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**CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK STRATEGIES IN TEACHING
ENGLISH IN SAUDI ARABIA: A PRELIMINARY STUDY**

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Abstract

This paper is a preliminary qualitative case study inquiry that aims to explore corrective feedback (CF) strategies that are implemented in teaching the English language in a Saudi context and how these strategies influence students' uptake. The literature indicates that oral corrective feedback has not been studied in a Saudi context from a qualitative case study perspective. This study analyzes the CF strategies that are used by teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) with a particular focus on the following strategies: recast, repetition, clarification request, explicit correction, elicitation and paralinguistic signal. This study will also explore how these strategies influence language students' uptake. A male and a female teachers of EFL participated in the study where one of them speaks English as his first language and the other speaks Arabic as her first language and English as her second language. The main tool of this study is audio recordings of language classrooms. Data analysis reveals that the EFL teachers implemented various CF strategies. Although recast was the most common CF strategy among the EFL teachers, some of the CF strategies were used by only one of the EFL teachers. The influence of the CF strategies on students' uptake varied. Further research needs to be conducted to find out whether similar findings would emerge or not.

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1. Introduction

The global spread and influence of the English language are increasing nowadays. This includes Saudi Arabia that treats the English language as a foreign language (EFL). Although the Arabic language is the main language of instruction in public schools, the main language of instruction in the fields of medicine and science at most Saudi universities is English. In order to ensure adequate preparation for the use of English as the means of instruction, Saudi universities introduced the preparatory year programs to bridge the gap between the levels of English studies that occur in public schools and level required for undergraduate education. These preparatory year programs mainly focus on teaching EFL to improve students' linguistic proficiency in it to be qualified for their undergraduate education.

One of the focuses in the teaching of EFL is corrective feedback. The literature shows that studies of corrective feedback (CF) strategies in the Saudi context focused on either written CF, EFL teachers' beliefs about the CF strategies that they use or students' perspective on CF strategies (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Alkhatib, 2015; Alhaysony, 2016; Alhazzani & Altalhab, 2018; Alkhamash & Gulnaz, 2019; Alwossabi, 2019; Rajab et al., 2016; Qutob & Madini, 2020). However, the literature does not indicate that the oral CF strategies that are actually used to teach EFL have been studied before in the Saudi context. Therefore, this preliminary study focuses on exploring oral CF strategies that are implemented by teachers in teaching EFL in the Saudi context and the influence of these strategies on students' uptake.

2. Problem Statement

Structural and communicative approaches to L2 learning and pedagogy consider feedback as a tool that assists in fostering motivation of learners and in maintaining linguistic accuracy (Ellis, 2009). Feedback could either be positive or negative. For example, positive feedback could be in the form of confirming that an utterance is correct whereas negative feedback could be done through pointing out that an utterance is inaccurate or not sufficient. Pedagogical theory perceives positive feedback as a crucial tool to provide affective support to learners and foster their motivation to proceed with learning (Ellis, 2009). Oliver and Mackey (2003) state that negative feedback is "feedback provided in response to learners' non-target-like production" (p. 519). CF is a form of negative feedback that could be displayed as a response to an incorrect utterance by learners (Ellis, 2009). This incorrect utterance usually contains a linguistic error. The main focus of this study is investigating negative feedback in the form of CF. Chaudron (1977) coined the term CF and defined it as "any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner's utterance" (p. 31), CF could consist of an indication that an error has been committed, provision of the correct target language form, metalinguistic information about the nature of the error or any combination of these (Ellis et al., 2006). According to Ellis et al. (2006), CF "takes the form of responses to learner utterances that contain an error" (p. 340), CF could either be written or oral. The existing literature mainly focuses on written CF (Razfar, 2010). However, this study aims to investigate the implementation of oral CF in teaching EFL in the Saudi context in an effort to fill this gap.

It seems that CF has raised controversy among researchers. For instance, Sanz and Morgan-Short (2004) argue that “it is enhanced positive evidence, rather than negative feedback, that affects acquisition” (p. 69). Truscott (1999, as cited in Genç, 2014, p. 260) calls for abandoning CF arguing that CF does not improve learners’ accuracy in speaking. On the contrary, there is a general agreement in the literature that CF is a positive tool in the learning process (Roothoof, 2014). Lightbown and Spada (1990) point out that early fossilization of errors may result from providing students with too much freedom that does not involve correction and explicit instruction.

