

Transporting Morals across Borders: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Moral / Philosophical Writings on Vehicles in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper examines the domain of writings and postings on vehicles which communicate moral and ethical values and the possible impact they can have on the readers who constitute the major audience of the vehicle insignia. The paper utilizes the sociolinguistic analytical tool to examine the ways in which vehicle inscriptions and stickers construct what Lawal, et al (1997) refer to as the ‘quintessence of a people’s collective wisdom ...’. In the paper, we discuss the ways in which moral/philosophical messages on vehicles in Southwest Nigeria can impact on the behaviour of the readers of the writings. This study is carried out against the backdrop of the prevalent and widespread moral decadence seeping through every sector of Nigerian life in the hope that the profound moral and philosophical inscriptions which are a common sight on the bodies of vehicles plying the major roads of some parts of Yoruba sub-ethnic group would serve as moral elixir, not only to the readers of the inscriptions but also to the general reading populace. A total of thirty data were used in this paper to construct five different domains of moral messages to the public. The paper utilizes Hymes’ (1962) Ethnography of Communication as its theoretical framework. Our findings showed that vehicles transporting moral and philosophical writings and stickers usually transmit didactic and intellectual messages, thereby invoking a very strong and positive ethical, cultural and intellectual renaissance in the minds of the readers.

Key words: Stickers and inscriptions, moral, borders, awareness, ethnography of communication.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The practice of writing inscriptions or posting stickers on the bodies of automobiles in Nigeria in general and the southwest in particular is, by no means, a novel phenomenon. It has had a fairly long history, although the use of vehicle inscriptions, from research findings, predates that of the stickers. They have a far longer history than the stickers, because their use had started with the inception of automobiles in the country. Vehicle inscriptions, according to Nwagbara (2008:2), refer to ‘written texts, drawings, images, messages, paintings and photographs, among others, which are inscribed on the panel of vehicles’.

However, the use of stickers on automobiles is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is an outgrowth of the advancement in science and technology. Stickers are a type of piece of paper or plastic, sticky on one side, and usually with a design and a message on the other. In both cases, the uses of inscriptions and stickers on vehicles have assumed a significant and global phenomenon. It has also assumed a somewhat ubiquitous dimension as a great majority of vehicles carry the insignia on the different parts of their bodies communicating diverse messages across to the readers. It is, however, pertinent to remark that vehicle inscriptions serve two fundamental purposes. First, they are used for aesthetic purposes that is, they add to the beauty of automobiles and, second, they serve as a form of discourse that utilizes various discursive strategies to communicate messages.

In this paper, we approach vehicle writings as written texts in that they arguably constitute a form of discourse, the purpose of which is to constitute a uniformed whole as well as communicate a certain message (see Halliday and Hassan, 1976; Bloor and Bloor, 2004; Nwagbara, 2008; Dada, 2010a, 2010b; Okanlawon, 2011). For instance, Bloor and Bloor (2004:5) define a text as ‘any stretch of language, regardless of length, that is spoken or written for the purpose of communication’. Chilwa (2008), quoting Foucault (1981), also remarks that discourse is to be viewed as ‘discursive practices that account for a number of statements regulated by a set of rules that lead to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements’.

As inscriptions and stickers on vehicles serve different purposes ranging from aesthetic, religious, didactic, cautionary and political purposes to those of public awareness, sports, humours and wits, and advertisement, we will only limit this present study to those that construct didactic or moral messages. Writings

in that domain are mostly constructed in proverbs or axiomatic expressions and are primarily intended to revive the flagging and almost dying moral and cultural values in any society. In other words, they serve as a veritable channel of moral regeneration to the almost dying culture of morality in the society.

Written in catchy and pithy expressions, vehicle writings that construct ethical and philosophical messages, embedded in proverbs, are mostly operated by elderly vehicle operators rather than youths. The reason why they are found among the elderly and experienced vehicle operators is not unconnected with the fact that age as a sociolinguistic variable constitutes one of the crucial factors of language use. For, while the older persons quite often intersperse their written and spoken expressions with heavy doses of proverbs, aphorisms and other forms of idioms to bring out the morals of their expressions, the younger folk merely use slangs and other forms of bland and sloppy expressions that are lacking in linguistic resonance to pass across their messages. Quite often, the slang expressions that have formed the stock-in-trade of the linguistic repertoire of the younger folk are unfamiliar to the older ones due to the over-bearing influence of civilization and foreign cultures on the youths' ways of life.

