

ELECTRONIC ADAPTER FOR ELECTRO-ACTIVE SPECTACLE LENSES

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CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[001] This application claims the benefit of Provisional Application U.S. Serial No. 60/815,870, filed on June 23, 2006 (and entitled Electronic Adapter For Electro-Active Spectacle Lenses That Enables Near Universal Frame Compatibility) which is incorporated in its entirety herein by reference

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**Field of the Invention**

[002] The present invention generally relates to an adapter for a spectacle frame housing electro-active lenses. Specifically, this invention relates to an adapter configured for enabling a spectacle frame to operate and control electro-active lenses housed therein without the need to either uniquely design and manufacture the spectacle frame or to perform undue modifications of an existing spectacle frame. In particular, the spectacle frame may allow electro-active lenses housed therein to focus and be controlled both automatically and manually with heretofore unrealized results.

Description of the Related Art

[003] With the invention of electro-active spectacle lenses that provide dynamic changes in focus there is a desire to engineer these lenses such that they can be compatible with most, if not all, pre-existing spectacle frame designs. To accomplish such a task, all of the components required to operate the electro-active functionality must be incorporated either internally or externally to the body of the lens so that the lens can be mounted into any unmodified spectacle frame and still be both aesthetically acceptable and fully functional.

[004] Historically, the optical industry has been structured in such a way that the patient selects his or her eyewear based largely on aesthetics that relate to frame comfort and appearance. Generally the frames are the first item selected in picking out prescription eyewear. Lenses, including tints, coatings, and optical design are usually picked second. Given the significant number of available frame styles, sizes, and colors, the manner in which the industry has historically functioned, and the desire of the consumer or patient to have a vast selection of frames to choose from, there is a desire to provide a means and system for near universal compatibility between the new electro-active lenses and existing frame designs.

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[005] Accordingly, there is now provided with this invention an improved spectacle frame adapted for housing electro-active lenses that effectively overcomes the aforementioned difficulties and longstanding problems inherent in the art. These problems have been solved in a simple, convenient, and highly effective way by which to control electro-active lenses.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[006] According to one aspect of the invention, an adapter for an electro-active lens is disclosed, wherein the electro-active lens is housed in a spectacle frame and the electro-active lens has a first set of electrical contacts. The adapter is a separate element from the electro-active lens and has a second set of electrical contacts for providing an electrical signal to the electro-active lens through the first set of electrical contacts.

[007] As will be appreciated by those persons skilled in the art, a major advantage provided by the present invention is enabling a spectacle frame to operate and control electro-active lenses housed therein without the need to either uniquely design and manufacture the spectacle frame or to perform undue modifications of an existing spectacle frame. The spectacle frame may allow electro-active lenses housed therein to focus and be controlled both automatically and manually with heretofore unrealized results. Additional objects of the present invention will become apparent from the following description.

[008] The method and apparatus of the present invention will be better understood by reference to the following detailed discussion of specific embodiments and the attached figures which illustrate and exemplify such embodiments.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[009] A specific embodiment of the present invention will be described with reference to the following drawings, wherein:

[0010] Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of an example of an electro-active lens and its drive components.

[0011] Figure 2A is a front view of a spectacle frame housing the adapter of the present invention.

[0012] Figure 2B is a top view of a spectacle frame housing the adapter of the present invention.

[0013] Figure 3A is a top view of the left temporal side of an embodiment of the electro-active spectacle lens of the present invention.

[0014] Figure 3B is a top view of the top left temporal side of an embodiment of the adapter of the present invention.

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[0015] Figure 3C is a top view of the top left temporal side of another embodiment of the adapter of the present invention.

[0016] Figure 3D is a top view of the top left temporal side of another embodiment of the adapter of the present invention.

[0017] Figure 3E is a top view of the top left temporal side of another embodiment of the adapter of the present invention.

[0018] Figure 3F is a top view of the top left temporal side of another embodiment of the adapter of the present invention.

[0019] Figure 3G is a top view of the top left temporal side of another embodiment of the adapter of the present invention.

[0020] Figure 3H is a top view of the top left temporal side of another embodiment of the adapter of the present invention.

[0021] Figure 3I is a top view of the left temporal side of another embodiment of the electro-active spectacle lens of the present invention.

