to be quite apposite due to its potential for deconstructing contextually loaded utterances. For, according to him, pragmatics is "the study of speaker meaning, contextual meaning, how word gets communicated than is said, and the study of the expression of relative distance" (Yule, 1996, p.3). Pragmatics is primarily concerned with the meaning of an utterance (or writing) rather than a grammatical sentence or proposition. According to Mey (2001, p.221), the pragmatic act theory is concerned with the environment in which both speaker (or writer) and hearer (or reader) find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation as well as what is actually being said. Mey's (ibid) argument is in tandem with the general goals of pragmatics which are aimed at explaining how utterances convey meaning in contexts, how meaning is decoded or retrieved from utterances in contexts and in particular situations, how contexts contribute to the encoding and decoding of meaning, how speakers and hearers of utterances perceive them, how speakers (or writers) say (or write) one thing, but mean something else and how deductions are made in context with respect to what meaning has been encoded in a particular communication event (see Osisanwo, 2005, p.52). In this paper, we endorse Yule's (1996) construct with reference to how words get communicated than are said in a communication event or how speakers (or writers) say (or write) one thing but mean something else.

#### 4. Findings

The findings of this research are categorised into two sub-sections and they are as follows:

##### 4.1 *The Religious Inscription and Sticker Texts*

The first level of our analysis which is the identification of the discourse domains of the vehicle writings indicates that inscriptions and stickers that carry religious messages that can be tagged safe journey messages or prayers on vehicles record a high percentage. The Christian messages or prayers include 'Psalm 121', 'The Blood of Jesus', 'Psalms 23', 'The Lord is My Shepherd' and 'I lift up my eyes to the Hills'. The Islamic/Muslim messages or prayers comprise 'Allahu Akbar', 'Wabillahi Taofeek', 'Bisimilahi' and 'Allahu Lateef'. Some messages or prayers that are written in Yorùbá, English and Igbo are 'Sò mi délé Olúwa' (Grant me protection to my home, oh Lord), 'À délé báre' (Safe journey), 'Bálé láyò' (Meeting home in peace), 'Safe Journey' and 'Ijeoma' (Safe journey). The Yorùbá people do say, "Tí kò bá nídíí obinrin kí jẹ Kúmólú" (Except there is a strong reason, a woman cannot be a leader (where there are men)). The high dominance of religious inscriptions and writings on vehicles may not be unconnected with the huge toll that traffic accidents exact on the country almost on daily basis. An allusion to the Holy Bible (RSV edition) points to the fact that (as far as the Nigerian road users are concerned) all days are evil, but each season must be redeemed (Eph. 5:16, RSV) although the Nigerian readers of this Biblical verse will add "through prayer". It is possibly in the light of this scriptural injunction that informs many of the religious vehicle writings. Such religious vehicle writings are expressions of supplications in which vehicle

users seek the face of God for His protection on a journey whose destination can only be guaranteed by Him.

However, the question, therefore, is: are the prayers embedded in the inscriptions truly answered? Our answer is in the negative in view of the available data from the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), a recent research by the World Health Organization (WHO) and some research findings by some researchers which reveal a mind-boggling rate of road carnages in Nigeria. For example, available data both from the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) and a recent research by the World Health Organization (WHO) show that out of 192 countries ranked, Nigeria came 191 in the number of deaths caused by road accidents, coming as the second worst country in the world. In its report, WHO confirms quite shockingly that 162 people die from road accidents from every 100,000 Nigerians. According to its estimate, over 1.3 million people are killed annually in road accidents while over fifty million people sustain various degrees of injuries from such crashes. The report indicates that deaths from road traffic accidents are gradually overtaking deaths from malaria and tuberculosis. The above alarming statistics on deaths resulting from road accidents were corroborated by the Corps Marshal and Chief Executive of the Federal Road Safety Corps who said that the rate of road carnage still remains high despite the efforts of the corps to minimise it (see *Daily Trust*, Tuesday March 15, 2016 and <https://m.facebook.com/notes/federal-road-safety-corps-frsc-n>, accessed on May 21<sup>st</sup> 2016). We daresay also that mishap still remains on the high proportion in spite of the variety of faith-based writings on most vehicles plying the Nigerian highways.

