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## **Fansubbing as a Locus of Experimentation and Subversion-A Case Study of Amateur Arabic Subtitles of Selected English Movies**

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### **Abstract**

One of the manifestations of the culture of prosumption that has arisen owing to the proliferation of digital technologies is the so-called fansubbing. The present study is premised on the idea that fansubbing, which refers to the practice of providing pro bono subtitles by fans for fans in affinity spaces, has heralded a paradigm shift in the field of audiovisual translation studies by virtue of its experimental and subversive ethos. It is experimental through introducing novel, creative practices that diverge glaringly from standard subtitling norms for the purpose of offering an immersive experience for the audience. It is subversive in the way it challenges the conventional invisibility of subtitlers by resorting to diverse forms of intervention in the semiotic composition of audiovisual texts. The significance of this amateur translation practice in Arabic is arguably underexplored. To address this paucity, the present study attempts to explore the phenomenon of Arabic fansubbing through a corpus of selected English movies from different genres. The analytical framework comprises Nornes's (1999, 2007) concept of abusive subtitling as it resonates with a core issue in the study, namely the visibility of fansubbers. The study draws on Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez's (2006) taxonomy of fansubbing conventions for the purpose of providing a detailed perusal of the experimental and subversive strategies used in Arabic fansubbing.

*Keywords:* fansubbing, abusive subtitling, visibility, experimentation, subversion

### **1. Introduction**

When the internet came into being last century, it transformed communication, giving rise to virtual communities where audiovisual exchanges have become at the disposal of cybercitizens (Díaz Cintas, 2013). The predilection for audiovisual interaction was impelled first by the rise of the cinema and television industry and was later catalyzed by the onset of the digital revolution toward the end of the twentieth century (Díaz Cintas, 2013). The rise of Web 2.0 has oiled the wheels of the creation and dissemination of contents by users, thus bestowing power on them (Díaz Cintas, 2013; Jiménez-Crespo & Ramírez-Polo, 2022). Web 2.0 is home to generating ideas and actualizing them in a digital space that draws on collective intelligence (Perrino, 2009). That is why it can be argued that communication is witnessing "a process of internetisation," the reach of which extends to subtitling (Díaz Cintas, 2013, p. 121). Given the mounting importance of technology, Pym (2011) argues that it is no longer a matter of being able to translate but rather a matter of being able to harness

technology, which poses a threat to “established power” and opens the door to “volunteers and paraprofessionals” (p. 5), hence “driving us to a world of amateurish fun” (p. 6). In a similar vein, Jenkins (2007) believes that “*fandom* is the future” (p. 361) and that “there is a new kind of cultural power emerging as fans bond together within larger communities, pool their information, shape each other’s opinions, and develop a greater self-consciousness about their shared agendas and common interests” (pp. 362-363). With the increasing engagement of consumers-cum-producers in translation practices, the standards governing the acceptability of translation and translators “are being altered by new configurations in the virtual reality of the global web” (Cronin, 2010, p. 136). The aggrandizement of digital technology has facilitated the flux of audiovisual materials on the internet, with subtitling being the audiovisual translation form that has the lion’s share of preference among netizens (Díaz Cintas, 2005). Viewers are no longer passive receivers of ready-made subtitles; rather, they have assumed a more active role by venturing into the world of subtitling by dint of the affordability of subtitling software. The thriving of subtitling “has allowed for the emergence of new voices—voices of dissent that subvert rules and conventions traditionally considered standard in the delivery of subtitles” (Díaz Cintas, 2005, p. 29). These new voices represent a growingly subversive movement to reckon with. The realm of audiovisual translation is experiencing “a process of hybridization where different subtitling approaches and strategies are competing” (Díaz Cintas, 2005, p. 31). Against this backdrop, the objective of the present study is to examine the phenomenon of Arabic fansubbing of selected English movies to highlight the experimental and subversive strategies that reflect the abusive approach adopted by the fansubbers. In other words, the study attempts to address the following research question:

How can the amateur Arabic subtitles of the selected English movies be indicative of the experimental and subversive paradigm of fansubbing?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Rise of Fansubbing*

Research on audiovisual translation has long been dominated by a focus on professional practices informed by standard conventions and norms. The situation has changed, however, in the wake of the new, burgeoning culture spearheaded by amateurs and fans. The academic focus has steered more toward exploring the dynamics of amateur audiovisual translation practices, such as the subtitling of Japanese anime and manga by ardent fans of their own volition. The dissatisfaction of anime fans with official corporate subtitles that obliterate the cultural nuances of anime was the driving force behind the rise of the fansubbing movement in the 1980s (Dwyer, 2019; Pérez-González, 2007a; Pérez-González, 2020). Moreover, it rose as a backlash against the dubbing of Japanese anime for English-speaking audiences (O’Sullivan, 2011) and was propelled by the desire to overcome language hurdles and the limited dissemination of Japanese animations (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007). Without remuneration, fans have taken matters into their own hands and started

producing subtitles that meet the expectations of their fellow fans. Fandom culture essentially forms the bedrock of fansubbing where fans revel in popularizing contents that they are passionate about and sharing them with others in languages they comprehend (Costales, 2012).

Japanese anime fansubbing is the starting spark for the ensuing booming of fansubbing practices beyond the anime remit. This fans-for-fans translation praxis has extended to include, inter alia, fansubbing of movies. Principally, fansubbing denotes “fan communities that voluntarily produce and freely distribute subtitles via the internet as opposed to an officially licensed translation done by professionals” (Díaz Cintas, 2018, p. 133). Fansubbing is a fan activity that can be carried out by a single person or by groups of fans and can be stimulated by aesthetic or political objectives (Pérez-González, 2012b). Besides the term fansubbing, there are many names that refer to the practice of producing translation on a voluntary basis, such as *collaborative translation* (Costales, 2012; O’Brien, 2011), *user-generated translation* (O’Hagan, 2009), *community translation* (Costales, 2012), *volunteer translation* (Olohan, 2014; Pym, 2011), *non-professional translation* (Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva, 2012), *cybersubtitling* (Díaz Cintas, 2018), *voluntary subtitling* (Chaume, 2018), *co-creational subtitling* (Pérez-González, 2012a), among others.

