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Cooptation over grammaticalization

The characteristics of discourse markers reconsidered

Abstract

The paper addresses the issue of categorization and category membership with respect to the functional class of discourse markers. In the course of the paper I will review possible criteria for discourse marker status and examine them from the perspectives of three alternative hypotheses about the development of discourse markers: grammaticalization theory; its modified version, the pragmaticalization hypothesis; and the cooptation hypothesis. The characteristics outlined in the paper suggest that the functional class of DMs constitutes a radial category either in the light of grammaticalization/pragmaticalization or the cooptation hypothesis, thus, a network model along the lines of Pelyvás (1995) is the most appropriate way of characterizing individual DMs in terms of prototypicality.
Keywords: discourse markers, grammaticalization, pragmaticalization, cooptation, cognitive grammar

1 Preliminaries, the problem

There is a rapidly growing body of research on linguistic expressions referred to as discourse markers (henceforth DMs), discourse connectives, discourse operators, discourse particles, cue phrases, pragmatic markers, framing devices; the list could go on as the function of the number of theoretical frameworks that have been applied to the study of these items (Relevance Theory, coherence-based studies, sentence grammar, interactional sociolinguistics, to mention but a few). It is widely agreed that such expressions play a vital role in utterance interpretation. There is, however, disagreement on the type of meaning they express and the criteria one can use to delimit this class of linguistic items.

Discourse markers are intriguing objects of study for several reasons: they promise the researcher ready access to the very fabric of talk-in progress (Redeker 2006), this class of linguistic items also brings up many of the questions concerning the pragmatics/semantics boundary; the differences between speech and writing, and the relationship between cohesion and coherence; gender-preferential differentiation; grammaticalization and a variety of other phenomena that have long fascinated and puzzled linguists.

Despite the rapidly growing body of research on DMs experts in the field observe over and over again that there are still a number of fundamental questions that need to be answered (cf. e.g. Schourup 1999, Fraser 1999, Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen 2004, Dér 2010, Heine 2013). Some of the issues include the lack of generally accepted terminologies and classifications, uncertainty regarding essential formal, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics, as well as the absence of a model in which DMs can be related to general linguistic categories in an integrated way.

In the present paper I am going to address the issue of categorization and category membership. Describing the characteristics of the functional class of DMs and developing criteria for deciding for every given instance whether it is a DM or not have been major preoccupations in recent DM research. However, very few attempts have been made to consistently relate such criteria to the diachronic development of individual linguistic items, an object of enquiry that is, naturally, beyond the scope of relevance-theoretic accounts as well.

Scholars who work in the field of DM research usually provide exhaustive lists of the formal, functional and stylistic criteria that are associated with DMs as a functional class (cf. e.g. Schourup 1999, González 2004, Fraser 1999), still, few authors give a systematic account of the motivation that lies behind the non-propositionality, optionality, context- and genre-dependence, variable scope, etc. of discourse markers. Conversely, scholars who work in the field of grammaticalization theory give detailed descriptions of the diachronic development individual DMs go through (cf. Traugott 1995, 1997), but they fail to address the issue of delimiting the functional class of DMs.

Accordingly, the aim of my paper is to reconsider the criteria that have been identified in the literature and to relate them to three different theories about the emergence and development of DMs: grammaticalization theory and the theories of pragmaticalization and cooptation.

2 Characteristics of DMs, possible criteria for DM status

2.1 *Non-propositionality and optionality*

Many scholars consider non-propositionality (non-truth-conditionality) as a sine qua non for DM status (cf. Schourup 1999), others include propositional items such as *then* and *after that* (e.g. Redeker 2005). While it is generally agreed that certain DMs (e.g. *well, however, etc.*) contribute nothing to the truth-conditions of the proposition expressed by an utterance, the non-truth conditionality of others (*frankly, I think*) have generated a great deal of controversy (see Infantidou-Trouki 1992).

