

Thematic Analysis of Inscriptions on Shops: A Case Study of Amamoma Community

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Abstract

Studies on language have drawn the attention of many scholars over decades because of language's feature-social phenomena. Social phenomenon of language is a feature that states that language is utilized when it is identified with people. This feature has paved way for many disciplines such as linguistics, philosophy, anthropology and many other disciplines to be more effective in human society. Thus, these fields of study have revealed the vital role of language use in society. Inscription is one of the ways in which language is used in society. The present study investigates themes that emerge from inscriptions on shops and the rationale behind those themes, within the geographical location of Amamoma (a community located within the University of Cape Coast, Ghana). The main idea behind this paper is to identify how educational environments (University of Cape Coast) can affect the themes of inscriptions on shops. The data collected, for this study, were mainly through observation and interview. The study analyzed themes identified to be dominant in the inscriptions used. It was established that the theme of identity was the most dominant theme because Amamoma is a community where new shops are continually being constructed. It also became evident that educational environments affect the choices of some of the themes where the shops are located.

Key words: Inscription, Shops, Thematic Analysis, Amamoma Community, Communication

Introduction

Daniel Jones (1967) describes language as a system of arbitrarily organized sounds used by a speech community. Hurley (2003) mentions that language has two basic linguistic functions - to convey information and to express or evoke feelings. Thus, based on the former, communication is one of the basic functions of language. Bortsie (1996) defines communication as the act of sharing information with others by speaking, writing, moving part of the body or using other signals. He also comments that communication can be verbal or non-verbal. Verbal communication is the process of exchanging information using words orally or in a written mode, while non-verbal communication is a process of communication through sending and receiving wordless (mostly visual) cues between people. Visual communication involves communicating through visual aids. It involves the use of typography, tattoo, drawing, graphic design, gestures, facial expression, statue, illustration and colors to share information with others (Lehman & Dufrene, 2002).

Sekyi-Baidoo (2002) establishes the fact that every form of communication must have a sender, a message and an intended recipient. The communication process is complete once the recipient has understood the message. It is worthy to note that persuasion is one of the main goals of communication. Persuasion is a process which involves a conscious attempt by one individual to change the behavior of another individual or a group of individuals through the transmission of some messages (Bettinghaus & Coby, 1994). Persuasive language is mostly used in advertisement genres in both oral and written forms of communication. It has been established that people use persuasive words in constructing inscriptions. Due to the fact that shop owners use inscriptions to convince people to patronize their products, they employ, to some extent, persuasive language in the inscriptions given, which has the potential of drawing the attention of the reader to the message or the reader responds to the message. Inscription is a form of communication which carries out some of these goals

Inscription

The underlying concept that underpins the study is inscription. Various scholars have come out with seemingly different views on what inscriptions are. Etymologically, the word, inscription, originates from the Greek word ‘*epigraphē*’ meaning ‘to write on’. The word was introduced into the English language as *epigraph* – a term which was used to define any inscription on a structure and its study as *epigraphy*. Epigraphy is thus the study of inscriptions from the earliest civilization through the present day, their interpretations and their classification.

According to Panciera (2012), inscriptions or epigraphs is defined as any writing affected in a given culture by the substitution of writing tools and surface used for writing. This means that in a culture, where one customarily writes with a suitable tools on wooden tables, tree bark, papyrus, parchment, or cloth an inscription would be any writing made on different writing surfaces, regardless of the technique used (Panciera, 2012: 8). He also argues that inscription is any particular type of written human communication in a unidirectional, in the sense that inscription does not anticipate that a respond will be provided to the sender. Coupland & Adam (1997) state that behind every inscription lies a reason. Thus, inscriptions are true reflections of the life of a person or people.

An inscription can also be defined as a word or group of words written or engraved on solid substance for preservation or public inspections. Such inscriptions are evidently manifested in the form of graffiti, billboard advertisements, handbills and inscriptions on shops. In brief, an inscription is the artistic use of language to express the writer’s or the user’s emotion, thought, ideas, philosophy and general outlook of life as a means of communicating something to the readers or the people.

