JOURNAL OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change,
2025, 10(3), 834-845
ISSN: 2589-1316

Lol in the Classroom: Internet Memes as Multimodal Tools for Language Teaching

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Citation: Mukherjee, A. and Mukherjee, S. (2025). Lol in the Classroom: Internet Memes as Multimodal Tools for Language Teaching, *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(3), 834-845. https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i3.2507

Published: November 28, 2025

ABSTRACT

Memes are infectious digital artifacts, which Richard Dawkins supported. This research is built on the conceptual intersection between multimodal learning of language and memetic strategies and tools, with consideration that memes are multipurpose and metaphoric tools that can be utilized as the new generation subscribes to the participatory digital memetic culture. The study is based on classroom ethnography, observation, and practical applications of different mimetic methods. It analyzes different methods, tools, and ways to use memes as an effective approach in language teaching and learning. The findings advocate a shift from traditional, rigid methods towards flexible, context-driven post-method pedagogies that incorporate digital artifacts as dynamic learning inputs. Memes, as linguistic and cultural replicators, serve not only as content but also as methods, enabling learners to co-construct meaning, critically analyze discourse, and navigate real-world communication. The paper proposes a memetic, learner-centered ELT model where multimodality, digital creativity, and affective engagement converge for enhanced language acquisition.

Keywords: Memes, English Language Teaching, Affective Humanistic Learning, Post-Method Pedagogy, Multimodality

INTRODUCTION

Memes are one of the most popular genres of digital artifacts among the new generation of learners. The consumption habit of memes can be pedagogically utilized in the English language classroom (Glasford & Joy, 2024). Susan Blackmore introduced memes as cultural replicators. Following Richard Dawkins, Blackmore supported the argument that memes are analogous to genes in biological evolution. Blackmore, in the essay "The Power of Memes," compares memes to memory. Among the hundreds of thousands of things our brain receives, only the events, stories, and facts we remember that are repeated, occur, or are remembered multiple times are memorized. The process of memorizing is a highly mimetic process. The development of human behavior, language, and social structures are the mimetic outcomes. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory supports the argument that individuals learn by observing the behavior of others, though the reciprocal determiners of an activity can be the personal factors, environmental influences, self-efficacy, and individual beliefs. Behaviorists like Skinner propose learning through reinforcement and punishment; the reinforcement is the outcome of repetitive imitation of the same behavior in response to the external stimuli. Constructivists argue that learning is development through experience and reflection, which acknowledges the role of imitation and role modeling as part of the learning process. Observation is important in mimetic learning; multimodal sensory observation

involves learning through multiple senses and perspectives (Beskar, 2023). Language acquisition is a process of imitation; it is complex and advocated in different forms by the behaviorist theorists, and infant language acquisition is primarily by "mimicking caregivers' speech, intonation, and gestures" (Tomasello, 2005), yet it is not the learner alone who imitates, as parents also imitate the child's utterances; Vygotsky's sociocultural theory finds language as interpsychological and then intrapsychological (Vygotsky, 1980), and learners imitate and appropriate linguistic forms in context, as Lantof and Thorne (2009) argue that "language development occurs through participation in communicative activity," progressing from imitation to modification, and Second Language Acquisition moves through repetition and reconstruction (Ellis, 1994); audio-lingual and communicative approaches build on behaviorist imitation, while CLT emphasizes authentic interaction, dialogue repetition, and immersion to mimic real usage, including cultural pragmatics like idioms and humor, aligning with Byram and Kramsch's (2008) "intercultural communicative competence" and Hymes' (1972) "communicative competence." Mimesis, from Greek, means imitation or representation and is tied to theater, where Plato and Aristotle discussed actors imitating actions and emotions, with Aristotle calling tragedy "an imitation (mimesis) of an action... effecting the proper purgation of these emotions" (Aristotle, 1987), and Schechner (2020) calling acting "restored behavior," a rehearsed performance manipulated like a meme. Plato critiqued visual art as "twice removed from reality" and supported the idea that visual realism or modernism is mimetic (Gombrich, 1960; Michell, 1986); singing reproduces voice, culture, and emotion, linking to language learning through tonal mimicry (Trehub, 2003; Papousek, 1996), and acts as performative mimesis (Assmann, 2011), while Bandura (1971) argued that social learning is mimetic. Bourdieu (1990) described habitus as learned through imitation, and rituals repeat mythic acts (Turner, 1969; Bell, 2010); storytelling mirrors feelings and social events (Nussbaum, 1992; Ricoeur, 1984) and triggers mimicry in listeners (Mar & Oatley, 2008); as Bruner and Ong noted, oral traditions and folk songs mimic collective memory, and in digital culture, memes and vlogs remix and imitate popular stories (Jenkins, 2006).

