SOCIOLINGUISTICS:
A Language Study in Sociocultural Perspectives

Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa dan Seni FKIP ULM
Banjarmasin
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5.1 Introduction

A language is also known as a system of symbols. As a system, it has at least four subsystems of symbols: (1) constitutive, (2) cognitive, expressive, and evaluative linguistic symbols. (Soetomo, 1985).

As a *system of symbols*, a language represents some symbols: constitutive, cognitive, evaluative, and expressive symbols. As a system of symbols, it has meanings. Words or utterances used by a language speaker are symbolically related to given objects or events in practical world. These utterances mean or include the various characteristics or have meanings. A meaning refers to something that is always present in human life; it will develop in line with the development of science and technology.

Culture provides guidance for humans in their lives. It teaches them the ways to behave in accordance with the existing cultural values. Some behavioral systems can be expressed through language. We find it difficult to distinguish the language from the realm of culture.

According to Parsons’ theory (in Soetomo, 1985) human behavior is controlled by the human action system. The human system of action is categorized into four subsystems: the cultural subsystem, the social subsystem, the personality subsystem, and the human behavior subsystems. Behavioral aspects of using a language may be hampered by cultural values. Those values have been firmly entrenched in a language speaker (Indonesia, for example), then he may be influenced by Indonesian culture when he speaks in another language (English or other).
Human action system can be subdivided into four subsystems: (1) cultural system, (2) social system, (3) personality system, and (4) behavioral system. As subsystem of culture, a language represents four symbolic systems: (1) constitutive symbol, (2) cognitive symbol, (3) evaluative symbol, and (4) expressive symbol. These symbols may influence the uses of speech acts in the speech events. For instance, a given speech community regard a certain local language or foreign language as having higher cultural values than Indonesian for its capacity to express more ideas or concepts more accurately than that of Indonesian. As a consequence, the elements of local or foreign language used in the speech events of Indonesian are regarded to be socio-culturally positive, though linguistically these are not based on the standardized Indonesian Grammar.

5.2 Cultural Values of Language as Constitutive Symbols

As has been stated that the constitutive symbol refer to symbol of belief towards the God, Creator of Universe, and/or that of belief towards the supernatural power outside human’s capacity. This is also referred to as Language of Religion. Language of religion in general uses symbolic and metaphoric utterances. Therefore, such utterances cannot be understood based their literal meanings. If these are understood based on their meanings, we will not get the messages implied in those utterances. It will bring about misunderstanding. There are three aspects as the object of study on language of religion. These are (1) language of religion for explaining the objects of metaphysical thought, especially about God, (2) the Scripture (Al-Qur’an for Muslims) referring essentially to God’s utterances which are metaphysical in nature and become language of humans as historical creatures which are tied to human culture, (3) ritual language which are not only limited
to oral production, but also involve gestures and bodily expression.²⁶

Another perspective on language of religion is as follows. Language of religion presents religious messages through religious sentences. “Religious sentences are containing a religious subject matter; a religious utterance is an utterance in oral or written forms containing religious teaching or religious message. Principally, religious subject matters can encompass the various agents, states of affairs and properties—such as God, deities, angels, miracles, redemption, grace, holiness, sinfulness. Most attention, however, has been devoted to the meaning of what we say about God.

According to the face value theory, an utterance “God is omnipotent” has some characteristics: (a) the utterance has the propositional/linguistic/semantic content that God is omnipotent and is true just in case God is omnipotent; (b) the utterance refers to an assertion that expresses conventionally the speaker’s belief towards omnipotence of God, as represented in “God is omnipotent”; (c) the utterance is a descriptive one that represents the fact that “God is omnipotent”. Generalizations of (a), (b) and (c) that extend to indicative religious utterances such as (God is omnipotent)—(a*), (b*) and (c*) respectively—can become the initial point to interpret the religious discourse.²⁷

Language of religion can be categorized into two types: (1) prescriptive language, and (2) descriptive language. A Scripture of Religion, as a living guide for religious followers, expresses the substance or the thing descriptively—and it is more democratic by involving human beings as historical creatures to discuss any problem. This is because the Scripture, as a living guide, does not only contain orders and restrictions but also it contains the prescriptive utterances, e.g. the utterances in the forms of persuasive texts containing orders or commands and restrictions or prohibitions. Furthermore, messages of God in

²⁶ https://fadhlilawang.com/2012/01/23/bahasa-agama/
²⁷ Religious Language in https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/
the Scripture are frequently expressed using metaphoric, symbolic, and iconic utterances.

