

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH MEMES: CREATING COMMUNITY THROUGH THE SOCIOPRAGMATICS OF STAR WARS PREQUEL MEMES

CAROLYN OLMSTED

University of Colorado Boulder

In the 1950s and 1960s, J. L. Austin changed the face of pragmatic linguistic analysis with his work *How to Do Things with Words*. Famously claiming that language does not simply describe the world but also changes it, Austin (1962) established the theory of speech acts. This paper builds on Austin's research by investigating internet memes as a kind of speech act; hence the title "How to do things with memes." Focusing in particular on a specific genre of memes that incorporates images and discourse from the American space epic media franchise *Star Wars*, the paper explores the following question: What are the sociopragmatic functions of memes used on the internet today by younger generations of internet users? The conversation analytic concept of adjacency pairs is used to understand the redistribution, recontextualization, and remediation of original media sources into memes, together with linguistic anthropological research that interrogates recontextualization as a kind of performance (Baumann and Briggs 1990). An investigation of the illocutionary forces behind select *Star Wars* memes exposes what exactly these memes are "doing" in their respective internet spheres. Specifically, the paper outlines how these memes function to build community, as illustrated by sociocultural linguistic work on identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 2005) and social semiotic concepts such as dual indexicality (Hill 1995). Through processes of memetic participation, digital users build community and draw closer together by expanding upon their existing communicative repertoires (Rymes 2012, 2014).

Keywords: sociolinguistics, memes, internet linguistics, pragmatics

1. INTRODUCTION

In his famous work *How to Do Things with Words*, J. L. Austin (1962) changed the face of modern linguistic analysis. Austin described language not simply as a tool to convey information, but as a way to change the world around us via speech acts. Speech acts can accomplish many different things: canonical speech acts include a judge sentencing a man to death or a priest marrying a happy couple, but smaller speech acts can also be performed in everyday conversations. The speech act need not even be as direct; that is, saying "it's stuffy in here" may prompt someone to open a window, thus changing the world. While these words are not expressed in a syntactic form that we normally associate with a request, their pragmatic meaning—or *illocutionary force*, as Austin calls it—carries the potential to change the world. This paper suggests that everyday actions such as shaping a community can be accomplished with words and the illocutionary forces

they carry. The analysis applies Austin's understanding of the world-changing role played by speech acts to the digital genre of memes, focusing in particular on a specific genre of memes that incorporates images and discourse from the American space epic media franchise Star Wars. Using this genre of memes, known to Star Wars fans as "prequel memes", I explore the following question: What are the sociopragmatic functions of memes used on the internet today?

This paper is divided into two parts. In the first section, titled "The Sociopragmatics of Memes," I explain how memes work through the processes of *redistribution*, *recontextualization*, and *remediation*. These concepts are taken from the linguistic field known as computer-mediated discourse (hereafter CMD). Much early CMD research focused on text-based synchronous language used in formats such as chat rooms or text-based asynchronous language used in formats such as email. My paper, however, focuses on the multimodal genre of memes specifically. I apply the above concepts to understand the sociopragmatic work that memes are doing as they circulate across digital users, especially their community-building properties, rather than simply describing their form and distribution.

In the second section, titled "Star Wars Prequel Fans as a Community of Practice," I offer a case study on the Star Wars prequel meme community. Star Wars prequel fans, as I call them throughout this paper, make heavy use of memes to define who is and is not considered a part of the community. This type of identity work is discussed by Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2004, 2005) as involving the processes of *adequation* and *distinction*, two concepts that figure prominently in my analysis. One of the most popular memes used in this community is what I refer to as the "General Kenobi" meme, explained in Section 3.1, which is based on an adjacency pair from the Star Wars prequel films. Past research in the field of conversation analysis has tended to focus on universal aspects of adjacency pairs in conversational turn-taking, but I focus instead on how community members use them to display and participate in community building and belonging.

I conclude with an analysis of how, exactly, Star Wars prequel fans are doing things with memes. My analysis is informed by sociolinguistic work on the ways that identity emerges through the telling of formulaic jokes (Hall 2019), stancetaking (Bucholtz, et al. 2011), adequation and distinction (Bucholtz & Hall 2004), and dual indexicality (Hill 1995). In this sense, what takes place in meme-sharing among Star Wars prequel fans is closely aligned with the sociolinguistic processes associated with identity work more generally. My analysis uncovers these parallels,

while also demonstrating some of the unique affordances offered by memes to the building of communities online.