Evolution from Methodology to Post-Methodology

The history of mimetic learning dates back to the dialogic method by the great Greek philosopher Socrates, also known as the Socratic method. In this method, Socrates engaged his students in dialogues, critical thinking, and arguments. This method was useful since it used observation, repetition, and group activities. Since the first half of the 19th century, scholars have come up with a new method of language teaching since the Grammar Translation Method was introduced. Though the methods were overlapping in nature in many cases, the philosophies behind them were unique or revolutionary. Scholars have overdone it with the existing methods of ELT in the last few decades; therefore, we will focus on the critical aspects of the open and closed windows of them from the interest of the paper: memetics.

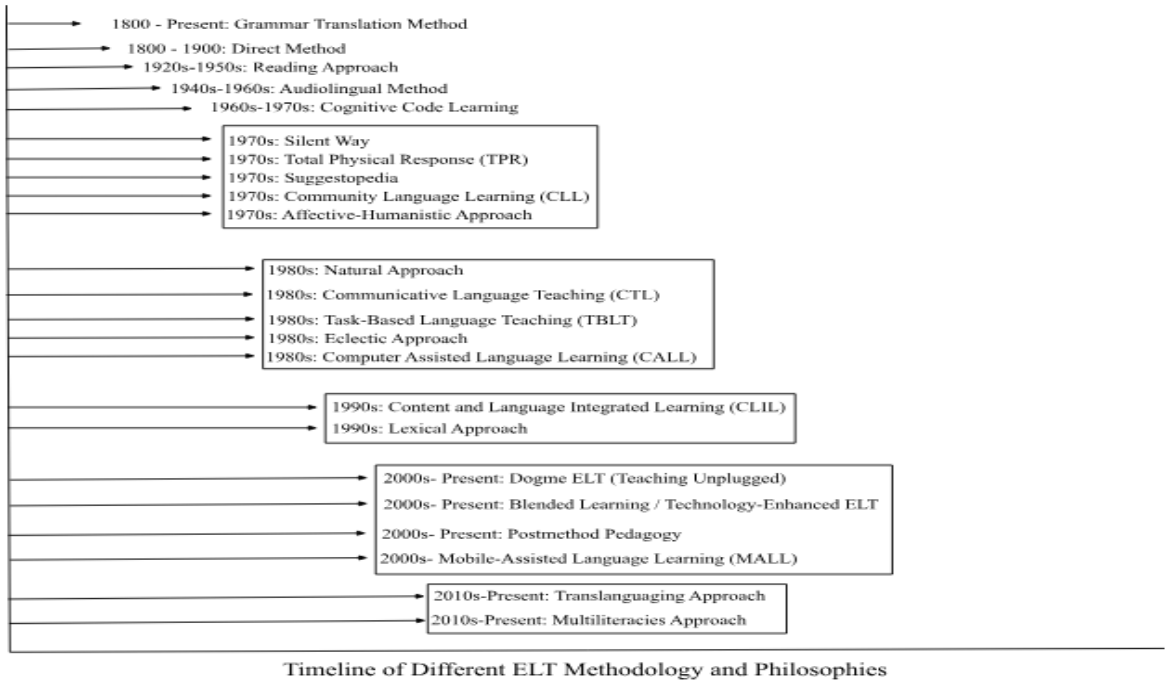

Figure 1: (Self-constructed)

Figure 1 shows, since the 19th century, English Language Teaching (ELT) has progressed through a series of methods, from Grammar Translation to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and beyond. These approaches can be categorized into

- **Closed Methods:** Grammar Translation, Direct Method, Reading Method—structured but less adaptable.
- **Open Methods:** Silent Way, TPR, Suggestopedia, CLL, Affective-Humanistic, Natural Approach, CLT, TBLT, Eclectic Approach, CALL, CLIL, Lexical Approach, Post-Method, MALL, Translanguaging, and Multiliteracies—flexible and accommodating teacher autonomy.