[0022] Figure 3J is a top view of the top left temporal side of another embodiment of the adapter of the present invention.

[0023] Figure 4 is a front view of an embodiment of the right side of the electro-active spectacle lens and adapter of the present invention.

[0024] Figure 5 is a front view of another embodiment of the right side of the electro-active spectacle lens and adapter of the present invention.

[0025] Figure 6 is a front view of another embodiment of the right side of the electro-active spectacle lens and adapter of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0026] The following preferred embodiment as exemplified by the drawings is illustrative of the invention and is not intended to limit the invention as encompassed by the claims of this application.

[0027] As shown in FIG. 1, as in all embodiments of the present invention, the electro-active spectacle lenses 100 contain an electro-active lens element 101 and drive electronics, including one or more focus sensors 102, all of which are embedded within the body of a lens 103 that act to correct refractive errors of the eye not associated with presbyopia. The drive electronics are contained within a driver. The driver may also include all necessary control components for providing the appropriate electrical signal for providing the proper optical power in the electro-active lens. The body of the lens may be either a finished blank (two optical quality surfaces) or a semi-finished blank (one optical quality surface). The focus sensors, drive electronics, and

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electro-active lens element may be typically attached to the anterior and/or posterior surface of a flexible but transparent star shaped substrate 104 where electrical connection is made via thin film transparent electrical leads 105 (such as, by way of example only, indium tin oxide, ITO). These thin film transparent electrical leads include connections 106 for an electrical power source. These thin film transparent electrical leads may also include connections for digital or analog signal transfer. In certain other embodiments, the power source and signal connections may be of a different design where they are connected to the flexible substrate but contain non thin-film conductors, such as, by way of example only, fine gauge metal wire. This alternative design is such that the connection does not significantly interfere with the user's vision or the aesthetics of the lens. These power source and signal connections as well as the focus sensors and drive electronics are placed near the edge of the lens, near where the frame eye-wire and temple connect, such that when the lens is fitted within the frame, the power source, drive electronics, and focus sensors do not interfere with the vision of the user. Alternatively, the drive components may be placed distal from the electro-active lenses either in the spectacle frame, the temples, or in the adapter of the present invention.

[0028] In an embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. 2, the electro-active lens 201 with electro-active region 203 is edged (cut to the shape of the spectacle frame) using techniques well known in the art. The process of edging the lens acts to either partially or fully expose the electrical leads that connect to the power source. This edged lens is then combined with an electrical adapter 202 that, as shown in FIG 3B, may contain one or more electrical power sources 305, one or more electrical switches to provide manual control of the lenses to the user 306, and one or more sensors 307 that acts to detect the presence of the user (determine if spectacles are being worn). As an alternative design, the sensor 307 may also include the drive electronics 102 for the electro-active lens. The sensor 307 may also sense if the frame is opened. This adapter has electrical contacts 308 that correspond to the power source and signal electrical contacts in the lens 106 such that when the adapter is placed between the spectacle lens and the eye wire of the spectacle frame, the pressure associated with securing the lens within the frame acts to make positive electrical contact between the lens and the adapter as well as physically secure the adapter to the spectacles. Components within the adapter are connected electrically by means of internal wiring 309. Power sources included within the adapter may be, by way of example only, disposable zinc-air batteries or rechargeable Li-ion or Li-polymer batteries. Manual switches included within the adapter may be, by way of example only, pressure switches, capacitive touch switches or optical proximity switches. Sensors to determine if the spectacles are being worn may be, by way of example only, optical proximity switches or accelerometers which, if activated, instruct the drive electronics to operate the focus sensors

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within the body of the lens. In this embodiment each of the lenses would be identical and would each require an individual adapter. The driver may provide an electrical signal for generating the appropriate amount of optical power in each of the electro-active lenses. The driver may also include a focusing sensor for determining the appropriate signal for the electro-active lenses.

