

# Preliminary Survey on ‘Alle Verbal System’\*

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 ‘Alle language

‘Alle language is one of Dullay languages and spoken in ‘Alle woreda (i.e. district). The term “Dullay” is derived from *dullayxo* “(people) of Dullay River.” The river runs through ‘Alle woreda and adjacent areas including Dirashe woreda. This language was formerly (and misleadingly) called Gawwada, named after the main village in this area, Gawwada. With the establishment of this ‘Alle woreda, their language is now officially called ‘Alle.

This language is called *pogo* ‘*allatte* (lit. ‘mouth of ‘Alle’). This transcription /<sup>h</sup>a/ follows the unpublished draft on the ‘Alle phonology (Horsch 2006: 2-3). There are two major dialect groups, one in the highland (Highland dialect group) and the other in the lowland (Lowland dialect group). The dialectal difference is observed in the sound change of particular phonemes (Hi. *gormo*, Lo. *kodmo* ‘work’; Hi. *pogo* ‘*allatte*, Lo. *poko* ‘*allacce*), but also in vocabulary (Hi. *digad-*, Lo. *mux-* ‘to finish’; Hi. *faʔ-*, Lo. *lubb-* ‘to burn (intr.)’). It should be kept in mind that this grouping here is very tentative.

### 1.2 ‘Alle woreda

This new *woreda* became independent from Konso woreda and Dirashe woreda in January 2011 (or 2003 in Ethiopian calendar). The current administrative

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centre is Gawwada, but this is temporary and the village called Wollango is to be the capital of ‘Alle woreda. Wollango is currently under construction, but according to their plan, the administrative offices will be transferred to Wollango in a few years.

### 1.3 Brief history of ‘Alle speakers

I had an opportunity to listen to the story about history of ‘Alle speakers, thanks to Ato Gorja, an English teacher at the school in Gawwada village. According to Ato Gorja, the people came from some original place called *Awgaroo* (probably no more than a thousand years ago). They inhabited the Highland area (i.e. northern) first, farming and keeping cattle. At some point, people came to the Lowland area (i.e. southern). The Highlanders were called *Alle*, and the Lowlanders *Ts’amay* earlier. This matches with the story that today’s Ts’amay people (who live on the other side of Dullay River, about 30km west to Gawwada village) are said to have come from some clan(s) of the Lowlanders. This reflects the situation today that the Lowland ‘Alle speakers can communicate with Ts’amay speakers, but the Highland speakers find it very difficult.

### 1.4 Literature

The most important literature concerning ‘Alle verbal system are Amborn et al. (1980) and Tosco (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010). In addition, *A Grammar of Ts’amakko* (Savà 2005) is important for ‘Alle studies, since, according to the Lowland people in Gawwada, the Lowland ‘Alle and the Ts’amakko are mutually understandable to both speakers. The relationship between ‘Alle and Ts’amakko is said to be dialectal (Sava 2005: 14).

Amborn et al. (1980: 56) says that there are three major language groups in Dullay languages, namely, Harso-Dobase, Gawwada-Gollango, and Tsamay (=Ts’amakko). Harso-Dobase roughly matches the Highland dialect group of ‘Alle language, while Gawwada-Gollango does the Lowland one.

The following tables are paradigms of suffixes in the Past, Present and Future tense forms in the affirmative main clausal conjugation of four dialects (Harso, Dobase, Gawwada, and Gollango), based on Amborn et al. (1980: 109-112).

**Table 1: Past tense suffix paradigms of four dialects in ‘Alle**

	Gawwada	Gollango	Harso	Dobase
3ms	<i>-i</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-i</i>
3fs	<i>-te</i>	<i>-ti</i>	<i>-ci</i>	<i>-ci</i>
2cs	<i>-ti</i>	<i>-ti</i>	<i>-ci</i>	<i>-ci</i>
1cs	<i>-i</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-i</i>
3cp	<i>-e</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-e</i>
2cp	<i>-te</i>	<i>-te</i>	<i>-ce</i>	<i>-ce</i>
1cp	<i>-ne</i>	<i>-ni</i>	<i>-ni</i>	<i>-ni</i>

