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GRAFFITI AS A LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON: DIFFERENT THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The present paper is a reflection on some of the conceptual discussions about graffiti and its broad applicability studied within the scope of linguistics in the recent years. The paper contains detailed information concerning the question what graffiti is and goes over the main linguistic features, their usage and functions as texts, as well as tries to reveal the contemporary tendencies of the development of graffiti along with the growing social, political or personal issues citizens experience every day. Along with the different achievements in the sphere of linguistics, graffiti should be considered as a model of communication. The paper aims to put the knowledge to use and to highlight the importance of studying graffiti texts from this new angle.

Key words: *graffiti, text, linguistic features, communicative features, visual and verbal components*

The evolution societies undergo in the course of history is being marked by the feedback its members give on this or that social event or phenomenon. These feedbacks are indicators of different attitudes, feelings, values, viewpoints the society holds during this or that event and not always they are expressed by means of traditional modes of communication – public speeches or newspaper articles or interviews. Most of the time people prefer to voice their opinions concerning public or personal issues using alternative modes of communication (social media pages, slogans, anonymous feedback-books etc.). However, there is an alternative means of communication which has been used by people since ancient times. Though at that time, not being perceived as a means of communication, people expressed whatever image or text they had in their mind using the walls that surrounded them. And indeed, people wanted to have their mark on the walls, to somehow leave their trace on the places they inhibited or travelled or even observed for various reasons. The walls being a unique medium of people's imagination and their pictorial reproduction silently bore much information concerning different problems and events happening at the times those pictures or writings appeared on them and only centuries later they were observed theoretically and were named as "graffiti". The times changed while the platform of self-expression still has the same name (personal social media pages are sometimes called "walls").

Graffiti is a rather old phenomenon but has come to the centre of scientific attention in the recent years mostly. In order to examine and find out present socio-

political issues it has been widely investigated in social studies, also researches have been carried out in arts, since sometimes there appear pieces of graffiti that are considered to be more artistic and powerful than other works that are exhibited or sold at unbelievable prices, as it says in a graffiti "just because it is not in a museum, does not mean it isn't art". Graffiti is also studied in pedagogy and psychology for teachers and individuals in order to pay attention to the needs and problems of the students, who cannot otherwise raise them.

To begin with, it is necessary to point out that graffiti is a unique medium of people's thoughts and their voicing among other people or to the authorities. Nowadays, despite the unimaginable abundance of the means of communication, people do not cease to raise their ideas, problems, complaints or even their talent using the walls that surround them. This is mainly conditioned by two factors. Firstly, it seems essential to know that what is said through graffiti may not otherwise be expressed explicitly: it can be a riot against an unfair authority or sorrow after a tragic event or even just a love confession to someone. Secondly, it stands to reason that graffiti provides publicity that is first of all more available to the targeted audience, besides its visibility and the interest the readers have, in our opinion, cannot be compared with other means of communication.

Before elucidating important questions about graffiti, it is worth mentioning that in linguistics the study of graffiti is relatively young, though it is known to people since ancient times and there is much that linguists can deal with considering its wide semantic and pragmatic scopas well as the usage of different linguistic units in it.

The present paper is a consideration of the theoretical information on graffiti in modern linguistics and covers its basic findings.

The Definition

Etymologically, the word graffiti derives from the Italian word graffio (means "to scratch"), meaning "incised inscriptions, (plural but often used as singular)" /Encyclopedia Britannica/. The dictionary definitions of the word put an emphasis on the different characteristics of the phenomenon of graffiti, for example the Meriam-Webster dictionary defines the word as "usually unauthorized writing or drawing on a public surface /https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/graffiti/, while the Cambridge dictionary stresses the content of the wall writings defining the word as "words or drawings, especially humorous, rude,   or political, on walls, doors, etc."/https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/graffiti/. The Oxford Dictionary gives a much simpler definition of the word: "drawings or writing   on   a   wall,   etc."/https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/ english /graffiti?q=graffiti/.