[0029] As also shown in FIGS. 3A-3J, the use of such an adapter 202 may require, in certain embodiments, other machining steps in addition to edging where, by way of example only, one or more of a slot, groove, or notch 301 is machined into the body of the lens 201 such that robust physical and electrical connection is made between the frame, lens, and adapter. As the adapter would be placed near to where the frame eye-wire and temple connect, such a machining step may allow the adapter to be located on the posterior surface of the lens 302 and be mostly hidden from view by the temple hinge. Such a placement would be advantageous for preserving the aesthetic quality of the spectacles. It is preferable that the edge profile of the adapter 303 match that of the lens 304 such that a secure fit is guaranteed between the frame, lens, and adapter.

[0030] Embodiments of the adapter of the present invention may contain any of a combination of components. For example, as shown in FIG. 3B, the adapter may have an on/off switch, a power source, and a sensor for sensing the presence of the user. Alternatively, as shown in FIG. 3C, the adapter may only have a power source. Alternatively, as shown in FIG. 3D, the adapter may only have an on/off switch. Alternatively, as shown in FIG. 3E, the adapter may only have a sensor for sensing the presence of the user. As shown in FIG. 3F, the adapter may have an on/off switch, and a sensor for sensing the presence of the user. As shown in FIG. 3G, the adapter may have an on/off switch, and a power source. As shown in FIG. 3H, the adapter may have a power source and a sensor for sensing the presence of the user.

[0031] As further illustrated in FIGS. 3I and 3J, the electrical connection made between the frame, lens, and adapter may include a physical connection in which mating elements between the lens and the adapter are screwed to one another. As shown, the adapter may include screw threads 311 which secure into mating threads 310 in the lens. Of course, as is well known in the art, such physical connections can further include a wide variety of equivalents, for example, a bayonet-type connection, a detent, snap-like connection and etc. As is also well known in the art, the electrical connection may be made with a wide variety of electrical mating elements, for example, male/female connectors, plugs, sockets, pins, and the like.

[0032] The adapter may be positioned so that it simultaneously contacts the lens and the frame or, alternatively, it may be positioned so that it only contacts the lens and does not contact the frame. The adapter may be positioned so that it is located under and above the surface of the

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lens when it is in contact therewith. The adapter may be further positioned so that it is located near a periphery of the surface of the lens when it is in contact therewith.

[0033] One issue with the above embodiments is that each lens operates independently from the other. Therefore, the possibility exists that under certain operational conditions one lens may be triggered to operate while the other is not. To eliminate this problem a means for synchronizing the operation of the two lenses must be devised such that when one of the two lenses is activated, the other will be activated by default. In another embodiment of the invention the electrical adapters of the two lenses are connected by means of discrete signal conduit such as, by way of example only, one or more of a small gauge metal wire or optical fiber. Such signal conduits could be hidden in the gap between the frame eye wire and the lens as well as behind the bridge that joins the two lenses.

[0034] In another embodiment the two lenses are synchronized by means of a wireless optical connection designed to transmit data across the bridge as shown in FIG. 4. In this embodiment an infrared optical transceiver unit 401 is tethered to each adapter 202 by means of a flex circuit 402, which may be hidden between the superior eye-wire of the frame and the edged electro-active spectacle lens 201. The transceiver unit is preferred to be located at the location of where the superior vertical distance of each eye-wire allows for the best, unhindered optical communication between the IR transceivers. As with the adapter, an additional machining step may be required where, by way of example only, one or more of a slot, groove, or notch 403 is machined into the body of the lens such that a robust physical connection is made between the transceiver unit and the spectacles. Furthermore, such machining steps would allow the transceiver unit to be mounted to either the anterior or posterior surface of the lens.

[0035] In another embodiment the two lenses are synchronized by means of a wireless, radio frequency (RF) communication system as shown in FIG. 5. In this embodiment the electrical adapter 202 contains circuitry for an RF transceiver that is tethered to a flex circuit antenna 501 (for example only). This flex circuit antenna may be hidden between the frame eye wire and the edged spectacle lens 201.

[0036] In another embodiment the two lenses are synchronized by means of inductive coupling as shown in FIG. 6. In this embodiment the electrical adapter 202 contains circuitry for a pulsed current source that is tethered to multiple-turn coils of an electrical conductor made using flex circuit 601 (for example only). These flex circuit coils may be hidden between the frame eye wire and the edged spectacle lens. In this approach, current pulses in the coils of lens 1 generates a magnetic field which, by way of Faraday's law of induction, generates a current in the coils of lens 2, which is then be detected by the circuitry of the electrical adapter of lens 2. In this manner communication between the two lenses is enabled.

