

MSC 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»****COMIC RECONSIDERATION IN MEMES AS THE MEANS OF
SOCIAL RELAXATION**

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Abstract

The article considers the functioning of such a genre form of contemporary folklore as a meme. It describes the peculiarities of a meme as a speech genre form created and functioning in social networks: thematic, stylistic, compositional. We noticed that the main feature of a meme is a comic reconsideration – connected with a socially meaning event or a socially meaningless image. The empiric base of the research comprised the memes devoted to the topical event, which became the impulse to launch a new key word moment in the international speech space – *Corona Virus*. The method of random selection helped to choose the memes, appearing in the English and Russian Internet space in February-March 2020. The analysis of the memes was conducted with the author's method: the search of memes connected with the current key word *Corona Virus*, the analysis of visual and verbal lines, the word semantic construction. The authors defined the connotative meanings of the word, which appeared due to the interpretation of the phenomenon in memes: *danger, plague, pandemic, disaster*. The article reveals the mechanisms of the language play, demanded in playing with the word *Corona Virus*: address to the external form of the word; address to the semantics. The main conclusion of the research is that memes as the finally formed speech genre of the Internet communication reflect the acute language world view of the certain mentality bearer and are the resource of renewal and formation of the semantic meaning of the key vocabulary, reflecting the agenda.

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1. Introduction

The Internet space as a special speech environment bears the unique system of speech genre forms. The laws of that system help the Internet communication develop which at present makes a significant influence on the organization of interaction in media – compositional and speech one. The compositional one is on the peculiarities of perception and as the result onto the demands to the text. The speech aspect is on the language in the whole – for example, the word acquires new usage meanings (Baghana et al., 2019; Tanaka et al., 2017); the formation of the layer of acute vocabulary – the current key words.

In this case we are interested in the meme, which constantly draws the attention of the researchers (Benavides-Vanegas, 2020; Bou-Franch & Blitvich, 2019 Dawkins, 1976 (the theory of memes); Dean, 2020; Gualberto et al., 2020; Kassing, 2020; Kepa-Figura, 2019; Nagel, 2020; Prokofeva & Shcheglova, 2020; Surikova, 2020; Ye Kyung & Crowder, 2019). The uniqueness of the research is that the focus of the attention is on the memes with the key word of the current moment, which is *Corona Virus*. The selection of the key lexeme happens due to the sharp rise of the interest to the named unit, which is on the agenda.

We consider the meme as a speech genre in the unity of visual and speech components. The combination of the genre signs is the following: 1) thematically the meme correlates to the significant political and social events, allowing to find the reason for comic reconsideration or is a comic reconsideration of non-urgent image; 2) stylistically the meme longs to the colloquial speech design, without any literary frames: they often use the deliberate corruption of the word form, rough simple vocabulary, even obscene vocabulary; 3) compositionally memes are the unity of visual and speech components, each element adds to the other one, performing the main communicative purpose – gradually making the situation absurd.

The meme is called to invite people to mutual laughter, i.e. its functionality is defined with drawing the addressee into the intellectual game, emotional relaxation, creating an entertaining moment.

2. Problem Statement

The comic effect is often based on the contradiction observed in the surrounding reality. The contrast, dissension, opposition within the comic situation (Borev, 1970) are presented excessively, provoking the laughter. It is important to notice that the laughter itself is conditioned socially and historically. Each epoch bears its forms and genres of the comic effect and actualizes the old ones. The comic effect is able to solve many social problems, their character being in correlation with the current demands: clarifying the true order of things, transferring the hidden sense, social relaxation etc. The features of the comic presentation in memes, in our opinion, demonstrate all that.

The comic reconsideration in memes is presented with two forms: content and speech (it is similar Propp, 1997).

The content in memes is shown with the violation of logical laws. The task of the comment is to make the situation absurd. It is often possible due to the background knowledge and hidden senses play. The speech plan in the conflict includes the image and the stylistic response of the comment, which does not relate to it.

We notice that on the one hand the multiconedness of the meme provides a mutual meaning refinement of the speech and visual components, on the other hand –there is a phenomenon of the self-existence of the both. The visual or speech components possessing a greater potential of meaning-production, it is spread in other memes, getting known and helping to create new language and logical games and to form the usage meanings of the key word.

