# Communicative and Stylistic Utilization of New Yorùbá Idioms among Students of Higher Institutions

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**REZUMAT: Utilizarea comunicațională şi stilistică a noilor idiomuri Yorùbá de către studenţii din instituţii de învăţământ superior**

Noile idiomuri şi expresii idiomatice sunt unice, iar expresiile contemporane generice constituie obstacole în comunicarea literară şi de zi cu zi în limba Yorùbá, din cauza complexităţii lor semantice şi a naturii lor deviante. Studiile existente pe acest subiect abundă în lucrările lui OLÁTẸ́JÚ (2005) şi (2016), AKÀNMÚ (2014) şi (2015), dar s-a scris foarte puţin spre deloc despre apariţia acestui fenomen printre studenţii din instituţiile de învăţământ superior. Această lucrare examinează chestiuni exprimate cu ajutorul acestor idiomuri şi strategiile adoptate pentru folosirea lor. Teoria lui MUKAROVSKY despre Limbajul Standard e adoptată pentru această lucrare pe baza potenţialităţii sale şi a abilităţii de a explica natura nonstandard a acestor idiomuri, precum şi 'differentia specifica' dintre limba conversaţiilor de zi cu zi şi cea literară. Universitatea de Stat Ọ̀jọ́ din Lagos şi Colegiul Adéníran Ògúnsànyà din I□ja□nikin au fost selectate pentru că printre studenţii lor se numărau mulţi utilizatori ai noilor idiomuri; opt noi exemple au fost observate în cele două instituţii. Acestea sunt: *'gúnṣẹ́ lọ́bẹ'* (înjunghie munca/slujba), *àgbékọ́* (sutien*)*, *láìwòwé* (fără a te uita la carte), *kò sí lórí fún un* (el nu are chestia asta în cap), *ó gbóná ó yeruku* (e cald şi prăfos), *gbéégún* (costumată în rochie de carnaval), *kúlú tẹmpà* (temperament calm), *ẹbọ* (sacrificiu). Informaţia a fost supusă unei analize stilistice. În toate aceste cazuri, doar chestiunea academică a fost exprimată şi contextualizată în absenteism, reportare/referinţe, sclipire, neghiob, temperament şi bucurie. Doar strategia lingvistică de metaforizare a fost folosită şi a fost derivată diferenţial din nominalizări, compoziţie, cuvinte împrumutate şi creaţii fonestetice. Aceste idiomuri reflectă dinamismul şi opţiunile stilistice constrânse de modernitate în discursurile Yorùbá.

**CUVINTE-CHEIE:** *noi idiomuri, instituţii de învăţământ superior, stilistică, discursuri Yorùbá, strategie lingvistică*



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**ABSTRACT**

New idioms and idiomatic expressions are unique and contemporaneous stock expressions constitute communicative clogs in Yorùbá literary and routine communication due to their semantic complexity and deviant nature. Existing studies on them abound in the works of ỌLÁTẸJÚ (2005), and (2016), AKÀNMÚ (2014) and (2015), but little or nothing has been done on the use of this phenomenon by students of higher institutions. This paper investigates issues expressed with these idioms and strategies adopted for using them. Mukarovsky's theory of Standard Language is adopted for this paper based on its potentiality and ability to explain nonstandard nature of these idioms as well as explaining 'differentia specifica' between the language of everyday conversation and literary language. Lagos State University Ọjọ́ and Adéníran Ògúnsànyà College of Education Ìjànikin were purposively selected for having many users of new idioms among the students where eight new idioms were retrieved from the two institutions. They are: *'gúnṣẹ́ lọ́bẹ'* (stab the work/job), *àgbékọ́* (brassier), *láìwòwé* (without looking at the book), *kò sí lórí fún un* (he does not have it in his head), *ó gbóná ó yeruku* (it is hot and dusty), *gbéégún* (robed in masquerade dress), *kúlú tẹmpà* (cool temperament), *ẹbọ* (sacrifice). Data were subjected to stylistic analysis. In all these, only academic issue was expressed and was contextualized in absenteeism, carry-over/references, brilliance, dullard, temperament and merriment. Only the metaphorisation linguistic strategy was employed and was differentially derived from nominalizations, composition, loan words and phonaesthetic coinages. These idioms reflect dynamism and modernity-constrained stylistic choices in Yorùbá discourses.