In Ghana, inscriptions are used in most places and they come in various forms: some are written on books, dresses, cars, canned foods, foot wares and many more. The shops in Amamoma are no exception. These inscriptions come with various themes such

as the love of something, an idea about life, the issue of politics, the issue of religion and others and these inscriptions call for curious investigation. It is for this reason that the researchers seek to conduct this research.

Literature Review

There has been a considerable interest among academics in investigating inscriptions in various socio-cultural settings. For instance, Nosovsky (2006) in his research, grouped epitaphs into three categories: epitaph as a literature genre, as an etymological source and as a historical source. To him, epitaphs on tombstones perform some functions, such as telling the public about the dead and helping the soul of the dead to be accepted in heaven. One main finding of his study attests to the fact that, inscriptions on tombstones give a historical account of the dead. Again, inscriptions function as literature genre and a medium through which the living make an appeal to the Spiritual being. Two years on, Kim's (2008) research on Americans Grave Legacy of changing identification confirms Nosovsky's (2006) assertion about the use of epitaphs. Kim discovered that epitaphs or inscriptions on tombstones do not only serve as a literature genre but it also gives some information about the deceased background and some achievements. Thus, Kim noted that inscriptions on tombstone are not written just for the purpose of writing but they are used as a way of giving credible information about a deceased's life legacy in death.

Some scholars have also made forays into investigating the language of inscriptions. Ejik's (2009) seminal work on inscriptions on vehicles revealed that inscriptions used by Ghanaians on vehicles are mostly phrases and not complete sentence due to limited space on the vehicle. Ejik identified various themes such as: slogans with religious dimensions, slogans with interpersonal dimension and slogans which cannot be categorized as pervasive in the inscriptions used on vehicles in Ghana. However, his discussion on the last category of slogans had some challenges because he could have grouped them under one specified slogan. Of interest in his research is the finding that there is a clash of several forms of discourses found in inscriptions on vehicles. Some

examples of the slogans on vehicles that were religious (for instance, ‘pray for life’ and ‘hope in God’), interpersonal (for instance, ‘Nipa yɛ bad’ meaning ‘man is evil’ and ‘kae dabi’ to denote ‘one must remember where he is coming from’). Some of the slogans are also unclassified as in ‘actually’ and ‘pancake’. He found out that religious slogans dominated his data set because religion is not compromised upon in Ghana and therefore, plays a prominent role in the lives of Ghanaians.

Inscriptions have also been studied in the field of graffiti. A case in point is the study carried out by Korang (2011). She conducted a study on “The language of inscriptions in T-shirt worn by the students in the University of Cape Coast” and she concludes that T-shirt with inscriptions are intentionally worn by students as a way of communicating various ideas and notions to others. She also grouped the inscriptions on T-shirt into love and relationship, religion, designer labels, academics, insults and miscellaneous.

From the review of studies of related works, it would be realized that much attention has not been given to thematic analysis of inscription on shops. It is on this inspiration that the researchers seek to fill in the apparent lacuna and contribute to knowledge on why people capture their emotions, thought, perceptions in terms of inscriptions or labelling of shops in the Amamoma community.

Methodology

Research Design

The qualitative research design was the dominant design used in analysing the data collected. According to Creswell (1994), qualitative design requires the researcher to go to the sites of the participant in order to develop a level of details about the individual or place and also involved in actual experience of participants. The qualitative research design was dominantly used because the researcher was interested in finding out or interpreting the rationale behind the use of inscription on shops. Therefore, the data was purposely about people’s view on inscriptions. The researcher also employed quantitative

research design to account for the use of basic descriptive statistical tools such as frequency counts to help support the findings in numerical terms.

Research Site

The research site for this study is Amamoma, a suburb of Cape Coast, Ghana. Cape Coast is the capital city of the Central Region of Ghana. Amamoma is one of the seven villages that surround the University of Cape Coast. The other villages include Apewosika, Akotokyiri, Kwesipra, Kwaprow and Duakoro. The researchers chose this site mainly because it is located in and around the University of Cape Coast of which the present researchers are located. This enabled us to access data easily from the respondents.

