



## The Power of Foreign Languages in Moroccan Classes: English as an Example

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### Abstract

Undoubtedly, language plays a vital role not only in one society, but in all societies as well. It can be even said that language represents an important part of people's everyday life. The reason behind this truth is that it is closely connected to everything that is human-made, and its value equals that of water and breath. In the field of education, for instance, language has proven to be an integral tool of communication and without it, learning cannot easily take place. In Morocco, teaching English seems to have been given a very significant importance at schools. English is taught alongside the other languages, especially Arabic, which is the mother tongue of Moroccans. More specifically, English is sometimes favored to French, which is the second language in Morocco for a variety of reasons. The present paper will attempt, on the one hand, to shed some light on the language situation in Morocco and, on the hand, to investigate the significant power of English at schools.

**Keywords :-** Language Definition; Functions; Situation in Morocco; Language and Nationalism; Power of English in Class.

### Introduction

Definitely, language plays a significant role in society; it is a part of people's everyday life because its value and importance equal that of water and breath. Therefore, it can be safely argued that no society can live without it. Language has been defined in different ways and its meaning has varied

from one linguist to another because of its richness and complexity, and because it is considered an important instrument of human life since it affects many facets of human life like religion, economy, society and politics (Oviogun & Veerde, 2020).

It is generally acknowledged that languages can be regarded as significant tools of communication since they can shape, on the one hand, the individual characteristics of a person and, on the other hand, the beliefs and practices of his or her community. In addition to this, languages may be compared to human beings, in that they are governed and controlled by certain rules. Languages are given much value and importance when people are in need of them, while they may die or be replaced once people stop using them. Within the same vein, Jespersen (Quoted in Brown, H. D: 2007:65) argues that ‘languages are to be considered organic natural bodies, which are formed according to fixed laws, develop as possessing an inner principle of life, and gradually die out because they do not understand themselves any longer.’

It is also important to mention that languages are not all alike. Certainly, each language has its own specificities with regard to syntax, phonology and morphology. This fact shows that languages keep changing and adapting to new requirements of human beings. The fact that some of them seem to be a little more complex than others does not prove that these languages are better. This is what John Edwards (2010:19) explains when he mentions that ‘languages are best seen as different systems reflecting different varieties of the human condition. Although they must be unequal in complexity at given points, this does not imply that some have, overall, greater expressive power. Environments differ and, therefore, the things that must be detailed in language differ.’

In fact, it is interesting to mention that scholars seem to have disagreed over a precise definition of language. More importantly, their disagreement mainly revolves around some annoying concepts such as whether or not language is purely human, or whether it must have a written and oral component to express ideas and emotions between human beings. Sapir (1921:7) who is concerned with this fact once stated that ‘language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.’ Another scholar whose name is Edwards (2009:53), and whose contributions to the field of language are undeniable, has tried to shed some light on Morris’s (1946) definition of language when he mentions that the latter is composed of a system of rules and elements that are based on order, and people tend to use these elements in order to reach communicative purposes. Edwards develops Morris’s definition of language and describes it as ‘A communication system composed of arbitrary elements which possess an agreed-upon significance within a community. These elements are connected in rule-governed ways. The existence of rules (that is to say, grammar) is necessary for comprehension, of course, but it is also essential for the virtually infinite creativity (or productivity) of a system that rests upon a finite number of linguistic gears and axles.’

In short, language has been defined differently because of its importance to all humankind, and because it represents the experiences within a geographic or cultural community (see Samovar and Porter, 2004), or it can act as a carrier of cultural values (see Agar, 1994). However, the majority of lay people seem to be unaware of its value; they speak it as naturally as waking up every day; they even don’t notice that a language is the foremost tool of communication, which almost always takes place within some sort of social context. Therefore, it is generally believed that a real understanding of the connections between the language and the people who use it is always required in order to reach effective communication.

## Language Functions

Generally, it is believed that language has a lot of functions; however, not all people are aware of

this fact. This means that they usually don't imagine that language has many functions since it has the ability to wield power, fuel debate or even cause big conflicts. This is how Edwards (p.38) clarifies this fact when he states that "language as the primary and key instrumentality has many functions. Most of the general population is quite unaware of these; language for them is part of the 'givens', like light and air." For the sake of relevance, the present paper will focus mainly on language functions that are closely connected to the present topic and consider the English language within the Moroccan classes' context.

