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"And with us is Brother Morgan": A cognitive semiotic analysis of a humorous stock character macro in Egyptian Arabic

Nada Hassan Helmy

Department of English, Faculty of Al-Alsun (Languages), Minia University, Egypt

Email: nada.hassan@mu.edu.eg

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Abstract

The current study discusses one type of image macros, namely stock character macros in Egyptian Arabic. The data consists of 5 stock character macros. The data analysis is based on three theoretical bases: Berger's Code Violation, McCloud's taxonomy of image and text relations in comics and Fauconnier and Turners' Conceptual Integration Theory. The study aims to explore and investigate the humorous nature of stock character macros; how humour is created semiotically; how different signs interact, either equally or subordinately, to produce laughter; and how texts and images are compressed, projected, and blended to create new humorous meanings. The study also aims to define the unique textual and visual characteristics of this type of memes in Egyptian Arabic, a different culture that was not investigated before in such a context. One dimension of the current study is to present a linguistic analysis of a widely recognized but academically underrepresented digital artefact such as image-macro memes. The current study also focuses on the role of images in such a multi-modal construction. The results reflect causes of humour, types of text and image relations, and the unique textual and visual features of the data in question. Cognitively speaking, the ability of the meme maker's mind to use already existing mental spaces to create new creative blends and the ability of the meme receiver/reader's mind to decode and deconstruct the never seen before blend into its basic mental spaces to understand what needs to be

communicated are highlighted.

Keywords: Internet memes, humorous stock character macros, code violation, Conceptual Integration/Blending Theory, Egyptian Arabic and taxonomy of image and text relations in comics

1. Introduction

Internet memes are a modern flourishing phenomenon. Dawkins (2006) introduced the term ‘‘meme’’ in 1976 in his book *The Selfish Gene*, as a cultural counterpart to the biological term gene as it determines the behaviours of an organism. Following the flourishing of the internet, memes transformed into an online artefact, namely internet memes. Milner (2012) defined Internet memes as “amateur media artefacts, extensively remixed and recirculated by different participants on social media networks.” (p. iii). Internet memes refer to any content that goes viral, edited, shared and passed online from a person to another. They take many shapes including videos, hyperlinks, GIFs and image macros, which are combinations of images and texts that are sometimes superimposed or just written above the images. Image macros are classified according to the type and function of the image, e.g., stock character macros, reaction images, advice animals, LOLCats, multi-panel image macros and screenshots.

2. Objectives of the study

The study aims to examine humorous image-macro memes in Egyptian Arabic from a cognitive-semiotic point of view. It examines selected data of image macros to explore and investigate their humorous nature, how different signs interact either equally or subordinately to produce laughter, and how texts and images are compressed, projected, and blended to create new humorous meanings. The study also aims to define the unique textual and visual characteristics of image-macro memes in Egyptian Arabic. A semiotic explanation of humorous image macros is presented through McCloud’s comics’ taxonomy and Berger’s notion of code violation while the cognitive analysis is based on Fauconnier and Turner’s Conceptual Integration Theory.

One dimension of the current study is to present a linguistic analysis of a widely recognized but academically underrepresented digital artefact such

as image-macro memes. The study aims at enriching the poor literature on semiotic and cognitive analyses of image macros. It also provides a unique data from the Egyptian culture; the analysis of such data may yield new semiotic, cognitive and textual features for the formal organization of memes and their functions and meanings.

3. Statement of the problem

This study aims to analyse selected memes in Egyptian social media from a cognitive semiotic perspective. Cognitive studies of image macros are relatively few (e.g., Younes & Altakhaineh, 2022). These studies did not reveal how input spaces are blended to create new structures and meanings. Semiotic studies of internet memes are few (e.g., El-Masry, 2021; Hussein & Aljamili, 2020; Mahasneh & Bashayreh, 2021); none of them investigated the semiotic cause of laughter or investigated image and text relations systematically. Textual features of Egyptian Arabic used in internet memes have not been investigated before, to the researcher's best of knowledge. The current study adopts a theoretical framework that was not used before to analyse internet memes data, in a distinguished culture such as the Egyptian one; thus, it yields significant and new findings.

