## Meme-Assisted Debate: 21st Century Visuals Serving EFL Spoken Production on a Sample of Level B2 Hungarian Secondary School Students

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Abstract: The aim of the present research is to introduce and assess the application of thematically structured internet macros as a starting point for a level B2 EFL debate task on national stereotypes related to the culture and everyday life of the United States of America. The main focuses of the paper include attempts at describing how and why such 21st century visuals can be loaded with the capacity of enhancing L2 oral production and examining students' self-reflections and (self-)evaluations of the learning outcome. Also, it gives some interesting research-based insights into the characteristic features of the typical present day teenage language learner in the system of Hungarian public education with relevance to the methodology of teaching foreign languages.

Keywords: internet memes, glottodidactics, visual aids, teaching English as a foreign language, American stereotypes

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# Meme-Assisted Debate: 21ˢᵗ Century Visuals Serving EFL Spoken Production on a Sample of Level B2 Hungarian Secondary School Students

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> "… I have included visibility in my list of values to be saved…"
> (Italo Calvino)

## 1. Motivations for the Research: GenZers & EFL

Judit Lannert's 2023 analysis bears a rather enigmatic title: What should we teach in the 21st century (content) and how should that content be taught (process)? (Lannert 2023). The present research was motivated by the first-hand experience of a secondary school teacher of English as a foreign language working in Hungarian public education and facing the ever-green pedagogical problem 'making-learning-engaging' in the context of the third decade of the millennium. The elements of this context include Gen Zers and their specific learning characteristics not witnessed earlier, the content/learning outcome regulators for foreign languages in Hungarian secondary education, and the teacher's as task designer's perennial concern to provide motivating, meaningful, and tailor-made input for the learners, thus enhancing the energy-consuming and sometimes seemingly tedious work of the learning process. How can these elements be characterized and applied successfully according to the description of successful 21st century teachers, who are "capable of altering the process of learning so that it is innovative: gameful, emotional, linguistically diverse and conscious of the presence of different cultures" (Lannert 2023: 21)?

Lannert's aforementioned research highlights that, sadly, even the top-performing Hungarian students adopt learning techniques that rely on memory and repetition (methods with low efficiency) instead of detecting and connecting information from a variety of sources (higher quality learning and thinking strategies) (Lannert 2023: 20). This may result in their self-efficacy declining, contrary to the desired notion of autonomous, self-regulatory learner described in scientific literature (OECD 2018, Pintrich 2003, Reeve, Bolt and Cai 1999).

Gyarmathy (2011) states that digital natives are weaker at precise, systemathic, methodic thinking since the digital age has brought about changes in the way learners think. She lists five mutations (supported by either medical or empirical evidence, or both), from which the following aspects are worth mentioning from the perspective of the present paper: instead of making images they use ready-made pictures, instead of motoric-perceptional experiences they rely on visual experience, instead of active participation they make machines actively participate, and, finally, they tend to gain passive experience through low neuro-physical involvement.

Kraynov and Shalaeva's (2020) impressive essay on the effects of the clip thinking of today's youths resonates with such findings. They examined the reading skills of Russian university students and discovered that "instead of realizing and interpreting meaning of previously read texts, students „reproduce an incoherent set of memorable phrases, while between phrases there are often no semantic and logically justified connections" (Kraynov – Shalaeva 2020: 2027). They found that an abundance of color schemes, small text blocks, and animations made it easier for their students to understand linear texts. In addition, they suggest that applying a combination of different teaching methods and techniques might lead to the development of students' cognitive and analytical abilities. What is intriguing here is the

resemblance of these thoughts with Lannert's (2023) viewpoint in that the traditional approach to giving and expecting too many bits of information alone cannot be as effective (perhaps not effective at all) as combining them with multimedial settings.

English has become the most widely chosen foreign language in Hungarian secondary schools at present time. (According to the data published by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, the total number of secondary school students in Hungary in the 2022/2023 school year amounted to 517,000 (Link 1), out of whom about 398,000 (Link 2) learnt English). The acquisition of this moderately flective language is especially aided by the possibility of constant exposure to or accessibility of the language (artifacts of dissemination of popular/ high culture and those of production of knowledge: films, songs, social media platforms, on-line lectures, informational vlogs and blogs, broadcasts, influencers, etc.). This new lingua franca is generally regarded as meaningful teaching and learning content, providing relatively strong instrumental and integrative motivation for learners.

The expected learning outcome in Hungarian secondary grammar schools is predefined by the requirements of the school-leaving matura examinations that can be taken at two levels: A(dvanced) and O(rdinary) (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels B2 and B1, respectively). It is compulsory to sit at least one foreign language exam, and most of the students choose English, as it is the most widely studied foreign language in Hungary. Although O-level is the universally mandatory exam level in a foreign language, lots of students opt for A-levels in foreign languages (especially in their first foreign language) due to the fact that possessing B2 certificates entitles them to get extra points when applying to higher education, and, consequently, means higher chances of getting admitted to stately-financed university courses. In May 2023 A-level English exams amounted to 18,848 (Link 3) (the highest number of examinees of all the subjects); in May 2024 this figure rose to 20,821 (Link 4). The school where the present research was conducted contributes to such rising figures as well, so it seemed purposeful for the present experiment to practice one type of the A-level oral examination tasks, which is generally feared by the candidates: the debate.

