WHEN WALLS BECOME SILENT BATTLEGROUNDS: DECIPHERING COLLEGE STUDENTS' GRAFFITI WRITINGS ON SCHOOL CAMPUS WALLS

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ABSTRACT

Although graffiti has become a significant cultural and linguistic phenomenon and has been studied throughout history, there is still room for the exploration of how graffiti in different contexts, particularly in a higher education institution, serves to voice the anonymous student writers' thoughts and feelings. Thus, this study examines the common themes and the lexical and syntactic features of college students' graffiti writings on the walls of a state college in Zamboanga del Sur, Mindanao, Philippines. Employing thematic analysis, this study reveals that students' graffiti writings contain a variety of themes such as love, discrimination, self and group identities, hatred, sex, faith and religion, management, education, and fanaticism, with love and discrimination as the most prevailing social themes. Students' graffiti writings also exemplify distinct lexical features such as loan and swear words, taboo words/expressions, abbreviations, ironies, acronyms, repetitions, and compound words. Borrowings and using offensive or swear words are the most common lexical features found among these graffiti writings. In addition, students often use brief or terse statements to clearly express their thoughts and feelings to the public. Indeed, graffiti writings are a distinctive and silent way of communication, particularly for students who are in the marginalised section of any society.

Keywords: Graffiti writings, language structures, lexical features, themes, syntactic features

INTRODUCTION

Graffiti as a concept is derived originally from the Italian word "graffito" to refer to the writings or images on the surfaces of buildings, parks, and toilets, often bearing political or sexual contents, propositions, or obscene words (Chiluwa 2008). The origin of graffiti can be traced back to primordial times, having examples dating back to the ancient Greek and Roman empires. Othen-Price (2006: 6) also affirms that the origin of graffiti as a social practice could be drawn back as "early as human societal living". Furthermore, Teixeira et al. (2003) similarly argue that writing on the walls is indeed an ancient behaviour.

Contemporary graffiti has been used to send sociopolitical messages to other people in various artistic forms. The growth and development of graffiti in urban culture have been mainly driven by the evolution of hip-hop and different urban cultures. Although having been well-received by many, graffiti is still regarded as a constant point of disagreement or differences between anonymous artists/writers and law enforcement officers (Mwangi 2012).

Tracy (2005) views graffiti as freedom of expression where the writers are often anonymous and are restrained by personal inhibitions and social norms from expressing themselves freely. Graffiti has been an essential cultural phenomenon for an extended time (Blommaert 2016). It is a "map of genuine representation of reality and an evolutionary means" that allows people to reflect on their cultural identities using the artistic modes of expression (Sheivandi et al. 2015 : 63). As a linguistic phenomenon, graffiti includes both form and content and use discourse to signify something other than itself (Mwangi 2012).

Graffiti has also become a "rallying force" for discordant social and political communication since sociocultural and political atmospheres do not guarantee a protest discourse (Obeng 2000 as cited in Farnia 2014: 49). It is likewise a "second diary book" representing people's voices to express their anger, thoughts, love declarations, political pronouncements, and outcries, among others, in public and private places (Farnia 2014: 48; Raymonda 2008: 4). Furthermore, graffiti is an avenue for long-established social communication in numerous societies worldwide (Peiris and Jayantha 2015; Kariuki et al. 2016).

Graffiti is also a source of data, including linguistic studies of discourse patterns and grammar, investigating cultural production in different areas, and examining gender differences (Farnia 2014). It is a source of important

information and a pointer to future intentions and actions (Zakareviciute 2014). Moreover, Hanauer (2004) argues that graffiti is a mode of linguistic communication that helps people clearly understand discourse resources in a particular community.

Graffiti is a global linguistic phenomenon common in Philippine colleges and universities (De Leon 2010). However, graffiti about significant matters affecting the school and the community is usually taken for granted. Moreover, they are considered crimes, and those caught writing on walls are often punished. Although many studies on on-campus graffiti have been conducted in various contexts, Borja (2014) discloses a severe research gap in the Philippine context. Thus, this study addresses this gap by examining college students' graffiti writings in the autonomous campus of the Josefina H. Cerilles State College, the only state college in Zamboanga del Sur, Mindanao, Philippines.

