

# CLIL: THE POTENTIAL OF MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is an educational approach to language learning promoted by the EU Commission to develop multilingual European citizens. The approach has rapidly spread in different forms throughout Europe, mainly as a teacher-led phenomenon. The CLIL approach is also being introduced into Higher Education to meet the needs of rapid internationalisation in European universities. This article provides a brief overview of how CLIL is being implemented, and discusses some of the issues that are currently the subject of debate, focussing mainly on the questions surrounding the CLIL teacher. It concludes with a description of a project for CLIL teacher qualification being developed at the University of Venice.

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## INTRODUCTION

In its *Framework Strategy on Multilingualism* (2005), in response to the 2002 EU Heads of State meeting in Barcelona, the EU Commission adopted the long-term objective of increasing «individual multilingualism until every citizen has practical skills in at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue» [COM (2005) 596, part II.1.1] for the aim of promoting «unity in diversity: diversity of cultures, customs and beliefs – and of languages» (part I.1). In the section on the Multilingual Economy, the European Commission is clear on the rationale underlying EU language needs: «There is some evidence that European companies lose business because they cannot speak their customers' languages»; «For the Single Market to be effective, the Union needs a more mobile workforce. Skills in several languages increase opportunities on the labour market»;

EU consumers need to be able to read product packaging in different languages so as to be able to «choose from a wide variety of products from all Member States» [COM (2005) 596: 9-10]. The document also discusses the *i2010* initiative to encourage multilingualism «to foster growth and jobs in the information society» and the professional needs of the language industry in Europe.

One of the proposed key areas for action in education systems and practices resulting from these new needs for multilingualism is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), an educational practice that is rapidly moving into mainstream education in Europe. The term CLIL was adopted in 1994 as a generic «umbrella» term to refer to «diverse methodologies which lead to dual-focussed education where attention is given both to topic and language of instruction. It is used to describe any educational situation in

which an additional (second/foreign) language is used for the teaching and learning of subjects other than the language itself» (Marsh *et al*, 2005: 5). CLIL may be used in short thematic modules using the L2 for relatively little time within a curriculum, or it may involve much greater percentages of the curriculum, as in International Baccalaureate schools or schools which offer half the curriculum in L2. CLIL is a very European-oriented approach and, even though it has developed differently in different European countries, the pan-European networks that have been set up give the approach a single educational framework. The most frequently used languages in CLIL are English and French, followed closely by German. The content subjects most commonly taught are History, Geography and Social Sciences; Mathematics and Biology are also taught in some countries.

The CLIL movement has devel-



oped throughout schools in Europe with differing rates of application, and various models of CLIL have developed in different countries to meet quite different needs. In northern Europe, in Finland and Sweden in particular, CLIL has been part of mainstream education since the late 1980s/early 1990s and has particular focus on the professional sector. In Finland, since 1991, teachers in state schools can use a foreign language (mainly English) to teach any school subject. In Sweden there are two different forms of CLIL: the first introduces the foreign language gradually, beginning with one subject and then extending it to others, while the second approach begins immediately with a full immersion in the foreign language.

Not all northern European countries, however, have such an interest in introducing CLIL. In England, for example, there seems to be no widespread interest except in elite settings such as European Colleges, although the Content and Language Integration Project (CLIP), hosted by the National Centre for Languages (CILT), is monitoring a number of foreign language projects aimed at ages 7 to 16, which include the integration of French in the primary curriculum. The University of Nottingham and Leeds Metropolitan University carry out research into CLIL and offer CLIL teacher training and development courses, as does the Norwich Institute for Language Education.

In Central Europe not only are there a great number of border areas in which two languages are used within the education system, there also is a much higher interest in the new opportunity to bring multilingualism into mainstream education. In Germany, for example, there is a tradition of bilingual French-German education that began with an agreement between the two countries signed in 1963. and, since the mid 1990s, bilingual programmes in many other language have been introduced. In France, besides this bilateral agreement, since 1991 many schools have introduced

European sections where students are given two years' intensive training in the foreign language before it is used to teach a content subject. In Austria, English has for many years been used to teach subjects in technical schools within the *Englisch als Arbeitssprache* project, in addition to the bilingual education used in border areas. Curiously, although Belgium is officially a trilingual country, government policy has been to avoid the issue of bilingual education except in the case of children of immigrants for whom a kind of immersion programme is in place.

