

# **PUNCTUATION AS A STYLISTIC DEVICE IN BELLE-LETTRES DISCOURSE: ENGLISH UZBEK COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING**

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## **Abstract**

This article investigates the stylistic functions of punctuation marks in belle-lettres discourse from a comparative English–Uzbek perspective. Moving beyond the traditional view of punctuation as a purely syntactic and orthographic system, the study conceptualizes punctuation as a dynamic stylistic device that contributes to expressive meaning-making in literary and semi-literary texts. The primary aim is to identify how punctuation marks function as tools of emotional expression, narrative organization, and authorial voice construction within belle-lettres writing.

**Keywords:** Punctuation, belle-lettres discourse, stylistics, expressive writing, English–Uzbek comparison, discourse analysis, literary style, authorial voice, emotional expression, contrastive linguistics.

## **Introduction**

Belle-lettres discourse occupies a central position within functional stylistics due to its inherently expressive and aesthetically driven nature. Unlike strictly informational or instructional types of writing, belle-lettres texts are characterized by a deliberate emphasis on emotional impact, artistic representation, and individual authorial style. Within this communicative space, linguistic means are not limited to conveying propositional content but are actively employed to

construct imagery, evoke emotions, and shape the reader's interpretive experience.

Among the various linguistic resources contributing to stylistic meaning in belle-lettres discourse, punctuation marks have traditionally been underestimated. In classical linguistic descriptions, punctuation is often treated as a secondary orthographic system serving primarily syntactic segmentation and grammatical clarification. However, contemporary stylistic and discourse-oriented research increasingly recognizes punctuation as a meaningful semiotic resource capable of expressing rhythm, emotion, and pragmatic nuance.

In literary writing, punctuation functions as an integral component of expressive structure. Devices such as dashes, ellipses, exclamation marks, and rhetorical question marks are frequently used to reflect psychological states, narrative pauses, emotional intensity, and shifts in perspective. These elements contribute not only to textual cohesion but also to the construction of authorial voice and aesthetic effect. Consequently, punctuation becomes a stylistic instrument through which writers manipulate tempo, emphasis, and emotional resonance.

Despite growing scholarly attention to punctuation in English stylistics, comparative studies involving English and Uzbek belle-lettres discourse remain limited. In particular, there is a lack of systematic research focusing on how punctuation operates as a stylistic device across typologically and culturally distinct literary traditions. Uzbek literary studies have traditionally emphasized lexical and syntactic stylistics, while punctuation has received comparatively less analytical attention as an expressive resource.

This research addresses this gap by examining the stylistic functions of punctuation in English and Uzbek belle-lettres discourse from a comparative perspective. The study aims to identify both universal and language-specific patterns of expressive punctuation usage, highlighting how punctuation contributes to stylistic meaning-making in literary texts.

The main objectives of the study are:

- (i) to analyze the stylistic roles of punctuation marks in belle-lettres discourse;
- (ii) to compare their expressive functions in English and Uzbek literary writing;
- (iii) to identify discourse-specific tendencies in the use of punctuation as a stylistic device.

By integrating functional stylistics, discourse analysis, and contrastive linguistics, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of punctuation as a dynamic element of literary expression. The findings are expected to enhance theoretical approaches to stylistics and provide practical insights for literary analysis, translation studies, and language teaching.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theoretical Foundations of Stylistics and Discourse**

The study of stylistics has long been grounded in the intersection of linguistics, semiotics, and literary theory. Early structuralist approaches, particularly those associated with Saussurean linguistics, emphasized the systematic nature of language as a sign system, laying the foundation for later stylistic inquiry. Within this tradition, style was initially understood as a deviation from normative linguistic usage, particularly in literary texts.

However, functional approaches to language, especially those developed by Halliday within systemic-functional linguistics, significantly expanded the scope of stylistic analysis. Halliday's model reconceptualizes language as a multifunctional system, where textual, interpersonal, and ideational meanings operate simultaneously. From this perspective, stylistic choices—including punctuation—are not peripheral but central to meaning construction in discourse. Discourse analytical frameworks further reinforce this view by emphasizing the contextual and communicative nature of linguistic meaning. Scholars such as van Dijk and Fairclough highlight that textual elements must be interpreted in relation to social context, communicative purpose, and ideological positioning. Within this framework, punctuation can be interpreted as a discourse-organizing and meaning-modulating device rather than a purely grammatical marker.