Initially being of hazy contours, fansubbing has now amassed wide attention, transiting from the margins to the light (Orrego-Carmona & Lee, 2017). Regardless of its contentious legality on account of its reliance on disseminating materials with copyright over the internet without obtaining permission, translation carried out by fans has morphed into “a global phenomenon” (O’Hagan, 2009, p. 94). Sweeping technological advances and low-cost subtitling software have provided a breeding ground for fansubbing (Díaz Cintas, 2018; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007). The way digital technologies have become largely accessible has encouraged many to embark on subtitling outside the confines of industrial subtitling spheres for a variety of purposes (Huang, 2022). The exponential involvement of amateurs in subtitling practices “is inextricably intertwined with the reconfiguration of the digital media industries into participatory spheres” (Pérez-González, 2017, p. 18). Being one of the exemplifications of community translation, the *raison d’être* of fansubbing lies in the desire to grant others the opportunity to enjoy media contents in their languages (Costales, 2012). This chiefly springs from a sense of affinity for a community that is based on collective efforts to share and circulate contents of common interest (Costales, 2012). Given this aspect of affinity, fansubbing is exemplary of Gee’s (2004) concept of *affinity space* which denotes “a place or set of places where people can affiliate with others based primarily on shared activities, interests, and goals, not shared race, class, culture, ethnicity, or gender. They have an affinity for a common interest or endeavor” (p. 67). People who speak different languages and descend from various cultural roots can come together in this affinity space. Interaction lies at the core of fansubbing affinity spaces where it is customary in these digitally mediated spaces that the audience articulate their feedback concerning the fansubbed materials, which helps fansubbers enhance their practice (Vazquez-Calvo et al., 2019).

Fundamentally, fansubbing emblemizes the rise of participatory zones that are established by self-appointed subtitlers for the creation and dissemination of free subtitles for various audiovisual texts.

## 2.2. *Fansubbing as a Paradigm of Prosumption*

The internet has paved the way for the evolution of the so-called *prosumption* (Ritzer, 2015). Prosumption is a blended word that was created by Toffler (1980) from the combination of the two words of production and consumption. The long-established dividing line between production and consumption in mediascape is fading (Jones, 2019), “leading to new forms of playful citizenship” (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 227). The unremitting progress in communication technologies has helped users gain the upper hand apropos of the creation of what they need (von Hippel, 2005). The cyberspace is characterized by “decentralisation” and “deregulation” that “offer individuals the potential to act as prosumers and to become a source of information” (Díaz Cintas, 2018, p. 140). The empowering potential of electronic media resides in allowing ordinary citizens to play the role of prosumers, which poses a serious challenge to “the top-down tyranny of the media” (Gross, 2009, p. 67). Chaume (2018) argues that “the producers and distributors of audiovisual contents will have to take into account the social, co-participating and unrestricted nature of this new scenario whereby contents have to be produced together *with* the audience and no longer *for* the audience” (p. 52). Simply put, the dynamics of production and consumption have been largely revolutionized and have empowered consumers, turning them into producers.

The practice of fansubbing is marked by proactivity; fansubbers bow out of the role of passive users of cultural products and instead take on the role of agents (Vazquez-Calvo et al., 2019). Accordingly, fansubbing epitomizes the burgeoning culture of prosumption (Dwyer, 2019). Since amateur subtitlers not only consume audiovisual materials but also play an active role in producing subtitles for them, these amateurs can be regarded as prosumers whose subtitling practices are characterized by a transformative timbre (O’Hagan, 2009; Pérez-González, 2014). Pérez-González (2014) posits that the translation practice of prosumers can be viewed as “an act of resistance against the dynamics of the media marketplace and the socio-economic structures that sustain it” (p. 245). Empowered by digital technologies, amateur subtitlers have instigated a new mode of consumption of media content, thus “turning digital media into new terrains of democratization” (Pérez-González, 2012c, p. 159). The digitization of mass media has turned it into “a more interactive experience, thus giving individuals the opportunity of being not only information receivers, but also information sources” (Díaz Cintas, 2018, p. 131). In light of this, fansubbing bears a resemblance to a Bakhtinian carnival, principally in the way they both involve tearing down hegemony and subverting norms (Díaz Cintas, 2018). As cultural chaos tightens its grip on media, “top-down control is eroded, bottom-up creativity flourishes” (McNair, 2006, p. xxi). In media sociology, a paradigm shift has occurred with control being subordinated to chaos. By extension to the context of fansubbing,

mainstream subtitling corporates represent the control paradigm, whereas self-mediated practices carried out by amateurs symbolize the chaos paradigm. The abundance of digital media technologies has facilitated the toppling of the top-down media corporate model of gatekeeping. Fansubbing undercuts the power of media corporates that hold sway over means of dissemination and consumption of audiovisual materials (Pérez-González, 2012b), which signals a power reshuffle. Fansubbing has engendered a novel system of media consumption, which renders it “indicative of fundamental and far-reaching social transformations, epitomising the increasingly ‘participatory’ nature of today’s popular and public realms alike” (Dwyer, 2017, p. 137). In effect, digital technologies have reconfigured the balance of power in the audiovisual terrain. Before the rise of participatory amateur subtitling practices, means of production and distribution of audiovisual materials have been monopolized by media corporates. With the democratization of technology and decentralization of the power of media corporates, the demarcation line between production and consumption of audiovisual materials is evanescent, giving rise to prosumption, the quintessence of which is the practice of fansubbing.

