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Effectiveness of Direct Teaching of Apology Speech Act Strategies in Improving Kurdish Students' Pragmatic Competence

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ABSTRACT

Grammar rules are essential for acquiring knowledge of any language. In the learning process, the difficult respect is the pragmatic principle of language, which brings about several challenges to language learners. Teachers should look for the most influential approach in instructing pragmatic skills to cope with this issue. To do so, the study aimed to investigate the effect of direct teaching of the apology type of speech act on the Kurdish students' development in apology strategies. A total number of 73 Kurdish students took part in a pretest, treatment, and posttest teaching that was divided into four groups. Two experimental groups of intermediate and advanced levels and two control groups of intermediate and advanced levels. To collect the data, a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) composed of ten open-ended apology discourse scenarios was used. To select the apologetic situations, social and distance status variables were employed. The results showed that direct teaching was effective in facilitating and developing apology strategies and pragmatic competence for Kurdish EFL learners in various contexts.

Keywords: Direct teaching, Apology speech act, Apologetic strategies, Pragmatic competence, Pragmatic expectation, Kurdish students

1. Introduction

Communication is specific to a certain context and dynamic in nature. It has to do with the negotiation of meaning between two or more interlocutors, who understand the scenario and also rely on pre-existing knowledge (Savignon, 1983). In other words, a person's language performance depends on the interaction between their competence and the communicative competence of others (Hymes, 1977). Language competence is classified into "organizational and pragmatic competence" (Bachman, 1990, p.87).

Organizational competence consists of information about linguistic patterns and orders of the rules to make a text. These capacities are divided into two forms: "grammatical and discourse competence". Secondly, communicative competence is classified into "illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence" (ibid)

Insufficient knowledge of vocabulary and grammar makes the speakers to be incapable of producing language functions as native speakers do. These speakers need to gain communicative competence and become conscious of not only the differences of the two languages but also the two cultures (Rajabi, Azaizfar, and Gowhary, 2015). Hymes (1963) states that speech norms are affected by culture-specific and/or social restraints that assist speakers about “what to say”, “to whom”, and “under what condition”. Consequently, English language pedagogy needs teachers to promote learners’ “speech acts” competence in an appropriate pedagogical practice (Takahashi, 1996).

Speech acts are defined as “all the acts we perform through speaking, all the things we do when we speak” and “the interpretation and negotiations of speech acts are dependent on the discourse or contexts.” Since a speech act is an expression aimed at achieving the goal of communication, speakers’ use is to fulfill communicative purposes Schmidt and Richards (1980, cited in Istifçi, 2009, p.19). So, it is pivotal for EFL learners to know the way speech act sets are produced both in native and non-native languages. Speech acts as “functions” of language, comprising, for example “complaining, thanking, requesting, apologizing, refusing, and inviting” (ibid). There are many more types of speech acts: other examples are predicting, speculating, commanding, etc.

When the speakers’ behavior fails to comply with the social norms, the act of apology emerges. Therefore, when an action or expression has resulted from some sort of wrongdoing, the act of apologizing is greatly needed to set things right (Eslami-Rasekh and Mardani, 2010). Leech (1983) argues that the speech act of apology is a noteworthy aid after committing an offense to put back the relationship between participants. The act of apologizing normally needs the presence of two parties who are usually the person who apologizes (apologizer) and the other who receives the apology (apologizee). As a result, it seems essential for teachers to draw the learners’ utmost attention to apology speech act rules to let them be qualified in employing apologetic strategies (Rajabi, Azizifar, and Gowhary, 2015). This could be carried out in many ways; chief among is explicit teaching of the aforementioned strategies. In so doing, the current study is aiming to explore the impact of direct teaching of the apology speech act strategies on Kurdish EFL students’ pragmatic competence. Therefore, it attempts to answer the following research question.

