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MAPPING THE MODEL OF COMMUNICATION THROUGH GRAFFITI

The paper views graffiti as a form of mass communication and tries to outline and analyse the characteristic features of each of the elements of the communicative model graffiti develops. The paper reviews the basic models of communication proposed by theorists and attempts to figure out the integrative model of communication that is shaped when the members of a society decide to voice their ideas, personal issues or socio-political viewpoints through this unique medium.

Key words: *graffiti, graffiti discourse, communication, communication models, elements of communication*

Communication is believed to be an act to develop meanings between the speakers via interaction. And to be able to communicate effectively one needs the most important life skills. Among them are good interpersonal qualities to create the necessary atmosphere (or the environment) for a good and productive conversation (both verbal and non-verbal). Communication in a loose sense is defined as an “exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols” /<https://www.britannica.com/>. It seems essential to emphasize that to communicate with large masses of people one needs to take a wider system of symbols to be available to everyone and to fulfill the communicative aim of his speech accurately. Some people prefer to communicate with others using graffiti. Communication through graffiti requires knowledge and awareness of a wide range of symbols necessary for the communication to take place, hence it has a wide semantic scope of investigation. In the present paper we will try to combine the results of our previous studies on graffiti as a form of persuasive speech with the model of communication it shapes when processed by large masses of people.

A significant number of investigators who studied various aspects of graffiti writings give diverse definitions for it having in mind its communicative potential. Reviewing these definitions and highlighting the similarities and differences between them will be of tremendous help in singling out the communicative properties of the pieces of graffiti and in the mapping of the model of communication graffiti creates. Some of the researchers consider “any type of public markings or written words that appear on walls of buildings” to be graffiti /Mwangi and others, 2015: 2/, others place an emphasis on it as a source of information about important social issues /Yieke, 2003, cited from Al-Khawaldeh,

2017: 31/. Gach provides a reasonably objective criterion for graffiti defining the term by specifying 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 has been led to believe that any type of drawing, writing or scratch on the walls can be considered as graffiti, no matter what kind of inspiration the writer has /Basthomi, 2007, cited from Al-Khawaldeh, 2017: 31/. A comprehensive definition of graffiti 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 uphold the view that any type of public markings on the walls are considered to be graffiti irrespective of the writer’s inspiration. As a starting point for our research on the study of the communicative aspect of graffiti we accept Abel and Buckley’s approach, who regard 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, 2017: 31/. The need to study graffiti as a form of communication is drawn from the fact that these writings are normally “free of the everyday social strains”, i.e. there is no need for the writer to adjust his/her speech according to the existing social and ethical rules, instead the graffiti writers feel free to express themselves irrespective of 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/.

It stands to reason that graffiti with its communicative properties can be considered as a form of mass communication, hence, taking this angle of analysis it is useful firstly to single out the components of this model and then try to build the model according to the characteristic features of each component on the basis of their interconnectedness with one another.

There exist two main domains within which communication through graffiti takes place – public domain and private domain. Both of them are to be understood in two ways. First, 'public domain' is the public property or the surface where the piece of text or picture appears and sets up a communication with the audience, second, 'public domain' encompasses a series of social, political, educational events or phenomena the problems of which are raised through graffiti. As for 'private domain', it includes a number of personal issues that are voiced in graffiti; the voicing of these problems penetrates into the audience’s personal space thus triggering some thoughts and emotions among them.

The following figure illustrates the interpretation of graffiti in the context of public and private domains:

Public domain	Graffiti	Private domain
Public surfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears in visible for the public places • Raises personal issues 	Personal issues
Problems concerning the public interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raises public issues • Communicates with different members of a society, penetrates into their personal space 	Communication with the audience

Figure 1

Most theorists nowadays split the main communication models into three main types: linear, interactive and transactional.

The linear model is the basic communication model consisting of the following elements: the sender of the message, the channel for sending, the message itself, the receiver of the message, as well as the potential source of noise, which may appear on the channel of the communication causing misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the message /Shannon & Weaver, 1949; Yousef, Cheng, 2017; Pierce & Corey, 2009; Petersons, Khalimzoda, 2016/.

