

METAPHORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DEMOCRACY IN THE UK AND ROMANIA

Adina Oana Nicolae, Assist. Prof., Phd, "Petroleum-Gas" University of Ploiești

Abstract: Ever since the coining of the term in ancient Greece, democracy has never ceased to be a hot topic. Other cultures have added their own theoretical and practical contributions to the evolution of democratic societies, including the Western and Eastern European ones. As long as action at the social, political and personal levels is tightly interconnected to public discourse factors, the metaphorical representations of a key notion such as democracy are likely to provide valuable insights into the conceptualisation of the phenomenon in two different countries (the UK and Romania) and two different languages (English and Romanian). Relying on up-to-date excerpts from newspapers issued in the two countries, the article seeks to outline which recurring metaphorical patterns are publicly available and to emphasise their manifold implications.

Keywords: democracy, metaphor, newspaper, public discourse.

Ancient Greece has launched democracy as a particularly fascinating concept with innumerable promises, whose fate was to spread across the globe. Since then, other cultures have added their own theoretical and practical contributions to the evolution of democratic societies. In the wake of the 1989 revolution, which fostered the development of a modern democratic state, the understanding of the concept of democracy in Romania has been blatantly submitted, along with that of other bell-ringing terms (such as national interest, the reform of the state, etc.), to ongoing elaboration, definition, renegotiation and criticism. Yet the debates and controversies over the rules and best practices of democratic forms of government are not over and they are often incorporated in public discourse, either as the focal point or as an offshoot of another topic. As long as action at the social, political and personal levels is tightly interconnected to public discourse factors, the metaphorical representations of a key notion such as democracy are held to arise from an interplay of socio-cultural and linguistic dimensions, that together elucidate the role of a particular metaphorical network in language and thought.

The central goal of this paper is to investigate the range of metaphorical source domains currently adopted in outlining the chosen abstract target concept, i.e. democracy, in the Romanian and British public discourse. In order to provide an empirical basis for this quantitative and qualitative analysis, two relatively small corpora (of 12,187 and 11,145 words, respectively) have been compiled between 2009 and 2011: the Romanian one consists in samples of the written press discourse (extracted from the central daily newspapers *Gândul*, *România liberă*, or an online source of topical news and commentaries, www.ziare.com); the English corpus features comparable public discourse excerpts elicited from a range of British newspapers such as *The Independent*, *the Daily Mail*, *the Morning Star*, *the Express*, *the Financial Times*. This research aims at drawing a parallel between the metaphorical patterns that are hosted in each culture, and will henceforth refer to the two corpora as the Romanian Public Discourse Corpus (RPDC) and the English Public Discourse Corpus (EPDC).

This paper adopts a metaphor-led discourse analytic approach (Cameron et al, 2009) and uses a dependable metaphor identification procedure, which is based on a threefold

approach to metaphor as a complex linguistic, cognitive and discourse unit (following Charteris-Black 2004). In order to extract data from the two corpora, computerized corpus analysis, powered by Wordsmith Tools (Scott 2008), is performed for the lexical tags related to the core lexeme democracy, both in English and in Romanian. For the Romanian concordances that serve for exemplification purposes below, the translation has been provided.

Researching metaphors in the public discourse: a rationale

Since Demosthenes' times, public speakers have known that metaphors work to change people's minds. Yet, in the last decades, this has been intensely researched and professionally done.

