Display typography and Lettering: juxtaposed with Panelology

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Abstract:

After observing the various lettering styles and use of Display type done to enhance the look of comic books abroad making them interesting to read, the task was taken up to design the four aspects of comic books viz. Mastheads, Story titles, Onomatopoeic words and credits for English , Gujarati & Marathi, Hindi (devanagari) comic books of Indian origin. Hence the use of lettering and Display type for Indian comics was taken as subject matter of this paper. English language comic books were matter of reference, with the various references of lettering styles, size and colors used. Similar look for the lettering was adopted in designing the titles and mastheads of comics available in different languages.

Keywords

 Comic books, Lettering, Display typography, panelology, Gujarati, Devanagari, Onomatopoeia, Mastheads, Story titles, credits.

Introduction:

Although illustration is an inseparable part of comic books and hence comic books as a piece of art are preserved and referred to as panelology. We come across various use of lettering styles and display type done in English comic books. Display type and lettering as form of art can be observed in four aspects designed very interestingly in comic books.

1. Mastheads: gives a visual identity. The term masthead also applies to the front-page nameplate of a newspaper/ Magazine. The printed matter in a newspaper or periodical that gives the title and details of ownership, advertising rates, and subscription rates. (According to Webster's dictionary).
   The name of a newspaper or periodical, its proprietors, staff, etc, printed in large type at the top of the front page (According to Collin's dictionary).

   Figure: 1

2. Story title: reflects the plot/situation of the story. The distinctive name of a work of art, musical or literary composition or a descriptive name, caption, or heading of a section of a book, speech (According to Collin's dictionary).

3. Onomatopoeic words: reflect the sound and its intensity in the particular situation. We come across various onomatopoeic words while reading English comic books; these words exaggerate the situation more clearly. These words in a way try to convey the same situation and sounds that the writer has thought about to convey it to the reader.
   Onomat means 'name' and poios means 'making' hence the word means 'making names'. But the dictionary meaning for the word onomatopoeia states 'The formation of the words whose sound is imitative of sound of noise or action designated'. The use of such words is for poetic or rhetorical effect (According to Collins dictionary).
   (According to Webster's dictionary) The naming of a thing on action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it.
   (Webster's for children) explains as the use of words whose sounds suggest the action / scene (as for poetic effect).
   Hence in context to comics books onomatopoeia is a device par excellence to convey non-verbal sounds in comics. Onomatopoeia is a base stage of language and speech:

(phonetics). The speech system called phonetics can be divided into three principle elements

I.   Articulatory phonetics: the way we create sound.

II.   Acoustic phonetics: Physical properties of sound.

III.   Auditory phonetics: Our perception of sound.

Animator Nick Park's created set of inter-changeable mouths recreating the lip shapes of human speech for wallace one of his animated character
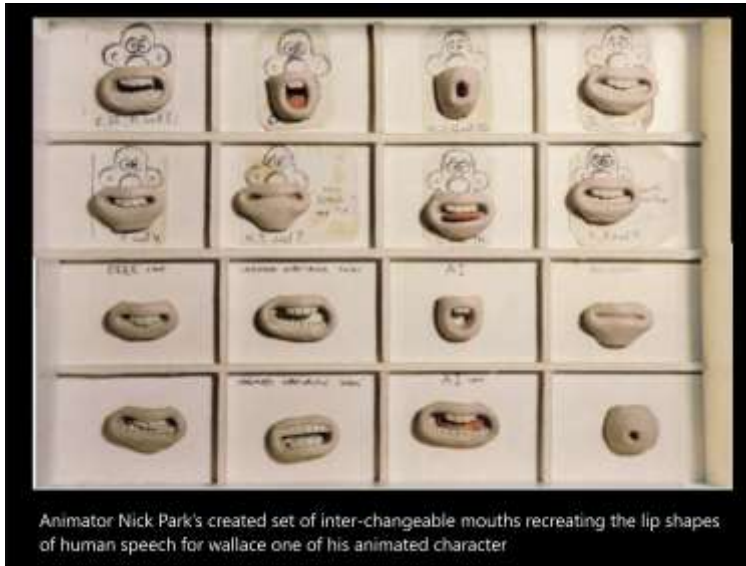
Figure: 2

These phonemes differ from language to language and region to region.

