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Factors Impede Simultaneous Interpreting Efficiency

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the factors that influence simultaneous interpreting from English into Arabic. The rationale behind this research is that when people are challenged with communication barrier, they resort to translators or interpreters who can comprehend the two languages to translate for them. The interpreters or translators need to develop rigorous cognitive capabilities and skills to render the input utterance in the TL. However, many factors impede the interpreting fluency and affect the performance of the interpreter particularly the case of simultaneous interpretation. Therefore, in this attempt the researcher, place special emphasis on factors that represent challenges for SI and consulted some resources and references to manage the factors that inhibit interpretation process. Moreover, the research gave insights into some translation quality and training. The researcher adopted descriptive analytical method due to its relevance to these types of researches. The research concluded with some findings that may help developing simultaneous interpreting and solve problems that encounter human interpreters.

Key words: Interpretation modes, memory, time lag, strategies, training.

Introduction

By nature, oral translation is a challenging and demanding task because two or more divergent languages are involved. Each Language includes phonological, structural, meaning, stylistic and cultural components that are different from one another. The main purpose of interpreting process is to facilitate multilingual communication between people of different languages and culture through mingling these components. To conducting proper conversion and the interpreters need to develop awareness and understanding of the nature of interpreting. For that reason, scholars of translation have provided a plethora of definitions for translation as a conversion process from one language to another in either the written or the spoken forms. More specifically, interpreting refers to the translation of the spoken word and the translation of the written word. It can simply be defined as "oral translation of a written text" (Shuttle worth& Cowie: 1997:83). Furthermore, Sandra Beatriz Hale (2007: 2) regards interpreting as a branch of translation that involves simultaneous and consecutive modes. (Pöchhacker, 2004a) has classified interpreting as a form of Translation in which a first and final rendition in another language is produced based on a one-time presentation of an utterance in (A) source language. Pöchhacker, (2004: 25) Simultaneous interpreting (SI) as a type of oral translation has been defined an immediate form of translational activity, performed for the benefit of people who want to engage in communication across barriers of language and culture.

Rabin (1958: 123) defines Translation as a process by which a spoken or written utterance takes place in one language which is intended and presumed to convey the same meaning as a previously existing utterance in another language. It thus involves two distinct factors, a 'meaning', or reference to some slice of reality, and the difference between two languages in referring to that reality.

Form all these definitions; the researcher observed that there is a concurrence on the nature of interpreting. However, some authors take the nature from challengeable and controversial perspective. For instance, Salevsky (1993:148) believed that interpreting is not merely a matter of reproduction of the communicative realization of the target text. Rather it is a variety of interactions between analysis as recognition and sense attribution, planning, drawing comparisons, probability considerations and formation of hypotheses involving examination procedures for alternative objectives and means, problem-solving and decision-making techniques, feedback, and mechanisms for control and evaluation.

Translating vs. interpreting

In many respects, translation and interpretation are similar but the main distinctive feature between these forms is the timing of input and output. In interpreting, the time of the deliverance and conveyance of the message is almost the same because the author and the interpreters are present in the same place, which enable them to interact with each other. The interpreter starts to interpret when the speaker stops speaking, either in breaks in the source speech (discontinuous interpreting) or after the entire speech is finished (continuous interpreting) Judith (2009:455). The interpreter may ask the speaker for clarification and explanation of the intended message. In addition, s/he can ask for repetition and slowing down if the speaker speeds up. In contrary, translators undergo not pressing time, they have ample time to consult many resources but there is no communication between them and the authors.

On the other hand, in translation, the time factor is not essential factor and not fixed between the author and interpreter. Sandra Beatriz Hale (2007: 8) argues that the differences between Interpreting and translation although interpreting and translation have much in common; the differences between them are great. The first, obvious difference is that one is expressed in written form (Translation) and the other in oral form (Interpreting), and for this reason, the translation process includes a number of steps that

are not available to the interpreter. Translators have the complete text in front of them, which they will read and thoroughly analyze as a first step.

