

The Universality of Creative Arts in Visual and Film Arts: Understanding the Language and Communication

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Abstract

Art generally has a universal language that could be understood no matter where such an individual life and comes from around the world. Language is a discrete unit of coded information of various sort, rules and principles with which meaningful information is sent to a particular individual or group for decoding through a prior universal agreement. When language is mentioned, majority of people think about encoded sound decoded by a hearer. However, it has been noticed that media such as visual and film arts do a universal communication in which encoded information is deciphered by so many people who do not speak the language of the artist or artiste. This means therefore that language spoken through art forms is universal than language emanating from the culture of the people, that is semiotism. This paper is looking at understanding the language in view of communication endowed to emanate from visual and film artists. The paper considers the theories of many scholars in establishing the thematic content of this discuss. It gives credence to the argument on how to understand various codes and signs in visual and film arts. The paper concludes with some suggestion on how to engage with the art total social development.

KEYWORDS: Language, Communication, Visual art, Film Art and Semiotic

Introduction

Language is a method of communication through either speech making; written speech or sign in words which are structured in a way that convention will be able to decipher. Language can be traced as a style used by a particular community or country to pass information across people who need to be communicated at a particular time. Language therefore is inseparable part of human being activities. Without decipherable ability of language by the recipient or hearer, it becomes difficult for communication to take place no matter the education and versatility of the communicator and communication recipient. There should be a connectivity that binds the communicator and receiver together before understanding can be attained. That connectivity is the ability of both communicator and recipient to understand the code used for information

transfer as the case may be. Language therefore has become so versatile in making intention and instruction known to individual or collections of people who the information is meant for. For example, the little success achieved when building the tower of Babel was through understanding themselves when they speak and the failure to continue was responsible for the confusion that came into their language. Since they could not understand themselves again the work ended prematurely.

Through language, human came out of Stone Age which at the same time helped to develop science, art and technological forgery of all sorts. Language to human is not the same in comparison to animal world. To human, language can be arbitrary, productive, creative, systematic, vocalic, social, non-instinctive and conventional unlike animals that make sound according to their specie and as programmed by nature. The characteristic of this nature set human apart from animals when it comes to communication. Though some afore mentioned characteristics of language might apply to animal but for human it is total when it comes to application. Language can be used to advocate, educate, agitate, entertain, evoke emotion, debate, inform, mobilize, plan, lobby, persuade, strategize, raise awareness, train, cause trouble, promote an action and win an argument among others. Language should not be used and decipher with assumption or else the speaker would have created different impression from the hearer's standpoint. A popular saying in Yoruba language fits this argument which says that the way a speech is made determines the reward reaction, or after effect (*oro lo n yo obi lapo, oro naa lo n yo ida ninu apo*). Language therefore has unprecedented power that requires its judicious use.

Before language can be said to have been effective, the tenet of communication must be taken into consideration. This means that there must be reason warranting speech making (source), what to be said must be planned, the channel to be used must be identified and the target to which the set of speech is meant for must be determined and identified. The effectiveness of such communication through use of language is measured through the feedback. The feedback for hearer at times may come inform of return speech (response) or action which is also necessitated by the earlier content of the communication. The response actually determines the extent to which the message was understood. When language is used in communication, there is a type called *Duality* which refers to two systems of sound and meaning. When communication does not enjoy feedback from the recipient (s), it means such speech has not affected the hearer either positively or negatively. Language has fundamental characteristic such as symbolism, flexibility, cultural relevance, variation, and social importance. The language we speak today is just a symbol agreed upon to mean what convention takes it to be. As one word stands meaningful to a group, it looks meaningless to some. It only resonates incongruence sound to those who do not understand what the word stands for. There are words classified as homonyms because they sound alike but have different meanings. When making

speech, these words could be used easily but in writing they can easily be confused and an attempt to use them wrongly stifled the reason and meaning of what is said or written. For example, if you say *Oh my friend, I know your name*, this is understood because the choice of written words and spellings were in tandem with the intention of the speaker and that made it clear. However, when one writes the voiced statement with wrong choice of words and let's say the hearing transcriber writes *Oh my friend, I no your name*. The two words *know* and *no* sound the same way but are written with different composition of letters. However, the usage in writing gives real meaning if the writer comprehends what was said and it is written with correct choice of words that carry-out the intention of the speaker. So, language is complex, understanding its rudiment and usage prevents transferring confusion. From the foregoing, does art takes note of these rules when speaking? Let us therefore look at art and language parley.