Population and Sampling Technique

The target population for the study was hundred (100) shops in Amamoma. The researchers used purposive sampling method to select fifty shops with inscriptions out of one hundred shops in Amamoma. The criterion used was that the shops selected are to be situated within Amamoma. The researcher thinks a sample size of fifty shops is a good representation of the total population because per the theory of saturation in data collection, they represented the “optimum number necessary to enable valid inferences to be made about the population” (Marshall, 1996:522; Thomson, 2011).

Research Instruments

Two main research instruments used in gathering data for this study are observation and interview. Observation is the method of data collection that employs the sense of vision as its main source. Second, the researcher used structured interview in gathering data for the study. Research interview is a form of questioning characterised by the fact that verbal questioning is used as its principle technique of data collection. A structured interview is an interview based on strict procedure where questionnaires are read by the interviewer as prescribed by the researcher to the interviewee to answer (Creswell, 1994). With the interview, the researchers had a face-to-face interaction with

the interviewees, the shop owners and some of the epigraphers to know the reason(s) behind the choice of a particular inscription on a shop. This was done to have first-hand information from the categorized group of people. During the interview, the researchers used a tape recorder to record the interaction, and the consent of the interviewees was sought before the recordings were done. During the interview, the interviewees raised some concerns, so for the issue of confidentiality of the interviewees, the researchers used pseudo-names instead of real names of shop owners. The consent was sought in order to cater for the ethical considerations that are associated with such studies.

Analysis and Discussions

The analysis of this study is done in relation to the research questions stated below:

- a) What themes emerge from the inscriptions on the shops found within the Amamoma Community?
- b) What rationale underpins the choice of particular inscriptions by shop owners in the Amamoma Community?

Themes in the Inscriptions on Shops in Amamoma

The study revealed that shop owners use various themes to communicate to the general public. These themes emerged based on the owners' perspective in life. Some of these themes are identity, ownership, inspiration, classic professionalism, reverence to God, and academic. Below are the analysis and discussions of the various themes:

Theme of Identity

Identity is something inherent to the complexity of a person's social practices but not a person's internal state. In simple terms, identity is the recognition of a certain kind of a person in a given context (Gee, 2001). In this study, identity is the cognition of a person's kind of goods and services provided in the use of inscription. The theme of identity is evident in the names or phrases that are used by shop owners to communicate to the general public the kinds of product or services they provide in that particular shop.

The following examples are some of the identified inscriptions grouped under the theme of identity:

1. Unisex Beauty Salon
2. Copy Shop
3. Point for Phones

The afore-mentioned inscriptions give credence to the fact that these inscriptions give information about the kind of goods and services provided by the particular shops. The theme is chosen by shop owners who feel invisible in the market domain. In an interview with one of the respondents, Mr. Samuel (this is a pseudo-name) stated, “When I came here, *Alphama* and *Mystic* were already in the system. So I used a name (inscription) that will easily tell students that I run photocopy here, hence the name, ‘copy shop’.” This pronouncement supports the assertion that some shop owners feel that they have so many competitors around them who are ahead of them in the market domain. In order for their intended customers to know them, they must go for inscriptions that will advertise the products they sell or the services they render rather than any other form or theme. The shop owners are aware of the fact that they may not choose a brand which is not popular enough to compete with the already known brands in the market that may be providing the same products and services. Therefore, they decide to go for inscriptions that easily identify them with their intended customers. Considering the inscriptions in the above examples such as ‘unisex salon’-they trim and do hairstyles for both sexes, ‘copy shop’-run photocopies of part of books and articles, ‘point for phones’-they sell phones and their accessories. It is evident that the shop owners specifically want to advertise what they do or sell to the general public.

The Theme of Inspiration

Inspiration is something that mentally simulates someone to do or feel something. In other words, it is something that inspires the performance of a particular act. Here, shop owners try to communicate to the general public their source of inspiration, that is to

say, their source of inspiration could be God, fellow human or even a text read from somewhere. Below are some examples:

