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ARABIC AND ENGLISH CULTURAL TRANSLATION GAPS: PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Transferring meaning from one language to another while taking the linguistic and cultural quirks of both the source and target languages is a difficult process called translation. This study looks at the cultural differences between English and Arabic translation and how they have a big impact on the translation process. This study looks into the issues with mistranslating cultural signs, the causes of these mistranslations, and practical translation techniques that work best for conveying the intended meaning. A theoretical framework, including some definitions of culture and translation, is offered before the analysis. Since Arabic and English-speaking cultures have different historical, religious, and social origins, cultural references are essential to translation. To ensure appropriate transmission of allusions and references, translators must have cultural awareness and expertise. The study concludes with some final thoughts.

Keywords: Culture, translation, Cultural gaps, strategies of translation, Cultural mediator.

Introduction:

Translation is the act or process of expressing something using a different language or set of symbols than the one it was originally stated in. Language translation has been assumed to occur between speakers for generations. Undoubtedly, one of the fundamental tenets of translation is to be true to the original as it serves as a vital means of communication. This principle states that translation must first accurately represent the content of the source language, with literal translation accurately capturing the original cultural meaning. Although there may be cultural differences that make translation difficult, anything can be translated. Translation is a "re-coding" or alteration of the surface structure that represents the underlying deep structure. The need for translated material has grown significantly during the beginning of the third millennium, when the effects of globalization are being felt throughout the entire world. For instance, the translation of literary and non-literary works from English into Arabic continues to intensify in the Arab world. Two factors can be used to explain these phenomena. First, the appearance of Arabic and English as global official languages. Second, there has been a huge increase in the production of pragmatic, scientific, and texts in both English and Arabic. Millions of literary works in the Arab world need to be translated from Arabic to English. The topic of cultural gaps in translation has been covered in this context, along with solutions for translators who work with languages that are so dissimilar from one another, like Arabic and English.

The translation process is significantly impacted by the cultural distinctions between English and Arabic. For correct and efficient translation, it is crucial to comprehend and navigate these differences. To accurately transmit the intended meaning, translators must be adept in rearranging sentences and changing wording. In addition to having a solid command of both languages and cultures, translators also need to be excellent communicators and interpreters. The difficulties created by cultural gaps can be solved, resulting in effective cross-cultural communication, by understanding these differences and using the right translation procedures (Al Madhoun & Elyan, 2020). Both languages have distinctive vocabularies and idiomatic idioms that might not have exact translations in other languages. To identify appropriate counterparts or express the intended meaning using alternate phrases or explanations, translators must have a thorough awareness of cultural subtleties and context. Due to their different historical, religious, and social origins, Arabic and English-speaking cultures have different cultural references and symbols. To ensure that the target audience correctly understands references and allusions, translators must be culturally aware and competent (Al Madhoun & Elyan, 2020). For messages to be successfully communicated and to prevent misunderstanding or offense, translators need to be aware of these distinctions. The need for translators to make educated decisions while taking into account cultural characteristics is highlighted by the fact that literal word-for-word translations sometimes miss the intended meaning or cultural nuances (Almijrab, 2020).

Objective of the Research:

The primary objective of this study is to clarify the difficulties that translators frequently face when attempting to translate between two languages and two cultures while also identifying the cultural differences in translation between English and Arabic.

Methodology:

The study looks into the cultural differences in translation that occur while translating texts from English to Arabic and vice versa. There are three sections: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. The goal and structure of the work are discussed in general terms in the introduction, along with a discussion of some theoretical advancements in the field. The research's findings will be compiled in the conclusion. The discussion of the topic is contained in the body.

Literature Review:

The concept of culture has been examined and defined broadly. The traditional definition of culture does not provide a substantive definition; instead, it focuses on a multitude of cultural characteristics, including social heritage, beliefs, practices, morals, tradition, and language. The acquired norms, behaviors, experiences, and laws that set one civilization apart from another are referred to as culture.

According to Newmark (1988, p. 94), culture is the way of life and its distinctive manifestations within a group of people who use a certain language to communicate. To find translation solutions that fit the established concept of the target text culture, it is necessary to recognize cultural variances.

