

Научная статья

УДК 81

DOI 10.52070/2542-2197_2023_10_878_77



Особенности немецкоязычной цифровой меметики

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Аннотация. Одним из современных молодежных способов цифровой коммуникации является использование кратких образных и в то же время содержательных единиц коммуникации, называемых мемами. Широкое распространение вышеуказанного коммуникативного средства охватывает практически все языковые сегменты Интернета. Исключением не является и современный немецкоязычный сегмент Интернета. В статье отражены особенности современной немецкоязычной меметики в соотношении с их тематическим содержанием и видом используемого кодирования (монокодировости и поликодировости).

Ключевые слова: меметика, социально-сетевой дискурс (ССД), монокодировость – поликодировость, немецкоязычный сегмент Интернета

Благодарности: Работа выполнена при поддержке Российского научного фонда (РНФ), проект No 22-28-01050.

Для цитирования: Потапова Р. К., Потапов В. В. Особенности немецкоязычной цифровой меметики // Вестник Московского государственного лингвистического университета. Гуманитарные науки. 2023. Вып. 10 (878). С. 77–85. DOI 10.52070/2542-2197_2023_10_878_77

Original article

Features of German Digital Memetics

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Abstract. One of the ways digital communication is used by the rising generation nowadays is the use of short figurative and yet meaningful communication units called memes. The wide distribution of this communicative means covers almost all language segments of the Internet. The modern German-language segment of the Internet is no exception. The article reflects the features of modern German memetics in relation to their topical content and the type of coding used (monocode and polycode).

Keywords: memetics, social network discourse (SND), monocode – polycode, German-language segment of the Internet

Acknowledgments: The research was carried out with the support of the Russian Science Foundation (RSF), project No. 22-28-01050.

For citation: Potapova, R. K., Potapov, V. V. (2023). Features of German digital memetics. Vestnik of Moscow State Linguistic University. Humanities, 10(878), 77–85. 10.52070/2542-2197_2023_10_878_77

INTRODUCTION

Distribution of modified digital texts, posts, memes, etc. created a social environment that shapes the psyche of the modern young generation, which, as a rule, is strongly influenced by modern “ideals” of the way of life. Thus, if the question of motivation in the tendency to destruction and breakdown is raised, that is, to the use of “toxic” virtual communication means, then on the basis of many studies, the “toxicity” of incoming information was directly related to the emotional trigger, which is a releaser for the emergence and development of conflicts, aggression, escalation of threats and further real actions. The effect of an emotional trigger extends both to individuals – participants in digital communication, and to entire communities. The permanent exposure of Internet users to such a digital emotional trigger of a negative nature can radically change personal motivational categories. If the hierarchical system of motivational needs traditionally includes the needs of self-realization, the satisfaction of cognitive and aesthetic needs, the needs of a physiological nature and self-preservation, then according to the concept of A.N. Leontiev [Леонтьев, 1975], the motivational sphere of a person, like other psychological characteristics, has its sources in his / her practical activity [Немов, 2004].

The motivational sphere of life of the “*digital personality*”¹ is fundamentally different from the motivations of the representatives of previous generations. The main reason is the speed, volume and “variegation” of incoming information, which often differs in a direct dependence on the goal of “customers” who form information content, which is “toxic” in some cases. Recently, in such cases, it is preferable to use not text, but an image (picture) or a combination of both (memes), which has a multi-purpose value: a meme does not require a semantic analysis of the text and is more effective in perception. The degree of impact increases when a still image “comes to life” and is complemented by instantly created clips. In this case, the polycode nature of a stimulus is also realized.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF MEMETICS

“...we define memetics as an interdisciplinary field of knowledge, including, as an object of study, methods of transmitting network information with concise

¹The term “digital personality” first appears in: P. K. Потапова, В. В. Потапов. Основы многоаспектного исследования «электронной личности» по голосу речи в информационно-коммуникационной среде Интернета // Человек: Образ и сущность. Гуманитарные аспекты. 2017. № 1–2. С. 87–111.

monocode or polycode (creolized) ministructures characterized by maximum network virality and popularity” [Потапова, Потапов, 2022, с. 80].