The interactive model of communication suggests that communication is a more dynamic phenomenon and highlights the factor of the *feedback* in this process. This model is based upon the response of the receiver of the message that triggers more exchange of information. The feedback (which can be both verbal and non-verbal) indicates how well the receiver understood the message and helps the speaker to logically continue the conversation /Pierce & Corey, 2009: 3, Schramm, 1971/. Here both the speaker’s speech and that of the receiver are based upon their “field of experience” /Pierce & Corey, 2009/.

The transactional model of communication is even more dynamic than the interactive model. Here the two actors of the communication – senders and receivers are named *communicators*, which is essential in understanding what this model implies. As opposed to the linear model of communication, where the message flows from the sender to the receiver, and in contrast to the interactive model, where the continuation of the communication heavily depends on the

feedback, here the two participants of the action (the communicators) “create shared meaning in a more dynamic process” /Pierce, Corey, 2009: 5/. It means that each of the communicators has a unique field of experience and at the same time they both share a common knowledge, which makes the communication between them possible /Pierce & Corey, 2009; Petersons, Khalimzoda, 2016; Yousef, Cheng, 2017/.

There has been recently proposed another model known as ecological model of communication /Foulger, 2004/. The author of this model takes into account the fact that between the sender and the receiver of the message, there is a *language*, the message makes use of, and a *media*, within which this “usage” occurs. The author calls the senders *creators* and the receivers – *consumers*. According to this theory the creator of the message imagines and creates the message inventing and evolving the language within the media used. On the other hand, the consumer of the message observes, attributes and interprets the message by learning and socializing the language within the media /Foulger, 2004; Yousef, Cheng, 2017/. This new model of communication implies that the consumers can become creators of the message if they give a response or a feedback and the creators, as the author states, “have perspectives of and relationships with the consumers” /Foulger, 2004/. There is some evidence to suggest that this model of communication is worthy of studying in depth as it considers the sending of the message not solely as a process of directing certain piece of information to the addressee, but rather a creative process of “inventing and evolving the language”. This prompts us to think that the conveyance of the message in a communication process generally (and in communication through graffiti especially) has a direct influence on the modification and alteration of the language the message is conveyed with. On the other hand, this model suggests that the decoding of the message by the addressee can be enhanced with such mental processes as “learning and socializing”. At the same time the potential misunderstanding of the message or its misinterpretation (because of the *noise*) has not been taken into consideration. This factor, however, does not prevent us from using some components of this new communication model in the integrative model of communication through graffiti we intend to map in the present paper.

Structurally the communication model through graffiti is more likely linear than interactive or transactional. We tend to think so because of the process that is taking place when a certain message is being communicated through this medium as well as taking into account the characteristic features of the elements of communication included in this model.

It is well known that the basic elements of communication are the speaker (i.e. the sender) the channel, the message, the receiver (or consumer) and the source of noise.

In graffiti discourse **the speaker** is usually an individual or a group of individuals who want to voice personal or public issues. The speaker is the starter of the communication process. These people are usually quite talented (if we speak about professional graffiti artists) at managing to voice their opinion on public surfaces, being pressed for time and space especially when they create the graffiti in a forbidden area. It goes without saying that in graffiti discourse it is not a must to be a graffiti artist or a professional in the field to be considered as a “speaker”. The content of the graffiti ranges from strictly personal to largely social or political. There are many individuals who prefer this way of communicating with people, for example to make a love confession or to share the problems bothering them.

The speaker in graffiti discourse encodes the message multimodally using both textual and pictorial components. The speaker’s background linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge as well as the issue s/he is raising through graffiti predetermine the character of other elements of communication: channel, message, noise (if there is any), receiver.

The next element necessary for communication to take place is **the channel**. In communication generally and in graffiti discourse particularly the channel is the medium which is used to transfer the message to the target audience. In graffiti discourse the role of the medium is taken by the walls or other surfaces where the writing and drawing is possible. The choice of this medium (or channel) for communication via graffiti is not random at all. Firstly, this channel makes the interference of public and private domains we discussed above possible: the channel is meant to be seen first by the target audience, then – by large masses of people and be processed by them. The choice of this channel for communication is not something novel, though graffiti as a cultural practice has been developed in the recent years only. If we look back to ancient times, we will notice that people always wanted to somehow leave their trace on the places they lived, e.g. the cave walls. These “places” now are a precious matter of investigation for archaeologists, anthropologists and other specialists. Times have changed, however, this practice has remained unaltered. Even social media pages, sometimes called walls, perform almost the same function as physical surfaces: they both are platforms for sharing ideas.

