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## PROBLEM OF CULTURAL MARKEDNESS OF THE COMIC WHEN TRANSLATING INTERNET MEMES

**Summary.** Internet memes are laconic messages that convey information and entertain online audiences. They often aim to evoke laughter and use both verbal and non-verbal elements for creating the comic effect. Internet memes are culturally marked, reflecting specific cultural aspects and values within a society or community. Understanding this cultural context is crucial for interpreting the meaning and impact of Internet memes in various online and offline settings, especially when translating them into languages from different cultures, which determines the research relevance. The aim of the article is to analyze how cultural markedness of the English Internet memes is represented in the Ukrainian translation using different-level translation transformations. There are the following research objectives: 1) to characterize basic approaches to understanding the comic; 2) to describe the comic as an inherent feature of the Internet meme; 3) to reveal the specifics of the cultural markedness of the comic in the English Internet memes; 4) to analyze the specifics of applying different-level translation transformations when representing the cultural marked comic in the English Internet memes in Ukrainian translation. It was revealed in the course of the research that the theory of the comic has evolved from viewing it as a critique of “worse people” to recognizing it as a philosophical-aesthetic concept that elicits laughter. Modern theories of the comic include inconsistency, superiority (disparagement), and liberation theories, all based on recognition of the comic by the audience. Internet memes, combining text and visual elements, serve as a popular medium for cultural and political expression. They function as comic texts and cultural artifacts, evoking emotions and trying to address social issues. Internet memes can shape collective thinking and behavior, representing a facet of Web 2.0 culture. They act as a metalanguage, inviting to reinterpretation. Internet memes often reflect current events and offer a platform for sharing opinions. Internet memes can create the comic both based on common social stereotypes that can be understandable for carriers of most cultures, and based on certain culturally specific objects / phenomena. In the latter case, they need to be adapted to the target culture, in particular, using complex translation transformations.

**Key words:** meme, Internet meme, cultural markedness, the comic, adaptation, translation transformation.

**Problem statement.** Internet memes are laconic emotional messages that frequently serve as a means of communicating information and can effectively convey the central message while highlighting the significance of a particular subject. In a broader context, memes are regarded as tools capable of succinctly and intensely conveying and preserving information [1, p. 24]. In the contemporary world, memes serve not only as a means of preserving and distributing information across various domains but, above all, as a source

of entertainment for the online audience. They frequently intend to produce laughter from the audience, which allows classifying them as humorous content, in which the comic effect is achieved through a combination of verbal and non-verbal elements.

The cultural markedness of Internet memes refers to how these online phenomena often reflect and highlight specific cultural aspects, norms, or values within a given society or community. Internet memes are not created in a vacuum; they are born from the cultural context in which they emerge and are shared. Understanding the cultural markedness of Internet memes is essential for interpreting their meaning and impact in various online and offline contexts, thus, cultural markedness of the Internet memes is their essential feature which should be taken into account when representing them by the means of other language belonging to other culture.

**Literature review.** In the contemporary linguistics, Internet memes are today widely studied. In particular, they are researched as a specific unit of communication [1; 2], as a unit of knowledge [3; 4], as creolized texts [5], as a meaningful discourse [6], and even as tools enhancing educational processes [7]. However, the phenomenon of cultural markedness of the comic in the Internet memes and its realization in translation still need further research.

**The aim of the article** is to analyze how cultural markedness of the English Internet memes is represented in the Ukrainian translation using different-level translation transformations. According to the research aim, the following objectives have been set: 1) to characterize basic approaches to understanding the comic; 2) to describe the comic as an inherent feature of the Internet meme; 3) to reveal the specifics of the cultural markedness of the comic in the English Internet memes; 4) to analyze the specifics of applying different-level translation transformations when representing the cultural marked comic in the English Internet memes in Ukrainian translation.

**Main findings.** The theory of the comic has made its way from understanding the comic as highlighting the depravity of “worse people” [8, p. 53] to deriving the comic as a philosophical-aesthetic category and understanding it as an aesthetic phenomenon that can cause an implicit or explicit laughing reaction [9, p. 7; 10, p. 33].

The main theories of the comic at the modern stage are theories of inconsistency [11; 12; 13], theories of superiority (disparagement theories) [14; 15; 16] and theories of liberation [17; 18; 19]. Despite the diversity of the interpretation of the comic in these approaches, they have in common that the interpretation of the comic depends on the communicative situation and the previous experience and psychological characteristics of the addressee, that is, any linguistic means of creating the comic becomes effective only if the addressee recognizes the comic intention of the speaker and will react to it accordingly.

The comic, the main forms of which are humor, irony and sarcasm, is realized in a work of any genre. Internet memes are “creative media that combine text and vision modalities that people use to describe their situation by reusing an existing, familiar situation” [4, p. 1]. They are popular media content (in terms of scale but also in the meaning given by the cultural studies approach) through which cultural and political identities can be communicated and negotiated [5, p. 168]. People produce and share memes not only to have fun (ludic motivations) but also to inform one another and to discuss things. Internet meme has become a significant modality of online discourse, a popular discursive tool for social, cultural, political, and consumer commentary [6, p. 74]. However, in this research we concentrate the attention on the entertaining role of Internet memes describing them as the comic texts, i.e., the texts creating the comic effect.

