

An Error Analysis of DeepL Translation in Children's Literature: A Case Study of *Dolly and Her Little Red Umbrella*

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how effective is the DeepL Language Translator when translating the story *Dolly and Her Little Red Umbrella* from English into Indonesian language. Error analysis was conducted on the translation using the taxonomy of machine translation errors by Costa et al. (2015). A total of 36 errors were detected during the analysis and these errors were classified into four categories namely semantic, syntactic, lexical and pragmatic errors with the frequency of occurrence of 5, 1, 5 and 23 respectively. The most common type of error was pragmatic, highlighting challenges in conveying the cultural and contextual aspects of language in children's literature. These issues often stem from DeepL's difficulty in capturing subtle meanings, idioms, and unspoken cues that are crucial for accurate translation. The findings suggest that while DeepL demonstrates strong grammatical accuracy, improvements are needed in understanding and conveying contextual subtleties and cultural references. To enhance translation quality, future advancements should focus on refining context comprehension, incorporating feedback from language experts, and leveraging sophisticated machine learning techniques.

Keywords: Translation, DeepL Language Translator, children's story, translation error taxonomy

Introduction

Translation is described as a process of change involving speech or text from one language to another but retaining the same meaning, context, and all the nuances (Munday et al., 2022). Such a practice illustrates the activity of different peoples that has existed since the times when various peoples began to be engaged in trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange. Growing demands for translation services and more globalization of the economies led to the practice of translation being accepted as a profession. More than just seeing the first language to be changed into another language, there are prominent events seen in histories of translations from language founded to advancement in language as a science and a trade (Karimova, 2025; Sun et al., 2025). Over the ages, translation has been increasingly used as a tool for exchange of cultures, for trade, dissemination of knowledge, and for communication across linguistic barriers.

In order for a translation to achieve the desired goal its accuracy has to be maintained all through it. In practical terms, Newmark (1988) agreed and defined translation as the action of transmitting the meaning in the source language (SL) into the target language (TL) so that the message from the original author is not altered. Larson (1984) similarly describes translation as the transfer of meaning from SL to TL. Although translation has made it easier to accomplish cross-cultural communication, globalization has resulted in a much more widespread utilization of technology than before, making the definition of translation today much broader than just changing words from one language to an equivalent in another (O'Hagan, 2019). Dewi et al. (2016) note that successful translation makes it possible to retrieve and utilize information from foreign sources, which encourages the multilingual interaction in the context of globalization.

In the past few decades, globalization as well as new developments in machine translation (MT) and computational linguistics have altered the translation landscape. Increasingly advanced automated translation systems such as neural machine translation and natural language processing algorithms have improved the translation processes and the accuracy of translations. They, however, cannot substitute for a human translation entirely in those efforts that are best served by having a cultural perspective, or understanding and imagining context (Toral and Way, 2018). Nonetheless, it is evident that human intervention is still crucial, especially in translations of literature, legal documents, medicine, and technology as automated tools continue to penetrate the industry. Rojo (2018) notes that the rise of technology has made human translators somewhat “invisible,” though their expertise continues to be indispensable.

Communicating in different languages has been made possible by Google Translate, DeepL and other translation applications that have served as quick and mass translation means. Wang (2024) points out technologies that have made it possible to translate the translations almost instantaneously as opposed to before. Neural translation expert, DeepL, is also hailed as one of the tools that defeat the most used tools in its ability to further enhance forgotten aspects in translation. DeepL is widely recognized as a neural machine translation system that utilizes advanced algorithms to produce more fluent and contextually appropriate translations compared to earlier systems (Popović, 2018). Despite these advancements, a closer examination of machine translation output is required to identify and classify the types of errors that may still occur.

Translation errors can happen at different levels which may include semantic, syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic and Costa et al.'s (2015) taxonomy is a very useful framework to identify and classify such errors. For instance, they segregate errors into four types: semantic errors (talking about the meaning), syntactic (structure of language), lexical errors (use of words), and pragmatic (contextual or cultural mismatches). With the use of this taxonomy, this study specifically examines the classification of the errors that occur in the translation of the English version of *Dolly and Her Little Red Umbrella* into Indonesian by DeepL. This framework allows for a comprehensive assessment of DeepL's translation quality, offering insights into potential areas for improvement in machine translation algorithms.

