

# Teaching with memes

di **SILVIA CHINI, LEONARD O'SHEA**

## WHAT IS A MEME?

Memes are now saturating the net but they're not a new concept at all. The root of the term dates back to ancient Greece. The Greek word *minema* means imitated. The term "meme" was coined by evolutionary biologist **Richard Dawkins** in his 1976 bestseller *The Selfish Gene*. Though the book is mainly concerned with the propagation of genetic material, Dawkins briefly turned his attention to the propagation of cultural material. He observed that fashion and customs evolve rapidly, resembling the ways genes evolve.

So what is a meme?

According to the media historian Patrick Davison, "an Internet meme is a piece of culture, typically a **joke**, which gains influence through online transmission." Professor Limor Schifman defines it as "cultural information that passes along from person to person, yet gradually scales into a shared social phenomenon."

## BRIEF HISTORY OF INTERNET MEMES

Internet memes are quite new, but their staying power is phenomenal. The dancing baby came out in 1996 and is considered by many to be the **first digital meme**. However many years before internet and the dancing baby, **Kilroy** with his long nose and bald head is considered to be the first meme engraved on the Washington DC WWII Memorial.

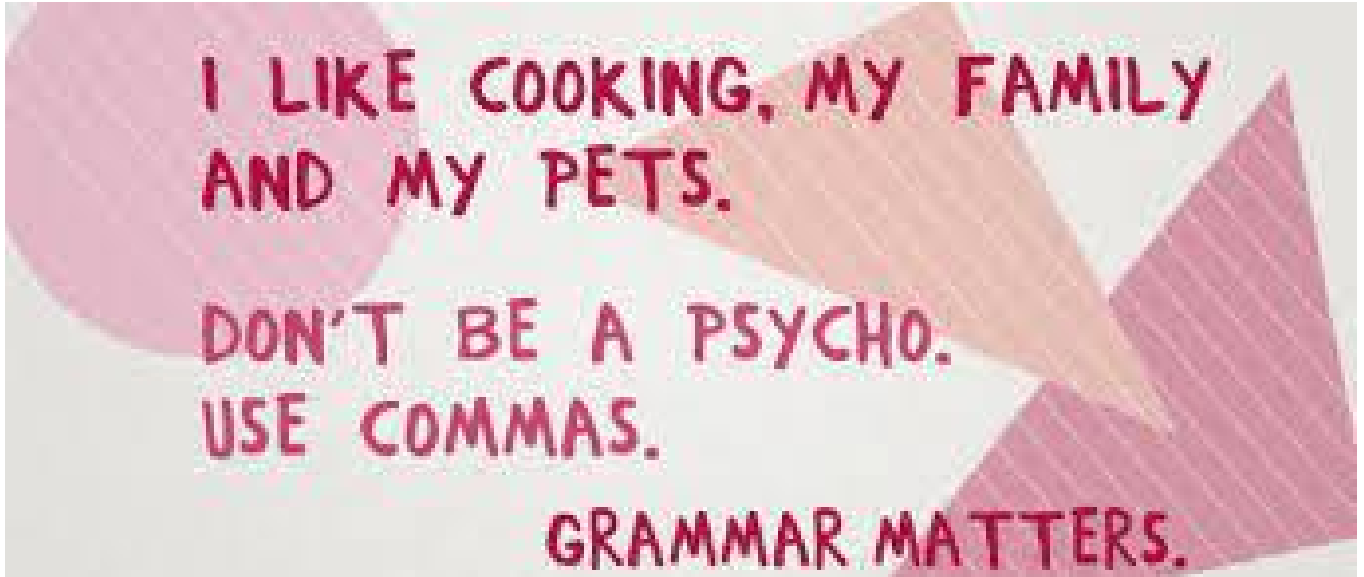


According to the expert **McCulloch** "an internet meme is a template of sorts that spreads by people creating their own versions of and innovations on that template." Soon after the dancing baby in 1994, people incorporated images into internet memes. Today, many memes consist of an image with overlaid text, which can be altered.

