# The New Typographic Narratives in Children's Books in Mexico

Luz del Carmen Vilchis Esquivel

# The New Typographic Narratives in Children's Books in Mexico

Luz del Carmen Vilchis Esquivel, National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico

*Abstract: Mexico has developed an important trend toward the development of alternative visual and textual dedicated to children. Within them stressed by their creativity and importance the narrative through the font worked as image because the letters become part of a wealth of meanings that transcend its sound and visual original, are part of the pages of the books in quality of a metalanguage figure that multiplies its perceptual links. Thus, the letters, in this new narrative, have various functions, from the calligraphically or the reading text continued until the formal that presents the idea merged the configuration of an idea, the symbolic, associated with a meaning arbitrary or the ornamental that uses the characters as part of the context of the page, in a fund of water or in the play relations with the space. In these new options, the complicity between graphic designers and editors is important, both of which allow the possibility of foray into innovative developments that have expanded the options of legibility for children for whom the book becomes a sensitive experience, because it includes feelings and perceptions various. The concepts that are involved in this thought about the children's books are the representation and interpretation underpinned by the possibility of free exercise of the conditions of construction and deconstruction of the structure of the book.*

Keywords: Children, Books, Narrative, Typography

## Introduction

I N MEXICO, THERE is a significant trend towards the development of visual and textual alternatives in children's books. With these new options, complicity between graphic designers and editors is vital, since both allow the possibility of delving into innovative proposals which have expanded the reading choices for children. These books become an integral experience for children, offering diverse sensations and perceptions. Current children's books are characterized as hybrid discourses resulting from the combination of two visual discourses of a different nature; they are also considered alternative since educational and recreational intentions are merged, resulting in the possible alternation of both the message and its results.

## Narrative Sense in Designed Things

The idea of sense in designed books, as a set of perceptible manifestations that form an individual's thought, is the manner in which something is understood: a purpose, direction, or course that is available for interpretation. In book design, this idea comes with the need for communication, which is indispensable for the construction of the socialization phenomenon in which human beings share a common spirit. Humans learn from specific relationships based on shared experiences, which are also associated with a sense of community. Visual

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narratives in designed books and their reading comply with what the philosopher Bauman[1] describes as the personal experience or the need for experiences that reflect feelings of security; feeling safe and protected in the midst of the uncertainty of the contemporary world. Opening a book that is well-designed constitutes a unique experience for a child; it is an entry to a warm space, a comfortable place.

Semiosis, which results from visual narratives integrated by organized relationships of iconic elements in tangible structures syntactically determined by the visual text, discourse, medium, and context in which a visual image is immersed, is what creates different interpretive moments.



Sense is evidence, and as the foundation of all intentional tasks it is determined as a multiple, complex meaning. In order to interpret sense, one must acknowledge the basic cultural units associated with it: visual text and its corresponding narratives which, by being fixed, capture the capacity and power of the vision that reifies and totalizes them in an exercise of command and control, through reading.[2]

By itself, no object or visual sign signifies more than what is in its essence; however, when immersed in intentional communication, it is possible for it to acquire other meanings, producing a surplus of meaning of which independent variables elaborate so-called reading grids; that is, semantic transformations that weave complex networks of meaning integrated with the percipient's visual memory.

This systematization of signs is understood as a language since it integrates form and content in its communicative intent—the material expression of signs and knowledge regarding these signs. Graphic design standardizes the principles of its signs—it systematizes them based on conventions as repertoires susceptible to being integrated and nominated, as codes whose rules interrelate with syntactic constraints and the boundaries of visual grammar.

Based on the previous, we speak of the narrative of visual text manifest in organized groups of signs subject to structural rules, enabling relationships that comply with the essence

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[1] Valdir José Morigi. "Narrativa visual…", p. 162
[2] David Michael Levin. *Modernity and Hegemony*…, p. 212

of all languages: communication, the possibility of expression, and the complex conjunction of visual codes.

