

Story by Memes:

A Pedagogical Framework for Language Learning

By Boris Vazquez-Calvo (bvazquezcalvo@uma.es, University of Málaga, Spain)

Welcome to the "Story by Memes" workshop—a pedagogical framework designed to leverage digital culture for enhanced language acquisition. This approach combines the universal appeal of storytelling with the contemporary engagement of memes to create powerful learning experiences across all educational levels.

What You'll Learn

Discover how to integrate memes—viral images paired with text that convey complex ideas through visual-textual interplay—into language instruction to illuminate linguistic patterns, pragmatic norms, and sociocultural references while developing students' multimodal communication skills.

Why It Matters

Today's language learners need proficiency not only in traditional literacy but also in the visual grammar and cultural coding that characterize online discourse. This framework acknowledges that digital literacy extends beyond basic technology use to encompass students' ability to critically navigate, evaluate, and create content in digital environments.

How To Implement

This framework adapts easily to different proficiency levels, allowing you to scaffold learning experiences that develop both linguistic competence and digital literacy skills. The activities can be modified for primary through university settings, with adjustable complexity while maintaining high engagement through culturally relevant content.

This pedagogical framework is a transfer-of-knowledge product originated from the research project DEFINERS: Digital Language Learning of Junior Language Teachers (TED2021-129984A-I00), funded by the Spanish Government MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and the European Union NextGenerationEU/PRTR).



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Story by Memes: Engaging Language Learners Across Levels

In today's digital era, memes—these bite-sized combinations of images and text that convey cultural references, humor, and social commentary—have become a ubiquitous form of communication across online platforms. Digital literacy, the ability to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information through digital technologies, has emerged as an essential skill for effective participation in contemporary society. When integrated into language education, memes offer a powerful vehicle for developing these digital competencies while simultaneously enhancing linguistic skills through culturally authentic materials that resonate with learners' everyday experiences.

Workshop Implementation Guide

Course Details

Instructor: [To be completed]

Academic Year: [To be completed]

Module: [To be completed]

Workshop Duration: 3 hours approx.

Target Audiences

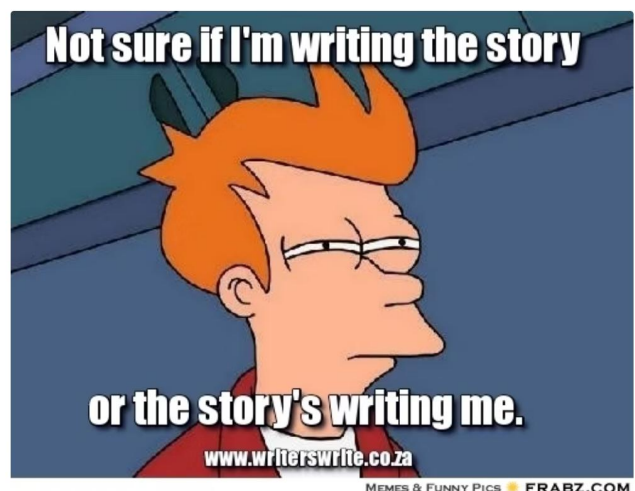
Primary implementation:

- University-level language teacher training courses

Adaptable for:

- K-12 language classrooms
- University-level language courses
- Professional development workshops

Storytelling forms the foundation of human communication and language acquisition at all educational levels. This workshop demonstrates how visually-enhanced narratives—specifically stories incorporating memes—significantly boost student engagement and linguistic development. As ubiquitous communication tools in digital spaces, memes provide a valuable bridge between formal language instruction and authentic contemporary discourse.





Preparation Phase

Introduce the concept of memes as multimodal texts and their relevance to language learning. Guide participants in exploring meme repositories to understand common formats and cultural references.



Analysis Phase

Facilitate critical examination of selected memes, focusing on linguistic features, cultural context, and communicative functions. Develop analytical frameworks for interpreting multimodal meaning-making.



Creation Phase

Support participants in selecting appropriate meme templates and crafting linguistically meaningful content that demonstrates understanding of both language objectives and digital genre conventions.



Narrative Construction

Guide learners in sequencing their created memes to form a coherent narrative that communicates personal experiences or fictional scenarios while showcasing targeted linguistic features.



Reflection & Assessment

Facilitate peer feedback sessions and self-assessment of both linguistic accuracy and digital literacy skills demonstrated in the final narrative products.