As multimodal constructions, image macros consist of text and image. The use, and thus analysis, of texts is normal in the majority of linguistic data. However, in general, the use of images is unique as they convey many aspects of meanings depending on their background (the movie, TV series, interview, advertisement or talk show they are extracted from), the stock character (a celebrity, animal, object, etc.), facial expressions, and other elements of an image. A semiotic analysis of image macros is needed to examine textual and visual features of both verbal and visual signs and highlight the relationship between them that renders meaning, usually humorous in the end.

4. Literature review

Image macros in general and stock character macros in particular are underrepresented topics in the Arab academic field. This topic was not investigated before in Arabic, to the researcher's best of knowledge. Stock character macros are images of animals or humans with superimposed text. As Dynel (2016) puts it, they are "a type of image macro series featuring

animals of some kind (including humans) that are accompanied by captioned text to represent a character trait or an archetype that fits the role of a stock character" (p. 663). According to Börzsei (2013), the first instance of a stock character macro featuring animals, e.g., Advice Dogs, appeared in 2006, and featuring humans, e.g., the FFFUUUU Rage Guy, appeared in 2008.

Shifman (2012, 2014a, 2014b) is one of the contemporary scholars who contributed greatly to the development of memes concepts and genres. In addition to defining internet memes as "a group of digital content units sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance." (p. 177), Shifman (2014a) listed and defined genres of internet memes which "share not only structures and stylistic features, but also themes, topics, and intended audiences" (p. 99). Shifman's list of genres consists of nine genres: reaction photoshops, photo fads, flash mob, lipsynch, misheard lyrics, recut trailers, LOLCats, stock character macros, and rage comics (see Shifman, 2014a, pp. 99-118 for a detailed explanation). Stock character macros "do share two features: they use image macros, and they build on a set of stock characters that represent stereotypical behaviours" (Shifman, 2014a, p. 112).

Milner (2012) specifies image macros as artefacts that "apply text over the image itself, often a clause on the top of the image to set up a premise and a clause on the bottom to deliver a punch line." (pp. 85-86). According to (Kavitha, 2018):

> Image macros are characterized by the presence of a person, animal, object, or basically anything that can be made fun of. The main subject of the macro is placed at the middle of the image and provided relevant yet witty text on top and bottom of it. The text should portray the subject characteristics. The subject can be either real or fictional, and it can be anything as long as other people understand it. (p. 220)

Kucherenko (2022) investigated Arab internet memes, including videos, online games, news, T.V series, etc. commenting on Russian invasion of Ukraine to present a linguistic analysis that examines language as a tool that affects online public opinions. Based on analysis of internet memes of various types, it was found that Arab memes expressed the following attitudes: admiration of the Russian president, fear of Russia's nuclear

weapons, criticizing western attitude towards Russia, likening Ukraine to Palestine and avoiding completely the word "war". The linguistic analysis reveals the following: using interchangeable varieties such as Egyptian Arabic and Mashriq varieties, using slang words such as "nawawī", lesser use of MSA and the use of a simplified version of it, e.g. (omitted ḥamza, letter haʾ instead of taʾ-marbūṭa, etc.), the insertion of frequently used spoken lexemes (''bass'' – only/but, ''innū'' that, etc.). Kucherenko (2022) attributes these linguistic characteristics to "the desire to imitate the real-life speech and, thus, to be close to the recipients and to have an impact on their behaviour, both online and offline." (p. 431).

Mahasneh & Bashayreh (2021) used de Saussure's (1966) signifier to perform an "intersemiotic translation" of the relationship between texts, images and meanings in six randomly selected internet memes tackling Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in 2017. The concept "intersemiotic translation" was first introduced by Jacobson (1959) who defined it as translating verbal sings to non-verbal ones. Mahasneh & Bashayreh (2021) found that internet memes have more than one signifier and one signified; thus one meme may convey more than one meaning. The authors conclude that "semiotic theories, including Saussure's and Peircean definitions of semiotics (signifier and signified) and Jacobson's intersemiotic translation are the most appropriate theories by which to study memes." (p. 41).

