Transmitting the Message
Paralinguistic Communication through Voice Overs in Infographics

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Abstrakt

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1. Introduction

Have you ever reflected upon the voice feeding you with information when watching a program or commercial, or listening to the radio? Whether it was appealing, tiresome or there at all. A large portion of the message that the producers behind either of these productions want to transmit is carried out through the narrator. In other words, the narrator is under a lot of pressure to both grab the listeners, or viewers, attention and then keeping that attention fixed on his or her voice.

The core of that which we work with within informatics is just that - information and how we can spread it. Put simply; communication. Ranging back to the early stone age we have been able to see how different means of communication were used. Cave paintings, for one, were not just beautiful pictures to decorate the walls of caves or slabs of stone. They were used to store and transfer information (Droste, 2014). Supposedly, before mankind began printing books, information and stories were shared sitting around a campfire, retelling the same stories over and over again to pass them on to the younger generations so that they could live on. This was also used to share important information such as where food could be found and the behaviour of local wildlife, ranging back as far as 1.8 million to about 11,000 years ago (Miller, 2008). These methods are still used to this day in different variants. There are tribes on indonesian islands that still pass down knowledge to the younger generations in the form of storytelling. In contrast to this, there is today's modern society where we have transitioned to a more digitalized kind of storytelling. It has evolved quite a bit though the core principles remain (Miller, 2008). We display information by visual means. Every day, everywhere we go we are constantly fed with information in different ways. Posters and plackets, auditory messages and commercials. Within informatics we work with refining these methods, polishing them to appeal to the largest audience possible. Infographics are a very modern way for both businesses, companies and private operators to spread information with a combination of both visual and auditory content, creating that which today is known as audiovisual productions. While it plays such a central part in today's ways of communicating with a large amount of people, it is highly relevant to examine and evaluate how this way of communicating with your audience can be used in a most efficient way. A local film production company were the ones who first asked me the question how “articulation, pace, gender and such stuff” affected a viewer and their way of interpreting the content of the infographic.

In spring of 2015, I met a man named Monte Reid, a giant amongst voice actors. He told me that “... it is not what we say, but how we say it”. What this means is that we can talk about more or less anything that we normally would find agonizingly boring and make that topic interesting and exciting by the way we present it.

Paralinguistic cues are that which makes this possible, the non-verbal expressions present while we speak, that which decides the underlying message (Reid, 2013).
1.1 Problem Statement, Purpose & Goal

With the background presented above it stands clear to see that both visualizing information through pictures or drawings as well as communicating through speech have been present for ages. An old saying goes that “a picture says more than a thousand words”. Most of us can probably agree this to be fairly true while pictures, signs or visualizations often have a clear message to transmit. The same goes for the visual part of the infographics, they are mostly very clear in the sense that they contain visualized information. Therefore, the research question of this study will revolve around the voice overs alone.

The question to which this thesis will revolve goes as follows:

To what extent do paralinguistic cues impact credibility in voice overs?

Using visual and auditory content in conjunction with one another is still something relatively new in regards of infographics and therefore we still have a couple of steps left before we have learnt how to best optimize this synergy. Because infographics play such a big part of today’s way of communicating it is important that we obtain a good understanding of how different factors within the infographic determine its appeal with its intended audience and their interpretation of it. As of now the voice over of an infographic seem to fall far behind in importance in contrast to the visual content. In their article, Jonas Eriksson and Joakim Ottosson (2012) conduct a study revolving around the audience interpretation of infographical productions. They do indeed emphasize the significance of including a voice over when producing an animated infographic in order to divide the absorption of information into two separate channels, one visual and one auditive. They also point out how a voice over can actually decrease of increase the production value of an infographic. They do not, however, explain further in terms of what separates a good voice over from a bad one. In other words, they underline the value of including a voice over in an infographic but do not go into deeper detail how to achieve what makes it valuable in the ears of the viewers.

The purpose of this thesis is, with the above in mind, to provide producers with a clear picture what to put their effort into when looking for a voice actor and/or producing their voice overs. Through a literature study explaining theoretical terms, followed by a case study where findings from the literature study are implemented and put to the test to determine what defines a credible voice over and what does not. The intended readers for this thesis are mainly said producers of audiovisual content who do indeed make use of voice overs to some extent. However it is also intended to provide some overall knowledge on how to produce voice overs for anyone interested in doing so.

Throughout the thesis you will continuously see brackets being used to wrap different words, phrases and sentences as in the following example [This sentence is an example.]. The reason for using these brackets instead of quotation marks is simply to make the word, phrase or sentence I want highlighted to stand out more from the rest of the text. Should quotation marks have been used instead the highlight, in my opinion, would not be as clear. This is used solely out of personal preferences.
2. Infographics

In the following section, infographics will be further introduced to the reader, explaining the general thought process behind today's modern infographics while also clarifying in what ways infographics are connected to informatics as an area of study. This is to make sure the reader has a general idea as to how infographics are produced and what values are put into them before introducing the infographic produced for this study.

Much as the name states, infographics are graphical productions containing information (Davis, 2013, Krauss 2012). The look and esthetics of these graphics may vary a lot depending on what kind of information the producer wishes to spread through their infographic. Krauss (2012) pinpoints some core features that are to be had in mind when producing an infographic;

Tell a story. Basically the context of the infographic consisting of pictures, titles, a key question or perhaps even a legend, a persona of some sort, a main character for the story being told.

Be clear. It must be very apparent how each and every fact presented is relevant to the message that you wish to transmit to your viewers/listeners.

Use good data. Be critical towards your sources and only use data that has been gathered and presented recently, so called “fresh” data.

Pay attention as you move about as you will find yourself surrounded by infographics everywhere, all the time. Take inspiration and draw ideas from them to use in your own productions.

