



CONSONANTAL SYSTEM OF SHERPA

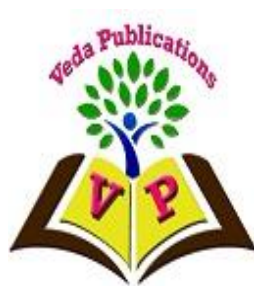
Mustafizur Rahman^{1*}, Prof. S. Ganesh Baskaran²

^{1*}(PhD Scholar, Dept.of Linguistics, Assam Univeristy, Silchar.)

²(Professor, Dept.of Linguistics, Assam Univeristy, Silcha.)

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ABSTRACT



The present study “Consonantal system of Sherpa” discusses the Sherpas of Sikkim mainly settled in South and West District. According to the Census of India 2001, the total speaker of Sherpa in Sikkim is 13,922. However, *Denzong Sherpa Association* claims that the population of Sherpa is more than 65,000 out of which more than 32,000 people speak their Mother Tongue in their native environment particularly in the home domain. Linguistically, Robert Shafer has divided Tibeto-Burman into four main groups: Bodic, Baric, Burmic and Karenic. According to Shafer, Sherpa belongs to the Central Unit of the Bodish Section within the Bodic Sub-division of Sino-Tibetan.

The present paper attempts to describe the Consonantal system of Sherpa. Sherpa has twenty six (26) consonantal sounds. It has fourteen stops i.e., /p, p^h, b, t, t^h, d, t, t^h, d, c, c^h, k, k^h, g/, four nasals /m, n, ŋ, ŋ/, four fricatives /s, ʃ, ʒ, h/ one lateral /l/one trill /r/ and two semi-vowels; bilabial semi-vowel /w/ and palatal semi-vowel /j/. **Consonant combination in Sherpa can be classified into two categories these are: (i) consonant cluster (ii) consonant sequence. Sherpa has initial and medial consonant clusters that occur within the syllabic boundary.** Sherpa has a wide variety of consonant sequences. Gemination, Homorganic and Contagious are the Consonant sequences found in Sherpa Language.

Keywords: *Central Bodish, consonantal system, combinations, consonant cluster, consonant sequence.*



INTRODUCTION

Sherpa is the name of the community as well as language. It is one of the endangered languages spoken in Sikkim. Pasang Sherpa in his book 'The Sherpas' described, the term Sherpa comes from two different words *shyar* "east" and *pa* "people". However, Sherpa means 'People of the East'. The Sherpas are one of the indigenous tribes of Sikkim having a distinct ethnic identity. The language is very rich in folk literature like songs, dance, riddles, proverbs, etc. Sherpas are found in all four districts of Sikkim namely East, West, South and North Sikkim. However, Sherpa population is higher in the West and South Districts than the North and the East Districts. Based on the population the research work has been conducted in West and South Districts of Sikkim. According to the Census of India 2001, the total speaker of Sherpa in Sikkim is 13,922. However, *Denzong Sherpa Association* claims that the population of Sherpa is more than 65,000 out of which more than 32,000 people speak their Mother Tongue in their native environment particularly in the home domain.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to find out the consonantal phonemes and consonantal combination of Sherpa.

METHODOLOGY

- *The interview and observation methods were applied to collect the primary data.*
- *The data for the present study was collected in several visits to the Sherpa inhabiting areas of West and South Districts of Sikkim.*
- *However, secondary materials like books, journals, thesis etc. are also used.*

CONSONANTAL SYSTEM OF SHERPA

There are twenty six (26) consonantal sounds.

Sherpa has fourteen stops i.e., /p, p^h, b, t, t^h, d, t, t^h, d, c, c^h, k, k^h, g/, four nasals /m, n, ŋ/, four fricatives /s, ʃ, z, h/ one lateral /l/one trill /r/ and two semi-vowels; bilabial semi-vowel /w/ and palatal semi-vowel /j/. The consonantal phonemes of Sherpa are illustrated below in the Table no. 1.

Table 1: Consonantal phonemes chart.

