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Autobiographic Narratives as Data in Applied Linguistics

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In the past decade, language memoirs, linguistic autobiographies, and learners' journals and diaries have become a popular means of data collection in applied linguistics. It is not always clear however how one should go about analyzing these data. The aim of this paper is to offer a critical review of analytical frameworks applied to second language users' personal narratives. I discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these frameworks in relation to the type of information they seek: subject reality, life reality, and text reality. I argue that some analytical approaches, in particular content and thematic analyses, are insensitive to the interpretive nature of autobiographic data. Subsequently, I offer recommendations for systematic analysis of bi- and multilinguals' narratives on macro- and micro-levels in terms of content, context, and form.

A well-known anthropologist Victor Barnouw once remarked that from a scholarly perspective the main difficulty with life stories, fascinating as they are, is knowing what to do with them (Crapanzano 1984). His remark rings true not only in the field of anthropology but also in our own field, where, in the past decade, autobiographic narratives have become a popular means of data collection. Once they have been collected however, novice researchers often do not know what to do with them—it is not uncommon to see a summary of participants' observations, richly interspersed with quotes, presented as analysis. The researchers are not to blame however: none of the textbooks on second language (L2) research teach them how to analyze narratives, either fictional or personal, nor do guides to the analysis of life histories deal with the unique challenges of translating one's life story into a second language.

The purpose of this paper is to remedy the situation by offering first an overview of current approaches to analysis of autobiographic narratives and then a set of recommendations for future work. Due to space constraints, I will not revisit the literature on narrative and life history analysis (Atkinson 1998; Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Cortazzi 1993; Denzin 1989; Linde 1993; Riessman 1993; Toolan 2001; Wortham 2001) but proceed directly to examine applications of this work to autobiographic narratives of bi- and multilingual speakers. The terms *bi-* and *multilinguals* and *L2 users* will refer here to speakers who use two or more languages in their everyday lives, be it simultaneously (in language contact situations) or consecutively (in the context of immigration), regardless of respective levels of proficiency.

My discussion will be limited to sociolinguistic analyses, leaving out analyses of linguistic development, an issue I have addressed elsewhere (Pavlenko in press). I begin by discussing three types of autobiographic narratives examined in our field and the three purposes for which they are examined. Then, I review analytical frameworks commonly applied to L2 users' narratives and highlight their strengths and weaknesses. Subsequently, I offer a set of recommendations for systematic analysis of bi- and multilinguals' narratives on macro- and micro-levels in terms of content, context, and form.

THE PLACE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, narratives became the focus of the evolving interdisciplinary field of narrative study, influenced by developments in structuralist literary theory (Barthes 1966; Propp 1968; Todorov 1987), sociolinguistics (Labov 1972; Labov and Waletzky 1967), and cognitive psychology (Rumelhart 1975; Schank and Abelson 1977). At the intersection of these approaches, narrative emerged not merely as an oral or literary genre, but as the central means by which people give their lives meaning across time: 'we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative' (Hardy 1968: 5). With time, in what is now known as a narrative or discursive turn in the humanities and social sciences, narratives became both an object and, in the form of narrative inquiry, a legitimate means of research in history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and education.

The narrative turn also found its way into our field where the Schumanns (1977, 1980), Bailey (1980, 1983) and others began to examine L2 learners' diaries to identify factors that impact the learning process. With time, diaries were supplemented with published language learning memoirs and autobiographic interviews, all analyzed in an effort to understand how people experience second language learning and make sense of this experience. These studies challenged the portrayal of L2 learners as unidimensional abstractions and presented them as human beings who have feelings (Bailey 1980, 1983; Schumann, F. 1980; Schumann, J. 1997), who are positioned in terms of gender, race, and class (Norton 2000; Ogulnick 1998; Polanyi 1995), and who exercise their agency in the learning process (Kanno 2003; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). This deepened understanding of the L2 learners and users allowed researchers to advance new theoretical constructs for the study of second language acquisition (SLA), ranging from competitiveness and anxiety, to emotions, agency, and symbolic domination.

Altogether, autobiographic narratives offer three major contributions to research on SLA and bilingualism. First of all, they offer insights into people's private worlds, inaccessible to experimental methodologies, and thus provide

the insider's view of the processes of language learning, attrition, and use. Secondly, they highlight new connections between various learning processes and phenomena, and, in doing so, point to new directions for future research. Thirdly, autobiographic narratives constitute a valuable information source for historic and diachronic sociolinguistic research in contexts where other sources are scarce (Nekvapil 2003).

Three types of autobiographic narratives are commonly examined in the study of sociolinguistics of bilingualism and SLA. *Diaries and journals*, written by L2 learners either spontaneously or in response to teachers' and researchers' requests represent the first source of information about learners' beliefs and feelings (Bailey 1980, 1983; Norton 2000; Ogulnick 1998; Polanyi 1995; Schmidt and Frota 1986; Schumann, F. 1980; Schumann, F. and J. Schumann 1977; Schumann, J. 1997). The second source, rapidly gaining in popularity, are *linguistic biographies* and *autobiographies*, that is life histories that focus on the languages of the speaker and discuss how and why these languages were acquired, used, or abandoned. In the European tradition, these narratives, also known as *Sprachbiographien*, are collected through life history interviews (Čmejrková 2003; Franceschini 2003; Franceschini and Miecznikowski 2004; Meng 2001; Meng and Protassova 2002; Nekvapil 2000, 2003; Protassova 2004). In the North American tradition, they are collected through interviews (Heinz 2001; Kanno 2003; Kouritzin 2000; Mkhonza 1995; Vitanova 2004, 2005) or as classroom assignments (Hinton 2001; Pavlenko 2003; Tse 2000a). To avoid influencing speakers' responses through elicitation procedures, researchers appeal to a third type of narratives, published linguistic autobiographies, also known as *language memoirs* (Besemeres 2002, 2004; Granger 2004; Kinginger 2004; Pavlenko 1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2004; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Schumann, J. 1997; Tse 2000b). Let us examine now what approaches have been taken to the analysis of these narratives.

