Pragmatic Equivalence in the Translation of Cultural References from Uzbek into English

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Abstract:
The problem of translating cultural references has been one of the most critical aspects of translation studies in recent years. Due to the complexity and diversity of nations, several issues including cognitive dissonance, misinterpretation of customs and traditions, loss of national color, and omission of national connotations can arise during the translation process. Representation of pragmatic features in the context aids in keeping the core meaning of cultural references in translation. This article highlights possibilities of pragmatic equivalence in translating culture-specific words from Uzbek to English based on a case study of two novels. Furthermore, a new model of implementing pragmatic equivalence has been proposed to cover the cultural gap between the addresser (translator) and the addressee (reader). This model is created based on the theory of equivalence by Baker (2006) and the theory of conversational implicatures by Grice (1989). The obtained results may serve to train professional translators and to increase the quality of translations from Turkic languages into English.

Keywords: cultural references, equivalence implicature, implied meaning, literary translation, pragmatics, pragmatic equivalence, translating culture

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Introduction

Translating novels poses a significant challenge as the intended readers must easily understand the translated content. It requires conveying the contextual meaning, often tied to specific cultural elements or background knowledge. The issue arises when translating for individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds, demanding the translator’s consideration of both cultural acceptability and the text’s readability. To address these challenges, translators employ various techniques, making necessary adjustments while preserving the original text’s intended meaning and pragmatic impact. For instance, in dealing with complex expressions, simplification may be employed for better readability. Additionally, if the target language lacks equivalents for specific expressions, the translator might opt to substitute them with culturally appropriate alternatives. It then helps to focus on achieving pragmatic equivalence, especially when dealing with cultural elements unfamiliar to English readers.

Literature Review

Text pragmatics

Most scholars widely recognize that text is not just a basic tool for communication but also a multifaceted entity that includes psychological, rhetorical, and practical aspects. In numerous academic studies, pragmatics is considered to be a crucial element of text, aligning with semantics to form a vital aspect of scholarly inquiry. Scholars such as Al-Saedi, Hayder (2013), Dressler (1973), Shansky (1990), Dotmurziyeva (2006), and Fedorov (1963), have extensively investigated various aspects of text pragmatics, examining general approaches, translation challenges, pragmatic meaning provision through stylistic methods, and pragmatic elements within the realm of literature and Corpus Linguistics. Given how broadly the term “text pragmatics” is used, we determined it was necessary to identify a few essential elements of this area. According to Nayer (1985), the text ought to contain the following elements in this regard:

- text pragmatics as a global category, it is a mandatory property of every text and reflects the attitude of the addressee to the object of communication, the communicative act itself and through it to the addressee;
- presence of addressee and addressee;
- pragmatic intention of the text;
- pragmatic content;
- pragmatic effect of the text. (Nayer, 1985, p. 5)

Thus, the correlation between the addressee’s intention and the text’s pragmatic importance explains the latter. Additionally, as Dressler (1973) pointed out that the pragmatic meaning of the text is understood from a particular problem, circumstance, area, or time regardless of the language in which it is written. We believe that the primary characteristic of the text is its communicative role, which further links it to a pragmatic element. Since pragmatics is a component of communication as well. Based on the aforementioned factors, it is possible to conclude that the pragmatic nature of the text is defined by the transmission of specific information to the addressee (reader), as well as by guaranteeing the alignment of the addresser’s and the addressee’s intentions and influencing the latter as a consequence of the pragmatic effect.
Particularly, American scholar Hayder (2013) examines the novel “The Giver” by Lois Lowry through the lens of Grice’s theory of conversational implicatures. The scientist claims that on one hand, spoken language requires the attendance of the paralinguistic cues which are absent in the written language. The paralinguistic cues or resources represent the voice as well as the facial expressions which enable the speakers to show the effect of the words that he or she is saying. On the other hand, the writer is careful in choosing the words and he or she is not interrupted by the interlocutors (the readers). There is no pressure on the writer when he or she writes what s/he wants and the writer does not know who is the audience.” (Hayder, 2013, p.7)

