

REFERENCE, PREDICATION AND INDIVIDUATION*

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Abstract: In this paper I shall offer a strategy to bypass a counter-example which Gareth Evans offers against Quine's well-known Thesis of Referential Inscrutability. The bulk of the paper will be devoted to developing an extension of a proposal that Christopher Hookway offers on behalf of the Quinean which avoids losing its empirical adequacy. I shall argue that Evans' counter-example cannot refute Quine's thesis.

Key-words: Radical Translation; Indeterminacy; Inscrutability; Reference; Quine; Evans.

1. LOCATING SCHEMES OF PREDICATION

Quine maintains, in his well-known parable of Radical Translation,¹ that we may assign to the Native term 'gavagai' as its

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¹ The reader not familiar with Quine's arguments should consult his *Word and Object*, chapter 2 (Quine (1960)). For a comprehensive review, see Calvo Garzón (1999).

extension either the set of rabbits or the set of undetached rabbit parts. The conclusion is that it is indeterminate what the term 'gavagai' refers to. Our only hope, in Quine's view, of solving the indeterminacy is by looking at the interaction of such expressions with the apparatus of individuation (plurals, identity, etc.). Hence, by asking the native, let's say, whether there are two or three so-and-so's present, we may be able to tell whether the so-and-so is a term of divided reference or a mass term, for instance.² If the native is able to answer the question, that could count as evidence in support of the thesis that the so-and-so divides its reference. On the other hand, abstention from judgment may count as evidence in support of the thesis that 'gavagai' refers to objects not subject to such division.

Imagine then, for the sake of the argument, that we could ask the native whether a certain gavagai is or is not the same as the one she saw the day before, or about the number of gavagai present at the time of the query. In this way (borrowing, and recasting an example from Christopher Hookway (1988), pp. 148-9), if the linguist asked the native: 'Cuántos gavagai hay allí?', she may translate the native's answer (let us say, 'Dos gavagai') as 'There are two rabbits', and she would feel confident enough about her translation manual because of what she observes about the native's environment and her linguistic behaviour. Unfortunately, this hope is thwarted, Quine argues, since the apparatus of individuation itself is also inscrutable.

Evans disagrees with Quine's contention, and notes that for Quine's argument to work:

it must rest upon the belief that the sole reason a semanticist can have for treating an expression as a predicate with a particular divided reference is to account for that expression's interaction with the (putative) apparatus of individuation. (Evans (1975), pp. 345-6).

² Notice that this strategy already involves a crucial assumption that I shall grant for argument's sake, namely, that the linguists are able to ask questions in Native where the apparatus of individuation is present.

However, according to Evans, the apparatus of individuation is not the only way to identify an expression as a predicate that refers to such-and-such objects. As a matter of fact, the location of the scheme of predication takes place at a subtler level. And such a prior anchoring determines the apparatus of individuation. The apparatus of individuation can, thus, only be secondary. Evans explains what this subtler level consists of:

The primary function of construing an expression, *G*, as a term dividing its reference over rabbits – or trees – is to explain how the truth-conditions of certain elementary, but compound, sentences into which it enters are determined by their parts. The apparatus of individuation may be entirely absent from such sentences. To see the notion “what *G* is a predicate of” in this way is to see it as constrained by a theory of sentence composition into which it fits and which alone gives it sense. (*Ibid.*, p. 346).

There is in particular one phase in the route to linguistic competence where Evans starts to dig in to launch his attack. This is the process by which two observational expressions are attributively combined as occurs for example in ‘White rabbit’ or ‘Yellow paper’. Attributive composition can be better appraised by contrasting it with a more primitive form of combining one-word observation sentences. That is *conjunction* (see Quine (1990), p. 4 and (1970), pp. 9-10). This mode of combination differs from the attributive one in that it does not require any sort of overlapping of the features referred to by the two conjuncts. In this way, ‘White here and rabbit here?’ will be assented to whenever there is both a rabbit and *something* white in the speaker’s vicinity. By contrast, the attributive compound ‘White rabbit?’ will only be assented to when a *decent-sized portion* of the rabbit is itself white. The overlapping of both features is the crucial point that distinguishes what Quine calls *mereological functions* (as in the case of attributive compounds) from truth-functions (such as, for example, conjunction). But, as Evans remarks, mereological functions are not

enough for predication. What we do when we take an expression as a mode of predication is “to associate with it a certain condition, upon whose satisfaction by objects depends the truth or falsity of the sentences in which the expression occurs”. (Evans (1975), pp. 348-9).