ANALYSIS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Narrative study differentiates between three interconnected types of information one might gather from life histories: subject reality (i.e. findings on how 'things' or events were experienced by the respondents), life reality (i.e. findings on how 'things' are or were), and text reality (i.e. ways in which 'things' or events are narrated by the respondents) (Denzin 1989; Nekvapil 2003). The studies of autobiographic narratives in our field commonly focus on one of the three types of information and methods of analysis vary depending on the focus of the study.

Subject reality

The largest group of studies examine subject reality. These studies commonly appeal to some form of thematic or content analysis to examine L2 learners'

thoughts and feelings about the language learning process (Bailey 1980, 1983; Caratini-Soto 1997; Norton 2000; Ogulnick 1998, 1999; Polanyi 1995; Rosa 1997; Schumann, F. 1980; Schumann, F. and J. Schumann 1977; Schmidt and Frota 1986; Tse 2000a), bilinguals' attitudes toward their respective languages (Heinz 2001; Pavlenko 1998, 2003; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Treichel 2004; Yelenevskaya and Fialkova 2003), and heritage language speakers' views about language maintenance and ethnic identification (Hinton 2001; Tse 2000b).

The main analytical step in *content* and *thematic analysis* is the coding of narratives according to emerging themes, trends, patterns, or conceptual categories (Strauss and Corbin 1990). For instance, Francine Schumann (1980), interested in the influence of personal variables on the acquisition of a second language, identified ten such variables in the analysis of diaries she and her husband kept in Tunisia and Iran: transition anxiety, nesting patterns, reactions to pedagogical techniques, motivation for choice of language learning materials, desire to maintain one's own language learning agenda, eavesdropping versus speaking as a language learning strategy, competition versus cooperation, the role of the expatriate community in hindering the learning process, and the disadvantages of being a woman and an English-speaker.

This list illustrates both advantages and disadvantages of content analysis. The key advantage of this approach is the sensitivity to recurrent motifs salient in participants' stories and thus to themes that are important to L2 learners but may not have been reflected in previous scholarship. Schumann (1980), for instance, was the first to point to the importance of gender in access to linguistic resources, an issue that until then remained invisible in the field of SLA. On the other hand, we can also see that the factors listed reflect different areas of concern (attitudes, language learning strategies, social factors, etc.) and are of a different nature (external vs. internal) and different degree of generalization and abstraction (e.g. the spread of English in Iran vs. nesting patterns, that is, one's preference for comfortable surroundings). Putting them together in a list may qualify as a preliminary analytical step, but not as analysis, because we are left with a multitude of questions: What exactly do these factors reflect? How are they linked to each other? How generalizable are they?

These questions stem from five major weaknesses of content and thematic analyses. The first is the lack of a theoretical premise, which makes it unclear where conceptual categories come from and how they relate to each other. The second is the lack of established procedure for matching of instances to categories. The third is the overreliance on repeated instances, which may lead analysts to overlook important events or themes that do not occur repeatedly or do not fit into preestablished schemes. The fourth is an exclusive focus on what is in the text, whereas what is excluded may potentially be as or even more informative. The fifth and perhaps the most problematic for applied linguistics is the lack of attention to ways in which

storytellers use language to interpret experiences and position themselves as particular kinds of people.

In other words, in the absence of a theoretical framework and a clear methodological procedure, content analysis may result in a laundry list of observations, factors, or categories, illustrated by quotes from participants, that misses the links between the categories, essentializes particular descriptions, and fails to describe the larger picture where they may fit. For instance, Pavlenko's (1998) paper proposes two sets of stages in the process of second language learning, losses and gains, without stopping to consider the rhetorical purposes these stages serve in the autobiographic accounts under consideration, nor the unique nature of the immigrant group in question.[1]

Studies relying exclusively on thematization also risk offering conclusions that are too obvious and trite (e.g. learners prefer interesting materials, immigrant children are experiencing first language attrition), and may end up speaking past each other, because different analysts focus on different 'emerging themes.' In fact, the notion that themes and patterns 'emerge freely' in analysis, taking shape of a 'grounded theory' (Strauss and Corbin 1990), is in itself naive and misleading, because it obscures the sociohistoric and cultural influences on the researcher's conceptual lens. In reality there is no way to examine texts 'from nowhere in particular' and it is hard to imagine that an analyst can truly 'step outside of' himself or herself (Santana 1999: 28) to create objective interpretations.

The impact of sociopolitical changes on researchers' conceptual lenses is particularly visible in the field of diary studies. Early diary studies conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s present L2 learners as a single homogeneous category of educated middle-class classroom dwellers and focus on competitiveness, motivation, and anxiety (Bailey 1980, 1983; Schmidt and Frota 1986; Schumann, F. 1980; Schumann, F. and J. Schumann 1977). In contrast, recent diary studies reflect the postmodern sensibility and highlight disadvantages experienced by women, immigrants, and refugees in access to linguistic resources and interactional opportunities, privileging the categories of gender, race, class, and ethnicity in analyzing learners' experiences (Norton 2000; Ogulnick 1998, 1999; Polanyi 1995).

This critique does not imply that content analysis should be abolished from studies of subject reality in linguistic autobiographies. Rather, I argue that content cannot be analyzed in separation from context and form, and that thematization is a preliminary analytical step and cannot be confused with analysis. To provide analysis that goes beyond a list-making activity, researchers need to adopt a specific theoretical framework that would allow them to clarify the nature of their conceptual categories and to pinpoint the links between the recurrent themes and conceptual constructs (for examples of such analyses in a variety of frameworks, see Granger 2004; Norton 2000; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Schumann, J. 1997). Analysts also need to consider linguistic means used by narrators in positioning themselves and

others (cf. Granger 2004; Pavlenko 2003) and in making sense of their life experiences (cf. Treichel 2004; Yelenevskaya and Fialkova 2003).

Life reality

The second group of studies are those interested in both subject and life reality. In the North American tradition many of these studies appeal to thematic analysis to pinpoint repeated events and commonalities in L2 learners' and users' experiences (Calvin 1999; Caratini-Soto 1997; Dykman 1999; Hinton 2001; Kanno 2003; Menard-Warwick 2004; Mkhonza 1995; Norton 2000; Pavlenko 2001c; Rosa 1997; Santana 1999).

