



Appropriating Bollywood Theme- Based-memes in English Language Teaching in India

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Abstract

Any discussion on memes and academia has to begin with the acknowledgment that the former was seen with suspicion and considered inappropriate to be associated with the latter. However, research and experiences have identified the importance of memes as content and tools in academia, especially in Language teaching. Language is a representation of culture and memes are 'gene-like infectious units of culture that spread from person to person' (Dawkins). Therefore memes can be a very effective exercise not only in language teaching but also for Cultural Studies. This paper intends to study how memes around Bollywood (the mainstream Hindi film industry) can be used intelligently and effectively in a classroom to teach Business English specifically. The omnipresence of Bollywood is prominent in social media and most specifically in memes. Bollywood stars and movie dialogues in memes become viral in no time. Bollywood-themed memes work instantly because of the drama ingrained in them. Thus, such memes have the obvious ingredients - visuals, dialogues, drama, music, lyrics, action and of course sentiments. Therefore, such memes become prolific resources in a Language classroom in Higher education classes, which is the focus of this study. This study focuses on the effectiveness of using Bollywood-based memes in learning Business English and how such resources can be best utilized for Business communication for non-native English speakers in Indian Classroom. This research primarily focuses on Business English for MBA students. The paper engages in language activities like dialogue writing, descriptive writing, types of sentences, and vocabulary based on Business English through writing meme texts and discusses its effectiveness.

Keywords: *Bollywood, Business English, Language, Meme*

1. Introduction

Digital media is one of the most prolific resources for research and advancement. Therefore is inevitable for it to have a strong presence in classroom sessions. Language is a representation of culture and memes are 'gene-like infectious units of culture that spread from person to person' (Dawkins). Therefore memes can be a very effective exercise not only in language teaching but also for Cultural Studies. This paper intends to study how memes around Bollywood (the mainstream Hindi film industry) can be used intelligently and effectively in a classroom to teach Business English specifically.

1.1. Literature Review

Digital resources are used extensively in Language classes. There are customized software, apps, websites and activity zones in digital space. However, it is Harvey and Palese's article "Nevertheless memes persisted: Building Critical Memetic Literacy in the Classroom." (2018) that paved the way for using memes in Language sessions in the classroom. Memes have always been popular and fun and for these very characteristics, there have been hesitations in integrating them into 'serious' academic interactions. However, Harvey Palese breaks through this academic ceiling and claims that memes are an integral part of sociocultural structure and are vital in classroom learning. Digital resources give learners a sense of autonomy and independence. Memes as mentioned by Richard Dawkins are the smallest cultural unit. Language is a cultural tool and resource and therefore memes can be a very effective mode of Language teaching.

Harshavardhan, Wilson, and Kumar in their article "Humour Discourse in Internet Memes: An Aid in ESL Classrooms" (2019) observes that 'humor has great educational value, that it can motivate and engage learners, create and sustain good teacher student and student-student relationships, reduce stress levels, and create trust' (44). Their study further notes that that memes sometimes contain puns, intentional misspellings, slang, and baby talk for humorous effect (49-50). Such things can be



very effective for teaching language to non native English speaking learners. Memes also enables 'plentiful opportunities for developing intercultural competence' (Vinokoruva 274).

Valentina Vinokurova in her research article "Memes: Learning, Bonding, and Emotional Support in Times of COVID-19" (2021) worked extensively on the effectiveness of memes in communication to garner emotional strength to continue learning. As she mentions,

Memes are a relatively new internet genre and they typically involve a witty juxtaposition of image and text that expresses their creators' emotions about a widely relatable situation. As such, because memes use image and text in complementary ways, they can be a conduit for teaching and learning about multi-modality and developing digital literacy (Vinokoruva 271).

Valentina Vinokorva's research was project-based. The project was implemented at the end of the semester in an intermediate (third semester) students for Russian language course. The first activity in the project was to identify and post four memes with commentary on a Padlet board, with each of the four memes addressing a topic assigned by the instructor. The project activities was supplemented with an in-class discussion that typically took place a week before the activities were due. The classroom discussions were engineered to engage students in a deeper analysis of memes and to address any questions that students might have about the project. After this in-class discussion, students had a week to find and post four memes with commentary on a Padlet board, with each of the four memes addressing a topic assigned by the instructor. Specifically, students were directed to look at memes related to four specific topics: Russian language, School/university, COVID-19, and New Year's (275). Vinokoruva concludes that the meme project was successful and the student commentary and memes showed some evidence of increased engagement with the Russian language and culture, development of intercultural competence and digital literacy, and an increasing sense of belonging to a community. (280)

Drawing ideas from the success of the above project and the articles this research has identified Bollywood memes for effective Business English teaching/learning because of the popularity and the entertainment value Bollywood enjoys across India. Bollywood is a word coined along the lines of Hollywood that refers to the pan-India Hindi film industry and primarily embraces the mainstream potboilers that have a mass appeal and are a 'religion' in India, Using such thematic memes, add to the interest and appeal generating an immediate connect with the students.

