A poetic conspiracy: the rhyming pattern of the first person plural prepositional form *-mp-ny* in Middle Breton

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A POETIC CONSPIRACY: THE RHYMING PATTERN OF THE FIRST PERSON PLURAL PREPOSITIONAL FORM *-MP-NY* IN MIDDLE BRETON

Abstract

Based on its rhyming pattern, the 1pl. prepositional ending with an enclitic pronoun is argued to have been /-Vni/ in the language of *Le Grand Mystère de Jésus* (and probably of *Buhez sante Barba*), not the expected /-Vmpni/. The form in /-Vni/ is explained as having arisen through analogy within the paradigm of inflected prepositions with an enclitic pronoun. The form is not directly attested in writing in Middle Breton, but occurs in Early Modern Breton and in the modern Cornouaillais dialect.

1. Middle Breton versification as a tool

Middle Breton poetic texts generally follow a strict system of syllable counting combined with final and internal rhyme.[1] This formal structure offers a valuable point of departure for linguistic analysis, providing information about the phonology of the language which is not always revealed by the spelling conventions. This includes hiatus, sonorant length and, to an extent, proclisis.

These rules may allow us to identify words or passages that have undergone textual corruption during transmission. When a given word, phrase or construction *repeatedly* and *consistently* rhymes in a way that runs counter to the way it is spelled, we may assume that something other than what is written was intended phonemically. Such a mismatch between spelling and rhyme could be due to changes made to the text(s) after composition. However, it does not always have to be the result of textual corruption. A clear case of systematic and intended mismatch is seen in the representation of the consonant mutations in word initial position and in transparent compounds. Here the consonant mutations are generally not written, but they are taken into account for the purpose of rhyme and thus are clearly there in a phonemic sense. An example of this is provided by the following line from *Le Mirouer de la mort* (M):[2]

M 2415. *Ha tan grizias hastiff, ouz ho lesquiff dimat*
'and scorching fire swiftly burning them cruelly'

[1]For detailed descriptions see Ernault (1900; 1912), Loth (1900; 1902: 177–203), Kervella (1965), Jones (1977), Pennaod (1979: 165–76), Le Menn (1999), Le Berre (2011: 613–26; 2012: 81–109).

[2]Ed. Ernault (1914) and Le Berre (2023).

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The obligatory internal rhyme is expected to be between the penultimate syllable (the "in-rhyme") and a preceding final syllable immediately before a caesura. The caesura after *hastiff* is fixed, ensuring that the rhyme must be in /iv/, /if/, /iμ/ or /iu̯/ in this line. We may therefore safely read[3] the line as

M 2415. *Ha tan grizias hastiff, ouz ho lesquiff di[ff]at*

with a main rhyme between *hastiff* 'swiftly', *lesquiff* 'burning' and *di[ff]at* 'cruelly, badly', the internal rhyme revealing the lenition after the privative prefix *di-* in *dimat*, yielding /diμad/.[4]

Systematic mismatches between spelling and versification are not restricted to productive mutations, however. A different type of systematic mismatch will be investigated in this paper.

2. The first person plural prepositions with an enclitic pronoun

The specific issue investigated in this paper relates to the rhyming pattern of the 1pl. ending *-Vmp*[5] of inflected (or 'conjugated') prepositions with an additional enclitic pronoun *-ny*, *-ni* /-ni/ 'us',[6] forms like *deompny* 'to us' (from *da* 'to'), *entrompny* 'among us' (from *entre* 'among, between').

In the following, I will examine all attestations of such forms in obligatory rhyming position known to me from the major works of Classical Middle Breton poetry.[7] The majority of attestations, seven in total, are found in *Le Grand Mystère de Jésus*[8] (Jpass. and Jres.).[9] Of the seven attestations in J, the following five appear to be defective with respect to the rhyme:

da 'to, for'
Jpass. 90/1855. *Eguyt se ez compse ef* ***deompny***[10]

[3]This is not to suggest that the texts should be emended in this way, only that the spelling does not always reflect the phonemic level.

[4]Compare Nl. 419 *Da monet d-e ty, peur difat*, where the lenition is spelled out.

[5]The Middle and Modern Breton prepositional ending *-Vmp* replaces the Proto-Brittonic ending **-Vnn*, which is still preserved in Middle Welsh and Middle Cornish. Middle Breton *-mp* was imported from the verbal system and ultimately reflects the 1pl. present ending **-mos(i)*, with the unlenited **-mm-* taken from the verb 'to be', where **es-m-* yielded **emm-*. The origin of the final *-p* in Breton *-Vmp* is unclear.

