

Міністерство освіти і науки України
Київський національний лінгвістичний університет
Кафедра англійської філології і філософії мови

Курсова робота

на тему: Мовна гра в текстах англомовних мемів: перекладацький аспект

Студентки групи МЛа 05-19
факультету германської філології і перекладу
денної форми здобуття освіти
спеціальності 035 Філологія
Сироватської Софії Євгенівни

Науковий керівник:
доктор філологічних наук,
професор Наталя Павлівна Ізотова

Національна шкала _____
Кількість балів _____
Оцінка ЄКТС _____

Київ 2023

Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine
Kyiv National Linguistic University
Department of English Philology and Philosophy of Language

Term Paper
Word play in the texts of English memes: from the perspective of translation

Syrovatska Sophie
Group __MLa 05-19__
Germanic Philology and Translation Faculty

Research Adviser
Prof.
PhD (Linguistics)
Natalya Izotova

Kyiv 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER ONE. Theoretical aspect	5
1.1. The origin of meme.....	5
1.2. Meme as part of Internet culture.....	6
1.3. Typology of Internet memes	7
1.4. Wordplay	8
Conclusions to Chapter One	9
CHAPTER TWO. The translation aspect	11
2.1. Using translation techniques for memes	11
2.2. Translating English memes.....	13
Conclusions to Chapter Two	18
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS	19
RÉSUMÉ	20
LIST OF REFERENCE MATERIALS	21

Introduction

The relevance of the research. In the age of the Internet, with the rising popularity of social media, memes have become an integral part of modern culture. Memes are highly topical, they are shared and spread virally on a daily basis, and they possess high potential for linguistic variations, different stylistic techniques, deliberate distortion of spelling etc. One of them is play on words. One common feature of memes is puns, which involve a clever and creative usage of the language.

Object of the research is word play in the texts of English memes.

Subject of the research is the meme as a unit of Internet discourse. The paper closely examines the meme as a unit of Internet discourse, its structure, functions and the comic effect inherent in this type of text.

The aim of the research is to study the usage of world play in the texts of memes from the perspective of a translator.

The **goal** consists of several objectives:

- 1) to define the popular phenomenon of puns and word play in memes in the scope of the modern culture and politics;
- 2) to take into consideration the function of memes and their features;
- 3) to analyze the phenomenon of play on words as part of Internet meme as a type of comic text;
- 4) to analyze the phenomenon of play on words from a linguistic perspective and how translation is taken into account.

Methodology of the research includes an analysis of the provided memes, collected from the Internet, semantic analysis and comparative analysis of memes in two primary languages: English and Ukrainian.

Practical significance. Internet memes are intricately rooted in cultural references that are familiar to particular groups or communities. Studying memes, and wordplay as part of those memes can provide insights into the ways in which language and culture intersect. By observing how language is used, changed and transformed in memes, it is possible to gain useful insight into how humor and satire work in the digital age, and how people use language to express their views on current events and social issues. This knowledge can be used to develop better strategies for engaging and communicating with diverse audiences, including those who may have different cultural backgrounds or perspectives.

The novelty of the paper. As a newly emerged phenomenon, memes have evolved into a complex and culturally significant entity in the digital web, composed of both verbal and verbal-visual elements that have an exceptional ability to spread online over short periods of time. This phenomenon has captured the attention of numerous renowned scholars, who are interested in studying the sociological and linguistic aspects of memes, despite still remaining one of the least studied aspect of Internet communication. Memes and puns are fascinating objects of communication studies because they provide unique insight into the rapidly evolving Internet spaces and communities, many of which often contain their own inside jokes and cultural references that are only understood by specific groups of people, such as fans of a particular TV shows or followers of a particular internet celebrity.

Chapter One. Theoretical aspect

The origin of meme

In today's world, language and Internet communication have become inseparable. It has become a widespread notion to transfer real communication to the Internet, but there is a phenomenon that, on the contrary, from Internet communication penetrates into our everyday life, quickly spreads and is actively used, this phenomenon is called an Internet meme. An Internet meme is a complex entity with verbal and non-verbal components that have cultural value and the ability to quickly spread on the Internet [1]. The use of memes predates the internet, according to some linguists who propose that humans have employed memes as a communication tool for centuries. Memes are recognized as a means of engaging in cultural dialogues and a platform to partake in online trends.

