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Translanguaging Practices in the Multilingual Classroom: A Case Study of Pakistani University English Language Learners

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Abstract

The primary concern of this paper is to find out the use of the first language among English language learners belonging to diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds. The studies conducted in the past have shown serious concern about shuttling between multiple languages, known as, Translanguaging; others have found it highly beneficial. Therefore, the primary aim is to explore the strategies adopted via translanguaging practices of learners with multiple literacies, using translanguaging in the university classroom as a valuable strategy. A qualitative research paradigm has guided the study, based on the theoretical framework of Creese and Blackledge's (2010) language ecology approach which exhibits the interdependence of existing linguistic knowledge acquired across languages. Sixty undergraduate students, both male and female, participated in this study selected purposively. Two data collections, i.e. Classroom observations and Focused Group Discussions were utilised. The findings revealed that translanguaging accommodates the learners in achieving communicative proficiency and makes learning effective.

Key Words: Translanguaging, Bilingualism, linguistic knowledge, diverse backgrounds, Communicative Proficiency

Introduction

The term 'Translanguaging' has been proposed by Williams (1994) and was used for the first time in the 1980s as a Welsh origin word across the school context. As a newly emerged concept, "Translanguaging is the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages" (Baker, 2011, p. 288). Translanguaging concerns effective communication, function rather than form, cognitive activity as well as language production. Further, we are passing through globalised world; bi/multilingualism is essentially becoming a norm across the world and in different speech communities. In the last few decades, the monolingual approach has been foregrounded, focusing on teaching English to learners in order to meet their social and academic purposes but without taking into consideration their linguistic backgrounds (Kleyn & Garcia, 2019). At the advent of the 21st century, multilingualism started replacing the norm of mono/bilingualism and viewed appropriate languages as reshaping the language ecology of the western world (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). Thus, it paved the way for sociolinguists to coin a term that can incarcerate the vibrant aptitude of the bilinguals' way of communication, thereby leading to the emergence of translanguaging (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

Consequently, the newly recognised term "Translanguaging" is comprised of basically three principal components; the very first prefix 'trans' employs 'transcending', that is to go beyond certain linguistic periphery and to shuttle around; 'language' stands for the channel or mode of communication; whereas, 'ing' shows a dynamic nature of act rather declining its static nature (Wei, 2011). Likewise, it doesn't look at languages from distant the perspective of different systems of codes rather translanguaging considers and highlights the procedure bilinguals communicate to utilise an included unitary linguistic structure, from which the diverse linguistic background learners choose to build up linguistic repertoire and select the relevant features for accomplishing a

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communicative act. Following Otheguy et al. (2018), who stated that bilingual speaker equally shares some dominant linguistic systems of the bilingual speakers which makes translanguaging more visible and apparent. Moreover, the term translanguaging has been derived from Cummin's (1979) concept of 'interdependence', stating that performance in a second language (hereafter L2) depends on the extent of proficiency in the first language (hereafter L1), as demonstrated in (Garcia & Wei, 2014). It is pertinent to draw a distinction between the two overlapping concepts of code-switching and translanguaging, wherein the latter is viewed as a pedagogical strategy and the former is regarded as shuttling between languages in different contexts (Nagy, 2017), 'rarely institutionally endorsed or pedagogically underpinned' (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 105). According to Lewis et al. (2012), translanguaging is perceived as the pedagogic approach that creates thereby a convenience in conveying and comprehending the ideas in an appropriate manner.

Studies conducted in the past by scholars such as Canagarajah and Liyanage (2012) and Khubchandani (1997) about the multifaceted and intricate nature of multilingualism across the different speech communities has primordial heredity, sociolinguistic studies has shifted its attention in the West towards building a multilingual rapport (May, 2013), as communicative interaction has increased with due to rapid increase in globalisation, and made apparent the "superdiverse" linguistic contexts wherein learners belonging to diverse backgrounds perform and execute an act (Arnaut et al., 2015; Blommaert, 2010; Jørgensen, 2008). Scholars such as MacSwan (2017) who implies the word *translanguaging* and demonstrates that all languages are formulated on the basis of precise grammar. In contrast, Otheguy et al. (2015) sustain that such learners make their way to employ only a unified language organisation, thereby choosing avertedly one grammar from the existing linguistic knowledge. Therefore, both the notions of translanguaging and bilingualism are entangled which doesn't minimally supersede the other. Thus, the notion of translanguaging encompasses the heteroglossia implicated in language.