Sneeze: in Bengali - hach-chu, In Hindi, achhee!

4. Credits: reflect the overall plot of the story (In extension to comics ⟶ with cartoon films and cartoon movies credits is given more importance).

A list of those responsible for the production of a film , television programme. (According to Collins dictionary)

Art of Lettering in English comics is given the same importance as the illustration of these comics (By 1940's the career of freelance letter was born and letters such as Gasper, Saladino, Sam Rosen, Ben Oda had fulltime careers as letter's for D.C. Comics and Marvel comics. They designed book titles & Mastheads of comics.)

Alex Nino artwork from *Old Samurai Never Die* published by DC Comics 1972 in *Weird War Tales #13*.

Figure: 3   Ben Oda's lettering.

Figure: 4

The style is Ben Oda's personal creativity that is today used and developed as font for convenient use.

Figure: 5   Figure: 6

Story title of Hercules created   recent day Digital lettering done by Rian by

Gasper Saladino.   Huges.

Alike these English comics none of Indian language comic books have special Letterers for titles, mastheads , onomatopoeic words as one's for English comic books. If at all they are designed they are just the bold letters with bright colors, to a maximum extend with bold outlines.

Target Audience:

A comic book is a preliminary stage for a child to get introduced to vocabulary and literature, and hence they need to be designed attractively to draw child's attention. The picture vocabulary any how draw's child's attention but when it comes to readability point the letters also need to be designed attractively taking the target age group into consideration (age group 3 – 13 taken in to consideration). Hence we observe today that many cartoon/story titles itself attract the children to buy the related stuff.

Figure: 7

It is essential to note that tolerance toward reading and understanding text varies greatly, depending on the age of children and whether they are pre-readers, beginning readers, or readers with middling skills. Most children learn to read by going letter by letter until they are able to make sense of an entire word. Therefore, it is important to design letterforms with well-defined contours and generous space between letters, which gives a warm and inviting feeling.

It is vital to establish a visual hierarchy in expressing interactivity and, at the same time, convey a playful look and feel, designers should be cautious when using extra bold or extra thin letterforms, as well as drop shadows, italics, underlining, caps, and color. Designers Always need to test and ensure that the styling used *supports* the user

rather than detracts them from it—especially when working with preschoolers and beginning readers.

Many applications for children feature color, textured, patterned, or gradient backgrounds. Such backgrounds can easily decrease the legibility of letterforms—particularly when there is not enough contrast between text and its background. For this reason, it is essential to test the usability of an application with kids of different ages within desired target age range and reading levels. If they experience any difficulties or spend considerable time reading and understanding the letterforms, the design should simplified, typographic styling, the background, or both.

This becomes even more critical when children from different linguistic backgrounds, different levels of language skills will use the (Design) product you are working on. Difficult part is to provide similar (looking) design alternatives for different languages. However, if this is not possible or the audience is very heterogeneous within one region, designer needs to avoid using overly stylized typefaces, which can make it more difficult for kids to understand content or interact with letterforms.

Lettering and Display typography:

Lettering is a stage in between of calligraphy and typography. Lettering is classified in three parts

1. Freehand lettering: hand lettering

2. Mechanical lettering: Using calculation and some mechanism

3. Modern lettering : with computer aided software

Hand lettering is found in large variety from writer's scrolls to wall graffiti to comic books, and serves different purpose everywhere. In India hand-painted lettering is used on hoardings, banners and trucks for political messages and also public interest messages for people. Before the days of the mall and the supermarket, the *kirana* shops scattered all over Indian towns used hand-painted signs to proclaim their ownership. Bollywood posters and ads on the walls also used lettering

