

Izon verbal extensions

[DRAFT CIRCULATED FOR COMMENT]

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION: VERBAL EXTENSIONS IN AFRICA	1
2. BACKGROUND TO IZỌN.....	1
3. IZON VERBAL EXTENSIONS	2
3.1 Causative.....	3
3.2 Directional	3
3.3 Extended directional -mẹ́n.....	4
3.4 Mediopassive -í/í(n)	6
3.5 Reciprocal	7
3.6 A combined extension	8
4. DISCUSSION	9
REFERENCES.....	9

TABLES

Table 1. Distribution of African languages allowing stacked verbal extensions	1
Table 2. Simple and extended verb stems in Izọn	2
Table 3. Izon verbal suffixes	3
Table 4. Causative extensions in Izon	3
Table 5. Extended causative verbs where the simplex form is lost.....	3
Table 6. Examples of directional extensions in Izon.....	4
Table 7. Extended directional verbs where the simplex form is lost	4
Table 8. Directional and extended directional verbs.....	4
Table 9. Extended directional verbs with no simplex or opaque relationships	5
Table 10. Examples of the mediopassive extension in Izọn.....	6
Table 11. Extended mediopassive verbs where the simplex form is lost	6
Table 12. Simplex and extended verbs with nasalisation.....	7
Table 13. Verbs with -í/í-n and no simplex form.....	7
Table 14. Reciprocal extension on verbs with one syllable	8
Table 15. Reciprocal extension on verbs with two or more syllables	8
Table 16. Verbs with reciprocal extension and no simplex form.....	8
Table 17. A case of serial extensions	8

ABBREVIATIONS

1. Introduction: verbal extensions in Africa

Systems of verbal extension are widely reported in the world, and are scattered throughout Africa, where they compete with strategies such as serial verbs and auxiliaries plus verbal collocations. Within Africa they can be subdivided into two major sub-classes, systems which permit stacked or strings of verbal extensions and those where a variety of individual extensions may be affixed to the verb root, but which do not permit stacking. Needless to say, transitional systems exist but they are quite rare. Kru languages, for example, have functional verbal extensions throughout the family, but nowhere permit stacking. Table 1 shows a highly tentative distribution of African languages allowing stacked verbal extensions; information on Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan may well be inaccurate.

Table 1. Distribution of African languages allowing stacked verbal extensions

Phylum	Branch	Sub-branch	Sample languages
Niger-Congo	Atlantic	North	Fulfulde
	Heiban-Talodi	West	Moro
	Kalak-Domurik		Kalak
	Tegem-Amira		Tegem
	Adamawa	Tula-Waja	KiTule
	West Benue-Congo	Edoid	Degema
	West Kainji	Kambari-Kamuku	Cicipu, Rege
	Bantu		
Afroasiatic	Cushitic	Central	Oromo
	Semitic	Ethio-Semitic	Amharic
	Chadic	Central	Bura, Muyang
Nilo-Saharan	Kadu		Krongo
	East Sudanic	Nilotic	?

Apart from functional systems, there are clear traces of fossilised or unproductive extensions elsewhere in Niger-Congo, such as in the Plateau languages of Nigeria. These almost certainly form the link that joins the West Kainji languages to Bantu.

The Ijoid languages constitute an interesting transitional case. The verb can have suffixed verbal extensions, but these are constructed out of extremely limited segmental material. Although there is an example of what seems to be a composite extension, Ijoid does not generally allow stacked extensions. Although the existence and function of extensions can be deduced from the lexicon, there is little evidence that these exist in the minds of speakers as productive morphemes. The analysis of verbal extensions in Ijō is virtually absent from the anyway rather sparse grammatical literature on this branch of Niger-Congo. Williamson (1965: 54) describes a causative but does not treat this as part of a system of extensions and her section on ‘passive and intransitive’ does not deal with valency-changing extensions. Jenewari (1977) similarly does not refer to a system of verbal extensions, although similar morphemes are clearly present in the Kalabari lexicon. A glance at the Nembe dictionary (Kaliai 1964) again shows the presence of cognate forms. Even Defeka, the most remote relative of Ijō, appears to have *-ma* extensions cognate with Kalabari (Jenewari 1983), although these are conceivably borrowed from Nkōrō. This suggests that the topic has been under-analysed in the previous literature and that a fresh look at the verbal systems of Ijō is warranted. This paper¹ describes the evidence for verbal extensions in Kolokuma, a major lect of Izon, or Western Ijō.