The Russian linguist Dotmurziyeva (2006) defines pragmatics of literary texts as “the use of various linguistic tools in the speech of the author and the main character to influence the addressee, and the reader receives the message of the author relying on extralinguistic (background) knowledge and combines it with the intention of the written text. Also, Fedorov, states in that “even when the writer violates the word forms or phrase construction of the text to the pragmatic meaning and intention of the addresser can be comprehended as those errors demonstrate a person’s mental state or cultural or social identity” (Fedorov, 1963, p. 42). Breaking these “rules” is the outcome of getting linguistic material and a deliberate, creative decision made from the language’s possibilities. Also, Al-Hindawi & Saffah (2019) highlight the main aspects of literary pragmatics including literary discourse, context, author and reader, author and narrator relations and the voice of the texts. Those factors play a crucial role to form the pragmatic effect of the text. Also, scholar Alwazna, (2017) point out that “literary pragmatics is a recent trend which is interested in the investigation of the contextual influences exerted by authors or writers on their readers by means of their literary products” (p. 15).

**Pragmatic potential of the text**

Matveeva, (1984) proposes to distinguish the pragmatic function of the literary text as a part of the communicative function, because the pragmatic function plays a very large role in the act of communication. The ability of the text to create a communicative effect and have a pragmatic effect on the receiver of information is usually called the **pragmatic potential of the text**. In other words, the way the text’s content is chosen, how it is transmitted linguistically, and how semantic relations are constructed all contribute to the pragmatic potential of the text. Additionally, this term is determined in two ways: through verbal and nonverbal forms of communication.

Meanwhile, Bajenova (2003) emphasized that the use of non-verbal means of communication (NMC) in literary texts significantly affects the pragmatic potential of the text, as well as its emotional impact. In particular, Bajenova (2003) pays attention to the preservation of intertextual communication of language units related to the code of culture in the subconscious memory of people in this or that community. According to the scientist, “the re-creation of emotional expressions in the literary text serves not only to transmit intergenerational culturally important features but also to form the awareness of the cultural identity of the speakers of the language”. All types of emotional expressions have pragmatic
potential including features of the speaker’s personality, social, ethnic, cultural level, age, gender, and profession. In this sense, the expression of feelings is a product of the author’s discursive thinking activity, which fully corresponds to the ideas of what he feels in a specific emotional state and how it is manifested externally.

**Pragmatics of literary translation**

To increase the quality of translation and to comprehend the actual message conveyed by the text, it is helpful to pay attention to pragmatic facts and principles during the translation process. Many scholars have discussed the pragmatic aspects of translation thus far. Some have focused on the pragmatic aspects of translating folktales, in contrast, others have examined the pragmatics of translating poetry and attempted to address the challenges that have come up in translation. Among European scientists, Baker (2018) and Hatim (1990) conducted their research on the difficulties of translating between cultures, and the monograph of scholar Abulhassan, (2011) involves essential details regarding the pragmatic issues with translation and pragmatic equivalence.

**Pragmatic equivalence in translation**

Since it is directly tied to the descriptive and practical aspects of translation, the concept of equivalency has drawn the attention of translation researchers. The term equivalency, which emerged as a key component of translation theories in the 1960s and 1970s, designates the “identical” conceptual state between the source text (hereafter ST) and the target text (hereafter TT).

In the classification of equivalence, Nida (1964) points out two main types of equivalence:

1. **formal equivalence**;
2. **dynamic equivalence**.

Nida (1964) states that in dynamic equivalency, TT attempts to convey the information in ST as naturally as possible, whereas in formal equivalence, TT is highly identical to ST in both form and content. In nearly all of her research publications, she advocates for dynamic equivalence because she considers it a more successful translation technique. To get the same result for many audiences simultaneously, the scholar employed dynamic equivalence in the Bible translation. Nida & Taber proposed a type of equivalence often highlighted as “more preferable”, which later became known as “pragmatic equivalence”. This is considered one of the main types of equivalence in translation studies today (Nida & Taber, 1969).

