

Graffiti and the Discursive Construction of Fitness in Gyms

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Abstract. This paper is an attempt to add knowledge to scholarship in a field that has attracted less attention from researchers. It presents a study of graffiti found on a board located inside a gym in Madrid that was carried out in order to get a grasp of the functions of the graffiti and gain an insight into discursive practices in gyms. Data analysis focused on texts while overlooking the graffiti's non-verbal features and was carried out following Fairclough's (2004, 2013) approach, which emphasizes the study of language as a social practice and encourages a three-fold analysis of discourse that includes action, representation and identification. The study revealed that social agents attempted to act and interact directly or indirectly with fellow gym-goers through graffiti.

Keywords: graffiti; sport; fitness; discursive practices; discourse analysis.

Introduction

This article is a discourse analysis of graffiti found in a gym located in Madrid, Spain. This study was carried out in the context of the increasing popularity of fitness in Europe and Spain in particular, far away from the United States, where it all started. It was motivated by the desire to add knowledge to scholarship, based on the belief that the study of graffiti could help us reach conclusions that would encourage further research on language practices amongst fitness aficionados in Spain. Since this study mainly falls within Discourse Analysis, data analysis will be guided specifically by Fairclough's approach as presented in *Analyzing Discourse: Textual analysis for social research* (2004). The data analysed in this study include graffiti authored by gym-goers between 2014 and 2021. This paper, therefore, aims at providing answers to the following questions.

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RQ1) What ideas do the graffiti express?

RQ2) What linguistic practices do these graffiti reveal?

RQ3) What do they say about the discursive construction of fitness in that specific gym?

Before proceeding to the most important part of this paper, which is a detailed analysis of data to provide answers to the questions mentioned above, we shall set this work within general discourse studies, review the literature on language and sports, and describe the methodology we followed.

1. Literature review

1.1 *Graffiti as a form of expression*

Graffiti have been classified from various perspectives, including location, type of message, the materials and techniques used by their authors (Aguilera-Carnerero, 2019, p. 80). As concerns location, graffiti can be found in open or enclosed spaces and mostly appear on different surfaces in general urban landscapes and educational settings (Alkhaldeh, et al., 2017; Kigen, 2019). They can involve an image, a text or a combination of both (Blume, 1985, p. 139; Aguilera-Carnerero, 2019, p. 80). Finally, graffiti may be produced by means of chalk or a spray and can include several techniques such as abstract painting, writings, symbols, etc. (Aguilera-Carnerero, 2019, p. 80).

In an attempt to classify graffiti according to the contexts in which they appear and analyse their contents, researchers have come up with three main types, namely tourist graffiti authored by people who visit a specific place and wish to leave a trace of their being there, inner-city graffiti which project an identity, express opinions and mark one's territory, and *latrinalia*, i.e., writings and other pictorial representations found on toilet walls (Matthews, et al., 2012). Overall, graffiti has been seen as a cultural phenomenon, a practice mostly favoured by marginal social groups that may not have access to mainstream means of speaking their minds and stating their beliefs (Farnia, 2014; Matthews, et al., 2012). Graffiti can thus be viewed as a way of enforcing free speech, and more so because their authors can anonymously convey messages and opinions with very little risk of facing negative consequences (Tracy, 2005).

There has also been a debate on what should indeed be considered as graffiti, with some researchers establishing distinctions between graffiti and other concepts such as street art (Collins, 2018) or the so-called "pintadas" (Vigara Tauste & Reyes Sanchez, 1996). While legality was the determining factor in Collins's (2018) attempt to distinguish between graffiti and street art, Vigara Tauste and Reyes Sanchez (1996) insisted on how important message is when trying to differentiate between graffiti and what they referred to as "pintadas" – which we can loosely translate as "tags". More specifically, Collins (2018) suggested that there should be a clear distinction between graffiti, which according to him, are always illegal, and street art that includes pieces of work whose creation may be encouraged (or at least tolerated). Vigara Tauste and Reyes Sanchez (1996), on the other hand, indicated that graffiti always intended to be artistic, while the so-called "pintadas" (tags) tend to emphasize a linguistic message that their authors want

to communicate. We believe that establishing distinctions such as the above may be too limiting for what should be considered graffiti. Graffiti may be legal or illegal, include artistic representations or mere writings on a toilet wall, a classroom desk or a graffiti board, as illustrated in this paper.