The translator starts his with initial comprehension stage to facilitate understanding, analysis stage, conversion stage and editing. Technical texts will require a different type of preparation from general or literary texts. The translator will also need to research parallel texts in the other language, to compare styles, terminology and appropriate thematic structures. The production of the text in the target language is accompanied with a number of drafts preceding the final version. Another distinction is made between translation and interpretation concerning the access to the numerous resources when preparing the translation and these are becoming increasingly sophisticated with very important aids, such as software packages dictionaries; bilingual and monolingual. However, Interpreters need to deal with the oral text as it is presented before them, without the opportunity to consult references, previous interpreting assignments correct and edit their final product.

What to know about simultaneous interpreting (SI)
Simultaneous interpreting term implies providing the target-language message at roughly the same time as the source-language message is being produced. According to Seleskovitch (1978a: 125), in simultaneous interpretation the interpreter is isolated in a booth. S/he translates at the same time as the speaker and therefore has no need to memorize or jot down what is being delivered. Moreover, the processes of analysis-comprehension and of reconstruction-expression are telescoped. The interpreter works on the message bit by bit, giving the portion he has understood while analyzing and assimilating the next idea. Moreover, SI is considered the complex task of Simultaneous Interpretation (SI) might be viewed as a psycholinguistic experiment designed to test how the processes of speech production, speech perception, translation and monitoring operate simultaneously (Klaudy 2004).

Sandra Beatriz Hale (2007: 16) says the interpreting process includes the three main steps of the interpreting process are **comprehension**, **conversion** and **delivery**. Each one needs to be analyzed in its own right in order to understand the complexity of the process.

It is now an established fact that comprehension is not a passive, receptive process but depends crucially on what is already known. Processing new information thus requires the active construction of some form of mental representation integrating the input with various kinds of pre-existing knowledge – lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, encyclopedic, etc. (Pöchhacker, 2004a: 119).

Sandra Beatriz Hale (2007: 21) the conversion phase is the mental translation process. This is where the interpreter needs to make strategic mental choices to decide the most appropriate and accurate rendition in the target language. A constraining difficulty found at this phase in interpreting, and which is not found in translation, is the need to act in real time, with little opportunity to contemplate the choices.

Sandra Beatriz Hale (2007: 24) the delivery phase comprises the end-product, the verbal output after the previous two phases have been completed. The style of the delivery will depend on the type and mode of interpreting and on the purpose of the interaction.

Consecutive vs. simultaneous interpreting
Nolan (2005:4) differentiates between consecutive and simultaneous interpretation. A consecutive interpreter listens to the speaker, takes notes, and then reproduces the speech in the target language. Depending on the length of the speech, this may be done all at one go or in several segments. The consecutive interpreter relies mainly on memory, but good note-taking technique is an essential aid. A simultaneous interpreter, usually sitting in a soundproof booth, listens to the speaker through earphones and, speaking into a microphone, reproduces the speech in the target language as it is being delivered in the source language. Because the simultaneous interpreter cannot fall too far behind, this method requires considerable practice and presence of mind. Consecutive interpreting is more relaxing than simultaneous interpreting and there is a chance for consecutive interpreters to demand repetition for some ambiguous information whereas simultaneous interpreters are overwhelmingly exhausted with tension and concentration. Therefore, simultaneous interpreters need to adopt and pursue some strategies to conduct their job properly.

Strategies of simultaneous interpreting
Interpreters employ different types of strategies during the course of interpreting. Taxonomy of these strategies vary from one researcher to another. Kalina & Koln (2002:5) argued that complex operations of strategies are employed by the interpreter to arrive at competence. They stated that comprehension strategies include segmentation of input, anticipation, inference, accessing previously stored knowledge, building relations between stored and new information, in short, mental modelling. Text production strategies comprise restructuring, paraphrasing, condensing or expanding information, and the use of prosodic or non-verbal features. Another type of strategies is the global strategies. These strategies are of a more general and comprehensive nature; they involve memorizing the input, adapting one's mental model, monitoring one's own output for deficiencies but also that of the text producer for coherence and repairing errors.
   a) Riccardi (2005) agreed with Kalina and Kohn to some extend on some strategies. Riccardi made a clear distinction between four categories of strategies employed by interpreters: comprehension strategies, production strategies, overall strategies and emergency strategies.
        1- Comprehension strategies include anticipation, segmentation, selection of information and stalling or waiting.
        2- Production strategies comprise compression, expansion, approximation and generalization, use of linguistic open-end forms, morphosyntactic transformation and the use of prosody elements such as pauses and intonation.
        3- Overall strategies comprise décalage [lag] and monitoring.
        4- Emergency strategies may include omission of text segments, transcoding and parallel reformulation.

