

Towards an Integrated Approach to Cabin Service English Curriculum Design: A Case Study of China Southern Airlines' Cabin Service English Training Course

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Abstract

This paper has reviewed the history of EOP (training) development and then illustrated the curriculum design of cabin service English training from the three perspectives of ESP, CLIL and Business Discourse. It takes the cabin crew English training of China Southern Airlines (CZ) as the case and puts forward an operational framework composed of three integrated essential elements: language basic skills, cabin service practices and cabin service communication competence. It argues that on the basis of mastery of language skills and cabin service practices flight attendants should further to improve their communication competence as the course objective of cabin service English training.

Keywords: CZ, cabin service English training, curriculum design, case study

1. Introduction

With the further development of “One Belt and One Road Strategy” (Note 1), not only do the land and sea transportation need developing quickly, but air transportation has been pushed forward very fast, because transportation ways including land, sea and air play the crucial role in the success of the globalization cooperation strategy of China. And there is no doubt that the aviation market has been consequently booming, due to the increase of business traveling, exhibition and tourism etc. Therefore, more and more international flight routes will be quickly launched in order to meet the huge demand of air traffic. And thus, qualified aviation professionals with good intercultural communication competence such as dispatchers, ground staff, and flight attendants etc. are urgently required. To be specific, these professionals are not only required to be expertise in their working practices, but competent at intercultural communication in English at workplace.

Flight attendants are a group of special staff who only offer services to passengers in cabin. With a large number of international flight routes being launched and operated, a big challenge for the flight attendants' communication competence comes into being. Specifically, the flight attendants may serve more foreign passengers, which requires them to communicate with passengers from all over the world well in English in order to satisfy the passengers. China Southern Airlines Training Department (CSTD) did a survey in 2013 and showed that majority of flight attendants did not fit for international flights because of their low proficiency in English. In order to cultivate more qualified flight attendants, CSTD has begun to offer cabin service English training courses since 2013. As a branch of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) (Stevens, 1988; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Jordan, 1997), EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) aims to cultivate more qualified professionals who can communicate in English at different occupational situations, which conforms to the current “One Belt and One Road Strategy”. Cabin service English is used by flight attendants in cabin while serving passengers, which is undoubtedly subject to EOP.

The observation on the cabin service English training conducted by CSTD and survey of the trained flight attendants (Note 2) indicate some problems: 1) The training course is mainly designed by CSTD and trainers, while flight attendants' needs are not sincerely examined before training; 2) the course design is similar to General English consisting of speaking, listening and reading which focus language foundation knowledge and general skills, meanwhile each module is mainly instructed in Chinese; 3) After training, most flight attendants

cannot properly apply English to cabin services. With reflection on the problems above, cabin service English training is supposed to be different from General English training or pure Business English training and requires further research on curricula, syllabuses, courses and training materials etc.

The study presents an overview of the relevant researches on EOP (training) development and curricula and then discusses the cabin service English curriculum design from the perspectives of ESP, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and Business Discourse by taking China Southern Airlines (CZ) cabin service English training course as a case study. Finally, it suggests a working framework for cabin service English curriculum design by gaining the insights from the integration of three perspectives above. In doing so, the present study attempts to shed light on EOP curriculum design.

2. Review of the Related Researches

Based on Dudley-Evans and St. John's classification (1998), EOP is a direct branch derived from ESP and defined as English for Occupational Purposes with courses for professional, vocational or pre-work purposes. In other words, EOP is supposed to be more specific discipline related with completely clear-cut learning aims.

In the discussion of EOP training courses, Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) suggest that general English courses usually precede professional ones. They argue that learners need a good foundation before attempting to achieve demanding job tasks in a foreign language. With this point, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) continue to maintain that, although EOP can be taught to beginners, the norm is to wait until they have acquired a basic command of the language if specific work related goals are to be gained. However, the paper attempts to put forward a doubt whether it is efficient to separate the language basic skills acquisition from work related practices learning. Is it possible to integrate the two types of learning simultaneously, especially for professionals who have limited leaning time?

