

Article

Exploring the Instruction of Academic Functional Phrases in an EAP Pre-Sessional Course

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Abstract

Despite being admitted into highly competitive English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) programs, international students often find themselves lacking communicative efficiency in such contexts. Language-related challenges appear to be the foremost barriers to successfully implementing EMI. Considering this situation, teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) needs to play a crucial role in providing students with the necessary targeted language support. Nevertheless, research into EAP tutor's instruction of functional phrase use remains rare, particularly when it comes to incorporating an English as a lingua franca in academic settings (ELFA) awareness into functional phrase teaching. To address this gap, this research adopted two qualitative techniques to gain an in-depth insight into the pedagogical practices that EAP pre-sessional tutors implemented to teach functional phrases to improve the effectiveness of academic intercultural communication. Initially, I observed and recorded 24 hours of spoken English sessions of an EAP pre-sessional course run by a UK university, King's College London. Special attention was paid to how pre-sessional tutors developed pedagogical practices to consolidate students' pragmatic use of functional phrases for achieving communicative effectiveness. Classroom observation was followed up by retrospective interviews with the observed four pre-sessional tutors. The research results unveiled a preference among pre-sessional tutors for utilizing the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) approach in teaching functional phrases. Pre-sessional tutors also face significant challenges in integrating ELFA pragmatic awareness into their EAP pedagogical approaches when it comes to teaching functional phrases.

Keywords

Functional phrases, EAP pedagogy, Academic Intercultural Communication

1. Introduction

The last few decades witnessed significant growth in the number of international students enrolled in EMI degree programs at Anglophone universities. This phenomenon has not only led to Anglophone universities being a *home turf* for academics but also a prototypical ELFA scenario where students frequently employ their linguistic resources pragmatically to engage in their EMI degree study. The

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acronym ELFA bears witness to this situation, just like the existence of the ELFA corpus (Mauranen, 2003) and many other studies focused on ELFA interaction (e.g., Björkman, 2013; Seidlhofer, 2011). This reality results in that most EAP students studying at Anglophone universities are expected to get accustomed to this new environment not only in terms of linguistic proficiency, but also pragmatic competence required for classroom participation (Wingate, 2017). Nevertheless, the language support provided by EAP programs falls short in adequately preparing students to mitigate the language-related challenges commonly encountered in the EMI context (Jenkins, 2014). Such challenges mainly arise from the lack of a transition period from learners' EFL learning situations to the real academic intercultural communication at Anglophone universities (Jenkins, 2014). In particular, pre-sessional programs seem to neglect the intercultural nature of lingua franca communication within the EMI university setting by uncritically adhering to teaching the functional phrases used by first language (L1) speakers as the idealized standard (Jenkins, 2014). Moreover, even though Nesi and Basturkmen (2006), Biber (2006), and Hyland (2012) have emphasized the essential functional roles of some phrases in enhancing academic communication and EAP programs, EMI universities tend to expect students to imitate the L1 norms without questioning their suitability (Wingate, 2017; Jenkins, 2017). Thus, numerous EAP students from diverse lingua-cultural backgrounds inevitably encounter challenges when it comes to adapting to an EMI environment (Jenkins, 2014). Additionally, despite having abundant lexical or phraseological resources suitable for a degree-level program, EAP students are not necessarily able to effectively manipulate these resources in their communication (Wingate, 2017).

This issue is primarily attributed to EAP students' lack of awareness of ELFA communication and exposure to the diversity of functional phrases pragmatically used by their peers from different linguacultural backgrounds. ELFA scholars such as Mauranen (2012) and Jenkins (2014) claim that the communicative inefficiency among EAP students stems from their limited familiarity with ELFA communication. To address this issue, Mauranen (2012) and Cogo and House (2017) specifically investigated the intercultural nature of lingua franca in academic contexts, focusing on the flexibility and fluidity of ELFA interaction. Their studies reveal that ELFA speakers skilfully resort to a variety of functional phrases pragmatically to improve communicative effectiveness through either constructing mutual understandings or pre-empting potential misunderstandings. However, the incorporation of ELFA-aware insights into developing EAP learners' pragmatic use of functional phrases seems to be overlooked not just in EAP literature but also by EAP practitioners. Therefore, to develop EAP learners as competent communicators in academic intercultural communication, it becomes quite necessary to enrich and develop functional phrase teaching in the EAP classroom by incorporating the sociolinguistic aspects of academic intercultural communication. In order to accomplish this purpose, it is essential to initially conduct a study exploring how to employ ELFA-aware principles to guide the pedagogical advancements in teaching functional phrase as pragmatic strategies within the EAP domain.

2. Literature Review

Functional phrases are multi-word units that encompass a contiguous sequence of words, whether conspicuous or not. They may recur in different types of spoken discourse but mainly revolve around managing and organizing conversation (O'Keeffe et al. 2007). Biber et al. (2004) introduced a taxonomy to classify the differences between spoken and written phrases in academic discourse. This taxonomy has been taken as the cornerstone by various studies (e.g., Bal, 2010; Conrad & Biber, 2005; Staples et al., 2013). It comprises four essential categories: 1) stance expressions that deliver the speakers' opinions or attitudes; 2) discourse organizers that introduce or elaborate on topics; 3) referential bundles that specify focus and quantity or emphasize time or place; 4) and special conversation functions that show politeness or inquiry. Hyland (2012) and Biber (2006) claim that effectively employing frequently occurring functional phrases and understanding their pragmatic functions can facilitate academic communication.

Recent corpus linguistics research also indicates the important functions of multi-word phrases in academic discourse (Simpson & Ellis, 2010; Charles, 2011). To further distinguish the discourse functions between spoken and written phrases in academic registers, Simpson-Vlach and Ellis (2010) drew on both statistical measures and teacher insights to produce an empirically derived and pedagogically useful list of functional phrases for academic speech and writing. The Academic Formula List (AFL) contains multi-word units that (i) commonly recur in corpora of written and spoken language, (ii) occur much more frequently in academic discourse than in non-academic discourse, and (iii) are widely employed in a wide range of academic genres. To tailor this list for EAP instruction, Simpson-Vlach and Ellis (2010) descriptively classified and analyzed the academic functional phrases in this list based on the pragmatic functions of these phrases. This classification process facilitates pinpointing important and relevant functional phrases for EAP learning and teaching purposes (Lin & Chen, 2020). The practicality of this list led to its widespread adoption in EAP classroom instruction and material development (Wingrove, 2022; Gil, 2019).

