

A Small-Scale Exploratory Study on Omani College Students' Perception of Pragmatic Meaning Embedded in Memes

Maher Al Rashdi

Centre for Foundation Studies
Middle East College, Muscat, Oman
Email: al_rashdi911@hotmail.com

Abstract

Memes are a viral phenomenon in the contemporary digital culture. The modern, digital definition of memes depicts them simply as pictures with texts circulated in social media platforms that tackle a particular issue in a humorous way (Chen, 2012; Rogers, 2014; Shifman, 2014). Due to its growing popularity, memes have been considered as a tool to negotiate cultural-social norms especially among teenagers (Gal, Shifman & Kampf, 2016). However, not much research has been done on memes in relation to other fields. Therefore, it is important to examine how the educational field could benefit from utilizing memes in discourse analysis and English teaching. To be more specific, the study aims at investigating the perceptions of Omani students at Middle East College of the utilizations of memes in the education. The present study seeks to answer the question: how do Omani undergraduate students perceive the use of memes inside the classroom? Primarily, data was collected through observing 29 semester three students in a higher education institute by giving them five different memes to infer their pragmatic meaning. After the observation, a short questionnaire was distributed to students to investigate their perception of memes. The findings revealed that most students were able to infer the pragmatic meanings embedded in memes. In addition, students held positive attitudes towards the use of memes in their study. The paper concluded with some practical implications on the best methods to utilize memes in education, and suggestions for future research. This exploratory study was significant since it contributed more to the body of literature that is done on the field of discourse analysis and memes.

Keywords: discourse analysis, language learning, memes, middle east college, Oman, pragmatic meaning

Cite as: Al Rashdi, M. (2020). A Small-Scale Exploratory Study on Omani College Students' Perception of Pragmatic Meaning Embedded in Memes. *Arab World English Journal(AWEJ)*. Proceedings of 2nd MEC TESOLConference 2020: 298-313.
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/MEC2.22>

Introduction

Internet memes are a rapidly spreading phenomenon that is becoming increasingly popular in social media platforms. Memes are pictures; however, they are different from ordinary pictures in that they incorporate texts within them. Thus, a picture with a text is a medium to deliver a message, and the population of social media users has gained interest in this notion, delivering a message through memes in a humorous way. Not much research has been done on memes in relation to other fields. So, it is significant to examine the impact that memes might have on the educational process instead of the regular pictures. Therefore, the main purpose of this small-scale exploratory study is to investigate Omani undergraduate students' perception of memes in a private higher education college (Middle East College). The study seeks to answer two main questions: To what extent are students able to infer pragmatic meaning embedded in memes? how do students perceive the use of memes in the classroom? The objectives guiding the current study revolve around examining learners' ability to infer the pragmatic meaning embedded in memes, and how they perceive memes as an educational tool inside the classroom. Both qualitative and quantitative tools are used respectively in this exploratory study to answer the two main domains of research mentioned above. The results of this study add more data to the narrowly explored field of research concerning memes and education.

Literature Review

Semantic and Pragmatic Meaning

In discourse analysis, the two concepts of semantics and pragmatics are interrelated. "Taken as properties of sentences, semantic properties are on a par with syntactic and phonological properties" (Bach, 2004, p. 27). To explain, semantic meaning refers to the literal meaning of words in a spoken or a written discourse with complete disregard of the context. So, it can be said that when a person utters a sentence, the semantic meaning would be the structural aspects that modify the sentence itself. On the other hand, pragmatics is defined as the use of context to infer the intended meaning of an utterance (Fasold, 1990). Context in spoken discourse in this case, as explained by Cutting (2002), has three main types which are situational context, co-textual context, and background information; situational refers to the elements around the interlocutors, co-textual refers to the linguistic environment that surrounds an utterance, and background information refers to both interpersonal and cultural knowledge (O'Keeffe, Clancy & Adolphs, 2011).

Memes and Internet: Emergence of Memes

Despite what is commonly perceived in the digital age, memes were not always pictures with texts. The term meme was first introduced in 1976 by the British biologist Richard Dawkins to refer to the cultural behaviors that resembles the behavior of particular human genes called "selfish genes" (Rogers, 2014). Therefore, Dawkins said that memes are cultural information that multiple for their own benefit, and Rogers (2014) defined memes as the transmitted ideas, behaviors, skills, or phrases from one person to another by means of oral, or visual communication. This notion of categorizing memes continued until the 21st century when internet started providing a suitable habitat for the creation and distribution of memes; thus, the concept "internet memes" came to light (Rogers, 2014). Internet memes are perceived as "memes that emerge within the culture of the Internet, gained popularity, bringing renewed interest to the meme concept [and] spread from person to person through imitation, typically by e-mail, social media, and various types of Web sites." (Rogers, 2014, para. 5). Due to their wide spread in recent years, Chen (2012)

considered memes to have a significant impact on social and cultural values; this resembles the notion implied by Richard Dawkins when he stated that memes are highly contagious ideas transferred from individual to another. However, Rogers (2014) explained that Richard Dawkins and other scholar consider internet memes to be different from the original concept coined by Dawkins because internet memes are altered on daily basis to communicate new ideas; whereas, Dawkins's original meme was perceived as transferred ideas without change. As a result, a new type of memes was brought to the world through the internet which is called internet memes. Since internet memes could include pictures, videos, and graphic interchange formats, this study singularly examined picture memes only. Therefore, the present study perceived memes as a humorous socio-cultural digital product of the internet used to transfer different ideas rapidly among internet users.

