Applied Linguistics at KMUTT

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The importance of semiotic choices

http://arts.kmutt.ac.th/crs/crsforum/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=6

The importance of semiotic choices

by **admin** Posted: **04 Jan 2016 15:07**

FROM: Richard Watson Todd (04/18/13 6:01 PM PST)
SUBJECT: Higgs and Comic Sans

The discovery of the decade in experimental physics was the confirmation of the existence of the Higgs boson - a widely anticipated finding involving hundreds of physicists at CERN. The announcement of the discovery was, however, partly overshadowed by the decision of the CERN staff to use Comic Sans font in their media presentation. Much of the ensuing social network discussion of the discovery didn't focus on the discovery itself, but on the use of Comic Sans (see e.g. http://storyful.com/stories/14030).

Font choice is a semiotic decision. Do you think there is any justification for the CERN physicists using Comic Sans? How important are font choices in your communications?

Re: The importance of semiotic choices

by **admin** Posted: **04 Jan 2016 15:13**

FROM: Stuart Towns (04/19/13 10:03 PM PST)
SUBJECT: RE: Higgs and Comic Sans

Yes, the choice of using Comic Sans font for a major scientific presentation can be justified. I can imagine that the author of the CERN presentation (a physicist, not a graphic designer) might think that Comic Sans is 1) easy to read on a screen in a huge auditorium and 2) might lighten up an otherwise heavy and dull presentation.
We have all experienced presentations where the speaker apologizes that the slides are hard to read because of the fonts or colors chosen. But judging by the pictures I have seen of this CERN presentation, this was certainly not the case. Yes, the fonts and colors are a bit jarring, but they are definitely readable, even from the back of the room.

I am sure that the actual academic paper was printed in a journal using Times New Roman or some other sarif font as usual. Comic Sans in that case would have probably been inappropriate because it does not follow convention and would have distracted too much from the content. It also takes up more space on the page so the publisher would probably not approve.

As to the inappropriateness of this post, I will let you all be the judge of that.

Re: The importance of semiotic choices

by **admin** Posted: **04 Jan 2016 15:13**

FROM: Richard Watson Todd (04/21/13 10:47 PM PST)
SUBJECT: RE: Higgs and Comic Sans

One further reason that someone suggested could justify the use of Comic Sans is that it distinguishes more clearly between 1, l and I, and between 0 and O than most fonts. (I tried writing this in Comic Sans like Stuart to show more clearly what I intend to say, but couldn't work out how to do it)

Re: The importance of semiotic choices

by **admin** Posted: **04 Jan 2016 15:15**

FROM: Stuart Towns (04/22/13 12:06 AM PST)
SUBJECT: RE: Higgs and Comic Sans

It took me a few tries to get it right... You have to use HTML tags like this < font face = "comic sans ms" > but without the spaces before and after the brackets < >. And don't forget the < /font > at the end or otherwise everything that comes after will be comic sans.
In any case, you make a very good point about 0 and 1

0 O 1 l I | (Comic Sans)

0 O 1 l I | (Arial)

0 O 1 l I | (Times New Roman)

That's zero, capital letter O, number one, lower letter L, capital letter I, and I threw in the "pipe" key at the end for fun. I'd agree that the Comic Sans characters are the most different from each other.

Re: The importance of semiotic choices

by **admin** Posted: **04 Jan 2016 15:16**

FROM: Dougal Graham (04/22/13 11:03 PM PST) SUBJECT: RE: Higgs and Comic Sans

That's a very good point, it's something I researched a bit when choosing a font for my text editor, and then I forgot all about it. There are a lot of freely available fonts that are very careful about making sure all the characters can be distinguished (so that may not be an excuse for the scientists after all).

For comparison, here's the font I use (and another):

0 O 1 l I | (Source Code Pro)

0 O 1 l I | (Inconsolata)

Re: The importance of semiotic choices

by **admin** Posted: **04 Jan 2016 15:17**

FROM: Stuart Towns (04/24/13 8:45 PM PST)
SUBJECT: RE: Higgs and Comic Sans

That's cool, Dougal. Thanks for sharing these fonts. They definitely make a big difference between these letters!

