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# The Netflix Translation of Humour from the Egyptian Vernacular Dialect into MSA: the Case of “*el-Limby*” and “*Illy Baly Balak*” Films

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ARTICLE INFO

*Article history*

Received: 23 June 2022

Accepted: 29 July 2022

Published: 31 August 2022

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*Keywords:*

Netflix

Intralingual

Humour

Cultural referents

Subtitling/Dubbing

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ABSTRACT

Humour is the infallible and never-outdated medium for creating intimacy and collective understanding among peoples of versatile interests and, sometimes, conflicting attitudes. It is the moment of catching the humorous effect that counts. Humour creation is not easy because the factors that would trigger laughter vary from one person to another. Creating humour on an international level demands distinguished abilities, as it is hard to accommodate all the factors that would motivate diverse peoples and social brackets to laugh at the same time for the same reason, due to national, historical and cultural factors. The hypothesis is based upon the assumption that the world societies speak the same language with the same dialect. Yet, the situation gets complicated if translation problems and techniques are considered, and it turns to exigently complex when the source dialect differs from that of the targeted audience. However, the latter case has never been a problem for the Egyptian drama, as the entire Middle Eastern societies can transcend the dialect barrier. Notably, the vernacular dialects in the Middle East region are fundamentally diverse to extent that they are, sometimes, incomprehensible altogether. Recently, along with the growing hegemony of the online streaming forums as well as their attempt to globalise the streamed content to attract more subscribers, an active process of subtitling and dubbing are initiated. In the process, all the problems of translation, subtitling and dubbing came to the fore. The article discusses the Netflix intralingual subtitling/dubbing of the Egyptian comedies from the Egyptian vernacular dialect into MSA with reference to the famous and hilariously comic Egyptian films “*el-Limby*” (2002)<sup>[20]</sup> and “*Illy Baly Balak* [You-Know-Who]” (2003)<sup>[21]</sup> starred by the Egyptian actor Mohamed S’ad. The article also seeks to underline the influence of the Netflix subtitled/dubbed MSA content upon the Middle East region.

## 1. Introduction

Compared to cognitive abilities, humour involves “reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, complex idea comprehension, and learning from experience” (Gottfredson, 1997, p. 80)<sup>[17]</sup>. Yet, creating humour is more complicated than any cognitive ability

due to its “relative and idiosyncratic nature” (Dore, 2020, p. 19)<sup>[16]</sup>. A humorous content to one culture might not be as humorous to another or even not humorous at all. More complexity is added when attempting to translate humour so as to reach a wider audience. The major obstacle is the reproduction of humorous effects when it comes to the active process of changing the AVT mode whether it is

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concerned with the “transfer of audiovisual texts between two languages and cultures (interlingual) or within the same language and culture (intra-lingual)” (Chaume, 2013, p. 106)<sup>[8]</sup>. The reproduction process requires not only highly skilled translators but also ones who are capable of capturing the elusive nature of humour by rendering it “tangible (in the form of laughter, for instance)” so as to transfer it to its “safest place” (Vandaele, 2002, 154)<sup>[38]</sup>. Nonetheless, many scholars still debate whether humour is fully translatable because this ‘safest place’ is not necessarily capable of reflecting the genuine essence of humour in the ST. Explaining such an opposing view on the (un)translatability of humour by underlining the obstacles of transferring humour, Chiaro says:

[H]umour discourse, which is naturally impeded by linguistic and social barriers, actually succeeds in crossing geographical frontiers. The translation of Verbally Expressed Humour (VEH) concerns one of the most complex types of language to translate owing to the fact that it needs to come to terms with the very tenets of translation theory, those of equivalence and (un) translatability. (2006, p. 135)<sup>[10]</sup>

The principal mission of the translator is transferring the humour in the ST with an equal effect into the TT. Significantly, translating Verbally Expressed Humour (VEH) is linked with the translators’ intentions, objectives and choice of the linguistic medium representing the cultural background. Accordingly, providing the recipients with the same reading/viewing experience is not guaranteed.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Studying humour and humour translation receive a wide attention on the academic and the social levels. The academicians have analysed the practice of translating humour scientifically on terms of delving into the long tradition of translating humour as well as expounding the terminological and semantic problems for which they have coined various theories; (Attardo-Raskin 1991<sup>[6]</sup>, Attardo 2020<sup>[5]</sup>, Ross 2005<sup>[32]</sup>, Delabastita 1996<sup>[14]</sup>, Gutt 1992<sup>[18]</sup>, ... etc.). They have gone further in their research when they have attempted shedding more light upon AVT to elucidate the recent change in the perception and practice of translation (Diaz Cintas-Ramel 2007<sup>[15]</sup>, Chiaro 2006<sup>[10]</sup>, Chiaro 2010<sup>[11]</sup>, Remail 2003<sup>[31]</sup>, ... etc.). On the social level, theories on humour communication and cognition from a cultural dimension have been initiated to underline that the reception of the translated humour matters because it surpasses the linguistic and the semantic interests (Sperber-Wilson 1995<sup>[35]</sup>, Gutt 2000<sup>[19]</sup>, Morreall 1987<sup>[27]</sup>, ... etc.). Due to the novel interest of the Netflix online streaming forum in the shows and the dramas of the Middle East region, in its attempt to attract

more subscribers, there is an active process of translating the most famous and successful media shows into many other languages. However, the intra-lingual translation of these shows from the vernacular dialects into MSA (Modern Standard Arabic) does not receive a significant approval; especially when an active intra-lingual translation of the Egyptian comedies started. The whole project has been greeted with a severe backlash because the Netflix intra-lingual dubbing/subtitling cannot retain the hilariously humorous aspects of the original shows. Moreover, the subtitled AV comedies, which they are allegedly for the deaf and the hard-hearing, are not faithfully translated and, also, fail in making the TT reflect the cultural background of MSA.

