

## Exploring the perceived benefits of the process of multimodal video making in developing multiliteracies

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### Abstract

*The digital technology era has profoundly evolved and changed the ways that people consume and produce information. As language itself is recognized as a multimodal resource for communicative purposes, different forms of multimodality have been advocated to nurture students' multiliteracies in educational contexts. This study aims to investigate students' perceived benefits with respect to the process of their multimodal video making. The participants were 69 advanced English as a foreign language undergraduate students who took a course titled Multimedia English for one-semester (18 weeks) at a university in Taiwan. The students were trained to utilize a wide range of multimedia affordances to facilitate their English learning. They were asked to produce a digital video employing multiple modalities for their final project. The collected data for the scope of the paper included students' uploaded reflective essays and videos of their final oral presentations with their PowerPoint slides based upon their overall perceptions regarding their video creation processes and the perceived benefits they experienced. The findings showed that a multitude of students perceived that the video making process nurtured their multiliteracies to different degrees and expanded their awareness of the interplay between different modes of semiotic resources for meaning construction. This study also highlights pedagogical implications for language teachers regarding the provision of opportunities for students to become involved in the creation of multimodal artifacts in developing their multiliteracies.*

**Keywords:** *Digital Literacies, Multiliteracies, Task-Based Learning and Teaching*

**Language(s) Learned in this Study:** *English*

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### Introduction

The paradigm shifts from traditional literacy practices to multiliteracies, with the aim of engaging learners in using semiotic representation in various modes to convey their meanings, has increasingly attracted the attention of researchers. The term *multiliteracies* was coined by the New London Group (1996) to respond to the increasing dominance of technology in today's literacy practices by re-conceptualizing literacy in accordance with the ways people consume and produce information in the evolving digital technology era. As outlined by the New London Group, multiliteracies are comprised of five distinct, and yet interconnected, semiotic modes that constitute multimodal textual design: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial. According to Jewitt (2008), "the pedagogic aim of multiliteracies is to attend to the multiple and multimodal texts and wide range of literacy practices that students are engaged with" (p. 245). Likewise, Lankshear and Knobel (2003) claim that learners need to describe, understand, and respond to the world by going beyond traditional literacy, which is defined in terms of linguistic aspects alone, and by connecting with literacy practices that involve different modes of expression.

While Hauck (2010) has expressed the concern of some scholars that "communicating through visual, digital, or audiovisual media will displace reading and writing" (pp. 222–223), Jenkins (2006) has argued

that the traditional literacies of reading and writing are essential in facilitating learners' engagement in participatory cultures, wherein learners are both consumers and creators of knowledge. Based on the premise that traditional and new literacies concurrence is essential, language itself is recognized as only one of several semiotic tools for communicative purposes, which also include visuals, symbols, sounds, animation, and images. These multimodal resources for the consumption and production of knowledge, which are largely propelled by the affordances of digital technology, call for new approaches in curriculum and pedagogy (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Jewitt, 2006; Kress, 2003; Mills, 2010).

Different forms of multimodality have been advocated to nurture students' multiliteracies in educational contexts, such as presentation slides (Hung, Chiu, & Yeh, 2013), multimedia essays (Nelson, 2006), web page compositions (Shin & Cimasko, 2008), digital storytelling (Castañeda, 2013; Lee, 2014; Yang, 2012), and digital video projects (Hafner, 2013; Hafner & Miller, 2011). In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, several approaches to multimodality have been used to promote learner autonomy and flexible modes of assessment. Various benefits of using multimodality to facilitate EFL learning have been reported, including (a) providing multiple modes for effective communication, (b) heightening semiotic awareness, and (c) developing self-monitoring in the multimodality design process. For instance, in a study by Shin and Cimasko (2008), students learned to convert an argumentative essay into a multimodal compositional piece, thereby departing from linear organization to create non-linear web pages that incorporated hyperlinks, images, audio files, and so forth in their online spatial arrangements. Similarly, Yang (2012) reported how learners arranged and re-arranged semiotic modes to find the most effective vehicle for communicating meaning. Hafner also concluded, from two related studies (i.e., Hafner, 2013; Hafner & Miller, 2011), that students enhanced their communicative competence through making videos for authentic audiences in online communities.