In translation studies, there is also the concept of cultural equivalence, and it is important to distinguish it from pragmatic equivalence. In his article, Chinese scientist Siyu (2016) discusses the importance of cultural equivalence in translation and in which cases this method should be used. According to the researcher, “To avoid the human factors, how to achieve cultural equivalence in translation is also determined by the following four factors:

1. Types of the original text.
2. The importance of cultural color in the original text.
3. The purpose of translation.
We believe that cultural equivalence in translation emphasizes accurately expressing the idioms, traditions, customs, and symbolic meanings of the source language culture in the target language. This involves conveying not only the exact meaning of the words but also the key cultural associations and nuances of the original text. The goal is to ensure that the translated content reflects the same cultural influences as the source text while also resonating authentically with the target culture. However, pragmatic equivalence seeks to accurately and successfully translate pragmatic and contextual components of the source text in addition to the meaning itself. It requires maintaining the writer's intention, speech acts, implied meanings, and communication intentions of the original text in the target language. Ensuring the translation accurately conveys the pragmatic effect, social context, and communicative features of the original language material is the primary function of pragmatic equivalence.

In this regard, Baker (2006) addresses the issue of equivalence by applying a neutral approach when she states that equivalence is a relative concept. In particular, the chapters of her book are structured at different levels of equivalence, that is word, phrase, grammar, text, and pragmatics. Hence, terms such as grammatical, textual, and pragmatic equivalence arise. More specifically, differences between word-level and higher-level equivalence are explored in the case of English and Arabic languages in her analysis.

According to Baker (2018), Pragmatic equivalence in translation is defined by two concepts as such coherence and implicatures. Also, as pragmatic equivalence is associated with implicatures, which are the main part of pragmatics, Grice’s theory of “Conversational implicatures” is an integral part of it. Implicature focuses on the implied meaning of a sentence rather than the spoken meaning. In other words, the focus is not on what is said, but on the meaning implied or intended to be implied in a given context. For example:

**Speaker:** Will you go to Tom’s party?

**Hearer:** I should check the weather +>

As you can see in the example above, when S asked to go to the party, H said, he should check the weather. In this case, H meant that he couldn’t go to the party, not that he decided to go to the party because of the weather. And this “not going to the party (or not being able to go)” is an implicature in the given dialogue, and in the analysis of examples involving implicature in scientific and theoretical literature, the sign “+>” is placed next to the implicature.

Pragmatic equivalence has been widely studied in English, Russian, Persian, Arabic, and involves the translation of national-culturally specific language units, expressions and metaphors, and is constantly analyzed depending on the context. This type of equivalence pertains specifically to contexts where communication is a crucial factor. It holds significant weight in the translation of spoken language as well as in the translation of literary works, considering the communicative and pragmatic aspects inherent in such texts. Grice (1989) emphasizes the significance of four maxims essential for any successful communication to go including the maxim of quality, the
maxim of quantity, the maxim of relevance and the maxim of manner. Grice’s “Cooperative Principle” is achieved by following one of the four maxims. Several norms are adhered to by communicators across four cooperative categories of communication:

- quantity (informativeness),
- quality (accuracy),
- attitude (direction of conversation),
- and manner (expression style).

Moreover, Grice (1989) asserts that implicatures are implicit meanings stated by speakers, which emerge due to violating cooperative maxims. Thus, one of the four maxims of Grice must be violated to create implicatures.

**Method**

We aimed to demonstrate the use of communication implicatures in the provided diagram, based on the theories and research discussed in earlier sections.

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*Figure 1. The use of pragmatic implicatures in communication*

In the aforementioned diagram, As Bekmurodova (2023) states, the parties engaged in the conversation are denoted as S (the speaker) and H (the hearer). The diagram outlines the involvement of implicatures in the sentence. Here, A represents the utterance by S, B indicates the meaning the speaker intends to convey, and C represents the sentence comprehended by H. When B and C are not equivalent (B≠C), it indicates a violation of one of the maxims of Grice’s “Cooperative Principle,” leading to the realization of an implicature. Let’s examine an example to further illustrate this concept:

- Husband: *Babe, it’s already time. Let’s go*
- Wife: *Have something to drink.* +>
- Husband: *Drink? Why?*

In this example, we have communicators S (speaker) - husband, H (hearer) - wife,
A – Have something to drink. +>
B – I am not going to be ready soon (implied meaning)

Here, S used implicature in her speech and tried to convey the meaning she wanted to imply to H by saying (B).

