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# DECOLONIALITY IN ELT: A POLITICAL PROJECT

DECOLONIALIDAD EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS: UN PROYECTO POLÍTICO

DÉCOLONIALITÉ DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT D'ANGLAIS : UN PROJET POLITIQUE

DECOLONIALIDADE NO ENSINO DO INGLÊS: UM PROJETO POLÍTICO

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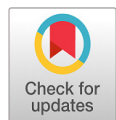
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We started this project as a collective enterprise. *Íkala* invited Carmen Helena, a Colombian ELT teacher educator and researcher, to organize a special volume on decoloniality and ELT. Having a decolonial mind, Carmen Helena could not do it single-handedly and in Colombia alone. She remembered that Clarissa, from Brazil, was also working on decoloniality from within ELT, and proceeded to invite her as a co-organizer. Clarissa immediately accepted the invitation and suggested Gabriela to integrate the group. As an Argentinian scholar, expert on decolonial political theory, and a journalist living in the US, Gabriela would contribute with a third take on decoloniality from outside ELT per se, but dealing with the perks and benefits of being/acting within English inside and outside academia. Gabriela also accepted the invitation and now, here we are.

HOW DID WE START THIS  
PROJECT? WHO ARE WE  
INTELLECTUALLY?  
WHERE DO WE COME  
FROM? HOW DID WE  
MEET?

Our shared praxes come to being on a large interface created by our similar readings, but not without tensions, since our understandings are informed by our individual (but collectively constructed) experiences, emotions, perspectives, cultures, interpretive communities and so on. Nevertheless, we managed to establish significant links in our online conversations, and what was a “merely academic” endeavor turned out to be a space where we, *corazonando*, grew fond of each other. The reason we mention this affective dimension of our project, a dimension not usually present in scholarly texts, is that this lack is one of the violences in our traditional scholarship



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that decoloniality tries to denounce. What we mean is not that scholarly work is done without emotions, but that such aspect of our academic relations is rarely highlighted, if ever, despite its central role in how we think and do our work.

Having that in mind, we decided to present our readers with our *seasoned* academic backgrounds and research interests, bringing to the fore some aspects of our personal identifications that do not usually appear in scholarly journals such as *Íkala*. So, here we go:

*Carmen Helena:* “Among the different identities I embody, I would like to bring up the one I like the most: I am a teacher educator. In that path, I have been in contact with many teachers from many places and with many and varied realities. From them, I have learned about a world that is not in the books or in the journals but in their daily lives, those lived within “el espanto y la ternura” como la canción de Silvio Rodríguez. In that same vein, I have leftist ideas and ideals, which have influenced the way I exist in the world. Criticality has been at the core of both my academic work and personal life, and most recently I have started to walk towards decoloniality in ELT. In that path I have claimed and invited others to claim ownership over our “other language” (English) and over the field of ELT.

*Clarissa:* “I am a white, cisgender female in her late 50’s, living a de facto relationship for 20 happy years. I am tutora of two twin cats who are now already 7 years old. Not long ago, I started taking up music and singing lessons, which turned out to be a big challenge that dissipated any thoughts of accommodation I might have had as a retired professor. I volunteer to teach and supervise Master and Doctoral students at postgraduate level at the Federal University of Parana, and recently have become a visiting professor at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, São Gonçalo. These are two tuition-free

universities in Brazil. My research interests have been in the interface of ELT and teacher education, post-structuralism, ELF and decolonial praxes.”

*Gabriela:* I am a survivor of the alienation to which Eurocentrism and the epistemic dependency of our universities condemn us in the face of the knowledge yardsticks generated by modernity. Envision this surviving of mine not as a before-and-after event, but more like the daily, continuous, always ongoing, never stopping struggle of addicts in recovery to keep sober, one day at a time, and to always be tempted, in my case, by the mirage of assimilation and hyperindividualism. Surviving has not been my own merit, or better, has not been my merit alone. I have had the privilege to work with the maestros, maestras y maestres of anti-colonial and anti-racist thinking and to learn about their resistances on the paper and in the flesh. I have had the fortune to inhabit institutional spaces that have already been cracked by previous generations of decolonizers, feminists of color, philosophers of liberation, pedagogues of freedom, theorists of dependency, intercultural translators, and border thinkers. The cracks are weak but are spirited. I have inhabited these spaces with other survivors of colonial onto-epistemic violences. We have been weaving together nets of concerns, ways of living, ancestral wisdoms, spiritual and social relations, and experiences towards liberation. We have been propagating the weeds on the cracked walls to get to know one another decolonially. My focus has been on the linguistic creative inhabitations of the colonial difference, for which we need an analysis of racialized capitalist linguistic oppressions, the colonality of language, in order to overcome it by means of decolonial communication.