Several studies display awareness of the interplay between content, context, and form and pay attention to the uses of causality markers, attribution, inference, and justification, and to narrators' positioning with regard to ideologies of language and identity that have currency in their environments (Kanno 2003; Menard-Warwick 2004; Mkhonza 1995; Norton 2000; Pavlenko 2001c). Kanno (2003) also considers evidence of reinterpretation visible in contradictions and discrepancies between different tellings of the same experience.

Other studies treat narratives 'as observation notes and transcripts' (Tse 2000b: 191) and thus as facts, rather than discursive constructions. This treatment disregards the interpretive nature of storytelling, that is the fact that the act of narration unalterably transforms its subject and any further interpretation interprets the telling and not the event in question. Importantly, narrators do not necessarily consciously 'distort the truth', rather they use the act of narration to impose meaning on experience, so that for instance in a diary entry the 'written text constructs, narrows down, clarifies, and focuses the truth of the event in quite a different manner than it was lived at the time' (Kramsch and Lam 1999: 59–60).

One example of such reductive treatment can be found in Hinton's (2001) discussion of 250 linguistic autobiographies of Asian-American college students. The paper is divided into two parts, each consisting mostly of quotes interspersed with brief commentary. The first part summarizes students' experiences (e.g. language shock, first-language attrition, involuntary code-mixing, poor communication between generations) and the second identifies factors influencing first language maintenance and attrition (the use of language at home, peer group pressure, pride in one's heritage, drive to assimilate, etc.). The major contribution of the study is in letting the reader hear the real voices of members of the 1.5 generation who experience linguistic discrimination and are in the process of losing their native languages.

At the same time, presenting textual reality as an experiential one, this study suffers from two major problems. On the one hand, by treating accounts as facts, the researcher takes a questionable shortcut to the study of sociolinguistic phenomena. It is well known that people's descriptions of their own and others' linguistic behaviors and competencies do not always

correspond to reality (cf. Tuominen 1998; Vitanova 2004), and phenomena such as language attrition and shift are best examined through triangulation of linguistic, observational, and interview data, rather than narratives only. On the other hand, the study misses out on a unique opportunity to examine the accounts as narratives and to understand discourses of language and identity people draw on in making sense of language maintenance and attrition. The 'factors' listed by the author are not really factors in the traditional meaning of the word—rather, they are systems of beliefs espoused by the writers and should have been analyzed as such.[2]

A different approach to analysis of autobiographic narratives is taken in the European tradition, where researchers use linguistic autobiographies to reconstruct sociolinguistic circumstances of bi- and multilingual families and speech communities (Čmejrková 2003; Meng 2001, 2004; Meng and Protassova 2002; Nekvapil 2000, 2003, 2004; Protassova 2004; Tabouret-Keller 2004) or linguistic trajectories of individual learners (Deprez 2004; Deslarzes 2004; Franceschini 2003; Hašová 2004; Treichel 2004).[3] These analyses pay close attention to the deployment of narrative resources and examine a range of linguistic devices, including ethnic categories and personal pronouns (Čmejrková 2003; Nekvapil 2000), volitional and cognitive verbs (Deprez 2004), episodic and argument structure (Treichel 2004), reported speech (Franceschini 2003), and lexical borrowing, loan translation, semantic transfer, and code-switching (Protassova 2004). The narrative data are frequently triangulated with sociohistoric and sociopolitical information and with behavioral data about speakers' idiolects, in particular the level of L2 proficiency and idiomaticity (Franceschini 2003) and the level of L1 attrition (Protassova 2004). This triangulation allows analysts to pinpoint and explain inconsistencies between narratives and historic events, or between content and form. For instance, Čmejrková (2003) observes that while her Ukrainian study participant claims that there are no syntactic differences between standard Czech and the speech of Ukrainian Czechs, his own Czech narratives exhibit several deviations from the standard and the influence of Russian and Ukrainian syntax and phraseology.

To sum up, linguistic autobiographies can undoubtedly be successfully used in the study of life and subject reality but the success of this enterprise is predicated on sensitivity to the interpretive nature of narration. This sensitivity, displayed through close attention to textual and interactional aspects of the narratives, and to similarities and differences between different versions of the same story, between stories of different participants, and between narratives and linguistic and factual data, contributes to, rather than detracts from, the general enterprise of the study of life.

Text reality

The third and the most recent group of studies in the field are those concerned with text reality. These studies examine how bilinguals construct

selves in their respective languages (Koven 1998, 2001, 2002, 2004) or in a second language (Vitanova 2004, 2005), how L2 writers create textual homes in a second language (Besemeres 2002, 2004; Kramsch and Lam 1999; Pavlenko 2001a, 2001b, 2004), and how language learning experiences are reflected in L2 users' positioning and narrative plots (Crawshaw *et al*. 2001; Leppänen and Kalaja 2002). To understand how humans author selves in narratives, these studies use a variety of analytical frameworks and examine how linguistic features and narrative structures are deployed to perform specific interactional and narrative functions.

Some studies focus on narrative structure and consider plots and schemas that allow storytellers to create engaging and coherent stories. For instance, Leppänen and Kalaja (2002) appeal to story grammar analysis to examine linguistic autobiographies of Finnish learners of English. The authors show that language learners draw on fairy tales, a familiar and fairly formulaic genre, to construct recognizable stories of learning as a heroic quest or, alternatively, as suffering and victimization. Rintell (1990) appeals to Labovian analysis to show that speakers with low proficiency who do not bring in a sufficient amount of detail and evaluation fail to create engaging stories of personal experience. Other authors draw on Davies and Harré's (1990) notion of positioning to examine how selves are constructed 'as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines' (p. 48). Pavlenko (2001a, 2001b) examines how writers writing in their second language position themselves in terms of linguistic, national, gender, and class identities. Crawshaw and associates (2001) analyze how an English speaking learner of Spanish positions and repositions himself in a diary kept during study abroad.