Another element in this communication model, which is the most crucial one and has the widest scope of investigation, is the **message**. As we have already mentioned the content of the message encompasses a rather broad scope of topics ranging from strongly personal to largely public, social and political. The texts and pictures in graffiti discourse that form its message pursue the aim of not only simply informing the audience but also persuading them in their viewpoints, ideologies, etc. This factor primarily determines the ways the message is conveyed

through and the methods selected for their analysis. In order to find out the persuasive strategies performed by graffiti pieces we have previously analysed them according to the functions of the language, according to the strategies of persuasion (Aristotle's persuasion triad); for a more comprehensive and thorough examination of the subject we have also taken up critical discourse analysis (CDA) to study graffiti discourse.

Turning to the linguistic organization of the message several points should be singled out:

- Graffiti texts contain almost all the communicative types of sentences (declarative, interrogative, imperative) classified according to the aim of the communication.

- Each type of the sentence serves a particular purpose: to realize one of the functions of language, to make the speech more persuasive and motivating and to have an emotional impact on the receiver.

- Graffiti texts widely use the technique of opposition (grammatical, semantic, etc.) to make the speech convincing and to obtain the desired result.

- The communicative aim of the graffiti text is often realized through visual or verbal metaphors or by the conceptual centre of the utterance both explicitly and implicitly.

- The content and linguistic organization of the pieces of graffiti are heavily determined by the factor of limitation as well. Graffiti appears on public surfaces and the latter are not physically boundless. Besides, graffiti creators are pressed with time: they have to be quick in order to keep their anonymity. So temporal and spatial restrictions make the language and the text of graffiti more “economical” thus exploiting the linguistic economy principle in order to overcome the limitations.

- Being a multimodal discourse graffiti conveys the message not only through a text or a picture alone, but also through a combination of both. They are semantically interconnected: these two modes of communication do complement each other in the meaning-making process.

It logically follows from what has been said that the messages conveyed through graffiti should not only be seen to everyone, but also be so “strong” semantically and pragmatically in order to be processed by large masses of people with the potential of an emotional and ideological influence on them.

The next element of the communication model through graffiti which is not mandatory but often appears in this discourse, is the **noise**. Four types of noise in the communication process are usually distinguished: physical, physiological psychological and semantic /DeVito, 2013/. The latter two are the most common types in the model of communication under study. The presence of this element is mostly determined by the unique linguistic characteristics of texts and pictures,

which can cause misunderstanding on the part of the receiver. The following might cause the occurrence of the noise:

- As the creators of professional graffiti writings have a specific font and handwriting typical only of them, from purely visual point of view it can be hardly understandable for ordinary citizens.
- Pieces of graffiti are mostly connected to the social contexts they appear in. Understanding the content of the graffiti and being ignorant about its social context proves to be a source of noise in the communication model and the message can be misunderstood by the receivers.
- Graffiti texts and pictures are often intertextually bound to famous Biblical or literary narratives. The lack of this kind of background knowledge, on the one hand, and an “inability” to realize the intertextual relation of the text to the socio-political setting, on the other, can also cause noise hindering the proper interpretation of the message.
- As there is a strong correlation between the two modes of communication in a piece of graffiti (the text and the picture), the familiarity with the content of one of the modes (e.g. the text) and the ignorance of the other or a complete unawareness of both might bring about noise and disturbance.
- The main message of the graffiti can be expressed either explicitly or implicitly (through different figures of speech, interrogative sentences etc.). In order to decode an implicitly expressed message, the receiver firstly has to interpret the hidden meaning behind the graffiti text or picture, secondly, s/he is supposed to understand the background information the implicitness is based on.

As we have already come to understand, the “speakers” in the graffiti discourse, i.e. their creators, voice their message on public surfaces. They might be meant to reach only one receiver or a small group of them, meanwhile they are being processed by large numbers of people. Among them are people unaware of the social context or having no background knowledge necessary to decode the piece of graffiti adequately, hence there is more chance for the noise to appear in the model of communication quite often.