1.2 (Critical) Discourse Analysis, graffiti and sport

Graffiti can be studied from a (Critical) Discourse Analysis perspective because they are communicative acts that include an addresser, an addressee and a message in accordance with Jakobson's (1960) model. Therefore, graffiti often reveals a lot about authors' identities, opinions, and even the struggle for power in certain societal settings. Aguilera-Carnerero (2019) studied graffiti messages to understand their contents and relate them to societal happenings. In the end, five of the six different types of graffiti she obtained were about some power struggle and social activism, namely feminism, anti-capitalism, anti-establishment, anti-clericalism, and animal rights.

Discourse analysts are interested in naturally occurring language, which in sports could refer to "forms of talk in everyday interactions within a particular sport team, and how that structures relations and experiences of coaches and athletes." (McGannon, 2016, p. 230). Most discourse analysis publications on language and sports that we reviewed dealt with how identity and experiences are reflected in text and talk produced by athletes or found in the media and other sources. Kavoura et al. (2015) studied how Female judo athletes from Greece negotiate issues as biology, gender, femininity and sport, and found that those athletes would attempt to reconcile various identities while perpetuating certain stereotypes. Another author who analysed discourses in sports is Brooke (2019), whose focus was the discursive construction of dragon boating in both Hong Kong and Singapore. Using the appraisal model (Martin, Rose, 2007), he found that dragon boating in both city-states is linked to positive affect and given social validation and positive moral judgment. Finally, Quintero Ramírez's (2019) study of sports headlines in English and Spanish revealed that victory and defeat are often expressed through metaphors pertaining to war, pain, life and death, etc.

From the above, most publications on language in sports from a discourse analysis perspective have aimed at describing how ideas are expressed and identities constructed, reproduced, and resisted in particular discourses. Nevertheless, there is no (C)DA work specifically on gym graffiti, which was further motivation to carry out the study presented in this paper.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data collection and theoretical framework

In June 2021 we decided to study graffiti found in a gym located in Madrid, Spain. Since 2014, fitness aficionados at that gym had been given the opportunity to express

themselves on a board inside the gym and intended specifically for graffiti. After realizing that the graffiti could be studied from an academic perspective, we took pictures of the board and transcribed all the graffiti. There were 52 graffiti written in different languages and made up of text and other non-verbal signs.

Out of the 52 pieces of graffiti collected, one was written in Arabic script, so it could not be transcribed or analysed in this paper. Therefore, 51 graffiti were analysed from a Discourse Analysis perspective by exploring action, representation and identification in accordance with Fairclough's approach (2004, 2013), whose foundation is the belief that discourse includes three dimensions of social practice, namely *genres* or ways in which people interact with each other, *discourses*, i.e., particular ways of representing reality, and *styles* which are personal idiosyncrasies or qualities (Fairclough 2004, p. 26). In other words, according to Fairclough (2004), the representation of society through particular discourses can make people develop certain ways of acting or interacting with others, which would eventually lead to the creation of new identities. The study was meant to provide us with both qualitative and quantitative insights into the graffiti.

Fairclough (2004) believes that before moving on to social practices, discourse analysts should consider other concepts such as social agents, social events and social structures. Texts are thus considered to be *social events*, authored by *social agents* whose actions are somehow determined by external forces referred to as *causal powers* (Fairclough, 2004, pp. 21–22). These causal powers may be determined by social structures understood as abstract constructs like an economic structure, a social class or a language. Attempts at enforcing certain social structures at the expense of others through ways of acting, ways of representing and ways of being are then referred to as social practices (pp. 23–24).

Therefore, Fairclough helps one use discourse as a starting point to make claims about society at large, especially when it comes to how hegemonic discourses may influence people's day-to-day practices and identities.

2.2. Data analysis

The graffiti were analysed in order to learn more about the social practices (functions and discourses of fitness) they could reveal by considering the social structures (language choice, register etc.) in which those functions and discourses were embedded. To build the foundation for a thorough analysis of those graffiti, we had to relate the texts (social events) to their authors (social agents) as well as to the contexts and circumstances that surrounded the writing of the graffiti and affected the authors (causal powers). In short, this study will therefore attempt to explain the extent to which, through their use of graffiti, gym-goers navigate between abstract social structures on the one hand and more specific social events on the other hand.

