Transnational Education in the Anglophone University: A Viewpoint Article

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Abstract
This viewpoint article provides a critical reflection on the gatekeeping and academic language practices of Anglophone universities, evaluating these in light of the promotional claims universities make about internationalization and global reach. I then consider the arguments put forward in each of the main articles in this special issue from this critical perspective, connecting the authors’ accounts of EMI practices in transnational higher education contexts with the language requirements and practices of the Anglophone university. I argue that there is considerable overlap between the concerns of stakeholders in EMI settings and those of international students and academics in Anglophone universities in a UK setting. I find that the English language requirements for admissions as well as orientations to academic language in higher education curricula can in EMI settings and ‘international’ Anglophone universities alike be underpinned by language ideological positions that do not reflect an especially global outlook, and that remain in many senses tethered to ‘native’ language and ‘native’ academic discourse norms.

Keywords
Anglophone University, Transnational Education, translanguaging, English as a lingua franca, language ideologies

In our increasingly interconnected world, the strategic vision of Higher Education (HE) institutions has become inexorably linked to internationalization. Efforts to internationalize HE in so many contexts worldwide have meant increasing numbers of universities adopting English as their academic lingua franca. This coincides with two major trends globally: larger numbers of international students attending Anglophone universities; and widespread expansion of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in non-Anglophone HE settings not traditionally teaching subject matter in English. The proliferation of English

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medium university programmes affects such a diverse array of EMI practices that Richards and Pun (2021) classify the many guises of policy and practice in a typology of EMI, for which they identify a bewildering 51 features across 10 curriculum categories. In this viewpoint article, I discuss my take on the main articles in this Special Issue, with my commentary on each focussing on notions of internationalization and transnational higher education (TNHE) from the perspective of Anglophone universities. As this is my home academic environment as it were, it is the setting I can comment on most from an informed position.

The International University in the UK

Universities in the UK market themselves competitively as global institutions, promoting their global credentials to appeal to higher numbers of international students and seek out greater international collaboration through education and research partnerships. In my own institution, as no doubt in many others, there is a faculty Vice Dean for international affairs, international research networks, staff fora on internationalization, and strategic commitment to internationalization and global reach. The university website has pages dedicated to its global strategic goals.

Our ambition is to engage and work collaboratively in every region of the world, through partnerships with like-minded institutions, membership in university networks, and engagement with key regional and national stakeholders.

(King’s College London: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/about/strategy)

In her critique of the politics of academic English language policy, however, Jenkins (2013) poses a critical question regarding how universities pursue this internationalization agenda. She suggests they may do so more as a means of gaining the economic rewards derived from recruiting overseas students than promoting a genuinely international outlook and fostering genuinely collaborative practices. Increased global mobility of both students and academics amplifies transnational contact and interconnectedness, attracting (higher fee-paying) international students and promoting international prestige. As EMI is thus propelled by globalization we must also acknowledge market-driven forces, neoliberal ideologies and commodification in HE. This backdrop has to be recognized when investigating specific EMI practices, a factor that each of the articles in this Special Issue to some extent addresses.

Jenkins (2013) argues that while we see a burgeoning volume of literature on internationalization, that internationalizing processes are accompanied by increased use of English as global academic lingua franca tends to be neglected. For instance, English language requirements for university entry continue to be grounded in national standard native speaker (NS) varieties. As Jenkins points out, recent decades have witnessed huge expansion in highly standardized ‘international’ language tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFEL) for university admissions. Leaving aside critical questions about the validity of these tests for determining HE English language requirements (see Jenkins and Leung,
2019 for a radical alternative), the way these tests are administered – and who they are sometimes administered to – can be hugely problematic.

In Dewey (2020), I discuss research findings from a language autobiography project in which English language teachers provide narrative accounts of their learning and teaching personal histories. Participants in the study regularly reported encountering language discriminatory practices, including in their experiences of HE. In the following extract, for example, Priya (pseudonym), an experienced English language teacher who identifies as Anglo-Indian, talks about being asked to take an English language exam to meet university entrance requirements.

It’s like, while I’ve grown up speaking English as my first language, I’m asked to take a test just because I’ve been born and brought up in India, which is not an English speaking country. And I need to prove that I can speak.

