

Semantic Critique Of The Language Of Some Religious Car Stickers In Oyo State, Nigeria.

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Abstract: *This paper is set out to characterize some of the significant features of language of religious stickers. Data on two major religions i.e. Christianity and Islam were collected in the year 2004 in three major towns in Oyo State of Nigeria. The investigations revealed that the type of stickers placed on individual cars identified the faith of the car owner and the inscription on the sticker shows the intention of the owner of the car for the rest of the year or the rest of his life. It was also observed that some of the car owners had more than a sticker on their cars. Some of the stickers depict the year, their deities, denominations, specific occasions, or situations, which also depicts the intentions of the owners. The investigation also reveals that some of the stickers have logo signs associated to the two religions likewise the colours used in printing out the stickers also have semantic meanings. The paper used some semantic concepts for the analysis of the data collected.*

Keyword: *Car, Christian, Moslem, Semantic, Stickers, Oyo State*

I. Introduction

Language is essentially a social phenomenon, the assertion is clearly fore-grounded in the definition of M.A.K Halliday cited by Bloor and Bloor (1995) that "Language is a system of meanings". That is to say that language can be 'woven' to express the intention of a writer.

When people use language to express meanings, they do so in specific situations, and the type of language that they use is usually influenced by the complex elements of those situations (ibid). Car owners just like every other human being have used car stickers to express themselves. According to Babajide (2002), every human being is naturally endowed with capacity for language use for the expression of self and reception of others' expressed messages. Car stickers could be seen as an informal way of expressing non verbal messages to readers. According to Akhimien (2004) verbal responses to greetings like 'How are you' comes with such responses as 'Thank God', 'We bless God', 'It is well' and 'Al Hamdu lillah' which is an Arabic expression but has been borrowed into Hausa language and are used by majority of Muslims to appreciate their deity. This mode of verbal expressions to greetings is peculiar with Nigerians especially the Yoruba tribe where every acts has its form of greetings.

Language performs such functions as ideational, textual and interpersonal. These functions explore the ways in which people use language to express their psychology and world-view. This is also evident in religious stickers. There is dearth of information on religious car stickers in linguistics and in the purview of semantic. Most scholarly works on text like this have been on newspaper headlines, speeches and 'T-Shirt Inscriptions' in purview of pragmatics and critical discourse analysis (Chiluwa, 2006; Abdullahi-Idiagbon, 2010; Olaniyi, 2010; Okanlawon, 2011) respectively in Nigeria and not a whole text and its semantic intentions revealed in this paper.

This paper intends to consider a vital concept in semantics that will serve as theoretical framework to enhance our understanding of the analysis of the data. The main purpose of this investigation is to reveal other form of text there for teaching of English as second language (ESL). It will also add to the few exiting scholarly works on textuality. The paper's main focus is on two religions: Christianity and Islamic stickers in Oyo State.

II. Method Of Data Collection

Some stickers of the afore mentioned religions were randomly collected in three major towns across the state (Ibadan, Oyo and Ogbomosho these are major cities in the state). During the collection of the data, it was observed, that there were some cars that have more than one sticker with different inscriptions, the stickers on such cars were all recorded while those cars with similar stickers that have already been recorded were ignored.

Most of the stickers were expressed in English language with very few ones in the language of the environment (Yoruba). This could be traced to the importance of English language in Nigeria as opines by Lamidi (2004) that, "the English language is a principal subject at the secondary schools level." Oyetade (2001) asserts that "English is a prestige language in Nigeria". One can therefore successfully state that, the users of car stickers knowingly or unknowingly are advocate of English language as most of the stickers were written in

English. The colours used in designing some of the stickers were also taking into consideration. These colours (especially on Christian stickers) have semiotic values.

III. Data

Christian Stickers

1. It's My Turn To Shine 2001 Isaiah 60:1
2. 2004, My Year of Supernatural Opening
Oluseyi Baptist Church Off Poly Road Olopomewa Eleyele Ibadan
3. 2004 Solution
4. Harvest 2004
5. GT My year of overflowing
6. Jesus only is our message
7. 2004 So Blessed No Stress
8. I'm More than conqueror Through Jesus That Loves Me.
9. The Baptist Empowering Churches for Growth
10. Jesus Christ Our peace 91st Annual Session Abuja 2004 "Peace I leave unto you, My peace I give unto you John 14:2.
11. R.C.C.G OYO Province II. I'm Holy Ghost Carrier
12. Follow me to Jesus
13. Jesus
14. Thank you Jesus
15. I'm covered with the blood of Jesus
16. Givers Never Lack
17. God's Property
18. I'm not along Jesus is with me
19. His Presence makes the difference
20. 'Sanu mi Oluwa' (ie have mercy on me Lord)
21. 'Oluwa ni Oluwo aguntan mi' (ie the Lord is my shepherd)
22. A new song Holy Ghost congress Ministering: Pastor E.A Adeboye & Anointed Ministers of God.
23. Shalom the Lord of Peace.