C – Drink? Why? determines that H did not understand the meaning of B, and C is a sentence understood by H. In this case, since B and C are not equal to each other (B ≠ C), the “Cooperative principle” in the communication implicatures of Grice is not fulfilled. The reason for this is the violation of one of the four maxims, namely, the maxim of relevance resulting in implicatures in the speech. The same situation is reflected in the communicative-pragmatic nature of literary texts. Only the third person TR - translator also participates in this triangle (Fig. 2).

Taking into consideration that texts have communicative function, we used the same formula to clarify the way pragmatic equivalence is achieved in translation. The only distinction from the original communication is that it occurs between the writer and the reader. The third person T - the translator - also participates in translating literary texts. In this case, the roles of S (speaker) and H

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 2. The use of communicative implicatures in translation of literary texts (hearer) are performed by W (writer) and (R) reader, and it depends on T (translator) that the sentence A reaches the reader in the form C. If the implied meaning intended by the writer during the translation process is equal to the meaning conveyed to the reader after the translation (B=C), if the intended pragmatic effect D is achieved, then pragmatic equivalence is ensured in the translation.*

In the analytical section of our research, we will examine several works that reflect Uzbek national traditions and values, along with their English translations. Our focus will be on ensuring that these translations achieve pragmatic equivalence based on the previously mentioned formula.

Examples are taken from Abdulla Qadiri’s work “The Scorpion from the Altar” (translated by I.M. Tokhtasinov, U.R. Yoldoshev, A.A. Khamidov (2019)) and Cholpan’s “Night and Day” (translated by Christopher Fort (2019), O. Mominov along with A. Hamidov into English (2014)).
Results
Example (1) Cultural reference “fotiha” (fatiha)

“— Men qayoqdan bilay, qanday mehmon… fotihaga kishilar kelar emish, deb eshidim.
— Fotihasi qanaqa?
— Bilmasam qanaqa? Anvar o‘ylanib yana kulimsidi:
— Sening fotihang bo’lmasin? (implikatura) +>
— Menim qanday fotiham bo’lsin, men hali tirikman.
— Teskariga burma, Ra’no, balki seni erga bermakchidirlar?” (Source text)
The communicative implicature is involved in the original language itself, and the Cooperative principle” was not achieved due to the violation of the maxims. In the excerpt from the above work:

S (speaker) - Anwar
H (Hearer) – Ra’no
A (uttered sentence) - fotih
B (implied meaning) - fotih (implicature) +>
C (obtained idea) is fotih

It can be seen that since B and C are not equal to each other (B ≠ C), a completely different meaning is understood from the uttered sentence.

If we focus on the English translation of the same passage,
— We are waiting for the guests.
— Do not lie, Rano, - Anvar said smiling.
— What kind of guests?
— How do I know? I heard that people should come to read fatiha.
— What’s the occasion of fatiha?
— I do not know. Anvar thought, then smiled and said:
— Maybe it will be your fatiha? +>
— How can they read fatiha for me? I am still alive.
— Do not shirk, Rano! Maybe, you are going to marry? (English translation)

In this example, the implicature is hidden behind the cultural reference “fatiha”, and they preferred to translate the sentence as “we are waiting for the guests” into English. However, we believe that English-speaking students would better understand the word “fatiha” if additional explanations were provided using a combination of foreignization and descriptive methods. Also, in the following sentences, simply giving the word “fatiha” through the foreignization method prevented the reader from understanding its pragmatic meaning in this context, and pragmatic equivalence was not provided. In order to fully convey the cultural reference involved in this passage and the implicature hidden in it to the English reader, it would be appropriate to use words that exist in the English language and culture. For example, the cultural reference “fatiha” belongs to the type of religious, cultural reference. According to the explanatory dictionary of the Uzbek language, the word “fatiha” has multiple definitions:
(1) opening, beginning, introduction, the first chapter of the Qur'an;
(2) praying with open hands and pulling them to their faces;
(3) wish good luck to the person who is going to do something;
(4) after the girl and the boy agree to get married, a pre-marriage ceremony is held in order to announce this to the relatives and residents of the neighborhood;
(5) it can be used in the meaning of rituals held for the memory of the deceased on the first three days of death and Eid days in the house where the dead came out.