2. THE SOCIOPRAGMATICS OF MEMES

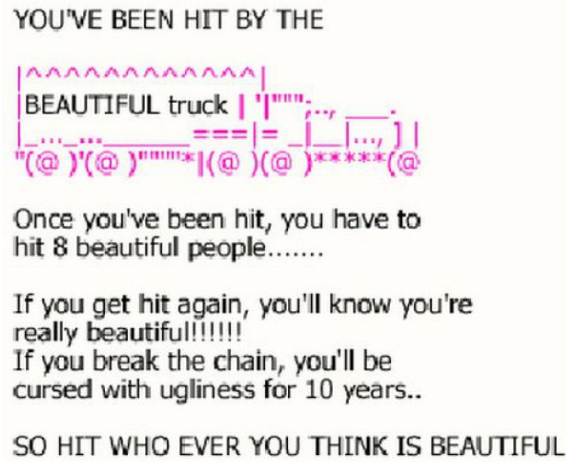
Memes are one of the most widespread forms of communication on the internet today. The word *meme* has typically been applied to digital media to refer to “something that’s remade and recombined, spreading as an atom of internet culture” (McCulloch 2019); however, there is a general lack of consensus among users online about what exactly a meme is. Stripped down to their basic parts, it seems that memes are jokes spread online, usually involving images, and almost always involving some type of language. When we look at traditional mediums of language through the lens of speech act theory, we can see, to borrow a phrase from Austin, “how to do things with words”. Similarly, if we look at computer-mediated discourse (hereafter CMD) through the same lens, we can see “how to do things with memes”. Through processes known to CMD researchers as redistribution, recontextualization, and remediation, memes carry a kind of illocutionary force that builds and strengthens community.

2.1. REDISTRIBUTION

The first and most important part of how a meme gains its illocutionary force is through *redistribution*. Redistribution, which involves simply sending a message or form of media unaltered to someone else, is how a meme makes its way through and around communities. Without redistribution, there would be no memes at all; memes take their meaning and illocutionary force only from being shared within communities. Redistribution, being the most fundamental component of memes, is also a process central to non-digital forms of communication.

What may be seen as the predecessors of memes, and are described as such by McCulloch (2019), belong to the pre-internet era and relied solely on physical circulation among people. One example is that of newspaper clippings; to share a newspaper article with another, one must cut it out and give it or send it to them physically. An early form of digital communication, still prominent today, that overtly relies on redistribution is that of chain emails, a genre continuous with earlier non-digital “chain letters” sent by mail. Chain emails often have a similar format to that of the one in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. EXAMPLE OF A CHAIN EMAIL (HGRANT 2012)



Chain emails like this one are designed to be sent, or redistributed, to a large group of people unaltered. The concept of redistribution is therefore inherently simple in that no part of the original message is changed; however, CMD theorists would argue that the act of sending this email into new contexts potentially invites a change of social meaning that is worthy of analysis. This is because of their reach and targeted audience.

While redistribution has certainly been around for as long as people have been sharing information, CMD is a rather new way of accomplishing this. CMD allows vast amounts of information to be distributed among exponentially more people than ever before in very short amounts of time. Because of this, memes can very quickly bring together a large community of people. Additionally, redistribution can select the targeted audience for the redistributed content. In Figure 1, the chain email is directed at those who both would be flattered by the compliment “beautiful” and who would like to share that compliment with others. The act of redistribution and those who perform it can have any kind of target audience in mind: family, friends, even Star Wars prequel fans. It is important to recognize that the concept of redistribution is foundational to the concepts of recontextualization and remediation, which more overtly focus on the ways texts take on new meanings as they undergo circulation.

2.2. RECONTEXTUALIZATION

The concept of *recontextualization* relies heavily on the idea of a communicative repertoire. Betsy Rymes (2012:216) describes a communicative repertoire as “the collection of ways individuals use language and other means of communication... to function effectively in the

multiple communities in which they participate” and as composed of “mass-mediated cultural elements, circulated, often, via viral Internet sources”. To Rymes, the most important observation is that the “repertoire elements are... catchy, memorable, or dramatic”, which makes them “highly recontextualizable bits”.

To say that repertoire entries are recontextualizable means that they can easily be removed from their original context and placed in a different social context, a process linguistic anthropologists Bauman and Briggs (1990) identify as *entextualization*. Recontextualization, which follows decontextualization, is an expansion of redistribution in that the text is likewise redistributed and entered into circulation; however, the concept focuses not so much on the act of redistribution but rather on the transformation that occurs when the text is removed from one context and placed into another. Essentially, CMD researchers are interested in how and why a text may become highly quotable and easily recognized as it enters new contexts.

This concept can be applied to many memes originating from various works of media such as *Star Wars* or *Lord of the Rings* as well as viral videos, as seen below.

FIGURE 2. “CEDAR RAPIDS” MEME
(ILLUSIONS 2018)



FIGURE 3. “FARMING” MEME
(EDWARDS 2016)



Figure 2 is a still from a viral video featuring Hillary Clinton in which she says, “I’m just chillin’ here in Cedar Rapids”, and Figure 3 is a quote from the Star Wars film *Rogue One*. These images are often posted around the internet with no additional text or other images, which redistributes as well as recontextualizes them. Because they are not simply the original work presented in an original context but rather an explicit reference to an earlier piece of media (a process I will discuss

later as remediation), they have advanced from simply featuring redistribution to featuring recontextualization as well. Additionally, the references' widespread use among many digital users in a given community, such as Clinton supporters or Star Wars prequel fans, shows that they have become part of the communicative repertoires of their respective communities.