(Also quoted in Dewey, 2020)

The test referred to is IELTS, which Priya was required to take for acceptance onto a Master’s degree in the UK. Crucially, Priya describes herself as a native speaker of English, and before her interview had made it clear that English had always been her dominant language. The frustration she expresses at having to justify her status as a speaker of English is unsurprising. Requiring university applicants who identify as native speakers to provide a valid IELTS score is indicative of a narrow, discriminatory approach to determining academic language proficiency.

The policy reality reflected in Priya’s narrative is underpinned by monolingual and standard language ideologies. Universities that promote internationalization ought not to require students to conform to a narrow model of academic English. This is incongruous. Yet, this is precisely what continues to happen in so many contexts, a point which Jenkins (2013) unequivocally spells out in her critique of this ‘assimilationist perspective’.

While in practice there may be more tolerance and even acceptance of non-native-like English on non-Anglophone campuses even if this has not yet made its way into language policy, a strong uni-directional language discourse socialization perspective continues to hold sway in ‘international’ Anglophone universities.

(Jenkins, 2013: 123).

While greater mobility has resulted in greater diversity, Jenkins suggests that so far we do not have a good track record in addressing the greater complexity this diversity brings, in that Anglophone universities have tended to ignore the linguistic implications of a diverse student and staff make-up.

As Wingate (2018) similarly comments, although HE communities are becoming increasingly diverse and multicultural, the multilingual composition of student populations is not properly acknowledged. Wingate observes that while monolingual standards prevail, and while we continue to pursue language policies which favour NS language proficiency, we risk neglecting this diversity and disadvantaging certain student groups. Jenkins (2013) suggests this diversity has been neglected both in home campuses and Anglophone
offshore campuses, whose aims may simply be to replicate what is on offer at the home campus, without developing locally relevant practices in collaboration with local academics. This is clearly not the case in the studies described in this Special Issue (see especially Reynolds), each of which engages with diversity and localized practices.

Yeo and Newton – Inclusive Transnational Education Partnerships in Higher Education: a Case Study of a Master of Arts in TESOL

Yeo and Newton present a case study of a transnational MA TESOL provided through a partnership between institutions in New Zealand and Singapore, designed specifically for English language teachers from the ASEAN region. The case study focuses on participants’ perceived impact of the MA on employment prospects, professional skills development and understanding of theory, as well as language proficiency. A vital feature of the MA TESOL is that it employs academics from both New Zealand and Singapore to provide course content, crucially with academics from Singapore functioning as lecturers, content developers and local tutors, which the authors describe as ‘a departure from earlier ‘colonial’ structures, where only academics from the home institution were allowed to deliver content’. This is to my mind a vital aspect of the programme’s goal of inclusivity, and chimes well with recent moves in TNHE to promote a more inclusive approach and with attempts to ‘decolonise’ the curriculum.

If we pursue internationalization, it is crucial that we do so with inclusivity in mind, that we do much more than we currently do to decolonize HE curricular in Anglophone universities. Yeo and Newton’s analysis reveals that the programme displays inclusivity by achieving the following: collaborative teaching and programme planning; combining regional and international expertise; contextual relevance of programme (for consistency as it is spelt “programme” elsewhere.) content; and collaborative intercultural learning. The international scope of the case study MA TESOL reportedly provides valuable intercultural learning opportunities, with on-campus classes involving students from multiple teaching contexts as well as opportunities for interaction with distance students transnationally. In addition, there is an emphasis on interactivity in the mode of delivery. The survey finds that students value highly the intercultural dimension of their learning experience, affording an appreciation of the wider international professional community and feelings of empowerment as they engage with other teachers from around the world.1