One of the decisive elements in the communication model through graffiti is the **receiver**. Why decisive? This element decides whether the communication model will change from linear to interactive or transactional or whether it will remain linear in all the cases giving rise to new elements of communication. The receivers (or consumers) of this communication model can be either targeted or not, whereas, whatever the aim of the graffiti creator, the ordinary people, the residents of the area, the citizens become involuntary receivers of the message and communicate it. We can divide the receivers of the graffiti communication model into the following groups:

- The society as a whole: this group comprises people who in some way or another belong to the socio-political contexts within which the graffiti appears and their collective attention and intention are needed to reach the result desired by the graffiti creator.
- Some layers of a society: this group comprises people whose social status, profession, age, political views or other features might be addressed by the graffiti creators and the messages expressed in graffiti might be conveyed taking into account the above-mentioned features.
- Individual members of a society: this group comprises people who are “targeted” by the graffiti creators; their “names” might or might not be mentioned in the “main body” of the graffiti.
- No one specifically: the graffiti artist may regard graffiti writing as a hobby and show his talents by drawing pieces on the walls. This kind of messages may not have special addressees but may be processed by large masses of people irrespective of their and the addresser’s will.

Of all the receivers’ groups mentioned above, the most common is the first one, since this group may include not only people from a particular society, but also people from other societies as well (e.g. tourists, foreign observers etc.) who come to read the graffiti text by chance or look at the pictures of the graffiti pieces and become the immediate receivers of the message, communicate it within the social context, whose background knowledge might vary from person to person. The linear communication model under study basically has the following structure (Figure 2) with a potential for expansion – depending on the receiver’s will.

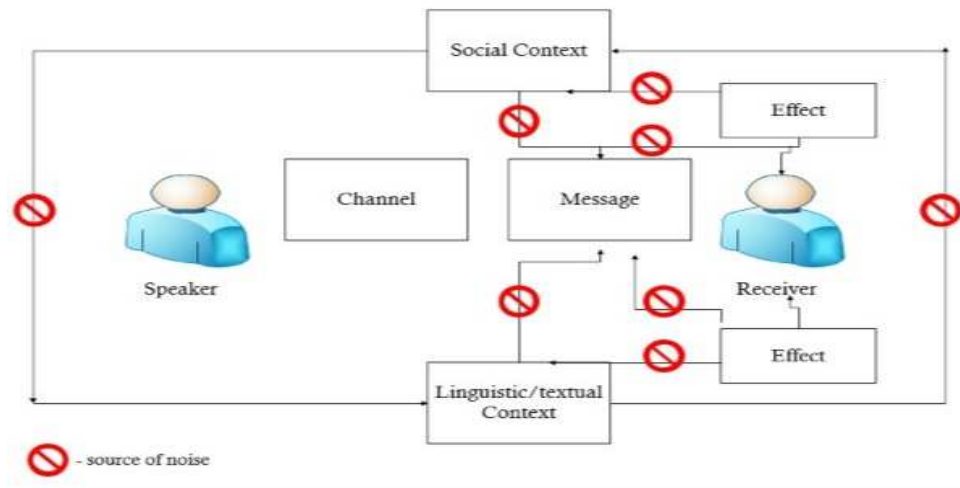


Figure 2

The figure clearly shows the sequence of the elements in the graffiti communication model and the potential “dangerous” sources of the noise. The message itself, the social and linguistic contexts it is unfolding in are the key elements in this model. In case one wants his message to be adequately decoded and have the desired impact on the audience s/he should take into account whether the audience can arrange these three elements in a sequence (the message, the social and linguistic contexts) and highlight the interconnections between them.

As we consider graffiti discourse to be at crossroads of textual and pictorial components of communication that are not only meant to inform the public about certain issues but also to convince them in the ideologies, we highlight the importance of the **effect** the message has on the receivers of the message. We think it is necessary to consider possible expansion of the model and include the *effect* as a separate element of the graffiti communication model. Bringing this concept into the model of communication pursues the aim of emphasizing the importance of the sender’s intention and the impact s/he desires to have on the audience, as in graffiti discourse this intention and impact determine the conveyance of the message, its textual and pictorial organization. Figure 2 shows the interdependence of the *effect* on the rest of the elements of the graffiti communication model. First of all, it is closely interconnected with the receiver of the message, because the receiver is the “unit”, who decodes the message and undergoes the impact. Next, the intensity of the *effect* heavily depends on the message, its degree of persuasiveness and availability to the receivers. Lastly, the “existence” of the effect of a message expressed through graffiti steadily rests on the source of noise, i.e. the noise caused by the message – social context or message – linguistic context relations can bring about the misunderstanding of the message, hence fail to reach the desired result on the receiver.