Specifically, this study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the common themes conveyed by the college students' graffiti writings?
2. How are the college students' graffiti writings structured according to lexical and syntactic features?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Graffiti is a linguistic phenomenon that includes both "form and content", and it is, therefore, both valuable and essential to recognise and analyse the importance of graffiti as a product of human linguistic expression, as well as the nature and impact of the message being shared (Gross et al. 1997: 275). Girder (1975, as cited in Ta'amneh 2021) firmly argues that graffiti is a mode of linguistic communication within a community setting and its ramification. Furthermore, as a linguistic phenomenon, graffiti usually takes the form of a written language whose authorship remains anonymous (Mwangi 2012).

Several scholars worldwide have studied graffiti from a linguistic point of view. According to Hall (2005, as cited in Gasparyan 2020), there are several processes that a language undergoes in graffiti texts. These processes include phonological (alteration of vowels, consonants, puns, etc.), morphemic (alteration of words as to affixes and roots), syntactic (use of specific structures at the initial part of sentences), modifications of existing expressions, parallel syntax, questions with no legitimate answers, conditional sentences,

patterning, and common expressions, among others. In addition, AbuJaber et al. (2012) state that graffiti writers usually employ several strategies such as unnecessary capitalisation, use of various signs and punctuation marks, simplification of spelling, vowel elongation, spelling errors, popular spelling, romanisation, mother tongue inferences, etc.

Recently, Ta'amneh (2021) has found that students' graffiti uses simple language, conveying complete thoughts to other people religiously, politically, and emotionally. Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2017) have observed that simplicity and variation are the linguistic features present in college students' graffiti. These features are used in students' graffiti for personal, social, national, religious, political, and satirical purposes. El-Nashar and Nayef (2016) have noticed the lexical features of Egyptian vehicle graffiti, with most of these graffiti bearing religious expressions.

Sheivandi et al. (2015) have revealed peculiar linguistic features of graffiti such as consonant alteration, proverbs alteration, use of parallel syntax, conditional patterns, and puns. Abu-Jaber (2013) has disclosed that the common grammatical errors committed by graffiti writers include the use of articles, concords, conjunctions, contractions, nouns, and pronouns. Writers commit these grammatical errors because of mother tongue interference, overgeneralisation, conformity with native speakers, and ignorance. Mwangi (2012) also has observed that the language used in the students' graffiti contains humour, symbolisms, ironies, short forms, acronyms, and abbreviations which perform varied communicative functions.

Al-Haj Eid (2009) has found simplicity as an observable linguistic feature of students' graffiti, with alliteration and rhyming as striking linguistic devices. Obeng (2000) has observed that graffiti sentences are often short and of a simple sentence type. Also, graffiti as a discourse contains interactional properties such as turn-taking, repair, opening and closing, adjacency pairs, and indirectness. Moreover, Claramonte and Alonso (1994) have noticed the presence of peculiar and idiosyncratic spellings in students' graffiti, with abbreviations, acronyms, clippings, puns, rhymes, slang, and derivations as the strategies used by university graffitists who are linguistically quite creative.

METHODS

This study employs the qualitative method, specifically thematic analysis, to carefully analyse and interpret college students' graffiti writings. Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative approach to analyse raw data such as graffiti

writings by gathering similar thematic codes to related clusters of meaning (Braun and Clarke 2006). It allows researchers to associate analysis of the frequency of the theme with the full content, which confers accuracy and enhances the researchers' interpretations or meanings (Alhojailan 2012). Furthermore, it goes beyond the counting of exact words or phrases and concentrates on identifying and describing both explicit and implicit ideas. Codes that are created for the themes are then linked to the raw data as summary markers for later analysis, which may involve a comparison of relative frequencies of themes within a data set, looking for code co-occurrence, or graphically displaying relationships of codes (Namey et al. 2008).