As Yeo and Newton also crucially point out ‘[r]ecent nationalist and isolationist policies coupled with travel restrictions have prompted a shift in perspectives on the internationalization of higher education’. This may have major impact on student mobility, raising all manner of challenges, but also opportunities, regarding how universities pursue TNHE goals. The authors comment that although the global pandemic has drastically reduced international travel, students continue to be motivated by the prospect of transnational education. Alternative forms of TNHE, with students accessing degree programmes remotely, present intriguing possibilities in terms of widening participation. It may ultimately mean that the aspiration to study ‘abroad’ becomes accessible to students who would not otherwise have had this opportunity. This does though make issues about equity and diversity even more pressing. Furthermore, if internationalization relies on more remote modes of learning than it did pre-pandemic, it is essential that universities adapt our practices to ensure we can maintain high levels of interactivity.
Yeo and Newton’s study also finds that the MA has a positive impact on course participants’ English language development, ‘with convincing reported gains in participants’ reading, writing and academic vocabulary’, as well as ‘substantial reported gains in confidence, global development and listening and speaking’. This is a valuable and promising finding, which confirms what has been found in other studies in EMI literature, which appear to provide quite extensive evidence that EMI promotes English proficiency (e.g. Macaro, 2018). However, to my mind this warrants further scrutiny, especially in light of the debate surrounding inclusivity and diversity.

It is unfortunately not stipulated in the article, but claims regarding language proficiency can only be fully attested and made sense of if we account for how proficiency is constructed and measured. We need to know what kind of proficiency is being promoted in EMI. If, for example, a study such as this shows proficiency levels improve in measures devised in conventional English language exams, then we need to consider whether and to what extent these exams are valid in the local context. Are the exams problematic in the context of TNHE, inclusivity, and intercultural collaboration? Are other opportunities to enhance intercultural awareness/competence being missed or side-lined due to an insistence on NES norms?

Harrison and Chen – From Dancing K-Pop with Chinese to ‘English in class please’: English Language Policy Negotiations as Relational-languaging Episodes during Classroom Interaction

In their article, Harrison and Chen explore a fascinating but neglected aspect of TNHE, the language policy negotiations that take place during classroom interactions, with teachers attempting to enforce policy and students claiming language use rights and discourse space of their own. The authors find that these practices serve as a means of resolving language-related issues. They identify policy negotiations as a form of language-related episode (LRE), quoting Swain and Lapkin’s (1998: 326) definition of LREs as ‘any part of a dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others’. As Harrison and Chen indicate, LREs can be hugely important for language development, providing scope for learners to explore language collaboratively, producing critical moments of peer-to-peer interaction.

Acknowledging the value of these negotiating LREs, as this article does, signals clearly that exclusive insistence on English is problematic, as an English only policy may prevent students from exploiting valuable learning opportunities. This raises a compelling question for transnational programmes in Anglophone settings as well. We have to consider to what extent teachers make space for multilingualism in their classrooms. Academics outside linguistics have little or no specialist language knowledge or training, so we have to assume they are unlikely to be aware of translanguaging practices and the value of multiple language resources (particularly if academics themselves are monolingual English speakers). Increasingly, academics in Anglophone settings teach multilingual classes in which students have diverse repertoires. Are important opportunities being missed through pedagogic monolingualism? This is clearly a fruitful area for further research.

Harrison and Chen comment on an English language policy notice posted on campus, which reads ‘Speaking English is not everything. But Not speaking Eng-lish is nothing’,
suggesting that the wording on the poster might be viewed as comprising ‘awkward forms of segmentation’ (Harrison and Chen, my emphasis). The authors aptly suggest the wording on the poster supports Blommaert’s (2012: 9) view that writing is always accented, with ‘local sociolinguistic and literacy traditions’. However, their analysis of the poster is worth investigating. It is unclear how we determine ‘awkwardness’ except by adopting a deficit-oriented perspective. Further, it is also unclear why the authors go on to describe this instantiation of English as ‘mangled’. The Cambridge Dictionary online provides the following meaning descriptions for *mangled*.

...destroyed by being twisted with force or torn into pieces so that the original form is completely changed

Particularly telling, is the secondary description that is then provided, which goes as follows:

(of a speech, piece of writing, etc.) spoiled by having many mistakes in it:

This is then followed by a suggested example:

He made fun of his own mangled syntax and grammatical errors. (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mangled)

These definitions strongly suggest that *mangled* reflects a pervasive standard language ideology, where language difference is predominantly described as ‘deviant’ or ‘spoiled’. I do not suggest the authors intentionally see the language on the poster in this way, but I would argue that they (and we are all susceptible to this) unwittingly enact this ideology when describing the poster. It is crucial that we exercise caution not to reproduce folk descriptions of non-standard language, especially in contexts where we are concerned with power inequity and policy interpretation.

