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# A COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS APPROACH TO INTERNET MEMES ON SELECTED POLISH INTERNET SITES

## Abstract

The present study aims to analyze selected internet memes as examples of social communication from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, and to examine more closely the relation between their visual and verbal aspects. Internet memes contain a wide range of constructions (necessary for rebuilding the semantic framework and extracting selected content), which are fragmentary but at the same time sufficient to induce a whole framework of meanings by using their salient features. The multimodal context is considered within the frameworks of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), construal (Langacker, 1987, 2008), frame semantics (Fillmore, 1988), conceptual blending theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) and Discourse Viewpoint Space (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2016). The paper will present an analysis of the structure of internet memes, which are rich concepts that spread rapidly and widely, and also invite recipients to actively participate in the construction of the message, thus becoming contributors.

**Keywords:** internet memes; multimodal communication; conceptual blending; semantic frames

## 1 The phenomenon of internet memes

Internet memes are a specific type of internet communication that combine image and text. Memes evolved from earlier types of multimodal communication, such as comics and satirical drawings, in order to facilitate communication and perception. Memes are artifacts that bear both cultural and social characteristics, reflecting current events or problems of everyday life and fulfilling, among others, such functions as commentary, criticism, protest or entertainment. They seem to be constructed according to the rules of image and written text (in the prototypical version they are bimodal, but they also appear in other modal constellations, such as with sound and moving

images). It is important to note that the meaning of these digital pictorial texts constitutes part of a collective discourse: memes are never constructed by only one user of the network.

Internet memes appear to represent fertile ground for cognitive linguistic research as they combine two modalities that may be considered to involve the same conceptual mechanisms, assuming that language and its structure are based on perception (which is mainly visual, as vision is our dominant sense) (Kwiatkowska, 2011, 2013). To discuss both language and visual artifacts, numerous concepts can be applied, such as dimensions of imagery (construal), e.g. specificity, perspective, and profiling (Langacker, 1987, 2008), as well as conceptual figurative devices, e.g. metaphor and metonymy. Language and image intermingle in memes and complement each other. Thus, these components should not be analyzed separately. Although memes are no longer a novelty, they do not yet appear to have received much linguistic interest. However, due to their dynamic and ephemeral character, it does not take long to find items commenting on new, current topics.

The very concept of the meme as the smallest unit of cultural information is related to the theory of imitation and reproduction of cultural ideas and phenomena proposed by Richard Dawkins (1976). According to Dawkins, memes, analogous to genes, are self-replicating information carriers, thanks to which a person passes on skills or ideas. They can be “tunes, ideas, catchphrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or building arches” (Dawkins, 1976, p. 206). The dictionary definition of meme focuses mainly on internet memes, understood as multimodal constructions (usually visual or verbal-visual), which are disseminated by Internet users due to their attractiveness and catchiness. The “contagious” potential of popular images has been reflected in the adjective ‘viral’, which in English describes creations that spread on the principle of a virus. In the case of memes, they leap from brain to brain and are thus disseminated. Viral content (e.g.: videos or memes) usually lives briefly but intensely – often within a few hours it can reach a large number of users, but when its popularity drops, it “dies”. This ephemerality is related to the function that allows meme creators to make comments on current social and political events. Thanks to templates available on the Internet and special applications facilitating the creation of memes, anyone can become a commentator on reality – it is enough that from a wide range of backgrounds someone chooses a picture that interests them and proposes upper and lower text. For the purposes of this study these will be labelled, according to Dancygier and Vandelanotte, (TT) top text and (BT) bottom text (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2016). The application adds the text to the picture and the user becomes an author or meme maker. In template memes, which are based on reproduced graphics, the visual layer becomes more important and more dominant in the verbal-visual bimodality. The given picture, gaining popularity, becomes in some way defined; it acquires associative meaning and interpretation and also acquires particular connotations.