The American Heritage stresses the importance of visibility of the graffiti and defines it as "drawings or inscriptions made on a wall or other surface, usually

without permission and so as to be seen by the public" /https://ahdictionary. com/word/search.html?q=graffiti/. As far as the grammar of the word is concerned, we use the word graffiti as singular, when we refer to it as a phenomenon in general and not as a linguistic unit, since in the different theoretical approaches there isn't any fixed rule of the use of the word and its singular version (graffito).

Researchers define the word differently depending on the aspects of graffiti writings they study: some of them consider "any type of public markings or written words that appear on walls of buildings" to be graffiti /Mwangi and others, 2015: 2/, others view it as a source of information about important social issues /Yieke, 2003, cited from Al-Khawaldeh et al, 2017: 31/. Gach defines the word graffiti not only taking into consideration its possible written character but also the type of sentence usually used in it: "statements and drawings… penciled, painted, crayoned, lipsticked or scratched on desk and walls" /Gach, 1973: 285, cited from Şad and Kutlu, 2009: 40/. Basthomi describes graffiti as any type of drawing, writing or scratch on the walls, no matter what kind of inspiration the writer has /Basthomi, 2007, cited from Al-Khawaldeh et al, 2017: 31/. A more general definition is given by Bates and Martin who think that "anonymous messages of graffiti are socially uncontrolled manifestations of thought" /Bates and Martin, 1980, cited from Şad and Kutlu, 2009: 40/. We agree with the statement suggested by Mwangi and others that any type of public markings on the walls are considered to be graffiti irrespective of the writer's inspiration. We accept the notion of graffiti as a form of communication based on Abel and Buckley's definition, who view graffiti as a form of communication, which "is both personal and free of the everyday social strains that normally prevent people from giving uninhabited reign to their thoughts. As such these sometimes-crude inscriptions offer some intriguing insights into the people who author them and into the society in which these people belong" /Abel and Buckley, 1977: 3, cited from cited from Al-Khawaldeh et al, 2017: 31/.

It is clear from what has been said above that the need to study graffiti as a form of communication is drawn from the fact that those writings are normally "free of the everyday social strains", i.e. there is no need for the writer to accommodate the speech according to the existing social and ethical rules, instead the graffiti writers have freedom both in the wording of the text they create and in "telling the truth" without being afraid of its consequences. Researchers strongly believe that "the nature of graffiti is unrestricted. It does not follow any set rule of expression. It is unrehearsed and honest, it is both candid and sincere" /Tracy, 2005: 23/.

Functioning

Researchers usually assume several functions of graffiti and it is necessary to discuss and compare them. Some theorists think that the functions of graffiti are