Positioning is also at the center of Vitanova's (2004, 2005) work on narratives of Eastern European immigrants. To understand how these immigrants construct selves in a new language, the researcher appealed to Bakhtinian analysis that highlights creative appropriation of new linguistic resources and active engagement with the voices and positions of others. This approach allowed the author to identify the audiences whose voices get transformed and incorporated in the new textual selves (more experienced immigrants, American employers). Unlike content analysis that provides no means to contest participants' statements, Bakhtinian analysis offered Vitanova (2005) the necessary tools to explore the tension between the study participants' beliefs about linguistic self-construction and the actual processes they engaged in. For instance, a Russian woman Vera believed that authoring the L2 voice meant to perfect her grammar through textbook exercises and English classes and engaged in that enterprise with much fervor, yet her narratives display a much more important resource, a dialogic engagement with others.[4]

A few studies also remind us that bi- and multilinguals' narratives are by definition hybrid, therefore, in addition to linguistic devices commonly considered in studies with monolinguals, their authors examine unique

features of bilingual speech, including lexical borrowing (Besemeres 2004), language play (Belz 2002), code-switching (Vitanova 2004, 2005) and shifts in linguistic competence (Franceschini 2003). For instance, Franceschini (2003) noted that her informant, Hülya, a Turkish immigrant in Germany, expanded her linguistic repertoire and became more subtle, idiomatic, and grammatically correct as the story of her learning of L2 German progressed. In turn, when talking about early episodes of her life in Germany, she fell into the simplified register of foreigner talk.

ANALYSIS OF BI- AND MULTILINGUALS' AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

The overview above questions the usefulness of atheoretical thematic and content analyses and identifies three complementary theoretical approaches to analysis of autobiographies: (a) *cognitive approaches* that treat autobiographies as meaning-making systems and thus as evidence of how people understand things (Bruner 1987; Linde 1993), (b) *textual approaches* that see them as a creative interplay of a variety of voices and discourses, and thus as evidence of larger social and cultural influences on human cognition and self-presentation (Bakhtin 1981; Fairclough 1995, 2003), and (c) *discursive approaches* that view them as interaction-oriented productions, and thus as evidence of the co-constructed nature of our lifestorytelling (Edwards 1997).

Drawing on these approaches and on my own experiences of working with L2 users' narratives, I articulate below a set of recommendations for elicitation of autobiographic narratives and for analysis of their content, context, and form on macro- and micro-levels. My goal here is not to prescribe a particular approach, but to highlight issues that need to be considered in analysis of bi- and multilinguals' life stories and to present a range of options for researchers to choose from according to the purposes of their study and their theoretical framework.

Collecting linguistic autobiographies

The first issue to consider in collection of linguistic autobiographies is, not surprisingly, language. It is well known that even in one language different renderings of the 'same' story may vary in the amount of detail, reported speech, emotional intensity, episodic structure, and framing of particular episodes (Chafe 1998; Norrick 1998; Schiffrin 2003; Tannen 1982). The differences are even more pronounced between stories of the 'same' experience told in different languages (Koven 1998, 2001, 2002, 2004). Studies of bilingual memory also show that stories told in the language in which the original events took place are higher in emotional intensity and amount of detail (Javier *et al*. 1993; Marian and Kaushanskaya 2004), while storytelling in the other language may allow speakers to discuss events that are too painful to reveal in the language in which they took place

(Pavlenko 2005). An insufficient level of proficiency or a high level of attrition may also impact the form and content of the narratives (Rintell 1990).

These concerns are not always heeded in the study of linguistic autobiographies. Many researchers collect stories in one language only, the one most convenient for analysis, without thinking through the implications of this choice. Undoubtedly, in studies of subject and life reality where the speakers' L2 proficiency is low and the L1 is shared with the researcher, the choice of L1 as the language of data collection is justified. It becomes problematic in studies of text reality where the focus is on the actual linguistic construction of self and the inquiry could benefit greatly from a comparison of L1 and L2 narrative constructions (cf. Koven 1998). The choice of a single language is also problematic in studies that involve participants with high proficiency in more than one language. Settling on a single language in such studies signals an assumption that stories and interviews are simply descriptions of facts, whereas in reality the presentation of events may vary greatly with the language of the telling. The insistence on one language only also deprives bi- and multilingual speakers of an important linguistic resource with a range of semantic and affective functions, namely code-switching.[5]

To get a comprehensive picture and to enable analysis of linguistic biographies and autobiographies as narratives, Nekvapil (2003) recommends collecting several autobiographies from the same informant, at significant intervals, and in all of the informant's languages. When possible, these narratives should be collected by different interviewers, because the speakers may choose to foreground different ethnic identities with different interlocutors. In cases where researchers are unable to collect narratives in all of the languages, particular attention needs to be paid to implications of language choice made in the study and to the relationship between the language of events described and the language of the telling. To a degree, these comments are also relevant for language memoirs, as the authors' positioning and framing of events may change with the change of the audience. Thus, whenever possible, it is preferable to analyze not only the original version of a particular language memoir, but also its authorized translation into the author's other language or languages.[6]

Innovative uses of linguistic autobiographies by European researchers also show that these narratives work best if they supplement, and not substitute, other means of data collection, and are combined with linguistic analyses of narrators' idiolects and competencies. In turn, North American studies show that triangulation is possible even in introspective analysis and in analysis of language memoirs. Thus, Dykman (1999) interviewed the authors whose memoirs she analyzed. Ogulnick (1998, 1999) tried to tape-record as many of her language learning encounters in Japan as possible. And Santana's (1999) introspective analysis of her L2 learning experiences relied not only on her own recollections but also on interviews with relatives, friends, and teachers,

and on her analysis of the creative and academic writings she produced since she began to study her L2 English.

Importantly, I do not argue that repeated narratives in all of the languages of the speakers have to be collected on all occasions and for all purposes. Rather, I aim to highlight unique possibilities open to researchers working with bi- and multilinguals, to expose the implications of the choices they make, and to emphasize the importance of discussing the rationale for one's choice of language (for instance, a relationship established in a particular language between the researcher and the participant), as well as possible limitations imposed by that choice.

Transcribing oral narratives

The first step taken in any analysis of elicited oral narratives is the choice of transcription conventions. There is no standard way to transcribe oral narratives—transcription conventions are usually chosen with the research questions and the theoretical framework in mind (Cameron 2001; Ochs 1979; Riessman 1993). Regardless of the actual conventions, two types of errors need to be avoided—additions and omissions. Inexperienced transcribers tend, for instance, to organize spoken discourse into written prose, that is a series of sentences. Nevertheless, even though punctuation makes transcripts easier to read, this addition may negatively affect subsequent analysis—it is not a faithful representation of the data. Transcribers may also decide to omit repetitions, false starts, or paralinguistic features. This decision can also create problems for analysis—pauses, self-corrections, repetitions, slips of the tongue, false starts and restarts, code-switches, requests for help, paralinguistic features, and temporal variation are crucial cues in analysis of lexical choice problems, in the understanding of speakers' intentions and positioning toward the subject matter, in analysis of affect, argument and narrative structure, and in the determination of whether a particular episode is a repeated and well-rehearsed production, a translation, or an on-line construction.

