การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบการใช้กลวิธีลดทอนความหนักแน่นและอคติของเอไอ ในบทความวิจัยด้านการสอนภาษาอังกฤษของชาวไทยและเจ้าของภาษา

A Comparative Study in Using Rhetorical Hedging and the AI Trap of Thai and Native ELT Research

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความซับซ้อนทางวาทศิลป์ของการใช้กลวิธีลดทอนความหนักแน่น (Hedging) ในส่วนผลการวิจัยและอภิปรายผลของบทความวิจัยด้านการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ (ELT) งานวิจัยนี้ใช้รูปแบบการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพแบบเปรียบเทียบ (Qualitative comparative design) โดยรวบรวมคลังข้อมูลจากบทความวิจัยที่ผ่านการประเมินจากผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ (Peer-reviewed) จำนวน 20 บทความ (ตีพิมพ์ระหว่างปี ค.ศ. 2019 ถึง 2024 แบ่งเป็นบทความที่เขียนโดยนักวิจัยชาวไทย 10 บทความ และเจ้าของภาษา 10 บทความ) ข้อมูลถูกสกัดโดยใช้โปรแกรม AntConc และดำเนินการเข้ารหัสข้อมูลด้วยมนุษย์ (Manual coding) ตามกรอบแนวคิดการใช้คำลดทอนความหนักแน่นของ Hyland (1998) ตามด้วยการวิเคราะห์แก่นสาระ (Thematic analysis) ผลการวิจัยเผยให้เห็นความแตกต่างทางวัจนปฏิบัติศาสตร์ที่สำคัญ กล่าวคือ ผู้เขียนชาวไทยพึ่งพาการใช้กริยาช่วย (Modal verbs) อย่างมาก (ความถี่ 98 ครั้ง) สำหรับแนวทางการเขียนที่เน้นผู้อ่านเป็นศูนย์กลาง ในขณะที่ผู้เขียนเจ้าของภาษานิยมใช้การระบุเงื่อนไขที่จำกัด (Limiting conditions) (ความถี่ 54 ครั้ง) เพื่อกำหนดขอบเขตข้อกล่าวอ้างของตนอย่างแม่นยำ นอกจากนี้ รูปแบบการใช้กลวิธีลดทอนความหนักแน่นที่ซ้ำซ้อนของผู้เขียนชาวไทย ซึ่งมีลักษณะความหลากหลายของคำศัพท์ต่ำ พบว่าสอดคล้องกับลักษณะทางภาษาที่มักกระตุ้นให้เครื่องมือตรวจจับ AI ตรวจพบความผิดพลาดแบบผลบวกลวง (False positives) ข้อสังเกตนี้ได้เน้นย้ำถึงความจำเป็นเร่งด่วนในการจัดการเรียนการสอนเพื่อขยายคลังความรู้วาทศิลป์ของนักวิชาการที่ไม่ได้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่ และเน้นย้ำถึงความจำเป็นในการมีวิธีตรวจจับ AI ที่มีความเท่าเทียมทางภาษา

คำสำคัญ : กลวิธีลดทอนความหนักแน่น การสอนภาษาอังกฤษ อคติของการตรวจจับด้วยเอไอ นักวิจัยชาวไทยที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษา

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the rhetorical complexities of hedging within the Results and Discussion sections of English Language Teaching (ELT) research articles. Employing a qualitative comparative design, a corpus of 20 peer-reviewed articles (10 authored by Thai NNES and 10 native speakers) published between 2019 and 2024 was compiled. Data were extracted using AntConc software and manually coded according to Hyland's (1998) typology of hedging, followed by a thematic analysis. The results revealed a significant pragmatic divide: Thai authors relied heavily on modal verbs (98 instances) for a reader-oriented

approach, while native authors preferred limiting conditions (54 instances) to precisely bound their claims. Furthermore, the repetitive hedging patterns of Thai authors, characterized by lower lexical diversity, were observed to align with linguistic features known to trigger false positives in AI detection tools. These findings underscore the urgent need for pedagogical interventions to expand NNES scholars' rhetorical repertoires and highlight the necessity for linguistically equitable AI detection methodologies.

