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COMMUNICATION THROUGH INTERTEXTUAL GRAFFITI

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ABSTRACT

Intertextuality is a discourse strategy that is often used by graffiti writers. Intertextuality helps graffiti creators to express their fears, happiness, concerns towards different phenomena.

The present article focuses on intertextual graffiti and its communicative value. The results of the study point out that graffiti is an unconventional channel for the teenagers. It is one of the most powerful channels of expression their sentiments. The analysis revealed that teenager graffitiists of Batumi prefer to produce intertextual graffiti and to quote primary texts directly. They borrow famous quotes or original texts and in rare cases rewrite, paraphrase, transform or parody them. Thus, they echo the primary texts. Intertextual graffiti has an aesthetic, artistic, emotional impact on readers.

KEYWORDS

Graffiti Discourse, Communicative Value, Intertextuality, Graffitiist, Quote

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INTRODUCTION

Graffiti has a long history. Artefacts of verbal graffiti have been found on ancient tombs, on the debris of buildings in Rome, Pompeii, Southern Syria, the US state of New Mexico or Egypt. Runic inscriptions made by Vikings have also been discovered (Nemsadze, 2022:95). It is a very old phenomenon but the scientists became interested in studying this phenomenon from the second half of 20th century. Graffiti is studied in sociology, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, criminology, pedagogy, linguistics, etc. Most of the linguistic academic papers (Snyman (1996), Hanauer (2004), Alshreif (2016), Alexiou (2017), Ferrel (2017), Al-Khawaldeh, et al., (2017), Bloch (2021), Gasparyan (2023)) devoted to Graffiti study discourse characteristics of Graffiti, its communicative value, purpose of its usage and its impact on the society.

Graffiti is considered to be an example of verbal/visual communication and is understood as a form of art on the one hand and crime (vandalism) on the other. Graffiti can evoke different feelings and emotions (ranging from positive emotions: interest, pleasure, wonder, pride to negative ones: disappointment, discontent, disinterest, embarrassment, anger, disgust) in its audiences.

Verbal graffiti mainly serves three purposes: a) it allows marginalized communities to express themselves publicly; b) it allows marginalized messages to enter public discourse that would otherwise be “dangerous” to be expressed by other media; c) it allows individuals to express contentious messages publicly (Hanauer, 2004:29).

Verbal Graffiti is of different types, but in this article, I will concentrate on the communicative value of intertextual graffiti that is one of the most dominant forms of graffiti. The material for the present analysis comprises 20 examples of intertextual graffiti photographed by me in Batumi, in 2024. The sample texts are in Georgian.

Intertextual graffiti is a type of graffiti, where people’s feelings and emotions, desires, personal or common problems are expressed on the basis of famous texts (proverbs, aphoristic quotes, quotes, etc.). According to G. Gasparyan, ‘Verbal Graffiti may contain direct citations of famous sayings and quotes (sometimes the names of the authors are mentioned)’ (Gasparyan, 2023: 92).

Any work of art, for J. Kristeva, is an intertext which interacts with the other texts, rewrites, transforms or parodies them. This idea is shared by M. Zedgin. The scholar believes that all texts are intertexts because they refer to, recycle and draw from the pre-existing texts. Intertextuality suggests a range of links between a

text and other texts emerging in diverse forms as direct quotation, citation, allusion, echo, reference, imitation, collage, parody, pastiche, literary conventions, structural parallelism and all kinds of sources either consciously exploited or unconsciously reflected. (Zedgin, 2016: 300).

G. Gasparyan in his scientific article “Covid Graffiti as a genre of Literary Writing” writes about the manifestation of intertextuality in graffiti: ‘The artists in graffiti discourse mostly choose easily recognizable personalities or objects in the visual domain and well-known phrases and quotes in the textual domain and modify them if necessary to convey the desired meaning. It is worth mentioning that within the development of the graffiti culture, intertextuality has broadened its scope of expression, involving various texts and narratives (both graffiti and non-graffiti) and connecting them to modern problems, issues and ideologies. Moreover, in graffiti discourse, intertextuality can connect not only two literary texts but also a literary text, on the one hand, and the ongoing reality considered as a unique text, on the other.’ (Gasparyan, 2023:92)

Intertextuality in graffiti refers to the way graffiti artists incorporate and reference other texts, artworks, or cultural elements within their own creations. Graffiti often includes elements from various cultural sources, such as music, movies, and historical events. Graffiti artists may draw inspiration from classical and contemporary art. Graffiti can also include textual references, such as quotes or phrases from literature, poetry, or other graffiti works. This creates a dialogue between different texts and adds layers of meaning to the artwork.