Mereological functions are assented to when there is a significant overlapping of the features compounding the function. But, clearly, it is not sufficient for the speaker to be confronted with a decent-sized portion of *rabbit* which is white. Think for example of several non-white rabbits with white tails which are distributed in such a way that their tails form a continuous white picture (cf. Evans (1975), p. 351). In that case, speakers would still dissent from ‘White rabbit?’. This illustrates the fact that mereological functions cannot be taken as predicative constructions. In short, ‘White rabbit’ (taken as a mereological function) does not amount to ‘There is a white rabbit here’. What we require to obtain the correct assent-conditions, and this is the key point, is that the white feature gets distributed in a characteristic way in relation to the boundaries of a single rabbit, such that its presence prompts assent to the query ‘White rabbit?’ (cf. Evans (1975), p. 351).

Hence we may say that ‘White rabbit’ is true if, and only if, there is a rabbit in the vicinity of the speaker which satisfies the condition of being white. In this way, a first step in individuation has been achieved. By identifying the construction ‘White rabbit’ with ‘There is a white rabbit here’, the truth-conditions of such compound sentences can be easily explained. The contribution of the parts (‘white’ and ‘rabbit’) can be explained by taking ‘rabbit’ to be associated with a particular divided referent (i.e., a whole enduring rabbit), and ‘white’ as being distributed within the boundaries of such a particular object in a certain homogeneous way. So, summing up, the position Evans has arrived at is the following:

To say that an expression has a particular divided reference makes sense only in the context of the explanation of compound sentences.
To decide that a term divides its reference over rabbits is to decide that

the sentences into which it occurs involve predication of rabbits. And to decide that a set of sentences involve predication of rabbits is to identify the way those sentences' assent conditions are generated from their parts as depending upon the identity conditions of rabbits, and so systematic mastery of those sentences requires mastery of the identity conditions of rabbits. (Evans (1975), p. 355).

The Quinean, however, does not need to disagree with Evans in order to preserve her perverse alternatives. Explaining the aforementioned compounds as involving predication of rabbits may help the semanticist to construct her theory. Nevertheless, no reason has been given to support the view that the same role cannot be played by appealing to different ways in which the compound terms might divide their reference. For instance, over temporal stages of whole enduring objects, or over their undetached parts. Evans is aware of this point, and his aim in the last part of his seminal paper 'Identity and Predication' is to provide evidence to show why alternative perverse referents cannot possibly deliver the goods to the Quinean. Evans develops several different counter-examples in order to disprove one by one the various Quinean *ad hoc* alternatives.³ In what follows, I shall focus exclusively on Evans' treatment of 'undetached rabbit part'.⁴

³ Well-known putative examples are undetached parts of rabbits, their temporal stages, or any other perverse referent that 'gavagai' might divide its reference over which does not violate Quine's behavioural adequacy conditions. Furthermore, the native term could be equated with some Home expressions that do not divide their reference at all. These are cases such as the abstract singular term 'rabbithood', standing for the universal; or 'rabbitfusion', that denotes the scattered region of space-time composed of all rabbits. Likewise, 'gavagai' could also be translated as the feature-placer 'rabbiting', which would stand in analogy with, for instance, 'raining' or 'snowing'.