From our point of view, memetics completely coincides with the functions of *social network discourse (SND)* in the enlarged sense of the word. Mention should be made of the main distinctive features of SND, which are also significant for understanding the specifics of memetics in digital communication. Identification of the verbal and paraverbal specifics of the formation and functioning of the SND in the global electronic media environment is based on its definition as a special electronic macropolylogue, taking into account the following types of categories of form, content and functional weight²:

a) electronic macropolylogue of a special SND form: distant; mediated; real-time (online) and delayed (offline); single-vector – multi-vector; monochronic – polychronic;

b) electronic macropolylog with special SND content: monotopical – polytopical; information-rich (high context) – not information-rich (low context); provoking controversy, specific actions and deeds – not provoking controversy, specific actions and deeds;

c) electronic macropolylogue with a special SND function: informing, containing the message sender’s point of view; influencing, containing special linguistic means of influencing the recipient of the message; encouraging, with a specific goal to commit specific actions and deeds (particularly destructive ones, this type is implemented according to the scheme “stimulus → pragmatic reaction in the form of a specific destructive action”), manipulating the consciousness of the recipient; intended for a target limited group of users – for an unlimited number of users;

d) electronic macropolylogue with SND that considers factors influencing the specifics of communication: psychological and physiological (for example, age, gender, pathological, emotional, etc.); ethnic; socio-economic; political and geopolitical; confessional; culturological; pragmatic; moral and ethical.

SND in the global network can be described in the following terms: irreversibility; situationality; dynamism; violation of the hierarchy of social relations (democratism / pseudo-democratism);

²In this regard, see works: Potapova R. From deprivation to aggression: verbal and non-verbal social network communication // Global Science and Innovation. Materials of the VI International Scientific Conference. Vol. 1. Chicago (November 18–19th, 2015). Chicago (USA), 2015. P. 129–137; Потапова Р.К. Депривация как базовый механизм вербального и паравербального поведения человека (на материале социально-сетевой коммуникации) // Речевая коммуникация в информационном пространстве / отв. ред. Р. К. Потапова. М.: ЛЕНАНД, 2017. С. 17–36.

combinatorics of monochrony and polychrony due to the high speed (pace) of information dissemination; combinatorics of statements from representatives of low context and high context cultures; increase in interpersonal space; topical unlimitedness; casual conditioning; manipulation of the consciousness of the recipient; emotional-modal saturation.

Exploring various SND types, one can come to the conclusion that memetics satisfies all the conditions that are typical for communication in the modern digital space. Moreover, the pictorial means of memetics push their own boundaries when it comes to the varieties of SND. The reason for this is the polycode nature of meme-information: pictorial, sound, color, textual, etc. Meme-information includes all the above features, endowing this communication method with conciseness, imagery and informativeness. This form of communication is actively used by modern youth in various countries of the world. The most “visited” are the meme-segments of the Internet in English, German and Russian. The exchange of information (in chats) using memetics is the preferred means of SND, as it makes it possible to respond promptly to various events with respect to morals and choices of today’s youth. The study we conducted on the material of three language segments of the Internet (Russian-language, German-language and English-American language) [Потапова, Потапов, 2022] demonstrated the huge information potential of communication in relation to the young users of these segments. Memetics-based SND made it possible for users to instantly respond to the most significant events in the world, as well as in their own language area.

STUDY OF MEMETICS IN THE GERMAN-LANGUAGE AREA

Currently, in the countries of the German-language area, memetics is analyzed mainly in connection with social and political topics, for example, in [Bown, Bristow, 2019; Egner, 2018; Milner, 2012; Milner, 2013; Nowotny, Reidy, 2022; Osterroth, 2015; Osterroth, 2016; Segev, Nissenbaum, Stoler, Shifman, 2015] and others. In the above studies, polycode memes are the content dominant, including various manifestations of the real political life of a particular country. It should be emphasized that the data obtained showed the relevance of the meme as a pedagogical and sociological means of observation [Reidel, 2019].

In German-language memetics, there is a wide use of various codes that characterize SND types [Petz, 2021]. These can be images of chess pieces in the traditional style or images of animals, images of paintings and sculptures in the classical style. A

special type of monocode and polycode memetics includes the image of a person belonging to a certain class indicative of his/her social status: celebrities from the artistic world, famous politicians (persons of public interest).