The ELT methods are here classified into two types: closed methods have little space for innovative approaches that teachers can accommodate, while open methods are more likely to advocate teacher autonomy for advanced teaching and learning techniques. Though grammar translation, reading, and audiolingual methods are primarily mimetic in nature, the flexibility of creative changes is less in comparison to the open methods. The Silent Way by Caleb Gattegno in the 1970s is a learner-centered method of ELT; it prioritizes autonomy, discovery learning, and minimal teacher intervention. Silent Way is rooted in problem-solving, visual cues, and student articulation, making it a flexible method. Similar to this, which uses color and imagery to represent phonemes and grammar, internet memes use multimodal cues (image and text) to convey cultural and linguistic meaning. Grammatical errors, ambiguity, or cultural jokes in memes naturally provoke curiosity and discussion and social spread. A punctuation error or cultural misunderstanding in a meme can spark peer-led correction and analysis, aligning with the silent way's focus on self-correction. Text-based memes with exaggerated spelling or mispronunciations (e.g., "doggo," "heckin," "boi") can draw attention to phonetic irregularities. Instead of using explicit grammar instruction, learners could create memes that illustrate sentence patterns, tense shifts, or word order. Like Cuisenaire rods, memes can be manipulated, rearranged, and creatively constructed, turning a learner into a linguistic designer. Teachers can present memes silently and allow learners to interpret, describe, correct, or remix and engage in peer interaction and communicative production. Total Physical Response is discussed in the next section. Suggestopedia, developed by Bulgarian psychiatrist Georgi Lozanov in the 1970s, prioritizes positive suggestion and a relaxed learning environment. It advocates that learning happens consciously and subconsciously and language learning is a wholesome process. A relaxed and joyful environment is considered crucial to lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1982); therefore, a classroom should have a comfortable setting and playful performances that can reduce anxiety. Memes, concise, repeated, and emotionally sticky, in the lesson slides function as low-stakes peripheral input, just as suggestopedia uses posters and visuals. Community Language Learning (CLL) was developed by Charles A. Curran in the 1970s. It is grounded in counseling-learning theory with a focus on emotional support, group solidarity, and the co-construction of language knowledge. Internet memes have multiple genres; for example, cricket memes are popular among cricket lovers, and similarly, political memes are popular among politically aware individuals. Therefore, there are subcultures and communities on the internet, which are diverse in number. Students can subscribe to their interest areas of memes and can engage with them. Also, memes, those that deal with the common ground like student frustrations, social awkwardness, or classroom humor, can be used to express feelings in a lighthearted, indirect manner. Learners can create or curate memes that reflect their learning experience, which builds collective communal resonance and group identity. CALL and MALL Methods can incorporate memes in various advanced ways, which we have discussed in the next sections. The eclectic method gives the teacher flexibility to choose the most suitable approach based on the situational needs of the classroom; it also allows immediate switching between different methods. Postmethod pedagogy by B. Kumaravadivelu ultimately drops the idea of following the defined methods and giving ultimate liberty to the teacher to find out their own methods based on their experience and objectives and student needs. Its three-P philosophy advocates particularity, practicality, and possibility in language teaching.

RESEARCH QUESTION, OBJECTIVE, AND METHODOLOGY

The research question, "How can memetics practices improve the ELT classroom methodologically and pedagogically?" aims to find out the possible pedagogical and methodological implications of memes in English language classroom practices. The authors have been adapting an ethnographic classroom observation along with a review of the existing methods and tools for four weeks as ELT university teachers' language teachers in Bengaluru. The study is conducted with 60 undergraduate students. The observation and reflections are continuous throughout this period, and outcomes are recorded in the form of natural communication notes, reflections, and discussions in the classroom itself. Through different trials and errors in real-life teaching practices at different levels of ELT students, some of the major findings are reported in this research brief. All participants were adults and provided informed consent prior to participation. The research activities were embedded within regular classroom practices, posed no physical, psychological, or ethical risks, and ensured confidentiality and voluntary participation. As the study was conducted as part of routine teaching and reflective observation, formal clearance from an institutional ethics review board was not required. The study adhered to ethical standards for educational research and respected the rights and well-being of all participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Mimetic teaching of language is believed to be based on the philosophy that humans are natural imitators (Beskar, 2023). The mimetic approach to language teaching, grounded in cognitive science, sociocultural theory, and performative pedagogy, involves imitation, modeling, embodiment, and repetition, which facilitate the learners' acquisition of linguistic and communicative competence through observation, performance, and re-enactment. Language learning is a diverse process; it is not only a verbal process; it also involves gestures, facial expressions, parody, fun, happiness, daily social and private life, and the development of ideas and beliefs. Therefore, we have multiple ways to use memes to facilitate better language learning through remix, replication, and intertextual play (Shifman, 2013).

Multimodal Affordances f Memes

Memes, whether pictorial or video-based, offer a blend of text, image, sound, and cultural references. They employ colloquial, idiomatic, and metaphorical language that encourages learners to analyze tone, register, and cultural subtext (McCulloch, 2019; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). Classroom activities can include:

- Identifying meme genres and their rhetorical functions.
- Remixing memes to practice grammar or vocabulary.
- Conducting critical discourse analysis on memes related to social and political themes (Wiggins, 2019).