Metaphor plays an important role in ensuring that verses of the Scripture are esthetic and have high literary values. Metaphoric concept of Al Qur'an is that a verse contains a comparison but it does not use such words as *like* or *as* or the like. In the verse, there is an utterance with the different meaning from the original one. For being able to understand the metaphoric utterance in the Holy Qur’an, it is necessary for someone to have a science of *balaghah*. Metaphoric utterance has a potential to new understanding. That is why the Scripture will always exist in anytime and anywhere. However, its negative side will occur; there will be a speculation and relativism in understanding the verses of the Scripture.²⁸

The existence and the holiness of Scripture depend on humans’ response. Besides, there was a shift of relation between readers and their Scripture. Initially, the Scripture had been revealed (by the God, as the subject) to the Prophet (as the object). In the next time, the Words of God have become the written texts. This condition also has changed the view towards the Scripture. It has been regarded as the object of reading by the readers (as the subject). This is a view showing that the existence and the holiness of Scripture depend on the humans’ response. This is to say that the Scripture is highly valuable for the followers of a particular religion. In other side, for non-followers of the religion, it may be regarded just as a series of fairy tale.²⁹

The Qur'an is the Scripture of Islam. The language of the Qur'an has special characteristics, which, of course, is very different from the inherent traits of a language used in everyday human life. The language used by humans in daily life generally

²⁸ https://fadhlilawang.com/2012/01/23/bahasa-agama/
²⁹ https://fadhlilawang.com/2012/01/23/bahasa-agama/
refers to the empirical world. The language of the Qur'an does not only reveal the empirical experience, but also covers the space and time in the metaphysical and theological senses.

Therefore, the verses of Qur’an are impossibly understood just on the basis of their linguistic aspects. That is why the hermeneutic experts of the Qur’an, who have excellent linguistic competence/performance in Arabic language and sufficient Islamic knowledge, have been conducting hermeneutic interpretation as an effort to have understanding on the metaphoric and analogic language of Qur’an. They have helped other ordinary followers of Islam in understanding the Qur’an.30

5.3 Cultural Values of Language as Cognitive Symbols

Cognitive symbols are created by human beings as their efforts to have knowledge on everything around them.31 Susanne K. Langer gives an example way of how a child gets knowledge from his environment as follows. “Watch a young child that is just learning to speak play with a toy; he says the name of the object, e.g. Horsey! Horsey! Horsey! over and over again, looks at the object, move it, always saying the name to himself or to the world at large. It is a quiet time before he talks to anyone in particular; he talks first of all to himself. This is his way of forming and fixing the conception of the object in his mind, and around this conception all his knowledge of it grows. *Names* are the essence of language; for the name is what abstracts the conception of the horse from horse itself, and lets the mere idea recur at the speaking of the name. This permits or enables the conception that was gathered from a horse experience for being exemplified again and again by the other instance of a horse, so the notion represented in the name is referred to as a general notion (Langer, in Gar. 1993:17).

30 Mustamar, Marzuki. Memahami Karakteristik Bahasa Al Qur’an dalam Perspektif Balaghiyah. Malang: UIN
31 https://fatchulfkip.wordpress.com/page/6/
These cognitive symbols enable human beings to capture the dynamic relationship between the world of values and the world of knowledge. Language as a means of daily communication may shape our ways to use and to have knowledge, to analyze and formulate discourses, and determine certain patterns of discourses. In other words, cognitively, a language can be regarded as system of symbols on one side, and it can be used as a means of thinking as humans’ to create and develop science.