Theories on decoloniality have existed in the academic scene since the last decade of the twentieth

century. The first meetings of the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program were comprised of Latin American, Caribbean, and US Latino/a scholars from different areas and disciplines such as social sciences (Grosfoguel, Lander, Quijano), semiotics (Mignolo, Palermo), philosophy (Castro-Gómez, Dussel, Lugones, Maldonado-Torres), anthropology (Coronil, Escobar), and education (Walsh), among others, and were followed and expanded internationally by a second generation of interdisciplinary scholars.

Decolonial theories propose a reflection on the colonial heritage of the Iberian empires in America during the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which are entrenched in what contemporary social theory calls “modernity”. The decolonial narrative proposes that modernity and coloniality are two phenomena, dependent on one another, genealogically rooted in the same matrix of power/knowledge/being produced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and geopolitically articulated with the birth of the global capitalist system. Quijano showed that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century a racial/international division of labor was produced, a colonial identification of the world population which would mark the subsequent history of the capitalist system. That is why, for decolonial scholars, the theme of “race” as the first form of modern “othering” and its link with coloniality occupies a central place in their reflections.

Another central theme is the reflection introduced around the geopolitics and bodypolitics of knowledge, which shifts the center to knowledges “other” and subjects of reason “other”, whose potential challenges Eurocentrism and the coloniality prevailing in our universities and schools, and is capable of mobilizing life projects “other”. In addition, decolonial scholars refer their genealogies to non-dominant thinkers (Anzaldúa, Césaire, Fanon, Freire, Guaman Poma de Ayala, Kusch, etc.) to trace the foundations of a critical theory of society (Castro Gómez, 2007). Finally, decolonial thought and action are postulated as

an option, an alternative to eurocentrism, and not as a counter-hegemony that would reproduce the universality that is put into question and interrupted.

By now, decoloniality has been understood and defined in many ways, stressing its characteristics as a plural, heterogeneous field of knowledge that encompasses various different forms of local actions or, better still, praxes. We prefer the term *praxes* from the perspective that theory and practice are always intertwined, inseparable —such entanglement being stressed by most decolonial studies (Freitas, 2018).

### WHY DID WE EMBARK IN THIS PROJECT?

Nevertheless, decoloniality is not a perspective in which anything goes. We conceive of this field as having some tenets that bring together scholars and practitioners of various walks of life, including (a) an emphatic plea for the knowledges and knowers that have been invisibilized by the logic of modernity/coloniality and neoliberalism; (b) a claim to localize and situate knowledge in its embodiment/affect; and (c) a struggle to cherish heterogeneity and simultaneity of world views as productive, albeit tensioned and conflict-abiding. This is to say that decoloniality does not silence difference, and at the same time it does not accept the violence (either subtle or explicit) imbued in world-views that exclude and/or promote death, both physical and metaphorical.

This issue of *Íkala* also aims to start filling up what we see as a geopolitical and bodypolitical gap in ELT studies. The concepts *Global South* and *Global North* have been used by critical scholars to describe a grouping of countries and regions along socio-economic and political characteristics and, importantly, along their location in the colonial-imperial Anglo-European history and civilization designs; that is, they convey whether a country or region is on the departure or receiving end of colonization. As such, we use the terms

mainly in reference to specific onto-epistemologies rather than geographical locations.

