TOWARDS A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF LANGUAGES IN CONTACT: EVIDENCE FROM LANGUAGE CONTACT CASES IN SPAIN

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0.   Abstract

The study of language contact has been traditionally carried out from a structural perspective (synchronic or diachronic), from a sociolinguistic perspective and/or from a rather psychological perspective, centered on the linguistic and communicative competence of the multilingual individual.

However, a great number of linguistic and sociolinguistic topics that appear in language contact situations may be productively tackled from a pragmatic viewpoint. This pragmatic perspective takes into account linguistic use in communication contexts and raises, at a different level, questions that deal with the structures and the evolution of the codes in contact.

The main aim of this presentation is the analysis of some of the specific problems that arise in given language contact situations from a pragmatic perspective, considering the adaptation processes of the speakers, their particular interactive strategies and the social meaning generated. Understanding pragmatics in its original sense, i.e. as the study of the relationship between linguistic signs and speakers (users of certain resources), these phenomena should be understood as the result of speakers' adaptation to changing sociocultural circumstances. This adaptation creates a new distribution of the verbal resources (or linguistic economy) of the community and, consequently, modifies its varieties as far as form and function are concerned.[1]

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[1] An earlier, shorter version of this paper was delivered as an oral presentation at the 1990 International Pragmatics Conference (Barcelona, 9 - 13.VII.1990). The authors thank Anxo Lorenzo for comments on the data presented.

1.   Introduction and aims

The main aim of this contribution is to show that:

(a)   the study of languages in contact may take advantage of a pragmatic approach, and that

(b)   pragmatics as a discipline may benefit in more than one way from the data obtained in the analysis of language contact, basically in the following aspects:

(i)   the multilingual individual and his communicative behaviour,

(ii)   the processes of language maintenance and language shift, and

(iii)   the processes of the adoption and adaptation of linguistic elements originally foreign to a code, that is to say, interference.

2.   The analysis of language contact

Language contact has never been considered a central domain for linguistics. Rather, it has been understood as a peripheral area, irrelevant to linguistic thought, and sometimes even purely anecdotal or marginal. The reasons why this has been so are obviously diverse, but the more important of them have to do with the prevailing conception about the boundaries of linguistics as a science.

Nuances or changes in this conception have determined the different approaches advanced. The main lines developed in the study of this issue have been:

(a)   the study from a historical point of view (XIX and XX century up to the thirties),

(b)   the study from a structural point of view (1930's up to 1953), and

(c)   the study from a sociolinguistic point of view (1953 onwards).

While structuralism prevails all along the first half of our century, later on sociolinguistics replaces that perspective. Weinreich's book, issued in 1953, surely the main work even now in the study of language contact, represents the bridge between both conceptions. It starts from a structural basis but establishes for the first time the necessity of taking into account the sociocultural background of contact.

Two complementary lines --even geographically distinct-- should still be pointed out: firstly, anthropological linguistics in the U.S.A., which in part results in the ethnography of communication, and secondly psycholinguistics in Europe, mainly concerned with the problem of bilingualism since the mid twenties of this century. In the latter case the

subsequent development could be connected with the recent growth of neurolinguistics.

3.   Pragmatics and language contact

Setting aside the case of the ethnography of communication, just mentioned, and some specific sociolinguistic proposals, pragmatics has never been one of the dominant views in language contact analysis.

The reciprocal ignorance between these fields may be demonstrated --even if in a somewhat clumsy way-- by looking at the more authoritative textbooks of each speciality. Thus, neither Levinson (1983) nor Leech (1983) includes any explicit reference to issues related with language contact. On the other hand, the work that may be taken more properly as a textbook on language contact, Appel & Muysken (1987), makes no explicit reference to pragmatics either. In spite of this mutual oblivion, it seems reasonable to argue, in general terms, that as far as pragmatics offers a different, fruitful view of language problems --as is usually accepted-- it may do so also in this field.

Understanding pragmatics in a very general sense, simply as the study of language use, we should be concerned, as well as in sociolinguistic analysis, with:

(a)   macrosociolinguistic processes of maintenance and shift,
(b)   the emergence of contact varieties attached to specific social groups (pidgins, L_2 varieties), and
(c)   microsociolinguistic processes of interaction, where particular language choices are manifested (for instance, code-switching).

