

Article

Nonstandard Use of the “Reflexive” Affix *-sʹa* in Russian Speech of Bilingual Speakers of Northern Siberia and the Russian Far East

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Abstract: One of the features of the oral Russian speech of bilingual speakers of the indigenous languages of Russia is the omission/the overuse of the “reflexive” affix *-sʹa* (a “middle voice” marker with a wide range of uses including reflexive, reciprocal, anticausative, passive, and some others). We discuss the data on the nonstandard use of *-sʹa* in the Russian speech of bilingual speakers of two language groups that differ both from Russian and from each other in this grammatical domain: Samoyedic (Forest Enets, Nganasan, and Nenets) and Tungusic (Nanai and Ulch). The data come from the corpus of contact-influenced Russian speech, which is being created by our team. We show that the mismatches in standard and nonstandard usage cannot be explained by direct structural copying from the donor language (indigenous) to the recipient one (the local variety of Russian). Nor is there a consistent system which differs from standard Russian since there are many more usages that follow the rules of standard Russian. The influence of the indigenous languages explains some overuses and omissions; the others can be explained by other factors, e.g., difficulties in the acquisition of verb pairs with non-transparent semantic or syntactic relations.

Keywords: bilingualism; language contact; pattern borrowing; Russian; Samoyedic languages; Tungusic languages; reflexive; valency changing; middle voice

1. Introduction

One of the features of the oral Russian speech of bilingual speakers of the indigenous languages of Russia is the nonstandard use of the “reflexive” affix *-sʹa*, which can occur as an overuse (1) or as an omission (2).

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---------------|------------|---------------------|----|-------------------|--|
| 1. | davaj | ne | | propadaj-sʹa | | | |
| | let’s | NEG | | disappear.IMP-SJA | | | |
| | ‘Don’t disappear’. (L1 Nganasan) ¹ | | | | | | |
| 2. | ty | duma-ješ | živoj, | čto | li | osta-l-sʹa | |
| | 2SG | think-PRS.2SG | alive.SG.M | what | Q | stay-PST.SG.M-SJA | |
| | ‘Do you think that he stayed alive?’ (L1 Nanai) | | | | | | |

¹ Abbreviations: 2, 3—2nd, 3rd person, ABL—ablative, ACC—accusative, ADJZ—adjectivized, ANT—anterior suffix, DAT—dative, DRV—derived, EX—existential predicate, F—feminine, GEN—genitive, IMP—imperative, IMPS—impersonal,

The nonstandard use of *-sja* is not just a characteristic of the Russian speech of the speakers of the Samoyedic and Tungusic languages. It was also mentioned in some other contact-influenced varieties of Russian, see (Daniel et al. 2010, p. 82) on Daghestanian Russian and (Shagal 2016) Erzya Russian. In addition, it is attested in some Russian dialects (Kasatkin 2005, p. 154).

The “reflexive” *-sja* (*-sja/-sʲi*) in Russian is a derivational affix (earlier a clitic), which is attached after inflectional affixes (a “postfix”). It is a “middle voice” marker, see (Kemmer 1993), which has a wide range of uses. It has the following main meanings: reflexive (*mytʲi—mytʲisja*, ‘wash’—‘wash-self’), reciprocal (*celovati—celovatʲisja*, ‘kiss’—‘kiss each other’), passive (*stroitʲi—stroitʲisja*, ‘build’—‘be built’), modal-passive (*ne otkryvajetsja*, ‘won’t open’), passive-impersonal (*ukazyvatʲi—ukazyvaetsja*, ‘point’—‘be pointed out’), anticausative, or anticausative (*razbitʲi—razbitʲisja*, ‘break (transitive)’—‘break (intransitive)’), benefactive reflexive (*zakupatʲi—zakupatʲisja*, ‘buy in’—‘buy in’), intransitive), objective-impersonal (*kusatʲi—kusatʲisja*, ‘bite’—‘bite everybody’), and modal-impersonal (*ne spitsja* ‘not able to sleep’), for a more detailed classification see e.g., (Letuchiy 2016, pp. 268–340).