**KEYWORDS:** *new idioms, higher institutions, stylistics, Yorùbá discourses, linguistic strategy*



**RÉSUMÉ : L'Utilisation de la communication et de nouveaux idiomes stylistiques Yorùbá par les étudiants dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur**

Les nouveaux idiomes et les expressions idiomatiques sont uniques, et les expressions contemporaines génériques constituent des obstacles dans la communication littéraire quotidienne en Yorùbá, en raison de leur complexité sémantique et de leur nature déviante. Les études disponibles sur ce sujet abondent dans les œuvres de ỌLÁTẸJÚ (2005) et (2016), AKÀNMÚ (2014) et (2015), mais on a écrit peu à rien sur l'émergence de ce phénomène chez les étudiants



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des établissements d'enseignement supérieur. Ce travail examine des questions exprimées par ces idiomes et les stratégies adoptées pour leur utilisation. La théorie de Mukarovsky sur le Langage Standard est adoptée pour ce travail en raison de sa potentialité et de la capacité d'expliquer la nature non standard de ces idiomes, ainsi qu'à la « differentia specifica » entre le langage des conversations quotidiennes et la langue littéraire. L'Université d'état Ọ̀jọ́ de Lagos et le College Adéníran Ògúnsànyà de Ìjànikin ont été choisis parce que parmi leurs étudiants se trouvent beaucoup d'utilisateurs de ces nouveaux idiomes; huit nouveaux exemples ont été observés dans les deux institutions. Il s'agit de : *'gúnṣẹ́ lọ́bẹ'* (poignarde le travail/l'emploi), *àgbékọ́* (soutien-gorge), *láìwòwé* (sans regarder le livre), *kò sí lórí fún un* (il n'a pas cela dans l'esprit), *ó gbóná ó yeruku* (il fait chaud et poussiéreux), *gbéégún* (costumée en robe de carnaval), *kúlú tẹmpà* (tempérament calme), *ẹbọ* (sacrifice). Les informations ont été soumises à une analyse stylistique. Dans tout cela, seul le problème académique a été exprimé et a été contextualisé dans l'absentéisme, le report / les références, l'éclat, le dérangement, la négligence d'examen, le tempérament et la joie. Seule la stratégie linguistique de métaphorisation a été employée et dérivée différemment des nominalisations, de la composition, des mots empruntés et des créations phonestétiques. Ces idiomes reflètent le dynamisme et les choix stylistiques contraints à la modernité dans les discours en Yorùbá.

**MOTS-CLÉS :** *nouveaux idiomes, institutions d'enseignement supérieur, stylistique, discours Yorùbá, stratégie linguistique*

## Introduction

THIS PAPER IS ANOTHER DOGGED attempt to project and re-emphasize in a plain term, the pervasiveness implication and currency of the new Yorùbá idioms among the students of higher institutions in Nigeria and as an aspect of language, which is fast becoming a universal phenomenon. The paper is equally motivated because the new idioms and idiomatic expressions are instrument in the hand of its users who have serious desires to move with time and be part of the latest development in every area of human experiences. Nevertheless, in the course of participating in the latest or new development in science and technology as well as telecommunication faced with certain linguistic constraints imposed on them by their language, especially difficulty in getting the appropriate lexical items and terms to express fresh ideas.

However, to get out of this linguistic imbroglio, the option left for them according to BABALỌLÁ (1972), AWÓBÙLÚYÌ (1992), ÀKÀNMÚ (2014) and ỌLÁTẸ́JÚ



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(2005) lies in the use of the new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions derived by coining new words and by ascribing new meanings to the existing words or idioms. This paper is preoccupied essentially with the effort of analysing and interpreting new idioms and idiomatic expressions used among the students of higher institutions in Lagos State in order to determine their stylistic and communicative relevance.