### 2.3. *Fansubbing and Abusive Subtitling*

With the advent of talkies, subtitles have entered the scene and have become subject to stifling regulations that entail “violent reduction” where subtitlers “accept a vision of translation that violently appropriates the source text” (Nornes, 2007, p. 155). This reduction-based practice is what Nornes (2007) calls *corrupt subtitling*. In corrupt subtitling, the foreign elements of the source text are accommodated to the target language culture by either omitting or domesticating them, which consequently leaves the target viewers “ignorant of the conspiracy and the riches that remain hidden from the cinematic experience” (Nornes, 2007, p. 178). This reflects how the subtitler’s part in actualizing the traverse of the source text to a new linguistic and cultural terrain is obscured (Nornes, 2007). Invisibility of subtitlers is the norm in mainstream media industries “to guarantee that audiences have a positive viewing experience and that commercial interests are protected” (Díaz Cintas, 2018, p. 140). Moreover, there is no room for experimenting with the way subtitles are produced so as not to run the risk of producing an estranging effect on the target audience (Díaz Cintas, 2018).

One of the major theoretical contributions to the hotly debated issue of the subtitler’s visibility is Nornes’s (1999, 2007) proposed approach of *abusive subtitling*. It is Nornes’s (2007) contention that “what we need are translators who are unruly, not transparently naked. Not sober but intoxicated ... positively abusive. We want translators with attitude” (p. 27). Abusive subtitling draws on Lewis’s (1985/2000) concept of *abusive translation* which denotes translation that “values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies and plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own” (p. 270). This experimentation is essential when translating conceptually dense or literary texts (Palumbo, 2009). By the same token, abusive subtitling is the practice of preserving the otherness of the cinematic text, which is instrumental in flaunting the subtitler’s visibility. This

abusive approach to subtitling rose as a backlash against corrupt subtitling practices which pivot on domesticating the source text, ultimately reducing the subtitler's visibility and preventing the target audience from savoring the otherness of the source culture. Unlike corrupt subtitling, abusive subtitling “avoids this kind of erasure of difference, seeking to intensify the interaction between the reader and the foreign” (Nornes, 2007, pp. 178-179). As opposed to the reductionist bent of corrupt subtitling that requires subtitlers to “suppress the fact of this violence necessitated by the apparatus,” those engaged in the practice of abusive subtitling bask in “foregrounding it, heightening its impact, and testing its limits and possibilities” (Nornes, 2007, p. 179). The abusive approach to subtitling entails “experimentation with language and its grammatical, morphological, and visual qualities—to bring the fact of translation from its position of obscurity” (Nornes, 1999, p. 18). The subtitler who adopts an abusive approach “assumes a respectful stance vis-à-vis the original text, tampering with both language and the subtitling apparatus itself” (Nornes, 2007, p. 179). For example, whereas obscenities are left untranslated in the practice of corrupt subtitling, the opposite is true in abusive subtitling (Nornes, 2007). In abusive subtitling, “rather than smoothing the rough edges of foreignness, rather than convening everything into easily consumable meaning, the abusive subtitles always direct spectators back to the original text” (Nornes, 2007, p. 185). While corrupt subtitling is solidly grounded in the principle of effacement of subtitlers, abusive subtitling is undergirded by the precept of valorizing the foreign, which subsequently crystalizes into a heightened visibility of those who conduct the transfer of the cinematic text into the target language.

Being a norm-breaking practice in essence, fansubbing is paradigmatic of the abusive turn in audiovisual translation. This quality of being abusive is intrinsically entwined with the quality of creativity. There is “a creative turn” that has started to characterize movie subtitling studies with the surge in fansubbing communities (McClarty, 2012, p. 133). Visibility of subtitlers is the key feature of fansubbing that reflects these abusive and creative strands. The co-creational aspect of subtitling forges a departure from its being representational into becoming interventionist (Pérez-González, 2014). This interventionist streak can be best captured in Nornes's (1999, 2007) concept of abusive subtitling. Movie fansubbing can be construed as a case of aesthetic activism or “a new paradigm of abusive mediation” where fansubbers surmount linguistic barriers in innovative ways that deviate from subtitling norms (Pérez-González, 2014, p. 79). Falling under the category of “DIY” practices, Dwyer (2017) maintains that “uncontrollability and non-standardisation are built into the fansubbing ethos” (p. 154). Fansubbers do not treat subtitling “as unwanted interference” (Dwyer, 2017, p. 135). On the contrary, they resort to a variety of experimental and subversive strategies to amplify their visibility and enhance the immersive experience for viewers as discussed in the following subsection.

