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DOI <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/65-3-25>**Oleksandr SODEL,***orcid.org/0009-0005-6759-8232**Candidate of Philological Sciences,**Senior Lecturer at the Department of English Philology**National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine**(Kyiv, Ukraine) oleksandr_sodel@nubip.edu.ua***INTERNET MEME AS CREOLIZED COMIC TEXT**

The article deals with Internet memes as creolized comic texts. The relevance of the research is justified by the fact that, in the modern world, memes are not only the means of storing and transmitting information in virtually any sphere of life but, first of all, are the source of entertaining the audience of the Internet; the Internet memes are creolized comic texts, and comic effect in such information products is achieved both verbal and non-verbal means.

The aim of the article is to characterize Internet meme as a creolized comic text with determining the specifics of interaction of its verbal and non-verbal components. There are following research objectives: to define the concept of Internet meme and provide its basic characteristics; to characterize Internet meme as a comic text; to describe the specifics of interaction of the verbal and non-verbal components of the Internet meme as a creolized comic text.

The research reveals that Internet meme is a particularly unique information medium that arises in the context of the situation when the real and the virtual worlds are becoming increasingly closer. Internet memes are defined as creative media that combine text and vision modalities that people use to describe their situation by reusing an existing, familiar situation. Internet memes are the comic texts, i.e., the texts creating the comic effect, and the comic is an aesthetic phenomenon that can cause an implicit or explicit laughing reaction. Internet memes have a semantic homogenous system, in which different structural levels are distinguished – verbal, visual, and musical-sound ones, and play the role of a dispenser of linguistic material in a social network. Thus, Internet memes are characterized by different degree of creolization – zero, partial and full creolization. The communicative effectiveness of the Internet memes with zero and partial creolization is most dependent on the language means of creating the comic, while Internet memes with full creolization can only be understood as comic texts only in complex of verbal and non-verbal components.

Key words: *meme, Internet meme, creolization, the comic, verbal and non-verbal components, language means of the comic.*

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Статтю присвячено вивченню Інтернет-мемів як креолізованих комічних текстів. Актуальність дослідження обґрунтовується тим, що в сучасному світі мему є не тільки засобом зберігання та передачі інформації практично в будь-якій сфері життя, але, насамперед, засобом розважити аудиторію в мережі Інтернет. Інтернет-мему – це креолізовані комічні тексти, і комічний ефект у таких інформаційних продуктах досягається як вербальними, так і невербальними засобами.

Метою статті є характеристика інтернет-мему як креолізованого комічного тексту з визначенням специфіки взаємодії його вербальних і невербальних компонентів. Завдання дослідження: визначити поняття Інтернет-мему та представити його основні характеристики; охарактеризувати Інтернет-мем як комічний текст; описати специфіку взаємодії вербальної та невербальної складових Інтернет-мему як креолізованого комічного тексту.

Дослідження демонструє, що Інтернет-мем є унікальним носієм інформації, що виникає в умовах, коли реальний і віртуальний світи стають все ближчими. Інтернет-мему визначаються як креативні медіа, що поєднують модальності тексту та зорового сприйняття, які люди використовують для опису власної ситуації шляхом повторного використання існуючої знайомої ситуації. Інтернет-мему – це комічні тексти, тобто тексти, що створюють комічний ефект. Комічний ефект тут розуміється як естетичне явище, яке може викликати приховану чи явну сміхову реакцію. Інтернет-мему мають семантично однорідну систему, в якій виділяються різні структурні рівні – вербальний, візуальний та музично-звуковий – і відіграють роль розповсюджувачів певного мовного матеріалу в соціальній мережі. Таким чином, Інтернет-мему характеризуються різним

ступенем креолізації – нульовою, частковою та повною. Успішність сприйняття Інтернет-мемів з нульовою та частковою креолізацією найбільше залежить від мовних засобів створення комічного, тоді як Інтернет-меми з повною креолізацією можна розуміти як комічні тексти лише у взаємодії їх вербальних і невербальних компонентів.

Ключові слова: мем, інтернет-мем, креолізація, комічне, вербальні та невербальні компоненти, мовні засоби створення комічного.

Introduction. Internet memes are laconic emotional messages, which are often a way of conveying information, capable of reproducing the main meaning, determining the importance of a certain topic. That is, in a broad sense, a meme is considered as a mechanism that is able to concisely and concentratedly transmit and store information (Теглівець, 2022: 24).

A certain symbol or image, a manner of human behavior, an idea or even a sign can serve as the basis for creating a meme in general and an Internet meme in particular. The condition for its appearance is the combination of a visual image, including an artistic one, with an unexpected element. It represents another visual image, the combination with which will be provided by the graphic processing program; unusual inscription or slogan; accompanying photos with a sound track, etc. (Поліщук, Слюсар, 2020: 79). In other words, a meme should be considered as a specific informational unit “that can repeat itself through imitation, and has three characteristics that make it successful: durability, productiveness, and loyalty to copy” (Castaño, 2013: 85).

