

“It’s Morbin’ Time”: The Morphology and Syntax of Morbius Memes

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ABSTRACT

Memes are an everyday feature of the Internet nowadays, and recently they have become a point of interest in the field of linguistics. This study particularly has taken an interest in Morbius memes, a meme phenomenon replete with linguistic features, with the goal of unraveling the morphological and syntactic features that characterize them. The study is beneficial to the field of linguistics and memes. It provides students with examples of how to conduct scholarly work in the field of morphology and syntax, and it also serves as a preservation of meme culture. The study was conducted following a descriptive qualitative design that employed morphological and syntactic analysis. It abides by ethical standards: it does not infringe on the copyright of memes and ensures the results will be properly disseminated. The study found that the morphological regularities that characterize Morbius memes come in the form of word formation processes—namely clipping, backformation, compounding, blending, and derivation—and a feature the researcher refers to as “the -ing rule”. In the case of syntactic regularities, these come in the form of recurring and unique sentence constructions in which the “It’s morbin’ time” phrase is a constant feature. These linguistic features of Morbius memes are, as the researcher infers, an observable manifestation of linguistic creativity in which individuals are manipulating language for the purpose of creating memes. Furthermore, it goes to show that individuals subconsciously employ their innate linguistic knowledge in creating memes. Therefore, memes may serve as mediums for language practice.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Memes are a ubiquitous feature of the Internet. Whether people seek or ignore them, they nevertheless have come to pervade digitally-mediated communication. From X (Twitter) and Facebook to Reddit and Tumblr, memes are shared all over existing online platforms. The term “meme” has been defined over and over again since its inception as a word. The definitions range from highly scientific and all-encompassing to overtly specific and simple. A definition that would be more familiar to the average Internet user would be from the latter; and this is the idea that a meme is simply an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations (Allen, 2022.). What is certain about memes are their creativity and replicability. Once a meme gains traction, it will be recreated, replicated, and spread on the Internet. It is a fact therefore that there now exists a vast multitude of memes on the Internet, and one particular meme collective is this study’s concern.

Morbius is a Marvel superhero film released on April 1, 2022. It revolves around the character, Morbius, a doctor who, in an attempt to cure himself of his blood illness with the help of vampire-bat genes, finds himself turned into a bloodthirsty vampire. The film was a critical success, earning as much as five *morbillion* dollars worldwide and acquiring a whopping two-thousand percent rating in *Morbiumeter*. In addition, the film also dominated Internet discourse and popular culture, with its *morbiously* iconic line “It’s morbin’ time” being hailed as one of the iconic movie quotes of all time. At least, that is what memes made it seem like. In truth, the film was neither a commercial nor a critical success, nor was “it’s morbin’ time” an actual line from the movie (Donohoo, 2022). Where the film achieved success, however, was in inciting a spree of Internet memes making fun of the movie. In fact, the popularity of the memes prompted Sony to re-release the film in theaters on the premise that

there is genuine interest for the film based on the vast assortment of *Morbius* memes being posted online (Laman, 2022). Still, the film failed a second time as the premise proved to be false.

The details of the meme aside, an aspect of this meme phenomenon not being talked about is the linguistic process working underneath the surface. Throughout these memes are recurring linguistic features involving linguistic creativity. For instance, since the inception of the meme, people have been engaging in a variety of language play involving the word *Morbius*. In such plays, they would make up a plethora of words from the name and use them to make reference or to low-key make fun of the movie. Although these made-up words cannot be considered neologisms, they nevertheless have entered standard usage in meme communities, so much so that the researcher would consider them as Internet slang words specific to meme communities. In fact, some of these words have seen enough usage that people have already written definitions of them on the crowdsourced online dictionary for slang words and phrases. One of the definitions of *morb* is a verb for when *Morbius* gets angry and attacks you (Laman, 2022). This language play in *Morbius* memes is not limited to words but extends to phrases and sentences as well such as in the case of the “*It’s morbin’ time*” catchphrase. The phrase is supposedly uttered by the titular main character and is being quoted all around the internet ever since the beginning of the meme. This trend spread in such a way that people took the phrase and began mimicking it through a variety of made-up catchphrases.

It is these instances of language play that occurs within *Morbius* memes that has taken the interest of the researcher. Underneath the silliness of the *Morbius* meme phenomenon is a linguistic process worth investigating. In this undertaking, the aspects of morphology and syntax will be of particular focus as the linguistic creativity in *Morbius* memes seems to occur at both morphological and syntactic levels. The rationale behind the study is that there is a lack of linguistic investigation on the *Morbius* meme phenomenon despite its pervasion of the Internet popular culture through linguistic means.

Related Literature

A common observation echoed by scholars is that memes exhibit some of the characteristic qualities of language. Yus (2021) mentions semanticity, arbitrariness of form and meaning, productivity and creativity, social transmissibility, and compositionality among others as the linguistic features of memes. Allen (2022) remarked that memes, like language, are used to convey information, and that alone makes them a point of interest in linguistics.

