

## TEACHING ENGLISH TO CHILDREN AS A SECOND LANGUAGE THROUGH A GENRE-BASED APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims at proposing activities for children EFL classes through a genre-based approach. The activities expose young students to genres that not only ignite creativity and interest in the language, but also provide students with a more solid foundation for using the language in the “real world.” This study is developed based on the idea that, by introducing students to various genres early in their burgeoning relationship with their new language, teachers will make them more motivated and better able to communicate. Studies such as Alves and Calvo (2007) have shown the efficiency of genre-based approaches in EFL classes. The present study demonstrates how genres can be explored to teach English to children through a plethora of pedagogical activities.

**Key words:** English as a second language, genre, comic strips, game rules.

### INTRODUCTION

Mingling different types of languages, such as verbal, visual and symbolic, can enhance students’ ability to utilize all their senses to perceive meaning. The fact that students are responsible for making the connections between different signals makes

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them agents of meaning construction. In order to understand the message being conveyed in a billboard advertisement, for instance, learners have to associate what is written to what is drawn so that the message can be fully interpreted. If teachers are able to help students noticing the aspects of a given genre in a text, students' perception will become better and, consequently, students will be able to get more meaning from what is presented to them. Therefore, genre-based teaching can enable students not only to read better, but also to make better associations, inferences and interpretations.

The ludic aspects present in many kinds of literature may boost children's interest in reading. Nell (2005, p. 33) states that when someone reads 'for its own sake' "the inner consequence that is rewarding to the central nervous system is arousal". Therefore, if children read for pleasure it might decrease their tension and encourage them to take part in the whole process of reading. However, in order to fulfill this urge to have pleasure, enjoyment and amusement, students will have to pass through the barriers that language may impose. Learning successfully in this kind of activity does not depend only on the ludic aspects of what is being read, as we shall see.

English as a foreign language (EFL) classes should be a spur for students to speak the language they are learning, providing them an environment where they are able to use language meaningfully. In other words, classes should be designed in a way that the students will feel like communicating using the language they are learning. Learners' previous experience and knowledge tend to be an efficient tool and it can be worked upon to boost their interest in the language. Furthermore, teachers should explore students' view of the world rather than imposing one. In this paper, it will be explored how the genres "game rules" and "comic strip" can be utilized in classroom in order to apply these ideas.

## 1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section of the paper, it will be presented some remarks on teaching English through a genre-based approach.

In today's society, we are surrounded by different kinds of genres, which can be either oral or written. They vary in shape, size and objective, and bringing them into the classroom can be very beneficial, since students would have their communication repertoire enriched. In addition, Alves and Calvo (2007) argue that it is important to develop student's reading strategies regarding inference, cognates identification, false cognates identification, and association of words. Learners should also learn how to recognize linguistics options and intertextuality, and teachers would, through this work, promote reflection (ALVES; CALVO, 2007). In other words, it is important to work with reading in a deeper way, so that students may become more critical readers, capable of identifying the different discourses present in the texts.

Bakthin (2003) states that the language interaction between the I voice and the other voices are of great importance, due to the fact the discursive communication process takes place in both the speaker and the listener's position who agrees, disagrees, amongst others. In addition, the variety of discourse genres are infinite, since the variety of the human activity never ends, and each sphere of these activities consists of a discursive genre repertoire which will differentiate and grow as it develops and become more complex. This is why genre would enrich language classes by providing authentic situations in which learners would have the chance to take part in the discursive communication process.

Some authors have presented good arguments in favor of a genre-based approach. Alves e Calvo (2007) argue that teaching language through genre would allow students to explore language in a contextualized and dynamical way. Moreover, students would develop their critical reading skills, as well as become more familiar

with the great amount of genre available. Finally, this would help them develop oral and written skills.

