



Formalist devices in the Typography of Picture Books for Age Groups "A" and "B"

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Introduction

Typography acts as a bridge between the form and content of written expressions. Essentially, it embodies the connection between linguistic elements and their aesthetic presentation. In children's picture books, particularly in their cover designs, graphic designers and typographers find ample opportunity for creativity. Publishers regard covers not only as promotional tools to engage readers but also as artistic creations that establish a link between the reader and the book's internal narrative. Typographers in children's literature enhance words with additional visual meanings alongside their intrinsic linguistic interpretations. Typography aims for defamiliarization and formal foregrounding of written text, which is why it is fundamentally classified as a formalist text. While formalism may be criticized for neglecting content and meaning, it does not dismiss them; instead, as V. Shklovsky points out, "what others refer to as content is regarded as one aspect of form" (Erlich, 1955: 160). This study investigates how visual devices function to expand the conceptual framework of typography in books aimed at age groups A and B.

Research Questions

1. What visual-verbal devices lead to defamiliarization?
2. In what ways do these formal devices produce multiformity?

Methodology

This research is analytical-descriptive in nature, focusing on picture books for age groups "A" (+4) and "B" (+8) that feature Persian or English typographic titles, irrespective of whether they are translations or original works. The study is limited to books published in Iran and the United States between 2002 and 2021, with most samples being in Persian. The choice to include a target population from two different languages aims to highlight the cross-cultural representation of various visual devices in typography. The samples were selected using a non-probability purposive sampling technique, with the criterion being the presence of notable examples of typographic play within the book titles or texts. Out of one hundred and ten picture book titles examined, typography-based books were chosen, resulting in a statistical sample of ninety-seven titles that will be analyzed using a formalist approach.

Discussion and Results

1. Fontography and Typography

Fontography refers to "letter design," whereas typography denotes "design using letters." Essentially, fontography (letter design) serves as the foundation for typography (design with letters). Typesetting with typefaces can be approached in two ways: through monoline typefaces or non-monoline typefaces.

a) Monoline Typefaces: These typefaces exhibit uniform thickness and consistency. In "The Worm on Page Nine," a work by Bigdelo (2007), the designer incorporates letters that resemble worms. The letters—particularly the circular shapes of "م" (meem), "ه" (heh), and "ی" (yeh) in Persian—not only possess the ability to twist and turn like a worm's body but also maintain a consistent thickness akin to that of a worm's body (Image 1).

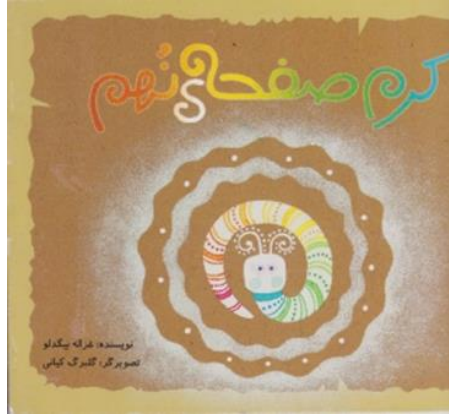


Image 1: The Worm on Page Nine (2007)

b) Non-Monoline Typefaces: This category of letters exhibits considerable variation in thickness. In "One Two Three Chilik," authored by Ghayoumi (2017), all characters are depicted as frogs. The graphic designer employs a non-monoline font in such a manner that the circular shapes of the letters (e.g., "ق" (qaf), "و" (vav), "ف" (feh), "م" (meem) in Persian) appear bold, large, and solid, while the necks of these dark circles and other elements of each letter remain slender. The selection of non-monoline letters in this typography is influenced by the asymmetrical appearance of baby frogs (Image 2).



Image 2: One Two Three Chilik," by Ghayoumi (2017: 7)

2. Letter Size

One of the most straightforward typographic techniques used in children's books is the alteration of letter sizes. Frequently, in the typography of titles containing words such as "giant," "Monster," "Div," "Rostam," and "Strong," both thickness contrast and font size contrast are utilized to create a Gothic effect.