These types of memes are extremely typical in groups focused on a single franchise or piece of media. The memes seen above are only one example of the vast collection of recontextualizable quotes used in their respective internet domains. However, not all the memes circulating in these groups feature only recontextualization. As suggested earlier, they can also be combined with other repertoire elements in a phenomenon known as remediation.

2.3. REMEDIATION

As described by Bolter and Grusin (1999), the term *remediation* refers to the way that digital media is constantly recalling or incorporating its media predecessors—most notably, “older” forms of media such as film, television, photography, or even handwriting.

When analyzing memes, CMD theorists often use the term remediation to reference how one meme may incorporate several different works of media. These can be “older media” fictional works like television shows or movies, but they can also involve other repertoire elements known as *meme templates*. Meme templates are images with blank slots for users to fill in their own text or images, as seen in Figures 6 and 8; there are even “meme generator” websites that enable users to produce new memes based on popular, already circulating templates. These templates are thus extremely recontextualizable and widely circulated, perhaps even more so than other repertoire elements.

In my research on memes, I have found that most examples of remediation can be classified in two ways: normative remediation between different works of media, and combinatorial remediations that alter and “remix” two media pieces into a novel form. This last form, in particular, is characterized by the heavy use of meme templates, often redesigned for use in a specialized knowledge space. The “form” of the meme is retained even though the material within it changes, similarly to how syntax functions in a sentence.

The first type, remediation between different works of media, is probably the most easily identifiable type of remediation. It involves explicit references to multiple works, with several unaltered repertoire elements from each inserted into, or perhaps more accurately, on top of each other. The unaltered repertoire elements are a hallmark of this first type of remediation; if they

were altered, they would be of the second type. The first type may be described as cutting and pasting, both digitally and physically. The content creator simply cuts a face, character, object, or other recognizable repertoire element out of one image and enters it into a scene, background, or context from another one. This type can be seen in the examples below.

FIGURE 4. EXAMPLE OF REMEDIATION BETWEEN *STAR WARS* AND *THE OFFICE* (U/POOPYPANTS1234321 2017)

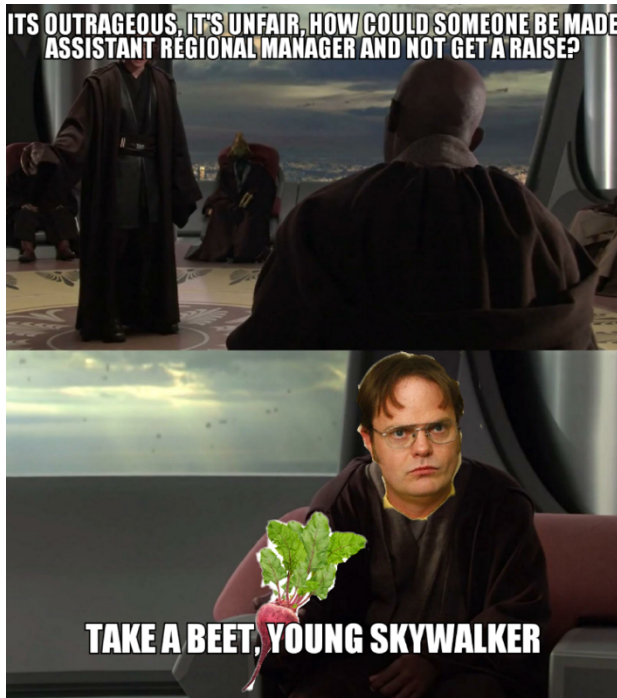
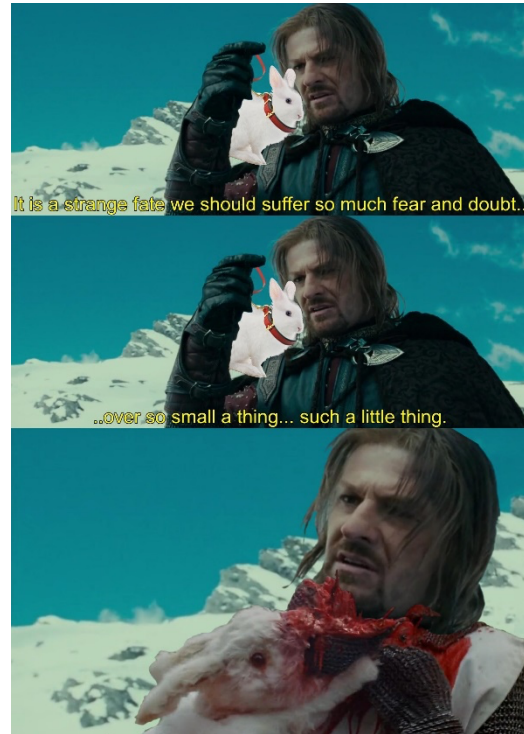


FIGURE 5. EXAMPLE OF REMEDIATION BETWEEN *LORD OF THE RINGS* AND *MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL* (U/FUTURARMY 2019)



