Comparative analysis of memes in Russian- and English-language internet space

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Abstract. The article deals with creolized memes in Russian and English Internet space, which are defined as memes that include a linguistic and visual component and carry a semantic load. Both of these components can also carry semantic load, endow it with its own meaning and also influence the interpretation of the creolized text. The general features of this type of text in both language cultures under consideration are outlined, a comparative analysis of creolized memes in Russian and English languages is carried out, the peculiarities of Russian and English Internet communication in terms of themes, forms of the comic, and methods of creating a comic effect are considered. The examples of memes given in the article are based on language play, and the graphic patterns considered express satirical and ironic forms of the comic on the Internet.

1 Introduction

Due to the blending of verbal and graphic elements and the possibility of making up for the components unavailable in written communicative act, creolized texts, very popular among different participants of Internet communication, are at the present becoming one of the extensive Internet phenomena. The significance of this study is dictated by the growing interest of learners in studying the peculiarities of online communication and the use of the comic form of communication, as well as by the dynamic growth of the science of memes (memetics), which deals with the consideration of memes and the study of their participation in the expression of public opinion from the linguistic, sociological and psychological points of view, which, of course, determines the position that creolized memes have in contemporary online communicative acts and modern society’s life.

2 Materials and methods

Creolized memes in Russian and English selected from the electronic resources VK.com, Pinterest.com and Memepedia.ru were used as material for this study.
The methodological and theoretical basis of the study was formed by the works of Russian and foreign scientists E. I. Golovanova, N. A. Zinovieva, N. V. Chasovsky, S. Blackmore, A. A. Edwards, M. Nobel.

Comparative analysis, definitive method, method of observation and generalization are used as research methods.

3. Results and discussion

In this article, the key notion is "Internet memes", the study of which has recently experienced a significant increase in interest due to the immense popularity and limitless creative possibilities inherent in this kind of online texts.

This notion has been known since 1982, when R. Dawkins mentioned it in his "The Selfish Gene", where the author proposes the conception of a "replicator" capable of creating its own copies regarding sociocultural processes [1].

D. Rushkoff refined this idea, supplementing it with the foundations of the theory of memes — memetics, according to which language is a kind of virus that gradually "infects" all its carriers and slowly settles in the human environment [2].

According to the two points of view concerning the theory of memes, memes are such special units of communication, including online communication, which belong to the representational plane, and memes also correspond more to the content plane in their content.

S. Blackmore in the course of her research supplemented the definition of the notion "meme", referring to this notion everything that can be, in one way or another, copied by one person from another person [3].

The scientist has made a very significant contribution to the development of the science of memes, and her research can well be labeled as a core preamble for the linguistic study of Internet memes in the communicative act in online format. She suggests that not all memes can be popular, and carefully analyzes the factors that make them successful and the extent to which they can attract attention. For example, in creolized texts prominent on the Internet, various quotes from different movies, famous speeches of celebrities, multiple photos and drawings are quite often found separately from their original source, which leads to the fact that, the user may not be aware of their direct origin and understand the essence of this text.

Kh. Danung analyzes the gradual and qualitative transformation of Internet memes from traditional graffiti to the modern form, the author notes that the notion of Internet memes is usually considered as a certain phenomenon of online communication: According to the definition of R. Dawkins, the essence of a meme is not only a simple copying of something, but a kind of imitation of something, and copying is the main way of such a rapid spread of memes in the virtual environment of communication [4].

An important feature of Internet memes is their recognizability: any Internet meme is a text that carries additional secondary meanings, in addition to its literal meaning, in the course of users' reactions and evaluations to them and not only.

An Internet meme can also be created independently, similar to already existing ones or completely unique, which suggests a strong potential for the dissemination of memes, which is that users can actively disseminate them by including them in hypertext while coming up with their own parodies.

In this paper, we define the term "Internet meme" as various images, video format, audio format and creolized texts that spread very spontaneously and with lightning speed by copying or imitating by users and become popular on the Internet. The term "creolized Internet meme" refers to Internet memes that combine linguistic and graphical elements.
From a technical point of view, the creolized Internet meme we are considering is such a file in the form of an image, where the main component is the presence of any linguistic signs. Internet communication contributes to increasing the availability of any information and parallel simplification of its exchange, which helps to internationalize the Internet space.

