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DISCOURSE & COMMUNICATION 2008; 2; 371

DOI: 10.1177/1750481308091909

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(Los Angeles, London, New Delhi
and Singapore)
www.sagepublications.com
Vol 2(4): 371–387
10.1177/1750481308091909

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ABSTRACT This study focuses on analysing the ways in which vehicle stickers construct individual and group identities, people's religious faith and social vision in the context of religious assumptions and practices in Nigeria. Data comprise 73 vehicle stickers collected in Lagos and Ota, between 2006 and 2007 and are analysed within the framework of the post-structuralist model of discourse analysis which views discourse as a product of a complex system of social and institutional practices that sustain its continuous existence (Derrida, 1982; Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995; Foucault, 1972, 1981). Results show that through stickers people define their individual and group identities within religious institutional practices. And as a means of group identification, they guarantee social security and privileges. In constructing social vision the stickers help mould the individual aspiration about a future which transcends the present. Significantly, stickers in the data also reveal the tension between Islam and Christianity and the struggle to propagate one above the other.

KEY WORDS: *assumption, discourse, discursive, practices, religion, stickers*

Introduction

Nigeria is the most religious country in the world, with about 91 percent of the population attending religious services and 95 percent praying regularly (BBC, 2004; Emenyonu, 2007). Christianity and Islam are the predominant religions accounting for about 93 percent of the entire population (Johnstone and Mandryk, 2001). While Islam dominates the north, Christianity is more popular in the south. Although many professing Christians do not attend church services, about 80 percent are committed regular church-goers. Modern wave of protestant charismatic have also attracted a large number of nominal religious adherents to the churches. This new tempo of religious renaissance in the country champions some various forms of social mobilization strategies,

crusades and enlightenment programmes designed to disseminate the different kinds of faith and practices. Alongside the evolving social communication strategies are creative religious discourses, computer-mediated communication and online presence as a means of propagating and sustaining religious tenets and membership. Vehicle stickers like graffiti have been part of this foray of religious communication as a means of self-expression, documentation of group membership, expression of protest or rejection of certain social standards (Blume, 1985). Studies on religious discourse have identified distinct categories of discourse domain such as prayers, sermons, liturgies and other forms of rituals (Crystal, 1994; Taiwo, 2007). This study focuses on analysing the way in which vehicle stickers being considered as discourse, construct individual and group identity, social vision and are a reaffirmation of faith in contemporary Nigeria.

Stickers

According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (new edition) a sticker is 'a small piece of paper or plastic with a picture or writing on it that you can stick on to something'. So a 'sticker' sticks, being an adhesive label or sign which can easily stick to a smooth or rough surface. Stickers unlike graffiti do not necessarily warrant paintings or drawings. Certain commercial stickers however do have background pictures with writings printed on them. Most vehicle stickers do not include pictures, but are often printed on coloured or white adhesive papers of different shapes and sizes. My use of 'vehicle stickers' rather than 'bumper stickers' (see Bloch, 2000; Newhagen and Ancell, 1995) is more appropriate to the Nigerian situation, where stickers are usually found on the windscreen or the rear window rather than the bumper of vehicles.

Stickers are often used by business/religious organizations, schools, clubs or political associations as a form of advertisements. In modern Nigeria, stickers are used as a platform for social communication. Messages printed on stickers such as 'I am proud to be a Muslim', 'Thank you Jesus', 'Cool down', or 'Vote for PDP' are the different ways individuals attempt to express their religious affiliations, social values or their political associations.

The history of stickers is closely tied to the history of ancient graffiti (Italian *graffito*) – a term for any form of writing or images on the walls or surfaces of public buildings, parks, toilets, buses or trains, usually bearing some political or sexual contents; a lover's pledge, proposition, or obscene words. Contemporary usage includes all forms of obscenities and inscriptions/designs scratched on walls, tables, doors, buses, cars or private houses. On the ancient Catacombs of Rome, the writings were messages by lovers in form of poetry, obscene terms, political slogans, sexual solicitations, religious antagonisms or philosophical statements. Today, stickers perform these functions but are not generally designed or written by the individuals who stick them to their vehicles, rather by graphic artists and some specialized organizations that produce different types of stickers. Individuals simply buy the types that appeal to them or that best express their thoughts and situations.