As outlined in Table 1, Ellis (2009) classifies CF into: recast, repetition, clarification request, explicit correction, elicitation and paralinguistic signal. These are the six most common types of CF strategies that are used by language teachers.

Table 1. Corrective feedback strategies

Corrective feedback Strategy	Definition	Example
1. Recast	The corrector incorporates the content words of the immediately preceding incorrect utterance and changes and corrects the utterance in some way (e.g., phonological, syntactic, morphological or lexical).	Student: Cardige [mispronounced the word Claridge’s] Teacher: Claridge’s
2. Repetition	The corrector repeats the learner’s utterance highlighting the error by means of emphatic stress.	Student: ... Hassan and George are... are is Teacher: Are is?
3. Clarification request	The corrector indicates that he/she has not understood what the learner said.	Student: Now cooks Teacher: Huh?
4. Explicit correction	The corrector indicates an error has been committed, identifies the error and provides the correction.	Student: Yes, I ready. Teacher: OK!... What I ready? I’m ready.
5. Elicitation	The corrector repeats part of the learner’s utterance but not the erroneous part and uses rising intonation to signal the learner should complete it.	Teacher: He doesn’t? Student: Has Teacher: He doesn’t? Student: have
6. Paralinguistic signal	The corrector uses a gesture or facial expression to indicate that the learner has made an error.	Student: What are you do? Teacher: [disappointment sound]

Adapted from Ellis (2009, p. 9)

Some researchers argue that recast is the most preferred type of CF among language teachers (Dilāns, 2016; Hussein & Ali, 2014; Roothoof, 2014). However, other studies point out that there is not consistency in regards to the most common CF strategy in teaching L2 (Aranguiz & Quintanilla Espinoza, 2016; Alkhamash & Gulnaz, 2019; Dilāns, 2016). Alkhamash and Gulnaz (2019), in their study that was conducted in the Saudi context, found that elicitation and repetition were the most preferred CF strategies. Aranguiz and Quintanilla Espinoza (2016) outlined that explicit correction was the most used

CF strategy by language teachers. Dilāns (2016) comment that repetition was rarely used by language teachers.

Uptake refers to a learner's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Lyster and Ranta (1997) assert that uptake can be described as a reaction to teacher's objective to attract student's attention to an aspect of his/her initial utterance. Researchers noted that foreign language learners have positive attitude towards CF (Azar & Molavi, 2013; Barnes & Lock, 2013; Genç, 2014). Lyster and Ranta (1997) point out that some CF strategies, such as elicitation, clarification request and repetition, assist students to either self-correct or to correct their peers. Milad and Mohammadzadeh (2021) noted that elicitation and repetition were the most preferred types of CF by students. Aranguiz and Quintanilla Espinoza (2016) found out that repetition, metalinguistic feedback and clarification request were the most effective strategies in leading to successful uptake. However, learner's proficiency level has a crucial influence in evaluating the effectiveness of any CF technique (Ammar & Spada, 2006). For instance, CF plays a major role in the level of anxiety and self-confidence in oral communication performance and, therefore, low-level learners are expected to be hesitant and anxious in this type of communication (Genç, 2014). Nonetheless, implementing CF in communicative activities is more effective than neglecting it (Ammar & Spada, 2006).

Studies have focused on teacher's beliefs regarding the usefulness of CF. Hussein and Ali (2014) observed a discrepancy among EFL teachers regarding their perceptions towards helping students to speak correctly. For example, foreign language teachers may either prefer to avoid providing CF or prefer providing recast as a CF because they may be concerned about disrupting the flow of communication (Genç, 2014). Roothoof (2014) reported that teachers of L2 believed that immediate CF could disrupt communication and it may have a negative influence on students' confidence and motivation. Nonetheless, Roothoof (2014) asserts that teachers' beliefs regarding CF contradict their practices. According to Roothoof (2014), "teachers are not always aware of the quantity and types of feedback they give to their students" (p. 74). For example, Friedman (2010) noticed that a teacher highlighted errors to provide replacements usually in the same turn immediately after committing an error, interrupting the turn in progress sometimes, and learners corrected their errors in the next turn. This study focuses on analyzing CF strategies that teachers actually use during teaching EFL in the Saudi context.