In language classes, teachers can use multimodal internet memes with text, images, grammatical patterns, typographic features, image-specific structures (e.g., top text/bottom text, reaction formats), videos, songs, dialogues, and gestures, which blend cultures with them to simulate multimodal mimesis. Teachers can also encourage students to create memes in the target language to improve the visual literacy of the students. Memes are multimodal internet artifacts

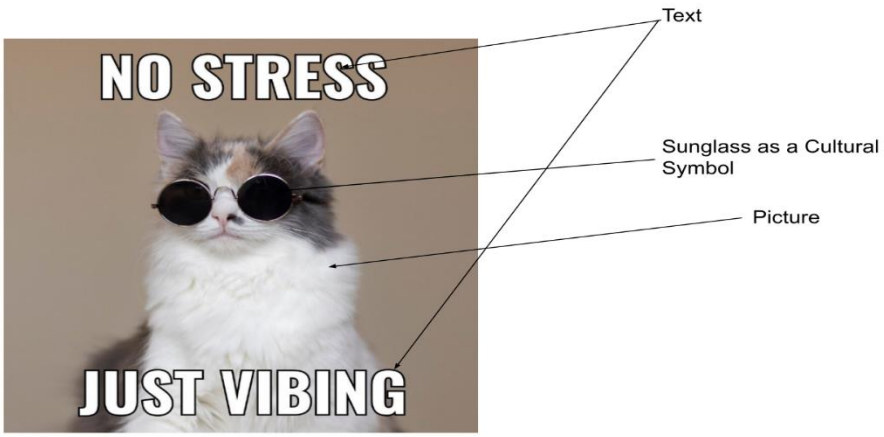

Figure 2: Multimodality of Internet Memes (self-constructed). Image source: "Simple Vibing Cat Square Meme | Free Vector"

The multimodality of internet memes gives scope for modification and utilization based on needs. For example, in Figure 2, the single meme has different modes like text, visual, and a cultural symbol like "Sunglass," which can be changed as per lesson needs. Similar to the picture memes, video memes are also multimodal in nature, embedded with stickers, emojis, pictures, texts, sounds, music, other small video clips, clips of viral dialogues, etc., which make the content relatable and engaging. Memes frequently use colloquial, idiomatic, metaphoric, and slang expressions, which are subject to the individual interpretations of learners, who can extract and analyze common phrases, phrasal verbs, and culturally embedded expressions from them.

AI-Driven Meme Generation

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT can create classroom-appropriate memes to teach language structures like punctuation. For example, prompts can yield visual-text pairs highlighting the semantic shifts caused by misplaced commas or apostrophes. Such AI outputs are copyright-free when generated by the instructor and can be adapted to lesson plans. For example, a teacher can use ChatGPT to create memes for teaching "doing words" or punctuation in a fun way. First, think of sentences where punctuation misuse creates humor, or generate them with AI.

1. Let's eat, Grandma! (inviting Grandma) vs. Let's eat, Grandma! (eating Grandma)

2. I like cooking, my family, and my dog. (three hobbies) vs. I like cooking for my family and my dog. (disturbing!)
3. A woman, without her man, is nothing. (sexist) vs. A woman: Without her, man is nothing. (empowering)

Next, use prompts to create classroom-friendly meme images:

1. "Generate a funny meme showing how punctuation changes meaning, with cartoon visuals—one correct, one incorrect."
2. "Create a meme on apostrophe misuse with one correct and one incorrect version."
3. "Make a meme showing how missing commas change meaning, with visuals and humor."

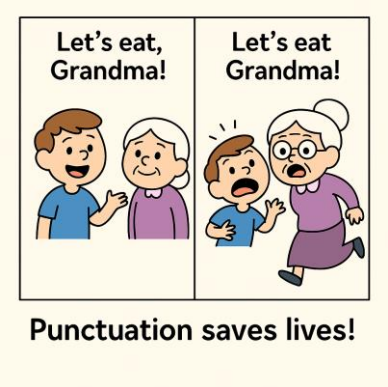

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figures 3, 4, and 5: ChatGPT memes on punctuation uses for classroom purposes.

The above multimodal images in Figures 3, 4, and 5 are engaging since they blend text with animated characters the young students may like. The next section draws tools for customizable memes, with pictures of the creator (student or teacher or anyone). Students are likely to engage with language tasks that they are a part of and engage in on a daily basis; memes are a known common platform for that, which is an everyday media ecology and offers social relevance (Gee, 2004). Memes are communal, meaning different students may like creating memes from different genres; someone who likes cricket may create cricket memes, and someone who likes games may create sports or game memes, which enable a cultural and multidimensional social exchange.