Blakemore (2002) argues that we need to make a distinction between *truth-conditional* and *non-truth conditional* meaning on the one hand, and *conceptual* vs. *procedural* meaning, on the other. Thus, many of the above mentioned controversies stem from the fact that certain scholars confuse the two distinctions and use them interchangeably. Schourup (1999), for example, uses the *compositionality* test to argue in favour of the *truth-conditionality* of *in addition*:

(1a) Owens is a respected drama critic. I tell you *in addition* that she has written...
(1b) Owens is a respected drama critic. *In addition*, she has written... (Schourup 1999: 232)

While *in addition* is indeed truth-conditional, the above test would predict that *frankly* is also truth-conditional, while DM uses of *frankly* are non-truth conditional, but *conceptual*. It is, therefore, important to point out that the compositionality test will be a useful tool in deciding whether individual DMs have *conceptual* or *procedural* meaning, the *truth-functionality* of DMs is tested more efficiently in terms of whether they retain their original meaning when embedded in *if-clauses* or under the scope of factive connectives such as *because*:

(2a) *Allegedly / Obviously / Frankly*, the cook has poisoned the soup.
(2b) If the cook has *allegedly / ?obviously / *frankly* poisoned the soup, we can eat the meal without worrying.

(2c)   We shouldn't eat the soup, because the cook has *allegedly/?obviously/*frankly* poisoned it (examples adapted from Blakemore 2002).

The uncertainty with regard to whether or not *obviously* retains its original meaning in the above examples (for a detailed discussion, cf. Blakemore 2002) suggests that the truth-functionality / non-truth functionality distinction should be viewed as a *continuum*, rather than a dichotomy. This is consistent with the finding in grammaticalization theory that due to the diachronic grammaticalisation processes that are synchronically manifested in the use of discourse markers, there is sometimes a *gradation* (layering) between uses that are non-truth conditional and (omissible) and those that are not (cf. Andersen 2001: 41-42).

Optionality as a distinguishing feature is in many respects derivative of the previously discussed criterion of non-propositionality, DMs are considered optional from the perspective of sentence meaning because their absence does not change the conditions under which the sentence is true.

There are, however, two further senses in which DMs are claimed to be optional. Firstly, they may be seen as syntactically optional in the sense that removal of a DM does not alter the grammaticality of its host sentence. Secondly, they are optional in the sense that if a DM is omitted, the relationship it signals might still be available to the hearer, though no longer explicitly cued (cf. Schourup 1999: 231).

Optionality in pragmatic terms is nonsensical, as suggested by, for example, Dér (2005), since DMs are essential for the organization and structuring of discourse and for marking the speaker's attitudes to the proposition being expressed as well as the processes of pragmatic inferences, i.e. the hearer's efforts to find out what is not explicitly stated but is implied by a given utterance.

From a diachronic perspective, syntactic optionality is a corollary of the process whereby linguistic items (source categories of DMs) gradually lose their original, *propositional* meaning and take up *textual* and *interpersonal* functions. This process has been alternately associated with *grammaticalization* or *pragmaticalization*. Sometimes the two terms are used interchangeably with relation to DMs (e.g. in Busquets, Koike & Vann 2001). A number of scholars, e.g. Erman and Kotsinas (1993) and Aijmer (1997) are convinced that DMs undergo a process of pragmaticalization, while others, including Traugott (1995), feel strongly about the need to describe the process in terms of grammaticalization.

Grammaticalization is defined as a process whereby lexical items take on certain grammatical functions in certain linguistic environments or an already grammatical item takes over new or additional grammatical functions (cf. e.g. Lehmann 1995, Hopper &Traugott 1994, Dér 2013). In contrast, the pragmaticalization of DMs is defined as a process of "habitualization and automatization" whereby "metacommunicative use creates a variant of the original item" (Frank-Job 2006).

Traugott (1995) criticizes the use of the term pragmaticalization by Erman and Kotsinas (1993) and Aijmer (1997), who use this term for the purpose of mapping the functions of *y'know* and *I think*, respectively. She argues that, *y'know* and *I think* are no more pragmaticalized than tense and aspect or, alternatively, just as grammaticalized as tense and aspect:

> In the linguistic literature, tense, aspect and mood are often treated as syntactic or semantic categories, and may not appear to be as obviously pragmatic as discourse particles, but they have pragmatic functions in most, may be all, languages. We need only think of the English pragmatic use of past for politeness as in What was your name?, the well-known backgrounding and foregrounding functions of aspect [and] uses of the narrative present (Traugott 1995: 5).