In these examples, Figure 4 involves a remediation of a scene from *Star Wars* and a character from *The Office* and Figure 5 is a remediation of a scene from *Lord of the Rings* and a scene from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. To understand any of these memes, or find them funny, the reader must be familiar with both works of media referenced in the meme and have the characters, scenes, or other references in the meme in their own communicative repertoire. For example, if a reader were familiar with *Lord of the Rings* but did not have *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* in their communicative repertoire, they would be confused and not find the meme very funny, if at all. However, someone familiar with the references would understand that in the scene referenced, the man pictured (Boromir of *Lord of the Rings*) is holding and almost succumbing to the evil of the

One Ring, a powerful object of world-destroying proportions. Juxtaposing this serious scene with a reference from the very comedic film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* turns the seriousness on its head for comedic effect. One unfamiliar with one of these references would not understand the juxtaposition in mood and therefore miss the humor. Even though this type of remediation requires broader forms of specialized knowledge, it can be extremely popular if both references are something many people have in their communicative repertoires.

The second type of remediation is the type I find the most interesting: remediation that goes even further than the first type and “remixes” the two original pieces into something distinctively new. This type relies heavily on communicative repertoire entries such as meme templates and creates new content by using an existing form as a vehicle for understanding. The “syntax” of the meme is retained, but the elements are replaced with scenes requiring specialized knowledge. Instead of taking two separate images and cutting-and-pasting them together, as in the first two types, this type creates a new image from a blank template. Of course, the new image is necessarily evocative of the element or elements appearing in the original template; otherwise, the reference would be unnoticeable. However, no elements in the original image, other than the template itself, appear in the new image. Usually, this form manifests itself in the form of a new meme template made using only references to a single work of media. In the examples below, I include the original meme template as well as the remediated form.

FIGURE 6. “DRAKE” MEME TEMPLATE (N.A. 2019 “DRAKE HOTLINE BLING MEME GENERATOR”)



FIGURE 7. REMEDIATION OF “DRAKE” MEME TEMPLATE AND KERMIT THE FROG (W_A_C 2019)

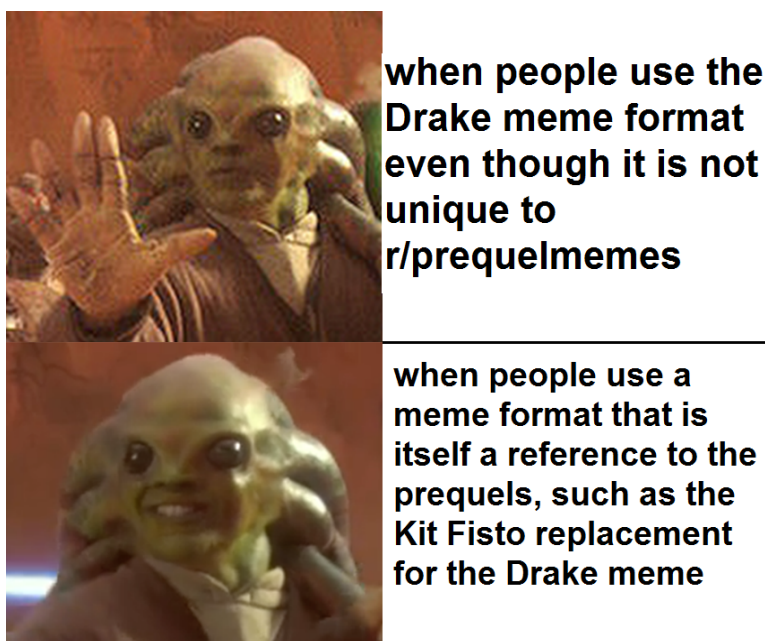


The meme in Figure 7 is a remediated form of the “Drake” meme seen in Figure 6, in which Drake, the man in the orange jacket, first expresses dislike for something (upper image), and then preference for something (lower image). Meme creators fill the blank boxes next to these two images with texts or pictures representing their ideas or opinions. A remediated example of the Drake meme can be seen in Figure 7, which shows Kermit the Frog in stances that recall the original. In this meme, the creator expresses preference for using Kermit’s picture instead of Drake’s “because he is cute”. If a person viewing the meme is unfamiliar with the Drake meme format, they will not understand the first panel’s intertextuality with the Drake meme and might not understand the concept that the creator is trying to express.

This type of remediation relies the heaviest on communicative repertoire, as shown by the fact that they are difficult to understand fully without knowledge of the meme template they are based on. Since they are new, separate images, they often take more effort to create than the other types, due to their type of remediation. Rather than simply cutting and pasting images together, these creators replace the original images in a meme template with another set of images that recall the sense of original meme even while advancing something new. Because these memes are so much harder to create and understand, the question is raised: why create them at all? They are frequently well-received and rather popular, but only within the communities of practice they target; the people who understand the meme recognize the reward and effort put in.

This observation is key to my argument regarding how these memes function to build community. I suggest that many of these memes are created and shared out of a desire to keep communities “pure”; that is, they incorporate characters or concepts from works viewed as central to the communities that exchange them. This ideology can be seen in the meme below, which is also based on the Drake meme in Figure 6.

