

Transcript

INTRODUCTION

00:00 One day in February 2025, a man uploaded a song to the internet. The song wasn't very good. The lyrics didn't make sense, but people liked it. They watched it again and again, millions of times.

And the interesting thing isn't that people liked it. It was what they were doing with it. People would share it with their friends. They would say its lyrics and they would make people laugh. But they would make many other people feel confused.

Hi, my name's Rhys. I'm a master's level English teacher from the UK with more than 10 years' experience, and I'm here to help you level up your English.

So, in today's episode, we're going to be talking about memes and the English language. And we're going to start with two numbers, 6 7.

MAIN PART

You've probably heard it before. It's all over social media at the moment.

01:00 Instagram, TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and you can't escape it. It's on basketball edits. It's on music videos. It's in videos where it doesn't really belong. In fact, you can hear it in the real world. Usually, some small kid shouts 67 in a supermarket. Or you can go on to my videos and scroll down into the comments and somebody is saying 67. Doesn't make sense to me.

The first time I heard it was in an episode of South Park, which is a show that I enjoy, and the kids on there were doing it, and I didn't know what it meant. So, I asked some of the younger people in my family and they couldn't explain what it meant, but they seemed to enjoy it. And because of that, I started to ask questions, you know?

I was thinking, "Is this a joke?", "Is this a reference to something that I don't understand?", "Maybe there's something I don't know". And at first, to be honest, I
02:00 felt a bit annoyed. I guess, probably, because I felt left out, right? And I'm sure a lot of you feel the same when you hear 67.

And the thing is, it actually feels worse over time when you realise that there are no answers to these questions. It's not a joke. It's not a reference. So, you start to ask an even deeper question. What the heck is 67 all about? Well, I'm going to tell you what it means or what it doesn't mean later. But first, let's go into the history of 67 and talk about where it comes from.

So, in the beginning of this episode, I talked about a person who uploaded a music video. The person is called Skrilla, and he uploaded a video called "Doot Doot," right? It's now called "Doot Doot (6 7)". I don't know if he changed the, you know, the title later. Um, but that's what it's called now. And the thing is, I don't think I'm being rude when I say this, but the song is just not good.

03:00 It kind of makes me feel old to say, but if you listen to it, you'll understand. It's very mumbly. And when I say mumbly, it means the words don't come out clearly. You can't understand the words being spoken.

"Pull up clean in my white tee, rollin' off a honey too (huh?)

Diamonds VV, straight from Lex

And I got a custom pendant waitin', wait 'til when you see that, ooh"

And at first, the lyrics, the words in the song, they feel like nonsense. They feel like they make no sense. Uh, but to be honest, I'll, you know, I'll hold my hands up here. I looked into it, into what the lyrics meant, and actually there is some meaning there. So, he did put in the effort.

But regardless, this song just randomly says 67 a couple of times, like two times. And people started using parts of this song in their basketball edits.

04:00 So, there are these people on TikTok, for example, who take clips of basketball games and edit them together and put a song on top. There's one player in particular, he's called LaMelo Ball, and he's 6' 7 in tall. So, whenever he's playing, these people who make the videos like to play that bit of the song, "67".

And just a quick aside, Mr Ball is a great name for a basketball player, I have to be honest.

And from there, the meme kind of started. It lost any original meaning from the song. And it didn't ever have a meaning really. Even Skrilla, the guy who made the song, says that there is no real meaning.

And I think that that's the part that feels uncomfortable or annoying to us because we like to find meaning, don't we? When somebody tells a joke, we try to

understand the punchline. When somebody tells us about something they learned, we try to figure it out, too. And when something goes viral on the internet, then we assume it must be clever or funny or deep.

05:00 But 67 is none of these things. It's not clever by itself. It's not funny by itself. And it's not important by itself. So why did it spread? Well, because memes are not really about meaning. They are about belonging. If you understand 67, then you are a part of the group. And if you don't understand 67, then you are not a part of the group.

And that feeling of belonging, of being in a group, of connection is what's important. That's what people like about 67. Think about inside jokes with your friends. Other people don't understand them. Think about slang when you're young. Your parents don't know what you're talking about. And think about film references. People like to say lines from film and TV to each other, even though the people around them don't get it.