Concerning the investigation of functional phrases in the ELFA domain, Mauranen's (2006) examination of three-word functional phrases yielded valuable insights into ELFA phraseology. However, the effects of discipline or genre on ELFA phraseology remain unknown, as the data is not distinguished based on these factors. Seidlhofer (2011) advocates more empirical research on how functional phrases are employed in ELFA interaction across diverse contexts. In line with this call, in recent years there is an expanding body of research exploring the employment of functional phrases by ELFA speakers. A series of functional phrases, ranging from short to longer units of variable sequence have been identified as important ELFA pragmatic strategies (Cogo & House, 2017; Mauranen, 2012; Cogo & Dewey, 2012). ELFA pragmatic strategies can be defined as part of the resources speakers strategically use to fulfil their communication needs. In this regard, ELFA pragmatic strategies can be normally used for meaning negotiation or resolving misunderstanding challenges in naturally occurring conversations (Cogo & House, 2017). When engaging in ELFA interaction, a variety of pragmatic strategies which normally appear in the form of functional phrases play an important role in co-constructing mutual intelligibility when uncertainty or a lack of understanding is perceived. The adept and flexible use of these pragmatic strategies indicates a high level of interactional and pragmatic competence among participants in ELFA communication (Cogo & Pitzl, 2016; Mauranen, 2012). For instance, functional phrases such as *What do you mean by...?* or *If you mean...* are frequently employed by ELFA speakers to seek meaning clarification.

ELFA speakers also proactively address potential issues of unintelligibility or misinterpretation in ELFA intercultural communication by employing functional phrases as pragmatic strategies. Mauranen (2006, 2012) points out that speakers often use pre-emptive strategies like checking comprehension or self-paraphrasing to prevent the occurrence of misunderstandings or ensure intelligibility in ELFA interaction. In particular, functional phrases such as *What I mean is...* or *This means that...* typically serve as pre-emptive strategies employed by ELFA speakers to prevent communication misunderstandings. The analysis of functional phrases in ELFA talk also provides valuable insights into the role of some phraseology as pragmatic strategies in academic intercultural communication. In this regard, functional phrases such as *It is important that...*, and *It is noteworthy that ...*, which are about signalling importance, are found to be predominantly employed by lecturers as a technique to draw students' attention to critical notions (Björkman, 2010). Moreover, the phrase *I think* is found to be frequently employed as a discourse maker to express the speaker's subjective opinion in ELFA interaction (Björkman, 2013). Similarly, expressions such as *I mean* and *What I mean is...* are frequently employed with a strong evaluative element, usually acting as a focalizing device that marks the beginning of a subjective evaluation (Cogo & House, 2017).

When it comes to employing functional phrases pragmatically in ELFA communication, considerable variability or creativity frequently occurs in the linguistic forms used by ELFA speakers. In particular,

Mauranen (2009) examined how ELFA speakers used functional phrases interactively, varying from short, fixed expressions to longer variable units to navigate their interactions and collaboratively construct effective discourse. Mauranen (2009) revealed that the longer, more variable patterns are conducive to real-time communicative performance, which may deviate from the conventions of native English (e.g., *in/on my point of view*). Similarly, as outlined by Pitzl (2012), creativity is also evident in lexical substitution (for example, using *I'm not very sure* instead of *I'm not quite sure*, and variations in syntax and morphosyntax (such as using *in the right track* instead of *on the right track*). Studies on ELFA pragmatics (Cogo & House, 2017; Cogo & Pitzl, 2016; Jenkins, 2015) indicate that linguistic creativity or variation from L1 norms should be regarded as neither language deficiency nor errors. Instead, it indicates a deliberate choice made by speakers to enhance their communicative effectiveness, particularly in academic intercultural communication (Mauranen, 2009; 2012). From an ELFA pragmatic perspective, achieving successful ELFA interactions extends beyond conforming to prefabricated linguistic features (Mauranen, 2012). It primarily involves the flexible and variable use of functional phrases when they are considered or employed as pragmatic strategies to facilitate ELFA communication (Jenkins, 2011; Björkman, 2013). Thus, to develop EAP students' communicative competence in ELFA communication, the focus should be on cultivating their capabilities to collaboratively achieve mutual intelligibility by flexibly employing functional phrases as pragmatic strategies. This approach surpasses rigid adherence to a set of prefabricated norms with the sole focus on codifying surface-level linguistic features.

Based on these previous research findings, functional phrases serving as pragmatic strategies seem to play a crucial role in promoting collaborative meaning negotiation, addressing potential misunderstandings, and constructing mutual intelligibility in ELFA interaction (Cogo & House, 2017; Mauranen, 2012; Kaur, 2017). Due to the importance of functional phrases in facilitating communicative effectiveness, there is a necessity to develop EAP learners' communicative competence by pragmatically employing functional phrases to achieve mutual intelligibility or enhance meaning negotiation in academic intercultural communication. Nevertheless, there exists a gap between what students are taught in traditional EAP classrooms (Wingate, 2017) and the language they encounter in real academic intercultural communication, including EMI content classes (Jenkins, 2014; 2015). For most students studying in EAP programs in Anglophone settings, it is a great challenge to overcome the barriers of adapting to meaning-focused interactions in academic intercultural settings due to the lack of instruction and practice in applying functional phrases pragmatically (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Additionally, while researchers such as Simpson-Vlach and Ellis (2010) and Biber et al. (2004) provide a pedagogically valuable list of functional phrases for EAP instruction, so far there is a dearth of empirical proposals exploring the practicality of teaching functional phrases by incorporating ELFA-aware implications. EAP practitioners also lack concrete suggestions to fill the gap between understanding ELFA-aware principles and integrating ELFA awareness into the EAP pedagogical methods currently used to teach functional phrases in practice (Dewey, 2015; Mauranen, 2012; Vettorel and Antonello, 2023).

3. Research Question

Given the limited exploration of integrating an ELFA-aware perspective into functional phrase teaching in EAP, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What pedagogical approaches are currently implemented by pre-sessional tutors in practice to develop EAP learners' pragmatic use of functional phrases?
2. What are pre-sessional tutors' views on the incorporation of ELFA-aware principles into functional phrase teaching?