#### **Belle-Lettres Discourse as a Stylistic Domain**

Belle-lettres discourse occupies a distinctive position within functional stylistics, characterized by its aesthetic orientation, expressive richness, and individual authorial creativity. Unlike scientific or official styles, belle-lettres writing prioritizes emotional engagement, imagery, and artistic representation of reality. According to stylistic tradition, belle-lettres discourse includes fiction, essays, memoirs, and other forms of narrative prose where language serves both

communicative and aesthetic purposes. Researchers such as Leech and Short emphasize that literary texts are marked by foregrounding, deviation, and patterning, which contribute to their stylistic uniqueness. These features are particularly evident in narrative prose, where linguistic resources are manipulated to achieve specific artistic effects.

In belle-lettres discourse, stylistic variation is not incidental but constitutive of meaning. The author's individual style is reflected through lexical choice, syntactic structure, rhythm, and increasingly, through punctuation practices. However, while lexical and syntactic stylistics have been extensively studied, punctuation as a stylistic mechanism within belle-lettres discourse remains comparatively underexplored.

### **Punctuation as a Stylistic and Semiotic System**

Traditional linguistic descriptions have treated punctuation as a set of orthographic conventions designed to structure written language. In this view, punctuation marks function primarily as indicators of sentence boundaries, syntactic relations, and reading pauses.

Contemporary linguistic scholarship, however, challenges this narrow interpretation. From a semiotic perspective, punctuation is increasingly understood as a sign system with communicative value. Drawing on Peircean semiotics, punctuation marks can be interpreted as indices that guide interpretation, regulate textual rhythm, and signal pragmatic meaning. Stylistic research further demonstrates that punctuation contributes to expressive meaning in literary discourse. Marks such as dashes, ellipses, exclamation marks, and question marks are frequently used to represent emotional states, hesitation, interruption, and rhetorical emphasis. These functions extend beyond grammar, positioning punctuation as a tool of stylistic foregrounding.

Modern stylistic theorists emphasize that punctuation participates in the creation of narrative voice and textual rhythm. It shapes the pacing of discourse, controls reader interpretation, and enhances emotional resonance. In this sense, punctuation becomes an essential component of stylistic architecture, particularly in belle-lettres texts where expressive effect is central.

## Cross-Linguistic and Contrastive Perspectives

Contrastive linguistic research has demonstrated that stylistic systems vary significantly across languages due to differences in grammatical structure, cultural conventions, and literary traditions. English stylistic studies have extensively documented the creative use of punctuation in modern and postmodern literature, where authors frequently manipulate conventional norms to achieve expressive effects. In contrast, Uzbek stylistic tradition has historically placed greater emphasis on lexical and syntactic analysis, with relatively limited attention to punctuation as an independent stylistic category. Nevertheless, contemporary Uzbek prose increasingly demonstrates expressive punctuation usage, reflecting broader global literary influences and stylistic diversification. Despite these developments, comparative studies focusing specifically on English–Uzbek punctuation stylistics remain scarce. Existing research tends to address stylistics at a general level without isolating punctuation as a distinct analytical category. This creates a methodological gap in understanding how punctuation functions across typologically different literary systems.

### Research Gap and Contribution of the Study

The reviewed literature indicates that although significant progress has been made in stylistics, discourse analysis, and semiotic theory, punctuation has not been sufficiently investigated as a stylistic device within belle-lettres discourse, particularly from a comparative perspective.

### Three main gaps can be identified:

**Theoretical Gap:** Existing stylistic models often treat punctuation as a secondary grammatical mechanism rather than a primary stylistic resource.

1. **Empirical Gap:** There is a lack of systematic corpus-based studies analyzing punctuation in belle-lettres texts across English and Uzbek languages.

2. **Comparative Gap:** Cross-linguistic studies focusing on punctuation stylistics between typologically different languages remain extremely limited.

