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Concepts of wholeness and homogeneity in language and some directions of linguistics

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It is understandable that modern man in the flow of impressions that surrounds him is in great need for stabilizing concepts, in order to make it possible to grasp reality and the external world. The need is not, however, restricted to modern times, but has as long a tradition as have the written sources we have access to, and therefore most likely a history beyond that.

Concepts like broken language, pure dialect, correct language, literal meaning and standard language, all have a bearing on this topic, referring, directly or indirectly, to homogeneity or purity. Within the domain of language, the pressure to state pure or right forms seems to have increased. The increasing importance of oral and written standardized languages during several centuries is presumably reflected in this (cf. Ong 1982).

Linguistic theories, even of recent times, are related to this issue. For example, the difference between the rules of a standard written-language grammar and the grammar of a language, as it is used in a variety of functions and forms, is not always acknowledged among linguists, and seldom accepted by laymen. Within science in general, the search for completeness, homogeneity etc., is also prevalent. In many of its directions theory-building has been transmitted within the tradition of rationalism. Good theory-building is sometimes described as the most efficient and simplest way to embrace as much as possible. In the simplest form of a theory there is only a binary opposition left: true or not true, or, zero vs. one.

In man's search for a meaningful destination in life, both from the angle of everyday experiences, and from that of philosophical and spiritual striving, the ultimate goal is regularly the real, the complete, the original or pure fulfillment of attempts to reach a target. When aspects of science and world views, including religious aspirations, are compared, they frequently coincide and have in common exactly this striving for the unique, the ultimate fulfillment of the goal. The moral and ethic problems of such views are maybe not so much the
efforts and targets as such, but the prize that is paid to attain them, and the sanctions that are used against those who fail.

I will briefly discuss some prominent concepts referring to the idea of completeness and/or the pure, regarding language and some linguistic directions. I will also try to show that such concepts are lurking behind sociolinguistic approaches as well, despite their attempts to describe variation and change in language.

The need for concepts of homogeneity and stability

The sources of the striving for the ultimate, the pure and so on, can probably be found in the limitations of the human psyche or mind, as well as in fairly primitive aspirations to gain social advantages over fellowmen. This is presumably, despite the inclination of Western culture to exclude itself from the basic and ‘primitive’, a matter of profound human behaviour and to some extent universal. One recurrent topic connected to this is the way we qualify or disqualify ‘us’ vs. ‘them’. In older times expressions like barbar (and barbarian) referred to the foreign speech of others, not belonging to the familiar own group, a simplifying way of dealing with the unknown. It seems that our species has not progressed very far from this.

Within behavioural sciences and the sociology of knowledge simplifying procedures in human action are fundamental processes. They make perceptual intake easier and more handily portioned. The very basis for habitual action and social organization depends on this ability (Berger & Luckmann 1991 p. 70 ff.).

The need of simplifying is thus probably a basic behavioural feature, but the additional striving of purifying and cleansing the homogenized or simplified descriptions of reality \textit{in absurdum} is a result of social and normative pressure, the result of various kinds of -isms, furthered by social and ideological organization. Presumably, the need is also a basic characteristic in the struggle for power: who shall have the power to define reality and to decide upon the necessary action deriving from the definition (op.cit. p. 134 ff.)?

Concepts of right and wrong in language and linguistics

The similarity between religious aspects of purism and the more obviously social, but similarly strongly defended views on language has been pointed out in writings of Mary Douglas, and by George Thomas (cf. Thomas 1991). A direct connection to religion was offered by Dante Alighieri, who at the beginning of the 14th century tried to show how the original, perfect language of Adam had developed into various dialects, and later to Romance languages (Eco 1995 p. 34 ff.). In essence it seems that the generated attitudes to religion and language behaviour have much in common, which presumably reflects types of social organization and maintenance in both of them.

The connection to purism is evident in religious scripts, with a heavy pressure to retain what has once been accepted as right and pristine. Few other things connected to language have aroused such turmoil as the change of liturgical texts, hymn books, re-translations of the Bible and other scripts. Even people with little active interest in the content of the written sources, become upset due to deviations from earlier religious forms.

