

The Provision of European Languages in Anglophone Contexts: Aotearoa/New Zealand in Focus

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Abstract: The provision of European languages within the New Zealand education system is discussed here in the context of the origins and evolution of language education in the country and the various problems that have been associated with it. These problems include the fact that any discussion of languages inevitably raises issues concerning the endangered status of Māori, the indigenous language of the country, issues which have the potential to highlight deep divisions within society. Hence, there is an unwillingness on the part of successive governments to engage seriously in debate about language needs and aspirations. Only a very small percentage of students at any level of the education system study languages other than English and Māori. Although European languages are studied by over half of those who do study languages, there is very little choice in terms of the European languages on offer. Furthermore, public opinion favours the teaching and learning of Asian and Pacific languages. In fact, two of the languages on offer that originated in Europe, French and Spanish, may have retained their position, in part, because they are, for many New Zealanders, at least as strongly associated with the Pacific and Pacific Rim countries where they are spoken as they are with their countries of origin.

Keywords: European languages; language study; language policy and planning; New Zealand education

Setting the Context

The provision of European languages, that is, languages originating in Europe, in Aotearoa/ New Zealand is a fragile and potentially at-risk activity. This is not a recent phenomenon and the fragility is not limited to European languages. The teaching and learning of all additional languages in Aotearoa/New Zealand has always been, and continues to be, an extremely complex issue. In part, this complexity is a product of the country's relatively isolated geographical position, but the origins of an ambivalent national attitude towards the provision of language education can also be traced back to the country's colonial past. In the late 1890s, when the education system in Aotearoa/New Zealand was formalised and made compulsory for all, a succession of educational policy decisions and education acts (see, for example, the Native Schools Act 1867 (Calman, 2012)) led to the imposition of English as the sole language of educational instruction. The dominance of English in the education sector was to bring the language of the indigenous Polynesian population (Māori) to near extinction with severe punishments meted out to students who spoke their language at school, even during recreation periods. In spite of determined efforts by Māori to revitalise the Māori language, particularly over the past four decades, it remains on the list of the world's endangered languages (<http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/>). The fact that there is widespread indifference to this in the country as a whole has meant that successive governments have been able to avoid any serious commitment to Māori language

revitalisation and, of course, the financial implications of such commitment. As a result, one of the country's official languages is now at a point where it risks being lost within a few generations.

The overall situation in relation to language education in New Zealand is captured by Robert Kaplan in the following observation:

[Language] education is not adequately provided for in New Zealand, . . . the language situation is essentially not well understood, . . . an element of chaos exists in the various sectors that deal with language and . . . language rights - indeed, the very existence of some languages - are threatened by the failure to deal systematically with language matters. These concerns have, to some degree, been offset by a residual racism in society, by the mistaken belief that English is the only language necessary for New Zealand's development, and by the disturbing absence of real data regarding the language situation (Kaplan 1992, reported in Kaplan, 1993: 3).

The provision of European Languages in the New Zealand education system: First steps

The current position of European languages in New Zealand's education offerings cannot be appreciated without first understanding its overall development and placing this alongside the development of languages other than those which connect New Zealand to Europe.

When education was first made compulsory in New Zealand in the late 1890s, the curriculum, including modern languages, was a replica of the one on offer in Great Britain at that time. Students at secondary school studied Latin and Greek as a standard part of their education alongside English, science, mathematics and, even though their schools were twenty thousand kilometres away, British and European history. The importance accorded to Latin and Greek was apparent when each of the four New Zealand universities that were founded between 1869 and 1890 prioritised the establishment of a professorial chair in the classics. For a long period of time, enrolments in language papers at university level flourished because Latin (from the beginning) or Greek (from 1903) were compulsory subjects for the Bachelor of Arts degree. From 1917, this requirement for Arts students was lifted but law students were still required to study first year Latin until 1952 (Pollock, 2014).

The abolition in 1917 of the compulsory study of Latin and Greek at tertiary level for Arts students was replaced by a requirement that they should have a 'reading knowledge' of a modern foreign language. This, combined with a growing perception that modern languages were more relevant to day-to-day life than classical ones, led to the emergence of modern languages in schools, with French rapidly becoming the most commonly taught language at both school and university level and with specialist appointments in French being made at the four universities. While German had also begun to be offered, it was generally taught by non-specialist academics at universities.