4. Theoretical Framework of EAP Pedagogy

As this study focuses on investigating the pedagogical methods currently implemented in pre-sessional classes for teaching functional phrases, it is necessary to understand the essential theoretical framework that underpins EAP pedagogy. EAP programs typically organized and systemically regulated by central language units in Anglophone universities are designed for students majoring in various disciplines. The language support provided in EAP courses attaches much importance to native-speaker language proficiency and norm-driven assessment (Jenkins, 2012; 2014). This emphasis arises from the predominant viewpoint in second language acquisition (SLA) widely held in EAP programs. Consequently, EAP pedagogy tends to emphasize the idealized norms of L1 English speaking and urge students to uncritically embrace the conventions of what is perceived as a homogenous academic culture. Any deviation from the L1 English standard is often automatically viewed as an error, leading L2 speakers to be largely categorized as “unsuccessful native speakers” (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 32). The standard form-focused underpinnings adopted by EAP pedagogy are normally based on training in monologic L1 speaking performance, which generally involves accurate memorization or rehearsed recitation of expressions or phrases (Wright et al., 2022). On the contrary, from an ELFA perspective, differences, or divergences from L1 varieties are not deemed as signals of deficient linguistic proficiency, but rather as legitimate variations or “emerging or potential features of ELFA” (Jenkins et al., 2011, p.284).

As a paradigm-shifting approach, ELFA is comprehensively defined by Jenkins (2014, p. 61) as “non-mother tongue international academics (at any level in their career) who use English in intercultural communication in academic contexts anywhere in the world.” ELFA shares significant similarities with *Critical EAP* (arguing against the uncritical way in which EAP teachers prepare students to accommodate to institutional requirements) and *Academic Literacies* (which criticizes EAP instruction for forcing students to accept a set of dominant academic discourse rules). ELFA considers academic English as a social construct, contingent on context, and prioritizes the voices and identities of the individuals involved (Mauranen, 2012). The core principle of ELFA emphasizes that achieving mutual intelligibility, rather than strict adherence to a L1 standard version of English should be the primary criterion for effective spoken communication within the academic community. Consequently, linguistic deviations or variations from L1 norms should be deemed acceptable as long as they are comprehensible (Wingate, 2017).

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Ethical consideration

The ethical approval to collect research data from the EAP pre-sessional tutors was granted by the KCL Foundation Department. Before the start of this course, I gained permission from the pre-sessional course director to observe a series of classes and conduct follow-up interviews with the observed teachers. This permission enabled me to email pre-sessional teachers a call for research participation which illustrated the research aims in more detail, and what they would need to do to participate in this study.

5.2 Data collection

This study employed a combination of two qualitative methods, classroom observation and follow-up retrospective interview. Classroom observation was used to investigate EAP pre-sessional tutors’ practices to help consolidate students’ use of functional phrases. I observed a series of spoken English sessions delivered by four experienced EAP tutors during a 21-week pre-sessional course. Each tutor’s class was observed twice, resulting in approximately 24 hours of class observation data in total. The

pedagogical practices implemented by pre-sessional tutors to teach functional phrases was audio-recorded and complemented with relevant field notes. It is important to supplement the information gathered from the observed class with relevant field notes as certain details cannot be captured solely through the audio-recording method.

The field note form (see Liu, 2024) presents a typical example, illustrating my observation findings, pre-sessional tutors' oral feedback on learners' performance in pragmatically employing functional phrases in academic discussion tasks, etc. Class observation was followed up by a semi-structured retrospective interview with each of the four EAP pre-sessional tutors. These interviews were used to explore pre-sessional tutors' insights toward developing the approaches of teaching functional phrases through incorporating ELFA-aware principles. Prior to conducting individual interviews with the observed pre-sessional tutors, the following principles associated with implementing ELFA-aware pedagogy for teaching functional phrases, as suggested by Mauranen (2012) and Dewey (2014), were provided. This practice was conducted due to the consideration that pre-sessional tutors might not be acquainted with the concept of ELFA-aware teaching.

Implementing ELFA-aware principles to teach functional phrases

- Increase exposure to various ways in which functional phrases are used globally; present students with alternative variants.
- Highlight the sociocultural context of academic intercultural communication in which functional phrases can be used pragmatically to achieve communicative competence.

The pre-sessional tutors' interview answers were selected and discussed here based on the extent to which their proposed methods for teaching functional phrases were most convergent and divergent with the ELFA-aware principles. As the interviews were semi-structured, they were guided by several core questions listed in Table 1. Moreover, demographic information regarding the four observed pre-sessional tutors is presented in Table 2.

Table 1

Interview Questions for the Pre-Sessional Tutors

1. Can you provide some feasible pedagogical methods that you will implement to develop EAP learners' communicative competence by employing functional phrases as pragmatic strategies in ELFA interaction?
2. Can you suggest one approach that could effectively incorporate teaching functional phrases with ELFA awareness in EAP classes?
3. What kinds of pedagogical practice will you undertake from drawing on ELFA-aware implications to inform your teaching of functional phrases in EAP class?
4. Could you please elaborate on the pedagogical way you adopt in your class to teach functional phrases, especially the Task-based language teaching method?
5. Have you ever considered cultivating an awareness among students that the patterns of functional phrases may vary depending on who they are talking to, or what they are talking about?

