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## Linguo-culturological analysis of the translation of phraseological units on the basis of Mo Yan's novel "Life and Death are wearing me out"

Лингвокультурологический анализ перевода фразеологизмов на примере романа Мо Яня «Устал рождаться и умирать»

语言文化学分析成语的翻译 (以莫言小说《生死疲劳》为例)

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### Abstract

The article considers the issue of the peculiarities and methods of translating phraseological units from Chinese using the example of Mo Yan's postmodernist novel "Life and Death are wearing me out". The purpose of this article is to analyze the linguo-culturological approach when translating phraseological units with the elements of national culture, as well as to consider the methods of translating phraseological units both in the process of interlingual and intercultural communication. The linguo-culturological aspect is presented in the literary text in various ways, primarily in the form of vocabulary where you can meet a linguo-cultural or national-specific component. Phraseology contains a national-cultural component in its semantics and it also has cross-cultural value. Both in Chinese and in Russian, these set expressions have a vivid emotional coloring and clearly reflect a particular linguistic trait of the people.

**Key words:** difficulties and techniques of translation, Mo Yan, national specifics, phraseology, russian language.

### Аннотация

В статье рассматривается вопрос об особенностях и способах перевода фразеологических оборотов с китайского языка на примере постмодернистского романа Мо Яня «Устал рождаться и умирать». Цель данной статьи: проанализировать лингвокультурологический подход при переводе фразеологических оборотов с элементами национальной культуры, а также рассмотреть приемы перевода фразеологических единиц как в процессе межъязыковой, так и в межкультурной коммуникации. Лингвокультурологический аспект репрезентируются в художественном тексте различными способами, прежде всего в виде лексики, в которой присутствует лингвокультурный или национально-специфический компонент. Фразеология содержит в своей семантике национально-культурный компонент и имеет страноведческую ценность. Как в китайском, так и в русском языках эти устойчивые выражения имеют яркую эмоциональную окраску и четко отражают ту или иную языковую черту народа.

**Ключевые слова:** русский язык, фразеология, национальная специфика, трудности и приемы перевода, Мо Янь.

### 摘要

文章以莫言的后现代主义小说《生死疲劳》为例，论述了汉语成语翻译的特殊性和翻译方法问题。本文目的是：语言文化学方法分析带有民族文化元素的成语在语言和文化交流过程中的翻译方

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法。语言文化学分析在小说文本中以不同的方式表现出来，首先是以带有语言文化或民族特色的词汇。成语在其语义中包含了民族文化的成分，并具有国家特定的价值。在汉语和俄语中，这些稳定的表达方式都具有鲜明的情感色彩，并清楚地反映了这个或那个民族的语言特点。

**关键词：**俄语，成语，民族特色，翻译的难点和手法，莫言。

## Introduction

In recent years, linguists have paid much more attention to the problems related to the interaction of different cultures and overcoming intercultural differences, cultural barriers and cultural conflicts. The issues of correlation of various linguistic views of the world have become relevant. This article is devoted to the study of the features and techniques of translating phraseological units into Russian using the example of Mo Yan's novel "Life and Death are wearing me out" in the linguo-culturological aspect. The study material is phraseological units from Mo Yan's novel "Life and Death are wearing me out" and its translation in Russian. In the process of research, linguo-culturological and descriptive analyses, comparative method and lexico-semantic methods are used. The peculiarities and difficulties of translating phraseological locutions with national-cultural components, as well as the methods of translating phraseological units with national-cultural components have been analyzed in the section "Results and Discussion". As a result of studying phraseological units from this novel, it can be noted that the translator I.A. Egorov uses a word-for-word translation widely. The given translation is accompanied by a combination of translation methods to show Chinese view of the world to readers and to avoid distortion of the meaning of phraseological units.

