

# The Noun Phrase: Diversity in Dutch Design and the Design of Diversity

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*vacancies*: 2 Ph.D.positions & 1 Postdoc position

## Summary

The overall aim of this research program is to contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon of *grammatical* (more in particular, *syntactic*) *diversity* and the way it is encoded, *its design*, in human language. This will be done by taking a *micro-comparative approach towards linguistic variation in the nominal system*. This means that linguistic variation will be studied from a “single-language” perspective, i.c. Dutch. The approach towards linguistic diversity taken in this study can thus be characterized as *Comparative Dutch Linguistics*. The linguistic data that will constitute the empirical comparative basis for this study will come from contemporary-dialectal and older variants of Dutch. An advantage of this research line is that, given the global similarity of the Dutch grammatical systems compared, we can more easily identify the finely-grained grammatical differences that exist between languages and the correlations that exist between varying grammatical properties. This way, we will get a richer and more precise understanding of the notion of linguistic diversity (i.e. parametrization).

## 1. Description of the Proposed Research

### 1.1 Overall aim

The overall aim of this research program is to contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon of *grammatical* (more in particular, *syntactic*) *diversity* and the way it is encoded, *its design*, in human language. This will be done by taking a *micro-comparative approach towards syntactic variation in the nominal system*. Syntactic diversity will be studied from a “single-language” perspective, i.c. Dutch. The approach towards linguistic diversity taken in this study can thus be characterized as *Comparative Dutch Linguistics*. The linguistic data that will constitute the empirical comparative basis for this study will come from contemporary-dialectal and older variants of Dutch. This project will give insight into the fine-grained aspects of syntactic diversity in the nominal system and will result into a fuller understanding of the theoretical notion of parameter.

### 1.2 Backgrounds and Motivation

#### 1.2.1 Why study linguistic diversity?

Linguistic diversity (i.e. the unlike part of human language), just like linguistic sameness (the ‘alike part’), is a core property of human language (cf. Greenberg 1963, Chomsky 1981, 1986). A complete answer to the question “What is the design of human language?” requires an in-depth and elaborate investigation into the design properties of the variant part of human language. What makes this enterprise challenging are the strong indications that grammatical differentiation is not arbitrary, unlimited and unpredictable, but rather non-arbitrary, bounded and predictable. Certain imaginable patterns of linguistic variation turn out to be rare or non-existent. *All this imposes the task upon the linguist to uncover the design of linguistic diversity and to address the scientifically important question of how best to characterize those variant properties of human language. This research program aims at contributing to this enterprise through an in-depth study of micro-diversity in the Dutch nominal system.*

### 1.2.2 Why study micro-diversity?

For an overall insight into the design of linguistic diversity, it is important to compare languages at different linguistic scales. *Macro*-comparative research typically takes as its empirical basis a variety of genetically and historically unrelated languages (e.g. Dutch, Turkish, Chinese) and provides insight into the *gross (i.e. macro) range* of linguistic variation. It considers variant properties which have a broad, overall and mostly very noticeable effect on language structure and this way gives insight into the ‘macro-boundaries of variation’. On the *meso*-level, languages are compared that are members of the same language (sub)family (e.g. comparison of French and English, or comparison within the class of Germanic languages). Micro-comparative linguistics, finally, considers grammatical variation as it occurs in a “single” language (e.g. Dutch). It concerns the study of differences among language systems that are extremely closely related (e.g. they are often mutually intelligible) and typically have many grammatical properties in common.

Obviously, for a complete understanding of the design of linguistic diversity, comparative research is needed on all three levels. In the framework of generative syntax (the Principles and Parameters model), the study of syntactic diversity has mostly taken a meso-comparative (e.g. Holmberg & Platzack 1995, Kayne 1981, Pollock 1989, Rizzi 1978, Shlonsky 1997, Vikner 1995, Zanuttini 1997) or macro-comparative perspective (cf. Baker 1995, 2001, Borer 1984, Cheng 1991, Cinque 1999, Hale 1983, Kayne 1994, Travis 1984) thus far. This research has led to the identification of various loci of variation within the human language system. In recent years, an increasing awareness has grown of the relevance of micro-comparative research (Kayne 2000). A more prominent role for the micro-comparative study of linguistic diversity is legitimate for: (i) it gives us insight into the UG-defined micro-bounds of variation (i.e. variant properties with finer-grained effects); (ii) it arguably leads to a more direct identification of co-varying properties (i.e. what syntactic differences are linked to each other?) due to the fact that, to a great extent, the compared language systems are grammatically similar. *An important aspect of this research program is its systematic focus on facets of microvariation in Dutch in order to gain a better understanding of the fine-grained dimensions of syntactic variation.*