those of a challenge to authorities, and a form of informal communication for marginalized and neglected groups to express their discontent, needs and wishes to those in a higher rank /Mwangi and others, 2015: 3/. This view is supported by Nwoye, in addition the author puts that the social groups that are in one way or another deprived of public space, rely on the creation of graffiti to voice their opinions /Nwoye, 1993, cited from Mwangi, 2015: 3/. Hanauer also shares this view, according to the author: "graffiti fulfills three functions of a) allowing the entry within public discourse of messages regarded as marginal by other media; b) providing the individual with the opportunity to express controversial contents publicly; and finally c) it offers marginal groups the possibility of expressing themselves publicly" /Hanauer, 2004: 29, cited from Farnia, 2014: 49/. It should also be noted that in this regard graffiti may function both as a means of resistance and oppression for marginalized social groups if members of a minority group in a society use graffiti "to silence other marginalized groups" /Rodriguez and Clair, 2009: 3/. In this context, Ferrel introduces the specific language that a group of people may employ in graffiti writing, according to this theorist people may use codes that are "uniquely understood by the writer and targeted audience" /Ferrel, 1993, cited from Mwangi, 2015: 3/. It can be inferred that in order to perform a certain function, graffiti writers may use certain linguistic units that can be decoded only by the audience it is targeted to. As it is necessary to study graffiti texts as a model of communication, this point is rather crucial, for in order to find out and explain the communicative aspect of a certain piece of graffiti text, firstly one has to find out the function that piece of writing performs and in order to understand that function one has to carry out a scrupulous analysis on each of the linguistic element making up a graffiti text, since the latter is mostly created by anonymous authors and under unknown circumstances. Thus, that's a bit hard or even impossible to find out what function the graffiti text performs according to the cause it was created. The language in this case can be a "witness", some kind of a "betrayer" of the author that can tell the story of the reasons and purposes underlying the text. George Orwell in his essay "Politics and the English language", partially agrees with the statement that "language merely reflects existing social conditions, and that we cannot influence its development by any direct tinkering with words and constructions" /Orwell, 1946: 7/8/, he also states that "the great enemy of clear language is insincerity" /Orwell, 1946: 7/8/. While considering anonymous writings in order to reveal their communicative functions, one can be guided by those hypotheses, since the language of graffiti supposedly should be "clear", as it is used sincerely by the author, and, obviously, it reflects the "existing social conditions", for graffiti mirrors the surrounding social, political situations. Researchers also summed up the reasons underlying the creation of graffiti thus being deeply personal up to speaking about the injustice of political situations

/Graham, 2004: 7/. The main functioning of graffiti, in our opinion, has been studied more comprehensively by Elisha Foust and Sophie Fuggle. In their manual called "Word on the Street" they firmly state that "street slogans are messages that express resistance to economic, legal, political and religious authority" /Foust and Fuggle, 2011: 54/. They consider street slogans (as they call the graffiti writings) to be a part of the Bourdieuian "struggle over the specifically symbolic power of making people see and believe, of predicting and prescribing, of making known and recognized" /Foust and Fuggle, 2011: 54/. What is peculiar in this study is that they believe that "They [street slogans] attack social order and organization through an incessant and deliberate re-contextualization of the language of the community" /Foust and Fuggle, 2011: 54/. Based on the examples of the street slogans in Thessaloniki, Greece, they strongly believe that "street slogans function to pervert our shared frames of knowledge" /Foust and Fuggle, 2011: 58/. Studies also prove that graffitists mostly use the knowledge common to other graffitists /Obeng, 2000: 342/. Of all the functions introduced above one is of particular interest, the function of communication by means of wall writings. Whatever message graffiti text contains, whatever intention the graffitist may have, to write something on the wall means to communicate within temporal and spatial dimensions. Some theorists consider graffiti to be a "highly structured communication medium" /Kostka, 1974, Bushnell, 1990, cited from Rodriguez and Clair, 2009: 2/. Others clarify that it is the function of graffiti "to vent hostilities, express fantasies, communicate triumphs, declare rebellion and promote propaganda" /Reisner and Wechsler, 1974, Newall, 1986-87, cited from Rodriguez and Clair, 2009: 2/. Thus, we may conclude that this kind of functions of street writings should necessarily have their due influence on the different aspects of the language it is written in.

General linguistic features

Speaking about the linguistics of graffiti texts it should be mentioned that "Graffiti is viewed as a linguistic phenomenon that embraces both form and content and uses discourse to signify something other than itself" /Mwangi, 2012, cited from Al-Khawaldeh et al, 2017: 31/. In the linguistic study of graffiti texts, we must reconsider the generalizations theorists made and the linguistic features inherent to the texts of graffiti they singled out during their studies. As a result, we can have a relatively clear picture of what has so far been done in the field and will see the dynamic(s) of the language of graffiti from their investigations to ours. According to Hall, there are several procedures that a language undergoes in graffiti texts:
- phonological procedures (alteration of vowels, consonants, puns etc.),
- morphemic processes (alteration of words according to their affixes and roots),
- syntactic procedures (use of specific syntactic structures at the beginning of the sentences),

• alterations of the existing expressions ("Old soldiers never die, they just fade away", alteration: "Old soldiers never die; young one does"),

• parallel syntax based on the reader's expectations ("It's normally warmer in summer, than in the country"),

• questions with no legitimate answers (Did Adam and Eve have belly buttons?")

