
The Heart of the Matter: Methodological Challenges in Developing a Contemporary Reading Programme for Monolingual Lexicography, from the Perspective of the Dictionary Unit for South African English*

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Abstract: This article argues the importance of the reading programme as the pivotal issue in the lexicographic process. It is essentially a practical article which outlines strategies for developing and implementing a reading programme for monolingual lexicography. The arguments are informed by theory, together with an examination of the data-collection procedures followed by the Dictionary Unit for South African English (DSAE) and a survey of current practice in major English dictionary units around the world, namely the Oxford English Dictionary, the Canadian Oxford Dictionary, the Australian National Dictionary Centre and the New Zealand Dictionary Centre. The reading programme for the DSAE is first defined and contextualized within its mission statement. The article then explores the challenges inherent in sampling contemporary written and spoken English in the South African multilingual context. It is intended to inform the DSAE's intake policy, in terms of the following critical issues:

- the definition of South African English,
- the monitoring and selection of print, oral and electronic sources,
- the excerpting of citations and relevant bibliographic information, and
- the recruiting and training of readers.

These interlinked aspects of the reading programme have crucial implications for the quality and authority of the monolingual dictionary on historical principles.

Keywords: READING PROGRAMME, MONOLINGUAL DICTIONARY, HISTORICAL PRINCIPLES, CONTEMPORARY, INTAKE, CITATIONS, STRATEGIES

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Opsomming: Die kern van die saak: Metodologiese uitdagings by die ontwikkeling van 'n eietydse leesprogram vir eentalige leksikografie, uit die perspektief van die Dictionary Unit for South African English. Hierdie artikel bepleit die belangrikheid van die leesprogram as die kernsaak in die leksikografiese proses. Dit is hoofsaaklik 'n praktiese artikel wat strategieë vir die ontwikkeling en implementering van 'n leesprogram vir eentalige leksikografie skets. Die argumente word ondersteun deur teorie, saam met 'n ondersoek na die dataversamelingsprosedures wat deur die Dictionary Unit for South African English (DSAE) gevolg word en 'n oorsig van die huidige praktyk by belangrike Engelse woordeboekeenhede oor die hele wêreld, naamlik die Oxford English Dictionary, die Canadian Oxford Dictionary, die Australian National Dictionary Centre en die New Zealand Dictionary Centre. Die leesprogram van die DSAE word eers omskryf en geplaas binne sy missiestelling. Die artikel ondersoek dan die uitdagings verbonde aan die toetsing van eietydse geskrewe en gesproke Engels binne die Suid-Afrikaanse veeltalige konteks. Dit is bedoel om die DSAE se opnamebeleid te belig betreffende die volgende kritieke sake:

- die omskrywing van Suid-Afrikaanse Engels,
- die kontrole en keuse van gedrukte, gesproke en elektroniese bronne,
- die ekserpering van sitate en tersaaklike bibliografiese inligting, en
- die werwing en opleiding van lesers.

Hierdie verbandhoudende aspekte van die leesprogram het beslissende implikasies vir die gehalte en gesaghebbendheid van die eentalige woordeboek volgens historiese beginsels.

Slutelwoorde: LEESPROGRAM, EENTALIGE WOORDEBOEK, HISTORIESE BEGINSELS, EIETYDS, OPNAME, SITATE, STRATEGIEË

Introduction

'Most users believe that the lexicographer simply sits down and "writes" a dictionary. This is far from true! The dictionary editors conduct a reading program, excerpting quotations (citations) from many written sources — from books, periodicals, newspapers, letters — and sometimes from spoken sources — tapes, television and radio.' (Kipfer 1984: 1). In terms of Zgusta's theoretical model (1971), the collection of material is the lexicographer's 'first task' in the dictionary compilation process. For a dictionary arranged according to historical principles, like the *Dictionary of South African English* (1996), the collection of material depends on a well-conceived and frequently-monitored reading programme. It is therefore not just the first in a series of tasks, but the pivotal issue in the lexicographic process, with consequences down the entire length of the process.