If we understand pragmatics in a more traditional restricted sense, as the study of language usage as it is produced by languages users, the pragmatic approach give entrance to the subjects in our analysis of linguistic facts, that is to say, it interprets these facts taking account of the speakers' values, attitudes and goals. Although this conception is mainly oriented towards microsociolinguistic processes, it further allows us to conceive of macrosociolinguistic processes as the result of the speakers' cummulative choices and actions. Taken like that, language maintenance and language shift may be viewed as a consequence of the adaptation of some groups of users to changing sociocultural circumstances through language use continuity or disruption.

This notion, as expounded and analyzed by and large by Verschueren (1987) may be one of the more significant theoretical contributions of pragmatics to the analysis of language contact. Leaving macrosociolinguistic processes aside, this adaptation is constantly produced by the subjects' communicative activity, basically in language choice, in code-switching and in interference.

A pragmatic perspective, useful and applicable to the analysis of language contact must necessarily be broad and integrative in such a way as to include all the factors --diverse in origin and nature-- present in multilingual situations. Charles W. Morris (1938:30) worded it precisely in these terms: "it is a sufficiently accurate characterization of pragmatics to say that it deals with the biotic aspects of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs."

Indeed the biological parallelism in many issues of language contact has hardly been explored. To give an example, which will be dealt with further on, let us mention the notion of mimetism applied to interference. In the same line the concept of adaptation becomes more significant and may be understood as the users' response to their environment as well as its effect on their languages, with the aim of improving and accommodating the verbal resources of the community. To paraphrase a typically sociolinguistic formulation, the question may be put in the following way: who adapts what, who adapts to whom, when, how and why?

4.   The process of linguistic interference

The phenomena called code-switching and code-mixing have been accounted for traditionally, and even more so lately, from a pragmatic viewpoint (cf. Gumperz 1970, 1972, 1982; Auer 1983, Heller (ed.) 1988). Leaving them aside, we may concentrate on the domain of interference, which, in contradistinction to the former, has hardly ever been approached in this way (cf. Auer 1983, Flores & Valiñas 1987).

Linguistic interference may be understood, generally speaking, as an induced language change, that is to say, as a process by which some elements, originally foreign to a given language, are used by its speakers (Payrató 1985:2.2.). The apparent reason for this use is in principle the speakers' knowledge of other languages or else the fact that their linguistic competence does not refer to only one code. However, the real account for interference is not given by this knowledge being mixed at random, as it were, in linguistic production.

One must suppose that certain factors influence the processes of interference decisively. What is more, avoiding a purist and academic misconception, so frequently held around romance languages, one must suppose that the processes of interference imply some kind of <u>gain</u> for languages and their users, at least in terms of the adaptative biological standpoint taken before.

From a pragmatic viewpoint, this verbal improvement shows up in expressiveness, functionality, explicitness, economy of resources in the processes of language production and understanding, and in mechanisms of information storage. After all, that is what can explain in a more real and deeper way the appearance of interference phenomena between languages in contact.

Interference hardly ever obeys a single factor. In this sense, it seems to be an ideal field for the analysis of the central topics in pragmatics: the interdependence of social and cognitive aspects of language use. This can be ascertained either for individual interference in speech or for interference in language as a social code (Weinreich 1953:2.14.). These factors may be arranged along the following three axes:

(a)   the sociocultural value of languages in contact, in other words, the sociocultural background of languages: the specific sociolinguistic dimension,
(b)   the particular traits of subjects, their (in)capacity to keep both codes separate in use, and also the individual attitudes towards the languages, the specific psycholinguistic dimension, and lastly
(c)   the contextual features, that is to say, the specific setting of speech events and the relationship between interlocutors.

5.   Functions of interference in language maintenance and language shift

If interference is analyzed not only as a strictly structural fact, but rather as a phenomenon with a functional capacity, it can be shown to characterize dissimilar long-term processes.[2] So, interference through borrowing, initiated mainly in the lexicon, usually characterizes language maintenance processes and is proper to people who show resistance to

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[2] The ideas in the present paragraph have mainly been drawn from the analysis presented in Argente (1989).

language shift. As a consequence, the direction of interference runs from a dominant to a recessive language.