As any comic texts, Internet memes are culturally marked type of texts. Meme is an elementary element of culture and cultural subsystems: religion, politics, language, etc. [2, p. 118]. It can be stated that a meme is a complex container of meanings of both purely network culture and various cultures / subcultures, works of audiovisual art, etc. The main ability and mission of a meme is to evoke emotions, which in the future become an important factor for memorizing a meme and an incentive for its further distribution and understanding [20, p. 5]. An Internet meme is associated with a short text or phrase, it becomes “viral”, spread; it allows to describe emotions, everyday situations with a humorous tone, even in many cases sarcastic and ironic one [7, p. 27].

At the heart of any successful meme is coverage of the site of “social unconscious”, a topic that for some reason was censored, suppressed, considered unacceptable. A meme is an effective way to “break through” a protective barrier in the minds of a large number of people simultaneously. In fact, a meme is a sign that contains certain information, and circulating on the Internet, it can be improved, overgrown with other meanings and details, becoming a certain code that expresses the main meaning and, during communication, becomes a kind of marker of the communicator’s attitude to one or another topical issue. Thus, memes gain mass distribution, resonate with the opinion of the majority, and it is precisely this that is shared [20, p. 5].

Memes can be understood as cultural information that passes from person to person, but gradually narrows into a common social phenomenon. Although memes spread at the micro level, the impact of memes is also felt at the macro level: they shape the thinking, behavior and actions of social groups. The meme segment is an indicator of how culture is shaping up in the age of Web 2.0, marked by application platforms to facilitate the creation of custom content. YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, and other similar applications are based on the distribution of content by users. Such sites represent “express trajectories” for the diffusion of memes: their content is shared by individuals and can increase to mass levels within hours. Accordingly, imitation and remix, which are guided by Internet users, have become important “pillars” of modern participatory culture, which is guided by hypermemetic logic [3; URL].

To some extent, Internet memes act as a metalanguage, they rarely carry any information directly, often refer to something already forgotten, offering unique contents. They create conditions for the independent creation of content, for a new reading, which is characteristic of postmodern culture. Memes sneak into people’s minds imperceptibly and remove certain barriers. This is one of the reasons why memes do not say anything directly and do not

reveal anything immediately. On the contrary, it is a certain misunderstanding that should include individual experience and fill in the substantive gaps [2, p. 118].

In terms of content, memes formed by Internet users reflect the current reality, which is subject to daily interpretation with the opportunity to “share” one’s own impressions and thoughts in the process of communication. Therefore, absolutely all persons, objects, artifacts, events and phenomena of the socio-cultural space, which constitute a certain significance, value, interest, or that which is unusual or simply absurd, can fall into the focus of post-folklore [20, p. 6], for example, popular Internet memes about dogs like the following one [21; URL].

### WHEN YOU REALIZE YOU WERE THE GOOD DOG ALL ALONG



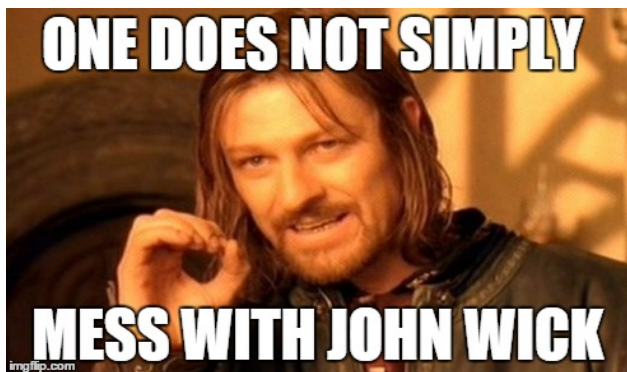
In the above example, Internet meme is based on the dogs’ typical reaction on the phrases *Good boy / girl* or *Good dog*. They are often glad to hear these phrase because people taught them that these phrases are often accompanied by snacks and petting. However, many people already think that gods understand what they say, so they really understand it as evaluation. In this meme, a dog understood that it is always good dog, so it feels happy and relieved. To understand this meme, no cultural background is needed except basic knowledge about dogs owning, so the translation of the meme is as follows:

*When you realize you were the good dog all along* [21, URL].

*Коли ти усвідомлюєш, що весь час був хорошим собакою.*

Such memes can be translated often using literal translation together with lexical, lexical and semantic or grammatical translation transformations, in particular, transposition *you were the good dog all along* – *весь час був хорошим собакою* as a means of emphasis, and differentiation *realize* ‘розуміти’, ‘усвідомлювати’ – *усвідомлюєш* in order to adapt the text to the norms of Ukrainian word use.