Indeed, memes have become a point of interest in linguistics. Many studies focusing on particular linguistic aspects of memes have already been published. For example, in a study by Sabado (2022), the *Karen* meme was historically and semantically analyzed to determine changes in its meaning from before it became a meme to after it became a meme. The study also attempted to identify all sociocultural connotations associated with the meme through content analysis and synthesized them. The findings revealed that *Karen* was a name of Scandinavian origins and it originally meant “pure and unsullied.” After it became a meme, the name *Karen* became a pejorative pertaining to a middle-aged blonde white woman. The name also acquired a plethora of negative connotations such as entitled, anti-science, and microaggressive, to name a few.

A study by Yus (2021), pragmatics was combined with the theory of multimodality to analyze humor in Spanish memes. The study attempted to find out how humor arises from the processing of the meme as well as how humor derives from specific combinations of multi-modal elements. The study found that there are several inferential strategies (reference assignment, disambiguation, concept adjustment, and saturation) that Spanish memes exploit in order to draw out humor. The study also found that Spanish memes use text-image combinations in four different ways (word-specific, picture-specific, duo-specific, additive) to constitute the humor of the meme.

A study more closely related to this research at hand is by Bivens (2018). In her study, *Doggo-speak*, an internet language often used in *Doggo* memes, was analyzed to find out its prominent linguistic features. In the process, a corpus of two hundred instances of *Doggo-speak* in the form of meme captions were collected and analyzed. The study found out five linguistic features that characterize *Doggo-speak*. These are: (1) the *do* rule; (2) the usage of *heck*; (3) pronoun mismatch rules; (4) spelling transformations; and (5) capitalization rules.

Similarly, in a study by Bury and Wojtaszek (2017), *LOLspeak*, another Internet language often used in *LOLcat* memes, was analyzed to find out linguistic regularities that occur in it. In the process, a corpus of one hundred instances of *LOLspeak* in the form of user comments were collected and analyzed. The study found recurring linguistic features and these are as follows: the “*can has*” formula; auxiliary verb substitution; omission of auxiliary verb; manipulation of (lexical) categories; deviate spelling; and onomatopoeia and rhyming. In another study by Olmsted and Sojak (2019), the morphology and syntax of memes were looked into. In morphology, they found three repeating forms in memes: the construction of *do* as dative form, subject-verb agreement reduction, and the *-o* suffix. In syntax, they found two forms repeated in memes: *Doge* syntax and copula deletion.

Although these studies came up with abundant findings, the problem is that they lack specificity—particularly the ones by Bivens, Bury, and Wojtaszek—by taking on general linguistic features instead of focusing on specific areas. Hence, this study narrowed down the areas of interest to morphology and syntax.

Conceptual Framework

Memes

The term meme was originally coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 in his work, *The Selfish Gene*. According to Allen (2022), the term was initially created to “describe a single unit of culture, spread from one person to another through imitation—a conceptual gene.” From this definition, it is understood that a meme can be any idea or behavior that begins from one source and spreads to others. As such, a meme can be as simple as a fashion trend. Davison (2012, as cited in Allen, 2022) appropriated this definition to the Internet to mean “a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission.” Herein, a meme is narrowed down to refer to a typically humorous thing transmitted through the Internet. That humorous thing can be an image, gif, video, text, idea, etc. For the purposes of this study, Davison’s definition was followed. The data consisted of memes in the form of images.

Morphology

The term morphology literally means “the study of forms” (Yule, 2020). It is concerned with how words are formed by smaller word elements. These elements are referred to as morphemes. In other words, it is the study of the internal construction of words (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2023).

This body of knowledge is one of the concerns of the study. The morphology of Morbius memes was analyzed to determine morphological regularities that characterize language play in Morbius memes.

Morphological Analysis

Lapham (2023) defines morphological analysis as “the analysis of a word based on the meaningful parts contained within.” These meaningful parts are the morphemes. According to Lapham (2023), morphological analysis is used to describe word-building processes. Morphological analysis was used in determining and describing the morphological features and regularities of Morbius memes.

Syntax

Syntax is the study of the formation of phrases, clauses, and sentences and the relationship of their constituent parts (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2023). It is essentially concerned with how words form larger phrases and sentences.

Since the study of sentence structure falls under syntax, this body of knowledge is one of the concerns of the study. The syntax of Morbius memes was analyzed to determine prominent syntactic regularities that characterize Morbius memes.

Syntactic Analysis

Syntactic analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that is concerned with structure of sentences or of parts of sentences (Syntactic Analysis | Engati, n.d.).” It involves the identification of clauses, parts of speech, constituents, etc. It also involves the drawing of the syntactic structure of the text being studied through a syntax tree.

Syntactic analysis was conducted in determining and describing the syntax of Morbius memes.

Creativity of Language

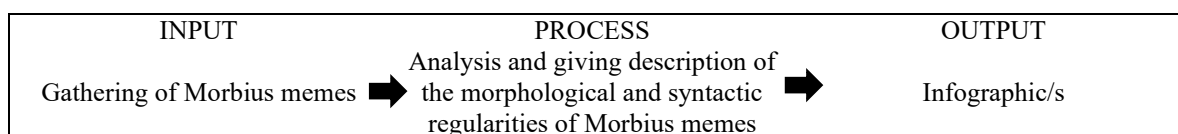
The creativity of language, also referred to as linguistic creativity, is a fundamental aspect of human language that allows speakers to generate and understand an infinite number of novel and meaningful utterances. This is closely related to the concept of language productivity which posits that speakers of a language can create and understand an unlimited number of new sentences, even ones they have never encountered before. These concepts are central to the field of linguistics and have been extensively discussed by the linguist, Noam Chomsky.

