

Introduction to Academic Language

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Topics for today

- What is academic language?
- How does the TPA conceptualize academic language?
- What are some ways that academic language can be taught across the curriculum?
- How can we prepare teachers to fulfill this role?

What comes to mind when you think of academic language?

- Do a write around: What are some examples or features of academic language in your area?

Definitions

- “..academic language is the set of **words**, grammar, and organizational strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher order thinking processes, and abstract concepts.”
 - (Zwiers, J. (2008). *Building academic language*, p. 20)

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Compare the definition from a TPA webinar

Academic Language

- Language for academic purposes differs greatly from every day purposes
- These differences include:
 - a clear system of purposes with explicit expectations about how texts are organized to achieve academic purposes
 - precisely-defined vocabulary to express abstract concepts and complex ideas
 - often more complex grammar in order to pack more information into each sentence
 - a greater variety of conjunctions and connective words and phrases to create coherence among multiple ideas
 - formatting conventions, graphics and organizational titles and headings to guide understanding of texts



Conjunctions and connective words

nevertheless
although **due to** **unless** **since**
in addition
moreover
furthermore **however**
in contrast
if-then **on the other hand** **therefore**

Definition of Academic Language on TPA includes....

- oral and written language
- context information to make the meaning clear for a distant audience.
- visuals such as illustrations and charts,
- genres within a field (e.g. lab reports).
- instructional language needed to participate in learning and assessment tasks

Academic language is NOT

- JUST specialized vocabulary
- JUST words
- JUST linguistic forms without meaning or purpose
- JUST written language
- JUST formal language
- JUST the use of standard (“correct”) forms

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Key point

- Academic language includes forms and functions that teachers typically take for granted, but which can be barriers to academic success for diverse students

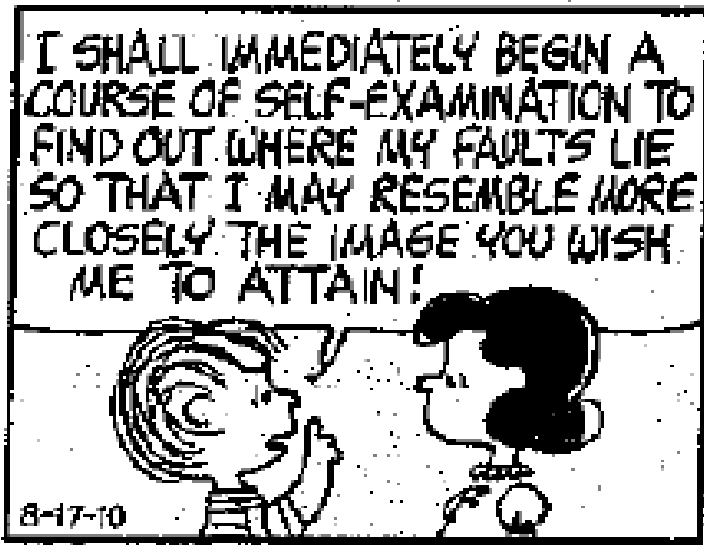


Conversational language....

- Conversational language can be complex and sophisticated but in different ways, as in depending on a lot of social information to interpret meaning