Genre is produced in many different spheres of human activities. For example, they are present in the internet, television, newspaper, magazines, and others. Because of this variety of genre, Dolz *et al.* (2004) divide them into groups with similar functions. They believe that even though each genre presents its own characteristics, they share some common goals. Based on this, the authors present the following division for the genres available for human communication:

| <b>Social communication domain</b>               | <b>Dominant language capacities</b>                               | <b>Examples of oral and written genre</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| Fictional literary culture                       | To narrate the mimesis of action through intrigue creation        | Tales, fables, legends, adventure narratives, science fiction, soap operas, short stories |
| Documentation and memorization of human behavior | To report Representation of the lived experiences throughout time | Experience and travel report, testimonial, curriculum vitae, news, sports chronicles      |
| Discussion of social controversial issues        | To argue To sustain, refute and negotiate an opinion              | Readers letters and complaints, debates, defense and accusation speeches                  |
| Knowledge transmission and construction          | To expose Textual presentation of different shapes of knowledge   | Seminars, conferences, papers, specialist interview, scientific reports                   |
| Instructions and prescriptions                   | To describe actions Mutual regulation of behaviors                | Recipes, game rules, instruction  |

Source: DOLZ *et al.* (2004, p. 120)

Even though the author presented such a broad classification, it is important to highlight that these are only some of the many genres in this world. Dolz *et al.* (2004) reminds us that genre cannot be defined in an absolute way. In addition, Halliday (1978) defends the idea that a language is firstly seen as a social semiotics, as a resource to produce meaning. It is involved in the center of the process in which human beings negotiate, build and modify the nature of experience. This is why,

besides teaching students about genre, teachers should stimulate learners to produce genre, to enrich their experience, and give them the chance to produce language in a meaningful way.

By taking these studies into consideration, this paper aims at presenting how an EFL class for children can be developed through a genre-based approach. In order to develop this suggestion two genres present in children's lives were chosen: Game Rules and Comic Strips. In the next sections, it will be presented how both genres could be utilized in an EFL class for children.

## **2 EXPLORING GAME RULES**

In this section, we will go over some pedagogical activities that will serve as examples of how the genre 'game rules' can be explored in an EFL class. Texts that instantiate this genre are characterized by the straightforward messages that provide players with clear instructions for a specific game. Another noticeable feature is the frequent use of the imperative mood when presenting the rules. Due to its relation with different games, this genre is likely to be highly accepted by students. Game rules will have two functions at first in a classroom: ludic and educational. Together, these functions will provide the children with fun, pleasure, knowledge and education. Learning might happen more naturally and smoothly than in a regular class due to the positive environment established by the ludic function.

The game Simon Says was selected in order to exemplify how the genre "Game Rules" can be applied in classroom. This game was chosen due to some specific reasons. First, it is a popular game in many different countries; as a consequence, chances are that students will already be familiar with the game. Second, Simon Says is a very flexible game; it can be applied in almost any kind of environment to students of various levels. Furthermore, the game can be applied for the same class in several

different manners, which allow the teacher to use the same tool for different purposes in an interesting way. Third, Simon Says can also be utilized by the teacher as a class management strategy. Finally, besides enhancing students' language skills, this game can make students more attentive. All these features will be highlighted in the activities to be presented in the next subsections.

- SIMON SAYS**
- Simon Says is a game for three or more players.
  - One of the players is Simon.
  - The others must do what Simon tells them to do when asked with a phrase beginning
    - with "Simon says".
  - If Simon says "Simon says jump", the players must jump (players that do not jump are out).
  - However, if Simon says simply "jump", without first saying "Simon says", players do not jump; those that do jump are out.

Figure 1. Simon Says game rules.

Next, our suggestion for working with Simon Says rules will be presented.

## 2.1 FIRST ACTIVITY

- 1 – What's the text about?
- a) Rules to play soccer
  - b) Rules to play Simon Says
  - c) Rules to play opposite game
  - d) Rules to play baseball

Figure 2. Game rules first activity.

The first activity (Fig. 2) is aimed at making students skim through the text to get its gist. Depending on the level, pictures can be utilized to give students more sources which will help them understand the text. This activity should give students a better idea of what they are going to read.

## 2.2 SECOND ACTIVITY

2 – Answer the questions:

- a) Can 2 players play Simon Says?
- b) Can 100 players play Simon Says?
- c) What is the ideal number of players in your opinions? Why?
- d) How many Simons are there?
- e) What must the players do if Simon says “Touch your nose”? Why?
- f) What must the players do if Simon says “Simon says touch your head”? Why?
- g) What must the players do if Simon says “Do not move!” Why?
- h) What must the players do if Simon says “Simon says move!”? Why?
- i) Who gets out of the game?
- j) Does Simon get out of the game?
- k) When is the game over?

