

¿Qué dijistes?: A Variationist Reanalysis of Non-standard *-s* on Second Person Singular Preterit Verb Forms in Spanish

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1. Introduction

The goal of this study is to provide a variationist analysis of the addition of non-standard *-s* on second person singular preterit verb forms in several spoken varieties of Spanish. In Spanish the second person singular of the preterit is marked by the endings *-aste*, for *-ar* verbs, or *-iste* for *-er* and *-ir* verbs. These inflectional morphemes descend from the Latin endings *-ASTI* and *-ISTI*. Thus, we can see that the marking of the second person singular preterit with a final *-s* is a non-etymological modification that coexists with the standard form of the conjugation.

The existence of an *-s* marked variant for the second person singular form of the preterit, as in *dijistes*, *cantastes* or *fuistes*, has been reported by previous descriptions of regional and social varieties of Spanish. Vaquero de Ramírez (1998:30), for example, briefly mentions the phenomenon in her description of Latin American Spanish as a common tendency in several dialects. Lipski (2002:374) points out the general extension of the *-s* marked variant and claims that the addition of *-s* is more acceptable in dialects that have *voseo*. Frago García (2003:17) also notes the common use of the non-standard form by speakers in middle and low social classes in Peninsular and Latin American Spanish.

Penny (2002:219) attributes the existence of this variant to the analogical extension of the final *-s* present in all the second person singular forms in the Spanish verb paradigm and also states that, despite being rejected by the standard, its use is still very frequent in informal speech styles. In his description of verbal inflection in Spanish, Alcoba (1999:4926) links the existence of the *-s* variant to the pressure from the “regular” second person singular marking and to the tendency of the speakers to correct irregularities.

The addition of final *-s* in second person singular preterits seems to run contrary to the process of *-s* weakening in word-final position that has been observed in many varieties of Spanish, resulting in different degrees of aspiration or deletion. Particularly relevant to this paper are studies that have focused on *-s* deletion in verbal morphemes, where *-s* functions as a person marker. Research has shown that in those cases there are no lower rates of deletion due to the lack of redundancy and potential ambiguity (Terrell, 1979; Poplack, 1980; Ranson, 1991). In the case of preterit forms under study, despite the presence of a morpheme marking second person singular (*-aste*, *-iste*), examples of redundant non-standard final *-s* have been found even in *-s* deleting dialects. It is possible that the addition of *-s* in second person singular preterits could reflect hypercorrection on the part of the speakers of *-s* deleting dialects.

Despite ample recognition of the common use of *-s* marked second person singular preterit forms, there has been no empirical research that explores the distribution of the two variants in Spanish. As we have seen, the majority of the references to the existence of this variant constitute impressionistic statements about its extension and its association with certain social classes and speech styles. The purpose of this study is to elucidate the linguistic constraints that govern the choice between the two possible variants, exemplified in (1) by the *-s* variant, and in (2) by the standard, non-*-s* variant:

- (1) Tú **dijistes** que era un jardín bueno (CREA)
‘You said that it was a good garden’

- (2) porque tú **dijiste** que tenías enemigas (CREA)
‘because you said that you had enemies’

2. Data

The data for this study were taken from three different corpora: the oral archive of the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* (CREA), the *Habla Popular Mexican Spanish* corpus (Lope Blanch 1976) and The *Corpus del Español* (Davies). All the materials used were transcriptions of oral data. The transcriptions available in the corpora consulted are all orthographic in nature and do not represent the phonetic realization of the segments. An oral register was selected due to the fact that *-s* marking of the second person singular preterit has been described as a phenomenon that normally takes place in informal speech. Most of the oral documents available in the corpora I consulted date from the second half of the 20th Century, with the most recent documents being from 2004. The oral documents available in the CREA and the *Corpus del Español* come from both interactions recorded in the media and face-to-face conversations. The data from Spain contain both types of oral documents, including interactions in radio programs and televised shows, documentaries, debates, public events, telephone and face-to-face interviews, among others. The data available from Venezuela is comprised mostly of face-to-face interviews ranging in degrees of formality. Finally, all the linguistic data provided in the *Habla Popular Mexican Spanish* corpus comes from sociolinguistic interviews and recorded interactions between more than one informant. As the preceding suggests, the data are heterogeneous in nature and reflect different degrees of formality and discourse style.