The article adopts a qualitative approach for selecting and analysing the data of the study. The parameter of choosing the sample comic shows is based upon their effectiveness; on terms of the regional popular response to these comedies. “*el-Limby*” (2002)<sup>[20]</sup> and “*Illy Baly Balak [You-Know-Who]*” (2003)<sup>[21]</sup> are famous examples of comedy shows that have influenced the audience regionally. Apart from their commercial success since they have been on cinemas; for almost two decades, they are the most popular among all the age and social brackets in the Middle East. The mispronounced words and the mixed-up logic of *el-Limby* are still public aphorisms. The sweeping criticism against the intra-lingual translation of the widely-spread Egyptian comedies, in general, and *el-Limby* film series, in particular, deserves extensive studies. “*el-Limby*” and “*Illy Baly Balak [You-Know-Who]*” are a considerable sample because they illustrate the commonly used techniques in AVT; namely, dubbing and subtitling. Besides, the complexity of the humour in these two films makes of them a vital hub for the whole gamut of problems that would meet translating humour either intra-linguistically or interlinguistically.

Though dubbing and subtitling are comparable methods of AVT, however, analysing the dubbed/subtitled content requires, somehow, different criteria. The analysis majorly runs in the vein of comparing the ST and TT. Measuring the success of the literal and functional translations in producing effective humour triggers in the TT compared to the ones in the ST is underlined. Notably, the reference study material, “*el-Limby*” and “*Illy Baly Balak [You-Know-Who]*” films, are not translated into English. Accordingly, I have proposed a translation of the ST and TT that illustrates the problems of the Netflix intra-lingual translation of the Egyptian comedies.

## 3. Discussion and Results

A highly skilled task as it is, scholars still debate

whether humour is fully translatable (Low, 2011<sup>[24]</sup>; Chiaro, 2006<sup>[10]</sup>; Jing, 2010)<sup>[22]</sup>. The referential effect might be produced if a translator has more information about the historical and cultural backgrounds of a humorous piece that would count for the cultural-specific situations, wordplay and witty repartees which are rooted in “the particular structural characteristics of the source language” (Delabastita, 1994, p. 223)<sup>[13]</sup>. Linguistically, translating humour is a challenge because of its relative and idiosyncratic nature that makes the common practice of translation requires “mapping” and “prioritizing” (Zabalbeascoa, 2005, 187)<sup>[42]</sup>. Thus, general rules and the common dictating ‘translate the words and/or the contents and then keep your fingers crossed and hope that the humor will somehow come across with the rest’ are not enough (Zabalbeascoa, 2005, p. 188)<sup>[42]</sup>. The history and the geography should be prioritised to discover the real essence of humour in the ST. The theories of humour developed by scholars across disciplines (Vandaele 2002<sup>[38]</sup>, Attardo 2009<sup>[4]</sup>, Zabalbeascoa 2005<sup>[42]</sup>, Attardo 2001<sup>[3]</sup>, etc.) underline the intertwined linguistic, semiotic, cognitive, cultural and social aspects of humour that should be explored before presenting a functional equivalent in the TT. Yet, fully capturing the essence of the original humorous ST is still at risk despite the studious attempts to bridge the language and cultural differences.

### 3.1 Subtitling and Dubbing

The major forms of language transfer in media production are subtitling and dubbing which are, in turn, methods of translation practice. Subtitling is a rewriting practice that presents a “written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavours to recount the original dialogue of the speakers, as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards, and the like), and the information that is contained on the soundtrack (songs, voices off)” (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, p.8)<sup>[15]</sup>. As for dubbing, “the replacement of the original speech by a voice track which attempts to follow as closely as possible the timing, phrasing and lip movements of the original dialogue (qtd. in Baker & Hochel, 1998 p. 74-75)<sup>[7]</sup>. Dubbing is a practice that is similar to subtitling but in spoken form that allegedly “give a viewing experience that is closer to the original because ... [of maintaining] the original actors’ voices” (Orrego-Carmona, 2019)<sup>[28]</sup>. Compared to subtitling, it is also fettered by linguistic, semantic and temporal constraints but in a more expensive way. The dubbed and subtitled AV content makes the audience familiar with different cultural setting and enjoy the humour of other cultures but never present the same experience of the original text. In fact, the subtitles are

a rewritten version of the original story on screen that is compared to dubbing which is an oral version of the original AV content narrated from the viewpoint of the translator. In either case, the audience is trapped in an *adaptation* that usually replaces the language dependent and/or complex humour with another version reflecting the translator’s abilities and familiarity with the ST language.

### 3.2 Subtitling and Dubbing Humour

The greater challenge that posits itself before a translator is the reproduction of linguistic and idiomatic meaning of the spoken SL material that the TL audience would understand. Thus, SL grammatical mistakes are corrected and the “broken” use of language is neglected due to the linguistic and written mode constraints (Diaz Cintas and Remael, 2007, p. 192 & p.185)<sup>[15]</sup>. Considering specific lexical items; such as cultural taboo concepts/ words, insulting expressions/words, sexual idioms and swearing words, they are rendered to some more functional TL expressions or omitted altogether. As a consequence, the dubbed/subtitled AV content is reduced to a less emotionally charged adaptation as the cultural/ linguistic specific triggers of humour are insidiously generalised. The rewritten adaptation of the AV content in subtitling is, somehow, accepted the same way it is presented as long as the content is in concordance with the other visual semiotic channels; such as the actors’ gestures, tone of voice, the way they speak, space, costume, etc. However, its visibility on the screen incites the audience’s feedback; this makes the subtitling an easy target for sharp criticism. In other words, it would “offer the pretext for a linguistic game of ‘spot the error’” when the audience have command of the SL and the TL (Shochat & Stam, 1985, p. 46)<sup>[34]</sup>. Considering dubbing, it often alienates the SL material when the original soundtrack is removed so as to be replaced by the voiceover actor who limits significant semiotic channels available in case of subtitling; specifically, the actor’s tone. The “dubbing scripts ... possess more target-language-specific features” than subtitling (Vandaele, 2010, p. 64)<sup>[37]</sup>. Thus, synchronising the voiceover target script with the source script necessitates more indirect translation that may ignore/manipulate the verbally expressed humour and wordplay, and, in the process, becomes less humorous.