A striking characteristic of vehicle writings that depict ethical values is that they are usually cryptic and enigmatic. As a result, their meanings may not appear decipherable and interpretable to casual readers or those who lack semantic competencies. However, sometimes, the writings may easily be decipherable and interpretable from the graphics, even though their meanings may still be shrouded in obscurity. They are models of compressed or forceful language that make people conform to the rules and norms of a particular society as they are intended to warn, advice or admonish (Ademowo and Balogun, 2014 :151-152).

Similarly, vehicle writings reveal the thoughts and world-views of the users. In most cases, vehicle writings reflect the inner sub-consciousness of the patrons of the insignia. They verbalize their fears, feelings and philosophies in graphics on the bodies of the vehicles they operate with a view to impacting positively on the lives of the readers of the inscriptions as well as "arousing, defining, manifesting and establishing the expectations, aspiration and consciousness of a people". (Fasiku, 2006: 5 cited in Ademowo&Balogun, *ibid*).

Finally, vehicle writings expressing ethical values are not always rendered in full sentences. Rather, they are rendered in part, that is, a part of the expression which forms the noun phrase (NP) of the sentence is most often written while the other segment of the NP completing the sentence is left out for the readers to complete. In other words, because they are constructed in compact and allusive phraseology, vehicle writings in this domain utilize what can be ordinarily termed as jigsaw puzzle primarily aimed at tasking the readers' cognitive domain. It is only the discerning readers, most especially those who possess both the pragmatic and semantic competencies, that can successfully decipher and complete the other segments.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- (i) to examine vehicle inscriptions and stickers as a type of discourse, taking into account their communicative value; and
- (ii) investigate the extent to which vehicle writings that transmit ethical messages impact on the lives of both the patrons and readers of the insignia.

Previous Studies

A few research studies have been carried out on vehicle writings, each applying different approaches ranging from stylistic and linguistic to ethnographic perspectives to examine the contents of vehicle writings (see Jordan, 1978; Ajani, 1999; Chiluwa, 2008; Nwagbara, 2008; Mgbemena, 2013; Oduro-Frimpong, 2013 and Asangba and Agoswin, 2015). The scholars who have researched extensively into the communicative import of vehicle writings, however, hold divergent views on such socio-cultural factors as age, sex, status, ethnicity and religion that really influence the use of vehicle writings. For instance, while some ascribe the posting of stickers and writings of inscriptions on vehicles to the users' behavioural traits, claiming that the writings on vehicles are symbolic of, and analogous to, the idiosyncrasies of the users (see Jordan, 1978 and Van der Geest, 2009), others argue that writings on vehicles are responses to the users' experiences of life, their fears and the need to seek God for possible solutions to life's problems (see Chiluwa, 2008 and Nwagbara, 2010). From the linguistic perspective, (Samaila, 2010 and Asangba and Agoswin, 2015) investigate the grammatical implications of writings on vehicles. They analyze the grammatically and graphologically deviant graphics on the bodies of automobiles with a view to correcting the possible negative influence such deviant constructions could have on the readers of such writings.

However, Mgbemena's (2013) study on the inscriptions on tricycles (*keke* NAPEP) is a marked departure from the previous studies examined, because the study focuses on tricycles rather than four-wheeled vehicles as a means of transportation. The study, carried out in the Northern part of Nigeria, discusses how writings on tricycles have helped in enhancing national integration and development. Drawing insights from sociolinguistics, Mgbemena (2013) avers that the novel trend in language use via inscriptions on tricycles is

capable of adding value to language development, assisting in the understanding and development of social relationships that exist among communities as well as explaining the different ways people signal aspects of their social identities.