In southern Europe, whereas some countries – such as Portugal and Greece – have introduced little or no CLIL, others have widely introduced the approach. In Spain in particular a working paper published in 2005 (Quality Education For All and Between All: Proposals for Debate) set out government policy to see students fluent in two languages by the end of secondary school, on top of Castilian and, in some regions, the official language of that region (Catalan or Basque, for example). A pilot CLIL programme introduced almost ten years ago, in partnership with the British Council, is now being extended to bilingual centres within state schools to provide the teaching of a series of subjects and primary and secondary level in a foreign (English) language (Kessler, 2005).

In recent years, CLIL in Italy has grown to promote local minority (heritage) languages, especially in the three autonomous border regions: Valle d'Aosta, Trentino Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia, which have, for historical reasons, maintained strong linguistic ties with the German, French and Slovene languages, respectively. Increasingly, since the introduction in 2000 of a ministerial project (*Progetto Lingue 2000*) for the development of foreign language education, module-based CLIL instruction in English, German French and Spanish has been developed within various European projects and is currently being piloted

in schools throughout the country. More recent educational reforms intend to introduce compulsory teaching of a subject in English in the final year of secondary school throughout Italy.

A more detailed overview of the various forms of bilingual education, including CLIL, can be found in Coonan, 2002, Marsh, 2002, and Wolff, 2005.

Since the Bologna Agreement, and the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System, as well as the Erasmus and Socrates exchange programmes for students and teachers, the EU policy on language learning and CLIL has also been extended to Higher Education. Over the past 20 years, the presence of increasing numbers of international students and faculty staff, as well as the dominance of English as a *lingua franca* in the international academic world, have brought about important language policy changes in most universities throughout Europe. Although EU policy explicitly states that the aim is for all EU citizens to have two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue, and the school system, to a degree, attempts to maintain a multilingual approach, English is by far the most widely used language at university level. In some countries, Turkey for example, English medium universities have existed for decades. In others, two different models tend to be followed. In the first – which is mainly used in Finland and The Netherlands – a percentage of a certain course is taught consistently in English throughout; in the second, widely used in countries where secondary education is not yet able to provide sufficient English proficiency, the amount of English used increases over time as the course programme continues.

In 2002, the Academic Co-operation Association produced a report on English-taught programmes in European universities (*English Language-Taught Degree Programmes in European Higher Education*, Maiworm & Wächter, 2002). The survey revealed that most of the English-medium teaching takes

place in northern Europe, a certain amount in the central European countries, such as Hungary, and little or none in southern Europe (however, this situation is changing rapidly). The three countries that most use English in higher education are Finland, The Netherlands and Germany. In The Netherlands, Maastricht University decided as early as 1996 to become a bilingual university to cater for foreign students, providing courses in both Dutch and English; yet the «bilingual» nature of this programme has been altered as certain faculties, economics for example, now offer instruction only in English (Ritzen, 2004). In Finland, some short university courses began to be offered in English in the late 1980s, both to train Finnish students for work in an international environment and also to meet the needs of international students; today about 5 to 10% of university courses are taught in English, the biggest portion in higher education in Europe outside English-speaking countries. Meanwhile, the polytechnics in Finland have been teaching most of their courses entirely in English since the early 1990s (Lehikoinen, 2004). In Germany, the 16 Länder each have considerable autonomy in terms of language policy, so no single national policy exists. German universities have a decades-long policy of co-operation with developing countries and to cater for the needs of the international students who choose to study in Germany, a model of decreasing English instruction is commonly used, where students can start their studies using English, but are expected to master sufficient German to complete their studies in this language after a couple of years in Germany (Nastansky, 2004).

