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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on students' spoken corpus-based analysis of academic presentations and to be specific, this study has collected texts of spoken data of Polytechnic students doing their academic presentations. However, there were very few studies focusing on the students' spoken corpus of oral academic presentation especially when dealing with ESL learners at Polytechnic level. This study aims to examine the kind of cohesive devices used by the students, when they use them and for what purposes and lastly, what problems do the students face in using cohesive devices in oral academic presentations. This study is a corpus-based study consisting of 20 academic group presentations that were audio-taped and transcribed manually, and analyzed using Antconc software version 3.2.4w. The recordings were based on the presentations of the students from semester three and five. Results had indicated that the students only employed five different categories of cohesive devices which are enumerations and additions, apposition, result or inference, contrast or concession and summation cohesive devices. The analysis also revealed that the students tend to use simple and single-word cohesive devices as it was easier to memorize and pronounce. The students used these five types of cohesive devices to fulfil different functions such as to start and end the presentation, to give further elaboration and instances, to signal the next step to the audience, to show contrast and also, to sum up the presentations. This study suggests teachers provide scaffold to students and give sufficient guidelines on the functions of cohesive devices in oral academic presentations so as to help them to improve their presentation skills.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysian students have been exposed to the English Language since young. English is first introduced in primary levels and used extensively as medium of instruction at pre-university levels or polytechnics. This has been supported by [1] who stated that not only younger learners are taught the English Language, but they have been taught the language extensively all the way to tertiary levels or in higher institutions.

Background of the Study

At polytechnic or pre-university levels, the English courses are skill-based and designed to prepare students for the use of English Language at the workplace. The emphases are on the common language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, writing and communicative ability [2]. Despite extensive exposure to English in the education system, students still have yet to master the language, as their language is full of errors especially when it comes to speaking.

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In Malaysian Polytechnic Education System, students need to take English for Communicative Purposes for three semesters to get a Diploma. The contents of the three courses emphasize on the communicative activities. The details of the courses shown in the Table 1.

Table 1 English	for communicative	purposes in po	lytechnic Malaysia

	Level	Course Name	Course Code	Prerequisite Course	Semester
1	Level 1	Communicative English 1	DUE10012	None	One
2	Level 2	Communicative English 2	DUE30022	DUE10012	Three
3	Level 3	Communicative English 3	DUE50032	DUE30022	Five

Even though the focus of the three courses is the same, which is communicative skills, the contents are different. Semester one students must take Communicative English 1 (Level 1) which focuses more on general knowledge such as study skills, information-processing skills, reading skills, and individual oral presentation skills. In contrast, semester three students will have to enroll in Communicative English 2 (Level 2), which focuses more on group oral presentations about product and services, process and procedures and role-play of complaints. Finally, students must pass Communicative English 3 (Level 3) when they are in semester five, where it focuses more on report writing skills, and the academic oral presentations using graphs and charts (in groups), and individual mock job-interview. In brief, the students must pass all of these three English levels in order to graduate from polytechnics.

Statement of the Problem

In Polytechnics, students' major assessments for the Communicative English 2 and Communicative English 3 courses are mostly based on the students' oral presentations. At the same time, the students need to do presentations in English for other courses too. Therefore, the students need to have good oral presentation skills but the problem is that the students have limited English proficiency. They struggle to make basic sentence structures and they have difficulties to show how ideas are connected. It becomes very difficult especially when they have to speak spontaneously in oral academic presentations.

The presentations done by the students were not only full of grammatical mistakes but also, they lack the knowledge on how to connect their ideas or points and they do not know how to link or arrange their ideas cohesively even though they have good ideas. This might be because students are easily confused on the appropriate usage of numerous cohesive devices and they are not given enough scaffolds on the micro-organizing skills.

For instance, the syllabus of the two courses DUE30022 and DUE50032 do not put much emphasis on the linguistic aspects, specifically. These caused English lecturers to not focus much on the linguistic aspects in their teaching. Basically, the syllabus has overlooked this aspect entirely and this has somehow made the students to resort to memorizing their oral presentation texts.