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Post Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	p b	t d			ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	
+ aspirated	p ^h	t ^h			t ^h	c ^h	k ^h	
Nasal	m		n			ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative			s	ʃ ʒ				h
Trill			r					
Lateral			l					
Semi-vowel	w						j	

Description of Consonants

Stops

- /p/ as in /pak/ voiceless bilabial stop.
- /b/ as in /bak/voiced bilabial stop.
- /p^h/ as in /p^hap/ aspirated voiceless bilabial stop.
- /t/ as in /tep/ voiceless alveolar stop.
- /d/ as in /do/ voiced alveolar stop.
- /t/ as in /te.mu/ voiceless retroflex stop.**
- /t^h/ as in /t^hem.bu/ voiceless alveolar stop.
- /t^h/ as in /t^he/ **aspirated voiceless retroflex stop.**
- /d/ as in /ɖul/ voiced retroflex stop.**
- /c/ as in /cei/ voiceless palatal stop.
- /c^h/ as in /c^hja/ voiceless palatal stop.
- /k/ as in /kan/ voiceless velar stop.
- /g/ as in /ga.ma/ voiced velar stop.
- /k^h/ as in /k^hap/ voiceless velar stop.

**Fricatives**

/s/ as in /sa.la/ voiceless alveolar fricative.

/ʒ/ as in /ʒ in.ba/voiced post-alveolar fricative.

/ʃ/ as in /ʃal/voiceless post-alveolar fricative.

/h/ as in /hon/ voiceless glottal fricative.

Nasals

/m/ as in /maŋ/ voiced bilabial nasal.

/n/ as in /ne/ voiced alveolar nasal.

/ɲ/ as in /ɲen/ voiced palatal nasal.

/ŋ/ as in /ŋop/ voiced velar nasal.

Lateral

/l/ as in /la/ voiced Alveolar lateral.

Trill

/r/ as in /raŋ/ voiced Alveolar trill.

Semi-vowels

/w/ as in /woŋ/ voiced bilabial semi-vowel.

/j/ as in /jaŋ/ voiced palatal semi-vowel.

Consonantal Minimal Pairs

The consonantal minimal pairs in Sherpa are schematized below:

/p/ vs. /p^h/

/pe/ 'open'

/p^he/ 'bite'

/p/ vs /b/

/pa/ 'meat'

/ba/ 'hide'

/p/ vs. /m/

/par.c^{hi}/ 'often'

/mar.c^{hi}/ 'chili, pepper'

/b/ vs. /p^h/

/bak.pa/ 'mask'

/b/ vs. /m/

/bin/ 'give'

/t^h/ vs. /t/

/t^hak/ 'blood'

/tak/ 'lion'

/d/ vs. /t/

/da/ 'arrow point'

/ta/ 'horse'

/d/ vs. /n/

/dama/ 'cornar'

/nama/ 'bride'

/t/ vs. /t/

/tici/ 'ask'

/tici/ 'singular marker'

/t^h/ vs. /t/

/t^hoŋ.ba/ 'plough'

/toŋ.ba/ 'property'

/d/ vs. /d/

/da/ 'arrow point'

/ɖa/ 'enemy'

/t/ vs. /d/

/ta/ 'wheat'

/ɖa/ 'rice'

/d/ vs. /t^h/

/ɖi/ 'go'

/t^{hi}/ 'knife'

/d/ vs. /w/

/ɖoŋ/ 'wild yak'

/woŋ/ 'power'

/k^h/ vs. /c/

/k^ha/ 'hill'

/ca/ 'do'

/k/ vs. /c/

/ka/ 'stick'

/ca/ 'do'

/k^h/ vs. /c^h/

/p^hak.pa/ 'boar/hog'

/k^hap/ 'needle'

/min/ 'negative marker'

/c^hap/ 'complete'

/k/ vs. /k^h/

/ka.lak/ 'crow'

/k^ha.lak/ 'relatives'



