

The Role of Dubbed Cartoons in Supporting Third Culture Kids: A Case Study of the Toy Story Trilogy

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: October 01, 2019

Accepted: October 25, 2019

Published: November, 2019

Volume: 2

Issue: 6

DOI:10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.6.6

KEYWORDS

Dubbed cartoons, cross-culture skills, Cross-Culture Kids, Third Culture Kids, Toy Story Trilogy, globalization, Egyptian Arabic

ABSTRACT

Although the act of dubbing *per se* asserts the nationalistic identity of a given language and its traditions, it has the potential to make viewers forget the foreignness of the movie presented. Dubbing foreign material, mostly presenting the Western or American culture, can be an effective medium to crisscross the cultural barriers between what is "us" and what constitutes "them." Therefore, it is a powerful cross-cultural venue for not only observing a great variety of cultural practices but also for developing strong cross-cultural skills. Moreover, the variety of topics presented in these dubbed movies represent an epitome of the hybrid culture or "third culture." In this sense, dubbing provides a multi-dimensional form of support to Cross-Cultural Kids (CCKs). This paper questions the ways through which dubbed cartoons assist Cross-Cultural Kids (CCKs) in general, and Third Culture Kids (TCKs) in particular, through hypothesizing the existence of a mid-way form of global interaction and third culture reproduction. It also examines the effects these dubbed movies impart on TCKs insofar as they grant them the chance to look to the world anew through three basic approaches: liminality, liquidity and mediation. This resonates with a new form of globalization: globalization-from-within- that may usher in a new phase of global interaction. Dubbed in Egyptian Arabic, Disney's *Toy Story* Trilogy is a quintessential example of this approach, since it provides TCKs with two cultures: one heard and the other watched. The product is pregnant with ideas and supportive techniques which sustain TCKs through their journey to cross-cultural assimilation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to draw upon the collective wisdom of different civilizations and construct a new synthesis of views that ensures human survival and prosperity without sacrificing the richness of diversity that characterizes the human family? (Reed 1999, 24)

This paper takes as its point of departure the new forms through which children's awareness of the "Other" increases through exposure to dubbed cartoons reflecting the culture(s) of "the Other" presented in the viewers' native language. This process, it is argued here, adds to the growing sense of harmonious integration among different cultures in the process of cosmopolitanism and globalization.

Dubbing, the process of lip-synchronization of movies and other film productions, has gained widespread popularity since the 1930s. Recently, the number of dubbing projects have increased to a remarkable extent in all Arab countries in general, and in Egypt in particular. Dubbed cartoons are prominent; they have received a great deal of attention for the sheer benefits—culturally and economically—the film industry gains. From the cultural perspective, dubbed cartoons can be seen as a milieu for crisscrossing barriers among world cultures. They present to their viewers the "foreign culture" in a "local" attire. It is argued here that this process assists the generation of "third culture" where the native local culture presents itself powerfully in the voice of native artists, while the events take place in foreign countries, forming a synthesis of the "we" and the "Other." The interaction

of the Self and Other in this sense will be the result of what the author calls "globalization-from-within."

The paper is also an examination of the approaches of support dubbed cartoons can provide TCKs: liminality, liquidity and mediation. CCKs include some basic forms: traditional Third Culture Kids (TCKs), immigrant children, or refugees, or those who are exposed to "different cultural worlds in one country," and international adoptees or children of minorities. (Pollock & Van Reken 2009, 13) For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be directed to TCKs since they are the targeted audience for dubbed cartoons. It is suggested that the boom in the dubbed cartoons market can sustain TCKs in overcoming the challenges of identity formation, among other things, through highlighting the commonalities that tie all such types.

Prominent among these dubbing projects are Walt Disney's animated cartoons whose themes, in most cases, can be described as cross-cultural. This can be clearly seen in the *Toy Story* trilogy whose characters, locations and, on top of that, themes are likely to be found almost everywhere in most countries. They, one can argue, tackle universal issues that can positively contribute to the educational, emotional and intellectual development and integration of younger children from different cultural backgrounds.

