

The Adaptation of a Novel to Filmic Needs: Thematic Focus in the Subtitles of Two Filmic Versions of *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify the shared and unshared themes in the dialogues of two screen adaptations of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and to determine to what extent they correspond to those identified by scholars in both the novel and the films. The subtitles from the two films were semantically tagged, and compared with the spoken part of the BNC sampler to extract their key semantic domains. These concordances were qualitatively examined through a close reading of their concordance lines. The analyses showed that the subtitles of the two films share a set of themes relevant to the plot, and reflect all the core themes that scholarly work has repeatedly identified in the novel on the basis of corpus methods or subjective observations. However, quantitative and qualitative differences were observed. The subtitles of the 2005 film give more prominence to romantic love and individual relationships, while those of the 1940 version include a wider number of themes, and have a stronger focus on social conventions and social judgements.

Keywords: corpus-informed analysis, subtitles, film dialogue, filmic transposition, *Pride and Prejudice*.

1. Introduction

The investigation of fictional narratives involves the identification, explicitation and motivation of their themes, the description of their characters' traits and behaviour, and the decodification of their viewpoints. This sheds light on the author's implied outlook on the issues, phenomena and circumstances that their narratives focus on.

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Traditional discussion of fictional works – be they textual or filmic – consists in detailed commentaries on their content, style and structure. It relies on scholars' understanding of their topics and views, and their familiarity with the relevant literary, socio-cultural and historical context. Such interpretive work requires insight and perceptiveness, disciplinary knowledge, and an ability to notice similarities and contrasts across texts, genres and authors. But the subjective understanding gained in this way is not amenable to verification, because either it is not supported by systematic evidence or it has not been derived from the application of a replicable approach. In addition, the skills required for this job are a combination of talent and experience which develops over time and cannot be easily taught to other scholars. Analyses will become more valid only if they can *show*, besides *informing* us of, what works of fiction are like.

An alternative type of investigation involves identifying recurrent topics in fictional works and finding ways to encode them through a corpus-informed analysis of their lexico-semantic make-up. Indeed, a recent trend in linguistics is the analysis of literary works using corpus-informed methods, which has made it possible to identify themes, profile characters, trace the sequencing of narrative episodes, outline and contextualise cultural values and beliefs, and also account for readers' intuitive responses to literature (*e.g.* Hubbard 2002; Mahlberg 2010; Scott and Tribble 2006; Culpeper 2002; Stubbs 2005; Rayson 2008; Culpeper, Archer, Rayson 2009). This approach has been largely applied to written narratives, but much less so to fictional products that are not completely verbal, such as films.

In this paper we analyse the subtitles of the 1940 and 2005 filmic adaptations of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, in order to identify shared and unshared themes in their dialogues, and to determine to what extent they correspond to those observed by scholars in both the novel and the films. More specifically, we address these research questions: RQ1) What themes characterise the two films?; RQ2) Are they given similar prominence in the two films?; RQ3) Do they match those described in the literature? These issues are explored by using a corpus-informed approach, which comprises the automatic semantic tagging of the texts considered, the automatic extraction of their key semantic domains, and a close reading of the concordance lines in which they are instantiated.

Our approach is grounded on the following considerations. First, a screen adaptation is a condensed version of the literary work based on the director's interpretation of the original text (Kaplan 2007). It is thus the outcome of a conscious selective process. An investigation of the verbal component of a film may reveal the themes the director has chosen to focus on. Also, a bottom-up, evidence-based approach is verifiable, and can show whether the themes previously identified through qualitative analyses of the films (see Section 2), which primarily considered visual features, are borne out by a quantitative examination of their lexis. Finally, by applying corpus methods to filmic products, we aim to contribute to investigating the little-explored area of the role that dialogues play in films.

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 contextualises our study. Section 3 reports on the data collection and analysis. Section 4 presents the findings of the study, and Section 5 summarises the findings and draws implications from them.

