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## A SYNTACTIC CLASSIFICATION OF NON-AUXILIARY VERBS IN SHONA\*

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THE CLASSIFICATION WHICH follows is based on the simple verb only. By a simple verb is meant any of the following three types of verb: primitive, derived and adoptive verbs. A primitive verb is one which is indigenous to Shona, is undervived and consists of a verb root and a terminal vowel; e.g.

(1) *-nwá* (drink)

(2) *-cheka* (cut)

(Verbs are cited with a dash before them because they usually occur in an inflected form in sentences.)

Simple verbs which have, as their base, morphemes that are not verbal in character are what are referred to here as derived verbs. These verbs consist of at least three morphemes, e.g.

(3) *-tsakat-ik-a* (get lost, vanish)

cp. *tsakata* (of vanishing)

(4) *-paru-r-a* (tear)

cp. *paru* (of tearing)

(5) *-tete-p-a* (be thin)

cp. *-tete* (thin)

Then there are simple verbs which Shona has acquired from other languages by adoption. Such verbs are what are called here adoptive verbs. Normally these adoptive verbs are derived from verbs in the foreign language, but it is not uncommon to come across an adoptive verb which is derived from other parts of speech in that foreign language. When a verb is imported from a foreign language it usually undergoes morphological as well as phonological changes. Examples of adoptive verbs are the following:

(6) *-foira* (fail)

cp. fail (English)

(7) *-rafura* (be rough)

cp. rough (English)

(8) *-dhura* (be expensive)

cp. duur (Afrikaans)

The extended verb and the reduplicated verb are not considered in this classification. The reason for this is the generally accepted fact that, given a syntactic classification of simple verbs, the behaviour of the simple verbs of each class with verbal extensions is to a very large extent predictable, and that almost any simple verb in Shona can be reduplicated; if, then, extended verbs and reduplicated verbs were used in a syntactic classification of verbs, these important linguistic generalizations would not be captured, and consequently this would result in a weak grammar. In the rest of this study,

\* This article is a revised version of Chapter Three in my 'Verbal Constructions in Korekore' (Univ. of London, unpubl. M.Phil. thesis, 1970).

unless otherwise stated, simple verbs will be referred to simply as 'verbs' for the sake of convenience.

Syntactically verbs in Shona may be divided broadly into auxiliary and non-auxiliary verbs. Briefly an auxiliary verb is one which is necessarily followed by an embedded sentence as its complement, e.g.

- (9) *Vana vakaramba vachitamba bhora.* (The children kept on playing football.)  
 (10) *Shamwari yangu ichanguno kudya.* (My friend is still having his meal.)

These verbs form a closed set and are few in number as compared with the non-auxiliary verbs. Auxiliary verbs will not be discussed any further as this study is not concerned with them, but with the non-auxiliary verbs.

1.1 The non-auxiliary verbs may be classified in terms of the type of object complement by which they are followed. By object complement here is meant a noun phrase functioning neither in a locative nor in an adverbial capacity. An illustration of this is:

(II)

Subject	Inflected Verb	Object	Complement	Adjunct
<i>Mudzidzisi</i>	<i>arova</i>	<i>mwana</i>	<i>maoko</i>	<i>neshamhu</i>

Locative Complement	Adverbial Complements of		
	Time	Frequency	Reason/Manner
<i>kuchikoro</i>	<i>masikati</i>	<i>kairi</i>	<i>zvatisiririsa kwazvo</i>

(lit.: The teacher beat a child on its hands with a stick at school in the afternoon twice in a way which filled us with pity.)

The term 'complement' refers in this study to any noun phrase which is not in a subject relationship in a clause. Note that a noun clause belongs to one of the noun classes in Shona and can control concordial agreement in a clause. Complements are divided into three groups, namely, object complements, locative complements and adverbial complements. Object complements are as a rule more closely tied up with the verbs they follow than either of the other two which can occur with almost any verb. Because of their loose affinity with verbs it is doubtful whether locative and adverbial complements could be of any help in classifying verbs. For this reason attention is drawn to the object complement.