When speaking about examinational framework, one should remember that exams are often mentioned with a negative connotation as far as the language learning process is concerned. Medgyes (1994), for instance, speaks of the backwash (washback) effect, blaming it for the frequent phenomenon that teachers may tend to prepare learners for specific exam tasks instead of developing their language skills. To our understanding, however, such washback effect can also be regarded as a positive side effect of the exams preparation process: it can serve to give guidelines as to what and how to teach (content and process) (cf. Vígh (2012)). In addition, the structure of the oral A-level Hungarian school-leaving examination in foreign languages is meant to simulate real-life communicational purposes, the debate task included. Also, preparing for certain testing types means practising the language for meaningful, in other words, useful purposes. Performing meaningful tasks is one of the major criteria of student engagement (Fodor 2024, Fredricks 2011), so if such tasks are fed to learners, they might be more willing to gain knowledge and, as a result, the teacher can successfully convert a potentially negative exam characteristic into a potentially beneficial feature.

In order to be able to communicate effectively in a foreign language – especially if communication is thematically focused on national culture and stereotypes – it is inevitable to bear in mind that apart from the four foreign language competences mentioned in Canale-Swain's competence model (Bárdos 2000, Taş and Khan 2020), a fifth competence, namely cultural competence (Bárdos 2002) is also essential. This latter is also addressed by the OECD countries in the four fields of global competence: learning about local, global, and cultural issues, understanding and respecting other people's opinions, and enhancing interaction between cultures. "Hungarian students learn significantly less about global issues than students in other countries (Lannert 2023: 23), they are amongst the lowest when it comes to being open to, interested in and respecting other cultures (ibid: 24-25). As it was stated at the Eurydice Conference in Budapest, in 2024 "teaching foreign languages and the mother tongue is a

fundamental cultural issue and it should also be desirable to strive to learn about and understand foreign cultures" (Derényi 2024: 3).

## 2. Memetics & EFL: Memes as Vehicles of Transmitting Linguistic and Cultural Knowledge

Italo Calvino (1988) in one of his *American lessons,* in *Visibility*, distinguishes two types of imaginative processes: one that starts with words and arrives at images, and the second, whose starting point is the image and it ends in verbal expression. Then he goes on to describe the method his stories were created:

> ...there was a visual image at the source of all my stories. [...] ... the first thing that comes to my mind is an image that for some reason strikes me as charged with meaning, [...] I set about developing it into a story; or better yet, it is the images themselves that develop their own implicit potentialities, the story they carry within them. (Calvino 1988: 88-89)

This quote does not only precisely describe the process memes for the present research were created, but it also contains a faithful description of Richard Dawkins' (2005) and Susan Blackmore's (2001) notion of memetic proliferation: memes get passed on thanks to their inherent inclination to be spread.

What characteristic features of memes can make them potential language pedagogical tools? While Dawkins and Blackmore concentrate on the selfish, automatic self-multiplying potential of memes, Miltner (2018) and Milner (2012) believe that internet memes are successful as long as people can emotionally relate or be committed to certain aspects of these media objects. Internet memes also have the potential to spread while changing one of the main dimensions of theirs: content, form and stance (Shifman, 2014). The borderlines of meme proliferation coincide with the boundaries certain disjunct groups of people have, so memes cannot only unite users by the inevitably necessary common knowledge that is essential for them to be deciphered, but they also have the capacity to separate clusters of users, giving them this way a sense of belonging to or identifying with smaller communities (Zinovyeva 2015, Izgarsheva 2020).

In the present paper we are interested in one specific type of memes, namely image macros, and the term (internet/digital) meme in this study refers to image macros that take a multimodal format: (a) visual element(s) and one or more textual elements named captions. Our research proves that in the sample secondary student vernacular the word 'meme', in the first place, is used for indicating this special type of internet meme. (In the pre-task survey the students were invited to give their own definitions of memes. The descriptions included terms such as *visual element, textual element, alteration, humour, spread on the internet, common background knowledge/specific knowledge*). According to the Britannica Dictionary, the second meaning of the word *meme* (Link 5) is "an amusing or interesting picture, video, etc., that is spread widely through the Internet". One of the most well-known meme template sites defines image macros as follows:

> [an] image macro is a broad term used to describe captioned images that typically consist of a picture and a witty message or a catchphrase. On discussion forums and imageboards, image macros can be also used to convey feelings or reactions towards another member of the community, similar to it predecessor emoticons. It is one of the most prevalent forms of internet memes (Link 6).

According to the Oxford Languages Dictionary (Link 7) an image macro is "(on the internet) a photographic image on which a humorous caption or catchphrase has been digitally superimposed." Definitions, linguo-pedagogical characteristics of image macros, and some

possible ways of their application in the foreign language classroom are described in detail by Kocsis (2023) with special emphasis on different interpretations and characteristic features, still it seems worthwhile to cite Glazkova, who "substantiates the consideration of memes as temporary, unstable cultural dominants without knowing which it is impossible to understand the current cultural situation and hence the full mastering of a foreign language" (Glazkova 2019, 72). This is especially relevant to the present research task that involves teaching and talking about national culture specificities (the United States of America being the target country in our meme-triggered task). Both global and local background knowledge should be acquired and activated so that it is possible to understand and further deepen culturally specific notions, aspects and arguments.