Majority of polytechnic students who were assigned to give oral presentations reported that they lack training in giving presentations and or lack explicit discussion of the presentation evaluation criteria which may give them ideas on how to do the presentation in a proper way. Many lecturers or instructors seem to assume that students simply 'know' how to put together a presentation either based on their previous experience or by modelling their presentations after the lectures and presentations of more experienced presenters such as their instructors [3].

In conclusion, lecturers find it difficult to teach the language due to factors such as varied students' competencies in the language, lack of linguistic input in the syllabus, and not much of language preparation given in the module. These factors have hampered the teaching and learning process of the language. Eventually, all of these problems have triggered the interest to examine the communicative activities in term of the use of cohesive devices in oral academic presentations among POLISAS students

Research Objectives

In particular, this study aims to:

- a) Investigate the kind of cohesive devices used in academic presentations among students in POLISAS.
- b) Examine when do students use cohesive devices and the purposes of using them in academic presentations.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions:

- a) What kind of cohesive devices do students use in academic presentations?
- b) When do students use cohesive devices and for what purposes they use them in academic presentations?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Presentations

Presentations for students among ESL learners are regarded as the most difficult part in the L2 assessments. This is due to their reluctance to speak the language [4] and they are not comfortable using the language. There are numerous studies and suggestions on how to deal with these problems, and various strategies and techniques have been introduced throughout the years.

To be more specific, the focus of this study is on academic presentations that the ESL students have to take part in learning the L2. Oral academic presentation is an activity through which the presenters communicate with the audience. It is called academic because these presentations deal with college or university life [5]. Students also deal with courses that are taught in the universities sections and academics.

There are many ways for the universities and colleges to improve students' presentation skills [6]. This seems to be fully supported with a case study on the investigation of how students' experience in evaluating their self-oral academic presentations can help them to learn academic discourse [7]. Many students seem to have no problems with their writing but, when it comes to speaking, especially in oral academic setting, they have issues of uncertainty and pressure. Thus, it is very crucial for the teachers to give their students the assessment criteria in advance in order to prepare them for the presentations so that students will know exactly the points of weakness and strength in their presentations [8].

Corpus of Academic English

Nowadays, the interest in the use of language corpora and computer analysis tools for language education has grown tremendously in the past few decades. Unfortunately, however, the

previous corpus collected have not researched the oral academic discourse, specifically in students' academic presentations as much as they have done for the academic written corpus.

Corpus of Spoken English

Spoken academic English is generally recognised as a specific genre or register with its own social dynamic and linguistic features [9]. The best way to investigate the typical characteristics of spoken academic discourse is through analysis of corpus. However, building a corpus of academic spoken presents a major challenge unlike the written corpus that are available in copious quantities online. The spoken academic corpus must be painstakingly recorded as well as transcribed and annotated carefully [10]. In general, there are many examples of spoken English Language corpora collected to date [11]. The list is as follows:

- 1. The Bank of English written and spoken English.
- 2. The BNC (British National Corpus) written and spoken British English.
- 3. CANCODE (Cambridge Nottingham Corpus of Discourse of English) spoken British English.
- 4. ICE (International Corpus of English) international varieties of spoken and written English. The international corpus of Learners' English is a part of it.
- 5. London-Lund Corpus (Survey of English Usage) spoken British English (now, it is quite old).
- 6. Santa Barbara Corpus spoken American English
- 7. Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English

The majority of the corpora listed above are based on native speakers collected in English speaking country (with exceptions of Hong Kong Corpus and ICE Corpus). However, there is very little effort that has been made in collecting spoken corpus of non-native speakers of English in other countries and particularly, learner corpus involving L2 speakers with special linguistic needs.

Learner Corpora in Malaysia

Although limited, the development of the learner corpus in Malaysia seems to have received increasing attention be it spoken or written corpus. As to date, there are a few corpus-based studies which are available and can be accessed by the public. The list is as follows:

- 1. EMAS Corpus (English of Malaysian School Students) by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) written and spoken
- 2. MACLE Corpus (Malaysian Corpus of Learner English) written
- 3. COMEL Corpus (Corpus of Malaysian English) by Universiti Malaya (UM) spoken
- 4. CALES Corpus (Corpus Archive of Learner English Sabah and Sarawak) written
- 5. MaCFE Corpus (Malaysian Corpus of Financial English) by UiTM written

Hence, it can be concluded that most of the corpus based studies done previously are only emphasizing on the written corpus compared to the spoken corpus. This scenario is possibly due to the reason that the data for written corpus based are easier to be collected compared to the spoken corpus, which are a bit complicated and difficult.

