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PRESERVING MEANING AND CONTEXT: A STUDY OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN THE TRANSLATION OF ARABIC PROVERBS

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Abstract

This research delves into the intricate dynamics of translating proverbs, aiming to ensure that the essence of the source language is accurately conveyed in the target language. Translating proverbs presents unique challenges due to the inherent cultural and contextual nuances embedded within them. To address this, employing culturally equivalent strategies becomes crucial in faithfully representing the intended meaning. The process of translating through culture is not merely a mechanical task; it serves as a bridge fostering a profound understanding between different cultures. This bridge facilitates the effective communication of proverbial messages in the target language, exemplified by the proverb "Qabla ar-rima tumlau al-kanain." A literal translation fails to capture its essence, but a cultural approach reveals its Indonesian equivalent: "sedia paying sebelum hujan." This stark contrast underscores the necessity of cultural adaptation to convey the intended message accurately. This qualitative study relies on data sourced from various references, such as "Al-Balaghah Al-Wadhihah" and "Al-Amtsal Al-Arabiyyah Wa Al-Amtsal Al-Amiyah: Muqaranah Dalaliyah" by Al-hamzawi. Proverbs are extracted, and the research applies content analysis and a cultural adaptation approach. The fusion of Arabic proverbs with Indonesian counterparts from works like Dipo Udi's "Kumpulan Peribahasa Indonesia" and the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture's "500 Pepatah" allows for a comprehensive analysis. The findings affirm that cultural adaptation effectively conveys proverbial messages. This adaptation involves substituting proverbs with culturally relevant expressions, ensuring a seamless integration into the cultural context of the target language. Ultimately, this research sheds light on the significance of cultural sensitivity in translating proverbs for a more nuanced and accurate representation of their intended meanings.

Keywords: Proverbs, Source Language, Target Language.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menggali dinamika terjemahan peribahasa yang rumit, dengan tujuan memastikan esensi bahasa sumber tersampaikan secara akurat dalam bahasa target. Penerjemahan peribahasa menghadirkan tantangan unik karena adanya nuansa budaya dan konteks yang melekat erat di dalamnya. Untuk mengatasinya, penggunaan strategi padanan budaya menjadi krusial dalam upaya menyampaikan makna yang sesungguhnya dengan setia. Proses penerjemahan melalui budaya bukan sekadar tugas mekanis; ia berfungsi sebagai jembatan yang menumbuhkan pemahaman mendalam antarbudaya. Jembatan ini memfasilitasi komunikasi pesan peribahasa yang efektif dalam bahasa target, sebagaimana dicontohkan oleh peribahasa "*Qabla ar-rima tumlau al-kanain.*" Terjemahan literal gagal menangkap esensinya, tetapi pendekatan budaya mengungkapkan padanannya dalam bahasa Indonesia: "sedia payung sebelum hujan." Kontras yang mencolok ini menggarisbawahi perlunya adaptasi budaya untuk menyampaikan pesan yang dimaksud secara akurat. Penelitian kualitatif ini mengandalkan data yang bersumber dari berbagai referensi, seperti "*Al-Balaghah Al-Wadhihah*" dan "*Al-Amsal Al-Arabiyyah Wa Al-Amsal Al-Amiyah: Muqaranah Dalaliyah*" karya Al-hamzawi. Peribahasa diekstraksi dan dianalisis dengan teknik analisis isi serta pendekatan adaptasi budaya. Penggabungan peribahasa Arab dengan padanannya dalam bahasa Indonesia dari karya-karya seperti "Kumpulan Peribahasa Indonesia" karya Dipo Udi dan "500 Pepatah" yang diterbitkan oleh Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI memungkinkan analisis yang komprehensif. Temuan penelitian menegaskan bahwa adaptasi budaya secara efektif menyampaikan pesan peribahasa. Adaptasi ini melibatkan substitusi peribahasa dengan ekspresi yang relevan secara budaya, memastikan integrasi yang mulus ke dalam konteks budaya bahasa target. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya kepekaan budaya dalam menerjemahkan peribahasa untuk representasi makna yang lebih bernuansa dan akurat.

