

## Chapter 5

# Language Socialisation in Multidialectal Households: A Case Study

Using a case study that focuses on home language socialization practices, this chapter investigates the third subset of research questions: What are the students' usual language practices at home? How are they socialised to make such language choices? How do they justify their choices? We examine how parents in a migrant family deal with the sociolinguistic challenges for their child in such a multidialectal city as Guangzhou, and how family language policy may influence the child's language use and attitudes.

It is generally agreed that attitudes are learned. They may be learned through observational learning and instrumental learning (Garrett 2010). In the first process, we notice others' attitudes and the related consequences; in the second, we consider the negative or positive consequences of certain attitudes. Such learning happens through language socialisation (Duff 2010), in which children and other novices acquire the norms, knowledge, and communicative competence in order to react to the their social world in a consistent and characteristic way and thus become competent members of their communities.

In bilingual families, the parents' language attitudes become particularly clear when they "choose", with varying degrees of awareness, the languages in which their children first learn to talk and later the rules of speaking at home—the family language policy (Luykx 2003). However, it is too simplistic to equate the choice of one particular language with favourable attitude towards that language. The parents' justifications for their choices are at least as important as the choices per se, the close examination of which enables us to situate their attitudes within the wider historical, social, cultural, and educational contexts. Moreover, children do not simply inherit their parents' language attitudes and imitate their language behaviours. In line with the current trends in language socialisation research (Luykx 2005; Baquedano-López and Kattan 2007), the current book takes as its premise the fact that children are as active agents as adults in shaping language socialisation practices and coconstructing language attitudes. In situations of language contact in which children generally have greater access to socially valued linguistic resources than their parents do, the children's emerging competencies could have significant impact on the family language practices (Luykx 2005; Gafaranga 2010).

Using a case study that focuses on home language socialization practices, this chapter examines the third subset of research questions: What are the students' usual language practices at home and school? How are they socialised to make such language choices? How do they justify their choices? The case of Chen's family illustrates the longitudinal process of how the family language policy was adjusted to Chen's shifting multilingual competence and how Chen's language attitudes seemed to be related to his language socialisation experience at home.

Mr and Mrs Chen were from the same town in the Chaoshan (Teochew) Region and spoke the same variety of Teochew dialect. They came to Guangzhou for tertiary education in 1989 and 1993 respectively and stayed there from then on. The Chen family was well off and they had just moved from another "respectable" neighbourhood in Tianhe District to the Grand Estate before Chen was transferred to this school. According to Chen's parents, both neighbourhoods had many Teochew people but that was just a coincidence for them.

Chen was born and raised in Guangzhou. He was 10 years old and had just transferred from another school at the onset of the study. He was outgoing, quick-witted, proud, and soon elected as one of the four class presidents. He is the boy who, as mentioned in the last chapter, showed great interest in reading a classical poem in Cantonese and who first supported but later "attacked" Hay, the discredited Cantonese native speaker. In his interview, Chen did not hesitate to identify himself as a Teochew person based on the network of "家族" (*Jiazu*, "family and clan").