The sense of graphic design as a visual narrative is disclosed first in the form of graphic signs (point, line, outline, figure,) then in the articulation of these signs as visual texts and their materialization in a genre of graphic communication, and last, in the discursive alternatives of educational and recreational graphic communication.[3]

## Bases of the Significance of Visual Narratives

The logical order of graphic communication is based on the principles of diagramming and spatiotemporal fragmentation, which correspond to the bases of formal articulation that are a part of visual literacy. Secondly, this type of visual grammar serves as a foundation for morphological, chromatic, typographic, and photographic codes, which are in turn fixed in the different editorial, indicative, narrative, and ornamental genres in their discursive dimensions.

Graphic communication as a language establishes its conditions in the artificial and arbitrary being, in its ability to represent that which is recognized as "real" through graphic signs, and to understand them as such and not in a different manner; what Rudolf Arnheim defines as "visual thought" is an unnatural way of making thought possible.[4]



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[3] Luz del Carmen Vilchis, *Semiosis hermenéutica de los lenguajes gráficos no lineales,* p. 15-18
[4] Rudolf Arnheim, *El pensamiento visual*, p. 15-35

Visual language modifies the terms in which both learning and communication are understood, as the images identify beings, facts, and recollections they awaken awareness of social and cultural entities and reinterpret circumstances and experiences. The written language is transcended by the use of graphic communication, which adds cognitive assimilation to visual perception through which the construction of non-linguistic symbolic sequences determines modes of thought, expression, reaction, and behaviour in general.

The semiosis of visual narratives is established based on the correlation between the substances and the forms of expression: syntactic structures created by the possible interrelations between morphological, iconographic, chromatic, typographic, and photographic codes; between the substances and the forms of content (semantic structures and their cultural contents,) and between the substances and the forms of interpretation: pragmatic structures that emerge from relationship of proximity, perception and interpretation between a semanticized object and an interpretative subject, where "semiosis is the action of the sign, the process of meaning, the process through which any object can be used by a person as a sign of something else. Those who interpret a sign infer what it means, and by doing so they increase its meaning."[5]

Reality is expressed in visual narratives by virtue of the possibility of being perceived; the comprehension of a visual text that is fixed to a material support is the awareness of the existence of that which is acknowledged as reality; it is a representation or re-presentation of modes in which subjects and objects are specific.

The semantic ability of visual signs implies the possibility of establishing identity and credibility in real or fantastic beings, and the existence of these beings is assumed because they integrate a visual text fixed to a material support.

While visual narrative is manifest in an object: the designed concept from which it emerges—as a thing that refers to a being that is thought—the message that sustains it and the object itself represent conditions of objectivity in which visual text materializes. The perceptual moment and its possible interpretation are associated with subjectivity. The communicative relationship is a mediation between subject and object, a relationship between objectivity and subjectivity that determines visual culture.

We are not dealing with a linear sequence here. The semiosis of graphic design in children's books refers to multiple semantic mediations defined between the extremes of external sender–designer, designer–internal sender, internal sender–receiver, receiver–external sender, categorized from one time to another, or from one action to another, in semantic interpolations that are subject to the interpretation of partial graphic communication scenarios, or graphic communication understood as a syntactically, semantically and pragmatically complex whole.

## Children's Books Design Discourses

On the one hand, we have educational discourse, which integrates the possible relationships of the designed image for the purpose of didactic communication focused on informal teaching (that is, unschooled,) which comprises all aspects of learning: family, contexts, interaction with media and new technologies, etc. Here, the percipient's response lies in tangible behavioural modifications. The corpus of this discourse includes, as internal senders, publishing houses (those that stand out in Mexico for their national and international recognition

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[5] Francisco Conesa and Jaime Nubiola, *Filosofía del lenguaje,* Barcelona, Editorial Herder, 1999, p. 68

include Petra Ediciones, Editorial Serpentina, Editorial El Naranjo and NOSTRA Ediciones), and the Secretariat of Public Education, among others, as promoters of innovation in children's books.