06:00 But if you do get the joke or the slang or the reference, then you feel close to the people you're talking to. And if you don't get them, then you feel distant. Maybe you sometimes feel this when you listen to native English speakers talk. Maybe you understand the words and the grammar. The sentence makes sense to you, but then all the native speakers laugh and you don't know why. It's like you understand English, so why don't you understand this?

But it's not a problem with your language. It's a problem with the culture. You just missed out on that bit of culture. And yeah, that can feel frustrating, annoying.

You might even feel stupid, but you're not stupid. You just missed out on a little conversation or a film or something else that everyone else saw.

07:00 67 works because millions of people experienced it at the same time in the same place, the internet. And once you notice 67 a few times, then you stop asking about it and you stop trying to understand it. You just recognise it, right? And suddenly you are in the group.

And that's just like language because it is language. In fact, 67 was dictionary.com's word of the year 2025. I'm going to say that again because even though you heard me right, you still might not believe it. 67 was dictionary.com's word of the year 2025. Absolutely crazy. Or is it?

Because in the past 10 years, Oxford's words of the year have been things like rizz, goblin mode, youthquake, and even an emoji. And this is where I start to draw the line, even as an English teacher.

08:00 How did an emoji make it as word of the year in one of the top dictionaries? I get why dictionaries are there. They're to tell us how language is being used. And I guess people were using a lot of emojis. But is an emoji a word? That is even I struggle with that. I have a master's degree in applied linguistics and I am not sure how to answer that. That is a good topic for another episode.

Okay, I digress.

And when you really think about it, if you go back to the 1990s and early 2000s when I was growing up, we had a lot of strange words, too. We had information

superhighway, cyber, tweet, podcast, chav, and maybe the worst one when you really think about it, unfriend. And I'm sure the older generations were really annoyed by that, too. Every generation creates its own language. Even the word cool was considered slang when it was new. Everything starts as slang. You have to use it enough for it to get into the dictionary. You have to start in slang. So, you

09:00 know, in 10 years, maybe 67 will be considered formal English. I highly doubt it, but it is possible.

So, 67 is just another part of that. It's not more stupid than usual. The kids are not doomed. It's just another in-joke like every generation has had.

In the second part of this episode, I'm going to talk about memes from the past. Maybe memes that you will recognise, unless you're a young person watching this, watching me talk about 67 and thinking, "Oh, come on, old man. That's 2025's meme. We're on this new meme now". Okay, fine. I accept it. We're going to look at how memes change over time now. And what that means for language learning.

10:00

AD BREAK

If 67 feels confusing or empty, that's only because it's new, right? Like we've talked about, every generation comes up with its own memes. So, let's go back. Let's look at some older memes that many adults today will understand. And as we look back at these memes, I want you to ask yourself one very important question: "Did it make sense at the time?"

We're going to start in 2013. A picture of a dog, a Shiba Inu. The text is colourful.

The grammar is terrible.

"very wow" "much meme".

11:00 This was Doge. At first, Doge looks like it's saying something, but when you really think about it, it's not really saying anything. Yes, it's a little bit sarcastic, a little bit playful, but there's no real point to it.

And yet, people loved it and they learned the rules very quickly. You must use Comic Sans, you must use a picture of a dog, preferably this specific Shiba Inu, and you must use bad English grammar. And if you didn't know these rules, then Doge seemed stupid and annoying and pointless. But if you did know them, then Doge seemed fun and warm and wholesome, and you felt like you were a part of the group.

And that tells us something very interesting about language. Perfect English is not the goal. Connection is the goal. Good English will help you with connection, but connection itself is the real goal of learning a language.

12:00 Now, let's look at another meme. It's April 2007. You open up MSN on your computer and a friend sends you a link for the new Indiana Jones film. You click it, but instead of Harrison Ford, it's Rick Ashley singing "Never Gonna Give You Up". You have just been rickrolled for the first time.

So, ask yourself, is this funny? Because the song's not a joke. It's not shocking. It's not offensive. It's just a normal pop song, isn't it? So what's the joke?

The joke is the surprise. You expected one thing, but you got another. And the more serious your expectation, the funnier it was. If a friend rickrolls you, it's funny. But if your teacher rickrolls you, that is hilarious.