One may at first sight be tempted to consider claims on purism referring to language as being the result of modern nationalism or remnants of earlier, 19th century nationalistic purism, connected to independence movements, such as in most European countries; e.g. one language—one nation, and one nation—one language. The last two centuries can thus be extensively exemplified with developing nation states, societies and individuals, who spent a bulk of their existence purifying and cleansing their language and linguistic territories (Thomass 1991, Hobbsbaum 1992).

It is, however, possible to find statements referring to correct and pure language, seen as absolute values, from any century with a written record from even earlier times, and from various cultural contexts. The ancient Greeks and the Romans referred to the language of some writers as the ultimate and only correct form, the Japanese courts of the 10th and 11th centuries developed an excessive demand of purity and grace, in grammatical form, as well as in graphic shape. In the development of academies, from the first one in Florence in 1572, over the French, Spanish, Swedish, Hungarian, Finnish and Croatian and other ones, to later similar institutions, it is possible to see the striving of purity and the condemnation of other than the to-be correct forms be repeated. For example, the member of the French Academy, Claude Favre de Pérôges de Vaugelas (1595–1650), has been seen as a main contributor to the development of a more standardized French, not the least regarding its vocabulary. The Florentine Academy, \textit{Academia della crusca}, set out to purify the language

\footnote{The similarity to famous scientists’ and linguists’ texts is not far-fetched. Consider the story of e.g. de Saussure’s, Chomsky’s and later, as we shall see, Labov’s texts.}
four hundred years ago, and the Spanish Academy continues to do so today (e.g., Pratt forthc.). The best-known attempts have apparently been those of the French Academy and its supporters, who today suggest fines of especially state officials’ use of English loanwords. This measure is supported in the xenophobic defence of French, in Europe as well as in Québec. Further, the complete translation of the Bible into Finnish in 1642 had as an overt aim to correct and cleanse Mikael Agricola’s (ca. 1508–1557) 16th century codification of Finnish from influences of Swedish and German. In 1649, Sweden received a national school regulation, the mission of which was to spread a nationwide, beautiful and clean Swedish writing and pronunciation. The French tradition of linguistic purity and terrorism, was brutally reinforced during the French revolution (cf. Lainio 1990). Oftentime a defined linguistic and political enemy has been the target of the efforts.

The concept of pure has also been used to refer to dialects, and lately, even to pidgins like Tok Pisin (Romaine 1992 p. 242), i.e. varieties that have lacked a written standard, and that are obviously the result of adoption and confrontation of different languages’ features. Since the 1970s complaints have occurred about the Anglicization of urban Tok Pisin; rural forms are seen as the pure ones.

It is possible to see the development of grammatical rules as an expression of, and willingness to create ultimate, well-formed, regular systems, from which odd birds—in practice often the remnants of historical development—have frequently been removed, or classified as irrelevant exceptions. When ‘modern’ linguistic paradigms were developed, other directions of linguistics were seen as non-scientific, not the least since they were considered atomistic. On the other hand, e.g. sound laws also represent such theoretical regularizations. Regularity has then been added or reinstalled by external measures in linguistic theories, such as Noam Chomsky’s, in a similar fashion as they have been introduced by language cultivators into standard languages. One example of the effects of this for a standard language is Finnish, in which artificial regularities, which were not a part of the language, have been created by language cultivators (Paunonen 1976). Other examples of linguistic overextension are the attempts to force other languages into universalist—implicitly or explicitly—theories of language, based on, first Indo-European languages, later English.

By the establishment of the national standard languages, idealized, and to some extent, untouchable language systems have become widely accepted and spread during the last two centuries. These views have become entertained by lay people’s rigid views on language. Though linguists have contributed much in the same tradition, it seems that the ‘enlightened’ linguists of recent times have had less understanding for the puristic correctness views (cf. e.g. Appel & Muysken 1987 p. 46 ff.).

The concept of pure dialect

In language policy and cultivation another concept, in addition to the striving to stop the standard from changing, and especially from allowing it to borrow new material from specific sources, has been important, namely that of the pure dialect. This is connected to a historicist view of language, but has clearly had an impact on various standard language developments, e.g. the bi-standard Norwegian situation, in which e.g. Ivar Aasen and Knud Knudsen used the ‘folk language’ as a resource. The re-codification of Finnish during the 19th century is another Nordic example of this. Dialects with a reputation of being purer were used as sources for redeveloping the grammar and a new vocabulary in the enrichment of Modern Finnish. As sources of inspiration and the creation of cohesiveness in the standard language, dialects have no doubt played important roles.