In the modern world, memes are not only the means of storing and transmitting information in virtually any sphere of life but, first of all, are the source of entertaining the audience of the Internet. They often make the audience laugh thus they are to be considered as comic texts. Moreover, as it was previously stated, they combine verbal and non-verbal means of expression, thus, the Internet memes are to be characterized as creolized comic texts, and comic effect in such information products is achieved both verbal and non-verbal components, and the interaction of them can differ in different Internet memes, which justifies the relevance of the current study.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

The idea of Internet meme stems from R. Dawkins’ notion of biological memes, coined as a “unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation” (Dawkins, 1976: 192). The researcher draws an analogy between memes and genes, describing both as self-replicating entities: like genes, memes are transmitted between individuals, yet through imitation rather than duplication (Dawkins, 1976: 323). Thus, memes propagate themselves through people and, then, through time. As a recent actualization of the meme phenomenon, Internet memes are concepts, customs, and habits, i.e.,

the building blocks of culture and society. L. Börzsei believes that the first internet Memes were emoticons that were created by combining different characters and letters (such as “:-)”) – smiling emoticon (Börzsei, 2013). According to P. Davison, a key defining aspect of Internet memes is online transmission (Davison, 2012: 120), which requires Internet memes to be encoded into an internet-viable medium (visual, sound, text, or multimodal), and shared online (Tommasini, Illievski, Wijesiriwardene, 2023: 2).

Internet memes have been extremely popular: according to a recent survey by Facebook, 75% of people between 13 and 36 share Internet memes, and 30% do it daily (Adamic et al., 2021). Internet memes can be viral: following another study (Davison, 2012), 121,605 different variants of one particular meme were posted across 1.14 million status updates. As multimodal (they combine visual and language information creatively), relatable (and, thus, dependent on community and virtual context), succinct (they spread complex messages with a minimal information unit that connects the virtual circumstances to the real ones), and fluid (subject to variations and alterations), Internet memes provide essential data to study the flux of ideas on the Web (Thakur et al., 2023: 1–2).

Recently, the Internet memes became an object of the research of numerous domestic and foreign scholars who tried to trace their history (Adamic et al., 2021; Börzsei, 2013), typology (Дзюбіна, 2016; Milosavljević, 2019; Thakur et al., 2023), functions (Поліщук, Слюсар, 2020; Milosavljević, 2019), communicative and discursive features (Теглівець, 2022; Davison, 2012; Nowak, 2016; Tommasini, Ilievski, Wijesiriwardene, 2023). However, most of the researchers concentrate of the very essence of the Internet memes, and there is a need to characterize their components. In particular, there is lack of the research about the structure of the Internet meme as the comic text in terms of the language codes (verbal and non-verbal ones).

The aim of the article is to characterize Internet meme as a creolized comic text with determining the specifics of interaction of its verbal and non-verbal components. Accordingly, the following research objectives had been set: 1) to define the concept of Internet meme and provide its basic characteristics; 2) to characterize Internet meme as a comic text;

3) to describe the specifics of interaction of the verbal and non-verbal components of the Internet meme as a creolized comic text.

Presenting main material. In the Internet era, the real and the virtual worlds are becoming increasingly closer, and nearly every person, event, and idea have a Web counterpart. A particularly unique information medium that arises in this context is the Internet meme: “a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission” (Thakur et al., 2023: 1). Internet memes are “creative media that combine text and vision modalities that people use to describe their situation by reusing an existing, familiar situation” (Tommasini, Illievski, Wijesiriwardene, 2023: 1). According to J. Nowak, Internet users ascribe the meme tag to observable audiovisual content, such as online images, e.g., screenshots from movies or music videos, user-published photos from social media websites and many more, or videos both: culture industry- and user-originated ehat are shared online by internet users through forwarding, linking, or copying (Nowak, 2016: 74).

Internet memes are the essence of popular culture. They are popular media content (in terms of scale but also in the meaning given by the cultural studies approach) through which cultural and political identities can be communicated and negotiated. People produce and share memes not only to have fun (ludic motivations) but also to inform one another and to discuss things. Internet meme has become a significant modality of online discourse, a popular dis-cursive tool for social, cultural, political, and consumer commentary (Nowak, 2016: 74). However, in this research we concentrate the attention on the entertaining role of Internet memes describing them as the comic texts, i.e., the texts creating the comic effect, and the comic is an aesthetic phenomenon that can cause an implicit or explicit laughing reaction (Лазер, 2016: 3).