Research on Memes and Education

Because internet memes are a relatively new field to be examined in relation to discourse analysis, it was challenging to find pragmatic-based studies on memes. However, I managed to find few recent studies that discussed memes, discourse analysis, and education.

Harshavardhan, Wilson and Kumar (2019) asserted upon the importance of motivation and attentiveness inside the classroom. Therefore, their paper suggested engaging technology native learners using digitally oriented methods of teaching English language skills. Researchers proposed using memes in teaching English to bridge the generation gap between digital native students and digital immigrant teachers. According to Harshavardhan et al., (2019), the humorous nature of memes could help lower the affective filter inside the classroom, thus increasing students' willingness to participate. The researchers found that memes can be used to teach different areas such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary; it all depends on how to teachers' ability to adapt memes to their lessons. However, it is worth mentioning that students' comprehension of memes depends on how well they are aware of popular culture and media consumption. Therefore, students' understanding and ability to form memes might be hindered by their incapacity to form connections between movies, popular media culture, social and political matters, semantics of memes and so on. Teachers must take these factors into consideration when trying to use memes in the classroom.

Similar to Harshavardhan et al., (2019), Purnama, Desiarti and Aflahah (2018) attempted to explore methods of motivating learners by utilizing memes in the classroom. The aim of the study was to bridge the gap that might occur between students' in-class performance and the rapid development in educational technology using memes. 50 EFL students were observed while creating memes on different themes related to their study. After the end of the lesson, email interviews were employed to examine students' impression of memes. The findings of the study showed that students enjoyed the activity of memes creation and had overall positives attitudes towards the use of memes in the classroom. It was suggested that future research could focus on the use of memes in different settings considering variables such as students' language proficiency, classroom size, and length of activities.

Another study that examined the use of memes in the classroom is Purnama's (2017). The researcher attempted to incorporate Instagram memes to improve students' participation in the

class. The study collected data from 23 college level, EFL students through observation and pre- and post-questionnaires. In groups, students were asked to create memes related to different topics. The findings indicated that students had an enjoyable time creating these memes. Memes creation in groups enhanced students' communication with each other and the teacher. According to the researcher, this kind of activity could help integrate the use of mobile phones and technology in the language-learning classroom. Despite the overall positive attitudes, the researcher recommends further research to examine the effectiveness of memes in language development.

Romero and Bobkina (2017) had a different perspective in mind when attempted to examine memes in their study. They had a sample of 20 secondary school teachers completing their master's degree. The study aimed at enabling teacher to create memes-based lessons for their secondary school students as part a master's workshop. The workshop lasted for four weeks through which different lessons were created to promote visual literacy in the class. One random lesson was selected that implemented visual literacy to teach listening skill. Memes were used as a 20-minute warm up activity for the listening lesson with the experimental group, whereas the control group worked on the activity in a top-down approach. The results showed that the experimental group slightly outperformed the control group in answering the during and post listening questions. Nevertheless, further research is needed to establish the effectiveness of memes in language skills acquisition.

In an empirical study of memes and education, Huang (2016) examined the extent to which memes help college students develop their writing skill. In specific, the study inspected the role played by memes language on the development of English writing skill with Chinese Tertiary learners. The study included 52 students who are separated into an experimental group and a control group. Huang used a pre- and post-test after the implementation of memes with the experimental group. The results showed that there was a significant improvement in the writing skill of the experimental group in comparison with the control group who used a traditional way of teaching English writing skill. The researcher suggested that memes could be tested against other types of writing styles besides the argumentative type used in this study.

Milner (2012) in his exploratory research investigated memes, discourse, and identities formation. In particular, the purpose of Milner's study was to get a fuller picture on identity and discourse in relation to memes and their producers. The project used a critical analytic discourse method to examine three aspect of cultural interaction: politics, processes, identities. The preliminary results showed that: memes need literate people to create them, some memes creators were discriminated against by others, and political memes occur in a narrow perspective. The researcher finally found that memes are a product of interaction and disparities.

Overall, the review of literature revealed that memes are gaining increasing momentum inside today's classrooms as a tool for language learning or discourse analysis. Both Harshavardhan et al., (2019) and Purnama et al., (2018) studies examined the effectiveness of memes in motivating students, and their main findings were similar indicating that today's digitally-native students are motivated to work with memes in their language learning classes. However, memes in these two studies were only used as a tool for motivation and not language acquisition. On the other hand, Romero and Bobkina (2017) and Huang (2016) observed the

effectiveness of developing listening and writing skills respectively. Their results revealed positive correlation in using memes to develop the targeted skills. Although these preliminary results seem promising, these studies were merely cross-sectional studies in need for further evidence. Therefore, more longitudinal, extensive research is needed to prove the effectiveness of memes in targeting and developing specific language skills.

The present study differs from the above discussed studies in two main aspects. Firstly, this small-scale exploratory study aims to investigate the extent to which college students are able to infer the pragmatic meaning of memes, which has not been attempted by previous studies.; thus, focusing more on students' higher thinking and elicitation skills rather than learning language skills. Secondly, the study attempts to examine students' attitudes towards using memes in the classroom as a learning tool in an Omani context which is a context rarely explored. The present study focuses primarily on pragmatics and memes in Omani settings. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that the findings of the current study will further contribute to the body of literature related to memes and discourse analysis.

