

Written Mixed Language Variety in Multilingual South African Media: Intellectualisation of African Languages (isiZulu)

Sandiso Ngcobo

Abstract

The South African Constitution embraces multilingualism and makes commitments aimed at promoting the use and development of indigenous languages. This paper investigates the extent to which different parts of government and other influential structures of society use the media in their attempt to make multilingualism a reality. Data were collected from the internet, billboards, newspapers and pamphlets, leading to qualitative analysis of written English and isiZulu code switching. The findings illustrate creative ways in which written switches occur at clause boundary, in the form of tags and within sentences. Such an approach is considered a step in the right direction towards the intellectualisation of African languages as it has the potential to contribute to the promotion of multilingualism.

Keywords: Code switching; English; isiZulu; multilingualism; South Africa

Sandiso Ngcobo Imvange yolimi olubhalwe lwaxutshwa kwimidiya ebuliminingi yase Ningizimu Afrika: Ukwenza izilimi zomdabu Zase-Afrika Zisebenze emikhakheni eyahlukene

Isifingqo

Umthethosisekelo waseNingizimu Afrika uphakamisa ubuliminingi uphinde

uzibophezelele ekuphakamiseni nokuthuthukisa izilimi zomdabu. Leli phepha lihlose ukuhlaziya igalelo lezakhiwo ezahlukeni zomphakathi ekulandeleni le migomo yomthethosisekelo. Le zakhiwo zimbandakanya uhulumeni, ezokuxhumana kanye namabhizinisi lapho zixuba ukubhalwa ngesiNgisi nangesiZulu. Indlela elandelwe ukuqoqa ubufakazi balokhu kube ukubuka imibhalo ekumakhompuyutha, ezikhangisweni ezisemgwaqeni, emaphephandabeni kanye nasemabhukwaneni. Kutholakale ukuthi lezi nhlaka zilandela izindlela ezahlukeni nezingubuchule lapho zihlanganisa khona amagama alezi zilimi ezimbili. Loku kuthathwa njengendlela encomekayo ekuphakamiseni izilimi zesintu engaholela ekuqhakambiseni ubuliminingi.

Introduction

In the democratic South Africa, indigenous languages have politically been recognised as capable of competing equally with the former colonial languages, particularly with English. To this effect, the South African Constitution of 1996 gives official status to nine African languages (isiNdebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, siSwati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, isiXhosa and isiZulu) together with two previous official languages (English and Afrikaans) in an effort to give acknowledgement to the multilingual nature of the South African society. Not only does government recognise the status of African languages as a political gesture, it also goes further and makes commitments aimed at their use and development that should be adhered to by its different structures. Hence, the Constitution, under the language provisions, states that:

3(a) The national government and provisional governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.

3(b) Municipalities must take into account the language usage and

preferences of their residents (Chapter One, Founding provisions, Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996: 4)

Evidently, the approach of the Constitution is bottom-up in that it emphasises that the different structures of government should take into account language usage, practicality and preferences of the communities involved. In so doing, this would ensure the promotion of functional multilingualism. As a means to explore the extent to which policy is put to practice, the current paper examines instances wherein the national government, provisional governments, municipalities, businesses and the media have contributed to the formal use of written code-switching (hereafter CS). The languages of consideration in the current study are English and isiZulu as used in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. English is part of this study's consideration because it is generally valued for its socio-economic benefits. The choice of isiZulu is influenced by the fact that it is demographically a dominant African language in South Africa. Census 2011 data from Statistics South Africa indicates that isiZulu-speakers dominate at just above 20% (11.5-million). Moreover, while the majority of isiZulu L1 speakers (81%) are located within the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), isiZulu-speaking citizens can be found almost all over the country. Fifty percent of the population is estimated to be conversant in isiZulu, which means isiZulu could possibly serve as a common African language within South Africa. The widespread knowledge of isiZulu can be attributed to the fact that isiXhosa, the second most demographically dominant language (16%), has much in common with isiZulu. Other South African languages that are in the same language group with isiZulu – the Nguni or Bantu language group – are siSwati (2.7%) and isiNdebele (1.6%) (Census 2011, StatsSA; www.southafrica.info). Understandably, isiZulu is the commonly used African language in the public sphere either on its own or together with English. The reason for the continued use of English despite it being spoken by a mere 8.2% of the population as its home language is that it has a high socio-economic status, as pointed out earlier. This also explains why many Africans prefer to mix English with their indigenous languages in speech and written forms.