In 2003, one such attempt was launched by the Democrat George Lakoff, who became the founder of the Rockridge Institute. The main aim of the newly-founded institute was to strengthen democracy by revealing and questioning the way public interest issues were framed, i.e. the metaphorical language used in discussing and asserting political and social views. This think tank claimed that metaphors had become manipulative tools of communication to such a perilous extent that they set the agenda of the national political debate. The point was made by invoking recurring syntagms such as “the danger of surrendering to terrorism” or “the wave of illegal immigrants”. Lakoff and his collaborators (Lakoff 2002, Lakoff, Dean and Hazen 2004) argued that the dichotomy which underlay American politics at that time was based on two reflections of the family frame: for the conservatives, it was an “authoritarian, strict father family” model, whereas the progressives embraced a “nurturant parent” model, prone to valuing freedom, opportunity and community building. Although the institute ceased to exist in 2008, some echoes of its ideas and concerns were heard in Obama's campaign messages. Consider for instance the debate over the American health care system that highlighted health marketability in the conservatives' view, as opposed to the progressives' concern regarding health affordability and availability (Neagu 2010, 49). In a like-minded study, the political scientist Richard D. Anderson targeted the dynamics of metaphors in three parallel sources: Brezhnev-era speeches by Politburo members, 1989 “transitional” speeches, and post-1991 discourse by post-Soviet political people (Anderson 2001). The essential conclusion he reached was that the discourses of the three spans surveyed in the study were dominated by discrepant cognitive-linguistic projections and, in time, a shift had occurred: metaphors of “personal superiority”, of “distance” or of “subordination” had been replaced by metaphors of “equality” and of “choice”. As it could have reasonably been expected, the changes in the political system were reflected in changes of metaphorical paradigms. In other words (Anderson 2001, 335), “change in Russian political discourse has been such as to promote the emergence of democracy”.

The American business market hosts a number of consulting firms that seek to enhance their clients' awareness of the present and potential metaphorical patterns available in a certain kind of discourse. Among these there are Olson Zaltman Associates, a consulting firm that uses a procedure called “metaphor elicitation” to help global brands (clients include GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer, Chevron, DuPont, Procter & Gamble, Coca-Cola and the World Bank) target consumers' implicit thoughts, feelings and knowledge, or Charles River

Analytics, which provides expertise in semantics, communication through narratives and cultural language patterns for the Department of Defense.

The relevance of metaphorical language and thought in people’s behavioural patterns has attracted the interest of The Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA), a US government agency that funds “high-risk/high-payoff research” into areas of interest to the “intelligence community”. It was founded in 2007 and is now based in a new facility at the University of Maryland, thus benefiting from academic expertise in the field of communication. In April 2011, this agency proposed the so-called Metaphor Program, a five-year project to discover what a foreign culture’s metaphors can reveal about its beliefs. A synopsis describes this program as one that “will exploit the fact that metaphors are pervasive in everyday talk and reveal the underlying beliefs and worldviews of members of a culture”. In phase one of the project, large amounts of native-language texts, with various underlying cultural frames, will be fed into heavy-duty computers, then retrieved by categories and analysed by linguists. In phase two of the project, separate case studies will implement the findings of the first phase so as to disclose and substantiate the hidden aims and frames of mind behind different factions involved in some dispute.

This study furthers the interest in the way Romanians perceive their values and their choices, their assets and their future. In a previous study (Nicolae 2007), I relied on another Romanian public discourse corpus in order to provide an overview of the conceptual frames applicable to Romania’s EU membership. Another strong deliverer of cognitive-based explanations for how public issues are or could be grasped by the target public is a strategic communications consulting company called Cultural Logic, which was founded by Axel Aubrun, Meg Bostrom and Joseph Grady. Following the founders of Cultural Logic, it can be argued that metaphors do play a significant part in public discussions of public interest issues—and the democratic system may be such a perennial thought–provoking hot issue.

Metaphorical Facets of Democracy: Where Romanian and British Conceptualizations Meet

The concordance lines in which a key word such as “democracy”, “pro-democracy”, “democratic”, or “democratize” was identified were surveyed for the semantic tension and the cognitive transfer between the Topic, DEMOCRACY, and a Vehicle term. A statistical overview of the results is presented in Table 1.

Patterns	RPDC	EPDC
Total hits	175	121
Non-metaphorical use of terms	60 (34.28%)	32 (26.44)
Metaphorical expressions	115 (65.71%)	89 (73.55%)
Main metaphorical patterns	91 (52%)	66 (54.54%)
CONFLICT	27 (15.42%)	23 (19.00%)
JOURNEY	10 (5.71%)	17 (14.04%)
OBJECT	26 (14.85%)	15 (12.39%)
LIVING ORGANISM	23 (13.14%)	7 (5.78%)
TEACHING	5 (2.85%)	4 (3.30%)
Secondary metaphorical patterns	24 (13.71%)	23 (19.00%)

Table 1.