According to Widdowson (1983), in ESP syllabus there has been no distinction between the eventual target behavior of the learners (aims) and the pedagogical constructs which enable the learners to achieve the behavioral targets (objectives), so that the content of the course will be determined based on the "needs analysis of a specific purpose language situation". However, Douglas (2000, p. 11) once criticizes that "ESP teaching suffered from a lack of theoretical motivation for course design, and become a very narrowly focused training exercise in which learners were taught specific behaviors but not strategies enabling them to adapt to new, unspecifiable situations". As Widdowson points out (1983), including a kind of "ability for use" or schemata in designing a discourse model can be a reply to this criticism against EPP teachers and discourse/genres analysts who treat professional genres as simply textual artifacts (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990) that "EPP students are unable to handle the discursive realities of the professional world although they are fully aware of the textual features of the professional genres" (Yekta, 2014).

More recently, however, some researchers begin to integrate discursive and professional practices of the professions that always complement each other (Bargiela & Nickerson, 1999; Bazerman & Paradis, 1991; Bhatia, 2004; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Russell, 1997; Smart, 1998; Swales, 1998). The paper, on the basis of case study of CZ, aims to demonstrate an integrated model of professional practices and discursive competence are essential parts for cabin service English training in order to cultivate qualified flight attendants.

3. Three Perspectives and Case Analysis

In the paper, three perspectives of ESP, CLIL and Business Discourse are integrated to design cabin service English curriculum because the integration shows the following strengths: 1) The integration helps understand the trainees' needs thoroughly; 2) It is beneficial for trainees to acquire the language skills and occupational practices simultaneously together; 3) And finally it enhances improvement in communication competence at workplace.

In the following will be the case analysis of CZ cabin service English curriculum design from three perspectives which also answers three research questions:

Q1: What will be taught in cabin service English training?

Q2: How to teach the cabin service English?

Q3: What is the course objective(s) of cabin service English training?

3.1 ESP and Cabin Service English Training

ESP is quickly developed in the 1960s as a major reform in English teaching. By contrast with General English teaching, it is different in terms of syllabus design and material design. ESP is first clearly defined as a language for specific related jobs such as civil servants, police, lawyers, doctors, agriculturists and engineers etc.

(Halliday, MacIntosh, & Strevens, 1964). Although the introduction of ESP has been changing and developing all the time, there seems to have a consensus among researchers (Munby, 1978; Widdowson, 1983) that ESP is for a particular work area and prioritizes the learner needs. Based on these agreed concepts, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) further to point out that ESP must be seen as an approach, rather than a product. They highlight that ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology and should be properly understood as an approach to language learning, which is tightly based on learner needs. The idea gains the support from Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, pp. 4-5). They underpin the understandings of ESP by proposing two criteria: absolute characteristics and variable characteristics (Table 1).

Table 1. Absolute and variable characteristics of ESP (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, pp. 4-5)

Absolute characteristics	Variable characteristics
1. ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner.	1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines.
2. ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves.	2. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English.
3. ESP is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse, and genres appropriate to these activities.	3. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be used for learners at secondary school level.
	4. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advance students. Most ESP courses assume basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners.

With the Table 1, three absolute and four variable characteristics are identified. Among these characteristics, besides highlighting meeting the learner needs, ESP may be designed for specific disciplines for adult learners in a professional work. Furthermore, ESP does not strictly require the language proficiency levels of learners which means no matter the learners' language proficiency is good or bad, ESP may be adapted to teach them. With the guidance of these characteristics of ESP, EOP training gains the insights and develops quickly. Ellis and Johnson (2002, pp. 7-9), for example, provide valuable information on designing training programs for work-experienced learners, which also sheds light on the present study. The cabin service English training is in the case in point. It is designed for the discipline of cabin service for the experienced cabin crew whose mastery of English may be quite varied.