### **2.3.1. Experimental and Subversive Strategies in Fansubbing.**

Fansubbing is exponentially growing, with plenty of room for idiosyncrasy and aberrancy. By analogy to cultural chaos theory, fansubbers can be perceived as “agents of chaos” (Pérez González, 2007b, p. 276). They have ushered in novel subtitling conventions, the influence of which on professional subtitling practices ought not be downplayed. Those engaged in the practice of non-professional subtitling pay no heed to professionally established rules, thereby wreaking disruption (Orrego-Carmona & Lee, 2017). The reciprocity of recognition between amateur subtitlers and their target audience provides a strong basis for the resort to intervention, eventually producing subtitles that pander to the tastes and expectations of their audience (Pérez-González, 2012b). There are possibly points of convergence between fansubs and subtitles produced by professionals; however, the former “are clearly more daring in their formal presentation, taking advantage of the potential offered by digital technology” (Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006, p. 51). Fansubbers “exploit semiotic resources in full” (Pérez-González, 2007a, p. 72). Contrary to professional subtitling, there are no constraints on the number of lines in amateur subtitling (Bogucki, 2009). Fansubbers resort to the use of the so-called *headnotes*, *topnotes* (Díaz Cintas, 2005) or *pop-up gloss* (O’Hagan, 2013), and they sometimes opt for the use of comments akin to book prefaces preceding the start of subtitled materials (Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006). This practice stands in stark contrast to the professional subtitling rule that requires that subtitles be unobtrusive, hence the pressing demand for domestication. The concept of headnotes or pop-up glosses widely used in fansubbing praxis is congruent with Appiah’s (1993/2012) concept of *thick translation* which “seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context” (p. 341). Fansubbers enhance their visibility through the interventionist act of adding non-diegetic headnotes that provide explanation for culturally bound terms and information related to the background of the displayed events (Pérez-González, 2014; Pérez-González, 2020). Headnotes constitute an interactive zone between subtitlers and viewers, maximizing subtitlers’ visibility and catering for viewers’ expectations (Pérez-González, 2012b). The tendency for making subtitles override the visual semiotic mode of movies stems from the paramount importance accorded to the notion of affectivity (Pérez-González, 2014). Affectivity is a substantial “non-representational” impetus for amateur subtitling where subtitles “seek to performatively intervene in the articulation and reception of the audiovisual semiotic ensemble” (Pérez-González, 2012b, p. 335). Amateur subtitlers perk up picture-related aspects of the semiotic composition of audiovisual texts through, for example, using a variety of fonts and colours. This experimental practice, accordingly, converts subtitles into “spatially affective spaces within the audio-visual ensemble, ultimately providing an immersive spectatorial experience for their viewers” (Pérez-González, 2012b, p. 347). Additionally, the use of various fonts and colours “is a very important aspect of this trend towards spectacularization” (Pérez-González, 2014, p. 261). Along these lines, resorting to the use of animated and karaoke-style subtitles emanates from the fansubbers’ keenness on maximizing the immersive experience for

their fellow fans or viewers (Pérez-González, 2014). Johnson (2019) explains that “foregrounding the written lyrics in a music video alters the affective experience of the music and, in most cases, constitutes a superimposition upon the intended visual dimension of the semiotic ensemble” (p. 425). The feasibility of the aforementioned experimentation in subtitling attests to the fragility of the traditionally imposed constraints and regulations (Dwyer, 2017). There have been many attempts at formulating codes for proper subtitling practices. The ultimate aim of such proposed codes is to outline some standards or recommendations that can be taken into account when subtitling. They are not preserved in aspic; on the contrary, they are amenable to modification (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007). The catapult of fansubbing to prominence among netizens in the cyberspace arguably suggests that the norms and constraints grounded in commercial codes of subtitling can potentially undergo transformation.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Model of Analysis**

For the analysis of the selected movies, the study employs Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez’s (2006) taxonomy of the common experimental and subversive strategies adopted in fansubbing:

1. use of different fonts throughout the same programme
2. use of colours to identify different actors
3. use of subtitles of more than two lines (up to four lines)
4. use of notes at the top of the screen
5. use of glosses in the body of the subtitles
6. the position of subtitles varies on the screen (scenetiming)
7. karaoke subtitling for opening and ending songs
8. adding of information regarding fansubbers
9. translation of opening and closing credits (p. 47)

There is another strategy discussed in the analysis section, but it is not included in the above taxonomy. This strategy is the use of colloquial Egyptian words and expressions. It is peculiar to fansubbing in the Egyptian context. Its inclusion in the analysis contributes to reinforcing the argument adopted herein concerning the fansubbers’ penchant for subverting mainstream subtitling norms.

#### **3.2. Corpus of the Study**

The movies selected for the analysis belong to a variety of genres, such as animation, fantasy, action, drama, and thriller to show that the experimental and subversive fansubbing strategies are not confined to a particular movie genre. The subtitles of the selected movies are produced by an Egyptian fansubber named Eslam Al-Gizawi. The movie subtitles are produced either by Eslam Al-Gizawi on his own (i.e., *Minions*, *Deadpool*, *Deadpool 2*) or in collaboration with others (i.e., *Coco*, *Mother!*, *Thor: Ragnarok*, *Justice League*, and *Spider-Man: Homecoming* are fansubbed by Eslam



Al-Gizawi and Omar Al-Shakiki; *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* is fansubbed by Eslam Al-Gizawi, Omar Al-Shakiki, and Mohamed Al-Azazi).

Al-Gizawi's fame is the reason for choosing his subtitles to be scrutinized as an exemplification of the phenomenon of Arabic fansubbing. His Facebook page has 1.4 million followers. The rating of his page is 5, which reflects the satisfaction of his viewers with the subtitles he produces. He was hosted in a symposium organized by the Faculty of Al-Alsun, Kafr El-Sheikh University, on March 31, 2019, to deliver a talk on his movie subtitling career. This rapturous acclaim Al-Gizawi has garnered signals that Arabic fansubbing is taking root regardless of its questionable legality. It begs the question of how norms and conventions are tweaked in fansubbing in order to provide an immersive experience for viewers as discussed in the following section.