*1) Naming:* This function is believed to be one of the basic and fundamental functions of language, because a name is a term that is used for identification. Certainly, names can identify a person, a class, a category of things, or a single thing, either uniquely or within a given context. In other words, names can play a big role in identifying as well as helping people to be aware of everything around them. In an attempt to shed light on the importance of names in language in general, Edwards (pp, 39-40) states that "to name is to affix a verbal label and establish a verbal usage; that is to say, it is a process by which some experienced objects, quality, act, person, or event, is identified, so that it might be subsequently recovered and referred to in communication with self and others. The first step in knowledge is always to give a name."

In the world of education, names are also very significant just like an individual's name. The right name immediately conveys to professors and students the image they want to project. Moreover, names allow for locating people and classifying them as well as telling about some of their characteristics. In Moroccan classes, professors attempt to use English names in order to help students shape both the American and Moroccan cultural reality. This means, for some researchers such as kramsch (1993), for instance, that only few people can view their language as a representation of their cultural reality and as a result, they try to align themselves with the culture once they start using the language (William Littlewood, 1982). It should be admitted that English names are more than just words; they embody the values, beliefs, customs, and traditions of a particular culture, which helps students perceive the world around them and influence their thoughts, behaviors, and interactions with others. Additionally, students use names to express their unique identities and assert their place within the society. For a better understanding of this fact, Vahdany (2005:97) explains that "although people are not necessarily prisoners of their language, it is undoubtedly true that the way a culture sees the world is reflected in its language."

*2) Words:* The second function of language is words. Certainly, words are also very necessary because they play a vital role in helping human beings understand each other. As a matter of fact, when individuals use words, they try to combine their understanding of the nature of these words as well as the way they are put within a sentence. As a consequence, this way will surely lead them to understand the meaning of the speech, or at least get a general idea of the meaning of words. Within the same vein, Edwards also (p.39) confirms that "words are constructed by men; each word is a deed, stands for a deed, and makes a deed existential. Viewed operationally and concretely, words are the significant units of verbal behavior and the smallest vehicles of meaning. All words have something behind them; they stand for some-thing."

When applying the function of words on the education sector, we come to the conclusion that words are also very necessary because thanks to them those Moroccan students can identify, describe and understand each other. Students are strongly recommended to develop the necessary set of words that allow them for locating and organizing information about the target language so that they would be able to deal with it in the right way. Of course, this can be done via various strategies such as making friends, talking to foreign people, reading books, watching movies or listening to radio and broadcasts. These strategies will certainly allow students to stop stereotyping others and deal with them in a more appropriate manner. In short, Moroccan students need to understand that the right and appropriate use of English words in their classes will allow them for a

better understanding of English and American peoples and cultures.

3) *Transmission*: The third function of language which also seems to be very essential is that of transmission. Certainly, language is believed to be a means of transmission because it is able to transfer different types of knowledge from one person to another and from one generation to another. This idea is also clearly illustrated by Edwards (pp 50-1) when he states that “the fact that language is the memory agent implies that is also the major vehicle whereby we transmit - that is, impart or send and receive- our actualized experiences (all sorts of knowledge, in the form of definitions, concepts, descriptions, interpretations, as well as techniques, taboos, rules and principles) to others across space and time; that is, to accomplish the transmission of these from one individual, one area, one generation, one ear, one cultural group to another.”

In trying to link the idea of language as a factor of transmission to the world of education in general and to Moroccan classes in particular, one would easily find out that this function is always present. Every minute, Moroccan professors and teachers are required to send messages, descriptions, definitions and other sorts of knowledge to their students, who receive them because they need to study them and solve their exam problems. However, when we get an idea of the circumstances and conditions in which this type of transmission between Moroccan professors and their students is made, we immediately question the extent to which the goals of this transmission are achieved. For instance, a close look at the Moroccan textbooks used by teachers of English in Morocco reveal that these books tend to focus more on the target culture than the host one. This gives the impression that English textbooks in Morocco try to deprive English from its cultural specificities by directing the student’s attention to the target culture and neglecting the host one. One of the best proofs is that it rarely happens to find an activity or a skill, where Moroccan students are exposed to the English or American culture. Moroccan students are usually asked to read or write a short paragraph, for example, about the way they can prepare tea with mint or ‘Harira’, which is a famous Moroccan soup. However, their attention is never drawn, for instance, to talk about English people, who would prefer black tea with milk together with a big breakfast in the morning in contrast to Moroccans, who prefer a big lunch or dinner with too much bread.