Kata Kunci: *Peribahasa, Bahasa Sumber (BSU), Bahasa Sasaran (BSA)*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic has had a longstanding development. 'Abbas al-'Aqqad stated about the existence of Arab culture as quoted by Abd. Shabur Shahin in his book "*Fi Ilmu al-Lughah al-'Amm*" that Arab culture has existed for a long time, long before Greek culture, which is about more than 2000 years ago.¹ According to Ibrahim Anis, Arabic has existed since the 3rd century AD.² Language develops according to cultural development because language and culture are related to each other. It can be said that language and culture have a causality relationship,³ it means that language is part of the results of human culture. Vice versa, language can influence human culture. There are three views on the relationship between language and culture.⁴ First, language is a reflection of the entire culture of the society concerned. This view is the basis for some anthropologists to understand a society through the language used. Second, language is part (one of the elements) of culture,

¹ Abd. Shabur Syahin, *Fi Ilmu Al-Lughah Al-'Amm* (Beirut: Al-Risalah, 1984), 69-77.

² Ibrahim Anis, *Fi Al-Lahajat Al-'Arabiyyah* (Kairo: Maktabah Al-Anglo Al-Mishriyyah, 1973), 40-48.

³ Devianty Rina, "Bahasa Sebagai Cermin Kebudayaan," *Jurnal Tarbiyah* 24, no. 2 (2017): 226-245.

⁴ Islah Gusmian, "Lompatan Stilistik Dan Transformasi Dunia Makna Al- Qur'an," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 2, no. 2 (2007): 445-446.

meaning that language is seen not as a distinctive phenomenon, but a phenomenon that is no different from other cultural elements, such as art. Third, language is a condition for culture. There are two meanings in this view. First, language is a condition for culture in a diachronic sense, meaning that we can know Javanese, Sundanese, or other people through language. Second, language is a condition for culture because the materials used to construct language are essentially the same in shaping culture. Here it is clear that language – as well as culture – can develop.

Language in addition to functioning as a medium of communication or media to interact with each other⁵ in it there are cultural symptoms that indirectly reflect the culture in it. Here there is a very close relationship between language and culture because they influence each other. Nababan in Robert Sibarani argues that every language has four classes of functions, namely cultural functions, social functions, individual functions, and educational functions.⁶ It is very difficult to say whether proverbs used to be or whether the culture that emerged because of the expression "to know proverbs, you must know the culture of the owner of the language", and there is also the expression "through language can be known the culture of the owner of the language". Language and culture go hand in hand. We look at the definition of language based on the opinions of experts. In this regard, I take the opinion of Ibn Jinni who says that language is the *lafadz* used by a people, to express their intentions and purposes.⁷ Here it can be understood that culture will not occur without the existence of tools or media that can be used by people or individuals to express feelings, goals, feelings, and others.

Language and culture are very difficult to separate because language is a means of communication for individuals or society, and in society, there is culture in it. Culture can occur when there is language because language is what makes culture possible and it is with language that it can be recorded and passed on to the next generation. Through language, it can be identified how human behavior, culture at that time, and so on, especially in proverbs. The proverbs referred to in this paper are as defined by Padmosoekotjo⁸ and Subalidinata,⁹ which is an expression whose meaning is different from the original meaning (the meaning contained in the word). The culture of our ancestors can be accepted and passed on to our children and grandchildren only through language.¹⁰ Therefore, the language reflects cultural reality.¹¹ There are several strategies for

⁵ Ibnu Jinni, *Al-Khashaish, Jilid 1* (Kairo: Dar Al-Hadits, 2007), 33-34.

⁶ Robert Sibarani, *Hakikat Bahasa* (Bandung: PT. Citra Aditya Bakti, 1992), 90.

⁷ Ibnu Jinni, *Al-Khashaish, Jilid 1*, 34-35.

⁸ S. Padmosoekotjo, *Ngenggengan Kasusastran Djawa I, II* (Jogjakarta: Hieun Hoo Sing, 1958), 25.

⁹ R.S Subalidinata, *Sarining Kasusastran Djawa* (Jogjakarta: PT. Jaker, 1968), 93.