Research Questions

This study is guided by two main research questions:

- 1- To what extent are students able to infer pragmatic meaning from memes?
- 2- How do students perceive the use of memes in the classroom?

Methodology

Participants & settings

This small-scale exploratory study used both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. The sample of the study included 29 semester three undergraduate students from a private, higher education college in Oman (Middle East College). The researcher asked permission from the teacher to include her students in the study, whereas other classes were excluded because their timetable clashed with the researcher's. Students' consent was ensured through a verbal and written consent form.

Instruments & research procedure

The researcher employed two tools to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Firstly, an observation was used to examine students' ability to infer the pragmatic meaning embedded in memes, the researcher divided the sample into six groups, gave them five different memes and observed each group individually. The research asked each group to try and infer the intended meaning in each meme. The memes were specifically selected to cover different disciplines such as music, education, and politics to check whether students have enough exposure to uncover the hidden meaning in various memes. At the end of the observation, the researcher gave the students a paper-based questionnaire that included 10 agreement statements to explore their perception of memes as a learning tool. The observation and questionnaire data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively respectively.

Results Analysis

Observation

At the beginning of the class, the sample of students was divided into six groups. The researcher asked the groups if they are familiar with the term “memes”, and only six participants out of 29 recognized the term and were able to explain its meaning. Then, the researcher illustrated for the rest of the participants the difference between memes and pictures and explained the meaning of “pragmatic meaning / implied meaning”. Oral concept check questions were used to make sure that the participants understood what was explained to them.

After that, the researcher gave five memes one after the other and asked the groups if they can tell what is intended meaning of each meme. The teacher recorded the groups' answers in an observation grid. Table one shows the observation grid used by the researcher to determine whether the six groups of participants are able to infer the hidden meaning of all the five memes given to them. The answers in table one are recorded in three formats:

- 1- **Correct:** given if all students in a group can correctly guess the pragmatic meaning of a meme.
- 2- **Partial:** given if some students in a group guess the meaning correctly and the rest incorrectly, or if students provide a close answer to the pragmatic meaning of a meme.
- 3- **Incorrect:** given if all students in a group cannot guess the correct meaning of a meme.

Table 1: *Observation grid*

	Group one	Group two	Group three	Group four	Group five	Group six
Meme one (homework)	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Incorrect	Correct	Correct
Meme two (music)	Correct	Correct	Partial	Partial	Correct	Correct
Meme three (education)	Correct	Correct	Correct	Correct	Correct	Correct
Meme four (USA, oil)	Partial	Correct	Partial	Correct	Correct	Correct
Meme five (poverty)	Partial	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Partial	Correct

Each of the six groups was given the same meme and was asked to try and infer the pragmatic meaning hidden in the meme. Two minutes were given to all groups to discuss and figure out the implied meaning of each meme. After that, the researcher discussed each group's understanding of memes. The results came as shown in table one. Below is a brief description of what the groups concluded on each meme.

Figure one shows the first meme that was given to all the six groups. The pragmatic meaning of this meme is (your friend does not want to send you a picture of his/her homework, so he/she intentionally sends you a blurry picture).

when you ask your friend to
send you a pic of the homework

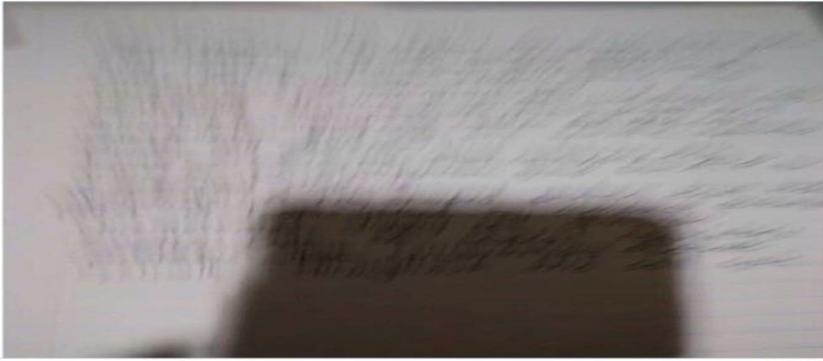


Figure 1. Meme one (homework)

By looking at table one, it is concluded that groups one, two, five, and six were able to infer the pragmatic meaning of the meme by saying that this friend is not cooperative with others, or he is not willing to share his homework. However, groups three and four said that there might be a problem with the camera. Other participants of these groups said that maybe the friend was in a hurry, so he took a blurry picture. Their interpretation of the meme is quite rigid without considering the text, the picture, and its humor.