**Excerpt 5.1** Interview with Chen: Wherever the *Jiazu* is, it is my hometown

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|---|-------|---|
| 1 | Liang | <P> So if someone speaks Cantonese, you would consider him/her a Guangzhouer ?  |
| 2 | Chen  | No, I don't think so. Yet some classmates say that people's birthplaces are their home towns.   |
| 3 | Liang | What do you think?  |
| 4 | Chen  | I don't agree with them.  |
| 5 | Liang | So what's your opinion?   |
| 6 | Chen  | Wherever the <i>Jiazu</i> is, it is (the hometown).   |
| 7 | Liang | So where do most members of your <i>Jiazu</i> live?   |
| 8 | Chen  | Chaozhou (Teochew city). Two thirds of the population live in Chaozhou. Err...three fourths, actually, because only my father, his brother and the sons of some relatives have left (Chaozhou) to work elsewhere. Very few of them live in Guangzhou. People from Chaoshan (the Teochew region) who are our relatives (and live in Guangzhou)...very few. |
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Chen's quick response showed his familiarity with the issue and the confidence he had in his answer. The notion of *Jiazu* is related to patrilineal ancestors—the official definition of a person's place of origin—but puts more emphasis on lineage and the social network. It was common in the past for people with the same family name, that is, the same lineage, to live close to each other in the same or neighbouring villages, which formed a *Jiazu*. Single- or multilineage residential villages are still common in Guangdong and Fujian Provinces (Zhou 2002; Freedman 1966), in other words, more or less among the Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, and other Min-dialect-speaking populations. In the past, migration was relatively rare, unless because of war, political persecution, famine, or disasters, in which case the whole *Jiazu* moved together. In the analysis later in this chapter, we will find that Chen's *Jiazu* played an important role in his relearning of his mother tongue and reinforcing his self-identification as a Teochew person. He often spoke of “we Teochew (people and dialects)”, as if he were speaking not only as an individual but also as a member of the whole *Jiazu* on behalf of all Teochew people.

## 5.1 Language Shift Within the Family

Language shift takes place out of sight and out of mind (Gafaranga 2010), but Chen's family was an exception. A lot of stories were told about what language choices they consciously made and their opinions about the language shift they experienced.

They had been using Teochew speech only in the family until Chen went to kindergarten, when they started to teach him Cantonese. As soon as he started primary school, however, Chen switched to Putonghua for communication with his parents and began to forget Teochew speech and Cantonese. Yet Mr and Mrs Chen found ways to reeducate him in Teochew speech.

It was between 2002 and 2004 that Chen went to kindergarten in his former neighbourhood. The Language Law 2001 was supposed to have taken effect, and therefore schools and kindergartens were supposed to be teaching in Putonghua. Yet for Chen, the second language variety he picked up was Cantonese. Mrs Chen remembered how they decided to teach Chen Cantonese.

**Excerpt 5.2** Interview with Chen's parents: Language shift to Cantonese during the kindergarten period

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Mrs Chen	<P> We used to speak Teochew speech only. However, when Chen went to kindergarten, he could not understand the teacher, neither did the teacher understand him, and so we taught him to speak Guangzhou Hua ever since. In that kindergarten, for about three to four years, he spoke Guangzhou Hua.
Liang	So they spoke Guangzhou Hua at that kindergarten?
Mrs Chen	Yes. Those teachers spoke Guangzhou Hua. He spoke well (at that time).

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Chen also remembered the experience of not being understood at first in the kindergarten, and the shame and anxiety of the event(s) might explain his vivid memory—he wet his pants because his request in Teochew speech was not understood by the teacher. He said that he learned Cantonese quickly because the teachers always talked to him in Cantonese, but Putonghua was also taught in the kindergarten. By the time he was six, he could speak Cantonese very well and when his parents took him to Hong Kong, he had no problem communicating with the locals. The turning point came when Chen went to primary school. Chen’s kindergarten classmates went to the same primary school with him. Mrs Chen recounted that all of them suddenly switched to Putonghua.

**Excerpt 5.3** Interview with Chen’s parents: Maybe it’s because they promote Putonghua all the time

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- 1 Liang <P> That was quite...an abrupt change wasn’t it? How come?
- 2 Mrs Chen **Maybe because they are promoting Putonghua. Isn’t that (banner) in every school now? “Please speak Putonghua”**, no matter what.
- 3 Mr Chen Another thing is that there aren’t many **“pure” local people** in Guangzhou now. Like in Chen’s school...Grand Estate is in fact a new community, and the school is a new school. Take A (the previous estate they lived in) for instance, most of the students in that school were children from A, and some of them came from elsewhere. Then **the atmosphere** was not one in which the “pure” Guangzhou locals outnumbered...
- 4 Mrs Chen The same. **It was actually the same (The demography of the children in A primary school and A kindergarten were the same)**. The point is once you go to primary school, you must speak Putonghua. You must learn it. Then after you learn it (in class), in order to consolidate his (Chen’s) Putonghua proficiency...I meant the pronunciations and tones. I felt that it was **from that time, that they (the kids) all spoke Putonghua**. Putonghua at home, Putonghua with the teachers. Even the teachers would communicate with each other in Putonghua. **But it is okay if you occasionally speak to them in Guangzhou Hua**.
- 5 Liang I have rarely heard the students talk with the teachers in Guangzhou Hua.
- 6 Mrs Chen Right, none. There are none (of the teachers who talk to the children in Cantonese) now.