4. Which One
5. Encounter Beauty Salon
6. Arise and Build

The above-mentioned inscription support the notion that some shop owners' views in the use of inscription is to tell the public what inspires them and eventually resulted in their current state. That is, their source of inspiration, or in simple terms, how they got to where they are with the help of someone or a supernatural being. For instance, with the inscription of 'Which One', someone might interpret it as an interrogative statement that persuades an intended customer to make a choice out of the numerous delicious cuisine captioned in the inscription. However, my interview with the shop owner, Kwaku Sampson, revealed that the inscription 'Which One' is a name of an elderly brother, who helped him in diverse ways. He said, "my elder brother has really helped me, and I have also decided to show my appreciation to him by using his name for my shop." So in order not to forget what his brother did for him, and still remembers his source of inspiration, he goes for the name 'Which One'. In the sixth (6) example, 'Encounter Beauty Salon' the owner describes her inspiration in one phrase as 'Encounter'. She avows that some people boast of their family treasures as the root of their success and inspiration, but to her what inspired her is one encounter with God. That encounter turned her life around for good in every aspect such as good marriage, fruit of the womb, peace and prosperity in her life. In the same light, 'Arise and build' is an inscription used by a kenkey seller who is inspired by the Bible quote Nehemiah 2:20, '...We his servants will **arise and build**'. She pronounces that though she was already in the business of selling kenkey, she was not enthused to do the work properly till she heard the word of God that really inspired her to arise from her indolent attitude and build the business as Nehemiah purposed in his heart to build the wall of Jerusalem and prospered.

The Theme of Academic

Academic can be simply defined as pertaining to areas of study that are not primarily vocational. It relates to college, academy school, or other educational institution. This theme is one of the few themes used by shop owners to communicate to the general public, specifically students. They use these inscriptions to tell their intended customers that they are one of them and as such patronize their goods and services. Below are some examples:

7. The Graduate
8. Prof. Waakye special
9. V. C Bookshop
10. Roommate Boutique

The above examples support the claim that the theme of academic is one of the themes that emerged from the inscriptions used on shops in Amamoma. The shop owners, based on my interview, claimed that students (specifically university students) like to purchase things from their fellow students. This observation is based on the second semester entrepreneur project embarked upon by Business of Commerce students in level 400 every academic year. They noticed that no matter the proximity of a product to students, they would happily patronize the goods of their fellow students at a distance. All the shop owners used one phrase at the end of their sentence, ‘sukuufo de wope sukuufo ade to’, this phrase literally mean that ‘students like to purchase things from their fellow students’. So in order to attract their intended customers they go for terms or lexical items that are related or common to students, that is, ‘Professor’, ‘V. C (Vice Chancellor)’, ‘Graduate’, and ‘ Roommate Boutique’. With these kinds of inscriptions, students or their intended customers identify themselves with the product they sell. For instance, Mr. Frank said, “it is the dream of all students to be called ‘Graduates’ and most importantly students prefer someone from their field to do their paper work such as printing for them, so that when the person sees any mistake he or she can correct it for them. Therefore, I used this inscription (The Graduate) to tell them that I am the right

person to run their photocopies for them.” So with these inscriptions, shop owners persuade their customers to patronize their goods, with the belief that they (the shop owners) are one of them, students.

Similar notion is used in the construction of the inscription ‘Prof. Waakye special’. *Waakye* is a special food made in Ghana with rice and beans. In the academia, ‘Professorship’ is the highest rank and as such it is accorded with a high respect in the university community. Hence, anything that is attached with professorship in the university environment is accorded with great value by students; therefore, the shop owner adopts the theme of academic as in ‘Prof. Waakye Special’ to show students that she is not only one of them but well knowledgeable in the food she sells as well.

The Theme of Reverence to God

Reverence is a feeling or attitude of deep respect shown to someone (God). The shop with inscription like ‘clap for Jesus” example 14 below has nothing to do about the products or services rendered at the shops. We see that the shop owner intends to convey something more than just the service she offers, that is, a beauty salon. The shop owner may be trying to tell us she is grateful to God for helping her start the business in the first place. It is also clear from the inscriptions that the shop owners highlight more on God rather than their products, which in a way informs the researcher of the theme behind them. Below are some of the inscriptions captured in the data.

