Language Hegemony and Translation of Product Labels in Iranian Industrial Context

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Abstract

The present study investigates the impact of English language hegemony on the different industries in Iranian context. A sample of eighty food, health, and beauty products was selected to examine the prevalence of English on product labels. Data were collected on label content, including legal requirements of labeling, statements, claims, and nutritional information, both in Persian and their corresponding English translations. Statistical analysis revealed that although both producers and consumers of these products were Persian speakers and there was no legal requirement to translate the labels, approximately 75 percent of the labels featured English translations. This finding suggests that translation serves as a linguistic tool that reinforces language hegemony within the industry. Despite the absence of legal mandates, English operates as a symbolic tool, potentially enhancing product appeal through its association with success and high quality. This study contributes to understanding industrial contexts by illuminating the complex interplay between language, power, and commerce. Additionally, it highlights the need for further examination of the socio-cultural implications of English language hegemony in non-Anglophone countries, offering valuable insights for policymakers, industry professionals, and scholars in translation studies and cultural studies.

Keywords: language Hegemony, Industry, Label Translation, Linguistic Imperialism

Introduction

Based on the statistics published in Statista, 1.5 billion people speak English around the world. Many scholars consider English one of the most important languages globally (Baugh and Cable, 2002). The strong power of the British Empire, and its efforts to force local people to speak English, are considered the starting point for spreading the English language. Even after the decline of the British Empire, the United States assumed a significant role in disseminating English worldwide through technological developments and Hollywood productions (Khaiyali & Akasha, 2018, pp. 153–155). To put it in a nutshell, Al Khaiyali and Akasha (2018) identify eight key factors behind the dominance of English over the world: 1. English Empire 2. Media 3. Internet 4. Computer technology 5. Education and immigration 6. Multinational companies 7. Political hegemony 8. Military power. Moreover, Crystal (2003, p. 7) highlights economic, technological, and cultural power as drivers for a language achieving global status, emphasizing "the power of its people – especially their political and military power" (Crystal, 2003, p. 9).

The English language holds an undeniable position of power in today's globalized world. The hegemonic power of the English language inevitably influences the political, cultural, and economic aspects of various nations. The influence is significant because of the substantial economic power of English-speaking countries such as England and America. Antonio Gramsci (1971) coined the term hegemony, emphasizing that the most powerful country in international relations defines hegemony. He (1971) emphasized that military and economic strength are crucial aspects of hegemony, but his theory goes beyond brute force. Gramsci (1971) further emphasizes the importance of consent alongside power and force. Consent can play a pivotal role in persuading peripheral countries to, for example, change their beliefs or adopt the hegemon's language as the most prestigious one. Building on this idea, Nye (2004) introduced the concept of "soft power", which refers to a country's ability to attract others through its values, culture, policies, institutions, economy, and industry.

The Many Faces of Hegemony

Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony was further explored by scholars like Pahre (2005). He identified different sources of power within hegemony. Based on his classification, the first kind of power consists of an "overt form of influence", i.e. permutation, cooperation, and coercion. The second type relates to changes in preferences driven by Americanization and globalization. Finally, the third kind is "ideological" power, which aligns with Gramsci's notion of hegemony achieved through cultural dominance.

Following Pahre's (2005) study which explained the relationship between hegemony and power, Antoniades (2008) adopts a new perspective and studies hegemony as a movement of power, the power that can be external or internal. He suggests four different movements of power to illustrate the origin and target of the power. 1) Outside-out: "The existence and reproduction of the hegemon/the hegemonic power are based on its ability to maintain its primacy and superiority mainly in terms of material capabilities". 2) Outside-in: hegemony is about "consent, shared values, preferences, and beliefs, in one word, about identity". 3) Inside-out: "Hegemony is achieved through the enforcement of a new commonsense within the sphere of influence or rule of the hegemon". 4) Inside-in: "Hegemony is conceptualized as a diffused and decentered apparatus of power that governs human life from its interior" (Antoniades, 2008, pp. 8–10). Building on this typology, Antoniades (2008, p. 11) mentions four different dimensions of hegemony: "hegemony as the production of *coercion*, the production of *consent*, the production of *attraction* and the production of *life*".