To understand how this model works consider the following example.

The graffiti appeared in Colombia quite recently. It consists of a textual component and is placed in an area visible to the public. The text is constructed by combining *COVID19* with a famous novel by George Orwell *1984*. The message of the graffiti is firstly meant to inform the public about the ongoing social situation (social context), secondly, to persuade them with the help of this information. This aim is being realized thanks to



intertextual relations of the graffiti with the famous narrative (1984 – the textual context). The social context of the graffiti is the outbreak of the virus (COVID19), when the supervision over citizens of a country, who tested positive, was raised and their personal contacts and location could be determined by the police in order to isolate and cure them. This social situation is intertextually bound by the narrative of the book the graffiti creator alludes to, where the police is paralleled with the “Big brother”, who is “constantly watching you” (Orwell, 1961). The sender of this message obviously meant to make his/her audience think of the ongoing social situation from the point of view of its hidden, at first sight unseen and veiled layers, from the point of view of the undertaken safety measurements that seem to become a must (the “new normal” as they say), whereas they have a deep connection with the dystopian, existential issues the author of the book “1984” raised so many years ago. The receiver can get this message properly only in case the following two conditions are ensured: a) being familiar with the narrative “1984” and being able to recall its corresponding part; b) being cognizant of the ongoing social situation with the events that happen “on the surface” and underneath it. After all, the receiver of the message should be able to combine the two contexts the message is unfolding in. The lack of such knowledge brings about communication noise, which will result in misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Regarding the potential effect this message may have on the audience, we can deduce it by taking into account the dependence of the *effect* as an element of communication on the social context (*COVID19*), on the textual context (*the novel by Orwell*), on the way the message is conveyed (*drawing parallels between COVID19 and the novel, changing colours from red to black*), as well as on the aim the speaker pursued before creating this piece of graffiti.

As we have already mentioned, the graffiti communication model is mostly linear. It is conditioned by two main factors: a) the speaker voices an idea which directly flows to the addressee, b) it is not mandatory for the addressee to give an immediate response. Nevertheless, graffiti texts and pictures being consumed by large masses of people have a potential to trigger more communication among the addressees themselves (monologues) and with the other members of the society.

The central role here belongs to the receivers of the message and the effect the message has on them. In this case, the communication model through graffiti may be developed in two ways. Consider them in the form of a figure.

The figure shows the potential of the linear model of communication to develop into an interactive one and partially transactional one.