Davis (2013) writes about how man has been using pictures to store and spread information since our very early ages. In such way, the paintings on the walls of caves originating from the Stone Age are no different than our modern time infographics. Should we apply Krauss’ core rules unto these cave paintings we can clearly see that these rules applied even at those times. Filip G. Droste (2014) confirms this in his article in which it is said that the paintings are indeed more than just artistic work, but can also be seen as “vehicles for transporting information”. Eriksson & Ottosson (2012) means that no infographic is created without something that the producer wants to transmit to others, that there are no “empty” infographics. The actual graphics used should originate from the question that the infographic is supposed to answer but with careful consideration. While a question or statement itself might be short in phrasing, the underlying information that can be drawn from it may eventually turn out to be overwhelming if not condensed before being used as a foundation for the production (Eriksson, Ottosson, 2012). Eriksson & Ottosson (2012) also emphasize that it is easier for us as humans to perceive and understand something that we feel a personal connection to and are familiar with. This goes for both visual as well as
auditive content. In the case of audiovisual infographics both of these aspects need to be taken into consideration. However, it is of utmost importance that the visual and auditive are in synchronization with one another (Eriksson, Ottosson, 2012). For instance, should the visual be that of a beach with the sparkling sea, one would expect the sound effects to be something of the likes of waves and/or seagulls. Should the sound instead consist of the roaring traffic on a highway it would most certainly cause confusion as the two normally do not occur together.

Ottoson & Eriksson (2012) further explains the content of infographics and the psychological aspect of them regarding how much data to present in an infographic is enough. In order for the largest quantity of people to take part of the infographic in the personal manner that Eriksson & Ottoson deems as critical in order to captivate the audience they argue that the content should neither be reduced nor simplified, but rather reduce the amount of static noise, remove certain fragments of the content that maybe are not necessary for the message of the infographic to make it through to the audience. For instance, in an infographic about a water power plant there may not be need to animate the salmons jumping upstream but instead focus solely on visualizing how the plant itself works. This feature is what is key when arguing how infographics are tied to informatics as a department of research. Infographics are basically information incarnate in its most apparent way. Information is presented by a speaker and visualized before the eyes of the audience to get a better understanding of that which is being said, or vice versa.

What could be called the older brother of infographics is information visualization. Many of the features lifted by Eriksson & Ottosson (2012) can also be seen within information visualization as presented by Tufte (1990) to whom they also refer throughout their thesis. Tufte (1990) emphasizes the possibilities to replace long, written explanations by using an example of a rule book for railway employees. In the book, the employees are faced with the same illustration of a railway cart appearing over and over again with the small exception of it being color coded in different ways depending on what signal light the illustration is supposed to represent and explain. Card (1999) means that information visualization is visual representation of abstract data to amplify cognition. Cognition is our ability to undertake and process information through different so called "cognitive channels", whereas the most relevant in regards of infographics and information visualization are our ability to hear and see (Eriksson & Ottosson, 2012). Card continues with

"Its purpose is not the pictures themselves, but insight (or rapid information assimilation or monitoring large amounts of data). Information visualization is a part of the new media made possible by the development of the real-time visual computer."

What this means is that information visualization and infographics as a whole are not meant to simplify or reduce the amount of the data presented, but rather clear out some of the noise that might otherwise appear within information that is spread solely through text, as mentioned above.
Fig. 1 - One of the pictures displayed within Krauss’ article (2012) used to explain infographics.
3. Keys to Communicate

This section will cover research priorly conducted in the field of paralinguistics. Key features to paralinguistic communication are presented followed by a summary of the findings. Researchers have had very similar thoughts as to what paralinguistics are, however they have all slightly different opinions regarding the contents of them.

3.1 The Benchmark of Paralinguistics

As has been stated priorly, there are countless of different approaches upon the term of paralinguistic cues. Because of this, should I choose to delve right into taking bits and pieces from here and there trying to summarize the common denominator the structure of this study would presumably become very abrupt. A benchmark will instead be used in the form of Reid’s F.A.S.T.E.D. principle to have a solid initial point to which parallels can be drawn, instead of grasping at straws of hay (Reid, 2013).

Reid formed this principle while studying credibility amongst leaders of companies and people of greater authority (Reid. 2013).

\[ F \] - Fluidity. How fluent the spokesman is in his or her speech. Should the spokesman stutter and use a lot of filler-words such as “like”, “uh” etc. their credibility is likely to decrease.

\[ A \] - Articulation. How articulate the spokesman is in his or her speech. Whether the words uttered can be understood. Should the spokesman mumble or over-articulate what they say might seem less credible.

\[ S \] - Sonority. The overall quality of the spokesman’s voice. Is the spokesman’s voice pleasant to listen to? A seemingly personal question of a matter of taste, yet important.

\[ T \] - Tempo. The pace at which the spokesman delivers his or her speech. Should the spokesman speak too slowly he or she might give the impression of being less intelligent, or should the tempo be too fast the audience might have a hard time keeping track of what is being said, losing focus.

\[ E \] - Emotion. The underlying emotion in the spokesman’s voice. Reasonably, the emotion of the voice should fit the message being transmitted. A message regarding starvation amongst children probably shouldn’t contain laughter, for instance.

\[ D \] - Dynamics. How playful the spokesman is with his or her pitch of the voice. Should the spokesman speak in a too monotone way they might seem bored with what they are saying, greatly decreasing their credibility. The same
goes should the voice be too dynamic, making the spokesman seem overly excited or non-serious.

The reason behind the F.A.S.T.E.D. principle being used as a benchmark for the study is because of its very easily overlooked generalisation of the concept of paralinguistic cues. However, as Reid has focused solely on leader’s credibility and their way of speaking when conducting his study, there are some cues that have been left out.

### 3.2 The Missing Cues

Other studies conducted revolving paralinguistic cues have often been focused on calls made to emergency call centers (Devillers, 2006, Klessa 2013). In summary, these studies were conducted to help the call center agents detect emotions amongst the callers in order to more easily and accurately approach the caller with the appropriate mindset (Devillers, 2006, Klessa 2013). Much like Reid’s study, these studies partially considered the credibility of the call center agent as a person of authority. The agent’s assignment is to give a sense of assurance, that the caller is in safe hands. In order to this the agent had to present themselves in the most credible way possible (Devillers, 2006). Devillers did a lot of findings within this area and could in most cases pinpoint the emotions transmitted through a complex formula that he and Vidrascu used in their study. The data that they present, having transcribed and analyzed several hundreds of dialogs between callers and agents, showcase many of the paralinguistic cues that Reid’s F.A.S.T.E.D. principle present, although Devillers and Vidrascu present them in a slightly different manner. Amongst the data presented is the ratio between male and female callers and agents respectively. However, these pieces of data are never taken into consideration when concluding their data. This is where we find the first missing cue; whether the spokesman is male or female.