Tools for Meme Creation

Encouraging students to collect, share, or even meme-ify class content connects language learning with participatory culture, autonomous learning, and multimodal and creative identity expressions. While websites like GitHub, Reddit, and Pinterest have thousands of meme templates and ideas for creative meme creation, we discovered some useful tools for teachers and learners to create customized memes:

Non-AI Tools:

1. Imgflip is a very popular website to create memes using different customizable meme templates; it has four major options: 1. To create memes 2. To create a Gif 3. To make a chart 4. To make a demotivational poster. Among these four options, the first and the fourth are useful to create a customized meme. The interesting part of this website is the existing templates of different popular and viral memes are already available on the website.
2. Canva recently launched its own meme generator. Canva memes has an easy drag-and-drop editor with a claim of 3 million-plus photos and graphics.
3. Adobe Express provides a dedicated landing page for meme creators to create funny and engaging memes.
4. I Love Image Meme Generator provides a simple meme-generating interface to simply upload a photo or generate a meme using the existing meme templates.
5. ImageResizer is a simple platform with several meme templates and simple on-site editing and downloading facilities.
6. Clideo is a meme creation tool that can even generate meme videos. It also supports GIF and image and helps in customizing a meme.
7. Clipchamp is a good tool to generate video memes; the user can use his or her own video template, add meme text, and share it as an MP4 or GIF with the audience. Unlike some other tools I mentioned, which are mainly template-bound, Clipchamp gives the scope to create original video memes. Similar to Chipchamp, CapCut (dot) com also provides the same facilities to create meme videos online.

Some other websites having dedicated landing pages with tools to create memes are makeitmeme(dot)com, kittl(dot)com, flexclip(dot)com, flixier(dot)com, Filmora video editor, icons8(dot)com, mememaker(dot)meme, poki(dot)com, screenplay(dot)com, rounder(dot)pics, indianmemetemplates(dot)com, mimingo (Android

application), lumen5(dot)com, memecreator(dot)org, meme-creator(dot)com, and makeameme(dot)org. meme-creator-kappa(dot)vercel.app, textstudio(dot)com, rezuaq(dot)be, meme(dot)bpowers(dot)net, and deathgenerator(dot)com. Frinkiac(dot)com is a unique platform having 3 million Simpsons screenshots, which is simply a repository for meme resources ("Frinkiac").

AI Tools:

1. KAPWING is an advanced meme-generating website that gives multiple options to create content with text using AI, add visuals, audio, subtitles, transcripts, and translations, and add AI voice and has multiple templates, layers, transitions, plugins, and recording options.
2. Pixlr is an AI-powered, cutting-edge technology that allows the users to craft hilarious memes that resonate with the audience, and it serves easy-to-use tools to create multipurpose memes.
3. Supermeme.ai is an AI-powered meme template search tool; it assures you it will provide high-quality images without watermarks and without any NSFW or offensive meme templates.
4. Viggle is one of the most powerful meme-creating websites, which allows the user to create a custom meme video with Viggle's body swap tech or add a fresh twist by animating a classic static meme image. It allows you to pick a meme template, upload your photo, and have AI swap you into the meme, which is super funny and engaging. Imagine you are showing yourself in a meme to teach a dialogue.
5. Cutout is also an AI-based meme generator platform that allows the users to create and share a self-made meme by adding custom text, background removal and change, and face cutout.
6. Invideo is an AI meme videogenerator primarily designed for platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, which allows users to generate meme videos from simple text prompts with options to add voiceover, music, etc.
7. MemeGen is a super exciting platform to generate funny memes using AI. They claim to have world-class AI experts on their team to give exclusive services on "generative AI video generation.

Simplified(dot)com(https://simplified.com/ai-meme-generator),remaker(dot)ai (https://remaker.ai/tools/meme-maker/) are among some of the other useful tools we can use for classroom content development.

While all of these meme generators are subject to responsible use, some websites and applications should be avoided or very carefully used. For instance, platforms like tweetgen(dot)com and tweethunter(dot)io are purposeful platforms to create fake tweets, though they can be used for example and meme purposes but are vulnerable to misuse and spread of false news and narratives. Facilitators should always take care of which tool to use and which should be avoided for a classroom and lesson purpose.

Other than the pictorial memes, memetic art can be used in a number of ways as a timely strategy in language teaching:

Expanding Mimesis Beyond Memes

Memetic principles extend into various classroom strategies:

- **Cooperative Games:** Cooperative games such as scavenger hunts, escape rooms, or classroom quests require the learner participants to mimic functional language like giving instructions, making requests, making critical decisions, solving different situational problems, responding to co-players, and supporting them. These goal-oriented social tasks in a virtual world help in assuming multiple characters and roles and language registers, reinforcing both grammar and pragmatic competencies (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2006). Digital cooperative games like Classcraft and Wordwall can simulate role-specific language demands, encouraging repeated mimetic use of expressions related to negotiation, persuasion, or coordination.
- **Gesture Mimesis:** Teachers and students use synchronized movements while saying new words; it enhances memory and comprehension (Goldin-Meadow, 2014). In the primary-level classes, it is often seen that the teachers use phonetic drill classes, breaking the syllabus into small parts with hand movements in a repetitive pattern to make the young learner habituate to the practice. James Asher's (1977) Total Physical Response (TPR) method is based on the same idea that young learners internalize better the commands and vocabulary when they imitate physical movements associated with language; in military practices we also find the application of TPR. For example, in early English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, the learners might mimic actions like "turn right," "sit," "walk," and "stop," which reinforces the vocabulary through bold imitations. GoNoodle, Kahoot! Are some tools useful for the TRP approach to add physical movement to classroom routines, use visual cues, and use mimicry-based quizzes for body-based vocabulary learning?
- **Role-Play, Drama, and Performative Mimesis:** Process drama, improvisation, and role-play allow learners to inhabit communicative roles, practicing linguistic forms in simulated, emotionally resonant