Islamic Stickers

1. (Arabic inscription) This is a favour from my Lord
2. (Nasfat) NASRUL - LAHI - IL FATHI SOCIETY OF NIGERIA. THERE IS NO HELP EXCEPT FROM ALLAH
3. (YUSRULLAH) YUSRULLAH ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA. IRORUN OLUWA ALASALATU
4. ALASALATU IRORUN OLUWA FAMILY. ISLAM IS THE ONLY WAY TO SUCCESS
5. ----- if NOT ALLAH, who else neither Sleeps nor Slumbers?
6. ANSAR - UD - DEEN FAMILY BARISON PUB. OJA - ODAN OGUN STATE.
7. (AL - ANSAR) ANSAR - UD - DEEN SOCIETY OF NIGERIA. Hold fast to the cord of ALLAH and be not disunited.
8. I Confess ALLAH IS MY SAVIOUR
9. LOVE BEING A MUSLIM (Arabic inscription) THERE IS NO OTHER 'god' EXCEPT ALLAH
10. I am TOO DEFENDED TO BE A VICTIM.
11. ONLY ALLAH CAN SAVE

IV. Data analysis

4.1 What is sticker?

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (11th edition) describes 'sticker as an adhesive label usually tuck on something which often has a message on it.' In other words, a sticker is a device of passing messages across to a reader, that is, from a writer to a reader in the form of written text. Stickers could be found on door posts, on files, on walls, on windows, on cassettes, on automobiles, trees, cups, plates most other objects that are able to sustain adhesives.

4.2 Sticker as Graphology

Graphology can be described as the art or form of writing or drawing. The Hutchison Encyclopedia (1999: 459) defines and explains graphology as: The study of the writing system of language, including the

number and formation of letters, spelling patterns, accents and punctuations, taking an example from a car sticker:

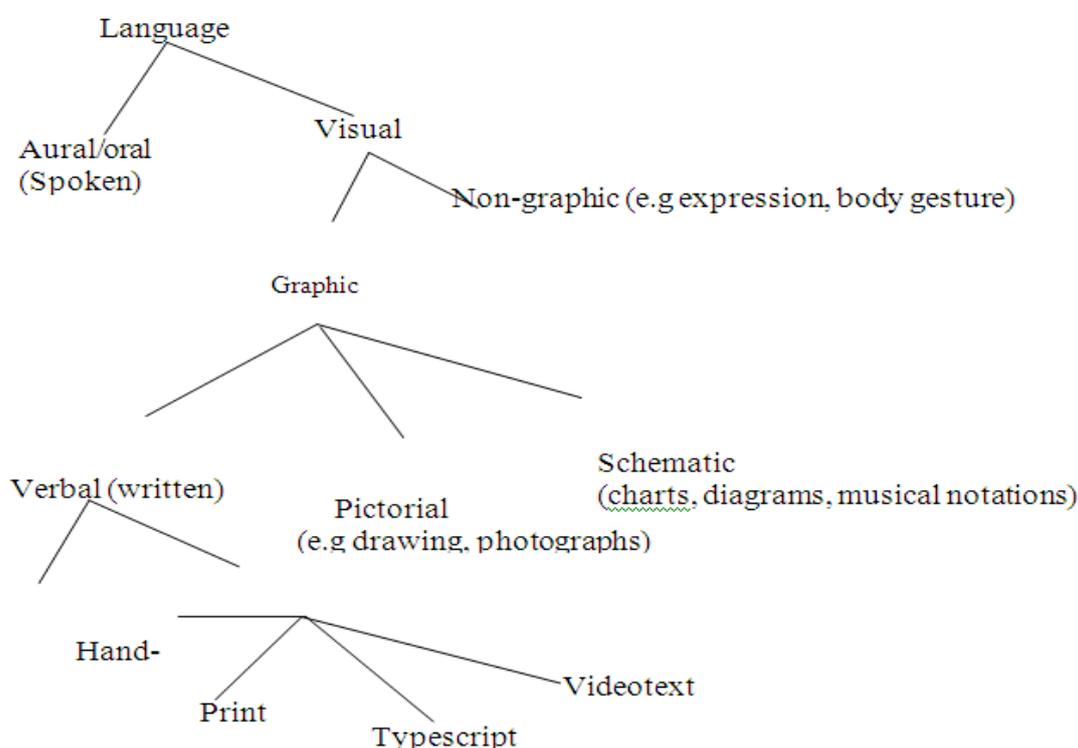
2004, So

Blessed
NO STRESS

This contains the whole features of the above definition. The manner in which it is written could be studied stylistically, it includes number (2004), letters are formed into words e.g 'S' 'O' = SO, the spellings of the words are patterned into past tense to achieve their meanings and are arranged in accented order to give their prosodic value as: So¹ blessed₁ no¹ Stress. As well as its punctuation marks and capitalization, there is a punctuation mark of coma after 2004 (,) that places emphasis on that year without much work then each of the first letters of the first three words begin with capital letters for caption and then the last word STRESS is in capital letter to mean the focus or topicalization of the word in the phrase.

Berry (1977:99) affirms that graphology can be viewed from two senses: the linguistic and psychological. Linguistically, it is the “study of the systems of symbol that have been devised to communicate language in written form”. Psychologically, it is “the study of handwriting as a guide to character and personality”.

Graphology, as a style and as a concept, comes under graphic language as captured in the sketch below which is based on the analysis by the British typographer Michael Twyman, cited by Crystal (1987:182) which can be schematized thus



There is a wide range of graphological devices which people in everyday writings consciously or unconsciously use and are of great semantic values. Some of such devices as are identified by Crystal and Davy (1998:18), as the distinctive use of punctuation, capitalization, spacing, paragraphing, italicization, abbreviations, spatial organization, colours and special symbols like logograms, as in the Islamic religion for example the use of moon and star is a special symbol associated with the religion all over the world. The sign of cross is associated with Christianity while Islam is half moon and star.

From the above diagram, we can conveniently established the fact that sticker is a language typology, as some of the features explained above are seen on stickers – it possesses individual words or phrases which are patterned in different linguistic contexts, lexical items of their form and functions are capable of distinguishing meanings.

V. Language Of Religious Car Stickers

The issue of owning a car in Nigeria is seen in different ways: as luxury, as necessity, a sign of affluence as well as a part of blessing from God. The owner of cars, therefore use language through car stickers

as a medium to express their gratitude to God who they believe have showered His blessings on them and as such stickers that depicts blessings from God are expressed on such cars, for instance:

- **God's Property**
- **JESUS is MY source**
- **This is a favour from my Lord**

Some also use car stickers to express their divine protection in God as well as the car e.g:

- **I've got the power Jhn 1:12**
- **My help comes from the Lord who made Heaven and Earth**
- *'----- if not Allah, who else neither sleeps nor slumbers?

Some use car stickers to profess their faith and the denominations they belong to e.g:

- **GT (Glory Tabernacle) Flights for Heights**
- **2004 My year of supernatural Opening – Oluseyi Baptist Church off Poly Road Olopomewa: Eleyele Ibadan.**

* **Ansar-Ud – deen family Barison Pub. Oja – Odan, Ogun State**

* **Nasfat (NASRUL –LAHI – IL FATHI SOCIETY OF NIGERIA) There is no help except from Allah**

Most car stickers are avenues for most believers in both religions to proclaim the gospel. Christians are enjoined by Christ "to go ye" into the world to preach the gospel and as such see this as an avenue to do so since cars are driven about by their owners to various functions like market, their working places, hospitals, packed on the streets where it is believed that the wider society could be reached, would read the stickers and could minister to them. For instance:

- **JESUS only is our Message**
- **Follow me to JESUS**
- * **I confess Allah is my saviour**
- * **'Alasalatu irorun Oluwa' Family – Islam is the only way to success**
- * **Only Allah can save**

While some only portray a period when certain events took place giving an information e.g:

- **Jesus Christ Our Peace (91st Annual Session) Abuja 2004 "Peace I leave unto you, my peace I give unto you John 14:2**
- **A new Song. Holy Ghost Congress Ministering: Pastor E.A Adeboye & Anointed Ministers of God.**
- **The Baptist empowering churches for growth.** Again stickers are produced according to the prevailing situation in the state to suite such situation, consumers on the other hand buy the ones that suite them. So, in order to really arrive at the meanings of such stickers, one needs to know the context of the situation.