Keywords: hedging strategies, English language teaching (ELT), AI detection bias, Thai non-native researchers

Introduction

Hedging is an essential language technique in academic writing, enabling authors to convey their ideas accurately, politely, and thoughtfully. By softening assertions, expressing doubts, and acknowledging alternative viewpoints, it helps maintain the objective tone required in academic discourse. This technique is particularly vital in English Language Teaching (ELT) research, where scholars engage with complex theoretical frameworks and diverse perspectives to develop nuanced arguments and position their work within the broader literature. In international contexts where English serves as a second or foreign language, authors from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds often employ a range of rhetorical devices, including hedging (Curry & Pérez-Paredes, 2021). However, mastering these nuanced techniques presents additional challenges for non-native English-speaking (NNES) researchers, who must navigate both the intricacies of the English language and the often-unfamiliar cultural norms of English academic discourse.

In response to these challenges, many NNES researchers have turned to generative artificial intelligence language models, such as ChatGPT, for language support and immediate formative feedback (Ding et al., 2025). However, while AI can aid in grammatical and lexical improvement, it often falls short in dealing with higher-order rhetorical concerns such as coherence, cohesion, and the strategic deployment of hedging - areas where human instructor guidance remains crucial (Luo et al., 2025). Moreover, the use of AI-assisted writing introduces new ethical complexities, particularly concerning the blurred line between paraphrasing and plagiarism, which requires nuanced understanding and mentorship, especially for NNES writers (Jasper et al., 2024). Compounding this issue, automated paraphrasing tools may obscure authorial voice.

Beyond mere surface-level corrections, AI tools also struggle to replicate the sophisticated, context-sensitive hedging characteristic of native academic writing. This shortfall further disadvantages NNES researchers in global academia, where inadequate rhetorical proficiency may result in misinterpretation, overstated claims, or an apparent lack of scholarly modesty - potentially undermining how international peers receive their work. This disparity underscores a critical gap in academic writing instruction for NNES scholars, highlighting the need for targeted pedagogical interventions to foster rhetorical flexibility (Kim et al., 2024). Therefore, investigating how NNES researchers employ hedging in high-stakes sections of research articles, such as Results and Discussion, is essential for designing such support.

Although the importance of hedging is well recognized, comparative studies between Thai and native English-speaking ELT researchers remain scarce. To address this gap, the present study examines and contrasts hedging strategies in the Results and Discussion sections of peer-reviewed ELT articles authored by native English speakers and Thai NNES researchers. This study seeks to promote rhetorically aware pedagogy for NNES scholars and explore interactions between certain linguistic patterns and emerging AI detection technologies.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth comparative analysis of hedging strategies employed by native English-speaking authors and Thai non-native English-speaking authors in the Results and Discussion sections of peer-reviewed ELT research articles. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. investigate how Thai non-native English researchers use hedges in the R-D sections of ELT research articles compared to native English researchers.

2. examine the functions that these hedges serve for each respective group.

3. determine the extent to which the hedging patterns of non-native researchers align with linguistic features associated with AI detection bias.

Literature Review

1. The Concept and Function of Hedging

Hedging refers to linguistic devices that express uncertainty or moderate the strength of claims. According to Hyland (1998), hedging helps writers manage their stance and engage readers by avoiding full commitment to propositions. As an interactional feature of Interpersonal Metadiscourse Theory, hedging promotes academic dialogue, enhances credibility, and allows room for alternative interpretations, making it essential in scholarly writing (Khoo & Kang, 2022).

2. Cultural Influences and Comparative Studies

Cultural norms influence hedging practices in academic writing. For example, Vietnamese writers use hedges more frequently than American writers, reflecting a preference for indirectness. Native English speakers also tend to employ a wider range of hedging strategies than non-native speakers (Escalante et al., 2023; Tsai et al., 2024). Despite these findings, limited research has examined hedging in ELT articles, particularly between Thai non-native English speakers (NNES) and native English speakers (Özçelik & Ekşi, 2024). This gap highlights the need for further investigation into rhetorical strategies across different linguistic and cultural contexts (Lim & Mali, 2021).