Figure 3. Game rules second activity.

In the second activity (Fig. 3), students will answer several questions that will guide their understanding of the whole text. At the end, students will be likely to have the feeling that they understood the text even though the text was not translated or thoroughly explained. Below it is shown how each question will contribute to the student understanding and what grammar point is worked upon.

Questions (a) and (b) both focus on the number of players that can play the game: three or more. Question (a) checks if students understood that it has to be at least three, whereas question (b) checks if students understood that no maximum limit was imposed. Question (c) gives students the chance to think critically, since they were exposed to the rules of the game, they probably have an idea of how it is played. So in this exercise, they should be able to think and opine about the ideal number of players. Students usually think that the right answer is in the text. This can be a good opportunity for them to understand that if they have good arguments the right answer may be in their minds. Different opinions might be brought up and it is a good opportunity for the teacher to manage the class in a way that they can have a meaningful and fruitful discussion about their different opinions, since there is no

“right answer”. All in all, exercise (c) should be utilized to make students think and have their own opinions based on their own understanding of the game.

Question (d) focuses on the understanding of one of the basic rules of the game. If the students did not understand that only one of the players is Simon, then chances are that he or she did not really understand the game. Although it is a very straightforward and simple question, the teacher can further elaborate it. Children are very creative and such quality should be always explored. Considering this, the teacher could ask students how they could play “Simon Says” with two Simons, for example. Students could have some time to think, to discuss and to defend their ideas. At the end, they could again think critically and decide whether it is better to play with only one Simon or with two. Thus, what seems to be a very simple question can be utilized to check students’ comprehension of the text, test their creativity and encourage them to think critically.

Questions (e), (f), (g) and (h) are mostly focused on the understanding of the practical part of the game and on grammar. There are more questions regarding this part of the text for two main reasons. First, the understanding of these questions is of paramount importance for the success of the game. Second, the linguistic features of these questions and of the part that they refer to on the text can be considerably difficult depending on the students’ proficiency level.

Question (i) seems simple at first, but it can be very fruitful if different aspects of it are worked upon. First, by answering the question student will be testing their understanding of the text. Second, the teacher could ask, for example, about who gets out of the game. In doing so, students would have to use again the structure learned on questions (e), (f), (g) and (h). “Out” is one of the key words of this kind of genre and so teachers should make sure that students understand it. Hence, question (i) can test and develop students’ comprehension, accuracy and vocabulary.




Question (j) and (k) will test students ability to make inferences. The answers for both questions are not in the text, so students will have to think about the possible answers for them. Question (j) will make students hypothesize about what would happen if Simon got out of the game. Again, they could also contrast the traditional to a “new” and “different” ways of playing Simon Says, which would help them developing critical thinking. Question (k) also has a traditional answer. The game is over when only one player is left responding to Simon Says command. Nevertheless, students could also come up with different ways of finishing the game. Besides, question (k) also introduces a key word for game rules: “game over”. After answering these questions, students can be encouraged to complete the rules of the game or even modify it.

Activity 2 is supposed to provide students with a clear idea about the manner the game is played and about the content of the text – meaning, vocabulary and grammar.

### 2.3 THIRD ACTIVITY

3- READ THE FOLLOWING COMICS

Source: guywithstick's production



a) Do you think they are playing the game Simon Says correctly? Why or Why not?

b) What must they do to play the game correctly? And what mustn't they do? Explain to both boys how Simon Says should be played.

Figure 4. Game rules third activity

The third activity aims at evaluating students' comprehension of the text and ability to apply the vocabulary and grammar learned; discussing with them certain social behaviors; and introducing them to a new genre. By answering question (a), students will be checking whether the situation being presented in the comic strip is in accordance with the first text content. In doing so, students will be able to apply the knowledge they acquired from the text "Simon Says", which makes the text itself more meaningful since it is being read not only because the teacher asked for it, but also because its content is important to perform an activity.

