



THE EFFECTS OF INTERNET MEMES ON FORMAL SPEECH AND SPOKEN
GRAMMAR AMONG UTAR UNDERGRADUATES

SEOW SUN JUN

UTAR

A RESEARCH PROJECT

SUBMITTED IN

PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONS) ENGLISH LANGUAGE

FACULTY OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

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SEOW SUN JUN

APPROVAL FORM

This research paper attached hereto, entitled "Title of Research Paper" prepared and submitted by "Candidate's Name" in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) English Language is hereby accepted.

Supervisor
Supervisor's name

Date: _____

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ABSTRACT

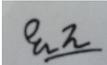
Internet memes have grown in popularity amongst internet users and its effects on language, especially its role in introducing new yet informal vocabulary, sparked concerns on its possible deterioration on language. This research is done in response to whether it affects spoken grammar and choice of words in formal settings, particularly internet slang that derive from internet memes. 10 participants were tasked to give a formal impromptu speech which were recorded, transcribed and analysed for grammatical errors and use of internet slang. These were then compared with how often they look at internet memes as stated by said participants in a semi-structured interview that followed. Analysis showed that there was no relation between internet memes and the 2 variables stated. However, findings suggested that grammatical errors were instead caused by the speakers' own skills, and the absence of internet slang in said speeches were the result of the speakers' context consciousness, that they were aware of the inappropriate use of informal words in formal settings.

DECLARATION

I declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

Name : SEOW SUN JUN

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Signed : 

Date : 13th April 2021

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Chapter 1: Introduction

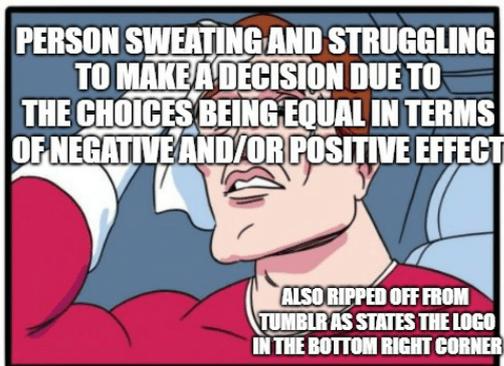
1.1 Introduction

“Meme” is a term introduced by renowned biologist by Richard Dawkins (1976) in his book *The Selfish Gene*. It is the theory of cultural and societal evolution based on the principles of the Darwinian Evolutionary Theory (Miltner, 2017). Derived from the Greek word ‘*mimema*’ (meaning imitation), memes are the spread of ideas and behaviours among individuals and populations, be it songs or even religious beliefs (Miltner, 2017). A relatively recent development of internet memes however has birthed a new digital culture of spreading content online from user to user with changes and variations along the way (Börzsei, 2013). Internet memes have grown so much that it has become a norm in modern culture.

A fact not known by many is the origins of internet memes. According to Börzsei’s (2013) findings, the sideways smiley face ‘:-)’ and sideways sad face ‘:-(’ were created by Scott E. Fahlman on 19 September 1982 as a way to avoid misunderstandings from humour and sarcasm due to the lack of visual channels on USENET, a network for exchanging news. Its spread has then led to these punctuations being called ‘*emoticons*’, which is already a display of the many characteristics of internet memes. Overtime as the internet developed, pictures started coming into play. The almost effortless act of photoshopping words onto a picture allowed for remixed memes whereby said pictures with a known context can be given different captions, making the creation of memes highly accessible and spreadable (Börzsei, 2013). Remixed memes are essentially the combination of a picture with a context known as an image macro or a meme template, and humorous inside-joke captions (Ong & Lee, 2019). An example of a meme template that is currently popular can be seen in Figure 1. The context of this meme template can be explained with Figure 2, followed by an example in Figure 3.



Figure 1: Two red buttons meme template



imgflip.com

JAKE-CLARK.TUMBLR

Figure 2: How the two red buttons meme works

Figure 3: Two red buttons meme example

A mere template however will not stop internet users from expressing their creativity. Meme creators tend to remix memes in multiple ways with not only written captions (Ong & Lee, 2019) but also the combination of additional pictures via Photoshop (Börzei, 2013; Miltner, 2017) to depict varied situations that cannot be done with the original template. Examples are as follows:



Figure 4: A reference to the European Union's copyright plan proposal, Article 13 in 2019



Figure 5: A reference to a mini-game in the video game *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*



Figure 6: A reference to Donald Trump's speech on deporting U.S citizens of Mexican descent



Figure 7

Besides pictures, internet memes also come in a form of videos (SproutSocial.com, n.d.), many of which originate from YouTube or Vine. A fine example would be the viral Vine video titled *#yeet* that has reached over 40 million views (Know Your Meme, 2019). In the video, a 13-year-old boy who calls himself Lil Meatball was performing a dance at a school track as his friends cheered “*Yah, yah, yah, yah, yeet!*”, whereby Lil Meatball made a throwing action with his arms as his friends shouted “*Yeet!*” (Figure 8).



Figure 8 (ALDBARAN official, 2014)

According to Ward (2018), “*Yeet*” is widely used in basketball when someone shoots a 3-pointer and are confident they will score. Ever since the video has become viral, many have started screaming “*Yeet!*” as they threw an object through the air (Urban Dictionary, 2017). “*Yeet*” and a large number of other internet slang words derived from internet that were either coined or underwent semantic change has essentially birthed a new non-standard variety of English.

1.2 Background of the study

As internet memes have become a norm among active internet users, it is no surprise that it contributes to introducing new yet informal vocabulary. Besides “*yeet*” as aforementioned, there has been a multitude of new vocabulary introduced by memes which has made its way into real-life conversations, one of which is the currently trending word “*sus*” (as of 2020). “*Sus*”, which is a shortening of “suspicious” originated from players of popular video game, *Among Us* (Kay, 2020). It is used to call out players who are suspicious and has since become widely used after being spread throughout the internet via memes across the internet. Outside of the game, “*sus*” is often used as a reaction to something questionable or shady on social media, especially on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook (SlangLang, 2020), resulting in a new vocabulary for active internet users (Börzsei, 2013). Figures 9 to 12 are examples of social media posts with the use of “*sus*”.