Errors in different machine translation (MT) systems have been studied earlier. For instance, Alkatheery (2023) in *Google Translate Errors in Legal Texts: Machine Translation Quality Assessment examined the quality of Neural Machine Translation (NMT)* with respect to legal texts translated from Arabic to English by focusing on Google Translate. A manual evaluation of the study revealed some of the NMT output errors that were common, which included errors of lexical and syntactic levels. Although people could better make use of Google translate, the application did not do well in the area of translation of legal discourse as it could not get the common legal structures and terms translated correctly. Likewise, Amilia and Hasni (2023) in *Investigating Subtitle Error Typology in Unofficial Movie Streaming Website Using the FAR Model*, analyzed subtitle errors as regards an online streaming site, LayarKaca21 (LK21) through the FAR Model: Functional Equivalence, Acceptability, and Readability. They focused on the movie *How To Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World* and compared LK21 subtitles with those of Netflix where they identified 716 errors with Functional Equivalence errors being the most common and which could lead to incomplete understanding of viewers. In another study, Almahasees (2018) in *Assessment of Google and Microsoft Bing Translation of Journalistic Texts* assessed the accuracy of Google Translate and Microsoft Bing Translator with a focus on journalistic translations from Arabic to English. The study being a linguistic error analysis study indicated that both systems achieved considerable accuracy with respect to orthography, grammar and performed well in collocations of lexicon and grammar partly

because of the utilization of NMT. Based on the application of Costa's taxonomy to this research on DeepL's translation of the children's story from English into Indonesian, it can be concluded that it is similar to other studies that seek to assess MT quality through the examination of errors. While Alkatheery concentrated on MT of legal texts, Amilia on movie subtitles, and Almahasees on journalistic texts, this one adds to their work by looking into children's literature translating which DeepL as the MT system and Costa's taxonomy to gain a new perspective regarding analysis of errors in MT.

Building on the gap identified in previous studies, which have primarily focused on legal, audiovisual, and journalistic texts as well as on translation tools other than DeepL, this study addresses the underexplored area of machine translation in children's literature. Accordingly, the research is guided by the following question: What types of translation errors occur in DeepL's Indonesian translation of *Dolly and Her Little Red Umbrella* based on the taxonomy by Costa et al.? In line with this question, the objectives of the study are (1) to identify and classify the translation errors found in the DeepL output into semantic, syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic categories, and (2) to analyze the patterns and distribution of these errors to evaluate DeepL's translation performance. The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on children's literary text—an area that requires sensitivity to simplicity, context, and cultural nuance—combined with the application of error classification by Costa et al. (2015) to assess DeepL, a neural machine translation system that has received comparatively less scholarly attention in this domain. By doing so, this study offers a distinct contribution to the growing body of research on machine translation quality assessment.

Method

In this study, a qualitative research design is employed to examine the accuracy of machine translation, particularly in identifying and analyzing translation errors. As noted by Miles and Huberman (2018), a qualitative approach enables researchers to explore and understand social and cultural phenomena from an interpretive perspective. This design is considered suitable for answering the research question, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of translation errors within their linguistic and contextual settings rather than relying on numerical measurement. More specifically, this study adopts a descriptive case study approach, which, according to Creswell & Creswell (2022), provides a detailed and comprehensive account of a particular case. The case selected for this study is the children's short story *Dolly and Her Little Red Umbrella*, making the design appropriate for examining how machine translation performs in a specific and context-bound scenario.

The subject of this research is the English version of *Dolly and Her Little Red Umbrella*, written by Wong Chew Wee and published on letsreadasia.org, along with its Indonesian translation generated using DeepL. The selection of this text is purposeful, as children's literature presents unique linguistic and cultural challenges, including simplicity of language, narrative coherence, and sensitivity to context. These characteristics make it a suitable sample for analyzing semantic, syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic errors in machine translation. The narrative, which follows a little duck named Dolly on her journey to visit her grandmother on a rainy day, provides sufficient variation in language use to support a comprehensive error analysis.