With the principles of ESP, the cabin crew English training begins with flight attendants' needs analysis which is aimed at revealing the needs in communication in English of flight attendants at work. The target needs data consist of information about the flight attendants' necessities, lacks, and wants in learning English, while the learning needs data is mainly composed of information about their attitude, preference, and learning habit. In order to collect the data, the questionnaires are handed out to 300 flight attendants (Note 3). Because pursers or chief pursers work for more years than newly-recruited or junior flight attendants and gain more experience of cabin service, some of pursers or chief pursers are selected to be interviewed in order to gain more hands-on experience data. When the data is collected, it is classified into four groups of needs, the flight attendants' necessities, lacks, wants and their learning needs.

The flight attendants' necessities in learning English consists of: make an announcement before taking off or landing, cabin routine services (welcome boarding, baggage placement services, safety demonstration, drink and meal services, in-flight entertainment services, special passengers' services, duty-free items services, international flight transfer services and immigration application services, and sky pearl club services), and dealing with some emergencies etc. In sum, the flight attendants' necessities in learning English is to be able to serve passengers in English in cabin during the whole flight journey. The lacks of the flight attendants are accessible pronunciation, cabin service related vocabulary mastery, and good abilities of applying variety of sentence structures, which not only prevent them from expressing their ideas well at work, but damage their confidence in speaking English in the cabin services. Furthermore, the wants of the flight attendants surveyed are

to communicate with passengers well in English and make the passengers satisfied with their cabin services. Some flight attendants confess that it is difficult to communicate with passengers smoothly, even if they can speak some English. It often happens that poor communication incurs passengers' complaints.

As for learning needs, it is found that the flight attendants' attitude toward English learning is positive as they are aware of the importance of English in their job. In our case of CZ flight attendants, there is a very important reason that English proficiency determines their salary and career promotion. Therefore, they are very ambitious to improve their language proficiency and communication competence in English.

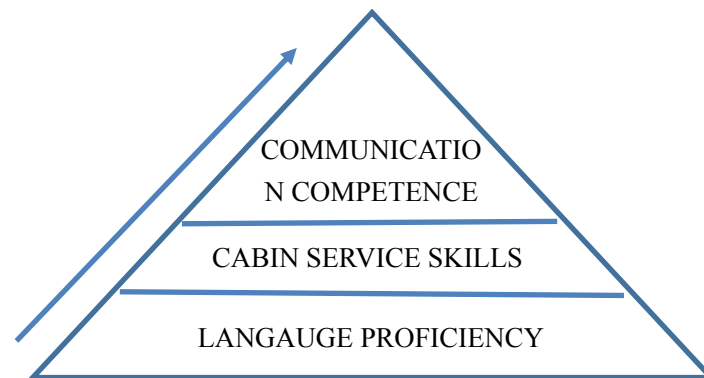


Figure 1. Hierarchical needs ladder

To sum up, the paper synthesizes their needs into 3 elements in a hierarchical ladder in cabin service English training 1) language proficiency (understandable pronunciation, cabin service related vocabulary, and grammar etc.) 2) cabin service skills (greeting, requesting, offering, persuading, selling, dealing with emergencies and dealing with special passengers etc.) 3) communication competence with foreign passengers. With the communication competence, the flight attendants may serve the passengers well and improve the cabin service quality. These needs are interrelated with each other from the easiest one, language proficiency to the most difficult one, communication competence. In accordance with the needs analysis results and guidance of ESP perspective, the paper makes clear that the cabin service training course should not only focus on the language aspects, but equip them with cabin services related skills and help improve the communication competence. Although ESP works well to identify what the cabin service English should teach, it cannot be invoked to answer the second question of how the cabin service English is taught.

3.2 CLIL and Cabin Service English Training

As a specific discipline of EOP, cabin service English training may require a customized methodology. ESP perspective proposes that cabin service English training should concentrate on both the language training and cabin service related skills or contents training. Integrating content and language learning together, CLIL may offer an operational methodology to cabin service English training.

CLIL is coined in the 1990s in Europe (Dalton-Puffer, 2007) and is an integrated term referring to a dual focused educational approach in which content courses are taught through the medium of a foreign language (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, & Smit, 2010a, 2010b; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010). One of the best known L2-medium programmes is immersion which is a type of CBI (Content Based Instruction).