/g/ vs. /k ^h /	
/ga/	'haapy'
/k ^h a/	'hill'
/k/ vs. /ŋ/	
/kar.mu/	'white'
/ŋar.mu/	'sweet'
/k/ vs. /g/	
/ko/	'skin'
/go/	'outside'
/m/ vs. /n/	
/ma/	'wound'
/na/	'swearing'
/m/ vs. /p ^h /	
/mar/	'butter, ghee'
/p ^h ar/	'away'
/m/ vs. /w/	
/c ^h a.me/	'know' neg. obs
/c ^h a.we/	'know' obs
/n/ vs. /t ^h /	
/na/	'barley'
/t ^h a/	'hawk'
/n/ vs. /t/	
/num/	'oil'
/tum/	'wrap'
/ŋ/ vs. /j/	
/juk/	'go'
/juk/	'weep'
/ŋ/ vs. /ŋ/	
/ŋa/	'fish'
/ŋa/	'1 sg. nom'
/j/ vs. /ʒ/	
/ʒal/	'net'
/jal/	'search'
/ʒ/ vs. /s/	
/ʒo/	'do'
/so/	'eat'

/r/ vs. /l/	
/ra/	'goat'
/la/	'mountain'

Distribution of Consonants

The distribution of twenty-six Consonantal

Phonemes are discussed below:

/p/

Initial

/pak/	'dough'
/par/	'photograph'
/pa.la/	'father'

Medial

/k ^h jak.pa/	'ice'
/t ^h uk.pa/	'fight'
/ku.tok.pu/	'narrow'

Final

/t ^h o.kup/	'to use'
/t ^h en.dup/	'high'
/t ^h o.rup/	'to sow'

/p^h/

Initial

/p ^h ap/	'yeast'
/p ^h i/	'wine'
/p ^h ar/	'towards'

Medial

/p ^h a.p ^h o/	'far'
/muk.p ^h u/	'snail'
/dim.p ^h iru/	'key'

/b/

Initial

/bak/	'bamboo sheet'
/bu.tup/	'to offer'
/bom.bu/	'big'

Medial

/doŋ.bu/	'rai community'
/gem.bup/	'to dry'
/bom.bu/	'big'

/t/

Initial

/tu.ta/	'smoke'
/ten.dok/	'reason'
/tom/	'bear'



Medial		/dɛ.sil/	'pulau'
	/tɛ.tup/	'to slip'	
	/p ^h i.tok/	'evening'	
	/p ^h e.tup/	'bite'	
/t^h/			
Initial		Medial	
	/t ^h i.tup/	/ku.dɛ.mo/	'aged woman'
	/t ^h er.pa/	/tuk.dʌŋ/	'mosquito'
	/t ^h oŋ.gup/	/man.dʒi/	'scar'
Medial		/c/	
	/p ^h en.t ^h ok/	Initial	
	/mun.t ^h al/	/cɛn.ba/	'wood'
	/da.t ^h o/	/cɛ/	'up hill'
/d/		/cʊr.wu/	'sour'
Initial		Medial	
	/dɔk.tok/	/bu.cok/	'depression'
	/dik.pa/	/bu.ci/	'wet'
	/du.tɛp/	/lɔp.ci/	'study'
Medial		/c^h/	
	/tʃiŋ.dup/	Initial	
	/ʃeŋ.dup/	/c ^h ʃaŋ /	'north'
	/ʃoŋ.da/	/c ^h ʃa/	'bird'
/t/		/c ^h i.wa/	'rat'
Initial		Medial	
	/tɛ.mu/	/tʌk.c ^h al/	'echo'
	/tʊŋ.na/	/mʌp.c ^h a/	'peacock'
	/tʌl/	/mɛ.c ^h aŋ/	'dirty'
Medial		/k/	
	/k ^h o.tɔ/	Initial	
	/ko.tɛ.ʃi/	/kʌŋ/	'stem'
nut'		/kai/	'cup'
	/ku.tʊŋ/	/kʊr/	'bread'
/t^h/		Medial	
Initial		/nʌ.kʌm/	'dry fish'
	/t ^h o.kup/	/p ^h ʊk.pa/	'cave'
	/t ^h o.up/	/mʌk.mi/	'army'
	/t ^h o.kup/	Final	
Medial		/do.ke/	'similar'
	/ʃi.t ^h o/	/mɛ.wʌk/	'gun'
	/lʊŋ.t ^h iŋ/	/mʌk/	'war'
	/sem.t ^h al/	/k^h/	
/d/		Initial	
Initial		/k ^h ʌp/	'needle'
	/dʊl/	/k ^h ʌp.tok/	'lid'
	/dʌ/	/k ^h a.rʌp/	'quiet'
		Medial	
		/mɛn.k ^h aŋ/	'hospital'
		/sʌ.k ^h aŋ/	'restaurant'
		/ʒim.k ^h aŋ/	'residence'



