The Preferred Learning Styles and Strategies of Adult Thai EFL Students in a Bangkok Business Setting

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Abstract
This exploratory study was designed to look at personal learning styles and preferred language learning strategies in Thai students of English. A questionnaire incorporating statements from Willing (1989) on learning style, and from Oxford (1990) on learning strategies, was constructed and administered to 30 adult EFL students at a large computer-network service company located in Bangkok. Although the results are inconclusive, they suggest adult students in Thailand represent the full range of learning styles but exhibit a slight preference for what Kolb (1979) called the Concrete Experience dimension; that is, students' scores are highest for Willing's (1989) Communicative Learning Style, followed closely by Concrete Learning Style. These results have implications in the classroom, both for general teaching and for specific strategy training. Thai students need to be explicitly taught to make better use of their preferred styles, in other words, to turn their love of group interaction into an effective learning strategy.

Background and literature review

Thai students come from a background of rote learning. Although teachers are held in high esteem, this can be a double-edged sword; if teachers are believed to know everything, then they are also deemed responsible for the students' learning outcomes. This can lead to students being passive recipients of information rather than being involved in their own learning process, which could be a particular problem in adult language learning situations. An awareness of one's own learning style, and consequent strengths and weaknesses can lead to the use of effective learning strategies, which becomes more essential as we get older, and language learning is no longer as organic as it is for younger children (Hilles & Sutton, 2001).

If students are not taking an active role in their own learning, they may not be using the most effective strategies, and a lack of awareness of their own learning styles could further impede learning of, or willingness to try, new strategies. Furthermore, a mismatch of student learning styles and classroom teaching style can lead to poor outcomes (Rao, 2001).

After teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to several small groups of employees in a large Thai computer-network service organization in Bangkok, the researcher was curious to what extent these students' learning styles and stated preference for language learning strategies would match theory. As they had come, or were coming, to the end of their company-paid language lessons, the researcher was also curious whether they would express positive feelings about English language learning. Therefore, this study was intended to investigate three general questions:

1) What learning styles do these adult Thai EFL students favour?
2) What learning strategies do they say they prefer?
3) Are adult Thai EFL students positively disposed towards learning English?

Research into strategy use has established that it is related to more global general learning styles (Oxford, 1994; 2003) in that individuals with particular styles tend to prefer particular strategies; however, students will not make use of effective learning strategies if they have no motivation or little opportunity. Thus, these three areas will be explored in turn, starting with a look at learning styles, then learning strategies, before turning briefly to students' attitudes and opportunity.

Learning styles
Learning styles have been categorized and conceptualized in a variety of ways. Kolb (1979) defined learning styles as relatively stable preferences for ways of perceiving and processing information. He identified four learning modes, which he placed on two continua: from Concrete Experience to Abstract Conceptualization on one; and from Reflective Observation to Active Experimentation on the other. This model was taken up and adapted by Willing (1988). The framework is illustrated in Figure 1, below:
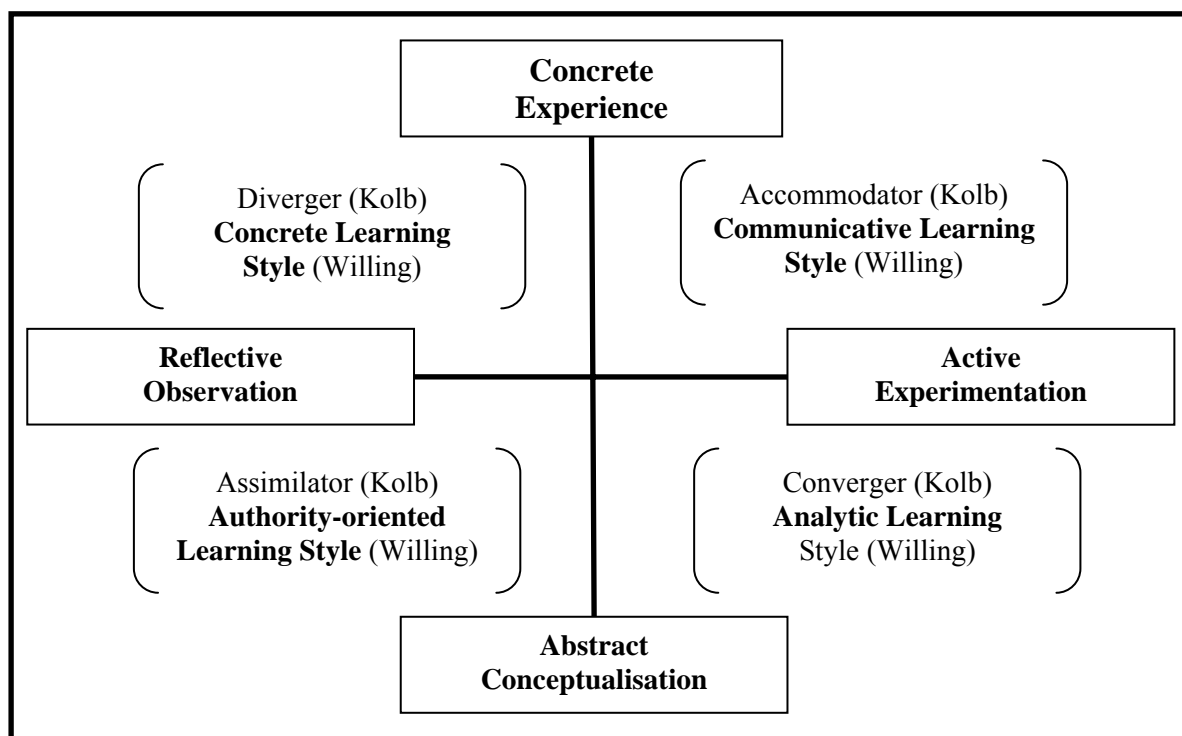
Concrete Experience

Diverger (Kolb)
Concrete Learning Style (Willing)

Accommodator (Kolb)
Communicative Learning Style (Willing)

Reflective Observation

Active Experimentation

Assimilator (Kolb)
Authority-oriented Learning Style (Willing)

Converger (Kolb)
Analytic Learning Style (Willing)

Abstract Conceptualisation

Figure 1: Kolb's four learning modes, with the four learning styles as conceptualized by Kolb (1979) and adapted by Willing (1988)

According to Willing (1988), students with a concrete learning style are field dependent, and prefer practical, hands-on classroom activities and working in groups. Communicative learners are also field dependent, but are more holistic and active than concrete learners, and prefer to get into real-life situations where they will take risks for the sake of practice. Analytic learners are also active, but are field independent learners who prefer to work alone. They have a tendency to prefer to learn 'about' language, and therefore prefer language exercises rather than communicative practice. Authority-oriented learners are also field independent, but being more passive, prefer clear, structured guidance in classroom activities.