Ascertaining the initial meme ever created is a challenging, most likely impossible task. However, Richard Dawkins, a British evolutionary biologist, is recognized as the individual who coined the term "meme" in his book "The Selfish Gene" published in 1976. In his paper, Dawkins proposes that there is a new type of replicator that is responsible for the transmission of cultural information, which he names a "meme". The term is derived from the Greek word *mimeme* and is meant to convey the idea of a unit of imitation or cultural transmission. Examples of memes include tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, and items of clothing belonging to fashion. Dawkins suggests that memes propagate themselves through a process of imitation that spreads from brain to brain. According to Dawkins, memes are living structures that can parasitize the brain, much like a virus parasitizes a host cell. D. Andrew Price, social media expert and writer, shares this view and concurs that Richard Dawkins merely coined a term for something that has been in existence for centuries. Mr. Price further explained that a meme is essentially an idea that spreads rapidly through the collective awareness of a society [10]. Dawkins initially defined a meme as a unit of

cultural transmission or replication, but subsequent definitions have varied, leading to a lack of a consistent and rigorous understanding of what constitutes one unit of cultural transmission. This has caused issues in discussions regarding mimetics.

Meme as part of Internet culture

The term “Internet meme” refers to an idea, concept or piece of content that is transmitted rapidly through the Internet from person to person. These can be shared through social media, email, blogs, or other news sources. Richard Dawkins, who coined the term “meme”, described an Internet meme as a variation of his original concept, created deliberately through human creativity, as opposed to random mutation and natural selection.

Internet memes demonstrate the workings of Dawkins’ meme theory by reflecting current cultural events and defining the zeitgeist of a particular period.

Internet memes can be perceived as linguistic cultures within the Internet space, ultimately influencing the language and culture of contemporary society. Within memetics, Internet memes are regarded as fundamental building blocks that have a significant impact on shaping modern culture via the Internet, while simultaneously functioning as regulators of cultural carriers.

As a meme circulates and spreads to different Web communities, its meaning is continually changing [12].

Internet memes are utilized in communication and written texts as part of modern folklore, representing a desire for communicators to develop novel forms of expression, imagery, appeals to unfamiliar individuals, and methods for evaluating various phenomena, situations, and personalities. Both verbal and non-verbal Internet memes serve a wide range of purposes.

The primary purpose of a meme is to provide amusement to Internet users. It establishes its own linguistic environment, which is expressed through both the textual content and the accompanying visual elements. The humor of memes is often attributed

to the juxtaposition of an unexpected ending with a recognizable and vibrant background, such as a photograph or abstract color scheme, rather than relying on a predetermined phrase or linguistic structure [1].

Typology of Internet memes

Due to the fact that the concept of a meme is subject to the definition of a sign, the primary division of memes into types will be based on the simplest division of signs: by the method of providing and receiving information. So, two basic types of memes can be distinguished: verbal and non-verbal. The focus of the research is on the verbal memes.

Text memes are defined by a word, phrase, or expression, such as ‘LOL’, ‘IRL’, which often come from ordinary user statements.

Picture memes, on the other hand, are recognizable images or pictures created with editing software, where both the visual component and the content are significant. Examples of picture memes include the “Pepe the Frog” meme [14], in which a personified cartoon conveys multiple emotions, and the collage meme, created through creative image processing based on a generalized character idea.

Video memes are humorous video stories that are commonly shared on personal social media pages and transmitted from user to user through various channels. They can be reproduced multiple times, even collectively, and their popularity is based on the number of views.

Creolized memes are a type of text consisting of both verbal and non-verbal components, often combining an image with text created using the Photoshop software. The verbal component typically includes fixed phrases, phrases in a specific style, or non-fixed text, while the iconic component can be any image or photograph, ranging from movies and TV shows to any animal. These memes often have additional text or images to increase their potential for sharing. The coherence of the creolized text is shown in the close interaction between its verbal and iconic components.

It is worth noting that the original meaning or context of the image used in the meme is often quite different from the meme itself. However, there is usually at least one connecting segment that makes the original context necessary for understanding the meme. The source of creolized memes is usually the demotivator, a web-comic genre consisting of a picture with a humorous inscription meant to surprise, puzzle, or amuse the viewer.

