

# Toward a Hermeneutic Model of Cultural Globalization: Four Lessons from Translation Studies

Sociological Theory  
2019, Vol. 37(2) 142–161  
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DOI: 10.1177/0735275119850862  
st.sagepub.com  


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## Abstract

Many scholars study the global diffusion of culture, looking at how institutions spread culture around the world or at how intermediaries (or “cultural brokers”) adapt foreign culture in the local context. This research can tell us much about brokers’ “cultural-matching” or “congruence-building” strategies. To date, however, few scholars have examined brokers’ interpretive work. In this article, the author argues that globalization research needs to pay more attention to interpretation. Building on translation studies, the author shows that brokers’ work is shaped by (1) how they imagine their dual roles, (2) how they imagine different parts of the world, (3) how they interpret a text’s intertextuality, and (4) how their audience imagines the foreign Other. In this way, the author lays the groundwork for a hermeneutic model of cultural globalization.

## Keywords

globalization of culture, cultural globalization, global diffusion, translation studies, glocalization

In this article, I argue that studies on the global diffusion of culture need to pay more attention to interpretation. Social scientists have studied how objects, images, narratives, norms, and technologies spread across cultural and political borders (for useful reviews, see Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett 2007; Halliday and Osinsky 2006; Wejnert 2002) and how actors try to fit imported culture into different local contexts (Boellstorff 2003; Burke 2009; Kraidy 2005; Kuipers 2015; Jijon 2013, 2018; Levitt and Merry 2009; Merry 2006; Robertson 1995). But researchers often write about this work as strategic “cultural matching” or “congruence building” (Acharya 2004; Cortell and Davis 2000), that is, we write about the “diffusion of culture” but not about “diffusion as a cultural act” (Levitt and Merry 2009:444).

Existing research can tell us much about the strategies actors use to spread and adapt global culture into the local context. However, this work often forgets that actors need to understand and interpret global culture first. Culture can always be read in many different ways (Geertz 1973; Griswold 1987; Reed 2011), and social actors and institutions are always

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shaped by structures of meaning (Alexander and Smith 2002; Reed 2009, 2011; Wagner-Pacifici 2000). So, we have to consider the role culture plays in processes of global diffusion, not only as the objects being moved but also as the context in which these objects move, as “the landscape of meaning [that] *forms* those entities that *force* social life forward” (Reed 2011:143). We need, in short, a hermeneutic approach to cultural globalization.

To develop this approach, I build on translation theory. Around the world, for more than 1,000 years, translators have been thinking about how we communicate meaning from one language and culture to another (López García 1996; Robinson 2002; Venuti 2012). In the past 20 years in particular, translation studies has grown into a rich interdisciplinary field (Bassnett 2014; Pym 2017; Venuti 2012). Social scientists sometimes use the term *translation* to discuss processes of global diffusion (Alvarez 2000; Chabot and Duyvendak 2002; Czarniawska 2014; Sahlin and Wedlin 2008; Rajaram and Zararia 2009; Zwingel 2012), but we rarely engage with translation studies on its own terms.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, I argue that there is much we can learn from this literature. Translation studies can help social scientists develop new conceptual tools and theoretical lenses.<sup>2</sup>

Although translation studies has adopted sociological concepts (Cronin 2003; Heilbron and Sapiro 2007; Wolf 2007), sociologists rarely use insights from translation theory. Notable exceptions are Bielsa (2014) and Kuipers (2015), who ask how translation studies can contribute to discussions of cosmopolitanism and the globalization of media, respectively. These authors, however, bring translation studies to their empirical analysis of diffusion, rather than theorizing on its interpretive foundations. I aim to push the dialogue with translation studies further, showing how this literature can help us rethink our theoretical assumptions.

In what follows, after defining key concepts, I review what I call the “bottom-up” studies of global diffusion. This literature has advanced our understanding of cultural brokers and their localization strategies, pointing to the agents, settings, objects, and strategies involved, to the “who,” “where,” “what,” and “how” of cultural globalization. I then show that this literature undertheorizes brokers’ interpretive work, overlooking how the agents, settings, objects, and strategies are also drenched in culture. To address this shortcoming, I turn to translation theory, which proposes a distinction between “instrumental” and “hermeneutic” models of translation. The bottom-up literature, I argue, relies on an unacknowledged “instrumental” model, whereas I propose we move toward a hermeneutic approach. Finally, I discuss four ways in which sociologists can apply this new approach, examining (1) how cultural brokers imagine their dual roles, (2) how they imagine different parts of the world, (3) how they interpret a text’s intertextuality, and (4) how their audience imagines the foreign Other. I conclude by discussing the implications of this argument for globalization research more broadly.

## DEFINING “CULTURE,” “GLOBALIZATION,” AND “CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION”

Before I address cultural globalization, I must explain what I mean by these two rather slippery terms. Following cultural and pragmatic sociology, I understand culture as the shared narratives, symbols, practices, norms, and meanings that motivate people’s actions (Alexander and Smith 2002; Reed 2011), that is, the intersubjective, often taken-for-granted logics that allow people to understand, justify, and judge one another (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Although some globalization scholars claim that the world is increasingly rational and disenchanting (Giddens 1990), study after study shows that culture still brings emotion, morality, and the sacred into social life (Alexander and Smith 2002; Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014; Wagner-Pacifici 2000).

Drawing on Holton (2005:15), I understand globalization as (1) the movement of people, capital, objects, and images across political and cultural borders (Appadurai 1996; Lechner and Boli 2005; Meyer 2010; Meyer et al. 1997); (2) the connection of national and local spaces so that social processes become more interdependent (Castells 2011; Giddens 1990; Held et al. 1999); and (3) the imagination of the world as a single, albeit unequal, place (Robertson 1995). I focus on the first dimension—movement—but consider how it is shaped by the other two—transnational connections and people’s global imagination. I use the terms *globalization of culture* and *global diffusion* interchangeably, to foreground this movement.<sup>3</sup>

In this article I aim to reorient sociological research from its focus on the “globalization of culture” toward “cultural globalization” (see also Levitt and Merry 2009:444). By this I mean that culture is not only the object being spread around the world or the local context being transformed by (or resisting) the foreign object. Culture is also the “horizon of affect and meaning” (Alexander and Smith 2002:136) that shapes the work of the agents of globalization. If “globalization of culture” is the study of how cultural objects move, “cultural globalization” is the study of how culture itself shapes this movement. With this in mind, I now turn to the existing research on the globalization of culture.