Seen in the Swedish and Finnish contexts, the so-called ‘pure’ dialects are believed to be disappearing or even dying. Older dialect forms are being replaced by newer ones, which are regularly seen as aberrations, mixed, non-original, and the like. The transformation of dialects is not as clearcut as such a fear indicates. For various linguistic variables continuous changes are taking place, some of which have been halted, others of which have only recently begun. The changes of spoken varieties have been accelerated during our days, but they are not as straightforward as has generally been believed (see e.g. Thelander 1979, Mielikäinen 1984).

The concept of pure dialect is also a remnant of earlier views on language. It was seen as essential for many developing national cultures to find the original sources of a language, especially of those, which were searching for a glorious past. One aspect of pure dialects has been the search for the original, exotic forms, another has been the attempt to describe the native features of the language, if necessary by excluding and dismissing any foreign influence.

One way of trying to assess this was by choice of informants for studies of dialects. In British dialectology they have been referred to as NORM-speakers (non-mobile, rural, older, male) by Chambers & Trudgill (1980 p. 33). Though older Nordic informants have tended to be female, the definition of the inform-
The concepts of pure and correct language

During periods of deep national sentiment, language has been one of the major formative and supportive symbols in the creation of a common, national identity. In order for it to function as such, it has forced the proponents of any selected variety of language to alter linguistic realities. A language, which contains abundant features that can be directly connected to a specific culture and language has to have the obvious 'foreign' features removed, especially if the independence movement and the political separation are attempting to free themselves from it. In the politics of language, ethnic cleansing has been a recurrent phenomenon, and more than once has its most drastic version, genocide, co-occurred with xenophobic, linguistic purification. This has been evident in 18th-century France, in Franco's oppression of Catalonia, in Nazi-Germany, in the Soviet Union, and so on. It is at present an obvious characteristic of several of the former republics of Yugoslavia, e.g. Croatia. It has recently been invoked in the Slovak republic, and has old traditions in Rumania, where use of Hungarian is prohibited.

One would believe, that speakers of oppressed languages and varieties would have detected the hidden principles of arguing regarding the choice of 'correct' or 'pure' vs. un-pure languages. This is not so, but it is still not a question of lack of 'evolution' on behalf of the oppressed group. Attitudes to language are often transmitted: a minority may be socialized to take over the views of the majority. For example, during recent efforts in Sweden to clarify the indepent status of the two main Finnish varieties, "Melän kieli" (Tornedal Finnish), and Sweden Finnish, affected discussions regarding both of them have aroused, especially during 1994–1995. One can say that both experience critical historical phases— their survival is most likely at stake. In both cases there is one view saying that the 'mixed, ugly, dialect, slang' etc. Finnish in Sweden is not worthy of, or in need of, an independent development, neither compared to Swedish nor to Finland Finnish. This parallels the social history of numerous languages. There is also another view, saying that the development has already taken place; the question is what linguistic and language planning conclusions should be drawn from this. There are differences in view about how far one should proceed, to support the independence of the varieties in question, also within this second view. The arguments against among Finnish-speakers themselves, seem to connect more to puristic, i.e. xenophobic, than correctness views, which may, but need not, coincide.

Man has always, it seems, tried to prohibit the use of specific languages or varieties. Man has also complained about his fellow people's way of using language. During the various periods of revival of Latin, e.g., classical Latin was the target of revitalization efforts. In one of its extreme directions, 'correct' classical Latin was reconstructed as the language of one single person, the poet and politician Cicero.

The rich metaphors for language purifiers remind us of these periods: the millers, gardeners, metallurgists, grinders, physicians, geneticists, and so on, have come and gone.

As has been described by many scholars, the development of widespread literacy—like in societies with academies—has been of great importance. The conserving effect of writing has contributed to the fact that language users connect writing to 'language', and highly standardized written language to an orthoepic pronunciation as the norm. However, the strictures of correctness run into perpetual difficulties, since language per se, both since it exists in social context and since its subsystems develop through variable social and linguistic phases, and thus presents opposing processes to stability.

