

Morphological Processes in Anaku Igbo: Situating Universality

by

Ifeoma Obuasi

ifeomamebo61@yahoo.com

College of General and Communication Studies,

Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,

Umudike - Nigeria

Abstract

The thrust of this study is a discussion of the copious examples of morphological processes available in Anaku, an Igbo language variety based on some universal morphological processes. In this study, utterances were collected through oral interview and analyzed using the descriptive approach. The findings reveal that most of the morphological processes available in other world languages also exist in this Igbo language variety. With the use of the concatenate and non-concatenate processes, this variety of Igbo proves to form words in the same styles as other world languages, but it tends to be more towards the derivational processes other than the inflectional processes.

Keywords/phrases: Morphology, morphological processes, Communication, concatenate processes, Language universals, Anaku, Igbo language.

Introduction

Linguistic inquiries into the operations of human communication reveal the phenomena of language universalities or the common core of all languages. The parameters of the inquiries vary as well as the language of inquiry, and as such all languages deserve these inquiries into their variations to improve communication. According to Nwachukwu (2003) such inquiries are best done and should be done by native linguists of the languages to make for an accurate and detailed description of the individual languages, a view that speaks for the relevance of this study.

Communication is meaning-dependent, and these meanings depend on the make-up of words which are the morphemes which in turn are environment dependent. Morphemes are those basic elements of meaning that are arbitrarily united which cannot be analyzed into smaller or simpler elements. They are grouped into free morphemes (root words) that can stand on their own; the bound morphemes that cannot stand on their own, and the zero morphemes - those unseen reflections in a word where no inflectional essence is seen, like in the changing of some verbs into nouns in English language. The study of these morphemes form an important part of linguistics as it is an inquiry that serves as the bridge between syntax and phonology (Radford 1997:83).

Morphology can simply stand for the structure of something's parts, which is the structure of anything made up of interconnected or interdependent parts. In Biology, it is the study of the forms and structures of organisms. It is therefore necessary to have a working definition in this linguistic research to mean the study of word formation including the patterns of inflections and derivations in a language. Thus morphological processes are those mechanisms employed by speakers of a language to change or modify the meaning of particular base-forms, as well as form new words. It involves adding, subtracting or modifying the base-forms of words in a language to suit its syntactic and communicational contexts.

This research was conceived from the perspective of an online handout in the official website of the John Paul II Catholic University of Linking (www.kul.pl – Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawla II) which discusses universal morphological processes. This study uses the nomenclatures of this PDF handout to analyze the morphological processes in Anaku Igbo to prove or disprove the universality of the processes.

Area of Study

The area of this study is Anaku in Ayamelum, Anambra State, Nigeria, a language group (a variety of Igbo language) of about sixteen thousand (16,000) inhabitants according to the 2006 Nigerian census projection. This work intends to expose the morphological processes available within this Igbo language group in comparison with some universal morphological processes as discussed in the handout.

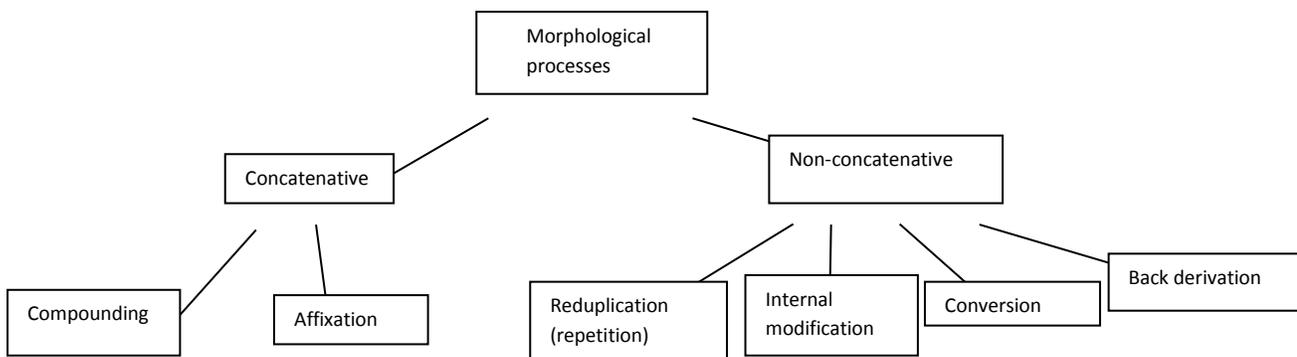
Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theory of morphology that has dominated the area of linguistics most of this century which states, “That all morphological contrasts consist of segmentable materials correlating on a one-to-one basis with meaning contrasts . . . segmentable because they reflect from either suffixation or prefixation (rarely infixation)” Bender (2000).