While the aforementioned studies suggest how multimodality might be integrated into second language pedagogy, the focus has largely been on students' multimodal products, and little is known about how the process of constructing them might benefit students' multiliteracies. Therefore, this study aimed to fill the gap by investigating students' perceived benefits with respect to the process of their multimodal video making. The overarching research question is: How did the process of producing multimodal videos benefit students' multiliteracies?

## The Study

### Methodology

69 students from the Department of Applied Foreign Languages at a university in Taiwan, taking a required undergraduate course, *Multimedia English*, were selected as participants for the study. An introduction to the various modalities of multimedia was provided along with how the multiple modes could be utilized as important resources to deliver meaning in the required course. The students learned from different multimedia modalities in combination with the traditional modalities (e.g., reading materials) and nurtured their English proficiencies in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The participants included 67 freshmen, one junior, and one senior. Their English proficiency levels ranged from 700 to 850 on the TOEIC exam, which categorized them as advanced EFL learners.

*Multimedia English* was a one-semester (18-week) course designed to train students to utilize a wide range of multimedia afforded by technology to facilitate their English language learning. By taking this class for two hours per week, students were introduced to the affordances of popular multimedia tools, such as EverCam, PowerDirector, and Microsoft Moviemaker, which provided resources for them to creatively compose multimodal artifacts on their own. As a final project, students produced a digital video employing multiple modalities to introduce any topic of their choice related to Taiwan's culture based on their own interests (e.g., virtues of Taiwan, beauty of Taiwan, people of Taiwan, etc.). In addition, at the end of the course, students were required to compose a 500- to 750-word reflective essay based upon their overall perceptions, by responding to the prompt questions regarding their overall processes of making multimodal

videos and the perceived benefits they experienced in this project ([Appendix A](#)).

To complete the final project, the students were divided into 14 groups, with approximately five people in each group. In order to help the students construct digital videos that could showcase local culture effectively and visually, they reviewed a series of selected YouTube videos. These examples promoted different aspects of Taiwanese culture, including local festivals, regional cuisine, and traditional arts. After watching the videos, the instructor led a discussion in which the students collaboratively analyzed the multimodal design components (e.g., visuals, audio, moving images, linguistic expressions) as well as the cultural issues in each video in order to create their own to fill gaps in the existing YouTube videos.

While composing their own digital videos, the students responded to the prompt guidance provided by the instructor on the classroom management platform by writing reflective essays on the video creation process and uploaded them as a record of their learning process. In addition, the instructor and the research assistants held meetings with each group on a weekly basis to provide feedback on their current work and helped them solve problems. In the final two weeks, each group gave a 3- to 5-minute oral presentation with PowerPoint slides guided by reflective prompts to share their learning process with the whole class. These final presentations were video recorded for the researcher to transcribe, and all of their final video clips were uploaded to YouTube.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The collected data for the scope of this paper included students' uploaded reflective essays and videos of their final oral presentations with the PowerPoint slides. After transcribing the final oral presentations, the researcher analyzed both the reflective essays and transcripts using thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns [themes] within data" (p. 79). Furthermore, King and Horrocks (2010) define themes as the "recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterizing particular perceptions or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question" (p. 150). The researcher recursively examined the data sets for representative themes in order to identify the main process used by the students in their multimodal videos. The themes highlighted how the students improved their ability to apply and design multimodal artifacts by integrating different modes of meaning, as well as the perceived benefits, such as language learning, during the project. The student-created final video clips served as a supplementary dataset to triangulate the findings. The collected video clips were graded by the research team using the rubric for summative assessment proposed by Hung et al. (2013; see [Appendix B](#)).

### **The Video Creation Process**

The students were required to produce a YouTube video as a group to promote Taiwan as they went through similar video-making processes. Before they settled on their final topics, they spent time searching for information on their chosen topics and narrowed them down to the specific aspect of Taiwanese culture they intended to present in their videos. Most students went through three principal processes to produce the multimodal videos and to ensure their overall completeness and coherence: composing the scripts, enacting the scripts, and editing the videos.