⁴ It must be stressed that even if the forthcoming arguments that I shall be offering against Evans' counterexample are on the right track, that would not have a straightforward bearing upon Evans' (1975) other counter-examples (for a thorough appraisal of these other counter-examples, the reader should

2. EVANS' COUNTER-EXAMPLE

To introduce Evans' counter-example, consider two *semantic theories* of Native, one standard and the other perverse.⁵ On the one hand the Standard Theory, ST, deals with, say, the Native expressions 'Rojo gavagai' and 'Verde gavagai' in the following way:

ST

Axioms:

- (a) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'gavagai' iff } x \text{ is a rabbit})$
- (a₁) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'rojo'} \wedge f \text{ iff } (x \text{ is red \& } x \text{ satisfies } f))$
- (a₂) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'verde'} \wedge f \text{ iff } (x \text{ is green \& } x \text{ satisfies } f))$

*Theorems:*⁶

- (a₃) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'rojo'} \wedge \text{'gavagai' iff } (x \text{ is red \& } x \text{ is a rabbit}))$
- (a₄) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'verde'} \wedge \text{'gavagai' iff } (x \text{ is green \& } x \text{ is a rabbit}))$

consult Wright (1997)). However, it must be noted that for the Inscrutability Thesis to work, the sympathiser of Quine may simply stick to *one* perverse alternative to standard semantic theorizing. In the remainder of this paper, I shall thus restrict my interest to Evans' treatment of 'undattached rabbit part'.

⁵ Although noted that Evans' approach differs from Quine's insofar as the semanticist, unlike the translator, is concerned with semantic notions, the Quinean need not disagree. A sympathiser of Quine can concede that referential inscrutability actually concerns indeterminacy in the semantic field. By transferring Quine's original formulation into semantics, we fear no loss. Any theory of semantics will have to match Native with Home sentences. And in doing so the semanticist relies upon the same body of evidence as the translator does. Namely, native assent to/dissent from queries under concurrent observable circumstances. From now on then I shall follow Evans, and illustrate Quine's perversity by means of theories of reference, rather than translation manuals.

⁶ The reader might be expecting that 'theorems' of the standard theory would assign truth to sentences. However, it is simpler to stay with satisfaction for nothing in my ensuing argument hangs on the difference.

On the other hand the perverse semanticist offers the following alternative:

PT1

Axioms:

- (b) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'gavagai' iff } x \text{ is an undetached rabbit part})$
 (b₁) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'rojo'} \wedge f \text{ iff } (x \text{ is red \& } x \text{ satisfies } f))$
 (b₂) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'verde'} \wedge f \text{ iff } (x \text{ is green \& } x \text{ satisfies } f))$

Theorems:

- (b₃) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'rojo'} \wedge \text{'gavagai' iff } (x \text{ is red \& } x \text{ is an undetached rabbit part})$
 (b₄) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'verde'} \wedge \text{'gavagai' iff } (x \text{ is green \& } x \text{ is an undetached rabbit part})$

Let us suppose that ST is behaviourally adequate. We can, thus, identify the sentences 'Rojo gavagai' and 'Verde gavagai' with 'There is a red rabbit here' and 'There is a green rabbit here', respectively. However, Evans considers a line of attack which he believes is lethal for the Quinean semantic proposal. Evans argues that if ST is behaviourally adequate, then PT1 is not behaviourally adequate. There are certain circumstances in which PT1 fails to reflect correctly the native's linguistic behaviour (Evans (1975), p. 358), assuming ST does correctly reflect the native's linguistic behaviour. As Evans suggests, if the native language under study contains

some unstructured expressions whose satisfaction conditions were given on [ST] by use of 'is partly red' and 'is partly green', then, when we permute, it might be thought that these expressions could be given conditions satisfied by some but not all parts of the same rabbit. Thus the sentence whose truth conditions used to be given by ['There is a rabbit here and it is partly red'] is now rendered by the use of ['There is a rabbit part here and it is red'] – which has incontestably the same stimulus meaning [...] This theory, however, will not work if [ST] did.

For the sentence ['There is a rabbit here and it is partly red and it is partly green'] would occasionally elicit assent, inexplicable upon the new theory, under which the sentence emerges as true iff there is a rabbit part present which is both red and green. (Evans (1975), pp. 359-60).

Evans contends that the putative empirical adequacy that Quinean perverse semantics enjoys will be lost as soon as we pay attention to more complex Native sentences. Any perverse counterpart of the standard English sentence 'There is a rabbit here and it is partly red and it is partly green' would fail to preserve stimulus synonymy, misrepresenting thus Native usage.

