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IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION OF IRANIAN EFL AND NON-EFL LEARNERS AS A RESULT OF EXPOSURE TO ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Language and culture are two integral elements of identity. Through learning a foreign language and culture, learners may alienate from their root ethnicity, language, and culture and subsequently their identities can be reconstructed. Thus, the present quantitative study aimed at investigating English language learners' and Engineering students' identity reconstruction within the Iranian EFL context. Moreover, the study sought for identifying any discrepancy between academic and non-academic L2 exposure. In order to fulfill the objectives of the study, a Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of 31 items representing identity reconstruction was distributed among participants. A total of 112 English language learners as well as 104 Engineering students participated in this survey. Descriptive and inferential statistics were run between the data collected by the questionnaire. Statistical analysis of the data revealed that there was a very minute negative relationship between EFL learners' language exposure and identity reconstruction. Also a small positive correlation between language exposure and identity reconstruction was shown among non-EFL learners. Based on the results identity scores were different among academic and non-academic L2 exposure. Finally, the implications and further suggestions for this study were discussed.

Keywords: EFL Learners, Non-EFL Learners, Identity, Identity Reconstruction, Iran (ian)

INTRODUCTION

With the emergent of globalization and the importance of English as an influential practical language, many people around the world try to have command of English. Many countries include this language of power as part of their school syllabus and children start learning it at a young age. In our time, the global expansion of English has often been cited as the primary example of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). Many ELT experts display pessimism about what English is playing in the world and consider it as a means used by some powerful countries in the world to transfer their thoughts, life styles, ideologies and attitudes to the other nations of the world who have to learn English (Kasaian, 2011).

The relationship between identity and language learning is of interest to scholars in the fields of second language acquisition, language education, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics. When language learners ask, "Who am I?" they are seeking to understand the complex relationship among identity, language and learning.

Language is the main vehicle of expressing the self (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008) and learning a new language is sometimes said to mean acquiring a new identity (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Researchers state that identity is influenced by language, which creates the medium for its negotiation (Belz, 2002). According to Norton (1997), identity is defined as "how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future".

Due to the rise and competing prominence of English, learners in an EFL context are highly motivated to become an English language learner and try to be like English speaking people since they regard learning English as a prestigious one. Moreover, based on supremacy and power that learners observe in English, they get a positive attitude towards it and desire to speak like native speakers. Therefore, they converge to this foreign language and depending on identity and social factors they put themselves close to exposure

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of input. They crave to be assimilated to English language people since they find speaking English as being a credit for being eminent and indeed value the importance of English as an essential language to know.

Within the Iranian EFL context we may face the risk of identity crisis in our learners as a result of exposure to English language. English language learners might have increased negative attitudes and affiliations towards Persian culture and national identity as a result of exposure to English as a foreign language.

Theoretical Background

Poststructuralist theories of language are becoming increasingly attractive to researchers of identity and language learning. These theories build on structuralist theories of language, associated mainly with the work of Saussure. For structuralists, the building blocks of language structure are signs that comprise the sound and the meaning. In addition, structuralist approach, perceives identity as a relatively fixed set of attributes. Khatib and Rezaei (2013) claimed that "One of the main shortcomings of structuralist theory was its inability to account for the social aspect of signs and languages in general". However, post structuralism like many other "post", relates to the theories evolving after structuralism. According to Khatib and Rezaei (2013), in post structuralism, "Language system is considered to be dynamic and instable rather than preformed and prescribed". In poststructuralist theory, identity is seen as a fluid, ongoing and interactive process rather than a fixed product, with people constructing and reconstructing various aspects of their identity throughout different experiences in their lives. Three poststructuralist theorists whose works have been influential in recent research on identity and language learning are Mikhail Bakhtin, Pierre Bourdieu and Christine Weedon.

Unlike the structuralists, Bakhtin (1981) believed that language needed to be investigated not as a set of idealized forms independent of their speakers but rather as utterances in which speakers tried to create meaning. Another poststructuralist view on language is related to Bourdieu (1977), a contemporary French sociologist, focused on the unequal relationships between interlocutors and the importance of power in structuring speech. He addressed relationship between identities and power relations. Next influential theoretician is Weedon (1997) who had the same idea as Bakhtin and Bourdieu. However, Weedon used the term subjectivity that differed her from other theoreticians.

So this research is theoretically based on poststructuralist view of language since it approves the dynamicity of identity.

