ปัญหาการพูดภาษาอังกฤษในระหว่างการประชุมขององค์กร: กรณีศึกษาผู้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในบริษัทสื่อสังคมออนไลน์

English Oral Communication Problems during Corporate Meetings: A Case Study of ELF Users in a Social Media Company

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาปัญหาการพูดภาษาอังกฤษโดยมุ่งเน้นปัญหาสำคัญที่พนักงานบริษัทต้องพบในระหว่างการประชุมขององค์กร และ 2) สำรวจกลวิธีในการสื่อสารที่พนักงานนำมาปรับใช้เพื่อช่วยให้การพูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นไปด้วยความราบรื่น ข้อมูลเก็บจากผู้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศจำนวน 63 คนซึ่งเป็นพนักงานในบริษัทสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ ได้แก่ แบบสอบถามออนไลน์โดยใช้โปรแกรมกูเกิ้ลฟอร์มโดยใช้ชุดโปรแกรมทางสถิติเพื่อสังคมศาสตร์ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเพื่อหาค่าความถี่ ร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย และค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน ผลที่ได้จากการวิจัยพบว่า 1) ปัญหาหลักของการพูดภาษาอังกฤษที่พนักงานบริษัทซึ่งใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศต้องพบได้แก่ สำเนียง การเน้นเสียง และ การออกเสียงซึ่งมีค่าเฉลี่ยสูงที่สุด ตามด้วย ปัญหาการใช้ไวยากรณ์ คำศัพท์ และ ปัญหาการใช้อวัจนะภาษา นอกจากนี้ 2) พนักงานบริษัทใช้วิธีการตั้งใจจับคำสำคัญซึ่งเป็นกลวิธีที่ใช้บ่อยที่สุดในการสื่อสารในระหว่างการประชุมขององค์กร ตามด้วยความตั้งใจที่จะเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษเพิ่มเติมเพื่อพัฒนาสมรรถนะในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษของตนเอง รวมถึงกลวิธีการเรียนรู้เกี่ยวกับวัฒนธรรมของเพื่อนร่วมงาน

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are to investigate the English oral communication problems by focusing on the main problems that the participants encountered during the corporate meetings, and to explore the communication strategies the participants applied to facilitate their English oral communication. The data were collected from 63 respondents who are ELF

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users and working at the studied social media company by collecting data with online-questionnaires through the google-form platform. The results were analyzed by the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) program to calculate frequency, percentage, mean score, and standard deviation (SD). The results of this study revealed that the main problems of English oral communication faced by ELF users in this study were the accent, stress, and pronunciation problems which received the highest mean score, followed by grammatical usage problems, vocabulary problems, and the problem of non-verbal communication. In addition, the participants applied the strategy of paying more attention to catch key words as the most used communication strategy during corporate meetings, followed by the intention to learn more English skills to improve their English competency, and the strategy to learn about the cultures of their colleagues.

Keywords: Oral communication, ELF users, Communication strategies, Corporate meetings

1. Introduction

English is an international communication language throughout the world. Most non-native English speakers can use it to communicate with other people who speak in different languages as a lingua franca (ELF) (Kirkpatrick, 2007). According to Sangmala (2008), communication is an instrument to convey messages for exchanging information. In this study, oral communication skill is the ability to communicate among ELF users in a social media company. However, communication problems could occur if people lack language proficiency, such as by using inapplicable language and expressions (Jampa & Dennis, 2016). This study aims to investigate the key problems of English oral communication during corporate meetings in a social media company. The reason why this social media company was selected is due to its nature of ELF communication; this company is facing a number of issues especially during corporate meetings, so I would like to find out what are their problems, what are the factors that make them face these problems and what are their communication strategies used to handle the problems.

1.1 Research Questions

1.1.1 What are the main problems of English oral communication among ELF users during corporate meetings in the studied social media company?

1.1.2 What are the communication strategies they used to facilitate English oral communication during corporate meetings?

1.2 Research Objectives

1.2.1 To investigate the main problems of English oral communication among ELF users during corporate meetings in the studied social media company.