1.2. The sentence in (11), namely, *Mudzidzisi arova mwana maoko neshamhu kuchikoro masikati kairi zvatisiririsa kwazvo* consists of a subject: *mudzidzisi*, and a predicate: *arova mwana maoko neshamhu kuchikoro masikati kairi zvatisiririsa kwazvo*. The predicate in turn is made up of two immediate constituents, namely, the inflecting mechanism<sup>1</sup> : /a... a/, and the verb phrase: *-rov- maoko neshamhu kuchikoro masikati kairi zvatisiririsa kwazvo*. Complements and adjuncts are part of the verb phrase, that is, the inflected part in a clause. Adjuncts differ from complements in that they cannot be assigned to noun classes nor can they control concordial agreement in a sentence. They too, like locative and adverbial complements, are of little use in classifying verbs. In the verb phrase given above the object complements are : *mwana* (class 1) and *maoko* (class 6); the adjunct is : *neshamhu*; the locative complement is : *kuchikoro* (class 17); and the adverbial complements are : *masikati* (class 6), *kairi* (class 12) and *zvatisiririsa kwazvo* (a relative clause with a subject concord of class 8).

## 2.0. The Basis of the Classification

2.1. As has already been stated above the classification which is discussed in this study is based on the type of object complement that a verb takes. Object complements may be divided into those that are primary and those that are secondary. Object complements are said to be primary if they can have an object concord or object substitute as a co-referent,<sup>2</sup> and if they cannot have an object substitute they are secondary. In the examples below and in the rest of this paper, object complements and object concords are printed in bold.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (12) a. <i>Sekuru vanwa hwahwa.</i>              | (Uncle drank beer.)   |
| b. <i>Sekuru vahunwa.</i>                        | (Uncle drank it.)   |
| (13) <i>Mupwere uyu akakura musoro chete.</i>    | (This child is grown in respect of its head only, i.e. it is only its head which is big.) |
| (14) a. <i>Mombe yatsika mukoma wangu gumbo.</i> | (The ox trod on my elder brother's foot.)   |
| b. <i>Mombe yamutsika gumbo,</i>                 | (The ox trod on his foot.)  |
| (15) a. <i>Warova Matiyenga ziso.</i>            | (You hit Matiyenga on the eye.)   |
| b. <i>Wamurova ziso.</i>                         | (You hit him on the eye.)   |
| (16) <i>Mukomana uyu anoshinha kwazvo.</i>       | (This boy is very mischievous.)   |
| (17) <i>Murume uyo aneta.</i>                    | (That man is tired.)  |

<sup>1</sup> Inflecting morphemes here include, among other things, subject concords and tense signs.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to M. Guthrie for the terms 'object substitute' and co-referent', *Journal of African Languages* (1962), I, 202-20.

Note that the object complement *musoro* in (13), *gumbo* in (14), and *ziso* in (15) do not have object substitutes in these sentences, and that sentences (16) and (17) do not have any object complements.

2.2 Furthermore, the division of object complements into primary and secondary is confirmed by the applicability, or lack of it, of the passive transformation in sentences in which they occur. A sentence in which there is a primary object complement can be passivized by interchanging that primary object complement with the subject across the verb, whereas this is not possible with a sentence in which there is a secondary object complement, e.g.

- (18) *Hwahwa hwanwiwa nasekuru.* (The beer has been drunk by uncle.)  
cp. (12) a. above.

but not

- (19) *Musoro chete wakakuriwa nemupwere uyu.* cp. (13) above.

2.3 Notice that the verbs which can support object complements, either primary or secondary, can be used in questions with the interrogative pro-form *ani* (who? whom?) for human nouns, or *-yi* (what? for non-human nouns. In such questions these pro-forms represent object complements and are regarded as such here, e.g.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (20) <i>Waoneyi?</i><br>(What have you seen?)                                  | cp. <i>Ndaona ndege.</i><br>(I have seen an aeroplane.)                                  |
| (21) <i>Uri kureva ani?</i><br>(Who do you mean?)                              | cp. <i>Ndi:i kureva iwe.</i><br>(I mean you.)  |
| (22) <i>Vakamurovereyi?</i>  | cp. <i>Vakamurovera zviito zvake.</i><br>(They beat him up on account of his behaviour.) |
| (23) <i>Wati waityoreyi?</i><br>(What part of its body did you say you broke?) | cp. <i>Ndati ndaityora gumbo.</i><br>(I said I broke its leg.)                           |

These two interrogative pro-forms cannot be used to represent either locative or adverbial complements.