Literature Review

One of the current issues recently receiving maximum attention is identity and its relation to language learning. One of the pioneering works of identity is Norton's book published in 2000. Norton (2000) investigates immigrant women's identity in Canada. She found that the women were constantly constructing their identities and that their home lives were affected. However, foreign studies mostly investigating social factors in terms of national identity. As an example Baca and Lunquist (1980) found that socialization factors affected identity change among Southeast Asian women.

Yan *et al.,* (2005) investigate Chinese College students' self-identity changes associated with English language learning. Results showed that in the Chinese EFL context, English learning exerted influence on learners' identities, the most prominent being self-confidence. At the same time, learners' values and communication styles underwent some productive and additive changes. Sex, college major and starting age for English language learning had significant effects on certain types of self-identity change.

Also Diab in 2009 investigated Lebanese university students' perceptions of their ethnic, national, and linguistic identity and their preferences for choice of first foreign language (FL) and medium of instruction in pre-university schools in Lebanon.

In Iranian EFL context, there is not much study about identity and language learning. As everywhere, English in Iran spreads as a commodity because Iranian has not experienced a short history of colonialism. In Iranian EFL context, English is not a language for communication. However, it is not too foreign and irrelevant to the students' lives. According to Mojtahedzadeh and Mojtahedzadeh (2012), in

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Iranian EFL context, English has become much more than a school subject to its learners. It is considered as an utensil for expanding sociocultural horizons.

Razmjoo in 2010 conducted a research about the impact of identity aspects on EFL learners' achievement. However, the results demonstrated no significant relationship between language achievement and the aspects of identity; that is, none of the identity aspects is a predicting variable for language achievement in the Iranian context. Among the demographic factors, only gender can account for two aspects of identity, namely, personal and relational identities.

In relation to immigrants, Mohammadi (2011) examined the ways in which the identity of the characters are affected by the experience of immigration and shaped by the process of confrontation with a new culture different from the native one. The focus was on two fictional works by Lahiri, the American Indian writer: Interpreter of Maladies which was a short story collection and The Namesake, her novel.

As, EFL teachers may show signs of identity conflict experienced while learning English, Sadeghi-Ordoubody (2012) attempted to examine the role of EFL teachers' access to social and culture capital in their home cultural attachment. The results demonstrated that access to social competence and social solidarity, played a significant role in teachers' home culture attachment. The remaining components, literacy and extraversion, did not play any role in their home culture attachment.

Also a case study focusing on identity reconstruction in Iranian as English language learners was done by Mohammad and Saeed (2013) and was related to Reza, who was 26-year-old boy from a well-educated family. The results of this study showed how the identity of an individual language learner in Iran changed after studying English for a long time, and how learners in higher levels of proficiency could be more enthusiastic about English language and culture. In addition, the results on this individual indicated that after getting to the age of adulthood, learners might become critical about their sense of being. The individual language learner in this case study went through a reconstruction of identity because he changed from being an individual possessing a mindset of a local Persian to a more global individual.

Studies about identity and English language learning conducted in Iran context were limited. In other words, this is an under research topic not pursued in the Iranian EFL context. Thus, the idea of having a study about identity in an EFL context was quite relevant in order to fill a gap of previous studies. Efforts were made to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL and non-EFL learners' foreign language exposure and identity reconstruction?
2. Does academic L2 exposure leave a different impact on identity reconstruction of learners compared to non-academic exposure?

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Method
Design of the Study
For the purpose of this study, quantitative research method was employed. This quantitative study involved a fairly large-scale questionnaire survey which was administered to graduate and undergraduate EFL and non-EFL learners. The main purpose of conducting this research was to investigate the relationship between English language exposure and identity reconstruction.

Instrumentation
In order to focused on how EFL learners' and non-EFL learners' identity might have shifted after embarking on English language learning journey, the researcher employed Likert-style questionnaire. The development of the identity questionnaire began with the selection of interview items of an article which was conducted by Khatib and Rezaei (2013). Once the first draft of the questionnaire was prepared, a pilot study was performed on twenty-six learners in order to elicit information concerning the content of the items and clarity of instruction. So, after revising the questionnaire based on the pilot study the questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first section with eight items included a number of general demographic questions which dealt with personal information such as age, major, nationality, gender, academic level, linguistic background, the length, and the way of learning English. The second part,

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which was composed of thirty-one Likert-scale items (items 1-31), was designed in order to investigate any sign of identity shift among subjects; however, item 23 measured identity preservation, so its quotient was reversed (refer to Appendix A). This section required respondents to express their opinions about each statement by marking the options on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (to a very great extent) to 0 (not at all). To avoid any confusion and enhance validity, the Persian version of the questionnaire was utilized for non-EFL learners and the translation by two experts in the field confirmed the original concepts of the translated questionnaire (refer to Appendix B).