The rationale behind the project is to enhance the proficiency of MBA students in Business English through Bollywood memes in India as 'memes are imbued with an inherently social function and are packaged with effect. They are concise expressions of widely relatable feelings within or among cultures that people can bond over (Vinokurova 272).

The reason for choosing Bollywood memes is their wide outreach and popularity, and that they are relatable for most Indian students. Bollywood is a combination of entertainment and business. Hence the project was curated with the intention of enhancing Business communication through language, culture, context and of course humour. There is an apprehension among the students in a Business English class in India to get disorientated and disengaged primarily because the language, vocabulary and Business culture are highly colonial and Western. So by incorporating Bollywood memes one can break the cultural ceiling and make way for more conducive learning of Business English. As Harvey and Palese (2018), argue that that being able to create successful memes can grant language learners entry into various communities of practice, many of which today utilize memes to communicate or bond. Harshavardhan, Wilson and Kumar have corroborated that humour is relevant in education and enables healthy, stress-free and engaging learning. Internet memes very conveniently fit in as a tool for language learning and culture study.

The humour factor in memes helps in sustaining students' interests.

2. Objectives and Methodology

This research intends to focus on the effectiveness of teaching and learning Business English through Bollywood theme-based memes. The target learners are MBA students in India. The research aims to identify the areas of Business communication that can be learned through Bollywood memes in a classroom. The study is based on meme-based task given to the students which requires them to connect it with Business context, content, experiences and etiquette. This enables them to assess the relevance of their language, expressions and vocabulary to Business English and appreciate creative thinking along with synchronization of the visual and textual content in the memes.

The objectives of the studies are as follows

- To observe the effectiveness of Bollywood theme-based memes in teaching/learning Business English in Business communication course



- To analyze the relevance of Bollywood theme-based memes in learning Business Vocabulary
- To interpret the types of sentences in the text content of the memes
- To assess the ability of the students to contextualize the Bollywood images with Business keeping the humour alive.

The study is based on experiential research. The task/activity on Bollywood theme-based memes was conducted in the classroom. The identified learners were MBA students from Bangalore, India. The students had medium to advanced level proficiency in English. The activity was conducted to assess the learning of Business English through Bollywood memes.

The learning aspects aimed at Bollywood meme- based Business English are

- Language skills and vocabulary
- Creative thinking and communication
- Synchronization of Visual and Textual Communication

The Bollywood images were given to MBA students of three different sections and were asked to add creative texts relevant to Business English/environment/etiquette. The task was given after a month of exposure to Business English, environment and etiquette training. The students were intermediate to advanced level learners and the average age was 22 years.

2.1. Design and Implementation

The students were of Indian origin residing in Bangalore pursuing an MBA programme and were in their first year. The students had moderate to advanced proficiency in English but were doing Business English for the first time.

A session on memes in general and Bollywood-based ones was done before the students started working on the given task. It was an effective warm-up session and prepared the students for the task. A few examples were shared of Bollywood-based memes on Business communication, culture and context. The students interacted and responded to the examples and were prepared to begin the task. Some of the examples shared with students are given in the figures.



Fig. 1. Business English Bollywood theme-based meme sample

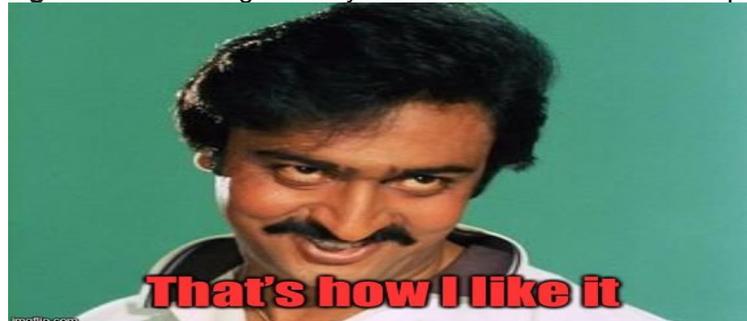


Fig. 2. Business English Bollywood theme-based meme sample



Fig. 3. Business English Bollywood theme-based meme sample



Fig. 4. Business English Bollywood theme-based meme sample

2.2. Activity/Task - Business English through Bollywood Memes

The instructions for executing the task were clearly stated to the target learners. The sheet with seven visuals was shared with the students. The students were instructed to write textual content for the memes. It was an individual activity and the students were categorically reminded to keep the content relevant to Business purposes and had to be in English. The examples were used for reference. The parameters of assessment were communicated and they were asked to keep them in mind while composing the textual content.



