Assessing the Gap between Theory and Practice in Implementing CLT at Secondary Level in Bangladesh: A Case Study

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Abstract

The Ministry of Education (MOE) of Bangladesh introduced Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) at the Primary and Secondary levels in 1990s in a hope to bring a qualitative change in the field of language teaching. But the outcome has not been up to the mark. There is a gap between theory of CLT and its implementation in our language teaching scheme. Some mismatches are reported in CLT implementation process in Bangladesh. This study aims at identifying the mismatches –factors- that hinder the implementation of CLT at the Secondary level of Bangladesh with a view to drawing the attention of the education administrators to bring necessary changes towards making language teaching more effective

1.   Introduction

The Ministry of Education (MOE) of Bangladesh has brought a substantial change in the paradigm of English language teaching by introducing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the place of Grammar Translation Method (GTM). This new approach advocates teaching practices that develop communicative competence in authentic contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). So, the primary focus of CLT is to facilitate learners in creating meaning, not in developing grammatical structures or acquiring native-like pronunciation. This means that success of learning a foreign language depends on how well the learners have developed their communicative competence and how much they are able to apply this knowledge of language in real life situations. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT starts with a theory of language as communication, and its goal is to develop learners' communicative competence. Thus the teacher-dominated view has been shifted to the learner-centered view. Today the teacher has to act as a facilitator of learning. This new language teaching policy demanded not only new textbooks but also a new approach to teaching English commonly known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP), jointly funded by the Government of Bangladesh and Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK in cooperation with National Curriculum Textbook Board (NCTB), started working to facilitate teaching and learning of English in Bangladesh immediately after the launch of new language teaching approach. It paid significant attention to CLT and introduced the approach in the national English curriculum of the country for the first time in 1990s. From 1997, the communicative English tasks were introduced in the compulsory English Textbooks for secondary and higher secondary level students in Bangladesh.

We have been witnessing the CLT era over two decades. Unfortunately, we have not seen the success story in the field of teaching English. English language proficiency of our students has remained at disappointing level. There are arguments regarding the failure of the new language teaching approach viz. CLT. Some experts consider it as the failure of the approach itself while some other opine that, it is not the approach itself but the partial implementation of CLT that has caused the incongruity and ultimately made the teaching scheme unsuccessful one. This study, therefore, aims at exploring the factors that hinder teachers' implementation of CLT in Bangladesh

Newly developed quality teaching materials have been introduced but majority of our language teachers are not proficient enough to use these materials in the classrooms. On top of that, our language testing system is considered problematic which is blamed for creating harmful backwash. We assume that CLT has never been truly implemented in Bangladesh. It should be remembered that 'in courses based on principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) , it is important that these principles are reflected , not only in curriculum documents and syllabus plans, but also in classroom activities, patterns of classroom interactions, and in tests of communicative performance' (Nunan (1988:5).

1.2   Purpose of the study

The prime purpose of this study is to analyze the gap between theory and practice in CLT in Bangladesh at Secondary level in Bangladesh.

So the present study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

i.   To identify the gap between the principles of CLT and English Language teaching at Secondary level in Bangladesh.

ii.   To explore the difficulties and challenges that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers face in implementing CLT in their English classrooms.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. History of CLT

The origins of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are to be found in the changes in the British language teaching tradition from the late 1960s. British applied linguists emphasized approaches to language teaching at that time –the functional and communicative potential of language. They felt the need to focus on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery over structures. Scholars such as Christorher Candlin and Henry Widdowson, drew on the work of British functional linguists. The work of the Council of Europe, the writings of Wilkins, Widdowson, Candlin, Christopher Brumfit, Keith Johnson, and other British applied linguists on language teaching the rapid application of these ideas by textbook writers and the equally rapid acceptance of these new principles by British language teaching specialists, curriculum development centers, and even governments gave prominence nationally and internationally to what came to be referred to as the Communicative Approach. Since the mid-1970s, the scope of Communicative Language Teaching has expanded. Both American and British proponents now see it as an approach that aims to make Communicative competence the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. 'One of the characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language' (Littlewoods 1981:1).

