

TIME, SPACE, AND IDENTITY IN POPE MEMES: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

by

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DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

To my daughters, Hannah, Sarah, and Jemima Klingbeil

May you keep looking for new and creative ways

to keep communicating and blessing others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No man (or woman) is an island, especially when writing a dissertation. This study is the result of a lot of input and support from many people who have accompanied me in my academic journey during the last five years.

In particular, I would like to mention my promoter, Dr. Marcelyn Oostendorp. I am indebted to her for her expertise and extensive support, especially during the pandemic, when she was my only link to academia. She went above and beyond in helping me track down elusive articles, suggested references, helped me reformulate and dig deeper in my dissertation; lent a listening ear, and generously offered encouragement when needed.

I am indebted to my employing entity, the Ellen G. White Estate, for financial support. In particular, I am grateful to the since retired director, Dr. Jim Nix, who encouraged me wholeheartedly to embark on this adventure. I am also grateful to my colleagues at the White Estate for their reassuring affirmations. The empathy shown by all those, who have already traveled this academic path was much appreciated.

I am thankful for my family's support and the encouragement and affirmation of my daughters, Hannah, Sarah, and Jemima ("It's a real cool topic", "You can do it Mama", "Yeah, go Mama, go!", "You got this!"). I hope that observing this process will serve as an inspiration to go above and beyond in their lives. I am also grateful to my parents, Robert and Esmé Ross, who instilled a love of learning in me and always exhibited boundless confidence in me. A big thank you, too, to my mother-in-law, Marianne Klingbeil, for her continuous support and her prayers that followed me as I wrote.

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Finally, I am grateful to my Heavenly Father for life, health, and the privileges and opportunities that I have been given to explore this vibrant, communicative world.

ABSTRACT

Internet memes do not provoke a lot of debate or analysis, and serious scrutiny of them seems to be avoided. In this dissertation I want to argue that memes can be a useful area of study as they are a distinctive form of communication that makes it possible to analyze broader multimodal forms. This study makes use of a combination of multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996; Iedema 2003a) and Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) conceptualization of discourse to explore Pope Francis memes. The study probes the texts and discourses selected by meme creators and the way in which time and space is multimodally constructed in Pope Francis memes. The texts and discourses selected by meme creators to construct the identity of Pope Francis through these memes are also examined. This study seeks to provide a flexible theoretical framework, which could be used for the analysis of data that combines verbal and visual modes. It also wishes to demonstrate that internet memes, with their deceptive appearance of triviality, are a distinctive form of communication, the study of which can be useful in testing the theoretical underpinnings of communicative theory. The findings suggest that memes provide challenges to how discourse has generally been viewed in linguistic theory and argues for a chronotopic, multimodal, and dynamic view of communication.

OPSOMMING

Internetmemes veroorsaak nie baie debat of analise nie en dit lyk asof ernstige ondersoek daaroor vermy word. In hierdie proefskrif wil ek die argument maak dat memes 'n nuttige studiegebied kan wees, aangesien dit 'n kenmerkende vorm van kommunikasie is wat dit moontlik maak om breër multimodale vorms te analiseer. Hierdie studie maak gebruik van 'n kombinasie van multimodale diskoersanalise (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996; Iedema 2003a) en Bakhtin (1981, 1986) se konseptualisering van diskoers om Pous Francis memes te verken. Die studie ondersoek die tekste en diskoerse wat deur memeskeppers gekies word en die manier waarop tyd en ruimte multimodies gekonstrueer word in Pous Francis memes. Die tekste en diskoerse wat deur meme-skeppers gebruik word om die identiteit van Pope Francis te konstrueer deur hierdie memes word ook ondersoek. Hierdie studie poog om 'n buigsame teoretiese raamwerk te verskaf, wat gebruik kan word vir die analise van data wat verbale en visuele modusse kombineer. Dit wil ook demonstree dat internetmemes, met hul misleidende voorkoms van trivialiteit, 'n kenmerkende vorm van kommunikasie is, waarvan die studie nuttig kan wees om teoretiese onderbou van kommunikatiewe teorie te toets. Die bevindings dui daarop dat memes uitdagings bied aan hoe diskoers oor die algemeen in taalteorie beskou is en argumenteer vir 'n chronotopiese, multimodale en dinamiese siening van kommunikasie.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Declaration</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Dedication</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Opsomming</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Table of contents</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of figures</i>	<i>xi</i>
Chapter 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background and Rationale	1
1.2 Pope Francis and the Larger Context of the Catholic Church	3
1.2.1 A Brief Historical Overview of the Roman Catholic Church	4
1.2.2 The Function and Role of a Pope	5
1.2.3 Brief Introduction to Pope Francis	7
1.2.4 Pope Francis and Social Media	9
1.3 A Brief Historical Overview of Major Social Media Platforms	11
1.3.1 Facebook and Meme Sharing	11
1.3.2 Instagram and Meme Sharing	14
1.3.3 Pinterest and Meme Sharing	15
1.4 Statement of Problem	16
1.5 Research Questions	17
1.6 Theoretical Framework	17
1.6.1 Understanding Time, Space, and Identity by Means of Memes	18
1.6.2 Memes and Cultural Values	20
1.7 Research Design and Methods	21
1.7.1 Research Design	21
1.7.2 Data Collection Methods	22
1.7.3 Data Analysis	22
1.8 Brief Chapter Overview	23
Chapter 2	25
MEMES AS MULTIMODAL DIGITAL COMMUNICATION	25

2.1	The Emergence of Memes	25
2.2	Mememes and Why They Spread.....	26
2.3	Early Internet Memes.....	28
2.4	What Makes a Meme Memeable?	31
2.5	Types of Memes.....	32
2.6	Dissecting Memes.....	37
2.7	The Singularities of Meme Composition, Creation, and Spread.....	40
2.8	Mememes and Humor	41
2.9	Uses of Memes	45
2.9.1	Mememes and Politics.....	45
2.9.2	Mememes and Marketing	48
2.10	Mememes as Focus of Linguistic Study	50
2.11	Summary.....	55
Chapter 3		57
THEORETICAL INSIGHTS INTO MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATION		57
3.1	Brief History of Multimodality	57
3.2	A Brief Overview of the Development of Multimodality in the Field of Linguistics.....	58
3.2.1	Moving From Mono- to Multimodality in Linguistic Research.....	59
3.2.2	Multimodality and the Internet	61
3.3	Modes and Multimodality	62
3.3.1	Modal Affordances	65
3.3.2	The Notion of Modal Salience.....	67
3.3.3	Resemiotization and the Process of Multimodality	70
3.4	Summary.....	74
Chapter 4		76
TOWARDS A BAKHTINIAN APPROACH TO MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS		76
4.1	Introducing Chronotopes	76
4.1.1	Historic Overview of the Use of the Term.....	78
4.1.2	Definitions.....	80
4.1.3	Use of Chronotopes in Applied Linguistics.....	81
4.2	The Conceptualization of Time and Space in Chronotopes.....	85
4.3	Notions of Space in Chronotopes.....	87
4.3.1	Chronotopes and Spatial Context in Social Media	88
4.3.2	Space and Mememes	89

4.4	Dialogic Qualities of Text	91
4.5	Chronotopes as a Means of Establishing Identity and Cultural Values	96
4.5.1	Memes and Identity, and Culture Development	99
4.6	The Carnavalesque	102
4.7	Summary	105
Chapter 5		106
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY		106
5.1	Introduction	106
5.2	Pope Francis Memes	106
5.2.1	Limitations of Meme Collection	106
5.2.2	Data Collection and Analytics	108
5.3	Meme Analysis	109
5.3.1	Analytical Framework Used	110
5.3.2	Data Analysis Approach Explained	110
5.4	Summary	113
Chapter 6		114
EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEANING-MAKING IN POPE MEMES: AN ANALYSIS (PART I)		114
6.1	Pope Holding Things	115
6.2	PopeBars	129
6.3	PopeBars Revival	134
6.4	Pope and Trump	136
6.5	Pope Slap	146
6.6	Elf on the Shelf Photo Fad	159
6.7	Summary	166
Chapter 7		169
EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEANING-MAKING IN POPE MEMES: AN ANALYSIS (PART II)		168
7.1	Pope Signing Lamborghini	169
7.2	Pope Rage Comics	174
7.3	Dopest Pope	180
7.4	Pope's Cape Memes	182
7.5	Pope Reaction Memes	193
7.6	Pope as Predator Meme	195
7.7	Border Walls Meme	198

7.8	Commie Pope Meme	201
7.9	Summary	203
Chapter 8		206
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS		206
8.1	Introduction	206
8.2	Review of the Research Questions	206
8.3	Summary of Findings on the Time/Space Discourses Used in Pope Memes	206
8.4	Summary of Findings on Theoretical Concepts Used to Explain How Time/Space Is Used	208
8.4.1	Affirmations of and Challenges to Bakhtin’s Chronotope Theory	208
8.4.2	Chronotopes and Scale Interaction	209
8.4.3	Chronotopic Borders	210
8.4.4	Micro and Macro Chronotopes	211
8.5	Summary of Findings on the Discourses Used and Identity Created in Pope Memes	212
8.5.1	Texts and Discourses Used in Meme Construction	212
8.5.2	Humor in Multimodal Meaning-Making	213
8.6	Implications for Sociolinguistic and Discursive Research	216
8.7	Limitations of the Study	218
8.8	Recommendations for Future Studies	218
REFERENCES		220

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1:	Yo Dominic! Meme	8
Figure 1.2:	Faith and Science Meme.....	8
Figure 2.1:	Motivational Poster.....	29
Figure 2.2:	Demotivational Poster.....	30
Figure 2.3:	LOLcats Cheezburger Meme	31
Figure 2.4:	Multipane Rage Comic	34
Figure 2.5:	Planking Fad Meme	35
Figure 2.6:	Justin Trudeau on FaceApp	35
Figure 2.7:	Trump Reaction Meme	36
Figure 2.8:	LOLcats Meme	36
Figure 2.9:	Distracted Boyfriend Original Photograph	38
Figure 2.10:	Photographic Remediation Meme.....	38
Figure 2.11:	Painting Evoking Distracted Boyfriend Meme.....	39
Figure 2.12:	Two Examples of the Manipulation of Text.....	40
Figure 6.1:	Pope Holding Wafer Photo	116
Figure 6.2:	Pope Holding 1989 CD Meme.....	118
Figure 6.3:	Pope Holding Dark Souls CD Meme.....	119
Figure 6.4:	Pope Holding Ice Pack Meme.....	121
Figure 6.5:	Pope Holding Baby Yoda Meme	123
Figure 6.6:	An Example of a Please Work Meme.....	125
Figure 6.7:	Sleeping Pope with iPhone Meme	126
Figure 6.8:	Recursive Pope Meme	128
Figure 6.9:	Reformation Meme	129

Figure 6.10:	Pope Francis in Bangui Photo.....	130
Figure 6.11:	Rapper Spaghetti Pope Meme.....	131
Figure 6.12:	Pope Father Rap Meme.....	133
Figure 6.13:	Pope Rapping on Plane Meme.....	134
Figure 6.14:	Pope’s Rap Battle Meme	135
Figure 6.15:	Pope and Trump Meeting Photo	137
Figure 6.16:	Hey! Look at Me! Meme	139
Figure 6.17:	Trump and Grumpy Cat Meme.....	141
Figure 6.18:	There is no Global Warming Meme	144
Figure 6.19:	Pope Slap Photo	146
Figure 6.20:	Mistakes Made Meme.....	147
Figure 6.21:	Pope and Rampage Meme	149
Figure 6.22:	Woman Yelling at Cat Pope Meme	150
Figure 6.23:	Yelling Woman and Cat Meme	151
Figure 6.24:	Yelling Woman and Cat Argument Meme	152
Figure 6.25:	Reese Slap Meme.....	153
Figure 6.26:	Batman Slaps the Pope Meme	155
Figure 6.27:	The Original Batman Slaps Robin Illustration.....	156
Figure 6.28:	I’ll Be Ready Meme.....	157
Figure 6.29:	Uncaptioned Elf with Doodles Meme.....	160
Figure 6.30:	The Shrek on Deck Meme	161
Figure 6.31:	The Pence on a Fence	162
Figure 6.32:	Pope on a Rope Meme	164
Figure 6.33:	Hope on a Pope Meme.....	165

Figure 7.1:	Pope Signing Lamborghini Photograph Meme.....	169
Figure 7.2:	Pope Drawing Pepe the Frog Meme	170
Figure 7.3:	Pope Identifying the Root of All Evil Meme.....	172
Figure 7.4:	PC Elects Pope Rage Meme	175
Figure 7.5:	Depression Guy Facebook Meme.....	178
Figure 7.6:	Dopest Pope Meme	180
Figure 7.7:	Pope Cape Flying in Wind Video Frame.....	182
Figure 7.8:	Pontiff Pizza Meme.....	183
Figure 7.9:	Popey Pope Survey Meme	184
Figure 7.10:	Back from the Vet Meme.....	185
Figure 7.11:	Holy Venom Meme.....	186
Figure 7.12:	Remediated Holy Venom Meme A.....	188
Figure 7.13:	Remediated Holy Venom Meme B.....	188
Figure 7.14:	Remediated Holy Venom Meme C.....	189
Figure 7.15:	Remediated Holy Venom Meme D.....	189
Figure 7.16:	Who Wore It Better? Pope Meme.....	191
Figure 7.17:	Trump or Corn – Who Wore It Better? Meme	192
Figure 7.18:	Pope Reaction Meme	193
Figure 7.19:	Cute Predators Meme.....	196
Figure 7.20:	Border Walls Meme	198
Figure 7.21:	Check-Mate Meme.....	201
Figure 7.22:	Meme Created by Chantal Klingbeil	205

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Throughout history, people have always endeavored to communicate to large audiences. Ancient monumental reliefs, larger-than-life hieroglyphics, and handwritten books all seemed to be searching for a wider audience. With the invention of the printing press, then radio, television and the internet, communication has finally become global. Communication on the internet takes place on the numerous social media platforms available. In the majority of social media platforms meme creation and sharing is a significant element of this communication effort.

In 1976, biologist Richard Dawkins proposed in his book, *The Selfish Gene*, that a meme could be a ‘unit of cultural transmission’ by comparing it to the self-perpetuating gene of biological data. The term *meme* has since taken on new life within internet cultures, particularly on social media platforms. In these contexts, “*meme* identifies digital objects that riff on a given visual, textual or auditory form and are then appropriated, re-coded, and slotted back into the internet infrastructures they came from” (Nooney and Portwood-Stacer 2014:249). Memes are well adapted to cross geographic and linguistic borders and spread quickly as a form of communication (Shifman 2014a:151, 152).

There are numerous and varying definitions of internet memes that range from the very general Google online definition of a meme being “any bit of a culture or system of behavior that is spread by internet users” to the even less specific definition of memes being, “a worldwide social phenomenon”, to definitions that focus on what memes do rather than what they are – “like infectious flu and cold viruses traveling from person to person through social media” (Gil 2021).¹

¹ Although this is a direct quotation, no page number is provided as this is an online website without page numbering. Due to the nature of the research done in this dissertation, extensive use is made of online resources that often do not have page numbering. Page numbering will be provided as far as possible in line with referencing practices. However, in the absence of page numbering in online resources, only the author and year will be provided.

But, perhaps, the most comprehensive definition is given by Limor Shifman who defines memes as “(a) digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created with awareness of each other; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users” (Shifman 2014a:7, 8).

While video memes that go viral seem to get even the attention of mainstream media outlets, the real bread and butter of the social media world are photo-based memes. These have evolved into a relatively small number of photo-based genres that enjoy very long and creative lives on all social media platforms.

The academic study of memes offers an important tool for understanding a wide range of contemporary thought movements, language developments, cultural as well as social and political processes (Shifman 2014a:149). This is especially true in an era marked by a convergence of media platforms where the line between the expert and the amateur is blurred, and content can flow from one medium to another. In such an environment, memes have proven themselves to be highly adaptable, flexible, and, therefore, transmittable (Shifman 2014a:4, 7).

Memes also offer a unique opportunity to investigate the discursive representation of time and space, as memes spread across different geographical spaces and elements of older discourse are embedded in newer discourses. In fact, to make meaning, memes require discourses from various timeframes and different contexts to work together. Memes thus provide unique challenges and opportunities for discourse analysts, who work with meaning theories of time and space. Historically, time has mostly been treated within discourse analysis as linear (Blommaert 2016) but meme creation challenges this idea. The present research will add to a growing body of literature that views time as multiplex, fragmented, and non-linear (Blommaert 2005; De Fina 2016; Oostendorp 2017).

Although memes are theoretically very interesting, my interest was initially sparked through personal engagement with them. Nine years ago, when I began my current work with the Ellen G. White Estate Inc. (a religious organization associated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church), I started to work with the White Estate’s social media posts and quickly noticed that an inspirational quote posted on our Facebook account without a meme would have a reach of perhaps 1,000 while the same text post made into a meme could have an average reach of 25,000 plus (sometimes

reaching more than 80,000). I also noticed that our memes would often turn up on other Facebook feeds months or even years later, sometimes in a modified form. Thus, my particular interest in the discursive construction of time, space, and identity in memes was born.

There are various kinds of memes to choose from to investigate. Pope Francis memes have been chosen as I believe them to be an ideal niche for academic research because they provide enough variety and scope to be academically significant.² While other political figures and cultural icons enjoy a flurry of memes for short periods of time (as, for example, Donald Trump during the 2016 and 2020 U.S. elections), Pope Francis memes have continued to be used and circulated since his election in 2013. The Catholic Church is one of the oldest institutions in the world (Kerrigan 2014). Its influence in the political, social, and religious arenas over the last 2,000 years cannot be overstated. The pope, as head of this institution, has always been a public figure, but this ancient institution has shown itself remarkably adaptable to the twenty-first century (O’Loughlin 2015). Thus, when designing pope memes, a 2,000-year history can be drawn on representing a considerable length of time and widely diverse historical contexts. Furthermore, the Catholic Church has tremendous international reach across different physical and other kinds of spaces and has reinvented itself constantly. In other words, the way in which identity has been constructed for this institution has never been stagnant. Although there are some generic pope memes and some Pope John Paul memes, Pope Francis has been the most meme-able pope, probably because memes have only gained widespread popularity on social media within the last decade (O’Loughlin 2015:25). Through memes, Pope Francis has attained the status of being both “cool” and virtuous. He seems to be becoming a symbol of values such as tolerance, environmental conscience, compassion for refugees and foreigners (Wilkinson 2016) – even as the Catholic Church struggles with many internal issues such as the role of women, LGBTQI+ groups, and child abuse scandals (De Boer 2019).

1.2 POPE FRANCIS AND THE LARGER CONTEXT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The following section will offer the necessary historical context, including a concise overview of the history of the Roman Catholic Church, the function and role of the pope within the

² Following generally accepted writing conventions, the noun ‘pope’ will only be capitalized in this dissertation if it appears in conjunction with a personal name, at the beginning of a sentence, or in conjunction with a recognizable product or website. All other usages will be lowercase.

administrative construct of the Church and concludes with describing Pope Francis' relationship and engagement with social media.

1.2.1 A Brief Historical Overview of the Roman Catholic Church

The Church at Rome is rooted in the establishment of the Christian Church in apostolic times (circa A.D. 30-95). The Roman Catholic Church, which would become the main religion in the Roman world for centuries, originated gradually as other Christian churches outside of Europe separated from the Rome-based church. This process began in the fourth century A.D. and did not culminate until the eleventh century (Gonzalez 1984).

During the first two centuries of its existence, Christianity spread to every part of the Roman Empire but remained persecuted and powerless. This changed with the emperor Constantine becoming a Christian and making Christianity the official religion (Greer 2004). After this, even as the Roman Empire was on a downward trajectory, the Christian Church remained on an upward trajectory.

After the fall of Rome and during the ensuing gradual collapse of the Roman Empire, the Christian Church tried to maintain unity between the Eastern church and Western church. The physical distance between East and West, as well as a growing multiplicity of theological ideas and varied practices, proved difficult to surmount (North 2015). Continual political instability with numerous invasions from outside forces dominated the political and religious landscape and led to desires for political as well as religious autonomy in a world that had been held together by the Roman Empire. With the decay and transformation of the Roman Empire, the Western Church transitioned into a political as well as a religious power. By the time of the official split in A.D. 1054 into the Western Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, with the patriarch of Constantinople as its head in Constantinople, the bishop of Rome had already assumed the title that had previously belonged to the Roman emperors – Pontifex Maximus (Sullivan 2001) – and had become a political powerbroker in Europe by declaring the Frankish kings Holy Roman Emperors in exchange for oaths of loyalty. Over the ensuing centuries, the Roman Catholic Church developed a unique control of Western Europe. Although not directly ruling all the kingdoms of Europe, the pope approved the marriages of all the kings and queens of all European kingdoms. Due to this practice, the Church's bishops and abbots soon controlled much of the land in various

European countries. As part of the Roman Catholic system, their political power and agendas remained firmly aligned with the Church and thus the Church's rather than national interests were often served (North 2015).

The Roman Catholic Church dramatically shaped all aspects of life during the following centuries. Architecture, science, medicine, music, literature, education, the judicial system, and even the calendar were interwoven with and shaped by the Church and Church doctrine. The monasteries of the Church became the preserver of the great literature of the classical world. Later, a very wealthy Church also became the biggest patron of the arts (Syndicus 1962).

There were individuals and groups, such as the Waldenses in northern Italy, that challenged the Church's teaching and practice during the Middle Ages. These were excommunicated by the Church and by default from all participation in society and were persecuted (Audisio 2004). Another way of dealing with challenges to Church practice was the founding of new monastic orders such as Bernard of Clairvaux, who, in reaction to the wealth and lifestyle of the Benedictine monasteries, founded the Cistercian order in A.D. 1098. Members of this order, instead of retreating to a monastery, became a military force and were known as the Knights of the Templars (Fanning 2009). Through political strategy, use of force, or the founding of new monastic orders, the Catholic Church was able to ward off any challenges to its power until the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s (Greer 2004).

Interestingly this ancient institution has preserved its structure, beliefs, and worship with very little change. The present liturgy of the Mass, the service order for Catholic worship, the practice of devotion to the saints, and the importance of the Virgin all date back to the Middle Ages (Fairchild 2019). Until Vatican II (1962-1965), the Catholic Church worshiped and prayed in Latin. And despite protests, the priesthood continues to be exclusively reserved for celibate males, a practice only established by papal decree in the 1000s.

1.2.2 The Function and Role of a Pope

The pope, elected by an assembly of cardinals, holds the position of spiritual leader of the Catholic Church for life or until he resigns. When a pope dies or resigns, the assembly elects a new pope, for this role (Flanning 1913).

One of the roles of the pope is to define all issues related to morality and faith as well as clerical issues, or political issues such as birth control and abortion. The Catholic Church has an organized hierarchy with the pope, the Bishop of Rome, at the top. In effect, the pope functions as the acting absolute sovereign of the Catholic Church. The pope's authority gives him papal primacy and infallibility under certain circumstances – in other words, his statements, decrees, and interpretations of sacred writings are the final word. The pope also performs all the duties of an acting bishop and priest within the territory of the Vatican (Joyce 1911).

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian faith community in the world and is unique in that it also resides in a sovereign state, namely the Vatican. It employs thousands of people and controls billions of dollars' worth of investments and property. The pope serves both as head of the political state of the Vatican as well as the president of the church organization and makes strategic decisions about its objectives and administration (Robbers 2006).

The pope is assisted in the day-to-day government of both the state and the Church by the Roman Curia, which is one of the oldest bureaucracies in existence. This complex group of various Vatican bureaus is the result of a long evolution from the early centuries of Christianity, with its 'modern' form dating back to changes by Pope Sixtus V, late in the sixteenth century. The work of the Curia has traditionally been associated with the members of the Sacred College of Cardinals, acting either as a body or individually as administrators in the various bureaus.

Cardinals are the most senior members of the church hierarchy after the pope. Although cardinals elect a pope and serve as advisors, only the pope may name a member of the clergy as a cardinal (Joyce 1911).

The pope also appoints bishops who administer all church functions within a particular geographic area referred to as a diocese. In addition to appointing bishops, it is the pope's responsibility to create new dioceses or split up old ones to accommodate the gain or loss of church members (Flanning 1913).

An important part of Catholic theology involves the veneration of saints. The process of making a deceased person a saint is lengthy and difficult. The person being considered must have fulfilled an extensive list of requirements during their lifetime, and multiple miracles (normally healings)

must be attributed to this person's intercession after death. Once it has been demonstrated that a candidate meets these requirements, the pope must then either confirm or deny that the person is a genuine saint (Pullella 2018).

The pope, unlike leaders of many other religions and denominations, is not just the leader of the Catholic Church, but also its principal public representative. A significant part of the pope's role involves interaction with the media and in making public announcements, the pope helps shape how Catholicism is seen by the rest of the world (O'Loughlin 2015).

1.2.3 Brief Introduction to Pope Francis

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1936. As a young man, Bergoglio did not initially aspire to become a priest. He worked for a time as a bouncer and a janitor before training as a chemist. He then began working as a technician in a food science laboratory (Chua-Eoan and Dias 2013). The fact that he worked as a bouncer and a chemist has provided surprising chronotopes³ that have readily been incorporated into internet memes. The following two memes offer examples.

³ The notion of chronotopes was coined and first developed within the context of a literary analysis theory to appropriately understand the literary genre of a novel (Bakhtin 1981). Bakhtin saw chronotopes as "a formally constitutive category of literature" where "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (Bakhtin 1981:84). Blommaert, in particular, has promoted the use of chronotopes as a means of contextualizing complex discourse (Blommaert 2015:2). According to Blommaert, chronotopes can be seen as "invokable chunks of history organizing the indexical order of discourse" (Blommaert 2015:1). See chapter 4 for a more in-depth introduction and discussion of the notion of chronotopes.



Figure 1.1: Yo Dominic! Meme from maddogblog.com

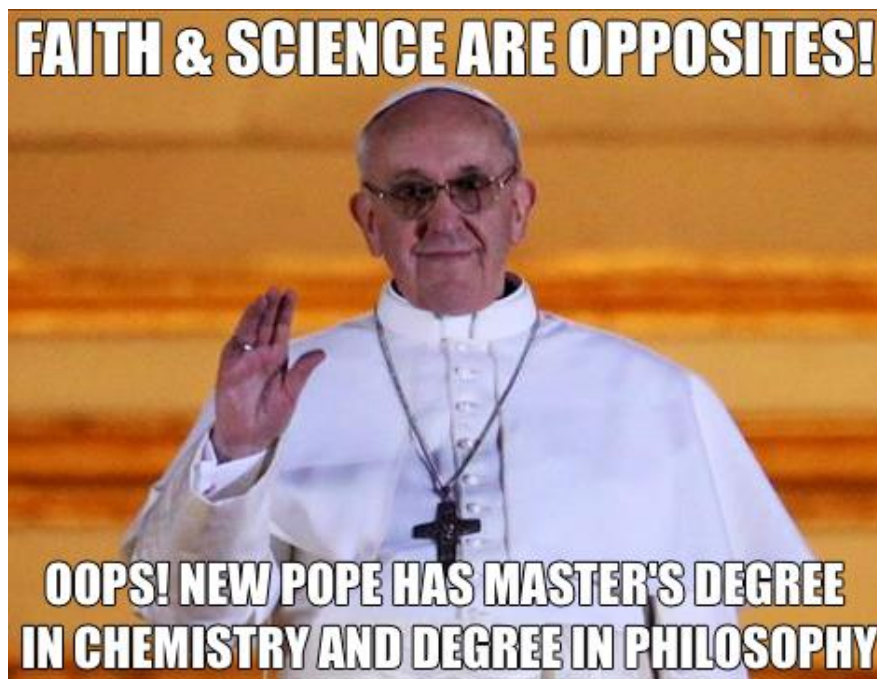


Figure 1.2: Faith and Science Meme from anastpaul.tumblr.com

After a severe bout of pneumonia, which resulted in the loss of part of a lung, Bergoglio made the life-changing decision to join the Jesuit Society in 1958. After obtaining a degree in philosophy, he was ordained a Catholic priest in 1969. He began a teaching career but was soon promoted to Argentina's provincial superior of the Jesuit Society. He became the archbishop of Buenos Aires

in 1998 and was appointed a cardinal in 2001 by Pope John Paul II. He led the Argentine Church during the December 2001 riots in Argentina, where he was considered a political rival of the Kirchner administration (Lifshitz 2013). Following the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI on 28 February 2013, a papal conclave elected Bergoglio as his successor on 13 March. He chose Francis as his papal name in honor of Saint Francis of Assisi. As the 266th pope of the Catholic Church, he was the first to take the name of Francis. He is also the first pope in more than 1,000 years to not come from Europe and the first pope originating in the Americas (Walsh 2015).

Pope Francis has gained worldwide attention by speaking out on climate change, poverty, and the death penalty (Moynihan 2013). He is often both praised and criticized for what is seen as his progressive positions. While advocating for interfaith dialogues and speaking out against materialism, he still maintains the Catholic position against abortion (Ivereigh 2014). He has sent shock waves through both the religious and secular world by his surprising advocacy for same sex civil unions (Pullella 2020) in a break with long-held anti-homosexuality tradition.

1.2.4 Pope Francis and Social Media

Although Pope Benedict, who was elected in 2005, was the first pope of the internet age, the web still functioned as a database which was largely used to find information. Much later, on December 12, 2012, Pope Benedict launched the papacy into the digital age with the first tweet (O’Loughlin 2015). By the time Pope Francis was elected, the internet had transformed, and social networks had entirely changed the way people communicated (O’Loughlin 2015:21).

Traditionally, when a pope is elected the cardinals are secluded and there is no communication with the outside world until a new pope is elected. The indication that the election has taken place is signaled by white smoke. Throughout the 2013 election, social media interest focused on the event (Newcomb 2013). During the two days of the election, more than 130,000 people signed up for a website called Pope Alarm, which would text the result as soon as the pope was elected (Villalva 2013). Virtual participation was high, with thousands playing a type of fantasy game called ‘Fantasy Pope’, which was modeled after the fantasy baseball game where, instead of forming their dream team, people ‘elected’ their dream pope at <http://fantasypope.com/>. As the white smoke rose the Twitter profile @Pontifex first used by Pope Benedict, tweeted “HABEMUS

PAPAM FRANCISCUM” (“We have Pope Francis”). For the first time, social media ushered in a new papal era (Nelson 2013).

While Pope Francis has referred to the internet as a gift from God, which he has fully embraced, he has also been vocal in warning of its potential dangers. Before other world leaders (including former U.S. president Donald Trump), Francis had embraced Twitter as a means of communication with people on the ground. His tweets, while offering him direct access to people, have also served as a window into his theology and actions. Pope Francis uses social media to practice “Pendulum Papacy, seemingly hitting the edges of both the ecclesial left and right, sometimes in the same week” (O’Loughlin 2015:9). Unlike the practice of former U.S. President Trump, Pope Francis does not send his own tweets but relies on his communication department to send them although he writes the tweets (O’Loughlin 2015).

Fabio Ragona took the first known selfie with Pope Francis on August 29, 2015, which was uploaded on social media and was widely spread. Since then, the widespread use of cell phone selfies with the pope has become a common practice (Keating 2013). Sometimes the pope will pose with the individual, but very often the person takes the selfie with themselves in the forefront and the pope in the background (Ohleiser 2014). Selfies, as well as stock pictures, have become a staple for social media and meme creation. ‘Pope Selfie’ is a searchable term online and produces hundreds of pope photos. Social media has “transformed Pope Francis into a veritable social media star, extending his reach in ways previous popes could never have imagined” (O’Loughlin 2015:8).

The pope’s visit to the United States and Cuba in September 2015 highlighted his popularity on social media. The search term ‘pope’ received more than 1.6 million mentions on Twitter, at a rate of about 500,000 mentions per day during the visit, and Twitter even unveiled four different hashtag-based emojis especially for him (Molina 2015).

Speaking of the perceived change that social media has had on the pope’s image, Catholic Church religion reporter Michael O’Loughlin (2015:11) states that comments about the Catholic Church normally lead to talking about Pope Francis and that “comments range from curiosity to fascination to outright fawning, but there’s hardly ever a negative reaction.”

Unlike previous popes, Pope Francis has been seen to be actively associating with social media stars and influencers. An example of this mutually beneficial social media relationship is the tweet that Kim Kardashian, a social media super influencer, tweeted on September 24, 2015, when she stated that, “The Pope is dope”, implying that he was cool and the ultimate high (Marcus 2015). Shortly after this, the Vine channel uploaded a short remix video titled Pope Is Hope, featuring a scene from the 1976 movie *Rocky* with the pope’s head replacing the protagonist Rocky Balboa (Vitto 2015). The video quickly went viral. In the same month, the pope released a tease for an upcoming progressive rock album that featured his speeches from locations around the world accompanied by progressive rock music composed by various Italian musicians (Dolan 2015). O’Loughlin, commenting on the pope’s relationship to social media, says, “Pope Francis is masterful at this. He’s dusting off antiquated parchment and presenting Jesus in a way that’s more accessible to the digital generation” (O’Loughlin 2015:4).

1.3 A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF MAJOR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Social media both creates and is created by certain chronotopic expectations (Ito and Okabe 2005:14). The following section will briefly review the history of the selected distinct social media platforms and the way in which memes are created and spread on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

1.3.1 Facebook and Meme Sharing

Facebook was created in 2004 on a university campus by students for students as a way for them to stay connected. Prior to this, computer technology was mainly viewed and used to store information and to make complex calculations that had little to do with most people’s everyday life. Facebook revolutionized this basic assumption of computer technology by beginning information social networks, which would form online communities whose primary goal was to help people form friendships and connect through an exchange of content (Hall 2019). Facebook has quickly risen to become the biggest social network in the world, with revenues (through advertising and product placement) exceeding the GDP of many countries. Because Facebook crosses so many country borders and now is a massive business enterprise that touches on all aspects of human engagement, it has drawn the attention of governments that are still struggling

to regulate it (Dennison 2022). Some countries, such as China, have completely banned Facebook. China has instead promoted their own social network Weibo (Chiu 2012). Even though these networks are completely disconnected a significant amount of content still manages to cross over into different social media platforms. Because of their ability to easily morph memes are particularly apt at doing so (Stuef 2012).

The strength of Facebook lies in the diverse options for finding and communicating with people. Facebook offers a search function that enables a person to befriend people based on where an individual currently lives or has lived, works, or where they went to school. Facebook also recommends friends of friends (Strickland 2019).

Facebook quickly moved beyond the friendship circle and made it possible to follow posts from a wide range of accounts, which include cultural icons such as actors, athletes, musicians, as well as corporate brands. Facebook has also moved into the function of a news outlet by also featuring headlines in sports, politics, science, and entertainment. Facebook often sponsors presidential debates, interviews newsmakers, and commissions opinion polls, similar to that of more established media organizations, but without the same regulatory checks and balances (Stuef 2012).

Communication has been facilitated by an easy status update selection of an ‘I am feeling...’ application that a person can choose to express how they feel in a script, photo, emoji, GIF or video snippet. In the case of a natural disaster or other calamity, a person may also mark themselves ‘safe’ for the benefit of worried family and friends. Other social features include status updates where a person can mark themselves in a relationship, etc. (Strickland 2019).

By design sharing of content is promoted. Most posts have a share icon which allows a person to easily take content from another user’s profile and re-post it on their own profiles. They can repost as is or modify the post with an original byline. These shared posts, which are very often a meme, carry on the legacy of chain letters and chain e-mails that were a major part of internet culture in the 1990s. Memes regularly accumulate tens or hundreds of thousands of ‘likes’ and ‘shares’ (Strickland 2019).

There are no built-in fact-checking mechanisms on Facebook, even though some restrictions have been introduced following the 2020 United States presidential elections and with the amount of misinformation being circulated on the scope, cause, and treatment of COVID-19 (Robertson 2020). Although certain words and phrases can be flagged, blocked or censored, memes are proving particularly adept at dodging automated censorship. Because memes do not provoke a lot of debate or analysis, they seem to avoid scrutiny. The method of distribution on this platform also ensures that any debunking of a meme will not be shared nearly as broadly as the original meme itself, which can lead to a meme being reposted for years (Stuef 2012).

The most prominent feature of Facebook is the news feed, which is managed by Facebook's algorithm that decides which posts from friends, family, public pages, and sponsored content is to be included on a person's feed. This algorithm has come under scrutiny with a perceived bigger share of the feed being used to show paid content and less from friends (Barnhart 2020).

Facebook users' friends are by and large, demographically similar to themselves. As a result, Facebook has been criticized for not only facilitating but actively promoting, through the algorithms used, posts that create insular bubbles. This ensures that rather than facilitating open communication and access to different views, the posts shared and viewed tend to function to confirm and strengthen a person's ideological beliefs while not providing variable facts (Stuef, 2012). In one study, which looked at the impact of status and meme content on the spread of memes in virtual communities, researchers found that Facebook memes spread well when users have extreme perspectives. They found that individuals who were socially isolated and on the fringe of a group had a greater chance at creating a successful meme (Mazambani et al. 2015).

Although the attraction of Facebook has always been the multiplicity of communication features potentially offered, it is increasingly drawing criticism for ambitions to use 'friendship' and networking for commercial enterprises (Stuef 2012). In 2017, Facebook began a video streaming service in an attempt to compete with Netflix and has further ventured into the marketplace with Facebook Marketplace, which allows people and companies to use Facebook unequivocally for commercial enterprises (Laukkonen 2021).

1.3.2 Instagram and Meme Sharing

Instagram was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010 (Lagorio-Chafkin 2011). It is currently owned by Meta, the parent company of Facebook. Facebook was rebranded as Meta in October of 2021, after revelations about the company's push for growth while ignoring safety concerns (Wilton 2021). Meta oversees all of the company's products, including the social media platforms of Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, and WhatsApp.

Instagram is often compared to Facebook but with a special emphasis on image sharing. This social media platform can only be fully utilized on mobile phones. In common with social networks, users can interact with other users by following them, being followed by them, and commenting on, and interacting with the images posted. Although users are able to send private messages, the main intention of Instagram is to find and share the best photos and short videos (Moreau 2020).

What makes Instagram popular in the array of social network platforms is the ease with which pictures can be saved to a personal device and/or modified. More than 40 filters can be applied to photos and photo editing options let the user straighten the image, adjust brightness and warmth, and overlay color. A caption can easily be applied to the photo and unique memes can be created or easily modified. Users can upload their memes that can then be edited with filters and organized by hashtags and geographical tagging. Posts can be shared publicly or with select groups of followers. Users find trending content by using tags and locations (Moreau 2020).

Although Instagram is used outside of the United States of America, it does not have the same global reach as Facebook. It is, however, more popular with younger generations with 62 percent of the 1.9 billion daily active users under the age of 35 (Aslam 2022).

Like Facebook, Instagram has struggled to balance freedom of expression with public safety and health (Yurieff 2019). Instagram has long been criticized for promoting unhealthy idealization and sexualization of the female body and has been linked to depression (MacMillan 2017; Patrick 2018; Feldscher 2021; Wells, Horwitz and Seetharaman 2021). It has also begun banning images of drug use and pornography as well as misinformation during the COVID-19 health crisis (Krishan 2020).

Memes may not be easy to trace on Instagram, but Instagram is really all about memes with the content focusing on images. There are even highly popular accounts dedicated to various meme types that are widely followed and shared (Hathaway 2021).

1.3.3 Pinterest and Meme Sharing

In March of 2010 creators Ben Silbermann, Paul Sciarra, and Evan Sharp released Pinterest (Griggs 2012). Although Pinterest is referred to as a social media platform, it is different from other social media where much of the content shared is personal images focused on the users' personal or professional lives. Although Pinterest does have some social aspects, it is actually more of a search and discovery engine that is used to save ideas, products, to collaborate with friends, and to bookmark things for later use. While not overtly interpersonal like other social networks, Pinterest is more of a solitary activity where users are focused on self-improvement or inspiration rather than socializing (Meredith 2017). But Pinterest does market itself as an online community since users can share their interests and inspirations. Users can see what others are posting and can select interests that will link them to similar users (Wachtel 2012). While most social media platforms use images, content shared on Pinterest is driven entirely by visuals. In fact, one cannot share on Pinterest unless an image is involved.

As with other social media platforms, a user creates an account and selects interests, boards or people to follow. The Pinterest home feed will then provide a constant selection of Pins from people the user is following, Pins that Pinterest selects for particular boards, and Promoted Pins. By following a profile or a board on Pinterest, Pinterest is learning what the individual user wants to see more of and will in turn supply more of that type of content (Meredith 2017).

Unlike many other social media platforms memes and images are more easily linked back to their place of origin on Pinterest, making appropriate credits easier than on other sites. Because of Pinterest's more organized approach to meme sharing, it has, unlike other social media platforms, been seen as a useful tool for research in various fields. Studies have analyzed patterns of activity and correlation between audience attention, content reposting, and effects of user behaviors (Chang 2014), the topology of networking, body image, and comparison (Lewallen 2016), although it seems that the field of sociolinguistics has yet to discover the treasure trove of research possibilities that Pinterest offers. Memes spread across these different social media platforms and

are also shared via email or messaging apps like WhatsApp. This makes memes an ideal textual artifact to investigate in terms of how they move across discursive spaces and across time. This is then also the particular area of focus of this dissertation.

1.4 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The relatively newly discovered interplay between the notions of time, space, and identity and their impact on all aspects of communication seems to be fostering new academic inquiry in the humanities (Blommaert 2015).

Studying these notions can be challenging as they cross multiple academic disciplines and are broadly entwined in the human experience. Rather than being contained in a particular academic discipline, these notions interact with social, cultural, and political realities that challenge a study to be broad and specific simultaneously.

It will be argued that the challenge for a study to be both broad and specific simultaneously can be addressed in a careful study of internet memes. Memes do not provoke a lot of debate or analysis and they seem to avoid serious scrutiny but can be a helpful area of study (Stuef 2012). Memes are complex communicative units that seem well suited to showcasing the notions of time, space, and identity in a communication-orientated perspective. Although the study of internet memes is a relatively new field, more researchers are discovering that the study of internet memes lends itself to many different theoretical and methodological approaches across disciplines (see Section 2.10 below).

In peer-reviewed journals, this growing awareness of memes can also be noted. This can be illustrated by a recent article by Constance Iloh (2021), who asserts that memes are and can be significant to current and future qualitative research. Iloh goes further by presenting memes themselves as a model of what all research approaches should ideally be – namely, relevant, meaningful, and empirically appropriate.

The multimodal approach articulated and used in this dissertation seeks to add to this growing body of research by providing a flexible theoretical framework, which could be used for the analysis of data that combines verbal and visual modes. It also wishes to demonstrate that internet memes, with their deceptive appearance of triviality, are a distinctive form of communication

whose study can be particularly useful (Lyons 2017; Lugia 2019) in testing a number of theoretical underpinnings of communicative theory.

In addition, the dissertation will show how productive the combination of multimodal discourse analysis is when used in combination with Bakhtin's conceptualization of discourse. The study will provide insight into how the mundane aspects of communication can lead to new theoretical conceptions of discourse, time, and space. As a starting point, this study will explore the way time and space is constructed in Pope Francis memes. Additionally, a multimodal approach will be formulated to facilitate the examination of the texts and discourses selected by meme creators and constructions of the pope created through these memes.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. Which textual apparatus are used to incorporate discourses that are spatially and temporally distant (from the current meme) into pope memes?
2. Which theoretical concepts can be used to explain how time/space is used?
3. What other texts and discourses do meme creators use in the construction of pope memes and what are the effects of using these discourses? In other words, what meanings are created, and specifically, what kind of identity is created for the pope?

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996), based on an approach inspired by Bakhtin (1981), with notions such as chronotope and intertextuality being central. In this section the concept of chronotope and its role in the discussion of the discursive representation of time and space in meme production and dissemination is introduced. This is followed by a discussion of the role and function of memes in reflecting, enforcing, and forming cultural perceptions and values.