Figure two shows the second meme that was given to all the six groups. The implied meaning of this meme is (my friend's taste of music is not good)

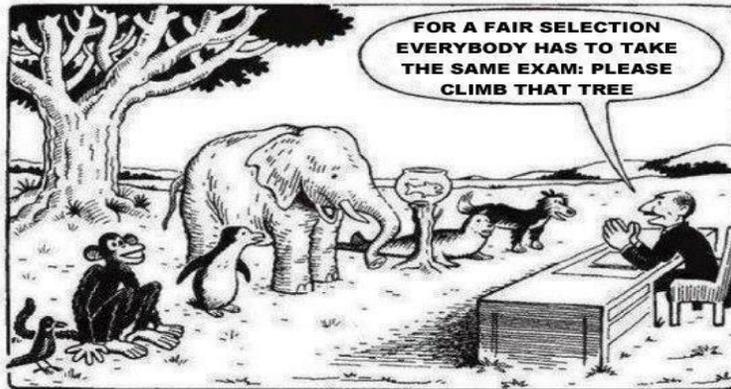
me listening to my friends' playlist



Figure 2. Meme two (music)

By looking at table one, it can be noticed that meme two is easily understood by the majority of participants in all the groups. Their interpretations were that “his friend has a bad taste in music”, “human have different tastes in music”, and “his friend's music is basically rubbish”. On the other hand, there were few participants from group three and four who thought that the man was crazy for putting his headphones in the rubbish. These students were not able to relate the text, the picture, and its humor to elicit the correct intended meaning, again showing direct interpretation of the picture only.

Figure three displays the third meme that was given to all the six groups. The pragmatic meaning of this meme is (the educational system does not pay attention to the individual differences between learners)



OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

Figure 1. Meme three (education)

By looking at table one, it can be concluded that the six groups were able to accurately infer the pragmatic meaning of this meme. This is probably due to the fact that this is considered a classic meme which portrays reality regarding the educational systems around the world, and since they are students, they were able to relate it to their educational settings. Some participants said that the meme indicates that the person sitting in the chair is the wrong man in the wrong place, and that he should be removed from his position. Other participants explained that the animals in the meme refer to learners from different levels, while others said that the animals could also indicate minorities or different ethnicities that exist inside the classroom. Overall, the students provided accurate interpretations of the meme.

Figure four illustrates the fourth meme that was given to all the six groups. The pragmatic meaning of this meme is (America is always acting as a friend when it comes to oil). It has a political background.

We all have that one friend that
walks into your home like it's theirs



Figure 2. Meme four (USA & oil)

From table one, it is noticed that the majority of participants in all of the groups were able to infer the implied meaning in meme four. In general, they believed that the meme shows America as a thief hiding in the cloth of a friend to steal oil, and others claimed that America is just using the Arab countries and stealing their oil. Moreover, some participants also indicated that America behaves as a friend when something is of interest to them. On the other hand, few participants from group one and three were not able to infer the pragmatic meaning. They said that the meme shows America as a customer wanting to buy oil from those countries; whereas one participant from group three asked an unusual question which is “what is the relation between America and oil?” This might indicate that some participants lack the adequate background knowledge in relation to the common political perspectives in the Gulf area.

Figure five reveals the fifth meme that was given to all the six groups. The pragmatic meaning of this meme is (the guy in the picture is coming from a poor country where they cannot find food to eat).

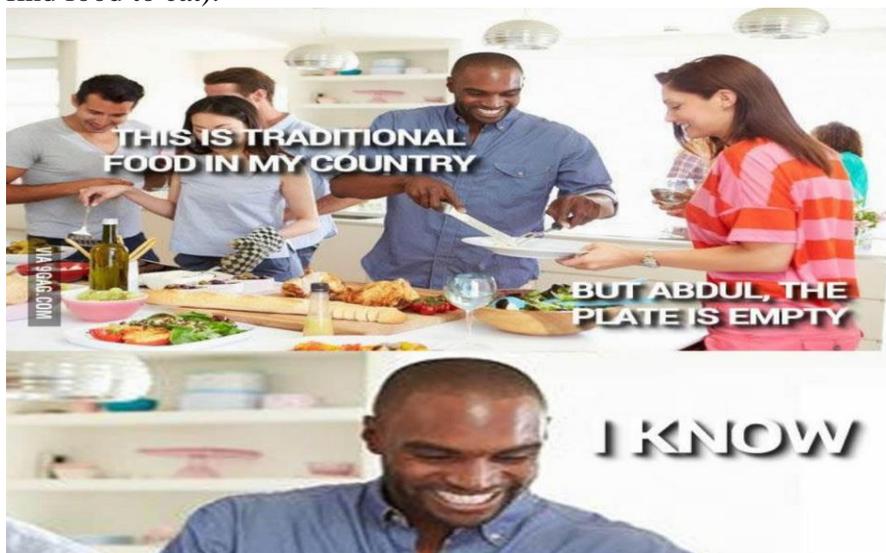


Figure 3: Meme five (poverty)

This meme has an ambiguous, embedded meaning within it. First, I thought that the participants will not be able to infer the pragmatic meaning, yet groups one, three, five, and six were able to recognize the implied message of the meme. Some participants from the aforementioned groups claimed that this meme is offensive because it shows that black people coming from “Somalia” for example do not have anything to eat. In contrast, participants from groups two, four, and five could not infer the implied meaning from the meme. Some said that the meme shows a person coming from a country where they do not have traditional food. Others claimed that the black man does not know where he is originally from, so he does not know any traditional food. Few participants said that it is difficult for them to infer the pragmatic meaning from this meme.

Questionnaire

After the observation, a questionnaire consisting of 10 agreement statements was handed to the participants to examine their perception of memes. Table two illustrates the analysis of the questionnaire:

Table 2. *Questionnaire results*

NO.	Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1.	Memes are usually funny.	83%	14%	3%
2.	I think memes discuss important ideas in a funny way.	72%	28%	0%
3.	Memes have hidden meanings. (pragmatic messages)	86%	14%	0%
4.	The hidden meaning in memes is easy to infer.	55%	35%	10%
5.	In my opinion, memes are good to teach students how to infer hidden meaning (pragmatic meaning).	86%	10%	4%
6.	Some memes require background information in order to understand them.	66%	24%	10%
7.	Memes only address political issues.	27.5%	45%	27.5%
8.	Memes are different from ordinary pictures.	86%	7%	7%
9.	I want more memes to be used in the classroom.	73%	24%	3%
10.	I think memes should be used more than pictures in the classroom.	76%	21%	3%

The following figures demonstrate with results and explanation the various perceptions of memes indicated by the students.