The present study, therefore, however, investigates the discourse content of the ethical or philosophical writings on selected vehicles in the southwest part of Nigeria and the impact which those moral inscriptions can have on the lives of both the patrons and readers of the vehicle insignia.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In analysing discourse genres like vehicle inscriptions, it is imperative that a theoretical framework upon which the study is anchored is explained, however briefly. It is in this regard that we have found Hymes' (1962) *Ethnography of Communication* theoretical enterprise very apposite for this study. Hymes' *Ethnography of Communication* (EOC) is one of the theoretical frameworks that has really enjoyed the patronage of quite a number of research efforts (see Goodenough (1966), Levi-Strauss (1966), Fishman (1968), Bauman and Sherzer (1975), Saville-Troike (1982) and, most recently, Ikotun (2003, 2011a, 2011b). Studies by those researchers attest to the inseparable connection between language and culture. For them, the interface of language and culture is arguably analogous to the connection between the two sides of a coin which cannot be separated. *Ethnography of communicative event* is an overall description of the cultural and linguistic factors necessary in understanding how a certain linguistic behaviour achieves its objectives.

Language forms a part of the culture of a people. It is the veritable means by which members of a speech community communicate their different feelings and ideas with one another. To put it succinctly, language is a *sine qua non* to culture as one rubs on the other for the achievement of a cohesive and indivisible societal tie. *Ethnography of Communication* is the study of the role of language in culture and society. It is a method of discourse analysis in linguistics and other related fields like anthropology and ethnomethodology, and it is used to categorize persons (participants), place (setting) and activities (acts). It is also about how speech situations, the form of speech events, the interpretations of speaker(s), addressee(s), channel(s) and setting, and how the ways in which the speakers draw upon the resources of their language to perform certain communicative functions, are utilized to enhance effective communication within group members.

Hymes' (1962) theoretical framework which is the theoretical thrust for this paper underscores the importance of culture in the interpretation of a stretch of sentences or a given discourse. According to Hymes (1962: 22), 'speech cannot be considered separate from the sociological factors that help shape linguistic forms and create meaning'. In other words, Hymes' (1962) theoretical framework model is primarily concerned with the contextual use of language as well as how language is used to perform certain things that people do with that language.

Many scholars have employed this theoretical construct to study interpersonal communication in their studies. They include, among others, Adams (1966), Frake (1972), Philipsen (1975), Sherzer (1983), Ford (2002), Ogunsiyi and Osundina (2005) and Ikotun (2003, 2011a, 2011b). For instance, while Adams (1966) study centres on expressive communication in an Egyptian village via the symbiotic relationship between language and society, Frake's (1972) is on how to ask for a drink in Subanon. Ogunsiyi and Osundina's (2005) study is another ground-breaking effort that discusses the relevance of culture in an important aspect of the Yoruba culture: greetings. In all of the studies, there is a general consensus among the scholars about the interface of language and culture. It is against the backdrop of those studies that we posit in this paper that language is both culture and context-bound, and that the primary concern of language is to convey the identity of a speaker in relation to the context of culture of which the speaker is an integral part.

Philosophical / ethical vehicle writings

The domain of this paper which is referred to as philosophical / ethical vehicle inscriptions consists of axiomatic expressions both in English and Yoruba languages. The English language is the nation's *lingua franca*. It is the official language used in formal and informal domains. Apart from the exoglossic English language that is officially recognized in the country, there are three other major ethnic languages that also function as media of communication. They are: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Although vehicles plying the major roads across the southwest of Nigeria carry both the exoglossic and endoglossic codes, we have decided in this study to utilize writings constructed only in English and Yoruba for spatio-temporal reason.

Both the English and Yoruba languages deploy axiomatic and philosophical expressions as everyday language use of speakers in our study area. Vehicle writings in both languages take the form of idiomatic expressions meant to admonish, preach, teach and serve as lamps to the feet of the hearers. They admonish the youths about the core values of life, and as such, shape the behaviour of the younger ones. Idiomatic expressions, like proverbs, 'form a great part of a people's traditional repository of what they consider to be of great value and concern to them. They are the quintessence of a people's collective wisdom sustained and transmitted from generation to generation' (see Lawal, Ajayi and Raji, 1997: 637).

