Translation of Personal Pronouns in Politics-Related Texts: How to Maintain the 'US' and 'THEM' Ideology in Thai-English/English-Thai Translation

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Abstract

Personal pronoun has long been known as a problematic issue in English-Thai and Thai-English translation. Personal pronouns in Thai often identify social status, level of intimacy, interpersonal relations, etc. of the addresser and addressees in the texts, whereas personal pronouns in English hardly represent the same ideas. In translation of politics-related texts in which the ideology of 'us' and 'them' is represented, translators need to be aware of their translation of personal pronouns in the texts in order to make the translated texts and the source texts equivalent. This paper aims to explore the translation techniques used by translators in maintaining the 'us' and 'them' ideology in politics-related texts. Ten selected texts were used as data for the study. Concordance software, Antconc 3.2.4 and Thai Concordance 1.25, was used as a tool to facilitate the analysis of the data. The study indicated that translators were aware of their translation of personal pronouns. The main translation technique used for both Thai-English and English-Thai translations was direct translation. This technique seems to be the best method for maintaining the 'us' and 'them' ideology in the translation. Despite translating with awareness, the problem concerning translation equivalence seemed to remain when the 'us' and 'them' ideology is the main concern.

Keywords: Personal pronoun, Politics-related texts, English/Thai Translation

1. Introduction

Personal pronouns can be one of the crucial problems in English-Thai/ Thai-English translation, especially when the texts contain sensitive issues such as different religious beliefs and political conflicts. Traditionally, there seems to be a tendency to try to translate English personal pronoun usage directly to Thai pronoun usage (Campbell & Shaweevongse 1957, Noss 1964). That is, some linguists try to categorize Thai personal pronouns by comparing them with the English personal pronoun system. Nevertheless, this has led them to difficulties because of the great variety in form and usage of Thai Personal pronouns. For example, the first person pronoun 'I' in English can be translated into various forms in Thai, depending on which context the word is used. Hoonchamlong (1992) suggested the following possible Thai translations for 'I' / 'me' in common: 1) ผม (*phŏm*), 2) ดิฉัน (*dichăn*), 3) กระผม (*kraphŏm*), 4) ข้าพเจ้า (*khâaphacâw*), 5) ฉัน (*chăn*), 6) ข้า (*khâa*), 7) เรา (*raw*), 8) เค้า (*kháw*), 9) กัน (*kan*), 10) กู (*kuu*), 11) ตัวเอง (*tua ?eeŋ*), 12) หนู (*nŭu*), 13) อั๊วะ (*?ua*) (Chinese loanword), 14) ไอ (?ay) (English loanword). When the first person pronoun is appeared in the context related to the royal family, the form can even be more complicated, such as ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า (*khâaphráphútthacâw*), เกล้ากระหม่อม (*klâawkramɔ̀m*), กระหม่อม (*kramɔ̀m*), เกล้ากระผม (*klâawkraphŏm*)(Cooke, 1968). Such the variety in form and usage, Thai personal pronouns should be paid attention to by translators whose work concerns with sensitive social issues. Misuse of pronouns may create different effects

of the texts on readers.

In Thailand, politics has long been known as a sensitive topic for discussion in public. Recently, the topic seemed to be a taboo subject to discuss in a Thai family too (Pisuthipan, 2014). Writers of the texts containing political contents may need to be aware of the fact that their writings may create more conflicts in the Thai society. For example, press releases from the Royal Thai Government seem to be very carefully written in order to prevent any conflicts that could have been occurred. In doing this, the use of pronoun is likely one of the aspects the writers are aware of. Based on my observation, it seems that the Royal Thai Government uses the word พณฯท่าน (*phǎnǎthǎn*) '*Her Excellency*' to refer to the former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, whereas, the anti-government groups use other forms, such as 'นางสาว' (*naŋsǎo*) 'Miss' instead. These different word choices tend to well reflect the 'US' and 'THEM' ideology in the Thai society.

