The Syntactic Interpretation of Overt NPs in Embɔsi*

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*In this paper I analyze the binding relation of overt NPs in Embɔsi. It has been demonstrated that some of the binding theory principles namely Principle A fails to explain Reflexives distribution because they can occur outside their governing category and accessible subject. Hence I claim that the principle A enters among many other issues concerning parametric variation postulates. Yet I also assert that reflexives are very particular in Embɔsi a*s they are *[+Anaphor] and [+Pronominal.]*

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1. Introduction

Standard analyses on the syntactic typology of NPs classify them in the light of the features [± anaphor] and [± pronominal]. These binary features classify NPs in terms of overt and non overt ones.

In this connection, this paper discusses the syntactic distribution of the overt NPs in Embɔsi[1]. Its main objective is to extend the descriptive binding tradition (Chomsky 1981, 1986, Liliane Haegeman 1991, Lasnik and Uriagereka 1988, Black 1999, Radford 2004, Abney 1987) to a Bantu language in order to question the universality of binding theory principles. Put otherwise, this paper aims to check whether the dichotomy [± Anaphor] and [± pronominal] can efficiently and adequately account for data from world languages or fall into parametric variation issues.

To start with, overt NPs refer to visible lexical categories among which pronouns, and names. Let's take (1) as the starting point:

(1)   a.   Ikíà àdìngà wà
              lit.   Ikia he/she-love him/her
              i.e.   Ikia loves him/her

        b.   Mwánà àkɔsì wàmɛ̀nɛ̀
              lit   Child he/she-hurt him/herself
              i.e.   The child hurts him/herself

        c.   Ambɔrì básɛ̀rɛ̀ bárè bá ádì ándzàngà
              lit.   Soldiers they-say that them they-be warriors
              i.e.   Soldiers say that they are warriors

        d.   Ngala àbààrà nàrè Kùmù àdì òyòò
              lit.   Ngala she-think that Koumou he/she-be poor
              i.e.   Ngala thinks that Koumou is poor

It appears that the above examples that there are three types of overt NPs:

(2)   a. Lexical NP such as Ikíà, Mwánà,Ambɔ̀rì,Ngàlà,Koumou
        b. Pronouns such as wà, bá
        c. Reflexive pronoun such as wàmɛ̀nɛ̀

The interpretation of these three types of NPs is not identical. On the other hand, their syntactic distribution within a sentence domain obeys restrictive conditions. For instance, lexical NPs do not need some other entities to capture their reference; they have inherent properties that enable them to select an independent referent. Yet, pronouns and reflexives lack inherent properties to select a given referent from the universe of discourse. They require an outer element from which they inherit their reference. At this point I advance that each type of NPs in (2) has its principles which offers an explanation for its different distributions and its references. In this respect, three principles have been developed in the literature namely:

(2) d.

- Principle A: It concerns anaphors and it claims that they must be bound in their governing categories (e.g. wàmɛ̀nɛ̀);
- Principle B. It deals with pronouns and it assumes they pronouns must be free in their governing category (e.g. bá, wà); and
- Principle C: It covers R-expressions and it suggests that they must be free everywhere (e.g. Ikíà, Ngàlà, Kùmù)

In fact, Principle A can explain the following occurrences of reflexives and anaphors:

(3)   a.   Olómì yàmbá Ngàlà àkɔ̀sì wàmɛ̀nɛ̀
            lit.   husband of Ngala he-hurt himself
            i.e.   Ngala's husband hurt himself

        b.   Mwásí yàmbá Kàngà àkɔ̀sì wàmɛ̀nɛ̀
            lit.   wife of Kanga she-hurt herself
            i.e.   Kanga's wife hurt herself

        *c.   Mwásí yàmbá Kàngà àkɔ̀sì bámɛ̀nɛ̀
            lit.   Wife of Kanga she-hurt themselves
            i.e.   *Kanga's wife hurt themselves

        *d.   Ngá íkɔ̀sì nɔ̀mɛ̀nɛ̀
            lit.   Me I-hurt yourself
            i.e.   *I hurt yourself