There are other transformational processes in the language which will confirm the division of object complements into primary and secondary object complements but these will not be discussed nor will they be used in the classification which follows. Nothing is lost by not employing them.

Some verbs in Shona will take primary object complements only, others will take secondary object complements only, others both, and still others none at all. For the sake of convenience labels will be employed for each class of verb. I propose in a rather arbitrary manner to classify verbs as follows: Class 1 for verbs that do not allow any object complement, class 2 for verbs that take a secondary object complement only, class 3 for verbs that take one primary object complement only, class 4 for verbs that take one primary and one secondary object complement, and class 5 for verbs that

take two primary object complements. No verb has been found which took two secondary object complements or two primary and one secondary object complement.

### 3.0. The Verb Classes

#### 3.1. Syntactic Class 1:

These are verbs which do not take any object complement. Some verbs that belong to this class are:

- |                              |                           |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (24) -boira (blink)          | -fanza (boil)             |
| -fara (be happy)             | -gwadaira (walk on knees) |
| -naka (look or taste good)   | -neta (get tired)         |
| -penya (shine)               | -popota (complain; scold) |
| -shinga (show determination) | -shinha (be mischievous)  |
| -tirira (endure)             | -tsvinda (be clean)       |
| -vhaira (show off)           | -uya (come)               |

Examples in sentences:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (25) <i>Mvura yaipenya necheku-Goromonzi manheru.</i> | (There was lightning in the direction of Goromonzi last night.) |
| (26) <i>Muchinda uyu akatsvinda kwazvo.</i>           | (This gentleman is very smart.)                                 |

3.1.1. Among the verbs in Class 1 there is a sub-class to which locatives suggest themselves more readily than adverbial complements. Examples of such verbs are:

- |                               |                     |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| (27) -uya (come)              | -dzoka (return)     |
| -mira (stand)                 | -svika (arrive)     |
| -kohomara (sit like a baboon) | -chonjomara (squat) |

The sentences in (28) and (29) below are examples of such verbs in sentences.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (28) <i>Uya kuno iye zvino!</i>             | (Come here immediately!)  |
| <i>Mwedzi akakohomara pado-mbo kudanga.</i> | (Mwedzi is sitting like a baboon on a stone at the cattle-pen.) |

A few of these verbs like -svika and -mira can take what looks like object complements, e.g.

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| (30) <i>Muchenje akasvika nzvimbo zhinji.</i> | (Muchenje got to many places.) |
| (31) <i>Mira nzvimbo yangu!</i>               | (Stand in my place!)           |

It should be realized, however, that these seemingly object complements refer to location and that in their stead the locatives *kunzvimbo* and *panzvimbo* respectively may be used without prejudice to the meaning of these complements.

The rest of the verbs in Class 1 usually employ one or more of the adverbial complements. This in no way implies that these verbs do not take locative complements.

3.1.2. These verbs cannot allow the passive extension except perhaps with the impersonal subject prefix /ku-/, e.g.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (32) <i>Kwauiwa nemunhu uye.</i>                        | (That person has now come.)                            |
| (33) <i>Kuri kumirwa pamuti uyo.</i>                    | People are to stand under that tree.)                  |
| (34) <i>Kwadzokwa kare! Mhoti anga aenda kunovhima?</i> | (He has returned already! Had he gone hunting really?) |

3.1.3. The tests which involve object concords and the interrogative pro-forms do not apply here because by their very nature these verbs do not allow object complements.

### 3.2. Syntactic Class 2:

There is quite a number of verbs which take secondary objects only. The following are some examples:

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| (35) -bva (come off)  | -chena (be white)        |
| -fa (die)             | -kura (grow)             |
| -kuvava (get injured) | -paruka (get torn)       |
| -sara (remain)        | -svauka (get peeled off) |
| -tsva (burn)          | -tsvuka (be red)         |
| -wa (fall down)       | -woma (dry up)           |

For examples in sentences, see (36)–(41) below.