Most of the tokens extracted belong to the Peninsular and Venezuelan varieties of Spanish. The rest of the dialects represented in the data were grouped in an ‘other’ category. This category includes tokens from Mexico, San José, Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Havana and Lima. Because the number of tokens found for each of those dialects was not large enough to consider them separately in the statistical analysis, they were combined into a single group. We should keep in mind that the heterogeneity of this group would render any conclusions about the effects of regional variety inappropriate. Thus, in order to observe the role that dialectal region has in the addition of non-standard *-s*, a larger study including more data from each of the regions selected would be necessary. The classification of the tokens as either belonging to Peninsular or Venezuelan Spanish was made based on the only regional information provided in the corpora that were used for this study.

All the second person singular preterit verb forms that showed variation were extracted from the corpora, yielding 854 tokens containing the variants under study. Verbs that did not show variation (i.e. those that had either no *-s* tokens or those that had only *-s* tokens) were excluded from the analysis, leaving a total of 37 verbs included in Table 1.

Table 1. List of verbs that show variation.

aprender	criar	enterar	hacer	matar	poner	salir	ver
casar	decir	entrar	ir	meter	preguntar	sentir	vivir
comentar	dejar	equivocar	llamar	mirar	preparar	tener	
conocer	empezar	escoger	llegar	montar	quedar	tomar	
contar	encontrar	estar	llevar	notar	regresar	venir	

Meta-linguistic comments (3) and formulaic utterances (4), such as pause fillers, were also excluded:

- (3) También nos dice María Asunción que le irrita cuando oye **planchastes, escuchastes**.
(CREA)
‘María Asunción also tells us that it irritates her when she hears *planchastes, escuchastes*.’
- (4) Y ahora se quieren comprar un trailer porque la carpa, **¿vistés?** tiene sus inconvenientes.
(*Corpus del Español*)
‘And now they want to buy a trailer because the tent, you see, has its inconvenients’

Table 2 shows the overall distribution of the *-s* marked forms found in the three corpora divided by geographical variety. Of the 854 tokens analyzed, 119 contain a non-standard *-s*.

Table 2. Overall distribution of *-s* marking on preterit verb forms that show variation.

	<i>-s</i> marked	Non <i>-s</i> marked
Spain	13% (33)	87% (220)
Venezuela	13.9% (67)	86.1% (483)
Other	16.1% (19)	83.9% (99)

$$\chi^2 = 1.33, p = 0.514, df = 2$$

The distribution of the variants across dialects is not statistically significant and, as we can see in Table 2, the percentage of *-s* marking in second person singular preterit is similar in the different varieties of Spanish under study. Only between 13% and 16% of the verbs that show variation correspond to the *-s* marked variant, whereas the majority of the second person singular preterit forms maintain the standard inflection.

3. Methodology

Previous dialectological descriptions of different varieties of Spanish have pointed to a possible relation between certain social factors, particularly those of social class and education, and the use of the *-s* marked variant. Additionally, metalinguistic comments such as the one exemplified in (3) show that the addition of non-standard *-s* to second person singular preterits is stigmatized among some Spanish speakers. Even though we recognize the potential role of these factors, due to a lack of social information for the majority of the speakers in the three corpora consulted, this study focuses only on the internal linguistic factors that constrain the variation. Further research using new data where extralinguistic information about the speakers is available would be necessary to examine the role that social factors play in the variation under study.

Following the sociolinguistic variationist method (Tagliamonte 2006), the data were coded for the following linguistic factors:

3.1. Presence of pronominal subject

In order to test whether an overt subject pronoun would have an effect on the addition of non-standard *-s*, the data were coded for the presence of a pronominal subject. The relation between *-s* aspiration in verbal morphemes and the presence of the pronominal subject “tú” as an effect of functional compensation has been widely debated in the literature. Poplack (1980) and Hochberg (1986) found evidence of functional compensation in Puerto Rican Spanish. Their studies show that a pronominal subject is more likely to be used in cases where *-s* deletion renders the verbal form ambiguous with respect to person marking. Cameron (1993) compared the presence of overt subjects in Puerto Rican and Madrid Spanish and concluded that *-s* aspiration does not constrain the presence of a pronominal subject. Instead, he found that switch reference had a significant effect in the process.

