Pragmatic Dimensions of Communicative Language Teaching

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Pragmatics, a major division of semiotics, has been defined as the study of language from the point of view of the user, particularly of the choices he makes, the constraints he encounters in using language in social interaction and the effects his use of language has on the other participants in acts of communication. (A First Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, 1980.)

In the situation where English is an International Language (EIL) and used purely as a tool for communication--professional, academic or occupational, English teaching in the two modes, auditory and visual, must have sound communicative underpinnings incorporating pragmatic dimensions of language communication.

In teaching the skills series in the Thai lower secondary education level, courses EN 041-042 and EN 061-062, a set of materials, namely *Keep Talking* and *Writing to Communicate* have been widely used. The interplay between the auditory and visual modes of language communication is emphasized. Language practice involves communicative activities emphasizing fun and authentic language functions. The paper elaborates on the various enabling communicative techniques to strengthen the students' English skills.

The paper will be in four parts. In Part I, I will define the concept of pragmatism as relevant and applicable to the field of language teaching. The concept of communicative language teaching will be given whithin the dimensions of pragmatism in Part II. In Part III, the focus will be on the English syllabus for the lower secondary level of education in Thailand. The communicative tasks in the textbooks entitled "Writing to Communicate" developed for the program will be described and discussed in Part IV of the paper.

Part I : Pragmatism and Language Teaching

In philosophy, pragmatism has been defined as the development factor for traditional empiricism (Baldwin, 1902). The Oxford Dictionary (1962) gives its meanings as "matter-of-fact" treatment of things (1872) ; as a method of treating history in which the phenomena are considered with special reference to their causes, antecedent conditions, and results, and to their practical lessons.; and as the doctrine that the whole meaning of a conception expresses itself in practical consequences (1898). In Baldwin (1902) definition pragmatism is "the whole meaning of a conception expresses itself in practical consequences, either in the shape of conduct to be recommended or in that of experience to be expected if the conception is true, which consequences would be different if it were untrue, and must be different from the consequences by which the meaning of other conceptions is in turn expressed."

In linguistic science "pragmatism" or "pragmatics" has been defined as "the study of language from the point of view of the user, especially of the choices he makes, the constraints he encounters in using language in social interaction and the effect his use of language has on the other participants in act of communication." (A First Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, 1980). Fillmore (1981) interpreted pragmatics as the unifying point of the linguistic form (syntax), the communicative functions that these forms are capable of serving (semantics: form, function), and the contexts of settings of the communicative functions (pragmatics: form, function, setting). Thus the Fillmorean pragmatic approach to discourse production and interpretation emphasizes deixis and dynamic development of the communicator's "world sets" or contextualization which consists of (1) external contextualization concerning proper use of the text in the world and, (2) internal contextualization concerning the imaginative worlds of the creator and interpreters of the text.

The following sentences exemplify the external and internal contextualization processes in discourse interpretation.

"Pat bought a hat." As contrasted with "Pat bought herself a hat."

"Do you like this one better than this one ?"

(External contextualization)

and in a narrated monologue

"She never had enjoyed listening to her husband lecture, and this time was no exception."

We can, thus, present the above pragmatic description of discourse as follows :
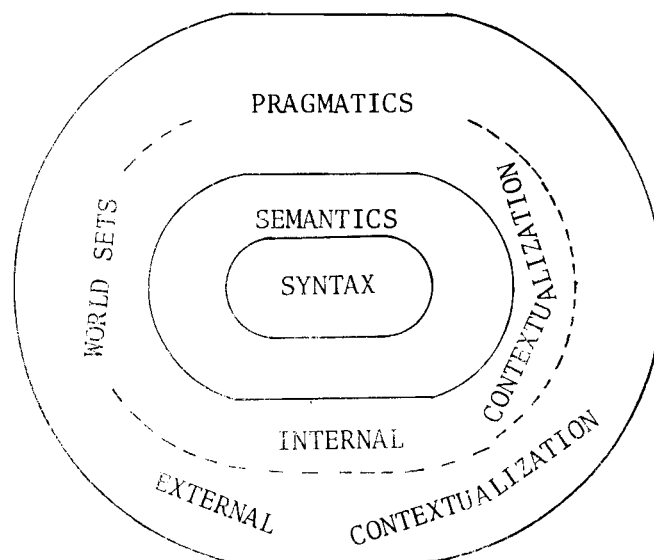

Figure 1 : Pragmatic Description of Discourse

In the production and interpretation of discourse, the addresser and the addressee's linguistic knowledge and knowledge of language use are necessary. The latter encompasses the knowledge of properties of expressions, the knowledge of literary conventions and encyclopedic world knowledge.