This study is, in a way, an investigation into the creative aspect of language. Specifically, the findings give us insight on how Morbius memes reflect this concept of linguistic creativity.

Schematic Illustration of The Study

The study was conducted following the input-process-output model. The input involved the gathering of a hundred (100) memes. The process consisted of the analysis of data and the discussion of the findings. Lastly, the output involved the creation of infographics synthesizing all the findings.

Figure 1
Schematic Illustration of the Study



Significance of the Study

The field of linguistic research on memes is a fairly recent development and is continuing to thrive until now. For this reason, this study serves as a further foray into the field of linguistics and memes. Furthermore, the study may prove beneficial to the following individuals and fields.

To the researcher, this study is a personal attempt at exercising his linguistic knowledge for the purposes of linguistic research. Furthermore, the study is a foray into meme culture; a ubiquitous feature of the Internet world which the researcher is part of. As such, the study will benefit the researcher in terms of the exercise of linguistic knowledge and the acquisition of meme culture knowledge.

Moreover, this paper may serve as an example and a source to researchers of this area, given the lack of studies concerning the morphology and syntax of memes.

To linguists and students of the English language, this study showcases the application of morphology and syntax in conducting scholarly work. Therefore, it can serve as an example on how these linguistic theories and methodologies are applied.

In relation to this, this study contributes to the larger field of linguistics as it adds to the vast knowledge that has been collected in this field. Specifically, it adds to society's collective knowledge of the culture and linguistics of memes, considering that memes are a relatively new phenomenon knowledge of it is still limited.

Furthermore, now that memes are undeniably a part of the Internet popular culture, this study can be seen as a preservation of the Internet culture, particularly the Morbius meme culture.

Lastly, this study adds to the collective effort of promoting linguistics as a very empowering practice without severe drawbacks or consequences. For instance, the conduct of linguistic studies contributes to human knowledge and culture without doing harm to people, communities, cultures, the environment, etc. Hence, it is a sustainable practice that is worth promoting.

Objectives

The study aims to provide an analysis and description of the morphology and syntax of Morbius memes. In the pursuit of this, the goal is divided into the following objectives:

- To analyze, determine, and describe morphological regularities that characterize Morbius memes.
- To analyze, determine, and describe syntax features regularities that characterize Morbius memes.
- To synthesize all the findings into an infographic presenting the findings about the morphology and syntax of Morbius memes.

2. METHODS

Research Design

The study was conducted following a descriptive qualitative research design. It involved the analysis and discussion of the morphological and syntactic regularities that occur in Morbius memes through detailed descriptive discussion. In this pursuit, morphological and syntactic analysis will be used.

Source of Data

The data came in the form of memes gathered from the Internet. A corpus of one hundred (100) instances of Morbius memes in the form of images were collected. Given that memes in general are replete with linguistic features, the researcher concluded that this sample size is more than sufficient to uncover whatever linguistic (morphological or syntactic) features take place in Morbius memes and achieve data saturation.

The memes were obtained mainly from Reddit because it was observed that the Morbius meme phenomenon is still active on this site. Social media sites like Twitter were considered but it proved difficult to use their search function to look specifically for Morbius memes. Whereas on Reddit, its forum-like organization of different content made it easier to look for the needed data, and its search function also proved to be more generous in providing results. The actual collection of memes was done by inputting keywords on the Reddit search bar. The gathering of memes was done via purposive sampling and the only criteria followed was that the meme should contain words, phrases, or sentences. There were no additional criteria followed regarding the nature of the text used in the memes.

Data Gathering Tool

The Morbius memes were gathered and cataloged via tabulation. However, instead of inputting the images themselves on the table, each meme's textual content was instead extracted and presented on two tables. One table is for the morphological analysis and another for the syntactic analysis. For the morphological analysis, the table included the textual content of each meme and their respective morphological analysis. For the syntactic analysis, the table included the full textual content of each meme and their syntactic analysis. The data gathering tool can be viewed on the appendices of the paper.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering involved the gathering and analysis of Morbius memes. First, the researcher gathered memes from Reddit through the Reddit search engine. These memes and their textual content were then listed through two tables. One table is for the morphological analysis. The other is for syntactic analysis. Afterwards, morphological and syntactic analysis were conducted.

Treatment of Data

The gathered data was analyzed through morphological and syntactic analysis. The corpus of memes as presented through the tables were examined to determine recurring word formation processes and sentence structures and patterns. These were then discussed through descriptions.

For regularity, a morphological or syntactic feature has to be observed in at least two memes to be considered recurring and thus be considered in the discussion. For this, the researcher simply followed the definition of "recurring". Recurring is when a thing happens multiple times over, and "multiple" is defined as "more than one". Therefore, in this study, if a feature happened more than once, then it was considered to be recurring.

Ethical Considerations

There is no human participation involved in the data gathering process of the study aside from the researcher himself. Therefore, there was no need for informed consent.

With regard to the meme themselves, the researcher only aimed to analyze them as linguistic units. The researcher does not necessarily approve nor support any agenda or idea being pushed forward by the memes.