In question (b), students will be able to apply the grammar, vocabulary and information they learned in the text "Simon Says", because they are supposed to write what the basic rules of the game is. This third activity also introduces to students the

genre that will be worked upon next. Consequently, when students start studying the genre “comic strip” they will already be familiar with it.

## 2.4 FOURTH ACTIVITY

4 – Game time! Let’s play Simon Says!

Figure 5. Game rules fourth activity

In the fourth activity, students will play the game “Simon Says”. As it was mentioned previously, the successfulness of a class with games is related to the balance of ludic and educational aspects presents in the class. English can be practiced and learned during the time the game is being played. For instance, the vocabulary utilized in Simon’s commands can also be used to students learning process. Students can learn different kinds of vocabulary depending on the level, the group and age. They could, for example, learn the parts of the body (touch your NOSE, touch your RIGHT FOOT, touch your HAIR, touch your NECK). Therefore, “Simon Says” can also be utilized to teach students new vocabulary even when the game is being played.

## 2.5 FIFTH ACTIVITY

### HOMEWORK

Do you want to play more games? Give the class a suggestion! Write a text explaining the rules of an interesting game you want to play in the class and draw some comic strips showing how the game is played.

Figure 6. Game rules homework

Students can be assigned homework. In order to practice the genre “game rules” students can be encouraged to write the basic rules of a game, following the model they have. Teacher may utilize the following class as a “game class”, in which the games whose rules students will try to write will be played. Students will be told that they will play the game whenever they are able to explain the rules. In doing so, they will be able to think more carefully and each one will spend as much time as needed to develop something of their choice. Besides that, part of the homework is intended to get students more familiar with the genre that will be worked upon next.

### **3 EXPLORING COMIC STRIPS**

The genre to be suggested next was already introduced in the first activity: Comic strips. This genre was chosen due to several aspects: the familiarity children have with this genre, which enables teacher to use student’s previous knowledge; the presence of humor, which can be used as a motivational hook; and the visual features, which draws more attention to the reading and improve students ability to make connections (between text and picture). The readers’ imagination links the different parts of the story, creates the characters voices and tones, and interprets the onomatopoeias. Thus, comic strip is an apt genre for children not only due to its ludic aspects, but also because of the abilities that students can develop by reading it.

In comic strips both verbal and visual language are important for a good comprehension of the context. Students should be encouraged to explore the speech balloons, boxes, panel’s layout, gutters, sound effects, symbolia and motion lines (WALKER, 2000). Students will be better readers of comic strips when they are able to interpret all these features present in this genre. Therefore, it is important that the teacher explores all the details of the comic strips with the students so that they recognize the importance of each part in the text.

Source: <http://lucsdg.googlepages.com>



Figure 7. Lindonjhonson comic strip.

Figure 7 illustrates the comic strips that the will use as a model class to be worked upon in this paper. However, it is not the first part of the activity. As we shall see, there will be some previous activities that will introduce the lesson vocabulary, which includes important words for the understanding of the whole text.

### 3.1 FIRST ACTIVITY

Source: <http://www.photos.com/royalty-free-images/children-washing-dishes/87604448>

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>1) Answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a- What are these children doing? Why?</li> <li>b- Do you help your parents at home? How?</li> <li>c- What don't you do? Why not?</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

Figure 8. Comic strip first activity

Comic strips first activity will introduce the students to the topic of the class and raise the curiosity about the vocabulary related to chores, which is the language


focus of this activity. First, students will see the picture above and will answer question (a). This question aims at introducing an expression related to chores “do the dishes” and at bringing up a discussion about the importance of helping parents with the chores at home. Question (b) and (c) will make students reflect on how helpful they are at home and might also make them feel the need for certain vocabulary, which should give them enough motivation to move on to the next activity. Instead of translating chores expression for students, the teacher will hand out a crossword (Fig. 9).

### 3.2 SECOND ACTIVITY

Source: *EFL-galaxy.com*

2) Fill in the following crossword puzzle

**How do you help at home?**  
Home chores



**Across**

2. Every morning I \_\_\_\_ the plants.
5. My father usually \_\_\_\_ the dishes.
7. My mother usually \_\_\_\_ the meal.
8. Jack is a lazy boy. He never \_\_\_\_ at home.
9. I always \_\_\_\_ the floor with a mop.
10. I usually \_\_\_\_ the table before meals.