This assumes that all languages have segmentable morphemes as their smallest meaningful unit, as such have affixation as the only morphological process while taking other processes like reduplication as special affixation. Though some languages like the Chinese may not fit into this, majority of world languages fit in.

Morphological Processes: An Overview

Generally, linguists view morphological process from two perspectives: inflectional (the grammatical process by which such forms as past tense, plural and present participles etc. are arrived at); the derivational morphology (those processes whereby new words are formed from existing ones), (Agbedo 2000; Finch 2000). The difference between inflection and derivation is that as derivation gives new lexemes, inflection gives forms to existing lexemes that are syntactically environmental dependent. Another difference according to Aronoff & Fudeman (2005) is that inflectional morphology does not change the core lexical meaning or category of the words they are attached to, while derivational morphology brings about changes in meaning. Though we agree with these general views, we would prefer to base our study on the views of this online class-handout which grouped morphological processes into two broad perspectives as in the following sketch:



Culled from www.kul.pl

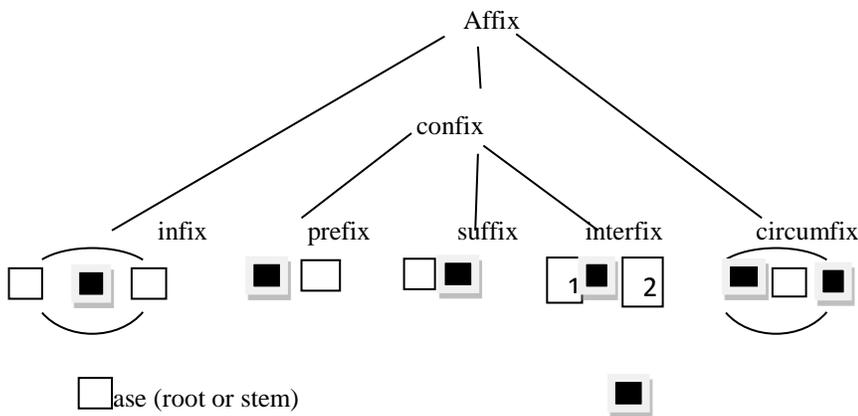
Here, all morphological processes are grouped into two: the concatenative process involving concatenating or putting morphemes together as in compounding and affixation; and the non-concatenative process involving modifying internal structures of morphemes/content words. The following brief discussion of each of the processes discussed in the handout as universal would give a clue and base to the points of our comparison.

The Concatenate Processes

(a) **Compounding:** This is simply bringing of free morphemes together to form new words
e.g.

News + paper = Newspaper,
wrist + watch = wristwatch,
foot + ball = football,
time + keeper = timekeeper.

(b) **Affixation:** This involves the insertion of morphemes to a root word; that is forming morphologically complex words by the addition of morpheme(s) to the base, illustrated in the following sketch:



Culled from www.kul.pl

Infix, is as in some informal English words like Uni+bloody+versity → uni-bloody-versity,

Prefix is as in dis+ability → disability,

Suffix is as in affix+ation → affixation,

Interfix: The handout couldn't get examples from the English language for this, so it can be regarded in some languages as empty morph.

Circumfix is as in un+grateful+ness → ungratefulness,

Non-Concatenative Processes

Reduplication

This is the partial or total morphological process of copying the base; a common phenomenon in onomatopoeic expressions and some English compounding like ding-dong, zigzag etc. It occurs when a part or a whole word or phrase is repeated exactly or with slight change. It can be seen as a process that duplicates all or part of the base to make a grammatical or semantic contrast (Pei, 1996). When reduplication occurs three times, it becomes triplication, which some refer to as playing with tune. Inkelas (2005) sees all as morphological doubling. Different languages have different kinds which can occur at any word position.

