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FEATURES OF USING LEXICAL INNOVATIONS AND SLANG IN INTERNATIONAL MEMES (ON THE EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS)

The article explores the dynamic use of lexical innovations and slang in contemporary international memes, which are prevalent in popular social networks such as Instagram and Facebook. Memes, as a significant phenomenon of digital culture, have evolved into a unique form of communication, blending linguistic creativity with visual content to deliver messages that are often humorous, satirical, or socially reflective. This study analyzes the structural and functional features of memes, focusing on how slang and lexical innovations contribute to their effectiveness in engaging audiences and conveying complex ideas succinctly. By investigating the specific linguistic tools utilized in memes, such as newly coined terms, idiomatic expressions, and non-standard word formations, the research highlights their role in shaping online discourse. The findings also shed light on the cultural and social implications of these linguistic phenomena, emphasizing how they reflect and influence the habits, attitudes, and practices of young people, especially those learning English as a second language. Moreover, the research identifies the primary functions of lexical innovations and slang in memes, including emotional expression, humor, and the creation of shared online identities. The analysis contributes to a broader understanding of how digital communication and language intersect, providing insights into the transformative power of memes in modern Internet discourse.

Keywords: meme; international memes; slang; lexical innovations; internet discourse; internet meme.

1. INTRODUCTION

Formulation of the problem. The modern stage of society's development is characterized by the growing role of Internet communication. Online communication satisfies human needs (and primarily young people) in communication and socialization, and also accumulates a variety of language practices, methods and formats of such communication. So modern communication in the Internet is difficult to imagine without the use of memes, because today there is an incredible number of them in blogs, chats, social networks, forums, etc. The use of memes in Internet communication affects one or another language system, so modern English is influenced by digital culture, in particular international memes.

Today there is a significant number of scientific works devoted to various aspects of the memes study: approaches to the interpretation of the concept of "meme"; their features and characteristics; peculiarities and difficulties of their translation, etc. However, there is absolutely no scientific research that would be devoted to the issue of researching the influence of Internet discourse (memes in particular) on the language habits and language practice of young learn English as a second language, which determines the relevance of this research.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The object of this study is the phenomenon of lexical innovations and slang as they appear and function within the texts of international memes. Memes, as a unique form of digital communication, are central to the research focus, particularly their role in the development of Internet discourse and language habits.

The *subject* of the study is the linguistic and cultural characteristics of lexical innovations and slang in memes shared on popular social networks, such as Instagram and Facebook.

The *aim* of this article is to analyze the peculiarities of using lexical innovations and slang in international memes. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Examine the linguistic tools and processes behind the creation of memes.
2. Highlight the cultural and social implications of memes for online communication.
3. Explore how lexical innovations and slang reflect and influence language habits and practices.

The following methods were used in the research: theoretical: analysis of scientific literature on the research problem, definition of the main research concepts, generalization and systematization of the received data, empirical: content analysis of popular memes based on social networks. Such popular social networks as Instagram and Facebook served as material for the research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Concept of a Meme

In general, the concept of “meme” was and continues to be the object of attention of many domestic and foreign scientists who consider and research this concept in various areas and directions.

Thus, S. Blackmore proposes to understand the concept of “meme” as any information transmitted from one person to another. It can be anything - habits, music, clothes, which are widely distributed in society, thus forming the culture of this society (Blackmore, 2017).

The concept of a “meme” is interpreted by T. Rime as a picture or graphic figure that serves as a template or background for the written content added to it (Reime, 2015).

P. Davison explains a meme as a certain functioning process that goes through three stages: assimilation (creation of an idea); expression (representation of this idea in a person’s memory) and transmission (distribution of this idea). According to the researcher, modern memes that are spread in the Internet are a part of the culture of one or another people and are humorous in content, transmitted by people in the Internet (Davison, 2012, p. 122).

According to G. Chik, the concept of a “meme” is understood as a unique unit of cultural information that reproduces itself and is transmitted socially, regardless of its form or specific features (Chick, 2020). Therefore, memes play a significant role in the spread of cultural knowledge and ideas.

An Internet meme is defined by S. Chemerkin as a unit of information that gains popularity in the virtual environment, with its main properties being reproducibility and integrity (Chemerkin, 2015, p. 114). Consequently, these features enable memes to maintain their relevance and continue circulating widely.