In a similar development, a researcher confirmed that in 2013 alone, 6,430 Nigerians lost their lives on Nigerian roads. The report further notes that between 2009 and 2013 alone, about 30,435 people were killed in road accidents in Nigeria, which is ‘about the size of a European city, e.g. Gyula or Hungary’ (see <http://omojuwa.com/2015>, accessed on May 21<sup>st</sup> 2016). The conclusion from the report indicates that ‘next to Boko Haram insurgency, road accident is the second highest source of violent death in Nigeria’. In fact, going by the daily reports of carnage on Nigerian roads, it will not be an over-statement to say that every journey embarked upon these days is fraught with incalculable hazard because every destination is usually characterised by apprehensions and uncertainties both by the vehicle operators and the passengers. Reports of blood-curdling and ear-splitting news of road accidents involving several lives on Nigerian roads are no longer a new phenomenon these days. In the year 2016 alone, cases of road mishaps claiming many lives of illustrious and promising Nigerians who would have contributed significantly to the social, economic and spiritual well-being of the country have been reported in the national dailies (see *The Punch*, March 7, 2016 and *The Nation*, March 7, 2016, p.7). These and many of such sad cases have become a source of concern and worry to the public as well as the vehicle operators. That this concern is articulated in many of the religious inscriptions and stickers on the bodies of vehicles considered in this paper shows that practical or proactive steps and not necessarily prayers alone should be sought to stem the monstrous tide of the carnage on Nigerian roads.

Still on the religious messages, the preponderance of religious vehicle writings over the other discourse domains can be supported with evidence from the existing research that Nigeria is arguably the most religious country in the world ‘with about 91% of the population attending religious services and 95% ‘praying regularly’ (see BBC, 2004; Emenyonu, 2007; Chilwa, 2008; Akítì, 2013). For instance, Chilwa (2008, p.371) claims that Christianity and Islam are the predominant religions accounting for about 93 per cent of the entire population’. According to Akítì (2013, p.115), ‘as sensitive as religion is, it is worth living for; it offers a pride of place for people as they subsequently derive satisfaction from it as well as a sense of security’. The Yorùbá race, which is the major ethnic group in the south-western part of Nigeria, practises Christianity or Islam or the Yorùbá traditional religion. According to the

Nations Encyclopaedia, the overall statistics of religions in Nigeria indicate that ‘about 50% of the population are Muslim, with a majority practising the Sunni denomination of the faith and about 40% being Christian while about 10% practise traditional African religions or no religion at all’.

Again, with reference to good governance, accountability and prudence, how have both Islam and Christianity, the two most prominent religions in Nigeria, helped to mitigate the legion of challenges staring us in the face? Without being pretentious, it is crystal clear that the two religions are not beneficial and the question reminds us of the research works that have been carried out by Osagbemi and Adepetu (1999), Ogunkan and Fawole (2001), Omoṣoṣo, (2001), Ogunkan (2011), Ikotun and Balogun (2016). The research works focus on why alms-begging is rampant in South-western and Northern Nigeria. For example, Osagbemi and Adepetu (1999) report that 96.6% of the beggars in Jos, Northern Nigeria, are Muslims; 2.3% are Christians and 1.1% of the entire population belong to African traditional religion. In Ogbomoṣo, in South-western Nigeria, Ogunkan and Fawole (2001) report that 84.4% constitute Muslims while 15.6% of the colony of the beggars are Christians. Therefore, to address the problem of poverty with alms-begging in Nigeria, Omoṣoṣo (2001 p.67) suggests that ‘government should make education free at primary and secondary levels and make it obligatory for all the children under the school age’. Ogunkan (2011, p.131) too recommends that ‘government should break the cycle of poverty through the restructuring of the economy in order to improve the economic situation of the country’. But, the probing posers raised by Ikotun and Balogun (2016 p.186 - p.187) are worth noting. They ask the following questions:

1. Who are the people that make up the government in Nigeria?
2. Who are the people that have been ruling Nigeria since 1953 or since Independence?
3. Who are the ones that have been the policy-makers in Nigeria?
4. Who are the people that have been at the helms of affairs at the local, state and federal government levels and who will not make the good suggestions by Omoṣoṣo and Ogunkan work?
5. Who are the people that were responsible for the distressed banks where several youths, who were in the employ of the banks, were later sent back to the labour market?
6. Who are the bank workers who, despite their good remunerations, still defraud their employers?
7. Who is the chairman<sup>2</sup> of the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) that has been accused of not remitting money recovered from the corrupt public officers to the government account?
8. Who are the people that have been arraigned by Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) for money laundering and for stealing public money and pensioners’ funds?
9. Who are the lawyers who have been defending those alleged to have been involved in the stealing of public money and pensions funds?

In answering the above posers, Ikotun and Balogun (2016, pp.186-187) insist that the culprits are both Muslims and Christians and not the Traditional African religion practitioners. They argue further that:

...the story of crimes committed by highly privileged Nigerians who are in charge of public money against Nigeria and Nigerians is endless and that the issue of governance in Nigeria since independence reminds us of a statement

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<sup>2</sup> One of the former Chairmen of the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) is being referred to here

credited to a white man in Akinlolu Aje's 'Historical Excursions' that if Africa was granted independence, it was like giving a baby a razor blade. It is disheartening to see the realization of this white man's submission in Nigeria where everybody claims to be either a Muslim or a Christian who should be an embodiment of everything that is Godly considering the number of religious activities in the country where nearly every house is either a mosque or a church.

The submissions of Ikotun and Balogun (ibid) above point to the fact that most Nigerians are religious without the spiritual impact showing in their conduct. Kenneth Gyado remarks that "the only weapon left to fight official crime in Nigeria today is the mobilization of shame" (see *The Punch* of July 4, 2016). In fact, despite the establishment of Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to punish looters of government treasury, overwhelming available evidence shows that stealing of government money is still being reported in Nigerian dailies.

Furthermore, in spite of the proliferation of Christian and Muslim worship centres across the Southwest in particular and Nigeria in general, the incidence of moral decadence is frightening. For instance, such social vices as armed robbery, kidnapping, ritual killing, rape, ballot box snatching, thuggery and abduction with request for ear-splitting ransom from victims' families are few of the worrisome cases that occur on daily basis (see *Crime Watch* on TVC News, 3.30p.m-4.00p.m, every Thursday, <https://dailypost.ng>). According to some national dailies, the case of insecurity in the country has become so alarming that the National Assembly, piqued by the increasing level of insecurity, has invited the Inspector General of Police to the floor of the House to explain how best the menace can be addressed. Cases of general insecurity in the country are like the recurring decimal. They are widely reported in the national dailies. A few of such cases include recent incident of bank robbery at Offa, Kwara state in which no fewer than 38 persons were killed, a most recent incident of the abduction of a university professor at the prestigious Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in which a ransom of over #5 million was paid to the abductors, Boko Haram insurgencies, clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and farmers that have claimed several lives as well as cases of kidnapping not only in the Niger Delta area anymore but also in all the parts of the country as a whole all of which have made the country an unsafe place to live in. These cases have equally robbed the country of her claim to being a haven for foreign investors. Similarly, against the backdrop of the eerie insecurity in the country is the life-style of many of the religious leaders which leaves much to be desired. Most of them live flamboyant and extravagant life-style such that rather than centre their homilies on contentment and godliness, their focus is now on self-aggrandizement and craze for acquisitiveness. In Nigeria, for instance, many of the acclaimed clergy men now ride in posh cars and costly aircraft, leaving many of their church members to wallow in abject poverty while they, on the other hand, luxuriate in sheer opulence. It is also pathetic to remark further that institutions established by some of the religious organizations through tithes, offerings and special contributions from the flock who pay through their nose, charge cut-throat tuitions which members of their congregation find too impossible to afford. This insensitivity of most of the supposedly men of God towards their flock has left many of the adherents do the unthinkable.