Since 2015–2016, in Germany and Austria, special attention has been paid to the topical range of issues related to the problem of “*Flüchtlinge*” (“refugees”) (see, for example: [Halmdienst, 2016]) that continue to be relevant. Due to this global crisis in Austria, the following macro topics are included in the relevant meme research corpus: “Law”, “Danger and Threat”, “Crime”, “History”, “Finance”, “Name Meaning”, “Scapegoat Search Strategy”, “Dichotomy”, “Relativity of the ‘victim ↔ perpetrator’ dichotomy”, “Intentional provocation / carefully estimated ambivalence”, “Conspiracy theories” and “Myth of Salvation” [Halmdienst, 2016, p. 100–107].

“Law”

The topic of “Law” is not mentioned so often in memes. For example, here the government’s decision on refugees (the upper limit of their number) is used as an argument. A negative assessment of the above policy is given in relation to the legislative decision.

“Danger and Threat”

This topic is often used as an argument. Taking into account the danger, the memes describe mainly three different circumstances: on the one hand, most of refugees are presented in memes as a “threat”; on the other hand, it is argued that many refugees are women whose image is incompatible with the image of women in Europe. For example, the following meme: „*An alle Gutmenschen: Ihr fordert die Aufnahme von Millionen Flüchtlingen aus archaischen Gesellschaften, in denen Frauen oftmals nicht besser behandelt werden als ein Stück Vieh... Und dann wundert ihr euch über die Vergewaltigungsorgien in Köln?*“ (To all kind people: You demand the admission of millions of refugees from archaic societies where women are often treated no better than cattle... And then you marvel at the rape orgies in Cologne?). According to this argument, this image of a woman leads to sexual harassment, whereby the generalization about refugees is again made here. Thirdly, an argument is often made in favor of the radicalization of the behavior of refugees in Austria (for example, the association of refugees with various terrorist organizations). In this regard, some types of memes can be mentioned that display the destructive nature of the phenomenon of Islamischer Staat (IS) (“ISIS”), where the text is presented in English, for example, „*ISIS, is coming to your town*”.

very soon". According to K. Halmdienst, this linguistic statement is basically connected with the image of the crowd, giving rise to the general impression among Internet users that absolutely all refugees are dangerous for the autochthonous population of Austria and "belong to the Islamic State".

"Crime"

The topic of crime is closely related to the topics of "Threat and Danger". It is believed that refugees are synonymous with the image of "bringing crime into the country". Some of the memes are associated with "criminal outlanders" and "fictitious asylum seekers". The term "fictitious asylum seeker" is most directly related to the term "economic refugee", suggesting that the refugee's place of residence is "illegal" and therefore "criminal". For example: the following meme also refers to crimes related to refugees: *„Pfeffersprays ausverkauft, Kampfsportschulen melden hohen Zulauf, Selbstverteidigungskurse ausgebucht – Und Waffenhersteller freuen sich über die vielen neuen Waffenscheinbesitze“* ("Pepper sprays sold out, martial arts schools report high demand for their skills, self-defense courses are fully booked – and gun manufacturers are excited about the arrival of many new gun license holders"). The listed effective actions with the help of the pictorial component of the meme are attributed to the members of the *in-group*¹. Therefore, in this situation, one can expect a corresponding negative reaction of the autochthonous population to alleged crimes of refugees.

"History"

This topic is also used as a means of argument: "Historische Rückgriffe / Vergleich mit dem Nationalsozialismus" ("References to historical facts /comparisons with National Socialism"). The reason this argument is chosen is in many cases the comparison of historical facts with modern life. For example, the following meme: *„Österreich ist auch mal in Schutt und Asche gelegen...aber unsere Vorfahren sind nicht einfach geflüchtet, sondern haben alles wieder aufgebaut“* ("Austria was once in ruins... but our ancestors not only fled, they rebuilt everything"). This is probably an allusion to the situation in Austria after World War II.