Heine (2013) rejects both grammaticalization and pragmaticalization as the diachronic processes that account for the semantic bleaching of DMs, and cogently argues that DMs undergo the process of cooptation,[1] a process whereby "a chunk of SG [sentence grammar], such as a clause, a phrase, a word, or any other unit is deployed for use as a thetical" (Kaltenböck et al. 2011: 874-875, quoted in Heine 2013: 1221). Cooptation explains why DMs are optional in a syntactic sense (and, therefore, do no affect the truth-conditions of the sentence), since theticals are, by definition, outside the syntactic structure of the sentence.

2.2 Context-dependence and (extreme) multifunctionality

As was mentioned in the introduction, the study of DMs brings up fundamental questions about the semantics/pragmatics interface (or boundary in the case of modular approaches), since, on the one hand, DMs usually have context-dependent meaning, on the other hand, they are frequently mentioned as linguistic units that are inherently indexical. In fact Aijmer (2002) considers indexicality as the most important property of DMs, a property whereby DMs are linked to attitudes, evaluation, types of speakers and other features of the communicative situation. In this respect DMs can be compared to deictics. Incidentally, definitions of deictic expressions overlap to a great extent with those of DMs. Both categories are usually defined in terms of context-dependence i.e. in terms of having meaning only by virtue of an indexical connection to some aspect of the speech event (cf. e.g. Sidnell 1998).

Taking the above into consideration, one could argue that DMs are indeed a subgroup of indexicals; in a comprehensive article on deixis, Levinson (2004), in fact, calls DMs discourse deictics, other subgroups including spatial, temporal and social deictics.

Similarities between indexicals and DMs are also recognized by proponents of Relevance Theory. Carston (1998: 24), for example, notes that the two seemingly disparate phenomena are brought together by the fact that both encode a *procedure* rather than a *concept*, and both play a role in guiding the hearer in the pragmatic inferential phase of understanding an utterance. The difference between the two sets of phenomena, according to Carston, is that indexicals constrain the inferential construction of *explicatures* and DMs (discourse connectives in RT terms) constrain the derivation of *implicatures* (in other words, intended contextual assumptions and contextual effects).

From the perspective of grammaticalization theory, the criterion of context-dependence is an important by-product of the process whereby DMs become semantically bleached, i.e. lose their inherent, context-independent meaning. However, at the same time, DMs take up more *subjective, textual* and *interpersonal* functions, in other words, they become pragmatically enriched. Both processes are in line with the general processes of grammaticalization: semantic bleaching conforms to Lehmann's (1995) integrity parameter, while pragmatic enrichment conforms to the principle of subjectification (cf. e.g. Brinton & Traugott 2005: 28). In this respect, pragmaticalization is not incompatible with grammaticalization, while cooptation will also predict that theticals are increasingly used in more and more contexts, that is, they undergo contextual extension (cf. Heine 2003: 1223).

The criterial feature of (extreme) multifunctionality is derivative of the process of pragmatic enrichment: in addition to their role in discourse organization, individual DMs are associated with a plethora of functions including hedging and politeness functions, they can

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[1] Later on in the paper he proposes that cooptation might be a form of pragmaticalization. For the purposes of the present overview, I will keep the three concepts of grammaticalization, pragmaticalization and cooptation separate.

also be salient in conversational exchanges as openers, turn-taking devices, hesitational devices, backchannels, markers of topic shift and of receipt of information, and so on. However, the functional spectrum of individual DMs do not, in any respect, form a paradigm. Even though certain DMs appear to complement each other in particular contexts (e.g. *I mean* vs. *you know*, cf. Fox Tree & Schrock 2002), there is usually a great degree of overlap and interchangeability. Therefore, the multifunctionality of DMs and the resulting functional overlaps violate at least two parameters of grammaticalization: paradigmaticization (cf. Lehmann 1995: 135) and obligatorification (cf. Lehmann 2002: 146).