The participants in this study are from various linguistic, cultural and gender backgrounds. Gurzynski-Weiss (2016) observed that the individual characteristics of the instructors mostly determined their field of focus whether on learners and/or contextual factors. These characteristics included their second language acquisition background, teaching experience and less frequently their native language. The first language (L1) of foreign language instructors has clearly different consequences in what they are listening for and attending to during their CF (Gurzynski-Weiss, 2016). Gurzynski-Weiss (2016) revealed that instructors' native language influenced their CF decisions uniquely. Native speaker language teachers focused on meaning while imagining themselves inexperienced with learners' L1 before providing CF. On the other hand, non-native speakers of L2 were attempting to prove their knowledge of L2 and demonstrated their proficiency in L2 when providing their CF. In addition, Gurzynski-Weiss (2016) reported that a non-native instructor employed metalinguistic feedback to display his/her knowledge to his/her students.

This study focuses on the CF strategies that EFL teachers use and the influence of the used CF strategies on student's uptake. Lyster and Ranta (1997) revealed, in their study, that teachers employed six different types of CF: recasts, elicitation, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, explicit correction and repetition of error. They asserted that the most common CF was elicitation and the least common was repetition. They pointed out that elicitation led to uptake in all the instances whereas recast did not lead to uptake in most of the instances. They added that most of the instances of clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback and repetition resulted in uptake while only half of the explicit correction instances resulted in an uptake. Therefore, teachers should take into consideration the L2 proficiency of their learners when making decisions about feedback (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

3. Research Questions

The reviewed literature shows that CF is a significant issue that has not been given sufficient consideration by researchers. The literature also shows that implementing oral CF strategies has not been studied in the Saudi context in the field of L2 teaching. Therefore, this paper concentrates on studying the use of CF by teachers of L2 in the Saudi context where the English language is taught as a foreign language. This study attempts at identifying the CF strategies that are used by EFL teachers and how these strategies influence language students' uptake of CF. This study aims to answer two major questions:

1. What are the CF strategies that English language teachers use in the Saudi context?
2. How do these CF strategies influence students' uptake?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to explore the CF strategies that teachers of EFL use in teaching English in Saudi Arabia. This paper aims as well to investigate the impact of the used CF strategies on students' uptake.

5. Research Methods

This study investigates CF strategies that EFL teachers use in the Saudi context. This paper incorporates a qualitative case study inquiry. During May 2022, the data of this study was collected. This study was conducted in the English Language Center (ELC) of a Saudi university. This paper constitutes a preliminary study. Therefore, only two EFL teachers took part in this study. The main data collection instrument is audio recordings to investigate the strategies of CF that were used in teaching EFL.

The studied university has two separate campuses where one of them is dedicated to male students and the other is dedicated to female students. It was not feasible for the researcher to personally observe the classes that were conducted in the female campus of the studied university for cultural and administrative boundaries. Thus, the participants were requested to wear the audio recorder when they were teaching EFL. One of the participants audio recorded four sessions of her EFL classes whereas the other audio recorded two sessions of his EFL classes. This means that this study involves audio recordings of six sessions of the EFL classes. The convenience of the participants and their duties were

considered during conducting data collection. Both of the participants and their students were asked to conduct their usual behavior by disregarding the presence of the audio-recorder.

The participants were EFL teachers who were working in an ELC in a Saudi university. One of the participants was from the male section of the ELC whereas the other participant was from the female section of the ELC. The studied ELC included a variety of EFL teachers with various linguistic backgrounds. Some of EFL teachers speak English as their L1 and the others speak Arabic as their L1 and English as their L2. Therefore, this aspect was taken into consideration. One of the participants works in the ELC of the male campus of the studied university and speaks English as his L1. On the other hand, the other participant works in the ELC of the female campus of the studied university and speaks Arabic as her L1 whereas English is her L2. Pseudonyms was used to tag the participants to protect their identities. The teachers have been named: Ali and Heba whereas students have been named Student.