Rickrolling worked because everyone shared the same online experience. You clicked links without thinking. You believed titles were accurate. You believed that people were honest. So that created a shared experience. "You got rickrolled", "I got rickrolled too". And that was the real point of the meme. It wasn't the joke or
13:00 the surprise. It was that shared connection. Once again, that is why the meme was popular.

Now, let's go back even further to the early 2000s. "All your base are belong to us". It's a line from a video game with a very bad English translation. The grammar's all wrong. It's the kind of English you learn in a beginner's English class.

And it became one of the first global internet memes. People put it on pictures, in videos, they even put it on t-shirts. But ask yourself again, why? Because it wasn't really a joke. It wasn't really trying to make a point. It was just that people saw themselves in the situation. This person, they thought of an English sentence, but they made a mistake. And it was a mistake made in a very public way.

People weren't laughing at the English. They were laughing at the situation. They
14:00 were laughing because they saw themselves in that situation. Any language learner has made a similar mistake where a sentence feels right in your head, but

after it comes out, you realise it's totally wrong. So, the sentence stopped being about the mistake. It became a signal. If you knew the story, then you were in. If you didn't know the story, then you were out. And it's always been this way.

We could keep on going back. In 2002, we had "the game". In World War II, we had "Kilroy was here". In the sixth century, we had "the three hares". And I think we could go all the way back to the first humans. I think the first humans were creating memes because memes create in-groups. They create connection.

But another thing about memes is that they don't explain themselves. And that is what makes them frustrating. It's not like learning a language. Someone's always
15:00 there to explain when you're learning a language. It could be a teacher, or a course, or a textbook.

But when you look at a meme, you don't have much to go on. You need to see the meme many times in many different ways to understand it. But actually, that is like learning language. It's like learning your first language.

When you're a baby, nobody can explain what words mean to you. You just need to hear those words again and again in different sentences. Maybe you need to try the words, maybe make some mistakes and finally you will get it. And you're in a sort of in-group there, of all the people who know that word. To someone else, a foreigner who doesn't know your language, it's confusing, right? That is not very different to memes. I think that is so interesting.

So next time you see a meme that you don't understand like 67, instead of thinking to yourself, "What does this mean?", or "Why are the kids so stupid these

16:00 days?", instead think "Ah! This is probably today's lolcats or rage comics or planking".

And that is just respecting another culture, isn't it? And it is another culture. It's a subculture. And that is what we're all about, isn't it? Respecting cultures and language and so on. And remember, culture is part of language.

IN CONCLUSION

Before we finish, let's take a look at some of the more advanced phrases from today's episode. The first one is "you can't escape it". That means it appears everywhere. It's impossible to avoid it. Earlier I said that 67 is on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube shorts. You can't escape it.

Another example, "English is everywhere these days. You can't escape it".

The next phrase was "it doesn't really belong" and that means something feels
17:00 out of place or not appropriate in that context. So, "67 is in videos where it doesn't really belong".

"I went to the party, but I didn't feel like I really belonged".

The next one is "left out". It means to feel excluded or not included in a group or experience. "I guess, probably, because I felt left out, right?".

"Everyone else was having fun, but I felt left out".

The next one is "I'll hold my hands up".

This is a British idiom and it means I admit my mistake or I take responsibility.

"I'll hold my hands up here. I looked into it and Skrilla's lyrics do make sense".

"I'll hold my hands up here. I'm the one who ate the last cookie".

The next one is "just a quick aside". This means I'm going to make another point that isn't part of this main topic.

18:00 "Just a quick aside, Mr. Ball is a great name for a basketball player".

"I'm listening to your story, but just a quick aside, your hair looks fantastic today".

So, leave a comment telling me about the first meme that you remember being a part of and also how other people felt about it. Try to use some of the phrases that I just gave you.

And if you would like to improve your English even faster, check out the Podcast Course. We'll use this episode to boost your listening comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar. So, you don't want to miss it. There's a link in the description.

Lastly, I would like to thank my dedicated members. That's Anna, Alina, Marcela, and Daisy. And remember, my dedicated members get a free conversation class with me every month. So, if you're interested in joining them, click the link below.

I'll see you in the next episode.

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