2.3 Quasi-initiality

An important clause of the definition of grammaticalisation (cf. e.g. Lehmann 1995, Hopper & Traugott 1994) states that it takes place in special *morpho-syntactic environments*. In the case of DMs, this environment can be associated with sentence-initial position, hence many scholars regard quasi-initiality as a distinguishing feature of DMs (e.g. Schourup 1999), and quasi-initiality serves as an argument in favour of the grammaticalization of DMs. However, the heterogeneity of their source categories (cf. section 2.5) indicates that DMs and their source categories are by no means restricted to clause or utterance-initial position either before or after they become theticals.

2.4 Weak clause association, phonetic reduction and variable scope

It is frequently observed in the literature that DMs usually occur either outside the syntactic structure or loosely attached to it (cf. e.g. Brinton 1996: 34 or Hansen 1997: 156). Quirk et al. classify many linguistic items that are elsewhere included among DMs as *conjuncts* (e.g. *nonetheless*) which are considered to be clause elements but to have a detached role relative to other, more closely interrelated clause elements such as subject, complement, and object: "Conjuncts are more like disjuncts than adjuncts in having a relatively detached and 'superordinate' role as compared with other clause elements" (1985: 631).

It is important to note that the property of weak clause association is with reference to linguistic elements *external* to the DM's form, since a whole range of DMs clearly have their own internal syntactic structure (e.g. *on the other hand*) and certain other DMs (e.g. *y'know, I mean*) are clearly clausal despite the fact that the latter are considered to be non-compositional (procedural) and non-truth-conditional.

Weak clause association poses a problem for scholars who adopt the framework of grammaticalization, since it violates the parameter of fusion (also referred to as bonding), one of the most fundamental factors in the grammaticalization process. Three different approaches to the problem are commonly taken:

- some argue that there are two different types of grammaticalization: Grammaticalization I (movement towards morphology) and Grammaticalization II (movement towards discourse), the development of DMs, naturally, belongs to the latter, in which bonding is not a requirement (cf. Wischer 2000),
- some argue that we cannot expect DMs to conform to the same principles of grammaticalization as other linguistic items, since DMs are unique by nature (cf. Dér 2005),
- some argue that we need to find out more about grammaticalization and challenge some of its basic premises in light of the findings of DM research (cf. Traugott 1995).

The cooptation hypothesis, on the other hand, offers an intuitively as well as empirically plausible explanation: during the process whereby DMs become theticals, the bonds between the DMs and the syntactic environment (phrasal element) become gradually weaker and more loose, as a result of which DMs are ultimately reanalyzed as syntactically independent units (cf. Heine 2013: 1231).

Weak clause association is frequently discussed in relation to phonological independence: DMs often constitute independent tone units, or are set off from the main clause by 'comma intonation' (cf. Hansen 1997: 156). Lack of intonational integration poses the same problems for grammaticalization theory as weak clause association.

The scope of DMs poses yet another challenge to the regular process of grammaticalization. Compare (3) and (4):

(3)   A: I know how close you are to your mom. How old is she?
       B: *Well*, she probably doesn't want me to say... (*Larry King Live*, March 3, 2004, transcript available at www.cnn.com).

(4)   You're not going to have quality if you can't sleep and you itch and you bitch and you weep and you cry and you bloat and you can't remember anything and you don't have a, *well*, sex drive (*Larry King Live*, March 14, 2004, transcript available at www.cnn.com).

As the examples above show, the size of the linguistic unit *well* can take in its scope ranges from a whole sentence through clausal elements to single words. Waltereit (2006) observes that this variability is a remarkable property, but it is not an exclusive feature of DMs, since conjunctions as a word-class (and even some individual conjunctions as lexical items) can also have variable scope, giving the following sentences as examples:

(5a)   Ed and Doris loved each other.
(5b)   Ed worked at the barber's, and Doris worked in a department store.

In (5a) *and* has scope over two NPs, in (5b) it has scope over two clauses. The difference between *and* used as a conjunction and its DM use, however, lies in the fact that the scope of the conjunction *and* can always be determined in grammatical terms. It could be defined as ranging over two constituents of the same type adjacent to *and*, which, in turn, make up a constituent of again the same type. The scope of DMs, in contrast, cannot be determined in grammatical terms, as is clear from the examples taken from (Schiffrin 1987: 53):

(6)   My husband got a notice t'go into the service
       and we moved it up.
       And my father died the week ... after we got married.
       And I just felt, that move was meant to be.