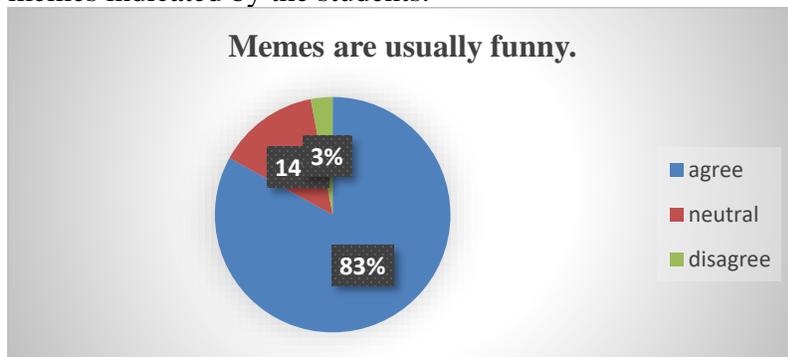


Figure 4. Statement one

As shown in figure six, the majority of participants (83%) consider memes to be humorous; whereas 3% disagree, and 14% are neutral. Many participants are aware of the humor delivered by memes, but some participants are neutral probably because they consider some memes to be offensive or difficult to understand; thus, perceived as not funny.

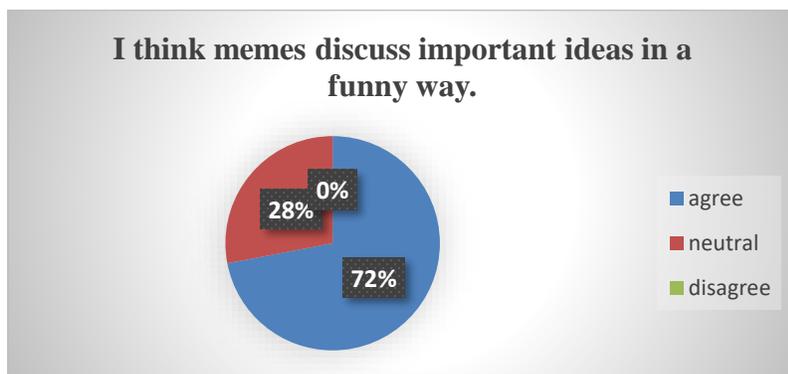


Figure 5. Statement one

As can be seen from figure seven, not less than 72% of participants believe that memes tackle central ideas in a funny way. On the other hand, 28% are neutral when it comes to the same notion. It appears that none of the participants disagree with this statement. Despite the fact that there are participants who see memes for the first time, the majority still consider memes to be of great importance in particular notions such as shedding light on matters like political issues, world famine, or educational systems.

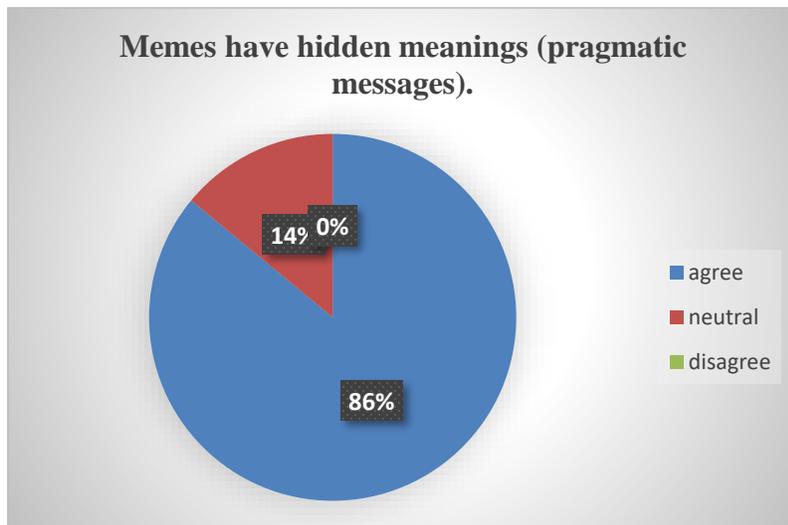


Figure 6. Statement three

The researcher explained to students the meaning of pragmatic meaning before the observation. About 86% of participants believe memes have pragmatic meaning. None of the participants disagree with this statement, yet 14% are still neutral. This neutrality is probably due to the fact that some learners in some groups were not able to conclude the pragmatic meaning in memes leading them to think that some memes might possess surface meaning only.