FIGURE 8. REMEDIATION OF “DRAKE” MEME TEMPLATE AND THE STAR WARS PREQUELS (U/AVATYLER 2017)



This meme features a character from the Star Wars franchise as the replacement for Drake in the meme from Figure 6 and provides its reasoning for doing so, making it a sort of “meta-meme.” The creator of this meme, who is a member of the subreddit r/prequelmemes, displays a preference for keeping the community “pure” by encouraging members to use memes with content taken only from the Star Wars prequel films. The accompanying text indicates that community members should replace Drake with the Star Wars character Kit Fisto (a fan-favorite film character beloved for his smile), shown in the left panels of the meme. This is how this particular type of remediation builds community: by appealing to an internally recognized communicative repertoire.

3. STAR WARS PREQUEL FANS AS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

This section analyzes how the processes of redistribution, recontextualization, and remediation are deployed within a specific community of practice: digital users who create and exchange Star Wars prequel memes. Prequel memes are a subcategory of Star Wars memes based on the franchise’s prequel films: *The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, and *Revenge of the Sith*. Prequel memes are extremely popular among fans of these films. One of the main online spaces in which prequel memes are published is on the social media website Reddit, as we saw above in the remediated Drake meme. Subreddits resemble forums and are a type of community dedicated to

one topic. The subreddit r/prequelmemes, which is extremely popular with over 1.8 million subscribers, allows only posts with at least tangential relation to the Star Wars prequels.

Most prequel memes simply involve quotes from the films. Sometimes they are recontextualized into a new joke based on the quote; sometimes the joke is simply the stating of the quote itself. The community is extremely aware of their frequent quoting practices, as seen in this meme of a scene from *Revenge of the Sith*.

FIGURE 9. AN EXAMPLE OF A STAR WARS PREQUEL MEME THAT USES A QUOTE WITH NO CAPTIONS (U/DHOGAN73 2018)

Them: You can't understand prequel memes without subtitles

Me:



The quote in the original scene from which this picture is taken is “You underestimate my power” (Lucas 2005), said by Anakin Skywalker, the character in the picture, in the middle of the bitter duel at the film’s climax. The joke in this meme, then, is that when outsiders (represented by “them”) say that it is impossible to understand such memes if the quote from the film is not provided in the subtitles, those who are in the community can do just that. That is, for Star Wars prequel fans, the image alone recalls the quote “You underestimate my power”, providing a perfect response to outsiders who lack the specialized knowledge needed to interpret the image.

3.1. “GENERAL KENOBI” MEMES AND ADJACENCY PAIRS

An extremely popular and often-quoted prequel meme is what I refer to as the “General Kenobi” meme. To understand the “General Kenobi” meme, one must first understand the

linguistic phenomenon known as adjacency pairs. Adjacency pairs is a concept taken from conversation analysis and refers to a type of conversational turn-taking in which two speakers produce two utterances in succession. The first utterance (or first-pair part) elicits an utterance in response (or second-pair part). Second-pair parts are discussed in conversation analytic literature as either *preferred* or *dispreferred* (see, e.g., Kitzinger and Frith 1999), meaning that the second speaker will either respond with the expected answer or type of answer, which would be preferred, or the unexpected answer or type of answer, which would be dispreferred. For example, if a first-pair part were an invitation, the second-pair part could either be an acceptance or a refusal; the acceptance would be preferred and the refusal would be dispreferred. While conversation analysts often discuss preference expectations as part of a general grammar shared by speakers of a language, my work focuses on how members of a particular community—in this case, Star Wars prequel fans—collaboratively participate in novel adjacency pairs as a display of communal belonging.

The “General Kenobi” meme is based on an exchange between two characters in the third prequel film, *Revenge of the Sith*, seen below in Figure 10.

FIGURE 10. THE “GENERAL KENOBI” MEME (LUCAS 2005)