One of the bullet points within the F.A.S.T.E.D. principle presented by Reid (2013) covers the area of Sonority - the overall quality of the voice. While gender of the spokesman might be considered as a factor of the quality of his or her voice, it is not clearly presented through Reid’s principle, neither does Devillers, Vidrascu or Klessa take gender into consideration within their studies.

*Segment duration* as presented by Gussenhoven (2006) is also a highly relevant cue. Like other paralinguistic cues Segment duration does not change the linguistic content in its whole, but rather alters how it is said, much like emphasizing and articulation. Surely most of us have either said it ourselves or heard someone else utter the phrase [But mom.]. Written on paper it does not look very intriguing. When adding the Segment duration-cue the sentence should look (sound) something along the lines of [But mo-om!] (Gussenhoven, 2006). Should one say say both variants of this simple utterance, taking into consideration the added [-om!] one would be able to hear a clear difference. The added exclamation mark is that which adds some energy to the utterance instead of being a drawn-out, monotone [But mo-om.].
3.3 Openness Toward the Audience

In relation to the question revolving around gender of the spokesman, the openness toward the audience plays a big part when transmitting a message (Yang, 2010). Yang, Kang and Johnson conducted a study revolving crisis communication and whether bloggers could enhance their readers engagement within said communication. What they found was that keeping an open dialogue between the audience and the author (or distributor of information) greatly increased their engagement with the active topic of discussion. By making the audience feel involved in the subject they proved more eager to assimilate the information presented to them (Yang 2010). Two examples of different blog posts will be shown and reflected upon to 1) to demonstrate how different scenarios and approaches regarding distribution affect an audience openness and receptance towards the information presented and 2) reflecting upon how the structure of these blog posts may be translated to use for creating a voice over for similar effect upon the audience.

The first example has been written in the form of a novel, consisting of a high narrative structure. Below is the first piece of the novel-written blogpost.

“My 6-year old son is scared to eat ice cream - our ice cream. The ice cream we jump on the couch to eat together after dinner and watch cartoons. He came to me this morning and wanted to know why daddy’s ice cream made his best friend so sick that he had to go to the hospital. How do you answer that? I’m so lost with this one.” (Yang, 2010, 18).

This is but a fraction of the written post. An introduction, rather. Already has it portrayed a horrible scenario in which, I hope, not one of us would want to find ourselves in. How children suffer because of us. In that sense these blog posts do not differ from Red Cross call to actions running on our television screens. They both use the same technique although in different ways. While the televised version of this would probably show the sick children laying in hospital beds with a gloomy voice explaining with great focus on emphasizing the emotion of the situation through paralinguistic cues, the blog posts work solely with the linguistics - what is being said (or written, rather).

The second blogpost regards the author’s openness to, in this case, his readers.

“I’ve been constantly reading and responding to everyone’s comments from my last post about the immediate recall of our Organic ChocolátteKizz ice cream from schools in the Upstate area. Each comment is sent instantly through email to my iPhone so I can respond no matter where I am. You can reach me privately at the same email, [...] I guarantee a personal response within an hour” (Yang, 2010, 20).

Putting the two quotes into contrast with one another there are a few notable key factors. They both give the impression that the author is responsible for something bad that has
happened, and that he is sorry for the damage caused. The difference, however, is that in the first example the apology, or expression of empathy, is expressed through a narrative which is meant to be very open for people to be able to relate to what has been written. In the second example he invites the audience to directly contact him for a personal apology (Yang, 2010).

The first quotation can be directly applied unto infographical content. As mentioned above, it consists of a high narrative structure with lots of context to which many can relate to. In other words, an infographic using the blogpost as “script” would transmit the same feelings as its written origin while the core of the transmitted message would remain the same. However, transferring the second quote into an infographic would require some alteration. While it is one thing for a CEO or highly positioned employee to write a blogpost to communicate with their customers, there are two things that speak against creating an infographic with the same structure. First, creating an infographic in which the narrator him- or herself is the main character of the story would rather seem as if though the narrator were trying to shield him- or herself using the content of the infographic rather than showing him- or herself, almost as if though the person in mind were afraid to show their actual, living face. Second, producing a televised apology that is meant solely for one person to apologize for him- or herself is quite a lot of effort for a seemingly small outcome. However, having the CEO appear in person, apologizing on behalf of the company would likely deem a much more acceptable approach given the receptance shown from the study conducted by Yang (2010).

3.4 Relation Between Linguistics and Paralinguistics

While paralinguistics themselves greatly affect how what we say is interpreted, we can not deviate from the fact that the message we wish to transmit can not, in most cases, be carried through solely through gruntings and sighs, especially in the case of an infographic where our body language is absent.

In his article, Gussenhoven writes about prosodic phrasing. Essentially, this is a rhythmic hierarchy of words and phrases uttered and how these can be interpreted in different ways, partially depending on the presence of paralinguistic cues (Gussenhoven, 2006, Downing, 2011). For instance, the two sentences [To govern, people use language.] and [To govern people, use language.]. While these two sentences are seemingly constructed the same way, it is something so small as a slight pause in different spots that determine its meaning. This is the relation that linguistics and paralinguistics have with one another. While these paralinguistics can be applied to a variety of different sentences, it is the exact choice of words that makes for the possibility of the two priorly mentioned sentences to transmit those exact messages with [people] being the key word. [To strictly govern people, use bad language.]. Here the sentence has been slightly changed to contain more information. However, should this information be about the [people] themselves, the subject of the sentence, the structure cannot be changed as freely. [To govern people rioting, use language]. Should we want to change the meaning of this sentence it will require [rioting] to be moved. [To govern rioting, people use language.]. There is now a vague difference
between the two sentences. The first leaning more towards being instructing while the other is presented as people using language to govern rioting being a fact. The seamless possibility to play with its structure has been negated due to the sentences growing more complex.

Going back to the sentence [To govern people, use language.], there are two prime examples as to how the paralinguistics might affect the underlying message. [people], [govern] and [use language] all carry an equal amount of information in this sentence. There is something that someone needs to [govern], who is either governed or wants to govern are the [people], and they either [use language] themselves in order to govern, or someone else is using it against them. By emphasizing either of these three units we can change the underlying message of the information presented (Gussenhoven, 2006, Downing, 2011).

[To GOvern people, use language.] With the emphasis on [govern] it is suggested that the person uttering the sentence is explaining how to govern, whilst there might be other options to undertake.

[To govern PEOple, use language.] Emphasizing [people] specifies that they are the ones to be governed.