1.6.1 Understanding Time, Space, and Identity by Means of Memes

In 1937, Bakhtin proposed a theory that, among other things, views time and space as connected and non-linear as a way to understand literature and other artistic forms. Within this theory of time and space, Bakhtin created the concept of the *chronotope*. Unlike many other theories, Bakhtin's theory has been characterized by its "vagueness and openness" (Bemong 2010:iii), which becomes particularly apparent when trying to define the concept of the chronotope. Perhaps the closest one could come to a definition would be that the concept of the chronotope situates time and space as being essence categories (also by their interaction) through which human beings perceive and structure their surroundings (Bemong 2010:4). The concept of the chronotope was initially used in genre theory to help categorize the novel (Bakhtin 1981). For example, in the western novel we have certain overlapping chronotopes that ascertain a certain time period (1865-1900) and geographical setting (wild west), which will influence and be influenced by the characters (cowboys, Indians, settlers, dance hall girls), their perception of the world, the dialogue, and the story plot. Both readers and the author would carry to the novel their own chronotopes as it relates to a western novel. All of these would interact to provide meaning. Although ignored for most of the last century, this concept is making a comeback as it has proven useful as a means to cross over to many other communication research fields (Clark and Holquist 1984).

In the 1960s, Julia Kristeva, influenced by Bakhtin's work, coined the term 'intertextuality'. While Bakhtin recognized the multiplicity of perspectives and voices in a novel, Kristeva took this further by exploring the interrelationship between a text and other texts or interpretations which can be multilayered (Orr 2003:24-28). Intertextuality lends itself to the world of social media, where memes are created and promulgated through interrelationships. Layers of borrowed and transformed texts are combined to create a meme, which assumes a reader's prior knowledge and understanding (Genette 1997). Memes feed off all types of intertextuality, using obligatory, optional, and accidental intertextuality for meaning (Fitzsimmons 2013).

Memes are not only intertextual but also multimodal. The textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and visual components of a meme are all used to communicate. The whole organization of the content creates meaning (Lutkewitte 2013). Multimodal discourse analysis provides the tools to investigate meme discourse.

While intertextuality and multimodality are a part of the notion of a chronotope, the complexity of time-space is a key aspect in this notion. Blommaert, in particular, has promoted the use of chronotopes as a means of contextualizing complex discourse (Blommaert 2015:2). According to Blommaert, chronotopes can be seen as “invokable chunks of history organizing the indexical order of discourse” (Blommaert 2015:1). Chronotopes can be particularly useful in the study of the time/space aspect of pragmatics as they provide the context in which certain discourse “are possible, likely, or even inevitable” (Cavanaugh 2004:14). Chronotopes often overlap and coexist.

The communication process does not stop after a meme is posted on Facebook (or any other social media). There is a continual creative process of recontextualization of memes, which consciously or unconsciously changes the discourse with each new posting. This process extracts the text, signs or meaning from the original context and introduces it into another context by modifying the meme or simply by sharing or displaying it. The change of context normally implies a different communicative purpose, too. According to Blommaert (2005:47-48) “decontextualisation and recontextualisation combined with metadiscursive regulation are crucial for the continual unfolding of texts, discourses and conversations.”

The construction of identity in the media is part and parcel of the communication process. Identities are continually being assembled, shared, modified, and deconstructed on social media. For example, a public figure’s identity is formed and evolves as “intertextual references move across different semiotic modes” (Oostendorp 2014:43). Identity is continually formed and modified in memes by reference to specific historical and/or cultural icons, which are combined with specific discursive formations and practices by specific schemes.

Considering that a meme can be described as an intertextual, multimodal, recontextualized form of communication, studying memes provides a fertile area for exploring the questions of time, space, and identity (Allen 2011:213-216).

In view of this, the concept of chronotopes is foundational in the theoretical perspective taken in this study.

1.6.2 Memes and Cultural Values

In identity studies there seems to be a broad consensus developing, which tends towards an anti-essentialist or constructivist understanding of both self and group identity in which identity is not seen as part of a pre-social, invariable set of characteristics (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Berg-Sørensen, Holtug, Lippert-Rasmussen 2010). Identity is preserved rather as group and individual imaginations. “Collective identities thus result from an ongoing process of construction and reproduction of shared understandings about a group’s self” (Hülsse 1999:2).

Due to the nature of digital media, group as well as individual identity has become more dynamic. Traditionally, culture and cultural values were shaped or imagined by the language, ideas, customs, and social behaviors of an elite group (such as the king and royal court), which then trickled down to be constructed, adapted, and reproduced in the different stratas of society. The democratizing power of digital culture, however, has empowered everyone to influence and be influenced by culture and seems to be capable of transcending geographic borders and even languages (Shifman 2014a).

Interacting with photos has been a part of digital culture since its start (Kuipers 2002) and has always been a way of imagining identity. Since memes, which are photos or drawings, often with superimposed text, seem to be an important unit of cultural transmission, a study of memes will provide important keys for understanding social and cultural practices as well as offer valuable insights into cultural values, identity, and transmission.

This study explores the collective identity creation process (De la Rosa-Carrillo 2015:22) in which individual meme makes make Pope Francis memes and share them on social media. The online communities that these individuals are a part of find and create their own identity (Shifman 2014b:342), while creating an online identity for Pope Francis through meme creation and manipulation.

Although social media users are normally physically isolated, they innately want to see and be seen by others. They want to create a shared culture. Memes help to provide this shared culture by

encouraging users' ingenuity, creativity, and participation in various levels of society (Aslan 2018).⁴

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

1.7.1 Research Design

This study will follow a qualitative research design making use of a multimodal discourse analysis. This will be a useful approach to memes, which are by composition multi-semiotic in form, drawing on a complex variety of modes afforded by different media. A multimodal social media ethnographic approach recognizes that meaning is not produced in isolation but socially through the levels of discourse, production, design, distribution, and use, as well as the written text of a meme (Dicks 2006). So, instead of attempting the impossible task of following a meme in all its transpositions, this study seeks to document meme discourse, not as a collection of events, but as interwoven into the here-and-now.

I assume that meme modifications will signal parts of their journey with various transposition cues, that will refer back to and anticipate previous memes, meme creators, and audiences. In the identification and selection of the memes for analysis, I followed guidelines of currently emerging social media ethnographic research (Georgakopoulou 2014:522). These are based on the understanding that new, flexible methodologies need to be found in research to suit the mobile, ever-shifting landscape of social media. In these new systems of research, the researcher's own engagement and involvement in social media culture are recognized as a major part of the development of ethnographic understanding. Furthermore, "systematic immersion in the field is replaced by the researcher's mobility across social media platforms" (Georgakopoulou 2014:525) and the identification of practices and shifting intensities in the spread of memes.

⁴ Although this is a specific idea from the reading, that would normally need a page number, no page number can be provided as this article is published exclusively online as a website.

1.7.2 Data Collection Methods

My collection focused on a particular category of meme genres, namely image macros. Image macros consist of an image (either a photograph or a drawing) overlaid with text. See, for example, Figures 1.1 and 1.2.

Most of the memes were selected using popular search engines such as Google, Memegenerator.net, or the search function of the particular social media platforms including Pinterest, Facebook, and Instagram. Although there are new social media platforms and apps being developed all the time, these three were chosen as they have been around the longest and therefore have more history of meme spread and development to examine. Facebook still remains the largest social media site and as such provides a wide range of memes to draw from. Search terms used included ‘pope meme’ and ‘Pope Francis’. Further suggestions generated by the search engines (such as ‘Pope Francis slap’, ‘Pope and Trump’, ‘Pope Francis signing a Lamborgini’, ‘pope bars’) were also investigated. Most of the memes chosen were well represented on all three of the social media platforms. The memes for this study were selected over the time period of 2018-2021 (see Section 5.2.2 for more on the process of data collection and analytics).

1.7.3 Data Analysis

In this study, the collected memes were analyzed with special attention being paid to salience, the reading path, vectors, and how memes have been resemiotized (Kress 2003). Memes were organized into themes using multimodal thematic discourse analysis. Memes, despite their versatility and variance, have set genres and adhere to rules of content and composition. The analysis will focus on identifiable themes and patterns. After the memes have been collected a thematic analysis will be undertaken in order to identify patterns in each meme. These patterns would then be combined and catalogued into related patterns that may suggest themes (Aronson 1995).

Once the collected memes have been organized into themes, the elements of time and space will be explored in order to trace the history, movement across modes and ideological effects of the different meme themes (Oostendorp 2014). These themes in turn, will help in determining which

chronotopes are being evoked. The emerging chronotope patterns will then be analyzed to understand applicable and clearly distinguishable social and cultural influences.

In order to establish context use will be made of sites such as Know Your Meme, which traces the origins of memes and the context out of which they arose. Many images were taken at particular historical events (e.g., the papal tour of the United States in 2015) and primary context can be established by the event in which the photograph was taken. Further personal background knowledge can be used to help establish context.

1.8 BRIEF CHAPTER OVERVIEW

After the overview and introduction to the study of time, space and identity in pope memes, and the theoretical framework provided in chapter one, chapter two focuses on memes as multimodal, digital communication. It begins with a brief discussion of a working definition, followed by some of the considerations dealing with the phenomena of the spread of memes on social media. Various types of meme families are identified and explained and the role of humor in the process of meme creation is addressed. A brief history of the development of internet memes is provided along with current interests and attempts to harness them in the fields of politics and marketing. An examination of memes as a focus of linguistic study concludes this chapter.

Chapter three provides theoretical insights into multimodal communication. In this chapter a brief general history of multimodality in communication is followed by an overview of the development of multimodality in the field of linguistics and the gradual movement away from monomodality to multimodality within linguistic research. Fundamental concepts or notions connected to multimodality that underpin important linguistic theory and are important for this dissertation are briefly introduced. These include modal affordances, the notion of modal salience, and the role of resemiotization in the process of multimodality.

Chapter four explores a number of theoretical concepts coined by Bakhtin and seen as central to this dissertation. These concepts include the chronotope, the Bakhtinian dialogic qualities of text and their relationship to intertextuality, and Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque. The relationship between chronotopes, identity, and the creation of cultural values is also explored. The usefulness of these concepts for meme analysis is interwoven into this discussion.

Chapter five addresses issues of research design and methodology by providing the rationale for the memes chosen and the process by which the memes and their pertinent data were collected. The use of chronotope as a tool for meme analysis, as well as its potential weaknesses, are reviewed and the specific approaches to addressing these weaknesses are outlined. The analytic toolbox for meme investigation, which consists of selected approaches from a wide range of analytic models, is also presented.

Chapters six and seven study examples of the selected meme types using distinct approaches from a wide range of analytic models in order to discover the discursive representation of time and space in individual memes across different geographical spaces. The chapters also attempt to uncover elements of older discourse that are embedded in newer discourses. Due to the size of the data, the meme analysis has been divided into two chapters.

Chapter eight concludes with a brief recap of the research questions followed by a concise assessment of the findings in regard to the research questions as well as the theoretical implications of the results of the meme analysis undertaken in chapters six and seven. Some of the implications for sociolinguistic and discursive work are then discussed. Finally, the limitations of this study are considered and recommendations for future studies are suggested.

Chapter 2

MEMES AS MULTIMODAL DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Memes are complex communicative units that seem well suited to showcasing the notions of time, space, and identity in a communication-orientated perspective. This chapter focuses on memes and begins with a brief discussion of a working definition, followed by some of the discussion involving the phenomena of the social media spread of memes. This is followed by an exploration into the qualities that make a meme spreadable and a brief history of the development of internet memes. Various types of meme families are then introduced. This is followed by a brief explanation of meme content and the process of meme creation. The important part that humor plays in both the creation and circulation of memes is then examined. Before an examination of memes as a focus of linguistic study concludes this chapter, the use of memes in politics and marketing are briefly discussed, seeing that the communicative potential for meme use in these areas has in many ways driven research, which, although not the focus of linguistic studies, often overlaps with linguistic research interests.

2.1 THE EMERGENCE OF MEMES

The term *meme* is well known within internet culture, particularly on social network platforms. As already noted in the introduction to chapter one, the term *meme* was originally coined by biologist Richard Dawkins (1976), who suggested that memes were a unit of cultural transmission that would behave like the self-perpetuating genes of biological data. Within social media contexts, a meme, “identifies digital objects that riff on a given visual, textual or auditory form and are then appropriated, re-coded, and slotted back into the internet infrastructures they came from” (Nooney and Portwood-Stacer 2014:249).

Shifman notes (2014a:151, 152) that memes are well adapted to spread quickly as a form of communication and cross geographic and linguistic borders. Despite this, they are difficult to define.

Limor Shifman’s definition of a meme will be used as the point of departure in this dissertation because of its range. Shifman (2014a:7, 8) defines memes as “(a) digital items sharing common

characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created with awareness of each other; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users.” This definition points towards some of the characteristics, content, and intentions of the producer as well as the spread of the meme, which lends itself well to investigation within discourse theory.

2.2 MEMES AND WHY THEY SPREAD

In 1976 evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins published his book *The Selfish Gene*. In it, he argued for the notion that ideas and behaviors could be spread in an infectious, gene-like fashion based on the assumption that information has a certain agency of its own and will proliferate itself to ensure survival. This basic unit of information he called ‘meme’. Subsequently, other scholars, such as Richard Brodie (2009) and Susan Blackmore (2000), have developed the idea that information is basically selfish and that it strives to get copied with humans serving as hosts and transmitting mechanisms for memes. Blackmore, a strong supporter and promulgator of this idea, bases her understanding of memes on the principle of ‘Universal-Darwinism’. She sees humans as copying machinery by which memes compete in order to get themselves copied. This controversial position is still being held by some, as, for example, TechCrunch journalist Josh Constine, who, in 2014, while commenting on the results of a Facebook social influence study, concluded that, like organisms, social media memes adapt in order to survive to their surroundings (Constine 2014). Generally, however, this position has for the most part been replaced in media scholarship by a treatment of memes as media objects with specific features and practices rather than self-spreading ideas.

According to Brunello (2012:5), the idea of the selfish meme striving to get copied can be questioned on two levels. First, the emphasis on a meme as a unit of cultural transmission and imitation would necessitate the isolation of these units as in its biological counterpart. A virus can be isolated, and its genetic characteristics can be identified. This has proven difficult in real life, as any simple picture, news item, video, private or public person, and even an egg,⁵ may or may

⁵ As documented by <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/world-record-egg>, in January 2019 @world_record_egg Instagram page uploaded a photograph of a brown egg. Within 10 days the egg had gained more than 28.3 million likes and as a viral sensation morphed into many memes.

not become a meme and then be widely copied and spread throughout the digital world. This makes the very existence of clearly defined and packaged units questionable.

A second problem with this assumption is the idea that memes are embedded with a virus-like will of their own and a power that overrides the normal decision-making process of humans in order to infect and replicate themselves in hosts.

Already in 2001, Rosaria Conte (2001) suggested that people should be viewed as active agents in the process of cultural transmission rather than mindless organisms, as intentional decision-making is crucial to meme dissemination. People engage actively based on their perceived social norms and preferences in meme generation and transmission (Aunger 2000). Limor Shifman (2013) has also criticized the view of humans being passive agents and argues that because memes are social phenomena reproduced and shared through imitation, competition, and selection, the vital role of the active human agency is central to an understanding of internet memes.

John Searle, a philosopher and an early critic of memes being viewed as a selfish gene, summarizes the problems with the virus-like view of memes. Searle (1997:105) points out that “. . . the spread of ideas though imitation requires the whole apparatus of human consciousness and intentionality. Ideas have to be understood and interpreted. And they have to be understood and judged as desirable or undesirable, in order to be treated as candidates for imitation or rejection.”

Edmonds (2005) suggests that any theoretical framework for meme analysis must include a view of memes as speech acts, seeing that people understand them and communicate with each other using them. This idea has taken root and the role of the human agency has moved into a central focus in meme studies as demonstrated in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media's* definition of memes as “units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process” (Burgess, Marwick, and Poell 2018:414).

Some researchers, such as Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green (2013), emphasize the textual features of memes by defining them as ‘spreadable media’. They argue that they are texts, and, as with all texts, readers will create their own meanings or interpretations of a text and then put this knowledge to use in creative forms.

Based on the well-known research by Berger and Milkman (2012), which studied how emotions shape social transmission, scholars, such as Milner (2016) and Heiskanen (2017), tend to focus on the emotionality of memes as the motivator for an individual to interact with and spread a meme. In other words, rather than a mechanical sharing of a cultural unit, they argue that people feel emotionally attracted to a meme, engage with it, and then feel emotionally driven to share it with friends. Memes can be “collective mediators of shared experience” (Pilipets 2019:175). Pilipets further undermines the notion of an autonomous virus-like sharing by pointing out the dynamics of internet memes that cross different registers of communication and cultural contexts. This requires the active involvement of liking, searching, uploading and downloading, commenting, appropriating, and remixing of memes. Pilipets (2019) sees memes in terms of currency that social media users exchange and circulate to achieve their communicative and social goals.

2.3 EARLY INTERNET MEMES

Many of the current meme genres are not new and did not suddenly emerge with the internet (Lessig 2008). As Lessig (2008) and Jenkins (1992) have argued, posters which combine image and text have long been recognized as powerful communicators. In the 1970s and 1980s, motivational posters in classrooms and offices enjoyed a surge in popularity and served as a launch for some of the first memes on the internet. Motivational posters generally featured a high-quality photograph with a large text attitude or phrase followed in smaller text by a quote or explanation. These were often set in a black or dark frame.

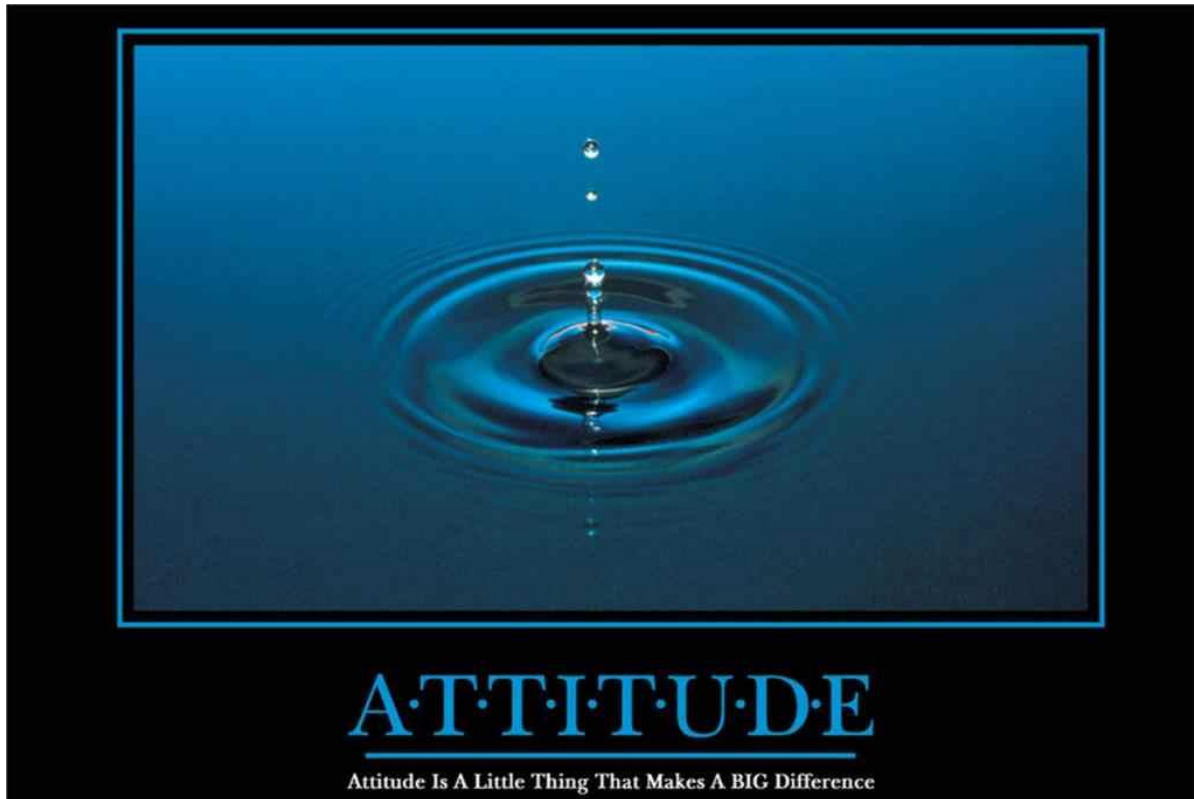


Figure 2.1: An example of a motivational poster that was popular as wall art in workplaces, doctor's offices, and other public places before the internet. Taken from <https://www.aliexpress.com/i/32361343382.html>

Interestingly, rather than simply converting these posters into electronic forms and posting them to a wider reach, parodies of these motivational posters were made, which were coined demotivational posters. These became some of the first internet memes (Miltner 2017).

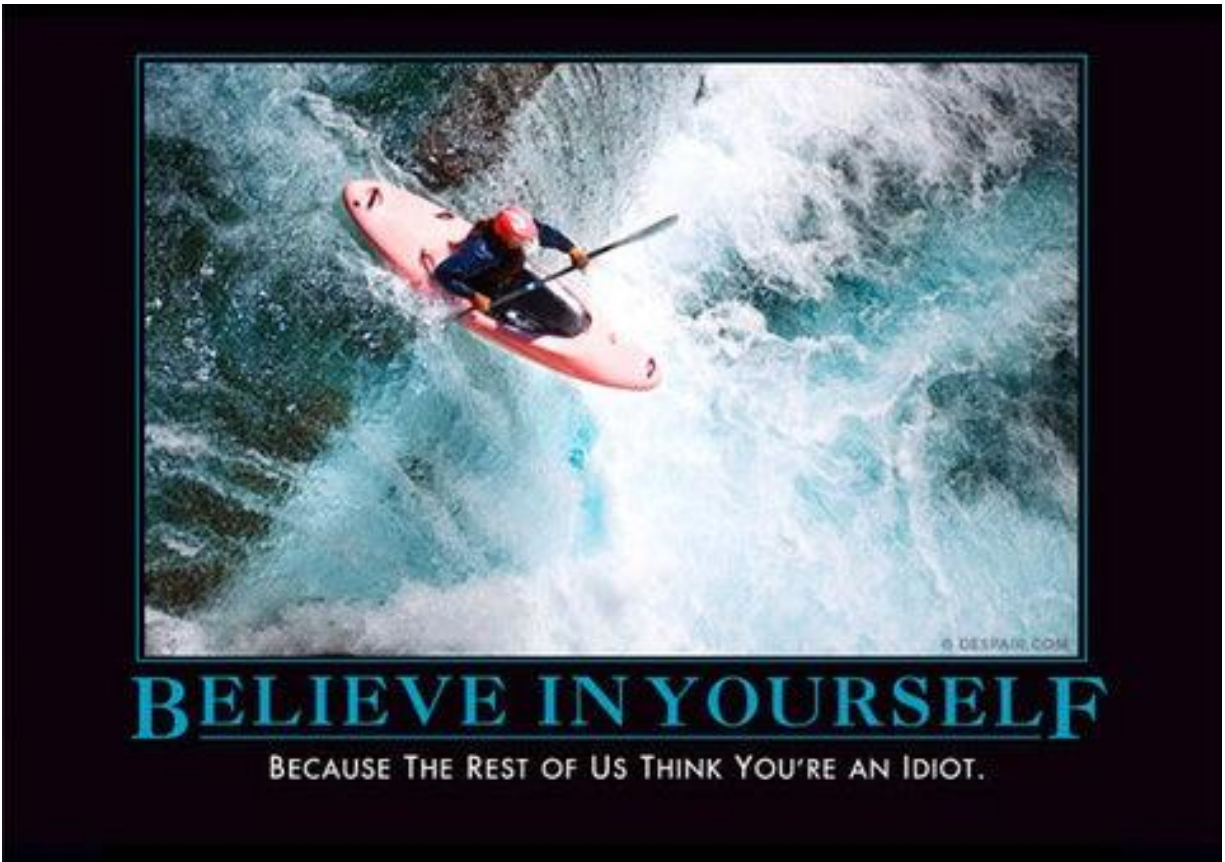


Figure 2.2: An example of a demotivational poster. Taken from <https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/597501075546620721/>

Most of the first internet memes were websites that consisted of a single page with the domain name that matched the content of the site (Kottke 2008).

These early internet meme sites were often considered cultural relics of certain groups. They generally were only available on subcultural web communities such as www.4chan.com and specialized in insider jokes and comments where only members with the necessary technical skill would be able to appreciate their meaning (Milner 2016:44-46). Memes may have stayed an internet subcultural genre had it not been for the emergence of LOLcat (see Section 2.5), which has, besides being the internet's most longstanding meme to date, also brought image macros to the attention of a larger group of internet users.

In 2007, an internet blogger named Eric Nakagawa took a picture of a gray cat used in a Russian cat food advertisement and put the text 'I Can Has Cheezburger?' over the top of the picture, which he then posted on the site he created called icanhascheezburger.com. This meme was the first to

go viral and LOLcats suddenly became mainstream (Tozzi 2007). Animal icons in memes allowed for textual flexibility and new meaning-making possibilities by new groups and proved popular not only in the LOLcats among English speakers but also in various other cultures (Miltner 2014).



Figure 2.3: An example of a LOLcats meme. Taken from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/464152305318040086/>

At about the same time, with the development of Web 2.0, more nonprofessionals became able to actively participate in the creation, evolution, and propagation of memes by liking, sharing, creating, and reformulating the multimodal content of memes (Lugea 2019).

2.4 WHAT MAKES A MEME MEMEABLE?

Particular memes or meme families have been around on the internet since its inception. Online definitions of internet memes are as subjective and as prone to change as are memes themselves. Although memes make up the bulk of shares on social media, research interest in them, especially for marketing, has been on content that goes viral (Cook 2008; Kolman 2018). Virals are content that spreads very quickly and widely through social media.⁶ The composition of internet memes

⁶ The Kony 2012 video, for example, had about 34,000,000 views in three days and 100,000,000 views in six days, and the Gangnam Style 2012 dance video had one billion views within five months. As internet speed and accessibility

has often led researchers to view memes and virals as synonymous. However, this is not the case. They only share some qualities. Both can be intentionally spread in an unaltered format. Yus (2017), however, points out that virals normally spread beyond the user's intention and take everyone (even the person who posts it) by surprise. Memes, on the other hand, are more intentionally created and transmitted.

Another basic difference between a meme and a viral is the handling of the content. If the content is quickly shared, intact, and unaltered, it tends to be viral. Virals enjoy tremendous spread but are often short-lived. If the content is altered or changed as it is shared, it can be considered a meme (Shifman 2014a). Well-known meme website knowyourmeme.com supports this notion and further distinguishes an internet meme from the original Dawkins concept of a meme by contending that content that is only shared and which has not evolved or been modified while being passed on to others is viral content, and not a meme (Börzsei 2013).

Crosby (2018) points out that the nature of both memes and virals is undergoing a movement from grassroots spread to something more controlled. While the content of the meme has been in the past, the largest predictor of its ability to spread, the content is now playing a smaller role. A large share of a meme's reach can now be traced to the people that advertise it. A single influencer with millions of followers can reach people more quickly than individuals sharing with friends. The influencer is quickly taking on the role of gatekeeper on what is shared quickly and widely.

2.5 TYPES OF MEMES

Many different media objects have been termed internet memes. Although memes can be viewed as the raw material that individuals creatively use as a form of communication and self-expression, they can also be classified into specific categories. As Shifman (2014a:99) remarks, "in theory, all Internet users are free spirits, individuals who take their unique path to the hall of digital fame. In practice, they tend to follow the same beaten tracks of meme creation". These 'beaten tracks' are genres which are in reality "socially recognized types of communicative action" (Yates and Orlikowski 1992:299), which individuals use to participate in a community. While subgroups or on-line communities often develop their own unique features, recognizable meme genres can still

increase the speed and reach of virals is projected to increase significantly (Weng, Lilian, Menczer, Filippo, Ahn, and Yong-Yeol 2013).

be observed. These can broadly be categorized into the short video, and the static meme. The first category includes GIFs, flash mobs, recut trailers, and lip dubs (Shifman 2014a).

A GIF is an image file used to create a very short, animated video - normally of just a few seconds. GIFs predate the World Wide Web by about two years, with CompuServe publishing the GIF format in 1987. It was first used on MySpace pages and in email chain letters (Heinzman 2019). The GIF format has adapted well for social media use and is often used to supplement the emotion lacking in text communication. For example, one could react to a humorous post by a friend by simply posting a GIF of a well-known actor laughing hysterically instead of a comment.

Flash mob videos are video clippings of large groups of people organized through social media who suddenly appear in a public place and do something unusual such as sing or dance and then quickly disperse.⁷ Recut trailers are short satire videos made by editing original film trailers and taking them out of their original context.⁸ Lip dubs are short amateur videos which feature an individual or a group lip synching to a popular song (Shifman 2014a:105).⁹

Static memes consist of exploitable image macros, that include rage comics, reaction photos, photo fads, and LOLcats (Shifman 2014b:343).

Exploitable image macros consist of easy-to-replicate image templates with space for text. These can be single pane or multipaned. There are numerous sites such as Meme Generator, dedicated to providing the user with image templates that can be easily manipulated.

Rage comics have long been a staple in meme creation. Dating back to 2008, they are a series of web comic characters which are easily drawn with basic drawing software. They are normally used to express real-life situations with a twist (Bolton 2012).

⁷ See, for example, the <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxLbmnvMWM0> flash mob of an orchestra playing Ode to Joy, which was then viewed more than 6.5 million on-line views.

⁸ A good example of this is the mash up of the trailer for Pirates of the Caribbean with the Muppets, which creates the tone of an entirely different genre from the original film. Online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCIZACz68bA&list=PLzqVS0Y1WRPZgfLHIK31V-6qaIbQs91Jz&index=3>

⁹ See, for example, the Norfolk Police Department that lip dub Bruno Mars' "Uptown Funk." Online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ma_FXCAx_w

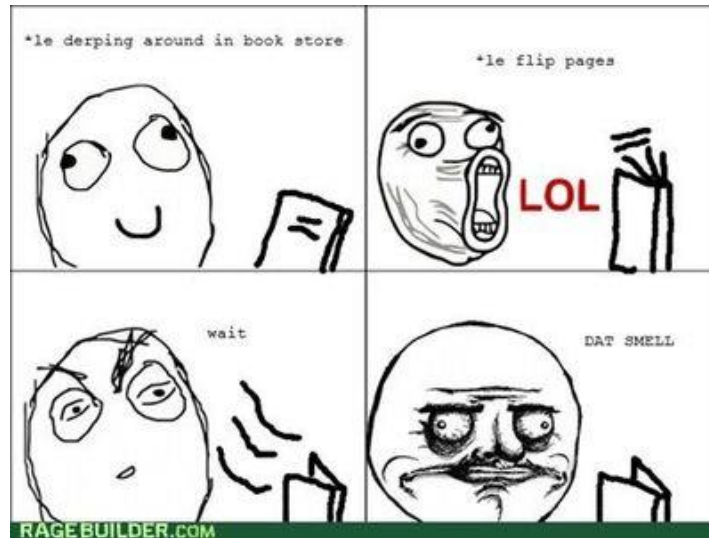


Figure 2.4: ‘I love the Smell of New Books’ is an example of a multipane rage comic from www.ragebuilder.com.

Photo fads include staged photos of people imitating actions in various settings in reaction to a similar photo posted on their social media feeds. They either volunteer or are dared to do this. In this way the photo fad becomes a type of identity building group dare. Photo fads are in many ways image macro equivalents of flash mobs. This has included people planking in various positions as well as the 2019 trend, which saw people using the FaceApp to upload selfies and then easily manipulate their age to see what they were projected to look like when 70 or 80 years old and share this on social media. This particular trend saw a big kickback over privacy concerns and fears of what the Russian-based app company would do with the photos in its possession (Tiffany 2019).



Figure 2.5: An example of a meme commenting on the 2017 planking fad. Taken from www.memecenter.com.



Figure 2.6: A picture of Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau run through FaceApp. Taken from Bobby Hristova's *National Post* article (July 17, 2019) on the challenges of FaceApp. Online at <https://nationalpost.com/news/world/faceapp-makes-you-look-older-what-else-is-it-doing-with-your-face>.

Politicians, athletes, celebrities, and random pictures of people expressing emotion provide the image macros for reaction photos (Shifman 2014a). These reaction photos provide a handy creative

tool for people. The reaction photos are often used to humorously make fun of politicians and politics.



Figure 2.7: This meme of United States president Donald Trump's reaction made a visual reference to Nero playing while Rome burned and was used to critique his golfing holiday as the United States faced the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020. Taken from <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-shares-twitter-meme-fiddling-critics-compare-nero/story?id=69488386>.

LOLcats is an image macro that deserves special mention and consideration. While the image macro of one or more cats is not different from other memes, the text is unique. The image's text is normally intentionally misspelt, and words are written phonetically or replaced with numerals and symbols (Green 2007).

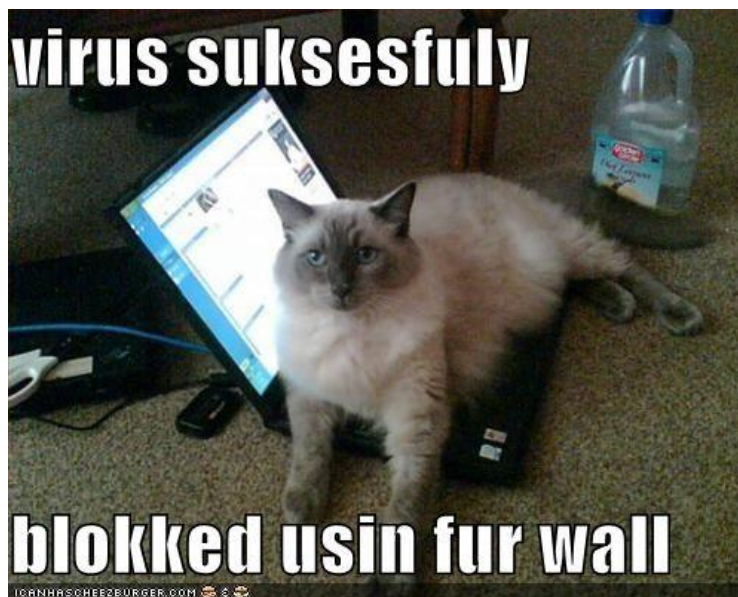


Figure 2.8: Example of a LOLcats meme in which a cat image is combined with phonetically spelt text introducing a play on words. Taken from www.icanhascheezburger.com

This very successful meme genre has since expanded to include dog pictures (LOLdogs), which are also widely shared, and other animals such as horses and hamsters, which are gaining in popularity.

According to Shifman (2014a), all meme genres can be analyzed in terms of content, form, and stance, which provides a connection with the audience and can be imitated and used by individuals in meaning creation.

In this dissertation particular attention will be paid to the image macro, which Davison defines as “a set of stylistic rules for adding text to images” (Davison 2012:123).

2.6 DISSECTING MEMES

The content of a meme refers to the specific text of a meme, which references certain ideas and the ideologies that are conveyed through the meme. The form is the physical incarnation of the message, which speaks to the visual and/or audible senses. This includes the physical features of the video or image as well as the font used, layout, and sound. The stance of a meme refers to ways in which people position themselves in relation to linguistic codes. It also includes the tone and style of communication and the participation structures by pointing out who is entitled to participate and how (Shifman 2013).

While internet memes have underlying stylistic rules, new media technology allows for user adaptation across each iteration of a meme. This paradox between internet memes’ capacity for both cohesion across iterations and, at the same time, uniqueness, has been noted by several scholars (e.g., Davison 2012; Segev et al. 2015). Pilipets (2019) classifies the user interaction and adaptation of a meme into four categories, namely photographic remediation, mundane imitation, memetic commentary, and memetic play.

Photographic remediation of the image consists of the image being manipulated through image manipulation software, such as Adobe Photoshop. This remediation could include the addition of images or the cutting out of part of the original image.



Figure 2.9: The original photograph taken by Antonio Guillem which has become a very popular meme type known as the distracted boyfriend meme. Taken from <https://www.wired.com/story/distracted-boyfriend-meme-photographer-interview/>



Figure 2.10: Example of photographic remediation of the original meme in which the people's heads have been replaced by objects and a dog's head showing most dog's preferences for eating trash rather than dog food. Taken from www.knowyourmeme.com.

Mundane imitation would indicate minimal interference with the image macro or the copying of some aspect of the image evoking the original. For example, the 1761 painting by Joshua Reynolds

on display in the Tate Modern Museum in London has been reimaged as a distracted boyfriend meme and widely shared on social media.



Figure 2.11: Joshua Reynolds's painting evoking the distracted boyfriend meme. Taken from <https://anith.com/someone-found-the-18th-century-version-of-the-distracted-boyfriend-meme/>

Memetic commentary focuses the manipulation on the text rather than the image. Both mundane imitation and memetic commentary do not require specialized skill as there are many websites and apps that easily facilitate this.





Figure 2.12: Two examples of the manipulation of text on the Distracted Boyfriend Meme. Taken from www.dailydot.com.

Popular memes are often dependent on their use of irony and humor (Milner 2016), and these require skill on the part of the user to use memetic play to communicate.

2.7 THE SINGULARITIES OF MEME COMPOSITION, CREATION, AND SPREAD

Limor Shifman (2014a:41) suggests that memes can be examined as “groups of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form and/or stance,” often “created with awareness of each other.” Unique features of the meme as well as those elements that are repeated and remixed indicate this awareness. Although sociocultural phenomena, by which a seemingly random bit of cultural information becomes an internet meme, cannot be reliably and consistently copied, the content structure of a meme can be easily identified, duplicated, and used (De la Rosa-Carrillo 2015).

While the repetition of different meme elements shows how memes have become both visually and textually standardized, their unique variations demonstrate how people individualize the meme format based on their own interpretations and intentions (Milner 2016).

Memes are highly participatory by nature and bigger than a single image macro. They are collections of texts and not singular units that are collectively created, shared, and transformed by

many participants. This makes memes compact and yet complicated when trying to decode them. Like a conversation, they can be probed and read on many levels. Memes can be examined as a single cultural unit or as part of a genre. They are normally part of a conversation between individuals or groups that will then form a part of a public conversation. These conversations, both private and public, will influence and be influenced by culture and will affect perceptions of public figures, groups, and commonly held values. The complexity of the task is alluded to by Milner (2016:2) who suggests that memes exist “in the space between individual texts and broader conversations, between individual citizens and broader cultural discourses”.

Pilipets (2019:176), in summarizing the phenomena of meme sharing, touches on the challenge of figuring out how memes work by saying that it is “neither a property of the image nor does it emerge exclusively through viral connections that can be rendered visible by counting likes and shares”. She goes on to say that an effective meme is “a contingent quality of visual social experience in digital networks that is shaped by what can be seen and what can be felt and what could always have been experienced otherwise”.

2.8 MEMES AND HUMOR

A quick look at what is shared on social media will reveal the important role that humor plays in memes. Since the days of LOLcats it has been noted that humor plays an important part in both the making and distribution of internet memes (Milner 2013; Shifman 2013, 2014a; Miltner 2014). Internet memes can be compared to an inside joke that is shared with the entire internet (Akram 2020).

Before discussing how humor is integrated in the socialization process, it is crucial to note, as Holmes (2000:166) does, that “all utterances are multifunctional Hence, a humorous utterance may, and typically does, serve several functions at once”. In fact, as Priego-Valverde (2003) argues, humor can be used to ‘do’ almost anything.

Humor is a very human behavior shared across all cultural groups (Flamson and Barrett 2013). Although sometimes identified with amusing effects, such as smiling or laughter, it can take on many different expressions, and what is humorous in one culture is not necessarily so in another (Reyes et al. 2012). A series of complex subjective, social, or cultural values and beliefs are

involved in the formation of an individual, as well as a collective sense of humor (Shabbir and Thwaites 2007).

From a physiological point of view, humor is seen as functioning as a way to release emotions and generally positively affects health. In advertising studies humor was found to be one of the best ways to attract attention (Speck 1991; Weinberger and Gulas 1992), as well as create a positive reaction (Kurtzberg et al. 2009).

The most apparent function of humor is to generate cohesion among a group. According to Davies (1984), humorous interactions are co-constructed, with participants becoming involved in the humor production by developing, repeating, and commenting on it or simply indicating their appreciation, thereby bolstering it. Although this study was done before the arrival of social media, meme production and distribution has highlighted the validity of these co-constructions and shown them in an even more exaggerated form. Kotthoff (2009) labeled the extreme form of participation construction, modification, and spread of a humorous interchange ‘joint fantasizing’ and reported the longest sequence of joint fantasizing extending to thirteen turns. Attardo (2015) however, pointed out that the majority of humorous exchanges are under three modifications. Humorous memes have far exceeded these norms, with a meme morphing, changing languages, and evolving for months or even years in thousands of forms on social media.

While creating cohesion in a group, humor also serves to define the borders of the group by creating an in-group and an out-group (Haugh and Bousfield 2012). It can also be a powerful tool in reinforcing and upholding power imbalance or the status quo (e.g., sexist jokes that are told where everyone – even the women in the group – feel obligated to laugh). Humor can be used as a less offensive way of getting potentially controversial information out (Schnurr and Plester 2017). For example, instead of stating that a two-meter social distance must be practiced in order to avoid passing on an infection during the COVID-19 pandemic, memes were printed showing two people with a cow between them while the caption reads ‘Practice social distancing – keep at least a cow or 4 dancing penguins apart’.

Humor can be used most effectively as a way of challenging authority because of its retractable feature. In this way one can push the limits, and as soon as an attempt is made at accountability one can maintain that it was ‘just’ a ‘joke’ or ‘satire’ (‘just kidding’) and cannot be taken seriously.

The embedded decommitment option in humor makes this possible (Haugh and Bousfield 2012). Bakhtin, one of the major literary theorists of the twentieth century (Mambrol 2018), realized this subversive element of humor and used the term ‘carnavalesque’ to characterize this de-stabilization or reversal of power structures, although temporarily, as occurs in conventional forms of carnival (see Section 4.6 for a more comprehensive discussion of the Carnavalesque). Bakhtin explained that “carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order” (Bakhtin 1998:45).

Humor is derived from various sources such as word play, cartoons, as well as social situations (Samson, Zysset, and Huber 2008). It seems to occur where two or more ideas, concepts or situations are combined in an unexpected way (Lefcourt and Martin 1986) and can be used to help resolve incongruity in these situations (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hover 2000). However, not all unexpected incongruity is necessarily perceived as humorous (Hübler and Bell 2003).

Figurative language, such as metaphor, analogy, ambiguity, and irony, are largely used in humor as they help in the communication of complex meanings (Reyes et al. 2012). Online humor is often made up of a hybrid text and image interaction, as in memes (Samson et al. 2008).

Vaetch (1998) theorized that humor occurs when there seems to be a paradoxical perception between normal things and situations, which are then perceived, at the same time, as being wrong.

Various other scholars have theorized about humor. Thorson and Powell (1991) describe several dimensions of humor, including humor production, a sense of playfulness, humor to achieve social goals, personal recognition of and appreciation of humor, and the use of humor as an adaptive device. In groundbreaking work on humor, Raskin (1985) explored the typology of the humor process, underlining the incongruity of situations, which put two or more incompatible or unexpected circumstances or elements together causing tension that invites a unique pattern of processing or problem solving by the reader (‘getting the joke’) that often leads to humor (Alden, Hoyer, and Lee 1993). In other words, humor could occur when two competing chronotopes intersect, leaving a person in a state of tension that needs resolution.

There are seven categories of humor, according to humor researchers Catanescu and Tom (2001), all of which can be found on social media and in meme production and distribution. These

categories include: (1) comparison – connecting several elements together to create a humorous situation; (2) personification – human characteristics are given to animals, plants, and objects; (3) exaggeration – overstating and exaggerating something; (4) pun – using language to create unusual meanings; (5) sarcasm – tongue-in-cheek responses to situations; (6) silliness – use of funny faces or gestures; and (7) surprise – creating unexpected situations.

Also seeking to classify humor, Martin et al. (2003) suggested that there are four styles of humor: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. Some people use affiliative humor to enhance relationships with others and create a sense of community, while others embrace self-enhancing humor as a coping mechanism to help keep a positive perspective when faced with adverse situations. People engaging in aggressive humor often resort to sarcasm and ridicule. While this type of humor often helps to create or solidify a group's identity, it is likely to also lead to anger, hurt, and alienation. Those who create self-defeating humor amuse others by humorously disparaging themselves (Martin et al. 2003).

