

Vietnamese Perception Verbs – The Transfer of Their Cognitive Metaphors into English

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Abstract: Fillmore stated that frame semantics offers a particular way of looking at word meanings, as well as a way of characterizing principles for creating new words and phrases, for adding new meanings to words, and for assembling the meanings of elements in a text into the total meaning of the text. [9, p.111] Besides, the semantics of Vietnamese perception verbs is very diverse, subtle, and complicated. Therefore, this article researches the cognitive metaphor semantics (meanings) of Vietnamese perception verbs and their semantic cognition transferred from Vietnamese into English. The researcher inspected and collected 3,946 sentences with perception verbs as research data from two sets of English-Vietnamese, Vietnamese-English bilingual novels: *The adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Arthur Conan Doyle (English version and Vietnamese version), and *Love after war*, Wayne Karlin, Ho Anh Thai (edited) (Vietnamese version and English version). Then, cases of specific semantic cognition transferred from Vietnamese into English were tracked down by using statistical analysis method. Simultaneously, the linguistic methods, such as descriptive, analysis, and contrastive methods have been used to analyze and investigate in order to find out the basic ways these verbs can convey cognitive metaphor meanings. There are totally 6 modes of the cognitive metaphors of the perception verbs. Those cognitive metaphors are formed due to the dominance of the cognitive object, the dominance of the cognitive perceiver, being in the same cognition phase, cognitive spaces switching, cognitive results conversion and perception organs conversion. This research results can help learners, language users, translators and interpreters of Vietnamese and English work effectively and comprehensively in their bilingual interactions.

Keywords: Perception Verbs, Cognitive Metaphor, Cognitive Semantics, Semantic Cognition Transferred

1. Introduction

Metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon. [8, p.14] Metaphor helps humans to try to understand new problems in terms of existing cognitive resources. [13, p.325] Metaphor is a major and indispensable part of our ordinary, conventional way of conceptualizing the world, and that our everyday behavior reflects our metaphorical understanding of experience. [10, p.186] The widespread use of metaphorical language in our everyday lives has given rise to the idea that we do not only talk metaphorically much of the time, but that we may also think metaphorically much of the time. [5, p.68] And metaphors provide rich evidence about the ways in which some aspects of our lived experience are associated with others, for reasons that reflect basic aspects of perception, thought, and possibly neurological organization. [11, p.188]

In metaphor, the structure of a given domain (called the “source” domain) is mapped onto a different one (the “target” domain), which as a result is structured and understood in terms of the first one. [14, p.15] Besides, cognitive semantics sees linguistic meaning as a manifestation of conceptual structure: the nature and organization of mental representation in all its richness and diversity. [7, p.156] Verbalizations of non-verbal or conceptual metaphors may affect their possible interpretation. [12, p.10] In Vietnamese language, the semantics of the perception verbs is very interesting and deserves deep study and investigation. For instance, in Vietnamese, the verb *thấy* (*see*) can be used to express the information from all of the senses, not just the visual. The verb *nghe* (*hear*) also has a variety of meanings, which is only inferior to the verb *thấy*. Therefore, this article’s aim is to research and study the cognitive metaphor

semantics of Vietnamese perception verbs as well as their semantic cognition transfer between Vietnamese and English.

From the survey of the two sets of English-Vietnamese, Vietnamese-English bilingual novels: *The adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *Love after war*, the researcher collected 1950 units with Vietnamese perception verbs (*nhìn, nghe, ngửi, nếm, sờ* and *thấy*) and 1996 units with English perception verbs (*look, see, listen, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel*). After having carefully processed, analyzed, and researched, the research data revealed that 6 reasons for the existence of cognitive metaphor meanings for those perception verbs. At the same time, the research has also tracked down all the possible semantic cognition transfers between Vietnamese and English.