## Theoretical Framework or Literature Review

The study of phraseological units within the framework of modern linguistics is actively developing in modern science. The phraseological richness of the language attracted the attention of such linguists as V.S. Vinogradov (1997), N.M. Shanskiy (1996), S.I. Vlahov, S.P. Florin (2012), C.G. Ter-Minasova (2000), V.N. Telya, A.V. Fedorov (1958), V.N. Komissarov (2001). Their works are devoted, in particular, to the study of the theory and practice of translation of phraseology. N.M. Shanskiy defines "a phraseological unit as a reproducible linguistic unit of two or more stressed words, holistic in their meaning and stable in their composition and structure" (Shanskiy, 1996, p. 15). The emergence and

development of phraseology as an independent discipline in Russian linguistics was possible thanks to V.V. Vinogradov in the 40s of the XX century. In his opinion, phraseological units are "stable combinations of words reproduced in speech" (Vinogradov, 1997, p. 316).

In modern times, translation plays an important role in contacts between different peoples. "Translation is a kind of art. When translating phraseological units, the translator needs to reflect their imagery without missing their stylistic function. If there is no complete equivalent in the language, the translator needs to look for approximate correspondences that do not distort the meaning and semantics of this language unit" (Odincova & Chmyh, 2018, p. 66). In a broad sense, translation as the reality of inter-language contact is also considered as the cultural interaction of languages. "Phraseological unit acts as a language unit arising as a result of cognition process of a wide variety of phenomena of reality (natural, sociocultural, spiritual and ideological) by representatives of a particular community" (Bogdanova, 2017, p. 50-57). Translation of phraseological units always represents a great difficulty, especially when translating these set expressions in fiction. As V.N. Telya states "phraseological units arise in national languages on the basis of such a figurative representation of reality that reflects the everyday empirical, historical or spiritual experience of the linguistic community..." (Telya, 1996, p. 13). Since phraseology is always an objective reflection of national activity, the richness and diversity of the phraseological fund of the Chinese language, its numerous language units have been preserved since ancient times. The source of most Chinese phraseological units is Chinese classical literature, for example: classical canons, philosophical treatises, historical chronicles, fiction, as well as historical and philosophical parables, borrowings from other languages, etc. In addition, modern Chinese is constantly replenished with new phraseological expressions. The vast majority of pieces of art of modern Chinese fiction refer to Chinese classics

which is a consequence of the cult of wisdom and philosophy. It is typical for China.

In the field of literary translation, phraseological expressions represent a great difficulty for the translator. Due to its figurative nature and emotional reflection in fiction, the phraseological unit in the cultural context is the most important linguistic means of providing expressiveness and formal aesthetics. According to Bulgarian translators and theorists of literary translation S.I. Vlahov and S.P. Florin, "In the "scale of untranslability" or "difficulty of translation" phraseologisms or phraseological units occupy almost the first place: the "untranslability" of phraseology is noted by all the experts among the characteristic features of set expressions; it is invariably referred to by the supporters of the "theory of untranslability"; a translator-practitioner constantly encounters the difficulty of translation of phraseological units, the theorist of translation respectfully speaks about it" (Vlahov & Florin, 2012, p. 203). J.I. Recker notes that "the translator must be able to independently understand the main issues of phraseology theory, distinguish phraseological units, disclose their meaning and transfer their expressive and stylistic functions in translation" (Recker, 1974, p. 161).

According to S.G. Ter-Minasova, "in the idiomatics of the language, that is in the layer that is nationally specific by definition, a system of values, public morality, attitude to the world, to people, to other peoples are stored. Phraseological units, proverbs, sayings most clearly illustrate both the way of life, and the geographical location, and the history, and traditions of one or another community united by one culture" (Ter-Minasova, 2000, p. 80). The national values, wisdom and national specifics of speakers of this language are preserved in phraseological units. V.N. Telya also states that "the phraseological fund of the language is a mirror where the linguistic and cultural community identifies its national identity" (Telya, 1996, p. 9). So, phraseology constitutes a vivid and nationally peculiar part of native speakers' linguistic picture of the world and it also represents the culture of native speakers of a certain linguistic community.

Therefore, when translating phraseological units, many difficulties arise due to differences in culture and customs, styles, as well as in geographical, historical, religious beliefs, habits, etc.

## Methodology

In the process of studying the difficulties and techniques of translating phraseological units on the example of Mo Yan's novel "Life and Death are wearing me out", various methods and research techniques were used. When analyzing the difficulties of translating phraseological units, a descriptive and linguo-cultural methods were used. To determine the methods of translation of phraseological units, a comparative method and lexico-semantic techniques were used.