Based on the belief that graffiti is a type of discourse, the texts will be analysed following Fairclough's three steps approach, which includes looking at acting, representing and being. More specifically, this article will attempt to 1) discuss the ways of acting encoded in the graffiti text by identifying the functions of the texts, taking into account

their social agents (authors), social structures (register, language, etc.), and then 2) discuss how the idea of fitness is represented in the graffiti and what this representation reveals about social structures, including the authors' linguistic choices and causal powers that might have influenced them. Finally, it is important to note that although the graffiti were mostly made up of text, some also included non-verbal elements. Nevertheless, the authors of the article decided to focus on texts to effectively implement Fairclough's (2004) approach, whose main target is text.

3. Results and discussion

The first part of this analysis aimed at identifying the graffiti and analysing the ideas of action and interaction in them and this could only be achieved by looking at the functions of the graffiti. The graffiti mostly fell within five functional categories: motivation, (self-)praise or satisfaction, self-shame, and interaction. Although most of those functional categories targeted other gym-goers, they could also be aimed at the authors themselves.

Table 1: Functions of graffiti

Function	Number of graffiti
motivation	24
(self-)praise and satisfaction	12
Self-shaming	2
Dialogue (jobs)	2 (6 replies)
Miscellaneous	5

3.1 Expressing motivation

Motivation is the most important functional category we found. It expressed the desire of the authors to motivate not only themselves but also other gym aficionados. Out of the 51 graffiti that were studied, 24 dealt with motivation through wishes and exclamations (n=10), enjoiners (n=8), sayings (n=5) and verbal constructions (n=1).

3.1.1 Wishes and exclamations

The most common way for gym-goers to motivate themselves and their peers was through wishes. This function is seen in the use of words like "suerte" (luck), "deseo" (wish), "espero" (hope) and tenses such as the subjunctive. Some gym-goers see workout as an adventure where good luck is needed to achieve one's aims (Examples 1 & 2). Therefore, it is not surprising that Examples 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 are literally about wishing the addressees good luck. In these cases, the use of the second person makes it clear that the authors of the graffiti are addressing either other gym-goers in general or some specific individual, as seen in Example 5.

- (1) Mucha suerte compis, os quiero
Good luck, mates, I love you¹
- (2) Suerte en la aventura
Good luck in the adventure
- (3) Os deseo que esta aventura salga genial, suerte
I wish this adventure to be great for you, good luck
- (4) Espero que esta aventura vaya para arriba y creciendo
I hope this adventure will always be successful
- (5) Que salga todo bien papa!!! Jajaja
May everything be okay, Dad!!! Hahaha

While wishing good luck is the main idea in the graffiti where the addressees are identified, we found one specific graffiti that rather aimed at congratulating other gym-goers and encouraging them to keep training harder (Example 6).

- (6) Felicidades chicos y ánimo
Congratulations mates and chin up

When it comes to specific linguistic choices, the use of casual words and phrases such as “compis”, the short form of “compañeros” (mates) in Example 1, generic “chicos” (Example 6) that can also be translated as “mates”, the use of multiple exclamation marks and interjections expressing laughter (Example 5) are all evidence of the fact that informal register tends to be used by the graffiti authors. This may be a way for them to establish emotional proximity with the addressees and strengthen their motivation message.

In addition to the above, the authors may express wishes concerning their personal fitness goals (Example 7) or life in general, as in Examples 8 and 9. These last two examples reveal the common belief amongst gym-goers that training will improve various aspects of their lives.

- (7) Para ganar: fuerza, resistencia, inteligencia
To gain: strength, resistance, intelligence
- (8) Por un futuro lleno de éxitos y muchos cuentos
For a future full of success and much more
- (9) Esto es el principio de un cambio
This is the beginning of a change

Finally, when motivation is not achieved through wishes, exclamations can be used to serve that purpose, as in Example 10.

- (10) Gym time!!! A full

¹ My translations – R. E.