García and Wei (2014) referred to the prospective of translanguaging in terms of "to transform not only semiotic systems and speaker subjectivities but also sociopolitical structures" (p. 43). Similarly, García and Lin (2016) have drawn a distinction between well-built and a feeble account of translanguaging in educational practices. The description of the latter describes national languages, at the same time, makes an urge for flexibility of those restrictions implemented across educational institutions truly necessitates bilingual pedagogical strategies that influence the norms that society would mark as learners' L1. Cummins (2007), for instance, has manipulated what is termed as the "two solitudes" and encouraged a bendable pedagogical practice so that intermingling across languages might be made possible in real life situations. On the other hand, a well-built edition of translanguaging as a language approach, nonetheless, presumes that bilinguals construct a unified linguistic catalogue from which learners choose suitable and relevant features (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). For instance, in Garcia's (2011) study of the US bilingual kindergarten class, learners' tendency to use translanguaging demonstrates to arbitrate understanding, construct meaning, comprise and eliminate the speakers, and exhibit a broader sphere of knowledge, including other meta-functions. Hence, translanguaging as a pedagogical practice in the multilingual classroom has been documented by researchers across the world in different contexts and classrooms (Krause & Prinsloo, 2016) or can be observed in classrooms at the university level (Zavala, 2015). Looking at the phenomenon of translanguaging practices in academic settings are Blackledge and Creese (2014) and Cenoz and García (2017).

There is a growing tendency to conduct research in the field of translanguaging in the academic setting (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Canagarajah, 2011a, 2011b; Wei, 2011). A study on Wales demonstrates the use of two languages simultaneously in Welsh classrooms to grasp the intent during content learning, particularly translanguaging (Jones & Lewis, 2012; Lewis et al., 2012). It was evident from the findings that translation was frequently preferred; the employment of translanguaging was observed in around a third of all contents delivered in lessons as simply one or prevailing strategy. Taking an instance into consideration, a 10/11- year age learner was instructed to watch an English medium DVD, which discussed the core concept elaborated in Welsh and also finished the written task in Welsh. It was found in this study about the teacher who was using translanguaging to inculcate the linguistic potential for enhancing linguistic skills in both Welsh and English and to strengthen the ability for cognitive development and to comprehend the content in an appropriate manner.

In the last few decades, as translanguaging theoretical underpinnings have been used in unlike academic contexts, overt instructional practices that control translanguaging have been studied (García et al., 2017; García & Kleyn, 2016). Therefore, translanguaging practice in pedagogy essentially aims to formulate learners' diverse linguistic practices in such a manner so to maintain them in escalating their communicative repertoires to contain aspects which are essential to expand diverse ways of gaining knowledge and subject matter in academic settings (García & Wei, 2014). In this regard, García et al. (2017) recognise and devised four basic utilities for translanguaging in practices in academic settings in general: a) To maintain learners understanding for comprehending complex core content and complicated texts; b) to ensure learners' linguistic practices in academic settings; c) to sustain a margin for learners' bilingualism and world view; d) Lastly, to maintain learners' bilingual identities and their socioemotional development. Having the above literature into consideration, the present study aims to explore the strategies of translanguaging practices adopted by multilingual learners of English in the multilingual academic setting. It also aims to find out whether 'Translanguaging' affects or increases multilingual linguistic background learners' content learning and performance.

Research Questions

Following research questions will be answered.

- Q. 1 What is the specific function of translanguaging practices carried out by multilingual background learners of English in a university class?
- Q. 2 How does the phenomenon of translanguaging affect the learning process inside and outside of the classroom?
- Q. 3 Why do multilingual learners tend to use translanguaging as a strategy during the learning process in the classroom?