## Results and Discussion

In 2012 the Chinese writer Mo Yan, whose works have been translated into many foreign languages, including Russian, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. The famous Russian translator I. A. Egorov calls him an author who has "a power that has deep roots in the land of China" (Egorov, 2014, p. 5). The postmodernist novel "Life and Death are wearing me out" should be distinguished among Mo Yan's works (Mo Yan, 2014, 703 p.). The novel contains numerous phraseological units (in Chinese they are divided into: *chéngyǔ*, *guànyòngyǔ*, *xièhòuyǔ*, *yányǔ*, proverbs, idioms and expressions, aphorisms) and quotes from Chinese classical literature, legends and myths. Many of them are vivid, emotionally intense expressions belonging to a certain language style. The expressions often have a pronounced national character. With the help of these set expressions, the narration becomes more evident and vivid, the characters are distinguished by identity and vividness, they are endowed with expressive and colorful speech.

For the first time, the term "idiom" was used by the English linguist L.P. Smith. According to this author, the English term idiom corresponds to the French term *idiotisme* and is used to reveal the grammatical structure of combinations of words characteristic of the English language which meanings cannot often be explained from the point of view of grammar and logic (Smith, 1922, p. 10). According to Maslova, "Phraseological units semantically reflect the long process of development of people's culture and record and pass cultural attitudes and stereotypes, standards and archetypes through generations" (Maslova, 2008, p. 81). The study of idioms allows us to trace the history throughout the development of human society from the origin of traditions and customs to the development of science and technology, as well as compare the evolution of two or more language communities.

Therefore, first of all, the difficulty of translating phraseological units with historical and cultural components is that it is necessary to provide commentary that is related to Chinese history, the way of life of Chinese people. Let us give examples from the Russian translation of the novel "Life and Death are wearing me out": 螳螂挡车 (the mantis detains the chariot) - the idiom is quoted from the books "Zhuang Zi - Peace on the Earth" (Zhou, 2018, p. 136), which says that the mantis raises his front legs to stop the chariot, not knowing that he doesn't have enough strength. This phraseological unit is used to describe the inevitable failure of a person trying to do the impossible overestimating his powers.

When translating phraseological units with cultural components, the difficulty is that different peoples understand and evaluate non-linguistic cultural phenomena also in different ways. According to Timko, the main factors that influenced the difficulties of translating lexical units with cultural components include, first of all, the fact that "native speakers of the target language are not familiar with the phenomenon of foreign-language culture". Secondly, "different peoples differently assess a similar phenomenon of culture: for example, native speakers of the source language are positive, and native speakers of the target language are negative" (Timko, 2007, p. 9).

For example, in the Chinese view of the world, the sheep is treated with sympathy, pity, because it is good, kind, but weak and meek, for example: 绵善如羊 (good and kind as a sheep) describes a kind person, 羊入虎口 (the sheep got into the tiger's jaws) illustrates the dangerous position of a naive sheep. In Russian, taking into account national cultural connotations, the sheep is associated with negative images. The sheep has cultural connotations: "weak", "cowardly" - a bully is always a coward; and "unworthy" - even a bad sheep gives a bit of wool. Phraseological units describing the elements of culture, mentality and life of different nations play a particularly important role in the process of creating a linguistic view of the world.

Translators also find it difficult to work with phraseological units that are a part of ancient Chinese folk beliefs. In ancient times, people's worldview was based on the oldest beliefs (animism, fetishism, etc.), which were embodied in myths, rituals and rites. In Chinese ancient consciousness and the concept of the world, a variety of spirits played a great role. They were

reflected in linguistic activity through phraseological units or set expressions. Buddhism had a great influence on Chinese culture, so in Chinese there are many phraseological units that are associated with this religion. Let us give examples from the novel under study: 鬼哭狼嚎 phraseological unit (to howl, to produce heartbreaking cries) interprets it as a ghost crying, describing loud mournful cries. Phraseological set expression 救人一命, 胜造七级浮屠 (to save a person's life is better than erecting a seven-story pagoda) appeared from Buddhist canons and is often used in Chinese literature.