1.2.2 To explore the communication strategies they used to facilitate English oral communication during corporate meetings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

2.1.1 Definition and Concept of ELF

According to Kirkpatrick (2007), English as a lingua franca (ELF) refers to the medium language that is used to communicate among people who have different linguistic backgrounds. In addition, according to Jenkins (2009), the researcher also stated that in a particular context of communication, English is being used as the usual language of choice by interlocutors who have divergent linguacultural backgrounds. Furthermore, English has rapidly come to be a lingua franca which is used in the business field around the world. It is used among business operators who come from various communities that do not have the same

cultures and do not speak the same native languages. (Du-Babcock, 2013; Guffey, Du-Babcock, and Loewy, 2016).

2.1.2 ELF Oral Communication

According to Hamilton and Kroll (2017), communication is the procedure by which people share information such as opinions, thoughts, ideas, and feelings in generally understandable ways. In the communication process, people communicate for the same purposes which are exchanging information, thoughts or ideas. It occurs with people who use the same first language, and also occurs with ELF users. Even though ELF users have different first languages, they also have similar purposes which are to communicate with each other, to exchange ideas, and to transfer a message to the receiver.

2.1.3 ELF Oral Communication Problems

Oral communication problems are able to occur in all communities including an ELF community. Oral communication problems among ELF users might occur from several factors. However, in every problem that occurs, it might arise from the differences of languages, nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and level of language competency (Rani, 2016). As a consequence, the language barriers occur because of these factors and it leads to oral communication problems. ELF oral communication problems occur from the following factors:

2.1.3 a. Fluency

Jung (2010) stated that fluency is one of the elements causing communication problems due to the differences of the interlocutors' mother tongues. Since they are ELF users, they are not native speakers, communicating in a fluent way might be difficult for them.

2.1.3 b. Grammar

Oral communication skills are related to how people use grammar correctly, such as using correct tenses when they talk about the situation at various times. It is important to deliver the message accurately because the ability to convey the message to the receiver in a clear and correct way can improve the speaker's competency for communication (Lane, 2010, as cited in Jeharsae, 2012).

2.1.3 c. Vocabulary

To be a good speaker, having a large vocabulary is better than lack of vocabulary word choice (Flatley and Lesikar, 2005; Lane, 2010, as cited in Jeharsae, 2012). Moreover, there is a semantic barrier that blocks the interlocutors from effective communication because different people may understand the same word in a different way. In addition, sometimes when we use jargon, slang, or when we have unsuitable levels of language, people cannot understand what we would like to communicate. (Lunenburg, 2010, p.5; Emjoy, 2015; Rani, 2016).

2.1.3 d. Intercultural awareness

According to Miao's (2011) study, the researcher states that intercultural communication is the procedure of conveying the message among those who have various

cultural backgrounds in different levels of awareness. If people do not open their mind for receiving other new cultures, communication breakdown can easily occur at any time.

2.1.3 e. Lack of self-confidence

People who have low self-confidence or self-esteem see their given difficult tasks as personal threats. For this reason, they probably give up because they easily lose confidence and their competency (Dörnyei, 2001).

2.1.3 f. Accents, stress, and pronunciation

Accents, stress, and pronunciation are the possible factors affecting the communication problems. If people do not try to understand each specific pronunciation, communication breakdown can occur (Jung, 2010).

2.1.3 g. Quality of voice

Good oral communicating needs a pleasant tone of voice, pitch, or the rate of speed. Speaking might cause miscommunication if the interlocutors speak too loudly, too softly, too quickly or not clearly (Flatley and Lesikar, 2005, as cited in Jeharsae, 2012).

2.1.3 h. Non-verbal communication

People believe more in your non-verbal communication because it is expressed in your body language, for instance, eye contact, facial expression, breathing rate, their movement, gestures, some signals, or clues (Mcpheat, 2010).