## LOCALIZING GLOBAL CULTURE: ADVANCES IN THE “BOTTOM-UP” STUDIES OF DIFFUSION

There are two types of studies on global diffusion: “top-down” research uses large data sets to ask how culture spreads (Dobbin et al. 2007; Lechner and Boli 2005; Meyer 2010; Meyer et al. 1997; Wejnert 2002), and “bottom-up” research uses individual cases to ask how culture enters the local context (Boellstorff 2003; Giulianotti and Robertson 2007; Jijon 2013, 2018; Levitt and Merry 2004; Merry 2006; Robertson 1995; Tsing 2005). For a long time, this bottom-up research was stuck, with scholars devising many different concepts to describe how global and local culture intersect.<sup>4</sup> We could call this process glocalization (Robertson 1995), hybridization (Burke 2009; Pieterse 1994), creolization (Hannerz [1991] 2000), indigenization (Appadurai 1996), critical transculturalism (Kraidy 2005), or cultural dubbing (Boellstorff 2003), to name only a few. And although each concept emphasizes different things, they all make a similar point: actors try to reconcile and fit a global object, image, narrative, or model into preexisting local cultural frameworks, creating a new “glocal” or hybrid product in the process.

The problem—beyond what Swyngedouw (2004:26) called a “Babylonian confusion” of terms—is that this is usually a “black box” explanation (Holton 2005; Kay forthcoming). As Levitt and Merry (2009) noted, studies often “assert some form of homogenization, creolization or hybridization without explaining why or how it happens” (p. 443). Connell (2007) similarly argued that to call something “glocal” or hybrid does not tell us much, “it is to assert both terms of a static polarity at once” (p. 374). In recent years, scholars have been trying to open this black box. Today, researchers ask more specific questions about the agents, settings, objects, and strategies of glocalization, the who, where, what, and especially how of localization processes.

First, researchers ask *who*. Culture does not move on its own. Specific agents of globalization help spread culture: “chains of actors stretch from the sites of the global production . . . to localities where ordinary people around the world adopt them” (Levitt and Merry 2009:447). These are the “people in between” who “control the flow of information”; they are often outsiders, “open to suspicion, envy and mistrust” (Levitt and Merry 2009:449). They are experts, advisers, merchants, travelers, journalists, diplomats, guides, immigrants,

or refugees (Meyer 2010:10; see also Çalışkan 2010; Gootenberg 2008; Jijon 2018; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Geertz (1960:229), borrowing from Wolf, called them “cultural brokers” (see also Swidler and Watkins 2017). They mediate, circulate, block, promote, adjust, and communicate culture (Stovel and Shaw 2012).

Second, researchers ask *where*. Culture does not move in a vacuum. The cultural brokers who carry culture are always located in institutions and in social structures (Drori, Höllerer, and Walgenbach 2014; Kuipers 2015; Mujica and Mesa 2009; Strang and Meyer 1993). Liu, Hu, and Liao (2009), for instance, studied brokers’ institutional positions. They found that when brokers try to bring women’s rights to China, if they work in government or government-adjacent organizations, they place women’s rights squarely within national legal frameworks. In contrast, if brokers work for independent organizations, they bring women’s rights but also promote legal reform. In their study on the global spread of cricket, Kaufman and Patterson (2005) looked at brokers’ social position. They found that where brokers are located in the social hierarchy (and how secure they feel in this location) influences whether they capture or promote the sport.

Third, scholars ask *what* form culture takes in order to move. For objects, images, narratives, norms, models, and practices to circulate around the world, they first need to be abstracted, typified, standardized, theorized, taken out of the particular, and made, in some way, to seem universal (Strang and Meyer 1993:492; see also Czarniawska 2014; Drori et al. 2014; Meyer 2014). Much of cultural brokers’ work involves filling these abstract forms with local content or meaning (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007:182). For instance, in their study on soccer, Giulianotti and Robertson (2007) found that teams, players, journalists, and fans around the world adopt similar rules, organizational structures, and goals. But the meaning people give these rules, organizations, and goals varies depending on the local context. Just look at team names, coaches’ traditions, the levels of violence in different fan subcultures, the aesthetic codes of banners and chants, or even athletes’ styles of play. In a way, local actors color within the lines of global shapes.

Moreover, global culture does not travel alone. Scholars argue that when culture moves, it moves in “packages,” “bundles,” or “assemblages” (Levitt and Merry 2009; Rajaram and Zararia 2009; Tsing 2005). This is easiest to see in the case of normative packages, such as women’s rights. This bundle contains “loosely coupled, roughly analogous elements such as gender equality, valuing autonomy in marriage and divorce choices, an emphasis on women’s empowerment, and a secular concern with political and economic status” (Levitt and Merry 2009:445). But this is also true of commodity bundles. Gewertz and Errington (2010) discussed how lamb or mutton flaps (a fatty and cheap type of meat) move from Australia and New Zealand to the Pacific Islands. The authors found that local actors who import the meat associate it with broader ideas about the West, modernity, and an aspirational middle-class lifestyle. When local actors adopt one piece of culture, they often adopt several related pieces: they must unpack the package, unbundle the bundle, and then put it back together.

Finally, scholars ask *how* actors bring global culture into the local context. Here most scholars talk about strategies and rational actions taken to achieve a goal (Alvarez 2000; Czarniawska 2014; Drori et al. 2014; Sahlin and Wedlin 2008; Strang and Meyer 1993; Zwingel 2012). For instance, authors write about how actors *select* what to present to local audiences from global bundles, sometimes obfuscating the selection process (Bourdieu 1999). Actors also *frame* or try to explain global culture, providing a “preface” or accompanying language (Acharya 2004:243). Actors *graft* global culture, inserting it in and associating it with local institutions, aesthetics, and norms (Acharya 2004:244; see also Merry 2006:10). Actors *simplify*, *compartmentalize*, *reorder*, and *reconstruct* culture (Rajaram and Zararia 2009), finding ways to make it “congruent with preexisting local normative order” (Acharya 2004:244).