Figure 1<sup>1</sup>



Figure 2<sup>2</sup>

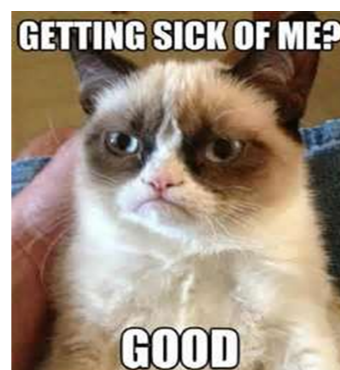


Figure 3<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup><http://www.quickmeme.com>

<sup>2</sup><http://cdn.memegenerator.net/instances/31447299.jpg>

<sup>3</sup><http://memebly.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/grumpy-cat-as-cartoon-character.jpg>



Figure 4<sup>4</sup>



Figure 5<sup>5</sup>



Figure 6<sup>6</sup>

When a photo of Grumpy Cat appeared on the internet, users (based on the FACE EXPRESSION IS EMOTION metonymy) immediately attributed the peculiar look of the animal's mouth curve to such emotions as reluctance, contempt, or irony. Memes with this cat were usually constructed in such a way so as to reflect the cat's viewpoint, which was often self-reference reflecting the cat's (negative) attitude to the presented situations.

Through this personification, and hence the ontological metaphor that emphasizes human features in non-human entities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), we see the cat as an intelligent commentator on reality (c.f. Majdzińska, 2013, 2014). Creating new memes is an extensively recirculated process which may go on endlessly, since every participant on a given network can reinterpret the image and reproduce the meme as many times as s/he wants. Probably the only limitation of the verbal layer of a meme is the connotation, or its 'frame'. In the case of *Grumpy cat*, it was its negative attitude.

## 2 The meme as a conceptual blend

Mental spaces are structured by frames. This is a term introduced by Fillmore (1976) to represent a structured cluster of knowledge metonymically evoked by one of its parts. According to Fillmore, "particular words or speech formulas, or particular grammatical choices, are associated in memory with particular frames, in such a way that exposure to the linguistic form in an appropriate context activates in the perceiver's mind the particular frame" (Fillmore, 1976, p. 25). Access to any element or part of a frame can activate our understanding of the whole or part of the frame; this dynamic is called frame metonymy.

Internet memes as creative artifacts, combining modalities and often being intertextual and allusive, are complex, spatial and multilevel structures, and as such they can be an example of conceptual blends. The creative construction of new content becomes possible through conceptual integration or conceptual blending, which is recognized as the basic instrument of human creativity (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). At least two input spaces participate in this process, which contain elements from various scenarios. The process of creating a conceptual blend consists of several steps: through a selective mapping of corresponding elements from different scenarios, abstract connections (frames) are created, which materialize in the blended space, creating new frames (other than those from individual spaces), i.e. emergent structure (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 61).

According to this theory, conceptual understanding develops through a dynamic interaction between input mental spaces that produces a blend with a unique, emergent structure and logic.

These spaces include two 'input' spaces (which, in a metaphorical case, are associated with the source and target of conceptual metaphor theory, or CMT), plus a 'generic' space, representing

<sup>4</sup><http://memoblender.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/grumpy-cat-as-cartoon-character.jpg>

<sup>5</sup><http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-sr2BkdKhf-4/UNSRuaC070I/AAAAAAAAAMO/1f0VidKV2tg/s1600/worth+it.jpg>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.complex.com/style/the-funniest-grumpy-cat-memes/>

a conceptual structure that is shared by both inputs, and the ‘blended’ space, where material from the inputs combines and interacts.

Cichmińska (2004) argues for Fauconnier and Turner (2002) that the conceptual operation of blending concepts, or conceptual integration, is an extremely fast, unconscious, dynamic and routine process, and conceptual blending has been shown to operate in the same way at the highest levels of scientific, artistic, and literary thought (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). It is responsible for the creation of language, art, religion, science and other manifestations of human creativity, and is necessary and ubiquitous in everyday reasoning, as well as in all artistic and scientific abilities. The new quality/meaning/structure created in a blend can, over time, be consolidated in a specific context in a given culture, and thus gain the name of the established language structures, which may also later become the basis for creating new meanings. Behind the emergence of conceptual blending, there are three processes: composition, completion and elaboration. Each of these processes enables the potential emergence of a new content (emergent structure), not available from either of the separate input spaces.