#### 4. Analysis

##### 4.1. Use of Different Fonts Throughout the Same Programme

The visual aesthetics of fansubbing comprise the use of text animation as found in the subtitling of the movie title *Minions*. The Arabic title mimics the yellow colour, the big font size, and even the space between the letters and appears at the top of the screen:



Figure 1: Screenshot from the movie *Minions* (00:01:39)

Al-Gizawi employs a zoom effect animation in subtitling the name of Marvel entertainment company in the opening credits of the movie *Deadpool*. Figure 2 shows the entry of the Arabic subtitle "مارفل" in small red font:

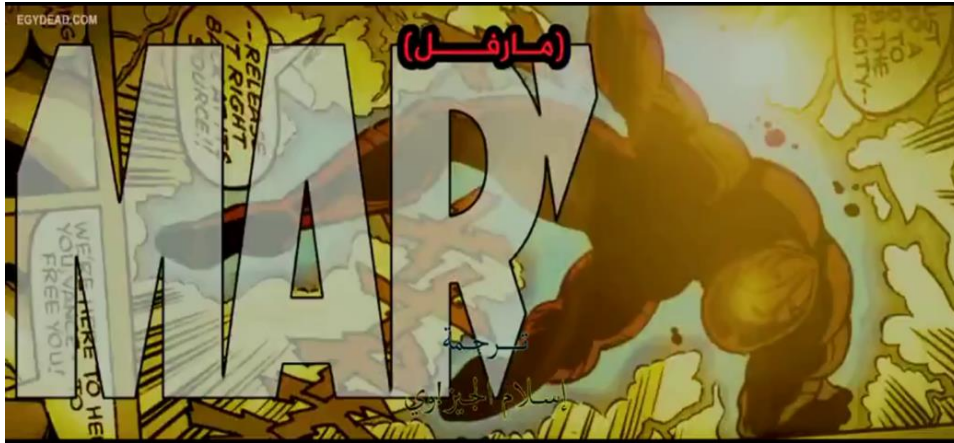


Figure 2: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool* (00:00:31)

Given the zoom effect, the font size of the Arabic word gets bigger as shown in Figure 3:



Figure 3: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool* (00:00:33)

The experimental styling of fonts reflects how subtitles are treated as part and parcel of the cinematic experience and not relegated to a secondary status. Experimenting with fonts can be construed as a norm-breaking, abusive subtitling strategy for it contributes to rendering subtitles innovatively conspicuous.

#### 4.2. Use of Colours to Identify Different Actors

A panoply of colours is used for various purposes by the fansubbers. In the movie *Justice League*, the name of each superhero is written using a colour that corresponds to his or her outfit. For example, in subtitling Superman's name in Arabic, both red and blue are used to dovetail with his blue costume and flowing red cape:



Figure 4: Screenshot from the movie *Justice League* (00:00:35)

The same strategy is adopted when subtitling Lantern's name in Arabic in the same movie through the use of green:



Figure 5: Screenshot from the movie *Justice League* (00:00:41)

To distinguish between actors speaking over the phone, two colours are used in the scenes cited from the movie *Deadpool 2*. Blue is used to signal Deadpool's talk turn (Figure 6) and orange to signal that of the Chinese interlocutor (Figure 7):



Figure 6: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool 2* (00:03:00)



**Figure 7: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool 2* (00:03:03)**

The employment of an array of colours is conducive to aestheticizing the viewing experience. Akin to the experimentation with fonts, the use of various colours is a manifestation of the abusive approach adopted by the fansubbers as it accentuates the prominence of subtitles among other semiotic modes.

#### **4.3. Use of Subtitles of More Than Two Lines (up to Four Lines)**

Since the conviction in many professional subtitling circles that subtitles should not be attention grabbing, it has become the norm that interlingual subtitles should not exceed two lines (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007). In fansubbing, however, there is no limit to the number of the lines of subtitles. In *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, there is a scene which depicts a situation of misunderstanding and commotion. A woman says, “Hey! Shut that off!” in reference to a car alarm, to which Spiderman apologetically responds, “I was ...” and gets interrupted by the man he mistakenly thinks is trying to steal a car. This man says, “Can you tell him it’s my car?” These three exchanges are rendered using three lines of subtitles:



**Figure 8: Screenshot from the movie *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (00:17:42)**

Another example of three-line subtitles is found in *Deadpool* in the scene where the main character comes up with his superhero name. His friend makes a toast saying, “To Mr. Pool. Deadpool” as shown in Figure 9:



**Figure 9: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool* (00:59:59)**

This talk turn is rendered using two lines which remain on the screen and overlap with another line of subtitle for the remaining of his utterance “That sounds like a fuckin’ franchise”:



**Figure 10: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool* (1:00:01)**

The encroachment of subtitles on the images gives weight to the role of subtitles in the semiotic ensemble. The disregard to the conventional number of subtitles attests to how subtitles are not deemed subordinate to the pictorial mode in fansubbing. This runs counter to mainstream subtitling conventions where the image holds sway.

#### **4.4. Use of Notes at the Top of the Screen**

The fansubbers’ visibility is heightened through the use of intrusive headnotes. For example, the leading actress in the movie *Mother!* brings ice to a woman who burns her hand. A pop-up gloss in red is inserted to advise viewers not to do the same in case of burns and to use lukewarm water instead:



Figure 11: Screenshot from the movie *Mother!* (0:21:22)

The insertion of this headnote cues the audience to the presence of the fansubbers, which intensifies the virtual bond between them and their audience. In contrast to conventional subtitling practices which require that subtitles be kept as low-key as possible, the addition of such non-diegetic headnotes is a subversive strategy that renders subtitles glaringly obtrusive. This arguably stems from the notion of affectivity which constitutes a driving force for amateur subtitling practices. The cinematic text is harnessed to function as a virtual space for fansubbers to indulge in not only providing subtitles for different audiovisual elements but also in communicating with their audience.

Content warnings are another form of pop-up glosses that are used in fansubbing. In *Deadpool 2*, the leading character, Deadpool, is a foul-mouthed superhero, which makes the movie rife with obscenities. In the content warning displayed in red before the start of the movie, Al-Gizawi mentions that the movie is for adults only as it contains profanity. He translates the majority of the profane words literally instead of opting for the conventional way of rendering them into "تبًا لك" and "اللعة", in a nod to the subtitling strategy of obscenities used in mainstream subtitling spheres, such as Anis Ebeid's movie subtitling organization, the most famous one in the Middle East:



Figure 12: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool 2* (00:00:05)

As mentioned earlier, it is the norm to translate obscenities in abusive subtitling. In light of this, Al-Gizawi's literal translation of taboo words marks a daring break with the conventional strategies used in mainstream subtitling spheres. The resort to literal

translation in rendering obscenities signals the abusive approach adopted by the fansubber; instead of deodorizing profanity, he remains faithful to the source text and deviates from traditional subtitling strategies. Another content warning is displayed inside the movie *Deadpool* itself. It alerts the viewers that an inappropriate scene is about to start:



**Figure 13: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool* (00:23:17)**

Providing content warnings augments the fansubber's visibility and reflects the profound attention paid by him toward tailoring the cinematic experience to the expectations of conservative viewers.