Zarobe and Cenoz (2015, p. 1) indicate that CLIL should be a kind of integration of terms such as CLIL, bilingual education or CBI, with all its variants which include "immersion". Denman, Tanner and Graaff (2013) summarize the principles of CLIL as follows: "Foreign language development is facilitated in subject classes, and content knowledge development is supported by content-based language learning strategies in language classes". In the study, CLIL can be adapted into the following concept that the flight attendants improve their English by learning cabin service knowledge, practices, procedures or culture related courses through the medium of English. By this means, can their English proficiency be really enhanced?

In Europe, many studies have confirmed the effectiveness on enhancing learners "linguistic competence in CLIL education. As Dalton-Puffer (2008) argues, CLIL learners' linguistic performance is generally satisfactory in certain areas such as listening and reading skills, vocabulary, morphology, creativity, fluency, and risk-taking. Other studies indicate that not only are receptive linguistic skills significantly enhanced in CLIL education, but

productive competence, for example, speaking skill is also improved. CLIL learners have been found to produce more and longer utterances, develop constructive abilities in the L2 and display a higher language level than non-CLIL learners (Coyle, 2013; Denman, Tanner, & Graaff, 2013; Lo, 2014; Ruiz, 2008; Wannagat, 2007). With ESP, needs analysis discovers three classified needs aspects, language, cabin service skills and communication competence which are mainly subject to productive competences and are proved to be enhanced by the prior studies if taking CLIL approach.

The implementation of CLIL takes different forms that are related to the educational and contextual settings in which it takes place. In the case of cabin service English training, content and language integrated learning should take the following factors into consideration.

1) Content

The content learning should tightly related to the cabin service. All the trainees in the case have working experiences and are all familiar with the cabin service knowledge, practices and procedures in their mother tongue. And thus, thorough understanding of their work may facilitate their cabin service content based language learning. By introducing cabin service content in English, the flight attendants can associate content learning in English with their daily work, which helps them to acquire the content in English more easily.

2) Language

The language learning could not separate from the cabin service content. The trainees have very clear occupational specific needs, so pure language learning cannot satisfy their needs. For example, pronunciation teaching is supposed to link with cabin announcement. The flight attendants practice cabin announcement with the guide of pronunciation rules, which seems to be more effective. As for grammar learning, it sounds unfruitful to instruct the flight attendants the grammar rules systematically. It is more functional to identify the grammar points mostly used in cabin service and concentrate on learning relevant ones. During training, the flight attendants are guided to apply these grammar rules to the imitated cabin service situations.

3) Means of integrating content and language

In the case, the means to apply CLIL in cabin service English training courses include announcement imitation, team working, role play, or situational conversation. By taking team working as an example, the flight attendants can work together to learn the cabin service vocabulary. Because they have experience in cabin services, and they can work out the vocabulary lists and share with their fellow colleagues. The vocabulary may not be accurate in English, so they are encouraged to discuss together to find out the wrong ones. The teacher can finally correct them too. Thus, the trainees can integrate content and language learning effectively. By the means of situational conversation, the flight attendants may practice speaking English in imitated working situations. For instance, the flight attendants play roles to take care of the elderly. They have a situational role play of learning to speak English properly to look after the passenger well, which helps to integrate the content and language learning. They improve their language proficiency through the professional practices.

4) Duration of cabin service English training

As mentioned above, CLIL is argued to be a kind of integration of terms such as CLIL, bilingual education or CBI (Zarobe & Cenoz, 2015, p. 1). One type of CBI is immersion which is L2-medium programme. Cabin service English training in the case also offers “immersion” atmosphere. The duration time of immersion is crucial in the approach of CLIL. The longer the immersion time is, the more effective the learning is suggested to be. Each cabin service English training course lasts three weeks and all the trainees have three weeks off work and are immersed in the course without any job distractions. It sounds that three weeks are much shorter than the other immersion programs, however, it may be the longest off-duty interval the flight attendants can afford.

It is noticeable that teaching content through the medium of a second or additional language is challenging especially when the English level of trainees keeps a large difference. Because of the differences of language proficiency of the flight attendants, their understanding of the English instruction varies. Therefore, in the specific teaching situations or tasks bilingual instruction may be accepted, for one form of CLIL is bilingual education.