#### ***Composing the Scripts***

After searching for and reading information about their selected topics, each group began to develop their own scripts. Through exploring existing information and available clips online first, they used English to introduce Taiwanese people, customs, cultural values, or architectural history in their created videos.

#### ***Enacting the Scripts***

After composing the scripts, most of the groups had come up with different innovative ways of presenting their topics through the combination of multiple modes to present their core themes.

## Editing the Videos

Throughout the entire project, editing was considered the most important process by which students could manipulate different modalities to develop their multiliteracies. They needed to learn how to combine multiple modes such as adding text, pictures, subtitles, effects, narrations, soundtracks, and PowerPoint slides, to tie all their ideas together to construct the videos.

## Results and Discussions

Table 1 shows the themes and frequencies that emerged from analyzing the data in students' reflective essays and final oral presentations and includes some excerpts from the participants.

Table 1. Students' (N = 69) Perceived Benefits of Engaging in the Process of Making Multimodal Videos

Themes	Excerpts
1. Language learning	
a) Vocabulary (N = 50)	<p><i>Through presenting Taiwanese culture in English through script writing, I have acquired a large vocabulary list about Tainan delicacies. (Student 9, final oral presentation)</i></p> <p><i>To do this final project, we discussed, wrote the script, and made the video in English. Doing all these helped me to learn a lot more vocabularies and to correct my English to better express myself. (Student 49, final oral presentation)</i></p> <p><i>During the process of editing, I learned the correct usage of those words not only in presenting local culture but also in using concise and precise expressions. (Student 5, reflective essay)</i></p>
b) Speaking (N = 48)	<p><i>I have trained my English pronunciation through this project, because if I don't articulate it clearly, the audience might not understand what I said in my video. (Student 30, reflective essay)</i></p> <p><i>My English speaking has improved very much, because we needed to use English to introduce our project to foreigners. (Student 62, reflective essay)</i></p> <p><i>I used PPT (PowerPoint) slides in the video and recorded my own voice to provide bountiful information for global audiences. After finishing the work, I found that I was not afraid of speaking English anymore. (Student 58, final oral presentation)</i></p>
c) Translation and Writing (N = 42)	<p><i>Because the video was targeted at global audiences, we needed to produce English subtitles. Therefore, my translation abilities have also improved. (Student 20, reflective essay)</i></p> <p><i>My translation skills have improved because I have become more confident in choosing the precise words that I should use. (Student 68, final oral presentation)</i></p> <p><i>Most of the information on the Internet is in Chinese, so I had to translate it into English. Doing this helped me improve my English writing ability. (Student 51, final oral presentation)</i></p>

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| 2. Cultural learning<br>(N = 40)                | <p><i>Through this video-making process, I acquired more knowledge and knew more legends and stories about Sun Moon Lake... I realized that Sun Moon Lake is not just a lake. It is a place that contains many cultures and heritages. (Student 5, reflective essay)</i></p> <p><i>Before making this video, I understood that Taiwan's temples exert a huge influence on the lives of Taiwanese people. My understanding was raised to a higher level after I visited the temples. Temples have already been deeply rooted in the life of Taiwanese people. We really need to preserve these invaluable cultural assets. (Student 48, reflective essay)</i></p> <p><i>I felt more connected with Taiwanese culture. After finishing the project, I understood more about Beigang and learned to appreciate its local customs and arts. (Student 68, final oral presentation)</i></p> |
| 3. Editing skills for<br>multimodality (N = 38) | <p><i>I have improved my ability for making short videos. Our group learned new special effects and editing tools, combining with special texts, images, ads, or music in our video. Although doing this really took much time, I think my effort has been worthwhile because I have become more familiar with how to use the multi-media software to introduce my own culture in those different combinations of elements. (Student 23, reflective essay)</i></p> <p><i>I have learned to add English subtitles. This is something I never did before. I kept correcting my own grammar and semantic meanings. (Student 53, reflective essay)</i></p> <p><i>Our group have learned to use Word, PowerPoint, Power Director to their full extent to edit videos. (Student 26, final oral presentation)</i></p>  |
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From the results, the majority of students indicated positive effects of writing scripts on their English learning—particularly on vocabulary, speaking, and translation and writing. They also highlighted how their work was beneficial to learning about their own culture and gaining multimedia skills while making the multimodal videos to introduce Taiwanese culture in English.