4) *Facts*: The last function of language I would like to stress is that of language relation with facts. Certainly, language has a close relationship with facts. This can be clearly understood in the role language plays in all the actions and experiences of human beings. More specifically, facts can be regarded as all those events and products that individuals use to perceive, realize, think and evaluate things in their everyday environment. Edwards (p.45) also makes reference to this idea by stressing the importance of facts. For him, ‘Facts are the fundamental elements with which human beings think, evaluate, make decisions, and act. They are the conceptions of those parts of reality that men have discovered (become aware of) and designated (named), categorized (typed and distinguished from other phenomena) and defined (described as to characteristic nature and attributes).”

Indeed, a scrutiny of the components and elements of facts offers insight into their importance in our everyday lives, but when we try to link them to the case of education in question, we understand that the efficiency of facts has to be questioned. As a matter of fact, when Moroccan students are exposed to the English language, one would start to wonder about the extent to which language can really serve as a means of telling the truth and providing others only with facts. Even for technology tools used in classrooms and, which are expected to facilitate interactions between students and their professors, they sometimes play a negative role as they help students to cheat and change realities. Of course, this does not mean that professors are not intelligent enough to discover that their students are not telling the truth. It has been proved that some very simple questions while interacting with students, can provide professors with this reality. Based on these elements, it can be safely claimed that language cannot always be considered a means of telling the truth; it is also used

to lie, to indoctrinate, to manipulate or talk about fictitious worlds.

### III. LANGUAGE SITUATION IN MOROCCO

Recently, the issue of language diversity seems to have gained a growing social prominence. Numerous studies have been concerned with this phenomenon and tried to explore it from different perspectives. However, it is widely acknowledged that studying languages is not an easy task. Its complexity lies in the fact that it is very difficult to know the exact number of languages all over the world.

Before exploring the linguistic situation of Morocco, I would like to give my readers an idea of the linguistic diversity in the whole world. In a broad sense, linguistic diversity has been defined as the “range of variations exhibited by human languages” ([www.terralingua.org](http://www.terralingua.org)). Nowadays, the distribution of languages around the world is believed to be very problematic because all areas on earth widely differ with regard to language size. For instance, according to Ethnologue ([www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)), there is about 6,912 languages all over the world, but some of these languages are seen just as varieties or dialects in other accounts (see table 1).

**TABLE I**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF WORLD LANGUAGES BY AREA OF ORIGIN**

<b>LIVING LANGUAGES</b>		
<b><u>AREA</u></b>	<b><u>COUNT</u></b>	<b><u>PERCENT</u></b>
AFRICA	2,146	30.2
AMERICAS	1,060	14.9
ASIA	2,304	4.0
ASIA	284	32.4
PACIFIC	1,311	18.5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>7,105</b>	<b>100.0</b>

According to the table above, Asia and Africa have a larger number of languages than the other places. The Count column in the table gives the number of living languages that originate in the specified area. Normally, a language is considered a living one when it has at least one speaker for whom it is believed to be his or her first language, but languages that are used as a second language are excluded from these counts

For the Percent column, it tends to give the share of the count for that area as a percentage of the

total number listed at the bottom of the Count column.

Interestingly, it is argued that language diversity can be the result of different factors. For instance, historical and political movements represented in imperialism or colonialism has led to the spread and coexistence of some languages in some countries. Moreover, economic movements have also contributed to language diversity. As a matter of fact, the weak economy of some countries has resulted in the movement of the population towards other countries where economy is powerful. This fact automatically develops the diversity of languages and cultures in the host countries. Another important factor is that of increasing communications among different countries all over the world as well as the necessity to use new languages to facilitate interactions. Clearly, English or French have really become the most important languages of wider communications and they have been widely used by millions of people around the world who also speak other languages. As for the last factor that led to language diversity, it revolves around education and religious movements. In many countries all over the world, it is very obvious that some second languages, especially English and French, are considered a part of the educational curriculum.