#### *4.2 Cautionary Inscription and Sticker Texts*

Vehicle Writings that communicate warnings and cautionary messages are very common on the bodies of automobiles that ply the Nigerian roads. Such writings are used to construct warnings to guide other drivers as well as the pedestrians on use of roads and



highways. Much of the discourse in this domain is identifiable among haulage trucks, lorries and other heavy duty automobiles that traverse inter-state and inter-regional routes. Because of the intimidating size of this category of vehicles, inscription texts on them are mostly used for cautionary purpose either to on-coming vehicles or those coming from the rear. The insignia signifying warnings and cautionary messages are meant to help in checkmating avoidable crashes on the road by sending warnings to both the pedestrians and smaller vehicles. One unique characteristic about the texts signalling caution and warnings is that they are boldly and colourfully inscribed mostly in red and yellow colours at the back of the vehicles that transport them to warn vehicle operators coming from behind to take note of the messages. They also serve as warnings to impatient pedestrians who may want to use the opportunity of the long vehicles to dash across to the other side of the road that they should always exercise patience and restraint whenever they want to cross to the other side of the road. Inscriptions or stickers in the domain are equally used to communicate precautionary advice and suggestions to the readers so that they may achieve health and longevity since it is only the living that celebrate. Vehicle inscriptions that are commonly used in this respect include, 'Slow down', 'Stop', 'Horn before overtaking', 'Speed thrills, but kills' 'Don't kiss me', 'Speed limit': 60km/h', 'Ambulance', 'Highly Inflammable' and a host of others.

Again, the question that is begging for answers is: to what extent has safety of lives been guaranteed on Nigerian roads in spite of those cautionary writings boldly written on the bodies of the automobiles? The answer is also in the negative as the state of Nigerian roads over the years has been as palpable as it is deplorable, all pointing to the fact that it has been in a state of utter and seemingly irretrievable neglect. A road, according to the Nigerian Highway Code (2008, p.1) is 'a path established over land for the passage of vehicles, people and animals. It provides dependable pathway for moving people and goods from one place to another.' The acute need for connectivity makes the road network a web of complexity. This is because there exist different types of road networks, each of which has its own complexities and utilitarian functions. For instance, among road typology, there are: private drive pathways, two-lane highways, dual carriage ways, expressways, each of them with its own characteristic complexities like T-junctions, roundabouts, interchanges, intercessions, etc (Nigeria Highway code, 2008). The poor state of the road networks in Nigeria in recent years has become a source of concern to most well-meaning Nigerians. This has been so because of the deplorable state in which the roads have been. Road users, especially vehicle operators as well as commuters, have expressed worries over the worrisome conditions of Nigerian roads. It is no exaggeration that most of the roads across the country are in a sorry state of neglect and seemingly irredeemable condition. There is hardly any part of the country, except, of course, the nation's capital, Abuja, that can boast of motorable or passable road network. The consequence of the palpable picture of the roads is very obvious: avoidable deaths. Nigerian roads have, for far too long, become death traps, killing innocent and promising Nigerians with a high fatalistic frequency.

Furthermore, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), for instance, gave a frightening statistics of lives which road accidents have claimed over a period of five years; i.e. between January, 2013 and June, 2018. The figures are as follows: 2013: 5,539; 2014: 4,430; 2015: 5,400; 2016: 5,053; 2017: 5,049 and between January and June 2018 alone, road mishaps have claimed no fewer than 2,623 lives. Lending credence to these figures of fatality due to road crashes, the "Sunday Vanguard" claimed that between July and September 2018, no fewer than 126 lives had also been wasted to road crashes. The "Guardian" further remarks that, 'summation of these figures gives a heart-rending total of 28,195 lives crashed in 68 months, an equivalent of 415 lives per month, 14 persons per day and two lives in every four

hours. This makes Nigeria one of the countries with very high road fatalities in the world' (see [vanguardngr.com/2018/09/6](http://vanguardngr.com/2018/09/6)).