Moving, or animated by hand pictures known as gifs are essentially short, non-verbal depictions of various emotional reactions, ranging from horror to delight. Additionally, popular individuals often become standalone memes, leading to their mentions spreading beyond the internet and into various mass media outlets such as television, radio, and newspapers [1].

Wordplay

There is ongoing scientific interest in the language game phenomenon, with many thematic works relating it to culture, particularly artistic styles that emphasize directness and playfulness. The concept of game in the language is multifaceted, encompassing a special type of worldview and certain forms of human activity, including action, technique, and means. Modern interest in the language game is associated with a form of self-awareness of the era, including allusions, masks, and hypertext in literature, as well as a demand for various crossword puzzles in mass literature.

Hints of the language game were first seen in the time of Socrates, with the concept of “cognitive game” introduced in Plato’s dialogue “Eutidemus”. More extensive research on the game as a language phenomenon was undertaken in the 18th century by philosophers E. Kant and F. Schiller, whose work focused on the relationship between play and artistic activity, emphasizing human freedom.

The Austrian philosopher L. Wittgenstein is a key figure in the study of the language game in the 20th century, introducing the term into scientific discourse.

Wittgenstein argues that language games do not involve any one logical form, although all human activity is characterized by its own logic and language. He emphasizes that the mechanisms of human thinking depend directly on the meaning carried by words and phrases [2].

English scholar A. Chesterman discusses the prevalent memes in the field of translation studies, namely: The Source-Target meme, which emphasizes the transfer of information from one language to another. The Equivalence meme, which focuses on the pursuit of faithfulness as much as possible, which is on the decline due to the postmodern understanding that perfect equivalence is sometimes unattainable in translation. The Untranslatability meme, originating from the belief that great literature cannot be replicated in another language, still persists. The Free vs Literal meme, which centers on how closely a translator should adhere to the source text, has been another dominant discussion in translation discourse. Lastly, the All-Writing-Is-Translation meme challenges the distinction between translating from one language to another and translating meanings into words in the same language.

Conclusions to Chapter One

In conclusion, the concept of the meme has been in existence for centuries, but as a term it was coined by R. Dawkins in 1976 as a new type of replicator responsible for the transmission of cultural information. Since then, the concept has evolved and become popularized, particularly with the rise of the internet and social media. Internet memes are fundamental building blocks that have a significant impact on shaping modern culture via the Internet while simultaneously functioning as regulators of cultural carriers. They reflect current cultural events, define the zeitgeist of a particular period and can be perceived as linguistic cores of the internet space, ultimately influencing the language and culture of contemporary society.

The typology of internet memes can be divided into two basic types: verbal and non-verbal memes. The understanding of memes has also impacted the field of

translation studies, where A. Chesterman identified prevalent memes such as Source-Target, Equivalence, Untranslatability, Free vs Literal and All-Writing-Is-Translation. These memes continue to shape and influence translation discourse, challenging the traditional ideas about language and its transmission.

In summary, the origin of memes and their evolution demonstrates how they have become an integral part of modern communication and culture. Puns and wordplay play a significant role in the world of memes, contributing to their popularity and entertainment value. They add an extra layer of humor and cleverness to the content, making memes more engaging and shareable among Internet users.

Chapter Two. The translation Aspect

As has been stated previously, memes serve a wide range of purposes and are utilized in communication and written texts as part of modern folklore. There are two basic types of memes: verbal and non-verbal, in this paper the subject of discussion is the verbal meme. Verbal memes include words, phrases, and expressions. Analyzing memes, wordplay they contain and their evolution is crucial for researchers and anyone interested in understanding contemporary culture and its impact on society.

As such, studying wordplay in modern memes can have significant relevance in several ways. Firstly, wordplay is an essential tool for humor and satire. Secondly, wordplay in memes can be used to subvert dominant cultural narratives and challenge established power structures. For example, memes that use puns, sarcasm, or irony can be used to critique political leaders, corporations, and social norms.

Using translation techniques for memes

English serves as the predominant language in the online realm. Memes created in English are increasingly gaining popularity on the worldwide web and are widely replicated.