• conditional sentences (e.g., "Would you be more careful if it was YOU that got pregnant?"),

• patterning after political slogans, protests against trials of political activities, or mocking of election slogans (e.g., "Shriver for something", "Free Huey-and Dewey and Louie"),

• graffiti based on common expressions (e.g., "In case of emergency-Panic!"),

• negative admonitions and affirmative exhortations (e.g., "DO NOT WRITE ON THIS DESK!!!!!!!", "Let's put some life into our funerals"),

• dialogues (planed or spontaneous),

• common expressions put at the end (e.g., "Vasectomy means never having to say you're sorry"),

• broadening the scope of an original expression (e.g., "Breathing is habit forming"),

• narrowing the scope of original expression (e.g., Hire the morally handicapped") /Taghinezhad et al, 2015: 66/.

As can be seen from the study the language of graffiti might deviate or in many ways be modified from the standard language. Hence, it should be taken into consideration beforehand how that modification may influence the communicative process and the communicative strategies the readers should employ to understand the message provided in the graffiti writing.

Hanna AbuJaber and others covering the spelling issues in graffiti state that in order to attract the attention of the readers, graffiti writers usually employ the playful spelling like:

• unnecessary capitalization,
• use of different signs and punctuation marks,
• simplification of spelling,
• vowel elongation,
• spelling errors as a "politeness strategy",
• popular spelling,
• romanization,
• mother tongue inferences, etc. / AbuJaber et al., 2012/.

The study suggests that not only is the linguistic domain of the graffiti different from that of the standard one, but even its spelling is rather complicated

and when we view this kind of graffiti writing as a communicative model, it makes us pay attention to the orthography of the text as well.

Obeng states that graffitists use inclusive and exclusive pronouns such as we, us, our, they etc. in order to either show proximity or distance. Most importantly, Obeng speaks about the employment of both lexical and semantic intertextuality, i.e. graffitists use the knowledge common to other graffitists in order to express meaning through the text /Obeng, 2000: 342/. As for the stylistics of graffiti texts a great number of stylistic devices are used, like alliteration, repetition, pun, allusion, irony etc.

Researchers also carry out textual analysis on graffiti writings. According to Morva, linguistic aspects originally proposed by Jorgensen and Philips /2002/ should be taken into consideration: these are the interactional control (relationship between speakers) the metaphor, the ethos (the construction of identities through language), modality, wording and grammar as well as the intertextuality of the graffiti text under investigation /Morva, 2016/. It should be noted that this linguistic feature of intertextuality has been understudied by the researchers. Some linguists state that both types of intertextuality (namely manifest and constitutive as defined by Fairclough /1992/) are applied. As for the wording and grammar, the subject of the sentence is considered to be the responsible agent for the action or state as it is accepted grammatically. Modality in graffiti texts is mainly subjunctive with the prevailing first-person singular pronoun and it shows the speaker's affinity to the action or the state described /Morva, 2016: 25/.

Another study combining the content and language scope of graffiti and viewing it as a platform of multimodal communication stresses that predominantly three parts of speech (an adjective, a noun or a verb) that are used in graffiti texts perform certain function in effecting the audience /Paudel, Neupane, 2019: 67-69/. Should the authors want to be more descriptive they may make use of more adjectives, should they want to be more interactive with the audience they may make use of verbs in present tense, should they want to communicate what is going on around, they make use of nouns, that can "densify" an event or phenomenon in just one word. In case the authors need to have a "direct impact" on the audience, they may start using rhetorical devices like metaphors, satire, rhyme or ellipse. As far as the syntax is concerned, this study shows that different sentence types (declarative, interrogative, imperative, etc.) are used interchangeably to convey the messages intended by the writer /Paudel, Neupane, 2019/.