3.3 Business Discourse Perspective and Cabin Service English Training

Until now, with the perspectives of ESP and CLIL, the curriculum for cabin service English training sounds achievable, because the training contents have been tailored and the relevant methodology is identified. However, more questions are raised: 1) Can the flight attendants who achieve higher proficiency in English speaking communicate with the passengers well? 2) Are these flight attendants with good English speaking skills

are qualified flight attendants in cabin? Based on the questions, the paper presents the third research question of what is the course objective of cabin service English training.

In order to answer the third question, the Business Discourse view has to be employed. Business discourse is defined all about how people communicate using talk or writing in commercial organizations in order to get their work done (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2014) which implies that what is said or written is not a pure language form but a social practice with a certain purpose in a specific context. The language-as-discourse view takes both language and the context in which it operates into consideration. English spoken by flight attendants in cabin should not be simply treated as language but a discourse which helps flight attendants serve the passengers. Discourse analysis looks at the way in which language communicates the meaning, social and power distance (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2014). Therefore, when the flight attendants speak English, the context is supposed to be the crucial factor. Halliday's (1978) conception of register is tightly relevant. Register is used to relate language forms to the context in which they are used. The variables of field, tenor, and mode in turn relate linguistic choices to the three contextual variables-subject matter, interpersonal relations, and the channel of communication (Halliday, 1978). It is quite clear to conceptualize the flight attendant English's register as a specific variant of EOP. In a simpler way, the cabin crew English is spoken in cabin between cabin crew and passengers almost face to face. To be more specific, the three situational determinants are as follows:

1) Field

The first of the three situational determinants is the field of discourse which concerns not only "what we are talking about"—the subject matter that the actual chat group focuses on, but also concerns "what we are doing", or "what is going on", within which language is playing a part (Halliday, 1978). In the case, the field of communication is a specific business service situation in cabin. However, the situation is not stereotyped but changeable and there are supposed to be different sub-communicative situations such as boarding service, baggage placement service, safety demonstration, drink and meal service, and in-flight entertainment service etc. which are illustrated above and form a particular genre of cabin service English.

2) Tenor

The second of the three situational determinants carries the information on "who are taking part" (Halliday, 1978, p. 189). In Halliday's understanding, the tenor of discourse results from the speech communication and reflects the relationship, contact and attachment among members (ibid: 33). The social relations between the members are usually reflected in the social status of power and solidarity. Cabin service participants include both flight attendants and passengers. It is clear to define the relationship between them as service givers and service receivers. Passengers who pay for the flight and deserve a good service may have the higher power position in the communication. Flight attendants who earn money by serving them have relatively lower power position. Therefore, flight attendants should show respect and offer satisfactory services to passengers, which determines they are supposed to be polite and considerate, thus making passengers feel like at home.

3) Mode

The third situational determinants is the mode. In linguistic terms, "mode" refers to either a medium of communication (spoken/written) or a rhetorical channel (Halliday, 1978, p. 222). They form a special relationship in that the former predetermines the latter and the latter is an indicator of the former. Thus, mode of discourse answers the question "how" the communication is carried out and makes the third situational determinant of the discourse. Halliday's (1978) semiotic structure of the situation stresses that it is only through mode that field and tenor become operational. The cabin service English is spoken between the cabin crew and passengers and their communication should be brief or easily understandable. Generally speaking, common vocabulary and short sentences are often used in most communication situations in cabin. The communication between them should be direct but polite and tedious talk should be avoided in routine cabin services. Undoubtedly, there are exceptions when some emergencies happen.

Halliday's conception of register reminds the flight attendants of the communication contexts. If cabin crew want to communicate with the passengers well and make their work satisfactory, they should understand their communicative contexts such as subject matter, interpersonal relations, and choice of media and channels of communication, which finally determines the success of communication.

