

Chapter 4

Syntactic reduplication and plurality: On some properties of NPN subjects and objects in Polish and English

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This paper is concerned with selected properties of noun–preposition–noun (NPN) clausal subjects and objects (e.g. *day after day/dzień po dniu*) in English and Polish. At the descriptive level, the relevant phenomena include NPN subject–verb agreement and the aspectual features of verbs co-occurring with NPN subjects and objects. The phenomena are discussed in the light of the “internal” properties of NPN structures derived by the mechanism of iterative (syntactic) reduplication developed in Travis (2001, 2003) where a reduplicative head (Q) copies the complement of the preposition. The copy of the noun moves to SpecQP. Both nouns are treated as “defective” nominals (*nPs*) due to the absence of the DP-layer since the presence of determiners is excluded (arguably cross-linguistically). The whole NPN is syntactically singular though semantically it encodes plurality (a sequence or succession of entities or events). In both English and Polish the singular character of NPN subjects is manifested by their co-occurrence with singular rather than plural verbs. Whenever such NPNs are subjects or objects, they only occur with imperfective verbs in Polish. While this is not morphologically marked in English, English clauses with NPN subjects or objects only allow imperfective interpretation too.

Keywords: reduplication, iteration, plurality, agreement, aspect

1 Introduction

Although the key characteristics of the syntax and semantics of NOUN–PREPOSITION–NOUN (NPN) structures (e.g. *day after day* in English, *dzień po dniu* in



Polish) are discussed in a number of studies (see Pi 1995, Travis 2001, 2003, Beck & von Stechow 2007, Jackendoff 2008, Dobaczewski 2009, 2018, Rosalska 2011, Haik 2013, Pskit 2015, 2017), the properties of NPNs functioning as clausal subjects and objects have not yet been investigated.

§2 presents the basic internal properties of NPNs in English and Polish, mainly based on what is reported in earlier studies. It also proposes an account of the mechanism responsible for the derivation of NPNs, which is a revised version of an earlier proposal in Travis (2001, 2003). §3 is concerned with the behaviour of argument NPNs: their status as subjects and objects, NPN subject-verb agreement patterns, and aspectual characteristics of the verb with NPN subject or object in Polish. §4 summarises the discussion, offers some tentative conclusions, and remarks on prospects for further research on the topic.

The current study constitutes but a preliminary look at the relevant problems and the observations made below need to be confronted with data from other languages.

2 The structure and internal properties of NPN structures

2.1 NPNs and related structures

What comes to be called NPN in the relevant literature represents a heterogeneous inventory of structures. Thus, there are idiomatic NPNs with a restricted selection of different nouns (e.g. *cheek by jowl*, *hand over fist*) and more regular NPN patterns with several prepositions but without lexically constrained nominals (e.g. *day by day*, *bumper to bumper*, *layer upon layer*). The latter category includes a number of highly lexicalised instances, such as *face to face/twarzą w twarz* ‘face.INS in face.ACC’. The productive pattern involves the English prepositions *by*, *for*, *to*, *after* and *upon* (Pi 1995, Jackendoff 2008) and the Polish prepositions *w* ‘in’, *po* ‘after’, *za* ‘behind/for/after/by’, *przy* ‘next to/close to’ and *obok* ‘next to’ (Rosalska 2011, Pskit 2015, Dobaczewski 2018). Thus understood NPN structures are distinguished from PNPN constructions with identical (e.g. *from cover to cover/od deski do deski* ‘from board.GEN to board.GEN’, *from door to door*) or different nominals (e.g. *from mother to daughter*, *from shelf to floor*, *z ojca na syna* ‘from father.ACC to son.ACC’) (cf. Zwarts 2013). In particular, (P)NPN with the optional initial *from* in English can give an impression of being NPN, as in Jackendoff’s (2008: 12) examples below (cf. also Zwarts 2013: 70):

- (1) a. Adult coloration is highly variable (from) snake to snake.
- b. (From) situation to situation, conditions change.

An important characteristic of NPN structures with identical nouns is that they seem to involve some combination of the doubling of language form (identical nominals “surrounding” the preposition) and the plurality (or iteration) in terms of interpretation.¹ As Quirk et al. (1985: 280) observe, in such NPNs “two nouns are placed together in a parallel structure”.

