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# Diachronic Reevaluation of Translation Procedures

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**ABSTRACT:** Today's world has necessitated changes in almost every aspect of our lives. Technological advancements have fundamentally challenged the routines that many of us took for granted and did not observe as transmutable. Was translation an exception? A principal idea behind writing this paper is to take a step back and soar above the every dynamics in order to get an adequate vista over translation theorizing/theories and the actual decision making in translation activity. The objective is not to offer solutions but rather to involve in theory-based translation argumentation through the analysis and discussion of commonly authentic translational files. Language has many functions and takes varying forms depending on the situation in which it is used. Any attempt to offer an in-depth analysis of the theory-practice boundary imposes the choice of a language pair where the different aspects of translation can be explored with ease and insight. The choice of English and Serbian as the relevant pair hardly needs any justification with English being an international lingua franca and Serbian being used in large swaths of the Balkan peninsula. Another main motivation for writing this paper is to accommodate for the renewed and booming interest in translation in the Balkan peninsula both at the practical and academic levels.

**KEYWORDS:** theory, reevaluation, expressions, procedures, English, Serbian

**RIASSUNTO**: Il mondo contemporaneo impone continue trasformazioni a quasi ogni aspetto della nostra vita. Lo sviluppo della tecnologia ha radicalmente messo in discussione molte consuetudini che tendevamo a dare per scontate e a considerare immutabili. Ciò vale anche per la pratica della traduzione? Questo contributo intende, come prima cosa, porsi nella giusta prospettiva per offrire una significativa panoramica sui principi generali e le teorie della traduzione, in rapporto con la prassi concreta del tradurre. L'obiettivo non è quello di offrire soluzioni, ma di proporre una riflessione sulla teoria della traduzione attraverso l'analisi e la discussione di materiali autentici. Il linguaggio ha molte funzioni, e assume forme variabili a seconda del contesto in cui è utilizzato. Ogni tentativo di produrre una dettagliata analisi dei confini tra teoria e pratica impone la scelta di almeno due lingue attraverso le quali poter compiutamente approfondire i differenti aspetti del tradurre. La scelta dell'inglese e del serbo come lingue di riferimento non ha bisogno di particolari spiegazioni, essendo l'inglese un fondamentale strumento di comunicazione internazionale, mentre il serbo è utilizzato in un'ampia parte della penisola balcanica. Un altro importante obiettivo del presente lavoro è quello di dar conto del rinnovato interesse per la traduzione, in forte espansione nella penisola balcanica, tanto nella pratica quanto nella teoria.

**PAROLE CHIAVE**: rivalutazione, espressioni, procedure, inglese, serbo.



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## 1. Contemporary translation horizons

The twenty-first century has brought numerous challenges to many scientific disciplines. In many cases, those changes have necessitated the introduction of stricter standards and grater adherence to procedural guidelines. In the case of translation, there are numerous facets that make it difficult to streamline and standardize the procedures without undercutting some of its vital functionalities. Different texts require different approaches and different human factors provide inputs that are difficult to filter through and either rule out or favourise as being better or worse. Observations and reflections regarding the phenomenon of translation date back to the BC period, with influential scholars such as Cicero, Jerome, Quintilian, Augustine, Jerome discussing the issue of the "free" or sense-for-sense and "literal" or word-for-word translation (Munday 2000; Venuti 1995).

It is this question that will be the prevailing subject of many discussions concerning translation practice until Dryden's classification of translation types in 17th century. Translating a text from one language to another is frequently wrought with head-banging difficulties owing to the fact that the people in the source culture and the source text originators conceptualize their experience of the world in different ways. Nida and Reyburn (1981: 2) maintain that the issues stemming from cultural inconsistencies "constitute the most serious problem for translators and have produced the most far-reaching misunderstandings among readers". Relying on the pontification put forth by Blum-Kulka (1986: 19), Baker (1992: 183) assesses that every language has its own stylistic conventions and preferences in using certain textual patterns, that is, cohesive devices, thematic patterns, and parallel structures. Accordingly, it would transpire that culture is not "a material phenomenon", consisting of "things, people, behavior, or emotion" (Goodenough 1964: 39-40). Instead, it is an organization of these things since words only have meaning in terms of the culture in which they are used, and although languages do not determine culture, they certainly tend to reflect a society's beliefs and practices.