Different issues arising while translating phraseological units are treated differently, various methods and opinions on the translation are offered. According to most researchers, including V.N. Komissarov, L.V. Dmitrieva, N.F. Smirnov, E.A. Martinkevich (2008) and S.E. Kuncovich (1999), four main methods of translating phraseological units can be distinguished: *the method of phraseological equivalent, the method of phraseological analogue, word-for-word translation of phraseological units and descriptive translation of phraseological units.*

When analyzing the translated text of Mo Yan's novel, the following methods of translating phraseological units were discovered:

#### 1) The method of phraseological equivalent.

When such a method is used in the target language, it means that there is a phraseological unit that coincides in all parameters with the phraseological unit of the source language, and the entire set of values of the translated unit is maintained. However, the translator is required to most fully reproduce a foreign phraseological unit. For example:

他蓝脸泛青, 瘦骨嶙峋, 仿佛一只拔光了羽毛的公鸡, 全身散着臭气, 一耸一耸地往前逼近。/ "His birthmark was nearly black. By then he was **so skeletal** he looked like a plucked rooster, and a very smelly one, as he advanced on the fat woman..." (Translation by I.A. Egorov) (Mo Yan, 2014, p.117)

你把这事悄悄跟爹说, 让他那榆木脑袋开开缝, 抓紧时间, 牵牛入社, 融入集体大家庭。/ Talk about this thing inchmeal with him, drum into his **dimwit** that it is needed to use the moment and join the commune with the bull, to join the ranks of the collective farm" (Translation

by I.A. Egorov) (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 229). The Chinese idiomatic expression 榆木脑袋 has the corresponding equivalent of “dimwit” in Russian. It coincides both figuratively and in meaning, but also stylistically and emotionally. Phraseological units differ from each other in structure and meaning in Russian and Chinese, so this method is rarely used by the translator.

## 2) The method of phraseological analogue.

According to V.N. Komissarov, “this type of phraseological correspondence is the so-called phraseological analogue” (Komissarov, 2001, p. 14). Phraseological analogues are used when there are no phraseological equivalents in the target language and you need to choose a phraseological unit with the same meaning but based on a different image. For example: 你们西门家院里出来的, 不论是人还是驴, 都是一箭双雕的强梁. / In your Shimen estate either people or cattle...everybody is able to kill two birds with one stone (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 73) In the example, the phraseological unit 箭双雕 is word-for-word translated as **“to kill two hawks with one shot”**. When translating into Russian, an analogue “to kill two birds with one stone” is used. The use of such a method provides a sufficiently high degree of equivalence while maintaining stylistic and emotional significance.

## 3) Word-for-word translation of phraseological units.

A word-for-word translation (calquing) of phraseological units can be applied only if the result is an expression which imagery is easily perceived by the Russian reader, and there is no impression of unnatural and non-characteristic of the generally accepted norms of the target language. According to Komissarov, “Calquing is a way of translating the original lexical unit by replacing its components (morphemes or words (in case of set expressions) with their lexical equivalents in the target language” (Komissarov, 1990, p. 173-174). In other words, a word-for-word translation is used when it can convey to the reader the true meaning enclosed in the source language. For example: 人是一言既出, 驷马难追; 驴是一诺千金, 不见不散. / **Words once spoken by humans cannot be taken back, not even by a team of horses** (instead of “words are not birds – out you let them, and back you never get them”); for donkeys, **it’s a matter of a promise is a promise, and we would wait for one another, no longer how long it took** (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 65).

There are three phraseological units in the original sentence. The translator uses various methods in this case. When translating phraseological units 一言既出, 驷马难追 and 一诺千金, calquing is used. And the descriptive method of the translation is used when translating a set expression 不见不散. It is worth noting that the translator analyzes the sentence in details concerning the meaning and structure of phraseological units. The choice of translation methods is also different in various situations. 我的声音悲壮凄凉, 传播到阎罗大殿的每个角落, 激发出重重叠叠的回声. / “... sad and miserable tones that penetrated every crevice of Lord Yama’s Audience Hall and rebounded in layered echoes” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 36). For the same purpose, the complex “contextual replacement + word-for-word translation is used”: 你可真是石头蛋子腌咸菜, 油盐不进啊. / “You are really stubborn. It’s like talking to a brick wall, a real **“brick in pickled vegetable: it doesn’t absorb any salt”** (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 73). 如果她像我一样博学多才, 知道爱斯基摩人就住在雪堆成的屋子里. / “If she were as **highly educated and talented as I was**, she would know that the Eskimos put snow cubes together to build a house ...” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 495).