Look at some examples of language



Academic vs conversational language features

Academic

- Decontextualized – doesn't depend on the external context for interpretation



Conversational

- Context-embedded – rely on external context for interpretation



Academic vs conversational language features

Academic

- Less dependent on interpersonal cues



Conversational

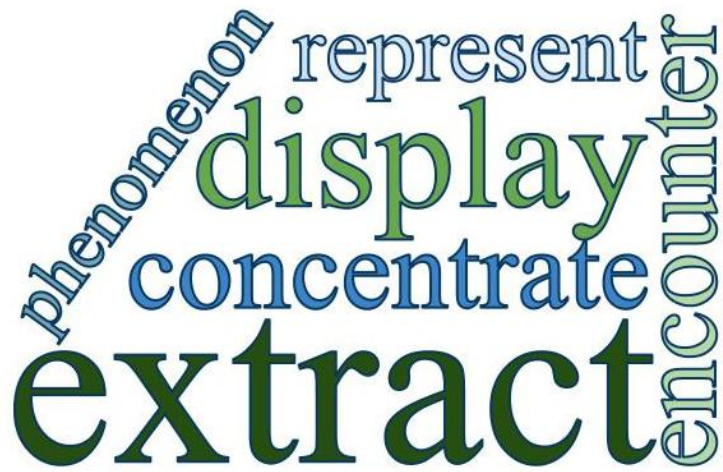
- More interpersonal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, intonation clues, give and take to negotiate meaning



Academic vs everyday vocabulary

Academic –

- Larger range, more precise, often Greek and Latin origin



A word cloud of academic vocabulary. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape. The largest word is 'extract' at the bottom. Other prominent words include 'display', 'concentrate', 'represent', 'phenomenon', and 'encounter'. The words are in various shades of green and blue.

phenomenon represent
display
concentrate encounter
extract

Conversational

- Smaller range, more general, often Anglo-Saxon origin



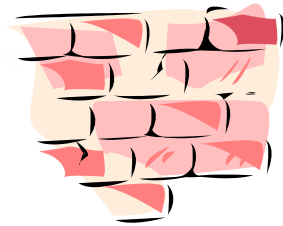
A word cloud of conversational vocabulary. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape. The largest word is 'stand for' at the bottom. Other prominent words include 'think', 'show', 'thing', 'take away', and 'meet'. The words are in various shades of purple, blue, and pink.

think show
meet thing
take away
stand for

Academic English Vocabulary –

Dutro and Moran (2003)

- Content Specific (“brick”)



- Examples: *molecule, landform, coefficient, protagonist, symmetry, treble*

- General academic vocabulary (“mortar” – holding the bricks together)



- Examples: *aspect, complex, exhibit, interpret, range, furthermore*

Look for brick and mortar words in this text

- **Physical properties** are features of all matter that can be observed and measured without changing the chemical composition of the substance. Think about how we recognize a strawberry. We know its color, taste, odor, and state of matter. These features are physical properties.

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- -----are ----- of all ----- that can be observed and measured without changing the ----- of the -----.
Think about how we recognize a strawberry. We know its color, taste, odor, and ----- . These ----- are **physical** properties.

Grammatical features: complex sentences, embedded clauses

Physical properties are
features of all matter

that can be observed and measured
**without changing the chemical
composition of the substance**

Nominalization leads to density

- “Irresponsible human intervention in the natural environment is resulting in increasing degradation of aquatic ecosystems.”
 - (Derewianka, 2011)
- (10 content words in one clause)
- What becomes a thing?
 - Intervention=Process of humans intervening
 - Degradation=Process of actions that degrade aquatic ecosystems

How nominalization works

- When people clear land for houses and roads they change the environment. They destroy the forest and bushland and then many animals lose their homes. More houses and roads will pollute the environment even more.
- Clearing and development of land often results in the destruction of the natural habitat of many local species. It may also increase the level of pollution.
- (Gibbons, 2009)