Most of the available research on code switching is on speech form mainly within the educational domain (Uys & Dulm 2011; Probyn 2009; Setati, Adler, Reed & Bapoo 2002; Moodley 2003) and social settings (Ndebele 2012; Ndimande-Hlongwa & Ndebele 2014). Research on written

CS form is, however, very limited (Dube 2008; Ngwenya 2011). This research gap has contributed to very little attention being given to written multilingualism in its role as it helps to promote ‘social identity and linguistic creativity’ in South Africa (Ngwenya 2011:2). In this respect, Ngwenya (2011:2) postulates that written CS has the potential to ‘make things that appear incongruous co-exist harmoniously with one another’ such as ‘viewing the different South African languages as resources and using them to create tapestry’. Equally, in analysing the English-IsiZulu written CS form this study aims to investigate the extent to which the form taken reveals effort to intellectualise African languages and contribute to multilingualism in a democratic South African society. In this context, the word intellectualisation is understood to refer to efforts directed at developing African languages for social equity, and individual and social identity in a multilingual South Africa (Alexander 2007).

Furthermore, the formal use of written mixed language variety that is witnessed in the new South Africa could be taken as an indication of language choices made by influential structures in recognition of social contact that has come about through the mixing of different racial groups (Finlayson & Slabbert 1997). As different racial groups make efforts to learn one another’s languages, it is appropriate that the government, the business community and the media should take these efforts into cognisance in their daily activities. Accordingly, CS by the different influential structures in South Africa can be viewed as an effort to use African languages in a modern manner following the bi-/multilingual speakers’ preferences.

In the following sections, there is first a review of literature that clarifies pertinent terms, theories and analytical approaches adopted in this article. The second section explores the significance of the study. The third section presents a descriptive analysis of how CS is achieved and its function(s) by pointing at instances of English-isiZulu CS in the public sector by the government and its various structures, mass media and business. The final section concludes the article.

Code-switching: Definition

The word *code* is a synonym for *language or language variety* (Gumperz 1972; Romaine 1995; Cenoz & Genesee 2001). For instance, Romaine (1995) asserts that code does not only refer to language but also to styles and

varieties. King and Chetty (2014: 42) extend the definition by explaining that ‘switching refers roughly to the use of at least two languages within an exchange’. This therefore means that code-switching is a language variety in which there is an interchange of more than one language within a communication discourse. Thus, the use of written CS in the public domain is in this article perceived as an emerging language variety in the new South Africa. The common trend in the South African public domain has been to use English as a lingua franca. With the advent of democracy and the equal status allocated to all languages in recognition of the multilingual nature of society it would appear that there are now efforts to use English alongside African languages as well.

According to Milroy and Myusken (1995), terminology on code-switching is used differently by different researchers. While some linguists would use the terms code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing as separate, others would use them as a single phenomenon (Backus 2000; Boztepe 2003; Clyne 2003; Heller 1988). Throughout this article the preferred term is code-switching for the sake of convenience. Hence, the definition of CS adopted in this article is that it is the alternate use of two or more languages in the same discourse, sentence, utterance or conversation (Poplack 2000; Grosjean 1982; Gumperz 1982; and Myers-Scotton 1993b). This alternate use of different languages can range from a single word (Pfaff 1997: 295), a phrase (Schaffer 1978: 268), to a sentence or several sentences (Grosjean 1982). The mixing of languages has previously been interpreted as internal confusion that prevents the separation of different languages (Lipski 1985). However, in many bi-multilingual contexts, such as South Africa, it has been proven that code-switching is not a result of bilingual incompetence but rather a complex process involving a great amount of skill in both languages involved and a socially and culturally motivated phenomenon (Uys & Dulm 2011; Probyn 2009; Setati, Adler, Reed & Bapoo 2002; Moodley 2003; Ndimande-Hlongwa & Ndebele 2014; Ngwenya 2011). The broad corpus of written CS presented in this article is also of a different range that uses two languages, which are English and isiZulu.