The historical antecedents of stickers on vehicles in Nigeria began with lorry owners and a few car owners in the early 1970s (Allo, 2006). The most common inscriptions on vehicles then were 'goods only', 'private', or 'goods at owner's risk'. When commuter buses known as *molue* and *danfo* emerged in Lagos for example, the bus owners inscribed graffiti on them. At that time, stickers were just beginning to emerge. Inscriptions and stickers like 'safe journey', 'the Lord is my Shepherd', 'go slow', etc. became the vogue. Stickers alongside graffiti became a medium for class placement varying with the type of vehicles. Old cars bore stickers that read: 'the downfall of a man is not the end of his life', or 'my beginning may be small but my latter end shall be great'. Cars that were fairly new would have stickers like 'a patient dog eats the fattest bone', 'what the Lord has started in me, he will perfect', etc. More classy and flashy cars would have stickers that say: 'the storm is over', 'one with God is majority', 'back to sender', etc. (Allo, 2006). This did not just explain class consciousness but also the individual psychological self-awareness. Generally, stickers are as a matter of fact another form of modern graffiti which provide individuals, denied of other legitimate means of social communication, the opportunity to express their views on social and political matters or voice their grievances or protest against injustice (Blume, 1985; Jeff, 1995; Nwoye, 1993; Teixeira and Otta, 1998).

Objectives

Previous studies of bumper stickers have revealed their interesting features and functions as social communication, but none of the studies examined the functions of stickers in a purely religious context especially in the Nigerian situation. The objectives of this study therefore are primarily: i) to investigate how religious stickers construct individual religious faith, social vision and group identity, ii) how properties of the discourse of stickers reflect religious institutional practices and assumptions.

Review of literature

A good number of studies on stickers have applied different approaches ranging from the cultural, linguistic, aesthetic, ethnographic, etc. to the contents and meaning of stickers (Gadsby, 1995). Content analyses of bumper stickers through ethnographic methods and approaches in social psychology show that stickers are discursive means of expressing emotions and social status (Newhagen and Ancell, 1995) and a spontaneous medium of protest evolving into a routinized form of public discourse (Bloch, 2000). In Israel, for instance, 'political bumper stickers have become a ubiquitous medium of communication, expressing complex national-ideological messages that reflect individual opinions on a mass scale' (Bloch, 2000: 1). Individuals generally use bumper stickers to show their support and allegiance to an organization; spread the message of interest groups, and communicate candidate preferences in a political campaign (Endersby and Towle, 1996; Salamon, 2001). As a social campaign strategy, dashboard stickers

have also been used to improve compliance to safety belt-use (Thyer and Geller, 1987). The present study is an investigation of the discourse content of religious stickers in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Traditionally, discourse is viewed as language in use (Brown and Yule, 1983), constructed as oral or written texts and functions in social contexts, occurring naturally and spontaneously (Chalon, 1985; Coulthard and Montgomery, 1981; Onadeko, 2000; Van Dijk, 1985). In this vein, discourse doesn't have to conform to grammatical rules, but that it communicates and is recognized by its receivers as coherent (Cook, 1989). Discourse analysis is therefore an investigation of language in use in a way that reveals the actual intention of the user in a social context (Van Dijk, 1989). However, with the growing interest in post-structuralist research, the concept of discourse has been extended to include social and 'discursive' practices (Fairclough, 1989; Howarth, 2000). Hence, discourse is viewed as a socially and historically situated mode of action in a dialectical relationship (i.e. socially shaped and socially shaping) with other facets of the social (Fairclough, 1995). According to Foucault (1972: 80), discourse refers to 'general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements' and they consist of historically specific rules of formation that determine the difference between grammatically well-formed statements and what is actually said in particular contexts (Foucault, 1991a; Mills, 2003). Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (1989) which is partly developed out of Foucault's work as well as Derrida's contributions gives more insights to how political texts (or discursive practices) with their ideological imprints are agents of dominations by those in power. Thus discourse or discourses are shaped by social practices and are in fact part of those social practices (1989).

