

HOW INTERNET MEMES BECOME PART OF EVERYDAY LANGUAGE: A STUDY OF MEMETIC EXPRESSIONS IN CONTEMPORARY COMMUNICATION

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Abstract. Internet memes have developed from humorous digital artifacts into recognizable resources of everyday communication. Expressions originating in memes now occur not only on social media but also in informal conversation, workplace interaction, advertising, journalism and political discourse. This thesis examines the linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms through which memetic expressions enter everyday language. It draws on qualitative discourse analysis and research in digital culture, participatory communication, multimodality, Internet pragmatics, and Uzbek Internet discourse. The analysis demonstrates that repetition alone does not make a meme part of language. Conventionalization occurs through collective recognition, contextual flexibility, semantic compression, grammatical adaptability and continued social use.

Keywords: Internet memes, everyday language, memetic expressions, digital communication, pragmatics, multimodality, Uzbek Internet discourse.

INTRODUCTION. The expansion of social media has changed not only the channels through which people communicate but also the linguistic forms they use. Words, phrases, images, gestures, sounds and quotations can now move rapidly from a local online context into broader public discourse. Among the most visible products of this process are Internet memes. Although memes are usually associated with humour, their communicative role is wider: they can express approval, criticism, irony, frustration, disbelief, solidarity or social judgement without requiring a long explanation.

The theoretical origin of the term meme is associated with Richard Dawkins, who used it for cultural elements transmitted through imitation. In his model, tunes, ideas, fashions and catchphrases could pass from one person to another in a manner comparable to the replication of genes [2, p. 206]. Contemporary Internet memes, however, are not merely unchanged packets of information.

Limor Shifman offers a communication-oriented definition of Internet memes as “a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance” [10, p. 41]. Her definition shifts attention from a single viral object to a family

of related versions. A meme therefore exists through repeated social use rather than through the isolated popularity of one image or phrase.

The present study aims to explain how expressions associated with Internet memes move into everyday language and begin to function as relatively stable communicative units. It asks what makes a memetic expression reusable, how an expression becomes independent of its original image or platform, what pragmatic functions it performs, and how shared cultural knowledge influences its interpretation.

MAIN PART. Knobel and Lankshear describe meme-making as a form of cultural participation [4, pp. 199–201]. A user must recognize an earlier pattern and know how to change it appropriately. Wiggins and Bowers similarly call memes “remixed, iterated messages” that continue a public conversation [12, p. 1886]. Milner explains this process through five linked features: multimodality, reappropriation, resonance, collectivism, and spread [6].

Yus argues that the verbal and visual parts of a meme guide the reader toward a contextually relevant interpretation [13, pp. 107–110]. The words alone may be incomplete, and the image alone may be ambiguous. Meaning appears when the reader connects both modes with cultural knowledge. Dynel’s work on visual-verbal humour also demonstrates that meme humour commonly depends on the relationship between several voices, images, and implied evaluations [3, 2021].

Uzbek research provides an important local perspective. O. S. Ahmedov and X. A. Akramova state that Internet discourse has become a source of new words and expressions in both English and Uzbek [1, p. 60]. Sh. T. Toshmurodova considers Internet language not only a new linguistic form but also a reflection of wider changes in global communication [11, p. 345]. M. Sh. Nuriddinova shows that English digital units can adapt to Uzbek morphology and pragmatics; forms such as *layk bosish*, *strim qilish*, and *story joylamoq* combine borrowed bases with Uzbek grammatical resources [8, pp. 509–510]. M. Mengaliyeva also notes the movement of new words, abbreviations, and visual signs from social networks into spoken communication [5, pp. 356–357].

The corpus contains eight user-selected screenshots: five English memes and three Uzbek memes. Each item was analysed at five levels: 1) verbal form, including vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and ellipsis; 2) visual organization, including gaze, gesture, sequence, and labels; 3) pragmatic function, such as evaluation, irony, criticism, or solidarity; 4) cultural presupposition, or the background knowledge needed to understand the joke; and 5) reusability, meaning how easily the pattern can be adapted to a new topic. English meme origins were checked against documented meme histories where possible.

Analysis of English-language memes



Figure 1. A creative variant of the One Does Not Simply meme.

The sentence in Figure 1 is *One does not simply be remembered for one's films*. The construction comes from Boromir's line "One does not simply walk into Mordor" in the 2001 film *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. The pattern later became a reusable image macro. In the present example, the expected structure is preserved, but the final action is changed. The wording makes being remembered appear difficult and almost impossible.

The humour is also intertextual. The actor Sean Bean is widely associated with characters who die on screen, so the statement can be read as self-referential irony. Grammatically, the pattern One does not simply + verb phrase works as a semi-fixed construction. It can accept many new endings while keeping the evaluation "this action is more difficult than it seems."