- Does explicit instruction of the apology type of speech act affect EFL students’ pragmatic competence?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Theoretical Background

Pragmatic competence is a complex term and has many definitions; it is not easy to define (Levinson, 1983). This term mostly refers to the utilization of language in various communication contexts, especially the connection between sentence patterns, situations, and contexts where they are utilized (Mohammed, 2012, p.23). Pragmatics is the speaker's intended meaning (Yule, 1996). It is the study of language users' ability to match a set of utterances with the situation in which they are suitable (Levinson, 1983). Similarly, Jaszczolt (2002) believes that pragmatics covers the way recipients add on contextual knowledge to the semantic form and how they infer from what is uttered.

The ability of learners to catch the main ideas of what a speaker utters in real communication is known as communicative competence in language pedagogy (Terrell, 1977, p.326). Communicative competence also involves the ability of learners to transmit the main points of their messages adequately to the context of their messages. Tateyama (2001) asserts that instruction is beneficial in the field of pragmatics. For learners who are eager to learn and put into practice the new structures and patterns of communication, classrooms are one of the safe settings. Thus, the learners can participate in the communication and broaden their insights and horizons about the language, culture, and its users.

The appropriate application of speech acts is an indivisible part of pragmatic competence. John L. Austin presented the theory of speech acts in 1962 to refer to the entire context of utterance. He further states that the speech acts theory is not solely used to say things but to perform actions as well. Austin (1962, p.5) divides the utterances into "performative vs. constatives". The former is neither "describe[s]", "report[s]" nor confesses anything and is not correct or incorrect. The latter is a sentence that can be judged in terms of truth in the sense that does not cause actions (Aydin, 2013). Language is used as a medium for using speech act in fulfilling actions. Searle (1976, p.67) systematized Austin's theory and came up with his speech act theory that classified illocutionary speech acts into five categories: "Representatives 'which commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding, etc)' (Searle 1976 as cited in Álvarez, 2005: 696). An example is 'Passengers are hereby advised that the train will be late' (Searle, 1976, p.67). Directives 'which are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (paradigm cases: requesting, questioning). (Searle 1976 as cited in Álvarez, 2005: 696). To exemplify, 'I order you to leave' (Searle, 1976, p.67). Commissives 'which commit the speaker to some future course of action (paradigm cases: promising, threatening, offering)' (Searle 1976 as

cited in Álvarez, 2005: 696) For instance, ‘I promise to pay you the money’ (Searle, 1976, p.67). Expressives that express a psychological state (paradigm cases: thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating) (Searle 1976 as cited in Álvarez, 2005: 696). For example, ‘I apologize for stepping on your toe.’ (Searle, 1976, p.67), and Declaratives ‘which effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (paradigm cases: excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment).’ (Searle 1976 as cited in Álvarez, 2005: 696). An example is ‘I call him a liar’ (Searle, 1976, p.67).

Apology is an expressive speech act that seems difficult for EFL learners’ appropriate use. Apology has been defined differently by different scholars. For example, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) found apology as a social act and they thought that its use is when social norms are being violated. Some scholars refrain from the meaning of apology. For example, Owen (1983) restricts the meaning of apology only to expressions such as “sorry” and “I apologize”. For Goffman (1967) apologizing is a sort of “remedy”. In his study, Holmes (1995) revealed similarities and differences in the way genders perform apologies. Majeed and Janjua (2014) found that in contrast to males, females seem more aware of their face-saving and utilize less hazardous strategies with their family members and friends. Both genders use the same kind of strategies on formal occasions.

Suszczynska (1999) states that speech act theory categorizes and specifies apology patterns on the bases of the felicity conditions that comprises of a verb of apologetic performance and an utterance of remorse. Additionally, apology is related to concurrent functions it may serve. For instance, it can be regarded as a rectifying word used to cure an existing offense to keep up or bring back ruined social harmony (Goffman, 1971) or it is a negative politeness strategy that signifies the speaker’s unwillingness to influence the hearer’s negative face to preserve the receiver’s honor (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.187). Apology is classified into seven prototypical and diverse types of strategies to perform norms of apologizing which are the outcomes of cross-cultural diversities (Blum-Kulak, House, & Kasper, 1989.p.9). To conclude, apologies are of several taxonomies, yet; the linguistic expression of apologies is language-culture specific. Many studies have been done about learners’ usage of apology strategies in EFL settings. Here is the review of some of those studies.