The Reach of Hegemony: From Education to Indigenous Languages and Social Media

Some studies have been conducted to examine the hegemonic power of the English language in different aspects, including culture, identity, education, and economy: Regarding the influence of the hegemonic power of English on education, Crystal (2003, p. 50) illustrates that in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific region, "English had come to be established throughout the region". In many Asian countries, English is either a compulsory subject in schools or is taught in separate English institutions. As Chowdhury and Kabir (2014, p. 1) maintain, Asian countries have been concerned that "incompetency in the English language may result in keeping them lagged in taking economic advantages from the momentum generated by globalization, of which English is arguably a major driving force". Yoo and Namkung (2012) studied the impact of American linguistic hegemony on the Korean education system and its impact on job status. They examined the relationship between American linguistic hegemony and the Educational Testing Service (ETS). Yoo and Namkung (2012, p. 249) concluded that "English functions not only as a gatekeeper to positions of prestige in Korean society but as a dominant international language".

The effect of the hegemonic power of the English language has also been studied on minority and indigenous languages. Because of the economic power of English-speaking countries, the impact of English on indigenous languages is considerable. As Crystal (2003, p. 15) points out, considering English a global language may even cause the "disappearance of minority languages". As a case study, Anyanwu, Okecha, and Omo-Ojugo (2013), examined the impact of English hegemony on the indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria and how these minority languages are threatened by English. They proposed two methods to maintain indigenous languages: the application of diglossia, and linguistic localism. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (2022) employ a critical analysis approach to examine the dominance of English and its consequences. They engage with language policies, linguistic imperialism, and the concept of linguicism to address linguistic inequality. They argue that the myth of English being a "global" language is deceitful and results in linguistic and cultural genocide. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (2022) also highlight the limitations faced by scholars who only function in English and explore successful language policy challenges and endeavors in academia and education, including the learning of additional languages like English.

As another aspect, the effect of the hegemonic power of English was examined by Shanta (2017) on the national language of a country in social media. Shanta (2017) studied the changing trends of language in Bangladesh, including "code-switching", "violation of the standard form of Bangla", and "use of English accent in pronouncing Bangla". These changes were mainly caused by the widespread usage of electronic media such as Facebook. He concluded that "a nation-wide awareness program" is needed to tackle the possible future drawbacks of the English language on the national language.

The Double-Edged Sword: Benefits and Concerns

While English proficiency offers economic advantages and access to jobs and resources (Monzó, 2020), its dominance raises concerns about cultural and linguistic homogenization. As Monzó (2020) highlights, the growing demand for English worldwide, with nations making it a national project and mandating English education, can be seen as linguistic imperialism. She discusses the cases of Portugal and Poland, where the pursuit of English proficiency has raised concerns about the potential loss of national identity and its impact on individuals and societies. She (2020) asserts that learning English is seen as a way to boost a nation's competitive edge on the global market and elevate its status and power. English proficiency has been linked to better economies, providing individuals with greater access to jobs and resources. Overall, Monzó (2020) suggests that while English proficiency

may offer economic advantages, it is important to consider the potential consequences of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Scholars like Tsuda (2014) have problematized the dominance of English, associating it with neocolonialism and globalism. The hegemony of English perpetuates linguistic and communicative inequality, linguistic discrimination, and colonization of consciousness. The domination of English in international mass communication leads to Anglo-Americanization, transnationalization, and commercialization of contemporary life. Tsuda (2014) also proposes the Ecology of Language Paradigm as a counterstrategy, emphasizing the right to language, equality in communication, and the importance of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Regarding the impact of using English language on industry, rare studies have been conducted in Iran. As an instance, the impact of English in Persian advertisements in Iran on Iranian target groups' perceptions and purchase intentions was examined by Jalilfar and Shokrollahi (2015). They interviewed 180 participants to assess their reactions to advertisemtns containing English texts. Their study confirmed existing literature suggesting that using English in international advertising enhances the brand's prestige and symbolizes positive attributes. Their findings emphasize the relevance of incorporating English in advertisements to create a desirable impact on Iranian consumers, aligning with the globalization of business and marketing practices. Following studies that have examined the impacts of the power of the English language on different aspects, the present research aims at investigating the possible effects of the English language on Iran's industry.

Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony and Joseph Nye's (2004) concept of soft power this research seeks to address the following question:

What are the possible hegemonic effects of the English language on Iran's industry?

Antonio Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony and Joseph Nye's (2004) concept of soft power are used to analyze how the hegemonic power of English is maintained through consent, shared values, and attraction, rather than overt coercion. The incorporation of English translations on product labels could be seen as a manifestation of soft power and hegemonic influence.

Methodology

To investigate the hegemonic effects of English on the Iranian industry, eighty food, health, and beauty products were selected. These products were purchased from hypermarkets in Tehran, the capital of Iran, without considering the brand name. The Label of a product is the first thing that a customer encounters. Research conducted by Mirghotbi, Bazhan, and Amiri (1391) on 2123 Iranian customers indicates that over 80% of participants read labels while shopping and use the information to decide on a purchase. Similarly, studies carried out by Wang, Fletcher, and Carley (1995), Guthrie, Fox, Cleveland, and Welsh (1995), Levy and Fein (1998), and Lubman, Doak, and Jasti (2012) also confirm the importance of food labels among customers, who use them to compare products. Therefore, the labels of 80 food and health and beauty products were collected to extract the information presented on them.

The examined products are listed below:

- Cakes and biscuits: Minoo Wafer, Naderi cookie, Didaniha two-layer cake, Naderi cookie with raisins, Shirin Asal Tea Time cookie, Sisi caramel cake, Ekbatan Novin cake, Narbon wafer, Dorni cake, Salemin biscuit, Rangarang wafer, Ashena keep cake, Chee puff cookies, Minoo cookie, Dorna FunCake, Dorna burger

- Dairy products: Pegah Cheese, Pakban Milk, Choopan milk, Sabah lactic cheese, Damdaran milk, Domino milk, Domino ice cream, Mihan Ice cream, Pak milk, Damdaran yogurt

- Noodles: NC pottage macaroni, Bozorgmeher pottage macaroni, Tak Macaron spaghetti, Adl rice macaroni, Pirooz pottage macaroni

- Chocolates: Farman Deragee, Eleman candy, Shiba jelly gum, Sina Gaz, Aidin chocolate

- Snacks: Jaragheh puffed wheat, Chee.Toz popcorn, Shirin Asal cracker

- Sauces: Dehkadeh Khoram Liquid Kashk, Sahar ketchup, 1 & 1 ketchup, Somayeh Kashk, Mahram mayonnaise, Tabarok mayonnaise

- Beverages: Damavand Mineral Water, Landa carbonated drink, Bisheh mineral water, Zamzam mineral water, Sunich orange syrup, Hoffenberg malt beverage, Aquafina drinking water

- Beauty and health products: Pooneh toothpaste, oven cleaner Rafooneh, carpet shampoo Bath, fabric softener Softlan, Persil power gel, glass cleaner Active, glass cleaner Rafooneh, all-purpose cleaner Fedisheh, surface cleaner Attack, Active bleach, Firooz shampoo, Cinere shampoo, Sehet body wash, Latifeh shampoo, My cream, Firooz soap, Golrang hand washing liquid, Goldnet toothpaste, ABC toothpaste, Nasim toothpaste

- Miscellaneous: Amoon bread crumbs, Sayan cardamom, Farmand jelly powder, Famila olive, Roshd white flour, Nanavaran bread, Abshan honey, Zamani vinegar