2.1.4 ELF Communication in the Corporate Meetings

Communicating among ELF users in the corporate meetings need English as a lingua franca to be used as the medium language to communicate with each other because they have different first languages and they cannot use it to exchange information or discuss their issues during the corporate meetings (Nielsen, 2009). Furthermore, ELF users in the studied company are from different countries; they are non-native English speakers and they have to use English while communicating, especially in the corporate meeting. They might not understand some nonverbal cues that a speaker tries to send to them and miscommunication might occur from the aforementioned factors. Therefore, they have to find the way to handle it if the problems occur during communication, so the effective communication strategies will be the way they can cope with the problems they faced.

2.2 **Communication Strategies**

Communication strategy is the deliberate endeavor or effort to deal with any languages that are involved with the communication problems during communication (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). According to Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011), there are continues strategies and discontinues strategies that the senders use for trying to convey messages. Additionally, there are the strategies for trying to understand messages.

According to their study, they identified and categorized it into two important groups. The first one is procedures for sending a message or information to the receiver which is

divided into the procedure to continue interaction for sending information to a person they communicate with for example, using some words or phrases in Thai (native language), trying to correct the grammar, the vocabulary, or the pronunciation that they think they use in the wrong way, using some other words that have the familiar or same meaning, using body language, gestures, facial expressions, or non-verbal expressions, and trying to spell the words, phrases, or sentences, repeating words, phrases, or sentences two or three times to be sure that the receiver understands the information that they want to send with the same meaning. Furthermore, there is the procedures to terminate interaction for sending a message to a person they communicate with for example, keep quiet while thinking about how to send the message, speak slowly to take more time to think and compose sentences, trying to think the sentence in Thai (native language), asking others to help, and searching for the difficult words in a dictionary.

The second one is procedures for understanding the information or message. These are the procedures where the sender is trying to understand the message, whether while the sender was transmitting the message or after the sender had already sent the message for example, attempt to grab the speaker's key point, ask the speaker to repeat the message for confirming what they said, request the speaker to slow down the speed rate, ask the other people around to help, and ask the speaker to use easier words.

2.3 Previous Related Studies

According to Jung (2010), the researcher conducted their research by collecting data from 91 undergraduate students from two universities. There are many factors that could achieve intelligibility such as tone of voice, stress, and pronunciation of English. The researcher found that the senders thought the factors of comprehensibility or how much they can understand the messages were more important than those of intelligibility or how they speak. That means they gave more attention to the meaning of the message than how to pronounce it perfectly. The researcher also added that miscommunication that occurred from people in various countries may occur from a diversity of English pronunciation, distinct sounds, how people speak in different styles and also the larger socio-cultural, pragmatic ability, and general variables can be the cause of miscommunication as well. In consequence, people need to develop their listening and speaking competency for better communication and they also need to have confidence, respect and adapt to other cultures, and understand each other.

Huang (2010) investigated the factors affecting the oral communication strategies by conducting the study with sophomore students of Lunghwa University of Science and Technology. The instruments of this study were the questionnaire and students' term grade. The result finds that the most often used by the students is message reduction while the least often used by the students is message abandonment strategies. For speaking skill, the

motivation and the frequency used in speaking English is related to the use of communication strategies. However, gender and English capability do not influence the use of oral strategies.

In order to investigate the communication problems, according to Jeharsae (2012), the researcher collected data from Thai workers who work in the fuels marketing customer service department in an international company located in Bangkok. A survey questionnaire was applied for the study. The researcher categorized the participants into two major groups. The first group is the workers who directly communicate with the native speaker customers, and the second group is the workers who communicate with the non-native speakers. The result of the study revealed that the first group encounter the listening problem as the major problem because the foreigners speak too fast, and also have the problem of producing correct grammar while communicating as well. For the second group, the workers have wider problems such as the listening problem because the foreigners spoke too fast, the failed use of grammar while speaking, hardly understanding foreign accents, producing word stress misplacement, deficiency of knowledge of the other cultures, and the volume of the foreign voice problem.