2 Both 'variety' and 'language' would be appropriate terms for both Melän kieli and Sweden Finnish: the views can be defended by fairly objective criteria (see Lainio 1995a). The question is, what social and political support there is for such conclusions within the groups, i.e. self-categorization.
Various directions of sociolinguistics have clarified the inner, structured life of language and the relativity of language use, even though the concept of variability was discussed earlier than by its most famous proponent, William Labov. Linguistic variability was related to correctness and purism, e.g. already by the Prague school of written-language theoreticians during the 1920s. Linguists like Bohuslav Havránek and Víšek Mathesius, as well as František Današ, another representative of this school, took part in the development of a written language theory (cf. Kolari 1977; Sajavaara 1993). Današ has summarized the main claims for stability in language in the following dialectic pairs:

- **attitudes to language use** differ from language use itself,
- in language there is perpetual striving for change—*dynamicity*—, whereas a well-functioning language presupposes a high degree of *stability*,
- from the point of view of communication, *homogeneity and uniqueness* of form are necessary, but in language there is *continuous variation* and streams of variability.

Labov has later added social dimensions to variability, in similar maximes, e.g. that the language of lower-class speakers tends to be evaluated as bad, poor and the like, since the language is used by lower-class speakers. Lower-class people also tend to speak a variety markedly different from the standard, which reinforces the negative attitudes to their speech.

The view of laymen assumes that correct language constitutes an entity, given once and for all, and that it remains that way. The idea that language is continuous, at several levels, socially and linguistically, is not easily accepted among non-linguists. The standardization of language has contributed to this conception, and since written language is decontextualized, contrary to most spoken language, the demands of the written code support the uniqueness of form and the request for stability and homogeneity.

This has also resulted in the view that only the standard language, and of that, the written part, is language. This view has been substantiated efficiently by a century of school-teaching in the mother-tongue curriculum. The remainder has become referred to as dialect, social dialect or slang, and in another dimension, as spoken language. In Sweden and Finland, sociolinguists have been among the public voices in attempts to bring about knowledge about such misconceptions (for Sweden e.g. Nordberg 1985, for Finland Paunonen 1982).

The pressure for speakers to either adhere to the concept of pure dialect, pure or correct language, puts the speaker in the non-enviable position of being considered either a plague or cholera, from a puristically minded society's point of view. In such speech communities hardly anyone manages to match the criteria of the cleansed standard, or of the mummified dialect.

Concepts of homogeneity and completeness in studies of bilingualism

One of the fields within which the concepts of homogeneity and completeness would be expected to be scarce, but are instead central and frequent, is the vast field of bilingual studies.

The target of comparison for bilinguals is generally the monolingual, which to date has been seen as the ‘normal’ case of a language user. Globally, monolinguality is probably an exception, also at the individual level, but in literate societies, the monolingual has become the ‘normal’ one.

One of the most practised methods of analyzing a learner’s language development or a bilingual’s competence and performance, was for several decades error analysis. This kind of testing has mainly presented negative evaluation about the learner’s progress, and not been able to consider other than criterion-referenced development. Comparisons have only been made to a static standard norm, irrespective of the developmental and social variability that any language user, also the monolingual, is expected to express.

Aberrations from the monolingual, static norm have been termed in various ways, from the deprived, more or less simple-minded, over the semi-lingual and fossilized, to the non-native or near-native speaker of our days. In Sweden, e.g., there are at least half a million speakers with Swedish as a second language, but representations of this variety, with various degrees of language learner and language contact features, are seldom seen as an attainment of linguistic skills. Instead, the users are seen as having acquired too little, or to use defective Swedish. The concept ‘Swedish as L2’ has turned into a stigma for its users: it has come to signify under-achievement and impure Swedish.