The objectives of this study were explained to the participants. Then, they were asked to sign a consent form. The participants were notified that they had the opportunity to withdraw without any consequences. The data of this study namely the audio recordings of the EFL classroom sessions were analyzed. A word processor software was used to verbatim transcribe all the audio-recorded sessions with a particular focus on the words of the participants and their students. Then, the classroom observations were analyzed using Ellis's (2009) six strategies of CF. An objective coding of the strategies of CF was conducted through conducting line-by-line analysis of the classroom audio recordings.

6. Findings

This section analyzes the data of classroom observations. The data of classroom observations are analyzed in light of Ellis's (2009) strategies of CF. The data analysis includes samples of strategies of CF that emerged from the data of this study.

6.1. Recast

The data analysis of the studied classes pointed out that CF strategy of recast was used by both of the participants (Ali and Heba).

Table 2. Extract 1

Extract 1
Student: I have been using it since last month. You can see it is very light [mispronounced the word light] and it... goes very fast.
Heba: Yeah! It is very light .
Student: light

Based on Table 2, Extract 1 contains a use of recast to correct a mispronunciation of a word. A student mispronounced the word *light* in line 1. Heba provided a recast in line 3. This use of the strategy of CF led to a successful uptake by the student in line 4.

Table 3. Extract 2

Extract 2
Student: Ferguson has had arrived in the United States from Scotland to previous [the student could not pronounce the word previous correctly] year. Heba: Scotland the previous year. Good!

Based on Table 3, Extract 2 shows another example of using recast to correct a mispronunciation of a word. A student could not pronounce the word *previous* in line 1. In line 3, Heba used recast to provide the correct pronunciation of the mispronounced word. However, it seems that this instance of using the strategy of CF recast did not lead to a successful uptake by the student. The student did not correct her mispronunciation of the word *previous*.

Table 4. Extract 3

Extract 3
Student: at the beginning of... 2002 the Euro Dollar exchange rate was 1 Euro... equal 0.88 Heba: Equals Uh-huh! Student: Equals 0.88 Dollar.

Based on Table 4, in Extract 3, there is an example of recast to correct a grammatical error. A student committed a grammatical error in line 1 where the student did not add the third person singular S morpheme to the verb *equal*. Heba used recast as a strategy of CF in line 2. It seems from line 3 that the student noticed this use of CF because the student provided a successful uptake by a correct use of the third person singular S morpheme with the verb *equal*.

Table 5. Extract 4

Extract 4
Student: a snake that you can see does not bite [mispronounced the word bite]. Ali: bite [loudly] Student: bite

Based on Table 5, Extract 4 shows an example of using recast by the second participant (Ali) to correct a student's mispronunciation of a word. In line 1, a student did not pronounce the word *bite* correctly. Ali in line 2 used the strategy of CF recast to correct this mispronunciation. It seems from line 3 that the student noticed the CF because the student provided a successful uptake by correcting his pronunciation of the word *bite*.

6.2. Explicit Correction

The analysis of the studied classes also revealed that the CF strategy of explicit correction was used by the two participants (Heba and Ali).

Table 6. Extract 5

Extract 5
Student: the first cash point machine was one thousand nine-hundreds sixty-seven in the UK. Heba: here you need to say nineteen sixty-seven . OK? Student: nineteen sixty-seven in the UK.

Based on Table 6, in Extract 5, there is an instance of explicit correction that was used by Heba. In line 1, a student was attempting to state a Gregorian year, 1967. However, the student did not divide the year into two pairs of digits. Heba provided an explicit correction CF in line 3. The student's uptake in line 4 reveals that she corrected her error.

Table 7. Extract 6

Extract 6
Student: On the days when I don't organize my time, I get wasted. On the days I organize my time, I feel like I have a complete something.
Ali: Alright! So instead of saying I get wasted, you can say I waste time or time gets wasted.

Based on Table 7, Extract 6 shows an example of explicit correction strategy of CF that was used by the second participant (Ali). Line 1 contains an instance of a grammatical error that was committed by a student when he was attempting to express the feeling that he would lose time if he did not organize his schedule. Lines 3 and 4 highlight that Ali used explicit correction as a strategy of CF. Nonetheless, the strategy of CF in this extract did not lead to an uptake by the student.