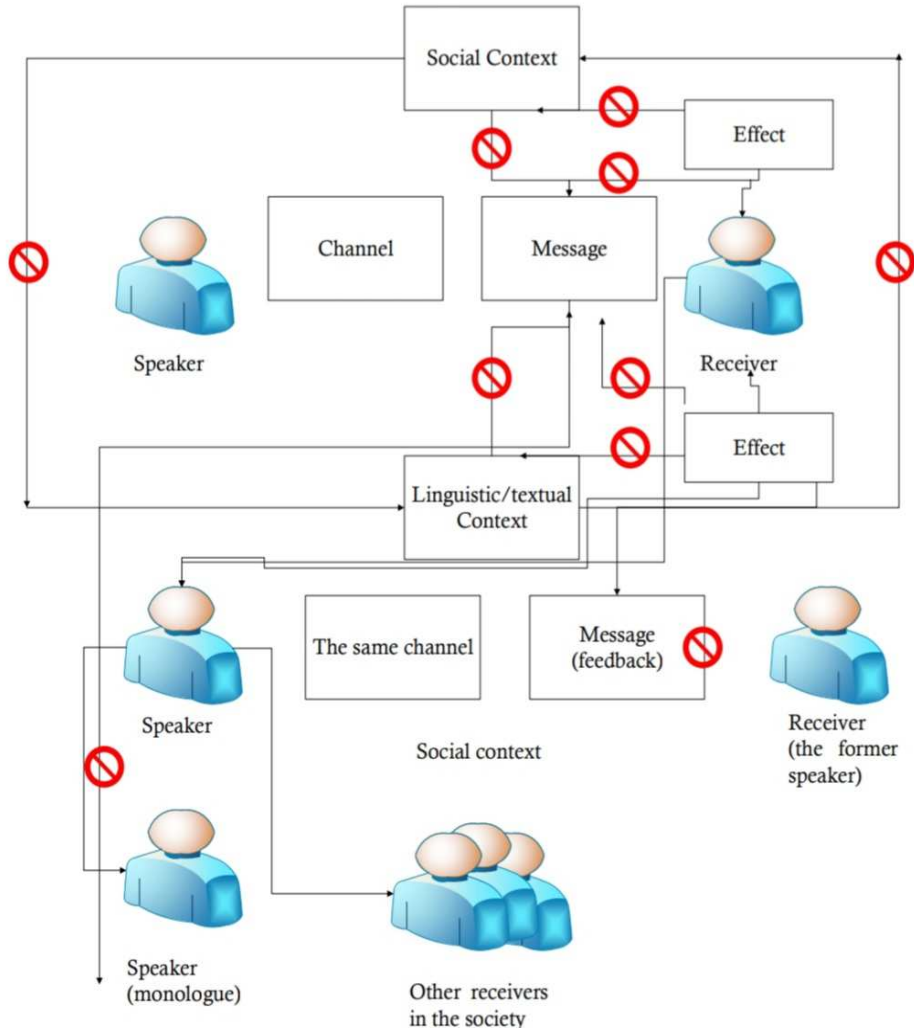


Figure 3

The “evolution” of the model from linear into interactive heavily depends on the receiver of the message, on the effect the first message had on him and on whether or not the message is distorted by the noise. If the receiver decides to convey a new message (the *feedback*), it will be based on the previous message and the way he interpreted it. The feedback is being given through the same channel (the wall the graffiti is written on) and in the same social setting. The textual/linguistic context might be changed by the speaker (the former receiver)

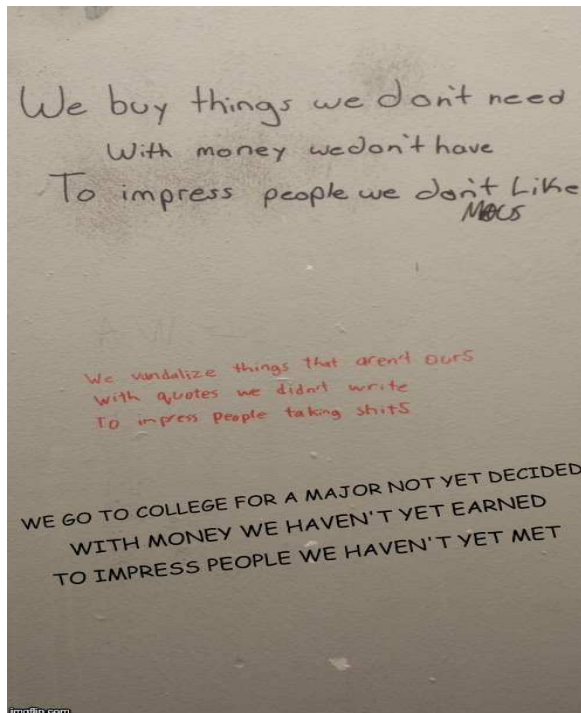
depending on the way s/he structures his speech. In this case the source of the noise is on the message, particularly on its textual and linguistic organization. One of the characteristics of the model of graffiti communication is that the feedback given by the receiver of the message is consumed by other members of the society in addition to the person the feedback is addressed to.

Another way the linear graffiti communication model turns into an interactive one is the following: the receiver starts thinking over the problems raised through graffiti and talks to himself/herself (a monologue).

In the reverse scenario, the receiver of the first message, thanks to the effect it had on him, may share the ideas not with himself but with other members of the society as well. It is important to note that this “further” communication can be done in various forms – oral or written, in various discourses – daily life, social media, news media etc., among various participants and might not necessarily include graffiti discourse. However, we take into consideration this potential development of the communication process, since its starting point is the graffiti discourse, where the subjects discussed are numerous and do not recognize any ethical, moral or social restrictions.

