THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

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The loss of referential null subjects in Russian: what subordinate clauses can tell us

1)

Old Russian:

Попше-л-ъ ес-мъ за мор-е индъйск-ое
poshē-l-ъ jes-mi za mor-e indrijsk-oje
go-PTCP-M.SG be.PRS-1SG beyond sea-N.LOC Indian-N.LOC

Modern translation (1999):

Попшёл я за мор-е Индийск-ое
Poshē-l-о ja za mor-e Indijsk-oje
go-PST-M.SG I beyond sea-N.LOC Indian-N.LOC

‘I have gone beyond the Indian sea’

(extract from “A journey beyond the three seas” by Afanasy Nikitin, XV)
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- (Meyer 2011: 123)
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• (Meyer 2011: 124)
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BG1</td>
<td>Sample of birch-bark letters</td>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;-late 13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>PVL</td>
<td><em>Povest’ vremennyh let</em></td>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BG2</td>
<td>Sample of birch-bark letters</td>
<td>early 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;-15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CC1</td>
<td>Sample of court charters</td>
<td>early 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;-2nd half 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CZT</td>
<td><em>Choždenie za tri morija Afanasija Nikitina</em></td>
<td>second half of the 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>VZP</td>
<td><em>Povest’ o pskovskom vzjatii</em></td>
<td>early 16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>POS</td>
<td><em>Perepiska Andreja Kurbskogo s Ivanom Groznym</em></td>
<td>second half of the 16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>CC2</td>
<td>Sample of court charters</td>
<td>17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>AVV</td>
<td><em>Žitie Protopopa Avvakuma</em></td>
<td>second half of the 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>FSK</td>
<td><em>Povest’ o Frole Skobeeve</em></td>
<td>18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Corpus – (Claudi 2014)
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• (Claudi 2014: 151)
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• (Claudi 2014: 156)
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• (Claudi 2014: 158)
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Past (perfect without auxiliary) (Kibrik 2013)

1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person: overt pronouns
3<sup>rd</sup> person: null pronoun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Early OR (12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;-17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; c.)</th>
<th>Middle-Late</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>MR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; person</td>
<td>jesmǐ dalǔ</td>
<td>ja dalǔ</td>
<td>ja dal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; person</td>
<td>dalǔ</td>
<td>dalǔ</td>
<td>on dal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ In OR at the initial stage there are no weak forms of nominative third person pronouns. Overt pronouns are demonstratives (prosodically strong forms)
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2)
OR. CC1
A vy, pečerëne, sloušaite ego i čtite.

CONJ 2PL.NOM P.:VOC.PL listen:IMP.2PL 3SG.M.ACC CONJ read:IMP.2PL
a ŏn vas bljudet.

CONJ 3SG.M.NOM 2PL.NOM look.after:FUT.3SG

‘And you, Pečerjans, listen to him and read, and he will look after you.’

• (on demonstrative, cf. a contrastive particle)
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This is probably the most plausible way of viewing the effect of impoverishment: Among the available preterite forms, the bare, impoverished one is chosen. The extent to which this happens supposedly influences the availability of pro-drop in the grammar as a whole. It is of secondary importance, what amount of all verb forms gets inflectionally impoverished, because this number depends on the amount of preterite vs. Present tenses, a specific textual feature outside grammar proper (Meyer 2011: 127)

... the increasing frequency of the 3rd person subject pronoun in the perfect led to a structural change in the referential system of OR, i.e. to onǔ being reanalyzed as semi-obligatory, and ... this is most visible in subordinate clauses introduced by čto and čtoby. The new status of onǔ also surfaces diachronically in the present/future tense ... the present ... introduced it after the new status of onǔ was consolidated. (Claudi 2014: 160)
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• čto and čtoby are more recent subordinate conjunctions
• They have replaced other earlier conjunctions and constructions

Old Russian texts:

• Jako – in knižnyj style (for this reason it is not found in birchbarks)
• In other kind of texts: Čto, aže, ože
The history of Russian shows a restriction in the use of *jako* and an increasing use of *čto* in argument clauses.