## **CLIL: SOME CURRENT ISSUES**

### **CLIL learners**

As CLIL gathers momentum, various issues are emerging that are the focus of debate and research. Although families generally express satisfaction

at CLIL experiences, some reservations come from the parents of young learners who fear that too much exposure to a second language may lead to neglect of the child's first language; other doubts concern whether learning a subject through another language might slow down or impair the learning of the main content. CLIL experts reassure that the natural use of a second language in the classroom, «learning by using the language», can only have a positive impact on a child's thinking processes (Marsh, 2000), and research on early immersion bilingual programmes has shown that not only do these problems generally not arise, but through a dual focus on language awareness and subject content learners actually acquire a greater understanding of their own language (Lambert 1990: 216). In addition, in relation to achievement in academic domains (mathematics, science and social studies), research has shown that in bilingual programmes students «generally achieve the same levels of competence as comparable students in (first language) programs» (Genesee, 2003 cited in Marsh, 2002:77).

The presence of two languages in the educational setting does nevertheless complicate the already complex interaction between students and teachers. In educational settings that promote bilingual education, a certain balance in the use of both languages is implied: «True bilingual education requires the full use of *both* languages as vehicles of culture and instruction» (Titone, 1979: 39). This is the case, for example, in national schools operating on foreign soil that seek certification in both in the host country and in the home country. Or in schools operating in bi- or tri-lingual settings in border areas, where L2 (or L3) of the dominant culture is balanced with the L1 of the minority language group (see Leung, 2005, for the example of the trilingual schools in the Ladin Valleys in South Tyrol).

In the CLIL classroom, such a balance between L1 and L2 neither exists

nor is expected to exist. At its most dominant, several subjects may be taught to large groups of students over a period of several years, as is the case in some schools in Finland. However, nearly all CLIL teaching is organised on a modular basis, in which certain specific subjects are taught in L2 for a very limited number of hours over a restricted period of time.

The level of L2 proficiency the learners' are expected to achieve will therefore also vary considerably. Although the aim of bilingual instruction is native-like competence, findings have shown that the receptive skills of early immersion students reach native-speaker level and later immersion students consistently surpass comparison groups who have received foreign language instruction. As CLIL learners share some characteristics of late immersion students (they are often young adult learners with some foreign language experience who gradually move into a more extensive L2 learning environment), they might be expected to achieve similar high levels of proficiency. And yet the 2004-2006 Action Plan (2003: 8) specifically states that «native-speaker» fluency is not the objective of CLIL instruction; what is aimed at is to develop «effective communicative abilities» focusing on active skills rather than passive knowledge, aiming at «appropriate levels of skill in reading, listening, writing and speaking in two foreign languages» - yet no definition of «effective communicative abilities» or «appropriate level» is provided. Thus the level of L2 proficiency CLIL learners are expected to reach is explicitly below native-speaker competence – communication skills combined with academic language skills – matching much more closely the skills acquired by FL or SL learners.

Possibly one of the most essential distinctions between «traditional» forms of bilingualism and the CLIL approach is that in CLIL, the use of two languages takes place in a single contact area: the CLIL classroom. The CLIL learner

has no regular contact with L1 users of the language s/he is working in (see Mackey, 2000: 34-5 for a description of some of the areas of contact and pressure – economic, historical, cultural etc. – normally associated with bilingualism). Language use within a single domain deprives the language user of a whole series of role-relations and situations that make up language behaviour in multilingual settings (see Fishman, 2000). It would thus seem that the L2 in the CLIL learning setting firmly remains a foreign language, making research into foreign language acquisition also seem relevant to this field.

Yet, there are some definite advantages to be had from the CLIL classroom environment. Both teachers and students are non-native speakers of the foreign language used for instruction and share their native language, so teachers have a clear notion of their learners' weaknesses. In addition, CLIL learning is clearly confined to the educational domain; it does not carry the same implications for identity as the more traditional examples of bilingualism we have examined above. The common language status of teachers and students may therefore aid the co-construction of meanings and contexts through joint participation in the CLIL classroom.

It may be interesting at this point to look at the study carried out by Nikula comparing the use of L1 and L2 in EFL and CLIL classrooms (Nikula, 2005). In the EFL classroom, she found that the teachers invariably switched to Finnish when teaching grammar, even if they had previously been teaching in English, and that Finnish was extensively used as the language of classroom management. Teachers used English instead for talk relating to teaching materials (textbook chapters, completing exercises and dealing with listening comprehension tasks). In CLIL classrooms, on the other hand, the situation was «dramatically different»: the one-language policy was strictly adhered to by teachers and students

alike, even for organisation and discipline. Whereas in the EFL classroom students tended to use Finnish for off-record discourse, in the CLIL classroom students constantly used English when working together in small group and pair work. Finnish was used most often only momentarily to clarify the meanings of individual concepts.