In addition, although copyright protection in memes is subject to debate, this study does not infringe on the copyright of memes. This study only aimed to study the words, phrases, and sentences used in the memes and these are not subject to copyright. In addition, memes can be argued as part of the public domain. Memes also get reposted over and over again on the Internet that it becomes impossible to trace the original creator of a specific meme. Therefore, the study has opted not to credit the creators of every single meme covered in this study.

Lastly, dissemination is an essential part of research because it is imperative to share gained knowledge. Therefore, the researcher will make sure that the results of the study will be shared for the benefit of everyone by making it available online in the form of an infographic. Furthermore, since the study has no human involvement aside from the researcher, there are no other participants that will need to be informed about the results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Morphological Regularities that Characterize Morbius Memes: Word Formation

The study found word formation to be a prominent morphological feature in Morbius memes. Specifically, the study identified five types of word formation processes that occur. These are clipping, backformation, compounding, blending, and derivation. Somewhat expectedly, word formation in Morbius memes mostly involves the titular name *Morbius*.

Clipping & Backformation

Clipping occurs when a word is reduced to a shorter form. Backformation is a special type of this reduction process, and it occurs when a word is reduced to a shorter form of a different word type. (Yule, 2020) In other words, when the shortened word is of the same word class as the original, it's described as clipping. When the shortened word is of a different word class, it is described as backformation. The study observed that these two processes occur exclusively with the word *Morbius*. Table 1 presents some Morbius memes using the form *morb* which seems to originate from the word *Morbius* through reduction, either clipping or backformation.

Table 1*A Selection of Morbius Memes Using the Form “Morb”*

Meme	Text	Word of Interest	Lexical Category
#5	A wizard pondering his Morb	morb	noun
#47	MORBATAR THE WAY OF MORB	morb	noun
#92	NO MORBS?	morb	noun
#2	STAND BACK VICTORIA. I’M BEGINNING TO MORB!	morb	verb
#4	look out I'm gonna Morb	morb	verb
#9	THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF BEING IN THE UNIVERSE THOSE WHO MORB, AND THOSE WHO DO NOT	morb	verb

In Table 1, the use of a peculiar word, *morb*, in a selection of Morbius memes is presented. The word is by no means an actual word in standard English. However, its form is evidently visible in the word *Morbius*. Therefore, the most probable explanation is that *morb* originates from *Morbius* through reduction. That is, the latter part *-ius* was removed to form *morb*.

However, as seen in Table 1 two different uses of *morb* can be distinguished, as a noun and as a verb. Therefore, it can be further inferred that there are actually two words with the same form. The first one is a noun and the second one is a verb. Therefore, two specific reduction processes can be specified. The noun *morb* is a reduced form of the noun *Morbius*, maintaining the noun status of the original word. This reduction process is described as clipping. The verb *morb* is also a reduced form of *Morbius*, but it shifted to a different lexical category. This reduction process is described as backformation.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of these two processes. Essentially, the form *morb* originates from the word *Morbius* via a reduction process. This form exhibits two uses and, subsequently, two words can be discerned: *morb* (noun) and *morb* (verb). Therefore, two reduction processes can be further specified: clipping and backformation.

Table 2*Breakdown of the Word Formation Process Behind the Form “Morb”*

Original Word	Reduced Form	Word Formation Breakdown	Description
Morbius	Morb (Noun)	Morbius → Morb(ius) → morb	Clipping
	Morb (Verb)		Backformation

Compounding & Blending

Compounding and blending are two different types of word combination. When two whole separate words are conjoined to form a single form, it is described as compounding. On the other hand, when the beginning of one word is combined with the end of another word, it is described as blending. The study has made adjustments so that when a whole word is combined with the beginning or end part of a word, it still counts as blending. (Yule, 2020) Table 3 provides a selection of Morbius memes using words exhibiting these two processes.

Table 3*A Selection of Morbius Memes with Words Exhibiting Either Compounding or Blending*

Meme	Text	Word of Interest	Lexical Category
#3	THIS POST HAS BEEN MORBCHECKED BY TRUE MORBHEADS √MORB	Morbcheck Morbhead	verb noun
#64	2000% MORBIUSMETER 99999 Reviews Better Than The Godfather	Morbiumeter	noun
#7	TEN MORBUCKS	Morbuck	noun
#44	MORBE HE'S BORN WITH IT. MORBE IT'S MORBELLINE MORBELLINE	Morbe Morbeline	adverb adverb
#47	MORBATAR THE WAY OF MORB	Morbatar	noun
#55	ONE MORBILLION	Morbillion	noun
#75	NOW I'M A LITTLE MORBIVATED	Morbivate	verb
#65	Don't you get it? It was never about Morbi-you or Morbi-me. It was always Morbius.	Morbi-You Morbi-Me	noun noun

The study found that there is a degree of overlap between compounding and blending such that a form is seen as exhibiting either or both of these two. Table 4 below presents a breakdown.