¹An *in-group* is a social group of like-minded people with common interests and beliefs, with strict rules of collective interaction and alienation in relation to non-members of their group, that is, in relation to the group of "strangers" (*out-group*) [Tajfel et al., 1971; Tajfel, 1974]. According to the theory of social identity, people tend to evaluate the actions of their group or team members much more positively than the actions of members of an out-group [Molenberghs et al., 2013].

Some memes use the term "Nazi". For example, an angry face is depicted that accuses someone of being a Nazi; in another meme, the following words are given as an argument: *„Ich bin kein Nazi, ich hasse nur Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge“* ("I am not a Nazi, I just hate economic refugees").

"Finance"

The data corpus also includes the topic of "Finance". For example, one of the memes mentions the following: *„Politiker sagen: Sie werden unsere Wirtschaft ankurbeln“* ("Politicians say: they will boost our economy"). Similarly, the term "economic migrants" includes a finance argument. On the one hand, according to politicians, refugees have a positive function for the economy and other areas of employment. In contrast, the term "economic refugee" also has a negative connotation, since it is assumed that refugees left their homeland in order to shift all economic difficulties to the shoulders of the host country. Racist reasoning often uses the argument that "strangers" are unemployed and live on taxpayers' money.

There are also memes on this topic, which contain information according to which "refugees are rewarded for inaction", while "Austrians themselves are in need". Once again, it seems that these minorities are lazy and exploit the Austrians. For example: *„Flüchtlinge sind Parasiten“*, based on the following argument: *„Verrecken sollt ihr Politiker! Für Familien mit Kindern ist kein Geld da!!! Für die alten schon gar nicht!Aberzusätzliche Millionen für Asylanten! Fuck you, Dreckspack!!“* ("Refugees are parasites." "Die, "Politician"! There is no money for families with children!!! Especially for the elderly! But you have additional millions for asylum seekers! Fuck you, bastard!!") and *„Dreckspack, gerade über die Grenze gekommen und schon wollen sie an unsere Kohle“* ("Shit, you just crossed the border and already want our hearth").

As a result, it can be concluded that the refugees are presented as greedy or lazy and that, without the desire to work, they join the ranks of the unemployed. On the other hand, politicians blame the Austrian social system for misallocating tax money.

"Name Meaning"

Approaches serving to determine refugee status vary. Thus, for example, in some cases, memes represent refugees as not those people who have an objective reason to flee. There are terms that evoke different types of connotations when the definition of "refugees" is framed when written in quotation marks, thus calling it into question.

“Scapegoat Search Strategy”

The scapegoat strategy is used in all data corpus examples. The following three main groups are used as “scapegoats”: refugees, politicians and benefactors. On the one hand, it is argued that refugees are “scapegoats”, since their arrival in Europe means that they destroy the order established there. Their very existence is considered a hindrance to the local population of the country. Politicians are also often blamed for the refugee crisis: in some cases this is done in a humorous way, in other cases in a satirical way. Thirdly, people who are often called “benefactors” also become “scapegoats”. In most cases, descriptions of memes claim that the warm reception of refugees by the local population was the reason for the rape of women in Cologne.

“Dichotomy”

When analyzing the units of the data corpus, it became possible to provide a dichotomous description for a number of phenomena in memes, which made it possible to build a system of dichotomous connections in relation to various plots of the “refugees” topic. For example, the following dichotomous groups represented in memes are suggested: victim ↔ criminal, masculinity ↔ femininity, refugees ↔ European / Austrian citizens, danger ↔ security, “stupid” politicians ↔ “normal” citizens, East ↔ West, “rightist” politics ↔ “leftist” politics, “righteous” refugee ↔ “unrighteous” refugee, good ↔ evil, etc. Different points of view are quite rare, opposite-polar descriptions are much more widespread that are used for studies of evaluative reactions on the part of autochthonous populations.

“Relativity of the ‘victim ↔ perpetrator’ dichotomy”

The reversal of the roles of victim and perpetrator (or criminal) is often described in the texts of the meme corpus as an argument used. Members of the “*in-group*” are assigned the role of “victim”, while members of the “stranger” group are usually assigned the role of “perpetrators”. And, therefore, in most patterns of argumentation, the “*in-group*” members become “victims”: “wrong policy”, “refugee terrorists”, “benefactors”, “sexual abuse” or “false attitude of the Catholic Church”. Members of the “*out-group*” are depicted in memes not as victims of the war circumstances, but as “criminals” who pose a danger to life in Europe. However, some memes convey the sense that refugees themselves can be seen as victims of the political situation. Thus, some memes

ironically criticize work with refugees, for example, with the help of a critical image of the construction of the border fence. In this case, the refugees are also not presented as criminals.