In both corpora, the procedure resulted in a number of non-metaphorical uses of the searched lexemes. The remaining metaphorical hits were subsequently divided into main metaphorical patterns (the highest percentage patterns in each corpus) and secondary metaphorical patterns, i.e. rare or occasional metaphors, with fewer instantiations (less than 4 per corpus). The findings reveal that both the English and the Romanian public discourse embrace worldviews that grow out of root metaphors which account for and guide their peoples' experiences. The metaphorical paths that most frequently direct the two popular perceptions of democratic experience cluster around one of the following concepts: CONFLICT, JOURNEY, OBJECT, LIVING ORGANISM and TEACHING.

According to the statistics, the war or CONFLICT metaphors clearly prevail in both corpora. Two complementary views shape the conflict typologies, namely the conflict for democracy, coded as a propitious form of socio-political organization, as in (1), (2), or (3) below, or against negatively rated personal and social phenomena (e.g. poverty, injustice, corruption), as in (4) and (5). Understandably, in the light of the people's recent historical past, dictatorship and anarchy are outlined in the Romanian texts as the opponent of democracy (6). They belong to a range of potential enemies, and so do the people that support them. The population is divided into attackers and defenders of democracy, as in (7), (8), (9), enacting a widely accepted correspondence–POLITICS IS CONFLICT– that shapes modern international political thinking, as in (10).

(1) “Let the fightback for democracy start here”

(2) “Britain has just 15 hours to save its democracy today, David Cameron warns”

(3) “Democracy's defenders rally before crunch vote on EU referendum”

(4) “BBC pro-Brussels bias is an outrage against democracy”

(5) “Însă există democrații unde lupta împotriva corupției este considerabilă.” (“But there are democracies where the fight against corruption is significant”)

(6) “vor genera o corcitură între dictatură, democrație deșănțată și anarhie” (“will generate a mixture of dictatorship, indecent democracy and anarchy”)

(7) “nostalgiei perioadei comuniste sunt, de fapt, cei mai mari dușmani ai democrației” (“the people who regret communism are, in fact, democracy's greatest enemies”)

(8) “nu așa cum și-ar fi dorit apărătorii democrației” (not as some defenders of democracy would have liked”)

(9) “unii jurnaliști își apără democrația” (“some journalists defend their democracy”)

(10) “Western social democracy won the Cold War”

The CONFLICT metaphor is inferred from Vehicle terms that correspond to threats, dangers and strategic decisions, obvious in (11), (12), (13) or (14). The Romanian corpus unexpectedly matches enemies of democracy onto the press (15) and the economic crisis (16). A particular re-interpretation of the conflict scenario is enacted in a mixed metaphor context (White 1996, 49), where elements of boxing (the good and the bad corner) and chivalry fights are intermingled, with the president of Romania being the knight mounting on democracy and the boxer fighting the press (example (17)). Only in RPDC, this scenario singles out the press as a detrimental institution for democracy.

(11) “David Gardner on the threats to democracy in the Arab world”

(12) “care urlă în gura mare că democrația este în pericol” (“who cry out that democracy is in danger”)

(13) “Over-regulating the British press would ‘put democracy itself in peril’”

(14) “a strategy of engagement with the democratic, modernising forces across the region”

(15) “Democrația s-a aflat în război cu presa” (“democracy found itself at war with the press”)

(16) “Democrația este amenințată de criza economică” (“democracy is threatened by the economic crisis”)

(17) “În colțul bun stă președintele călare pe democrație, în colțul rău se află presa ticăloșită mânuită și manipulată de moguli feroce și haini” (“in the good corner there is the president riding democracy, in the bad corner there is the evil press handled and manipulated by ferocious and wicked moguls”)

Among the mappings that have been claimed to license POLITICS AS CONFLICT, there have been intermingled an evolutionary argument, LIFE IS A STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL, and a well-established personification, i.e. SOCIETY IS A PERSON (Charteris-Black 2004, 92).