The majority of students were limited by their English ability to express local culture. While developing their scripts in the video-making project, they acquired vocabulary from extensive reading of their local culture. This expanded their limited vocabulary knowledge and aided in writing scripts pertinent to the local traditions, delicacies, and buildings. In addition to learning from reading online materials, the students also learned from searching and watching related YouTube videos to help them compose the scripts, as exemplified below:

*When I was doing this [script composing], I've learned some [English] vocabulary about local dishes I didn't know before by watching videos on YouTube. I learned the English name for 蚵仔煎 [oyster omelet] and learned to use English to introduce the procedures of making this yummy dish... YouTube videos and COCA corpus really helped me a lot when I was writing our script. (Student 13, final oral presentation)*

Notably, the reflection by Student 13 revealed that most of the students learned how to present the local delicacy and its cooking procedure by watching YouTube videos. The aforementioned excerpt exemplifies how the students benefited from script composing and improved the deficiencies in their knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, phrases, expressions) by introducing their local culture in English. This finding corresponds to the study by Hafner and Miller (2011) indicating that students' active engagement in a digital video making project can facilitate autonomous language learning, especially when students use Internet search skills to extend their existing knowledge of how to use the target language. Meanwhile, students' multiliteracies were nurtured from this developmental process because they absorbed the information needed for their task

not solely from traditional printed texts, but also from other multimodal sources, such as websites, corpora, or YouTube videos. Subsequently, the process of enacting the scripts was perceived as beneficial to developing students' multiliteracies, since they needed to learn how different combinations of modes could better represent the cultural features they chose to present.

The 14 groups frequently adopted and integrated different combinations of modes to enact their scripts such as storytelling (7 groups), interviewing (6 groups), performing a skit (4 groups), drawing illustrations (3 groups), or hosting a TV program (3 groups). The students highlighted the use of other modalities, body language, and gestures to help them better act out the script and demonstrate their key ideas:

*My teammates and I presented our topic [Taiwanese Local Snacks] in the form of hosting a TV show. It was more interesting and the global audiences wouldn't feel bored ... When tasting the food, we emphasized our facial expressions and body language to assist us to persuade our audience how delicious the food was. ... And we had a shot focusing on our smiley faces and thumbs-up gestures. I'm sure that international audiences would love to taste those local snacks after seeing our skit in the video.* (Student 27, reflective essay)

The above excerpt demonstrates how the students focused their efforts, using non-verbal communication as rhetorical strategies, to stimulate interest and involve global audiences in the tasting of local delicacies. According to Hafner (2013), these strategies are "goal-directed acts of meaning making in multiple modes that are meant to realize the designer's communicative intent" (p. 660). In order to promote the local delicacies to foreigners, students were encouraged to (re)think and learn how to interweave multi-faceted modes of meaning as strategies to appeal to their potential audience. As such, the active engagement in enacting their scripts was also a process that was advantageous in developing students' multiliteracies.

The editing process demonstrated key benefits of the multimodal video making process that emerged during the project. The most frequently mentioned advantage of the editing process was learning how to manipulate a range of modes that were visual and aural in nature and that could be used to combine the content into the final video. For instance, one student stated, "the interview part [in our video] was too serious. So we revised it with soft music and some moving images with explanatory texts using PowerPoint slides to make it more attractive" (Student 49, reflective essay). Similarly, Student 33 also noted, "we recorded voiceovers and revised subtitles in an ongoing manner to help explain the static pictures and used transitional effects to make the scene more vivid" (Student 33, reflective essay). Overall, the students from these 14 groups all attempted to intricately incorporate a range of modes (i.e., audio, visual, or linguistic modes) into the scenes through many rounds of editing and revision in order to make their videos more appealing to their global audiences. Some of the recurring comments from the students are listed below:

*Our group drew some cute and vivid pictures and made a short animation with PowerPoint and Power Director to present how to protect ocean so that the video would be more interesting. Our viewers were amazed it was made by PowerPoint.* (Student 5, reflective essay)

*We also learned shooting skills from YouTube in order to have a better specific visual performance.* (Student 9, final oral presentation)

*We spent time editing our clip with interviewing, acting out, taking a field trip to enact our short skit to convey the ideas to our audience.* (Student 10, reflective essay)

*We have included a short scene about the history of Kaohsiung with images from different angles.* (Student 23, reflective essay)

*I think the best way to convey the values and ideas we wished to present was through editing the film, using different combinations of images and sounds to impress people more favorably.* (Student 12, reflective essay)

As previously mentioned, Student 5 and Student 9 said that they performed more amusing scenes through their multimodal video project by adding and editing pictures or shooting scenes for better visual

presentations. In addition, Student 10 described revising the scripts constantly to incorporate different modes in order to produce an optimal skit for audiences. Student 23 reported producing a short skit to introduce the history of the Taiwanese city of Kaohsiung, using pictures from multiple perspectives. Moreover, Student 12 recognized that video was not only an optimal tool for demonstrating the concepts, but also a great tool for enhancing audiences' impressions of Taiwan through different combinations of images and sound effects.

As previous studies revealed, when composing multimodal artifacts, the students were able to expand their awareness of the interplay between different modes of semiotic resources for meaning construction (Nelson & Hull, 2009; Shin & Cimasko, 2008) with authentic audiences in mind. Therefore, it is evident that the entire video-making process nurtured students' multiliteracies by multiplying orchestrated modes of meaning in producing videos.

## **Conclusion**

In response to the pressing need to equip students with the 21st century skill of utilizing different semiotic modes to create meaning, this study implemented a digital video project to engage students in producing multimodal digital videos and explored their perceived benefits of video creation process for enhancing their multiliteracies. The findings showed that a multitude of students perceived that the script-composing, script-enacting, and video-editing processes nurtured their multiliteracies to different degrees. Specifically, while the students composed their scripts, they tended to develop their own interests about Taiwanese culture in English and enhance their language skills, such as vocabulary, speaking, translation, and writing. In the script-enacting process, the students' multiliteracies were promoted when they learned how various modes could be integrated effectively. With respect to the video-editing process, they learned to orchestrate various semiotic modes that supplemented one another to tackle technical problems in the process, such as video editing skills from the resources shared by tech-savvy Internet users. The whole video making process fostered passion, enthusiasm, and excitement not only in the course of production, but also in language learning and local cultural learning. This allowed students to immerse themselves fully in the language, enhancing the amount of motivation to learn the target language. The increased exposure to the language helped students improve their English skills. The students concluded that they learned how to present their local culture in appropriate English through the affordances of technology, and they underwent several rounds of self-revision and video editing with their global viewers in their mind.

Pedagogical implications for language teachers can be drawn based on the results of this study. First, the study suggests that language teachers should not confine their teaching activities to traditional literacy (mostly in the form of written language). Instead, they could create more opportunities for students to become involved in the creation of multimodal artifacts such as digital videos. Such meaning-making processes have great potential to develop the students' multiliteracies by using and combining multiple semiotic resources to voice their ideas and present their local culture. Second, given the evidence of this study that technology can be exploited as a pivotal tool for nurturing students' multiliteracies, it is suggested that the language teachers teach students how to critically evaluate and filter Internet resources to make sure that they can absorb reliable information to extend their knowledge repertoires. Although this study only investigated EFL students' perceived benefits of how the digital video making process enhanced their multiliteracies, it demonstrated how different video crafting processes could be used to promote the students' multiliteracies and highlighted deficiencies in the literature on multiliteracy-related studies in EFL contexts.