Research Methodology

This study provides many thick and thin descriptions through the qualitative research paradigm. Further, the study has benefitted from two research tools, i.e., classroom observations and Focused Group discussion (hereafter, FGD). 30 male and 30 female undergraduate English language learners participated in the study. For Classroom observation, a thematic sheet was developed to determine the occasions on which the participants were using translanguaging. The participants were observed inside and outside the classroom. For FGD, a few questions concerning the role and function of translanguaging have been employed. The thematic analysis, further supplemented with content analysis, has been used as an analytical framework.

Theoretical Framework

This study primarily focuses on translanguaging practices in the multilingual classroom. It is guided by the theoretical underpinnings lay down by Creese and Blackledge (2010) of the language ecology approach focusing on the previously acquired conventional norms with the new one. Moreover, Van Lier's (2008) ecological approach exhibits the need to develop the new languages alongside the development of existing languages. In addition to that, Van Lier (2008, p. 54) promulgates that it is of utmost significance for teachers teaching foreign languages to employ such practices and activities that elaborate to develop "a panoramic view of self". Similarly, Creese and Martin (2003, 2008) regarded the settings of classrooms as ecological microsystems. A similar concern is raised by Jaffe (2007, p. 225), who claims for "microecologies" of linguistics, social, political, and pedagogical practice. An ecological perspective in a multilingual setting is "essentially about opening up ideological and implementational space in the environment for as many languages as possible" (Hornberger, 2002, p. 30). In addition, this study is also inspired by translanguaging theory in different aspects as it mainly focuses on individuals who choose from a variety of available linguistic resources that reflect a unitary communicative repertoire to carry out the strategic practice of communication. The theory of translanguaging elaborates that speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds have a unified linguistic repertoire and resemble a collection of different linguistic aptitudes preferred and organised across diverse contexts.

Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier that this study has benefitted from two data collection tools. The results obtained from FGD have been discussed in the below section. The sole purpose of this discussion was to get a deeper insight into the topic under study. Ten male and ten female learners of English participated in this discussion. Furthermore, the following themes were derived as the crux of the discussion after codification and categorisation.

- 1) Translanguaging is a means of imparting information
- 2) The necessity of translanguaging in English Language Classrooms

The following results guided the researcher in understanding the phenomenon of translanguaging in the multilingual classroom.

Analysis of Theme 1: Translanguaging as a means for imparting information

During the discussion, the participants were observed employing the strategies of translanguaging practices not only to convey the intended meaning to the speaker but also to avoid any hindrance in the process of miscommunication. It stands true to see translanguaging on account of "normal" (Garcia, 2009 b), highlighting this notion further to learners cross linguistic precincts through the use of the existing varieties of language. A participant stated thus:

"I often feel convenient whenever I refer to anything in other than target language because I want to make a proper response at the listeners' end. I use other languages in order to create convenience in conveying any idea so that the other can understand the true nature of you as what you want to ask?"

It has been asserted explicitly that using other languages in an academic setting creates ease in conveying the true intent of the message. It seems learners are naturally inclined to use other languages simultaneously to convey the information through different communicative modes. This participant stressed the usage of translanguaging practices as it allows the multilingual background learners to build up the desired aptitude in the target language. It was further elaborated that such learners did rely on and be surrounded by languages simultaneously to develop a language catalogue, for least, to fulfill the communicative intent. Some advantages of translanguaging were highlighted by the participants that such an academic setting where learners come from diverse multilingual backgrounds would be in dire need of using local languages. The results contended that learners from different linguistic profiles do not draw any line between languages rather reflect as a tool to acquire competence in the target language. It is argued here that new ideas and expressions are imparted mainly by the learners in local languages that are used in the learning process of the target language. Consequently, translanguaging practices create ease for emergent multilingual, and also increases the aptitude of the learners to shift assertively and efficiently between languages for carrying out unusual communicative needs. Thus, the primary role of translanguaging is kept limited only to increase communicative proficiency, wherein learners infer meaning through the assortment of definite linguistic features from local languages.

