

## INTERNET-MEME AS METHOD OF CULTURAL CODE REPRESENTATION

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Annotation. This article is devoted to Internet memes operating in the modern media scene. The relevance of the study is determined by the increasing interest to the problem of the Russian language functioning in the World Wide Web. The development of modern technologies has led to the fact that the Internet has become a universal global infomedia (information environment). Representing a new form of communication the Internet is becoming a new platform for the language implementation, where various language units appear. Their knowledge is necessary for effective communication in the network. Internet memes are a special kind of precedent phenomenon. That is based on the actualization of this phenomenon in the consciousness of the recipients. Internet memes are revealed in visual images, creolized texts, fixed phrases, names and titles and thus carry a cultural code that evokes meaningful information in the mind of an individual. The sources of Internet memes origin are classified and their characteristics as precedent units are detected, what is illustrated by the examples of popular Internet memes usage. The article concludes the essence of Internet memes and the functions that they perform in the media discourse. In modern society where the right of access to the Internet is one of basic human rights, the usage of Internet memes not only becomes an integral part of online communication, but also is infiltrating into various spheres of real life, such as: the media, advertising products, informal communication and even social and political actions.

Key words: Internet meme, media scene, precedent phenomenon, linguistic persona

### 1 Introduction

The development of information technologies in the 21st century has led to the fact that the Internet has become the main communicative space for people from all over the world. The accessibility, mobility and convenience of Internet communication have largely determined the choice of a modern person: business or personal correspondence is maintained per e-mail, communication occurs via instant messengers (Whats App, Telegram), in which it is possible to organize workplace or informal communication in group chats, and channels in Telegram, as well as news feed in Facebook and VK, have become the main platform for broadcasting your opinion.

New types of communication contribute to the emergence of new platforms for the language implementation, require and at the same time create new language forms. As noted by T.G. Bochina and A.N. Miftakhova, "Internet is a specific, varied by its national, age, educational and other characteristics community of people with their own values, linguistic world image, particularity of linguistic consciousness (collective and individual), cultural paradigms, development history, etc." (Bochina, 2014).

Massive accessibility of the Internet provides an opportunity for every person not only to be a recipient of information, but also to become its author. Today, when the information space is overfilled because of globalization, a unit of information must be truly unique to interest a large number of users and impel them to distribute this unit. Internet meme has become such a phenomenon in the modern media scene. Meme, in a broad sense of the term, is a unit of information transmitted from one linguistic persona to another. Specific character of Internet memes lies in their distribution channel (the Internet), as well as in the existence of cultural codes embedded in them.

Internet memes are revealed in visual images, creolized texts, fixed phrases, names and titles transforming itself and generating new interpretations with each new dissemination among users of the network. Like a precedent unit Internet meme appears in

communication repeatedly, has a set of cultural connotations that evoke meaningful information in the mind of an individual and the ability to elicit an adequate emotional response.

Relevance of the study is determined by an increasing interest to the problem of the Russian language functioning in the Internet space. Due to new ways of communication such an information unit as Internet meme appears. Its knowledge is necessary for effective communication not only in the network, but also in real life. In addition, the chosen focus of research - representation of cultural codes with the help of Internet memes - adds to the relevance of the study. The way in which an information item becomes meaningful to the reference group and the language means that are used in the process are of value to sociolinguists.

The purpose of the study is to classify the sources of Internet memes and identify characteristics of Internet memes as precedent units. The objectives to be reached are: to determine the nature of Internet memes; to classify the sources of their formation; to identify the characteristics of Internet memes as precedent units; to present the functions that Internet meme performs in the media discourse.

### 2 Methods

As a material for the study we used, firstly, the data of public social networks (Facebook, VK, Twitter), where the largest number of Russian-speaking users is logged in; secondly, the new format of Internet communication - channels in Telegram, which are analogous to messaging to subscribers; thirdly, the information of such online media outlets as TJ Journal, Wonderzine, WOS, Medusa. The target audience of these sites are young people who become the main creators and consumers of Internet memes. The afore mentioned resources were chosen due to the fact that "Internet sources are becoming an important tool for linguistic research, because in the era of high technologies the Internet has become the most popular means of communication in any field" (Yapparova et al, 2016). The purpose of the research and specific character of the material under study have determined the choice of the following scientific methods: introspection and participant observation method. Despite the obvious subjectivity, they allow you to have an insight into the subject of research and give it a more objective characteristic than with the help of ordinary observation. Continuous sampling method, description and classification are used along with the aforementioned methods.