b) Al Qinai (2001) suggested five strategies that help improve the interpreter's quality of delivery. These strategies included:
- Queuing: the postponement of TL production during heavy loaded times and catching them up later in pauses or lulls.
- Segmentation and parceling: splitting SL input into smaller units to deal with short memory span. Parcelling is used when SL units are numerous; the interpreter may opt to group 'parcel' them into larger unit.
- Syntactic adjustment:
- Calque and paraphrase: This may involve verbatim rendition.
- Paraphrase: a strategy of explication.
- Approximation and substitution
- Reduction: a strategy of reducing and briefing the text content.
- Compression: to reduce the density of the text.
- Borrowing: adopting terms from the source language.
- Ellipsis: either to skip unnecessary or contract it.

The above strategies play vital role in meeting challenges of that encounter simultaneous interpreters. Moreover, they facilitate interpreting processes whether consecutive or simultaneous. However, some constraints can undermine the delivery of oral translation message. These constrains are discussed as follows.

c) Constraints:
Al Qinai (2001) investigated the competence in translation and interpreting. He also reported some constraints that face Arab interpreters when interpreting from and into English. These constraints included:
- Time lag: the time between the production of source language and its interpreting into target language.
- SL deficiency: this is attributed to poor quality of input language; solecisms, non-standard accents, misarticulated word segments and idiolectal peculiarities.
- Structural asymmetry: the interpreter has to wait for theme before interpreting the rhyme.
- Lexical incompatibility: a new neologism, which probably needs deep Processing or paraphrasing.
- Phatic communion: Arabic and English styles of address are different. In Arabic, for example, it is customary to greet the audience with honorary titles.

Quality assurance of interpreting
Garzone (2005:108) notes that it is thus hardly surprising that there should be no single, unambiguous agreed definition of the concept of quality in interpretation". The concept of quality involves many different variables and perspectives so that it may be very difficult and maybe even impossible to ever find one uniform working definition of interpreting quality applicable to all kinds of interpreting situations. However, some definitions were given for the term. Pöchhacker (1994) defines quality within the framework of a hypertext situation, "hypertext" referring to the conference setting as a whole. The quality of interpreter output is described as one aspect of communicative interaction and discourse qualityi. The quality definition proposed by Mack (2002) is that of an evaluator. Interpreting, as translation, is the transfer of textual information between two languages; it requires the skill of being able to establish equivalences in terms of content, shape and performance. As a special type of interlingual communicative act in a complex social network of relations, it is an effort, on the pragmatic level, at achieving speech acts with optimum effect. Quality could then be measured as the rate of success in this effort.

Quality refers to properties and characteristics of a product or a service and to the fulfilment of standards defined beforehand (Mack 2002: 110). For Mack, any agreed definition of quality depends on the position that interpreting assumes in a given culture.

Likewise, Kopczynski (1994) defines quality as a function of situation and context, variables that might call for different priorities in different interpreting situations. In an effort at widening the perspective to include other types of interpreting, Pöchhacker sees the common denominator of all types of interpreting in the fact that the interpreter "supplies a textual product which provides access to the original speaker's message in such a way as to make it meaningful and effective within the socio-cultural space of the addressee." (Pöchhacker 2001: 421) This dimension is also addressed by Mack with reference to community interpreting (Mack 2002: 114), where interpreters are generally expected to act on behalf of the weaker party.

Optimum quality is "the quality an interpreter can provide if external conditions are appropriate" (Moser-Mercer 1996: 44). This means that " an interpreter provides a complete and accurate rendition of the original that does not distort the original message and tries to capture any and all extra linguistic information that the speaker might have provided subject to the constraints imposed by certain external conditions" (Moser-Mercer 1996: 44)ii. Most comments on ST quality refer to "spoken vs. written style" (e.g. Déjean Le Féal 1982, Vuorikoski 2004), delivery characteristics including segmentation and speed (Shlesinger 1994, Pöchhacker 1994) and highly personal features such as monotony of speech, hesitations, non-native accents and others. These factors cannot be influenced by interpreters but are likely to affect interpretation quality. The speaker therefore bears a certain responsibility for interpreting quality, too, as do others that act within the framework of the overall speech situation (cf. also Vuorikoski 2004: 25).