Another type of headnote is the one used in *Justice League* to draw the viewers' attention that the movie has not yet ended and that there is still a scene coming after the end credits:



**Figure 14: Screenshot from the movie *Justice League* (1:48:36)**

This further enhances the interpersonal dynamics between the fansubbers and their fellow fans. It gives the impression that they share the viewing experience with them. Their task is not confined to providing subtitles; rather, they virtually accompany the viewers to ensure they do not miss out on any details. In addition to drawing the viewers' attention that there is still a scene coming after the end credits of *Deadpool 2*, Al-Gizawi addresses his viewers, stating how exhausting it was to subtitle this movie and expressing his hope that they like his subtitles:

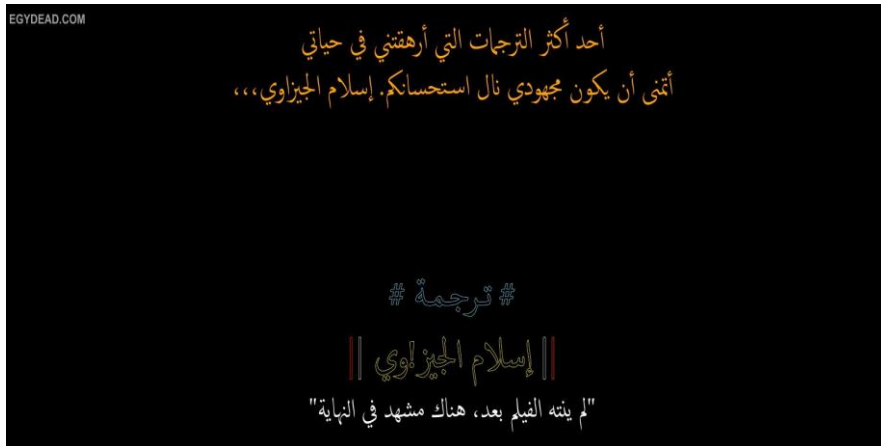


Figure 15: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool 2* (02:07:48)

This gives insights into how the fansubber makes the most of the audiovisual text by expanding its boundaries beyond the mere delivery of subtitles and transforming it into a hub for personal expression and interaction.

#### 4.5. Use of Glosses in the Body of the Subtitles

In mainstream subtitling practices, there is no leeway for subtitlers' intervention to provide extralinguistic information, for example in the form of footnotes, to explain puns or culturally bound items so as not to counter the conventional precept of keeping subtitles unobtrusive within the confines of two lines and in synchrony with the source text dialogues and displayed images (Díaz Cintas, 2005). The situation is quite the opposite in fansubbing where non-diegetic glosses are used extensively, materializing Appiah's (1993/2012) concept of thick translation where fansubbers can provide necessary information for the interpretation of obscure references in source texts. When providing explanatory glosses under the main subtitles, different colours are used to signal their non-diegetic nature. For example, in *Deadpool 2*, Al-Gizawi explains the reference Deadpool sarcastically makes to the movie *Batman vs. Superman* "Actually, I was fighting this caped badass, until I found out that his mom is also named Martha" in a footnote using yellow colour and inverted commas:



Figure 16: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool 2* (00:11:00)



There is another example in *Justice League* where Al-Gizawi and Al-Shakiki explicate a humorous scene using two-line footnotes in red. The superhero named Flash mistakenly bids a little Russian girl farewell saying “Dostoevsky,” the renowned Russian novelist, instead of the Russian expression for bidding someone goodbye “Dasvidaniya” because of his incomprehension of Russian:



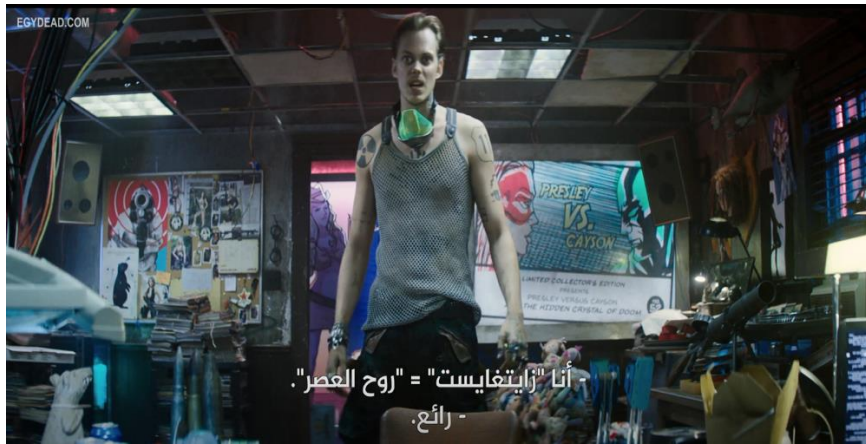
**Figure 17: Screenshot from the movie *Justice League* (1:41:22)**

Footnotes are used as well for the explanation of culture-specific items. For example, in the movie *Coco*, the food item “tamales” is transliterated into "التمال", and an explanatory footnote "طحين ذرة يغطى بأوراقه ويطهى على البخار", written in red and enclosed between inverted commas, is used:



**Figure 18: Screenshot from the movie *Coco* (00:03:49)**

Sometimes the explanation of certain words appears in the line of the subtitle itself. For example, the name “Zeitgeist” is transliterated into "زايغتايست" and an explanatory note "روح العصر" is provided in the same line between inverted commas after the equation symbol as shown in Figure 19:



**Figure 19: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool 2* (01:05:13)**

Transliteration exemplifies the abusive strategy of foreignization. The subversiveness of foreignization rests on defying the commercially prescribed politics of domestication that denies viewers an authentic experience of the other under the pretext of achieving naturalness. The use of explanatory notes signals a considerable shift from prescribed invisibility to a highly overt presence and intervention of fansubbers in the audiovisual texts.

