



## The Language Teacher Facing Transnationality

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## The Language Teacher Facing Transnationality

Since the 1990s it has become more and more clear that the traditional national paradigm of language teaching and learning is out of sync with the complexity of the modern world. The language teacher of today has to take account of the shifting landscapes of languages and cultures and try to enact an alternative to the national paradigm. This article theorizes language as linguistic practices spreading or flowing in social networks all over the world as a result of all kinds of mobility. It considers language as a carrier of linguaculture no matter where it is used and no matter what the topic is. This view implies that the language teacher's object of teaching is a world language with an infinitely variable linguaculture, used in different cultural contexts all over world as part of changing linguistic landscapes. In order to prepare language teachers for this situation, it is important to design curricula that invite students to transgress the national and monolingual focus of foreign and second language studies, as for example in the kind of studies conducted at Roskilde University, in which students combine mainly national studies with studies of interculturality, transnationality and global/local issues.

Keywords: language teaching, national paradigm, transnational paradigm, linguistic flows, linguaculture, monolingualism

### Introduction

Since the 1990s it has become more and more clear that the traditional national paradigm of language teaching and learning is out of sync with the complexity of the modern world. The language teacher of today has to take account of the shifting landscapes of languages and cultures and try to enact an alternative to the national paradigm that presupposes an identity of national language, national culture, national history and national territory.

One can speak of a pre-national, a national and a post-national phase of language teaching. Before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century language teaching was not nationally oriented. As an example of a pre-national textbook, the Latin primer *Ianua linguarum reserata* (Comenius 1649) had a universal and encyclopaedic content divided into 100 chapters on topics such as the elements, the earth, the body, the economy, grammar, music, geography, history and angels. It was translated into several languages and also appeared in multilingual editions with reading passages divided into, for example, a Latin, a Greek and a French column.

The present national orientation of language teaching took place in connection with the processes of nation-building in Europe and the rest of the world, particularly during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In that period language teaching gradually became nationalised and included in the general shaping of populations to a nationally structured view of the world. A geographical division of labour developed between languages as school subjects that involved a narrowing and focusing in terms of content: the subject English looked towards England, the English and the English language; the subject French looked towards France, the French and the French language, etc.

But since the 1980s and especially the 1990s, as a result of increasing internationalisation and globalisation, we have seen the emergence of ideas of postmodernism, interculturality,



transnationality and transculturality – all ideas that thematise the retreat of the national as the primary and taken-for-granted reference for all political, social and cultural activity. Some scholars use the term post-national for this phase, not believing that the national has disappeared, but that it does not have the prominence it once had: although national structures and identities are continually constructed and reconstructed, they are embedded in wider, transnational and global processes of great strength.

This questioning of the national focus has resulted in a crisis in the identity of language teaching, a crisis that has perhaps been most evident in the teaching of English because of the growing importance of English as an international language; but in principle the development is relevant for all languages. The crisis has forced practitioners and theorists to reformulate the very bases of language teaching and learning: the view of language, and the view of the relationship between language, culture and society. We have seen the emergence of post-national theories that are meant to serve as new bases for language teaching in the modern complex world, among them Kramersch 1993 and 2009, Holliday 1999 and 2005, Phipps & Gonzalez 2004, Kumaravadivelu 2008, and Risager 1998, 2006 and 2007.

The following pages contain a brief outline of the basic ideas in Risager 2006 and 2007. It focuses on transnational linguistic and cultural flows, therefore it can be characterized as a transnational approach. In the end of the article I will present an existing programme of language teacher education (at Roskilde University) that combines mainly national studies with studies of interculturality, transnationality and global/local issues.

## Rethinking the view of language

### *Global linguistic flows*

The teaching and learning of languages since the 1970s has been influenced by the pragmatic turn in linguistics. Today it is common to state that language use should be analysed in relation to the context of communication, and that language teaching and learning should focus on the appropriate use of the target language, oral and written, according to situational and wider social contexts. This communicative approach is often characterized as sociolinguistic as it rests upon a concept of language that foregrounds language as a means of communication in social interaction. It is a dynamic concept of language, focusing on practice. But it is also a concept that is bound to the local: the focus is on the use of language in delimited situations of communication.

