

REVISITING TAGLISH NA NAMAN: A CONGRUENCE APPROACH TO TAGALOG-ENGLISH CODE-SWITCHING

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is a highly multilingual country. McFarland (1994) indicates that there are 110 mutually unintelligible codes or languages known to exist in the country. Among these 110 languages is Filipino, the Tagalog-based *lingua franca* of the country, which is rapidly spreading and which is said to be spoken and understood by a vast majority of Filipinos (Gonzalez 1985). Aside from these 110 languages, English is the “present language of wider communication . . . (and it) was reported in the 1980 census as being spoken by *at least* 64.5% of the population six years and older” (Gonzalez 1985:39). Thus, one can realistically expect that at least half of the Filipino population can speak and understand three languages: a native language (not Tagalog), Filipino (which is Tagalog-based), and English.

In such a multilingual setting, it is not surprising to find that Filipinos code-switch, that is, that they use more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode. The variations are numerous: Filipinos could potentially code-switch between two, maybe even more, of the 110 Philippine languages; between their native language and Tagalog; between their native language and English, etc.¹ Of interest to this paper is Taglish, a name coined to refer to the code-switching variety of Tagalog and English which is extensively being used “ . . . in the national mass media and in certain domains of life in Metro Manila” (Gonzalez 1985:46).

Taglish is definitely not a new phenomenon in the Philippines as far as speakers and researchers are concerned (see Bautista 1980, 1991). In fact, Taglish has been re-studied again and again using different constraints and frameworks that have been proposed as possible explanations for the syntax of code-switching. But such constraints and frameworks have been found to be limited in explaining or accounting for code-switching in Taglish (see Bautista 1998b).

This paper builds on the most recent published work on Taglish (see Bautista 1998b). For data, the study uses Taglish examples culled from e-mail, a method that has just been recently employed (see Bautista 1998a, 1998b, 1998c). This study, however, may be a departure from prior studies as it focuses on the idea that “...wherever there [is] congruence between the structures of Tagalog and English, switching [is] possible” (see Bautista 1998b: 129). As such, this study uses the “congruence approach” posited by Sebba (1998) as the framework for classifying and attempting to explain Taglish code-switching strategies.

Thus, this paper attempts to shed new light on answers to the following questions: Is there congruence between the structures of Tagalog and English? Which structures of

Tagalog and English are congruent? In answering these questions, this paper demonstrates how Sebba's "congruence approach" is realized in Taglish. The implications that are drawn from such an analysis are used to shed light on a question that has been raised by Filipino researchers again and again: How competent is the Filipino bilingual in Tagalog and English?

2. DATA AND PROCEDURE

The Taglish samples used in this study were culled from 28 e-mails sent to the researcher by 13 of her friends in December 1998. Their ages ranged from 20 to 43. Two of the respondents were based in New York City,² while the rest were based in Metro Manila. Of the 13, four were working in corporate institutions, the others were based in universities, either as graduate students or members of the faculty. All of them can be said to use the Taglish characteristic of upper middle class Manila.

While there were numerous instances of intersentential (between sentences) code-switching, only intrasentential (within the sentence) code-switching was considered for this study. In instances where an acceptability test was necessary, the researcher had one other Taglish speaker validate her judgements.³

That the data came from the specific group was serendipitous to this study. Sebba (1998) indicates that the healthiest environment for code-switching is one "... where switches are not limited by lack of competence on the part of the speakers and take place in response to a positive motivation rather than as a strategy of avoidance" (p.15). The data used in this study come from that kind of a situation. Bautista (1998c) supports this further by confirming that Taglish is the *unmarked* code in such a context and what "... calls attention to itself is ... pure Tagalog or pure English ..." (p. 3).