- 7 Mr Chen **This may be related to the fact that they are promoting Putonghua all the time now.**
- 8 Mrs Chen In that way, let's see if the children will forget Guangzhou Hua.
- 9 Liang Yeah, many children seem to have...
- 10 Mr Chen Look at them. When they speak, it already sounds rather ...
- 11 Mrs.Chen No, (Chen) can't speak Cantonese any more, or very little. Sometimes I talked to him (in Cantonese), the tones he speaks with...already sound weird. He used to speak quite standard (Cantonese). Kids learn easily.
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Mr Chen suggested that changes in the composition of student groups caused the language shift from Cantonese to Putonghua in Chen's primary school. More exactly, the decrease in the proportion of "pure" Guangzhou local people resulted in the loss of a Cantonese-speaking atmosphere, which led to the displacement of Cantonese by Putonghua in school. By "pure" Guangzhou local people, Mr Chen probably meant those whose family had lived in Guangzhou for generations and spoke Cantonese as their native language. Mr Chen considered the sheer majority of the "pure locals" as the guarantee of a Cantonese-speaking atmosphere. Many other adult participants shared this view. If we look at the statistics, from 1990, the year after Mr Chen came to Guangzhou, to 2000, the year after Chen was born, the *Hukou* population<sup>1</sup> dropped from 90.89 to 70.29%. However, the drop in the relative percentage of "pure local" people in Guangzhou did not prevent Mr and Mrs Chen from acquiring Cantonese after they came to Guangzhou. In contrast, that percentage has remained relatively constant at around 70% since Chen was born (GZBS 1991, 2001; Guangdong Bureau of Statistics [GDBS] 2011), which means that Chen's sudden shift in language choices in 2004 cannot be explained statistically.

Nevertheless, there may be implications in Mr Chen's feeling, as people tend to react to their perceived environment (Garrett et al. 2003). In daily life, it is unusual to enquire of someone unfamiliar whether he/she is a "pure" Guangzhou local. Without directly asking the question, the perception of ethnolinguistic identity is a matter of mutual speculation based on each other's language choice and discursive performance. The more a person has the opportunity to speak Cantonese, especially with unfamiliar people, the higher the proportion of "pure local" population he/she is likely to perceive. Hence Mr Chen's perception probably comes from his day-to-day experience of the language shift, which has taken place over the years.

<sup>1</sup> As the exact number of these "pure local" people is unattainable from the censuses, the percentage of *Hukou* population is used instead. Presumably, the number of people having a Guangzhou *Hukou* is greater than that of "pure locals", because migrants with social resources can obtain a Guangzhou *Hukou*.

Mrs Chen disagreed with Mr Chen as she noticed that Chen's classmates in primary school were more or less the same as those in kindergarten. Therefore the language shift was apparently not due to changes in interlocutors. She proposed that the ubiquitous Putonghua promotion campaigns and the necessity to master Putonghua were the main reasons. In this light, the reason for speaking Putonghua all the time at school, even at home with parents, was for practice—the motivation is largely instrumental. However, Mrs Chen assumed it would still be acceptable if the students spoke to the teacher occasionally in Cantonese, which was how Chen had learned Cantonese in kindergarten. At my prompt, she agreed that the teachers rarely, if ever, talked to the children in Cantonese at school now. Mr Chen came to agree with Mrs Chen and reiterated the impact of the around-the-clock Putonghua promotion campaign on the language shift. From their perspective, the discourse of Putonghua promotion was so powerful that its impact had gone far beyond the enhanced acquisition of Putonghua—it was directly responsible for the decline in proficiency in Cantonese among schoolchildren, as was the case of Chen.