Although the concept of 'US' and 'THEM' ideology in Thailand may not be as obvious as that in the West, such concept does exist, especially in the Thai political contexts where political ideas have divided people into two major groups: the pro-government group and the anti-government group. Each group tends to create 'US' and 'THEM' ideology by using different techniques. One of those is the use of personal pronoun to emphasize the political divide, for example, the use of Thai kinship term, ลุง (*luŋ*) '*uncle*' instead of the general second person pronoun 'you' to show that the speakers and the hearer are so close like people from the same family; the use of professional titles, e.g. อาจารย์ (*a:ja:n*) '*professor*', instead of the general first pronoun 'I' to show the status of the speaker, etc. This complication of pronoun use may lead to a problem when translating the text into other languages where the pronoun system is not equivalent to that in the Thai language.

Studies on Thai personal pronoun translation have been done in different fields, especially in literary work (Phirompak & Thanetchaikupt, 2013; Naksakul, 1997). However, the translation of personal pronoun in political texts is rarely explored. What translators should do when facing translation problems concerning personal pronouns in political texts is still mysterious. Especially when the text is concerned with the 'US' and 'THEM' ideology, the choice of pronoun used in translation can even be more complicated. Therefore, the personal pronoun translation in politics-related texts is worth studying.

2. Differences between English and Thai Personal Pronoun

The personal pronouns in Standard English take forms according to number, person, case and natural gender. Numbers of English grammarians (Thomson & Martinet, 1990; Greenbaum, 1991; Leech, 1992) have formed a table of prototypical pronoun as shown below.

Table 1. Prototypical pronoun in standard English

			Subjective case	Objective case	Determiner function	Nominal function	Reflexive
1st person	sg.		*I*	*me*	*my*	*mine*	*myself*
	pl.		*we*	*us*	*our*	*ours*	*ourselves*
2nd person	sg.		*you*	*you*	*your*	*yours*	*yourself*
	pl.		*you*	*you*	*your*	*yours*	*yourselves*
3rd		masc.	*he*	*him*	*his*	*his*	*himself*

person	sg.	fem.	she	her	her	hers	herself
		non-personal	it	it	its	its	itself
	pl.		they	them	their	theirs	themselves

According to the table, it is explicit that English pronouns have distinct lexemes- that is, they have strict meanings and can only be used for particular 'person' or number of persons, although the gender usage does vary. This seems to make English pronoun system simple to use. Unfortunately, when translating English into Thai and vice versa, this pronoun system can be problematic as the Thai pronoun system is quite complicated.

To understand the Thai personal pronoun, Campbell (1998) pointes out that it is necessary to take into account both the social aspects and the linguistic aspects of the Thai language. Thai personal pronoun also reflects the complex 'class' structure in Thai society. Hoonchamlong (1992) clarifies this point by observing the use of first person pronoun in Thai, e.g. ผม (*phŏm*), ดิฉัน (*dichǎn*). She introduces five types of pronominal elements that can be used to refer to the speaker (first person) as follows:

1) Personal Pronoun Proper (The Royalty, The Buddhist Monks, The Commoners)
2) Names (both nicknames and given names)
3) Professional Titles (e.g. อาจารย์ (*a:ja:n*) *'professor'*, หมอ (*mɔ̌:*) *'doctor'*)

4) Kinship Terms (e.g. พี่ (*pǐ:*) *'elder brother/sister'* ลุง (*luŋ*) *'uncle'*)
5) Zero (omission of pronoun)

The examples given by Campbell (1969) illustrates the use of these pronominal elements.

(a) พ่ออยากไป   (*pɔ̌: yà:k pai*) *'I want to go'* (where he refers to himself as a father)
(b) โจอยากไป (*jo: yà:k pai*) *'I want to go'* (where he refers to himself as Joe, his name)
(c) ครูอยากไป (kru:*yà:kpai*) *'I want to go'* (where he refers to himself as a teacher)
(d) ผมอยากไป (*phŏm yà:k pai*) *'I want to go'* (where he refers to himself using a normal first person pronoun)

Here are the examples of saying 'I' in Thai, which Campbell (1969) claims that there is no parallel feature in everyday spoken English. That is why the translation of a Thai personal pronoun can be complicated.