The present paper focuses on the productive subtype of NPNs with the English prepositions *after* and *upon* and the Polish prepositions *po* ‘after’ and *za* ‘after/by’ (lit. ‘behind’), because only such NPNs occur as clausal arguments. As observed in other studies, while some NPNs allow dual (in Jackendoff’s (2008) terms: the sense of juxtaposition of two entities or matching of two entities or sets of entities) or plural readings (succession in Jackendoff 2008), those with *after/upon* in English and with *po/za* in Polish have invariably plural readings.

2.2 Constraints on NPN-internal nominals

In both Polish and English, there are similar constraints on the nominals in NPNs. There is preference for countable singular nouns in both N_1 and N_2 position in N_1PN_2 . As a result, uncountable (2) and plural countable nominals (3) appear to be ruled out (English data from Jackendoff 2008):

- (2) a. * water after water, * dust for dust
 b. * *odzież za odzieżą*
 clothes.SG.NOM after clothes.SG.INS
 Literally: ‘clothes after clothes’
- (3) a. * men for men, * books after books, * weeks by weeks
 b. * *książki za książkami*
 books.PL.NOM after books.PL.INS
 Literally: ‘books after books’
 c. * *tygodnie po tygodniach*
 weeks.PL.NOM after/by weeks.PL.LOC
 Literally: ‘weeks by weeks’

An obvious counterexample to the ban on mass nouns (2a) and plurals (3a) is the expression found in the Anglican burial service:

- (4) ... earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust ...

¹For more on different approaches to the semantics of NPN structures see Beck & von Stechow (2007) and Jackendoff (2008).

However, it is an instance of formulaic language and the NPNs *ashes to ashes* and *dust to dust* – whether used separately or together – have attained the status of idiom(s) rather than given rise to a productive pattern. It is also possible to interpret the data in (4) as elided versions of their clausal counterparts. The English NPNs with the preposition *upon* provide further problems with regard to the aforementioned constraint on nominals. What turns out to be relatively productive is the occurrence of mass nouns that undergo the well-known process of semantic recategorisation (mass / uncountable → countable):

- (5) Absurdity upon absurdity. (Internet)

Its Polish counterpart (though unattested) would definitely have a countable reading ('a number of instances of absurdity following one another'):

- (6) absurd za absurdem
absurdity.SG.NOM after/upon absurdity.SG.INS
'absurdity upon absurdity'

A semantically related and well-attested clausal counterpart also involves the doubling of the nominal that is countable, but such clausal structures are beyond the scope of the present analysis:

- (7) Absurd goni absurd.
absurdity.3SG.NOM chase.3SG.PRS absurdity.3SG.ACC
'It is absurdity upon absurdity.'

The English *upon* turns out to be a "troublemaker" in the context of NPNs that permit plurals such as *millions* below:

- (8) ... there are millions upon millions who support your decision ... (Internet)

While *millions* has morphological plural marking, its plural sense is non-specific: a very large but non-specific number/amount. One way to account for this apparent exception to the ban on plural nominals in NPNs is to rely on Acquaviva's (2008) notion of lexical plurals. In spite of their plural inflectional marking, the English *hundreds*, *thousands* or *millions* are instances of number neutralisation, in the sense of neutralisation of the singular-plural opposition (Acquaviva 2008: 23, 26), or in Link's (1998: 221) wording they "have the *form* of a plural, but their reference is *transnumeral*" (emphasis in original). Then the ban on mass nouns and plurals should perhaps be rephrased in terms of number-neutrality or in terms

of an unvalued number feature: bare nominals occur as N_1 and N_2 , because they are number-neutral or their number features are unvalued.² The doubling of the nominals is responsible for the plural interpretation. This makes the presence of *millions* in (8) somewhat redundant from a semantic point of view.

The “bareness” of N_1 and N_2 is also reflected by the absence of any kind of determinative material: articles (in English), demonstratives and indefinite determiners (in Polish and English):

- (9) a. * the man for the man, * a day after a day
 b. * some inch by some inch (Jackendoff 2008: 9)
 c. * ten dzień po tym / tamtym dniu
 this.SG.NOM day.SG.NOM after this that.SG.LOC day.SG.LOC
 Literally: ‘this day after this/that day’
 d. * jakiś dzień po jakimś dniu
 some.SG.NOM day.SG.NOM after some.SG.LOC day.SG.LOC
 Literally: ‘some day after some day’

All in all, the doubling of the nominals seems to yield the meaning of plural. Obviously, the identical nominals – though with different morphological case markings in Polish – capture identity of sense rather than identity of reference.