Thus, from the comments given in the passage of the work above, the meaning of (2) is used at the beginning by H; when S used it for the second time, it was in the implicature form (A) conveying meaning (4) in (B), and in the sense understood by the listener (C) meaning (5) was obtained. In this case, taking into account that almost all the meanings of “fatiha” cultural reference are inextricably linked with religion, this word can be given in English as “ritual”. It is due to the fact that the word ritual is defined as “a fixed set of actions and words, especially as a part of a religious ceremony” according to the Cambridge English dictionary. In the given context it can be absolute equivalent for the word “fatiha”.

— Men qayqo’dan bilay, qanday mehmom… fotihaga kishilar kelar emish, deb eshitdim.
— Fotihasi qanaqa? (Source text)

— I don’t know who the guests are… They might be coming for a ritual
What kind of ritual? (English translation)

Hence, in this translation, pragmatic equivalence is partially ensured and the English reader can understand what is meant in this passage. However, although the pragmatic effect of the translation has been partially achieved, we can see that the cultural reference of the Uzbek language has lost its national color in the English translation. Interestingly, the online monolingual “Merriam-Webster” English dictionary also has the word “fatiha”, according to which it is defined as “the short opening sura of the Koran used by Muslims as a prayer”. However, the fact that it did not come in the sense that the writer intended in the above context will undoubtedly cause misunderstanding in the addressee. Therefore, both by foreignizing the word “blessing” and by using the word “ritual”, it will be possible to fully convey the pragmatic meaning to the reader and have a pragmatic effect.

— I don’t know who the guests are… They might be coming for a ritual to read fatiha1.
— What kind of ritual and fatiha?
— I do not know.

Anvar thought, then smiled and said:
— Maybe, the reason of this ritual is You. It may be your fatiha? +>
— How can it be my fatiha? I am still alive.
— Do not shirk, Rano! Maybe, you are going to marry? (Our translation)

This translation aims to uncover implicit meanings and establish pragmatic equivalence by employing the words “ritual” and “fatiha” in English translation.
The other extract is taken from the novel “Night and Day by Cholpan which focuses mainly on the social problems in Central Asian issues in the 19th century.

- Yelkamda o’n putdan o’ttiz put yukim bor... - dedi mingboshi. Bu ham baqirishga yaqin bir ovoz bilan aytilgan edi.
  Uchala xotin ham bu yukning nimaligini anglab yetolmadilar. Xadichaxonning fikricha, mingboshiga “irim” qilgan edilar. Endi uni “qaytartirmoq” dan o’zga iloj yo’q edi. Bu fikr boshqa kundoshlarning miyalaridan ham o ‘rmadi emas... Faqat, Xadichaxonning bu fikri qat’iy bo’lsa kerakkim, yashirishga luzum ko’rmadi:

- Ayollarning bilgani irim, bilgani qaytarma, bilgani azayimxon... Qovog’i uchsa ham azayimxonga chopadi... – dedi mingboshi. (Source text)

There are some cultural references used professionally by the writer along with the use of conversational implicatures in them. However, English translation of them by two translators are quite distinctive from each other.

“There are thirty pounds of weight in my shoulders. Do I need another ten?! ” he bellowed so even those who had exited could hear. +>

There wives didn’t understand what that weight was. Xadichaxon thought that mingboshi must have been cursed by someone, and now she would have to dispel it. This thought must have passed through other two’s heads as well. But Xadichaxon had more conviction than her rivals and dared to offer her assistance.

It looks like your rivals had it out for you. Do you need me to cast a spell for you?

You women only know your superstitions and spells and healers. If your eyelid starts to switch, you run to your healer right away,” said mingboshi. (Translated by Christopher Fort, P.113)

Discussion

In the given extract, implicature is expressed through the word “yuk”(burden), and in the part where “There are thirty pounds of weight in my shoulders”, Speaker (mingboshi) indicates that he has 3 wives and they are his thirty pounds of weight in his shoulders.