According to the general specifications that are published by the Iran Food and Drug Administration, some legal requirements are mandatory for labeling products in Iran. According to the 4th paragraph of the General Standards for the Labeling of Foods, Dietary-nutrition and Sports Supplements published by Iran Food and Drug Administration (2011, pp. 1–11), the following items are mandatory on product labels: 1. Statement of identity: product's name and brand name 2. Net quantity of contents 3. Permit number 4. Date of manufacture and use-by date 5. Designation of ingredients 6. The name and address of the manufacturer and packer 7. Made in Iran 8. Batch number including lot identification 9. Permit number 10. Storage condition 11. Instruction for use where applicable. The 5th paragraph of these regulations mandates the following descriptive statements on labels: fresh, frozen, natural, dried, organic, enriched foods; cautions, and special dietary usage. The 7th paragraph specifies the following claims that must be included: general claims, nutrition claims, and health claims. Finally, Nutrition information was added according to the 8th paragraph. It is worth mentioning that for health and beauty products according to Article 11 of the health and beauty products' regulation published by the Iran Food and Drug Administration (2004, p. 61), many of the items on health, and beauty product labels are the same as food products. These mandatory requirements must be written in Persian. According to Article 11 of the regulations for food, beverages, health, and beauty products published by the Iran Food and Drug Administration (2013, p. 34), labels only need to be translated if the product is intended for export. If the exported products are returned to the country under special circumstances, they cannot be sold in Iran unless Persian labels are attached. Therefore, all the products that are intended to be distributed in Iran's market must have Persian labels, and translating the content on the product labels is not mandatory.

Based on the list, all product labels were analyzed to extract the information. Although it was not mandatory to translate the information on the product labels, many manufacturers included English translations on the labels. Therefore, a list of previously mentioned requirements, statements,

claims, and nutrition information was compiled in Persian. Additionally, any corresponding English translations (if present) were collected.

To analyze the data collected from the product labels, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was employed. The quantitative analysis focused on the numerical representation of the data, while the qualitative analysis delved into the underlying meanings and implications.

Frequency analysis was used to calculate the frequency and percentage of labels featuring English translations for each category of information (requirements, statements, claims, and nutrition information). This provided an overview of the prevalence of English translations across different label sections. By comparative analysis, the frequency of English translations across different product categories (e.g., food, health, and beauty products) was compared. Then the results were analyzed qualitatively based on Antoniades's (2008) redefined model of hegemony and power to shed light on the potential role of English as a signifier of modernity and prestige.

Results and Discussion

After Extracting all the features from the labels (requirements, statements, claims, and nutrition information), the data was tabulated. Table 1 presents the results for both the information in Persian and its corresponding English translations.

Table 1. Information Presented on the Labels in Both Persian and English

General Features	Special Features	No of labels in Persian	No of labels in English	Percentage of the translated labels	Total percentage of the translated labels
Requirements	Name	75	73	91%	74%
	Brand Name	75	79	99%	
	Date of manufacture and use-by date	79	34	34%	
	Designation of ingredients	73	57	71%	
	Net quantity of contents	70	63	79%	
	Lot identification	80	80	100%	
	Health cert. No.	78	34	43%	
	The name of the manufacturer and packer	76	60	75%	
	address of the manufacturer and packer	79	48	60%	
	Made in Iran	71	45	56%	
	Storage condition	78	56	70%	
	Instruction for use	24	7	27%	
Statements	Descriptive statements (fresh, frozen, natural, etc.)	8	7	88%	69%
	Cautions (energy drinks, etc.)	5	2	2%	
	special dietary usage	0	0	0	
Claims	General claims (under license, No preservative)	38	33	87%	80%
	Nutrition claims (claims about calories, sugar, salt, etc.)	7	3	43%	
	Health claims	1	1	100%	
Nutrition Information	Nutrition information (energy, protein, carbohydrate, fat, saturated fat, etc.)	39	32	82%	82%

The information in Table 1 details the presence of translated labels on Iranian products, where such translations are optional according to Iranian Food and Drug Administration (IFDA) regulations. The table breaks down the data by information category and the presence or absence of an English translation.

Looking at the "General Features" section, 74% of the labels included English translations for general information, while 99% had their brand names translated. Data on other general features like date of manufacture and use-by date (34%), designation of ingredients (71%), and net quantity of contents (79%) were all translated into English at least somewhat frequently. Notably, 100% of the labels included English translations for lot identification, the only category within "General Features" to have a perfect translation rate. Forty-three percent of the labels had English translations for health certificate numbers. Information on the name and address of the manufacturer and packer was translated on 75% and 60% of the labels respectively. Interestingly, only 56% of labels included English translations for "Made in Iran". Storage condition information was translated on 70% of the labels, while instructions for use were only translated on a small minority (27%).