5.1 Other Findings

The quotations on the stickers are mostly taking from the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran and all the messages are focused on God. Christian's topicalized on JESUS and Moslems on ALLAH. Some stickers that do not mention the name of their deity directly still point to Him, for example:

- **His presence (His is anaphora to Jesus/Allah)**
- **I'm a living proof (could mean to Jesus/Allah)**
- **I'm a winner (could mean in the Lord Jesus/Allah)**

Most of the religious car stickers are written in capital and small letters, or written in bold capitals and unbold capitals, for example:

- Follow me to **JESUS** (this shows that the focus is on Jesus).
- *... if **NOT ALLAH**, who else neither Sleeps Nor Slumbers?

The above stickers have the mixture of both small and capital letters, the emphasis on the negatives [which is an example of such unbold capitals] as well as the deity that are the focus of the inscription. The use of punctuation mark is another feature of the religious car stickers such punctuations like: bracketing, quotation marks, apostrophe, comma, ellipses, abbreviation, exclamation marks, question marks etc. All these add meanings to the stickers thus:

- **It's harvest time!**
- *... if **NOT ALLAH**, who else neither sleeps nor slumbers?
- **I am a member of United Evangelical Miracle Church ['Alajahorah' Family].**

Syntactically, the languages of the religious car stickers are mostly in phrases and simple sentences examples are:

- **My year of overflowing (simple sentence)**

- 2004 So blessed no stress (Adj. P)
- Follow me to Jesus (VP)

They are mostly in phrases and simple sentences usually in subjectless than in compound or complex sentences for example:

- Thank you Jesus (instead of 'I thank you Jesus').
- *Only Allah can save (instead of 'It is only Allah that can save').

Some religious car stickers have logo signs which have semiotic values, some Christian stickers for example have the 'cross sign' (depicting the death of Jesus Christ on the cross), some have the logo of a 'flying bird' (dove), (also depicting the Holy Spirit). Likewise, the logo of moon and star is commonly seen on Islamic stickers to mean that such stickers belong to a Muslim. Examples include:

- (flying bird) Holy Ghost Zone keeps off
- (the crucifixion sign '+') No greater Love
- *(star and moon) 'Nasfat NASRUL – LAHI – IL FATHI' SOCIETY OR NIGERIA, THERE IS NO HELP EXCEPT FROM ALLAH.

Some of the inscriptions are quoted directly from the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran respectively, but this is more common with the Christian stickers, for example:

- 2004 My year of All – Round Increase I THESS 3:12 EMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH (this has a contextual meaning, it shows that the expression is only known with the members of the church to be the church's theme for the year).
- The Counsel of the Lord for me shall stand Proverbs (19:21)
- Uncommon Success Dan 6:18-28, Pro 11:8, Lk 10:19, Lk 13:17 (These verses are also contextual in meaning, it is the users of the stickers that know the intentions of using such verses except a reader search them up in the scriptures. It is important to note that the cars are not the one performing the act; they are only reflecting the minds and the beliefs of the owners through the stickers.

5.2 Colour

While the issue of colour is not linguistic per se, we need to observe that it has to do with semiotics. The use of different colours on different religious car stickers is communicative. Most of the common colours found on Christian car stickers were: red, white, black, yellow and green. Some stickers were multi-colour with the above types while some were combinations of two colours, for example: black colour background with the inscription of Jesus written in white colour or red background with white inscriptions as in 'I'm covered with the blood of Jesus'.

Semantically, the red colour on Christian stickers means the blood of Jesus which was spilled on the cross is full of power, protection and victory; black depicts evil which connotes devil himself. White on the other hand connotes peace, so 'Jesus' is being written in white colour to contrast the black to mean that Jesus is the peace over every activities of the devil. Green means vegetation that is, prosperity, increase productivity and greatness used on stickers with inscriptions like:

- 'The Redeemed Christian Church of God, unlimited greatness, my year of greatness'

Yellow colour also depicts gold i.e. riches. Used on stickers with inscriptions like:

- '2004 My year of All – round Increase. 1 Thess. 3:12 Emmanuel Baptist Church (where people learn to live forever with God).
- '2004 My year of Overflowing Harvest, Grace Family Church'

Green and black colours are the most common colours on Islamic stickers and the meaning could be the same as above. Further analysis of the data is based on some semantic theories like: Context of Situation, Reference, Inference, Entailment, Presupposition, Truth-condition.