The messages inherent in the inscriptions on the bodies of the automobiles that transport them serve emotional, intellectual, imaginative and didactic functions for both the patrons and readers of such captions. Apart from the stylistic elegance inherent in those writings, they also contain noticeable poetic and rhetoric vigour that make their meanings profound and thought-provoking. They also provide insights into some of the greatest pragmatic context and competence which those who read them from the bodies of automobiles have to invoke and deploy to interpret them appropriately. The messages which such inscriptions transmit to the public are varied and profound. But, the advisory performative messages considered in this paper are meant to admonish, advice, instruct, or reprimand all and sundry, especially those who care to read the messages.

As didactic / philosophical writings, they serve as moral fillip to the discerning minds to modify their ways of life. In other words, the purpose of the writings is to impact positively on the minds of the readers by giving them a sense of direction on how to live a decent and meaningful life in a society that is already riddled with social and moral malaise.

Data Collection

In this paper, we used only thirty (30) data that construct moral / philosophical messages to the readers of the vehicle writings. As earlier stated, the data that comprised ethical vehicle writings were constructed in English and Yoruba languages. The data were randomly selected from among a cluster of data on the subject matter. The study drew its data from some of the motor parks across some parts of the Yoruba towns and cities that constitute the southwest of Nigeria. Our decision to use the motor parks was not unconnected with the fact that motor parks constitute the melting-pot for intra- and inter-city vehicles of different brands of automobiles that transport the variety of ethical / philosophical messages used in the study.

Data Analysis

This section analyses the data used for our study. The data were classified into five domains that capture the thematic preoccupations of the area of our study. They are messages that construct:

- (a) The virtue of hope, patience and resilience
- (b) Industry
- (c) Respect for elders
- (d) Admonition
- (e) Mortality

(a) Patience, hope and resilience

Vehicle writings in this category communicate the virtue of hope, patience, resilience and endurance. So captions such as: 'To be a man', 'No condition is permanent', 'Ojuenimaa la' (The eyes that will behold wealth), 'K'oro to dayo' (Before a situation turns joyous), 'Suuru' (Patience) and 'Bi emibawa' (If there's life) and 'Onisuuru' (A patient person) are common writings on the bodies of commercial vehicles. They all verbalize the philosophy of resilience, patience and hard-work. The underlying principle behind this thematic preoccupation is that patience is a necessary ingredient needed to confront and overcome the mirage of problems staring people in the face and which have led many to take rash and tragic actions. It is a generally held belief that there is no other easy way to enduring success than through exceeding resilience, patience and stoic equanimity before one can achieve success in the present society that is characterized by the craze for sudden wealth. Except for the caption: 'No condition is permanent', others in this category are the NPs (noun phrase) of some lexical items. The other segments are referred to as the empty constituent parts because they are not mentioned along with the first part of each of the NPs. The other empty parts are: '... aari'yonu' (will be faced with daunting challenges), '... ojutiri' (eyes will have beheld a lot of challenges), '... l'oogun aye' (is the antidote of life), '... ireti n be' (there is hope) and '... nii fun warakiniun' (extracts milk from the lioness' breasts) respectively complete the first segments of each of the above expressions. The full realization of each of the expressions above reads thus: 'Ojuenimaa la, aariyonu' (The eyes that will behold wealth will be faced with daunting challenges), 'K'oro to dayo, ojutiri' (Before a situation turns joyous, eyes will have beheld a lot of challenges), 'Suuruloogun aye' (Patience is the antidote of life), 'Bi emibawa, ireti n be' (If there's life, there's hope), 'Onisuurunii fun warakiniun' (A patient person extracts milk from the lioness' breasts). Therefore, the vehicle writings above constitute a didactic or moral discursive elixir which connotes that to succeed in life requires hard-work and tenacity of purpose just in the same manner as it will require a more than ordinary patience to extract milk from a lioness' breasts. The moral tonic is akin to the popular pithy expression that, the patient dog eats the fattest bones.

Similarly, vehicles that carry messages of hope and sanguinity on their bodies express the philosophy of brightness and hope for the future. Patrons of the inscriptions believe in the sanctity of hard-work in the hope that it will produce a fruitful result for them in the end. So, inscriptions such as: 'Ojoola a dara' (Tomorrow will be better), 'All will be well', 'The storm is over' and 'Tomorrow is now' are some of the discursive strategies in

this category that express hope for the future. Patrons of the writings have a strong conviction that the inscriptions help to re-affirm their hope that all will be well with them.