In order to develop a transnational view of language, one has to consider language as practices in a global perspective. I will here refer to the concept of social network, which is widely used in the social sciences, for instance in Hannerz 1992. Social network theory makes it possible to examine social relations and chains of social interaction at various levels of social practice, from the micro-level of interpersonal interaction to macro-levels of transnational and global mass-communication and communication between organisations and other collective actors. Language practices can be said to spread in social networks all over the world.

Take for example the French language: French is used in many kinds of social networks at various levels in francophone countries. But it is also used in other places in the world. In fact French is a world language in the sense that speakers of French live in practically every country and region in the world - as tourists, students, business people, diplomats, doctors, journalists, scientists etc. So a language such as French (i.e. people using French) spread all



over the world, across cultural contexts and discourse communities. This mobility (which is by no means accessible for all) is made easier than before by modern technologies of transportation.

Connections between people all over the world in patterns of social networks are made easier than before by the means of telecommunication and the world wide web. For instance, a French-speaking person can correspond by e-mail in French with a colleague in Australia, and she can talk in French by mobile phone to a relative who is travelling in Poland. If she is also German-speaking, she can read on-line newspapers produced in the German-speaking community in Argentina, and she can skype in German with a friend in Norway. I am not only thinking of language spoken as first language, but also as second or foreign language.

We are witnessing the development of more or less global linguistic networks. Many languages of the world take part in this process, not just the major languages that are taught as foreign languages. A language like Danish, for example, is also a world language in the sense that it is spoken by people staying or living in all corners of the earth – as first, second and foreign language. Of course the Danish language network is especially dense on the Danish territory, but nevertheless it has a global range. In this perspective the notion of linguistic area (the French-speaking area, the Danish-speaking area etc.) is problematic: Languages are not territorially bound.

The various language-specific networks meet locally, thus creating local multilingual settings of great complexity. Almost any place in the world is characterized by multilingualism to some degree, not least the big cities. In a small country like Denmark, for instance, about 120 languages are spoken by various groups of immigrants. With inspiration from the transnational theory of Arjun Appadurai (1996) (involving such concepts as global ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes), I would like to speak of global and local *linguascapes* (landscapes of languages), covering both actual practices (the actual languages spoken by specific individuals and groups in specific situations, maybe in situations of code-switching) and people's representations of languages and language use (e.g. ideas of language hierarchies and language mixings, e.g. *franglais*).

### ***Implications for language teaching and learning***

The language teacher faces the global linguascape, incl. his or her target language, and this language is a world language. This goes not only for English, but for any language taught as a foreign or second language. The empirical reference for the study of a specific language is not the linguistic area (say *France* or *La Francophonie*), but the worldwide network of the target language. Where and in what situations do people speak, read and write the target language? How is the target language used on the internet by ordinary people and interest groups? What role does the language have in transnational migration of all sorts? What role does it have in transnational companies, markets and media? In international politics? In international cultural cooperation? Thus learning a new language would mean entering the global and transnational scene by means of competences in the language in question. It could also mean getting an opportunity to be seen as a (coming) world citizen with a cosmopolitan outlook.

Another implication is that the analytical object is not only (texts in) the target language as first (native) language, but also as second and foreign language. The target language is learnt and spoken by many kinds of people and for many different reasons. So an awareness of the complex functions of the target language opens up for its great regional and ethnic variability: How is the target language - French for instance - used by Arabic immigrants in



France? How is it used by Chinese immigrants in Canada? It is important to have this inclusive concept of the functions of a language partly because students engaged in foreign language studies may indeed have many different language backgrounds. Students of French in higher education, for example, are not only foreign-language speakers of French, some of them may be first- or second-language speakers of French, studying their language abroad.

A third implication is that the target language is part of global and local linguascapes. It is always in relation to (in competition with, struggling with) other languages that have different positions in actual and imagined language hierarchies. Thus learning a new language would also mean to get some introduction to the target language not seen in isolation, but seen in relation to other languages. This could mean reflections on structural and typological differences between the target language and other languages, or reflections on language encounters: studies of situations of code-switching in conversation, or studies of code-mixing in vocabulary and grammar, for example the development of ‘franglais’ in France or ‘Danglish’ in Denmark. One of the aims of language teaching and learning could be to develop multilingual awareness – an awareness of global and local linguascapes and related issues of identity, power and recognition.