This study was conducted at the Dumingag Campus, one of the organic or autonomous campuses of the Josefina H. Cerilles State College, the only state college in Zamboanga del Sur, Mindanao, Philippines. The campus offers several curricular programmes namely teacher education, agriculture, environmental studies, information technology, and criminology. Since the campus is situated in a rural community, most of its students are believed to be graffiti creators and come from neighbouring municipalities within and outside the province. In addition, most of these students belong to low-income families and receive scholarship grants or subsidies from the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The data gathered and analysed consist of 164 students' graffiti writings that were found on the walls of classrooms, offices, halls, and comfort rooms. The researcher used a mobile phone camera, notebook, and pencil when conducting visual inspections. The mobile phone camera was used to take images of graffiti writings from actual sites, while the notebook and pencil were utilised for note-taking. The graffiti writings were photographed to ensure the authenticity of the data. Furthermore, only those with comprehensible writings are considered in this study while drawings, sketches, caricatures, and other images are excluded.

Thematic analysis is used as an approach in the analysis and interpretation of college students' graffiti writings after the data collection. The analysis involves two levels. The first level of analysis focuses on the themes conveyed by the college students in their graffiti writings. At this level, thematic analysis is used to carefully read and visually scan the students' graffiti writings many times to discover distinct connections and patterns before they are reduced and classified into meaningful units. The resulting concepts are then grouped into relevant overarching themes to examine the content and the contextual meaning of the particular examples of students' graffiti writings. According to Halldorson (2009, as cited in Al-Khawaldeh

et al. 2017), thematic coding allows the researchers review the entire data by identifying its most essential meaning or what the data are trying to tell.

The second level of analysis focuses on the language structures of college students' graffiti writings in terms of their lexical and syntactic features. Lexical features refer to the linguistic aspects of students' graffiti writings. These include 1) taboos, 2) swear words, 3) loan words, 4) repetitions, 5) acronyms, 6) abbreviations, 7) ironies, 8) compound words, 9) blend words, and 10) antonyms. Syntactic features, meanwhile, pertain to the sentence structures of these graffiti writings. These are 1) declarative, 2) interrogative, 3) imperative, and 4) exclamatory.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Common Themes Conveyed by College Students in Their Graffiti Writings

The first objective of this study is to determine the common themes that college students wanted to convey in their graffiti writings. Based on Table 1, "love" is the most common theme conveyed as it has obtained the highest frequency of 65, followed by "discrimination" (33), "self-identity" (23), "hatred" (13), "sex" (10), "faith and religion" and "management" (5), "group identity" (4), and "education" and "fanaticism" having the lowest frequency of 3.

Love is the most common topic among college students, as their graffiti writings mostly revolve around this social theme. Love is considered a moral, selfless, and well-intentioned emotion that is pure and can do no evil. However, this idealised view of love is far from realistic. In reality, love is fraught with perils. People have committed the most heinous crimes in the name of altruistic love ideals. Here, eternal love and self-sacrifice are used to legitimise whatever is done in the name of love. One best example of this type is "Don't love too much because too much love will kill you". Furthermore, it can be said that the most prominent social actor incorporated in graffiti is the reader referred to in the second person "you" or its abbreviated form "u" or "U". Examples that illustrate this type are "#ILOVEYOU" and "I LOVE U". It cannot be denied that love is indeed the most common theme in students' graffiti writings as it is a shared fact that teenagers nowadays have become addicted to romantic movies and even to social media, where it is easier for them to know other individuals online. Furthermore, during this

stage, teenagers start to explore the world and others, especially those of the opposite sex.

The second most dominant theme is discrimination. Kohler-Haussmann (2020) defines discrimination as an action or practice that excludes, disadvantages, or merely differentiates between individuals or groups of individuals based on some ascribed or perceived traits. In the study, several forms of discrimination are found in students' graffiti writings such as the appearance-based "I LOVE U *sa mga Pangit!!!*" (I love you, ugly!!!) and "*Jeather botit*" (Jeather, puffer fish [a name calling for obese people]), gender-based "*Dili tanang laki gwapo. Dili tanang gwapo laki. #BAYOT KA!!!*" (Not all men are [truly] handsome. Not all handsome are [truly] men. #You are gay!!!) and "*AYAW TUWAD BISAG ASA KAI D KA IRO DAY!!! TWO KA!!!*" (Girl [addressed particularly to female prostitutes], do not bend over anywhere like dogs do!!! Remember, you are a human being!!!], and the ethnic-based, "*Gikan sa* China, Drug Lord" (those who come from China are drug lords). It can be noted that discrimination takes various forms in the preceding examples. Among the most popular forms of discrimination are gender-based such as being a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, etc., i.e. the LGBTQIA+ group. Such gender-based discrimination can be mainly attributed to the Philippine society's adherence to moral and ethical standards. The school community, composed of members from different religious groups, remains conservative and does not condone any sexual deviations such as being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, etc.