Oller (1973) defined pragmatics as "the study of the correspondence of linguistic forms to contexts. It logically includes syntax and semantics"; and later Oller (1979) stated that "Briefly, pragmatics is about how people communicate information about facts and feelings to other people, or how they merely express themselves and their feelings through the use of language for no particular audience, except possibly an omniscient God. It is about how meaning is both coded and in a sense in the normal intercourse of words and experience." Here again the interplay between internal and external contextualization of pragmatic language use is mentioned.

Savignon (1983) succinctly gave the meaning of pragmatics as "the science concerned with the relationships between expressions in the formal system of language and anything else outside it ; an interdisciplinary field of inquiry concerned with relations between linguistic units, speakers, and extralinguistic facts ; roles and uses of language in social contexts ; the science of language use."

From the above discussions, we can conclude that pragmatics impinges on both psycho-linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of language transactions. It seems appropriate to conclude by citing Morris (1938 : 108) who stated that "....it (pragmatics) deals with the biotic aspects of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occurs in the functioning of signs."

Part II : Pragmatic Dimensions of Communicative Language Teaching

"Communication is multi-functional," and "categories of communicative functions.... are ....pragmatic ; elements relate....to the extrinsic functions of language use." (Widdowson, 1978).

The relationships between pragmatics and communicative language teaching are dynamic and procedural. The biological, psychological and sociological dimensions of pragmatics serve as input : materialistic and motivational, and process : setting-field, province, domain or register ; mode-genre ; channel-aural or graphic ; tenor-role-relationships, and style. The process of pragmatic mapping of biological, sociological and psychological data onto target language surface forms comes into play from the materials preparation stage to the preparation, packaging, presentation and exploitation stages of communicative language teaching.

The dimensions of pragmatics, the features of communicative language teaching and the pragmatic mapping onto target language surface features might be shown diagrammatically in Figures 2, 3 and 4 as follows :

INTERNAL   ←----------------------→   EXTERNAL
CONTEXTUALIZATION   CONTEXTUALIZATION

Biological	Psychological	Sociological
age	attitude (voice)	function
sex	- negative	register
readiness	- positive	province (domain, field)
etc.	- sarcastic	- topic
	- sincere	- situation
	- ironic	status
	etc.	role-relationship (tenor)
	intelligence	
	temperament	proxemics ⎫ polite-impolite
	empathy	kinesics ⎭ intimate-formal
	motivation	value
	ego permeability	culture-culture
	aptitude	

Figure 2 : Pragmatic Dimensions of Communicative Language Teaching

Figure 2 presents the biological, psychological and sociological dimensions of pragmatics. The biological dimension is at the internal contextualization end of the bi-polar scale representing pragmatic mappings. The sociological dimension, on the other hand, is at the external contextualization end of pragmatic mapping. The psychological dimension is in between representing both internal and external effects of the process of contextualization in pragmatic mapping.

Preparation	Packaging	Presentation	Exploitation

- materials
- objectives
- lesson plans
- classroom
  environment
	- episodic
	  organization
	- size
	- complexity
	- range
		- pre-teaching
		- teaching
		- listening ⎤ INPUT
		  reading ⎦
		- error correction
			- one-way communication
			  listen/read
			- partial two-way
			  communication
			- full two-way
			  communication