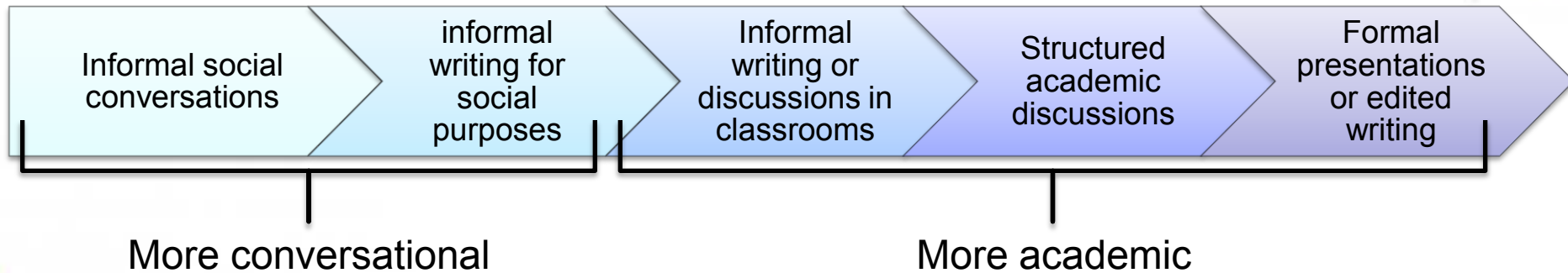
Nominalizations are used across content areas

- Opposition (physical education)
- Evolution (science)
- Colonialism (social studies)
- Probability (mathematics)
- Personification (language arts)
- Chord progression (music)
- Conservation tillage (agriculture)
- Consumerism (FACS)
- Composition (art)

Instructional language in assignments and assessments

- *Name* five capital cities.
- *State* the reason for the revolt.
- “Which is the main activity expressed in the poem?” (which _____)

Caution :AL/CL should be seen as a continuum rather than a dichotomy



Scaffolding students along the continuum – Move from more conversational to more academic

- Conversation between peers during hands-on activity
- Discussion with teacher about activity
- Model a written text on the topic
- Co-construct a written text about the activity

Scaffolding students along the continuum –1 (Gibbons, 2009)

- “Look, it’s making them move.”
- “That’s not going.”
- “Those ones are going fast.”
- Three children talking about magnets while doing an experiment to find out which are magnetic.



Scaffolding along the continuum

-2

- “We found out the pins stuck on the magnet and so did the iron filings. Then we tried the pencil but it didn’t stick.”
- One of the children who did the experiment explains to a classmate what happened, without having the materials present.

Scaffolding along the continuum

- 3

- “Our experiment was to find out what a magnet attracted. We discovered that a magnet attracts some kind of metal. It attracted the iron filings and the pins but not the pencil.”
- Same student wrote about the experiment, with scaffolding from the teacher.

Scaffolding along the continuum-4

- “A magnet is a piece of metal that is surrounded by an invisible field of force which affects any magnetic material within it. It is able to attract a piece of iron or steel because its magnetic field flows into the metal, turning it into a temporary magnet.”
- Excerpt from an encyclopedia written for children.

Why is it important for all teachers to teach academic language?

- “Proficient use of – and control over – academic language is the key to content-area learning”
 - Francis, D., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006).

“But I don’t have time to teach academic language!”

“..it isn’t really possible to teach content without addressing language, since the language is the means by which subject knowledge is realized. ..So rather than being concerned with ‘covering content’, it is better to think in terms of ‘uncovering the subject’ – that is, making the ways of using language and the ways of thinking in the subject explicit to your students.”

»

Gibbons, P. (2009, 127)

English learners and stages of language development

TPA criterion: “Candidate describes academic language strengths and needs of students at different levels of academic language proficiency.”

ELs are often classified into about 5 levels of proficiency, from emergent to advanced, based on general use of language and ability to use English for academic purposes

A dilemma: ELs often „get stuck’ at the intermediate level

- May sound fluent in conversation, but have trouble explaining abstract concepts
- Tend to use simpler words and grammatical structures, unfamiliar with many academic words
- Can decode but may have trouble with reading comprehension
- Have *basic* writing skills