“Intentional provocation / carefully estimated ambivalence”

Carefully estimated ambivalence is understood as a strategy, which, like deliberate provocation, is predeterminedly presented with linguistic errors. An example is the “racist discourse”, which includes a large number of statements, where right-wing populist politicians (“National Socialists” in some sense) “glorify or hush up something”, then apologize for it, but still remain true to their beliefs. According to K. Halmdienst, this strategy cannot be applied directly to the texts of the analyzed data corpus.

“Conspiracy theories”

The topic of “Conspiracy theory” is often used as a strategy for further work with the data corpus. Therefore, it can be argued that the „*Flüchtlingskrise*“ (“refugee crisis”), which led to the spread of the Islamic religion in European countries, is assessed as a negative phenomenon.

“Myth of Salvation”

The myth of salvation is rarely used as an argument in relation to memes analyzed on the material of the data corpus. But, nevertheless, in this section, the author uses, from our point of view, a polycode variety of memetics, including individual utterances in the text, as well as photos. K. Halmdienst cites as an example a meme with a photo where German Chancellor Angela Merkel shows with her pointing finger that the population will cope with all the difficulties „*Ihr schafft das!*“ (“*You’ll do it!*”).

Turning to German-language memetics, we were able to fix the dominant topical groups associated with a kind of reaction of young people to the most relevant events in a temporally synchronous juncture. Thus, the following large topical blocks were identified, which are arranged in descending order in quantitative terms: „das Studium“, „Alcohol und Partys“, „Tiere“ (e.g. „Wölfe“ und „Frösche“), „Sport“ – „Fitness“, „Alltagsleben“, „Politik“, „Coronavirus-Pandemie“, „Bier“, „Schimpfwörter“, „das Essen“, „Sex“, „Unterhaltung“, „Muße“, „Impfung“ („Impfgegner, Anti-Vaxxer“), „Partei der Grünen“, „Klima“, „Flüchtlinge“, „die Wahlen“, „Frau Merkel“, „Wissenschaft“, „Bildung“, „Verhältnis“ (e.g. „Verhältnis“, „Freundschaft“, „Frauen und Freundschaft“, „Schwule und Homosexualität“, „Transvestiten“),

„Konflikt in der Ukraine“, „Trickfilme“ (e.g. „Sponge Bob“, „Shrek“), „Tod von Königin Elisabeth II“ („Queen Elizabeth II“), „Thronbesteigung von Karl III“ („Charles III“), „Drogen“, „Prokrastination“, „Programmierung und Computer“, „Geschlechterstereotypen“ (über Frauen, über Männer). The distribution of the above data according to the frequency of their occurrence made it possible to identify a change in the rank sequence in relation to the main topics of German memetics.

When studying German-language memetics, the following trend is observed: foul language (that is, obscene vocabulary) is generally not typical for German-language memetics; it is rather characterized by the frequent use of memes containing a description of life processes and sexual relations (that is, the *area of physiology*), which are manifested, according to our observations, in the use of a large number of *lewd and obscene memes in the style of abrasive naturalism at the level of physiology*. For example: (1) only text is present in a meme: „Nach 4 Jahren endlich den G-Punkt meiner Freundin gefunden. Konnte ja nicht ahnen, dass er in ihrer Schwester ist. (Finally found the G-spot (Gräfenberg-Zone, or G-Zone, english G-Spot is described as an erotogenic zone in the female genital organ) of my girlfriend after 4 years. Couldn't guess it was in her sister“); (2) a picture of a male naked „beer belly“ with a very small penis and the following text: „Wenn er seinen „Zerstörer“ auspackt von dem er die ganze Zeit geschrieben hat...“ („When he unpacks his „destroyer“ he wrote about all this time...“); (3) a picture of a woman in a bathing suit looking under her swim trunks while a small child is looking at her, with the following text: „Ich wünschte ich wäre stattdessen geplatzt. ...und ich wünschte ich hätte den letzten slice nicht gesehen.“ („I wish I had burst instead. ...and I wish I had not seen the last piece“); (4) a picture of male anal fisting with the following text: „Sweizerdeutsch: Ich wünschte ich wäre stattdessen geplatzt.“ („I wish I had burst instead“); (5) a picture with a photo of Chancellor Merkel placed under a sketchy skin next to a hair follicle and the following text: „Merkelzelle: mui. dr. meme univ Endlich wieder lernen, endlich.“ („Merkel's cell (place): university doctor of meme. Finally studying again, finally“).