Theme 2: Necessity of translanguaging in the multilingual classroom

The participants of the study were affirmed and raised a unanimous concern regarding the judicious use of other languages in the learning process of foreign language and permits translanguaging practices carried out by learners in the multilingual classroom. It was further acknowledged that shuttling between languages is natural when it comes to the linguistically diverse classroom. This statement was justified by the participant and warned the speakers about the increasing globalisation that has brought them into closer contact. The judicious use of translanguaging was highly recommended. It reminds me of Canagarajah (2011) submits a serious concern regarding translanguaging practices in pedagogy and warns them to strictly adhere to the norm of translanguaging practices and develop such a mechanism that reflects truly the postulates lay down in these generally conceived models of translanguaging that creates and alleviate the learning process. The use of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms is beneficial for learners with less proficiency in the target language because it removes prevailing linguistic insecurities. It was also elaborated during the discussion that miscommunication will occur

for sure if the use of local languages is not entertained, hence, encouraging the tendency to provide a potential place for translanguaging practices in the multilingual classrooms.

The core purpose of translanguaging is to allow the learners to arbitrate comprehensions, infer or deduce meaning and provides an opportunity for the speakers to participate in the ongoing discussion. The participants also argued for translanguaging use as it provides an opportunity for learners to comprehend and minimise the extent of miscalculations in learning a foreign language. Further, the participants were vocal in their stance that well planned translanguaging strategy shall be maintained and executed by both teachers and learners to "clarify or reinforce lesson material" (Garcia, 2009b, p. 299). Learners' reliance on the use of other languages in the target language helps them to open new dimensions for understanding a concept. Similarly, Garcia (2011) argued for strengthening translanguaging to develop a less distant relationship between languages and to maximise the overlap in the learning process. It, thus, plays a role of a backbone in learning a foreign language. Among the participants, a participant explicitly asserted that translanguaging practices should not be simply overlooked as it facilitates and creates convenience for learners in the learning process. It can be argued here that the merger of language is not only restricted to language but also includes language varieties.

Analysis of Classroom Observation

This section provides the thematic analysis of classroom observations used as data collection tools. A thematic sheet was developed reflecting the function and effectiveness of translanguaging in the multilingual classroom. Following the vein of Wragg (1999, p. 2) regarding classrooms stated thus: "Classrooms are exceptionally busy places, so observers need to be on their toes". The notion and newly emerged concept of translanguaging encompasses the notion of code-switching and itself serves as a tool beyond the notion of code-switching. The following two main themes were derived after thorough codification and categorisation of the collected data.

- a. Functions of translanguaging practices
- b. Effectiveness of translanguaging in the language learning

Theme 1: Functions of Translanguaging Practices

Note

The italicised text highlights the extracts taken from the data.

The participants were observed in different classes and reported that translanguaging was primarily used whenever a communicative barrier was encountered merely to alleviate the learners during the due process of learning. It was revealed that participants were found curious about the use of translanguaging with positive indicators in the learning process. The participants were given a poem meant to be silently read. A participant uttered to his classmate: "*Dekhein na' (Look at this)* which was used in order to elaborate on the preceded idea or content. It was shown that an expression was developed first in the English language and later switched to the local language in order to build a coherent and cohesive aptitude for the communication process. It can be contended here that the use of simultaneous languages becomes a dire need in the communicative context to negotiate the intended meaning and make learning effective. Here, it goes in the same vein as Lopez (2008) who calls for the use of multiple languages in the bi/multilingual classrooms. Otherwise, the intended meaning cannot be understood.

Consequently, the concerned teacher himself was using translanguaging in pedagogic practices to make learning effective as it assumes that legitimate use of hybrid linguistic practices enacts the potential of multilingual speakers. Delivering instruction to the students, it was observed that the said teacher presumes the notion of bilingualism for covering the act such as *Kisi b topic ka soch len. Ok, here we go! (You can definitely search for any topic of your own choice)* This example illustrates that the teacher wanted to engage and make the learners understand the nature of the activity. Thus, it provides them with an opportunity to display the acquired linguistic proficiency skillfully in the multilingual setting. It was meant to accomplish the core intent of their lesson in its true sense, which makes learning commendable. Likewise, it can be asserted here that most participants of the study thoroughly admitted the use of other languages through "bilingual label quests", which allows the diverse

linguistic background learners to accomplish their learning contents bilingually. The sole function of using short phrases indicated a language repertoire of the multilingual learners with the intent in mind to make a coherent argument. The use of local languages such as Pashto and Urdu in the learning process of the target language occurred due to already acquired linguistic resources.