The empirical basis for the study of minimal syntactic variation are language systems that are (genetically and historically) very closely related. This can be co-existing language systems at a single point in time (e.g. dialectal variants of Dutch) or language/dialect systems representing different stages in the evolution of a language (e.g. older variants of Dutch, like Middle Dutch, 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch). In order to get a detailed picture of the richness of microvariation in the Dutch nominal system, a broad perspective is taken in this study: data will be considered from both ‘types’ of variants of the Dutch language system. Since the aim of this research program is to chart and explain the nature and bounds of micro-diversity in the Dutch nominal system, the compared grammatical systems will be studied from a synchronic point of view. That is, it is not our purpose to explain the (diachronic) transition from one grammatical stage to another.

**1.2.3 Why study micro-diversity in the nominal system?** Thus far, the comparative study of the Dutch language has mostly focused on aspects of variation in the sentential system, focusing on phenomena such as verbal clusters, sentential negation, complementizer agreement (e.g. Bennis & Haegeman 1984, Den Besten 1989, Evers 1975, Haegeman 1992, Haegeman & Van Riemsdijk 1986, Zwart 1993). *An innovative aspect of this program is that it aims at a systematic, in-depth study of syntactic microvariation in the nominal system.*

It should be emphasized that from the theoretical perspective of cross-categorical parallelism, micro-variation is expected to be present in the nominal system. There is no obvious reason why micro-variation would be more richly expressed in the sentential system than in the nominal one. A global inspection of certain (Dutch) dialect grammars confirms this richness of variation in this phrasal system. *This study will broaden the empirical basis of the theoretical study of the functional architecture of the noun phrase. Importantly, many interesting facts and linguistic correlations observed in traditional dialectology studies will be integrated in modern syntactic theorizing* (cf. e.g. Ausems 1953, Overdiep 1940, De Bont 1958, Pauwels 1958, Sassen 1953, Ter Laan 1953).

#### **1.2.4 Functional categories and the design of diversity (theoretical framework)**

For our investigation into the design of syntactic micro-variation within the Dutch nominal system, we will make use of the theoretical framework known as the *Principles and Parameters model of human language* (cf. Chomsky 1981, 1986, 1995). According to this model, sameness and diversity are defined by Universal Grammar (UG). Cross-linguistic sameness (universality) is explained in terms of so-called universal *principles*, cross-linguistic variation in terms of so-called parameters, i.e. choice points in UG which can be fixed in one of a limited number of ways. *A central question in comparative-syntactic research (hence also in this project) on variation is how to best understand the notion of parameter.*

A leading idea in much current comparative work on the design of syntactic diversity is that the central parameters of Universal Grammar involve properties of heads (i.e. the word-category that determines the syntactic type of the phrase in which it occurs), more in particular so-called functional heads (i.e. those elements that fulfill an essentially grammatical function in syntactic structure; e.g. determiners). (cf. Borer 1984, Chomsky 1995, Rizzi 1989, Ouhalla 1991). In recent years, research on the functional architecture of the nominal system has led to the identification of various functional layers, such as DP (specifying the reference of the noun phrase) NumP/QP (specifying number/quantitative properties), PossP (specifying properties of possession and involved in argumental distribution), FP (involved in attributive adjectival modification) (cf. Coene and D'Hulst 2003).

The hypothesis that the design of syntactic diversity is localized in the functional system is promising and interesting in that it makes a specific claim about the bounds of syntactic variation. This research program will contribute to this research line of investigation by examining the following empirical domains within noun phrase syntax:

- Pronominals (more in particular: possessives and demonstratives); Project 1.
- Number, quantification and negation; Project 2
- 'Left edge phenomena': i.e. phenomena involving left peripheral elements associated with meaning properties like: interrogation, exclamation, focalization/emphasis; Project 3.