Otherwise, interference through shift --or substratum effect--, originated mainly in phonic and syntactic structures, usually characterizes language shift. Generally speaking, it is proper to people who move towards the adoption of a new language. Consequently, it runs from a recessive towards a dominant language.

Thus, in the specific historical Catalan - Spanish language contact situation, traditionally borrowing from Spanish into Catalan has been proper to autochthonous speakers, while nowadays interference through shift characterizes the speech of Spanish allochthonous speakers adopting the Catalan language.

Without considering the consequences of this fact for the evolution of the Catalan language, these two types of interference carry out very different functions. The main function of interference through shift is to facilitate the learning and use of another language by Spanish speakers, and can result in the emergence of a new language variety, in this case a Catalan as second language variety. In contrast, borrowing does not facilitate the learning of any new language. Rather, as a matter of fact, its objective result is to functionally restrict and in the end to formally disintegrate the autochthonous language. Although these processes are evaluated in a very different way depending on the users' involvement, both cases may be qualified as adaptive strategies of these users to changing sociocultural factors. In this sense one might hold interference to be one of the linguistic mechanisms producing direct consequences in the macrosociolinguistic processes of language maintenance and language shift.

Finally, interference also has an adaptive function as far as it concerns the verbal repertoire of the community, and goes hand in hand with sociolinguistic processes of expansion or retraction. So, in the case of Catalan - Spanish contact, borrowing does not imply an increase in the social basis of the Catalan speech community, but furnishes it with some expressive resources that will allow this community to accommodate to new circumstances, although it will keep the community in a sociolinguistically subordinate position.

Instead, interference through shift contributes in principle to increasing the social basis of the language community and to broadening its verbal repertoire. Again, we see how interference offers itself as an adaptative strategy in order for the community to give a linguistic response to the pressure exerted by socioecological and sociopsychological circumstances. Or,

adaptation appears in both cases as a reciprocal relationship between subjects and the environmental factors just mentioned --precisely those modifying the system of sociocultural values and functions that were prevailing before contact.

6. Interference as an adaptive strategy of speakers in pragmatically relevant contexts

It is generally assumed that while code-switching is either a strategy to convey social meaning or a rhetorical device employed in the construction of discourse, interference is an automatic, non-monitored, structurally all-embracing mechanism.

However, one cannot dismiss the possibility of finding interference phenomena used to convey social meaning and rhetorical functions. Facts of this kind may be observed in ethnographic fieldwork centered upon verbal interaction in small population groups.

6.1. Presentation of the data

As a matter of fact, some cases of what we have in mind have been recorded by Lorenzo (1990) in the course of ethnographic fieldwork in a small speech community near Vigo, a Galician seaport in the North-West of Spain, where Galician - Spanish language contact takes place.[3]

While searching for Galician inherent variation, Lorenzo observed that in a language contact setting inherent variables may come about as a result of the speakers' intentional reallocation of verbal material originally proceding from language contact phenomena, such as certain kinds of interference --that is to say, language contact turns out to be the source of inherent variation in such a setting.

Thus, Lorenzo notes that in spontaneous language use certain systematic alternances take place in some words between variants that we will characterize, respectively, as an autochthonous variant and the corresponding

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[3] The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in the parish of Coiro, within the village of Cangas de Morrazo. Galician is the autochthonous language of Galicia, and is habitually used by a people whose main socioeconomic activities are related to agriculture, cattle raising, fishing and merchant navy.

allochthonous solution, for instance single lower mid vowel versus diphthong: [ɛ] / [je] and [ɔ] / [we], or voiceless palatal fricative versus voiceless velar fricative: [ʃ] / [x]. As is shown in cases (1) to (3) below:[4]

(1a)   <...> El nunca sufriu na súa pel o m[ɛ]do do mar e os desastres
       'He himself never suffered the fear of the sea and the disasters'

(1b)   A trampa que lle están facendo ó gob[je]rno é tremenda
       'The government is about to fall into a terrible trap'