Composition: Taken together, the projections from the inputs make new relations available that did not exist in the separate inputs. Completion: Knowledge of background frames, cognitive and cultural models, allows the composite structure projected into the blend from the inputs to be viewed as part of a larger self-contained structure in the blend. The pattern in the blend triggered by the inherited structures is ‘completed’ into the larger, emergent structure. Elaboration: The structure in the blend can then be elaborated. This is called ‘running the blend.’ It consists of cognitive work performed within the blend, according to its own emergent logic. (Fauconnier, 1997, pp. 150–151)

Conceptual integration is the basic mechanism of human creativity and by using it language users create a blend, with a new semantic quality, which can have new frames and new features and associations resulting from one’s culture, nationality or language.

Memes, as a new genre, deserve special attention. Due to the multimodal nature of the internet meme, they represent a multimodal formal and intentional whole resulting from the use of various characters. According to Dobrzyńska (1993), a text is a sequence of specific language elements, phonic or graphic objects, that refer to non-linguistic reality, i.e. they have a referential and a communicative function. The message of a meme is received as a whole, without separating the text from the image: the image is “co-read” and the text is “co-watched”.

Memes represent a text-picture dependence based on the rules of a certain game that co-creates discourse. Without the picture, the text would be incomplete and probably unintelligible, even though the verbal part is presented in a shortened form, often in which no grammatical rules are applied. The text usually takes on a completely different meaning when combined with the image, referring to a commonly known and popular semantic framework. Semantic roles are often assigned to specific characters. The interdependence and interactions between the linguistic and visual forms are what make Internet memes multimodal in a specific sense (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2016).

In the process of ‘unpacking’ meanings, the recipients of memes use frame metonymy, a process of identifying frame elements that are clear enough to allow the entire frame or context to be understood and to understand the behaviour of its participants. When analyzing memes, one cannot separate them from their cultural associations and connotations. One’s perspective is constantly influenced by the information contained in the memes, most often of an ironic or satirical character. Firstly, one’s perspective of a meme depends on stereotypes, beliefs, clichés, and opinions that are common to a certain group of people, since memes are never constructed by a sole user of the network. Secondly, memes cause the recipients to modify, change, and transform the original meaning, making them co-authors of the meme. Each meme’s content is associated with different situations, because everyone’s experiences are individual and unique, and humour is directly related to creativity.

Memes should not be analyzed as isolated artifacts because they always carry some background



meaning with them: they not only refer to previous versions of the meme or situation and participate in the process of creating new ones, but they also create a network of concepts and references to the context, images, and situations to which they refer. These are multimodal constructions, which largely depend on the narrative perspective of a specific culture and context.

### 3 Ironical and mocking memes

The following section analyses examples of memes that have gained particular popularity in Poland over the last two years. Each of the selected group of memes, however, has a different motivation.

The meme ‘And then I tell him . . .’ with the former Polish president Lech Wałęsa (1990–1995) is based on our knowledge of the typical behaviour of Lech Wałęsa. The behaviour containing the element of ‘good advice’ is understandable and acceptable to us, because it fits into our cultural frames and what we know about the former president’s conceited behaviour.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the gaffes of another Polish president, Aleksander Kwasniewski (1995–2005), have also triggered a series of memes on the topic of alcohol. The former president tried to ascribe his erratic behaviour (problems with balance and speech, excessive sweating, and memory loss) to an exotic disease known as Philippines fever (pol. “choroba filipińska”).<sup>7</sup> Since then, the expression ‘Philippines fever’ has become a euphemism in Polish for being drunk.

The third group of popular memes are those based on an image of the proboscis monkey (in Polish known as *Nosacz sundajski*) which depict the typical Pole. They refer more to the emotional side of an average Pole and how certain feelings and emotions become part of specific behaviour, such as what a man feels after a tasty meal while lying on the couch and waiting for an entertainment program on television. In this situation, the image also completes the entire ‘text’ or meme, evoking specific emotions which each of us shares. Selected examples of ironic memes depicting Lech Wałęsa, Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Nosacz (proboscis monkey) follow.