The vehicle writing, 'Ojoola a dara'(Tomorrow will be better), constructs a didactic message of hope about the future, especially for the vehicle operators and the readers of the inscriptions. The underlying assumption in the vehicle inscription is that the vehicle caption may have been constructed by the vehicle operator who, perhaps, may not have been the owner of the vehicle he is operating. The vehicle operator using this kind of inscription on his vehicle may have decided to use it for the purpose of encouraging those in his present state never to give up, but to hope for the better. It is also an indirect comforting message to the readers of the caption that "the living chicken can still swallow corn". The vehicle caption, therefore, becomes moral elixir for both the vehicle operators and the readers that there is always light after the tunnel. Expression of anticipation and hope in this context, according to Chiluba (2008), is both spiritual and social.

(b) Industry

Inscriptions in this group are anchored on the principle of the dignity of labour or the beauty of hard-work. This fundamental principle is in tandem with the Biblical injunction that '... if any would not work, neither should he eat' (II Thess 3:10). Industry or hard-work thus becomes such a sterling virtue that is desired for a bright future. In the area of our study, which is the southwest part of Nigeria, for instance, parents do not spare their children when it comes to the issue of hard-work. At the early stage of their children's life, parents admonish their children to shun indolence and cultivate the spirit of hard-work because hard-work is the antidote to poverty. It is through hard work that one can attain the desired height of greatness in life. The Holy Bible also affirms the virtue of hard-work when it rhetorically asks in Proverbs chapter 22, verse 29, 'Do you see a man skilful in his work? He will stand before Kings; he will not stand before obscure men'. Therefore, inscriptions like: 'No food for a lazy man', 'Apalara' (the arm is one's kith and kin). 'Work and pray' and 'Isel'oogunise' (hard-work is the antidote to poverty) are some of the vehicle writings that verbalize the fundamental doctrine of hard-work.

(c) Respect for elders

Vehicle inscriptions have, for long, proved useful emblems that promote the value of the sanctity of age among the Yoruba sub-ethnic group. Deference to elders is an age-long virtue among the people in the southwest part of Nigeria. Veneration for elderly people is exemplified mostly in Yoruba culture in a number of proverbial and idiomatic expressions that regularly adorn the bodies of automobiles plying the highways in our study area. Vehicle writings that confer veneration on the elders in the society include, among several other discursive strategies, 'Respect', 'Ma t'agbam'ole' (Don't trample on elders), 'Mo juba agba' (I respect elders) and 'Agbanit'ara' (I'm an elderindeed). The Nigerian culture, most especially the Yoruba culture, reveres and venerates the aged by according them a pride of place in the society. Because of their myriad of experiences in life as a result of their advancement in age, they are believed to be custodians of wisdom, and, hence, are treated with a high modicum of respect and utmost civility. This explains why the younger male folk are forbidden from outstretching their hands in a hand-shake when initiating a greeting to the elders. Neither is a younger female folk allowed to greet elderly persons while standing. Instead, while the younger male prostrates on the floor to greet his elders, the female counterpart is required to be on her knees when greeting an older adult. These practices still subsist till date. This time-honoured virtue is what is known and regarded as the *Omoluabi* ethos for which the Yoruba sub-ethnic group are known. Every child is guided by this virtue and, anyone who deviates is often regarded as a bastard. So, the vehicle captions: 'Respect', 'Ma t'agba mole' (Don't trample on elders), 'Mo juba agba' (I respect elders) and 'Agbanit'ara' (I'm an elderindeed) constitute honorific messages which underscore the need to place the elderly people on a pedestal. Readers of such vehicle captions tend to internalize the values of the writings and adopt the messages as a part of their daily lives so that it can be well with them.

(d) Admonition

Commercial vehicles that convey writings that are admonitory in nature are many. They ply the major southwest high ways on a daily basis. Words of admonition which they convey are in diverse ways: sometimes, they send messages of warning against a bad practice; at other times, they encourage noble and dignifying habits. Such admonitory writings help in inculcating in the minds of the reading public the best way to behave, thereby regulating their behaviour in the society. Inscriptions in this category include: 'Falana, gboti e' (Gossips, mind your business), 'Awodioko' (The Eagle in the sky), 'Eyinkulel'otawa' (Enemies lurk at the back of the house), 'B'oseere' (If you do it well ...) and 'Iwal'obaawure' (character is the king of money-making charm).