To dub these cartoons into Egyptian Arabic means to present such issues to the respective children - as well as their concerned parents - from a universal perspective. This, in turn, nurtures a tolerant flexible reception of the "Other" which - if wrought and produced with a cosmopolitan heart and mind - will ultimately yield fruitful results in the years to come. Vanessa Leonardi (2008) stresses the role played by the media in audiovisual translation (AVT) in the process of globalizing world cultures. She observes that "in an increasingly globalized world, there is a need to unite people and eliminate all forms of discrimination, and AVT can certainly help in this respect." (169) This target can be achieved when considering the notion that AVT provide venues which encompass intra-lingual (or monolingual) and inter-lingual (or bilingual) forms of translation - namely subtitling and dubbing. They, Leonardi asserts, have the virtue of maintaining one's identity while promoting cultural pluralism at the same time. (169)

2. THIRD CULTURE KIDS (TCKs): CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Being a TCK means in the basic sense to be exposed to at least one foreign culture which might be mostly different from the local one. The term CCK is a modification of the original traditional concept of Third Culture Kids (TCKs) which entails the mobilization of the child to other countries. David C. Pollock and Ruth E. van Reken (2009) define a TCK as one who "has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background." (13). TCKs are heralding an era in which cultural identification is niche, personal, and fluid, and multiculturalism is an advantage. In his 1984 talk at the International Conference of Missionary Kids (ICMK), Ted Ward predicted that TCKs would be the prototype citizens of the future. Now, after more than two decades of Ward's prophecy, the significant increase in global mobility has made it come true. TCKs have become a usual case throughout the world, whatever the reason for their mobilization is. As of 1999, the number of TCKs worldwide was estimated at four million. Additionally, TCKs report lower self-esteem as compared to non-TCKs.

The most prominent challenges TCKs face are those related to identity formation and culture shock. With the high rate of mobility for reasons related to their parents' jobs or other formal commitments, TCKs find themselves with a growing sense of no-place and rootlessness. Most of them may suffer from being alienated from their peers or "foreign friends." The result is a form of fragmented identity that synthesizes a number of cultural backgrounds. Yet, the agony escalates when one bears in mind that

(TCKs) have to trade in their social network of relationships, crucial to adolescent development, for new ones each time they move. Others may only sojourn to one country before repatriating, but they experience mobility indirectly if, for example, they attend an international school that caters for expatriate families and therefore has a high student turnover rate. Even though they stay in one place, those who know them change with each

new academic year as their old friends move away and new ones come. Thus, the people who mean the most to them are geographically scattered.

(Danau Tanu 2015, 20)

Both psychologically and socially, these TCKs find it difficult to copy with the culture shock they undergo, witnessing a rupture in cultural continuity.

However, in light of the globalization process that has normalized mobility and relocation, these challenges bear the fruits of a number of positive sides of being a TCK. Mobility issues can provide chances for flexibility, while culture shocks generate a resolute will to cope with and even assimilate the new culture. With the accumulation of experience, TCKs become more capable of redefining their identities and re-modulating their interpersonal relationships. They are given various life choices and chances which abound to form an asset rarely found if they were to be fixed in their passport country. Taking life decisions and the flexibility to interact with the "Other" are among these merits.

3. SUPPORTIVE APPROACHES AND DUBBED CARTOONS

With their ever-changing lifestyles in mind, TCKs tend to find in dubbed cartoons three major supportive approaches: liminality, liquidity and mediation. Liminal situations describe those in which TCKs find themselves between two-states, resulting in the need to face the new culture challenge. Dubbed cartoons play a vital role in supporting TCKs become more apt to harmonize themselves with the two situations. The heard dialect, with voices of native popular actors, reinforces their "home" culture, whereas the watched scenes link them to their new milieu. TCKs' parents, in most cases, resort to their native dialect in their everyday interaction with their TCKs, and this increases the possibility of normalizing themselves with this liminality. In this case, liminality becomes a blessing. Youngsters are more likely to get the utmost benefits of both while watching the dubbed versions of their favourite cartoons.

The second approach to TCKs' capability of benefitting from this liminality is their high-level liquidity in identity construction. They gain open-mindedness and reach an equilibrium out of their fragmented identities, since, in the words of E. S. Fanøe and G. Marsico (2018), "cultural identity has been conceptualized as a never finished result of an

interactional context-dependent process where individual and collective levels are in a mutual shaping relations." (89) Dubbed cartoons provide these kids with examples of such blending of identities which help them overcome any negative experiences due to this fragmentation. Presenting everyday life situations in their native dialect will give them the chance to emulate the behaviors they watch, and in so doing, overcome their challenges.

