ABSTRACT

ADAPTIVE HUMOR IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

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Introduction. In the modern digital world, technologies not only change the way of communication, but also actively influence language practice. One of the most striking phenomena of recent decades is the emergence of numerous neologisms related to the use of the Internet, social networks and mobile applications. Some of these new creations are of a serious, technical nature (AGI, cloud services, blockchain), but a significant layer is made up of comic, playful and ironic terms such as "password child", "sharent" or "fexting". In our opinion, humorous terms in IT and Internet discourse not only perform an entertaining role, but also become a tool for overcoming "digital anxiety", creating group identity and criticizing digital practices.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the fact that language in the digital age has become not just a means of communication, but also a way of reflection and cultural resistance to technological challenges. As Yus notes, "…on the internet we: (a) find new sender users; (b) who produce new types of discourse; (c) through new interfaces (d) directed at a new kind of user; and (e) who comes up with a variety of interpretations" [6; p. 3], which aligns with Crystal, who argues that the Internet has created conditions for unprecedented linguistic diversity and experimentation [2].

Humor and playfulness in language. Humor in language is traditionally associated with such features as informality, creativity, wordplay, irony and satire. In the digital context, these features acquire particular importance, since the Internet encourages experimental and frivolous stylistic practices [2].

Linguistic mechanisms of humor in digital communication include:

- Wordplay (password child) – using everyday context (favorite child) to describe digital practice (choosing a password);

- Analogies (sock puppet) – creating comic associations (sock puppet as a metaphor for a fake account);

- Hyperbole (Whexit) – exaggerating an everyday action (leaving a WhatsApp group) through an allusion to the political process of Brexit;

- Irony (sharent) – critical ridicule of parents who excessively "share" their children's lives on social networks.

The theoretical basis for the analysis is provided by the incongruity theory, according to which humor arises from a clash of the expected and the real [5]. At the same time, as Holmes emphasizes, humor also performs a social function of solidarity: it cements communities, relieves tension and serves as a tool for soft criticism [3].

Origin and conditions of appearance. The origin and development of humorous neologisms on the Internet are associated with several key sociocultural factors:

- Digital overload: technologies have flooded all spheres of life, causing information fatigue and "technostress", so societies immersed in technologies inevitably produce cultural mechanisms for their criticism. Humor becomes one of such mechanisms. For example, "dumbphone" ironically refers to an "old-fashioned" telephone as a way to escape from "smart" overload: *After a few years hovering in the background of mobile phone design,* **dumbphones** *are stepping into the mainstream. (dezeen.com, August 28, 2025)*

- Online communities as a source of collective experience: online, humorous terms emerge as "inside jokes" that later become common usage. For example, "Zoomwear" (clothing for videoconferencing, formal on top and casual on the bottom) or "fexting" became products of mass experience during the pandemic. This shared understanding of the otherwise vague implications has always been an important element of online discussions, greatly appreciated by the users. As Crystal noted, "…they are aware of what they are doing, as is evidenced by their 'metadiscussions' about what counts as acceptable linguistic (and social) behaviour, and their 'metahumour', playing with the group's own linguistic conventions" [2; p. 170].

- Generational differences: "digital natives," as defined by Prensky, differ in their style of thinking and information acquisition [4]. This is where terms like "goldfish generation" (a generation with a short attention span) or "TikTot" (children who actively use TikTok) come from. They illustrate the ironic self-awareness of generations raised in a digital environment. Another example is "password child": this term refers to a child whose name is most often used as a password by parents. The humor here is built on exaggeration – password is identified with the sign of "favoriteness".

Thus, humor in digital communication is not a random phenomenon: it arises from the need to adapt to the technological environment, to find a collective language for its comprehension and expression of criticism.

Functions of humor in digital communication. The key one would be shaping the community, as humorous terms create the effect of "joking around". When users understand what "doomscrolling/hopescrolling" or "Zoomwear" are, they feel a sense of belonging to the digital culture: *Remember that your attention is valuable. This requires self-awareness, setting boundaries, taking breaks, and deliberately unfollowing or following certain accounts. Less* **doomscrolling***, and more, shall we say,* "**hopescrolling***." (healthline.com, August 14, 2025)*

Reducing technostress: humor helps to cope with technology-related overload. Apt words like "Whexit" or "password child" relieve tension and turn serious situations into comical ones. This aligns well with Freud's theory, where laughter is explained as the release of psychic energy.

Cultural criticism: terms like "sharent" or "bossware" perform a satirical function: they are not only funny, but also serve as a tool for criticizing digital practices. In this way, humor performs a socially significant function.

Memorability: comic words spread much faster than neutral terms. This can be explained by their imagery, playfulness and associativity.

Consequences and significance. Since language is a mirror of culture, humorous neologisms reflect the collective concerns of society. For example, "doomscrolling" reflects addiction to negative news, and "sharent" captures the discussion of children's privacy. Digital communication is becoming increasingly ironic and playful. People communicate not only in content, but also in style, demonstrating their belonging to the "digital tribe". Humor also accelerates the consolidation of new words. As Aitchison notes, game-like new products easily pass into common vocabulary, since they evoke an emotional response [1]. That is why terms such as "sock puppet" or "fexting" have entered dictionaries.

Conclusions. Humor in digital communication is not a random phenomenon, but a mechanism for adapting to the online environment. It helps communities unite through common jokes, reduces psychological stress associated with technology, and acts as a means of cultural critique by ridiculing digital practices; promotes the rapid spread and consolidation of neologisms. Thus, humorous neologisms make digital culture more "human" and at the same time more self-reflexive.

References

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АДАПТИВНИЙ ГУМОР У ЦИФРОВІЙ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ

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