In short, existing bottom-up research has started to open the black box of glocalization by determining the actors, setting, objects, and strategies involved, the who, where, what, and how. The problem, however, is that scholars only focus on rational, instrumental strategies. This literature almost always overlooks interpretation.

Now, to be fair, this literature does not neglect interpretation altogether. Some scholars show that cultural brokers make choices as they *interpret the local context*. Acharya (2004:248), for instance, wrote that glocalization depends, among other things, on cultural brokers' legitimacy, local traditions, and preexisting structures of meaning. Rajaram and Zararia (2009:477) showed that cultural brokers make assumptions about what their audience wants to hear or is likely to understand or expect. Interpretation, in other words, is present in bottom-up studies of global diffusion.

What is missing, however, is a discussion of how cultural brokers *interpret globally-circulating culture in the first place*. The strategies mentioned—selecting, framing, grafting, reordering, compartmentalizing, and congruence building—treat global culture as if it had a single, stable, invariant meaning. Moreover, existing theories often assume that people around the world all understand this meaning, and understand it in the same way (Bielsa 2014:11). In the next section, I show how this aligns with what translation scholars call an “instrumental” model of translation. I then show how a different set of assumptions—a “hermeneutic” model—can provide a more complete understanding of global diffusion.

## INTERPRETING GLOBAL CULTURE: FROM AN INSTRUMENTAL TO A HERMENEUTIC APPROACH

Bottom-up studies of global diffusion want to understand how people communicate across cultural borders, how people bring a foreign cultural object into a local context. Translation scholars ask similar questions, although they focus on the communication of texts. Yet the globalization literature has largely ignored translation theory. This may be because most people think of translation as a straightforward technical process, whereby someone simply takes a text written in one language (what translation scholars call “the source”) and reconfigures it to fit another (what translation scholars call “the target”) (Bassnett 2014:2). In this view, a translator simply needs a grasp of both languages and a bilingual dictionary or translation software. Translating is seen as “just” reproducing a text in a new context.

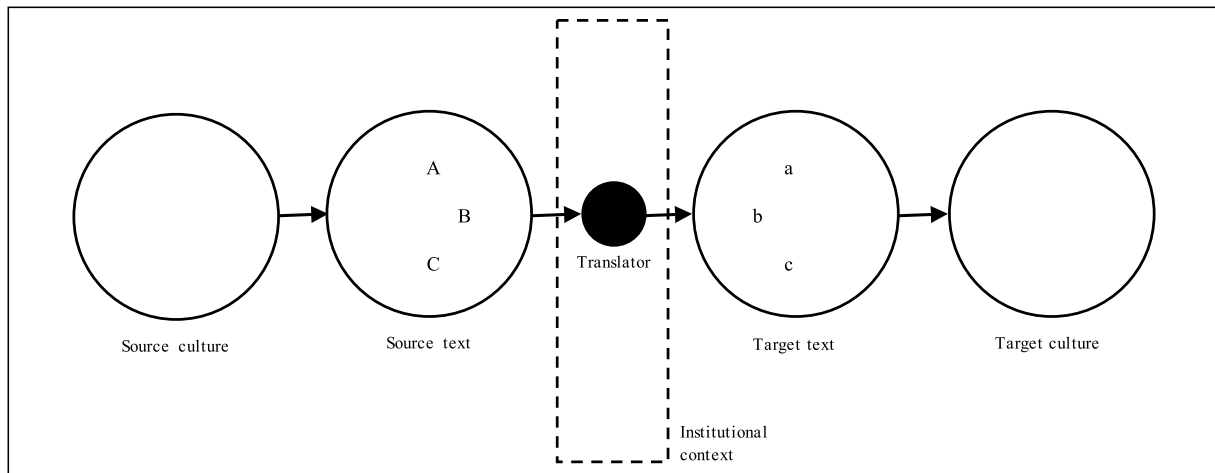
Translation scholars, however, refute this understanding. As Bassnett (2014) wrote,

Anyone who has ever translated anything understands; languages are never identical, hence no translation can be the same as the original. This means that the translator has to engage in both *interpretation* of the source and *reformulation* in another language. (p. 3)

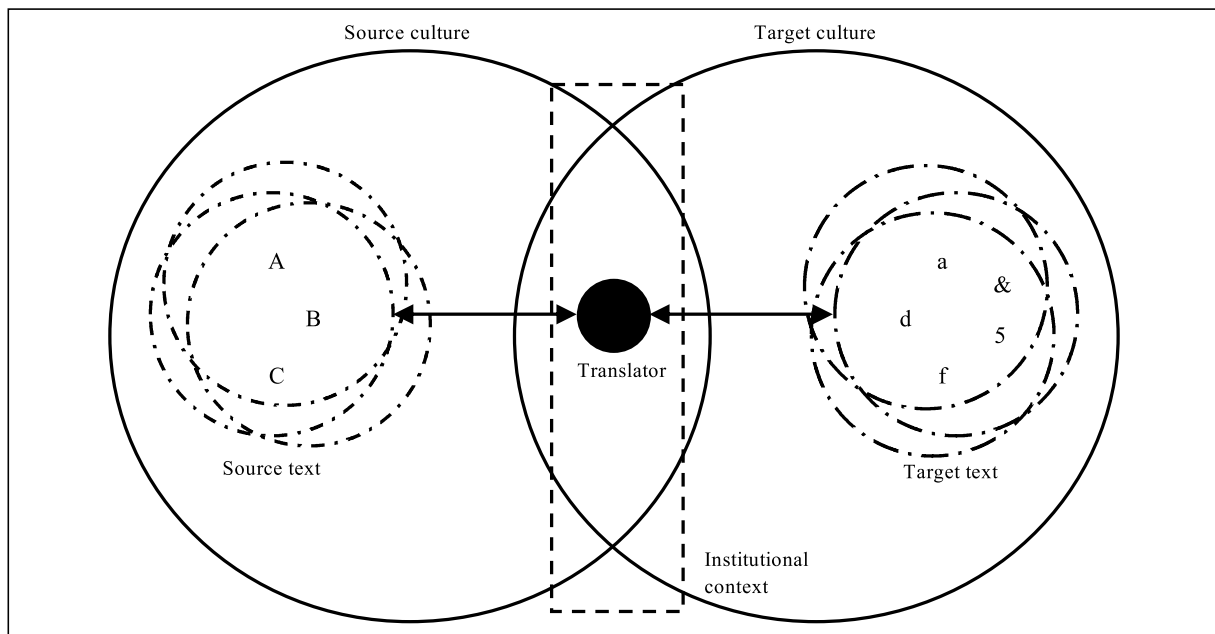
Today, most translation scholars talk about translation not as a transmission or reproduction of a text but as a form of reading and rewriting.

