

**ENGLISH IN RUSSIAN INSTAGRAM MEMES: CODE-SWITCHING IN DIGITAL HUMOR**

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**Abstract:** The global spread of English has increasingly influenced communication in online environments, particularly within social media discourse. One noticeable example of this influence can be seen in internet memes, where humor and creativity frequently involve the combination of multiple languages. This study examines the presence of English elements in Russian-language Instagram memes and analyzes the role of code-switching in the creation of digital humor. The research is based on a corpus of memes collected from Russian-speaking Instagram accounts published between 2022 and 2025. These memes contain Russian text combined with English words or short expressions. Through corpus-based and discourse analytical approaches, the study identifies common patterns of code-switching and explores their communicative functions. The results show that English is mainly used through lexical insertions, brief phrases, and well-known meme templates, contributing to humor, irony, and the expression of shared identity within global online culture.

**Keywords:** code-switching, internet memes, digital discourse, English influence, Russian language, Instagram communication

**ЭЛЕМЕНТЫ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В РУССКОЯЗЫЧНЫХ МЕМАХ  
INSTAGRAM: ФЕНОМЕН КОД-СВИТЧИНГА В ЦИФРОВОМ ЮМОРЕ**

**Аннотация:** Глобальное распространение английского языка оказывает всё более заметное влияние на коммуникацию в онлайн-среде, особенно в дискурсе социальных сетей. Одним из наиболее наглядных проявлений данного влияния являются интернет-мемы, где юмор и креативность нередко строятся на сочетании нескольких языков. В настоящем исследовании рассматривается присутствие элементов английского языка в русскоязычных мемах Instagram, а также анализируется роль код-свитчинга в формировании цифрового юмора. Исследование основано на корпусе мемов, собранных из русскоязычных аккаунтов Instagram, опубликованных в период с 2022 по 2025 годы. Данные мемы характеризуются сочетанием русского текста с английскими словами или краткими выражениями. С использованием методов корпусного и дискурсивного анализа выявляются наиболее распространённые модели код-свитчинга и исследуются их коммуникативные функции. Результаты исследования показывают, что английский язык преимущественно используется в форме лексических вставок, кратких фраз и известных мем-шаблонов, что способствует созданию юмора, иронии и выражению общей идентичности в рамках глобальной онлайн-культуры.

**Ключевые слова:** код-свитчинг, интернет-мемы, цифровой дискурс, влияние английского языка, русский язык, коммуникация в Instagram.

**RUS TILIDAGI INSTAGRAM MEMLARIDA INGLIZ TILI ELEMENTLARI:  
RAQAMLI HAZIL KONTEKSTIDA KOD ALMASHISH HODISASI**

**Annotatsiya:** Ingliz tilining global miqyosda keng tarqalishi, ayniqsa ijtimoiy tarmoqlar muhitidagi muloqot jarayonlariga tobora kuchli ta'sir ko'rsatmoqda. Ushbu ta'sirning yorqin namoyon bo'lish shakllaridan biri internet memlarida kuzatiladi, bunda hazil va ijodkorlik ko'pincha bir nechta tillarning uyg'unlashuvi orqali ifodalanadi. Mazkur tadqiqot rus tilidagi Instagram memlarida ingliz tiliga oid elementlarning mavjudligini o'rganishga hamda raqamli hazilni yaratishda kod almashish (code-switching) hodisasining rolini tahlil qilishga qaratilgan. Tadqiqot 2022–2025-yillar oralig'ida rus tilida so'zlashuvchi Instagram akkauntlaridan to'plangan memlar korpusiga asoslanadi. Ushbu memlar rus tilidagi matnning inglizcha so'zlar yoki qisqa iboralar bilan birgalikda qo'llanishi bilan tavsiflanadi. Korpusga asoslangan va diskurs tahlili usullari yordamida kod almashishning keng tarqalgan namunalari aniqlanib, ularning kommunikativ funksiyalari o'rganildi. Tadqiqot natijalari ingliz tili asosan leksik qo'shimchalar, qisqa iboralar hamda mashhur mem shablonlari orqali qo'llanishini ko'rsatadi. Bu esa hazil, kinoya va global onlayn madaniyat doirasida umumiy identifikatsiyani ifodalashga xizmat qiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** kod almashish, internet memlar, raqamli diskurs, ingliz tilining ta'siri, rus tili, Instagram kommunikatsiyasi.

### **Introduction**

The rapid expansion of digital communication has created new environments for linguistic creativity and language contact. Social media platforms provide spaces where users experiment with language, combine different linguistic resources, and develop new forms of humor. One of the most prominent examples of such practices can be observed in internet memes, which function as concise multimodal units combining images, text, and cultural references (Shifman, 2014).

Memes have become an important element of online culture and a powerful means of expressing collective experiences, social commentary, and humor. Their popularity lies in their ability to communicate complex meanings through short and easily recognizable formats. Within this context, language mixing has emerged as a common strategy for enhancing the expressive potential of memes (Milner, 2016).

English plays a particularly significant role in this process. As the dominant language of global internet culture, English frequently appears in digital communication even among speakers whose primary language is not English (Blommaert, 2010). In Russian-speaking online communities, English lexical items, phrases, and expressions are often incorporated into Russian texts, creating hybrid linguistic structures.