Much deeper understanding of the linguistics of street writings is found in Foust and Fuggle's study. Here we see that there is a constant linguistic shift in the struggle of street slogans and hegemonic discourses. Hence, in order to understand the purpose and the "outcome" of a certain piece of street writing, the attention should also be drawn to the discourse it is unfolding in. Besides, the authors also

make a distinction between the two concepts – language and anti-language. They think that "The writing of street slogans is a discursive practice in which the authors of the slogans perform roles that produce anti-meanings or, in effect counter-information" /Foust and Fuggle, 2011: 56/. In order to prove it, they cite Halliday's idea: that "An anti-language is the means of realization of a subjective reality: not merely expressing it, but actively creating and maintaining it" /Halliday, 1978: 172, cited from Foust and Fuggle, 2011: 56/. Besides the anti-language street writings employ, researchers also state that "street slogans capitalize on our knowledge of acceptable attributions. Instead of conforming to permissible configurations, street slogans express incongruous attributions which aim to subvert our knowledge of the world" /Foust and Fuggle, 2011: 59/.

Covering the linguistics of wall writings we should by all means study the phenomenon of doublespeak (deliberately obscure and euphemistic language use) in the context of graffiti. As Don L. F. Nilsen mentions in his article "Graffiti vs Doublespeak" "we can joke about doublespeak but it is a very serious business" /Nilsen, 1978: 20/. He thinks that doublespeakers and graffitists are more or less similar, since they may share common techniques of manipulation like card stacking (underlining one side and repressing the other one), bandwagon (using activities currently fashionable), advertising techniques (like tautologies, contradictions, logical deviations, Humpty Dumpty language etc.) /Nilsen, 1978: 21-24/. Though Nilsen sums up his study thinking that "doublespeakers and graffitists are on the opposite side of the establishment fence" /Nilsen, 1978: 25/, if they share certain common features, a contrary comes to the fore; on the one hand, we study graffiti as a means to express "the truth", otherwise inexpressible, on the other hand, we come across doublespeak in graffiti, thus, it becomes a priority to see which of those two regularities of graffiti prevail and how it influences the language and consequently the whole communicative process.

Analyzing graffiti from linguistic point of view, researchers consider it to be conversational, stating that a piece of text on the wall may assume later responses triggering more and more texts /Onyango, 2016/. In addition to the linguistic properties mentioned already, researchers also single out code-mixing and code-switching that are usually applied in graffiti texts. This usually happens where speakers of a certain language appear in a different cultural context /Onyango, 2016: 4/.

As for gender differences in the creation of graffiti, it is believed that graffiti made by women is more dialogic than those of men. There is more interaction in the questions raised by women via graffiti and they get more responses than those made by men. In this regard it is also worth mentioning that graffiti created by men are mostly of sexual content /Onyango, 2016: 5/.

Researchers classify graffiti according to the causes of its creation. S. Marquez and others using the motivational approach in their study on the gender differences in graffiti distinguish between two large sections:

I. For mass and reflexive communication there are the four types of graffiti:
1. Existence of proof;
2. Need of self-expression;
3. Pleasure in Aesthetics, Creative, Physical Acts and Boredom;
4. Documentation of Group membership.

II. For categorical and individual communication there are three types:
1. Expression of criticism and protest;
2. Rejection and agreement or disagreement;
3. Search for a contact /Marquez and others, 2018: 179-183/.

It is important to note that though this research did not directly refer to the analysis of the communicative aspect of graffiti texts, the classification the authors based on the communicative functions graffiti texts perform. Hence, the creation of a graffiti presupposes some kind of communication, be that because of the need to express oneself (self-communication) or because of the other reasons mentioned above.