3) OR.PVL (11th century):

I *jako* poslaša bolgare věstě kǔ cesarju,
AND CONJ AOR.3PL bulgarian:NOM.PL news:ACC.SG to Tsar:dat
*jako* idutĭ Rusĭ na Cesarĭgrad (...).
CONJ go:PRS.3PL Russian:NOM.PL towards Tsargrad:ACC
‘And the Bulgarians sent the news to the Tsar, that the Russians were going towards Tsargrad (...).’
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The origin of čto is linked to the change in the semantics and in grammatical function of the relative pronoun čto (Borkovskij 1979: 119). In more recent texts, jako and čto can coexist, but they are used in different contexts (Borkovskij: 124)

4) OR:BG1
600 (1220-1240)
[(...) se poslali dva mouža chotyněné k (...)]
pro tu těžju pro reku pro čto to poslale
for DEM.ACC lawsuit:ACC for river:ACC because.of which dem:ACC send:PTCP.M.SG
negane ô knězę i ô tebe.
N.:NOM from prince:GEN.SG and from 2SG.GEN
‘People from the river Chotynka sent two men (to you) for the lawsuit of the river through which Negan sent (a man) in your name and in the name of the Prince.’
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čtoby replaced Old Russian da and daby (XIV century), as well as the infinitive construction with dative subject.

In Old Russian texts: da, daby

5) OR. PVL (11th century)

Počaša grěći mira prositi, daby ne

begin:AOR.3PL Greek:NOM.PL peace:GEN.SG ask:INF CONJ NEG
voevalũ grěčikoj zemli.

fight:PTCP.PST.M.SG Greek:GEN.F.SG country:GEN.SG

‘The Greek began to ask for peace, so that he would not wage war on the Greek country.’

6) Example from Madariaga (2015: 23)

Вођь že ne xotja [ni edinomu pogybnuti]. (OR: Pechersk Patericon, 79)

God part. not wanted not one.DT die.INFIN

‘God did not want for none of them to be destroyed.’
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7)
BG2 102 (1340-1360)

(...)Starosta Aleksandrova pogosta bějetě celomě sto by
Starosta:NOM.SG Aleksandrov:GEN village:GEN beat:PRS.3SG forehead:INSTR conj conj
jesi gospodine okupile ichů i slovo položile
be:PRS.2SG lord:VOC ransom:PTCP.PST 3PL.ACC conj word:ACC.SG put:PTCP.PST.SG
so mnoju
with 1SG.INST
‘The Starosta of the village of Aleksandrov begs (you), o lord, to ransom them and to agree with me’
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8) OR. CC1 (Early 14th–2nd half 15th century) [I souđija vůsprosil černiča Semena:] Komou ž to vědomo, who:DAT.M.SG PTC DEM.NOM.N.SG known:NOM.N.SG čto ty pašešů těe zemli? CONJ 2SG.NOM plough:PRS.2SG DEM.ACC.F.PL land:ACC.PL

‘And the judge asked the černic Semën: who is aware of the fact that you plough those lands?’

9) OR.CC1 (Early 14th–2nd half 15th century) [I ty, gospodine, boga radi, pokaži k nim svoju ljuboví i žalovanje,] čtoby ne pogibli v zabluženii v tatarskich stranach, CONJ NEG die:PTCP.PST.PL in mistake:LOC.SG in of.tatar:LOC.PL land:LOC.PL da tamo by ne skončalisř CONJ there CONJ NEG die:PTCP.PST.PL

‘[And you, oh lord, for God’s sake, show them your love and compassion,] so that (they) do not die in sin in Tatar lands, so that they do not die there.’
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10) OR. POS (2nd half of the 16th century)
[Mnogo otpuščeno vsjakichŭ ljudej: sprosja ichũ, uvedaj.]
A pisal sebĕ v dosadu,
CONJ write:PTCP.PST.M.SG REF.L.DAT.SG in disappointment:ACC.SG
čto my tebja v dal’nikonyja grady [...] posylali.
CONJ 1PL.NOM 2SG.ACC to far.by.horse:ACC.PL town:ACC.PL send:PTCP.PST.PL
‘[A lot of men have been released: ask them, and you will know.] But you wrote to us in disappointment that we have sent you to distant towns.’

11) OR. CC2 (17th century)
[Kŭ sej zapisi Ugleča goroda popŭ Stefan vmĕsto uglečanina Semena Ivanova syna Golosova po evo velĕniju ruku priložil,]
čto onŭ promĕnilŭ svoju pomĕsnuju
CONJ 3SG.M.NOM exchange:PTCP.M.SG POSS.REFL.ACC.F.SG manorial:ACC.F.SG
pustoši
lot:ACC.SG
‘[This record of the town of Ugleč pope Stefan wrote with his own hand on behalf of the Uglečanin Semën Ivanov son of Golosov,] because he exchanged his own manorial lot.’
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12) OR.AVV (2nd half of the 17th century)
Vidjat one, čto ja ne soedinjajusja s nimi, prikazal
see:prs.3pl 3pl.nom conj 1sg.nom neg join:prs.1sg with 3pl.instr order:ptcp.pst.sg.m
gosudarï ugoverivatï menja Rodionu Strešnevï, čtoby ja
lord:nom persuade:inf 1sg.acc r.:dat s.:dat conj 1sg.nom
molčal.
keep.silent:ptcp.pst.sg.m

‘They see that I do not join them, the lord ordered Rodion Stresnëv to persuade me to keep silent.’