Below we will adduce an example, that can best illustrate the above-mentioned points and show how the model works.

The following piece of graffiti text appeared in a public bathroom (the social context). Though it does not contain any intertextual narration, it has a very distinct linguistic organization (textual context). The first message the speaker sends is directed to the addressee implicitly: there is the category of integrity (with *we-inclusive-of-addressee*) intended not to exclude the addressees from the “actions”, but to involve them in the events and make his speech persuasive and more influential. To emphasize the message conveyed the author uses repetitions of the narrated “events” of the text (the verbs) in a negative form. The logical chain of the text is built with a



preposition (*with*) in the first part of the text, an infinitive (*to impress*), as well as exploiting the linguistic economy principle (omission of *that* in the secondary clauses). The response or the feedback which appears in the same social setting and follows the same linguistic pattern. As we see the feedback corresponds to the message not only structurally but also “thematically”. Each clause in the feedback is a direct response to the first message and shows sarcasm for the creator and criticises him. This graffiti, besides being responded by an unknown receiver, has triggered more communication across different discourses /<https://imgflip.com/>. The last sentence in the picture given above is a logical continuation of the main communication (appeared on the wall), but was added to the picture in the social media and is still being communicated by large masses of the society in a variety of social contexts /<https://imgflip.com/i/2jzylx/>.

Summing up, we can state that each element of this communication model depending on its characteristic features determines the potential of the structure of the model to turn from linear into interactive and from interactive into transactional. The *effect* a piece of message may have on the receiver should be considered as a separate element of communication in graffiti discourse based on the social context the graffiti appears in and the intention of the sender not only to inform but also to persuade the reader in his ideologies. In the linear model of graffiti communication the communicative centre is the *message* that marks the start of the communication. In the interactive and transactional models of communication, the centre is the *receiver* and partially the *effect* the message may produce on him/her, which decide the development of the communication, its discourse and aim. In all the types of communication models the graffiti shapes the potential source of noise hindering communication lies on the message, its linguistic and textual characteristics and on the social and textual contexts the piece of graffiti appears in. The elements in the model of graffiti communication are interconnected with and interdependent on one another even when the structural type of the model shifts across different discourses.

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Գ. ԳԱՍՊԱՐՅԱՆ – Որմնագրության միջոցով հաղորդակցության կաղապարի ձևավորման շուրջ. – Հոդվածում որմնագրությունը դիտարկվում է որպես զանգվածային հաղորդակցության ձև, անդրադարձ է կատարվում որմնագրության միջոցով ձևավորված հաղորդակցական կաղապարի բաղադրիչների առանձնահատկություններին: Քննության են առնվում տեսաբանների կողմից առաջադրված հիմնական հաղորդակցական կաղապարները: Հոդվածում փորձ է արվում ձևավորել այն համակցված հաղորդակցական կաղապարը, որն առաջանում է, երբ հասարակության անդամները բարձրաձայնում են իրենց անձնական խնդիրները, սոցիալ-քաղաքական հայացքները՝ օգտագործելով հաղորդակցության այս եզակի միջոցը:

Բանալի բառեր. որմնագրություն, որմնագրային խոսույթ, հաղորդակցություն, հաղորդակցության կաղապարներ, հաղորդակցության բաղադրիչներ

Г. ГАСПАРИЯН – Структура модели граффити как формы коммуникации. – Рассматривая граффити как форму массовой коммуникации, в статье делается попытка выявить структурные элементы ее модели и раскрыть характерные черты каждого из компонентов данного типа коммуникации. Приводятся различные модели коммуникации, анализ которых позволяет предложить интегративную модель коммуникации, отражающую основные структурные составляющие, характеризующие граффити как специфическую форму общения.

Ключевые слова: граффити, граффити-дискурс, коммуникация, коммуникативные модели, элементы коммуникации

Ներկայացվել է՝ 04.03.2021
Երաշխավորվել է ԵՊՀ Անգլերենի թիվ 2 ամբիոնի կողմից
Ընդունվել է տպագրության՝ 14.04.2021