In (3 a-b), the reflexives pick up their references from the NP which is higher to them. Thus we assert that both the antecedent (the higher NP) and the reflexive are co referential by virtues of agreement. It emerges from (3) examples that all the nominal features, mainly the gender is not overt in Embɔsi. As Embɔsi lacks gender the male and female refer to the same

reflexive *wàmɛ̀nɛ̀*. Yet the number feature rules out (3c) which is then ungrammatical. Similarly, the person feature renders (3d) odd or ungrammatical. An in-depth analysis of the relationship between a reflexive and its antecedent will lead to the consideration of the C-command criteria and locality constraints which are expressed through the Principle of Reflexive Interpretation (PRI): '*A reflexive pronoun must be bound inside a clause that contains it and its governor.*'

(4) a.   Kàngà àtà nàrè wàmɛ̀nɛ̀ àdí obwɛ́
          lit.   Kanga he-see that himself he-be good
          i.e.   Kanga thinks that himself is nice

     b.   Isòngò àbàarà wàrè wàmɛ̀nè àdí là ilɔ′ngɔ̀
          lit.   Issongo she-think that herself she-be with beauty
          i.e.   Issongo thinks that herself is good looking

     c.   Nɔ̀ òbòmì ndzórò nɔ̀mɛ̀nɛ̀
          lit.   you you-kill body yourself
          i.e.   You kill yourself

     d.   Nɔ̀ nàrè nɔ̀mɛ̀nɛ̀ ɔdzwà ɔbà mwásí
          lit.   you that yourself you-go marry wife
          i.e.   You say that you are going to marry your wife yourself

     e.   Ibàrà wàmɛ̀nà àyàà
          lit.   Ibara himself he-come
          i.e.   Ibara is coming himself

     f.   Wàmɛ̀nɛ̀ Ibàrà àyàà
          lit.   himself Ibara he-come

     g.   Wàmɛ̀nɛ̀ àyàà
          lit.   himself he-come

An examination of reflexives in (4a-b, 4d-g) shows that there is no clausemate antecedent to which they are bound although these sentences are grammatically correct in Embɔsi. Thus these sentences stand as a violation of the Complete Functional Complex (CFC) which reads as follows: '*A reflexive must be bound in the minimal domain containing it, its governor and a subject.*'

The domain of binding defined in terms of CFC is successful in other world languages such as English, but it is rather inadequate in Embɔsi because it cannot offer an explanation for the grammaticality of these examples. In order to accommodate examples such as (4a-b, 4d-g), we need to revisit the CFC and PRI principles. In (4a), *Kanga* fails to C-command the reflexive that is lower to it because of the Comp barrier as illustrated below.
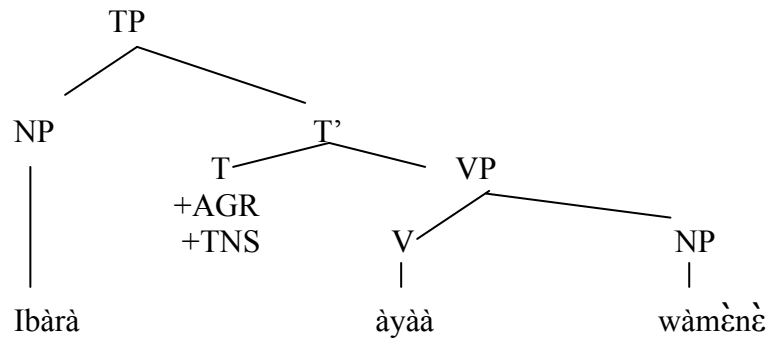
(4) h.
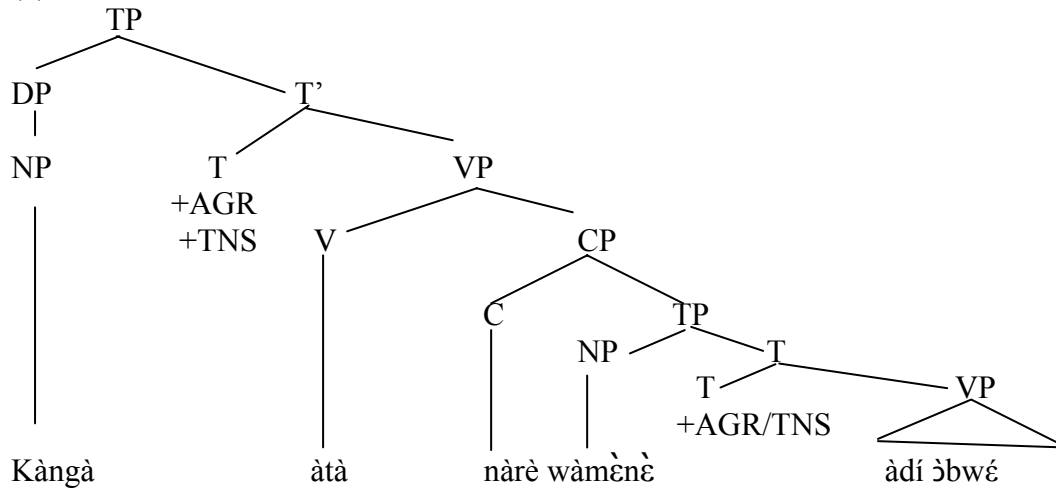
As 'Kanga' does not C-command nor bind 'himself', how can one explain the grammaticality of (4a) and the like? This suggests that the domain of binding for reflexive is parameterised across languages because barriers for government are language specific. Ndongo Ibara (2007) argues that CPs are not too powerful to block government in Embɔsi. Consider furthermore that in (5), there are more than two CPs that intervene between the reflexive and its governor without yielding any deviancy.