2.3 Modification of NPN-internal nominals

Usually the nominals cannot be modified (10) (examples from Jackendoff 2008), although *after* and *upon* allow premodification and postmodification (11) (examples from Jackendoff 2008 and Haïk 2013). Interestingly, in English both premodifiers and postmodifiers occur either on both N_1 and N_2 (11a) or just on N_2 (11b–11c). Moreover, both *after* and *upon* allow iteration (11e).

- (10) a. * father of a soldier for father of a soldier
 b. * day of rain to day of rain
 (11) a. tall boy after tall boy
 b. day after miserable day
 c. day after day of rain
 d. layer upon layer of mud
 e. day after day after day of unending rain

²As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, the notion of unvalued feature seems to be more appropriate than that of number-neutrality, esp. if the latter is understood as general number.

By contrast, Polish NPNs with relatively productive *po* ‘after’ and *za* ‘after/up-on/behind’ exhibit lower acceptability of modification (12), and if modification is marginally acceptable, which is more likely in the context of premodification, then it is found on either both N_1 and N_2 , as in English, or only on N_1 , as opposed to the English data in (11).

- (12) a. ? *deszczowy dzień za deszczowym dniem*
rainy.SG.NOM day.SG.NOM after rainy.SG.INS day.SG.INS
Literally: ‘rainy day after/upon rainy day’
- b. ? *deszczowy dzień po dniu*
rainy.SG.NOM day.SG.NOM after day.SG.LOC
Literally: ‘rainy day after day’
- c. ?? *dzień deszczu za dniem deszczu*
day.NOM rain.GEN after day.INS rain.GEN
Literally: ‘day of rain after day of rain’
- d. * *dzień deszczu za dniem*
day.NOM rain.GEN after day.INS
Literally: ‘day of rain after day’
- e. * *dzień za dniem deszczu*
day.NOM after day.INS rain.GEN
Literally: ‘day after day of rain’

While the availability of modification does not seem to directly affect the issue of number in NPNs, the nominal concord involving morphological marking of number, gender and case on the noun and its premodifier in Polish does have implications for the account of the structure and derivation of NPNs, as is made clear in §2.4 below.

2.4 The structure of NPN via syntactic reduplication

Following Travis (2001, 2003), I assume that NPNs are derived by the mechanism of iterative (syntactic) reduplication, where a reduplicative head (Q) copies the complement of the preposition. The copy of the noun moves to SpecQP as in Figure 1 below.

Importantly, the mechanism of iterative reduplication developed by Travis (2001, 2003) permits some subdomains to be copied into specifier positions. The kind of copying in question substantially differs from the copying in the “classical” movement since in the case of syntactic reduplication it is copying without

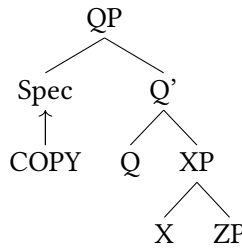


Figure 1: Syntactic (iterative) reduplication (Travis 2001, 2003)

deletion. Given the modification patterns in (11–12), and in particular considerable variation concerning the presence of modifiers on both nominals or only N_1 or only N_2 , Travis’s approach needs to be reconsidered: the whole nP is copied, and modifiers can undergo PF deletion on either N_1 (in English) or N_2 (in Polish). The distribution of modifiers in NPNs could be regulated by Fanselow & Ćavar’s (2002) distributed deletion mechanism, but it is not to be elaborated on here.

Travis (2001, 2003) does not take it to be a settled matter whether the Q head selects a PP as its complement, or it is lexically realised as the preposition. In the latter case, the preposition would be an overt realisation (or at least the guise) of the reduplicative head. As a result, there are two possible structures for NPNs derived via syntactic reduplication: see Figures 2 and 3.