6.3. Elicitation

The analysis of the data also indicated that the CF strategy of elicitation was used by both of the EFL teachers (Ali and Heba).

Table 8. Extract 7

Extract 7
Student: nothing deserve your sadness [mispronounced the word sadness]
Ali: nothing deserve your?
Student: sadness [mispronounced the word sadness]

Based on Table 8, there is an instance of a strategy of CF in the form of elicitation in extract 7. A student in line 1 committed a pronunciation error in line 1. Ali, in line 2, used elicitation to indicate the mispronunciation. The use of elicitation led to an uptake by the student in line 3, but the uptake was not successful because the student did not correct his mispronunciation.

Table 9. Extract 8

Extract 8
Student: Before I entered the shop, I had hitten the dog.
Heba: I had? What is the verb?
Student: hit

Based on Table 9, there is an instance of using elicitation as a strategy of CF in addition to metalinguistic feedback within one utterance in extract 8. In line 1, a student committed a grammatical error by not using the correct past participle of the verb *to hit*. Heba, in line 2, used elicitation as a strategy of CF to attract the student's attention to the grammatical error. In addition, Heba in line 2 used

metalinguistic feedback to indicate the type of the error that the student committed. The student managed to provide a successful uptake in line 3.

6.4. Repetition

The data analysis clarified that repetition was used as a CF strategy by one of the participants (Ali).

Table 10. Extract 9

Extract 9
Student: Diligence, patient and not being lazy will make your ambition real. Nothing related to this problem happened to me, but I find it very expressive to real life. That's it. Ali: Alright! Diligence, patient? Student: and not being lazy.

Based on Table 10, in Extract 9, there is an instance of using repetition strategy to provide a CF. Line 1 shows a grammatical error that was committed by a student. The student used the adjective *patient* in line 1 instead of the noun *patience*. Ali used repetition as a CF strategy in line 3. Nonetheless, the student's uptake in line 4 shows that he did not manage to correct his grammatical error. Instead, he continued his answer without noticing the grammatical error that his teacher indicated.

6.5. Clarification Request

The data analysis of the studied classes indicated that clarification request was used by one of the participants (Ali) as a strategy of CF.

Table 11. Extract 10

Extract 10
Student: whoever has a reason to live [mispronounced the word live] can bare [mispronounced the word bare] almost anything. Ali: I'm sorry. What? Student: whoever has a reason to live [mispronounced the word live] can bare [mispronounced the word bare] almost anything.

Based on Table 11, Extract 10 includes an instance of clarification request. A student in lines 1 and 2 did not pronounce the words *live* and *bare* correctly. It is possible that Ali used clarification request in line 3 as a strategy of CF to attract the student's attention to his errors. Lines 4 and 5 indicate that the student performed an uptake. However, it is possible that the student did not realize that Ali was providing a CF because the student repeated the same errors again.

6.6. Recast and elicitation

The CF strategies of recast and elicitation were used by one of the EFL teachers (Ali) within one utterance as the data analysis indicated.

Table 12. Extract 11

Extract 11
Student: sadness [mispronounced the word sadness]
Ali: sadness [loudly] nothing deserve your?
Student: sadness

Based on Table 12, Extract 11 reveals an example of using two strategies of CF within the same utterance by Ali. Ali used recast and elicitation as strategies of CF to correct a student's pronunciation error. A student, in line 1, did not pronounce the word *sadness* correctly. Ali in line 2 started with using recast as a strategy of CF and he immediately used elicitation to stress the pronunciation error. Line 3 indicates that the student managed to provide a successful uptake through correcting his pronunciation error.

7. Conclusions

Data analysis of this study showed that both EFL teachers used strategies of CF in teaching the English language. The use of CF in teaching a language is consistent with the viewpoint of Lightbown and Spada (1990) and Roothoof (2014) that CF is a positive instrument in the process of language learning. The EFL teachers varied in the CF strategies that they used in teaching the English language. For example, three of the CF strategies (recast, explicit correction and elicitation) were used by both of them (Heba and Ali). On the other hand, two of the CF strategies (repetition and clarification request) were used by only one of the EFL teachers (Ali). One of the CF strategies (paralinguistic signal) was not used by any of the participants. This agrees with the literature which indicates that the used CF strategies are not consistent in all contexts of teaching the language (see Alkhamash & Gulnaz, 2019; Aranguiz & Quintanilla Espinoza, 2016; Dilāns, 2016).

