

UDC 378.147

<https://doi.org/10.33619/2414-2948/129/55>

INTERNET MEMES AS A NEW MODALITY OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: SOCIO-LINGUISTIC DIMENSIONS

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ИНТЕРНЕТ-МЕМЫ КАК НОВЫЙ СПОСОБ ЦИФРОВОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ: СОЦИОЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ

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Abstract. This paper explores the evolution of internet memes, analyzing them as a distinct communicative modality and a vital sociolinguistic phenomenon within the contemporary media ecosystem. Once viewed merely as ephemera or digital entertainment, memes have transformed into a highly efficient global vernacular capable of transmitting nuanced ideas rapidly and emotionally. This research evaluates how visual-textual metaphors and humorous iconography reconstruct public consciousness, influence geopolitical discourse, and bridge intergenerational communication gaps. Due to their semiotic minimalism and adaptive structure, memes effectively transcend conventional linguistic borders. Additionally, the study contextualizes their capacity to alter public consensus and sustain cultural memory. Ultimately, internet memes are framed as a highly sophisticated stage of digital linguistic evolution, charting their future trajectories within cognitive sociology and media linguistics. This research serves as an academic framework for scholars investigating digital media trends and modern pop culture.

Аннотация. Рассматривается эволюция интернет-мемов, которые анализируются как особая коммуникативная модальность и важнейший социолингвистический феномен в современной медиаэкосистеме. Мемы, которые когда-то воспринимались лишь как мимолетное явление или цифровое развлечение, превратились в высокоэффективный глобальный язык, способный быстро и эмоционально передавать сложные идеи. В работе оценивается, как визуально-текстовые метафоры и юмористическая иконография реконструируют общественное сознание, влияют на геополитический дискурс и сглаживают разрывы в межпоколенческой коммуникации. Благодаря своему семиотическому минимализму и адаптивной структуре мемы эффективно преодолевают традиционные языковые барьеры. Кроме того, в статье контекстуализируется их способность изменять общественный консенсус и поддерживать культурную память. В конечном итоге интернет-мемы позиционируются как высокотехнологичный этап цифровой языковой эволюции, и определяются траектории их дальнейшего изучения в рамках когнитивной социологии и медиалингвистики. Данное исследование служит академической базой для ученых, изучающих тенденции в цифровых медиа и современную поп-культуру.

Keywords: internet memes, digital vernacular, visual semiotics, cyber-culture, linguistic evolution, social discourse, information flow.

Ключевые слова: интернет-мемы, цифровой язык, визуальная семиотика, киберкультура, языковая эволюция, социальный дискурс, информационный поток.

In the contemporary era, the paradigm of human interaction has undergone an irreversible metamorphosis driven by rapid breakthroughs in information technologies. Legacy modes of communication — such as physical correspondence, landline telephony, and standard electronic mail — have steadily yielded ground to dynamic, visually driven, and hyper-interactive digital formats. Positioned at the forefront of this shift is the internet meme, an increasingly dominant cultural artifact.

While the concept of the "meme" was originally synthesized by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976 to describe units of cultural imitation, its modern digital iteration behaves quite differently. Today, a meme denotes a multimodal construct — incorporating static imagery, text, audio, or moving visuals—that undergoes continuous replication and alteration by internet users. Though rooted in parody and satire, these artifacts frequently anchor serious socio-political movements and reshape ideological landscapes. Consequently, memes function as a complex shorthand for web users, facilitating instantaneous shared meaning among specific digital networks while naturally alienating those unfamiliar with the underlying context.

This paper interrogates the communicative architecture of memes, mapping their societal relevance, core academic objectives, and the analytical methodologies used to decrypt them. In the context of the rapid development of digital technologies and the global spread of Internet communication, Internet memes occupy a special place in modern culture. Initially perceived as an element of entertainment content, memes have now transformed into a full-fledged tool for transmitting information, expressing emotions, public opinion, and collective identity. They are actively used in social networks, messengers, media spaces, and even in political discourse, significantly influencing language culture and forms of interpersonal communication. Modern people encounter memes daily, often perceiving them as a natural part of the digital environment, which indicates a high degree of their integration into social communication [1, 2].