To attain the utmost accuracy in translation, it is crucial to utilize various forms of translation techniques. These include: finding an appropriate variant in target language that aligns with the English meaning and figurative basis; conveying the meaning through a descriptive phrase; using Ukrainian equivalent that corresponds to English meaning but differs in figurative basis; transferring negative meaning through an affirmative construction and vice versa; literal translation or tracing of phraseological units with or without equivalent; and overtone translation or contextual replacement, which requires a creative process to find the most fitting translation in a specific context. This is especially significant when dealing with metaphors, wordplay, puns, and literary works that contain author's comments or phraseological synonyms.

To look at wordplay in memes in terms of translatability, we first need to understand how language play is used in the texts of memes. Language play at the

phonetic level in Internet memes is implemented in the play of a sound image by means of an accompanying inscription. Examples can be onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance.

Below are the examples of memes that employ this form of wordplay in them and are shared by the users of the Internet on a daily basis.

cooking and use within 3-5 days. If the cabbage is part of mixed dish like cabbage rolls, store covered in the fridge and use within 3-4 days.

How do you fix bitter coleslaw

Ingredients

1. Generous amount of mayonnaise
2. Generous amount of sour cream
3. ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
4. 1 tsp. table salt, heaped, plus more to taste.
5. 2 tsp. granulated sugar plus more to taste.
6. 1-2 tsp. celery seed (optional)

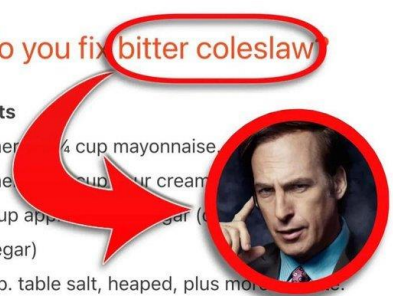


Fig. 1

The comical effect is created through paronymy by the phonetic similarity of the name of the TV show 'Better Call Saul' and bitter coleslaw. Paronymy is one the most popular mechanisms for creating puns. Some other examples include syntactic paronymy: *Ice cream/I scream*, *Justin Case/just in case*, *Robin Steele/rob and steal*; as well as cases with dismembering the words for comical effect: *comrade/come rat*, *defense/the fence* and so on.

Another form of wordplay can be seen in the following example (Fig. 2) through the use of homonymy. The word 'single' is an homograph, in different contexts meaning either 1) the marital status of a person; 2) a song which is released as a standalone. The humour lies in the interchange between those two meanings.



Fig. 2

Translating English memes

Bearing this in mind, let's try to analyze the wordplay in English memes into Ukrainian. Translating memes while preserving the original sense can be a challenging task. Memes often rely heavily on cultural references, especially wordplay, and linguistic nuances that may not have direct equivalents in another language.

Let's look at the first example (Fig.3) which contains another form of paronymy in it. This time the joke is built around an unexpected resolution of the word 'bofa', which turns into 'both of':



Fig.3

In this case the play on words can easily be transferred into Ukrainian, as the structure of the word 'both of' is not crucial in making a comical effect. It can be translated as:

“Не можу повірити, що ти не хочеш оби

Що таке оби?

Обидві мої руки, що стискають тебе в любовних обіймах”



Beesechurger Fig.4

The next example is a verbal-visual meme, which consists of disassembling the parts of a given word, and simultaneously, the object itself, this doesn't pose a particular challenge in translating the meme as simply 'Бізчургер', or 'Бургерчіз', because the word *cheeseburger* is borrowed straight from English and has no synonyms in Ukrainian.

Going further, in the next case the humorous effect is created by the high collocability of the phrasal verb 'to go' and combination 'to go insane', which is switched with 'to go to' in the sense of visiting a particular physical place. Ukrainian 'сходити з розуму' has the same property and therefore a translation of this meme would be adequate to the original and look something like this: Я зйду з розуму, вам щось треба? (Fig. 5)



Fig.5



Fig.6

In the next case presented (Fig.6) the meme offers language play within a parenthetical phrase 'I'm afraid' in English and 'Боюся' in Ukrainian, both carrying the double sense of terms of politeness, and a quality of a person being scared of

something or someone. Both of these phrases work in this situation and can be translated as:

*‘Боюся, міжнародна доставка неможлива
Боїтеся чого? Не бійтеся’*

Moving on to other types of wordplay, some examples do not offer a direct or easy equivalent in translation, as can be seen from Fig. 7:



Fig.7

In the case above, the wordplay consists of the pun with the Pacific Ocean and the quality of a person to be more peaceful. There is no direct equivalent to the word Pacific, however, it is possible to more or less still carry the similar sense: “*Коли мене просять бути більш тихим*”, referring to *Тихий океан*.