In fact, it was not until 1947, after the end of World War II, that the first full time appointment in German at a New Zealand university was made (Pollock, 2014). In addition, other European languages, namely Russian, Spanish and Italian, began to be offered at university level and in a very limited number of secondary schools. There were, however, within a very short space of time, three events that would have a negative impact on this relatively positive situation so far as European languages were concerned. The first was the signalling by the UK in the early 1960s of an interest in joining the European Union (EU), it actually doing so in 1973 and, in 1987, it becoming a signatory to The Single European Act, which was designed to create an internal market allowing for free movement of goods throughout Europe. The second was the removal, in the 1970s, of the requirement that students studying for a Bachelor of Arts degree in New Zealand universities should have a reading knowledge of a modern language. The third was the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior in 1985 (see below).

In New Zealand, which had for so long been a key exporter to the UK, debate in the UK about whether to join the European Union and its subsequently doing so was a major concern, one that prompted many New Zealand businesses to seek to diversify their markets, particularly after the creation of a single European market in 1987, and one that also motivated the New Zealand Government to forge closer socio-political relations with New Zealand's Pacific Rim neighbours. As a result of this national shift in economic and political focus, universities and, following their initiative, a small number of secondary schools began to diversify their language offerings, introducing Asian languages, beginning with Japanese, Chinese and Indonesian in the second half of the 1960s (Pollock, 2014). In the late 1980s, a range of Pacific languages were also introduced. A number of other languages, such as Arabic, Croatian, Hebrew and Polish, were also offered for short periods of time in isolated locations but were subsequently withdrawn. European languages were under increasing pressure as the range of languages on offer expanded, with Japanese rivalling for a time French as the most widely studied language. At the same time, the overall number of students studying languages was decreasing.

The second event referred to above, the decision not to require BA students to be able to demonstrate a reading knowledge of a foreign language, led to a dramatic decrease in the number of students studying languages in universities and, due to the wash-back effect, also in schools. Languages departments were forced to enter into a highly competitive market-driven quest for enrolments.

The third significant event referred to above to have an impact took place on July 10th 1985. Under instruction from the French government, undercover intelligence agents bombed a Greenpeace vessel in Auckland harbour. The Rainbow Warrior was on its way to protest against French nuclear tests in Mururoa, French Polynesia. Fernando Pereira, a Portuguese photographer was killed and the event marked the beginning of a period of anti-French and, by association, anti-European sentiment in New Zealand. The drive for Pacific-rim alliances was intensified and many students made the conscious decision *not* to study European languages and, in particular, the French language.

The history of language policy development in New Zealand: A lost opportunity?

According to a 2013 report of the Royal Society of New Zealand (Behrens, 2013), the country is now "home to 160 languages". Certainly, New Zealand, like Australia, is now a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society. However, whereas Australia has gone beyond its original National Policy on Languages (Lo Bianco, 1987) to a revised Languages and Literacy Policy (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1991) and continues to be proactively engaged with language policy and planning issues, New Zealand has not yet succeeded in putting in place any sort of national languages policy. This makes it extremely difficult to engage in rational language planning of any type.

Throughout New Zealand's history, there have been various attempts to bring the teaching and learning of additional languages into focus, and to regulate their place in the educational offerings of the country. In reality, however, there are relatively few documents that refer specifically to the teaching and learning of international languages in the New Zealand context. Those that do report very similar findings, reach very similar conclusions and make very similar recommendations - all which have largely been largely ignored. This may be, in part, because the recommendations made, even those contained in official reports, are rarely accompanied by detailed supporting information and/or by an analysis of costs and benefits. Some key reports concerned with the teaching and learning of languages in New Zealand are the Thomas Report (Department of Education 1942/ 1959), the Marshall Report (Department of Education, 1978) and a report entitled *Second Languages in New Zealand Education* (Bancroft, 1980). Each of these has a great deal to say about the value of learning modern languages, but very little to say about how New Zealand could, or should, optimize language learning opportunities. The primary advantages of learning languages other than English are seen as being related to first language awareness, intellectual development and cultural awareness and, finally, to reducing isolation and coping and competing in the international arena.