### 3.3 Netflix and Egyptian Humour

In its attempt to reach a wider range of worldwide audience, the online streaming forum Netflix translates world media content into various languages as well as

dialects, knowing that the intralingual translation is done from scratch producing two language varieties (Chaume, 2018, p. 89)<sup>[9]</sup>. It was a precedent, however, for the Arabic language speaking audience in the Middle East region to find their most loved comedies, which are all Egyptian productions in the Egyptian vernacular dialect, have been subtitled/dubbed into MSA. The intralinguistic subtitling/dubbing was a shock that the audience could not overcome both linguistically and psychologically. Significantly, the diverse Middle Eastern nationalities are the principal audience despite their vernacular dialect is, in some cases, unintelligible altogether to the Egyptians, as is the case with the Maghreb countries. Nonetheless, it is easy for them to understand the Egyptian vernacular dialect. Thus, the MSA dubbings and subtitles are greeted with heavy backlash on social media and journalism denouncing it as ridiculous. There is a consensus among the Middle Eastern audience that such an intralingual subtitling/dubbing is inconvenient; some assert that the Egyptian vernacular dialect “is the easiest to understand and enfolds the least incomprehensible terms,” while others believe that “the Egyptian dialect picks up jokes well” and “it would have been much better if the subtitling/dubbing practice was designed for the Maghreb countries’ dramas/movies, as their vernacular codes are too difficult to decipher” (“*el-Limby* and *School of Mischief*”, 2020)<sup>[1]</sup> [*My Translation*].

### 3.4 Mohamed S’ad’s Films and Netflix Translation

Many films starred by the Egyptian comedian Mohamed S’ad; especially his most famous two films in the “*el-Limby*” series; namely “*el-Limby*” and “*Illy Baly Balak ...*” [You-Know-Who], received the widest attention when subtitled/dubbed in MSA. The *el-Limby* film series depict the adventures and the constant mischiefs that befall an awkward bum called ‘el-Limby’ whose verbal responses and serious attempts to break the vicious circle of his bad luck are a source of hilarious laughter. The humour in “*el-Limby*” and “*Illy Baly Balak ...*” [You-Know-Who] films, in particular, and in all Mohamed S’ad’s films, in general, depend upon the invention of new language derivations, collocations and nonsensical locutions which all serve introducing a hit formula of burlesque cinematic content that are hard to imitate or reproduce; simply because S’ad makes sense of nonsensical content. Accordingly, translating that linguistic content into another foreign language *kills* the hilarious culture specific terms/locutions. In case of the MSA intralingual translation, the case is worse; as the Egyptian vernacular dialect almost defy the norms of the MSA. Unlike the written translation, dubbing and subtitling, in which the time limit and synchronisation mandate fetter the spoken/written utterance. The script

that appears on screen does not assimilate any cryptic allusions or explanatory annotations, except in very few minor cases in which the annotations seem awkward. On Twitter, cynicism and satire against the Netflix subtitling/dubbing of Mohamed S’ad’s films were acute. Amr Samado is one of the users underlined, “We are not satirising the project; it is the subtitling that we make fun of because the ST has lost its meaning. I cannot think of a proper solution. Yet, if the subtitles were in the Egyptian vernacular dialect, it would have been better.” (Samado, 2020)<sup>[33]</sup> [*My Translation*]. The non-Egyptian dialect audience who are Arabic language speakers denounced the whole project as unnecessary; it is generally conceived that “the MSA translation of comedies *per se* makes it lose its meaning.” (“*el-Limby* and *School of Mischief*”, 2020)<sup>[11]</sup> [*My Translation*]. An Iraqi university student “enormously condemns the intralingual translation. He asserts that he has never needed any MSA subtitles for a dialect that the Iraqis adore; besides the members of his family are avid audience of the Egyptian productions.” (“*el-Limby* and *School of Mischief*”, 2020)<sup>[11]</sup> [*My Translation*]. S’ad’s films introduce a new norm of informal language registers that the MSA translation has breached.

The principal obstacle of subtitling/dubbing *el-Limby* film series is that they depend upon culture specific references; not to mention the audience who almost memorise *every* and *each* line of this series. The iconic *el-Limby* character evokes a humorous effect through the creation of a special sociolect that cannot be severed from its source Egyptian dialect. Moreover, some humorous scenes are built upon wordplay, as the dialogue is heavily loaded with terms that insinuate to versatile allusions in the ST and have no equivalence in the TT. The MSA, with its rigid terms, fails to capture “the particular structural characteristics of the source language” (Delabastita, 1994, p. 223)<sup>[13]</sup>; i.e., the vernacular dialect. Such a discrepancy made the MSA subtitles/dubbings seem ridiculous. Knowing that “any action is determined by its purpose” (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984, p. 90)<sup>[30]</sup>, the translation fails to achieve its prospective function which is, originally, the *Skopos* (the purpose) for which the ST is translated; namely, creating a humorous TT that is compared to the ST. The Netflix translation should have considered that both the Egyptian vernacular dialect and the MSA have specific cultural backgrounds, which, in turn, make the ST “oriented towards, and is in any case bound to, the source culture” (Vermeer & Chesterman, 1989, p. 229)<sup>[40]</sup>. In accordance, the TT should suit the *Skopos* for which it is needed in the target culture. Considering the Netflix translation of *el-Limby* film series, it could not achieve this task.



### 3.5. Translation of “*el-Limby*” and “*Illy Baly Balak ...*” Films

Translation of “*el-Limby*” and “*Illy Baly Balak ...*” films were, sometimes, *ad verbum* (literal equivalence) attempting to make the TT as close as possible to the ST, and, in other times, *ad sensum* (functional equivalence) that attempts to retain the meaning and the humorous content as much as possible to “satisfy the needs of recipients who want to be amused by a humorous text” (Chiaro, 2010, p. 2)<sup>[11]</sup>. The Netflix MSA subtitling/dubbing is keen to use terms which are as close as possible to the vernacular dialect to the extent that the code switching and code mixing processes are almost there all the time: “Code-switching [is] a product of local speech community identities. Speakers are seen as shifting between ingroup and outgroup language varieties to establish conversational footings informed by the contrast of local vs. non-local relationships and settings” (Kester, n.d.)<sup>[23]</sup>. Though code mixing/switching is there all the time, it cannot produce the same humorous effect.

### 3.1. Analysis of the Intralingual Translation of “*el-Limby*” and “*Illy Baly Balak ...*”

The Netflix intralingual translation of “*el-Limby*” film is in form of dubbing, while “*Illy Baly Balak ...*” is closed captioned, yet, in either case, the same AVT failings are common.