Figure 9 (Ejah-chaann, 2020)



Figure 10 (Eleo, 2020)

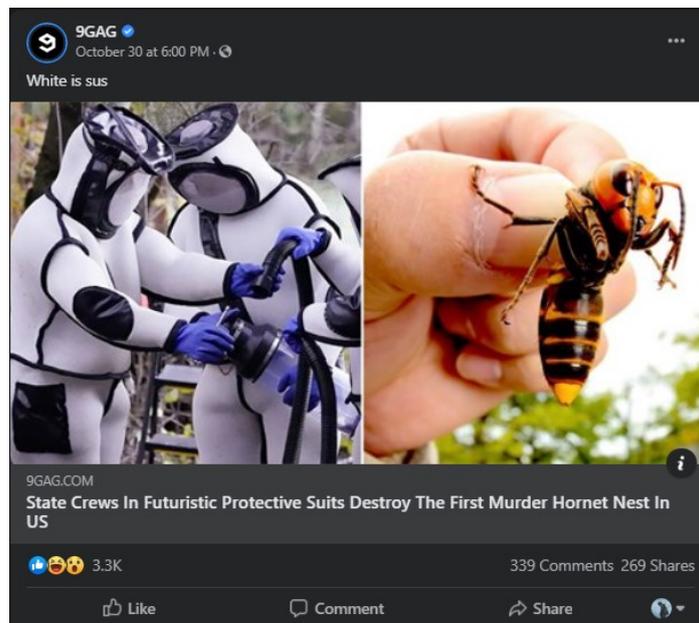


Figure 11 (9GAG, 2020)



Figure 12 (IGN, 2020)

”*Sus*” and many internet words and phrases alike have, again, made their way into real-life conversations, such as the use of “*I can’t even*” when one is speechless (Magalhães, 2019), or “*simp*” meaning person who overvalues another to a point they will do way too much for them (Urban Dictionary, 2020). A popular internet slang “*GG*”, an acronym for “*good game*”, has also been used by many in real life. It is originally used in competitive multiplayer games as a mark of sportsmanship and has been standard practice for gamers to type “*GG*” in the chat after every match (Vicente, 2020). “*GG*” eventually became an internet meme thanks to a group of Starcraft announcers yelling “*GG*” in unison during an E-sports tournament in South Korea (Paez, 2020). In Malaysia however, the acronym seems to have a different meaning when used in real-life. When something bad happens, Malaysians tend to say “*GG*” which signifies “*game over*” (Goh, n.d.), similar to “*We’re dead*” or “*We’re screwed*”. Example of real-life usage is as follows:

“Bro, I couldn’t finish my FYP in time?”

“GG.”

It is rather interesting that internet users use internet slang even in real-life. As internet slangs are informal in nature, a question on whether meme-loving speakers adapt their internet vocabulary, consciously or unconsciously, into their speech in formal settings comes to mind.

In addition, while typos and unintentional grammatical errors can occur, many memes utilize grammatical errors deliberately to apply a comedic or mocking factor (Stojchevska & Shalevska, 2018). Popular memes that reflect this are “Y U NO Guy” (Figure 13) and “If it fits, I sits” (Figure 14). For context, “Y U NO Guy” is a meme template used to address a particular issue or subject in a comedic manner (Know Your Meme, 2018) while “If it fits, I sits” is a popular caption used for pictures of domestic animals, particularly cats, resting in unusual places (Know Your Meme, 2020).



Figure 13

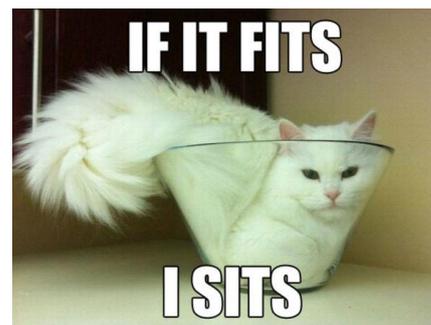


Figure 14

However, memes created by non-native English speakers seem to make unintentional grammatical mistakes that are similar to those in their oral production as well. According to Stojchevska and Shalevska (2018), common grammatical mistakes that can be found in internet memes include:

- Using *do* instead of *does* for third person singular in Present Simple (He go to work.)
- Using verbs in Past Simple after *did* or *didn't* (Did you ate?)
- Using *have* instead of *has* for third person singular
- Mistaking *they're* for *their*, *he's* for *his*, *your* for *you're*, *we* for *we're*, and vice versa

- Using double negatives (I didn't do nothing)
- Counting uncountable nouns
- Using *who* instead of *whom*

As such, will the spread of internet memes, with or without intentional grammatical errors, affect grammar as well?

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do internet memes affect spoken grammar?
2. How do internet memes affect spoken vocabulary in formal settings?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the impacts of internet memes on spoken grammar.
2. To determine the impacts of internet memes on spoken vocabulary in formal settings.

1.5 Significance of study

While there are many studies done on internet memes, there is not much done in terms of its effects on vocabulary and grammar. A question on whether meme lovers who have unsatisfactory grammar are due to internet memes or their own skills is unanswered. However, it cannot be denied that the English proficiency in Malaysia is slowly collapsing. The need to spend money on English speaking and writing classes at postgraduate levels and copy-and-paste culture in universities (Lovrenciear, 2019) is already a bad sign. The copy-and-paste culture serves no purpose in improving writing but instead only functions as a dead giveaway for lecturers to identify said copy-and-pasted writing due to the massive gap in writing skills and grammar skills of students. In fact, Malaysia has dropped from 26th in 2019 to 30th place in 2020 in Education First's English Proficiency Index (EF, 2020), dropping Malaysia from the high proficiency category to moderate.

To make matters worse, the Ministry of Education itself has admitted that there is a short of specialist English Language teachers in Malaysia (Nambiar, 2019). Teo Kok Seong, an academic, also claimed that more than half of English teachers in Malaysia do not have good command of the language, and that even parents know that some students speak better English than their teachers (Soo, 2019). According to a study by Rusli, Yunus and Hashim (2018), teachers play an important role in bringing an impact to students' speaking skills. However, 55% of the respondents of said study claimed that teachers focus more on the active students rather than the passive and weaker ones. The same study also had respondents voicing out that the speaking practices in their textbooks are insufficient. There is clearly a problem with how the Malaysian education system is handling the English language, which explains our current placing in Education First's EPI.