One of the challenges a translator may encounter is the fact that some words or phrases designating things, facts, phenomena, etc., have roots so deeply ingrained in their source culture and are so distinctive (and possibly exclusive or unique to the culture that produced them) that they lack an equivalent in the target culture, whether because they are unheard of or because they have not yet been codified in the target language (TL). In talking about correspondence issues in translation, "differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure" (Nida 1964, p. 130).

By talking about the translation "strategies" used to address cultural issues, the translation process will be evaluated. Translation methods are typically described by academics as the steps that lead to the best resolution of a translation issue. Lefevere claims that the translational unit is 'culture'. As a result, the "cultural turn" in translation studies was influenced by Lefevere's approach to translation from a cultural perspective. Lefevere (2014) developed the intercultural and multicultural trend in the postcolonial era in collaboration with Bassnett. The studies by Lefevere and Bassnett (2016) focused on the importance of translation for the advancement of international communication as well as the development of politics, culture, and society. The significance of Lefevere's idea is that it broadens the translator's duty from the linguistic level to a more comprehensive social context rather than restricting translation to a linguistic approach.

In conclusion, culture and language are intertwined since one exists without the other. Functionally, language can be seen as a tool for communicating different kinds of messages, and structurally, it can be seen as a system of sounds, words, sentences, and discourse or conversation. Aspects of culture are more broadly defined as ideas, concepts, practices, and ways of living. These include things like literature, science, thought, art, cooking, eating, dressing, and other forms of habits. According to this perspective, language serves as a conduit between the first and the second, while culture serves as the realization, representation, and incarnation of ideas in the real world. Later, a few English/Arabic idioms and proverbs will be chosen in order to study them and demonstrate the significance of cultural aspects in translation. To further emphasize the idea of the cultural gaps and contrasts between the two languages, further examples are provided.

Culture and Translation:

What is Culture?

In accordance with Baker, "culture" refers to "the complex collection of events which condition daily existence. It covers the people's history, social institutions, religious beliefs, and traditional practices. The complex ties between the many social classes, races, and religious groups that coexist in opposition to one another in each given civilization are also included (1992, p. 22). The discussion of cultural norms in the following pages will center on this concept of culture. We must not ignore the crucial role that culture plays in language and translation, though. And as Gazala notes, "we should understand that culture is a huge problem of translation, yet it is translatable, however difficult and inconsistent that might be" (1995, p. 149). According to Gazala, "I define culture as the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression" (1988, p. 194) is how Newmark defines culture.

What is Translation:

In reality, translation is a transforming process. Theoretically, a successful translation ought to convey to the reader the same idea that the original would convey to a native speaker. According to Nida, a proper translation can be judged by the receptor's reaction to the translated message, which must then be contrasted with how the original receptors would have likely responded to the message had it been delivered in its original context. According to Jakobson, translation is a process of information replacement rather than simply the conversion of symbols into another language. A translator's job is to convert the information he gets into symbols that he will communicate with. According to Catford, there is just signifier equivalent in translation, not meaning equivalence. There is a translation equivalency limitation because the originating and target languages differ from one another. This limitation shows up in grammatical constructions and word meanings, but it also shows up more obviously in cultural disparities.

Translation and Culture:

Being true to the original text's content is one of the most important translation rules to follow in order to prevent any potential cultural misunderstandings. This is possible not only through literal translation but also by comprehending the cultural values and beliefs of the other language. Since the languages of any two cultures are a clear reflection of the distinctions between them, this comprehension aims to express the original cultural meanings in a precise manner. Understanding the original text is crucial, but it's equally important to be able to create new text that expresses the original text's meaning. Every single word can be translated throughout the recoding process that is translation. If the translation is to have the same impact on the target reader—both linguistically and culturally—as the original text did on the reader of the source language, translation theories and translation theorists frequently advise that the translator find an equivalent in the target language (TL) culture for each source language (SL) cultural item.

To foster understanding between other nations and countries is the goal and hallmark of translation. Translation, according to renowned American translation theorist Eugene Nida, is the process of replicating in the target language the closest natural counterpart of the original, first in terms of meaning and then secondly in terms of style. However, cultural variations more or less have an impact on reproducing "the closest natural equivalent" in the target language. There are several translation barriers that prevent individuals from understanding each other correctly due to the disparities in histories, geographic regions, local customs, and religious beliefs, among other things. Translation requires knowledge of the respective cultures in addition to language proficiency in the

translator or interpreter. In this sense, translation entails more than just converting phrases, clauses, or entire texts from one language to another. It also refers to cultural transfer.