Memes that function in the Internet network, which are directly created by communicating users, due to their humorous and funny basis, are the most effective and operative way of responding to events, presenting one’s own position to the general public, and expressing evaluative judgments. The information and meanings contained in them are mediated by the relevant sociocultural environment, which is equally understandable to all participants of communication. For persons included in the field of common sign-semantic culture, “reading” of all value and semantic meanings represented by the texts of Internet folklore occurs by understanding these meanings for the sake of acceptance and symbolic unity in understanding the higher meaning projected by laughter [20, p. 6], for example, in the following meme [21; URL].



The presented meme is based on two movie franchises: “The Lord of the Rings” and “John Wick”. *One Does Not Simply...* (full: *One does not simply walk into Mordor*) is a memorable quote from the 2001 fantasy epic film “The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring”. Variants of the phrase are often used in image macros featuring Mordor, a fictional location from The Lord of the Rings franchise, or the character Boromir, who originally says the line in the film [22, URL]. Also, the meme takes the idea from the film “John Wick” where the main character was a dangerous killer, so it was not advisable “to mess” with him”.

In order to translate the presented meme, the translator needs to take into account the intertext and translate intertext elements as they are presented in already translated movie franchises:

*One does not simply mess with John Wick* [21; URL].

*Не можна просто так взяти і створити проблеми Джону Віку.*

Here, more complex translation transformations are used. Along with simple transcoding *John Wick – Джон Вік* as it was transcoded in Ukrainian localizations of the movie, total rearrangement together *One does not simply – Не можна просто так взяти i* is used in order to activate the intertext for the target audience. Moreover, lexical and semantic transformations of modulation *mess* ‘плутатися’, ‘безладити’ – *створити проблеми* is used in order to make the text more understandable for the reader.

**Conclusions.** It was revealed in the course of the research that the theory of the comic has evolved from viewing it as a critique of “worse people” to recognizing it as a philosophical-aesthetic concept that elicits laughter. Modern theories of the comic include inconsistency, superiority (disparagement), and liberation theories, all based on recognition of the comic by the audience. Internet memes, combining text and visual elements, serve as a popular medium for cultural and political expression. They function as comic texts and cultural artifacts, evoking emotions and trying to address social issues. Internet memes can shape collective thinking and behavior, representing a facet of Web 2.0 culture. They act as a metalanguage, inviting to reinterpretation. Internet memes often reflect current events and offer a platform for sharing opinions. Internet memes can create the comic both based on common social stereotypes that can be understandable for carriers of most cultures, and based on certain culturally specific objects / phenomena. In the latter case, they need to be adapted to the target culture, in particular, using complex translation transformations.

The prospects for further research are connected with investigating the specifics of translating Internet memes as culturally marked comic texts taking into account their cognitive and discursive characteristics.

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**Содель О. С. Проблема культурної маркованості комічного при перекладі Інтернет-мемів**

**Анотація.** Інтернет-меми – це лаконічні повідомлення, які передають інформацію та розважають онлайн-аудиторію. Вони часто покликані викликати сміх і використовують як вербальні, так і невербальні елементи для створення комічного ефекту. Інтернет-меми є культурно маркованими, відображаючи певні культурні аспекти та цінності суспільства чи спільноти. Розуміння цього культурного контексту має вирішальне значення для інтерпретації значення та впливу Інтернет-мемів у різних онлайн- і офлайн-середовищах, особливо при їх перекладі мовами різних культур, що визначає актуальність пропонованого дослідження. Мета статті – проаналізувати, як культурна маркованість англійськомовних Інтернет-мемів репрезентується в українському перекладі за допомогою різнорівневих перекладацьких трансформацій. Завданнями дослідження є: 1) охарактеризувати основні підходи до розуміння комічного; 2) описати комічне як невід’ємну рису Інтернет-мему; 3) розкрити специфіку культурної маркованості комічного в англійськомовних Інтернет-мемах; 4) проаналізувати специфіку застосування різнорівневих перекладацьких трансформацій при репрезентації в українському перекладі культурно маркованого комічного в англійськомовних Інтернет-мемах. У ході дослідження виявлено, що теорія

комічного еволюціонує від розуміння комічного як критики «гірших людей» до визнання його як філософсько-естетичного явища, що викликає сміх. Сучасні теорії комічного включають теорії несумісності, переваги (зневажливого ставлення) і вивільнення, які базуються на розумінні комічного аудиторією. Інтернет-меми, поєднуючи текстові та візуальні елементи, служать популярним засобом культурного та політичного самовираження. Вони функціонують як комічні тексти та культурні артефакти, викликаючи емоції та намагаючись вирішити суспільні проблеми. Інтернет-меми можуть формувати колективне мислення та поведінку, являючи собою невід’ємний елемент культури Web 2.0. Вони діють як метамова, запрошуючи до переосмислення. Інтернет-меми часто відображають поточні події та пропонують середовище для обміну думками. В Інтернет-мемах комічне може створюватися як на основі поширених соціальних стереотипів, зрозумілих носіям більшості культур, так і на основі певних культурно-специфічних об’єктів / явищ. В останньому випадку їх потрібно адаптувати до цільової культури, зокрема, використовуючи складні перекладацькі трансформації.

**Ключові слова:** мем, Інтернет-мем, культурна маркованість, комічне, адаптація, перекладацька трансформація.