How do memes come into play? Firstly, Malaysians of all ages are actively using the internet for many purposes, one of which is to look at memes for humour. As mentioned previously, internet memes introduce new yet informal vocabulary and sometimes exposes readers to incorrect grammar. Since memes have become a huge part of internet culture and that Malaysia's English proficiency is deteriorating, the question of whether we should be concerned about memes should hence be addressed. Is it worsening our current situation with English proficiency or is it something we should not be worried about?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

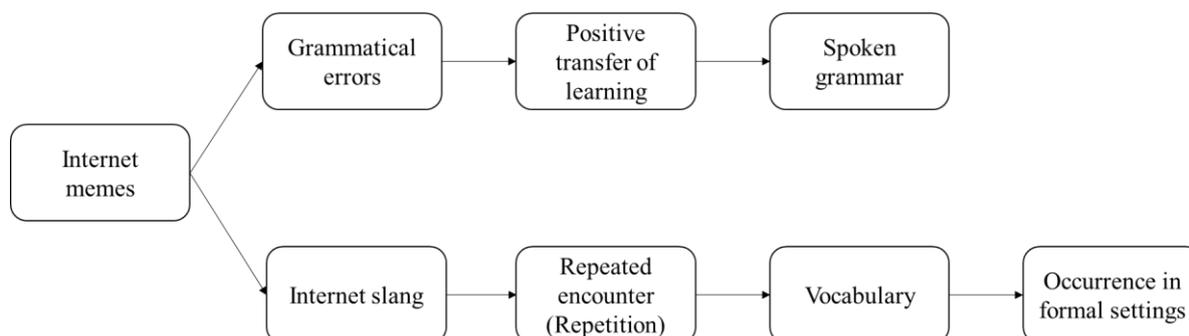


Diagram 1

1.6.1 Grammatical errors

As previously mentioned, some memes on the internet utilize intentional grammatical errors for comedic purposes. Users, especially non-native English speakers, who are exposed to these memes may not know of this and assume that they are instead correct. As such, the false impression may lead to them learning incorrect grammar. This may affect spoken environments due to positive transfer of learning. Positive transfer of learning refers to applying past knowledge and experience with a certain task and using them to master a new yet similar task (Perkins & Salomon, 1992). In simple words, a well-versed car driver finds learning how to drive a truck easier as his experiences with a steering wheel can be applied to truck driving.

As such, speakers of a language will find it easier to learn a similar second language in comparison to an entirely different language. This also applies to grammar as well. A study done by Kang (2016) on the transfer of Chinese grammar into English grammar teaching concluded that although there are differences between the grammars of both languages, there are also similarities as well. Such similarities (i.e. basic sentence patterns, word categorizations, use of clauses) allowed Chinese speakers to adapt their knowledge into English, easing language learning in these similar aspects. Hence, the case of intentional grammatical errors

utilized in certain meme templates is a similar one, although it is not a good thing. While English memes are not an entirely different language, it has however become an informal non-standard variety of English (Ong & Lee, 2019). Learning grammar from these meme templates may result in learners applying their incorrect knowledge into not only their writing but also their speech.

1.6.2 Internet slang

As aforementioned, many internet slang words derive from internet memes. As a meme template becomes popular, many variations of said template will be spread around social media platforms like Reddit, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Memes like “sus” and “yeet” as previously mentioned are some of the many memes out there that introduce new vocabulary to this non-standard variety of English. Constant exposure to these memes, especially at their peak of popularity, will result in readers learning not only the word but also its meaning through the meme’s context. But what makes these words memorable is, again, the readers’ constant exposure to these words. According to Webb (2007), constant repetition of words will result in better knowledge gain as his study implied that a learner has a larger opportunity to learn a word if he/she encounters it frequently.

Hence, through repetition via repeated encounters online, internet slang will work their way into one’s vocabulary. However, since internet slang is informal in nature, it is unclear whether speakers use these words consciously or unconsciously in formal settings, and what may cause the latter to occur if so.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Technology has given us the ability to share all forms of information with anyone around the world, and that includes memes. They are often compared to viruses due to its ability to spread (Buchel, 2012), hence the term “viral memes” or “viral videos”. Memes are called as such because a meme is a cultural analogy of genes that replicate catchphrases, rumours, fashion trends or melodies through a population (Bauckhage, 2011). The concept of memes itself is developed by Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist who was trying to explain cultural transmission, cultural evolution and the development of human society (Buchel, 2012; Börzsei, 2013).

Memes are mainly spread thorough social media, text-messages, blogs or forums (Bauckhage, 2011) much like a viral outbreak, except said outbreak is a humorous kind that requires no quarantine procedures. Said memes usually come as pictures with contextual captions (Ong & Lee, 2019) and video clips (SproutSocial.com, n.d.). In short, memes are essentially inside-jokes that internet users are fond of that are widely spread, resulting in replications and variations. These variations all abide by a meme template (alternatively known as macro memes) that each have their own contexts but with varied content, resulting in a phenomenon known as remixed memes (Ong & Lee, 2019). Every meme template has their own origins, some of which are completely random, but most are based on real-life events such as political feuds, natural disasters, acts of terrorism, deaths of celebrities and other forms of crises (Rintel, 2013). These memes are usually spread concurrently with news reports (Rintel, 2013), somewhat making them a source of news but are instead made fun of.

In the linguistics side of things, internet memes seem to have features that can also be found in textspeak, the language of text messaging (Gorney, 2012). According to Prochazka (2014), these features include contractions (“TXT” in Figure 15), letter homophones (“Y U” in Figure 15), clipping (“BRO?” in Figure 16), and acronyms (“OMG” in Figure 17). Aziz,

Shamim, Aziz and Avais (2013) stated that there was a growing concern that textspeak is deteriorating our language in both spoken and written form.



Figure 15

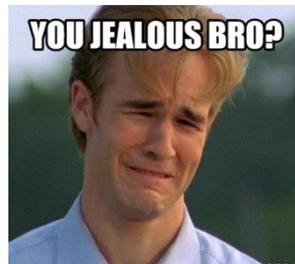


Figure 16

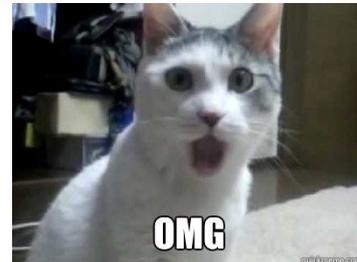


Figure 17

Due to the influence of the internet on modern-day text messaging, internet slang can also be found in text messages and written posts on social media as the internet, particularly memes, plays a huge role in introducing new vocabulary to internet users (Börzsei, 2013). The harmful effects of textspeak have been a long-debated topic. Crystal (2008), in his book titled “The Gr8 Db8” (The Great Debate), rebuts the concern of SMS language (or textspeak) having harmful effects on literacy. He mentioned that students do not regularly use abbreviations in both examinations and homework, and that users should be able to spell before knowing how to text which hence means that textspeak is not the cause of bad spelling among users of textspeak. The book also mentioned that roughly only 10% of words in messages are abbreviated but may however not apply to modern-day texting. Baron (2008) also claimed that the usage of textspeak displays creative use of letters, punctuations and numbers (i.e. “:”) as a smiley face) and improves phonetic awareness in children. Observations also suggest that texting styles vary with people, resulting in individually unique styles of writing.