A language is constructed of symbols. Symbols here are things that refer to the things else. This is what is called knowledge. Thus it can be said that language refers to knowledge. Then, what is meant by knowledge and where is it derived from? The term knowledge as it is used here has two sources: (1) knowledge that is received from the world around humans through their senses. This is what is called as direct knowledge based on experiences. Then the sensual knowledge are used as the basics to construct other concepts created of human experiences and imagination, and (2) from human experiences of ‘cows’ and ‘purple’, people may create ‘purple cows’. From direct experiences people may create concepts such as ‘relativity’ or ‘quantum mechanics’. Relativity was created by challenging assumptions; quantum mechanics was created to explain certain unexpected experiences. There is no question that those who understand these terms consider the understanding.32

In relation to the relation of language and knowledge on plants and animals, the biologists attempt to determine the structure and character of plants and animals. They observed four verbal variables of plant elements, namely: the shape of the plant element, the quantity of plant elements, the way the plant


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elements are distributed, and the relative distance of plant elements. If a botanical scientist will study the plant reproduction system, then he must calculate the number of pollen and pistil or record their quantities in the effort of identification for naming them. Then he will respectively notice how the geometric position of the spread of pistils and pollen in the flower whether they form circle, triangle or hexagonal (the way the elements are distributed). Through these ways, it is expected that the scientists may describe the particular identity names of the various types of plants and animals. The purpose is to determine the proper nouns of the various elements of plants.\footnote{Nurdin Muhammad dalam: bumibutur.blogspot.com/.../bahasa-dalam-pembentukan-ilmu.html}

Biology or physics as a specialized field have vocabularies, at least, in three types or categories: (1) a main vocabulary as shared with all of the sciences and technologies; (2) a specific vocabulary as used for the branch of science itself; and (3) more specific vocabularies as only known in its specific subarea such as microbiology (a subarea of biology) or plasma physics (a subarea of physics) (Schiffrin, et al 2001: 715).

In human life, there are various branches of sciences. Just as in biology or physics, there are at least three types of vocabulary in other sciences. Special terms in the economic field or company, among others, are: \textit{balance sheet, income statement, investment, stocks, expenses, income, production, management, commodity, quality, stagnant, liquidity, inflation, profit, nonprofit}, etc. The term \textit{income statement}, for instance, cannot be understood based on its lexical meaning. It does not only refer to \textit{information about income} as it is understood in a daily life, but it also refers to more detailed information about company’s income. Let us read: “\textbf{Income statement} – Also called Profit and Loss statement. An income statement is a financial statement that shows sales, cost of sales, gross margin, operating expenses,
and profits or losses. Gross margin is sales less cost of sales, and profit (or loss) is gross margin less operating expenses and taxes. The result is profit if it’s positive, loss if it’s negative.”

In the language field (linguistics), we have a term construction and morphology. However, a construction in linguistic concept is different from that in technological field; term morphology in a linguistic study is of course different from that in a biological study.

Likewise naming things related to physical environment. At first the things do not have names or words that symbolize them. The names or terms are created based much on their physical environment. People know that there are many types of snow in the Eskimo community. To differentiate one type of snow to another one, the community needs appropriate terms for all the types of snow. Their knowledge on different types of snow causes them to distinguish the various names of snow. For the Eskimos, naming the snow with the various names is very important for their life. This is because their physical environment demands the existence of such names of snow. While people living near the equator do not need to distinguish the types of snow and therefore they have only one word, namely: snow (Trudgill, 1983).

Meanwhile, the British people only have the word rice to refer to what the Javanese call pari, gabah, beras, and sega. This is because the British and Javanese have different interests. In this relation, Javanese people are more interested in creating the different vocabularies, because the words pari, gabah, beras and sega refer to the different objects. In the context of Javanese culture a word pari is often used in the context of cultivation activities, such as in nandur pari (rice planting); product of


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nandur pari is called gabah. Dried gabah peeled through the process of grinding is called beras; small fraction beras is menir; and beras is used to refer to material for being cooked to make sega, lontong, kopat and so on. Meanwhile, the British call pari, gabah, beras, menir and sego with one word, namely: rice (Fatchul Mu’in, 2009).