2. Background

Jane Austen's works portray ever topical themes (*i.e.* class, love, wealth). A case in point is *Pride and Prejudice*, which depicts a social microcosm and presents a worldview through the combined techniques of showing and telling. As literary scholars have argued, the novel shows how individuals' desires are constrained by, but nevertheless fulfilled within, society's conventions (Ailwood 2007), stressing the importance of harmonising the familial and social orders (Wiesenfarth 2001), and shaping romantic love with wisdom (Anderson 2007) for happiness to be achieved (Wiesenfarth 2001). It illustrates how certain convictions and conventions absurdly affect peoples' lives, thus conveying irony (Powley 2003). The novel also creates well-rounded characters (Morris 2004), exploring their relationships (Ellwood 2001) and development through dialogues, allusions to standards, other characters' description of them, and by contrasting their behaviour and their personality types (Wilson 2004; Rytting 2001). The only corpus-informed study of the novel we know of is Fischer-Starcke's (2009). By using corpus tools, the author compared this novel to a corpus comprising four other literary works by Austen, and to one including 30 novels by authors roughly contemporary with Austen, thus identifying the keywords

(*i.e.* unusually frequent words) peculiar to *Pride and Prejudice*. Next, she manually grouped the keywords into larger semantic fields, showing how the novel focuses on the topics of family relationships; the characters' emotions, mental states and perceptions; courtship, marriage and love; and communication (p. 449). She also observed the ample presence of words referring to men and women (with a predominance of females), and the military (p. 448).

Pride and Prejudice has been repeatedly adapted to the screen. Its two best-known film adaptations are the 1940 film directed by Robert Z. Leonard, and the 2005 film directed by Joe Wright. In both works, the content, structure and slant of the novel are adapted – through the use of cinematic techniques – to provide a nostalgic picture of England and to suit viewers' social and narrative preferences (Stovel 2013).

Studies examining the 1940 film have defined it as a screwball comedy (Stovel 2013; Parril 2002) with farcical situations and characters, but also as a courtship comedy with sentimental features (Sørbø 2014; Ellington [1989] 2001; Cartmell 2010), which explores the themes of class differences, wealth, social conventions and humour (Cartmell 2010; Sørbø 2014). Scholars have also observed how this work sentimentalises the family – portraying the Bennets as affectionate and united – and highlights the common good that the familial microcosm can provide to the individual that fits into it (Seeber 2007; Barcsay 2006).

The analyses of the 2005 film have discussed its genre membership, content, (non-)adherence to the novel and filmic techniques. First, the film does not fully adhere to the heritage tradition: while it shows spectacular landscapes (Dole 2007) and formal events in ornate interiors (Durgan 2007), it also represents the realistic details of an agricultural economy (Dole 2007). Second, it is a romantic comedy focusing on the love story between Darcy and Elizabeth (Chan 2007; Martin 2007; Woodworth 2007), and Elizabeth's emotional journey (Stewart-Beer 2007), thus exploring the tension between individual aspirations and the social order (Ailwood 2007; Anderson 2007). Third, the film differs in several respects from the novel: a) it avoids dealing with the issues of class consciousness and status differences – *e.g.* social connections, marital politics, propriety of behaviour – (Camden 2007; Woodworth 2007); b) it uses space to metaphorically represent characters' social positioning, the protagonists being

represented as social outsiders through their frequent association with the natural world (Dole 2007); c) it often adopts the point of view of Elizabeth (Camden 2007; Gollay 2007; Wells 2007), portraying her as an authoritative and dominant figure (Wells 2007; Anderson 2007), and a free spirit (Chan 2007); and d) it positively depicts the Bennets as a protective and loving family, while downplaying the head of household's shortcomings (Seeber 2007). Furthermore, through clever use of the camera, with constant movement between angles of vision, it explores the characters' inner lives (Dole 2007), thus staging intimacy and introspection (Paquet-Deyris 2007).

The above-mentioned studies are all based on an observation of the overall filmic products, and illustrated with reference to their visual features alone. As far as we know, the only linguistic investigation of a filmic transposition of *Pride and Prejudice* is a corpus-study by Bianchi (2016), which examines the subtitles of Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice*. Her analysis involved: automatic semantic tagging; automatic comparison to the spoken part of the BNC sampler, with extraction of key domains and key POS tags; and manual analysis and reclassification of the extracted concordance lines. Her findings indicate that the film is focused on the semantic fields of positively connoted feelings, negatively connoted attitudes, family and interpersonal relationships, social life, and social norms. This study adopts a similar approach.