On the other hand, teachers, parents and linguists alike have blamed texting on its harmful effects on both language and spelling (Vosloo, 2009). This is further supported by a survey conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project which showed that 64 percent of teenagers in the United States admitted that some form of textspeak can be found in their academic writings (Lenhart et al., 2008). Vosloo (2009) also pointed out that teachers in South

African schools have been encountering the same issue whereby students use textspeak in their formal written assignments. This concern has then kickstarted research on the topic at hand. However, research on said topic is rather limited due to texting being a relatively new phenomenon that is constantly evolving.

The limited studies on textspeak's effects on literacy each have varying results. A study done by Arellano and Gemora (2015) focused on identifying whether textspeak influences English spelling skills among Teacher Education students of West Visayas State University in Philippines by providing English spelling tests to 205 randomly selected Teacher Education subjects. Findings conclude that textspeak did not affect said students' spelling skills, whereby said spelling errors are caused by their own skills instead. A similar study done by Aziz et al. (2013) in Pakistan also had similar findings. This study focused on textspeak's effects on students' academic writing instead. In the study, 50 students were tasked with writing an essay and researchers analysed said essays for textspeak features. Findings suggest that users are context conscious and are aware of when to and when not to use textspeak. Similarly, a study done by Drouin and Davis (2009) comparing literacy between textspeak and non-textspeak users conclude that there were only little differences between the two in terms of translating target words like '*ur*' (your) and '2' (to) into standard English, and that literacy levels between the two yield the same result.

Dansieh (2011) however, had different results. His study of Ghanaian polytechnic students and their relationship with the use of text speak found that text messaging increases their tendency to use informal English and abbreviations in both exams and reports, which rejects Crystal's claims. Said findings also contradicts Aziz et. al.'s study (2013). This is possibly due to cultural differences as the previously mentioned studies are all done in different countries.

The mixed results have led to an inconclusive debate, with the only similarity being that all these studies focus on writing. This is to no surprise as texting and writing go hand in hand. However, the common features between texting and internet memes suggests that internet memes may or may not in fact have an effect on writing as well, although no such studies have been done to determine so. The effects of both memes and textspeak on speaking is also an unexplored topic.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study will adapt a qualitative approach, whereby participants will be tasked to give a formal 2 to 3-minute impromptu speech. The context of the research will not be revealed to the participants before and during the speech test. This is to avoid said participants from being conscious of grammatical errors and informal choice of words. The researcher will then analyse the participants' grammar based on the grammatical features of internet memes by Stojchevska and Shalevska (2018), and their choice of words (namely the presence of internet slang) throughout the speech. The next step involves an interview asking participants how often they look at memes on the internet from a scale of 1-10, with 1-3 being rare, 4-6 being average and 7-10 being often.

3.2 Sample

The target population will be undergraduates of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). As they are commonly exposed to formal settings (i.e. presentations) and use the internet frequently, undergraduates regardless of their courses are suitable participants for this study. This study aims to obtain 10 participants.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the speech and interview will be conducted online via Microsoft Teams as all UTAR undergraduates have access to the application. As such, both the speech and interviews will also be recorded. The researcher will be keeping an ear out for the participants' use of internet slang in their formal speech as well as their spoken grammar. In the next stage, a semi-structured interview will be conducted. The interview will use a list of questions which will be prepared earlier along with additional questions when necessary. The participants' responses will be transcribed and analysed via thematic analysis to determine if

there is a relationship between internet memes and vocabulary in formal contexts as well as spoken grammar. As thematic analysis allows for identifying relations via patterns in data (Braun & Clarke, 2012), the relationship between internet memes and the presence of internet slang in formal settings as well as spoken grammatical errors can be identified.

3.4 Conceptual framework

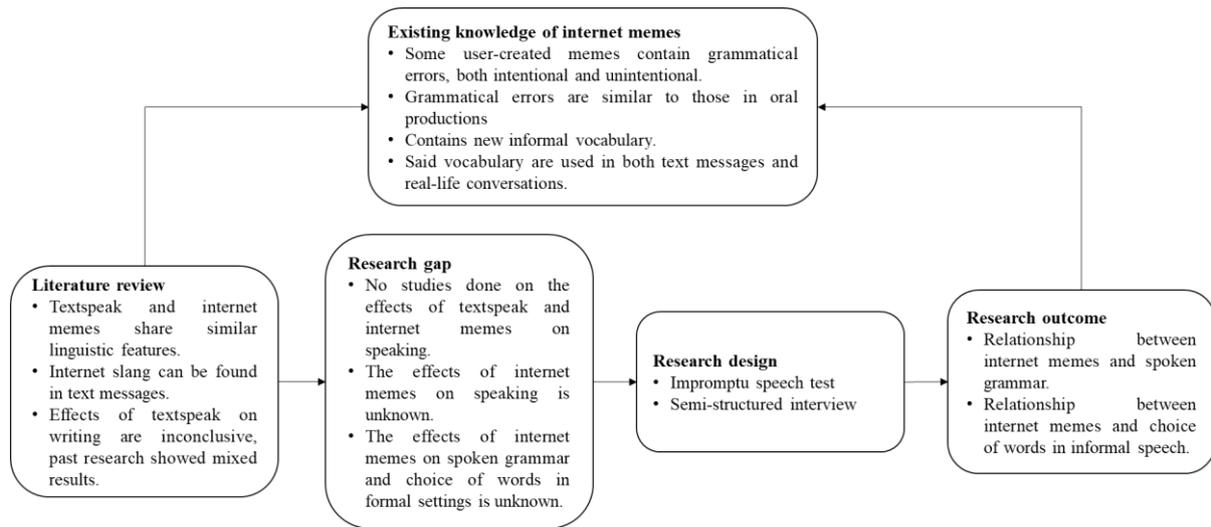


Diagram 2

Diagram 2 shows the process of the current research from the planning stage to its outcome that will contribute to the existing knowledge of the research topic. Past research has shown that textspeak and internet memes have similar linguistic features as previously mentioned. While there has been research done on textspeak’s effect on writing, however no study has been done on its effects on speaking. Additionally, no existing research highlights the effects of internet memes on both speaking and writing. This study aims to cover the research gap of its effects on speaking only.