Internal Modification

Though all morphological processes entail modification, it is used here to refer to those processes that leave some segments of a word unchanged, while a part or two is changed for change in meaning. The modifications can be in the phonetic subtractions that leave a form with segments that remain constant, while in some cases, the vowel quality undergoes substitution, alternation, shortening or lengthening as graduation e.g. sing, sang, sung, song.

Suppletion is another process which involves total modifications as in strike and struck, go and went; while tonal modification is another process obvious in the syllable stress of English, example: tránsport - transpórt. Tonal modification is a common phenomenon with many African languages. In Igbo language we have a[˩]kwa[˩] (cloth), a[˩]kwa[˩] (egg), a[˩]kwa[˩] (bed), a[˩]kwa[˩] (cry). See also Matthews' (1974) for examples from Lamasaaba (a Bantu language from East Africa).

Another type of modification is subtraction where words are reduced to shorter forms and not vice versa. This involves the dropping of some syllabus as reported by Blust (1979).

Example: →John Ohn.

This is a common phenomenon in the variety/form of language identified in this study.

Conversion

This is a word-class exchange of modification in function not form, also called zero derivation since only implicit transposition takes place and no overt change in form. In affixation, this comes under zero morphemes .e.g.

| English | Igbo | |
|------------|---------------|--------|
| Man – verb | àkwá = sewing | (verb) |
| Man – noun | àkwà = cloth | (noun) |

That this comes under zero morpheme may explain why Bender (2000) states that many scholars view affixation as the only process, adding that they see other morphological processes as forms of affixation.

Back derivation is the formation of new lexeme by the deletion of a suffix from a complex form. Okolo and Ezikeojiaku (1999) group this and clipping as a form of word formation under reduplication. They see it as the opposite of derivation and compounding as words undergo deaffixation. This is just a form of modification as in subtraction (deletion) above. Our comparative discussions on the Anaku Igbo will be based on these universal morphological processes according to the handout.

Empirical Studies

The lexical items of all languages though stored in the lexicon of such languages have rules which govern their formation and processes of use. As an organic phenomenon, the word content of all existing languages can neither be static nor exhaustive as they grow in number and usage. This explains the dynamic and creative characteristics of language. For an instance, it is only a probe into the history of words (etymology) that would reveal that disease was once a compound word, dis + ease = dis-ease, (Bender 2000). The phonological and semantic changes of this word expose what creativity in morphological processes can do with language over time.

Some studies on the morphological process of Igbo language have been carried out. Emenanjo (1983:43) from his research states “The verb is the only form class from which useful plethora of cognate lexical items or varying morphological structure and equally of varying syntactic behaviour have been derived and can still be derived, at least for a good majority of them”.

In the same line Onukawa (2000:57) adds that “majority of the verbal derivatives are nouns and the main morphological processes involved in their derivation are prefixation, interfixation and reduplication”. This supports the views of some scholars that most morphological processes entail some kind of affixation. Onukawa focused on only three language forms/varieties of Igbo – Ohuhu, Onitsha, and Nimo.

In another study by Ihezuonu and Anedo (2008) on the language form/variety of Okwudo in Igbo, they observed that complete reduplication involves the reduplication of the whole v-structure, and is used for the formation of nouns from verbs in Okwud. Their study adds that this process is a bit more complicated in Igbo than English, because there must be an addition of a prefix before the doubling process. Examples:

chị = rule/reign, o + chí → chí o chí chí = reigning or ruling

nụ = marry, o + nu → nu o nu nu = marrying

ji = hold, o + ji → ji o ji ji = holding

Their work observed that the added prefixes have tone.

This empirical review is evident that the morphological processes of Igbo language have received attention by researchers with stress on reduplication and affixation. This study will therefore add to the studies by exposing more of the morphological processes availability in Igbo language generally through the Anaku of Igbo, prove the universality of the processes, and historize the Anaku Igbo morphological processes.

Methodology

In this research, the oral interview method was employed for data collection as tape recorded from the native speakers of the language of Anaku within Igbo language. Finally, the descriptive approach was used in the analysis of data, while the tones were marked by the researcher.