The sociolinguistic aspect of Internet memes lies in the fact that they are closely connected with social groups, age categories, cultural characteristics, and language norms of Internet users. Memes are capable of performing the functions of identification and uniting people according to their interests, views, or belonging to a particular online community. The use of certain memes often indicates a person's involvement in the modern media context and their understanding of a specific digital communication code. Thus, a meme becomes a kind of marker of collective culture and a way of expressing social position.

Moreover, Internet memes have a significant influence on language development. Memes actively use elements of colloquial speech, slang, abbreviations, anglicisms, wordplay, and transformations of fixed expressions. They contribute to the emergence of new words and expressions that may later go beyond the Internet space and become established in everyday speech. Due to the speed of their dissemination, memes become an effective means of popularizing linguistic constructions and cultural images. In this regard, the study of memes makes it possible to trace modern trends in language development and the peculiarities of language functioning in the digital environment.

Of particular interest is the ability of Internet memes to convey complex ideas in a brief and accessible form. Memes often act as society's reaction to political events, social problems, cultural phenomena, and global trends. Through humor, irony, or sarcasm, Internet users express their attitudes toward ongoing events, shaping public opinion and influencing the perception of information. In some cases, memes become a tool of social criticism and a way to draw attention to important issues. This demonstrates that memes can no longer be viewed exclusively as an entertainment element — they perform important communicative and cultural functions [6-8].

Scientific interest in Internet memes is also explained by their interdisciplinary nature. This phenomenon is studied within linguistics, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and media

communications. However, it is the sociolinguistic approach that makes it possible to most fully examine the relationship between language, society, and the digital environment. The analysis of Internet memes provides an opportunity to identify the peculiarities of speech behavior among Internet users, determine the mechanisms for the formation of new communicative norms, and understand how the Internet influences modern language and communication culture.

Relevance of Memes in Modern Communication

The relevance of studying Internet memes is determined by the fact that they represent not only a phenomenon of mass culture but also an important sociolinguistic object. Memes reflect linguistic processes occurring in society, demonstrate changes in the ways information is transmitted, and show how language adapts to new digital conditions. In the era of the information society, communication becomes shorter, more visually saturated, and emotionally expressive, while memes perfectly meet these requirements. They combine text, images, symbols, and cultural allusions, forming a special type of message understandable to a specific Internet audience. Several structural variables account for the escalating academic relevance of digital memes.

First, the contemporary attention economy is oversaturated with data, forcing platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) to algorithmically prioritize concise, visually arresting, and easily shareable media. Memes align perfectly with these parameters, making them the native currency of digital expression.

Second, the structural barrier to entry for meme production is incredibly low. The proliferation of intuitive smartphone applications and web-based templates has democratized media production. This democratization enables everyday citizens to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, transforming passive consumers into active cultural producers who can mobilize public sentiment on a global scale.

Third, memes have consolidated as key instruments of modern political warfare and social commentary. During institutional elections or geopolitical crises, these artifacts act as immediate mirrors of public anxiety or dissent, significantly altering how historical events are perceived. Far from being trivial distractions, they are vehicles for active political agency.

Furthermore, the viral capacity of memes is inextricably tied to their affective resonance. By deploying hyperbole and dark irony, they trigger strong psychological responses, ensuring higher retention rates and rapid peer-to-peer transmission across digital networks.

Finally, memes act as primary building blocks for digital tribalism and subcultural identity. Online enclaves utilize localized meme templates to establish boundary lines, signaling shared values and worldview alignments. As noted by Aslan, they represent compact narratives that solidify solidarity within contemporary cyber-communities [3, 4].