Chapter 4: Findings & Analysis

The overall results were rather surprising as they showed that internet memes have no effect on spoken grammar and formal speech at all. To display this, the participants were first classified into 3 categories based on the number of grammatical errors and pauses made in their speech, ranging from fluent, average or below average. Each participant also gave responses on how often they look at memes on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1-3 being rare, 4-6 being average and 7-10 being often. Out of the 10 participants, 6 of which looked at internet memes often and 4 of which are average. All participants conducted their speech as if they were in a formal setting. Table 1 summarizes each participant's fluency and how often they look at internet memes. From the table, there is no consistent pattern between the participants' fluency and their frequency of internet meme exposure. Refer to Appendix B for more details including additional grammatical errors as well as frequency of pauses that determined the participant's fluency category.

Participant	Fluency	Frequency of internet meme exposure (X/10)
A	Fluent	5 (Average)
B	Fluent	8 (Often)
C	Below average	8 (Often)
D	Below average	10 (Often)
E	Below average	8 (Often)
F	Average	6 (Average)

G	Average	5 (Average)
H	Below average	4 (Average)
I	Fluent	9 (Often)
J	Fluent	8 (Often)

Table 1

4.1 Impacts of internet memes on spoken grammar.

According to Table 1, the frequency of internet meme exposure is not a contributing factor to each of the participant's fluency in the English Language as there is a mix of average and frequent internet meme viewers amongst the fluent speakers, and the same can be said for both average and below average speakers. The grammatical errors made by all participants also did not meet any of Stojchevska and Shalevska's (2018) conditions of grammatical errors commonly found in internet memes which, again, are:

- Using do instead of does for third person singular in Present Simple
- Using verbs in Past Simple after did or didn't
- Using have instead of has for third person singular
- Using double negatives
- Counting uncountable nouns
- Using who instead of whom

As they are speeches, the condition of mistaking *they're* for *their*, *he's* for *his*, *your* for *you're*, *we* for *we're*, and vice versa is ignored as it only applies to written language. Regardless, the presence of grammatical errors is hence not caused by one's tendency to look at internet

memes. The following (Table 2) are several examples of grammatical errors made by participants, all of which do not meet Stojchevska and Shalevska's conditions. As Participants A, I and J did not make any grammatical errors in their speeches, they are excluded from the table.

Participant	Errors
B	- ...that is where she lacks in it .
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - So, in generally, there have many types of media in Malaysia. - ...the opinion of public actually have shaped by the newspapers. - ... this is not only happen on uh- newspapers...
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm the U- UTAR Kampar student who are currently studying - ...you have to go very hard training - ...you have to went through the audition - ... hundred of people, thousand of people - ... and then small company tend to will close down due to the... - ...this is the pro and cons - ... for small company, you can get to debut somehow easy compare to big company - If you enough luck and talent, ...
E	- ...going to improve and improve day by days, year by years
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ...something feel that we might need another companion... - ... we get lesser and lesser communicates with our family - What is it that I'm lack of love?

G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... the history of media back in the days, where we have broadcast media... - ... things have been shifted totally different, ... - ... I'm trying not to involved...
H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different era have different kinds of fashion. - ... you can't identify a different people from the rest of them. - So that period really defines the whole fashion... - ...people who goes to disco - Do I fell that- ...

Table 2

Participants C, D, E and H who are below average speakers, were previously Chinese secondary school students and are native Chinese speakers. In contrast, Participants B, I and J who are classified as fluent speakers were National Secondary School (SMK) students and Participant A was an international school student. Said participants as a result were more exposed to the English Language in comparison to participants C, D, E and H during their secondary education. Average speakers, namely participants F and G, also studied in Chinese secondary schools as well. However, they mentioned that they were exposed to English media, especially novels, comics, movies and television shows since childhood. This suggests that educational background as well as exposure to the language possibly contributed to their fluency in the English Language and their grammatical skills.

Regardless, positive transfer of learning from incorrect grammar in internet memes to speech is hence inaccurate. However, it is possible that the grammatical errors unrelated to internet memes made by the average and below average speakers were results of L1 interferences. Further research is required.

4.2 Impacts of internet memes on spoken vocabulary in formal settings

All the participants did not use any internet slang. In fact, none of the informal words used fall under the category of internet slang. For example, with reference to Table 3, Participant A used “*gonna*” once, an informal abbreviation of “*going to*” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021a) and “*pretty*” twice, an informal adverb meaning moderately high (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021b), and Participant B used “*fricking*” once, an informal adverb to express anger or annoyance (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021c). These occurrences were not only extremely rare, but they also do not fall under the category of internet slang and are hence considered insignificant.

Participant	Informal words used
A	- ...today I'm gonna talk about intelligence, ... - ...we pretty - we've gone pretty far with that.
B	- ...that she's a fricking Dean's list.

Table 3

As all participants are university students who actively participate in formal presentations, their experience likely contributed to their performance in the speeches when it comes to choices of words. While code-mixing is also very common among Malaysians in both online (Bukhari, Anuar, Khazin & Abdul, 2015) and physical conversations (Ng, 2018; Ariffin & Susanti Husin, 2011), this also did not occur in any of the speeches. The lack of informal words and code-mixing is likely due to the participants being aware of the context that it is a formal speech and were hence more conscious of their choice of words.

4.3 Summary

Overall, internet memes do not seem to have an effect on spoken grammar and formal speech. When it comes to grammar, educational background and the amount of exposure to the English Language seems to be a common link between all participants, but further research is required to confirm this. As for formal speech, participants were context conscious, which hence caused them to not use any informal words in their speeches as they are inappropriate in formal settings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The results were rather unexpected as internet memes play a big role in internet culture. As the use of the internet has become a common activity in daily life, its non-existent effect on language in formal settings is surprising. Of course, the internet, especially memes, do affect language outside of formal settings, ranging from online text messages to face-to-face conversations. However, what is more surprising is the below average speakers' ability to differentiate between formal and informal words, namely participants C, D and E despite their unfamiliarity with the language, relatively speaking. Said participants are also aware of the meanings of many internet slangs but chose to avoid using them in their speech. This proves that repeated encounters of internet slang do cause readers to acquire these words into their vocabulary. Their absence in the speeches, however, is very likely due to the participants' awareness that new words introduced by internet memes are not in the English dictionary and are inappropriate for use in formal settings. This is consistent with Aziz et al.'s (2013) findings where students did not apply any textspeak features into their essays as they were context conscious, knowing that the use of informal slang in essays are inappropriate. Needless to say, the current study which took place in Malaysia contradicts Dansieh's (2011) study in Ghana, just like Aziz et al.'s (2013) study that took place in Pakistan. Dansieh's study found that textspeak increases the students' tendency to use informal English in reports and exams. This is, again, possibly due to cultural differences. Further research is required in terms of the effects of both textspeak and internet memes on language, as well as the effects of different cultures on the English Language.

