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SOMETHING BE LIKE: PERFORMATIVITY
IN THE POST-IRONIC MEMES

MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

Many contemporary media objects are multimodal products, combining several channels of transferring information. One such example is post-ironic statements balancing on the verge of humor and truth. The thesis aims to study how such statements, together with a picture, are viewed as post-ironic and act as communication actors capable of constructing a representation of performative online identity. More specifically, the thesis considers for selection those statements that fulfill the content criterion of referring to subjectivity or a group of people and contain words such as "girls", "me", "women", followed by a description of the person's action ("be like", "do") and an accompanying picture, which is not limited to selecting and might be a celebrity photo, art, or a movie shot. Multimodal Discourse Analysis as a method includes criteria such as semiotics, intertextuality, and contextuality, which are responsible for examining the selected images in accordance with the research questions and chapters.

Objects are first examined for their post-ironic core with the criteria of semiotics in the first chapter. Their intertextual nature is analyzed in the next chapter dedicated to identifying tools that assist in recognizing memes and their interconnections. The last chapter deals with the objects' ability to help construct an online identity and express oneself, considering the influence of such contextual concepts as multivoiced information dissemination, fake news, authenticity and femininity.

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INTRODUCTION

The methods of formatting and transmitting information are undergoing significant changes in the present era. Due to the vast array of formats provided by various Internet platforms for content creation and dissemination, it is noteworthy that an increasing number of formats are emerging and, importantly, being embraced by Internet users and content creators. Among these, one can highlight the format of content transmission via memes, which Internet users employ to process some significant events (Laineste and Voolaid 2017).

The development of social media and the Internet has engendered new forms, methods, and channels of information dissemination. Furthermore, evidence of their evolution lies in the fact that modern digital memes bear little resemblance to their predecessors, which existed and circulated just a decade ago. Upon close examination, it can be noted that contemporary memes differ in complexity since they operate not as directly but rather as a balance between sincere expression and humor.

However, it is not advisable to equate everything observed on the Internet with such duality. Some entities still operate solely within one channel—either seriously and sincerely or humorously. This paper explicitly examines instances wherein a meme operates in two fields simultaneously, incorporating elements of sincerity and humor in its form. Such instances have been termed "post-irony" on the Internet, and the memes themselves are considered post-ironic.

Research questions and thesis objective

Therefore, all further mentions of post-irony in this paper pertain directly to the post-irony that currently exists in the form of textual or visual memes. This study's research object is post-ironic Internet memes containing a textual statement accompanied by a picture regarding some situation that can be described as "Something Be Like". This title is

collective, as it reflects meme phrases in the sense that it suggests establishing a metaphorical equivalence between the given text and the image. The memes' aforementioned duality serves as a focus in all research inquiries, albeit across various levels, including semiotics, intertextuality, and contextuality, in that order. The subsequent section on the criteria determining the inclusion of a particular meme in the study's sample sheds more light on the examined gap between seriousness and humor as well as the whole title.

The paper argues that such a sequence of analysis allows for commencing at the semiotic micro-level within the confines of a specific meme, subsequently progressing to examining interconnections among various memes based on the obtained semiotic results. Then, the analysis can delve into the broader context, elaborating on external reasons for the emergence of such memes. Following this sequence is justified by the fact that the findings of each level lead to the analysis at the next one, which would be incomplete or even futile without the preceding levels. Moreover, this structural sequence corresponds with the following 3 research questions, as each question can be addressed within the framework of a specific level: 1) *how does post-irony manifest itself via semiotic tools?* 2) *how do memes function as a communication phenomenon, transmitting information and enabling interaction within meme complexes?* 3) *how do post-ironic statements in memes contribute to identity construction and self-expression?*

To answer the first question, the first chapter analyzes the memes' textual and visual elements and their combined contribution. Both text and image, along with their contribution to the meme's overall meaning, can be analyzed in terms of semiotics and particularly grammatical constructions. Besides, a metaphorical gap emerged because of various modes of textual condition and visual response is also examined.

The second question is tackled in the second chapter, which examines memes from the perspective of their communicative function and transmission of information. The

obtained semiotic results support analyzing memes' intertextual ability to form meme complexes and reflect references to one another. Therefore, the second chapter introduces meme-literacy and deals with memes' capacity to communicate within their complexes and contain information within themselves and their distribution platforms. Additionally, an empirical analysis of memes is conducted in this chapter based on Noam Gal's criteria, which is further clarified in the methodology section.

To address the third question, the environment that facilitates the existence of memes is analyzed. This question is explored in the third chapter, which investigates how post-ironic statements in memes can be seen as attempts at constructing online identity and. The third chapter aims to link the ambivalent-subjective nature of the chosen memes to the external context and norms set by the Internet and social media.

Method and selection criteria

Memes are applicable to various fields, not only to images but also to objects containing video and audio elements. However, this paper considers only graphical memes that meet the specific criteria described below. It is also important to mention that memes without specific authorship were used in theoretical sections dedicated to analyzing the memes' functioning as a whole. The presence of highlighted criteria for post-irony mattered more than knowledge of the specific author because the principles of memes that do not affect authorship were examined. Therefore, the source of such memes can be broadly attributed to the Internet, as they were encountered either on platforms such as KnowYourMeme or stumbled upon on Instagram through algorithms.

However, regarding empirical analysis sections, the memes were not randomly chosen but sourced from the Instagram profile @girlworldjpg. Instagram is a leading social media platform for demonstrating how contemporary culture, identity, and communication

intersect being moved away from long posts in favor of image focused and instant communication (Van Dijck 2013). Plus, it follows that Instagram is a social network focused on self-presentation more than all the other social networks usually dedicated to maintaining social contacts and socializing (Harris and Bardey 2019).

Regarding the choice of a particular profile, @girlworldjpg provides a lens through which it is possible to explore these intersections, especially in terms of expressing identity, performativity, femininity and post-ironic humor, which are also examined in this study. Moreover, the specificity of selecting authorship is explained by the fact that the empirical sections contain criteria for analyzing modes of intertextuality and contextuality, which directly consider markers of authorship and platforms. Based on this, the decision was made to demonstrate the operation of these markers on the example of a specific account, since it produces memes that meet all the criteria for analysis. Consequently, the responsibility for selecting memes lies entirely with the paper's author, as the emphasis is placed on qualitative analysis.

After briefly introducing the principles of meme selection, a detailed description of the criteria used by the author to decide whether or not to include a meme in the analysis can be provided. The graphical content in the following objects in Fig.1 can be viewed to understand what specifically allowed the author to include such memes in the paper. These examples in Fig. 1 are not utilized in subsequent analysis but serve as demonstrative examples of criteria.



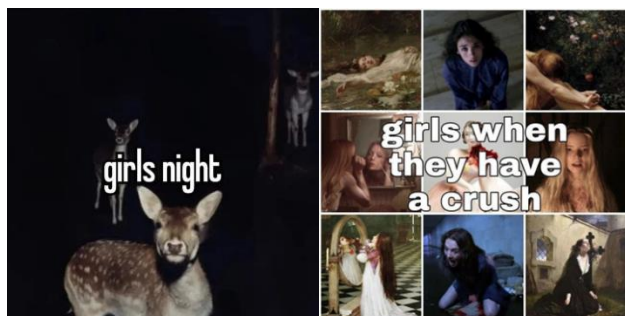


Fig. 1: A compilation of different memes across the Internet

Regarding the meme's textual component, the object should contain a statement that falls under the title "something is like something". In the selected images, this often refers to some external object or event ("Fight Club," "girls night") or appeals to a female group or individual user ("women," "girls," "me"). After identifying the object or group of people, there is an explanation of their characteristics, properties, or actions expressed in verbs, often accompanied by conditionals such as "when" or "if" ("be having," "when they have a crush", "when I came to the realization that..."). To summarize, a textual criterion contains a statement about some group or an external concept, sometimes using an additional condition, while the answer to this statement is offered in the visual part.

The visual components do not undergo as strict a selection process as the text and, therefore, can be presented in various forms, including movie stills, photographs of famous or ordinary people, drawings, images of animals, and collages. Thus, the text introduces a condition, while the images act as the resolution presented in the statement, where one should look for the second element of the equation "something be like something." Therefore, the criteria for selecting the visual part are not as strict because the presence of the image itself is important, even if it appears somewhat detached from the text. The very gap between the textual statement and the image-response is the subject of examination in the semiotics section, which constitutes an invisible metaphorical element contributing to

the meme's meaning formation. All the conditions listed are relevant for all further examples of memes, both in theoretical sections and empirical analyses.

Regarding femininity as a possible criterion for including a meme in this analysis, it should be noted that this aspect is also taken into broader consideration and examined in the third chapter. The focus of the work is not solely on feminine representation, as the statements often contain only "Me" in the textual part. However, attributes of femininity (primarily images of women in addition to the references in the text) cannot go unnoticed and therefore require separate mention within the idea of online femininity establishment.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is implemented to examine the selected statements. Since the chosen post-ironic memes rely both on visual elements and written language, MDA, as a tool that operates with different layers within one object, can be used in analyzing different modes interaction. Moreover, memes' intertextual and contextual power is also considered, providing additional layers for analysis that MDA can accommodate. Therefore, employing this kind of analysis enables better understanding of the modes interplay, meanings, and cultural contexts within a meme. These modes can consider chosen memes from different angles, decomposing their sides into separate areas for examination. Although these criteria seem divided and detached, they can be examined as distinct layers, where each leads to an expansion of the next one.

The semiotic analysis, as well as the examination of intertextuality and contextuality, draws on the ironic markers proposed by Noam Gal (2022), including platform, participants, style, intra-textual knowledge, and contextual knowledge. These markers enable the analysis of ironic content, and their essence is elaborated on in the relevant sections. Additionally, another work by Gal et al (2016) considers memes from the perspective of polyvocality, which is also applied in the empirical section of this paper.

In addition to Gal, the paper also employs the analysis method by Kate Scott (2021), which is based on relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986). Scott's method is suitable as it analyzes "object-labeling memes", which structurally resemble memes in this study. Object-labeling memes are considered stock images with added labels for humorous effect (Scott 2021). Relevance theory is applied in this case to relate the visual components to the textual ones, assign meaning to this relationship, and attempt to decipher the external idea implied by these labels. The mapping method provided by Scott correlates with the conclusions from the paper's first chapter regarding the meme's textual structure, which needs to be filled with individual interpretation. For this reason, her method is employed in the empirical analysis of this work, dedicated to the attempt to decipher the metaphorical gap in a meme.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since it was decided to analyze post-ironic memes and their ability to be performative and communicative, starting with definitions related to memes, post-irony, and their capabilities is advisable. To accomplish this, it is necessary to introduce the ideas of meme, post-irony, and performativity and delineate which specific meaning is more appropriate within this paper.

Meme and Internet meme

According to Richard Dawkins (1976), a meme is an imitation unit operating akin to a virus, as it spreads by being passed from one brain to another, thereby turning another mind into its carrier. Strictly speaking, a meme can be defined as any cultural unit of various formats that has resonated in people's minds for a certain period, allowing this unit to spread and permeate other cultural spheres through human influence. The term "meme" first appears

in that sense, but over time, it has been either contested by different authors or supplemented and refined.

It is also believed that anything potentially subject to imitation and replication can be considered a meme (Dennett 1995). It may include ideas whose embodiments are found in physical cultural carriers like tools, books, or pictures, each carrying distinct memetic ideas. (Dennett 1991). Besides, since memes are constantly evolving in this manner, they should be regarded not individually but as an entire collection or unified complex (Rogers and Giorgi 2023).

Regarding the evolution of memes, Milner (2013) emphasizes participants' contribution to this process. It is the participants who are responsible for modifying certain parts of the meme while preserving others, thereby ensuring the memes' interdiscursivity. Interdiscursivity, in turn, can be explained as the relationship of individual memes to their common complex because memes are created by many participants and contain references to each other (Shifman 2014).

After outlining the concept of a meme, the next step is to delve into the analysis of a specific type known as an Internet meme. In this sense, an Internet meme can be seen as detached from Dawkins' original idea, as Dawkins placed greater emphasis on the process of meme dissemination rather than its mechanism (Sperber 2000). He did not particularly consider the role of the audience, upon whom the viability of Internet memes directly depends. Since it is people who participate in modifying and spreading memes, this does not support the notion of memes as self-replicating units, as posited by Dawkins (Sperber 2000). Thus, memes are not self-replicating units; rather, they depend on cultural adaptation and transformation processes with direct intervention from participants. An Internet meme, being

a product of social networks that inherently imply collaboration and communication among many users, cannot exist independently of them.

Expanding on Dawkins' idea of comparing memes to genes, Plotkin (2000) found such a comparison problematic. He notes that even though memes are similar to genes as they contain something that can be passed on and therefore can be compared to memories, it is difficult to determine what is precisely preserved for copying, as each subsequent transmission of information from one carrier to another may undergo changes (Plotkin 2000). This criticism suggests that the analogy between memes and genes oversimplifies the complexity of cultural transmission and evolution.

However, there is an objection and a return to the similarity between memetics and genetics. Even if memes are memories, they must not be memories of personal experience but must be contained in a language that can encode and disseminate these memories (Jeffreys 2000). Based on this, he concludes that it is incorrect to say that each newly reproduced meme is dissimilar to a so-called parent meme.

Although the Internet meme can take various forms (videos, hashtags, GIFs), it is primarily associated with still images, which undergo modifications, alterations, and remixes by users (Milner 2013). It is also noted that a meme is a multi-layered and intertextual combination disseminated through active audience engagement (Laineste and Voolaid 2017). A similar definition of an Internet meme can be found in Shifman's work (2014), suggesting that the modern meme should be viewed as part of a group of digital items, where each meme is created in awareness of other versions and shares common characteristics of "content, form, and/or stance" with them.