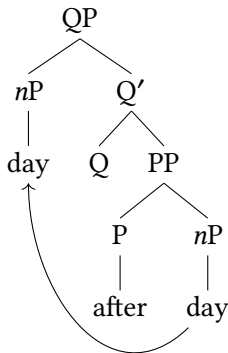


Figure 2: A variant of syntactic reduplication where the Q head selects a PP as its complement

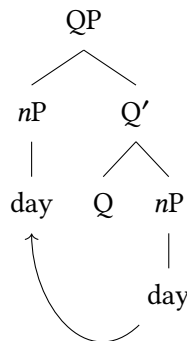


Figure 3: A variant of syntactic reduplication where the Q head is morpho-phonologically realized as a preposition in languages such as English or Polish

The structure in Figure 2 has a somewhat un-Minimalist flavour as it is based on a head (Q) that would probably be morpho-phonologically empty in all languages. Apart from this, the mechanism involving movement of a nominal complement out of a PP in non-P-stranding languages such as Polish poses another difficulty. If Abels (2003) is right regarding the phasal status of P in non-P-stranding languages, then Figure 3 would involve the crossing of a phase boundary.

The configuration in Figure 3 seems to capture the facts from languages where NPNs have no preposition, as illustrated for Kazakh (Turkic) in (13) (Turkish would follow the same pattern, Dilek Uygun Gokmen p.c.):³

- (13) a. *kunen kunge*
 day.ABL day.DAT
 ‘day by day’
- b. *elden elge*
 country.ABL country.DAT
 ‘country by country’
- c. *sureten suretke*
 picture.ABL picture.DAT
 ‘picture after picture’ (Kazakh)

The major theoretical disadvantage of the structure in Figure 3 is that – by allowing the copying of the content of the complement of Q into its specifier – it violates anti-locality (Abels 2003, Grohmann 2003): the movement is too local. In particular, Abels (2003) argues against movement from the complement to the specifier of the same head.⁴ This analysis can be saved by stipulating that the syntactic reduplication is distinct from the “classical” movement: copying without deletion – licensed by the reduplicative head – is allowed to be that local.⁵

For languages like Kazakh or Turkish, the structure in Figure 2 would entail the presence of two empty heads: the Q head triggering reduplication, and the adposition-like case assigner heading the complement of Q, which is quite an

³The Kazakh examples were provided by native speakers of the language who participated in comparative morphosyntax seminars I taught at the University of Lodz (Poland) 2016–2019.

⁴According to an anonymous reviewer, the only solution to the problem of anti-locality in the case of NPN structures would be to treat this kind of movement as a non-syntactic operation. I leave it for further research to decide whether the original idea of syntactic reduplication in Travis (2001, 2003) can be maintained.

⁵Another problem pointed out by an anonymous reviewer with respect to movement without deletion is that this kind of operation overgenerates. However, if we assume that this sort of movement is only triggered by the reduplicative head that has some selectional restrictions (as illustrated in §2.2 above), the operation becomes restricted, though obviously by stipulation.

unwelcome result. According to the structure in Figure 3, the Q head would be morpho-phonologically realised as a preposition in languages such as English or Polish, and it would be phonologically null in languages such as Kazakh.⁶

As regards case assignment in Polish or Kazakh NPNs (and possibly in other languages with a rich system of morphological case), it would have to take place after the reduplication occurs. The nominal following the preposition is copied before it is assigned case by P: in Polish the case-marking of N_2 is determined by the preposition. This would involve post-syntactic realisation of case inflection (Sigurdsson 2012) or delayed movement to the appropriate position in KP as in Caha (2009). The details of case assignment are not going to be elaborated on here, however.

Based on the idea of cross-categorial symmetry between the nominal and the verbal/clausal domains, there has been a long-standing tradition of assuming the presence of an outer *nP* shell headed by a light noun and serving as the complement for some other higher functional heads (cf. Radford 2000, 2009, Alexiadou et al. 2007) as a nominal counterpart of the *vP* projection in the clausal domain. Following this tradition, I assume that the bare nominals in NPNs are “defective” in the sense that they lack the DP-layer in English (and other languages with articles) and in Polish if one assumes the universality of DP (see e.g. Progovac 1998, Willim 1998, Pereltsvaig 2007, Jeong 2016). The NPN-internal nominals also lack projections hosting demonstratives and other determinative heads in both English and Polish, which I expect to be valid cross-linguistically, but it obviously remains a tentative hypothesis to be tested in the course of further research. They resemble Pereltsvaig’s (2006) small nominals, as argued for in Pskit (2017). Alternatively, the “defective”/small nominals inside NPNs can also be viewed as *nPs* in the sense of roots with a categorising *n* head, as in Distributed Morphology (cf. Halle & Marantz 1993, Harley & Noyer 1999, Acquaviva 2008). Whether there are any higher functional projections dominating *nP* is a questionable issue. Given the number-neutral status of N_1 and N_2 , they most probably do not include NumP, though this may seem problematic from the point of view of subject-verb agreement facts discussed in 3 below, and is perhaps even more controversial in the context of plural agreement as in (8) above, reproduced in (14) below for convenience:

- (14) ... there are millions upon millions who support your decision ...
(Internet)

⁶This needs to be corroborated by analysing the behaviour of NPNs in clauses in Kazakh or Turkish.

Acquaviva (2008) argues that plurality that is inherent in nouns such as *hundreds*, *thousands* or *millions* is encoded in the categorising *n* head, making the nouns in question [*n* [ROOT]] complexes in the spirit of Distributed Morphology. If NumP is absent, the fact that the case endings on N₁ and N₂ in Polish are for the singular results from the treatment of these number-neutral bare nominals as singular by default. The same “singular-by-default” explanation would have to work in the context of premodifiers of the bare nominals, if they are found licit in Polish (cf. the data in (12) above), as such premodifiers necessarily agree with the head noun in terms of number, gender and case. As regards gender, the absence of the relevant functional head could be explained based on the assumption in Alexiadou et al. (2007): gender is an inherent part of the lexical entry of each noun rather than the matter of a dedicated functional head in the syntax.⁷

If NPNs are actually QPs, it naturally follows that the properties – including the quantificational properties – of the whole NPN are determined by the Q head.

3 The external properties of NPN subjects and objects

In both English and Polish, NPNs with all the prepositions in question can occur as adjuncts in typical adjunct positions in the clausal architecture. Consider the English data in (15) (from Jackendoff 2008 and Huddleston & Pullum 2002) and the Polish examples in (16):

- (15) a. Page for page, this is the best-looking book I've ever bought.
b. John and Bill, arm in arm, strolled through the park.
c. We went through the garden inch by inch.
d. She worked on it day after day.
- (16) a. Szli łeb w łeb.
go.3PL.PST head.SG.NOM in head.SG.ACC
'They went/ran neck and neck.'
b. Dzień po dniu zbliżaliśmy się do celu.
day.SG.NOM after day.SG.LOC approach.1PL.PST to goal
'Day after day we were approaching our goal.'
c. Wertował książkę kartka po kartce.
leaf.3SG.PST.through book page.SG.NOM after page.SG.LOC
'He leafed through a book page after page.' (Dobaczewski 2018: 249)

⁷As an anonymous reviewer aptly observes, this may mean that both plurality and gender are encoded in the categoriser. An alternative would be to assume that – given data such as (13) – the NPN-internal nominals contain the NumP projection, which requires investigating more cross-linguistic data on NPN subjects and objects.

English NPNs can also be DP-internal premodifiers (17a), and those with *after* and *upon* can function as complements of prepositions (17b) or possessive determiners (17c) (Jackendoff 2008: 19), though such patterns are not available in Polish:

- (17) a. Your day-to-day progress is astounding.
 b. We looked for dog after dog.
 c. Student after student's parents objected.

A selected set of NPNs – with *after* and *upon* in English and with *po* and *za* in Polish – can become clausal subjects or objects.

- (18) a. Day after day passed.
 b. I drank cup after cup (of coffee).
 (19) a. Mijał dzień za dniem.
 pass.3SG.PST day.SG.NOM after day.SG.INS
 'Day after day passed.'
 b. Czytał wiersz za wierszem.
 read.3SG.PST poem.SG.ACC after poem.SG.INS
 'He read poem after poem.'
 c. Mówiła studentowi za studentem ...
 tell.3SG.PST student.SG.DAT after student.SG.INS
 'She told student after student ...'