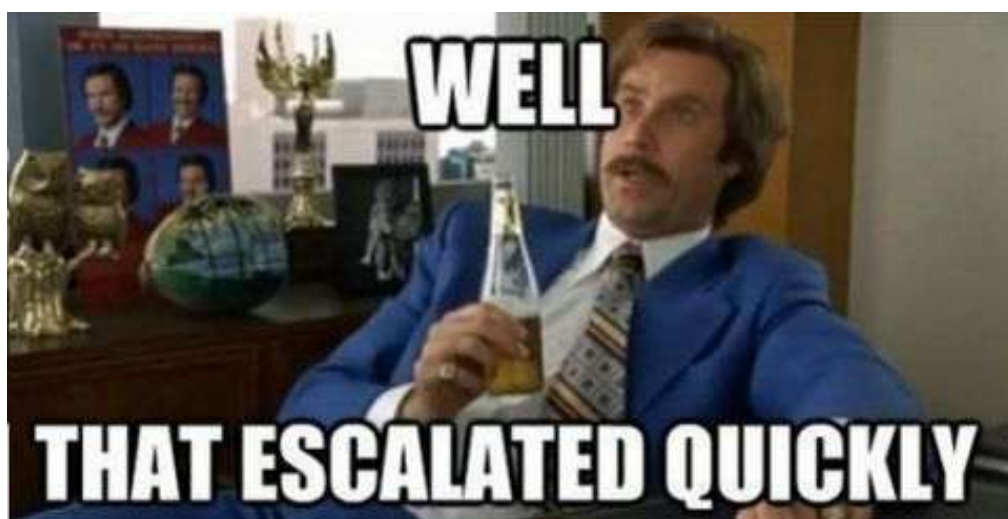


Figure 2. The That Escalated Quickly reaction meme.

The words Well, that escalated quickly form a complete evaluative utterance. That points back to an event already known to the speakers. Escalated describes a rapid

increase in seriousness or conflict, and quickly intensifies the suddenness. The calm seated pose contrasts with the dramatic event that the sentence presupposes. This mismatch creates humour.



Figure 3. Same Energy used to compare three versions of Windows.

Figure 3 places three similar facial expressions above three Windows logos. The phrase Same energy does not claim that the people or operating systems are identical. Energy is used metaphorically to mean a shared impression, mood, or style. The meme asks the reader to compare two parallel sequences: changes in the face and changes in the logo. The humour comes from perceived resemblance. No full sentence is needed; the noun phrase Same energy performs the speech act of evaluation. The reader supplies an implicit proposition such as “these different versions create the same general feeling.”



Figure 4. Blank Drakeposting template showing rejection and approval.

The blank template has two ordered reactions. In the upper frame, Drake turns away and raises his hand, visually rejecting an option. In the lower frame, he smiles and accepts the alternative. The empty white spaces are slots for new text. Users normally place an unwanted option above and a preferred option below. This meme has a stable pragmatic grammar: rejection is followed by approval. The gestures function like the verbal pair no / yes or not X / but Y. Because the template is blank, it demonstrates that a meme can carry a communicative structure before any specific words are added.



Figure 5. Distracted Boyfriend adapted to the conflict between pizza and a diet.

In Figure 5, the man is labelled me, his partner my diet, and the passing woman pizza. These labels change a stock photograph into a small narrative about temptation. The gaze supplies the relation: the speaker turns from a long-term commitment toward an attractive immediate choice. The girlfriend's facial expression adds criticism and makes the broken commitment visible.

Analysis of Uzbek-language memes

**Ma buni ol
busiz qiynalib ketding**

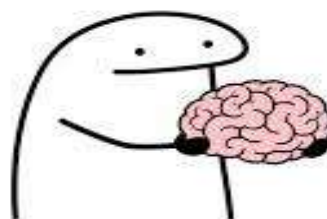


Figure 6. Uzbek Flork-style meme: “Ma buni ol, busiz qiynalib ketding.”

The visible wording *Ma buni ol busiz qiynalib ketding* represents colloquial Uzbek. In edited standard form it can be written as *Mana, buni ol, busiz qiynalib ketding* (“Here, take this; you have struggled without it”). The reduced form *ma*, the absence of punctuation and the compact spelling imitate rapid informal speech. The picture shows one character offering a brain to another. The deictic pronouns *buni* (“this”) and *busiz* (“without this”) refer visually to the brain. The literal act appears helpful, but the implied meaning is an insult: the receiver is presented as someone who has been acting without a brain. Humour comes from the conflict between the surface speech act of offering and the underlying negative evaluation. The image is necessary because it identifies what this means.



Figure 7. Uzbek meme: “Maqsad bir xil, dizayn boshqacha.”