This research adopts this post-structuralist social theory of discourse to the study of religious vehicles stickers; hence vehicles stickers are 'discourse' being viewed as social practice, constructing the society and showing how society operates. As a form of religious discourse they represent social meaning as meaning-making resources of society. Stickers are constructed as written texts in which human and social/religious experiences are structured and at the same time showing how discursive practices and non-discursive activities and institutions especially in the religious context connect to mould the individual's vision of himself, his identity and religious faith (Derrida, 1982; Foucault, 1982, 1991b; Howarth, 2000; Lemke, 1995).

Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of the study within the framework of the post-structuralist discourse theory, specific features of social meaning of the stickers are investigated. Since stickers are characteristically short and bidirectional,

interaction management, which includes patterns of turn-taking, will not be included, especially as they are single texts. Analyses will primarily be concerned with investigating how the stickers constructs individuals' social visions, religious faith and group identity as members of the society and what dimensions of the society are revealed by the stickers. Data are divided into three broad groups corresponding to their discourse domains, namely: i) social vision (17); ii) group identity (14); iii) re-affirmation of faith (41).

DATA

Data comprise 72 vehicle stickers collected in Lagos state and Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria, between 2006 and 2007. Lagos is chosen for the study because of its mass transit population and being the busiest commercial capital of Nigeria. Ota is a region of Ogun state which is very close to Lagos. Commercial buses and cars ply direct routes from Oshodi (in Lagos) to Ota. The researcher lived in Lagos for many years and presently lives in Ota, Nigeria. The data are presented in the orders in which the discourse domains are cited. Each of the broad categories is analysed in sub-groups.

i) Social vision

- From glory to glory
- I am a winner
- It can only get better, worst days are over
- I'm stepping on higher ground
- With Jesus, you have everything
- My year of laughter
- There is joy in the morning
- See you on the top, the bottom is too crowded
- The storm is over
- I choose to succeed
- I will be perfected
- No cause for alarm, my case is settled
- It is my turn to shout
- It is well
- No controversy, I'm blessed
- If God be for me
- I am not alone, Jesus is with me
- The Lord is my Shepherd
- I'm not smarter, it's God's favour

ii) Individual/group identity

- Islam is my Religion
- Redeemed family
- Winners family
- I'm proud to be a Muslim
- TREM

- I'm a Catholic
- I'm proud to be an Anglican
- Abraham Seed
- Muslim family
- I am what God says I am
- I am the apple of God's eye
- I am born again
- I am a chosen child of God
- Salem

iii) Reaffirmation of faith

- Jesus is coming soon
- If God says Amen
- All power belongs to Jesus
- Blood of Jesus
- When I see the blood, I will pass over
- One with God is majority
- Jesus
- Allah is one
- Rock of Ages
- Prayer is the key
- Rain of mercy
- God is with us
- Repent
- Satan keep off! Danger Zone!
- I'm not smarter, it's God's favour
- Grain to grace
- Winners never quit
- Only praise can take you higher
- A life without Christ is like a doughnut: there's a hole in the heart
- God pass them
- Let's do it right
- Givers never lack
- Be patient
- Relax, God is in Control
- Try God
- Father, forgive them
- The kingdom woman
- With God nothing is impossible
- Someone let you down? Try Jesus
- Remember to forgive
- Real women love Jesus
- Only his grace averts disgrace
- Wise men still seek Jesus
- Keep off, angels on guard

- Heaven is my home
- Meet me in church
- Get connected to Jesus
- Fear not, I'm with you always
- His glory has risen
- If men were God