contexts (Winston, 2012). Heathcote and Bolton (1994) argue that drama in education transforms the classroom into a mimetic rehearsal space to experiment with different identities and character traits, which exposes them to the language, which is a part of a character image, in a socially meaningful way. The digital resources like the archives on drama and theater (for example, V&A: vam.ac.uk, The National Archive: nationaltheatre.org.uk) or the public video platforms on the internet can add to the research of the character representations in successful dramas and movies. In a language classroom, acting out different characters helps in a significant way to engage and interest the learners of different age groups to learn a language effectively; it also helps to eliminate the stage or public speaking fear. Some digital storytelling, role simulation, and dramatic reenactment tools are

1. ***Flip (formerly Flipgrid):*** Flip enables the students to record and share role play, dramatic readings, and dialog reenactments.
2. ***VoiceThread (voicethread(dot)com):*** A platform to create multimodal presentations and narrate over visuals to mimic real-world speaking scenarios.
3. Storyboard That (storyboardthat(dot)com): It is a platform to script and visually plot role-playing.
4. ***iMovie/Clipchamp/Canva Video:*** Platform for student-led skits, story reenactments, and dramatizations.
5. For writing, teachers may motivate learners to use Medium, Wattpad, Inkspired, Writco, IngramSpark, or Draft2Digital to publish their creative writing with global communities, as well as Scrivener, Atticus, and Reedsy Book Editor, which can be used for editing purposes.

- **Music and Rhythm:** Lyric-based exercises enhance prosody and memory (Trehub, 2003). Useful tools that can be utilized are
  LyricTraining—Learners listen to songs and fill in lyrics; the process is encouraging in mimicking pronunciation and prosody.
  SignUp/Songs for Teaching—It is a collection of educational songs for language practice and mimetic rhythm learning.
  FluentU: This platform gives real-world videos (e.g., music videos, news, and vlogs) with subtitles to help students mimic real-life speech.
- **Shadowing:** Immediate repetition of native speech aids fluency (Murphey, 2001). Choral repetition is another shadowing technique that is very helpful to create a low-pressure mimetic environment in the classroom. Useful tools we found are
  1. ***ELSA Speak (elsaspeak(dot)com):*** An AI-based pronunciation tutor with real-life feedback, it helps with mimicking native-like English.
  2. ***Speechling (speechling(dot)com):*** The Speechling platform provides native speaker recordings and helps learners shadow them with personalized feedback.
  3. ***YouGlish (youglish(dot)com):*** A resourceful website with thousands of real-world examples of native-speaking phrases and words used in different contexts.
  4. ***LingQ (lingq(dot)com):*** This website includes audio-text syncing for listening while reading and mimicking native pronunciation.
- **Social Immersion:** For the young learners, social immersion is very effective; for example, if students of the English language can visit a community of English speakers, they will effectively absorb the communicative cues, idiomatic expressions, and prosodic features by observing and mirroring authentic discourse (Lantolf & Thorne, 2009). Social immersion also helps in the development of the critical understanding of the communal practices and subcultures of the language group. It is always advisable for the teachers of any language other than the first language to give the learners opportunities for social immersion.
- **Storytelling and Interactive Games:** Storytelling is inherently mimetic. Storytelling and role play from target cultures help learners to reproduce socio-pragmatic norms. including politeness strategies, humor, and turn-taking (Ricoeur, 1984). Interactive storytelling games like PBS Kids Story Games or Twine-based story creation engage learners in role play, character dialogue, and dramatic improvisation, thereby turning language into performative mimesis. These experiences help learners to comprehend linguistic roles and bridge cognition, emotion, and communication.
- **Digital Content Creation:** Learners like to access digital tools; it is useful to help them to identify the potential use of YouTube, podcasts, and vlogs in language. Teachers can suggest specific channels and people the students can listen to or watch on these platforms for accent refinement and vocabulary. Students should be motivated by the language teachers to participate in these open platforms and start their own podcast or channel to communicate with others, build public relations, and develop public speaking and word sensing in situations. Scripting, rehearsal, and delivery can help students mimic not only vocabulary and grammar but also intonation, tone, body language, social cues, and presentation

aptitudes (Hafner, 2013). The iterative nature of digital production allows learners to revise and refine their outputs, promoting self-awareness, observation, and rectification, which leads to language accuracy. An exercise like creating a vlog or recording a podcast on "a day in my life" in the target language for advanced-level learners with classmates can be effective. Teachers can also be involved in the development of storytelling aptitudes in them.