Accordingly, since the present paper revolves around the linguistic situation in Morocco, it would be of great interest to investigate the major languages spoken by the Moroccan population. As a matter of fact, the strategic location of Morocco at the crossroads of Africa, Europe and the Middle East has made of it a multilingual country which is open to a variety of cultural and linguistic influences. This is why when we mention any account of language issues in Morocco, we find ourselves obliged to talk about Berber, Classical Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, French, Spanish and or English.

*1) Berber:* It is said to be Morocco's original and oldest language. This term was first used by Europeans to refer to the indigenous languages of Morocco and other parts of North Africa before the Arab conquest. In the past, Berber was believed to be an oral language that is used among a category of people who tend to identify themselves as being ethnically Berbers. However in the following years, Berber has become an official language that is no longer just spoken, but also having a written form and acknowledged in all Moroccan administrations. Berber includes three main dialects which are Tarifit, Tamazight and Tashelhit. Within the same vein, Bentahila (1983:1) mentions that "Berber is used as if it designated a single language; in fact it covers a number of widely differing dialects which are not altogether mutually comprehensible."

More significantly, it should be mentioned that in the past, communities that preferred to speak only Berber used to have less access to education. This is why it is generally acknowledged that their language was seen a language of low prestige that carried with it the stigma of belonging to the uneducated class (see Diyen, 2004). However, in the last few years, things seem to have changed with the situation of Berber. It is experiencing a cultural renaissance especially in films and literature, which is very promising.

*2) Arabic:* It is the official language of Morocco; it has always been considered a language of prestige, but for the purpose of this part, I find it important to distinguish between two types of Arabic. The first one is Classical Arabic and the second is Moroccan Arabic. To start with Moroccan Arabic, it can be safely confessed that it is the most widely spoken first language of Moroccans and it is the mother tongue for over two thirds of the Moroccan population (see El Amraoui, 2007) although it is not the country's official language, nor has it been the medium of instruction at schools.

In addition to this, Moroccan Arabic is mostly used among family members and in social contexts, but not in academic or professional communications. The reason behind this fact is that most Moroccans tend to see it an impure dialect that is quite different in terms of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation from Classical Arabic which is, according to most Arabic speakers, a

pure language. In line with this idea, Edwards (p.63) defines a dialect as “a variety of language that differs from others along three dimensions: vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation (accent). Because they are forms of the same language, however, dialects are mutually intelligible.”

Classical Arabic, on the other hand, is widely used in the practice of the Islamic religion as well as formal educational context. For instance, many Moroccan children are exposed to it from the very beginning, especially those who attend Quranic pre-schools at the age of four or so. In fact, there were many attempts to distinguish between different periods in the history of Classical Arabic. For instance, it is said that the term Pre-Islamic Arabic was used to describe the language of poets in their writings before the Islamic era (see Rabin, 1955). This period was succeeded by what is called the Quranic Arabic since it was the language of the Koran. For the language used in the seventh and eighth century through the period of the Arab conquests, it is often called Middle Arabic (see Blau, 1965).

Briefly, we can clearly assume that the two varieties of Arabic used in Morocco today play a vital role and serve for the welfare of Moroccans. The simple contrast between Classical Arabic and Moroccan Arabic is that the former seems to be like a sacred and prestigious language because it is the language of the wholly book. This fact leads many people, especially in Morocco, to believe that Classical Arabic is much superior to Moroccan and that those who do not know much about it are missing a lot in their lives.

3) *French*: In 1912, France decided to colonize Morocco and colonization lasted until 1956. During this French protectorate, Moroccans were expected to learn French because it was regarded as the language of education and administration at that time. In fact, it is a bit difficult to talk about the exact number of Moroccans who can speak and read French, but it can be generally claimed that the numbers are very high nowadays. This is due to the fact that French seems to have a profound influence in many areas of activity even outside the educational system or home environment. In an attempt to confirm this fact, Lanly (quoted in Bentahila, p.13) points out that “among the Muslims of North Africa who use French we find the whole range of speakers, from the intellectual who is proud of the purity of his speech to the man of the barracks, the building site and the fields, who knows a few words which he pronounces badly and uses basic, everyday sentences.”

