Ágnes VESZELSZKI

Promiscuity of Images
Memes from an English–German–Hungarian Contrastive Perspective

In this paper we are going to introduce and describe the basic hypotheses of memetics by the socio-biologist Dawkins and its altered version developed and/or modified by the philosopher Dennett. We are also going to try to give an explanation why funny pictures (and their varieties) spreading on the Internet are more and more often considered as memes, that is in what measure they meet the requirements of the criteria of Dawkin's memetics and that of Dennett's.

The basics of memetics lay in evolutionary biology; Dawkins says that ideas are new replicators, and uses the term 'meme' – first in 1976 – to describe the complex of ideas, the units of cultural transmission or imitation that are capable of transforming themselves into units to be observed. Dawkins' meme concept, which is originally based on Darwin's theory of evolution, has gone through a large expansion of semantic interpretation: from the definition of cultural gene, the cultural unit transmitted by imitation to the general term defines it as practically any audio-visual-textual content spreading uncontrolled and as a sort of unwritten tradition on the Internet.

Memes on the Internet can be characterized with a feature of gossiping, typical of orality, actuality, and instant reaction to actions. This meme is a phenomenon, notion, text, picture or text-picture combination that is trendy and spreads on the Internet; its content can be a joke, gossip, picture, website, reference, or rumor. All of these share the same features, that is they are fast and spread on the Internet. These memes – unaltered or with more or less changes – may revolve and linger on the Internet for years, but most of them generally last for only a few weeks or months.

The empirical research supplementing the talk investigates in what extent memes relate to the conventions of a certain culture, whether speakers of other languages or of other cultures can comprehend them, and if foreign memes can be easily adopted on the local market by translating textual information.

Ágnes VESZELSZKI, PhD, born 1982, is Assistant in Hungarian linguistics (Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Budapest), editor of the online periodical Filológia.hu (Hungarian Academy of Sciences). Research fields: impact of infocommunication technology on the Hungarian language (digi-lect), modern philology, grammar of spoken language, interdisciplinary connections between marketing and linguistics. Her publications include: "Image and Self-representation", in András Benedek and Kristóf Nyíri (eds.), *Images in Language: Metaphors and Metamorphoses* (series VISUAL LEARNING, vol. 1), Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011; "Connection of Image and Text in Digital and Handwritten Documents", in András Benedek and Kristóf Nyíri (eds.), *The Iconic Turn in Education* (series VISUAL LEARNING, vol. 2), Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012. Homepage: www.veszelszki.hu. E-mail: veszelszki.agnes@gmail.com.