3.2.1. The verbs in this class take object complements which are incapable of having object concords as co-referents, and which are also in the majority of cases considered as constituting an inalienable part of the subject of the clause, e.g.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (36) <i>Mombe yedu yakafa ziso.</i>         | (Our cow had an eye damaged.)                                       |
| (37) <i>Chikochikari chabva vhiri.</i>      | (One of the wheels of the scotchcart came off.)                     |
| (38) <i>Kana aka kasara mabondo chete.</i>  | (Only a skeleton is left as far as this little child is concerned.) |
| (39) <i>Mukuyu uye wawa bazi.</i>           | (One of the branches of that fig-tree has fallen down.)             |
| (40) <i>Uchatsva tsoka naizvozvo.</i>       | (You will burn your feet because of that.)                          |
| (41) <i>Vasekukru vachena musoro zvino.</i> | (Grandfather is now grey-haired.)                                   |

3.2.2. These verbs cannot be used with the passive extension except perhaps with locative subject concords. When so used these verbs retain their object complements, e.g.

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| (42) <i>Kwachenwa musoro zvino navasekuru.</i> | cp. (41) above. |
|--|-----------------|

Note that the use of the passive, even with the impersonal subject prefix /ku-/, is not common with these verbs.

3.2.3. According to the interrogative pro-form test the strings which are in bold type in (36)–(41) above are confirmed as object noun phrases, e.g.

- (43) *Chikochikari chabveyi?* (What part of the scotch-cart came off?)  
(The answer is (37) above).

3.2.4. Note that the object complement of these verbs may nonetheless be transposed from the object-relationship to the subject-relationship. When this is done the original subject becomes a possessive phrase, or a locative if the original subject referred to a place, and no change is effected in the verb. With this transformation these verbs then seemingly behave like those in Class 1 above:

- (44) *Ziso remombe yedu rakafa.* (Our cow's eye was damaged.)  
cp. (36)  
(45) *Vhiri rechikochikari rabva.* (The scotch-cart's wheel came off.)  
cp. (37)  
(46) *Bazi remukuyu uye rawa.* (A branch from that fig-tree fell down.)  
cp. (39)  
(47) *Musoro wavasekuru wachena zvino.* (Grandfather's hair is now grey.)  
cp. (41)

### 3.3. Syntactic Class 3:

The third class consists of verbs which take one primary object complement only. This is a fairly big class. Some examples are:

- |                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (48) <i>-funga</i> (think of)  | <i>-guta</i> (be satisfied)      |
| <i>-ramba</i> (refuse, object) | <i>-rima</i> (plough)            |
| <i>-tenga</i> (buy)            | <i>-tsvaga</i> (look for)        |
| <i>-tuka</i> (scold)           | <i>-tya</i> (fear, be afraid of) |
| <i>-wana</i> (find, obtain)    | <i>-zvara</i> (beget)            |

Some examples in sentences:

- (49) *Murume akatenga **mombe idzo.*** (The man bought those cows.)  
(50) *Gunje acharima **munda wako mangwana.*** (Gunje will plough your field tomorrow.)  
(51) *Sara atuka **Toko kuchikoro.*** (Sara scolded Toko at school.)

Notice that a number of verbs of this class may be used quite freely without object complements. What happens in such cases is that the logical object will have been deleted by the operation known as Object Deletion. Examples:

- (52) *Mwana uyu anotya kwazvo.* (This child is very timid.)  
(53) *Mukomana uyo anoteerera.* (That boy is obedient.)  
(54) *Mukoma wangu anonwa.* (My elder brother drinks [beer].)



3.3.1. The interrogative pro-form test will confirm the strings in (49)-(51) as object noun phrases, e.g.

- (55) *Murume akatengeyi?* (What did the man buy?)  
(answer is (49) )
- (56) *Sara akatuka ani kuchikoro?*  
(answer is (51) )

3.3.2. The verbs in this class are distinguished from other classes in that they all take only one object complement which may have an object prefix as a co-referent, e.g.