**Table 2: Present tense suffix paradigms of four dialects in ‘Alle**

	Gawwada	Gollango	Harso	Dobase
3ms	<i>-a</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-a</i>
3fs	<i>-ay</i>	<i>-aay</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-a</i>
2cs	<i>-ay</i>	<i>-aay</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-a</i>
1cs	<i>-a</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-aay</i>	<i>-a</i>
3cp	<i>-anki</i>	<i>-anki</i>	<i>-anki</i>	<i>-anki</i>
2cp	<i>-anku</i>	<i>-anku</i>	<i>-anku</i>	<i>-anku</i>
1cp	<i>-ane</i>	<i>-aani</i>	<i>-aani</i>	<i>-aani</i>

**Table 3: Future tense suffix paradigms of four dialects in ‘Alle**

	Gawwada	Gollango	Harso	Dobase
3ms	<i>-na</i>	<i>-na</i>	<i>-na</i>	<i>-na</i>
3fs	<i>-nay</i>	<i>-nay</i>	<i>-na</i>	<i>-na</i>
2cs	<i>-nay</i>	<i>-nay</i>	<i>-na</i>	<i>-na</i>
1cs	<i>-na</i>	<i>-na</i>	<i>-naay</i>	<i>-na</i>
3cp	<i>-nanki</i>	<i>-nanki</i>	<i>-nanki</i>	<i>-nanki</i>
2cp	<i>-nanku</i>	<i>-nanku</i>	<i>-nanku</i>	<i>-nanku</i>
1cp	<i>-nane</i>	<i>-naani</i>	<i>-naani</i>	<i>-naani</i>

The most obvious difference between Gawwada-Gollango and Harso-Dobase is the contrast of /t/ and /c/ in the third person feminine singular and in the second person forms in the past tense (Table 1). Another is found in the present and the

future tenses that Harso and Dabase dialects lack a distinction between masculine and feminine in the third person singular, which makes no difference between the third and the second person singular (in Dabase, even the first person common singular shares the same suffix). There are also verbal prefixes that mark the person, gender and number more clearly.

## 2 Surveys in 2012-2013

### 2.1 Data collection

My fieldwork was conducted in February 2012 with one informant and February-March 2013 with three informants (one of them is the same person as in 2012). The data contain the pronominal system and six verbs in paradigms and sentences. The Highland dialect data are solely from the informant T.F., while the Lowland one from the informants N.G. and E.E. The informant N.G. is, however, fluent in several languages and educated in linguistics at university. This reflects his careful attention to the “correctness” in language use that leads to a full, systematic verbal paradigm.

Name in initials	N.G.	T.F.	E.E.
Dialect	Lowland	Highland	Lowland
Sex	Male	Male	Female
Age	25	25	18
Birthplace	Gawwada (Lowland)	Mokite (Highland)	Gawwada (Lowland)
Language(s)	‘Alle, Amharic, Boraana-Oromo, Konso, English	‘Alle, Amharic, English	‘Alle, Amharic
Occupation	Official	Official	Student
Educational background	B.A. in English (Addis Ababa University)	Grade 10+3	Attending a local high school as of March 2013

### 2.2 Pronominal system

The Table 4 is a pronominal paradigm of ‘Alle language. The data was collected from a Lowland dialect speaker (informant N.G.). The Highland one is

shown in the table only where the data are available; otherwise, everything is of the Lowland dialect.

The grammatical gender is only distinguished thoroughly in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singulars, with an exception of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular in the dative case. The 1<sup>st</sup> person and 2<sup>nd</sup> person singulars show difference between the nominative case and the others.

The suffix *-si* of the dative case is said to be the same as the definite marker according to the informant N.G. When the definite marker *-si* is attached to a noun, the noun can be nominative, accusative or dative in a sentence.