Moreover, Thai society seems to be highly stratified. Stratification is apparent within every social environment such as family, work, markets and school - to name just a few formal ones. Each new environment that a Thai person enters calls for a re-assessment of his/her social standing. The choice of language use is also dependent on relative 'highness' or 'lowness' (i.e. relative social standings) of the speaker and addressee. The words สูง (*sú:ŋ*) *'high'* and ต่ำ (*tàm*) *'low'* are used to describe people and things in terms of perceived importance, or perceived Level of Merit. To clarify this point, the merit is an integral facet of Thai society and is tied to all the other factors in determining which personal pronoun to use with a particular person in a given social environment. In other words, merit is the basis for all personal pronoun decisions. A Thai person needs to weigh-up his/her level of merit when making a decision which

personal pronoun to use in a certain situation.

Hanks (1962) describes the stratified Thai society as resembling "...a military organization more than an occidental class-type society." (p.1252). This assertion seems to hold at least in the way that Thais tend to stick rigidly to the social order of power relationships. For example people that have certain 'important' occupations, for instance a public servant, has a much higher standing than a market woman. In the situation where the public servant is talking with the market woman, the public servant's power/status level of merit is much higher, prompting the use of particular personal pronouns. This social difference is taken to extremes when the status difference is large, such as the situation of a rich businessman in a restaurant. The social distance between the waiter and the business man is so great that the business man treats the waiter with such a detached manner that it almost seems like he has contempt for the 'lowly' worker.

Hanks (1962) also goes on to say that a Thai person is able to increase their status and power, otherwise known in Thai society as 'Merit' "...without regard for his humble origin." This changeability in social status adds yet another dimension to the personal pronoun choice calculation.

Age in Thai society is also very important. The older one is the more merit ones have, and therefore the more respect ones demand in Thai society. However age as a factor in the merit-total can be outweighed by other factors, especially by status and power. As in the previous example involving the market woman and the public servant, quite often the market woman is older than the public servant. However, the status of being a public servant can outweigh the age consideration, leaving the public servant in a position to be associated with 'higher' personal pronouns than her.

There are many other sources of merit, which give merit to varying degrees, that add to the complexity of placing oneself in the correct social stratosphere. These include the religious group one is associated with, ethnic group, sex and level of education. It must also be noted however that each social situation, be it at the market, in a restaurant, or living with family, has it's own web of merit-measures that sum to one's social place within that particular group/situation. With these reasons, it seems impossible to list all choices of Thai personal pronouns in just a simple table like English.

3. The 'US' and 'THEM' Ideology

According to Berman, Berger and Gutmann (2000:53), "people tend to view their social, political, and in-group affiliations as an articulation of their chosen values, stemming from ideological roots and expressing a carefully thought out rational world view. At the same time, they are inclined to shun other groups, which support contrary values and ideals…The division into opposing groups, cast as us and them, constitutes a basic structure of human social organization. It is, in a sense, a given of human nature, (one that people are often disposed to deny). Conceived in this manner, this division predates contents, opinions, and ideologies and is impulsive and unconscious in character. It is this division that defines "us" as a source of closeness and sharing, and "them" as different, antithetical, negative, and a potential enemy. Ideologies and group history are built on the foundation of this structural division".

The 'US' and 'THEM' ideology is, most of the time, expressed through the language used. See examples presented in Frederick's (1993) work: "Vietnam 'fell to', but Afghanistan was 'liberated from' the communists. Ronald Reagan called Nicaraguan Contras 'freedom fighters', whereas the Sandinistas referred to them as 'mercenaries'. Palestinians are 'terrorists', whereas Israelis carry out 'retaliation raids'. The purpose of using different terms to refer to the same thing is that the users want to create certain

ideologies which they preferred. Positive words are likely used when mentioning 'US' , whereas negative words are for 'THEM'.

A choice of personal pronoun used is considered a strategy that writers or speakers use to form the 'US' and 'THEM' ideology. For example, the use of มัน (*mʌn*) '*it*' to refer to someone in Thai can be seen as that the addresser ('us') may have negative feeling towards the addressee ('them'). On the contary, when the addresser uses positive forms, such as kinship terms, to refer to the addressees, it can be interpreted that the addresser may want to be included in the addressee's group.

4. The Study

This study is a qualitative research aiming to explore the translation methods used by professional translators in their translation of personal pronouns in politics-related texts. The main focus is on how the translators translate personal pronouns in the source language to the target language, and whether the translators maintain the 'US' and 'THEM' ideology in their translation.

4.1 Research Questions

Two questions addressed in this study include:

1) What translation techniques do the professional translators used when they have to translate Thai politics-related texts?