Table 4*Breakdown of the Overlapping of Compounding and Blending in Words in Morbius Memes*

Word	Word Formation Breakdown	Description
Morbcheck	morb + check	Compounding
	morb(ius) + check	Blending
Morbhead	morb + head	Compounding
	morb (ius) + head	Blending

As presented in Table 4, the form *morbcheck* could be seen as a compounding of the form *morb*, which is an established word in Morbius memes as discussed earlier, with the word *check*. It can also be interpreted as the blending of *Morbius* and *check*. That is, the beginning of *Morbius* (*morb*) was blended with *check*. This overlap can be seen in the form *morbhead* as well.

Regardless of these overlaps, there are forms that exhibit only one of these two. Table 5 below presents an example of a word resulting from compounding.

Table 5

Word Formation Breakdown of the Compounded Form “Morbiusmeter”

Word	Word Formation Breakdown	Description
Morbiusmeter	Morbius + meter	Compounding

In Table 5, it is shown that *morbiusmeter* is the compounding of the words *Morbius* and *meter*. For blending, a lot more examples have been gathered by the researcher. Table 6 below presents some examples.

Table 6

Breakdown of Blending in Words in Morbius Memes

Word	Word Formation Breakdown	Description
Morbuck	Mor(bius) + buck	
Morbe	Mor(bius) + (may)be	
Morbeline	Mor(bius) + (may)belline	
Morbatar	Morb(ius) + (av)atar	
Morbillion	Mor(bius) + billion	Blending
Morbivate	Morbi(us) + moti)vate	
Morbi-You	Morbi(us) + you	
Morbi-Me	Morbi(us) + me	
Morbiverse	Morbi(us) + (uni)verse	

In Table 6 it is shown that blending occurs exclusively with the word *Morbius*. The beginning part of it has been blended with all sorts of words. For instance, in the form *morbillion*, the *mor-* portion of *Morbius* was blended with the word *billion*. In *morbivate*, the *morbi-* part of the word was blended with the *-vate* part of *motivate*. There are variations in how the word *Morbius* is reduced before blending, but it stands that this blending process has been done with only the aforementioned word as a base but has yielded a lot of words.

To sum up, compounding and blending occurs abundantly in *Morbius* memes, such that they yield a lot of words with only the word *Morbius* as a base form.

Derivation

The last word-formation process the study identified is derivation. This word formation process involves the creation of words by means of affixes (Yule, 2020). Table 7 presents some examples of words from *Morbius* memes that originate from this process.

Table 7*Some Examples of Words in Morbius Memes that Originate from a Derivation Process*

Meme	Text	Word of Interest	Lexical Category
#13	MY DOCTOR JUST TOLD ME I'M MORBIUSLY A BEAST	Morbiusly	adverb
#16	FINALLY 100% MORBIUM	Morbium	noun
#21	Morbians on their way to make their Morbillionth Morbius meme.	Morbian	noun

It can be seen in Table 7 that derivation solely occurs with the forms *morb* and *Morbius* as the base form. Table 8 breaks down this process. In the word *morbiusly*, *Morbius* was affixed with *-ly*, a suffix often used in forming adverbs. In *morbium*, *morb* was affixed with *-ium*, a suffix often used in naming elements (cadmium, barium, platinum, etc.). Lastly, in *morbian*, *morb* was affixed with *-ian*, a suffix often used to indicate “related to or belonging to.”

Table 8*Breakdown of Derivation in Words in Morbius Memes*

Word	Word Formation Breakdown	Description
Morbiusly	Morbius + <i>-ly</i>	
Morbium	Morb + <i>-ium</i>	Derivation
Morbian	Morb + <i>-ian</i>	

In this derivation process, Morbius memes were able to come up with other unique words, although less in number than the other word formation processes identified. Still, the creativity of the language play in Morbius memes is still manifested in this process.

Morphological Regularities that Characterize Morbius Memes: The *-ing* Rule

Another morphological regularity the study found concerns the use of the *-ing* suffix, a suffix used in forming the present participle forms of verbs. The study observed a frequent usage of this suffix in Morbius memes to create new words. However, it is done so in an unusual manner, such that the suffix is not being used with verbs at all but with nouns, particularly proper nouns. Table 9 provides some examples of Morbius memes featuring peculiar words written in the present participle form.

Table 9*Some Examples of Words in Morbius Memes Written in -Ing Form*

Meme	Text	Word of Interest	Lexical Category
#38	And then Anakin walks into the room where the younglings are hiding, and he says “It’s Skywalkin’ Time!”	Skywalkin’	Verb
#46	IT’S MOHGIN’ TIME	Mohgin’	verb
#72	The best part of Schindler's list is when he says It's Schindlin’ time	Schindlin’	verb
#58	My favorite part of Kenobi is when Darth vader shows up and says “Its vading time” and procedes to vade all over them.	vading	verb
#35	It's Morfyn' time.	Morfyn’	verb

In Table 9, four peculiar words seemingly in present participle form are presented. These words were originally proper nouns, specifically names of characters from popular media: *Skywalker* (Star Wars), *Mohg* (Elden Ring), *Schindler* (Schindler’s List), *Vader* (Star Wars) and *Morfyn* (The Rings of Power). It is shown that they are affixed with the suffix *-ing*, although they are written in contracted form (*in’*) to represent casual speech. In the case of *Morfyn*, the spelling was maintained, such that it was written as *Morfyn’*, not *morfin’*. In the case of *Skywalker*, *Schindler*, and *Vader* their end parts (*-er*) were clipped off before being affixed with *-ing* to form *skywalkin’*, *schindlin’*, and *vading*.