[To govern people, use LANguage.] Lastly emphasizing [language] suggests either that 1) someone answers a question as to how one should govern [people], or 2) that [people] has priorly been governed using a faulty or unethical method which should be replaced with using language.

As mentioned priorly, Reid's F.A.S.T.E.D. principle is that which has been used for benchmarking the view upon paralinguistics for this study. With the examples used above we have, however, yet to cover any other area than Dynamics while also scratching the surfaces of Fluidity and Tempo. Articulation, Sonority and Emotion are very hard to print out in text, and will be further discussed as the case study progresses later in this thesis and how they were implemented into the different versions of the voice overs used for the infographic.

### 3.5 Summary of the Literature Study

Infographics are a modern way to communicate so long as they apply to the established frameworks that have been carefully sculpted to optimise their efficiency. This applies to both still frames as well as animated infographical content. In the case of the animated infographics, the voice overs and how they are produced are of utmost importance. In order to produce a voice over that matches the quality of its intended infographical host it is important to know what factors play what parts and how they affect the quality of the voice over.

Most researchers are unified that paralinguistic cues affect voice overs or speech in some ways. However, the one who summarized them the best was Reid with his F.A.S.T.E.D. principle. Fluidity, Articulation, Sonority, Tempo, Emotion and Dynamics are the key cues that Reid puts his effort into. However, there are other paralinguistic factors that deserve
and should be included in this list. Of course the list of what paralinguistic cues are could be made extraordinarily long, so we are going to keep it quite simple yet cover some areas that I personally consider very important aspects. One of these being the gender of the spokesman. One might argue that the gender can be considered a part of the Sonority. However, as the difference between a man and a woman and their sonority might be as different as night and day I definitely consider this as its own paralinguistic cue - Gender. The other being Segment Duration as presented by Gussenhoven. Segment Duration is for how long we choose for a word to last, this going hand in hand with Dynamics. [But mom.], written like this, this sentence is rather dull and does not transmit any message in particular. However, should we add Segment Duration writing it as [But mo-om!] most of us will probably interpret something entirely different out of the sentence. Thus adding a second cue – Segment Duration.

Naturally there is a connection as to what we say and how we say it. This relationship is defined by Gussenhoven and Downing as part of the hierarchy within prosodic phrasing, how certain paralinguistic cues affect certain utterances and how one sentence can transmit different messages depending on what and how paralinguistic cues are used to, for instance, emphasize different words.
4. Method

4.1 Literature Study

Literature study refers to theoretical sampling of already grounded theories (Patton, 2002). Reviewing that which has already been written about the intended object of study and its surroundings in order to gain a more solid foundation to base ones research upon. For this thesis and its case study it is important to understand the theoretics behind paralinguistics in order to use them correctly in voice overs.

In the literature study of this thesis, paralinguistic cues as a term was more closely investigated and concretized. While the general idea behind the term is well agreed upon amongst researchers, professors and teachers, being the non-verbal expressions in our speech as mentioned above, what exactly these non-verbal expressions are, or which, rather, is something that more or less every other person has their own opinion about. Therefore the literature study was aimed towards finding the median of these expressions to provide a simpler, more easily overlooked generalization of the term using Reid’s F.A.S.T.E.D. principle as a benchmark (Reid, 2013). Even though the study itself does not revolve around the concept of infographics but rather its content, the general idea behind them has been more thoroughly explained to provide an even more solid foundation to stand upon for when the paralinguistic cues were put into context with the infographics produced for the case study. Much like F.A.S.T.E.D. will be used as a benchmark for the study of the paralinguistic cues, Krauss (2012) and Davis (2013) provide a very good overview of the foundation upon which infographics are usually created.

In order for you as a reader to have the findings of the literature study fresh in your mind before heading over to the case study where the findings are actually put into use, a summary of the literature study can be found as the last subheading of the previous section 3.

4.2 Case Study

With the term case study one refers to a scenario organized by the analytic in order to extract data. To keep in mind however, is that they are per definition unique. In other words, no case study will be made under the exact same premisses nor with the same results (Patton, 2002).

The findings regarding paralinguistic cues were implemented in the form of voice overs put unto a short infographic produced using Krauss (2012) and Davis (2013) frameworks. While infographics are viewed by many different audiences, I chose to focus on young adults within the vicinity of Umeå University campus. The reason being that infographics are something that is encountered on a daily basis on several different occasions within the perimeters of a campus. In other words, my ideal respondents for this study is supposedly accustomed to the phenomena of infographics but have paid them no additional thought in a sense of what their production values are, the quality of their voice overs, the audiovisual content, etc. After having been shown the infographics the respondents will be asked to fill in a short survey allowing for them to reflect upon certain aspects of the infographics that they might not have otherwise thought of should the floor have been left completely open for
them to speak without guidelines. As the questions of the survey are aimed to evaluate what the respondents do and do not find credible with the voice overs one could say that the survey evaluates what areas of improvement within the voice overs. This corresponds well with the Common Measurement Tool (CMT) manual issued by the Institute for Citizen-Centered Service (ICCS) in 2003 (ICCS, 2003). Their framework supports the use of scale-based questions such as "How satisfied are you with the given service?" followed block representing a scale of one to five for the respondent to choose the alternative that best suits them, one being not satisfied at all whilst five being completely satisfied (ICCS, 2003). While this is essentially how the survey used for this case study is constructed, I deemed that using a scale system would leave too many blanks in regards as to why the respondents had chosen, for instance, a two on a scale of one to five. Because of this I used a "yes" or "no" method instead, followed by an opportunity for the respondent to further elaborate on what they felt after having heard each version of the voice over. Kelley et al. (2003) names these kind of questions as open ones and points out that even though they require a lot more out of the respondents they can provide useful insight into the discussed topic. It is also pointed out that these kind of questions can prove difficult to analyze and that one should carefully consider what approach to take when analyzing them even before conducting the survey. With this and the fact that most answers would likely be emotionally loaded I deemed that the easiest way to summarize the results of the survey would be to categorize the answers into separate emotional categories. For instance, should a respondent write "the voice over seemed too bored", the category would be the same; bored, which in turn is something negative. The same method was used to trace and pinpoint positive emotions apparent in the comments of the survey in order to finalize a summary in the form of bar graphs displayed below in section 5.3.