3. Linguistic Patterns and Automated Detection Bias

Recent advances in generative AI and detection systems have introduced new challenges for L2 academic writing. Most AI detectors rely on perplexity and burstiness, with AI-generated texts typically displaying lower variation than human writing (Foltýnek & Newton, 2025; Krajka & Olszak, 2024; Revell et al., 2023). However, NNES writers often use formulaic expressions and repetitive hedging strategies to ensure clarity and accuracy, which can reduce textual variation and increase the risk of false-positive AI detection (Liang et al., 2023; Perkins et al., 2024).

At the same time, AI writing tools are widely used by NNES scholars for grammar and vocabulary improvement. While beneficial, these tools often promote common and predictable linguistic patterns, potentially limiting rhetorical diversity and reinforcing stylistic similarities with AI-generated texts (Kim et al., 2024; Setiawan & Alkhowarizmi, 2025). This creates a complex relationship in which AI functions as both a writing aid and an authenticity evaluator.

In Thailand, studies have shown that Thai authors use a narrower range of hedging devices than native English writers (Papangkorn et al., 2021; Prasithrathsint, 2015). Native writers also tend to prefer writer-oriented

hedges, whereas non-native writers favor reader-oriented forms (Aditama, 2018; Boginskaya, 2022). These findings suggest the need for discipline-specific research in ELT. However, some scholars argue that NNES writers may adopt dominant English academic conventions, potentially masking cultural rhetorical preferences (Lim & Mali, 2021).

Methodology

Research Design and Corpus

This study employed a qualitative comparative design to analyze the frequency and functions of hedging devices. The corpus consisted of 20 research articles published between 2019 and 2024, selected to represent high-standard academic discourse in their respective contexts. Specifically, the Native English Speaker dataset included 10 articles from the top-tier international journal TESOL Quarterly, exemplifying established global standards, while the Thai Non-Native English Speaker dataset comprised 10 articles from reputable peer-reviewed journals based in Thailand, which serve as key platforms for local scholars. These selections ensured a balanced representation of both established international norms and local academic practices, allowing for a nuanced comparison of hedging strategies (Prasithrathsint, 2015). This deliberate selection facilitated an in-depth analysis of how hedging devices manifest across diverse authorship groups within applied linguistics research.

Authors were classified into NES and Thai groups via triangulation of their names, academic affiliations, and biographical data provided in the articles: the NES group comprised authors with Anglophone names affiliated with institutions in Inner Circle countries, whereas the Thai group included authors with Thai names affiliated with Thai universities. Additionally, all articles were selected from the field of English Language Teaching to ensure disciplinary homogeneity, thereby minimizing potential variations in hedging practices attributable to subject matter differences (Shafqat et al., 2022). The detailed overview of the compiled corpus, including the journal sources, publication years, the number of articles, and the total word counts of the analyzed sections, is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of the Compiled Corpus

Corpus Group	Journal Source(s)	Publication Years	Number of Articles	Total Word Count (Results & Discussion)
- Native English Speakers (NES)	- TESOL Quarterly (Top-tier international journal)	2022 - 2024	10	25,885
- Thai Non-Native English Speakers (NNES)	- Various Thai peer-reviewed ELT journals (e.g., LEARN Journal, rEFLections, Journal of English Teaching)	2020 - 2024	10	24,608
	Total		**20**	**50,493**

Data Analysis

The analysis focused exclusively on the Results and Discussion sections of the selected articles. Frequency lists and concordance lines were generated using the software tool AntConc to identify potential hedging devices. These items were then manually coded and classified according to Hyland's (1998) typology of forms and framework of functions that classify hedges into two categories: content-oriented hedges and reader-oriented hedges. To ensure the reliability of the coding process, 20% of the data was cross-checked by a second coder, and any disagreements were resolved through discussion. Finally, a thematic analysis was conducted to interpret patterns in hedging usage between the two groups. This rigorous approach ensured both quantitative and qualitative insights into the nuanced rhetorical choices made by scholars in each corpus, thereby enhancing the study's analytical depth. This methodology aligns with previous corpus-based studies that have leveraged similar tools and frameworks to investigate hedging in academic discourse (AlGhamdi & Alyousef, 2022; Budiarti et al., 2023; Thuy, 2018).