2. The Cognitive Metaphor Mechanism

Basing the analysis of communicative interactions on mental states means, first and foremost, examining individual motivations, beliefs, goals, desires, and intentions. The next step in the analysis is to examine how these states are expressed. The definition of communication as a process implies that communicating linguistically or extralinguistically will involve two different ways of processing data. The same input may be analyzed from both a linguistic and an extralinguistic standpoint, and except in special cases, it will be processed in two parallel ways. [4, p. 1-2] Metaphor, understood traditionally, is an action of meaning transferring based on the similarity of objects in color, shape, nature of movement, etc. According to Croft, W. and Cruse, D., metaphor involves an interaction between two domains construed from two regions of purport, and the content of the vehicle domain is an ingredient of the construed target through processes of correspondence and blending. [6, p. 193] Broadly speaking, metaphor is a mechanism of speech. It is reflected in the way of using words of a certain class of objects or phenomena in order to define or identify the objects belonging to another class, or identify the other class, which has similarities with the default class in certain relationships.

Ex: “Tổ quốc ta như một con tàu

Mũi thuyền ta đó – Mũi Cà Mau”.

(Xuân Diệu)

(*Mũi Cà Mau*: Ca Mau Nose = Ca Mau Cape)

Metaphor is a very popular way of meaning transfer in which the individual words or expressions are linked together due to their semantic similarities. It is formed by means of humanization, objectification, abstractionism, etc. It is used to enhance the expressiveness of the speech.

So, what is the cognitive metaphor mechanism of the perception verbs like?

3. The Cognitive Metaphor Mechanism of the Perception Verbs

Being a part of a linguistic system of a particular language

the verb conveys national peculiarities of the conceptual system of its native speakers as well as the way a speaker visually perceives the environment. [3, p. 3] Based on meaning features, similarities, or similar elements in the same meaning category as well as the meaning proximity within each period of cognition or within the meaning group, these perception verbs can convey cognitive metaphors, which are distinctive, special, and diverse. These cognitive metaphor meanings enrich the semantic elements for the perception verbs.

For example, the verb *thấy* (*see*) is a verb belonging to the third period of the cognition process – the cognition result’s output phase. This verb is used to express experiences. Due to those two reasons, this verb has some meaning features that are relatively close to those of the verb *biết* (*know*). Therefore, we have a cognitive metaphor: *thấy là đã biết* (seeing is knowing).

Ex: Nhưng qua cô gái ấy, tôi *thấy* yêu được ai quả là một điều vô cùng hạnh phúc. But looking at her, I *knew* that being love must be extremely joyous.

4. Cognitive Metaphors of the Vietnamese Perception Verbs

4.1. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb Nhìn

-*Nhìn is watching*

Ex: *Nhìn* họ nói chuyện với Tây, với Tàu, với Nhật mà khoái. [15] It was satisfying to *watch* them speaking to Europeans, Chinese and Japanese. [16]

-*Nhìn is judging*

Ex: Đó là nhược điểm chính của hắn; còn *nhìn* chung thì hắn rất được việc. [1] That is his main fault, but *on the whole* he’s a good worker. [2]

-*Nhìn is facing*

Ex: *Nhìn* mặt nhau suốt ngày ở phòng làm việc. [1] We *faced* each other at work in the office. [2]

-*Nhìn is longing to a certain direction*

Ex: Cái điểm nhỏ trông hoang, tường xây bị lở từng mảng lớn, cửa điểm *nhìn về phía* bãi sông. [15] From its doorway, where they sat, they could see *down to* the riverbank. [16]

-*Nhìn is accepting*

Ex: Có người không lấy chồng cho thỏa nghiệp, có người như đào Hồng có con rồi, vì mê hát, vì chiến tranh mà gởi con cho người ta, đến nước nó không thèm *nhìn* mình nữa. [15] She had remained true to her vow, and remained single for the sake of her art, even though finally her own son had *rejected* her because of her insistence on following her talent. [16]

Table 1. Cognitive metaphors of the verb nhìn.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage
nhìn	<i>watching</i>	17	42.50%
	<i>judging</i>	10	25.00%
	<i>facing</i>	4	10.00%
	<i>longing to a certain direction</i>	5	12.50%
	<i>accepting</i>	4	10.00%
Total		40	100.00%

4.2. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb *Thấy*

-*Thấy is thinking*

Ex: Ủ, cô cũng *thấy* nên để má con toàn quyền! [15] I *think* we should give your mother complete authority here. [16]