#### 4.6. *The Position of Subtitles Varies on the Screen (Scenetiming)*

Conventionally, subtitles are placed horizontally at the bottom of the screen so as not to interfere vastly with the pictorial mode. Fansubbing is characterized by an unbridled latitude when it comes to placing subtitles on the screen; subtitles can be located anywhere in the audiovisual text. For example, in *Deadpool 2*, the subtitle of a leaflet title partly written in green “Haunted Segway Tours” is provided on the middle left side of the screen in green “جولات بالدراجات الكهربائية”:



**Figure 20: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool 2* (00:02:39)**

In *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, boxes appear next to each of the four main characters listing their strengths and weaknesses in different colours. This feature is faithfully rendered in Arabic. For example, the subtitles are written in yellow and located in different parts on the screen with the main subtitle of the character’s

utterance “Paleontology? What does that even mean?” kept at the bottom of the screen:



**Figure 21:** Screenshot from the movie *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (0:32:18)

The non-conformist strategy of distributing subtitles in different places on the screen reveals how subtitles in the praxis of fansubbing are ascribed a great weight and not deemed peripheral. They are instrumental in providing a comprehensive understanding of all the meaning-making signs present in the cinematic text. Additionally, this subversive strategy betokens the essence of abusive subtitling, notably the need to boost the visibility of subtitlers.

#### 4.7. Karaoke Subtitling for Opening and Ending Songs

The experimental streak of fansubbing is well demonstrated in the use of karaoke-style subtitles for the translation of song lyrics. The Arabic translation of the original lyrics “Everybody rolls with their fingers crossed” are rendered using karaoke subtitling, enclosed between hashtag symbols, and placed on the upper right side of the screen as shown in the following screenshot from *Justice League*:



**Figure 22:** Screenshot from the movie *Justice League* (00:05:21)

Using karaoke-style subtitles arguably vivifies the audiovisual text and conduces to a better immersive experience. It is congruous with the aspect of spectacularization that is idiosyncratic of fansubbing. Apart from rendering song lyrics, Al-Gizawi provides

the names and singers of the songs played in *Deadpool 2* in karaoke-style subtitles as illustrated in Figure 23:



**Figure 23: Screenshot from the movie *Deadpool 2* (00:04:06)**

In addition to heightening the fansubber's visibility, the use of extratextual information is reflective of the fansubber's eagerness to furnish the viewers with the minutest details that could be of interest to them, which is congruent with the ethos of fandom.

#### **4.8. Adding of Information Regarding Fansubbers**

In the practice of fansubbing, fansubbers are not treated as unsung entities. Although fansubbing is legally questionable, this does not deter fansubbers from indulging in making their names in the fansubbing industry and garnering fans. An important means of attaining visibility for fansubbers is the addition of their names and information about them in the audiovisual texts they mediate. For example, in the end credits of *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, as shown in Figure 24, the fansubbers' names are provided in three different colours (i.e., yellow, red, and green), with a link to Al-Gizawi's Facebook page written in red, overriding the closing credits. Al-Gizawi's Facebook page serves as the affinity space in which he shares his subtitles with fellow movie aficionados and practises other fan-related activities, such as providing movie reviews and starting discussions on that matter.

Besides the fansubbers' names, a karaoke-style message appears at the top of the screen saying "نتمنى أن تكون ترجمتنا نالت إعجابكم" (We hope you like our subtitling), which arguably reflects the fansubbers' care to provide a satisfying viewing experience buoyed by suitable, bespoke subtitles:



**Figure 24:** Screenshot from the movie *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (1:52:38) This intrusive message reveals how fansubbers prioritize optimizing their visibility over subtitling norms that leave no room for the addition of non-diegetic elements.

**4.9. Translation of Opening and Closing Credits**

The name of the company “Warner Bros. Pictures” in the opening credits of *Justice League* is rendered into Arabic using karaoke-style font and is enclosed between inverted commas. Besides translating the opening credits, the fansubbers insert a three-line directive, namely that it is better for viewers to first watch *Batman vs. Superman* to be able to understand the events in *Justice League*:



**Figure 25:** Screenshot from the movie *Justice League* (00:00:13) This further substantiates their abusive approach to maximizing their visibility and to keeping the viewers fully apprised. Similarly, karaoke-style font is employed in the same movie in the subtitling of the name of the company “Access Entertainment,” along with the use of inverted commas around the Arabic transliteration of the word “Access.” The translation is divided into two parts: the first one “أكسيس” appears at the upper right side and the second one “المواد الترفيهية” appears at the upper left side, which further reflects how the fansubbers are unfettered by subtitling conventions regarding the position of subtitles:



**Figure 26: Screenshot from the movie *Justice League* (00:00:30)**

Aside from translating opening and closing credits, fansubbers resort to the use of explanatory notes akin to book endnotes. For example, *Mother!* is a highly controversial movie based on an allegory to God and the creation of Earth, but this allegory is left unexplored in the movie. The fansubbers, however, decode the allegory by providing explanatory notes that obscure the closing credits:



**Figure 27: Screenshot from the movie *Mother!* (1:56:35)**

A preface-like explanation is provided at the opening credits of the movie *Thor: Ragnarok*. The explanation starts with the sentence "معلومات عليك تذكرها قبل مشاهدة الفيلم" (Information you need to remember before watching the movie). It is followed by a numbered summary, which takes up the whole screen, of the events of the second part of the movie anthology and a glossary of the terms used in the movie:



Figure 28: Screenshot from the movie *Thor: Ragnarok* (00:00:02)

The intrusion of the complementary paratextual material on the opening and closing credits signals the importance ascribed to the non-diegetic elements in fansubbing; walking the audience through the movie plots by explaining important details on which the understanding of the movies relies is integral to the immersive experience. This strategy of addition materializes Nornes's (2007) call for translation with attitude; fansubbers impose their interpretations and offer guidance to their audience.

