

Language ideologies, language socialization and language revival in an Italian Alpine community

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1. Introduction

In the changed political and social landscape of Europe, many of its nation-states have witnessed a resurgence of local identities accompanied by a revival of local languages (Nelde, 1995). Speakers' language ideologies (Silverstein, 1979; Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994) as a nexus of micro and macro social frames, are crucial agents in such processes. They determine attitudes, approaches and practices that can enhance or downplay the prestige of a given code, determine its roles and functions, and foster or hinder its use, transmission and thus, its vitality. In this paper I discuss a few salient language ideologies underlying the dialect revival that is occurring in Revò, a small multilingual community in the Italian Alps where three language varieties are in contact: the local vernacular Nones, the regional dialect Trentino, and the national code Italian in its regional variation. To illustrate the workings of language revival in the community, I examine the articulation between its members' explicit language ideologies and the implicit ones surfacing in their practices in the area of child language socialization, a crucial site of language transmission and indicator of a code's vitality. My discussion is based on fieldwork conducted in the community of which I am a native member, from 1995-1999, with systematic audio-recording of socially occurring speech concentrated in May-August 1998.

The resurgence of the local vernacular in Revò is sustained by explicit ideologies that support it as the marker of a rediscovered cultural heritage and local identity, and child language socialization theories that promote Italian-Nones biligualism as a cognitive, social and relational advantage. As for pragmatics, or ideologies implicit in practices that are fostering the dialect revival in the community, these consist in code-switching, code-mixing, and other "prestigious practices" (Alvarez, 1991), strategically relied on by speakers in Revò to index authority, community-mandated rights and responsibilities, and positive and negative affect. In this paper, I will focus on caretakers' pragmatics. To illustrate implicit ideologies at work in sustaining the resurgence of the local vernacular in Revò, I draw examples from caretaker-child interactions recorded in community households and primary schools. These are important agencies of language socialization and transmission, as well as crucial sites for the production and reproduction of linguistic

ideologies. I will present excerpts from audio-recordings in two Italian-dominant contexts: a self-declared Italian speaking household, and a fourth grade classroom where Italian is the nationally mandated code of the curriculum. My analysis of interactions from these settings reveals a discrepancy between speakers' metapragmatics and pragmatics (Silverstein, 1981) that gives insight into the processes at work in promoting language revival in Revò.

2. The Setting

My study is set in Revò, a small agricultural community in the high Alpine rim of Northern Italy numbering 1200 people, the majority of whom are engaged in the monoculture of apples. The community is located in the northern part of the Val di Non, a valley known for its apple industry which has in recent years brought considerable wealth to the region, transforming it from an area of emigration to one of in-migration of seasonal laborers. The languages spoken in Revò are Italian, Nones and Trentino. Only the first two are used in caretaker-child interactions and will be discussed here. Italian, the national code, is the "high" variety, typically reserved for formal institutional contexts and official transactions. Nones, the local vernacular, is the low variety and the home and in-group code. In traditional dialectology textbooks (Anzilotti, 1997; Ascoli, 1873; Pellegrini, 1962), Nones is described as "an archaic Trentino" belonging to the Ladin/Romansch family of languages spoken in Switzerland, Friuli and the neighboring Val di Fassa¹.

In their study of ethnic coexistence and ecological adaptation set in the Val di Non, Cole and Wolf (1974) describe the decline of Nones use in the valley, and state that, contrary to speakers in the neighboring Ladin speaking areas (who have actively cultivated their linguistic integrity and sought acknowledgement of minority status), the Nones never developed a sense of independent cultural identity and linguistic separateness. Instead they looked to assimilate to the more modern urban context outside their peasant world. In relation to language this has involved community members' convergence towards Italian, which indexes membership in the broader urban context, symbol of civilization and wealth denied by the local peasant status. The 70s and 80s represented a peak in the Italian orientation, with an increasing number of parents adopting the national code as the language of child-rearing. This established a trend that would seemingly lead to the formation of a monolingual generation, or at best passive bilinguals, possibly favoring in the long run the occurrence of language shift. In the last few years, though, this trend is being reversed, with more and more young parents adopting Nones instead of Italian as the language of their children's first socialization.