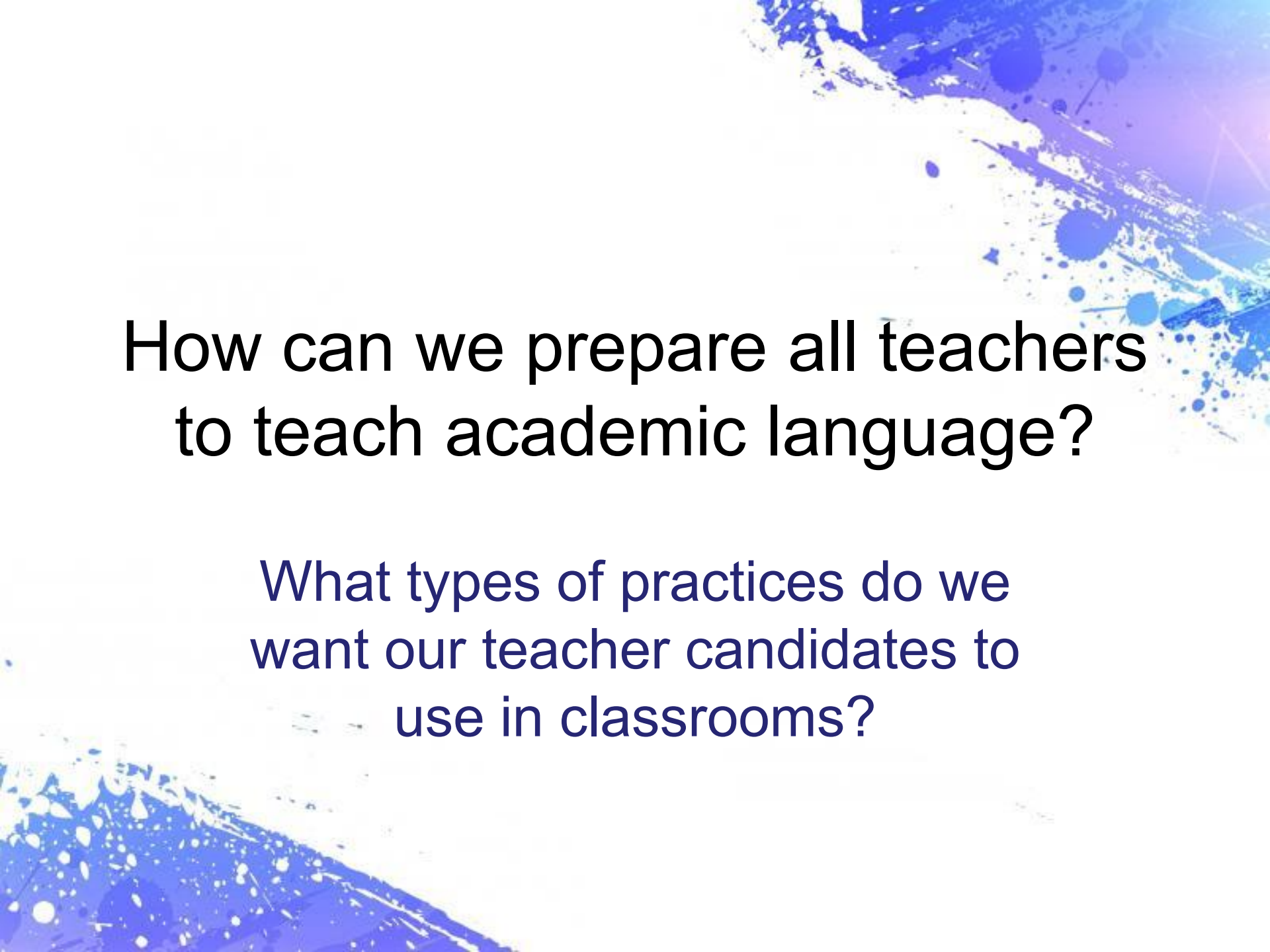
Teachers often misinterpret language proficiency

- “They’re level 4 and 5 ELL; they should know those words.”

What is the vocabulary learning task that ELs and other struggling learners face?