Data Analysis

In addition to the availability of morphemes in Igbo language as tools for word formation, tone plays a vital role in the formation of words. As such, the configurations of pitch are used to create words or lexemes as in tone languages. In Igbo language, the morphological processes involve the formal processes as operations by which words are formed, altering the status of existing words, as well as the use of different configurations of tones on a word to form more words. These processes serve as productive resources that make the words of a language limitless.

The following is the comparative and descriptive look at the available morphological processes of the Anaku:

The Concatenate Processes

(a) **Compounding:** Compounding is a concatenative morphological process of bringing two or more free morphemes into a unit – a word. To concatenate is to connect separate units or items into a linked system. It is the cognitive architecture of compositionality. Two main types of compounding feature prominently in literature as verbal/syntactic and nominal compounds. For Anaku Igbo, what dominates is nominal compounding. Examples:

(b)

| | |
|--|--|
| u ^o na ^o + a ^o kwu ^o kw ^o | u ^o na ^o kwu ^o kw ^o = school |
| u ^o mu ^o + n ^o ne ^o | u ^o mu ^o nne ^o = brothers/sisters |
| m ^o ma ^o + e ^o kwu ^o | m ^o ma ^o e ^o kwu ^o = a type of kitchen knife |
| o ^o che ^o + e ^o re ^o | o ^o che ^o re ^o = throne |
| i ^o ve ^o + o ^o nu ^o | i ^o ve ^o o ^o nu ^o = necklace |

This does not rule out verbal/syntactic compounding, though none was found in the data for this study.

(b) **Affixation:** This is the combination of a stem/root with one or more bound morphemes to form morphologically complex words. It seems to be the most frequently used of the morphological processes of word formation. Bender (2000) supports this when he says “The extreme prevalence of affixation has created problems for morphological theory. It has overshadowed other legitimate processes to such an extent that (1) they are ignored, or (2) there is an attempt to reinterpret them as affixation, albeit strange and deviant, and difficult to deal with”.

It involves the attachment of dependent segments to independent segments or morphemes which Yule (1997) refers to as the small ‘bits’ that appear in words. Not all types of affixation are available in Anaku Igbo. Those available are:

(bi) **Prefixation:** Here, morphemes are added at the word initial position of words. Though Onukawa (2000:57) states that the verb is the major source of word formation in Igbo language, this does not rule out the nouns/gerunds. Examples:

| Prefix | Root word | Derived word |
|--------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| a - | ru ɲ → | a ɛ ru ɲ = to train/sponsor (verb) |
| e - | me ɛ → | e ɲ me ɛ = doing (verb) |
| n - | je ɛ → | n ɛ je ɲ = to walk (verb) |
| m - | gba ɛ → | m ɲ gba ɛ = to wrestle (gerund) |
| o - | lu ɛ → | o ɛ lu ɛ = work (noun) |

The sound /i/ is commonly used in Igbo language as a prefix and as a second person pronoun. It does not exist in Anaku Igbo as a prefix, but only as the second person pronoun. The speakers of this language would rather use /m-/ or /n-/ in place of the /i-/ prefix, as such the /n-/ or /m-/ as syllabic nasals are tone marked here, examples:

i- + gba ɛ = i ɛ gba ɛ eg i ɛ gba ɛ m ɲ gba ɛ = to wrestle (Standard Igbo)

m- + gba ɛ = m ɛ gba ɲ eg m ɛ gba ɛ m ɲ gba ɛ = to wrestle (Anaku Igbo)

i- + ku ɛ = i ɛ ku ɛ = sowing (Standard Igbo)

n- + ku ɛ = n ɛ ku ɛ = sowing (Anaku Igbo)

These examples also show that prefixation in Anaku Igbo make the verbs change to either nouns or verbal nouns/gerunds, which makes prefixation an inflectional as well as derivational operation in the language.