The receivers of this discourse are children and youth, ranging between the ages of three months and fifteen years. Thus, the content of the messages includes symbolic information with arbitrary or conventional meanings as well as content information, which is manifested in the presence of reading text with different degrees of complexity and levels of depth. The books are developed based on the rhetoric of education, which includes learning in terms of comprehension of content and the possible responses to it, and on the rhetoric of information, which informs or notifies the readers of something, with no intention to modify their behaviour.
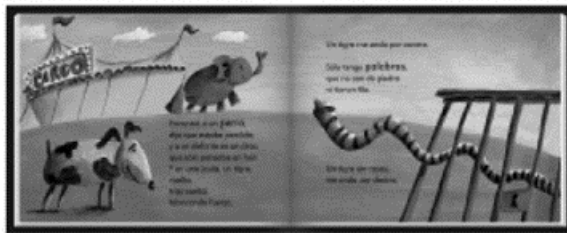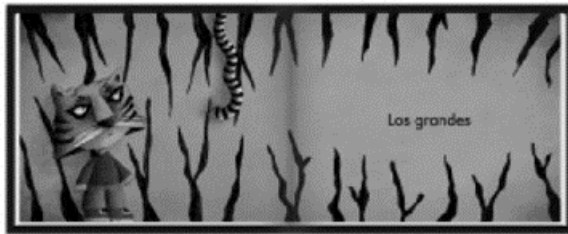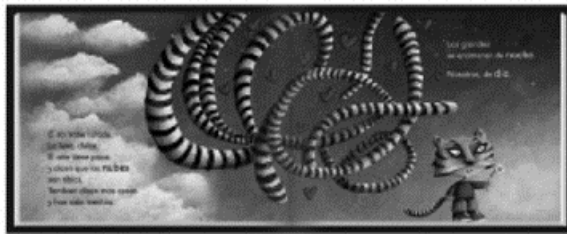
Simultaneously, plastic discourse is manifested in relationships between the designed image and aesthetic and recreational thought; it is inserted in visual arts as part of the so-called graphics. Its corpus includes, as external senders, designers, signs, and the alternatives of editorial composition.

Readers have within eye and arm's reach graphic communication that complies with a poetic function, using references from stylistic influences. Thence, to the previously mentioned rhetorical modes, we add aesthetic rhetoric and recreational rhetoric, which invite the reader to contemplation. We often find examples of children's books initially written for education purposes that are substituted by a poetic function, which gives rise to plastic discourse.

In the next level of understanding this type of children's books, it is important to point out that they exhibit generic examples of linear and non-linear narratives. The former includes expressions of which basis of interpretation are manifested through drawing; if they include text, it is determined by the narration itself. They are close to the receiver, in whose hands they can remain indefinitely, and reading them is favourable in such a way that understanding of their content is reached in a continuous sequence, complying with Vygotsky's views.[6]

The second case deals with graphic manifestations of which basis of interpretation includes randomly organized drawings and text; thus, their reading is not limited by conditions of sequence and continuity, but is considered open and interactive. These are books of which proximity to children and youth equals the boundaries of imagination and their permanence depends on the type of reading matter.

Based on the previous, the elements that form the system of graphic communication in books for children and youth are defined and classified through a combination that goes according to basic rules of editorial design. The articulation of different codes of graphic communication creates a structure in which the modification of one element would involve the modification of other elements, resulting in the alteration of the sense in the communication.

## Analysis of Grammar in Children's Books in Mexico

The following elements can be found in new narrative proposals for children's books:

- The morphological code, which is based on formal figurative elements: drawings, illustrations, vignettes, montages, collages, etc., that integrate the design, and which can be characterized as organic, geometric, regular, or irregular, and identified by degree of iconicity. Young illustrators understand that ideas and emotions must be expressed with clarity and that it is essential to use the resources that are required to emphasize the sense using the precise signifiers and signifieds.[7]
- The chromatic code, which uses color schemes characterized by intensity, dynamic value, legibility due to color contrast with the environment, brightness, reflection, and semantic conditions through which the colors have very specific cultural references of sense.
- The typographic code, which uses texts characterized by variations in size, value (white/black), grain (uniform outline or well-defined white/black interference), form, and orientation of characters. It also includes the selection of signs (thick or well-traced letters) and structural or stylized configurations (formal, casual, pop, manuscript letters, etc.). This type of code is complex because it substitutes one of the expressions of the metalinguistic function of narrative in books for children and youth, since it translates and semanticizes one language (the linguistic text) into another, turning it into something signified, and its analysis involves syntactic overlap.