Hussein & Aljamili (2020) adopted Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) social semiotic approach and used a questionnaire to analyse 20 Jordanian social media internet memes and caricatures commenting on Corona virus. They found three thematic representations, namely: mocking the virus, the protective procedures enforced by governments to fight the pandemic and the living conditions of people at this hard time. According to Hussein & Aljamili (2020), "the results cast a new light on humour as being a powerful coping strategy especially when facing a crisis. It also spots the light on the psychological effect of humour on people in reducing stress and maintaining emotional well-being." The authors conclude that memes and caricatures help people to alleviate the impact of the pandemic and also reflect the cultural identity of the Jordanian society.

El-Masry (2021) adopted Attardo's (2014a & 2014b) General Theory of

Verbal Humour to analyse 20 Egyptian internet memes about Corona Virus in order to identify different techniques and strategies of humour creation. It was found that the main cause of humour is textual or based on texts while the visual mode or the images are found to play "secondary supporting role by providing a detailed background of the meme." (p. 749) by helping the reader to recall the movie main topic and link it to that of the meme. El-Masry (2021) also concluded that "the meme's template can work as a jab line or a punch line and this affirms the collaboration between the verbal and the visual elements to produce humour." (pp. 749-750).

The only study that performed a cognitive analysis on internet memes is that of Younes & Altakhaineh (2022). The authors adopted Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Forceville's (2008) Mono-modal and Multimodal Metaphor Theory and Musolff's (2006) approach in identifying source domains scenarios. They examined 250 memes depicting COVID-19 in Jordanian social media. The study found that the HUMAN source domain was the most frequently used one in the analysed data. It was concluded also that memes are built as multimodal constructions at which textual and pictorial clues are used to construct the metaphors. The analysed data revealed culture-specific metaphors in addition to near-universal ones.

5. Theoretical framework

The researcher uses three theoretical bases, namely McCloud's taxonomy of image and text relations (1994; 2006), Berger's notion of code violation (1989; 1998; 2005) and Fauconnier and Turner's Conceptual Integration Theory (2002). For a more in-depth understanding of both visual and verbal modes, both textual and visual features are analyzed. The three theoretical frames are closely related and integrated in the data analysis, though belonging to two different disciplines: semiotics and cognitive linguistics. Visual and textual analyses yield defining characteristics of the two modes and help to understand them better. Berger's code violation investigates how readers build expectations based on both verbal and visual sings and how unfulfilled expectations create laughter. McCloud's taxonomy examines the relation between verbal and visual modes and how they convey meaning either subordinately or co-ordinately. Fauconnier and

Turner's Conceptual Integration Theory clarifies how images and texts are blended together to create new innovative image macros and how their receivers can deconstruct them back to their basic integration networks to understand the meaning meme makers want to convey.

5.1. Berger's notion of code violation

Throughout many publications, Berger (1989; 1998; 2005) presented his semiotic notion of code violation. Codes are rules that enable language users to interpret the meanings of signs and to expect what signs are more likely to come next. Humour results from code violation, or failure of meme reader to expect the coming sign or the punch line which creates laughter. Since the relationship between signifier and signified, (to use De Saussure's terms), is arbitrary, there must be rules or "codes" to interpret signs and tell what they mean. According to Berger (1989), "humour, in general, is connected to code confusion and violation. The difference between what one expects (knowing the code) and what one gets (due to code confusion and violation) generates laughter" (p. 233). As Calimbo (2016) puts it, "Something can be found funny if it is irrational, paradoxical, illogical, incoherent, fallacious, or inappropriate." (p. 4). In the context of a humorous text, regardless of its type, the reader expects and anticipates a certain end based on their interpretation of the signs in the text. However, when one reaches the end of the humorous text or the punch line in a joke, a surprise occurs as expectations are not fulfilled. The fact that the punch line cannot be inferred from the events that precede it allows the punch line either to generate laughter or cause embezzlement. If the text provides clues for resolution of incongruity, humour and laughter exist. If the reader does not find a resolution or does not get the joke, embezzlement ensues.

5.2. McCloud's (1994, 2006) taxonomy of text and image relations

McCloud (1994, 2006) based his taxonomy of image and text relations in comics on the following seven categories.