Although the emerging trend in Revò goes towards a rehabilitation of the dialect, still the community presents conflicting ideologies in the area of child language socialization. Some parents (typically younger and educated), dismissing the pedagogical superiority of Italian, advocate a return to Nones, putting forth its social advantages (stronger integration of children into the community), cognitive advantages (the more languages the better), and relational rewards. Nones-oriented caretakers state that speaking the dialect with their children allows for more

¹ The debate on the philological status of Nones as having full-fledged membership in the Ladin group has arisen only in recent years, and has been controversial and politically laden.

spontaneity in interaction, avoids generational gaps between children and Nones speaking grandparents, and fosters increased participation in family life, thus strengthening family ties. These rationales for the adoption of the local vernacular are all in defiance of popular notions, until very recently espoused by the majority, which contend that pedagogically savvy and responsible parents instead adopt Italian with their children in order to favor their academic success and advancement in the world. The Italian bias is based on a deep-rooted monoglot standard ideology of Italian (Silverstein 1996) perceived as a lexically richer, grammatically more complex and sophisticated language. Following this, the use of Italian indexes natural forms of refined expression and, ultimately, refined distinction embodied by its speakers (Bourdieu, 1991).

Nevertheless, a closer look at Italian-oriented caretakers' interactions revealed a discrepancy between their meta-commentaries on the two codes and their use, and their actual communicative practices (Philips, 1991). Those who advocated the use of Italian as the language of child rearing, explicitly theorizing its advantages, did not practice what they preached. An analysis of their interactions with children shows that they, too, participate in promoting the dialect which, in fact, is showing a strong comeback among the community's children and teens, even those from self declared Italian-oriented families.

3. "They come home speaking Nones"

A leitmotif among Italian-oriented caretakers is that once children start to attend the local kindergarten and school, due to wider contact with the dialect in the community and pressure from older peers, they "come home speaking Nones," progressively switching to it altogether, notwithstanding parental efforts to maintain Italian as the language of child-rearing. Through this rationale, parents shed responsibility for their children's developed competence in Nones and eventual choice of the dialect over Italian, generically blaming instead the schools and community. When questioned on such an outcome, Italian-oriented parents underlined their "educational imperative" to teach their children Italian and denied or strongly downplayed their use of the dialect with them. However, notwithstanding such pedagogical intentions, Italian was not the only language of the home, nor the exclusive code used with children. Adults communicated with each other in Nones and switched to the dialect with children for crucial affect- and authority-laden activities.

Caretakers in Italian-oriented homes displayed a pattern of code-switching from Italian to Nones to get children's attention and to convey sternness and strong intentionality in disciplining them, often after such attempts in Italian had failed. The switch to the vernacular was also often accompanied by increased volume, which marked the critical situation even more. Following is an excerpt from a family dinner during which parents switch from Italian to Nones at a crucial urgent moment of interaction, i.e., when disciplining their five year-old, who does not respond to their first attempts delivered in Italian. The child, standing on the edge of a bench, is in danger of falling. The parents, first in Italian, warn her of the danger and ask her to sit. When the child does not respond, they then shift into the more authoritative Nones to signal—in a more emotionally laden utterance—the seriousness of their intents to discipline her if she does not listen. Before the switch to Nones, Erica and her parents are speaking (in Italian) about a coconut she wants to crack open. When the daughter

stands on the bench and moves to its edge, putting herself in danger of falling, the father, first in Italian, asks her where she is going, comments on the danger, and firmly but calmly asks her to sit down. When Erica does not respond to the request, both parents switch to Nones, order her to sit down, and threaten to discipline her. Finally, the father's metalinguistic comment on the interaction ("In what language do I have to tell you?") brings to the fore how codes are contrastively used to accomplish specific functions, and here, how Nones is used to mark a shift in footing, to intensify affect and index authority signaling the seriousness of the speakers' intent.²

[Exchange in Italian on cracking the coconut: 7 utterances]

Erica: ma io ne voglio ancora

but I want some more of it

Davide: ma dici, ce la facciamo a romperlo?

what do you say can me manage to crack it open?

Maria: ma si prova dai

yeah go ahead and try

[Erica stands up on the bench and moves to its edge]

Davide: dove vai? Guarda che li cadi siediti valà brava!

where are you going? Watch out you are going to fall there sit down come on be good!