### 3.2. MSA Dubbing of “*el-Limby*”

The shortcomings of the “*el-Limby*” dubbing start with the very first moment of running the film. The professional rule necessitates that the voiceover actor’s tone and voice should be close enough to the original one so as to provide a similar audio-visual experience of the original ST that will, undoubtedly, make the audience convinced with the dubbing practice. This would, in turn, facilitate being absorbed in the dubbed content without developing what Diaz Cintas and Remael call a “feedback effect” (2007, p. 55)<sup>[15]</sup>. That feedback effect is produced when the subtitles fail to reproduce the same idiomatic meaning. In case of dubbing “*el-Limby*” film in which the voices of the actors are very-well known and widely imitated, the voiceover does not only create a ‘feedback effect’, but also adds to it; as the voiceover forces tones and voices that commonly distinguish the children’s cartoons. The Netflix dubbing also removes the Egyptian accent overtones out of the dialogues replacing it with one that has a semi-Levantine aura. As for the voice of the central character, *el-Limby*, it is flattened though the original actor, Mohamed S’ad, intentionally plays with his tone and manner of pronouncing words to reflect the special personal traits and the sociolect of *el-Limby* that is a *street*

*rep.* who abuses drugs. One of the major scenes illustrating all the shortcomings of the Netflix intralingual AVT is that of *el-Limby*’s mother when she tries to make it up between her son and his fiancée so as to consummate the marriage.

#### 3.7.I. Literal (*ad verbum*) Translation<sup>①</sup>

ST	TT	Intended ST equivalent	Provided TT equivalent
مع السلام عليكم-1	مع السلام عليكم	Hi and goodbye	With Hi
إمشي يا بن المنكوبة-2	إذهب يا بن المنكوبة	Go away son of the mischievous.	Go away son of the mischievous.

In this scene, *el-Limby* is very confused and refuses the idea of being in a weak position because he considers that this is a humiliation for his macho self. He desires to leave the house of his fiancée the moment he drops in. Implicitly expressing his reluctant attitude, he plays with expression of greeting. Clipping and mixing are his technique. The Arabic greeting of (عليكم السلام) ‘*assalam alaikum*’ which literally means “peace be upon you” is principally said when a guest drops at the house of somebody. This expression is the literal equivalence of the English term “Hi”. On the contrary, the greeting said at the time of leaving is (مع السلامة) that literally means “with peace” and its literal English equivalent is “goodbye”. The original tone of the Egyptian actor Mohamed S’ad could aptly express the clipping and mixing of the two greetings so as to reveal his reluctance to be nice because he is in a weak position. Thus, he said (عليكم مع السلام) which literally means “hi and goodbye” in a neutral tone that would suit both of the greetings said at the time of dropping in and leaving. *El-Limby*’s invented greeting formula along with his tone do not seem like a sign of reluctance to make it up to the father of his fiancée, though the audience who know the background of the whole situation understand what *el-Limby* really hints to. Considering the dubbed version, the rising tone of the voiceover actor when he enthusiastically says the greeting destroys the wordplay and makes that same formula of greeting nonsensical. Notably, the tone of the voiceover actor is not the only factor to blame because the cultural background of the MSA terms does not allow the like playing with words/expressions. This proves that this nonsensical expression is what both the director and the voiceover actors understood of the provided MSA script. Wordplay and expressions mixing/switching are one of the most common comic props in all Mohamed S’ad’s films. Yet, they have been deformed in the MSA script and, in the process, humour also was lost.

The second example is a swearing formula that is used by the Egyptian vernacular dialect. Its *ad verbum*

① The translation of the Arabic content is mine.

translation in MSA is out of place because the standard Arabic language does not enfold the like formulas of swearing. The same *ad verbum* translation is repeated in many other instances; specifically, in the scenes when the mother of el-Limby rebukes her son. In each instance, the swearing formulas are shocking; especially, to the Egyptian natives' ear. The audience cannot accept similar swearing formulas in MSA the same way they do with the original copy of the film. Simply, these insulting formulas are strange to MSA. They lost their humorous aura when the non-Egyptian audience attempted to make reason of the MSA translation though such swearing formulas were very humorous in the Egyptian vernacular dialect. The Egyptian audience hilariously satirised the translation because of its incongruence. The lost humour is not retrievable by a literal script; the MSA script should be convincing enough and reflective of the cultural background of the MSA.

In the first sentence, the fiancée who refuses the idea of consummating the marriage, elucidates her position in the ST through repeating some definite words, i.e., “marry” and “finished”, so as to evoke laughter on the way she expresses her thoughts, which is compared to el-Limby's. The comic text attempts to reveal that they are a perfect foolish match. As for the TT, it gave an equivalent that suits somebody with organised thoughts. The omitted repetitions are also a vital humor trigger; especially the repetition of “finished ... finished” that Noussa, el-Limby's fiancée, repeats in several occasions making of it a characteristic personal register that she uses when she is angry.

As for the second sentence, el-Limby's way to dissuade his fiancée in the ST emphasises his macho attitude as he asserts it is her to blame if the marriage does not take place. Then he seduces her with words of endearment that are favoured in her social class; namely, by calling her “بت” , which is a derogatory term of a “female”. Notably, its English equivalent is “chick”. Likewise, he defines himself as “the adoration”; a title that is familiar and commonly used in el-Limby's social class. Both terms are used by lovers when they reach the highest levels of love and intimacy. The TT lacks the derogatory overtones which are a sign

of intimacy in el-Limby's low social class. The TT is a mixture of balanced MSA when he calls his fiancée “فتاة” (girl), and literal translation of the ST when he calls himself “the adoration”. The TT translation might have solved the problem if the vernacular word “بت” was replaced by the MSA word “بنيت” that would have expressed some derogatory overtones of endearment the same way the word “بت” does.

The functional translation of the script written in Egyptian vernacular dialect has created a new script, or better defined as *adaptation*, that has no definite national identity. In the first sentence, the father of the fiancée complains of the audacity of el-Limby to his mother; yet, the translation has turned it to an insulting formula. The second sentence, which is the retort of el-Limby's mother to that complaint, reveals that she indirectly backs her son's attitude. She confirms her stance by implicitly insulting the father of the fiancée for having the audacity to criticise her son's behaviour. The mother's dexterous handling of the situation is a source of enormous humour. Considering the intralingual translation, it has given the opposite sense; the mother has explicitly insulted both of her son and the father of the fiancée. El-Limby's comment to the angry attitude of the father of the fiancée is menacing to pull down the house because El-Limby is angry. However, the intralingual translation changed his comment to a menace to “set fire to the house”, that menace is added to the original text. There is no reason behind that change except a subjective translation that imposes personal attitudes the way it prefers and, in the process, it writes a new script.