Following the functional compensation hypothesis, if we assume that the addition of *-s* is motivated by a further desire on the part of the speaker to mark second person singular, we should expect to find less *-s* marking in cases in which there is an overt subject, since there is increased redundancy.

Preverbal and postverbal pronominal subjects were coded separately and later combined for the statistical analysis, since they patterned similarly and there was a low number of tokens that had postverbal subjects. Thus, in the final analysis only two factors were considered, presence or absence of a pronominal subject. Examples (5) – (7) illustrate the possible options in the realization of the subject:

- (5) Ahora yo tenía que haberte hecho a ti lo que **tú** me **hicistes** en tu casa. CREA
 ‘Now I should have done to you what you *did* to me in your house.’

- (6) yo es que te lo quería comentar, que leí hace unas declaraciones que **hiciste tú**. CREA
‘I wanted to tell you, that I read some statements you *made*.’
- (7) No te entendí la pregunta que me **hiciste** hace rato, perdón. CREA
‘I didn’t understand the question you **asked** me a while ago, I’m sorry’

3.2. Subject specificity

All the tokens were coded for subject specificity. Ashby & Bentivoglio (1993) refer to this property as ‘generalizability’ and they distinguish between particularizing and generalizing NPs (specific and non-specific respectively in this study). According to the authors, generalizing NPs refer to a group of entities whose members are interchangeable, while particularizing NPs are used for unique referents. Thus, in this study second person non-specific subjects are considered to be the cases in which the second person singular does not refer to the particular interlocutor in the communicative situation. The difference between specific and non-specific subject is illustrated in (8) and (9):

- (8) Ahora, referente a lo a la pregunta que me **hiciste** sobre el metro, no sé en realidad. CREA
‘Now, regarding the the question you *asked* about the subway, I don’t really know’
- (9) si tienes completa la hoja esa, pues te dan una especie de título conforme **hiciste** el camino, eres un buen peregrino CREA
‘if you have completed that form, then they give you some sort of diploma saying that you *completed* the pilgrimage. You are a good pilgrim’

3.3. Semantic class of the verb.

Verbs were initially divided into five different semantic categories: verbs of cognition, verbs of communication, verbs of perception, states, and verbs that refer to external or physical activities. The first three categories were later combined for the statistical analysis, since they behaved similarly and they all refer to activities that involve internal processes, as opposed to states and physical activities.

3.4. Type of conjugation

All the tokens were coded for the type of preterit ending: *-aste* or *-iste*.

3.5. Frequency of the preterit form

The frequency of the verbs included in this study was determined using the calculated frequency values of the preterit forms under study provided in the ‘List of frequencies’ of the CREA. In the list of frequencies, each lexical item that appears in the corpus is assigned a calculated frequency based on the absolute appearances of each token. The calculated frequency values of the forms extracted for this study range from 0.05 to 13.41. Three different frequency categories were established using these values: low frequency (values from 0 to 1), medium frequency (values from 1 to 5) and high frequency (values higher than 5). The division was done arbitrarily before coding the data, a process that has been followed in studies that examine the effect of frequency as an independent variable (Bybee 2000a, 2002). The difference between high and medium frequency was set due to the larger gap in frequency found between one of the most frequent forms and those that had a lower frequency; i.e. while the low and medium frequency forms increased in frequency in a consistent manner (with a difference of 0.5 or lower in calculated frequency between each form), I took the sudden increase of 4.2 in calculated frequency as an indicator of a difference between high frequency words and the remaining words. The division between low and medium frequency was set so that there was a similar number of tokens belonging to each category. The choice of three categories as opposed to two (high

and low frequency) attempts to differentiate the two poles of the frequency continuum from the rest of the forms. On the possibility that high and low frequency words patterned similarly, distinguishing a third category would allow us to see whether the linguistic process under study shows the same pattern in all the words or whether that pattern is only observed in the forms situated at the two frequency extremes.

3.6. *Regional variety*

Initially the tokens were coded for eight different regions: Spain, Venezuela, México, San José, Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Havana and Lima. As was mentioned above, the last six areas were later combined for the statistical analysis, due to the low number of tokens extracted from each of those regions. In some of these regional varieties and, in some cases, in particular areas within the country designations used in the corpora, aspiration and deletion of *-s* is a frequent phenomenon. Because access to the original recordings was not possible, the determination of whether there was an underlying /s/ or not was made following the transcription provided in the corpora.