The early English 'hard-word' dictionaries were the products of a blend of intuition and a selection of material from other dictionaries. Both the intuitive aspect of the practice and the selection of material were highly subjective, usually driven by the lexicographer's personal agenda. Johnson, in *The Plan of a*

Dictionary 1747, stated that his aim was 'to preserve the purity and ascertain the meaning of the English idiom' and he expressed a preference for words found in the works of 'polite writers' (1970: 4). Furthermore, as Crystal (2004: 383) notes: 'The quotations were chosen more for their literary or moral value than for their linguistic clarity.' The use of secondary sources and a reliance on subjective intuition was the accepted methodology of the day.

Dictionary-making today is very different. Svendsen (1993: 40-53) describes the collection of evidence based solely on the lexicographer's linguistic intuition as 'hazardous', and cautions the lexicographer to guard against the influence of personal preferences and prejudices when selecting material on which to base a dictionary. Latter-day wisdom is that the selection of material for a dictionary, especially a monolingual dictionary on historical principles, ought to be from verifiable primary sources. It is by observing this practice that the lexicographer can claim that the created dictionary represents 'authentic' language use.

Definition

The reading programme involves the systematic collection of citations or quotations to enable the lexicographer to construct a picture of the language variety, which will be described in the dictionary. It is a process which is at the heart of all major historical dictionaries. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) reading programme of 1857 involved the collection of quotations excerpted from a variety of original written texts, ranging from personal letters to scientific treatises, going back as far as Anglo-Saxon literature. The current OED reading programme is continuing this tradition by ensuring that a wide range of modern authors and source types are constantly monitored. Surveying and sampling English in the 21st century for an extensive project such as the OED requires the lexicographer to acknowledge all varieties of World English and to include conventional written texts as well as commercial databases, electronic texts and the Internet.

In the production of the *Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* (DSAE Hist.), quotations were amassed over a period of 25 years from sources as diverse as diaries, letters, newspapers, books, periodicals, and even one-liners from labels on medicine bottles. In 1971, the Dictionary Committee of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa at Rhodes University, submitted 50 sample entries for the proposed 'Dictionary of South African English'. The submission was prefaced by the following salutary observation: 'A perfect Dictionary of South African English would be based upon a study of all English texts that might be regarded as South African. Since a study of this kind is possible only "in the dreams of a poet doomed at last to wake a lexicographer" (Johnson 1755), an actual Dictionary must be based upon a sampling of the available material, both written and spoken.' (The Dictionary Committee 1971: 4).

The challenge to the current Dictionary Unit for South African English (DSAE) in drawing up a Contemporary Reading Programme is similar in some respects to the one that confronted Robert Burchfield, the new editor of the OED in 1957. At that time, he established a Reading Programme to target modern-day language and extended the coverage to include more general, popular, and scientific sources (Winchester 2003: 244).

However, the DSAE faces the additional challenges of sampling contemporary written and spoken English in the multilingual South African context, where English is in contact with ten other indigenous languages. The reading programme has been compiled against this dynamic linguistic background and is structured as follows:

- the definition of South African English,
- the monitoring and selection of print, oral and electronic sources,
- the excerpting of citations and relevant bibliographic information, and
- the recruiting and training of readers.

What is South African English?

In the broadest sense, South African English (SAE) might be taken to include all the varieties of English spoken and written in the Republic of South Africa. It includes:

1. the English of people for whom it is a mother tongue or first language, and
2. the English of people for whom it is an additional language.

SAE is not one monolithic variety of English, but an interesting collection and mix of varieties, ranging from the standard form with no local base, to highly localized and specialized varieties. Some of the recognized varieties are:

- Black South African English (De Klerk and Gough 2002),
- South African Indian English (Mesthrie 1996),
- Cape Flats English (Malan 1996),
- Afrikaans English (Watermeyer 1996), and
- Xhosa English (De Klerk 2002).

There are possibly other varieties that may not yet have been formally acknowledged in research literature. They could include:

- regional varieties such as Eastern Cape English, West Coast English, KwaZulu-Natal English and so on, located in the different provinces or geographical areas of South Africa,

- slang associated with specific age groups such as children or adolescents, and
- specialized vocabularies relating to hobbies, trades or professions.