Therefore, many previous researchers have avoided collecting spoken corpus although, in fact, the data collected from a spoken corpus is more reliable since it is both authentic and interesting at the same time.

Apart from that, there are very few studies done which have looked into the polytechnic students as a major focus. For years, the focus of research and discussions has been either on

the students at the university or at the secondary school levels. As to date, there is no study focusing on the use of cohesive devices in academic oral presentations among polytechnic students.

Cohesive Devices

Cohesive devices play a crucial role in indicating the semantic relationship between textual segments explicitly, and in making text logically cohesive [12]. Then, cohesive devices are also known as the most powerful tool in reading, writing and speaking because they show how an argument is developed and without which, it will lead to the misunderstanding and ambiguity of the text due to the missing of some important connection [13]. The fact of it can be illustrated as in the following example:

He found that it was helpful to practice conversation with native speakers. He learned a lot about the customs of the country by talking with them.

The sentences above are grammatically correct but it cannot tell the readers or the listeners on how these facts are related or connected. This problem can be solved by using cohesive devices to indicate the relationship between the two sentences:

He found that it was helpful to practice conversation with native speakers. (also, besides, moreover, indeed, furthermore) he learned a lot about the customs of the country by talking with them.

Therefore, it is vital for second language learners, whose are often said to be lacking in logical lucidity either in written or spoken text, to use cohesive devices in an appropriate way. It may vary in terms of its length, form and functions but cohesive devices can make explicit the relationship between two units of discourse [14]. They are used to show the signal of relationships and therefore, they also function as important devices for creating textual cohesion. In brief, cohesive devices are very important in making the points clear and in signaling the presentation to the audience.

The justification for choosing the typology of cohesive devices [15] is due to the reason that it is clear, simple and easy to be differentiated. The framework has also been a widely used model in previous research or studies [16]. Most of the earlier studies have adopted the semantic classifications [15] because although it is not the most accurate, it is still worth for its clarity, comprehensiveness and simplicity at the same time.

METHODOLOGY

Corpus Compilation

This study focuses on students' spoken corpus-based analysis of academic presentations and to be specific, this study has collected texts of spoken data of Polytechnic students doing their academic presentations. Students' academic presentations in English were recorded and transcribed.

Background Information of Participants

In this corpus, the participants were the students from various diploma programmes studying at Politeknik Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah (POLISAS), Kuantan, Pahang. The participants who were involved in the corpus consist of 75 students from semester three and semester five, who study DUE30022 and DUE50032 courses in POLISAS. There were 35 students from DUE30022 class

(Communicative English 2) and 40 students from DUE50032 class (Communicative English 3). The number of male students involved in this study is 44 and female students are 31. Most of the students involved in this study were from the age range of 19 to 23 years old.

Students who study DUE30022 have been taught previously on oral presentation skills in semester one (DUE10012) since it is a pre-requisite course for DUE30022 Course. Students of DUE50032 have been exposed to oral presentation skills twice i.e. when they were in semester one (DUE10012) and again, in semester three (DUE30022) since both of the subjects are also a pre-requisite course for DUE50032 course.

Task Setting

There were two levels of academic presentations involved. Firstly, all the semester three students have to do presentations on process and procedures (DUE30022) and secondly, for semester five students are required to do presentations on graphs and charts (DUE50032).

The presentations can consist of three to four students per group, but the number of group members is varied. Nonetheless, the lecturers have to make sure that each group member will have an equal chance to speak. The details on the number of group members are presented in Table 2.

No.	Number of members/ grou	p Total number of groups involved	Total number students involved	of
1	2 members	2	4	
2	3 members	7	21	
3	4 members	7	28	
4	5 members	2	10	
5	6 members	2	12	
	Total numb	er of students:	75	

Table 2 Number of group members per group

The duration for the presentation is 15-20 minutes for each group, but there were some groups that had exceeded the time given due to the number of members in their group. This study involved a total of 20 group presentations from both of the English courses chosen. To summarize, there were 75 students involved with a total of 243 minutes of presentations that were recorded and transcribed.