An interesting subject-verb agreement pattern emerges from the data in (18–19): in both English and Polish the verb is invariably singular in spite of the plural semantics of the whole NPN, which is corroborated by (20) below:

- (20) a. Day after day passes ...
 b. * Day after day pass ...
 c. Mija dzień za dniem.
 pass.3SG.PRS day.SG.NOM after day.SG.INS
 'Day after day passes.'
 d. * Mijają dzień za dniem
 pass.3PL.PRS day.SG.NOM after day.SG.INS
 Intended: 'Day after day passes.'

Given the derivation of NPNs as QPs via syntactic (iterative) reduplication, I assume – as suggested in §2.4 above – that the quantificational properties of NPNs are determined by the Q head. The agreement data prove that subject NPNs are syntactically singular. In addition, Polish NPN subjects agree with the verb also in terms of grammatical gender; see (21a) vs. (21b):

- (21) a. Mijał dzień za dniem.
pass.3SG.M.PST day.SG.M.NOM after day.SG.M.INS
‘Day after day passed.’
b. Mijała noc za nocą.
pass.3SG.F.PST night.SG.F.NOM after night.SG.F.INS
‘Night after night passed.’

The data in (20) and (21) suggest that the relevant agreement relation is established in one of the two ways: either the T head may look into the features of N_1 or the feature valuation takes place between T and Q, with the Q head inheriting the phi-features of N_1 .

Whenever NPNs are subjects or objects, they only occur with imperfective verbs in Polish as in (22). While this is not morphologically marked in English, English clauses with NPN subjects or objects would only allow imperfective interpretation too. Note that morphologically perfective verbs in Polish are fine with non-NPN plural objects (22c):

- (22) a. Strzelał bramkę za bramką.
score.3SG.M.PST.IPFV goal after goal
‘He scored goal after goal.’
b. * Strzelił bramkę za bramką.
score.3SG.M.PST.PFV goal after goal
Literally: ‘He has scored goal after goal.’
c. Strzelił wiele bramek.
score.3SG.M.PST.PFV a.lot.of goals
‘He has scored a lot of goals.’

One possible – though stipulative – account of the co-occurrence of imperfective verbs with NPN objects and subjects is based on the mechanism of valuation of the relevant feature of the Asp head in the extended verbal projection and the Q head of the NPN. An alternative is to relegate the issue to the level of LF interface as this property of NPN subjects and objects is shared with NPN adjuncts.

Indeed, irrespective of the grammatical function of NPNs, their plural semantics (iteration of entities or events) seems to match the morphological manifestation of the outer (grammatical) aspect in the verbal domain. The lack of such morphological aspectual marking in English points to the semantic licensing of the phenomenon.

4 Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to discuss the properties of subject and object NPNs in the light of the internal characteristics of NPN structures derived via a revised version of syntactic reduplication, originally proposed in Travis (2001, 2003).

The investigation is preliminary in nature and awaits corroboration by further research on NPNs in English, Polish and beyond.

The singular syntax of NPNs in both languages is reflected by the singular subject-verb agreement, whereas the plural semantics of NPNs corresponds to the imperfective characteristics of the verb with all types of NPNs.

The modification data discussed in §2.3 above suggest the following hypothesis with possible typological implications. While they encode the plurality of entities or events, NPNs are structures that are formally “abbreviatory”: the mechanism of syntactic (iterative) reduplication yields expressions with minimal structure. The NPN is a structure with as little material (both in terms of “surface” morpho-phonological material and in terms of the articulation of the underlying syntactic structure) as possible. Ideally, there are two bare nominals “linked” by a preposition. Hence, in a language such as Polish, with rich nominal-internal agreement between the head noun and its modifiers, the amount of the morpho-phonological material resulting from establishing the agreement makes it too “heavy” for the Q head to accept modification within the NPN. But this remains a hypothesis to be tested empirically in other languages, especially beyond Germanic and Slavic and indeed beyond Indo-European, and also to be further pursued on theoretical grounds.

If the internal and external properties of NPNs discussed above turn out to be cross-linguistically valid, as expected based on fragmentary data from other languages, the lines of reasoning suggested above may gain further empirical support.

Abbreviations

3	third person	M	masculine
ABL	ablative	NOM	nominative
ACC	accusative	PFV	perfective
DAT	dative	PL	plural
F	feminine	PRS	present
INS	instrumental	PST	past
IPFV	imperfective	SG	singular
LOC	locative		

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