Kelly (1979) and Venuti (2010) called these two views the “instrumental” and the “hermeneutic” models of translation. The instrumental model, illustrated in Figure 1, shows translators (within institutional constraints) moving a text from a source to a target culture. The audience in the target culture receives and easily understands the imported text. The audience may imagine it is reading the text's author and not a bilingual intermediary, but translation scholars break this text in two: there is an original source text and a similar but separate target text in another language and cultural configuration.

The reality, however, is more complicated. Unlike the instrumental model, the hermeneutic model of translation recognizes that a text can always be read in many different ways and meaning is always “variable, subject to inevitable transformation during the translating



**Figure 1.** The instrumental model of translation.



**Figure 2.** The hermeneutic model of translation.

process” (Venuti 2010:6; see also Kelly 1979). In this view, translators must choose one of many possible interpretations. The text itself is not a “self-consistent container” but a dynamic “signifying process” (Venuti 2010:22). Figure 2 shows my interpretation of this model.

In this diagram, a translator is never outside culture but uncomfortably straddles both the source and target groups. Where translators come from, and to which identity they are “loyal,” influences their work (Sapiro 2013; Tymoczko 2010). Translators are also surrounded by institutions with technical but also normative standards. Translators work with preestablished ideas about what counts as a “good” translation.

In this model, the source and target culture overlap, avoiding the implied reification of the instrumental view. No culture exists in a vacuum. Societies intersect with and organize one another in hierarchies of cultural prestige. Translators work in a world where some regions not only have more resources and power but are also associated with specific representations of place. These representations enable and constrain how translators translate (Casanova [2002] 2010, 2004; Damrosch 2011; Heilbron [1999] 2010; Sapiro 2015).

In Figure 2, the source text is not outside the source culture but is enmeshed in this environment. Its shape is blurry and undefined, representing the instability and multivocality of a text. As Venuti (2010:22) noted, texts create meanings through different levels: the *intratextual level*, or the words, sounds, grammar, syntax, and tropes of the text; and the *intertextual* or *interdiscursive level*, that is, the text's references to other discourses, narratives, symbols, or genres (see also Hermans [1996] 2010; Ye [1994] 2004). Translators have to interpret a text's relationship to its source culture and to other circulating texts.

Finally, Figure 2 represents the target text inside the target culture: translators help their audience understand a text by anticipating what the audience expects not only about itself but also about the foreign Other (Kahf 2010; Lefevere 1998; Mason 2010; Venuti [1993] 2010). Translators write a new intratextual surface—using new words, new sounds, a new grammar—and draw new intertextual links—aligning the text with the audience's "horizon of expectations." In doing so, translators can reinforce or challenge the audience, domesticate or foreignize the Other (Venuti [1993] 2010:69). Yet although translators may try to fix the meaning of a text—creating, as it were, the "definitive translation"—all texts are open to further interpretation and decoding (Hall 2006). This is why the target text is also blurry in Figure 2.

Figure 2 is a useful but imperfect model. It does not address the physical distance cultural texts or objects travel. Also, traveling culture generally meets several translators, not just one (Tsing 2005). A translation can also be the translation of a translation, not of an original text (Heilbron and Sapiro 2007:96), so more than two cultures can be involved. And cultures influence one another in the creation of texts over time; for instance, modern authors writing in Hebrew incorporated Russian modes of dialogue (Even-Zohar 1990:114). Still, this figure usefully shows the contrast between the instrumental and hermeneutic models and illustrates many of the different assumptions underlying discussions of transcultural communication.

I argue that most bottom-up studies of global diffusion inadvertently build on an instrumental model of communicating meaning. Scholars write about cultural brokers "selecting," "framing," "grafting," or "reordering" the meaning of a global object, image, narrative, or practice as if it had only one, relatively clear, intentional, straightforward reading. The literature forgets about the multivocality of culture. It forgets that culture shapes translators' work. If all social action is both interpretation and strategizing (Alexander 1987:289), we need to bring interpretation into our study of this specific social action: bringing global culture into the local context. I believe the hermeneutic model of translation offers the first step in this direction.

The hermeneutic model of translation, as I defined it, gives social scientists four useful lessons, summarized in Table 1: globalization is shaped (1) not only by *who* cultural brokers are but also by who they imagine themselves to be (their dual identities), (2) not only by *where* cultural brokers are located but also by where they imagine a text comes from (their representations of place), (3) not only by *what* cultural brokers move but also by what they imagine a text references (the text's intertextuality), and (4) not only by *how* cultural brokers "build congruence" but also by how their audience imagines the foreign Other (the audience's horizon of expectations). These lessons are not all that translation theory has to offer, nor do they represent a comprehensive overview of this complex, heterogeneous field. I chose these lessons because they relate to the questions globalization scholars are already asking, questions about the agents, settings, objects, and strategies of globalization. I now turn to each lesson in more detail, showing how bottom-up diffusion research can pay more attention to interpretation.

### "Translators Have to Be Traitors": How Translators Imagine Their Role

Globalization scholars are increasingly interested in the actors involved in "making globalization" (Holton 2005:26), in change agents (Rogers 2003), globalizers (Drori et al. 2014),

**Table I.** Lessons from Translation Theory.

	Instrumental Approach	Hermeneutic Approach
Who	Cultural brokers connect the source and target cultures.	Cultural brokers connect and inhabit the source and target cultures. Their work is shaped by their identities and cultural “loyalties.”
Where	Cultural brokers are located in institutions and social structure.	Cultural brokers are located in institutions, social structures, and an unequal world. Their work is shaped by representations of place.
What	Cultural brokers carry and reconfigure abstracted, bundled cultural objects.	Cultural brokers interpret and reconfigure abstracted, bundled cultural objects. These objects have multiple, shifting, intra- and intertextual meanings.
How	Cultural brokers reconfigure the cultural object according to the local audience’s ideas about itself.	Cultural brokers reconfigure the cultural object according to the local audience’s ideas about itself, as well as its “horizon of expectations” about the foreign Other.

or cultural brokers (Geertz 1960; Swidler and Watkins 2017). But although research shows that cultural brokers stand at the intersection of the source and target culture (Levitt and Merry 2009:449), most scholars treat these agents as if they were somehow outside of culture themselves (Merry 2006 is a notable exception). We do not know enough about how cultural brokers navigate different cultures or make sense of their own intermediate role. Consequently, we do not know how these self-understandings influence the strategies brokers use to bring global objects to local contexts.