Table 2

The Pre-Sessional Tutors' Professional Teaching and Training Background

Name	Years of EAP teaching experiences	Nationality	DELTA or CELTA holder	English as L1 or Non-L1	Holder of TESOL or Applied Linguistics MA degree	Received in-service pre-sessional teacher training
Maryna	6	Polish	YES	Non-L1	NO	YES
Koula	10	Greek	YES	Non-L1	NO	YES
Andy	8	British	YES	L1	YES	YES
Jennifer	13	British	YES	L1	YES	YES

5.3 Data analysis method

This study adopted a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012) to interpret the data obtained from both the class observation and follow-up interviews with the pre-sessional tutors. Following the guidelines proposed by Robson and McCartan (2016), I began by transcribing all audio-recorded classes and interviews verbatim. The class transcripts were supplemented with relevant information derived from my field notes. To preserve confidentiality, the tutors' names were pseudonymized during the transcribing process. In the second phase of data analysis, I adopted an inductive approach to explore recurrent themes. This approach allowed me to analyse the transcripts from both data sources without relying on a pre-established theoretical framework to inform the analytical procedure (Riazi, 2016). It also allowed for the identification of themes within the data that may have not been previously considered, providing comprehensive insights into the research questions. As this study aims to address two specific research questions, the data analysis process yielded two primary themes. To address the first research question, two codes were generated inductively from pre-sessional class observation: (1) 'the inductive approach used to enhance learners' understanding of functional phrases' and (2) 'the TBLT approach adopted to create opportunities for learners to practice functional phrases in academic interactions'. These codes were grouped under the theme 'Pedagogical approaches currently implemented in pre-sessional classes to develop EAP learners' competence in pragmatically using functional phrases'. To answer the second research question, another set of codes was established, including (1) 'increasing learners' exposure to diverse uses of functional phrase in academic settings', (2) 'providing opportunities for learners to employ functional phrases as ELFA pragmatic strategies to negotiate meanings in interaction' and (3) 'adopting an ELFA-aware TBLT approach to improve learners' capabilities to employ functional phrases as ELFA pragmatic strategies'. The three codes were categorised under the theme 'Pre-sessional tutors' pedagogical insights on incorporating an ELFA-aware perspective into functional phrase teaching'.

5.4 Research setting

The observed pre-sessional course was systematically regulated and monitored in terms of pedagogy, assessment, and teaching materials adopted by the Foundation Department at King's College London, so teachers have relatively limited flexibility to diversify their pedagogical methods. As for its teaching target, this course is designed to cater to students from all disciplines who have not successfully met the English language entry requirement for their EMI degree study.

6. EAP Pre-Sessional Classroom Observation Results

6.1 Inductive approach for reviewing functional phrases

The outcomes derived from my thematic analysis reveal that the pre-sessional tutors generally adopted an inductive approach to initially encourage students to review the pragmatic functions of phrases, focusing on their various roles in enhancing academic communication (Thornbury, 1999). This approach primarily aimed to provide learners with the necessary conditions for practical learning, namely exposure to appropriate input, opportunities for communicative practice, and feedback on their production performance. According to Shaffer (1989), an inductive approach is characterized by two key aspects: 1) directing students to focus on the structure being learned, and 2) requiring students to independently formulate and articulate the underlying pattern. However, in this study, the pre-sessional tutors under observation shared a perspective with Martínez-Flor and Beltrán-Palanques (2013), who considered both inductive and deductive teaching methods as forms of explicit instruction. Within this approach, EAP learners were not directly instructed on rules. Instead, they were guided to uncover the rules that govern functional phrases through exposure to typical examples and engaging in discussions about their pragmatic functions in academic settings.

Table 3

Five Categories of Functional Phrases with their Functional Titles

1. Supporting viewpoint	2. Clarifying meanings	3. Evaluating arguments	4. Indicating disagreement	5. Seeking clarification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not only ..., but also ... • To give an example, ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What I mean is ... • This means that ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's impossible to conclude that this is fair. • That's the crucial question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suppose that ... • If I were you, I'd ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you mean by ...? • But what would happen if ...?

This section aims to exemplify two cases where an inductive approach was adopted for EAP learners' intensive learning of functional phrases in the pre-sessional classroom. As can be seen in Table 3, the categorized functional phrases were chosen and extracted from the AFL (Simpson-Vlach & Ellis, 2010) by pre-sessional tutors to structure teaching tasks and develop teaching materials. The selection of functional phrases for pre-sessional teaching was carefully curated through a triangulation approach, involving an analysis of their frequency in corpus data and an assessment of their meaning and suitability for teaching. In Table 3, a series of functional phrases were organized and categorized into five columns, based on the different pragmatic functions that they perform in effectively managing academic discussion. To stimulate students' review of the pragmatic functions of phrases in each category, the tutor, Jennifer, initially organized students into several groups to discuss what function title best summarizes the pragmatic functions of phrases in each column. After a five-minute group discussion, Jennifer nominated each group representative to report their answers to the function titles in each column. According to students' responses, Jennifer provided a more detailed explanation of the pragmatic functions of these phrases in the seminar discussion. She also tried to stimulate students to elaborate on any specific cases on how functional phrases listed in Table 3 could be pragmatically applied in seminar discussions. Following the interaction with the students, Jennifer revealed the answers to the task and addressed any questions or uncertainties the students had regarding the pragmatic functions of these phrases.

(a) Teaching focus:

Review five categories of functional phrases classified in each column based on their different pragmatic functions in the seminar discussion.

(b) Task requirement:

Write the missing functions that describe them at the top of Table 3.

Another pre-sessional tutor, Maryna, also adopted the inductive approach to help students review functional phrases. Nevertheless, unlike Jennifer, Maryna took advantage of an online platform called Nearpod (<https://nearpod.com/blog/nearpod-in-the-classroom/>) to enhance students' engagement in the activity of reviewing functional phrases. Ahead of her class, Maryna had already uploaded Table 4, sourced from the AFL produced by Simpson-Vlach and Ellis (2010), onto the Nearpod platform for class preparation. After outlining the teaching focus and task requirements, Maryna encouraged her students to log into the Nearpod platform on their laptops. Once successfully logged in, students could see Table 4 on their laptop screens. The left column of Table 4 contained functional phrases with one missing word, while the right column offered a selection of words in random order. The task required students to choose an appropriate word from the right side to fill the gap in each functional phrase. Completing functional phrases by filling in their missing words was designed to consolidate students' comprehension of these spoken expressions concerning their various functions in academic interaction.

(a) Teaching focus:

Review a range of useful functional phrases for expressing agreement and disagreement or asking for opinions in seminar discussions.

(b) Task requirement:

Complete the below functional phrases and fill in their missing words by selecting appropriate words from the right column.