The data analysis in this study found three main departures from the literature. Firstly, this study manifests that recast was the most common CF strategy as it was used by both of the EFL teachers several times to provide CF to pronunciation and grammatical errors. This finding is in line with Dilāns (2016), Hussein and Ali (2014) and Roothoof (2014) findings that recast was the most common CF strategy among language teachers. Secondly, the EFL teachers' use of recast supports Genç's (2014) argument that language teachers may prefer recast to avoid disrupting the flow of communication. Thirdly, the data analysis indicates that the CF strategy of repetition was used by only one of the participants to highlight a grammatical error. This finding agrees with Dilāns (2016) and Lyster and Ranta's (1997) observations that the least common CF strategy was repetition; however, it disagrees with Alkhamash and Gulnaz's (2019) finding that repetition is a preferred CF strategy by language teachers. Although this study and Alkhamash and Gulnaz's (2019) were conducted in a similar context (Saudi Arabia), the data from this study indicates a possible contradiction between teachers' beliefs about their practices and their actual practices (Roothoof, 2014).

While studies show that foreign language learners have a positive attitude towards CF (see Azar & Molavi, 2013; Barnes & Lock, 2013; Genç, 2014), data analysis of this paper indicates that students' uptake based on their language teacher's CF varied. Some of the CF instances led to successful uptake by the students, but others did not. Three out of the four of the analyzed extracts of recast CF strategy led to

successful uptake by the students. This agrees with Lyster and Ranta's (1997) note that recast assists students in performing uptake. One of the analyzed examples of explicit correction CF strategy examples led to a successful uptake whereas the other did not. Lyster and Ranta (1997) revealed that only half of the explicit correction instances produced an uptake. In elicitation CF strategy, students in both of the reviewed extracts managed to provide uptake. However, one of the students provided a successful uptake whereas the other did not. This is inconsistent with Lyster and Ranta's (1997) finding that students managed to perform successful uptake in all elicitation instances. Both extracts of repetition CF strategy and clarification request CF strategy produced uptake by the students. However, it seems that using repetition CF and clarification request CF did not assist the students in noticing that they have committed errors that needed to be corrected. This contradicts Aranguiz and Quintanilla Espinoza's (2016) finding that repetition and clarification request were effective strategies in leading to successful uptake. Data from this study points out that using two types of CF strategies (recast and elicitation) within one utterance was successful in assisting students to produce a successful uptake. Although the obtained data indicates that the CF strategies varied in their influence on students' uptake, this does not undermine the significance of CF on students' learning of L2. On the contrary, this supports Ammar and Spada's (2006) remark that using CF strategies is more effective than not using them.

To sum up the paper, the findings for the two research questions are reiterated. The first question regarding the specific CF strategies used by English language teachers in the Saudi context led to the following findings. Firstly, the participants varied in the CF strategies that they implemented. Secondly, recast was the most common CF strategy among the EFL teachers. Thirdly, some of the CF strategies were used by only one of the EFL teachers including repetition and clarification request.

In terms of the second question of this study, the CF strategies that were implemented by the EFL teachers varied in their influence on students' uptake. While recast was the most common CF strategy among the EFL teachers, this strategy did not always assist the students in realizing successful uptake. The same can be said about the explicit correction and elicitation CF strategies wherein all the students also did not manage to perform successful uptake. Furthermore, the CF strategies that were used by only one of the EFL teachers (repetition and clarification request) did not assist students in providing successful uptake. Of additional note in relation to the data of this study, only two EFL teachers participated in this study. It must be stressed that the data of this study are considered preliminary. Therefore, further research should be conducted by expanding the number of participants to detect whether similar findings to this study would emerge or not. It should be noted that the participants in this study were from the male and female sections of the studied university. A similar study has not been conducted in the Saudi context with male and female participants.

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