Translation theory helps us fill this gap by pointing to the idea of a broker’s “loyalty.” For translation scholars, a translator is always inside culture (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999). Translators speak at least two different languages and have dual identities. They are both “guardians” and “traders,” both “the zealous . . . protectors of national languages” and the “indispensable intermediaries [opening] the world to the circulation of commodities, people, and ideas” (Cronin 2003:70). Translators are “embedded in crisscrossed, even competing narratives” (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999:71), yet they cannot engage with competing cultural narratives equally. Translators must, consciously or unconsciously, make a choice, prioritizing the source or the target culture. That is why translation scholars often quip “traduttore traditore” or “translator, traitor” (Jakobson [1959] 2012:131). Translators are always “loyal” to one culture as they “betray” the other (Lefevere 1992:13).

These “loyalties” have real consequences. When a translator is loyal to the source culture, she reconstructs a text as closely as possible to what she believes were the original author’s intentions. Conversely, when a translator is loyal to the target culture, she translates in a way that makes the most sense to the local audience (Lefevere 1992). The results can be markedly different. For instance, in the English *Standard Edition* of Freud’s work, translators made Freud sound more scientific and depersonalized than in the original German, in which he has an “anecdotal” and “everyday character” (Venuti [1993] 2010:75). These translators, in other words, were loyal to their audience: English psychoanalysts. Their choices color how we perceive Freud today.

Translators can also be loyal to other identities, like their professional selves. In her study of people who translate Hebrew literature into French, Sapiro (2013) found that occasional or amateur translators are cautious and try to stay close to the meanings of the words. Translators with more literary ambitions, in contrast, are less “faithful” to the words but more “faithful” to the text’s “music” (Sapiro 2013:76). Professional translators with more experience in local publishing, in turn, often radically change the source text to fit the target



readers' expectations: "Some of them change, for example, the name of the protagonists, with the author's approval, in order to make it easier for the reader to know whether certain characters are male or female" (Sapiro 2013:75).<sup>5</sup>

Notions of faithfulness and loyalty are not the translator's purview alone. Translators work with preexisting, shared, often institutionalized norms (Toury 1981, 2012) that define what "counts" as a good or faithful translation. These norms usually vary across space and over time, and some are operational, regarding concrete decisions translators make when rewriting a text (Toury 2012). Other norms are cultural, regarding more general ideas about "what the role of literature is, or should be" (Lefevere 1992:26). For example, many translators of Anne Frank's diary purposefully omitted talk about sex, bodily functions, and women's emancipation because that was not the purpose of this kind of book (p. 65). The first German translator adapted Anne's behavior to make her more "proper," in accordance with gender norms of the time. In the Dutch original, Anne makes a dress out of her mother's lace slip (p. 70); in the German translation, her mother makes the dress for her (p. 71).

If cultural brokers are like translators, then when they select, rearrange, frame, and compartmentalize global culture, they do so not only to "build congruence" with local frameworks but also to reconcile their own multiple, conflicting identities. Before brokers can think about their audience, they need to decide whether they are "faithful" to the source or the target culture. Cultural brokers, like translators, build a sense of self and contend with institutional norms. They need to have a stance on "what the role of culture is, or should be."

### "A View from Somewhere": How Translators Imagine the World

Globalization scholars study where cultural brokers work. Sometimes this means looking at concrete, mediating institutions (Kuipers 2015). Sometimes it means looking at networks of organizations (Lechner and Boli 2005; Levitt and Merry 2009). Sometimes it means looking at the unequal structure of the world as a whole, at how cultural objects, practices, or norms move from the global core to the periphery and back (Wallerstein 2004). But, once again, the literature skips over how cultural brokers interpret these different spaces, how representations of place affect the choices cultural brokers make.

Translation studies complicate our view of the world. Recent theories—influenced by Wallerstein and Bourdieu but also by Valéry and Goethe—describe how translations occur on an uneven playing field or "literary world" (Casanova 2004). Where translators are located in this world influences how and why they translate (Casanova [2002] 2010, 2004; Damrosch 2011; Heilbron [1999] 2010; Sapiro 2015). But, just as importantly, how translators *envision* this world influences how and why they translate. As Damrosch (2011) wrote, "any view of the world is a view from somewhere" (p. 169).

In the literary world, what space is at the center and what space is on the periphery depends on the distribution of power and resources but also on the distribution of prestige and recognition (Casanova [2002] 2010:298). For example, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people defined Paris as the literary capital of the world: the ultimate center. Paris had many resources—it published books, it fostered artists, it had a language many people aspired to learn—but Paris also had an accompanying myth: people told stories about Paris as a cosmopolitan hub (Casanova 2004:30). These narratives, in turn, brought new writers to the city, making it more cosmopolitan in practice. Literary prestige is thus partly the result of a place's long political, economic, and cultural traditions, but also the result of people's representations about this place. "'We are,' as Valéry says, 'what we think we are and what we are believed to be'" (Casanova 2004:17). The same is true for the "territories of literature" (Casanova 2004:23).

Sociologists have found that the same is true for other “cultural territories.” Bandelj and Wherry (2011) wrote that “having one’s firm ‘home grown’ in Italy differs from having the same type of firm started in Switzerland, especially if the firm is in the high-fashion industry. . . . the opposite might be true for financial consulting” (p. 1). In other words, we cannot separate people, organizations, or firms from intersubjective narratives and representations. The world of high fashion does not have the same centers and peripheries as the worlds of finance, tourism, wine, meat, alternative energy, and human rights. The resources in Italy and Switzerland might be similar, but the “meanings encased in place” are different (Bandelj and Wherry 2011:1).