3. THE CONGRUENCE APPROACH TO TAGLISH

Sebba (1998) recognizes that the idea of "congruence" as a basis for code-switching is not new. However, he posits that congruence is:

... not just a function of the syntax of the languages involved. The locus of congruence is the mind of the speaker, but community norms determine, by and large, the behavior of individual speakers. Bilinguals "create" congruent categories by finding common ground between the languages concerned. (p. 8)

In saying that congruence did not entirely depend on the structure of language and that it is "... relative to the language pairs, speech communities and speakers involved" (p. 9), Sebba represents a movement away from theories based on universal syntactic constraints in code-switching. (For examples, see Belazi, Rubin & Toribio 1994 and Bokamba 1989). Such a movement may be productive, especially as it has been strongly argued that "... the postulation of universal syntactic constraints on code-[switching] may be premature and ... the constraint-oriented theory to the study of this phenomenon is descriptively inadequate ..." (Bokamba 1989). To explain why bilinguals code-switch when they do, the congruence approach identifies "... four possibilities with regard to switching between two categories ... these [are] harmonization, neutralization, compromise and blocking (Sebba 1998:9). Furthermore, this congruence approach postulates that :

(If circumstances are conducive to it, we might expect the grammatical norms of the 'switched' code to converge not to match the *monolingual* norms of either of the two languages concerned, but to converge on a *new*, mixed or "hybrid" set of norms. (p.15)

What is suggested here is that code-switching may be the process by which congruent categories are negotiated by two languages and what emerges from such convergence (or non-convergence, as the case may be) is a new mixed language that has rules and quite possibly, quirks of its own.

The congruence approach appears to be an appropriate framework for analyzing the data. The framework also appears to be promising in so far as generating propositions to answer the stated problems is concerned. Taglish is typologized and analyzed according to the four alternative outcomes:

3.1. Harmonization

Harmonization is the term used to refer to the state where full congruence is established between categories in the two languages. According to Sebba (1998), "(g)rammatical categories may be construed as congruent if they: have similar syntactic function, including possibly the same subcategorization frame . . . and . . . similar semantic properties . . ." (p. 8). Thus, the categories that may *potentially* be harmonized by code-switching speakers are not just the phrase structure or the so-called X-bar categories (e.g. NP, N', N", VP, V', V") but many other categories of the grammar as well, including gender, plurality, animacy, tense, and aspect.

In the data, this harmonization can be obviously seen at work in code-switches between certain open set items in Tagalog and English. The open set items where this is most obvious are the nouns and the adjectives. (Note that as a convention in this paper, all English elements are in regular type, all Tagalog elements in italics, and the structure under consideration in capital letters. The first sentence is the Taglish sentence data and the second sentence is recast in pure English or pure Tagalog.)

Thus, there are code-switches between nouns:

(1) *Malandi pa rin ako pero STUDIES muna.*

Malandi pa rin ako pero ARAL muna.

(2) And you're not a TITA yet.

And you're not an AUNT yet.

There are also code-switches between adjectives:

(3) *Baka masyado nang LATE kung 16 ka pa darating dito.*

Baka masyado nang HULI kung 16 ka pa darating dito.

(4) *Siyempre lalong naging UNCOMFORTABLE ang dalawa.*

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Siyempre lalong naging HINDI KOMFORTABLE ang dalawa.

Predictably, there are code-switches between X-bar categories such as noun phrases made up of Adj + Noun;

- (5) *Baka TEN YEARS nga lang bago dumating.*
Baka SAMPUNG TAON nga lang bago dumating.
- (6) *Siguro, mga 20 PAGES, ok na.*
Siguro, mga DALAWAMPUNG PAHINA, ok na.

And then, there are the so-called “smooth switches” at the clause boundaries such as:

- (7) between coordinate clauses
You must tell me all about it AT KUNG MAY BAGONG CRUSH KA NA NGAYON.
You must tell me all about it AND IF YOU HAVE A NEW CRUSH NOW.
- (8) between a main clause and a subordinate clause;
Sana kita-kita tayo sa Manila BEFORE I FLY BACK HERE.
Sana kita-kita tayo sa Manila BAGO AKO LUMIPAD PABALIK DITO.

Aside from re-emphasizing the criteria that bilinguals use to determine when and where they will code-switch, Sebba (1998) goes a step further by saying that given that speakers may switch whole congruent categories between languages, they may also choose to switch *within* the categories. If speakers can choose to switch *within* the categories, a corollary to this may be that speakers may also be considering the congruency between broad categories such as clauses and whole sentences while deciding when and how to code-switch. This distinction is important not just for explaining switches between lexical categories within larger phrase structures, but also for helping explain some of the problematic code-switching choices that have been encountered by previous researchers. These will be dealt with later in the paper.