Although learning styles are a product of individual personality and cognitive style, they are influenced by socialization (including the demands of the prevailing school system) and past experience. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, in a country like Thailand, where the cornerstones of society are considered to be 'relationship' and 'hierarchy' (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1997), that students would group towards the concrete and reflective ends of the continua. That is: students from a hierarchical society could conform to an *Authority-oriented Learning Style*; their school system with an emphasis on rote practices might lead them to a *Concrete Learning Style*; and the societal value placed on relationship would require them to be 'Accommodators' (Kolb, 1979), who conform to Willing's (1988) *Communicative Learning Style*.

It would be useful to establish if this is an accurate picture of learning styles predominant in this Thai student population, and, if it is, whether it predicts students' preferred strategies, as was suggested earlier.

Learning strategies
Even a brief look at second language learning literature will turn up a number of different definitions of learning strategies (Ellis, 1994). For the purpose of this investigation, the Oxford (1989, cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 531) definition was used: "Language learning strategies are behaviours or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable."

Oxford (1990) has divided strategies into two groups: *Direct Strategies*, which include memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies, and which, as the name suggests, are believed directly to involve some kind of processing of the target language; and *Indirect Strategies*, which include metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies, and which provide more general indirect mediation towards language learning.

Strategy use changes with time and context and with the learning-task requirements (Ellis, 1994; Wenden, 1987), but, in general, good learners use more appropriate strategies than poor ones (Chamot, 2001; Reid, 1987; Rubin, 1987).

There can be cross-cultural differences, not only in initial strategy use, but also in students' willingness to consider new strategies (Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). One recent study of Thai first-year architecture university students learning English (Singhasiri, Darasawang & Srimavin, 2004) showed their preferred learning styles to be consistent with their cultural context; that is, they were people-oriented with a concrete learning style, and preferred learning activities, particularly practice drills, putting things into context, and using diagrams or picture cues. They scored low on

analytic strategies, and particularly disliked studying alone. Another study (Mullins, 1992, cited in Oxford, 2001), however, found that Thai university students who used the affective strategies of positive self-talk, mood monitoring, and breathing, had *poorer* learning outcomes. Clearly, further investigation into learning strategies in adult Thai students would be useful.

Attitudes and opportunity
There are innumerable studies of aspects of 'attitude'; in the field of second language learning, and no attempt will be made here to survey this literature. However, socio-political and cultural factors (which have been briefly alluded to already), students' beliefs about language learning and their desire (motivation) to learn, cannot be ignored. Without an intrinsic desire to learn or some strong ongoing instrumental motivation, adults are unlikely to put in the effort needed to improve their second language, and the question of their preferred strategies or learning styles becomes moot.

Virtually every book about Thailand describes the concept of 'sánǔk', loosely translatable as 'fun', which is pervasive in Thai culture. This includes the EFL classroom – if something is not fun, students will not want to persist with it (Adamson, 2003; Barnard, 2002). If students are only studying English because it is expected of them, rather than because of their own enjoyment of the language, this would have a negative impact on their attitudes to English, and a consequent impact on their motivation to learn. Green (1993) describes the case in Hong Kong, for example, where English is considered a necessary, rather than enjoyable or desirable, commodity, leading to low affective drive. He suggests that this is common in EFL contexts.

One of the biggest difficulties with improving spoken language is making the opportunity to practice. Many Thais in business settings are obliged to use English as part of their work, which is, of course, why employers often pay for English classes. However, their contact with English-speakers, inside and outside the workplace, can be very infrequent. Use of English in work and social settings can be indicative of need (i.e. have people to use the language with: therefore need to learn), or desire (i.e. want to learn the language: therefore seek out English speakers to practice with). In addition, positive practice experiences build confidence, which can in turn, enhance motivation (Dörnyei, 1998).

Thus, in addition to examining students' predominant styles and preferred strategies, it was important to get some measure of students' desire to learn, and their actual language use.

Methodology
Subjects
All the respondents were tertiary-educated, native Thai-speakers employed by a large computer-network support company. Although they had been out of tertiary education between one and 13 years, the largest proportion (N = 8) had finished study only two years before, and two thirds of them (N = 20) had finished university within the last five years.

As graduates of Thai schools, all of the participants had studied some English from a young age. Some had participated in additional language classes since finishing university, and all had studied between 80 and 120 hours of EFL in classes conducted

by the investigator. They had been studying from the *International Express* workbooks (Taylor, 2002) at elementary and lower-intermediate levels, and their English proficiency, as observed by the investigator, was in keeping with this range. Only seven of the participants had studied other languages, three of whom had studied Chinese, a language which is still used in some Thai families, with ethnic Chinese representing 14% of the country's population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2005); one student reported 10 years of Chinese study. The others reported only one or two years of other language study. A summary of the demographics of the 30 subjects is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Information about the participants

Age	range = 23-37 years mean age = 29 years modal age (N=5) = 24 years	
Sex	Male Female Total	18 (60%) 12 (40%) 30 (100%)
Job	Engineering: (associate service engineer, service engineer, or system engineer) Administrative or accounting Sales, purchasing or management Total	18 (60%) 5 (17%) 7 (23%) 30 (100%)
Most recent tertiary study	Range mean time modal time (8) 2nd modal time (6)	1-13 yrs prior 5.2 yrs prior 2 yrs prior 5 yrs prior
Previous language study	"No" "Yes; one" "Yes; two" Total	23 (77%) 5 (17%) 2 (6%) 30 (100%)
Other languages studied	Chinese French Japanese Bahasa Malay	3 2 2 1