Definitely, the French language is believed to be more interesting than the other languages used in Morocco, especially when it is linked to the economic sector. As a matter of fact, many jobs nowadays like those of banks, airports, travel agencies or administrative offices require that candidates must be able to use the French language alongside with Arabic. This observation, which seems to be largely true nowadays, was mentioned by Bentahila (p.15) who quoted it from Gallagher (1968) that “It may be stated flatly that in Morocco today the non-French-speaking candidate has no chance of getting a good government job or advancing himself in any ministry except justice, religious affairs, or in specialized functions in the interior (Police work) or education.”

4) *Spanish and English*: Undoubtedly, both the Spanish and English languages have played a central role in the Moroccan society. To start with the Spanish language, one would easily claim that the geographical proximity of Spain and Morocco as well as the years of Spanish colonialism over the northern parts of the Moroccan territories have indicated that the Spanish language has exercised a big influence over the Moroccan context. More interestingly, the presence of Spain which is still visible, especially in Ceuta and Melilla which are still under the Spanish control, reveals that many Moroccans still have a big contact with the Spanish language. However, it should be stated that Spanish has not played a significant role in the Moroccan educational system in the greater part simply because it remains a foreign language even for the small category of people who can speak it fluently.

As for English, the case is also very revealing. Nowadays, English is considered the most important language of wider communication in the world. This is due to the British colonial power in the nineteenth century. Additionally, English is the main language of science and technology as well as popular culture and globalization. When we try to link it to the Moroccan context, we find that English is really playing a vital role in our country, especially in the educational system. For instance, it has always been the third foreign language after French and Spanish among the educated youth. Moreover, it is taught in all public and private schools from the third year onward. Morocco has one private, English-language university, Al-Akhawayn. It was founded in 1993 by King Hassan II and King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and its curriculum is based on the American educational model.

## V. LANGUAGE AND NATIONALISM

Interestingly, the study of nationalism is very essential to understand the close relationship that exists between people and the place or area to which they belong. More importantly, nationalism is very significant in understanding the world of politics. However, explaining nationalism does not seem to be a simple task. The reason behind this is that nationalism has become a term that is closely associated with language, state, nation, ethnicity, conflict, national identity, and struggles for self-determination. In an attempt to clarify this fact, Simpson and Weiner (1991:231) explain that nation is “an extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language or history, as to form a distinct race or people, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory.” Obviously, the two researchers believe that when referring to nation, it is essential to consider its relation with language and history because these are important characteristics that should be taken into account while distinguishing between a nation and another.

It should be stated that this term is not a very old idea; it dates back to the French revolution in 1789, when the first “nation-state” is believed to have been created. Later on, namely in the second half of the nineteenth century, nationalism imposed itself and became a powerful idea. At that time, it was an interesting topic in all Europe until the twentieth century when it has gained much importance not only in Europe, but all over the world as well. In fact, nationalism has been used in different forms and with different interpretations, depending on the context in which it is used.

For the purposes of this paper, nationalism is best studied when it is linked to the aspect of language. As a matter of fact, numerous studies have discussed the ability of language to establish a network of allegiance and commonality within a nation. More interestingly, it is believed that once a strong relation between language and a group of people of a nation is approved, the protection of both language and nationalism often becomes inescapable. The reason behind this fact is that language seems to be able to distinguish the “Us” from those who do not fall within the same linguistic realm, or from those who are not part of the same nation. Johnson and Stanne, 2000:54) try to confirm this idea, claiming that “language, as a means of communication, connects the members of the in-group and excludes those outside the group. Thus, a distinct language can be used to draw group boundaries, and in turn, strengthen national identity.”

Similarly, another researcher called Urciuoli (1995:525) has also elaborated on the same relation between language and nationalism, suggesting that “language differences signify categories of persons defined by ethnic or national origin and that these categories are opposed to each other.” This means that people who belong to the same linguistic group tend to consider themselves to be part of the same category or group of people and, therefore, they have the same national identity which is completely different from that of the other categories.