3.2. Neutralization

In the case of neutralization, switching is permitted “. . . by creating a slot for a congruent category, where the alternative syntactic construction[s] would involve noncongruent categories” (Sebba 1998:11). Thus, neutralization also includes nativization strategies which involve “the introduction of a morpheme that serves to nativize a word” (Appel & Muysken in Sebba 1998:11).

In the data of this study, it appears that the Tagalog system of inflecting verbs using Tagalog affixes has been particularly fruitful in allowing switching. In Taglish, this system of affixes is used to inflect verbs in English which would otherwise be unacceptable in their base (English) form when they are used in a Taglish sentence. For example:

(1a) **Pumunta ka na dito at MISSING na namin ang maliit mong waistline.*

would be unacceptable in Taglish. The unmarked sentence in Tagalog follows the predicate-topic structure, a structure which is incongruent with the unmarked S-V-O sentence pattern of English or even the marked passive one. Even when the structure of the Tagalog sentence is radically changed so that the predicate corresponds to the English verb position, the result is still unacceptable in Taglish, whether the sentence is cast in the English active or passive voice:

(1b) **Pumunta ka naman dito at kami ay MISSING na ang maliit mong waistline.*

(1c) **Pumunta ka naman dito at ang maliit mong waistline ay MISSING na namin.*

In Taglish, it seems that the way to accommodate such incongruency at the sentence level “category” is to “nativize” the English verbs using Tagalog verbal affixes. Thus,

(1d) *Pumunta ka naman dito at NAMI-MISS na namin ang maliit mong waistline.*

There are a good number of examples of this from the data, most of which use Tagalog verbal prefixes to inflect English verbs:

(2) NA-IIMAGINE *ko tuloy kung kasali ako doon . . .*

(3) Ngayon, medyo NAKA-RECOVER *na ako . . .*

(4) Gusto na daw niyang MAG-QUIT *sa trabaho . . .*

(5) . . . ngayon, pwede na akong MAG-ENTERTAIN *ng bisita.*

English verbs can also be inflected using Tagalog infixes:

(6) . . . BINIBUILD-UP *nang husto ang dalawa . . .*

Even English words which can be used as either nouns or verbs are inflected into Taglish verbs:

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- (7) NAGSTAY-OVER *nung* Thanksgiving . . .
- (8) . . . *matatagalan din siguro bago ako* MAKAKA-EMAIL *uli*.
- (9) *Lalo na yata akong* MAA-ADDICT.
- (10) PA-ORDER *mo na lang*.

It appears that this inflectional system can also be used to change the grammatical categories of English words. Thus, what could have been grammatically incongruent (e.g. adjective-verb) is made congruent. For example, an English adjective can be changed into a verb:

- (7) . . . *kailangan* MAGPABLONDE *muna ang Goseco*.

A noun phrase consisting of an Adj + N can be also be converted into a verb:

- (11) NAGNU-NEW LOOK *ang aming* department.

An English noun can become an adjective:

- (12) . . . *puwede ba masyado kang* MADRAMA.

And an English verb can become a noun:

- (11) *Kailangan ko ng* KA-PRACTICE *sa pool* . . .

Worth noting here is the use of the make + Tagalog verb construction, this time to insert Tagalog verbs into what would otherwise be purely English sentences:

- (13) I just got e-mail from him but he didn't MAKE KUWENTO.

Bautista (1998b) also notes the following examples from her own e-mail data (pp. 138–139):

- (14) . . . so I'll have to MAKE *BAWI* before I get caught up in work again . . .
- (15) If I didn't MAKE *KULIT*, for sure we won't have the phone yet . . .
- (16) Saturday, while Mike MADE *BUTINGTING* in the house . . .
- (17) I MADE *BANTAY* while Mike window-shopped.

(18) I think I MADE *BILIN kay Neneng* who has since left . . .

What is the status of such lexical insertions in the lexicon of Tagalog? With regard to the use of Tagalog verbal affixes, Bautista (1998:139) states that their Tagalog inflections show “. . . that the words have been syntactically and morphologically integrated into Tagalog” (see also Bautista 1980). Sebba (1998) does not indicate whether or when such lexical insertions should belong to one language or the other. If one were to follow the congruence approach, it would appear that these inflected verbs belong to *neither* Tagalog nor English, but would simply be indicative of the degree to which these two languages are harmonizing such that what emerges is a hybrid form. In short, the above examples of code-switching may be indicative of an emerging Taglish lexicon which is neither Tagalog nor English.