1. Word specific: the text or the verbal mode is the primary one and takes prominence over image; it conveys all information to the reader.
2. Picture specific: this kind is the opposite of the word specific type. Presence of the text is not necessary to convey meaning; it only

enriches the silent picture.

3. Duo specific: this type has some degree of redundancy as both the image and the text convey the same message.
4. Intersecting: in this type, one mode provides new information or adds new meanings to these delivered by the other. Verbal and visual modes overlap in presenting information. In *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1994), this type of relation was labelled "additive". The new term "intersecting" is introduced in *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics. Manga and Graphic Novels* (2006).
5. Parallel: if the relation of images and texts is parallel, they are completely unrelated.
6. Montage: where words are integral parts of the pictures.
7. Interdependent: The visual and verbal modes convey complementary content. Grasping the meaning relies on both modes as each mode carries part of the meaning.

According to Yus (2019), two categories are not expected to be present in the data under examination, namely, parallel and montage. As for parallel, image macros are combinations of closely related and mutually interacting texts and images; they cannot be completely unrelated and separable. The montage relation is also expected to be absent as meme creators abide by meme generating sites and software limits which only enable them to write certain texts with limited properties (text, font, etc.), thus creative designs are impossible.

5.3. Fauconnier & Turner's conceptual integration / blending theory

Conceptual Blending Theory, a theory of meaning construction, is developed from Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Fauconnier's (1985) Mental Spaces Theory. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) see conceptual metaphor as conceptualizing one abstract domain such as life or argument in terms of more concrete domain, e.g., journey and war, respectively. According to them, "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphoric in nature." (p. 3).

As for the latter, mental spaces can be conceived as "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk for purposes of local understanding and action." (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 102). To understand any discourse, hearers have to integrate distinct knowledge structures from different domains or mental spaces. According to Birdsell (2014), the Conceptual Blending Theory "aims to provide a general cognitive model for meaning-making and for how novel concepts emerge." (p. 72).

Despite developing over many papers, the most comprehensive account of Conceptual Integration Theory was presented in Fauconnier and Turner (2002). The process of meaning construction involves the blending of a structure and that gives rise to more than the sum of its parts (Evans & Green, 2006). People conceptualize new structures by constantly integrating information from different mental spaces or domains of knowledge and experience (Forceville, 2004). To deliver a new meaning, online meaning construction is based on mappings, partial projections and blending processes (El-Attar, 2017). Conceptual Integration Theory is a theory of online meaning construction, meaning that the conceptual blending happens at the moment of perception and creates new meanings out of existing ways of thinking (Joy et al., 2009).

The basic component of conceptual integration is the conceptual integration network, either one or several. According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002), the network in question consists of four mental spaces:

1. Two input spaces containing the two domains that are to be integrated, with their meaningful elements and the relations among them.
2. A generic space containing common characteristics of the two domains.
3. A cross space mapping that proves the non-arbitrary nature of the two corresponding domains by connecting the counterparts in the two input spaces.
4. The blended space is connected to the generic space to create the new structure based on the common characteristics. The projection of the elements from the two input spaces is partial as some elements are compressed or eliminated.

Blending is done through three unconsciously operating cognitive processes (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002):

a) Composition: creation of new relations between counterpart elements projected from the two input spaces to the blended space.
b) Completion: unconscious retrieval of background knowledge to the new blended structure.
c) Elaboration: emergence of the new structure that can be projected back to the two input spaces to modify them.
d) As in Figure 1, the solid lines between the input spaces represent counterpart connections. The dotted lines between the generic space and the input spaces represent the common elements. The dotted lines between the input spaces and the blended space reflect elements projected from the former to the latter (Dzanic & Berberovic, 2017). The diagram in Figure 1 is a one-shot preview of a dynamic blending process which occurs repeatedly and simultaneously.