The pattern essentially is the recurring use of the suffix *-ing* to inflect proper nouns, as if verbs, into present participle form. The intention behind this, as the researcher infers, is most likely to mimic the form *morbin’*— first seen in the phrase “It’s morbin’ time,” popularized in Morbius memes— which follows the same rule of having a proper noun be affixed with *-ing* (*Morbius* → *Morb* → *Morbin’*).

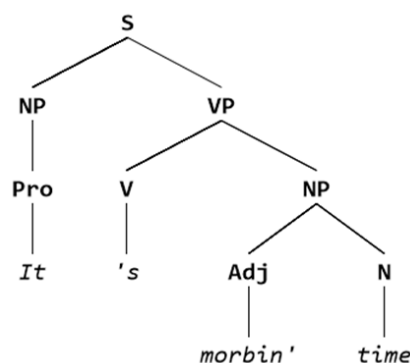
The use of the suffix *-ing* has essentially become a rule that Morbius memes follow, and now it’s a characteristic morphological trait that can be observed in Morbius memes.

Syntactic Regularities that Characterize Morbius Memes: Recurring Constructions

Syntactic regularities in Morbius memes generally boil down to repeated syntactic constructions. These vary from short simple sentences to longer constructions.

The “It’s Morbin’ Time” Construction

The “*it’s morbin’ time*” catchphrase, being the most ubiquitous feature of Morbius memes, is the most widely replicated construction. Figure 1 represents the structure of this phrase.

Figure 1*Structure Of the “It’s Morbin Time” Catchphrase*

As seen in Figure 1, the phrase is a short and simple construction consisting of only two main parts, a noun phrase and a verb phrase. The noun phrase consists of the pronoun *it*. The verb phrase consists of the verb *is* and another noun phrase consisting of the noun *time* and the form *morbin'*, functioning as an adjective.

This structure is essentially copied throughout Morbius memes, with each of its elements maintained and never changed. Table 10 presents some examples of Morbius memes replicating this construction.

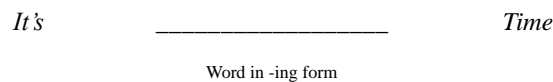
Table 10
Replication of the “It’s Morbin Time” Structure in Morbius Memes

Meme	Text
	IT'S MORBIN TIME
#18	IT'S SAULIN TIME IT'S WALTIN TIME
#22	*Laughter* It's Bowsin Time
#35	It's Morfyn' time.
#97	ITS CLOBBERING TIME
#38	And then Anakin walks into the room where the younglings are hiding, and he says “ It’s Skywalkin Time! ”
#100	Alright ladies, it’s webbin’ time

As seen in Table 10, the *it’s morbin’ time* structure is replicated down to every single element. The change that does happen in each iteration occurs only with the adjective slot of the phrase (*It’s morbin time*), with the word *morbin'*, functioning as an adjective, being replaced by a different adjective.

In essence, this phrase structure has become a formula or a template to be followed in which the adjective slot is a blank spot to be filled. Figure 1 presents this as a template.

Figure 2
The “It’s Morbin Time” Template



As shown in Figure 2, the template only consists of changing the word *morbin'* with another verb in *-ing* form. However, as seen in Table 10, it really need not be a verb, but any word affixed with the *-ing* suffix. This is where the *-ing* rule discussed earlier comes into play. As explained in the morphology of Morbius memes, proper nouns, particularly the names of media characters, would be taken and affixed with the suffix *-ing*. It is these resulting forms then that would be inserted in the *it’s morbin time* construction.

As also seen in Table 10, this construction does not always appear on its own. Often, it is embedded in larger constructions on which larger patterns could be seen repeated. Table 11 presents some examples of this.

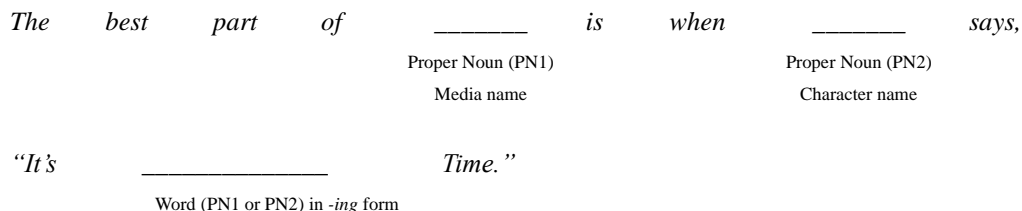
Table 11
“It’s Morbin’ Time” Embedded in Larger Constructions

Meme	Text
#1	the best part of Morbius was when he said " IT'S MORBIN' TIME " and morbed all over those guys
#58	My favorite part of Kenobi is when Darth vader shows up and says “ Its vading time ” and proceeds to vade all over them.
#72	The best part of Schindler's list is when he says It's Schindlin time
#73	The best scene in 'Forrest Gump' is when Forrest says ' it's gumpin time '

In Table 11, all four samples repeat the same structure, albeit with minor alterations on each iteration, with some being longer and others shorter. Once again, a formula can be seen through these constructions. Figure 3 simplifies the structure of the sample memes in Table 11 into a template.