As far as Mr and Mrs Chen saw it, school was an important site, besides home, for children to learn and use Cantonese, especially for children like Chen who were learning Cantonese as their second or third dialect. It seemed instrumentally justified for them that Putonghua should be used for lessons and part of the communication out of class, but abundant opportunities for speaking Cantonese were also desirable. Echoing Mr and Mrs Chen's comments on his declined proficiency in Cantonese, Chen also remembered a significant incident. He remarked during the first interview that when he visited Hong Kong again in grade 2, he could no longer speak Cantonese with ease while he could before primary school.

What Chen started to forget during the first year of his primary education included not only Cantonese but also the Teochew dialect. Mr and Mrs Chen were unhappy about that and took proactive measures to intervene. Mrs Chen seemed to be in charge of reeducating Chen in the Teochew dialect. Chen often quoted his mother when discussing the features of Teochew dialects and the necessity for Teochew people to acquire Teochew dialects, and the importance of being multilingual.

Mr Chen, who was a businessman, highlighted the potential socioeconomic capital of being multilingual. Mrs Chen had something more "essential" in mind—proficiency in Teochew dialect is considered a building block of the Teochew identity. With such conviction, Mrs Chen took steps to ensure that Chen learned Teochew speech. The first step she took was to immerse Chen in a Teochew-speaking environment by sending him to his grandparents, that is, his *Jiazū*, in Chaozhou city.

**Excerpt 5.4** Interview with Chen: You have to keep speaking that language, or otherwise you will forget it

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1	Chen	<P> I learned (the Teochew dialect) from my maternal grandmother. It was a summer vacation. I went back to my home town as soon as the vacation began but my parents returned to Guangzhou to work. They did not take me back to Guangzhou until the very end of the vacation. It was during that period that I learned the Teochew dialect really well.
2	Liang	How old were you?
→3	Chen	It was (after) the second semester of Grade One.
4	Liang	Didn't you say that you could already speak the Teochew dialect in kindergarten, which was why the teacher did not understand you?
5	Chen	Yes, but I switched to Putonghua. I mean, you have to keep speaking that language. Otherwise, you could not understand it, and will forget it eventually.

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Mr and Mrs Chen's plan seemed successful. Chen was then able to talk to his parents in Teochew speech on daily topics, with an occasional switch to Putonghua. Similar successful cases have also been reported elsewhere (Esch and Riley 1986/2003, p.158), reporting how a multi-/bilingual child's "dormant" language can be reactivated through immersion in appropriate language environments.

## 5.2 Rules of Speaking at Home

Speaking of Chen's tendency to switch to Putonghua, Mr and Mrs Chen said that they were used to it and did not mind. In Mr and Mrs Chen's eyes, Chen spoke a great deal of Putonghua at home, but he perceived otherwise. He claimed that he always spoke the Teochew dialect at home apart from words he did not know. During the first focus group session, I asked the participants to do a little language experiment: to talk to a person using a language that they normally would not use with him or her. Chen chose to speak English and Putonghua to his parents during dinner. He tried English first, asking his father: "What's your favourite food?"

**Excerpt 5.5** Interview with Chen: A language experiment at home, part one

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Chen <P> He just didn't understand. Guess what he said when he couldn't understand? He said: "Chinese people speak Chinese languages. Don't speak foreign languages. If you want to speak it, wait till you go back to school. Now that we are at home, **speaking Teochew speech or Putonghua!**"

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According to the first interview with Chen, Mr Chen could understand some English, so that such a reaction was more likely to have been triggered by irritation than by humiliation. Mr Chen explicitly emphasised the obligation for Chinese people to speak Chinese languages and the only acceptable exception is for learning purposes in educational institutions. Moreover, the expression of Chinese identity is possible through both Putonghua and the Teochew dialect. Now that Mr Chen eventually sanctioned the use of Putonghua at home, Chen went on with his experiment by speaking Putonghua to Mrs Chen.

**Excerpt 5.6** Interview with Chen: A language experiment at home, part two

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1 Chen <P> Then I spoke Putonghua to my mom, and... They are used to talking in the Teochew dialect when having dinner.