The research methodology includes the following steps: a) selection of Internet memes according to their relevance; b) typology of Internet memes in accordance with the source of their origin; c) analysis of Internet memes as precedent units; d) description of the functions that Internet meme performs in the media scene.

### 3 Results

Having identified the nature of Internet meme as a representation of cultural stereotypes and a carrier of relevant information, we can correlate it with the notion of precedence. The term "precedent text" was introduced by Y. Karaulov, who defines precedent texts as "texts, (1) significant for a particular person in cognitive and emotional respect, (2) having "a superpersonal character", i.e. well-known not only to a person, but also to their social circle, their predecessors and contemporaries, and, finally, (3) that are repeatedly referred to in the discourse of a certain linguistic persona" (Karaulov, 2007). Later the definition of the term "precedent text" was extrapolated to precedent phenomena and the very term "precedent text" became more narrowly defined. On the basis of this definition we can distinguish the following characteristics of Internet memes as precedent units: recognition, relevance and regular reproducibility.

Taking into consideration the specific character of the Internet as a medium for the functioning of Internet memes, we can say with certainty that Internet meme, due to the universal accessibility and interactivity of the global network, is able to spread incredibly quickly among users as well as to go beyond the sphere of Internet communication and infiltrate into the mass media and real life.

Internet meme is alive while it is popular. The popularity of any Internet meme is provided by two factors: the possibility to use its cultural code to interpret a new event of current interest and the ability of a meme to "hook" the recipient eliciting the necessary emotional response with the help of its structure (provocative, aggressive, comic, etc.).

In order for an information unit to become an Internet meme, it must have an important feature - the ability to create new derivatives while preserving the semantic core. Ample opportunities of the global network and its mass accessibility gradually remove all the barriers that existed earlier for anyone who wanted to distribute the information product. Users have a choice: to try to create an original meme or to take a well familiar to most people information unit, and put it into a new cultural context.

So, Internet meme is a special kind of precedent phenomenon, because it has its essential characteristics and reflects the specific character of virtual communication: remoteness of communicants, intercultural nature of communication, underdevelopment of social norms, etc.

In modern media scene we can distinguish the following types of Internet memes according to the source of their origin: 1) Internet meme as a meaningful statement; 2) Internet meme as a creolized text; 3) Internet meme as a real person or a character; 4) Internet meme as a visual image.

Meme, if it is a meaningful statement, can consist of one word, a combination of words or a fixed phrase. Meme "Wasted" that appeared due to a low-quality translation of the computer game GTA, came into use to describe life's failures and turned into a symbol of despair in Russian reality.

It was so popular with Russian-speaking Internet users that the poor translation of the game became the basis for new language forms actively used in literary creation and poetry. Several VK communities dedicated exclusively to the "wasted language" and communication in it were created (The Agency "WOS", 2017).

Speech clichés are popular in the network serve as the basis for creating a new meme, which carries a certain message: "One does not simply ..." (do something). The phrase is taken from "The Lord of the Rings", when one of the heroes says that "one does not simply walk into Mordor", because it is a well-protected country. The statement is used in a truncated form to ridicule simple actions that people unreasonably complicate (Internet-memes database Know Your Meme, 2017).

"*There is no money. But you hang in there!*". This is a quote, taken out from the dialogue between D. Medvedev and the Crimean pensioners, which went like this: "There is simply no money now. When we find the money, we will do the indexing. You hang in there! Best wishes, cheer! Take care!" The meme in no time reached the top of requests in search engines and became one of the most popular Internet memes in 2016. It was alluded to in the Russian dubbing of "Sing" and such large companies as "Alpha-bank", cellular service provider Tele2, marketing service Aviasales (sells airline tickets) used Medvedev's words to promote their products not only in the Internet, but also offline. The phrase is often used in a truncated version, where money is replaced by any other object and users are offered to "hold in there" despite the absence of this object (The Internet newspaper Lenta.ru, 2017).

Creolized texts are objects "the structure of which consists of two non-homogeneous parts: verbal linguistic and non-verbal (belonging to other sign systems, rather than natural language)" (Sorokin et al, 1990). Creolized texts in an Internet meme often does not just carry a certain idea, but also imposes a stereotypical position explicable in the precedent text according to the existing pattern. The popular Internet meme "Be like ..." can be mentioned as an example. The character of the meme, most often named Petya (and Bill in English version of the meme), always does the right thing, because Petya is smart ("Be like Petya"). The headquarters of the opposition leader A. Navalny used this meme agitating young people to take part in their election campaign and thereby claiming that a person will act smartly as a meme character if they join the campaign (The site of A.N. Navalny, 2017). While the coarse imposition of particular views or models of behavior usually repels people, especially the youth, being imbedded into the structure of an Internet meme it can be perceived uncritically and get a positive re-enforcement.