-*Thấy is finding*

Ex: Nhưng dạo này Duyên bỗng *thấy* mình hay soi gương. [15] But during these days, Duyen suddenly *found* herself looking in the mirror. [16]

-*Thấy is hearing*

Ex: Từ khi sống bên nhau, lần đầu tiên, Ngoan *thấy* Mi to tiếng. [15] It was the first time since they had lived together that Ngoan had *heard* Mi raise her voice. [16]

-*Thấy is understanding*

Ex: Các ông *thấy* đấy, cảnh sống mà tôi vừa kể khiến chúng tôi không còn thích giao du với bất cứ ai cùng trang lứa và địa vị. [1] You can *understand* that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see anyone of our own age and position. [2]

-*Thấy is noticing*

Ex: Mình có *thấy* cách chi tiêu của hắn không? [15] Have you *noticed* the ways he spends money? [16]

-*Thấy is watching*

Ex: Tôi lặng nghe Muôn hát, *thấy* giọt nước mắt lăn trên gò má của cô. [15] While she sang I listened in silence, *watching* the tears spill down her cheeks. [16]

-*Thấy is catching*

Ex: *Thấy* tôi nhìn bàn tay, Mi bỏ xuống cười xòa. [15] *Catching* me looking down at that hand, she dropped it, and smiled apologetically. [16]

-*Thấy is meeting*

Ex: Tôi chưa *thấy* cô nào được như vậy. [15] I've never *met* a woman like that. [16]

-*Thấy is knowing*

Ex: Nhưng qua cô gái ấy, tôi *thấy* yêu được ai quả là một điều vô cùng hạnh phúc. [15] But looking at her, I *knew* that being love must be extremely joyous. [16]

-*Thấy is observing*

Ex: Trên mái tai hắn ông có *thấy* hai lỗ đeo hoa tai không? [1] Have you ever *observed* that his ears are pierced for earrings? [2]

-*Thấy is perceiving*

Ex: Tôi *thấy* mọi cái đều ổn. [1] I *perceive* that all is as it should be. [2]

-*Thấy is realizing*

Ex: Nhớ lại cái ngày mới vào đây, lấy xe đạp đạp vung các nơi, ông *thấy* mình đã thành ông lão rồi. [15] Remembering his early days in the city, when he would go everywhere on his bicycle, he *realized* how old he had gotten. [16]

-*Thấy is having*

Ex: Không *thấy* kinh nó lại giúp mình đỡ phiền hà. [15] Not *having* our periods actually simplified things for us. [16]

-*Thấy is being impressed*

Ex: Tôi *thấy* trong ít phút qua mà má như đã trải thêm hàng mấy năm trời, lưng còng thêm xuống. [15] I had the impression that the last few minutes had aged her many

years; she seemed even more bent over now. [16]

-*Thấy is agreeing*

Ex: Đến thế mới *thấy* giỏi ngoại ngữ tức là giỏi nhất. [15] To that extent, one would have to *agree* that the best qualified were those who were good at foreign languages. [16]

-*Thấy is witnessing*

Ex: Lần đầu tiên tôi *thấy* một vẻ buồn đàn ông. [15] This was the first time I had ever *witnessed* such sadness in a man. [16]

-*Thấy is imagining*

Ex: Vàng, các ông *thấy* đó, thật là khó mà trở lại làm một công việc nặng nhọc để có lương 2 bảng một tuần. [1] Well, you can *imagine* how hard it was to settle down to arduous work at 2 pounds a week. [2]

-*Thấy is distinguishing*

Ex: Tôi *thấy* rõ dấu của một bàn chân còn ướt trên bờ cửa sổ. [1] I could *distinguish* the outline of an instep where the wet foot had been placed in. [2]