- *The average linguistically advantaged 1st grade student probably knows 5,000-10,000 words (orally).*
- *The average linguistically advantaged high school graduate probably knows 50,000 words.*
- *Linguistically disadvantaged students both enter and leave school with vocabularies half that size.*

» Graves, 2006, p. 14



How can we prepare all teachers
to teach academic language?

What types of practices do we
want our teacher candidates to
use in classrooms?

TPA Criterion: Developing students' academic language repertoire

- *“The candidate’s use of **scaffolding** or other support provides access to core content while also **providing explicit models, opportunities for practice, and feedback** for students to develop further language proficiency for **selected genres** and **key linguistic features**.”*

Goal=Scaffolding, not Enabling

(Zwiers, 2008)

Scaffolding

- Provide high levels of language support in early stages of learning
- Teachers gradually release responsibility

Enabling

- Not enough modeling and scaffolding of academic language
- Teachers accept oral and written responses that are not sufficiently academic

English learners (and others) need practice in Academic Language

- “English-language learners spend less than 2 percent of the school day improving their academic oral language, she said, even though it's a critical foundation of literacy.” (Education Week, 8/24/11)



Zwiers' : Building habits of communication

- Co-shape conversations
- Use language slightly above students' level
- Give students control
- Be supportive, patient
- Focus on meaning
- Ask questions that go beyond facts



How can teachers support students' comprehension of academic language?

- **Think alouds** – Talk about ways to make meaning as you read. For example, look at forms of passives and link to meaning, or show how to chunk long sentences.
- **Translate from academic to social and social to academic-** Model how to say something in a more academic way or how to paraphrase academic texts into more conversational language.

How can teachers support students' production of academic language?

- **Use sentence frames for speaking or writing tasks** - Provide a frame on the wall, the board, or a worksheet that students can use as they write as well as during spoken tasks.
- **Vocabulary work:** Plan direct vocabulary instruction and recycle words often.
- **Have students highlight or underline words:** Choose words that are important to a task or are generally useful in many academic tasks.

What dispositions should we foster?

- Openness to collaboration on equal footing with specialist teachers



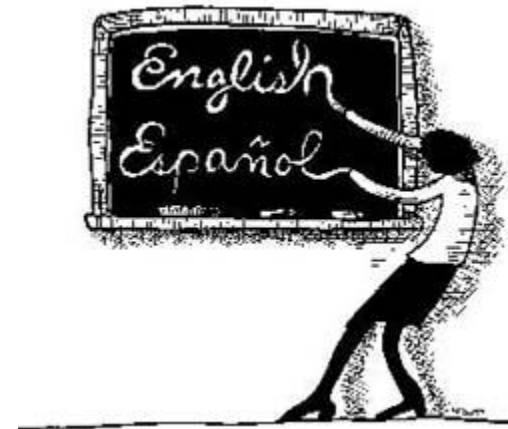
What dispositions should we foster?

- Openness to taking on the role of language/literacy teachers as well as content expert



What dispositions should we foster?

- Openness to using students' home languages as a resource and means for talking about content, while adding academic English as an additional resource



Key linguistic features for teachers to become aware of

- Brick and mortar words
- Genres
- Challenging grammatical structures

Developing language as well as content objectives

- **Content Objective:** SWBAT apply knowledge of types of angles (right, acute and obtuse) to identify, label, measure and classify angles.
- **Language Objective:** SWBAT ask “Is it 90 degrees?”, “Is it less than 90 degrees?” and “Is it more than 90 degrees?” when they measure angles in order to correctly identify, label and classify angles.

How can we teach academic language AND be culturally and linguistically responsive?

- “We must create learning spaces for our diverse students so that they build from what they have and *add* the knowledges and language skills needed in future schooling and work. We must challenge students to expand their linguistic capital...

Zwiers on culturally responsive teaching

- “Yet at the same time, we must be willing to push back against society’s narrow-minded expectations...and limited perceptions of our students’ abilities...Our diverse students’ knowledge and linguistic abilities are assets that should be integrated into how and what we teach.”

Sources

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