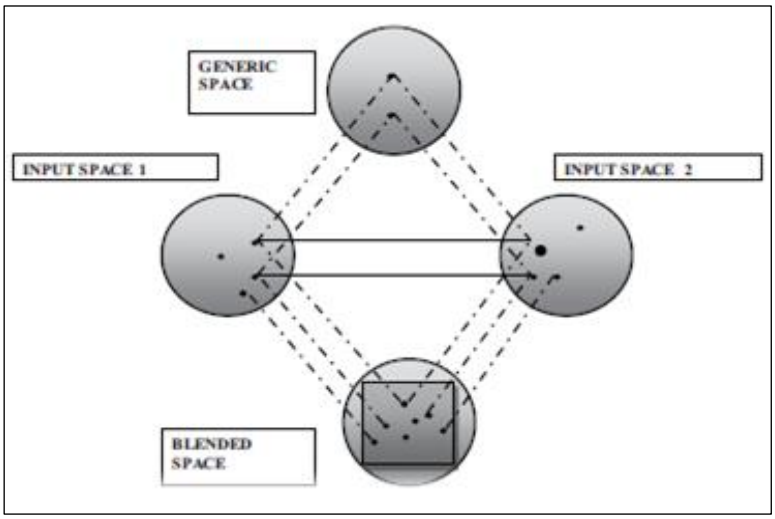


Figure 1: The basic diagram (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 46)

6. Data collection

The memes under examination in this study are instances of image macros, or combinations of related texts and images, with texts sometimes divided into top and bottom texts. The data is 5 image macros. To validate the data, three criteria should be fulfilled, namely form, virality and possibility of

alteration and change. Identical to that of image macros, the form of stock character macros is an image of a stock character, of a human here, either male or female, accompanied with text that can be divided into top and bottom texts superimposed on the image. Another important criterion of stock character macros is being viral or having many versions exchanged among users. The third criterion is alteration and change. The change meant here is both textual, with different texts superimposed on the same image, and visual, or photoshop editing on the image, e.g., Exploitables. There is no Egyptian Arabic site for internet memes as, e.g., knowyourmeme.com for English memes. Thus, the image-macro memes in question are titled by their famous names with which memes' users use to google them.

The following memes are chosen as they conform to data collection standards, namely: consisting of top and bottom texts superimposed on an image, being modified (textually) by adding different texts to the same image and being manipulated and changed (visually) to add humorous meanings; two characteristics that reflect virality, or passing from a user to another, and changeability or alterability. The data in question also abides by stock character macro subtype prevailing trait, namely representing stereotypical behaviours.

7. Data analysis

The stock character macros under examination are listed below in Figure 2, which contains the meme template and five examples of the meme in question, followed by the origin and context, semiotic analysis and cognitive analysis, respectively.

7.1. Origin and context

The group of memes under examination is a screenshot from an Egyptian movie starred by Adel Imam titled "Morgan Ahmed Morgan". The stock character macros consist of two panels, picturing Adel Imam, or Morgan Ahmed Morgan, and Aḥmed Essadany, or Brother Mahmoud. These memes are always used to depict stereotypical behaviours. Throughout the movie, Morgan deals with different contrasting views, he belongs to liberal movements sometimes and to religious groups other times. In the selected screenshot Morgan joins a religious group named "نور الحق" or "Light of the Right", as soon as Mahmoud introduces him to other members, he instantly

Meme template

Meme 1

Meme 2

Meme 3

Meme 4

Meme 5

Figure 2: "And with us is Brother Morgan" stock character macros[1]

turns into one of them and says "السلام عليكم" while putting his hand on his chest. Egyptian meme creators use this screenshot as a template and superimpose different sentences on it to make fun of humorous stereotypical situations. Despite the absence of a comprehensive meme data such as knowyourmeme.com for Egyptian Arabic data, it could be said that Morgan Aḥmed Morgan is an Arabic example of a stock character macro meme, similar to Scumbag Steve, with the difference being that Scumbag Steve depicts untrustworthy and selfish behaviours while Morgan depicts stereotypical behaviours of instant adaptation to radically different situations.

7.2. Semiotic analysis

Stock character macros in this group follow a phrase template or a snowclone, which is defined by knowyourmeme.com as: "a type of phrasal templates in which certain words may be replaced with another to produce new variations with altered meanings, similar to the "fill-in-the-blank" game of Mad Libs" (Gulin, 2020). The phrase template of this group of memes goes as follows: ("with us is Uncle / Engineer / Sister: Morgan /

[1] These memes are quoted from www.pinterest.com and www.facebook.com

Morganah + a predicate that tells the situation). The top text presents a subordinate clause that sets up the background. The bottom text is the main clause or the punchline.