2 Liang Mm.

3 Chen Then, they, my dad and mom were talking, and I told them so and so happened today at school. The thing about Song, you know.

4 Liang Mm.

5 Chen Then she said,

→ <T> [da dio sua ue]<sup>a</sup> (但潮汕话, "speak Teochew-Swatow speech"),

<P> which was [shuo chao zhou hua] ("speak Teochew speech").

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- 6 Liang ((@)) Was she like very angry, or what?
- 7 Chen Yes. Because she said, “You spoke enough English at school, and enough for Putonghua too. Don’t you speak any more (English and Putonghua at home).”

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<sup>a</sup> The transcription of Teochew dialects is given with the help of Teochew friends and the convention of romanisation was adopted from an online Teochew dialects dictionary (Teochew Dictionary 2005). Since there is considerable variability within Teochew dialects, the romanisation was according to the actual pronunciation of the participants.

Chen clearly knew the rule of speaking in the Teochew dialect during dinner, and Mrs Chen’s reaction made it clear to him that speaking Putonghua at home “for no good reason” would not be tolerated. The premise was that enough time had already been devoted to learning and practising Putonghua (and English) at school, so that the Teochew dialect should be spoken as much as possible at home. Chen quoted the short but powerful “order” of his mother in Teochew speech, which not only gave a sense of authenticity but also recreated the tension of that scenario. By making the request to switch in the target language (the Teochew dialect), Mrs Chen intensified the effect of that request, since using the language was also a message in itself (Gafaranga 2010). Chen might have understood the meaning of both the medium and the literal message, so that he reproduced both to me. I asked him what might have happened if he had carried on speaking Putonghua regardless of what his mother said. He said she would probably tell him to be quiet and do his homework, even if he had not finished dinner. By purposely violating the unspoken rules about how to speak at home, it became clear to Chen that what language behaviour was acceptable at home and what was not. Putonghua was allowed in the household only for complementary purposes, that is, when there was something that was difficult or inconvenient to express in the Teochew dialect.

After executing the S.O.S. hometown-immersion measure and establishing the home language preference, Mr and Mrs Chen now turned their attention to Chen’s Cantonese. Chen said that recently his parents had started to tell him to brush up his Cantonese as they had found out that his Cantonese proficiency had declined significantly. They would sometimes “check” him by talking to him over the telephone in Cantonese. Chen said that he would not cooperate, and replied in Putonghua. Mr Chen said that they watched a lot of Cantonese television programmes at home, and Chen would watch but just would not speak. They did not push him further as they had done with his Teochew-dialect learning. Chen declared in his first interview that he did not care to improve his Cantonese at the moment, because he believed that Putonghua, Teochew speech and English were quite enough for him. If he had time, he would like to learn more foreign languages instead. “But Cantonese might be useful in the future, and I will learn then”, he added.

### 5.3 The Importance of Being Multilingual

The experience of learning, unlearning, and relearning several language varieties has not only affected Chen's linguistic competence but also his language awareness and attitudes. First, he realised that "native speakers" are not "naturally produced entities" but "socialised beings", and there is no guarantee of the intergenerational transmission of mother tongue (McEwan-Fujita 2010). Second, he readily identified with the value of individual and societal multilingualism. These could be seen in his interaction with other students with regard to issues concerning regional dialects and Putonghua. During the first focus group discussion, I asked the students to comment on the functions of Putonghua and regional dialects. Chen had a debate with Lei, a Putonghua-D1 speaker.

**Excerpt 5.7** Grand-Estate boy focus group: What is the point of using regional dialects?

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- 1 Chen <P> I feel that speaking home-town speech is...I mean, it feels more intimate to speak one's own home-town speech. ((The children quieted down.)) So I think by using regional dialects...
- 2 Liang You feel that its function is to enhance intimacy.
- 3 Lei ((Interrupted and spoke loudly)) I feel that, **it doesn't matter** whether we use home-town speech or not, because Putonghua is commonly-used. **It doesn't hurt** if everyone speaks Putonghua.
- 4 Chen The function of Putonghua is that if everyone in the whole world, er, across the whole China is able to speak it, then everyone...
- 5 Lei ((Interrupted)) I feel that if everyone can speak Putonghua, then **there's no point using regional dialects.**
- 6 Chen You are nuts.
- Du ((@@@))
- 7 Lei YOU are nuts.
- 8 Wu I say it is more convenient (to have regional dialects).