Questionnaire

A two-page questionnaire was constructed (see appendix), utilizing simple language and an easy-to-answer format, so that it could be filled in quickly by students of elementary and intermediate English-language ability. Demographic items included questions about previous study and other language learning. A six-question self-rating scale of confidence and enjoyment, which was constructed by the author for use with EFL students at university, was included, and four questions regarding actual English usage were added. To measure learning styles, 33 statements selected from Oxford (1990) and Willing (1989) were listed with a five-point agreement scale. Some of the original statements were adapted to simplify the language for Thai students. Although it is considered advisable to include negatively worded statements to correct for response bias (Borg & Gall, 1983), that is, so respondents do not tick the same answers to everything, because of low language ability, the concern in this study was to prevent confusing the students unnecessarily. A further statement, *'If work didn't pay for class, I would still study English',* was added to assess participants' desire to study English. Two sentence completions were included so that participants had the opportunity to comment more freely if they wished.

Questionnaire administration
The questionnaire was administered in one of two ways: in a worksite classroom setting and by email. This was because two groups of students were on a break from classes, and therefore most easily accessible by email. Email English had been a component of their English course, so they were familiar with this as a medium of communication with the researcher. The 12 students in the classroom setting were given the opportunity to comment on the questionnaire itself, and had they had difficulties with it, the questionnaire would have been changed.

Two questions on English usage were added to the questionnaire before it was emailed to a further 30 employees of the same company. The accompanying letter of transmittal was intentionally informal, in keeping with the relaxed atmosphere of the classroom. After the response deadline, a second request was emailed to non-respondents.

Results
This study aimed to look at the language-learning styles, attitudes and practices of adult EFL students in a Thai business setting through a short survey. The results of this survey are presented below, starting with a report of the response rates. Measures of the students' attitudes and actual practice will then be examined before looking at their reported preferences on the learning-style and learning-strategy measures. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, and the smallness of the sample size, significance tests were not conducted on any of the measures.

Response procedures
The classroom questionnaires (12/12; 100%) were all returned. Of the 30 questionnaires emailed, only 25 reached their intended recipients; the remaining five students had changed jobs. Of the 25 questionnaires delivered, 18 (72%) were returned by the due date. A further three were returned after the reminder, but they were too late for inclusion in the data. Thus, the effective sample was 30 participants, for an overall response rate of 81%.

Experience of English
Participants were asked, on a five-point Likert scale, how *confident* they felt writing, reading, speaking, or listening to English. They were also asked how much they *enjoyed* written (print) or aural English. Their responses (transposed, so that 1 = 'Not at all', 3 = 'OK', and 5 = 'Very') are averaged across students and depicted in Figure 2. Students expressed lowest confidence with speaking, and it would appear there is a trend for students' enjoyment of English to be in the positive range, and to excede their confidence.
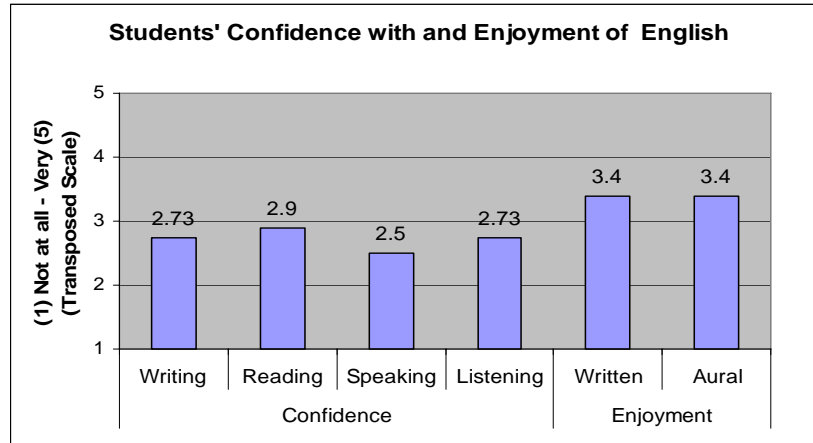
Figure 2: Students' confidence with and enjoyment of English

Likes and dislikes

Participants were given two sentence stems regarding what they liked and disliked about English. It was hoped that these sentence completions would provide a more detailed picture of the respondents. Responses will be looked at briefly in the discussion as they provide possible insight into some of the quantitative results.

Desire to study English

In response to the statement *'If work didn't pay for class, I would still study English'*, 67% (16/30) of respondents selected 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' (4/30). Although a third of the sample (10/30, 33%) was undecided, none disagreed or strongly disagreed.

English usage

Participants were asked how often they used English. As can be seen from Figure 3, most of them (26/30; 86.67%) are using English at least weekly at work, with 12 using it almost every day, 9 (30%) using it 3-5 times a week and a further 5 (16.67%) using it 1-2 times. Frequency of usage outside work is much lower, with only 6 (20%) saying they use English 3-5 five times a week or daily.
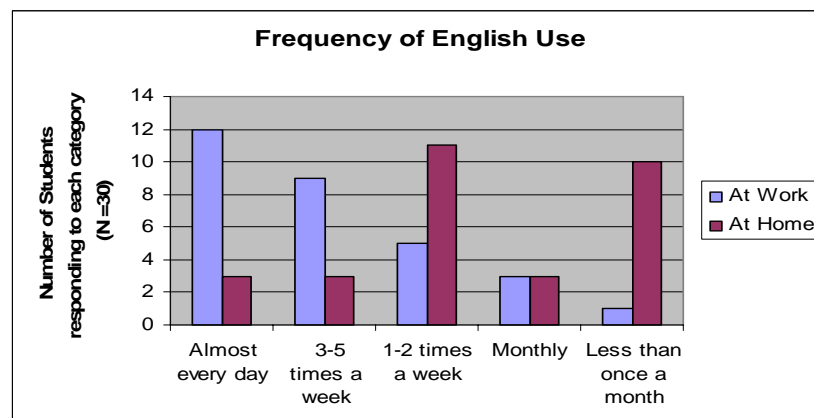

Figure 3: Frequency of English use

Learning styles

The means and standard deviations of the responses of the 30 students on a five-point Likert scale to 21 survey statements that were adapted from Willing (1989), and their categories, are tabulated in Table 2, with overall category means in Table 3.