2) Do those translation techniques help maintaining the 'US' and 'THEM' ideology presented in the texts?

4.2 Data Collection

The data used in this study were collected online from the websites of Royal Thai Government (www.thaigov.go.th), Voice TV (www.voicetv.co.th) Reform Thai (www.reformthai.com) and U.S. Embassy, Bangkok (http://bangkok.usembassy.gov). The first three websites are the sources of Thai-English translations, and the last one provides the data of English-Thai translations. Since these websites are of the well-known institutes and organizations, it can be assumed that the translators who work for these sources are professional enough for observing their translation techniques.

The collected texts are listed below.

Thai-English
1. News: PM hopes Constitutional Court consider her case on the same standards previously applied to other politicians.
2. Statement by H.E. the Prime Minister of Thailand on the Current Political Situation delivered on 28 November 2013
3. Statement delivered by H.E. the Prime Minister of Thailand on the dissolution of the House of Representatives On 9 December 2013
4. Statement delivered by H.E. the Prime Minister of Thailand on the general election on February 2, 2014
5. Letter from 'Netiwit' to 'Suthep Thaugsuban'
6. Why ReformThai?

English-Thai
7. Statement by Jen Psaki, Department Spokesperson: Protests in Thailand
8. Statement by Jen Psaki, Department Spokesperson: Political Tensions in Thailand
9. Statement by Jen Psaki, Department Spokesperson: Election-Related Unrest in Thailand
10. Statement by John Kerry, Secretary of State: Violence in Thailand

4.3 Data Analysis

The collected data were processed by using two concordance software, Antconc 3.2.4 and Thai Concordance 1.25. Antconc 3.2.5 was used for English data analysis, and Thai Concordance 1.25was used for the Thai data. The analysis was mainly focused on personal pronouns and their translations. The objective is to list the translation techniques used by the translator of each text. Then the 'US' and 'THEM' ideology in each text was investigated in order to consider if the translation techniques used are good enough to maintain such ideology.

5. Results and Discussion

The study shows that translators of politics-related texts tend to use some certain translation techniques as listed below.

A. Thai to English Translation

When the translators did their translation from Thai to English, the common translation techniques found are:

1. Direct (literal) translation

Examples:
ดิฉันขอให้ความมั่นใจกับพี่น้องประชาชนทุกท่าน...
I would like to assure my fellow citizens…

ดิฉันขอให้ผู้ชุมนุมยุติการชุมนุม
I would like to propose that the protesters end their rallies…

ประเทศไทยเป็นของคนไทยทุกคน **เรา**จึงต้องร่วมกันหลีกเลี่ยงการสร้างเงื่อนไข
Thailand is our country, so **we** should refrain from making conditions…

ดิฉันได้ตัดสินใจขอพระราชทานทูลเกล้าฯถวายร่างพระราชกฤษฎีกายุบสภาผู้แทนราษฎร
I have decided to present a draft Royal Decree to dissolve the House of Representatives…

ช่วงเวลาต่อไปนี้เป็นช่วงเวลาที่ประชาชนทุกคนควรร่วมใจกัน....เพื่อถวายเป็นสักการะแด่ใน หลวงที่เป็นที่รักยิ่ง**ของพวกเรา**ทุกคน
The following period is a time for all Thais to unite…in order to pay tribute to **our** dearly beloved monarch.

…เป็นโอกาสครั้งสำคัญที่**เรา**ทุกคนจะร่วมกันใช้หนึ่งสิทธิ์หนึ่งเสียงที่เท่าเทียมกัน…
... a great opportunity for **us** all to exercise our rights on 'one man one vote'

รัฐบาลพร้อมเจ้าหน้าที่ทุกฝ่ายจะพยายามอย่างเต็มกำลังความสามารถเพื่อดูแลสวัสดิภาพของ พี่น้องประชาชนและรักษาไว้ซึ่งความศักดิ์สิทธิของกฎหมายและระบอบประชาธิปไตยที่เป็นที่ รักยิ่ง**ของเรา**ทุกคน
The Government and its officials will make our utmost effort to protect the welfare of fellow citizens, and uphold the sanctity of laws and **our** beloved democratic system.