A further interesting aspect of the CLIL classroom dynamics, compared to those of the FL/SL classroom, is the degree of student involvement in the language setting and how they themselves use the L2. Butzkamm (1998) noticed in his CLIL classroom observation that turn-taking generally tended to be teacher-initiation, student-response, teacher-feedback, typical of teacher-student dialogue in FL situations. Rarely did students initiate interaction, nor did they tend to use L2 amongst themselves. In other words, the classroom discourse tended towards detachment rather than involvement. (It must be added, at this point, that Butzkamm's study is limited to the observation of only one lesson.)

Quite different are the findings reported by Nikula (2005), whose more extensive study of CLIL classrooms in Finland showed clearer signs of student involvement. In these classrooms, students voluntarily use English even in non-curricular activities; more importantly they seem to engage more also in instructional talk. This may be explained by various aspects: the CLIL classroom activities observed by Nikula tended to be more student-centred group or pair work, or practical activities such as experiments in science lessons. Yet she found that also in teacher-fronted situations CLIL students more readily asked questions or initiated participation. She suggests that student feedback shows that the absence of explicit monitoring of language skills in the CLIL classroom may have a «liberating» effect, although the fact that CLIL education tends to attract more talented students also may play a part.

### **The CLIL teacher and teacher training**

The development and introduction of CLIL over the past 10 to 15 years has led to a rapidly-growing «grass-roots» movement in which teachers have played an active part in experimenting with the new methodology. As a direct result of the policy for the development of multilingual European citizens, the European Commission's recent Action Plans, in the section devoted to Life-long Learning, have provided funding for trans-national projects for the development of CLIL methodologies. Schools have received funding to introduce CLIL, teachers have been involved in exchanges for foreign language development, numerous projects have been set up for the development of new materials, involving both subject and foreign language teachers. The European Eurydice Unit and Network has been launched to gather and disseminate information on the availability of CLIL in European education and training systems (COM (2003) 449, part I, 2.5-7), as the Commission invites Member States «to implement the Conclusions of the Luxembourg Presidency concerning CLIL, including raising awareness of the benefits of this approach, exchanging information and scientific evidence on good CLIL practice and specific training for teachers» (part II.3). The sitography at the end of this paper provides links to some of the pan-European projects.

For teachers and administrators, the most pressing issues to be dealt with are related to the implementation of the CLIL approach. An initial problem is that of the development of suitable teaching materials. One of the main claims of the CLIL approach is that it makes authentic use of authentic materials to carry out authentic tasks. However, as most CLIL programmes have to follow national curriculum requirements, this leaves the responsibility for the development of teaching materials with suitable content largely up to the individual teacher, who must

take into consideration a series of features: the level of the language, the subject content and how to provide suitable language support to aid comprehension, as well as the design of activities able to assimilate concepts and develop competences. Co-operation between subject and foreign language teachers is essential, but it is time-consuming and requires considerable commitment. The development of national and pan-European networks, in particular the Comenius project, have played an important role in aiding teachers in this aspect of CLIL, as have projects of teacher exchange in which teachers have visited and job-shadowed colleagues in other countries. The demands on CLIL teachers are nonetheless onerous.

A second, and much more complex issue is that of the role of CLIL teachers and their training. It is already clear from the above discussion that the CLIL teacher plays a fundamental part in this largely teacher-led movement. And it is precisely in the role of the teacher that the essential difference between CLIL and other «traditional» forms of bilingualism lies.

Teachers in privileged bilingual educational settings are generally bilingual or multilingual. In European Schools, for example, which operate in Europe to meet the needs generally of the children of EU officials or expatriate communities, all teachers are native speakers of the languages they use as the language of instruction; in addition all teachers must be bilingual and know at least one of the three working languages of the European School (English, French, German). Few teachers have been trained in multilingual teaching but most «learn how to teach multilingual groups of non-native pupils while on the job and in the in-service training programs organised by the schools» (Housen, 2002: 5-6).