We believe that the phrase “a full” is the result of some cross-linguistic influence involving English and Spanish, as discussed in detail later in this paper.

3.1.2 *Enjoinders*

Enjoinders, which are emphatic directives, are also way to express motivation in the graffiti. As we shall discuss later, these imperatives are often underpinned by the idea that working out is just the same as going to war. Therefore, gym-goers are challenged to grab their weapons (Example 11), just like Spartan warriors (Example 12) and go for what they want (Example 13). When faced with difficulties in achieving their fitness goals, they are urged not to give up (Examples 14 & 15) but rather to stay strong, unbroken and fit (Examples 16 & 17), always making sure they do not complain but rather look for ways to move on and make progress (Example 18).

- (11) A las armas
Grab your weapons
- (12) Spartanos, todos a una
Spartans, all for one (one for all)
- (13) Love and hate Xenxo, a por ello
Love and hate Xenxo, go for it
- (14) Don't stop, you can mate
- (15) El gitano spartano!!! Proibido (sic.) respira hondo y sigue
The Spartan [*masc.*] Gypsy!!! Forbidden, take a deep breath and move forward
- (16) Stay strong
- (17) Unbroken, stay fit
- (18) No te quejes, busca soluciones
Don't complain, seek solutions

Here again, we can see that English is used by some, which further illustrates the relative importance of this foreign language, which will be discussed later in this paper.

3.1.3 *Sayings*

At times, gym-goers decided to use common sayings to motivate themselves and those who would read their graffiti. While Example 19 emphasizes the need to have strong willpower when starting to work out, Examples 20 and 21, convey that the only way to achieve one's fitness goals is to lift heavier weights and experience pain.

- (19) Querer es poder
When there's a will there's a way
- (20) Sin peso no hay progreso!!
No weight no progress!!
- (21) No pain no gain

When those sayings are not about the need to face one's difficulties to meet whatever fitness objectives one has, they suggest that gym-goers should overlook difficulties and go for what they want. This is exactly what transpires from Examples 22 and 23. In the latter, it is worth noting that the difficulties experienced by gym-goers are seen as walls, which is also part of the war metaphor, metaphor that will be further discussed later in this paper.

- (22) Solo aquel que mira sufre la impotencia
Only those who look [at their inabilities] will be unable to overcome them
- (23) Les murs sont plus forts que la tête que les doit dérober, mais on verra!!
The walls are stronger than the head that should destroy[?] them, but we shall see!!

3.1.4 *Verb constructions*

In a piece of the graffiti we analysed, motivation is achieved through a series of conjugations describing the process of doing burpees. This example which can be likened to a *cri-de-guerre*, is aimed not only at stimulating gym-goers but also creating a sense of belonging amongst them. This is why the author moves from the first person to the second person and then goes on to include everybody.

- (24) Yo burpeo, tu burpeas, todos burpeamos!!
I do burpees, you do burpees, we all do burpees!!

To sum up, most of the graffiti we studied aimed at motivating gym-goers in their journey to self-improvement and self-realization through fitness. The motivation was realized through wishes and exclamations, enjoiners, sayings and a verb construction. These motivational graffiti also reveal a lot about the metaphors used in the fitness sector and linguistic choices, which shall be analysed in the discussion section of this paper.

3.2 *Expressing (Self-) praise and satisfaction*

When the graffiti were not about motivation, they aimed to praise oneself, fellow gym-goers, or express satisfaction with a training session or the workout experience as a whole. Self-praise would be reflected in the use of comparatives like “stronger” and Spanish equivalent “más fuerte”, or exclamations including words and phrases like “poder” (power), “paraíso” (paradise) or “a tope” (to the fullest). Some graffiti could be used specifically to express their authors' satisfaction with their gains (Examples 25 & 26) and in other cases, would convey the addressers' claims that they are stronger than other gym-goers. To achieve this, these fitness aficionados would use comparison tainted with a bit of sarcasm (and sexism), like comparing other gym-goers to their girlfriend rather than themselves (Example 27) or stating that their warmup alone would be a full training session for other gym-goers (Example 28). Finally, graffiti is used to praise gym-goers in general or members of specific fitness groups, as seen in Examples 29, 30 and 31.