There have been a number of research-based projects which have compared the languages situation in New Zealand with that of comparable regions in Australia (see, for example Peddie, 1994) and/or have discussed the importance of international languages in relation to business activity and the national economy in New Zealand (see for example Dunmore & Rollason, (1967), Enderwick & Gray, (1992); Enderwick & Akoorie, (1993), Watts & Trlin (1994). These, too, have been largely overlooked.

In 1991, after a significant amount of lobbying from language organisations and individuals interested in language issues, the New Zealand Ministry of Education commissioned a report on the language situation in the country and the factors that would need to be taken into account in the establishment of a national language policy. That report, *Aotearoa: speaking for ourselves*, was produced in 1992 (Waite, 1992a & b) and, in common with earlier reports, makes reference to the intellectual and cultural advantages associated with language learning. Thus, international languages are said to

offer New Zealanders the opportunity to “broaden our intellectual horizons” (Waite, 1992b, p. 6) and to “extend our understanding of others” and “improve our general language skills” (1993b, p. 62). The emphasis, however, is now less on the intrinsic value of language learning and more on its economic value:

New Zealand needs people who can communicate effectively in a range of international languages, and move comfortably in a range of international cultures, in order to improve its diplomatic and economic relations with the world (Waite, 1992a: 6).

In the project overview, Waite lists the following as priorities:

- revitalisation of the Māori language;
- second-chance adult literacy;
- children’s ESL and first language maintenance;
- adult ESL;
- national capabilities in international languages;
- provision of services in languages other than English.

In relation to the penultimate item, he makes the following observations:

In the areas of international relations, security, trade and in-bound tourism, New Zealand requires people with language skills in specific international languages, namely the languages of the countries with whom we deal. Some are needed in the public sector, in the Ministry of External Relations and Trade and in the Trade Development Board, but most are required in the private sector. Our international language requirements will change over time, most notably in line with our trading patterns; any forward planning in the area of language capabilities must therefore attempt to anticipate these changing trends.

When combined with business and technical skills, a knowledge of the appropriate international language can add a much-needed competitive edge to a company’s performance. Any programme designed to promote international language skills must include a package aimed at pointing out to exporting companies the benefits of employing multi-skilled bilingual people (Waite, 1992a: 21).

Waite’s report was met with a great deal of enthusiasm by various groups of language professionals and was followed by debates about the issues involved throughout many sectors of New Zealand society. Although the report itself does not attempt to estimate implementation costs or to examine the probable political impact of some of its recommendations, it became evident even before it was released that certain of its recommendations, such as, for example, prioritizing Māori language revitalisation, would be resisted strenuously in some quarters and that that resistance had the potential to be dangerously socially divisive. It also became clear that the report would need to be supplemented by a more detailed study that attempted to quantify language needs (social and economic) more precisely and to set specific targets in relation to

costs and benefits. This, in turn, would require the involvement of a number of government agencies. National language policy and planning must, inevitably, impact not only on education, but also on health, immigration, justice, business and many other key areas of society. For this reason, Kaplan recommended that planning should be “separated as soon as possible from the Ministry of Education” so that others could be “empowered to move policy implementation discussions toward a genuine national policy” (Kaplan, 1992, reported in Kaplan, 1993:3). However, in spite of a number of detailed responses to the Ministry of Education’s initiative in commissioning the Waite report (ibid; but see also Crombie & Paltridge, 1993; Peddie, 1993) and significant encouragement for the policy to be fully articulated and implemented, no follow up action was taken by the New Zealand government. It seems that even the added temptation of enhanced national economic performance was not enough to sway national and Governmental opinion towards the implementation of a national languages policy.

There have been at least two attempts since the effective demise of the Waite report to engage the nation on discussion of the potential value of a national languages policy. The first was initiated in 2008 by the then Race Relations Commissioner, Joris de Bres (de Bres, 2008). The second was initiated by the Royal Society of New Zealand in 2013 (Behrens, 2013). These initiatives also failed to gain any real traction.

European languages in New Zealand: A fight for survival?