Quality criteria/dimensions:
However, there is a consensus on some quality criteria, which are more or less independent of the context: ideational clarity, linguistic acceptability and terminological accuracy as well as fidelity on one side, and appropriate professional behaviour on the other. These contribute to high-quality Translation, although the relative weights given to them by individual raters can vary (Bühler 1986; Kurz 1989 for conference interpreting)iii.

Quality criteria include semantic content, linguistic performance and presentation. Semantic content represents the consistency, logic, coherence, completeness, accurateness, unambiguity, clarity and reliability. Linguistic performance includes grammatical correctness, adherence to TL norms, Comprehensibility, stylistic adequacy, terminological adequacy, discretion and lack of disturbance. Presentation involves voice quality, articulation, public speaking, discipline simultaneity, technical mastery and conduct. All these criteria can raise the awareness of interpreters.

Quality assessment
Quality assessment is done in the field is not necessarily reliable. This is due to several factors, including the assessors' cognitive limitations and the variability of their needs, which makes them attribute different weights to various quality components. Regardless of the Client's assessments, constant striving for maximum quality is an important prerequisite for each Translator's long-term job satisfaction

Problems face interpreters
Experts and professional translators determined the difficulties that frequently encounter interpreters while on stage as follows:
   a. a speaker reads out text fast
   b. speaker's language is dense, implicit in character, whereas target language tends to be redundant and explicit, or
   c. speaker quotes complex text passage or reads out figures, names, acronyms which have not been made available to interpreters, prior advice to speakers and conference organizers
   d. a speaker commits a speech error
   e. uses language which would be judged offensive in target culture, or
   f. uses metaphors, puns or figurative speech for which there is no equivalent in target language,
   g. a speaker loses his or her thread or
   h. is linguistically vague or
   i. intentionally ambiguous, even for the ST audience
   j. a speaker comes to an end, but the next speaker or chairman does not wait for the interpreter to complete output.

These factors influence the quality of Simultaneous Interpreting are illustrated as follows:
   a. Speed and time lag
      Chernov (2004:15) argued that the speed of delivery [production of simultaneous interpreting] is relatively dependent on the speed of the incoming discourse. He stated that this lag and simultaneity are independent of SI language combination, and only relatively dependent on the SL speech, and consequently on the rate of SI activity, but depend considerably on the level of professionalism on the interpreteriv.

      Li (2010: 19) focused on the dilemma of fast delivery. He stated, "fast speech is the arch enemy of simultaneous interpreters". Li argued that fast speech results in misinterpreting, loss of information and difficulty of comprehension. The interpreter's prior preparation may help compensate for lack of knowledge and terminology, and then can possibly ease the pressure of fast delivery (Li, 2010)v . However, speed beyond certain limits will allow no interpreter to convey the message in full, even if the interpreter is highly qualified and knowledgeable about the subject matter. Time lag is the time between the production of source language and its interpreting into target language.

   b. Attention and Memory
      Memory is classified into long and short term. The interpreter needs a good short-term memory to retain what has been heard at the moment of speaking while a good long-term memory is needed to put the information into context. Ability to concentrate is a factor as is the ability to analyze and process what is heard" Mahmoodzadeh (2001:4-5). Both types of memories are required and can advance the delivery of the message in SI and there is some resemblance between them.
      Hebb (1949) points out that there is a clear distinction between short-term memory (STM) and long-term memory (LTM). He argued that STM is basically dependent on temporary electrical activation, while LTM is dependent on neuronal growth. Later studies sustained Hebb's suggestion of this distinction where they ascertained that information was easily forgotten unless such information was exercised well later. Ideas underpinning this distinction came from the studies that showed small amounts of information are rapidly forgotten unless repeatedly rehearsed. Working memory is central to different kinds and forms of complex thinking such as reasoning, language comprehension and problem solving (Carpenter & Just, 1989). However, it is a theoretical concept pertinent to cognitive psychology and neuroscience. Working memory is of two main kinds, short-term memory (STM) and long–term memory (LTM). Carpenter and Just (1989) argued that short-time memory is generally recognized as a storage device, allowing us to hold information up to the time it is recalled.