A similar perspective on memes regarding their shared features can be found in the work examining the memetic nature of users' contributions to a single video campaign,

where various memetic responses contribute to forming a collective LGBT identity (Gal 2016). The original video and its responses did not inherently carry humorous undertones; however, this did not prevent the author from identifying their memetic nature due to their ability to function as "both meaning-making and disciplining tools in the boundary work of collectives" (Gal 2016). Viewing memes in this light reveals that the humorous component is not a mandatory criterion for labeling an object as a meme. This notion that a meme does not necessarily have to contain humor to be called a meme is echoed by various authors, as memes can participate in larger processes such as identity formation and shaping public discourse rather than only creating a joke (Miltner 2011).

Thus, meme is a multimodal object with various speech registers, capable of persuading and mobilizing the audience (Hakoköngäs et al 2020), gaining influence through online dissemination (Davison 2012), thereby becoming part of the general consciousness (Tuten and Solomon 2017) or communal property for use by anyone involved in online communities (De la Rosa-Carrillo 2015). Such a mode of collaborative art speaks to memes as objects of participatory discourse (Milner 2016). In other words, memes operate on the principle of creative reestablishment, differentiated from, for example, viral content, since viral content remains in its original form and undergoes no alterations (Knobel and Lankshear 2007).

An observation about viral content can be found in the Urban Dictionary. This platform explains various terms that are not necessarily related to Internet culture. However, it offers a way to examine different versions of term explanations, especially regarding some phenomena directly associated with the Internet. For this reason, one can explore the explanations of Internet meme provided directly by Internet users. Regarding viral content, one can encounter the opinion that once a photo, video, or plain text goes viral, it can then become a meme, as it may undergo modifications and copying (Urban Dictionary 1999-

2024). It is also noted that the distinction between a meme and viral lies in the fact that a meme undergoes various alterations and modifications by users (Shifman 2011), thus becoming an additive piece of content, not an independent object (Shifman 2014). To sum up, it can be assumed that every meme was, to some extent, viral, but not every viral object necessarily became a meme. The transformation from a viral object to a meme is facilitated by altering the original object with the help of adding various elements (text, images, videos, music). Additionally, virals are single units, while memes constitute a collection of texts (Shifman 2014: 56–58).

To summarize the various descriptions of memes, one can refer to Shifman's (2014) conclusion that memes relate to each other, including being crafted, changed, and circulated with mutual awareness while sharing commonalities in content and form. Moreover, while the humorous component may be present, it is not mandatory. Considering the various versions and details of the meme's meaning, this work adheres to categorizing memes as still images containing visual and textual elements that allow them to be characterized as both humorous and sincere. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the selected images contain specific textual conditions, which distinguish them from their predecessors that did not engage with the audience nor introduce conditionals, hence never directly addressed their audience in such a manner.

Post-irony

Unlike the rich array of academic explanations of the term meme, the concept of online post-irony is primarily explained by non-academic sources due to the relative novelty of the topic and limited existing research. While there are numerous academic works on memes, they often do not explicitly mention the term "post-ironic memes" and thus, post-irony is not extensively discussed compared to memes. This may be because memes have

become tightly intertwined with contemporary Internet culture that explicitly labeling them as "post-ironic" is no longer deemed necessary, as it might be redundant. However, it should be mentioned that labeling memes in this work as post-ironic is still required because there is a vast number of memes that fit into the category of conventional irony based on their structure and content. These could include, for example, memes from the early 2000s or graphical memes that contain direct jokes in their textual part. The memes examined in this work cannot be directly classified as humor, yet they also cannot be categorized as sincere expressions. For this reason, the decision was made to label them as post-ironic and examine them from the perspective of post-irony. Consequently, all further explorations of post-irony revolve around the borderline between humor and sincerity on the Internet. Thus, considering explanations and analyses from non-academic sources may seem logical because post-ironic memes are a product of Internet culture. However, before examining post-irony specifically in memes, it is possible to explore its manifestation in other cultural and multimodal objects.

To begin with, post-irony is associated with Wallace, whose works and essays contain analyses of post-irony. For instance, an excerpt from his study of the 1984 Pepsi advertisement (Wallace 1993) can be viewed and compared to the analyzed objects in this study. He notes that this advertisement manages to consciously "make fun of itself, Pepsi, advertising, advertisers, and the great U.S. watching/consuming crowd" by using clichés, which still conform to the format of advertising (Wallace 1993). Departing from the standard advertisements' attempts to conceal the techniques they use to sell. Wallace argues that this particular advertisement consciously operates with clichéd methods but no longer hides this fact while still aiming to sell. As a result, such advertisement conveys a vague but multi-layered message, consisting of sub-levels that can be divided into "yes, we are using all this

consciously", "yes, it all looks too much," and "yes, this is still advertising, and we are still trying to sell the product, but we are no longer hiding it".

Irony relies on a knowledgeable audience, whereas for the rest, it might appear as falsehood (Williams 2003). This resonates with the Pepsi advertisement above, as the audience is expected to have the same awareness and understanding of what is happening again. This same level of required knowledge in terms of detecting post-irony is also indicated by the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford Languages 2016), where "post-ironic" means "having or showing awareness of irony or an ironic effect and so deliberately either avoiding or emphasizing it".

The example of post-irony involving FHM magazine and the bare breast on its cover is illustrative as well, as it also operates on implicit awareness (Williams 2003). Such a cover visually conveys the idea that women are sexual objects, yet this is no longer entirely acceptable in modern times with a strong feminist perspective. On the other hand, such a cover also does not entirely deny that women are objects, as doing so would be considered "dated, over-sincere, mawkish even" (Williams 2003). Therefore, there is a dual statement that "women are neither objects nor non-objects," but the bare breast remains present, and it is the only thing that matters.

These analyses illustrate the essence of post-irony, which operates through dual meanings and exposes the depicted object, such as the example with FHM magazine above, stripped of precise and straightforward statements like "women are objects" or "women are not objects." These discussions reflect the principles of post-irony in cultural artifacts, which can also be traced in the selected objects in this study.

It is important to note that the examples above relate to commerce; therefore, the intention to sell something was also considered. When discussing Internet memes, it becomes clear that such post-irony does not sell anything concrete but still operates with the

same conscious duality and playfulness with its content. This can best be seen in the case of Internet trolls, another product of Internet communication alongside memes. Such Internet trolls aim to incite chaos and conflict for entertainment purposes (Hardaker 2010: 237). In other words, the user intentionally escalates a discussion about a particular topic (or in the comments section under it), but the other users engaged in the debate may not realize the troll's deliberate intentions to joke. As a result, what ensues is a discussion (or rather, more of a quarrel and exchange of insults) that cannot be unequivocally deemed sincere, as at least one participant is expressing their views while merely exploiting sincerity. The recognition of Internet trolling existence in this study may be helpful in understanding the duality of Internet culture, but not for analyzing how such Internet trolling can be deciphered specifically as trolling since linguistic and contextual criteria for recognizing it deserve separate analysis. However, awareness of its existence can aid in understanding how post-irony may manifest online.

The prefix "post" usually implies a phenomenon that has emerged after another phenomenon as an innovation or difference. The part of the name after that prefix suggests that in the new phenomenon the foundation of the old one still remains, and in the case of post-irony, this is no exception. The depicted part in post-irony appears as pure irony, yet in some cases, it is intended to express sincere motives and opinions. Returning once again to the Urban Dictionary, one may encounter such a definition of post-irony as "when the speaker is ironically being ironic" (Urban Dictionary 1999-2024). Thus, when users now refer to post-irony, they specifically mean post-irony in memes. However, this term is undoubtedly applicable to various cultural objects where there is a possibility of depicting ambivalent relationships between a classical genre and cultural object that, in form, may belong to such a genre but, in content, serves more as its mockery or a reconsideration. Therefore, the mention of post-irony in this study directly relates to humor, which

nevertheless does not adhere to conventional comedic rules and may not always be distinguishable from sincere statements. However, neither the form nor the meme's topic necessarily ensures post-irony; instead, it is the ambiguous and blurred position of the creator that fosters it (Shifman 2013).

In summary, post-irony is a mode of conveying information that subtly incorporates humor, where this subtlety is achieved through various visual and textual techniques that introduce doubt regarding the author's intentions.

Performativity

Performativity, as a theoretical concept, has been applied in various fields. However, focusing on those definitions that directly deal with identity expressed via textual or visual tools is beneficial, as memes are closely linked to these areas. Additionally, it is useful to define the term "performativity" as it is meant in the work, since it views performativity that participates in constructing an image, namely an online image.

The classical definitions of performativity have undergone some changes within the framework of its consideration in online space. Therefore, in the context of this work, performativity is examined with regard to the Internet, social networks and group identity. As mentioned earlier, memes thrive on their spreadability, which means they are unequivocally dependent on the audience that directly participates in creating and distributing. Therefore, when discussing the performativity of memes, the work also refers to the construction of online identity through the appeal to external, non-online concepts, such as gender, negative feelings, or the desire to share an idea and be related to it (depending on which idea a particular meme refers to).

For this reason, one can consider Butler (2006), who analyzes performativity primarily from gender studies perspective and the "expectation that ends up producing the

very phenomenon", which functions as a ritual repetition and thereby creates, reconstructs, and sustains itself. According to Butler, gender is not an inherent quality but rather a repeated performance enacted within social norms. Since the selected memes in this work reflect statements regarding women's behavior or actions, Butler's reflections on gender can be applied to memes as similar rituals that uphold representations and perceptions of gender.

Regarding performativity on the Internet, particularly in humor and memes, Gal (2019) states that the polysemy in Internet memes contributes to creating a closed public in-group identity. This, in turn, may lead to segregation between groups, as proper meme's message decoding often requires contextual knowledge, while the intention usually resides between what is said and what is implied. Therefore, interaction with a particular meme demonstrates the user's relationship to the meme and affiliation with a specific group. Gal primarily works with political memes, where the distinctions between different groups are more pronounced because such memes often vividly mock the opposing group. However, although such hatred in the memes discussed in this study is not presented, Gal's (2019, 2022) methods can be applied to consider the very concept of group identity.

Those ideas of performativity are applied in the study in that the selected memes exploit textual and visual elements, which also participate in the formation of gender and identity online. Moreover, the performative nature is examined from different perspectives in the following sections.

MDA

As previously mentioned, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) serves as a tool capable of examining various aspects of an object and creating an overall picture based on the covered aspects. One foundational aspect of MDA is rooted in the works of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), who introduced the concept of a "grammar of visual design" and highlighted the role of visual elements in meaning-making. Their approach emphasizes the

systematic ways in which visual elements contribute to communication, forming an integral part of the overall discourse. In addition, multimodality challenges the classical linguistic approach to the singular creation of meaning, as the presence of multiple levels also implies the existence of various meanings (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). Modes, as "socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resources for making meaning" (Kress 2010: 79), can be analyzed in terms of their contribution to the overall object. In the current era of digitization, various modes of communication have converged at a certain level of representation. This leads to questions about whether something should be conveyed, for example, through sound, music, visual, or verbal (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). This approach acknowledges that communication extends beyond mere words, recognizing the significance of diverse semiotic resources in conveying meaning. MDA draws upon synthesizing theories from linguistics, semiotics, and visual studies to understand and interpret complex communication phenomena.

It can be said that this is a variant of verbal Critical Discourse Analysis, which also incorporates the idea from CDA that discourse (whether complex or verbal) represents reality in the objects under consideration as performative rather than representational (Jancsary et al 2016: 5). Moreover, it is also tied to power relations, as the depicted reality includes a portrayal of those "who have a voice" (Jancsary et al 2016: 7). In such cases, it is possible to examine who or what is allowed to speak and convey ideas using different levels of meaning-making. It is also feasible to consider which forms or combinations of various words are used to create a certain representation of the described object and clearly show who is allowed to speak this way.

With regard to the authors above, MDA in this work narrows to the aforementioned works of Gal and Scott since their methods provide a comprehensible framework. Even though memes in their works do not quite relate to post-irony, their methods for analyzing

irony are still applicable in this study, since they engaged in a similar decryption of memes across their various layers.

1. SEMIOTIC MANIFESTATION OF POST-IRONY

As already mentioned, post-irony balances on the border between humor and sincerity. It is believed that the cue that might hint at the superior power of humor often lies in contextual knowledge (Hirsch and Blum-Kulka 2014). In such cases, it is necessary to know the external context in order to decode the gap between what is said and what is actually meant. However, it is also possible to consider how elements that directly construct a meme participate in recognizing irony without considering the dominant power of the context alone.

In MDA, a semiotic mode refers to a channel of communication that utilizes specific signs and symbols to convey meaning. MDA recognizes that communication is multimodal, involving the interplay of various semiotic modes to construct meaning within a given discourse. Even though semiotics has a wide range of communicative resources, including language, visuals, gestures, sounds, and spatial arrangements, this work focuses on linguistics and visuals, as other modes are either absent, deemed unimportant, or are already included in those. Such modes can be observed within the cases that contain the pronoun "Me":



Fig. 2: A compilation of different memes with "Me" across the Internet

The entire "Me, when..." complex (which also includes variations shown in Fig. 2 as "Me after" or just "Me") is structured using the pronoun "Me", a condition and external situation, without using the pronoun "I". "I" instead of "Me" would depict the active agent's stance or even could be written as "This is me, when/after...", but "This" remains omitted and is not included in the textual part. The choice to leave "This" omitted and unused might suggest that the statement does not fully claim to convey the message truthfully but leaves room for viewing the meme persona from the distance.

Ultimately, only "me" remains, being an object pronoun, which means that the pronoun experiences the action upon itself or, namely, experiences the effect of an action. It is also noteworthy that according to grammar rules, object pronouns cannot start sentences but follow a verb or preposition. This is not observed in such memes, and the presence of this error can also signal that this picture is a meme, as altering the usual language with non-standard or erroneous forms in combination with ambiguity creates a ground for generating humor (Blake 2007).