The semi-lingualism debate of the 1970s and early 1980s can be included in this discussion. The concept implies a ‘full bilingualism’, which is an abstraction, also for monolinguals, and in practice, impossible to attain. In the aftermath of the debate, this concept has been admitted to have served political and educational aspirations. Unfortunately for the speakers who were labeled semi-linguals, the stigma has been difficult to wash away. Still today, a decade or two afterwards, one may see various kinds of studies of bilingualism, and even text-books on language, referring to especially Sweden Finns as a group of semi-linguals.
A homogeneity concept in sociolinguistics: casual speech

When William Labov's ideas of ordered variation in language were becoming more widely accepted, they had been preceded by others, like John L. Fischer's study (1958) on English school-children's pronunciation of *-ing* and its variant *-in*. The fact that their ordered variation could be connected to external factors like socio-economic status and sex, was made explicit in the Labovian descriptive method. Similar observations had been made much earlier in various contexts—e.g. by the Finnist Martti Airila (1910), in a pronunciation test of /d/ among Finnish school-children, where girls were clearly more often successful regarding the standard variant [d]—but the regularity of the intervention of social factors in speech was first described by Labov in his various studies of American English varieties.

In his study of phonological variables in the Lower East Side project, he developed a multisituational base for stylistic variation, which has been integrated into the idea of how language and individuals interact in the change of language: the linguistic deepening of a change is paralleled by a social spread of the feature. Labov was quite detailed both in his methodological and analytical descriptions (e.g. Labov 1985 p. 87–99). The sociolinguistic interview and its subsections of styles have been spread and imitated world-wide among sociolinguists. There were originally five styles in Labov's study—minimal word pairs, word lists, reading lists, monitored careful speech, i.e. the interview style, and casual speech. The latter two have been referred to as spontaneous speech. I will concentrate on the least monitored spontaneous style here, i.e. casual speech.

In order to elicitate fully casual speech, the interviewer was supposed to make the informant monitor his/her speech minimally. This was made by asking informants to describe a situation that had been connected to a 'close-to-death' experience. This was believed to cause a loosening of formalizing factors in the interview situation, and to provoke a fully unmonitored, purely spontaneous speech. The attempt to track down this style has been referred to as overcoming the Observer's Paradox (cf. Chambers 1995 p. 18–19).

There are also social class, sex and age aspects connected to the concept of casual speech: the most spontaneous archetype of this speaker is the uneducated, adolescent, working-class, male, who has not yet been influenced by social upward striving and who has not been 'destroyed' by the impact of the standard language (Labov 1985). The concept of casual speech may be seen as a modified version of the pure dialect concept (cf. Trudgill's and Chambers' above mentioned NORM-speakers).

As a device for creating a basis for comparison between different speaker groups this may be acceptable, but the implication is also that there is an absolute zero point of language use and development in terms of spontaneity, i.e. purity and originality. The consequence is also, that other speakers—older, women, middle-class speakers etc.—are seen as aberrations of the 'perfect' model. Though most speakers nevertheless acquire a more standardized register, this has come to imply, that no-one can have the standard as a mother tongue variety. A fully standardized, monostylistic speaker is labelled 'defective' by Labov (1995 p. 157–158).

Labov presumably never intended to create a 'spontaneousness' phobia, but spontaneity has been uncritically adopted as an absolute value by many of his sociolinguistic successors. The concept of spontaneous speech has fulfilled its task as a methodological device, but since it became interpreted as a zero value for comparisons of language use, it may have been counterproductive to methodological progress in this kind of studies.

Varieties and registers can be seen as positions or areas on highly gradual continua, both regarding developmental linguistic, and social linguistic aspects. Since language never stops—unless it is being abandoned altogether—but continues to be changed in its systems and in its social space, it is difficult to imagine a zero point for speech. And what will happen, when the classical working-class is gone? Will no-one be able to fulfill the requirements of spontaneous speech anymore?

The view of a defined spontaneity spectrum, has been used recently in psycholinguistics as well (Bialystok 1991 p. 136–137, partly based on ideas of Elaine Tarone). Though this seemingly builds on the same variation theme as Labov's, it also includes a paradox. Bialystok has given two psycholinguistic causes for variation, cognitive and performative. The former depends on developmental, and thus diachronical variation: when a child learns how to use new aspects of language, this causes a temporary variation between old and new forms. For bilinguals she presupposes a similar variability, connected to registers of L2. Performative variation is connected to situational factors, more in the Labovian, sociolinguistic sense. On the one hand, Bialystok discusses factors like attention to speech, but she refers mainly to the more mentalistic point of view, i.e. attention to speech, which influences use to become variable. She

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3 Since I do not consider an archetypal UAWM-speaker (uneducated, adolescent, working-class, male) to be a universal reality, I will not support the use of such an acronym.
calls this synchronic variation. The influence of social, contextual factors is not extended upon. On the other hand, only children and second-language learners (which are the categories she discusses in the article) are, according to her, subject to both diachronic and synchronic variation. Thus, adults would not face diachronic variation, since only children are said to show developmental variability. This implies that after childhood, speakers are not subject to diachronic variation, i.e. speakers do not develop their linguistic control after childhood. The uneducated, adolescent, working-class male, would according to Bialystok’s view, not show cognitive variation, and according to Labov’s view, hardly performative/sociolinguistic variation either.