3. Method

To analyse the verbal component of the films in question, we focused on their subtitles, for two reasons: as transpositions of dialogues, which include punctuation, subtitles are ready for corpus analysis; also, as they are written by professionals and approved by production/distribution, they adequately reproduce the core contents of the dialogues. Subtitles may differ in form from the dialogues they transcribe; in fact, reading speed and display size sometimes call for avoiding the reproduction of features typical of spoken language (*e.g.* hesitations, repetitions) or for condensing meaning into more compact phrasings (for a list of typical techniques see *e.g.* Diaz-Cintas, Remael 2007). However, this does not impact their overall content. We extracted the subtitles from the films' DVDs, obtaining two corpora (14,992 words *vs* 15,220 words for the 2005 and 1940 film, respectively).

The analysis was carried out in two steps with the help of Wmatrix (Rayson 2003), an automatic tagger and corpus-analysis tool. Wmatrix matched each word (or multi-word unit)¹ to a semantic category from a given list (the USAS tagset, embedded in the software), and for each corpus created a list showing the frequency of those semantic categories. Next, by comparing our corpora to the spoken part of the BNC sampler – already semantically tagged by the software – Wmatrix identified the positive key semantic domains (Rayson 2008) of the two films, that is those semantic categories that showed statistically higher frequencies of occurrence. To do so, the software was set to use the log likelihood (LL) statistic, and only values higher than 15.13 ($p < 0.0001$ id.f.) were considered. Such a threshold is sufficiently stringent to indicate high statistical significance, and is suitable for small corpora, such as the ones in this study, where lower p values would return no results (cf. Culpeper, Archer, Rayson 2009; Bianchi 2016).

Despite its powerful features, Wmatrix's semantic tagging has some limits. The USAS tagging is decontextualised, and each word is uniquely attributed to one of the USAS categories, some of which are general (e.g. *E4: Happy/sad*; *S4: Kin*), while others are specific (e.g. *E4.1+: Happy*; *S2.2: People: Female*). Furthermore, the list of categories is not homogenous, as it includes semantic, but also grammatical categories (e.g. *Z1: Personal names*). Thus, for example, references to women are scattered across several domains: *S2.2: People: Female*; *Z1: Personal names* (e.g. 'Elizabeth'); and *S4: Kin* (e.g. 'sister'). Similarly, references to the social – as opposed to the personal – sphere can be found in *K1: Entertainment* (e.g. word 'dancing') and in *S6+: Strong obligation: Necessity*.

To overcome these limits, we manually checked the concordance lines in all the key domains with $LL > 15.13$, re-assigning them to new, inductively identified themes cutting across the domains originally identified by the software (see examples below). In doing so, we aimed to label themes so that they would not overlap with one another semantically. One author coded the lines, while the other checked their classification. When in disagreement, we discussed the co-text and context of the lines until we made a decision. When we could not agree, we assigned the lines to the category 'Other'. Also, repeated readings

¹ Wmatrix recognises multi-word expressions (e.g. *Ms Bennet, have to, in love*) as units of meaning.

of concordances suggested that, besides illustrating given themes, some lines also conveyed a connotative meaning, others stressed the involvement of the characters in the interaction, and still others denoted personal or social merits and demerits, notions previously identified in Bianchi (2016) and Fischer-Starcke (2009). In such cases, we also coded the relevant lines for these additional themes, namely EVALUATION, COMMUNICATION and MERITS AND DEMERITS, respectively.

For example, in the 2005 film, the key domain *Q2: Speech Acts* included a set of concordances such as the following:

- 1) *us chase it. Oh, dear! I do apologise, sir. I'm awfully sorry.*
- 2) *Only deep love will persuade me to marry*
- 3) *reversible? It is. Why do you ask such a question? To make out*
- 4) *You forget I have given no answer. Lady Catherine will thorough*
- 5) *you like most to hear? That reply will do for present. Perhaps*

In concordance [1], the node word (underlined)² refers to a range of social actions aimed at managing social debts/credits, including pleasantries. In concordance [2], the node word represents an attempt to influence other people's behaviour connected to the personal sphere. In concordance [3], the node word point to an information exchange. We attributed [2] to the theme SOCIETY AND MANNERS, and [3] to the theme PEOPLE AND FAMILY TIES. We also classified all the concordances of this semantic domain as COMMUNICATION, namely, verbal exchange.

