Contextualising Third-Wave Historical Sociolinguistics

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Sociolinguistic research has accounted for language variability by studying the correlation between intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors. As a result of this correlation, the study of style has played a pivotal role within the field of sociolinguistic variation, in which stylistic variation is a fundamental aspect along with linguistic and social variation (Rickford & Eckert, 2001: 1). Over the past few decades, the study of variation in sociolinguistic research has been approached from three different perspectives or generational waves (Eckert, 2012), summarised in Figure 1. As illustrated, there has been a gradual transition from deterministic theories of speech behaviour to more social constructionist approaches throughout the development of sociolinguistic variation studies (see Hernández-Campoy, 2016: 158; Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa, 2012: 7).
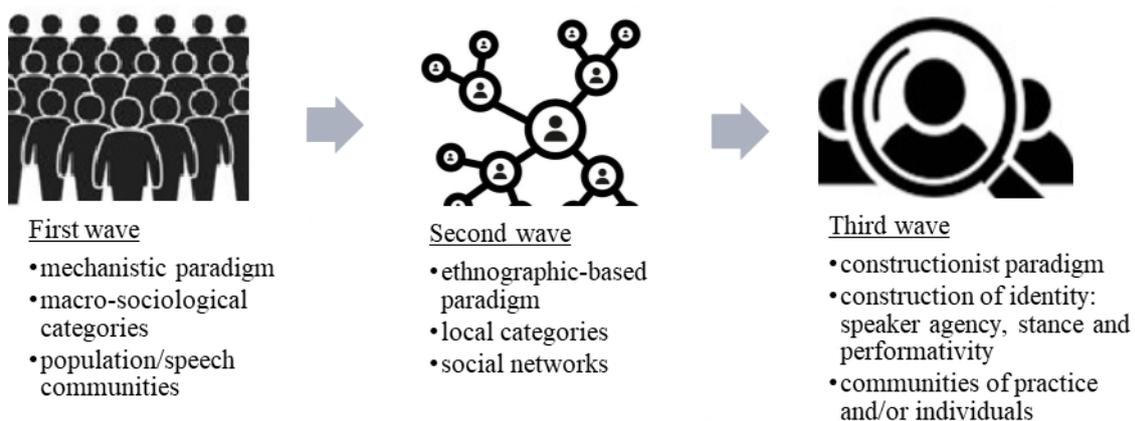

First wave
- mechanistic paradigm
- macro-sociological categories
- population/speech communities

Second wave
- ethnographic-based paradigm
- local categories
- social networks

Third wave
- constructionist paradigm
- construction of identity: speaker agency, stance and performativity
- communities of practice and/or individuals

Figure 1. Three waves of sociolinguistic variation.

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The first wave is couched within the tradition of quantitative studies. During the 1960s, the mechanistic paradigm of first-wave variationist sociolinguistic research relied on large-scale population surveys that aimed for statistical representativeness and whose final outcome was to provide stratified patterns of the speech of populations (see Labov, 1966). As such, variation in language was predetermined by macro-sociological categories on the basis that patterns of linguistic variation were correlated with broad sociodemographic factors (such as age, gender, social class, ethnic group, etc.), exploring, this way, the analysis of variability through the lens of sociolinguistic universals.

In the decades that followed, second-wave studies arose drawing largely on local categories, identifying the vernacular as an expression of local or class identity and as a source of social agency. Accordingly, the social meaning of linguistic variables emerged from below through ethnographic investigation of locally significant and linguistic meanings (Schilling, 2013: 339), aiming at "finding out how certain linguistic forms are locally meaningful to specific social groupings […] based on participant beliefs of how the community is structured" (Schleef, 2020: 612). As a result, studies grounded on the second-wave approach of sociolinguistic variation underlined the correlation between language variation in the micro-context of local forms of speech and social networks, defined as "the aggregate of relationships contracted with others, a boundless web of ties which reaches out through social and geographical space linking many individuals, sometimes remotely" (Milroy & Gordon, 2003: 117).