I. A. Borisova wrote about the distortion of English speech on the Internet, and among foreign scholars this problem was studied by L. Gone, J. Bohan, J. Lefler and others. According to I. A. Borisova, this phenomenon of the Internet language originally appeared among people who could not write correctly, but at the same time introduced a fashion for such illiteracy against the language of intellectuals [5].

At the same time, in Russian virtual communication this trend is mainly limited to orthography, but aspects of English grammar are also affected: the principle of phonetic spelling of words is mainly used for orthographic distortions, speech reduction, vocalization of consonants in Russian and English, as well as the rules of transcription of English words in general contribute to the emergence of alternative spellings based on pronunciation [6].

These changes have also affected the punctuation system, which can be observed in the examples from the languages under study, where commas are omitted quite often. It should be noted that in this paper all examples are used with the author's orthography and punctuation preserved.

In addition to the above phenomena, one can observe various abbreviations, mostly originated in English but popular among users around the world, such as Laughing out loudly (LOL) and Rolling Over Floor Laughing (ROFL) in English. On the Internet, there is a whole list of English abbreviations used in international communication via computer or mobile devices, many of which have since become common slang vocabulary for virtual communication.

In addition, there are other techniques used in Internet communication that are more or less related to linguistics:

- not using capital letters in sentences;
- capitalizing whole words in a sentence to emphasize meaning or convey additional emotional meaning;
- using unusual punctuation to convey additional emotional meaning (e.g., multiple question and exclamation points, multiple periods);
- frequent use of emoticons, either as visual elements or written with punctuation.

Other features characterizing creolized memes in the language cultures under study include:

- the use of certain types of caricatures: thus, the most popular creolized memes are those based on trolling, irony or sarcasm, or with absurd caricature effects;
- the use of prioritized sources, which include works of popular culture or famous political and cultural leaders of the language culture being studied;
- the use of linguistic techniques that help to achieve comic effect;
- use of fixed visual components or graphic templates;
- use of caricatures, which are becoming popular as creolized memes in the Internet space.

In this paper we consider two main types of language play: text-graphic type of language play and textual type of language play. In the first type, semantic information is in both verbal and visual parts, while in the second type, semantic information is carried by the image, and only linguistic elements can be used to correctly interpret the language game.

It is important to note that both types of creolized memes using language play can contain the same type of language play. At the same time, creolized memes can combine several characteristic features that define this communicative genre, which to a certain extent contributes to their comic effect.
The text-graphic type of language game is based primarily on the author's construction of words and polysemy, when all the images and selected verbal elements maximally complement each other, such as the double use of phraseologisms, i.e., the process of defrazeology is observed. Other popular techniques of language play include the author's use of different temporal forms, polysemy, homonyms and puns (fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Text-graphic type of language game. Part 1

According to these creolized memes of English and Russian, defrazeology is achieved by using images that represent a literal interpretation of a phrase, word combination, quotation, or sustained expression.

For example, in the Russian example, the phrases потеряла надежду and скрипя сердцем are interpreted literally and visual support is created.

The English example of the meme visualizes the inner state through the defrazeology English I speak/English in my head (fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Text-graphic type of language game. Part 2
In these two English-language meme examples, we can observe a language game in the use of the occasionalism Briteesh, which is based on the British love of tea and a euphemism for the noun dinosaur along with the thesaurus by consonance Russian-language memes we can observe a language game, which is manifested in the use of the occasionalism yes... ли бы... Аш два О and the phrase Аш два О, based on the consonance with the chemical formula H2O (water), which creates a comic effect.

In general, if we analyze memes on the Internet, puns are very popular linguistic means of creating a comic effect in Internet communication in English and Russian. In the above example, the image complements the linguistic elements by introducing additional frames, which is very characteristic of creolized memes.