¹⁰ Ali Ahmad Sa'id, *Arkeologi Sejarah-Pemikiran Arab-Islam* (Yogyakarta: LKIS, 2007), 193-194.

¹¹ Merry Lapasau and Sulis Setiawati, "Translation of Culture-Specific Items in Laskar Pelangi from Indonesian into German," in *Kibar: Proceedings of The 1st Konferensi Internasional Berbahasa* (Jakarta, 2020): 89-97.

translating text in the source language into the target language, namely textual translation, cultural equivalent, abortion, descriptive equivalent, absorption, and couplets.¹² Effective translation not only conveys the message but also preserves the cultural richness and nuances embodied in the source language. Thus, translating Arabic through culture is not only a process but also a bridge to deeper understanding between cultures. Arab culture has a depth of history and social context that influences the meaning of an expression or phrase. The translator needs to understand this background to interpret the text correctly and accurately. For example, the expression below:

(١) من عرف بعد السفر استعد

“siapa yang tahu jauhnya suatu perjalanan, maka harus menyiapkan segala sesuatunya [Whoever knows the distance of a journey must prepare everything.]”

(٢) قبل الرماء تملأ الكنائن^{١٣}

“sebelum memanah, anak panah harus diisi terlebih dahulu [Before shooting an arrow, it must be filled first.]”

Arabs or Arabs use the expression "Whoever knows the distance of a journey (to be taken), must prepare everything. This is not surprising because the Arabs often traveled long distances through the desert to trade and so on. Likewise, with the expression "before archery, the arrow must be filled first". Arabs use the word place arrow because in ancient times they often fought, and the tools used among them were arrows so the place of arrows had to be filled first when going to war. This certainly will not be easily understood by the Indonesian people because the culture contained in the Indonesian nation is different from Arab culture. The phrase they use is to express an idea "prepare everything before starting the activity" So that the proverb can be in line with the proverb contained in the Indonesian "prepare an umbrella before it rains" because Indonesia is a tropical country, unlike in the Arabian Peninsula. Another example is the expression below:

إنه أشبه من التمرة بالتمر

“sesungguhnya dia benar-benar lebih menyerupai daripada buah kurma dengan buah kurma [Indeed, he truly resembles one date with another date.]”

The proverb is meant to resemble two things so similar that this proverb when translated into Indonesian is tantamount to "bagai pinang dibelah dua". Arabs in expressing proverbs use the word

¹² Nurul Asmira Mohammad Yusuf dan Suhaila Zailani Ahmad, “Penterjemahan Identiti Budaya Material Masyarakat Melayu Dalam Komik Budak Kampung Ke Bahasa Arab [The Translation of The Material Cultural Identity of Malay Community in The ‘Budak Kampung’ Comic into Arabic],” *Bitara: International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2023): 84–98.

¹³ Ali Al-Jarim and Mushtafa Amin, *Al-Balaghah Al-Wadhihah* (Dar Al-Ma’arif, 1998), 98.

tamrah because dates are very fertile in the Arabian Peninsula, even plants that are characteristic of it, besides that, this tree has various types and different flavors. This is different from Indonesia which only grows or even though it bears fruit, unlike what happens in the Arabian Peninsula so the Arabic proverb that takes the word from plants is dates.

Translating proverbs from the source language to the target language has its challenges due to the cultural and contextual characteristics of the proverbs. Several writers have researched translations, including those carried out by Sutopo,¹⁴ which concludes that in general, in translation there are three main elements, namely first, translation must be able to lead to the function of the state of the translated text to be used. Second, the translation must see who will use it. Third, what the translation will be used for. Other authors who have discussed translations from cultural aspects, including those carried out by Muhammad Yusuf and Suhaila Ahmad,¹⁵ conclude that translation must be tailored to the needs, expectations, or demands of users or clients in the target community, in other words, adapted to the target language. Devianty¹⁶ in his writings concluded that language and culture have a causality relationship, meaning that language is part of the results of human culture. Vice versa, language can influence human culture so it can be said that language is a reflection of the culture of society. Moreover, Devianty concluded that culture would not be possible without the medium of language. This paper is in line with what has been done by several researchers, previously that the translation results must adjust to the target language as the user of the translation results, it's just that what will be studied in this paper is the translation of proverbs by paying attention to cultural elements. Given that, in proverbs, there is cultural content and so on, proverbs from the source language will be difficult to interpret by non-original language speakers if the translator ignores cultural aspects.