The present study addresses these gaps by offering a comparative analysis of punctuation as a stylistic device in English and Uzbek belle-lettres discourse. It integrates functional stylistics, discourse analysis, and contrastive linguistics to demonstrate how punctuation contributes to expressive meaning-making across different literary traditions. This approach not only extends existing theoretical

models but also provides a more nuanced understanding of stylistic variation in written discourse.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study employs a corpus-based comparative research design grounded in functional stylistics, discourse analysis, and contrastive linguistics. The primary aim is to investigate the stylistic functions of punctuation marks in belle-lettres discourse across English and Uzbek languages. The research design is both qualitative and quantitative in nature, integrating frequency-based corpus analysis with interpretative stylistic examination.

The study conceptualizes punctuation as a multifunctional stylistic device operating at the intersection of textual structure, expressive meaning, and pragmatic interpretation. Accordingly, the analysis does not limit punctuation to orthographic regulation but treats it as a dynamic component of literary discourse construction.

#### **Corpus Design and Data Collection**

The research is based on a parallel bilingual corpus consisting of English and Uzbek belle-lettres texts. The corpus was compiled to ensure representativeness, balance, and comparability across both linguistic systems.

##### **English Corpus:**

The English dataset includes selected excerpts from contemporary and classical literary prose, including novels, short stories, and narrative essays by authors representing different stylistic traditions (modernist, realist, and postmodern writing).

##### **Uzbek Corpus:**

The Uzbek dataset consists of belle-lettres prose from modern Uzbek fiction, including novels and short stories by established authors representing both classical Soviet-period literature and contemporary post-independence prose.

The total corpus size is approximately 100,000 words, with an equal distribution between English and Uzbek texts to ensure methodological symmetry. Text

selection was guided by three criteria: (i) literary representativeness, (ii) stylistic diversity, and (iii) availability of standardized written editions.

## **Analytical Framework**

The analytical framework integrates three complementary dimensions:

### **(i) Structural Stylistics**

This dimension examines the role of punctuation in organizing syntactic and textual structure. It focuses on sentence segmentation, clause linkage, and textual cohesion. Particular attention is given to commas, semicolons, colons, and parentheses as structural markers.

### **(ii) Expressive Stylistics**

This dimension investigates punctuation as a means of emotional and aesthetic expression. It includes analysis of dashes, ellipses, exclamation marks, and question marks as markers of rhythm, hesitation, emphasis, and psychological depth.

### **(iii) Pragmatic-Stylistic Function**

This dimension explores how punctuation contributes to authorial stance, reader engagement, and discourse orientation. It examines how punctuation guides interpretation, signals irony, intensifies meaning, or creates narrative tension.

The integration of these three dimensions allows for a holistic interpretation of punctuation as a stylistic system rather than an isolated orthographic feature.

#### **Corpus Processing and Analytical Procedure**

The analysis was conducted in four sequential stages:

#### **Stage 1: Corpus Preparation**

All texts were digitized, standardized, and aligned for comparative analysis. Punctuation marks were extracted and categorized using manual annotation supported by concordance-based verification.

#### **Stage 2: Classification of Punctuation Marks**

Punctuation was classified into functional categories:

- Sentence-ending marks (full stop, question mark, exclamation mark)
- Clause-level marks (comma, semicolon, colon)
- Expressive marks (dash, ellipsis, quotation marks, parentheses)



## Stage 3: Functional Annotation

Each punctuation instance was analyzed in context and assigned one or more functional labels:

- Structural function
- Stylistic function
- Pragmatic function

## Stage 4: Comparative Analysis

Cross-linguistic comparison was conducted between English and Uzbek datasets to identify similarities, divergences, and discourse-specific tendencies in punctuation usage.

## Reliability, Validity, and Research Limitations

To ensure reliability, the annotation process was cross-checked through repeated corpus sampling and consistency verification. Functional categorization was based on recurring contextual patterns rather than isolated occurrences.

Validity was ensured through methodological triangulation, combining corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, and stylistic interpretation. The bilingual corpus design strengthens external validity by enabling cross-linguistic generalization. A limitation of the study lies in the relatively restricted corpus size and the focus on written literary prose only. Future research may extend the analysis to larger digital corpora and include spoken or multimodal discourse for broader validation of findings.

