

A discourse study of silence in selected political speeches

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Abstract

Politics is said to be a game of maneuverings and part of that is the use of silence as a means of communication. This may sound strange as communication itself connotes the art of expression. However in politics, a political figure may choose to remain silent as a means of passing a message across to the public in a trouble situation when he is expected to make a comment.

This research paper tackles that whereas this strategy works well in some instances it fails in other instances. It, therefore, recommends that politicians should be cautious in the use of strategic silence as a means of political communication in view of the nature of politics which calls for self-expression in the use of persuasion, clarification and conviction to win public support and sympathy. Maintaining silence when one is most expected to speak out could easily be misunderstood as a sign of incompetence, intransigence or outright arrogance by the public.

This research paper is divided in to three sections; the first section is an introduction to the problem, aims of the study, limits and procedures of the study. The second section introduces the concept of silence, its features, types, functions and an important theory in which is the spiral of silence. Section three contains all the conclusions the study has arrived at and the referenced used.

Keywords: *political speeches, communication, self- expression*

I. Introduction

1.1 Problem of the study

The problem of the present study is silence, its function and types. Silence plays a great role in politics since it serves many functions. It may be understood in certain situations and it may not in others.

1.2 Aims of the study

The present study aims at the following:

1. Explaining the concept of silence from different perspectives.

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2. Showing the meaning of silence in many context.
3. Providing the functions and types of silence.

1.3 Limits of the study

The present study is limited to investigating silence in political context. It is limited to silence in political speeches its function and its types.

1.4 procedures of the study

The procedures followed in the present paper are the following:

- 1- Explaining the basic notions such as silence.
- 2- Numerating types of silence and their use.
- 3- Providing explanation of the major functions of silence
- 4- Explaining the features of silence.
- 5- Giving examples about silence in certain contexts.

II. Section Two

2.1 Introductory Remarks to Critical Discourse Analysis.

Critical discourse analysis is a branch of critical linguistics which studies the relationship between discourse events and sociopolitical and cultural factors. These emphases distance the subject from 'text linguistics', when this is seen as the formal account of the linguistic principles governing the structure of texts. But there is considerable overlap between the domains of discourse analysis and text linguistics (for example, the notion of cohesion is prominent in both), and any attempt at a principled distinction would be premature. In semantics, some use is made of the term universe of discourse (or domain of discourse), viz. the range of entities, topics, situations, etc., within which a particular speech event makes reference. (Crystal ,2006: 149).

Trask (2007:61) states that the analysis of texts within their social context. It is possible, of course, to examine a text from a purely structural point of view: the vocabulary and constructions it employs, the linguistic devices it uses to relate one part to another, and so on. But the approach called critical discourse analysis is rather different.

This approach is primarily interested in the social context in which a text is written. (Critical discourse analysis is particularly associated with the work of the British sociolinguist Norman Fairclough, and it has become particularly influential in Europe and Australasia.) Why was this text constructed at all? To whom is it addressed, and why? Does the writer or speaker have concealed purposes, and, if so, what are they? What hidden assumptions and biases underlie the text? These are the sorts of questions pursued in critical discourse analysis.

The linguistic techniques involved in such analysis are often called critical linguistics, and the educational policy of teaching people to be alert to such matters is critical language awareness. A simple example is provided by headlines and stories in different newspapers reporting the same story.

Compare the following possible headlines for the same real-world event: Police shoot demonstrators; Demonstrators are shot; Shooting at demo; Demo ends in violence; 2 dead at demo; Police make arrests as 2 die in demo riot. A critical discourse analyst would consider the different ideologies encoded by these different linguistic forms, such as the implicit assignment of blame and the shifting of emphasis

2-2 The concept of Silence

Silence can be defined as the absence of speech. It happens in any context. Also, it serves many functions. It refers to moments in which an actor's non behavior stands out in light of main expectations as to how they ought to behave in a relevant situation. The link between expectation and perception of silence is important: for what is commonly called "silence" denotes not so much an empirical matter of fact - for example, the total absence of noise or sound - as it does a social artifact. Silence is a state of inaction or dullness, it is attributed to others in cases in which their inactivity is conspicuous in relation to others. (Gray,2014:7)