Table 2: Participants' learning styles

Rank	Learning Style Statement	Category	Means	SD
1	2) I like the teacher to explain everything to us.	Authority	4.5	0.51
2	3) I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes.	Analytical	4.2	0.83
3	16) In class, I like to learn by conversations.	Communicative	4.1	0.78
4	27) In class, I like to learn by games.	Concrete	4	0.85
5	11) I like to learn by pictures, films, videos.	Concrete	4	0.87
6	13) I like the teacher to give us problems to work on.	Analytical	4	0.61
7	28) I like to go out and practice with native speakers.	Concrete - Communicative	3.9	0.84
8	15) At home, I like to learn by watching TV in English.	Communicative	3.9	0.70
9	10) I like to learn by talking to friends in English.	Communicative	3.9	0.90
10	26) In class, I like working with a partner.	Concrete	3.8	0.73
11	18) I like to learn English words by hearing them.	Communicative	3.7	0.87
12	17) I like to learn English words by seeing them.	Authority	3.7	0.88
13	9) At home, I like to learn by listening to CDs and tapes.	Concrete	3.6	0.82
14	24) I like to have my own textbook.	Authority	3.5	0.86
15	1) In class, I like to learn by listening to CDs and tapes.	Concrete	3.4	0.93
16	22) At home, I like to learn by studying English books.	Analytical	3.4	0.89
17	30) I like to study grammar.	Authority - Analytical	3.2	1.22
18	23) I like to write everything down.	Authority	3.2	0.94
19	6) I like to study English by myself.	Analytical	3.1	0.86
20	8) At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers.	Analytical	2.9	0.98
21	33) In class, I like to learn by reading.	Authority	2.7	0.83
Note: Coding the subjects' responses as numeric values results in:		**Means** 1.00-1.80 = 'Strongly Disagree' 1.81-2.60 = 'Disagree' 2.61-3.40 = 'Agree' 3.41-4.20 = 'Undecided' 4.21-5 .00 = 'Strongly Agree'		

As can be seen from Table 2, responses range from a low of 2.7 to a high, for Statement 2 *'I like the teacher to explain everything to us'*, of 4.5. The mean response to this statement has a particularly low standard deviation; in other words, the subjects were in high agreement on this point: they want explicit explanations from their teachers. The two lowest-ranked items relate to reading, Statement 33 *'In class, I like to learn by reading'* and Statement 8 *'At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers'*. The other reading-related item, Statement 22 *'At home, I like to learn by studying English books'*, ranked at 16/21, is also low on the agreement scale.

Overall means rank with *Communicative* and *Concrete* learning styles rating somewhat higher than the *Authority-oriented* and *Analytic* learning styles (Table 3). The variance in the latter two categories appears to be greater. Possible reasons for this become clearer when we look at the individual statements, graphed in Figure 4 below, where they are grouped into their categories. Five items are related to Willing's (1989) Learning Style 1 *'Communicative'*. As can be seen from Figure 4, there is a consistently high agreement with these statements.

Table 3 General learning styles

Rank	Learning Style	Means	SD
1	Communicative Style	3.89	0.82
2	Concrete Style	3.77	0.86
3	Authority-oriented style	3.48	1.04
4	Analytical Style	3.47	1.01

Note: Coding the subjects' responses as numeric values results in:

Means
1.00-1.80 = 'Strongly Disagree'
1.81-2.60 = 'Disagree'
2.61-3.40 = 'Undecided'
3.41-4.20 = 'Agree'
4.21-5.00 = 'Strongly Agree'

Preferred Learning Styles (From Willing, 1989)

Overall Mean: Communicative Style — 3.89
28) I like to go out and practice with native speakers. — 3.9
18) I like to learn English words by hearing them. — 3.7
16) In class I like to learn by conversations. — 4.1
15) At home, I like to learn by watching TV in English. — 3.9
10) I like to learn by talking to friends in English. — 3.9

Overall Mean: Authority-oriented style — 3.48
30) I like to study grammar. — 3.2
33) In class I like to learn by reading. — 2.7
24) I like to have my own textbook. — 3.5
23) I like to write everything down. — 3.2
17) I like to learn English words by seeing them. — 3.7
2) I like the teacher to explain everything to us. — 4.5

Overall Mean: Concrete Style style — 3.77
28) I like to go out and practice with native speakers. — 3.9
27) In class I like to learn by games. — 4
26) In class, I like working with a partner. — 3.8
11) I like to learn by pictures, films, videos. — 4
9) At home, I like to learn by listening to CDs and tapes. — 3.6
1) In class, I like to learn by listening to CDs and tapes.. — 3.4

Overall Mean: Analytical Style — 3.47
30) I like to study grammar. — 3.2
22) At home, I like to learn by studying English books. — 3.4
13) I like the teacher to give us problems to work on. — 4
8) At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers. — 2.9
6) I like to study English by myself. — 3.1
3) I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes. — 4.2