Meme 1 TT: (ومعانا عمى مرجان روحت اطلب ايد بنته)
"With us is Uncle Morgan to whom I went to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage[2]"

BT: (يابنى احنا ناخدها من ايدها ونوديهالك لعند البيت. احنا بنشترى راجل .. عايزين 2 كيلو دهب ومؤخر نص مليون زى بنت خالتها)
"Son, we will hold her hand and deliver her to your home. We buy a man.. We want 2 kilos of gold and half million pounds, the same as what her cousin was given by her fiancé"

The two dots mark two chains of texts that are contrastive. In the first chain uncle Morgan implies that they want nothing expensive and that "they buy a man". However, in the second chain, viewers are surprised by his expensive requests, to be no less than her cousin. Both texts are expressed in Egyptian Arabic, the spoken variety the meme creators use to write texts in their memes. This meme ridicules society norms of exaggerated deferred dowry fathers ask for their daughters.

Meme 2 TT: (ومعانا البشمهندس مرجان لسة متخرج السنادى وراح يشتغل فى موقع)

"With us is Engineer Morgan, he has just graduated and he went to work in a building site".

BT: (الله ينور يا رجالة أحلى كوباية شاى للمحاميد)
"Well done, men.. The best ever cup of tea for Mahameed"

The top text sets the situation which raises viewer expectations, unfulfilled and humorous at the end. Viewers expect to see Morgan working according to his educational qualification. However, in the second panel, viewers see Morgan holding a tray of tea and water glasses while addressing others. Meme 2 is an instance of Exploitables, which, according to knowyourmeme.com, represent

> a meme template in which a single image is manipulated through various

[2] The English translation of the Arabic text is the researcher's translation.

> means to achieve the intended, humorous effect. This can involve replacing words in the original image, adding words to the original image, or manipulating positions of objects in the image to change the original's meaning. (Malak1147, 2021)

The meme in question is exploited as the original panel is substituted by a panel featuring a building site; Morgan and Brother Mahmoud faces are photoshopped into the faces of building workers to create humorous effects. Both top and bottom texts are written in Egyptian Arabic, with distinguishing words such as (كوباية, لسه, بشمهندس, المحاميد, راح, رجاله). Maḥameed is the plural of Muḥammad, a very common name in the Egyptian society. Through this meme, the meme creator makes fun of fresh graduate engineers as they stereotypically work at jobs inferior to their qualifications.

Meme 3 TT: (ومعانا الأخ مرجان لسه فاتح المحل ومش لاقى حاجة يعملها)
"With us is Brother Morgan who has just opened his shop and he has nothing to do"

Meme 3 is a two-panel image macro. The top panel is the original screenshot taken from the movie. The bottom panel is a screenshot of a shop owner throwing water on the ground to decrease flying dust and get some fresh cold air in summer, a common practice of the majority of shop owners and workers in Egypt. The bottom panel is an instance of an Exploitable, or manipulation of an image to create humorous effects. Similar to all memes in this group, meme 3 is structured as a clause, of which the top panel presents the first part that sets the background. The second panel, or the bottom image in particular, is central to this meme as it replaces the bottom text or the main clause. The bottom panel/image is a visual completion of an incomplete verbal structure.

Meme 4 TT: (ومعانا اختى مرجانه لسه متجوزه من اسبوع وجات عندنا البيت زياره)
"With us is my sister Morganah who got married a week ago, and came to visit us"

BT: (انتو بتحطو برطمان السكر فين)
"Where do you put the sugar jar?"

This meme is exploited by adding a long pink female scarf to Morgan's character. The written words are full of punctuation and hamzah mistakes in the following words (بتحطو / مرجانه / متجوزه / اسبوع / اختى / زياره /انتو). This type of mistakes is common and acceptable (based on common linguistic features tackled in previous studies of internet memes (e.g., Dynel, 2016) in internet memes in general, especially when they are written in a colloquial not a standard variety. Egyptian Arabic is always used in internet memes as it is the variety people use and speak in everyday communication. When Modern Standard Arabic is used in image macros, it is usually meant to create "register humour" as in the below example.