OCURRENCE OF THE DISCOURSE DOMAINS IN THE DATA

The stickers in the social vision category significantly overlap in structure and content with those of the affirmation of faith, though with some minor differences. The social vision stickers, are more individualized, reflecting some personalized vision, as most of the stickers in the category either begin with or contain the personal pronoun 'I', 'we', 'me' or the possessive 'my' in a form of forward-looking, personal-aspiration statements which, however, is informed by the religious convention or belief system. (This is explained in detail in the analysis.) Those of the reaffirmation of faith, however, tend to re-enact scriptures. Many of the stickers in the category are simple paraphrases of some Bible verses which individuals reaffirm as faith boosters. Rather than express some personalized dictums, they touch on a number of doctrinal issues which I have tried to explain in the sub-categories in the analysis. The analytical categories are, however, bound to overlap due to the religious context in which the stickers operate, especially the Nigerian situation. As a matter of fact, what may ordinarily be viewed as 'social vision' may also be perceived in the religious context as a manifestation of faith or an expression of spiritual identity. So it is possible for one sticker to fit into two or all three categories at the same time. For instance, a sticker like 'I am a winner' is both visionary as well as reaffirming an individual's faith in himself or in his religion. The categorization has been a matter of convenience for purpose of analysis in order to ascertain some various levels of meaning which operate in religious stickers as a form of social communication.

ANALYSES

The first level of analysis which is the identification of the discourse domains of the stickers, that is, social vision; individual/group identity and reaffirmation of faith shows that religious stickers are indeed a dynamic form of social communication. This section will involve a more detailed discussion of how the stickers under the identified domains actually construct those domains.

TABLE 1. *Occurrence of the discourse domains in the data*

| | N | % |
|---------------------------|----|-----|
| Social vision | 18 | 25 |
| Individual/group identity | 14 | 19 |
| Reaffirmation of faith | 40 | 56 |
| Total | 72 | 100 |

i) Social vision

Religion is often defined in terms of some culture-bound mode of social behaviour, expressed within a cultural context and is in fact an integral part of culture itself. Weber and Durkheim, for instance, believe that religion is essentially a way in which society constructs and maintains its cherished traditions and moral values; traditions which may embody certain principles such as fundamental human rights, freedom, justice and social equality (Luckmann, 1965; Nabofa, 1997). To a devout Christian however, everything about life, relationships, education, career, money, sexuality and family life, etc. are viewed as having some religious significance. Hence, in his interaction with faith and society, a Christian, for instance, achieves a definition of himself as well as the kind of society he seeks to create. Thus stickers under the social vision category reveal some various ways this domain of discourse constructs an individual's vision in the context of his religious belief and practices. This means that the individual's vision of himself is formulated by religious practices, operating as essential tenets of the church/mosque. This vision is expressed in three ways.

The first type of vision is based on modern Christian charismatic faith-pronouncement theology, which posits that a Christian has the right to decide his fate by simply confessing or pronouncing his future in advance. This first level of vision enables the individual worshiper to see himself with 'the eyes of faith'. Stickers in this category include:

- I am a winner
- The storm is over
- It is well
- It can only get better, worst days are over
- No cause for alarm, my case is settled, etc.

These stickers visualize the future right in the present and function as a form of assurance against possible anxiety. It is generally believed among Nigerian charismatic Christians that assurance of this nature constantly keeps the soul focused and stabilizes the individual from wavering. Notice that the individual's vision is borne out of the popular Christian theology which is pervasive in the religious discourse of the stickers and individuals simply imbibe them. In his explanation of the role of ideology in language, Fairclough (1989) argues that ideology or 'common sense assumption' is the means by which individuals or institutions control others and confine them to specific statuses and roles. Individuals simply adopt certain modes of behaviour and practices as normal and unchanging. In the religious context, theologies function as ideologies by which the institutions mould adherents/worshippers' behaviour, their thinking and their vision of themselves. In the Nigerian religious context some everyday social experiences are viewed as having some religious/spiritual significance. Therefore, a sticker such as 'it can only get better, worst days are over' or 'no cause for alarm, my case is settled' is generally interpreted as a faith-based confession, declaring what is believed would happen to them before they happen. As a matter of fact, the individuals using this sticker are experiencing in real life, some hard times but are made to believe that operating in the tradition of the popular 'positive

confession' would change their social conditions for the better. The stickers do not only have some religious association but are excellent manifestations of social vision about which is generally viewed as 'walking in the spirit'.