Figure 3 : Features of Communicative Language Teaching

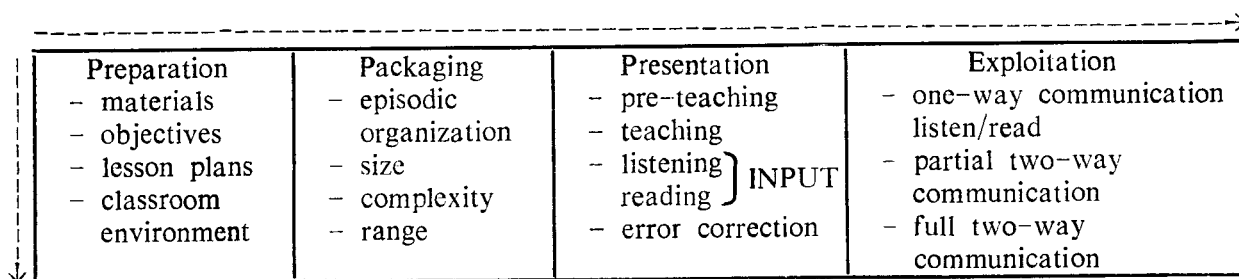Communicative activities progress from pre-communication in one-way communication and partial communication steps under "exploitation." The full two-way communication is the authentic communication step in which learners become actively engaged in decoding and encoding information utilizing internal and external contextualization processes of pragmatic mapping from and onto target language surface features.

The listening and reading activities serving as input under "presentation", are preparatory to exploitation. The functional purposes of the decoding/encoding activities at this stage are different from those under "exploitation" in which the functional purposes are initiated by language learners who partake in communication as interpreters and transmitters.

Littlewood's (1983) domains of communicative skills building consisting of structural practice, relating structure to communicative function, relating language to specific meaning and relating language to social context may work well in EFL situations where ELT for communicative purposes normally stresses specific meanings/functions and purpose-oriented communicative tasks.

Target Language Surface Features (in natural chunks)

ENCODING | DECODING

| - Pragmatic
- Rhetorical
- Semantic
- Grammatical | STORAGE |
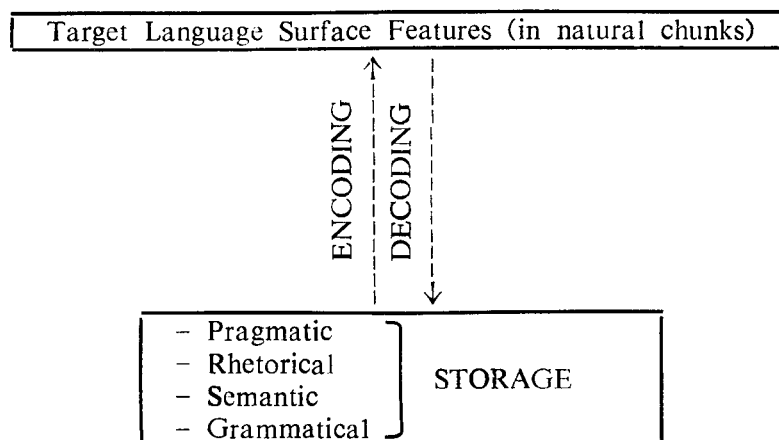
Figure 4 : The Process of Pragmatic Mapping

In analytical teaching students utilize a language corpus presented to them in natural chunks as a springboard for real communication. Littlewood's domains of communicative teaching comprising relationships among structures, functions, specific meaning and social meaning are to be considered in conjunction with pragmatic mapping and natural chunking of language input and desired output.

Part III : The Writing Specific Skills Program in the Thai Lower Secondary English Syllabus

The specific skills programs in the lower secondary English syllabus consist of three components : Listening-Speaking 1 and 2 (EN 041, 042), Reading 1 and 2 (EN 051, 052) and Writing 1 and 2 (EN 061, 062). The purposes of the specific skills courses are :

1. To develop the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing for more accurate and fluent uses in various situations and occasions,

2. To impart the knowledge and understanding of the target culture embedded in the lessons.

The objectives of the specific writing skills program (EN 061, 062) are :

Students will be able to write

1. answers to questions on the texts read and listened to
2. summaries for the texts read and listened to
3. sentences to complete various passages
4. essays on given themes
5. personal letters (e.g. appointment and invitation)
6. business letters (e.g. inquiry, making reservation, request).

The program is task-oriented with specific purposes and functions. Descriptions of the program will be given in Part IV which follows.