/g/		Medial	
Initial		/kaŋ.pa/	'leg'
/ga.ma/	'wife'	/kaŋ.nam/	'trousers'
/ge.lu/	'king'	/t ^h uŋ.gup/	'to drink'
/gir.po/	'big'	Final	
Medial		/ko.muŋ/	'broom'
/ko.gam/	'leather box'	/taŋ/	'and'
/c ^h oŋ.gup/	'to sell'	/tuk.raŋ/	'just'
/c ^h eŋ.ga/	'relatives'	/s/	
/m/		Initial	
Initial		/sa.la/	'tomorrow'
/maŋ/	'more'	/saur/	'itching'
/miŋ/	'name'	/silo.wa/	'dew'
/mi/	'human'	Medial	
Medial		/tur.sa/	'grave'
/kam.po/	'dry'	/duk.se/	'worse'
/t ^h a.mu/	'fight'	/de.sa/	'village'
/p ^h a.ma/	'parents'	//	
Final		Initial	
/p ^h u.rum/	'sleeve'	/jaŋ.wa/	'blind'
/bum/	'lakh'	/ja/	'face'
/mi.lam/	'dream'	/ja.l.ka/	'bowl'
/n/		Medial	
Initial		/tam.ja/	'oath'
/ne/	'disease'	/de.jeŋ/	'level'
/nar.pu/	'sneezing'	/dom.ji/	'addition'
/na.ri/	'usually'	/3/	
Medial		Initial	
/tan.da/	'now'	/3in.dak/	'owner'
/teŋ.bu/	'warm'	/3in.ba/	'donation'
/dun.lam/	'career'	/3i.nak/	'lie'
Final		Medial	
/sen/	'seed'	kaŋ.3e/	'foot print'
/den/	'carpet'	/ku.3al/	'audience'
/mon.dun/	'wish'	/dor.3i/	'thunder'
/ŋ/		/h/	
Initial		Initial	
/ŋa/	'fish'	/ham.dj/	'fungi'
/ŋa.s ^h iŋ/	'yoke'	/haj.aŋ/	'vessel'
/ŋeŋ/	'listen'	/hon/	'sense'
/ŋ/		/r/	
Initial		Initial	
/ŋa.la/	'in past'	/raŋ/	'honey'
/ŋar.mu/	'sweet'	/rap.pu/	'thing'
/ŋo.ji/	'silver'	/ra/	'cloths'

**Medial**

/kar.ma/

'star'

/ta.ra/

'whey'

/doŋ.ra/

'wick'

Final

/kor/

'about'

/mar/

'butter'

/min.bur/

'eyelash'

/l/**Initial**

/la/

'soul'

/la.ma/

'monk'

/lon.po/

'minister'

Medial

/kal.tok/

'kidney'

/ti.luk/

'bell'

/p^hi.la/

'outside'

Final

/pal/

'wool'

/rul/

'snake'

/ru.bal/

'tortoise'

/w/**Initial**

/wu.kjaŋ/

'breath'

/woŋ/

'power'

/waŋ.di/

'winner'

Medial

/ko.wa/

'skin'

/p^ho.wa/

'stomach'

/bal.wa/

'frog'

/j/**Initial**

/jak.pu/

'good'

/ja.jo/

'above'

jaŋ. ga/

'light'

Medial

/kuj.on/

'salary'

/da.jaŋ/

'rhyme'

/wu.kjaŋ

'breath'