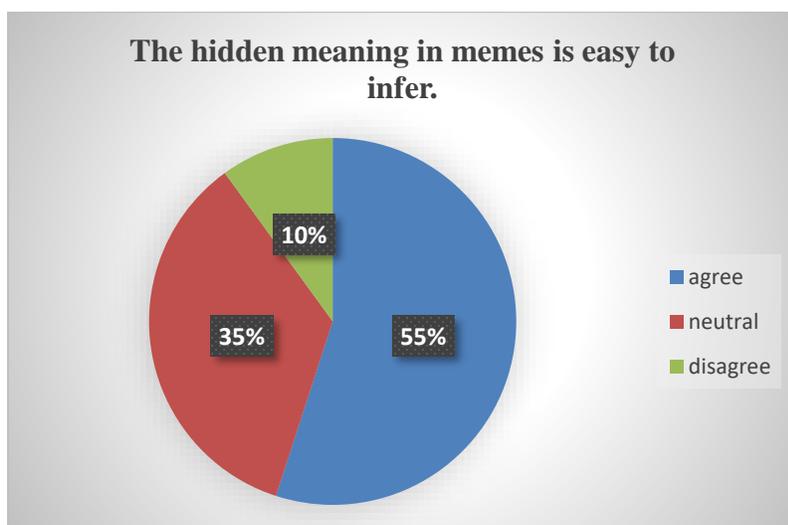


Figure 7. Statement four

As evident from figure nine, nearly 55% of participants think that pragmatic meaning inference from memes is easy; however, 10% disagree with this. On the other hand, 35% of the total population is neutral probably because some of the memes given to them in the observation process vary in difficulty. Clearly, few students are facing difficulty with meaning inference especially some participants from groups three and four (see table one).

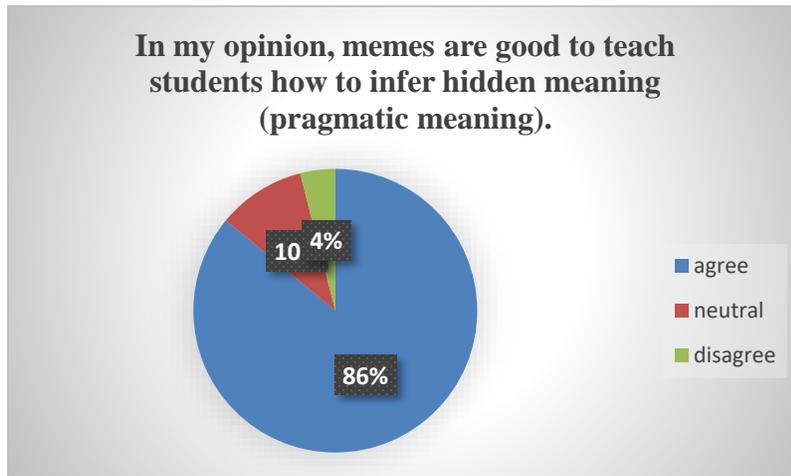


Figure 8. Statement five

Figure 10 indicates that 86% of participants believe that memes could be used as a tool to teach learners pragmatic meaning inference, 10% are neutral, and 4% disagree. Therefore, there is an overall positive attitude towards using memes to teach pragmatic meaning and develop critical thinking skills.

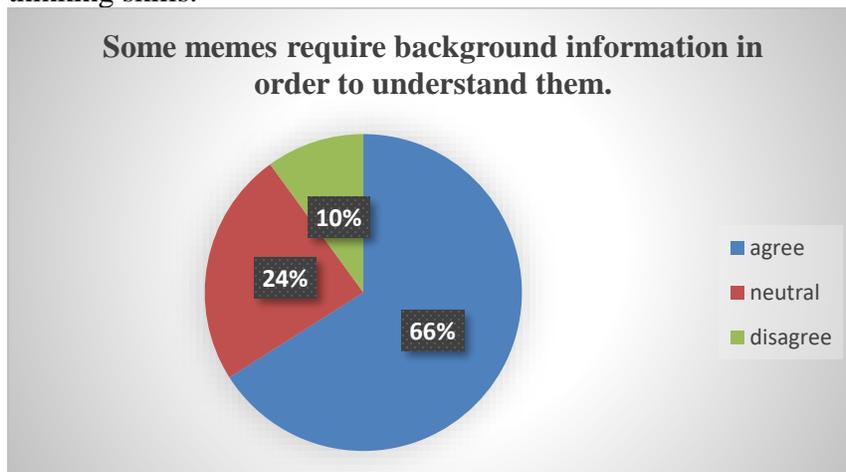


Figure 9. Statement six

As can be elicited from figure 11, 66% of participants consider knowing more background information about memes important in inferring their implied meaning. On the other hand, 10% disagree, and 24% are neutral to the statement. About a third of the participants are natural or disagree with the statement maybe because as Omanis, students are not fully aware of the true nature of memes.

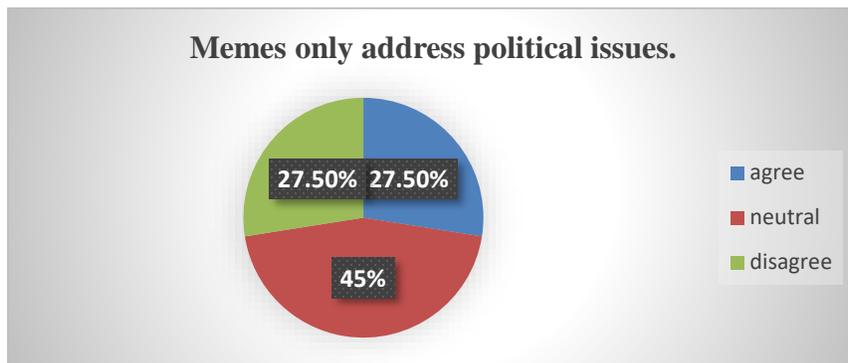


Figure 10. Statement seven

Even though participants were given memes from different fields beside politics, still 27.5% think that memes only concentrate on political issues only. However, 27.5% disagree, and 45% are neutral to this statement. So, only quarter of the students believes that memes are created on various fields including politics, whereas the majority are uncertain probably because the lack exposure to memes from different genres.