Table 2. Cognitive metaphors of the verb *thấy*.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage
thấy	<i>thinking</i>	19	10.80%
	<i>finding</i>	56	31.82%
	<i>hearing</i>	15	8.52%
	<i>understanding</i>	5	2.84%
	<i>noticing</i>	20	11.36%
	<i>watching</i>	6	3.41%
	<i>catching</i>	10	5.68%
	<i>meeting</i>	3	1.70%
	<i>knowing</i>	14	7.95%
	<i>observing</i>	8	4.55%
	<i>perceiving</i>	4	2.27%
	<i>realizing</i>	10	5.68%
	<i>having</i>	1	0.57%
	<i>being impressed</i>	1	0.57%
	<i>agreeing</i>	1	0.57%
	<i>witnessing</i>	1	0.57%
	<i>imagining</i>	1	0.57%
<i>distinguishing</i>	1	0.57%	
Total		176	100.00%

4.3. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb *Nghe*

-*Nghe is obeying*

Ex: Ông tôi không *nghe*. [1] My grandfather refused to *obey*. [2]

-*Nghe is understanding*

Ex: Đấy, thế đấy, chú *nghe* rõ chưa? [15] Do you *understand*? [16]

-*Nghe is consulting*

Ex: Tôi đi thẳng từ Praha đến đây để *nghe* lời khuyên của các ông. [1] I have come incognito from Prague for the purpose of *consulting* you. [2]

-*Nghe is knowing*

Ex: *Nghe* nói, hồi đó, nhà ông giàu có khét tiếng xứ Bạc Liêu. [15] It was well *known* that he came from a very rich family in Bac Lieu. [16]

-*Nghe is distinguishing*

Ex: Mà vui thật, vui ra phết, bà *nghe* rõ tiếng từng con một, mỗi con một giọng, mỗi kiêu gáy. [15] And lift her spirit it did, it was downright humorous, she could *distinguish*

clearly the sound of each cock, each one had its own distinct voice, its own way of crowing. [16]

-*Nghe is feeling*

Ex: Tôi bất chợt *nghe* lạnh suốt lưng. [15] I *felt* suddenly chilled to the spine. [16]

-*Nghe is catching*

Ex: Đây chính là từ mà người hấp hối thốt ra, nhưng anh con trai chỉ kịp *nghe* có hai âm tiết cuối cùng. [1] That was the word the man uttered, and of which his son only caught the last two syllables. [2]

-*Nghe is finding*

Ex: Thầy chưa *nghe* nói gỗ đá thành Phật bao giờ. [15] I've never *found* a stone or a piece of wood that could become a Buddha. [16]

-*Nghe is thinking*

Ex: Ông cũng *nghe* như thế ư? [15] You *think* so, too? [16]

-*Nghe is checking*

Ex: Sáng hôm sau, nhà lại vắng như mọi hôm, bà lão Tứ *nghe* ngóng xung quanh im ả, rồi lần lần vào bếp. [15] But the next morning, when everyone was out of the house again, Mrs. Tu *checked* to make sure no one was around, and then groped her way back to the kitchen. [16]

-*Nghe is sounding*

Ex: *Nghe* mù mờ mà hấp dẫn quá. [15] It *sounded* so vague and yet so attractive. [16]

Table 3. Cognitive metaphors of the verb *nghe*.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage	
nghe	<i>obeying</i>	11	30.55%	
	<i>understanding</i>	2	5.56%	
	<i>consulting</i>	2	5.56%	
	<i>knowing</i>	2	5.56%	
	<i>distinguishing</i>	2	5.56%	
	<i>feeling</i>	4	11.10%	
	<i>catching</i>	3	8.33%	
	<i>finding</i>	2	5.56%	
	<i>thinking</i>	2	5.56%	
	<i>checking</i>	1	2.78%	
	<i>sounding</i>	5	13.88%	
	Total		36	100.00%

4.4. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb Nghe Thấy

-*Nghe thấy is receiving*

Ex: Thành tích này của ông chúng tôi đã từ khắp nơi *nghe thấy*. [15] This account of you we have from all quarters *received*. [16]

-*Nghe thấy is seeing*

Ex: Về phần cô ta, tôi không *nghe thấy* gì. [1] Of her, I could *see* nothing. [2]

-*Nghe thấy is catching*

Ex: Cha tôi có lấp bắp mấy tiếng không rõ, tôi chỉ *nghe thấy* một từ hình như là “A rat”. [1] He mumbled a few words, but I could only *catch* some allusion to a rat. [2]