Results

The analysis revealed distinct patterns in the hedging strategies employed by native and non-native researchers. The frequencies and types of hedges identified are summarized below.

1. Hedging Patterns in Native Speaker Discourse

The use of hedging devices within the corpus of native-authored articles is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 Hedges Used in Results and Discussion by Native Researchers

Types of Hedges	Frequency (n=116)	Percentage (%)	Example Phrase(s)
Lexical verbs	5	4.31	appear, believe
Adverbials	1	0.86	possibly, apparently
Adjectives	15	12.93	likely, possible
Modal verbs	39	33.62	may, should
Limiting conditions	54	46.55	under these conditions, so, it is difficult to conclude whether
Modal nouns	2	1.72	possibility, assumption, estimate
Model, theory, method	0	0.00	-
Lack of knowledge	0	0.00	-

Analysis indicates a clear hierarchy in the rhetorical strategies these authors favor when qualifying their claims. Most prominently, limiting conditions emerged as the primary hedging mechanism, appearing 54 times. This suggests that native scholars often prefer to nuance their findings by explicitly bounding the scope of their assertions within specific contextual or methodological constraints. Close behind, modal verbs—such as may and should—represented a significant portion of the data with 39 instances. The authors also frequently utilized adjectives like likely or possible (15 instances) to soften the strength of their propositions.

In contrast, other linguistic categories were utilized far more sparingly. Lexical verbs (e.g., appear, believe) and modal nouns (e.g., assumption) were used only 5 and 2 times, respectively. Adverbials were nearly absent, with only a single recorded instance. Notably, native researchers in this sample did not employ any hedges related to model/theory/method or lack of knowledge, with both categories returning zero results. Native authors frequently utilize modal verbs to soften their propositions. For example: “Before delving into the motivation... it may be beneficial to provide an overview of OU’s AGC program.” Overall, these findings point toward a diversified repertoire that prioritizes context-specific limitations over simple grammatical modifiers.

2. Hedging Tendencies Among Thai Non-Native Researchers

The linguistic choices of Thai non-native researchers, as summarized in Table 3, reveal a distinct rhetorical profile characterized by a heavy reliance on specific grammatical categories. Most notably, modal verbs dominated the discourse, appearing 98 times. This suggests that Thai authors tend to favor accessible, high-frequency auxiliaries-such as may or should-to manage the strength of their claims and express academic politeness.

Table 3 Hedges Used in Results and Discussion by Non-Native Researchers

Types of Hedges	Frequency (n=164)	Percentage (%)	Example Phrase(s)
Lexical verbs	9	5.49	appear, believe,
Adverbials	2	1.22	possibly, apparently
Adjectives	12	7.32	likely, possible
Modal verbs	98	59.76	may, should
Limiting conditions	40	24.39	under these conditions, so, it is difficult to conclude whether
Modal nouns	3	1.83	possibility, assumption, estimate
Model, theory, method	0	0.00	-
Lack of knowledge	0	0.00	-

In contrast, Thai non-native researchers showed a heavy reliance on modal verbs (98 instances), while limiting conditions served as the secondary strategy, with 40 recorded instances. Other categories were utilized with varying degrees of frequency: Adjectives (likely, possible) appeared 12 times. Lexical verbs (e.g., appear, believe) were used in 9 instances. Modal nouns (e.g., possibility, assumption) were employed sparingly, with only 3 instances. Adverbials were the least frequent, occurring only twice.

Mirroring the native-speaker group, Thai researchers did not utilize hedges within the model/theory/method or lack of knowledge categories, both showing zero instances. This pattern indicates a "reader-oriented" approach that prioritizes directness and clarity. However, the disproportionate reliance on a narrow range of modal verbs contributes to less varied sentence structure than in the native speaker corpus. To demonstrate this reader-oriented approach, the following authentic excerpt highlights a Thai researcher’s use of modal verbs

to convey academic politeness and recommendations: "Additionally, teacher trainer programs should also help pre-service and in-service teachers to gain a better understanding of the real status of English today."

3. Comparative Synthesis of Hedging Strategies

A side-by-side evaluation of the two groups, detailed in Table 4, uncovers substantial divergence in how native and non-native authors navigate academic uncertainty. While both cohorts recognize hedging as a vital component of the Results and Discussion sections, their tactical execution differs significantly in both frequency and variety.