Maria: dai Erica stai giù per piacere

come on Erica stay seated please

Erica: il coccoooo!

the cocoonut!

Davide: *vara vara io che pases zo*

watch out there you are going to fall

Maria: *no che es za pasada zo en bot*

no you have already fallen once

Maria: *vei zo da io*

come down from there

Davide: ERICA!

Maria: *sentite zo Erica! Vara che ades la te ariva se cogni dirtel amò en bot*

sit down Erica! Watch it that now it's going to come to you if I have to tell you one more time!

Davide: *cognite enrabiarme?! En che lingua cognite dirtel po? Se la te dis de nir zo vei zo!*

do I have to get mad?! In what language do I have to say it to you then? If she tells you to get down get down!

Erica: ahh [she finally gives in and sits]

My field notes and recorded data are interspersed with numerous instances of caretakers switching to Nones to underline the seriousness of their intentions. Typical were appellations and call to order sequences in which parents diligently started out in Italian, but when they received no response from children, switched out of the

² Transcript conventions are the following: Italian is in regular font, *Nones is in italics*, and the English translation is bolded maintaining the italics and regular font of the original languages. Pauses under two seconds are rendered as (.). Longer pauses are indicated with number of seconds counted (3). Exclamation marks indicate emphatic intonation; question marks indicate rising interrogative intonation, and capital block letters represent louder volume. A dash is for truncated utterances, @/@ indicates laughter, and XXX incomprehensible speech.

national code, which marked their savvy modern parent roles, into the less contrived, less controlled and more authoritative, thus effective, Nones. Nones here signaled seriousness of intent to which children more promptly responded. Caretakers' reliance on Nones in these critical moments, and for the accomplishment of such speech acts as ordering, threatening, scolding, and disciplining, which are always emotionally charged, indirectly indexes (Ochs, 1992) the greater authority of the vernacular (and the person speaking it), and socializes children to such a linguistic order within the family and community linguistic economy.

Although Italian is the matrix language of caretaker child-interactions, and thus, quantitatively more diffuse, it is, however, circumscribed to the performance of less salient (to the child's world) functions in comparison to Nones. The local code is, instead, consistently drawn upon by caretakers to perform affect-laden speech acts that are crucial to the parent-child relationship and to children's representation of the reality surrounding them. In a child's world, centered on affect, the understanding of her surrounding environment and the social order it entails is mediated by the actions and attitudes that her caretakers perform and express. Ochs (1993:346) comments that "not only the content of language, but the manner in which language is used, communicates a vast range of sociocultural knowledge to children." For children in Revò, the repeated association of Nones with the cluster of salient speech acts and functions mentioned above, points to its weight and instills the idea of a social order in which Nones speakers are more powerful than Italian speakers. In contrast, the limitation of Italian to less affect-laden and, thus, less crucial speech activities undermines its authority, devaluing its use and users. Such practices socialize children into how they should think about the languages and social order around them, while at the same time providing them with models on how to become effective communicators and community members (Schieffelin, 1990). Testimony to this is young children's reproduction of adult patterns of language use, which is evidence of their developing communicative (and here bilingual) competence. Following is an instance of an Italian-dominant child switching to Nones to perform one of the speech acts discussed above. It is taken from a child at play, who, imitating adult practices, switches to Nones to reproach, threaten, and discipline her playmate the mother.

After dinner, Erica decides to play hairdresser. The parents and I take turns as clients in the dining room chair. Erica, who is combing her mother's hair, is unsatisfied with her "client's" behavior (the mother doesn't sit still enough, and furthermore, laughs). To call her mother to order, Erica switches from Italian to Nones, first ordering her to sit still, and then threatening to slap her if she continues to laugh.