2.2 Previous Studies

There was a socio-pragmatic study to investigate the apology speech act pattern realization in the Persian language, in which a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) questionnaire of 10

fixed discourse scenarios was used to gather the intended data. The respondents were 100 native Persian university students of equal males and females. The study found that similar to other languages, apologies in Persian are formulaic in pragmatic structure. The apology formula mostly used in Persian was the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID). Also, the findings revealed that there is a relationship between the apology intensifiers of social distance and power (Afghari, 2007). In addition, the result of a study to explore the use of apologies in the cross-culture of Persian and English-British accents carried out by (Chamani and Zareipur, 2010) showed that although English and Persian interlocutors use a fairly similar range of apology strategies, they were significantly different in their preferences. Another study about the use of apology as an expressive type of speech act by Iraqi EFL students was conducted by Mayuuf and Asi (2013). Two groups of participants were recruited. The study aimed to explore the extent to which these two groups are similar and different in the speech act of apology realization. To this end, two classes of forty foreign language students were recruited among whom 20 were in the level of intermediate and the other half in the level of advanced along with 5 English teachers whose native language was English. The study was conducted at Babylon iBT TOEFL Center. To gather the intended data, 8 apology scenarios were used through a Discourse Completion Test. The participants had been asked to take a placement test and based on their results were assigned to two different proficiency levels. The data were analyzed and the frequencies were driven to compare the groups. The results indicated that in some states the participants in the advanced level used apologies as native speakers did and more than the intermediate group. Both groups were similar in the use of formulas in some conditions, yet different from native speakers. It also revealed that the subjects' native language interference affected their use of apologies.

In another study, Istifçi (2009) studied the extent to which apology type of speech act is used with the sample of an intermediate level class of 20 learners, one advanced English proficiency level class of 20 EFL learners, and 5 English native speakers. The collected data were from DCT composed of eight apology scenarios. According to the obtained results from her study, she claimed that there are similarities and differences between the two groups. The participants' native language had effects on the use of apologies, for the most part, the intermediate-level group of subjects transferred Turkish speaker norms in English.

Discovering the impact of instructing apology strategies with a special emphasis on intensifying ones was a study carried out by Eslami-Rasekh and Mardani (2010) in which sixty subjects participated who were homogenized and grouped into explicit and implicit apology teaching strategies. The results demonstrated that the participants in the group of the

direct teaching of apology strategy outperformed the other group, and also, the results indicated that the subjects who got direct instruction of apology strategy used intensifiers more properly in comparison to the subjects without direct apology strategy instruction.

2.3 The Problem Statement

The existing literature on language pedagogy is not evident in the adequate and appropriate use of linguistic competency. Not only linguistic competence and grammatical “knowledge”, but also socio-pragmatic principles of language are prerequisites for effective communication. The acquisition of the socio-pragmatic aspect of language may be done by contacting native users of English for example, in immersion or exchange programs, but not all students have access to such programs. This study aims to explore the impact of direct teaching of apology strategies on Kurdish students’ pragmatic skill development.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Research

The current study was designed around the quantitative method of research. The quantitative approach as stated by Robinson (1981) followed a pretest-posttest experimental design.

3.2 Participants and Setting

This study takes 73 male and female Kurdish EFL undergraduates who were third-year students of two large classes. A convenience sample was used as there were only those numbers of people available for the study (Best & Kahn, 2006) who participated voluntarily. They signed a consent form to participate in their will. They were divided into four smaller classes of 18-19 students each per class at the Department of English Language-Faculty of Education prior to exposing to any test performance whose ages were between 20-23 years old. Gender and age were not considered as a variable. The classes were classified into two experimental and two control groups. They took part in the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) which was taken from (Allan, 2004) at the beginning of the term. The analysis of the OPT demonstrated that two of the students must be expelled from the study as their test scores were below the standards of the OPT scores. Depending on the results of the test, two classes were assigned as intermediate and the other two were as advanced levels who were native users of Kurdish. The research was conducted in the second semester of the academic year (2023-2024).