Recently, over the course of the twenty-first century, a third wave of sociolinguistic variation, following a constructionist approach and based on anthropological-oriented studies, has highlighted the study and reconstruction of the social meaning of linguistic variables within layered communities, which may share a similar background, social aspirations, mentalities, etc. (Eckert, 2012). The need for emphasis on localised community environments and local interactions has drawn attention to qualitative, syntagmatic patterning of variants (Hernández-Campoy, 2016: 186). While traditional quantitative studies focused on how linguistic variants correlate with social categories, current approaches to sociolinguistic variation stress "how speakers use language to make social meanings, including identificational and interactional meanings, in unfolding discourse via stylistic variation" (Schilling, 2013: 328). Rather than highlighting the relationship between the speech community and abstract categories (such as age, social status, gender, etc.), as in first-wave studies, in this new approach, the focus is put on the constructed relationship between an individual and their imagined community of practice. In this way, this new wave considers the active agency of communities of practice (Conde-Silvestre, 2016; Kopaczyk & Jucker, 2013; Wenger, 1998) and "the individuality of speakers by making use of a constructivist approach based on speaker's agency (individual action), stance and

    IJES, vol. 23(2), 2023, pp. 1–14

performativity to more accurately account for the nature of the indexical relations between linguistic and extralinguistic variables" (Hernández-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre, 2015: 15).

The concept of *community of practice* is a central component in third-wave studies, which is well illustrated by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992: 464) (see also Eckert, 2000: 35) as:

> [a]n aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.

In this respect, language change does not depend entirely on broad social categories but also on specific contexts and situations in which individuals engage in their daily lives with their communities of practices, negotiating and constructing their linguistic styles. According to Wenger (1998: 72–85; see also Kopaczyk & Jucker, 2013: 6–7), three specific dimensions are crucial for a community of practice: (i) the mutual engagement of a group of people who get together to engage in (ii) some joint enterprise in which they are involved with the aim of (iii) sharing any repertoire of practices, resources or ways of doing things (linguistic or non-linguistic, such as language, styles, routines, gestures, common behaviour, etc.). In light of this, individuals' linguistic choices do not explicitly designate their social categories but rather reflect attitudes, activities and ways of life associated with specific categories. Thus, the individual uses variables to build an identity and to choose a community of practice to associate with.

As such, third-wave sociolinguistics stresses the social meaning of linguistic variation as an intrinsic feature of language, understanding variation as a social semiotic system which conveys the entire spectrum of social issues within a community. Because these social issues are in constant change, linguistic variables cannot only mark fixed meanings, but rather their primary feature must be "indexical mutability" (Eckert, 2012: 94), which is achieved in stylistic practices.

The notion of *style* is derived from the identification of language traits with certain social groupings and it constitutes a fundamental component in the indexicalization (see Silverstein, 2003, 2004) of speakers' sociolinguistic behaviour in interpersonal communication, occupying a key position in the relational association between linguistic, social and stylistic divergence. According to Fowler (1981: 174), style in sociolinguistics is basically "[a] theory of varieties, of correlations between distinctive linguistic choices and particular socio-cultural circumstances. The individual text can be described and interpreted in relation to the stylistic conventions which generate it and the historical and sociological