(5)   Kàngà àbààrà wàrè ìbàà lídí ìbwɛ́ èdí wàmɛ́ne
      lit.   Kanga he-think **that** man **who**-be good it-be himself
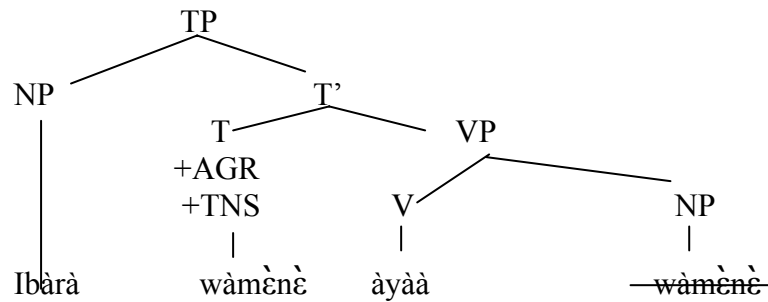   i.e.   Kanga thinks that the man who is good is himself

It appears that the distance of the binding domain is too large in Embɔsi. As a result, I reformulate the Principle of Reflexive Interpretation along the following lines: Extended Principle of Reflexive Interpretation (EPRI) which is read as: '*A reflexive can either be bound inside and or outside its governor and accessible subject.*'

This reformulation will account for the grammaticality of examples in (4). Yet some of the reflexives in (4) instance different distributions to the ones I have just dealt with. It results that the binder and these reflexive are too close so as they appear in the same constituent (4e-f); it is lower or even higher than its governor. Again (4g) shows a reflexive that lacks an overt NP hence its governor is not accessible. From (4e-g) examples, I assume that the different distributions of the reflexives are the consequences of Move α rule on one hand, and on the other they instance Embɔsi pro drop language features. I assert that the reflexive in (4e-f) originates from its underlying position in post verbal position and follows a cyclic movement. Basing upon the copy theory of movement, a copy of the reflexive that is preposed is left at the post verbal position as in:
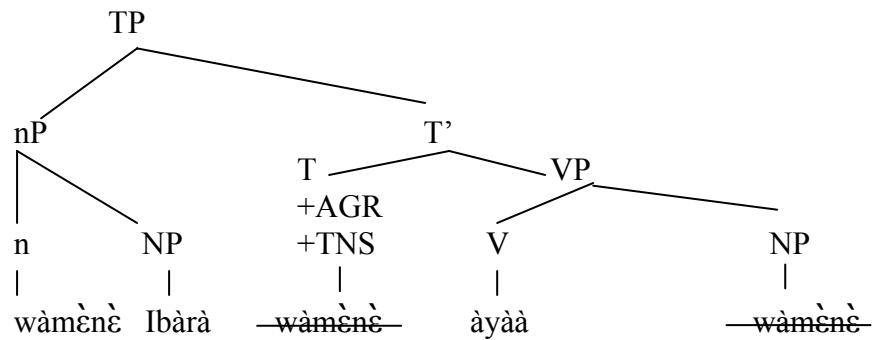
(6) a.