3.3. Compromise

“Compromise strategies . . . allow switching to take place *in spite of* the resulting structure lacking grammaticality from the viewpoint of monolingual speakers of one of the two languages concerned” (Sebba 1998:12). There was no evidence of the compromise strategies being used in the e-mail data of this study. This has rather important implications for evaluating the competence of the Filipino bilingual. The absence of compromise strategies in Taglish may indicate that these Filipino bilinguals are striving and successfully achieving well-formedness in the sentences where they code-switch. Such well-formedness can only be achieved if the bilinguals concerned are sufficiently competent, even highly competent, in the two languages involved (see Bhatt 1996). Thus, the absence of compromise strategies in the data and the resulting well-formedness of the code-switching data corroborates Bautista’s view (1980,1998a,1998b,1998c) that Filipino bilinguals belonging to this specific social class are highly competent in both Tagalog and English and can be considered as maximally fluent bilinguals.

3.4. Blocking

When there is a lack of congruence between categories, and such cannot be harmonized or neutralized, speakers are confronted with two choices. They may choose to: (a) compromise and affect the grammaticality of the construction insofar as the viewpoint of the monolingual speaker is concerned; or (b) prohibit switching from taking place at such a point. This strategy of prohibiting code-switches at certain points is called blocking.

3.4.1. Tagalog-English Closed-Set Items: A Case of Blocking?

Bautista (1998b) indicated that although the following Taglish sentences appeared in her data, these sounded a “. . . little less natural than other forms of CS” (p.134):

(1a) . . . *hindi namin naasikaso* THE FOLLOW-UP.

. . . was not attended to by us THE FOLLOW-UP.

(2a) . . . *ngayon bayad na* THE ROOM AND KUYA RAFFY’S GREEN FEE.

. . . now already paid THE ROOM AND KUYA RAFFY’S GREEN FEE.

She acknowledged the need to find out the acceptability of such utterances. What may be crucial here is the choice of determiners. When the Tagalog determiner “ang” is

substituted for the English determiner “the” in the above sentences, the resulting Taglish is more acceptable:

(1b) . . . *hindi namin naasikaso* ANG follow-up

(2b) . . . *ngayon bayad na* ANG room and Kuya Raffy’s green fee.

In the data that was studied, Taglish speakers appeared to be making code-switching choices between closed-set items such as determiners, conjunctions, and prepositions. Closed-set items have been cited for their markedness in code-switching, that is, that these items are not very “flexible” when it comes to code-switching (see Myers-Scotton 1993).

With Bautista’s examples, the choices could not be explained by the congruence of phrase structures alone. In theory, if there is indeed congruence between two categories, the elements of such a category could be used interchangeably without affecting the acceptability of the code-switch. If the acceptability of the code-switch is affected, then it is likely that the categories are not considered congruent by the bilingual.

From the data, it appears that Taglish speakers have varying judgements on what is congruent or not between specific items in the closed-set categories of determiners, conjunctions, and prepositions. (Note that as a convention for this part of the paper, the first sentence in each pair was taken from the e-mail and was considered as an acceptable and “grammatical” code-switch. The second sentence was generated in order to test the acceptability of switching between the closed-set categories specified.)

3.4.1.1. Determiners

In this case, only the congruency between the determiners “the” in English and “ang” in Tagalog were tested:

(3) *Madali lang* ANG mirc.

**Madali lang* THE mirc.

(4) *Hindi ko type* ANG icq.

**Hindi ko type* THE icq.

(5) *Tuloy na ba* ANG Baguio trip *ninyo*.

**Tuloy na ba* THE Baguio trip *ninyo*.

(6) *Hindi mo na maaabutan* ANG dept. party.

**Hindi mo na maaabutan* THE dept. party.

(7) Those are just THE usual Xmas *ching-chingan*.

*Those are just ANG MGA usual Xmas *ching-chingan*.