Theme 2: Effectiveness of Translanguaging Practices

It was found that the use of translanguaging practices in the multilingual classroom for both pedagogy and learners had far reaching results as its functions emphasise the need for the use of at least two languages to establish a procedural domain of knowledge about the assigning task. Upon the effectiveness of translanguaging it can be contended to create an ease in learning with some prominent outcomes. It showed an assortment to shuttle between languages as it enables the learners to move forward with the assigned task. Likewise, it was exhibited that moving between different linguistic systems enhances the ability of learners to comprehend difficult communicative tasks in the learning process. A narrative pattern of classroom ecology was noted, focusing on the domains of what is enough adequate and sufficient appropriate in terms of preference for one language over the other. In this extract, learner's were found using Urdu language words such as *q nahe (why not)* in the core of the argument, indicating true substantiation used for creating ease and to elaborate further on the idea or given concept. It stands true to what Cummins (2008) and Garcia (2009) highlighted the appearance of the direct method as a teaching methodology, along with the newly developing approach of communicative language pedagogy, has cautioned monolingual beliefs to some extent had prevailed in the teaching of English, particularly in the launched bilingual education programmes.

Importantly, the participants' use of local languages in the classrooms was primarily used and also reflected a shift in the topic. It is evident from the transcription that a long interaction has taken place accomplished in local languages, indicating an enhancement in learners' multiple literacies when they encounter resources of their existing linguistic competence. It goes in the same vein as (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 18) "that a child's first language skills must become well developed to ensure that their academic and linguistic performance in the second language is maximised." Astonishingly, this class highlighted multiple instances and various efficacies of translanguaging in pedagogical practices celebrated by learners in a way to shuttle and move around more recognised and casual varieties of the other languages. The interaction in transcribed data clearly demonstrated that translanguaging permits the learner to make a concept contents vivid to comprehend and achieve communicative proficiency and to maximise the ability and potential of learners' learning process. It is pertinent to mention here that some English words were used accompanied by Urdu language words such as *Ma apni educational career urdu medium school sey he kar chuka hun (I have started my own educational career from Urdu medium school)* showed an evidence to build a communicative rapport.

Findings of the Study

In their responses during the discussion, it was evident that translanguaging paves for diverse learners to make access to all the available linguistic resources, thus, not only broadening their understanding to comprehend but at times, helping them in achieving a balanced communicative proficiency. Most significantly, it was found from the responses of participants that translanguaging practices build a language repertoire that creates to learn and convey an expression appropriately. It was further found translanguaging enables the learners to get access across the domains of local languages proven later while using less translanguaging observed on different occasions during their communicative practices. Similarly, the participants were found to switch unconsciously to other languages to build a language repertoire. Additionally, it was observed that participants were never found with a conscious attempt to shuttle among languages during their hybrid communicative practices instead, the use of other local languages was meant to minimise the communicative needs. The participants raised their voices and demanded to abolish the monolingual way of pedagogy and learning too.

So far, the findings of the classroom observation are concerned; learners showed much reliance on embedding local languages for the purpose of negotiating a sense making way of communication. Moreover, translanguaging proves effective in inferring different meanings, thereby making learning effective.

Translanguaging assisted them in making a concept understandable and promises to offer clarification of an idea or complicated concept. Regarding the effectiveness of translanguaging, it was found from the participants to allow the use of local languages because it had a greater effect on the communicative proficiency of the learners. In contrast, translanguaging doesn't affect the proficiency of the learners but helps them to broaden their understanding of the integrated system of languages. To conclude, it was found that translanguaging provides multiple scenarios for foreign language learners as this phenomenon of translanguaging accommodates the learners during the learning process and discourages the practice of monolingual pedagogy.