To give another example, the following list shows the 1940 film concordances of key domain S6+ (Strong obligation or necessity):

- 6) *Is Miss Bingley engaged to Mr. Darcy? If she is, she ought to break it. Why? No man can be in love and look so bored!*
- 7) *I'm starving! So am I! How long do we have to wait for this Collins person?*
- 8) *Mr. Collins will take Miss Bennet. I'm afraid you'll have to go in alone, Mrs. Collins. Mr. Darcy 's sister, Georgiana, is*
- 9) *The man must be mad.*

Example [6] attends to the notion of obligation originating from personal views rather than conventions; example [7] evokes the

² In each example, the underlined word is the one that the software matched to the given semantic domain.

social obligation of respecting good manners in polite society (*i.e.* waiting for a guest before starting dinner); concordance [8] refers to necessities imposed by circumstances. Finally, concordance [9] encodes no obligation, but rather epistemic modality. Personal obligation contributes to the theme PEOPLE AND FAMILY TIES, while social obligation to the theme SOCIETY AND MANNERS. A very small percentage of the concordance lines in this domain indicated some form of COMMUNICATION (*e.g.* *You must come and visit me, Lizzie. Very soon! Promise? I promise*).

The following section sums up the findings of the lexico-semantic analysis.

4. Results

The 1940 and 2005 corpora illustrate 45 and 34 key domains, respectively. Of these, 25 are shared (Table 1), while 20 are specific to the 1940 film (Table 2), and 9 to the 2005 one (Table 3). Tables 1-3 present: the codes the software assigns to the domains (*e.g.* S7.2) and their official descriptions (*e.g.* Respect), and, for the codes ending with the plus/minus sign, our reformulated descriptions, in square brackets, where appropriate (*e.g.* Lack of respect), with examples in round brackets.

TABLE 1
Key domains in both films

S4	Kin (<i>sister; papa</i>)	I1.1-	Money: Lack [Poverty] (<i>poor; penniless</i>)
Z1	Personal names (<i>Elizabeth Bennet</i>)	S7.2+	Respect [Deference] (<i>admire; esteemed</i>)
A13.3	Degree: Boosters (<i>so; very</i>)	St.2.3+	Egoism [Selfishness] (<i>arrogant; patronizing</i>)
E4.2+	Happy/sad: Contentment (<i>pleasure; proud</i>)	G2.2+	General ethics [Morality] (<i>forgive; honour</i>)
E2+	Liking [Liking] (<i>darling; affection</i>)	St.2.4+	Politeness [Courtesy] (<i>compliment; thankful</i>)

(continued on next page)

TABLE 1 (continued from previous page)

S3.1	Social Actions, States and Processes: Relationship: General (<i>friendship</i> ; <i>partner</i>)	O4.2+	Judgement of appearance [Positive judgement] (<i>nice</i> ; <i>charming</i>)
X2.6+	Expect [Expectation] (<i>hope</i> ; <i>expectation</i>)	I1.1+++	Money: Affluence [Wealth] (<i>fortune</i>)
S2.1	People: Female (<i>miss</i> ; <i>woman</i>)	S6+	Strong obligation or necessity (<i>oblige</i> ; <i>duty</i>)
A13	Degree (<i>indeed</i> ; <i>so</i>)	S1.1.1	Social Actions, States and Processes: General (<i>introduced</i> ; <i>treated</i>)
K1	Entertainment generally (<i>play</i> ; <i>leisure</i>)	A2.2	Affect: Cause/ Connected (<i>reasons</i> ; <i>join</i>)
T1.1	Time: General (<i>ever</i>)	S1.2.6-	Sensible [Foolish] (<i>fool</i> ; <i>ridiculous</i>)
E4.1+	Happy/sad: Happy (<i>delighted</i> ; <i>bliss</i>)	S7.2-	Respect [Lack of respect] (<i>derision</i> ; <i>dishonour</i>)
Q2.2	Speech acts (<i>apologize</i> ; <i>proposal</i>)		