The second form of expressing vision in the data is the expression of hope – a spiritual anticipation of an after life of bliss. Again this vision is anchored on the fundamental doctrine of the after life of bliss or paradise. Some of the stickers in the data read as follows:

- There is joy in the morning
- I shall be perfected
- I'm stepping on to higher ground

This type of anticipation and hope is both spiritual and social. 'Morning' or 'higher ground' in this context symbolizes an after life condition or heaven and as well represents an anticipated social class or social condition which the individual envisages. Again notice that the hope of heaven is both theological and ideological which worshippers adopt and visualize.

The third phase of social vision which the stickers construct is the hope of a social uplift. In this case, the stickers are not symbolic of a spiritual state; they are rather expressions of some desired social conditions which range from New Year good wishes (e.g. my year of laughter) to attitudes of commitment to progress (e.g. see you on the top, the bottom is too crowded). Other stickers in this category are:

- From glory to glory
- I choose to succeed, etc.

Here the individual religious adherent views success as a choice and a destination which is attainable by certain criteria rather than a miracle.

Generally, the stickers of social vision construct the religious practitioner's social aspiration, perceived as an envisaged paradise which is attainable only by a supernatural act. They are also constructed as a dream social status, class or condition which is achievable by certain standards such as hard work, patience and self-control. All of these are based on institutional standards and practices.

ii) Individual/group identity

To many people, religion is best understood at the level of individual spiritual life, his relationship with a supernatural creator and especially as a quest for self-identity. Different forms of religious experience are actually individualistic ranging from asceticism, mysticism, conversion experiences to modern methods of positive thinking and faith-based confessions (*Microsoft Encarta*, 2006; Nabofa, 1997). Religious stickers in this context construct this identity, which is often based on some supposed conversion experience or an encounter with supernatural forces. Stickers that construct individual identity include:

- Abraham Seed
- I am what God says I am

- I am the apple of God's eye
- I am born again
- I am a chosen child of God
- Kingdom woman

These are mostly Christian-based stickers (Christian stickers constitute about 97% of the data). 'Abraham's seed' is a general claim which attempts to identify a Muslim or a Christian with the patriarch Abraham who is believed to be the historical ancestor of Christians and Muslims. The sticker constructs the owner as a seeker of some ideological privileges which s/he stands to enjoy by publicly linking his individual/spiritual identity with Abraham. This kind of religious identification with Abraham is often viewed as one of the overriding hallmarks of genuine Christian or Islamic piety. It is believed that 'Abraham's seed' are immune from certain natural calamities or social misfortunes. So a form of public testimony of one's spiritual pedigree with Abraham is said to guarantee certain privileges or some miracles in favour of the religious practitioner. 'Kingdom woman' in the data is equivalent to 'Abraham's seed'.