3.3 Tools and Data Collection

3.3.1 Tools

The two instruments used for the collected data were a verified test “Oxford Placement Test” by Oxford University (Allan, 2004). “Discourse Completion Test” as pre and post-tests in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns Project (CCSARP) by (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989). Although the DCT is not appropriate for studying actual language use, it can supply interesting and informative results (Golato, 2003). The OPT tool helps teachers to know the right place and proficiency level of students at the beginning of the course (Rajabi et al, 2015, p.53). At the start of the study, a DCT was utilized as a pre-test, which consists of a set of defined situations to extract particular speech acts (Varghese and Billmyer, 1996).

3.3.2 Data Collection

The researchers adopted pre-test, treatment, and post-test as the procedure of data collection. In the first place, OPT was administered to 75 learners of two classes at the Department of English Language-Faculty of Education at Koya University. The rest of the students were assigned to the control and experimental groups. To lay out the equivalency of both groups in terms of proficiency before the main phase of the research, i.e., the experimental, comparability of both groups was extracted through comparing the pretest mean scores that shows there was no statistically significant difference between the groups. The DCT contains 10 scenarios that provided participants the chance to record their speech act preferences at the beginning and at the end of the course in the pre and post-tests. While the control group did not get any treatment, the experimental group received treatment on the speech acts of apology for a total amount of 50 minutes, with 10 minutes allocated for teaching each one, in 24 lectures. The data were collected from an advanced conversation course that the same teacher taught for both groups. While the control group was presented with instruction without any supplementary materials, the experimental one was presented with supplementary teaching activities about the way and the time to use apology speech acts appropriately. Except for the treatment, both groups had the same conditions. Having done with the treatment, both groups took a posttest, yet different scenarios in order to measure expected changes how they use those strategies. Farahian, Razaee, and Gholami’s (2012) scoring criterion was used to code and score the data. A four Point Likert Scale for scoring was adopted. The scale of 4 represents ‘absolutely appropriate’, the scale of 3 indicates ‘mostly appropriate’, the scale of 2 refers to ‘generally appropriate’, and the scale of 1 resembles ‘completely inappropriate’. The gathered data were coded and entered into (the Statistical Package of Social Sciences) SPSS (version 26) for analysis. To accomplish the aim of the study, not only descriptive but inferential statistics was utilized to analyze the collected data.

4. Results

The primary goal of the study was to find out the effectiveness of direct teaching of the apology speech act strategies in the pragmatic competence development of Kurdish students. In so doing, the collected data were analyzed and interpreted as presented in the inferential statistics in the tables.

Table 1 Pre-test mean score of the intermediate-level control and experimental groups

Percentages

	<i>Scenarios</i>	<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(4)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>Control/ Intermediate</i>	Scenario 1	6.0	83.0	11.0	0	2.06	0.417
	Scenario 2	67.0	33.0	0	0	1.4	0.486
	Scenario 3	28.0	59.8	5.5	5.6	1.9	0.759
	Scenario 4	78.0	22.0	0	0	1.3	0.428
	Scenario 5	6.0	83.0	11.0	0	2.06	0.417
<i>Experimental/ Intermediate</i>	Scenario 1	11.0	74.0	15.0	0	2.05	0.511
	Scenario 2	66.0	34.0	0	0	1.4	0.490
	Scenario 3	25.9	69.1	5.0	0	1.80	0.524
	Scenario 4	80.4	19.6	0	0	1.20	0.411
	Scenario 5	27.8	61.1	5.5	5.6	1.9	0.759

As descriptive statistics shows in Table 1, the control group's performance in the apology speech act, the mean for the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth scenario is (2.06), (1.4), (1.9), (1.3), and (2.06) respectively. The experimental group's performance in apology speech act mean for the first, second, third, fourth and fifth scenario is (2.05), (1.4), (1.80), (1.20), and (1.9). This result indicates that there is no statistical significant difference in the mean scores of both the control and experimental groups at the intermediate level. That is, the mean scores between the two groups were not very much different from one the other.