The translation process heavily depends on culture. Without a strong basis in both the source and destination languages' cultures, a translator will probably struggle to understand the underlying meaning. Translation professionals must therefore be aware of cultural differences and have an open mind about how different languages function in various contexts. But a key factor in the translating process is cultural origins. It is obvious that different words may not have the same emotional implications in different languages. Because of the various cultural origins, different languages typically reflect various implications and correlations of mood.

The real goals of translation are to make up for the semantic zero created by culture and to attain cultural equivalency between the source and target languages. Semantic and pragmatic equivalence are the two basic types of cultural equivalency.

Translators as Cultural Mediators:

Because they are themselves a part of certain cultures, translators contribute to the traditions, values, and customs that are embedded in those communities. Can a translation possibly convey to its readers the comprehension that foreign readers have of the original text? argues Venuti. Yes, I do wish to argue, but this communication will always be inadequate, biased toward the home scene, and always partial (Venuti, 2000, p. 473). In reality, the translator is able to create a target text document that will communicate effectively in the target culture. However, in order to accommodate the cultural differences involved in the creation of a fully-fledged target culture document, the translator must be an expert in cross-cultural communication, operate in accordance with a well-structured and well-planned translation strategy, and adhere to a clear functional brief. The translator's role is much more important than might have been initially believed, as this article has shown. The translator must have cultural awareness and knowledge in order to successfully employ translation strategies when creating a cross-cultural communication tool that is most effective in the target culture.

Results and Analysis:

Cultural Gaps of Translation: Challenges, Complications, and Possible Solutions:

Even if there are differing views on whether or not language is a part of culture, the notions of culture and language cannot be separated when contemplating the consequences for translation. The issues with correspondence in translation were examined by Nida in 1964, giving equal weight to the linguistic and cultural distinctions between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). He came to the conclusion that cultural differences could present a translator with more serious difficulties than linguistic ones. He continued by saying that cultural analogies frequently enable understanding despite major formal shifts in translation.

Every nation has a distinctive culture, as is well recognized. It represents their mind in a special way. The knowledge or beliefs required to function in a way that is acceptable to the society's members in whatever capacity that they accept for themselves make up a society's culture. In a nutshell, culture is a society's entire way of life. It encompasses not just intangible things like ideas, conventions, family patterns, and languages but also tangible things like towns, institutions, and schools. Language is viewed as a crucial component of culture rather than as an isolated phenomena suspended in a vacuum. It is seen as the cornerstone of culture by some social scientists. On the other hand, culture has an impact on and shapes language. It illustrates culture. It simply acts as a link between culture and translation, which is why it is crucial. Cultural disparities throughout the translation process, as we all know, can make us feel uncomfortable. How can we effectively handle it? In my opinion, we need first understand the true nature of this situation. Words may swiftly and directly reflect changes in social life and the evolution of national culture since they are the most active and vibrant part of a language. Because word meanings represent cultural differences between nations, we must therefore pay more attention to word analysis and comparison. The domains of cultural background, non-equivalence, extension and aim, and derivation are among those where these cultural gaps can be observed.

A person can convey himself or his experience more easily while speaking with someone from his own culture because they will likely have many shared concepts. The process is more difficult when there are cultural differences between the parties involved. Words serve as a powerful tool that allow authors to express their attitudes, opinions, and points of view. So, it is possible to say that language communicates cultural reality, making intercultural sensitivity particularly crucial. Some aspects are simple to pick up on when a translator first encounters a foreign tongue. He simply adds a few additional lexical terms and grammatical constructions and

carries on speaking and listening. Other things are more challenging, but it is possible to overcome language barriers with a little work. Lack of cultural understanding has a negative impact on comprehension. For instance, when a child learns the term "dog" while growing up in the American cultural context, he typically learns the cultural meaning of the word, which is that the dog is "man's best friend," whereas a child raised in the Chinese cultural context will be taught that the dog is a filthy and dangerous animal. A person with any of these two mentalities would have a very different perspective on the same animal. People are prone to instinctively interpret events using their own cultural references since they naturally identify their mother tongue with the culture. The term "intuitive competence" refers to this innate tendency.