**Table 4: ‘Alle pronominal paradigm**

	Nominative	Accusative	Dative	Possessive
3ms	Hi. <i>usoo</i> ; Lo. <i>isoo</i>	<i>isoo</i>	<i>isoo-si</i>	<i>xuusu</i>
3fs	<i>isee</i>	<i>isee</i>	<i>isee-si</i>	<i>xiisi</i>
2cs	Hi. <i>acoo</i> ; Lo. <i>atoo</i>	<i>xo</i>	<i>xoo-si</i> (m.) <i>hee-si</i> (f.)	<i>xooxu</i>
1cs	<i>anoo</i>	<i>ye</i>	<i>yee-si</i>	<i>xaayu</i>
3cp	Hi. <i>isunoo</i> ; Lo. <i>isundee</i>	<i>isundee</i>	<i>isunde-noo-si</i>	<i>xuusindi</i>
2cp	<i>xunee</i>	<i>xunee</i>	<i>xune-noo-si</i>	<i>xaaxundi</i>
1cp	<i>inee</i>	<i>inee</i>	<i>in-eno-si</i>	<i>xaani</i>

### 2.3 Verbal paradigms

The verbal paradigm seems very systematic. However, several irregularities are observed in the surveys conducted in 2012 and 2013:

- 1) Confusion of the Passive stem and the Middle stem;
- 2) Optional use of the pronominal prefix for the nominative case; and
- 3) Use of different lexical items (more dialectal irregularity).

The vowel length is given, but there seems no distinctiveness between short and long vowels.

As shown in the Table 5, apart from the prefixes, there are shorter forms and longer ones in the non-past tense forms of the second and third person plurals. All the three informants said there was no difference in meaning between them. The informants T.F. and E.E. used the shorter form more than the other, whereas the

informant N.G. constantly employed the longer one. This Table 5 also tells that the future tense form derives from the present tense with a suffix *-in*, which is directly attached to the stem.

**Table 5: Paradigm of the verb *ood-* (to go down) in the Base stem (Informant N.G.)**

oodi 'to go down'	Base stem		
	Past	Present	Future
3ms	<i>(iʔ-)ood-i</i>	<i>(iʔ)ooda</i>	<i>(iʔ)oodina</i>
3fs	<i>(iʔ-)ood-iti</i>	<i>(iʔ)oodaj</i>	<i>(iʔ)oodinaj</i>
2cs	<i>(aʔ-)ood-iti</i>	<i>(aʔ)oodaj</i>	<i>(aʔ)oodinaj</i>
1cs	<i>(anʔ-)ood-i</i>	<i>(anʔ)ooda</i>	<i>(anʔ)oodina</i>
3cp	<i>(iʔ-)ood-e</i>	<i>(iʔ)ooda(ngi)</i>	<i>(iʔ)oodina(ngi)</i>
2cp	<i>(aʔ-)ood-ite</i>	<i>(aʔ)ooda(ngu)</i>	<i>(aʔ)oodina(ngu)</i>
1cp	<i>(anʔ-)ood-ine</i>	<i>(anʔ)oodani</i>	<i>(anʔ)oodinaani</i>

There are at least five different stems so far in the data collected during surveys in 2012-2013: base, causative, passive, middle, and intensive. Among them, the intensive stem is often combined with other stems. The combination of the causative and the middle is found with a verb *oox-* “to change” only from the data given by the informant T.F. (Highland dialect speaker). The use of the passive middle stem is observed with a verb *kollis-* “to teach” in all the data from three informants.

Each informant shows a slightly different verbal conjugation. The informant N.G. gives longer forms in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> plurals more frequently and consistently than other two informants. The verbal prefixes are present in most cases.

**Table 6: Verbal conjugation (Informant N.G.)**

	Past	Present	Future
3ms	<i>iʔ-...-i</i>	<i>iʔ-...-a</i>	<i>iʔ-...-in-a</i>
3fs	<i>iʔ-...-iti</i>	<i>iʔ-...-aj</i>	<i>iʔ-...-in-aj</i>
2cs	<i>aʔ-...-iti</i>	<i>aʔ-...-aj</i>	<i>aʔ-...-in-aj</i>
1cs	<i>anʔ-...-i</i>	<i>anʔ-...-a</i>	<i>anʔ-...-in-a</i>
3cp	<i>iʔ-...-e(ngi)</i>	<i>iʔ-...-a(ngi)</i>	<i>iʔ-...-in-a(ngi)</i>
2cp	<i>aʔ-...-ite(ngu)</i>	<i>aʔ-...-angu</i>	<i>aʔ-...-in-angu</i>
1cp	<i>anʔ-...-ine</i>	<i>anʔ-...-(a)ani</i>	<i>anʔ-...-in-aani</i>

Every person-marking suffix in Table 6 starts with a vowel and has V, VCV or VCCV structures. Future forms also have a suffix *-in-* between the stem and the person-marking suffix. When stem-changing suffixes in a VC structure are attached, the person-marking suffixes are shortened from VCV to CV or from VCCV to CCV.