Silence is considered in contrast with voice in measuring democratic empowerment. This contrast is not necessarily "wrong" - but it is over generalized, usually implicitly, with an ironic result. Specifically, most theorists do not inquire into the conditions under which silence, like voice, may itself be an empowering choice. Thus, if systematically about the place and functions of silence in a democracy, it is needed to expand the traditional conception of silence to accommodate a much broader consideration of the place and functions of silence. (ibid, 2014:7)

Silence refers to the moments during a conversation in which verbal communication has ceased. The parties in the conversation may feel they have nothing left to say, cannot offer a response, require time to formulate a response or fully comprehend emotions. Silence can be a manifestation of power, the action of one party refusing to discuss one or more topics another party wishes to consider.

Silence can also be an opportunity for the parties to reflect on what has been said and to consider ways forward. The absence of verbal communication however, does not automatically mean that communication is not occurring. The temporary termination of conversation has different impacts on the flow of communication. It may deepen one's comprehension of another's point of view or it may severely inhibit the ability of another party to fully express their opinion, thoughts and emotions. (Gendron, 2011:1-2)

Political conflicts, identities, and ideologies are negotiated linguistically, language being both the instrument by which humans interact and the means of constructing what it means to be human. That voice and speech are central to the construction of community and political action is practically a truism within politics. The assumption that language is deployed without problems and ubiquitously that is, that language 'just is' and that all people use language identically and constantly is, unfortunately, it is just a saying. (Ferguson, 2002:2)

Models of communication usually provide an entity that refers to some physically manifest sign or signal that can be understood to refer to phenomena of the outside world and/or be intended to communicate some sort of meaning. They also provide an entity which is at the receiving and perceiving end of this reference, communicative intention and of the physical signs that are transmitted.

Models may differ with regard to the extent that message distortions and situational factors or functions of language are integrated, but they will hardly do without the three entities, however more or less differentiated. There is widespread agreement that silence can be a form of communication as well, but then a crucial element in such a model of communication seems to be missing.

Bühler's relatively simple yet influential is instructive in this respect because Bühler (1934) cited in (Schröter, 2013:13) saw language as an instrument of communication and it therefore provides a good basis for considering what happens when the task is performed without use of the instrument.

Buhler's model of communication can be seen in the following figure:

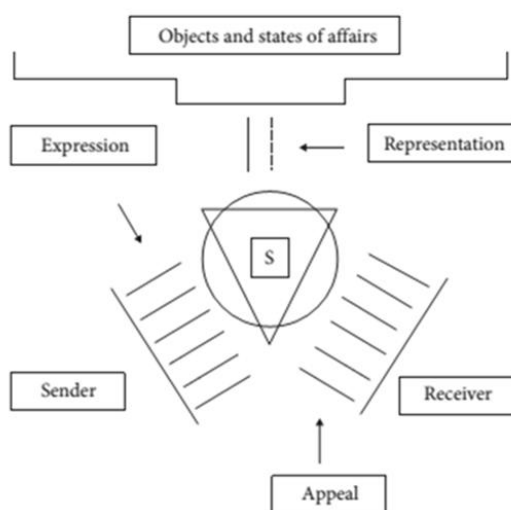


Figure 1. Bühler's model of communication (Speech)

In figure (2), in the case of silence, the signal (the triangle with an S) is absent. What is then missing is the clue which signals an intention on behalf of the sender to communicate something and which triggers the receiver's processing of this clue as some sort of message s/he is supposed to process.

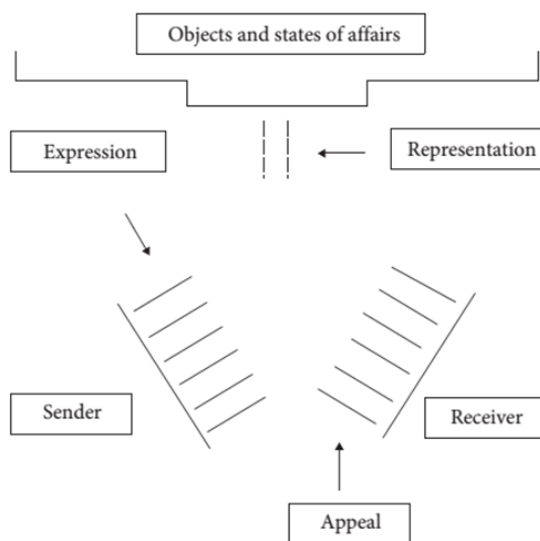


Figure (2) Silence

In a communicative situation, it matters whether or not politicians choose to talk. The possibility of speech reduces its absence potentially meaningful. But as there can be no denotation with the absence of signs, meanings and interpretations of silence seem to depend entirely on the context. (Schröter, 2013:15)