I don't think that Evans' counter-example can sink Quine's project. In the remainder of the paper I shall offer an extension of a proposal that Hookway (1988) offers on behalf of the Quinean which shows how this project can maintain its empirical adequacy (assuming Evans' hypothesized data).

According to Evans, an extension of our standard theory, ST, would cope with, say, the *unstructured* Native expressions 'parcial-rojo' and 'parcial-verde' in the following way:

ST⁺

Axioms:

- (a) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'gavagai' iff } x \text{ is a rabbit})$
- (a₅) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'parcial-rojo' } \wedge f \text{ iff } (x \text{ is partly red \& } x \text{ satisfies } f))$
- (a₆) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'parcial-verde' } \wedge f \text{ iff } (x \text{ is partly green \& } x \text{ satisfies } f))$

Theorems:

- (a₇) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'parcial-rojo' } \wedge \text{'gavagai' iff } (x \text{ is partly red \& } x \text{ is a rabbit}))$

- (a₈) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'parcial-verde'} \wedge \text{'gavagai'} \text{ iff } (x \text{ is partly green \& } x \text{ is a rabbit}))$
- (a₉) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'parcial-rojo'} \wedge \text{'parcial-verde'} \wedge \text{'gavagai'} \text{ iff } (x \text{ is partly red \& } x \text{ is partly green \& } x \text{ is a rabbit}))$

Assuming that ST^+ is behaviourally adequate, natives would assent, for example, to the combined construction 'Parcial-rojo, parcial-verde gavagai?' only in presence of a rabbit which is partly red and partly green. Now the challenge for the Quinean is to produce an alternative semantic theory to ST .

Consider the following perverse semantic theory, HT , in terms of disjunctive axioms that Hookway ((1988), p. 155) offers on behalf of the semantic sceptic:⁷

HT

Axioms:

- (c) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'gavagai'} \text{ iff } x \text{ is an undetached rabbit part}).$
- (c₂) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'rojo'} \text{ iff either}$
 (i) 'rojo' occurs together with 'gavagai' and x is an undetached part of a red rabbit,
 or
 (ii) 'rojo' occurs in some other context and x is red).
- (c₃) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'verde'} \text{ iff either}$
 (a) 'verde' occurs together with 'gavagai' and x is an undetached part of a green rabbit,
 or
 (b) 'verde' occurs in some other context and x is green).

⁷ HT relates to a perverse semantic proposal that Hookway produces to reply to a different counter-example that Evans raised against the Quinean (see Calvo Garzón (2000b)). To the best of my knowledge, Hookway has not addressed Evans' present criticism. We may nonetheless recast Hookway's proposal in our terminology for our current purposes (see below).

Theorems:

- (c₄) (x)(x satisfies ‘rojo’ \wedge ‘gavagai’ iff (x is an undetached part of a red rabbit))
- (c₅) (x)(x satisfies ‘verde’ \wedge ‘gavagai’ iff (x is an undetached part of a green rabbit)).

The reader should notice that a translator guided by this perverse scheme will predict native assent to/dissent from ‘Rojo gavagai?’ and ‘Verde gavagai?’ in exactly the same sort of situations in which a ‘non-perverse’ translator would. A sympathiser of Hookway may contend that his disjunctive strategy can be deployed in order to cope with the hypothesized pool of data. Hence, our perverse semantic theory HT might be thought to deliver the goods *via* the following extension:

HT⁺*Axioms:*

- (c) (x)(x satisfies ‘gavagai’ iff x is an undetached rabbit part)
- (c₆) (x)(x satisfies ‘parcial-rojo’ $\wedge\psi$ iff either
- (i) ψ = ‘gavagai’ and x is an undetached part of a partly red rabbit,
- or
- (ii) ψ = f \wedge ‘gavagai’ and (x is an undetached part of a red rabbit and x satisfies f \wedge ‘gavagai’),
- or
- (iii) ‘parcial-rojo’ occurs in some other context and x is partly red)
- (c₇) (x)(x satisfies ‘parcial-verde’ $\wedge\psi$ iff either
- (i) ψ = ‘gavagai’ and x is an undetached part of a partly green rabbit,
- or