situation which brought it into existence". Style had previously been defined and understood in a limited sense within the framework of first- and second-wave approaches to sociolinguistic variation and viewed as an ordinary characteristic alongside social aspects. This has brought about the distinction between *inter*-speaker (social) and *intra*-speaker (stylistic) variation (see Figure 2): "[t]he social dimension denotes differences between the speech of different speakers, and the stylistic denotes differences within the speech of a single speaker" (Bell, 1984: 145). Traditional accounts of both inter- and intra-speaker variation established that the most salient patterns of language use are determined by the social categories to which speakers belong and the social context of the situation. Nevertheless, these approaches neglected the idea of intentional choice in that speakers may strategically design their language production to change their personal image or social world to project a specific identity (see Hernández-Campoy, 2016; Hernández-Campoy & García-Vidal, 2018a; Podesva, 2012).
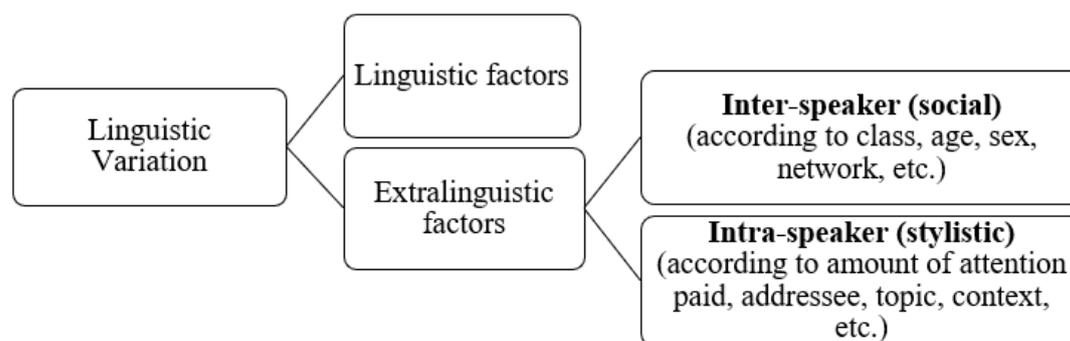

Figure 2. Linguistic variation in sociolinguistics (adapted from Bell, 1984: 146).

In fact, previous variationist studies conceived the concept of *style-shifting* as a universal factor, described as a social reaction (response) to a particular situation and scaled in terms of formality (Labov, 1966, 1972). However, the assumption that style-shifting can be measured by the amount of attention paid to speech with the formal-informal stylistic continuum was questioned by scholars, for it might not encompass all the components that comprise stylistic variation in interpersonal communication. Style-shifting, as Rickford and Eckert observed (2001: 1), is a crucial component of speakers' sociolinguistic behavior in interpersonal communication, and its indexical nature is now being investigated in studies embedded in the third wave of sociolinguistic variation. According to Bell (1984: 150), the amount of self-monitoring in a speaker's speech does not mirror intra-speaker variation since it is understood as a response between a situation and a style: "[w]hat happens when a speaker talks in any social situation involves many linguistic features almost simultaneously, at all levels of language, all contributing to the mosaic of the sociolinguistic presentation of self in everyday life" (Bell, 2007: 91).

In the 1980s, the notions of *speaker agency*, *audienceship*, *addressivity* or *responsiveness* gained prominence in the development of new theories of intra-speaker variation, whereby the audience (listener/recipient) is put at the epicentre of stylistic variation. Drawing on the Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1979) and the linguistic marketplace (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1975; Sankoff & Laberge, 1978), Bell developed the Audience Design Theory, which viewed stylistic variation as a "response to inter-speaker variation, chiefly as manifested in one's interlocutors" (Bell, 1984: 158). Not only does this variationist approach to style consider style shifts as largely affected by one's audience, but also by the way speakers modify the speaking context through the usage of words associated with a non-present audience or certain dialogical attitudes. Consequently, this model stresses the significance of external factors to account for the causes of style-shifting by focusing on the audience: people engage in style-shifting in response to external factors (the audience), thus introducing an initiative (proactive) dimension, in addition to the responsive (reactive) dimension (Hernández-Campoy, 2018: 38). Accordingly, the Audience Design model offers a more complete and accurate account of the explanation of stylistic variation than the Attention to Speech model (Labov, 1966), since (i) it is more applicable to casual and spontaneous interactions; (ii) it attempts to explain the relationship between inter- and intra-speaker variation and; (iii) introduces the concept of speaker agency when speakers engage in natural conversations (Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa, 2012: 3).