Types of Code-switching

Poplack ([1980] 2000:247) provides three categories that are useful in de-

scribing the forms, the length and the position within a communicative episode in which languages are alternated. Poplack's three categories are: *inter-sentential switches*, *tag-like switches*, and *intra-sentential switches*. Firstly, the inter-sentential is the switching that takes place at a level of a phrase, sentence clause or discourse boundary where each clause or sentence is in a different language (Poplack 1980; Romaine 1995). The second type is tag switches which are small units of another language in the form of tags, interjections and idiomatic expressions that are appended to a communicative episode that is mainly in one language. This implies that the use of another language is just an add-on, as the word tag suggests, that could be intended to make a certain impact to the message. Thus, tags are used by neither causing any interference with the main language nor violating the grammatical rules. This is due to the fact that tags can be moved freely and inserted almost anywhere in a discourse (Poplack 1980).

Lastly, intra-sentential refers to switches that occur within a sentence or a clause presented in another language (Poplack 1980; Romaine 1989). On the one hand, Winford (2003) prefers to term intra-sentential switching as code-mixing because the switch occurs such that the produced communicative episode is grammatically correct in accordance to both or more languages mixed. On the other hand, Gumperz (1982: 66) describes intra-sentential switching as 'borrowing' due to the fact that it occurs within a sentence by making use of loan words. The reason for the choice of this term is because bi-/multilingual speakers or writers would use words from another language such that those words become part of the host language. Gumperz (1982) further argues that borrowing is different from code-switching in that CS is a juxtaposition of two varieties which operate under two grammatical systems. Yet, Myers-Scotton (1993b) asserts that the distinction between the two terms is not critical to analyses of bilingual speech. For this reason, this research study accepts what could be termed borrowing as an instance of CS. The data presented in the current study also meet the three categories as described by Poplack (1980). As such, data utilised in this research are grouped according to the parameters set by these three categories during the analysis and discussion of the findings.

Even though the definitions and forms of CS described above would mostly be used to refer to conversational CS, the article presents instances of alternate use of isiZulu and English within various written communicative episodes as used in the public space. For this reason, it is to be expected that

the use of written CS in the social context is more formal in that it would be structured, well thought out, edited and intentional than speech forms which occur informally. That is what differentiates written CS from conversational CS that was earlier dismissed as random and deviant (Weinreich 1968 – in Poplack 2004). The structured nature of written CS provides a source of different languages development in a multilingual environment such as South Africa. Hence, written CS allows a person to have a record of this type of language episode that could easily be referred to in order to develop a new language. It is for this reason that the article views the use of the written CS in the public domain as profound in the development of bi-/multilingualism in the new South Africa.

Theoretical Approaches

The analyses of CS can be approached from different theoretical frameworks. On the one hand, Appel and Muysken (1987) advances three approaches to analysing CS: psycholinguistic, linguistic or grammatical and sociolinguistic. On the other hand, Winford (2003) suggests two ways of studying code-switching: a linguistic and a social approach. In both instances the two authors share the same two approaches of analysing CS (linguistic and social). They only differ in that Appel and Muysken's (1987) third approach is based on psycholinguistics.

This research study adopts a sociolinguistic approach (Auer 1998) also referred to as pragmatic approach (Romaine 1995) to the analysis of collected data. According to Auer (1998), such a perspective suggests that the sociolinguistic approach seeks to analyze the link between linguistic and social structure. The sociolinguistic approach to the present data analysis is also considered suitable in that it seeks to describe how the use of CS by influential structures in society is related to what is prevalent in South African multilingual communities who alternate languages in discourse. This approach is influenced by Stroud (1998:323) who argues that 'code-switching is so heavily implicated in social life that it cannot be treated apart from an analysis of social phenomena'. In this respect, Stroud (1998) suggests that in the analysis of CS it is necessary to integrate social action into the language analysis. Ndimande-Hlongwa and Ndebele (2014) note this social practice as evident in the context of the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), particularly

in the Inanda, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu (INK) areas. Ndebele (2012) finds that isiZulu and English not only co-exist in communities and schools but also in companies with diverse linguistic background. This code-switching phenomenon is, however, not limited to KZN as it is to be found across many parts of South Africa.