Translations studies add the insight that these representations of place shape how cultural brokers translate. Not all of Italy equals high fashion. Switzerland is more than financial consulting. But this is how people represent these “imagined communities” around the world (Anderson [1983] 2006). When cultural brokers translate, they must contend with these images and hierarchies of prestige. Lefevre (1992:8), for instance, found that Victorian English translators rewrote Persian poets “in a way [they] would never have dreamed of rewriting Homer or Virgil.” Their ideas about place, their ideas about Persia’s “poetic inferiority” to Europe, influenced how they translated.

Ideas about place not only shape how people translate, they also shape the direction in which people translate. Casanova ([2002] 2010:290) argued that when actors bring a text from the center to the periphery, this is usually a way for actors on the periphery to acquire the resources they need to participate in transnational conversations; she called this “translation-accumulation.” We can also think of examples in the globalization of culture. Peripheral groups appropriate the central discourse of human rights (Elliot 2007:344), whereas groups in the center rarely seek out peripheral discourses on dignity and justice.

In contrast, when translators rewrite a text from the periphery to the center, they usually do so to give the peripheral text value, what Casanova ([2002] 2010:290) called “translation-consecration.” A peripheral author gains wider recognition when she is translated into a central language, just like problems on the periphery gain international attention when they are rewritten in the language of human rights (Brysk 2000:202; Casanova [2002] 2010:295). Translators in both cases can be “faithful” to the culture either in the center or the periphery, but the direction in which a text is rewritten matters.<sup>6</sup>

The point is that unequal recognition around the world affects the act of translation, it affects how cultural brokers bring global culture to the local context. As brokers make choices regarding the circulating bundle, their choices are shaped by how certain spaces have been given meaning. These agents’ work, in turn, reproduces and challenges these meanings. The more people translate from the periphery to the center, the more the periphery is recognized and approaches the center, changing the boundaries of the literary—or financial or fashion or tourism—world (Casanova 2004:39). But the inverse is also true. The more people translate from the center to the periphery, the more they “broaden the influence of the center” (Casanova 2004:134). This “imagined world,” in short, shapes how cultural brokers translate culture.

### *The “Texts within a Text”: How Translators Contend with Intertextuality*

Research on global diffusion shows that culture moves around the world in bundles (Levitt and Merry 2009; Tsing 2005). Narratives, ideas, and concepts are often loosely coupled and adopted in groups. Cultural brokers thus have to uncouple and reassemble the different elements in these groups: they rearrange, reorder, prioritize, and repackage (Rajaram and Zararia 2009).

Translation studies takes us one step further, arguing that texts carry with them much of their source context. Thus, to understand a text, we cannot look only at its component parts or *intratextuality*—its words, sounds, grammar, or syntax (Venuti 2010:22). We also need to consider its *intertextuality*—its references to other texts, narratives, discourses, tropes, symbols, genres, and beliefs in the source culture (Venuti 2010:22; see also Hermans [1996] 2010). We need to look at the “texts within a text” (Ye [1994] 2004:82).

A joke, for example, is intertextual: it depends on cultural expectations and surprise. It is relatively easy to translate an absurd joke or a joke about general human foibles (Low 2011:62), these are loosely intertextual. But it requires more creative work, more rewriting, to translate a joke involving wordplay, like a pun, or an “in joke” that takes its subject-matter from a specific cultural reality (Low 2010:62, 67). These are more tightly intertextual.

The same is true of the globalization of culture. Television sitcoms tend to be highly intertextual, for instance, *The Nanny* made references to U.S. and Jewish culture that dubbing companies in European nations dealt with in different ways (Kuipers 2015:986). Human rights treaties and economic models, in contrast, are designed to be generalizable and universal (Meyer et al. 1997) or less intertextual. Still, no cultural text is ever free of its source, something that critics of the human rights discourse (Brems 1997; Mutua 2002), neoliberal economics (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007; Mignolo 2012), and definitions of development (Escobar 1998) have emphasized for years.

Translators not only have to *understand* the text they are importing but also assess its degree of intertextuality—high or low, tight or loose. There is no consensus within translation theory as to how to “objectively” measure intertextuality. Like Griswold (1987) said of ambiguity, it might be more interesting to see how people determine intertextuality in everyday life.

Once determined, the translator must then decide what to do with a text’s intertextuality, “how to handle features of the source culture (e.g., objects, customs, historical and literary allusions) that are unfamiliar to the receiving audience” (Tymoczko 1999:23). The translator not only has to recognize a text’s web of references, she also has to anticipate what the target audience will or will not know.

Some translators do not worry about explaining or recreating the source context. For Nietzsche ([1882] 2012), who wrote about intellectuals in the French Revolution appropriating Roman culture, translation was a “form of conquest”: “Not only did one omit what was historical; one also added allusions to the present and, above all, struck out the name of the poet and replaced it with one’s own” (pp. 67–68). Other translators invent the foreign context for their readers. Borges ([1935] 2012) analyzed different English translations of *The Thousand and One Nights*, showing how each translator created a different image of the “Orient.” Finally, some translators try to educate their readers on the source culture. They engage in what de Campos ([1987]2003:62) called “cultural pedagogy” or what Appiah ([1993] 2012:341) called “thick translation”: the translator “seeks with annotations and . . . accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context.”

Cultural pedagogy, or thick translation, occurs in global diffusion as well. Multinational corporations offshoring customer services, for example, teach Indian workers about the United States; trainees are exposed to the “subtleties of American culture” by watching movies like *American Pie*, *Independence Day*, and *JFK* (Nadeem 2009:112). We can also think of cases of cultural invention: an Italian dubbing company transformed *The Nanny* into *La Tata*, in which “the nanny is an Italian immigrant with a strong regional Italian accent. . . . Many jokes have been rewritten, often converted to Italian ethnic jokes. All Jewish references and Yiddish words are gone” (Kuipers 2015:986). And we can find examples of cultural erasure: the Croatian government, for instance, translated its “difficult past” for a

European audience by *not* commemorating the Yugoslav war, by “reframing Croatian history and culture in a way that excludes the war and describes Croatia in terms of its similarity to other countries” (Rivera 2008:623). This was done in an attempt to “cover” the country’s stigma and attract foreign tourists, separating the “text,” or representation of Croatia, from its source context and history.