There are texts that only the graffiti writers and the intended audience can decode, but intertextual graffiti is more or less understandable for the society as they contain widely known phrases and quotes.

How is communication achieved through intertextual graffiti? In this type of graffiti discourse **the speaker** is an individual who wants to voice personal or public issues but uses not his/her own ideas or words, but famous quotes from literary works, films, musical clip lyrics, etc. The speaker starts communication process with the audience. Graffiti writer remains out of sight (is anonymous) but is always visible.

The content of the graffiti differs greatly. It ranges from personal to social or political. Many individuals prefer to write intertextual graffiti on the walls and make a love confession or share the problems with the broad audience in this way. The real voice of the graffiti writer is not heard. Graffiti creator shares the opinion of famous men, finds their quotes similar to his/her ideas, alludes famous quotes and expresses himself/herself. Graffiti artist wants to say that all that is inscribed on the walls is not only his/her idea or problem. It is common and therefore known to the whole society.

The speaker in graffiti discourse encodes the message either textually or pictorially. In graffiti discourse the role of the **medium** is taken by the walls or other surfaces where drawing and writing is possible.

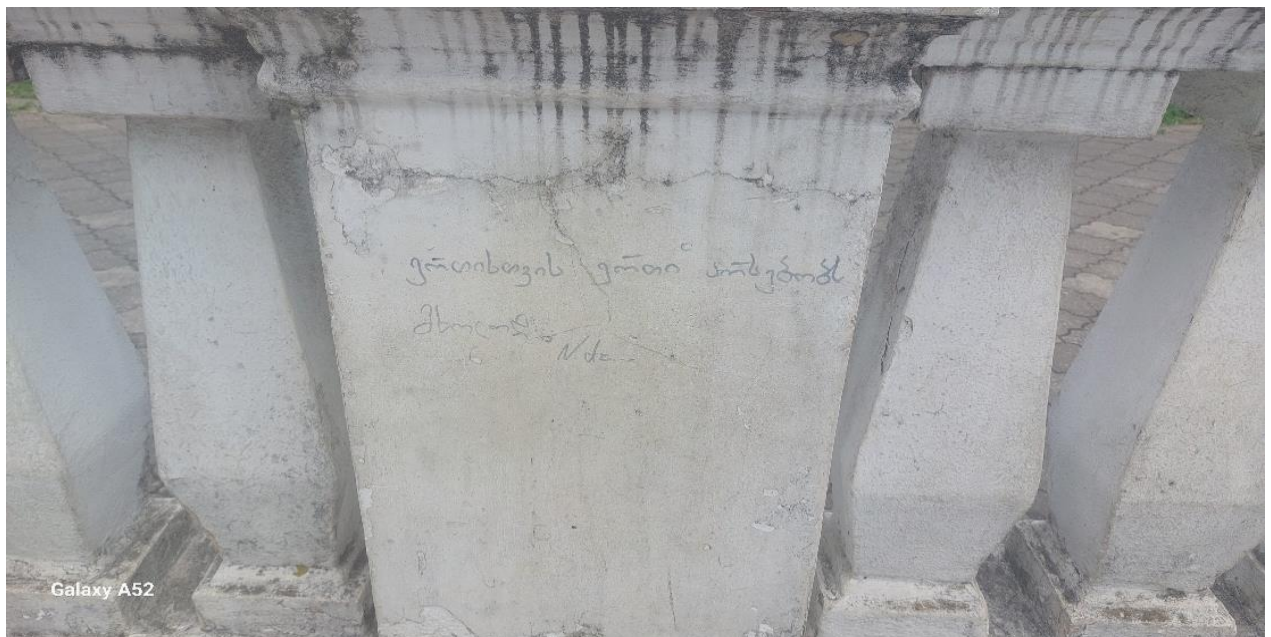
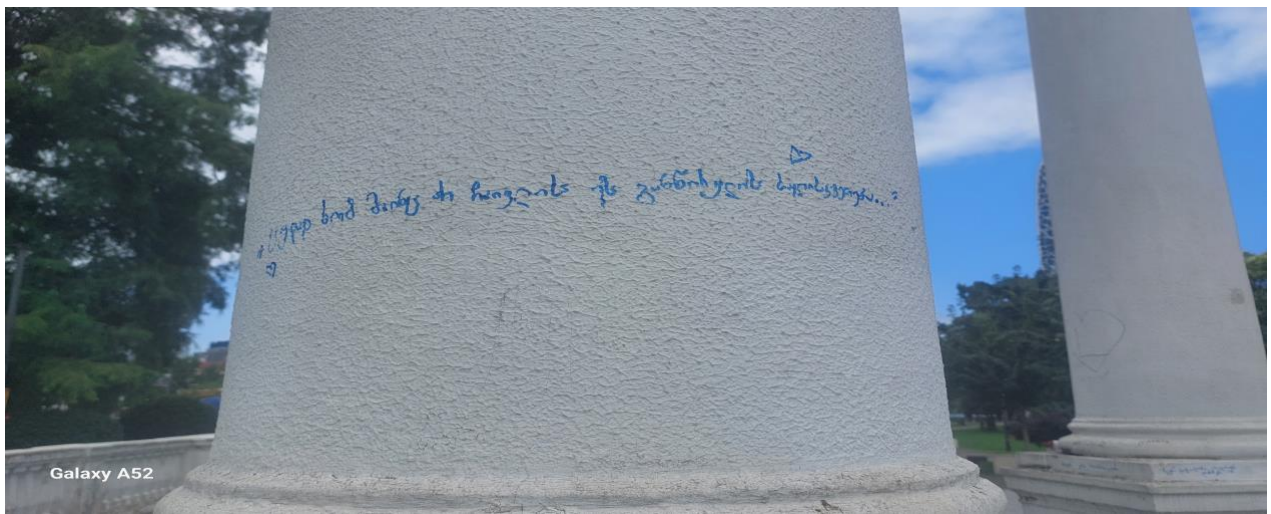