TABLE 2

Key domains in the 1940 film

A1.4-	Chance, luck [Misfortune] (<i>misfortunes</i> ; <i>unfortunately</i>)	S1.2.4-	Politeness [Impoliteness] (<i>insolence</i> ; <i>offended</i>)
B2-	Health and disease [Disease] (<i>symptoms</i> ; <i>sick</i>)	S7.4+	Permission [Consent] (<i>consent</i> ; <i>allow</i>)

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TABLE 2 (continued from previous page)

E1	Emotional actions, States and Processes: General (<i>compassion; wit</i>)	T1.1.3	Time: General: Future ('ll; <i>going to</i>)
E2-	Liking [Dislike] (<i>detestable; hate</i>)	W2	Light (<i>shining; lights</i>)
E2+++	Liking [Liking] (<i>dearest</i>)	X2.3+	Learn [Learning] (<i>hear about; find out</i>)
E4.1++	Happy/sad: Happy (<i>happier; raptures</i>)	X2.6-	Expect [Surprise] (<i>wonder; surprising</i>)
I1.1+	Money: Affluence [Wealth] (<i>rich; wealth</i>)	X3.1	Sensory: Taste (<i>taste; sweetest</i>)
Sl.2.3-	Egoism [Unselfishness] (<i>unselfish; modesty</i>)	X5.1-	Attention [Inattentiveness] (<i>disturb; disregard</i>)
Sl.1.4+	Deserve etc. [Deserving] (<i>deserve</i>)	X9.2-	Ability: Success and failure [Failure] (<i>lost; failures</i>)
Sl.2	Personality traits (<i>childish; kindness</i>)	Z99	Unmatched

TABLE 3
Key domains in the 2005 film

A13.2	Degree: Maximisers (<i>perfectly; most</i>)	S2.2	People: Male (<i>man; gentleman</i>)
A13.7	Degree: Minimisers (<i>hardly; at least</i>)	S3.2	Relationship: Intimacy and sex (<i>love; romantic</i>)
A5.2+	Evaluation: True/false [Truth] (<i>in fact; frankness</i>)	X7++	Wanting; planning; choosing [Will] (<i>impulse; caprice</i>)
A7+	Definite (+modals) [Likelihood] (<i>can; would</i>)	Z8	Pronouns etc. (<i>what; me</i>)
Sl.1.3+++	Participation [Intervention] (<i>interfere; intrude</i>)		

Table 4 shows the themes we identified after reading the concordance lines instantiating the key domains. It reports their frequency in raw figures and percentage values. As the table shows, both films focus on the following themes: PEOPLE AND FAMILY TIES; ROMANTIC LOVE; SOCIETY AND MANNERS; EMOTIONS; PRIDE; MONEY; EVALUATION; MERITS AND DEMERITS; and COMMUNICATION. These results are broadly in line with Fischer-Starcke's (2009) findings in her corpus analysis of the novel (Section 2). Indeed, our theme PEOPLE AND FAMILY TIES groups together her categories of 'women', 'men', 'family and interpersonal relationships'; our theme COMMUNICATION corresponds to her category 'communication'; the characters' emotions, mental states and perceptions she identified appear in the films as the themes EMOTIONS, PRIDE, and EVALUATION; finally, her category of 'courtship, marriage and love' is distributed in our study across the themes ROMANTIC LOVE and SOCIETY AND MANNERS, since marriage is often seen as a social duty or need.

TABLE 4
Themes

Themes	Concordance lines in		
	1940 film (%)	2005 film (%)	Theme ratio
PEOPLE AND FAMILY TIES	1,371 (48.63)	2,713 (73.98)	1:1.5
ROMANTIC LOVE	14 (0.50)	42 (1.15)	1:2.3
SOCIETY AND MANNERS	481 (17.06)	223 (6.08)	2.8:1
EMOTIONS	43 (1.53)	24 (0.65)	2.3:1
HEALTH	26 (0.92)	0 (0.00)	
PRIDE	25 (0.89)	17 (0.46)	1.9:1
MONEY	22 (0.78)	9 (0.25)	3.1:1
FATE	9 (0.32)	0 (0.00)	
EVALUATION	223 (7.91)	90 (2.45)	3.2:1
MERITS AND DEMERITS	175 (6.21)	75 (2.05)	3:1
COMMUNICATION	161 (5.71)	110 (3.00)	1.9:1