Table 4

A List of Functional Phrases with their Corresponding Missing Words

1. I..... agree. It certainly is.....	Absolutely
2. Yes,	Views
3. I understand your.....,but I believe.....	Say
4. Do you have any.....?	Believe
5. I wouldn't.....that.....	Say
6. I honestly that.....	Feel
7. That's an interesting way toout this.	Point
8. I would..... that.....	Completely
9. How would you about that.....	Views

Once students had submitted their answers through Nearpod, this platform allowed Maryna to quickly identify the mismatched pairs made by her students. The criterion for identifying incorrect pairings between the functional phrases and their missing words was based on the standard usage of functional phrases by L1 speakers in academic interaction. In this regard, it seemed that Maryna tended to uncritically adopt a normative attitude towards teaching functional phrases. This attitude led to strict conformity to “native” forms of functional phrases, or more specifically, closely imitating the way L1 English speakers employ functional phrases in academic settings. It also resulted in little understanding that linguistic variations on functional phrases can be acceptable when they are employed as ELFA pragmatic strategies in academic intercultural communication. When the Nearpod indicated that all students had completed this pair-matching task, Maryna worked with her students to review and discuss the pragmatic function of these phrases. In the final step of this task, Maryna disclosed the appropriate matching word for each phrase and provided intensive feedback on common mistakes made by students.

6.2 Practicing functional phrases through task-based language teaching (TBLT)

In addition to adopting an inductive approach in different ways to review functional phrases, pre-sessional tutors adopted the TBLT approach to provide opportunities for students to pragmatically apply functional phrases into real academic interaction. This research finding was derived from the field notes taken while observing the pre-sessional classes. An essential principle of TBLT is attaching priority to the meaning of the language over its form, creating communicative contexts in the classroom tasks that encourage the use of language authentically (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). However, according to ELFA scholars, the deficit of TBLT is that it does not challenge the normative assumptions of communicative language teaching and earlier grammar-based approaches (Widdowson, 2013; Sifakis, 2019). Even though it emphasizes communicative language use, TBLT still views effective communication, and the goal of teaching and learning, in relation to adhering to NS norms (Sifakis et al., 2018; Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 2018).

Aligned with the key principle of TBLT, the pre-sessional tutors organized, and facilitated the group discussion task to create an intercultural communication environment for students to apply the reviewed functional phrases into real practice. They considered the group discussion task as a meaning-focused and goal-oriented communicative opportunity for participants to practice the functional phrases in real academic interaction. Although the four tutors tended to pay more attention to monitoring the issues of students’ pragmatic use and pronunciation of the functional phrases, they still did not ignore the goal of the designed discussion task. That was to focus on providing opportunities for students to negotiate mutual understandings, and exchange viewpoints on the proposed discussion topic through real academic interaction. The way pre-sessional tutors applied the TBLT approach in EAP classrooms bore some similarity with the approach suggested by Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005). This approach drew from the principles of communicative language teaching, emphasizing fluency in language use. In essence, it included an initial phase where functional phrases were introduced and practiced, focusing on their pragmatic functions in academic interaction. Subsequently, learners were organized to participate in interactive tasks that necessitate the strategic employment of these functional phrases to accomplish specific communication goals. Subsequent Section 6.2 focuses on exemplifying how TBLT was employed by pre-sessional tutors to consolidate students’ use of functional phrases as pragmatic strategies.

To further enhance the practical application of functional phrases previously reviewed, the pre-sessional tutor organized a group discussion task, which required students to engage in discussing a given research topic within a group. Aligning with the central construct in the TBLT framework, the completion of this group discussion task mainly involved three phases, namely pre-task, main-task, and post-task phases (Ellis, 2017). In the pre-task phase, with the support of a teaching handout (see Liu, 2024), students were informed of the discussion topic and research question in advance. Additionally, they were

provided with two relevant reading resources as a reference to explore the assigned discussion topic. To motivate students to actively utilize functional phrases during group discussions, the tutor highlighted the significance of employing such phrases to seek clarification. Students were also prompted to reflect on what types of functional phrases could effectively help them resolve the difficulties in achieving mutual understanding. The primary aim of this practice was to ensure effective preparation for engaging in these discussions.

In the pre-task phase, the tutor initially provided a clear explanation of the task requirements and outlined what students should do to complete the discussion task. The tutor's initial interpretation of discussion task requirement was targeted at helping students realize that they were expected to draw on the ideas, arguments, or evidence from the provided reading resources to develop their group discussion on the given topic. At the end of the discussion, it was mandatory for each group to arrive at a collective agreement on *what extent the introduction of autonomous vehicles will have a substantial impact on improving society*. To ensure the achievement of this desired outcome in the discussion task, the tutor also required each group to designate one representative responsible for capturing the key arguments contributed by each member and taking notes of their group agreement on topic question. When the tutor brought all students back to the main classroom, the representative should be prepared to report the group's collective agreement to the panel of the class. Students were also provided with specific guidelines to improve the effective achievement of communicative tasks (see Liu, 2024). In the pre-task phase, following up the explanation of task requirement, the tutor randomly assigned students into several groups to engage them in the group discussion task.

The pre-task phase paved the way for the group discussion task in the main-task phase. This phase mainly involved allocating all students to different groups for the 20-minute discussion task. When students engaged in group discussion, the pre-sessional tutor walked around the groups to monitor how students develop communication or interaction with their group members. Furthermore, the tutor also made a special note of instances where students effectively used functional phrases to request clarification when there was a lack of comprehension during the discussion.

In the post-task phase, all separated groups were brought back to the main classroom. The pre-sessional tutor performed the leading role in encouraging students to reflect on their performance and evaluate the contribution of other group members in developing the discussion task. The tutors mainly committed themselves to providing some general feedback on each group's performance, according to the notes taken while observing each group's discussion progress. The tutors particularly gave feedback on the aspect of students' pragmatic use of functional phrases in the group discussion. After receiving general feedback from the tutor, the spokesperson of each group took turns presenting their group's arguments and illustrating the consensus they had reached through critical negotiation and debates. In response to each group's mini-presentation, the pre-sessional tutor did not focus on evaluating the arguments that they put forward, as further discussion of the research topic (auto-vehicle) was not the essential teaching and learning focus in this language-based class. Nevertheless, when evaluating students' performance in this discussion task, a pivotal aspect in the tutor's feedback was the extent to which they could adeptly employ functional phrases as pragmatic strategies to enhance interaction or improve communicative competence. This perspective can be observed in section 6.3, where excerpts from tutors' oral feedback concerning students' proficiency in utilizing functional phrases will be discussed in detail.