One more element in intertextual graffiti communication model is the **message**. The message not only informs the audience but also persuades the receivers that the viewpoint in the message is true, most common and it can be experienced by any member of the society. There are cases when the message is vague for the receiver because they lack intertextual knowledge and are not capable of realizing the intertextual relation of the text to the famous text.

Although the author of graffiti when creating his/her work, might not bear in mind a concrete reader, the graffiti work does have a receiver. **The receivers** of the graffiti communication model are the society as a whole, individual members of a society or no one specifically.

DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH RESULTS

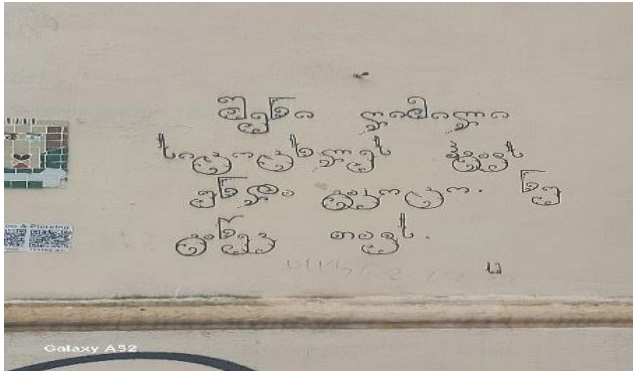
Intertextual graffiti is found in every modern city and my native town Batumi (Georgia) is not an exception. In the Black Sea coastal town of Batumi, street art is blooming. One may see an odd mix of traditional graffiti clashing with stencil art or colorful 3D chalk drawings that entertain the public. In the city’s most unexpected places one can find many abstract things; excerpts from works of literature and eternal words of wisdom sketched onto street walls. Memed Abashidze street is recognized by its unique verbal graffiti. These “Talking Walls” teach the audience (especially youngsters) about the philosophy of Love. The graffiti artists are supposedly teenagers who have experienced love for the first time and adore this feeling. Through the “Talking Walls” we guess that youngsters are well-aware of Georgian literature, films, song lyrics, famous Georgian public figures’ quotes and use them for their purpose.

