Letterforms as Visual Communication Elements

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DIFFERENT LANGUAGES


similarities, some of the sounds they represent are different.

between Greek, Latin and Cyrillic Alphabets.

– https://commons.wikimedia.org
– www.ideelart.com
– Article by Mike Zender on: Wikipedia
– Cooperation and the evolution of symbolic communication

Peter Gärdenfors - Cognitive Science, Lund University

/ʃ/, /ʃ/ sound is called the “voice-

H

X

B

/r/, /r’/

SOUNDS PRODUCED

NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY/DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION DESIGN

Tatiana Ribeiro

This research will attempt to re-contextualize written symbols as abstract forms, look closely at the development from ancient to modern letterforms. Which will show how deeply ingrained our visual perception of letterforms is. Additionally, different languages. Being one of the most important design elements, typography is an incredibly powerful tool. The findings of this study will provide an impactful insight to any designer who wants to broaden their spectrum of understanding typography.

LETTERFORMS IN ABSTRACT ART:

left to right, top to bottom:


WHAT MAKES A LETTERFORM?

A letterform is a type of glyph (FIG. 3), which is a specific, concrete way of writing an abstract character or grapheme. In typography, a glyph (/ˈɡlɪf/) is an elemental symbol within an agreed set of symbols, intended to represent a readable character for the purposes of writing. Glyphs are considered to be unique marks that collectively add up to the spelling of a word or contribute to a specific meaning of what is written, with that meaning dependent on cultural and social usage. In most languages written in any variety of the Latin alphabet, the dot on a lower-case ‘i’ is not a glyph because it does not convey any distinction, and as i in which the dot has been accidentally omitted is still likely to be recognized correctly. However, in Turkish it is a glyph because that language has two distinct versions of the letter ‘i’, with and without a dot.

In linguistics, a grapheme (FIG. 2) is the smallest unit of a writing system of any given language. An individual grapheme may or may not carry meaning by itself, and may or may not correspond to a single phoneme of the spoken language. Graphemes include alphabetic letters, typographic ligatures, Chinese characters, numerical digits, punctuation marks, and other individual symbols. A grapheme can also be construed as a graphical sign that independently represents a portion of linguistic material. The word grapheme, coined in analogy with phoneme, is derived from Ancient Greek γράφω (gráphō), meaning ‘write’, and the suffix -eme by analogy with phoneme and other names of emic units. The study of graphemes is called graphemics. The concept of a grapheme is abstract and similar to the notion in composing of a character. By comparison, a specific shape that represents any particular grapheme in a specific typeface is called a glyph. For example, the grapheme corresponding to the abstract concept of “the Arabic numeral one” has two distinct glyphs (allographs) in Times New Roman and Helvetica font.

In graphemes, the term alphabet (FIG.3) denotes any glyphs that are considered variants of a letter or other grapheme, like a number or punctuation. An obvious example in English (and many other writing systems) is the distinction between uppercase and lowercase letters. Allographs can vary vastly, without affecting the underlying identity of the grapheme. Even if the word “cat” is rendered as “cAt”, it remains recognizable as the sequence of the three graphemes ‹c›, ‹a›, ‹t›.

Thus, if a group of individual glyphs (shapes that may or may not represent the same letter) are allographs (they do represent the same letter), they all represent a symbolic communication systems

It is now a proven fact that Homo Sapience is the only species with a symbolic language. Some of the major ideas for such evolutionary selection suggest that language brings with it the ability to inform one another about prey, dangers of different sorts, as well as replaces the social grooming found in monkeys and apes as an instrument for building social bonds. It has also been proposed that language is a “mother tongue” that evolved among kin for “honest” communication. While different aspects of language may fulfill different evolutionary needs, the one, perhaps, more important aspect is that language makes it possible to cooperate to achieve future goals. To understand the functions of language as a higher form of cognition, one must rely on analysis of how animals represent “things”, namely, the world around them and what it has to offer. While there is an extensive debate on how to appropriately “define” what representation is, it is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of representations: cued and detached.

SYMBOL

[Key features of representational forms, so-called “small scale models”]

Objects/Events that are neither present in the current situation nor triggered by a recent situation. It is a memory of something that can be evoked independently of context where the memory was evoked

LANGUAGES

Intricate Inner World

Fun Fact

- 80% of words in the English language have roots E.T.A.

LANGUAGE

SOURCE:
- Cooperation and the evolution of symbolic communication
- Article by Mike Zender on: The Core of the Mental Imagery by Stephen M. Kosslyn, William L. Thompson, and George Evans - www.isi.edu
- www.kos.ku.se
- https://commons.wikimedia.org

LETTERFORMS AS VISUAL COMMUNICATION ELEMENTS

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this research is to explore the value and objectivity of written language through investigating human perception of letterforms as abstract visual communication elements. While communicating with another we are not unique to humans, and other species have been observed to be able to produce, perceive and learn different forms of communication, the visual aspect of human languages, represented in an organized system of symbols is uniquely human. Languages, as our primary way of communication, possess an enormous power which is used to create and destroy, unite and divide, facilitate progress and reflect.

This research will attempt to re-contextualize written symbols as abstract forms, look closely at their composition using basic design elements and principles and explore three abstractions outside their direct conventional meaning. During the research, we will look at typographic elements as subject matters in abstract art to challenge our accepted ideas of what is considered meaningful, explore visual aesthetics of letterforms in two and three-dimensional mediums, compare similar letterforms in different languages and touch upon the history of symbolic communication development from ancient to modern letterforms.

The findings of this research will demonstrate how we are able to recognize letterforms even when they are presented as basic abstract shapes within or without their usual content, which will show how deeply ingrained our visual perception of letterforms is. Additionally, we will learn about the role of human visual perception in creating mental letterform representation and get familiarized with letterforms similarities and differences across different languages. Being one of the most important design elements, typography is an incredible powerful tool. The findings of this study will provide an impactful insight to any designer who wants to broaden their spectrum of understanding typography.

METHODS:

This research looks into what makes a letterform and how the symbolic communication system of language is unique to humans, introduces concepts and methods of analyzing our ability to create mental images, compares similar letterforms in different languages and explores aesthetics of typography in 3-Dimensional space and as a subject matter in abstract art.

MENTAL IMAGING: How do we “see” meaning?

According to Stephen M. Kosslyn, William Thompson, and , “A mental image occurs when a representation of the type created during the initial stages of perception is present but the stimulus is not actually being perceived.”

FIG. 1

Visual Perception
Organized, simpler forms
Mentally Reconstructed Representation
“depictive” (FIG.4)
“propositional” (FIG.5)
Units, that correspond to distinct objects & properties

Cued

Something that is present in the current external situation and/or triggered by something in a recent

Detached

Objects/Events that are neither present in the current situation nor triggered by a recent situation. It is a memory of something that can be evoked independently of context where the memory was evoked

= SYMBOL

Language