Part IV : Writing to Communicate

A team of curriculum designers and materials developers was appointed by the Ministry of Education to develop the present new curriculum and texts to suit the syllabus. For the Specific Writing Courses, *Writing to Communicate Skills Series* Books I and II were developed.

Notional-functional-communicative approaches were used in developing the textbooks. Book I contains 10 units ; each unit is subdivided into lessons. There were 21 lessons in Writing to Communicate I with topics ranging from general information, physical appearance to direction, distance and at the department store. The four intervening revision units contain summary consolidating tasks. Book II also has 10 units with 18 lessons and 4 revision units. Topics include writing an application, business letters, house and home, education and future career, occupations and travel, etc.

Description

Each lesson begins with the objectives given in Thai. Language with graphic presentations are presented as input for pre-communicative, partial communicative and communicative activities. For pre-communicative and partial communicative phases, students read and learn necessary language input. The exercises include substitutions, fill-ins and transformations. In the communicative phase, students write from their experience and in accordance with given guidelines. At this stage they will use the internal and external contextualization processes of pragmatic mapping in rendering the visual information. Instructions for visual communication tasks include "Fill in the following form with information about yourself," "Now tell about your hobby," and "Describe one of your close friends' character....." At the end of each lesson, a glossary of necessary words and expressions is given with their Thai equivalents.

Over sixty percent of the tasks in the 10 units are quasi-communicative whereas about eighty percent of the tasks in the 4 revision units are real communicative demanding solid language intake and full pragmatic mapping on the students' part.

A specimen lesson is given here. The lesson comes from Writing to Communicate II for Course EN 062.

Unit VII

Lesson I Character

บทเรียนนี้ว่าด้วยอุปนิสัยใจคอของบุคคลในอาชีพต่างๆ อุปนิสัยเหล่านี้เป็นลักษณะเฉพาะกลุ่มของ
คนในแต่ละอาชีพตามที่คนอื่น ๆ เป็น และเป็นอุปนิสัยใจคอของบุคคลที่ใกล้ชิดกับผู้เรียนเช่นคน
ในครอบครัวเดียวกันและเพื่อนร่วมชั้น เป็นต้น

I. หมวดคำเหล่านี้เป็นคำที่ใช้อธิบายนิสัยใจคอและอุปนิสัยของคน

① diligent
helpful
hard-working
strict
patient
serious
confident

② friendly
pleasant
sweet
nice
kind
good
polite

③ naughty
wicked
nasty
moody
lazy
bossy

④ fun-loving
extroverted
talkative
persistent

⑤ intelligent
clever
wise

⑥ shy
introverted
quiet
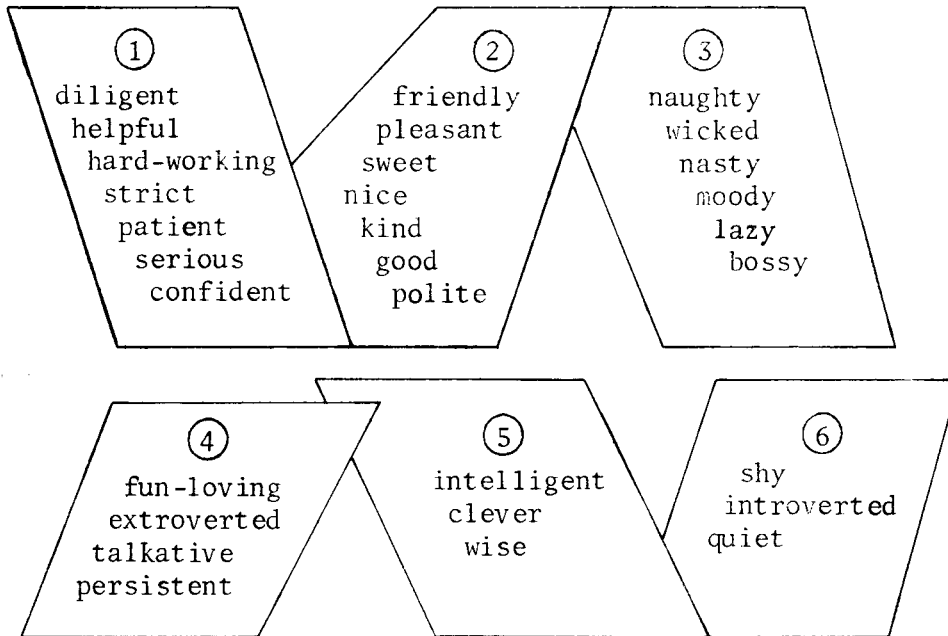
หมวดที่ ① ② และ ⑤ เป็นอุปนิสัยที่ดี ส่วน ③ และ ⑥ เป็นอุปนิสัยที่
อาจจะได้รับการติเตียนได้ หมวดที่ ④ นั้น เป็นอุปนิสัยที่ดีหรือไม่ดีก็ได้ขึ้นกับสถานการณ์