Radchenko (2011) speaks of the cross-cultural adaptation of internet folklore as communication processes on the web are being globalized, hence, local, national specificities may tend to be fading, and such a tendency is being echoed in language use. Sharing common background knowledge and reciprocal knowledge of referred elements are vital to communication. English, as a 21st century lingua franca, bears the potential of creating linguistic and cultural communities, thus, in the national segments of the internet one can observe the integration and localization of English language texts (Radchenko 2011). We find it important to add that one may also be witness to the integration and localization of image macros which transmit national characteristics in a globalized framework. The local-global dual characteristic, combined with the tradition-innovation dichotomy of memes (Zinovjeva 2015), may make these popular culture artifacts suitable for application in language pedagogy in desperate need of constant renewal.

To sum up, let us turn to Calvino again:

> my procedure aims at uniting the spontaneous generation of images and the intentionality of discursive thought. Even when the opening gambit is played by the visual imagination, [...] it finds itself sooner or later caught in a web where reasoning and verbal expression also impose their logic. (Calvino 1988: 90)

One of the aims of the present research was to follow – at least to some extent – in Calvino's (1988) footsteps: it recycled used images in a new context that changes their meaning, thus making memes become opening moves to structured, grammatically and verbally aided argumentations that would result in linear, verbal oral production in the foreign language.

## 3. The Research: Content and Process

Conducting a debate in a foreign language involves a plethora of skills and abilities. It puts the examinee's wide range of linguistic competences to the test, including cultural competence, which is a conspicuous aspect of the task presented in this paper. National stereotypes, cultural specificities form an integral part of English language course books at the aforementioned levels, moreover, they are essential fields of study of 21st century soft skills and global education (Rácz 2022). The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume* (2020) marks a crucial step in the Council of Europe's engagement with language education, which seeks to protect linguistic and cultural diversity, promote plurilingual and intercultural education, reinforce the right to quality education for all, and enhance intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and democracy. (Link 8)

Salient descriptors of a level B2 debate include (see also Figure 1) the ability to sustain an argument on learners' preferences, form opinions on topical and complex issues through expanding and supporting viewpoints at some length while developing an argument systematically, to taking into account the interlocutor's perspective and employing emphasis effectively by "highlighting significant points appropriately and formulating points precisely in well-structured language" (Link 9).

| | |
|---|---|
| **A** | Can develop an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail. |
| **B2** | Can develop a clear argument, expanding and supporting their points of view at some length with subsidiary points and relevant examples.<br>Can construct a chain of reasoned argument.<br>Can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. |

Figure 1. CEFR descriptors ¯Sustained monologue: putting a case

In 2020 memes were the third most frequently shared type of social media content (Han-Smith 2023); "Being able to read, reply, reproduce, remix, or even create memes in an L2 requires not only the ability to interpret the words, but also the ability to decipher the information hidden behind the interplay of semiotic resources (e.g., humour, cultural significance, etc.)." (ibid, 156)

Tricia Hedge in her widely acknowledged book suggests creating and using opinionnaires for discussions as they can "be effective devices for motivating […] and providing students with content", moreover, she argues that "they provoke response and reaction which can be explored in classroom discussion as a precursor to writing" (Hedge 2005, 73). Based on such grounds, we considered opinionnaires to be suitable starting points for a level B2 debate. One major difference was introduced though: by applying a pre-opinionnaire phase, students were asked to use image macros to trigger ideas, in the hope that the humorous effect coming from the well-known visual stimuli and the precedential-text captions might enhance motivation even to a larger extent. As our flow chart (Figure 2) shows, it was also the task-designer teacher's intention to consider how Gen Zers seek, find, and try to process information: that is by inviting learners to gather information from three different sources (memes – stereotypes – fun facts/statistics/media experience) and dress them elegantly with a grammatical unit, distancing expressions, to create well-formed statements that could ignite further debate. Working on grammar with relatively high-performing advanced level learners might also mean being hindered by their frozen competence – or fossilization, as termed by Medgyes (1994) – in certain skills or with certain language content. Grammar may represent one of these fields, which is why it seemed progressive to introduce them to a new grammatical item as well. The principal aim of an L2 class is to convert knowledge into production – either oral or written –, which is why the students were eventually requested to both express their views on the given statements and ask their peers to do so by applying their own handmade opinionnaires and the turn-taking devices they were already familiar with. The whole process was meant to result in a carefully designed oral production preparatory exercise with a clearly pre-defined learning outcome, and this pedagogical goal was indeed fulfilled.