For the purpose of this study, all of the 20 audio-recorded group presentations had been transcribed based on the method presented [17]. Transcriptions were coded according to group number. For instance, for group number one, it was coded as transcription one and for group number two, it was coded as transcription two. This method had been applied to the rest of the groups until twenty (e.g. *Group 20 – Transcription 20*). Other than that, the coding of the presenters or speakers has also followed the same method. For example, for speaker number one, it was coded as S1, and for speaker number two coded as S2, and the coding was the same for the rest of the other presenters or speakers.

Corpus Description

All of the transcriptions that were in word format (.doc format) had been converted into the .txt format for the purpose of analysing the data. This is due to the reason that, the process of analysing the data must use certain software and for this particular study, Antconc version 3.2.4w had been used. With the help of the Antconc software, it has been found out that the total

number of the word tokens used in these 20 group presentations is 17159 and the total number of word types is 1971.

Meanwhile, the total duration used for all the 20 groups presentation is 4 hours 2 minutes and 41 seconds. So, the average duration per group presentation is 12 minutes 21 seconds and as for the average words are 858 words per group presentation.

Data Analysis

In order to analyse the data for this study, 20 groups of students doing academic oral presentations were recorded and each of the audio-recorded group presentation was transcribed manually in the word format in order to get the written data of the oral presentations. Then, the transcriptions were converted from the .doc format to the .txt format for the purpose of analysing the data using the software named Antconc version 3.2.4w. This is due to the reason that the software can only read the data in .txt format because there were many hidden mark-ups in the .doc format.

Antconc is a concordance programme developed by Professor Laurence Anthony, The Director of the Centre for English Language Education, Waseda University in Japan. It is available at no charge over the internet [18] and it is also a user friendly software which is easy to use.

The main instrument used to analyse the data for this study was Antconc version 3.2.4w even though it is not the latest version. This is due to the fact that the study was on a small corpus size. Furthermore, this study only looked at the word count and frequency of the cohesive devices used and not looking at the sophisticated use of the sentences in the corpus.

For the purpose of this study, all the 20 transcriptions in .txt format were uploaded onto the programme in order to get the analysis done. Then, the six categories of cohesive devices were searched based on Biber et al. [15] in terms of the enumeration and addition cohesive devices, summation cohesive devices, apposition cohesive devices, result or inference cohesive devices, contrast or concession cohesive devices and lastly, transition cohesive devices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Frequency of Occurrences of Cohesive Devices in Students' Spoken Academic Presentations

Frequency of occurrence plays an important role in the previous research of cohesive devices since its role is as an indicator for the linguistic properties of a text [19]. A total number of 38 types of cohesive devices were found to be used by the students in this corpus and the total number of tokens or words used by the students in the corpus are 17, 159. The highest cohesive devices occurrences are from the category of enumeration and addition cohesive devices, which ranked at the top three out of 38 cohesive devices used.

The students were found to have used all categories of cohesive devices in their presentations eventhough in limited variation. However, there is one category which is transition cohesive devices that did not appear.

The degree of lexical variation in a corpus is often determined by calculating the type to token ratio (TTR) [20]. A larger type to token ratio is interpreted as an indication of a wider range of language used. This ratio is calculated by dividing the types (the total number of different words) occurring in a text or utterance by its token (the total number of words). A high TTR

indicates a high degree of lexical variation while a low TTR indicates the opposite. The range falls between a theoretical 0 and 1 and the calculation as the ratios can be illustrated in Figure 1.

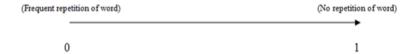


Figure 1. Interpretation on calculation of ratios.

Figure 1 above shows the interpretation on calculation of ratios. For the purpose of this study, the number of separate words (types) in the corpus is 1971 and the number of words in the corpus (tokens) is 17,159. Therefore, the calculation will be as below (Figure 2):

Figure 2. Type token ratios (TTR).