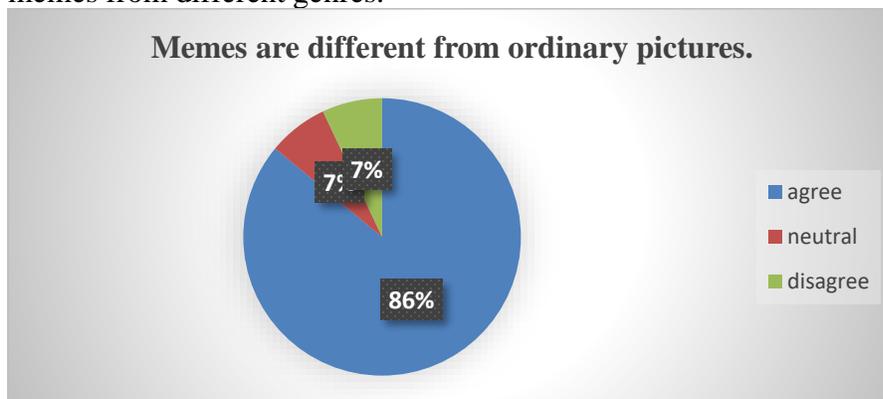


Figure 11. Statement eight

Although the researcher explained the difference between memes and pictures, 7% of participants think that memes and pictures are the same. However, 86% consider memes to be different from pictures. In my opinion, these varying results are due to differences in students' perception of the idea of memes.

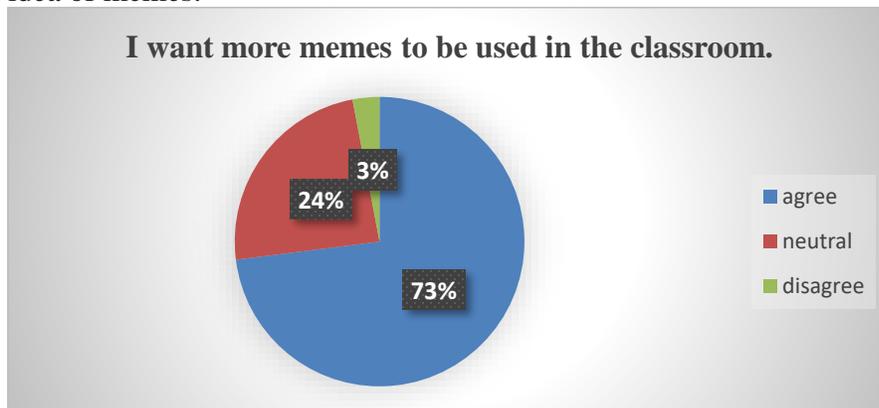


Figure 12. Statement nine

As shown in figure 14, nearly 73% of participants would like their teachers to use more memes in the classroom; in contrary, only 3% do not want this. The rest of the participants are neutral. This could be interpreted as a need to include internet memes inside the classroom where students could work collaboratively to create or explain memes.

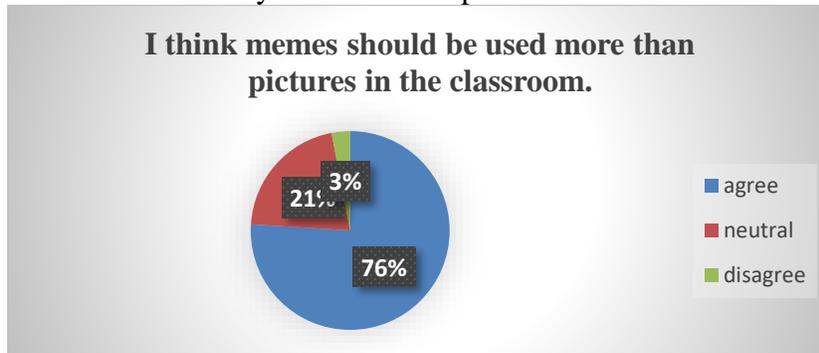


Figure 13. Statement 10

Almost similar to the results in statement nine, the majority of participants, 76%, think that memes should be used more than picture in the classroom, while 3% disagree with this suggestion. 21% of participants are neutral in this matter maybe because this is mainly a new method to be implemented in educational settings, so they are cautious about it.

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to examine students' ability to infer pragmatic meaning included in various types of memes. In addition, the study explored students' perception of memes being used as an educational tool inside the classroom. Overall, students expressed positive attitudes towards memes and were generally able to elicit hidden meaning in memes. Some of the reviewed literature have similarities with the findings of this study as discussed below

Most participants could infer pragmatic messages hidden in memes by taking under consideration the amount of background knowledge these participants possess in relation to memes. In addition, it is noticed that when memes move away from mainstream fields related to learners such as education, music, and friendship towards more complex notions such as politics, and world poverty, learners tend to face difficulty in inferring pragmatic messages. As Harshavardhan et al., (2019) stated in their paper, students' comprehension of memes depends on how well they are aware of popular culture and how much they consume media on regular basis. So, maybe that is why some students were not able to understand memes related to politics or international poverty.