To increase transcript reliability, analysts need to go over the tape and the transcript multiple times, and, if possible, use two or more independent transcribers. Subsequent analysis should be based on transcripts as well as on the original tapes, because non-verbal characteristics of speech are notoriously hard to capture on paper. Whenever possible, researchers should go over the tapes, transcripts, and translations with the study participants, checking for correctness and gathering their insights into why certain things were said or omitted. In the write-up, quotes should be presented both in the original language and in translation, so that readers familiar with the original language would have an opportunity to see what the participants really said.

Lastly, all narratives should be analyzed in the language in which they were told and not in translation. As Fairclough points out, 'to include textual analysis of translated data as part of the analysis of a discursive

event... strikes me as a procedure which is open to serious objections' (1995: 190). A poignant comment on the practice of analysis of translations appears in Santana's (1999) dissertation. The researcher, bilingual in Spanish and English, admits that her decision to analyze Spanish interviews only in their translated versions may have reflected an internalized shame and contempt for her native language (p. 24), and, we can add, the disregard for the impact of language as medium on the telling of experience.

Analyzing language choice

The second analytical step I recommend is the analysis of the language choice made by the researcher or the narrator. In the study of published language memoirs, analysts could begin by examining what audience the authors chose to address and why. What are the implications of this linguistic choice for their narrative? Which events in their learning trajectory have become particularly significant and which have likely been omitted as a result of this choice? And if the memoir is available in the two languages of the author, what are the similarities and differences between the two versions? How can we best understand the discrepancies?

If the study involves orally elicited autobiographies, the questions are somewhat different: were the stories elicited in two languages or just one? What reasons informed the researcher's decision? What are the speaker's levels of proficiency or degrees of attrition, in these languages? Is it possible that proficiency or attrition have influenced the manner of the presentation or the amount of detail offered by the narrator? Did the language of the story correspond to the language in which the events in question took place? If not, is it possible that the discrepancy influenced the telling, for instance, by lowering the level of affect and the amount of detail?

Once again, what is at issue here is not comprehensiveness per se but implications of and limitations imposed by a particular language choice.

Analyzing content

The next step is analysis of the narrative content, context, and form. Although in what follows I discuss these analyses in separate subsections, this choice is made for convenience only: in reality the three are interdependent and understanding of content is impossible without close analysis of both context and form.

Unlike traditional content analysis, the approach proposed here encourages the analyst to consider not only what was said or written but also what was omitted and why. For instance, in an analysis of the diary she kept while learning Japanese in Japan, Ogulnick (1999) noted that she had never mentioned the fact that she was Jewish and never corrected her Japanese acquaintances who assumed that she was Christian. She attributed this silence to her desire to fit in and not be further marked as different.

In turn, Pavlenko (2001a) noted a discrepancy in references to gender in language memoirs written by male and female authors. Women closely examined the impact of gender on their linguistic trajectories, men, on the other hand, did not discuss gender at all in relation to language learning. These differences suggested to the researcher that membership in a privileged or unmarked category may make the category transparent, while marginalization may make the learners sensitive to the category that prevents them from equal access to linguistic resources.

I also encourage analysts to reflect on their conceptual lens and to formulate their theoretical assumptions prior to analysis, even though subsequent analysis might modify the nature of these assumptions. In doing so, researchers no longer have to pretend that their categories are 'emerging' and their analysis is extemporaneous and objective, instead they make their assumptions clear, conceptual constructs explicit, and analyses replicable. Considering what framework they adopt allows researchers to decide: What do we read the narratives for?

A wide range of theoretical frameworks is presently available to researchers working with autobiographic narratives and the final choice will depend on their own research interests and purposes. Feminist and poststructuralist theories, for instance, center analysis on power relations, symbolic domination, and the role of gender, race, and class in the language learning process (Norton 2000; Ogulnick 1998, 1999; Pavlenko 2001a, 2001b, 2001c), sociocultural theory brings with it the notion of activity (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000), while psychoanalytic theory focuses attention on the concepts of anxiety, ambivalence, conflict, and loss (Granger 2004).

Analyzing context

Different approaches to narrative analysis vary in the degree to which they include context (cf. Riessman 1993). I encourage researchers to consider both global and local contextual influences on narrative construction. The global or *macro-level* of analysis should attend to historic, political, economic, and cultural circumstances of narrative production. The local or *micro-level* should attend to the context of the interview or manuscript writing, and thus to the influence of language choice, audience, setting, modality, narrative functions, interactional concerns, and power relations on ways in which speakers and writers verbalize their experiences. Notably, there is no clear-cut separation between the two sets of factors (cf. Heller 2001), rather narrative activity allows us to examine multiple linkages and interdependencies between them.

Several decades of narrative study convincingly demonstrate that autobiographic narratives are cultural, institutional, and social productions, they function as a genre and reflect literary conventions, social norms, and structures of expectation of the place and time in which they are told. These influences are evident not only in the form but also in the content of autobiographies and in particular in the arguments and debates in which the

authors take part and in the master narratives according to or against which they speak. For instance, immigrant narratives published in the US in the early twentieth century draw on the trope of the self-made man and on the rags-to-riches plot to create didactic stories, reflecting the mythology of individual achievement, prevalent at the time (Pavlenko 2004). Written in the atmosphere of relative linguistic tolerance, these memoirs rarely discuss language issues, focusing instead on economic and employment concerns and cultural assimilation. Later, in the xenophobic atmosphere of World War I and the post-war years, when the country began to aspire to the 'one nation, one language' ideal, immigrants were forced not only to learn English but also to abandon their former ethnic and linguistic allegiances. Language memoirs written in the 1920s and 1930s responded to this shift and questioned the need for full linguistic assimilation. In turn, the revival of ethnic and racial consciousness in the 1970s inspired new immigrant narratives whose authors focused on the links between languages and ethnic, cultural, and national identities and aspired to construct mixed and hybrid identities for themselves and their readers (Pavlenko 2001b, 2004).