Art and the Language

Speech made through art is comprehensive and communicative without bound. Visual art uses language that is inaudible while film art combines both audible and inaudible language to disseminate meaningful information to whoever cares to decipher it. Film and visual arts both communicate through different means so as to reach their target audience. Film combines symbolism and voice to transfer the intended message by the conceiver while the major means of visual communication comes in symbols that represents the intention of the conceiver too. Language itself informs through series of encoded symbols that everyone with understanding to decode can decode. Unlike in the visual art, it makes use of specialized symbols in which only those with knowledge or ability to decode its symbols of expression understand the meaning of its message. In the other way round, film art synthesizes, chose specialized symbols as it is in visual art though with conventional symbols that could be understood by conventional locale as it is with international peoples' language of expression where the film is billed to appeal. That is the reason why it is easier to understand the expression of film art better than visual art by all and sundry. Film art goes further to add running subtitle in general language to draw the attention for understanding of what is communicated.

Simply put, visual art transmission of information is also combined with written form of expression to dissuade confusion. It employs the use of two-dimensional or three-dimensional formats, colors, brushes, painting accessories, drawing instruments, pencil, pen, ink and other materials to get information across to recipients. For example, billboards are information carriers; however, this means of informing people is segmented into lower, middle and high grades. Information in visual art classified as lower grade is meant for people in the society with limited or no education at all. This is designed in such a way that the message therein carries illustration in detailed form to the extent that even when the beholder cannot read, the illustration informs. To cap it up for better understanding, the messages are put in written form

to tell the story of the artist. This type of art work can also serve the need of those in medium grade because even if they can read and write, their limited education requires further treatment of the art work for them not to misconstrue the intended information therein. The art work meant for high class requires little or no illustration before the class understands the intent and content of the message. This is found in most visual art works in the society, while it means something to some people who can logically see and decipher, some view them as mere decoration. In many cases such art works are done in abstraction for it to speak to the specified class of people in high grade within strata of the society.

Similarly, film art goes a little further to employ all avenue of visuality in disseminating the intent and message of the artiste. Learning takes place with the involvement of all the human senses that is why film art appeals to all these senses to disseminate information. Film art relates to all aspects of the production of film. Because of its versatility in information dissemination, it employs various aspects of the followings to make information possible, these are- story, setting camera to work, light to illuminate, sound, sound effects, costume, make-up, creation of special effect, animation, editing, music, crew and other too numerous to list. Film art production is so encompassing to the extent that each of these areas in specialty require specific training for performance (Metcalf Lisa, 1). One imagining the multiple names and profession appearing as credit to a film production make one to realize the multi-faceted personnel required to produce a film. A film art production literally involves hundreds of professional and non-professional in various aspects of what becomes the finished product. In the beginning, film was not classified as an art form because some looked at it as a photographic record of an artistic performance, but not an art form in its own right (Jesse Prinz 1). This paper looked into how visual and film art devolve the use of language in disseminating information to the public. Deciphering coded information in both forms of art becomes important for socio-cultural development of humanity.

Visual and Film Arts: Link to Social Environment

Communication in visual art is a creative process that combines the visual arts and technology to disseminate ideas for social development. Parokoroko (1) outlines that film focuses on the aesthetic, cultural and social significance and interconnections of cinema, television and new screen technologies. Film art concerns itself with communicating with people through screen literacy as applied to moving images. From the emergence of cinema after 19th century with internet revolution, the production and consumption of moving images constitute a major social and cultural force in the 20th and 21st centuries. It has been observed that art possesses aesthetic, artful qualities that involve the society and an individual in the society. We have different forms of art which is regarded as high-art and popular art; ballet and films. The culture revolving around the art transforms and engenders reformatory collaboration which is made possible through different art forms. Visual and film arts embodied creative thinking and critique, which

encompasses communication alongside other art forms such as literature, music, theatre, film, music and others. The role these segments of art take to inform varies from how they transmit their content to effectively affect the society positively in order to correct vices that have eaten deeply or entrenched into the fabric of exhibition of humanitarian characterization.