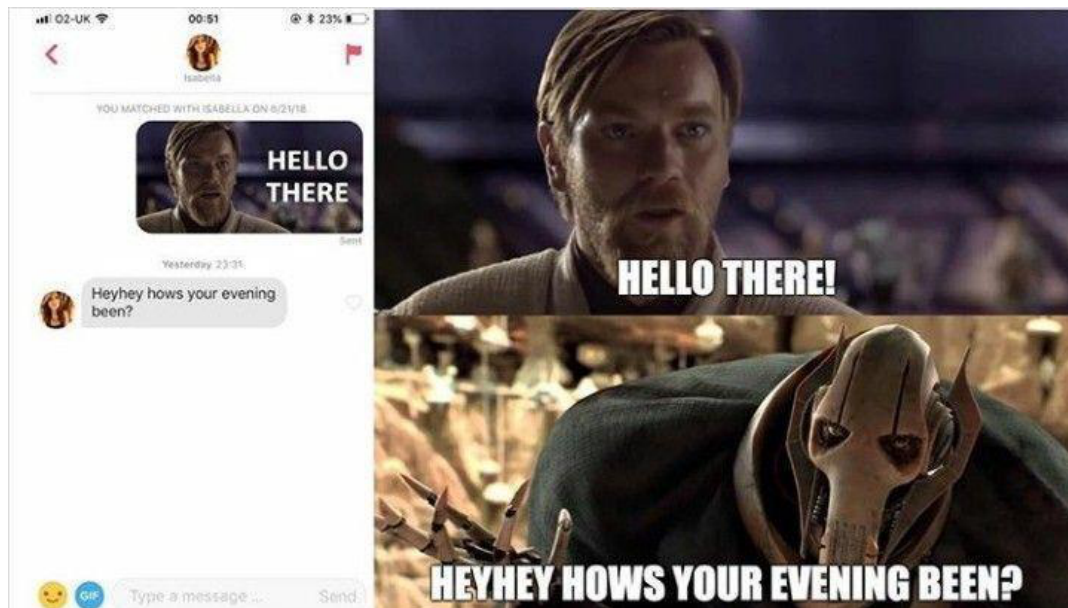


In this scene, Obi-Wan Kenobi, the man with the beard, greets his long-time adversary, General Grievous, the robot-looking alien. This scene is one of the most popular memes in the r/prequelmemes community; whenever someone on the forum says “Hello there!”, there will be many responses of “General Kenobi!”

3.2. EXAMPLES FROM TINDER EXCHANGES

The “General Kenobi” exchange is not a normative adjacency pair; however, it has many similarities to both the concept and execution of adjacency pairs. The exchange is often replicated among Star Wars prequel fans and acts as a gatekeeping device to signal membership in this in-group. The first-pair part of this adjacency pair is the “Hello there!”; the second-pair part preferred response, for these fans, is “General Kenobi!”. The preferred response, if given, signals to the first speaker that the second speaker is part of the in-group of Star Wars prequel fans. However, if the second-pair part is a dispreferred response, the first speaker knows that the second speaker is not a Star Wars prequel fan, or at least not the kind that memorizes dialogue from the films. An example of a dispreferred response that leads to a joke can be seen in the exchange and accompanying meme in Figure 11.

FIGURE 11. A DISPREFERRED RESPONSE TO THE “GENERAL KENOBI” FIRST-PAIR PART (U/NOTFREDRHODES 2018)



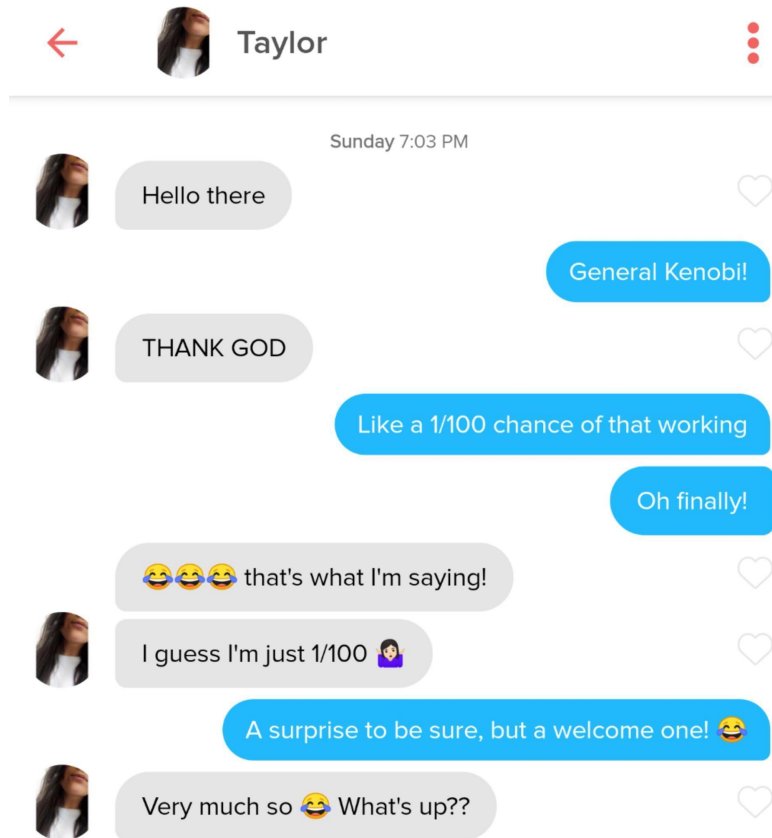
In the exchange from the dating app Tinder, seen on the left, the first messenger offers a “Hello there!”, but the second messenger gives a dispreferred response of “Heyhey hows your evening been?”, signaling to the first messenger that she does not know the context or expected response to the first-pair part. Interestingly, this exchange was posted alongside a recontextualization of the “General Kenobi!” meme seen above in the same image file. This recontextualized meme puts the text of the Tinder conversation over two frames from the film.

This example is illuminated by the social theoretical framework of adequation and distinction, two “tactics of intersubjectivity” described by Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2004, 2005) as involved in identity production. According to these authors, adequation “involves the pursuit of socially recognized sameness. In this relation, potentially salient differences are set aside in favor of perceived or asserted similarities that are taken to be more situationally relevant” (2004:383). Adequation is not very present in this example, but will clearly be seen in the second example. The second concept is that of distinction. Bucholtz and Hall write that distinction is “the mechanism whereby salient difference is produced. Distinction is therefore the converse of adequation, in that in this relation difference is underscored rather than erased” (2004:384).