The reasons for choosing these empirical domains of grammar are: (a) they belong to the core phenomena associated with the functional system of the noun phrase (i.e. the system which expresses the more grammatical meaning aspects, rather than the more descriptive meaning associated with lexical categories); (b) To a greater or lesser extent, these phenomena have been topics of discussion in modern grammatical theorizing, which means that there is a theoretical framework which this research on micro-diversity can be connected to; (c) global inspection of available reference grammars indicates that these are potentially rich domains of grammatical variation.

The intricate syntax of the nominal system with its articulated functional architecture in combination with the ‘breadth’ of the sample of Dutch languages to be studied — required for a proper view on the fine-grained dimensions of variation — makes a programmatic approach necessary. Another surplus-value of this programmatic approach towards micro-diversity is that through the interaction between the three projects (and consequently the researchers) a better picture will be obtained of aspects of co-variation between the functional layers (e.g. properties of the internal make-up of pronominals (project 1) may have consequences for their distribution within the noun phrase (project 3)).

In our attempt to come to a proper characterization of the nature and bounds of micro-variation in the nominal domain, the following questions will be addressed regarding the design of diversity:

- Can cross-linguistic diversity be explained in terms of presence or absence of some functional category in the structure of the noun phrase?
- Should cross-linguistic variation be associated with sub-features of the feature make-up of functional categories?
- Can cross-linguistic diversity be explained in terms of cross-linguistic differences in the morpho-lexical realization of some functional category (and its associated positions)?
- What is the interplay of certain dimensions of variation (i.e. parametric choices)?
- What is the relationship between the functional categories of different lexical categories?

### **1.3 Research Methodology and Data Resources**

An original aspect of this part of our study is the integration of two types of methodologies: (i) the hypothetical-deductive approach towards language, characteristic of modern grammatical theory and (ii) the more descriptive, data-based approach characteristic of typological and historical studies of language. The data sources will consist of reference grammars (cf. the dialect grammars mentioned above; cf. Stoett 1977, Duinhoven 1988, Overdiep 1931-1935, Weijnen 1952) and articles discussing phenomena within the nominal system. For the data on older variants of Dutch, use will be made of texts/corpora that are electronically available. In the case of dialectal varieties, data will also be obtained from present-day speakers of dialects by the use of various elicitation techniques, such as questionnaires, judgment tasks and interviews.

### **1.4 Institutional embedding and collaboration**

The proposed program will be embedded in the Utrecht Institute of Linguistics OTS at Utrecht University. An integrated approach towards grammatical theorizing and other linguistic disciplines such as typology, acquisition and psycholinguistics constitutes a central point of scientific policy. This project fits into this. Importantly, this project complements this research through its strong orientation towards aspects of micro-diversity in grammatical systems. This project on micro-variation will also arguably lead to an interesting exchange of thoughts with researchers at Uil-OTS working on macro/meso-typology.

There will be close collaboration with researchers of the Meertens Institute, where, currently, a large-scale research project is being carried out which focuses on variation in the clausal domain (the SAND-project).

## **2. Projects**

## 2.1 Micro-diversity in a micro-domain: the case of Dutch pronominals. (Ph.D. project)

This project investigates grammatical variation in the formal expression of Dutch pronominal elements, focusing in particular on the morphosyntactic realization and distributional properties of possessive and demonstrative pronominals. What makes these pronominal elements important objects for the comparative study of grammatical variation is that they represent small (i.e. micro-) syntactic building blocks. This way, we can get insight into dimensions of variation in micro-syntactic building blocks.

*The research goals of project 1* are:

1. Investigation of (morpho-)syntactic diversity in:
  - the distribution of attributive pronominals within the nominal domain
  - the distribution and morphosyntactic expression of substantively used pronominals
  - the interplay between articles, demonstratives and possessives
  - the expression of nominal constructs featuring non-pronominal possessors in combination with definite articles/demonstrative pronouns.
2. Identification and explanation of choice points (i.e. dimensions of variation) in this micro-syntactic domain of the functional system of the noun phrase: What is their nature, what is their locus and how do they interact?