- (57) a. *Maidei anotyia imbwa yako.* (Maidei is afraid of your dog.)  
b. *Maideyi anoitya.* (Maidei is afraid of it.)
- (58) a. *Mudzimai uyu aguta hwa-hwa.* (This woman has had enough beer.)  
b. *Mudzimai uyu ahuguta.* (This woman has had enough of it.)
- (59) a. *Vadzitateguru vedu vairima minda nechifengu.* (Our forefathers used to till their fields with a bent hoe.)  
b. *Vadzitateguru vedu vaiirima nechifengu.* (Our fathers used to till them with a bent hoe.)

3.3.3. It is a common feature of these verbs that they can all be used with the passive extension. When this is occasioned the object complement is transposed to the subject position and the logical subject becomes an adjunct. The examples below are passive transformations of sentences that have already occurred elsewhere above.

- (60) *Imbwa yako inotywa na-Maidei.* (Your dog is feared by Maidei.)  
cp. (57)
- (61) *Hawhwa hwagutwa nemudzimai uyu.* (A lot of beer has been drunk by this woman.)  
cp. (58)
- (62) *Toko akatukwa kuchikoro na-Sara.* (Toko was scolded at school by Sara.)  
cp. (51)

#### 3.4. Syntactic Class 4:

The verbs in this group may be followed each by one primary and one secondary object complement. They include the following:

- |                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (63) -bata (catch, hold) | -baya (pierce)              |
| -cheka (cut)             | -dumura (break into pieces) |
| -dya (eat)               | -dzimba (injure)            |
| -kuya (grind)            | -pfura (shoot)              |
| -rova (hit)              | -tema (cut, chop)           |
| -vaka (build)            | -vhura (open)               |

Examples in sentences:

- (64) *Taura mazwi anovaka mwana uyu hunhu hwake.* (Speak words that help to build up this child's character.)

- (65) *Vavhimi vapfura nzou gumbo.* (The hunters shot an elephant in the leg.)  
 (66) *Wadzimba amai ruoko rwavo.* (You hurt mother's hand.)  
 (67) *Mukomana akarova mombe nyanga.* (The boy hit the ox on one of its horns.)

The sequence of these two complements after the verb is fixed, the primary complement comes before the secondary complement. The secondary complement nearly always constitutes an inalienable part of, or is closely related to, the primary complement.

3.4.1. That the strings in bold type in (64)–(67) are object complements is easily demonstrated by employing the interrogative pro-form test. Taking (65) and (66) we obtain the following questions which are well-formed.

- (68) a. *Vavhimi Vakapfureyi gumbo?* (What did the hunters shoot on the leg?)  
 (answer: *nzou*)  
 b. *Vavhimi vakapfura nzou chiyi?* (What part of the elephant did the hunters shoot?)  
 (answer: *gumbo*)  
 (69) a. *Wadzimba ani ruoko?* (Who did you hurt on the hand?)  
 (answer: *amai*)  
 b. *Wadzimba amai chiyi?* (What part of mother did you hurt?)  
 (answer: *ruoko rwavo*)

3.4.2. As was pointed out earlier only the primary object complement may have an object prefix, e.g.

- (70) *Taura mazwi anomuvaka h-nhu hwake.* Speak words that help to build up his character.)  
 cp. (64)  
 (71) *Wavadzimba ruoko rwavo.* (You hurt her on the hand.)  
 cp. (66)  
 (72) *Mukomana akairova nyanga.* (The boy hit it on one of its horns.)  
 cp. (67)

3.4.3. Like the verbs in Class 3, these verbs may be used with the passive extension. When the primary object complement is transposed to the subject position, the secondary object complement is retained and the logical subject becomes an adjunct. The subject and the object complement in this passive sentence now bear a relationship somewhat akin to that which obtains with Class 2 verbs (see 3.2.1. above), e.g.

- (73) *Nzou yapfurwa gumbo nava-vhimi.* (An elephant was shot in the leg by the hunters.)  
 cp. (65)  
 (74) *Amai vadzimbwa ruoko rwavo newe.* (Mother was hurt on her hand by you.)  
 cp. (66)

- (75) *Mombe yakarohwa nyanga nemukomana.* (The ox was hit on one of its horns by the boy.)  
cp. (67)

With this class of verbs secondary object complements may be transposed to the subject position in a passive sentence but only if the primary object complement is turned into a possessive phrase which qualifies the new subject, e.g.