ELT has traditionally been dominated by the worldview of the Global North, determining not only how and what English language should be taught, but also what counts as knowledge and the kind of research that should be conducted in, within, and about the field. The main idea underlying our title, “O Sur Writes Back”, is that the experience of the world in general, and ELT in particular, is much broader than the Global North, and that the Global South has been an inexhaustible source of experiences, knowledges, political and social innovations, and celebrations of differences that have been consistently silenced. Thus, challenging the canonical Global North onto-epistemic tradition, this issue of *Íkala* also intends to innovate through encounter and dialogue with understandings and practices of ELT that emerge from the geopolitical and bodypolitical difference of educators, researchers, and scholars in the Global South.

The scholarship directly dealing with ELT that has been most meaningful to us and has helped us build our own knowledges and ways of knowing around (de)coloniality, comprises the work of scholars, such as Suresh Canagarajah, Telma Gimenez, Adriana González-Moncada, Carlo Granados, Jennifer Jenkins, Clarissa Jordão, Braj Kachru, Michelle El Kadri, B. Kumaravadivelu, Mario López-Gopar, Sinfrey Makoni, Walkyria Monte Mór, Alastair Pennycook, Barbra Seidlhofer, Sávio Siqueira, Jairo Soto-Molina, Lynn Mario T. M. de Souza, and Henry Widdowson, to name but a few. Although not all of them can be comfortably labeled as *decolonial* or located geopolitically in the Global South their work has helped us reflect on our praxes and position ourselves within the scholarship on Applied Linguistics, EFL and ELF. Their names are mentioned here in order to facilitate the location of the understandings of decoloniality that underpin this issue of *Íkala*.

That being said, the implications of decolonial thinking to specific landscapes in language teaching

and learning are still underexplored, especially when it comes to foreign (or second or additional) languages such as English. In its functions as a lingua franca, and its reification as a dominant language in Latin America, unmistakably after the implementation of language policies favoring its teaching-learning over other languages, English has been closely tied to globalization and internationalization (Figueiredo, 2017; Jordão et al., 2020), two areas that greatly benefit from decolonial criticism, notably when we consider the tenets mentioned above (visibilization, embodiment, localization). Such tenets also connect with critical interculturality and translanguaging, two areas that have been more explicitly developed in their relations to ELT than decolonization. As you will realize, in this issue, both of those theories are brought together in their interface with decolonization, which represents a significant move towards a possible filling of such gap.

A further gap we see in ELT scholarship is the lack of attention to decolonizing efforts made by teachers and learners, including teacher educators. Such absence is another dimension of the field that this special issue of *Íkala* on decolonization and ELT starts to engage.

The decoloniality we are foregrounding here comes from the geopolitical and onto-epistemological South that writes back. We are writing from our, until recently, marginalized positions, which are now slowly coming to visibility. The contemporary interest in Southern voices is perhaps due to the feeling that it is time to look for other ways to understand the world differently from what was projected as universal by modernity/coloniality. Or, perhaps, this interest comes from the realization that those systems of understanding have not helped us care for each other, sustain and cherish life on earth (in the spirit of Gaia<sup>1</sup>),

1 According to Boston (2008, p. 86), “the Gaia hypothesis supposes Earth to be a planet-scale-integrated entity composed of the nonliving parts of the planet plus its ecological systems – in essence, a superorganism. The entity is



so we urgently need to find alternatives. Or, perhaps, such interest simply stems from affection and empathy. Whatever the reason, decoloniality in its interface with Southern thinking has joint efforts with other schools of critical thought to contribute theory and methods that interrogate how Eurocentered modern/colonial rationality attempts to erase difference, homogenize ways of knowing, and produce similarities in a violent process of silencing and diminishing some subjectivities while promoting others as universal.

**WHICH DECOLONIALITY,  
WHICH ELT, WHICH SOUTH?**

Our gaze to ELT is tinted with a critical perspective that sees teaching-learning English in South America as a dimension of life pregnant with possibilities to resignify world views and to develop a decolonial attitude to situated political agency and active citizenship. The English language, compulsory in many educational systems in the South, allows us to promote classroom praxes that enlarge perspectives and expand interpretive procedures, helping teachers and learners to feel collectively responsible for their worlds as they participate in school practices that allow them to envisage alternatives to onto-epistemic and physical oppression and violence. English as a subject-matter is for us, and for the authors in this issue, a space for challenging linguistic prejudice, epistemic racism, native-speakerism, authoritarian normativism and pedagogy, among many other dimensions of language teaching-learning that have been submitting local creativity to the arrogance of purportedly universal ways of teaching, learning and doing languages.

viewed as a self-regulatory system in which ecological and biological processes control the values of the many physical parameters of the Earth within certain bounds that are conducive to the continuance of life”.