3.2. Characteristics of Memes

So, among the main characteristic features of memes, we can highlight such as:

- rapid and unlimited distribution, especially in the Internet (researchers call this property of memes virality);
- the ability to spread anywhere (both in the online space and in the usual communication of people);
- rapid formation;
- have structure and content;
- emotionality (transmission of emotions and encouragement to experience them);

- seriality (ability to form a chain of similar memes);
- relevance (connection with a specific life context, topic or problem),
- humorous orientation (Chaplak & Chuyko, 2022, p. 345).

In our research, we analyze the English-language Internet discourse in order to find out the peculiarities of the functioning of international memes in it.

3.3. Internet Memes in Discourse

The internet discourse is a type of communication in the global Internet, in which communication between communicators is carried out using an electronic data transmission channel, a hypertextual mechanism for their structuring and routing using verbal and non-verbal means.

It is important to note that today memes are quite common in the internet discourse and are an integral part of it. In connection with this, a new special term even appeared – “Internet meme”, which is understood as a short informative message, phrase or expression, image, melody, etc., which instantly became popular and which is reproduced in the Internet, as a rule, in new contexts (Poda, 2017, p. 118).

So, below we will consider and analyze lexical innovations and slang in the composition of international memes using the example of today's popular social networks Facebook and Instagram.

However, it should first be emphasized that lexical innovations in modern linguistic research are considered as the result of dynamic processes that reflect the adaptation of language to the transformations taking place in political, economic and social and other spheres of human activity (Kucherenko, 2019, p. 101).

So, for example, Yu. Zatsny gives the following interpretation of the concept of “lexical innovations”: these are words (word combinations) or new meanings or shades of meanings of words that appear in the language (Zatsnyi, 2008, p. 253).

So, on the example of the meme shown in figure 1 we notice a lexical innovation at the level of the word combination – “facebook puzzle”. Such a lexical innovation was probably created by a Facebook user and used to demonstrate to other Facebook users a certain incomprehensible or even absurd situation described in the meme. Such a combination of separate full-fledged words aims, firstly, to draw the attention of users of this network to such a meme and, secondly, to mark a new concept.

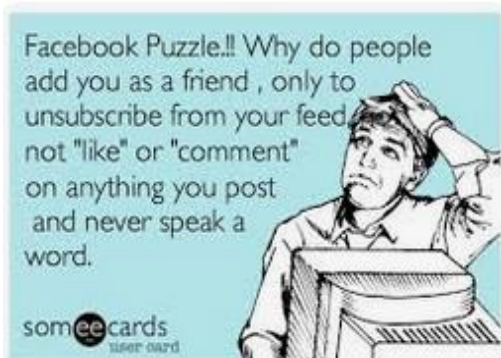


Figure. 1. Example of international meme № 1 (Funny Political Memes)



Figure 2. Example of international meme № 2 (Funny Political Memes)

On the example of another international meme (Figure 2), we can note another example of lexical innovation: this is the lexical unit “unfriend”. In the given example, it is used as a verb and is formed by the prefix method, when the prefix un is added to the English word friend, as a result of which a new lexical unit was formed.

The significance of this lexical innovation in the context of such a meme can be seen in the linguistic economy, which is an important aspect for meme texts.

Let's consider other examples of international memes and the use of lexical innovations in them.

On figure 3 presented an example of a meme taken from the social network Instagram, on

which we notice the lexical innovation “apolocheese” in the text part. The newly formed lexical unit is the result of the combination of two separate words of the English language, namely the word apologize and the word cheese. Such a lexical innovation in the context of this meme serves as a language economy and gives a name to a new concept.



Figure 3. Example of international meme № 3 (Actual memes)



Figure 4. Example of international meme № 4 (Actual memes)

Another lexical innovation can be seen in another example of a meme (Figure 4). This is a lexical unit like “kissable”, which is formed by prefixing: the English suffix – able is added to the English root word kiss. The role of such lexical innovation in this meme is linguistic economy.

Today, slang is also a common linguistic phenomenon in almost all styles of speeches and spheres of human activity, including Internet discourse in general and memes in particular.

The term “slang” is used to understand a certain type of colloquial language, which is evaluated by society as “unofficial” or “everyday” language.

So, while looking at memes in social networks Facebook and Instagram, we noticed a rather frequent use of such slang as “stupid”, which in the context of the analyzed memes is aimed at describing people (Figures 5 and 6).