Table 2 Pretest mean scores of advanced level of both groups

Percentages

	<i>Scenarios</i>	<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(4)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>Control/ Advanced</i>	Scenario1	12.0	64.4	23.6	0	2.2	0.601
	Scenario2	47.2	35.0	6.0	11.8	1.82	1.015
	Scenario3	10.9	77.2	11.9	0	2.00	0.501
	Scenario4	64.5	23.6	5.9	6.0	1.52	0.875

	<i>Scenario5</i>	11.8	76.5	11.8	0	2.00	0.501
<i>Experimental/ Advanced</i>	<i>Scenario1</i>	5.8	55.0	22.8	16.4	2.50	0.858
	<i>Scenario2</i>	32.2	45.6	16.33	5.9	1.94	0.873
	<i>Scenario3</i>	11.3	61.9	26.7	0	2.2	0.619
	<i>Scenario4</i>	65.7	17.6	0	16.7	1.7	1.138
	<i>Scenario5</i>	11.1	61.1	27.8	0	2.2	0.619

The achieved result demonstrates no difference in the means of the two groups at an advanced level. In other words, the mean scores between the two groups were not much different. Yet, the means of inferential statistics should detect it as in Table 3.

Table 3 Independent samples T-test of pre-test of intermediate and advanced level groups

<i>t</i> -test for equality of means							

95% confidence							
interval of the differences							
	Mean	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Differences							(2)
Differences							<i>tailed</i>
Intermediate/ Control	-.026	0.081	-.192	0.142	-.302	36	0.762
Advanced/Experimental	.158	0.200	-.250	0.565	0.787	33	0.438

Table 3 shows that the p-values are higher than ($\alpha .05$). The p-value is equal to 0.762 for the intermediate level and it is equal to (0.438) for the advanced level. Thus, at both levels, there is no significant difference in the pretests of both groups. This result shows that both groups had almost the same knowledge of apology speech acts at the beginning of the course.

Table 4 Post-test mean scores of both groups at intermediate levels

Percentages

	<i>Scenarios</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>Control/Intermediate Level</i>	Scenario1	17.0	72.0	11.0	0	1.94	0.540
	Scenario2	32.2	67.8	0	0	1.7	0.490
	Scenario3	10.8	82.4	5.8	0	1.94	0.417
	Scenario4	62.1	37.9	0	0	1.4	0.502
	Scenario5	16.6	72.3	11.1	0	1.7	0.486
<i>Experimental/Intermediate level</i>	Scenario1	7.0	19.4	63.6	9.9	3.05	0.945
	Scenario2	4.0	70.1	20.4	5.5	2.4	0.671
	Scenario3	0	36.0	44.0	20.0	2.85	0.746
	Scenario4	4.0	81.0	15.0	0	2.10	0.448
	Scenario5	7.0	19.4	63.6	9.9	3.05	0.945

As it can be seen in the above table, the descriptive statistics show that the mean scores for all scenarios role played by the control group at the intermediate level are 1.94, 1.7, 1.94, 1.4, and 1.7 respectively. The mean scores for all scenarios performed by the experimental group at the posttest are 3.05, 2.4, 2.85, 2.10, and 3.05 which indicates a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of both the control and experimental groups at the intermediate levels.