- Maria: mi fai la permanente cara?
are you giving me a perm dear?
- Erica: sì una coda metto il fermaglio
yes a pony tail I'm putting the hairpin
- Maria: che bello la coda
how nice a pony tail
- Davide: che bella mamma che fai
what a beautiful mamma you are making
- Erica: sii @@
yes @@

Erica: stai ferma
stay still
 Maria: @@@ @
 Erica: *e se XX te don na- na sberla se rid es*
and if XX I'll give you a- a slap if you laugh

On a formal level, noteworthy in Erica's code-switching into Nones to scold her playmate is her use of the Italian verb stem "rid-" (from "ridere" as opposed to the Nones "grignar"), which she conjugates using the Nones second person singular ending *rid-es* instead of the Italian *rid-i*. Erica's reproduction of adults' code-switching patterns illustrates her developing pragmatic competence, while her mixed Italian-Nones morphology is evidence of her developing interlanguage competence and gradual mastering of Nones. Children in Italian-oriented homes acquired the vernacular through exposure to it, and increasingly oriented towards the dialect because of the manner in which Italian and Nones were used with them and around them. The repeated association of Nones with salient speech activities and more powerful speakers, i.e., adults, indirectly constitutes its users and the code itself as the language having more importance and power in the family and community. Children's understanding of such a hierarchy, indirectly indexed through caretakers' language practices, underlies their orientation towards the dialect in an apparently (rather superficial) Italian-oriented context.

In sum, although parents portrayed themselves as dedicated Italian teachers, they nonetheless, through their Nones privileging practices discussed above, indirectly fostered children's acquisition of the dialect, preparing the ground for their eventual shift to it at a later age. Typically, as children got older, they tended to use the dialect more and more and shifted to it altogether by the time they were nine or ten. Parents, who accommodated such a choice, presented it as deriving from influences outside the home and out of their control, namely, the schools and the community, and accepted children's shifts as part of their growing up and becoming full-fledged members of the community. Such an analysis was not altogether incorrect. It was, however, incomplete in that classroom practices simply reproduced practices (ratifying their meanings and implications) that children were already socialized to in the home.

4. Learning (about) Italian and Nones at School

For children in Revò, the school represents their first formal and structured contact with a national institution where the use of Italian is expected and (apparently) enforced. The school is the locus of literacy development, and the main vehicle of literacy is Italian. Italian is the language of instruction and, by definition, the language of schooling. It is thus central to didactic activities and, at least in theory, to all classroom practices. Nevertheless, my observation of classroom practices revealed that despite being the official code, Italian is not the only one employed in the school; instead, Nones has its part in the educational/socialization process. Although historically the domain of Italian, the schools and the households covertly promote the dialect, socializing children to the greater value of the local language and identity. This is obtained through a variety of practices that directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly privilege Nones. These go from the tolerance of Nones use in the classroom for didactic activities to the integration of Nones into the curriculum and its graphic, albeit informal, codification, as well as Italian-Nones code-switching.

Children at school in Revò are exposed to patterns of code-switching similar to those which they experience in the homes. As in the homes, teachers in the schools switch to Nones in crucial, affect-laden moments of interaction to perform functions that Italian apparently fails to accomplish. These include the expression of positive and negative affect, scolding, disciplining, and calls to order, which are all vehicled through Nones. With their use of Nones teachers appeal to individuals' responsibility and accountability as community members: a locally-grounded role and identity that outweighs the institutional (and nationally-mandated) teacher/student one. Through such practices, which indirectly index the power, weight, and authority of Nones and its speakers, teachers in the school, like parents in the home, socialize children to the place of Nones and Italian (and their speakers) within the community.

5. Language Practices in the School

Teachers in the community's primary school do not censure, but increasingly tolerate children's use of Nones as they grow older.³ Following is an excerpt that illustrates teachers' acceptance of Nones use in the classroom. It is taken from a whole class activity in the fifth grade called "Riflessioni sulla lingua" (Reflections on language) in which pupils are required to carry out a grammatical analysis of sentences the teacher dictates to the class. Noteworthy in this segment is how the teacher allows students to exchange views in Nones on the form of an Italian utterance until they reach an understanding, which she then rectifies in the more appropriately didactic Italian.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Maestra: | comincerò- come si chiama questo tempo? |
| Teacher: | I will begin- what do you call this tense? |
| Federico: | <i>l'ai vist amò com'ela po peta</i> futuro passato
i've already seen it what is it then wait futuro passato |
| Giancarlo: | futuro passato
future past |
| Nicola: | <i>o l'e futuro o l'é passato no?</i>
it's either future or it's past |
| Federico: | futuro maestra l'è futuro simo?
future teacher it's future isn't it? |
| Maestra: | futuro si futuro
future yes future |

Teachers' tolerance for children's use of Nones for such activities centered on Italian language awareness is a practice that rehabilitates the dialect and implicitly constitutes its value and authority. More specifically, the tolerance of Nones for such a metalinguistic activity indirectly acknowledges the dialect's ability to channel higher-order thinking processes, a feature typically associated with Italian, and places Nones on the same level as the national code, giving it intellectual legitimacy and prestige.