5.3 Context Of Situation

Linguists have become increasingly aware of the importance of context in the interpretation of sentences since the beginning of 1970. Firth in particular according to Brown and Yule (1989) asserts that context of situation is best used as a suitable schematic construct to apply to language. Context of situation for linguistic work brings into relation the following categories:

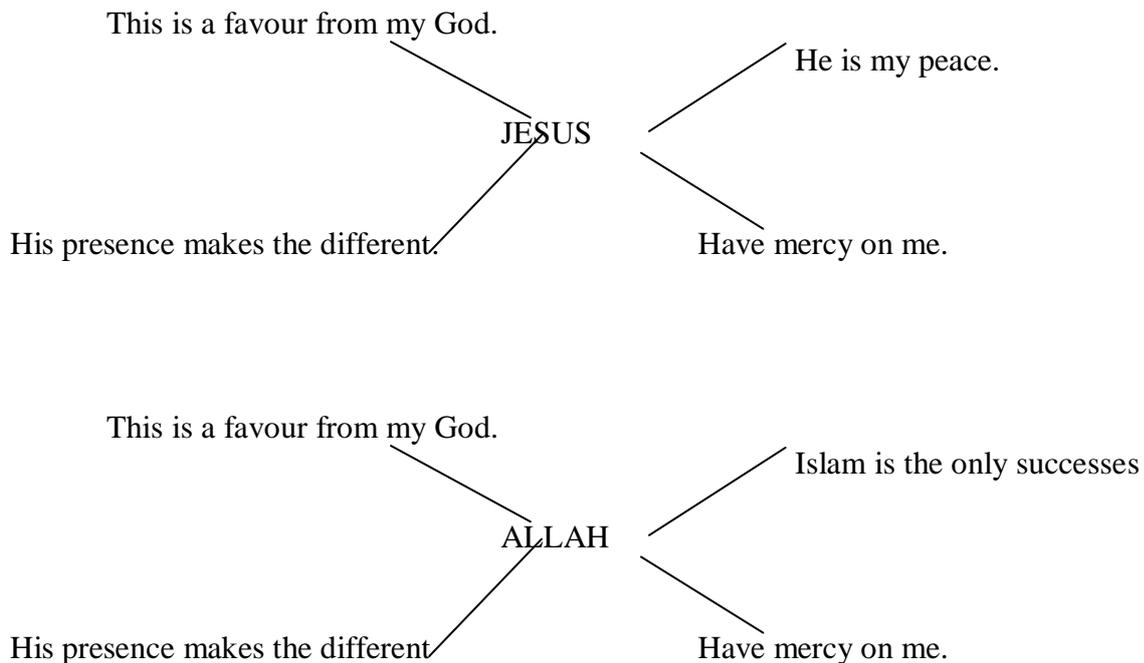
- a. The relevant features of participants: persons, personalities,
- b.) The verbal action of the participants
- c.) The non-verbal action of the participants.
- b.) The relevant objects
- c.) The effect of the verbal action.

Likewise Hymes [1964] views the role of context in interpretation as limiting the range of possible interpretation and, on the other, as supporting the intended interpretation. He emphasized that the use of a linguistic form identifies a range of meaning. When a form is used in a context eliminates the meanings possible to the context other than those the form can signal the context eliminates from considering the meanings possible to the form other than those the context can support. We can understand that context gives meanings to utterances. Brown and Yule (ibid) are of the view that context can support a range of meaning. When a form is used in a context it eliminates the meanings possible to that context other than those the form can signal. For example: ‘Givers never lack’.

Lexico semantically, the word ‘giver’ is a noun i.e. someone who gives and we know that if one gives, there is every tendency for the ‘giver’ to either be left with nothing or to be left with little and in the actual sense of it the person has lacked but the meaning will only be possible by looking at the situational context of the utterance where the Bible enjoins every Christian to give (specifically stated in Luke 6:38- “Give and it shall be given unto you” and in 1 Corinthians 9:7- “Each man should give what he has”) and it is based on this injunctions that the inscription on the sticker emanates.