Apart from regular formations, *-sja* is also used with bound reflexive stems (verba deponentia, i.e., verbs without unsuffixed correlates): verbs of emotion (*bojatʲisja*, ‘be afraid’), behaviour (*lenitʲisja*, ‘be lazy’), natural phenomena (*smerkatʲisja*, ‘get dark’), and some modal verbs (*nuždatʲisja*, ‘have a need’). The affix *-sja* cannot be used with some transitive semelfactives (*kapnutʲi*, ‘drop’) and intransitive uncontrolled situations (*umeretʲi*, ‘die’), but there are no restrictions on transitivity.

In Samoyedic languages (Enets, Nenets, and Nganasan), there is a reflexive (-medial) conjugation, which is used only with intransitive verbs or labile verbs (in the intransitive use). In other words, what is parallel to Russian *-sja* in these languages is a paradigm of inflectional suffixes (Siegl 2013; Nikolaeva 2014; Tereschenko 1979), which is not productive and which is used with a lexically determined set of verbs, e.g., only approximately 65 verbs in Forest Enets corpus (Khanina and Shluinsky 2019). It is hard to generalize the conditions of its use, but there are some tendencies, for example, these are mostly change-of-posture verbs (*ad-e-zʲ?* [sit_down.PFV-REFL-3SG.REFL], ‘sat down’, Forest Enets), motion verbs (*soʔ-e-zʲ?* [jump.PFV-REFL-3SG.REFL], ‘jumped (somewhere)’, Forest Enets), and some spontaneous events and emotions. However, having one of these meanings does not imply that the verb will obligatorily take the “reflexive” affixes. Another tendency is that the reflexive conjugation is frequently used with inchoatives (*ozi-ʔ* [be.visible.IPFV-3PL.S]—*ozi-rio-zoʔ* [be.visible.IPFV-INCH-3SG.REFL], ‘was visible’—‘appeared’, Forest Enets) and passives (*toza-d* [bring.PFV-2SG.S]—*toza-r-e-zʲ?* [bring.PFV-PASS-REFL-3SG.REFL], ‘you bring’—‘was brought’, Forest Enets).

In Southern Tungusic languages (Nanai, Ulch), there are two derivational suffixes that share some functions with *-sja*. The first one is the “passive” *-p* (Avrorin 1961, pp. 41–42), which has passive, anticausative, and modal-passive uses, cf. *xoʒe-p* ‘to be finished’ [finish-PASS-], *xuəda-p* ‘to be lost’ [lose-PASS-] (Nanai). The second one is the reciprocal *-məči* (Avrorin 1961, pp. 42–43), cf. *sore-məči* ‘to fight to each other’ [fight-RECIP-] (Nanai). The productivity of these suffixes is comparable to that of *-sja*. Moreover, there are labile verbs (however, this class is not very large), cf. *təpčiu-* ‘to start (transitive, intransitive)’, (Nanai), and the impersonal construction, which has an accusative object and no overt subject (Avrorin 1961, pp. 84–92; Stoyanova 2016).

Thus, both Samoyedic and Tungusic markers overlap with *-sja* in the mediopassive semantic domain, but not in the reflexive one. Within this domain, the anticausative suffix *-p* in Tungusic is similar to the Russian *-sja* in terms of productivity, while the Samoyedic reflexive conjugation is much more restricted and it overlaps with *-sja* only for a closed set of verbs.

INCH—inchoative, INS—instrumental case, IPFV—imperfective, LIM—limitative, LOC—locative, M—masculine, N—neuter, NEG—negative, PASS—passive, PFV—perfective, PL—plural, PP—prepositional case, PRON—pronominal stem, PRS—present tense, PST—past tense, PTCL—particle, RECIP—reciprocal, REFL—reflexive conjugation, Q—question particle, S—subject conjugation, SEM—semelfactive, SJA—*sja* suffix, SG—singular, STAT—stative.

Since there are Samoyedic and Tungusic parallels to *-sʹa*, the following questions arise: (i) whether the attested nonstandard use of reflexives is triggered by the influence of indigenous languages, and (ii) whether the different overlap between functions of Russian *-sʹa* and Samoyedic or Tungusic morphemes creates differences in the nonstandard uses of the former.

According to the facts above, the following differences are predicted: In Tungusic Russian, the nonstandard uses of *-sʹa* are expected within the mediopassive (and especially anticausative) domain, in which *-sʹa* and *-p* considerably, but not fully, overlap. In Samoyedic Russian, deviations from standard Russian are expected to concern a closed set of particular verbs and not the entire semantic class.