Social beliefs and practices, although to immune to the pervasive globalization pressures, are still showing some resilience in terms of not going gently into oblivion and inexistence. Even though the pervasiveness of universal and ubiquitous modes of behavior and acceptance of international clichés is undeniable, different cultures have still managed to preserve their core identities and characteristics. That might explain why Peter France points out to the fact that theoreticians today have a far more complex task than the mere differentiation between what is good and what is bad; what they are concerned with nowadays is the different options that translators can utilize and the ways they can be adapted in conformity with the historical, sociological and cultural context (2000: 24).



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The polarity of views is not surprising and is not dependent only on the epoch. It owes its polymorphism to other factors as well. Being genre dependent and oriented, translation has shaped its conventions into divergent avenues. What is recommended for scientific and technical translation does not necessary fit within the guidelines for belletristic or poetic translation. This divergence and dichotomy of procedures is universally acceptable and common, but the recent changes have shifted the pendulum substantially towards the natural equivalence paradigm, much to the detriment of the directional equivalence paradigm (in Anthony Pym's terminology). The translator is no longer solely in charge of the TT and he/she has to surrender the steering wheel to modern technological solutions such as CAT. The long forlorn days of translator's preference to own the text, going back to Cicero and Horace, have given way to the current liability to transpose every syllable in accordance with prescribed glossaries.

## 2. Multiple facets of the issue

This in itself would not be problematic if it were not for the imposition of foreign lexis and structures, which gradually erodes the capability of the target language to express concepts with its own wording, whereby the famous Schleiermacher's foreignization and domestication binary approach is elbowed out of equilibrium. More specifically, foreignization has gained such preponderance that the very existence of the domestication approach is jeopardized. This natural equivalence quest and pursuit would not seem odd if it did not at the same time undercut the very foundation of the natural equivalence paradigm. Namely, its main premise that there is a *tertium comparationis*, belonging to neither language and accessible by both, can hardly be corroborated any more.

The long held conviction that there shall be no superordinate nor subordinate languages is being reexamined and reevaluated under the light of the new, twenty-first century translation paradigm, one that observes equivalence through asymmetric lenses. This paper attempts to provide a diachronic overview of translation doctrines concerning foreignization and domestication approaches, while at the same time describing the current state of affairs in the language equality arena, furthermore so as ttranslation is a quintessentially multi-faceted and multi-problematic process with different manifestations, realizations and ramifications, which might explain why, in recent years, the focus of translation studies has shifted from endless debates about equivalence to broader issues, including culture and its effect on both the process and product of translation. Being part of a broader discipline, the study of the connection between linguistic properties of a text and cultural surrounding that engenders it, the translatorial process is often demarcated as a study of language use, that is, "the study of purposes for which such linguistic



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forms are used" (Stalinker 1973: 380). It is also often seen as a transcreation inculcated within the constraints of the discourse of the targeted culture. Culture thus becomes an essential and ubiquitous element in any translatorial consideration. Nida (2002: 157) defines culture as "the total beliefs and practices of a society".

Still, however, once a translation professional has been formed and becomes ready to tackle different tasks, a crucial question must be asked. At which point in the translation continuum should he or she start. Are they just dwarfs standing of shoulders of giants, or fully fledged experts who have no need to reflect on the practices of the past. Translation is not alone in this maze of theories. Numerous other fields of science are coping with their orientation and fundamentals too. The twenty-first century has brought numerous challenges to many scientific disciplines. In many cases, those changes have necessitated the introduction of stricter standards and grater adherence to procedural guidelines.