This example serves to show how narrative analysis can benefit from the examination of a larger sociohistoric context of narrative production, that is of ways in which particular narratives are located in time and place and thus 'written for us by law, literature, politics, and history' (Zaborowska 1995: x).[7]

A context-sensitive approach to immigrant narratives is also taken by Čmejrková (2003), who examined life histories of repatriants from Ukraine in Czechoslovakia. The participants in her study were members of the Czech minority in Ukraine, who lived in areas immediately affected by the Chernobyl disaster. After the Velvet Revolution of 1989 in Czechoslovakia, the community appealed to the Czech government for help and was eventually allowed to resettle in Czechoslovakia between the years 1991 and 1993. A comparison of several life history interviews with members of this community, combined with close attention to the sociohistoric circumstances of their repatriation, allowed the researcher to identify similarities and discontinuities between the narratives and to analyze the meaning-making systems at work. In particular, Čmejrková was able to pinpoint attempts to project the current situation into the narrative and to reframe the resettlement prompted by an environmental disaster and a change in political circumstances as a reunification project long worked for.

Notably, I do not argue that applied linguists are in the business of determining the 'truth value' of particular accounts. At the same time, they cannot conduct their analyses in a vacuum and treat narrative versions of reality as reality itself. Rather, narrative analysis in sociolinguistic studies has to consider larger historical, political, social, and economic circumstances that shape the narratives and are reflected in them, language ideologies and discourses that have currency in narrators' communities and with regard to which they position themselves, and, last but not least, the setting where particular versions of narrative experience are produced and the audience

they are produced for. The analysts need to be particularly sensitive to the fact that speakers use linguistic and narrative resources to present themselves as particular kinds of individuals. In the context of autobiographic interviews, the preferred portrayals may emphasize ethnic, linguistic, and cultural loyalties, and interpret one's own decision-making in the light of these loyalties, rather than chance or economic circumstances.

Analyzing form

As shown above, context analysis exposes global and local influences on the content of individual narratives. In turn, analysis of form highlights linguistic, cultural, and genre influences on ways in which people structure their life stories (macro-level). It also allows us to examine how storytellers achieve their interactional goals through particular narrative devices or lexical choice (micro-level) and illuminates individual creativity and agency in the presentation of self.

Three approaches to analysis of narrative structure are commonly used in the field. *Story grammar analysis*, based on Propp's (1968) analysis of Russian fairy tales, examines the degree to which the story is structured around the explicit goals of the protagonist (setting, initiating event, character's internal response and plan, character's attempts to solve the problem, consequences) (for application to linguistic autobiographies see Leppänen and Kalaja 2002). *High point analysis*, developed by Labov (1972; Labov and Waletzky 1967), examines narratives in terms of the presence and elaboration of abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and a coda (for application to personal stories of L2 users, see Rintell 1990). *Stanza analysis*, proposed by Hymes (1982) and Gee (1991), breaks narratives into lines and then groups the lines into hierarchical levels, such as stanzas (a group of lines about a single topic), scenes, and acts, presenting a narrative as if it were a prose poem (for application to stories by L2 users, see Maeno 1995).

Cross-linguistic explorations using these frameworks show that the pervasiveness of narrative does not imply uniformity and that basic elements of narrative construction, including structural principles, storytelling conventions and devices, and judgments as to which events are tellable, differ across speech communities (Chafe 1980; Holmes 1998; Klapproth 2004; McCabe and Bliss 2003; Minami 2002; Tannen 1982, 1993). As a result, what is considered to be a 'normative' personal narrative or autobiography varies across speech communities along several dimensions, including organization, structure, and authorial voice.

In terms of organization, differences among speech communities can be found in preferred narrative structure. For instance, in contexts where speakers of Standard English favor chronologically organized personal narratives, speakers of African-American English or Spanish may prefer narratives organized thematically or episodically rather than temporally

(McCabe and Bliss 2003; Michaels 1981; Riessman 1991). Cross-linguistic differences may also be found in the presence of certain structural elements, such as codas or resolutions. Maoris in New Zealand, for example, tell stories where the conflict may be created but not resolved, while resolution is expected by their Pakeha interlocutors (Holmes 1998). Differences may also exist in terms of the preferred authorial voice: Western memoirs are commonly written in the first person, while traditional Chinese autobiographies favor the third (Hokenson 1995; Wong 1991).

To acknowledge these and other dimensions of possible cross-linguistic variation, macroanalysis of form requires us to pay attention to how the speakers' choices and omissions are shaped by culturally sanctioned topics, modes of expression, interpretive repertoires, and storytelling conventions. As a result, this analysis reveals how people draw on culturally sanctioned narrative resources to create coherent stories and to present themselves as recognizable members of particular linguistic, social, and institutional communities (Linde 1993). Bruner (1987) urges for close consideration of these resources in analysis of autobiographic narratives, because 'the culturally shaped linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very ''events'' of a life' (1987: 15).

Macroanalysis also considers ways in which genre constraints shape the form of linguistic autobiographies. Diaries, for instance, are constructed as private texts and thus involve a lot of implicitness, inferencing, private speech and references clear only to the author. Elicited journals and published autobiographies are also written as if they were private, but in reality they are public texts written with an audience in mind and thus have a higher degree of explicitness.

In oral interviews, the degree of explicitness is co-constructed between the interviewer and the narrator, whereby some comments require further clarifications and others are accepted on the level of inferences. The co-constructed nature of the oral responses presents a challenge for analysis. To approximate the narrative format, some researchers compile interview answers into narratives and then analyze these narratives as any other written or oral narrative. This approach, however, ignores interactional influences on the presentation of self. To acknowledge these influences researchers should incorporate methods developed in conversation and interaction analysis.

Different versions of the same experience may be constructed with different goals in mind, they may be told to justify, to apologize, to hide, to reveal, or to mislead, and, without exception, they are told in an attempt to construct a particular self. Conversation and interaction analysts have repeatedly argued that narrative has to be examined as a fundamentally interactional activity, or, in other words, that we have to analyze not only its structure or rhetorical devices, but also the interactional goals speakers are trying to achieve by telling particular stories (Edwards 1997).