More recently, new approaches to stylistic variation are highlighting the proactive potential of style-shifting in speech as well as the individuality of speakers (Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa, 2010, 2012). In this sense, speakers use a variety of stylistic choices to portray a distinct identity in society when addressing someone else. As a result, earlier approaches to the study of style have moved away from deterministic and system-oriented to more social constructionist and speaker-oriented approaches (see Figure 3). This new paradigm is based on the idea of understanding language variation as acts of identity considered active, agentive and socially motivated: whenever a speaker makes an utterance, they are conveying a form of identity, and the choice of one linguistic variant over another reflects their social affiliation. Therefore, it is now understood that linguistic variation does not only reflect social meaning but also creates it by focusing on the individual's manipulation of the conventional social meaning (construction of *personae*) to account for other stylistic choices. In this way, the third-wave approach also brings the concept of *identity* into view, assuming that the linguistic behaviour of any individual is "a series of acts of identity in which people reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles" (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985: 14).
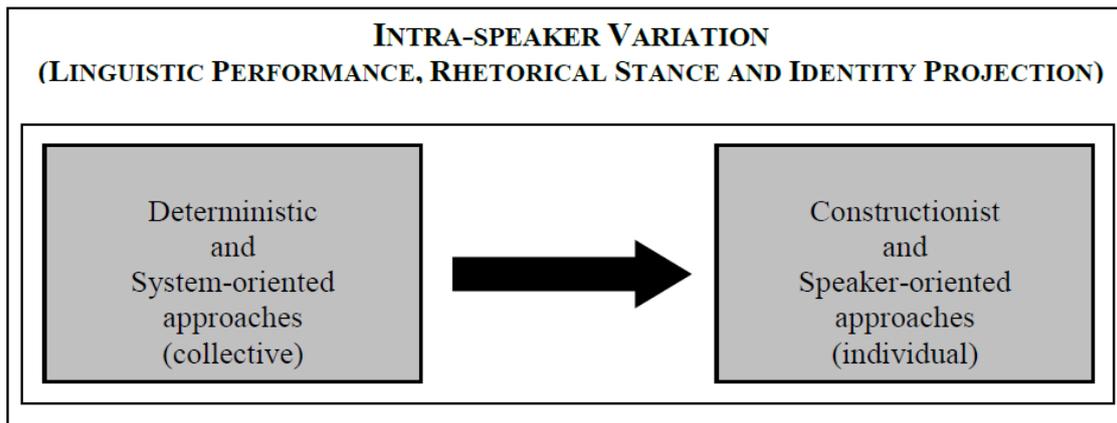
Figure 3. A shift from deterministic and system-oriented to social constructionist and speaker-oriented approaches to intra-speaker variation (adapted from Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa, 2012: 7).

Following Eckert's (2012) description of the third-wave approach to intra-speaker variation, it has become simpler to identify those more prominent linguistic characteristics that project a speaker's identity and social positioning in various circumstances. With this assumption, current multifaceted socio-constructionist approaches to stylistic variation highlight the socially constructive potential of style-shifting for the construction and transmission of meaning in interpersonal communication. In tune with this, the Speaker Design Theory (Coupland 1996) emerged as a multidimensional model, filling the gap in the explanation of styles by taking into consideration a broader variety of characteristics that contribute to style-shifting: speakers are more actively involved in the process of language production in that they are continually creating and re-shaping social structures and interactional norms in a strategic way in order to project multiple identities, rather than just accommodating to the audienceship (see Hernández-Campoy, 2016: 128; Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa, 2012: 4). Thus, intra-speaker variation is seen now as a useful sociolinguistic tool to explore speakers' style management, its deliberate effective use, and how it reflects and transmits social meaning in social interaction; in other words, this sociolinguistic model of style-shifting is acutely aware of the fact that speakers employ stylistic resources creatively to form and reshape identities, circumstances or social structures, as well as the individual voice plays a crucial role in the understanding of the social context, as it is conceived as agent for the transmission of sociolinguistic meaning (Johnstone, 2000: 417). Overall, this post-modernist social constructivist conception of style reflects the existence of different realities that can have multiple interpretations as interlocutors can embrace alternative social positions through speaker agency in linguistic choice or through the shaping of style.