(bii) **Suffixation:** The bound morphemes are added at the end or after the root/stem. Such exist in Anaku Igbo, but not in large numbers. Examples:

-chaa, -chọ, or -chee as the case may be (past tense morpheme) e.g.

| Root/stem | surffix | derived word |
|-----------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| li ɛ (eat) | - chee → | li ɛ che ɛ e ɛ = finished eating |
| kọ ɛ (tell) | - chaa → | kọ ɛ cha ɛ a ɛ = finished telling |
| bi ɛ a ɲ (come) | - chọ → | bi ɛ a ɲ chọ ɛ o ɛ = finished coming |

wo or wọ as the case may be (depicts simple past) e.g.

| Root/stem | suffix | derived word |
|--------------|--------|-----------------|
| bi☉a☉ (come) | wọ → | bi☉a☉wọ☉ = came |
| je☉ (go) | wo → | je☉wo☉ = went |
| nye☉ (give) | wo → | nye☉wo☉ = given |

-lo or -lọ as the case may be (negative morpheme) e.g.

| Root/stem | suffix | derived word |
|--------------|--------|------------------------|
| ra☉ (answer) | lọ → | ra☉lọ☉ = did no answer |
| ti☉ (beat) | lo → | ti☉lo☉ = did not beat |

(biii) **Interfixation:** Though the affixation sketch above has infix and interfix differently, there is no such difference in the two in Anaku Igbo. It is assumed that the sketch depicts the model of all morphological processes. Not all languages can have all that it depicted. In Anaku Igbo the infix and interfix can be regarded as one. It involves the existence or insertion of an affix in-between two identical forms. It is a bound morpheme uniting two segments in derivational operations e.g.

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| e☉li☉ + m + e☉li☉ | e☉li☉me☉li☉ = edibles |
| e☉nyị☉ + m + e☉nyị☉ | e☉nyị☉me☉nyị☉ = huge (+human) |
| n☉ta☉ + n + n☉ta☉ | n☉ta☉n☉ta☉ = large quantity of meat/delicacy |
| a☉gwa☉ + l + a☉gwa☉ | a☉gwa☉la☉gwa☉ = mix-up |
| e☉kwu☉ + l + e☉kwu☉ | e☉kwu☉le☉kwu☉ = talkative or talkativeness |
| i☉ja☉ + ta + n☉ja☉ | i☉ja☉ta☉n☉ja☉ = careless dancing |

The Non-Concatenate Processes

Reduplication is a most common name for the morphological process also referred to as cloning, doubling, repetition, and tautonym of words, (Wikipedia, retrieved 5/8/2015). It is an onomatopoeic expression of segments, phonemes (consonants or vowels), prosodic units (syllables or moras), or the linguistic constituents (words/stems/roots). Whichever element duplicated or reduplicated is called a reduplicand often abbreviated as RED. There are two major types of reduplication:

Full reduplication entails complete reduplication of the original state without any change. It can be the base plus one or more of the duplicands, at times with some additions or modification. In Anaku Igbo, this process is a bit complicated because it entails the doubling of the stem, as well as the addition of a prefix in some cases, before the doubling process. Examples:

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------|------------------------------|------------|
| nụ (marry), | o + nụ + nụ → | o nụ nụ = marrying | |
| ji (hold) | o + ji + ji → | o ji ji = holding | |
| nka (old) | nka + nka → | nka nka = being old | |
| one (how many) | one + one → | one one = how many/ how much | |
| bi (come) | bia + bia → | bi bi = come | |
| kpa (no) | kpa + kpa → | kpa kpa = no | } emphasis |
| ngwa (hurry) | ngwa + ngwa → | ngwa ngwa = in a hurry | |

Reduplications like this last three which are for emphasis can be reduplicated as many as the stresses are intended.

Partial reduplication is the type of reduplication is when the original state is reduplicated with some modifications which sometimes occur mainly out of vowel harmonization. Examples:

| Root/Stem | Reduplication | Realized out of harmonization |
|------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| sa (reply): | o + sa + sa → | oŋsiŋsa = replying |
| yọ (plead): | o + yọ + yọ → | oŋyiŋyọ = pleading |
| be (cut): | o + be + be → | oŋbuŋbe = cutting |
| je (go): | o + je + je → | oŋjiŋje = going |
| wọ (be cunning): | a + wọ + wọ → | aŋwọŋwọ = cunning |

It can be said that reduplication is a very common process in most language forms/varieties of Igbo. It therefore calls for more research into its positions to see how that affects the vowel harmonization in Igbo language and its forms/varieties.

(c) **Internal modification:** From the groupings in the handout, modification entails the changing or replacing of internal segments at the consonant, or vowel level, or both as partial modification; while complete modification would entail complete suppletion, as in “go” and “went”. Complete suppletion does not exist in Anaku Igbo, while partial modification can be regarded as what takes place in reduplication in Anaku Igbo as displayed above.