The DSAE's policy regarding the collection and documentation of the language should be inclusive and flexible in keeping with the complexities of the South African linguistic landscape. More specifically it should encompass the range of English from the most conservative usages to the broadest, from speakers and writers for whom it is the sole language of communication, to those for whom it is an additional language in multilingual South Africa. In doing so, it will be upholding the commitment expressed in its mission statement:

Considering the central role of English as a language of communication between South Africans, ... the Unit is committed to the recording of the history and culture of English in South Africa, and the documentation of its changing vocabulary.

Code-mixing and assimilated words

In defining the linguistic boundaries of English in a multilingual country like South Africa, it is realistic to note that code-mixing (*ad hoc* borrowing of lexical items between languages) is a normal occurrence. However, a distinction needs to be made between words used in code-mixing and those which have been assimilated and have stabilized in SAE. The following criteria may be used individually or together, to help the lexicographer discern the 'assimilated' items:

1. Assimilated words occur frequently in several contexts and have generally had a long duration in SAE, e.g. *donga* from Xhosa or Zulu *udonga*, earliest citation 1857 (DSAE Hist.), *naartjie* from Tamil *narattai*, earliest citation 1790 (DSAE Hist.), and *eland* from the Dutch word *eland* meaning 'elk', earliest citation 1786 (DSAE Hist.).
2. Assimilated items follow English grammar rules or orthography, e.g. *braai*ed is from Afrikaans *braai*, but past tense formation *-ed* follows English rules, and *winelands* is from Afrikaans *wynlande*, but plural formation follows common English rule of adding *-s*.
3. Assimilated items are not glossed, placed within inverted commas or underlined, e.g. *lobola*, *boerewors*, and *gogga*.
4. Assimilated items undergo a change or extension of meaning between the parent language and English, e.g. *pondok* is from Malay *pondok*: a hut or shed; school and lodgings for students of religion. In modern Malaysia, the *pondok* is a rural, resident, Islamic educational institution conducted in reed huts. In SAE the *pondok* or *pondokkie* refers almost

exclusively to a shack or crudely constructed shanty made of pieces of wood, cardboard, corrugated iron and scrap material. So in South Africa, the original Malay word *pondok* has lost its association with the education of students of religion. In the South African socio-political context, the primary sense of *pondok* encodes details about the fragile materials and the appearance of the structure, together with an associated notion of the economic situation of those who live in pondoks.

Having defined the parameters of South African English and established some guidelines for identifying relevant lexical items, the next task of the editors is to fix the period that the reading programme will cover. The material collected for the DSAE Hist. came from a vast collection of sources dating back to 1589. The present reading programme is targeting contemporary sources after 1996 (when the DSAE Hist. was published) up to the present.

Sources

The field of primary sources for the DSAE contemporary reading programme is divided, according to the medium, into print, oral and electronic sources. In restricting the use of sources to primary material, the editors are aware of the need to expand their holdings of SAE to include the following categories of items:

- words which have only appeared recently,
- new senses of existing words,
- slang and colloquial words and expressions,
- variant spelling forms, and
- a range of varieties of SAE.

Print sources

Newspapers

James Murray acknowledged the importance of newspapers by commenting as follows in the Murray papers of 1882: 'To the philologist & historian of language — newspaper quotations are the most valuable of current instances — they show how the language grows ...' (Muggleston 2000: 14). Newspapers then are an essential part of any contemporary reading programme. They capture and disseminate trends in the language, whether these relate to new coinages such as *vuvuzela*, new senses of existing words such as *laager mentality*, or *rainbow nation* or new spellings of words which have already been recorded such as *takkies* (formerly *tackies*) and *Joburg* (sometimes *Jo'burg*). Crystal (2004:

519) observes: 'On 4 October 1957, the first sputnik was launched; on 5 October, the word *sputnik* was known everywhere, thanks to broadcasting and the press.'

In the South African context, Branford (1976: ix) urged that 'the Dictionary is not intended merely as an historical monument but as a record also of contemporary South African English at its most important points of growth'. That is as true today as ever it was when the idea of collecting evidence towards the DSAE Hist. was first mooted. It is a sentiment that is echoed by lexicographers of major English dictionary centres on both sides of the Atlantic: Nic Shearing (2005), the Reading Programme Manager of the OED: 'If I had to suggest just one thing to start with, it would be reading newspapers.'¹; and Katherine Barber (2005), editor-in-chief of the Canadian National Oxford Dictionary: 'We read the national newspapers of course ... but we also make an effort to acquire small local newspapers from across the country and read them.'² It follows then, that newspapers must be a crucial part of any reading programme that is seeking to collect evidence of contemporary language usage.