For example, the basic stem has *-iti* in the third person feminine, but the causative stem has *-asti* ( $\leftarrow$  *-as-iti*) as shown in (1) and (2) below.

- (1) *ise*      *gargi-to*      *iʔooditi*.  
 3FS      tree-from      go down.3FS.PAST  
 “She climbed down from a tree.”

- (2) *ise*      *qalqallo*      *harra-te*      *iʔoodasti*.  
 3FS      sack      donkey-from      go

down.CAUS.3FS.PAST

“She lowered a sack (of cereal) from a donkey.”

With the middle stem suffix *-Vdʔ-*, there occurs a total retrogressive assimilation where /n/ is adjacent (i.e.  $d \rightarrow n / \_n$ ) as illustrated in (3). In other words, this assimilation happens in third person feminine singular, second persons and first person plural in the past tense, and all the future tense forms.

- (3) a. *gormo*      *digadi*.  
 work      finish.MID.3MS.PAST  
 “Work ended.”

- b. *gormo digada.*  
 work finish.MID.3MS.PRES  
 “Work ends.”
- c. *gormo diganna.*  
 work finish.MID.3MS.FUT  
 “Work will end.”

One exception of this assimilatory process in Table 7 below is the past tense form in the second person plural. The phoneme /d/ doesn’t assimilate with the adjacent /t/, while it does in the third person singular feminine and the second person singular.

However, the informant N.G. also gives *-addē* (← *ad-te*) as the negative 2cp form with the middle intensive stem (i.e. the first syllable of the verb is repeated), such as (*xune?*)*o?oxaddē*. He uses the shorter suffix (i.e. *-ite*) with other verbs and stems, but no combinations of this stem (*-ad-*) and the shorter 2cp suffix (*-ite*) are found in the affirmative sentence.

**Table 7: Paradigm of a verb *ooxad-* “to exchange” (Informant N.G.)**

<i>ooxad-</i> “exchange”	Past	Present	Future
3ms	<i>i?ooxadi</i>	<i>i?ooxada</i>	<i>i?ooxanna</i>
3fs	<i>i?ooxatti</i>	<i>i?ooxadaj</i>	<i>i?ooxannaj</i>
2cs	<i>a?ooxatti</i>	<i>a?ooxadaj</i>	<i>a?ooxannaj</i>
1cs	<i>an?ooxadi</i>	<i>an?ooxada</i>	<i>an?ooxanna</i>
3cp	<i>i?ooxadengi</i>	<i>i?ooxadangi</i>	<i>i?ooxannangi</i>
2cp	<i>a?ooxadtengu</i>	<i>a?ooxadangu</i>	<i>a?ooxannangu</i>
1cp	<i>an?ooxanne</i>	<i>an?ooxadaani</i>	<i>an?ooxannaani</i>

The informant T.F. omits the verbal prefixes, unlike the informant N.G. (Table 8). There are only several cases where he used the prefixes. He said that one can use these prefixes optionally but he usually doesn’t. This means that he finds no difference between them.

**Table 8: Verbal conjugation (Informant T.F.)**

	Past	Present	Future
3ms	<i>(iʔ-)...-i</i>	<i>(iʔ-)...-a</i>	<i>(iʔ-)...in-a</i>
3fs	<i>...-ici</i>	<i>...-aj</i>	<i>...in-aj</i>
2cs	<i>...-ici</i>	<i>...-aj</i>	<i>...in-aj</i>
1cs	<i>...-i</i>	<i>...-a</i>	<i>...in-a</i>
3cp	<i>(iʔ-)...-e</i>	<i>(iʔ-)...-a(nki)</i>	<i>(iʔ-)...-in-a(nki)</i>
2cp	<i>...-ice(j)</i>	<i>...-a(nku)</i>	<i>...-in-a(nku)</i>
1cp	<i>...-ini</i>	<i>...-ani</i>	<i>...-in-aani</i>