[6]Of the type described by Hemon (1975: 76).

[7]This comprises *Le Grand Mystère de Jésus* (J), *Le Mystère de Sainte Barbe/Buhez sante Barba* (B), *Le Mirouer de la Mort* (M), *La Vie de Sainte Nonne/Buez santes Nonn* (N), *L'ancien Mystère de Saint Gwénolé/An Buhez Sant Gwenôlé* (G), *An Nouelou ancien ha devot* (Nl.), *Trois Poèmes en Moyen-Breton* (Pm.), *La Destruction de Jérusalem* (Jer.) and *An Dialog etre Arzur Roe d'an Bretounet ha Guynglaff* (Dag.).

[8]Ed. Hersart de la Villemarqué (1895) and Le Berre (2011).

[9]Abbreviated here as Jpass. = the Passion and Jres. = the Resurrection in order to distinguish between the two parts of J.

[10]Ideally, *ef* would be part of the main internal rhyme, rather than *compse*, due to the fact that we expect the caesura to come after *ef*. However, the internal rhyme is clearly in /e/, as shown by *Eguyt se* earlier in the line. Moreover, the line is hypermetric, possibly indicating that *ef* should be deleted. Le Berre (2011: 210) instead suggests that *Eguyt se ez* should be contracted to *Eguyt se*

'However, he said to us'

Jres. 219/4467–9. *Na leueret quet en fet se*
Rac mar publiet drouc graet ve
Ha preiudicc cref ve ***deompny***[11]
'Do not talk about that matter,
For if you divulge it, damage would be done
And grave harm would be for us'

Jres. 220/4478. *Breman plen a certen* ***deompny***
'Right now certainly for us'

gant 'with, by'
Jpass. 162/3315–7. *Dan lech ha don ty ancien*
Donn em confort en vn ordren
Monet breman plen ***gueneomp ny***
'To the place and to our old house
To console each other,
Going right now with us'

entre 'among, between'
Jpass. 70/1140–1. *Maestr special doe ro saluo*
Ha roz enoro ***entrompny***
'Dearest master, may God keep you safe
And may he honour you among us'

In these examples we see that what is written <eomp> in *deompny* 'to us, for us' and *gueneomp ny* 'with us' and <omp> in *entrompny* 'among us', the sequence expected to carry the in-rhyme,[12] does not take part in the rhyme as we would expect. In other words, five of the seven instances of this grammatical category in J appear to be defective with respect to the rhyme. This is clearly noteworthy and calls for an explanation. We may note that in all four cases of <eomp> (*deompny*, *gueneomp ny*), the surrounding text either requires (as indicated by the end-rhyme of the preceding line(s)) or suggests an in-rhyme in /e$(C)V/[13] or /en(C)V/.[14] The single instance of <omp> *(entrompny)* requires

'z. This would also produce the correct syllable count.

[11] One might interpret this as a rhyme between *cref* /eμ/ and *deompny* /eo/ (if such a rhyme is considered acceptable). However, this cannot be the case, since the preceding lines require the internal rhyme to be of the open-syllable type in /e/.

[12] The in-rhyme is the obligatory 'pivot' rhyme, usually falling on the penultimate syllable of the line. It determines the main internal rhyme of the line. In some verse structures, the in-rhyme is itself determined by the end-rhyme of the preceding line (as in Jres. 219/4467–9, Jpass. 162/3315–7 and Jpass. 70/1140–1 in the examples discussed here).

[13] $ marks a syllable boundary. The notation /e$(C)V/ does not necessarily imply the presence of zero or one consonant after the rhyming vowel, but simply indicates an open syllable that would be able to provide a rhyme with word-final /-e/. Crucially, /emp$nV/ does not provide a suitable rhyme.

[14] But this does *not* include a rhyme /ennV/.

an in-rhyme in /o$(C)V/. This means that we expect the penultimate syllable of the lines to contain /e$(C)V/, /en(C)V/ and /o$(C)V/.

In some of the examples above, it might appear that the penultimate syllable is skipped and that the in-rhyme is irregularly placed on the antepenultimate syllable. However, as argued in §3 below, this interpretation is unlikely to be correct.