### *An first impression of microvariation*

A first phenomenon of cross-Dutch variation concerns the co-occurrence of the definite article and the possessive pronoun in non-elliptical nominal contexts. Possessive pronouns in non-elliptical contexts (cf. \**de/die mijn auto*; ‘the/that my car’) cannot occur together with a determiner-like element. In a language like Middle Dutch, however, such patterns are found:

- (1)    *dese mijn dochter*      (Middle Dutch: 1200-1500)  
      this my daughter

The question arises how to account for this different behavior of pronominal elements among Dutch languages. Does it reduce to a categorial distinction (e.g. determiner-like pronouns versus adjectival pronouns)? Or is it the case that all possessive pronouns are categorially alike and occupy the same unique structural position, e.g. a functional position following the determiner, which is associated with possession. In that case, the absence of the definite article/demonstrative should follow from some other property of the grammar of present-day Dutch. In short, this issue about differences in the co-occurrence of possessive pronominals and determiner-like elements amounts to an investigation into the interaction and relationship between these grammatical elements.

A second phenomenon of diversity concerns grammatical variation as displayed by so-called substantively used possessives, i.e. possessive pronominals in elliptical noun phrases: e.g. *de mijne* (the my-infl; ‘mine’) in standard Dutch. As is already shown by the small set of examples in (2), the range of variation within this syntactic micro-domain is quite astonishing.

- (2)    a.    *de miene*      (de + possessor + -e)      (Aalst)  
      b.    *miende*      (possessor + -n + de)      (Ruinen)

- |    |                  |                       |           |
|----|------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| c. | de <b>miende</b> | (de + possessor + de) | (Drente)  |
| d. | <b>mienes</b>    | (possessor+es)        | (Zealand) |

At a descriptive level, the question arises what the range of micro-variation is in the morphosyntactic expression of these substantively used possessives. At the explanatory level, the following questions arise among others: How do we interpret the inflectional elements that attach to the possessive pronoun in elliptical contexts? What is the relationship between the determiner/definite article and the pronominal element? For example, should *-de* in (2b) be interpreted as a definite article which has been merged with a (raised) possessive pronoun? Or should this morpheme, which is homophonous with the definite article, be interpreted differently in view of the sequence in (2c), where we find two instances of *de*? Another question about this domain of variation concerns the nature and behavior of the empty noun (i.e. *e*, like in *de mijne e*, *the my-inflection e*, 'mine') in these constructions.

Research on these elliptical possessive constructions should answer the question which dimensions of variation hold in this domain of syntax: e.g. variation in the morphosyntactic realization of the functional system, and variation in movement relationships between different functional positions.

Related to the pronominal patterns in (2) are elliptical constructions like: *den ons moeders* (the our mother's; 'the one of our mother'; dialect of Oerle). This pattern, in which a definite article is followed by a genitival possessor, is not permitted in present-day Dutch, which only allows for the (meaning-equivalent) expression: *die van ons moeder* (that of our mother).

The syntax of demonstratives also displays variation: Some dialects permit the co-occurrence of determiners and demonstratives (*de deis* (the this; 'this one')), others (e.g. Standard Dutch) don't: *deze* (this; 'this one'). Variation also holds for the placement of deictic adverbs associated with demonstratives: *deze (boom) hier* (this (tree) here; Standard Dutch) versus *hieër deizen böom* (here this tree), and also: *hieër den deizen* (here the this; 'this one here'; dialect of Oerle). The question arises what the dimensions and limits of (morpho-)syntactic micro-variation are in this domain, and how these can be accounted for. In addition to this, the question will be addressed to what extent cross-pronominal patterns of variation can be found (cf. *de mijne* and *de deis*) and to what extent these cross-pronominal aspects of diversity are uniform within a single language.

## **2.2 Micro-diversity in the expression of number, quantity and negation. (Ph.D. Project)**

One of the most characteristic properties of nominals is their quantifiability: the quantity of an object or substance denoted by the noun can be specified, like in the following English examples: *many cars*, *three cars*, *much water*. In the syntax literature, the phenomenon of quantification has triggered the search for the locus in the functional system of the noun phrase, where number and other quantificational aspects are expressed (cf. Ritter (1991), Giusti (1997)). Aspects of micro-linguistic diversity in this domain of nominal syntax has thus far largely been ignored. An important reason for investigating variation in the noun phrase-internal expression of negation and quantification is the richness of word order variation in this domain of nominal syntax. Thus far, word order in the Dutch noun phrase has mostly been looked upon as being rather rigid and invariable.