2.2. Concept of CLT

Language teaching history shows that during the 1970s, communicative views of language teaching began to be incorporated into syllabus design. The vital question for the advocates of this new view was 'what does the learner want / need to do with the target language?' rather than 'what are the linguistics elements which the learner needs to master?' (Nunan1988:11).

Harmer (2007:69) maintains 'A major strand of CLT centers around the essential belief that if students are involved in meaning-focused communicative tasks , then 'language learning will take care of itself', and that plentiful exposure to language in use and plenty of opportunities to use it are vitally important for a student's development of knowledge and skill'. Activities in CLT typically involve students in real or realistic communication, where the successful achievement of the communicative task they are performing is at least as important as the accuracy of their language use.

The goal of language teaching is to develop 'communicative competence'.

In Hymes view, a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use with respect to

i.   Whether something is formally possible.

ii.   Whether something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available.

iii.   Whether something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation a context in which it is used and evaluated.

iv.   Whether something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails (Hymes 1972:281).

CLT wants to involve students in real or realistic communication through different activities. In this case the accuracy of target language is less important than successful achievement of the communicative task. Richards and Rodgers (2001) summarized the communicative view of language as:

- Language is a system for the expression of meaning
- The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication
- The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses
- The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning.

So, the communicative approach views language as a system through which the meaning is expressed perfectly. Its main function is to permit interaction and communication; the primary elements of language are not only grammatical and structural features but also the functional and communicative meaning.

2.3. Learner's Roles in CLT

As the importance in communicative language teaching is on the process of communication rather than mastery of language forms, there are different roles of learners in classroom. The main role of learners is negotiating. They negotiate among themselves, the learning process and the objective learning. Learners should contribute as much as they gain, and thereby learn in an independent way. They interact within the groups and within the classroom.

In a CLT classroom, the teacher is no longer the giver of knowledge, the controller, and the authority, but rather a facilitator and a resource for the students to draw on. Some core common activities in CLT classroom are as follows:

- Individual work
- Pair work
- Group work
- Whole class work
- Acting from a script
- Communication games
- Conversation or discussion sessions
- Debate
- Role-playing controlled through cues and information
- Basing dialogues on school experience
- Processing information
- Reconstructing story-sequences
- Following directions
- Discovering missing information
- Discovering sequences or locations
- Describing pictures
- Listening an audio
- Watching a video

2.3. Role of the teachers in CLT

Teacher's attitude to the language and the task of learning will be vital. An obvious enthusiasm for English and English learning would seem prerequisite for positive classroom. The role of a teacher in a CLT classroom is dimensional. S/he has to play various roles in different situations. S/he has to be innovative and imaginative. Teachers in learner-centered classrooms need special qualities including maturity, intuition and educational skills.

2.3.1. Facilitator: The teacher acts as a facilitator in setting up communicative activities (Larson-Freeman2004:127).

2.3.2. Organizer: Whenever possible, "authentic language"- as it is used in a real context- should be introduced (Larson-Freeman-2004:125).

2.3.3. Advisor: The teacher is an advisor during the communicative activities (Larson-Freeman2004:127).

2.3.4. Controller: When a teacher is in charge of the class, he/she has to play the role of a controller. A controller takes the roll, gives instructions to the students, organizes drills, and also reads aloud.

Jeremy Harmer (2001) holds that ' of course there are times when acting as a controller makes sense such as when announcements need to be made, when order has to be restored, when explanations are given, or when the teacher is leading a question and answer session. Indeed, in many educational contexts, this is the most common teacher role' (Harmer2001:58).

2.3.5. Assessor: A teacher assesses students' performance by offering feedback and correction and grading them in various ways.

2.3.6. Prompter: Sometimes the students cannot proceed productively due to the lack of vocabulary. At this stage, they become unable to translate their thoughts in their scripts and they may not be quite sure how to proceed.