‘Target language countries’ do not only encompass native speakers of the target language. Parts of the population speak it as a second or foreign language. And parts of the population have other languages as their first language. So one would miss an important part of the social and cultural life of the target language country if one restricts the horizon to ‘native speakers’.

So the transnational approach emphasizes the need to challenge the very strong monolingual tradition of language teaching and learning. The language teacher should still be a specialist of the target language, but not exclude any interest in or knowledge of other languages – cf. the division of labour characteristic of the national phase of language teaching mentioned in the introduction.

## **Rethinking the view of the relationship between language and culture**

### ***Defining a third position***

Nowadays, the most usual and easy way of dealing with the relationship between language and culture is to state that it is a complex relationship, thus verbalizing the difficulties of coming to grips with this thorny question. Those who do formulate an opinion on the issue, may largely be characterized as holding one of two opposite positions:

- language and culture are inseparable, *or*
- language is culturally neutral

The first view is associated with the cultural turn in linguistics since the 1980s, and is maintained in various forms in research disciplines such as linguistic anthropology, translation studies, and studies of intercultural communication. This is of course also a popular belief among people in general, not least in Europe in the present process of political integration of nation states in a larger union. The second view is mostly associated with the study of English as a lingua franca, but is also implied in the CLIL approach (Content and Language Integrated Learning), in which the target language is used in combination with subjects like mathemat-



ics, technology, or geography. In these cases it is maintained that languages may be seen as flexible and culturally neutral instruments of communication that may in principle be used with any subject matter.

None of these positions is satisfying. The first one emphasizes that language is culture-bound, and one is not far from a conception of a closed universe of language, people, nation, culture, history, mentality and land – the national paradigm. The other position claims that language can be seen as a code, and one is not far from a reconstitution of the classical structuralist conception of the autonomy of language.

I would like to describe a third position, in which both of these problematic views of language are avoided:

- language and culture can be separated, *and*
- language is never culturally neutral, it carries linguaculture

### ***Language and culture can be separated***

Two different dimensions of the relationship between language and culture need to be distinguished: culture as context and culture as content. In both dimensions, language and culture can be separated.

When culture is seen as context, the focus is on language use in different situations, and the theoretical point of departure is taken in a pragmatic, sociolinguistic or discourse-analytic view of language use. At the centre of interest is the relationship between language use and the wider cultural context, often with a preference for the ‘native’ context: French in France, German in Germany, etc. (i.e. the national paradigm). However, concerning culture as context, it follows directly from the perspective of linguistic flows that language and culture can be separated: Linguistic practice spreads or flows across cultural contexts all over the world. A Chinese-speaking person who has acquired Chinese in China, and who moves to Germany, takes the Chinese language with him or her and puts it to use in the new cultural context (and the language may change in the process). Thus a language can be used in any cultural context in the world – more or less easily depending on the lexicalizations and other structural characteristics of the particular language, i.e. its linguaculture (see below).

When culture is seen as content, which is very common in language teaching, the focus is on the topic areas that are preferred in the teaching, such as literature, history, ways of life, work and leisure, institutions, political issues, etc. At the centre of interest is the choice and use of topics, traditionally with a preference for what is going on within the national state (i.e. the national paradigm). However, concerning culture as content, it is evident that in theory any topic could be chosen as thematic content of texts in a particular language. There can be texts in German about Argentina, and texts in Spanish about Denmark, and about any other topic in the world – again more or less easily depending on the peculiarities of the language in question (its linguaculture, see below).

### ***Implications for language teaching and learning***

The language teacher’s primary object of teaching, the target language, is not necessarily tied to ‘target language countries’. One can include studies of the use of the target language in all sorts of cultural contexts, as for instance the use of French in companies in São Paulo, or the use of French in the French school in Copenhagen. This could also imply a greater opportunity for internationalisation in language teaching and learning: when all contexts are in prin-





principle relevant, then contacts all over the world are relevant. It would be relevant to communicate in the target language with people in any cultural context, for example immigrants learning Swedish as a second language in Sweden communicating with Swedish-speaking people in Iceland, perhaps via the internet or by actually visiting each other. The point is that the choice of contexts and contacts are not naturally bound to the target-language countries, but can transcend them, and that means that the actual choice needs pedagogical justifications that are independent of the particular language.