The data collection process is conducted systematically to ensure replicability. First, the source text is read multiple times to gain a thorough understanding of its meaning and context. Second, the text is translated from English into Indonesian using DeepL as the machine translation tool. Third, the translated output is compared with the original text, and relevant segments are identified for analysis. The primary instrument used in this study is an error classification framework based on error classification by Costa et al.

(2015), which categorizes translation errors into four types: semantic, syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic. This framework guides the identification and classification of errors in a structured and consistent manner. The data recorded in this study consist of words, phrases, and sentences that contain translation errors, along with their corresponding classifications.

For data analysis, this study employs qualitative content analysis. As defined by Neuendorf (2017) and Krippendorff (2018), content analysis allows researchers to systematically examine communication artifacts in a way that is both structured and replicable. The analysis is carried out by categorizing each identified error according to the taxonomy by Costa et al. (2015) and then examining the patterns and distribution of these errors across the dataset. The procedures are organized in a logical sequence, beginning with data familiarization, followed by error identification, classification, and interpretation. This method enables the researcher to provide a detailed account of the types of errors produced by DeepL and to assess its translation performance. Through this approach, the study aims to highlight specific areas in which machine translation still requires improvement, particularly in handling linguistic nuances and contextual meaning.

Results

The researcher examines DeepL as a machine translation tool focusing on translating a children's story from English into Indonesian in this section. The researcher applies a framework drawn from Costa et al.'s taxonomy to systematically analyze the translation errors that emerge during the process. The results reveal a total of 36 errors that have been classified into four types: semantic, syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic. These errors are then exemplified in the text with information on how these errors distort meaning or purposes of the original texts. This analysis is undertaken to point out the translations that seem to require revision when translated by DeepL especially in translating children's story.

Table 1. Frequency of Types of Errors

No.	Types of Errors	Number of Errors
1	Semantic	5
2	Syntactic	1
3	Lexical	5
4	Pragmatic	23

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of translation errors identified in the study. The errors are categorized into four types: semantic, syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic. A total of 36 errors are recorded across all categories. Among these, pragmatic errors account for 23 cases, while semantic and lexical errors each occur 5 times, and syntactic errors appear once.

Discussion

Semantic Error

Table 2. Example of Semantic Error

SL	TL letsreadasia.org	TL DeepL
"Thank you, you are very kind, <i>but my little red umbrella, I have to find,</i> "	"Terima kasih, kamu baik sekali, <i>tetapi aku harus menemukan payung merah kecilku,</i> "	"Terima kasih, kamu baik sekali, <i>tapi payung merah kecilku, aku harus mencarinya,</i> "

In the context where Dolly thanks Squeaky the Squirrel for offering her an umbrella, she politely declines and expresses her determination to find her beloved red umbrella. The phrase "Thank you, you are very kind, but my little red umbrella, I have to find" is translated literally by DeepL as *Terima kasih, kamu baik sekali, tapi payung merah kecilku, aku harus mencarinya*. Here, DeepL retains the grammatical structure of the source language (SL). However, the phrase *tapi payung merah kecilku, aku harus mencarinya* sounds awkward when translated directly, as the word "I," referring to Dolly as the main subject, should be placed before the object, the "little red umbrella." A more suitable translation would be *tapi aku harus menemukan payung merah kecilku*, which conveys the meaning more clearly in the target language (TL). This misalignment represents a semantic error, as the literal translation can lead to confusion due to the incorrect word order and phrasing in the TL.

Table 3. Example of Semantic Error

SL	TL letsreadasia.org	TL DeepL
<i>One rainy day, to her grandmother Dolly prepared to go.</i>	<i>Pada suatu hari ber hujan, Dolly bersiap-siap hendak pergi ke rumah Nenek.</i>	<i>Pada suatu hari hujan, Dolly bersiap-siap untuk pergi ke rumah neneknya</i>

The sentence describes how, on a rainy day, Dolly prepared herself to visit her grandmother's house. In the source language (SL), "One rainy day" indicates a past event, as confirmed by the following sentence with "prepared," which also refers to the past. In the target language (TL), DeepL translates "One rainy day" as *Pada suatu hari hujan*, which sounds unsuitable. According to the KBBI, *hujan* refers to "droplets of water falling from the air due to a cooling process," while the Oxford Dictionary defines "rainy" as a condition where it is raining. Therefore, "rainy day" implies a period when it is raining, not a unique day for rain. Using *hari hujan* in the TL gives an impression that rain only occurs on that day, which is not the intended meaning. This misinterpretation creates a semantic error, as it produces a nonsensical phrase in the TL, making the translation less coherent in context.