- (25) ¡Stronger than yesterday!
- (26) Con esto el cutter lo parto
With this I can definitely break a cutter/ On this I put an end to my cutting (dieting)
- (27) Mi chica está más fuerte que tú!!!
My girl(friend) is stronger than you
- (28) ¡¡Tu entrenamiento es mi calentamiento!!
Training for you is warm up for me!!
- (29) Crossfiteros al poder!!!
Power to crossfitters!!!
- (30) Sin Firchis no hay paraíso
Without firchis² there is no paradise
- (31) Crossfiteros a tope
Crossfitters to the fullest

The idea of (self-)praise is very much related to satisfaction. This is exactly why, when they did not literally boast, the authors of the graffiti we studied would express satisfaction by praising a specific activity, session or the whole workout experience (Examples 32, 33, 34, 35 & 36).

- (32) 1ar clase -> Encantada
First session -> delighted [*fem.*]
- (33) Esto va palantee
This is moving forward
- (34) Esto es la ¡¡leche!!! Un espartano flojeras (sic.)
This is dope!!! A weak [*masc.*] Spartan
- (35) Un Segundo en la vida no es nada, un segundo en un WOD, es toda una vida.
A second in life is nothing, but a second on a Work Out Day is life.
- (36) Sin crossfit no hay paraíso
No crossfit, no paradise

While in graffiti 32, the author indicates that she really enjoyed the first workout session, the authors of graffiti 33 and 34 use informal Spanish expressions, namely “esto es la leche” (this is dope) and “esto va palantee” (this is moving forward), to describe how exciting and fulfilling a workout session can be. This informal register is emphasized by letter duplication (Example 33) or multiple exclamation marks (Example 34) and evidenced in the very use of the word “palante” a contraction of “para adelante” that is only used in spoken language. Finally, in Example 35, a workout session is seen as something so worthy that just a second of it can mean everything, and this is exactly why without crossfit one cannot experience paradise (Example 36).

² Crossfit group name, which we found out was a deformation of English word “flirty”.

Although self-praise and satisfaction put the authors to the foreground, they might also target indirectly other members of the fitness community. For instance, expressing satisfaction can be a way to direct praise at a personal trainer or encourage other gym-goers not to give up training.

3.2 Self-shaming or doubt

While most of the graffiti we studied were positive, graffiti 37 and 38 below expressed negative experiences and feelings.

- (37) Aquí el rubio perdió un pulmón...
The blonde guy lost a lung here...
(38) Nec ego ipse capio totum quod sum
I don't understand everything about myself

Example 37 is about someone who lost a lung in the gym, which may indicate that they feel they are not as fit as they would like to be. Nevertheless, this example can also be interpreted as an attempt to emphasize how intensive workout sessions can be and could therefore be seen as positive by most fitness aficionados. Example 38 is more of a philosophical utterance in which a gym-goer states that they do not understand who they are. Since there is no specific context attached to it, it is impossible to be sure about what they were really referring to. Nevertheless, fitness is described as a journey of self-discovery and a way to improve one's self-esteem, and that might be the reason why this specific gym-goer starts working out.

3.3 Interaction and miscellaneous

As opposed to the 38 graffiti presented earlier, example 39 and 40 below are overtly interactional as they aimed at eliciting responses from other gym-goers by asking them what they do for a living. Nevertheless, only Example 40 led to responses and other sarcastic comments in the end.

- (39) Crossfiteros cual es nuestro oficio: Au! Au! Au!
Crossfitters, what do we do: Au! Au! Au!
(40) "Crossfiteros: cual es vuestro oficio...
Crossfitters, what do you do...
(41) Community manager
(42) DJ
(43) Estilista
Stylist
(44) Ostias así no vamos a ningún lado
Damn, with this we're going nowhere

- (45) No creas, hay por lo menos un phd en el grupo!
Don't be surprised to find out there's a PhD (holder) in this group
- (46) Asesor fiscal
Tax adviser

While the authors of 41, 43, 43 and 46 simply answer the question asked by giving their professions, the author of example 44 makes fun of the jobs included in the responses that preceded theirs. Their “ostias así no vamos a ningún lado” (Damn, with this we're going nowhere) is a way to point out that the jobs their predecessors mentioned are not the most sought for in society. Therefore, it is to prove them wrong that the author of example 45 says they should not be surprised to find out there is a PhD holder amongst them, thus suggesting that not all those who go to that gym have low-status jobs. We can one more time see that the tone of the graffiti is quite friendly, which points to informal register.