(2a)   Antes habia moitos b[ɔ]is labrando <...>
       'In the old days there were many oxen to plough <...>'

(2b)   O comercio en Pontevedra non está tan alto en imp[we]stos como
       en Vigo
       'Taxes upon trading are not as high in Pontevedra as they are in
       Vigo'

(3a)   Cando era nova, tamén anduven ó me[ʃ]ilón
       'When I was young, I also went to harvest mussels'

(3b)   Conxuntamente Coiro e Tirán eran antes partido [x]udicial
       'Coiro and Tirán were once one administrative district'

Traditionally, these differences have been considered as lexical facts, with no more qualification than treating (b)-cases as instances of lexical borrowing, i.e. as loanwords, while considering (a)-cases as traditional words.[5] Now, Lorenzo's contention is that they must be analysed as inherent

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4   These data are fragments of natural conversations recorded by Lorenzo, and include other cases of interference besides those studied. The choice of examples and English translations are our own, and they should not be taken for granted as the best. Variables other than those presented have been investigated, with similar results. Alternances are but one of the structural results derived from language contact.

5   Actually we are in the presence of correspondence rules or what was termed "automatic conversion formulae" by Weinreich (1953:1.2.), i.e. rules that establish interlinguistic equivalences and diminish the psycholinguistic burden of bilinguals. From Lorenzo's standpoint these rules would have

phonological variables, used by local speakers in order to discriminate socio-symbolic values of legal currency within the community.

Indeed, a case is made that the single vowel and [ʃ] variants appear predominantly in so-called <u>local</u> words, that is to say, words referring to local socioeconomic activities and homely life. Instead, the imported diphthong and [x] variants appear in so-called <u>non-local</u> words, i.e., vocabulary relative to activities, institutions or facts originated outside the speech community.

These systematic alternances affect both nominal and verbal items. Restricting ourselves to nominal elements and vowel variables, let us apply a new series of cases classified according to the mentioned distinction and subclassified following several relevant topics:

(i)   [ɛ], [ɔ] **in local contexts**

(A)   Lexical items in merchant navy or fishing contexts:

   (4)   <u>Cando non se vía, usaban un cordel e unha</u> p[ɛ]dra
         'When they could no longer see, they used a cord and a <u>stone</u>'

(B)   Lexical items in peasant contexts:

   (5)   <u>Miña irmá Manuela foi apañar a</u> h[ɛ]rba <u>ás</u> h[ɔ]rtas <u>do cura</u>
         'My sister Manuela went to cut down some <u>herbage</u> from the parson's <u>orchards</u>'

(C)   Lexical items in homely life contexts:

   (6)   <u>Eu fago <as> labores da casa, <non teño> nin</u> n[ɛ]tos <u>nin fillos</u>
         'I work at home, <I have> neither <u>grandchildren</u> nor children'

(ii)   [je], [we] **in non-local contexts**

(D)   Lexical items in trade contexts:

   (7)   <u>Pero a maioría dos</u> p[we]stos <u>son de toda a vida, sempre veñen</u>
         'But the most of these <u>stalls</u> have been here forever, they always come <to this market>'

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ceased to be interlingual.

(E)   Lexical items in Administration contexts:

(8)   <u>Estamos no régimen especial agrario, por</u> c[we]nta <u>propia, agraria</u>
'We are subject to the system for self-<u>employed</u> agricultural workers'

(F)   Lexical items in religious and sanitary contexts:

(9)   <u>A misa vou cando hai</u> ent[je]rros
'I go to mass when there is a <u>funeral</u>'

(10)   <u>Sacáronme o</u> tratam[je]nto <u>porque decían que xa estaba ben</u>
'They took me off the <u>treatment</u> because they said that I was no longer ill'

6.2. Discussion of the data

There are several points in Lorenzo's thesis and in our interpretation of it. These are mainly:

(I)   The alternance is a matter of phonological variation, not just of lexical borrowing.
(II)   This phonological variation has its source in interference phenomena -- originally loanwords.
(III) This phonological variation is of a socio-symbolic nature, in the sense that it conveys social meaning.
(IV)   This socio-symbolic phonological variation, originated in contact phenomena, can be best described as pragmatic in nature.