**Down**

1. My brother sometimes \_\_\_\_ the window.
3. Tom always helps at home. He usually \_\_\_\_ his bed in the morning.
4. I usually sweep the floor with a \_\_\_\_.
5. My sister \_\_\_\_ the clothes.
6. I always \_\_\_\_ the floor at home.

ESL-galaxy.com  
100 Teacher & Student Resources

Figure 9. Comic Strips second activity

Students are not supposed to know all the words in the crossword (Fig. 9), but instead of telling the students what the right answer is, the teacher can help them

achieve the right word. For example, to achieve word (2) in the crossword for example, the teacher could ask the students “what do you use to do this (mimicking watering plants)”, for (4) and (9) the teacher could tell the students that the words are present in other questions. If the hint the teacher gives to students is not very effective, teacher could play hangman to complete all the words. Once the crossword is filled in, students will be able to answer question (b) and (c) with sentences such as, “I do the dishes” and “I set the table before meals” for (b) and “I don’t mop the floor” and “I don’t clean the window” for (c). Thus, by discussing the topic above, student will not only learn chores vocabulary but also practice the simple present.

### 3.3 THIRD ACTIVITY

|       |   |   |   |
|-------|---|---|---|
| 3) a. | How often do you organize your closet?<br>A)Always<br>B) Sometimes<br>C)Never | How often you take out the garbage?<br>A)Always<br>B)Sometimes<br>C)Never | How often do you make your bed?<br>A)Always<br>B)Sometimes<br>C)Never |
| 3) b. | How often do your classmates do the chores listed on the crossword?           |   |   |

Figure 10. Comic strip third activity

The third activity (Fig. 10) focuses mainly on introducing vocabulary. Adverbs of frequency are commonly used and, hence, it is important that students become able to understand and to use them. Depending on the level of the students, more adverbs can be included in the list. In Exercise 2a students will be introduced to the adverbs. Since the introduction of the vocabulary itself is not enough to make students utilize these adverbs correctly, the teacher should explicit on the board how the adverbs are used by writing down examples such as “I always organize my closet”; “I sometimes take the garbage out”; and “I never make my bed. In this activity, students will be encouraged to interview their classmates in order to compare the frequency they do their chores and, therefore, practice the structure they have learned. Besides that, the



third activity introduces students to the chore that will be presented on the comic strips: “take out the garbage”. In doing so, students will be able to understand the comic strip more easily.

### 3.4 FOURTH ACTIVITY

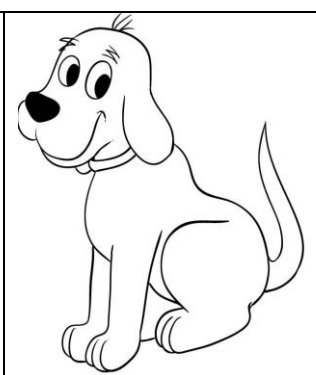
|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>4) What do you have to do if you have a dog?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Do you have to walk your dog?<br/>_____</li><li>- Do you have to feed your dog?<br/>_____</li><li>- Do you have to study with your dog?<br/>_____</li><li>- Do you have to play with your dog?<br/>_____</li></ul> |  |
|--|---|

Figure 11. Comic strip fourth activity

The fourth activity aims at introducing a topic and a grammar point. It introduces students to the topic of the comic strips. In doing so, students should be more familiarized with the topic when reading the comic strip and they will be more likely to understand the meaning being conveyed. The grammar topic being presented is similar to one that was presented during the exercises on games rules. The similarities between “must” and “have to” will allow students to recapitulate part of what was learned in the previous section and understand more easily the grammar topic being presented here. Thus, the fourth activity will help students comprehend the comics presented; will introduce a new grammar topic, “have to”; and will recapitulate part of what was studied in the previous section.