Thirdly, mediation is a constructive way to live the "in-betweenness" of the globalized community. It leaves room for intolerance to whatever TCKs find in their "foreign" country. One of the supportive mediation instruments is dubbed cartoons. TCKs find in them a resource to learn and socialize with their peers at schools, clubs and other institutions. Norma McCaig (1996) maintains that

in an era when global vision is an imperative, when skills in intercultural communication, linguistic ability, mediation, diplomacy, and the management of diversity are critical, global nomads are better equipped in these areas by the age of eighteen than are many adults. Why? Because they have spent years developing these skills as strategies for social survival in times of transition. (100)

Mediation becomes a strategy for acquiring, as well as, practicing the social skills TCKs gain in the new society. They nurture a sense of tolerance with the passage of time and, entering into adolescence, they become more aware the cultural differences around them. Dubbed cartoons in general, and *The Toy Story* Trilogy in particular, are prized over other types of dubbed movies with the sheer universal themes they present, which form a strong basis for TCKs' mediation.

4. GLOBALIZATION-FROM-WITHIN

Globalization – if it adopts and applies the universal principles of cosmopolitanism that calls for equality among all individuals and nations - can provide promising solutions to the issues faced by TCKs. The cosmopolitan version of globalization can provide new vistas of thought through which TCKs can view the whole planet as having many versions of cultural aspects that also reflect respect and concern for everyone's serious problems of life. In this case, they

shift in perspective from marginalized "Global Nomads" to normalized "Global Citizens."

The two basic models of globalization are globalization-from-above and globalization-from-below. While the former is dictated by the powerful and the rich nations, negating the rights of the deprived, the latter attempts to grant the marginalized and poor a safe place under the sun. Both models work according to pre-set agendas, and this may account for their unsuitability to the high rate mobility TCKs undergo. A third model is suggested: "globalization-from-within." It denotes the natural processes of cosmopolitanism that TCKs normally go through while growing up in their third culture global community. They familiarize themselves with this mid-way situation and achieve a kind of equilibrium between whatever cultures they come to know.

Being in line with the principles of cosmopolitanism that calls for spreading justice and equality among all individuals and nations, globalization-from-within can substantially contribute to the process of doing away with such terms as "the upper class, the dominant nations or powers, and the elite classes. Such terms as "the under-developed nations" and "the uncivilized communities" can one day disappear from common usage or, at least, marginalized if "globalization-from-within" is given a chance to apply its cosmopolitan principles of justice and equality among all individuals and all nations. Thus, Reed's call for "a global civilization based on the principles of equality, justice, and life enchantment" (1999, 31) can be realized.

The media in general, and movies in particular, can substantially contribute to realizing that ideal of globalization-from-within model. J. Champoux (1999) highlights the importance of creatively using film scenes in classroom situations; they can provoke good and positive discussions. This necessarily calls for reassessing one's values and self if marred with narrow provincialism that deny *others* the milieu necessary to be equal with the powerful ones even though they were unfairly categorized as belonging to "the lower classes or backward nations" and many other pejorative or degrading terms. As such, movies – dubbed cartoons included - have the potential to build bridges among different cultures, and facilitate cross-cultural dialogues. Hence, "films are entertaining, engaging and in many cases stimulate curiosity towards other cultures. Films can be very valuable intellectual exercise in deciphering other

cultures" (Pandey 2012, 331) because they can creatively promote – often in subtly molded interactions among the characters of the movie – the values of interpersonal understanding and cross-cultural tolerance.

5. THE TOY STORY TRILOGY

Toy Story is an animated media franchise created by *Pixar* and distributed by *Walt Disney Pictures*, beginning with the original 1995 film, *Toy Story*. The franchise focuses on a group of toys that secretly come to life and end up unexpectedly embarking on life-changing adventures.

All three sequels were highly acclaimed, with the first and second films getting a perfect 100% rating. The third film in the series became the highest-grossing animated film and the 9th highest-grossing film of all time. It also became the third animated film in history to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture, following *Beauty and the Beast* and *Up*.