2.3.7. Participant: A teacher is a participant.

2.3.8. Actor: A teacher is an actor. He is just like a stage performer.

2.3.9. A Researcher: A teacher is a researcher.

2.3.10. Needs Analyst: A teacher is a need analyst. A CLT teacher assumes the responsibility of determining and responding to learner language needs. This may be done informally and personally through one to one sessions with students in which the teacher talks through such issues at the student's perception of his or her learning style, learning assets, and learning goals (Richards and Rodgers 2001:167).

2.3.11. Counselor: In a CLT classroom, a teacher is a counselor. 'The teacher-counselor is expected to exemplify an effective communicator seeking to maximize the meshing of speaker intention and hearer

interpretation, through the use of paraphrase, confirmation, and feedback' (Richards and Rodgers 2001:168).

2.3.12. Group Process Manager: A teacher is a group process manager. He is responsible for grouping activities into 'lessons' and for ensuring that these are satisfactorily organized at the practical level. This includes deciding on his own role within each activity (Littlewood 1981:92).

2.3.13. Negotiator: A teacher should also play the role of a negotiator in a CLT classroom.

2.3.14. Tutor: A teacher can act as a tutor when students work with descriptive writing and with preparations for a talk or a debate. He/she needs to go to the individual students or small groups and try to point them to directions they have not yet thought of taking.

2.3.15. An instructor: In many activities the teacher may perform the familiar role of language instructor: He will present new language exercise. He will have direct control over the learners' performance. The teacher will evaluate learner's performance and correct it.

2.3.16. A monitor: The teacher may also move about the class room in order to monitor the strengths and weaknesses of the learner, as a basis for planning future learning activities (Littlewood 1981:93).

2.3.17. Observer: The teacher goes round listening to pairs, which are asking and answering questions. Teachers need to pay attention to the amount and type of talking they do, and to evaluate its effectiveness in the light of their pedagogical objectives.

2.3.18. Resource: In preparing a piece of group writing or a presentation, students may consider the teacher's direct interference entirely unwanted, rather they want him/her play the role of a resource. 'Students might ask how to say or write something or what a word or phrase means. They might want to know information in the middle of an activity about that activity or they might want information about where to look for something – a book or a web site for example. This is where we can be one of the most important resources they have' (Harmer 2001:61).

2.3.19. Co-communicator: A teacher is a co-communicator with the learners. 'In this role he can stimulate and present new language, without taking the main initiative for learning away from the learners themselves' (Littlewood 1981:93).

2.3.20. A Guide: A teacher guides classroom activities.

2.3.21. A Motivator: A teacher is a motivator of every activity.

3. Research Method

To avoid the difficulties in collecting the data, we have used mixed methods research instead of Qualitative or Quantitative research.

According to Dorneyi (2007), "Mixed method research involves different combinations of qualitative and quantitative research either at the data collection or at the analysis levels'.

3.1. Research Instruments

We included questionnaire, interview and observation as instruments in our research. To find out the gap between theory and practice in CLT in Bangladesh at Secondary School level (class IX to X) and in order to answer the research questions that we mentioned above, we used the following instruments:

  i.   A questionnaire addressed to the   teachers of secondary schools.
  ii. Teachers' interview
  iii. Classroom observation

3.2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire with open-ended and close-ended questions is designed for the practicing teachers at secondary level in Bangladesh as it is important to 'take account of difficulties which teachers will probably be exposed when they attempt to implement the innovation' (White, 1988:142). This questionnaire basically has highlighted the following issues:

  i.   The impediments to the implementation of CLT
  ii. The gap between the concept of CLT and present education system of Bangladesh.

3.3. Interview

We adopted structured interview as a means of data collection to gather direct information. 'This approach has the advantage of standardizing the interview and therefore the greater consistency and reliability', Burns (1999:119). We understand that for some practical reasons, busy teachers' response in the questionnaire may appear incomplete. So, an interview might elicit the real scenario and it will ultimately make this study more reliable and valid one.

3.4. Observation

Class observation helps the researchers to know what is really happening inside the class. 'observation allows us

to see in a relatively unobtrusive way what it is that people actually do compared with what they say they do' (Burns, 1999:81-82). It provides an authentic picture about the classroom activities. During observation following issues are concentrated on:

    i.   Teaching method of the teachers
    ii.   Students activities
    iii.   Teacher-student and student-student interaction
    iv.   Role of / types of teaching materials.