In addition to the physical environment, the social environment can be reflected in language, and often has an effect on vocabularies. For example, a kinship system of a particular society is usually reflected in kinship vocabularies. We can say the kinship vocabularies are important for Banjarese people so that they have many kinship vocabularies. The followings are Banjarese kinship vocabularies: (from the oldest generation) muyang, muning, waring, anggah, datu, kai, abah, anak, cucu, buyut, intah, cicit, muning and muyang. Besides, there are some vocabularies: uma, julak, gulu, paman, and acil. Also, there are vocabularies: ading, laki, bini, ipar, marui and warang. (Suryadikara, 1989). English speech community has the kinship vocabularies: son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter, brother, sister, father, mother, husband, wife, grandfather, grand- mother, uncle, aunt and cousin (Trudgill, 1974).

Vocabularies of a given language are very great in number. Linguists classify them into: content words and function words.³⁵ Content words are defined as words that have clear lexical meanings; they are very great in number; they have formal markers by which they can be formed into inflections and derivations; and they are said to be open classes of words.

Meanwhile, function words are defined as words that have the opposite properties from the content words, namely: they do not have clear lexical meanings; their numbers are limited; they cannot be formed further either into inflections or derivations;

³⁵ https://www.google.com/search?q=content+word+and+function+word&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b
and they are said to be closed classes. *Content words* cover nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. *Function words* are also called as grammatical words including *auxiliary verbs, pronouns, articles, and prepositions*. *Function words* are present to explain or creating grammatical or structural relationship to make grammatical sentences or syntactical constructions based the patterns of the language itself.  

Furthermore, *content words* can be explained as follows. As have been discussed before, these word-classes include: nouns, main verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. These kinds of words can symbolize or represent *cultural contents*. As cognitive symbol, a language constructed from vocabularies, phrases, and sentences can be used to express their knowledge of everything on human beings and their lives.

### 5.4 Cultural Values or Contents of Language as Evaluative Symbols

A language can be regarded as the symbol used to give good-bad judgments, to state proper-improper behavior, to evaluate politeness-impoliteness, and the like. Human behavior will be closely related to values, norms, rules or laws (in the written form and convention), and the like. These values, norms, rules or laws are represented in the speech acts. Thus, other than symbolizing humans’ belief (religion), and cognitive knowledge, a language also symbolizes behavioral evaluation or morality. In the social communication and interaction, human beings are ruled and controlled by cultural values, norms, and rules as their living guidance. Polite behavior should be followed by polite speech acts. Non-verbal behavior should be followed by

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36 Ibid

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polite verbal communication/interaction), by using polite speech acts.

In one perspective, language use is influenced, controlled, and ruled by the socio-cultural norms. These norms can be related to the old idea as suggested by Fishman “Who speaks what language to Whom and When (1972:244), and by Pride and Holmes “factors influencing language use are participants, topics of discussion, setting, channels, mood, and intention (1972:35). The acts of speaking in front of the senior audience should be in the polite manners. The speakers should be respectful to their audience. They should choose the honorific utterances. Therefore, the participants involved in the speech events should use the utterances implying respectful attitudes. There are some characteristics of respect: tolerance, acceptance, privacy, non-violence, courtesy, politeness, concerned, and responsibility.

In the modern era, British society has made an effort to build a democratic community. This has implications on forms or structures of language and behavior of speaking acts in democratic ways. The so-called democratization showed that there has been the gradual leveling out of overt social distinctions, although its implications are not so great that social differences of power and status no longer matter. That is to say that these social differences are not shown explicitly and they are referred to by the use of honorific devices. Honorific values are stated in the ceremonial addressing terms such as Your Majesty and Your Grace, and indirect request such as Would you like to help me? Do you want to get the coffee?. The utterances show politeness; and at the same time, social status and power are still maintained (Leech, 2014).