To end this section, it is worth mentioning that some graffiti could not fit into any of the categories mentioned earlier.

- (47) Enrique
(48) The big hand fdo: Tocho
(49) Sate Josele y Roberto
(50) Hini firchi lucha
(51) #NucleoDuro #Paralelos #Stopleyendas #Ibiza2016

The above graffiti could be mere signatures (Examples 47, 48, 49), texts that could not be deciphered (Example 50) or hashtags (Example 51). It is also important to indicate one more time that we collected an inscription in Arabic that could neither be reproduced nor described in this paper.

4. Representation and identification

While studying the graffiti presented earlier in this paper, we realized that they could reveal a lot about discourses of workout in that gym or ways in which their authors represented the idea of fitness. We realized that fitness tends to be described as a challenge that all must take to achieve self-improvement. Furthermore, we also saw that fitness aficionados might resort to languages other than Spanish to communicate.

4.1. *Fitness as a battle/war and an adventure*

The graffiti we studied revealed that working out is often likened to a challenge that may help people become better versions of themselves. This is exactly why the authors of the graffiti resort to metaphors involving ideas such as adventure/journey or war to discuss fitness.

Fitness is described in the graffiti as a battle, as a war in which the only way to win is to be resilient. The war metaphor is reflected in motivational graffiti in which gym-goers describe themselves or their mates as Spartans (Examples 12, 15 & 34), and encourage fellow Spartans to take up their weapons (Example 11) and destroy the walls that may hinder their progress (Example 23). The graffiti also present fitness as an adventure, a journey that would lead to positive findings if the gym-goers do not give up. This is exactly why the word “aventura” (adventure) appears in three pieces of graffiti (Examples 2, 3 & 4) aimed at motivating readers to continue the journey because great things await them in the end.

What makes the authors of these graffiti liken working out to war and adventure is that both include difficulty and uncertainty, something most gym-goers face when they start their workout journey. Therefore, they are encouraged to face those challenges, knowing that this is the only way they can achieve their goals. Hence, pain and difficulties in a gym are often seen as the gateways to success and fulfilment, as seen in Examples 20, 21, 30 and 36. Difficulties are also described as walls that may look intimidating but can be destroyed (Example 23). Finally, the addressees are given tips on facing those difficulties and hurdles. The most important thing for them is to have strong willpower (Example 19) and focus on their goals rather than the difficulties they may face (Example 22).

4.2. Authors’ language choices and possible causal factors

The fitness industry can be considered one of those cultural movements the United States of America (USA) has exported to the world. Therefore, it is not surprising that although Spanish remains the most common language in the graffiti, a considerable number of them, i.e., 17, are written entirely or partly in English. This is far more than the three other foreign languages used (Latin, French and Arabic), each represented by one piece of graffiti.

The use of English in the graffiti include well-established Anglicisms like “Dj” or “Community Manager” (Examples 41 & 42), as well as other expressions which indicate the hegemony of English is in the fitness sector. For instance, though “Crossfit” started as a trademark, it is now a generic term used to refer to fitness programmes that combine of different types of exercise. Apart from Example 36 where “crossfit” is used as a common noun, in other situations, the authors of our graffiti add a Spanish derivational morpheme to the word in order to come up with “crossfiteros” which appears in four examples (29, 31, 39 & 40). The latter is very similar to what the author of Example 24 does with “burpee”, which refers to a specific type of exercise. The word in that example is added inflectional morphemes to be conjugated as any other Spanish verb ending in *-ear*. This is how “burpeo”, “burpeas”, “burpeamos” are achieved.