2.1 Ambiguous lines

The two remaining instances of 1pl. inflected prepositions with an enclitic pronoun in J are ambiguous with respect to the rhyme pattern:

da 'to, for'
Jres. 209/4263. *En hent plen gueneomp ha* ***deompni***
'On the road with us, and to us'

gant 'with, by'
Jpass. 155/3187. *Guell eu deomp ren plen* ***guen eomp[ny]***[15]
'It is better for us to take with us'

These two lines could be understood as having a completely regular main internal rhyme *gueneomp* = *deompni* and *deomp* = *gueneompny* respectively. However, the presence of words providing a rhyme in /en/ in both lines – *plen* and *ren*, *plen*, respectively – is noteworthy. In light of the fact that the four defective instances of *-eompny* in rhyming position discussed above in §2 all indicate a rhyme in /e$(C)V/ or /en(C)V/, it would be more parsimonious to assume that these two ambiguous lines present the same rhyming pattern, with a main internal rhyme in /en/ correctly placed on the penultimate syllable (for reasons that will become clear later).

2.2 A rhyming conspiracy

As shown above, five out of the seven attestations of the 1pl. preposition with an enclitic 1pl. pronoun fail to display the expected in-rhyme. This is, in itself, cause for suspicion. When we add the fact that the in-rhyme predicted by the context in *all* cases seems to be /en/ or /e/ (for *deompny* and *gueneomp ny*) and /o/ (for *entrompny*) and the pattern becomes even more striking – a proper rhyming conspiracy.

3. Antepenultimate in-rhyme?

It might be argued that some of the instances of 1pl. prepositions with enclitic *-ny* given in §2 should be interpreted as showing antepenultimate in-rhyme (in-rhyme falling on the third-to-last syllable) rather than the usual penultimate in-rhyme (in-rhyme falling on the second-to-last syllable). Under this assumption,

[15]Line-final *-ny* is missing from the text, but its presence is indicated by both the end-rhyme and the syllable count. It may therefore be taken as a fairly secure emendation (as also proposed by Hersart de la Villemarqué and Le Berre).

the line Jres. 220a/4478 *Breman plen a certen deompny* discussed above would be formally correct: it has the required number of syllables and the required internal rhymes. The only irregularity would be the placement of the in-rhyme on the antepenultimate syllable, *certen*. However, as argued in Jørgensen (2007: 59–94), the placement of the in-rhyme on the antepenultimate instead of the penultimate syllable is not a random event. There is a specific limitation to when this kind of in-rhyme may happen: antepenultimate in-rhyme is almost exclusively allowed if the penultimate syllable is taken up by a proclitic word, such as the definite article (*an*), a preposition (*en, da, oar, ouz*), a verbal particle (*a, ez*), a possessive pronoun (*da, hon*), conjunctions (*ha, na*), etc. This may be exemplified by stanza 224 from noel 17 of *An Nouelou ancien ha deuot* (Nl.):[16]

Nl. 224. *Pemp mil blizien ancquen* ***à voe***
Oz gortos Doue enou[e]et,
Be[t] ma-z maruent, ez eant ***da-n tan***
Buhan gant Sathan poaniet,
Iesu so deuet, lamet ***hon crim***
Ma-z omp a-n lim redimet

'After five thousand years of anguish
Waiting for God, troubled
Until they died, they went to the fire
Swiftly tormented by Satan,
Jesus has come, taken away our crime,
So that we are redeemed from limbo'

Here we see how the proclitic syllables in the syntagms *à voe* 'was' (verbal particle *à* + stressed 3sg. preterite verb *voe*), *da-n tan* 'to the fire' (preposition *da* 'to' + definite article *an* + stressed noun *tan* 'fire') and *hon crim* 'our crime' (1pl. possessive pronoun *hon* + stressed noun *crim* 'crime') are skipped. In each case the in-rhyme instead falls on the preceding, antepenultimate syllable, *ancquen*, *eant* and *lamet*, respectively.

Counterexamples in which the in-rhyme skips a *non-proclitic* penultimate syllable are sufficiently rare that we may generally assume they are either the result of textual corruption during transmission, a rare slip on the part of the poet,[17] or a misunderstanding of the rhyme pattern on our part.

The option of using antepenultimate in-rhyme by skipping a proclitic word in the penultimate position is not exploited equally across the different texts. It occurs very frequently in *An Nouelou ancien ha deuot,* somewhat less often in *An Buhez Sant Gwenôlé*,[18] and only rarely in *Le Mirouer de la mort* (the texts examined in Jørgensen 2007). Irrespective of the frequency, the general restriction of antepenultimate in-rhyme to lines with a proclitic word in the penultimate position seems to apply to all the Classical Middle Breton poetic

[16]Ed. Hersart de la Villemarqué (1889, 1890, 1891, 1892) and Pennaod (1984).
[17]In which case it should not be systematic.
[18]Ed. Ernault ([1935]) and Widmer and Jørgensen (2011).

works, with the exception of *Buez santes Nonn*, which does not appear to use the option at all, and possibly *Tremenuan an Ytron guerches Maria, Pemzec leuenez Maria* and *An Dialog etre Arzur Roe d'an Bretounet ha Guynglaff*, which are either unusually corrupt or follow a less strict system of versification.