'Falanagboti e' is the shortened form of the admonitory expression: 'Falana, gboti e, t'araenil'aagbo' (Gossips, mind your business; it is one's own business that one minds). This expression of admonition is used to

warn anyone who is in the habit of meddling in the affairs of others to desist from such meddlesome habit. One aspect of the Yoruba philosophy or belief in core values is their intrinsic value for character development. They believe that a person's character is often instrumental in their fate in life. A gossip is characteristically an idle person who flips about dropping snippets of bad reports about others in order to cause bad feelings. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000: 513) defines a gossip as 'a person who enjoys talking about other people's private lives'. This attitude in anyone, to say the least, is abhorrent and condemnable in the society. The Holy Bible equally disapproves of the habit. In his Epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul admonishes the Church in Thessalonica against idleness as the habit was alien to the body of Christ. He writes: 'Now, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us' (II Thess. 3:6).

In Yoruba culture too, there are a number of ways by which the elders cast aspersions on anyone who habitually engages in surreptitious activities believing that nobody notices them. Hence, the vehicle inscription, 'Awodioko' (The Eagle in the sky) which is the noun phrase (NP) of '... komop'araile n wooun' (... doesn't know that others notice it) is a philosophical comment which verbalizes an indictment on anyone whose stock-in-trade is engaging in shady and surreptitious acts. 'Awodi' (The Eagle) is a type of a large bird of prey. It is a bird that kills other creatures for food with its sharp curved beak and a very good sight. Eagles usually soar overhead, hence the NP 'Awodioko'. It is believed that whenever they soar skywards, they are planning subterfuge or an onslaught on their unsuspecting prey. As they hatch their evil schemes heaven-wards, so will their prey, especially the wary and unsuspecting ones, be planning a counter-attack or an escape beneath the sky. The message in the vehicle emblem is that no evil deed goes unnoticed.

Other vehicle captions in this category which are equally admonitory in nature include 'Banuso' (Commune with yourself) and 'Eyinkule'otawa' (Enemies lurk at the back of the house). 'Banuso' constructs the deeply metaphorical message of secrecy, privacy and taciturnity. 'Banuso' (Commune with yourself) is a cryptic and a highly profound expression with a socio-cultural implication. Yoruba elders are known to be taciturn and deeply reflective in nature. Their taciturnity is rooted in the axiom that it is not all that the eyes behold that must be said by the mouth. The philosophy behind the message is that it is ideal to always confide in oneself in far-reaching life matters rather than involve the third party in decision making. The assumption is that the involvement of a third party is capable of stalling whatever success a conceived plan or a decision is expected to achieve. 'Eyinkule'otawa' verbalizes the age-long Yoruba socio-cultural belief that 'the insect that devours the vegetables dwells right in the vegetables', meaning that since man is always the subject of vicious attacks from enemies both within and without, he must keep the secret of his accomplishment because discretion is the better part of valour.

Contextually, the user of the vehicle which carries the writings is, perhaps, not oblivious of the ubiquitous existence of evil and wicked people who may be lurking stealthily

to pose hindrance to his success. The captions may be used as a warning to the readers to always learn to be discreet as well as realize the fact that there are evil people around them who may not be happy with whatever advancement they are making in life. As the readers of the writings internalize the inscriptions, they may want to juxtapose the inherent meanings conveyed by the messages with their own world view and therefore adjust their lifestyle lest they expose themselves to the evil machinations of the wicked people.