Non-Equivalence Gaps:

The goal of total equality is clearly unattainable, and has been for a very long time. Languages are diverse from one another; they contain unique codes and laws that govern how grammatical stretches of language are constructed, and these codes and rules have distinctive meanings. The word "equivalence" in this case quickly conveys the sense that it is necessary to locate the exact comparable equivalent words in two languages. When translating, one generally searches for an equivalent word to convey the original meaning in the target language. However, this is untrue. The principle will be made clearer by the examples that follow:

(Girls) students went to visit the museum.

الطالبات ذهبن لزيارة المتحف

The two students went to visit the museum.

الطالبتان ذهبتا لزيارة المتحف

The Muslim has to pay Zakat Al-Fiter before prayer of Eid.

على المسلم دفع زكاة الفطر قبل صلاة العيد

The translation strategies a translator employed to communicate the message are explained by the aforementioned examples. It is evident from the first example that Arabic has subject and verb agreement. However, there is no such agreement in English. hence, while utilizing the plural subject (الطالبات), It's crucial to have verbal agreement (ذهبن) to let the reader understand that the intended audience is solely the students of the girls. Boys didn't go to the museum, either. In English, the word "students" can refer to both boys and females. Arabic does, however, distinguish between men and women. The word Zakat Al-Fiter, used in the third example, doesn't exist in the English language; therefore, the translator had to employ the transliteration method to make the meaning obvious to the reader.

Lexical gaps:

The literature on the subject alternately uses the phrases "lexical gaps" and "lexical holes." However, the term "lexical gap" is more popular than "lexical hole." The definition of a lexical gap is agreed upon by linguists and translation experts alike. Unlexicalized concepts or objects across languages are blamed for lexical gaps. For instance, two vocabulary terms were created that refer to both as "corpse" and "carcass," respectively, as a result of the cultural institutionalization of the distinction between dead humans and dead animals. On the other hand, there is no term for dead vegetation. The same holds true of the distinction in English between 'shelling' and 'bombardment' where both are translated into Arabic as **Qasif القصف** "unless the former collocates with artillery" **maddfa6iah مدفعية** "to be distinguished from the latter when co-occurring with aircraft fighters **taairat طائرات**". Thus, such lexical mismatches will lead to the absence of adequate translations where the translator must decide between straight borrowing, neologism and providing an explanation.

The examples below show the lexical gap that affects translation from English into Arabic differently. Words like **bank**, **chair**, and **left** have distinct meanings depending on the context in which they are used:

1. I live near the **bank**.
أنا أعيش بالقرب من البحيرة
2. I work in the international **bank**.
أنا أعمل في البنك الدولي.
3. The committee **chair** asked for a cup of tea.
رئيس اللجنة طلب كوباً من الشاي.
4. The **chair** is broken by the child.
كسر الطفل الكرسي.
5. I **left** my phone at home.
6. I put my phone on the **left** side of the room.

تركت هاتفي في المنزل.

وضعت هاتفي في الجهة اليسرى من الغرفة

There is also a significant meaning difference between the two languages in the area of kinship ties, where eight kinship relations are used in Arabic:

ابن العم، بنت العم، ابن العمّة، بنت العمّة، ابن الخال، بنت الخال، ابن الخالة، بنت الخالة
unsuitably translated by the lexical kinship term "cousin." Only paraphrasing presented as footnotes or comments inside the body of the translated text can fill this lexical gap. Following are two examples:

1. **My cousin** (my maternal aunt's son) got married yesterday.
2. **My cousin** (my parental uncle's daughter) got married yesterday.

تزوج ابن خالتي بالأمس.

تزوجت بنت عمي بالأمس.