3.7. *Following phonological context*

Because *-s* aspiration and deletion have been found to be constrained by the following phonological context (Terrell, 1979), all the tokens were coded for whether they were followed by a vowel, a consonant or a pause, in order to examine whether the following segment also constrains the addition of a sound in word-final position. Examples (10) – (12) illustrate the three possible contexts, vowel, consonant, and pause, respectively:

(10) Tú me **preguntaste** una cosa y yo te estoy contestando otra. CREA
‘You *asked* me one thing and I’m answering a different one’

(11) bueno tú me **preguntastes** la relación que existe todo esto con la carrera, arquitectura. CREA
‘well, you *asked* me about the relation that there exists between all of that and the degree, Architecture’

(12) Entonces ahí yo creo que todo depende de esa formación que tú **tuviste**. CREA
‘So, I think that it all depends on that education you *had*.’

4. Results and discussion

The GoldVarb results displayed in Table 3 reveal that the frequency of the preterit form and the following phonological context are the only two significant factor groups constraining the variation, with frequency being the most important factor group by virtue of a larger Range than following phonological context.

Table 3. Factors contributing to the addition of –s on second person singular preterit verb forms.
 Input = .129 (13.9%); Log likelihood = -332.025

		Prob	% -s marked	N	% of data
Frequency of preterit form					
	Low	.66	23.4%	141	16.5%
	Medium	.51	14.3%	329	38.5%
	High	.43	10.2%	384	45%
	<i>Range</i>	23			
Following phonological context					
	Vowel	.61	19.7%	295	34.5%
	Consonant	.48	12%	350	41%
	Pause	.39	9.1%	209	24.5%
	<i>Range</i>	22			
Semantic class of verb					
	Cognitive	[.57]	16.1%	311	36.4%
	External	[.48]	12.6%	356	41.7%
	States	[.42]	12.8%	187	21.9%
Regional variety					
	Other	[.62]	16.1%	118	13.8%
	Spain	[.49]	13%	253	29.6%
	Venezuela	[.48]	13.9%	483	56.6%
Presence of pronominal subject					
	Presence	[.55]	16.6%	235	27.5%
	Absence	[.48]	12.9%	619	72.5%
Type of conjugation					
	-iste	[.51]	12.7%	708	82.9%
	-aste	[.48]	19.9%	146	17.1%
Subject specificity					
	Non-specific	[.52]	14.5%	62	7.3%
	Specific	[.50]	13.9%	792	92.7%

4.1. Frequency of preterit form

The Varbrul analysis reveals that the addition of final *-s* is favored in low-frequency preterit forms and disfavored in high-frequency ones, whereas medium frequency forms neither favor nor disfavor the variant. We find an explanation of why low-frequency forms favor the addition of non-standard *-s* in the lexical diffusion model proposed by Bybee (1998, 2000b, 2002).

Several researchers have stated the importance that frequency of use has in processes of phonological change. Bybee (2000b:252) explains its effect as follows: “sound change takes place in small increments in real time as words are used. The more a word is used the more it is exposed to the reductive effect of articulatory automation. [...] Thus words of higher frequency undergo more adjustments and register the effects of sound change more rapidly than low-frequency words.”

However, there is another direction for lexical diffusion with regards to frequency. Phillips (2001, 2006) and Bybee (1985, 2002, 2007) state that morphological substitution and analogical changes affect low-frequency words first. According to Bybee (2002:270), irregular patterns can be learned and maintained in high-frequency forms, whereas low-frequency words, due to their limited availability in the speakers’ experience, may be subject to regularization and changes influenced by the general patterns of the language.

Bybee (1985:133) also claims that there is a difference in how items are stored in the mental lexicon depending on their frequency. Whereas high-frequency items are stored as autonomous units, low-frequency words are stored in connection to other lexical items. Thus, low-frequency forms are

subject to analysis on the part of the speaker, whereas high-frequency items are not (since they constitute a whole unit). This representation explains the tendency of more frequent forms to resist regularization within a paradigm.