METHOD

This research is qualitative, using a content analysis method with an approach or matching culture from the source language into the target language. Content analysis is used so that researchers can understand the symbolic messages contained in documents, literary works, etc. as unstructured data.¹⁷ Qualitative based on John W. Creswell, that a researcher can become a key instrument, namely the researcher becomes a data collector, observes behavior, or even participates

¹⁴ Anam Sutopo, "Teori Skopos Dan Translation Brief Dalam Penerjemahan," *The 1st International Conference on Language, Literature and Teaching* (2017): 1025–1030, <https://publikasiilmiah.ums.ac.id/bitstream/handle/11617/8957/i60.pdf?sequence=1>.

¹⁵ Yusuf dan Ahmad, "Penerjemahan Identiti Budaya Material," 84–98.

¹⁶ Rina Devianty, "Bahasa Sebagai Cermin Kebudayaan," *Jurnal Tarbiyah* 24, no. 2 (2017): 226-245.

¹⁷ D Zuchdi, *Panduan Penelitian Analisis Konten* (Yogyakarta: Lembaga Penelitian IKIP Yogyakarta, 1993), 29.

in interviews.¹⁸ The content analysis used is a symbol coding technique, where the author records symbols or messages systematically, and then gives them an interpretation.¹⁹ The object of this study is Arabic proverbs. Translating proverbs would be more appropriate using a cultural adaptation approach as explained by Lawrence,²⁰ Gentzler,²¹ and Syarif Hidayatullah.²² The author looks for and recorded Arabic proverbs found from *Majma' Al-Amstal* by Abu Fadhl Al-Maidani,²³ *Al-Balaghah Al-Wadhihah* by Ali Al-Jarim and Musthafa Amin,²⁴ and proverbs from various other sources, both printed and electronic. Then the messages contained in the proverbs found from various sources were analyzed and looked for equivalents in Indonesian proverbs taken from the book of proverbs by Dipo Udi T, entitled *Kumpulan Peribahasa Indonesia* by Dipo Udi T,²⁵ and from Aman's work published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture with the title *500 Pepatah*.²⁶

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The translation of a text from the source language into the target language does not simply change words from one language to another but also involves the transfer of cultural meanings and contexts, especially translations related to proverbs. The process of translating Arabic through culture has a central role in bridging understanding across languages and maintaining the authenticity of meaning in a cultural context. In the translation of Arabic texts, cultural considerations are essential because the language is rich in nuances related to the history, traditions, and values of Arab society. The culture referred to in this paper is a group of people and its contents include various phenomena including norms, values, shared meanings, and patterns of behavior.²⁷

Translating idiomatic proverbs or expressions from the source language to the target language involves special challenges due to the cultural and contextual characteristics of the proverb. Therefore, it is important to adapt culture to translation as said by Lawrence Venuti. The cultural adaptation in question involves replacing proverbs with equivalent expressions that are more familiar or more culturally relevant so that the translated proverbs fit the cultural context of the

¹⁸ J. W Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage Publication Ltd, 2013), 173.

¹⁹ Imam Suprayogo, *Metodologi Penelitian Sosial-Agama* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2001), 137.

²⁰ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation, Journal of Translation and Language Studies*, Second edi (New York: Routledge, 2008), 8-9.

²¹ Edwin Gentzler, *Translation and Identity in the Americas* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 13-15.

²² Moch.Syarif Hidayatullah, *Seluk Beluk Penerjemahan Arab-Indonesia* (Jakarta: PT. Grasindo, 2017), 59-67.

²³ Abu Al-Fadhl Al-Maidaniy, *Majma' AL-Amsal* (Beirut: Dar Al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 142-151.

²⁴ Al-Jarim and Amin, *Al-Balaghah Al-Wadhihah*, 69-97.