Table 4. Example of Semantic Error

SL	TL letsreadasia.org	TL DeepL
<i>"I want my umbrella, it has been with me for years."</i>	<i>"Aku ingin payungku, payung yang sudah bertahun-tahun bersamaku."</i>	<i>"Saya ingin payung saya, payung itu sudah ada bersama saya selama bertahun-tahun."</i>

The dialogue describes Dolly's deep desire to find her lost umbrella, which she has had for years. In the source language (SL), the sentence "It has been with me for years" is translated by DeepL into the target language (TL) as *payung itu sudah ada bersama saya selama bertahun-tahun*. This translation is overly wordy, as the word *ada* is unnecessary due to the presence of *bersama*, which already implies the umbrella's existence with her. The overly literal translation from DeepL is not well-suited for a children's audience, as it makes the sentence cumbersome and less engaging to read. Consequently, this represents a semantic error due to the addition of unnecessary words, resulting in a translation that is too literal and unsuitable for the intended readership.

Syntactic Errors

Table 5. Example of Syntactic Error

SL	TL letsreadasia.org	TL DeepL
<i>Smiled Grandma</i> , with Dolly's little red umbrella.	<i>Nenek tersenyum</i> , dengan payung merah kecil Dolly.	<i>Senyum Nenek</i> sambil memegang payung merah kecil milik Dolly.

The sentence conveys Dolly's grandmother's expression as she smiles while holding Dolly's red umbrella, left at her house. The phrase "smiled Grandma" is translated by DeepL into the target language (TL) as *senyum Nenek*, which introduces a minor error in translation due to reversed word placement. In the source language (SL), "smiled" functions as a verb, but DeepL translated it as *senyum*, a noun in TL. This results in a change in word class, as *senyum* should have remained a verb to preserve the original meaning. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "smile" (verb) means "to make a happy or friendly expression," while the KBBI defines *senyum* as an expressive silent laugh showing pleasure. Thus, this represents a syntactic error due to the incorrect word class and misplaced word in the TL.

Lexical Error

Table 6. Example of Lexical Error

SL	TL letsreadasia.org	TL DeepL
"Oh no!" <i>Dolly searched high, and Dolly searched low</i> , "Where could it be? Hope somebody knows."	"Oh, tidak!" <i>Dolly mencari ke mana-mana</i> , "Di mana payung itu? Semoga ada yang tahu."	"Oh tidak!" <i>Dolly mencari ke atas, dan Dolly mencari ke bawah</i> , "Di mana itu? Semoga ada yang tahu."

In this context, Dolly is panicking because she cannot find her favorite red umbrella despite searching everywhere, and she hopes someone knows where it is. The sentence "Oh no! Dolly searched high, and Dolly searched low, Where could it be? Hope somebody knows." is translated by DeepL as *Oh tidak! Dolly mencari ke atas, dan Dolly mencari ke bawah, Di mana itu? Semoga ada yang tahu*. The phrase "Dolly searched high, and Dolly searched low" is translated literally, resulting in *Dolly mencari ke atas, dan Dolly mencari ke bawah*. However, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, "high and low" means "everywhere," and thus should have been translated as *ke mana-mana*, which conveys the correct meaning and is more suitable for children. According to KBBI, *ke mana-mana* means *di segala tempat* or *ke segala tempat*, making it the appropriate choice. This literal translation error represents a lexical error due to the inaccurate word choice, which may confuse young readers.

Table 7. Example of Lexical Error

SL	TL letsreadasia.org	TL DeepL
<i>Freckle the Frog</i> was resting on a log. "Did you see my little red umbrella?" asked Dolly. "No," said Freckle.	<i>Freckle si Katak</i> sedang beristirahat di sebatang kayu. "Apakah kamu melihat payung merah kecilku?" tanya Dolly. "Tidak," kata Freckle.	<i>Bintik si Katak</i> sedang beristirahat di atas batang kayu. "Apakah kamu melihat payung merah kecilku?" tanya Dolly. "Tidak," kata Bintik.