This informant T.F. clearly shows the characteristics of the Highland dialect (or Harso-Dabose dialect group). One of them is the use of /c/ instead of /t/ in the environment V\_V. Another is the use of /k/ instead of /g/ in any circumstance (see (4)). Other person-marking suffixes match with those of the informant N.G. above. In the second person plural, an extra /j/ is found to appear optionally. The first person plural suffix gives *-ini* (cf. *-ine* in the speech of the informant N.G.).

(4) a. *ato*      *gargi-to*      *oditi*.      (N.G.)

b. *aco*      *karki-lõ*      *odici*      (T.F.)

2CS      tree-from      go down.2CS.PAST

“You climbed down from a tree.”

(/õ/ in (4b) is according to my auditory impression. It turned out he can use a normal /o/ in the same environment. So it probably means that [o] and [õ] are variants of a phoneme /o/.)

The informant E.E. is also a Lowland dialect speaker but she gives a slightly different conjugational system from the other Lowland speaker N.G. (Table 9). She felt that it is more natural to use no prefixes and shorter suffixes. The third and second person plurals in the past tense have an extra /j/ at the end of suffixes. The first person plural suffix is *-ini* like the informant T.F. Actually, the informant N.G. stated that he could use *-ini* instead of *-ine* but there is a slight difference between the two (which he could not describe well). Other informants answered that they don't see a semantic difference.

**Table 9: Verbal conjugation (Informant E.E.)**

	Past	Present	Future
3ms	<i>(iʔ-)...-i</i>	<i>(iʔ-)...-a</i>	<i>(iʔ-)...in-a</i>
3fs	<i>...-iti</i>	<i>...-aj</i>	<i>...in-aj</i>
2cs	<i>...-iti</i>	<i>...-aj</i>	<i>...in-aj</i>
1cs	<i>anʔ-...-i</i>	<i>anʔ-...-a</i>	<i>anʔ-...in-a</i>
3cp	<i>(iʔ-)...-ej</i>	<i>(iʔ-)...-a(ngi)</i>	<i>(iʔ-)...-(i)n-a</i>
2cp	<i>(aʔ-)...-ite(j)</i>	<i>(iʔ-)...-a(ngu)</i>	<i>(iʔ-)...-in-a(ngu)</i>
1cp	<i>(anʔ-)...-ini</i>	<i>(anʔ-)...-ani</i>	<i>(anʔ-)...-in-aani</i>

The intensive stem employs a reduplication of the first syllable of the verb. This stem matches what Tosco (2009: 394-395) calls the iterative, for the stem marks the repetition of an action and the plurality of subject and/or object. Two similar sentences with a singular and a plural subject have slightly different meanings as seen in (5).

- (5) a. iso           gargi-to           iʔoʔoodi.  
           3ms       tree-from       go down.INT.3MS.PAST  
           “He climbed down from a tree again and again.”
- b. isunde       gargi-to           iʔoʔoodengi.  
           3cp       tree-from       go down.int.3cp.past  
           “They climbed down at once.

The example (5a) shows the repetition of the action, whereas (5b) tells that a number of subjects (i.e. “they”) did it simultaneously. The opposing meaning is expressed by another stem that Tosco calls the semelfactive where the second (and the third) syllables are reduplicated (Tosco 2009: 394).

According to those three informants, generally speaking, the passive and the middle are too similar in meaning and sometimes also in pronunciation (e.g. the future tense form) (see Table 10 and Table 11 below). This caused the confusion a lot of times while recording them.

**Table 10: Confusion or merger of two different forms with similar meanings (informant T.F.)**

	Expected forms	Actual forms in speech
T.F.	<i>kodmo baayadi.</i> work start.MID.3MS.PAST	
	“Work started.”	
	<i>kodmo baayada.</i> work start.MID.3MS.PRES	<i>kodmo baayama.</i> work start.PASS.3MS.PRES (lit. “Work is started.”)
	“Work starts.”	
	<i>kodmo baayanna.</i> work start.MID.3MS.FUT	<i>kodmo baayamna.</i> work start.PASS.3MS.FUT (lit. “Work will be started.”)
“Work will start.”		