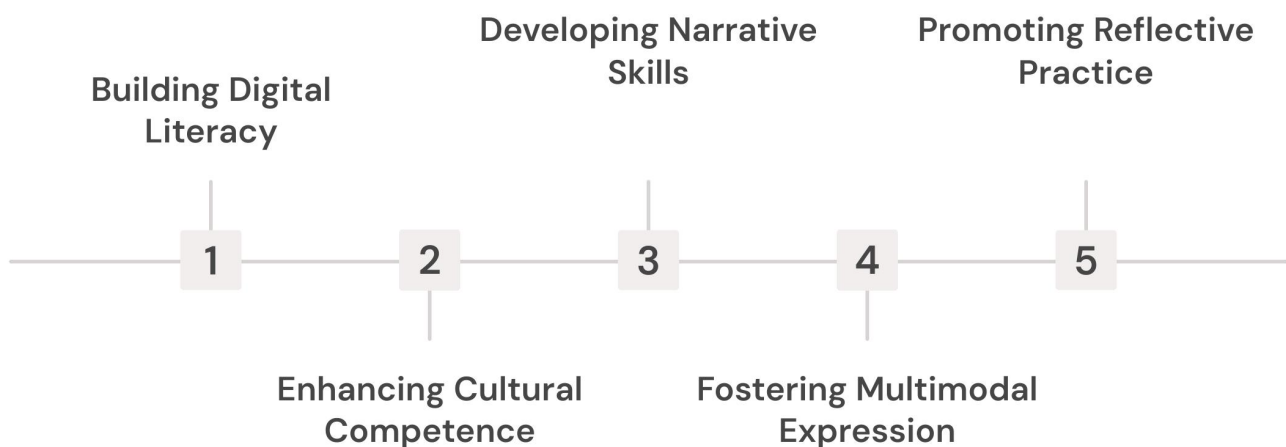
The "Story by Memes" framework offers a versatile methodology scalable from beginner to advanced levels, enabling educators to adjust linguistic complexity while maintaining high motivation through culturally relevant content. By connecting academic language objectives with the visual vocabulary of students' everyday digital interactions, this approach creates meaningful learning experiences that resonate across diverse educational contexts while developing transferable communication skills for today's multimodal world.

The "Story by Memes" Activity

This engaging multimodal activity empowers language learners to explore their identity while developing digital literacy skills through creative storytelling.

Understanding Memes and Digital Literacy in Language Education

Memes are a unique form of digital communication that combine images and text to convey cultural meaning, humor, and social commentary. As ubiquitous elements of online discourse, memes function as powerful carriers of contemporary culture that language students must understand to achieve comprehensive communicative competence in digital environments. By analyzing and creating memes, students engage with authentic target language materials while developing the multimodal composition skills essential for effective communication in today's interconnected world.



Follow-up reading for university language teacher training courses:

Kim, Y. J., & Belcher, D. (2020). Multimodal Composing and Traditional Essays: Linguistic Performance and Learner Perceptions. *RELC Journal*, 51(1), 86–100.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220906943>

Digital Storytelling Through Memes: Exploring Your Teaching Identity

Here follows an adaptation of the instructions used with "Story by Memes" in language teacher education courses in Spain from 2022 onwards. Findings from it can be accessed in Vazquez-Calvo et al. (2025) and Vazquez-Calvo & York (2024). In this creative workshop (total duration: 3–4 hours), you'll develop a visual narrative about your journey as a language learner and teacher using memes as a medium of expression. The workshop is divided into 4 steps, with the first 2 steps outlined below:



Step 1: Onboarding & Digital Literacy (30 minutes)

Explore the concept of memes as a communicative genre and their potential in language education:

- Understand what constitutes a meme and how they function as cultural artifacts
- Analyze examples of educational memes and their communicative objectives
- Discuss the intersection of digital literacy and language teaching competencies
- Consider how memes can express complex ideas about language learning and teaching identity

This initial exploration provides the foundation for creating meaningful digital narratives that resonate with contemporary communication practices in educational contexts.



Step 2: Reflection & Brainstorming (30 minutes)

Consider these guiding questions in English, Spanish or any of the target or vernacular languages your students use (or a combination of these!):

- **Past:** How have you seen yourself as a language learner until today? (*¿Cómo te has visto como aprendiz de lenguas hasta la fecha?*)
- **Present:** How do you see yourself as a language teacher student now? (*¿Cómo te ves como profesor de lenguas en formación actualmente?*)
- **Future:** How do you envision yourself as a language teacher in 10 years? (*¿Cómo te imaginas como profesor de lenguas dentro de 10 años?*)
- **Technology:** Do digital technologies help or hinder language teaching? How? (*¿Crees que las tecnologías digitales ayudan o dificultan la enseñanza de lenguas? ¿De qué manera?*)
- **Connections:** What other insights do you have about language learning/teaching and digital technologies? (*¿Qué otras reflexiones importantes tienes sobre el aprendizaje de lenguas, su enseñanza y/o el uso de tecnologías digitales?*)

List as many ideas as possible. Aim for at least 10-15 reflection points. Creativity is strongly encouraged! While the target language will be the primary language for your final project, you can incorporate other languages where meaningful during this brainstorming phase.