Suwanpakdee (2012) collected data from 118 people in film production companies. They were Thai people who worked in the film service industry and non-native English speakers who speak English as a foreign language, and also work in the film service industry. The researcher stated the factors affecting the English communication problems by dividing the communication problems into the categories in terms of the English communication problems as the listening problems, the speaking problems, the semantic problems, mixed messages, and intercultural problems.

In conclusion, as the previous theories and studies are stated by many researchers, English is used as a lingua franca for speaking among people who are ELF users. Furthermore, this study was conducted on the ELF users during the corporate meetings. As the abovementioned contexts mentioned that face-to-face communication is the richest way to gain all codes including verbal, vocal, and nonverbal codes from the people in the meeting rooms. During oral communication among ELF speakers, they normally have communication problems because of many factors that influence their competency to communicate with each other, and each person commonly has their strategies to deal with it when they encountered the oral communication problems.

According to the previous related studies as stated, some studies were conducted in other countries, such as Korea and Taiwan with university students, and some previous studies were also conducted in Thailand, but they were focused on different groups of participants (rather than collecting data from ELF users in a social media company as in this study). However, the contexts of English oral communication problems and strategies used, the factors that affect the comprehensibility, intelligibility, pronunciation, and

misunderstanding, the factors influencing the oral communication strategies, as well as the way they handle the problems, are all implicated or related to this study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Context

This study is a case study of a business social media company. It is located in the Silom area. This company is quite a huge company, so there are a number of employees working in this company and there are several departments in this corporation. They are working as an outsourcing customer service for social media companies. However, in the working process, especially in most corporate meetings, there is only one main department that has to attend the corporate meetings; it is called Supporting team department. They have to attend the corporate meetings at least once a week. Since the nature of this company is an ELF community, the employees are non-native English speakers and they come from many countries, thus they all need to use English as a medium language to communicate through the face-to-face oral discussion in the corporate meetings.

3.2 Research Participants

The participants consisted of 84 employees in a social media outsourcing company. All of them are ELF users from the Supporting team department which consists of five team sections. There are Analyst team, Quality analysis team, Trainer team, IT supporting team and Operation team. These employees have to attend the corporate meetings every week; each team need to discuss their problems, ideas, work tasks, or some projects in the meetings with other teams. All of them unconditionally need to use English language in the meetings because they are from different countries, some groups of them speak different languages.

3.3 Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire was used in this study as a tool to collect the data. It included both closed-ended and open-ended questions that the researcher adapted from Jeharsae's (2012) and Suwanpakdee's (2012) study. The questionnaire consisted of personal information, the problem of oral communication, and communication strategies used by ELF users.

3.4 Data Collection

The online questionnaire which is Google Forms, were used to collect the data by distributing the questionnaires to all participants who normally have to attend corporate meetings in the company at least once a week. The researcher spent four days to collect data from the participants. In addition, the expected return rate of the questionnaires was 70 copies from 84 copies. However, the number of the questionnaires that were returned to the researcher were only 63 copies.

3.5 Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, the researcher used SPSS program to analyze the data by analyzing the score from the questionnaires by percentage, frequency, or the mean score that

must be accompanied by standard deviation (*SD*). The data focused on the agreement of participants about the issues of oral communication and what strategies they used to cope with those problems.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 What are the main problems of English oral communication among ELF users during corporate meetings in the studied social media company?

The participants were asked to rate their agreement regarding English oral communication problems of ELF users in this studied social media company during their corporate meetings which are the meetings in general, not meetings via online platform or video conferences according to a five-point Likert-scale (5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Moderately Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree).

