

Chapter 4.10

Visualization of Communication in Some Mobile Phone Directory and Call Log Icons

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary world, visual communication is fast growing in importance. In the internet, computer, digital media, Artificial Intelligent Programming Languages, etc, communication is dominated by visual resources. Most people, particularly in the third-world countries, face some difficulties in understanding this phenomenon of language. This study applies Eco-semiotic theory on the analysis of some mobile phone directory and call log icons. The study indicates that some of these visual codes do not constitute a new/esoteric language but that they are familiar resources appropriated and spray-painted to have novel semantic values. It therefore proposes that the reading and interpretation of mobile phone visual discourse can best be done through dependence on the general community and individuals' knowledge of natural phenomena and material world from which these codes are generated. The study also indicates that the communication system is limited in its operation only at the primary level of signification and therefore proposes the exploration of both the primary and secondary level of signification so that audience, particularly those who can only read non linguistic signs would be adequately served by the emerging system of communication. On the whole, the study stresses the need for mobile phone technologists to orient their iconic designs towards meeting the needs of the illiterate audience by drawing iconic signs from their eco-semiotic environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of the *World Wide Web* has brought a tremendous and radical revolution in the world's lingual environment. Human communication today is increasingly growing la/iconic as evident in the computer, digital etc, media. Worded language is gradually losing to digitally-processed visual signs. With the fast penetration of computer media of communication into rural areas, where the largest number of people who cannot read icons can be found, there is the need to engender researches in technical media literacy with a view to enhancing the semiosis (production and interpretation) of the emerging phenomenon of language. This study therefore arises from the need to fulfill this obligation.

The most popular of the modern technical media of communication in the third world countries, is the mobile phone. In Nigeria, for instance, the mobile phone has become an invaluable possession not only for communication but also for recording events, browsing the net and even, for scam. Accordingly, computer technologists all over the world now target the handset market, innovating regularly in their creation of new icons so as to be able to cope with the new values as well as the *laconic* nature of the medium. This chapter focuses on the handset medium as a paradigm of the contemporary computer-mediated communication generally and its directory and call log icons as specimens of the emerging pattern in human social interaction. The specific objectives are to (1) identify the icons used in the two signifying realms of the mobile phone, (2) relate these icons to the Nigerian eco-social environment, (3) classify the icons as typical or atypical, and (4) identify the limitations of the signifying practices and suggest ways of orienting iconic communication in the mobile phones used in Nigeria to the country's eco-social environment.

BACKGROUND

The first idea of telephone was by the French inventor Charles Bourseul, who "suggested in 1854 that vibrations caused by speaking into a flexible disc or diaphragm might be used to connect and disconnect an electric circuit, thereby producing similar vibrations in a diaphragm at another location, where the original sound would be reproduced". However, it was the American inventor, Alexander Graham Bell who produced, in 1875, the first telephone capable of transmitting and receiving human speech with its quality and timbre (Encarta, 2006). Since Bell's invention, there have been several advances on the communication instrument. These advances vary in terms of sophistication, size, basic components, functionality (coverage), and utilitarian value.

The most ubiquitous of these advances is the cellular mobile telephone system, first tested in Japan in 1978. Since then, the invention has grown in importance in every part of the world. In Nigeria, for instance, people do many complex things with the instrument such as for communication, for recording events, for browsing the net and even, for scam. Discourse scholars in the country have researched into the language behavior of people in this important domain. For instance, Chilwa (2007) carried out a study on the language style of SMS (short message service) text-messaging in the Nigerian Christian context. With the application of social discourse analytical theory on fifty-three text messages produced by some Christians in Lagos and Ota areas of Southwestern Nigeria, the study indicated that the language served in representing Christian values and sentiments for they are characterized by "faith-based pronouncement, prayer and well wishing, admonition and assurance, appreciation, praise and worship and season greeting"(p.5).

Similarly, Taiwo (2007) examines the implications of computer-mediated communication for the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria. The study explores the linguistic usage in one

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