This phenomenon can be analyzed through the concept of code-switching, which refers to the alternation between two or more languages within a single communicative act (Myers-Scotton, 1993). While code-switching has traditionally been studied in spoken multilingual interaction, recent research has increasingly focused on its presence in digital discourse (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Online environments encourage creative language mixing, and memes provide an especially productive context for such practices. Previous studies suggest that code-switching in digital communication often serves pragmatic and stylistic functions, including humor creation, identity construction, and the expression of cultural belonging (Tagg & Seargeant, 2014; Zappavigna, 2012).

Despite growing interest in digital multilingualism, the use of English elements in Russian-language memes—particularly on Instagram—remains relatively underexplored. Instagram represents a unique platform for meme circulation due to its visual orientation and highly interactive user community. Meme communication on such platforms is typically multimodal,

combining visual and textual elements that together construct humorous meaning (Dynel, 2016; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The present study aims to investigate the use of English in Russian-language Instagram memes and analyze the communicative functions of code-switching in this context. Specifically, the research seeks to identify the main types of English–Russian code-switching found in memes, determine the frequency of English elements, and examine their pragmatic functions in meme discourse.

### **Methods**

The dataset for this study consists of memes collected from Russian-language Instagram accounts specializing in humorous content. The collection period covers three years, from 2022 to 2025. The accounts were selected according to several criteria: the primary language of the content is Russian, the account regularly publishes meme-based posts, and the memes contain textual elements integrated into visual formats.

A total of 520 memes were initially collected. From this dataset, 210 memes containing both Russian text and English lexical items or phrases were selected for detailed analysis. Memes that contained only Russian or only English text were excluded from the final corpus.

All memes were archived in a digital corpus that included screenshots, transcription of textual elements, and contextual information such as the date of publication and user engagement indicators. The analysis followed approaches commonly used in studies of digital discourse and social media communication (Herring et al., 2013; Page et al., 2014).

The study employs a mixed methodological approach combining corpus-based analysis and discourse analysis. The corpus-based approach was used to identify patterns in the occurrence and distribution of English elements within Russian meme texts. Each meme was manually coded according to the type of code-switching present, following sociolinguistic frameworks for analyzing multilingual interaction (Myers-Scotton, 2006; Woolard, 2004).

Three main structural categories of code-switching were identified: lexical insertions, phrase-level switching, and the use of established meme formulas. In addition to structural classification, discourse analytical methods were applied to examine the pragmatic functions of code-switching in meme communication.

### **Results**

The analysis of the corpus demonstrates that English elements appear frequently in Russian-language Instagram memes and play a significant role in meme construction. Three main types of code-switching were identified.

Lexical insertions represent the most common type of code-switching, accounting for approximately 48% of the analyzed cases. These include individual English words embedded within Russian sentences. Examples include words such as cringe, random, fail, and mood. These lexical items often function as evaluative markers summarizing emotional reactions or social situations.

Phrase-level switching accounts for approximately 32% of the memes in the corpus. In these cases, short English expressions are inserted into otherwise Russian texts. Common examples include expressions such as same energy, no comments, and what is happening. These phrases frequently function as humorous punchlines.

The third category consists of established English meme templates and formulas, which appear in about 20% of the dataset. Such templates include expressions such as expectation vs reality, when you realize, and that feeling when. These formulas originate from global meme culture and are widely recognizable to online audiences (Shifman, 2014).

The analysis also revealed several communicative functions of English code-switching. English elements frequently enhance humor by creating unexpected linguistic contrasts between

Russian and English expressions. Code-switching is also used to produce irony or exaggeration, especially when English phrases dramatize emotional reactions. In addition, the use of English expressions often signals affiliation with global internet culture (Milner, 2016).

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that code-switching between Russian and English is a common feature of Instagram meme discourse. The frequent presence of English lexical items and phrases reflects the influence of global internet culture on Russian-speaking online communities (Blommaert, 2010).

One notable observation is the predominance of lexical insertions. Short English words such as cringe or mood have become highly productive elements of meme language. Their popularity may be explained by their brevity, expressive potential, and widespread recognition among internet users.

Phrase-level switching and meme formulas also play an important role. These expressions often carry cultural meanings associated with global meme traditions. By incorporating such elements, meme creators draw on a shared repertoire of online humor (Shifman, 2014).

The results also highlight the pragmatic functions of code-switching in digital discourse. English elements frequently act as stylistic tools that intensify humor and irony. This linguistic contrast between Russian narrative text and English punchlines creates a distinctive humorous effect.

Furthermore, code-switching contributes to the construction of digital identity. The use of English expressions signals familiarity with global online culture and may serve as a marker of belonging to digitally connected communities (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Zappavigna, 2012).

From a broader sociolinguistic perspective, the integration of English into Russian meme discourse reflects ongoing processes of linguistic globalization. English increasingly functions not only as a lingua franca but also as a symbolic resource within multilingual digital communication (García & Wei, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the use of English elements in Russian-language Instagram memes and explored the role of code-switching in digital humor. The analysis of memes collected between 2022 and 2025 revealed that English words, phrases, and meme formulas are widely integrated into Russian meme discourse.

Three main types of code-switching were identified: lexical insertions, phrase-level switching, and the use of established meme formulas. These linguistic switches perform several communicative functions, including humor creation, ironic expression, and the construction of shared digital identities.

The findings demonstrate that code-switching in memes reflects broader trends in digital communication, where language mixing becomes a resource for creativity and cultural expression. Future research may explore multimodal aspects of memes, cross-platform differences, and audience interpretation of multilingual humor.

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