³ The tolerance of the vernacular in the schools (as in the households) is directly correlated with the acknowledgement of children's autonomy and personhood, which go hand in hand with their community membership status entailing the respect of its code of conduct. In the primary school the use of Italian (with low Nones tolerance) is enforced only during the first years, when the focus is on form and the development of literacy skills.

Parallel to such implicit acknowledgement are more overt forms of Nones promotion in the schools that contribute to the constitution of its authority and value. Examples include the creative use of Nones for school poems, skits and songs that children are encouraged to compose. These activities, in addition to giving Nones space in a prestigious institutional context that is traditionally the monopoly of Italian (the official, state-mandated language of instruction and marker of education), also acknowledge an aesthetic quality and value to Nones that goes beyond the realm of folklore, to which creative endeavors in the dialect have been traditionally confined. The content of works is, in fact, not limited to clichéd, bucolic mountain themes, but deals with children's experiences of the surrounding world and/or is related to academic subjects developed in the curriculum. Moreover, children's works in Nones were elaborated in a written form, a practice that strongly contributes to establishing the status of languagehood for the vernacular (Alvarez, 1991).

6. Teacher/student roles and community identity

Although quantitatively dominant, Italian in the school setting is the language of didactic performance, limited to school-related topics and activities usually involving whole class or group participant structures. Nones, instead, is the code relied on for less controlled "offstage", one-on-one transactions, and for the enactment of and appeal to participants' community selves. Through the use of Nones, speakers enact their own and also appeal to interlocutors' community selves and the notion of individual responsibility and accountability that such a construct entails. Such a strategy is typically relied on by caretakers for reproaches and for re-runs of failed disciplinary attempts formulated in Italian.

In the classroom setting, when the more neutral didactic frame was not effective in obtaining their interactional goals, teachers shifted out of it by switching to Nones, which indexes a community identity that outweighs the institutional student-teacher roles and brings the conversation onto a more personal level. Typically, switches to Nones are positioned at the end of Italian sequences as a re-framing of previous utterances and/or as a commentary to them. More specifically, Nones switches have the function of re-framing failed disciplinary attempts, from a formal and more performative didactic mode to a more 'authentic' (and effective) community stance. The heavy silences that followed such re-formulations and commentaries are a testimony to the effectiveness of such a strategy. Through them, teachers appealed to students' community identity—which entailed a sense of individual and collective responsibility and obligations—and with this, underlined the seriousness of their intent. Shifts to Nones marked aspects of broader social relationships that went beyond the contextually limited student and teacher roles. They indexed rights, obligations, and accountability that children, as acknowledged community members, are held to. Following is an example of a commentary in Nones to an unsuccessful Italian disciplinary attempt. It is taken from the fourth grade classroom.

Children were working individually at their desks illustrating a math problem they had previously worked on. Teacher direction was low and children were free to move around and consult with peers. However, when at a certain point the level of noise got too high, the teacher called the class to order addressing the whole group in Italian. Her first move is a threat: to collect the notebooks students were drawing on and to switch to a less entertaining writing activity. When the noise still does not

decrease, she raises her voice, calling children's attention, again in Italian. This is followed by a reproach in the form of a rhetorical question "where do you think we are?" In the still noisy classroom a student responds literally to this indirect call to order with a wisecrack "al manicomio" ("at the madhouse") provoking his peers' laughter. Immediately following such an affront, the teacher switches to Nones to comment on children's ill manners, stating her rejection of the affront and disrespect. With this she brings the interaction on a more personal level. She then continues (in Nones) appealing to their sense of judgment ("now excuse me") describing the situation that had gotten out of hand ("one is yelling, one is roaming around") and reformulating in Nones the rhetorical question previously uttered in Italian ("where do you think we are?"). Here the teacher no longer threatens, nor scolds, but bringing the exchange to a more egalitarian level through her description and commentary, she appeals to children's sense of judgment and obligations to behave in a more respectful manner. The call to order is carried out in Nones, which adds a moral weight to the communication, rendering it more effective. The moral weight is that of community values and norms and individuals' responsibility to adhere to them in respect of the collectivity. In short, through the Nones re-formulation of previous Italian utterances and the commentary in Nones, the teacher finally manages to accomplish her interactional goals of reaching children's attention and affecting their behavior. The long silence testifies to this.