Also, to make sure the items used in the questionnaire all referred to the same issue which was identity reconstruction, the internal consistency of items via Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was assessed. Cronbach's Alpha index was (.86) which revealed this questionnaire enjoyed a high reliability index.

Participants

To accomplish the objectives of the study, 132 female and 84 male Iranian learners ranging in age from 18 to 50, from different levels of instruction (Diploma, BA, and MA) willingly and cooperatively took part in the study. This study was conducted among two categories based on the amount of L2 exposure: English language learners, and non-English language learners (Engineering students). The sample of 112 EFL learners (30 in diploma, 21 in BA, and 61 in MA level), and also 104 Engineering students (31 in diploma, 23 in BA, and 50 in MA level) returned their completed questionnaires and constituted the participants of this study. Diploma level learners referred to freshmen students in their first, second, and third semesters and BA learners were seniors who were at their final semester. Moreover, participants were selected on the basis of simple random sampling from Islamic Azad University Bandar Abbas Branch.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analyses

The researcher started the collection of data from the EFL and non-EFL learners by personally distributing the questionnaires to the respondents in autumn semester of 2014. All participants were given a brief overview of the objectives of the study, and the directions for answering the questionnaires. Also, there was no force on the part of the participants to write their names. For collecting the required questionnaire data, EFL learners were given a questionnaire in English and the Persian version was distributed among non-EFL students. The participants were asked to bring the questionnaires back in one week for enough time to study and complete. In order to observe ethical issues and not violating confidentiality, the respondents were informed about the nature and purpose of the study. They took part voluntarily and knew that the results were published.

Data analyses were directed at identifying the level of identity reconstruction among participants through distributing questionnaires. The gathered data from the questionnaires showed the amount of identity shift by calculating mean and percentage and using SPSS computer software. The correlation between identity scores and English language exposure were calculated using Pearson product-moment correlation. In addition t-test was also used for further analyzing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In order to answer the first research question of this study, two correlations were run between EFL learners' and non-EFL learners' identity reconstruction and years of language exposure.

Table 1: Correlation between EFL Learners' IR and LE

		identity	exposure
identity	Pearson Correlation	1	-.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.834
	N	112	112
exposure	Pearson Correlation	-.020	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.834	
	N	112	112

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As Table 1 shows, the relationship between EFL learners' identity reconstruction and language exposure was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation. The preliminary analyses indicated that there was no violation of the normality, linearity and homoscedasticity assumptions. There was a very minute negative correlation between the two variables, r = -.02, n = 112, p =.83 with an effect size of 44.7 indicating that the lower language exposure in an EFL context, the more identity scores can be and vice-versa.

Table 2: Correlation between Non-EFL Learner's IR and LE

		identity	exposure
identity	Pearson Correlation	1	.239[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.015
	N	104	104
exposure	Pearson Correlation	.239[*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	
	N	104	104

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Based on Table 2, the relationship between non-EFL learners' identity reconstruction and language exposure was scrutinized using Pearson product-moment correlation. The result indicated that there was a small positive correlation between the two variables, r =.23, n = 104, p =.01 with an effect size of 47.9 indicating that the more language exposure in an EFL context, the more identity scores can be.

In order to investigate the impacts of academic and non-academic exposure on identity reconstruction, inferential statistics were run among EFL Diploma versus non-EFL Diploma, EFL BA versus non-EFL BA, and EFL MA versus non-EFL MA learners.

Table 3: EFL Diploma vs. non-EFL Diploma

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Identity score	EFL Learners (Diploma)	30	2.9527	.80227	.14647
	Non-EFL Learners (Diploma)	31	2.1176	.53711	.09647

As it is presented in Table 3, the mean score of EFL Diploma (n=30, SD=.14) and non-EFL Diploma (n= 31, SD=.96) are 2.95 and 2.11 respectively. But to figure out if any discrepancy existed between academic and non-academic exposure in terms of Diploma degree, the inferential statistics in Table 4 should be referred.

Table 4: Inferential statistics concerning EFL and non-EFL Diploma

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Identity score	Equal variances assumed	7.012	.010	4.792	59	.000	.83510	.17428	.48638	1.18383
	Equal variances not assumed			4.761	50.440	.000	.83510	.17539	.48290	1.18730

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As indicated in table 4, an independent-samples t-test was run to discern if there was any discrepancy among EFL Diploma and non-EFL Diploma with regard to language exposure. Consequently, the analyses of data demonstrated there was a significant difference among EFL and non-EFL Diploma learners (t = 4.76, p =.001, df = 59).