Self-identity or egocentrism is also one of the dominant themes in students' graffiti writings. Preoccupation with one's own internal world is a symptom of egocentrism. Egocentrics believe that they are the most important or valid and that their own opinions or interests are also the most important or valid. The use of the first personal pronoun "I" is widespread in graffiti writings having this theme. It indicates that the author is the most prominent social actor in the text. To establish their identity, they positively represent themselves by using a positive lexicon. An example of this is "Cute *qoh*? *Dili*?" (Am I cute? No?). Aside from pronouns, using someone's name with a positive description indicates egocentrism. Examples are "Jr., You can trust." and "Angel Grace (surname), *Gwapa*" (beautiful). Such self-centeredness among Filipino teenagers is indeed a common trait as they start to explore the physical world, where there is a need to validate their selves not on how other people view or think about them but on how they think and make themselves essential or relevant to others, especially their contemporaries.

Another social theme found in college students' graffiti writings is hatred. Boichuck (2014) defines hatred as a durable, active, negative feeling of a human, directed against people or phenomena, contradicting their needs, desires, convictions, values, and aspirations. It is often associated with feelings of anger, disgust, and a disposition toward hostility. In the gathered data, students use graffiti writings to express their intense dislike for other students, teachers, and even their ex-boyfriends or girlfriends. This can be shown in "*Dangan jud mong DUHA*!!! Bitch!" (You are both pests!!! Bitch!), "I Hate You!!!", "I Hate you Earl Lawrence." and "Argie, Fuck You!". Students express their views, and feelings about themselves to the school community. They also protect their identities by sharing hateful messages with others if they are threatened.

Sex is another social theme found in students' graffiti writings. In this study, students sometimes express their views about sex by making some scratches on the walls. An example that deals with sex is "Sex is truly gift of god. Amem!!!!" This graffiti-writing conveys that sex is truly a gift, a gift that comes from God, and it is supported by the expression "Amem" (a variant of Amen) found after the sentence, which means "Yes". Other graffiti writings that convey sex are "Fuck me Plz.", "*Iyot lami!!*" (sex is pleasurable), "*WALA NAMAN KAY LAMI WIFFEY UY! LATA NAMAN KEAAU KAH*! Your hubbie" (To my wife, you are no longer sexually pleasant as you have already rotten! This is your husband), and "*Unsaon manang oten nga murag tinapa kung ang bilat sa imong uyab murag planggana*" (What is the use of your can-sized penis against your girlfriend's washbasin-sized vagina). Although it is mainly considered taboo, sex has also become a dominant topic or theme as college students, being in their youthful years, are at the start of exploring their sexual identities, and their sexual urges or desires are still developing.

Some students' graffiti writings also convey faith and religion, and management as themes. Examples of the graffiti-writings which convey faith and religion are "Basic Information Before Leaving Earth (BIBLE)" and "R.I.P." (rest in peace). Here, the first graffiti-writing contains the author's definition of "BIBLE", indicating that they are Christians who believe in the Bible as holy scripture. Although a common expression, the second graffiti writing also shows the author's belief in having another life after death. Students also use graffiti writings to express their satisfaction/ dissatisfaction with how school is being managed, particularly in establishing school facilities. Examples of these graffiti writings are "Pls admin. Improve *unta ninyo ang* facilities *sa skul.*" (To the administration, please improve your school facilities) and "*Cgeg bayad ug* internet *unya way cgnal.* We're

ang justice *ane*?" (We always pay the internet fee but there is still no signal. Where is justice here?). In the examples given for management, it can be generally observed that graffiti writings have been used by college students, being the marginalised group, as a form of protest to indicate that there have been issues of mismanagement in the campus, as well as a powerful tool in the conveyance of knowledge or certain social realities, in this particular case, the provision of quality education.