3. Serif

The term "serif" translates to "tail" and refers to a group of Latin typefaces characterized by a horizontal stroke at the ends of their letters (for instance, a serified "T" versus a non-serified "T"). Typefaces without serifs are referred to as sans-serif or Helvetica. Persian letters are fundamentally sans-serif; however, Persian typographers occasionally emulate Latin serified letters in their designs. The title typeface for the book "Cats Ahoy!" by Bently (2015) is constructed from bone and skull elements. The protrusions on either side of the bone in the book's title function as serifs (Image 3).

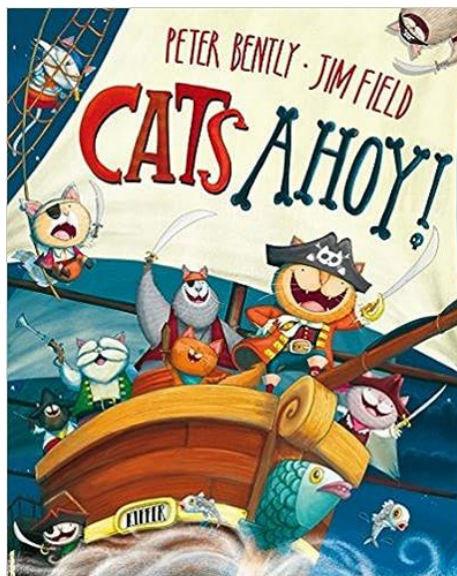


Image 3: Cats Ahoy! (Bently, 2015)

4. Color

One prevalent typographic technique involves changing colors or tonality. Titles for most stories featuring words like "snow," "crow," or "sun" are typically rendered in white, black, and yellow respectively, or set against backgrounds in those colors.

5. Pictographic Collage

In this approach, images are integrated with or intertwined into text. For instance, in "The Magic Glasses" (Schwartz, 2018), the illustration of glasses connects to the dots on the letter "ی" (yeh). The resemblance between these two dots and two eyes supports the merging of both the glasses image and the word "عینک" (glasses).

6. Calligram

A "figurative collage" consists solely of attaching an image piece to a text piece; however, iconography emerges through letters featuring various fonts and forms arranged in a specific manner.

7. Volume

Creating volume and three-dimensional effects manifests in two ways: one as "image volume" and another as "actual three-dimensional volumes" (Afshar Mohajer, 2014: 27-28). In typography specifically, two types can be utilized: visual volume (virtual) and tactile volume (real).

8. Monogram

The word "monogram" originates from Greek and signifies drawing a single letter. In typographic design, it refers to either an individual's initials or those of a company (Chareie, 2019: 77). In Zanzanbar's work titled "Vāv" (1400), Moushbaqer is depicted as being captured by a hunting eagle and dropped onto sharp rocks below. During his fall, he exclaims loudly "Ah." "Moushbaqer screamed as loudly as a multitude of 'آآ...'" (Zanzanbar, 2021: 42). After falling, a mouse is represented

as a wavy line over the letter "ā." The letter "ā," being the first character in "āḥ" (ah), appears in monogram form.

9. Pictography of meaning transfer in calligraphy

On the title page of Habibi's book "The Horn That Had Croup" (2008), handwritten text presents the title. The handwriting displays a tremulous quality that evokes the sound produced by a horn afflicted with croup. This typographic technique is known as meaning line or pictorial line.

10. Moving Type

The aspect of movement within typography is termed moving type. Essentially, moving type represents one branch of typography focused on depicting motion within written works—both singular and composite—(Chareie, 2019: 84). In Honarkar's work "The Moon Said Glub Glub Help" (2014), the arrangement and composition of words illustrate how the moon descends from the sky into a pond.

Conclusion

The role of language is to act as a medium for conveying meaning without attracting the audience's attention. In contrast, children's books aim for language to be a prominent medium that engages readers through typographic play. Consequently, typography fundamentally relies on the device of defamiliarization. This concept, introduced by Shklovsky in formalist theory, pertains to the formal and structural methods that render language visible by estranging it and deviating from established norms. This study suggests that when viewing the visual elements of typographic phrases as a unified entity, the polysemy found in children's books emerges from defamiliarization achieved through graphic techniques. Specifically, aspects such as font type, thickness, size, color, volume, letter serifs, tracking, moving type, monograms, and similar elements contribute to the literary function of the visual representation of typographic phrases.

Keywords: children's story, picture book, typography, formalism

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