In the dialogue between Freckle the Frog and Dolly, Dolly asks Freckle about her lost red umbrella, to which he responds that he hasn't seen it. DeepL translates the name "Freckle" as *Bintik* in the target language (TL), whereas Letsreadasia.org keeps "Freckle" as it is. In this context, "Freckle" is the frog's name, not a descriptive term. According to the Oxford Dictionary, "freckle" refers to a small, pale brown spot on the skin, while KBBI defines *bintik* as small spots on the skin or fabric. Translating "Freckle" to *Bintik* is inappropriate here, as it disregards the fact that it is a proper noun. The translation introduces a lexical error due to an inaccurate word choice in the TL, as names typically remain unchanged.

Table 8. Example of Lexical Error

SL	TL letsreadasia.org	TL DeepL
Mighty the Mouse was just leaving his house.	Mighty si Tikus baru saja meninggalkan rumahnya.	Si Kancil Perkasa baru saja meninggalkan rumahnya

The sentence above has a context where a mouse named Mighty has just left his house. The sentence *Mighty the Mouse was just leaving his house* is translated by DeepL into *Si Kancil perkasa baru saja meninggalkan rumahnya*. The mistranslation takes place in the translation of *the Mouse* into *si Kancil*. Referring to the Oxford dictionary, *mouse* itself means *a small rodent that has a pointed snout, large eyes and ears, and a long tail*. Meanwhile, referring to KBBI, the word *Kancil* means *mamalia berjari kaki genap, dengan tubuh ramping dan rambut berwarna coklat kemerahan*. Thus, the translation has lexical error and it is out of context because the difference in meaning is very far from the actual meaning.

Pragmatic Error

Table 9. Example of Lexical Error

SL	TL letsreadasia.org	TL DeepL
"I want my umbrella, it has been with me for years."	"Aku ingin payungku, payung yang sudah bertahun-tahun bersamaku."	"Saya ingin payung saya, payung itu sudah ada bersama saya selama bertahun-tahun."

In this context, after Dolly cries and sheds her tears, she still longs to have her umbrella back. The dialogue "I want my umbrella, it has been with me for years" is translated into *Saya ingin payung saya, payung itu sudah ada bersama saya selama bertahun-tahun*. Here, "I" is translated as *Saya*, which is a formal pronoun, referring to Dolly as the main subject. According to the Oxford Dictionary, "I" is a general first-person pronoun that can be used in any context, while in Indonesian, the translation can vary between *Saya* (formal) and *Aku* (informal) based on the situation. KBBI defines *Saya* as a formal first-person pronoun, while *Aku* is more casual, suited for familiar or informal contexts. Since this is a children's story, the language should be casual and easy for young readers to understand, making *Aku* a more appropriate choice. This difference creates a pragmatic error in the translation due to an unsuitable level of formality, causing a mismatch in the story's tone.

Table 10. Example of Pragmatic Error

SL	TL letsreadasia.org	TL DeepL
said Dolly as she waded quickly down the river.	ucap Dolly sambil lekas-lekas <i>berjalan</i> ke sungai.	kata Dolly sambil <i>mengarungi</i> sungai dengan cepat.

In this context, after Dolly's conversation with Freckle the Frog, she continues her search around the river. The sentence "said Dolly as she waded quickly down the river" is translated by DeepL as *kata Dolly sambil mengarungi sungai dengan cepat*. Here, "waded" is translated as *mengarungi*. According to the Oxford Dictionary, "wade" means to walk through water or another liquid with effort, as it's deep enough to reach high up on the legs. The Indonesian term *mengarungi* means "to cross (a river, etc.) by walking," but it implies more of a deliberate crossing rather than simply moving through water. In the context, Dolly is walking along the river rather than crossing it, and *mengarungi* may be challenging for children to understand. This creates a pragmatic error in the translation, as the chosen word is slightly off in meaning and not well-suited for a young audience.

Table 11. Example of Pragmatic Error

SL	TL letsreadasia.org	TL DeepL
Suddenly, the rain stopped and Dolly looked up.	Tiba-tiba, hujan berhenti dan Dolly <i>mendongak</i> .	Tiba-tiba, hujan berhenti dan Dolly <i>mendongak ke atas</i> .