II.   **Typical Types**

เมื่อเรานึกถึงคนในอาชีพใดอาชีพหนึ่ง เรามักจะมีภาพพจน์ เกี่ยวกับคนในอาชีพนี้ว่าเป็นคนอย่างไรมีอุป-
นิสัยใจคอเช่นใด

ตัวอย่างเช่น salesman

A. Wera is a car salesman. He is successful in his profession. He can sell many cars. He earns a lot of money. This is because he is talkative and persistent. He can talk the buyers into buying his company's cars.

B.   What about a movie star ?

Describe a movie-star's character. Use the following words.

Adj.
temperamental
fun-loving
out-going

N.
dresses
make-up

V.
sing
dance
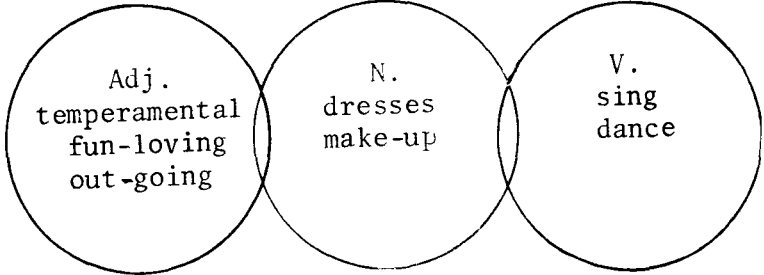
Siranee is a famous movie-star. She is..

....

She likes to...

She has many.........................and loves to put on...

C. What about a teacher ?

Describe a typical teacher. Use the following words.

Polite
serious
quiet
kind
good
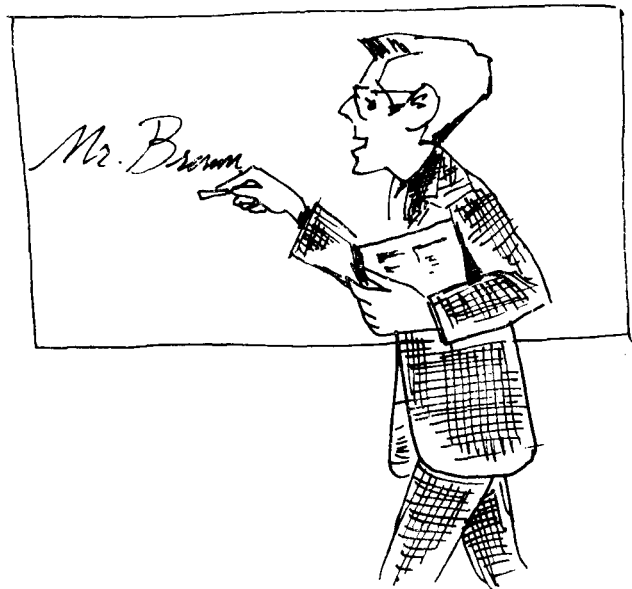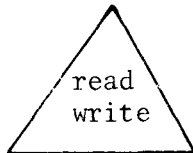
read
write

Mr. Brown is a teacher in a high school. He is..

....

....

He likes to...

Every weekend he visits several bookstores to buy books to read. His students like him because he is....................and.......................

My Teacher

Describe your teacher. Write about his/her character and what he/she likes to do.

....

....

....

....

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....