Discussion

Although the finding of the current study goes similar to studies on translanguaging conducted in an English learning classroom context wherein it was established well that learner reliance on complete linguistics repertoire is to comprehend the given concepts s/he acquires during the learning process at all levels (Baker, 2011; Kleyn & Garcia, 2019). As Baker (2011) sharply observed, the intended message is conveyed and "digested" when the reading task is accomplished in one language, most confidently the one the learners feel convenient and contented using (L1). Later, the students make an endeavor to answer the questions in the target language. Further, the effectiveness of translanguaging illustrated the executed procedure as it would assist in the assimilation of complex bilinguals with promising multilingualism in almost the multilingual classroom. In simple words, it acknowledges the statement of Estyn (2002, p. 1) at the individual level which overlaps translanguaging with the term 'dual literacy'. In this article, some positive outcomes of translanguaging are described in terms of decontamination of an individual's potential to manipulate and comprehend knowledge in dual languages. It also proves helpful in developing flexibility within the mind and having a positive and broader perspective towards other languages and cultures. Lastly, translanguaging enables individuals to efficiently use and shuttle between L1 and L2 in multilingual contexts. Thus, Mazak and Carroll (2017) warned the practitioners to include and call for the realisation of the translanguaging lexis as mandatory in the multilingual classrooms, particularly where a foreign language is taught. Similarly, Kleyn and Garcia (2019) highlighted diverse strategies for the implementation of translanguaging into ESL classrooms, with the core concern of developing English while also conceptualising the hidden intent behind the content. They further added in favour of a flourishing translanguaging in an English language learning context implies offering bilinguals with sustenance in their heritage of home language literacy (probably, L1) to ensure the relevant move. It is of utmost significance to draw a distinction between an ESL lesson's orientation and outcomes to be considered in the early phase of translanguaging.

The findings of the study indicated that Pakistani learners of English come up frequently with the use of translanguaging practices between Urdu, regional languages and English regardless of their plain views commending for maintaining languages as split entities (Palfreyman & Al-Bataineh, 2018). On the other hand, Al-Bataineh and Gallagher (2018) investigated the attitudes and beliefs of pedagogy towards translanguaging practices limited to languages and dialects whenever a written assignment is entrusted to bilingual learners in a course entitled as "Children's Literature" taught as a compulsory course at an English/Arabic bilingual university in UAE. It was evident from the study of Hassan and Ahmad (2015), who found how teachers and learners cautiously amalgamate and swap between Arabic, Urdu, Sylheti and English when encountered with the course content to exhibit how a multiplicity of languages can be enhanced proficiently across different classroom contexts. This study broadly highlighted the significant advantages of translanguaging on account of its practical outcomes and benefits. In this regard, Park (2013) reported surprisingly and warns that translanguaging is essentially a multilingual practice which is still observed and maintained partially with lucid restrictions. It asserted further that such pedagogic strategies are yet to be developed which facilitates language learning as well as assist them in securing imposing academic achievement. Thus, it can be concluded with a note that translanguaging shall be given an appropriate place in multilingual classrooms. It is argued as a concluding note here that the prevailing and emergent norm of bilingualism across the world requires essentially an implementation of an approach that fulfills the communicative purposes which shall not be kept confined only to the academic setting.

Conclusion

Translanguaging precedes the interaction that takes place between interlocutors regardless of language use, and especially emergent bi/multilingual learners who assist other bilingual diverse linguistic background learners. Translanguaging holds much undertake to renovate prevailing multilingual subjectivities in accomplishment that provides an equal opportunity to ensure participation in society; at the same time, it continues as such to be seen by many as suspicious. Scholar has regarded it as legitimate bilingual practice, essentially for the grassroots multilingualism of speakers. The concurrent mixing of languages in larger contexts wherein accomplishment of communicative acts demands due consideration to the translanguaging of speakers. Likewise, we are in dire need to continue developing new conduct of utilising language that meets the societal communicative norms and needs. Language is the sole property of speakers, not of political states. Therefore, translanguaging is the tool that releases the speakers from the compulsions to use language while strictly adhering to prevailing norms and conventions wherein preferring only the communicative channels shall be encouraged across different academic settings. It is inferred that it needs accommodation in all educational contexts to preserve the linguistic rights of either the language majorities or minorities. On the other hand, research has revealed that enough space shall be given to promote bilingual pedagogic practices and learners shall not be kept restricted to monolingual teaching practices because we still have a long way to go to observe the practices of learners' local language use in the academic setting to minimise the communicative potential and to build a language repertoire for communicative purposes, at least.

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