### 3.5 FIFTH ACTIVITY

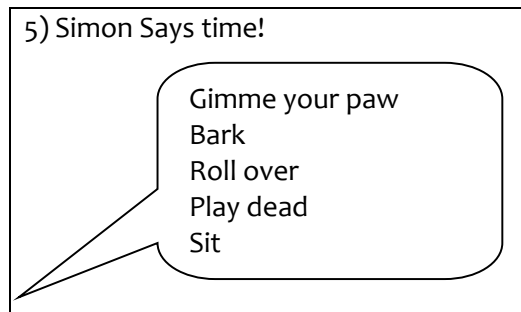


Figure 12. Comic strip fifth activity

In order to cover the part of the comics that has not been introduced to students yet, students will play Simon Says. In turn, they will recapitulate what was the main topic of the previous section and will also have fun. They can go over the rules in order to practice what was studied in the previous section and they can always be encouraged to explain why someone got out of the game. By playing the game students will be, naturally, practicing some of the vocabulary presented in the comic strip. After this exercise, students are likely to have a good understanding of the verbal part of the comic strips, which is also supported by the visual aspects.

### 3.6 SIXTH ACTIVITY

5) Read the comic strip and answer the following questions.



1. Who is the boy playing with?
2. What are they playing?
3. Is Lindonjohanson a boy?
4. Who is Lindonjhanson?
5. What is “WOOF, WOOF!”?
6. Why is the “WOOF, WOOF! Balloon different?
7. Who produces the “SNIF! SNIF!” sound? Why?
8. Is the smell good or bad? How do you know?
9. Why is the last part of the story bigger than the others?
10. What do you think is the best title for the story?
11. Is it a funny story?
12. Did you like the story? Why or why not?

Figure 13 – Comic strip sixth activity

The last part of this class is constituted by the comic strip and a group of questions which aims at helping students explore this genre. The comic strip is short but the language used is not as easy as one might think. If part of the vocabulary is not introduced beforehand, chances are that students, depending on their level, will not be able to understand the content of the verbal part and will have to stick to the visual aspects of the comics. Understanding only the visual aspects may be enough to have an idea of what the comic strip is about, but students ought to understand both visual and verbal aspects to have a rich comprehension of what is being conveyed and of the features of this genre. By working with this comic strip, the teacher should be able to work with many language aspects, as it was presented in the previous exercise, that were related to the topic. In addition, the topic helps to keep the education environment of an English class, by discussing topics such as the importance of doing house chores and taking care of pets. In spite of the fact that it is small, this comic strip presents rich visual language, which can enable students to understand how different meaning can be conveyed in this genre.

Students should, then, be encouraged to produce comic strips as well. The teacher could propose a topic or encourage the students to select one. At the end, the

work could be displayed in many ways, such as panels, or a book with all the comic strips from a class could be created.

## **FINAL REMARKS**

This paper has presented a range of activities with the intent of exemplifying how a genre-based approach can be used in an EFL class. Two genres were selected: game rules and comic strips. These genres were chosen for their characteristics that have the potential to enhance students learning and interest in EFL classes. We also highlighted the importance of students having the opportunity to deal with different genres, not only to practice language, but also to improve their capacity to think critically and expressing their view on the world.

A plethora of genres is welcome to be used in an EFL class. However, as it was presented in previous sections, it is important to consider how the genre fits the group of students to which it is intended. We hope that this paper has demonstrated how the selection of the texts and elaboration of activities have a considerable impact in the successfulness of an EFL class with a genre-based approach. In turn, we believe that future studies should make proposals of EFL classes exploring different genres for different student profiles

## **RESUMO**

Este trabalho tem como objetivo apresentar atividades para o ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira para crianças, à partir de uma abordagem baseada em gêneros textuais. Tais atividades visam expor os jovens aprendizes a gêneros que não apenas aumentem a criatividade e o interesse na língua, mas que também forneçam aos alunos uma base sólida para que eles possam usar a língua no “mundo real”. Este estudo foi elaborado com base na ideia de que, ao introduzir os vários gêneros aos alunos logo no início de sua relação com a nova língua, os professores farão com que esses alunos fiquem mais motivados e preparados para se comunicarem. Autores como Alves e Calvo (2007) apontam para a eficiência de abordagens baseadas em

gêneros textuais em aulas de inglês como língua estrangeira. O presente estudo demonstra como gêneros podem ser explorados no ensino de inglês para crianças através de uma série de atividades pedagógicas.

**Palavras-chave:** inglês como segunda língua, gêneros, história em quadrinhos, regras de jogo.

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