The fascinating point of humor is that all types of humor are not used equally (Martin et al. 2003). In a study of more than a thousand memes in English and Thai, researchers found a preference for certain types of humor in the two languages (Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong 2014). It was found that self-defeating humor spread best in English while self-enhancing memes did well in Thai culture. Interestingly, in both humor styles senders of the meme made fun of themselves.

Humorous memes are clearly used for more than spreading humor as a vehicle to indirectly communicate and self-express thoughts and feelings that could not be openly discussed, such as breakdowns in relationships, academic failure, and other moments in life that could be labeled as disappointments (Guadagno et al. 2013). Those who share these feelings will in turn share the memes. The aggressive humor, in which a meme makes fun of others negatively, consistently arouses strong feelings and was therefore hypothesized to have the highest number of shares. It turned out not to be as popular, however. It would seem that more 'positive' memes communicate better, even though they may not have as strong an emotional reaction. These results confirm research done by Berger and Milkman (2012), who investigated the role of emotion in social transmission and viral dynamics. They found that positive content is more viral than negative

content, although even content that provoked strong negative reactions, such as anxiety and anger, could be highly viral as well.

2.9 USES OF MEMES

The communicative potential of memes has long been recognized and attempts have been made to harness this potential and turn memes into tools for sales or votes. This interest has driven academic investigation into memes. Although these studies do not focus on linguistic questions, they often overlap with linguistic research interests and will be overviewed before focusing on meme studies with a more linguistic focus.

2.9.1 Memes and Politics

Parody is central to meme humor (Nuessel 2005), and also an important area of linguistic research (Tervo and Ridanpää 2016; Pennycook 2007). This has made memes an ideal vehicle for political propaganda, commentary, and critique as memes play into duplicating candidates' contradictory or incongruous statements (Lugia 2019). Despite this fit, researchers generally have paid little attention to political memes due, in part, to their deceptive appearance of triviality (Lyons 2017).

The 2016 United States presidential primary was the first time that memes were notably used in an election campaign (Heiskanen 2017). Political memes brought together several features of older political media, combined in new ways (Lyons 2017). Although memes share some characteristics with political cartoons, their participatory nature made many more people able to use and modify them for their individual entertainment or commentary (Hristova 2014).

Prior to the 2016 United States presidential election, most political analysts and the academic community as a whole seemed to share Stefka Hristova's question of whether memes and even digital media as a whole could serve as a serious platform for politics. In the discussion of the effective use of digital space Hristova claimed in 2014: "I am suspicious about the extent to which digital space can be utilized effectively for political dissent and I argue that digital space has remained the space of the civil and the cultural, and not of the political" (Hristova 2014:3).

This attitude changed with the surprising win of Donald Trump in defiance of polls and mainstream media predictions as well as conventional political analysis, and left many researchers wondering

if memes had any noticeable influence on voting. A large number of studies and articles on the memes used and spread in the run-up to the election followed. These included popular articles such as Miranda's (2016) article, which focused on Pepe the Frog political memes and tried to quantify this well-shared meme genre in order to discover its influence in the 2016 election, as well as academic studies such as Benita Heiskanen's article titled "Meme-ing Electoral Participation," published in the *European Journal of American Studies* (2017).¹⁰ This new fear of and fascination with memes as unexplored political propaganda tools has led to dissertations such as Heidi Huntington's doctoral dissertation, which attempted to assess the influence of user-generated political memes (Huntington 2017).

Nagy Antal (2018), in his dissertation on memes and their impact on politics in which he focuses on the 2016 election in the United States, points out that although there is no actual evidence that memes or a particular meme won the election, there is increasing data suggesting that the mass of grass-root memes changed the election's tone by drawing attention to sensational accusations against Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton, and forced her campaign to address topics that they would otherwise have ignored. Although it is impossible to directly connect this meme activity to actual votes, these memes seemed to provoke an array of real actions, such as the armed assault on a Washington pizzeria wrongly believed to be hiding child sex slaves (Kang and Goldman 2016).

Fears of mass political manipulation through political memes were further fueled by the discovery of Russian interference in the United States 2016 elections. One of the ways in which this was done was through the creation of fake social media accounts that targeted specific groups in an attempt to influence and sway votes (Jamieson 2018). However, rather than being able to quantify the effect that political memes had on election results, many of the studies highlighted the emotional appeal of memes, which had both a polarizing and galvanizing effect on social media.

Memes enable users to quickly formulate an opinion and react to emerging political events. They have been proven to provide alternative discussions to mainstream media. Theoretically, this discourse should enable the mobilization of voters. Some studies have found that exposure to

¹⁰ A review of the varied approaches taken by academic disciplines to the role of and political implications of memes can be found in Julia Nuckols' 2018 MA thesis from the University of Jyväskylä in Finland (Nuckols 2018).

political memes is an important factor in influencing participation of citizens in developing countries (Kasirye 2019). This, however, has not been conclusively proven in regard to Millennials, some of the largest demographics engaged in meme generation, who did not turn out to vote despite high social media involvement in the United States 2020 Democratic primaries (Milligan 2020).

Memes feed off real-life events and perceptions and can quickly launch a political voice from relative obscurity to highly visible and well known. A good example of this was the case of a little-known Democratic governor of Kentucky who began live broadcasts during the Coronavirus crisis in 2020. These broadcasts quickly became the material for a wide range of memes that made the governor a well-known figure on social media (Grim 2020). Due to the business models of social media companies such as Facebook and Twitter, which are designed to push attention-getting content rather than high-quality content (Tenove 2018), political information and misinformation can quickly be spread without having to provide any sort of referencing. This has raised the critical question as to whether voters can be trusted to differentiate between information and misinformation.

There are also economic incentives for creating sensational rather than accurate content as well as not vigorously addressing the problem of bots rather than real people boosting and sometimes driving social media activity. Social media platforms have also been designed to gather user data in order to enable micro-targeted advertising. This is very useful to advertisers (Bell and Owen 2017), but can lead to abuse, as, for example, when Facebook enables advertising to people with anti-Semitic views (Angwin, Varner, and Tobin 2017), or when Russian actors can use targeted memes to provoke social tensions or promote fake news (Collins et al. 2017; Isaac and Daisuke 2017).

Another challenge inherent in political meme use is that because of the very abbreviated amount of text that can be used in a meme and its dependence on emotive appeal, complicated positions, issues, and policies are categorically reduced to a single meme. Some researchers fear that this could undermine a voter's ability to make well-based, rational, logical political decisions (Heiskanen 2017). Other researchers point out that memes are constructed by both the addresser

and the addressee. This, they believe, should serve to offset the fear of a foreign power radically manipulating a country's voting through targeted memes (Lukianova 2019).

Although the effectiveness of memes as political tools has become an important area of research results are often inconclusive (Kasirye 2019). It would seem that memes do not start a new political conversation or give ownership to a particular view but rather serve as a powerful reinforcement when shared within a group of already likeminded users. This in turn makes it difficult to predict whether or to what degree memes can change political behavior (Heiskanen 2017).

2.9.2 Memes and Marketing

Since memes are observed to be an effective method of getting a message out, they have long been of particular interest to marketers, entrepreneurs, and media companies (Forced Meme 2010).

Dawkins' book (1976), although unintended, was quickly seized upon as the theoretical basis for approaches to marketing and led to popular 'computer virus' and 'viral marketing' strategies (Marwick, 2013). Going beyond Dawkins' original notion, Seth Godin (2001) argued in his book *Unleashing the Ideavirus* that advertisers could use the power of the internet to create 'ideaviruses' that would spread from person-to-person without being driven – basically the advert would advertise itself and revolutionize marketing through memetics.

However, despite a few examples of memes being turned into marketable merchandise (Chard 2010) or being used to tap advertising (Cook 2008), marketers who have invested millions of dollars in marketing campaigns in an attempt to create a successful meme have met with little return on their money as memes created by marketers and advertisers are mostly perceived as inauthentic and 'forced' and not taken seriously. An example of this is the emergence of the subreddit /r/memeconomy site which began as mimicry of the attempt by big business to make memes marketable. The site offers a fake meme stock market, in which users 'buy' and 'sell' memes based on their projected values. Even though no real money is invested the site enjoys all the features of a real stock market.

While meme genres have long lifespans and often make a comeback even years later, single memes tend to have a very short lifespan. What is extremely popular or funny to social media followers one week can be completely irrelevant the next. Using something that is now out of fashion –

rather than promoting a product or brand – does the exact opposite and makes the brand seem more outdated than no meme use would have. This has made memes very difficult to use as planning expensive marketing campaigns cannot be a spontaneous reaction to what is current in popular meme culture (Skager 2019).

One of the reasons why memes have proved so elusive for big business is aptly pointed out by De la Rosa-Carrillo (2015:22), who states that

a caveat must be regarded when considering any utilitarian production of Internet Memes; namely the fact that memes can only be generated by a community that adopts, shares, repurposes and turns them into memes proper. In other words, just because a person, or group of persons, generates specific instances of content that look like Internet Memes does not mean that they will in fact become Internet Memes, since only the Internet culture itself will decide whether or not they are in fact Internet Memes.

When using memes in marketing, brands have generally embraced one of two options – either piggybacking on an existing meme (known as ‘memejacking’) or attempting to create a new meme from scratch (Bernstein 2014). Both options hold challenges for the marketer. Memejacking a currently popular meme may be perceived as an unoriginal way to get noticed and not be accepted by the online community. An original meme created by a marketer also runs the risk of being perceived as advertising, which online communities seldom embrace.

All successful social media memes used by marketers have provided an interactive meme to users that has encouraged social media engagement. A good example of this is the U.S. online food delivery service, Seamless. In 2014, Seamless created a set of memes piggybacking off Academy Award nominations that have always been a popular topic on social media. They dubbed the campaign the ‘Oscar Nom Noms’ and created a number of spoof film posters playing on the title of current popular movies (Arata 2014). For example, the ‘Wolf of Wallstreet’ became the ‘Waffle of Wallstreet’. One of the most effective parts of the campaign was the fact that it invited user-involvement and encouraged people to make suggestions for new film posters. Seamless then created new posters and reacted with posters that people had generated.

Another example is the Dennys' food chain that quickly reacted to a popular social media trend in which social media users were posting stills from popular movie series and encouraging others to 'zoom in' and find errors or incongruencies in the film. For example, an extra wearing a watch in a film set in the Middle Ages. Dennys posted memes and asked users to zoom in on particular parts of an image, which would then reveal hidden messages and the eventual punchline: "Has this distracted you from overwhelming existential dread lol" (Gilliland 2017).

Sometimes the unexpected can happen as with the South African 2019 Woolies Water Challenge. Woolworths, a South African retailer, and their own brand of bottled water, went viral when a group of students created a humorous video depicting how this brand of water 'changed their accents'. It took local media by storm and inspired people to put their own spin on the challenge. Although Woolworths publicly approved of the challenge, it was not generated by the company, and the company had no control over whether the publicity garnered would be positive or negative.

Harnessing memes for marketing can be hit and miss. Memes have not proved to be the viral self-generating advertisement that marketing departments originally envisioned with the coming of the social media platforms, but they can potentially be used as part of a creative and innovative advertising campaign. Although, much like a public relations department, they cannot be directly quantified in terms of sales figures or profit. They can, however, help improve marketing and invite engagement as well as promote a brand's image (Gilliland 2017).

In view of the scope and reach of memes, big business continues to explore ways to use memes. Memes have become an integral part of the online environment and do seem to help with branding and help a brand to gain social validation (Srinivasan 2021). Although the direct influence they exert on advertising is still to be determined. They do, however, demonstrate to their target demographic that they are active participants in online culture (Bury 2016).

2.10 MEMES AS FOCUS OF LINGUISTIC STUDY

Although the study of internet memes is a relatively new field, there has been a concerted effort by scholarship in the past ten years to describe meme phenomena and advance meme theory (Ballard 2018).

There has also been a significant increase in articles mentioning social media memes in journals over the last few years, demonstrating a new awareness of this medium, which lends itself to so many different theoretical and methodological approaches and uses. In more popular journals, and research sites this can easily be observed. For example, *The Conversation* (<https://theconversation.com>), a website sponsored by dozens of universities, which attempts to link academics to social and societal issues, has published 58 separate articles on internet memes. Beginning with a single article in 2011, the importance of the topic can be gaged by the increase in the number of articles per year, with nine articles in 2020, 11 in 2021 and two articles within the first few months of 2022. These articles, while not necessarily contributing to linguistic research, demonstrate the potential for memes to contribute to research in various fields, such as psychology where memes can be useful in trauma processing (Myrick 2021), or providing opportunity to test humor theories (Rolfe 2022). They also proved useful in nature conservation studies (Jeffries 2021), and public health awareness and pandemic studies (Derksen 2021), to name a few.

Linguistic research in the area of meme studies has taken various focal points, with scholars often using critical discourse analysis. Some research has concentrated on the viral nature of memes, exploring memes as a form of communication that imparts information in order to determine success or effectiveness. This research is of particular interest to the fields of marketing as in Berger and Milkman's (2012) analysis of the spreadability of internet content and political communication. Other research has focused on the political uses of memes, as, for example, Julian Porch's dissertation on memes as political statements (Porch 2017).

In more vigorous academic journals this growing awareness of memes can also be noted, as demonstrated by the recent article of Constance Iloh (2021) in the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, who asserts that memes are and can be significant to current and future qualitative research. Iloh goes further by presenting memes themselves as a model of what all research approaches should ideally be – namely, relevant, meaningful, and empirically appropriate.

Within the linguistic field numerous articles have also been published. Following is an overview of articles that hold particular theoretical importance for this dissertation. As early as 2014, Marion Provencher Langlois investigated the communication potential of memes in an article. In applying

theories of image to the web, she explored the complex context of memes and pointed out that rather than being viewed as a distraction from boredom, they should be appreciated as culturally relevant units (Langlois 2014).

Around the same time, academic interest in memes was demonstrated in a complete issue of the *Journal of Visual Culture* being devoted to internet memes. Articles of particular interest to this dissertation in this issue include Peter Lunenfeld's article in which he revised Dawkins's notion of the meme as a replicating unit of culture, concluding that rather than a "pseudo-genetic concept transfer", memes are rather a "text-image matrix" in a fully networked world (Lunenfeld 2014:256). Lisa Nakamura (2014:257-274) examined how sharing affordances on social media caused users to unintentionally spread degrading stereotypes of race and gender. Patrick Davison (2014:275-297), explored remediation by examining the formal properties, and cultural role played by MS Paint, a widely available graphics program used to make internet memes. Kate Brideau and Charles Berret (2014:307-313) continued analyzing remediation through their examination of meme font typeface. Limor Shifman (2014b:340-358) explored the functionalities and affordances of digital media through theories of photography. Shifman focused on the cultural meaning of the image macro meme genres that combine the two frames of text and photograph. These memes were discovered to be operative signs designed as invitations for action.

In other journals, the importance of meme research can also be noted, as with Wiggins and Bowers' exploration of meme genre development (2015:1886-1906). Using sociologist Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (1981) the authors examined the capacity of memes for adaption to create a participatory digital culture. Gal, Shifman, and Kampf (2016:1698-1714) move beyond a genre focus in their meme study. Taking a quantitative and qualitative analysis approach, they investigated the role of memes in potential subversion and the formation of collective identity. Heidi Huntington (2016:77-93) moved into an important area in her article by drawing attention to the intertextual nature of memes as she examined the visual rhetoric of memes in activist contexts. Meme research quickly showed potential to challenge existing paradigms, as in the case of Nissenbaum and Shifman (2018), who offered a cross-linguistic study using meme templates to explore the globalization of culture. Nissenbaum and Shifman reviewed templates in meme generators across four languages, and examined the forms, social identities, and emotions

embedded in the templates used to create memes. They concluded that memes were emotionally disruptive and seemed to contradict existing literature on cultural values.

Several dissertations have also been written in the field of language and discourse studies as scholars have begun to take cognizance of the rich investigative possibilities of internet memes. One of the first was Ernesto Leon de la Rosa-Carrillo (2015), who explored the language of internet memes as part of arts and visual culture education. De la Rosa-Carrillo traced the path of the written word to the remixed image of a meme. Rather than language or image macro being dominant, he discovered that meme communication is “equal parts form and content” (2015:15), with memes serving to incorporate “technology, storytelling, visual thinking and remix practices” (De la Rosa-Carrillo 2015:207).

Andrew Peck’s (2017) doctoral dissertation again demonstrated the potential usefulness of meme studies to scholarship. Peck used a linguistic communicative focus in which memes were examined as a language practice where people create, distribute, and legitimate knowledge through memes. Peck’s work illuminates the collaborative nature of memetic practice. Memes are demonstrated to be a vernacular practice that individuals use to make arguments based on common knowledge using the vernacular authority of meme construction. Peck’s work highlighted the potential meme studies could have in helping to identify emergent trends in communication (2017:172-189).

As well as contributing to the wide sweeps of communication trends, study of individual memes and their evolution can make a contribution to discourse theory as demonstrated by Brian Edward McClure (2020), who used critical discourse analysis in his dissertation to examine the memes that have evolved around Nike’s ad campaigns featuring Colin Kaepernick and the phrase, “Believe in something – even if it means sacrificing everything”. McClure demonstrated that memes are being used to engage in digital public discourse about serious social and political issues. He shows a recognition of the independence of the meme as a unit of communication by using critical discourse analysis to examine both the meme form as well as the discourse facilitated by it.

Another, less common linguistic research focus, has been on the memetic content of the meme and its role in the formation of social identity in digital cultures as, for example, can be seen in the dissertation of Zhao Ding (2015), who drew on concepts from rhetorical criticism, vernacular rhetoric, and visual rhetoric to investigate the formation of online identities of Asian Americans

as constructed and presented by internet memes. Ding examined memes as persuasive discourses by probing their content, rhetorical components, and structure. His study found that memes complicate the construction of racial identity in vernacular discourses by reflecting and intensifying the social conflicts surrounding race.

The attention that memes are beginning to have in language and discourse studies is reflected in the publication of several foundational academic volumes. Knobel and Lankshear (2007), in their book *The New Literacies Sampler*, conducted one of the first discourse analysis studies of internet memes and established multimodal discourse analysis as a method for studying internet memes. Their work also introduced approaches for considering memes as literacy units and underlined the importance of humor for a meme's ability to spread.

Another foundational volume for meme studies was published by Limor Shifman (2014a), a prominent meme scholar in the humanities and social sciences, whose work was entitled *Memes in Digital Culture*. This book investigates the connection between internet memes and digital culture while making a compelling argument for taking memes seriously in language and discourse studies. Her discourse analysis of memes provides a solid grounding for internet meme theory while also including important observations on the complexity of defining memes (Shifman 2014a:37).

The complexity of memes was explored by Ryan Milner in his book *The World Made Meme* (2016). Milner investigates the convergence of language and culture by focusing on memes and highlights their cultural and political importance in public conversations. Using discourse analysis, he highlighted the multimodal properties of memes and labeled some genres and subgenres of memes (Milner 2016:79). Both Shifman and Milner's approaches outlined in their books will be extensively used in this dissertation. Also important for linguistic studies, Bradley Wiggins, in his comprehensive book *The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture* (2019), argues that internet memes represent a new genre of online communication. He goes on to explore their production and dissemination in light of semiotics and intertextuality. Memes as a new genre of online communication is further explored by Grant Kien in *Communicating with Memes: Consequences in Post-truth Civilization* (2019). Kien approaches memes as a new digital language that can be used in work and relationship commentary as well as for political criticism. Kien traces

the history of contemporary digital memes and, using communication theory, discusses meaning-making and memes as a way to open cultural dialogue.

Despite all this insightful scholarship on internet memes, there are several linguistic approaches and tools that have not yet been tapped but that, I believe, should prove fruitful in continuing to understand meme phenomena. To make meaning, memes require discourses from various time frames and different contexts to work together (Blommaert 2015; 2017). Memes also spread across different geographical spaces and contain elements of older discourse embedded in newer discourses (Blommaert 2015). These characteristics of memes present unique opportunities to investigate the discursive representation of time and space and have not been sufficiently explored. In fact, although some research has explored internet memes as a distinctive form of communication (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006; Shifman 2014a; Milner 2016), a toolkit has yet to be assembled to attempt multimodal discourse analysis (O'Halloran 2011; Kress 2012) on memes within their specific spatio-temporal contexts (Agha 2007a). This dissertation strives to fill this gap by assembling and testing such a toolkit. The meme analysis toolkit will have the potential to provide the internal structure, map, and configuration of the meme (Lorino and Tricard 2012). This could also potentially be modified and used to analyze broader multimodal forms (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006) and discover persuasive ideological functions behind social media communication.

2.11 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed how the understanding of memes has evolved from Dawkins' view of memes as a 'unit of cultural transmission' to media objects with specific features and practices rather than self-spreading ideas. In addition, this chapter also discussed different kinds of meme families while introducing the particular kind of meme that will be focused on in this dissertation; namely the image macro. The important role that humor plays in memes was also reviewed, while functions of memes beyond entertainment (specifically as political tools and for marketing) were discussed. The chapter concluded with a concise review of literature that focused on memes from a discursive point of view. While studies in this area have rapidly grown, there are still various gaps in the literature, specifically as to how memes challenge our notions of how time/space is organized within discourse.

Chapter 3

THEORETICAL INSIGHTS INTO MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATION

In this chapter a brief general history of multimodality in communication will be followed by an overview of the development of multimodality in the field of linguistics and the gradual movement away from monomodality to multimodality within linguistic research. Fundamental concepts or notions connected to multimodality, which underpin important linguistic theory and that prove essential in the exploration of the multimodality of time and space in social media memes, will then be briefly introduced. These include modal affordances, the notion of modal salience, and, finally, the role of resemiotization in the process of multimodality.

3.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF MULTIMODALITY

Multimodality is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history people have been using different modes, often simultaneously, in an attempt to better communicate (Kress 2010:7-10). In ancient times, multimodal communication was already well used as will be illustrated below.

Pictograms were introduced in various cultures to facilitate better communication. Gradually these pictograms evolved into words independent of the spoken equivalent (as in Chinese) or were simplified into symbols which represented sound segments which would evolve into alphabets independent of the original sounds and symbols (Fromkin and Rodman 1988). Although linguistic evolution would seem to tend towards monomodal forms, with text and graphic each developing independently, people would often combine these different modes for better communication. A good example is the widespread use of iconography in the ancient Near East.

At least as far back as 1700 BCE people across the ancient Near East were using seals and amulets. These seals and amulets often consisted of a graphic image and a text. Both the text and the graphic intricately connected as part of the communication (de Hulster, Strawn, and Bonfiglio 2015:33). This multimodal communication demanded multiliteracy on the part of the reader. Because ancient

Near Eastern cultures and languages are so far removed from current cultures, iconography has developed into a highly specialized field for the reading of these ancient artifacts.¹¹

Seals and amulets were not the only examples of the wide use of multimodality in the ancient world. Even rhetoric, which could be thought of as monomodal, became multimodal as classical rhetoricians emphasized not only speech but voice intonations, gestures, and expressions in public speaking as communicative strategies (Welsh 1999). Even as written texts developed communication continued to be multimodal, as evidenced in the widespread use of illumination and calligraphy.

In other examples of multimodality, images were often used in oral cultures, and it is difficult to ascertain whether or not these images were writing or drawings.¹²

3.2 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIMODALITY IN THE FIELD OF LINGUISTICS

Following the invention of the printing press, education and learning came to center around printed text. Becoming educated meant being able to read and write (Mulhern 1959). The transmission of knowledge became largely monomodal. Later on, most academic fields were inclined to be exclusive and flourished within their own methodologies by producing books and papers without much interaction with other related fields (Henle 1972:v). The printed text dominated the twentieth century as a primary source of academic investigation and communication.

Carey Jewitt (2005:315) has more recently argued, however, that “print-based reading and writing are and always have been multimodal” – especially considering the fact that they require the interpretation of more than just a text. Yet for most of the twentieth century, despite the use of cartoons, photographs, sketches, and diagrams, within academic circles, these tended to be viewed as decoration rather than as part of the communication. Monomodality, as in singular text or print mode, was almost exclusively viewed as the subject of serious study in linguistics.

¹¹ See de Hulster, Strawn, and Bonfiglio (2015:36-38) for an overview into the complexity of the process involved in reading these objects.

¹² See, for example, Menezes de Souza (2002), who explores the ecology of writing among the Kashinawa people in Brazil.

As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001:1-2; italics in original) have noted:

There *were* other modes of representation, though they were usually seen as ancillary to the central mode of communication and also dealt with in a monomodal fashion. Music was the domain of the composer; photography was the domain of the photographer, etc. Even though a multiplicity of modes of representation were recognized, in each instance representation was treated as monomodal: discrete, bounded, autonomous, with its own practices, traditions, professions, habits.

Most fields associated with the study of language tacitly assumed that words and texts were the proper, if not the only, object of serious academic research. Linguistic textbooks, academic papers and research focused on linguistic texts. If a picture or drawing was used it was strictly for illustrative purposes and not integrated into the communicative discussion (de Hulster, Strawn, and Bonfiglio 2015:19). Thus, other modes were left to other disciplines and not integrated into the field of linguistics.

3.2.1 Moving From Mono- to Multimodality in Linguistic Research

Changes became apparent during the 1960s and 1970s as many writers began reexamining the process of composition and turned to photography, film, and audiotapes to discover new ideas about composing (Williamson 1971). This new movement, which became known as expressionism, led to a focus on the sensory and encouraged writers to look away from text and even language to explore new mediums. Donald Murray, a professor often closely associated with expressionism, linked writing, and text with the visual medium by often having students think of themselves as cameras making visual observations of their world (Palmeri 2007). Thus, expressionists began moving the process of writing into a multisensory experience across different modes.

Although the semiotician Charles Peirce (1977) had already proposed his theory of signs in the 1860s, within the field of literary studies Barthes' collection of essays entitled *Mythologies* (1957), made a significant impact by presenting a semiotic theory that broke down the process of reading signs and focused on their interpretation by various cultures or societies. Barthes paved the way

for a multimodal approach to signs by pointing out that signs had both a signifier, that is, the way a sign is perceived through the senses, and the signified or meaning that is interpreted.

The movement towards multimodality in linguistic studies was accelerated in the 1980s, thanks to a new focus on cognitive research about learning. Researchers studied alphabetic writing and how its configuration compared to art, music, and other forms of creativity and found that the process of creative writing was similar to that of designing images and sound (Berlin 1982). Going beyond a monomodal assumption of text Joseph Harris (1997) found alphabetic writing to be the result of multimodal cognition. In another development, which caused waves in the education and popular science fields, Neil Fleming, based on his research, introduced the idea of neuro-linguistic learning styles. He described three modes of learning (auditory, kinesthetic, and visual learning) to explain that individuals were best able to learn, create, and interpret meaning by using unique modes or combinations of these modes (Fleming 2001). The idea of a communication being multimodal was further enhanced in research conducted by Linda Flower and John Hayes, who concluded that even when using a principal modality such as text, writers often combined non-text modes with the principal mode to express themselves (Flower and Hayes 1984:160).

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's book (2003) *Metaphors We Live By*, first printed in 1980, challenged the commonly held view of metaphors as simple figurative literary devices used in speech or text. Their work became a corner stone for research in linguistic studies and the cognitive sciences as they demonstrated the important role that metaphor plays in understandings the way in which people think and express thoughts in language.

Foundational work was also being done by linguists such as M.A.K. Halliday, who in *Language as a Social Semiotic* proposed that language can be understood only "in the total context of the interaction between an individual and his human environment" (1978:9). Halliday went on to develop a systemic functional linguistics approach in his book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985). This was elaborated by other researchers, such as Hodge and Kress (1988), who addressed the conceptual difficulties that have limited semiotics' usefulness in research and proposed that it could be integrated with the social analysis of power and ideology, as well as gender and class. Also building on Halliday's approach, Kress and Van Leeuwen published their

ground-breaking volume, *Reading Image: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996), which introduced an analytic structure for examining images drawing on tools from functional grammar.

These researchers set the stage by establishing a theoretical basis for a multimodal view of communication and literacy, which was pushed to the forefront with the radical changes in communication that came with the world wide web.

3.2.2 Multimodality and the Internet

In the 1990s, multimodality grew in scope with the development of digital technologies such as personal computers. With the advent of the internet, and the resultant surge in social media, communication profoundly changed, and a new literacy emerged. People became accustomed to text circulated in pieces, informally, and across multiple mediums of image, color, and sound. This also led to challenges in literacy. Students were coming to the classroom literate in video, graphics, and computer skills but unable to read or write linguistic texts (Kress 2003:37). Educators were challenged to change their teaching practices to include multimodal lessons in order to help students achieve a new literacy.

These challenges led to the full introduction of multimodality into linguistic studies with the presentation of the New London Group (1996) paper, in which a group of ten leading researchers assessed the challenges in literacy teaching and learning. They coined the term ‘multiliteracies’, which related to multimodality as multiple modes were examined and encouraged. Although specifically aimed at education, this ground-breaking work quickly became a theoretical basis for linguistic studies (Lankshear and Knobel 2011).

Subsequently, singular mode communication, such as the presentation of text on a page, has given way to complex multimodality forms, both in practice and in much of linguistic research. Text is now generally viewed as part of a larger complex integrated presentational form, and not as the sole or main focus of all serious linguistic research (Bateman 2008).

Since then, linguistic studies based on the New London Group paper have engaged multimodality on many different levels. The notion that language covers only a part of human expression, understanding, and meaning-making has been confirmed (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001).

This realization has led to multimodal research in the linguistic field expanding into two areas of investigation, namely multimodality in texts and multimodality in interaction (Jones 2013:3992-3994). Texts include magazines and books as well as films, art, and web pages. Multimodality in interaction concentrates on other modes of expression, such as visuals and sound, which were seen as equally relevant in human communication processes (Iedema 2003a). More recently, significant research has been devoted to understanding visual communications (Bell and Davison 2013) with Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) book playing a significant role in the formation of an analytic structure for examining images drawing on tools from functional grammar.

Although this overview focuses on the development of linguistic research in screen and print modalities, mention should also be made of the vibrant research in other areas of multimodality, such as oral communication or gesture. Kalantzis and Cope (2012) suggest seven modes of meaning-making, including written, oral, audio, visual, spatial, tactile, and gestural modes. Much research into a better understanding of these modes and their interrelationships has been undertaken, especially in the field of education. Wyatt-Smith and Elkins (2008:899-940) provide a concise overview of research in this area in their article on multimodal reading and comprehension in the online environment. Some other research includes Stein and Newfield's (2004) important work on multimodal literacy in the South African classroom context in which multiliteracy was found to be an important component of trauma healing for students. Research has also focused on the different bodily modes of interaction, such as gesture, gaze, body posture, and oral speech (Kress, Jewitt, Ogborn, and Tsatsarelis 2001; Lancaster 2007; and also Unsworth 2008). More recent examples of research in this area include Fjørtoft's (2020) research on multimodal assessment strategies and Sigrid Norris's book (2020) on multimodal theory and methodology.

3.3 MODES AND MULTIMODALITY

Multimodal discourse analysis examines the formation of meaning through the interaction of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just language. Although communication has always been multimodal (see Section 3.1 above), it is only recently that this challenge has been taken up in the field of applied linguistics (Jones 2013:3992). It should be noted that multimodal discourse analysis is not a specialized examination of a particular type of discourse but rather refers

to a more wide-ranging examination of the various layers of a communication (Scollon and Levine 2004:1-2). Although multimodal research is increasingly being recognized and used in linguistic studies, the methodological approaches used do not always utilize the full potential of multimodal discourse with multimodal research often being based on the assumption of mode being “simply a transparent and trivial container of language” (Prior 2013: 520). As noted by Markus A. Höllerer et al. “systematic research on multimodality – i.e., the combination and orchestration of multiple modes in communicative acts – has remained rather sparse in our domain of scholarly inquiry” (2018:2).

The notion of mode as a bounded semiotic system with stable characteristics is problematic, especially when we see that this has been carried over from different academic disciplines that have brought with them structural and analytic processes that may not always be easily applied to multimodal investigations – especially in light of the blend of modes that social media platforms provide (Jones 2013:3993).

Essential to a better application of multimodal discourse theory is an understanding of the components of multimodality – namely modes. Gunther Kress, a leading scholar in multimodality, defines mode in two ways. First, a mode “is a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, speech, moving images are examples of different modes” (2010:79). Second, “semiotic modes, similarly, are shaped by both the intrinsic characteristics and potentialities of the medium and by the requirements, histories and values of societies and their cultures” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:35).

These intrinsic characteristics and potentialities allude to the variety of modal resources, which have been shaped by the culture and the history of different social groups. Each of these modes can in turn be further broken down into separate components. Each part carries both potential and limitations in meaning-making (Kress 2010). For example, writing can be broken into different modal resources such as lexical, grammar, syntax, and graphic resources. These could then be further subdivided. For example, graphic resources could be broken down into layout, font size, and type. These resources do not carry meaning in themselves, but in the mode become carriers and shapers of meaning (Kress 2010:114). Considering the fact that a mode inherently carries differing communication potential, this has an influence on the choice of a particular mode or

modes in communication occurrences. Modes are not static, and while they shape the systems in which they participate, they are also being shaped by these systems.

Modes normally need a medium in order to reach recipients. A medium can be viewed as the ingredients that form meaning as well as the avenue through which it becomes accessible to others and could include sociocultural and technological practices such as newspapers or social media (Jenkins 2006).

When communicating, modes are seldom used in isolation but are combined into multimodal units to advance communication. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:37) propose that, “transcoding between a range of semiotic modes, represents [...] a better, a more adequate understanding of representation and communication”. Thus, the study of multimodality allows for a wider focus moving away from exclusive concentration on verbal or written texts to all modes of meaning-making and their interrelationships by looking at the units or modes of communication.

These units are formed within a society over time and become familiar cultural forms. Film, for example, is dependent on several modes to produce meaning. These include visual modes, modes of dramatic action, speech, music, and even sound effects. In a demonstration of the dynamics of the combination of modes to form multimodal units, Andrew Burn and David Parker coined the term ‘kineikonic mode’ in 2003 in reference to the multimodal unit of film or moving pictures (Burn and Parker 2003), which has become a familiar cultural form in most societies.

While a recognition of the multimodal nature of communication holds potential for a better understanding of communication, it is not without its challenges. The dynamic nature of multimodal units has resulted in an ongoing debate about the symbolic and representative aspects of modes and whether or not these need to be better defined with regard to their roles in the construction of meaning (Jones et al. 2017; Höllerer et al. 2018; Forceville 2021). Others, such as Bateman, Delin, and Henschel (2002), have also argued that the analytical principles adopted from one mode (such as written text) cannot be transferred to other modes (such as visual layout) without empirical evidence that people process information in the different modes in the same way.

An important criticism comes from Sarah Pink (2015), who, based on ethnographic findings, questioned the norms about human perception that attach modes to specific sensory routes. It has

been assumed that certain modes are attached to certain senses, as, for example, a photograph would only be thought of as linking to modes that are visual (Dicks et al. 2006:88), but actual ethnographic field work points to a more inclusive experience of a photograph for a viewer (Pink 2011:272). Pink points out that senses are interconnected, rather than differentiated, and advocates for this to be included in an approach to modes. She therefore takes issue with Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) assertions on the specificity of images and the precision of their meanings. Pink's criticism draws attention to the relationship between the phenomenology of perception and the cultural construct of sensory categories (2015:11). This in turn calls for a more nuanced approach to mode categories, especially when used in non-western cultural settings (Forceville 2021).

In order to meet some of the challenges of multimodal investigation, the following properties and qualities of modes, namely modal affordances, salience, and resemiotization, and their conceptual interaction will be reviewed.

3.3.1 Modal Affordances

Each mode has different potentials and constraints for meaning-making. Affordances is a term used to describe these different potentials of modes for making meaning (Bezemer and Kress 2008:171-172).

The term was originally coined by psychologist James Gibson in 1979, who used it to refer to all action possibilities depending on the users' physical capabilities. The term has been expanded to include the possible actions or interaction a user can take with the particular mode. As noted by Van Leeuwen, perception is always subjective, and therefore, perceivers will note different affordances, dependent on their needs and interests, and therefore even affordances that remain unnoticed, "continue to exist objectively, latent in the object, waiting to be discovered" (Van Leeuwen 2005:273).

Communicators are continually using the specific affordances of different modes and assembling them to meet the complex needs of the communicator, message to be communicated and the audience (Bezemer and Kress 2008:171-172). This can be noted in the almost endless uses of social media communication where, for example, Facebook, beyond the obvious messaging

system, can now be used as a marketplace, to screen movies, hold live events such as concerts, create and stream advertising, facilitate real time meetings, record and provide archives, and in many cases it has replaced actual physical offices in running businesses (Kretchmer 2020).

Kress's use of affordances has proved extremely valuable to the research of images. But the basic notion of affordances, as first used by Gibson (1979), was intended to prevent the objective properties of things from being divided into strict categories. Although appreciative of the potential that Kress and Van Leeuwen's approach brings, cautions have been raised in scholarship, with some viewing "Kress' treatment of 'affordances' as highly determinative, mutually exclusive, and binary" (Prior 2005:26). Scholars, such as Prior, point out that affordances should be regarded as relational, ecological, and tendential, with more fluidity between affordances such as words and images (Prior 2005: 26). Much of the criticism leveled at *Reading Image: The Grammar of Visual Design* revolved around the impression created by Kress and Van Leeuwen that culture could be neatly placed in mutually exclusive categories and that the different affordances contain precise or universal meanings that can be read from them. In a more nuanced approach to affordances Ian Hutchby (2001) made a distinction between functional and relational affordances with functional affordances providing occasions for action that develops from the communicative properties offered by a materials' properties and relational affordances indicating patterns of actions that develop over time from the use of the material within certain discourses and societies.

Perhaps the notion of affordances will prove more useful if, rather than organizing affordances into predetermined categories, they should be left to emerge from the processes involved in the context of interacting with an object (Prior 2005:29-30; Pink 2015:11).

Recently, the affordances of social media both as technological and social modes have received more dedicated scholarly attention (Eisenlauer and Karatza 2020), bringing about valuable insights as in Jovanovic and Van Leeuwen's (2018:683-699) study of the technological affordances of pre-designed templates for social media, as, for example, emojis on Facebook. Their analysis across several social media platforms suggests that the affordances of the different platforms not only invite changes in the genre and structure of the communication but also can be linked to the emotive reactions evoked. For example, there are only five reaction emojis on Facebook that all represent emotional reactions. There are no emojis to react rationally or evaluate a statement.

Facebook thus funnels conversations away from rational discourse towards emotion-based interchanges (Jovanovic and Van Leeuwen 2018:694). Tagg and Lyons (2021:245) reported a similar finding in their micro-analysis of the ethnographic data of two women of Polish origin living and working in the United Kingdom, looking specifically at their use of mobile messaging apps including WhatsApp and Viber. The study demonstrated that the selection and arrangement of a communication is created by the affordances and limitations of the virtual spaces in which the communication takes place.

Zoe Hurley's (2019:1-16) examination of the affordances of Instagram as used by female Arabic social media influencers indicates that the affordances can appear at three different levels, namely the material, conceptual, and imaginary levels. The movement between these levels gives influencers and followers strategies for managing contradictory modes of representation and self-presentation in society. Mengtian Chen's (2022) study of teaching with digital affordances during the COVID-19 pandemic explored the relationship between the digital platforms, programs, and teachers and concluded that affordance and agency are mutually dependent and must be viewed as a working unit. In an interesting exploration of multimodality on the social media platform TikTok, Wang and Feng (2021:20), using a semiotic framework, analyzed 294 videos, which contribute to the construction of the digitalized urban imaginary of the Chinese city of Xi'an. The TikTok videos serve to highlight the city's dual identity as a modern metropolis and a historical city. Wang and Feng concluded the study by labeling multimodality an affordance of the social media site.

The recent studies on social media/digital affordances serve to highlight the multimodal nature of online communication with social media creating different modal affordances, which in turn present new challenges and limitations in the configuration of the modes.

3.3.2 The Notion of Modal Saliency

The notion of saliency has come into focus in more recent linguistic studies. This concept holds particular interest for multimodal communication that is dependent on multiliteracies. Saliency focuses on the role of processing in understanding meaning. The notion traditionally has been studied to explore why languages have particular properties and how all these properties have been acquired. It seeks to do so by identifying particular mechanisms that shape internal memory as

well as external factors like frequency of use or repeated activation (Chiarcos, Claus, and Grabski 2011).

In earlier research, salience was viewed as an acoustic phenomenon consisting of variables in a sentence, such as phonetic substance, stress level, or serial position (Brown 1973:409). More recently, the notion of salience has been viewed as the perceptual phenomena of preferences in linguistic interpretation and has been expanded to encompass non-acoustic features of communicative stimuli that stand out in various senses (Goldschneider and DeKeyser 2001; Carroll 2006). This would include associations between linguistic elements, frequency or infrequency of patterns in output (Paradis 2004:28), as well as failed expectations when social or linguistic conventions are violated, which could produce surprise effects (Ellis 2016). The notion of salience also seeks to explain implicit social inferences about, or attitudes toward, the communicator (Squires 2016).

In their book *Reading Image: The Grammar of Visual Design* Kress and Van Leeuwen included the notion of salience as an important part of the meaning of a visual composition. The notion of salience includes all “the elements that are made to attract the viewer’s attention to different degrees, as realized by such factors as placement in the foreground or background, relative size, contrasts in tonal value (or colour), differences in sharpness” (1996:183).

Even the placement of text and graphics has information value. Information value is given by the placement of elements in the various sections of the image (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006:177). They go on to explore this in their examples of photographs, stating that, for example, new information or ideas are placed on the right, while the left is the “side of the already given” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:186). Information or images at the top of a layout represent the ideal, while those on the lower section of a spread reinforce the real (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:193). They state that in structured visual compositions the center and margin also carry information value. The center generally carries the “nucleus of the information on which all the other elements are in some sense subservient” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:206). Although the specifics of the information value proposed, has drawn criticism from scholars such as Prior (2005:26), who warn of the danger of overdetermining “modes of communication and their consequences around a small

set of prototypical objects and scenes”, the notion of salience has drawn attention to the representational and interactive meanings of all the interrelated systems in a communication.

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:183) salience together with framing, creates the image’s meaning. While salience embraces all the elements in an image, framing contributes to salience by holding the elements of an image together and directing a viewer’s attention to the image by creating visual borders, often by spaces or dividing lines (Aiello 2020:375). While framing could carry information value and call a viewer’s attention, framing generally functions to direct attention to other features of the image. Framing is also used to indicate relationships between images (Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011:54). Especially in meme creation, different image macros are often framed together, indicating that the images must be read together as a unit. Framing also enables viewers to visualize the context of the image while feeling certain emotions for the subject of the image. In the case of photographs color often serves to create frames (Harrison 2003:56).

Together with framing, color is included in the notion of salience and plays an important part in meaning-making. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002:355), colors carry affordances from which both the communicator and audience can draw in a communicative act. Colors removed from their natural frame become “signifiers in their own right” and “expressive of emotive . . . meanings” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:177). Ideas have been expressed by color for a long time, as in Medieval color symbolism used in classical paintings (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002). Color can be used to denote specific people, places, and things as well as classes of people, classes of places, and classes of things, as well as help in identity formation through association (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002:352). Although modern attempts have been made to decode the universal meaning of particular colors, research has shown that color meaning can vary depending on the culture of the target audience (Gage 1999; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002). The same color may have opposite meanings in a different culture or context (Whitfield and Wiltshire 1990). Colors can work to create different qualities and unique perspectives on an image macro, which can evoke emotional responses in the viewer (Boyce 2021).

3.3.3 Resemiotization and the Process of Multimodality

Not originally part of Kress and Van Leeuwen's toolkit, resemitization was introduced by Rick Iedema (2001) as complementary to the main tenets of multimodal discourse analysis. Resemiotization plays an important part in multimodality. Rather than exploring the separate modes, resemitization examines the how and the why of how multimodality works by examining the social semiotic processes of multimodality. Iedema (2001:24), who introduced the concept of resemitization to multimodal discourse analysis, describes resemitization as "how meaning-making shifts from context to context" as a part of discourse strategies. Iedema viewed resemitization as a practice that is fundamental in creating organization. His well-known work on the building of a health care facility demonstrated the process of resemitization as communication moved through different modes from oral communicatives to written documents and architectural plans that eventually became an actual building (Iedema 2003b:144).