Gaps in the Translation of Idioms:

Despite the fact that there has been much published about the translation of idioms from Arabic to English and vice versa, some idioms continue to be contentious among translation experts. This is because these idioms have counterparts that range from one to zero in the TL. Since proverbs are considered a subtype of idioms and are culturally specific, they are not an exception in this sense. The duty of the translator is made particularly challenging when the expressions and functions of idioms vary in both SL and TL. In this case, mastering the culture and way of life, in addition to the linguistic system, becomes necessary before such idioms (including proverbs) may be rendered. For instance, the Arabic equivalent of the English expression "between the devil and the blue sea" is "بين فكي كماش". There is one equivalent in this instance that captures the essence of the English idiom. The following instances serve as more illustrations of how the cultural differences between the two languages are expressed:

The cat has nine lives.

القطّة لديها سبعة أرواح

The forbidden fruit is sweetest

كل ممنوع مرغوب

The translation above makes it very evident that Arabic culture differs from English culture and that there is a distinct cultural divide between the two.

Proverbs have a major role in bridging cultural differences as well, thus a translator should look for equivalent proverbs in the target language to avoid misunderstandings. The examples that follow will clarify it:

Let bygones be bygones

اللي فات مات

To add insult to injury

زاد الطين بلة

The Significant Roles of Translation in Transferring Culture:

Making Culture Universal:

When it comes to making a culture universal and inclusive, translation is essential. It serves as a bridge to communicate between all languages, especially those that are similar to one another given their shared linguistic characteristics and global cultural norms. As a result, it connects every node in the world's network. Additionally, translation presupposes the existence of cultural barriers, and the translator is likely aware of these barriers and their inevitable crossing. Without cultural universalities and commonalities, it will be hard to translate between different cultures and for individuals to communicate with one another. Translators must transmit the same referential, pragmatic, and interconnected meanings when comparing two languages that need to be translated equally. However, only partial semantic equivalency is possible because of the cultural differences between the two parties.

Getting Familiar with popular Culture and Habits:

Popular culture evolves alongside human development, and some of those cultures become ingrained in daily life. A person becomes familiar with the prevalent cultures and customs of individuals from many locations because translation automatically communicates the culture that is hidden beneath this culture. For instance, "Mother's Day" as a cultural phenomenon demonstrates how much people value mothers. This unique day has so become customary for all nations across all continents. Additionally, ordinary daily behaviors like accessing the Internet have spread around the world and are now practically universal.

Getting Acquainted with Cultural and Religion Customs:

The cultures and religions of each language are unique. Through translation, every society spreads the distinctive culture that makes it up. Understanding different cultures' varied forms of worship is made easier through cultural translation. Muslims can now pray in mosques, Christians can attend church, Jews can attend synagogues, and the definition of "Christmas Day" has been enlarged. Translation ties civilizations together in a chain. As a result, it is clear that translation is a form of cross-cultural communication; it goes beyond simple linguistic patterns and sentences.

Give Advantages of the Source Language Cultures:

A good translation prompts the reader to consider the cultural setting of the original material. One benefit of transferring concepts, practices, and social behaviors from one culture to another is known as cultural borrowing. If the translation is done well, readers or listeners from the target language's culture will gain several beneficial advantages, such as the ability to extend the Iranian custom of greeting and saying hello to others they encounter elsewhere in the world. The other example is the table manners of some countries, which show how that country's culture is.

Strategies of Dealing with Cultural Gaps:

Some strategies introduced by Newmark dealing with cultural gap:

- 1) **Naturalization:** The process of incorporating an SL term in its native form into TL language.
- 2) **Couplet, triplet, or quadruplet:** The translator uses this strategy while transferring, naturalizing, or calqueing to avoid any misunderstandings. In his opinion, it is a combination of strategies used to address a single issue.
- 3) **Neutralization:** At the word level, neutralization is a type of paraphrase. It would be a paraphrase if it were at a higher level. The SL item is paraphrased with certain words from other cultures when it is generalized (neutralized).
- 4) **Equivalents for descriptive and functional terms:** In a description of a cultural item in the source language, there are two parts: a descriptive part and a possible functional part. The descriptive equivalent discusses composition, size, and color. The functional equivalent discusses the meaning of the SL word's specific cultural connotation.
- 5) **Footnote explanation:** The translator may want to provide the TL reader with more information. He would include a footnote with this additional information. It can appear at the bottom of the page, at the conclusion of the chapter, or at the conclusion of the entire book.
- 6) **Cultural equivalent:** The TL cultural equivalent of the SL cultural term is used.