A characteristic of these types is that they are presented in combination of image content and the textual content that serves as a clarification of ideas of a meme (Milosavljević, 2019: 11). Consider the following example (Facebook, 2023):

The presented Internet meme mocks the idea of compulsive eating when the person eats rather than solves the actual problems. The Internet meme concerns difficult situation; however, it is funny because of the example of the main character of L. Carroll’s “Alice in Wonderland” where such behavior pattern actually worked.

So, the Internet meme combines the verbal and non-verbal components which interact to create comic effect. It allows to state that Internet meme is a cre-



olized text. Creolized text, according to K. M. Bilyk, is a polycode text (combination of natural language code with the code of any other semiotic system) that combines different semiotic systems, such as images, animations, melodies, infographics, diagrams, graphics, diagrams, drawings, etc. (Білик, 2022: 7). Creolization gives the meme expressiveness and carries hidden information (Дзюбіна, 2016: 376).

Creolized Internet memes have a semantic homogeneous system, in which different structural levels are distinguished – verbal, visual, and musical-sound ones, and play the role of a dispenser of linguistic material in a social network. Creolized Internet memes are in some cases the platform for creating a recognizable phrase, which later becomes a text Internet meme and is easily quoted in the community of the social network with a zero degree of creolization.

In a sense, creolized Internet memes act as a super-language. They not only provide an opportunity for content creation, but also allow to present information in the most condensed form, often without even using verbal means, but by sending the interlocutor, for example, an image or a melodic beat, thereby giving him the opportunity to independently find meanings and expand the communication channel. An Internet meme implies some kind of understatement that will ensure the inclusion of individual experience filling in the meaning gaps (Дзюбіна, 2016: 376).

Thus, the structural organization of the creolized Internet meme as a product of the implementation of the comic intention includes verbal and non-verbal components. Based on the interaction of these parts, three groups of creolized Internet memes are distinguished, namely: texts with zero, partial and full creolization (Марченко, Нікитюк, 2018: 436). In case

of zero creolization, the image is absent, the text is purely verbal. If there is partial creolization, the verbal part is relatively autonomous, independent of the image. As a rule, the non-verbal component in this case accompanies the message and is not a mandatory element of the work. A significant fusion of components is found in a text with full creolization, where the verbal and non-verbal components cannot exist autonomously, independently of each other. The verbal part is oriented to the image or refers to it, and the image itself is a mandatory element in the organizational structure of the creolized text (Бондурівська, Лукаш, 2021: 240).

In the Internet memes with zero creolization (Facebook, 2023), the comic effect is fully conveyed by the text component as presented below.



In particular, in the presented example, the basis for the comic effect is intertext, as the potential interlocutor states that there are no night museums for the reason explained in the movies meaning that night museums were the object of horror movies, so visiting museums in the dark. Such ironical expression based on intertextuality makes this Internet meme comic as the reader understands the intention of the interlocutor from the text. So, it can be stated that the Internet memes with zero creolization are the most dependent on the language means of creating the comic, and the lexical and stylistic devices of creating the comic are most common for this type of meme.

Another type of creolized Internet memes is Internet memes with partial creolization (Facebook, 2023) as illustrated below.

In the presented Internet meme, the text almost fully represents the idea of the joke – the personage named Will Byers in the TV series “Stranger Things” has strange haircut over several seasons, so the author of the Internet meme jokes that the real monster in



this TV series if Will’s barber. The text is enough for understanding by the people who watched the TV series. However, to make it more understandable, the author of the Internet meme adds the image illustrating what he or she means. Thus, in the Internet memes with partial creolization, the comic is created also by the language means, however, the image is used to make joke more understandable or to increase the comic effect by illustrating it.



The third kind of the Internet meme as creolized comic text is the text with full creolization (Facebook, 2023) as presented below.

Here, the comic is based on both verbal and non-verbal component of the Internet meme; the verbal component cannot be understood without additional

explanation or illustration provided by non-verbal one. In particular, the joke here is about the dog that is so excited about going for a walk that its owner cannot put the leash on it. Such a situation is so common for the dog owners and those liking the dogs that makes them smile. So, in the Internet-memes with full creolization, both verbal and non-verbal means of creating the comic are interrelated and interdependent creating the complex joke.

Conclusions. Internet memes are creative media that combine text and vision modalities that people use to describe their situation by reusing an existing, familiar situation. Internet memes are creolized texts that perform different functions including entertaining one. As the means of entertainment, they are creolized

comic texts which are characterized by different degree of creolization – zero, partial and full creolization. The Internet memes with zero and partial creolization are most dependent on the language means of creating the comic, while Internet memes with full creolization can only be understood as comic texts only in complex of verbal and non-verbal components.

The conducted research demonstrates wide prospects for further studies. In particular, there is a need in determining the cognitive mechanisms of creating the comic in Internet memes with zero, partial and full creolization, as well as the studies concerning the specifics of rendering Internet memes in translation as the Internet memes are worldwide phenomenon.

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