Although Iedema originally focused on the movement from oral to text communications, his research on resemitization in institutional settings has led to claims of a movement towards less embodied formats in text trajectories as a text gets resemitized, as, for example, where sketches and notes might get turned into written reports. This has generally been true for institutional settings, although multiple formats may be in use at the same time (Iedema 2003a). Iedema sees the process of resemitization as a movement from relatively negotiable and readily available towards increasingly durable (Iedema 2003a:43). In contrast to resemitization, Prior and Hengst (2010:1) have opted to describe this movement in terms of remediation. They see remediation as pointing to ways in which a communication is mediated through the materials currently available, while simultaneously changing the conditions for future action. In this way, they avoid the issue of having to identify the different modes involved in the process.

Iedema's work in resemitization has provided framing for some core assumptions of multimodality by insisting that modes cannot be evaluated in isolation and that dynamic changes take place in the communicative movement across modes. Resemiotization appears to structure a range of social-organizational activities by demonstrating that a translation of one kind of meaning into another is not a simple process (Iedema 2003a:44-46). Resemiotization provides an analytical recourse for tracing how semiotics change in visual communication as social processes develop

and why certain semiotics do certain things at certain times. It intersects multimodality by illuminating the “issues of concern to the meaning maker, e.g., the choice of material relations of meaning [and] the social dynamics that shape our multimodal meanings as they emerge” (Iedema 2003a:41).

Every repetitive expression of a sign invariably involves an entirely new set to contextualization and conditions and thus results in an entirely ‘new’ semiotic process, allowing “new semiotic modes and resources to be involved in the repletion process” (Varis and Bommaert 2015:36). Researchers such as Saint-Martin (1995:393) note that each semiotic has its own specific limitations and affordances. For instance, things that can be done with language, cannot completely be done in visual representation, and vice versa (Saint-Martin 1995:387; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:37). Resemiotizations also involve privileging different domains of human experience. This is because each resemiotization requires new resources and restructuring. In the process, different expertise and literacies are drawn from, thus opening different modalities of human experience (Iedema 2003a:48).

Multimodality is continually developing as the different modes interact with new combinations of modes and mediums. This forces a continually changing speaker and audience relationship, creating the need for multiliteracy (Kress 2003). Resemiotization serves to draw attention to the social, cultural, and historical structures of modes (Müller 1994; Schatzki 1996), which must be understood for communication to take place. Ultimately, multiliteracy will determine whether and how a communication is understood.

Resemiotization challenges the pre-set categories of multimodal analysis by shifting the focus of analytical attention from discourse as structured meaning towards a more multi-semiotic representation, which includes the material and historicized dimensions of a communication. It also creates a self-critical and reflexive strand within multimodal analysis, which makes it a useful tool in “doing socially relevant, multi-semiotic discourse analysis” (Iedema 2003a:50).

Although resemiotization broadly captures the social semiotic processes of multimodality, several other concepts have been developed to help focus on different aspects of the dynamic of the process (Oostendorp et al. 2021:9). Bezemer and Kress (2008:175) make a distinction between the kinds of recontextualizations and transformations that take place during resemiotization with the term

‘transformation’ being used to describe changes “in the arrangement within one mode” (Bezemer and Kress 2008:175) and ‘transduction’ referring to “the move of semiotic material from one mode to another” (Bezemer and Kress 2008:175).

Rather than using the term resemiotization, Prior and Hengst (2010:1) highlight social action in multimodality by terming the process semiotic remediation. An additional concept draws attention to the knowledge gained through multimodality. ‘Regenring’, originally introduced by Fiona English (2011) to explain the reshaping of texts and meanings, refers to the transformation of material into different genres or communicative formats while providing new meanings and access to knowledge for the user. English (2018:179) states that “different genres help us to grapple with knowledge more effectively than relying on one alone”.

Recent studies in linguistics have continued exploring the role of resemiotization in different communicative acts. In particular, formats that combine visual and linguistic modes have drawn attention. Dorra Moalla (2021) demonstrated different levels of resemiotization in a video speech. Using a multimodal analysis, Moalla explored resemiotization in a political discourse through an investigation of a video of a 2012 speech by Belaid, a Tunisian politician, on a TV panel discussion. Belaid was assassinated the following year by religious extremists. Building on contextual factors, the paper highlights two levels of resemiotization. On the first level, Belaid repurposed the original purpose of the panel discussion to infuse his ideology and political views. Second, the literal death of the author induced several re-interpretations of this talk. Moalla argues that the different levels of resemiotization are facilitated and highlighted by the integrated use of semiotic resources such as gaze, gestures, camera movements, sound features, and language. Other emergent semiotic resources were then exploited by secondary sign-makers for the re-interpretation of this video.

Matti Nikkilä’s (2021) study of the online treatment of a cartoon mascot also investigated the unpredictability of the resemiotization process and highlights the question of who owns the process. Drawing on nexus analysis, this study analyzed some of the discursive practices and visual material produced during an online gaming controversy. The treatment of a cartoon mascot was discussed through the resemiotizations the character faced. The original character was objectified and sexualized, showing resemiotizations that were not within the initial goals of the community.

The study documents how the community was unable to maintain control of the resemiotizations of the character.

Resemiotization can provide resources for identification in social media as demonstrated by Catherine Tebaldi's (2020) study. Drawing on research in resemiotization and raciolinguistics, Tebaldi analyzed the use of the French accent circumflex, which was inserted on the French flag on Twitter in opposition to the 2016 spelling reforms. On right-wing French Twitter accounts, the resemiotized flag became a symbol of linguistic purism and racist ideology. Tweets with the hashtag #JeSuisCirconflexe shared this ideology by voicing the racial other in pidgin to make them appear illiterate. In reaction to this, the hashtag was resemiotized and reframed from #JeSuisCirconflexe to #JeSuisSirCornflakes by non-White French youth who used playful language and satirized white speech to contest racist French nationalism.

Paradoxically, online resemiotization holds new restrictions as well as new possibilities. Rasmussen and Van Leeuwen (2022) point out that, social practices that have been multimodally enacted, continue being multimodal in the virtual world, as, for example, asking the boss for time off becomes clicking on the online leave application form provided on the company internal website. Although online application processes may be perceived as more multimodal in terms of color, typography, layout and image use, the online interaction may be less multimodal as less senses are engaged. Online interactions are also deliberately resemiotized and designed quite prescriptively in ways that often leave the users with less input and options.

On the other hand, Otsuji and Pennycook (2021) propose the possibilities of more complex, dynamic processes of resemiotization, in which meaning is reconfigured across wider semiotic and artefactual spaces. By examining data from a small store in Tokyo and discussing interartefactual translation from a metrolingual perspective, they show how meaning is reworked across interaction of people, objects, spaces, and languages. They see resemiotization as a form of translation between various semiotic modalities as well as between designs and their instantiation. They argue that thinking of resemiotization in these terms opens a wider area for study that can include online activities and points towards an emmeshed space in which resemiotization interacts with people, languages, things, and places.

3.4 SUMMARY

This chapter provided a brief review of how people have historically been using different modes, often simultaneously, in an attempt to better communicate. After the invention of the printing press, education and learning came to center around the printed text, which dominated the twentieth century as a primary source of academic investigation and communication. Monomodality, as in singular text or print mode, was almost exclusively viewed as the subject of serious study in linguistics. Changes became apparent during the 1960s and 1970s as many writers began reexamining the process of composition. The movement towards multimodality in linguistic studies was accelerated in the 1980s, thanks to a new focus on cognitive research about learning. In the 1990s, multimodality grew in scope with the development of digital technologies. With the advent of the internet, and the resultant surge in social media, communication profoundly changed, and a new literacy emerged. Subsequently, singular mode communication, such as the presentation of text on a page, has given way to complex multimodality forms, both in practice and in much of linguistic research. More recently, significant research has been devoted to understanding the multimodality of visual communications.

Multimodality is dependent on the interaction of multiple modes of communication, with each mode carrying different potentials and constraints for making meaning. Affordances is a term used to describe these different potentials of modes of meaning-making. Communicators are continually using the specific affordances of different modes and assembling them to meet the complex needs of the communicator, the message to be communicated, and the audience to be reached.

Multimodal communication is dependent on multiliteracies. Saliency focuses on the role of processing in understanding meaning, with saliency being formed by the representational and interactive meanings of all the interrelated systems of communication. The notion of saliency also seeks to explain implicit social inferences about, or attitudes toward, the communicator. Resemiotization also plays an important part in multimodality. Rather than exploring the separate modes, resemiotization examines the how and the why of how multimodality works by examining the social semiotic processes of multimodality.

The increased focus on multimodality in research has led to the formation of several theoretical assumptions that now undergird research in multimodality. These are that all communication is

multimodal as it draws on many modes, each of which has the potential to equally contribute to meaning; modes have different representational properties as they each have their own affordances; meaning is created through the selection and configuration of the modes; and multimodality is greatly dependent on the social context in which a sign is created (Jewitt 2009:14-15).

Chapter 4

TOWARDS A BAKHTINIAN APPROACH TO MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In this chapter, a number of theoretical concepts coined by Bakhtin and seen as central to this dissertation will be explored. Together with multimodal discourse analysis (see chapter three), Bakhtin's approach to discourse will be the main theoretical and analytic frameworks of this study. Seeing that the notion of chronotope is based on the dynamic interaction and relationship between time and space (Bakhtin 1994), its potential usefulness as part of the toolkit for meme analysis will also be assessed. To begin, a historic overview of the chronotope is undertaken, tracing its morphosis from a diagnostic tool for patients suffering from dissonance between perceptions of time and space to a means for understanding and categorizing the novel. This is followed by an overview of the difficulties in trying to define chronotopes and the proposal of a working definition. The conceptualization of time and space in chronotopes is then introduced. This is followed by a more specific focus on notions of space in chronotopes. An overview of chronotopes and spatial context in social media and meme construction is then undertaken, followed by a discussion of the Bakhtinian dialogic qualities of text and their relationship to intertextuality. In the sections which follow, the relationships between chronotopes, identity, and the creation of cultural values are explored and the role of memes in identity and culture development is investigated. Finally, the Bakhtin carnivalesque, which has been recognized as a useful tool in recent linguistic studies, is briefly overviewed. This is followed by a concise summary.

4.1 INTRODUCING CHRONOTOPES

The notion of chronotopes was coined and first developed within the context of a literary analysis theory to appropriately understand the literary genre of a novel (Bakhtin 1981).

A little-thought-of but obvious feature of a literary work is the fact that literary time is fundamentally different from normal time. Narratives do not follow normal biological time sequences that begin with conception, gestation, birth, etc. Literary time also does not realistically reflect the life events and stages of the characters. Childhood and youth are not always mentioned

or are only referenced as a reflection. The narrative will highlight a certain event or events and a period of life while ignoring or barely referencing others. Although some literary movements and works, such as, for example, James Joyce's stream of consciousness, have attempted to challenge this literary feature, it has remained a firm foundation of novels and become even more obvious as storytelling mediums dispose of less chronological time (Mendilow 1952). Movies based on books have to condense time even more by leaving out or creating new compilations of scenes that include several events in the novel (Santos 2013). This technologically driven movement to communicate more notions of time in less chronological time has spread across all communication platforms.

This, in turn, has led to an important distinction in terminology in literature, namely the plot and the fabula. The plot is the time sequence of events that an audience either infers or is given as the narration unfolds, while the fabula is the actual temporal sequence of events that the audience frames the narration in but that does not have to be mentioned, such as the fact that the main character was born at some point, or the fact that a human character must sleep (Selden et.al. 2005). A large part of the meaning-making consists in the actual temporal sequence being believable and recognizable from the common experience of life that the audience shares and brings to the reading (Lorino and Tricard 2012). In other words, the fabula could be seen as the linear time that the audience could reassemble by untangling the timeline of the plot.

Literary space, too, is fundamentally different from actual space. The space of a 1,000-mile journey can be covered in a line, while it may take pages for the character to cross the room. Space carries much of context. If the space noted in a text is a room in a luxury hotel, it will carry with it notions of typical furniture, esthetics, emotions, and meanings that will be very different from a dungeon cell and will provide generic values, identities, and competences (Lorino and Tricard 2012). This could be coined the architecture of space.

Literary time and space are closely interwoven (Lorino and Tricard 2012). In many ways, they are indistinguishable, since both time and space in a novel occur in the interchange between the text and the reader's imagination. The one cannot exist without the other. The notion of a chronotope is based on this dynamic interaction and relationship between time and space in literature (Bakhtin 1994).

4.1.1 Historic Overview of the Use of the Term

The word chronotope comes from the Greek nouns *chronos*, “time,” and *topos*, “space,” and refers to the interconnection between time and space (Pick et al. 2015).

The period between the two World Wars was characterized by tremendous advances in the hard sciences, such as mathematics and physics, which focused on the nature of spatio-temporal configurations. Einsteinian relativity theory was gaining widespread attention and focusing on the intrinsic connectedness of time and space (Bemong et al. 2010). Against this backdrop, Bakhtin developed his concept of the chronotope.

The concept of chronotope was first used in the 1920s by the Russian neurophysiologist A. A. Ukhtomsky. Ukhtomsky explored the interaction of time and space as perceived by his patients suffering from chronic cerebral vascular insufficiency and studied the way these patients related to the events surrounding them. He devised a system for measuring the dissidence between perceptions of time and space in his patients. His work went on to play an important part in the mental health sciences (Gomersall 2015).

In 1937 Mikhail Bakhtin proposed a theory as a means of understanding and categorizing the novel. His theory viewed time and space in a novel as connected and non-linear. Baxter, in reflecting on the influence of Bakhtin’s work, states that, “Bakhtin’s life work can be understood as a critique of the monologization of the human experience that he perceived in the dominant linguistic, literary, philosophical, and political theories of his time” (Baxter 2006:102). Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the formulation of the concept of the chronotope. Bakhtin saw in this theory a better way of analyzing Russian literary forms as chronotope structures facilitate opportunities for meaningful ways of understanding agency (Tuomi 2019).

For Bakhtin, the concept of the chronotope was a way of expressing the connections of time, space, and human social action in a literary piece. Before Bakhtin, space and time in narratives were normally considered separate from one another. He saw chronotopes as “a formally constitutive category of literature” where “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (Bakhtin 1981:84).

Rather than having one chronotope in a novel, Bakhtin identified overlapping chronotopes. These chronotopes determine the broad outline of the novel by establishing the time period and geographical setting. Chronotopes would then also influence and be influenced by the characters. They establish the social and political world in which everything else will become meaningful. Chronotopes would help to establish the inner world of the characters by facilitating a formulation of their perception of the world. Specific chronotopes contain a repertoire of specific kinds of person that take certain actions. They play an important part in the novel's worldview, by determining the vocabulary and dialogue patterns as well as the ideological belief systems of the characters of the novel. Chronotopes also enable a plot structure and influence plot development. Chronotopes can extend their influence beyond the covers of the book, as the author also carries his or her own chronotope to the writing of the novel, and readers will bring their own individual chronotopes to the reading of the novel. All of these chronotopes will interact and play a role in making the novel understandable to the reader in specific ways and providing meaning (Bakhtin 1981). Additionally, identifying chronotopes also addresses the co-occurrence of events from different times and places in novels.

The concept of the chronotope was in many ways a reaction to the formalist or structuralist approaches to language and, by default, narrative, such as Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language, which emphasized sign systems as a basis for the formation and development of language. Bakhtin argued that rather than signs and symbols being the genesis of language, language evolves within a community and is thus a part of specific social elements (Holquist 2002).

Due to political and social isolation and controversy¹³ Bakhtin's body of work was overlooked for most of the last century. The concept of the chronotope is, however, making a comeback as it has proven useful as a means to cross over to many other fields of research in different academic fields.

¹³ Bakhtin was born near Moscow, Russia, in 1895. He experienced the radical changes that came with the revolutions of 1917. Bakhtin maintained an association with a wide array of other intellectuals from various disciplines who were influenced by the German philosophy of Kant and the new physics of Planck, Einstein, and Bohr. Bakhtin was arrested in 1929, probably as a result of his religious activities, and exiled to Kazakhstan. Several years later, he was given a professorship at the Mordovian Pedagogical Institute in Saransk. He was, however, denied a doctoral degree. During the 1930s and early 1940s, he completed some of his most important studies on the novel. After his death, his work was discovered in the 1960s by a group of Moscow graduate students. His work spread throughout the West in the 1980s and eventually became the subject of vigorous debate and reassessment in Russia in the mid 1990s (Clark and Holquist 1984).

Apart from literary studies, it is also being used in philosophy, semiotics, cultural studies, anthropology, biblical studies (Green 2000), feminist and post-colonial studies, ethics and studies of Marxism (Bakhtin 1994), and recently also sociolinguistics and discourse analysis (Agha 2007b; Blommaert 2015; De Fina 2016).

4.1.2 Definitions

Trying to define the chronotope concept can be a frustrating enterprise. Unlike many other concepts that can neatly be defined, chronotope has been best defined by its “vagueness and openness” (Bemong et al. 2010:iii). This lack of an all-encompassing and generally accepted definition is perhaps the most fundamental criticism leveled at the concept (Bemong et al. 2010). A second connected criticism is the lack of a “clearly articulated protocol for identifying and analyzing chronotopes and the relations between them” (Ladin 1999:213).

Bakhtin (1981) himself, in his introduction to ‘chronotopes’ in *The Dialogic Imagination*, does not define the concept. Rather, he gives specific examples, which he then discusses and draws out generalizations resulting in the domino effect of helping the concept to acquire ever new related meanings. Scholz (2003:146) remarks that instead of a definition, Bakhtin uses chronotopes in a way that the “meanings only gradually unfold as the argument progresses and the examples accumulate. Bakhtin’s terms, in other words, are frequently encountered ‘in use’, without explicit statement of the rules governing such use”.

The lack of a systematic definition of the concept of chronotope has led to a profusion of types and groupings. Chronotopes are used to refer to both particular narrative genres and particular worldviews held by characters in the world of the narrative as well as the changing spatial situation with an accompanying progression in time as depicted in the literary work (Keunen 2011). Some chronotopes can be associated with particular genres, as, for instance, folkloric chronotopes or the chronotope of the adventure novel of everyday life. Other chronotopes deal with the different types of space related to the historical plausibility of the literary piece and the relationships between the characters as well as with their environments. Some examples of chronotope types include chronotopes of abstract space, which do not represent any real-life place, and chronotopes of concrete space, which normally represent a specific place at a specific and historical point in time. Another category of chronotopes focuses on the environment. They may include alien, native,

static, or dynamic environment chronotopes (Vlasov 1995:43). Keunen goes so far as to propose the teleological chronotope, or the dialogical chronotope, which are based upon where and when the conflict takes place in a narrative (Keunen 2011:81-116).

Some scholars have attempted some level of organization of chronotope types on distinctive levels of abstraction. These, although often referred to under different terms, could be divided into minor and major chronotopes, motifs, and generic chronotopes (Keunen 2000). Even though one generally thinks of chronotopes as encompassing the whole of a novel or literary work, or large parts of it, as one begins looking for chronotopes, the discovery is quickly made that there are an unlimited number of minor chronotopes, even within language units smaller than the sentence. These small units can potentially be minor chronotopes when individual words and phrases contribute to “coherent overarching meanings” (Ladin 1999:216).

The exponential nature of chronotope categorizations continues to be a challenge in the identification and application of chronotopes. Rather than having a clear external definition and categorization system, which is projected over the text, a chronotope, its categorization, and meaning should evolve internally from the text itself (Bemong et al. 2010:4).

Perhaps the closest one could come to a definition would be that the concept of the chronotope situates time and space as being essence categories (also by their interaction) through which human beings perceive and structure their surroundings (Bemong et al. 2010:4). Or perhaps, as Bakhtin himself describes in *The Dialogic Imagination*, a chronotope forms when “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (Bakhtin 1994:84).

4.1.3 Use of Chronotopes in Applied Linguistics

Within discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, chronotopes have also recently received more attention. Jay Lemke (2009:293), in an article on multimodal genres, suggested that tools such as Bakhtin’s notion of a chronotope can be applied “to understand the semiotic contributions of pacing, place, and movement in virtual-world media”.

Blommaert in particular has promoted the use of chronotopes as a means of contextualizing complex discourse (Blommaert 2015:2). According to Blommaert, chronotopes can be seen as “invokable chunks of history organizing the indexical order of discourse” (Blommaert 2015:1).

Chronotopes, which often overlap and coexist, can be particularly useful in the study of the time-space aspect of pragmatics as they provide the context in which certain discourse is “possible, likely, or even inevitable” (Cavanaugh 2004:14).

Recently, a number of studies have been conducted in linguistics that have used the concept of chronotope and added various aspects to chronotope theory, as, for example, the recent study of Sixuan Wang and Anikó Hatoss (2021), which contributes to the methodology of using chronotopes in sociolinguistic research. Taking a qualitative approach while drawing on semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations, they used chronotopes to explore the issues behind the language shift in the Blang community. Wang and Hatoss (2021:2) demonstrate the usefulness of chronotopes as an analytical tool for “understanding how various spatio-temporal configurations drive linguistic practices and how narrators engage with these configurations in their accounts”. They (2021:5) encourage researchers not to attempt to “equate chronotopes with pre-existing time–space capsules” but rather to focus on, what they term, ‘chronotopization’, that is the way in which chronotopes are built, “drawing on existing, intertextual and pretextual moral indexical arrangements”.

Work has also been done applying the notion of chronotopes for research in the area of linguistics and mass media.¹⁴ Christiansen made use of social media platforms in her research and offers a good example of this development. Using a discourse-centered online ethnographic approach, Christiansen (2017:159) examined contexts in which the discourses were formed in conversations posted on Facebook. She proposed that Facebook’s multimodal and qualitative affordances allowed participants to create cultural chronotopes. Also, using Facebook postings as data, Jennifer Delfino’s (2021) semiotic discourse analysis looked at how the figure of the white ally is constructed on Facebook via raciolinguistic chronotopes. Her study highlights the role of framing in chronotope creation. The participants used anti-racism framing histories to produce raciolinguistic chronotopes, which rather than combating racism, placed individuals outside of histories and spaces that drive white privilege. Delfino (2021:255) asserts that the supposedly antiracial chronotopes created were in reality a rearrangement of socially positioned chronotopes “to produce an imagined future of racial equality belied by the durability of racialized bodies across

¹⁴ For more of the discussion of chronotopes in relation to social media, see Section 4.3.1 Chronotopes and Spatial Context in Social Media.

time and space”. Preceding Delfino, chronotopes were also used to investigate racialized discourses by Bonnie Urciuoli (2011:117). Urciuoli (2011:117) describes language that is used in discourses on race as “aspects of the chronotopes within which these events of discourse occur, the space-time envelopes experienced by social actors that anchor their shared social experience – in this case, experience of racial markedness or unmarkedness”.

Christiansen (2019) also focused on another widely used social media platform, namely Twitter. Taking an online-discourse approach, Christiansen traced the participation of Mexican immigrants and children of Mexicans living in the United States of America in an online viral cultural event marking the coming of age fifteenth birthday of a girl. Christiansen (2019:3) found that individuals used Twitter to co-construct chronotopic fields by erasing time and place to form imagined spaces and shared experiences through which they strengthened their ties and Mexican identities. In another study focusing on mobile communicative affordances, Agnieszka Lyons and Caroline Tagg (2019) used an ethnographic approach to explore the ways in which migrant micro-entrepreneurs exploit mobile messaging apps to co-construct mobile chronotopes. They noted the dynamic configurations of time and space as they were negotiated by people who were geographically separated and drawing on different contexts and frames of understanding. Their study highlights the role that multilingual and multimodal semiotic resources play in co-constructing mobile chronotopes. Of particular interest is the exploration of the borders of intersecting chronotopes, which reveal the critical junctures at which communicative expectations are challenged and must be renegotiated. Lyons and Tagg (2019:680) conclude that while the “medium affordances of mobile messaging facilitate a transgression of individual frames within exchanges resulting in intra-interactional mobile chronotope adjustment” mobile chronotopes are not completely dependent on app technology, but also depend on other chronotopes, namely those of “the historical, biographical, and social relations of interactants involved in an exchange”. Rachele Jereza and Sabina Perrino (2020), using a chronotopic lens, analyzed digital discourses on Facebook and YouTube that pertain to Philippine drug users and racialized remarks against migrants in Italy. The study demonstrated that despite their historical, economic, and social differences, far-right ideologies were ordered through chronotopes of national crisis in both cases.

In her analysis of Iranian Twitter users’ reactions to a new orthographic norm, Taraneh Sanei (2021), using a chronotopic approach to the study of discourse, demonstrates the use of

chronotopes as an analytical tool to investigate how chronotopic images are invoked and constructed in order to make legitimate points in an argument. She explores the relationships between ideologically more powerful and accessible chronotopes and their use in power positioning in online argumentation. Sanei (2021:23) advocates for the use of “a chronotopic-scalar lens” in order “to explore how users situate the larger-scale chronotopes within smaller-scale ones”.

The viral video clip of a little girl dancing on a balcony that emerged in Italy in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown provided the focus of Anna de Fina’s (2022) study on the formation and evaluation of chronotopes in social media. In this qualitative study, 125 top postings from a Twitter search of the video clip of the little girl dancing on a balcony were used to explore the formation of chronotopes in mass-mediated environments through repetition and recycling of the same or similar semiotic material (an approach that resonates with the research approach of the current dissertation). De Fina’s study (2022:19) pointed to the central role of stance taking by Twitter users in the creation of the chronotope as a cultural object. This was done through generalizations and upscaling.

Asif Agha (2007a), in the introductory article to a special issue dedicated to the comparative study of chronotopic representations, introduced the issue of chronotopic boundaries and emphasized the need for examining depictions of place-time-and-personhood in mass communication. Agha (2007a:321) sees chronotopes not as a discussion of a place or a period but as a “form of chronotopic organization of semiotic practices, distinctive in the ways in which it links frames of representation to frames of participation”. Taking Agha’s work further and focusing on the interplay of locale, time, and personhood, Nobuhle Lumphondo and Christopher Stroud (2012) found that certain chronotopes can be persistent regardless of changes in the medium used. Employing a chronotopic and multimodal analysis approach, they studied a South African campaign, which aimed at promoting new role models for South African men in an attempt to combat the spread of HIV. Lumphondo and Stroud (2012:56) found that the chronotopes of masculinity that reinforce or transform general perceptions and practices of masculinity remained constant despite the difference in contexts of production and consumption.

Since Agha's (2007) appeal to also include personhood in chronotopic investigations, identity formation has become an important part of the way in which chronotopes have been used in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis (see, for example, Blommaert and De Fina 2017; Procházka 2018). Focusing on the role of participants in chronotope formation, Yi-Ju Lai (2020) examined the instructional practices between bilingual international teaching assistants and undergraduate physics students using a multimodal conversation analysis approach in addition to the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope. Lai's findings illustrate that the simultaneous chronotopes of physics discursive practices engaged both the teaching assistants and the students, necessitating the joint attention and input from both parties as co-contributors to meaning-making. The chronotopic link created a space in which knowledge construction took place through an integration of mathematical symbolism and images.

The theme of identity formation was also explored in a study by Farazad Karimzad and Lydia Catedral (2017), who investigated ethnolinguistic identity using the notion of chronotope. Taking an ethnographic approach, they analyzed the linguistic data from Azerbaijani and Uzbek communities, tracing the impact of various chronotopes on the participants' acts of ethnolinguistic identification. Karimzad and Catedral's (2017:109) study demonstrates that ethnolinguistic identification is an outcome of the interaction between multiple levels of large and small-scale chronotopes, which "guided their discursive processes of (de) authenticating certain identities".

The explosion of studies using chronotopes within sociolinguistics and discourse analysis illustrates the ongoing efforts to find theoretical concepts that can deal with complexity in communication.

4.2 THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TIME AND SPACE IN CHRONOTOPES

Although time is a key element of the chronotope concept (Travi 2015), for Bakhtin time and space are never separable, as events are always correlated to a chronology, and each chronotope is intrinsically attached to both the temporal and spatial interaction, which create the concrete whole of a particular world.

Bakhtin believed that chronotope time was layered (Lakoff et al. 2003) and included not only linear progress, but also flashbacks and forward-leaps, which, while helping in facilitating meaningful

ways of understanding agency, even influenced the future fate of protagonists in the novel (Tuomi 2019). Bakhtin found in the history of Western literature a showcase of how different narrative forms have historically embedded unique norms about time and space, causality, and the human agents affecting change (Bakhtin 1981). Each historical form of chronotope carried with it a model of causality and agency, which both facilitated and limited the stories that would have meaning in its context.

Thus, a chronotope serves as a dynamic reference point for experience, with each participant occupying their own place in reality. Each participant then shares from this time-space position in a dialogical interaction with the other participants situated in their unique time and space. This interaction creates yet-to-be futures, and each unique act effectively contributes to the future.

The influence of chronotopes on time is demonstrated in that different chronotopes lead to different ways of understanding the future. Tuomi (2019) identifies several chronotopes that serve as frameworks for understanding, referencing, and influencing the future. Among them, he mentions recursive chronotopes that point to the future as a repetition of the past, in contrast to constructivist foresight chronotopes, which do not point to the past to know the future but rather aim at actively laying the foundation for new realities that will create the future.

Chronotopes can powerfully influence time by being able to make and anticipate futures. Choosing a different chronotope would then in turn create different futures and provide new possibilities for action. It used to be possible to see all the new content in an individual social media feed. When social media first became widely used, people read the content in a chronological order and could reach the end of new content by the end of the day (Veix 2018). Multiple social media platforms, each with their continuous flood of new feeds, now transcend space and time, offering an infinite scroll of content faster than can reasonably be consumed.

Social media has had a profound effect on how time is perceived, completely disrupting a linear experience of time. Due to the nature and possibilities of social media, on-line interactions can remain unaffected as physical contexts change, which allows individuals to re-enter existing mobile communicative spaces at different times, as well as revisiting earlier moments in the communication (Lyons and Tagg 2019).

Memos play a role in this new perception of time, with memos often creating a feeling of participation in a live event or witnessing a particular moment. Part of this active participation and timeless now-ness of the memo is created by the comments that often accompany the posting of the memos, where participants will interact, answer, and comment on previous comments randomly without reference to the time flow of the previous comments (Rentschler 2004).

4.3 NOTIONS OF SPACE IN CHRONOTOPES

Context has always been central to sociolinguistic approaches to meaning-making as it is a fundamental part of language (Scollon 1998:80). Perceptions of context are based on and create the space for actors and activities to take place in (Duranti and Goodwin 1992:4). Assumed in the notion of this space is often the underlying idea that spatial context is more or less sedentary, always local, and often static and stable. Context, however, also carries a dynamic aspect that adjusts to mobility and is continuously evolving as it becomes the location for action (Blommaert 2016). The concept of chronotopes can help to critically check the superficial and inadequate way in which the term ‘context’ has been used in a range of disciplines (Blommaert 2018).

The chronotope could also prove a useful tool in connecting the stable to the dynamic aspects of space. According to Bakhtin (1981) the chronotope is a time space configuration. Blommaert calls it an “objective bit of context”, characterized, and joined, by ideological or more “subjective” features. This combination of particular times and places creates an environment that stipulates who can act and which actions are normative. The chronotope would then also determine how these actions would be evaluated by others, who may not share the chronotope. For instance, a good cowboy in a Western is expected to be tough and not overly expressive of his feelings. He is expected to be a good horse rider and a good shot, and inspired by the noble motives of justice and coming to the aid of the helpless. We would expect his actions to fit in with this pattern. A cowboy who cannot ride a horse or who starts crying loudly would be judged by the audience as not being a real cowboy. In this way, the chronotope offers a dynamic unit in which time and space can work together. Combined with multiple chronotopes, they will influence the characters, and even the dialogue of the narrative. Chronotope can even go further in not just bridging the sedentary context with the more dynamic or mobile aspects of spatial context but even provides a specific ethnographic description which carries explanatory potential as well (Blommaert 2018).

Chronotopes highlight the fact that individual actions that are specific to a particular context or space at a certain time are also part of a much larger context at the social and not just the individual level. Procházka refers to these actions as the ‘micro’ facts that invoke a ‘macro’ context within discursive communication (Procházka 2018). These levels of context are what Procházka (2018) describes as “nested chronotopic frames”. These actions can be seen as “micro act[s] of contextualization”, that operate in the larger space as “translocal (macro) meanings” (Blommaert 2015:107).

4.3.1 Chronotopes and Spatial Context in Social Media

Rosamond (2018:1) states that online communications “take place in a strange space: one that blurs the distinctions between the immediate and the remote, the intimate and the abstract”. Chronotopes are useful in understanding this strange space. Social media is the shared transnational space of communication, which is co-created by people who do not know each other in a literal physical space but communicate in a non-territorialized place (cf. Blommaert and de Fina 2017; Blommaert 2018; Szabla and Blommaert 2018). Online conversations create virtual spaces and facilitate chronotopic fields by erasing literal time and physical place to form imagined spaces in which people can interact in the same virtual place when in reality they may be separated by national borders and multiple time zones (Christiansen 2017). This virtual space of online communication provides for shared experiences and the strengthening or formation of new identities.

Context has been recognized as a vital part of the communication process in linguistics for some time. Its complexity, too, has long been acknowledged. With the invention of social media platforms, the complexity and constructed nature of ‘context’ has once again come into focus. In early mobile communication, some researchers, such as Meyrowitz (1985), assumed that online communication was devoid of a sense of spatial context. Subsequent researchers realized that instead of online communication being devoid of place, offering one level of context, it should rather be viewed as involving multiple places and contexts simultaneously, especially considering the fact that people, who communicate through social media, are located both in their physical location and in the context created by their on-line communication. This would make all online

communication “always translocal” (Kytölä 2016:375), with a more complex context to be deciphered.

It has also been noted that social media users themselves engage with various spaces and contexts simultaneously, both on and offline with fluctuating attention levels (Jones 2004). This “multicommunicating” (Reinsch, Turner, and Tinsley 2008), “makes new media communication different from old ways of communicating” (Jones 2009:16), with both tasks and contexts flowing together and affecting one another (Cohen 2015).

The concept of a mobile chronotope is useful in addressing this complexity without supposing a distinction between offline and online contexts (Blommaert and de Fina 2016). It also recognizes the social media user’s ability to work with the various time-space arrangements, which are happening concurrently across mobile and physical spaces (Lyons 2015).

Social media both creates and is created by certain chronotopic expectations (Ito and Okabe 2005). Social media platforms generate a sense of social and physical closeness and create expectations of intimacy and informality. This is reflected by the private, casual register normally used. The physical proximity is reinforced by very frequent ‘check-ins’ – happening often hourly (Rainie and Wellman 2012:170) – and helps foster a sense of intimacy and closeness despite less physical company (Wei and Lo 2006; Christensen 2009; Yu et al. 2017).

4.3.2 Space and Memes

The internet has become synonymous with the space that facilitates viral-like dissemination of content. It would seem that, at least on social media platforms, memes are at the forefront of this space that promotes spread (Kolman 2018).

The participatory nature of a meme allows for a compact space, often with the trigger of an image macro, to fill to become a space in which a specific chronotope can play out. For example, an image macro of a desk and chair will create office space and bring to mind all of the chronotopes of office relationships, problems with bosses, etc. It is this compact space setting ability of memes that make them particularly effective and timeless, allowing the social media user to relate to the meme and understand the intersection of this office chronotope with other chronotopes, e.g., the

chronotope of someone getting the better of a thoughtless co-worker, to understand and acknowledge the humor of that particular meme (Varis and Blommaert 2015).

As has been noted already, memes are rarely limited to a single geographic location. Social media, particularly platforms such as Facebook, are well suited to cross national boundaries. Humorous memes in particular seem to carry well across linguistic and cultural borders. This in itself seems to be paradoxical, as humor is often viewed as being linguistically and culturally bound. But studies suggest that gender differences and consumerism chronotopes seem to be easily understood globally (Shifman 2014:159).

Up to this point, research into the role of memes as part of a process of Westernization and Americanization is inclusive (Shifman 2014a). Some countries, such as China, have been wary of this process and have banned social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, and introduced alternative platforms, such as Sino Weibo, to keep these foreign processes out. However, many memes still seem to be able to make the jump to these more controlled platforms because memes often morph to fit into local culture, which makes pinpointing a meme's origin difficult. A good example of this is the 2012 viral video meme 'Gangman style' music video, which produced an astounding amount of modifications, reinventions, and adaptations in many languages and cultural contexts.

Although memes provide space for various interconnected chronotopes, the process of its global spread to different national and linguistic spaces is facilitated by ordinary internet users who customize the form, content, and stance of a meme and then distribute it (Shifman 2014a:155).

Memes provide a space for creating a wide variety of contexts that bring chronotopes of local meaning to memes and help to construct and maintain personal and collective identities, while also often playing a part in globalization (Eckert 2004). Memes are created, used, and shared almost exclusively on social media and thus share a unique mobile chronotope. The term 'mobile' does not suggest that other types of chronotopes are fixed and not dynamic, but mobile chronotopes recognize the inherently dynamic nature of memes (Agha 2007b). Within this chronotope a meme can be identified as a text and image based on a socially conditioned configuration of time and space within a virtual communication exchange. As with other chronotopes, mobile chronotopes are co-constructed by contributors, who use different facets of their individual and collective

communicative backgrounds. This includes their biographies, histories, beliefs, and values, as well as their actual physical spaces and includes also their spatio-temporal understanding of the world. All of these can be examined as individual chronotopes and the relationships between these layers of chronotopes will all contribute towards the meaning (Lyons and Tagg 2019).

Bakhtin (1981) was also one of the researchers, who from very early on was interested in the relationships not only between different chronotopes but between other texts and discourses.

4.4 DIALOGIC QUALITIES OF TEXT

Bakhtin did not coin the term intertextuality, but his ideas on the dialogic qualities of text was fundamental in Julia Kristeva's coinage of the concept. According to Bakhtin (1981:276), any discourse "finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value". Any discourse is embedded in an entangled web of other discourses it "merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group" (Bakhtin 1981:276). Crucially, all of these prior discourses shape the current discourse and may leave traces (Bakhtin 1981:276). As such all communication is an act of appropriation in that it is never original but already permeated with the history of its use (Allen 2000:28).

Intertextuality as a term is not restricted to literary arts. Intertextuality has been used in reference to theatrical productions (Carlson 1994) and can also be used as a bridge between literary and non-literary communication forms. Already in the 1980s Wendy Steiner began using it extensively in her analysis of paintings (Steiner 1985). Intertextuality has also been used as artistic expression by mixing and exploiting the tension between photo images and texts. Barbara Kruger used the tension between a photograph's apparent unmediated vision of the world and showed its dependence on genres and conventions by building text into the photographic images (Allen 2000). Of particular interest for this study is the early recognition of the role of intertextuality and multimodality as important elements in the chronotope, as shown in a 1986 study of six political posters, which consisted of visual images with text that evolved over time to develop the political message for the viewer (Hutcheon 1989:106). Using image macros and text these posters were intertextual in genre and code, as well as in the placement of the posters. This connected well to the Bakhtinian notion of the social situatedness of art (Allen 2000), already anticipating the usefulness of the notion of chronotope in the study of internet memes.

Within linguistics, intertextuality was taken up early, especially in connection to language in education (Lemke 1992; Duff 2003), linguistic anthropology (Briggs and Bauman 1992) and critical discourse analysis. Already in 1992 Fairclough made a call for “systematic textual analysis as a part of discourse” (1992:193). He also observed that intertextuality involved more than working with the text but that “audience anticipation is always relevant to intertextuality” (1992:208). Since then, multiple studies within linguistics have contributed insights and methodological development in the area of intertextuality.

Patricia Duff’s (2004) study examined the intertextuality of the infusion of pop culture in educational discourse. In her article, she analyzed the linguistic, social, cognitive, and affective features of pop-culture-infused talk that influenced meaning-making and identity among students. Duff (2004:238) noted that intertextuality was more than associations among texts but that it was also “the result of social actions that brought the various textual strands and voices together in the first place”. Intertextuality, which referenced pop culture, also served as a “powerful resource for the display of class members’ various social and cultural identities” (Duff 2004:252).

Introducing the notion of intertextual chaining, Anna Solin, in her study analyzed the intertextual relations in public discourse. The concept of intertextual chains refers to the process in which claims produced within one domain are taken up in other domains and travel across domains (Solín 2004:273). In her detailed analysis of an environmental debate on air pollution in the United Kingdom, Solin followed the contributions from science, government, the press, and an environmental pressure group. The analysis supports the assumption that intertextual chains are not a neutral form of mediation, and that there are significant constraints on textual interaction among different groups.

Helen Caple and Monika Bednarek (2010) explored the intertextual and multisemiotic play used in an Australian newspaper and its interpretation by readers, using a corpus linguistic methodology. Caple and Bednarek (2010:220) conclude that an image-nuclear news story is “complex in its multimodality and intertextuality” and necessitates a research focus that moves “beyond purely ‘language’-based corpora”.

Also moving beyond only linguistic intertextual forms, Christopher Hart (2017) in his article examined metaphor and intertextuality in the media framings of the 1984-1985 British Miners’

Strike. Drawing on cognitive linguistics and critical discourse theory, he examined the metaphorical framing of the strike, which led to media strategies of either delegitimation or legitimation of the strike. The study illustrates the important role that intertextuality, that is, the appropriation of or allusion to prior texts, both linguistic and visual, plays in the framing of the current text. Intertextuality also provides a vehicle for metaphorical interpretation (Hart 2017:25). Intertextuality is not limited to text or linguistic forms. Hart points out that a visual or pictorial metaphor often involves visual forms of intertextuality where an image that resembles or is reminiscent of another image is used with the new story. The intertextuality of this image then serves to give the article a particular frame (Hart 2017:17).

Intertextuality can also play an important role in identity development. Kristin Helland (2017) conducted a multilingual, multimodal critical discourse analysis of several videos by Mona AKA Sad Girl, a Japanese/Mexican rapper, who sings in English, Japanese, and Spanish. Helland's genre-based research studied how the artist constructed a feminist global identity through a combination of song lyrics, musical style, cultural iconography, body decoration, gestures, and film techniques. Her use of intertextuality enabled Mona to create "a hybrid identity that is in the constant process of syncretizing and mixing through local-global multidirectionality" (Helland 2017:38).

Villy Tsakona (2017) explored the interplay between intertextuality and humor in contemporary political jokes. Her study emphasized the role that intertextuality plays in setting the boundaries between the ingroup and outgroup. Tsakona's work (2017:3) also pointed out that parody "is built on intertextuality and cannot be understood unless one identifies the original text referred to". Humor has been studied through an intertextual lens in other contexts as well. Marta Dynel (2021) developed the idea of multimodal voicing as a tool for describing user-generated online humor in her study of humorous COVID-19 mask memes. Using multimodal discourse analysis, she explored the Bakhtinian notion of voicing (Bakhtin 1981:45) that she identifies as a certain type of intertextuality in which the reader can identify two recognizable voices in the meme. In this type of parody, "a second voice that exaggerates, critiques, ridicules, interrogates, or otherwise polemicizes the first voice" (Dynel 2021:180) helps to create the humor.

In an earlier study, William Feng and Peter Wignell (2011) had also referred to the Bakhtinian notion of voicing as they explored intertextuality across a number of semiotic resources in their multimodal analysis of TV advertisements. More specifically, they focused on the interaction between intertextual voices and the advertised message, as well as the multimodal construction of voices and engagement in advertising discourse. Feng and Wignell's (2011:566) study demonstrated the process in which intertextual voices frame advertising discourse to be "ideologically motivated to manipulate readers' attitude and behaviour".

Also, developing the notion of voicing, Katherine Arnold-Murray (2021), using a quantitative analysis approach, examined the multimodality of the construction of dialogue in political commercials using a variety of semiotic resources. Her work illustrates how intertextuality is used in campaign voices to keep the opponent reframing their words and reconstructing their identities.