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## Appendix A. Final Reflective Essay Prompts

### Multimedia English Class: Taiwanese Culture Multimedia Video Projects

This final essay is designed to help you reflect on what you have learned from the Taiwanese Culture Multimedia Video Project this semester. Please use the following guiding questions to compose a 500–750 word reflective essay, and thoroughly answer each of the questions in your essay. Extra credit will be given to those who exceed the minimum requirement.

#### Guiding Questions for your Reflective Essay

##### Benefits

1. How do you think your English language skills (e.g. listening, writing, reading, and speaking) have improved after completing this project?
2. What did you learn from making a digital video presenting Taiwanese culture?
3. How did this Taiwanese culture video making project enhance your other skills?
4. Overall, what did you benefit from most in this Taiwanese culture multimedia project? Please explain in detail.

##### Challenges

1. What difficulties did you encounter in this Taiwanese culture multimedia project? How did you overcome them?
2. What challenges did you experience in making a digital video presenting Taiwanese culture? How did you overcome them?
3. What was the most challenging aspect of presenting the cultural values of Taiwan to a global audience? How did you overcome this difficulty?

## Appendix B. Rubric for Assessing Video Projects Based on Their Multimodality Aspects (adopted from Hung et al., 2013)

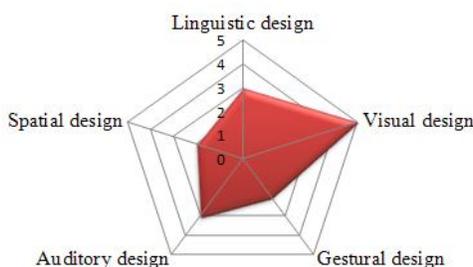
Design Elements	Evaluation Questions
Linguistic design	Was the linguistic content comprehensible without major grammatical errors? Was the linguistic content structured in a logical and organized manner? How did the linguistic design represented in the multimodal text enable or limit the author's communication of meaning?
Visual design	Did the author adopt a visual theme? Did the author carefully arrange the use of color and typology to reflect the selected visual theme? If visual design was used, did the author use available visual elements, such as graphics, to construct meaning in a cohesive and meaningful manner? How did the visual design represented in the multimodal text enable or limit the author's communication of meaning?

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Gestural design	<p>Did the author employ any animated elements or special effects to design dynamic sequencing of the content?</p> <p>If used, could the animation purposefully and meaningfully complement or supplement other design modes in constructing meanings in a cohesive manner?</p> <p>How did the gestural design represented in the multimodal text enable or limit the author's communication of meaning?</p>
Auditory design	<p>Did the author make use of any auditory elements, such as music, sound effects, or narration?</p> <p>If used, could the auditory elements purposefully and meaningfully complement or supplement other design modes in constructing meanings in a cohesive manner?</p> <p>How did the auditory design represented in the multimodal text enable or limit the author's communication of meaning?</p>
Spatial design	<p>Did the author adopt a specific layout to structure design elements?</p> <p>If chosen, did the author employ text alignment and margins as design elements to complement or supplement other design modes in constructing meanings in a cohesive manner?</p> <p>How did the spatial design represented in the multimodal text enable or limit the author's communication of meaning?</p>

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An example of how to assess one group's video using a radar chart:



## About the Author

Hui-Chin Yeh is currently a Distinguished Professor in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages at National Yunlin University of Science and Technology in Taiwan. She received her PhD in language education at Indiana University Bloomington. Her research interests center on EFL teacher education, computer-assisted language learning, and EFL reading and writing. She has published many articles on these topics in *Language Learning & Technology*, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *Educational Technology Research Development*, *Educational Technology and Society*, *ReCALL*, *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, *Asia Pacific Education Review*, and *Taiwan Journal of TESOL*. She received distinguished young scholar awards from the Ministry of Science and Technology in 2011 and 2017, a 2016 Yunduo award in teaching and mentoring, a 2014 Research Excellence award, a 2011 Excellent Mentor award, and a 2010 Teaching Excellence award from her university. Her *Multimedia English* course has been certified as a quality e-learning course from the Ministry of Education in Taiwan. In addition, in recognition of several different language systems developed, five patent achievements were honored with the TWPatentDB. She hopes her efforts in different aspects can contribute to academia.

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