Step 3: Creating Your Meme Storyboard (40 minutes)

Transform your reflections into a visual narrative using memes: (1) Organize your ideas into a coherent storyline (chronological or thematic) - 15 minutes; (2) create at least 6 memes that represent key points in your narrative - 30-45 minutes, and (3) develop a storyboard that shows the progression of your ideas - 15-30 minutes.

Meme creation resources in English (imgflip.com/memegenerator) or Spanish (memegenerator.es/crear). Students may also adapt existing memes if they better express your narrative intention

Crafting Your Digital Learning Narrative

Memes in Language Education

Memes combine images and text to convey ideas in an accessible and fun way. When incorporated into language teaching, memes become vehicles for cultural expression, linguistic creativity, and critical thinking. By creating and analyzing memes, teachers and students develop multimodal communication skills while engaging with authentic cultural content. This workshop helps participants articulate their teaching identity through a medium that their future students will likely find familiar and engaging.

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Step 4: Draft Your Narrative (40 minutes)

Weave your memes into a cohesive personal story that authentically reflects your language learning/teaching identity. Connect each image to specific milestones or revelations in your journey.

Balance vulnerability and strength by sharing both challenges and triumphs. Your spoken narration should be concise yet meaningful, targeting 3-5 minutes in length (approximately 450-750 words).

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Step 5: Create Your Digital Story (40 minutes)

Combine your memes and narrative into a dynamic multimodal presentation using PowerPoint, Canva, Google Slides, or any digital storytelling platform you're comfortable with.

Focus on clean, uncluttered design that enhances—not overpowers—your narrative. Visual elements should complement your spoken words while maintaining a consistent aesthetic throughout.



Step 6: Refine Your Narrative (20 minutes)

Test your script's flow by reading it aloud to a peer or recording a practice version. Listen for natural pacing and emotional resonance.

Consider the multilingual context of your story—how effectively do your narrative and meme alignment represent your identity as a language learner and teacher? Are transitions between languages (if any) meaningful and purposeful?



Step 7: Produce Your Digital Story (20 minutes)

Record your narration alongside your visual presentation, creating an MP4 or similar video format. If adding background music, keep volume at 10-15% to avoid interfering with your voice. Ensure your digital story effectively communicates your personal journey while demonstrating the digital literacy skills you would want to model for your future students.

What Did Story by Memes Add to Our Teaching?



Boosted Engagement

Students connected quickly through humor and creativity—perfect for breaking the ice in large groups.



Encouraged Reflection

Helped future teachers think deeply about who they are as learners and who they want to become as educators.



Used What They Know

Tapped into students' meme literacy and digital fluency—making learning feel authentic and relevant.

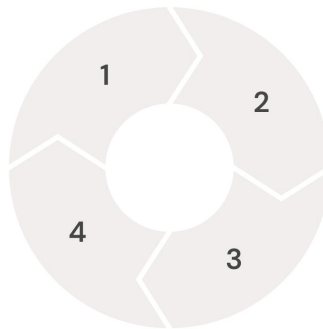
What Did We Learn?

Primary Ed Teachers

Focus on vocation, passion, and personal growth in their meme narratives.

Memes as Mini-Narratives

Each meme packed a story about learning, teaching, or identity—providing an encapsulated snapshot of identities in meaningful ways.



Secondary Ed Teachers

Focus on critique, stress, and navigating gaps in their professional training.

Humor = Insight

Memes revealed hidden emotions and coping strategies—often more telling than traditional tasks.

What Can Others Do?



Adapt It

Works in different languages, subjects, and age groups.



Use It Early

Great for building class community from day one.



Research With It

Offers rich, student-generated data for educational research.



Let Students Lead

They bring the humor, stories, and insight that make this approach powerful.

Want to Know More?

Explore our research and projects related to memes and language teacher identity in the publications below or keep up with our latest findings on <https://definersproject.wordpress.com>.

References

Kim, Y. J., & Belcher, D. (2020). Multimodal Composing and Traditional Essays: Linguistic Performance and Learner Perceptions. *RELC Journal*, 51(1), 86–100.
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