แม้จะมีอุปสรรคขวากหนาม แต่หาก**เรา**ยึดหลักสันติ...**เรา**ก็จะสามารถประคับประคองและ

แก้ไขให้ สถานการณ์ต่างๆให้ลุล่วงไปได้
Even with obstacles, **we** should be able to carry on and eventually have resolutions to the current situations if **we** adhere to peaceful principles and rules…

This is the most common translation technique found in this study. As a translator, it can be said that this technique is simple to employ. If there is an equivalent lexical item in the source and target language, it seems to be the tendancy that the translators employ literal translation. In the examples, it is quite interesting that the first personal pronouns 'I' and 'We' were literally translated; and, it seems that the ideology of 'Us' and 'Them' is maintained.

2. *Zero* → *Personal pronoun*

Examples:
◎หวังว่าศาลรัฐธรรมนูญจะพิจารณาบนมาตรฐานเดียวกัน...
she hopes the Constitutional Court would consider her case on the same standard…

◎หนักใจในเรื่องของระยะเวลา......
…**she** was concerned about the time frame….

ผู้แทนราษฎรคือตัวแทนของคนไทยทุกคน จึง◎ต้องรับฟังเสียงทุกเสียง
MPs are representatives of all Thai citizens, so **they** must listen to all voices.

รัฐบาลขอให้ประชาชนทำหน้าที่และใช้สิทธิเลือกตั้งด้วยความพร้อมเพรียง
The Government wishes to ask the Thai people to perform **their** duties and exercises **their** right to vote concertedly…

การคืนอำนาจให้ประชาชนเป็นผู้ตัดสินใจ
returning power to the people, so that **they** can decide…

It is not surprised at all that the translators used this technique, as the Thai language allows zero subject. But in English language, pronoun is needed as a subject of the sentence. In the first two examples, the translators selected to use the pronoun 'she' to refer the former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. Similarly, the pronoun 'they' is used to refer to the Members of Parliament in the third example. 'Their' and 'they' in the fourth and the fifth examples are used to refer to the 'people'. Interestingly, the pronoun 'she' is used instead of the title (Prime Minister). 'They / their' is used instead of 'We/our'. Now, the ideology of 'Us' and 'Them' can be problematic because the translators have to interpret what the 'zero' subjects /objects in the source text are.

3. *Noun Phrase* → *Personal Pronoun*

Examples:
นายกรัฐมนตรีกล่าวว่า **ตน**เป็นผู้ถูกกล่าวหาคงไม่สามารถอยู่ในวิสัยที่จะพูดเช่นนั้นได้
PM Yingluck stated that as an accused, **she** could not give any opinion…

รัฐบาลไม่ต้องการเล่นเกมการเมือง เพราะ**รัฐบาล**เชื่อว่าเกมการเมืองจะทำให้ประเทศถดถอย
the Government does not wish to play political games, as **we** believe that political games will set the country back…

กระผมจึงปรารถนาเขียนจดหมายถึง**ลุงกำนัน**ด้วยความเคารพ พร้อมตั้งคำถามและแสดงความคิดเห็น
I wish to respectfully write to **you** with questions and in order to express my opinion.

ถ้า**คุณสุเทพ**เดินตามขบวนการแห่งอหิงสาวิธีดังที่นักวิชาการบางคนสรรเสริญยกยอ
If **you** really follow the path of non-violence, in line with how those academics have glorified you

ผมหวังว่า**ลุงกำนัน**จะตอบผม ผมเขียนด้วยความหวังดีเป็นกัลยาณมิตรต่อลุงกำนัน
I hope that **you** will answer with a response to my questions and concerns.

From these examples, it seems that the translators are trying to avoid literal translation for some reasons. The use of personal pronouns instead of the direct translation of the noun phrases may cause the missing of some word sense. For example, the word **ลุงกำนัน** (literally means 'Uncle Village Headman') was translated to 'you'. With this translation, it is likely that certain ideology in the source is missing. That is, in the source text, the author may want to show that he is one of the family members as he uses the kinship term 'uncle'. With 'you' in the translation, the ideology of 'us' and 'them' seems to be missing.