In textual types of language games, the paralinguistic component of a creolized meme is used only to attract attention and to set accents, without having any informational content. The graphical component in such texts is usually conditioned by the choice of color, background canvas, the necessary font, and if the text contains images, their display is not provided. All examples presented in text format retain the original spelling and punctuation (fig. 3).

![Fig. 3. The text-graphic type of language game. Part 3](image-url)

In the given examples of Russian-language creolized memes of Internet-communication we can observe the application of language game with the use of only text design, on a colored background, or on a monotonous background, which is clearly aimed at having an effect on the reader with comic content (fig. 4).
In the example of the use of creolized memes in English, we can observe a language game based on the literal interpretation of the adjective *outstanding*, the formation of *it* from the adjective *standing* and the adverb *out*, as well as the use of the phrase *I don't know* in the format of a language game with an abbreviation. In the third example we observe a language game organized around the opposition of the verbs *show, look, see*, which cannot perform their function according to the comic content of the text.

For texts with partial creolization, where all the information necessary for correct interpretation is contained in the linguistic component, we most often observe a combination of caricature effects, which are based on the use of occasionalisms, with creolized memes, where humorous dictionary definitions of already existing words are present. This is due to the fact that mostly occasionalisms are created in order to better represent an already existing phenomenon, and its comic definitions are the author's interpretation of a known word (fig. 5).

A vivid example of such an application in the Russian language is the project "Slovach", which is engaged in recording neologisms created by users in the network. The comic effect in this kind of memes is created by coming up with a suitable definition for a phenomenon that can be divided into its constituent words.
On the example of the presented creolized memes used in Internet communication in the Russian language for the creation of new occasionalisms is used wordplay based on the abbreviation of two full-valued words. As we can observe, the words are quite interesting and easy to memorize, which contributes to their rapid spread and long-term use in virtual communication.

Articles of comic character are also very popular in English, where not always the introduction of a suitable neologism is the basis for creating a comic effect, sometimes a new comic definition is given to a word already recorded in the dictionary (fig. 6).

In the first example, the language game is based on changing the position of the nouns "money" and "time", which in this situation can be counted. The second example mocks the daily life of a typical Internet user who has no interesting moments outside of virtual communication except for online communication. The third example mocks those who blame not themselves but calories for being overweight.

The use of polysemy and puns is very popular in creolized text memes (fig. 7).
In Russian-language Internet communication we see the following examples of creolized memes. In the first example, the comic effect is created by the unexpected interpretation of the word combination "простые вещи" as denoting everyday problems and situations. In the second example we see the play of the words "здрово" and "здорово". In the third case the comic effect is due to the correlation of the verb "хранить" with the noun "воспоминания", not only with money.

On the example of English Internet communication we can observe the following examples of the use of polysemy and puns in creolized memes (fig. 8).

In the first example we see the use of language game, in which the names of famous holidays are used to describe life situations, if you are married to this or that person, the second example shows the paronymy of the word "exercise" and "extra fries", which is the...
basis for creating a comic effect, and the third example is based on the language game using the pun Anti-social - Selectively social.

These examples show that the language game technique is gaining popularity as a linguistic means of creating creolized memes. Some graphic patterns used to create creolized memes are used by representatives of many countries and have characteristic names. This group in the article includes both creolized memes united by a common visual design and separate types of memes selected on the principle of a single graphic component or its part.

As a rule, the selection of the layout depends on the type of linguistic text that the author of a creolized meme plans to add to the picture. Thus, among the most famous visual patterns can be named a few, such as Someecards (in the Russian variant it is called "Atrkritka") and Philosoraptor. English-language and Russian-language examples with the use of such patterns are similar, because the type used is determined by the type of pattern, not the author himself, but the emerging popularity of a particular layout among Internet users from different countries may not be virtually the same.

The first pattern type "Someecards" is considered the most frequently used, as it can be used in combination with various humorous texts, similar layout design Youreecards is used in English. Its distinctive feature is the use of special types of graphics and fonts, colored backgrounds. The drawn images accompanying the text do not carry any denotative load, but serve to illustrate the linguistic component. The comic effect of these creolized memes is mainly based on the technique of language play or ridicule of everyday situations familiar to all users (fig. 9).