Meme 5 TT: (ومعانا الاخت مرجانة خطيبها نسى يكلمها الصبح يسألها فطرتى ايه)
"With us is Sister Morganah whose fiancé forgot to call her to ask about what she had for breakfast.

BT: (لم يستوصوا بنا خيرا يا رسول الله)
"They did not treat us in a good and kind manner, oh Prophet of God".

In the meme in question, the meme creator changed 'Brother' to 'Sister' and 'Morgan' to 'Morganah). The top text is in Egyptian Arabic. It is worth noting that the meme creator did not edit the image of Morgan to turn him into a female character as in the previous photoshopped memes. The bottom text is in Modern Standard Arabic and is a part of a prophetic saying that requests men to treat women in a kind and good manner. The exaggerated reaction of the woman to her fiancé's action is humorous. The meme creator criticizes the oversensitive nature of Egyptian engaged females. This meme is a good example of "register humour" (Vásquez & Aslan, 2021). Register humour, a type of linguistic humour, results from the contrast between the colloquial Egyptian Arabic, in the top text and the highly eloquent Modern Standard Arabic prophetic saying in the bottom text.

Humour in the data under examination is the result of three elements: code violation, Exploitables and linguistic humour. As for code violation, the examined memes have code violation as an inherited characteristic. At the movie scene of the screenshot, movie audience is surprised by the instant adaptation of Morgan. As soon as he is introduced to the religious group in question, he turns into one of them, which is reflected in his way of

pronouncing "السلام عليكم", in standard Arabic dialect, and his hand position as if he is an old sheikh. In the data under examination, the top panel represents Morgan being introduced to the meme readers. Similar to his attitude in the original context, Morgan surprises meme readers with his unreasonable stereotypical behaviours. The humorous effect ensues from the contrasting unexpected second sign, consisting of both the image and the superimposed text. When processing the top panel, or the top image and text (the setup), meme reader recalls the background of the image (the movie, its plot, scenes, etc.) if they watched it before. The humorous effect is achieved in the bottom panel, or the bottom image and text (the punchline), which show stereotypical responses that are usually exaggerated or surpass reader's expectations based on the first sign.

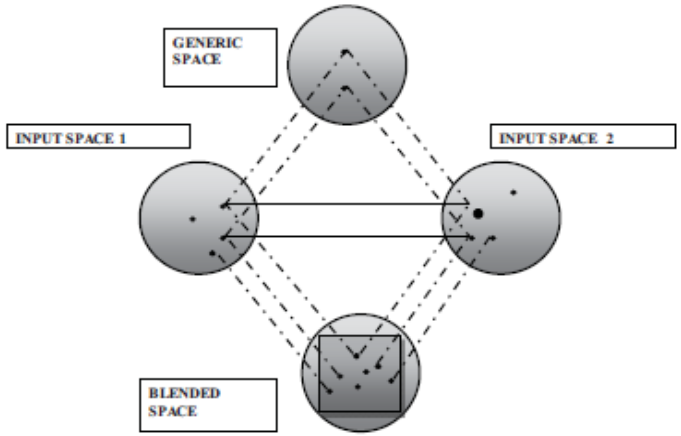
The relation between the images and texts in the memes under examination are interdependent in McCloud's (1994 & 2006) terms as both texts and images convey a meaning that none of them can convey alone; meaning cannot be grasped if one mode is eliminated, an inherited property of a multimodal construction. The image is central to meme understanding as it enables the reader to recall the background scene, thus without the image the image macros in question are mimed. It is worth noting that even in photoshopped image macros, faces of Morgan and Mahmoud are put to help readers recall the context, better understand the meme and link the two panels together. Being a stock character macro, "And with us is Brother Morgan" image contributes to the meme meaning by relating different behaviours expressed in the top texts and bottom texts to this large group of memes and their distinguishing character trait: humorous stereotypical behaviours.