#### 3.1 Memes with Lech Wałęsa “And then I tell him . . .”



Figure 7<sup>8</sup>

Wałęsa was bragging about his photo with Trump: “My story was an inspiration for him to run the president election”.

<sup>7</sup>Rafał Zimny & Paweł Nowak (2009). *Słownik polszczyzny politycznej po roku 1989*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN. ([https://pl.wiktionary.org/wiki/choroba\\_filipińska#cite\\_ref-SPPPR1989\\_1-0](https://pl.wiktionary.org/wiki/choroba_filipińska#cite_ref-SPPPR1989_1-0))

<sup>8</sup><http://memy.pl/show/big/uploads/Post/99508/14789774854787.jpg>

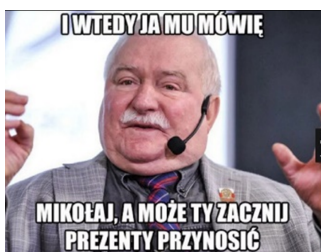
The appearance in 2016 of memes depicting President Lech Wałęsa is related to the remark made by Lech Wałęsa that in 2010 he became an inspiration for Donald Trump’s presidential candidacy. The former president mentioned that he was the one who suggested that the billionaire run for president.

The response to this claim came in the form of multiple pictures depicting the former president with a commentary consisting of two parts: firstly, the formulaic phrase “And then I tell him . . .” (or a similar one: “I told him then”), and secondly a suggestion to some prominent figure, such as Santa Claus, Christopher Columbus, or the renowned Polish writer Adam Mickiewicz, e.g. “. . . Nick, maybe you could start bringing presents?”; “Chris, why don’t you sail West? Maybe you’ll discover something there?”; “Adam, write something about Lithuania, your country.”



TT: And then I said:  
BT: listen, Chris! Why stay at home? Hop on the ship and go West, who knows, maybe you’ll discover something?

Figure 8<sup>9</sup>



TT: And then I say:  
BT: Hey, Nick! Why don’t you start bringing presents?

Figure 9<sup>10</sup>



TT: And then I say:  
BT: write something about Lithuania, your country

Figure 10<sup>11</sup>

The meme mechanism is based on recalling another famous figure is known for his/her exceptional achievements. When quoting a given character or cultural text (directly or indirectly), the meme becomes allusive and intertextual, and is thus directed to an intelligent recipient who has some knowledge about the world and can properly embed the meme in a broad context and interpret it correctly. In addition, the recipient must know the genesis of the joke, in this case, the claim made by Wałęsa about his conversation with Trump.

The meme consists of four elements: the visual element is a picture of Lech Wałęsa (it should be noted that this element is not fixed, the picture may vary but it does always depict Wałęsa as if he were admonishing somebody). There are two textual elements: the TT (top text), which is a formulaic phrase, and the BT (bottom text), which usually delivers the punch line. The final element is the reference to a well-known figure. The TT is always the same: “And then I tell him . . .”, and the BT usually refers to another important character, who has accomplished something in history, science, politics, or other areas. In the original picture, it was Lech Wałęsa’s comment about Donald Trump becoming the US president. It triggered a countless number of memes where Wałęsa acts as a great inspiration to others.

In terms of language use, the present tense (historical or narrative present), typical for sports reports, jokes, and stories, introduces the dynamics of events and conceptually brings the recipient into the events and the characters recalled in it. The statement is formulated from the speaker’s viewpoint, and the deixis “I say” additionally reinforces the applied subjective perspective (Langacker, 1987). The use of these elements brings about the comic effect and makes the recipient feel as if the statement were an anecdote, a joke, or a funny story.