Table 1: Frequency and distribution of students' graffiti writings in terms of the themes conveyed

Theme	Frequency	Example
Love	65	Don't love too much because too much love will kill you. *Tanang naay uyab* attention *wa'y* forever. [to all who are in a relationship, there is no forever] *Bahalag maibog basta dili mangilog* By: Frank 5 [It is better to have a crush on someone's partner than to steal his/her partner from him/her. By: Frank 5]
Discrimination	33	*Dili tanang laki gwapo. Dili tanang gwapo laki*. *#BAYOT KA*!!! [Not all men are (truly) handsome. Not all handsome are (truly) men. #YOU ARE GAY!!!] *Gikan sa* China, Drug Lord. [those who come from China are drug lords] *Ang pangit ko kaya iniwanan mo ako*. [I am ugly; that's why you left me]
Self-identity	23	Jr. You can trust. My name is Zen E. Perigo. *Gwapa pero* joke. [My name is Zen E. I am beautiful but it is just a joke]
Hatred	13	I Hate you Earl Lawrence. *Dangan jud mong DUHA*!!! Bitch! [You are both pests!!! Bitch!]
Sex	10	Sex is truly a gift of god. Amem!!!! Fuck me Plz.
Faith and religion	5	Don't be afraid just BELIEVE. Basic Information Before Leaving Earth (BIBLE)
Management	5	Pls admin. Improve *unta ninyo ang* facilities *sa skul*. [To the administration, please improve your school facilities]
Group identity	4	*#CrimSamahangWalangIwanan* [#CriminologyAnOrganizationthatLeavesNoOneBehind]
Education	3	*Daghan na pud ko malearn nga* new knowledge *ani*. [I will soon have to learn new knowledge]
Fanaticism	3	Kobe Bryant Idol!!!
Total	164	

Another social theme conveyed in their graffiti writings is group identity. Also known as collective identity, this type of identity refers to the shared sense of belongingness to a particular group. It is also conceptualised as the individuals' identifications of, identifications with, or attachment to specific groups. In this study, students use graffiti writings to indicate their affiliated groups and attract and convince others to join them. Examples of these are *"#CrimSamahangWalangIwanan"* (#CriminologyAnOrganisationthatLeavesNoOneBehind), "Sales Gang", and "Camp *Sawi*" (camp [for the] unfortunate). In addition, students use graffiti writings to show that although they are a marginalised group, they can still contribute to the progress and development of the academe.

Lastly, education and fanaticism are the themes least conveyed in students' graffiti writings. Although found on college walls, graffiti writings show that education is the theme not often chosen by students to talk about. Examples are "*Taas kaau ang* standard *sa* grading system. *Dili ko kareach. Hahay*" (The grading standards are so high. I cannot reach them. Hahay [an expression for dismay/frustration]) and "*Daghan na pud ko malearn nga* new knowledge *ani*" (I will soon have to learn new knowledge). Meanwhile, *fanaticism* is behaviour that displays "excessive enthusiasm" for specific religious or political beliefs (Schuurman and Taylor 2018 : 13). From the data, college students are inherently basketball lovers based on their use of famous names of individuals or teams. Examples are "Go Cavs!!!", "*Bawi lang ta sa sunod* SPURS!!" (We will just make it next time, SPURS!!), and "Kobe Bryant Idol!!!".

Language Structures Used in College Students' Graffiti Writings

The second objective of this study is to ascertain how languages such as English, Filipino, and Bisaya, which are all used in the college students' graffiti writings, are structured in terms of lexical and syntactic features.

Lexical features of college students' graffiti writings

Table 2 presents the frequency and distribution of college students' graffiti writings as to lexical features. Based on the table presented, loan words are the most common lexical features of students' graffiti writings as supported by the highest frequency of 47, followed by swear words (37), taboo words/ expressions (22), abbreviations (20), ironies (12), acronyms (11), repetitions (9), and compound words with the lowest frequency of 2.