Figure 2. Flow chart illustrating the meme-based task (Author's own creation in Canva™)
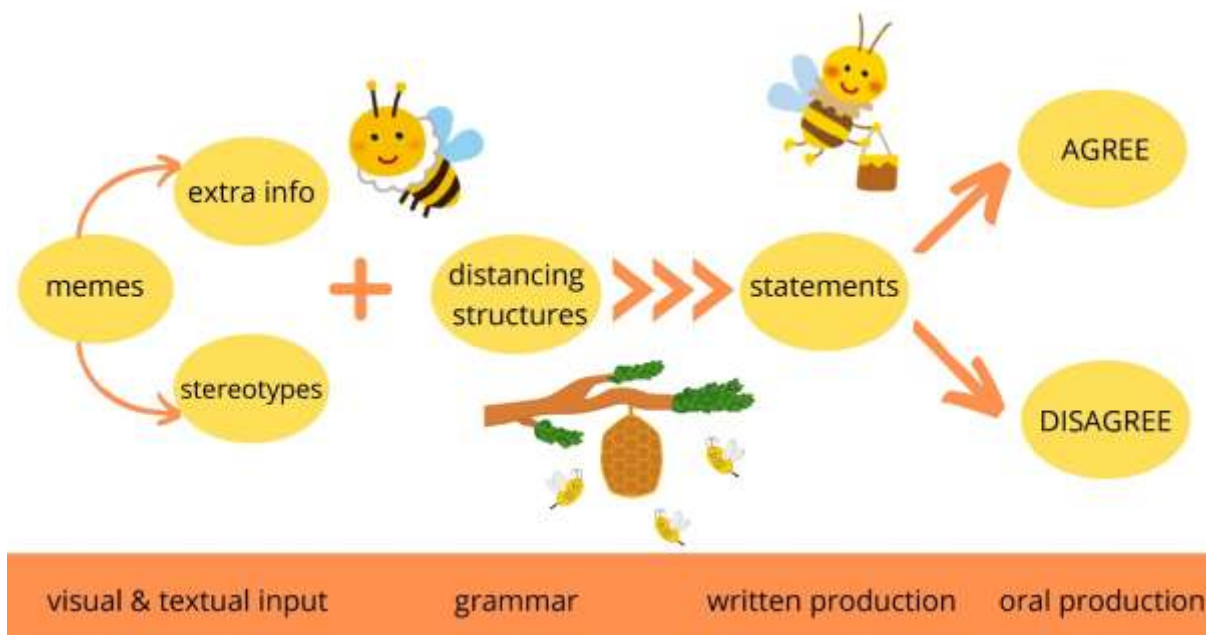


## 4. The Research: Hypotheses and Results

The present research, whose results were obtained by applying bi-modal – both qualitative and quantitative – measurements, was focused on a quadrifold pedagogical guideline: L2 input and gain; brainstorming ideas aiding oral production; as well as student's positive and negative feelings.

Before and after the meme-based task, tailor-made on-line questionnaires were applied (Google form), from which descriptive statistics were drawn and quantitative measurements were calculated with the help of the SPSS software. (The numbers of the participants in the preliminary and the closing survey differ; the reason for such difference could not be reliably explained.)

### 4.1. Foreign Language Linguistic Content and Skills

H1: Before the experiment our assumption was that participants might sense linguistic enrichment in grammar, lexis, and speaking skills after accomplishing the meme-triggered task. In the pre-task survey, value 1 is attributed to the fact that the participant does not feel that the specific linguistic field or skill must be improved or that the participant is satisfied with that specific aspect of EFL; value 6, on the other hand, signals a strong perception of need for improvement. In the post-task questionnaire, lower values stand for lower levels of the task being perceived as useful, while the highest value (6) means that the participant regarded the task as highly useful from the viewpoint of the given linguistic content or skill.

In Figure 3 one can see that our hypothesis is partly justified. In the post-task questionnaire (highlighted in red) grammar takes relatively lower values (2,64), vocabulary slightly precedes (3,49) pre-task (highlighted in blue) values (3,47), speaking, however, takes undoubtedly higher values in the post-task survey (3,74), which may lead us to the conclusion that the students felt that the task contributed to the improvement of their speaking skills.

Figure 3. Language content and skills in the preliminary and the closing questionnaire

H2: Before the meme-based task, our belief was that there would be significant lexical enrichment and speaking skills growth reported by the participants (based on 55 responses) after the task. Sadly, no significant correlation was achieved to prove these suppositions, but, at the same time, based on the answers of the respondents who in the pre-task questionnaire felt that their lexis needed further improvement, a certain degree of correlation *was* found as to the usefulness of the task from this aspect. In other words, those who perceived themselves in greater need of vocabulary improvement sensed the meme-based task more useful ($rs(55) = 0,28, p = 0,03$) (Figure 4).

**Ranks**

| | | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kérlek, jelöld meg, hogy angol nyelvi fejlődésed szempontjából mennyire érezted hasznosnak a mémes feladatot az alábbi területek fejlesztése szempontjából: nyelvtan (grammar) - Kérlek, jelöld meg, hogy angol nyelvi fejlődésed szempontjából mennyire érzed szükségesnek jelenleg az alábbi területek fejlesztését: nyelvtan (grammar) | Negative Ranks | 10[a] | 6,35 | 63,50 |
| | Positive Ranks | 1[b] | 2,50 | 2,50 |
| | Ties | 5[c] | | |
| | Total | 16 | | |

| | szempontjá ól: nyelvtan (grammar) - Kérlek, jelöld meg, hogy angol nyelvi fejlődésed szempontjáb ól mennyire érzed szükségesne k jelenleg az alábbi területek fejlesztését nyelvtan (grammar) | szempontjáb ól: szókincs (vocab) - Kérlek, jelöld meg, hogy angol nyelvi fejlődésed szempontjáb ól mennyire érzed szükségesne k jelenleg az alábbi területek fejlesztését szókincs (vocab) | ó szóbań (speaking) - Kérlek, jelöld meg, hogy angol nyelvi fejlődésed szempontjáb ól mennyire érzed szükségesne k jelenleg az alábbi területek fejlesztését szövegalkotá s szóban (speaking) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Z | -2,740[b] | -1,098[b] | -,312[c] |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | ,006 | ,272 | ,755 |

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on positive ranks.

c. Based on negative ranks.