**The research goals of project 2 are:**

1. Description of the dimensions of variation in the expression of quantification and negation.
2. Explanation of dimensions of variation in the nominal construction types featuring quantificational elements, addressing questions like: What is the nature of these dimensions of diversity? What grammatical property is variation associated with? Where in the functional structure of the noun phrase are quantificational and negative elements located? Are there any correlations between aspects of variation?

### A first impression of microvariation

A superficial comparison of present-day standard Dutch and older variants of Dutch already shows that there are some striking asymmetries in word order between those varieties of Dutch (cf. also Stoett (1923), Duinhoven (1988)):

	Present-day standard Dutch		Middle Dutch
(4)	a.	zijn <i>vijf</i> heilige wonden his five holy wounds	a.' zijn heilige wonden <i>vive</i> his holy wounds five
	b.	<i>al</i> zijn lieden al his people	b.' sinen lieden <i>al</i> his people all
	c.	<i>geen</i> water no water	c.' water <i>negheen</i> water no

The question arises how to interpret this difference in word order. Should it be related to a categorial difference between numerals, which correlates with a difference in syntactic placement? Or should it be interpreted in terms of displacement of quantificational elements? At the descriptive level, the question arises whether postnominal placement of quantificational elements is still permitted in contemporary dialects of Dutch.

Also so-called partitive constructions (i.e. constructions of the type *een van mijn vrienden*; 'one of my friends') display some quite remarkable differences in word order patterning across varieties of Dutch. First of all, some dialects require the presence of the prepositional element *van*: *een van mijn vrienden* (one of my friends; Standard Dutch). In other variants, *van* must or can be absent: *driej de dikse hao'nen* (three the fattest cocks; dialect of Oerle/Kempenland), *som die boeke* (some these books; Middle Dutch). Secondly, some variants require initial placement of the numeral (cf. *een van mijn vrienden*); others require postnominal placement: *Sauls knape een* (Sauls servants one; 'one of Saul's servants'; Middle Dutch), *onzen eene* (us-Gen one; 'one of us'; dialect of Oerle).

In the domain of negation, we find differences in linear placement of elements that are associated with the negative word: For example, in standard Dutch we say: *geen boeken meer* (no books more; 'no books anymore'); in the dialect of Ruinen, we find a continuous pattern: *giin meer drank* (no more liquor). The question arises how to interpret these dependency relations: Do they start off, for example, as a syntactic unit and is there a process of displacement involved which separates one element from the other? If so, is it the negative element that is moved away from *meer* (leftward displacement), or is *meer* extraposed to the right periphery of the noun phrase?

Another dimension of variation within this domain of nominal syntax concerns the morphosyntactic realization of quantifying expressions. It turns out, for example, that certain dialects display different formal realizations of numerals (e.g. *acht* (eight) versus the strong form *achte* (eight-e)). The choice of the form seems to depend on the syntactic configuration in which it occurs. At the descriptive level, these syntactic configurations should be charted.

At the explanatory level, questions like the following should be answered: What underlies this intra-linguistic variation in form? Do Dutch languages that do not display any difference in form between strong numerals and weak ones display other grammatical characteristics on the basis of which the two can be distinguished (e.g. distributional properties)?

### **2.3 Micro-diversity in the left periphery of the Dutch noun phrase (Postdoc-project)**

This project investigates micro-diversity in nominal constructions that arguably involve leftward displacement of phrases to the left periphery of the noun phrase. As such, it will contribute to our understanding of the design of micro-diversity in the left periphery of the noun phrase, i.e. that part of the nominal phrasal skeleton which is associated with discourse related properties, such as: interrogation, exclamation and focalization. Since these discourse-related properties are also syntactically expressed in the left periphery of the sentential phrasal skeleton, this project will also consider cross-categorial aspects of sameness and variation in the nominal and the sentential system.