Another implication is that the target language does not determine texts, topics and areas of knowledge (cf. the traditional expression ‘the culture and literature of target-language countries’). As seen in the CLIL experiences, it is possible to teach languages in relation to a whole range of different topic areas. The link between the study of language and the study of ‘its’ literature is thus not a natural one, it is a historical construction that was once important in the nation-building process. When this link is maintained today, it has to be specially motivated, for language teaching and learning may as well focus on social studies, cultural studies, media studies, business studies, art studies etc. Dissolving this traditional link offers greater opportunities for cross-disciplinary cooperation.

***Language is never culturally neutral: it carries linguaculture***

Any language carries meaning, and in this sense any language carries culture. A special term for this is ‘linguaculture’, which could also be called ‘culture in language’.

The concept of linguaculture (or languaculture) has primarily been developed by Michael Agar (1994) and later by me. Agar has coined the term ‘languaculture’ as a concept covering language plus culture, and he is especially interested in the variability of languaculture in discourse (verbal interaction), both among different native users of the same language, and among people who use the language as a native and/or a foreign language. Agar focuses on the semantic and pragmatic variability of linguistic practice and invites the reader to explore ‘rich points’ in intercultural communication, i.e. points where communication goes wrong.

Whereas Agar uses the concept of languaculture in order to theorize the single universe of language and culture, I use it as a concept that may offer us the opportunity of highlighting the culturality of language while at the same time maintaining the conception (metaphor) of linguistic flows across cultural contexts in the world. So it makes it possible to say that languages (i.e. language users) spread in social networks, across cultural contexts and discourse communities, but they carry languaculture with them (in my recent writing I am beginning to prefer the term ‘linguaculture’).

This means that there are dimensions of culture that are bound to a specific language, namely linguaculture, and there are dimensions that are not, for instance musical traditions or architectural styles. There may of course be lots of historical links between such cultural phenomena and the language in question, but the point is that the phenomena are not dependent on that specific language.

I suggest to distinguish between three dimensions of linguaculture:

- the semantic-pragmatic dimension
- the poetic dimension
- the identity dimension



The semantic-pragmatic dimension is that explored by Agar, and by many others interested in intercultural pragmatics and contrastive semantics. It has also been a longstanding focus of interest for linguistic anthropology since Boas, Sapir and Whorf. This dimension is about constancy and variability in the semantics and pragmatics of specific languages: More or less obligatory distinctions between (in English) 'forest' and 'wood', between 'he' and 'she', between 'red' and 'orange', between 'hello' and 'how are you', between 'nature' and 'culture' etc. - and the social and personal variability that is found in concrete situations of use.

The poetic dimension is related to the specific kinds of meaning created in the exploitation of the phonological and syllabic structure of the language in question, its rhymes, its relationships between speech and writing etc., areas that have for a long time interested literary theorists focusing on literary poetics, style, literariness and the like (cf. Jakobson 1960).

The identity dimension is also called social meaning by some sociolinguists (for example Hymes 1974). It is related to the social variation of the language in question: in using the language in a specific way, with a specific accent for instance, you identify yourself and make it possible for others to identify you according to their background knowledge and attitudes. Linguistic practice is a continuing series of 'acts of identity' (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985) where people project their own understanding of the world onto the interlocutors and consciously or unconsciously invite them to react. This dimension has been explored by those scholars within sociolinguistics that are interested in the relationship between language and identity.

Linguaculture has both collective and personal aspects: On the one hand the individual's linguaculture is shared with other people's linguacultures in the sense that all share the same structural constraints and potentials of the language in question, for instance related to the difference (in English) between 'forest' and 'wood'. On the other hand, the individual's linguaculture is tied to his or her personal life history under specific social, cultural and historical circumstances: What role does the word 'forest' and the concept of a forest have in your life experiences – how has it been embodied, what significance does it have for your emotions, what place does it take in your imagination? (cf. Kramsch 2009).

One's linguaculture is first and foremost tied to the language you learnt first in life. Learning other languages means building on the linguaculture of your first language. Personal connotations to words and phrases are transferred, and a kind of language mixture develops, where the new language is supplied with linguacultural matter from the first language.