The caption *Maqsad bir xil, dizayn boshqacha* means “The purpose is the same, but the design is different.” The images show a small mousetrap, a larger animal trap and a ring in a jewellery box. The first two objects make the concept of a trap explicit. The ring is then metaphorically placed in the same category. The verbal structure uses parallel contrast: *bir xil* (“the same”) is opposed to *boshqacha* (“different”). The sentence guides the reader to ignore physical differences and search for a common function. The joke depends on a culturally recognizable stereotype that marriage can restrict a person’s freedom. The laughing emoji marks the intended humorous stance and reduces the force of the negative comparison. This meme shows how a short Uzbek sentence can direct a complex visual analogy.

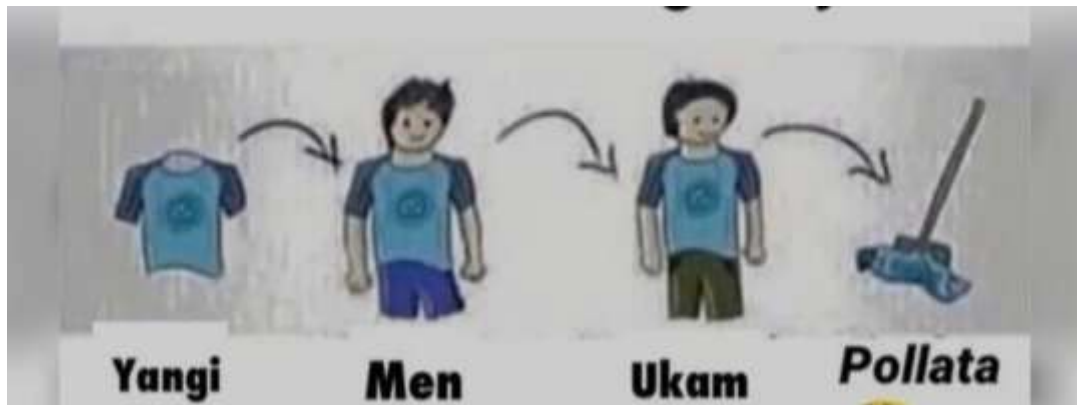


Figure 8. Uzbek meme: “Futbolkaning hayoti.”

The title *Futbolkaning hayoti* means “the life of a T-shirt.” Four labels organize the sequence: *Yangi* → *Men* → *Ukam* → *Pollatta*. The last label compresses *pol latta* (“floor cloth”) into a colloquial written form. Full sentences are omitted, but the arrows let the reader reconstruct the stages: a new shirt is worn by the older child, passed to the younger brother, and finally used as a cleaning cloth. The meme personifies the T-shirt by giving it a life history. The kinship word *ukam* is culturally important because it activates a familiar household practice of passing clothes to younger siblings. Humour comes from recognition and exaggeration: the object loses value at every stage but remains useful. Linguistically, the meme relies on nominal labels, possessive marking in *futbolkaning* and ellipsis. It shows that a complete story can be communicated without finite verbs.

Table 1. Comparative linguistic and pragmatic features of English and Uzbek memes.

Analytical feature	English memes	Uzbek memes
Main communicative form	Reusable verbal constructions and fixed visual templates	Colloquial expressions, compressed spelling, ellipsis, and local images
Semantic compression	<i>Same Energy</i> expresses a comparison in two words; <i>That Escalated Quickly</i> gives a brief evaluation	<i>Maqsad bir xil, dizayn boshqacha</i> expresses contrast in one clause; <i>Futbolkaning hayoti</i> tells a story through four nouns and arrows
Dependence on images	<i>One Does Not Simply</i> can function without its image, while <i>Drakeposting</i> and <i>Distracted Boyfriend</i> depend on visual relations	The brain meme requires the image to reveal the ironic insult; the captionless screenshot requires community knowledge
Source of humour	Contrast, exaggeration, visual analogy, and unexpected evaluation	Colloquial wording, cultural stereotypes, family experience, metaphor, and incongruity
Cultural knowledge	Knowledge of films, celebrities, digital templates, and earlier meme versions	Knowledge of Uzbek informal speech, kinship relations, household practices, and local media
General finding	Memes combine reusable verbal patterns with recognizable visual structures	Memes reshape digital forms through Uzbek grammar, spelling, and cultural experience

The eight images support Shifman's view that a meme is a family of recognizable, transformable items. Their meaning is not stored in words alone. It is produced through the relation among verbal form, visual design, previous versions, and the knowledge of a particular audience.

CONCLUSION. These findings confirm that memes are not simply decorative online jokes. They are compact multimodal utterances. Through repeated use, they introduce new meanings, strengthen informal constructions, and provide speakers with ready-made ways to evaluate situations. Further research could use a larger English-Uzbek corpus and audience interviews to test how age, platform, and cultural experience influence interpretation.

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