At the same time, such pronoun usage, which directly invites the audience to apply the condition and the response given in the image to themselves, may be associated with the term iconicity. It denotes the closeness between the form and meaning in a single sign, and high iconicity depends on how closely the form of the sign can resemble its meaning or how accurately the form replicates the signified object (Kazmierczak 2001). Iconicity can also work backward when meanings can condition forms (Gasser et al 2005). In this case, the choice in favor of a flawed spoken language may serve the purposes of iconicity, even despite some errors or gaps, as in the case with the "Me, when..." construction. Besides, memes with high iconicity avoid using constructions that could sound authoritative and demanding, instead using conditionals (Chuah et al 2020).

One of iconicity's advantages is the ability to be retained in long-term memory, as well as its impact on the recognition and memorization of similar forms (Gasser et al 2005). In other words, if a learner remembers a specific formula by encountering a similar formula, it will be easier to remember by analogy with the first one

In this case, it can be said that high iconicity affects both the recognition of the specific object and the recognition of all subsequent and similar objects. This, in turn, can lead to considering parts with high iconicity as separate constructions that contribute to the meaning formation of both the single object and similar ones. The following subsection examines how semiotic parts of a meme can act as grammatical constructions and increase the iconicity level.

1.1. Fixed constructions

One can consider the meme's textual component as an autonomous construction, which can also be integrated with other similar ones into a single complex. In other words, certain individual phrases might become "memetic" over time. By their usage outside of their complex in speech, it can be inferred that the person is familiar with this complex and not only understands the encrypted information but also senses the situations in which this meme would be convenient to apply in other contexts. For this reason—due to the meme-phrases' ability to freely integrate into different spheres of communication—it is possible to examine such phrases as speech constructions.

The correct application of grammatical structures in various situations indicates a comprehensive understanding of the language as a whole (Langacker 2005). Constructions, acting as units, also function as "prepackaged assemblies" because such an assembly operates as a unified whole in its semantic and grammatical meaning (Langacker 2005). Moreover, the use of these units (which can even include individual sounds) does not require

special effort. Once something is assimilated to the extent that its reproduction and application become automatic, it is appropriate to speak of the birth of such a unit. The principle of automation is explained through the example of the sound *ü* in French to show that construction can be something other than a word or phrase. Thus, a French speaker does not think about the position of their lips or anything else when pronouncing the word "tu" so that the sound *ü* is distinctly heard. However, a hypothetical Englishman learning French would need to spend some time and practice before the sound *ü* is produced automatically when saying "tu" (Langacker 2005: 57).

According to this example, for a unit to attain its status, it is only essential that it is brought to automatism, regardless of whether it was absorbed immediately as part of learning the native language as a child or learned subsequently. Those expressions, in which one part is fixed and unchangeable, while the other one is variable, allowing a series of substitutions, fall within the grammar of constructions (Skrebtcova 2018). Any construction is a combination of form and meaning in a sign, where form encompasses syntax and phonology while meaning pertains to the semantics and overall use of the sign (Lakoff 1987: 467).

Before analyzing fixed and variable components in the textual part, the phrases should be examined from a formal perspective to identify commonalities in those components' construction. As has been stated, all chosen memes contain a certain general assertion. It consists of a subject and a condition (for example, "Me, when...") or asserts a certain state of this subject ("Women be..."). Also, after the introduced condition, there is another condition expressed in the verb—explicitly ("Me when I care"). These verbs also serve as an additional condition since the response hidden in the visual part describes the subject and could answer the question from the stated assertion. Those questions derived from the statements might sound as "What are you, when...?", "What do you do, when...". The answer to these questions is no longer placed in the text but in the visual part, where the

data can be completely varied—photos of celebrities, movie stills, drawings, engravings, collages. For example, in one of the images in Fig. 2, the assertion "Me after being myself" can raise a potential question, "What are you/who are you after being yourself?". The answer to this assertion is depicted in the image of a bloodied yet calm-looking girl.

Images-answers may depict actions (walking girls in Fig. 2 from the condition "Me entering school"), hint at emotional states (a collage of women in Fig.1 under the condition "Girls when they have a crush"), or seem detached from the condition (a deer in Fig. 1 under "Girls night"). Despite such differences, it becomes clear that in any case, a parallel is suggested between the textual distinct statement, consisting of a subject and introduced condition, and a response that contains no text but only a visual and unrestricted component. In this relationship, this formal set of "subject + condition + image" can be considered as the fixed part, whereas the visual part itself and the gap between that part and text are variables. Recognition of the meme occurs through its formal part, which allows for identifying its various contents and affiliation with a particular meme complex.

Selective remembering serves as a criterion for why meme creators often use historical photos to depict an unattractive present, suggesting that the situation was better in the past (Hakoköngäs et al 2020: 5). Although the objects in this work do not speculate on comparing a better past and a worse present, the criterion of selective remembering can also be found, as images from media or culture are often used. In such cases, it is possible to associate oneself with a particular character based on their role in one's life, whether a movie or literary character. Selective remembering stands for choosing particular situations and characters with some prominent features, which meme creators exploit for instant association with these features. In such a scenario, the response to a potential question "What are you when..." may be elucidated through an image of a widely recognized character, known for specific actions or traits.

Apart from selective remembering, association with a meme can also occur with the help of authenticity, which arises from the design of such images. Opting for an amateur style can help engage a new audience and create a sense of closeness, as the amateur format makes it easier to imitate and replicate the original form (Gal 2016: 9). The functioning of such a fixed construction can be demonstrated even in those memes where a change infiltrates the grammatically fixed meme phrase itself. For example, a variation of the meme is considered where the phrase "My memes are ironic, my depression is [chronic]" is a "popular motif whose grammar is predetermined" (Chateau 2020).



Fig. 3: "My memes are ironic, my depression is [chronic]" from Chateau 2020

Such a description of the phrase allows for a comparison with a stable meme phrase, whose fixed grammar acts as a signal that we are dealing with a meme from this particular complex ("My memes are ironic, my depression is chronic"). The alteration of the last word "chronic" in Fig. 3 is considered an intentional change in the narrative, which nonetheless helps identify the entire construction, thereby facilitating the recognition of the meme. In simpler terms, the slight change to the fixed meme construction did not affect the recognition of the original version of the meme.

The same analysis can be conducted based on the selected objects, explicitly using the meme complex "in my era" as an example:

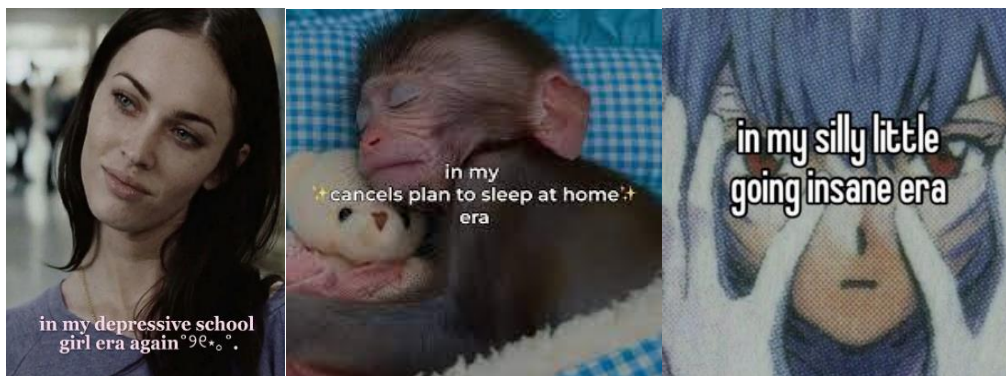


Fig. 4: "In my era" meme complex across the Internet

The previously mentioned amateur design, which facilitates new users' contribution to creating and modifying the original, can be observed. Speaking of the original meme, one can refer to the platform KnowYourMeme, which contains information about the origin and first mention of various memes online. Although the search for the specific phrase "In my era" did not yield results, it revealed several variants, including "Flop era," "Slut era," "Corporate villain era," and "Snail girl era" (KnowYourMeme 2008, 2022, 2022a, 2023). They can be considered as variable modifications of "In my era," similar to the earlier example where the construction "My memes are ironic, my depression is chronic" lost its last word but could still be considered part of its meme complex. From this, it follows that the fixed part here is "In my era" while "era" can be called the predominant and determining part since "in" and "my" as separate elements can be omitted.

The phrase remains unchanged and sets a condition, whereas the solution lies in the picture. Because of that, the picture can be considered the variable part since the meme phrase is fixed and plays an ambivalent role of dominance. On the one hand, as already mentioned, the meme phrase is fixed, and the pictorial solution must be accountable for it. The meme phrase sets the tone of the meme, so from a formal perspective, it can be said that

the fixed phrase-construction is predominant. On the other hand, the phrase is merely a condition that may not fully convey the entire spectrum of the meme without the visual response. To explore the role of the picture as a sign that directly appeals to the audience, it is worth examining those instances where the conditional phrase remains the same while the solutions change:



Fig. 5: Different versions of "In my (flop) era" across the Internet

Although the variable part operates within the condition set by the meme phrase, it nonetheless participates in the meaning-making process through emotional appeal. In terms of common understanding, visual images retain their potency by turning abstract concepts into easily shareable forms. Furthermore, visual images evoke emotions and engage emotive processing compared to rational arguments. As a result, visual communication is considered rhetorically more powerful than direct verbal or textual arguments (Joffé 2008). Therefore, "particularly expressive gestures" turn into "reusable, quotable forms" (Owens 2019).

The presence of fixed constructions can also serve as a primary distinction between a meme and a viral. For this reason, it can be concluded that the selected objects are indeed memes, as the fixed construction allows the meme to transcend its boundaries and invites other users to create references to this construction since it became recognizable and thus open for modification. Viral content, on the other hand, as has been stated, lacks such a

communicative function and is not subject to changes. It can be argued that as soon as there is a reaction to a certain viral, while it is placed in new contexts, parodied, or combined with other virals there is the meme birth. In defense of those memes whose textual part has not yet become a recognizable and recurring construction for some reason, it can be said that they can also be considered memes, not virals, based on their visual design. They may stylistically resemble a specific meme complex and become interpretable and recognizable through it.

Even though the connection between fixed constructions and visual answers is established, there is still a gap between those two that remains invisible. Its existence stems from the initial disjunction between textual condition and visual response that reside in different modes. The balance between truth and humor could have been entirely lost if, for instance, the response to the condition "Girls when they have a crush" from Fig. 1 had been conveyed solely through text rather than a collage of women pictures. However, since the condition and the image belong to different modes (text and visual), the gap between them must also be addressed.

1.2. Metaphorical gap

Memes are associated with synecdoche and metaphor, which contribute to their rhetorical power, as such fragmented depictions of an external idea invite the audience to interpret both the meme itself and its intended message (Huntington 2016). The visual strength of this fragmented mode is capable of conveying abstract meanings in an easily accessible form (Hakoköngäs et al 2020). Metaphor and irony are compared since in both instances the meaning is replaced with a similar and figurative idea, which grants them a "decorative value that distinguishes them from their literal counterparts" (Wilson 2013). The

format of selected post-ironic statements also implies a gap created by the suggestion to equate the textual condition with a response image.

One can refer to Kress (2010) and his discussion on why a child's drawing of a car, despite being far from the appearance of an actual car, was still classified as one due to the presence of many wheels. Despite their numerous quantities, however, the presence of wheels, or "wheelness" is identified as the main criterion for classifying an object to the category of cars. This led to a double metaphor with assertions—"circles are wheels", and "many wheels are a car", which ultimately constructed a complex sign of a "car". This thought process was articulated as "circles are (like) wheels", "many wheels are (like) a car" and finally as one metaphor "this (the complex visual sign) is a car" (Kress 2010: 70).

Just as the example with such car should not be equated to the literal signified of a car, so too the constructions in the memes should not be read literally. Instead, the absent space that needs to be mentally filled and considered when equating signifier and signified to achieve a unified meaning should be taken into account. Therefore, the presence of defining detail acting as an association with another object is crucial. Technically, a wheel or many wheels do not equal the whole car and therefore the metaphorical equation between them remains unspoken while associative thinking fills the missing gap and allows one detail to be depicted through the other.

A similar equation between the two expressions (wheels and a car), the missing gap, and the expression of a general concept can also be found in the selected objects, as their operation is built on a similar metaphorical expression. In other words, textual expressions such as in Fig. 1 should not be read literally but rather as a conceptual metaphor associated with something external. A conceptual or cognitive metaphor is a theory suggesting that metaphor is not merely a linguistic device used for poetic or rhetorical purposes, but rather

a fundamental mechanism through which people understand abstract concepts and structure an everyday thought and language (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Such metaphors involve mapping knowledge and understanding from one conceptual domain (the source domain) onto another (the target domain). Within this framework, it is possible to shape understanding of the target domain via the source domain.

This also might mean that metaphorical language is a reflection of the metaphorical nature of our thoughts. The authors wide-known examples include oppositions such as "time is money" or "argument is war", which precisely operate within such frameworks (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The authors emphasize that this does not mean that an argument is a subtype of war, but rather that they are distinct as "verbal discourse and armed conflict" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5). The concept of an argument is understood, structured, and discussed in terms of military action, and therefore all the concept, activity, and language are metaphorically structured.

From the semantic point of view, it is stated that the structure consisting of a textual condition and visual answer implies a gap between them. Identifying this gap at this stage allows for moving forward and examining the means by which it can be filled. However, before doing so, it is worthwhile to analyze intertextuality, as it accounts for a meme's ability to function beyond its immediate boundaries. Based on the variants of the phrase "In my era" found in the KnowYourMeme, one can analyze the description of each variant to grasp the intertextual core of such constructions in the next chapter.

2. MEME AS A COMMUNICATION PHENOMENON

As MDA expands the discourse analysis beyond verbal language and embraces visual, auditory, and gestural modes, intertextuality explains how these various modes intersect and contribute to the object's understanding. Strictly speaking, the intertextuality criterion is a method that enables one to unravel the impact that the object might receive from other ones. Thus, intertextuality highlights that no text or cultural object exists in isolation but instead operates as part of an interconnected web comprising historical, textual, and socio-cultural elements. Therefore, the task of intertextuality involves searching for communication between objects that, for various reasons, contain references and allusions to each other.