Table 2: Distribution of Consonants

Phonemes	Initially	Medially	Finally
p	✓	✓	✓
p ^h	✓	✓	x
b	✓	✓	x
t	✓	✓	x
t ^h	✓	✓	x
d	✓	✓	x
ɖ	✓	✓	x
c	✓	✓	x
c ^h	✓	✓	x
k	✓	✓	✓
k ^h	✓	✓	x
g	✓	✓	x
m	✓	✓	✓
n	✓	✓	✓
ɲ	✓	x	x
ŋ	✓	✓	✓
s	✓	✓	x
ʃ	✓	✓	x
ʒ	✓	✓	x
h	✓	x	x
r	✓	✓	✓
l	✓	✓	✓
w	✓	✓	x
j	✓		x

From the above data and table no. 2. we find that, phonemes /p, k, m, n, ŋ, r, l/ occurs in all three position, phonemes /ŋ, h/ occurs only in initial position. Whereas /p^h, b, t, t^h, d, ɖ, t^h, d, c, c^h, k^h, g, s,



ʃ, ʒ, w, j/ occurs only in initial and medial position.

Consonant Combinations

The term consonant combination refers to the occurrence of two or more consonants in an immediate position within a single syllable or across the syllables, i.e., intra-syllable or inter-syllable.

Again, the intra-syllable occurrence of consonants can be consonant cluster, whereas the inter-syllable is consonant sequence.

Consonant Clusters

Consonant clusters are found in Sherpa language.

The combinations of Stop + Semi vowel, Nasal + Semi-Vowel, Dental + Semi-Vowel, Lateral + Semi-Vowel, Fricative + Semi-Vowel are discussed below:

Stop + Semi vowel Cluster:

Consonant Cluster	Example	Gloss
/g+j/	/gj-/	/gjap/ 'backside'
	/-gj-/	/ke.gjen/ 'jewelry'
/k+j/	/kj-/	/kjaŋ/ 'donkey'
	/-kj-/	/kun.kja/ 'deal'
/k+w/	/kw-/	/kwa.sa/ 'fireplace'
/k ^h +j/	/k ^h j-/	/k ^h jen.dup/ 'to know'

Nasal + Semi-Vowel Cluster:

Consonant Cluster	Example	Gloss
/ŋ+j/	/-ŋj-/	/kun.ŋjam/ 'similar'
/n+j/	/nj-/	/nja.sur/ 'from'

Lateral + Semi-Vowel Cluster:

Consonant Cluster	Example	Gloss
/l+j/	/lj-/	/lja.ta/ 'brain'

Dental + Semi-Vowel Cluster:

Consonant Cluster	Example	Gloss
/t+j/	/tj-/	/tjan/ 'carpet'
/d+j/	/-dj-/	/jen.dja/ 'hot'
/t+w/	/tw-/	/twa.ʃiŋ/ 'cobra plant'

Fricative + Semi-Vowel Cluster:

Consonant Cluster	Example	Gloss
/ʃ+j/	/ʃj-/	/ʃja/ 'rate'
		/ʃje/ 'limit'

Consonant Sequence

Sherpa has a wide variety of consonant sequences. Gemination, Homorganic and Contagious are the Consonant sequences found in Sherpa Language.

Gemination

Gemination can occur in word medial position only. Such kind of sequence has got similar feature in both place and manner of articulation as can be seen in the following examples:

Stop + Stop

/-p.p-/	/rap.pup/	'things'
	/lop.pon/	'teacher'

Velar + Velar

/-k.k-/	/kak.kup/	'to break'
	/kuk.ku/	'cuckoo'

Nasal + Nasal

/-n.n-/	/min.nok/	'not'
	/men.na/	'spices'

Lateral + Lateral

/-l.l-/	/til.lup/	'to ring'
	/tal.li/	'up to'

Trill + Trill

/-r.r-/	/k ^h ur.ru/	'load'
	/fer.ri/	'immediately'

**Homorganic**

Such type of the sequence of phonemes have similar feature either in place of articulation or manner of articulation as illustrated in the following examples:

Stop+Stop

/-k.d-/	/kak.dop/	'suffocation'
/-k.p-/	/t ^h uk.pa/	'fight'
/-p.t-/	/gop.tek/	'meat-soup'
/-k.d-/	/c ^h ak.dar/	'tin'