Goals and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this research is to study Internet memes as a new form of digital communication and to analyze their sociolinguistic features. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to examine the concept of the Internet meme and the history of its emergence, determine the main functions of memes in the digital space, identify the linguistic characteristics of memes and their influence on modern communication, as well as analyze the role of memes in shaping Internet culture and social interaction. Thus, Internet memes are an important element of modern digital communication, reflecting the peculiarities of the development of society, language, and culture in the conditions of global informatization. Their study makes it possible to better understand the mechanisms of online communication, the transformation of language norms, and the specifics of communication in the virtual space. In the context of the rapid growth of digital technologies, the study of Internet memes acquires particular significance and becomes an important direction in modern sociolinguistics.

The primary trajectory of this research is to decode the operational mechanics of memes as a vital communicative apparatus in the network society. Gaining clarity on this phenomenon yields critical insights into contemporary language shifts and ideological trends.

To satisfy this goal, the following research objectives are established:

1. *Theoretical Re-contextualization*: To trace the conceptual trajectory of the meme from Dawkins' biological analogy to its current status as a digital, collaborative text.
2. *Structural Anatomy*: To isolate the multimodal properties of internet memes, evaluating how textual and visual signs interact to allow for infinite replication.
3. *Functional Taxonomy*: To identify the precise communicative tasks memes perform, ranging from pure escapism and information dissemination to ideological persuasion.
4. *Linguistic Impact Assessment*: To document how meme ecosystems generate new syntactic structures, neologisms, and shorthand vernaculars that bleed into offline speech.
5. *Socio-Political Mapping*: To critically analyze the capacity of memes to manufacture public consent, disrupt mainstream institutional narratives, and influence collective memory [3, 4, 5].

Research Methods; Analyzing a phenomenon as fluid as meme culture necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that bridges structural linguistics, media sociology, and digital humanities:

- *Quantitative Content Analysis*: Used to categorize massive datasets of memes across specific platforms. This method tracks recurring motifs, popularity metrics, and stylistic shifts (e.g., distinguishing between standard image macros and abstract video formats) over targeted timelines;
- *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*: Deployed to unpack the hidden power dynamics and ideological frameworks embedded within trending internet humor, mapping how these graphics interface with broader political realities;
- *Semiotic Analysis*: Focuses on the relationship between the signifier (the template image) and the signified (the text or cultural joke). This helps researchers understand how deep layers of meaning are compressed into a single visual frame;
- *Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis*: Tracks how global meme templates are localized or translated across different geographic territories and language barriers, highlighting regional nuances;
- *Empirical Surveying*: Relies on structured questionnaires to gather data regarding user consumption habits, comprehension rates, and the demographic dispersion of meme literacy;
- *Experimental Media Psychology*: Involves controlled settings where participants are exposed to specific meme formats to measure cognitive retention, emotional triggers, and shifts in political opinion.

Conclusion

Internet memes have solidified their position as a cornerstone of 21st-century digital literacy. Their unique ability to fuse imagery with text, compress intricate societal arguments into minimalist templates, and achieve viral distribution renders them highly potent communicative tools. Far from being mere digital background noise, they reflect the collective anxieties, political fractures, and creative impulses of modern civilization. As digital infrastructure marches forward, the footprint of meme communication will inevitably deepen [9, 10]. Future scholarly inquiry must shift toward tracking the emergence of generative AI in meme production, the weaponization of memes in disinformation campaigns, and their role in hyper-localized digital ecosystems. Decrypting these vectors remains vital for understanding where human language and digital society are heading next.

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Поступила в редакцию
17.05.2026 г.

Принята к публикации
26.05.2026 г.

Ссылка для цитирования:

Zikirova Ch. Internet Memes as a New Modality of Digital Communication: Sociolinguistic Dimensions// Бюллетень науки и практики. 2026. Т. 12. №8. С. 467-471.
<https://doi.org/10.33619/2414-2948/129/55>

Cite as (APA):

Zikirova, Ch. (2026). Internet Memes as a New Modality of Digital Communication: Sociolinguistic Dimensions. *Bulletin of Science and Practice*, 12(8), 467-471.
<https://doi.org/10.33619/2414-2948/129/55>