Consider the mechanism of action of this meme on the basis of the picture “And then I tell him, listen, Chris! Why stay at home? Hop on the ship and go West, who knows, maybe you’ll

<sup>9</sup><https://www.fakt.pl/wydarzenia/polityka/byc-jak-walesa-memy-z-walesa/bvxe3ef>

<sup>10</sup><https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/14824/I-wtedy-ja-mu-mowie-Memy-z-Walesa-hitem-internetu.html>

<sup>11</sup><https://paczaizm.pl/i-wtedy-ja-mu-mowie-napisz-cos-moze-o-litwie-twojej-ojczyznie-mickiewicz-1-ech-walesa/>

discover something?” This meme is an example of a conceptual blend based on the combination of elements from different mental spaces. Lech Wałęsa is a contemporary figure who “talks” to Christopher Columbus, a historical figure. In the real world such a meeting would not be possible, but thanks to the process of conceptual blending elements from the input spaces are selected and combined into the blended space generating new meaning. Between the various elements from both spaces there is a correspondence. Elements such as a man, a historical figure, a conversation, or a hero of a breakthrough moment in history are identical for both characters and create an abstract connection in the generic space. The elements in the input spaces are those that will be part of the blended space, i.e. the “me” (Lech Wałęsa) and Chris (Christopher Columbus), and the discoveries made by Columbus and Wałęsa’s original statement.

This combination of the present and the past within one temporal-spatial domain is hyperbolization, which seems absurd and surreal to the recipient, enhancing further the comic effect in the context of Trump’s candidacy in the presidential election.

### 3.2 Memes with Aleksander Kwaśniewski

These memes cover only one topic, namely alcohol consumption.



Figure 11<sup>12</sup>

The two input spaces: Kwasniewski is the official face of Poland and Kwasniewski is a drunk blend together. In this case the visual modality, as well as our frame knowledge about ‘Philippines fever’, create the Discourse Viewpoint Space (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2016) where Kwasniewski is a person who drinks excessively.

The statement in the TT that what we see is intoxication is refuted by the explanation in the BT that it is actually an allergic reaction to the heat. It evokes the frame when Kwasniewski’s appearance was publicly discussed and the explanation given was that his state was caused by an exotic disease (Philippines fever). This name in Polish has become a euphemism for being drunk, thus the ‘alcohol drinking’ frame is evoked and the metaphorical extension ALCOHOLISM IS A DISEASE is implied.



TT: May be there is smog in the air,  
BT: but vodka is crystal clear

Figure 12<sup>13</sup>



TT: Favorite character?  
BT: Ginnie\* from/in the bottle  
\*genie

Figure 13<sup>14</sup>



TT: How do I book a room in English?  
BY: Rum, plz!

Figure 14<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup><https://www.fakt.pl/wydarzenia/polityka/aleksander-kwasniewski-ujawnia-nie-pije-juz-wodki/v7jtfwn-slajd-7>

<sup>13</sup>[https://memy.pl/index.php/mem/22691/Co\\_prawda\\_to\\_prawda](https://memy.pl/index.php/mem/22691/Co_prawda_to_prawda)

<sup>14</sup><https://www.wykop.pl/tag/kwasniewski/>

<sup>15</sup>[https://memy.pl/mem/26519/Jak\\_po\\_angielsku\\_zamawiam\\_nocleg](https://memy.pl/mem/26519/Jak_po_angielsku_zamawiam_nocleg)

The Kwasniewski memes are a case when meme receivers can still make sense of the memes, even without the reference and background knowledge. The information that he is the former president of Poland may sometimes even fall outside their semantic frame.

Kwaśniewski compares vodka with the air, assessing its quality as superior to the air: “Maybe there is smog in the air, but vodka is crystal clear”. As for his favourite fictional character, it is “Ginnie\* from the bottle”, suggesting that it is rather the drink gin and not a \*genie from a fairy tale. Another example is the expression he uses to book a room: “Rum, plz!”. The written form of the word suggests that we are again talking about a drink.

In every meme the punchline in the BT is related to alcohol, which is also reinforced by a biased image that depicts Kwaśniewski unfavorably. The meme construction is built multimodally to support its idea.