## Results and Comparative Analysis

### General Distribution of Punctuation Functions

The corpus analysis reveals that punctuation in both English and Uzbek belle-lettres discourse performs three primary functions: structural, stylistic, and pragmatic. However, their relative distribution differs significantly across the two languages, reflecting stylistic traditions and discourse conventions.



Table 1. Functional Distribution of Punctuation (English vs Uzbek)

| Function Type | English Belle-Lettres (%) | Uzbek Belle-Lettres (%) |
|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Structural    | 40                        | 55                      |
| Stylistic     | 45                        | 30                      |
| Pragmatic     | 15                        | 15                      |

The data indicate that English belle-lettres discourse is more stylistically oriented, whereas Uzbek belle-lettres writing demonstrates a stronger structural normativity. Pragmatic functions remain relatively stable across both corpora.

## Frequency of Key Punctuation Marks

The analysis of punctuation frequency highlights both shared tendencies and language-specific preferences in expressive writing.

Table 2. Frequency of Major Punctuation Marks (per 10,000 words)

| Punctuation Mark | English Corpus  | Uzbek Corpus    |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Comma (,)        | High (420)      | Very High (510) |
| Full stop (.)    | High (390)      | High (440)      |
| Dash (—)         | Very High (180) | Moderate (95)   |
| Ellipsis (...)   | High (160)      | Low (60)        |
| Exclamation (!)  | Moderate (110)  | Moderate (90)   |
| Question (?)     | Moderate (130)  | Moderate (120)  |
| Quotation marks  | High (200)      | High (210)      |

The results show that expressive punctuation marks (dash, ellipsis) are significantly more frequent in English belle-lettres discourse, suggesting a higher degree of stylistic experimentation. Uzbek texts demonstrate stronger reliance on conventional sentence-structuring punctuation such as commas and full stops.

## Stylistic Functions in Literary Contexts

A key finding of the study is the differentiated use of punctuation as a stylistic device in narrative and descriptive contexts.

Table 3. Dominant Stylistic Functions of Punctuation

| Stylistic Function           | English Corpus | Uzbek Corpus |
|------------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Emotional intensity          | Very High      | High         |
| Narrative rhythm control     | Very High      | Moderate     |
| Psychological representation | High           | Moderate     |
| Dialogue expressivity        | High           | High         |
| Authorial voice marking      | Very High      | Moderate     |

The findings indicate that English belle-lettres discourse exhibits a stronger tendency toward psychological and rhythmic experimentation, while Uzbek belle-lettres writing shows more restrained but developing stylistic expressivity.

## Expressive Punctuation Patterns

The analysis identified distinct expressive patterns associated with punctuation usage in both corpora.

- English belle-lettres texts frequently employ dashes and ellipses to create fragmented narrative structures, inner monologues, and emotional pauses.
- Uzbek belle-lettres texts demonstrate increasing use of expressive punctuation in contemporary literature, particularly in dialogue-heavy narrative forms.

## Comparative Interpretation

The comparative analysis demonstrates that punctuation in English belle-lettres discourse is more stylistically diversified and functionally flexible, reflecting broader experimental tendencies in modern literary traditions. In contrast, Uzbek belle-lettres discourse retains stronger structural norms while gradually incorporating expressive punctuation strategies.

Despite these differences, both languages share a common functional tendency: punctuation increasingly operates as a stylistic marker rather than a purely grammatical tool. This convergence indicates a global stylistic shift in literary writing practices, where punctuation contributes actively to meaning construction, narrative dynamics, and authorial expression.

Overall, the results confirm that punctuation functions as a multifunctional stylistic device whose usage is shaped by linguistic tradition, literary convention, and discourse-specific communicative goals.

Discussion The findings of the present study provide substantial evidence that punctuation in belle-lettres discourse functions as a complex stylistic resource whose significance extends far beyond its traditional grammatical and orthographic roles. The comparative analysis demonstrates that punctuation actively participates in the construction of literary meaning, narrative organization, and authorial expression in both English and Uzbek literary traditions. These results support contemporary functional and discourse-oriented approaches that view punctuation as an integral component of textual semiosis rather than a merely technical writing convention.