These examples indicate that there appears to be no congruency between the Tagalog determiner “ang” and the English determiner “the”. In the first place, the identicalness of “the” and “ang” is deceptive. Bautista (1998b) notes that although “(t)he basic rewriting rule for Tagalog NPs and English NPs is the same, i.e. NP → Det + N . . . the Tagalog determiners *ang*, *ng* and *sa* are at the same time relation-markers [while] the English determiners *the*, *a* and *an* are not” (p.135). This appears to support the idea that maximally fluent bilinguals do not determine code-switches at the surface syntactic level, but on the level of syntactic function. This assumes an “in-depth” knowledge of both languages, as it can be predicted that one who is not yet competent in both languages will probably code-switch freely at such points, regardless of the syntactic functions of the elements concerned. The apparent sensitivity in the use of “ang” and “the” in the data studied may also indicate that the bilinguals who produced the e-mail are highly competent in both Tagalog and English.

So when does one use “the” and when does one use “ang”? It seems that the blocking strategy employed by the bilinguals in this study has resulted in what may be a rule where the determiner is prevented from being switched at the possible code-switch point. Thus, the determiner is in the language of the sentence or the phrase preceding it and the code-switch can *only* occur in the noun category. As such, one uses “the” if the word, sentence, or phrase preceding it is in English and one uses “ang” if the preceding language is Tagalog.

What happens if “the” and “ang” are at the beginning of a sentence? The following generated sentences were judged as either unnatural or unacceptable:

(8a) *THE *bata* What happens if is cute.

*ANG *bata* is cute.

(9a) *ANG kid *ay maganda*

*THE kid *ay maganda*.

Although THE + N can be commonly found at the beginning of the sentence for an S-V-O language such as English, the same is not true of Tagalog which is a predicate-topic sentence. If one were to convert these sentences into the predicate-topic structure of Tagalog, the resulting sentences follow the rule suggested above and are considered acceptable:

(8b) Cute THE *bata*.

(9b) *Maganda* ANG kid.

That sentences such as (8a) and (9a) do not occur in the data and are considered unacceptable by Taglish speakers again implies that the bilinguals have a deep understanding of how the two different languages operate, and that they are judging congruence according to such broad categories as sentence structure. Since Tagalog and English are so different in terms of sentence structure, the bilingual copes with this by blocking sentences such as (8a) and (9a) and not letting them occur in the first place.

3.4.1.2. Conjunctions

Although there appears to be a possible rule for the determiners “the” and “ang”, the case is more ambiguous with regard to conjunctions. The rule suggested above does not seem to strictly hold for conjunctions, as it does for the determiners “the” and “ang”. Taglish speakers seem to switch between conjunctions freely regardless of the language before or after the conjunction used. The conjunctions that were tested were the Tagalog/English pairs of *at/and*, *dahil/because*, *kasi/because*, *so/kaya*, *but/pero*, *kung/if* and *tapos/then*. (Note again below that the first sentences were from the e-mail data and the second sentences were generated to test the acceptability of such forms.)

AT/AND

(8a) *Ang layo* AND I have scheduled to face my pending work come new year.

**Ang layo* AT I have scheduled to face my pending work come new year.

(8b) *Ingat diyen* AT call when you get here.

Ingat diyen AND call when you get here.

(8c) Good luck on your studies AT *huwag masyadong mainggit* . . .

*Good luck on your studies AND *huwag masyadong mainggit* . . .

(8d) It’s like a chatline too AND *kayong dalawa lang talaga*.

It’s like a chatline too AT *kayong dalawa lang talaga*.

DAHIL/BECAUSE

(9) . . . *naghahanap din ako ng hulog ng langit* like the PPO thing DAHIL
mahal ang tickets. . .

. . . *naghahanap din ako ng hulog ng langit* like the PPO thing BECAUSE
mahal ang tickets. . .

KASI/BECAUSE

(10) *Tapos* they met *na* during the intermission of the concert KASI late *si lalaki*.

Tapos they met *na* during the intermission of the concert BECAUSE late
si lalaki.

KAYA/SO

(11a) Chat rooms cut across the servers SO *kahit ang server mo* . . .

Chat rooms cut across the servers KAYA *kahit ang server mo* . . .

(11b) Madhatter *kuno* SO wear a hat.