Bearing this background in mind, we look at the English language from the South and in the South, negotiating our understandings with institutionalized expertise, trying to find the gaps that will allow us to move forward anew, rather than passively accepting its rule over our local praxiologies. This has been far from easy. As guest editors, we celebrated that the well-known and widely circulated journal *Íkala* was working to make room for a special issue on decoloniality, and in this way, pushing its own limits regarding ELT studies. This was for us a starting point and an invitation to push the limits further. However, we did have to negotiate, on the one hand, with the authors, in order for them to be creative and original in ways that could be well-received and understood by *Íkala* and its intended audience. On the other hand, we needed to plead with *Íkala* to be more flexible in their editorial demands, especially in terms of previously determined text-structure and classifications for the articles – i.e. the given working labels of empirical, case studies, methodological, theoretical, literature reviews. We were fortunate to count with *Íkala*’s openness: For this special issue, *Íkala* accepted to open a section named “pedagogical experiences”. They also accepted the sections within the papers to be named differently: Some of the articles, as readers will notice, do not come with a special section for “results” or “methodology”, and many do not name their sections in the way that is usually done in other *Íkala* issues.

This took some pushing from *Íkala*’s part too, since they legitimately worry about indexes that establish the prestige of the journal. Such indexes widen the audience and amplify the interest created by some journals, but they also tend to privilege homogeneity and constrain creativity, preferring structural and methodological pre-determined arrangements that many times do not correspond to what has actually been done in the process of research and/or writing academic papers. Besides, scholars all over the world have been subjected to the neoliberal logic that binds salary increments to the publication in journals indexed in national and international databases such as Publindex

and Scimago, presently indexing *Íkala*. In the process of preparing this issue, we had to consider that dimension of scholarly life as well.

Therefore, the tensions between our expectations as guest editors of a decolonial issue, who envisioned it as embodying decoloniality at multiple levels, and the rules and regulations an indexed journal such as *Íkala* has to follow demanded compromise. Our negotiations were around what is considered scientific *rigor* and *academic* writing within this largely colonized and neoliberal field of scholarly knowledge. Should we give in to the naturalized expectations that good-quality papers need to follow specific normalized practices? Should we dare and tension such expectations? Should imperialist logics such as the one behind Publindex and Scimago stop us from accepting papers that did not comply with such practices? We dared. A bit. Not too much, in order to have the papers published and *Íkala's* classification preserved, but enough to make us proud with the outcome and to hope all stakeholders, together with our readers, will be proud as well.

Among the three of us there was also a lot of negotiation. To start with, our understandings of decoloniality and how plurally, broadly or narrowly it could be perceived were different. Not only did we have to agree on what counted as decolonial or not, but we also needed to come to terms with what each of us understood as “academic rigor” and its (un)importance to determine which papers could be selected for this issue. The solution we came up with, considering the heterogeneity of practices withing decoloniality, was to acquiesce to how each paper/author had chosen to set their own decolonial terms, as long as they kept to the three widely-defined tenets mentioned above that inform our shared view of decoloniality.

We are thankful to one another as editors, to the authors and to *Íkala*, especially to Doris Correa, for their receptiveness and patience negotiating with us. From such a complex process of negotiation we managed to construct this special issue, as a collective

effort that, we hope, can inspire scholars and ELT teachers wherever they see their praxes happening.

## About the Articles

While we acknowledge how *Íkala* arranged the articles according to their editorial classification, we want to offer a summary of the articles that shows how they *do decoloniality* echoing the above-mentioned tenets.