2. Background to Izon

Ijō, often anglicized as Ijaw, refers to a language cluster spoken in the Niger Delta of Nigeria and its associated waterways by people who recognize a common linguistic and ethnic heritage. Ijō lects are spoken from the town of Nkōrō, in the extreme east of Rivers State, westwards to the towns of the Arogbo clan in

¹ The genesis of this paper is as follows; I discussed the idea of analysing verbal extensions with Kay during 2004, and she then began to collect a file of examples based on the developing Izon dictionary. I have now written a paper around the examples, as well as trawling the dictionary for other comparative material. All the text argumentation is by the first author and I am unable to say whether Kay would have agreed with my analysis. In the light of a complete absence of discussion of verbal extensions in Izon, it seemed worthwhile to bring this paper to publication.

Ondo State, and from the Atlantic coast in the south to Elemebiri on the Niger and to within a short distance of Benin City in the north.

Ijoid languages are Niger-Congo but their actual position is disputed; recent classifications have tended to treat them as early splits. They have no traces of a noun-class system, and SOV word order, like Mande and Dogon. Previous literature has not highlighted a verbal extension system, and although it is clear that such a system exists, its segmental morphology and behaviour is rather different from the more familiar systems of Bantu. The Izon people constitute one branch of Ijoid, usually called ‘West Ijoid’ and they form a closely related chain of languages, the most widely spoken of which is Kolokuma Ijo. Williamson (1965) is a grammar of Kolokuma, and a variety of publications analyse various aspects of the language (Williamson 1978, 1979a,b, 1991) including also a locally-published dictionary (Williamson & Timitimi 1983). The examples in this paper are drawn from an expanded version of that dictionary, which is still being prepared for publication.

The tone-marking convention used in this paper is common in academic publications on Ijoid. Tone is only marked when there is a change of height. Unmarked is low, but all tones after a high remain high unless or until a low tone is marked.

All Ijo verbs can be divided into three tone-classes, as follows;

Class 1	<u>L</u> H
Class 2	H
Class 3	H(L)

When numbers are given to verbs in the course of the paper, these tonal patterns hold.

Izon languages have nine or ten vowels divided into two ATR harmony sets and harmony is usually strictly maintained at the level of the word. However, recent loanwords, compounds and some suffixed elements can violate harmony. The Open or +ATR set is marked with a subdot under the vowel and the orthography typically marks only the first vowel of a word. Nasalisation is symbolised by –n following a vowel or sequence of vowels and does not apply at word level.

3. Izon verbal extensions

Verbs in Izon, as in other Niger-Congo languages, can take suffixes which extend their meaning and may modify the syntax of a sentence. Table 2 shows the example of a simplex verb *finí*;

Table 2. Simple and extended verb stems in Izon

	Izon	PoS	Gloss	Example
a.	finí	<i>v.t.</i>	open; unlock	
b.	finíí	<i>v.i.</i>	be opened, unlocked	Wáribòò finíí dọ The door has opened
c.	finimọ́	<i>v.cs.</i>	separate; spread out	Bìdẹmọ́ fìnimọ́ Spread out the clothes
d.	finimọ́	<i>v.dir.</i>	open for	Wáribòòbì nì u finimọ́ Open the door to him

In Table 2;

- (a) is the simple transitive verb (v.t.) ‘open’
- (b) is an intransitive verb (v.i.), with the suffix **-íí(n)**, which changes the valency of the transitive verb
- (c) is a transitive causative verb (v.cs.) in which the addition of the suffix **-mọ́** changes the meaning to ‘cause to open out’, i.e. ‘spread out’.
- (d) is a transitive directional verb (v.dir.) in which the addition of the suffix **-mọ́** changes the meaning to ‘open to(wards)’.