First of all, if we pay attention to the use of the concepts of “yuk” or “yuki bo’lmoq” in the Uzbek language, the word “yuk” has the following meanings in the explanatory dictionary of the Uzbek language:

1. weight that needs to be lifted and transported from one place to another;
2. phrase an excess that tempts and worries a person; worry, trouble;
3. The child in the womb; fetus;
4. according to religious belief, a disease caused by offending saints.
In the given example, S – mingboshi, H – his wives, A – the word “yuk” (burden). If S meant (2) by saying “I have a weight/burden on my shoulders” (A), it may seem that H interpreted it according to meaning (4) and the “Principle of cooperation” was not provided by the violation of the maxim of “quantity”. In fact, (C) implies the meaning which is not provided in the dictionary – “using magic for the purpose of doing harm to someone, and therefore has a negative effect on a person”. In this case, the translator preferred to give the cultural reference “irim” through the word “cursed” and “qaytarma” is given as an equivalent to “to dispel” and “to cast a spell”, the pragmatic meaning and implicature were understandable to the addressee, “qaytarma” in Uzbek – according to the old belief, to ward off sickness, calamity, etc., to pray for the purpose of taking away a magic from someone by reciting a prayer, it means to be freed from evil spells that were cast long before. However, In English, “to cast a spell” means “to use words thought to be magic, especially in order to have an effect on someone.” Our research shows that “to cast a spell” in English is used in many cases to cast a spell with evil intentions or to turn something or an object into something else. Therefore, we cannot say that they are pragmatically equivalent, but because they are above semantic equivalence and below pragmatic equivalence, the phrase “to cast a spell” is quasi-equivalent to the Uzbek word “qaytarma”.

In the translation given by O. Mominov and A. Hamidov, these cultural references are interpreted as follows:

– There is a bitter heavy burden on my shoulders! – told mingboshi by voice near to shout. All wives of him could not understand what that burden really was. To Khadichakhan mind, mingboshi was cursed and someone was behind it. Thus, she thought to prepare some prayed water. So she told about her husband:

– I suppose your enemies made any curse about you, maybe I will have prepared a prayed water for you.

– All women are similar. All of them know only curse, only superstition shouted mingboshi. Saying that words his face brightened a bit. (Translated by O. Mo’minov va A. Hamidov, P.62)

In this translation, the words “irim” or “qasd qilmoq” are interpreted as “curse” and “qaytarma” as “prayed water”, translators tried to convey the pragmatic intention of the addressee by adding the specific expression “prayed water”. However, due to the non-existence of the concept of “prayed water” in English, due to the differences between our culture and religion and English culture and religion, the translators could not provide a connection between W and R and pragmatic equivalence was not provided. In general, given that the concept of “qaytarma” is not actually related to religion, but is based on superstition, it would be clear for R to convey it through the verb “to dispel a curse”, and B=D would be achieved.

The examples and excerpts discussed in this article highlight the accurate interpretation of Uzbek cultural expressions and national cultural identities in English. Uzbek and English cultures differ across various dimensions, with this divergence manifesting directly in language usage and artistic expression. Uzbek literary works typically encapsulate national traditions and values deeply rooted in ancient customs. As a result, translating Uzbek artistic works into English diverges significantly from other forms of translation, posing a highly complex endeavor. This
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complexity increases substantially when encompassing the divergent ways of life, societal viewpoints, and pragmatic features of two distinct cultures. While it is often feasible to find a semantic equivalent for a word in the target language, uncovering pragmatic equivalence – revealing the underlying pragmatic elements and the writer’s original cultural and linguistic context in the translated language – demands exceptional skill from the translator.

Conclusion

In conclusion, text pragmatics is closely linked to translation studies which emphasizes some features and messages implied by the writer. Also, the concept of equivalency in translation, specifically dynamic and formal equivalence, has been a topic of interest for translation researchers, making the latter be basis of the creation of pragmatic equivalence. Implicatures play a crucial role in formation of pragmatics of the literary text to send the message of the writer to the reader. It is vital to note that pragmatic potential of the text can be conveyed in multiple ways to provide the better pragmatic effect of the source text. Concerning the translation of cultural-bound expressions or words, we can use pragmatic equivalence by combining numerous translation strategies such as foreignization or domestication. Based on the analysis provided above, we can summarize that although this way of translating implicatures and cultural references had enhanced meaning with better pragmatic effect, there was an issue of maintaining the cultural color of the given phrases or words. In most cases, implicatures tend to arise when words have multiple meanings, and providing pragmatic equivalence in translation can be quite challenging.

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