

Conventions

By Dawn Grow

Conventions are a form of cultural constraint, associated with how people behave. They provide constraints on behavior, prohibiting or discouraging actions. This is paraphrased from Don Norman on page 131 in his book, *The Design of Everyday Things*.

In relation to traffic patterns, these can be associated with things like what side of the road to drive on or who has precedence at an intersection. Road signs can come in many different shapes, colors and symbols. For the following US signs there are others in other countries that mean the same thing but look different. I chose to spotlight a few in Scotland. Not only are their road signs different but so is the side of the road they drive on and who gets preference at an intersection, even a simple wave or flashing of the car lights can take on a whole new meaning.



A stop sign can be a simple thing to us but to someone from another country it is strange. If it weren't for the word "Stop" on the sign, they might not know what it stands for.



Wildlife crossing is different in each country because not all countries have the same wildlife. Just as Australians wouldn't expect to see a kangaroo crossing here, we don't expect to see an elk crossing there. But clearly there is a frog crossing in Scotland. I found this squirrel crossing but wouldn't have thought it was for squirrels without the words on the bottom to validate it.





I also found ones for people crossing the road. I have never seen one for elderly people before here in the US. Note how the crossings for the US were shaped in a yellow diamond while they were red triangles for Scotland. These are conventions that we as a people have set up to help us automatically recognize the shape and color as a certain type of sign.



There are other good examples and comparisons. The speed signs in the US are white rectangles with the speed limit while they use a red circle with the number in it. I am assuming that the numbers on the truck are the weight limit for that area.



Typical for us is the convention or understanding that the red triangles are for yield signs. I found that they use it for that too, under another name. However, they use that design for other signs as well with the triangle inverted.





Is there a curve ahead or is this just for motorcycles?



Here are a few more signs that I found for Scotland. The LED lights one is fairly understandable as a speed limit with cameras, and a 30 Km speed limit to slow down but the one in the middle is unfamiliar to me. Does it mean it wants the driver to slow down for a church or possibly a school?

The circle with the two arrows would imply two way traffic to me but what is the significance of the black arrow being larger than the red and why two different colors for the arrows?



To name a few different traffic conventions: which side of the road to drive on, kilometers versus miles, the language, sign color, sign shape and what the lights mean when you flash them at another driver or wave at them. There are different conventions exercised in each country and traffic signs are just one of them.