- 7) **Compensation:** A strategy utilized when a text's metaphor, sound effect, or meaning is lost in one particular section. A word or idea is substituted in another section of the text.

Cultural transposition, according to Hervey & Higgins, has a scale of degrees that leans more toward the selection of traits native to the target language and culture than features that are ingrained in the source culture. As a result, the target text's foreign traits are diminished and, to some extent, naturalized. Exoticism, calque, cultural borrowing, communicative translation, and cultural transplanting are five factors to take into account while thinking about cultural transposition.

- 1) **Exoticism:** This area has relatively little adaptability. The grammar and cultural elements of SL are transferred to TL in the translation. Transference is fairly close by.
- 2) **Calque:** Although it is unidiomatic to the target reader, it is to a large part familiar because it uses TL vocabulary but in SL structure.
- 3) **Cultural borrowing entails directly translating SL expressions into TL.** There is no translation from SL to TL. They typically establish themselves as the norm in TL terms over time. In historical, legal, social, and political literature, cultural borrowing is highly common; examples include "La langue" and "La parole" in linguistics.
- 4) **Communicative Translation:** This kind of translation is typically used for idioms, proverbs, fixed expressions, and other culturally distinctive clichés. In these circumstances, the translator uses an existing notion from the target culture to replace the SL word. Although the propositional meaning is different in a cultural substitution, the reader's response is identical. The literal translation in this case might be amusing. The extent to which this tactic is employed occasionally relies on the license that commissioners provide the translator as well as the translation's intended use.
- 5) **Cultural Transplantation:** The whole text is rewritten in target culture. The TL word has somewhat comparable cultural meanings but is not a direct counterpart. It is a different kind of extreme, but it is directed at the target culture, and the entire idea is imported into TL. Both exoticism and cultural appropriation should be avoided in a proper translation.

Some translation experts claim that a translator has three alternatives when translating cultural elements:

- 1) Using a foreign term without any justification.
- 2) Adding elaborate explanations to the foreign word.
- 3) Rewriting the material to improve its comprehension by readers who speak the target language.

They added that there is a growing convergence of cultures, which he thought translators should take into consideration. It depends on the goals the publisher or, more frequently, the translator has for a particular translation. By incorporating SL cultural features, in their opinion:

- a. A more fluid reading of the text (without pauses).
- b. A text that is still exotic and strange.
- c. A translator who is better familiar with the original culture.
- d. A more accurate representation of the source culture is given to the target text's reader.

They saw this process of converting loan terms into TL as a crucial component of translation. Cultures are unified through translation. They stressed that the process of globalization is advancing more quickly than it ever has and that there is no sign that it will stop very soon. Every translation will have some degree of cultural distortion. There is currently a choice to include more foreign words in target documents, albeit the translator will have to defend the decisions he or she makes. As a result, target texts can now retain SL cultural features. Every translation will have some degree of cultural distortion. There is currently a choice to include more foreign words in target documents, albeit the translator will have to defend the decisions he or she makes.

Conclusion:

This essay's major goals are to describe cultural gaps and the issues they raise for translators working on texts from other cultures, to define terms that are peculiar to those cultures, and to consider various translation strategies. As a result of what has been stated thus far, it is clear that a translator has generally transmitted cultural words with phonetic alterations. He gave his translation a sense of alienation by doing this. He uses the two techniques of gloss and replacement in an effort to mediate between the cultures and ease the process of

cultural understanding. His readers now feel as though they are familiar with the material as a result of this. This fact alone makes understanding easier.

The translator should have the ability to develop an equivalent that has a similar effect in the target language in addition to understanding cultural terminology and their consequences in the original text. However, this is a difficult task that is sometimes impossible to do. This essay has suggested a few likely approaches to problem-solving that can be used in genuine challenging situations. It is crucial to understand that elements other than the translator's experience play a role in the translation of cultural terminology. The success of choosing to apply one unique process over another depends in large part on the potentials of the target language and culture.

This study focused on how to handle the translation issues in this industry and the cultural divides. Additionally, this study only focuses on a portion of language's cultural worth. The challenges surrounding this component of culture are complex and challenging, and in addition to those that have already been discussed in this article, there are still many other culture-related translation issues and techniques that require specialized study.

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