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[6] Virginia Tompkins. "Mothers' autobiographical memory…", p. 2
[7] Elif Songür. "Examination of facial…", p. 2961

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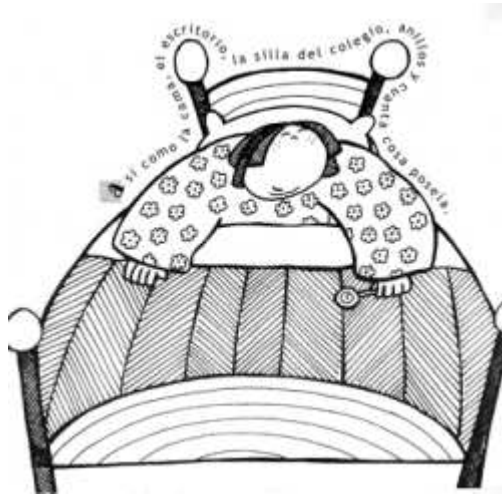
In terms of typography, letters have several functions within this perspective: *calligraphic*—a representation of handwriting, *legible*—continuous text characterized typographically for optimal reading, *formal*—presenting text as the configuration of an idea, as in concrete poetry, *symbolic*—associated with a conventional meaning, as in logotypes, *ornamental*—using characters as morphological elements, as with capital letters. With these, children establish a correlation between text and illustrations.[8]

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 2957

*Visual Texts in Children's Books*

The articulation of this new narrative in children's books is determined by typography, as a basis for the semiotic organization that designers implement to form new units of sense. It is understood, in principle, as the display of the syntactic possibilities which necessarily involve semantic and pragmatic interrelations. "One must not lose sight of the primary role of sensory perception, although it must be regarded as inseparable from memory, organization and concept formation."[9]

Typographic composition determines and proposes the relationship procedures of graphic communication codes. It integrates the spatial determination of design, the conditions of format fragmentation, and is the main support for the organization of formal elements. It also strengthens the dynamic interaction of aspects of the book and the purposes of reading.[10]

The rules that determine the existing relationships between structural elements and which emerge from typographic qualities and conditions dictate what must be included or omitted

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[9] Angelique, Trachana. "Nuevos medios gráficos…", p. 203
[10] Rohaty Majzub. "The practice of Reading books…", p. 754

from a specific configuration, as well as the qualities of harmony, rhythm, balance, movement, depth, tension, contrast, unit, synthesis, order, and their possible variations that must satisfy the formal structures.

## Conclusions

As a result of its configuration, the current typographic narrative in children's books in Mexico displays the meanings of subtlety, integrity, audacity, activity, passivity, attraction, and transition. As Deleuze affirms, the subject is not visible, but rather invisible things.
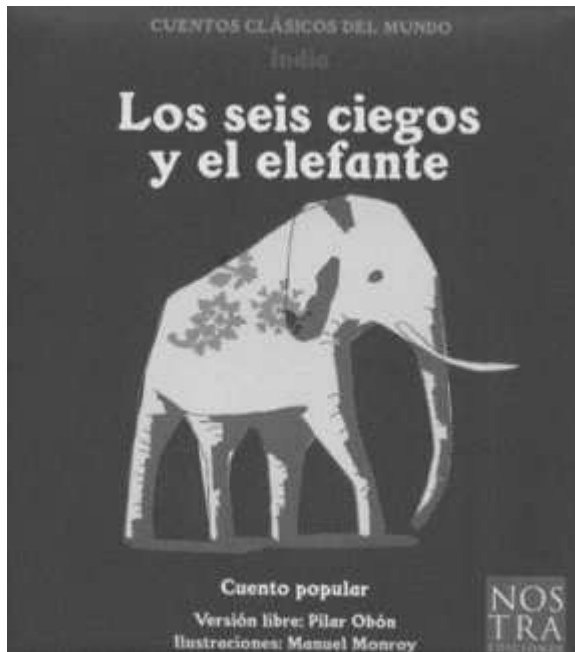