11. God’s Gift
12. God Gave Us
13. Try Jesus
14. Clap for Jesus
15. Nyame Deε mothercare (sic) mother care

The inscriptions stated above illustrate shop owners’ appreciation to their Supreme Being or God than the products or the services they provide. To a large effect,

shop owners try to attract the attention of their fellow Christians with the use of these inscriptions. Mr. Mensah, the owner of ‘Try Jesus Photoshop,’ said that when he was about to register his shop, he had a lot of inscriptions, but he used ‘Try Jesus’ because God is the root of his success and he also wanted to evangelize the word of God. That is, one cannot believe or trust what he has never tried before, so readers must try Jesus in everything they do.

The Theme of Classic Professionalism

According to Trimble (2008), behind every inscription lays a reason. It is therefore convincing that the use of inscriptions is a form of advertising technique used by shop owners. “Advertising is the non-personal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media” (Bovee, 1992:7). The study grouped all inscriptions that use nice adjectives to qualify the kinds of products they sell or the services they provide as the theme of classic professionalism. These shop owners categorized under this theme, classic professionalism, deem it necessary to advertise their services or product in a grand style. They add value to the services they render more than their immediate competitor (those who sell or provide same services close to them). One non-verbal element that is identified with this group is the uniqueness of their environment. Their building or exterior and interior decoration are very nice. Below are some extracts from the research site:

16. Icons Barber shop
17. Exquisite Cosmetics shop
18. Beauty secret
19. Nosh up

From the examples stated above, it is evident that these inscriptions show a sense of good quality of their product. For instance, ‘exquisite cosmetics’, ‘Icons barber shop’, ‘Nosh up’ clearly assert this notion. Madam Serwaa and Mr. Jackson said “we believe in

value for money, that is, getting the best for the money one pays.” Based on my interview, they declared that there is a difference between selling a good product and branding the good product one sells. Here, they believe in branding a good product one sells because with this, one does not only delight old customers but also attracts new customers every day.

The Theme of Ownership

Ownership according to Black’s Law Dictionary is the collection of rights allowing one to use and enjoy property, including the right to convey to others. This right of ownership is revealed through idiosyncrasy in terms of language. Idiosyncrasy is the use of language that is distinct and peculiar to individuals. In the same way, the use of some inscriptions reveals the personalities behind those inscriptions on shops. In this study, the researchers grouped all inscriptions that identify the personalities behind the inscription under the theme of ownership. Below are some examples:

- 20. Mystic Ventures
- 21. Kwateng Emmanuel Ventures
- 22. The willies
- 23. Bentil’s Shop

The examples above clearly support the assertion that the use of these inscriptions talks about the shop owners and not the product they sell or the services they provide. From the examples 20-23, it is acknowledged that these shop owners are not interested in advertising their product rather their names as compared to example ‘2’ (copy shop) which talks about the services they provide in the inscription. Mr. kwateng, who sells stationery stated, “If God blesses you with a shop I think it is appropriate to name it after yourself.” Most of these shop owners are the people who are already popular in the market domain; therefore, they deem it appropriate to advertise their names because a lot of people already know the kinds of products or services they provide.

Presented below is a statistical representation of the types of themes that were present in the data collected. The scale used on the frequency side is two centimeters to two units (2cm =2units)