(1-1.80) Strongly disagree - (1.81-2.60) Disagree - (2.61-3.40) Undecided - (3.41-4.20) Agree - (4.21- 5) Strongly agree
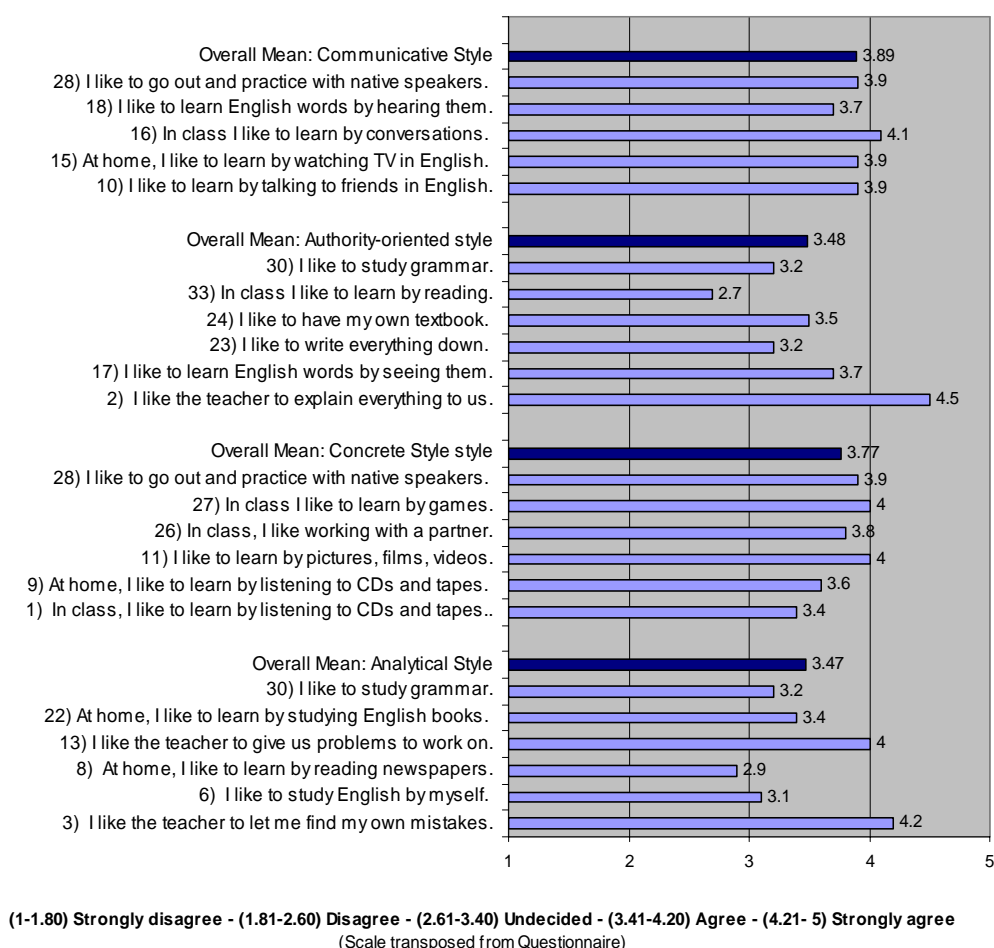(Scale transposed from Questionnaire)

Figure 4: Participants' learning styles

There is relatively high agreement, overall, with statements relating to Willing's (1989) Learning Style 2 *'Authority-oriented'*. However, as noted above, the responses to the six questions in this category show a lot of variation. This group comprises the statement with the highest agreement (Statement 2 *'I like the teacher to explain everything to us')*; the lowest agreement (Statement 33 *'In class, I like to learn by reading')*; and, looking back at Table 2, two of the three statements with the most variable agreement (Statement 30 *'I like to study grammar';* and Statement 23 *'I like to write everything down').*

As was suggested by the low standard deviations for the overall mean on the Concrete Learning Style, average subject responses were consistently positive to the six items corresponding with Willing's (1989) Learning Style 3 *'Concrete'*.

The responses to the six statements relating to Willing's (1989) Learning Style 4 *'Analytical'* lean toward agreement. This category shows some scatter, however, with Statement 8 *'At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers'* having the second lowest mean, and Statement 3: *'I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes'* having the second highest. As noted above, Statement 30, *'I like to study grammar'*, which is considered to fit both the authority-oriented and analytic categories, has the highest standard deviation of all the statements. In other words, while some subjects responded strongly in agreement, others disagreed.

Learning strategies
The means and standard deviations of the responses of the 30 subjects, on a five-point Likert scale, to the 12 statements about learning strategies adapted from Oxford (1990) are tabulated in Table 4. These 12 statements were chosen as being the most representative of Oxford's (1990) six strategy groups from within her two categories, that is: memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies from her *Direct* category; and metacognitive, affective and social strategies from her *Indirect* category. At the same time, these statements needed to have minimal overlap with Willing's statements, already included in the questionnaire.

Table 4: Learning strategy statements

Rank	Learning Strategy Statement (see appendix)	Category	Means*	SD
	Mean subject agreement with 12 survey statements corresponding to Oxford's (1990) two learning strategy categories (N = 30)			
1	31) I learn best when I analyse language and understand it.	Direct	4	0.87
2	4) I learn best when I practice drills in writing, or orally.	Direct	4	0.72
3	14) I learn best when I review things regularly.	Direct	3.9	0.73
4	32) I like learning about English culture and customs.	Indirect	3.8	0.82
5	21) I learn best when I use pictures, or diagrams or sounds.	Direct	3.8	0.76
6	19) I am good at using gestures or finding simple words.	Direct	3.7	0.67
7	25) I like asking questions.	Indirect	3.6	0.89
8	20) I like rewards when I do well.	Indirect	3.6	0.73
9	7) I learn best when I put things in sentences or groups.	Direct	3.6	0.61
10	5) I don't mind making mistakes.	Indirect	3.4	0.83
11	12) I am good at guessing and predicting.	Direct	3.3	0.74
12	29) At home, I organise my study time well.	Indirect	2.9	0.74
1	**Overall Mean: Direct Strategies**		**3.75**	**0.76**
2	**Overall Mean: Indirect Strategies**		**3.47**	**0.84**
	*Note: Coding the subjects' responses as numeric values results in:	**Means** 1.00-1.80 => 1.81-2.60 => 2.61-3.40 => 3.41-4.20 => 4.21-5 .00=>	**Category** 'Strongly Disagree' 'Disagree' 'Undecided' 'Agree' 'Strongly Agree'	

In general, the subjects agree more strongly with *Direct-* rather than *Indirect-Strategy* statements, with five of the top six items relating to *Direct Strategies*. There is fair agreement between the subjects, as demonstrated by the relatively low standard deviations on the means. The lowest item, an *Indirect-Strategy* statement, Statement 29 '*At home, I organise my study time well*', is noticeably lower than the next lowest item.