It is noteworthy that in some instances, some students had to explain the pragmatic meaning using L1 because they thought that it was difficult to explain the meaning in English. Although these students were semester three undergraduates, their English proficiency needs improvement since they were only required to simply explain meaning of memes in a few words.

Some participants wrote in the comments section that memes helped them learn English in a funny way. Others wrote that memes are useful in improving their memories, and a few participants said that they look at memes in their free time and it helped them improve their

mentality. As stated by Harshavardhan et al., (2019), digital-native students spend considerable amount of time examining different genres of media in their free time.

Moreover, memes usually tackle complex ideas in a funny way, so they require people to link the written text the picture and the context to infer the pragmatic meaning. That is why some participants believed memes to be helpful in developing their mental skills. In addition, most of the participants held positive attitudes towards the utilization of memes as an educational tool inside the class. This kind of positive attitude towards memes was reported in other studies as well (see e.g. Purnama et al., 2018; Purnama, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This exploratory study examined students' perception of memes. Being a relatively less researched field in relation to education, the influence of memes was the center pillar of this paper by examining how memes might influence the educational process. The methods used in data collection and analysis revealed some interesting findings.

In general, learners held a positive perception of memes, and they expressed preference of using memes more often in educational settings. Also, by looking at the observation data, most learners were able to infer the pragmatic meaning used in memes. Therefore, it is recommended that memes should be used as a tool to teach pragmatic meaning inference. Moreover, according to learners feedback on the questionnaire, memes are useful in developing critical thinking skills when working on meaning inference. Milner (2012) and Harshavardhan et al., (2019) stated that memes creation and interpretation requires knowledgeable people of what is popular in media culture. So, memes interpretation could help students develop an understanding of sociolinguistic satire on the internet by piecing together the meme context and the possible alterations to reach intended meanings.

In addition, students showed interest and positive attitudes towards using memes in a language classroom. Huang (2016) used a framework to teach writing through memes, whereas Romero and Bobkina (2017) studied the possibility of utilizing memes in teaching listening, and both of their results were promising. Linxia and Ziran (2006) explained the importance of memes in language development by arguing that memes provide a quick and an effective way to enrich human languages through replication and transmission. So, it is recommended that memes be integrated inside language classrooms as warm up activities as the case with Linxia and Ziran (2006), or as meme-based lessons as used by Huang (2016). Memes could help foreign language learners absorb and learn the transmitted language phrases as they encounter memes on daily basis.

However, some limitations were faced while conducting this small-scale study. First, due to time constraints, the researcher had to conduct the study on a small sample which might not be representative enough. Moreover, there is a considerable lack of literature in the field of memes and education, so there is not enough data to support the findings of this small-scale exploratory study. Therefore, more research should be carried on this field, and larger quantitative samples could be studied to gain more solid insights into the subject of memes and education. In addition, comparative studies could be of great importance to decide on memes' suitability to teach different levels of learners and different language skills.

About the author

Maher Al Rashdi is an English lecturer with more than 6 years of experience in Omani higher education institutions. He is currently working at the foundation institute at the University of Nizwa. He holds a bachelor's degree in English language from Sultan Qaboos University and is presently working on his master's degree in TESOL at the University of Nizwa. He is interested in infusing technology with education to facilitate teaching and learning.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6202-521X>

References

- Bach, K. (2004). Minding the gap. *The Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction*. Stanford: CSLI Publications, 27, 43.
- Chen, C. (2012). The Creation and Meaning of Internet Memes in 4chan: Popular Internet Culture in the Age of Online Digital Reproduction. *Habitus*, 3, 6–19.
- Cutting, J. (2002). *Pragmatics and Discourse: A Resource Book for Students*. Routledge.
- Fasold, R. W. (1990). *The Sociolinguistics of Language*. Blackwell.
- Gal, N., Shifman, L., & Kampf, Z. (2016). "It Gets Better": Internet memes and the construction of collective identity. *New Media & Society*, 18(8), 1698–1714. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814568784>
- Harshavardhan, V., D. D. W., & Kumar, M. V. (2019). Humour Discourse in Internet Memes: An Aid in ESL Classrooms. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 29(1), 41–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1326365X19842023>
- Huang, Z. (2016). An empirical study on the application of memetics to the teaching of college English writing. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 25.
- Linxia, C., & Ziran, H. (2006). Analysis of memes in language. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 38(2), 108–114.
- Milner, R. M. (2012). *The World Made Meme: Discourse and Identity in Participatory Media*. <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/10256>
- O'Keefe, A., Clancy, B., & Adolphs, S. (2011). *Introducing Pragmatics in Use*. Routledge.
- Purnama, A. D. (2017). Incorporating Memes and Instagram to Enhance Student's Participation. *Language and Language Teaching Journal*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.2017.200101>
- Purnama, A. D., Desiarti, E. M., Aflahah, N. A., & Ekaningrum, V. C. (2018). UTILIZING MEMES TO PROMOTE STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM. *LET: Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal*, 7(2), 134–153. <https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v7i2.1946>
- Rogers, K. (2014). *Meme | cultural concept*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/meme>
- Romero, E., & Bobkina, J. (2017). Teaching visual literacy through memes in the language classroom. In *THE IMAGE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING* (pp. 59–71). ELT Council.
- Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in Digital Culture*. MIT Press.