In contrast, the effects of internet memes on grammar, or lack of, were not as surprising. All grammatical errors made by the participants showed no similar features to those described in Stojchevska and Shalevska's (2018) research, hence showing no relation between internet

memes and grammar. The errors made were instead due to the speakers' skills and possibly L1 interferences as well. As mentioned, the factors affecting the speakers' fluency, which includes grammar, are likely due to their educational background and exposure to the English Language since childhood, but further research is required to determine so. This hypothesis is merely based on the consistent pattern between the participants' backgrounds and their fluency, but there could be other possible factors at play as well.

While they do not affect speaking negatively, internet memes may still be a concern when it comes to Malaysia's English proficiency, or internationally in general, as this research does not cover their effects on writing. It is unknown whether internet memes affect writing, and research done by Dansieh (2011) and Aziz et al. (2013) on textspeak's effects on writing further reinforces this due to their contradicting results. Said results showed that not all students are context conscious, but is it, again, the difference in culture causing this or are there other factors at play? Further research on this field is required. Needless to say, this does not apply to informal forms of writing such as blogs and comics. It is also important to note that the aforementioned studies are relatively old, texting has evolved with more vocabulary introduced, and more and more memes have been created since. Their effects on language may have evolved in the span of 8 to 10 years.

Speaking of culture, all 10 participants who were all volunteers are of Chinese ethnicity. As UTAR students are dominantly Chinese, the researcher could not find any students of other ethnicities who wanted to volunteer for this study. As such, the results do not represent all Malaysians in general, assuming culture being one of the factors affecting students' context consciousness and tendency to use informal language in formal settings. The small sample size of 10 is also not enough to all UTAR students, let alone Malaysian university students. This hence makes it possible that the findings of this study are inaccurate. This study having taken

place during the COVID-19 pandemic also led to a time-consuming data gathering process, particularly participants' scheduling conflicts and internet connection issues that had led to multiple delays due to the inability to meet face-to-face. Issues with the Microsoft Teams application were also a culprit to said delays. Having to gather and analyse data in the timeframe of 13 weeks in addition to the delays made it impossible to gather more participants for this study, hence the relatively small number of 10 participants that is nowhere near enough to represent all students.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Contrary to popular belief, this research has shown that internet memes do not affect spoken grammar and formal speech as long as context consciousness is present. University students are context conscious of when and when not to use informal words, which includes internet slangs that derive from internet memes. By requesting participants to give a formal impromptu speech and having their speech analysed based on how often they look at memes in relation to their choice of words and grammatical errors in said speech, we can conclude that memes do not affect formal language and spoken grammar as no relationships were detected.

In addition, internet slang making its way into real-life conversations should be viewed as a positive addition in making the English Language unique. Like the aforementioned example of “GG” having its own separate meaning in Malaysia in comparison to the rest of the world, it shows that even memes are capable of producing regional slangs, hence creating another non-standard variety of English. While it is too soon to say that memes do not affect language as additional research is required to fully determine so, the absence of any harmful effects on at least spoken grammar and formal speech, and their linguistic value in producing unique varieties in not only English but other languages as well, show that memes should instead be embraced as a humorous culture and not a plague to language.

As English proficiency is still a concerning issue in Malaysia, Malaysians do not have to worry about the popular internet culture affecting language negatively, at least when it comes to speaking. Internet memes should instead be appreciated as a creative form of humour that serves to make one’s day better and encourage creative thinking to both creators and readers/viewers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview questions

1. Do you know what memes are?
2. Have you ever seen any internet memes?
3. If so, how often do you look at memes from a scale of 1 to 10?

Appendix B: Speech transcriptions

Participant A

Transcription:

Hi, my name is Alycia and today I'm gonna talk about intelligence, specifically emotional intelligence. We come from an Asian uh country. Malaysia is part of Southeast Asia and what we pride most is having a very high IQ. That means we are... we are intelligent in ways that are academically valuable but nowadays a lot of companies are looking towards EQ, emotional intelligence. Aside from being able to memorize a bazillion topics, aside from being able to do 10 different Math formulas in an- in an instant, how good are you at being empathetic, how good are you at being compassionate, how good at you are caring for somebody other than yourself in terms of selfishness, we pretty- we've gone pretty far with that. How about we look at selflessness? So when we talk about emotional intelligence, the way we can progress forward is, and I know this sounds a little bit feministic but the way we can progress forward is to give safe spaces for our men to grow in emotional intelligence, to permit them to show affection, especially for each other, you know. We are always seeing men having to be strong, these toxic masculinities that really um peg all of our men down and it's so unhealthy. How can they show affection to their family if they can't even love themselves? So, emotional intelligence is something we that should put forward especially in our studies, we should put it forward in our daily lives and I think that through this, a lot of things will change. Through this, a lot of- a lot of the ways that we run businesses, the way that we uh we shape our families for the future will be very different. We have to focus on self-masculinities in order to progress to a better future. And I think that emotional intelligence will be the next step umm... in replacement of what we have already learned in school. Things like morals, things like civics, those are very memorizing-based. We can practice EQ in classes... whether it- it- the- it- regardless of your gender. I think that society will view umm the way we treat men, the way we expect men to behave, very differently. So uh... this is this the next step. This is... a very small but very significant difference and I think that through this, a lot of things will change for the better. Thank you.

Duration: 2 minutes 42 seconds

Frequency of meme exposure: 5/10 (Average)

Classification: Fluent

Participant B

Transcription:

So, the topic will be intelligence today then... let's talk about the general definition of intelligence itself that it's actually not related to common sense but intelligence is uh- you have the knowledge about certain context of something and many people actually mistook it for common sense in a way that you are actually smart here and there but I don't... what- in my personal opinion, I don't believe that those 2 are actually related whatsoever. Let's talk about the examples that I had to face through- through- throughout my 2 years of suffering in university with useless groupmates. Let's talk about this particular person... that she's a **fricking** Dean's list. Yes, a Dean list student. Unfortunately she has- she's gifted with that intelligence but she entirely lacks the common sense, 100%. So basically, the common sense she lacks so badly is that... okay like I said, intelligence is the knowledge about that subject but common sense is how you actually use that knowledge of that particular subject to [inaudible] to utilize it in that skills or your projects or whatever assignments and **that is where she lacks in it**. And that is where I learned that common sense is not intelligence whatsoever. For example, when I ask her to do a job. A responsible job to call the company. Basic journalism ethics. No, you had to call the company and demand them to call them back and demand them to ask for an... to ask for an interview whereas you're the one that's asking them and you should be actually be polite enough to actually talk to them and negotiate with them for an interview, not demand. And that's where the common sense is lacking. Your intelligence is there but your common sense is entirely 100% lacking.