The merit of such approaches is questionable in the case of translation procedures as they are inherently dichotomist in their liberty-versus strictness-nature. The polarization of views on the imposition of standards in translation is not new; it has existed for as long as people used scripts from foreign languages, but it has never been as acute as it is nowadays. On the one hand, the globalization processes have driven the equivalence standards to an unprecedented scrutiny; while on the other hand the antipodal strive to preserve and maintain the cultural identity still insists on averting such impositions to a safe distance and forestalling the efforts to gradually blunt the edge of ethnicity based differences. Translators have found themselves in the middle between the two oppositional forces; their allegiance being to both, their procedures being reevaluated.

## 3. A retrospective view

Translation is practically as old as writing itself and for almost as long as humans have been writing they have been translating. Indeed, evidence of this can be found in ancient clay tablets containing bilingual Sumerian-Eblaite glossaries (Deslisle and Cloutier 1995:7). That translation has accompanied virtually every significant scientific and technological discovery throughout the ages is well documented and it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a single example of an invention or discovery which was not exported to another language and culture by means of translation (Byrne 2003: 3).

What is interesting in observing historical nature of numerous factors that defined various translation methods is how they were shaped by the changes within a culture. That change affected all aspects of translation process – standards of accuracy, the ways of interpretation of a foreign text, linguistic style, liberties and restrictions. In other words,



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governing translation norms were subjected to historical variation. One thing that becomes apparent in this kind of research is that there seem to be certain translation traditions which remain constant throughout the ages. For example, word for word vs. sense for sense dilemma emerged time and time again with different degrees of importance influenced by the varying concepts of language suited for a certain period's governing philosophy.

The reason why translation has had such divergent valuation in different epochs lies in the concept of enrichment of literature through translation, which carried with it enrichment of language as well. For Horace and Cicero the art of the translator was expressed in judicious interpretation of the SL text in order to produce TL version based on the principle non verbum de verbo, sedsensum de sensu. On that matter, Bassnett quotes Cicero: "If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording. I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator." (1980: 49).

The portentous events from the past are not mentioned here in order to say that translation practice at the time had resolved the issues of adequate approaches to the process. Even more than today, translation lacked the standards of accuracy and quality that we expect nowadays. It was only feasible for as long as there was a certain amount of equivalence in between the languages. And indeed, the notion of equal values among languages has dominated the translation paradigm for centuries. If translations are supposed to bring in information that is new to a language or culture, then they cannot be expected to be naturally equal. That is, new ideas and techniques will eventually require new terms and expressions, so that translations are going to be marked in ways that their source texts are not.

This argument usually becomes a question of terminology: should the translation use loans from the source text or should new terms be invented from the resources considered 'natural' in the target language? (Pym 2010: 21). The centuries of theoretical dormancy began to show some awakening during the 1950ies. James S. Holmes published a seemingly simple and yet highly portentous paper 'The name and nature of translation studies' in which he attempted to delineate the boundaries of translation both as a scientific discipline and a practical profession. Wisely enough he included descriptions of other vast and diversified disciplines that translation studies potentially had tangential relations with. Inasmuch as the framework was revolutionary and progressive at the time, anyone who has ever attempted translation will be aware of how illusory it is to abide by the rule of any rigid frame for translated thoughts to be molded in. Decades have passed since the publication of the paper and it would be untrue to say that no development has taken place in the then nascent sub-disciplines of applied translation and translation policy. What



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was once seen as its main shortcoming – the underdevelopment of translation policy, is nowadays a frequently debated field with discussions ranging from what place, if any, translation should occupy in the language teaching and learning curriculum, to the undervalued status of translation professionals.

## 4. Practical implications

Even though the practice of translation is long established, the study of the field evolved into an academic discipline only in the second part of the twentieth century. Before its official induction into the realm of the academia, translation had often been regarded as an element of language teaching. In fact, from the late eighteenth century to the 1960s and beyond, language learning in secondary schools in many countries had come to be dominated by what was known as grammar-translation (Cook 2010: 9-15).