#### 4.10. *The Use of Colloquial Egyptian Words and Expressions*

Since "foreign audiovisual materials are almost universally rendered into Fusha" (Gamal, 2008, p. 7), the use of the colloquial Egyptian variety is significantly reflective of the subversive approach adopted in fansubbing. For example, in the movie *Spider-man: Homecoming*, there is a scene of two neighbors exchanging pleasantries. The male character says, "Marjorie! How are you? How's your mother?" This utterance is rendered into "(مارجري)، إزيك وإزي أمك!" where the colloquial form "إزيك" is used instead of its modern standard Arabic counterpart "كيف":



Figure 29: Screenshot from the movie *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (00:17:57)

In the movie *Coco*, which revolves around the dream of a young boy named Miguel to become a musician, there is a dialogue between him and a musician. The latter advises Miguel to confront his family with his desire to pursue his dream saying, "I'd march right up to my family and say, 'Hey! I'm a musician. Deal with it!'" The last part of "Deal with it!" is rendered using the colloquial Egyptian expression "أعلى ما في خيلك اركبوه" which is uttered when someone boldly states that he or she does not care much about something disapproved by another person:



Figure 30: Screenshot from the movie *Coco* (00:06:55)

In *Thor: Ragnarok*, a character named Thor is forced to have a haircut. He pleads with the barber saying, "Please, kind sir, do not cut my hair." The fansubbers resort to the use of a colloquial equivalent "وحياة أمك" for the English expression of pleading instead of the modern standard Arabic equivalent "أرجوك":



Figure 31: Screenshot from the movie *Thor: Ragnarok* (00:51:19)

The significance of using this strategy lies in challenging the mainstream convention of confining Arabic subtitles to modern standard Arabic given its prestigious status as opposed to the colloquial variety. The insertion of colloquial words and expressions boils down to an attempt to render the source text messages easily comprehensible for Egyptian viewers who use colloquial Egyptian Arabic and not modern standard



Arabic in daily life, which is another testament to the due attention paid to delivering subtitles that are tilted toward viewers' tastes and expectations.

## 5. Conclusion

The voluntary participation of fans, without prior training in subtitling and with no expectation of monetary rewarding, in the subtitling of their favorite audiovisual contents betokens a paradigm shift apropos of the dynamics of movie subtitling. The analysis of the fansubbing strategies used by Al-Gizawi, Al-Shakiki, and Al-Azazi reveals their abusive approach to subtitling. The experimental and subversive streak of their practice lies in not toeing the line when it comes to standard subtitling conventions. By employing unorthodox subtitling strategies, such as playing around with fonts and colours, injecting vibrancy into subtitles through employing karaoke-style and animation effects, scattering subtitles all over the audiovisual texts, and using subtitles of more than two lines, it is evident how subtitles are not deemed subordinate to images. Rather, vast salience is placed on subtitles, and they are accordingly presented in a conspicuously creative fashion. This creativity is conducive to enhancing the fansubbers' visibility—an anathema to mainstream subtitling circles. The subversive flair of the fansubbers is demonstrated in the use of colloquial Egyptian words and expressions in defiance of the established convention of confining subtitles to modern standard Arabic in official subtitling spheres. Foreignization is another significant subversive strategy employed by the fansubbers as it challenges the mainstream convention of domestication that keeps viewers in the dark concerning culture-bound information and conduces to the invisibility of subtitlers. The fansubbers' visibility is fostered via the insertion of information germane to them and subtitles that transcend the diegetic boundaries, such as headnotes and footnotes. All such strategies signal a considerable shift from prescribed invisibility to blatant visibility marked by the intervention of fansubbers in the audiovisual texts they mediate. That is why fansubbing can be perceived as a locus of unrestrained experimentation and subversion.

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### Filmography

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- Watts, J. (Director). (2017). *Spider-Man: Homecoming* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; LStar Capital; Marvel Studios.

English Movies	Links to the Fansubbed Versions
<i>Mother!</i>	<a href="https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-mother-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/">https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-mother-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/</a>
<i>Minions</i>	<a href="https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-minions-2015-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/">https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-minions-2015-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/</a>
<i>Jumanji: Welcome to the jungle</i>	<a href="https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-jumanji-welcome-to-the-jungle-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/">https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-jumanji-welcome-to-the-jungle-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/</a>
<i>Deadpool 2</i>	<a href="https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-deadpool-2-2018-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/">https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-deadpool-2-2018-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/</a>
<i>Deadpool</i>	<a href="https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-deadpool-2016-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/">https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-deadpool-2016-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/</a>

<i>Justice league</i>	<a href="https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-justice-league-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/">https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-justice-league-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/</a>
<i>Coco</i>	<a href="https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-coco-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/">https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-coco-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/</a>
<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i>	<a href="https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-thor-ragnarok-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/">https://w8.egydead.live/%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-thor-ragnarok-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/</a>
<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i>	<a href="https://w8.egydead.live/%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-spider-man-homecoming-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/">https://w8.egydead.live/%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%af-%d9%81%d9%8a%d9%84%d9%85-spider-man-homecoming-2017-%d9%85%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%ac%d9%85/</a>