Following the case study is the section for analysing the results set against the theoretical background presented in the literature study. These results are then further discussed in the form of seeing to potential future research to either further investigate the paralinguistic features of communication or to cover areas that might have been missed in this study.

4.3 “Alma”

While the familiarity with infographics amongst my respondents will vary, I wanted to transmit a message that each and everyone is familiar with. The reason for this being that should respondent X both be unfamiliar with the concept of infographics and thus having to focus a lot to simply grasp the general idea of how and why the movie that X is being shown is produced the way it is, it will be ever so much harder for X to undertake the content of the movie should the subject also be on something that he/she is unfamiliar with. In other words, while the goal is to investigate paralinguistic cues in general within infographical movies, it is redundant to make the infographics about a subject unfamiliar to the respondents while the intentions are not to actually teach them anything new, only to reflect upon how the content is presented.

With the above in mind I chose to make the infographic about children in critical situations. More specifically about starvation. “Alma” is but the first name that popped into
my head when speculating around this idea and has not been chosen due to any personal references or to act as a metaphor for anything. The name is purely hypothetical and how the infographic will be mostly referred to throughout this thesis. The topic of starvation or other difficulties among children is very often commercialised on different TV-channels and radio-stations and is therefore something that most people are familiar with. In order to investigate how the paralinguistic cues affect the transmitted message with the infographic, there will be six different voice overs;

- One version was performed in a very dull and seemingly bored way, as if the spokesman did not really care about that which he or she is talking about - the spokesman is indifferent.
- One that is produced in an appropriate way with the right mindset and underlying emotions - sadness.
- And lastly one which is overly excited, almost as if the spokesman were to tell you about a new amusement park that is opening soon - the spokesman is happy in an eccentric way.

These three different versions were produced with both a male and female voice artist. Research that has been conducted earlier regarding the paralinguistics within communication has yet to take into account whether it might affect the recipient if the spokesman is of the male or female gender. Later in this thesis I delve deeper into the question as to whether gender should be considered a paralinguistic cue, see section 4.2.

After having conducted the case study and accumulated the data gathered I set said data against the findings of the literature study in order to answer whether, and if so how large of an impact, the paralinguistic cues have on information presented through infographics.

4.4 Limitations

The directions in which this study were to go felt very clear to me from the very beginning. While it revolves around a seemingly narrow subject there was no need for any significant limitations regarding the paralinguistics themselves. Some limitations were made, however, in regards to technical terms. For instance, in section 4.4, Gussenhoven’s definition of prosodic phrasing is lifted which is a hierarchy of words, including a complex formula in order to determine which word is most likely to be uttered following the first word uttered (for instance; [dear] followed by [mother]). Explaining such a formula is irrelevant to the understanding of paralinguistics and has therefore been left out.

As for the production itself of the infographic “Alma”, it was produced with no music attached to it. This in order for the respondents to be able to fully focus on the voice over, focusing entirely of the emotions transmitted by the speaker not being influenced by the emotions transmitted by the music.
4.5 Research Ethics

Using Vetenskapsrådets principles founded in 1990, there are four main factors that needs to be taken into consideration when working with respondents. These factors as well as how they have been adapted to will be explained below.

First is the demand of information. The respondents are to be well aware as to what the study is about and why they are participating. Any factors that might affect the respondent’s willingness to participate must be revealed and explained. The participants were indeed informed how the study was to be conducted as well as them being completely free to cancel their participation at any time.

The second is the demand for consent. The respondents have to agree to any- and everything in which they are to participate in within the study as well as to what extent their participation will be.

This demand has been met while the respondents did all give their consent toward watching the infographics, filling in the survey as well as the data gathered from this being used within the study.

Third, the demand for confidentiality. The respondents are to remain anonymous without risk for their identity being revealed to anyone outside of the team of researchers. A signed agreement regarding these matters should, preferably, occur.

While I conducted the research by myself and the survey following the viewing of the infographics was very blank with no questions regarding anything specific to which one could pinpoint one person solely by their answer the identity of the respondents has indeed not been revealed to anyone outside of the study.

Fourth, the demand of utilization. The data and/or information gathered throughout the study are to be used for the purpose of research and that purpose only.

The information gathered through the respondent’s participation has not been used outside of this thesis.
5. Case Study - Which Voice Over is Credible?

Now that we know what paralinguistics are and how to utilize them, it is time to put them to use. First, you will be shown cuts out of the visual content of “Alma” and given the general idea as to how the infographic itself is played out visually followed by a walkthrough of the script and the thoughts behind it. Further, the results of the study will be presented.

5.1 Storyboard and Finished Counterparts

As I have mentioned before, the focus of this study is supposed to be mainly on the voice over of the infographic. For this sake, the infographic was produced in the simplest way possible without any extraordinary visual quality or effects. It basically has two purposes that both converge with one another. First, the storyboard acts as a foundation when writing the monologue. Secondly, when applying the monologue unto the finished visual content, the content acts as a visualizer to provide something for the viewer to directly connect the information given through the voice over to.

As can be seen both in the storyboard and the snapshots from the finished visual content the characters are made as basic stick figures without any particular characteristics. This is to keep them as blank as possible in order to let viewers paint their own picture as to how these characters may actually look for a deeper sense of connectivity.

Fig. 2 - Displaying the first half of the concept behind “Alma”. The first frame featuring the main character, Alma, where she is given a short presentation. The second frame the camera has panned outwards, showing her friends while the narrator explains the dire situation of starvation that Alma and her friends are suffering from. The friends fade away one by one, symbolizing them dying out of starvation.
Fig. 3 - Displaying the second half of the concept behind “Alma”. In the first (third) frame the camera has panned back unto Alma whereas the narrator explains that this dire situation will also affect her. In the last frame, Alma too fades, symbolizing her imminent death should nothing be done to help. The narrator then finishes the monologue with a call to action, asking viewers for help to prevent Alma from meeting this fate.

Below are screenshots from the finished infographic showing off the specific frames that the frames of the storyboard are supposed to represent.

Fig. 4 - The finished model of both Alma and the other female characters appearing in the infographic. More or less the same as the first frame of the storyboard (although perhaps slightly more artistic. Slightly).
Even though there are four frames displayed in the storyboard I chose to not include the third one while it is essentially the same as the first. While the visuals of the infographic turned out just as simple as I had hoped, it still give a general idea as to what is happening.