The OED consults the *Willings Press Guide* for listings of printed media sources. The South African equivalent is the *Media List*. As it is not possible to read every newspaper, it is necessary to be eclectic, but objective, in order to ensure that coverage of the language is wide and reliable. By using criteria such as target readership, circulation figures and geographical distribution, it is possible to extract a list of newspapers that would contribute to a balanced intake programme.

In the South African context, this means not just reading newspapers from all nine provinces, but also ensuring that these include a range of journalistic styles, from the more formal and conservative types, to the tabloids. The latter are known to be particularly innovative and often feature a mixture of articles in both informal and formal language. It is interesting that the tabloid, the *Daily Voice*, quickly acquired circulation and readership figures to rival that of the more established *Sowetan*. The figures are important as they are linked to the newspaper's potential to influence not only the reception, but also the production of the language.

Until its recent demise, the national daily English newspaper was *This Day*. No other daily national newspaper has taken its place, although several larger regional newspapers, such as Gauteng's *Sowetan* and *The Star* and Kwa-Zulu-Natal's *Daily News*, are distributed in major cities throughout the country. Fortunately the texts of two of the largest newspaper groups in the country are available electronically. They are the Independent Online (IOL), and Media 24. IOL includes the reportage of the *Cape Argus*, the *Cape Times*, the *Daily News*, the *Mercury*, the *Post*, the *Pretoria News*, the *Star*, the *Independent on Saturday*, and the *Sunday Tribune*, and Media 24 includes the *Witness*, the *Daily Sun*, the *City Press* and the *Sunday Sun*.

In addition to the large national newspapers, small local papers, e.g. the *Barrydale Times*, the *Stanger Herald*, and free community newspapers ('knock 'n drops') should not be overlooked. Their coverage of news relating to local affairs and culture often includes rare or regionally-based lexical items.

Magazines and Periodicals

The initial vocabulary for the *Dictionary of South Africanisms* was based on a survey of 34 fields of vocabulary ranging from 'human types' through 'food, dishes and cooking' to 'church and state' (Branford 1976: ix). The current reading programme of the OED has a daunting list of 350 labels to categorize incoming material. For the DSAE, the list of magazines from the *Media List* could be divided into broad interest areas such as Youth and Popular Culture, Women's Magazines, Sport, Leisure and Lifestyle, Men's Interest and Business and Current Affairs. Depending on the constraints of the budget and human resources, one or more magazines from each broad category could be selected for reading and intake. To ensure that the range of magazines within a category is monitored, titles could be rotated to keep the selection balanced.

Purchasing newspapers and magazines is a costly business, but it is possible to obtain free copies from libraries, student unions, regular subscribers and from the publishers themselves. Publishers may be willing to donate recent back issues if they are told that their magazine or newspaper is being consulted as a source for *bona fide* linguistic research and if they are assured that they will be properly acknowledged if any citations are used. They have been found to be particularly eager to cooperate when they are informed of the important part they play in contributing to the documentation of the language history of the country.

Printed books

One advantage of compiling a book list in post-1994 South Africa is that the researcher is not restricted by the censorship laws that existed under the apartheid regime. In the introduction of *Voorloper*, the text which preceded the DSAE Hist., Branford (1976: ix) observed that 'a very substantial body of South African writing' could not be represented in their collection as either the books themselves, or their authors were banned at the time and could therefore not be quoted. In 2005 the quantity and availability of material is both a blessing and a challenge to the lexicographer. Consequently some guidelines are necessary to enable the lexicographer to make a judicious selection. The OED consults publications such as *The Bookseller* and the *Times Literary Supplement* to monitor the appearance of new books on the literary scene. The South African equivalent of those references would be a list compiled from titles supplied by the National English Literary Museum (NELM) and the sources used to produce the S.A. Book Data Award. The titles could then be divided into initial broad categories such as adult fiction, non-fiction, and juvenile fiction. The fiction section might be broadly sub-divided into prose and drama, and the non-fiction might be sub-divided into biographies, letters, essays, criticism and travel, for example.