In this context, as Dolly searches for her umbrella, the rain suddenly stops, prompting her to look up. The sentence "Suddenly, the rain stopped and Dolly looked up" is translated by DeepL as *Tiba-tiba, hujan berhenti dan Dolly mendongak ke atas*. Here, "looked up" is translated as *mendongak ke atas*. According to The Free Dictionary, "look up" means to lift one's gaze or attention, typically by raising the head or eyes. In the KBBI, *mendongak* simply means "to look upward," making it unnecessary to add *ke atas*, as it is implied in the word *mendongak*. Therefore, the addition of *ke atas* results in redundancy, introducing a minor syntactic error by making the sentence wordier than needed.

This study identified a total of 36 errors in DeepL's translation, categorized into semantic (5 errors), syntactic (1 error), lexical (5 errors), and pragmatic (23 errors). The identified number of pragmatic errors is quite high and emphasizes the impact of cultural context and specific phrases employed in conveying children's literature. In comparison, Alkatheery's (2023) work on translating legal documents through Google Translate found similarities in syntactical and lexical errors but lesser pragmatic issues specifically due to the nature of legal documents translating with a sense of formality. In their study, Amilia and Hasni (2023) analyzed various movie subtitles and concluded with discovering 716 functional equivalence errors which are very concerning when looking at a larger scale, Almahasees (2018), on the other hand, studied the headlines in journalism related cases translating through Google Translate and Bing Translator, and concluded that both sophisticated paraphrasing and linguistic analysis had considerable accuracy, but there were still some minor issues with collocations. Although DeepL had fewer total errors, the predominance of pragmatic errors mirrors challenges observed across these studies, especially in culturally sensitive contexts. Each of those cases was also concerned solely with the quality of machine translations but approached this through different frameworks; in this work the taxonomy by Costa et al. (2015) and its application has been discussed, Alkatheery (2023) used a classification concerning the legal registers, Amilia and Hasni (2023) used FAR model, and Almahasees (2018) used linguistic error analysis. As with non-lexical errors, all three text types- legal, journalistic,

and narrative were focused on, but the emphasis seemed to vary, with Alkatheery (2023) and Almahasees (2018) on formal texts, and this study along with Amilia and Hasni (2023) on context-sensitive, creative domains. According to the results, though worldwide machine translation has developed a lot, it still struggles with translating texts that are contextually dense and culturally specific, which stresses the problem that specialized and creative text translations require advanced translation performance.

Conclusion

This study sought to analyze how translation errors occurred in the English-Indonesian translation of the text entitled *Dolly and Her Little Red Umbrella* which was translated using DeepL Language Translator through a framework of the taxonomy of machine translation error classification by Costa et al. (2015). The errors have been classified within the framework into errors such as semantic, syntactic, lexicon, or pragmatic. From the analysis, there were 36 translation errors which consisted of 5 semantic errors, 1 syntactic error, 5 errors in the use of lexis, and 23 pragmatic errors, with the highest number being the pragmatic issues. Pragmatic errors were particularly common due to challenges in conveying subtle cultural nuances and context-specific expressions, essential for children's literature. Idioms, implied meanings, and gestures are mostly not translated properly in systems like DeepL because those words are culturally specific. In addition, the distinctive style used in children's stories, such as the use of simple structures, playful words, and contextualized expressions, made the task of DeepL significantly more difficult. This could be attributed to the high pragmatic errors which stemmed from the translation tools highly emphasizing grammatical accuracy and omission of the intended meaning.

Two of the factors that appear to affect DeepL's translation quality the most are its comprehension of context and an audience's common practices for language use including formality, regional variations, or even jargon. At this stage, trying to tap into the language experts' practices could help the tool to handle cultural issues better. More sophisticated neural networks could be used as well in order to improve language relevance for a target audience. If the algorithms take into account language characteristics of the target country as well as its cultural context and work on the accuracy of translating basic texts, DeepL could grow into an even more efficient tool. For DeepL to attain such a target, analyzing feedback from users and professionals will be crucial with the purpose of taking this tool to the next level, and thus satisfying users worldwide.

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