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                    TP
          ┌──────────┴────────┐
         NP                   T'
          |          ┌────────┴────────┐
        Ibàrà        T                 VP
                   +AGR        ┌────────┴────────┐
                   +TNS        V                 NP
                               |                 |
                             àyàà             wàmɛ̀nɛ̀
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(6) b.

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                    TP
          ┌──────────┴────────┐
         NP                   T'
          |          ┌────────┴────────┐
        Ibàrà        T                 VP
                   +AGR        ┌────────┴────────┐
                   +TNS        V                 NP
                    |          |                 |
                  wàmɛ̀nɛ̀     àyàà            ~~wàmɛ̀nɛ̀~~
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(6) c.

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                    TP
          ┌──────────┴──────────────────┐
         nP                             T'
       ┌──┴──┐              ┌────────────┴────────┐
       n     NP             T                     VP
       |     |            +AGR          ┌─────────┴─────────┐
       |     |            +TNS          V                   NP
       |     |             |            |                   |
    wàmɛ̀nɛ̀ Ibàrà     ~~wàmɛ̀nɛ̀~~     àyàà            ~~wàmɛ̀nɛ̀~~
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Of interest is the fact that the reflexive merges onto the head of the null light nP because the NP is still visible in its initial position. This proposal has been put forward by (Radford 2004, Chomsky 2000, 2001). On the basis of this argument, it would be useful to suggest that in (6c) the lexical NP can be dropped at the S-structure to obtain a sentence such as (4g). In fact, since agreement is related to morphology (Bobaljik 2006) the reflexive Agr picks up the nominal features of the subject. As a matter of fact, Chomsky (1981) treats Agr as a Big subject. That is to say, in the absence its overt NP, the reflexive must pick up its reference from the clitic pronoun which is affixed to the verb prefix position. This last hypothesis rules out the following sentences.

*(7) a.   nɔ̀mɛ̀nɛ̀ àdìngà wà
       lit.   Yourself he/she-love him/her

b.   wàmɛ̀nà ídìngà nɔ̀
     lit.   him/herself I-love you

c.   bámɛ̀nɛ̀ lèdìngà wà
     lit.   themselves we/you-love him/her

It would be possible, of course, to set up an ad hoc rule according to which the binding domain in Embɔsi is a case of long distance binding where the subject can govern the reflexive from a lower tensed clause. In what follows, I am going to concentrate on the interpretation of anaphors.

(8) a.   Bá ápɛ́ ábìà àbòndì
     lit.   Them they-give others gifts
     i.e.   They give each other gifts

   b.   Okwéré àbààrà wàrè básí bátsénà là àbìà
     lit.   Okwere he-think that wives they-Insult-Rec to others
     i.e.   Okwere thinks that wives call each other bad name

   c.   Bùyà àbààrà wàrè àbìà bátswá
     lit.   Buya he-think that others they-insult
     i.e.   ?Buya thinks that some insult

   d.   Bánà áyɛ́lìnì là àbìà
     lit.   children they-enjoy-Rec to others
     i.e.   Children enjoy one another

   e.   àbwɛ́ bányángìnà
     lit.   in-laws they greet-Rec
     i.e.   In-laws greet each other

   f.   àlómì bábààrà bárè là àbìà ádìngìnà
     lit.   husbands they-think that each other they-love-Rec
     i.e.   Husbands think that they love each other

   g.   àlómì ádìngì
     lit.   husbands they-love
     i.e.   Husbands love

   h.   àtáì bábààrà bárè bá bábwéénà là àbìà àbángá
     lit.   fathers they-think that them they-throw-Rec
     i.e.   fathers think that they throw one another stones

As (8g) indicates, reciprocals require a plural antecedent. In Embɔsi reciprocity (Rec) is signalled through morpheme incorporation. The reciprocal morpheme '**n**' is incorporated into the predicate suffix position. In fact, Embɔsi allows two possibilities as regards reciprocity: In (8e) the verb *iyɛ́lɛ̀* is incorporated with the reciprocal morpheme '**n**' whereas

elsewhere the predicate is either followed by *là àbìà* phrase or it incorporates the reciprocal morpheme and selects the '*là àbìà* phrase'.