Thus, in the center of the given research there is a meme, which is considered as an acute in the Internet-communication speech genre of the comic sphere. They usually speak about the entertaining function of the meme in the Internet-communication. We consider that the meme is an integral resource for the net communication, possessing the multi-functionality and a high degree of adaptation to the demands of the audience (the transformation of visual and verbal components). In the case of memes with acute images we deal with a universal multicode system, able to solve such difficult problems as the social relaxation (from fear, hatred, meanness etc.). Frequently it happens through the game with multicode meanings, gathering around the key vocabulary of the agenda.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. How does a meme perform the functions of social relaxation?
- 3.2. What are the speech mechanisms of performing the function?
- 3.3. How are the current key words used in such memes?
- 3.4. What forms of memes may be distinguished with such a functionality?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the given research is the search for speech mechanisms of social relaxation (on the example of fear of illness) in memes with the current key word *Corona Virus*.

5. Research Methods

The empiric material of the research is the combination of memes (Russian and English), which appeared in connection with the spread of Corona Virus in the world (February – March 2020). The simultaneous rise of the threat and the number of messages about in media lead to the feeling of fear rising in the society. The line of words for representation of the new threat is formed inside the media discourse, provoking the feeling of helplessness; the central of those words is the nomination of the threat – *Corona Virus*. The word acquires the communicative status of the key one (about the role of key words in the news media discourse see). Used initially in its direct meaning only, the word is gradually reconsidered semantically, new connotative meanings are formed: threat, new unknown danger, pandemic etc. These meanings become the foundation for contradictions, necessary for the comic reconsideration of the situation. The comic becomes the means of social relaxation; laughter is the response to fear. This phenomenon has deep historical roots, but the genre form of presentation is new, it is acute for the current moment, it is the meme.

The methodological foundation for the research is, on the one hand, the method of characterizing the speech genre, on the other hand, we developed the method of linguistic stylistic analysis of key words

functioning in media space, based on the semantics and pragmatic of its usage. As the word Corona Virus relates to the semantic field “Disease” developing in the language world view, the key word in the given case was able to form the own lexical semantic field. This feature was also considered in the meme analyses.

The primary analysis of memes, devoted to Corona Virus demonstrated the possibility to continue the research with the following classification of types of interaction between the author and the key words:

- The address to the new form of the word, the sound form (homonymy, paronymy).
- The address to the inner content, semantics (polysemy, the use of acute connotative meanings of the key word, the elements of the lexical semantic field, formed by it).

6. Findings

6.1. The address to the sound form of the word

The simplest type of the game with the sound form of the key word is based on the paronymic attraction (Figure 01).



Translation: korova virus (cow virus)

Figure 1. The paronymic attraction *corona – korova (cow)*

The non-language paronymy of the words corona and korova allowed the author of the meme to produce the simple replacement of one element with the other. The incompatibility of notions for each word created the comic paradox, supported with the image of a cow against the background of the Corona Virus molecule. Thus, happens the typical replacement of notions, when a more emotionally loaded one is replaced with a neutral one – the decrease of pathos Bakhtin alleviates the feeling of fear in front of danger. The play with the word form is also realized through the literacy of its parts (Fig. 02).



Translation: Corona Virus in Russia (corona = crown)

Figure 2. The literacy of the root morphemes within the key word *Corona Virus*

The comic reconsideration in a number of memes happens due to irony at the pop stars, who like to try the crown on. The cited example shows F. Kirkorov and N. Baskov (S. Zverev and M. Galkin in other variants). Literally understanding the morphemes in the word, Corona Virus may be interpreted as a total interest to the image of king (pop). The literacy of meanings provokes laughter decreasing the emotional stress. The additional comic effect is produced with the visual element: F. Kirkorov and N. Baskov often perform together (in advertisements, shows), playing a fake contradiction on the stage. Their mutual interest to overestimate their significance is funny and the crown is the metaphor for it.

The homonymic anecdotes are also demanded in this theme. The English memes about Corona Virus generally contain the language play, based on the coincidence of the first part of the disease name and the name of one of the most popular beer brands. The comment *First Mexican victim of Corona Virus* is supported with the visual image: a drunk man sleeping amidst the boxes with beer. The comic reconsideration is realized through leaving out the seme “deadly disease” and the replacement of the disease with a temporary state of intoxication.

The game with the beer names is absurd due to the logical line, appearing in the semantic field “a deadly dangerous disease” (Figure 03).

CORONA BEER CHANGES THEIR NAME TO AVOID ASSOCIATION WITH THE CORONA VIRUS OUTBREAK



Figure 3. Logical games. Associative line

The meme is the clash of two images: dramatic photo in emotional pressure – disinfectors at work and the photo of a sandy seaside with the bottle of beer affront. The contradiction of images is stressed with the contradiction of speech comments: the first – intense – photo is accompanied with the comment *chill out*, the second with the completely relaxing content – *Have a corona!* The ambiguity of the last comment causes the laughter reaction due to the homonymic comparison. Also the additional hidden meaning is possible: in spite of all the safety measures the disease is spreading out.