Recognizing the potential to analyze and critique social relations of power and solidarity through intertextuality, Michael Farrelly (2020) helped to further develop the methodological framework for intertextuality by extending the analytical categories for intertextual reference beyond parts of texts to include whole texts and adding the concept of intertext which specifically identifies aspects of social practices that are being drawn on in the discourse. These can be combined to form networks of intertexts which give a more complete view of the intertextuality of the discourse being analyzed. He also introduced the concept of typicality, which Farrelly (2020:16) describes as "key to moving the focus of intertextuality from specific texts – important as they are – to the level of discourse and orders of discourse".

Since the invention of the World Wide Web, every item, be it text or image, is connected with accelerating connectivity to both other texts and images as well as other media devices. This means that intertextuality is experienced today at a more material as well as ideological level. George Landow refers, for example, to referenced material in a scholarly article, which in print form are difficult to follow, as the references are often found at the end of the article or in footnotes. The reader would have to leave the article and look up the reference and then physically go to a library to look for the reference. With intext references embedded in an online article, the reader simply could double-click to go straight to the article referenced (Landow 2006). Coughlan, remarking on intertextuality in cyberspace, writes that if "the computer is the point of intersection between

physical space and cyberspace, then the text is the porthole to the space of intertextuality, each text simply one exposed section of a limitless network of other texts which are, some would say, already present within that one text” (Coughlan 1997:116).

Since all textual, artistic, and historical material is being digitally recoded (McGann 2001) and all online communication is taking place through the intertextual process of “appropriating, mixing and transposing styles and functions” (Allen 2000:215), this makes this “a fundamentally intertextual phenomenon” (Landow 1994:10). Multimodality, too, is continually developing online as different modes interact with new combinations of modes and mediums (Kress 2003).

Both intertextuality and multimodality are intrinsically connected to chronotopes. Chronotopes are in themselves intertextual and multimodal as they are made up of spatial/temporal frames, which play a key role in the production of meaning. The spatial/temporal frames are drawn from multiple modes linked with certain value systems, identity markers, and even generic characters. The creation of the chronotope, as well as its interpretation, is dependent on various historical, social, and cultural settings (Lorino and Tricard 2012).

Any chronotope, like frames and modes, can be broken down into a number of smaller chronotopes to specify different parts of the communication that is being undertaken (Blommaert 2015). Like a Russian nesting doll, chronotopes are nested within chronotopes, with specific points and general ones interacting continually. These specific points of interaction are facilitated by means of intertextuality and multimodality (Procházka 2018).

While Bakhtin recognized the dialogic qualities of text in a novel, Julia Kristeva, who coined the term intertextuality (Allen 2011:15), took this further by exploring the interrelationship between a text and other texts or interpretations, which can be multilayered (Orr 2003:24-28). Intertextuality lends itself to the world of social media, where memes are created and promulgated through interrelationships. Layers of borrowed and transformed texts are combined to create a meme that assumes a reader’s prior knowledge, familiarity, and understanding (Genette 1997). Memes feed off all types of intertextuality, using obligatory, optional, and accidental intertextuality for meaning (Fitzsimmons 2013).

Noting this, Eline Zenner and Dirk Geeraerts (2018:167), using a cognitive linguistic analysis, examined internet meme image macros. They proposed that multimodality, multilingualism, intra-genre intertextuality, and external referencing formed the components of the image macro meme construction and suggested that this subgenre of internet memes could “open up promising research avenues” (Zenner and Geeraerts 2018:167).

As already noted, memes are not only intertextual but also multimodal. The textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and visual components of a meme are all used to communicate. The whole organization of the content and the interaction between these elements create meaning (Lutkewitte 2013).

While intertextuality and multimodality are a part of the notion of a chronotope, the complexity of time-space is a key aspect in this concept.

Considering the fact that a meme can be described as an intertextual, multimodal, recontextualized form of communication, studying memes provides a fertile area for exploring the questions of time, space, and identity (Allen 2011:213-216).

4.5 CHRONOTOPES AS A MEANS OF ESTABLISHING IDENTITY AND CULTURAL VALUES

Identity has always been a vague notion – even before the arrival of the internet and social media. Philosophers have long questioned and theorized about the notion of identity and semiotic markers such as Miss, Mrs., His Lordship, Jr., Snr., have widely been used to help answer questions of identity. In the late nineteenth century, the drive to identify individuals took on a new urgency with the issuing of photo identity cards, signatures, and fingerprints. More recently, the focus on credit scores, passwords, IP address activity, biometric, and psychometric data demonstrates an expanding focus on identifying people. This drive to identify has paradoxically been coupled with a probing of the very concept of identity itself (Tagg 1988). Identity can be investigated with multidisciplinary approaches as it is an important notion in multiple fields. For instance, it may be viewed through the lenses of psychology (Cheek 1989), post-modern literary theories, feminism (Meyers 2004), cultural studies (Thompson 1989), communication, or language studies (Fishman 1999).

Language and notions of identity have long been connected at different levels (Irvine 1989). Ideological identities within discourse have been pointed out by early researchers such as Foucault (1972) and Fairclough (1992), who explored the nexus of language, culture, and politics. Identity also played an important role in the groundbreaking systemic functional linguistics framework originated by Halliday (1978). Chomsky, a founding figure in modern linguistics, referred to generic categories of identity within the grammatical structures of language (Chomsky 1986). Identity like language formation has been shown to be a dynamic complex process influenced by unconscious psychological processes (De Vos 1992).

In identity studies there seems to be a broad consensus developing that moves towards an anti-essentialist or constructivist understanding of both self and group identity in which identity is not seen as part of a pre-social, invariable set of characteristics. Identity is preserved rather as group and individual imaginations. “Collective identities thus result from an ongoing process of construction and reproduction of shared understandings about a group’s self” (Hülse 1999:2).

Due to the nature of digital media, group as well as individual identities have become more dynamic (Varis et al. 2015). Traditionally, culture and cultural values were shaped or imagined by the language, ideas, customs, and social behaviors of an elite group (such as a king and royal court), which then trickled down to be constructed, adapted, and reproduced in the different strata of society. The democratizing power of digital culture, however, has empowered everyone to influence and be influenced by culture and seems to be capable of transcending geographic borders and even languages (Shifman 2014a).

We begin to see, for instance, how physical and social mobility operate by moving across time-space configurations, which involves a reshuffling of the social and cultural capital required for identity construction, prestige, and power, through, what Hymes calls, “functional relativity” (1996:44-45).

In the early twenty-first century, cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall fundamentally challenged notions of cultural identity, while still recognizing the political and discursive value of how identities came to be described and understood. Hall and others attempted to promote an understanding of identity that emphasized “not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much

as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are . . . constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall 1996:4).

Hall’s attempt to promote an identity that is created by an individual rather than what is societally conferred has arguably had some success in drives for gender-neutral language and more options in self-identifying gender and sexual orientation. However, identity for the individual at large has become more uncertain and susceptible to regulation, modification, and even complete transformation by others online where identity and online reputation have become fused. Social media is built around online rankings and ratings, which serve to quantify online users’ reputations. This online world is potentially volatile with reputations being made and lost sometimes with little or no consent by the individual. The effects of this identification can carry over into real life and have tangible consequences. This has been harnessed by political strategists, such as Steve Bannon, who have realized the potential of reputational violence to discredit political opponents (Rosamond 2018).

Chronotopes are not blank meaning containers. Bakhtin (1981:243) stresses that each generic chronotope is linked with certain types of emotions, values, and therefore identities:

In literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values. Abstract thought can, of course, think time and space as separate entities and conceive them as things apart from the emotions and values that attach to them. But living artistic perception (which also of course involves thought, but not abstract thought) makes no such divisions Art and literature are shot through with chronotopic values of various degrees and scope.

Bakhtin also states that the chronotope does not provide only the internal structure, map, and configuration of the narrative, but also a link between the narrative content and the social, cultural, and historical context of the communication (cf. Lorino and Tricard 2012).

Chronotopes are needed to provide context. Specific context has become extremely difficult to determine with the emergence of a global context in which social media users are not only passive receivers of cultural units but are actively participating in a continuous reciprocal interchange (Roberts 2008). Cultural units like memes do not enjoy any special status online. They are

generally not treated as cultural icons or displayed as works of art in galleries that invite serious thought and critical analysis. They circulate widely, often without an author or artist's credit, and rely heavily on context to be recognized and understood. Before the emergence of social media, ordinary objects and works of art or units of culture were normally easily distinguished from one another by authoritative voices on recognized platforms. Art images were viewed in museums and galleries with captions, and culture was guided by books and magazines. Context online is largely absent. Adding to this, social media users are not only receiving unmediated culture but are downloading images, transforming them, and then uploading them again, causing an often-drastic change in meaning through appropriation, remixes, and context switching (Tanni 2014).

4.5.1 Memes and Identity, and Culture Development

Interacting with photos has been a part of digital culture since its start (Kuipers 2002) and has always been a way of imagining identity. This close connection with identity becomes obvious in the explosion of 'Selfie' pictures that have proliferated all over social media since the rapid development of cellphone photography that easily facilitated self-portraits (Detweiler 2018).

These non-professional ways of expressing cultural elements are often characterized by low resolution, and are often not edited or retouched. What would have been inappropriate or crude to discuss or mention in public, such as swear words or bodily functions, are often used in an attempt to make posts seem more authentic (Tanni 2014).

Since image memes, which are photographic images or drawings with superimposed text, seem to be an important unit of cultural transmission, a study of these memes can provide important keys for understanding social and cultural practices as well as offer valuable insights into cultural values, identity, and transmission (Hülse 1999).

There are currently enormous amounts of memes circulating on social media platforms. And while it is theoretically possible for anyone to use a meme creation app or site, which would make possible meme types unlimited, there are in actuality a fairly small number of standard meme types that are well known and normally used (Shifman 2014b:342). This phenomenon points to the existence of online communities.

De la Rosa-Carrillo explains the process of meme creation through community, “. . . just because a person . . . generates specific instances of content that look like Internet Memes does not mean that they will in fact become Internet Memes, since only the internet culture itself will decide whether or not they are in fact Internet Memes” (2015:22).

Although social media users are normally physically isolated, they innately want to see and be seen by others. They want to create a shared culture. Memes help to provide this shared culture by encouraging users’ ingenuity, creativity, and participation in various levels of society (Aslan 2018).

According to Shifman (2014b:342), memes that become very popular templates and are used by meme creators through sharing serve to create a “sense of community in a fragmented world”. This sense of community is not universal or equally inclusive and often plays into antagonism and attempts at manipulation. Rather than providing a community in which all are embraced and have an equal voice, memes help in the establishment and maintenance of many online communities that may or may not overlap. All of these in turn develop their own culture and gatekeeping practices (Milner 2016). In other words, notwithstanding the fact that images, which are the most significant carriers of technological culture can jump all kinds of national, social, and linguistic barriers, people living in different cultures and societies react to and understand these images in totally distinct ways (Yengin and Algul 2019).

Fiske draws a distinction between diversity and multiplicity in social media. He points out that while the two terms are often treated like synonyms, they are not the same, with multiplicity producing ‘more of the same’, while diversity produces ‘alternative and new’ (Fiske 1994). It can be argued that memes, although capable of contributing towards new communities and identities, most often by virtue of their sheer volume, rather contribute to multiplicity than true diversity.

Memes can and do provide new types of culture by providing and spreading a grass roots movement that can combine pop culture, politics, sports, and a more academic culture in totally unexpected ways. They also shape and reflect general social mindsets. Cultural reproduction is generally driven by means of copying and imitation, which has become a big part of participatory culture. Memes as a part of this participatory culture are not universal, and there will be no universal meaning to a particular meme. Rather, memes require complex and multiple literacies in

order to understand their meaning and value that will change across a range of different global contexts (Jenkins et al. 2013).

Although memes are described as cultural units, it is important to remember that a particular meme is not a single cultural unit that has spread successfully. Memes are rather groups of items that are common cultural characteristics or are created with the awareness of other cultural icons or references (Shifman 2014a). While seemingly only trivial pieces of pop culture, memes also provide social commentary on events and seem to serve as a filter for what really becomes newsworthy. They can serve as a prism for understanding contemporary culture from the inside, “embracing the whole set of implications and meanings ascribed to it over the years” (Shifman 2014a:6).

The life span of a particular meme is rarely of lasting importance. Rather, memes provide the means for conversations and commentary from multiple sources. Individual memes serve as conversation turns or political arguments. They can be used to express an emotion or spread an idea. Interaction with cultural artifacts is now easier than ever. For example, it is now very easy to react to, reference, and repurpose a scene from a movie in the 1980s. Cultural industries do still have a big influence on cultural trends and development as they do still control a large portion of media content but this role is becoming blurred as more people find ways to express themselves and become culture trendsetters in their own right. Cultural industries, then, often appropriate material from popular sources (Milner 2016), as when news outlets pick up and report on a viral social media meme.

An internet meme goes through a recontextualization with each posting. This sometimes involves changes to the meme. Even though the meme may undergo radical changes as it is spread, every change must still be based on recognizability, and therefore, to a certain extent, on normativity. Seeing that social media is ordered by specific time-space structures, chronotopes can provide a basis for identifying complex social and cultural processes in the many overlapping online contexts needed for understanding memes.

Identities are continually being assembled, shared, modified, and deconstructed on social media. For example, a public figure’s identity is formed and evolves as “intertextual references move across different semiotic modes” (Oostendorp 2014:43). Identity is continually formed and

modified in memes by reference to specific historical and or cultural icons, which are combined with specific discursive formations and practices by specific schemes.

Memes are organized around certain chronotopes and users are continually both adopting and negotiating various aspects of particular normality “derived from the recognizability of relevant indexical orders with respect to specific chronotopic conditions” (Procházka 2018:85). This can, in turn, provide a window into identity formation by observing adherence and nonadherence to the group’s normality chronotope and the resultant dynamics of online community formation.

In a single meme, chronotopes often coexist, and multiple chronotopes interplay in the resultant communication. A chronotopic interpretation of a communication such as a meme is “never pure” but “always accomplished in terms of evaluation of what is perceived” (Holquist 2002:152) and reveals the meme user’s chronotopes, which are informed by various external factors and what they consider suitable on-line communicative behavior.

Online community formation often involves shared humor. In the following section the relationship between memes and humor will be further explored.

4.6 THE CARNIVALESQUE

According to Bakhtin (1984:5), carnivals were of utmost importance to medieval life. Carnival is described as not a spectacle that people attend – rather people participate in it. Carnival represents a “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (Bakhtin 1984:10). The notion of the carnivalesque has been taken up within the broader humanities in an array of different theoretical and analytical frameworks (Ravenscroft and Gilchrist 2009; Meddaugh 2010; Goh 2013; Khan 2020). The notion has come into particular focus in linguistic studies over the last few years. Although it has been used broadly in the humanities, this discussion will focus almost exclusively on the way in which the idea of carnival has been taken up in linguistics. Hoi-Yi Katy Kan in her book, *Digital Carnivalesque*, explores the usefulness of this “sharp empirical tool” and demonstrates, “a repositioning of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque as a fresh theoretical framework in light of its attendant orientation toward comedic performances as broadly counter-narrative in today’s performance-sensitive social media space” (Kan 2020:67). In her book Kan adopts a multimodal

critical discourse approach to challenge the framing of comedic acts as apolitical but rather as forms of power. The Bakhtin carnivalesque has been recognized as useful and developed in a number of more recent linguistic studies.

Taking up on the exploration of counternarrative, Corey Fanglei Huang, using a Bakhtinian carnivalesque approach (2022), explored some of the political implications of satirical poster collages at a Hong Kong University. For Bakhtin (1984), the carnival enacts a critical type of sociocultural and political contravention by temporarily suspending or inverting social relations, and the corresponding everyday cultural and political boundaries, which was demonstrated by “exaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness” (Bakhtin 1984:303). The study found that by temporarily removing social and political hierarchy, carnivalesque provides an “alternative world and worldview of universal freedom, equality and unity to those structured by powerful social and political institutions” (Huang 2022:2).

In an earlier study Häkkinen and Leppänen (2014:8) investigated mashup videos in which clips of politicians were carnivalistically resemiotized to make politicians laughable and ridiculous. Häkkinen and Leppänen draw on the Bakhtinian notion of carnivalistic laughter (Bakhtin 1984:106-109) to point out that in parody or satire a great deal more is permitted than in serious, normal discourse making mashups a relatively safe route for voicing political critique (2014:1). Häkkinen and Leppänen (2014:2) also differentiate between parody and satire, with parody attacking “the claims of the source material”, playing with it, and then re-evaluating “its truthfulness”, while satire “encourages cynicism towards the material being parodied by making judgments of the original claims”.

The distinction between what is allowed and what is not allowed during carnival is not always clear. Björkvall and Archer (2022) use an explorative approach to investigate concepts for thinking about destruction in terms of multimodal social semiotics and focus on two examples from Sweden and South Africa. They link ritualized destruction to the Bakhtinian concept of carnivalesque seeing that carnivalesque mobilizes excessiveness and grotesquery (Bakhtin 1984:122) and “destruction is sanctioned in a specific demarcated time and space” (Björkvall and Archer 2022:224). Their analysis shows that the distinction between sanctioned and disruptive in carnival,

is not always clear and often depends on complex power distributions between semiotic systems at a particular time and place.

Humor is often linked to carnival. Leticia Tian Zhang and Daniel Cassany (2021), using content and discourse analysis, re-contextualized the comments and identified the main mechanisms of humor created through the popular *danmu* viewing-and-commenting system used in China and Japan. They relate *danmu*-mediated writing practices to Bakhtin's (1984) notion of the carnivalesque by identifying the "subversive literacy mode against the assumed dominant style" of the movies being viewed and the use of "humor and chaos for free expression" (Zhang and Cassany 2021:276). They note that to maximize the humorous outcome, speakers deliberately flaunt their contradiction of the norm by dropping major spoilers or intentionally misplacing comments (Zhang and Cassany 2021:289).

Yingchi Chu (2020) explored the genre of comic art through the reading of single-framed, political cartoons. Her study demonstrates supports the carnivalesque creation of incongruity as the main source of the humorous effect of cartooning which contrasts "the cartoon and the viewer's reconstruction of the cartoonist's satirical target" (Chu 2022:274).

Like political cartoons, carnival is aimed at society as a whole and attempts to prompt carnivalesque "folk laughter" as a comeback for the "forbidden laughter in every official sphere of life and ideology" (Bakhtin 1984:71). Muireann Prendergast (2019), using multimodal discourse analysis, examined the political cartoon covers of the satirical publication *Humor Registrado* during the final years of Argentina's dictatorship. Reading the genre as a form of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, she found the publication to be a permissible and contained space of subversion against the official discourse version which enjoyed an "ambivalent" relationship with the official authorities where it was allowed to function as a "safety valve" (Prendergast 2019:52). Prendergast called attention to an important feature of the cartoons, namely their vivid colors, which for Bakhtin was also central to the carnivalesque, which he described as "vivid and colourful" (Bakhtin 1984:220).

Finally, carnivalesque itself can be turned into a counter-narrative and used to create rather than contravene sociocultural norms. Zhen Troy Chen and Ming Cheung (2022) conducted a social semiotic and multimodal analysis of e-commerce Chinese website banner adverts, which served

as the touchpoint for consumer navigation. Chen and Cheung (2022:180) found that the adverts “extended and obscured the rebellious notion of carnival and used it as a corporation-led strategy to create new cultural forms”.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter introduced and discussed a Bakhtinian view of discourse that sees discourse as inherently intertextual and chronotopic. In addition, it also proposes the notion of the carnival as an important lens to view discourse that transgresses, even if only temporarily, and discusses a Bakhtinian view to identity as chronotopic, intertextual, and multimodal. The chapter focused specifically on how these ideas have been introduced in linguistics and plots an approach to using these notions in the analysis of social media discourses and memes specifically. In the chapter that follows, these concepts will be used together with multimodal discourse analysis to analyze pope memes.

Chapter 5

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Memes serve as a classic example of “spatial and temporal indicators” fused “into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (Bakhtin 1994:84). They offer a unique opportunity to investigate the discursive representation of time and space, as memes spread across different geographical spaces and elements of older discourse are embedded in newer discourses.

Historically, time has mostly been treated within discourse analysis as linear (Blommaert 2016). In memes time is not viewed as linear but as multiplex, fragmented, and non-linear (Blommaert 2005; Oostendorp 2017). It follows then, that making and discovering meaning in memes would need to embrace a non-linear multifaceted process in which a variety of aspects need to be considered in both the making of and analysis of a meme (Blommaert 2015; 2017). In this chapter, I will discuss how I approached the collection and analysis of memes in order to follow an approach that did not see discourse as static and (necessarily) chronologically arranged.

In the following sections the rationale for the memes chosen and the process by which the memes and their pertinent data were collected will be discussed. The analytical framework used is then introduced. Following this, the approaches to the analysis of the data are explained.

5.2 POPE FRANCIS MEMES

The cyberworld is large and continually expanding. Any attempt to analyze one of its facets will have to be clearly delimited in order to make this possible considering the vastness and diversity of data and platforms. In the following I will explain the rationale for the memes chosen and the process by which the memes and their pertinent data were collected.

5.2.1 Limitations of Meme Collection

A survey of available material on social media made it quickly evident that there were far too many Pope Francis memes to be included in a single study, as he has been the most-memed pope since his inauguration. The sheer volume of data would be overwhelming and in order to be of

consequence would need access to tracking, which is not legally possible due to privacy laws.¹⁵ It would also demand an excellent knowledge of cyber literacy (and some hacking skills). Reliability and validity for other researchers would also be a challenge as verifying a quantitative approach would currently be impossible to reproduce with current legal cyber-data gathering. Quantitative research approaches are also not generally as useful when crossing academic disciplines or attempting to establish the usefulness of new methodological approaches (Wilson, Austria, and Casucci 2021) as is being attempted in this study with the integration of elements and approaches from a wide range of analytic models (see Section 5.3.2 below).

In view of the above-mentioned realities, it became apparent that this research project would need to do a qualitative analysis. Qualitative approaches also lend themselves better to studies in which meaning-making is attempted (Streefkerk 2019). Qualitative studies of social media phenomena face the challenge of deciding on a ‘field site’ and of setting the boundaries of the study (Hine 2008). This, Hine (2008) argues, is tied up with the theoretical approach taken in the study, and the research questions. Hine (2008:6) suggests that researchers should focus “on working across the immediately apparent boundaries, exploring connections, making tentative forays that are then turned into defensible decisions, and retrofitting research questions to emergent field sites”. This study will be restricted to examples of all major meme genres and show their development. My field site is not limited to one social media site (see data collection in Section 5.2.2 below), as the intention was to analyze how memes tracked across different discursive spaces. As Hine (2008) suggests, I was flexible in my approach and tried to be led by my research questions and the analytical framework.

A wide variety of image macros were used in this study. Finding the source of origin for each image macro is virtually impossible, since these memes are shared across an uncountable number of social media websites. However, the source of the meme is not the point, since this is not a study exclusively focusing on historical development. In fact, the nature of the meme image macro as public domain is exactly what lends these memes their viral and rhetorical power. Although no

¹⁵ For example, a particular meme would have to be tracked on a social media platform such as Facebook. This would necessitate tracking the meme and shares on the thousands of personal newsfeeds and in the process the individuals’ data would also be stored. It would also involve access to the technological back end of Facebook. While this may be possible technologically, in most jurisdictions, it would not be legal.

original sources are needed for the meme image macros, they will be provided whenever readily available.

5.2.2 Data Collection and Analytics

In order to offer a wide sampling of Pope Francis memes for detailed qualitative analysis, I have collected several memes and their iterations to represent the main meme genres identified by Shifman (2014b). Identifying the most popular meme families to analyze was impossible because individual memes do not retain their form¹⁶ and can change both image macro and text as they are in a continual state of change while being shared. One also cannot identify popularity with any degree of accuracy as every social media platform has another way of measuring success or popularity. This is sometimes based on number of views, likes or reactions; the number of different derivations of a meme (this in itself can be challenging as when features of two or more meme families are fused together to create a new meme), or numbers of mentions in search results (Segev et al. 2015).

Most of the memes were selected using popular search engines, such as Google, Memegenerator.net, or the search function of the particular social media platforms, including Pinterest, Facebook, and Instagram. Although there are new social media platforms and apps being developed all the time, these three were chosen as they have been around the longest and therefore have more history of meme spread and development to examine. Facebook still remains the largest social media site and as such provides a wide range of memes to draw from. Search terms used included ‘pope meme’ and ‘Pope Francis’. Further suggestions generated by the search engines (such as ‘Pope Francis slap’, ‘Pope and Trump’, ‘Pope Francis signing a Lamborghini’, ‘pope bars’, etc.) were also investigated. Most of the memes chosen were well represented on all three of the social media platforms.

Of the thirty-nine memes chosen, twenty-one examples selected show considerable evolution over time. Seeing that this study is interested in how and why memes travel, memes were also investigated that did not seem to change much discursively. Eighteen memes were chosen as examples of single cultural units, which did not demonstrate evolution through shares over time.

¹⁶ See, for example, Figure 6.2, in which Pope Francis is holding a CD, eventually evolves into Figure 6.9 of Martin Luther holding a paper.

In several of the examples chosen multiple memes have been created from the same image macro, forming a fad or family of independent memes.

Social media research is a relatively new field (Ballard 2018), which lends itself to many different theoretical and methodological approaches and uses (Shifman 2014a). Methodologies are still emerging in this field. This can create challenges as there is little historical methodological precedence to fall back on in methods of data collection for analysis.¹⁷ I follow Georgakoupolou (2015:522) in acknowledging that it is impossible to follow a meme “in all its transpositions”. Rather, the focus was on documenting the changes, not as events but as part of an ongoing process, with the analysis seeking to document key moves in transposition and evolution (Georgakoupolou 2015:522). The analysis does not give an exhaustive discourse analysis of memes but focusses on movement (or lack thereof), the meanings of such movements, and how the modal affordances were used to achieve this (see Oostendorp 2018 for a similar approach).

The memes for this study were selected over the time period from 2018 to 2021. In some cases, the year in which a meme first emerged can be identified. Two of the examples selected were from 2015, five from 2017, one from 2018, four from 2019, four from 2020, and two from 2021. Although the original photograph, movie or video clip from which nineteen of the memes selected can be dated, the release date of the corresponding memes is unknown.

All selected memes were checked on Knowyourmeme.com, an extensive online database of internet memes, which includes image macros. Knowyourmeme.com is an independently owned website. The editorial staff and moderators evaluate each meme submitted by users and research the online presence of the meme for verification. Knowyourmeme.com has been used as a source in several other academic studies of memes, such as Ryan Vickery’s 2014 study of the reappropriation of online macro-image memes (Ryan Vickery 2014) and Adrian Lou’s 2017 study of memes as multimodal similes (Lou 2017).

5.3 MEME ANALYSIS

Although some research has explored internet memes as a distinctive form of communication (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006; Shifman 2014a; Milner 2016), a toolkit has not been assembled to

¹⁷ See 2.10 for a discussion of memes as focus of linguistic study.

attempt multimodal discourse analysis (O'Halloran 2011; Kress 2012) on memes within their specific spatio-temporal contexts (Agha 2007). This dissertation strives to fill this gap by assembling and testing such a toolkit. In an attempt to best approach ways of analyzing memes and meaning, this study will integrate elements and approaches from a wide range of analytic models. In the following section the analytical framework will be outlined, followed by a discussion of the specific approaches used to assemble a workable analytic toolbox that has the potential to provide the internal structure, map, and configuration of the individual meme (Lorino and Tricard 2012), while also tracking its development as it spreads.

5.3.1 Analytical Framework Used

A Bakhtinian approach to multimodal discourse analysis is taken in this study with particular attention being given to the intersection of space and time as proposed by Bakhtin (1994). The tool kit assembled includes Shifman's (2014a) approach using content, form and/or stance to establish meaning as well as Pilipets' (2019) classifications of memes. Principles taken from Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) work on reading images are applied. A number of Bakhtin's concepts, such as chronotope and carnival, will be used in combination with these other approaches. Particular attention will be given to identifying and following the resemiotization of the memes studied.

5.3.2 Data Analysis Approach Explained

The intersection of space and time will be examined in the individual memes, which will include examples of the main meme genres identified by Shifman (2014b), namely rage comics, reaction photos, photo fads, and LOLcats. Seeing that static memes consist of exploitable image macros; Pilipets' (2019) classification of memes into four basic categories based on user interaction and adaptation of a meme, will be used in order to analyze a meme's development over time. Remixing, adaption, appropriation, remixes, and context switching will be identified along the categories suggested by Pilipets, namely photographic remediation, mundane imitation, memetic commentary, and memetic play.¹⁸ These will be determined and discussed in each meme.

¹⁸ See Section 2.2 above for a discussion of the way in which memes spread and the role that remixing, adaption, appropriation, remixes, and context switching play in this process.

There is a continual creative process of recontextualization of memes happening with each of the adaptations of a meme, which consciously or unconsciously changes the discourse with each new posting. Resemiotization theory will be used to examine the social semiotic processes of the meme's multimodality to discover "how meaning making shifts from context to context" (Iedema 2001:24) in meme spread.

Shifman (2014a) proposes content, form, and/or stance as a way of establishing meaning in a meme. Although Shifman's original intention was to use this model to examine video memes, Wiggins (2019) has demonstrated that this can be adapted and used as a way of describing the means by which image macro memes can be reproduced in terms of how they carry and form concepts and affirm views. Although Wiggins demonstrates the application of Shifman's model, he voices criticism of it for not specifically identifying the textual and stylistic features in the meme that indicate content, form, and/or stance (Wiggins 2019:15). In order to avoid this shortcoming and help in the identification of textual and stylistic features, principles will be taken from Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) work on reading images. While Kress and Van Leeuwen's work has come under criticism for being "insufficient for sociological interpretation of images" (Ly and Jung 2015:55) when used alone, it has been used successfully when used in cooperation with other models (Ly and Jung 2015). Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996:183) focus on the information value, salience, and framing of images will be particularly useful and applicable to memes being analyzed.

Bakhtin (1998) realized the important element of subversive humor, which he termed carnivalesque. A clear majority of viral memes are humorous. Humor plays an important part in the meaning-making of memes and in the ability of a meme to spread (Milner 2013; Shifman 2013, 2014a; Miltner 2014). In order to analyze the humor in the selected memes, use will be made of humor researchers Catanescu and Tom's (2001) categorization of types of humor, all of which are found in memes. These categories include (1) comparison, (2) personification, (3) exaggeration, (4) pun, (5) sarcasm, (6) silliness, and (7) surprise. This classification will form a starting point for the discussion of humor in each of the memes. Martin et. al. (2003) further refines this framework by providing tools for determining the style of humor used and its effects on the communicative value of the meme. The four styles of humor proposed, namely affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating, will also be identified and discussed.

A large part of the meaning-making consists in the actual temporal sequence being believable and recognizable from the common experience of life that the audience shares and brings to the reading (Lorino and Tricard 2012) of a meme. The historical background and connection to life experiences will be addressed in the analysis of each meme in order to discover the various chronotopes entwined in the meaning making of the meme.

In theory, chronotopes show promise as part of a framework for meme analysis but due to the lack of a “clearly articulated protocol for identifying and analyzing chronotopes and the relations between them” (Ladin 1999:213) their use can prove challenging. Because the concept of the chronotope was in many ways a reaction to formalist or structuralist approaches to language, it stands to reason that it would not provide a strictly prescribed framework for analysis (Holquist 2002).

This openness can, however, prove to be helpful in that a researcher is encouraged by the absence of a strictly prescribed framework to look for the best ways of analyzing and grouping space and time and even crossing over into other fields of research methodology involved in analyzing meaning (Bakhtin 1994), without having to completely commit to one protocol. Many frameworks, by using one particular categorization system, attempt a detailed analysis of some component of time or space and stop at evaluating only this component’s contribution to the creation of meaning in a meme.

The unique contribution that the chronotope framework brings is the emphasis on the intersection of time and space, while also recognizing the dynamic interaction and relationship between the two (Bakhtin 1994). Using chronotopes provides the researcher with the overview to observe the “spatial and temporal indicators” and observe their fusion “into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (Bakhtin 1981:84). Chronotopes, rather than imposing a categorization, allow meaning to evolve internally from the various layers of the meme or memes being studied (Bemong et al. 2010). The chronotope has the potential to provide the internal structure, map, and configuration of the meme (Lorino and Tricard 2012). The individual chronotopes and the relationships between these layers of chronotopes of a meme or meme genre all contribute to meaning (Lyons and Tagg 2019).

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Seeing that chronotopes provide a link between the narrative content and the social, cultural, and historical context of the meme's communication (Lorino and Tricard 2012) chronotope theory can then provide an additional launch point in the exploration of the way in which memes can contribute to identity creation.

5.4 SUMMARY

Memes offer a unique opportunity to investigate the discursive representation of time and space. In order to discover meaning in memes, a non-linear multifaceted toolkit will be needed. A qualitative approach will be undertaken as this lends itself better to studies in which meaning-making is attempted (Streefkerk 2019). Social media research requires the researcher to be flexible. Thus, for this dissertation, a wide sampling of Pope Francis memes have been selected using popular search engines such as Google, Memegenerator.net, or the search function of the particular social media platforms, including Pinterest, Facebook, and Instagram, and a number of different but compatible analytical approaches have been assembled. All the different analytical foci drawn on can handle multimodal, dynamic communication. In the chapters that follow these analytical approaches will be applied.

Chapter 6

EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEANING-MAKING IN POPE MEMES: AN ANALYSIS (PART I)

In the following two chapters examples of different meme types will be explored. Due to the size of the data set, the meme analysis has been divided into two chapters. In this chapter, the 21 examples chosen show considerable evolution over time, and this development will be given particular attention. The analytic tools discussed in chapter four will be applied to each meme in order to understand the meme's elaboration, maintenance, modification, and meaning (Wiggins 2019), beginning, where possible, with the original image macro. Although some work has been done on the development of the meme genre and attempts have been made to delineate a meme's development from spreadable media to emergent meme, and then finally to a bonified internet meme (Wiggins 2020), no attempt to force a meme into this sequence will be made here as "the distance between the emergent meme and internet meme is a kind of thin membrane" (Wiggins 2019:53), with the evolution often occurring so rapidly as to make attempts at separating the process impossible.

Although memes can be examined as a single cultural unit or as part of a genre, they are normally part of a conversation between individuals or groups that will then become part of a public conversation. These conversations, both private and public, will influence and be influenced by culture and will affect perceptions of public figures, groups, and commonly held values. The complexity of the task is alluded to by Milner (2016:2), who says that memes exist "in the space between individual texts and broader conversations, between individual citizens and broader cultural discourses".

Part of the complexity of the task is due to context. Context has long been recognized as a vital part of communication. However, a specific context for memes is difficult to determine because of the emergence of a global context in which social media users are not only passive receivers of cultural units but are actively participating in a continuous reciprocal interchange (Roberts 2008). The notion of 'chronotope' will form an essential part of the analytical apparatus, as this concept

highlights the dynamic or mobile aspects of spatial context and even provides a specific ethnographic description, which can also carry explanatory potential (Blommaert 2018).

Particular attention will be paid to the ‘micro’ facts that invoke a ‘macro’ context within the discursive communication of the meme (Procházka 2018:78-87). Attempts will be made to establish the levels of contexts that are often nested in different chronotopic frames (Procházka 2018). These micro and macro chronotopes will be identified as they contribute to the macro chronotopes that help to provide the “translocal (macro) meanings” (Blommaert 2015:107).

In keeping with the openness of the Bakhtian approach to the analysis of meaning (Bakhtin 1994) no particular categorization system will be used. Rather than imposing a strictly prescribed analytic format on each meme, the analysis will be allowed to evolve internally from the various layers of the meme (Bemong et al. 2010). Use will not be made of all the analytic tools for each meme, nor will each meme necessarily be analyzed in the same order.

6.1 POPE HOLDING THINGS

Static memes consist of exploitable image macros. Pope Francis Holding the Eucharist is a good example of an image macro that has become a long-lasting meme template. The meme is based on a photograph published by Getty Images in 2013. Over the years, it has become a stable online meme and has been ‘recoded’ into many individual memes and has even morphed into different meme types.



Figure 6.1: Pope Holding Wafer Photo. Getty Images photograph taken by Buda Mendes of Pope Francis at Mass at Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady Aparecida on July 24, 2013, in Aparecida, Brazil.

Attention-grabbing photographs that either epitomize or contradict the context of the historical event often are the fodder for memes and meme templates. This photograph's layout focuses the viewers' attention to a particular part of the image. The viewers' attention is carefully directed in the photograph through its framing (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:183). The background is blurred out to avoid distractions. The pope, with uplifted hands and a wafer, is the only human figure in the photograph and is large. His hands with the wafer and head are about the same size, indicating the importance and close connection between the two. Closed eyes intensify the concentration and even ecstasy of the moment (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:122). The wafer is placed slightly higher than the head indicating the importance of the object – in this case the wafer (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:146).

The pope raising the wafer at the Eucharist is in itself a powerful gesture. Even for non-Catholics or a non-religious audience, the act of holding something up indicates importance. For a Roman Catholic this is an important moment in which the wafer becomes the body of Christ. The believer

then ingests the wafer and the divinity is taken in. In a sense, the believer partakes of the divine (Evert 2001). While all this religious symbolism may be lost on a non-believer, the visual impact is still very strong (Colapietro 2016).

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:122), gesture can be termed an “image act”. Gestures create vectors that direct the viewer’s attention and help to create a ‘relationship’ with the viewer. The gesture of this image macro draws the viewer in as a participant in the worship service. As such, a sacred and serious setting is created. The viewer’s memories or stereotypes of a traditional worship service are evoked. This context helps to develop humor by the incongruity of the manipulations that this image macro will undergo as a meme.

This photograph forms a part of, what could be termed, a major chronotope of a divine encounter and as such is embedded in minor chronotopes of tradition, ancient religious worship acts, sacrifice, ritual, and life-changing moments. Time and space converge in this chronotope of a sacred place of worship and a transforming moment of time. This image macro has enough imbedded communicative content and evokes sufficient chronotopes as is without added textual value. As such, it is often used mostly intact with minimal remediation ‘tweaking’ to form a very versatile communicative unit.

Photos, such as this one of the pope holding the Eucharist, serve well as a meme template, as they contain several elements in the frame. Each element carries a minor chronotope. Specific features or objects can instantly provoke a chronotope (Blommaert 2015:7). In this case, the wafer provides the object of worship and evokes the ritual symbolism of the bread from the Last Supper. The image act calls for a chronotope of offering and dedication, while the Pope with closed eyes provides a chronotope of priestly service, as well as authority. All of these minor chronotopes are embedded in the major chronotope of a divine encounter. A sharp incongruity between chronotopes can be created by manipulating any of the elements that create these minor chronotopes. Elements can easily be manipulated with Photoshop. This legitimacy brainteaser invites other spin-offs, in which participants can humorously re-locate the main elements in other settings (Shifman 2014a) challenging other embedded minor chronotopes and the major divine encounter chronotope. The round form of the wafer would seem a natural association and memes were soon created by photographic remediation of the image to change the object (Pilipets 2019).

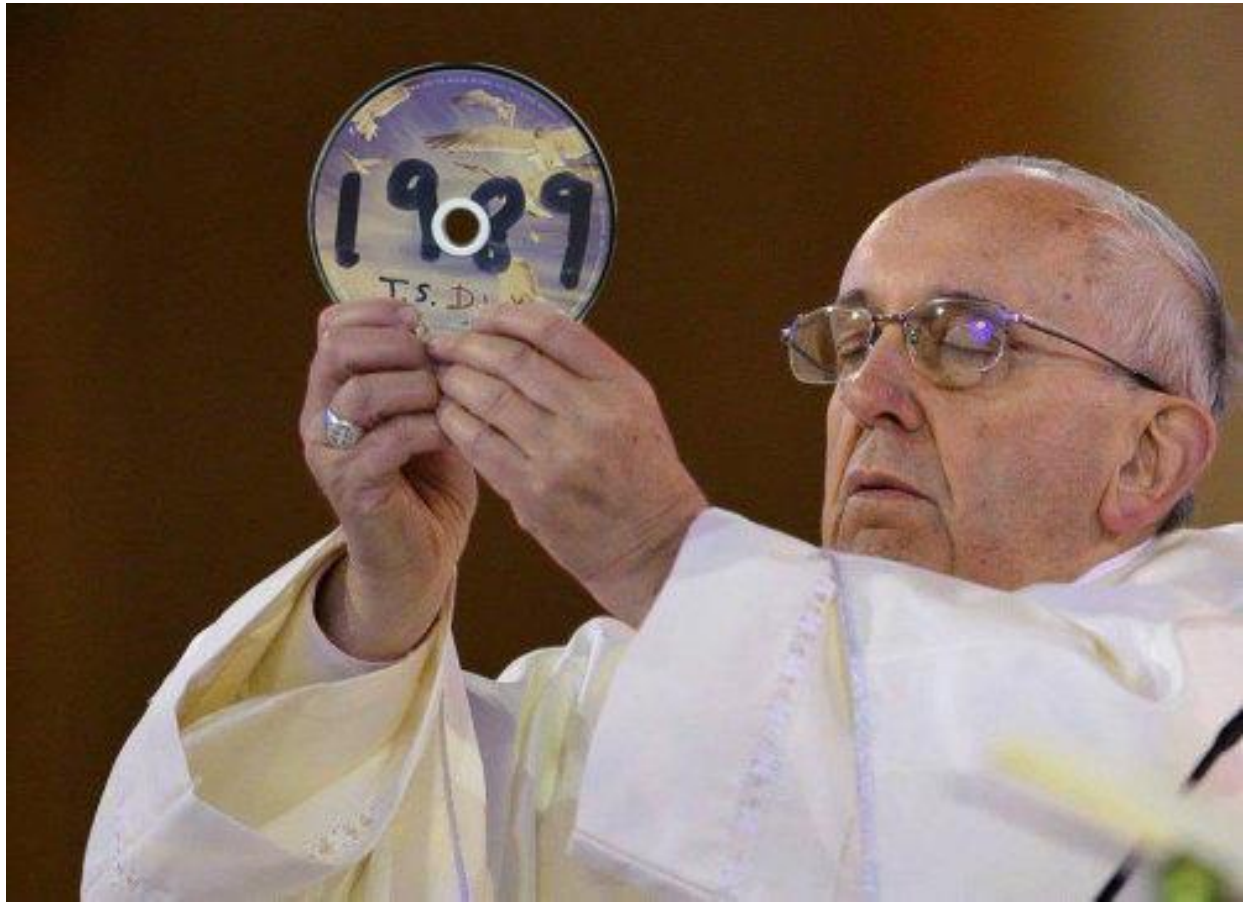


Figure 6.2: Pope Holding 1989 CD Meme from Tumblr 2015

In April of 2015, someone on Tumblr (i.e., the American microblogging and social networking website <https://www.tumblr.com/>) replaced the wafer with a copy of the singer Taylor Swift's 1989 music album, which had been released some months earlier. This generic chronotope of the simple remediated meme type is dependent on visual cues for interpretation of the embedded chronotopes. The CD is a replacement for the wafer, connecting music, and specifically Taylor Swift's music, to an act of worship and a life-changing moment. By modifying the original image macro's stance, the meme creator communicates that the music is 'divine' and at the very least endorsed by the pope.

This meme set off a flurry of imitations on multiple social media platforms. Soon a meme was being shared of the pope with a copy of the album *Take Me Home* by the band One Direction. In August of 2015, someone created a meme with the pope holding a copy of a video game

called *Dark Souls III*, which was widely shared. Although all of these memes had an element of humor created by the incongruity of replacing something ‘holy’ with pop culture items, the video game added an extra layer of irony and another embedded micro chronotope with the name of the video game (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hover 2000).



Figure 6.3: Pope Holding Dark Souls CD Meme from Tumblr 2015

In this photographic remediation of the original image the dark CD cover and the white of the pope’s robe create a stark color contrast. The eye is immediately drawn to the CD by the white center of the CD that should be seen through. The meme creator did not take the trouble to photoshop this out, implying that its presence added to, or at the very least did not distract from the communication intent. The script on the CD is clearly legible. Both words carry micro chronotopes, which help to create the ironic humor. Again, we have the pope promoting something and this time something dark. The use of the word ‘souls’ implies religious vocabulary. The Church is in the business of saving souls. Darkness is associated with evil. The combination of

these incongruent micro chronotopes provides the ironic tension, which creates humor in the meme (Lefcourt and Martin 1986). The audience is able to appreciate the humor even if they are unfamiliar with the video game.