Table 5: EFL BA vs. non-EFL BA

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Identity score	EFL Learners BA	21	2.4290	.56079	.12540
	Non-EFLBA	23	1.8892	.66515	.13869

As shown in Table 5, the mean score and standard deviation for EFL BA regarding identity reconstruction were 2.42 and .12 respectively. Also, the mean score of non-EFL BA with respect to identity reconstruction was 1.88. To figure out if there exists a difference among EFL BA and non-EFL BA learners concerning their identity reconstruction scores, an independent-samples t-test was conducted.

Table 6: Inferential statistics concerning EFL BA and non-EFL BA

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Identity score	Equal variances assumed	.269	.607	2.853	41	.007	.53983	.18925	.15764	.92203
	Equal variances not assumed			2.887	40.969	.006	.53983	.18698	.16222	.91745

The results based on Table 6 showed no statistically significant difference with respect to BA degree (*p=.007> 0.05*).

Table 7: EFL MA vs. non-EFL MA

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Identity score	EFL Learners MA	61	2.5708	.61974	.07871
	Non-EFL MA	50	1.9135	.54504	.07708

As displayed in Table 7, the mean score and standard deviation of EFL MA learners were 2.57 and .078, respectively. In addition, the mean score and standard deviation of non-EFL MA learners were 1.91 (SD=.077).

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Table 8: Inferential statistics concerning EFL MA and non-EFL MA

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Identity score	Equal variances assumed	1.193	.277	5.884	110	.000	.65721	.11170	.43585	.87857
	Equal variances not assumed			5.966	109.140	.000	.65721	.11016	.43887	.87555

As depicted in Table 8, an independent-samples t-test was adopted to identify if EFL MA and non-EFL MA differed in their identity reconstruction scores. As a result, a significant difference for the subjects in the EFL MA and non-EFL MA is found ($t = 5.88, p = .001$, df = 110).

Table 9: Total EFL Learners vs. Total non-EFL Learners

	group2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Identity score	EFL Learners	112	2.6475	.68876	.06537
	Non- EFL Learners	104	1.9757	.57534	.05615

As shown in Table 9, there were 112 EFL learners and 104 non-EFL learners in this study. Also, the mean score of the former was 2.64 (SD=.68) and the latter mean score was 1.97 (SD=.57).

Table 10: Inferential statistics concerning EFL VS. non-EFL learners

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Identity score	Equal variances assumed	2.990	.085	7.757	214	.000	.67176	.08661	.50105	.84247
	Equal variances not assumed			7.795	210.811	.000	.67176	.08618	.50188	.84163

According to Table 10, an independent-samples t-test was adopted to identify if the EFL and non-EFL groups differed in terms of their identity reconstruction. The results indicated that there was a significant difference for the subjects in the EFL and non-EFL groups (t =7.75, $p = .08$, df = 98).

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Discussion

Correlation revealed an interesting result that a very minute negative relationship was seen between EFL learners' language exposure and identity reconstruction in the Iranian context. Although there was a relationship, it was slight, minor and not significant. It meant the more language exposure in an EFL context, the lower identity scores could be and vice-versa. So, EFL learners in MA levels attached more to their home culture compared to EFL diploma and those in BA levels. This is indicative of the idea that EFL learners who have exposed more to foreign language and culture and bombarded with the huge number of information daily, might have looked at their home culture, and beliefs with fresh eyes and valued various aspects of their Iranian culture in order to maintain their home culture.

In fact, EFL learners who expose more to foreign language and culture become critical about their sense of being and cannot easily reconstruct their identity to the point of losing their own cultural identity. As a result of identity maintenance, some crucial elements such as belief, living style, and cultural elements may not change in EFL learners and teachers. As Joseph (as cited in Khatib & Rezaei, 2013) contends "The spread of English does not necessarily entail the erosion of national or sub-national identities or cultures.

This also seems to confirm the positive relationship between age and home culture attachment as it is studied in Pishghadam and Sadeghi (2011) survey. According to their results, the younger EFL teachers are less strongly attached to their home culture than the older EFL teachers. In addition, this kind of finding is in line with Haque (2007) research findings. The results of his study showed that the Emiraties youth are not changing under the influence of western culture. Although there is immense foreign influence on the minds of the younger people, the sample of respondents had a strong identity to their home culture.