Nevertheless, discussion of this poster prefaces a compelling argument. As the authors comment, enforcement of a monolingual English policy ‘threatens opportunities to discover the diversity and creativity of the linguistic, cultural, and material resources that students use to learn language’. They also argue that adhering to policy while ignoring potentially constructive dialogue (as the teacher in their study appears to) supports De Costa et al.’s (2020) observation that developing intercultural awareness requires taking multilingual resources into consideration. The central point of Harrison and Chen’s article is that when students interact in EMI they may switch to a different language to resolve language-related episodes (fittingly renamed *languaging*-related episodes). When students translanguage, they may well be contravening a stated language policy, but if teachers implement this policy in a disciplinary way they may be missing valuable multilingual moments of sense making.

Where I find slight ambivalence, is that despite renaming the episodes *languaging*-related, Harrison and Chen frame LREs predominantly from a Second Language Acquisition (SLA) perspective, in that episodes are discussed in relation to language problems that need to be corrected or language gaps that need to be filled. The start of an
episode is identified as a moment at which students begin to ‘struggle’ or ‘make mistakes’, with the end of an episode defined as its resolution. By contrast, we ought to adopt an alternative perspective on policy negotiating episodes, particularly in the context of TNHE, and particularly in connection with the persuasive arguments Harrison and Chen put forward regarding the collaborative, multimodal *languaging* practices analysed in their classroom observation. There are many accounts of translanguaging negotiations (in an international HE setting, see e.g. Batziakas, 2017), with speakers sharing, adapting, collaborating and making meaning in novel ways, without the analysis and interpretation of these episodes framed in relation to ‘errors’ or ‘problems’. To borrow Harrison and Chen’s terminology, such moments of sharing and adapting language resources might in fact be usefully described as *(trans)*languaging related episodes.

**Reynolds – What is ‘Intercultural Communication’ in Transnational Higher Education English-Medium Instruction?**

In posing the question of his title, Reynolds discusses a branch campus of Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, examining the nature of E in EMI, and in doing so adopting an ideological perspective that aligns with Cook’s (2016) premises of multi-competence. This stands in contrast to the ideologies underpinning the monolingual perspective on language that so often continues to characterize conceptions of English in Anglophone institutions. Reynolds describes the process of convening an elective course entitled *Communicating in the Global Marketplace*, originally designed and offered at the university’s home campus in the US, describing how the course was reconfigured to connect with the local contextual and cultural environment. In line with the position taken in De Costa et al. (2020), Reynolds frames the course as an opportunity to promote students’ ownership of English, develop critical intercultural awareness, and thus contest ‘native-speakerist ideology’.

Reynolds asks what level of adaptation is needed to ensure the branch version of the course is not ‘transferred’ from the home campus but transformed to create equivalence. This begins with the course description itself, whose original aims Reynolds finds ill-suited to the realities of students in Qatar, who we learn already inhabit the superdiverse communities and are already engaged in the transnational interactions invoked in the original course description. The discourse world ‘imagined’ for the home campus students is already a communicative reality for students on the Qatar course. Thus Reynolds seeks to distance the branch realization of the course from its home campus version, and in so doing re-examines the ‘stable, monolingual identities held up as possible selves for language learning’. This is precisely the kind of re-examining that is needed in Anglophone universities (including home campuses) to enable a more critical stance on dominant language ideologies, but which is often lacking and apparently elusive.

Reynolds examines some of the tension between competing sets of discourses surrounding the emergence of international branch campuses: one that sees TNHE as opportunity for widening access and internationalization; another that sees TNHE as potential threat to local autonomy in HE decision making. Universities can of course enact both these competing narratives concurrently. By recognizing the transferability of courses and engaging with sociocultural/political realities in the host context, Reynolds counteracts
some of the potential for reducing local autonomy. It is essential that course designers in home campuses engage in the same kind of critical reflection. If Anglophone universities are committed to attracting international students, we must also commit to re-examining the curriculum to ensure it remains relevant to diverse student and academic staff populations. The ‘adaptive transfer’ Reynolds undertakes may be as important in UK and US home campuses as it is in a branch campus in Qatar. We need to promote similar critical reflection and engage in similar acts of transformation. As Jenkins (2013) has commented, while HE institutions assign considerable value to critical thinking (which figures strongly in academic writing criteria), so far this criticality has not extended to notions of English and our conceptualization of academic discourse.