Point **(II)** --or at least its predicate phrase-- would be accepted by anyone. Point **(III)** is the marrow of Lorenzo's contention and the goal of his argument. Point **(I)** is in part argued by him and will be reinforced by us below in the light of some facts. Point **(IV)** must be our main contention here.

Concerning point **(I)**, there are several kinds of facts that may be adduced in order to argue the phonological character of the phenomena reported in (1) - (3). These include:

(i)   The fact that one may find these alternances in verbs, not only nouns.
(ii)   The existence in the verbal repertoire of the community of paradigmatic oppositions between lexical items differing only in the use of one or the other variant and giving way to semantically specialized doublets, like in **(G)**:

(**G**)   (a)   <u>tenda</u> 'shop, local place in the village' / <u>tienda</u> 'shop, public establishment where things can be bought'

(b)   <u>fogo</u> 'fire' / <u>fuego</u> 'fireworks'[6]

(c)   <u>escola</u> 'schooling' / <u>escuela</u> 'schoolhouse'

As in the following cases:

(11a) <u>Eu xente que veña a apagar o</u> fogo <u>vouche decir que foi: <...></u>
'I am going to tell you who used to come to put out <u>fire: <...></u>'

(11b) <u>Fáltalle un dedo de ir a buscar</u> fuegos
'He is missing a finger because he went to look for <u>fireworks</u>"

In these cases we observe apparent loanwords being used in concurrence with --and not only instead of-- traditional words in such a way that each lexical form is specialized to convey a different meaning, and this difference may be described in terms of the local / non local opposition. Now, this fact should reinforce the idea of the use of interference in order to convey semantic nuances related to some kind of in-group / out-group generated meaning, and it should pave the way to the assertion contained in point (**III**) above. Obviously one could interpret these facts not just as cases of phonological alternances but as different stages of adaptation in a process of lexical borrowing. But now, let us turn to argument (iii):

(iii)   More interesting even than these paradigmatic oppositions are the cases of syntagmatic contrast between alternating forms, such as (12), (13) and (14):

(12)   <u>Tu fíxate que non gastan un duro nos barcos, e a nós en tódolos</u> via[∫]es<u>, teñen que reparar o barco e neste último</u> via[x]e <u>aínda estuvemos tres días parados <...></u>
'Note that they don't spend one penny on the ships, and to us on all the <u>trips</u>, they have to repair the ship, and on this last <u>trip</u> we were laid up for three days <...>'

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6 This is a particurlarly interesting case, for both terms may be considered as loanwords (from Sp. <u>fuego</u>, 'fire') in front of Gal. <u>lume</u>, which is the genuine word. In this case it is obvious that the variants ɔ / we, associated to local/non-local meanings, must be taken in fact as exponents of a productive phonological variable, i.e. as a case of inherent phonological variation, not just as a case of a genuine lexical form vs. lexical borrowing.

(13)   Este home é neto de Paxariño. Este é nieto do home máis vello da
       parroquia
       'This man is Paxariño's grandson. He is the grandson of the oldest
       man on the parish'

(14)   Estabamos dous homes solos, coa máquina que arrea vinteseis
       peixes por minuto, e aquí estou, ¿e que?, quéroche dicir,
       ¿entendes?, e mátaste a traballar pa <que> o do puente <viva> de
       cló-cló <...> a ese home non se lle paga nada. Págaselle ós
       artistas, ¿é así ou non é? E si lle contestas algo xa che están dando
       o pase, xa te amenazan cun parche, ¿entiendes?, <...> Fun enlace
       sindical durante catro anos, <...> que me nombraron no mar os
       mariñeiros mismos... e non podes ir a ningún lado, ¿entiendes?

       'There were only two of us, with the machine turning out twenty-
       six fishes per minute, and here am I --and so what? I mean --do
       you understand?-- and you kill yourself with work for the one in
       the bridge <to live> off the back of another <...> and they pay
       almost nothing to this man. They pay the artists, don't they? And
       if you try to argue with them, they get rid of you at once, they
       threaten you with the sack --do you understand? <...> I was shop
       steward for four years <...> for I was named in the sea by the
       seamen themselves... and you can't go anywhere --do you
       understand?'