Figure 4. SPSS chart of negative emotions

## 4.2. Positive Emotions

Out of all the listed positive emotions connected to the memes in the task (motivating, humorous, makes it easier for me to acquire the material, relieves stress, gives a feeling of connection with others, I can be creative, I can learn from my peers), the most outstanding two were humour and the stress-relieving effect of the meme exercise ($N$ = 52). The motivating effect was the least prominent, as it is shown in the frequency diagram below (Figure 5).
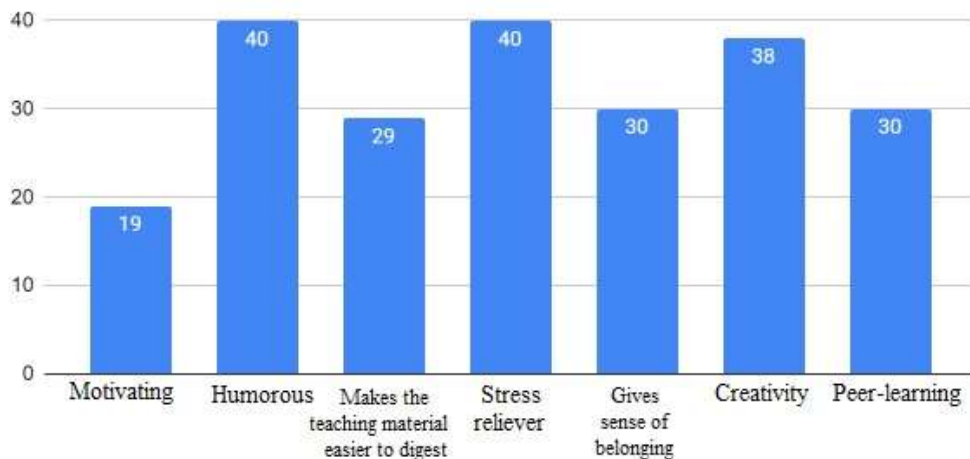


Figure 5. Bar graph of positive emotions

All of these results stand partly in harmony with our previous expectations, where humour, the motivating power, and the stress-relieving effect were expected to occur the most often. In reality, the motivating effect was replaced by creativity felt in connection with the exercise (38 yes answers). The low values referring to motivation are to some extent surprising, but, at the same time, according to the relevant literature, the presence of creativity is also a determining factor of a successful learning process. It would be valuable to draw the reader's attention to Lannert's observation that in the Hungarian National Curriculum the four basic soft skills –

creativity, cooperation, communication and critical thinking –, which are so vividly targeted at in the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR), are somewhat less assertively addressed. From this pedagogical angle the creativity pie chart of the given sample may still give us confidence that students appreciate and reflect upon this skill (Figure 6).
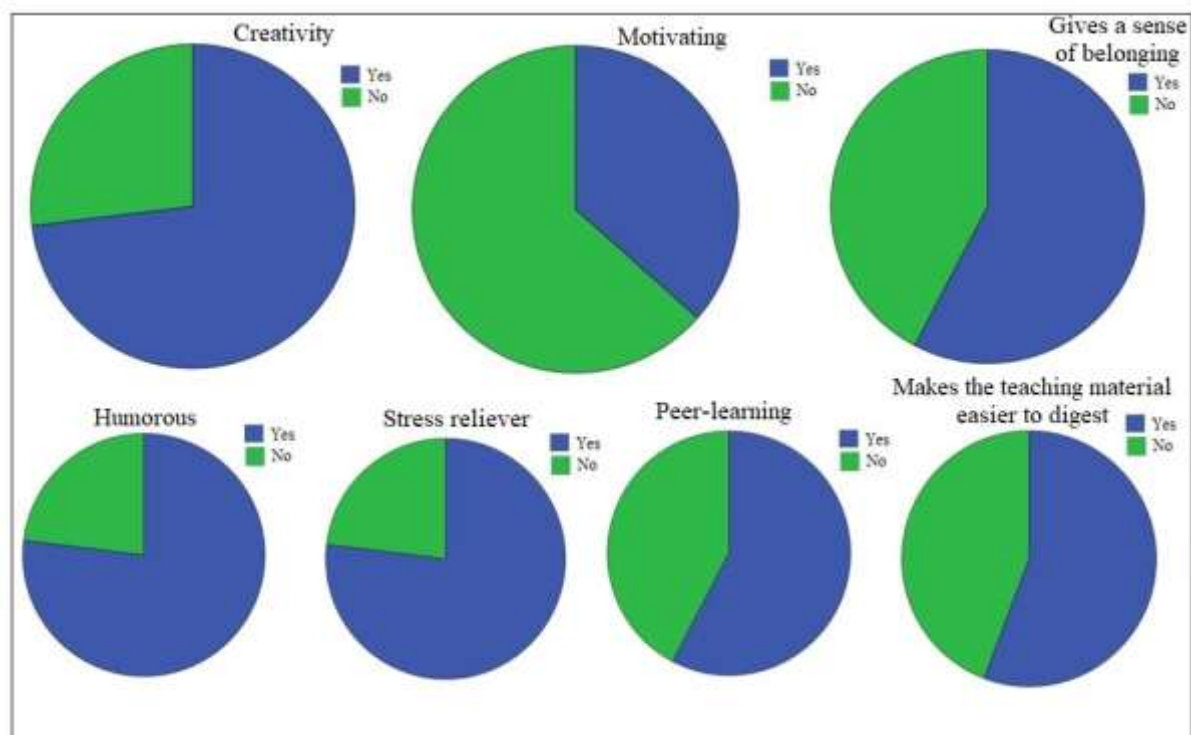