In this paper, we compare the nonstandard use of *-sʹa* in Samoyedic Russian and Tungusic Russian in order to check whether the indigenous language influences the use of *-sʹa* and whether there is a difference between Samoyedic and Tungusic influence on *-sʹa*.

2. Materials and Methods

As the data source, we used the corpus of contact-influenced Russian speech of Northern Siberia and the Russian Far East, which is being created by our team. This is a small spoken corpus of narratives in Russian recorded from speakers of indigenous languages of the area. The texts are transcribed in standard Russian orthography in ELAN² and manually annotated of grammatical and lexical contact-induced features (one of them is the nonstandard use or omission of the reflexive affix). In the study, we used the transcribed and annotated part of the Tungusic and Samoyedic subcorpora, which contained approximately 17 h (29,283 clauses). The whole collection of the records from the speakers of the Tungusic and Samoyedic languages contained approximately 96 h; see Table 1 for the details.

Table 1. Text collection.

	All (in hours)	Annotated (in clauses)
Enets (Forest and Tundra)	26.5	12,282
Nenets	9	2323
Nganasan	10	4768
all Samoyedic	45.5	19,373
Nanai	42	7269
Ulch	8.5	2641
all Tungusic	50.5	9910
total amount	96	29,283

The nonstandard use of *-sʹa* is not very frequent in our data (the most frequent grammatical peculiarities are the omission of prepositions and gender disagreement). In our annotated corpus, we found 71 cases of nonstandard uses of *-sʹa* in total: 46 uses in Tungusic subcorpus and 25 uses in Samoyedic subcorpus. Only 6% out of all uses of *-sʹa* are nonstandard in Tungusic subcorpus (733 uses). The data, available at the moment, are not enough for consistent quantitative analysis. So, in this paper, we present a preliminary qualitative study, in which we analyzed possible factors that could have influenced the nonstandard uses of *-sʹa* attested in the corpus.

3. Results

Some of the attested nonstandard uses of *-sʹa*, both omissions and overuses, can be indeed explained by the influence of indigenous languages. However, other cases seem to contradict this hypothesis. We show that some other factors connected to acquisition difficulties can affect the use of *-sʹa* as well. First, we discuss overuses, which are easier to explain (Section 3.1), and then omissions

² ELAN (<https://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/>) is one of the annotation tools developed at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, see (Sloetjes and Wittenburg 2008).

(Section 3.2). In Section 3.3, we give some quantitative data on the rate of omissions vs. overuses and the distribution across different semantic types of *-sʹa* uses.

3.1. Overuses of *-sʹa*

Overuses of *-sʹa* can be classified into three groups: (a) structural borrowing from the indigenous language (PAT-borrowing in terms of (Sakel 2007)); (b) incomplete acquisition of standard Russian: the existence of a particular Russian verb similar to that in question or the overgeneralization of a particular semantic type of *sʹa*-uses.

3.1.1. Structural Borrowing

Examples (3)–(4) illustrate structural borrowing, which leads to the overuse of *-sʹa*. (3) is a calque from the Nanai impersonal construction (4). The affix *-sʹa* can have the meaning presented in (3)–(4); however, the argument encoding differs from that of the Russian *sʹa*-verbs and repeats that of the Nanai impersonal forms: the direct object *takuju* ‘such a thing.f’ does not move to the subject position and takes the accusative case, in the same way as *čolombani* ‘soup.ACC.3SG’ in (4). So, *-sʹa* appears in (3) as an equivalent of the Nanai impersonal suffix *-wu*.

3. to tam potom jesli etot vot tak-uju dela-jet-sʹa ...
that there then if this.M here such-ACC.F do-PRS.2SG-SJA
‘And then there one makes such a ...’ (L1 Nanai)

Cf. the Nanai impersonal construction in (4):

4. oakta čolom-ba-ni Xon’ puju-u-r’
wormwood soup-ACC-3SG how cook-IMPS-PRS
‘How does one cook wormwood soup?’ (Nanai corpus)

Example (5) is more complicated. The Russian verb *snʹatʹ* ‘take off’ does not take the anticausative *-sʹa* in Russian monolinguals. The overuse of *snʹatʹ-sʹa* in (5) corresponds to the Nanai *ačo-p* ‘come taken off’ [take.off-DECAUS]. However, *snʹatʹ-sʹa* inherits not only the Nanai morphological pattern but also the lexical one. In (5), it has the meaning ‘to come untied’ and not ‘to come taken off’. This is explained by the fact that its correlate *ačo*—*ačo-p* is polysemous: along with the meaning ‘to take off—to come/be taken off’, it has another meaning ‘to untie—to come/be untied’³.