4. Data analysis

Necessary data have been gathered through the research instruments (Questionnaire, Interview and Classroom Observation) for empirical analysis and field work has also been done. All the instruments prepared for collecting data are completely in harmony with the objectives of this study. Bogdan and Biklen (2007:159) maintain that 'data analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns'. The results are discussed and analyzed in detail below:

4.1. Results of teachers' Questionnaire

The questionnaire is distributed among seventy nine teachers of fifty three schools and the data gathered from their responses are as follow:

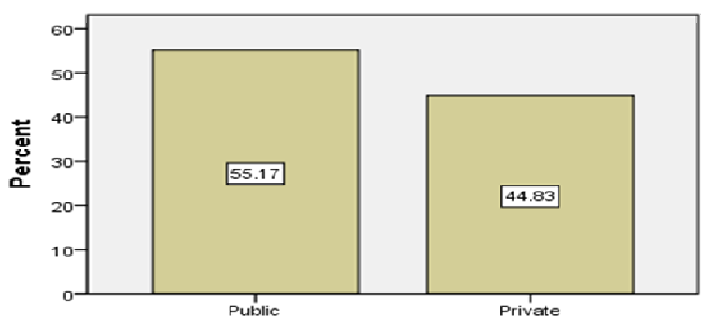Among fifty three institutions 55.17% were public and 44.83% were private.

Figure: 1.1. Designation of respondent teachers

Among 79 teachers 82.76% were assistant teachers, 3.45% were senior assistant teachers, 3.45% were senior teachers and 10.34% were head teachers.
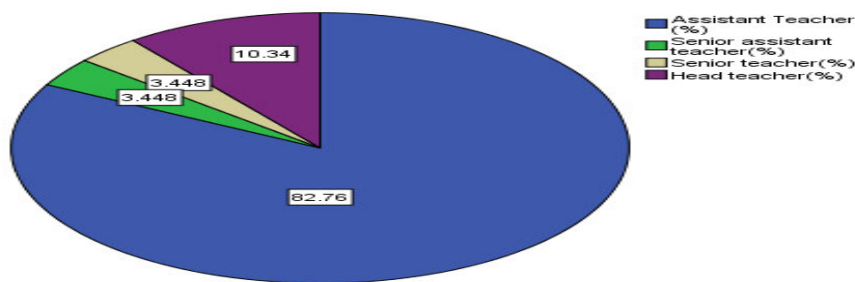

Table:1.2. View about communicative language teaching (CLT)

       Most of the respondents commented that CLT is student/learner centered approach, emphasizes fluency over accuracy, emphasizes communication in a second language (L2), relies heavily on speaking and listening skills, requires teachers' high proficiency in English, it involves not only group work or pair work but also grammar teaching.

       Among 79 teachers most of the respondents (75.86%) realize that integrated grammar discussion in CLT class room is happening and 24.14 % realize that it is not happening.
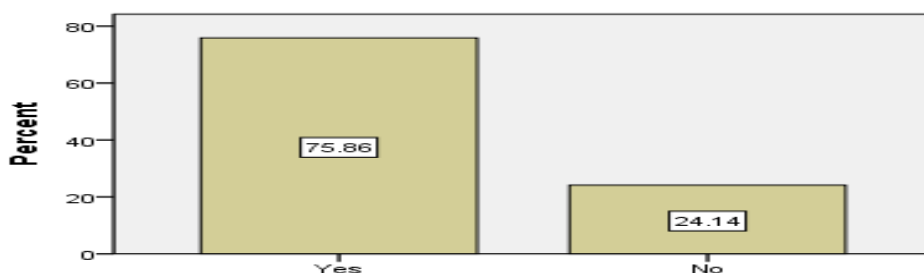
Figure: 1.3. Causes behind the partial implementation of CLT at Secondary level in Bangladesh:

Most of the teacher respondents think that lack of language proficiency(86.2%), shortage of teacher training (82.8%), lack of time for developing CLT materials (72.4%), learner related reluctance (48.3%), absence of supporting environment (75.9%) and large class(65.5%) are the main obstacles to the implementation of CLT at secondary level in Bangladesh.