It is easy to end up in circularity here: if an adolescent male shows variation, i.e. fails to be completely spontaneous, he may be referred to as lacking some of the objective criteria, e.g. not being ‘pure’ working-class, or showing synchronic variation, not diachronic, in Bialystok’s terms. The arguments oppose evidence from sociolinguistic studies. They also go counter to studies of adult speakers. For example, Paunonen (1996) has found a considerable variation and change of phonological and morphological variables of Finnish, among groups and within the same individuals, studied at the beginning of the 1970s and the 1990s.

Neither the strong claim that adults lack diachronic variation, nor that younger as the only ones have access to a zero register of spontaneous speech seem to fit well to real language use. Some language skills require a high degree of metalinguistic attention, which may be practised and developed throughout life. The idea of a fully unmonitored speech must also be seen as an idealization, even if statistical results show 100 per cent use of nonstandard variants. It does not matter, whether the language use pattern in a specific situation at a specific age is criterion-referenced (to a standard norm), or norm-referenced (to a pragmatic/situational norm), since a speech style has to be at least partly monitored, being a matter of choice. Bialystok’s arguments also repeat the idea of an absolute norm: she calls the criterion-referenced norm ‘correct’ and ‘objective’ (Bialystok 1991), which misses the point of dialectic unstability of language.

A middle-class variety may well be an ingroup, acquired mother-tongue, and adults may show spontaneity in speech. There is no need to state a zero point for spontaneity, even if it simplifies comparison between studies and social groups. There is no need to hypothesize a static, ‘pure’ type of language user: language use changes through the years of its users, at a different speed at different times, in different situations.

**Discussion**

Human conception of fellow people’s behaviour is probably based on a high degree of simplificatory intake. To some degree this is due to mental limitations of man, and to basic principles of social organization. One reason to people’s reinforcement of stability demands in language may be, that it is difficult to accept that social institutions may need to be changed, especially if it concerns institutions they have been involved in producing, grounding and transmitting themselves.

The force of simplification in linguistic traditions is obviously strong, even in recent linguistic paradigms, which are explicitly studying variation and change in language use. It has not been possible—or attractive—to avoid the use of extreme completeness or wholeness concepts in these paradigms either. To explain the use of such concepts, one needs to consider -isms of various kinds, in addition to theoretical and methodological aspirations.

The use of statistics and logical formulae has probably added credibility to some of the views, but not even these paradigms have been able to mirror reality and the processes of language use and change accurately enough. The statistical methods have, however, helped sociolinguistics to clarify and explain some interrelations of language, social life and the power of, and in, language. One good example is the study on nonstandard Black English (Labov 1972). It is probably within the applied field, that sociolinguistic methods have made their clearest contribution to avoidance of misconceptions about language as a social and linguistic phenomenon. Such efforts, however, still have a long way to go, before non-linguists and non-sociolinguists have reached a more realistic understanding of language in function.

In Sweden as well as in Finland the sociolinguistic paradigm has contributed much to a more sensible contemplation about language, along similar lines. Since its introduction by e.g. Gun Widmark and Bengt Nordberg (Nordberg 1972) in Sweden, the knowledge about dynamic and non-encyclopedic Swedish has increased considerably. Nordberg has also been, together with his colleagues at the Unit for Advanced Studies in Modern Swedish (FUMS), one of the most important mediators and inspirators of sociolinguistics in Finland. Nordberg has targeted and presented a high, and at times an ultimate quality in his own work, and his skilled handicraft has shown the way for many others, to a ‘non-ismic’ view on language from a social and linguistic point of view. As a sociolinguist, he has been successfully pragmatic.
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