5. i mladšij syn ... kak eto ... snʹa-l-sʹa ot etogo
and youngest.SG.M son how this.N take.off-PST.SG.M-SJA from this.GEN
‘And the younger brother come untied from this (pole) ...’ (L1 Nanai)

3.1.2. Incomplete Acquisition of Russian

One of the factors that can affect the use of *-sʹa*, besides the systems of the indigenous language, is the existence of Russian verbs that have a synonymous meaning but behave differently with respect to the *-sʹa* derivation.

In (1) repeated below as (6), a possible contamination with the Russian reflexive verb *čerjatʹ-sʹa* ‘get lost’ might have played a part in using *propadaj-sʹa* instead of *propadaj*.

6. davaj ne propadaj-sʹa
let’s NEG disappear.IMP-SJA
‘Don’t disappear’. (L1 Nganasan)

³ The lexical calquing might be even more important here, because the verb *otvazatʹ-sʹa* ‘to come untied’ [untie-REFL] does exist in monolinguals’ Russian, in contrast to **snʹatʹ-sʹa*.

In a similar manner, in (7), there could have been contamination with the Russian verb *perepravi-l-s'ja* (cross-PST.M.SG-SJA).

7. potom, govorj-at, pereply-l-s'ja i ruk-oj,
 later say-PRS.3PL cross-PST.M. SG-SJA and hand-INS
 govorj-at, mah-nu-l
 say-PRS.3PL wave-SEM-PST.M.SG
 'They say then he swam across the river and waved his hand (to show that he should go as well).'
 (L1 Nganasan)

In (8), a non-standard verb *obitat'^j-s'ja* is used instead of the Russian verb *obitat'* 'dwell'.

8. by-va-jut=to, vot, oni tam I
 be-IPFV-PRS.3PL=PTCL here 3PL there and
 obita-jut-s'ja, eto, kormj-at-s'ja
 dwell-PRS.3PL-SJA this.N feed-PRS.3PL-SJA
 'There are ... so, they dwell there, feed themselves'. (L1 Enets)

Enets stative verbs like 'dwell' normally do not bear reflexive suffixes, so this cannot be a calque. There is a synonymous Russian verb *vodit'^j-s'ja* 'be found, live' which has *-s'ja*. However, one could propose a different explanation: the verb *kormjats'ja* in the right context triggers the *-s'ja* suffix on the verb *obitat'^j*.

The verb *torgovalis'^j* in (9) is used in the object impersonal meaning ('to sell' > 'to sell different things').

9. nu ran'she zhe kitajtsy zdes' torgova-l-i-s'^j
 PTCL earlier PTCL chinese.PL here sale-PST-PL-REFL
 'Well, earlier, Chinese sold different things here'. (Nanai corpus)

This particular derived form is absent in standard Russian, despite the object impersonal meaning is one of the productive meanings of *-s'ja*. So, in Tungusic Russian, we are dealing with the overgeneralization of this meaning. It is not a calque from the indigenous language (Nanai), since in Nanai there is no affix with this meaning at all.

3.2. Omissions of *-s'ja*

It is more difficult to explain an unexpected absence of *-s'ja* than its overuse. On the one hand, some omissions can be explained by the absence of *s'ja*-type markers in the corresponding indigenous language. For example, the form *rodila* instead of *rodilas'^j* 'to be born' in Nanai Russian is supported by the Nanai verb *balš'e-* 'to be born' which is not connected to the verb 'to give birth', unlike its Russian correlate.