Interrogation by means of question words is one of the properties of human language which has been most extensively studied in generative syntax. It is the standard view nowadays that the formation of wh-interrogative clauses involves displacement of an interrogative word to a left peripheral position of the clause. At a purely observational level, wh-interrogative clauses and wh-interrogative nominals have an important property in common: the interrogative word occurs in the left periphery of the phrase. This parallel superficial distribution has not led to an analysis of interrogative nominals (i.e. nominal expressions like *which car*) in terms of DP-internal wh-displacement. Interrogative (i.e. wh-) words are typically base-generated in the left-peripheral slot of the noun phrase. Driven by the quest for cross-categorial parallelism, one of the goals of this project will be to explore a displacement analysis for interrogative (and related) nominals as well, this way further strengthening the cross-categorial parallelism between the nominal and clausal domain. Another central goal will be to investigate dimensions of micro-variation in this area of nominal syntax.

**The research goals of project 3 are:**

1. Investigation of syntactic diversity in nominal constructions expressing interrogation, exclamation and focalization.
2. Identification and explanation of dimensions of variation in the left periphery of these nominal construction types, addressing questions like: What is the nature of these choice points, what is their locus (the functional system), and how do they interact?
3. Investigation of aspects of cross-categorial parallelism (related to aspects of sameness and aspects of diversity) between the nominal system and the sentential system.

#### **A first impression of microvariation**

A first construction type, whose dimensions of variation will be investigated, is the so-called *wat voor*-construction (Corver 1991; Bennis 1995). Although it is traditionally assumed that the element *wat* is an element base-generated in the left periphery of the noun phrase, Bennis, Corver & Den Dikken (1998) have claimed that *wat* is an interrogative word which originates as a predicate in a post-nominal position (*voor boeken wat*) and is moved to the left periphery of the noun phrase, yielding *wat voor boeken*. Both from a conceptual (wh-displacement as a cross-categorial phenomenon) and empirical (the *wat voor*-construction) point of view, there are good reasons then for further exploring the wh-displacement hypothesis in the nominal

system. This will, first of all, be done by considering variants of the *wat voor*-construction in different varieties of Dutch. It turns out that there is great variation across varieties of Dutch in the realization of this interrogative property. Some examples: *wafferen hond* (what dog; dialect of Oerle), *watvukke keerls* (what fellows; dialect of Twente), *hokfor schoen* (how+for shoes; northern varieties), *hoeke schoenen* (how+inflection shoes: dialect of Culemborg), *huo zoo 'n kalf* (how so a calf; dialect of Ruinen), *hoe(ë)n hoet* (how a hat; dialect Culemborg). Besides describing the dimensions of variation in this domain of nominal syntax, we will account for the nature and limits (e.g. *\*hoeke for schoenen*: how+inflection for shoes) of variation and the interplay of the various syntactic elements involved. In addition, we will investigate whether symmetries in the grammatical encoding of diversity exist between the nominal interrogative system and the clausal interrogative system. As for the latter system, both descriptive-dialectal (cf. Van Haeringen 1939) and theoretical (cf. Zwart 1993) research on the left periphery of the Dutch clause has shown that this part of the clausal configuration is a rich domain of cross-Dutch variation, displaying, for example, variation in the morphosyntactic realization of conjunctions and variation in the co-occurrence of certain left-peripheral elements (e.g. interrogative words and conjunctions).

Another left periphery-phenomenon concerns the placement of certain adjectival phrases containing degree words. While Middle Dutch (and certain contemporary dialects) permits a sequence like: *te jonc een knecht*, Standard Dutch does not (only: *een te jonge knecht*). In addition, there is variation in morphosyntactic realization: for example, the degree words of certain dialects display inflectional properties: *veel tene grote honger* (much too+inflection big hunger; dialect of Aarschot (Pauwels 1958)). Similar (but also different) types of variation are found in exclamative constructions: *wa lang 'n hout!* (dialect of Oerle), *wat 'n lange stok!* (Standard Dutch), *wat 'n mooi 'n weer!* (dialect of Goeree).

### 3. Intended Results

The results will be communicated by presentations at (inter)national conferences and in publications in national and international journals. The PhD projects will result in a doctoral dissertation. In addition, the postdoc researcher and the project-leader will write a book containing the key results of this research enterprise.

Two workshops will be organized. At the end of the second year, the program's participants will present first results on the range of diversity in the Dutch nominal domain. The second workshop will take a broader comparative perspective by considering micro-variation in the nominal systems of a broader range of languages (e.g. Dutch, Norwegian., German, et cetera). This way, a broader perspective on micro-variation will be achieved.

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