4. Using different pronoun

Examples:
อย่างไรก็ตาม **เรา**ก็จะทำบนกลไกที่เหลืออยู่อย่างเต็มที่
Nevertheless, **she** would try her best based on the existing mechanism…

ประชาชนต้องลุกขึ้นและพึ่งพาพลังของประชาชน**เอง**
the people have to rise and rely on **their** own power

This phenomenon in translation may occur according to the translators' analysis of source texts. The use of pronoun that expresses 'US' or 'THEM' ideology can be challenging for the translators. In the first example, the translator decided to use 'she' instead of 'we' (literal translation of the source text). So, the 'Us' and 'Them' ideology seems to be altered.

B. English to Thai Translation
For English to Thai translation, it was found that the translators employed the following translation techniques.

1. Direct (literal) translation

Examples:
We are deeply concerned by the ongoing politically-motivated violence in Thailand.
เรามีความกังวลอย่างยิ่งต่อความรุนแรงที่มีมูลเหตุจูงใจทางการเมืองซึ่งเกิดขึ้นในประเทศไทย

ขณะนี้

I call upon Thai authorities to investigate these attacks swiftly
ข้าพเจ้าขอเรียกร้องให้ทางการไทยเร่งตรวจสอบความจริงเกี่ยวกับเหตุโจมตีเหล่านี้

We encourage all involved to resolve political differences peacefully and democratically
เราขอสนับสนุนให้ทุกฝ่ายที่เกี่ยวข้องแก้ไขความแตกต่างทางการเมืองโดยสันติ ตามระบอบประชาธิปไตย

We urge all sides to refrain from violence
เราขอให้ทุกฝ่ายหลีกเลี่ยงการใช้ความรุนแรง

We call upon all sides to uphold international norms that guarantee freedom of the press and the safety of journalists.
เราขอเรียกร้องให้ทุกฝ่ายยึดมั่นในบรรทัดฐานสากลที่รับประกันเสรีภาพของสื่อ และความปลอดภัยของนักข่าว

We strongly support the Thai nation and its people during this period.
เราขอเป็นกำลังใจให้ประเทศไทยและประชาชนชาวไทยในช่วงเวลาเช่นนี้

Literal translation seems also popular among English-Thai translators. As mentioned eariler, it is quite common that the translator translate the source language literally when the structures and lexical items in the target language are equivalent. And, this technique seem to well maintain the ideology of 'Us' and 'Them'.

2. Personal Pronoun → Proper Noun

Examples:
While **we** do not take sides in the political dispute and strongly support freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest
สหรัฐอเมริกาไม่เข้าข้างฝ่ายใดในความขัดแย้งทางการเมืองนี้และสนับสนุน เสรีภาพในการแสดงความคิดเห็นรวมทั้งสิทธิในการชุมนุมอย่างสงบ

We reiterate **our** call for all sides to refrain from violence
สหรัฐอเมริกาขอย้ำถึงข้อเรียกร้อง**ของสหรัฐฯ** ให้ทุกฝ่ายระงับการใช้ความรุนแรง

From these examples, the translation of 'We' to **สหรัฐอเมริกา** (the United States of America) in the translated text seems to express similar ideology, comparing to the source text. However, it may be depend on how the translators analyze the source text too.

3. Omission of personal pronoun

it is up to the people of Thailand to decide how **they** will resolve their differences
การตัดสินใจว่าจะแก้ไขปัญหาความแตกต่างด้วยวิธีใดนั้นขึ้นอยู่กับประชาชนชาวไทยเอง

This phenomenon can happen because the structure of the Thai language, the target languge is this case, allows the omission of subject of a verb. This translation technique tends not to affect the ideology of 'Us' and 'Them' in the text much.

6. Conclusion

Translation of personal pronouns in politics-related texts from Thai to English and English to Thai can sometimes be a problem for translators when the 'US' and 'THEM' ideology is concerned. This study shows that there are a number of ways that translators can employ in their translation. However, if the translators wish to maintain the 'US' and 'THEM' ideology, direct or literal translation seem to be the best method for both Thai-English and English-Thai translation. It is noted that the translators can use literal translation only when there is an equivalent structure and lexical items in both language. Using a proper noun to substitute a personal pronoun also seems to work well in the English-Thai translation. All in all, the translators may need to pay more attention when the ideology of 'Us' and 'Them' appears in the texts. Well analyzing the source text at the very beginning may help the translators to select the translation techniques to employ well.

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