To acknowledge the performative nature of narratives, microanalysis of form pays close attention to ways in which linguistic and narrative devices are deployed to serve storytellers' interactional goals and to construct particular selves. Here, analysts have a wide range of tools available to them. Pavlenko (2001a, 2001b) adopted Davies and Harré's (1990) *positioning approach* that considers *reflexive positioning* (how narrators situate themselves) and *interactive positioning* (how narrators describe others) through a variety of linguistic resources, including lexical and morphosyntactic choices, images, and metaphors. Crawshaw and associates (2001) drew on Ricoeur's (1990) notion of *attestation*, the active on-going process of self-narration, and examined positioning through three articulatory processes: *appellation*, as seen in reference, definition, description, translation, and explanation; *comment*, as seen in mitigation, concession, and interrogation; and *clarification*, as seen in argumentation and anticipation.

A notable place in the field is occupied by Bakhtin's (1981) theory of the dialogic nature of language. Bakhtinian analysis offers several tools for examination of the multiple influences on L2 users' texts (Besemeres 2002; Koven 1998, 2001, 2002, 2004; Vitanova 2004, 2005). In this framework, the notion of *voice* refers to recognizable social voices individuals appropriate in order to author selves and position themselves as particular kinds of individuals. *Voicing* refers to rendering the speech of others, directly or indirectly, and *double-voicing* involves instances in which the writer or speaker imposes her or his own meaning on the words of others, appealing, for instance, to ironic exaggeration to explicitly state something and implicitly deny it. *Speaking on behalf of another* refers to cases where a particular construction, for instance, a rhetorical question, implies alignment between the writer and the reader against some third entity, the Other. *Intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity* involve direct and indirect references to other texts and discourses (see also Fairclough 2003). Vitanova's (2004, 2005) work underscores the importance of two more notions, central in Bakhtin's thinking. The first of them is *otvetstvennost* (answerability/responsibility) that invokes the necessity to answer each other's voices in a discursive event, and thus the moral responsibility to actively engage with one's environment. The second is the *emotional-volitional tone*, or the speaker's evaluative stance, which functions as the active force of answerability and seeks a response from others.

An elaborate refinement of Bakhtin's (1981) notion of voicing and Labov's (1972) ideas about evaluation is offered by Silverstein (1993) and Wortham and Locher (1996), whose ideas in turn are creatively adopted by Koven. Koven's (1998, 2001, 2002, 2004) studies of French-Portuguese bilinguals' stories of personal experience examine the verbalization of selves through quantitative and qualitative analyses of the following discursive forms: (1) *speaker roles*, that is ways in which speakers position themselves as interlocutors, narrators, or characters; (2) *denotational characterizations*, that is speakers' references to various characters and entities (e.g. woman vs. chick);

(3) *metapragmatic descriptors*, that is speakers' descriptions of the verbal actions of others (e.g. he said vs. he groaned); (4) *quotation*, that is speakers' renderings of the speech of others (e.g. direct vs. indirect); (5) *epistemic modalization*, that is the status speakers give to the events described relative to the event of speaking, oftentimes indexed through manipulation of tenses (e.g. present vs. past).

Finally, as already mentioned earlier, in addition to features shared by mono- and multilinguals' texts, analysis of bi- and multilinguals' narratives also has to be sensitive to uniquely bilingual linguistic resources: code-switching, language play, lexical borrowing, loan translation, semantic and conceptual transfer, and manipulation of levels of linguistic competence (Belz 2002; Besemeres 2002, 2004; Franceschini 2003; Vitanova 2004, 2005). An exemplary treatment of such heteroglossia is found in Besemeres' (2002) analysis of self-translation in the work of bilingual writers: this analysis identifies several strategies, including but not limited to lexical borrowing, loan translation, and semantic and syntactic transfer, used by the writers to reveal—and at times to conceal—the tensions of the bilingual condition.

CONCLUSIONS

Several characteristics make autobiographic narratives into unique and appealing foci of applied linguistics inquiry. They are interesting and thus have aesthetic value and can engage the readers. They are accessible and thus can appeal to larger audiences. They are also textual and thus have reflective value for their authors and for the readers who are encouraged to imagine alternative ways of being in the world. Most importantly, they are transformative as they shift the power relationship between researchers and participants, and between teachers and learners, making the object of the inquiry into the subject and granting the subject both agency and voice.

These characteristics also make autobiographies into dangerous data sources as their immediacy may force researchers to disregard the line between life and text reality and to forget that narratives constitute, rather than reflect, reality. The overview offered here aimed to make clear that regardless of what type of reality one is interested in, it is quite likely that the realities of subject, life, and text are not easily separable and those interested in one aspect still need to be fully cognizant of the other two. Similarly, I tried to highlight the interdependence between context, content, and form, and to argue that researchers interested in the content need to take into consideration the context and the form of the telling.

I have also argued that the stories we tell are never fully our own—they are co-constructed for us and with us by our interlocutors, real or imagined, by the time and place in history in which the events portrayed have taken place and the time and place in which they are told, by the language we choose for the telling, and by the cultural conventions of the speech community in which the narrative is located. Consequently, linguistic

autobiographies cannot and should not be treated as observation notes, transcripts, or collections of facts. Rather, they should be treated as discursive constructions, and as such be subject to analysis that considers their linguistic, rhetorical, and interactional properties, as well as the cultural, historic, political, and social contexts in which they were produced and that shape both the tellings and the omissions.

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NOTES

1 Granger (2004) and Kramsch (2000) offer several useful examples of reanalysis of earlier diary studies where attention to the language and structure of the story reveals another level of depth in the data, neglected in content analysis. For instance, in her analysis of Bailey's (1983) diary, Granger (2004) notes that the author cannot fully express her own difficulties except by projecting them onto others, e.g. 'he is using a lot of energy fighting with his own frustrations', 'now I know what ESL students go through' (Bailey 1983: 74). Granger (2004) also shows how the writer renarrates her avoidance of the French class and homework, justifying these occasions as cases where 'departmental business' or other things just 'came up' and legitimately interfered with the learning process. She argues that the projection and justification help the author position herself as a good learner and a victim of unfortunate circumstances, rather than as an agent who made conscious decisions to skip class or ignore homework.