The three suffixes **-íí(n)**, **-mọ́**, and **-mọ́** are the only verb extensions so far identified in Izon. The rules governing the application of nasalisation to **-íí** are unclear and this may be the unproductive relic of another

former extension. Numerous verbs exist only in extended forms with no evidence for the form or meaning of the simplex root, although this can often be guessed. Table 3 shows the verbal suffixes recorded for Izoŋ;

Table 3. Izoŋ verbal suffixes

Extension	Semantics	Comment
-mọ	Causative	
-mọ	Directional	
-í/í(n) or -yaí	Mediopassive, reciprocal and intensifier	-yaí suffixed to a root with only one consonant, -í/í to a root with two or more consonants
-mẹ́n	Extended directional, collectivity	
-ìṃọ	Seriation	Single case

The segmental material is strikingly sparse and it seems quite possible that there has been historical merger at some time early in the diversification of Ijọ.

3.1 Causative

The most common verb extension is **-mọ** (corresponding to **-ma** in East Ijọ) which resembles a causative. It transforms the meaning into ‘make, cause (someone/something) to do/become X’. The tone is underspecified, and it copies the stem tone of the verb, as shown in Table 4;

Table 4. Causative extensions in Izoŋ

Class	Tone	Izoŋ	Gloss	+Suffix	Gloss
1	<u>L</u> H	bíín	be many, plentiful	binmọ́	make many, plentiful
2	H	bọ́u	drink; dry up; absorb	bọ́umọ	make drink
3	H(L)	búnụ	sleep	búnụmọ	make sleep

With some verbs, the verb **míẹ** ‘do, make’ is used instead of or in addition to the causative suffix (Williamson 1965: 54).

In a few cases, the original simplex verb has been lost, and the causative form persists (Table 5). The causative meaning can be retained, or it can be lost and the verb now has a plain transitive meaning. Proposed original simplex forms are given in this table and henceforth in italics.

Table 5. Extended causative verbs where the simplex form is lost

Original	Gloss	Synchronic	Gloss
<i>bíri</i>	dress	bírimọ	dress someone for a special occasion
<i>gbalá</i>	fill up	gbalamọ	cover up; cause to fill up
<i>nịni</i>	be short	nịnimọ	cause to become shorter; reduce the length of
<i>ovíín</i>	clean	ovínmọ	clean (e.g. blackboard); erase; disconnect
<i>yẹni</i>	?	yẹnimọ	threaten or attempt doing something while not actually doing it
<i>yẹni</i>	?	yẹnimọ	exert more energy in pressing down; press down with extra vigour

3.2 Directional

A similar verb extension is **-mọ** (corresponding to **-má** in East Ijọ) ‘directional’. This suffix converts both transitive and intransitive verbs into directional verbs (*v.dir.*) with the meaning ‘do (something) towards someone or something’. It has an inherent high tone, which combines with verb roots as in Table 6.

Table 6. Examples of directional extensions in Izon

Class	Tone	Izon	Gloss	+Suffix	Gloss
1	<u>L</u> H	bilé	dive	bilemó	dive towards
2	H	káì	lock (up)	káìmó	lock against, either outside or inside of a door or gate
3	H(L)	fína	tie; bind	fínamó	fasten, attach (to something)

In Class 1 verbs the tone is different for causative and directional:

pítí	bend
pitimóó	cause to bend
pitimó	bend towards

but in Classes 2 and 3 it is the same.

In a few cases, the original simplex verb root has been lost, and the directional verb survives (Table 7).

Table 7. Extended directional verbs where the simplex form is lost

Original	Gloss	Synchronic	Gloss
<i>bèñì</i>	gather	bèñimó	gather together
<i>gbéle</i>	lean	gbélemó	lean against
<i>sán</i>	call	sánmó	call to someone at a distance

3.3 Extended directional -mẹ́n

An apparently complex verb extension is **-mẹ́n**, which may be a merger of **-mó** + **-í/ì(n)** [mediopassive see §3.4], where the **-í/ì** has had its usual effect of lowering the tone of the preceding stem, including the **-mó**.

However, Izon permit sequences of back and front vowels so it is unclear why the **-ó**- should have become a mid-front vowel. Table 8 shows the verbs for which a **-mẹ́n** extension is recorded and for which either a simplex or directional form also exists. The semantics are not uniform, but most extended directionals have a valency-changing function combined with both directionality and collectivity. Thus **pẹ́le**, a standard verb meaning ‘to cut’ has an extended form ‘to be cut off’ which applies to a collectivity, such as fishes in a river.

