Multimodal and verbal Finnish internet memes

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Internet memes have become a new medium for daily computer-mediated communication. This new multimodal means of communication has changed how we use language both online and offline. Furthermore, they expand the domain of multimodality in cognitive grammar to the study of the interaction between text and images or videos. Previous research defines an internet meme as an image, video or phrase spread and remixed via internet (Castano 2013; Shifman 2014). Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017) approach internet memes as multimodal constructions, which contain text and image, and have their own constructional properties. However, they mention that there exists a multitude of different multi- and monomodal meme genres that should be studied further. The variety of internet memes and genres has been acknowledged in previous studies, but it has gained little attention in the analysis. My study is the first to my knowledge to adopt an empirical data-driven approach to the linguistic study of internet memes. The data-driven approach allows revealing and analyzing the great diversity of internet memes. My paper examines the following research questions:

1. What is an "internet meme" from a cognitive linguistics perspective?
2. What characterizes popular Finnish internet memes?
3. How Finnish internet memes differ from English internet memes?

My multidisciplinary research combines methodology from cognitive linguistics and memetics, the study of memes. The concept of "meme" as a unit of cultural evolution is older than the internet, and it has been studied in various fields (Blackmore 1999). As memetics is focused on human cognition and learning, it especially well fits the scope of cognitive linguistics. My data is gathered from the social media site Facebook, which is used by over 2 billion people monthly. The data consist of a corpus of around 200 Finnish internet memes in the context of one Facebook post.

My data shows that Finnish internet memes are heterogenous. Verbal internet memes can be categorized into online-specific non-standard syntactic constructs, intentionally misspelled lexical constructs and loan translations from English. Multimodal internet memes include image macros (see Shifman 2014), web-based chain letters, visual aphorisms and creative multimodal combinations specific to certain Facebook subcommunities. For example, *sori vihreestä* 'sorry for the greens' is a multimodal internet meme used in a Finnish group for unhealthy vegan food (see Figure 1). The members question stereotypes associated with vegans, so playfully apologizing for vegetables in the food pictures has become a community specific internet meme,

Based on the data, I define an internet meme as "a verbal or multimodal construction conventionalized and spread mainly via the internet."

Figure 1. An example of the sori vihreestä 'sorry for the greens' internet meme. 'Leftovers dinner for a busy day. Sorry for the greens but they were leftovers, too.

Kiirepäivän jämä-ja tähdepäivällinen. Sori vihreestä mutta sekin oli tähteitä.

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