2 This possibility is made apparent in Kramsch's (2000) reanalysis of a quote from Hinton's study. Kramsch (2000) shows how rhetorical analysis illuminates both the discourses that position the student and ways in which the student attempts to break away from the model minority discourse and to craft a voice that is English in code and Vietnamese in style.

3 Several of these studies are part of a concerted research program (cf. Franceschini and Miecznikowski 2004) and all display an awareness of the ongoing interplay between life, subject, and text reality and commitment to analyze not only the content of the narratives but also their form, that is the *mise en mots* or the verbalization of participants' thoughts, beliefs, and experiences.

4 Bakhtin's (1981) ideas also inform other analyses of linguistic autobiographies conducted by applied linguists (Kinginger 2004; Kramsch 2000; Kramsch and Lam 1999) and literary scholars (Besemeres 2002, 2004). These analyses consider the meanings and voices reflected in the authors' lexical and morphosyntactic

choices, ranging from pronouns and coordinating conjunctions, to tropes and metaphors, reported speech, and sentence and paragraph structure.

5 The situation becomes even more problematic when participants have only limited proficiency in the language of choice, oftentimes the native language of the researcher. In her defense of interviewing immigrant women in Canada in their L2 English, rather than through an interpreter, Kouritzin (2000) argued that interpreters fail to aid in understanding, distance participants, reduce the trust and privacy of the interview, and may ignore the affective dimensions of participants' speech. This is a valid argument yet it does not acknowledge that in interviews conducted in a weaker language, information requiring linguistic and narrative complexity may get misrepresented or left out. Even more importantly, the researcher did not consider the possibility that the language of the interview is not an either/or choice, instead one might consider collecting narratives in both languages of the participants, or at least give the participants an option to resort to the native language when necessary (cf. Vitanova 2005).

6 As already pointed out above, it is also preferable to collect not only narratives in the two or more languages, but also repeated accounts of an experience in the same language, since these accounts may often sport telling discrepancies. A repeated accounts procedure can also be used in diaries written for purposes of future analysis. For instance, if a class or a conversation have been video- or audiotaped, the first account could be written from memory, and the second while replaying the tape (Ogulnick 1999). The comparison of the two versions allows for identification of discrepancies between the actual speech events and the learners' perceptions of them. To avoid collection of amorphous and unwieldy data, Ogulnick (1999: 148, 156) provides a set of guidelines that structure diary entries as descriptions of sociolinguistic events.

7 An example of what happens when personal narratives are accepted uncritically, without any consideration for the global and local contexts in which they are produced, comes from Kouritzin's (2000) study of immigrant mothers in Canada. To understand linguistic and educational choices of immigrant mothers, the researcher conducted life-story interviews with 19 women enrolled in ESL classes. One of the focal participants in the study was a Ukrainian woman Oksana, a single mother who left Ukraine for Canada in 1989, leaving her two sons with relatives in Ukraine. In Canada, Oksana applied for landed immigrant status and had to wait for three years for reunification with her sons. By 1993, the time of the study, Oksana's sons were finally living with her and she was enthusiastically learning English. In her analysis of Oksana's trajectory, Kouritzin (2000) stated that 'Oksana was motivated to leave her country by her intense nationalism and her desire to keep her Ukrainian spirit alive. She had been unable to practice her religion, speak her language, or study the history of the Ukrainian people in the [former] Soviet Union, and therefore she was determined to change her geographical circumstances in order to pass along her private convictions that ''yes Ukrainian people smart, intelligent'' (Oksana: 1) to her sons' (p. 20). We can see that this

'analysis' does nothing but restate what the participant told the researcher. In doing so, it neglects several factual inconsistencies in the participant's account. The first such inconsistency is the statement about the speaker's inability to speak her language or study the history of the Ukrainian people. Historically Ukraine has always been a bilingual country, with Russian dominant in the Eastern part and Ukrainian in the West. At the same time, even in the East, Ukrainian speakers had access to Ukrainian-language theaters, TV and radio channels, books, magazines, and newspapers, and most importantly to Ukrainian-language education. During the Soviet times, throughout the republic, some secondary and higher education establishments functioned exclusively in Ukrainian and those that functioned in Russian were still required to teach Ukrainian language, literature, and history. More importantly, by 1989, the time of Oksana's departure, the USSR was already falling apart. On August 24, 1991, Ukraine declared independence and Ukrainian became the only official language of the country. By 1993–94, the time of the study, the Ukrainian nationalist revival was well under way, Russian had been eradicated from most public domains, and the overwhelming majority of institutions and educational establishments had switched to Ukrainian (Bilaniuk 2005; Wanner 1998). Hence, it is hard to imagine a better place for a committed Ukrainian than the newly independent Ukraine. Nevertheless, the speaker insists that in Canada 'her language and her customs would be more welcome than in her native Ukraine' (p. 28). What she does not mention is how difficult it must have been for her to be raising two sons singlehandedly in the new economic climate, with rapidly increasing poverty and unemployment and dwindling economic opportunities for older women. Why is Oksana telling a possibly misleading cultural heritage narrative and not an economic deprivation one that would be much more consistent with political and economic circumstances of the post-Soviet migration to the West? If we look closely at the context in which the story was collected, we will see the glaring power imbalance between the Canadian interviewer and the Ukrainian immigrant, afraid that she may be denied permanent status if someone discovered that she had emigrated for economic, rather than ideological, reasons. It is quite possible that in order to keep on the safe side, the immigrant woman decided to reproduce her 'ideological persecution narrative', told in many institutional contexts over her years in Canada. This story bears a striking resemblance to those told by countless other immigrants who know that in immigration interviews they have to emphasize ethnic, religious, and possibly linguistic persecution and to downplay the fact that they are looking for new economic and employment opportunities. Unfortunately, the researcher adopted Oksana's artful construction without checking the basic facts, understanding the larger background of Soviet and post-Soviet migration, or considering an immigrant's view of the interview procedure. As a result, the paper reproduced rather than analyzed Oksana's narrative and missed out on an opportunity to truly understand her meaning-making systems and the motivation behind this woman's decision to start life 'from scratch' in a new environment.

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