As one student reflected after a meme-based session:

"English stopped being only about exams. When I made a meme about cricket in English, my friends laughed and understood me. It felt like I belonged both in my language and in theirs."

A Four-Week Module: Design and Implementation

The module is a sample of one of the few that was implemented over four weeks with undergraduate learners in a metropolitan Indian university. Each week targeted a specific skill focus—grammar, vocabulary, and critical literacy—culminating in a reflective showcase.

Week 1: Orientation and Playful Grammar

The module began by dismantling the notion of grammar as dry rules. Students were introduced to punctuation memes, such as the classic *"Let's eat, Grandma!" vs. "Let's eat Grandma!"* (Table 1). The humor clarified the life-or-death role of commas more vividly than any worksheet.

Table 1: Week one: Lesson Design

Component	**Details**
Objective	To practice punctuation and sentence clarity using humor.
Materials	Meme examples on punctuation, meme generators, or drawing materials.
Procedure	1. Present punctuation memes. 2. Discuss how meaning shifts with commas. 3. Students design memes around punctuation errors. 4. Gallery walk to share and vote. 5. Peer feedback.
Reflection Prompt	"Which meme made you laugh the most, and what grammar lesson did it teach you?"

A student's reflection captured the shift:

"I understood commas better through laughter. It stayed in my mind; I enjoyed the mistake, not feared it."

Week 2: Idioms and Cultural Windows

The second week explored idioms through memes. Our students decoded memes with idioms like *"spill the tea*" or "hit *the books,"* then created memes by translating idioms from their mother tongues into English (Table 2). The classroom became a space of cultural exchange, with Bengali, Tamil, and Hindi idioms humorously reimagined in English.

Table 2: Week one: Lesson Design

Component	**Details**
Objective	To practice idiomatic expressions and build intercultural awareness.
Materials	Idiom-based memes, meme-making platforms.
Procedure	1. First, we will present idiomatic memes. 2. Then decode and explain meanings together in the classroom. 3. Help students to match idioms with literal interpretations; students can also participate in peer help. 4. Students create memes based on idioms from their own cultures, expressed in English. 5. At the end small small group presentations.
Reflection Prompt	"How did the idioms in memes connect to real life or your own language?"

One learner wrote:

"When I made a meme on 'pulling someone's leg' in my language and explained it in English, I realized idioms are like sisters across cultures. We all joke the same way, just in different words."

Week 3: Critical Media Literacy through Memes

The third week turned to memes as cultural texts. Students analyzed socio-political memes about elections, student protests, or climate awareness—discussing language, tone, and ideology. They then remixed or created counter-memes, learning how humor can reveal or resist power (Table 3).

Table 3: Week one: Lesson Design

Component	Details
Objective	To analyze socio-political discourse and language registers.
Materials	Indian socio-political memes and meme-creation tools.
Procedure	1. Present topical memes. 2. Guide students in critical discourse analysis. 3. Groups create counter-memes. 4. Discussion on humor, ideology, and power.
Reflection Prompt	"What did you learn about language and power from analyzing memes?"

A participant reflected:

"We were discussing that memes are not limited to jokes; they are opinions. When I made a counter-meme, I felt I was joining a bigger conversation in English."

Week 4: Showcase and Reflective Portfolio

In the final week Students curated a digital portfolio of their memes, each accompanied by a short reflective note on linguistic or cultural insights; samples are shown in figures 6 and 7 below.

One student remarked:

"Memes can be academic work! We never thought! But when we explained them, I saw how they carried grammar, culture, and politics all at once."

Figure 6: Sample of student portfolio.

Figure 7: Sample of student portfolio.

The integration of memes in ELT aligns with post-method pedagogies; it emphasizes learner autonomy, contextual adaptability, and multimodal literacy. Memes act simultaneously as content, method, and cultural unit, which enables the co-construction of meaning and promotes affective engagement. Memes bridge students' digital realities with formal language learning; meme-based instructions help to reduce affective barriers; language learning becomes creative as a result and helps to foster intercultural competence with the scope of multimodality. The approach resonates with the participatory classroom culture of contemporary learners, where the students are not just consumers of the content but actively participate to develop the classroom content, critique, and remix. It becomes a diplomatic and participatory classroom with memetic engagements, which blurs the gaps between classroom and community spaces. The integration of learners' everyday digital practices with the formal language instruction has significant implications across pedagogy, technology, socio-cultural engagement, and future research.