Perhaps the somewhat delayed postulation of translation as a scientific discipline and a proper walk of life has to do with the fact that true translation work is always pragmatic and the translator sifts through a variety of different options hoping to find the one that yields a maximum of meaning compatibility and a minimum of semantic deviation. Furthermore so since, as Octavio Paz used to say, every translation is an invention in a way, and, as such, it automatically yields a unique arena (1992). This is further enhances and corroborated by the belief that translation plays different roles in different societies. Translation is more than mere transfer of concepts – it is more akin to transfer of meanings expressed by words, and words are not necessarily the names of things and ideas. Defined loosely, the word is 'the smallest unit of language that can be used by itself' (Bolinger and Sears 1968: 43), which leads many to believe that the word is also the basic meaningful element in a language, which is a rather inaccurate belief. Meaning can be carried by units smaller that the word (consider the morphemes 're' or 'dis', etc in recreate and disbelief respectively). But if translation were solely the replacement of words, the appropriate procedure would be to consult a bilingual dictionary. At its best, however, a bilingual dictionary shares the main limitations of a monolingual one. It has the same alphabetic and atomistic classifications, the same tendency to obsolescence. Moreover, bilingual dictionaries tend to furnish standardized translations that do not correspond to the full lexical ranges in two languages and may therefore be incorrect because of temporal shifts of meaning in both languages.

The theoretical distinction between words and morphemes mentioned in the previous paragraph attempts to account for such elements of meaning which are expressed on the surface. It does not, however, provide an answer how words and morphemes can be further broken down into components of meaning. It is nevertheless important to



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be aware of this distinction as it can be useful in translation, especially in dealing with loan words. Perhaps the best description of the slippery path of relying of word-for-word translation is that expressed by Culler saying that if language were simply a nomenclature for a set of universal concepts, it would be easy to translate from one language to another. If language were like this the task of learning a new language would also be much easier than it is. But anyone who has attempted either of these tasks has acquired a vast amount of direct proof that languages are not nomenclatures, that the concepts of one language may differ radically from those of another. Each language articulates or organizes the world differently. Languages do not simply name existing categories, they articulate their own (1976: 22).

It would transpire from this that if one persist in putting 'round pegs into square holes' there would have to be a certain amount of flexibility in the elements of both the source and the target languages, notably in their lexical, semantic and syntactic components. This flexibility however can only go so far, and if the translator bends the words, their meaning or congruence too much they will tend to refract. Perhaps, Anuradha Dingawaney was right to say that translation from one culture into another involves varying degrees of violence (1995: 4). This idea of translation as refraction rather than reflection was first developed by Lafevere offering a more complex model than the old idea of translation as a mirror of the original. Inherent in his view of translation as refraction was a rejection of any linear notion of the translation process. Texts, he argued, have to be seen as complex signifying systems and the task of the translator is to decode and re-encode whichever of those systems is accessible (Grant 1992).

Lefevere noted that much of the theorizing about translation was based on translation practice between European languages and pointed out that problems of the accessibility of linguistic and cultural codes intensifies once we move out beyond Western boundaries. In his later work, he expanded his concern with the metaphorics of translation to an enquiry into what he termed the conceptual and textual grids that constrain both writers and translators (Bassnett 2002).

Because the occurrence possibilities of words within lexical items are typically severely constrained, the 'meaning entails choice' principle indicates that their meanings are similarly constrained. In other words, they are not fully functional semantic elements. Sinclair calls this restriction of meaning possibility 'delexification' (1987). There are many other factors that undermine the word-for-word approach and devaluate the resources of dictionaries. Numerous words in the language can hardly be said to serve the purpose of nominalization of the world around us.

Whatever may be argued about words like *house* or *kuća* (in Serbian) (and even this, as demonstrated in the opening paragraphs, can be very complex), they are as simple as any words can be in a language as



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far as nominalization goes; even more so if we ask ourselves what prepositions like *on*, *to*, *at* – or Serbian *na*, *u* etc, for the same matter - actually name. If it is maintained that they name ideas, such as ideas of spatial position, it would be difficult to allocate their correspondences between the languages.

To illustrate it further, ponder the English language *go to town*; *in the street*; *at the market* and the corresponding Serbian phrases *ići u grad*; *na ulici*; *na pijaci* etc. Clearly, the meaning of the prepositions varies according to the context, but this being so, they cannot be called 'names' in the sense that one could say that John is the name of a person, while dog is the name of a particular kind of animal. This, in turn, implies that translation is far from being transposition of names and is quite different from the comparing of languages or counting of words or phrases.