The seven statements pertaining to Oxford's (1990) *Direct Learning Strategies* and the five statements taken from Oxford's *Indirect Learning Strategies* are graphed in separate groups, with the overall group means, in Figure 5.
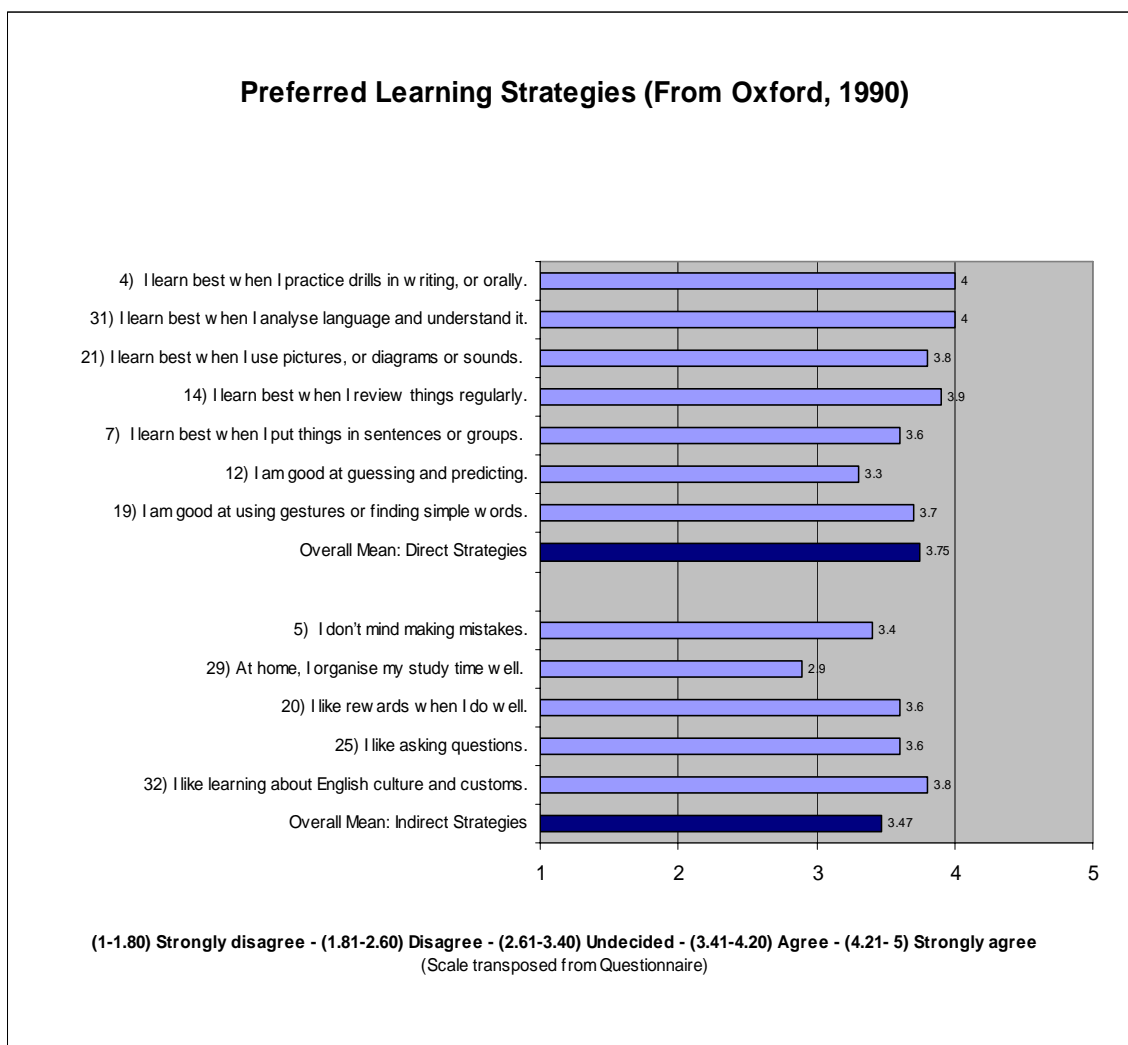
Preferred Learning Strategies (From Oxford, 1990)

Statement	Value
4) I learn best when I practice drills in writing, or orally.	4
31) I learn best when I analyse language and understand it.	4
21) I learn best when I use pictures, or diagrams or sounds.	3.8
14) I learn best when I review things regularly.	3.9
7) I learn best when I put things in sentences or groups.	3.6
12) I am good at guessing and predicting.	3.3
19) I am good at using gestures or finding simple words.	3.7
Overall Mean: Direct Strategies	3.75
5) I don't mind making mistakes.	3.4
29) At home, I organise my study time well.	2.9
20) I like rewards when I do well.	3.6
25) I like asking questions.	3.6
32) I like learning about English culture and customs.	3.8
Overall Mean: Indirect Strategies	3.47

(1-1.80) Strongly disagree - (1.81-2.60) Disagree - (2.61-3.40) Undecided - (3.41-4.20) Agree - (4.21- 5) Strongly agree
(Scale transposed from Questionnaire)

Figure 5: Direct learning strategies & indirect learning strategies.

Looking at Figure 5, we can see a consistently strong agreement with *Direct* learning strategy statements. The lowest is Statement 12 '*I am good at guessing and predicting*'. Agreement with the five *Indirect* learning strategy statements is slightly lower, with Statement 29 '*At home, I organise my study time well*' tending towards disagreement.

Discussion and classroom implications
The results of this survey study with adult EFL students in a Thai business setting have some interesting implications for business English classrooms.

Because student learning styles are global and affect both preferred classroom activities and language learning strategy use, it is important to know whether students in Thailand conform to the picture that is painted of Asian EFL students in general, that is, of highly visual, introverted, concrete learners, looking up to their teachers as a source of knowledge (e.g. Lu, 2004; Reid, 1987; Rao, 2001).

What was noteworthy in this study was that, contrary to what one would expect from reading the literature from other parts of Asia, the overall means for Willing's four learning style categories were very similar. That is, this group of adult Thai students did not express an overwhelming preference for any particular style. This would suggest

that teachers can safely include a variety of activities and modes of instruction in their business classes.