Figure 3

Prototypical Template of the Sample Memes in Table 11



As presented in Figure 3, Morbius memes expounded on the “*It’s morbin’ time*” formula, resulting in a larger construction that can be played upon. This larger construction has more slots to be played with which enables more room of creativity for the meme creators.

Table 12 presents a group of Morbius memes following another recurring construction. Figure 4 presents this construction into another template.

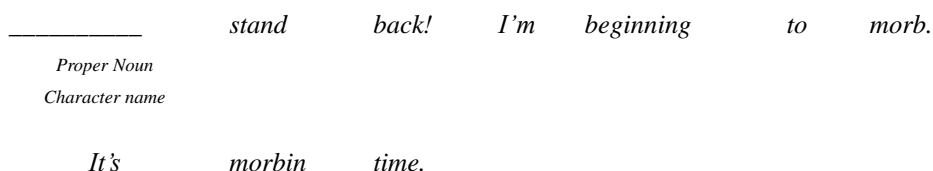
Table 12

A Set of Morbius Memes Repeating the Same Construction

Meme	Text
#15	FUBUKI STAND BACK! I'M BEGINNING TO MORB! ITS MORBIN TIME!
#54	griffon stand back! im begining to morb!, its morbin time!
#34	Hu Tao STAND BACK! I'M BEGINNING TO MORB! ITS MORBIN TIME!
#37	Stand back Toby, I’m beginning to Morb!
#31	stand back judy! I am beginning to morb i'm morbing

Figure 4

Template of the Samples in Table 12



As seen in Figure 4, this construction is simpler compared to Figure that of Figure 3. However, it maintains the rule of having a set template in which one or a few words will be changed.

The creativity of memes also meant that users were free to create Morbius memes the way they want to without necessarily following established trends. Table 13 presents some Morbius memes that do not repeat the same construction. It can be seen that they are all unique and creative. However, they all maintain that defining feature that characterize the humor of Morbius memes: the use of made-up words derived from *Morbius*.

Table 13*A Set of Morbius Memes Using Unique Constructions*

Meme	Text
#3	THIS POST HAS BEEN MORB-CHECKED BY TRUE MORBHEADS $\sqrt{\text{MORB}}$
#9	THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF BEING IN THE UNIVERSE THOSE WHO MORB, AND THOSE WHO DO NOT
#43	WATCH IT PUNK THE DOCTOR SAYS IM MORBIUS-LY A BEAST
#29	'... Morbius then picks up the Power Sword, holds it above his head and yells 'It's Morbin' Time!' with all his might, causing the Orc army to flee back to the Death Star'
#75	NOW I'M A LITTLE MORBIVATED

An Infographic on the Morphology and Syntax of Morbius Memes

The output of the study is an infographic. The purpose of the infographic is to present and visualize the findings of the study in a creative and entertaining way. It consists of two pages giving an overview of the morphological and syntactic regularities that characterize Morbius Memes. The intended audience for the infographic is the general public. In addition, it might benefit readers who are into making memes who might be interested in creating Morbius memes. Otherwise, it would serve as a fun infographic for those curious about Morbius memes. A QR code is provided for the infographic.



3.2. Discussion

From the results, several interesting interpretations emerge that are discussed and elaborated as follows. The morphological regularities that characterize Morbius memes primarily center on word formation processes, where the word *Morbius* is linguistically manipulated to create humorous made-up words. This linguistic creativity highlights the dynamic interplay between morphology and internet culture. The formation of words like *morbin*’, derived from the base word *Morbius*, exemplifies clipping and backformation, as well as derivation when combined with suffixes like *-ing*. According to Crystal (2011), internet language thrives on playfulness and innovation, often bending linguistic norms to create new forms of expression. The *-ing rule* identified in this study, where proper nouns adopt the *-ing* suffix to mimic present participles, is a humorous morphological innovation that reflects this trend. Such morphological processes not only display linguistic creativity but also reveal how memes establish shared cultural norms within online communities. By repeatedly forming words like *morbin*’, meme creators embed these constructions into a shared lexicon that signals in-group membership. This aligns with Danet and Herring’s (2007) observation that internet users often manipulate language to create new forms of identity and group solidarity. The repetitive use of *Morbius* as the morpheme to play upon also demonstrates how specific cultural phenomena can serve as linguistic anchors in digital communication.

Another significant aspect of these morphological regularities is their reliance on compounding and blending. Words like *Morbinstein* or *Morbinator* blend the root *Morbius* with other lexemes or names, creating compound neologisms that humorously exaggerate the character’s influence. These word-formation processes echo linguistic strategies commonly found in fan cultures, as noted by Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017), where humor and creativity drive the production of novel terms. The significance lies in how these processes reframe *Morbius*—a relatively obscure character in popular culture—into a widely recognized internet phenomenon. From

a semantic perspective, the made-up words often carry humorous connotations that extend the absurdity of the *Morbius* meme narrative. While their meanings are often ambiguous or context-dependent, their primary function lies in their comedic value. This use of playful ambiguity mirrors the linguistic phenomenon of semantic broadening, where words adopt flexible meanings based on context (Crystal, 2011). The meanings are constructed collaboratively by meme creators and consumers, emphasizing the communal nature of internet humor.