In JOURNEY metaphors, the purpose of socio-political life, of politicians’ and citizens’ actions is conceptualized as a destination called democracy:

(18) “as Egypt makes the journey to democracy”

(19) “the long-awaited declaration starts the clock on Lybia’s transition to democracy”

(20) “societăți pe care am dori să le sprijinim în drumul lor spre democrație” (“societies we would like to support on their way to democracy”)

(21) “votul prin corespondență e un pas spre democrație” (“the vote by correspondence is a step towards democracy”)

The corpus samples interconnected in the JOURNEY conceptual network share a series of implications, among which there are: the pre-existence of the destination, the existence of a unitary social will to reach that destination, a prerequisite succession of steps to be taken, etc. The clarification of the generic journey is achieved by collocational resources: the adjectives that precede the term ‘democracy’ lend it more specific features. “British democracy” (22) highlights the fact that there is a custom-made democracy for each country; “full democracy” (23) indicates the commensurability of the goal, normally an abstract entity that does not allow measurement; “genuine open democracy” (24) projects a double-sided perspective on the Topic term, as falsifiable and spatially (and therefore ethically) configured as open or not.

(22) “a free vote in a crucial debate next week could mark a turning point for British democracy”

(23) “gradual transition to full democracy is best for Oman”

(24) “to encourage and help the transition from military rule to genuine open democracy here in Egypt”

Although some negative characteristics still loom behind the metaphor linguistic layer (empty, closed, false democracy would be the unwanted destinations), the overall pragmatic orientation of the JOURNEY metaphor is a positive one. The audience is informed of “cautious steps” (25), obstacles (“sideslips”, (26)), the time pressure (“start the clock”, (19)),

movement constraints (“a clear road-map”, (27)), and public responsibilities (“take responsibility for”, (28)).

(25) “the monarch, who has ruled since 1999, has been forced to take cautious steps towards democracy”

(26) “toți cei care clamați derapaje de la democrație” (“all of you who call out sideslips from democracy”)

(27) “Guma El-Gamaty said there was a ‘clear road-map’ to democracy in Lybia”

(28) “Este un pas spre democrație pe care România trebuie să și-l assume” (“It is a step towards democracy which Romania should take responsibility for”)

Since these are inherent elements in a worthwhile journey, they eventually manage to increase the value attached to the common social goal, just as it had been noticed about journey metaphors in American presidential inaugural speeches, built in the same conceptual vein, confirming that PURPOSEFUL SOCIAL ACTIVITY IS TRAVELLING ALONG A PATH TOWARDS A DESTINATION (Charteris-Black 2004, 93). Occasionally, still within the journey frame, democracy is converted into the vehicle (29) or a path (30), and integrated into the more general correspondence between LIFE and JOURNEY, whose versatile functioning was discussed by Lakoff and Turner (1989, 3ff).

(29) “Muslim sectarianism will halt democracy in its tracks.”

(30) “declarațiile presedintelui PSD [...] sunt pe lângă democrație și transpirate de ură” (“The Social-Democrat Party’s president’s declarations are by the side of democracy and sweating with hatred”)

The positive cognitive imprint of the JOURNEY metaphor in the public discourse is achieved by virtue of two related triggers: one is the everyday experiential knowledge of purposeful journeys in which humans are the agents; the other is represented by deeply entrenched, culture-specific patterns of paradigmatic journeys, such as the quest for the Holy Grail in the British culture and the quest for evergreen youth and immortality in traditional Romanian folk tales. These two cognitive resources inevitably build the public expectations to be confronted with sacrifice, obstacles, time management skills and delayed satisfaction upon attaining the final goal. The meaningfulness of the JOURNEY metaphor is therefore enhanced through linguistic, cognitive, cultural and pragmatic factors concurring in a public discourse context. In both corpora, journey-based metaphors comply with the publicly desirable social goal and have motivational potential.

Through REIFICATION (Goatly 1997, 46ff), to the Topic-term democracy is assigned a specific ontological status, that of an object. The allotropes of this object are not few. Democracy is viewed as a container, usually accompanied by the preposition “in” (31). If the converse situation applies, that is democracy is the content, it collocates with quantity expressions such as “too much” (32), “more” (33), or “delivered in a package” (34). The connotations are ambivalent: a more advanced democratic society may be positively or negatively connoted, yet too much democracy is paradoxically evaluated as hindering the society’s efforts.

(31) “It’s harder and harder to do anything in a democracy”

(32) “Too much democracy to get anything done”

(33) “demanding a new constitution to bring more democracy”

(34) “În România, ca nicăieri în altă parte de altfel, democrația nu a venit livrată la pachet cu libertatea, după decembrie '89.” (“In Romania, and nowhere else, democracy has not been delivered in a package with freedom, after December '89.”)