In the fourth sentence, the angry fiancée asserts that there are so many who court her in the neighborhood that she proudly defines as “Misr El Kadima”. But the name of the district is omitted in the translation to be replaced by the neutral word “district” that obliterates the distinctive identity of the space where the action of film takes place.

The fifth and the sixth sentences illustrate that the nice dwellers of “Misr El Kadima” congratulate el-Limby because they know that his mother is at his fiancée's house to arrange for the wedding party. They are unaware that el-Limby is angry because he was forcibly ousted out of his fiancée's house. Vexed as he is, his impulsive retort to some passerby who congratulates him is dismissing

### 3.7.II. MSA Equivalents ( mixture of *ad sensum* and *ad verbum* translation)

ST	TT	Intended ST equivalent	Provided TT equivalent
بصي يا خالتي فرنسا، مش متجوزاه يعني مش متجوزاه، وبصي ... خلاص خلاص	أيتها الخالة فرنسا، لن أتزوجه مطلقاً بتائاً، وأيضاً انتهى الأمر	Look, Aunt Faransa, I will not marry him which means that I will not marry him, and, also ... finished, finished.	O you Aunt Faransa, I will never ever get married to him, and, also, it's over.
كده بتخربي على نفسك يا نوسة. ده أنا الليمي يا بت، العشق يا بت.	لا تقسدي الزيجة يا نوسة، إنني الليمي يا فتاة، العشق يا فتاة.	That way you are destroying your marriage, Noussa. It's me el-Limby, you chick. I'm the adoration, you chick.	Don't spoil the marriage, Noussa. It's me el-Limby, you girl. I'm the adoration, you girl.

## 3.7.III. Totally New Script

ST	TT	Intended ST equivalent	Provided TT equivalent
1. والد الخطيبة: شافية البجاجة بتاعة ابنك	والد الخطيبة: أرايت تبجح هذا الأبله	The fiancée's father: See how daring your son is!	The fiancée's father: Did you perceive the audacity of that stupid?!
2. والدة الليمبي: غور يا وش التصايب غور ... غور يا وش التصايب، خليت اللي يسوى واللي ما يسواش يقولك غور يا حزين	والدة الليمبي: انصرف أيها الأحمق المعتوه ... انصرف أيها الأحمق جعلتنا عرضة لكلام الرعاع المتشردين.	el-Limby's mother: Get out you mischiefs creator, get out ... Get out you mischiefs creator. You encouraged the valuable and the valueless say to you "get out", you poor.	el-Limby's mother: Get out you stupid idiot ... Get out you stupid. You made the homeless mop call us names.
3. الليمبي: هتخليني أكسر البيت على اللي فيه	الليمبي: سأشعل النار في أرجاء هذا المنزل	el-Limby: You will make me pull down the house while you all are in.	el-Limby: I will set fire to the house.
4. الخطيبة: أنا نص مصر القديمة بتجري ورايا	الخطيبة: إن نصف سكان المقاطعة يسعون وراي	The fiancée: Half of the dwellers of Misr El Kadima neighbourhood are after me.	The fiancée: Half of the dwellers of the district are after me.
5. الليمبي: الله يسهلك يا عم	الليمبي: وفقك الله يا صاح	el-Limby: Kindly, go away, man.	el-Limby: May God make you lucky, man.
6. أحد الجيران: الفرح - إمتى يا لمبي؟ الليمبي: بصوتك ده مش هيمت إن شاء الله	أحد الجيران: - مبارك يا لمبي. الليمبي: - له ما له وعليه ما عليه، يا رجل	A neighbor: - Limby, when is the wedding party? el-Limby: - With that voice of yours, it will never take place, may God will.	A neighbor:-Congrats, Limby. el-Limby: - It has got its pros and cons, man.

him the same way a beggar is dismissed "Go away kindly man." That offhanded retort was translated as a kind wish for good luck. In the sixth sentence, el-Limby's extremely rude and insulting retort to the man who asks when the wedding would take place is replaced by an ambiguous one; i.e. "It has got its pros and cons". The retorts of el-Limby in the dubbed version suit a polite person who somehow acts like a *douche*. As for the humour, it has been lost; as the new script left for the audience nothing to laugh at except the visual assets that, somehow, do not suit the screened new script in form of subtitles.

The mother of el-Limby explains to the father of Noussa, her son's fiancée, that his daughter is extremely beautiful and desirable. Thus, refusing to consummate the marriage just before making the wedding party, as agreed before, would disrepute his daughter. Faransa, el-Limby's mother, she uses simple vernaculars when describing Noussa and warning against the adverse consequences of refusing to consummate the marriage. Faransa's linguistic expressions

are illustrative of her social and cultural backgrounds. The translation, nonetheless, has replaced her simple terms with a highly complicated poetry line of the pre-Islamic poet al-A'sha. In these lines, al-A'sha describes an extremely gorgeous lady with highly complicated and obsolete Arabic terms that are decipherable by those who are interested in obsolete terminology or specialised in pre-Islamic poetry. In addition, the description is not applicable to the fiancée's physical traits; this makes the subtitles do not match what is projected on screen. Furthermore, the Egyptian audience are not familiar with that reference as it is not recurrent in the Egyptian media productions, and, equally, it is not commonly used in the daily exchanges. Obviously, such a line is neither proper to be said by the illiterate mother of el-Limby nor relevant to the assumptions of the audience. In brief, the proposed MSA script does not only fail to capture the humour in the original vernacular one but also troubles the audience with bizarre terms.

## 3.7.IV. Functional Translation with Remote Cultural References

ST	TT	Intended ST equivalent	Provided TT equivalent
هي بنتك أي كلام؟ البنت حلوة ونعشة وورشة وتمشي في الحارة ... يعني ... شوف الكلام اللي هيقال بقى!	- إنها غزء فرعاء مصقول عوارضها وتمشي الهويينا كما يمشي الوجي الوحل، فاسمع ماذا يقولون.	-Is your daughter anybody? She is beautiful, funny and sweet, and when she walks down the alley, ... I mean, listen to what would be said about her, then!	She is white, tall with a wide forehead. She walks seductively slowly. Listen to what they say!