6.2. Content. The address to the semantic of the key word and the elements of the semantic field

The main meaning, which is realized with the word Corona Virus, is “a dangerous disease; epidemic, pandemic”. One of the oldest ways to struggle with the panic and fear is to forbid the name of the threat, a sort of a taboo on its name (tabooed theme of death). There starts the language game in memes, based on the exception of the word Corona Virus. For example, replacing it on the omage and a certain game with the addressee in associative links (Figure 04).



Translation: What's it called? It's not called, it comes itself.

Figure 4. Game with the main name

The cited meme is the response from the anecdote: *How is your tax inspector called? - He is not called, he comes himself*, spread as a popular speech accompaniment for the memes of this theme.

The enlarged image of Corona Virus is in the center, which creates the focus on the meaning dominant of the meme with the actual absence of the word *Corona Virus*. The game beginning is based on the actualization of two meanings of the word *called*: “call by name” and “call”. There is an address to the background knowledge of the addressee, connected with the current word: a high speed of spread of Corona Virus, the threat of pandemic. This may be called an adult variant of the folklore children’s horror of the story “The coffin on wheels”, where the expectation of danger and its closeness becomes the foundation for the game.

In a number of cases the game happens with equal meanings of the main name or its parts. The memes about Corona Virus play with two meanings of the word *virus* (“the reason for contagious disease” and “the computer program connecting to other programs with a negative effect”) (Figure 05). Here comes the game in connection with *virus meme*, applied in the net to memes with the theme under consideration. A contagious meme, a quickly spread meme or a meme about virus?



Translation: Corona Virus. Share it.

Figure 5. The game based on the polysemy of the word *virus*

In the given case we again see the spread image of the Corona Virus molecule. To avoid the mistaken interpretation the image is supported with a sign performing the nominative function. Below the image there is a calling with the imperative verb. The absence of verbalized object referring to the predicate refers

to the image and the sign above. The comic effect is created with the ambiguity of reading: to share the infection (the absurd calling) and to share the meme, to make it virus.

The spread of the “plague” theme happens in the game of elements of the semantic field “Corona Virus” – frequently this is the replacement of the medical mask as the protection means for the plague ones. There is a phenomenon, which may be defined as the graphic periphrasis – the medical mask becomes the plague one, associatively calling for the line *Corona Virus – plague*. The mask and the protection uniform become the part of the lexical semantic field, gathering around the key word, and the theme for consideration in a great number of memes, both English and Russian. The most spread method is to place an extraordinary situation in a casual context. For example, a frequent variant is the turn of protection clothes into a pseudo fashionable trend in 2020. This subject is further absurdly developed entering the fashion race of film characters (Figure 06).



Figure 6. Logical games. Combination of real and unreal

The presented meme unites several signs of different plans, creating the additional hidden meanings. The sign of nuclear danger is united with the large image of the Corona Virus molecule, which places the new disease and radiation sickness in one line (the connotative meaning “danger”). The visual component is added with the animated characters from “Spiderman” – the main villain and his dominions, wearing various protection clothes starting with a plague mask and a respirator and finishing with a body armor. The ambiguity of the comment *2020 be like* provides an opportunity for various reading: a high degree of danger from the disease – fashionable trends 2020 – be like a villain – Corona Virus as the greatest evil of 2020. Depending upon the acuteness of any meaning for the recipient, the corresponding understanding is actualized.

7. Conclusion

Summing up, we shall notice the following: 1) at present the meme is formed as a speech genre of the Internet-communication with the variety of speech-genre features and a complex system of variants; 2) the speech model of the genre demands a further deep study, which will allow creating the classification of the genre diversity of memes; 3) the meme exists as a comic genre, focused on entertaining and social relaxation after the influence of the agenda; 4) the reasons for the meme appearance are connected with a) the necessity of the phatic communication (communication for entertainment), b) the demand for adaptation

to the stressed informational flow with a prevailing number of emotionally negative news; 5) memes help to fix the current key words in the usage; 6) connotative meanings of key words appear and lexical semantic fields of these words are spread in the result of language and logical games with the current vocabulary of the epoch; 7) memes reflect the acute language world view of the bearer with a certain mentality; 8) the analysis of memes, functioning in various language environments, shows the actualization of various associative links, different direction of language games with a significant number of contact points, considering the world agenda.

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