Furthermore, although these Thai business students did, in fact, score reasonably highly on *Concrete* and *Authority-oriented* learning styles, they actually scored higher and more consistently on the five items related to Willing's *Communicative* scale. Thus, the overall means show slight, but consistent (with relatively low standard deviations) preferences for *Communicative* and *Concrete* learning styles, or Kolb's (1988) *Concrete Experience* dimension. This is good news for communicative classrooms, and is testament to Thai love of social interaction (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1997).

Given a background of rote learning and the respect with which teachers are traditionally regarded in Thailand (O'Sullivan & Tajaroensuk, 1997), the relatively high agreement, overall, with statements relating to Willing's (1989) Learning Style 2 '*Authority-oriented*' is not surprising. The particularly strong agreement with Statement 2 '*I like the teacher to explain everything to us*' is noteworthy. This has classroom implications for the presentation of new language points and suggests that, whether students are engaged in deductive or problem-based learning, the teacher needs to give a clear, explicit explanation of the language point to be learned at *some* stage in the lesson.

The subjects showed a low and variable agreement with Statement 30 '*I like to study grammar*'. Although this seems inconsistent with their desire for clear explanations, it does fit with their disinclination to participate in anything deemed 'boring' (Barnard, 2002), and may be a reaction against the 'traditional grammar' taught extensively in Thai schools. However, if an activity is 'fun', students may not realize they are learning or practicing 'grammar'. Teachers need to be aware, however, that students tending towards Kolb's *Concrete Experience* spectrum will be more interested in the communicative function of language than in analysing the grammatical form. Many of these students will have great difficulty with 'correctness'. This is borne out by repeated negative references to English grammar in the sentence completions. There is a dilemma here, however, in that, while these subjects reported not liking to study grammar, their comments indicated that, for many of them, it is their worry about grammatical errors that leads to shyness and self-consciousness when communicating with English-speakers.

In general, the subjects were lowest in their agreement for statements on the Learning Style 4 '*Analytical*' scale, expressing a particular disinclination to read newspapers at home. In addition to the low agreement with the grammar item already discussed, the subjects were low in their agreement with Statement 6 '*I like to study English by myself*", which is consistent with their high *Communicative* scores. The relatively low rating for all the reading items and the higher ratings for more 'practical' and communicative activities have implications for how lessons can be best organized, with emphasis on small groups and practical activities.

One item, Statement 3 '*I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes*', stands out from the other *Analytic* items, and seems to disagree with *Statement 2* relating to teacher explanations (above). It is possible, however, that the subjects are reading this as a predominantly face-saving, rather than problem-solving activity. Similarly, it seems that Statement 13 '*I like the teacher to give us problems to work on*' is relatively well

endorsed because of the '*us*' in the statement; this 'problem solving' is seen as a small-group (hence, communicative) activity.

The subjects' responses to Oxford's (1990) learning strategy statements show similar patterns, that is, *Direct* strategies, are responded to somewhat more favourably than *Indirect* strategies. The lowest item in each category, that is, *Direct* Statement 12 *'I am good at guessing and predicting'* and *Indirect* Statement 29 *'At home, I organise my study time well'* both require what is, in effect, a positive self-assessment. Although 'guessing' is not encouraged in traditional classrooms and students may have had little practice using prediction strategies, it is possible that there were also the problems stemming from Thai 'politeness', which proscribes immodesty. This is so well acculturated that it may have constrained respondents from providing strongly favourable assessments of their own abilities.

Even so, Thai students need to be taught explicit pre-reading and pre-listening prediction strategies, as this was, particularly for those who finished school some time ago, absent from their schooling. English was the only 'second language' for most of the students investigated, and they all came out of a school system where most of their language learning had been rote, grammar-translation-based and teacher-directed. These factors could negatively impact their previous experience of learning, and their understanding of their own learning processes. However, they expressed reasonable levels of enjoyment of English and motivation to learn the language, and this can be capitalized upon.

Although these students responded very favourably to the Communicative Learning Style items, most of them have insufficient contact with native speakers to make good use of this as a means of improving their spoken English. Although many of them said they were using English once or twice a week at work, it is not clear whether they are including their English class in this count. Others said they spoke to no English-speakers in an average week; although they use English for work purposes, much of this is in the form of letters, emails or technical manuals. Very few of them have English-speakers in their social circles. Ways need to be found to help them turn their enjoyment of communication into a more effective learning strategy.

Study limitations
Because of the exploratory nature of the study and the smallness of the sample size, significance tests were not conducted on any of the measures. Although the students seemed similar to business students in other venues around Bangkok, it is possible that the results here are idiosyncratic.

There were several difficulties in interpreting the data. Firstly, it is possible that respondents were willing to respond to an item even if they did not fully understand it. Even though the questions were framed in very simple language, misunderstandings would reduce reliability. A questionnaire with more checks and balances might solve this problem but could be unduly long.

Secondly, Thai 'politeness' could have inhibited disagreement. On the raw data, there is almost no strong disagreeing with any statements, skewing the data toward the positive. This is a common problem with all questionnaire data, so that looking at relative rather

than absolute scores, gives a more accurate picture. However, in this survey, this might have impacted more on some questions than others.

Of course, as with any measure of learning strategies, while students may express a willingness to use particular strategies, this does not tell us if they actually *do* use them, how often, or how effectively, leaving room for much further investigation.

Conclusion
This study was intended to give a brief overview of adult Thai EFL students and their learning styles and strategies. Clearly, adult students in business settings represent a broader mix of learning styles than might be expected, which has positive implications for learning strategy instruction.

Although learning strategies used in students' L1 may transfer to similar tasks in the second language (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), many students in the Thai EFL context come from a traditional, teacher-centred classroom, and therefore may be lacking those very strategies we wish them to be using. Thus, explicit strategy training may be essential. However, students are generally more comfortable with strategies that conform to their previous schooling experience, and it has been suggested that too great a gap between teacher styles and student styles can lead to dissatisfaction in both parties and consequent failure to meet learning objectives (Rao, 2001). Promoting strategies which conflict with students' values or expectations can be counterproductive because of confusion, anxiety, or even outright resistance (Rao, 2003).