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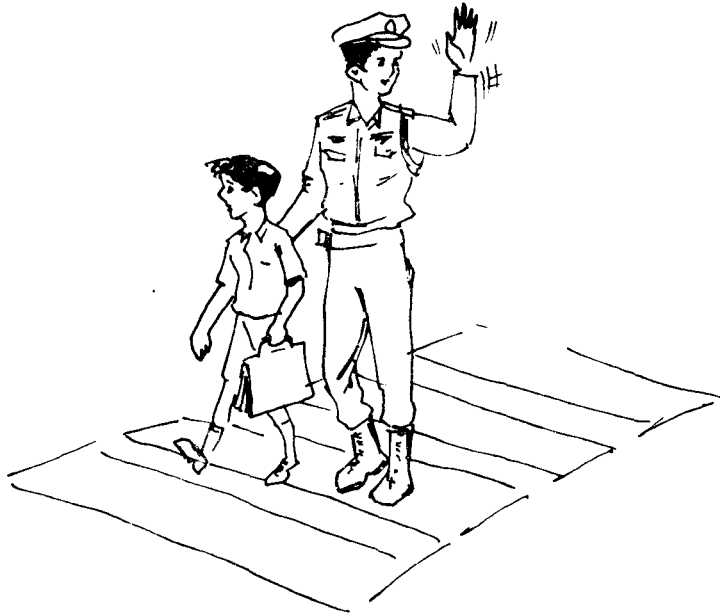
A Policeman

D. **A Policeman**

Use the adjectives given earlier to describe this policeman.

....

....

E. **My Friend**

Describe one of your close friends' character. Is he/she naughty ? Is he/she conscientious, bossy, fussy, wise, confident, etc. ?

....

....

....

....

F. **My Mother**

What about your own mother. Is she kind ? Is she sweet ? Is she strict ? Yes or No. Describe her.

....

....

....

....

ศัพท์และสำนวนที่ควรรู้

ศัพท์		
bossy	=	ชอบทำเป็นนาย ทำเป็นหัวหน้า ชอบเจ้ากี้เจ้าการ
confident	=	เป็นที่ไว้วางใจ
conscientious	=	มีสติรับผิดชอบ, มีความละเอียดถี่ถ้วน
diligent	=	ขยันหมั่นเพียร
extroverted	=	ชอบเปิดเผย
fussy	=	จู้จี้, ยุ่ง
hard—working	=	ทำงานแข็ง, ทำงานหนัก
helpful	=	เป็นประโยชน์ (มีนิสัยดี ชอบช่วยเหลือ)
introverted	=	ชอบเก็บตัว
make—up (n.)	=	การแต่งหน้าด้วยเครื่องสำอาง, เครื่องแต่งหน้า
moody	=	เศร้าหมอง อารมณ์เสีย (mood (n) = อารมณ์)
nasty	=	ฉุนเฉียว ไม่น่ารัก น่าเกลียด (ความหมายขึ้นอยู่กับ context)
out—going	=	ชอบแสดงออก, ชอบสังสรรค์
patient	=	อดทน
persistent	=	ยึดมั่นในความคิดเห็นของตน
serious	=	เอาจริงเอาจัง, ขรึม, ขึงขัง
strict	=	เคร่งครัด กวดขัน
temperamental	=	เจ้าอารมณ์ อารมณ์หวั่นไหวง่าย
typical type	=	ลักษณะเฉพาะแบบ

สำนวน

put on make—up	=	แต่งหน้า
talk someone into doing something	=	พูดชักชวน, เกลี้ยกล่อมให้ทำอะไรบางอย่าง

Conclusion

"Writing to Communicate" illustrates one communicative scheme for teaching the specific writing skills in line with the notional-functional approach to EFL. The activities were designed to lead students from pre-and quasi-communication to real communication. In the former phase, pragmatic mapping focuses on the rhetorical aspect including syntactic and semantic features, whereas in the latter phase, the internal and external contextualization processes of pragmatic mapping incorporating the biological, psychological and sociological deep features are used for communicative writing tasks.

Note

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The Author

Achara Wangsotorn, associate professor, received her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1975. Her working experience included teaching English at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, training of English teachers at the Central Institute of English Language (CIEL), Ministry of University Affairs and conducting various research projects on TEFL. At present she is Deputy Director for Research and Services of the Chulalongkorn University Language Institute.

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