One word of caution will be sounded here. The complement *là àbìà* refers to reciprocal actions only if it occurs in the post verbal position, while elsewhere it is something different (9h). In (9a), *bá* and *àbìà* cannot have the same referent by means of co-indexation. Furthermore, the insertion of *là* in front of the NP *àbìà* cannot trigger reciprocal reading though the accessible subject NP *bá* is plural. The fact that *là àbìà* cannot imply reciprocity is substantiated by the lack of an overt reciprocal morpheme. In this respect, *là àbìà* can only refer to reciprocal actions once the following arrangements are met:

(i)   It occurs in post verbal position, and (ii) the governor predicate must exhibit an overt reciprocal morpheme '*n*'.

A survey of a number of examples with reciprocals in (8) reveals that their interpretation is asymmetric to that of reflexives. It has been so far formulated that reflexives can be bound inside or outside the governing domain; yet, reciprocals are compelled to occur within their governing domain. As a matter of fact, I cannot argue in favour of uniformity of anaphors and reflexive interpretation; each of them should have a specific theorem. For, while reciprocals are bound within their governing category, reflexives are either bound or free from their governor. The following examples are concerned with pronouns.

(9)   a.   Iwàndzà àbéà wà
                lit.   Iwandza he-call him/her
                i.e.   Iwandza calls her/him

        b.   Ngàmbòmì àbààrà wàrè bòlà òkɔsì bwàmɛ̀nɛ̀
                lit.   Ngambomi he-think that sister/brother she/he-hurt her/himself
                i.e.   Ngambomi thinks that her sister hurts herself

        c.   Ngàkàlà àta nàrè wà àdí èmbóló ɛ̀nɛ́
                lit.   Ngakala he-see that he-be hunter big
                i.e.   Ngakala thinks that he is a great hunter

        d.   Ngyɛ̀kyɛ̀nì àbènyà òbé à wà/wàmɛ̀nɛ̀
                lit.   Ngyekyeni he-accept bad of him/himself
                i.e.   Nguekyeni accepts his own fault

        e.   Okòlà àtónà wàrè Ngàkòsò àβìnà wà
                lit.   Okola he-refuse that Ngakosso he-hate him
                i.e.   Okola denies that Ngakoso hates him

        f.   Wà àtóní ngá
                lit.   him/her he/she-refuse me
                i.e.   He/she dislikes me

g.   Ibàrà àdzé wà là bòlà
      lit.   Ibara he-ate him with sister
      i.e.   Ibara ate with his sister

h.   Elèngà àdzá wà èkɔ̀ ngá ídzá swé
      lit.   Elenga he-eat him cassava me I-eat fish
      i.e.   Elenga is going to eat cassava while I will eat fish

i.   Ikàmà àsɛ̀rì wàrè Ikía àtìyàà wàrè wà àdí èβóà
      lit.   Ikama she-said that Ikia she-told that her she-be crazy
      i.e.   Ikama said that Ikia told that she is crazy

It turns out from (9) that the syntactic distribution of pronouns is parallel to that of reciprocals and reflexives. It appears that a pronoun is totally independent and free in its governing domain. The only possibility that instances a case of pronoun binding in its governing category is that of coordination of NPs in (9g). In (9i) the occurrence of *wà* demonstrates that the foregoing explanation does not tally, hence it is important to work it out. As such, a pronoun can be bound in its governing category in case of coordination in Embɔsi.

From (10) below, it will surface that R-expressions do not need antecedent, they are free everywhere by virtue of their intrinsic properties.