5.2 The Voices Behind “Alma”

In contrast to how this thesis is written, the voice overs applied to “Alma” are performed in swedish. This is an addition to the concept of keeping the whole thing simple as it would require additional effort of the respondents to interpret a voice over given in a language other than their mother tongue. Also, it would require additional effort from both myself and
Gabrielle, performing the female voice overs, should we have performed in another language than our mother tongue.

I had Yang’s study (2010) in mind while writing the script. Writing something simple yet emotionally captivating that was so genuine that anyone could feel some sort of connection to what was being said. A short, yet tragic, story. In Swedish, the script is written as follows:


Translated into English:

-This is Alma. She has many friends, however each day someone of them dies out of starvation. Help us to help Alma, before it’s too late. Thank you for your contribution.

As the overlying message of the script has been phrased in a very minimalistic way, without unnecessary noise, paralinguistics are fairly easy to play about with. In other words, creating the different versions (indifferent, sad, eccentric) of “Alma” did not require any revisiting of the script itself, but rather only required some effort out of us as voice actors in order to alter the transmitted emotions.

As in the example of [To govern people, use language.] there are keys in the script of “Alma” as to where the main impact of the paralinguistics should occur. The first, naturally, being [This is Alma.] A short yet potentially very emotionally loaded sentence. Introducing the main character while also giving a first impression of the story. It is important to get the first impression right in order for less misinterpretations to occur. For instance, should [This is Alma.] be said with a genuinely happy tone, followed by the rest of the voice over sounding very gloomy and desperate a lot of confusion would likely occur amongst the audience.

Next is the main content of the infographic. [She has many friends, however each day someone of them dies out of starvation.] Alma’s friends are presented while also highlighting the critical situation that they are all situated in. Breaking this sentence with its subordinate clause into their key message-bearing words we get [friends], [dies] and [starvation]. These are all words with potential of having high emotional value. While it is indeed great that Alma has many friends, bearing the knowledge of them dying out of starvation rivals that joyful privity. A dilemma has been created. We now know that this is happening, that there are people suffering. [Help us to help Alma, before it’s too late.]. Here the option to intervene is presented to the audience, that there is actually something the viewer can do to help. Quite similar to the prior sentence, however, in the sense that it presents two options. The positivity of being able to aid Alma and her friends while also pointing out that time is running out. Lastly, [Thank you for your contribution.]. What this sentence does is imply that the person speaking really counts on the audience to help.
What should be noted about the script of “Alma” is that I wrote it solely from personal experience from having conducted various minor studies regarding the structure of commercials and other means of communication that has the essential purpose of persuading its audience. These studies have mostly been conducted around social media such as Facebook, Instagram and other similar platforms and has not revolved much around information presented through speech, but rather visualized through text or imagery. Transitioning these experiences in combination with the complimentary studies I have done in the area of communication and voice management in addition to my studies at the university I deem should be credible enough for my thoughts and the process behind the script of “Alma” to be cedent.

For the three different voice overs we needed to be able to deliver three rather specific emotions.

The first version was the dull, seemingly bored one - indifferent. For this voice over the Fluidity together with the Dynamics played a major role. The Fluidity being very bumpy using a lot of filler-words such as “uh” and “like” (although in Swedish, naturally). In combination with low dynamics, keeping a fairly monotone voice throughout the entirety of the voice over. Despite that this version was supposed to be emotionally dead I deemed it inappropriate to neglect all of the paralinguistic cues such as Sonority and Articulation. None of the voice overs were supposed to be an entirely obvious right or wrong even though the first (indifferent) and third (eccentric) were meant to greatly lean toward the wrong-side while the second (sad) was supposed to lean more toward the right-side. Therefore we did Articulate fairly well as well as focusing to keep an overall quality to our voices while performing.

As for the second, sad version there was a lot more effort put into making it sound as credible as possible taking each paralinguistic cue into consideration. Keeping the lines fluent and with proper Articulation while also working a lot with the underlying emotion of the voice as well as the Dynamics. However, the most difficult cue to work with was Tempo. In order to, mostly, fill the roughly 22 seconds of visual content with speech some of the lines had to have their duration slightly extended - their tempo reduced. This in combination with the fact that the voice over is supposed to be quite dulled due to its saddened emotion resulted in the voice over sounding a bit too dulled, almost bored, mainly in the male version. This is not necessarily a bad thing though, considering it gave the respondents more to reflect upon really having to put their thought into whether it is an adequate voice over should the infographic had been an actual, real commercial.

Lastly there is the eccentric version. Much like the sad version all cues had to be taken into account but done the opposite way. Again the Tempo was the cue that required the most thought. In comparison to the saddened voice, the eccentric one should generally keep a high tempo and seem enthusiastic. Here the above mentioned issue of the length of the visual content counter the overall length of the voice overs appeared again. To be able to keep the more enthusiastic tone of voice in relation to its tempo the decision was made to instead increase the length of the pauses between each separate line. In a scenario where this voice over were to be used this would cause one significant setback. The audience might lose their
interest in the video should the pauses be too long in between the presented pieces of information.

5.3 Procedure and Results

13 respondents participated in the study where ten of them were men and three women. As mentioned in section 4., the respondents were all young adults (21-29 years old) who are accustomed to the concept of infographics but have had limited experience with them.

Each respondent got to sit alone with headphones on to isolate themselves from surrounding sounds to be able to fully focus on “Alma” and its presented context. Before watching the six different versions, the respondents were informed about three major points; the order of viewing, the core context of the infographic and the fact that both the male and female version one, two and three respectively were conducted in very similar ways. The order of viewing due to the fact that in order for the respondents to fill out the survey following the viewing of the six different versions accordingly it was crucial for them to watch in the specific order that I had set up. Had they watched the second version first and then filled out the first blank of the survey the results would have been significantly distorted. Why the core context was explained is connected to that which I mentioned earlier regarding having to first focus upon grasping what the infographic is actually about before being able to focus upon whether the voice over is appropriate or not. Having presented the core context to the respondent before viewing they are somewhat prepared as to what will be said, but not how it will be said which is exactly what the point was about.

After each viewed version of “Alma” the respondents filled in one question of the survey, being the same for every version:

- Anser Du att berättarrösten framför filmens budskap på ett rimligt sätt?

And in english

- Do You deem that the voice over presents the message of the movie in an appropriate way?