Politeness or polite character refers to an integrative part of – and it is automatically influenced by- socio-cultural setting in which politeness is conducted. When politeness is realized in verbal language, there will be inter-cultural similarities and
differences, such as, in politeness degree of *greeting*. It can be expressed using such utterances as “Good morning”, “Good day”, “Hi”, and “Hallo”; and in other languages such as Indonesian, the greeting with its different degrees are used in the same ways. Speakers of Indonesian may greet others using “Selamat pagi”, “Selamat siang”, “Hai”, and “Halo”. In relation to *personal affairs*, such as asking *marital status* for both English and Indonesian should be avoided. English speakers may regard *salary* as a part of personal affairs; whereas Indonesian speakers may regard it as a usual thing. Thus, cultural differences may bring about differences to express politeness (or polite acts). Some utterances may represent politeness in one culture; and these may represent impoliteness in another. Therefore, inter-cultural language speakers should realize that there are differences in expressing politeness degrees. They should have not only linguistic competence, but they also have competence in cross-cultural understanding. As a consequence, *linguistic competence* together with *inter-cultural competence* should be an essential goal for language learning and teaching.

The following is the example of respectful and polite utterances in English Language. “A thank-you note is a simple phrase that contains a deeper meaning in a communication. Everyone would already understand the meaning of *thanks*. It is the single and simple word that has a deep meaning in human communication and interaction. It implies a binding force between both the speaker and listener. This cannot be separated from human daily life; therefore we should implement this good habit as character by giving a sincere gratitude. Broadly speaking, ‘thank you note’ is always associated with gratitude that we automatically say when accept something, whether it is in relation to the delivery of goods, help, service and etc. The thank-you note is important in a communication. This is because the thank-you note can make an interesting conversation. Besides, it can create a positive communication.
The thank-you note is a part of good attitudes showing good character. The following are the illustrations on the thank-you note: (1) It shows our appreciation to a person from whom we have his good treatment, (2) It may build our good personality, (3) It implies our gratitude to God; it enables us to share something to each other, and (4) It enables us to establish and maintain good social relationship to the other.

*I can’t believe you did that. You shouldn’t have, but thank you so much! This was very kind of you.*

In our daily life, we often have many problems. We may be able to solve almost all of our problems. There is one thing we cannot solve by ourselves. Someone knows we have a very hard problem. He then helps us to solve it so that our problem can be well solved. In this condition, we must thank to God and then to the person who has given us help. In this relation, we can use the expression as stated above.

*What a thoughtful gift! I really appreciate this!*  

Frequently our friends or other persons give something as gifts. In fact, we say ‘Thank you for the gifts’. But, we can use another expression as stated above. Although there is no a phrase ‘thank you’, the expression is the same in meaning. If we want to insert a phrase ‘thank you’ after the expression, as “What a thoughtful gift! I really appreciate this! Thank you!

*I really owe you one. Next time you need help, I’ve got it.*

Giving help to someone is a good character. We do not need to have expectation to be helped by him. As a good person, he will consciously help us whenever we have some problems to solve, as expressed using the utterances.
Respectful attitude toward the interlocutors can be expressed by using honorific speeches (=speeches with respectful connotation). Each language has a system that controls how people use their language. In English, similar attitudes are governed by Honorific Devices. Honorific device is a means to construct utterances implying respectful attitudes in accordance with the strategies of either oral or written communication, as suggested by Fishman, on ‘Who speaks What language to Whom and When’ (Fishman, 1972). In Javanese language, respectful attitudes in the acts of speaking are governed through what Clifford Geertz call as Linguistic Etiquettes. In Indonesian, respectful attitudes are suggested with a slogan “Gunakan bahasa Indonesia secara baik dan benar” and English language, through Honorific Devices.

5.5 Cultural Values or Contents of Language as Expressive Symbol

Expressive symbols are used to express emotion, feeling, and mood. Emotion refers to each experience consciously carried out and followed by intensively mental activities, and a given degree of pleasure or displeasure.

Feeling may be understood as either physical or emotional sense. A word ‘hot’, for instance, can be used in the physical and emotional senses. In the context of sentence like “It is very hot here”, a word ‘hot’ indicates a physical sense. Whereas, in the context of sentence like “This is a hot news”, a word ‘hot’ here indicates an emotional sense. This is a direction for understanding ‘feeling’. The feeling indicates something a person physically or emotionally perceives.