(10) a.   Adùà àbɛ̀rì wà
      lit.   Adùà he-beat him/her
      i.e.   Adua beat him/her

  b.   Okàndzé àsɛ̀rɛ̀ wàrè wà àβòdzá
      lit.   Okandzé he-say that him he-Asp-eat
      i.e.   Okandzé says that he is about to eat

  c.   Wà àsɛ̀rì wàrè Obàndzà àdí bɔ̀
      lit.   Him/her he/she-say that Obandzà he-be sleeping
      i.e.   He/she said that Obandza is asleep

Works within the binding theory have formalized the following chart as a summary of overt NPs features (Chomsky 1982:78, Haegeman 1991:322).

(11)

Type		Overt NPs
+Anaphor,	- Pronominal	Anaphors
-Anaphor,	+ Pronominal	Pronouns
- Anaphor,	- Pronominal	R-expressions
+Anaphor,	+Pronominal	/

A close attention of the above analysis of Embɔsi NP-types stands as an objection to consider that chart adequate device for the interpretation of its overt NPs. The chief objection

concerns anaphors. In fact, it is due to their common features (+Anaphor, -Pronominal) that reflexive and reciprocal have been classified into the same group in keeping with data from Indo-European languages. The overt NPs that are referred to as 'anaphors' do not qualify for being treating alike hence paired together in Embɔsi. If I try to puzzle out this matter, it is clear that reflexives and reciprocals are not subject to the same rule of interpretation. In this perspective, I suggest to consider Principle A as a parametric variation issues as word order and the like. I wonder whether it would be better to separate reflexives from reciprocals so as to attain explanatory adequacy in Embɔsi. Structurally, the refinement of the Principle A would clearly show the difference between them in accordance with the features that typify both types of NPs in the language under discussion.

(12)

NP Types	Features
Reciprocals	+Anaphor, -Pronominal
Reflexives	+Anaphor +Pronominal

It should be reminded that the three principles presented in (2) so far have been formalized in terms of the chart in (11). However, (12) is strict objection. It would not be necessary to set up another principle which admits the separation of reflexives from reciprocal because they share one identical feature although one aspect makes them different. As a result, the feature [+pronominal] of reflexives is an illustration of idiosyncratic features of Embɔsi. So I suggest that the following meets the syntactic features and distributions of overt NPs in Embɔsi.

(13)

Type		Overt NPs
+Anaphor,	- Pronominal	Anaphors
-Anaphor,	+ Pronominal	Pronouns
- Anaphor,	- Pronominal	R-expressions
+Anaphor,	+Pronominal	Reflexives

2. Conclusion

To summarize, Embɔsi is a particular language in which classical linguistic standards can be furthered and extended. In such a language, to maintain a syntactically oriented approach to anaphors and pronominals is to admit that some of the binding well known principles fall into cross linguistic parametric issues. As a matter of fact, Embɔsi shows that reflexives share both anaphors and pronominals features.

Notes

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[1] Embɔsi is one of the Bantu languages spoken in the northern part of the Republic of Congo particularly in the regions of La Cuvette and a part of Les Plateaux. See Théophile Obenga (1976) where Embɔsi is grouped with other speech forms namely Akwa, koyo, Mboko, and Ngare.

[2] Embɔsi relative pronoun 'that' varies according to its referring subject (see Ndongo Ibara 2007) for details. Cf. e.g. 1 (c-d); 4 (a-b); 8 (b-c,f,h) etc. Here are some more examples:

	ngá i-bààrà ngárè èdí òbé
lit.	me I think that it-be bad
i.e.	I think that it is bad

	nò ò-bààrà nàrè èdí òbé
lit.	you you think that it-be bad
i.e.	You think that it is bad

	wà à-bààrà wàrè èdí òbé
lit.	him/her he/she think that it-be bad
i.e.	He/she thinks that it is bad

	bíní lè-bààrà bárè èdí òbé
lit.	you you-think that it-be bad
i.e.	You think that it is bad.

[3] Embɔsi clitic pronouns generally bear low tone. And as a pro drop language, Embɔsi realises the null subject parameter. Examples above show that Embɔsi makes the difference between the second pronoun singular and plural.

	ì- yàà wó ìmbyéngì
lit.	I come there tomorrow
i.e.	I shall be there tomorrow

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