6

FB, IG

Duration: 2 minutes 56 seconds

Frequency of meme exposure: 8/10 (Often)

Classification: Fluent

Participant C

Transcription:

So, hello guys. Umm today, I'm going to talk about uh media, yeah. So, in **generally**, there **have** many types of media in Malaysia. Kay, there's television, radio and newspaper, yeah. And... the media... okay... so, in- in your opinion, what is the... ma- uh what is the- how- how to say, oh my god. Wha- what is the function of media? Can I have some response? Okay, never mind. So actually in my opinion, the function of media is not only to spread the information, but also to share people's opinion. For example, like newspapers. Like umm... the **opinion of public** actually **have shaped by the newspapers**. How to say, it's something like... especially like in the topic of... like uh... political issues. Yeah, if the newspapers talk about the bad things of the government and people will have the mindset like "Oh... uh government is bad." However, if the newspapers talk about the good thing... of the government, and public will have the good mindset to the newspaper... yeah. I- I- I mean to the government... yeah. So actually media is a very powerful... uh yeah it's uh very powerful especially uh... towards the public and the government. Yeah. Oh my god. And... actually this **is not only happen** on uh newspapers... uh in television radio is... yeah, is also like that. I mean... uh I mean the media is a very powerful... is a very powerful method... uh for politician... as well as the government. Okay, besides for the... formal.... uh how to say... I mean f- I mean the formal function like in- like for informal functions like blogs, like blogs, Facebook like that, social media can consider as types of media also. For those blogs and...

Duration: 3 minutes 7 seconds

Frequency of meme exposure: 8/10 (Often)

Classification: Below average

Participant D

Transcription:

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm She Rui En. I'm **the** U- UTAR Kampar student who **are** currently studying Public Relations and I'm currently in Year 3 Sem 3. So now I will start my impromptu speech... uh with the title of "How To Become A K-Pop Idol". So in order to become a K-Pop idol, first you have to go through **the** training period, and the training period is um... different for everyone due to one's ability, talent and appearance because this is how the company um evaluate you during the weekly evaluation. So, first of all you have to send your resume... or uh attend an open audition from **the** company. And the size of the company is also one of the important **aspect** for you to become a success artist. Because um if there is a big entertainment company, so um like [inaudible], JYP Entertainment, and YG Entertainment, and Big Hit Entertainment... um it definitely **ensure** your success in the future as it uh somehow like you study UM and USM in Malaysia. Yo- **you have to go very hard training** and um... everythin- you have to put many effort as the... how to say... um... there's many people inside the company and also like **you have to went through the audition**. It's like hundred... **hundred** of people, **thousand** of people and you are only one who survive the audition and then you make it. So it's very big um... fight over there, so you have to gone through everything. So, one- once you can make it um... through the audition, then you can become a trainee of that company. So if you go for the small company, um... the fight might not the- be... as severe or hard but um small companies tend to have **the problems** like um **the** financial problems or the PR management problems. So if the small company they face some um crisis like Coronavirus hit and then um... entertainment industry will be affected, and then small company **tend to will** close down due to the... crisis. So this is the **pro and cons**. So for- for- for small company, you can get to debut somehow easy **compare** to big company but this also um vary to each person talent and luck, because uh there's one saying in the Korea industry, so like um... although you put a lot of effort, but without **the** luck, you also can't be uh discovered by the public. So um back to the topic. So like um there is big company and small company. So, big company does- definitely ensure your success but this doesn't mean that small company couldn't ensure your success. If **you enough** luck and talent, you can also be discovered by the audience and then uh- become a big hit. So after you getting um- to be their- a official trainee under the company, then you can um- get- **went** through the training period [inaudible] evaluation. They also record down your video during the evaluation. And then after a few **evaluation**, and then years by years, months by month, some people they only went through only 1 month of training period

and then they get to debut as a K-Pop artist. But some people they train for 10 years because... yeah, this is how long it takes. And then after **become** a trainee, um you get to debut, and then this is how to become K-Pop idol. But e- everything starts not only um... how to say... you might think that “Oh, once I become a K-Pop idol... um... this is all for me” and then um... it’s actually a new start for you because that is only the official opening for you as a K-Pop idol. I think that’s all **for** me, thank you.

Duration: 3 minutes 6 seconds

Frequency of meme exposure: 10/10 (Often)

Classification: Below average

Participant E

Transcription:

Okay, so um... so, technology is a... very good thing. It's... bring us convenience for nowadays like... and technology is, how to say... like... like going to improve and improve **day by days, year by years**. And... we kind of like... we kind of like... we kind of like adopt on it to our daily lives. Everyone has a little technology within themselves like for example, phones, watches, smartwatches... and it's been... it's been used every day by people. People are able to connect, people are able to do their task, run everything by just technology. So, as what people say, "If you feel technology, that's not technology" ...

Duration: 2 minutes 5 seconds

Frequency of meme exposure: 8/10 (Often)

Classification: Below average

Participant F

Transcription:

Okay, so... let's talk about love, alright. So love doesn't mean- doesn't always mean that we must have a companion or some sort of... layman terms as a boyfriend or girlfriend, so love can be produced from that relationship. But to me, love is much more important, that it directs from our family, our siblings and relatives and all that. So basically, love... as they say, "Love is in the air", "Love is in some sort of relationship," and all that, but I believe that true love comes from family. So without our family, we do feel lonely. So as we grow up... from our childhood to teenagers and till adults, **something feel** that we might need another companion some sort when we step out to society. As we begin to step out, we feel that love is uh... begin to uh... how to say, become bleak, I would say... as we step out to the society and all that. We believe that we must have a uh... partner or a companion beside us because when we work outside or we study from far, okay, we get lesser and lesser **communicates** with our family, but there is one true thing uh... based on my experience. I myself **does** not have any... uh sorry, do not have any uh... a companion beside me, but there is **one true** that is always beside me which is God. Sometimes I feel that when I'm lonely, I would actually sit down and meditate myself. What is it that makes me lonely? What is it **that I'm lack of love**? Is it that I'm actually um... too bored of some things that I see people having a companion, a girlfriend or boyfriend, some sort of- based on their perspective, do I feel jealous about it? **Do I fell** that- do I really need or do I want it? A companion. So, that brings me to my question. Right now, I fell that it's not always important to actually have a girlfriend or a boyfriend. If you are a female, essentially depends on whether you gain trust or whether you entrust this companion to you.