       Lorenzo (1990) remarks that the diphthonged variant always
appears in second place, and attributes to it an expressive (pragmatic) value of
emphasis, partially independent of the basic value we are discussing here.

(iv)   Finally, perhaps the most interesting cases to be adduced for the sake of
the argument would be those where the fact can be observed independently of
any process of lexical borrowing, i.e. those where the variants [je], [we] or [x]
are used in otherwise Galician traditional words with no corresponding forms
in Spanish, at the time that the original [ɛ], [ɔ] or [ʃ] is kept and the purely
phonological alternance is used to convey the same values as in the cases
mentioned till now. At present, the lack of these cases seem to prove that
hypothesis (I) must be taken in a more coloured sense: the process of
phonologization has not yet finished.

       As in the case of a spontaneous sound change, then, some of these
facts probably originated as lexical phenomena, that is to say, they affected

some specific lexical items before generalizing to the rest of the contexts where they appear and before evolving towards a sound alternance --and so, a phonological variable.

What is at stake here is the nature of some facts of inherent variation in a language contact setting where the languages in concurrence are highly related, and, as a consequence, they share a great part of their vocabulary and structural features. It is under these circumstances that original interference phenomena may turn into socio-symbolic inherent variation.

Centering ourselves on this socio-symbolic value of the alternances considered, we describe it as properly pragmatic in nature --more than say strictly sociolinguistic--, in so far as the variables do not seem to identify a style --either measured in termes of a scale of formality or qualified as a natural variety--, nor to correlate with a stratified social group --men versus women, adults vs. children, older generation vs. younger generations, upper vs. middle vs. lower classes, peasant workers vs. sea-workers vs. white-collars, or any other--, nor even to characterize a register tied to a well-defined socio-cultural situation. Instead, they seem to mark some topics or key-words as, so to speak, in-group generated vs. out-group generated, and so, in some sense, autochthonous vs. allochthonous with regard to the community.

This interpretation does not follow mechanically from Lorenzo's data, for the group he investigated is a relatively homogeneous one as to age, educational level, socio-economic activities and position, ethnic group, etc. Anyway, everything seems to point in the direction of a generalized use of the phonological variables in the community --even children make use of them (Lorenzo, personal communication).

So, as far as Lorenzo's analysis holds true, and as far as our interpretation of the facts fits it, we are clearly confronted with a device for conveying social meaning.[7] On the other hand, a strictly correlational analysis would provide us with no adequate interpretation for the variables in question. Instead, only an analysis from the point of view of the use speakers make of them in verbal interaction and from the point of view of the values speakers assign to them in this specific socio-cultural context may put us on the track to

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[7]   As generally accepted, code-switching is another mechanism conveying social meaning and, in contradistinction to interference, it is usually interpreted as non-automatic. For Galician - Spanish code-switching in the observed community, see Argente and Lorenzo (1989, 1990).

discover what type of socio-symbolic meaning is conveyed by variables of this kind.

Not only are we allowed to examine these phenomena from a pragmatic standpoint, but this is the only analysis that will turn out to be the most appropriate: in so far as some interferences seem to be governed by the speakers' purposeful use, they should no longer be considered as automatic, non-monitored, general phenomena, but should rather be viewed from a perspective that takes language use --and specifically the relationship between language signs and their users -- as its main relevant topic of concern. This viewpoint is the one furnished by pragmatics.

Finally, the adaptive character of pragmatic values and elements shows up again. Indeed, we are entitled to consider interference as adaptation, in so far as it implies variation and choice, for any adaptation consists in selecting a variable, the one that is the most suited to a specific purpose.

We believe that studies in this line will also show interference to be used to express other pragmatically relevant values and functions in social interaction --either as a way of conveying social meaning or as a strategy in constructing discourse. A special case in point should be expressive values tied to irony and humour.

In short, the pragmatic values of interference show both that the study of languages in contact may take advantage of a pragmatic approach and that pragmatics as a discipline may benefit from the analysis of language contact.

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