Toy Story 1 (1995)

The plot involves Andy getting a new Buzz Lightyear toy, and Woody thinking that he has been replaced as Andy's favorite toy. As a result of Woody's jealousy, he tries to knock Buzz behind a table, but accidentally knocks him out of the window. Realizing that he did something awful, Woody determined to set things right, so he attempted to save Buzz, and both try to escape from the house of the next-door neighbor Sid Phillips who likes to torture and destroy toys.

Toy Story 2 (1999)

The plot involves Woody getting stolen by a greedy toy collector named Al. Buzz and several of Andy's toys go around the Tri-County Area to save him. Again the group of toys get into a series of breathtaking adventures to save Woody who insists on returning to his owner, Andy. In this part, the events cast plenty of shadows on Woody's glorious past, reminding the audience once more of the value of the Old.

Toy Story 3 (2010)

Set ten years after the events of the second film, the plot focuses on the toys accidentally being dropped off at a daycare center while their owner, Andy, is getting ready to go to college. The film contains over 150 new characters, according to *Pixar*. It is currently *Pixar*'s highest-grossing film of all-time worldwide,

surpassing *Finding Nemo*. Themes of separation and the possibility of continuity hover over the events with Andy getting older and refusing to get rid of his dearest toys to the daycare centre, gifting the cute girl Bonnie with them only when he becomes certain she can take care of them as much as he used to.

6. BENEFITS OF THE DUBBED VERSION

With this in mind, the *Toy Story* Trilogy provides a rich environment for positive cultural transmission of values that can contribute to the process of global homogeneity. Set in a US cultural milieu, the events can seem foreign to Arab children. Yet this sense of alienation vanishes once two facts are stressed in this regard. First, most of the targeted audience are accustomed to the main issues discussed in the story. Second, dubbing the three movies into Egyptian Arabic redresses any unfamiliar incidents, scenes and even characters in a way largely familiar to the audience.

Undoubtedly, dubbing, with its role in blurring the lines among the seemingly different cultures, has played a crucial role in presenting and casting the trilogy in an Egyptian mold and fashion that most viewers hardly feel vexed by the idea of watching “a foreign movie.” One merit of such a strategy is that the movies could overcome any chance of a cultural shock and the language limitation; TCKs find it very difficult to understand and appreciate humor, satire and verbal expression of feelings in a language they do not know well. The dubbed versions in colloquial Egyptian Arabic simultaneously guarantee both identity preservation and awareness of the Other.

As Satish Pandey (2012) has pointed out, using movies in a classroom situation or context has aided a lot in the cross-cultural management course for these movies could enlighten students with many culturally related issues and alert them to the various strategies that could assist in the process of global unity. While Champoux (1999) finds in the cinema, not only a potential but also the ability to “create unique experience [giving] it unbeatable power as a teaching tool” (207), one can adopt and apply the same trajectory of thought to dubbed movies. The linguistic, social and even moral experiences the trilogy presents are more likely to affect children’s acceptance of the Other – here the Western culture - as well as open up the gates to self-awareness through indulging in the process of reevaluating the extent of similarity – and also differences - between what is presented and what is there in the children’s own societies. Speaking the

same tongue and uttering the same colloquial, slang and idiomatic expressions can affect a shift in the TCKs point of view about the “foreign culture,” rendering it no foreign at all. This result can be due to practices of creative dubbing that depend upon local dialects to avoid alienating listeners from the cultural content that can be useful to many, if not all, cultures.

The dubbed version of such cartoons has also several other technical merits. It largely lacks the problem of lip-synchronicity which many opponents of dubbing claim as the main point of its imperfection. Since the characters’ lip-movements do not give precise articulation of words and sentences, this removes any chance of illusionary discrepancy between what is said and what is heard on the screen. What is more, children at their early stage are not geared towards this very technical side of the production. They, however, focus mainly on the events that seem to arrest their attention, and are attracted by the interesting characters and the speed of actions.