Issues / Questions	Number of participants	Yes	No
Lack of proficiency about the appropriate use of language	79	86.20%	13.80%
Shortage of teacher training	79	82.80%	17.20%
Lack of time for developing CLT materials	79	92.40%	7.60%
Learner related reluctance in CLT	79	78.30%	21.70%
Shortage of supporting environment	79	85.90%	14.10%
Large class is a problem for CLT	79	85.50%	14.50%

Table: 1.4. Causes behind the partial implementation of CLT in Secondary level in Bangladesh
Table: 4.2.1 Possibility and problems to success CLT
Possibility to apply CLT is 50%, lack of supportive environment is 86.7%, using material other than books in classroom activities 3.3% and teachers are the predominant speaker (86.7%) in the class room.
Figure: 4.3.2. Predominant speakers in class room according to students
Among 95 students, most of the students' (%?) concept about predominant speaker in the class room is teacher (94.74%).
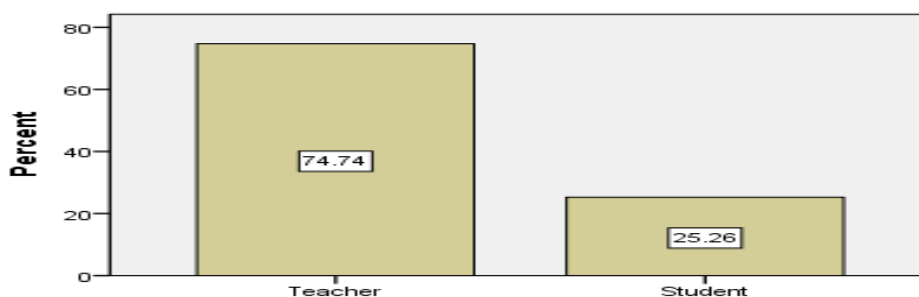

Table: 1.5. Using pair work, banner, group work and material beside book.
Among 95 students, 21.1% has used pair work for some time , 94.7% has never used to any banner/poster work, 18.4% has the experience of doing group work in some time and has used material beside books in most of the time.

4.2. Interview
We interviewed 18 teachers of different schools who have different length of teaching experience ranging from three years to twenty eight years. The interview results have revealed that most of the teachers do not have clear perception about CLT principles. It seems that most of them believe GTM is far better than CLT. They think CLT cannot be a substitution for GTM. We found that the teachers are forced to do something what they do not believe. They believe that the introduction of CLT has destroyed the standard of English of our students. Form their responses, we further understand that there exists a silent teacher resistance to implement CLT inside the classroom. The teachers also opine that large class size, too much work pressure and / or insufficient number of language teachers, lack of professional training , the popularity of guide books / note books among students and teachers, students' unwillingness to participate in the class, predictable testing patterns, faulty assessment system, etc. are crucial issues which hinder the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. All of the participants agreed that students do not get a supportive environment both at home and outside to practice English which is a major impediment in the development of language (English) skill. It is noteworthy to mention here that every teacher

participant sincerely feels that pressure from the board of education (political pressure) to increase the percentage of successful students in public examinations (PSC,JSC,SSC and HSC) is a major threat to the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. They also opine that Government wants to take the success rate to nearly 100% at any means which is ultimately forcing the teachers to assess the examination scripts in an exceptionally liberal manner. This politically motivated approach is directly hampering the teaching and testing of English.