Fig. 9. The text-graphic type of language game.

In these visual patterns we see a language game that comically defines lawyers in the first example, emphasizes women's revenge by silence as a characterizing female factor in the second and ridicules women's attitudes towards sports in the third one (fig. 10).
This visual pattern is very common in Russian, focusing on the relationship between a man and a woman or husband and wife. The language game here is aimed at emphasizing the comicality of the situation suggested in the meme (fig. 11).

In these English-language creolized memes, the comedic effect is achieved by ridiculing an everyday situation, which in this text is interpreted in a positive way (fig. 12).
In the presented examples of the use of Internet memes, the comic effect is built on the explicit ridicule of the overestimated self-esteem of a person who has completely lost the ability of self-irony, relying on the feeling of self-importance and importance of his opinion.

As can be seen from the above examples, comicality using this pattern type involves sarcasm in many situations, which is aimed at the reader and is based on the technique of language play.

The second pattern type "Philosoraptor" belongs to the category of advices (a means consisting of the image of a certain character on a square field with typical thoughts) and is always recognizable in the visual part (the name of the pattern is also based on the analogy with the name of the dinosaur), the text is also built on the same principle, in the form of a rhetorical question, and all the necessary information is contained in the linguistic part, while the humorous perception is based on oxymoron or other types of language play (fig. 13).
According to the given examples, the language game is based on the technique of opposition (oxymoron), where the author, using linguistic means combines completely incompatible notions, using additional frames to achieve a full-fledged comic effect in the meme (fig. 14).

Fig. 14. The text-graphic type of language game. Part 14

In these examples, we can observe puns, elaboration of facts on the basis of comic elements, and at the end of the phrase the comicality of the statement becomes obvious. The given graphic patterns are equally popular in both language cultures under study, but the nature of caricatures used in creolized memes of this kind depends more on the choice of visual design than on the author's belonging to one or another language culture.

The studied examples show that sarcastic and ironic forms of comics are gaining significant popularity in Russian- and English-language Internet space.

Conclusion

The results of the study have shown that both types of creolized memes exist in Russian and English Internet space, and in Internet memes that use language play, the textual type of language play is more common than the textual-graphic type.

At the same time, considering that word play is a universal technique that gives a comic effect in the languages under study, it is mainly based on the same techniques: defraseology, polysemy, word play, homonyms, antonyms, occasionalisms and humorous definition of existing words, but due to the differences in the grammatical structure of the Russian and English languages, certain types of word play prevail to a greater or lesser extent.

As for the themes of using and creating creolized memes, the following peculiarities stand out in the languages under study:

- In the case of creolized memes in Russian, the theme of the text is often based on ridiculing and humorous reinterpretation of everyday troubles that users often encounter, which makes it easier to survive these situations;
- In English, the theme of creolized memes is often aimed at ridiculing social problems and situations. Regardless of the topic, polysemy and puns are often used if the creator of a...
A creolized meme can find a successful image or linguistic situation that will help the created Internet meme to gain popularity among users.

Considering the themes used in the analyzed graphic patterns, we can say that:

- generational conflict is a theme characteristic mainly of Russian-speaking users and less present among English-speaking users;
- the theme of gender conflict is observed in both analyzed cultures, but can be portrayed in different ways. For example, trolling and satire directed at women are more common among English-speaking users, among Russian-speaking users satire directed at women is also common but less frequent; men are often presented as victims of female-dominated relationships;
- choosing everyday situations as themes or turning fictional situations into everyday reality are popular in both linguistic cultures under study, but everyday situations are equally represented in Russian and English virtual communication.

The comparative analysis of the linguistic characteristics of creolized memes in Russian and English helps further research, as it makes it possible, using the results obtained, to study the features of creolized Internet memes in online communication in other languages.

The obtained data contribute to the further development of the field of genre specificity study in the network space, namely, the identification and detailed analysis of the sociocultural component of creolized texts online and comparative analysis of the comic genre in online communication in other languages from the general linguistic and diachronic points of view.

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