As stated, post-ironic memes are characterized by blurring sincerity and irony and often thrive on appropriating familiar cultural elements. This can include references to earlier memes, images, or even broader cultural phenomena. Understanding the intertextual dimensions of post-ironic memes allows to unravel the strategies creators employ in manipulating and recontextualizing cultural references to convey complex and often ambiguous messages. In other words, "watchfulness" develops as the user becomes familiar with some meme, enhancing the chances of successfully recognizing subsequent similar memes. By identifying one of the meme-constructions, one can increase the chances of recognizing a similar construction and categorizing it as a meme.

A meme implies quotability and repeatability. By utilizing the original idea (or the form of its presentation), each new meme becomes recognizable, allowing the audience to perceive the information as familiar rather than strange and alien (Owens 2019: 103). Thus, each meme's version facilitates the recognition of the other versions. Moreover, social memory is created when exchanging such cultural units with various references to each other

or to external events, fostering a dialogue within a network of different texts (Laineste and Voolaid 2017). Furthermore, these cross-references are "used for social bonding rather than purely information sharing" (Zappavigna 2012: 103). Based on this information, the intertextual analysis of the phrase "In my era" from the previous chapter can be brought back with regard to meme-literacy facilitating the recognition of memes through each other.

2.1. Meme-literacy

According to KnowYourMeme, the variant "Slut era" does not have a precise description, but it may be related to another meme complex, "Hot girl summer," and deals more with a self-focused attitude of actions rather than literal promiscuity (KnowYourMeme 2022). Similarly, explaining one complex through another is also evident in the example of the "Snail girl era". Its meaning of "a period of time when a woman slows down, takes her time, and prioritizes her happiness and self-care over participating in hustle culture and overworking" allows the platform to compare the term with other complexes such as "Quiet quitting" and "Lazy girl jobs", and to name it as the antonym to the "girlboss" complex (KnowYourMeme 2023).

The "Flop era" variant was analyzed in semiotics, but now its intertextual power can also be viewed. Thus, "Flop era" stands for "a tough time or period of disappointment" (KnowYourMeme 2008). Another slang expression, "It's giving", is mentioned in the section dedicated to the "Flop era" along with the meme that utilizes both slangs. In such a case, it is possible to trace how two different complexes, such as "In my flop era" and "It's giving", correlate and use each other to express their meanings:



Fig. 6: An example of "In my (flop) era" and "It's not giving" intersection from KnowYourMeme

Regarding the "Corporate villain era", KnowYourMeme (2022a) reports that it was first tracked in June 2022, while using the "Flop era" was initially tracked on Twitter in 2008. Even though there is no directly mentioned connection between the "Corporate villain era" and other complexes, as was the case with the "Slut era" and "Flop era", the fact that this variant became famous in 2022 allows to assume that it was established with respect to the oldest versions of the entire meme-complex that uses the word "era".

This exemplifies the intertextual nature of memes since one complex can be compared with another and, furthermore, explained through it. Such a capacity to be expressed through one another allows memes to remain connected to other objects via references. In other words, the more a meme is open to various modifications and quotations, the more it will be used for this purpose (Laineste and Voolaid 2017). This, in turn, leads to meme-literacy (or "watchfulness"), which signifies a user's chances of understanding the specifics of a particular group (Milner 2016). Such literacy includes knowledge of both the meme's formal aspects and the external context of the specific community depicted in the meme (Knobel and Lankshear 2007). Thus, memes can be simultaneously open to various

modifications and closed due to meme-literacy for certain users who may not recognize a meme. Therefore, even though there are technically many ways open for participatory actions such as creation and remixing, the rules governing the meme's understanding can be "far from being democratic and inclusive" (Giorgi 2021).

From this arises the question regarding how one can analyze a meme without being "in-group" while dissect it into its components. The criteria identified by Gal can be helpful, allowing one to determine whether an object on the Internet contains irony or not.

2.2. Empirical analysis with Gal's criteria

Identifying irony on the Internet is complicated by its peculiar form, which was analyzed in the semiotic chapter. Its intentions are not always clear; therefore, using the example of political memes, Gal (2022: 1003) suggests that various ironic markers can indicate that the object's content "has crossed the line from plain extremism to irony". Among such markers that can reveal the presence of irony are the platform, participants, style, intra-textual knowledge, and contextual knowledge, where the last three criteria focus specifically on form and content (Gal 2022: 1003). Simply put, in the suggestion to consider how far an object "has crossed the line" it may be proposed to rely on ironic markers rather than a genuine statement. These markers can better reflect why the selected objects are related to irony (albeit with the prefix "post") and also dissect the meme's communicative abilities to convey information and open the field for discussion.

As for the platform, it is considered through web pages that either clearly indicate that they are dedicated to humor by the description provided about themselves or "camouflage their ironic keying" (Gal 2022: 998). In this sense, the platform marker serves as the first impression for all visitors and can thus form a teaser of the whole content. To achieve this, only those elements responsible for creating the platform's image as a whole

are considered without regard to its content. Fig. 7 represents such a teaser for "@girlworldjpg" account, where all content is dedicated to memes:

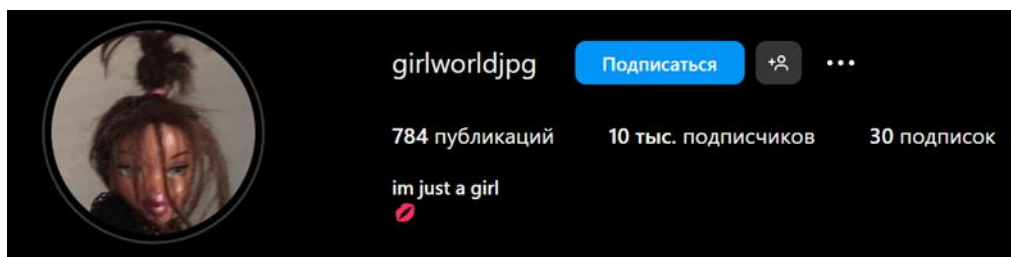


Fig. 7: A bio of @girlworldjpg account

As it can be observed, all elements – profile's name (girlworldjpg), main picture (a doll with messy hair), and text in bio ("im just a girl") argue in favor of the content being aimed at a female audience or rather actively exploiting elements that seem to be typically common for a female audience. However, the elements do not suggest any scientific or news content nor indicate anything about real female empowerment. The inscription "im just a girl" does not follow the English grammar rules, such as capitalization at the beginning of a sentence and using an apostrophe. This may indicate adherence to a speech style closer to one used on social media, where grammar rules are often disregarded. As for the photo, the appearance of the depicted girl seems to support the inscription above and deviates from serious content, resulting in the platform's overall image being directed towards humorous lifestyle content. The content orientation can be particularly observed when compared to another platform for women, more precisely in the comparison of the same platform markers:

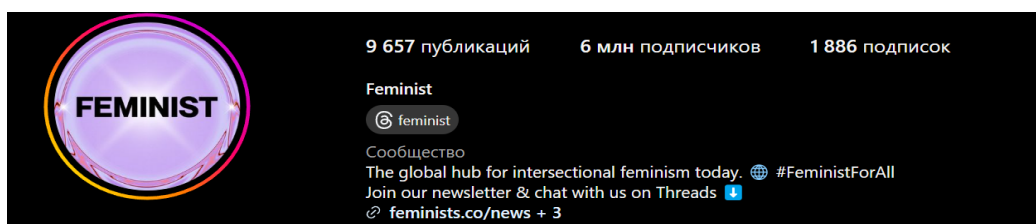


Fig. 8: A bio of @feminist account

Unlike Fig. 7, Fig. 8 uses the same tools (the word "feminist" in the name and the main photo, the profile description as "the global hub for intersectional feminism today") literally, framing the boundaries of its activities by using the rules of formal language, hashtags, and a call to join the community. The previous example in Fig. 7, in turn, does not claim such a strict position as in the case of Fig. 8. As a result, both groups position themselves as female-oriented in form thanks to the platform's tools and brief information about themselves. However, a more detailed analysis reveals that the form determines the further distinctive content and can provide a content's general idea without considering the content itself yet.

As for the next marker, participants, its work goes beyond the object itself, operating in the field of reactions and considering what the audience perceives as irony. Mentioning the positive orientation of memes can assist in analyzing this marker, implying a commitment to an idea, the criticism or condemnation of which may not be received positively (Gal 2016). In other words, this reinforces in-group identity and recruits like-minded supporters (Hakoköngäs et al 2020: 9) while indicates the meme's ironic direction.

Those outside the "informed" circle may fail to recognize the humorous undertone; thus, possessing preliminary knowledge becomes crucial to achieving such an effect. A semi-permeable barrier may emerge without entering such a circle, hindering the reception of a proper message. Social networks have a fragmented structure; hence, polysemy can serve both to unite and divide the audience (Gal 2022: 1000). In such a scenario, the already ambivalent structure of post-irony incorporates a participants marker, that makes the deciphering process even more difficult. The participants marker lies within information about the content creator based on incongruity, which may be expressed in details about the creator and hints that the message should be decoded "as indirect and interpreted accordingly" (Gal 2022: 1000). Besides, this marker might be both intertextual and

contextual. In the case of intertextuality, the ironic undertone may reside in the connection between a specific ironic object and other similar objects. In contrast, in the case of contextuality, deciphering the object correctly requires acquaintance with the author without relying on their content and social media persona (Gal 2022: 1001).

In the example of the profile @girlworldjpg, the intertextual version of the participants' marker can be examined. In the intertextual version of the marker, information about the creator's personality and participants' reactions to the meme can be perceived since contextual external knowledge about the platform or participants is not feasible. As previously mentioned and evident from the marker's name, it involves analyzing the audience, specifically their contribution to the meaning-making process. Based on this, the audience's reaction and comments to one of the most popular posts on the @girlworldjpg profile can be viewed:

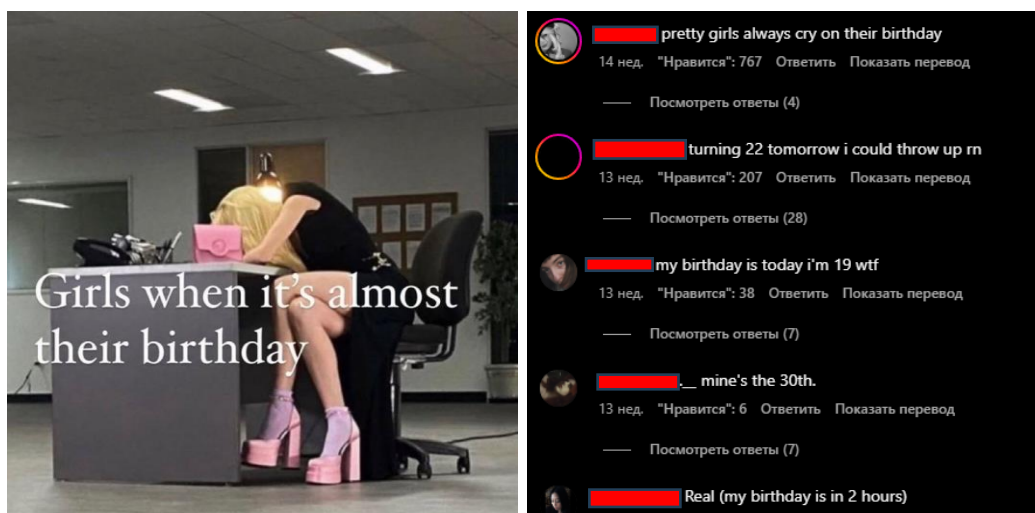


Fig. 9: A post and comment section from @girlworldjpg account

Even though the nicknames of those who left the comments are hidden for privacy reasons and because they are not respondents, analyzing these profiles or their nicknames is less important than the comments themselves. Apparently, the comments support the idea of a positive and supportive group reaction, as they do not contradict the depiction of the

birthday scenario proposed by Fig. 9. More specifically, the response to the condition "girls when it's almost their birthday" is established in the image, with a girl depicted in high heels and the whole posture suggesting her negative state. The comments reacting to this picture appear unequivocal in semiotic terms because they endorse the conditions presented and reinforce that statement. They indicate that users can relate to the statement (if comments are considered as semiotic signs only). However, as mentioned earlier, the participants marker can be both intertextual and contextual, and its intertextuality extends beyond the text itself and may involve analyzing the overall reaction and its effects.

The information obtained from those comments confirms the image's content and constructs the users' image as well. The presence of certain words in the comments, such as "tomorrow," "me yesterday," "real (today's my bday)," "turning 18 tomorrow," suggests that the users leaving these comments are part of the "in the know" circle. This indicates that the message conveyed by the image has resonated with a segment of users who can relate to it, essentially conveying the idea that "girls are (sad/desperate/crying) when it is their birthday".

As mentioned earlier, most users expressed solidarity with the meme, confirming that the message was interpreted uniformly regarding the girls' negative state on their birthdays. However, one might also come across a following comment:

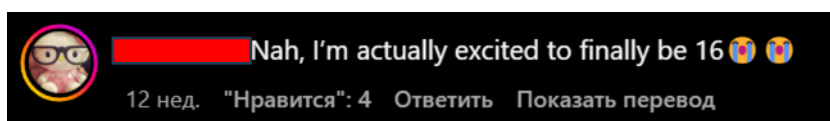


Fig. 10: One of the comments under the post in Fig. 10

Even though the comment in Fig. 10 contradicts the whole Fig. 9, it reveals that the statement "girls when it's almost their birthday" should not be interpreted as a relevant statement to literally "all girls". Indeed, the statement uses the word "girls", thereby seemingly unifying the experience of all girls without specifying which girls are meant.

Therefore, the statement claims a unifying experience and thus may obscure that this is not the case.

