

Editorial

When preparing to travel abroad, last minute googling of the country we intend to visit is a normal part of the process. We may hope to find a map, for example, or latest travel alerts, or advice on how to dress and behave appropriately. Earlier this year, in preparation for a trip to Uganda, one of those last-minute google searches for ‘Uganda’ returned as a top hit ‘Ugandan Knuckles’ as the title of a meme that developed earlier in the year.

Knuckles is a cartoon echidna who was originally featured in Sega’s video game franchise *Sonic The Hedgehog*, but was later caricatured as a shorter and fatter cartoon character in the follow-up game *Sonic Lost World*. Ugandan Knuckles is known by its catchphrase ‘Do you know the way?’, a phrase inspired by the film *Who Killed Captain Alex?*, which was produced in Wakaliwood, the film industry that has developed in Kampala’s Wakaliga slum. The phrase mimics African Englishes and, like many other memes that are designed to mock language varieties, disparages speakers of African English and evokes racist associations in doing so.

Memes today are ubiquitous and, when one goes viral by being copied and quickly shared between Internet users, memes have the potential to express and influence attitudes and prejudices toward languages, language varieties and/or the speakers of those varieties. Memes reflect Internet users’ innovative use of language and, by defying prescriptive norms, they also have a huge potential for accelerating the spread of neologisms. While most of the new words or expression coined in memes are ephemeral and likely to disappear along with the popularity of their references, some are bound to remain and become part of the English language’s lexicon. Early examples of viral memes include *lolcat* — a combination of a cat picture and a humorous catchphrase — or *Rickrolling*, which included a redirection link to a

video of pop star Rick Astley performing his 1987 song “Never Gonna Give You Up.” More recent memes, which are now captured in Oxford Dictionaries (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/>), include *to troll*, *hashtag*, *derp* (‘meaningless’ or ‘stupid’, also about side characters or story lines) *noob* ‘newbie’ and *woot* ‘an exclamation of joy or enthusiasm’. Furthermore, existing lexical items have undergone semantic change related to their specialised uses on the Internet, as is the case with *to unlike* or *to unfriend*, and of course the coinage of the word *meme* itself.

Related to an entirely unproblematic meme, that of *Grumpy Cat*, is one of the most intriguing of all Internet phenomena: cat videos. Unlike images of any other pet, videos of cats have come to occupy a large portion of Internet traffic, and the popularity of cat videos has even inspired scholars to investigate their possible psychological effects, suggesting that cat videos can uplift their watchers’ mood. With mobile and computer-mediated forms of communication having developed to augment or replace face-to-face encounters between people, the lead article of this issue of *English Today* is a timely demonstration of how members of a close-knit Instagram user community, #blackcat, use creative wordplay to construct their group identity.

Further topics range from a discussion of the spellings *-tion* and *-sion* in nominalisations to a critical account of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh, from a corpus study of the number of the word *none* to expressions of physical violence in 18th and 19th century dialect speech, and an investigation into the discrepancy between oral proficiency and test scores in formal exams. These are complemented by a presentation of signs found in an English city’s linguistic landscape and a review covering grammatical change in academic writing.

The editors

The editorial policy of *English Today* is to provide a focus or forum for all sorts of news and opinion from around the world. The points of view of individual writers are as a consequence their own, and do not reflect the opinion of the editorial board. In addition, wherever feasible, *ET* generally leaves unchanged the orthography (normally British or American) and the usage of individual contributors, although the editorial style of the journal itself is that of Cambridge University Press.