Loan words are the most common lexical feature of students' graffiti writings. They refer to foreign or borrowed words, often used with little modifications. In this study, graffiti writings mainly written in Bisaya and Filipino are heavily influenced by English, such as "*Walang* forever" (there is no forever), "*#AYAW NA PAG*WAIT *UY*." (you no longer have to wait [for him/her]) and "I LOVE YOU CRUSH *bahalag ulaw*" (crush, I love you although it is shameful). This situation occurs because English is used as a second language in the country. According to Espinosa (1997, as cited in Esquivel 2019), English in some areas of the Philippines is more popular than the official national language, Filipino. She adds that the Philippine education system has been using English as a medium of instruction from elementary to university for decades and has also strongly reinforced the notion that English is easy and available. Thus, it is widely used as a medium of communication.

Swear words are the second most common lexical feature. Drößiger (2017) defines swear words as dirty, offensive, or aggressive words used to show anger and disgust. They also refer to the use of impolite words to insult someone. In this study, "*tokog*" (thin), "*jogo*" (dull), and "*pangit*" (ugly) are offensive words found in students' graffiti writings. They are used to express anger to a specific person. Moreover, these graffiti writers are bold in including the names for whom the graffiti is addressed because their authorship is private and anonymous (Rawlinson and Farrell 2010).

Taboo words/expressions are the third most common lexical feature of students' graffiti writings. According to Al-Sadi and Hamdan (2005, as cited in Al-Haj Eid 2009), taboos are words people consider offensive because they refer to sex, body, or race. In this study, most of these taboo words/expressions are sexual in tone as they signify sex, such as "*pisot*" (uncircumcised), "porn", and "*iyot*" (sex). Another common subject in these graffiti writings is homosexuality, as shown in the popular expression "*bayot*" (gay), which appeared eight times. This result affirms Bates' (2014) finding that students' graffiti writings are anti-homosexual, implying that students do not generally support homosexuality.

Abbreviations are another lexical feature used in students' graffiti writings. Beisembayeva et al. (2016) define abbreviations as a unit of oral or written speech created out of individual elements of a sound or graphic form of speech (term or terminology combination) that contributes to a lexical-semantic connection of such units within it. Examples of these abbreviations are "4ever" (forever), "u" or "U" (you), and "ist" (first). The results show that college students might have used abbreviations to increase their writing speed because they did not want to get caught and be punished since graffiti-writing is strictly prohibited.

Table 2: Frequency and distribution of students' graffiti writings in terms of lexical features

Lexical feature	Frequency	Example
Loan words	47	*Walang* <u>forever</u>. [there is no forever] *Selamat pagi* means "Good Morning." *#AYAW NA PAG*<u>WAIT</u> *UY*. [you no longer have to wait (for him/her)] <u>I LOVE YOU CRUSH</u> *bahalag ulaw*. [crush, I love you although it is shameful]
Swear words	37	JL, *<u>tokog</u>*. *<u>Atay</u>*. [JL, you are like a stick (name calling for very thin people). Liver. (a Visayan term expressing one's disappointment)] Jericho. *<u>Jogo</u>*! *Otong oi*. [Jericho, you are an idiot! Better not breathe] I LOVE U *sa mga <u>Pangit</u>*!!! [I love you, ugly!!!]
Taboo words/ Expressions	22	*<u>Pisot</u> si* Mark Lee. [Mark Lee has not been circumcised] I love <u>Porn</u>. *<u>Iyot</u> lami*!!! [sex is pleasurable!!!] *Dodoy <u>bayot</u>*. Hahaha!!! [Dodoy, you are gay. Hahaha!!!]
Abbreviations	20	*Walay* <u>4ever</u>. [there is no forever (in relationship)] I LOVE <u>U</u>. I loved you *ra* but <u>u ist</u> broke my heart. [I still loved you but you first broke my heart]
Ironies	12	*Wag kang <u>pabebe</u>*!!! [Do not be a tweetum!!!] *Dili tanang <u>laki gwapo</u>*. *Dili tanang <u>gwapo laki</u>*. [Not all men are (truly) handsome. Not all handsome are (truly) men]
Acronyms	11	<u>NBSB</u> (no boyfriend since birth) <u>NGSB</u> (no girlfriend since birth)
Repetitions	9	Don't love <u>too much</u> because <u>too much</u> love will kill you. *<u>INGON</u> sila* MOVE ON. *<u>INGON</u> KO HILUM*!! [They said (to me), "Move on." I said, "Keep silent!!]"
Compound words	2	Thanks <u>everyone</u>. *Gikan sa* China, <u>Drug Lord</u>. [those who come from China are drug lords]
Total	160	