As Reynolds comments, in Qatar English functions as a lingua franca. However, as he also goes on to point out, many local people are excluded from accessing the TNHE opportunities of the branch campus due to English language requirements. The home and branch campuses require a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score for entry. I cannot say what Reynolds’ position is on this as it is not discussed – perhaps he also takes issue with the practice. Disappointingly though, he does not explicitly extend the same critical thinking to the university’s gatekeeping practices. If English is a lingua franca in Qatar, why do universities continue to require a particular test score in a standardized assessment of Native Speaker English (NSE)? I would like to see the same criticality applied to the English language requirements of TNHE that Reynolds conveys in the sensitivity to local norms displayed in his discussion of the curriculum. Continuing to require IELTS and TOEFL scores uncritically is problematic. We need to engage in discussion of alternatives (as above, see Jenkins and Leung, 2019 on rethinking English language gatekeeping practices).

**McKinley, Rose, and Zhou – Transnational Universities and EMI in China: How Admissions, Language Support and Language Use Differ from EMI Programmes in Chinese Universities**

This article explores policymaking in transnational universities in China, investigating the impact of EMI provision on TNHE stakeholders. McKinley, Rose, and Zhou comment that despite rapid growth in transnationalism in Chinese HE, this remains under researched. The authors adopt a contrastive case study approach, comparing two transnational universities in China with EMI practices in six other institutions. The authors pose two critical questions: ‘Are admission benchmarks necessary?’ and ‘What is the most effective model of language support for transnational universities?’ In answer to the first they conclude that admission benchmarks can have advantages, in that higher attested levels of proficiency have been shown to facilitate performance on EMI courses. However, they also warn that benchmarks are ultimately exclusionary, with students from privileged backgrounds having greater opportunity to study English, thus gaining easier access to EMI, which inevitably perpetuates inequality. Regarding the second question, concern over language support is exacerbated they observe since the General English teaching students typically receive ‘may ill-prepare them for the field-specific academic English required for learning in an EMI environment’.

McKinley et al., also remind us of the importance of not allowing local experience, cultural identity, and values to be eclipsed in ‘decontextualized globalised curricula’. The study
finds widely varying local practices in EMI implementation, but finds that use of Chinese is commonplace, regardless of what English language policy is in place. Essentially, we have to be wary of attempts to impose policy implementation from above without heeding the professional experiences and classroom realities of students and teachers on EMI programmes. This article sheds some light on the exceptional diversity in how EMI policy can manifest itself in practice, both in relation to gatekeeping and what happens in the classroom. There can thus be no universal agreement regarding desired language levels or what language and academic support is required – these are questions that must inevitably be answered locally. But it is also vital that we consider teachers/lecturers’ preparedness. Do academics have the necessary expertise and training to provide support? English language support requires specialist training so places additional burden on teaching staff and inevitably takes up time that would otherwise be available for curriculum content.

Perhaps the most telling aspect discussed in this article is the disparity between institutions offering subject specific academic English support and those offering generalized English for Academic Purposes (EAP). As the authors observe, research into EMI has shown the benefits of providing discipline-specific language support. This is a finding that goes beyond EMI and echoes the move towards adopting a ‘writing in the disciplines’ approach (see e.g. Deane and O’Neil, 2011) in which writing support is embedded in the academic discipline in order to enable students to develop the discourse skills and writing confidence necessary to succeed. Sadly, in many Anglophone settings this is still not the case; instead, generic academic writing support is provided in an isolated, disconnected way. As Wingate (2018: 430) comments ‘[t]his provision trivialises the complexity and discipline-specificity of academic writing and is deficiency oriented, targeting students who are seen to be in need of linguistic remedy’.