6.3 Pre-sessional tutors' evaluation of learning outcomes

Based on Maryna's feedback, Extract 1 indicates that, despite intensive learning of functional phrases as formulas prior to the group discussion task, most students struggled to apply those previewed functional phrases as effective pragmatic strategies in academic communication. Her feedback also highlights

those the EAP students' metalinguistic awareness when it comes to employing the reviewed phrases pragmatically could not be well-developed by solely relying on EFL approach. Even though students had received explicit instruction on the pragmatic roles of functional phrases, they lacked exposure to authentic cases demonstrating how these phrases can be flexibly or variably used by speakers from different linguacultural backgrounds to facilitate academic interaction. There was no evidence indicating that Maryna tended to incorporate an ELFA awareness into teaching functional phrases to reflect the sociolinguistic use of English in academic intercultural communication. Moreover, the rigid adherence to standard L1 norms, overemphasis on training linguistic proficiency and lack of intensive practice of employing functional phrases pragmatically in real ELFA interaction also resulted in failure to achieve satisfactory teaching outcomes. Consequently, acquiring functional phrases only through the EFL approach seems ineffective in developing students' proficiency in employing functional phrases effectively as pragmatic strategies in ELFA communication.

Extract 1 (Maryna)

I heard some good discussions going on, but I didn't hear many uses of the functional phrases that we had practiced. I think Rosia used some. I'm not sure I heard anybody else try to use any. Remember having looked at functional phrases, find the parts that you find useful to you. I heard some nice developments in your arguments. But when you cannot fully understand what the speaker is expressing, do not forget to use the functional phrases we introduced before to seek clarification. This is one important way to show your pragmatic competence. Please do not overuse the phrase I think, you could use other useful phrases taught in this class as an alternative.

Extract 2 (Jennifer)

So, if you don't understand, ask, and check. There's never any harm in checking. As we've discussed before, paraphrasing is a good way of doing that, so rather than saying 'Sorry, I didn't understand, could you say that again,' you could paraphrase. You could say 'What do you mean by this.....?' when you are trying to use your own words to explain what you think they've said. If that's not correct, the first speaker can say 'That wasn't what I meant. What I meant was...'

Moreover, as illustrated in Extract 2, the pre-sessional tutor, Jennifer, encouraged students to utilize the functional phrase *What do you mean by this...* as a paraphrasing strategy through the attempt to summarise or conclude the previous speaker's utterance differently. Jennifer's interpretation underscores that this functional phrase can play a vital role in seeking a comprehension check from the preceding speaker. Thus, Jennifer advised students to skilfully employ this phrase to confirm or check understanding in ELFA academic communication. In this sense, Jennifer aligns with Mauranen's (2010) suggestion, emphasizing paraphrasing as an effective pragmatic strategy to pre-empt the occurrence of misunderstandings and enhance the achievement of mutual understanding in ELFA interaction.

6.4 Research results: Interview with pre-sessional tutors

The interpretation of research results in this section is fundamentally based on the suggestions or insights provided by pre-sessional tutors in responses to the interview questions presented in Table 1. The interviewees' responses reveal they tended to implicitly incorporate ELFA pragmatic awareness into their pedagogy for teaching functional phrases. To raise students' awareness of the intercultural

communicative reality in the EMI world and enhance their confidence in communicating via ELFA, the pre-sessional tutors emphasized the importance of immersing students in diverse uses of functional phrases used by different speakers. They also highlighted the necessity of providing students with opportunities to employ functional phrases as ELFA pragmatic strategies to negotiate meanings or construct mutual understandings with people from diverse linguacultural backgrounds.

Extract 3 (Jennifer)

I think I will let them identify certain academic phrases that play a very important role in promoting successful academic interaction.... such as in seminar group discussion or pair discussion, either in a transcript or audio-recording..... so that they can hear how other people from different nations speaking different languages use the functional phrases in academic intercultural communication. And not just the words, but how are they using them? What are their functions? Getting students to make some choices about the functional phrases? Encourage them to think about what would be useful for them to use. Giving them practice in using them in different academic situations. So, to some extent, an element of self-selection about the functional? I genuinely think, for learners, that allowing people to make choices and recognize their own needs of the functional phrases rather than me telling them because they all have different needs.

Extract 3 is Jennifer's answer to Interview Question 1 from Table 1. It indicates that Jennifer prefers exposing students to functional phrases employed by different speakers in relevant resources such as specific audio recordings or conversation transcripts. This practice is mainly adopted to realize three teaching objectives: 1) identifying how functional phrases can be variedly and flexibly employed by different speakers, 2) reflecting how functional phrases perform their roles as pragmatic strategies in promoting effective academic interaction and 3) stimulating students' consideration on what functional phrases they may find useful to facilitate meaning negotiation in academic intercultural communication settings. In Jennifer's account, we can see her preference for encouraging EAP students to recognize and independently notice functional phrases either from audio recordings or transcripts, depending on their own communication needs or purposes. She entitles students with more autonomy and freedom to vary the usage of functional phrases to facilitate academic communication. This pedagogical practice demonstrates Jennifer's awareness of the variations in patterns of functional phrases within the EMI intercultural communication context. She recognizes that these patterns may differ based on specific communication needs. As a result, she does not expect students to strictly adhere to a predetermined L1 model of functional phrases. This point is manifested in her efforts to create academic intercultural communicative opportunities for students to adopt and apply functional phrases in situ, rather than insisting that successful communication is only achieved by observing rigid formulas.

Extract 4 (Koula)

I will show them a good model of a dialogue, an academic dialogue firstly in which people effectively communicate and exchange arguments, or points of view by functional phrases, without errors or mistakes. After that, directly draw their attention to the features of the functional phrases and highlight their functions. I suppose this way will help students effectively notice how functional phrases can be effectively utilized to achieve communicative goals.

Extract 4 is Koula's response to Interview Question 2 in Table 1. Like Jennifer, Koula highlighted the necessity of exposing students to authentic instances of how people interact or exchange opinions through functional phrases. However, unlike Jennifer, Koula tended to adopt the EFL approach that by default takes L1 speakers as the standard or model to follow. Koula also seemed to prefer the imitation of pseudo-real academic communication. As can be seen in Extract 4, Koula stated that after demonstrating to students the good model of functional phrases used by L1 speakers, she would take the initiative to point out how specific phrases perform their pragmatic functions in academic communication. In this aspect, Koula's approach to teaching functional phrases appears to diverge from ELFA-aware pedagogy, as it continues to prioritize mimicking the usage of functional phrases by L1 speakers in academic interactions. Nevertheless, to facilitate EAP learners' adjustment to ELFA interactions typical in their EMI degree studies, it is crucial to expose them to a range of diverse and creative ways of using functional phrases as pragmatic tools, rather than adhering strictly to a single variety of English (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011; Seidlhofer, 2011).