Madhatter *kuno* KAYA wear a hat.

PERO/BUT

- (12) . . . *maliit ang driver's room ko BUT I have a good-sized patio . . .*
 . . . *maliit ang driver's room ko PERO I have a good-sized patio . . .*

KUNG/IF

- (13a) I think *walang cover charge KUNG before 9 pm tayo dumating.*
 I think *walang cover charge IF before 9 pm tayo dumating.*
 (13b) I should ask Jevi *pala KUNG pupunta siya.*
 I should ask Jevi *pala IF pupunta siya.*

TAPOS/THEN

- (14) I managed to deliver the stuff TAPOS *hinatid na lang niya ako.*
 I managed to deliver the stuff THEN *hinatid na lang niya ako.*

A tentative explanation for this variability may be that the conjunction pairs studied are considered congruent by Taglish speakers and what is happening is actually harmonization. In contrast to the determiners “the” and “ang”, conjunctions may not be as highly marked in terms of syntactic function and thus can be used interchangeably. The data presented, though, is too limited for secure generalizations to be made.

3.4.1.3. Prepositions

The following prepositions occurred in the e-mail data and were tested: *about/tungkol* and *from/mula*.

ABOUT/TUNGKOL

- (15) *Wala pang balita ABOUT our Baguio trip.*
 **Wala pang balita TUNGKOL our Baguio trip.*

FROM/MULA (SA)

- (16) Dec.26 or 27 *daw ang punta namin FROM Tarlac.*
 Dec.26 or 27 *daw ang punta namin MULA Tarlac.*
 (17) *Sige mag-uwi ka ng mga dahon FROM Quiapo Church.*
Sige mag-uwi ka ng mga dahon MULA SA Quiapo Church.

Evidently, there is harmonization between the prepositions “from” and “mula (sa)”, and some kind of blocking is at work between the prepositions “about” and “tungkol”. The key to understanding this blocking may not lie in the prepositions themselves, but in the fact that, at least in (15), possessive pronouns occur after the preposition. Pronouns are also

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closed-set items and are an altogether different story. The effect of possessive pronouns on the prepositions may be worth noting and thinking about:

(18) *Wala pang balita* about *yung* Baguio trip NAMIN.

Wala pang balita tungkol sa AMING Baguio trip.

All in all, there cannot yet be any clear generalizations as far as closed-set items are concerned. In keeping with the congruence approach, what may be implied by the variability is that the code-switching between Tagalog and English has become creolized and is developing norms of its own. Closed-set items may be an advanced area of this type where a kind of congruence norm is being set by the community of Taglish speakers.

4. CONCLUSION

What has been gained by this revisiting of Taglish? For one, the congruence approach appears to have been productive in identifying both the over-arching categories and the categories within the categories that Taglish speakers consider to be congruent between Tagalog and English.

Second, this study, exploratory as it may be, has confirmed yet again the competence of the Filipino bilingual speakers coming from the situation described earlier. These Filipinos can be said to be highly competent in both English and Tagalog. From here, one can imagine the richness of the linguistic resources available to such bilinguals.

Third and perhaps most importantly, the congruence approach represents a shift in focus from the syntax of code-switching to the code-switching abilities of the speakers themselves. In doing so, it has highlighted the dynamism of bilingual speakers and of communities of bilingual speakers in converging two languages and, quite possibly, in shaping a new hybrid. This can certainly be seen in the Taglish speakers of this study. As for determining whether Taglish is an emerging creole, it may be too early to make any judgment. Has a whole generation been born with Taglish as their first language? There is evidence here to suggest, though, that Taglish seems to be an emerging new hybrid language that is neither Tagalog nor English, and one that has specific rules, quirks, oddities, and eccentricities uniquely its own. The Philippines may yet have another language to add to McFarland's 110.

ENDNOTES

¹As a convention of this paper, "Tagalog" from here onwards will be used to refer to "Filipino", the supposed national language of the Philippines. Thus, the Tagalog speakers that are referred to from hereon will include both native and non-native speakers of Tagalog.

²Of the two based in New York City, one had been in New York City since September 1997 and the other had been there since September 1998.

³The code-switching Tagalog-English bilinguals in this study will henceforth be called "Taglish speakers".

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