While mood is a more general term. This mood is not tied to a particular incident, but it is related to a series of inputs or inputs. Mood is strongly influenced by several factors: (1) environment (weather, lighting, people around us), (2) physiology (food, sport, and health), and (3) our mental state (our recent attention and emotion). The mood can take several minutes, hours, and even many days.

5.6 Summary on Language as System of Symbols

A language is a symbolic system. This does not mean that there is a strict grouping of language elements into the four types of symbols. This can be explained as follows. Let's take the example of the word father. This word has implications as constitutive, cognitive, and evaluative symbols.

As a constitutive symbol, Father is used in the context: “In Jehovah's Witness theology, only God the Father (Jehovah) is the one true almighty God, even over his Son Jesus Christ. They teach that the pre-existent Christ is God’s First-begotten Son, and that the Holy Spirit is God’s active force (projected energy)\(^{40}\).

As a cognitive symbol, a word father was arbitrary created to give an addressing term in the kinship relationship, referring to a male parent term.

As an evaluative symbol, a word father (ayah/bapak) implies a man as a head of household; he should play a good social role; he becomes a leader of his family members, and therefore, he should have respected morality. Family’s morality is influenced much by the father.

As an expressive symbol, a word father or father figure may represent a sad or happy feeling, as expressed in some songs such as Bang Toyib (Indonesian song) and My Father’s Eyes.

\(^{40}\) https://www.google.com/search?q=Father+as+God&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b
Bang Toyib
Gebby Vesta

Bang toyib
Bang toyib
Kenapa tak pulang pulang

anakmu anakmu
panggil panggil namamu

Bang toyib
Bang toyib
Kenapa tak pulang pulang

anakmu anakmu
panggil panggil namamu

Bang toyib
Bang toyib

reff ;

tiga kali puasa
tiga kali lebaran
abang tak pulang pulang
sepucuk surat tak datang

sadar-sadarlah abang inget anak istrimu
cepat cepatlah pulang semua rindukanmu

jika dijalan yang benar selamatkanlah ia
jika dijalan yang salah sadarkanlah dirinya

Bang toyib
Bang toyib

41 http://musiklib.org/ade_irma-bang_toyib-lirik_lagu.htm

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Kenapa tak pulang pulang

anakmu anakmu
panggil panggil namamu

Bang toyib
Bang toyib
kapankah abangkan pulang

anakmu anakmu
rindu ingin bertemu
My Father's Eyes
Eric Clapton

Sailing down behind the sun,
Waiting for my prince to come.
Praying for the healing rain
To restore my soul again.

Just a toe rag on the run.
How did I get here?
What have I done?
When will all my hopes arise?
How will I know him?
When I look in my father's eyes.
My father's eyes.
When I look in my father's eyes.
My father's eyes.

Then the light begins to shine
And I hear those ancient lullabies.
And as I watch this seedling grow,
Feel my heart start to overflow.

Where do I find the words to say?
How do I teach him?
What do we play?
Bit by bit, I've realized
That's when I need them,
That's when I need my father's eyes.
My father's eyes.
That's when I need my father's eyes.
My father's eyes.

Then the jagged edge appears
Through the distant clouds of tears.
I'm like a bridge that was washed away;

https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/1903623/Eric+Clapton/

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My foundations were made of clay.

As my soul slides down to die.
How could I lose him?
What did I try?
Bit by bit, I've realized
That he was here with me;
I looked into my father's eyes.
My father's eyes.
I looked into my father's eyes.
My father's eyes.

My father's eyes.
My father's eyes.
I looked into my father's eyes.
My father's eyes.


Chinn, Clark A. 2011.*Educational Psychology: Understanding Students’ Thinking.* Rutgers University, page 7.


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Nurhayati in eprints.unsri.ac.id/.../fungsi-bahasa-sebagai_pengembang_budaya_bangsa....., assessed at 05/05/2018, 11:13 PM


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Online resources

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https://fatchulkip.com/page/6/
https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/types-attitudes-zafar-bilal-nadeem
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