Just out of curiosity, what font did you use for Thai language on your software? When we were designing the ITS4Thai apps we spent a lot of time trying to find a font that looked good in Thai and English. Not all fonts have Thai support. And we wanted something simple for Thai, but a font that still had all of the necessary information encoded in the letters so that learners can recognize them easily. We eventually settled on Lucinda Grande.

Interestingly, I prefer English fonts that are simple (like Helvetica), but the really simplified Thai are very difficult for me to read because they leave out too much important information like where the small circles are. And there are some ridiculously ornate Thai fonts that have too much information and are also impossible for me to read.

Here's a nice list of Thai fonts http://www.wazu.jp/gallery/Fonts_Thai.html. No Lucinda Grande, though.

Re: The importance of semiotic choices

by **admin** Posted: **04 Jan 2016 15:17**

FROM: Daron Loo (04/27/13 9:02 PM PST)
SUBJECT: RE: Higgs and Comic Sans

Call me anal but Comic Sans irks the living hell out of me.

To help me desubjectify my response in this thread, I did a little snooping around and found several interesting articles regarding Comic Sans.

1. The creator, Vincent Connare, has since offered a public apology for the pain incurred to those adverse to Comic Sans. Apparently, the initial purpose for this typeface was to solve a computer pragmatic interface issue. - The Design Observer Group

2. A recollection experiment was done by having participants remember a list presented to them in Comic Sans, Arial, and Bodoni. It appeared that participants could remember lists which were presented in Comic Sans and Bodoni. - Nerdist

3. In another study to determine the truthfulness of a font, Baskerville appeared the most 'credible'. Comic Sans was one of the contender and it had the most 'disagreement' in terms of confidence level (The head of the CERN staff in charge of the Higgs boson project was asked "why Comic Sans" and she simply replied, 'because I like it'.) - NY Times, Errol Morris

Font choice is crucial for me. Presentation of information is affected by both content and form. Perhaps the reason why CERN physicists chose Comic Sans is to take ownership of their findings by totally disregarding what academic pundits may think of their choice, or perhaps to make it more memorable by opting for the 'most hated?'/controversial font.

p/s - there is a Comic Sans Appreciation Society on Facebook, it seems that this group was created out of sympathy, and I dislike Calibri.

Re: The importance of semiotic choices

by **admin** Posted: **04 Jan 2016 15:17**

FROM: Stuart Towns (04/28/13 11:41 PM PST)
SUBJECT: RE: Higgs and Comic Sans

Hmm... I was wondering about what fonts I have used on KMUTT presentations in the last year, and it looks like most of mine are in Calibri, which just means that the default looks good enough to me that I can't be bothered to change it (apparently).

So Daron, what font do you like? Or to be more specific, what font are you using in your upcoming proposal presentation and why?

Re: The importance of semiotic choices

by **admin** Posted: **04 Jan 2016 15:17**

FROM: Daron Loo (04/29/13 12:05 AM PST)
SUBJECT: RE: Higgs and Comic Sans

I look at Calibri is a font or typeface which didn't quite make the cut. It looks halfway-done, when compared to Geo Sans Light, or even Gill Sans. Nevertheless, I do recognize that not all fonts are supposed to look modern or sophisticated or minimalist.

For my proposal presentation, I would be using something with Serif, perhaps Times New Roman, High Tower Text, or Goudy Old Style. These three are very common in printed text, and I would want the audience to connect with the content by using a form which is not too radical, to avoid them from thinking that what I am doing beyond their comfort zone.

Re: The importance of semiotic choices

by **admin** Posted: **04 Jan 2016 15:17**

FROM: Dougal Graham (05/02/13 11:19 PM PST) SUBJECT: RE: Higgs and Comic Sans

Stuart, I hadn't taken font into consideration for that software yet. So, it will use whatever your default Thai font is. Bu maybe I should think about it for a later version. But for now, features and word translations are more important than font choice.

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