Table 4. Cognitive metaphors of the verb *nghe thấy*.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage
nghe thấy	<i>receiving</i>	3	60.00%
	<i>seeing</i>	1	20.00%
	<i>catching</i>	1	20.00%
Total		5	100.00%

4.5. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb Ngửi

-*Ngửi is taking*

Ex: Kẻ ăn trộm gà, người hàng xóm đơn độc, suốt ba trăm sáu mươi lăm ngày qua vẫn ngồi ủ rũ ngó qua, âm thầm *ngửi* mùi hương khói nhà bà. [15] The rooster thief, her solitary neighbor, sat disconsolate throughout the three hundred and sixty-five days and gazed across, silently *taking* in the fragrance of the incense in her house. [16]

Table 5. Cognitive metaphors of the verb *ngửi*.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage
ngửi	<i>taking</i>	2	100.00%
Total		2	100.00%

4.6. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb Ngửi Thấy

-*Ngửi thấy is existing*

Ex: Bầu trời xanh nhạt, những đám mây trong, trôi êm ả từ tây sang đông, mặt trời chói lọi, có thể *ngửi thấy* mùi nhựa sống trong không khí. [15] It was an ideal spring day, a light blue sky, flecked with little fleecy white clouds drifting across from west to east. The sun was shining very brightly, and yet *there was* an exhilarating nip in the air, which set an edge to a man's energy. [16]

Table 6. Cognitive metaphors of the verb *ngửi thấy*.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage
ngửi thấy	<i>existing</i>	1	100.00%
Total		1	100.00%

4.7. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb Ném

-*Ném is experiencing*

Ex: Nhưng chúng ta sẽ còn phải *ném* đủ mùi khủng khiếp chừng nào đêm nay còn chưa trôi qua. [15] But we shall have horrors enough before the night is over. [16]

Table 7. Cognitive metaphors of the verb *ném*.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage
ném	<i>experiencing</i>	1	100.00%
Total		1	100.00%

4.8. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb Sờ

-*Sờ is reaching*

Ex: Tỉnh dậy, *sờ* lên mặt chỉ thấy máu. [15] When I woke up and *reached* up to wipe my face, I felt that it was covered in blood. [16]

-*Sờ is focusing attention*

Ex: Tôi tự *sờ* lên đầu mình để kiểm tra, không còn nghi ngờ gì nữa, cú đánh như vậy chỉ có thể thực hiện từ phía sau lưng nạn nhân. [1] I *marked* the spot upon my own head.

Clearly such a blow must have been struck from behind. [2]

-Sờ is feeling

Ex: Tôi bò quanh mãi, chỉ sờ mó thôi chứ mắt có thấy gì nữa đâu! [1] I crawled all over, *feeling* the ground, unable to see anything. [2]

Table 8. Cognitive metaphors of the verb sờ.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage
sờ	reaching	1	20.00%
	focusing attention	1	20.00%
	feeling	3	60.00%
Total		5	100.00%

5. Modes of the Cognitive Metaphors of the Perception Verbs

5.1. Due to the Dominance of the Cognitive Object

These are the metaphors formed owing to the dominance of the semantic requirements and properties of the cognitive object. For example:

Ex: Mi nhìn tôi ăn chăm chú nhưng tôi biết rõ cô không nhìn thấy gì hết. [15]

In this example, the cognitive object of *nhìn* (look) is *tôi ăn* (I eat). This cognitive object is a process. Therefore, the verb *nhìn* in this example convey the metaphor meaning of *theo dõi* (watching). As a result, we have the English version of this sentence: Mi watched me eating attentively, but I knew clearly that she was not seeing anything. [16]

Table 9. Statistics of cognitive metaphors formed due to the dominance of the cognitive object.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage
nhìn	watching	17	6.03%
	judging	10	3.55%
	facing	4	1.40%
	longing to a certain direction	5	1.75%
	hearing	15	5.32%
thấy	watching	6	2.13%
	catching	10	3.55%
	observing	8	2.84%
	having	1	0.35%
nghe	witnessing	1	0.35%
	sounding	5	1.75%
ngửi thấy	existing	1	0.35%
sờ	reaching	1	0.35%
Total		282	30.07%