      They defined it through the following example "the purpose of short-term memory is the storage of a phone number between the time when it is looked up in phone directory and the time when it is dialed" (p. 32).

   c. Processing direction: This problem refers to structural dissimilarities between languages. The English word order is SVO whereas the Arabic one is VSO. In English, some modifiers precede nouns, i.e. Adjectives premodify nouns while Arabic adjectives are post modifiers. Shunnaq (1998) also considered such difference as a problem that faces Arab translatorsvi. It also agrees with Fluger (1983) who proposed that differences in word order should be syntactically problematic when interpreting into Danish (as cited in Schjoldager,1995). This syntactic dissimilarity makes the interpreter "wait" until the whole segment is revealed and consequently lag behind the speaker, particularly when clusters of adjectives precede the noun phrase.

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d. Gender and number differentiation

There are many differences between English and Arabic as for gender and numbers. English distinguishes only one (singular) and above one (plural), while Arabic distinguishes three types; singular, dual and plural. Therefore, the interpreter should be aware when rendering English plurality in Arabic. This conclusion is in line with Shunnaq (1998) who viewed number differentiation between Arabic and English as a source of difficulty. English distinguishes three genders; masculine, feminine and neuter, while Arabic has only two genders; masculine and feminine. Moreover, Arabic requires the adjectives and verbs to be marked for gender. Consequently, English neutral forms pose serious problems for Arab interpreters and translators. Shunnaq (1998) who considered neuter forms in English a problematic issue for Arab interpreters and translators stressed this conclusion.

e. Dialect and accent peculiarities

Gile (2001) and Darwish (2009) also listed pronunciation as one of the difficulties that encounter interpreters. The main problem lies in those who speak English as a second language, for example Indian English where the accent pauses a real problem for interpreters. Al-Qinai (2001) adopts a common ground; nonstandard accents create difficulties for interpreters.

f. Prior knowledge:

Li (2010) also claimed that prior preparation can possibly ease the burden of speed of delivery. This agrees with Dillinger (1994) who concluded that preparation reduces the importance of contextual variables and emphasizes correct terminology. It is understood, that prior knowledge and preparation can play a significant role in dealing with expected problems stemming from information that is unknown to the interpreter.

g. Noise and distraction:

This causes distraction and reduces or disrupts concentration which is one of the main requirements of the simultaneous interpreter. This view agrees with Gerver (1971), who found out that noise creates multiple negative impacts on the interpreter's performance; more omissions, errors and a considerable decrease in output. He also concluded that interpreters, under noise conditions, give priority for simultaneity over accuracy. It is fair to say that noise makes the interpreter's perception of the incoming message less clear and less intelligible and consequently produce poor output.

h. Visibility of the speaker and the conference room:

Interactive environment between audience, speaker and the interpreter is probably a helpful means for interpreters in decoding the speaker's message. Visibility refers to communication by means of non-vocal signals. Buhler (1985) also found out that non-verbal communications, in the Presence of both the speaker and the interpreter, have positive effects and are considered part of the referential content of the said message. Such non-verbal means are meant to be bodily activities that include gestures, facial expressions, orientations postures etc. It is worthy to mention here that unobstructed view of speaker and audience is an explicit requirement in the code of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC).

i. Number of attendees and attitudes towards interpreters:

When the number of audience is large or includes very important persons, some interpreters stand in awe and may getting panic. One subject put it as "Some interpreters might panic if there is someone who has a high position in the government or someone of the royal family". This idea agrees with Kurtz (1997) who, in the case of telecast interpreting, attributed the fear the interpreters suffer to the large number of audience. Some delegates consider the interpreter's work as insignificant or incompetent. Gile (1990) also referred to the negative attitudes towards interpreters. Conference organizers also try to exploit interpreters; they ask for double effort but offer less rewards. These attitudes may frustrate the interpreters and weaken their morale.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried on 20 interpretation trainees at college of Arts and Science, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. An oral text of ten minutes was given to students to interpret as a practice for their simultaneous interpretation classes. Trainees have been given the text from VOA special English website because it is devoted to education and training purposes. Their attempts were recorded for analysis and marking. Script was read again and the errors and deficiencies were illustrated and categorised as shown in the results.