The alternatives of yes or no were given. Whether the respondent chose yes or no they were asked to briefly motivate why they had picked the certain answer. Lastly, after having viewed all of the six versions there were a couple of questions regarding gender solely as a paralinguistic cue and what impact the difference between the male and female versions had had on them as respondents and whether one of the two were more credible than the other. As the gender of the spokesman or voice over artist directly impacts their sonority the gender is most definitely worth to consider a paralinguistic cue. As this has not been done before it was necessary to further evaluate these factors.

Below are the statistical results of the study. Due to the fact that only three women participated in the study one can not make a generalisation. Even though the three women participating all answered the same on the six different voice overs a generalisation about all
of the world’s women cannot be made. The number is simply too small. Because of this men and women will be displayed together in the bar charts below. However, some exceptions will be highlighted later, quoted from the comments given by the respondents regarding each voice over.
Fig. 7 - 12. The bar charts displaying the results in the form of yes or no being given as an answer to the question “Do You deem that the voice over presents the message of the movie in an appropriate way?”.

Comments and motivations as to why the respondents had answered yes or no were very similar in between the male and female V. 1 and V. 3. Therefore they will be displayed as a mashup. For instance, plainly ”V. 1” instead of creating two separate fields, one for male and one for female that are near identical. An exception will be made for V. 2 while the results deviate quite a lot between the male and female versions.

V. 1 - Indifferent.
As one can see from the charts displayed above, not a single respondent found the first version to be credible. In the survey they were asked to briefly motivate as to why they had chosen either yes or no. The general tone of the comments were along the lines of uninterested, too long pauses, using filler words, self-important, bored, unprepared and stumbling.

Male V. 2 - Sad.
Fairly even with a result of eight saying yes and five saying no to whether the voice over is credible or not. Some of the negative comments means that the voice over was too slow, seemingly manipulative, too empathic and sad (to the point where it seems faked), slightly bored. For the positive comments the respondents meant that there was more emotion, makes it easier to commit oneself.

Female V. 2 - Sad.
As for the female version there were a few cases in which the respondent had chosen yes while also giving constructive criticism in the comment section. All of the respondents who responded in this way had commented something along the lines of ‘good, but she seems a bit bored’. As for the positive feedback there were a few additions in comparison to the male version being that the intonation was put on the right words, the pauses were well performed, serious but no manipulative as well as pleading.

V. 3 - Eccentric.
The results of the eccentric are pretty much the same as for the indifferent with the single deviation of one respondent finding the male version credible. It was given a yes under the same premises that were made apparent with the female version of V. 2 where respondents chose yes while still commenting on certain shortages. “Objective, but a bit too happy” is how the respondent commented on his/her answer. Otherwise the comments were deliberatively negative such as too jolly, sounds like a game-show, the message doesn’t come through, too fast, carefree, too selling, not credible. One respondent stood out slightly, stating that “It sounds as it’s good that they’re dying”.

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In section 3.2 I suggested that gender might be considered a paralinguistic cue. The three last questions of the survey were written with this in mind and evaluated the respondents thoughts regarding the gender of the voice over artist. The first question was a general question about the script of “Alma” and whether they thought it was more suited for a man or woman to deliver these kinds of messages.

I realised while conducting the study that the way I had phrased the questions regarding gender were quite ill and gave too much room for interpretation. Originally the first question was phrased “Did You experience the male or female voice over to suit this infographic best?”. What the question was actually referring to was as can be seen as the title of the chart below.

![Fig. 13. Displaying the results revolving personal preferences of gender of the voice over artist about this specific kind of message - children in distress.](image)

Unfortunately I did not realise this until I read the comments of four respondents that had already completed the survey.

The second question was rather ill phrased as well. Again, I did not realise this until the same four respondents had completed the survey. In order to resolve this issue, I made sure to explain to upcoming respondents exactly what the questions were more specifically about. The first respondents had understood as if the second question was closely related to the first but rather evaluated what emotions the respondents felt depending on whether the voice over was performed by a man or woman. In the chart below the question has been rephrased as to how it was clarified to the other respondents.
Fig. 14. The results regarding whether the respondents had any personal preferences in general regarding gender of the voice over artist, regardless of what the presented information is about.

Despite the question having been clarified there were some deviations in interpretation. One of the respondents that chose yes did clarify in the comment section that it depended on the context of the commercial. An example was given by one of the respondents that it would “seem weird should a commercial about tampons be voiced by a man”.

Lastly a general question was asked where the respondents were asked if they usually reflect upon whether the voice over is performed by a man or woman.

Fig. 15. Results regarding whether or not the respondents usually reflect upon the gender of the voice over artist in commercials specifically
This question was asked mainly to determine whether or not a general interest exists about voice overs. As stated in section 4, I intended for participating respondents to be somewhat accustomed to the concept of infographics yet having paid no further attention to the process of production or ways of thought behind it. This question, apart from evaluating a general interest, shows that the respondents mostly met my expectations regarding familiarity with voice overs in infographics.
6. Analysis

In this section the results of the case study will be discussed and reflected upon followed by a conclusion of the thesis as a whole. In general it is quite clear that the expectations were met regarding the study and how the respondents would react upon the different voice overs. However, much like in the previous chapter where each version of the voice overs was presented separately, each version will, in this section, be discussed as a whole Meaning that V.1, regardless of gender, will be discussed as one version and so on. The analysis has been conducted bearing Reid’s F.A.S.T.E.D. in mind as a continued benchmark for the paralinguistics.

V. 1 - Indifferent.

Looking back upon what the thoughts behind this version was, Fluidity and Dynamics were the two cues making the major difference. The intentions regarding the Fluidity were for it to seem very distoriented, broken and full of filler words (filled with noise) while the Dynamics were to be more or less non-existent, giving the voice the dull tone. The respondents were overall very good at paying close attention regarding these aspects and did indeed pinpoint these exact things. One very important aspect that was also noted by one of the respondents is that they thought the voice sounded very insecure about what it was telling the audience. Reid (2013) does write about this in his master’s thesis - how can one be perceived as credible by others should they not believe themselves? In other words, if I do not believe what I am telling someone, then how am I supposed to convince them that what I am telling them is the truth?