4. An Integrated Approach to Cabin Service English Training Curriculum

Bhatia's (2002) proposes the conception of professional expertise consisting of three essential parts: disciplinary knowledge, professional practice, and discursive competence. Gaining insight from the model and the case study above, the paper also puts forward a curriculum framework that integrates language basic skills, cabin service practices and communication competence (discursive competence) in cabin. The framework is tailored to train qualified flight attendants with composite competences.

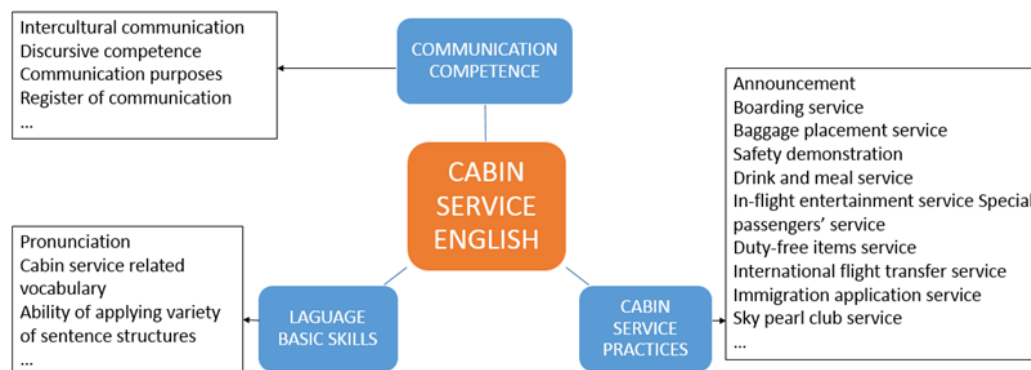


Figure 2. Cabin service English curriculum framework

As from the framework, cabin service English training consists of language basic skills, cabin service practices, and communication competence. They are not autonomous but tightly interrelated each other. The language basic skills are the foundation of the cabin service practices and it is not suggested to be learned separately but acquired through practicing cabin service practices. Both language basic skills and cabin service practices help build up communication competence. However, only good language abilities and cabin service practices do not lead to good communication competence because good communication concerns more aspects such as register, intercultural communication, and discursive competence and so on. These give insights to the design of cabin service English training curricula.

5. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the history of EOP (training) development and then illustrated the curriculum design of cabin service English training from the three perspectives of ESP, CLIL and Business Discourse. Firstly, the paper proposes that language skills, cabin service practices (skills) and communication competence should be main concepts in cabin service English training; Furthermore, CLIL is supposed to be an effective way to integrate cabin service knowledge to language learning. And finally, improving cross-cultural communication competence should be the utmost objective of the course.

Specifically, the paper takes CZ cabin crew English training as the case and puts forward an operational framework which can be applied to all cabin service English training. The tailored framework is composed of three interrelated essential elements: language basic skills, cabin service practices and communication competence. The framework concentrates on integration of language acquisition and cabin service practices and simultaneously highlights communication competence is the utmost course objective of cabin service English training.

By designing CZ cabin service English training curriculum, the paper proposes the integrated approach and formulates an operational framework which attempts to directly provide some insights into curriculum design and offers some implications on EOP training for teachers, trainers and researchers.

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Notes

Note 1. “One Belt and One Road Strategy” is also known as the “Belt and Road Initiative”. It is a development strategy and framework, proposed by People’s Republic of China that focuses on connectivity and cooperation among countries primarily in Eurasia, which consists of two main components, the land-based “Silk Road

Economic Belt” (SREB) and oceangoing “Maritime Silk Road” (MSR).

Note 2. Since 2013, CSTD has begun to offer Cabin Crew English Training course for the flight attendants. Due to some objective reasons, Only around 30 flight attendants from the headquarters and branches of CZ can be selected to take part in the training each session. There are usually 7 training sessions or so each year.

Note 3. There are nearly 12,000 flight attendants including ones in headquarters and branches of CZ. The questionnaire survey is only conducted on flight attendants in the headquarters. The reasons are as follows: Firstly, most of the cabin crew in the headquarters have the experience in flying internationally; Secondly, due the convenience of the location, it is more convenient for the authors of the study to collect the data and do interviews accordingly.

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