The other stickers in this category construct the individual as being in the class of God, in which the individual shares the spiritual nature of God. As 'a chosen child of God' or 'the apple of God's eye' man assumes a supernatural identity. This assumption functions as an ego booster and crystallizes the individual's self-esteem. Just as many Nigerian Christians claim to be 'born again' – an axiom akin to a deep spiritual insight or experience of the supernatural, a sticker which identifies one as 'born again', is simply viewed by some as solving the spiritual identity question and insulates one from some natural accidents. Similarly, religious groups in Nigeria deliberately produce car stickers for their members for the purpose of identification. In large churches or groups, members easily identify one another through car stickers and are able to assist them as the need arises. Unfortunately, members who do not own cars (and who are generally in the majority) have nothing to identify them. During emergencies they are often neglected or mistakenly ill-treated by their fellow brothers and sisters. Group identity stickers in the data include:

- Islam is my Religion
- I am a winner (Winners Chapel)
- I'm proud to be a Muslim
- Christ Embassy
- Muslim family
- Redeemed family
- TREM (The Redeemed Evangelical Mission)
- Salem
- I'm a Catholic

Such stickers have indeed proved useful in identifying certain people who needed them in cases of police harassment, social conflicts or ethnic violence. During some Muslim/Christian conflicts in the past, vehicles with identifying stickers had either been attacked or protected depending on the religious

affiliation of the attackers. There had also been cases where law enforcement agents had ignored traffic offenders when they realized that such offenders belonged to their religious groups or churches because of the identification stickers. A sticker like 'I'm a winner' is identifying the user as a member of the Winners Chapel church.

Stickers like 'Islam is my religion' or 'I'm proud to be a Muslim' in the Nigerian environment do more than define an individual's identity; it is also a response to the religious tension in Nigeria's multicultural context. By being 'proud' of Islam, the sticker's user extols the beauty of the Islamic faith, which in itself is a defence of its practice especially in the south where the majority are Christians. It also functions as a pragmatic indictment to some southern Muslims who had in the past demonstrated lack of optimism and commitment to Islam both in their physical appearance and comportment. Some had even abandoned Islam for Christianity. So the sticker is an institutional discursive strategy to denounce the lack of commitment of some Muslims to the Islamic religion. This same defence of faith is sustained in the sticker that says: 'I'm a Catholic'. Only about 14 percent of the Nigerian Christian population are Catholics with an annual growth of about 4.1 percent (Johnstone and Mandryk, 2001). By saying 'I'm a Catholic' the message is assertive and specific, constructing an individual's psychological and social identification but also going beyond personal commitment to a defence of an institutional pride. Although the many Nigerian Christian Charismatics were originally Roman Catholics, some committed Catholics have refused to desert their faith. They rather apply many social communication strategies to re-affirm their commitment to the Catholic Church. Generally in Nigeria, religious sentiments are sustained through vehicle stickers and there have also been proofs that some people have sometimes enjoyed certain favours from public officers, the police and religious leaders simply because they identified themselves with the stickers they put on their vehicles.

iii) Reaffirmation of faith

Stickers in this group do not just re-affirm an individual's belief or faith but also institutional standards and practices. According to Foucault (1972, 1981), 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. Here stickers are viewed as a discursive practice which is in themselves a product of religious institutional practices and ideologies. In the data, the stickers in this category are within the domain of statements which help to shape our perception of the Nigerian religious reality. There are three broad domains, which constitute 57 percent of the data, namely: i) those that make specific reference to Jesus Christ – the founder and leader of the Christian religion as a means of celebrating His personality, works and teaching, being a discursive practice of religious testimony; ii) those that are preachy and generally didactic as a reflection of the institutional practice of evangelism and propagation of religious ideals; iii) those that are based on philosophical, and institutional assumptions about God and His influence in the world.

Stickers that make specific reference to Jesus Christ are discourse that is based on the practice of 'Christian testimony'. These stickers are meant to celebrate Jesus – His personality, power, works, death, resurrection and His believed imminent return to the earth. Stickers in this category include:

- Jesus
- Blood of Jesus
- Jesus is coming soon
- All power belongs to Jesus
- I am not alone, Jesus is with me
- Someone let you down, try Jesus
- Get connected to Jesus
- Wise men still seek Jesus
- Real women love Jesus
- A life without Jesus is like a doughnut; there is a hole at the centre