On the basis of the above examples, Schiffrin concludes that *and* has "freedom of scope", rather than "variable scope", since "we can no more use *and* to identify the interactional unit that is being continued than we can use *and* to identify the idea that is being coordinated" (Schiffrin 1987: 150).

The property of variable scope DMs display violates the principle of scope reduction, yet another concomitant of grammaticalization. Traugott's (1995) solution is to argue that in

addition to Nominal clines (nominal adposition > case) and verbal clines (main verb > tense, aspect, mood marker), which are "staples of grammaticalization theory", a further cline: Clause internal Adverbial > Sentence Adverbial > Discourse Particle should be added to the inventory. According to Traugott, this cline involves increased *syntactic freedom* and *scope*.

Once again, the cooptation hypothesis offers a more elegant explanation by listing the different stages in the development of DMs as follows:

stage 1   The source category item governs a phrasal element and has scope within the sentence.
stage 2   The bonds between the source category item and its syntactic environment are loosened.
stage 3   The item (would-be DM) can begin to be postposed to the phrasal element.
stage 4   The phrasal element is then reanalyzed as an independent clause.
stage 5   DM is reanalyzed as a syntactically free parenthetical with scope over a discourse unit rather than a syntactic unit (stages adapted on the basis of Brinton 2008: 127 and Heine 2013: 1231).

2.5   *Procedural meaning and non-compositionality*

Although most scholars treat non-compositionality as a property of DMs *per se,* we saw earlier that Blakemore (2002) associates DMs with procedural meaning and uses non-compositionality as a *test* to decide whether individual items are conceptual or procedural.

Blakemore also claims that if DMs are synonymous with their non-DM counterparts, they encode conceptual meaning. Thus *seriously* and *in other words* in (7a) and (8a) encode a concept parallel to (7b) and (8b), respectively, *well* (as in 9a), however, encodes a procedure, since it is not synonymous with *well* in (9b):

(7a)   *Seriously*, you will have to leave.
(7b)   He looked at me very *seriously*.

(8a)   *In other words*, you're banned.
(8b)   She asked me to try and put it *in other words*.

(9a)   A: What time should we leave?
       B: *Well*, the train leaves at 11.23.
(9b)   You haven't ironed this very *well*.

A second test Blakemore uses is to see if a given item can combine with linguistic items encoding conceptual meaning to produce complex expressions. Thus, *in confidence* and *frankly* do not encode procedural meaning, as is illustrated by (10) and (11), respectively:

(10)   In total, absolute confidence, she has been promoted.

(11)   Speaking quite frankly, I don't think people ever ask themselves those kind of questions.

Since the functional class of DMs behaves rather heterogeneously in terms of having procedural meaning, Blakemore concludes that DMs do not form a homogeneous class and, therefore, should not be the object of inquiry. However, the cooptation hypothesis suggests that the loosening of the bond between a DM and its syntactic environment is a gradual

process, therefore, compositionality, i.e. the extent to which a given item can combine with other lexical (non-DM) units is a matter of degree. Grammaticalization theory also suggests that different items are at different stages of grammaticalization, these stages, however, usually represent stages of bondedness, rather than stages of syntactic freedom, as in the case of the development of DMs.

As far as the Blakemore's (2002) synonymity test is concerned, it is important to note that simply because no correspondence can be found between the adverbial *well* and its DM counterpart on the basis of native intuitions, it does not follow that such a relationship is absent (on the diachronic development of *well* cf. Finell 1989). Native intuitions, naturally, disregard diachronic aspects (dynamic development) of individual lexical and grammatical items, and it is exactly these aspects that account for the gradedness of the category of DMs.

2.6   *High frequency, orality, stigmatization*

There are a variety of additional stylistic and sociolinguistic factors that are considered in the literature when listing the characteristic features of DMs, resulting from the criterial feature of high frequency. High frequency is the backbone of various processes of grammaticalization as well as pragmaticalization (cf. Ariel 1998: 245), and, by the same token, cooptation. It needs to be added to the criterial features of prototypical DMs since the more frequently a given source category item is used, the faster it undergoes pragmaticalization / cooptation and the more complete the process will be.