This argument gives dubbing priority over subtitling that often causes a kind of perplexity to children who are unable to read fast the captions, or are unable to read altogether. With subtitling, the typical gap - often associated with the slow reading process or the “noise” caused by some alienating versions of the Standard Version of Arabic - between “us” and “them” is still there. This dichotomy vanishes in the case of dubbing. Pandey (2012) recalls when one of the students in his research about using films in teaching cross-cultural management admits: “I learnt that nothing is impossible, though cultural differences are there but attitude to mix and adapt with other cultures, and respect to other cultures helps in cultural adaptation. The movie also depicted how people get culture shock and learn to overcome it” (330).

Concerning information processing, the dubbed version provides the targeted audience with content that can be easily processed and comprehended. Moreover, creative dubbed versions can affect their conduct in day-to-day life situations pursuant to what they “learn” from those movies that often show how “good” characters ultimately win against the “evil” ones. The localization process that often carries cosmopolitan principles simply makes such movies more understandable and likeable for the new audiences without sacrificing the cultural specificity of the origin. Dubbers, in addition, have the freedom to clarify matters that the original text may pose as challenging. For instance, in the case of the *Toy Story*

Trilogy, they could successfully integrate a full load of culturally-rooted content in the dialogues to the extent that most of the issues discussed are clearly understood by the average viewer, whether a child or a parent.

7. NATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL OR TRANSNATIONAL

At this historical juncture of globalization and cosmopolitanism, dubbed cartoons mark a shift from the nationalistic preference for subtitling over dubbing. Akin to the remarkable acceptance of transnational companies in the world marketplace of the twenty first century, societies have witnessed a comparable shift in their acceptance of dubbed productions of all types: TV programs, series, movies and cartoons.

Traditionally, dubbing has been associated with the preservation of the nationalistic feeling of the target communities. Prior to the information technology influx at the outset of the third millennium, Martine Danan (1991) insisted that dubbing and nationalism are identical, albeit the economic burden. This is understandable since dubbing provides at a large scale the opportunity to preserve, and even boast of, one's nationalistic feelings. Communicating in the same language used by the targeted audience's, dubbing becomes "an assertion of the supremacy of the national language and its unchallenged political, economic and cultural power within the nation's boundaries" (Danan 1991, 612). Bearing in mind the various nationalistic characteristics that Fasold (1983) endows upon language, taking advantage of the natural flavor of the native language or vernacular seems to allow for a mass acceptance of the dubbed movies; this is so since it is the symbol of national identity, used for everyday purposes and accepted as a symbol of authenticity (77).

Yet to confine the use of dubbing to just fulfilling nationalistic purposes cannot be accepted at its face value. In line with the principles of cosmopolitanism that assert the equality of all individuals and all nations, one can contend that dubbed cartoons help as transnational tools for universal issues that assert the values of securing justice and equality for all. This cosmopolitan approach can be easily observed in the *Toy Story* Trilogy. The first part, for instance, discusses the tension arising between the old and new generations particularly in their relative modes of

thinking and the lure of modern technologies. This is shown in the character of Andy who receives Buzz Lightyear, a space fighter fully equipped with the-state-of-the-art-technologies, as the best birthday party. Woody, the traditional cowboy Sheriff, gets heated and feels envious of this intruder. Worthy of note is that the other toys confirm this "human" attitude which takes the story further to cover a series of events projecting more tension till Woody, unintentionally, throws Buzz into the garden of Sid, the sadistic child. Now, Woody's valour and nobleness direct him to take the course of action of saving Buzz. This part ends up with the lesson that both the past and the present are no enemies any more. They, on the contrary, can cooperate to assure human homogeneity as well as the universality of the human cause.

In the second part, TCKs encounter another set of universal themes, prominent among which is the issue of the humanistic bond in the face of greed in a deadly competitive economic world. Al, the greedy shop owner, steals Woody and decides to make a "good" deal by selling it to a Japanese museum along with the rest of the complete set of toys (the evil inspector, Jessie and his horse). In this case, Woody refuses to stay there, insisting to return to his real owner – Andy. On their part, other toys take all the risk to get Woody back. The real meaning of belongingness and fellowship is exposed in this part, which adds up to the new global dimensions which add more assets to the dubbed version.