The lack of a national languages policy and the problematic context in which the teaching and learning of languages takes place in New Zealand have an impact on the ways in which individual educational institutions choose to organize the delivery of the national curriculum. As a result of recommendation 19 in the Ministry of Education Curriculum Stocktake report (Ministry of Education, 2002), a decision was taken to make it compulsory for schools to provide students in years 7 -10 (ages 8-14) with the possibility of studying a language in addition to the main language of instruction from 2007 onwards. However, they stopped short of mandating that this should be a compulsory part of the curriculum, and they did not make any recommendations about which languages should be made available. Currently the situation is that schools, particularly primary schools, have almost unlimited choice about which language or languages to offer as part of the school curriculum and the uptake of these languages is optional. This means that it is perfectly possible for a student to complete his or her schooling without ever having had the experience of learning another language. This somewhat ad hoc arrangement about the delivery and up-take of languages has a profound effect on the relationships between one sector of the educational system and another. For example, a student beginning further language study at secondary school who has already completed two years of French language study at primary school may be placed in the same class as students who have had no contact with the French language at all, or who may have done a few weeks of French in the context of a programme that provides an introduction to a number of different languages.

There are further problems. For example, a 1994 Education Review Office report notes that the number of hours of language tuition available to students sitting the first level of national examinations in French could vary widely (between 24 and 160 hours) from school to school, with a similar situation in the case of other languages.

The place of languages within the education sector and the ways in which they are delivered has an impact on the attitudes and perceptions of learners and their families and, consequently, on take-up and retention. A study by Shearn (2003) examined attitudes towards the learning of languages other than English and Māori among New Zealand school students in years 8 and 9, the parents of year 9 students, and a wide range of teachers. The findings indicate that "while attitudes to foreign language learning, of both adults and children, were mostly positive", they "nevertheless involved "a complex web of factors". The research data also show that the main reason why only around 50% of Year 9 students elect to study a foreign language, with poor retention rates in subsequent years, is that languages are optional for most secondary students. They also suggest that continuing to study a language requires strong intrinsic motivation in a context in which students believe that this will involve missing out on the opportunity to try other subjects (ibid: i). Shearn also found that the majority of students who opted for, and continued with languages were girls, with boys tending to prefer practical subjects. In fact, in the case of one secondary school, she found that "the minority of boys who were permitted to start a foreign language were discouraged from continuing by the general organisation and ethos of the school" (ibid).

Overall, Shearn (2003) concludes that:

External factors often outweighed even the most positive attitudes among students, parents and teachers when option subjects were chosen. The low level of language learning in New Zealand, contrasted with the importance it has in comparable countries, was shown to result not so much from negative attitudes but rather from barriers within the education system as a whole and individual school cultures (Shearn, 2003: i).

In the early 1990s, the Education Review Office (1994) conducted interviews with students who were continuing with the study of a second language to senior levels, concluding that those who were studying a European language were likely to have parents with a university education, most often in the arts and humanities while all of those studying Japanese at senior levels who were interviewed had parents with tertiary education qualifications in areas other than arts and humanities or had parents who were in professional or managerial positions in the public or private sector. This suggests that there is an intergenerational dimension to language study and that the educational preferences and career choices of parents/caregivers can have a profound impact on a) whether children study languages and b) on the choice of language/s studied, with European languages appearing to have greater appeal for those with a particular interest in the arts rather than in commerce.

The findings of a recent survey conducted for the Asia New Zealand Foundation (2014) indicate that attitudes towards language learning are changing, with eight out of ten

New Zealanders believing that school children should learn a language other than English. The overall results of that part of the survey which reports on which languages were deemed important to learn are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Rank order of language learning preferences and number of secondary school language enrolments in New Zealand (Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2014: 37)

Language	% of respondents who say students should learn this language	Numbers enrolled in this language at secondary school
Māori	37%	22,729
French	18%	20,478
Japanese	19%	11,888
Spanish	18%	11,573
Chinese	49%	4,218
German	8%	4,185

The organisation responsible for conducting the report referred to above on behalf of the Asia New Zealand Foundation (Colmar Brunton) makes some important points about the data. In particular they note that:

[There is a] considerable gap between the survey results and the languages most commonly taught in New Zealand secondary schools. The latest statistics published by the Ministry of Education show that French is still the most commonly taught foreign language in New Zealand secondary schools, with 22,478 students enrolled. Although the number of secondary students learning Chinese has increased by close to 150 percent in the past two years, Chinese is still the fourth most common language taught, with just 4,218 enrolments (nearly five times as many secondary students learn French) (Asia New Zealand Foundation 2014: 34)

While French and Spanish are doing relatively well in comparative terms in relation to current enrolment numbers, it needs to be borne in mind that these languages are not necessarily primarily associated with Europe by New Zealand school pupils, many of whom are more likely to be familiar with variants spoken by their Pacific (New Caledonia and French Polynesia) and Pacific Rim (Latin America) neighbours, with whom they could play a vital role in establishing closer economic links.

The apparent enthusiasm and support for languages indicated in the Asia-New Zealand Foundation report referred to above does not appear to have translated into action. A subtle downward trend in overall enrolments in languages continues. In an article published in the largest daily newspaper in New Zealand, The New Zealand Herald, Tan (2015, April 26th) reports that:

[The] percentage of students learning a second language in New Zealand secondary schools has dropped to its lowest in over 80 years. . . . Since 2008, the number of learners dropped from one in four to one in five at secondary schools.

Based on Ministry of Education statistics, Tan (2015, April 26th) reports that "there were 14,054 fewer students learning additional languages last year (2014) compared with seven years ago, when the number was 71,730".

Recent trends in language study

A statistical overview of the take-up of European languages at various levels in the New Zealand education system between 2007 and 2014, derived from Ministry of Education statistics (available at <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/home>) provides an interesting snapshot. In the following tables, 'all languages' excludes English and Māori.

Table 2 below records the number of students studying a European language in years 1 to 8 (ages 5-12) from 2007-2014. Table 3 records the percentage of students studying a European language in comparison to overall number of students studying a language.

Table 2: Number of students studying a European language in years 1- 8 from 2007-2014

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
French	28,256	31,070	25,979	32,435	29,247	31,554	30,594	26,350
Spanish	21,893	23,627	23,778	27,533	23,325	24,319	24,906	24,548
German	11,106	11,503	8,830	11,525	10,659	10,283	9,458	8,089
Russian	114	122	174	55	17	65	180	173
TOTAL	51,369	66,322	58,752	60,929	63,250	66,161	64,958	59,160

Table 3: Total number of students studying a European language compared to the total number of students studying all languages in years 1 to 8 from 2007 – 2014

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total all languages	95,161	99,760	88,628	107,077	102,900	108,356	117,174	120,187
Total studying European languages	51,369	66,322	58,752	60,929	63,250	66,161	64,958	59,160
% studying European languages	54%	66%	66%	57%	63%	61%	55%	49%

Tables 2 and 3 above indicate that, with the exception of Spanish (where there was evidence of modest growth) the number of students studying a European language in Years 1 to 8 of schooling remained relatively stable between 2008 and 2014, but the overall percentage of students studying a European language shows a slight downward trend, particularly since 2012.

The total number of secondary school students studying a European language for the same eight-year period is indicated in Table 4 below. The percentage of secondary school students studying a European language as compared with the percentage of all students studying a language is indicated in Table 5.

Table 4: Total number of secondary school students studying a European language from 2007 – 2014

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
French	27,284	28,245	27,197	23,856	23,234	22,397	21,570	20,478
Spanish	9,529	10,900	11,161	10,970	11,301	11,372	11,680	11,573
German	6,623	6,251	6,085	5,554	5,200	4,663	4,477	4,180
Russian	29	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
TOTAL	43,465	45,396	44,443	40,380	39,269	38,432	37,729	36,231

Table 5: Percentage of secondary school students studying a European language compared to the total number of students studying all languages at secondary school level

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
TOTAL All languages	363,963	373,979	368,616	356,349	358,434	344,025	342,603	340,181
TOTAL European language	43,465	45,396	44,443	40,380	39,269	38,432	37,729	36,231
% studying European languages	12%	12%	12%	11%	11%	11%	11%	11%

Tables 4 and 5 above indicate that, with the exception of Spanish (where there was an increase of 12%), the number of students studying European languages show an overall decline between 2007 and 2014 and that, at the same time, the percentage of students studying a European language also showed evidence of an overall decline.