(e) **Mortality**

The concept of mortality is hinged on the philosophy of existentialism. Death is an inevitable phenomenon which every mortal is bound to taste. According to Mason (2015), death is the book-end of our existence in life because, according to him, 'it is useful to think about death only to the point it frees us to live fully immersed in the life we have yet to live'. (<https://www.philosophersmag.com>) assessed 30th August, 2018. The scriptural dictum: 'from the dust were you brought, and to the dust must you return' (Gen. 3:14) underlines the inevitability of death. It is a force over which no mortal has control. Writing on the agonising abrupt end which death foists on mankind, Osundare (2003: 219) quips philosophically:

*Death confronts man with the ultimate, universal
and most total horror. For, death is not a mere
transition, it is a complete transition; not just a
cessation of life, but also an irreversible transition.
The finality of death, its awesome
ruthlessness, the sudden and permanent
disappearance it engenders, and the mysterious
power with which it accomplishes all this, have
given death a dominant corner in man's
consciousness. For, what other force has the power to turn
a living, acting person, into a corpse within an instant?*

In the discourse of vehicle writings that construct mortality, exquisite messages adorn the bodies of both private and commercial vehicles to remind both the patrons and the readers of the captions of the ubiquity, on the one hand, and inevitability on the other, of death. Thus, vehicle captions like: ‘Aye l’oja’ (The world is a market place), ‘Remember your six feet’, ‘Ikulopineda’ (death signals the end of mankind) and ‘Enikan o laye’ (The world doesn’t belong to a single individual) are a few of the discursive strategies that constantly remind both the users / owners of vehicles and the readers that death is a great leveller that will strike at the least expected time.

While ‘Aye l’oja’ (The world is a market place) signals man’s temporary state of existence on earth, but an everlasting life hereafter (‘...orunnile’, meaning heaven is our permanent abode), ‘Remember your six feet’ and ‘Ikulopineda’ underscore the permanent cessation which death will bring to every mortal irrespective of status, age, sex or religion. The captions also serve as an admonition to individuals, especially those who do not live in the knowledge that death is inevitable, to always reflect on their existence on earth and so tread carefully in the belief that life is a transient phenomenon.

III. FINDINGS

Our findings revealed a lot about the communicative value of vehicle writings that transmit ethical messages across to the readers. In the first instance, it was discovered that the writings, by their nature, served as a moral elixir to the users and readers of such writings since their primary objective is to serve as admonitory and corrective measures to the individuals in the society.

Furthermore, findings revealed that moral / ethical writings on vehicles helped to task the cognitive and intellectual ability of the readers. As most of the vehicle writings used in this study are couched in figurative expressions, readers, mostly the young adult, will be better exposed to the understanding of figurative expressions if they care to read and internalize them. In addition, it was discovered that the domain of our study was found exclusively among the male vehicle users / owners. This implies that none of the vehicles operated by women carried ethical or philosophical writings. The reasons for our observation are not far-fetched. Only commercial vehicles were used in the study because such writings are more prevalent among operators of the commercial vehicles who are mostly men. In other words, operation of commercial vehicles in our study area is the exclusive business of the men-folk. This is because the business of operating a commercial vehicle is excruciatingly tasking and, therefore, is restricted to the men-folk.

IV. CONCLUSION

Our study has examined axiomatic writings on commercial automobiles as a sub-genre of social discourse. The study has shown, among other things, that vehicle writings constitute a popular medium of social discourse which communicate a key aspect of the culture of communication among vehicle operators in some parts of the southwest part of Nigeria. We also showed in the paper that the domain of vehicle inscriptions examined which is an aspect of philosophical statements represent the collective wisdom of a people. They are used daily for ‘the purpose of instructing the young and ignorant generations, or serve as reminders to the old, who have been remiss in the observance of the values of conduct expected in the society’ (Yadi, 2007: 167).

Consequently, vehicles transporting this category of age-long and time-honoured collective wisdom are mostly operated by experienced and elderly vehicle operators, who themselves are a repository of wisdom as it is only very rare to come across vehicles operated by adolescent vehicle operators with such poignant and profound messages. This is because most of the adolescent vehicle operators in our study area have their own exclusive and somewhat ‘privatized’ register which is far different from, and alien, to the language or register of the adult vehicle operators. For, while the former are likely to be fond of using slang as well as racy, ribald and sloppy writings on the bodies of the vehicles which they use for transportation, the latter will possibly prefer highly profound, philosophical and deeply thought-provoking inscriptions on the bodies of their automobiles.

Finally, it is the position of this paper that readers of the vehicle writings should cultivate the habit of reading and internalizing the kernel of the messages in the writings as inscriptions with underlying philosophical messages are capable of inculcating the right social, cultural and educational values in the hearts of the teeming youths.

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