我的主人摆出一副死猪不怕开水烫的架势, 蔫唧唧地说: 我等着. / **“Like a dead pig that’s beyond a fear of scalding water**, my master struck a nonchalant pose. “I’ll be waiting” (Mo Yan, 2014, p.57). 春苗穿着一条洁白的连衣裙, 不是我‘情人眼里出西施’, 她确实亭亭玉立. / Chunmiao in a white dress, and the matter is not that I make sheep’s eyes at her, as they say, **“in the eyes of her beloved, the beloved woman is like Xi Shi,”** - she is really slim and elegant” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 557). One of the four legendary beauties of ancient China was Xi Shi who lived at the end of the Spring and Autumn period. The translator uses calquing and adds a commentary to the name of Xi Shi to convey the worldview of the Chinese language to the reader. 他拄着一根柳木棍子, 面色苍黄, 眼窝深陷, 下巴上的胡须花白蓬乱, 这场大病, 使这个咬钉嚼铁的共产党员变成了一个老人. / He walked with a cane, his pallor, sunken eyes, and chin stubble showing the effects of an illness serious enough to turn **a hard-as-nails member of the Communist Party into an old man**” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 342).

In addition, when studying the novel, attention was drawn to a special group of phraseological units that were taken as quotes from Chinese

classical literature. For example, “猪十六啊，猪十六，士可杀而不可辱！我刁小三败了就是败了，请你自重，不要用这种方式侮辱我！” / “Sixteen, I say, Sixteen, **you can kill a warrior but you mustn't humiliate him.** Yes, I've lost and I admit it but I ask you to behave honorably and not to disgrace me!” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 396). 士可杀而不可辱 refers to a scholar who would rather die than be humiliated. In the Book of Rites -Confucian Conduct, one of five initial books of Confucianism: “Confucianism is something that can be kissed but not robbed, something that can be approached but not forced. They can be killed but not insulted” (Confucius, Chunqiu). The methods of calquing and adding a commentary in the translated text are used. Some more examples: 这真是你方唱罢我登场，杨七的表演，逗引得那拨无聊青年哈哈大笑。 / “All the tricks pulled off by Yang the Seventh are really, as they say, **“you didn't have time to finish the aria, and I'm already on stage,”** provoked young loafers' furious laugh” (Mo Yan, 2014, p.460). The set expression 你方唱罢我登场 was cited from the classical novel “Dream of the Red Chamber”.

#### 4) Descriptive translation of phraseological units.

According to L. F. Dmitrieva, E. A. Martinkevich, N. F. Smirnov (2008), and S. E. Kuncovich (1999), when translating and explaining the meaning of the phraseological unit, which has neither analogues nor equivalents in Russian and is not subject to word-for-word translation, the translator needs to use descriptive translation. At the same time, you often have to apply various lexical transformations of the units of the source language. For example, 因为国营农场里人才济济，有几个在这里劳动改造的右派就是留学海外归来的钢铁工程师。 / “because among the talented people gathered there, **the “right elements”** who underwent labor re-education, there were a couple of engineers who studied steel production abroad” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 56). The examples from the novel under study: 你大伯那么有钱，在县城置一套房子，那还不是小菜一碟？ / “Your uncle is so rich he can build a mansion for him in town **without missing the money at all**” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 625). The phraseological unit 小菜一碟 (literally “a little plate of snacks”) means “an easy deal”. 他待人接物一团和气，满嘴甜言蜜语，对待你的妻子更是礼貌有加，一口一个小姨，叫得十分亲热。 / “He was friendly to people, he spoke without restraint and his speech was replete with **fine words and**