Table 4 Comparison of Hedges Used by Native and Non-Native English Researchers

Types of Hedges	Native (n=116)F	Native (%)	Non-Native (n=164)F	Non-Native (%)	Functions of Hedges	Example Phrase (s)
Lexical verbs	5	4.31	9	5.49	Expressing belief or opinion	appear, believe
Adverbials	1	0.86	2	1.22	Indicating uncertainty	possibly, apparently
Adjectives	15	12.93	12	7.32	Modifying claims	likely, possible
Modal verbs	39	33.62	98	59.76	Expressing possibility or necessity	may, should
Limiting conditions	54	46.55	40	24.39	Specifying conditions	under these conditions, so, it is difficult to conclude whether
Modal nouns	2	1.72	3	1.83	Indicating possibility or assumption	possibility, assumption, estimate
Model, theory, method	0	0.00	0	0.00	Modifying claims; Indicating uncertainty	-
Lack of knowledge	0	0.00	0	0.00	Indicating uncertainty	-

The most prominent disparity lies in the use of modal verbs. Non-native Thai researchers utilized these auxiliaries more than twice as often as their native-speaking peers, with 98 instances compared to 39. This suggests that Thai authors may lean on these familiar grammatical structures as a "safe" or accessible method for conveying politeness and caution. In contrast, native researchers demonstrated a more sophisticated preference for limiting conditions, employing them 54 times compared to the Thai researchers' 40. By grounding their claims within specific constraints—using phrases like "under these conditions"—native authors achieve a nuanced precision that admits uncertainty not just in the claim itself, but in its universal applicability.

Other key comparative findings include:

Adjectives: Native speakers utilized modifying adjectives (e.g., likely, possible) more frequently (15 instances) than Thai researchers (12 instances), indicating a more effective modification of specific claims.

Lexical Verbs: Thai researchers showed a slightly broader range in this category with 9 instances, compared to 5 by native authors.

Adverbials: Usage remained low across the board, though Thai authors used them slightly more often (2 instances vs. 1).

Theoretical Models and Knowledge Gaps: Interestingly, both groups almost entirely avoided hedging when discussing theoretical models or explicitly acknowledging a lack of knowledge, with 0 instances recorded in these categories for both populations.

Ultimately, these patterns suggest that while Thai researchers are active participants in scholarly hedging, their "reader-oriented" focus on clarity often leads to repetitive sentence structures. Native authors, conversely, adopt a "writer-oriented" stance, carefully delineating the boundaries of their findings through a more diversified linguistic repertoire.

Discussion

The research reveals that both Thai non-native and native English researchers employ hedging as a crucial linguistic strategy in the Results and Discussion sections of ELT research articles, with modal verbs emerging as the most frequently used devices. This pattern directly addresses the research question by illuminating key differences in hedging practices between the groups: while both utilize hedges to express uncertainty, native researchers demonstrate a broader and more varied repertoire of strategies. These findings align with existing literature, which emphasizes hedging's role in academic writing for cautiously presenting findings, engaging with prior scholarship, and reflecting the influence of cultural and linguistic backgrounds on authorial styles. Specifically, lexical hedges and downtoners were frequently employed by both native and non-native English writers, suggesting their importance in mitigating strong claims within academic discourse (Shafqat et al., 2022).

An unexpected finding was the limited use of lexical verbs and adverbials by both groups, which may reflect researchers' hesitance to assert strong opinions—a convention prioritizing objectivity in academic writing. Ultimately, the study underscores hedging's vital role in academic discourse, suggesting that greater awareness and targeted instruction in these strategies could markedly enhance non-native researchers' writing skills and bolster their success in the global academic community.