Table 1 English Oral Communication

English Oral communication	Mean	SD
Fluency		
1. Speaking English with low fluency during the corporate meetings.	3.22	1.51
2. Inability to respond when I have to give my opinions.	3.11	1.40
3. Pausing too long when offering ideas during the corporate meetings.	2.84	1.35
Grammar		
4. Producing grammatical errors while consulting about problems with my colleagues.	3.43	1.18
5. Unable to use the forms of verb tense accurately when I discuss some issues. (i.e. present, past, future tenses)	3.14	1.18
Vocabulary		
6. Having poor or insufficient vocabulary to use when offering ideas in the corporate meetings (few choices of words).	3.22	1.33
7. Inability to understand the meaning of vocabulary used in daily life while consulting about problems with my colleagues.	1.78	0.77
8. Inability to understand the meaning of technical words, jargon, slang, or idioms while consulting about problems in the corporate meetings.	3.43	1.43
Intercultural awareness		
9. Having insufficient cultural knowledge of my colleagues.	3.11	1.23
Self-Confidence		
10. Having low confidence and feeling nervous while speaking English in the corporate meetings.	3.08	1.38

Accents, stress, and pronunciation		
11. I have trouble understanding foreign accents during exchanging ideas with my colleagues.	3.46	1.26
12. Producing word stress misplacements	3.11	1.17
13. Poor English pronunciation.	2.90	1.17
Quality of voice		
14. Having problem of controlling the volume of my voice.	2.83	1.31
15. Speaking so fast during the corporate meetings and their colleagues cannot keep up.	2.68	1.41
16. Speaking so slowly in the corporate meetings that my colleagues cannot catch the main ideas.	2.54	1.34
17. Mumbling when speaking because they cannot pronounce each consonant accurately.	2.95	1.32
Non-verbal communication		
18. Confused with the body language or non-verbal messages while speaking English with their colleagues.	3.35	1.34

In order to answer the first research question, overall, the results in this study indicate that ELF users agreed that they encountered a lot of issues regarding English oral communication during the corporate meetings. According to the research participants, table 1 reports that the most problematic aspect of English use in corporate meetings is accent, stress, and pronunciation, which is the problem of understanding foreign accents during the corporate meetings, with the mean of 3.46. For non-native speakers of English, this issue of accent, stress, and pronunciation has been discussed by Jung's (2010), Jeharsae's (2012), and Suwanpakdee's (2012) study which found that the accent, stress, and pronunciation is the possible factor affecting communication problems. Furthermore, they also stated that during communicating among ELF users, the difficulty to understand foreign accents or the unclear understanding of foreign accents is one of the reasons affecting communication problems. It is possible that foreign accents of ELF users or some pronunciation by them might be difficult to understand. Although they are ELF users who use English to communicate with others, the truth that they all are non-native English speakers could still be one of the factors which leads them to miscommunication due to the differences of their accents or pronunciation.

Moreover, the overall findings indicate that ELF users also had problems of confusion or inability to use grammar accurately (M = 3.43), and vocabulary problems (M = 3.43) during the corporate meetings. It is likely that ELF users could face a number of issues regarding English oral communication including the abovementioned problems which could be the main problems they encountered during their corporate meetings. The finding of grammatical usage

is in agreement with those problems of English oral communication in an earlier work by Jeharsae (2012), which found their participants encountered the failed use of grammar while speaking English, and the researcher also stated that oral communication skills are related with the way they used grammar correctly. Moreover, the finding of vocabulary usage is in line with those problems in the previous studies by Lunenburg (2010), and Rani (2016), which indicated that sometimes when people use jargon, slang, technical terms, or when they have different levels of language comprehension, they cannot understand what their interlocutor would like to communicate with them.

In addition, overall, the third place of the English oral communication problems was the problem of confusion with non-verbal messages (M = 3.35). It seems that non-verbal communication could be one of the important communication processes when the participants communicate with each other during the corporate meetings. This finding of non-verbal communication problem is consistent with those of Nielsen (2009), Mcpheat (2010), and Suwanpakdee (2012), who indicated that people usually believe in non-verbal messages of the speaker because it shows in their body language, such as facial expression, eye contact, movements, gestures, breathing rate, some clues, and some signals. They also mentioned that miscommunication could occur from these factors because they might not understand some non-verbal messages that the speaker tries to send to them while communicating.

4.2 **What are the communication strategies they used to facilitate English oral communication during corporate meetings?**

The participants were asked to rate their agreement regarding communication strategies according to a five-point Likert-scale (5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Moderately Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). The results of this section present communication strategies that ELF users in this company used to facilitate their English oral communication during corporate meetings.