Carvajal, Hurtado, Lara, Ramírez, Barón, Ayala, and Coy bring a rich collective autoethnography written (weaved) by seven in-service/pre-service teachers in which they tell their journeys towards implementing a pedagogy of possibilities. To this end, they declare pedagogy as a political way of resisting imposed and humanly-detached teaching and researching in ELT, while embracing indigenous principles to contest the “dryness” of ELT pedagogies. They use three “threads” to illustrate their walking together in this project: *Becoming*, *Embracing*, and *Transforming*. On *Becoming*, the authors reflect on the multiplicity of dimensions of their own selves and acknowledge teaching as a kind of activism. On *Embracing*, each one tells their own struggles to become these teachers who challenge the status quo and opt for a social justice path. On *Transforming*, they reflect on their own humanity, flaws, and growth, giving relevance to the emotional dimension of being a teacher. These three threads allow the reader to have a glimpse of the challenges and possibilities of a journey towards adopting the teaching of English from a decolonial perspective.

Granados's article is divided into two main parts. In the first part, he shares the results of a critical ethnography in which he analyzed undergraduate students' and teacher educators' opinions, and official documents in relation to coloniality in the field of English Language Teacher Education in Colombia. He finds that the implementation of the National Bilingualism Program (English) continues to generate unequal educational and professional practices. In the second part, and as a way to contest colonial practices in ELT, he makes

a proposal founded in critical interculturality. His proposal advocates for (a) the acknowledgement of English language teachers' professional, geo, and body-political dimensions, and (b) a turn in English language teaching programs to adopt a critical and interdisciplinary approach and overcome their instrumental language-oriented perspective.

Aguirre-Garzón, Ubaque-Casallas, Salazar-Sierra, and López' article analyzes and documents, from a border and post-abysal pedagogical perspective, the training of foreign language teachers in the construction of experiences of peace and reconciliation for the post-agreement in Colombia. The first part of the article discusses the factors that have influenced the existing void in ELT training on social reconciliation. In it, the authors show how eurocentrism and alignment with colonial legacies in official approaches to ELT entail instrumental and delocalized pedagogical practices that limit teachers from establishing links with social dimensions and cultural factors important for coexistence. The second part presents alternative knowledge and teaching proposals based on the places (loci) from which they are produced and enunciated. In this section, the idea and practice of *pedagogies of reconciliation* emerges to promote a non-pathologizing conception of conflict and, from there, an opening to the reconfiguring of the teaching of English as a humanizing social practice.

Ortiz, Arismendi, and Londoño make a contribution to the discussions about what it means to build interculturality in the field of foreign languages in Colombia with a project that understands interculturality as a project conceptually and pedagogically intertwined with the project of decoloniality. The initiative shows both how critical interculturality is a pedagogical possibility to decolonize ELT in Colombia and contribute to the construction of a fairer country, and how spaces for professional teacher development can themselves contribute to the construction of intercultural projects in the field of foreign languages from Colombia and for Colombia. Their

qualitative action research—study was based on a course that focused on offering teachers a space to explore and reflect on different forms of diversity and otherness, local and foreign, and on the co-construction of teaching proposals in conditions of equality, respect, fairness and dignity. The article offers rich bibliographical, methodological, evaluative and conceptual tools.

The two research studies discussed in Silva and Marson were developed in the field of English teacher education and problematize concepts of language as a neutral code or a space for the transmission of thought. Privileging language as a social practice, the authors demonstrate how the latter concept was perceived in both investigations. The authors exercised their “escuta atenta” (Freire, 2011), listening to the voices of their research participants (giving them visibility). They also developed their respective analyses without silencing the heterogeneity they found in the field, allowing for tensions to be exposed and positioning themselves, without necessarily resolving the conflicts they experienced. They claim for education to be a space of dialogue among differences rather than a space of imposed consensus.

Understanding the relevant role assigned to ELT materials, Núñez-Pardo conducts a critical content analysis of ELT textbooks to unveil the ways in which hegemonic ideologies are at the core of these materials. To this end, besides analyzing the textbooks, the author also held conversations with teachers, students and editors. Through this quest, Nuñez found that ELT textbooks are mostly spreading colonial ideologies attached to both English and neoliberalism. She also found some glimpses of decoloniality in the way teachers reflected critically on the contents of the textbooks. Nuñez's ulterior purpose was to make visible the colonial and neoliberal agendas spread through textbooks and the need to adopt a critical interculturality approach to counter hegemonic practices.