Silence can be a meaningful political event, a form of political involvement that generates new political subjectivities and changes existing realities by reconfiguring power relations. A particular politician remains silent to protest and affirms it as a tactic employed by a developing political collectivity to make itself noticeable, declare an injustice and challenge institutional power.

As such, the silent event under examination does not merely invite a turning of our attention to a practice that breaks the association of the political subject with the speaking subject; it also invites a reconsideration of what we are accustomed to accept as political activism. Silence is a critical practice, indeed, because it manifests an alternative possibility of being and acting; in so doing, it interrupts established patterns of thought and practice, and more specifically the inflexible distinction between speech and silence. (Hatzisavvidou, 2015)

Of interest here is one particular strategy, often used in situations of profound disagreement (religion, politics, and sexuality): that of silence. One important though not exclusive way to negotiate such differences is not to speak of them; to allow other, more uncomplicated, topics of discussion to form the linguistic medium in which the family exists (Tannen, 1990 cited in Ferguson, 2002:2).

There are many other ways in which silence can be detrimental, not only as a means of ignoring a particular dispute or issue, but also as a means of disempowering and otherwise reducing the quality of the interaction and of the overall relationship. Silence can be used as a tool of aggression, during a specific interaction and also as a tool in a larger strategy of aggression aimed at an individual or a group (Lusternberger and Williams, 2009 cited in Gendron, 2011:3).

Silence in the form of not providing sufficient information can have destructive effects on an individual, a series of relationships or an organization. For example, a bullied co-worker is intentionally denied access to information and computer programmers that are necessary for their job. Silence, when used to control and deny information to others, will reduce trust levels between the parties.

Silence can oblige individuals giving rise to inaccurate perceptions, misunderstandings, and rumors. Rumors can in turn lead back to the source of the silence, the individual or the party that does not divulge more or all available information, causing more distrust by the counter-parties and other interested parties, leading to further restriction of access to accurate, timely and truthful information. (Gendron, 2011:3)

2.3 The meaning of Silence

The nonverbal meanings and functions are differentiated by the unit of analysis. Meanings refer to the interpretations of messages, while functions refer to the goal and outcomes of interactions.

Each provides a useful system for understanding nonverbal behavior because they are potentially grounded in theoretical explanations of nonverbal communication such as systems theory, interactionism, and cognitivist.

For the following analysis, the meanings of silence are divided into three sections, i.e., positive, negative, and neutral pertaining to interpersonal communicative situations.

1. Positive silence relates to someone who uses silence as a tool of communication to promote, to solidify or to maintain the existing relationship.

2. Negative silence involves isolating, ignoring, disagreeing etc. which would destroy or melt away the existing good will of interaction.

3. Neutral silence is kept when both the negative and positive value of silence exist. Sometimes, this type of silence demonstrates not much of emotional expression e.g. to hurt or to heal a relationship but more to convey a period of thoughtfulness.

4. No silence means someone would not keep quiet in formal or informal situations. (Ling: 132-133)

2.4 Features of silence

Features that are attributed to silence are as the following:

1. Silence, whatever its motives, is something that is attributed relationally: emerging, as it does, vis-a-vis the perception of others. Silence may derive from a single actor's non behavior, but it is never perceptible alone. Silence exists between, and is oriented towards, others. Crucially, the relational quality of silence distinguishes the concept from closely related ideas of isolation and solitude, sometimes confused with silence. The difference is that these latter ideas move in more individualistic directions: connoting the retreat from public life. Silence retains a crucial aspect of attachment to the world outside oneself, in ways solitude, for example, does not.