Alternatively, cultural brokers might decide that their audiences *do* understand references from the source. In the Netherlands, a company that subtitles movies and television expected viewers “to have a fair knowledge of American and other European cultures. . . . Subtitles often contain untranslated references to phenomena like football, cheerleaders, or Thanksgiving” (Kuipers 2015:994). Cultural pedagogy is thus cumulative: after extensive exposure to foreign stories and traditions, audiences in the Netherlands knew enough about the foreign source that new translations did not need to reeducate them. This invites us to consider the effects of translation over time.

Research on global diffusion argues that for texts to spread they must be abstracted, removed from their original discursive context (Strang and Meyer 1993:492). Thus, the less intertextual a text, the easier it should be to spread. And there is evidence to support this view: action movies, for example, do not depend on their source context as much as comedies, therefore making them easier to export (Moretti 2001). But we can also find alternative cases. In her study on literary reception around the world, Griswold (1987) argued that the more ambiguous a novel, the more different professional reviewers, regardless of their place of origin, agree on its value. Griswold (1987) defined ambiguity as “the capacity of a novel for evoking multiple interpretations and the creative tension the reviewer experienced in deciding what was [the author’s] likely intended meaning or point of view” (p. 1108). Griswold presented ambiguity as both the author’s choice and the reviewer’s reading, and this relates to openness, to the text’s ability to be read in relation to a variety of different texts and representations. Not only does intertextuality matter, but it seems to matter differently depending on the object and on the gatekeepers of the object’s “world.”

In short, we know that culture travels in bundles. But we should also consider how it carries its context. Consumer products, moral ideas, economic models, and popular culture are never entirely free from their source. True, ideas that move across social and political borders “circulate without their context,” leading to misrepresentations and misunderstandings (Bourdieu 1999:221). But translators must contend with these source cultures, either actively erasing them, reinventing them, or attempting to educate their target audiences.

### *The “Horizon of Expectations”: How Audiences Imagine the Foreign Other*

So far, I have shown how translation theory complicates and enriches our understanding of the *who*, *where*, and *what* of globalization processes. This subfield points to cultural brokers’ interpretive work and how this work is influenced by who brokers imagine they are (their “loyalty” to dueling identities), where brokers imagine they are (their shared representations of place), and what they imagine they work with (a text’s intertextuality). Now it is time to consider *how* cultural brokers work, how they contend with their local audiences.

Research on global diffusion points to different ways cultural brokers try to align a global object with local cultural frameworks, trying to match the object with the local group’s understanding of itself. The U.S. fast food franchise Subway, for example, works to make its restaurants in India more “Indian” by tailoring their ambience, advertising, and social media to appeal to local values (Simi and Matusitz 2017). But translation theory pushes us to also consider how local groups imagine the foreign Other (Lefevere 1998:13). Translation theorists write about an audience’s “horizon of expectations” regarding the Other and how this horizon “restricts the range of meaning” available to each translator (Kahf 2010:30; see also Mason 2010).

Kahf (2010), for instance, discussed how the memoirs of Egyptian feminist Huda Sha'rawi were translated in the United States. She shows that the U.S. reading public tends to expect Arab and Muslim women to be victims of gender oppression, escapees of this oppressive culture, or pawns of Arab men. In the translation, Sha'rawi's text is molded to fit these expectations: "Sha'rawi's engagement with Arab men in relationships that she saw as satisfying is minimized; her orientation toward Europe is exaggerated; and her command of class privilege is camouflaged" (p. 30). By observing these changes, Kahf is not blaming the text's translator but is "seeing the translation as part of a process larger than one individual will" (p. 30). The foreign text is read within local conventions about how one should read the Other.

Scholars have made similar arguments regarding oral translators and interpreters. Interpreters in the United Nations High Commission on Refugees in Albania (Jacquemot 2010) and in U.S. public and private hospitals (Davidson 2010) are gatekeepers with significant power to decide who receives refugee status or medical attention. These translators abide by what the institution, their target audience, wants or needs, often at the expense of what the patient or refugee applicant wants or needs. These intermediaries enforce institutional agendas and abide by preexisting institutional assumptions about patients or refugees. They defer to their institutions' "horizon of expectations."

These are all examples of what Venuti ([1993] 2010) called a "domesticating" translation, in which the translator tries "to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar" (p. 68). The translator recognizes the audience's expectations and tries to fulfill them, transforming Huda Sha'rawi, refugee applicants, or patients into whatever their audience already expects of these types of people. In all these cases, domestication affirms ethnocentric assumptions about the Other. This form of cultural work often involves an "appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas, cultural, economic, [and] political" (Venuti [1993] 2010:68).

But Venuti ([1993] 2010), drawing on the work of Berman and Scheleirmacher, showed that translators can also use a "foreignizing" translation, an "ethnodeviant pressure on [local] values" (p. 69). This does not mean the translator has somehow preserved a foreign "essence" of a text. Rather, this translation deliberately aims to construct an "alien reading experience" (p. 69), forcing the audience to notice their taken-for-granted expectations and question their local practices.

A sociological example of this is when North American fans of Japanese manga dress and act like manga characters, a practice called "cosplay." Sometimes these cosplayers perform a different gender identity than their own (crossplay). By portraying the foreign Other, they challenge local ideas about gender (Leng 2013). Taken too far, however, foreignizing may undermine its aim, exaggerating foreignness and exoticizing the Other.

Many translations have both "domesticating" and "foreignizing" elements (Baker 2010:115). In southern Tanzania, for instance, traditional healers domesticate and appropriate technical innovations from Western medicine. Yet they represent biomedical practitioners trained in the West as foreign and incompatible with local culture (Marsland 2007).

A translation is never completely foreignized, the translator always makes it intelligible to the target audience by drawing on the target's cultural expectations. This led Lefevre (1999) to ask, "Can culture A ever really understand culture B on that culture's (i.e. B's) own terms?" (p. 77). Or is culture A's understanding always restricted by local narratives and expectations? Lefevre believes the target culture's expectations do determine how the text is understood, but audiences can change these expectations. The more people in a group translate, the more they incorporate new tropes, genres, images, and representations of the Other into their group, stretching their "horizon of expectations." Appadurai (1990:299) made a similar point. In his discussion of "mediascapes," he writes about the ways globally circulating information and images constitute and change both imagined worlds and "narratives of the 'Other.'"