Table 5 Post-test mean scores of advanced levels at both groups

Percentages							
<i>Speech acts</i>	<i>Scenarios</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>Control/ advanced level</i>	Scenario1	10.5	58.7	30.8	0	2.2	0.636
	Scenario2	30.0	65.0	5.0	0	1.76	0.563
	Scenario3	16.9	76.6	6.5	0	1.9	0.486
	Scenario4	46.5	53.5	0	0	1.52	0.515
	Scenario5	46.5	53.5	0	0	1.52	0.515
<i>Experimental/ advanced level</i>	Scenario1	4.5	21.8	55.9	17.8	3.85	0.803
	Scenario2	6.4	34.2	52.4	7.0	2.72	0.895
	Scenario3	0	28.1	51.1	20.8	2.94	0.726
	Scenario4	0	56.6	43.4	0	2.5	0.512
	Scenario5	0	56.6	43.4	0	2.5	0.512

Table 5 illustrates that the means for all scenarios are 2.2, 1.76, 1.9, 1.52, and 1.52 in performing the apology type of speech act at the posttest by the control group at the advanced level. Additionally, the mean for scenarios 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are 3.85, 2.72, 2.94, 2.5, and 2.5 for the experimental group at an advanced level. This result demonstrates a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of both the control and experimental groups at the advanced levels.

Table 6 Post-test mean scores of groups at both levels

t-test for equality of means

	Mean Differences	Std. Error Differences	95% confidence interval of the Difference	t	df	Sig (2-
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							tailed)
			Lower	Upper			
Intermediate	0.852	0.111	0.621	1.081	7.545	35	0.001
Advanced	0.866	0.098	0.661	1.069	8.67	32	0.001

The post-test results of both the control and experimental groups at intermediate and advanced levels revealed that there were significant in their performance of apology type of speech act as the p-values are not higher than the alpha (α .05). The differences are considered significant.

Table 7 Paired Samples T-test of pre- post-test of both groups at intermediate and advanced levels

		Paired Differences				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
Groups		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean					
							<i>t</i>	<i>df.</i>	sig. (2
									tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Control/	Pre-	-.110	0.287	0.067	-.253	0.031	-1.640	17	0.120
Int.	post								
Experimental/Pre-			0.546	0.122	-1.24	-.73	-8.073	19	0.000
Int.	post	-.986							1
Control/	Pre-	.028	0.440	0.106	-.197	0.256	.274	16	0.788
Adv.	post								

Experiment/ Adv.	Pre- post	-.721	0.527	0.124	-.984	-.45	-5.804	17	0.000
									1

As it is evident from table 7, a paired samples t-test is done to compare the pre-and post-test mean scores of groups. The results of the pre-posttests at both levels of control groups show that there is no significant difference because the p-value is higher than ($\alpha .05$). It is apparent that there is a significant difference between the post-and pre-tests at both levels of experimental groups because the $p=.0000$ is lower than ($\alpha .05$). It can be inferred that there is development in the experimental groups' pragmatic competence after taking the treatment.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of the research was to explore the effectiveness of direct teaching of many apology strategies in Kurdish students' pragmatic development. While both the control and experimental groups had equal levels of competency in the analysis of the pre-tests, the post-test analysis showed some differences. The control group post-test analysis did not indicate a meaningful difference regarding the apology type of speech act in comparison to the pretest results. These results showed that students in the experimental group who experienced direct instruction of apology strategy demonstrated higher performance in contrast to the other group. This result confirms the result obtained in the study by Eslami-Rasekh and Mardani (2010) which indicated that the participants in the direct teaching of apology strategy group outperformed the implicit group. These results may be beneficial for EFL teachers in the sense that the findings encourage them to furnish learners with as much knowledge as necessary in pragmatic principles so that their learners do not deliver messages unaware. It is recommended that gender variables and the first language interference should be considered in conducting further studies.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The findings, on the one hand, suggest to language teachers to incorporate activities that lead to promote their students' pragmatic skill awareness and on the other hand, work for raising their own consciousness of behavioral norms and cultural practices of the foreign or second language. Moreover, students should take courses in the manner of appropriately performing various speech acts in different social contexts. The implicit instruction of the apology speech act strategy as a crucial aspect of linguistics should not be forgotten and neglected in the EFL

classes. It is also suggested to examine the respondents' performance in a certain speech act using more than 10 speech scenarios.

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