Table 8. Directional and extended directional verbs

Simplex	Gloss	Directional	Gloss	Extended directional	Gloss
<i>bèñì</i>	<i>gather</i>	bèñimó	gather together	bèñimẹ́n	be gathered or come together
dìẹ	share out; divide	dịemó	share between, among	dịemẹ́n	be spread; be scattered all over
dósù (= dòsì)	pour (out); spill	dòsùmó	pour out upon; anoint with	dòsùmẹ́n	poured out over
gbéle² (= gbólo)	touch; tamper with; affect	gbélemó	lean against	gbelemẹ́n	lean back against
kpeki[í]	get together			kpekimẹ́n	be gathered together (on water) or collected
kpoó	clear away (rubbish); gather (things)	kpoomó	gather towards, together (as of rubbish)	kpoomẹ́n	be collected, gathered into one place; be wrinkled or gathered in lines
palí	stick; paste on	palimó	be stuck to	palimẹ́n	be gummed to, attached to
pẹ́le	cut; stop	pẹ́lemó	cross (one's path); intercept; interrupt	pẹ́lemẹ́n	be stranded, cut off (as fishes from river)

Simplex	Gloss	Directional	Gloss	Extended directional	Gloss
pín	become too small for (of clothes); be overcrowded	pínmọ	push through; force one's way through	pinmẹ́n	force one's way into or out of an already filled-up place
pọọ	snatch at	pọọmọ	pull apart with a struggle	pọọmẹ́n	be released through one's own effort
tíẹ	stand	tíẹmọ	lean (s.t.) against s.t.	tíẹmẹ́n	lean against

Table 9 shows cases where either only the form with the **-mẹ́n** extension has been recorded, or else the relationship with other verb forms is opaque. However, there is evidence in some glosses for the 'collective' sense.

Table 9. Extended directional verbs with no simplex or opaque relationships

Simplex	Gloss	Directional	Gloss	Extended	Gloss
djá	show			djámẹ́n	portend something; be ominous
gbáa	say; tell	gbáamọ	accuse	ẹ́şímẹ́n	hesitate; delay action
gbéín	jump from tree to tree like monkeys	gbéínmọ	sew together	gbámẹ́n	pretend; feign
				gbeinmẹ́n	clasp; embrace
				gbelemẹ́n	be related to, connected with
				gímẹ́n	break out (of fight, uproar, etc.)
				ìngímẹ́n	produce pressure in the stomach in order to bring out faeces; bear down
				imeín	leak (a small amount, of fishpond and canoe)
				kokomẹ́n	be collected (as faeces collect in a stagnant river)
kpún	pull; haul; drag			kpunmẹ́n	wriggle along on buttocks
lẹ́		lẹ́mọ	deceive; trick	lẹ́mẹ́n	feign; pretend
níní	shorten	(=lẹ́)mọ nínímọ	cause to become shorter; reduce the length of	nínímẹ́n	shrink
páa	come or go out, away: appear; shine (of sun); break out (as war); happen			paamẹ́n	occur to; happen to; appear to
				pumẹ́n	wake up briefly and then go to sleep again
				pumẹ́n	get free; get out of trouble; recover from sickness
				sanmẹ́n	peer
súọ	enter	súọmọ	approach	súọmẹ́n	accompany; join
tíẹ	stand	tíẹmọ	make stand; stop	tíẹmẹ́n	be collected together

An intriguing aspect of some extended verbs such as **pumeĩn** is that Izon does not usually permit simplex CV verbs, so the original form of this root must be sought elsewhere.

3.4 Mediopassive -í/ĩ(n)

A highly problematic verb extension is **-í/ĩ(n)**, where the vowel quality reflects the harmony set, which carries the sense of passive, middle and sometimes reversive. A small number of these are nasalised and are discussed in the next section. In the published Kolokuma dictionary (Williamson & Timitimi 1983) this was labelled ‘self-action’, to indicate that it did not refer to an action performed on something. There is no ideal term, but mediopassive is adopted here to express this range of meaning (cf. Mous 2007 for Afroasiatic examples). There is an identical and clearly related extension with a reciprocal meaning, discussed in §3.5.

When added to any transitive or intransitive verb, it causes the root to become low, whatever its original tone pattern.