Many written translations have changed the target language and culture. The most famous example in English is the translation of the King James Bible, which transformed English prose in ways unexpected at the time (McGrath 2001). Moving away from language and toward the global diffusion of culture, we can think of powerful speeches, charismatic figures, and compelling performances that changed how societies view each other. Activists made Nelson Mandela a global icon, influencing, among other things, how people around the world understand South Africa (Olesen 2015).

Every social group invents images, narratives, representations, and beliefs about themselves and about Others. De Campos ([1987] 2003) wrote that identity—individual and collective—is never closed or finished but comes from people’s efforts to establish difference against a “universal backdrop” (p. 59). In this context, translation is the “dialogic practice and capacity to express the Other and express oneself through the Other, under the aegis of difference” (De Campos [1987] 2003:59). Translation fashions an image of the Other—as familiar or different, safe or disruptive—and, by extension, an image of the Self—flattering or critical (Venuti 1998:159). If the work of cultural brokers is like translation, we cannot understand how people localize global culture without first understanding what they think of the foreign Other. Translators learn to manage these expectations and either concede to, challenge, or reeducate their audiences.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARD A HERMENEUTIC MODEL OF CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

At the start of this article, I argued that bottom-up studies of global diffusion are advancing our understanding of how actors adapt global culture in local contexts. Scholars are moving past neologisms and opening the black box of cultural globalization. We now know more about who adapts culture, where they adapt culture, what culture they adapt, and what strategies they use. I contend, however, that this literature has overlooked cultural brokers’ interpretive work. Researchers rely on an unacknowledged “instrumental” model of cross-cultural communication, they often assume culture has a single meaning and that cultural brokers need to find and communicate this meaning. Translation theory, in contrast, proposes a “hermeneutic” approach that recognizes the multivocality of texts. Cultural brokers, in other words, must choose one among many possible readings of a text, and how they choose is shaped by their cultural context. I argued that cultural brokers’ work is enabled and constrained by (1) their own dual roles, (2) broader representations of place, (3) a text’s intra- and intertextuality, and (4) the audience’s “horizon of expectations” regarding the foreign Other.

The hermeneutic model I propose looks only at how the translator interacts with the text, not with how translators interact with one another or how micro-rituals shape the meanings they give to an image or product (Wherry 2008). And it does not consider how the audience itself is made up of active, creative agents who also decode translated culture (Hall 2006). Nor does the model address the materiality of culture, how globally circulating ideas are given physical form and how these forms shape the ways people interpret these ideas over time (McDonnell 2010). This article, therefore, is only a first step in globalization theorizing. I hope it invites further theoretical thinking and research.

The next step is to test these theoretical ideas empirically. If cultural brokers have multiple identities and roles, which are the most salient? Where do these identities come from? How might these identities change? If cultural objects move through a world colored by representations and meanings, how might their movement affect these meanings? How might these meanings color the objects? How is the literary world similar to or different from the fashion world, tourism world, movie world, or human rights world? If all cultural

texts are intertextual, are there different types of intertextuality? Is the intertextuality of a norm like that of a text or an object or a practice? And if local audiences have a “horizons of expectations” about the foreign Other, do cultural brokers have a “horizon of expectations” about the local audience? How might these horizons change?

This article builds on and extends scholarship on the global diffusion of culture. Levitt and Merry (2009) and their colleagues (Liu et al. 2009; Mujica and Mesa 2009; Rajaram and Zararia 2009), for example, are more attuned to the causal power of culture than most global diffusion researchers. They too note the importance of brokers’ dual identities and the imagination of the world (Merry 2006:3, 11). This article adds a more systematic account to the existing literature, showing the different assumptions of glocalization studies and introducing researchers to alternatives from translation theory. I constructed a more comprehensive, integrative model, what I call the hermeneutic model of cultural globalization.

Globalization is not new. “Whether italicized, capitalized, or followed with an exclamation point, globalization does not represent an abrupt change” (Alexander 2005:83). We thus do not need to abandon existing theories or useful concepts to study globalization, we only need to “orient them in a more global way” (Alexander 2005:83). Theories of translation help us do precisely that. They allow us to understand how cultural brokers adapt global culture in the local environment. They invite us to consider how brokers’ work is shaped by culture and the imagination. They help us, in short, to look beyond brokers’ instrumental strategies, bringing interpretation to studies of the global diffusion of culture.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Philip Smith, Frederick Wherry, Jeffrey Alexander, the participants of the Yale Center for Cultural Sociology Supper Club, Shai Dromi, Dicky Yangzom, James Hurlbert, and Mayumi Shimizu, as well as the reviewers for *Sociological Theory* for their helpful comments and support for this article.

## NOTES

- 1 Social scientists have also used the term *translation* to talk about other types of changes, like transformations within networks (Callon and Latour 1981), or analytic strategies (Collins 1981). A discussion of further uses of the term exceeds the scope of this article.
- 2 In this article, I refer only to what Jakobson ([1959] 2012) called “intralingual” translation, or the transformation of a text from one language or group to another. Jakobson also discussed “interlingual” and “semiotic” translation, but for my purposes here, these other forms of translation would make the term too broad.
- 3 Some scholars dislike using *globalization* and *global diffusion* in this way, arguing that *global diffusion* presents a top-down process that underplays local agency (Zwingel 2011). I nonetheless make this choice because I want to emphasize globalization’s dimension of movement. This does not mean I am only discussing the diffusion of innovations literature (Rogers 2003).
- 4 I use the term *global culture* as shorthand to refer to cultural objects, images, practices, narratives, technologies, or models that have either been institutionalized in global organizations or networks or that circulate around most of the world. I am not suggesting that these objects are in fact universal in scope.
- 5 In later work, Heilbron and Sapiro (2007) took a more Bourdieusian approach to translators’ identities and roles, writing in contrast to the interpretive approach to translation I prioritize here. A discussion of the similarities and differences between these approaches exceeds the scope of this article, but I will say that I focus more on the latter because, like Alexander and Smith (2002), I believe that Bourdieu sees culture mostly as a dependent variable and strategic resource, underestimating the ways culture is also a relatively autonomous structure shaping social action.
- 6 People also distribute resources and recognition unequally within territories, so it matters where the translator is positioned in local hierarchies of status and power. This discussion, however, exceeds the scope of this article.

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