The various memes of Pope Francis holding up an assortment of music CDs and gaming CDs could be a reflection on the pope's initiative to meet with various popular celebrities (Roach 2017) and engage popular culture in a way not previously done by popes. The original image macro became a standard template and thus a generic chronotope on meme generator sites such as Meme Template (<https://imgflip.com/memetemplate/61302102/Pope-with-wafer>), further facilitating easy appropriation by social media users.

Many of the objects Photoshopped onto the image macro have been round objects, but not necessarily so as all sorts of other shapes have also been pasted in.

Although many of these memes depended solely on image macros to create meaning, not all of these memes did so. Many used the classic meme format of image and text to develop meaning, as in the example below.

kid: *gashes leg*

school nurse:



Figure 6.4: Pope Holding Ice Pack from Reddit

This particular meme makes use of photographic remediation and memetic commentary with the text forming important micro chronotopes, which are embedded in the meaning-making. The text lines take up about a quarter of the image macro, with the text being positioned above the picture. The white background blends into the scrolling page of the social media platform, which does not immediately draw the viewer's attention. The simple large text font is easy to read and reinforces the abbreviated text. As it is customary that memes only adhere to grammatical rules when they are specifically needed to underline communication intent (Green 2007), the two lines adopt a direct speech format with the double colon. The kid, rather than speaking, performs an action, i.e., gashing the leg. This is punctuated as a speech act, with the asterisks being used in place of quotation marks. The school nurse's reply is the image macro, which, rather than being an emotional reaction meme, is also an action.

Color, like other modes, is multifunctional and links social and cultural concepts (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002). As such color choice creates a micro chronotope, which adds to the meaning in this meme. The pope is easily associated with the school nurse through the traditional social convention of nurses wearing white. The pope, as well as the school nurse, are perceived as authority figures. The viewer's attention is drawn to the blue icepack, which makes for a surprising color contrast. Although icepacks are available in many colors, blue has been chosen, reinforcing that this is an ice-cold pack and not a heating pad. The remediated photo features a cartoonlike icepack and not a photo of an icepack. Photographic pictures of icepacks are easily available online and yet the meme creator has deliberately chosen the modality of a cartoonlike icepack, which – although clumsily cut out – has been carefully placed with realistic shading added. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:172), “deviations from naturalistic standard” is a visual pun that is “always related to the values, meanings and beliefs of a particular group”. This cartoonlike modality choice could provide a visual clue to the universal experiences of childhood, adding a dreamlike memory dimension, while also helping to create the humor in the meme.

Humor is created through the combination of the incongruity of the pope holding an icepack as well as the tension between the text narrative, which has created a major chronotope of a moment of extreme crisis with a person bleeding and needing a bandage or even stitches, and the chronotope of the underwhelming reaction of the nurse who presents an ice pack that is offered as the solution to the problem. The humor created through both exaggeration and a tongue-in-cheek response to a situation (Catanescu and Tom 2001) serves as an example of affiliative humor, used to enhance relationships with others and create a sense of community (Martin et al. 2003). The humor could also be a subtle criticism of the restrictions on school nurses in the United States, who are often not allowed to hand out any medication to students or administer any medical procedure without written permission from the parents and doctors (Holmes et al. 2016). Most viewers will remember school days and being injured or witnessing some injury at school. Vaara and Reff Pedersen, in their article on Bakhtinian chronotopes, discuss how the depiction of past events can create a chronotope of nostalgia (2013:18). This meme could serve to evoke such a feeling of ‘the good old days when kids were tougher’, as well as the discomfort of not being taken seriously or being presented with a simplistic solution to a very personal painful experience.

This meme once again demonstrates some of the layered and embedded features of chronotopes. While still bringing with it the major chronotope of the divine encounter from the generic chronotope, Figure 6.4 has added to the meaning by introducing the minor chronotope of a serious medical emergency through the addition of the text. The contrasting minor chronotope of the underwhelming solution is created through the embedded micro chronotope of the ice pack.



Figure 6.5: Pope Holding Baby Yoda Meme shared on Tumblr by strangefluxx in November 2019

The meme of the pope holding Baby Yoda is another example of photographic remediation and demonstrates the fact that appropriation for a meme is not constrained by the original element's shape. Immediately after the first episode of *The Mandalorian* premiered on November 12, 2019, in which an infant version of the *Star Wars* character Yoda was introduced (Giardina 2019), social media was flooded across various platforms with Baby Yoda memes. The social media audiences were quick to embrace and remix using the movie icon. These memes quickly populated all the

genres of memes. Image macros and examples of photographic remediation, mundane imitation, memetic commentary, and memetic play (Pilipets 2019) involving Baby Yoda could be found (Schwartz 2019).

Interestingly, the main stance of the Baby Yoda meme and the Pope Holding Things meme were quickly fused together in the creation of a new meme. Time is often circular or multiplex in meme creation (Blommaert 2005; Oostendorp 2018), with current popular meme families, each carrying their own generic chronotope, being fused with new memes or older memes being pulled from ‘retirement’ to add validation to a new meme. This seems to promote the virility of the meme as it seems to evoke more chronotopes and be infused with more meaning, making it a more powerful communication tool.

The non-linear nature of meme time is well demonstrated by the longevity of the Pope Holding Things meme template when for no apparent historical incident, a new pope meme became a photo fad in October of 2020. Photo fads include staged photos of people imitating actions in various settings in reaction to a similar photo posted on their social media feed. They either volunteer or are dared to do this. In this way the photo fad becomes a type of identity building group dare. Photo fads are in many ways image macro equivalents of flash mobs with each meme creator bringing their own individual historical chronotopes to the meme creation process (Blommaert 2015) and merging them into the generic chronotope of the viral chronotope.

The fad began on Twitter where users modified the original Pope Holding Things meme template by dividing the meme into 4 frames. Once again two meme types were merged and emerged as a viral photo fad. The Pope Holding Things image template was combined with framing and composition features (minor chronotopes) of the Please Work memes and GIFs, which had gone viral in December of 2019.



Figure 6.6: An Example of a Please Work Meme posted by Junior Miami@littlehonkyass December 2019

Please Work memes are single posts that contain multiple (normally 4), often separate images, that, when placed together, form a larger composite image. An unusual feature of these memes is the user and audience interaction. Wiggins (2019:112) suggests that “the term audience with regard to internet memes requires some adjustment” as the audience is for a meme an imagined construct. He goes on to explain that the meme creator has a very vague notion of who he or she is communicating with when creating or posting a meme. Wiggins (2019:50) furthermore states that the structure of the meme lets people know what to do in order to participate in meme creation and propagation, and users are quick to reproduce similar memetic content with the desire to have others recognize and interact with their meme. This process is normally not blatant. However, in the case of Please Work memes users captioned their memes creations ‘please work’ in an attempt to get validation and feedback from others as to whether the meme has been successful or not. (<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/please-work/>)

The new Pope Holding Things meme in the Please Work four-framed layout initiated a photo fad on Twitter and quickly crossed over into all of the other major social media platforms. The spread was reported on main news agencies, with *Time* magazine including it in the most influential memes of 2020 (Mccluskey and Clark 2021). Having four separate frames made meme creation

more variable (McCarter 2020), facilitating more minor chronotopes that could be used independently of the other minor chronotopes evoked by the use of the other frames. Users had more ability to easily manipulate the image macros so that the pope could do more than hold items up in these fad memes (Yeo 2020). Interestingly, the meme creators used the framing but did not include the unusual captioning of the Please Work memes and made no overt attempt to interact with their audience.

In Figure 6.7 the original pope image has been rotated 180 degrees and cropped to have the pope lying down with nothing in his hands. The image macro has been divided into four frames. The wafer has been removed and an iPhone has been placed on the Pope's face. The suspended hands lead to assumed movement. These two minor stance chronotopes lead to the creation of a major narrative chronotope. The phone has fallen from his hands as he has fallen asleep while looking at his phone (Venn 2020) creating a reaction meme.

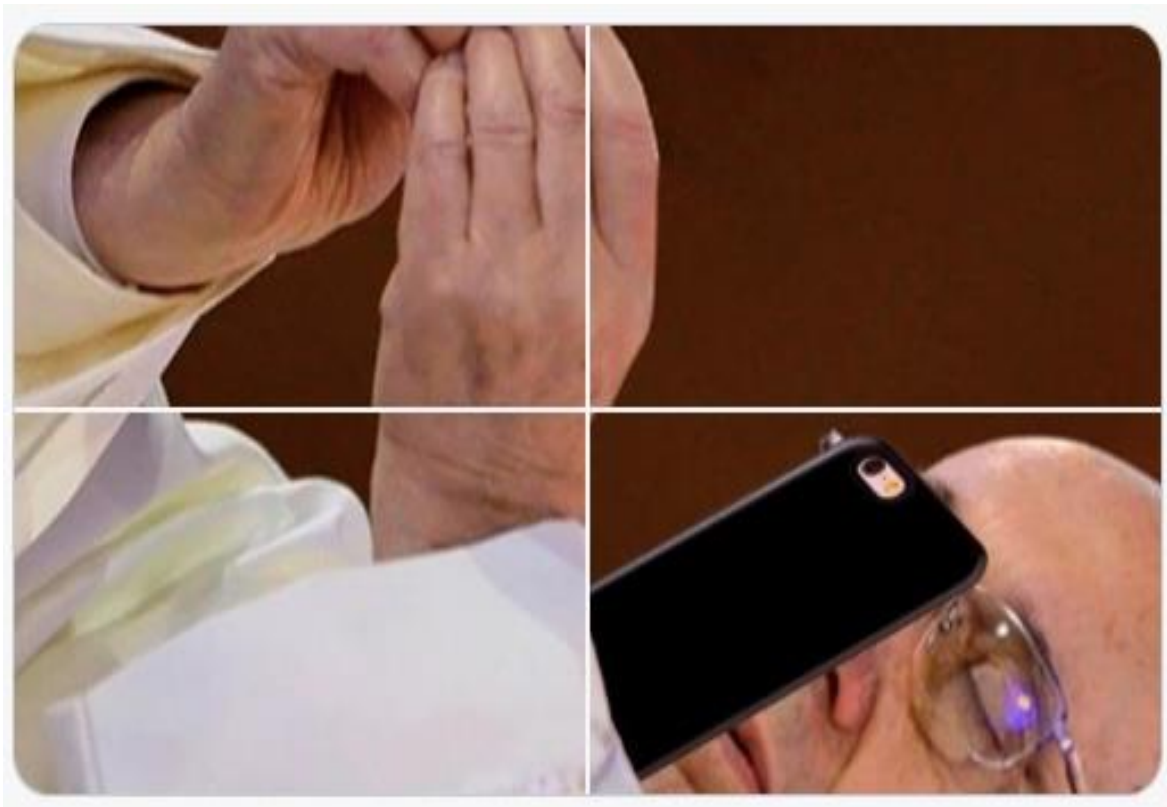


Figure 6.7: Sleeping Pope with iPhone Meme first shared on Twitter in October of 2020 by Igor Costoli@costoli

This meme can serve as an example of humor development through comparison. Several elements are linked to create a humorous situation (Catanescu and Tom 2001) within the generic chronotope of reaction memes. Most memes in the photo fad genre, such as this one, use affiliative humor to enhance relationships with others and create a sense of community (Martin et al. 2003). Interacting with technology has created many chronotopes. Most cellphone users have had the experience of lying-in bed and reading on their phones until their hands get tired and the user falls asleep dropping the phone. The importance of having the pope do this and not a private individual shows that this can happen to even the best of us and seems to have a socially leveling effect.

While this photo fad was trending on social media, not all users were using the meme as a personal means of expression (Blommaert 2015). The pope photo fad was also used to make a commentary on the photo fad itself. In Figure 6.8 below, the meme creator used photographic remediation of the four-frame Pope Holding Things meme to criticize users and point to the monotony of everyone doing the same thing over and over. The wafer of the original image has been replaced by an image icon of the same image that was embedded multiple times, creating a Russian nesting doll effect. Repetitions with diminishing size give an illusion of movement and can be a visual expression of time, signifying the unending trajectory of this meme fad as well as its relative inconsequentiality. While the fusion of time and space is fundamental to the notion of the chronotope, this meme evokes a warped time reality and distorted sense of space and, in this case, importance, by creating a house of mirrors at an amusement park, which could evoke a major chronotope of distorted realities and perceptions of importance. The humor is created through exaggeration (Catanescu and Tom 2001) by overstating the Pope Holding Things meme template.



Figure 6.8: Recursive Pope Meme first shared on Twitter October 2020 by Alas Poor Beckett-King@MisterABK

Chronotopes provide a nuanced dynamic concept of context in online communicative interactions by providing patterns in which communication can take place (Chun 2017; Szabla and Blommaert 2018). This is demonstrated by the emergence of yet another social commentary in reaction to the Pope Holding Things photo fad. Reformation memes, using a mundane imitation that included minimal interference with the image macro itself, kept the 4-frame layout and stance of the Pope Holding Things memes and replaced the image macro while still evoking the original major chronotope of the divine encounter. The pope was replaced with images of Martin Luther in these memes.

Figure 6.9 demonstrates one of these mundane imitation memes in which a picture is used in place of an image macro. Although image stills from Reformation movies could have been chosen the meme creator used an easily available stock painting. Care was taken to evoke the original by using a similar face size. Unlike the pope, Luther's eyes are open and engaging the viewer while the uplifted hand is holding up a paper instead of the wafer. Unlike the Pope Holding Things meme, most Reformation memes keep to mundane imitations and do not engage in further remediation of the Luther picture, as this would no longer evoke the original Pope Holding Things meme or the generic chronotope associated with it. In the meme example below Luther is nailing his 95 theses

to a church door, evoking a strong chronotope of resistance and protest. This historic event is seen as marking the beginning of the Protestant breakaway from the Catholic Church. The analogy used helps in the creation of humor (Reyes et al. 2012). With this exaggerated comparison (Catanescu and Tom 2001) the meme creator is protesting the Pope Holding Things photo fad that was dominant on social media during the last few months of 2020.



Figure 6.9: Reformation Meme posted by @MuscleSkoals on Pinterest October 2020.

6.2 POPEBARS

For a public person, any moment caught on camera could potentially become a meme. Objects or stances or the interaction of a person with an object can evoke minor chronotopes that inform a local in which time and space meet (Blommaert 2015:7). In 2015, the way the pope held the microphone made someone think of a rapper. Once this connection was made social media ran with this chronotope. And for several months various poses were interpreted this way (Madison 2015). The various PopeBars memes could be traced to the pope's initiative to meet with various popular musicians (Roach 2017). The original Getty image macro became a template on meme generator sites such as Meme Template (<https://imgflip.com/memetemplate>), further facilitating easy appropriation by social media users and providing a generic chronotope. Twitter marked these

memes as #popebars referring to the colloquial term for rapping as ‘dropping bars’ (McKinney 2015). A significant number of these memes were created.

In order to provide examples of the original PopeBars memes, the following two memes will be examined. As with the Pope Holding Things meme, the PopeBars enjoyed several months of social media popularity, undergoing many remediations before aging out only to enjoy a revival two years later. Two additional examples of later PopeBars will then be compared and contrasted.



Figure 6.10: Pope Francis in Bangui Photo. Getty Images published a photograph taken by Gianluigi Guercia of Pope Francis on November 30, 2015, in Bangui, Central African Republic.

On November 30, 2015, Pope Francis was photographed as he toured Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, where he urged people to reconcile following a long civil war (Harris 2015). This photograph quickly became the image macro for numerous PopeBars memes. In this image the pope is the centrally placed focal point in the image macro. Although there are many people in the image, few of them are in focus. The pope is framed on both sides by attentive priests, who further direct the viewer’s focus towards the pope. Color contrast also serves for heightened focus, with the pope being in white, while the other two priests and everyone in the background is dressed in black (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002:165). The pope’s hand gesture, the way he holds

the microphone, and the way he is leaning into the microphone are all typically associated with a rapper performing and work towards the formation of the rapper chronotope. This is further enhanced by having the two African men flanking him as rap culture is often associated with an African American cultural expression (Barrett 2006). The priest on the left is holding a microphone. His stance could play into that of a backup singer during a performance.

My psalms are sweaty
knees weak, cross is heavy



last supper is ready
it's lord's spaghetti

Figure 6.11: Rapper Spaghetti Pope Meme uploaded to Pinterest by Belle Lambert

Most of the PopeBars meme family make use of memetic commentary that focus on the manipulation of text rather than the image. The minor chronotope of a rap song is evoked by the text, which is above and below the image macro and presented as a rap lyric by the rhyme pattern and meter of the text (Makarechi 2015). The “intertextual process of appropriating, mixing, and transposing styles and functions” (Allen 2000:215) is well illustrated in this meme. The text is presented in first person with the pope being depicted as the speaker. The meme creator has taken text from famous rapper Eminem’s song *Lose Yourself* that won numerous awards and became the

first ever hip-hop track to win an Oscar for Best Original Song in 2002 (Roberts 2006). Eminem's song has become a widely known culture unit with various other sporting events, music stars, and television shows making mention of or using lyrics from the song (Goldstein 2003).

The original lyrics from the song inferred in the meme is as follows: "His palms are sweaty / knees weak / arms are heavy / There's vomit on his sweater already / mom's spaghetti" (Eminem 2002). The meme's text modified the original lyrics to reference several minor chronotopes of Christian beliefs and practices. The meme creator makes a deliberate pun in the first line where palms is replaced with Psalms. Since ancient times the biblical book of Psalms has functioned as a hymn book in both Judaism and Christianity (Ross 2011). This chronotope in turn is embedded in a major rap music chronotope that helps to create humor by the incongruity of bringing ancient religious hymns and rap music together.

The second line alludes to the micro chronotope of the crucifixion. It also ties into the gangster/rap fashion scene where bling is 'in', and use is often made of crucifix jewelry (Darby 2005). The second last line has been modified to introduce a minor chronotope of the Last Supper, which Jesus celebrated with his disciples before his death. This has become an important ritual in Christianity (Luke 22:19). Instead of mention being made of bread or wafers that are normally used in this ritual the meme creator adapts the lyrics of Eminem's song to make spaghetti the main object in the Lord's supper. Again, the incongruity of these minor chronotopes helps to create the humor (Catanescu and Tom 2001). In their discussion of literary chronotopes and genres Vaara and Reff Pedersen (2013:14) explain the chronotope of the family idyll as evoking a unity of space in a family territory and an idyllic folkloric past time. The micro chronotope of a food type can help establish this chronotope of the family idyll. In this case reference is made to spaghetti, which besides helping to establish an idyllic family chronotope also contributes to an Italian chronotope (Laroche et.al. 1998:125). Even though Pope Francis is Argentinian, the Vatican is situated in Rome and memes often play into this Italian connection with references to the pope's love for pizza (Grubb 2015). Although rap has come to enjoy a wider listener base, it is still seen as a counter-establishment musical form that often provides a platform for protest (Costilla 2017). Linking the pope with this platform reinforces a chronotope of protest and helps to reinforce the identity of Pope Francis as a type of reformer protesting the wrongs in the Church and the world (Ivereigh 2014).

God is my father, but yall are my sons,
 pray I don't take your girl and make
 her one of my nuns #PopeBars



Figure 6.12: Pope Father Rap. Instagram uploaded by @Daquan

Figure 6.12 offers another example of memetic commentary with the focus on the manipulation of the text rather than the image macro. Multiple embedded micro chronotopes in the text contribute to the major rap chronotope. Like Figure 6.11, this meme is also presented as a first-person rap. In an imitation of rap's communicative style, the abbreviation 'yall' for 'you all' is used. The lyrics adhere to a rhyme scheme with alternate lines endings rhyming, namely sons and nuns. The text is also clearly marked as rap lyrics by the hashtag, which is included as an identifier (Taylor 2015).

Rap songs often have to do with themes of relationships and power posturing. Rappers often boast about their sexual prowess and flaunt their interactions with women (Kirby 2006). The lyrics call these themes out. The meme creator is referencing another famous rapping icon, namely rapper Lil Wayne, and his song *I can take your girl* (Lil Wayne 2008). Power posturing continues with a play on the name of the pope. One of the official ways of addressing the pope is as 'Holy Father' (Collins 2009). In the meme lyrics the pope claims God as his father while still claiming that all

of the audience are not God's sons but the pope's sons. While not explicitly identifying himself as a father, he is claiming this patriarchal authority to challenge the sex lives of his sons. The pope is being depicted as engaged in a rap stand off or power posturing with his opponents – namely young male rapper fans with girlfriends. He implies that he has the power or 'star attraction' to take the girl and make her celibate when she becomes a nun. The humor in this meme comes from a combination of several humor categories. The meme creator uses comparisons by framing the pope as a rapper of Lil Wayne fame. A rap-off session chronotope is created in which the pope is engaged in exaggeration by overstating his power over the rap fan base. Humor is also created through the use of a pun on the word father and the papal title of Holy Father (Catanescu and Tom 2001). This meme makes extensive use of micro chronotopes found in the text, which combine and overlap to support chronotopes of rapping culture, and even tap into themes of male authority, and control of female sexuality.

6.3 POPEBARS REVIVAL

Reporters are often invited to travel with the pope on official trips. The pope normally addresses reporters on route. An image taken during an April 2017 trip from Cairo to Rome, after meeting with Muslim leaders in Cairo, led to the resurrection of the PopeBars memes with the release of the following photograph in which the pope is being braced for possible turbulence by two assistants.



Figure 6.13: Pope Rapping on Plane Meme. Reuters photograph 2017

Unlike the Pope Holding Things meme (Figures 6.2 and 6.3) that made a comeback with the same basic image macro, which was then modified, the PopeBars meme comeback did not always use the same image macro but only connected back to the rap chronotope while sometimes using both different image macros as well as different textual presentations. Many new PopeBars memes enjoyed wide circulation in 2017. Although the Reuters photograph seemed to serve as the catalyst for this comeback, various image macros were used with the pope in different situations. All photo images used contained the connecting visual element of the pope's 'rapper grip' of the microphone. The following is one example of a meme using the Reuters photograph.

BREAKING: Pope's rap battle showing so fly
hype men have to hold him back. 🔥🔥🔥
#PopeFrancis #DopeFrancis



Figure 6.14: Pope's Rap Battle Meme uploaded to Twitter by Adam, 2017

This meme uses an unremediated image macro with memetic commentary. However, rather than having a specific rap lyric, the text evokes a minor chronotope by locating the meme in a news release space. Although no specific time is fused with the news release space, an urgency is created by the text being presented in the form of a newspaper headline or a news alert, beginning with the word 'breaking' capitalized. The meme creator continues in the creation of micro chronotopes by using the rap slang term 'so fly'. The phrase 'so fly' came into use among African Americans

around the late 1960s or early 1970s and went more mainstream in the 1990s as a term of admiration suggesting that something or someone was stylish, or skilled (Kendall 2005). Reference is also made to the ‘hype men’. A hype man plays an important part in a rapper’s live show. He assists the rapper and is responsible for keeping the crowd animated during the show (Barrett 2006). Veatch (1998) theorized that humor often occurs when there seems to be a paradoxical perception between normal things and extraordinary situations. The stance of the hype men helps to create humor as these men, who are responsible for getting the crowd stoked, are said to have to hold the pope back. Here, too, the minor chronotope of the rap concert is contrasted with the visual chronotope of the priests as hype men. The combination of these incongruent elements provides the ironic tension which creates humor in the meme (Lefcourt and Martin 1986).

Multimodal layering is used as demonstrated by the three fire emojis and the further hashtags, which connect to the official Instagram account of Pope Francis as well as an Instagram account with humorous Pope Francis memes. These humorous memes are found under the DopeFrancis hashtag, which references the well-used Pope is Dope chronotope. Kim Kardashian, a social media super influencer, tweeted on September 24, 2015, that “the pope is dope”, implying that he was cool and the ultimate high (Marcus 2015). This chronotope quickly became popular with meme creators and has greatly contributed towards the creation of Pope Francis’s online persona. For a more detailed discussion of the dope chronotope, see section 7.3 below. Chronotopes evoke possibilities, constraints and likelihoods for characters (Blommert 2015:105-116). The way the pope and his priests are presented in both minor and major chronotopes in this meme can help to predict the likelihood of an epic rap. Thus, even the predictive function of the chronotope is here harnessed to underline the absurdity, which in turn heightens the humor.

6.4 POPE AND TRUMP

State leaders normally release a press photograph after meeting with the pope. On May 24th, 2017, the Trump family visited Pope Francis in the Vatican. Before his presidency, and in the months preceding the visit, Trump and the pope had publicly disagreed on several issues, including global warming and immigration. Photographers were allowed in the room after the meeting to take photographs. Many photographs were taken but one image in particular, of a grinning Trump next

to a stone-faced Pope Francis, was quickly uploaded to social media and went viral within hours as the basis for numerous memes.

Choosing an image to represent an event is very subjective with numerous factors at play. Composition and photographic quality are important but political bias and the chronotopes that can be linked to the photograph also play a big role in the selection (Katz 2017). A very good example of this is the selection of the image macro below from many other photographs of the same event. Memes that are critical of Trump normally are built on image macros with strong expressions. It would seem that expressions are to image macros what words are to text in terms of chronotope formation. They form micro chronotopes that help to inform the overall impression of a major chronotope (Bakhtin 1981:252). Expressions that make Trump look aloof, disinterested, or uninformed, help support the major chronotope of Trump as the bumbling idiot.



Figure 6.15: Pope and Trump Meeting Photo. Ivanka Trump, First Lady Melania Trump, and President Donald Trump stand with Pope Francis during a meeting at the Vatican on May 24, 2017. Evan Vucci-AP

This image macro has enough embedded communicative content and evokes sufficient chronotopes as is, even without added textual value, and can be used fairly intact with minimal remediation ‘tweaking’ to form a very versatile communicative unit.

Photos such as this one of the Trumps meeting the pope serve well as a meme template as they contain strongly contrasting expressions between the different persons in the frame, inviting other spin-offs, in which the expressions can be humorously reshaped to evoke new settings (Shifman 2014a) and chronotopes.

Meme creators quickly picked up on the pope’s stone-faced expression, which was then contrasted with a remarkably different smiling pope when meeting with other heads of state, such as Trump’s predecessor Barack Obama (Moran 2017). The image macro itself served as an example of humor development through comparison. Even though a contrasting image macro was not used, the history of other papal meetings and the expressions of the subjects connected together to create a humorous situation (Catanescu and Tom 2001).

Often in meme creation popular meme families are fused with new memes or older memes being pulled from ‘retirement’ to add validation to a new meme. This seems to promote the virility of the meme as it seems to evoke more chronotopes and be infused with more meaning, making it a more powerful communication tool. The same can be said for the fusion of two very widely memed persons such as the pope and Trump. The meeting between the pope and Trump led to numerous meme creations across a wide range of meme types within hours of the visit. The original image macro was quickly loaded onto meme generator sites, such as Meme Template (<https://imgflip.com/memetemplate>), as a standard template which further facilitated easy appropriation by social media users.

These memes circulated on social media sites for several months and were commented on by news sources such as *The Guardian* and CBS News. Below, some examples of different memes based on the image macro of the pope and Trump meeting will be discussed.



Figure 6.16: Hey! Look at Me! Meme first uploaded by Imgur May 24, 2017

The image macro in Figure 6.16 was chosen to illustrate a reaction photo meme. Reaction photos provide a handy creative tool for people. Reaction photos are often used to humorously make fun of politicians and politics, as is the case in this example (Green 2007). The text, rather than being placed above or below the image, is incorporated into the image, which serves to easily connect the text with the person and invites the reader into the intimacy of reading their minds. The bodies are used to serve as the commentary bubbles for the participants' thoughts that help to create a reaction photo. The text used a simple, clear font, which is well punctuated with contrasting color for easy identification, providing a clean uncluttered appearance in which the identities of the speakers, their facial expressions, and thought texts can quickly and easily be read, contrasted, and compared.

This meme is a good example of the interrelationships between chronotopes, with each exclamation feeding into individual minor and major chronotopes, motifs, and generic chronotopes (Keunen 2000). When the search for chronotopes is undertaken, the discovery can quickly be made that there are many minor chronotopes, even within these small language units, with the individual

words and phrases contributing to the “coherent overarching meanings” (Ladin 1999:216) of this meme. There is a natural build-up from the comments left to right, all with a play on the ‘me’. The viewer is directly addressed in each of the exclamations. Although both Ivanka and Melania are appealing for help, presumably for having to put up with Trump, the rivalry between Ivanka and Melania is alluded to in Melania’s statement (Wolkoff 2020). Trump’s exclamation directly contributes to a major chronotope of an out-of-touch egomaniac wanting to be the center of every encounter. In contrast, the pope, although looking unhappy, evokes sympathy for having to put up with Trump. The pope is the only one that poses a question, which is used to appeal directly to the reader and evoke sympathy. The question contributes to a chronotope of exhaustive parenting and can leave the impression of a long-suffering father figure with a difficult child.

The meme’s humor is created through a combination of incompatible statements that are brought together, causing a tension that invites the reader to look for and process a unique pattern of communication (Alden, Hoyer, and Lee 1993). Comparison, exaggeration, and a pun on the use of ‘me’ as well as the facial expressions contribute to the humor of this meme. There is also some irony in the pope’s exclamation of ‘Oh Lord!’ adding to the incongruity and humor of the meme (Catanescu and Tom 2001). Although plot chronotope types have normally been used with novels, many of these can also be identified in memes. In Figure 6.16 two dialogical chronotopes can be identified. Dialogical chronotopes outline the projected relationship between the different characters (Blommert 2015:5). The relationship between Ivanka and Melania could serve as a comic dialogical chronotope in which the two characters are balanced and serve to help develop the tragicomic dialogical chronotope between Trump and the pope in which neither character dominates the moment with their unresolved conflict serving to further the humor of the meme.



Figure 6.17: Trump and Grumpy Cat Meme. adevarul.ro uploaded to Google on February 28, 2018

Figure 6.17 makes use of photographic remediation, while also combining an LOLCats image macro. Although typically LOLCats memes include misspelt text, which is presented as in the first person with the cat speaking (Green 2007), this meme makes use of the reactions and expressions rather than text (Samson et al. 2008) to help in the creation of meaning, although in some iterations of the meme there is text above the image macro, which reads: “Pope Francis was not Happy when Trump Puzzy- Grabbed The Holy Virgin”. More than the fusion of two very widely memed persons such as the pope and Trump, this meme also makes use of a third very widely used meme – Grumpy Cat.

The photographic remediation is quite extensive. The original photograph has been cropped. Ivanka and Melanie have been cropped out, although Melania’s arm is still visible. The viewer’s attention is now focused on Trump and the pope, who has had his head replaced with Grumpy Cat. Grumpy Cat is the name given to a cat named Tartar Sauce that rose to online fame after several

pictures of her annoyed facial expressions were posted to Reddit in September 2012. Grumpy Cat has since become one of the most well-known memes on all social media platforms, and as a cultural icon has inspired Grumpy Cat T-shirt merchandise, a multimedia art exhibition (Ammons 2013), the rights to a Hollywood movie, an Amazon bestselling book, comics (Lovett 2015), and coffee drinks called Grumppuccino. The cat's death in 2019 was covered by several major news outlets (Victor 2019). Chronotopes can serve to capture the specific convergence of time and space to create a chronotopic moment. That chronotopic moment can then be carried into other chronotopes as a layer to help create further chronotopes (Blommaert 2015:7). Chronotopes also make certain types of characters. In this case the Grumpy Cat chronotope character, which seems to be the one of a continually disapproving, unimpressed or grumpy person, seems a perfect swap-out for the pope. Chronotopes are sometimes described as the joining points in a narrative. Here we have an example of such as two of the micro chronotopes of a grumpy expression seem to form a natural joining point for the pope and Grumpy Cat.

All remediations of the original are important and form a visual pun that is “always related to the values, meanings and beliefs of a particular group” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:172). An important component of this meme is the manipulation of the framed painting behind Trump and the pope. The original painting in the background has been cut out and the painting has been replaced by Bartolome Esteban Murillos' painting entitled 'Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception'. The Virgin has been positioned to be between Trump and the pope as a third person.

In October of 2016, *The Washington Post* released an article stating that Donald Trump, then the Republican presidential nominee, had boasted about sexually assaulting women in a recorded conversation. His 2005 conversation on tape was then released. In it he is heard saying, “You can do anything. Whatever you want. Grab them by the Pussy” (Revesz 2016). Since then, more than 15 women have accused Trump of sexual abuse (Keneally 2020).

This meme creates major chronotopes, which leave the overall impression of Trump as a vulgar sexual predator as well as the pope as a protector of virtue, or, at the very least, someone who is not complicit or tolerant of the sexual exploitation of women. Again, the chronotopes, which emerge from Figure 6.17, demonstrate a teleological chronotope proposing the likelihood of the characters of Trump and the pope being on a trajectory towards conflict. Although chronotopes

overlap and can be enmeshed (Procházka 2018), they do not seem to leave room for nuanced messaging. As, for example, in this meme where no mention or hint is given of the Catholic Church's history of abuse of women and children (Bruni 2002) or the numerous sexual scandals or cases involving rape or abuse that have been or are being brought against various Catholic schools and institutions (Adolphe and Rychlak 2018).

Humor can be used as a way of exploring offensive or potentially controversial information (Schnurr and Plester 2017). This meme seems to be plugging into the emotionally charged environment of the #MeToo movement, which is giving voice to the problem of sexual abuse of women by men in positions of power. Part of the unexpected incongruity contributes towards the humor, even while exploring politically charged themes (Hübler and Bell 2003).

Raskin (1985) explored the typology of the humor process, underlining the incongruity of situations, which put two or more incompatible or unexpected circumstances or elements together, causing tension that invites a unique pattern of processing or problem solving by the reader ('getting the joke') that often leads to humor (Alden, Hoyer, and Lee 1993). These include the personification of Grumpy Cat and the Virgin in the painting, as well as the simple pun on the word Pussy, which can be slang for the female crotch (Brooks 2016) and the name for a cat, as well as the silliness of replacing the pope's head with a cat (Catanescu and Tom 2001).



Figure 6.18: There Is No Global Warming Meme. Original drawing by Steve Bell and downloaded from Pinterest 2017

Memes and cartoons are in many ways related. Some have suggested that the first internet memes were simply a digitalization of cartoons (Winston 2016). While this may be true to some extent, there are usually some differences. Cartoons normally have an artist who has artistic talent. No ability to draw is needed in meme creation where a different skill set is utilized to manipulate image macros and graphics electronically. Because memes are multimodal and demonstrate the ability to adapt and jump mediums quickly, a meme can seldom be traced to a single creator.

Politically themed memes and cartoons are both used to create humor, comment on, ridicule, or satirize real world subject matters. While published political cartoons have always been regarded as political and/or social commentary, memes have generally been regarded solely as a means of online entertainment (Lyons 2017). However, social media can absorb political cartoons and give them cultural gravity and multidimensionality that make them more relatable and therefore more appealing to the audience as well as facilitating a much wider spread than print. Many newspapers and other printed periodicals are being forced to co-exist electronically as costs for printing rise

and subscriptions fall (Winston 2016). Likewise, political cartoons are being absorbed as memes, as demonstrated in the example of Figure 6.18.

Steve Bell drew the meeting between Trump and the pope, preserving the features and placement of the photograph (see Figure 6.15). Ivanka, on the left, has her hands clasped as in the photograph, and stands next to Melania. Trump wears his striped black and white tie (which has been exaggerated in length) while standing next to an unhappy looking pope. The painting in the background also helps to firmly connect the artist's drawing with the photograph. The artist remediates the photograph by adding Trump's hand gesture and the speech bubble.

As with the previous meme, humor is once again being used as a way of commenting on a politically controversial topic, namely global warming (Schnurr and Plester 2017). The pope is on record as voicing support for environmental issues and tackling the challenges of global warming. Trump, on the other hand, has voiced skepticism towards global warming, as demonstrated in his withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement. This difference was highlighted with the traditional gift exchange, which took place at the meeting between Trump and the pope, in which the pope gave the president a printout of the 2015 paper he wrote on the damaging effects of climate change (Faiola 2017).

Figure 6.18 was originally published as a cartoon in the British newspaper *The Guardian* on May 24, 2015, on the same day as the photograph of the meeting was printed. The cartoon was also uploaded to the newspaper's website (theguardian.com) from where it was uploaded onto various Twitter accounts and became a social media meme on several social media platforms, including Pinterest. It is interesting to note that this meme retained its form and did not undergo remediation like the photograph image macro memes. Although the cartoon was copyrighted it is unlikely that this served as a deterrent. Copyrighted images are regularly manipulated on social media platforms that are notoriously hard to track and still in the gray zone as far as copyright laws are concerned (Garcia and Hoffmeister 2017). The fact that it is not remediated as a meme may be due to the multimodal layers where an image macro is usually manipulated.

Manipulating a cartoon-style drawing would not be as noticeable (graffiti on graffiti) and rather than enhancing the communicative intent of the meme, could in fact dampen it. Thus, the meme has retained its original form in distribution.

The humor in this meme is dependent on chronotopes being enmeshed in the meme (Procházka 2018) from other sources. The reader must be aware of the chronotopes evoked by other news media or social platforms regarding the meeting between Trump and the pope. Trump is depicted as being rude, impolite, and uninformed in the speech bubble by reducing the complicated issues of global warming to nothing more than his flatulence.

6.5 POPE SLAP



Figure 6.19: Pope Slap Photo. Frame from Reuters video filmed on December 31, 2019

On December 31, 2019, as Pope Francis greeted pilgrims in Rome's St. Peter's square, a woman grabbed the pope's hand and tugged him towards her. The tug appeared to have caused him pain and a disgruntled pope slapped the woman's hand to free himself. Reuters news agency, which was filming the event, posted a video on their Twitter account of the altercation. The video immediately went viral (Kiley 2020). By the time Pope Francis apologized the following day, discussions were all over social media with people taking sides as to whether the pope's action was justified or inappropriate. A big part of the discussion took place through a large number of

memes, which utilized various meme genres and forms (Strapagiel 2020), demonstrating the inherently dynamic nature of mobile chronotopes (Agha 2007a).

As with some meme genres, based on a historic occurrence, some took stills from the video, while other meme creators only took an aspect of this occurrence to evoke commentary and humor (Milner 2016). This created a great diversity of Pope Slap memes. Below are some examples of this wide remediation and mundane imitation.



Figure 6.20: Mistakes Made Meme. Posted by u/ASTALT on January 1, 2021 on Reddit

Many memes focus the manipulation on the text rather than the image to create memetic commentary. As in Figure 6.16, this does not require specialized skill as there are many meme-generating websites and apps that easily facilitate memetic commentary. In this meme a still from the Reuters video has been captured probably by a simple screen shot as can be seen by the poor quality of the image. A blue label and a green label were then added to the image macro. While superimposing a phrase over a person is often used in memes in place of speech or thought bubbles, in this case the text serves rather as labels. Mistakes made in 2019 are visually personified in the lady that grabbed the pope's hand, while the meme creator moving into 2020 is represented by the pope. The meme creator has chosen a simple meme type font, which has been colorized. Color, like other modes, is multifunctional and has the ability to link social and cultural concepts (Kress

and Van Leeuwen 2002). The color choice adds to the meaning of this meme. Blue has been chosen for mistakes, having a cooler association, while green invokes endurance and growth, which has been chosen for the year 2020 (Alley and Alley 1998).¹⁹

In order to understand this meme, the meme creator assumes that the reader will have seen the video clip of the slap. Unlike in reaction memes, no facial expression could be seen in either of the participants. In his discussion of chronotopical scales Blommaert (2015:9) observes that “different audiences recognize different indexical orders”. While some reaction memes can be superficially understood, i.e., someone is upset, happy, or pulling a funny face, other memes assume multimodal literacy, as is the case with Figure 6.20. A somewhat fuzzy picture of the pope greeting a woman has no connection to the blue and green text without reference to the multiple modes in semiosis (Blommaert 2015:7) used to create meaning. The chronotopic moment of the pope slap, which was an actual moment in history, moved through different modes, from event to video and then to video still and, finally, meme. While an awareness of meaning in the different modes is not always necessary for meaning-making, in this case it is essential.

Humor is created through personification (Catanescu and Tom 2001) and readers can identify with having their mistakes trying to follow them into the new year where they may have to fight to free themselves of the consequences of past mistakes that want to hold them back.

¹⁹ Although Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) do make suggestions as to color saturation and meaning, they also note that the meaning of color is not universal but emerges out of specific contexts.

Pope Francis landed more punches in the past week than Rampage.



Figure 6.21: Pope and Rampage Meme. MMA Roasted uploaded to Google images

Figure 6.21 also uses an unremediated video still of the Pope Slap and places it together with another video still of a mixed martial arts fight. Two meme genres when combined often seem to enhance the virality of a meme, as for example in Figure 6.7. In this meme the meme creator, rather than combining two meme genres, combines two events. The meme compares the two images in the text above. The text refers to a time link between the two events, which both took place on the 29th of December 2019. Mixed martial arts fighter 'Rampage' Quinton Jackson, a former light-heavyweight champion, debuted as a heavyweight but was knocked out by Fedor Emelianenko in a much-anticipated fight. Jackson was criticized for being sluggish and out of shape (Coleman 2019). As well as creating humor, the meme also criticizes Jackson implying that an elderly cleric put up a better fight than a professional fighter. In Figure 6.17, the pope's grumpy expression and Grumpy Cat's expression formed a chronotopic link. In Figure 6.21, we have two chronotopic links. The actual shared date of both events in real time and the plot chronotope of two characters,

namely the pope and Rampage, whose separate ‘fight’ plots are balanced against each other to form a major comic chronotope.

The humor created through both exaggeration and a tongue-in-cheek response to a situation (Catanescu and Tom 2001) serves as an example of affiliative humor used to enhance relationships with others and create a sense of solidarity in this particular sporting community (Martin et al. 2003).



Figure 6.22: Woman Yelling at Cat Pope Meme uploaded to starecat.com

In this photographic remediation of a still from the original news video, the pope’s head has been replaced by a cat’s head and the woman’s head has been replaced by two women. By doing so the meme creator consciously connected the scene with two popular meme genres and in doing so combined their generic chronotopes.

The two women are from the TV series *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* (Gorman 2010). On December 5, 2011, an episode aired in which cast member Taylor Armstrong cries during an argument and is comforted by cast member Kyle Richards. The following day an article was published in the English newspaper *Daily Mail*, which described the new series and posted a still

of Armstrong pointing and crying (Watkins 2011). The photograph was picked up on social media and became a popular meme template called Woman Yelling, which is dependent on the use of reaction and expression rather than text (Samson et al. 2008) to create meaning.

In June of 2018, an LOLCat meme was posted on Tumblr, which featured a cat with a confused expression sitting in front of a plate of vegetables with a typically misspelt text caption “he no like vegetals”. This quickly became a reaction meme and was posted with different humorous dislikes. Both the Woman Yelling and LOLCat image macros saw sustained popularity as individual reaction memes until 1 May 2019, when a Twitter user made a single meme consisting of both images uncaptioned (Know Your Meme).



Figure 6.23: Yelling Woman and Cat Meme. The uncaptioned meme using both images posted to Twitter by @MISSINGEGIRL on May 1, 2019

The new meme quickly gained significant spread on various social media platforms and became a meme template, which became known as the Woman Yelling at a Cat meme. In this meme format the cat is unperturbed by accusations and has a good comeback for the punchline as can be seen in the example below. This meme genre gained widespread popularity with hundreds of independent memes being circulated (Jackson 2019). The meme’s impact can be noted by the fact that in November of 2019, EbaumsWorld, a popular entertainment website owned by Literally

Media, published a collection of significant examples titled “49 Best ‘Woman Yelling at a Cat’ Memes That Have Taken Over the Internet”.²⁰



Figure 6.24: Yelling Woman and Cat Argument Meme. An Example of Woman Yelling at a Cat meme from Google

In Figure 6.24, the remediated pope meme above makes use of the Woman Yelling at Cat meme chronotope, and by infusing it with the pope video still creates more layers of meaning, while at the same time enhancing its virality prospects.