Another term central to the third wave is *enregisterment*. Following Silverstein's notion of "indexical meaning", Agha (2003, 2006) developed the term enregisterment, describing it as a process "whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized

(or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users" (Agha, 2005: 38). According to this definition, the term enregisterment involves the use of a linguistic form that has become part of a register thus indicating a particular style that may be associated with a specific identity, indexing particular meanings. This way, this model explains how social meaning becomes attached to specific linguistic forms and how these indexicalized forms spread and reproduce in social interaction from a metapragmatic perspective (see Johnstone, 2010, 2011). Therefore, concepts such as indexicality and enregisterment are linked to the idea that "features of language (or, indeed other aspects of social behaviour such as dress) come to be associated with aspects of social identity such as class, gender, region, etc., and how clusters of such features (registers) are used by speakers to perform identity" (Beal, 2019: 9). In this sense, the traditional assumption of correlating a speaker's accent, dialect or variety to his/her social and geographical circumstances is now attributed to speakers' agency in the construction of sociolinguistic identity.

Another proactive approach that also tries to account for stylistic variation in the light of speakers' agency is the Style as Stance theory proposed by Johnstone (1996, 2000, 2009). Given that social identities are produced and encoded by language structures, this model highlights stance-taking practices as fundamental semiotic resources for identity and activity creation (see Bucholtz, 2009; Cook, 1996; Kiesling, 2005; Ochs, 1993). After exploring the role of stance-taking strategies in the use of a particular style in specific interactions, Johnstone reveals that repeated patterns of stance-taking practices can form a specific style that may be unique to a particular individual (see Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa, 2012: 5), where the individual voice is regarded "as a potential agent of choice rather than a passive, socially constructed vehicle for circulating discourses" (Johnstone, 2000: 417).

Third-wave studies in historical sociolinguistics are not abundant since macroscopic approaches (inter-writer variation) have predominated in this research field. This is basically due to the difficulty in reconstructing the social meaning of past societies, especially identities and communities of practice. More recently, there has been a burgeoning body of research exploring the potential usefulness of third-wave sociolinguistic findings and theoretical assumptions for historical sociolinguistics, drawing on historical data (see for example Schiegg & Huber, 2023; Werth et al. 2021: 283–405; amongst others). Back in the 1980s, Romaine (1982) demonstrated that the methodological principles of present-day sociolinguistics could be applied to historical material[1] to examine language variation and change from a diachronic perspective and, since then, the field has continued to develop by adopting third-wave sociolinguistic models. To this end, historical written documents, especially ego documents (Elspaß, 2012; van der Wal & Rutten, 2013), have become of paramount importance as a source of investigation for the exploration and reconstruction of social meaning embedded in linguistic patterns of variation at a micro level. Some of the

research taking a third-wave historical sociolinguistic approach has demonstrated that contemporary sociolinguistic models of intra-speaker variation can be extended back in time. For example, social and stylistic patterns of variation have been found in the epistolary interaction of individuals, as well as self-monitoring based patterns of style-shifting, implying, presumably, that style-shifting happens along a continuum of informality versus formality, either because writers self-monitor their stylistic choices by producing more careful linguistic patterns, or in response to audience pressures (see Alexandropoulos, 2015; Auer, 2015; García-Vidal, 2023; Havinga, 2021; Hernández-Campoy, 2023; Hernández-Campoy & García-Vidal, 2018a,2018b; Hernández-Campoy et al., 2019; Schiegg, 2018, 2022; Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2005; Voeste, 2018; amongst others). Accounts of communities of practice have also been found in historical data. By applying the contemporary tenets of this concept to reconstruct social groups in the past, some third-wave studies have unveiled the existence of identities and social meanings of past communities, interpreting various linguistic aspects associated with certain members ascribed to historical social groups, who engaged in some joint enterprise with the aim of sharing any common repertoire of resources (such as knights, gentry, scribes, printers, publishers, monks, clerks or even medical professionals) (Conde-Silvestre, 2016; Kaislaniemi, 2017; Kopaczyk & Jucker, 2013; Timofeeva, 2022; for example). In sum, sociolinguistic behaviours discovered through the analysis of historical corpora have allowed for the detection of how social meanings are conveyed in interactional communication as well as the reconstruction of early community values as reflected in the local communicative competence developed for language choice in style-shifting processes.

The present special issue contributes to the development of third-wave historical sociolinguistic studies with four contributions that provide evidence for such an emerging field of research with an eye to the English language.