Figure 6. Pie charts of positive emotions

### 4.3. Negative Emotions

In the pre-task questionnaire, students (N = 65) were asked to signal which negative feelings they expect to potentially experience in the upcoming meme task (Figure 7). They were provided with the following set: being tired, being unable to understand the memes, extremely easy task, extremely difficult task, boring task, task not being useful to the respondents' individual English skills development. Our hypothesis was that the first two and the last one would be the most frequently marked feelings, and the results are to some extent in harmony with our precursory beliefs. The most frequently marked negative feeling was not being able to understand the memes (24), boredom and unusefulness coming second (scoring 21-21 each). The respondents regarded the potential of the task being too difficult as the least fearful factor (8 scores). This might be explained by the fact that the population examined in the present research was by large margin made up of level B2 – B2+ learners who are already autonomous language users in English. It may also be interesting to observe that, on the whole, the number of 'No' answers when signalling expected negative feelings was twice as large as that of the 'Yes' answers, consequently, one might deduce that the students were less likely to expect negative feelings during the task.
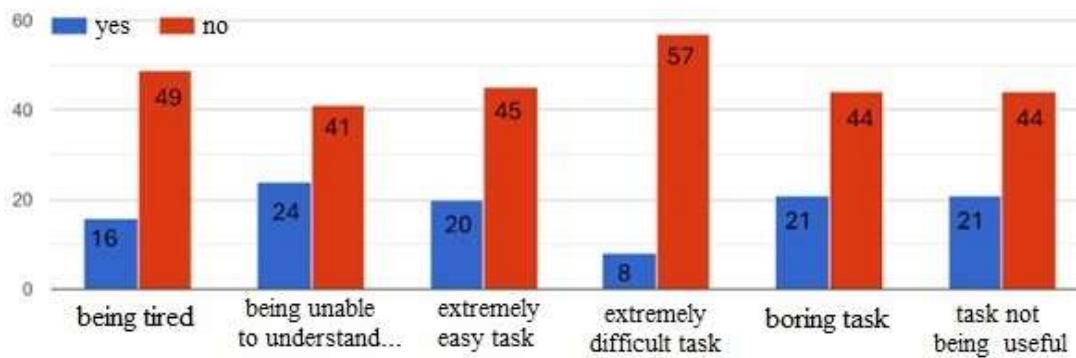
Figure 7. Bar chart related to the students' expected difficulties

Due to our previous experience with teenagers, according to which boys tend to be more familiar with image macros than girls, we were also intrigued to learn whether any measurable difference could be detected between the two genders in their presuppositions as to how capable they would be of understanding the memes. In order to test our preliminary perception, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used (because of the sample's nonnormal distribution).
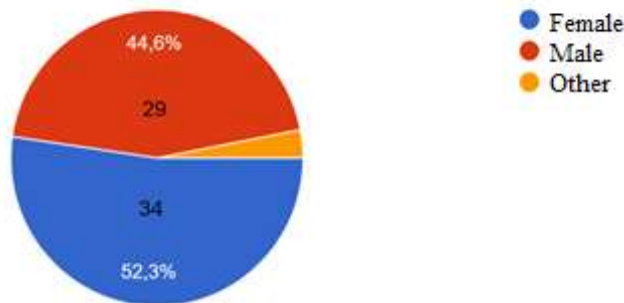


Figure 8. Male and Female Respondents

Figure 8 shows the number of male and female respondents (29 and 34, respectively – the two non-binary respondents were taken off the sample); 13 girls and 11 boys marked positive their fears of not being able to comprehend the memes. After concluding the Kruskal-Wallis test we can state that there was no significant diversion between the two genders' self-perception as to how capable they would be of deciphering the memes.

## Kruskal-Wallis Test

**Ranks**

| | Sex | N | Mean Rank |
|---|---|---|---|
| I won't understand the meme | Male | 29 | 32,05 |
| | Female | 34 | 31,96 |
| | Total | 63 | |

**Test Statistics[a,b]**

| | I won't understand the meme |
|---|---|
| Chi-Square | ,001 |
| df | 1 |
| Asymp. Sig. | ,980 |

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Sex

Figure 9: Kruskal-Wallis Test

### 4.4. Theme-Focused Brainstorming of Ideas

H4 We assumed that the meme project would give ideas to the students, and, therefore, they would be able to manage individual argumentation of the given topic in English more easily. As Figure 9 shows, the students ($N = 65$, $SD = 1.97$) gave 3.26 points on average on a 10- degree Likert scale (where 1 means 'does not cause me any hardship', while 10 means 'it causes me significant hardship') to the question how much hardship collecting ideas individually for elaborating on an English subject inflicts on them. According to the data of the post-task questionnaire ($N = 57$, $SD = 2.36$) students responded 5.52 to the question how much the meme-based task helped them to collect ideas so that they were able to further elaborate on this topic individually. The process of the 10-degree Likert scale was repeated here: value 1 means 'the task did not help at all', and value 10 means 'the task helped me significantly'.