**Table 11: Confusion or merger of two different forms with similar meanings (informant N.G.)**

N.G.	<i>gorm-ude i?baayadhe.</i> work-PL start.MID.3CP.PAST	
	“(Many kinds of) works started.”	
	<i>gorm-ude i?baayadangi.</i> work-PL start.MID.3CP.PRES	<i>gorm-ude i?baayada.</i> work-PL start.MID.3CP.PRES
	“(Many kinds of) works start.”	
	<i>gorm-ude i?baayannangi.</i> work-PL start.MID.3CP.FUT	<i>gorm-ude i?baayamna.</i> work-PL start.PASS.3CP.FUT (lit. “Works will be started.”)
“(Many kinds of) works will start.”		

The Table 10 shows that the passive stem *baay-am-* replaces the middle stem *baay-ad-* in the non-past tenses in the speech of T.F. However, as in Table 11, the informant N.G. confused two forms only in the future tense. The other informant

E.E. gave a set of forms as expected, but she claimed that both forms meant ‘almost’ the same thing. It is assumed that this confusion is purely personal (or idiolectal) but also that the two stems are practically indifferent in speech nowadays.

The pronominal prefixes are said to be optional by all the informants, but the informant N.G. told that the use of this prefix with the past tense form marked something like the Present Perfect in English. The example (6a) is the non-prefixed form with the simple past meaning, while (6b) is the prefixed form that signals things are in the same condition after the event.

- (6) a. *asapo-si ooxami.*  
 idea-DEF change.PASS.3MS.PAST  
 “The idea was changed.”
- b. *asapo-si i?ooxami.*  
 idea-DEF change.PASS.3MS.PAST  
 “The idea was changed (and has still been in the same condition).”

It is still doubtful because only the informant N.G. gave this information so far, and there is much to study about this use of the personal prefix.

Another interesting phenomenon is the opposition of specificity in the future tense form. It is confirmed that the suffix *-i-na* is neutral or basic, but there is another suffix *-i-ni*. The example (7a) uses a normal (or unspecified) future tense form and this message contains uncertainty (e.g. it is not clear when and where this person comes back and even whether this person comes back later or not). On the other hand, the example (7b) has a specified future tense form that tells the hearer can take this person’s word for it with a specifying element (i.e. *hagasa* “here” in this case).

- (7) a. *an?ogayina*  
 come.1CS.FUT  
 “I may come (back).”
- b. *hagasa an?ogayini*  
 here come.1CS.FUT  
 “I will (definitely) come (back) here.”

What is more interesting is that it seems possible to apply this alternation of the suffix-final vowel to non-future tense forms. It may result in another confusing case where the unspecified past tense form became identical to the specified present form (respectively, (8a) and (8b) below). Moreover, since the past tense form originally has a suffix *-i* there is a possibility that the verb in (8c) is in the specified form with explicit information (i.e. *japan* “Japan”). These make three possible interpretations of *anʔogayi*.

- |        |  |                            |
|--------|--|----------------------------|
| (8) a. | <i>anʔogayi</i><br>come.1CS.PAST<br>“I came (back).”                                     | [Unspecified, past tense]  |
| b.     | <i>hagasa anʔogayi</i><br>here come.1CS.PRES.SPEC<br>“I (definitely) comes (back) here.” | [Specified, present tense] |
| c.     | <i>japan anʔogayi</i><br>Japan come.1CS.PAST.SPEC<br>“I came from Japan.”                | [Specified, past tense]    |

### 3 Conclusion

The verbal system of ‘Alle language looks systematic. However, it becomes complex and confusing at syntactic and pragmatic levels. In this survey the researcher prepared the sentences for the informants. Several sentences were actually found to be less natural, depending on the informant. More data of natural sentences are required to analyse the data in depth.

Another needs is the data of a full dialectal variety of ‘Alle language. Amborn et al. (1980: 56) states that there are four dialects beside Ts’amakko; however, there are several more dialects according to people whom I met in Gawwada. These dialects must be identified in the following surveys.

## Reference

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