In order to understand and find the humor in this meme, the reader would have to have seen the pope video and understand the interaction between the woman and the pope (Kiley 2020). The details of the actions of both the woman and the pope are layered with the chronotopes of the imposed pictures (Cohen 2015). The woman is now an unsympathetic crybaby trying to dominate the pope’s time. The pope will not be dictated to and comes out unaffected and master of the situation. He is no longer even engaging with the woman and owes her nothing as the cat’s face is turned away from her.

²⁰ See <https://www.ebaumsworld.com/pictures/woman-yelling-at-cat-memes/86009016/>.



Figure 6.25: Reese Slap Meme from Google

Many memes focus on manipulating the text rather than the image to create memetic commentary. Other memes, such as Figure 6.22, make use of image manipulation. Figure 6.25, on the other hand, while not using any stills from the Pope Slap event, manages to connect to the chronotope of this event by the use of the word 'slap' in the text.

This meme began circulating in February of 2020 after well-known American baseball player Reese McGuire was arrested and charged with public indecency for masturbating in his car in a public place (Fisher 2020).

This is a very typical meme format with image icon and text carrying equal weight in meaning creation. The viewers' attention is carefully directed in the photograph through its framing (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:183). The layout consists of a remediated photograph of the pope with the finger pointed – a gesture that is often, though not exclusively, associated with a reprimand

(Kendon 2004). This association is further reinforced by Photoshopped glowing laser eyes, which have been given to the pope.

Laser Eyes memes became popular in January of 2010 with the release of a game called Mass Effect 2, in which certain game characters took control of others. The eyes of those controlled were depicted as glowing yellow (McElroy 2010). By 2011, the meaning of glowing eyes had changed to indicate strong energy, or a super mode being engaged and has come to be a character's indication of power in anime comics (Kincaid 2011).

Chronotopes indicate possibilities, constraints, likelihood, and improbability. The large easy-to-read meme font text demonstrates this chronotopic quality by evoking a warning, beginning with 'You're next' – a threat that has become a common meme type. This is followed by McGuire's first name indicating familiarity. Once again, the reader would have to know the story of his arrest in order to understand the meme. The Roman Catholic Church has long had a troubled history with human sexual expression. Masturbation is classified as a sin (Mackinnon 2004). Although a different image macro is used the '+10 slaps' evokes the chronotope of the pope slapping the woman, while also criticizing the inconsistency of the Catholic Church's handling of sexual sins with vocal criticism of masturbation while numerous accusations of child molestation by priests have gone unpunished and even covered up by the Church (Stevens 2011).



Figure 6.26: Batman Slaps the Pope Meme uploaded to Google in January of 2020

After the December 2019 event, Pope Slap memes quickly gained popularity on social media platforms where old meme templates were quickly adapted and repurposed. The Batman Slapping Robin or 'My Parents Are Dead' image macro was a good fit as similarities between comics and comic strips and memes have been pointed out and widely discussed (Hristova 2014).

Figure 6.26 serves as a good example of the way new meme content is quickly adapted using older chronotopes and formats by focusing on photographic remediation of the original image as well as memetic commentary through text manipulation (Pilipets 2019).



Figure 6.27: The Original Batman Slaps Robin Illustration from the 1965 comic *World's Finest* #153

Taken from a comic book published in 1965, in which Batman slaps Robin, the single-panel illustration has been used to create humorous parodies since at least 2008 (Cronin 2009). The popularity of this meme template can be gaged by the fact that when the meme generator Quickmeme (<http://www.quickmeme.com>) created a page with this template in April of 2012, more than 20,000 memes were submitted within the first eight months.

The meme format template is the actual comics panel that has been flipped horizontally, and a one-word balloon was altered to overlap the other, so that Batman appears to be slapping Robin mid-statement (Polo 2020).

In Figure 6.26, further photographic remediation has taken place, with Robin's head, yellow cape, and green glove being replaced by a comic-drawn pope's head, white cap, and hand, which fit the cartoon stylistically. In a humorous role reversal, it is the pope that is now being slapped and not doing the slapping. On first appearance, it could seem that the pope is being criticized for his position on gay marriage. However, a knowledge of the original storyline in which Batman slaps

Robin evokes a different chronotope. In the original storyline, Batman is obsessed with blaming Superman for his parents' deaths and it is Robin, who as his friend tries to get him to give up the self-destructive obsession. Batman is left the unsympathetic villain of the interaction (Cronin 2009).

The meme creator has once again used a humorous meme as a subtle commentary on the pope's stance on gays by comparing all critics of the Catholic Church's anti-gay positions to Batman who is obsessed and not willing to listen to the pope's reassurances that gay issues will be more sympathetically addressed (O'Loughlin 2015).



Figure 6.28: I'll be Ready Meme uploaded by Heavencanwait to Imgflip

Figure 6.28 is another variation on the Pope Slap meme type using two unremediated image macros to create a two-pane meme. This is a modification of a classical meme format, combining the pope's slap from a video still from December 31, 2019, and a Reuter's news agency photo of the pope holding up the Book of the Gospels as he celebrates Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on January 1, 2020 (Glatz 2020). Classical memes normally have text in the upper and lower quarters of the image macro. In this meme, text is used only in the upper quarter of each image macro. Both image macros are the same size suggesting equal importance in meaning creation.

A generic meme text font is used for the two phrases. In an unusual use of punctuation, which is often not used in memes, both phrases are in quotation marks. Memes only adhere to grammatical rules when they are specifically needed to underline communication intent (Green 2007). The pope's gesture in the first image macro makes it clear that the text is his quotation and not the woman's speech. In the second image macro, the text is easily assigned to the pope, as he is the only visible person. The meme is meant to be read from the top down, with the text being amplified by the gestures in each image.

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:122), gesture can be termed an "image act". Gestures create vectors, which direct the viewer's attention and help to create a 'relationship' with the viewer. The first image draws on the chronotope of the video and assumes that the viewer will have seen the pope slap the woman. 'No touchies' is a micro chronotope infant-directed speech (Dewar 2015), which directs the viewer to interaction with toddlers when a slap on the hand is administered if a child wants to touch or grab something not allowed. The humor of this childish interaction is intensified through the use of time markers demonstrating the use of "spatial and temporal indicators" and their fusion "into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (Bakhtin 1981:84). The time reference of 'next time' serves as the joining point between the major chronotopes that each meme carries and helps to form a plot chronotope of regeneration in which a conflict (the interchange with the woman in the upper meme) is overcome and the likelihood of an equilibrium is projected with a solved problem (no one will try to touch the pope again). The pope's slap on the evening of the 31st is intensified the next day in the image that follows. The upraised gesture is most often used as one of offering (as in Figure 6.1 The Pope Holding Things memes) but is being reinterpreted as a threatening gesture by the angle of the photographic image,

in which only one of the pope's eyes are visible, as if aiming at the viewer with the unusually heavy looking book that will be used as a weapon if someone tries to touch him again.

In this meme the element of humor is intensified with an added layer of irony created through a visual pun. The association of the idiomatic expression to 'throw the book at someone' that is, severely punishing them, with a book, in this case part of the Bible, which instead of bringing comfort and spiritual healing would be used to hurt (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hover 2000).

6.6 ELF ON THE SHELF PHOTO FAD

Memes often gain virility through photo fads. Photo fads include staged photos imitating actions in various settings in reaction to a similar photo posted on an individual's social media feed. The meme creator either volunteers or is dared to do this and creates their own fad meme. In this way the photo fad becomes a type of identity building group dare (Molloy 2012). Photo fads can be the macro equivalents of flash mobs. Participating individuals demonstrate their understanding of the major chronotopes of the meme by deconstructing and then reconstructing the micro or minor chronotopes. They creatively modify these chronotopes, while still retaining the major chronotope of the meme and preserving the meme chronotope genre. This is done through photographic remediation of an image, by adding or cutting out part of the original image or using mundane imitation by only minimal interference with the image macro, or by using a different image macro that only evokes some aspect of the original fad meme (Pilipets 2019). The Elf on the Shelf photo fad demonstrates this evolution.

The Elf on the Shelf photo fad refers to a series of image macros, which use a phrasal template. The meme is captioned "You've heard of Elf on the Shelf, now get ready for". This is followed by a photographically remediated image macro of two things that rhyme with each other – normally a person and object, which then serves as the punchline for the caption. This particular photo fad is only one step in the evolution of this long-lived meme genre.

In 2005, a children's book and toy set titled *The Elf on the Shelf: A Christmas Tradition* (Aebersold and Bell 2005) was released. The book tells the story of an elf, who spies on the children in the house and tells Santa. The story encouraged the tradition of placing the toy elf in different parts of the house to ensure that the children were being good. The toy and book proved very popular and

won the Learning Express toy retailer's Best Toy Award for three years running in 2008, 2009, and 2010 (Kavilanz 2017).

In November of 2009, a Facebook page began a meme photo fad titled "Elf on a Shelf Gone Bad", which highlighted image macros of the Elf on a Shelf doll posed in a variety of violent, sexual or degenerate situations. After a few months of popularity this meme genre seemed to be over, only to be relaunched in November of 2012, with a new caption "Elf on the Shelf Is Creepy".

In November of 2013, the meme dropped the caption and uncaptioned memes of photographs launched a new fad in which an Elf on the Shelf doll is posed next to sleeping children, or photographs of children with doodles drawn all over their faces (Know Your Meme).



Figure 6.29: Uncaptioned Elf with Doodles Meme. An Example of the uncaptioned Elf with doodles drawn on photograph meme fad uploaded to Pinterest

After a three-year hiatus, in October of 2016, the Elf on a Shelf chronotope returned and was fused with a creepypasta genre chronotope, which quickly gained popularity online. A creepypasta story is a very short purposefully bad horror story (Stegner 2020). In November the horror theme continued with a YouTube video in which an Elf on the shelf doll was cut open inspiring videos and memes of a mutilated Elf doll with diverse insides.

In September of 2017, the social media platform subreddit began posting many “Elf on the Shelf” meme variants. These included many of the creepy, or sexual situations but seemed to gradually tend towards silly or over the top exaggeration memes (Know Your Meme). Over the next few months these memes then morphed into the memes with the phrasal template of ‘You’ve heard of Elf on the Shelf, now get ready for’. One of the first of these memes was an image of Shrek on a backyard deck.

You’ve heard of Elf on the Shelf,
now get ready for



Figure 6.30: The Shrek on Deck Meme from Pinterest

As with other memes, this variant used a well-known public figure or movie personality and an object that rhymed with the name of the featured person. Photographic remediation is used to place the person and the object in the same image macro interacting in a humorous way.

The actual rhyming couplet is not mentioned, leaving the reader to guess the rhyme. To understand the meme, the reader must be able to identify the personality by name as well as the object. This demands a specialized level of cultural literacy. It also invites participation. In the commentary below the meme, many people engaging on different social media platforms commented on the rhyme or asked for help to understand the meme. The meme would then be shared with other people that appreciate the same cultural values. For instance, the Shrek on Deck meme would be shared with other Shrek movie fans. The meme used affiliative humor to enhance relationships with others and create a sense of community (Martin et al. 2003).

The selection of famous people and objects are in some memes based solely on rhyming schemes, but other meme creators also use this meme genre to make political or social commentary (Kulkarni 2017). For example, the meme below makes political commentary with former U.S. vice president Michael 'Pence on a fence' that spoke to the border crisis and the political controversy around the building of a fence on the U.S.-Mexican border during the Trump administration.

You've Heard of Elf on a Shelf, Now get Ready For.....



Figure 6.31: The Pence on a Fence Meme by Dailylopics.com from Google pictures

The fact that the pope is used in this meme genre (see Figure 6.32) underlines the fact that the pope is a well-known public figure and is as recognizable as movie stars and politicians.

The Pope on a Rope meme, while being a simple rhyme, also provides social commentary. A micro chronotope, namely the rope, is embedded in a minor chronotope that sets the rope-walking pope not in a circus (which would have also worked for the simple rhyme) but rather over a dangerous mountain canyon. These chronotopes, while keeping the meme firmly within this Photo Fad genre chronotope, also provide commentary on the fine line metaphorically that Pope Francis seems to be walking between progressive and conservative forces and doctrines in the Catholic Church, such as his interaction with and affirmation of gays and divorced people (O'Loughlin 2015).

The Pope on a Rope meme would in many ways promote a positive image of someone who is able to balance extreme views. The meme while being humorous contributes toward an action-hero chronotope of someone (Vaara and Reff Pederson 2013:17) who takes risks and is prepared to push boundaries as a reformer.

You've heard of Elf on the Shelf,
now get ready for



Figure 6.32: Pope on a Rope Meme from Google images via Jake52289r

The meme “You’ve heard of Elf on the Shelf, now get Ready for” continued through 2017 to 2019, reappearing each year around November and December. In 2020, it underwent an interesting change.

The change began with celebrities posting remediated image icons of themselves on another celebrity rather than an object. Although a meme’s audience is often only an imagined construction in that the meme creator normally only has a very vague notions of who he or she is communicating with when creating or posting a meme (Wiggins 2019:112), some meme genres, such as the Please Work memes discussed under Figure 6.6, attempt to remedy this by inviting reader participation. In this modification, the “You’ve Heard of Elf on a Shelf” prompt caption was sometimes removed, but readers were still encouraged to guess the answer with the hashtag #MyElf. Although originally begun by celebrities, this meme was wide open to

remediation, with people posing themselves with celebrities with names that rhymed with their own or made their own combinations of celebrities. Combinations of celebrities often involved animated figures from movies or games.

Once again, the pope's celebrity status was reinforced by him being used in this meme fad remediation, as in Figure 6.33, in which the meme creator has placed a dragon on the pope's head. This is an unusual posing as normally the other person or animated figure is posed on the shoulder of the celebrity. The prompt caption has been left in the meme as a dragon, and the positioning on the pope's head would be challenging to interpret unless the prompt to find a rhyming pattern between the two is given. The reading of this meme would require gaming knowledge as the dragon is from a popular online fantasy role-playing game called *Dragons of Hope* (Schick 1991). The humor is created around the simple pun of hope on a pope.

The humor created through these puns serves as an example of affiliative humor used to enhance relationships with others and create a sense of community (Martin et al. 2003).

You all heard of Elf On The Shelf
Now get ready for....



Figure 6.33: Hope on a Pope Meme from Pinterest uploaded by @Anime Obsessed Smol Bean

6.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter an analysis of twenty-one pope memes was undertaken using the analytic tools discussed in Chapter four in order to understand each meme's elaboration, maintenance, modification, and meaning, beginning, where possible, with the original image macro. In keeping with the openness of the Bakhtian approach to the analysis of meaning (Bakhtin 1994), no particular analytic format was used and the analysis was allowed to evolve internally from the various layers of the meme.

The memes all showed considerable evolution over time. The non-linear nature of meme time was well demonstrated, with a number of memes reoccurring after several years of dormancy, as in the Pope Holding Things memes (see Section 6.1) from 2015 that returned as a photo fad in 2020. Discovering historical background proved important in tracing the development and changes of the memes, as for example in the long evolution of the Elf on a shelf photo fad (cf. Section 6.6).

Attention-grabbing image macros that could easily be manipulated were drawn from other sources by meme creators and seemed to be one of the most used techniques in meme creation, as in Figure 6.15 of the photograph of the pope and Trump meeting that became a popular meme. News events often proved the source for meme creation, although the moments that became a successful meme were sometimes rather random and not necessarily directly associated with the news events that carried the most important political importance. Memes often fed into mainstream news media networks and became news items, and in turn sometimes took photographs or video stills from these sources in meme creation, as in the Pope Holding Things fad (cf. Section 6.1) or the pope and Trump meeting memes (Section 6.4).

Multimodal layering was well demonstrated in meme creation. While some memes depended on image macros to create meaning (such as Figures 6.8 or 6.9), when language was used, text and image macros normally carried equal importance in meaning creation. All changes to micro chronotopes through remediation or memetic commentary were always deliberate and carried meaning. Memes were created and shared as a means of self-expression (Figure 6.20), and/or to comment on personal (Figure 6.7), societal (Figure 6.27), or political issues (Figure 6.18). Memes were also used to integrate into or affirm positions in online communities.

The following chapter seven continues the analysis of different meme types with examples of memes that have not demonstrated extensive evolution through shares.

Chapter 7

EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEANING-MAKING IN POPE MEMES: AN ANALYSIS (PART II)

The following chapter continues the exploration of different meme types. The 18 pope memes in this chapter have been chosen as examples of single cultural units. Most of these memes are stand-alone memes, which have not demonstrated evolution through shares over time. In several of the examples multiple memes have been created from the same image macro, forming a fad or family of independent memes. The same analytic tools used in chapter 6 will be applied to each meme to understand the meme's elaboration, modification, and meaning (Wiggins 2019), beginning, where possible, with the original image macro.

As in chapter six, attention will be paid to the 'micro' facts that invoke a 'macro' context within the discursive communication of the meme (Procházka 2018:78-87). In the selected memes, the levels of contexts that are often nested in different chronotopic frames will be determined (Procházka 2018). Micro and macro chronotopes will be identified as they contribute to the macro chronotopes that help to provide the "translocal (macro) meanings" (Blommaert 2015:107).

The analysis will be allowed to evolve internally from the various layers of the meme (Bemong et al. 2010) and a strictly prescribed analytic format will not be followed, nor will each meme necessarily be analyzed in the same order.

7.1 POPE SIGNING LAMBORGHINI



Figure 7.1: Pope Signing Lamborghini Photograph from the official Lamborghini Facebook page

On November 15th, 2017, Pope Francis was photographed at the Vatican signing a Lamborghini Huracan donated to him by the manufacturer. The car was then auctioned off; and the proceeds were used to help Christian communities that had been attacked by ISIS.

A famous person signing anything is the equivalent of a blank check for meme creators as minimal technical skill is required to manipulate the image by erasing the script and adding new scripts or images. Gesture can be an important way of directing the viewer attention. Gesture, or “image act” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:122), can be used to create the vectors in an image that will direct the eye to the focus point. This image act of signing evokes a micro chronotope, which is normally imbedded in a minor chronotope of location by placing the actors in an ‘official’ location. This helps to create a major chronotope of power and authority. Meme creators can easily manipulate the text to produce dissidence and humor. This was demonstrated by the rapid creation and spread of memes whenever President Trump was filmed or photographed signing an executive order (Kircher 2017).

The photograph of the pope signing the Lamborghini was also quickly turned into a meme and widely shared. Hundreds of memes of Pope Francis writing were quickly created and spread across numerous social media platforms. A simple Google search of this meme brought up 235 memes using this image macro. Below are two of these memes demonstrating the wide range of topics and audiences addressed. The first one includes a simple memetic commentary, which focuses on the manipulation of the text with minimal interference to the image macro. This meme serves as an example of a meme's capacity for both cohesion across iterations and, at the same time, uniqueness (Davison 2012; Segev et al. 2015).



Figure 7.2: Pope Drawing Pepe the Frog meme

In this meme the pope's signature has been replaced with a simple drawing of Pepe the Frog. Pepe the Frog was created by cartoonist Matt Furie in 2005 as an online cartoon character. It has since become enormously popular with a very curious history. In using this drawing, the meme creator is tapping into an extremely convoluted and (by meme standards) long history with multiple converging and contradictory chronotopes. By connecting the pope with Pepe, the meme opens

itself to many interpretations dependent on the context and time period in which this meme is shared.

In order to understand some of this meme's illocutionary force, it must be noted that Pepe is one of the few cartoons that has come to be classified as a hate symbol by the Anti-Defamation League, which put it into the same category as the Swastika. Pepe then shed this chronotope to become a liberation struggle icon (Riemensperger 2018). Originally, when the cartoonist created the frog cartoon, he also captioned it 'feels good, man'. The image and phrase soon became a meme on social media (Khan 2015). The image macro of Pepe was kept, while the simple black-and-white line drawing was modified and Pepe became green with brown lips, and sometimes in a blue shirt (Collins 2015). The 'feels good, man' caption was dropped, and Pepe was used to evoke emotions, such as melancholy, anger, and surprise (Khan 2015). By 2014, Pepe's memes were still going strong on social media, and some of these memes were sold as physical paintings, on marketplace platforms, such as Craigslist (Gabe 2015). By 2015, Pepe was listed as one of the most important memes on social media (Nair 2015).

Although Pepe was used to voice many opinions and deliver humorous lines, the memes using Pepe to suggest racist, anti-Semitic, and bigoted notions had a larger coverage on social media leading to the association of the image with these views (Riemensperger 2018). The chronotopes associated with Pepe came into sharp focus when Pepe was used during the 2016 United States presidential election, with the meme being used in Donald Trump's online campaign. Pepe was already widely used by alt-right groups, and the Trump campaign's use of Pepe was viewed by various news organizations and the Hilary Clinton campaign as evidence of Trump's sympathy for white supremacy groups (Nuzzi 2016). In turn, this led to a fight over who owned Pepe and had the rights to the chronotopes he evoked. Eventually in 2017, Furie, the original creator of Pepe, announced that he was killing Pepe in an attempt to disconnect Pepe from his hate image (Riemensperger 2018). Furie spent the following years aggressively suing entities and sites using the Pepe image, successfully winning several court cases, and having the image removed from gaming sites, although the meme continued to circulate widely on social media (Swinyard 2019).

In August 2019, the Pepe meme made a viral comeback. Surprisingly, Pepe seemed to have lost all connections with alt-right and white supremacists when Hong Kong protestors began using

protest signs depicting Pepe in marches as a resistance symbol against police brutality and a China-imposed extradition bill (Bourke 2019). During these protests, the image of Pepe the Frog underwent a modification to show Pepe with an injured eye after a young female first aider lost her eye from a projectile fired by police. A sign with Pepe with an injured eye held by the injured person gained international media attention, which in turn inspired multiple social media memes (Daniel 2019).

The creation and evolution of this internet cultural unit has inspired a documentary movie entitled 'Feels Good Man' released in January 2020. The movie is a first in that it explores the Pepe chronotopes and proposes that meme culture is becoming a new 'language' medium for online communities (Allen 2020). As such, Pepe the frog is a good example of the radical symbolic growth and transformative potential a meme can have as a cultural unit.



Figure 7.3: Pope Identifying the Root of All Evil meme first posted by McJock

In Figure 7.3, the pope's signature has been replaced with text. The Berkshire Swash typestyle font is used. The font is free and thus easily available to meme creators. Meme creation is meant to appear quick and spontaneous. Thus, highly 'polished' memes or memes that appear to be from an official paid source are generally regarded with suspicion and usually do not enjoy the same virality (De la Rosa-Carrillo 2015). Although a font is generally not the focus feature of a meme, the font does carry chronotopes, which help to evoke a particular subject, mood, or historical period (Keung 2020). This font, while clearly legible even at the angle that it has been pasted, evokes the calligraphy of a hand-copied medieval manuscript. The phrase "the root of all evil" makes reference to a Bible verse, found in the New Testament: "For the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). The modified verse used in the meme replaces "the love of money" with "microtransactions".

A microtransaction is anything that is charged for in a video game apart from the initial purchase (Chandler 2020). Many video games have made use of microtransactions to make money from 'free' games. While normally players are given the option of earning tokens or credits that will give certain advantages to them, players can also buy with real money certain decorative or cosmetic features. In 2017, the game *Star Wars Battlefront II* brought microtransactions into mainstream focus by allowing players to purchase 'loot boxes' with real money (Makuch 2018). Loot boxes included abilities that affected gameplay and could not be earned through play. This was immediately criticized as being unfair. Gamers worried that someone could potentially win the game based not on skill but on the amount of money a gamer spent (McCaffery 2019). The issue with *Star Wars Battlefront II* turned attention to the use of microtransactions in the video gaming industry in general and dominated the forums dedicated to video game communities in the second half of 2017.

These online discussions led to the issue being taken up by lawmakers and regulatory bodies from around the world to determine if these loot box types of payments for games constituted a form of gambling. The implications are widespread, with children and underage youth making up a large part of the video gaming market (Makuch 2018).

Some countries, such as Belgium, passed laws to have monetary microtransactions removed from games. In the United States, some legislation to regulate microtransactions has been attempted.

Other countries, such as the United Kingdom, have set up committees to evaluate the effects of microtransactions in gaming on children and youth (Makuch 2018).

The micro chronotope of the typeface is nested in the minor chronotope of the text, which is written by the pope, and, carrying a chronotope of authority, contributes to the major chronotope of money being evil or morally questionable. A threat to the true value of life is evoked to ironically help protest its use in the very artificial morally questionable world of gaming. Although the humor is created by the incongruity of having the pope involved in an issue that seems nonreligious, this meme serves as an example of the implications memes can have on platforms that do not involve social media. It also offers an intriguing perspective into the real-life effects that memes can contribute to, such as the highlighting of issues, which ultimately lead to new legislation.

7.2. POPE RAGE COMICS

Examples of pope memes can be found across most meme families that consist of exploitable image macros, including also rage comics (Shifman 2014b). Although many of these memes make use of pope image macros, pope chronotopes can be used in a meme without drawings of the pope or pope image macros.

Dating back to 2008, when they first appeared as a series of web comic characters, rage comics have been used extensively in meme creation. Drawing software makes simple characters easy to reproduce. Sites such as Meme Generator also provide easy-to-replicate image templates with space for text that can be easily manipulated for meme creators who have no drawing skills. Rage comics are popular because they connect well with viewers by expressing real-life situations that viewers can identify with. They normally end with an unexpected twist, which helps to create humor (Bolton 2012). The following two examples have been chosen as illustrations of how rage comics and pope chronotopes have been combined in this type of meme.



Figure 7.4: PC Elects Pope Rage Meme posted to 9GAG.COM

This five-pane meme follows a comic format, with each picture being divided by lines. Unlike other cartoons, these are not framed properly. Three of the characters are rage faces. Rage faces are often created with simple drawing software. Although they do not look very professional, they have become standardized vehicles of expression (Boutin 2012) and are even used in teaching English as a foreign language (Wolford 2011).

Unlike other memes or even comics, the spoken script is not put in a speech bubble but simply at the top of each frame. Keeping with a minimalist appearance or theme, a simple typewriter script

is used. The typewriter script evokes an unsophisticated or ‘tell it like it is’ chronotope (Keung 2020). The last two images are better drawn, more sophisticated cartoon images.

Not all characters in this meme have the continuity of looking the same and therefore are identified by text below in the top two frames. The first column on the left is identified as ‘the stupid customer’ and the person on the right column is identified as ‘me at work’. This meme draws heavily on the minor chronotope locating the scene in an office setting. Within this office chronotope, there is the nested chronotope of work boredom. Chronotopes carry emotions and readers can feel the frustration of working in an unsatisfying work situation. This helps to recognize the stereotype of tech people having to deal with ignorant or stupid customers. The use of the personal pronoun ‘me’ encourages the reader to identify with the tech support person and not the customer in the cartoon.

The two drawings of the customer are identical, emphasizing this individual’s stupidity. This appeals possibly to the chronotope of stupid people, who are boringly stupid and lack creativity and are basically uninteresting. The meme’s humor focuses on the creative comeback of the tech worker. The rage comic face used for the customer is known as a Harp Darp and it is used to indicate someone is unintelligent or someone who makes ignorant statements. It is derived from internet slang and can be an online placeholder in conversations (Moss 2013).

The last two frames, in which the drawings are more sophisticated demonstrate the multimodal nature of rage comics composition. Both are derived from stills from popular movies. The rage comic face in the fourth frame is based on a drawing of Nicolas Cage from the 1988 movie *Vampire’s Kiss*. It is known as a ‘You Don’t Say?’ face that is used as a sarcastic response to an obvious observation or statement (Mayer 2014). The larger fifth frame is a line drawing of Captain Jean Luc Picard, played by Patrick Stewart, from a 1990 episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The captain’s reaction has become known as facepalming. This gesture has become a very popular part of the reaction in rage comic memes. It is used as a reaction to someone’s lack of judgment or lapse of logic and combines a mixture of humor and disbelief. This gesture has proved extremely popular with many thousands of memes being made with this reactionary gesture. Due to its popularity online as an emotive meme in 2011 facepalming made it into the Oxford English Dictionary. In 2016, facepalming was accepted as an emoji (Philiop 2019).

At the bottom of the meme a banner frames the meme. The banner refers to 9GAG, an online platform and social media website, which specializes in helping user-generated memes gain exposure (Wagener 2014). 9GAG memes are popular across most social media platforms and have become a type of informal branding for rage memes (Fiona 2012).

In the first two frames an office situation is alluded to. The tech person must answer a stupid question. It stands to reason that if the computer will not function and if it is smoking, then it is broken. Instead of stating the obvious the character makes reference to the historic event of the choosing of a new pope. When a new pope is chosen the event is marked with white smoke coming from the Sistine Chapel's chimney (Effron 2013). The humor is found in the ludicrous link of connecting a broken computer to the election of a new pope. To understand the humor, the event of choosing a new pope must be known to the reader (Raskin 1985). The last scene consists of a whole frame in which the character demonstrates exasperation. This is the punchline which leaves the reader to identify with the challenges of working with stupid people.

This meme is a good example of how framing text, drawings, and the placement of different figures all come together in the development of meaning. Instead of a one-frame meme, multi-frames are used to convey a situation that the reader can easily empathize with. Readers are given narrative through the use of rage faces, which serve as good placeholders for emotions. Rage comics have enjoyed wide use in memes because they are easily manipulated and can be used as vehicles for humorizing shared experiences (Hoevel 2011).

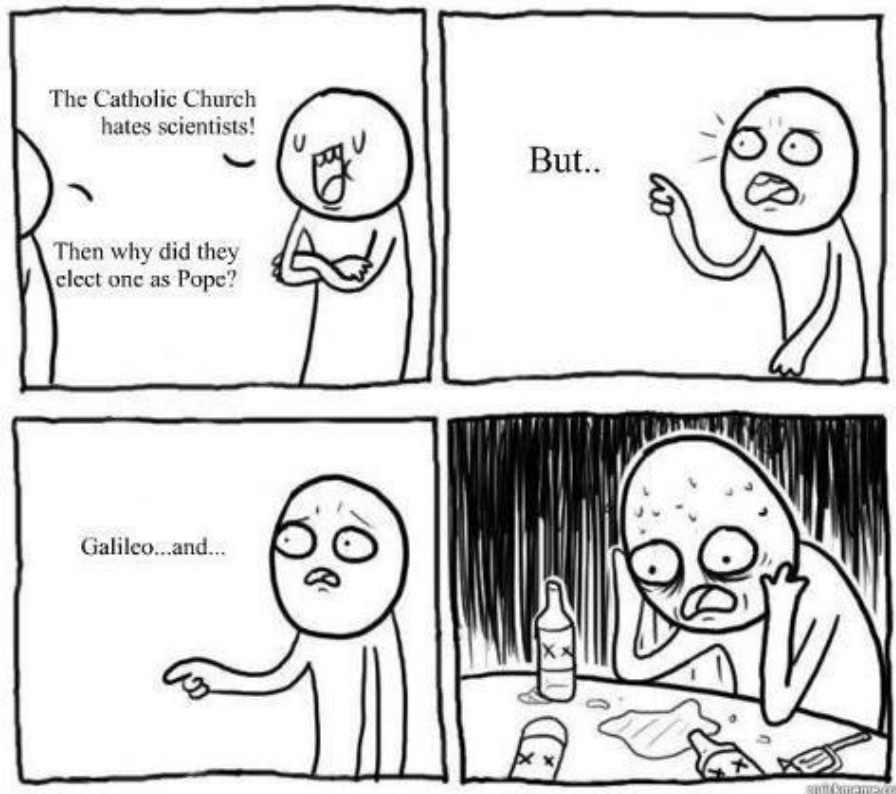


Figure 7.5: Depression Guy Facebook meme

While Rage Comic memes are normally created by using a set of pre-made and/or drawn rage faces, rage memes can also make use of a complete pre-made storyline. The complete meme minus the text is made into a template. Various examples of the same rage comic meme can be found on social media with the text that has simply been replaced. The meme above has been selected as an example.

Depression Guy, also known as the Overconfident Alcoholic, is an exploitable four-panel rage comic used to convey feelings of dismay after having a long-held truism destroyed.

The meme originated as part of a comic strip by Jesse Nylund and was first uploaded in 2011. In the original, the character claimed that nothing was funnier than a monkey in a suit, and the other person suggested that a baby in a suit with a cigar would be funnier (Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/overconfident-alcoholic#fn1>).

This simple storyline of an opinionated individual being challenged by a question seems to be fertile ground for meme creators. The template can be manipulated with minimal skill needed.

Unlike the previous rage comic (Figure 7.4), this one has each pane framed in an irregular frame which gives the feeling of being hand drawn. Although a second protagonist is mentioned in the first frame, the protagonist is not seen. The dialogue is presented with no cartoon bubbles. The speaker is identified by proximity to the corresponding script. The type is a simple typewriting font that is available for free and does not detract from the drawings.

In the first drawing a very self-assured speaker is shown. This emotion is demonstrated by the closed eyes and large open mouth as well as the folded arms. The character begins with a self-assured statement, which is reinforced by the exclamation mark. The speaker claims that the Catholic Church is unscientific. This speaker stands in for many readers, who may identify with this view. The second speaker then counters in the same pane with a simple question. The question implies that the Catholic Church cannot be anti-science seeing that they have elected a scientist as pope. This throws the character into confusion, as demonstrated by the confused expression and poised finger showing that the character would like to have a counter argument. In the third pane a weak attempt is made at argumentation by referencing Galileo. Here an attempt is made to show evidence from history that the Church is anti-science by referring to Galileo's 1633 Inquisitional Trial in response to his scientific discoveries suggesting that the planets revolved around the sun in contrast to the Church teachings that the earth was the center of the solar system (Blackwell 2006). The last cartoon pane shows the character in despair, possibly driven to the point of suicide, with the gun lying on the table as well as some bottles that presumably contain alcohol. He has been driven to despair because his long-held idea has been destroyed by the election of a scientist as pope. The combination of these incongruent elements provides the ironic tension for the character, which creates humor in the meme (Lefcourt and Martin 1986)

The humor of this meme is dependent on the chronotope of Pope Francis as the scientist, which has evolved from the fact that the pope has a chemical technician's diploma (Reese 2015).

7.3 DOPEST POPE



Figure 7.6: Dopest Pope Facebook meme post

This is a classic mundane imitation meme. The image macro has minimal interference with only the photographically remediated face of Pope Francis that has been pasted onto the held bag. The text follows a typical meme layout by dividing at the top and bottom of the image. Standard all-capitalized meme shadowed type font is used with no punctuation. The relative size of the text in relation to the image macro serves to indicate that both text and image share equal weight in meaning-making (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996).

In the image, two men are seen contemplating a plastic bag of something green. The pope's head has been Photoshopped onto the bag. The expression of the more casually dressed person on the left seems to be one of excitement. Seeing that he has his mouth open, the text can be assumed to be spoken by him. The text has been broken into two parts. 'Hands down' is an idiomatic expression for "easily, decisively, or without question" (Farlex Dictionary of Idioms 2015). Following this introductory statement, the reader's attention is drawn to the bag that both men are examining and most likely wonder about regarding its content. The final text consists of a word play with the rhyming 'dope' and 'pope' being manipulated to create ungrammatical superlatives.

Although the reader does not need to be able to identify the image macro in order to understand the humor of the meme, this image macro is a still from the 2008 movie *Pineapple Express* with Seth Rogen and James Franco. The movie's plot centers on a process server, who delivers court documents, and his marijuana dealer as they are on the run from hitmen and corrupt police. This movie became part of a cultural genre of comedies that revolved around the chronotope of the innocent recreational use of cannabis (Meltzer 2007).

The word dope has assumed a wide range of meanings over the past twenty years. Dope is both a slang term for excellence as well as the common name for cannabis (Lighter 1994). The word play in this meme works on many levels and contributes to the humor of this meme (Reyes et al. 2012). The Pope is Dope meme connects the pope to the culturally 'in' or 'cool' chronotope (Marcus 2015), while also associating him with the recreational use or, at least, endorsement of cannabis. According to the Urban Dictionary, 'pope' is also a slang term for the head of a drug cartel. The superlatives used also make for associations with doping or the use of performance-enhancing drugs. Multimodal layering is used in association with the words 'pope' and 'dope', connecting this meme to a cult movie. The chronotopes evoked in turn associate the pope with cool and the ultimate high. Humor is also created through the use of puns (Catanescu and Tom 2001). Although not directly addressing it, the meme also serves to poke fun at the religious antidrug movement that uses as its slogan "Get High on Jesus" (Plowman 1972).

7.4 POPE'S CAPE MEMES



Figure 7.7: Pope Cape Flying in Wind a frame from AFP news agency video filmed in December 2015

Although most people have had their hair blown out of style or have had to struggle to keep coats on or skirts down in a gusting wind, famous people who must deal with the elements in public always seem to make for good social media material. The pope has often been photographed with the wind blowing his cape, which has evoked many memes.

Images, such as the one above, can easily be Photoshopped and pasted into another frame to create incongruity between the elements in the frame. This invites other spin-offs, in which participants can humorously re-locate the main element in other settings (Shifman 2014a). The round form of the blown cape would seem a natural association and memes were soon created by photographic remediation of the image to change the object (Pilipets 2019). The original image macro became a standard template on meme generator sites such as Meme Template (<https://imgflip.com/memegenerator>), further facilitating easy appropriation by social media users. This generic chronotope of the simple remediated meme type is dependent on textual chronotopes, rather than visual cues for interpretation of the embedded chronotopes.



Figure 7.8: Pontiff Pizza meme

In Figure 7.8, the shape of the cape seemed to evoke a pizza for one meme creator. With photographic remediation, the pope's head and cape are inserted in place of pizza dough being hand-tossed. In the background of the main image macro, the pizza stone oven can be seen. Color, like other modes, is multifunctional and links social and cultural concepts (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002). The color choice adds to the meaning of this meme. The pizza maker's cap is in the Italian national colors. A meme type font is used for the unpunctuated text. Green for a meme font is unusual in memes and could have been chosen for its association with the green 'open' lighted signs that are often used in restaurants. The layout on the meme helps to create a pun with the 'Pontiff Pizza' being placed at the top of the image macro, which the word 'down' is placed at the bottom of the image macro. The word 'down' is used to amplify the pun by its location. 'Down' could be used as an adverb of location as well as a slang verb to be in agreement with someone or

something (Urban Dictionary). The pope, although Argentinian by birth, is well known to like pizza (Heasman 2022), which is also closely connected to an Italian identity (Demetri 2019).

A micro chronotope of a food type can help establish a chronotope of the family idyll. Vaara and Reff Pedersen (2013:14) describe the chronotope of the family idyll as evoking a unity of space in a family territory and an idyllic folkloric past time. In this case reference is made to pizza, which besides helping to establish an idyllic family chronotope, also contributes to an Italian chronotope (Laroche, et.al. 1998:125). Several chronotopes are evoked in this meme. There is the major chronotope of comfortable authenticity being created by intersecting micro chronotopes of pizza, big Italian families, and typically Italian traditions and identity. The incongruity of these minor chronotopes (the pope being used as pizza dough) helps to create the humor (Catanescu and Tom 2001).



Figure 7.9: Popey Pope Survey meme

For another meme creator, the shape evoked a pie chart. Pie charts are commonly used to present scientific information so that it can be easily understood by an audience. In Figure 7.9, a well-designed PowerPoint screen has been integrated onto the left of the image macro. The gray background makes for a seamless flow into the image macro. The connection to the pope is made by the slightly remediated photograph to the right of the meme. The round shape is accentuated by the green insert in both the pie chart and the opening in the pope's cape. Green is a relaxing color

for the human eye and has been chosen as it carries minor chronotopes of harmony, tranquility, and peace as well as stability and endurance (Alley and Alley 1998).

This meme is more text-heavy than most memes. It begins with what sounds like a legitimate research objective. Instead of a content question, a silly opinion is asked. In response to what was a serious presentation, in which the pope addressed pressing societal needs, no evaluation of facts or issues is surveyed. The ridiculous childishness is introduced to the survey by emphasizing the words ‘Popery’ and ‘hopey’, which carry a micro children’s poetry chronotope with the simple word play. The inconsistencies of the meme to the minor chronotope of scientific data help to create the humor. This meme introduces a major chronotope of misuse of scientific methodology. It is used to offer a critique on fake news in social media and misinterpretation of metadata (Jones 2000).



Figure 7.10: Back From the Vet meme

In Figure 7.10, the image macro seems to be used intact with minimal remediation to form a very versatile communicative unit.

Although this meme makes use of a natural association without photographic remediation of the image to change the object (Pilipets 2019), the association is not expected as the pope's cape seems to remind the meme creator of the recovery cone collars that are put on dogs and cats after surgery. The image macro is unremediated with the watermark still clearly visible. Text has been added above the image macro. A knowledge of the treatment of dogs or cats with the recovery cone is essential for the reader being able to identify the similar shape and application to the neck of the pope and identify the micro chronotope invoked. The minor chronotope would not be invoked without the embedded micro chronotopes in the text. This meme demonstrates the need for both linguistic literacies and visual literacies from different modalities to interact and complement each other in the meaning making process (Kress 2003). The humor in this meme is created through the inconsistency of the pope being a pet with a cone collar.



Figure 7.11: Holy Venom meme uploaded to Pinterest by Lindsey Stevens

The Holy Venom meme is probably one of the most widely circulated pope memes and has been shared widely on all social media platforms. Although this meme originated in 2015, it was still being shared on social media platforms, such as Pinterest, in 2022.

In the meme above, the watermark has been taken out of the photograph, but otherwise the image macro remains unremediated. As with the previous meme version, which refers to the pope's visit to the vet (see Figure 7.10), only the text above the image icon has been manipulated. This particular meme presents an unusual distribution pattern. A quick search on Google Images shows many of these memes.

Normally memes are shared with or without remediation, and although they have been shared hundreds of times in most of the shares, the content of this meme remains the same, although the memes are not identical. If a meme is shared with remediation, then the changes made normally become noticeable enough to result in a marked shift of meaning as every meme shared is shaped by multiple chronotopes that represent different understandings of the world and distinctive vantage points from which situations are observed (Morson and Emerson 1990). In this meme, rather than simply sharing the meme, many people changed the text font or the position of the text, personalizing it but not contributing to a shift in meaning before sharing, as can be seen in the examples of the variations shown below.



When threatened, the Pope can spray holy venom up to 25 ft

Figure 7.12: Remediated Holy Venom meme A



Figure 7.13: Remediated Holy Venom meme B



Figure 7.14: Remediated Holy Venom meme C



Figure 7.15: Remediated Holy Venom meme D

The remediated meme examples above serve as a sample of variations of the meme. They demonstrate that the text can be placed above and below, and inside the image macro or not on it at all without introducing new or modifying existing micro chronotopes. In Figure 7.12, the photograph has been slightly resized. Although the text is identical to the previous meme, a clearer

bold font type has been used and the text has been placed below the image macro. In Figure 7.13, the original image still with the watermark has been used. The text has been pasted into the image macro using meme-style font, and the phrase “blinding his victims” has been added. In Figure 7.14, the image has been cropped. The original text line is used unchanged. It has, however, been placed in the top of the image macro in meme-type font. A black border has been added to frame the meme. In Figure 7.15, the original photograph is used as can be seen by the watermark. It has been arranged in a typical meme layout with text above and below the image macro. The text has also been adapted, and the 25ft has been changed to thirty feet in words and not in numerals without punctuation. The added first phrase enlarges on the venomous-spitting dinosaur chronotope (see Figure 7.16 for an explanation of this chronotope). It would seem unlikely that the idea of the venomous-spitting dinosaur occurred to this many meme creators independently on being exposed to the 2015 video of the pope’s address. But rather than simply sharing the meme, which many people did do, many meme creators made adjustments to the image macro, layout, text, and text font of the meme before sharing in an effort to redesign the meme without changing the message.