So, the calculation gives the average of 0.11 which means that there was a general tendency towards less variety of lexical used in the corpus. One possible interpretation of this calculation is that the students tend to repeat the same word in their presentations and to be more specific, the students opted to use the same cohesive devices where the average TTR for the cohesive devices used in the corpus is 0.03 which signifies a very low variation of cohesive devices used in students' academic oral presentations.

General Findings

Among the six categories of cohesive devices described [16] there were only five types of cohesive devices used in the whole corpus and the most favourite cohesive devices used fall into the category of enumeration and addition cohesive devices, which forms more than half (64%) share of the whole percentage. It is then, followed by the categories of result or inference cohesive devices (15%), the apposition cohesive devices (12%), the contrast or concession cohesive devices (6%) and the summation cohesive devices (3%).

The total number of occurrences in both courses chosen is 470, which is 300 from DUE50032 course, and another 170 from DUE30022 course. The highest number of occurrences is from the category of enumeration and addition cohesive devices that occurred 298 times. This shows that this category of cohesive devices is easier to be used by the students compared to the other categories of cohesive devices. The second popular type of cohesive devices mainly apposition cohesive devices occurred 71 times, and then, followed by results or inference cohesive devices that had occurred 58 times.

Discussion

After a detailed examination of the results, there are several points that can be highlighted. As related to the first research question for this study, there are five out of six categories listed [15] have been used by the students in their academic oral presentations. The five cohesive devices found are from the category of enumeration and addition cohesive devices, apposition cohesive devices, result or inference cohesive devices, contrast or concession cohesive devices and lastly, summation cohesive devices.

The differences in cohesive devices ranking could be because of the task setting for each of the corpus collected is different. For instance, the high proportion of this category of enumeration and addition cohesive devices was overwhelming in the present corpus because the tasks of academic presentations demanded that students use listing and addition cohesive devices a lot in order to carry out the process and procedures presentations (DUE30022) and also the mini project presentations (DUE50032).

Other than that, another essential finding from the study is that the students tend to use simple and single-word cohesive devices that were easy to be remembered and pronounced. Single-word cohesive devices like *next*, *then*, *first*, *so*, *also*, *other*, *firstly*, *second*, *lastly*, and *another* as what has been explained earlier in the general finding were most preferred by the students to the extent that the students have had a tendency to repeat the same single-word cohesive devices throughout their presentations. This was proven with the result of the top ten most recurring forms of cohesive devices found in the corpus. This occurred because the students had to exert greater effort into the informational content of the presentation which demanded greater cognitive skills on the presenters [3] instead of focusing on the use of cohesive devices. This might be one of the possible reasons why the phrases cohesive devices such as *to begin with*, *on the other hand*, *as a result*, *in conclusion*, and *in a nutshell* had not been used as frequently as the single-word cohesive devices in the students' academic presentations.

Next, in order to examine the purpose of students using cohesive devices in the presentations, this corpus of study has been analysed based on when they used the cohesive devices according to the two Communicative English courses chosen which are DUE30022 (Level 2) and DUE50032 (Level 3). In Communicative English 2 (DUE30022), the students are required to present a topic on Process and Procedures and as for Communicative English 3 (DUE50032), they must present on the topic of a Mini Project. If we look at the topic or the task assigned for process and procedures presentations, the students might have to use a lot of cohesive devices compared to the presentations on the mini project because it dealt with a lot of explanation on the steps involved.

However, surprisingly, the data driven from the findings were different from what has been previously thought of. The major contributions of the use of cohesive devices were from the semester five students, who took Communicative English 3. The frequency of cohesive devices in DUE50032 presentations display more than 50 percent share on each type of cohesive devices. This shows that the students used cohesive devices more when they had to present about their mini project explaining graphs and charts. This interpretation is probably due to the elements of students' maturity, and their experience. In terms of the age and maturity, the semester five students were definitely older and matured compared to the semester three students. Meanwhile, in terms of experience, they had been exposed twice on the oral presentation skills compared to the semester three students who had only been exposed once when they were in semester one. As a result, the semester five students tend to use a lot of cohesive devices to explain about the graphs and charts and also, to give further elaboration of their mini project presentations.