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[0037] In another embodiment, the two lenses may be synchronized by means of ultrasonic signals transmitted over free space. In this embodiment the electrical adapter contains circuitry for an ultrasonic transceiver. Such an approach is advantageous in that no additional components are required to be tethered to the electrical adapter.

[0038] In yet another embodiment, the two lenses may be synchronized by means of vibrations transmitted through the spectacle frame. In this embodiment the electrical adapter contains a vibration transducer and detector that makes physical contact to the frame when the lenses, adapters, and frames are assembled. Transducers and detectors of vibrations may be made from, by way of example only, piezoelectric materials. Such an approach is advantageous in that no additional components are required to be tethered to the electrical adapter.

[0039] In order to simplify any of the above embodiments, only one lens could be outfitted with one or more focus sensors and a synchronization transmitter while the other lens would not include any focus sensors and only a synchronization receiver. In such an embodiment the lens with the focus sensor(s) would operate as the "master" while the other lens would operate as the "slave" and only operate when directed by the master. Such a one-way communication system would reduce power consumption (by eliminating synchronization transmitters and a focus sensors) and simplify synchronization, but at the expense of eliminating redundancy in the focus sensors.

[0040] Although the particular embodiments shown and described above will prove to be useful in many applications in the spectacle art and the electro-active lens art to which the present invention pertains, further modifications of the present invention will occur to persons skilled in the art. All such modifications are deemed to be within the scope and spirit of the present invention as defined by the appended claims.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An adapter for an electro-active lens, wherein the electro-active lens is housed in a spectacle frame and the electro-active lens has a first set of electrical contacts, wherein said adapter is a separate element from the electro-active lens, and wherein said adapter has a second set of electrical contacts for providing an electrical signal to the electro-active lens through said first set of electrical contacts.
2. The adapter of Claim 1, further comprising a power source operatively connected to said second set of contacts.
3. The adapter of Claim 2, further comprising a manually operable on/off switch connected to said power source.
4. The adapter of Claim 1, further comprising a sensor operatively connected to said second set of electrical contacts, wherein said sensor is for detecting if the electro-active lens is to be provided with the signal.
5. The adapter of Claim 1, further comprising a driver operatively connected to said second set of electrical contacts, wherein said signal is for generating a predetermined optical add power to the electro-active lens.
6. The adapter of Claim 1, wherein said first set of electrical contacts and said second set of electrical contacts further comprise electrical mating elements.
7. The adapter of Claim 4, wherein said sensor senses the presence of the user.
8. The adapter of Claim 7, wherein said sensor senses if the frame is opened.
9. The adapter of Claim 5, wherein said driver provides said signal for generating the appropriate amount of optical power in the electro-active lens.
10. The adapter of Claim 5, wherein said driver further comprises a focusing sensor for determining the appropriate signal for the electro-active lenses.
11. The adapter of Claim 1, further comprising a synchronizing means operatively connected to the adapter for controlling one lens based upon the control of another lens.
12. The adapter of Claim 11, wherein said synchronizing means comprises infrared optical transmission signals.
13. The adapter of Claim 11, wherein said synchronizing means comprises RF transmission signals.
14. The adapter of Claim 11, wherein said synchronizing means comprises an inductive coupling.
15. The adapter of Claim 11, wherein said synchronizing means comprises a flexible circuit extending through the spectacle frame.

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16. The adapter of Claim 11, wherein said synchronizing means comprises ultrasonic transmission signals.
17. The adapter of Claim 11, wherein said synchronizing means comprises vibration transmission signals.
18. The adapter of Claim 17, wherein said synchronizing means comprises piezoelectric materials.
19. The adapter of Claim 1, wherein the adapter is for simultaneously contacting the lens and the frame.
20. The adapter of Claim 1, wherein the adapter is for contacting the lens without contacting the frame.
21. The adapter of Claim 1, wherein the adapter is located under and above the surface of the lens when in contact therewith.
22. The adapter of Claim 1, wherein the lens has a surface and adapter is located near the periphery of said surface when in contact with the lens.