Distinction can very clearly be seen in Figure 11. The woman in the Tinder conversation gives a dispreferred response, and the first messenger creates a meme mocking her lack of Star Wars knowledge. By doing this, the meme creator is “establishing a dichotomy,” as Hall and Bucholtz put it, between himself¹ and the woman. By defining her as “not a Star Wars fan” because she does not get the reference and give the preferred response, he conversely defines “Star Wars fans” as those who do get the reference and give the preferred response.

This exchange provides a strong example of how community is created through distinction, but in Figure 12, below, adequation is instead the primary process used. A woman named Taylor messages the first-pair part “Hello there” and her interlocutor responds with the second-pair part “General Kenobi!”.

FIGURE 12. A PREFERRED RESPONSE TO THE “GENERAL KENOBI” FIRST-PAIR PART
(U/ASHMAN508 2020)



It is difficult to know the exact timing of the exchange due to the asynchronous nature of the image, but it appears that Taylor responds while the messenger is typing his follow-up message, because his second message seems to be a post-expansion based on his second-pair part of “General Kenobi”, and does not acknowledge Taylor’s intervening message of “THANK GOD”. After this brief misunderstanding, the messenger then gives another quote from the prequels “A surprise to be sure, but a welcome one!”, from the prequel film *The Phantom Menace* (Lucas 1999). He captions his Reddit post “This is where the fun begins!”, which is yet another quote from the same film.

The more than 200 comments that respond to this post are also very interesting. Most provide still more prequel quotes; others make approving statements like “Marriage material”, indicating that Taylor counts as part of the community. However, one comment says “Be careful. There are fakers out there who only do it to snag our poor lads hearts without actually caring about Star Wars”. Bucholtz and Hall (2004:384) write that the tactic of distinction “has a tendency to reduce

complex social variability to a single dimension: us versus them”. In this comment, the possibility of “fakers” creates a clear “them” for the community of “our poor lads” to be in opposition with. Additionally, the “lads” comment suggests that the community is thought to be made up mostly, if not entirely, of men, which in turn implies that women are the ones most likely to be “fakers”. These “fakers” who do not “actually [care] about Star Wars” are apparently a menace to the community that need to be carefully surveilled, again showing the importance of adequation and distinction to Star Wars prequel fan identity construction.

4. CONCLUSIONS

I began this paper with the question: How *does* one do things with memes? Although I have only scratched the surface with the research displayed here, I believe that the answer lies in a type of illocutionary force associated with all the memes I have discussed: community-building. When one person shows a meme to another, they are not simply redistributing it. Sharing memes, like sharing any form of humor, brings people closer together. By laughing at a meme together, community members demonstrate that they get the “joke” and thereby foster a sense of belonging.

Hall (2019:507) describes a comparable phenomenon of formulaic jokes told by urban youth in New Delhi, India: “Formulaic jokes are massively distributed, yet [...] also take on specialized meanings as they enter into localized interactions forged within specific communities”. This closely mirrors the “General Kenobi” memes described in this paper; they have a specialized meaning of community-belonging in only the specific community of Star Wars prequel fans. To outsiders, the “General Kenobi” adjacency pair would be seen simply as a movie quote. The specialized meaning only comes to exist through repeated localized interactions within the community. Citing Bucholtz et al.’s (2011:499) work on joke-telling, Hall writes that “the taking of interactional stances toward [specialized] knowledge may shape distinct identity positions”. As we saw in Section 3.2, when interlocutors use the “General Kenobi” meme, they not only take the stance that they are “real” Star Wars fans, they also identify “fake” communal belonging through the stances taken by others.

This works largely through the tactics of adequation and distinction (Bucholtz & Hall 2004), with which members build the identity of a “Star Wars prequel fan”. For community members, a prequel fan is someone who not only likes the Star Wars prequel films but can also recognize and participate in recitations of the films’ dialogue. As Hall (2019:499) writes, “from an interactional

standpoint, identity emerges within episodes of joke telling as speakers and hearers position themselves in relation to the specialized knowledge they display”. Through the specialized knowledge of the scripts and stories of the Star Wars prequel films, a distinct identity of “Star Wars prequel fan” emerges, and a community is built through the specific communicative repertoire associated with this identity.

This means of building community is well illustrated by the concept of dual indexicality as outlined by Jane Hill in her work on “mock Spanish” (Hill 1995). When a member of the Star Wars prequel meme community makes a joke using a quote from the communal communicative repertoire, they are not only mocking outsiders as “fake”, they are also indexing themselves as a particular kind of humor-loving Star Wars prequel fan. Because the sharing and creating of these prequel memes involves such heavy social implications for community members, they make sure to invoke these references very often, displaying their expertise through their facility with the film scripts and their cleverness in deploying them appropriately. Therefore, as seen in the Tinder exchanges discussed in Section 3.2, many post titles as well as comments on posts consist largely of even more repeated lines from the Star Wars prequels. Here and elsewhere in these online digital communities, when an interlocutor does not understand the reference, they are indexed as “fake” Star Wars fans.