### ***Implications for language teaching and learning***

The language teacher faces transnationality in the landscape of linguacultural diversity (cultural diversity in language). Teaching and learning the target language means managing the semantic-pragmatic, poetic and identity constraints and potentials of that particular language. At the same time it means sensitivity to the sometimes considerable individual diversity in connotations and experiences linked to the language, whether used as first, second or foreign language. Thus the English language (to take an example of a language that is sometimes described as potentially culturally neutral), carries linguaculture no matter in what context it is used, no matter where it is used, and with what topic. The same goes for any other language. Being a language teacher is therefore always also being a linguaculture teacher.

## **A transnational curriculum for language teachers: An example**





### ***Studies at Roskilde University***

In the following section I will exemplify these reflections with a study programme that is made possible by the particular structure of Roskilde University. This university, which is situated about 30 km from Copenhagen, started in 1972 and has a special educational and learning profile as it is based on principles of interdisciplinarity and problem-based learning. Studies are to a large extent organized as problem-based project work in groups of students supervised by teachers.

There is great flexibility of subject combinations, as almost all subjects may be combined in pairs with two equally weighted entities. If you are interested in languages (English, French or German), you may choose one of these languages along with another subject such as Geography, Communication, Philosophy, Pedagogy, Global Studies, Psychology, International Development Studies, Danish, History, or Cultural Encounters. This paper focuses on the combination of French and Cultural Encounters, which offers students the possibility of combining the mainly national perspective of French with the transnational and global perspective of Cultural Encounters.

Both French and Cultural Encounters are studies aiming at BA and MA levels, but the special structure of Roskilde University means that students accomplish their first two years of university studies in one of four broad interdisciplinary programmes: HUM (the humanities), HUM-TEK (the humanities + technology), SAM (social sciences), and NAT (natural sciences). One of the reasons for having these interdisciplinary programmes is that students are offered the possibility of postponing their choice of subjects until after one or two years.

Future students of French and Cultural Encounters would typically pass through the programme of HUM, where they carry out project studies together with students planning to choose other subjects. In the project groups students define problems (often contemporary societal problems and issues) and learn to use appropriate theories and methodologies from the area of the humanities in their work with the problems and the writing of the report, comprising 30-80 pages depending on the number of students in the group. Future students of French and Cultural Encounters are required to include some studies in HUM that are related to French and to Cultural Encounters as well. In the third year they focus more exclusively on their two subjects, studying for the BA degree (after three years), and possibly later also for the MA degree (two more years).

### ***French studies***

The subject French (number of students 2009: around 30) focuses on French language and the cultural, social and political history of France, with a special emphasis on literature and text analysis. There are also possibilities of working with the literature and culture of other French-speaking countries. There are courses on:

- The cultural and literary history of France
- Literature and text analysis
- Grammatical analysis
- Phonology and phonetic transcription
- Translation French-Danish
- Translation Danish-French
- Written proficiency: the writing of essays and other genres



- Oral proficiency: conversation, oral argumentation

The course curriculum builds first and foremost on the national paradigm, but it does not focus exclusively on France, it also invites studies of *La Francophonie* in a post-colonial perspective. Beside course studies, the students conduct project studies (one project each semester), in which they may include transnational perspectives if they are interested. Among projects titles one can mention:

- Amour, mariage et société [Love, marriage and society]
- Théâtre et société du XVIIIe au XIXe siècles [Theatre and society from the 17th to the 19th century]
- Analyse thématique: Le procès-verbal de J.M.G. Le Clézio [Thematic analysis: Le procès-verbal by J.M.G. Le Clézio]
- L'exil et le royaume
- Nationens penneførere: franske intellektuelle og nationens selvforståelse 1945-62 [The writers on the nation: French intellectuals and the self-understanding of the nation]
- Martinique og Guadeloupe: Udviklingsprocessen på de franske Antiller fra koloniseringen til i dag [Martinique and Guadeloupe: The development process in the French Antilles from the colonisation until today]
- Det moderne individ, et baudelaire'sk portræt [The modern individual, a Baudelairean portrait]