Essentially, all markers aim to recognize irony, and precisely, those reactions undermining the statement's unifying character can serve as markers of irony even more. The negative comments, as opposed to the supportive ones in Fig. 9, could serve as such a marker. They may indicate that the observed statement aimed to unify all the experiences is not claiming to be the truth but merely represents one of the possible perspectives on the situation.

However, it is essential to note the significant difference in the number of likes under the comment in Fig 9 and Fig. 10. Liking comments is also a form of expressing agreement and support, and it is evident that supportive comments gathered more likes and thus moved to the top of the comments list, whereas the negative comments are at the bottom and may therefore be overlooked. Public participation can construct a dominant discourse, thereby controlling others' perception of the object. This is discussed later in the section analyzing the concept of polyvocality, but at this stage it can be part of the participants marker.

It can be concluded that both supportive and critical comments contribute to recognizing irony, constituting the participants marker. From the supportive reactions, one can infer that the message reached the majority of the audience, meaning it was interpreted in accordance with the meme's intentions. On the contrary, critical reactions remind that the meme does not have a unifying meaning, even if constructed as though it claims universal truth.

Although the attributes associated with the style marker have already been analyzed in the semiotic part, they can be considered from the perspective of their communication ability here. The style marker is characterized by its parodic nature, expressed through

flawed grammar, excessive punctuation, errors, and other signals "indicating illiteracy or communicative incompetency" (Gal 2022: 1001). Often, the style marker operates subtly and reinforces explicit markers such as platform (Gal 2022: 1001). Overall, this marker speaks to a mismatch in the form into which the statement is incorporated, thereby casting doubt on the statement's authenticity of being fact-based and truthful. Such discrepancies in style lower the statement's credibility and thus hint at irony. On the example of @girlworldjpg and @feminist, it is possible to examine how the image of an entire profile is constructed through a unifying style:

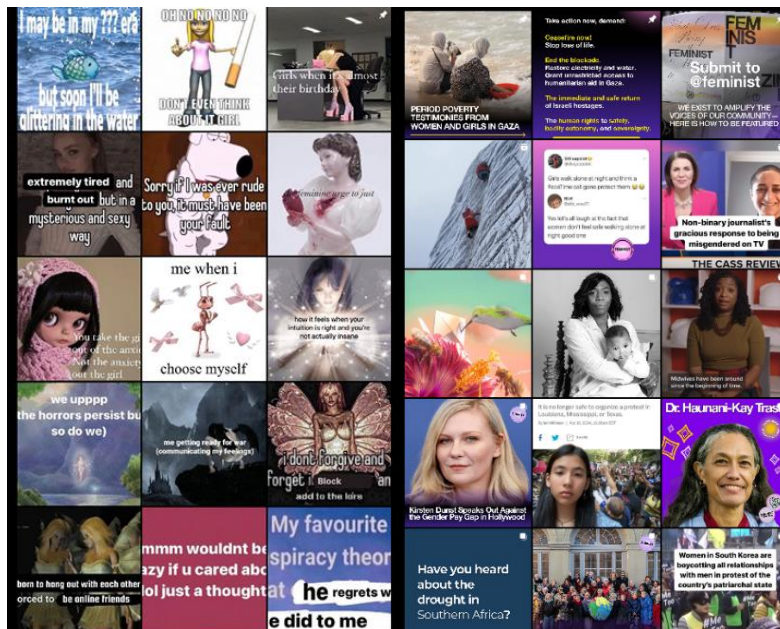


Fig. 11: The feeds of @girlworldjpg and @feminist accounts respectively

Both feeds have a similar color palette; however, upon closer inspection, it is evident that @girlworldjpg employs a variety of images that are not maintained in a single style. These include screenshots, fictional characters, and photographs of random people or celebrities, whereas the @feminist account adheres to a consistent style in selecting pictures of real events or speakers on feminism. Without examining each image individually or reading the text beneath it, but merely observing the profile feeds, one can note a discrepancy in the selection of visuals in @girlworldjpg and a coherent style in @feminist.

The same applies to the tools used for displaying text. Regarding @girlworldjpg, this account uses various registers and fonts that cannot be unified into a coherent style. Moreover, this style also does not feature a professional or designer arrangement. Instead, an amateur style is maintained, where text overlaps the image without considering its integration with other graphic elements. Through linguistic and design tools indicating communicative incompetence, a mismatch to the platform, the author's persona, or the rest of the content can be identified (Gal 2022).

As mentioned earlier, the amateur style facilitates greater involvement and eases contributions to meme development, as no special editing skills are required. However, when considering the amateur style from the perspective of graphic tools, it can be used as a marker to help detect irony. In such cases, even if the statement in the text is constructed as sincere, the form into which it is inserted may cast doubt. Moreover, different styles used in one account can directly indicate polyvocality, thereby undermining any claims of sincerity in the statements. For this reason, the style marker can suggest that if an account does not adhere to a single stylistic direction, the diverse content units should not be taken as the unified truth.

Thus, all three markers demonstrated the operation of memes beyond their boundaries, reaching the platform on which these memes exist, their general stylistic orientation, and responses from the audience that managed to recognize the meme. Each of the three markers deals with discrepancies found in visual presentation as well as participant reactions. The example of the objects discussed above demonstrated how they undergo analysis for various markers, and it is suggested that other objects from different meme complexes could undergo a similar decoding process.

The following two markers – intra-textual and contextual ones– differ from the first three presented, as they do not deal with discrepancies in form but in external content. The discrepancy of the intra-textual marker, as indicated by its name, lies within the intra-textual references between objects, whereas the discrepancy of the contextual marker should be sought in the extra-textual field. To analyze objects in this work according to these two remaining markers, one should first examine how a polyvocal way of representation emerged in social networks and how it is connected to group identity. To vividly demonstrate the operation of polyvocality, an analysis initially conducted by Scott (2021) is also replicated on an appropriate meme. After discussing these topics, one can return to continue the analysis of ironic markers in the following sections.

3. CONTEXTUAL POWER AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Associating oneself with a meme occurs fragmentarily, even when an entire character is used to convey the meme (Figlerowicz 2021). This is particularly evident in memes where images have also transformed into meme complexes, such as in the Drake complex, named on the platform KnowYourMeme as "Drakeposting":

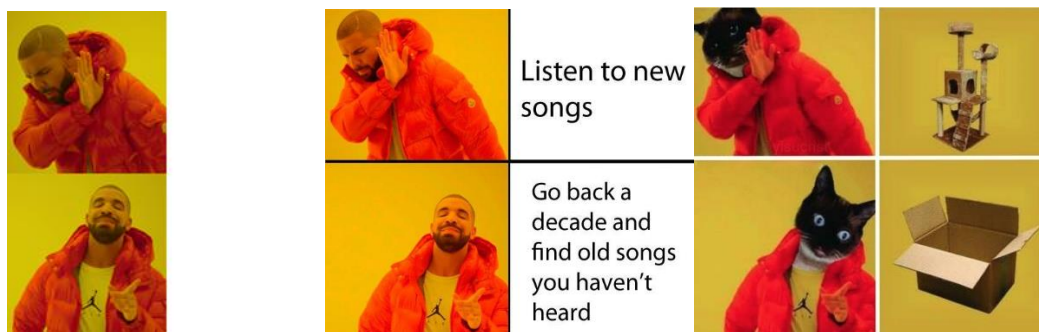


Fig. 12: A template and different versions of "Drakeposting" from KnowYourMeme

In such cases, self-association does not occur with the entire character, namely Drake, but with a subjective feeling detached from the character and any context altogether. Thus, while celebrities frequently appear in such portrayals, the primary focus is not on identifying with them as celebrities but with distinct features, such as a frown and smile, in Fig. 12 (Figlerowicz 2021: 178). This process is associated with pantomime, as both the association with meme characters and the effect of pantomime give an ambivalent feeling of "transcendence and degradation, of becoming more and less than one's current self" (Figlerowicz 2021: 174). The feeling of a mask emerges, and the irony that can be used in such masks triggers an intense process of deciphering among the audience, as it never indicates when to stop interpreting the irony (Chateau 2020). This suggests that the deciphering of a meme can be an ongoing process that never ends, as the emergence of a new user brings a new version of meme interpretation.

Moreover, Figlerowicz (2021: 172) compares memes to the id, as the reconstituting act of identification places abstraction at the center of meaning creation and understanding. Using the example of the "Distracted Boyfriend" meme, she explains the process of this meme's transformation across different stages of its cultural significance. Initially, the image was a stock one, then became a meme, acquired additional parameters such as captions humorously embodying distraction and desire, and later "became a way of talking about how we talk about distraction and desire" (Figlerowicz 2021: 172). In this way, the relationship between abstraction and the ability to relate it to one's own experience is noted, which can also construct a Freudian id. Thus, there is the opportunity to observe situations and relate to them from a distanced perspective, since the relation process, as previously determined, occurs with detached elements and is further intensified through the use of a detached "Me".



Fig. 13: "Distracted Boyfriend" template

Scott (2021) also examines a similar phenomenon using the "Distracted Boyfriend" meme as an example. After establishing that in memes such as "Distracted Boyfriend" and "Drakeposting", people mentally compare themselves to the depicted characters, the tools that facilitate such associations can also be examined

To begin with, the memes in the selected figures above demonstrate that the topics they address revolve around topics that could be characterized as routine, feelings, and gender relations. It is believed that such topics do not undergo considerable changes; therefore, they cannot be called proper memes but rather virals since they are universal and

too simple (Laineste and Voolaid 2017). As discussed earlier, virals do not form a collection of remixed intertextual texts but function as individual units. However, Scott (2021) holds a different view, suggesting that it is the universal experience as "a metaphor for a general scenario" that makes people relate to the picture. In other words, the shared universal experience facilitates the process of altering the meme, as each new version of the meme is created with awareness of the general context of all previous versions, resulting in an "act of semiotic belonging". The recognition of these versions, in turn, provides "intertextual pleasure" (Zappavigna 2012).

Based on the selected memes in this work, it can be said that they also appeal to situations that could be considered universal. This can be inferred from using "girls/women" since, as previously mentioned in the semiotics section, such a call attempts to unify everyone in this group. Given that Scott (2021) also holds the view that universally shared topics contribute to maintaining meme-literacy and thus also influence the meme's meaning-making process, it is feasible to examine her methods of decoding the "Distracted Boyfriend" meme and then apply them to one of the memes relevant in this study.

Thus, Scott's (2021) main argument is that the process of labeling the image creates a multimodal metaphor. Simply put, a parallel is drawn between the elements in the image and the captions belonging to them. This process is demonstrated using the "Distracted Boyfriend" example, specifically with the three highlighted characters—Distracted Boyfriend, Woman in Red, and Woman in Blue. In analyzing these three characters and their captions, which vary from one version of the meme to another, the author explores how the viewer processes the entire meme. Using Scott's analysis as a model, a similar approach can be applied, but with a relevant object for this analysis.



Fig. 14: One of the variants of "Distracted Boyfriend" used by Scott (2021)



Fig. 15: A meme from @girlworldjpg

The "Distracted Boyfriend" template is used in Scott's work, so it is used here as a starting point allowing to apply her analysis criteria to a Fig. 15 that, in contrast, is not a template. This means that the selected meme and its text function as a meme, even though it does not belong to a specific and fixed template like "Distracted Boyfriend". However, labeling is possible even in such cases, so it should be noted that decoding a meme begins with creating a conceptual file. This contains basic information that one can extract from the image, such as the appearance, the relation between characters in the image (if any), and the characters' behavior at that particular moment (Scott 2021). Basically, a conceptual file contains all the assumptions about the image a viewer can make. Mapping the textual labels to such conceptual files (or different parts of such files) constitutes the relevance-theoretic

comprehension procedure (Scott 2021). Such a mapping process represents what should be understood in the relationship between the text and the image, where the text is considered as an attribute attached to the image. From this, it becomes clear that Scott gives the dominant role to the image, as all further interpretations of textual markers are based on the position and appearance of the visual characters.

As with the example of "Drakeposting", Scott mentions that labeling an object, for instance, with the caption "Me" does not indicate a literal association of oneself with the character Distracted Boyfriend (Scott 2021). On the contrary, she discusses how pronouns in memes help users connect them to real people. For instance, the pronoun "Me" in "Distracted Boyfriend" written near the character Distracted Boyfriend may refer to the user who shared the meme, specifically "the viewer should merge the conceptual file representing the person in the image with the existing conceptual file representing the user" (Scott 2021). In such cases, personal information about the meme's sender or creator assists in interpreting the meme. However, if the sender is not personally known to the user or the meme is anonymous, Scott asserts that the conceptual file remains empty "consisting of little more than a placeholder with a username from the sharing account" (Scott 2021). However, this can be debated because when a specific sender is absent, the meme's interpretation relies entirely on the user, and nothing prevents them from adopting the pronoun caption "Me" as their own. Furthermore, it has been established that the form "Me" rather than "I" can make a distance and allow for self-association. Therefore, this work asserts that the analysis process conducted by Scott is possible even without an additional sender, whom she considers an essential figure in her work.