Fig.8

A bigger challenge, yet, presents the picture above (Fig.8). The word resolution has a double meaning of: 1) a promise or a plan a person makes for themselves in the upcoming year; and 2) the number of pixels and density of a computer screen. This double meaning does not translate into Ukrainian, however, there is a way to translate the joke: It is possible to replace ‘розширення (роздільна здатність)’ with a partial synonym ‘якість екрану’: ‘Яку якість ти прагнеш розвинути на наступний рік? Погану.’ In this way, the comical effect and the non-verbal connection in the picture are preserved.



Fig. 9

Fig.9 also offers a way to translate the pun and preserve its connection to the picture. ‘*Top secret*’ is a phraseological unit, meaning ‘Of the highest secrecy’, while the word ‘*top*’ simultaneously has the meaning of physical position. We can translate the wordplay quite accurately: ‘*Надсекретно*’ and ‘*Підсекретно*’.

Next, the following examples provide little to no equivalence from English to Ukrainian, as can be observed in the following picture (Fig.10)



Fig.10

This is a typical pun in the English language, based on the physical properties of an acorn: ‘a nut of an oak tree encased in a tough shell’, and the phraseological unit ‘in a nutshell’ is directly connected to it and therefore creates comedy. The same similarity, however, cannot be found in Ukrainian language, because the phrase ‘in a nutshell’ would be translated as ‘коротко, в кількох словах’, therefore the pun is lost here and can only be translated through descriptive translation.

Another common example of a pun in the Fig.11, interchanging the nouns ‘peace’ and ‘peas’ with the help of homonymy. In Ukrainian, these words are translated as ‘мир’ and ‘горох’, which do not correlate in any way: *‘Нарешті досяг миру у всьому світі’*.



Fig.11.

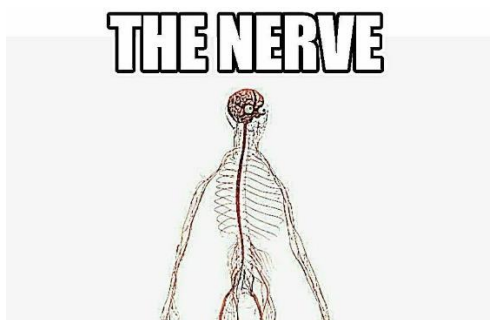


Fig.12

Another interesting case (Fig.12), the entirety of the meme is grounded on the polysemy of the noun ‘nerve’, used in the context of ‘the audacity’, preserving the same meaning, it would be translated as ‘нахабність’, and therefore lose its connection to the picture.



And lastly, a widely spread meme and its many variations, as can be seen from the picture above (Fig.13) and the textual pun: ‘*This steak is not well done, it’s congratulations*’. The humour of the pun relies entirely on the understanding of the reader of two senses of the phrase ‘*well done*’. It is mainly used as an interjection ‘Well done!’, used as positive reinforcement, and the second sense is related to the quality of grilled meat, as rare (з кров’ю), medium-rare (слабо просмажене), medium (середньо просмажене) medium-well (майже просмажене) and well done (просмажене). As we can see, none of the translations in Ukrainian can carry the second sense, so translating this pun is also extremely difficult.

Conclusions to Chapter Two

By analyzing the memes above in the context of different languages, we encounter challenges in preserving the original sense and linguistic nuances. The examples provided demonstrate the complexities of translating wordplay in memes. Some forms of wordplay, such as paronymy and homonymy, can be translated effectively, while others may require descriptive or contextual adaptations. In certain cases, the puns and double meanings may not have direct equivalents, making it necessary to find alternative ways to convey the humor and connection to the visual elements.