Ironies also characterise students' graffiti writings. As Van Hee et al. (2016) define, ironies are a genre of figurative language conventionally defined as stating the opposite of what is meant. In this study, writers use ironies to convey or express a humorous situation and a specific meaning opposite to

the words being used. Furthermore, the use of ironies shows the students' antagonistic attitudes toward specific human characteristics, such as being childish in the case of "*Wag Kang pabebe!!!*" (do not be a tweetum!!! [a woman/girl who's acting childish/babylike]) and homosexuality, as shown in the lyrics "*Dili tanang Laki gwapo. Dili tanang gwapo laki*" (Not all men are [truly] handsome. Not all handsome are [truly] men) from Rommel Tuico's popular Bisaya song from 2013 titled, "*Dili Tanan Gwapo Laki*" (not all handsome are [truly] men).

Acronyms are also the lexical feature common in students' graffiti writings. Alawad (2018) defines acronyms as abbreviations formed from initial letters of successive or compound words. Aside from being created from initial letters, they can also be pronounced as one word (Hales et al. 2017). In this study, acronyms are used by students to express their affiliation to a particular group, such as department or religion, as shown in "I LOVE YOU #HRM" where HRM stands for hotel and restaurant management and the phrase "Basic Information Before Leaving Earth" which are representative letters of BIBLE. Moreover, they are used to inform their status, particularly in love life, as illustrated in "NBSB", which means no boyfriend since birth, and "NGSB", which stands for no girlfriend since birth.

Repetitions also describe students' graffiti writings. In this study, they refer to the recurrence of words or phrases in graffiti writings. de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, as cited in Al-Haj Eid 2009) point out that repetitions are used in situations where stability and exactness of content can have significant practical consequences. Therefore, it can be concluded that repetitions are used to achieve clarity, accuracy, and preciseness. Furthermore, as Al-Haj Eid (2009) pointed out, they are used by writers to draw readers' attention and arouse the desire for emphasis or out of the intensity of feelings. These functions can be illustrated in "Don't love too much because too much love will kill you" and "*INGON sila* MOVE ON. *INGON KO HILUM!!*" (They said [to me], "move on". I said, "Keep silent!!").

Compound words are the lexical features least used by college students. Garciandia (2019) defines compound words as new lexemes formed by combining two or more lexemes. They consist of adding stems where words are created by combining two words (Wibowo 2014). In this study, the compound words are written as one word such as "Thanks everyone" or as separate words like "*Gikan sa* China, Drug Lord" (those who come from China are drug lords).

Syntactic features of college students' graffiti writings

Table 3 displays the data on the syntactic features of college students' graffiti writings. These syntactic features include declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences, following the categories of Radford (1997) and Quirk et al. (1985). Based on Table 3, the students' graffiti writings are mostly made up of declarative sentences with the highest frequency of 85, followed by exclamatory sentences (34), interrogative (6), and imperative with the lowest frequency of 3.

Declarative sentences mostly make up the students' graffiti writings. Declarative sentences refer to sentences that declare statements or convey information (Nordquist 2019a). Data clearly indicate that students use terse or brief statements to convey ideas, information, and feelings or wishful thinking. Terse statements are an attribute of students' graffiti writings as it is believed that brevity could help the intended readers easily understand the messages contained in them. The use of terse statements could also be attributed to another fact that writing on walls, especially in colleges or universities, is illegal, prohibited, and punishable by law. Thus, students tend to use only terse or brief statements to avoid being caught and punished by the school authorities.

Exclamatory sentences also make up students' graffiti writings. Nordquist (2019b) defines exclamatory sentences as a type of main or independent clause that conveys or expresses strong feelings through an exclamation. In this study, students often use exclamatory sentences to express strong feelings of love, hatred, complaint, and desire. Some are also used to annoy, tease or make other people angry, like the use of "Fish-T!!" and "FUCK YOU!!!". On the other hand, some writers used these sentences to express their appreciation or fondness for others, like "Cute *si* Troy".