Firstly, Scott's labelling process should be mentioned beforehand. Since she uses the name "Sara" as a hypothetical meme sender, to whom the pronoun "Me" should be associated in Fig.14, this name is also included in parts related to Scott's analysis here. This work does

not include such hypothetical sender and assumes that the sender does not participate in the communication process at all. Instead, there is only a hypothetical user who examines the meme independently. Thus, the primary association between the image and its caption is first established by Scott in this way:

Sara is the Distracted Boyfriend
 New books at the bookstore are the Woman in Red
 The untouched, unread books on my bookshelf at home are the Woman in Blue

The next stage involves identifying the characters' behavior based on their visual appearance. Scott mentions that this association may be adjusted when seeking the most optimal fit and can vary from one meme to another (Scott 2021). The analysis of the characters' actions in the "Distracted Boyfriend" meme led her to the following attribution:

DISTRACTED BOYFRIEND*: Easily distracted by the WOMAN IN RED*; finds the WOMAN IN RED* attractive and enticing; does not appreciate the WOMAN IN BLUE*
 WOMAN IN RED*: New; interesting
 WOMAN IN BLUE*: Familiar; available; not new

The characters are mentioned in a different register, as they were obtained through the relevance process and categorized by the author as ad hoc concepts (Scott 2021). Next, the labeled characters are substituted into the descriptions that received the ad hoc concepts mentioned above:

Sara is easily distracted by new, interesting things; Sara finds new, interesting things attractive and enticing;
 Sara does not appreciate familiar, available things that are not new
 New books at the bookstore are new and interesting
 The untouched, unread books on Sara's bookshelf at home are familiar, available, and not new

The final form of these associations looks this way:

Sara is easily distracted by new books at the bookstore
 Sara finds new books at the bookstore attractive and enticing
 Sara does not appreciate the untouched, unread books on her bookshelf at home

Regarding Fig. 15, it differs since it contains only one character and a more detailed text, as opposed to the simple labels in Fig. 14. The characters' postures and facial expressions in "Distracted Boyfriend" allowed Scott to further elaborate on the situation with the assumption that "Distracted Boyfriend is easily distracted". However, for example, she did not consider the facial expressions of the characters Woman in Red and Woman in Blue, although perhaps this was not relevant, as both Woman in Red and Woman in Blue represent inanimate objects (namely books in the case of Fig. 14) and only Distracted Boyfriend has agency. Perhaps for this reason, the facial expressions of Woman in Red and Woman in Blue were not considered, but in Fig. 15, emphasis should be placed on describing the characters' visual features, as the statement's interpretation may lie there. Additionally, it should be noted that this analysis does not use the hypothetical sender, "Sara," as in the example above in Fig. 14, so the identification of the primary characters may look as follows:

Me is the Girl
The own account is the Computer

Following a similar approach, the character's actions can be recorded in the same format and register:

GIRL* stalking COMPUTER* to see if COMPUTER* reflects GIRL* enough
GIRL*: unbothered, spotted by a camera, proud, covered in full make-up, arrogant
COMPUTER*: a picture on the screen

Based on this, the results are the following:

Me stalking a picture on the screen to see if a picture on the screen reflects unbothered, spotted by a camera, proud, covered in full make-up, arrogant enough
Account - a picture on the screen
Me - unbothered, spotted by a camera, proud, covered in full make-up, arrogant
Me stalking the account to see if it reflects me enough

Since the action was outlined, unlike in the "Distracted Boyfriend" example, there is a return to the original statement. However, because the action was already defined, there was an opportunity to focus on adjectives instead, where a more straightforward

interpretation of the action could be found. The textual condition-introduction to the situation was interpreted through the character "GIRL*" based on her appearance.

Despite the difference between the example in this work and those in Scott's work, it was essential to demonstrate how self-association with the observed meme occurs, especially in cases where the explicit association is encouraged through the word "Me". This ensures the meme is interpreted in an individual key, and it is possible that the interpretation of Fig. 15 may vary depending on which user encounters it. The descriptions such as "unbothered, spotted by a camera, proud, covered in full make-up, arrogant" were provided within the author's responsibility, who does not claim to provide a universal and truthful decryption. This could be further reinforced if respondents and their descriptions of Fig. 15 were available.

Scott's descriptions, which enabled her to assume, for example, that the "Distracted Boyfriend is easily distracted," are similar to the descriptions of Fig. 15, while demonstrating the very method of interpreting such objects. Such subjective interpretation, along with indications that objective truth was challenged by various tools, might reinforce the notion of a multivoiced representation, rather than a unified one. Each interpretation demonstrates user's "status as a digitally and culturally literate member of a social group" and provides a creative way of communication (Scott 2021).

When the style within a single account does not adhere to unification, it might suggest that the objective narrative was supplanted by something more inclusive. Such inclusivity Such inclusivity, expressed in the term polyvocality and implying the co-existence of different voices, will be analyzed further as the starting point for the remaining subsections dealing with the external context.

3.1. Polyvocality and group identity

As previously mentioned, Gal suggests that through memes, a group identity can be created (Gal et al 2016). It is essential to start by explaining how Internet memes contribute to the construction of collective identity, focusing on the "It Gets Better" campaign mentioned in Gal's work, to later apply this process to the meme analysis in this study.

Thus, the motto "It Gets Better" started with a video about suicide among gay teenagers due to homophobic bullying and grew into an entire campaign aimed at supporting LGBT youth facing harassment and discrimination (Gal et al 2016). This was achieved using Internet memes to spread its message through digital communication. The creation of a collective gay identity was evident in the fact that the original video, in which a gay couple talked about how their life gradually improved (thereby supporting the titular phrase "it gets better"), was rerecorded and modified by many users, who also shared their stories of similar changes in their lives for the better.

The reason why these videos, despite their serious undertone, are categorized as memes by Gal lies in the fact that these videos and memes are similar in their formation. They both constitute "a corpus of digital items based on imitation, in which numerous participants create new versions with awareness of previous ones, preserving and altering various elements in the process" (Gal et al 2016: 5). The same principles can evaluate the objects in this work as memes constantly change while retaining fixed elements that help recognize them.

By this criterion, all videos under the "It Gets Better" title were included in Gal's sample and were considered memetic in nature, as they all featured people sharing the same stories in terms of form and content (noting, for example, that their school years were tough, but then things changed with moving or growing up). Therefore, these videos (or memes), by being shared and modified across the Internet, serve not only as a tool for individual

expression but also as a means for building a shared sense of community and solidarity among marginalized groups.

This was particularly demonstrated when analyzing those videos that deviated from the supportive videos described above, as they criticized the source and did not contribute positively to the shared collective discourse (for example, they did not support the message of hope for the future, constructing their videos around the question "Do you really want me to wait till it gets better?") (Gal et al 2016: 13). Consequently, their deviation from the general discourse of the other videos was evident from the noticeably lower number of likes.

Such videos are referred to as performative acts, as they have "persuasive purposes"—the prevention of suicidal attempts among gay teenagers. When talking about performative acts, it is titled as a narration of one's biography, which constructs the subject of the narrative and the group to which the subject belongs, being excluded from the dominant discourse (Langellier 1999: 129). Therefore, these videos are presented as accessible media that facilitates the articulation of personal stories and messages of hope and support while also constructing a collective identity that exceeds geographical and cultural boundaries.

Such a detailed description facilitates the application of this definition to the objects examined in this work, as they also can transition from personal narratives to constructions of public identity through the discourse established within themselves. Memes can both "reflect the sociodemographic background of meme creators" and create a polyvocal discourse with various viewpoints (Gal et al 2016: 5). Polyvocality in this context is measured by how varied the objects presented in the discourse are, or, more precisely, how many voices can be found within a single object (Milner 2013: 2361). Memes display such polyvocality because they lack a fixed meaning (Milner 2013), but as objects created by different people and reflecting different viewpoints, they still represent a single branch. This

can be observed in the objects of this study, as entirely different variations of the meme can be found. Polyvocality can be especially examined in those memes with fixed textual parts that imply the substitution of various pictures as answers. One of such memes is the meme complex "Girlhood is a spectrum", which by its very name implies the presence of multiple answers:

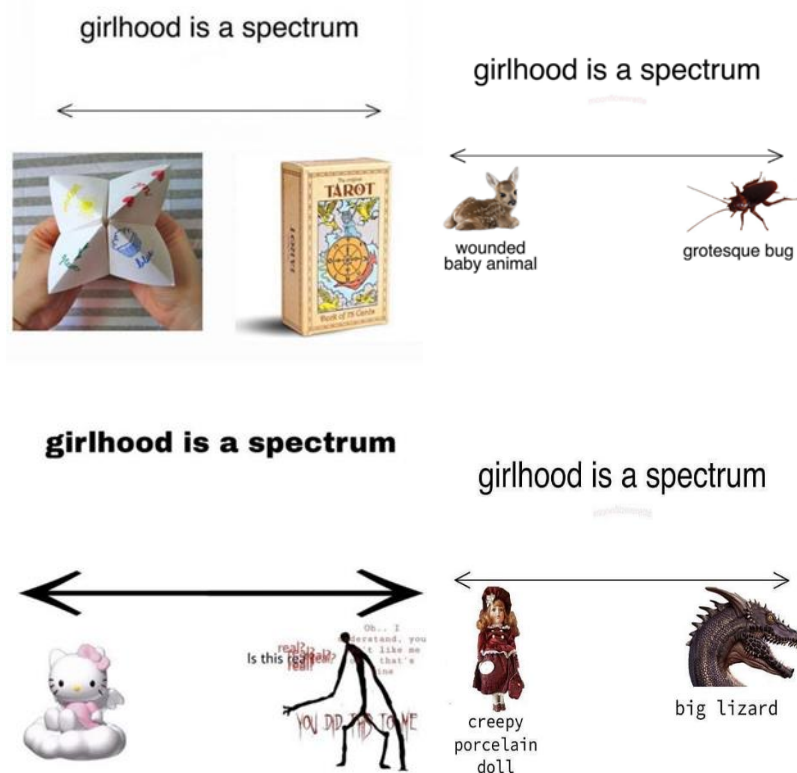


Fig.16: The variants of "Girlhood is a spectrum" from KnowYourMeme

It is impossible to identify with all the proposed variations of the meme simultaneously; however, despite this, they all exist within the framework of the polyvocality of the proposed choices. This polyvocality, in turn, can aid in the performative establishment of the boundaries of one's collective identity (Gal 2019: 4). Therefore, Gal's conclusions also align with the definition of meme as a distinctive mode of communication that can construct various virtual discourses due to its widely disseminated influence and presence (Huntington 2013, 2016). Memes can play a dual role, both as a reflection of existing norms and as a center where norms can be practiced and created (Shifman 2014). Offering various

behavioral options and perspectives on how "girlhood's spectrum" "should" (or rather "could") look contributes not to establishing a single truth or norm but to creating a polyvocal choice of voices that do not obstruct each other.

In this sense, it is possible to criticize the meme definition provided by Dawkins, as noted at the beginning of this work. In his comparison of memes and genes, Dawkins (1976) also compares their struggle for survival. He suggested that memes, like genes, undergo variation, competition, and inheritance, which allows them to evolve over time. For a meme to survive, it must be effectively replicated and passed from one individual to another, becoming a part of the cultural environment (Dawkins 1976). This can be considered a truthful statement regarding the meme's durability or fixed construction, as described in the semiotic analysis section. However, regarding the content, it becomes clear that any idea can be customized within unified forms, even if those ones that differ and contradict themselves, as long as they exist within one form. In this case, one might assume that the struggle has given way to polyvocal choices and the possibility of projecting and adjusting the emotional part of one's own narrative to a fixed form so that the meme is recognized as a meme and finds its audience. Moreover, as Dawkins proposed, memes do not replicate themselves but instead are "guided by the tactical decisions of the people who use them" (Laineste and Voolaid 2017). Internet memes function as persuasive messages with open meaning because they are open to likes, comments, and sharing and create a non-hierarchical structure (Hakoköngäs et al 2020: 10). This meme existence, not in isolation but in a cycle of sharing and reacting, acknowledges commonalities among people (Owens 2019: 103).

Having identified the multivoiced nature of memes, one can transition to the next section on authenticity, which is also associated with this form of presentation by addressing originality and online representation management. To achieve this, it is necessary to outline

the evolution of online authenticity and how it might have influenced the development of polyvocality, which, in turn, was found within memes.

3.2. Authenticity

The transition to polyvocal representation can be traced to the development of trends that were popular on social networks, specifically in the unwritten rules of styling one's profile. For example, there is now a shift away from a singular authentic vision and a move towards "post-authenticity," which may be related to the demise of original "authentic" movements on social media (Owens 2019: 88). The pursuit of aesthetics was called the "authenticity bubble," which, for some time, tried to sell authentic stories but then turned into caricatures and mockery (Walker 2015).

The demand for "people who preferred creating more than consuming" persisted for a while but then became unsuitable for the commercial world (Walker 2015). When such a movement was still relevant, companies and brands capitalized on terms like craft, artisan, and heritage, the fatigue from which culminated in the author's proposal of a term called anti-authenticity. With this term, Walker (2015) does not suggest abandoning authenticity altogether but instead wants to reconsider the visual and textual vocabulary used to describe authenticity. The suggestion is to no longer extend chase after words that have come to seem hollow due to overuse and ubiquity and instead focus on one's own identity without hiding behind empty descriptions.

Owens (2019: 91) concludes that such movements and the demand for authenticity turned social media into a performance, as they compelled people to create what they thought would most appeal to other. Although, over time, there has been a shift away from a singular version, style, and design for managing a profile in social media, it cannot be said that there is a complete "victory" over cliché ideas and words with which people want to promote

themselves or their brand online. Moreover, the word "authentic" was named the most popular word of 2023 by Merriam-Webster (BBC 2023), and this title was earned due to the number of users' searches. Its popularity is linked to the various meanings, including "not false or imitation" and also "true to one's personality, spirit, or character"

In this context, it becomes evident that the term has diverged from what it was during the inception and flourishing of movements focused on authenticity. Instead of a fixed vision, it has broadened its meanings and transitioned into what can be called polyvocality once more, as the authenticity emphasis now is on genuine originality rather than the seeming one. Besides, the popularity of authenticity is also linked to the expansion of artificial intelligence capabilities, which continually blur the line between real and artificial, making it increasingly difficult to find something truly authentic.

Among its various meanings, authenticity is also referred to as something that "brands, social media influencers, and celebrities aspire to be" (BBC 2023). The choice to use the phrase "aspire to be" rather than a specific "to be" is interesting, since in "aspire to be" one can trace a process of constant becoming, reconstruction, and self-presentation on a platform through various multimodal channels. It might stand for constant identity construction and also can be compared to post-irony, which does not communicate directly but rather facilitates the ongoing interpretation process.