For example, a speaker's saying *That's hilarious!* when talking to a converser who has just spilled coffee or a beverage on his trousers should not be construed at face value; In Serbian, that phrase would perhaps sound more like *Istina!* Both exclamations having totally different construals in ordinary situations. Otherwise, they would actually indicate, sarcastically, 'That's terrible' by the speaker and would require an apology. Consequently, the process of communication continues unhampered, owing to social reasonableness and cognitive prowess of people, all inculcated in the compliant codes between the utterance generator and the receptor.

However, there are some translation traditions that always remain. The question of literal translation vs. sense interpretation is one of those traditions that kept reemerging time and time again. During a common parlance, the text originator may want to utter only a segment of the message, leaving it up to the translator, to approach "the network of conceptual relations which underlie the surface text" (Baker 1992: 218) in which case, it will be the recipient's erudition that will serve as the amalgam in filling the absent parts of the message. Take for example certain formulaic expressions existing in English and Serbian. The question *What's up?* or its similar version in Serbian *Šta ima?* do not really beg for a true and pertinent answer. Jargon users in both languages will know better than to take them literally. In such a situation, it does not refer to worldly processes or ongoing events, rather it is a form of a streetwise greeting, in which case successful translators need to be insiders in both cultures. In other words, they need to possess deep and intimate knowledge of the cultural experience in the SL, and be insiders in the target culture. Only then will they be able to resonate the corresponding cultural experience in the TL. According to Blakemore's (2002: 71) observation, the fatic function, that is, conversational implicature, can only manifest itself when translators "go further than what is explicitly written, and metarepresent the ST thoughts about what he would think as relevant enough".



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This example goes to show that contextual setting may not necessarily be a matter of *tertium comparationis* positioned in the natural equivalence translation theory paradigm. It no longer matters whether they represent "a material phenomenon", consisting of "things, people, behavior, or emotion" (Goodenough 1964: 39-40). Instead, they ought to be looked at as an organization of numerous social elements. It is this organization of elements that people have in mind, their methods for perceiving, relating, and ultimately comprehending them. In this way, the capacity to deal with implicated messages is incumbent upon the supposition that the speaker is supportive and invites the listener to observe contextual elements to figure out the intended conversational implicatures. This, in return, can be a rewarding footing for the translator of implicatures to base his or her approach upon. One might also recall Sperber and Wilson's (1986) views that this discerning ability stems from the broad assumption that everything that is generated in the course of human conversation is pertinent to a certain extent; consequently implying that the listener deploys an array of cognitive skills to process the statement bearing in mind the circumstantial landscape and, as a result, considers them significant, echoing Nida's belief (1994: 157) that words only have meaning in terms of the culture in which they are used, and although languages do not determine culture, they certainly tend to reflect a society's beliefs and practices.

## 5. Changes on other frontiers

Katan (1999: 26), describes culture as a "shared mental model or map" for interpreting reality and organizing experience of the world. In such an arena, culture can be seen as a "system of congruent and interrelated beliefs, values, strategies and cognitive environments which guide the shared basis of behavior". In the aftermath of instability of peace because of the two World Wars, and the constant political tension between the participant forces of the wars caused Europeans to reconsider their belief systems which ultimately lead to questioning and dissatisfaction with the authorities which, as it seemed to many, where motivated by greed, exploitation of the working class, and hunger for power. This century marks the beginning of a cultural period in which individuals reject the past and question the base of knowledge.

In literature, writers dared to broke up the traditional rules of narrative and now experimented with language, creating linguistic games, shifting perspectives drawing the attention to the nature of language itself, while translators have often been hidden characters, unnamed people who have paved the way for some of the greatest contributions to the dissemination of ideas, knowledge and theories throughout the ages.