However, these marked differences in hedging strategies carry critical implications in the generative AI era. Non-native authors' heavy reliance on high-frequency modal verbs produces repetitive linguistic patterns associated with low perplexity—a key metric that AI detectors use to identify machine-generated text (Liang et al., 2023). Consequently, authentic writing by Thai scholars risks misclassification as AI-generated, not from academic dishonesty but because their "safe" rhetorical choices mimic the statistical predictability of large language models (Giray, 2024; Liang et al., 2023). This underscores a systemic bias in current detection tools, which penalize linguistic simplicity over rhetorical nuance. Moreover, uncritical reliance on AI editing tools may exacerbate these patterns, as algorithms prioritize succinctness over the complex sentence structures that hallmark sophisticated academic writing. This introduces a paradox where efforts to conform to academic

conventions, particularly for non-native English speakers, can inadvertently lead to their work being misidentified as algorithmically generated (Sirijanchuen & Phoocharoensil, 2025). This phenomenon raises significant concerns regarding inclusivity in higher education, as the very strategies employed by non-native speakers to navigate academic discourse could lead to unfair scrutiny and accusations of academic misconduct (Perkins et al., 2024).

Pedagogical Implications

The findings reveal a proficiency gap in hedging strategies between Thai non-native researchers—who relied heavily on modal verbs, likely reflecting a conservative approach influenced by their L1 backgrounds—and native researchers, who employed a more diverse repertoire favoring limiting conditions to craft nuanced, context-bound claims. To bridge this gap, ELT pedagogy for non-native speakers should prioritize training in advanced syntactic structures and lexical hedges, fostering rhetorical sophistication comparable to native practices. In parallel, educators must confront the biases of AI detection tools, which often misclassify such repetitive non-native patterns as machine-generated (Liang et al., 2023), by advocating for equitable evaluation practices. This entails advancing tools resilient to linguistic variations that do not unfairly penalize non-native English speakers.

Limitations of the study

First, the limitations of this study include a small corpus of 20 research articles, which limits generalizability of the findings. Second, because the field of study is limited exclusively to English Language Teaching (ELT) research, the observed hedging patterns may not represent other academic disciplines. Third, only the Result and Discussion sections were used for analysis, while other parts were not examined. Finally, because the selected articles were peer-reviewed and revised, they may not directly reflect the original English ability of the authors or the potential use of AI writing tools in the original manuscripts.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies should examine a larger, cross-disciplinary corpus to investigate hedging across all manuscript sections. Additionally, qualitative methods such as author interviews or the analysis of pre-peer-reviewed drafts would help reveal the authors' original linguistic competence before the editorial submission process. Finally, to address the "AI Trap," future research should investigate how AI detectors assess unedited non-native drafts and explore pedagogical frameworks that empower NNES scholars to employ AI effectively while preserving their authentic voices and avoiding false positives.

Conclusion

This comparative study highlights the pivotal role of hedging in constructing scholarly knowledge, particularly in the Results and Discussion sections of ELT research articles. Although both Thai non-native and native English researchers employ these strategies to address the tentativeness of empirical findings, their approaches differ markedly due to linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Thai authors show a strong preference for straightforward grammatical forms—especially modal verbs—while native authors use a more varied repertoire, focusing on limiting conditions to scope their claims.

The most striking finding of this study is Thai scholars' heavy reliance on modal auxiliaries, which they employed far more frequently than native speakers. This "reader-oriented" approach effectively conveys academic politeness and uncertainty but yields a narrower linguistic repertoire than the "writer-oriented" discourse of native researchers, who achieve nuanced precision by using limiting conditions to qualify not only their claims but also their scope of applicability.

These findings hold urgent implications amid the rise of generative AI. Non-native hedging's repetitive structures are exactly what trigger false positives in AI detection tools, creating systemic biases that threaten academic equity and risk marginalizing scholars from expanding circle countries via unfounded accusations of unauthorized content generation. While AI aids basic editing, it cannot replicate the rhetorical nuance and authorial intent vital to high-stakes scientific discourse. Bridging this divide demands that ELT pedagogy advance beyond simple lexical instruction: educators must emphasize advanced syntactic structures—such as limiting conditions and nuanced lexical hedges—to build rhetorical sophistication for international publication. Institutions, too, should champion AI detection methods resilient to linguistic variation, ensuring they do not penalize diverse authentic voices in the global research community. Ultimately, preserving scholarly integrity requires dual action: empowering non-native authors with richer rhetorical tools and freeing evaluative technologies from linguistic prejudice.

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