Sometimes real people or characters become memes. For example, Pepe the Frog created in 2005 by Matt Fury as a character of comics "Boy's Club" became a meme in 2008 thanks to the site 4chan. In 10 years of his life Pepe the Frog has evolved from a popular meme used to express different emotions (anger, joy, sadness, etc.), into a symbol of anti-Semitism and hatred. The meme went far beyond the youth sites and was actively used in the election campaign of the current US president Donald Trump (American news website The Daily Beast, 2017). It led to the fact that Trump was suspected in having a connection to the American nationalists and the giant of chain retailing Zara had to withdraw the denim skirt with a print that seemed to users to depict Pepe the Frog (British daily newspaper The Guardian, 2017). In May 2017 the creator of the frog officially put an end to the meme, publishing a comic about Pepe's death. However, network users were skeptical of his decision presuming that such a significant Internet meme like Pepe the frog would continue to be popular in the future and serve its initial purpose – expression of simple human emotions.

The possibility to freely use visual images (such as pictures, video, gif-animation) when communicating is a feature of Internet communication. The photograph of a dress published on the social networking service Tumblr with a question about its color was one of the main memes in 2015. It seemed to some users that the dress was white and gold, while others saw the true colors - blue and black. Online media outlet Buzzfeed conducted a survey asking "What color is the dress?", which went viral. The dress was shown on TV, experts and even scientists were invited to resolve the dispute. The meme generated many derivatives and was used as a powerful visual image in social advertising against domestic violence that contained word play (compare: "black and blue" as colors of the dress and "black and blue" as an idiom, which means to be beaten, to be in bruises) (British daily newspaper The Guardian, 2017). Thus, Internet meme is an information unit that conveys cultural code, which can be creatively supplemented by any linguistic persona belonging to the existing reference group. A meme changes not accidentally, but because of new events of current interest. These events can be political, cultural, social changes that cause a stir among recipients and elicit their emotional response. The more flexible the cultural code is, the longer an Internet meme remains popular. Consequently, it becomes more recognizable and has a wider cultural scope.

Undoubtedly, not only a user can influence a meme, changing and disseminating it, but a meme can also influence a user, as well as society overall. Meme reflects and interprets public life, gives new meanings to the usual stereotypes, enciphers feelings, emotions of recipients and even is able to impose certain behavior patterns. Being put in a comic or intentionally insulting and provocative form, it is perceived by users uncritically (in case of humor) or causes a violent emotional outburst (in case of aggressive connotation) and therefore is easily remembered for a long time.

#### 4 Summary

As a kind of precedent phenomenon functioning in the media discourse Internet meme performs the following functions: nominative function (memes give names to phenomena and social processes), expressive (meme is used as means of expression that puts emphasis on the necessary information and attracts audience's attention to it), estimative (meme is always subjective, it is a way of expressing your position on a particular issue, so it reflects the author's views), a password function (the author and the addressee form a group of people understanding each other well; thus, Internet meme contains an embedded opposition "friend or foe"). If a popular Internet meme is understandable for a recipient, the recipient feels flattered and disseminates the meme further to emphasize their belonging to a particular group. In this case, we can distinguish a social function: the usage of Internet memes is a kind of a language game, which makes the context less formal, eases the tension, and also attracts the attention of users. The Russian language provides a linguistic persona with ample opportunities for a language game. That is reflected, for example, in communication in forums, which are divided according to the topic: political (for example, (Yapparova et al,2015)), gender, professional forums, etc. The style of Internet communication undoubtedly has a strong influence on the chosen discourse (Bochina et al, 2015 ). Memes, being put into a form of game, can become part of a manipulation aimed at winning confidence of the recipient and inspiring them to take a desired position.

#### 5 Conclusion

Thus, the analysis allows us to assert that the Internet meme is polyfunctional, has the essential characteristics of a precedent phenomenon and contains a set of connotations embedded in the mind and vocabulary of a linguistic persona - the so-called cultural code. Meme encrypts emotions, feelings, ideas and customs of a society and therefore the cultural code of an Internet meme is a product of the collective unconscious, the product of modern culture. Internet memes impact the audience transmitting a certain behavior pattern or a specific assessment of the event. Events can be interpreted with the help of Internet memes in the following ways: reproduction of existing Internet memes by including them in a new context and production of new information units by framing an event into the cultural code of an Internet meme.

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