13) OR. AVV (2nd half of the 17th century)
Skaži otcu, čtoby on pravilo poprežnemu pravil.
tell:imp.2sg father:dat.sg conj 3sg.m.nom justly as.before rule:ptcp.pst.m.sg
‘Ask your father to rule justly, as he did before.’
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14)
OR.FSK (18th century)

I skazal emu, čtob zavtrešnej denič
CONJ say:PTCP.PST.3SG.M 3SG.M.DAT conj of.tomorrow:ACC.SG day:ACC.SG
prišel v Uspenskoj sobor.
come:PTCP.PST.SG.M to of.dormition:ACC cathedral:ACC.SG
‘And he told him to go to the Dormition cathedral the following day.’

15)
OR.FSK (18th century)

Podi skaži toj mamke, čto ty budešu,
Go:IMP.2SG say:IMP.2SG DEM.DAT.F.SG wet-nurse:DAT.SG conj 2SG.NOM be:FUT.2SG
ne odna [nekotorogo dvorjanina z dočeriju, deviceju]
NEG alone:F.SG
‘Go, say, to the wetnurse that you will not be alone[with a girl, the daughter of a certain noble].’
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16)
OR. FSK (18th century)
[I Frol Skobeev podošel k mamke, i otdal ej poklon, i prosil eja,]
čtob ona obužavila ob nem Annuške.

‘[And Frol Skobeev came closer to [Annuška’s] mother, and bowed down to her, and asked her to tell Annuška about him.’
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The occurrences of čtoby in the second and third time spans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BG2</th>
<th>CC1</th>
<th>CZT</th>
<th>VZP</th>
<th>POS</th>
<th>CC2</th>
<th>AVV</th>
<th>FSK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Čtoby pron</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Čtoby without pron</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other subjects</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Null subjects in Early Germanic languages

The syntactic distribution of null subjects in the earlier OHG prose texts is characterized by an asymmetry between main and subordinate clauses. Referential null subjects are almost exclusively attested in root sentences, more precisely in sentences with verb movement. (Axel 2007: 307)

In the older OHG prose texts a person split can clearly be observed ... Referential null subjects are attested in all persons and numbers. However, ... it is only in the third person singular and plural that the null variant is used more frequently than the overt one. (Axel 2007: 314)
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17) **uuordan uuardh chihoric untazs zi dode** (I 230)

*became became obedient until to death*

“he became obedient until death”

*effectus est oboediens usque ad mortem*

(Axel 307, main clause, OHG null subject, Lat. Null subject)

18) **Enti [so aer · danan fuor] · ququam in iro · dhinchūs ...**

*and when he thence went came to their synagogue*

“When he had departed from there, he went into their synagogue ...”

*{Et cum inde transisset, uenit in synagogam eorum ...}* (MF IV, 19; Mt 12:9)

(Axel 309, subordintae clause, OHG overt subject, Lat. Null subject)
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>clause type</th>
<th>Isidor</th>
<th>Monsee Fragments</th>
<th>Tatian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pronoun subject</td>
<td>pronoun subject</td>
<td>pronoun subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>overt</td>
<td>null</td>
<td>overt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>main</td>
<td>61 (56%)</td>
<td>48 (44%)</td>
<td>48 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>84 (64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1434 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>960 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subordinate</td>
<td>85 (91%)</td>
<td>8 (9%)</td>
<td>73 (85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1180 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>95 (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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How did weak overt subjects come about in Germanic?

Siewierska (2004:272) states that subject pronouns “came to be used obligatorily to avoid declarative sentences with initial verbs”.

Barbosa (1995:180) proposes that there is a general connection between XP–V–S-order and the possibility of subject drop. She presents cross-linguistic evidence from modern Italian and from the historical stages of various Romance and Germanic languages, where null subjects only occur in post-finite environments.