Moving to the "Statement" section, descriptive statements like "fresh", "frozen", or "natural" were translated on a much higher percentage (88%) of labels. Cautionary statements (such as those found on energy drinks) were translated on only 2% of the labels, while no labels included English translations for special dietary usage information. General claims (like "under license" or "no preservatives") were translated on a substantial 87% of the labels. Finally, of the translated information related to claims, nutritional claims (like those for calories, sugar, or salt) were included on 43% of the labels.

The data are summarized in the following chart to illustrate the percentage of translated data on the labels.
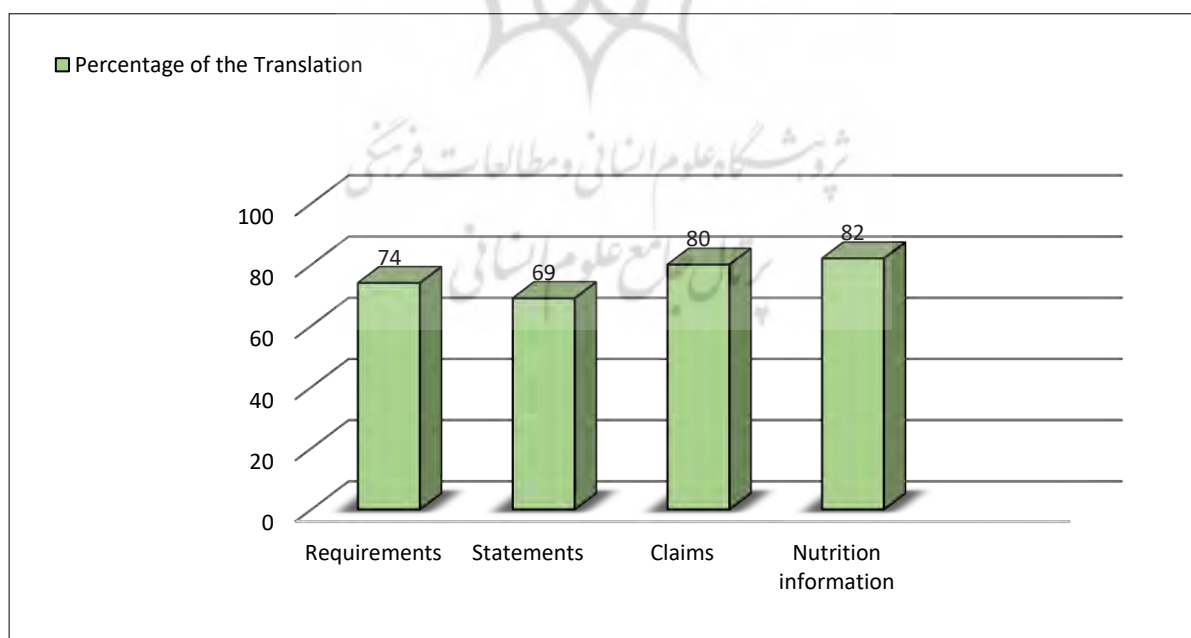

Figure 1. Percentage of Translated Data on Labels

Based on the bar chart in Figure 1, the percentage of translated data is highest for nutrition information, at 82%. Claims and requirements are the next highest categories, at 80% and 74% translated respectively. Statements are the least translated category, at only 69% translated. Considering the fact that the manufacturers were not obliged to translate the information on the labels, the result exceeded the expectations. As Shanta (2017, p. 35) illustrates, "Knowledge of English was unrealistically perceived as a general panacea that can make people's lives better by enhancing their livelihood and standing in the community. Thus, English is deemed as a sign of social status and prestige". In the present study, the manufacturers used translation as a tool to achieve success and high social and economic status.

English translation of the sections on the labels did not directly correspond word-for-word with Persian labels, indicating that communication of information was not the primary function of the English labels. The fact that some necessary information on labels, such as expiration dates, was not translated further supports this claim and suggests that English language hegemony was the primary reason. Moreover, the translation errors (syntactic errors, typos, inadequate conversion of measures and dates, and inconsistency in translation of technical terms) illustrate the status of translation in industry and the lack of translation quality control. For instance, translating ویفر پرتقالی into wafer orange, پودر خردل into mustard powder, and نظرآباد کرج into town Nazar Abad were among the errors that happened while translating the Persian sections into English. These errors serve as evidence of the hegemony of English in Iran's food industry, suggesting they were not created to convey information accurately.