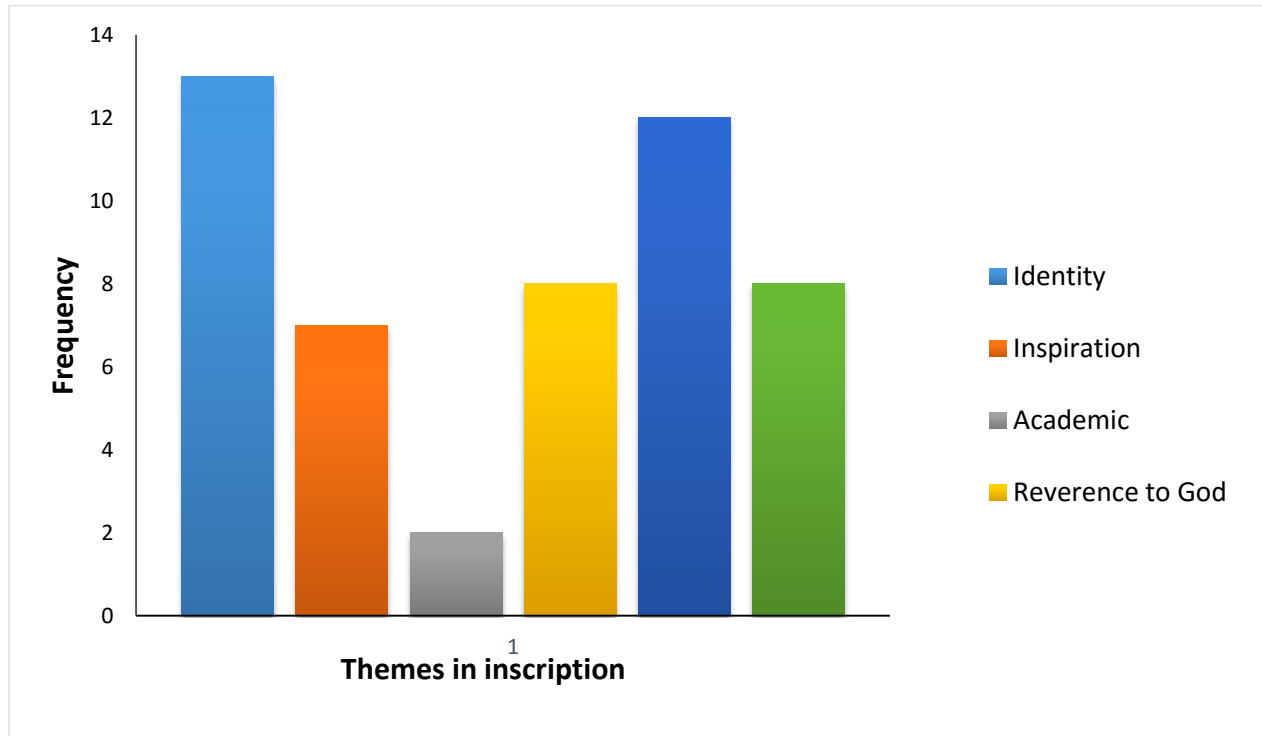


Figure 1. Distribution of themes in inscriptions on shops in Amamoma

The chart stated above indicates that fifty shops were used. Out of the fifty shops, six themes emerged from the inscriptions collected. Different colors have been used to show the distinction. The theme of identity is the first theme with the frequency of thirteen (13), followed by the theme of inspiration with the frequency of seven (7), the theme of academic is two (2), the theme of reverence to God is eight (8), then the theme of classic professionalism is (12) and lastly the theme of ownership is (8).

Based on the analysis above, it can be deduced that the theme of identity has the highest because Amamoma is community where new shops are continually being constructed. Therefore, shop owners deem it necessary to go for inscriptions that would advertise their goods and services because they are probably new in the market world.

This finding also corroborates Trimble’s assertion that inscriptions are writings with importance; they are used to communicate to prospective customers. This study also established that as education influences human lives in diverse ways, it also affects the use of inscriptions on shops located within educational environments.

Conclusion

The key findings in this study are identified in relation to the research questions. In relation to the first research question, which sought to identify the themes that emerge from the inscriptions on shops in Amamoma, it was revealed that some of these themes are the theme of identity, theme of ownership, theme of inspiration, theme of classic professionalism, theme of reverence to God and the theme of academic. The second finding, with regard to the last research question, is the rationale behind the use of inscriptions. The study discovered that, far from using inscriptions as a form of communication, the use of certain inscriptions on shops sometimes shows the shop owners’ status in terms of the market domain. For instance, the use of the theme of identity shows that the owner(s) are unknown in the market domain or has a lot of competitors around them and therefore needed to select inscriptions that easily identify them. The study also discovered that there are various ways shop owners communicate to the general public and these are based on their own perspectives in life as well as their creative and marketing abilities.

The findings have implications as far as this study is concerned, that is, the study contributes to knowledge in academia, in that, it adds to the already existing works on the significance of the use of inscriptions and also serves as a reference work for the study of inscriptions.

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Anita William Quayson, B.A. (Hons.) and Emmanuel Amo Ofori, Ph.D.
Thematic Analysis of Inscriptions on Shops: A Case Study of Amamoma
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