**Method of Data Collection**

As said earlier, data for this paper were collected from the Lagos State University, Ọjọ́ and Adéníran Ògúnsányà College of Education, Ọtọ̀/Ìjanikin as institutions whose students exemplified sufficient use of new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions. Some of the new idioms selected for critical analysis include *'gúnṣẹ lọ́bẹ'* (stab the work), *'àgbékọ́'* (brassier), *'láìwòwé'* (without looking or reading from the book), *'kò sí lórí fún un'* (he does not have it in his head), *'ó gbóná ó yeruku'* (it is hot and dusty), *'gbéégún'* (robed in masquerade dress), '*kúlú tempà'* (cool temperament), *'ẹbọ'* (sacrifice). Only academic issue was expressed by all the aforementioned and was contextualized in 'absenteeism,' 'carry over,' 'brilliance,' 'dullard,' 'examination malpractice,' 'temperament,' and 'merriment.' The new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions were analysed specifically at the stylistic level.

**New Yorùbá Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions**

New Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions are another unique and veritable aspect of language use formulated in reaction to the demands of the moment emanating as an outcome of the linguistic challenges faced by the users, which consequently necessitates creation of new idioms and idiomatic expressions. These contemporaneous stock expressions are so unique and vital because of their complex and deviant nature, which invariably necessitates overlapping tendencies of their semantic derivations and unique differences from the automatized or traditional idioms. These phenomenons are replication of metaphor, euphemism, and the established traditional Yoruba idioms in terms of structure and meaning. New Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions are differentially used in spoken and written form at the lexical and phrasal levels. The lexical ones are referred to as *'one word idioms'* while the phrasal or sentential ones that are more than one word expression are called *'idiomatic expressions*.' New idioms and idiomatic expressions, which are full of interest and vitality, are created



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through coining and by investing old words and expressions with new meanings. They are new, fresh, strange and ingenious. They are familiar and their origin are not cloudy to the users who are dexterous and dazzled at their appearance in any form and context.

## Existing Works on New Yorùbá Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions

There are significant number of works on the new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions by few scholars. These works include ỌLÁTẸJÚ (2005), and (2016), ÀKÀNMÚ (2014), and (2015) respectively. The two scholars are of the views that idioms are terms referring to as words or expressions whose meanings cannot be determined or predicted from the individual elements in them. These scholars examined idioms and idiomatic expressions from the linguistic and literary point of view using Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) and MUKAROVSKY's theory of Standard Language respectively. In their works, stylistic and some socio-linguistic variables were also adopted to bring out aesthetic and communicative potential of the new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions.

## Theory of Standard Language

Jan MUKAROVSKY formulates the theory of Standard Language in 1970, it is considered suitable for this paper because of its ability to explain the '*differentia specifica*' between the language of everyday conversation and literary language. It is also a good model used to explain and interpret the deviant and inventive nature of the new idioms and idiomatic expressions.

## Standard Language vs Literary Language

According to MUKAROVSKY (1970), Standard Language (SL) is the language of everyday usage and its major preoccupation is to facilitate understanding between the speaker and the audience in such a way that effective communication is ensured. It is unexamined, uncritical and does not draw attention to itself or open up provocative questions to the nature of its coding. It is used in schools, markets, during political campaigns and preaching. In Standard Language, communication must conform to the entire linguistic norms. Concepts crucial to the Standard Language are 'backgrounding' and 'authomatization' illustrated by the hypothetical example below:

Láì fàkókò ṣòfò
Mo *jẹun síkùn* mi



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Without wasting time
I eat into my stomach

It is clear from the above that no single element needs further clarification as regards meaning because of the standard form of the expression. However, Literary Language (LL) is the language of literature or poetic language. It has special nature which makes it remarkably different from Standard Language (SL), it cannot be referred to as the brand of standard because it has all the forms of given language such as syntax and others. It is a stylistic variation of Standard Language as observed by (ỌLÁTẸJÚ 1998). In Literary Language, violation of the norms of the Standard Language is its major preoccupation and, that is what makes possible the poetic utilization of language. Concepts embedded in the Literary Language are 'foregrounding,' 'de-authomatization' also illustrated in the example below:

Lâì fàkókò ṣòfò
*Mo jẹun sókè/mo jẹun sápò*

Without wasting time
I eat into the upper stomach/I
eat into the pocket

In contrary to the example presented under Standard Language, here, *'jẹun síkùn'* has been foregrounded to have *'jẹun sókè'* (eat into the upper stomach) and *'jẹun sápò'* (eat into the pocket). In other words, *'jẹun sókè'* and 'jẹun *sápò'* are the artistic forms of *'jẹun síkùn'* (eat into the stomach). There is no expression like *'jẹun sókè'* and '*jẹun sápò*', but there is *'jẹun síkùn'* in the language. *'jẹun síkùn'* is automatized and serves as the background from which *'jẹun sápò'* and '*jẹun sókè'* are derived to create a foregrounding effect. '*jẹun sókè'* and *'jẹun sápò'* are made new and thus become elements of surprise. New idioms of this nature are created for entertainment and communicative effects. While *'jẹun síkùn'* means 'eat into the stomach' *'jẹun sápò'* and '*jẹun sókè'* mean 'collect bribe' and 'move on/go on', respectively. Foregrounding is also applied in this paper by using new Yorùbá idioms whose formation and structure are deviant from the standard norms primarily for stylistic effects.

**Linguistic Strategies for Formation of New Yorùbá Idioms**

Word formation is a universal linguistic concept that is concerned with the study of the patterns on which a language forms new lexical item (BÁMGBÓṢÉ



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1975). In this paper, the linguistic strategies involved in the formation of new Yorùbá idioms include the following:

(i) Nominalization

Nominalization is a linguistic strategy known for generating new words in virtually all languages. It is a derivation of noun phrase from an underlying clause or sentence; or the process of forming a noun from other word classes (RUVET 1973: 172). Below is an example of new idioms created from the linguistic process of nominalization:

| Idiom | Formation | Literal meaning | Idiomatic meaning |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ọlọ́ṣẹkọ́ṣẹ | Oní + ọṣẹ + kí + ọṣẹ | Ọlọ́ṣẹkọ́ṣẹ | Olóríburúkú |
| | Pre+n+neg.mark+n<br>Owner-of-bad-soap | Possessor of bad soap | (a misfortune person) |

(ii) Compounding

According to ÒGÚNBỌ̀WÁLÉ (1967), ROWLAND (1969), and OWÓLABÍ (1976), compounding is a very productive word-formation strategy, which entails the combination of two or more independent words to form another word with an entirely different meaning. In compounding, two separate words are joined together to produce a single word. New Yorùbá idioms formed through compounding are mostly in form of verb and noun structure – (Vb+N) or ($N_1$+$N_2$) structure. For instance:

**Vb + N**

| Idiom | Formation<br>Vb + N | Literal meaning | Idiomatic meaning |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gbéégún | Gbé + eégún<br>Carry + masquerade | Gbéégún<br>Carry masquerade | Jí ìwé wò nínú ìdánwò |

**$N_1$ + $N_2$**

| Idiom | Formation<br>$N_1$ + $N_2$ | Literal meaning | Idiomatic meaning |
|---|---|---|---|
| Àtíkè Ọla | Àtíkè + Ọlà<br>Powder + Wealth | Powder of wealth | (a powdery substance) for an illicit drug like cocaine |

See ÀKÀNMÚ (2014) and (2015) for further study and examples of linguistic strategies involved in the formation of new Yorùbá idioms.



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**Analysis of New Yorùbá Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions used among Students of the two selected Institutions**

As discussed under method of data collection, the new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions from the two selected institutions are critically analysed at the level of stylistic in this section.