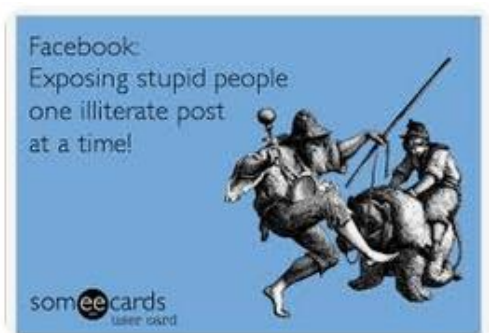


Figure 5. Example of international meme № 5 (Funny Political Memes)

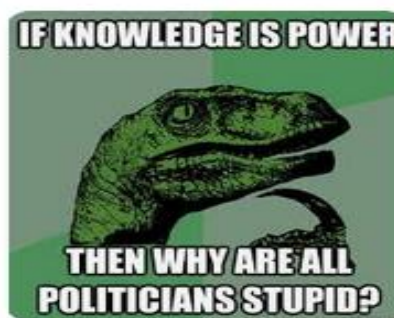


Figure 6. Example of international meme № 6 (Funny Political Memes)

So we can say that in the given examples of memes, the slang word stupid is designed to perform an emotional and expressive function, because such slang helps the author to express certain emotions and feelings, as well as to have a psycho-emotional impact on the reader. In addition, such slang in the analyzed memes also performs an evaluative function, because it expresses the negative attitude of their author towards a person or a circle of people.

Let’s consider other examples of international memes that include slang. So on figure 7 we

can notice the quite popular English slang “shut up”, which in the context of this meme, as in the previous case, performs emotional, expressive and evaluative functions.

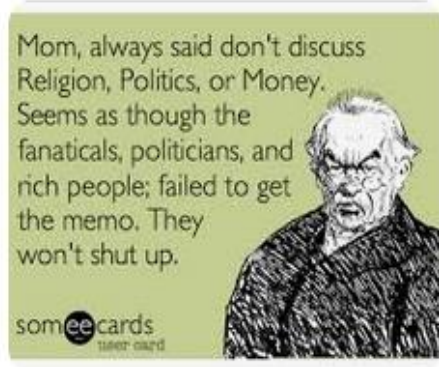


Figure 7. Example of international meme №7 (Funny Political Memes)

me doing some dumb shit waiting for my friend to notice



Figure 8. Example of international meme №8 (Actual memes)

On the figure 8 the text part of the meme also contains the slang expression “dump shit”, which was used both to attract the attention of users and to give an emotional tone to the text of the meme. It is also worth saying that such a slang expression in the composition of this meme is aimed mainly at the youth audience of Internet users, who in their speech often use this slang expression to name some senseless actions or activities.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SCOPE FOR THE FURTHER RESEARCH

Thus, lexical innovations and slang in the texts of the most Internet memes are an integral part of them. Their use in meme texts is due to a number of reasons: linguistic economy; naming a new concept (actions or features); providing a meme with a certain humorous effect, affecting the emotions of users, expressing the author's attitude to a certain situation or event, and to fill the lexical deficiency in general. The use of such types of vocabulary in the composition of memes actively affects both the development of the language and the online culture of communication.

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Олена Назаренко, Валентина Ребенок. Особливості використання лексичних інновацій та сленгу в міжнародних мемах (на прикладі соціальних мереж). У статті досліджується динамічне використання лексичних інновацій та сленгу в сучасних міжнародних мемах, які поширені в таких популярних соціальних мережах, як Instagram та Facebook. Мем як важливий феномен цифрової культури перетворився на унікальну форму комунікації, що поєднує лінгвістичну творчість з візуальним контентом для передачі повідомлень, які часто мають гумористичний, сатиричний або соціально рефлексивний характер. Це дослідження аналізує структурні та функціональні особливості мемів, зосереджуючись на тому, як сленг та лексичні інновації сприяють їхній ефективності у залученні аудиторії та стислому донесенні складних ідей. Вивчаючи специфічні лінгвістичні засоби, що використовуються в мемах, такі як новотвори, ідіоматичні вирази та нестандартні словотворення, дослідження підкреслює їхню роль у формуванні онлайн-дискурсу. Результати також проливають світло на культурні та соціальні наслідки цих лінгвістичних явищ, підкреслюючи, як вони відображають і впливають на звички, погляди та практики молодих людей, особливо тих, хто вивчає англійську як другу мову. Крім того, дослідження визначає основні функції лексичних інновацій та сленгу в мемах, серед яких емоційне вираження, гумор і створення спільних онлайн-ідентичностей. Аналіз сприяє ширшому розумінню того, як перетинаються цифрова комунікація та мова, і дає уявлення про трансформаційну силу мемів у сучасному інтернет-дискурсі.

Ключові слова: мем; міжнародні меми; сленг; лексичні інновації; інтернет-дискурс; інтернет-мем.

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