V. 2 - Sad.

For the second version there are a couple of things that were not entirely unexpected yet well worth discussing. The main one being the diversity of thoughts revolving the male version. Why did some find it credible while others found it not to be? Judging from the comments given by the respondents they seem to be agree upon the fact that the voice over appear slightly too slow. What intrigues me are the comments regarding the voice seeming too empathic and manipulative. As for the voice being too empathic I can imagine it revolving around the Tempo. Either one interprets it simply to be too slow on the verge to drudgery which becomes boring to listen to, or one can interpret it as an attempt to sound sadder with the risk that it reaches the point where it becomes melancholic and hard to believe.

V. 3 - Eccentric.

Much as expected, the overall thought of this version was that it was highly inappropriate considering the content of what was actually being said. The reactions themselves, however, were mixed. Some laughed at the absurdity of the happy-go-lucky fellow telling them about such tragic events while others would cross their arms with very stern looks upon their faces as if they saw this is as something very offensive toward those the context revolved around.
There was one exception though where one of the respondent chose yes over no to whether or not the voice over was appropriate. In the comments he/she wrote “Gets the point through but is too happy”. Here the respondent has weighed two contradictions - on the one hand, he/she thinks that the underlying message comes through while on the other he/she thinks that it is indeed a bit too happy. However as the respondent has chosen yes the carrying of the message seems to outweigh the fact that it sounds too happy. I find this very interesting considering the same kind of ways to ‘play safe’ by choosing yes while also commenting on that which could be improved has been highly represented in the second version which I see as perfectly reasonable. When this result came in I did indeed have to sit down rethinking my own image of voice overs. Throughout my experience of voice overs and communication I have only focused on what might be seen as the meta of communication. We are used to tragedies being voiced in a certain way and thus expect them to be presented the same way whether the tragedy is a tsunami or a bombing. Due to this comment my eyes (or ears, rather) were opened to the matter of personal taste which is something I have not considered priorly. A very interesting study could be made out of this where one focuses upon gathering information about what the audience actually want the voice over to be like and creating the voice over out of the data gathered, then presenting the finished product for the same respondents to see whether or not the production met their expectations.

As can be seen in the charts presented above revolving gender possibly being considered a paralinguistic cue, there are indeed some factors that point toward this. Ideally, should it under no circumstances be considered a paralinguistic cue the question “Do you generally prefer the voice over to be performed by a certain gender?” should be answered all with no. However as there are some misinterpretations to the question the results may be seen as distorted. The same goes for the question regarding whether the respondents had priorly reflected upon if the voice over was performed by a man or woman. As some have had the same tendencies as with the questions about the different versions of the voice over, choosing one answer while still pointing out certain flaws or exceptions as comments. One of the respondents who answered yes pointed out that he/she did not actually reflect upon the gender of the voice over but rather meant that regardless if it was performed by a man or woman, most voices seemed very forced and unnatural. If other respondents have reasoned the same way then sadly the results are not univocal enough to draw a conclusion whether gender should be considered a paralinguistic cue. This issue will be further lifted as a part of the section for future research.
7. Conclusion

In the beginning of this thesis I explain how the underlying message in words uttered are affected by paralinguistic cues - non-verbal expressions. The goal was to determine to what extent these cues impact on the credibility of information, and how this information is perceived by the audience, transmitted through voice overs within infographics. With the findings of the conducted literature study as a foundation for creating six different voice overs (three male, three female) the infographic “Alma” was created, an infographic explaining the dire situation of Alma and her friends all suffering from starvation. Having shown the six finished infographics to 13 respondents it was clear to see that paralinguistic cues did have a tremendous impact on how the viewer would perceive that which was being said. Four out of the six versions were created in ways that greatly deviated from the norm of these kind of infographics (or commercials, if you will) that are normally presented by someone in a very gloomy way to accentuate the critical situation the children are in and the importance that each and every one of the audience helps as best as they can, usually by donating money. In total, there were 52 answers given as to whether or not these voice overs were considered appropriate in terms of presenting the issue. 51 of these answers came back negative with one exception. However this single exception did point out one critical flaw he/she saw in the voice over which was that it was “too happy” yet still felt that the good outweighed the bad.

Secondly, two out of the six versions were made to be emotionally adequate - to transmit sadness. Out of 26 answers, 20 came back positive, confirming that these voice overs were mostly adequate in terms of transmitting the correct emotion, fitting the information presented by the voice over.

A secondary objective of the thesis was to determine whether or not gender should be considered a paralinguistic cue. As some respondents had interpreted the questions revolving this particular topic in different ways due to them being ill phrased by none other than yours truly, I reckon that a solid conclusion cannot be drawn yet. In other words; this area requires further research but is still of utmost relevance.

Through a literate and empirical study I have been able to confirm the importance of taking paralinguistic cues into consideration when creating voice overs. It is my hopes and beliefs that these findings will be of use to anyone who considers using a voice over, convincing them about the cues impact on how their eventual audience perceives the intended message behind their productions.

7.1 Future Research

For future research there two main topics that I personally would like to see investigated. The first being about personal preference within voice overs, to investigate if they could be “tailor-suited” to fit a certain target group one step farther than simply transmitting a certain feeling matching the primary message transmitted by the context of what is being said. Were I to conduct this study I would divide it into three main steps. 1) Gathering data from the target group, what they seek and prefer within a voice over, 2) triangulate re-occurring,
desired characteristics of the voice and thus producing it using said characteristics as a framework and lastly 3) presenting the finished product to the same group from which the data was gathered. Preferably this study would be conducted in a much larger scale than the one you have just read about to get a wider view upon what these personal preferences might consist of whilst these may indeed differ significantly from person to person.

The second being to further investigate the question about gender as a paralinguistic cue. What would be optimal is to make a separate study made solely to determine this. The questions about gender felt as if they were left in the shadow of the questions evaluating the voice overs themselves. I would conduct the study in a similar manner in which the study of this thesis has been conducted but with one well produced voice over of both one male and one female character. Another option would be to bend the stereotype within voice overs and commercials. For instance, using three different well-produced commercials; the first being about make-up, the second about men’s razors and the third about a seemingly more “gender-neutral” subject (such as “Alma”). Note that these three are naught but hypothetical examples. Normally the make-up commercial would probably have a female voice over while the commercial for razors would generally be voiced by a man. As part of the study there would be both a male and female version of each of these subjects and then presented in a similar way in which “Alma” was presented to the respondents followed by a similar survey. It is highly likely that this would generate more accurate test results than those I have been able to gather with the study conducted for this thesis.
8. References


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