For instance, in Lagos State University, a new Yorùbá idioms *'gúnṣẹ́* lọ́bẹ' was used by a student who in an attempt to inform his friend about his intention not to come for one of the general courses thus:

'Mo máa *gúnṣẹ́ yẹn lọ́bẹ* ni
I will stab that class with knife

In the above, the use of the new idiom *'gúnṣẹ́ lọ́bẹ'* (stab the work) is contrived through personification; it is not possible to stab what one cannot see or hold. However, the expression can be interpreted connotatively to mean 'absent from the class.' In another instance, to be specific, during the student union election that brought the incumbent president of Adéníran Ògúnsànyà College of Education into power, the president was applauded for his excellent campaigns' speech, which was full of scholarly quotations from different authors. At the end of his speech, the feedback from the fellow students was the use of the new Yorùbá idioms:

- Láìwòwèé
(without looking or reading from the book)

The expression above which literally mean (without looking or reading from the book) is used to eulogize high intellect displayed by the incumbent president of the student union in the delivery of his speech, especially for quoting some great portions from scholarly works without reading from the book. It is believed that only an exceptionally brilliant person can do it. The new idiom *láìwòwé* can be interpreted to mean *a brilliant person* or *someone who is intellectually* or *cerebrally endowed*. Moreover, when argument ensured between two students of Lagos State University, one of the students remarked thus:

Báwo lo ṣe ń sọ̀rọ̀ bí ẹni *tí kò sí lórí fún* báyìí*?*
(why are you talking as if it is not in the head for you)

In the above, the new idiom *'kò sí lórí fún'* (it is not in the head for/it is not in his head) is used derogatorily to insult and abuse the addressee as someone who does not have common sense, intellect or brain since it is believed



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that all these reside in human's head and whenever someone acts or talks stupidly in a manner comparable to the above, it means the person is *not intelligent, brilliant* or *lacks etiquette.* The issue of brilliance is also expressed in another instance where some students of Adéníran Ògúnsànyà were commending teaching ability of one of their lecturers thus:

…lecturer yẹn gbóná ó yeruku
(…the lecturer is hot and dusty)

The above is a new idiom also linked to *'brilliance'*. The idea behind it can be likened to the process of putting something on fire; food becomes good and perfect if is well cooked while iron comes out solid, strong and perfect for whatever shape the blacksmith prefers. Here, the new idiom *'ó gbóná ó yeruku'* (he is hot and dusty) is used for the lecturer probably because of the rigorous study he must have subjected himself to every day and night (putting something on fire for long) which consequently yielded into acquisition of great knowledge displayed during lecture. The new idiom of this nature can be interpreted to mean *'an erudite person,' 'a brilliant person,' 'intellectually sound person,'* and *'cerebrally endowed person*.'

There is also an instance of the use of the idiom '*kúlú tẹmpà'* which is popular not only between the two selected institutions but among virtually all students of higher learning in the south west, Nigeria. '*Kúlú tẹmpà'* an expression that is loaned from the English expression 'cool your temperament'. Students to douse tension, chaos and noise in a rowdy and chaotic situation on the campus, especially when student leaders are addressing their colleagues who are angry over certain issue use it. In order to get students' attention, student's leaders always employ the use of the new idiom *'kúlú tẹmpà'* (cool temperament). The moment they hear the expression, they will all maintain perfect silence. The expression '*kúlú tẹmpa'* can be interpreted to mean *'come down,' 'calm down,' 'cool down your temperament,' 'be calm and listen attentively.'*

It should be stressed here also, that student generally have different expressions for examination malpractice. For instance, in Adéníran Ògúnsànyà College of Education, whenever student is caught with some written information related to the examination of the day in a short piece of paper, this action is captured with a new Yorùbá idiom thus:

'Ó gbéégún'
(he carried masquerade)



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This new idiom is culturally inclined because it is assumed that the person who puts on the masquerade's cloth is veiled and cannot be seen or known by anyone except those in the Egúngún's cult. This scenario is likened to a student who is caught with some exhibits in the examination hall thinking that he is equally veiled and that nobody sees him, forgetting that nothing is hiding under the heaven and that the invigilators he thinks are not there when he is preparing the exhibits aware of such based on their experiences and can easily fish out the perpetrator(s) in a manner comparable to the non initiates of the Egúngún's cult who may also identify person wearing the masquerade's cloth especially when they are familiar with the person's movement, gesture, and body language. By and large, the new idiom *'gbéégún'* which is formed through compounding of verb *'gbé* (carry or lift) and Noun *eégún'* (masquerade) can be interpreted to mean *'cheating in the examination'* or *'examination malpractice'* respectively.