When one is reading for vocabulary, the literary merit of the books is not at issue: popular best-selling fiction is as worthy of consideration as scholarly

non-fiction. In fact, as with tabloids which enjoy a large readership, so-called 'pulp fiction' is important because of its potential to impact on vocabulary at large.

With regard to poetry, the guideline is to handle it cautiously and with due circumspection. James Murray is reported to have commented in this regard that 'we cannot take the language of poets too seriously' (Mugglestone 2000: 16). From a lexicographic perspective, examples of poetic usage by established literary figures are occasionally included as 'nonce' forms in a dictionary. While they are interesting examples of linguistic creativity, they do not represent common usage. It is true that some of these coinages may acquire currency and may be assimilated into the language. An example of this is Lewis Carroll's blending of *chuckle* and *snort* to produce the portmanteau word *chortle* in the poem 'Jabberwocky' from *Through the Looking Glass* (1872). As for *jabberwocky* itself, the lexicographers originally excluded the word from the first edition of the OED, but they were proved wrong when it was assimilated into general usage, and during a subsequent revision of the OED, it had to be included.

Oral sources

In a world where print sources are readily available, the collection and transcription of examples of oral evidence is a challenge to lexicographers. Many of the oral sources for Branford's *Dictionary of South Africanisms* were contributed by members of the public in response to a competition organized by the Dictionary Unit through the popular *Personality* magazine in 1970. Others, marked simply 'Informant' were what the dictionary team collected through their social networks.

Today, it is easier to access reliable oral sources where electronic corpora of the spoken language exist. Some corpora already available for SAE are:

- the SAE component of the International Corpus of English collected at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University,
- a corpus of spoken Xhosa English collected by Prof. V.A. de Klerk at the Department of Linguistics at Rhodes University,
- a corpus of Tswana English being collected by Prof. A.J. van Rooy at the North-West University, and
- corpora which might be part of university research projects.

Another source of spoken language data might be transcripts obtained from radio and television stations. Transcripts of phone-in programmes are particularly valuable in providing unrehearsed, unscripted spoken language, but speakers would need to be identified and traced as there are ethical problems surrounding the use of speech samples without prior permission of the speaker. This is a question that would need to be addressed well ahead of the stage of dictionary compilation.

It is occasionally argued that drama scripts can provide examples of the spoken component of the language. While they offer verifiable print evidence of a word's occurrence in a dramatized speech situation, they cannot be regarded as authentic speech as each character's words have been filtered through one writer's imaginative interpretation.

Electronic sources

Despite the burgeoning wealth of material available on the Internet, the prevailing wisdom (from the OED, for example) is that wherever possible, print sources are preferable, as they allow subsequent researchers to verify findings. However, in the absence of such sources, material should be 'judiciously selected from the open corpus of the web' (John Simpson OED 2005). The general rule in this regard is that the web sources consulted should be stable and durable.

Recruiting and training of readers

The readers are trained paid assistants or volunteers, who read texts and excerpt quotations to assist the lexicographers at various stages of the lexicographic process: sense and part of speech disambiguation, discerning orthography, finding collocational patterns, and selecting citations or example sentences. Most dictionary units, like the DSAE which has a staff of only four editors, cannot rely solely on staff to do the reading and excerpting. It is therefore necessary and in fact essential, in terms of ensuring a broad coverage of the language, to enlist the help of readers.

Quite early Branford (1976: xi) observed that 'the collection of materials for the Oxford English Dictionary Supplement is depending increasingly upon the work of paid readers, and it is clear that the preoccupations and commitments of English-speaking South Africa are such that substantial provision for this kind of help will have to be made in future budgeting for DSAE'. In the 25 years leading up to the publication of the DSAE Hist., the Dictionary Unit conducted a thorough historical reading programme under the editors-in-chief, William Branford and later, Penny Silva. Budget constraints at the time necessitated the use of unpaid volunteer readers but Branford's advice about paid readers is confirmed by the experiences of staff at other dictionary centres. The current editors at the National Dictionary Centres in Australia and Canada have found that using unpaid volunteers is not cost-effective. At both dictionary centres, they agree that the reading programme should not be viewed as a volunteer activity but as an essential part of serious lexicography that has to be budgeted for. Readers also need to be carefully selected and then trained in how to recognize and excerpt relevant material for the dictionary database. Murray's experience with recruiting readers was that the most consistently productive people were not necessarily scholars, but interested lay people. He found that scholars tended to display an interest in unusual or abstruse words

and would overlook familiar words in their search for the extraordinary. For example, Murray reports that he found 50 instances of the word *abusion* and not even five of the more common *abuse* (Winchester 2003: 105).