Table 10. Examples of the mediopassive extension in Izon

Class	Simplex	Gloss	Extended	Gloss
1	akaná	go round; encircle	akanaĩ	turn round; rotate
2	píge	“pin”; fix stick in ground	pigeĩ	become “pinned”, fixed
3	fĩna	tie; bind	fĩnaĩ	get entangled; get tied up

As with the other extensions, in some cases only an extended form is recorded. Table 11 shows synchronic verbs with the **-í/ĩ** extension and the hypothetical simplex verb with its probable meaning.

Table 11. Extended mediopassive verbs where the simplex form is lost

Simplex	Gloss	Synchronic	Gloss
<i>běni</i>	gather	běniĩ	gather together
<i>biri</i>	dress s.o.	biriĩ	be dressed
<i>gbógbó</i>	break s.t. down	gbógbóĩ	disintegrate (as disused house, canoe, or decaying animal)
<i>gbuni</i>	confuse, mix	gbuniĩ	get confused; get mixed up
<i>kpakpa</i>	rub, smooth s.t. hard	kpakpaĩ	wear away (of wood, etc.); go bad with getting soft (of yam)
<i>kpòkpòlò</i>	to knock down	kpòkpòlòĩ (= kpòkpòlèĩ)	(used with kòro) fall out, scatter (as sparks, coins, ripe palmnuts)
<i>li</i>	to erase, hide	liĩ	be out of sight; disappear (e.g. of scar on the skin); fade away
<i>nana</i>	?	nanaĩ	take complete possession of; occupy fully (e.g. enemy territory)
<i>suri</i>	to get rich	suriĩ	emerge from poverty to a better standard of living
<i>to</i>	to finish	toĩ	come to the end; be almost finished: Egberí bo tòíđo The story is coming to an end.
<i>zala</i>	to push over	zalaĩ	fall down
<i>zi</i>	to stretch	ziĩ	be stretched, slack (as of clothes, rope, etc.)

A small subset of these verbs has a nasalised extension as shown in Table 11. Apart from the transitivity changes, there is a sense of intensity marking; thus the meeting is held in anger, something is not only straightened but well spread out.

Table 12. Simplex and extended verbs with nasalisation

Simplex	Gloss	Extended	Gloss
biyaɪ	hold discussion, meeting	biyaɪn	meet in anger
ɛvɛn	search eagerly or thoroughly	ɛvɛvɛn	move about speedily and with all seriousness
inú	be smooth and well-mixed (of food)	inúɪn	become smooth and well-mixed; be fully harmonious (of music or speech); be fully in agreement
biyán	meet in anger	biyaɪn	meet each other in anger
sún	stretch; straighten	sún	be straight, horizontal, well spread out
yáɾɪn	shake; sift; sieve; rouse; move to action	yariɪn	be shaken; be moved

The reduplication in **ɛvɛvɛn** is without parallel elsewhere in the Izon verbal system.

Izon has a large number of verbs with final **-í/ɪ(n)** and no simplex form or other indications of etymology (Table 13). Only one of these, *áin*, is lacking a high tone on the **í** and its source may thus be different.

Table 13. Verbs with **-í/ɪ-n** and no simplex form

Izon	Gloss
áin	go in large numbers; troop out en masse, <i>e.g.</i> people
besenaɪn	turn away disdainfully
fangaɪn (=fanghaɪ)	be twisted
gɪnaɪn	resemble; be alike
kuaɪn	leave en masse
opɪɪn	remove the top part of the skin of cocoyam
osɪnsɪɪn	be bruised
oviɪn	go out (of lamp or fire); “quench”
pɛmɛɾɛɪn	move restlessly, itching to go into action
pɔsɪɪn	press an object flat with the hands and feet
tamanaɪn	guess
tanaɪn	spread; creep (<i>e.g.</i> of plants)
ukɔɾɛɪn	squat
yɛmɔɪn	be sunk
yɛɾɪɪn	be in readiness; be imminent; be on the alert

At least some of these verbs also have this sense of increasing intensity. About half of these have a mediopassive interpretation, suggesting that the ‘lost’, non-extended form was active and vice-versa. It therefore seems credible that there was an additional extension, originally combined with **-í/ɪ** which marked increase in intensity through nasalisation.