As a Christian practice, it is assumed that a testimony attracts men to Jesus; therefore every Christian is required to 'testify' of his experiences either verbally or in writing. These stickers therefore follow the institutional organized behaviour which is believed to further authenticate the individual's profession. Failure to do this regularly is often viewed as a denial of faith. Most of the stickers are discursive means of inviting non-Christians to join the Christian religion, rather than being viewed as a mere form of hero worship. 'Real women love Jesus' is an institutional voice associated with the gender controversy in some Nigerian churches where women are almost discriminated against. At such places women are viewed as generally materialistic, mundane and 'worldly minded'. Therefore to be a 'real' woman is to comply with the accepted mode of dressing or behaviour as approved by a particular church. Failure would simply brand the woman as fake or a 'child of hell'. While some of the stickers like 'Jesus' or 'blood of Jesus' may be perceived as a type of talisman (protection), it is in fact a means of associating the present and an envisaged future of bliss to a spiritual authority which is institutionalized in the person of Jesus Christ.

The second set of stickers is made up of those that make religious and didactic statements following the institutional practice of evangelism and propagation of religious ideals. Some of the stickers carry the following expressions:

- Repent
- Let's do it right
- Try God
- Givers never lack
- With God, nothing is impossible
- Someone let you down, try God
- Remember to forgive
- Allah is one
- Meet me in church
- Winners never quit

The tempo of religious renaissance in Nigeria has generated a great deal of cultural and ideological tension between Christianity and Islam. The sticker 'Allah is one' is assertive of the Islamic theology which functions as a projection of the Islamic identity in the Nigerian multicultural environment. It is also a reactionary strategy that rejects the Christian position that God manifests as a 'trinity', that is, three in one. So the sticker, rather than an individual attempt at soul winning is in fact an Islamic reaction to the widespread Christian 'heresy'. On the other hand, it addresses new Muslim converts who might be in danger of patronizing the Christian belief.

The other stickers in this group are Christian-based and take the position of a teacher while the reader is the student. In Nigerian society many religious people believe that the task of moral reformation and national rebirth which the country desperately needs, especially with the increasing rate of corruption in the polity, is a function of the church. Most Pentecostal churches publicize this and mobilize their members to carry out religious crusades in order to achieve the same. Stickers such as 'repent', 'let's do it', 'remember to forgive', and 'meet me in church', are the various discursive strategies aimed at achieving some moral and social reforms. Again in Nigeria, religious organizations are among the wealthiest, owing to the practice of 'sacrificial giving' among practitioners. 'Givers never lack' is among the stickers that help to sustain this practice. It is a form of propaganda towards obtaining further material support and it works in Nigeria because church members have been convinced of the irony of gaining while dispensing. Stickers like 'winners never quit', 'try God' and 'With God nothing is impossible' are other discursive strategies existing because of a complex set of practices which try to keep them in circulation (Foucault, 1972). Since in recent times most charismatic churches merely stress wealth creation, success principles and healthy living, church leaders and pastors crystallize these teachings through stickers. Members are therefore to 'try God' when all else fails. This actually follows the general consciousness of Nigerian people towards materialism, generating an ironical situation of the world's most religious country being also the most corrupt. God in this context is viewed as a means to an end. A few of the people who use these stickers confess that it was about time Nigerians attained some level of moral reformation to match their aggressive religiosity. Users of stickers such as 'Be patient' or 'relax, God is in control', say that the stickers aim at addressing a fundamental social problem in Lagos where everyone seems to be in hurry. Lagosians are said to be 'rushers' especially while boarding buses or taxis and drivers in most cases speed and violate traffic rules. These social misconducts are regarded as 'ungodly' in religious circles. Therefore Christian leaders and their Moslem counterparts alike warn their members against these vices not only in churches/mosques but also by mean of stickers. Those that use these stickers 'be patient', 'relax-God is in control' say that they are a form of follow-up to what they are told in church. They wished to remind each other to do the right thing.