On a stylistic note, the high frequency of DMs in the speech of different social and occupational groups e.g. women, adolescents, surfers etc. usually triggers negative attitudes and stigmatization, Erman, however, cautions against the application of terms such as overuse and idiosyncracy, since they suggest that "no further analysis is necessary" (Erman 1987: 33). Erman also points out that speakers are rational and economical and are, consequently, "not likely to use any linguistic means without a conscious or subconscious purpose" [ibid.]. Just as optionality is a nonsensical feature in pragmatic terms, orality and the consequent stigmatization of (some) DMs is an inevitable, but linguistically speaking, irrelevant concomitant of the cooptation of DMs.

2.7   *Heterogeneity of source categories*

Most scholars agree that DMs constitute a functional category that is heterogeneous with respect to syntactic class[2]. Fraser defines DMs as "a pragmatic class, lexical expressions drawn from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbials, and prepositional phrases" (Fraser 1999: 933). On this view DM status is independent of syntactic categorization: an item retains its non-DM syntactic categorization but has an additional function as a non-truth-conditional connective (which is loosely associated with clause structure, cf. section 2.4). Source categories to which DM function has been attributed include adverbs (e.g. *now, actually, anyway),* coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (e.g. *and, but, because),* interjections (e.g. *oh, gosh, boy),* verbs (e.g. *say, look, see),* and clauses (e.g. *you see*, I *mean, you know),* while many authors attempt to shorten or lengthen this list of categories. Fraser (1990), for example, included two additional categories: "literally used" *I have you, still and all*), whereas Fraser (1999) cautiously observes that "there are three sources of DM –

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[2]   Despite the fact that Knott and Dale call them a "reasonably homogenous group" from the viewpoint of their isolation as "objects of investigation" (1994:45).

conjunction, adverbs, and prepositional phrases – as well as a few idioms like *still and all* and *all things considered*" (Fraser 1999: 933). However, Redeker (1991: 1168) categorically denies that "clausal indicators of discourse structure" could be eligible for DM status.

While the syntactic heterogeneity of source categories is, naturally, not a criterial feature for DM status, it is important to consider that, once again, the cooptation hypothesis correctly predicts that linguistic units of a variety of sizes and complexity can be used as parentheticals, and, as a result, can emerge as DMs. Grammaticalization theory, on the other hand, has a hard time explaining the lack of restrictions in terms of the syntactic complexity as well as the distributional properties of the source items that emerge as DMs[3].

3   Conclusions, directions for further research

The theoretical challenges DMs pose are, to a large extent, due to their heterogeneity as a class of linguistic items both in terms of the source categories that emerge as DMs and the extent to which individual DMs display the criterial features that have been identified. In the course of the paper I argued that it is the cooptation hypothesis rather than grammaticalization theory[4] that best explains the characteristics associated with DM status.

If we assume that individual DMs are at different stages in the process of cooptation[5], it comes as no surprise that individual DMs may not share all the properties that characterize either the class as a whole or prototypical members of the class. In addition, even if they do, they might display particular properties to varying degrees. After identifying the relevant properties that might serve as criterial features, the next step is to provide a model that represents DMs as a graded category, in which individual DMs can be placed relative to their closeness to the core or the periphery.

In Furkó (2006, 2007), an attempt was made to provide such a network model and to place in the model linguistic items whose status as DMs has generated controversy in the literature. The model was based on Pelyvás's (1995) adaptation of Lakoff's (1987) cognitive model. Pelyvás's study focused on the class of English auxiliaries, a similarly heterogenous category both in terms of its formal-functional properties and the degree to which individual members have undergone subjectivization, a staple of the modified version of grammaticalization theory (cf. Traugott 1995). The models outlined in Furkó (2006, 2007) were based on grammaticalization theory and, as a result, the criterial features corresponded to the triggers, concomitants and results of grammaticalization. The discussion above suggests that the process of cooptation still results in a graded category, however, the model needs to be reviewed in the light of the new hypothesis, as a result of which the criterial features need to be reconsidered and weighted in terms of their relevance to the process of cooptation.

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[3] On the distributional properties and syntactic restrictions of source items for grammaticalization cf. Heine (2009).

[4] and its modified version, the pragmaticalization hypothesis

[5] For the description of the individual stages cf. section 2.4

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