**Descriptive Statistics**

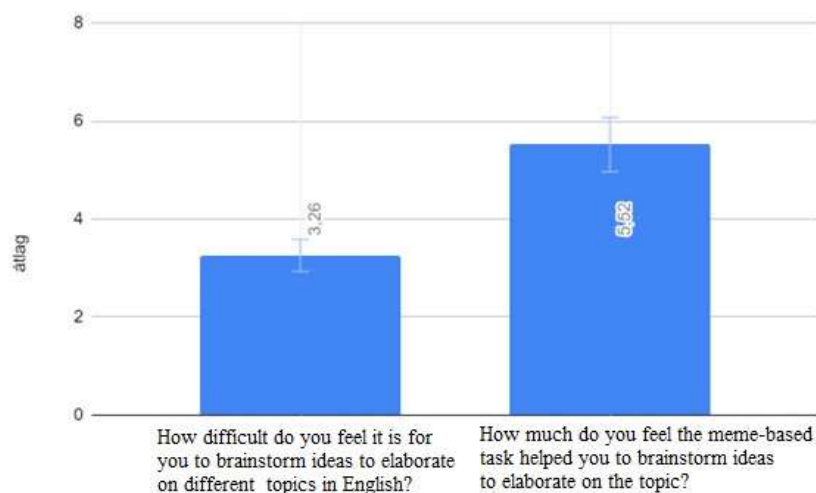| | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| How difficult do you feel it is for you to brainstorm ideas to elaborate on different topics in English? | 3,2615 | 1,97070 | 65 |
| How much do you feel the meme-based task helped you to brainstorm ideas to elaborate on the topic? | 5,5263 | 2,36873 | 57 |

Figure 10. Brainstorming Ideas

After examining the correlation of the two variables, no significant correlation could be found ($rs(55)$ = -0,17, $p$ > 0,1). This means that on the given sample, the expected beneficial effect of memes, namely that they would facilitate students who anticipated trouble getting ideas to a greater extent than others, could not be proven. However, after accomplishing a Mann-Whitney test, we obtained somewhat surprising results: students who felt it easier to brainstorm ideas N=43, average rank: 29.1) found that the meme task was more of a help than those who felt brainstorming more of a hardship (N=14, average rank: 28.68). This may be explained by the fact that deeper and/or wider background knowledge may generate a wider range of ideas, and also, by the perception according to which the more knowledgeable one is on a subject, the less confident they are likely to be (cf. the Dunning-Kruger Effect, Link 10).

5. Conclusion and Further Engagement

The aim of the present research has been to introduce and assess the application of thematically structured internet macros as a starting point for a level B2 EFL debate task on national stereotypes related to the culture and everyday life of the United States of America. The main focuses of the paper included attempts at describing such 21st century visuals as being loaded with the capacity of enhancing L2 speaking exercises and some possible assessment of how effective the assignment contextualized in a Hungarian secondary school educational setting can be based on the participants' perception. Amongst the most conspicuous results the highly creative atmosphere of the meme-based learning environment, significant lexical enrichment and enhanced brainstorming can be highlighted. The research might generate possible further activities for group or individual work in or out of the classroom (writing argumentative or take-a-side essays, students' autonomous creation of memes on home or target language countries and converting them into written or spoken production, etc.), as well as future investigation into the use of memes as potential tools of foreign language pedagogy.

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When creating the meme-based task, the author drew inspiration from the following internet resources (all last accessed 14 August 2024):

25 American Cultural Norms / Customs
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNvHKpov-H8&ab_channel=WonderinEnglishCourtney
13 Etiquette Rules in the US That Surprise Tourists
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uu6CG6vhvmw&ab_channel=BRIGHTSIDE
American Culture You NEED To Know
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCXjxMw9wak&ab_channel=SpeakEnglishWithVanessa
10 Tips You NEED TO KNOW Before Visiting the USA
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Crd6OCGIOY&ab_channel=SpeakEnglishWithVanessa
9 American Stereotypes: True or False?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofrryYmOBqQ&ab_channel=SpeakEnglishWithVanessa
Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) in the United States: Age Groups and Demographic Characteristics
https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-topics/alcohol-facts-and-statistics/alcohol-use-disorder-aud-united-states-age-groups-and-demographic-characteristics#:~:text=Prevalence%20of%20Past%2DYear%20Alcohol%20Use%20Disorder%20(AUD)&text=According%20to%20the%202022%20National,AUD%20in%20the%20past%20year.&text=This%20includes%3A,12.6%25%20in%20this%20age%20group)
Baywatch team
https://www.forbes.com/sites/nelsongranados/2021/04/28/how-baywatch-once-again-became-one-of-the-most-widely-distributed-series/
Oversized people eating
https://www.freepik.com/vectors/fat-people-eating
Han Solo cup
https://lennymud.com/products/han-solo-cup-limited-edition
Anakin Skywalker
https://character-stats-and-profiles.fandom.com/wiki/Anakin_Skywalker_(Canon)/BenAttackX