On one Greek colonnades of the 6 May Park entrance the readers read „თუ ღმერთი სიყვარულია, მაშინ ლოცვა ყოფილა სიტყვა „მიყვარხარ“ (If God is Love, “I love you” is a prayer). This quote belongs to a famous Georgian psychologist N. Panjikidze. It serves like a slogan and makes a great impact on the readers. On the other colonnade quote from a famous Georgian poet N. Baratashvili’s poem “Merani” (Pegasus) is inscribed: „ცუდად ხომ მაინც არ ჩაივლის ეს განწირული სულისკვეთება“. The text hints that the graffiti artist is deeply disappointed but believes in a better future. Georgian youngsters believe that when a person is born, his/her half is born but not everyone is able to find his/her second half. Some unfortunates die without finding their soulmates. This idea is reflected in the following intertextual graffiti „ერთისთვის ერთი არსებობს მხოლოდ“ repeating M. Machavariani’s well - known poem’s title.



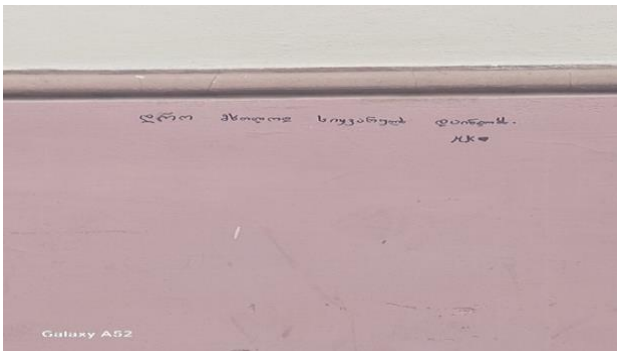
There are a great number of verbal graffiti examples that allude famous Georgian pop songs. The extract from N. Diasamidze's song "Simghera (Song)" is inscribed on one of the houses in the city center. It

says: „შენი ღიმილი სიცოცხლეს ჰგავს, უნდა გაკოცო ნუ გაწევ თავს“ (Your smile is life for me, I must kiss you and please do not turn your head away). The speaker is infatuated with the beloved and wishes to kiss her. The title of N. Diasamidze’s song „სიყვარულის დროა“ (It’s time to love) is inscribed on one of the colonnades of the 6 May Park entrance. Graffiti repeats the title of the song word by word and shows the importance of “Love” in the life of teenagers.

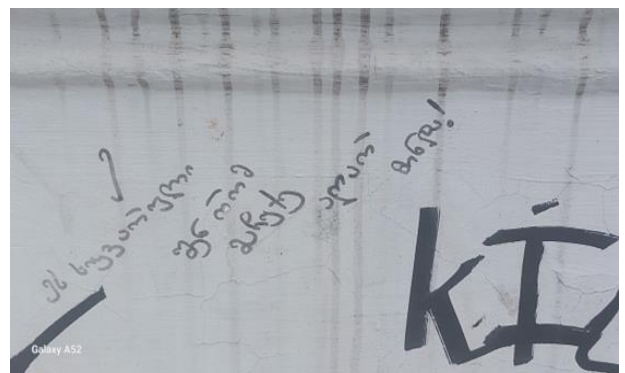


It seems that youngsters being in love are hopeful, they believe that notwithstanding of many problems in a relationship, all will end well. The quote from the song “Gaighime (Smile!)” „ზღაპრის ბოლო კეთილია“ (The end of the fairytale is happy) reminds the readers that love is like a fairytale, it is full of difficulties, struggles but mostly ends well. The message of graffiti is - If love affair ends happily, it deserves to be experienced.