7.3. Cognitive analysis

Meme 2 is analysed cognitively as shown in Figure 3. The first input space is a set-up of the background: recalling the movie context of Morgan's stereotypical behaviours. The second input space is the punchline that creates the cognitive clash: a freshly graduated engineer who works in an inferior position as an office boy to serve educationally inferior builders, a humorous but realistic stereotypical situation similar to the original one and linked to it visually (through the image) and textually (by using the same

Morgan / fresh graduates
Instantly turning to a sheikh / working in inferior jobs as a start
Stereotypical behaviours

Movie context (recalled through the image and phrase template)
An ordinary person introduced to a religious group and instantly adapts to their behaviours and attitude.
(Stereotypical but unreasonable)



(Text and photoshopped image)
A freshly graduated engineer who works as an office boy to serve educationally inferior builders rather than working according to his qualifications
(Stereotypical situation but unreasonable)

Similar to Morgan, who acts in a stereotypical way and instantly uses religious people way of greeting, fresh graduates of Faculty of Engineering stereotypically work in jobs that do not match their qualifications.

Figure 3: A diagram of the blending network of Meme 2

phrase structure). The cognitive clash is solved by viewing the meme in humorous satirical light. The cognitive analysis shows how the human mind can blend already existing mental spaces--one of the movie and the other of a reality situation--to create humorous internet memes that make people laugh and implicitly criticize humiliating work conditions of new graduates.

To reach the new structure, three processes are necessary. In the composition process, the two mental spaces are partially projected into the blended space since unrelated elements are compressed (other events in the movie and other events of an engineer's life). Through the completion stage, background knowledge is recalled: Morgan supposedly will need time to adapt to a new situation; a graduate of the Faculty of Engineering will work as an engineer. In the elaboration stage, the new structure is run; incongruity happens as the two mental spaces are contrasted: Morgan instantly turns to a sheikh, even if superficially; a fresh graduate of the Faculty of Engineering works as an office boy to serve older engineers and builders. Back projections are made to the two input spaces, and they are seen in a different light. Similar to stereotypical behaviours of Morgan, freshly graduated engineers are stereotypically expected to work in inferior positions at the beginning of their career, which, due to the photoshopped image and humorous satirical original context, explains the bottom text in a humorous light. Thus, incongruity is resolved and humour is created.

8. Conclusion

The data under examination yields certain visual, textual and cognitive features. Texts in the stock character macros follow a phrase template, or a snowclone, with a fill-in-the-blank structure. Register humour is also present in mingling both Egyptian Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic with their different styles in Meme 5. Visually, images are instances of Exploitables; they are photoshopped and manipulated to add meanings and to create humorous effects, e.g., memes (2, 3 & 4).

In terms of McCloud's taxonomy of image and text, the images and texts of the memes under examination are in an interdependent relation as both convey meanings that none of them can convey alone. Furthermore, in Meme 3 the image functions as the main clause, and thus completes visually an incomplete lexical structure.

Causes of humour in the memes in question are either visual (e.g., Exploitables), textual (e.g., register humour) or semiotic (e.g., code violation). Humour is created through unfulfilling the expectations of readers. Meme readers expect certain signs to follow the top panel/sign; however, they are confronted by unexpected bottom panel/image/text, which contrasts their expectations and, because of the stereotypical behaviour trait of this stock character macro, creates humour.

Cognitively speaking, the Conceptual Integration Theory highlights how meme makers exploit already existing knowledge and experience or mental spaces to create new structures through mappings, partial projections and blending. The theory in question also marks how meme readers can unpack and deconstruct the new never-seen-before structure, stock character macro meme here, to its basic mental spaces to grasp the intended meaning.

Based on review of the literature and data analysis, the current study contributes to the study of memes and fills some gaps. It adds to the semiotic analysis of memes by adopting two different theories and classifications that were not used before to analyse such data. It presents the semiotic cause of humour and specifies the relation between images and texts. The study is significant also in enriching the poor literature on cognitive analysis of internet memes, as previous studies are scare and used theories other than the Conceptual Integration Theory. It clarifies how new structures are constructed of already existing ones. Unlike previous studies that analysed internet memes in general, the current study specifies a certain genre of internet memes, stock character macros, which have not been investigated before, to the researcher's best of knowledge. It also deals with humour per se rather than the use of humour as a means of political or social commentary.

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