Extract 5 (Andy)

If we're looking within the context of EAP, then I tend to use the TBLT approach with ELFA awareness to enhance students' pragmatic use of functional phrases. Using this method, it provides students with a real academic context to communicate with each other. I can get students to do certain tasks and then look back and reflect on them and give each other feedback as well. So, if students are working on a group discussion, they can watch each other's interaction. After that, I will give them a document that students can use for peer-reviewed feedback. Using the document that I give them can draw students' attention to certain functional phrases, and then they can give each other feedback on how well they may have employed functional phrases to develop communication. So, it doesn't always just involve the teacher giving feedback to the students, and raising awareness, I can get them to do it with each other, which I think then works more effectively as well.

Extract 5 is Andy's response to Interview Question 3 provided in Table 1. Andy makes the case that, by incorporating an ELFA-aware perspective into the EAP classroom, TBLT may contribute to creating an authentic communicative environment for students to pragmatically apply functional phrases in real practice. In addition, from an ELFA-aware perspective, TBLT may also provide a coherent methodological framework for developing EAP students as competent communicators by employing functional phrases as ELFA pragmatic strategies. To offer an example of how this purpose could be realized in practice, Andy presented an ELFA-aware task that he might adopt in his teaching practice. To be more specific, during group discussions, students might be required to observe how their peers strategically utilize functional phrases to enhance academic intercultural communication. Following this observation, students could also be expected to provide feedback to their peers in terms of their pragmatic use of functional phrases to improve overall communication effectiveness. This process could be strengthened by furnishing students with a handout designed to guide them in evaluating particular types of functional phrases used by their peers during the feedback process.

Extract 5 also indicates that Andy's application of the TBLT approach incorporated reflective elements and emphasized enhancing students' pragmatic competence and sense as true owners of English. Apart from observing peers' use of functional phrases, students were also stimulated to reflect on their peers' performance and evaluate to what extent they employed functional phrases effectively as pragmatic strategies to improve communicative effectiveness or address communication problems. This practice demonstrated that Andy was inclined to draw on key elements of ELFA-aware implications and integrated them into TBLT. This is due to that ELFA-aware pedagogy involves enriching teaching practice with appropriate reflective activities that facilitate learners' development as competent ELFA users (Bayyurt & Akcan, 2015; Jenkins, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2011). Integrating ELFA awareness into

the TBLT pedagogical approach involves actively encouraging students to use functional phrases in a pragmatically appropriate manner. Simultaneously, such integration can facilitate raising learners' awareness that their peers from various lingua-cultural backgrounds may utilize functional phrases differently in academic intercultural communication (Seidlhofer and Widdowson, 2018).

7. Discussion

In the EAP pre-session course that formed the context of the present study, despite its typically short duration and students' diverse linguistic proficiency levels, EAP pre-session tutors attached emphasis on teaching functional phrases to improve students' communicative competence in academic settings. EAP pre-session tutors generally preferred to adopt an inductive approach to enhance students' acquisition of functional phrases and employed TBLT to provide students with opportunities to practice them in a real academic interaction context. EAP pre-session tutors also leaned towards incorporating ELFA-aware principles into their teaching of functional phrase. Particularly, Jennifer tended to immerse students in diverse varieties of functional phrases used in academic interaction by speakers with diverse linguacultural backgrounds. Andy provided a proposal for implementing TBLT with ELFA awareness in teaching practice, which involved organizing students to engage in peer observation and then giving mutual feedback on the performance of employing functional phrases. However, at this stage, integrating ELFA awareness into EAP pedagogy for teaching functional phrases appears to have posed several challenges for pre-session tutors. As this study revealed, while pre-session tutors were favourable towards integrating ELFA-aware principles into their own teaching context, the integration was far from easy, because of the native-speakerism perceptions that continued to dominate in the EAP teaching context. The pedagogical approaches adopted to teach functional phrases appear to have leaned towards the EFL approach which entails adhering to the NS norms as an ideal standard. Nevertheless, the shift towards adopting an ELFA-aware approach to teaching functional phrases necessitates grappling with the fact that functional phrases cannot be taught as a typical bounded variety.

The variable and adaptable ways in which speakers manipulate functional phrases during ELFA interactions contrast with rigid standardized norms (Seidlhofer, 2017). Given this perspective, it is important to make a shift in reconceptualizing the evolving functions and structures of functional phrases within the academic realm. ELFA communication places a heightened focus on communicative functions, prioritizing mutual understanding over language forms (Seidlhofer, 2011). This reality poses immense challenges for traditional EAP theories and practices guided by NS-based standards (e.g., British/American English), which are no longer effective and relevant for academic intercultural communication. A focus on learning standard L1 norms may be certainly relevant, but EAP learners can benefit enormously from improving their communicative competence in academic intercultural communication by skilfully employing functional phrases as pragmatic strategies to negotiate meanings in ELFA interaction. When interacting with speakers from diverse linguacultural backgrounds in an ELFA communication, achieving a shared understanding is a joint, dynamic, and interactive process that participants continuously engage in and work towards (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Cogo & House, 2017). Under this situation, pragmatic strategies become highly relevant tools in the process of meaning negotiation, which proves effective in dealing with the lack of an established common ground in ELFA interaction.