Iconographically, typographic elements in the form of drawings and visual representations expose, within their variants, the relationship between a visual stimulus and that same stimulus within the cerebral field. That is, the relationship between reality and the experience of young readers, in a recreational display of degrees of appeal or similitude, results in a visual arrangement with multiple visualization and reading variables.
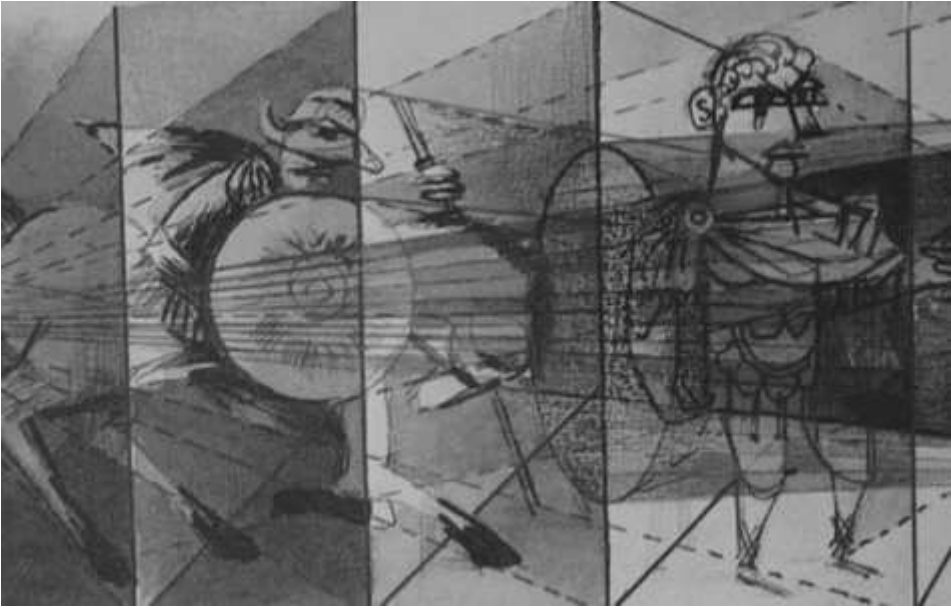
Likewise, the representation values of typography—the objects and representations that are the domain of visual perception—include everything from the highest figurative value to the abstract condition. This describes a peculiar condition of the form with theoretic, historical and cultural implications, through which they transcend as ways of thinking and analyzing the genre of graphic design of children's books that contribute to the shaping of behavior through the practice of reading.[11]

The most important conclusion is that the richness of children's books and variety of shapes, colors and typography, allowed to recover the visual education of new generations. For it has been significant education of graphic designers and visual artists in the specialty of illustration, and the development of concepts for understanding this issues to understand the implications of meaning and above all, consider the receiver, reader and interpreter, the child.

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[11] *Ibid*., p. 753

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## About the Author

*Dr. Luz del Carmen Vilchis Esquivel*

Ms. Luz del Carmen Vilchis Esquivel, PhD. Mexican. First graphic designer accepted in the Mexican National System of Researchers. Her education training: Degrees in Graphic Design and Philosophy, Master in Communication and Graphic Design, PhD in Fine Arts at the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, PhD in Philosophy at the UNAM and PhD Honoris Causa in Education Philosophy by the Ibero-American Council of Education in Uruguay. Professor during 32 years in Postgraduate Program of National School of Visual Arts at UNAM. Pioneer in Mexico using digital resources in arts and design. She has published 12 books about Graphic Design and Visual Arts Theory and Methodology, Non-linear Languages Semiotics, Graphic Design Hermeneutics and Mexican Graphic Design History, 15 contributions in books, 65 papers and 18 didactic manuals. She's official international tutor from postgraduate programs in the lines of philosophic, semiotic and hermeneutic studies in arts and design; has taught 85 courses, has participated in academic events in several countries and presented 135 conferences in 34 countries. Professional graphic designer, working in Mexico, USA, Canada and Greece in firms like BMG Entertainment, Environmental Law Institute or UNESCO in traditional and digital way with several international awards.

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