(Axel 2007: 314)
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Old English
In all of the texts that robustly exhibit referential null subjects, including Beowulf, null variants are more common in main clauses than in subordinate clauses. The effect of clause type in Beowulf (main vs. subordinate), for instance, is clearly significant ($p < .0001$).
(Walkden 2013: 163)

Percentage of null subject sentences in the whole corpus:

- Main clauses: 3.3%
- Subordinate clauses: 1%

(cf. Rusten 2015)
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- Old Swedish (Håkansson2013)

Table 2. The overall distribution of overt and covert referential subjects in Old Swedish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clauses with overt subjects</th>
<th>Clauses with covert subjects</th>
<th>Σ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,061</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. The distribution of overt and covert referential subjects in main clauses vs. subordinate clauses in Old Swedish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clause type</th>
<th>W/ overt subjects</th>
<th>W/ covert subjects</th>
<th>% w/ covert subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main clauses</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate clauses</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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• The loss of null referential subjects in Swedish can be regarded as an example of syntactic grammaticalization, in the sense that a phenomenon previously controlled by non-syntactic factors has been incorporated in the syntactic structure.
• Falk (1993), is that the distinction between main and subordinate clauses was less well-developed in Early than in Late Old Swedish.
• Subordinate clauses don’t have an adequate topic position. In non-pro-drop languages, in the case of non-finite subordinate clauses, there is no other option than having movement of the subject to the main clause (rendering an obligatorily controlled NS), but in the case of the finite subordinate clauses, there is the option of having an overt weak pronoun, which is the preferred option for economic reasons, and in fact, the more frequent option. (Madariaga p.c.)
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- We have demonstrated that emphatic R[oot] T[ransformation]s apply in assertions, but not in presupposed clauses and questions, and we have suggested that this is because it is inappropriate in language to emphasize backgrounded or information-seeking material (Hooper & Thompson 1973: 496)

- Subordinate clauses contain backgrounded information that is much less likely to be subject to topicalization, contrast and presentative focus; such manipulations are more appropriate and more commonly occur in main clauses. ... Subordinate clauses are constructions that are processed in relatively large chunks, which makes their constituents less independent and not so likely to change. (Bybee 2001: 2)
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OV subordinate clauses in the history of German

19) OHG

a. /... Inti thie thár hab&un diuual/ (T 133,1)
   and who PARTCL had-PL devil
   “and those who were possessed with the devil”
   /... & qui demonia habeabant./

b. /thaz in mir habet sibba/ (T 591,8)
   that in me have peace
   “that in me you might have peace”
   /ut In me pacem habeatis/

20) ModHG

a. ... die der Teufel besass

b. ... daß ihr in mir Friede habt
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• Both fixed WO in German and overt weak subjects in Germanic languages and in OR can be conceived as instances of syntactic grammaticalization → a pattern which could be discourse motivated becomes an obligatory feature in a certain syntactic environment.

• Reanalysis is followed by actualization (Timberlake 1977:157) "the change will be actualized earlier for terms in the hierarchy which are unmarked, or more natural, contexts for the change and later for terms which are marked, or less natural, contexts for the change."

→ Why are subordinate clauses a more natural context for obligatory subjects?
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Properties of subordinate vs. main clauses

• Main clauses are asserted
• Subordinate clauses are mostly presupposed
  • Semantic notion of presupposition: The presupposed part of a sentence is that part of the sentence that must be true in order for the rest of the sentence (the asserted part) to be either true or false (McCawley 1981: 326–30).
  • Pragmatic definition: Lambrecht (1994: 51–65), what the hearer is expected to know or take for granted as a result of hearing the sentence uttered. Asymmetrical cognitive relation between SoAs, such that one SoA imposes its own profile over the whole sentence, while the other SoA lacks an autonomous profile. →
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• In general, subordinate clauses do not allow topicalization. They don’t have an autonomous profile, and their information structure allows for less complexity than the information structure of main clauses.

• Once weak subject pronouns have been reanalyzed as obligatory, sentences that have no special information status favor their occurrence.

• This tendency is especially clear in čto and čtoby clauses which had recently been introduced, and is possibly reinforced by the high frequency of past tense forms (clauses with čtoby always contain past tense forms)
Subordinate clauses are not more conservative, but rather less flexible with respect to main clauses. Changes that bring about a more rigid structure are favored by the information structure of subordinate clauses: as the SoA encoded in a subordinate clause lacks an independent profile, constituents of subordinate clauses are less independent. When a new, pragmatically unmarked feature comes about, it is adopted more readily in subordinate clauses.
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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!
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