2. Attributions of silence involve a presumption of presence. When we perceive an actor as silent, we presume, even if one-sidedly, that they are in fact present in relation to us, and that this relationship has not simply broken off - as happens, for example, when individuals run from a quarrel, quit a political party, leave an unsatisfactory job, or emigrate from a state. Silence is attributable only to those who stay put. (Gray, 2014:8).

Conceptually, the presumption of presence - in either a proximate or mediated sense - is what distinguishes silence from concepts like exit, the place and functions of which have been extensively documented in democratic theory and practice (Dowding and John 2012; Hirschman 1970; Warren 2011 cited in Gray ,2014:9).

2-5 Types of silence

Communicative silence is given to a conception of silence that is not only distinct from, but has effects that go beyond, disempowered silence. Communicative silences are the nonlinguistic residuals of choice seen as revealing a politician's internal attitudes, judgments, or preferences by a

wider audience. "Expression" is used loosely here, as strictly speaking silence is not an expression at all - it is, recall, a kind of conspicuous nonbehavior.

Nevertheless, silence is communicative just because the perception of silence, specifically the perception of silence as chosen, has communicative implications. Or, rephrasing slightly, silence is nonbehavior; but silence becomes communication when an audience infers meaning from such nonbehavior, taking it to be an active expression of choice.

Actively silent politicians are not only aware that they are perceived as silent, but purposefully connect this awareness to achieving a desired end. At the margins, active silences might also be motivated by half-formed goals, such as feelings of anxiety or unease. (Gray, 2014:17)

Equally important to determining when silence is genuine communication is distinguishing silence-based from voice-based communication. While communication takes multiple forms in democratic systems, recall that democratic theorists traditionally identify voice with public expressions of choice that are either linguistic in content or immediately translate into the medium of language. The reason theorists focus on empowering voice communication is that it is capable of figuring into collective decision-making directly, through arguments, campaigns, deliberations, petitions, and votes, among other things. (Gray, 2014:18)

By contrast, communicative silence is used to identify nonlinguistic communications that are inferred as a consequence of perceived nonbehavior. Communicative silences figure into collective decision-making indirectly, through what is read into silence, appropriately or inappropriately, within collectivities or other kinds of social or political relationships. While features of voice may supplement silence - as when silent protesters clarify their silence with banners or signs - silence in itself is communication, even when not supplemented. As communication, silence registers in abstentions, obstructions, passive memberships within collectivities, and collective decisions approved tacitly. (ibid, 2014:19)

The force of communicative silence derives from the fact that it entitles inferences about the internal motivations of silent actors. Thus, in trying to know the likely effect of a given choice for silence, an attention should be paid to the inferences likely to be drawn from silence under the relevant circumstances. It is apt to find that the generic effects of choosing silence correspond to one of four ideal-types, as follows:

- **Affective silence** is about the communicative use of silence to induce others to make decisions or actions in line with one's own preferences, typically by choosing silence as a punitive sanction until others alter their behavior.
- **Demonstrative silence** is about the communicative use of silence to lead others to form specific beliefs or expectations about oneself, usually as the result of a decision to remain silent in response to direct cues, questions, or promptings.
- **Emulative silence** is about the communicative use of silence in compliance with formal institutions and organizations whose rules entitle some to speak instead of others in particular settings, or none at all.

- **Facilitative silence** is about the communicative use of silence in conformity with informal conventions that structure social and political interaction, through norms of civility, listening, tact, and cooperative conduct. (Gray, 2014:20)

2.6 Functions of Silence

Three communicative functions of silence are categorized by (Jensen (1973) cited in Ling :138-139) which is another taxonomy of functions of silence:

1. **face-saving:** face refers to public self-image not only where someone tries to project a self-image, to maintain a self-image, to save face if possible, but also where someone tries to conceal things or be covert in public or social assembly. Thus, it relates to silences caused by environment, situation, shyness and unfamiliarity. An example is shown in Bill Clinton keeping silent in order to face-saving after his scandal:



Figure 3 Bill Clinton after Scandal

2. **Affecting:** silence can heal and it can wound. It can also solidify or weaken an existing relationship. It has the power to affect us for both good and ill. An example is Trump keeps silent, but he uses the ok sign to express solidarity and to contact with the audience:



Figure 4 Trump with OK sign

3.Evaluating: silence provides judgments of another's behavior (character, motives and personality of other participants), showing favor or disfavor, assent or dissent. An example can be shown in which Obama keeps silent:



Figure 5 Obama shows disfavor

4.Linkage: Silence binds people together, or it can act to separate or to isolate someone from others. It has both a positive and negative sense. In the following example G.W. Bush keeps silent in order to bind himself with the families of victims of 9/11 attacks.