- (76) *Gumbo renzou rakapfurwa navavhimi.* (An elephant's leg was shot by the hunters.)  
cp. (73)
- (77) *Ruoko rwaamai rwadzimbiwa newe.* (Mother's hand was hurt by you.)  
cp. (74)
- (78) *Nyanga yemombe yakarohwa nemukomana.* (One of the horns of the ox was hit by the boy.)  
cp. (75)

3.4.4. The remark that was made in 3.3. above about the free use of verbs without object complements applies equally to this class of verbs, e.g.

- (79) *Gunje anorova, haatambe.* (Gunje beats hard, he does not play.)
- (80) *Muzukuru wangu anokuya chaizvo.* (My niece is an expert at the grinding stone.)
- (81) *Mbudzi iye yatiza zvakare.* (That goat has run away again.)
- (82) *Musoro wake waidzimba nezuro.* (His head was aching yesterday.)

### 3.5 Syntactic Class 5:

This is by far the smallest class of verbs, of which the following are the main examples:

- (83) -dzika (set up, plant) -kanda (throw at)  
-kwereta (borrow) -nyima (stint)  
-pa (give) -rakidza (show)  
-tura (take burden down) -udza (tell)  
-ita (do, perform)

3.5.1. The distinguishing feature of this class of verbs is the presence of two primary object complements, e.g.

- (84) a. *Mai Muzavazi vakapa VaShereni hwahwa* (Mrs Muzavazi offered Mr Shereni some beer.)  
b. *Mai Muzavazi vakavapa hwahwa.* (Mr Muzavazi offered him some beer.)  
c. *Mai Muzavazi vakahupa Vashereni.* (Mrs Muzavazi offered it to Mr Shereni.)
- (85) a. *Tigere anonyima imbwa dzake sadza.* (Tigere stints his dog's food).

- b. *Tigere anodzinyima sadza.* (Tigere stints them food.)  
*Tigere anorinyima imbwa dzake.* (Tigere does not give his dogs enough of it.)
- (86) a. *Handichaudza Magwenya nyaya yandanzwa.* (I shall not tell Magwenya the news I have collected.)  
 b. *Handichamuudza nyaya yandanzwa.* (I shall not tell him the news I have collected.)  
 c. *Handichaiudza Magwenya.* (I shall not tell it to Magwenya.)

Although the order of the complements with these verbs is flexible, where human beings are involved these seem to take first position, and animate things tend to come before the inanimate.

3.5.2. These verbs may be used happily with the passive extension. When one of the two object complements is transposed to the subject position the other is retained, i.e. it remains in its position after the verb, e.g.

- (87) a. *VaShereni vakapihwa hwahwa naMai Muzavazi.* (Mr Shereni was offered some beer by Mrs Muzavazi.)  
 cp. (84)  
 b. *Hwahwa hwakapihwa VaShereni naMai Muzavazi.* (Some beer was offered to Mr Shereni by Mrs Muzavazi.)
- (88) a. *Imbwa dzinonyimwa sadza naTigere.* (The dogs are stinted food by Tigere.)  
 cp. (85)  
*Sadza rinonyimwa imbwa naTigere.* (Food is refused the dogs by Tigrer.)

## CONCLUSION

As was pointed out in preceding paragraphs, verbs are not restricted to one of these classes only. Many verbs in Classes 2 to 5 may be used quite freely without an object complement in surface structure. Verbs in Class 4 are not infrequently found with a primary object complement only, that is, with the secondary object complement wanting. These classes rather mark in ascending order the maximum number of object complements verbs may support. Thus a verb in Class 2 may not support object complements of the type that are permitted by verbs in Class 3 or Class 4 or Class 5, but it may function as a verb in Class 1; a verb in Class 4 may not be used as a verb in Class 5, but it may be used as one in Class 3 or Class 1. Note, however, that verbs in Classes 3, 4 and 5 may not function as verbs in Class 2 at all.

This classification does not pretend to be an exhaustive treatment of the problem of transitivity in Shona. It is only a tentative approach to the problem.

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