Appendix: The learning material applied in the task

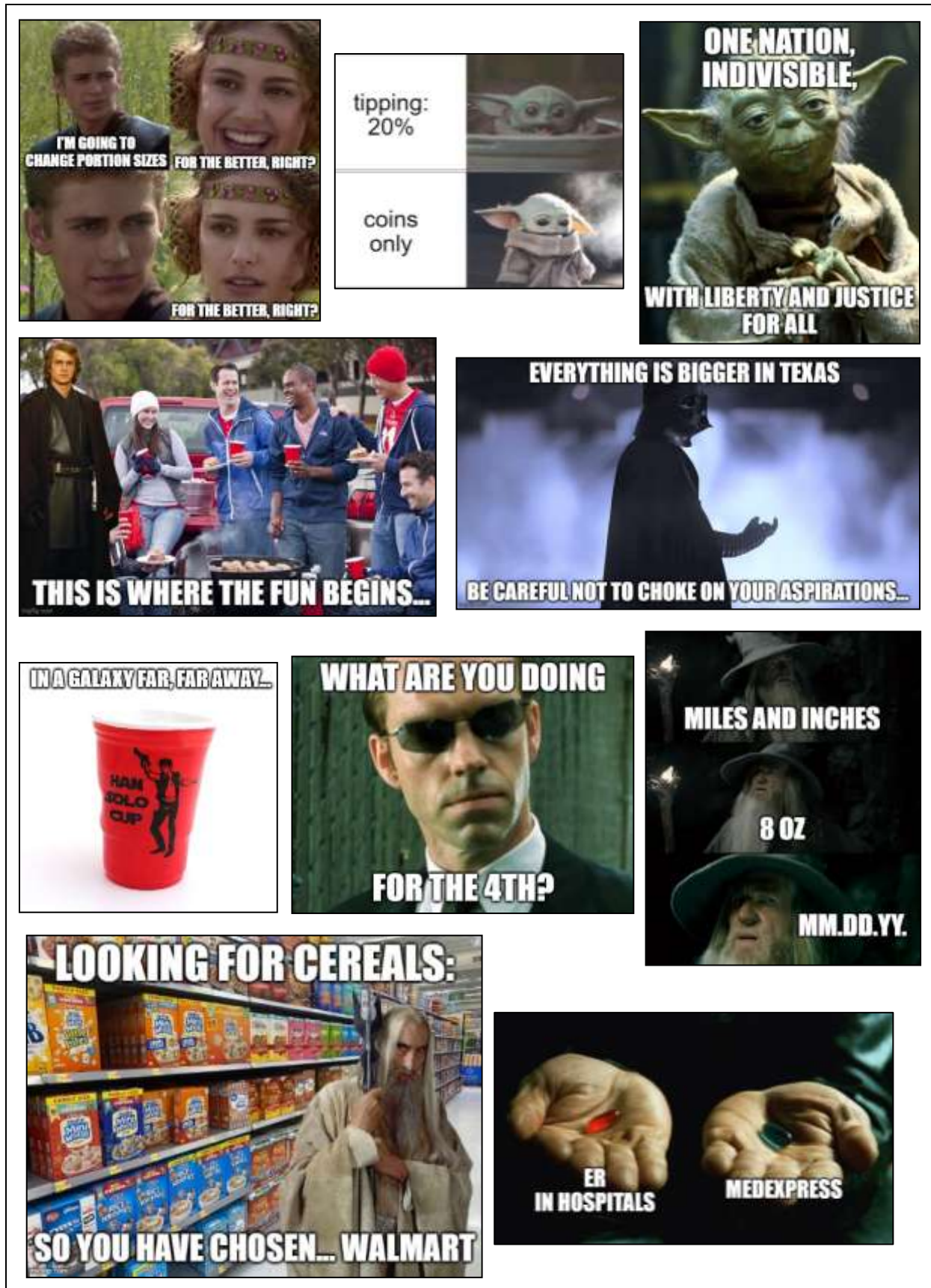Figure 11: Memes

| | |
|---|---|
| alcohol | expensive healthcare |
| respect the bubble | profit |
| advertising | big portions |
| patriotism | tailgates |
| the American dream | friendly people, who keep smiling |
| prom | obesity crisis |
| guns | cereals |
| creativity | tipping |
| being materialistic | Independence Day |
| everything is big | strange measurements |

Figure 12: Stereotypes

| | |
|---|---|
| treasure hunt; getting more value for your money; elegant brands vs second-hand shops | think outside the box; you can be different and still be accepted; lots of inventions |
| American flags everywhere; Declaration of Independence | adequate service; do not only leave change; 1 dollar is the minimum; waiters, taxi drivers |
| everything is spread out; big trucks/SUVs/vans | 2 out of 3 Americans are overweight or obese; eat on the go; free refills of soda; huge portions |
| 1 in 3 Americans owns a gun | pledge of allegiance before school starts |
| be out of sync with the rest of the world: metric system, dates | portion distortion; Doggy Bag for leftovers; portion sizes have been increasing since 1960 |
| eat food and (alcoholic) drinks from the tailboard of a car; grilling, barbecuing; in the car parks of sports stadiums | strike up conversations & small talk; linguistically diverse – rely on non-verbal communication more |
| seniors sign yearbooks; wear a corsage | a country governed by money; an immensely complicated tax system |
| personal space: stand at an arm's length | lots of commercials; many are specifically directed towards children |
| whole isles of cereals in one-stop stores; high carbohydrate intake | better to take out travel insurance before your visit to the USA |
| chasing the American dream; rags to riches stories; I am the master of my destiny; land of opportunity | 29.5 million people ages 12 and older (10.5% in this age group) had AUD (Alcohol Use Disorder) in 2022 |

Figure 13: Additional information