As said earlier, sometimes new idioms can be existing words in the language with new meanings. A typical example of this is the use of *'àgbékọ́'* (brassiere) by the students of Lagos State University for something different from its original meaning in the context like:

*Àgbékọ́* méjì ni wọ́n gbé fún mi ní last semester
(I was given two brassieres in the last semester)

Looking at the above, it looks so ambiguous, especially when the speaker is a male student because only the female can use brassiere. However, *'àgbékọ́'* which is formed through nominalization *à-gbé-kọ́* (that-which-is carried-and-hung) can be interpreted to mean *'carry over'* or *'reference'*. 'Reference' is called *'carry over'* by the students. The word '*carry*' from 'carry over' can be translated in Yorùbá as *'gbé'* while 'over' is translated as *'hang'*. In view of the aforementioned, the above context can be interpreted as 'I have two carry over in the last semester'.

There is also an instance of the use of the new idiom that is common among students of higher learning in Lagos State and by extension, south west Nigeria where a culturally based expression is given new meaning. The use of 'ẹbọ' (sacrifice) is credited to a student of Adéníran Ògúnsànyà College of Education, Ìjànikin when informing one of his friend about a party organised by one of them thus:

*Ebo* wà ní hostel àwọn
Bíọ́lá lọ́jọ́ Saturday



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*Ẹbọ* (sacrifice) is a Yorùbá word for propitiation, sacrifice or atonement. In its original sense, *'ẹbọ'* is used when someone is instructed by Ifá oracle to appease to god(s) with certain sacrificial items in order to overcome his or her misfortune. The metaphoric manner by which *'ẹbọ'* is used in the above connotes *'party,' 'ceremony,'* and *'merriment'* where assorted foods and drinks are served. The similarity of purpose here is that some of the items used for atonement in the cultural sense are sometimes assorted and sumptuous, especially to some careless, funny and hungry members of the society who may not have eating eggs, fish, chickens, palm oil and maize pudding items put on the *'ẹbọ'* for years.

**Inference**

In this paper, it is discovered that new idioms and idiomatic expressions were used in the routine discourse of students of higher learning for both stylistic and communicative effects. New idioms in this paper were found to be used to express purely academic issues and were differentially contextualized in brilliance, dullard, examination malpractice, absenteeism, dousing tension, carry over/reference and students' party respectively. The paper also revealed the various linguistic strategies involved in the creation of new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions used by the students of higher institutions in Lagos State. These include neologism through prefixation and nominalization, borrowing and compounding, some of which were conveyed through metaphorisation. The use of new idioms and idiomatic expressions analysed in this paper has further proved that the Yorùbá language has the mechanism to cope with any communicative exigencies.

**Conclusion**

This paper has established concrete examples of the communicative and stylistic potentials of new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions used among students of higher learning in Lagos State and by extension, south west Nigeria. It has equally shown that the Yorùbá language has the necessary mechanism, like every other language of the world, to cope with the linguistic constraints necessitated by global communicative economy. The coping strategies were discovered to be located in the word-formation capacity of the Yorùbá language in which the new idioms and idiomatic expressions constitute a vital and critical part of the strategies. Finally, students, scholars in Yorùbá studies and by extension, African indigenous languages are encouraged to tap into the far reaching implications and effects of this quintessential phenomenon called 'new Yorùbá



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idioms and idiomatic expressions' and make good use of it, especially in their respective disciplines and in global communicative economy.

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