

The Metapragmatics of Mock Language

Abstract

This paper examines **mock language**, a form of linguistic imitation in which speakers reproduce stylised features of other languages, such as the Mock Spanish expression ‘*No problema!*’ or scribbles labelled as Chinese script. Framed as ‘non-serious’ (Hill 1993, p. 155) and frequently circulating through **memes** (Huang 2024), mock language is tolerated despite its (c)overt Othering, which positions a language and its speakers as subordinate. Such meanings are foregrounded by **metapragmatic awareness**, understood as sensitivity to how language implicitly and explicitly communicates social meaning (Silverstein 1976).

Framing memes as a distinct multimodal and metadiscursive modality, this study examines mock language through the digital medium. It asks: *What linguistic and semiotic features characterise mock language in memes, and how do these features realise ideological meaning?*

The empirical analysis is based on a case study of Mock German memes ($n = 51$) across two templates: *Little German Boy* (**Fig.1**) and *Flammenwerfer* (**Fig.2**). Memes were gathered via targeted keyword searches on Tumblr and analysed as linguistic data using adapted interlinear glossing. Feature identification reveals systematic hyper-anglicisation/foreignisation and morphosyntactic re-configuration. Drawing on theories of indexicality (Ochs 1996), language ideologies (Irvine 2000), and metapragmatics, the analysis examines how features index a caricatured ‘German-ness’ through non-positive semantic associations (Halliday 1978).

Findings support the view that memes thrive on creative imitation, ideological subversion, and provocation, which makes them particularly conducive to mock language practices (cf. Shifman et al. 2014; Holm 2021). Ongoing work extends this analysis to additional mock language forms (e.g. Chinese, Turkish), with an emphasis on metapragmatic recognition and perceptual evaluation across audiences. The study contributes to sociolinguistic and memetic scholarship by highlighting the role of memes and circulation in the reproduction and amplification of language ideologies, and by offering a replicable framework for mock language research.



Figure 1. *Mock German*



Figure 2. *Mock German*

References

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