## WAYS TO USE MEMES IN ENGLISH LESSONS

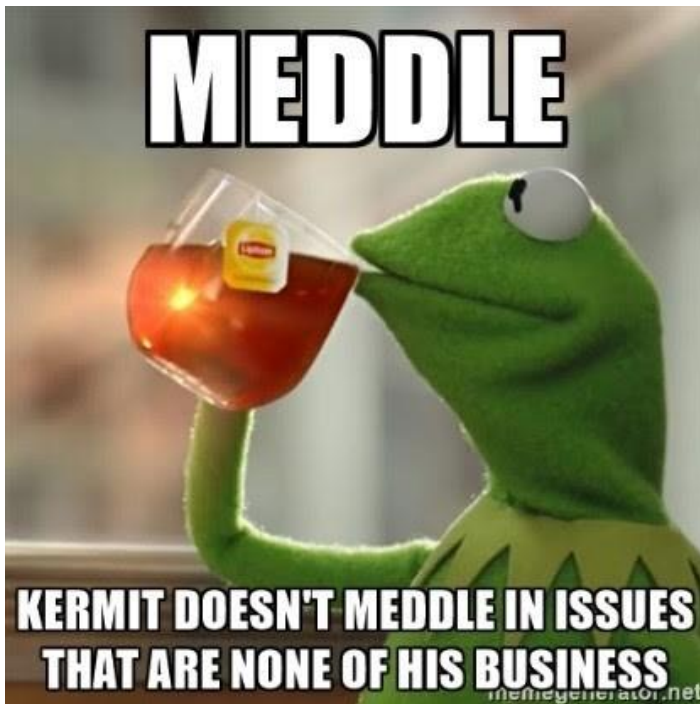
There are several ways to use memes in class to energize our lessons. Here you'll find some examples.

### Spelling+Punctuation



- Give your students a meme deleting the second part as you can see in the example below.
- Ask them to write the same sentence using the correct punctuation
- Divide your students into small groups and ask them to create a funny meme using the same rules you've practiced in class.

### Vocabulary



# News

- Once you've explained or practiced some vocabulary give your students some memes to explain.
- Ask them to create some memes using pictures of their classmates (great task when studying emotions!!!)

## Grammar

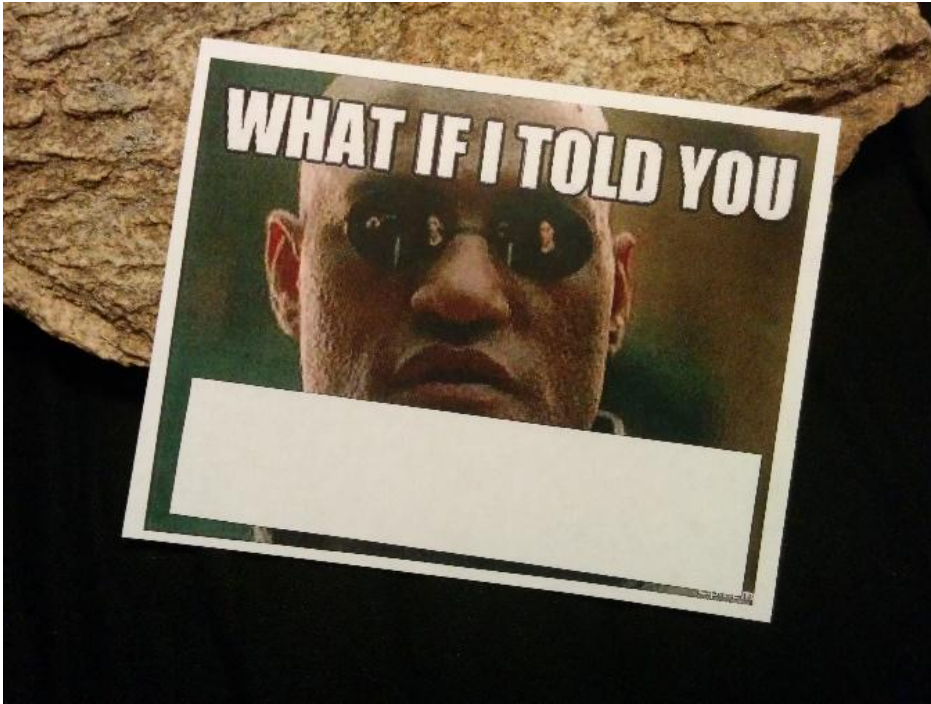


- Use memes to teach grammar or as a starting point for grammar exercises.

## Literature

- Ask your students to summarize a passage using memes. You can see an example below.
- After creating a meme students can write a supporting paragraph explaining their choices.

## Creative writing prompt



- For lower levels memes are perfect for creative writing.