Phillips (2001) calls this differential effect of word frequency the ‘Frequency-Implementation Hypothesis’ and she claims that it not only distinguishes between phonological versus morphological changes but also between physiologically motivated changes and modifications that are conceptually motivated.

Bybee (2007:29) provides an example of an analogical change in English that affects low-frequency verbs. She investigates the occasional re-shaping of the past tense of verbs that have a past form with a lax vowel: *creep*, *weep*, *leap*, *sleep*, *leave* and *keep*. She points out that, of the six verbs, *crept*, *wept* and *leapt* could be occasionally re-shaped with a regular *-ed* ending (*creeped*, *weaped* and *leaped*), whereas other forms, such as *slept*, *left* and *kept*, would resist analogical regularization. If we consider the frequencies shown in Table 4 (Bybee, 2007:29), we can observe that it is the least frequent verbs that accept this type of analogical leveling:

Table 4. Modern English Leveling

<i>Not Subject to Leveling</i>		<i>Subject to Leveling</i>	
keep	531	creep	37
leave	792	leap	42
sleep	132	weep	31

Bybee (2007:30) explains that, even though this leveling occurs just marginally, “the mere infrequency of a suppletive paradigm makes an analogical formation more acceptable. For instance [...], *creeped* is not standard, but I would not flinch if I heard it, and I might even produce it myself, although I know *crept* is “correct.” However, *keeped* would definitely cause a negative reaction, because the form *kept* is so solidly established, due to its frequency.” Bybee (2007:271) uses the term ‘Conserving Effect’ to refer to the effect that frequency has on words that are strongly entrenched in memory and are unlikely to be reanalyzed using a regularizing pattern.

In Spanish, final *-s* marks second person singular in all the verb tenses except in the case of the preterit. Thus, we can characterize the *-s* morpheme as being the most productive marker of second person singular. In contrast with this state of affairs, *-aste* and *-iste* have a very limited productivity in the verb paradigm. According to Bybee (1998:225), “The degree of productivity of a morphological pattern corresponds quite closely to *type frequency*, that is, the number of lexical items participating in the pattern” (my underlining). The higher the type frequency of a particular schema, the more likely it is to extend to other forms by a process of regularization. Thus, we can interpret the addition of *-s* to second person singular preterit forms as an analogical extension based on the most productive marking of second person singular.

According to the lexical diffusion model, this analogical change would affect the least frequent verbs first, due to their weaker representation in the mental lexicon of the speaker and their higher propensity to be analyzed and, as a consequence, be re-shaped on the basis of the most frequent pattern present in the Spanish verb paradigm. The results of the Varbrul analysis support this hypothesis, indicating that low frequency preterit forms are more likely to be regularized.

4.2. Following phonological context

The statistical analysis also reveals that a following vowel favors the addition of *-s* on second person singular preterit verb forms, whereas pre-consonantal and pre-pausal contexts disfavor the *-s* marked variant.

In order to determine whether frequency of the preterit form and following phonological contexts had an independent effect over the addition of *-s* to second person singular preterits, crosstabulations between the two factor groups were performed. The results in Table 5 indicate that following phonological context has a statistically significant effect over and above low frequency:

Table 5. Effect of following phonological context on –s marking on low frequency verb forms.

	V	Other
–s marked	34% (19)	16.5% (14)
Non –s marked	66% (37)	83.5% (71)

$\chi^2 = 5.74, p < 0.05, df = 1$

As we can observe, 34% of low-frequency verb forms followed by a vowel are marked with a non-standard –s, whereas only 16.5% of the forms that appear before a consonant or a pause present –s marking.

The effect of the following phonological context can be explained if we consider syllabification rules in Spanish. As opposed to other languages, such as English, in Spanish the universal CV tendency (Hualde, 1991a:482), according to which a consonant is always syllabified as the onset of a following vowel, applies across word boundaries. This phenomenon has been labeled as Resyllabification (Face 2002, Harris 1983, Hualde 1991b, 1991a) and is exemplified in (13) (Face, 2002:82):

- (13) [ka.lo.ɾ | in.so.poɾ.ta.βle] ‘unbearable heat’
 [klu. β | e.le.ɣan.te] ‘elegant club’
 [u.n | e. le.fan.te] ‘an elephant’
 [re.sul.ta.ðo.s | i.ɣwa.les] ‘same results’

Thus, in the resyllabification process, word-final consonants are always resyllabified as the onsets of a following word-initial vowel, rather than as the coda of the preceding vowel. Harris (1983:43) formulates the resyllabification rule as follows:

- (14) [+cons] → [+cons] / ____ # V
 | |
 R O

Face (2002:82) claims that resyllabification, together with the preference for complex onsets, “demonstrate that Spanish has a very strong preference for its consonants to be onsets rather than codas, even when they do not appear in the same morpheme, or even the same word.”