The popularity of depressive memes can now be elucidated by the fact that for a considerable period, emotions and issues typically represented in such memes were suppressed under the "tyranny of happiness era of social media" (Freitas 2017). This can be likened to the emergence of post-authenticity following conventional authenticity, as discussed earlier. In such a scenario, primary authenticity also revolved around positively oriented ideas and the desire to portray everything aesthetically. Like post-authenticity, depressive memes run counter to the happiness effect and "the authenticity imperative" on

social media, which have long been dominant. Information displays that are negative or at least not happiness-oriented constitute "anonymous or pseudonym-based cultures" (Chateau, 2020), to which memes precisely belong.

Ultimately, participation in "not happy" memes in the form of likes and sharing represents the construction of a more authentic "self" liberated from portraying everything in a positive light (Chateau 2020). It can be added that participating in creating and disseminating such memes not only seems more authentic but also "honest" where the criterion of honesty is not measurable in terms of honest revelation in each meme. However, it can be attributed to new sincerity rules on the Internet, which have shifted from depicting everything in a positive light to a more negative light, albeit not directly, but distantly through the lens of irony. Owens (2019) compares this format to Trojan Horse, since sharing difficult feelings conditions the audience "to respond in a hospitable mode". This means that the meme format seems to preemptively ensure a positive reaction from the audience due to its indirectness and appeal to others who can relate to it. The meme format, which may hint at humor but does not necessarily contain it, provides a step back from one's perspective and, due to its impersonal nature, can appeal to the relatability of others. Perhaps for this reason, it is uncommon to see users employing their own photos in the visual part of memes. In overly exposed feelings, there is no room for relatability for others, and content that openly displays someone's hysteria, complaints, or tears in a video or photo might even receive negative reactions. Irony acts as disguise allowing the person once again depicts the situation from the distance without revealing too much of personal information, so others would not feel that they cannot relate to such detailed and well-provided content.

Therefore, this post-authenticity is called "cold comfort" or collective communication that operates in a world of disposable content with irony and multi-layered objects (Owens 2019: 108). The result is a multitude of objects with a "post" prefix—post-

irony, post-authenticity, post-identity, and post-truth. Contemporary youth culture is proposed to be viewed as "Sensibleness, and Memes. Seriousness, and taking nothing seriously" (Owens 2019: 97). This suggests a way of dealing with life situations, stress, anxiety, and the surrounding world (Owens 2019: 100). By projecting some anxiety or piece of information into a humorous dimension, one might rise above the situation and look at it from a distance, as such a depiction through the lens of "ironically being ironic" can reduce the pressure from the embedded information.

Ironic presentation of information is inappropriate on those platforms that do not position themselves as entertainment platforms. There are profiles dedicated to sharing public struggles or issues related to various forms of abuse and oppression. However, as already demonstrated by the example of the @feminist account, such profiles can be distinguished from regular user accounts. The fact that they use social media to address public and serious issues frames a specific tone and style, for which memes could become an obstacle, as all content in the @feminist account is personalized and not distanced. When a profile openly positions itself as one that addresses issues related to human rights, abuse, and forms of rejection on any basis and uses personalized content and real witnesses, memes can only undermine such activities. However, this applies to topics and accounts that are not entertainment-oriented, as they explicitly show that, for example, a particular problem is not universal enough to be reduced to a statement such as "women be like". They specifically delineate the area of the problem and the topics on which their speakers comment.

The sense of relatability also arises from belonging to the female gender or is based on more specific criteria, such as experience in a similar situation. However, the memes selected in this work do not belong to a community that would use personal and impersonal content mixed together. The analysis of the memes using the intratextuality criterion revealed that even if each meme does not align with others in terms of statements (for example, within

the same account, where contradictory statements can co-exist), they harmoniously blend into the overall style. This contradiction allows each meme to exist autonomously to express its own vision of what "me/women/girls" are "be like", as there is no overarching theme or direction in such meme accounts, unlike the @feminist account. Therefore, memes appear impersonal and devoid of specific details that could hint, for example, at the country of origin, to ensure a widespread sense of involvement and subjective interpretation.

3.3. Truth and exaggeration

In the memes discussed in this work, one cannot find such overt opposition or ridicule of others, yet a positive in-group identity is still possible. Each image can be viewed as a voice offering its perspective, thereby inviting others to share this vision. The appeal is expressed in the subject it addresses ("girls", "me"), the given condition ("when"), and the picture-response to such a condition. Such sharing of common emotions due to a shared situation can be more evident in memes focused on a specific group of people, for example, a particular university. By examining which memes are used by a group of people united by more specific characteristics, such as a common university, rather than by belonging to one gender, these findings can be applied to female-oriented memes as well.

It has been established that through memes, people can collectively complain about, for instance, the average grade, even if this is not true for a particular student, because overall "memes come from a place of stress and anxiety" (Martineau 2017). It is important to note this mention that everyone complains, even those for whom the average grade or studying, in general, is not a problem. This can be supported by the statement that memes about depression and stress usually receive more likes and reactions and is also related to research showing that mental health issues among students are on the rise (Scelfo 2015).

The desire to complain, even in cases where the level of the problem depicted in the meme does not correspond to the actual situation, may indicate that the issue is generally relevant, albeit expressed in an exaggerated form. The power of the exaggeration effect, especially in a negative context, was established based on the analysis of 1000 random memes, during which the most viral turned out to be those where the author explains a situation relevant to themselves in a negative light, thereby attracting attention and views, making the meme highly iconic (Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong 2015). Consequently, "the total act of making meaning" occurs thanks to the collaboration of the creator, the meme itself, the audience, and its reaction (Blakesley 2004: 116). From this, it can be inferred that the emotional component, as well as participation in collective rhetoric, become more important than the presence of an objective truth criterion, which, if present, could limit the possibility of authentically expressing one's own state. The level of iconicity is influenced by the presence of universally understood features, which appear accessible due to the choice of image and text rather than significant influence from the context (Csordás et al 2017).

Thus, the textual part consists of direct statements and an image response, which, however, are not externally validated in terms of truth and objectivity, but still receive online support. It may seem that an argument and its veracity can be disproved by a simple disagreement and objection given by some individual user, such as "not all girls (look like in Fig. 9) when it's almost their birthday". However, one should return to the criteria of ironic markers (intra and extra-textual ones) by Gal discussed earlier in order to continue the analysis of exaggeration and truth.

According to these criteria, the information in the object conflicts with basic and non-specific information needed for successful decoding (Weizman & Dascal 1991). In such cases, the object presents an alternative view of a situation and encounters a conflict with

logic or common sense. For example, Gal (2022: 1002) considers the following memes that align with the markers of intra-textual knowledge and contextual knowledge, respectively:



Fig. 17: The memes exemplified intra-textual and extra-textual criteria from Gal (2022)

Both criteria are similar in structure since they deal with the statement expression, whose incorrectness lies outside the object in the external context. Gal (2022: 1002-1003) distinguishes them by noting that while intra-textual criteria are characterized by creating a double-scripted structure, in which internal contradictions appear within the text itself, contextual ironic criteria work with the discrepancy between intra- and extra-textual worlds. In other words, the context criterion, based on the comparison of memes in Fig. 17, can be suspected of playing with more context-related knowledge, such as knowing the external fact that the Beatles never performed "Bohemian Rhapsody", whereas the first picture is based on information that can be considered basic and non-specific, therefore corresponding to the inter-textual marker.

Despite these differences, both criteria are based on discrepancy while acting or performing as true statements, or at least as ones that claim to be true. After identification of the differences and, most importantly, their common working principle, the criteria for intra and extra-textual markers can be examined using the content of @girlworldjpg again:



Fig. 18: A compilation of different memes from @girlworldjpg account

In the intra-textual criteria, issues of punctuation and speech register, as in the style marker, are no longer considered, but attention is drawn to the contradiction of the entire text to something greater. The intra-textual criteria of discrepancy can be traced even better when comparing several pictures, such as in Fig.18, where each object contains information that may contradict the information embedded in another one. This can be viewed in such a context because the objects above are presented within the same profile. Analyzing the entire profile can lead to identifying such contradictions, which can simultaneously indicate a humorous undertone across all the objects.

As previously mentioned, when using the extra-contextual marker, one examines how the analyzed object relates to cultural-contextual information outside of that object. Some memes in the @girlworldjpg profile can be considered for testing alignment with the external context:



Fig. 19: A compilation of different memes from @girlworldjpg account

Determining the information inconsistency in the object in relation to external claims relies on some knowledge, which may not only be factual and historical but also related to beliefs or some ideology (Gal 2022: 1003). Moreover, this knowledge should be shared to the extent that the audience is expected to recognize for themselves that "it is unlikely anyone could hold such a deviant position" (Gal 2022: 1003). In other words, attributing an object to irony lies in the audience's responsibility, which is expected to be skilled enough in interpreting Internet humor. If the audience truly believes that the author might hold the opinions displayed in the memes, then a question arises about what such belief might say about the audience's own moral standards (Gal 2022: 1004). Therefore, if the content in the @girlworldjpg profile is compared with some global ideology, such as feminism, it becomes difficult to establish specific tenets, as the objects within this profile may contradict themselves as in Fig. 18. Moreover, they do not rely on external confirmation, although they receive approval reactions in the form of comments and likes on their internal content. Furthermore, by presenting such information in a multimodal form and for public viewing, the burden is automatically shared with other participants, thereby conveying "an indirect payload of empathy" (Owens 2019). In modern culture, which can be called participatory, the focal point shifts from mere individual self-expression towards proactive involvement within a communal framework (Mazali 2011: 290). As a result, one can liberate the truth or, rather, wrap it around humor, exaggeration, and irony (Owens 2019: 102).

Speaking of truth under the guise of humor, it can be concluded that the criterion of truth in post-ironic memes holds little significance, as this process is rooted in unstable irony (Chateau 2020). Instead of a truthful depiction, memes are proposed to be viewed as "an inter-affective network" whose authenticity lies in the realm of variability and instability (Chateau 2020). Since driving a meme to its logical conclusion rests on the user's responsibility, the meme thus can become a persuasive power, as each such user can constitute a "self-convincing audience" with variable versions and endings (Kjeldsen 2000: 321).

Beyond subjective interpretation, the impossibility of objective truth also lies in the determination of authorship when it comes to producing post-irony. Thus, the speaker of irony is "echoing a thought" while showing a mocking attitude towards it (Wilson 2013: 2). In other words, the speaker merely reflects their mocking attitude towards something external that did not align with the speaker's expectations. Wilson (2013) gives the example of the phrase "that went well", which he attributes to a hypothetical Mary saying this phrase as a response to a question about how the lecture went when in reality, the lecture was chaotic. In the response "that went well" the author sees neither a sincere assertion that the lecture actually went well, nor an ironic statement that the lecture went badly. In this statement, an attitude is expressed toward one's hopes for a positive outcome of the lecture, which did not come true (Wilson 2013: 2). Based on this view of irony, a similar process can be assumed for a sincere statement and then proceed to post-irony, which balances between the two.

While irony expresses the attitude between two dimensions, which serves as a distance, a sincere statement, on the other hand, is less "complex" than irony, reflecting the author's position without it being wrapped in an additional layer. In the case of sincerity, the phrase "that went well" would most likely sound as "that did not go well". Post-irony, in

turn, is unique because it is unclear whether the author expresses an opposite ironic attitude towards the external state of something or speaks their thought. This process is further complicated by the presence of an audience who witnesses such utterances, as our interpretation is interwoven with our own perception of whether the content is humor or sincerity. Therefore, this decoding process can be endless, being initially unstable at the level of its presentation, even without the involvement of interpreters.

Post-irony, in this case, could be expressed with the same phrase "that went well" but with a doubt as to whether it is a joke or not. Returning to expressing thoughts through meme constructions, the ordinary phrase "that went well" or "that did not go well" could be replaced with the already mentioned "It's giving" or "It's not giving" meme phrases. The very form of that expression might lead to doubts about whether the speaker is serious. One can also consider the external context, for example, how significant and serious the lecture was. In such a case, a reaction to, for instance, a failure at a major event expressed with "It's not giving" could create even more doubt. In such uncertainty, there may be no room left for truth, and this is further developed by the fact that now framing something as a joke or irony nullifies any statement. For example, this can relate to racist or misogynistic content when it is framed as "just a joke" (Gal 2016). The fact that this is possible in the first place undermines the need to seek truth in every piece of information on the Internet since it has become that easy to revoke the truth by framing it as a joke, even post factum. This can also be associated with concepts such as fake news and post-truth, which, although they existed long before the Internet, flourished with its emergence.

The concept of post-truth, which earned the status of Word of the Year in 2016, is described as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Languages 2016). In this context, the prefix "post" does not mean that we are now witnessing

times after truth, but rather that truth has become irrelevant and overshadowed by something else (McIntyre 2018: 5). This involves manipulating information to serve one's interests, even if this information does not correspond to objective truth, but nevertheless is used intentionally to mislead and sow doubt (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017: 213–214). As noted, this manipulation relates to areas and techniques such as conspiracy theories, disinformation, propaganda, and journalistic errors (Jaster and Lanius 2019: 10–11).

However, post-irony cannot be compared to fake news in every aspect, at least because fake news and post-truth deal with ideological supremacy, whose adherents have sufficient means and influence to impact the audience by manipulating objective and "inconvenient" facts (McIntyre 2018: 13). However, one can consider the fact that fake news is a common form of rhetoric on the Internet, which makes such a tactic possible in other online parts as well, namely humor. In this context, the existence of fake news and post-truth and their widespread presence in various media can frame the contemporary landscape of Internet reality and the mode of information dissemination. In both cases—post-truth and post-irony—the criterion of truth seems to be not directly visible, being lost among various visual, rhetorical, and contextual tools.

If, in the case of materials containing fake news and post-truth, it is still considered possible to trace the truth by going beyond the presented information and referring to external sources (for example, statistical reports and referencing the source of something that fake news attempts to manipulate), in the case of post-irony this may seem less straightforward. For example, in tracking the origins of fake news, one can use Critical Discourse Analysis to examine moments intentionally omitted in the text and trace the process of argument construction and its logic (Cukier et al. 2009: 186).