### 3.3. MSA Closed Caption Subtitling of “*Illy Baly Balak ...*”

Considering “*Illy Baly Balak ...*” [You-Know-Who] film, the closed caption subtitling is no better than dubbing; it has failed to meet the dominant cultural standards of both languages. The Netflix translation does not interfere as much as it can with the original script. *Ad verbum* translation is dominant and whenever there is a term/phrase that requires a cultural equivalent, omission is the solution. Unfortunately, abiding to this strategy makes the subtitling unprofessional in the wide majority of instances because it literally copies vernacular expressions; does not give an explanation to literal translation of cultural references; and completes unfinished utterances that are supposed to remain cropped or incomplete.

The “*Illy Baly Balak ...*” [You-Know-Who] film which is another episode starred by el-Limby depicts how his life is terminated after an accident that he suffers in his attempt to escape out of prison. Unfortunately, the prison manager who is personally chasing el-Limby also dies at that same accident. Notably, the body of the prison manager remains intact while el-Limby’s is seriously damaged though his brain remains actively alive. Humorously, an ambitious doctor experiments with transplanting the brain of el-Limby in the body of the prison manager whose name is Riyadh el-Manfalouti that the new el-Limby, who has the brain of el-Limby and the body of the prison manager, pronounces as Riyadh el-Pantalooni, which means *pantaloons* (trousers). The humour stems out of the stupid behaviour of el-Limby who is trapped in the body of the respectable prison manager.

#### 3.8. I. Literal translation of vernacular expressions:

Attempting literal translation as a solution to avoid the pitfalls of the MSA intralingual translation of an immensely humorous ST, the TT reads as another copy of the Egyptian vernacular dialect script with all its socio-cultural background written in MSA. To wrap the translation with an MSA aura, minor MSA words are added, in some minor cases, while in the majority, such an aura is neglected. “[Translation] problems are often as much bicultural as they are bilingual, and bicultural informants [...] are needed to determine when

a good translation is not a good adaptation [cultural transfer] into another culture” (Osgood et al, 1975, p. 17)<sup>[29]</sup>. Ignoring the cultural references deprives the audience of the humorous effect.

Notably, both sentences are almost identically pronounced in the vernacular and the MSA utterances. Yet, using the thematic terms “ازغرطلك ولا اطبلك” in an MSA context seems inconvenient; a functional translation would have been more proper. “This means that the translation has to be relatively free because in order to be effective certain expressions cannot be reproduced literally. Moreover, as a comic effect is impossible without smooth text comprehension, some expressions have to be expanded in a certain way” (Thierfelder, 1961 p. 74 qtd in *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*)<sup>[36]</sup>. The closed caption subtitling in “*Illy Baly Balak ...*” depends upon producing literal/semi-literal parodies of the vernacular dialect ST that would differ from the TT written in MSA only on terms of pronouncing certain letters or/and abiding to the orthographical rules of MSA. By blurring the lines of demarcation between the vernacular terms and the MSA ones, the ‘smooth text comprehension’ that would produce the ‘comic effect’ is distorted because the comic effect is replaced by a shock that produces cynicism. Notably, the literal copying of the vernacular terms/expressions in an MSA context is a strategy that this commonly used in “*Illy Baly Balak ...*”.

Functional translation is an infallible strategy when the literal becomes inconvenient. Yet, translating humour also requires maintaining the humour triggers to maintain the humorous effect. In the first sentence, humour in the ST is produced out of the unfinished word and the illogical punishment that el-Limby awkwardly pronounces. He threatens of making his friend’s nose with three holes not only two. The MSA translation discarded all the humour triggers for the sake of producing a logically and linguistically correct sentence that expresses similar meaning.

The translation pitfall is clearer in the second sentence when the humour in the ST is replaced by a menacing perlocution. Instead of translating the humorous warning of squeezing an adult criminal until ‘juvenile delinquents’ would come out of him, a logical warning was introduced. Thus, the deaf and the hard-hearing, who are the targeted bracket of such an intralingual closed captioned subtitling, would miss the humour in the expression that is actually trending.

ST	TT	Intended ST equivalent	Provided TT equivalent
- يعني ازغرطلك ولا اطبلك علشان تعرف ابي ابراهيم الاهتم؟	- هل ازغرد لك ام اطبل لك لتتأكد اني "ابراهيم الاهتم"؟	Would I ululate or drum for you so that you would know that I'm Ibrahim al-Ahtam.	Would I ululate or drum for you so that you would make sure that I'm Ibrahim al-Ahtam.



## 3.8. II. Functional Translation

ST	TT	Intended ST equivalent	Provided TT equivalent
1-والله العظيم أ... أطلعك في مناخيرك ثلاث إخراج في مناخيرك.	1-أقسم أن أصنع لك 3 فتحات في أنفك	I swear to God, a ... a ... I'll gear three holes to pop in your nose.	I swear to make three openings in your nose.
2- تغلط، ياريت، همسك أعصرك، هنزل منك أطفال أحداث	2-إن أخطأتما، كم أتمنى ذلك، سألقنكما درسًا لن تنسياه.	If you do wrong, hopefully you would, I'll squeeze you till juvenile delinquents would come out of you.	If you do wrong, I really wish so, I would teach you a lesson that you wouldn't forget.

## 3.8. III. Omission of Important Humour Triggers

ST	TT	Intended ST equivalent	Provided TT equivalent
1- يا سلام؟ إيه ده؟ إيه اللي ببيزر من وراء الباب الخوشب ده؟	- حقًا! ما هذا؟ من الذي يمزح من وراء الباب؟	Really! What's this? What's that thing which is joking behind that woody door?	Really! What's this? Who is joking behind the door?
2-إيه الخنقة دي! أعوذ بالله! أعوذ بالله! إقعد يا عم إنت وهو، إقعد. إيه!	- ما خطبكم؟	How choking! OMG! OMG! Sit down you man, and the other one, too. SIT DOWN. Come on!	What's wrong with you?
3-عندنا غطا ويلزم الحلة، وعاوزين ندخل الغطا والحلة في قلب بعض	خريد الجمع بين الغطاء والطنجرة	We've got a lid that needs a pot. We want to put the lid <i>through</i> the pot, and vice versa.	We want to put the lid on the pot.
4-الحادثة عملتني دماغ، ودماغ جامدة كمان. يعني أنا بقيت بدماعين.	- لقد جعلني الحادث في حالة نشاط ذهني، نشاط ذهني حاد أيضًا.	The accident made me high, and ... extremely high, too. This means that I have two highs.	The accident made me mentally alert and sharp, as well.