Furthermore, sentences like "*Iyot lami*!!" (sex is pleasurable!!) and "*Borikat ko*! *Pahibalo lang.*" (this is just to tell you that I am a whore!) are very sexual and vulgar. These anonymous authors are not ashamed to express or convey that sex is pleasurable and wish to indulge in it. As mentioned, students as authors of such private and personal thoughts are not afraid because of the anonymity of the graffiti writings authorship (Rawlinson and Farrell 2010).

Interrogative sentences are less often used in the students' graffiti writings. These sentences are employed in asking questions to elicit a certain response. Some questions are answerable by yes/no in this study, while some require specific answers. Furthermore, there are a few questions that deal with

human physical characteristics like "Cute *qoh*? *Dili*?" (Am I cute? Or not?) and "*Pongkol ka*?" (are you crippled?) while a few deals with sex or sexual desires such as "Free taste *ka ba*?" (are you free to taste [sexually]?) and "*Bakit ayaw mo makontinto*?" (why can't you be satisfied [being with only one]?).

Imperative sentences are the least commonly used in students' graffiti writings. As defined by Irawati (2019), imperative sentences are employed to give commands or orders. They are also used to instruct, advise, suggest, warn, or invite. In this study, student-writers use them to challenge school authorities to act on something, as illustrated by this graffiti, "Pls admin. Improve *unta ninyo ang* facilities *sa skul*" (to the administration, please improve your school facilities) and discourage fellow graffiti-writers from writing on walls, as shown in the phrase "No vandalism".

Table 3: Frequency and distribution of students' graffiti writings as to syntactic features

Syntactic feature	Frequency	Example
Declarative	85	Taken *na si Ser*. *Sakit kaayo*. (by secret admirer) [Sir (our male teacher) is already taken (or in a relationship). It really hurts. (by secret admirer)] *Way gobot ug way manghilabot*. [there will be no trouble if one does not get into it] *Nahigugma pako ni* Sam. [I still love Sam] Don't be afraid just BELIEVE.
Exclamative	34	Fish-T!! [You're a pest!! (a Cebuano term used to express disgust/anger)] Cute *si* Troy!!!! [Troy is cute] FUCK YOU! I love you idol until the end of my life!!/ Until the last breath!!
Interrogative	6	Cute *qoh*? *Dili*? [Am I cute? Or not?] *Bakit ayaw mo makontinto*? *Kaci dipa ako cgurado*. [Why can't you be satisfied (being with only one)? Because I am not yet sure] Free taste *ka ba*? [are you free to taste (sexually)?] *Punggol ka*? [are you crippled?]
Imperative	3	No vandalism. Pls admin. Improve *unta ninyo ang* facilities *sa skul*. [to the administration, please improve your school facilities]
Total	128	

CONCLUSION

This study examines the dominant themes conveyed by and language structures used in college students' graffiti writings found on the campus walls of a Philippine state college. An in-depth analysis shows that most graffiti writings are condensed with the students' thoughts and feelings about love. They also contain prejudices and biases concerning sexuality and nationality toward other people, including those who are not members of the school community. Other graffiti writings are lightly-laden with students' views about sex, self and group identities, faith and fanaticism, and management practices of the college. Most of the students' graffiti writings are loaded with borrowed or loan words from the English language, conveying students' thoughts and feelings that are forbidden, sensitive, filthy, and bigoted. Furthermore, students as graffiti authors use brief or terse statements to express their thoughts and feelings more clearly and avoid being caught and punished by school authorities.

Although graffiti writings have been well studied by various scholars, the present study still has something to offer as it helps us understand graffiti writings not as deviant social behaviour but as a powerful weapon that can be used to advance the rights and causes of students who comprise the marginalised sector of the society. In addition, an analysis of the language structures used in students' graffiti writings can also serve as a starting point from where language instructors can devise effective language programmes and activities aimed at improving students' communicative competence, as it has been observed that graffiti writings also reflect students' deficiency, especially in the use of the English language.

Given that the study poses several limitations, such as the insufficiency of the data analysed as well as the limited study site, it has been recommended that another study can be conducted to include graffiti writings found on other types of surfaces as well as to widen the study site by including the other autonomous campuses of the state college. Moreover, another study can be conducted to critically analyse students' graffiti writings to explore how graffiti writings can be used as a powerful tool for self-expression and negotiation.

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NOTE

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