Figure: 8   Wall graffiti of Tehran

Figure: 9

Lebanon wall graffiti

Figure: 10   Figure: 11

Figure: 12

In India lettering art was very extensively used and found on book cover designs, art and beauty of what is appreciated even today.
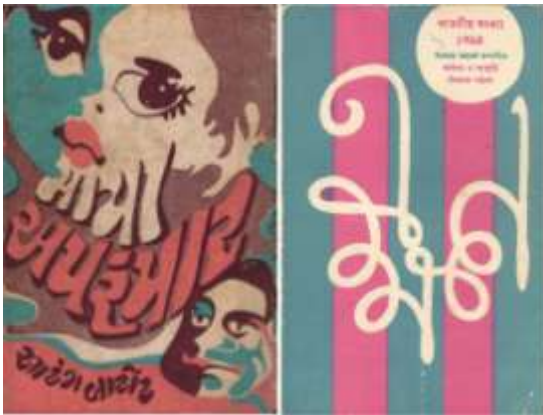

Figure: 13

Ironically this art form was found on covers of the novels and poetry books read by young and adults but not by children. Hand lettering was a boon for this art form but the digital age and improved printing technology has proved to be of great loss for this particular art form.
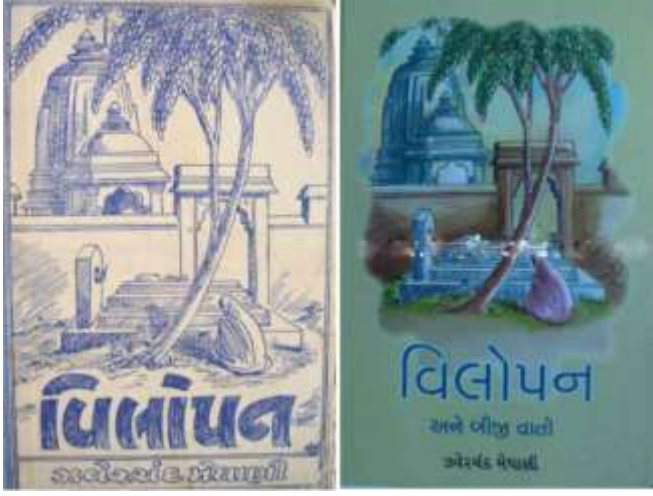
Figure: 14

Combination of hand lettering and digitalization is found today on film posters, theatrical play posters and many other mediums.

Figure: 15

By the time of Industrial revolution there was a growth in many other kind of printing to meet the demand of commerce this new form ephemeral required new type forms whose principal aim was to attract attention. Because of their scale and intend use they are referred to as display typefaces. The Industrial revolution in 1800 bought avalanche in display faces. Display type has been traditionally defined as type over 18 point size.

Since display typeface is used only for words not extending to paragraphs, stylizing is also important with readability. In addition to display typefaces some other typographical treatments used for display typography include:

Drop caps, Pull Quotes, Color, apart from these, 3D treatments, Drop shadow, bold outlines and Different Aligning.

('Bazaar': is clearly Display type it is big and meant to be seen and intention is to acquire attention – Thinking in Type: The Practical Philosophy of Typography by Alex W. White)

Along with display typography, illustrative typography is also part of it and is been extensively used with children's comics and story books

Method

Moreover the task taken up was to design the concept of lettering art and display typography for comic books in Hindi and Marathi (devanagari), Gujarati and English considering the four aspects of mastheads, story titles, onomatopoeic words, and credits (wherever necessary) (In extension to comics, cartoon films and cartoon series were also taken into consideration as there are many comic book stories today available as cartoon series and vice versa hence are interrelated).

Observation of styles and its Adaptation:

Various book titles, Mastheads, story titles of English novels, comic books, and movie titles were observed. Considerable variations were found Age wise, gender wise, and concept wise.

E.g.: Books meant for girls and boys had visual difference in font color and size aspect.

Figure: 16

(The font used were thin or medium but nowhere bold, many a times script font were used, in case of lettering lot of twists n turns with dramatic lines and color combinations were soothing and no too bright where as in the books read by boys the font used were also bold and mostly san serifs which gave a tough look, alignment was also static with no decorative styles no dramatic lines, to a maximum extent bold outline)
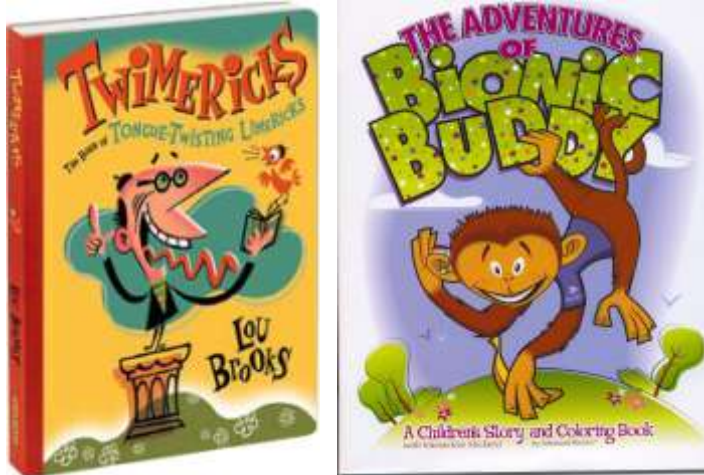