The issue opens up with Tino Oudesluijs and Nuria Yáñez-Bouza's article entitled "Constructing Identities and Negotiating Relationships in Late Eighteenth-Century England: Mary Hamilton and her Correspondents at Court". The authors explore the concept of intra-writer variation during the Late Modern English period in the correspondence of Mary Hamilton with George, Prince of Wales and Chartlotte Margaret Gunning by analysing the use of direct address forms and self-reference expressions. The research takes a third-wave sociolinguistic approach in examining the influence of these addressers- and addressees-oriented formulae on the construction of specific identities and the negotiation of their relationship in this specific type of writing. This illustrates how intra-writer variation might reveal social meanings in the context of identity construction and relationship management when addressing letters to two different recipients.

Carolina P. Amador-Moreno and Javier Ruano-García's contribution, "Linguistic Perceptions of Irish English in Nineteenth-Century Emigrant Letters: A Micro-Perspective

Analysis of John Kerr's Letters", addresses the concept of enregisterment pertaining to third wave sociolinguistic studies from a qualitative approach during the nineteenth century. By drawing on John Kerr's letters, included in the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence* (CORIECOR), the authors investigate the perceptions that Irish letter writers had of their own language (Irish English) at a microscopic level as well as how these ideas were shaped by historical accounts on Irish English and popular beliefs about the dialect. More specifically, the letters of Irish emigrant John Kerr to his uncle James Graham of Newpark reflect an enregistered repertoire of Irish English features that may have been influenced by literary representations and popular ideologies from Late Modern texts, thus showing that they could have had an impact on people's views and attitudes of this linguistic variety. Once again, the proven validity of private correspondence is significant for illustrating speakers' sociolinguistic behaviour in exploring processes of historical dialect enregisterment microscopically.

Dialect enregisterment is also at the centre of Paula Schintu Martínez's article, "Dialect in the Making: A Third-wave Sociolinguistic Approach to the Enregisterment of Late Modern Derbyshire Spelling". The author explores enregistered phonological features of the Derbyshire dialect in literary representations from the 19th century drawn from the *Salamanca Corpus*. By presenting a quantitative and qualitative analysis of numerous linguistic traits represented in historical dialect literature and literature dialect using nonstandard respellings, the author illustrates that this dialect was enregistered in the Late Modern Period. The analysis of the features discussed in STRUT, GOAT, MOUTH and FACE lexical sets indicates that the more localised representations are probably the ones that most strongly indexed the Derbyshire dialect.

Finally, José Miguel Alcolado Carnicero's contribution, "A Community of Practice in the Mercers of the City of London: Catching the Third Sociolinguistic Wave with a Multilingual Medieval Guild", closes the special issue by drawing our attention to the concept of community of practice in late medieval London. For the purpose, the author explores the applicability of the community-of-practice framework to the process of vernacularisation of the earliest extant financial records by the Mercers' guild of London, examining how this community of scribes engaged the multilingual environment to keep records in late medieval documents. This way, the author identifies that Latin and French were replaced by English in the different sections of that earliest extant account book when the administration of the Mercers' guild of London was being controlled and recorded by warden-bookkeepers, who engaged in the joint enterprise of serving the office of wardenship and keeping the annual financial accounts diligently with the shared repertoire of English as the alternative language of record.

All in all, this collection of papers provides new insights that will surely benefit future research in the field. The papers reveal the various shapes that stylistic variation in historical data may take both at the individual and collective levels within a community. I hope these studies will serve as an inspiration for further research and help to broaden the knowledge of third-wave historical sociolinguistic studies. I would not like to end without expressing my gratitude to all the authors on this special issue for their contributions and invaluable cooperation as well as to the anonymous reviewers for their enriching comments and valuable suggestions. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the General Editor of IJES and to the Editorial Team for their help and assistance.

NOTES

[1]The field of Historical Sociolinguistics embraces the use of present-day sociolinguistic methodologies in historical data, assuming that the *Uniformitarian Principle* (Labov, 1994: 21–25), i.e., the idea that languages exhibit the same types of patterns in the past as they are seen today, is universal and temporal valid.

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