(35) “E posibil exportul de democrație în țări aflate în tranziție?” (“Is the export of democracy to countries in transition possible?”)

(36) “Cred că mai multă democrație într-un partid niciodată nu strică” (“I believe more democracy in a political party won't hurt”)

(37) “Rușii spun că nu au nevoie de democrație” (“The Russians say they don't need democracy”)

In a few Romanian corpus samples, the authors prefer to treat democracy as a commodity, a merchandise to be exported and delivered to countries with other political regimes (e.g. (35), (36)). This representation is dysphemistic, downplaying the values and virtues of the target concept to the merits of a material, tradable product. In (37), the downgrading trend reaches the extreme when, based on the results of a poll of opinion, Russians are said to conceive of democracy as of a disposable, unnecessary item. In both corpora re-occur instances of democracy's genuineness (e.g. (38) through (41)). Through metaphorical means, “imitation”, “true”, “falsify”, “fake”, “original”, “genuine” become semantically compatible with the Topic-term democracy, confirming a parallel British-Romanian interest in preserving the authenticity of this particular system of government.

(38) “we have shown the world what true democracy really looks like”

(39) “Gorbachev has described Russia as an imitation of democracy”

(40) “Presa a falsificat democrația” (“The press has falsified democracy”)

(41) “Democrația românească originală a trecut în ultimii 20 de ani la privatizarea economiei.” (“The original Romanian democracy has spent the last twenty years privatizing the economy”)

In the selected corpora, personifications or animizing metaphors work for democracy in a heterogeneous fashion, verifying Lakoff and Johnson's claim that personification “is not a single unified process” (1980, 33).

(42) “Our democracy is stronger for the dropping of BSKyB bid”

(43) “Hail the dawn of a healthier democracy”

(44) “faptul ca democrația românească s-ar fi putut maturiza suficient în două decenii” (“the fact that Romanian democracy could have grown enough in two decades”)

(45) “o chestiune de supraviețuire a democrației în România” (“an issue treating democracy's survival in Romania”)

(46) “la rădăcinile democrației românești” (“at the roots of Romanian democracy”)

(47) “Regimul Băsescu a ucis democrația” (“Băsescu's regime has killed democracy”)

The human or animate features that become salient in metaphorical patterns (42) through (47) are diverse, yet they seem to impute to the target concept a few characteristics critical to living organisms: health, growth and survival. *Mutatis mutandis*, the public opinion is principally concerned with the well-being and the very existence of democracy. Given the short history of democracy in their country, Romanians focus particularly on the survival of this political system, indicating the fact they fear the worst and often doubt their future. Samples (45) and (47) project strong emotive associations and highlight the argumentative or persuasive potential of the sentences in which they are included.

As previous studies have pointed out, it should come as no surprise that TEACHING metaphors are used in the public discourse (Semino 2002, Nicolae 2007). These metaphors reinforce the public predilection to rank teaching and learning as crucial aspects of civilization in both the British and the Romanian culture. Teaching the subject matter called democracy to other peoples becomes therefore possible, or teaching it as a skill. If the British seem to insist on testing the learners' progress, the Romanians underscore another portion of the metaphorical network by associating it with a religious dimension, so much so that teaching becomes preaching and democracy will be a sermon. On top of the positive inherent cultural load of the metaphor, the religious content strengthens the positive emotional impact of the words. Ironically though, it is the president of Romania who preaches democracy to the British when visiting the UK, and the mismatch of democratic traditions may eventually undermine the metaphor's rhetorical potential in this particular case.

(48) "Tunisians get a crash course in democracy ahead of historic vote"

(49) "This small North African country sparked a string of revolutions in the Middle East – and now it is the first to put democracy to the test at the polling booth."

(50) "perioada de care românii ar avea nevoie ca să 'deprindă' democrația" ("the interval which Romanians would need in order to learn the skill of democracy")

(51) "De aici până la a învăța ce este democrația și, mai ales, până la a o pune în practică și a o respecta va mai trece o bună bucată de vreme." ("It will take sometime before we learn what democracy is and especially before we put it into practice and respect it")

(52) "Băsescu predică democrația englezilor" (Băsescu preaches democracy to the English")

A number of secondary metaphorical mappings are scattered in the analyzed Romanian and the English discourses. Statistically, they cannot be held to represent surface structures of recurrent and consistent conceptual correspondences. Nevertheless, similar occurrences are retrieved from both languages and, even if sometimes they are one-shot images, their rhetorical or pragmatic force may be relevant at some point in the public address. To the class of secondary metaphorical source domains belong BUILDING, PROCESS, THEATRE, EMOTION, IDEA, MACHINE, ETHICS.