According to the themes expressed in the writing or drawing graffiti has the following types:
• Political/religious
• Communication
• Humorous
• Romantic
• Need for belonging/homesickness
• Philosophical, etc. / Şad and Kutlu, 2009/.

We do agree with the above-mentioned thematic categories graffiti falls into. Nevertheless, we strongly believe that any type of graffiti performs certain communicative function irrespective of the author's will, hence we do not find it necessary to categorize communication as a type of graffiti, but to view graffiti as a model of communication.

Graffiti has also been studied as a method, which serves as a universally recognized medium with certain immediacy. In this sense it is the purest representation of the freedom of expression that can be "intensely private and overtly public outcry" /Tracy, 2005: 22/. Such a perspective of viewing graffiti as a method led Sally K. Tracy to conclude that the graffiti text may demonstrate certain qualities. Considering Barthes' and Deleuze and Guattari's theories the author states that graffiti texts are voiced to express exclamations, expletives, demands and commands for recognition and change /Tracy, 2005: 25/.

Our review may be fittingly concluded with a word or two that graffiti is a controversial phenomenon. Turning into a more detailed examination of the theoretical background of graffiti studied so far in linguistics, a very important point is to be made that graffiti, first of all, has its unique linguistic organization which should be taken into account when one analyzes it from the social, political, educational or linguistic points of view. It is a generally acknowledged fact that language besides serving as a means of communication can reflect the existing problems through grammatical and lexical structures, words with their direct and transferred meanings and the deviations from the accepted grammatical, orthographic or lexical rules.

The theoretical review of the literature on graffiti has brought us to the conclusion that graffiti should also be studied as a unique communication model with its distinctive semantic, semiotic and pragmatic features that can not only fit into the communicative models already known in linguistics but also create a completely new one, where the addresser might be a person or a group of people, whereas the target might be the society as a whole or individuals as a part of that "whole". Such an approach will help us to better understand the complex phenomenon of communication from both social and linguistic points of view.

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Գ. ԳԱՍՊԱՐՅԱՆ – *Որմնագրությունը որպես լեզվաբանական երևույթ. տարբեր տեսական մոտեցումներ.* – Սույն հոդվածը ներկայացնում է որոշ հայեցակարգային դրույթներ որմնագրության վերաբերյալ, որոնք լայնորեն ուսումնասիրվում են վերջին տարիներին լեզվաբանության մեջ: Հոդվածում քննվում են որմնագրության վերաբերյալ լեզվաբանական գրականության մեջ առկա տարբեր սահմանումները, գործառույթները, հիմնական լեզվական առանձնահատկությունները, ինչպես նաև բացահայտվում են որմնագրության զարգացման ժամանակակից միտումները` աճող սոցիալական, քաղաքական և անձնական խնդիրներին զուգահեռ, որոնց քաղաքացիները առերեսվում են ամեն օր: Տեսական նյութի ուսումնասիրությունը հանգեցնում է եզրակացության, որ որմնագրությունը կարող է դիտարկվել որպես հաղորդակցության մոդել` ընդգծելով որմնագրության` այս նոր դիտանկյունից ուսումնասիրելու կարևորությունը:

Բանալի բառեր. որմնագրություն, տեքստ, լեզվական հատկանիշներ, հաղորդակցական հատկանիշներ, տեսողական և բառային բաղադրիչներ

Г. ГАСПАРЯН – *Граффити как лингвистический феномен: различные теоретические подходы.* – В настоящей статье рассматриваются некоторые теоретические подходы к граффити как специфическому лингвистическому явлению. Подробно анализируются различные определения граффити, их функции и основные лингвистические особенности, а также выявляются современные тенденции развития граффити в контексте растущих социальных, политических и личных проблем, с которыми ежедневно сталкивается человек. Основным выводом работы является необходимость рассмотрения граффити в качестве специфической модели коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: граффити, текст, языковые особенности, коммуникативные особенности, визуальные и вербальные компоненты