Fig. 5. Image for Bollywood theme-based meme Business English Activity



Fig. 6. Image for Bollywood theme-based meme Business English Activity



Fig. 7. Image for Bollywood theme-based meme Business English Activity



Fig. 8. Image for Bollywood theme-based meme Business English Activity



Fig. 9. Image for Bollywood theme-based meme Business English Activity



Fig. 10. Image for Bollywood theme-based meme Business English Activity



Fig. 11. Image for Bollywood theme-based meme Business English Activity



Rubrics	
Language	10
Vocabulary	10
Creative Thinking	5
Synchronization of the image and the text	5
Total -30	

The students wrote the textual content which was followed by readings of the meme texts. The students were asked to exchange their notes and enjoy the memes as the most obvious response to memes is laughter and fun. The students recommended the best memes which was followed by a session of reading the content. The contents were appreciated based on the parameters that were communicated and the interplay between the words and the images. The students were engaged in an in-depth discussion on the contents and the language, vocabulary and relevance to Business context and communication.

2.3. Examples of Students' Work

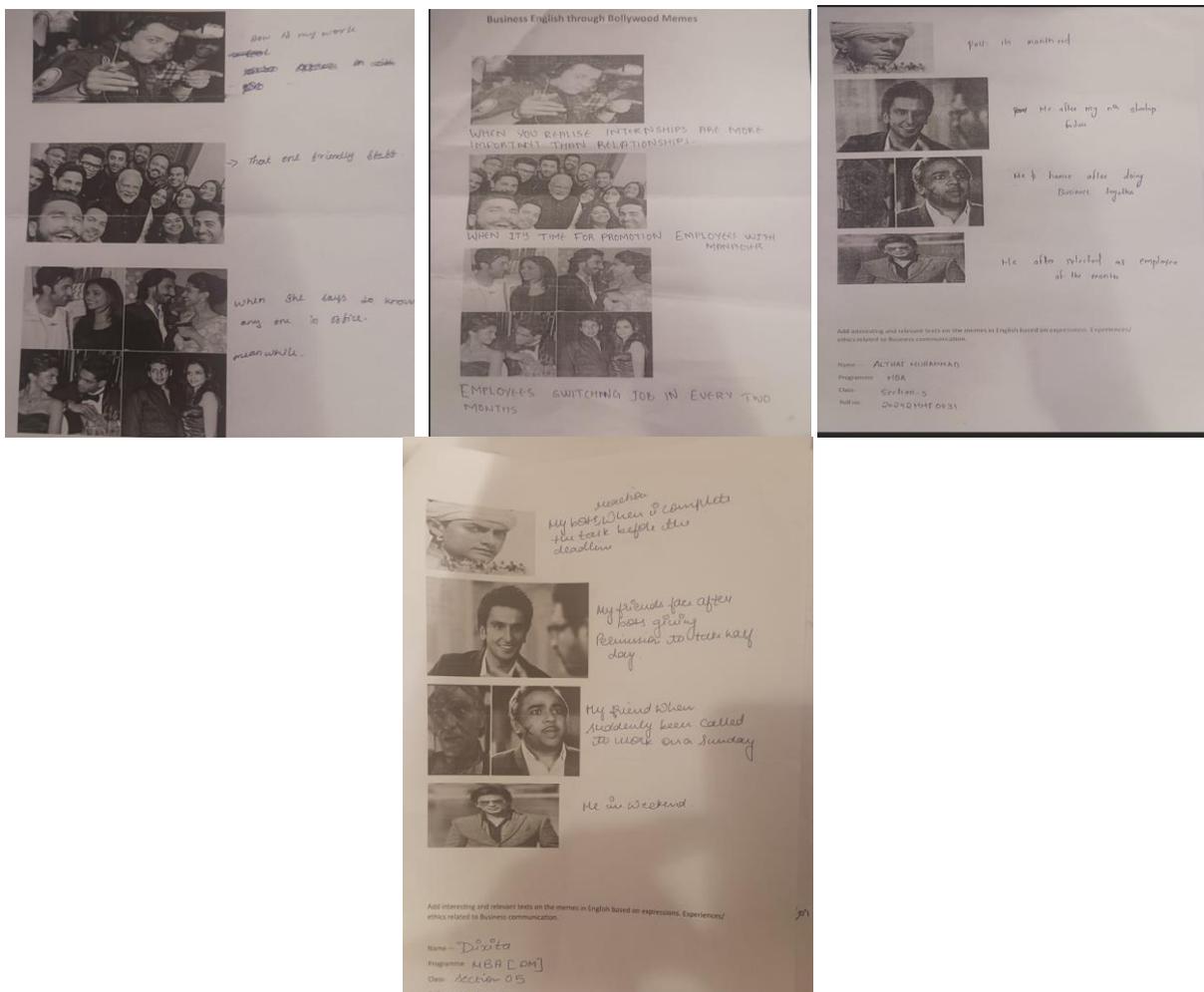


Fig. 12. Some Samples of Students' Work

3. Results and Discussion

The memes were collected and assessed based on the rubrics. The result was compared with the objectives of the research.

3.1 Cumulative Responses of the Students



Figure 5

Most of the students connected it with weekend relaxation after work. The language was informal and the use of exclamation marks was quite common. The responses also included post-salary relaxation and performance/project completion. The responses were relatable and convincing both in terms of language and context.

Figure 6

This response to this comment was mostly related to teamwork, post-team success poses and brush with celebrity. The content for this image was more varied and many of them had texts with two sentences. The first one had a direct association with the visuals and the second one a reaction. The presence of the Prime Minister in the image among the Bollywood celebrities added a layer to the context of politics in Business. The tone of the language was more careful probably because of the presence of the Prime Minister.

Figure 7

This image generated diverse yet unpredictable responses. It spoke of sexism, multi-tasking in work workplace, moonlighting, and post-appraisal parties.

Figure 8

The fourth image had more interrogative scope as the face of Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan in Lagaan had a rather quizzical expression. This prompted questions like what was wrong with the team what was the expectation of the team members and also speculative reactions and assertive statements.

Figure 9

This image had a shrewd expression on the face of the superstar Ranveer Singh (a current heartthrob). This prompted interesting statements like leave approval, rewards including salary hikes, new projects, or clients.

Figure 10

This image had two components. One was a picture of the legendary Bollywood onscreen villain Amrish Puri and the other was of the veteran actor/comedian Paresh Rawal. The responses included deadline threats, overtime work orders, getting fired from work, or nightshifts.