(ii) $\psi = f \wedge$ 'gavagai' and (x is an undetached part of a green rabbit and x satisfies $f \wedge$ 'gavagai'),

or

(iii) 'parcial-verde' occurs in some other context and x is partly green)

Theorems:

(c₈) (x)(x satisfies 'parcial-rojo' \wedge 'gavagai' iff (x is an undetached part of a partly red rabbit))

(c₉) (x)(x satisfies 'parcial-verde' \wedge 'gavagai' iff (x is an undetached part of a partly green rabbit))

(c₁₀) (x)(x satisfies 'parcial-rojo' \wedge 'parcial-verde' \wedge 'gavagai' iff (x is an undetached part of a partly red, partly green rabbit))

The reader can see that by linking the satisfaction conditions of 'parcial-rojo'/'parcial-verde' (when concatenated with 'gavagai') to things which are parts of partly red/partly green rabbits, we can avoid the results Evans predicted for the Quinean. The reason is simply that the partly- f feature applies to whole rabbits (as is the case under ST), rather than to their parts. Hence, according to HT⁺, native speakers will assent to the query 'Parcial-rojo, parcial-verde gavagai?' in exactly the contexts hypothesized by Evans, namely, when a partly red, partly green rabbit appears in their visual field. Stimulus synonymy, *contra* Evans, is thus preserved.

Someone, however, may maintain that the proposal does not go far enough. Put bluntly, the problem for HT⁺ stems from the fact that the native expressions 'parcial-rojo' and 'parcial-verde' are not actually *unstructured*. Plausibly, by observing the linguistic behaviour of native speakers we'll soon realise that they can talk of a wide variety of objects in their environment as being partly f (where ' f ' need not stand for a colour feature, but rather for any other property natives might ascribe to the object in question). So, they will be able to say, for instance, that

a bottle is *partly* empty.⁸ But in that case, any semantic theory aiming to explain the linguistic competence of native speakers must tell us what the semantic value of ‘parcial’ is. By taking into account the systematicity manifested in the natives’ behaviour, we shall be able to determine the semantic value of ‘parcial *f*’ from the satisfaction conditions of the semantically primitive expressions ‘parcial’ and ‘*f*’. In this way, we’ll be able to grasp the semantic contribution that the simple term ‘parcial’ makes in ‘parcial rojo’ as well as in, for example, ‘parcial vacío’ (the expression that ST has correctly equated with our ‘partly empty’).

Nevertheless, acknowledging that ‘parcial rojo’ and ‘parcial verde’ are structured expressions should not occasion any distress to those sympathetic to Hookway’s route, at least insofar as we manage to produce a semantic theory containing separate axioms for ‘parcial’, ‘rojo’ and ‘verde’. The perverse semantic theory thus required, HT⁺⁺, would include the following disjunctive axioms:⁹

HT⁺⁺

Axioms:

- (c) (x)(x satisfies ‘gavagai’ iff x is an undetached rabbit part)
- (c₁) (x)(x satisfies ‘rojo’ iff x is red)
- (c₂) (x)(x satisfies ‘verde’ iff x is green)
- (c₁₁) (x)(x satisfies $f \wedge$ ‘gavagai’ iff $(\exists y)$ (x is an undetached part of y & y is a rabbit & y satisfies f)
- (c₁₂) (x)(x satisfies ‘parcial’- $f \wedge \psi$ iff either

⁸ There is no point in arguing that, unlike English speakers, natives might lack the apparatus to construct this sort of combined expressions. Quine’s Inscrutability Thesis is meant to apply at Home, where we do employ ‘partly’ in many different contexts.

⁹ I leave as an exercise for the reader to modify the standard theory, ST⁺, so that it can account for the satisfaction conditions of ‘parcial’, ‘rojo’ and ‘verde’ in a *structured* way.