Antoniades's (2008) redefined model of hegemony and power, which includes the concept of consent, can be applied to the present study. Figure 2 shows the four-dimensional approach to hegemony presented by Antoniades (2008, pp. 8–12).

Figure 2. A four-dimensional Approach to Hegemony

The power of the hegemonic language (English, in this case) tries to "persuade the other members of the system about the appropriateness and desirability of its values and preferences and the legitimacy of its action" (Antoniades, 2008, p. 12). The outside-in power in which hegemony is about "consent, shared values, preferences, and beliefs, in one word, about identity" can be traced in the corpus and the hegemonic power of English on Iran's industry is clear. The power of language had a significant impact on the manufacturers' preferences, beliefs, and even identity. This explains the high percentage of data translated into English (around 75%, as shown earlier). Based on Antoniades's (2008) redefined model of hegemony and power, the values and preferences of the English language are used by manufacturers to present their products as more prestigious. Unlike Iran, where translating labels is used as a way to advertise and attract customers, FDA law in America forbids manufacturers from translating part of the information into a second language other than

English (Arai, 2002). According to the law implemented by the FDA, all the mandatory information to be printed in English on the food labels should be translated into another language in case the manufacturer wants bilingual labels. Therefore, manufacturers are not allowed to translate only part of the information written on the labels into the second language for advertising purposes (Arai, 2002). The data of the study's corpus revealed that some brand names had no information in Persian except for the product name. English in Asian countries such as China and Bangladesh is considered a "symbol of socio-intellectual eliticism", and "economic and social prestige" that controls the culture (Guo & Beckett, 2007; Shanta, 2017; Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014) and it seems it was proved by the findings of the present study. In line with the finding, Wiley (1996, p. 113) asserts that "linguistic hegemony is achieved when dominant groups create consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and usage as standard or paradigmatic." He continues to say that "those who fail to meet those standards […] view their failure as being the result of the inadequacy of their language." That can be the reason why some of the manufacturers preferred to present all the information on the labels in English. The present case exemplifies Nye's (2004) concept of soft power, where the dominance of the hegemonic identity and status is achieved not through coercion but through attraction and consent.

Conclusion

As has been argued by different scholars, there is a close relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995; Guo & Beckett, 2007; Hung Ng & Deng, 2017). The present study explored how the hegemonic power of the English language affects Iran's industry. According to the regulations of the Iran Food and Drug Administration (IFDA), translation of labels is optional for products designed for the Iranian national market. Despite this, as shown earlier, nearly 75% of all the information on the labels was translated into English. The dominance of English on the labels, even though translation is not required, aligns with the concept of hegemony, the power of a dominant group or culture to influence others, and in this case, English may be influencing the way Iranian manufacturers present their products. By including English translation, even if not mandatory, manufacturers might be hoping to enhance the marketability of their products. Manufacturers, by incorporating English translations, might be strategically targeting a wider audience or associating their products with a perception of international quality and prestige. Since the English language is known to be associated with "social status and financial security in various parts of the world," (Guo & Beckett, 2007, p. 121) the translation of labels can be seen as a strategic move. Campbell (2005) argues that the power dynamics inherent in translating must be considered, as translation involves not only transferring words but also power, given that the international figures available unambiguously indicate English as "the most central language in the international translation system" (Heilbron, 2014, pp. 433–434). The hegemonic power of the English language is also evident in Iranian consumer perception. Foreign products in Iran's national market, are often perceived as having higher quality and durability compared to Iranian-made goods. This perception can be attributed to the power dynamics between developed and developing nations. As Phillipson (1999, p. 40) argues, English, as a dominant language, carries the connotation of "success and hedonism." Therefore, when customers read part of the label in English, they will be tempted to buy the product. In this context, translation is not used in the simple act of transferring words from one language into another, but rather as an instrument to achieve hegemonic power.

Future research could investigate the motivations behind manufacturers' use of English translations. Additionally, studies exploring consumer behavior and the impact of translated information on purchasing decisions would provide valuable insights. By examining these factors, we can gain a more

nuanced understanding of the role of language in the global marketplace and its potential implications for both economic opportunity and consumer well-being.

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