In relation to English language policy, McKinley et al., find that most universities describe EMI courses as being delivered entirely in English, but that many participants in the study report that Chinese is used to facilitate explanations, with teachers commenting that they would often switch from English to Chinese if students were having difficulty. It is also notable that participants in the study raise concerns about the amount of time teachers are able to devote to curriculum content, together with concerns about students’ level of engagement with subject matter and active involvement in discussion. For me, the most salient point McKinley et al., make relates to how institutions frame their policy regarding the amount of English expected (i.e. whether they promote a 100% English only policy, or stipulate a more bilingual approach). They argue that although identifying desired percentages may be a managerial objective, crucially, language choice must be ‘determined by topic, circumstance, or pedagogical function’. So rather than attempt to legislate the amount for English language use in EMI, the authors fittingly observe that policies need to be fine-tuned and identified in relation to particular circumstances and pedagogic purposes and modes.

To Conclude

Whether EMI entails English only or English is the primary language of instruction, with other languages promoted to suit the educational demands of students and academics, is an empirical question that needs systematic research locally. As the articles in this Special
Issue make paramount, there is substantial variability across different contexts – even within individual institutions. In relation to the fundamental issue regarding how much English is appropriate in EMI, I will also comment on the article by Hiller, who illustrates a telling case in her own EAP course: ‘one of my Chinese students once lamented the fact that she did not have the vocabulary to search for Chinese language sources for her course paper on language learning motivation’. Because Hiller’s student was only exposed to course content in English, she was not equipped with the knowledge necessary in her first language to seek out alternative, non-English language sources.

This suggests we are in a somewhat distorted academic landscape, in which students writing about a particular subject and wishing to comment on this subject in connection with their own local context are unequipped to access literature written in the primary language of that context. Hiller’s response is to design a translanguaging writing task. This is key. We need TNHE graduates who are bi/multilingual – able to access and produce academic and professional outputs in English and their mother tongue (or other languages in their repertoires). Hiller’s approach is insightful. After all, if the outcome of EMI is to produce graduates who by the end of their degree programmes have developed academic discourse practices in English only (thus essentially becoming monolingually academic), then clearly there is something amiss. Worse still, as the number of EMI programmes continues to grow, we increasingly risk finding not only that students are unable to access literature in their dominant language, but that there is less academic discourse being produced in that language.

As we see in each article, conflict between policy expectations and practical realities is experienced by students and teachers in TNHE. Teachers have to respond to policy in ways that work effectively for them, so it is vital that they are supported in this and conferred the agency necessary to make their own decisions regarding English language practices. That EMI planning and policy can differ substantially from how EMI operates in practice speaks to the complex nature of the policy-practice interface. Rather than think about policy as being ‘implemented’, it would be more effective to think about policy in relation to ‘enactment’. We cannot take policy meanings for granted, as education policy makes sense only as it comes to be interpreted in school contexts – as it is experienced through multiple subjectivities and positionality. The process of enacting policy thus entails social and cultural construction and interpretation. Maguire, Braun and Ball (2015: 3) recognize policy enactments as ‘multi-layered and messy’, arguing that ‘enactment’ is ‘a theoretically richer concept [than implementation] which better captures the multifaceted ways in which policies are read alongside/against contextual factors’.

For EMI to be effective, it is therefore crucial that policy is developed with context sensitivity and stakeholder collaboration. We need informed discussion about the relative roles and status afforded to English and local languages, with the goals of EMI established from a multilingual, not monolingual perspective. In addition, it is crucial that institutions provide training and support to their academic and professional services staff. In countries where Content and Language Integrated Language (CLIL)/EMI are being actively promoted, ministries of education ought to be investing in programmes of teacher education that include an EMI component. These programmes need to address a range of key issues: including translanguaging, the nature of multilingualism, and the dynamic properties of language.
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Notes

1. This coincides with some of the feedback international cohorts report in MA Applied Linguistics/ TESOL programmes at King’s College London, who regularly comment favourably on opportunities to interact with professionals from diverse linguacultural settings. (In 2020–21, even with COVID-19 and expectations that we may see fewer international students, there are 23 nationalities represented across our current cohort for our two ELT related MAs).

2. Crucially, the article comments on video data, and as the authors make clear, their findings reveal that policy negotiations can be multimodal, incorporating gesture and other embodied behaviours speakers use in relation to each other.

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