Another challenge of adopting an ELFA-aware approach to teaching functional phrases lies in the contextual restrictions. EAP pre-session course is strictly regulated and monitored by Foundation Department at King's College London regarding its pedagogy and teaching materials. Thus, tutors are severely restricted from diversifying their teaching methods to teach functional phrases. This issue makes pre-session tutors reluctant to introduce dynamic or varied applications of functional phrases used in real academic intercultural communication in classroom. Despite the potential challenges of making ELFA-aware pedagogical changes, ELFA awareness put forward as a framework to comprehensively integrate ELFA principles and concepts within EAP is still worthy of being emphasized. In particular,

the emergence of ELFA as a distinctive field of applied linguistic research field brings an interesting and valuable pedagogical perspective for EAP programs in terms of how to develop students' academic intercultural competence by pragmatically employing functional phrases. The usefulness of this approach lies in that it does not dictate a specific way of teaching in EAP classes but focuses on teachers' dependence on deciding the relevance of ELFA-aware implications for their own classroom practices (Dewey, 2012). EAP teachers with higher levels of ELFA awareness will be well-prepared to teach the functional phrases more effectively and lead their students to higher levels of intercultural communicative competence in the EMI context. The goal of suggesting ELFA-aware implications for EAP teachers is not to impose any predetermined notions on how ELFA awareness should be integrated into their teaching of functional phrases. It is also not proposed as a different approach contrasted with EFL but as a way of informing and enriching the EFL approach (such as TBLT) by incorporating the sociolinguistic aspects of academic intercultural communication. This approach allows EAP practitioners to design their pedagogical practices and teaching materials independently and flexibly by drawing on ELFA-aware implications. To a certain degree, the interplay between the two paradigms, EFL and ELFA, can be employed to complement each other when EAP teachers aim to enhance their teaching effectiveness through enriching pedagogical methods of teaching functional phrases. Consequently, the incorporation of ELFA-aware consideration will be more helpful in preparing EAP learners to deal with the plurality and linguacultural variety of academic intercultural communication.

8. Conclusion

To integrate an ELFA-aware perspective in the EAP classroom, imitation of inauthentic academic communication tends to be less effective as what becomes more relevant is engaging in real academic interactions where diverse, creative, and complex forms of functional phrases may appear as ELFA pragmatic strategies used by diverse linguacultural speakers. Driven by insights from corpora (Mauranen, 2006, 2012), ELFA research has identified a range of functional phrases crucial for achieving communicative outcomes and negotiating meaning. An effective ELFA speaker in academic intercultural communication is a speaker who can employ pragmatic strategies frequently in his or her speech to collaboratively establish mutual understanding (Björkman, 2013). Implementing ELFA-aware principles to guide the teaching of functional phrases in the EAP field requires a fundamental shift in language teaching methods from at least three perspectives. Initially, EAP instruction should prioritize nurturing learners' abilities to use functional phrases as pragmatic strategies to enhance communicative effectiveness, rather than rigidly adhering to the norms of L1 speakers. Moreover, EAP instructors should aim to create opportunities for learners to employ functional phrases as pragmatic tools to negotiate meaning or collaboratively construct mutual understanding in academic intercultural communication (Mauranen, 2012; Jenkins, 2014; Galloway, 2017). The third perspective should involve exposing learners to diverse varieties of functional phrases pragmatically used by various linguacultural speakers and encouraging them to reflect on authentic examples of ELFA discourse.

To prepare students well for the increasing challenges of academic intercultural communication in the EMI context, EAP pedagogy needs to underscore the flexibility of linguacultural norms and centrality of negotiation skills, rather than the pure pursuit of linguistic features (Dewey, 2012; Jenkins, 2012). Thus, EAP teachers should avoid setting restrictions or building barriers on students' use of functional phrases in communication on the grounds of total adherence to L1 usage. Instead, they could work as mediators and facilitators in the process of language learning, with the focus on helping students develop functional phrases as pragmatic strategies to enhance academic communicative efficiency. Errors arising from the divergent uses of functional phrases from L1 standards are not problematic, as long as they do not hinder the communicative goal of delivering messages. Non-standard forms should not be viewed as errors or signals of a lack of language proficiency or communicative competence. Therefore, students should not be expected to achieve the idealized and unrealistic goal of employing functional phrases as L1 speakers do. Instead, they should be encouraged to become competent language users who can utilize functional phrases to successfully perform academic intercultural communication tasks.

Moreover, critical reflection activities should be conducted to encourage EAP learners to notice the various pragmatic and sociocultural features of functional phrases utilised by proficient ELFA users. In practical terms, such activities are typically metalinguistic, as they do not focus on correcting learners' *linguistic errors* according to a given English linguistic or pragmatic norm. Instead, they strive to raise learners' awareness of the fluidity, hybridity and flexibility of functional phrases that are dependent on the contexts of different ELFA interactions. This implies an understanding that the divergence from the L1 speaker norms is not errors but creative variations. By employing metalinguistic activities, teachers can expose EAP learners to specific, context-dependent ways of using functional phrases. Consequently, it encourages learners to recognize the limitations of solely relying on L1 conventions to employ functional phrases considering new evidence. Overall, the three practical suggestions discussed in this paper aim to bridge the gap between understanding ELFA theory and applying ELFA-aware pedagogy to teach functional phrases in EAP classrooms.

9. Research Limitations and Future Research

Due to its relatively short duration, this study could not explore the extent to which the ELFA-aware pedagogical principles can be practically integrated into the functional phrase of teaching in a pre-sessional program. Consequently, further research needs to be conducted with a longitudinal design, enabling ELFA researchers to monitor the long-term impacts of ELFA-aware pedagogy and examine the extent to which ELFA-aware principles can be incorporated into functional phrase teaching. Specific challenges related to developing ELFA-aware pedagogy as discussed in this article appear to be contextualized within the framework of an EAP pre-sessional program systematically regulated and organized in a UK university. EAP practitioners in different educational settings should be cautious when applying the findings of this research to their teaching environments. Further investigation also needs to illuminate the opportunities or constraints imposed by various EAP teaching contexts when it comes to developing and implementing ELFA-aware activities to teach functional phrases.

Future research on employing an ELFA-aware approach to the instruction of functional phrases should focus on gathering accounts from EAP teachers working in various higher education contexts, including pre-sessional tutors. These accounts should (1) outline the challenges encountered in their specific teaching context in light of ELFA-aware principles to teach functional phrases; (2) analyse the approaches they have attempted to address the challenges through specific lesson plans and tasks and (3) evaluate the outcomes of their efforts to implement ELFA-aware teaching to functional phrases. It is only through EAP teachers' accounts that ELFA researchers, scholars, and educators can eventually gain a comprehensive understanding of how the connection between ELFA-aware implications and the teaching of functional phrases can be effectively accomplished in the EAP classroom (Dewey, 2015).

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