CONCLUSION

The widespread use of the meme culture in various countries of the world shows that such features of a meme as the speed of information transfer, concise means of information convey, colorful images (photos, drawings, cartoons, etc.), possible sound accompaniment, text, etc. have become a

favorite means of mass communication, especially among young people around the world. On this occasion, one of the points of view should be cited; in particular, that of A. Osterroth, according to which memetics plays an increasingly important role in interpersonal and collective youth communication [Osterroth, 2016].

How do Internet-memes appear, or what distinguishes one Internet-meme from other memes, including *“utterances-images-texts”* (in the German terminology, *“Sprache-Bild-Texten”*); what corresponds to our classification under the general name *“polycode”* [Потанова, Потанов, 2022]? Memes are created collectively within an Internet-community, which also greatly distinguishes them from the traditional means of transmitting information using *“utterances-images-texts”*, that is, they always contain the author's vision.

What is their pragmatic function or are there pragmatic patterns or specific rules of use? In addition to communication and self-promotion, they are characterized by strict regularity. The use of memes is striking, especially in situations of virtual communication. For every situation, there are certain memes that are considered pragmatically appropriate. From the point of view of A. Osterroth, violation of the rules for the composition of memes and the functions of their use in communication will be condemned by the Internet-community or, from our point of view, will not be accepted at all, that is, it will be excluded from the category of an independent genre of information transfer on the Internet.

What role does the meme play in alternative public communities? Due to the strong connection with pop culture and the resources of the Internet, communication is realized exclusively with the help of memetics. From our point of view, not only a *speech act* [Austin, 1962], in itself can be a meme, but also a *“graphic act”* as well.

There are already known attempts in the Internet-community to ban memetics as a genre of digital communication, which is practically impossible from a pragmatic standpoint. According to A. Osterroth, at present and to this day, memes remain a rather unexplored subject in linguistics. The image linguistics approach provides enough analytical tools to classify memes as a type of text and make it pragmatically understandable. In this regard, there is a certain connection between the concept of memetics and the theory of the *speech act* by J. Austin.

In some cases, memes that convey the corresponding *speech act / image* become viral. Such memes are “doomed to success”, since they satisfy

the conditions of mass semantic interpretation to a greater extent, that is, they are more suitable for collective *semiosis*¹ (according to A. Osterroth). The question arises why some genres are viral and others are not, but there is no answer to it yet. But the trend could be identified in the presence of *Big Data* of memes and a deep versatile qualitative analysis of those.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that social network discourse (SND) in the field of memetics is characterized by polycode means used for depicting

reality, an extreme form of conciseness, increased emotionality, direct connection with day-to-day realities, increased politicization, the presence of synchronization with ongoing events within certain social groups of young people, and also a strongly pronounced national flavor. This SND type in some cases can be assessed as a kind of *cyber threat* in the humanistic field of the psychology of interpersonal relations and is an indicator of the behavior of young people in various countries of the world in the 21st century. Therefore, studies of various SND types in the “memetics” genre, based on Internet data, can rightfully be part of the concept of “Digital Humanities”.

¹Semiosis (ancient Greek σημείωσις, “designation”) is “a term adopted in semiotics; denotes the process of interpreting a sign, or the process of generating meaning” [Грицанов, Можейко, 2001, с. 709].

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Статья поступила в редакцию	19.06.2023	The article was submitted
одобрена после рецензирования	20.06.2023	approved after reviewing
принята к публикации	13.07.2023	accepted for publication