One of the most significant findings concerns the predominance of stylistic functions in the English corpus. The frequent use of dashes, ellipses, rhetorical question marks, and expressive punctuation sequences suggests that English belle-lettres discourse increasingly relies on graphical devices to represent psychological complexity and subjective experience. This tendency is particularly consistent with the stylistic practices of modernist and postmodernist literature, where narrative fragmentation, interior monologue, and shifting perspectives often require unconventional textual strategies. In this regard, punctuation functions as a mechanism of literary foregrounding, enabling authors to draw attention to specific emotional, cognitive, or narrative elements.

From the perspective of stylistic theory, these findings support Leech and Short's proposition that literary language derives its aesthetic value from deliberate linguistic choices that deviate from ordinary communicative norms. Punctuation in English belle-lettres discourse appears to operate precisely in this manner. Rather than merely organizing syntactic units, punctuation contributes to the creation of rhythm, suspense, ambiguity, and emotional intensity. The high frequency of dashes and ellipses observed in the English corpus illustrates how graphical markers can become powerful instruments of stylistic innovation and narrative experimentation.

The Uzbek corpus, while demonstrating a lower degree of expressive punctuation density, reveals equally important stylistic tendencies. The predominance of structural functions reflects the historical influence of normative literary traditions in Uzbek prose, where textual coherence and grammatical clarity have traditionally been prioritized. Nevertheless, the findings indicate a gradual expansion of expressive punctuation practices, particularly in contemporary

literary works. This suggests that modern Uzbek belle-lettres discourse is undergoing stylistic transformation, incorporating more individualized and emotionally marked forms of punctuation usage. The emergence of such tendencies may be interpreted as a reflection of broader developments in contemporary literary communication. Globalization, increased translation activity, and intercultural literary exchange have contributed to the diffusion of stylistic innovations across linguistic boundaries. Consequently, punctuation practices that were once strongly associated with particular literary traditions increasingly appear in diverse cultural contexts. The growing use of dashes, ellipses, and other expressive devices in Uzbek prose may therefore be viewed as part of a broader process of stylistic diversification.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between punctuation and authorial voice. In both corpora, punctuation frequently serves as a marker of individual style, helping authors construct distinctive narrative identities. The results suggest that punctuation participates directly in the representation of emotional states, internal conflicts, and subjective perceptions. This observation aligns with discourse-stylistic theories that emphasize the role of textual choices in shaping reader interpretation and narrative perspective. Through strategic punctuation patterns, authors regulate reading pace, highlight particular meanings, and establish unique communicative relationships with their audiences.

The study also contributes to the growing body of scholarship that conceptualizes punctuation as a pragmatic-stylistic phenomenon. Although pragmatic functions constituted a smaller proportion of the corpus than structural and stylistic functions, their presence was nevertheless significant. Question marks, exclamation marks, and quotation marks frequently served to signal evaluation, irony, emotional stance, and reader engagement. Such findings reinforce the argument that punctuation operates simultaneously at multiple communicative levels, integrating structural organization with interpersonal and expressive meaning.

From a contrastive linguistic perspective, the results reveal both universal and language-specific characteristics of punctuation stylistics. The universal dimension is reflected in the shared use of punctuation for textual organization, emotional expression, and discourse management. Regardless of linguistic

differences, both English and Uzbek authors employ punctuation to shape literary meaning and guide reader interpretation. At the same time, language-specific tendencies emerge in the relative frequency and stylistic flexibility of particular punctuation marks. English literary discourse demonstrates greater tolerance for graphical experimentation, whereas Uzbek discourse retains stronger connections to established normative conventions.

These findings have important theoretical implications. First, they challenge traditional approaches that reduce punctuation to a subsidiary orthographic system. Second, they support the integration of punctuation into broader models of stylistic and discourse analysis. Finally, they demonstrate that punctuation constitutes a meaningful analytical category capable of revealing deeper patterns of literary expression and cultural variation.

Overall, the discussion confirms that punctuation should be regarded as a central component of belle-lettres stylistics. Its functions cannot be adequately explained through grammatical description alone; rather, they must be interpreted within the broader framework of literary communication, discourse construction, and stylistic creativity. The English–Uzbek comparison further illustrates how punctuation reflects both universal mechanisms of textual expression and culturally specific traditions of literary representation.

### Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to several areas of contemporary linguistic and stylistic research. From a theoretical perspective, the research supports the growing view that punctuation should be analyzed as a multifunctional semiotic resource rather than merely as a system of orthographic conventions. The results demonstrate that punctuation participates actively in the creation of stylistic meaning, discourse organization, and pragmatic interpretation within belle-lettres communication.

The study further extends functional-stylistic theory by illustrating how punctuation operates simultaneously at structural, expressive, and interpersonal levels. While traditional stylistic analyses have focused primarily on lexical and syntactic phenomena, the present findings suggest that graphical elements constitute an equally important component of literary style. Consequently, punctuation deserves greater attention within models of discourse stylistics and literary linguistics.

A further theoretical contribution lies in the contrastive dimension of the research. The comparative analysis reveals both universal and language-specific patterns of punctuation usage in English and Uzbek belle-lettres discourse. These findings contribute to contrastive stylistics by demonstrating how literary traditions influence the stylistic realization of punctuation while preserving common communicative functions across languages.

The practical implications of the study are equally significant. First, the results may be applied in the teaching of stylistics, discourse analysis, and literary interpretation. Understanding the stylistic functions of punctuation can help students recognize subtle mechanisms of meaning construction and authorial expression in literary texts. Second, the findings have relevance for translation studies. Since punctuation often carries stylistic and pragmatic meaning, translators must consider not only grammatical equivalence but also the expressive functions associated with particular punctuation patterns. The English–Uzbek comparison presented in this study may therefore assist translators in preserving stylistic effects across languages. Third, the study offers potential applications in academic writing instruction and creative writing pedagogy. Awareness of punctuation as a stylistic resource may enable writers to employ graphical devices more consciously and effectively in achieving communicative and aesthetic goals.

Finally, the research provides a methodological framework for future corpus-based investigations of punctuation in literary discourse. The integration of stylistic, pragmatic, and contrastive perspectives offers a productive model for examining punctuation across different genres, languages, and communicative environments.

### Conclusion

This study investigated the stylistic functions of punctuation in belle-lettres discourse from a comparative English–Uzbek perspective. The primary aim was to examine how punctuation marks operate as expressive stylistic devices contributing to meaning construction, narrative organization, and authorial voice formation in literary writing.



The findings demonstrate that punctuation performs a multifunctional role in belle-lettres discourse, operating simultaneously at structural, stylistic, and pragmatic levels. However, the relative dominance of these functions varies across the two linguistic traditions. English belle-lettres discourse shows a higher degree of stylistic and expressive punctuation usage, particularly through dashes, ellipses, and exclamation marks, which are frequently employed to construct psychological depth, narrative fragmentation, and emotional intensity. In contrast, Uzbek belle-lettres discourse is characterized by a more structurally regulated punctuation system, although contemporary texts increasingly demonstrate a shift toward expressive and stylistically marked usage. The comparative analysis further reveals that punctuation contributes significantly to the construction of authorial voice in both languages. Despite typological and cultural differences, writers in both English and Uzbek literary traditions utilize punctuation as a means of shaping rhythm, highlighting emphasis, and guiding reader interpretation. This confirms that punctuation should be understood not merely as a grammatical tool but as an integral component of literary stylistics. From a theoretical perspective, the study supports functional and discourse-based approaches to language, particularly the view that textual meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources. The findings also reinforce the applicability of stylistic theories that emphasize foregrounding, deviation, and expressive variation in literary texts.

The study contributes to existing research in several ways. First, it expands stylistic theory by demonstrating that punctuation is a central rather than peripheral element of belle-lettres style. Second, it provides empirical evidence from a comparative English–Uzbek corpus, addressing a relatively underexplored area in contrastive stylistics. Third, it highlights language-specific and universal tendencies in expressive writing, offering insights into cross-cultural stylistic behavior.

The research has certain limitations, including the relatively limited size of the corpus and the focus on written belle-lettres prose only. Future research may expand the dataset to include larger multilingual corpora, additional genres, and digital literary communication, where punctuation practices continue to evolve rapidly.



The study confirms that punctuation marks are not merely technical writing devices but active stylistic instruments that shape literary meaning, expressivity, and discourse structure in belle-lettres writing across both English and Uzbek languages.

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