We need to bridge these gaps carefully, scaffolding our strategy training as we would any other teaching. We need to teach to students' strengths, and from there, select a number of gaps or weaknesses to focus on. In the case of adult Thai students, we would continue to give them plenty of concrete, structured communicative activities, and to stress the strategy uses that underlie these. Many students will have little or no experience with metacognitive processes, that is, with thinking about their own learning, and therefore, may not recognise their own behaviours as 'learning strategies'. Eliciting information about learning styles and strategy use as a whole-class activity ensures that students become more aware of what they are doing. At the same time, they will hear responses from students who favour different styles, and, in particular, from those better students, who may already be using the strategies we want all our students to learn and practice. Reframing their language-learning activities in this way teaches them about strategies while building their confidence, both in themselves and in us as 'knowledgeable experts', which will, in turn, allow them to try new things.

Learning styles, even though reasonably stable, can be stretched providing the predominant styles are recognised and accommodated while providing students with opportunities to try learning strategies they would not normally consider. This group represented styles and strategies from all categories. Whether they are typical of Thai business students or whether their expressed range of strategy use had already been expanded because of their previous English study is unclear but indicates their receptiveness to a variety of learning modes.

Teaching language learners the strategies that are associated with positive learning outcomes makes intuitive good sense. Surely the best way to ensure that our students learn English, especially when we have limited classroom time with them or when our time with them is coming to an end, is to teach them *how to learn.*

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Appendix: Questionnaire

What do you think about learning English?
Questionnaire

I want to find out what Thai students think helps them learn best, so I can help my current and future students learn better. Your answers and comments are **strictly confidential**, and the questionnaire should not take you long to fill in. If you have questions or comments, **please** ask me!

Demographics:

Age: _____   Sex: M ☐ F ☐   Job title: _____

Study background:

What year did you finish school? _____   What year did you finish university or college? _____

Language study:

Have you learned any languages **other than English**?

If **yes**, what language, and how many years have you studied it:

Language 1: _____   Years studied: _____

Language 2: _____   Years studied: _____

How much English have you studied since finishing university? _____

How **confident** are you with (Circle the appropriate number):

	Very Confident		OK		Not at all Confident
	☺		OK	☹	
1. Writing English	1	2	3	4	5
2. Understanding written English	1	2	3	4	5
3. Speaking English	1	2	3	4	5
4. Understanding spoken English	1	2	3	4	5

How much do you **enjoy** (Circle the appropriate number):

	Very Much		OK		Not at all
	☺		OK	☹	
1. Reading and writing English	1	2	3	4	5
2. Speaking and listening to English	1	2	3	4	5

Language usage:

How often do you use English **at work**?   *(Mark one ☒):*

Almost every day ☐   3-5 times a week ☐   1-2 times a week ☐   Monthly ☐   Less than once a month ☐

How many English-speaking people do you talk to **at work** most weeks?   *(Mark one ☒):*

None ☐   at least 1 or 2 ☐   between 2 and 5 ☐   around 5-10 ☐   more than 10 ☐

How often do you use English **outside work (socially, or for fun)**?   *(Mark one ☒):*

Almost every day ☐   3-5 times a week ☐   1-2 times a week ☐   Monthly ☐   Less than once a month ☐

How many English-speaking people do you talk to **outside work** most weeks? *(Mark one ☒):*

None ☐   at least 1 or 2 ☐   between 2 and 5 ☐   around 5-10 ☐   more than 10 ☐

What do you think about learning English

Read each of the following statements'. How much do you agree or disagree with them?

Mark (×) the best answer.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1) In class, I like to learn by listening to CDs and tapes.	SA	A	U	D	SD
2) I like the teacher to explain everything to us.	SA	A	U	D	SD
3) I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes.	SA	A	U	D	SD
4) I learn best when I practice drills in writing, or orally.	SA	A	U	D	SD
5) I don't mind making mistakes.	SA	A	U	D	SD
6) I like to study English by myself.	SA	A	U	D	SD
7) I learn best when I put things in sentences or groups.	SA	A	U	D	SD
8) At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers.	SA	A	U	D	SD
9) At home, I like to learn by listening to CDs and tapes.	SA	A	U	D	SD
10) I like to learn by talking to friends in English.	SA	A	U	D	SD
11) I like to learn by pictures, films, videos.	SA	A	U	D	SD
12) I am good at guessing and predicting.	SA	A	U	D	SD
13) I like the teacher to give us problems to work on.	SA	A	U	D	SD
14) I learn best when I review things regularly.	SA	A	U	D	SD
15) At home, I like to learn by watching TV in English.	SA	A	U	D	SD
16) In class I like to learn by conversations.	SA	A	U	D	SD
17) I like to learn English words by seeing them.	SA	A	U	D	SD
18) I like to learn English words by hearing them.	SA	A	U	D	SD
19) I am good at using gestures or finding simple words.	SA	A	U	D	SD
20) I like rewards when I do well.	SA	A	U	D	SD
21) I learn best when I use pictures, or diagrams or sounds.	SA	A	U	D	SD
22) At home, I like to learn by studying English books.	SA	A	U	D	SD
23) I like to learn every thing down.	SA	A	U	D	SD
24) I like to write every thing down.	SA	A	U	D	SD
25) I like asking questions.	SA	A	U	D	SD
26) In class, I like working with a partner.	SA	A	U	D	SD
27) In class I like to learn by games.	SA	A	U	D	SD
28) I like to go out and practice with native speakers.	SA	A	U	D	SD
29) At home, I organise my study time well.	SA	A	U	D	SD
30) I like to study grammar.	SA	A	U	D	SD
31) I learn best when I analyse language and understand it.	SA	A	U	D	SD
32) I like learning about English culture and customs.	SA	A	U	D	SD
33) In class, I like to learn by reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
34) If work didn't pay for class, I would still study English.	SA	A	U	D	SD

Finish the sentences:

What I like about English is: _____

What I don't like about English is: _____

Thank you!

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