5.4 Reference

In presenting the traditional semantic view of reference, Lyons (1969) says that ‘the relationship which holds between words and things is the relationship of reference ‘words’ here refer to things. (This traditional view continues to be expressed in those linguistic studies (e.g lexical semantics) which describe the relationship between a language and the world, in the absence of language users). The nature of reference, makes the following point: it is the speaker who refers (by using some appropriate expression): he invests the expression with reference by the act of referring (1977:177). And it is this later view that the semantist has to appeal to. Lyon (ibid) identifies singular definite reference and indefinite reference. Among the referring expressions we can distinguished those that refer to individuals from those that refer to classes of individual, but in the case of religious stickers the issue of reference is singular definite though the reference may be expressed differently but still points to the same reference (i.e their deity, either Jesus or Allah) this can be stigmatized thus:



‘This is a favour from my God’, the word ‘God’ refers to Jesus or Allah and ‘Islam is the only successes, also refers to Allah. The pronoun ‘His’ in ‘His presence makes the difference’ could be seen as donkey pronoun. Baker and Shan (2008) refer to donkey pronoun as a pronoun that lies outside the antecedent of a conditional (or outside the restrictor of a quantifier). Baker and Shan (2008) see donkey pronoun as covert definite descriptions (“D-type” pronouns) that seek their referents within severely restricted situations. Hence the pronoun ‘His’ is a referent to the sticker users deity either Jesus or Allah.

5.5 Presupposition

Presupposition is the assumption a speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge (Osisanwo, 2003). Presupposition is closely related to logic. Some religious car stickers presuppose some assumptions, for instance:

- It's my turn to shine 2001 Isaiah 60:7.
- 2004 my year of supernatural opening.
- 2004 so blessed no stress!

The above expressions presuppose that there are certain blessings that will be in each of the year mentioned, a specific blessing that the car owners have been waiting for which will be accorded to them divinely in the specified years.

5.6 Inference

The semantist like the hearer, has no direct access to a speaker's intended meaning in producing an utterance, he often has to rely on a process of inference to arrive at an interpretation of utterances or for the connection between utterances. According to Brown and Yule (1989) 'the general notion of inference appealed to is used to describe that process which the reader (hearer) must go through to get from the literal meaning of what is written (or said) to what the writer (speaker) intended to convey. Members of the public in Oyo State can reach an opinion regarding the belief system of some of the car owners based on the inscriptions on the stickers of those cars as seen in:

- Jesus only is our message.
- * Only Allah can save.

One can infer from each of the expressions above that, the owner of the vehicle is a Christian and the other a Moslem – this is as a result of the words 'Jesus' which is associated with Christianity and 'Allah' to Islam. The denomination or the sect of the car owners can be inferring through the stickers, like:

- The Baptist Empowering Church for Growth
- R.C.C.G OYO Province. I'm Holy Ghost Carrier
- * 'Nasfat' (NASRUL – LAHI – IL FATHI SOCIETY OF NIGERIA) THERE IS NO HELP EXCEPT FROM ALLAH.

The reader of such stickers will infer that the owner of such stickers belongs to the denominations or sects mentioned.

5.7 Truth-condition

In the truth-condition theory, there are some necessary conditions which a proposition must fulfill before such a proposition is said to be true, for instance:

- I'm covered with the blood of Jesus.
- * Only Allah can save.

These expressions on the car stickers are regarded to be true, if and only if there is blood of Jesus covering the owner and the vehicle as a whole. The above expression is not true in its real sense because there is no physical blood of Jesus covering the car owner, but on the other hand, in pragmatic analysis, the expression 'I'm covered with the blood of Jesus' is true because it is based on connotative meaning and both the owner and the reader have the shared knowledge of the expression.

5.8 Logic-Truth:

The analysis of meaning in terms of truth condition is often said to be the same thing as analyzing meaning with the logical form of an expression, for instance:

- 2004 Solution.
- I'm more than conqueror through Jesus that loves me.
- * I am too 'Deended' to be a victim.

The truth of the expression above is logical – '2004 Solution' shows that there had been a problem that the owner had been passing through that in the year 2004 there is a solution to such problem. 'I'm more than conqueror through Jesus that loves me' – also gives the logical truth that the owner of the car being in Jesus conquers every obstacle that comes his way.

Likewise in "I am too 'deended' to be a victim' shows that the owner is so strong in the religion that he/she cannot be a victim of any obstacle that may confront him/her.

VI. Conclusion

The use of car stickers by the two major religions in Oyo State had been used successfully by their owners to proclaim their faith, sect and denomination. It is from these that attempt have been made to bring to light some of the theories proposed on how we use language to perform different functions. Also, the

remarkable ability of language users to communicate more than their words and also deduce intended speakers meaning was brought to the forefront. Drawing insight from these, it becomes quite logical to conclude that human languages go beyond the mere description of the state of affairs. They also include both covert and overt manipulations, which dominate the complex art of discourse.

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