4.3. Observation
We have observed 28 classes of 13 schools. We understand that there are three sources of difficulty in the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. First, our educational system itself in which large classes, grammar-based examinations, insufficient funding and lack of support for teacher education undermine the implementation of this approach, Second, the students' low proficiency in English, lack of motivation for developing communicative competence and resistance to class participation make it difficult to use CLT. Finally, the teachers believe that their own inadequacies contribute to the problem. We have witnessed that teachers are randomly translating the texts into Bangla and sometimes they are providing solutions of the tasks and activities of the exercises. They feel that their deficiency in spoken English and sociolinguistic competence, along with their lack of relevant training and limited time to develop materials, add to their difficulties. However, we have observed that some teachers who are trained and who are working in schools run by Armed Forces (Army, Navy and Air Forces) are showing their capability and sincerity to implement CLT. If the above scenario continues, how will our Education Ministry implement CLT? Interestingly, Li (1998:682)) also finds a similar circumstances in his study in Korea when he states 'Students are not learning by means of authentic materials, such as newspaper, magazines, English news on radio and English TV programs. The curricula reflect the belief that 'CLT' is characterized by learner-centredness and teachers are encouraged to organize materials based on students' needs'.

4.4. Discussion and findings
The above data reveals that there exists a wide gap between theory and practice in the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh at SSC level. We find that many teachers are aware of the principles of CLT but they do not implement or even try to implement those for various practical reasons. Our teachers do not allow learner autonomy in classroom teaching though CLT reflects the notion that language teaching should be concerned with the development of autonomy in the learners. Our classrooms are mostly teacher-centred. Learners are encouraged / forced to gulp down their teachers' lecture. Students are happy when their teachers provide them with so called hand notes (solution to problems).

Most of the teacher-respondents thought that lack of language proficiency among teachers, unavailability of teacher training, lack of time for class preparation, learners' reluctance, absence of supportive environment and large classes are the main obstacles in the implementation of CLT. The result of the data that we have analyzed has given an indication that our Government did not consider the pros and cons when they decided to replace GTM with CLT. Even after two decades of the introduction of CLT in Bangladesh, a good number of our language teachers are untrained whereas CLT demands trained up teachers.' It (CLT) is probably the approach most used by trained language teachers today' (Davies and Pearse, 2000:193). Our language testing system is problematic. Many studies (Kabir 2007, Kabir 2008, Kabir 2009, Kabir 2011) have revealed that Bangladeshi English testing system lacks validity and reliability. We notice a mismatch in the planning and implementation of language teaching policy.

'It is important that , in planning, implementation , and evaluation of a given curriculum , all elements be integrated , so that decisions made at one level are not in conflict with those made at another' (Nunan 1988:4-5). The chaos that we notice in our language teaching scheme is the consequence of our Government's lack of integrated approach when they adopted CLT in Bangladesh. In this study the researchers also understand that CLT is contradictory with the age old education system of Bangladesh. Traditionally, our students admire teacher dominated classroom and they are habituated with rote learning. But CLT principles foster a totally reverse concept. We presume this notion of learning and teaching is also an impediment in the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. McKay (2002) rightly holds ''..While the most productive approach (CLT) , is not feasible in many countries because the local culture of learning tends to promote mechanical learning and a lack of individualism and creative thinking.(p-107)

5.1. Recommendations
The recommendations of this study are the followings:
- Enhancing teacher training is an important issue to improve current CLT situation in Bangladesh.
- Large class should be divided into acceptable size.
- Our testing system should be made valid and reliable.
- Group work, pair work, banner/poster work should be organized systematically.

- Supportive language learning environment should be created.
- Learners should be motivated and encouraged to practise English especially speaking skill.
- Teacher talk time should be reduced and student talk time should be increased

5.2. Limitations
If we took adequate participants by proper sampling method throughout the Bangladesh, we could get proper information for investigating gap between theory and practice in implementing CLT in Bangladesh.

5.3. Conclusion
This paper has made a discussion on the theoretical aspects of CLT and analyzed various data to ascertain the factors which are affecting the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. The study finds that lack of trained teachers, faulty testing system, insufficient classroom activities, inadequate or less standard materials etc. are the main barriers which disrupt the implementation of CLT at Secondary level in Bangladesh. It is crucial to bring an effective change in classroom activities and rethinking and redesigning the roles of teachers and learners in order that meaningful and real communication can be ensured. So, the authority concerned should consider the suggestions that are made in this paper with a view to getting the best out of CLT approach.

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