The third part tackles a very critical humanistic issue: growing up and doing without the toys. The whole part revolves around the best environment one must choose as one's home. Suffering in the daycare centre, the toys were fumed at Andy's decision. Yet, to know at the end that their transference to the daycare centre has been done by mistake, the toys' deep conviction in their comfort and ease at Andy's house got consolidated. The distinction between the vain and pompous characters in the daycare centre and the cute and careful Bonnie opens the viewers' eyes to the need for a fruitful discussion about where one should live with younger children.

As such, dubbing the trilogy gives homage to reaching a kind of equilibrium between what is "domestic and nationalistic," on the one hand, and what is "foreign and international." It is neither national nor international; it is "transnational." One feature of today's globalization status quo is the spread of

transnational companies that could be part of any society, despite the voices reminding people of their foreignness. Similarly, TCKs are more likely to accept the content of dubbed movies as transnational. They find nothing counter-intuitive there to deserve going against them.

Dubbing has also left room for the realization that the dubbed cartoon is not totally a domesticated local version. Through keeping some alien signifiers other than the dialogues, the movie still retains its "foreign" nature. Children can still grasp that the dubbed version they have been watching is a translated version. Some elements are to be mentioned in this respect. The names of main characters are kept, largely, in their original: Woody, Bonnie, Sid, Ken, Barbie and Lotso, to name just a few. The use of "identical sets, identical image composition and the rest of the sound track (every sound that is not the spoken word)" (Ascheid 1997, 32) hammers the idea that this is a foreign movie produced originally in a different language. This has to do with the tolerance the children are surely to have towards "the Other" insofar as it has a humanistic message and bears ample grounds of similarity to their milieu through using their native language in addressing or tackling issues relevant to them. In the words of Antje Ascheid (1997), dubbing cartoons relieves those belonging to different cultures from the burden of exerting an effort to assimilate behavior, values, and language alien to them in ways that help viewers from other cultures to assimilate and pass much easier through "cinematic identification, the suspension of disbelief and a continuous experience of unruptured pleasure." (33)

8. TWO DIFFERENT MOVIES

Hermeneutically speaking, the dubbed cartoon can be seen as a completely new production. Ascheid (1997) insists that the dubbed version has much more to say about the issue of equivalence in cross-cultural translation than just the transference of all what is there in the original version:

(T)hese *new* characters are uttering a *translated*, which always means interpreted, appropriated, and recreated *new text*, thus undergoing fundamental shifts in the construction of their national and cultural identity and context....the dubbed motion picture becomes a new and fundamentally re-contextualized product (33).

In light of this observation, the values that can be assimilated from the movie, resign its cultural specificity to a more globalized and universal one. If this is so, then dubbed movies are largely analogous to those produced in the multiple language era when directors used to produce the same movie in different languages.

Dubbing, as translation practice, has also to do with the fact that translation per se is a form of rewriting the original text. It is largely affected by, as Jeremy Munday (2001) contends, the ideology of the translator as well as the poetics they heed to throughout the translation process (130). In today's globalized approach to language and culture, the need to find a unified version of accepting other cultures has become persistent.

Dubbing, with its keen relationship with the notion of "doubling" (Delia Chiaro 2009, 147) the production and hence reaching larger audiences, could do a great deal of benefit rather than harm to both the original product and the targeted audience. TCKs find in the dubbed cartoons a safe harbor in which they learn and practice the possible ways of overcoming the challenges of identity fragmentation and psychological alienation, for they have already experienced this liminality.

9. CONCLUSION

The need to unite people through adopting the fair values of justice and equality can be creatively presented through dubbed cartoons. They may substantially contribute to TCKs' attempts at mastering cross-cultural skills that are of paramount importance to their feelings of such values. The paper has attempted to prove that dubbing can form bridges across different cultures, thereby increase the sense of homogeneity. Thanks to the creative productions in Walt Disney's *Toy Story* Trilogy, which often project cosmopolitan principles that harmonize domestic as well as universal issues, dubbing cartoons proves the prospected fruitfulness of the suggested globalization-from-within model. With the widespread concerns about TCKs' problems and challenges, this paper has presented a view of the ways dubbed cartoons can provide support to those youngsters, focusing more on their chances of benefits rather than loss. Depending on the examination of liminality, liquidity and mediation in terms of dubbing, it is more likely that these benefits can be achieved in real life, even if on the long run.

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