- 9 Chen Putonghua is just something for everyone in China to be able to speak (and share with). **If a person knows only one language, how boring that is. ((Peeked at Lei.))**
- 10 Wu It is too old-fashioned and stuffy (“古板”) to speak only one variety.

Both of Lei's parents are from Shaanxi Province, but Lei was born and grew up in Guangzhou. While all the adults (parents, his grandmother, and a housemaid) in his household regularly conversed in the Shaanxi dialect, Lei claimed that he could understand but barely speak it. In Lei's case, the Shaanxi dialect had never been a language of intimacy for him. Putonghua has replaced regional dialects for almost all purposes for him, and thus he reasoned that it would not “hurt” if everyone else also spoke Putonghua all the time. Chen refuted Lei's argument not by denying the (socio)linguistic adequacy of Putonghua to serve all purposes but by arguing for the value of diversity and multilingualism. From Chen's perspective, Putonghua was an additional lingua franca for an ethnically and linguistically diverse Chinese population rather than a substitute for regional dialects. His favourable attitude towards multilingualism was reminiscent of his parents' attitudes. Yet his support for regional dialects might also have come from the advantages he had found from knowing Chinese dialects other than Putonghua. For example, he was the only student in the group who was able to read the poems during the first session in both Cantonese and Teochew speech, and thereby taking an active part in both discussions. As a student who wanted to distinguish himself in every aspect, Chen also enjoyed being uniquely Teochew and speaking a dialect that only a few classmates could understand. Once, he explained why his favourite Chinese regional dialect was the Teochew dialect, “Putonghua is too *‘pu tong’* (common, ordinary)” (“普通话太普通了”). For want of a better expression, Chen dismissed Lei's one-language-is-enough proposition as “nuts” and “boring”. Wu's view following Chen was also interesting. Wu, who is a native Teochew-dialect speaker new to Guangzhou, spoke Putonghua with a Teochew accent. In the same session, Chen and Wu called people who could not speak Putonghua “bumpkins”, while here Wu called people who could speak only Putonghua “old-fashioned and stuffy”. So it seemed that only those who could speak both Putonghua and regional dialects might be called “modern” and “fashionable”.

On the other hand, Lei's one-language proposition should not simply be taken as his preference for monolingualism. In a previous individual interview, I asked Lei if he planned to improve his proficiency in Shaanxi dialect or Cantonese in the future. He replied that Shaanxi dialect was out of the question because he did not use it much, but he would consider improving his Cantonese. He said he used to speak Cantonese quite well in kindergarten (similar to Chen), and because he lived in Guangzhou after all, it would be worth improving his Cantonese. When I asked for the group's opinion on the issue on changing the broadcasting language of GZTV

(the issue mentioned in Chap. 1), Lei voted for a bidialectal mode of broadcasting, which was not an option in the question I asked. All things considered, I believe Lei supported multilingualism generally. He disregarded the value of regional dialects in that particular debate probably because regional dialects were not felt to be significant in his life. There is no Shaanxi dialect speech community comparable to the Teochew or Hakka speech communities in Guangzhou. While Lei's mother and relatives complained occasionally about his inability to speak Shaanxi dialect, they took no measures to deal with the "problem". Hence he generalised from his experience that regional dialects were not necessary. Yet if the question had been about the function of Cantonese more specifically, a dialect with which he could identify, the answer might have been different. Both Chen and Lei grew up in the city where their dialectal "mother tongue" (or hometown speech) was not the dominant variety, but their language attitudes sounded rather different. We could not be certain what exactly made the difference. Yet the home language socialisation experience of Chen did seem to have contributed to his way of perceiving languages and multilingualism.

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