Maestra: un momento

Teacher: **just a moment**

un momento!

just a moment!

adesso io raccolgo i quaderni

now i'm going to collect the notebooks

i disegni

the drawings

io raccolgo i disegni e vi faccio scrivere (.)

I'm going to collect the drawings and make you write (.)

AVETE CAPITO!

DID YOU UNDERSTAND!

ma dove siamo?!

but where are we?!

Manuel: al manicomio

at the madhouse

Class: @@ @

Maestra: *ades po!*

well now!

no me fon tuer enziro da bambini maleducati

I'm not going to let ill-mannered children take advantage of me

ma scusame tanto!

Well excuse me then!

un che l'urla lauter che le va enziro

one that is yelling the other that is wandering around

ma endo sente po?!

where do you think we are?!

ades po!

well now!

Class: (3)

Having obtained student's attention and re-established order in the classroom, the teacher returns to her instructor role, re-setting the didactic frame through a switch to Italian. Through the use of Nones, teachers appealed to children's accountability first and foremost as community members, not pupils. And participants' community selves have more weight than their contextually limited teacher/student selves. Appealing to them entailed evoking community values of "educazione" that is, being well-mannered, respectful, and fulfilling the obligations that accompanied community membership. Such constructs involved behavioral norms that children—as community members—were socialized to and accountable for. Their breach had far reaching social consequences in terms of reputation and acceptance in the community. Revò, given its size, low mobility, tight social networks, and the value that information and reputation have as commodities for its members, is a controlling and strongly conformist community. The breaching of its norms entails social criticism, decline of reputation, and stigma. Therefore, when the communication on the teacher-student level failed or was not forceful enough, teachers strategically appealed to the more powerful community stance indexed through the use of Nones.

Such a strategy illustrates participants' skillful management of symbolic resources in fulfilling their interactional goals, whose complex workings in the linguistic economy of Revò are not simply reducible to clear-cut high and low functions. In fact, although Italian can be deemed the high code—it holds prestige because it is the language of education, of high culture and of the institutions which have historically promulgated it—it is Nones that wins more authority (even in this institutional context), because of the weight that community identity and local values hold over nationally mandated institutional student and teacher roles. Although important, the latter are only a part of individuals' complex social beings. They are granted a more limited space (the school setting) and function (the performance of didactic activities).

In short, such Nones privileging practices reflect broader non-linguistic phenomena that influence speakers' organization of speech. Among these are the revalued weight and authority community identity has gained over nationally mandated institutional roles and the waning of the prestige national models hold.

7. Conclusions

Notwithstanding their immersion in Italian-oriented settings, children's acquisition of Nones and strong orientation towards it is, after all, the product of (adult) linguistic practices surrounding them in and out of the homes. Caretakers who, exhibiting their pedagogical acumen, overtly portrayed themselves as Italian-oriented, covertly promoted the dialect with children. The mismatch between their explicit language ideologies favoring Italian and the implicit ones privileging Nones that surfaced in their actual practices reflected community members' recent positioning vis à vis the broader Italian-marked national context, and an emerging disenchantment with the monoglot standard ideology of Italian. Although quantitatively dominant, Italian is no longer the unquestioned superior model. Nones, is, in fact, overtly and covertly seeping into its domains, as seen in the above discussion of household and school practices. Here the covert linguistic order reflects the emerging social order (Hill, 1998), wherein Nones identity and language are acquiring a more powerful role. Speaking Nones marks community membership and local identity, which in the

current situation are the more valuable symbolic capital for participants. Fearing homologation and loss of local privileges, reassured by the local prosperity, and encouraged by regional and European discourses promoting localism, speakers in Revò no longer look to the national and urban context as a model. This novel orientation is at the heart of the revival process in the community. For a better understanding of such a process it is necessary to further explore the articulation between the degree of explicitness of the ideologies supporting the revival and speakers' level of consciousness of the practices promoting it.

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