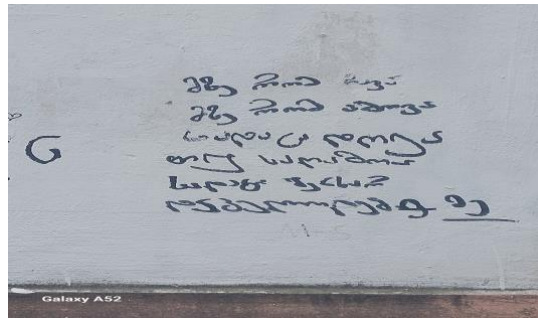
Verbal graffiti „დრო მხოლოდ სიყვარულს დაინდობს“ (Time will preserve Love) and „გაივლის დრო და წაიღებს ტკივილს“ (Time will pass and take the pain away) remind the readers I. Charkviani’s famous songs having the same titles. The first graffiti teaches youngsters that love is eternal, even time can’t defeat it. The other one tells the readers that time can cure all pain.



Verbal graffiti „სიყვარულს დავარქვი შენი სახელი“ (Love has your name) has an obvious reference with V. Kakhidze’s song having the same title. Some graffiti shows disappointment caused by unhappy relationship „ეს სიყვარული შენ რომ მაჩუქე აღარ მინდა!“ (I don’t need the Love you gifted me). It seems that the speaker is fed up with the relationship and wants to quit.

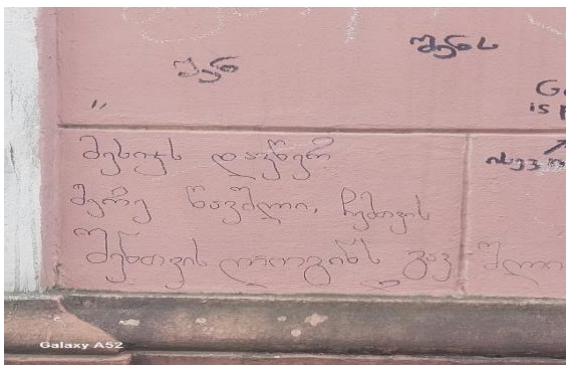


Intertextual verbal graffiti also make evident that Georgian youngsters' favourite bands are: "33a," "Mgzavrebi," "Ara." The next example of graffiti is taken from „Mgzavrebi“s song.



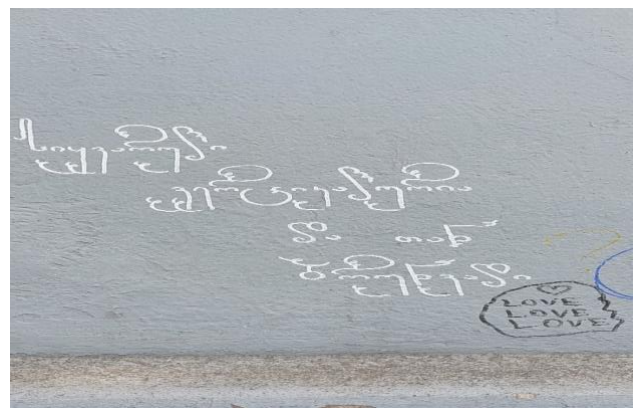
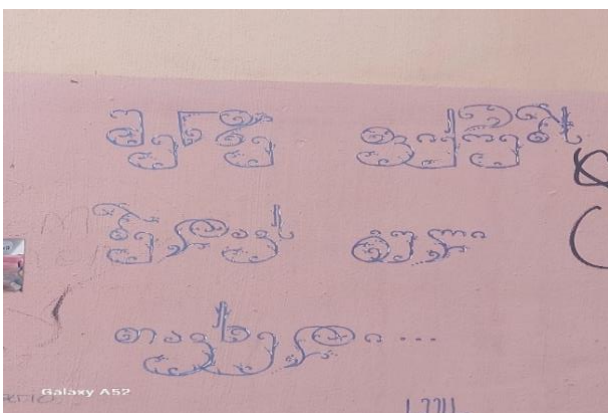
Here graffiti artist ignores punctuation marks, blends words and underlines first personal pronoun მე -I. The message is understood in this way – the speaker is deeply in love with someone and is eager to wait for her all day long.

