

The research problem was to visually represent the common idiom, “it takes two to tango.” Of course, the visual solution had to be moderately creative—One could not simply draw two people doing the tango and call it an effective solution. The very nature and connotations of idiom had to be researched, considered, and represented in the final product.

Because the communication objective was to visually represent the idiom, “it takes two to tango,” it was paramount to thoroughly understand its connotations and meaning. Tango is a sensual dance requiring two partners with a leader and a follower (“What is Tango?”). Typically, it is done between a man and woman. Tango requires full participation from both dancers to be successful—Otherwise, it is not tango. Within the context of the idiom’s usage, the sentiment can be distilled into this: This activity requires the full participation and engagement of two contrasting but attracted parties—Usually, the idiom is used when said activity is destructive or negative.

While the negative and sensual aspects were removed, the final design solution played up the contrast and partnership evoked by the idiom through two co-dependent robots—The leader and fighter, “Loco-Robo,” accompanied charger and follower, “Gen.” Together, they form a functioning unit. The clean and shiny rendering style was chosen to compliment the look of the robots and keep the message clear. The contrast and function of the two robots was communicated through shape language and symbols. With a sturdy pose, Loco-Robo is bulky and modeled after a train to evoke power. Battery displays were placed on his forearms to make his need for energy very clear. Gen, modeled after generators and batteries, is far more frantic and skinnier. Cracks were placed on his plus-minus glasses to emphasize his fragility. By having Gen charge one of Loco-Robo’s arms, their dependence on one another is obvious.

While the final product was rendered digitally, much of the visual development took place through traditional sketching, with research being conducted through the usual suspects like Pinterest. The chosen rendering style was inspired by soft, colorful vehicle illustrations found in older advertisements and the illustrations found on the box art of many older video games. Trains, generators, and batteries were all the subject of visual research for the character design. Emphasizing the contrast between the two robots was paramount early on, but their positioning and pose also had to be considered. Having the strong robot standing firm with the skinny robot riding piggy-back was ultimately settled upon for the visual interest and to establish their relationship. Tracing paper was utilized throughout the sketching process to great effect. In many steps, placing tracing paper over preferred concepts facilitated a cleaner refinement process. When the concepts were satisfactory, both robots were rendered on separate sheets of tracing paper. This allowed intuitive visualization of how the robots will interact with each other by overlapping the tracing paper. The final sketches were scanned and rendered in Photoshop with a simple but precise visual style. To ensure precision, most of the shapes were blocked off using vectors—The metallic textures and values were painted over the vector shapes by hand. Adjustment layers, multiply layers, vectors, and masks all played a role in getting the details right. To name a few techniques: The red accents on Loco-Robo are vector shapes with the “multiply” blending mode. Curves adjustment layers were frequently used to either push the values of a section or dial them back. To organize an already complicated piece, Gen was implemented as Smart Object to separate his layers from Loco-Robo. Determining which techniques to utilize took a great deal of trial and error, but the end result was effective.

Works Cited

“What Is Tango?” *Tangolingua*, 2015, www.tangolingua.com/what-is-tango.