The preference in Spanish of onsets over codas explains why the addition of –s in second person singular preterit forms is favored by a following vowel and disfavored by any other context, as the Varbrul results indicate. The addition of a final –s on preconsonantal or prepausal contexts creates sequences in which –s is necessarily a coda (CVC.C or CVC.# respectively):

- (15) ¿**Vistes** lo que salió? (CREA)
 [bis.tes.lo.ke.sa.ljó]
 ‘Did you see what came out?’

- (16) Y ya te **preparastes**. (CREA)
 [i.ya.te.pre.pa.fas.tes]
 ‘And you already studied’

On the other hand, the addition of –s before a following word-initial vowel results in a CV.CV sequence, where –s is resyllabified as the onset of the following word-initial vowel, complying with the preferred syllable structure in Spanish:

- (17) te **quedastes** adentro (CREA)
[te.ke.ðas.te.sa.ðen.tro]

4.3. Other factors

Even though no other factors were selected as significant in the multivariate analysis, it is important to address certain tendencies observed in the data. As we can see in Table 3 semantic or pragmatic factors do not constrain the variation under study since neither semantic class of the verb nor subject specificity were selected as significant in the statistical analysis. Instead, the motivating factors are lexical and phonological in nature. These results further corroborate the analogical nature of the addition of non-standard *-s* to second person singular preterits.

Despite not being selected as a significant factor, the tendency observed in the case of the presence of a pronominal subject goes contrary to the claims made by the functional compensation hypothesis, since the redundancy of the pronoun in the expression of second person does not disfavor the addition of final *-s*. Furthermore, the cases in which the pronoun is used tend to favor, though not significantly, the addition of *-s*. This behavior also points to the analogical nature of the process: the presence of the pronominal subject serves as a reminder that a marker of second person singular is necessary, thus leading to the addition of analogical *-s*.

Due to the lack of representation of some regional varieties and the heterogeneity of the categories used for this study, further research using smaller dialectal divisions should be conducted in order to examine the favoring trend observed in the “other” category.

5. Conclusion

This paper presents a variationist analysis of the linguistic constraints that motivate the addition of a non-standard *-s* on second person singular preterit verb forms in Spanish, providing quantitative evidence that the choice of the *-s* marked variant is not random. The fact that there are linguistic constraints that motivate the choice of one variant over the other strongly suggests that previous dialectological descriptions are not sufficient to accurately describe the distribution of the two variants. Consideration of more spoken data with a wider variety of styles and registers would be necessary to further corroborate the results of this study. Recording interviews or conversations between two or more informants that belong to the same network of friends and/or family could possibly allow us to obtain more second person singular preterits.

The multivariate statistical analysis revealed that the frequency of the preterit form and the following phonological context are the significant factor groups that constrain the variation. The fact that the addition of *-s* is favored by low-frequency words and disfavored by high-frequency items points to the analogical nature of the variation, confirming the claims made by Penny (2002) about the possible origin of the *-s* marked variant. Furthermore, this study offers empirical evidence in support of the lexical diffusion model, according to which frequency of use affects the mental representation of lexical items and determines the direction of phonological and morphological changes. Finally, the significance of the following phonological context is in accordance with the preference for CV sequences across word boundaries in Spanish. We can characterize the addition of *-s* on second person singular preterits as an analogically motivated process that is favored by certain phonological factors. It is interesting to note that in the cases in which the addition of *-s* takes place, the analogical process overrides the general phonological tendency of weakening that affects word-final segments and that, according to the lexical diffusion model, is more likely to occur in high-frequency words first. Despite the tendencies with regard to frequency observed in the results, we do not have evidence to conclude whether the addition of *-s* in second person singular preterits is a change in progress or what the direction of that change could be.

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