In line with the above examples, Leung (2010: 417) asserts that ‘code-mixing has become socially and communicatively unavoidable and it helps us develop and improve relationships and enable us to adjust and adapt in the environment we are in’. Accordingly, the collected instances of CS by different influential structures of society are here viewed as a means of contributing to the development of African languages and multilingualism in South Africa. This view is expressed following on Edwards’s (1995: 100-101 – cited in Dyers 2008) assertion that the vitality of any language can be measured according to the number of functions served by a language or language variety, as well as the importance or status of those functions. Similarly, Ngcobo (2009) further argues that people can be motivated to use their languages if information is made available in all official languages and creating the expectations for language use by those who are influential in the public service professional context.

Closely bound to sociolinguistics is the concept of the politics of language. In this regard Heller (1995:159) describes the politics of language as ‘the ways in which language practices are bound up in the creation, exercise, maintenance or change of relations of power’. South Africa comes from a history in which the only official languages were English and Afrikaans. Consequently, these were the only two languages that were mixed in the public domain.

Heller (1995) further explains that the study of politics of language can be linked with that of CS. According to this view there are two ways in which language is related to power. The first is that of language as part of processes of social action and interaction, part of the ways in which people do things, get things, influence others, and so on. The second, language itself thereby becomes a resource which can be more or less valuable, according to the extent that the mastery of ways of using language is tied to the ability to gain access to, and exercise, power (Heller 1995). In the context of the current paper, this suggests that when influential structures in society adopt a mixed language variety they are able to reach a wide audience. Even though this could be seen as self-serving, especially for businesses, it has the

potential to influence society positively with regard to language development and multilingualism. A written form of CS would then become a better tool than speech form to achieve these objectives. Written documents have a better impact as they can easily be passed from one person to the other. A person can also read and reread a written document when they are interested in developing a new language. The association made between the print form and sound form could have a lasting impact in a person's mind regarding the new language of interest.

Research Methodology

The study on which this article is based adopted a qualitative approach. According to Neuman (2000), a qualitative research technique has to do with the collection of data in the form of words or pictures. In the same breath, the current study is based on data collected in the form of words. The collected data include advertisements presented in the form of billboards, newspaper headlines and pamphlets issued by different structures of the government in the form of awareness campaigns. The sources in the form of billboards were mostly found in Umlazi Township and around the city of Durban which is situated in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Two types of newspapers served as the source of data. These were either mainly English (*Mail & Guardian* and *Times*) or mainly isiZulu language (*Ilanga leTheku*). Pamphlets were obtained from the government's Department of Health and Department of Transport. Data were collected and collated during the period between 2007 and 2013.

There is also a descriptive analysis of the collected data. In the analysis of collected data a sociolinguistic approach is followed in that the focus is on CS instances as they impact on society's use of languages in a multilingual country. The collected instances of CS in the public domain are grouped following Poplack's (2000) three categories of switches. Each category is accompanied by a discussion that explores the function of that type of CS as it contributes to language development.

Data and Analysis

Data analysis employs Poplack's (2000) three categories of describing the forms or the where within a communicative episode to identify the location of

the alternate use of languages in a discourse. These three forms allow the researcher to group similar type of data and to then discuss the functions of such CS.

Inter-sentential Switches

It takes place between sentences and in the form of full sentences or larger segments, i.e. the switch occurs at a clause or sentence boundary where each clause or sentence is in a different language. The examples below illustrate this type of CS:

(a) Siyakwemukela

eThekweni Municipality

Welcomes you (Billboard)

(b) INKOMAZI

Rich and Creamy

Inothile futhi inokhilimu

Clover Dairies (Billboard)

Both the above examples represent translated sentences in the form of CS within one communicative episode. Example (a) can be seen in billboards as one enters the city of Durban from different parts. Example (b) is an advertisement of sour milk known as INKOMAZI. Welcoming messages such as in example (a) were previously presented in English and Afrikaans only. In fact, the use of these two languages applied to almost all aspects of society. From government, business and education these were the only competing languages. For example, examination papers for Grade 12 or Senior Certificate and at some universities such as the University of South Africa (UNISA) were available in both English and Afrikaans only. This left Africans with no choice in their indigenous languages except to utilise their limited English command without much success either. The approach adopted in the above examples contributes to the development of African languages in that other non-speakers of African languages are able to read the translated form to develop their acquisition of isiZulu. In the long run, this form of CS has the potential to bring harmony between different languages and societies as it also contributes to language equity in a multilingual

country (Alexander, 2007; Ngwenya, 2011). The two examples further point to the changing politics of language in South Africa (Heller, 1995).