In immersion programmes, developed in North America and Canada and intended generally for Anglophone students who wish to add a second

language without substituting their L1, teachers tend to be native speakers of the language of instruction. Dalton-Puffer (2002:11) gives the example of Canada, where 58% of immersion teachers are native speakers of French, 34% are native English speakers and 3% are bilingual.

In less elite settings, however, teachers may not have sufficient language skills to achieve proficiency in academic language in both L1 and L2. Waldschmidt, for example, finds that many Spanish/English bilinguals working within two-way bilingual programmes in the US have themselves «been educated through a subtractive form of schooling - denied the opportunity to become fully bilingual/bicultural» (Waldschmidt, 2002), thus relegating the L2 (in the US mostly Spanish) to a minority power status. The shortage of bilingual teachers may also lead to recruitment of teachers without qualifications in the foundations of bilingual education, a great disadvantage as «teachers play the most important part in determining what is taught, how it is taught, and in what language it is taught» (Quezada, 1992: 1, cited in Gold, 1999).

The type of teacher implementing CLIL in different European countries is as diverse as the models of CLIL themselves. In some countries, such as Germany, where school teachers have qualifications in more than one subject, CLIL teachers may be trained in both the content subject and the foreign language. Although this is the «ideal» CLIL teacher (see Marsh, 2002: 13), it is not legally possible in other countries where teachers cannot have more than one subject specialization. Other CLIL teachers may be classroom teachers using an additional language, to some degree, as the medium of instruction, prevalently in primary school contexts. In other situations, foreign language teachers teach non-language subject content, drawing on their general culture. Within the various European projects, exchange teachers from other

countries are brought into the classroom of the host country where their lack of knowledge of the education system and curriculum is offset by their «native speaker status» and their additional knowledge of the cultures of the target language. Or the content subject teacher and the foreign language teacher work together to produce materials and to team-teach in the classroom. (See Langé, 2001, for an overview of the types of CLIL teacher.) The one aspect that seems common to all CLIL teaching is that, with very few exceptions, the CLIL teacher uses a foreign language as the language of instruction, to learners with whom they share their first language in a kind of simulated L1 classroom setting.

### **The CLIL teacher and CLIL methodology**

As there are so many different kinds of CLIL being implemented, it is understandable that there does not seem to be one single CLIL methodology. The approach does, however, seem to draw heavily on strategies taken from models of content-centred teaching.

The content-centred language teaching approach uses teaching materials, learning tasks and classroom techniques from the academic domain as the vehicle for developing language, content, cognitive and study skills. The teacher is usually a foreign language teacher or a team of language and subject teachers.

The sheltered approach to subject matter teaching involves adapting the language of texts or tasks and using methods such as visuals, graphic organisers (graphs, tables, maps, flow charts etc.) or co-operative work to make instruction more accessible to students of different levels of L2 proficiency. The teacher in this approach is usually a content teacher or a foreign language teacher with special expertise in another academic area. See Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989, for a more detailed discussion of the content-based approach.

The task-based teaching method is also a resource that is drawn on in CLIL methodology. In this method, teachers «interactively support task performance in such a way as to trigger processes such as the negotiation of meaning and content, the comprehension of rich input, the production of output and focus on form, which are believed to be central to (second) language learning» (Van Avermaet, P. et al., 2006: 175). In task-based learning classrooms, the teacher tends to ignore language errors and focus more on the real aim of the task. In this way the teacher «puts the initiative for solving comprehension problems, running the conversation and initiating the topic into the hands of the learner» (Van Avermaet, P. et al., 2006: 175).

Two-way tasks force the actors, in this case the teacher and learner, both non-native L2 speakers, to negotiate for meaning. This is defined as «the process in which, in an effort to communicate, learners and competent speakers provide and interpret signals of their own and their interlocutor's perceived comprehension, thus provoking adjustments to linguistic form, conversational structure, message content ... until an acceptable level of understanding is achieved» (Long, 1996: 418). This conventional form of simplified speech is also often referred to as *motherese*, or *foreigner talk*. Some of the language devices used in this process of negotiation are repetitions, recasts, confirmations, reformulations, comprehension checks, confirmation checks, clarification requests etc.

It is clear from this very brief outline how these methods and strategies are relevant to the CLIL classroom approach. The question remains as to what level of L2 proficiency the CLIL teacher must reach in order to be able to effectively implement the CLIL methodology.