So far as the tertiary education sector is concerned, the most recent enrolment data relating to European languages and total tertiary-level enrolments that are available are provided in Tables 6 - 8 below (from Tertiary Sector Language Learning 2003-2010).

Table 6: Total number of students studying European languages in New Zealand tertiary institutions 2003 -2010

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
French	870	906	893	866	851	809	970	965
Spanish	1,163	1,159	1,143	1,183	1,192	1,078	1,023	1,106
German	474	472	424	414	420	412	431	444
Italian	233	232	241	218	219	225	225	212
Russian	44	56	44	35	44	40	42	49
TOTAL	2,784	2,825	2,745	2,716	2,726	2,564	2,691	2,776

Table 7: Percentage of tertiary students studying a European language compared to the total number of students studying all languages at tertiary level 2003-2010

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
TOTAL All languages	4,929	5,017	5,097	4,810	4,693	4,339	4,283	4,436
TOTAL European languages	2,784	2,825	2,745	2,716	2,726	2,564	2,691	2,776
% studying European Languages	56%	56%	54%	56%	58%	59%	63%	63%

Table 8: Number of students studying European language as a percentage of the total cohort of tertiary level students in New Zealand, 2005 - 2010

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
TOTAL All enrolments	504,000	491,000	579,000	502,000	469,000	466,000
TOTAL European language	2,745	2,716	2,726	2,564	2,691	2,776
% studying European Languages	0.54%	0.55%	0.47%	0.51%	0.57%	0.6%

Overall, the total number of students studying a European language at tertiary level in New Zealand remained relatively stable between 2007 and 2010 while the percentage of students studying European languages as compared to non-European ones rose slightly, as did the percentage of the tertiary education cohort as a whole who were learning a European language. In particular, it is relevant to note that, throughout the eight year period covered, over half the students studying an additional language at tertiary level were studying a European language. However, there are four things that need to be borne in mind in considering this data:

- the actual number and overall percentage of students studying European languages was very small (never more than 0.6% of the total cohort of tertiary level students);
- the number of European languages offered was very small;
- two of the European languages offered are widely spoken in Pacific (French) and Pacific Rim countries (Spanish), countries with which contemporary New Zealand identifies closely;
- the data available are very limited with, for example, no indication being provided about how many students who began their study of European languages ab initio at tertiary level, how many were majoring in European languages and how many graduated during the period in question with a qualification that included one or more European languages.

A review of European language and language-related offerings in New Zealand University Calendars reveals a further important issue. It appears that these offerings are heavily weighted in favour of culture and literature rather than language acquisition, suggesting that the primary focus of European language programmes at tertiary level is

not on training students to become expert users of the target language but on familiarizing them with aspects of the literatures and cultures of the countries where the target language is spoken. The assumption that appears to underpin this is that languages students will somehow reach a level of proficiency adequate to manage complex texts on a variety of subjects even though they may have had a very limited number of hours of exposure to their target languages at school, or none at all, and even though they may have had very few hours of class contact at tertiary level devoted largely to language proficiency development.

Conclusion

There are many highly qualified language teachers and highly professional language associations doing very impressive work in the arena of language education in New Zealand. They are, however, doing so in the face of very considerable odds. The lack of a New Zealand national languages policy, combined with the 'chaos' in the area of languages provision referred to by Kaplan (Kaplan 1992, reported in Kaplan, 1993: 3) means that the environment in which languages are taught and learned is an uneasy one. So far as European languages are concerned, the situation is of considerable concern. Although over half of all language learners in the New Zealand Education system have continued to learn one of the few languages of European origin offered within the education system, the total number of such learners is small as a percentage of tertiary students as a whole. Furthermore, public opinion clearly favours the learning of languages more closely associated with Asian, Pacific and Pacific Rim countries. Unless there is some movement in the very near future towards requiring all young people in New Zealand to become involved in modern language learning, what is now a fragile situation is likely to become a critical one. Once the skills base is lost, it will be very difficult to recover.

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