On the same wall there are two extracts from band 's "Ara" famous song "Dro gadis dzalian nela" (Time passes slowly).



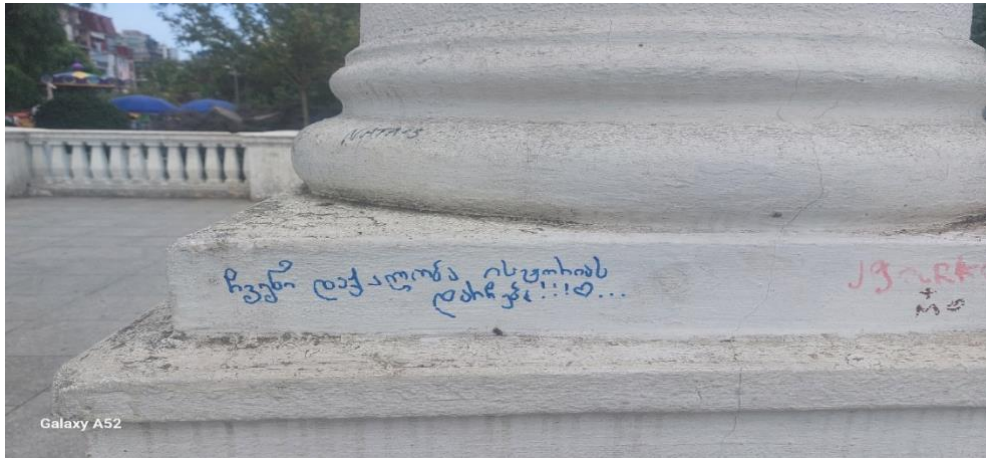
The speaker is bold enough and is not ashamed of expressing his "hot" sexual feelings towards the beloved. Here the speaker does not use the exact words of the song, but adds word "Cry" trying to show how disappointed is he because of the hopeless love relationship.

All who have watched Georgian film "A happy Roamnce" (1972) will recognize the words from G. Tshabadze's song „მენზე ფიქრებს ბედავს გული თავბედი“ (I dare thinking of you) sung by the main characters. If we draw parallels between the film and reality, we will guess that the feeling one has towards the other is forbidden, but the speaker is sure that in spite of separation and barriers, they will be together at the end.



One of the famous quotes from the film "The Eccentrics" (1974) was directly borrowed by a graffitist and inscribed on the house wall in front of a public school №2. The quote looks like this: სივარული ვერტიკალურია და თან ბრუნვადი (Love is vertical and rotatable).

Only one intertextual graffiti reflects transformation of an original quote. Graffiti artist recollects I. Charkviani's famous song "Istorias darcheba" and turns the direct text „ისტორიას დარჩება ჩვენი შეხება, ისტორიას დარჩება ჩვენი ხმა, ისტორიას დარჩება ის, რაც ვიპოვეთ ჩვენ, მე და შენ“ into „ჩვენი დაქალაქის ისტორიას დარჩება“ (Our friendship will remain in the history).



CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study point out that graffiti artists often borrow from previous texts or from public knowledge when creating graffiti. Intertextuality helps graffiti creators to express their fears, happiness, concerns towards different phenomena. Intertextuality enriches graffiti by connecting it to a broader cultural and artistic conversation, making each piece a part of a larger narrative.

The analysis showed that famous quotes or original texts are not rewritten, paraphrased, transformed or parodied by graffiti artists in Batumi. Primary texts are mostly directly quoted by teenager graffiti artists. Thus, they echo the primary texts. Intertextuality has an aesthetic, artistic, emotional impact on readers. Graffiti artists use intertextual graffiti for several reasons: they have a need of self-expression, they get pleasure from the texts they allude, show agreement with the ideas expressed in the primary texts or search for a contact. These are mainly romantic and philosophical graffiti. Intertextual graffiti is a means of communication that give voice to groups of society and serves as a slogan. Graffiti helps peoples of different cultures to know much about the places, the people living there and their world vision. Intertextual graffiti shows that the Georgians are the people of rich culture. They appreciate their culture and want to spread their cultural knowledge through graffiti.

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