Meme creation, as demonstrated throughout this paper, expands upon already circulating communicative repertoires in ways that revitalize the community, modernize its reach, and keep it from “dying out”. For communities built around a specific work of media, memes can additionally foster love and excitement for their chosen work, especially in long-lived series like *Star Wars*. Although memes have not yet been fully studied in terms of their illocutionary contributions to community-building, the examples analyzed in this paper provide a rich resource for understanding how memetic redistribution, recontextualization, and remediation may serve to create community.

REFERENCES

- Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to do things with words*. J.O. Urmson, & M. Sbisà (ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bauman, Richard, & Briggs, Charles L. 1990. Poetics and performance as critical perspectives on language and social life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19.59–88.
- Bolter, Jay David, & Grusin, Richard 1999. *Remediation: Understanding new media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Bucholtz, Mary; Skapoulli, Elena; Barnwell, Brendan; and Lee, Jung-Eun Janie. 2011. Entexualized humor in the formation of scientist identities among U.S. undergraduates. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 42(3).177–192.
- Bucholtz, Mary, & Hall, Kira. 2004. Language and identity. A. Duranti (Ed.). *A companion to linguistic anthropology*. 369-394. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell.
- Bucholtz, Mary, & Hall, Kira. 2005. Identity and Interaction: a sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies*, 7(4-5).585-614. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- [hgrant]. 2012. The 18 best chain e-mails you got in 2004. Article, 25 January 2012. Online: <https://www.buzzfeed.com/hgrant/the-18-best-chain-e-mails-you-got-in-2004>
- Hall, Kira. 2019. Middle class timelines: Ethnic humor and sexual modernity in Delhi. *Language in Society* 48.491–517.
- Hill, Jane H. 1995. Mock Spanish: A site for the indexical reproduction of racism in American English. *Language & Culture*. Online: <https://language-culture.binghamton.edu/symposia/2/part1/index.html>
- [illusions]. 2018. I'm just chillin' in Cedar Rapids. YouTube Video, 11 November 2018. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NT3vSZ2uXj4>
- Iqbal, Mansoor. 2021. Tinder revenue and usage statistics. *Business of Apps*. Online: <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/tinder-statistics/>
- Edwards, Gareth. 2016. *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*. Lucasfilm.
- Kitzinger, Celia, and Frith, Hannah. Just say no? The use of conversation analysis in developing a feminist perspective on sexual refusal. *Discourse & Society*. 10(3).293–316.
- Lucas, George. 2005. *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*. [Film]. Lucasfilm.
- Lucas, George. 2005. *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith*. [Film]. Lucasfilm.
- McCulloch, Gretchen. 2019. *Because internet: Understanding the new rules of language*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- N.a. 2019. Drake Hotline Bling meme generator. Online: <https://imgflip.com/memetemplate/114388676/Inhaling-Seagull>
- Rymes, Betsy. 2012. Recontextualizing YouTube: From macro-micro to mass-mediated communicative repertoires. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 43(2).214–227.
- Rymes, Betsy. 2014. Communicating beyond language: everyday encounters with diversity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. 24(3)372–374.

- [u/ashman508]. 2020. This is where the fun begins! Reddit post, 14 February 2020. Online: https://www.reddit.com/r/PrequelMemes/comments/f3wod6/this_is_where_the_fun_begins/
- [u/AvaTyler]. 2017. just how I feel. Reddit post, 13 September 2017. Online: https://www.reddit.com/r/PrequelMemes/comments/6zyac7/just_how_i_feel/
- [u/d_feral12]. 2020. I thought she was a star wars fan, guess not. Reddit post, 17 January 2020. Online: https://www.reddit.com/r/Tinder/comments/equaljc/i_thought_she_was_a_star_wars_fan_guess_not/
- [u/DHogan73]. 2018. Don't try it. Reddit post, 23 January 2020. Online: https://www.reddit.com/r/PrequelMemes/comments/9bmvai/dont_try_it/
- [u/futurarmy]. 2019. Oh, it's just a harmless little bunny, isn't it Boromir?. Reddit post, 26 September 2019. Online: https://www.reddit.com/r/LOTRholygrailmemes/comments/d9ivnn/oh_its_just_a_harmless_little_bunny_isnt_it/
- [u/NotFredRhodes]. 2018. She can't do that! Shoot her...or something! Reddit post, 26 June 2018. Online: https://www.reddit.com/r/PrequelMemes/comments/8u50ud/she_cant_do_that_shoot_her_or_something/
- [u/poopypants1234321]. 2017. Bears, beets, battlestar galactica. Reddit post, 25 November 2017. Online: https://www.reddit.com/r/PrequelMemes/comments/7fidvg/bears_beets_battlestar_galactica/
- [W__A__C]. 2019. Kermit the Frog meme template. Online: <https://imgflip.com/i/3bkinm>

ENDNOTES

¹ Since most digital users on Tinder who send messages to women are men, I am using the male pronoun in this section for speakers addressing women. According to Iqbal (2021), heterosexual users comprise 88%-99.9% of participants on Tinder.