Nasal+ Nasal

/-ŋ.n-/	/tuŋ.na/	'flute'
/-ŋ.m-/	/toŋ.ma/	'ant'

Contiguous

In this type of sequence, phonemes have adjacent or neighbouring positions either in place or manner of articulation as can be seen in the following examples:

Stop+ Nasal

/-k.m-/	/nak.mu/	'dusky girl'
/-p.n-/	/lip.ner/	'scholarship'

Stop+ Fricative

/-k.f-/	/kuk.fe/	'crippled'
/-k.f-/	/dok.fe/	'dwarfish'

Stop+ Lateral

/-k.l-/	/zuk.la/	'later'
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Stop+ Trill

/-k.r-/	/tuk.raŋ/	'just'
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Stop+ Semi-vowel

/-k.w-/	/nak.waŋ/	'divine power'
/-k.j-/	/mik.jul/	'aim'

Nasal+ Stop

/-ŋ.g-/	/loŋ.gup/	'to raise'
/-n.d-/	/tin.dop/	'to take along'

Trill+ Nasal

/-r.m-/	/pir.ma/	'common'
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Lateral+ Nasal

/-l.m-/	/t ^h al.ma/	'initial'
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Nasal+ Fricative

/-ŋ.f-/	/laŋ.fa/	'beef'
/-m.f-/	/dam.fi/	'foundation'

Lateral+ Stop

/-l.t-/	/kal.tok/	'kidney'
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Trill+ Fricative

/-r.f-/	/gur.fiŋ/	'sugarcane'
/-r.ʒ-/	/kar.ʒi/	'astrology'

Nasal+ Trill

/-m.r-/	/dum.ra/	'garden'
/-n.r-/	/c ^h en.rik/	'science'

Nasal+ Lateral

/-ŋ.l-/	/koŋ.lam/	'foot trail'
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Lateral+ Semi-vowel

/-l.w-/	/kal.wa/	'broken'
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Trill+ Stop

/-r.p-/	/gir.po/	'big'
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Nasal+ Semi-vowel

/-ŋ.j-/	/goŋ.jaŋ/	'forgiveness'
/-m.j-/	/c ^h om.jik/	'composition'

Trill+ Semi-vowel

/-r.j-/	/nar.jal/	'proud'
/-r.w-/	/c ^h ar.wa/	'rainfall'

Lateral+ Fricative

/-l.f-/	/nal.fol/	'labour'
/-l.ʒ-/	/pal.ʒor/	'economy'

Trill+ Lateral

/-r.l-/	/par.la/	'in between'
/-r.l-/	/mar.la/	'downwards'

**CONCLUSION**

• **Based on the analysis of Consonantal system of Sherpa, following conclusions are drawn:**

• **Sherpa language belongs to the central Bodish group of Tibeto-Burman language family (Bradley 1997).**

• **Sherpa has twenty six (26) consonantal phonemes are /p, p^h, b, t, t^h, d, t, t^h, d, c, c^h, k, k^h, g, m, n, ŋ, s, ʃ, z, h, l, r, w, j/.**

• **Consonantal places of articulation are divided into Bilabial, Dental, Alveolar, Post Alveolar, Retroflex, Palatal, Velar and Glottal.**

• **Manner of articulations are Stop, Nasal, Fricative, Trill, Lateral and Semi-vowel.**

• **The Consonantal phonemes /p, k, m, n, ŋ, r, l/ occurs in all three position, phonemes /p, h/ occurs only in initial position. Whereas /p^h, b, t, t^h, d, t, t^h, d, c, c^h, k^h, g, s, ʃ, z, w, j/ occurs only in initial and medial position.**

• Sherpa has initial and medial consonant clusters, and no final cluster is noticed in the language.

• All the consonant sequences occur in the word medial position in Sherpa.

• Consonant clusters are found in Sherpa language. The combinations of Velar + Semi vowel, Nasal + Semi-Vowel, Dental + Semi-Vowel, Lateral + Semi-Vowel, Fricative + Semi-Vowel are found in Sherpa language.

• Gemination can occur in word medial position only.

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