Figure: 17

Figure: 18

(Children (beginners) books were too colorful and most importantly bold letters with simplicity which could be easily read by them)

Similarly all horror book titles had a definite similarity in style and color

Figure: 19

(The horror story books or comics had either green or red color on the titles with drooping fonts or smudging effect).

Mastheads were designed to suit the name of that comic book, and the target age group. Story titles were designed to match the plot of the story. Adaptation of resemblance was also taken care of while working with different languages
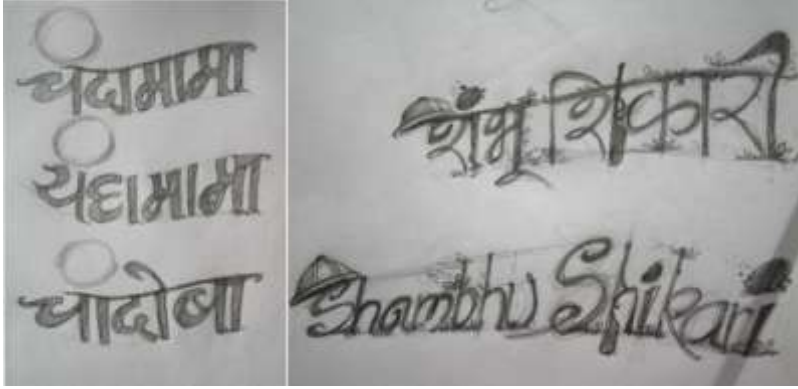
Figure: 20

Figure: 21

The design options to suit the plot and target audience were sketched and later digitalized; Emphasis was given to sensitivity of design by which the mood and situation were replaced for, color options were also explored later.

Figure: 22

Figure: 23

Figure: 24

Figure: 25

Various such stylizations of bold letter forms, thin letters, illustrative letters, and variants in color were explored to arrive to final design that could retain the characteristics for the design in desired area.

For designing the onomatopoeic words first the language aesthetics were studied and later the words. With this concept of maintaining the characteristics sensitively for (sounds) onomatopoeias were designed. Each word was first sketched out and later

when satisfied was given the further treatment of adding flat colors, vignette of two colors, outline, giving shadow and 3D treatment if required.

Figure: 26

The characteristic of horror/frightened was shown by shaky lines and cool color scheme. The characteristic of explosion was shown warm colors, and somewhere inserting them in callouts. Finally the concept of 'credit' was added wherever necessary (especially in cartoon series and movies in animated form).

Result

Gujarati font was outcome of the entire conceptualization which could be used for Display typography.

Figure: 27

Figure: 28

Figure: 29

Mastheads and story titles which were designed considering the current market of comic book could be used there, some onomatopoeic words were also designed for the comic book studying the situation and its requirement in comic book. Credits were designed for cartoon films and movies, currently been telecasted in India.

Conclusion

The paper finally concludes that the preliminary stage of child's exposure towards vocabulary and book can be made interesting and attractive not only by adding good illustration but also attractive typography. The art of book cover design and lettering which was and is in full swing applied to Bollywood posters, theatrical posters can also be used with this area/ context.

It can also be well concluded that how the phonemes from our surrounding context can be good examples of the onomatopoeic words which can be used in comic books and also how the lettering of these onomatopoeic words enhance the beauty of comic books effectively.

The aim of the paper is then to discuss how lettering art and display typography can be used in four contexts of Mastheads, story titles, onomatopoeic words and credits to enhance the beauty of comic books.