10. ja zhe derevne rodi-l-a
 1SG PTCL village.LOC be.born-PST-F
 'Actually, I was born in the village.' (L1 Nanai)
11. mī balš'e-xam-bi Muxu-du
 1SG be.born-PST-1SG Muxu-DAT
 'I was born in the village of Muxu.' (Nanai, field records)

Example (12) can have a similar explanation; the absence of the *s'ja*-type marker (the reflexive conjugation). See (12) with no *-s'ja* and no reflexive conjugation in the corresponding Nganasan verb from the parallel version of the Russian text (13).

12. a vmesto nego op'at' eta vot eta vot pov'azka
 and instead he.GEN again this.F here this.F here bandage
val'a-jet-s'a
 roll-PRS.3SG-SJA
 'And instead of it again this bandage is lying'. (L1 Nganasan)

13. d'an'ku taa-ni-ə d'üðü-tə
 NEG.EX that.remote-LOC.PRON-ADJZ hand-GEN.SG.2SG
 s'ügümü-ə-d'əə-raa takəə d'übə-i-ti
 bandage-ADJZ-ANT-LIM that.remote throw-DRV[STAT]-PRS
 n'ül'iā-jt'i-ti
 lie.down.straight-DRV-PRS
 'Nothing, only your finger bandage is lying there'. (Nganasan corpus (Brykina et al. 2016))

However, in these two examples, there might be alternative explanations. In standard Russian, the relations between *s'a*-forms and forms without *-s'a* are not always so regular, as in reflexive, reciprocal, anticausative, and passive uses. For instance, the relation between Russian verbs *val'at'* 'to drag' and *val'at'-s'a* 'to lie' is not transparent. The omission of *-s'a* in (12) can be explained by an under-acquisition of such irregular relations. Moreover, there is a synonymous Russian verb *lezhat'* 'lie'.

On the other hand, there are cases where the omission cannot be explained as a calque.

In (14), the verb *ispugat'-s'a* is used without *-s'a*, although the corresponding verb requires the reflexive marker in Enets (15).

14. ot tebe ja ispuga-l
 ABL 2SG.LOC 1SG frighten-PST.M
 I got afraid of you. (L1 Enets)
15. nəzun' lumu-e-z'
 1SG.ABL be.frightened.PFV-REFL-3PL.REFL
 [The reindeers] got afraid of me. (Enets corpus)

It seems that there is no equivalent Russian verb without *-s'a* that could have affected this use. The semantic relation between *ispugat'* and *ispugat'-s'a* is regular as well (anticausative). Presumably, this omission could be explained by a general tendency to omit it, which may have been inherited from the local Pidgin variety. Example (14) was taken from a text of the oldest speaker of Forest Enets (1910 year of birth). He probably knew Taimyr Pidgin Russian, or Govorka, which is now extinct (on Govorka see (Stern 2005)). In the basilect of this pidgin, *-s'a* is indeed regularly omitted (Urmanchieva 2010, p. 199).

The same explanation can be proposed for (16) from Nganasan Russian. This example cannot be attributed to the Nganasan influence since in Nganasan, inchoative verbs have the reflexive conjugation (Tereschenko 1979, p. 195). Example (16) comes from a speaker of an older generation (1923), who is regarded as a mesolect speaker of Govorka⁴.

16. purge načina-l-s'a sovsem
 blizzard begin-PST.SG.M-SJA entirely
 'A raging blizzard started'. (L1 Nganasan)

3.3. Quantitative Data

Table 2 shows that both in the Tungusic sample and in the Samoyedic one, the number of omissions is higher than the number of overuses.

⁴ Urmanchieva (2010) and Stern (2012) worked with him while describing Govorka.

Table 2. Overuses vs. omissions of *-sja*.

	Overuse	Omission	% of Overuse
Tungusic	17	29	37%
Samoyedic	8	17	32%
total	23	46	33%

Table 3 shows the distribution of overuses and omissions across different meanings typical of *-sja* (on the data of Tungusic subcorpus⁵). A significantly higher rate of nonstandard uses compared to standard ones is attested for anticausative *sja*-verbs (such as *lomati*—*lomati-sja* ‘break (intransitive)—break (transitive)’)⁶. Deponent verbs and verbs with an irregular semantic relation to the base verb, which amounts to the majority of *sja*-verbs used in a nonstandard way, do not deviate significantly from that of other semantic classes of *sja*-verbs.

Table 3. Distribution across meanings of *-sja* (Tungusic subcorpus).