Despite the appearance that post-truth is more accessible to check for objectivity than post-irony, it should be noted that post-truth often appeals to emotions and subjectivity while presenting a statement, and based on this fact, post-irony becomes similar to post-truth. For example, McIntyre (2018) provides an example of how post-truth might operate nowadays. Thus, he gives an example of how Trump stated in 2017 that the murder rate in the US had reached its highest level in 47 years, but the FBI report indicated the opposite. Later, House Speaker Newt Gingrich was asked to comment on Trump's statement, to which he replied, "No, but what I said is equally true. People feel more threatened. As a political candidate, I'll go with how people feel and let you go with the theoreticians" (McIntyre 2018). In this way, subjective feelings and appeals to public sentiment are placed above statistics. However, the fact that this situation pertains to a specific day and is documented with some objective data (the statement's author is known, as well as the date and context of its utterance) allowed the statement to be questioned. The issue concerned facts that could be traced and verified by external sources (such as the FBI crime report).

Regarding post-ironic humor, one might trace a similar external and independent framing by turning to statistics and constructing specific hypotheses. However, it should be understood that unlike the ability to verify a statement about the murder rate, the assertions in post-irony cannot be tested for truth in the same precise way. Post-ironic objects often address topics that cannot be specifically constrained, in contrast to examining specific information about murders. Therefore, it should be concluded that the examples in Fig. 19 do not pass the truth test (except for "anemia core," which could be verified based on knowledge about anemia), not because they are false, but because they set a tone of generalized conditions, the interpretation of which lies within the realm of each individual's subjective meaning. However, similar objects to Fig. 17 could be tested, because they contain information that can be verified from the external context. But neither Fig. 18 nor Fig. 19

can be analysed for truth, because they are inherently claiming it in topics that are not measured for truth in its unifying sense. In other words, precise confirmations and measurements on topics like "Hot girls" or "Girls night" cannot be found in the realm of objective information, unlike, for example, the claims on topics raised in the @feminist account, whose data can be subjected to measurements.

To sum up, post-irony is considered as a weak communication, which does not imply transferring a precise content, but rather cognitive alignment (Sperber and Wilson 2015). In other words, it is important not to convey information precisely, but to perform the act of communication itself and receive confirmation that the message has been reached and understood, regardless of whether it was understood exactly as the author intended. From this, it follows that the very fact of the impossibility of verification against external objective facts may indicate the presence of post-irony. The Fig. 17 and similar examples might undergo a test for intra or extra-textual inconsistency, however, memes under the "Something be like" category (such as Fig. 19 and similar ones) may initially operate with statements that cannot be objected on a large scale.

However, despite this, one could still try to refer to the external context that might explain the existence of the post-irony phenomenon itself. In other words, it is not about seeking objective confirmation for each meme, which claims to speak universal truth, but rather about exploring areas that could hypothetically have influenced the possibility of post-ironic statements in the first place. There were attempts to outline external framings in the sections on polyvocality, authenticity, and truth, which, if combined into one designation, speak of a shift towards non-positive portrayals of personal life on the Internet with appealing to group relatability through exaggeration or unification. After this, the last relatable and unexplored topic, namely, femininity, can be covered since many memes, as already shown, manipulate words and themes that are believed to be feminine.

3.4. Memetic femininity

In this context, one can ponder such "truth" based on various external data concerning trends that may be reflected in memes and their virality. Having established earlier that memes reinforce the possibility of polyvocal representation, this can be tied to a broader concept, such as the establishment of online femininity.

If starting with conventional "offline" femininity, one may encounter opinions that the very concept of femininity is oppressive for womanhood, as its presence or absence affects female identity, and therein lies its performative nature (Dahl et al 2018). Regarding the performativity of gender, Butler's well-known theory revolves around reproducing gender through daily gestures and acts, namely the stylization of the body (Butler 2006). In other words, this can be understood as gender creating itself through repetitive acts and affirmations. These external actions and expressions constitute a performance, which in turn reinforces ideas about how a particular gender should behave. This is not merely an expression or demonstration of a pre-existing gender identity but an active and dynamic production of that identity. Gender, therefore, can be understood as an "act" that requires constant reproduction in a social context.

One could suggest that this is also applicable to online space, where social networks have enabled images to become an important part of online self-representation. Social networks allow for manipulating these images, presenting oneself in different lights, and constructing versions of oneself (Buckingham, 2008). Social network space acts as a field for performance because it is "constructed social and relational spaces" where "we act" (Mazali 2011). Thus, in other words, performance is a processual "thought in action" (Mazali 2011). Online identity constructions are further facilitated by the participatory power of online spaces, as the reactions of others influence how they see us and how we, therefore,

see ourselves. The study by Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) investigates how presenting online profiles in social networks correlates with Goffman's ideas of self-presentation (Goffman 1959). They concluded that the online environment acts as a stage, and offline life as the backstage, and the avatar is viewed as a mask that serves the user's interests (Donath 2001). Individuals can manipulate their image, emphasizing desired aspects and minimizing unwanted ones, as users now have the opportunity to be creators and editors of their own online identity, including aspects of femininity (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013).

Regarding the representation of femininity, it was found that one respondent preferred to maintain her blog anonymously, styled as "really pretty – pink with butterflies" and under the nickname Velvet Paws because she "wouldn't want to sound like a man" (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013: 106). The research by Wickens and Haughton (2023) also established that "what is presented on Instagram is an idealized and carefully scripted version of them, based on socially constructed feminine ideals," with the focus of content generally being on positivity. In contrast, content that did not conform to this was labeled as "People Don't Need to See That" and was intentionally discarded, as it consisted of "undesirable content such as "negativity", or what is deemed by participants as "unfeminine" (Wickens and Haughton 2023). This conclusion brings authors back to Goffman's idea of the frontstage-backstage, which is performative due to deliberate identity management (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013). Given the aforementioned authenticity and the general trend of conscious managing of online identity, memes might serve as a tool of the same conscious managing but on the other side of the spectrum.

Memes concerning any state of femininity or womanhood might attempt to reclaim agency in participating in the Internet and manipulating external information or opinions about gender. In this usage, one can also observe post-irony, similar to what was described in the Pepsi advertisement above. The intentional and conscious use of clichéd techniques

simultaneously embraces these techniques while also rising above them through overt and bold exposure. Nevertheless, in such an approach, there is still room for hidden truth, as it is still possible that the Pepsi ad was created without the intention of post-irony and genuinely aimed to portray the product in that way. However, the forms in which the truth was enclosed and the chosen way of representation generated doubts but did not completely reject the truth; instead, they made it more hidden for interpretation. Instead, it was suggested that it can be viewed through the lens of a form that allows for embracing two dimensions: truth and humor. Moreover, such a borderline nature ensures the existence of polyvocality, which, even if its form contains text stating that "all girls do so" thus only appeals to the necessary part of the audience, leaving the rest a chance to disagree and move on.

The exploitation of memes about femininity may be an attempt to explicitly utilize them for specific purposes. Similar to a Pepsi advertisement that shows an awareness of typical clichés within its content, memes about femininity may also be attempting to openly exploit clichés. However, this can only be seen as a partial explanation for memes, because if it were merely a play on the intentional exploitation of a typically feminine image, there could not be memes like those depicted in Fig. 1. These create the image of the "other" woman, promoting qualities such as aggression in the case of the meme "This is our Fight Club" in Fig. 1. Furthermore, the possible co-existence of contradictory memes within the same profile was demonstrated. Therefore, understanding memes as attempts to openly construct femininity can be accepted with respect to polyvocality, which provides the possibility for several perspectives on a single issue. It ensures that any feeling or state can be conveyed as unifying as something that "all girls do". However, as has already been established, this is merely a form by which a meme can be recognized and should not be read literally.

Since those not in the group risk not understanding the meme at all, with female-themed memes there is a chance to construct one's identity without considering femininity in conjunction with masculinity or through its prism. Historically, many attempts to establish female identity were approached from the perspective of establishing a "female nature" without genuinely considering women, but using a scientific gaze (Walkerdine 1989). In other words, "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 2006), and in the case of online identity, such expressions can be tools that help create one's online profile.

Additionally, such expressions can be statements on the boundary between humor and truth, such as memes that suggest moving away from the construction of online identity focused solely on individual happiness. Instead, polyvocality makes it possible to represent multiple opinions regarding female behavior, including deliberately exploiting various images. Ultimately, what remains is the post-ironic "Seriousness, and taking nothing seriously", and its post-ironic nature involves dismissing the criterion of objective truth in an attempt to establish the boundaries of one's own identity.

CONCLUSION

The study posed questions aimed at exploring how post-ironic expressions related to identity operate across different dimensions, specifically in their construction, interrelation with other memes, and their reflection of broader concepts.

The first chapter, dedicated to the structural construction of statements, established that some textual parts of a meme function as fixed constructions. They are responsible for the meme recognition and also suggest the possibility of adding new pieces into the variable section of the meme. The fixed construction acts as a condition that may also include conditionals such as "when" or "after". The variable part may involve a minor change in some aspect of the fixed construction, an image intended as a response to the given condition, and a gap created by the overall appearance of the metaphorically structured textual part.. At the level of semiotics, this metaphorical gap is only identified, and based on this, it is examined more closely in the following chapter, which focuses on the memes' intertextual power.

During the demonstration of how one meme complex can be explained or compared to another, the concept of meme literacy emerges. That concept explains that so-called "watchfulness" develops as the user encounters more fixed meme constructions examined earlier. This allows memes to intertwine and explain each other, if some meme does not have a clear definition. Empirical analysis of different stylistic tools by Gal also showed that post-ironic statements can be perceived as post-irony due to the platform on which they appear, even if the textual part claims to be truthful. This enabled an examination of the intertextual power of memes in the sense that their memetic nature was revealed without considering the actual content within the meme. Instead, the platform and user reactions were analyzed.

Regarding the chapter explored contextuality, an analysis provided by Scott demonstrated that a meme can be deconstructed into components, which can be attributed to the characters of the meme, and interpret the metaphorical gaps. Interpretation depends entirely on the user, and this fact demonstrates the very possibility of various interpretations, whose flawless accuracy is not as important as the act of communication through memes itself. Based on this, polyvocal way of representation is established, which ensures a multivoiced representation and the establishment of an in-group identity. This relates to the studied memes in that polyvocality allows different voices to coexist together, and the statements in the selected memes may often contradict each other yet still offer an autonomous vision of how any group or any "Me" might act.

The next subsection dedicated to authenticity in turn, is also linked with polyvocality as it represents a departure from a singular, heavily edited, and positive self-representation on the Internet towards representing uniqueness. However, this uniqueness does not lead to an honest depiction as if it were the complete opposite of edited content. On the contrary, fake news is discussed as a potential tool that indirectly affects all statements that claim to be truthful. It is found that the tone of exaggeration examined in the next subsection is employed as a means to identify the meme and attract an audience, rather than as a call to read the message literally. Instead, post-ironic memes are proposed to be viewed as an attempt to relate to the relevant content for each individual, which intentionally use templates and unifying claims, since post-irony deliberately exploits the edges of humor and truth, thereby demonstrating awareness of the tools used. Besides, the empirical analysis of this part demonstrated that such unifying statements are not subjected to an analysis for truthfulness. They involve weak implicatures that are not responsible for conveying a precise message, but rather for the act of communication as a whole. The criterion of objective truth

was not established, as contradictory memes were found within the same account, coexisting without negating each other.

The last aspect suggesting the existence of post-irony concerns the online representation of women, as many memes make unifying statements about females. In light of comparing such memes with post-irony, it has been determined that the use of these memes can itself be post-ironic in the sense that post-irony involves the conscious use of techniques without clearly stating its position regarding humor or truth. For this reason, there is an opportunity to establish boundaries of femininity without experiencing any other gaze or prism. The rejection of any clear boundary regarding group identity may appear as a liberated attempt to embrace multiple perspectives and verges.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Vlada McCormick

Something be like: performativity in the post-ironic memes.

[*Something be like*: performatiivsus post-ironilistes meemides].

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Annotatsioon:

Paljud kaasaegsed meediaobjektid on multimodaalsed tooted, mis ühendavad endas mitmeid info edastamise kanaleid. Üheks selliseks näiteks on post-ironiajärgsed avaldused, mis tasakaalustavad huumori ja tõe piiril. Magistritöö eesmärk on uurida, kuidas selliseid avaldusi koos pildiga vaadeldakse kui postironilisi ja kuidas need toimivad suhtlusagentidena, võimelised looma esituse performatiivsest online-identiteedist.

Magistritöös käsitletakse valiku tegemiseks neid väiteid, mis vastavad subjektiivsusele või inimrühmale viitamise sisukriteeriumile ja sisaldavad selliseid sõnu nagu "*girls*", "*me*", "*women*" millele järgneb isiku tegevuse kirjeldus ("*be like*", "*do*") ja lisatud pilt, mis ei piirdu valikuga ja võib olla kuulsuse foto, kunst või filmivõte.

Multimodaalse diskursuse analüüsi meetod hõlmab kriteeriume nagu semiootika, intertekstuaalsus ja kontekstuaalsus, mis vastutavad valitud piltide uurimise eest vastavalt uurimisküsimustele ja peatükkidele. Objekte uuritakse esmalt nende post-ironilise identiteedi ja esimeses peatükis toodud semiootika kriteeriumite alusel. Nende

intertekstuaalset olemust analüüsitakse järgmises peatükis, mis on pühendatud tööriistade tuvastamisele, mis aitavad ära tunda meeme ja nende seoseid. Viimases peatükis käsitletakse objektide võimet aidata luua veebiidentiteeti ja väljendada ennast, võttes arvesse selliste kontekstuaalsete mõistete mõju kui mitmekihiline teabe levitamine, libauudised, autentsus ja naiselikkus.

Märksõnad:

Post-ironiajärgne, performatiivsus, meem, identiteet

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