While this study showed minute negative correlation between EFL learners' identity reconstruction and language exposure, there is no doubt that the influence of western and other cultures in this country, is increasing. However, this is necessary that teachers and learners become familiar with the Western norms and values in order to distinguish between their home and target culture. Into the bargain, cultural norms can be taught with a critical thinking approach in a way to reduce the risk of identity crisis in the learners (Khatib & Rezaei, 2013).

Also, a small positive correlation existed between non-EFL learners' identity reconstruction and language exposure showing that the more language exposure in an EFL context, the more identity scores could be _ that is, those who are studying English inclusively, are more vulnerable to lose their Persian identity, culture, norms, and values.

Moreover, non-EFL learners might go through a change since they had been exposed to English language through the books, movies, and lyrics. They need education on national culture in order to take things from foreign cultures that are consistent with national values. In fact, they might be mesmerized by English language and its culture. This finding accords with what Khatib and Rezaei (2013) announced in their survey which showed how the identity of a non-EFL learner changed after an exposure to English. This is in line with the dynamicity of identity due to the fact that a different identity was revealed as an exposure to English as a foreign language.

With regard to the second goal, any discrepancy among academic and non-academic exposure was investigated. By academic L2 exposure the researcher referred to those who are learning English exclusively as a university field and non-academic exposure also, meant those who are learning English inclusively which referred to those who are studying engineering majors in this study.

Based on the findings, academic L2 exposure leaves a different impact on identity reconstruction compared to non-academic exposure. It is because of the fact that EFL learners are more inclined to be aware of the peculiarities of their own culture in comparison with another culture which is foreign to it (Pishghadam & Sadeghi-Ordoubody, 2011). It indicates the idea that EFL learners preserve their home culture more, compared to non-EFL learners.

However, the values indicated that while totally there was difference in identity scores among academic and non-academic exposure based on the response patterns of individual members within each group,

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identity scores of BA students in two groups, nevertheless, did not vary. In other words, no significant difference in BA levels between both groups was existed. It may be because of time limitation, number of participants, or secret quality of identity which resulted in inaccurate responses. According to table 4, the analyses of data revealed that there was a significant difference among EFL Diploma and non-EFL Diploma learners, whereas based on an independent-sample t-test no statistically significant difference with respect to BA degree was shown in table 6. Furthermore, as depicted in table 8, a meaningful difference for the subjects in the EFL MA and non-EFL MA is found.

Conclusions and Implications of the Study

The first research question of this study aimed to find out if any relationship existed between EFL and non-EFL learners' foreign language exposure and identity reconstruction. The results showed there was a very minute negative relationship between EFL Learners' language exposure and identity reconstruction. Also, the results indicated a small positive correlation between language exposure and identity reconstruction among non-EFL learners of English.

The second research question of this study aimed at investigating if academic and non-academic exposure had different impacts on identity reconstruction of learners. The results indicated that there was a difference among academic and non-academic exposure with respect to diploma and MA students; however, identity scores of BA students in the two groups did not vary. Also, the totality of identity scores was different among academic and non-academic exposure.

The most important result of this study is bringing about awareness for EFL syllabus designers, material developers, teacher educators, and in a nutshell all policy and decision makers of the fact that cultural dimension of language learning is an important dimension of foreign language studies. In fact teaching the culture of a foreign language should be an integral part of the curriculum, but not at the expense of their home culture. Language materials are offered by syllabus designers which are the most important body and are character building and acknowledge norms, values, and thought. Thus, the global EFL textbooks should be alertly supervised and localized. Locally-designed ELT materials were preferred compared to the imported ones since the former would not expose the learners to the undesirable cultural contents that the latter may do (Kasaian, 2011). Brown (2007) claimed that "our zeal for spreading English needs to be accompanied by concurrent efforts to value home languages and cultures" (p. 207). The results of this endeavor can also be helpful for EFL teachers and educators, EFL and non-EFL learners due to the fact that teaching languages cannot be devoid of teaching cultural values of the target language (Soleimani, 2011) which can disparage cultural values of the community of the learners who are learning it. Parents who are eager to send their children to English language centers can also benefit by the results of this survey. Despite such unexpected findings, EFL learners may adopt Western culture and life style which clash with their local culture.

This study can be replicated in different academic contexts, in another Iranian city or another country, in order to explore identity reconstruction of English language teachers, EFL and non-EFL learners. Also, this was a quantitative study with a large and varied number of participants; further studies on identity can be done focusing on only one group such as just EFL students or non-EFL learners. Moreover, another survey can investigate Iranian migrants' identities abroad and how they might differ from those in their country. In the end, identity crisis is another issue which can be suggested for further studies.

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