Duration: 2 minutes 47 seconds

Frequency of meme exposure: 6/10 (Average)

Classification: Below average

Participant G

Transcription:

Good afternoon. So the topic I got was media. When we talk about media, the first thing we talk about is um... social media, but let's not talk about social media first. Let's think about what is um... the history of media back in the days, where we **have** broadcast media or even like mass media like TV, radio, or even... uh what else, uh newspaper. Yeah, so these- all these media **is** actually... a form of thing that we use to deliver our message or back in the days like how... uh you know politicians they actually use [connection interrupted] where um people get to use that platform to communicate and build relationships among one another. Yeah, especially for now during this COVID pandemic... things **have been shifted totally different**, uh from uh physical interactions to uh ... digital interactions whereby we get to like see each other over the WhatsApp call or even now, interview is no longer face-to-face but we are doing it via the Microsoft Teams. Uh... in terms of the benefits of media, I would say it definitely gives a lot of convenience and it saves a lot of time for uh people uh- as compared to the traditional media. But uh in terms of the disadvantage, I would say definitely the impact and influences that we receive um... over the media platforms have definitely give uh... some sort of uh... some sort of negative uh... negative influences to the users. So... uh in terms of my thought towards the media, I would say I'm trying not **to involved** and too influenced by this platform, although I am slowly seeing the power of this um... thing. Yeah, that's all. Thank you.

Duration: 3 minutes

Frequency of meme exposure: 5/10 (Average)

Classification: Average

Participant H

Transcription:

Good evening to uh Seow, my friend. My name is Hui Zhong and I've been given the topic of "Fashion". So, what is fashion? Fashion is actually uh... our normal **live**, our daily practices of, you know having uh- putting on shirts. Basically, like uh culture representation of us to the society. So, why people like fashion despite nowadays... like every gene- every era there's a different kind of fashion. **Different era** have different kinds of fashion. So, what could the world look like without fashion? People would look like, you know, the- the same type of people, the same identity, people will just wear the same shirt or trousers, and you will- you can't identify **a different people** from the rest of them. So for me, which period of fashion is the best. For me I think the 80s, the fashion from the 80s are the best, you know because before those ripped jeans, those uh- uh white t-shirts you know, basic tees. There were just cook jackets, trousers, those gentlemen suits that people wear to work everyday. And uh when people go out uh- just for fun, they would just wear, you know uh... boots, colourful uh... colourful... uh- shirts with afros on them. So that period really **defines the whole fashion** comparin- comparing to other like 30s, 40s or 50s because from that period we can see that people is very distinctive in culture. Yeah. So uh it's not only America but also you know in Malaysia, in Hong Kong. So different era there are different types of uh fashion, I would say. So at that time, people who **goes** to disco, you know who goes to nightclub, they didn't wear ripped jeans, they wear uh- instead the wear like, you know those uh... those what we call like... you know uh... the- the- the- the... jeans with the big designs, the big leggings. So you can see from the video games, like GTA... they are more like neon... neo... uh neo kind of you know, character, so it's very special to me. So sometimes I would like to look at the past fashion sense that I can try to imitate. And that's all for my topic, thank you very much.

Duration: 2 minute 54 seconds

Frequency of meme exposure: 4/10 (Average)

Classification: Below average

Participant I

Transcription:

Okay, on the topic of sports, there are mainly 3 types of people concerning with sports. 1, people who do physical sports. Those are normally called athletes, right? Or even in a more dramatic sense, sports artists. So for the past few decades, uh... in the... in the entertainment industry, athletes are considered to be one of the- to be of the highest authority. They have the- they have one of the highest incomes in the field, in the industry. Their career serves as a main form of entertainment for other people. And the second the is E-sports which is rising in the current generation, in the current society. Their income, similar to physical sports are also rising and they are mainly carried out through the mediums of the internet concerning with games such as League of Legends, DOTA... right. And the third type of people concerned with sports is actually people who do not do any sports. For them, the main source of entertainment are the previous 2 types of sports, E-sports and physical sports for the older generation, they still enjoy physical sports but for the new and upcoming generation, E-sports is the preferred way to go. So, I have briefly described 3 types of people concerned with sports, uh mainly people who do physical sports, people who do E-sports, and people who enjoy watching physical sports and E-sports, but to till the end of the day, it is utmost crucial to keep in mind that all form of sports are mainly- mainly serves as a type of- a form of entertainment for everyone, right. Athletes and non-athletes alike. That's all. thank you.

Duration: 2 minutes 34 seconds

Frequency of meme exposure: 9/10 (Often)

Classification: Fluent

Participant J

Transcription:

Okay, so in today's world, it's a bit interesting in a sense that we are... a lot more in tune with our mental health as well also, because right now there's quite a lot of movements that are actually advocating and also pinpointing on mental health. So, and then also comes in the whole entire notion of the International Women's Day which is actually today. So, the whole entire notion of how mental health and feminism works together is actually a very interesting circum- a very interesting phenomena since that... uh feminism is only a movement exclusively made up by women for women to actually advocate and empower women. Then, they also so do uh, what's that called?... advocate and actually try to improve mental health among themselves in the whole entire notion where... the victim is not to be blame- eh sorry- the victim is to be blamed is a very harmful understanding. Uh yeah, a very harmful understanding and a very harmful phase because it actually victimizes the victim who actually... yeah, it actually victimizes the victim and discredits the victim's experience and... uh what's that called?... the victim's experience and the victim's uh voice. So, this whole entire feminism thing and psychology is so deeply intertwined that... it cannot function without one another because it's basically just... on the notion of people's mentality. So that's why it's- I find it very interesting on how mental health and feminism cannot work without each other. So, it's... yeah, so basically the whole entire... uh what's that called? ... understanding or so... stems from how men think and how actually men actually- what's that called? ... oppress, manipulate and utilize women for their own gain. So, that itself is another facet to think about under the whole entire feminism movement to actually better gauge and understand... to what's that called? ... to actually achieve a more equal society among men and women. Yeah.

Duration: 2 minutes 49 seconds

Frequency of meme exposure: 8/10 (Often)

Classification: Fluent