Meaning	Nonstand	Stand	% Nonstand
deponent&irregular	18	281	6%
decaus	15	130	10%
refl+	6	168	3%
object_impers	4	8	33% ⁷
pass+	3	64	4%
recip	0	16	0%
prefixal	0	20	0%

Table 4 shows the correlation between the meaning of *-sja* and the type of nonstandard use. As expected, only omissions are attested across deponent verbs and verbs with irregular semantic relations between the base verb and the derived form and all overuses belong to the productive meanings of *-sja*. Moreover, across productive meanings, the above-mentioned asymmetry between omissions and overuses is not attested.

Table 4. Different meanings of *-sja*: omission vs. overuse (Tungusic and Samoyedic)⁸.

	Omission	Overuse
Deponent and irregular	27	0
productive meanings	19	25

Table 5 demonstrates the distribution of overuses of *-sja* motivated by different factors.

Table 5. Types of overuses (Tungusic and Samoyedic).

	N (%)
structural borrowing	4 (16%)
synonymous Russian verb	8 (32%)
overgeneralization	2 (8%)
non-evident	11 (44%)

⁵ The number of nonstandard uses in Samoyedic subcorpus is too small for the quantitative analysis.

⁶ Two-tailed exact Fisher’s test, $p = 0.0339$.

⁷ We do not take into account this semantic type, since it is too rare even across standard uses.

⁸ Two-tailed exact Fisher’s test, $p < 0.0001$.

Clear cases of structural borrowing are rarer than cases of incomplete acquisition (the interference with a synonymous verb without *-sʹa* and overgeneralization of productive meanings of *-sʹa*).

4. Discussion

Thus, we have analyzed the nonstandard uses of the reflexive suffix *-sʹa* in the Russian speech of bilingual speakers of indigenous languages of Siberia, namely Samoyedic and Tungusic languages. Such uses are quite infrequent in the text sample. Since there are many more uses of *-sʹa* that follow the rules of standard Russian, the uses observed in the data do not form a consistent system that differs from standard Russian. Moreover, sometimes we witness a variation: *-sʹa* can be omitted and used correctly within one paragraph or even within one sentence, as in (17).

17. kak budto vverh podnima-jet-sʹa. <... >
 how as.if up rise-NPST.3SG-SJA
 podnima-jet-sʹa, kak budto rastʹ-ot
 rise-NPST.3SG-SJA how as.if grow-NPST.3SG
 'As if he is rising. (And more ... like this. He encircles it more. More, like this.) He is rising, as if he is growing'. (L1 Nganasan)

We do not observe notable differences between the Samoyedic and Tungusic data. However, this might be partly explained by the extremely small number of nonstandard *-sʹa* uses in the Samoyedic sample.

We divided all nonstandard uses of *-sʹa* into two groups: omissions (the unexpected absence of *-sʹa*) and overuses (the unexpected presence of *-sʹa*). Both in the Tungusic text sample and in the Samoyedic one, omissions were more frequent than overuses. This generally agrees with our expectations on the influence of the indigenous system. The prevalence of overuses indeed is not expected, unless the correlate of *-sʹa* in the source language was much more productive. This was not the case either in Tungusic or in Samoyedic.

However, if we exclude deponent verbs, for which omission is logically the only option, and irregular *sʹa*-derivates, for which overuses are not attested either, overuses, in contrast, become even more frequent than omissions.

Not all nonstandard uses of *-sʹa* are caused by structural borrowing. There are even more cases that can be interpreted rather as manifestations of incomplete acquisition. In particular, these are the cases of interference with particular synonymous Russian verbs without *-sʹa* and overgeneralization of productive meanings of *-sʹa*. Some nonstandard uses of *-sʹa* in the speech of older speakers may be inherited from the local pidgin.

The Tungusic data show a significant prevalence of anticausatives across nonstandard uses of *-sʹa*. This agrees with our expectations on the interference with the anticausative *-p* in Tungusic. At the same time, deponent verbs do not show any prevalence, as could be expected according to the hypothesis of under-acquisition of the Russian system.

To conclude, we cannot fully explain the picture observed either by direct calquing of the pattern of the indigenous language or by the incomplete acquisition of standard Russian. We are dealing rather with the interaction of both types of factors and probably also with some additional ones.

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