Metaphorical Facets of Democracy: Romanian-English Contrasts

Several metaphors have been formulated unilaterally in only one of the two corpora. On the one hand, in EPDC the following representations of democracy are one-off analogies between democracy and food, colour or health. Their experiential bases may be different, yet they draw on tangible, concrete conceptual items, of central interest to humans. In (53) and (54), the abstract Topic is connected to sensory experiences of taste and sight, and in (55) the health script is invoked without mentioning the identity of the patient and the medical experts.

(53) "Taste of democracy sends Burma's fragile economy into freefall"

(54) "showed their grasp of the nuances of democracy"

(55) "The antidote to terrorism is democracy, human rights and freedom"

On the other hand, the Romanian discourse extracts are loaded with negative implications: as long as democracy is pictured as an experiment (56), the people may be its victims and the experiment may turn out to be unsuccessful.

(56) "Două decenii de experiment democratic" ("Two decades of democratic experiment")

(57) "democrația deșănțată" ("indecent democracy")

(58) “Democrație responsabilă, democrație iresponsabilă” (“Responsible democracy, irresponsible democracy”)

The adjective “deșănțată” (“indecent”, in (57)) introduces lack of appropriacy or common sense. In (58), personification is not the only possibility for interpretation; the antonymic pair “responsible/ irresponsible” democracy could also be based on a metonymy: democracy stands for the current actors or promoters of the regime, i.e. the government and their political, social and economic action. The opposition makes sense insofar as the expression “responsible democracy” is not considered to be pleonastic, and the phrase “irresponsible democracy” does not count as oxymoronic.

The contrastive metaphors in the two corpora were only one-off cognitive-semantic mappings, not coherent and recurring metaphorical arguments reclaiming culture-specific aspects. Therefore no final conclusions concerning the divergences between the corpora can be sustained. However, it is noteworthy that the preferences in the Romanian texts invite the readership to grasp mainly the negative aspects of the democratic process in Romania.

Metaphorical Facets of Democracy: Contextual Contributions

The role of the context in enhancing the authorial commitment to a certain metaphorical frame is significant in the surveyed corpora. In English, negative copulative constructions (in (59) and (60)) leave the affirmative counterpart to be inferred by the reader.

(59) “Nor is democracy a safeguard against extremism today.”

(60) “Democracy is not the same as freedom”

In Romanian, questioning the validity of an expressed or implied metaphor is achieved strategically by interrogative structures and conditional clauses that deny the hypothetical analogy. The rhetorical effect of such metaphor-diminishing contextual markers succeeds in unsettling not only the implied analogy, but also the validity of the Topic concept itself:

(61) “Avem o democrație responsabilă? Răspunsul este categoric NU!” (“Do we have a responsible democracy? The answer is definitely NOT!”)

(62) Asta să însemne democrație? (“Is that what democracy means?”)

(63) Dacă asta înseamnă democrație... (If that means democracy...)

Conclusions

In the final analysis, the metaphorical understandings which direct our perceptions of a complex and controversial socio-political reality are and must be periodically revisited, restructured or re-oriented depending on how well they do or do not serve as guides and explanatory tools.

The metaphorical patterns common to the two languages and cultures constitute important, albeit restricted, root metaphors for understanding and directing the people’s actions within their particularly diverse democracy. As John Dewey (1916, 87) famously said long ago, “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience”.

Metaphors drawn from many areas of experience, as identified above in the cross-linguistic analysis of two public discourse corpora, fulfill metaphor’s fundamental role, that of establishing a cognitive connection between a structurally impoverished domain and an

experientially close one. They are both legitimate and necessary, and their ideological force is not negligible: metaphors are both misleading and helpful in understanding and acting.

The similarities and discrepancies emerging from the two corpora are borne out of similar and dissimilar, longer or shorter experiences of democracy and diverse identities of the discourse participants.

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