Culture has been affecting the propagation of art in so many ways because many art forms reflect the social context of the society. In this context, all art works are to some extent the product of human way of living in their immediate society that is why the art reflects prevailing social assumption and beliefs. Wikipedia (2020) refers to art theoretical framework of human conception, human application found in human cultures and societies through skills and imagination in order to produce objects, environments and experiences. This connotes production of art works that are made from the contacts human (artist) made with the cultural (way of living) society which result to latter regurgitation of such interaction and later develops to inform the background for art production which is referenced as the artist experience. The visual artist therefore speaks the coded language from experience as an individual through different art forms under visual art such as architecture, ceramics, drawing, painting, photography and sculpture. The language art speaks through these forms can be classified into creativity and aesthetic. Creative art work emanates from what an artist conceived from the experiences he or she had gone through in the society in other to make statement while such art work can serve as means for aesthetic or beautification for those who do not understand the language of the art product. It is not an exaggeration therefore to say that cultural beliefs and way of people's life enhance the propagation of art production.

In some context, film art is classified under visual art. But it took a very long time before the visual artist could accept it to be so as mentioned above. In their contribution, Desai, DeSimone and Henig (204) say that there is no clear line between art and culture. Cultural fields like gastronomy are sometimes considered as arts. Looking at the coverage of art in general helps to distinguish the focus of each segment. For example, there has been a lot of misconception between fine arts and applied arts. Even some practitioners do misapply their context. However, each art form under the category functions differently because of the language each speaks. Fine arts aim at producing objects which are meant to beautify or creating intellectual stimulation which may not have anything to do with day-to-day human endeavor. Applied arts are the application of design and decoration that affect day-to-day human activities. The products are functional and pleasing in interacting with human development (Ian Chilvers, 29). That is why applied arts include fields such as industrial design, illustration, and commercial art. No wonder it is used in distinction to the fine arts (Kariger and Fierro, 95). Film art redirects performing arts into recorded movable photographic signals retrievable through a specified technology purposely created to perform such function. Film art is a form of visual art that develops the product made from the stable of performing art from real live performance to

portable signal components. Performing arts communicates through dance, music, theatre, opera, mime and various other forms of art that involve human performance. Unlike visual arts that remain as long as the society desires it, performing art lived for set time duration and that is why each discipline in performing arts is temporal in nature. In other to allow for the repeat of what was performed, the film art has made this possible. Performing art usually addresses the ills in the society when it first started, but now the trend at which it encourages decadence is the concern of every lover of the art. However, the purpose of this paper is to look at the language of the art as it is deciphered and understood by the public.

Shyon Baumann's (415) definition of film art suggests the integration of all forms of art media as an embodiment of art when he says... "Film is a medium of art with the broadest appeal of all contemporary arts. He suggests therefore that any medium of art that is directly or indirectly combined with recreation, amusement or any form of education and instruction has to be periodically reevaluated. In the process of appraising visual and film arts language, it is necessary to consider the nature of the society in which these arts address". The language ensuing from the art is universal and dynamic as stated earlier, however, the after effect of its language of dissemination is not the concern but the response and reaction it thereafter generated. It has been observed that treatment by these arts have dovetailed into political, economic, psychosocial and religious awareness of the people. Film art has in its bid to take over the entertainment space by subsuming other forms of art and factorizing its language along the fringes of these other arts to catch the attention of the masses. Since film art has become what majority in the society patronizes in the recent time, many things' people are imbibing and perceiving about other people has been through film treatment. It has therefore, changed the phase of the entire world both negatively and positively. My argument here is premised around the popularity film has enjoyed as a medium of entertainment and information dissemination now in the contemporary society, which requires paying attention to how it is churned for communal benefit. That is why any television houses now pay unusual attention to promoting films attracts so many audiences to their product unlike those whose television stations appeal only to the first-class citizen of the social strata.

The Implication of Film and Visual Art Languages

It takes the intervention of an intellectual art linguistic to decipher language of art. Language of art is though universal but it can as well be misconstrued by non-literate of art language. The language spoken by film art may be open to majority of people to understand but when it comes to addressing social issue in a symbolic way, this requires real understanding to be on the same page with the playwright and film producer. The visual art language seems more complex than that of film art because this form of art does not employ audible rendition in making the intension of the fabricator known. The content of its language is symbolic and concise in meaning for those who could translate it. Encoding and decoding language of works of art has

predated this contemporary time because scholars have described how Africans have excelled in symbolic rendition of their intension from long ago. In their contribution after thorough research of African usage of symbolic language to transmit intensions, Hayford, Fargion and Wallace interpolate that:

West Africa is also rich in other means of encoding, preserving and communication knowledge.... Such methods include symbolic systems such as the beautiful *adinkra* and *nsibidi*; techniques of communicating messages in tonal languages through music- using drums, but also other instruments such as flutes and whistles; or the use of objects as mnemonics as in, for example, the *aroko* system, in which a collection of shells and seed-pods could offer peace between kingdoms. ...some of them may be very old; whatever their age, they, as well as the scholarship described above are testimony to the powers of inventiveness and creativity of African authors, musicians and makers over centuries (13).