Meme incorporation in ELT curricula can formalize their role in developing multimodal literacies, critical media skills, and creative language use in African, Asian, and other countries, especially where internet access is limited and growing its infrastructure. We as language teachers can focus and design activities where students analyze, adapt, and produce memes in the target language, which can be an add-on to the direct method and can enhance agentic qualities and ownership of the learner in the language learning process. This approach aligns well with communicative, eclectic, and post-method pedagogies, which foster interaction, context-sensitive learning, and affective engagement. Teacher training programs must include digital literacy and meme-based pedagogy, ensuring educators are equipped to integrate these tools responsibly while maintaining alignment with learning outcomes. In our study, humor helped to create a more relaxed environment where students felt less anxious about making mistakes, which encouraged them to take risks in using the language and engage more actively in communication. Memes also served as a medium for intercultural competence and shared creativity. Our students, through the exchange of idiomatic expressions, discovered both similarities and differences across cultural contexts. We also introduced how assonance and dissonance help in creating meaning in certain memes; they found examples like "Don't Judge a book by Its Cover Memes." This expanded their linguistic repertoire and deepened their understanding of how language reflects cultural values and practices. Critical literacy they gained through examining the incorporation and interpretation of political memes, religious memes, and environmental memes; they became more conscious of how language and imagery can encode ideology and shape public opinion, and how the receiver can decode them differently based on their own experiences, preconceived notions, time, and context. The analysis encouraged them to question underlying assumptions and recognize the persuasive power embedded in humorous content. Memes contribute to the growth of learner autonomy. Students gradually shifted from being consumers of classroom materials to creators of their own digital content for learning; they exercised independence, personalized their own language style and use, and extended classroom learning into wider social and cultural discourses. For undergraduate students in India, where English often conflicted between academic necessity and social aspiration, memes offered ownership; the language stopped being an external imposition, and it became a medium of self-expression.

There are other implications, such as the technological implications of meme use in ELT classrooms; effective implementation of memes in a digital classroom environment requires access to ethical and user-friendly meme generation platforms, including AI-assisted tools. These advanced and timely technologies enable instructors to create tailored, classroom-appropriate memes that illustrate linguistic features such as punctuation, syntax, and idiomatic, semantic, and pragmatic expressions. AI in meme creation supports creative lesson design and promotes AI literacy among students, preparing them for future complex digital communication contexts. Memes also carry socio-cultural implications, as they frequently embed cultural references, humor, and socio-political commentaries; decoding and discussion of the memes in the classroom encourages learners to navigate diverse perspectives, detect ideological framing, and question stereotypes. This critical engagement fosters a deeper understanding of language as both a communicative and cultural act, allowing students to explore global digital discourse in an open culture. The potential of memes as pedagogical tools has further empirical scope of investigation. Longitudinal studies could assist their sustained impact on language proficiency, motivation, and multimodal literacy. Comparative studies have the scope to examine differences in learning outcomes between AI-generated memes, teacher-created memes, and student-produced memes, which can be a good extension of this research. Such research would provide evidence-based guidance for redlining meme-based pedagogical strategies across educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

Memes are the viruses of the mind, argued by Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene,* they are more than online trends and the digital art of amusements, millions of people from different age groups engage with one another through memes on the internet. Memes are a very important medium of communication with potential for academic and communication utility. With the blessing that we have hundreds of meme templates and open

access references for meme creation, which can influence the ideas and innovation. Memetic teaching of language can enable cultural immersion and open space for multicultural learning and adaptation. Memory of greetings, idioms, social routines, and cultural gestures helps learners to gain intercultural communication competence (Byram & Kramsch, 2008). ELT and Meme together can lower affective filters and enable contextual, participatory, and reflective learning. This study advocates for a shift towards flexible, multimodal, tech-responsive English Language Teaching practices that reflect the learner's lived realities and digital space experiences and encourage critical, creative, and cultural developments.

AI ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors acknowledge the use of *ChatGPT (OpenAI)* as a tool in the preparation of Figures 3, 4, and 5, which illustrate AI-driven meme generation for classroom purposes. ChatGPT was prompted to generate classroom-appropriate memes demonstrating how punctuation affects meaning. The prompts included, but were not limited to:

- "Generate a funny meme showing how punctuation changes meaning, with cartoon visuals—one correct, one incorrect."
- "Create a meme on apostrophe misuse with one correct and one incorrect version."
- "Make a meme showing how missing commas change meaning, with visuals and humor."

The outputs from these prompts were used to create multimodal meme images for pedagogical illustration, highlighting the semantic shifts caused by punctuation errors. These AI-generated memes were adapted to suit classroom contexts and integrated into the discussion as visual examples. While the authors acknowledge the use of ChatGPT for generating illustrative content, they affirm that they are the sole authors of this article and take full responsibility for the intellectual arguments, analysis, and conclusions presented herein, consistent with the recommendations of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

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