### 3.3 Nosacz – proboscis monkey

Memes featuring a long-nosed arboreal primate known in Poland as *nosacz sundajski* (proboscis monkey) gained popularity among the internet users in 2017. The meme mocks stereotypical negative Polish behaviour, personified here by an imaginary character named Janusz who is typically associated with a middle-aged obese man with a moustache whose favourite pastime is watching television and drinking beer. Being uneducated and ignorant, Janusz uses broken language packed with syntactic and inflectional errors.

The meme can be viewed as another example of conceptual blending: at the conceptual level there exists some similarity between the stereotypical figure of Janusz and the proboscis monkey. Certain features of the animal’s appearance, such as a hunched figure with a clearly distinctive belly and a large nose pointing downwards, have been exaggerated and are meant to metonymically (DOWN IS BAD) represent the unhappiness, misery, and world-weariness of the character. The Polish phrase ‘zwieścić/spuścić nos na kwintę’ means to be unhappy, and therefore having the monkey’s head and nose pointing downwards is meaningful. This hyperbole is aimed at creating a comic effect. Significantly, the monkey image does represent a person – it represents people’s negative traits and the conclusion that Janusz is an animal should be avoided. The meme disapproves of Janusz’s behaviour, not his appearance, hence it is not an example of anthropomorphization or personification, but rather an example of metonymic representation.



TT: Don’t tip him,  
BT: service is included

Figure 15<sup>16</sup>



TT: But  
BT: they haven’t said anything about it in the telly (TV)

Figure 16<sup>17</sup>



TT: How much is it  
BT: and why is it so expensive?

Figure 17<sup>18</sup>

The visual layer of the meme has become the carrier of the context which allows the interpretation of the verbal layer. The visual layer seems to be a mandatory element, without which

<sup>16</sup><https://memegenerator.net/instance/78408962/nosacz-koder-panie-po-ile-to-i-czemu-tak-drogo>

<sup>17</sup><https://paczaizm.pl/nie-dawaj-mu-napiwku-ma-zaplaczone-typowy-polak-nosacz-malpa/>

<sup>18</sup><https://memegenerator.net/instance/76128286/nosacz-koder-przecie-nic-w-telewizorze-nie-mwio>



the captions could not be properly interpreted. The verbal part of the meme most often plays an informative role: it comments on the current situation which the conceptualiser of reality observes from their subjective perspective (mental viewpoint) (Langacker, 1987), e.g. “Don’t tip him, service is included”/„Nie dawaj mu napiwku, ma zapłacone”, “But they haven’t said anything about it in the telly (TV)”/„Przecie nic w telewizorze nie mówio”, “How much is it and why is it so expensive?”/„Panie, po ile i czemu tak drogo?”

An important element of the verbal aspect of the memes is linguistic stylization, including register, highly colloquial phrases, and spelling and inflectional errors, all of which aim to reflect the inaccurate grammar and articulation of the speaker. There are also exaggerated, stereotypical idiomatic expressions which are meant to reflect the idiosyncratic style of a typical Janusz, e.g. „How much is it and why is it so expensive?”/„Panie, po ile i czemu tak drogo.”



Figure 18<sup>19</sup>

We can also observe memes contrasting two perspectives: one of a human and another of a monkey, e.g. “After the Sunday lunch when you are waiting for Family Feud on TV”/„Kiedy po niedzielnym rosole czekasz na familiadem”.

The proboscis monkey meme has variations, one of which is a pseudo-scientific comparison between a statement in neutral language, metonymically represented by a picture of a human skull, and its counterpart in Janusz’s idiolect, represented by a picture of the proboscis monkey. This analogy compares selected elements, creating a comic effect. Phrases and lexemes considered standard in general language („Carpe diem”, „Przepraszam pana”/“Excuse me”, „Rozumiem”/“see”, „Lekarz”/“Doctor”) seem neutral, but when compared to their stylized counterparts the difference in register is noticeable. The high degree of colloquiality of the latter manifests itself in the form of idiomatic sayings („Myślał kogut o niedzieli a w sobotę łeb ucieli”/“Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched”), inflectional errors („Ja rozumie”/I gets it), dialectal lexemes (“doktur”/“doc”), and highly colloquial vocabulary, in particular in relation to the interlocutor (“Hola Hola Gościu”/“Hey, you!”).