The dominance of English was further revealed by examples in which the absence of Spanish equivalents could not explain the use of English. In these cases, English is a stylistic choice that could have been motivated by the desire to connect to the fitness

culture and its origins, i.e., the USA. Therefore, we suspect that the hegemony of English in the world at large and the fitness sector in particular, has led to the spread of phrases such as “no pain, no gain” (Example 21), “WOD”-Work Out Day- (Example 34) or “stay fit” (Example 17) beyond English speaking circles. Furthermore, the constant interaction between English and Spanish goes beyond the use of loan words or phrases. For instance, instead of “espartano(s)” which is the right Spanish spelling for the Spanish equivalent of “Spartan”, two graffiti in our sample include the word “spartano(s)” (Examples 12 & 15), which may be the result of English influence. Spanish influence on English also led to phrases like “a full” (Example 10) that we consider to be an attempt to translate the Spanish phrase “a tope” (to the fullest).

All in all, the graffiti under study enabled us to understand that in the context where they were produced (i.e. a gym located in Madrid, Spain), there is constant interaction between the most spoken language in the country, namely Spanish, and other languages, especially English. Therefore, it seems the global hegemony of the English language can be felt in the fitness sector.

5. Discussion

The present study has demonstrated that graffiti can be considered communicative acts since they involve an addresser trying to transmit a message to (an) addressee(s) using different linguistic codes and features.

When it comes to the discursive functions of graffiti, the results presented in this paper go hand in glove with Fairclough’s (2004) thoughts when he described texts as social events. This study of graffiti helped us see that social agents (authors) would use social structures (language, register) to act and interact with addressees. This is in line with Aguilera-Carnerero (2019), Al Khawaldeh et al. (2017) and Farnia (2014), who all pointed out that graffiti often has messages aimed at not only expressing ideas but also creating some reaction in addressees. When it comes to the social agents’ language choice, it seems English in graffiti is not uncommon in non-native English-speaking contexts. Some of the graffiti collected by Aguilera-Carnerero (2019) were written in English, although the graffiti were collected in Granada, Spain, where the most spoken language is Spanish. Ta’ameh (2021) also pointed out that in addition to Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic, some of the graffiti were written in English, although English is definitely a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, where the research was carried out.

This study has also revealed that graffiti can be used to construct and enforce certain discourses in the area of sport. From this perspective, graffiti is a way of representing reality, according to Fairclough’s (2004) definition. In this specific case, the authors of the graffiti decided to resort to conceptual metaphors to represent their views of and attitudes towards fitness, thus using on various occasions words and phrases that likened fitness to a battle to win or a journey to self-discovery. Quintero Ramirez (2019) found a similar tendency to make use of conceptual metaphors such as war while talking about sports.

Conclusion

This research was aimed at analysing graffiti found inside a gym located in Madrid to get an insight into both the discursive and linguistic practices in that specific gym and set the stage for further research on language use in the Spanish fitness sector as a whole.

The 51 graffiti were first described in a bid to identify the messages their authors intended to convey and draw conclusions on ways in which they were used to cause action and interaction amongst members of the gym. This way, we found that most graffiti aimed at either motivating people (n=24) or expressing satisfaction or praise (n=12). In addition, we found that gym-goers tend to construct fitness using metaphors involving adventure and war. The adventure metaphor is used to emphasize the uncertainty that gym-goers might face when they start working out and the positive prospects of exercise. Working out is therefore seen as a journey to self-discovery and personal development, but as they try to achieve their full potential, gym-goers are expected to find hurdles on the way. This is exactly why fitness is also seen as a war, which requires fitness aficionados (who are often described as Spartans), to be strong, take up their weapons, and face pain to make gains.

Finally, we studied the agents' identification through language choice to grasp the gym-goers' linguistic choices. Therefore, the analysis of the graffiti revealed that the influence of English could be felt, as evidenced by the use of Anglicisms to refer to specific exercises. Furthermore, gym-goers would use motivational phrases like "no pain, no gain" instead of Spanish translations. Overall, we found that out of the 51 graffiti, 17 included some English, and even in situations where it could be safe to use Spanish, some authors still decided to use English.

Limitations of study

Although we suspect our study is representative of the Spanish fitness sector as a whole, it would be difficult to generalize our claims without further research. The graffiti were collected at one location and were quite limited in number. Furthermore, we could not interview the authors of those graffiti to find out more about their backgrounds, linguistic practices, etc. Therefore, this study intends to open a new line of research and encourage other researchers interested in discursive practices in the fitness sector in Spain to conduct similar studies, which would help confirm or discard the claims made in this paper.

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