Excerpting of citations and relevant bibliographic information

The volunteer readers from Britain, North America and the British colonies who responded to Murray's famous 'Appeal to the English-Speaking Public' in 1879, received guidelines about what to excerpt, as well as slips on which to send the quotations they had taken from books. This practice is upheld today. The Australian, New Zealand and Canadian Dictionary Centres all issue their readers with guidelines of what to excerpt and how to excerpt. The overarching rule at the stage of reading and marking is that 'the main objective is the collection of data, not evaluation or editing' (Svensen 1993: 55). Landau (2001: 195-200) offers detailed guidelines about citation gathering. In the case of SAE, the choices can be customized and summarized to include the following categories of words:

- Any word or expression that seem to be particularly South African, e.g. *tik*, *eish*, *papsak*, or *vuuzela*;
- Existing SAE words spelt in unusual ways, e.g. *tekkies* (takkiies), *springbuck* (springbok) or *rooibosch tea* (rooibos tea);
- Existing SAE words that have acquired a new or extended meaning, e.g. *laager mentality* (from *laager*);
- Any word or expression which, although current in World English, is believed to have originated in SAE, e.g. *puff adder*, *apartheid* or *struggle accounting*;
- Any word or expression with a particular SAE sense not found in other varieties of World English, e.g. *township*, *dam*, or *bunny aerial*; and
- Words which, though current in SAE, have fallen out of use in British English, e.g. *bioscope*.

In guiding readers how to excerpt, the following points are relevant:

- Choose the best quotations from a text — the ones which illustrate what the word means, or which capture the word in an unusual context.
- Include sufficient contextual information to enable the lexicographer to draft an entry. More will often be necessary, but less may sometimes suffice. As a general rule, it is better to give too much rather than too little. The context should normally be at least the full sentence in which the highlighted word or phrase occurs. If any words need to be omitted, indicate these by the use of ellipsis '...'.

- Do not take the same word from the same source and with the same meaning more than a specified number of times.
- Excerpts should not be too long or too short but should contain sufficient information to illustrate usage and enable disambiguation of senses.
- Do not use cite words which use 'eye dialect' (sound spellings) such as *wek* for *work* or *situhation* for *situation*.
- Do not cite proper nouns unless they are used generically ('Bhisho has issued a notice to all civil servants...' where *Bhisho* represents the Eastern Cape provincial government department) or are part of a multi-word unit (*Madiba shirt*, where the whole unit represents a new lexical item).
- Do not cite typographical errors as these are not examples of intended usage.
- Avoid figurative language, e.g. metaphors, similes and the kind of creative idiomatic usage found in advertising in particular.

More detailed rules regarding the specific types of words and senses that should be selected, can be formulated according to need. Finally, it is important to use traceable sources, so the excerpters should document everything they can about the source: author, title, page, date, publisher and place of publication.

Conclusion

The electronic age has brought with it both solutions and challenges to lexicographers. An obvious solution is that it is easier and cheaper to update dictionaries if they are in electronic form. In the case of historical dictionaries, ante-dates, inter-dates and post-dates can be easily uploaded, quotations can be corrected during the reverification process and whole entries can be reworked if necessary. But the electronic age has also deluged lexicographers with sources, some more ephemeral than others. One of the challenges to lexicographers is to make judicious choices and to select material that truly represents the language variety being defined in the dictionary. The other challenge is based in Sinclair's notion of the 'empty lexicon'. It is an approach that regards usage as a moving target, and 'learns about vocabulary from the texts, and is constantly being updated. No part of it is absolute or permanent, because the boundary between item and environment is likely to move with new evidence, and meanings may merge or diverge. This is the lexicon of the living language.' (Sinclair 2004: 162).

Endnotes

1. Personal email to the author dated 21 February 2005.
2. Personal email to the author dated 24 February 2005.

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