Another interesting finding is that the semester five students were assumed to use more cohesive devices from the category of contrast or concession cohesive devices because they need to do a lot of comparison and contrast in explaining the graphs and charts for their mini project presentation. However, the results turned out to be different from what has been thought previously when it shows that there were only 30 occurrences of contrast or concession cohesive devices used by the semester five students and this result somehow indicated that the students still have difficulties in using this type of cohesive devices.

Next, to answer research question number 2 on the purposes of cohesive devices and when the students used these cohesive devices in their academic presentations. First of all, it was revealed that the students used cohesive devices from the category of enumeration and addition cohesive devices to fulfil two different functions which are to enumerate pieces of information and to add items of discourse to one another. Based on the findings, enumeration cohesive devices such as *first* and *firstly* normally were used by the first speaker of the group to start the presentation.

Then, cohesive devices such as *then* and *next*, were also been used by students as they wanted to signal and tell the listeners in advance about what he or she is going to do next. Addition cohesive devices such as *furthermore*, *further*, *moreover* and *in addition*, even it was hardly found in the corpus, however, there were two students who managed to use it in their presentations. These students had used it to give further explanation and to add extra elaboration on the points given.

The second and the third ranking of cohesive devices used in this corpus were from the category of apposition (15 %) and result or inference (12 %) cohesive devices. These two types of cohesive devices were considered as the common cohesive devices since the students do not have many problems in using them. In the category of apposition cohesive devices, the students constantly used cohesive devices such as *other than that, on the other hand, another* and *for example* to give further examples or to give further instances on the preceding discourse. Next, the focus will be on the purpose of using cohesive devices in the category of result or inference cohesive devices. It turned out that the students used this type of cohesive devices such as *so, then* and *therefore* for a different function based on the context. For example, based on the finding, there were students who used the adverbial *so* to start and also to end the presentations.

Even though cohesive devices can occupy different positions in the sentence (initial, medial or final) [21], students tend to use the cohesive devices in the initial position. This might be because of the students do not know how to use the cohesive devices in the other positions or perhaps, the students wanted to facilitate the listeners on the content of their presentations before starting with their content.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to find answers to the research questions in terms of the types of cohesive devices that the students use, the way they use it and the purposes of using them, and also, to identify the problems that the students faced in academic oral presentations.

First of all, the results of this study revealed that there were only five categories which have been used by the students. The rank based on the frequency of occurrences are the enumeration and addition cohesive devices, result or inference cohesive devices, apposition cohesive devices, contrast or concession cohesive devices, and lastly, the summation cohesive devices.

Besides, based on the findings, among the 53 types of cohesive devices listed by [16], it has found that there were only 38 of them were used by the students. When the analysis was done, the occurrences of the cohesive devices in the present study is more than 38 but after it was carefully examined, there were some of them that were not considered as cohesive devices and must be excluded from the counting.

The majority of these 38 types of cohesive devices fall into the category of enumeration and addition cohesive devices whereby the students used cohesive devices in the process and procedures presentations for DUE30022 and also, in presenting graph and charts in DUE50032

course as well. Apart from that, the two categories like apposition cohesive devices and results or inference cohesive devices are considered familiar to the students since they were able to use it correctly for quite a few times in their presentations.

This is due to the fact that the topic or the task setting for each of the corpus collected is different. For instance, the high proportion of the category of enumeration and addition cohesive devices was overwhelmingly in the present corpus because the tasks of academic presentations require them to use listing and addition cohesive devices a lot in order to carry out the process and procedures presentations (DUE30022) and also the mini project presentations (DUE50032).

Other than that, this study has indicated that majority of the students may not know the proper use of cohesive devices in academic presentations. Ironically, teachers or lecturers always assumed that the students know and did not give enough scaffolds to the students. In fact, the majority of the students do not know how to use cohesive devices especially the semester three students. They do not know how to use most of the cohesive devices and they must be taught the correct way of using them.

Therefore, it is suggested that the future studies will collect a bigger corpus since this study only comprises a small one involving only the students from Politeknik Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah (POLISAS), Kuantan, Pahang. It would be interesting if the future studies can collect the same type of corpus from other polytechnics in Malaysia. By doing that, the background of the participants will be more varied and there will be a richer data on the polytechnic students doing their academic presentations. As a result, the corpus of the future studies can be used and its findings will be applicable for all the polytechnics in Malaysia.

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