Results

It has been observed that the deficiencies and challenges faced by trainees are too many. For instance, Split attention and memory (85.1 %) feature ranked one as one of the main barrier. Dialect and accent peculiarities (80.2%) feature ranked the next place. The rest of the factors are central point of the analysis. They has been investigated and illustrated as in Table (1) below.

Table 1. Demonstrates the output of trainees of interpreting.

Levels	Speed and Time lag	Spilt Attention and Memory	Processing direction	Gender and number differentiation	Dialect and accent peculiarities	Prior knowledge	Noise and distraction:	Spilt the attention
Experienced (Strength)	23.7%	14.9%	33.3%	23.3%	19.8%	33.3%	50%	38.1%
Inexperienced (Weakness)	76.3%	85.1 %	66.7%	76.7%	80.2%	61.9%	50%	61.9%

From the above table, It has been observed that eight factors has influenced the accuracy and proper delivery of interpretation. Experienced refer to one who demonstrated strength. Inexperienced means those who underwent many problems when they attempted to do simultaneous translation. These figures influenced the oral translation strongly because students of translation showed weakness in some areas and due to the lack of practice.

Suggestions for interpreting training
It goes without saying that training plays significant role in quality assurance of SI. "Training Paradigm" outlined by Mackintosh (1995), Moser Mercer (1994: 15) states that "Good training programs offer students sufficient exposure to a variety of speakers" and that Examination conditions should mirror real conference conditions; live speakers ad-libbing speeches come much closer to real life than extraneous texts taped and played back on poor sound equipment. In some professional exams, students have a chance to prove themselves both with ad-libbed speeches and with written texts, which they take to the booth and interpret as an interpreter-examiner reads the original, live.*vii*

Daniel Gale says three main factors must be in place at the beginning of training: Interpreters (and translators) need to have good command of their active working languages, have sufficient knowledge of the themes and subject-matters addressed by the texts or speeches they Translate and have both declarative and procedural knowledge about Translation (Gile 8-9).

Gile, who is a very well respected scholar on interpreting, acts on the assumption that formal training for interpreters helps them to "enhance their performance to the full realization of their potential" and to improve their performance and skills more rapidly than without formal training (Gile 7). However, training programs at university are between 2 and 4 years. Three to four year programs are at the under-graduate level but two year long ones more commonly at post-graduate level. Shorter and intense forms of training are sometimes available, mostly these are taught at institutions that use interpreter services, such as the United Nations (Gile 11).

Simultaneous interpreting training is usually not recommended until the consecutive has been trained for a while. In the conference interpreting, training in the University of Iceland this model of training is followed. The first semester focuses only on consecutive interpreting and simultaneous is introduced in the second semester. The students start interpreting from their B-language into their A-language, that is, from a foreign language that they can speak actively and into their mother tongue. Later, the 2qtraining goes on to include interpreting from A into a B-language and from C language(s) into A -or mother tongue (Jones and Kennsluskrá).

Sandra Beatriz Hale (2007: 22) these are acquired through training and/or experience. A bilingual person may understand perfectly well what was said by the source speaker (phase one of the process), but will not be able to convert the utterance into the target language if unequipped with the appropriate interpreting skills.

    Technical skills required include:
    • Note-taking,
    • Mastery of the different modes of interpreting (short consecutive, long consecutive, simultaneous, sight translation),
    • Situational management (knowing when and how to interrupt, take turns, seating arrangements),
    • The ability to deconstruct and reconstruct the message quickly,
    • The ability to make difficult, complex choices under pressure,
    • The ability to concentrate, listen and make use of long and short- term memory.

Conclusion and Findings
This paper demonstrated the nature of SI and illustrated the interrelated types of interpreting. The researcher investigated the factors that inhibit achieving high quality of SI. It has been found that thus factors impede SI. Many resources are consulted to highlight the problems and meet the challenges of interpreting as well. The researcher found that all these factors could be overcome by practice. Therefore, there should be ample continuous training and practice to eliminate these challenging the factors that impede SI.

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