(c) Finya ngendololwane [Have a feast/ Blow the nose with the elbow]

Streetwise two

It's a finger lickin' good

Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)

Example (c) is a very creative way of using indigenous language to serve business goals. This is one of many billboards used by KFC, an international company that originates from America, all over South Africa and many parts of the world that acknowledges local languages. In this example, an isiZulu idiom is utilised as an appropriate way of promoting the indigenous languages. In doing so, they have used the idiom cleverly as it relates to their selling slogan which is: 'It's a finger lickin' good'. In selling two piece chicken they have used the isiZulu idiom to suggest that one should [have a feast] which when translated literally it means [Blow your nose with the elbow] instead of using your fingers as some people would in the absence of a handkerchief or tissue paper. This would be necessary because feasting on the chicken would lead to one licking their fingers which would then make it inappropriate to also use your fingers to blow your nose. Idioms are part of language use that point to the richness of different cultures in society. The awareness of different aspects of various languages in society contributes to development and social integration (Alexander, 2007). It also creates awareness about language use, loyalty and contributes towards countering cultural genocide that permeates language imperialism. This observation tallies with that made by Dube (2008) in a Zimbabwe study on advertisements. Dube (2008) views the increased use of Shona in advertisements as a mark of a shift from the dominance of English in Zimbabwe wherein advertisements were formerly reserved for English. In contrast, Ngwenya (2011:13) views these efforts 'as no more than a front bent at exploiting African culture for monetary gains'.

Tag Switches

Tag switches are small units of another language in the form of tags, inter-

jections and idiomatic expressions that are appended to a communicative episode that is mainly in one language. The examples below make limited use of isiZulu in the form of tags:

(d) If you drink and drive

You are a bloody idiot

Just do right

Alufakwa [Zero tolerance]

Department of Transport: KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government

(e) Thompsons No. 1 Polony

Best flavour & Taste

Best value & Price

Iyashелеle [very smooth]

Thompsons Tasty Meats

(f) The New Life and Funeral Range

Need a Premium Holiday

Have it all. Have it **ZONKE!**

Old Mutual

The above examples represent different forms of isiZulu tags appended to communicative episodes that are in English, as found in billboards. The insertion of the used isiZulu tags in the middle of English messages could have been used in acknowledgement of the existence and equal status of these languages (Ngwenya, 2011). In (d) there is an isiZulu idiomatic expression which suggests that the KZN province has no tolerance for those who break road rules. As a matter of fact, when the expression is in English it is put as ‘zero tolerance’. This expression has come to be associated with the Department of Transport campaigns especially during holiday times since the province attracts a large number of visitors who are thought to drive recklessly which results in a high number of road accidents. The common use of this expression in written and electronic media would make it easy for someone interested in acquiring either isiZulu or English to develop these languages. In (e) there is an interjection which conveys an equally important message about the advertised product in addition to other points made in English. In (f) the tag is used to repeat the point made in the previous

sentence found in the same line. The purpose of this repetition could be to emphasise the point and make the message accessible to a wide audience. The fact that the point is repeated in a different language could also contribute to development of indigenous languages as it could open up a language learning opportunity for someone interested or curious about its meaning.

Intra-sentential Switches

Intra-sentential refers to switches that occur within a sentence or a clause presented in another language. The examples below illustrate cases where switches occur within a sentence:

(g) Why **ushona le na le** [go here and there]?