Figure 6 G.W. Bush after 9\11 attacks

2.7 Theories of Silence

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, the German political scientist contributes the famous model called “Spiral of Silence”. In 1947 Neumann and her husband found “Public Opinion Organization” in German and also she was a President of “World Association for Public Opinion Research” in 1978 to 1980. Through this Spiral of Silence theory Neumann indirectly explains the Jews status during World War II under Nazi’s control. Here, Adolf Hitler dominated the whole society and the minority Jews became silent due to the fear of isolation or separation.

Theory:

The one view dominated the public scene and others disappeared from the public awareness as it adherents became silent. In other words, the people fear of separation or isolation those around them, they tend to keep their attitudes to themselves when they think they are in the minority. This process is called “Spiral of Silence”.

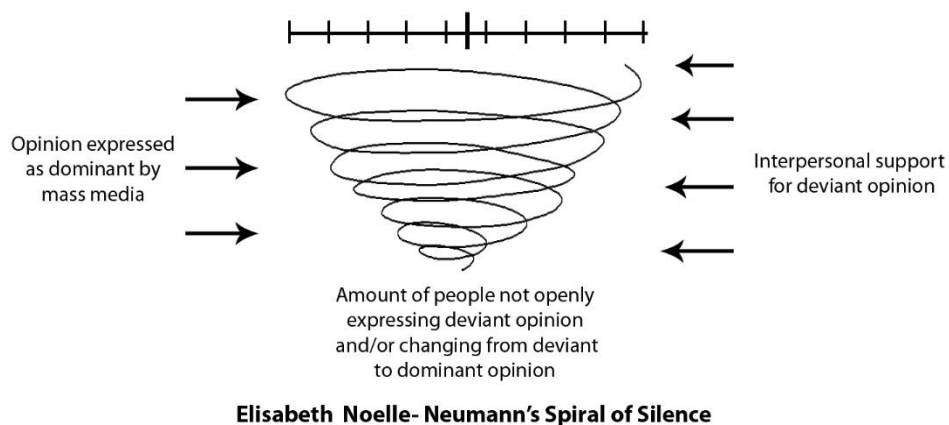


Figure 7 Noelle Neumann's spiral of silence

Example:

In a company, the managing director decides to increase their working hour from 8 to 10 and send e-mail to all employees. Majority of them accept this time changes and few employees are not satisfied with his decision. But they cannot or ready to express their thought publicly.

Because

1. They may feel unsupported by the other employees.
2. “Fear of isolation” like transfer
3. “Fear of Rejection” By rejecting their personal opinion from the public will help to avoid fight.
4. They may try to save their job by suppressing or avoid personal statement in public.

The frame work based on few assumptions:

1. Spiral of silence theory describe as a dynamic process, the predication about public opinion in mass media which gives more coverage for the majorities in the society and gives very less coverage for minorities.

2. In this social environment, People have fear of rejection to express their opinion or views and they known well what behaviors will make a better likelihood. It’s called “fear of Isolation”.

3. Being the part of Minority. People loss their confidence and silent or mute to express their views because of the fear of isolation or they feel alone or unsupported.

4. Sometimes the minorities withdraw their expressed opinion from public debates to secure themselves from the majority.

5. Maximum numbers get more vocal space in the society and lesser number become less vocal space or become silent.

Advantages and Disadvantages:

1. Spiral of Silence theory has both micro level and macro level explanatory process.
2. It works well during the public campaign, Senate and Parliament.
3. Spiral of silence theory – which helps to raise question about considering the role and responsibility of media in the society.
4. The theory which is not considering the other explanation of silencing. In some cases the person may feel the majority’s ideas or opinion is much better than his own view.
5. It portrait overly negative view of media influence the average people.