- (i) $\psi = \text{'gavagai'}$ and $(\exists y)(x \text{ is an undetached part of } y \ \& \ x \text{ is a rabbit} \ \& \ (\exists z)(z \text{ is an undetached part of } y \ \& \ z \text{ satisfies } f))$,¹⁰
- or
- (ii) $\psi = g \wedge \text{'gavagai'}$ and $(\exists y)(x \text{ is an undetached part of } y \ \& \ y \text{ is a rabbit} \ \& \ y \text{ satisfies } g \ \& \ (\exists z)(z \text{ is an undetached part of } y \ \& \ z \text{ satisfies } f))$
- or
- (iii) $\psi = \text{'parcial'}$ - $g \wedge \text{'gavagai'}$ and $(\exists y)(x \text{ is an undetached part of } y \ \& \ y \text{ is a rabbit} \ \& \ (\exists z)(z \text{ is an undetached part of } y \ \& \ z \text{ satisfies } f) \ \& \ (\exists w)(w \text{ is an undetached part of } y \ \& \ w \text{ satisfies } g))$
- or
- (iv) 'parcial-rojo' occurs in some other context and x is partly red)

The above axiomatic structure seems to deliver the goods to the Quinean. It delivers satisfaction theorems similar to those generated by HT^+ – (c₈), (c₉) and (c₁₀), so that the property of 'being partly f ' applies to whole rabbits, rather than to their parts. Otherwise, Evans' counter would certainly work. Thanks to HT^{++} , we have no problem in accounting for the different possible uses of 'parcial'. When natives talk about rabbits as being partly red, or partly green, we employ the first disjunct, (i) of (c₁₂), together with the appropriate supplementary axiom for the particular value of f in question. Hence we get, for example, the theorem:

- (c₁₃) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'parcial' } \wedge \text{'rojo' } \wedge \text{'gavagai' iff } (\exists y)(x \text{ is an undetached part of } y \ \& \ y \text{ is a rabbit} \ \& \ (\exists z)(z \text{ is an undetached part of } y \ \& \ z \text{ is red}))$

¹⁰ It could either be the case that $x=z$ or $x \neq z$. Notice that all (i) in (c₁₂) is saying is that x is an undetached part of a rabbit which has a part that is f . It does not need to be the case that x is the part that the f feature applies to.

and also, for example,

- (c₁₄) $(x)(x \text{ satisfies 'parcial'} \wedge \text{'rojo'} \wedge \text{'parcial'} \wedge \text{'verde'} \wedge \text{'gavagai'} \text{ iff } (\exists y)(x \text{ is an undetached part of } y \text{ \& } y \text{ is a rabbit}) \& (\exists z)(z \text{ is an undetached part of } y \text{ \& } z \text{ is red}) \& (\exists w)(w \text{ is an undetached part of } y \text{ \& } w \text{ is green}))$

So, it seems that HT⁺⁺ can deal perfectly with, say, 'parcial rojo, parcial verde gavagai' when 'parcial rojo' and 'parcial verde' are taken to be structured. The satisfaction theorem for 'Parcial rojo parcial verde gavagai' is derivable from the semantic properties of its constituents. That is, from the semantic values of 'parcial', 'rojo', 'verde', and 'gavagai', specified respectively in axioms (c₁₂), (c₁), (c₂) and (c). So, the way (c₁₄) has been generated is the following. Since 'parcial rojo' occurs together with 'parcial verde gavagai', we employed the third disjunct, (iii), of (c₁₂). Then in order to cash out the semantic vocabulary remaining in the right hand side of (iii), i.e., z satisfies 'rojo' and w satisfies 'verde', we employed axioms (c₁) and (c₂). As we can see, a native guided by HT⁺⁺ will assent to/dissent from the query 'Parcial rojo, parcial verde gavagai?' in exactly the same kind of contexts in which a native guided by the standard theory would, namely, when a rabbit which is partly red and partly green passes by. In conclusion, HT⁺⁺ is behaviourally adequate, and stimulus synonymy, *contra* Evans, is preserved.

I conclude that Hookway's perverse theory of semantics can be expanded to bypass Evans' counter-example. The present discussion indicates that the Quinean need not be embarked on a lost cause, at least with respect to Evans' hypothesized data.¹¹

¹¹ Crispin Wright (1997) has recently produced two arguments against Quine's Inscrutability Thesis, based on 'structural' and 'psychological' simplicity, respectively, which may jeopardize the perverse semantic route offered in this paper. For a rejoinder to Wright's arguments see Calvo Garzón ((2000a) and (under review)).

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