General Conclusions

To conclude, Internet memes are a distinct product of contemporary digital culture and exemplify many of its fundamental qualities. Initially coined in academic circles, the term “meme” was later adopted by Internet users and given a more specific definition. The study focused on Internet memes as collections of digital content that share common attributes, and are shared online by numerous individuals. Memes serve a diverse range of social and cultural functions. The paper provided an analysis of the structure, functions, and comic effect inherent in memes, particularly those that involve puns and wordplay. The aim was to provide insight into how humor and satire work in the digital age and how people use language to express their views on current events and social issues.

Translating English memes into Ukrainian requires careful consideration of cultural references, wordplay, and linguistic elements. While it may not always be possible to find direct equivalents, translation techniques can be employed to recreate the humor and essence of the original memes. This may involve finding appropriate variants in the target language, conveying meaning through descriptive phrases, and adapting wordplay to align with Ukrainian cultural and linguistic characteristics.

RESUME

В науковій праці розглядається мем як культурне надбання, аналіз структури, функцій і комічного ефекту, притаманного мемам, які включають гру слів. Визначення популярного явища каламбуру та гри слів у мемах в сучасній культурі. Дослідження спрямоване на вивчення використання гри слів у текстах мемів з перекладацького аспекту. Меми та гра слів є захоплюючими об'єктами лінгвістичних досліджень, оскільки вони надають унікальне розуміння внутрішніх жартів і культурних посилань, які розуміють лише певні групи людей. Новизна цієї статті полягає в її спробі вивчити лінгвістичні аспекти мемів, які досі є одними з найменш вивчених аспектів Інтернет-комунікації, а також надати аналіз мемів з перекладацької точки зору.

LIST OF REFERENCE MATERIALS

1. Бельбас Т.О. (2022) Англомовні політичні інтернет-меми у лінгвістичному аспекті. Вінниця
2. Дорошенко К. Мовна гра як теоретична проблема. Відновлено з <https://litp.kubg.edu.ua/index.php/journal/article/view/267/261>
3. Громова М. И. (2015) Интернет-мем как лингвокультурема современного филологического анализа. Одесса
4. Лебедева Е. Б. (2014) Уточнение понятия «языковая игра» в лингвистике.
5. Михайлова О.Г. (2019) Латинська мова в інтернет-мемах: нова комунікативна функція. Київ.
6. Радзієвська Т. В. (1993) Текст як засіб комунікації. АН України, Ін-т укр. Мови.
7. Самохіна В. О. (2012) Жарт у сучасному комунікативному просторі Великої Британії та США. Харків
8. Синиця А. (2008) Концепція «мовної гри» Л. Вітгенштейна. Актуальні проблеми духовності. Кривий Ріг
9. Chesterman A., Memes Of Translation: The Spread Of Ideas In Translation Theory. Helsinki
10. Dawkins R. The Selfish Gene. London: Oxford University Press, 2006
11. Glitsos L. (2020) The Pepe the Frog meme: an examination of social, political, and cultural implications through the tradition of the Darwinian Absurd. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338516691_The_Pepe_the_Frog_meme_an_examination_of_social_political_and_cultural_implications_through_the_tradition_of_the_Darwinian_Absurd
12. Pettis. B. (2021) Know Your Meme and the Homogenization of WebHistory. Retrieved from <https://mediarxiv.org/urgy7/>
13. Retsker J. (1993) The theory and practice of translation. In Zlateva (ed.) 1993.
14. Ross. A. (2016) The Language of Humour Alison Ross. Retrieved from <https://silo.tips/download/the-language-of-humour-alison-ross>

15. Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in Digital Culture*. The MIT Press.
16. Sándor G. About Memes of Chestreman. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/34439137/About_Memes_of_Chestreman
17. Yushan K. (2013) *The phraseology of phrasal verbs in English: a corpus study of the language of Chinese learners and native English writers*. Birmingham
18. Zenner E. and Geeraerts D., One does not simply process memes: Image macros as multimodal Constructions. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/j.ctvbkjv1f.10.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aa238b1c243150c404d75cb52e5f7a960&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1
19. Zittrain J. L. (2014). *Reflections on Internet Culture*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412914544540>