<http://communicationtheory.org/the-spiral-of-silence-theory/>.

III. Unit Three

3-1 Data Analysis

The current section deals with the analysis of two selected political speeches. The researches choose the Buhler,s model of communication because as Bühler (1934) cited in (Schröter, 2013:13) that he saw language as an instrument of communication and it therefore provides a good basis for considering what happens when the task is performed without use of the instrument.

1) Speaker: G.W Bush

Event: September 11 attack

"Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes or in their offices: secretaries, business men and women, military and federal workers, moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge -- huge structures collapsing have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong".

- The speaker uses the silent aspect to relay the news without pointing out specific names or race. In this case, the speaker does not acknowledge the act of terrorism is done by a specific race as that will enrage almost half of the US citizen that constitutes of different races.

- For the purpose of being perceived as compassionate and also empathetic, the speaker involves the citizens and also the victims of the attack in his speech by using the noun "our". Also to emphasize that there is no social standing difference between the person in power and also those who are directly/indirectly involved in the attack.

- The speaker also uses the verb "strong" to relay that he is vulnerable in the midst of the chaos by delivering contracting emotions in his speech. Although the feeling of sadness was portrayed, vulnerability was not acknowledged.

2) Speaker: Barrack Obama

Event: Hurricane Katrina

"I'm here to talk about a specific recovery. But before I begin to talk just about New Orleans, I want to talk about America's recovery, take a little moment of presidential privilege to talk about what's been happening in our economy. This morning, we learned that our economy grew at a stronger and more robust clip back in the spring than anybody knew at the time. The data always lags. We already knew that over the past five and a half years, our businesses have created 13 million new jobs. These new numbers that came out, showing that the economy was growing at a 3.7 percent clip, means that the United States of America remains an anchor of global strength and stability in the world -- that we have recovered faster, more steadily, stronger than just about any economy after the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression".

- The speaker enlightened the speech by using "specifically" to focus audience on the current matter at hand. When the word is used, audience will feel that he was very serious in regards of his condolences to the victims of the hurricane. This method is used to make one feel important as the speaker emphasizes on one issue instead of jumping to other unrelated topics.

- He speaker also blatantly announces of his privilege as a president and that will naturally close the political gap between the audience and also the person in power. Subsequently, the audience will feel that the speech is personal and unique as the speaker puts himself with the audience .

- The silent aspect of this speech is that the speaker uses facts to accentuate his speech, making it more believable and relatable to the audience which inevitably making it seems that the speaker has done his fair share of research before giving the speech.

3) Speaker: Donald Trump

Event: Political Rally in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

“Unbelievable. Unbelievable. Thank you. Hello, Green Bay. Thank you. We love Green Bay. Thank you. Thank you. In the great state of Wisconsin, home of the legendary Green Bay Packers and there's no place I'd rather be than right here in America's heartland, right? And there's no one I'd rather be with than you, the hardworking patriots, who make our country run so well and it's running right now better, maybe than it ever has“.

- The speaker uses a lot of repetitive words as to emphasize his emotions towards the silent aspect which in itself is a way to portray one's disbelief on a certain topic .

- In order to breach the audience and speaker's political gap, the speaker uses flattery to make the audience feel at ease with his presence, although the flattery, the speaker emphasizes on his status as someone important, which in this case defeats the purpose of the flattery.

- The speaker also uses the Q&A technique, which is a push and pull method in order to gauge the audiences' responds towards the speaker's emotion which is to be happy as the speaker obviously states in his speech.

IV. Conclusions

It has been concluded that silence is an effective tool for politicians so as to get their messages across to the audiences they address. Silence has many functions such as face-saving in which someone tries to avoid shyness, to maintain self-image or to avoid embarrassment. Also, it has the power to affect others and influence them. In situations of evaluating others' opinions politicians try to remain silent. For the purpose of maintaining relationships with others and to establish linkage with them. Types of silence vary as demonstrative silence, affective silence, emulative silence and facilitative silence. Each type has its own context and uses. Silence has features that differentiate it from solitude and it has a presumption of presence.

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