Syntactically, *Morbius* memes showcase regular patterns in sentence structure, particularly through recurring constructions like “It’s morbin’ time.” This phrase acts as both a linguistic and cultural template, inviting variation and replication within the meme community. As with other internet memes, the syntax of *Morbius* memes relies on intertextuality, where existing phrases are recontextualized to generate humor (Shifman, 2014). The “It’s morbin’ time” construction exemplifies this intertextual play, as it humorously mimics the formulaic catchphrases common in superhero media. However, the syntax of *Morbius* memes is not rigid. While recurring constructions form the backbone of the meme’s linguistic identity, deviations from these patterns underscore the creativity inherent in meme culture. This balance between conformity and innovation reflects what Shifman (2014) describes as the “meme’s duality,” where established templates coexist with individual creative expressions. For instance, meme creators might expand “It’s morbin’ time” into complex sentence structures or integrate it into larger narrative contexts, demonstrating the flexibility of syntactic templates.

These syntactic regularities also serve to enhance the meme’s comedic timing and delivery. Internet memes often rely on brevity and repetition to maximize their humor (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), and the recurring use of concise constructions like “It’s morbin’ time” aligns with this principle. Moreover, the simplicity of these templates makes them highly shareable and adaptable, contributing to the viral nature of *Morbius* memes. The interplay between syntax and pragmatics in these memes is another area of interest. While the syntactic constructions are primarily playful, their pragmatic function lies in their ability to evoke shared cultural knowledge about *Morbius* and its associated humor. This echoes Grice’s (1975) cooperative principle in pragmatics, where language users rely on shared understanding to create meaning. In this case, the humor of *Morbius* memes is contingent upon the audience’s familiarity with the character and the meme’s cultural context.

The morphological and syntactic regularities of *Morbius* memes underscore the broader phenomenon of linguistic innovation in internet culture. As observed by Tagg (2015), the internet provides a fertile ground for experimenting with language, leading to the rapid evolution of new linguistic norms. *Morbius* memes exemplify this by creating and popularizing novel linguistic forms that transcend traditional boundaries of word formation and syntax. Moreover, these memes highlight the influence of media and pop culture on language. The transformation of *Morbius* into a linguistic phenomenon demonstrates how cultural artifacts can be reimagined and repurposed through digital communication. This reflects what Jenkins (2006) terms “convergence culture,” where media content is collaboratively reshaped by audiences in participatory online spaces. By linguistically reimagining *Morbius*, meme creators contribute to the ongoing interplay between media and language.

The morphological and syntactic regularities that characterize *Morbius* memes reveal the intricate relationship between language, humor, and internet culture. Through innovative word-formation processes and recurring syntactic constructions, these memes create a shared linguistic identity that is both playful and culturally resonant. Future research could explore how these linguistic phenomena compare to those found in other meme cultures, shedding light on the universal and culture-specific aspects of internet language.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study aimed to describe the morphology and syntax of *Morbius* memes by looking at morphological and syntactic regularities that occur in them. In three sections, these regularities are discussed in detail. Firstly, the study discussed morphological regularities. Here, word formation is found to be a recurring feature in *Morbius* memes. These word formation processes are clipping, backformation, compounding, blending, and derivation namely. Another recurring morphological feature is what the researcher has come to call “the *-ing* rule,” in which *Morbius* memes would characteristically take proper names and affix it with the *-ing* suffix to create new words in present participle form. Secondly, the study discussed syntactic regularities. Here, recurring constructions are found to be a major syntactic feature of *Morbius* memes. The “it’s morbin’ time” phrase specifically is the most replicated construction. It was also found that *Morbius* memes have expanded on this phrase to create even longer constructions that become recurring as well. Lastly, the study presented these findings in an infographic. With this medium, the morphology and syntax of *Morbius* memes are demonstrated with visual aid and with examples. This medium also allows it the benefit of being shared online.

The morphological and syntactic regularities that occur in *Morbius* memes are, at their core, are a reflection of how memes are basically just another medium for linguistic creativity. Through this study, the researchers revealed the intricate ways in which language is manipulated and transformed in the creation of memes, highlighting specific examples of linguistic creativity like word formation and a play on sentence constructions. *Morbius* memes essentially demonstrate how language users creatively use and twist linguistic conventions not necessarily for genuine meaningful communication, but for humorous purposes. Furthermore, the cases of

linguistic creativity identified in this study—the word formation processes for instance—are already existing in the English language. Hence, it brings the idea of memes being a playground where language users subconsciously or consciously put their linguistic knowledge to practice. Therefore, one must think of the possibility of memes being probable mediums for language practice. Overall, the study sheds light on the dynamic nature of language as it adapts within online meme communities.

The research could be expanded to discuss meaning by including semantics and pragmatics in relation to the identified morphological and syntactic regularities. It could also be expanded to not only focus on image-based memes. The Morbius meme phenomenon is not limited to images or even videos. It can be observed in comment sections, discussion forums, and whatnot. Therefore, by expanding the source of data, a study on Morbius memes can yield more findings. Other researchers could also expand on the topic by looking into how the morphological and syntactic features affect the humor. They could also look into the visual elements and study how these affect the humor of the memes as well.

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