Definitely, when we try to examine the main subject of this research, which revolves around the power of foreign languages in Moroccan classes, especially English, and when we also take into

account the different working conditions inside Moroccan classrooms, we come to the conclusion that the concept of nationalism must be carefully questioned and examined in this section.

As it has been mentioned earlier, English plays a vital role in the teaching system in Morocco. Therefore, most students tend to give it much importance because they believe that it is a lingua-franca language, and because they look at it as a language of jobs not only in Morocco, but in the whole world as well. One of the best examples to be provided in this context are the English textbooks designed to Moroccan students, which shape the cultural representation alongside the English language. Certainly, the topics, characters, places and other components of the textbooks, which are, most of the time, reflecting the idea of Moroccan culture are all introduced and presented to students in English. More specifically, numerous essays and articles about the history of Morocco and some ancient or modern places like Fes, Tangier or Volubilis, for instance, are exploited to provide a vivid representation of the Moroccan culture. The same thing with clothes and food like the “Jellaba” and “Harira”, for instance, also help students to discover about their culture and be proud of their cultural heritage. It should be stated that the fact of not being faithful or unwilling to stick to one's language, identity, culture, norms and habits can be taken as a case betrayal to the principles of nationalism.

#### IV. POWER OF ENGLISH IN CLASS

Definitely, most people around the globe acknowledge that English has become one of the most important languages in the world. The reason behind this fact is that English is able to unify people, makes them gather and share new ideas, opinions and experiences. In Morocco, for instance, English is widely believed to have gained a very big prominence over the last several years, and it has become very necessary and crucial to various domains such as education, tourism and business.

It is true that the French and Spanish languages were forced on Moroccan people during the years of colonialism. Nevertheless, people, in the last several years, started to feel an urgent need to learn and deal with another language, which is English. This is why one may safely claim that English, nowadays, has become in a position that allows it to compete with French and Spanish in many realms of the Moroccan society. The evidence for this fact is that English tends to take advantage from the wide support of the government in different domains especially business, economy, tourism and education. In an attempt to shed some light on the crucial role of English, F. Vahdany (p.96) also explains that “speaking English is the key to employment”. He also stresses that “speaking English helps you to join the international community.”

In the last few years, a huge number of Moroccan students started to give much importance to learning English for various reasons: First, they believe that English is widely spoken all over the globe and, consequently, can be useful in several domains. Second, the majority of students think that English has become a vital language in the world and even more useful than their native languages such as Arabic or French, for instance, which implies that learning it will certainly yield positive consequences either in Morocco or elsewhere. A third proposition shows that students in Morocco are interested in studying English because they want to use it as a means of learning about other cultures. To put it differently, the Moroccan young generation wants, on the one hand, to learn English as a language and, on the other hand, to discover everything related to American and British habits, customs, traditions and cultures through their language. This idea is clearly shown by Vahdany (p.97) when he explains that “although people are not necessarily prisoners of their language, it is undoubtedly true that the way a culture sees the world is reflected in its language.”

Generally, a close examination of the educational system in Morocco shows that English is playing a vital role in classes. Students learn it in primary, middle and secondary schools. More importantly, students started to feel a cultural and social prestige over the last several years. Students tend to give it much importance and would prefer to learn it more than French or Spanish.

In trying to make reference to this reality, Fatima Saddiki (2007), who is one of the well-known Moroccan scholars of gender and language, reports in a survey that was conducted in 1991 that more than 87 per cent of people welcomed the idea of seeing English spread in Morocco, and more than 81 per cent believe that English will be very useful for Morocco and Moroccans.

In addition to Saddiki, another famous Moroccan scholar named Moha Ennaji (2005), and who is also concerned with the field of language and culture, has tried to contribute to this notion. He has shed some light on the role of the English language in the Moroccan educational system. To pave the way for his arguments, Ennaji strongly insists that English is compulsory for Moroccan students since it is required to pass the high school graduation exam. More specifically, English is needed to pursue higher education either in Morocco or elsewhere, where most countries insist that foreign students should have an acceptable level of English so that they would be able to join the educational system there. Other reasons reported by Ennaji are related to the efficiency of learning English, which remains, for him, one of the best and crucial tools that allows students to make research and go on their studies successfully.

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