Figure 11

The last one was a picture of the suave 'King of Bollywood' in a dapper suit. This had responses related to freedom during the notice period, being the boss, excellent appraisal, great confidence and so forth.

3.2 Discussion

The task was given to 150 students and the responses had variety but also some commonality. The following observations were evident in the content.

1. The students understood and followed the instructions
2. The students were successful in connecting the images with Business context, situation and experience
3. The students chose different types of sentences - interrogative, assertive, exclamatory, directive and some preferred phrases
4. The use of Business vocabulary was quite prominent - salary, hike, fired, promotion, increment
5. Creative thinking in the content was evident
6. Keeping the Business context alive, the text content had humour and wit.
7. The tonality of the textual content had a fine blend of Business English and meme Language.

The above results and observations evidently reinforce the objectives stated in the beginning of the research. The task helped the learners to use appropriate language based on Business context. It enabled them to understand and use Business English. The juxtaposition of visual and text challenged them to creative thinking. The students showed the ability to synchronize images with the text connecting it to Business English. The task also allowed the learners to explore different types of sentences based on their responses which were a very incidental way of learning types of sentences that can be used in Business English. The use of variety of Business vocabulary/phrases and expressions suggested that the task was quite effective in teaching and learning Business vocabulary. The Bollywood based images acted as a catalyst in engaging the students to create relevant text content appropriate for Business English. The entire learning took place keeping in mind the humour aspect of the content and hence garnered very positive responses.



4. Conclusion

The task aimed to assess the viability of Bollywood- based memes in learning Business English for MBA students in India. The target learners were MBA students who had medium to advanced levels of English Proficiency. The learners connected their English Language skills with Business context, situations and experiences. The Bollywood memes with their immediate familiarity and humour enabled Business English learning and usage very effectively. Business English was facilitated through this task incidentally but effectively keeping the learning relevant, useful, and interesting.

Following conclusions could be drawn from the students' responses in the activity

- The effectiveness of Bollywood theme-based memes in teaching/learning Business English in Business communication course was noticeable.
- The relevance of Bollywood theme-based memes in learning Business Vocabulary
- Learning the of types of sentences through the text content of the memes
- The students could successfully contextualize the Bollywood images with Business keeping the humour alive.
- The task was successful in facilitating Business Communication skills in English through Bollywood memes.

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