These memes (Figures 7.12-15) prove to be challenging on a theoretical level. As has been noted in previous examples, most memes undergo a process that Bezemer and Kress (2008:176) label as ‘transformation’, which, according to them, refers to changes on the structural level where structures are changed but the modality remains the same. In other words, the image macro or the text may undergo changes, but a meme remains a meme. However, a change of meaning is produced through this rearrangement of the elements (Kress 2010). In this process of ‘transduction’ something formed in one modality is reformed into a different modality (Kress 2003:47). Meaning may or may not be affected by transduction. As is the case when a still from a video (as in Figure 7.7) becomes a meme template, thereby changing mode. The examples above (Figures 7.12-15) change structurally, and are, thus, undergoing transformation, but they do not change meaning in any way. As has been noted in other memes, a small change in a micro chronotope is often enough to introduce new meanings and influence the major chronotope, which does not in fact happen in these meme examples.



Figure 7.16: Who wore it better? Meme uploaded to Pinterest by Sean Leahy

Figure 7.16 makes the implicit comparison more explicit with the use of four different frames in the image macro. By using the top two images of a Dilophosaurus, the micro chronotopes from the 1993 movie *Jurassic Park* are embedded in the meme. In the movie, the dinosaur's ability to spit venom is a distinguishing feature, as is the neck frill, or cowl folded against its neck that expanded and vibrated as the dinosaur prepared to attack (Shay and Duncan 1993).

The text line in meme type font is placed as a caption in the image macro. The dark banner with white text makes it easily noticeable. Who Wore It Better? is a mundane copy of the Holy Venom generic chronotope meme, which combines this meme with another standard meme generic chronotope – the Who Wore It Better? meme genre that is normally used to make a comparison between people or a person, animal or object that share similar colors or patterns or contrived features, while inviting reader response in the comments.

The humor is created by the incongruity of the comparisons. As seen in the example of a Who Wore It Better? meme below, in which the comparison between Trump and an ear of corn is based on a similar wind-blown angle of the picture.



Figure 7.17: Trump or Corn - Who Wore It Better? meme comparing Trump to an ear of corn uploaded to Google by me.me in 2017

The directed comparisons in the ‘Who wore it better?’ meme invite other even less obvious mental comparisons that could evoke more micro or minor chronotopes and provide an additional layer to the messaging of the meme. As for Figure 7.16 above the comparison could lead to other comparisons such as – is the pope as dangerous as a venomous dinosaur? Or is the Catholic Church or the papacy as outdated as a dinosaur?

7.5 POPE REACTION MEME



Figure 7.18: Pope Reaction meme downloaded from Pinterest

The image macro used in the meme above is taken from L'Osservatore Romano/Associated Press, an official news media source, as the pope is presented with a gift from Bolivian President Evo Morales during his 2015 South American tour. The gift is a crucifix formed out of the top of the communist hammer and sickle symbol. The crucifix was designed by a Jesuit priest, who was kidnapped, tortured, and killed in Bolivia in 1980 (Wilkinson and Burke 2015).

Politicians, athletes, celebrities, and random pictures of people expressing emotion provide the image macros for reaction photos. These reaction photos provide a handy creative tool for people. The reaction photos are often used to humorously make fun of politicians and politics as they are

seen as a safe and less controversial way to question politics and make political statements (Green 2007).

This reaction meme follows a typical meme layout by having the text divided at the top and bottom of the image. An all-capitalized meme type font is used with no punctuation. The relative size of the text in relation to the image macro serves to indicate that both text and image share equal weight in meaning-making. The meme is well framed with a careful layout. No photographic remediation is obviously noticeable. Vertically, the image macro is divided into three almost equal sections with the crucifix in the center flanked by the two figures. No one is facing the camera as both Pope Francis and President Morales are looking at the unusual crucifix. President Morales' facial expressions are obscured because of the angle. He is dressed in dark in contrast to the pope on the right, whose expression is visible, and who is dressed in white. The black shadow on the text makes it clearly legible.

Specific features or objects can instantly provoke a chronotope (Blommaert 2015:7). In this case, the two contradictory micro chronotopes are combined visually in the gift, namely the crucifix formed out of the top of the hammer and sickle. The crucifix is a symbol of Christianity, while the hammer and sickle are recognized as communist symbols. The visual impact evokes dissidence. The visual oxymoron evokes an emotion of confusion in the viewer as he or she is unable to mentally order the symbol. The reader's emotion is mirrored by the pope's puzzled expression, which serves to locate the minor chronotope of the awkward social encounter. The dialogical chronotope sets the pope and Morales as equals in a teleological plot chronotope in which the pope's actions or reactions can lead to conflict or the maintenance of an equilibrium. Readers are led to identify with the meme through these chronotopes. Most people have experienced the awkward moment in which they are given an unwanted gift and realize that their reaction can lead to conflict with the giver. This situational humor is often used in memes. Although this is a historically specific event, the reader is invited to participate by the use of the personal pronoun 'you' and the image or reactionary expression is underlined by the phrase "that face you make when you asked for". Zieglers.com is an online Catholic Church supply store. Readers are invited to remember the times when they have received an unwanted gift. Most readers have experienced an online order that has been mixed up or have been given a gift that they didn't know what to do

with. The humor of the meme is dependent on a reader's knowledge of social etiquette and norms, which dictate that we always express and demonstrate appreciation for a gift.

While being humorous, the meme also makes commentary on the pope's relationship to and interaction with socialist countries and trends in the Catholic Church. The interactions between Communism and the Catholic Church are an extremely complex and sensitive subject in Latin America, which is the pope's home continent (Gutiérrez 1988). The Catholic Church as an institution and individual Catholic clergy and leaders have often argued about the role of the Church and its assimilation of or rejection of communist ideology. Liberation theology, an important theological/social ideology, which has had a worldwide impact, was first formulated in Latin America as part of this conflict (Smith 1991). While he was an archbishop in Argentina, Francis tried to strike a delicate balance between advocating for the poor and preventing class warfare. This meme could be commenting on the pope's awkward handling of liberation theology, while trying to make all sides happy (Stourton 2015).

7.6 POPE AS PREDATOR MEME

Not all memes create or make use of positive chronotopes of any public figure, including the pope. There are many online meme communities in which societal norms for conversation themes and topics are deliberately flaunted (Falconer 2012). This is also reflected in the memes created and circulated in these groups. While some memes can be subversive or negative to challenge stereotypes, many are often blatantly gory, sexist, rude, abusive, or make use of dark humor and attempt to be intimidating or hateful. Although these memes are widely circulated within their respective communities, they seldom seem to break out into mainstream social media platforms and forums. It seems that memes that use humor and are more subtle have a better chance at a wider distribution (Berger and Milkman 2012).

This seems to be the case with pope memes as well. There are sites such as the Anti-Christ Pope Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/TheAntiChristPope>) and memes that are immediately visible as being anti-pope that evoke major chronotopes of dictatorship (e.g., by embedding micro chronotopes with the use of Nazi symbols), conspiracy theories (e.g., by combining image icons of Bill Gates, and pharmaceutical companies and the pope), and sinister secret societies (e.g., by using the micro chronotope of the number 666 and Satanic symbols) to criticize the papacy and/or

the Catholic Church system or policies. These memes do not enjoy wide distribution and are seldom shared. However, memes such as Figure 7.18, in which humor is used are more effective communicators and are more widely shared.

In order to provide some balance between the more positive pope memes, efforts to demonstrate more negative memes that found their way into mainstream social media were attempted. This proved to be more challenging. A simple Google image search for ‘pope memes’ or ‘Pope Francis memes’ brings up pages of positive memes in various generic meme chronotopes, some of which have been used as examples above. However, finding negative pope memes can only be done with a biased meme search such as ‘commie pope’, or ‘pedophile pope’. Some memes, which make use of negative pope chronotopes, can be found under other search topics, such as Figure 7.20, which is found as a ‘Cain killed Able with a rock’ meme family.

😍😍 **THESE PREDATORS ARE SOOOO CUTE** 😍😍



Figure 7.19: Cute Predators meme uploaded to dankmemes by u/Casnova24 in February 2019

In Figure 7.19, unremediated image macros and memetic commentary are used (Pilipets 2019). The reader's attention is carefully directed in the meme through its framing (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:183). The meme creator has used four image macros to form the meme. The blank spaces between the images disconnect the images, showing they are all different kinds of predators. The four image macros are then welded together through the caption. The first image macro is of a cute looking lion cub. The next is a tiger, followed by the pope, and, finally, a wolf. The gestures used in each of these memes create vectors, which direct the viewer's attention and help to connect directly with the viewer (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:122). This is particularly noticeable in this meme where the interaction of the reader with the animals evokes minor chronotopes that inform the local in which time and space meet (Blommaert 2015:7).

Chronotopes evoke possibilities, constraints, and likelihoods for characters (Blommert 2015:105-116). The animals in this meme help to create the projected dangerous nature of the Roman Catholic Church system as regards child abuse. The animals are not in particularly threatening poses, but all are making eye contact with the reader. The animals are majestic but powerful and dangerous, and should never be underestimated. The full attention that each animal is giving in making and keeping eye contact with the reader evokes micro chronotopes of hunting and stalking. The minor chronotopes of the animals engaging the reader is compared to the pope who, although not presented by a close head shot, is depicted as contemplative by the finger-to-chin gesture (Kendon 2004). This gesture makes him more dangerous than the animals, as he is less transparent.

The humor is created through multilayering of information. The first being the incongruity of grouping the pope with these animals that are clearly labeled as predators. The second layer of reader-perceived incongruity in the meme is the description of predators as cute (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hover 2000). The word cute is not normally paired with predator, as this word carries with it a micro chronotope of innocence. This is underscored by the use of love emojis that have become a carrier of emotion. The combination of these incongruent elements provides the ironic tension, which creates humor in the meme (Lefcourt and Martin 1986).

This meme began circulating as various Catholic child abuse scandals were uncovered in the United States, Australia, and Ireland (De Boer 2019). The meme evokes chronotopes of the

Catholic Church's history of abuse of women and children (Bruni 2002) or the numerous sexual scandals, rape, and abuse cases that have been or are being brought against various Catholic schools and institutions (Adolphe and Rychlak 2018).

Humor is used as a way of exploring this offensive information (Schnurr and Plester 2017). This meme seems to be plugging in to the emotionally charged environment of the #MeToo movement, which is giving voice to the problem of the sexual abuse of women by men in positions of power. While criticizing the role of the papacy in the handling of child abuse scandals, the meme also criticizes public opinion, which is depicted as codling and defending instead of recognizing the danger and standing against it. Part of the unexpected incongruity contributes towards the humor even while exploring these charged themes (Hübler and Bell 2003).

7.7 BORDER WALLS MEME



Figure 7.20: Border Walls meme. Uploaded to Facebook by Sizzle January 2017.

During President Donald Trump's presidency, he and the pope clashed publicly on several issues. One of these issues involved Trump's immigration policies (Borchers 2016). While Trump was still a presidential candidate, in 2016, Pope Francis made a reference to Trump's campaign promise to build a wall between the USA and Mexico by saying that "a person who only thinks about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian" (Burke 2016). Francis has made the predicament of migrants and refugees one of the significant issues of his papacy (O'Loughlin 2015). In the past, he has made many pronouncements on the morality of a border wall. In 2017, days after Trump released the first iteration of a travel ban, temporarily halting refugee admissions and blocking immigration from seven predominantly Muslim countries, Pope Francis again made reference to the morality of a border wall (Kuruvilla 2019).

In response to the pope's statements, Trump supporters created border wall memes, which were briefly shared. Unlike the other memes that enjoyed longer life and more visibility on social media, these memes were relatively short-lived and mainly shared by pro-Trumpers. The image icons used in these memes did not become templates in meme generating platforms and seemed to reflect the rugged individuality of the meme creators, who did not seem to borrow or modify other memes but rather made their own individual memes with little reference to or integration of other meme genres. The majority of these memes were very text-heavy and argumentative in tone. Most largely made use of sarcasm. This most likely is reflected in the low numbers of likes and shares on main line social media platforms, as, for example, Figure 7.20 only had 31 likes to date, which reflects a very small circulation. People engaging in aggressive humor often resort to sarcasm and ridicule (Martin et al. 2003). While this type of humor often helps to create or solidify a group identity, it does not seem to promote distribution outside of the group.

Figure 7.20 features a Photoshopped image of the pope pasted on an image macro of the Vatican City walls. Text makes up about half of the meme. The large image of the pope on the left is meant to draw the reader's attention, as in text reading from left to right, from the pope to the large wall behind him, with the focus on the not-too-clear papal coat of arms in the center of the meme. The large yellow text in the top and lower sections of the meme contains a quote from the pope suggesting that border walls are anti-Christian. Vatican City is placed in smaller red script as a label for the wall, and a large red arrow (larger than the yellow text) is meant to draw attention to the wall. Finally, the creator's watermark is clearly visible in the bottom right corner. As has been

seen in memes that started out as cartoons (as, for example, Figure 6.18), having a creator's signature on a meme often serves to discourage modification of a meme. This in turn can influence the likelihood of a meme being shared. Although the messaging of the meme is clear, it somehow does not seem to work as well as many of the other meme examples. This could be because of the oversimplification of the message. Although a knowledge of the interchange between Trump and the pope is needed to understand the meme, it lacks layers of meaning. The focal point for the eye, namely the Coat of Arms, is not clear or pertinent to the composition of the meme, and the large red arrow is almost insulting to the reader, who can see the large wall and knows that it is labeled as the Vatican's wall. Perhaps this meme evokes the chronotope of an explained joke, with someone carefully explaining a joke and pointing out the cleverness of the joke. With a large part of humor consisting in the personal act of 'discovering' the incongruity (Vaetch 1998) in two competing chronotopes, leaving a person in a state of tension that needs resolution, over explanation dissolves the humor. The meme lacks micro chronotopes of incongruent elements that provide the ironic tension which creates humor in memes (Lefcourt and Martin 1986).

While meme fonts are normally black or white, this meme makes use of color in the text. Kress and Van Leeuwen note that strong colors removed from their natural frame become "signifiers in their own right" and "expressive of emotive . . . meanings" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:177). Both the yellow and the red used, as well as their size, could be seen to trigger louder, aggressive or argumentative emotions. This meme aims at irony and points to the incongruity of the pope criticizing Trump's proposed wall when he is surrounded by the Vatican city's walls. It is meant to evoke a major chronotope of hypocrisy and undermine the pope's online persona as an icon of morality. While creating cohesion in a group, this meme also serves to define the borders of the group by creating an in-group and an out-group (Haugh and Bousfield 2012).

7.8 COMMIE POPE MEME



Figure 7.21: Check-mate meme from Google images

In the United States, despite repeated instances of mass gun violence, gun control laws have always been a controversial topic. On June 17, 2015, nine African Americans were killed during a Bible study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church by a white supremacist (Connor 2015). The Sunday following this event, Pope Francis spoke out against the dangers of gun use and ownership, calling people who manufacture weapons or invest in weapons industries hypocrites if they call themselves Christians (Hagle 2018).

In Figure 7.21, two meme frames are combined. The meme creator took a meme created by /cherrybalmz and incorporated it into a new meme created on imflip.com. In the first meme, in which the watermark is still visible on the bottom left, a still from the video of the pope's address has been combined with the pope's quote in parenthesis. The quote has also been labeled as reinforcing the authority of this statement. The meme attempted to draw on the chronotope of the pope as a moral leader and the ultimate authority on moral issues. This chronotope has the backing of historical tradition in which the pope during the Middle Ages was regarded as God's representative on earth and the ultimate authority (Joyce 1911). In a challenge to this chronotope, the meme creator has taken the meme and combined it with another, slightly larger meme, which indicates the importance of the second meme as a comeback or challenge to the chronotope of the first. In the second, the meme creator has used a Buddy Christ image icon in contrast to the pope image in the first. The Buddy Christ is taken from a still of the 1999 film *Dogma* in which a cardinal attempts to rebrand Jesus Christ in order to win a younger generation by replacing the crucifix with an image of a smiling, cartoonish Jesus Christ, who is holding both hands up, giving the thumbs up and winking (McDannell 2008). In 2012, this still was uploaded to a meme generator and quickly became a popular meme. As of January 2018, memegenerator.com included more than 28,000 examples of the Buddy Christ memes, demonstrating its popularity (knowyourmeme.com).

Using this image rather than a more traditional painting of Jesus introduces a micro cartoon chronotope. This chronotope is nested with the minor local chronotope, which sets a lighter, less threatening, almost playful background for the very controversial topic of gun control. At the top of the image, using the same font and size as the pope's quote, a Bible text (Luke 22:36) is quoted and Jesus is referenced. This evokes the Protestant reformation chronotope in which the pope's authority was questioned and *Sola Scriptura* (or 'the Bible only') was encouraged by reformers as the only valid authority.²¹ The Bible text, although not directly addressing guns, seems to be encouraging people to buy weapons to defend themselves. The 'Check-mate, commie Pope' in slightly larger font, serves to clinch the argumentation by evoking several micro chronotopes. The 'Check-mate' micro chronotope invokes a game of chess as the winner is about to make the winning move. 'Commie' is an abbreviation for Communist and introduces another micro

²¹ See discussion of Figure 6.9 for more on the Protestant Reformation chronotope.

chronotope that serves to connect the pope's comments on gun control with communist propaganda. The conservative political right in the United States has long been agitating against the pope's social and economic agenda as a covert communist attempt to take over the world (Stourton 2015).

A further layer of meaning is added to the meme by the postscript, which is meant to connect back to the two quotes by having the same font size. The postscript gives an additional argument against the pope's gun position by introducing another generic chronotope. The summary of the first biblical murder is mentioned including the weapon used, namely a rock. This statement evokes the Cain Killed Abel meme family. In anti-gun control communities, the Cain Killed Abel is a well-used meme genre that seeks to underscore that guns are not the problem in society but rather evil people (<https://ballmemes.com/t/cain-killed-abel>).

Although this meme is laid out in an argumentative format, it does seem to work better than Figure 7.20 as can be demonstrated by its occurrence on several social media platforms and sites (Google searches for pope and gun, awwmemes.com, reddit.com). The better visibility of this meme is probably because of more multimodal layering and more chronotopes that are evoked, as well as its use of humor. As has been noted, humor is a good way of exploring potentially offensive or polarizing issues (Schnurr and Plester 2017). The incongruity of a cartoonish Jesus cleverly outwitting the pope contributes towards the humor of this meme (Hübler and Bell 2003).

7.9 SUMMARY

In chapters six and seven, 39 meme examples were analyzed in order to understand each meme's elaboration, maintenance, modification, and meaning (Wiggins 2019), using distinct approaches from a wide range of complimentary analytic models discussed in chapter five. Particular attention was paid to the intersection of space and time of individual memes.

Chronotopes provided a nuanced dynamic concept of context in the memes studied. Examples of pope memes could be found in all the current popular meme families identified by Shifman (2014b), namely rage comics (e.g., Figure 7.4), reaction photos (e.g., Figure 7.18), photo fads (e.g., Figure 7.11), and LOLcats (e.g., Figure 6.17). Pope memes easily fused with the generic chronotope of each meme family. They were also often merged with new memes or older memes,

which had been pulled from ‘retirement’ and added to the validation of the newly created meme, which seemed to promote the virility of the meme (e.g., Figure 6.7). The more chronotopes a meme was able to evoke, the more meaning was infused in a meme, making it a more powerful communication tool.

Meme humor often proved to be layered, and less obvious humor could only be understood by wide multimodal literacy (e.g., Figure 7.2). Humor was often created through the sharp incongruity between chronotopes. Humor can be created by manipulating any of the elements that create the minor chronotopes in the meme. The humor created was often affiliative and used to enhance relationships with others and create a sense of community as in the different fads (e.g., Figure 7.16). Humor was also often used as subtle criticism. Aggressive humor such as sarcasm and ridicule, while helping to create or solidify a group identity, does not seem to promote distribution outside of a particular group (e.g., Figure 7.20).

The minor or macro chronotopes that were both nested and intertwined in the memes helped contribute towards the formation of a macro chronotope for each meme. Macro and minor chronotopes supported the formation of the pope’s online identity. Although many memes made use of pope image macros, pope chronotopes could also be evoked in a meme without drawings of the pope or pope image macros (e.g., Figure 7.4). Pope memes, even those that voiced some criticism or discussion of sensitive topics, overwhelmingly carried positive macro chronotopes, which helped to contribute towards the online identity of the pope. The pope is perceived as someone who is fun (e.g., Figure 7.6) and family-loving, even while being a strong but fair authority figure (Figure 7.18), who cares about the environment (Figure 6.18) and the rights of marginalized groups (Figure 6.26).

Memes can have implications on platforms that do not involve social media. They can contribute to discussions and highlight issues which could have real life effects such as the enactment of new legislation (e.g., Figure 7.3).

In the following chapter the results of the analysis undertaken and some of the theoretical implications will be further explored.



Figure 7.21: Meme Created by Chantal Klingbeil on Free Meme Generator September 1, 2021

Chapter 8

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an assessment of the findings in regard to the research questions formulated in chapter one, as well as some of the theoretical implications of the results of the meme analysis undertaken in chapters six and seven. Some of the implications for sociolinguistic and discursive work will be discussed. Finally, the limitations to the study will be discussed and recommendations for future studies suggested.

8.2 REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research draws on multimodal discourse analysis, especially a format inspired by Bakhtin with notions such as chronotope and intertextuality being central. The study attempted to address the following research questions proposed at the beginning of this study (see Section 1.5):

1. Which textual apparatus are used to incorporate discourses that are spatially and temporally distant (from the current meme) into pope memes?
2. Which theoretical concepts can be used to explain how time/space is used?
3. What other texts and discourses do meme creators use in the construction of pope memes, and what are the effects of using these discourses? In other words, what meanings are created, and, specifically, what kind of identity is created for the pope?

8.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ON THE TIME/SPACE DISCOURSES USED IN POPE MEMES

In the following section the findings and theoretical implications of the use of time/space discourses used in pope memes is addressed in order to offer answers to research question one,

namely; *Which textual apparatus are used to incorporate discourses that are spatially and temporally distant (from the current meme) into meme memes?*

From my analysis in chapters six and seven it is apparent that the textual apparatus of resemiotizing is essential in the construction of memes. The ability to use texts from previous settings and discourses is what makes memes such an interesting textual artifact. Research on resemiotization in institutional settings has led to claims of a movement towards less embodied formats in text trajectories as a text gets resemiotized, as, for example, where sketches and notes might get turned into written reports. This has generally been true for institutional settings, although multiple formats may be in use at the same time (Iedema 2003a). Iedema (2001) sees the process of resemiotization as a movement in which texts are transformed into a more durable format.

However, other researchers (Oostendorp 2018; Monfared and Haghbin 2019; Velásquez Urribarri 2020; Moalla 2021) have demonstrated that an intertextual chain of meaning for many texts does not increasingly get transformed into more durable formats outside of institutional settings (see also the alternative form remediation in Prior 2010). In fact, in memes the reverse is often seen to be the case, whereby the textual trajectory with linguistic elements is turned into visual format with the use of tropic emblems in the image macro, as, for example, in Figure 7.3 in which the written debate around the use of microtransactions in magazines and online forums becomes a meme or in Figure 6.26 in which the official stance of the Catholic Church on gay marriage becomes a Batman Slaps the Pope meme. This could be because social media both creates and is created by different chronotopic expectations (Ito and Okabe 2005) as these platforms generate a sense of social and physical closeness and create expectations of intimacy and informality as reflected by the private, casual register normally used. The textual trajectory could also be influenced by the different genres and setting with memes providing a space for creating a wide variety of contexts that bring chronotopes of local meaning to construct and maintain personal and collective identities, while also often playing a part in globalization (Eckert 2004) as, for example, in Figure 7.2 of the Pope Drawing Pepe the Frog meme, which demonstrates the radical symbolic growth and transformative potential as well as the wide geographic reach that a meme can have. Within an institutional setting, little emphasis is played on the maintenance of personal identities in resemiotization.

The affordances of visual images in image macros may also contribute to the inversion of the textual trajectory. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) refer to visual images as occurring in some kind of open order, unlike written text, which is more linear and sequential (see also Oostendorp 2015). The notion of salience is an important part of the meaning of a visual composition. Salience includes all “the elements that are made to attract the viewer’s attention to different degrees, as realized by such factors as placement in the foreground or background, relative size, contrasts in tonal value (or color), differences in sharpness” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:183). The multiplicity of visual composition could seem to favor more and not less formats in resemiotization. Instead of resemiotization in memes leading to more stable meanings and to the establishment of ‘fact’ (Iedema 2003b), resemiotization leads to dynamic, shifting meanings.

In the meme analysis of this dissertation, it has become very clear that the communicative strength of a meme lies in the multi-textual and multi-modal nature of its composition, and this is what allows memes to draw on discourses removed in time and space. This challenges Bezemer and Jewitt’s (2010) critique of multimodal research approaches, in which they point out that the focus on multiple different modes could encourage the researcher to gloss over the workings of a particular mode, while too much focus on a single mode will result in a narrow focus with limited results. They see multimodal analysis as focused on micro-interaction, which they claim limits its results that will then often have little bearing on the more general cultural and societal questions. In meme analysis the opposite was demonstrated. The multimodal analysis used in this study clearly connected the meaning to cultural and societal questions.

8.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ON THEORETICAL CONCEPTS USED TO EXPLAIN HOW TIME/SPACE IS USED

In this section the findings in relation to the second research question will be discussed, namely; *Which theoretical concepts can be used to explain how time/space is used?*

8.4.1 Affirmations of and Challenges to Bakhtin’s Chronotope Theory

In order to explain how time/space dimensions work within memes, Bakhtin’s (1994) notion of chronotope has proven itself to be a particularly useful concept (especially in combination with resemiotization; see section above). Bakhtin (1994) proposed that chronotopes both invoke and

enable the plot structure and/or trajectory of a novel. He also proposed that chronotopes played a significant role in producing specific kinds of people, actions, and meanings in the novel and were important in the creation of values and identities. Although Bakhtin originally proposed the chronotope concept as a way to understand a literary genre, it has proved a useful component of meme analysis as a meme in many ways functions as a compressed story on its own. Memes serve as classic examples of “spatial and temporal indicators” fused “into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (Bakhtin 1994:84). Chronotopes can be seen to be at the center of memetic representation. For meme creators, an ability to draw on chronotopic discourses across time and space is crucial to effective meme creation and is essential for readers to understand memes and make sense of them.

8.4.2 Chronotopes and Scale Interaction

This study particularly noted in the meme analysis the interaction of chronotopes with scales. Specific features in a meme – both textual and visual – were seen to operate as tropic emblems (Blommaert 2015) in that they instantly invoked a micro chronotope, which brought specific chunks of history to the meme, as in the unusual crucifix/communist hammer sickle in Figure 7.18. Often, the micro chronotopes contributed to the minor chronotopes of locale or setting. Combinations of these nested chronotopes led to the major chronotopes of the meme. It was noted that memes are highly communicative; that is, they can be appreciated by someone who is unaware of the associations of some of the tropic emblems. In memes recognitions can occur concurrently at different scale levels, with different readers recognizing different tropic emblems or chronotopes in the same meme. However, the meme will become more communicative dependent on the degrees or the scales of availability and accessibility of these multiple chronotopic contexts for the reader, as, for example, in Figure 6.17, where the pope’s head has been replaced by a cat’s head. Although the meme is amusing on a surface level with this incongruity, it becomes more communicative with the identification of the remediated painting on the wall, the awareness of the double meaning of pussy, and the selection of the iconic grumpy cat, as well as Trump’s history of accusations of sexual assault.

Although chronotopes have proven a useful theoretical concept, social media meme analysis also challenges some aspects of Bakhtin’s notions of chronotopes, particularly the issue of mobility.

Bakhtin (1988) asserted that although a text is mobile (in the sense that different chronotopes can be evoked in a single text) the text is always imprisoned in a particular mode, namely that of print. This is true in terms of the printed pages of a novel. However, this assertion is definitely challenged in memes as many of the chronotopes are found in images. The image macros may themselves be or carry tropic emblems, as, for example, in the pope's remediated laser eyes, which suggest a super mode being engaged in Figure 6.25. The image macros that form an important part of the discourse may be captured in video stills, photographs, cartoons from newspapers, or even emojis from social media. Social media analysis provides data that can serve to extend the idea of chronotopes.

8.4.3 Chronotopic Borders

According to Bakhtin (1981), every chronotope has a margin or boundary that is impermeable despite interaction with other chronotopes. Although Bakhtin probably had in mind the chronotopes of a novel with a narrator speaking into the story and interacting with it without the possibility of merging into the novel's chronotopes, this assertion was observed in the analysis of pope memes in which chronotopes could "replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships" (Bakhtin 1981:252), but never became one and the same, even while interacting in mutually enriching ways (these were most notably seen in memes that drew on many chronotopes and were multilayered, as in Figure 6.17, which featured Trump and the pope as Grumpy cat, which evoked multiple chronotopes by its composition).

The boundaries or chronotopic thresholds created in the pope memes served an important function in what Holoquist terms "calibrating" (2009:16). The edges of each chronotope in the meme revealed a disjunct between the various chronotopes that formed the meme. This introduced an element of uncertainty or surprise to the meme (White 2012:4). In the analyzed pope memes, numerous chronotopes were seen to be nesting within each other, while clearly retaining their borders. The compact composition of a meme with its various chronotopes provided numerous boundaries, which were seen to play a crucial role in meaning-making, and the creation of the humor, which was often built on the incongruity of the chronotopes making up the memes.

8.4.4 Micro and Macro Chronotopes

Chronotope theory points out that individual actions that are specific to a particular context or space at a certain time are also part of a much larger context at the social and not just the individual level. Procházka refers to these actions as the ‘micro’ facts that invoke a ‘macro’ context within discursive communication (Procházka 2018). While Procházka discusses distinct actions within discursive communication, this has proved useful in meme analysis as well and can be applied to more than actions to identify levels of contexts or nested chronotopic frames. Any tropic emblem and not just actions can serve as a “micro act[s] of contextualization”, that operates in the larger space as “translocal (macro) meanings” (Blommaert 2015:107) and helps to establish layers of meaning.

Time is multilayered and can be considered on many different levels when working with memes on social media. The individual image macro also challenges linear concepts of time, as an individual meme itself is also exchanged or modified in multiple forms without “having a linear trajectory of reproduction” (Pilipets 2019:176). Once the meme has been posted, the challenge with time continues as interpreting memes is in itself a phenomenon. Various chronological historical realities will need to come together as a social media user receives a meme in his or her feed and the user will have to combine this with the here-and-now historical reality in order to understand the meme (Blommaert and de Fina 2016). This was well illustrated in Figure 6.21, where the reader would have to know that the pope’s slap and an important mixed martial arts fight took place at the same time. The reader would also have to know the outcome of both events in order to find the humor in the meme.

The life cycle of social media memes also seems to follow a nonlinear, not yet well explored life cycle. Jackson, in an article exploring the life cycle of online memes, notes that at first glance a “meme death seems like a much less mysterious phenomenon than meme birth” (Jackson 2017), but meme death is proving equally elusive, with some memes dying and then coming back again and again, while others enjoy a surge and then quickly become obsolete. This resurgence was noted in several of the meme fads studied, such as the memes discussed in section 6.1, where the Pope Holding Things memes from 2013 had a comeback in 2020. The surge followed by the quick death of many memes has led to the widely accepted notion of meme acceleration. That is, while the

actual quantity of memes seems to be growing exponentially, their average lifespans seem to be growing shorter. The average lifespan of a meme seems to have decreased from about 4 months in 2006 to 2.28 months in 2018 (Veix 2018).

While not literature or a large body of text, memes serve as a classic example of “spatial and temporal indicators” fused “into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (Bakhtin 1994:84). They offer a unique opportunity to investigate the discursive representation of time and space, as memes spread across different geographical spaces and elements of older discourse are embedded in newer discourses. In fact, to make meaning, memes require discourses from various timeframes and different contexts to work together. Memes thus provide unique challenges and opportunities for researchers working with meaning theories of time and space. In particular, meme creation challenges the conception of time as linear.

8.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ON THE DISCOURSES USED AND IDENTITY CREATED IN POPE MEMES

This section focuses on discussing the results of this study regarding research question three, namely; *What other texts and discourses do meme creators use in the construction of pope memes, and what are the effects of using these discourses? In other words, what meanings are created, and, specifically, what kind of identity is created for the pope?*

8.5.1 Texts and Discourses Used in Meme Construction

To make meaning, memes require discourses from various time frames and different contexts to work together to make meaning (as discussed in the sections above). To this end a wide range of intertextual and interdiscursive references were deployed from popular culture, previous incidents in the pope’s life (see, for example, Figures 1.1 and 1.2, which draw on his work as a bouncer and as a lab assistant), politics (most of the memes that shared image macros of political figures, such as Trump, Figure 6.18, made political statements), and religious discourses (see, for example, Figure 6.9, which draws on Reformation history).

Pope memes examined were drawn from most meme families that consist of exploitable image macros, including also rage comics (Shifman 2014b). Image macros were drawn from newspapers, videos, movies, animated figures, comics, and artwork such as paintings. Because meme meaning

is created through the multilayering of information, politicians, athletes, celebrities, and random pictures of people expressing emotion were also used in meme creation. Of central importance was the need for the image macros used to be easily manipulated; thus, the widespread use of easy-to-replicate image templates can be noted in meme creation. Images were often pasted into another frame to create incongruity between the elements in the frames. Sometimes the meme creator used several image macros to form the memes. In these cases, the image macros were normally welded together through the caption. Textual elements and language were drawn from rap lyrics, newspaper headlines, the Bible, printed books, quotations, online gaming, political slogans, icons, hashtags, emojis, scientific jargon, and online texting practices. Language used in the captions often made use of literary devices, such as puns and rhymes.

Although many of the pope memes examined made use of image macros, pope chronotopes were also created in memes without drawings of the pope or pope image macros through references to historic incidences and images (as in Figures 7.4 and 7.5).

A large part of the meaning-making consists in the actual temporal sequence being believable and recognizable from the common experience of life that the audience shares and brings to the reading of a meme (Lorino and Tricard 2012). Thus, texts and discourses that connected the audience to historic backgrounds and shared life experiences were used in meme construction.

Intertextuality lends itself to the world of social media, where memes are created and promulgated through interrelationships. Layers of borrowed and transformed texts are combined to create a meme that assumes a reader's prior knowledge, familiarity, and understanding (Genette 1997). Memes feed off all types of intertextuality, using obligatory, optional, and accidental intertextuality for meaning (Fitzsimmons 2013).

Mememes are not only intertextual but also multimodal. The textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and visual components of a meme are all used to communicate. The whole organization of the content and the interaction between these elements create meaning (Lutkewitte 2013).

8.5.2 Humor in Multimodal Meaning-Making

By drawing on the texts and discourses mentioned above, one of the effects created is that of humor, which, due to its central role in the data set of this dissertation, is believed to be a significant

part of the meaning-making effort (Shifman 2014a:78), as well as in the distribution of memes (Shifman 2014a:94). Meme analysis confirmed the role of humor in creating cohesion in a group, while also serving to define the borders of the group by creating an in-group and an out-group (Haugh and Bousfield 2012). Bakhtin (1984:263) states that of “all aspects of the ancient complex only laughter never underwent sublimation of any sort. It never took on an official character, and even in literature the comic genres were the most free, the least regimented”. The lack of official character referred to by Bakhtin proved valid in the memes analyzed. While some attempts were made to use memes as a tool in reinforcing and upholding power imbalance or the status quo, humor was seen to be used most effectively as a way to challenge authority (as, for example, Figure 6.18, in which Trump’s stance on global warming is criticized; or Figure 7.21, in which the pope’s stance on gun control is challenged through memes). Memes provided an escape from accountability, while making commentary on sensitive or contentious topics because of the embedded decommitment option in humor (Haugh and Bousfield 2012). Bakhtin (1998) realized this subversive element of humor and used the term ‘carnavalesque’ to characterize this destabilization or reversal of power structures, even temporarily, as it occurs in conventional forms of carnival. This aspect of the carnivalesque is also evident in memes, with many memes often being of a fleeting, transient kind – showing up and then disappearing, perhaps to appear again with the next news cycle.

Bakhtin (1984: 264) refers to humor as a sociohistorical cultural phenomenon most often present in verbal expression and laughter. Meme analysis challenges this notion as the humor is normally created by both the language or text and the visual images of the meme. Although humor can be viewed from many theoretical vistas, Raskin’s work (1985) on the typology of the humor process seemed to best capture the essence of meme humor. Raskin sees the humor process as dependent on the underlying incongruity of situations, which put two or more incompatible or unexpected circumstances or elements together, causing tension that invites a unique pattern of processing or problem-solving by the reader (‘getting the joke’) that, in turn, leads to humor (Alden, Hoyer, and Lee 1993). This pattern of incongruity seems well represented in memes where the juxtaposition of images and or text often serve to create the humor. The analysis proves that classic theories on humor that emphasize a contrast between incompatible scripts or interpretations, can be used to identify humorous strategies in multimodal communication (Chu 2022:274).

Whether or not the genre of image macros is influenced by the function of humor can be debated. There are memes that are not humorous. And many meme genres can only be found to be funny by the 'in group' (Haugh and Bousfield 2012). However, the multimodal nature of memes with their nested chronotopes does provide the meme creator with a wider range of tools in humor creation, perhaps confirming that "comic genres were the most free, the least regimented" (Bakhtin 1984:263).

By looking at the way that the humorous mechanisms in both the verbal and the visual modes interact in memes, this study has added towards the multimodal theory of humor and towards the unification of linguistic and semiotic approaches to humor.

In his work on carnival (1984) Bakhtin closely connects two major ideas relevant to the conceptualization of the body and identity formation. As with the notion of chronotope, carnival can also conceptualize more than one thing. Carnival can refer to a historically instanced moment, as well as "an immaterial force which such particular instances characteristically embody" (Holoquist 1990:89). In Bakhtin's framework, embodiment forms a crucial aspect of the way in which carnival influences relations, with the body being perceived as both individual and collective at the same time (Holoquist 1990:89). Moreover, the body is considered chronotopic in that it is always situated in a particular time/space dimension. The body and everything associated with it is continually under construction in this fluid nonlinear perception (Bakhtin 1984:317).

Bakhtin's conception of the body is well supported in social media. The construction of identity in memes, while being part and parcel of the communication process, is also continually under construction, with identities being continually assembled, shared, modified, and deconstructed on social media. Identity, in particular a public figure's identity, is formed and evolves as "intertextual references move across different semiotic modes" (Oostendorp 2014:43). Identity is continually formed and modified in memes by reference to specific historical and/or cultural icons, which are combined with specific discursive formations and practices by specific schemes.

This was particularly observed in the meme analysis with the pope's identity being organized around certain chronotopes, and users were continually both adopting and negotiating various aspects of this particular normality "derived from the recognizability of relevant indexical orders with respect to specific chronotopic conditions" (Procházka 2018:85). This provided a window

into the online identity formation of the pope by observing adherence and nonadherence to the online accepted pope chronotopes that meme creators interacted with and the resultant dynamics of online community formation.

The online construct of the pope's identity was seen to have occurred through the creation of, what Bakhtin (1981) termed, "the great man", which Bakhtin describes as someone "not opposed to the masses – just on a grand scale". In the analyzed memes, this construction is created by the pope's depiction as an 'every man' taking on many different personas through association with other influential people. Unlike previous popes, Pope Francis has been seen to be actively associating with social media stars and influencers, as well as politicians, sports stars, actors, and musicians (O'Loughlin 2015:4). This provided ample resources for the creation of the 'every man' identity on a grand scale. This was observed in the different features and character qualities that meme creators chose to highlight by their selection of image macros from various events that often occurred at different times, creating, what Bakhtin (1981:142) refers to as an analytical biography. In other words, various moments of the pope's life are taken out of chronological order and combined to help in the formation of an identity contrived by the social media community (see, for example, Section 6.2, in which the pope's grasp of the microphone during official speeches is repurposed to make him a rapper).

The pope memes examined in chapters six and seven were analyzed both as single cultural units, as well as part of distinct genres, and also as parts of conversations between individuals or groups that then often became part of a public conversation. The conversations were seen to influence and be influenced by culture and commonly held values (Milner 2016). These conversations in turn helped in the creation of the pope's identity. The memes analyzed played an arguably large role in Pope Francis attaining the status of being both 'cool' and virtuous while becoming a symbol of values such as tolerance, environmental conscience, compassion for refugees and foreigners (O'Loughlin 2015:8).

8.6 Implications for Sociolinguistic and Discursive Research

The meme analysis suggested in this dissertation lends strong support to the theoretical assumptions that undergird investigation in multimodality. It clearly points to the fact that all communication is multimodal as it draws on many modes, each of which has the potential to

equally contribute to meaning. The nature and composition of memes also support the notion that language covers only a part of human expression, understanding, and meaning-making (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001) with other modes of expression, such as visuals, being equally relevant in the human communication processes (Iedema 2003a). The online world and the predictions of the highly immersive virtual world of the ‘metaverse’ (Brown 2021) where people will gather to socialize and work, will necessitate the use of multimodal approaches to future sociolinguistic and discursive research.

Meme analysis reveals the “multiplex, layered, mobile and nonlinear – hence indeterminate and relatively unpredictable” – components of multimodality that have replaced “the simple linear objects of linguistics as the (exclusive) conduits of meaning” (Blommaert 2015:17) in theoretical development. It is particularly notable that in memes image macros are not simply illustrative to the text (or language) but have their own representational properties and affordances.

In meme creation the selection and configuration of different modes can be observed, supporting the assumption that multimodality is greatly dependent on the social context in which a sign is created (Jewitt 2009:14-15). Gunther Kress defines mode in two ways. As a “socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, speech, moving images are examples of different modes” (2010:79), and as “shaped by both the intrinsic characteristics and potentialities of the medium and by the requirements, histories and values of societies and their cultures” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:35). Both definitions of mode can be observed in the composition and meaning-making properties of memes. The ever-increasing communication taking place online will necessitate further investigation into the nature and properties of modes.

The multimodal approach formulated and used in this study seeks to add to research by providing a flexible theoretical framework, which could be used for the analysis of data that combines verbal and visual modes. It also wishes to demonstrate that internet memes, with their deceptive appearance of triviality, are a distinctive form of communication, the study of which can be useful in testing the theoretical underpinnings of communicative theory (Lyons 2017; Lugia 2019).

The nature of memes – dynamic, fleeting, and simultaneously drawing on past and present discourses – also allows the possibility to see all communication differently. Long considering written communication as stable and permanent, memes allow the opportunity to challenge our

assumptions of all discourses, and perhaps to think of a radically different view of discourse – as always changing, chronotropic, and multimodal.

8.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the main limitations of this study was the limited data set used. While the usefulness of identifying micro and macro chronotopes was observed in this analysis, further application with other meme genres and perhaps even other forms of visual communication is needed to both refine and verify its usefulness in meaning-making.

The multimodal approach used in this study appears to be useful and provides a flexible theoretical framework, which could be used for the analysis of data that combines verbal and visual modes or even in cases where humor is based solely on visual representation, such as an image macro. It should be noted, however, that the multimodal data examined here, namely pope memes, were limited.

Further multimodal analysis of humor in memes should also be conducted in order to finetune the analytical tools used. The examination of a larger set of data would also be needed as it may show more combinations of visual and verbal meaning meme creation.

8.8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Meme analysis holds the potential to both add to as well as challenge the theory of mobility in texts when the material it is placed on is itself movable and editable. Theories on mobility can be expanded by further studies that would concentrate on the medium and modes in image macros, as related to how elements of image composition, such as framing and iconity, point to particular tropic emblems.

This study demonstrated the effectiveness of multimodal discourse analysis when used in combination with Bakthin's conceptualization of discourse in an exploration of the way time and space multimodality is constructed in Pope Francis memes. Future research could examine other public figures to assess the online identity developed and discover persuasive ideological functions behind the social media communication of the memes.

Furthermore, a comparison with memes from other well-known figures, as well as with memes that have been translated into different languages would be illuminating not only for the exploration of multimodal humor in memes but also shed light on on-line identity formation (Tsakona 2009:1172).

Another avenue for future research could focus on the meme audience in order to understand how audiences make meaning of memes by getting their perceptions as to which layers of a meme are perceived and why.

Finally, future meme research could broaden an understanding of properties and affordances. These properties and affordances could be compared and contrasted by an exploration of other video-based social media memes such as GIFs.

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