The concept of translation got a new meaning with the rise of the New Critics, Saussure, Chomsky, Derrida, Foucault and others. According



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to them, translation of a language is only possible on account of the existence of language universals, namely the fact that there are certain common denominators that are quintessentially ubiquitous in nature and, to a certain extent, exist in every language of the world. That being said, one should be mindful of another fact that no two languages function in the same way and interpretation of a text depends on the reader, which meant that not two interpretations are the same. That meant that that translator could not claim to have succeeded in capturing the author's true meaning. It raised the question how that meaning could be caught. Even though new criticism created difficulties, translation continued to flourish to our time. That might be accredited to the diligence and adaptability of translation professionals who work hard to uphold and improve the status of their profession and approach the issues of translation pragmatically. For many decades, or even centuries, the profession seem to lack coherence and sound organization in its establishment as one of the most important functions of human advancement. Nevertheless, its essential role seemed be too easily overlooked. In the 1950's, however, certain changes began to loom on the horizon, and books, such as James McFarlane's *Models of Translation* (1951), began to herald some new approaches to the study on translation in the West.

## Conclusion

The history of translation is like any other history and should not be approached from narrowly fixed position. The need for translation has been apparent since the earliest days of human interaction, whether it be for emotional, trade or survival purposes. One of the objectives of this analysis was to present and give some insight in just how much all layers that make a culture are intertwined and how the change of one aspect ripples across the surface of the others changing them as well. For example, whenever a major social change occurs literature is affected first and due to changes of literary genres the translation practices also alter. The Twentieth century introduces the concept of the translator as a shadowy presence whose job is the saving the uniqueness of the original while adapting it to target culture as if it was is the product of it Overlooking this facet would be tantamount to overlooking culture in translation and vice versa. Furthermore, studies by Snell-Hornby (1988/1995) and Bassnett (1980) urged that the translation process should no longer be seen as being merely between two linguistic systems, but is envisaged as being between two cultures. Observed from such a vista, Snell-Hornby (1988: 46), endorsement of Vermeer's (1986) views, would imply that translation is "a cross-cultural transfer, and the translator should be bicultural, if not pluricultural".

Needless to say, no matter how well prepared, there will always be certain cultural discrepancies that impede the translator's progress while



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rendering the text at hand owing to the illusive extra information hidden in the original text that need not be present as such, or in the same amount, in the end-product in the TT. Nida and Reyburn (1981: 2) hypothesize that the problems arising out of cultural discrepancies "constitute the most serious problem for translators and have produced the most far-reaching misunderstandings among readers".

No language is immune to violating the maxim of quality by invoking the faculty of metaphor, thus conversationally involving the matrimonial interpretation. Some of the more prominent translators, such as Hutchins, Kenny, Seleskovic and Gutt, respectively have put forth different strategies for different types of translation and interpreting. Their concepts spanned a wide range of issues, typically providing a bipolar dichotomy with oppositional preferences at the far ends of the spectrum. Take for the example the recommended approaches to translating metaphors. While the first two hold that translation ought to retain the conversational implicature by using the same metaphor, the second two see metaphor as mere communicative devise, and the translator should be allowed to substitute a transferred meaning with a literal one. If we take into consideration Katan's (1999: 26) view was that culture is a "shared mental model or map" implying that it is a "system of congruent and interrelated beliefs, values, strategies and cognitive environments which guide the shared basis of behavior", we can compare it other views that translation would have been more effective if it had preserved the conversational implicature by deploying the same lexical composition in English. This dichotomy alone suffices to prove that there is still so much to be regulated and procedurally upgraded in the field of translatorial activities, furthermore so since the current global trends in cultural exchange have bolstered the need for translation, driving the demand for translation services to be more apparent than ever, with businesses acknowledging the inability to expand internationally or succeed in penetrating foreign markets without translating marketing material and business documents. Looking back in history, however, one cannot be overtly sanguine that proper regulatory endeavors will be put in place any time soon.

Clashes in opinions have existed for two millennia and hoping that the twenty-first century will be the one to disentangle the dilemma seems to be too optimistic. That being said, there is still light at the end of the tunnel – the obvious need for translation in every aspect of our contemporary societies has helped university translation courses to gain traction, and that effort is bound to yield some fruit.



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