The submission of these scholars is an evidence of the use of symbols in works of art before it was later turned to an innovation in scholastic means of communication and even in continental security. Because of this Hayford *et al* concludes that throughout West Africa history, people's stories, and collective memories and narratives, have continued to emerge in writing, and as in visual art and music – in words, symbol and song (21). This shows that the legacy was transitory to new generation who now refined it with latest technological instrument to make it attractive for today's consumption. This is also buttressed by these scholars when they concluded that new generations continue to find new ways of reinventing in narratives, of using film and digital technologies to help reconsider traditional themes, and helping us reimagine the West Africa future (21). The communication strategy employed by the ancient people assisted them in making things work in the society because of their understanding of the language spoken by works of art around them. This transcends their existence to this time when technological breakthrough fabrications are employed to glamorize the reinvention of such art works.

This has had good implication because these art works have put people on their toes to do the right things at times. The campaign or dissemination of information were done in the past with symbolic languages that were easily understood by people because it was made part of their traditional education system to teach children how to decode social symbols that connote warning and restriction. There is no excuse to justify innocence from any member of the society because it is assumed they must have been taught meaning and consequence of warning symbols. However, in following the same trend today may seem detrimental because such language is somehow restricted to only the people that are educated to decipher the language art speaks. The visual artist can be representational and nonrepresentational in the way they manipulate their materials to disseminate the intent of the mind for public consumption. In this

same context, Karen Sullivan (1) said that representational artists claim to engage in a conversation with the view of their works, whereas nonrepresentational painters use the same words to describe colours, shapes, and their own artistic process. This implies that artists are endowed with ability to speak universally on the same theme in the society with different approach of applying their artistic specialisation. The audience could as well serve as a determinant factor for choice of language to be used by the fabricating or compositional artists as the case may be. Sullivan further buttressed this context when he cited Zevitas who said that “I engage in a dialogue with paint, my statement is each dot I make with the brush, then I respond intuitively to each unexpected play of dot... This process is an interchange with the painting activity...” He went further to add that “the drawings function for me as a language... It is my hope that they will communicate with a sense of potency to whatever audience receives them” (2). This argument here shows that artists interact with their society with after effect of their conception which they make real with their tools and material. These artistic products at the end affect the society both positively and negatively depending the way the society is able to translate the context of the product.

The application of artistic language to the society is the most important aspect of what is produced and the medium used in producing it. The medium here is either film or visual art process used, which dependent on the target audience in mind of the artist at conception. Addressing social problem with artistic oriented production remains with people for very long time. Film art appeals to different senses in human which enables retention of message acquired therein. Since social problem is an issue that concerned and affected every society’s great and small, means of addressing them with language understood by the masses required urgent artistic attention. We are all aware of the power of art works especially film that can inspire, enlighten, and even engage. Many works of art have achieved a serious phenomenal success in addressing the ills of the society. The power of satire and replication or reflecting the ills of the society has become an effective antidote to perpetration of social maladjustment. Film or visual art satires and condemns such ills in a precise terms or language of the masses to the extent of getting people talking about new way to make society work. The primary purpose of art works is to preserve history, entertain and put food on the table of practitioners. The content of an art work becomes relevant when the theme is drawn from the success and failure of the society. This type of content though achieved these other primary reasons mentioned above, without mincing words, it achieves other reasons like educating people and help them to see themselves like gazing into a mirror for redress.

The word is changing very fast even faster that one changes the socks. Since constant changes become prevalent, the changes have induced more themes for filmmaking. It has become noticeable that social event unfolding in the society continues to make more films available. The reason is not farfetched, film and visual artists are part of the society and the only way to

express their approval and disgust about such activities in the society is through artistic rendition. They eventually coined out their language to portray the negativity and thereby postulate correctional means of remediating ills or compliment the good gesture demonstrated that in their view needs to be followed. Film and visual art practice therefore require adequate training so that one will be competent to use appropriate language for disseminating the objective of the theme. The way the themes in visual art are addressed cannot be the same in film art. The two may be addressing the same theme, however understanding it should be made paramount by the creator so as to reach the target audience. Art influences the society by helping people to change their opinions, instilling values and making available peoples experiences across the space and time. It is a form of communication that is universal because different people from diverse cultural affinities can make their intention known through the use of images, sounds and relaying of stories.