Mosquera-Pérez's article gives an account of a qualitative case study carried out with the purpose of analyzing the types of hegemonic and resistance discourses that have taken place in ELT in the last few years in Colombia. Informed by critical literacy, critical discourse analysis, and the notion of counter-hegemony, their analysis shows, on the one hand, how Colombian language policy making has been manipulated to maintain unbalanced power dynamics in society and to implement neoliberal reforms. On the other, it reveals how ELT scholars have been resisting these hegemonic dynamics by promoting intercultural understanding, analyzing embedded Colombian sociocultural issues, and continuously reflecting on the role of ELT teachers as non-native English speakers.

Beato-Canato, Back, Cristovão, and Francescon focus on teaching resources for indigenous education in Brazil. Their analysis stresses the originality of a textbook that comprises materials developed by more than 10 indigenous peoples, including oral narratives, and brings to light a different concept of education and teaching. Nevertheless, the authors suggest changes to the book, such as choosing words that avoid pejorative terms to refer to indigenous knowledges (as for example *myth*), and a more decolonial view of language itself as a non-transparent practice of meaning-making. Their article helps us to realize that, even in a collection such as this, our *inner colonizers* do come to surface every now and then.

In the paper by Haus and Schmicheck, we are presented with a grounded discussion on possibilities for assessment otherwise, which takes a decolonial option as a way to build such practices. The paper, directed to language teachers, proposes a move away from assessment as measurement into assessment in light of critical literacy, translanguaging and ELF feito no Brasil, perspectives they situate within decolonial praxis. Throughout the text, Haus and Schmicheck point out the importance of considering the emotions involved in

assessing language students. By describing two English courses offered by them individually, but planned together, they present their experience as an invitation for other teachers to reflexively consider the possibility of taking up evaluation as an opportunity to think about the impact such process may cause on students' learning and their identities and the importance of collaborating with students in the process.

The next article reports on a pedagogical experience on an EFL course carried out by Gutiérrez and Aguirre, which was tailored to serve the needs of indigenous and Afro-colombian students. Using critical interculturality and translanguaging as pedagogical possibilities, the authors embarked in what they call "decolonizing our teaching practice". Throughout the article, the authors share not only their inner conflicts, tensions and struggles but also their epiphanies in trying to implement a decolonial approach to teaching a colonial language. To them, making critical interculturality and translanguaging tangible in the classroom was both challenging and rewarding, since, for once, traditionally underserved students felt they mattered. The authors conclude their article with a reflection on the responsibility of English teachers to disrupt the coloniality imbued in the teaching of this language and its long-standing consequences in the invisibilization of minoritized populations.

Reflecting on the practices developed in a Colombian doctoral teacher education program in ELT, Castañeda and Mendez bring to the fore the importance of considering the emotions involved in a decolonial teacher education. Their article calls for embodied knowledge and defends the importance of bringing affect to education, including its higher levels. Through the concept of *pedagogization*, they suggest a move away from the coloniality of knowledge and its universalization of teachers/learners, objectification and standardization of language, and linguistic imperialism/capitalism. They situate pedagogization as the

de-linking, submerged guiding, decolonial voicing, and cultivation of heterarchical relationships, and stress the value of *sentipensar* in the educational process.

Bonilla-Medina and Finardi examine the epistemological intersections between Critical Race Theory and Decoloniality. They focus on racialized/colonized views of ELT as a geopolitical construction and unfold some of the ways in which ELT in Brazil and Colombia has operated as a colonial power. Using their privilege as academics, they bring up the voices of four graduate/undergraduate students in Colombia and Brazil who, through their own research projects, which are graduation requirements, have questioned/contested/resisted racialized/colonized practices in ELT.

Finally, Costa Rosa and Duboc's article aims at analyzing the concept and field of inquiry of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) from a decolonial perspective. In the first part, the authors take up an exercise of identification-interrogation-interruption of coloniality pivoting on the question of "where ELF voices come from and who can voice ELF issues." The analysis is based on a documentary about the International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca, from 2008 to 2019. In the second part, and urging to "bring back the body" to ELF knowledge, the article reviews literature on ELF Feito no Brasil which aims to undo the epistemological violence of linguistic coloniality.

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