The third category of discourse domains in the stickers comprises those that are based on philosophical and institutional assumptions about God and His influence in the world. These include:

- If God says Amen
- When I see the blood
- One with God is majority
- If God be with me
- Only praise can take you higher
- God is with us
- God pass them
- Father forgive them
- The Lord is my shepherd
- Keep off, angels on guard
- Rain of mercy

Certain philosophical assumptions, values and truths about human nature, God and existence are accepted as unchanging. However, some of these assumptions that are viewed as permanent truths (some also expressed in stickers) have changed with time (Howarth, 2000). Some social attitudes and philosophical assumptions that today seem natural and inevitable are historical phenomena, dependent on time and place (Derrida, 1982; Foucault, 1972). In the religious context however, truths about God, his nature and power are generally perceived as permanent and unchanging. The statements of the above stickers demonstrate individual designations, prayer, confidence and aspirations. This is reflective of institutional practice and belief system which give rise to the stickers under study. More than half of the stickers are either direct quotations from the Bible or a paraphrase of popular scripture verses. This shows that the stickers not merely reflecting an individual's assumptions and personal faith are a carrier of all values of the Christian faith as well as advertising and popularizing them. The stickers attempt to celebrate God's nature and power in relation to His influence in the world. Hence, the stickers while expressing individual experience in relationship with God are also popularizing and disseminating the Christian institutional and philosophical assumptions.

Conclusion

This study shows that vehicle stickers are discursive and reflect social discursive practices. Rather than being viewed as merely reflective of an individual's communicative strategies, stickers in the context of the Nigerian religious groups reveal institutional practices and system of beliefs as well as help in moulding our perception about Nigerian religious practices. Most religious Nigerians define their group and individual identities in terms of their religious standards, thus their visions and assumptions of themselves are purely guided and regulated by Christianity or Islam. Thus, stickers have been a significant medium for expressing their loyalty and commitment to institutional assumptions and practices. Through this same medium they constantly reaffirm their faith in the supernatural God on whom religion itself is mostly founded. The stickers have also revealed the tension between Islam and Christianity and the struggle to propagate one above the other. In terms of sophistication (which may be cultural/

social) and access to communication through stickers, the rate of literacy has been a major factor. In the north, for instance, where literacy rate is relatively low compared to that in the south, a number of religious people (especially devout Muslims) do not generally use stickers and some feel no need to advertise their religion. In some cases however, stickers written in Arabic and other local languages have been prevalent to communicate the thoughts of the non-educated natives. Some stickers have also been used which may not be attached to any religious or institutional reasons.

Previous studies on graffiti in Nigeria noted that graffiti like stickers have been a medium for communicating social and cultural issues, ranging from social identity, hero worship, political affiliation, to moral questions and class placements (Aito, 2004; Nwoye, 1993), while an earlier work on the contents and structures of social stickers in Nigeria (Chiluwa, 2007) reveals that religion-based stickers outnumber all others in terms of contents and spread. This shows that stickers as a means of communication do indeed provide a platform for spiritual and psychological expressions, in the context of religious institutional standards. This is expected especially in Nigeria where the 95 percent of the population profess religion.

Interestingly, new discourse genres of stickers are still evolving, especially those that propagate messages associated with science and technology/new cultural practices. As the world experiences new social and cultural lifestyles, these lifestyles spread and new discursive stickers are emerging to accommodate new thoughts and new discourse strategies. It is not certain that stickers perform exactly the same functions in all African societies. Some societies may find it more useful than others depending on the levels of education, literary, social awareness and cultural values. Even in Nigeria as we see in the data, Christian-based stickers far outnumber those that reflect Islamic traditions, and that religious stickers are more in use in the south than in the north.

On the whole, the study has attempt to show that the discourse of stickers is not to be viewed as merely indicative of individual social relationships and identities but as a product of institutional practice which are socially moulded and protected by some unchanging religious assumptions. Stickers may in future serve, for many more people as an effective medium for disseminating, not just religious messages but also economic, political or scientific message as is already the case in some more advanced societies of the world.

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