There is no gainsaying that the menace of bad road network in Nigeria has become a national embarrassment. The numerous deep potholes and bumps have sent many private and commercial vehicles out of the roads as well as forcing many a vehicle owner to lose their vehicles and, by implication, their daily bread as a result of massive and irreparable damage which yawning and deep pot-holes have caused many an automobile. Needless to mention again that the incessant cases of traffic jams occasioned by the poor state of roads, have fostered the emergence of some petty cash and carry traders alongside the highways who sell their wares such as some vehicle parts, candies, undies and some household materials to stranded vehicle operators and passengers respectively. Another reason why road carnages have become a recurring decimal on Nigerian roads is lack of maintenance of major Nigerian roads. Maintenance culture in Nigeria is anything but desirable. Going down the memory lane, it will be recalled that during the late 1950s and early 1960s when the Public Works Department (PWD) which later transformed into the States' Ministries of Works was in place, road construction was taken seriously. The Department in the old Western region was very effective and efficient. Road repair works were promptly attended to even before the users called the attention of such roads to the government. Besides, quality job done on roads then ensured the sustainability of the roads unlike these days when shoddy repair works that hardly stand the test of time are carried out on roads. It is an indubitable fact that set-backs on Nigerian roads have remained unkempt and unattended to by the relevant authorities that are supposed to ensure their maintenance. Consequently, those set-backs are usually over-grown by weeds and thick bush. The effect of this neglect is that whenever some vehicles break down on the road, the bushy set-backs no longer serve as parking lots for such vehicles. Instead, such faulty vehicles are forced to use a portion of the road for their repairs. This practice has caused untold mishaps on roads as unsuspecting drivers, in some cases, run into broken-down vehicles and consequently cause avoidable ghastly accidents.

It is not only around road maintenance alone that Nigerians are culpable. Even in other social facilities too, the attitudes of most Nigerians are quite negative. An oft-repeated impression of Nigerians towards public utilities is that public utilities, especially those owned by the government are nobody's concern. Unlike in overseas countries where roads are regularly maintained, here in Nigeria, most roads belonging to the federal, state, and local governments are neglected. This phenomenon of neglect is quite unfortunate because there are a few agencies saddled with the responsibility of constructing and maintaining roads. For instance, we have state and Federal Ministries of Works as well as Federal Government Road Maintenance Agency (FERMA) and a few others who are responsible for road maintenance. But, it is paradoxical that most of these agencies only exist in name, in spite of the huge budgetary allocation allotted to those agencies. Even when they embark on road construction and or rehabilitation, sub-standard materials that will not make the roads last long will be used. A case in point is the shoddy construction work carried out on Osogbo- Ikirun expressway in Osun State in spite of the ear-splitting amount of money alleged to have been released for the project. Lack of proper supervision by the agency responsible for the work led to the substandard materials used in the construction of the 20 kilometer road. It is sad to remark that even before the completion of the road, deep pot-holes had been visible on the surface of the federal government-assisted dual carriage road. There are many of such shoddily completed road networks that have now become death traps to motorists.

Similarly, the problem of uncontrolled erosion is associated with the substandard state of most of the Nigerian roads. When inadequate or insufficient materials are used to construct or rehabilitate roads, the consequence is weak overlay of bitumen which easily gives in to

erosion as there is no provision for a drainage system to retain water. That is why most of Nigerian roads cannot stand the test of time. Suffice it to say that uncontrolled erosion on the roads has caused untold carnages to motorists, especially during the rainy season when most unsuspecting drivers just run into the erosion-infested roads. The consequence of such incidents is mostly ghastly accidents. Another cause of road mishaps is due to the many of the bridges constructed along the areas which do not carry warning signs neither were they constructed with handrails to guard both the pedestrians and drivers. The consequence of this phenomenon is frequent occurrences of carnages on the bridges. On occasions when vehicles plunge into the river as a result of bridges that were not constructed with handrails, many lives are usually lost. In Erio, a town in Ekiti State for instance, there is a bridge which connects the ancient town to other neighbouring towns. The bridge has, for long, been a death trap as vehicles, especially trailers and tankers, are known to have plunged into the deep gorge at the side of the bridge. On each occasion of such plunge, loss of lives is often recorded. This tale of woes is not limited or peculiar to the area just mentioned above. The Lagos-Benin road is another case in point. One can continue on and on mentioning those places where accidents are a commonplace due to the negligence and lack of commitment on the part of governments and agencies saddled with the responsibility of fixing roads. In short, Nigeria is a country where motorists pay for what the Nigerian government calls "Road Worthiness" every year when in actual fact most of the roads are not motorable. It is our hope that all the concerned authorities involved in road construction and maintenance will rise to the occasion and do the needful to reduce carnage on the roads to the barest minimum. The naked reality is that no amount of faith-based or prayer messages (inscriptions) can attenuate or mitigate the high occurrence of carnages on the nation's highways except proactive measures are taken by the relevant authorities.