Table 2 Communication Strategies

Communication strategies	Mean	SD
1. Using familiar words, phrases, and sentences during exchanging information with my colleagues.	4.06	1.09
2. Using other words, phrases, and sentences to describe the target word to my colleagues.	3.82	0.97
3. Describing words by using non-verbal language or gestures when my colleagues do not understand me.	3.96	1.10
4. Using other words that have the close meaning to the target word when my colleagues do not understand me.	3.92	1.02

5. Writing the word, phrases, and sentence or drawing a picture to clarify the message when my colleagues do not understand me.	2.71	1.19
6. Speak slowly or using some words to take more time to think such as “well”, “uh”, “I guess” etc.	3.73	1.24
7. Using a dictionary to help me understand unfamiliar words during the corporate meetings.	2.76	1.16
8. Paying more attention and focusing on keywords to improve my listening when communicating with my colleagues.	4.20	0.96
9. Asking others to repeat and confirm what they say while discussing the problems on working process.	3.85	1.07
10. Asking others to slow down when I cannot keep up.	3.42	0.91
11. Asking the translator for help to avoid miscommunication while solving the problems in the corporate meetings.	2.22	1.11
12. Asking others to use more easier language, and avoiding the difficult topics, slang, jargon, or technical words.	3.38	1.38
13. I will learn more English skills to improve the effectiveness of my communication abilities.	4.19	0.98
14. I will learn about the cultural backgrounds of my colleagues to understand them and to build good relationships within the team.	4.09	1.01

The results in this part provide the answer to research question 2 which indicate that ELF users who work in this social media company applied almost all the communication strategies that appeared in the questionnaire.

The significant findings were reported as the top three mean scores of all the strategies. The most common strategy used is paying attention to catch key words (M = 4.20), followed by the intention to learn more English skills to improve the abilities to use English (M = 4.19), and the third one is learning about the new cultures of their interlocutors (M = 4.09).

It is likely that ELF users may use many communication strategies to handle their problems when they face English oral communication problems to continue the conversation or to continue with their communication with their interlocutors. These findings of communication strategies have been discussed in the studies of Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011), and Jeharsae (2012), which mentioned that participants applied the communication strategies in several ways including the strategies to keep sending the message and also the strategies to pause and then take time to think while conveying the messages. The participants in their studies applied the strategies of trying to grab main points and focusing on keywords.

In addition, the study of Jung (2010) and Miao (2011) also mentioned that people who are non-native English speaker need to develop their listening and speaking competency for better communication, and they need to learn respect and adapt to other cultures for improving their comprehension and awareness of other cultural differences.

Conversely, the strategies to ask another person or a translator for help received the lowest mean score (M = 2.22) which means the participants did not use this communication strategy while they faced problems during corporate meetings. It seems that ELF users in this social media company applied all the communication strategies that appeared in the questionnaire except for the strategy to ask others around them for help. Therefore, this finding is different from the results in the previous studies that have been discussed by Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011) and Jeharsae (2012), which stated that when the participants faced the English oral communication problems or when they cannot keep the conversation going, they will ask other people around them for assistance.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the results of this study can be summarized that ELF users who work in this studied social media company encountered a number of issues regarding English oral communication problems. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the participants encountered the accent, stress, and pronunciation problem with the highest mean score. They agree that they have problems understanding foreign accents during exchanging ideas with their colleagues. Moreover, they also have trouble with grammatical usage and vocabulary usage including the inability to produce grammar accurately, and the inability to understand the meaning of technical words or particular words. In addition, the participants also encountered the problems such as confusion with nonverbal messages during communicating in the corporate meetings.

On the other hand, the participants agreed that they used many communication strategies to handle the problems during their corporate meetings. The top three communication strategies that participants used were the strategy to pay more attention and to focus on key points in order to improve their listening skill, the intention to learn more English skills to improve their English competency, and the intention to learn about the cultural background of their colleagues. However, the lowest score of communication strategies was asking the translator for help in order to avoid miscommunication.

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