3.5 Reciprocal

The least common extension is the reciprocal, which has two allomorphs, **-yaɪ** or **-í/ɪ**. The first variant is suffixed to a root with only one consonant, the second to a root with two or more. The second variant is identical in form to the mediopassive, but with a specific extension in meaning. Table 14 shows the reciprocal extension on verbs with one syllable;

Table 14. Reciprocal extension on verbs with one syllable

Simplex	Gloss	Reciprocal	Gloss
bóq (=búq)	miss; make mistake over s.t.	bóqyaí	miss each other
bóq (=búq)	match; be equated	bóqyaí	be equal, equivalent to, equated in value:
dáa	challenge one's authority; oppose	daayaí	be opposed to; be at loggerheads (with):
naá	hear; understand	nayaí	commune; take a decision together; talk together; discuss intimately
púu	A. split; B. separate; breach; make a gap, <i>e.g.</i> through a dam; C. peel (plantain); D. incise; operate on; pierce	puiyaí	compete; challenge one another

Table 15 shows the reciprocal extension on verbs with two or more syllables;

Table 15. Reciprocal extension on verbs with two or more syllables

Simplex	Gloss	Reciprocal	Gloss
kóbiri	mix (bags of “farina” or gari with different contents)	kobirií	be mixed; be in close contact with (<i>e.g.</i> people)
<i>gbolo</i>	<i>meet</i>	gbeleí (<i>arch.</i> gboloí)	meet (each other)
gbólú	box	gbólíí	box one another
kpótu	chase; drive away	kpotií	chase each other
labá	coil; embrace; wrap	labaí	be coiled; embrace each other
naná	have; own; possess; marry	nanaí	be closely-knit (in marriage or friendship)

Some verbs with this extension cannot be related to any simple verb root (Table 16);

Table 16. Verbs with reciprocal extension and no simplex form

Root	Reciprocal
duguyaí (=dúkuyaí)	clash; meet; be in opposition; butt against (<i>e.g.</i> rams, fowls)
fíyaí	agree with; be on good terms with
galabaí	be in disagreement (as husband and wife)
gbeleí (<i>arch.</i> gboloí)	meet (each other)
ikiá (=ikié)	befriend; make friends with
koriyaí	get on well with
kónlẹ́	(of lovers or spouses) play; embrace
oboyaí	shout ceremonially during the uzií ceremony for a deceased hero, or during a storm
zuinií	meet unexpectedly; mix; intermingle

3.6 A combined extension

There is a single case of a sequence of extensions, **-í/í** plus **-mó** ‘directional’ (Table 17);

Table 17. A case of serial extensions

Extensions	Izon	Gloss
Simplex	kía	filter; strain
Mediopassive	kíyaí (=kíai)	ooze out; be dried by water oozing out (<i>e.g.</i> of wet cloth)
Causative	kíamó <i>v.cs.</i>	strain; filter
Directional	kíamó	sift into
Combined	kíajmó	be drained, filtered into

4. Discussion

Iẓon has evidence for a small number of verbal extensions, whose meaning is sometimes hard to determine, suggesting that there have been mergers at some time in the past. Moreover, the system appears to be frozen, i.e. many forms with apparent extensions no longer have simplex equivalents, and speakers are not free to create new forms by adding extensions. Moreover, many extended forms have highly idiosyncratic meanings, which points to the loss of a productive system. There is a single case of a verb with two stacked extensions, suggesting this has never been a general strategy in Iẓon. However, the *-mein* extension could be the morphologisation of *-mó + -i/(n)* although this is not entirely phonologically consistent.

Strikingly, the segmental material does not appear to relate to other branches of Niger-Congo (e.g. Gerhardt 1971; Nurse 2008). Valency-changing suffixes, causatives and directionals are common in Bantu and other Benue-Congo branches, but the forms in Iẓon appear to be unique. There is no trace of the number marking on verbs found elsewhere in Niger-Congo (e.g. Aron 1996/7; Blench 2003; McKinney 1979). This suggests the possibility that the Ijò systems are innovative, formed by analogy with contact languages, but not through direct borrowing.

Related morphemes occur across a wide range of Ijoid languages, according to rapid inspection of lexical sources and this suggests that the reduction in segmental material happened early in the period of diversification. The next step will be to analyse other Ijoid languages for a sense of the comparative perspective.

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