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons for carnage on the roads is the contributory factor from the nation's security operatives, especially the police and the FRSC personnel. Road blocks are a common phenomenon on Nigerian highways. Road blocks are mounted most especially by the police ostensibly to arrest erring vehicle operatives. But, the fact is that most of the road blocks mounted by the police are easy avenues to extort money from motorists. Many an accident has occurred on most of the road-blocks because many of them are mounted at obscure locations where the drivers, especially the commercial drivers who always have a running battle with the police, unwittingly will run into those road-blocks. Cases of road-blocks accidents have been reported in the dailies. The most recent was the one which occurred along Ilesa-Akure road following a road-block allegedly mounted by the police. Closely connected to the above is the desperation of the police to make commercial drivers part with a certain amount of money. In this respect, whenever they signal any commercial driver to stop for the routine stop and search check, and, perhaps such a driver is not ready to offer a bribe, what he does is that as soon as he gets close to the police patrol road block spot, he accelerates and drives at neck-breaking speed in order to evade arrest. In a desperate bid, however, the angry police would pursue the 'erring' commercial driver with a view to tracking him down for arrest. A few drivers have, in the process of an escape, run their vehicles into ditches or obstacles, thus causing needless road accidents. This unwholesome and unethical practice is also common among the FRSC operatives. It was not until very recently that the practice of chasing vehicles whose operators disobey the 'Stop and Search' order by the FRSC following a directive from the office of the Corps Marshal of the Commission.

However, while we apportion blame for the causes of carnage on the road to the government and their various agencies, we should not fail to mention that commercial vehicle drivers also contribute to carnage on the road. Negligence on the part of most of the drivers on

the road is a contributory factor in that whenever their vehicles break down on the road, and they try to fix the vehicles, they usually abandon those items they work with to repair their vehicles right in the middle of the road. For instance, supposing a vehicle develops a flat tyre on motion, expectedly, the driver will need either big stones or broken blocks or a log to ensure that the faulty vehicle is placed on a stable position before the deflated tyre is removed. But most of the drivers usually abandon those objects right on the road without clearing them. More often than not, vehicle drivers will run over those obstructive objects, thus causing a somersault with its attendant casualty of large proportion in most cases.

## 5. Conclusion

We examine language use in vehicle writings among vehicle operators in Nigeria with a view to determining what manner of messages they convey to the public. The study has shown that vehicle inscriptions and stickers constitute a popular medium of discourse as well as a key aspect of the culture of communication among vehicle operators in Nigeria. This is so because, for quite a long time now, writings on vehicles have become a form of communication which has acquired clear-cut artistic and linguistic dimensions in our area of study. As a veritable medium of meaning generation, vehicle insignia have become ready tools in the hands of vehicle users to communicate a variety of messages to the public. We submit that despite the religious prayers that adorn the bodies of several automobiles, the incidence of moral decadence and all forms of criminal activities is alarmingly on the increase in Nigeria and that the religious prayers with reference to avoidable deaths on Nigerian roads seem unanswered in most cases in view of the daily reports of carnage on Nigerian roads. We argue further that beneath the aesthetic function of vehicle insignia is the profound communicative value inherent in the mobile emblems. More importantly, we have observed that vehicle writings express the feelings, behavioural traits and world views of some of the vehicle operators. And as more and more vehicles of different shapes and brands traverse the length and breadth of Nigerian roads daily, so do inscriptions on stickers that construct a variety of meanings can be found on the bodies of those automobiles. As a form of literary texts, therefore, vehicle writings generally have been found to be useful in the areas of religions and a host of others, all of which were considered in this study. Moreover, messages of vehicle inscriptions are, in most cases, engaging as they express somewhat enigmatic abstract ideas in crisp and compact language to the admiration of the reading public.

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