²⁵ Dipo Udi, *Kumpulan Peribahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kawan Pustaka, 2007), 1-8.

²⁶ Aman, *500 Pepatah* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1978), 1-130.

²⁷ Aliksandr Birukou et al., "A Formal Definition of Culture," *Springer* (2013): 1-26.

target language. In principle, the concept of cultural adaptation in translation emphasizes the adjustment of the text to the context of the recipient's culture or target language. In proverbs, in addition to cultural symptoms that indirectly reflect the culture in it, it is also to maintain national identity/society.²⁸ In this regard, Edwin Gentzler in his work entitled: "Translation and Identity in the Americas: New Directions in Translation Theory",²⁹ explores how translation can affect identity construction and how identity can affect the translation process. Proverbs are an important part of culture because they reflect the values, norms, and knowledge recognized by a society. Proverbs are often a traditional form of expression passed down from generation to generation, describing the wisdom, life experiences, and social norms of a particular society. Therefore, many proverbs are strongly related to specific local contexts and traditions, such as their relation to the natural environment, daily life, or religious beliefs that dominate a region, for example:

(١) قبل الرماء تملأ الكنائن^{٣٠}

(٢) من عرف بعد السفر استعد

Proverb no (1) means "before archery, arrows must be filled first" and the meaning of proverb no (2) "who knows the distance of a journey, must prepare everything". The proverbs in both examples above, describe the life experience of those who were nomadic, and always ready to fight to defend life. Therefore, the expression used relates to the tools of war and travel. In essence, the meaning contained in the two proverbs is the necessity of preparing something before starting the activity. Therefore, the equivalent of the two proverbs in Indonesian is "*sedia payung sebelum hujan*".³¹ The meaning of the Indonesian proverb can represent the two Arabic proverbs above because the desired meaning is that we prepare everything before starting an activity. The use of the words umbrella and rain is inseparable from the geographical conditions of Indonesia which is a tropical country. Therefore, it is not appropriate if the Indonesian proverb is translated literally into Arabic because the message contained will not be delivered. Another proverb that describes life experience is the likening of time to a sword (الوقت كالسيف). In Arab culture, time is likened to the sword because the sword is a symbol of defense and protection of something very important. Therefore, Arabs will fight for everything that is considered noble and special with the sword. Proverbs can be translated using cultural replacement strategies, namely by replacing the concept of

²⁸ Zaki Ghufron, *Bahasa Dan Identitas Sosial* (Serang: CV. Penerbit 3M Media Karya, 2019), 245-246.

²⁹ Gentzler, *Translation and Identity in the Americas*, 31.

³⁰ Al-Jarim and Amin, *Al-Balaghah Al-Wadhihah*, 98.

³¹ Udi, *Kumpulan Peribahasa Indonesia*, 250.

culture in the source language with the concept of culture in the target language which is almost similar or even the same,³² like the example below:

(١) سبق السيف العذل^{٣٣}

(٢) لكل صارم نبوة ولكل جواد كبوة ولكل عالم هفوة^{٣٤}

(٣) سلامة الإنسان في حفظ اللسان^{٣٥}

The two proverbs above cannot necessarily be translated according to the text alone because it may be that the meaning contained in the two proverbs cannot be conveyed so that proverb number (1) can be represented in Indonesian proverbs “*nasi sudah menjadi bubur*”.³⁶ There is another expression in Arabic, to represent this proverb, namely³⁷ بلغ السيل الزبي which means that the flood water has reached the trap hole. By seeing a phenomenon like that, it will not be possible for the water that is already in the hole to come out again like porridge which will not allow it to be made into rice again.