A) Doctor  
B) doc

Figure 19<sup>20</sup>



A) Excuse me  
B) Hey, you!

Figure 20<sup>21</sup>



A) CARPE DIEM  
B) Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched

Figure 21<sup>22</sup>



A) I see  
B) I gets it

Figure 22<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup><https://paczaizm.pl/kiedy-po-niedzielnym-rosole-czekasz-na-familiade-typowy-polak-nosacz/>

<sup>20</sup>[http://www.demotywatoy.pl/2914/lekarz-doktor\\_typowy\\_polak\\_nosacz\\_mozg.html](http://www.demotywatoy.pl/2914/lekarz-doktor_typowy_polak_nosacz_mozg.html)

<sup>21</sup><https://www.facebook.com/nosaczep1/photos/a.1143912569063753.1073741828.1143892899065720/1566830120105327/?type=3&theater>

<sup>22</sup><https://www.blasty.pl/25140/carpe-diem>

<sup>23</sup><https://www.wykop.pl/tag/polak/next/entry-23694241/>

On the basis of our experience and knowledge of the world, the proboscis monkey evokes emotions that may accompany Janusz in these situations. Adding context, we no longer see a monkey from Borneo, but rather the stereotypical figure of Janusz, who seems to be surprised and ready to haggle over prices (Figure 17), makes sure that the waiter does not receive a tip (Figure 15), acquires knowledge of the world solely from television (Figure 16), and takes a nap while waiting for an entertainment programme on TV (Figure 18). Within the framework of the conceptual blending theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002), the monkey from input space 1 blends with the typical Janusz from input space 2, with the two elements sharing common characteristics in the generic space and projecting selectively into the blended space, thereby creating a new meaning – the monkey thinking and acting like a human being (precisely, our Janusz).

As mentioned earlier, one’s perspective of the meme differs depending on the meme’s verbal aspect. The recipients of the meme see a monkey on a tree and they associate it with a man who lies comfortably on the sofa after Sunday lunch and is waiting for a favourite television programme. It is clear that this programme is not intellectually demanding, and as such brings him positive emotions. The frame within which Janusz is placed is so transparent that we can easily project its context and predict further scenarios. What becomes blended here is that blissful state in which one finds oneself after eating a good meal and waiting for an entertainment programme on TV (in this case ‘Familiada’, the Polish version of the game show known as ‘Family Feud’ in the USA and ‘Family Fortunes’ in the UK) and the emotional state in which the monkey was captured in the picture. The visual level reflects emotions referred to by the verbal level and the observers of the meme extend it to situations in which the characters’ traits are understandable and the context makes sense.

## 4 Conclusion

Internet websites are most often perceived as a form of transmitted content, a spontaneous joke. It should be remembered that memes are usually complex creations. They are multimodal, multi-level blends that affect our understanding of the world, which is slightly modified every time we “unpack” them. The ability to connect, to transfer the output space to the blend, and to notice the analogy between different elements and their features makes us think creatively. Using our creativity, we can enrich and develop the blend on the basis of individual experiences and interpretations of the world. This also explains why each newly created meme is slightly different from the previous one, while at the same time functioning in the generally accepted context (semantic frames) of a given culture and language.

It is often assumed that memes constitute a playful or even mocking look at the reality that surrounds us. Under the cover of sarcasm we can try to see the viewpoints shared within and between different internet communities, addressing various issues. Each template meme, in order to be reproduced, must be made according to certain rules, conventions and style. They have a connotated meaning and evoke specific associations. Memes are intertextual and allusive – they refer to other memes, well-known figures, or current political and cultural events. Metaphor, personification and metonymy, as well as the hyperbole which strengthens their comic overtones, are important means of constructing memes. The success of this form of expression also depends on its availability and accessibility (in the form of meme generators), its potential variance (the same picture, various comments), and its ease of expression and sharing.

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