Another style of this morphological process exists that involves subtraction, where words are reduced to shorter forms. This entails the removing/dropping of some syllables in most personal names. This process is commonly available in Anaku Igbo as you can hardly find any personal name that has no short form.

Examples:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Chuŋkwueŋmeŋke | Eŋmeŋke or Chiŋeŋke = personal name |
| Taŋvaŋnsi → | Taŋaŋnsi = personal name |
| Oŋbuŋaŋchaŋvuŋsiŋuŋmu | Oŋbuŋaŋsi = personal name |
| Eŋjiŋmọŋvọ | Eŋjoŋo = personal name |

In this too, the *-wọ* and *-wo* surfixes are also shortened to “-o” or “-o” which can sometimes be doubled for emphasis.

Examples:

Iᵒ jeᵒwoᵒ?

Iᵒ jeᵒoᵒ = Have you gone?

Iᵒ liᵒcheᵒwoᵒ?

Iᵒ liᵒchooᵒ = Have you finished eating?

Iᵒ naᵒtaᵒwoᵒ?

ᵒI naᵒtoᵒ = Have you returned?

I yᵒᵒ →

I yᵒᵒ = Have you asked?

It is also observed in this language that most words in association situations as above, or sentence environments, take this morphological process of subtraction in modification.

(d) **Conversion:** Generally, this process is regarded as just word-class change as a systematic aspect of complex words. It takes the existence of zero morphemes as implicit transposition takes place. Conversion can be seen as a form of internal modification where tone is used to bring a change in word meaning. Most tone languages like Igbo use this. The following are a few of the numerous examples from the Anaku Igbo:

ᵒᵒkuᵒkuᵒ = fowl/chick

ᵒᵒnwᵒ = death

ᵒᵒkuᵒkuᵒ = planting

ᵒᵒnwᵒ = joy/happiness

iᵒkeᵒ = buttock

ᵒᵒkuᵒ = fire/light

iᵒkeᵒ = strength/power

ᵒᵒkuᵒ = a type of earthen pot

ᵒᵒkuᵒ = wealth

iᵒgweᵒ = iron

iᵒsiᵒ = head

ᵒigweᵒ = king

iᵒsiᵒ = blind

iᵒgweᵒ = many

ᵒisiᵒ = smell

(e) **Back derivation:** This involves the blending or shortening of complex words. In English it can be done through clipping (shortening in an arbitrary way) or blending (bringing two or more words as phonetic coinage to form a new word e.g. brunch = breakfast and lunch). This is same with what has been discussed under modification, as such not an obvious separate morphological process in Anaku Igbo.

Summary

From these, it can be observed that there are certain steps in word formation that are common to most languages. The rules guiding them may not be same, but the steps make languages remain dynamic to accommodate development. Even when different nomenclatures were used in the analysis as the base, it is observed that Anaku Igbo tend towards the derivational morphology with the inflectional as supportive for appropriate processes.

Findings of the study

The findings of this study based on the data analysis found that:

- Languages of the world have a lot in common when it comes to morphological processes, as many of the universal processes in the culled sketches are applicable to the Igbo language and its associated languages.
- In Anaku Igbo, affixation, reduplication, and compounding are available, but modification is the most commonly used process of word formation in Anaku Igbo.
- Under affixation, the sound /i/ as a prefix in standard Igbo was not found in Anaku, hence, in Anaku the language use /m/ or /n/ sounds in its place, and /i/ stand only as the second person pronoun “you” in English.
- Tone plays a vital role in the meaning of words, as well as their morphological process. Words also take different tones in association from their isolation tones, as is obvious in the examples under reduplication and modification which exposed the effects of vowel harmonization in word formation processes.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to expose the variety of ways in which new words can be formed, involving affixation, reduplication, conversion and modification as morphological processes in relation to the universal processes. Though, these are natural morphological processes, they follow some rules which are dependent on each language. However, we do not claim an exhaustive treatment of the morphological processes in this language form/variety. Each of these processes deserves further studies to find out the rules around each process, how these rules work, as well as, add to the findings made in this study.

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