5.2. Due to the Dominance of the Cognitive Perceiver

These are the metaphors formed owing to the dominance of the semantic requirements and properties of the cognitive perceiver. For example:

Ex: Ủ, cô cũng thấy nên để má con toàn quyền! [15]

In this example, we can see that the verb *thấy* (see) is used to describe the thinking of the cognitive perceiver *cô* (the aunt). Therefore, we have the corresponding English translation of the sentence is: I think we should give your mother complete authority here. [16]

Table 10. Statistics of cognitive metaphors formed due to the dominance of the cognitive perceiver.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage	
nhìn	accepting	4	1.40%	
	thinking	19	6.74%	
	finding	56	19.86%	
	understanding	5	1.75%	
	noticing	20	7.09%	
	meeting	3	1.05%	
	knowing	14	4.96%	
	thấy	perceiving	4	1.40%
		realizing	10	3.55%
		being impressed	1	0.35%
agreeing		1	0.35%	
imagining		1	0.35%	
distinguishing		1	0.35%	
obeying		11	3.90%	
understanding		2	0.70%	
consulting		2	0.70%	
knowing		2	0.70%	
distinguishing		2	0.70%	
nghe		feeling	4	1.40%
		catching	3	1.05%
		finding	2	0.70%
	thinking	2	0.70%	
	checking	1	0.35%	
	receiving	3	1.05%	
	nghe thấy	seeing	1	0.35%
catching		1	0.35%	
ngửi	taking	2	0.70%	
nếm	experiencing	1	0.35%	
	focusing attention	1	0.35%	
sờ	feeling	3	1.05%	
	Total	282	69.93%	

5.3. Due to Being in the Same Cognition Phase

The percentage of the cognitive metaphors formed due to being in the same cognition phase is extremely high. For cognitive metaphors in Vietnamese, the percentage is 93.61%, and that in English is 98.47%.

The cognitive metaphors formed due to not being in the same cognition phase account for only a small proportion shown in the following table.

Table 11. Statistics of cognitive metaphors formed due to not being in the same cognition phase.

Verb	Metaphor meanings	Units with metaphor	Percentage
nhìn	accepting	4	1.42%
thấy	watching	6	2.13%
	observing	8	2.84%
Total		282	6.39%
see	quan sát	12	1.53%
Total		785	1.53%

5.4. Due to Cognitive Spaces Switching

These are the metaphors formed owing to cognitive spaces switching. They are the switching from the reality space to the assuming space (Ex: nhìn is judging, nhìn is accepting, etc.), from the assuming space to the cognition space (Ex: thấy is thinking, thấy is understanding, etc.), from the reality space to the experience space (Ex: thấy is knowing, thấy is realizing, etc.), and more.

5.5. Due to Cognitive Results Conversion

These are the metaphors formed owing to the conversion of the cognitive results of other verbs into the perception verbs. For example, we have the metaphors such as *thấy* is finding, *thấy* is realizing, *thấy* is perceiving, etc.

5.6. Due to Perception Organs Conversion

These are the metaphors formed owing to the conversion of the perception organs. In Vietnamese, the verb *thấy* of the visual perception and the verb *nghe* of the hearing perception can be used to convey the cognitive results of all the senses, not just the visual and the hearing only.

6. Conclusion

The survey results have shown us that the cognitive meanings of the perception verbs are extremely diverse, various, and special. Among them, the meanings with cognitive metaphors account for a big proportion.

The polysemy, sophistication, and subtlety of the perception verbs have enriched the language. However, they meanwhile, cause a huge obstacle to language learners and language workers. Therefore, it is necessary to pay utmost attention to the identification of the exact meanings in each certain linguistic unit when teaching or handling with languages.

Further studies of these verbs as well as their contrastive research within multi-languages are also very essential work.

Finally, this research has made a very important sense not only in linguistic study but also in language teaching, learning, in translating and interpreting, and many other activities in relation with languages.

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