Art has benefited people so immensely because through it, people have become observant, assisted in problem-solving skills, boosted self-esteem and enhanced sense of accomplishment. Art used different means of reaching the mind of the beholder or listeners. This is accomplished through painting, graphics, ceramics, textile designs, music, videos and films. The impart of art in people's lives cannot be quantified because it has appealed to people unknowingly as it turned their lives around for good or bad depending on the type one is devoted to embrace. All kind of art can affect human's mood in a positive way, like engendering of happiness when art creates amusing panorama, makes people to be calmer when similar experience is shared through story re-enactment in film. It has gone ahead to inspire people to do what they wouldn't have done if not exposed to products of art. That is why art makes the society; for these reasons therefore, a society without art is a society of living dead. Researchers in Newcastle University proved in 2013 that "viewing contemporary visual art had positive effects on the personal lives of nursing home-bound elders". This implies that Art has utilitarian effects and influences on the society because there is a demonstrable positive correlation between schoolchildren's grades in mathematics and literacy and their involvement with drama or music activities (Newcastle Researchers, 2013). It has been realized that some art forms combine a visual element with performance, this is without any present in cinematography, or like in comics when art works are combined with written word to amuse. That is why from the prehistoric period of cave painting up till modern-day films, art serves as a channel for storytelling in which humankind have interaction with the immediate environment in other to make an impart in people's life.

The National Art Education Association (NAEA) said that art is beneficial for the artist as an outlet for work. Art not only fosters the human need for self-expression and fulfillment; it is also economically viable. This extract portends that art does not only help people who are non-artist to live good lives but artists also develop the economy of their society through their

works. It employs different cadre of people in the society for the work to be done and make money to circulate. Education achievement cannot survive and record success without art taking the lion share in the disseminating process. Every artist plays different and necessary role in development and contribution to the well-being of their society. They provide community with joy, interaction, inspiration, but however critique bad political, economic and social system through their creative works. They have used their language to get society thinking, engaging in thoughtful exhibits of their works that make society talking. Art has been used to document history and expressing collective emotions on daunting societal issues. Lesley Birch considers that being emotional could be personal and universal but she however mentions that boxing up emotion is unlike of the artists, that is why she has this to say to buttress the idea,

“...most folks block out emotion. Then, suddenly, a painting speaks to them. At that point, the artist has done their job. For me, it is wonderful to connect with people through my work- when people respond to a painting and really feel. My painting is mainly about self-expression communicated out there on the canvas, but really I think it is everyone’s expression- I’m just a vehicle” (2-3).

In human society, it is common that everyone has one thing or the other that hurts. People likewise show love and hope, however die one day. Artists are in this together with the member of the society, the only one that survived is the expression artists have made with their works. They have been creating immortality with the language they speak to the society because it lives after them. In summation, the speech artists made in the society builds it and that is why it is important that every member of the society understands the language of artist so that they can reap the benefit together.

Conclusion

This research article has looked into how creative arts benefit the society. Among the branches of creative arts, the paper looks at visual and film art, their products and the language they speak. Their language is universal and it can be heard by all. Messages in the works of art are meant for different category of people that is why art itself classified human society into low, medium and high. The works used language of the slum to disseminate their content to people of low class, but for the people classified as medium are reached with language juxtaposing low and middle in rendition. However, the high-class people are addressed with royal language which may be difficult for people at low and middle classes to understand. In film the class enjoys classical message emanating from tragic stories while the other classes are treated to the language of the common people. Art serves as agent of social reform because it extends it critiques to human relation, psychology, economic, politic and social with an attempt that redefines the orientation of the people towards their development. Educational achievements

can only be attained better when art is fully involved. Cultural beliefs define people and their interest however, art complements these beliefs to address and readdress the issues emanating from the conflict engendered by the cultural practice that is becoming obsolete due to civilization. Since culture is dynamic, repositioning the culture of any society is dependent on how well they embrace the practice of art forms. The language of art needs to be understood by all in the society to enable individual to react to artistic criticism to better the society. There is conventional language of the people through cultural affiliations, but the language of art breaks all artificial boundaries created by culture. The development of people without art is like trying to clap with one hand since a society without enabling environment for art to thrive is a society of walking corpses.

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