Humour triggers are omitted to be replaced by flat functional translation. In the first sentence, in the ST, el-Limby's cynicism of the one who knocks at the door is the principal humour trigger. The mispronunciation of the word "wood" adds to the humour and accentuates el-Limby's sociolect that has become regionally trending. Yet, the TT has omitted the cynical attitude and the mispronunciation. The result is a flat utterance that lacks humour. As for the second example, in the ST, there is a couple of sentences reflecting el-Limby's impatience and how simple situations get on his nerves. All his angry utterances are expressed in a funny manner supported by his gestures and tone of voice. In the translation, yet, they are reduced to only one sentence that is devoid of any humorous traces. The third sentence is a famous popular saying that is commonly said in marriage proposals to assert that the suitor is a perfect match

for the female; just like a pot and its lid completing each other. The mixed up logic of el-Limby in the ST is replaced by a proper and a correct formula of that saying in the TT. In the fourth sentence, el-Limby in the prison manager body affirms his relentless character in front of the prisoners but the whole situation is deflated by the mixed up logic of el-Limby. The TT, however, shows that el-Limby behaves and speaks like a firm, educated prison manager who knows well how to subjugate the prisoners. This utterance asserts that el-Limby has become wise and sober. In contradiction is the ST, el-Limby menaces the prisoners like a drug abuser. The aforementioned examples are just a sample of many others that have deflated the comic effect by omitting the humour triggers. The TT replaces the chaotic foolish utterances of el-Limby with logical, polite and reasonable ones. The new MSA script has created a character

## 3.8. VI. Mistranslation

ST	TT	Intended ST equivalent	Provided TT equivalent
1- أنتم حثالة المجتمع وطفلة الحشرة. حمالار	- أنتم حثالة المجتمع وفضلات الحشرة حمار	You are the scum of society and a baby insect. Doonkey	You are the scum of society and insect excretion donkey
2-رياض البنطلوني اللي شابل قلبه وحاطط مكانه علبة بلاك (أسود)	-رياض البنطلوني الذي انتزع قلبه واستبدله بصندوق [بالإنجليزية] أسود	- Riyadh el-Pantalooni who took out his heart and replaced it with a container of mazut.	Riyad el-Pantalooni who tore out his heart and replaced it with a black [in English] box.

that contradicts the one described in the original script.

Cultural referents, new collocations, weird derivations and unusual inventions of terms and terminological associations are important humour triggers in Mohamed S'ad's films. Nonetheless, the like triggers in the process of intralingual/interlingual translation are deemed problematic. To avoid repeated omissions of problematic humour triggers, the Netflix MSA translation attempts some sort of a subjective equivalent that, in many instances, proves inability to assimilate the ST. Consequently, the TT is incomprehensible or mistranslated. For example, in the first sentence, the Netflix translation could neither understand the new terminological invention of "baby insect" nor could perceive that the word "donkey" is a separate swearing word that is leveled to some prisoner, not addressed to all the prisoners as in the main sentence. Yet, the TT produced a new incomprehensible formula "insect excretion donkey" that is striking, not funny. As for the second example, the major humour trigger is the term "black" that the Egyptians use to refer to "mazut". The cultural referent of "somebody tore his heart out to replace it with a container of mazut" is used when referring to somebody who turned extremely intolerant and cruel. The Netflix translation, nonetheless, could neither comprehend the cultural referent nor the exact meaning of the term 'black'. It introduced irrelevant ambiguous term "black box" which gives an impression that el-Limby refers to the 'black box' of a plane. Whenever the ST is incomprehensible, some subjective formula replaces the ST making use of some aspect that might make the new TT sound correct, as is the case when the term "black" that has become the launching point of an irrelevant translation.

All over "Illy Baly Balak ..." film, the intentionally mispronounced words are a source of vivid humour for the Egyptian and Arab audience to the extent that they are widely imitated until now. Yet, the Netflix subjectively assumes that mispronunciations should be corrected so as to make the TT easy to understand; the same way it did when correcting "sandwichtes" to be "sandwiches" in the first sentence, and "adibing" to be "abiding" in the second sentence. Correcting the mispronounced word in

the second sentence was minor compared to neglecting the translation of other vital humour triggers in that same sentence; namely, omitting a whole phrase ("In concise brief words") and mistranslating a term (ءءافك was translated as "competent" though, in the street slang, it means "trustworthy"). Both examples reveal that wordplay mixed with specific cultural references are mistranslated.

### 3.4. The Results of the Analysis of the MSA Intralingual Translation of "el-Limby" and "Illy Baly Balak ..."

The analysis of the MSA intralingual translation of "el-Limby" and "Illy Baly Balak ..." reveals the vernacular dialect and the culture-specific referents are problematic because they require more in-depth understanding. As a communication act, subtitling/dubbing should express a similar meaning that is not only based upon subjective decoding of the ST, but also "according to subjective criteria and goals" that would lead to "success in achieving predefined goals against the operative constraints for each occasion" (Zabalbeascoa, 1994, p. 90)<sup>[43]</sup>. Knowing that accuracy and 'authenticity' in translation, is a farfetched wish, translating humour is a harder task. As for the subtitling/dubbing practice, faithful and fluent TT requires much harder efforts and broader knowledge that would transcend the linguistic translation from one language to another.