In number (2) the meaning is “*tiap pedang yang tajam bisa meleset, tiap kuda bisa tergelincir, dan tiap yang berilmu bisa salah*”. The proverb also uses the sword symbol because the sword is a symbol of defense and protection of something very important. In addition, it also uses the symbol of a horse that can run quickly, used as a vehicle tool suitable for conducting warfare. The concept of culture in this proverb can be substituted into the concept of culture in the target language, which has the same meaning contained in the expression. Therefore, the meaning contained in the proverb can be represented by the proverb in Indonesian that reads “*sepandai-pandai tupai melompat, sekali akan gawal juga*”.³⁸ Likewise, the proverb contained in number (3) cannot be conveyed literally as the literal meaning contained in the expression is “*keselamatan seseorang terletak pada menjaga lisannya*”. Therefore, the expression can be correctly translated to “*mulutmu harimaumu akan mengerkah kepalamu*”,³⁹ or nowadays it may be used to keep fingers from writing status haphazardly so that it can also be possible to represent the meaning “*jarimu harimaumu*”. Other proverbs that describe the Arabic culture or customs of the time, such as:

³² Hidayatullah, *Seluk Beluk Penerjemahan Arab-Indonesia*, 63.

³³ Al-Maidaniy, *Majma' AL-Amsal*, 328.

³⁴ Al-Maidaniy, *Majma' AL-Amsal*, 187.

³⁵ Muhammad Tanthawi, “Salamatu AL-Insan Fi Hifdzi AL-Lisan,” last modified 2010, <https://www.alukah.net/sharia/0/23943/سلامة-الإنسان-في-حفظ-اللسان/>.

³⁶ Aman, *500 Pepatah*, 104.

³⁷ Ula Ismail Al-Hamzawi, *Al-Amsal Al-Arabiyyah Wa Al-Amsal Al-Amiyah: Muqaranah Dalaliyah* (Minya Kairo: Minia University, n.d.), 91.

³⁸ Aman, *500 Pepatah*, 128.

³⁹ Udi, *Kumpulan Peribahasa Indonesia*, 217.

(١) ترى الفتیان كالنخل وما یدریك ما دخل^{٤٠}

“engkau melihat para pemuda seperti pohon kurma, dan apakah yang engkau ketahui di dalam dirinya? [You see the youth like date palms; what do you know about what is inside them?]”

(٢) اتَّخَذَ اللَّيْلَ جَمَلًا^{٤١}

“dia menjadikan malam sebagai unta [He turns the night into a camel.]”

The above proverb is intended for people who do activities at night like a camel that is driven to pass the night. In Indonesia, it is commonly known as staying up late. The above proverb uses the word night because Arabs are more active at night, not during the day. The use of the words camel and date to indicate the geographical location that camels were a means of transportation for Arabs at that time to pass through the desert, and dates were typical plants found in the Arabian Peninsula. The use of the word "date" to indicate the geographical location, in which the tree thrives in Arabia, is as in the proverb below:

أشبه من التمرة بالتمر^{٤٢}

The proverb uses the date palm symbol as the identity of the region where the tree thrives in the Arabian Peninsula. The literal meaning of the proverb is “*sesungguhnya dia benar-benar lebih menyerupainya daripada buah kurma dengan buah kurma*”. The message contained in the expression is to indicate two entities that are very similar so that the literal meaning allows the message contained in it will not be conveyed properly. Therefore, the meaning of the proverb can be represented by the proverb contained in Indonesian, namely “*seperti pinang dibelah dua*”.⁴³ Other proverbs that describe culture from other aspects such as aspects of economic activity are as below:

إذا تفرقت الغنم قاداتها العنز الجرباء^{٤٤}

The literal meaning of the proverb is “*jika domba-domba itu bercerai berai, maka kambing (biri-biri) yang lebih kuat dan kotor akan menguasainya*”. There are two indications of economic activity reflected in the proverb: the word “*Al-Ghanam*” which means “sheep/domba”, and “*Al-'Anzu*” means “biri-biri”. The Arab custom of raising these animals other than camels aims to strengthen the family economy and so on. The above proverb can be represented by the proverb contained in the

⁴⁰ Al-Maidaniy, *Majma' AL-Amsal*, 137.

⁴¹ Al-Maidaniy, *Majma' AL-Amsal*, 142.

⁴² Al-Maidaniy, *Majma' AL-Amsal*, 386.

⁴³ Aman, *500 Pepatah*, 110.

⁴⁴ Farid Nashar, “إذا تفرقت الغنم قاداتها العنز الجرباء,” <https://www.alittihad44.com/Archive/6548>, last modified 2015, <https://www.alittihad44.com/archive/6548>.

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