**honeyed phrases.** He was especially polite in his dealings with your wife, he named her his little aunty in a manner a tender and beloved nephew did (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 624). “礼轻情义重，请笑纳！” / “ - The gift is frivolous, but heartily, please come down and accept! (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 623). The phraseological unit 礼轻情义重 (literally means “a present - a matter of small weight but it means a lot”). The examples from the novel under study: “庞春苗，我和你远日无仇，近日无冤，天下好小伙子有的是，你为什么非要拆散我们这个家？” / “Chunmiao, **we've never been enemies with you and there's no reason for you and me to be enemies now.** With all the eligible bachelors out there, why are you dead set on destroying this family?” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 608). 在以往的阴雨天气里，我总是精神萎靡、昏昏欲睡... / I was always listless during spells of wet and grey weather, **wanting nothing more than to lie down and sleep...**” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 598). 我苦思冥想不得其解 / I can't understand, come hell or high water” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 563). 过马路时我眼观六路，耳听八方 / At the cross-walk he looked in **all directions and listened** (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 531). The word-for-word translation of the phrase 眼观六路，耳听八方 is to watch six roads and to listen to eight cardinal directions. In Chinese, the phrase describes a person who is inventive, flexible and able to observe and analyze the situation.

To avoid errors in the reader's perception of a particular idiom, the translator uses a combination of different methods of translation. For example, combining descriptive translation with word-for-word translation, the translator explains the meaning of Chinese phraseological unit: 正如你刚才所说，你是我哥，而她又是她姐，所以我劝你们胃口不要太大，**天网恢恢啊！** / “As you've just said, you are my brother, and they are sisters, so I advise you not to let your appetites grow too big. As they say, **nothing escapes from celestial nets, justice has long arms!**” (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 597). The translator adds the phraseological unit “justice has long arms” and make the translation more understandable for the reader. “小姨，你是个大破鞋！”庞凤凰对目瞪口呆的庞春苗说，然后对着你儿子一挥手，像个指挥果断的军官一样，说：“撤！” / You are the whore of all the whores, aunty big **“worn out shoes!”** (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 622). “Worn out shoes” is a set expression to describe women of pleasure in China. Accordingly, with the semantic meaning of such an expression, the author adds an identical phrase from the Russian language. “She

threw it off to her. Then she waved in command to your son. - Let's go!" 我们一路上风餐露宿。 / "Along our complicated way we dined on the wind and slept in the dew" (Mo Yan, 2014, p. 155). The translator intentionally adds an adjective "complicated" for helping the reader to understand.

### Conclusions

Phraseology as an important component of the language system demonstrates the metaphors of language, emotions, feeling, logic of people's thoughts (Boldyreva & Han, 2020, p. 69). Having analyzed the translation of phraseological units of the studied material, we can conclude that the main difficulties of translating phraseological units that the translators can face are national specifics that a significant part of Chinese phraseological units possesses, linguistic and extralinguistic features formed on the basis of mythological, religious and folklore texts.

Translation of phraseological units from Chinese into Russian in various situations requires different approaches. The person who translates an expression must feel part of a foreign-language culture and find the only possible and unique version of its translation into Russian (Kardumyan & Pavlenko, 2018, p.1).

When studying the translation of the phraseological units considered on the basis of Mo Yan's novel "Life and Death are wearing me out", it can be noted that the most common of the methods used is word-for-word translation. The wide use of the calquing method which the translator skillfully combines with the combination of techniques allows him to preserve the finest nuances of the novel: word-play, ironies, allusions and references to the history, culture, religion, literature of China, and that is to convey the mesmerizing imagery of Mo Yan's narration to the reader (Vashkyavichus & Pavlova, 2019, p. 307).

A significant part of both Chinese and Russian phraseological combinations is associated with various realities of folk life, facts of history, customs and rites. The link between a language unit, culture and national character can be made through phraseological expressions. The material and spiritual values of peoples are also transmitted through these linguistic and cultural expressions. When translating these set expressions, translators need not only to convey their meaning, but also to reflect imagery by choosing a similar expression in the target language. In order to achieve accurate

translation, the difficulties encountered in the process of inter-language and intercultural communication must be overcome.

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