### ***Cultural Encounters***

Cultural Encounters (see Cultural Encounters' website in the References) (in Danish: *Kultur- og Sprogødestudier*) (number of students 2009: around 500) deals with cultural studies and postcolonial studies with a focus on (intersections between) sociocultural parameters such as ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, class, race, gender and age. It deals with identity construction, otherization and culturalization in multiethnic, multireligious and multilingual society, as well as with global, transnational and diaspora studies. The teachers of Cultural Encounters have different disciplinary backgrounds such as anthropology, cultural sociology, sociolinguistics, postcolonial literature, sociology of religion, minority studies and media studies. There are courses on:

- The national in the global
- Cultural and linguistic practice
- Categorization and power
- Research methods (field studies, interviewing, discourse analysis)
- Time and space: postcolonial studies
- Theories of identity
- Theories of globalisation and localisation
- Multilingualism (multilingual society, the multilingual individual, linguaculture)
- Religion and culture
- Theory of science/philosophy



This programme is explicitly transnationally oriented, and as regards the national, it focuses on theories of the nation and of nationalism, with an emphasis on the idea of the national as an imagined community. Among project titles one can mention:

- Multikulturalisme som vejen til ligestilling og stabilitet i Bolivia? [Multiculturalism as the road to equality and stability in Bolivia?]
- Salât. En undersøgelse af fire muslimers erfaringer med at praktisere de islamiske bønner på de danske uddannelsessteder [An investigation of the experiences of four Muslims with practicing islamic prayers at Danish educational institutions]
- Interskandinavisk nabosprogsforståelse [Interscandinavian neighbour-language understanding]
- Dannelse, deltagelse og identitet. En kritisk analyse af FN's definition af kulturelle rettigheder [Education, participation and identity. A critical analysis of the UN definition of cultural rights]
- Over there – a case study of the intercultural communication situation of Nilfisk Sozhou, China
- Danmarks fremtid. Et projekt om Dansk Folkepartis brug af fortiden i nutiden [The future of Denmark. A project on the Danish People's Party's use of the past in the present]
- Performance i Queerspace
- En kanon til debat. En analyse af debatten om forslaget til en national kulturkanon [Debating a canon. An analysis of the debate on the proposal of a national canon of culture]
- Cochlear Implant, et lille apparat, en stor forskel? Et projekt om døves kulturelle selvforståelse og Cochlear Implant [CI, small apparatus – big difference? A project on the cultural self-understanding of the deaf and CI]

Cultural Encounters is quite a big programme with many students, and the subjects they combine with are typically Communication, International Development Studies, Psychology, Social Studies, Global Studies and Journalism.

### ***The combination French-Cultural Encounters***

As there are very few students of French, the number of students who actually combine French and Cultural Encounters, is quite small. Nevertheless this curriculum might be an inspiration to other universities and institutions of teacher education.

Students of French and Cultural Encounters become specialists of French language and acquire a good knowledge of the cultural and literary history of France, and possibly other French-speaking countries. Thus they prepare for meeting the requirements of school curricula, which are to a large extent formulated within the confines of the national paradigm. At the same time they learn to think globally and see nations and states in a global historical perspective, incl. the postcolonial perspective. They become acquainted with cultural theories and methods, incl. field studies, interviewing and discourse analysis, and they are trained in methodological reflection, incl. self-reflection as a researcher and analyst.

This curriculum seeks to further a transnational and transdisciplinary teacher identity as it invites students to embed the national in a wider perspective, to be open to studies of multi-



lingualism and to the study of other languages, as well as to collaboration with neighbouring subjects (social science, geography, religion, history).

## Conclusion

The language teacher of today has to take account of the shifting landscapes of languages and cultures and try to enact an alternative to the national paradigm, which is increasingly untenable in the modern complex world. We have to construct post-national theories of language and culture, and this article has presented some basic ingredients in a transnational approach to the area. The approach considers language in the perspective of linguistic practices spreading or flowing in social networks all over the world, across different cultural contexts. It also considers language as a carrier of linguaculture no matter where it is used and no matter what the topic is. This implies that the language teacher's object of teaching is a world language with an infinitely variable linguaculture, used in different cultural contexts all over world as part of complex changing linguascapes. In order to prepare future language teachers for this situation, it is important to create curricula that invite students to transgress the national and monolingual focus of foreign language studies, as for example in the combination studies conducted at Roskilde University.

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