It is important to point out that fictional audiovisual texts are constrained by the conventions of scripting and film language; consequently, the basic principle of a sociolinguistically faithful representation of how people actually speak is by and large wishful thinking (as is the case for written literature). (Voellmer & Zabalbeascoa, 2014, p. 234)<sup>[41]</sup>

It is true that faithful translation of fictional audiovisual texts is a 'wishful thinking' but the translation of humour should retain humour triggers as much as possible so that the cultural background of the characters could be easily identified. Furthermore, the distinguished cultural features

### 3.8.V. Correcting Mispronounced Words

ST	TT	Intended ST equivalent	Provided TT equivalent
- آه، دول خطفوا مني السنوشنات.	نعم، خطفت مني حافظة الشطانر.	Yes, they snatched my sandwichtes (for sandwiches).	Yes, they snatched my sandwiches bag.
-يعني بالمختصر المفيد نتلزم بالقوانين تبقى صاحبي وحببي وكفاءة.	-إذا التزمنا بالقوانين نصير أصدقاء مقربين وكفاءة.	In concise brief words, if you become law-adibing [abiding], you would be my friend and intimate and trustworthy.	If you become law-abiding, we would be intimate friends and competent.

and referents that are inherent in various languages as well as would differ in their dialects varieties should be maintained by finding their counterparts that would replace the ones in the ST. Thus, the TT would almost retain the humour triggers in the ST. In accordance, the chance for the humorous effect to survive becomes greater. The translator, who is also a receptor of the AV material, should not be enmeshed in a process of encoding/decoding the ST from a standpoint that would add to the complexity of the original text. AV humour does not only address the audience's linguistic abilities but cultural backgrounds, as well. Accordingly, success in subtitling/dubbing AV humour is determined by the ability to *domesticate* the TT in a way that would render it fluent, "intelligible and even familiar to the target-language" audience (Venutti, 1992, p. 5)<sup>[39]</sup>.

An intralingual translation is compared to any other translation practice from one language into another, yet, in a more complicated manner. In any translation act, the original text (ST) is translated from scratch into the TT, and, in the process, the TT is "consulted" in the production of a "close dialect", or "or simply adapting the nominal and verbal features that differentiate the two language varieties, without consulting the original text" (Chaume, 2018, p. 89)<sup>[9]</sup>. In case of the intralingual translation, two language varieties are produced generating two different texts. Frederic Chaume confirms: "Two translations into two varieties of the same language are not the same text. So the term 'translation' does not imply the transfer of a text into just one language variety" (Chaume, 2018, p. 89)<sup>[9]</sup>. *el-Limby* film series have undergone such stages that have, at the end, transformed the MSA subtitled/dubbed films into re-written versions of the original ones.

### 3.5. The Netflix Intralingual Translation of "el-Limby" and "Illy Baly Balak ..." and the Arabic Language Speaking Subscribers:

Surprisingly, the number of the Egyptian subscribers of the Netflix forum have soared after shots of "el-Limby" and "Illy Baly Balak ...", subtitled/dubbed in MSA, have been shared on social media. Turning into trending comics, the newly re-written script is cynically described as "an extra-dose of amusement" ("After the translation", 2020)<sup>[2]</sup> [*My Translation*]. The Egyptian audience picked up the discrepancy between the translated MSA content and its cultural background, which is not expressive of the Egyptian vernacular dialect. The Egyptians assert that the MSA subtitling/dubbing is hilariously ridiculous because it fails to reflect the cultural background of the TT content said/written in MSA language because the MSA language has a culture of its own. Knowing that the "organised packages of knowledge based on

previous experience of objects, events and situations, which are stored in memory; ... [are] defined as mental representations of typical instances" (Cook, 1994, p. 11)<sup>[12]</sup>, the Egyptian audience have assumed the position of an interpreter whose background knowledge of the film actuates a re-interpretation of the newly re-written script in the vernacular dialect. Shocked by the MSA terms and the structures used to express their stored ST, the audience treat the new MSA script as a humorous joke; simply, because they feel that their stored culture-bound knowledge make them "more superior to the others" (Morreall, 1987, p. 9)<sup>[27]</sup> as well as because they are capable of "humour deciphering" (Attardo, 2009, p. 23)<sup>[4]</sup>. This supremacy is invoked by the incongruence of the TT that fails to produce a "message" that is "coherent 'in itself' and 'sufficiently' coherent with the situation in which it is received" (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984, p. 98)<sup>[30]</sup>. Notably, *el-Limby*'s character is accounted a national stereotype whose verbal expressions and gestures are deemed "public information about social groups that [sic] is shared among the individuals within a culture" (Macrae, et al., 1996, p. 10)<sup>[25]</sup>. The audience's amusement doubles while anticipating how some unconventional term would be translated. As the subtitling/dubbing is always lacking and inadequate to its purpose, the audience compensate the lost humour by making fun of the whole situation.

### 3.6. The Influence of the Netflix Subtitled/Dubbed MSA Content upon the Middle East Region

Despite the MSA subtitling/dubbing are useful for the deaf/hard hearing as well as those who watch their favourite shows on smart phones while commuting, the Netflix translation is a re-written version that fails to reflect the humour in the original one. For the Egyptians, the re-written script is a hilarious joke. For the other Arab nationalities, yet, it is a different and non-humorous content ("*el-Limby* and *School of Mischief*", 2020)<sup>[1]</sup>. On the long run, the MSA translations will negatively affect the Middle Eastern region. The Egyptian dramas are the hub where the versatile dialects of the Arab region converge. The dialect of the Egyptian media productions is comprehensible for any other nationality in the region. Thus, they set themselves as an example that motivates the other nationalities to follow their steps in hope that they would, likewise, attract audience from other nationalities in the region. The Syrian dramas won more audience when followed such a strategy, and the Gulf media productions currently do the same. Depending upon the MSA subtitling/dubbing, however, would insinuate the drama creators to produce a media content that solely pleases the national audience and celebrates a full national

dialect. Absorption in nationalism will make it impossible for the non-native audience to understand not only the dialect but also the cultural backgrounds of any humorous content. In brief, the media productions would be swollen with “*Arabics*” which are only comprehensible through MSA subtitling/dubbing.

#### 4. Conclusion

Notably, the Netflix intralingual translation of its streamed content is not specifically consecrated to the Middle Eastern media productions; the same project has been initiated in many other world regions; such as in the Spanish and Russian languages speaking ones. In whichever case, the project is opposed because translating some media content into a formal dialect is typically compared to its translation into another language. In either case, the TT is ever lacking. As for the humorous effect, it is lost in translation. On the long run, the subtitling/dubbing of the iconic *el-Limby* films, as is the case with many other comedies, would cease to be as humorous as they used to be because the cultural background of the films will be alien. The laughter will principally depend upon the *visual content* that illustrates the gestures of the actors and their performance in humorous situations. As for the spoken language which is divested out of its cultural background, it will cease being as hilariously humorous as it used to be.

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