### **The CLIL teacher and L2 proficiency**

The whole issue of CLIL teachers'

(L2) language competence is a little researched area., despite the fact that it is considered an essential feature of the success of CLIL: «One crucial aspect of CLIL should also be spelled out: how good should CLIL teachers' proficiency in the language of instruction be and how could that level be reliably checked?» (Takala, 2002). There is no agreement, for example, on the minimum L2 competence considered necessary for effective CLIL teaching, although it is generally recognised that the CLIL teacher does not always need to have native speaker L2 proficiency when teaching lower level learners: «Teachers do not need to have native or near-native competence in the target language for all forms of delivery, although naturally they need a high level of fluency» (Marsh, 2002: 11).

Some argue that an A2 level is sufficient to teach individual subject modules (Serragiotto 2003: 62). This claim is hotly disputed by others who see native speaker skills as being a necessary pre-requisite to avoid the risk of employing «teachers whose English does not allow them to respond to questions beyond the lesson plan they have carefully prepared the day before» (Smith 2005). The Finnish Board of Education requires a C2 level of L2 proficiency, a UK-based teacher-training course for primary school teachers of CLIL states «Teachers should have a language competence equivalent to the Council of Europe B2 level» (Bell Centres 2006), whereas an Italian project for teaching Mathematics in English suggests that a B1 level is the minimum requirement (Bernardini & Campanale, 2002).

### **TOWARDS CLIL TEACHER QUALIFICATION**

In Italy, the Comenius projects within the Socrates action programme, have provided much teacher training in the CLIL approach. In-service teachers in particular have received funding for the introduction of CLIL into schools, which has included foreign language

training for subject teachers, materials production and course and curriculum management, as well as training in other EU countries. Comenius has also provided individual scholarships for in-service teachers to develop CLIL competences, both linguistic and methodological. An on-line database – GOLD – has also been set up to collect and disseminate examples of good practice in the Italian school system, which also include the many teacher-led experiences in the CLIL approach.

Teacher training in Italy is currently provided by two-year postgraduate programmes delivered through the SSIS (Scuole di Specializzazione all'Insegnamento Secondario), autonomous institutions that share some staff with universities. At the SSIS Veneto, closely linked to the University of Venice, courses specialise in secondary education, and train language teachers to teach English, Russian, French, German and Spanish. Courses in CLIL methodology are also offered for foreign language teachers, mainly based on team teaching and materials preparation projects to be carried out with with subject teachers.

As CLIL moves progressively more into mainstream education also in Italy, the need for more pre-service training and qualification of specialised CLIL teachers is becoming crucial to ensure the highest possible quality of teaching. There are, however, several difficulties in implementing a specific pre-service training of CLIL teachers in Italy. The main obstacles are that the Italian education system does not permit qualification in both foreign languages and a content subject, and the current system does not allow for the specific certification of language proficiency necessary for CLIL teachers (Coonan, 2006).

Despite these hurdles, a project is being developed by a team of researchers in the Department of Language Sciences at the University of Venice, home to some of the country's most advanced research into the approach,

to design a test to certify both the L2 competence of CLIL teachers and their knowledge of CLIL methodology. This test is the first attempt, not only in Italy but in Europe, to identify the language features needed for teachers in CLIL classrooms together with the minimum foreign language competence needed for their implementation. The pilot test will be focussed on English in the science classroom, the most common subject taught within the CLIL approach. Research will therefore look at how the interplay of general

foreign language proficiency, subject-specific language, and the language of classroom interaction contribute to the construction of CLIL science classroom discourse, and what minimum L2 language proficiency is required of the CLIL teacher to effectively handle the methodology needed to put into practice this approach. Once designed and thoroughly piloted, the test will later be linked to the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2003), again the first project to date aimed at examining the issue of

linking teachers' L2 proficiency to the CEFR.

The project plans to meet the need to provide a scientific framework for good practice in the CLIL approach, considered not only as a cost-effective, practical and sustainable solution to attaining the EU Commission aim of training plurilingual citizens, but an important means of increasing intercultural knowledge, understanding and skills, promoting internationalisation and enhancing multilingual education.

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