However, in the two films, different weight is given to the shared themes. The 2005 film gives more prominence to ROMANTIC LOVE (ratio: 2.3:1), and individual relationships (PEOPLE AND FAMILY TIES; ratio: 1.5:1). The 1940 film highlights social relations/conventions

(SOCIETY AND MANNERS; ratio: 2.8:1), MONEY (ratio: 3.1:1), impressions and opinions (EVALUATION; ratio: 3.2:1), health and medicine (HEALTH), Fate, and social judgements interpretable as socially recognised merits or demerits (MERITS AND DEMERITS; ratio: 3:1). The presence of the theme HEALTH is probably due to the film's farcical situations and characters (*e.g.* the Doctor's visit to Jane in Bingley's house; Mrs. Bennet's lamentations about her health). Interestingly, in the 1940 film, the prominent presence of the MERITS AND DEMERITS theme is also characterised by an extremely varied series of labels, identifying permanent and temporary behavioural traits (Table 5).

TABLE 5
Merits and demerits: labels

<i>Merits</i>		<i>Demerits</i>	
<i>Common to both films</i>		<i>Common to both films</i>	
being agreeable/charming/pleasant		Stupidity	
being rich		Pride	
civility		foolishness	
forgiveness		disturbing others	
elegance			
graciousness			
gratitude			
politeness			
<i>1940 only</i>	<i>2005 only</i>	<i>1940 only</i>	<i>2005 only</i>
beauty	being good-humoured	making a fool of oneself	being poor
being refined	frankness	being unladylike	being ridiculous
affability	propriety	childishness	capriciousness
compassion		frivolousness	irrationality
condescension		disregard for others	
decorum		impertinence	
diplomacy		Incivility	
fairness		Insolence	
good taste		being a libertine	
honour		offending people	
integrity		rudeness	
intelligence		silliness	

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TABLE 5 (continued from previous page)

1940 only

kindness
liveliness
loyalty
mercy
modesty
nice tone of voice
nobility
respect
self-reproach
unselfishness

5. Conclusion

This paper has contrasted the subtitles of two filmic adaptations of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, in order to identify the shared and unshared themes in the dialogues of the two films, with unshared themes revealing the film directors' personal interpretations of the novel. Furthermore, it has explored to what extent the themes in the films correspond to those observed in the novel by other scholars, thus making the first forays towards the identification of the role that dialogues play in filmic transpositions. To this end, we used corpus-informed methods of investigation.

This led us to establish that the films share themes relevant to the plot, focusing on interpersonal feelings (ROMANTIC LOVE; EMOTIONS; PRIDE), interpersonal relationships (PEOPLE AND FAMILY TIES; COMMUNICATION), and sensitivity to social values (SOCIETY AND MANNERS; MONEY; EVALUATION; MERITS AND DEMERITS) (RQ1). However, while the 2005 film mainly focuses on two themes (ROMANTIC LOVE and PEOPLE AND FAMILY TIES), the 1940 one distributes its focus across all of the identified themes, and includes a more varied list of merits and demerits (RQ2). Finally, the themes identified in the films reflect all of the core themes of the novel, as determined by Fischer-Starcke (2009) using corpus-methods, but also as generally described in more traditional interpretive works

on *Pride and Prejudice* (Section 2). The themes we identified in the films also match the observations reported in previous scholarly literature (Section 2), which are based on the visual features of the films and relate to the entire narrative (RQ₃).

Our results clearly show that, though inspired by the same novel, the two films are characterised by different approaches, and that this can be observed in the film dialogues and subtitles by using corpus-informed methods. The study provides support for the view that a corpus-informed approach to the analysis of subtitles can successfully bring to light specific semantic domains and larger themes characterising filmic transpositions of a literary work. In the present case, evidence was collected supporting previous scholarly interpretations of the given films, in a way that makes replication studies possible. Since it was based exclusively on the verbal component, however, this type of analysis could be integrated with an analysis of the visual and aural components.

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