Thola i pay-when-you-can [get the],

umshuwalense omusha-sha [the newest insurance]

ongabizi onezinzuzo ezinhle kakhulu [that is cheap and has good benefits]

usuyatholakala manje e-Shoprite [now available at]. Old Mutual:
Invest in your success

(h) **Sutha ngesitayela** [Be full in style]

Sreetwize tiger

It's a finger lickin'

Kentucky Fried Chicken

The above two examples represent instances whereby some used isiZulu words are in a 'borrowed' or 'adoptive' form, i.e. 'umshuwalense' [insurance] and 'ngesitayela' [in style]. This form of language use is preferred and common among bilingual individuals, especially the youth. Moreover, it serves to point out that while languages might be considered different there are instances whereby they borrow from one another. The above examples (g & h) serve to illustrate that languages that appear incongruous can co-exist harmoniously with one another (Ngwenya 2011).

The following examples present the use of one different word within a sentence:

**(i) Court rejects go-go's
'excessive' demand**

The Times, 4 November 2013, p. 5

(j) 'Gogo's' act of goodwill

By Troy Martens

IOL. 14/02/2008 page 5 *Daily News*

(k) The all new Zulu

By Niren Tolsi, 27 May 2007 11:59

..... Yet even the **gogo** of vernacular newspapers is modernising.
(*Mail & Guardian Online*)

(l) Gogos raising awareness about African plight

A new group of grandmothers is devoted to helping families in Africa ...

Heather Colpitts / Langley Advance

October 4, 2012 (www.langleysadvance.com/news)

The common word in the above newspaper headlines, (i), (j), (k) and (l), is 'gogo'. This isiZulu word for 'grandmother' is possibly understood by a large number of non-Zulu speakers since it has been made popular by a cell phone network provider, Vodacom, that makes use of it in one of its slogans which is 'Yebo Gogo' [Yes grandmother]. It is possibly for this reason that the three journalists of the three newspapers (*The Times*, *Daily News* and *Mail & Guardian*) who are not isiZulu-speakers, judging by their names and surnames, felt comfortable to use this word. In addition, they have used this word in newspapers that are in English and the majority of their readers are likely to be non-Zulu speakers, especially in the case of *Mail & Guardian* (*M & G*) which is a national newspaper that also sells in other African countries like Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Of significance about the *M & G* example is that the word 'gogo' is used in a different meaning (oldest) to its usual one (grandmother). This shows how some of the usual indigenous words could be extended to mean other things in different contexts. In a related study, Ngwenya (2011:2) observes that 'language can serve as a window through which one can see into the other's social identity and worldview'. In the same token, the use of indigenous languages in the media, as illustrated above, has

the potential to develop and expose indigenous languages to other members of society.

Lastly, in contrast to the above examples in which indigenous languages are used in texts that are mainly in English, the following is an example in which the main language is isiZulu but there is the use of English within sentences.

(m) **EZEMISAKAZO NO: Zowakha Mbatha**

SEZIZININGI izinkinga **that have been identified by** abantu abaningi uma sikhuluma nge **co-hosting**. Kungicacelile ukuthi baningi abantu abawabonayo ama-**challenges** imisakazo yethu ebhekene nawo **in as far as this practise is concerned**.

Ilanga leTheku 21/02/2008 online

Example (m) is taken from a tabloid section of the *Ilanga* newspaper, referred to in example (k) above. The *Ilanga* newspaper dates as far back as 1911 and is considered the oldest vernacular print media in the country. According to the *M & G* full article the paper's CS style of writing is meant to make the paper appealing to its targeted young audience that is understood to prefer this language variety (Gumperz 1972; Romaine 1995; Cenoz & Genesee 2001). It would therefore appear that the mixing of languages is happening across different texts and is done by different members of society. This suggests that different sectors of South African society are acknowledging their multilingual nature.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to illustrate some of the ways in which written code switching is exploited by the government structures, businesses and media as a stylistic device which can contribute to the development of different languages in a multilingual South Africa. The paper particularly focused on the phenomenon of CS as it contributes to the development of isiZulu in society. This was achieved by exploring the structural and the sociolinguistic dimensions of CS. The purpose of the study was to illustrate how influential structures in society have come up with creative ways of implementing multilingualism. It was then argued that these instances have the potential to

contribute particularly to African languages intellectualization. This point is made with the understanding that it is through usage that a language develops and survives. African languages' value and prestige seem to be enhanced when they are used in the public domain alongside English.

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