J does not differ substantially from the main Middle Breton poetic corpus in this respect. This has consequences for the evaluation of the rhyming pattern of *deompny*, *gueneompny* and *entrompny* in J: since /(e)omp/ must have been stressed and not proclitic,[19] it is highly unlikely that the irregularity in rhyme can be explained by invoking antepenultimate in-rhyme.

4. The rhyming pattern of inflected prepositions with enclitic pronouns

Given that five out of a total of seven attestations in J behave in an irregular way, one may wonder whether this reflects a general problem with inflected prepositions with enclitic pronouns. However, inflected prepositions, when occurring with enclitic pronouns in other persons (1sg. *-Vffme*, 2sg. *-Vde*, 2pl. *-V(ch)huy*), show very few cases of irregular or absent in-rhyme. And when there are irregularities, they do not point to any specific underlying rhyme pattern. This is exemplified by attestations of *da, gant* and *digant* from J (there are no examples of inflected *entre* with suffixed pronouns in obligatory rhyming position):

da 'to, for'	
Jpass. 45/923.	*En reprim da credif* ***difme***[20]
Jpass. 59/1194.	*Disclaeryet autrou prim* ***difme***[21]
Jpass. 21/382.	*A ve hardiz da comps* ***dihuy***[22]
Jpass. 49/987.	*An Maestr a diquemenn* ***dihuy***[23]
Jpass. 73/1487.	*Mardeu me eu a fell* ***dihuy***[24]
Jpass. 118/2442.	*Aet gueneoch me en re* ***dihuy***[25]

[19] As it is in Modern LTK Breton (see, e.g., *ALBB* maps 109, 212 and 504).

[20] /dime/ rhyming with *reprim* (or, less likely, /diɰme/ rhyming with *credif*).

[21] /dime/ rhyming with *prim*.

[22] /dixu̯i/ provides a weak rhyme with *hardiz* /hardiθ/. This is understandable, given the rarity of words ending in /-ix/ (apart from *dich* itself).

[23] The verb *diquemenn* 'to summon' (ModBr *degemenn*) fits the context well and is probably intended, in spite of the later variants *An maestr à dy quemenn dy huy* (1609 edition) and *An maestr á dy á queme'n dy huy* (1622 edition). However, this intrepretation means that there is no syllable ending in /-i(x)/ before a caesura to provide a rhyme with *dihuy*. Therefore, this line is apparently missing an internal rhyme. I am grateful to Hervé Le Bihan for his help with this passage.

[24] /deoxu̯i/ rhyming with *eu*.

[25] /deoxu̯i/ rhyming with *gueneoch* or /dexu̯i/ rhyming with *guene[]ch*. Formally, an open syllable rhyme between /dexu̯i/ and *re* is also possible, though less likely.

Jpass. 154/3181.	*Bennos Doe a pedaf* ***dihuy***[26]
gant 'with, by'	
Jpass. 54/1095.	*Dre ouz eux guelet lem* ***guenefme***[27]
Jres. 190/3869–3871.	*Na pe tu ezoude cuzet* *Da hem discuez pan ouf queuzet* *Dif vn pret mar plig* ***guenede***[28]
Jres. 216/4405–7.	*A te gra goap ac achapet* *Eu ef lauar yach na nach quet* *Perac nac eu ef deuet* ***guen ede***[29]
Jpass. 104/2169.	*Maza ma sae me* ***guynihuy****?*[30]
Jpass. 155/3195.	*Meyel oar en lech* ***gueneoch huy***[31]
digant 'from'	
Jres. 221/4505.	*Dioar an lech* ***diguenech huy***[32]

As can be seen, there are no indications that first and second person forms of inflected prepositions with enclitic pronouns behave substantially differently from other stressed words. And when there are irregularities, they appear unsystematic and do not point in any specific direction. We may therefore conclude that, for whatever reason, the systematic irregularity in the rhyme pattern is specifically restricted to the 1pl. of prepositions with an enclitic pronoun.

5. Reinterpreting the rhyme pattern

There is one way to accept the rhyme pattern of the 1pl. prepositional forms without altering the meaning of the text. Given that in four cases of *deompny* and *gueneomp ny* the expected in-rhyme is /en(C)V/ or /e$(C)V/ (§2), and that the remaining two attestations are fully compatible with such a rhyme pattern (§3), I will suggest that *all* instances of *deompny* and *gueneomp ny* in J should be read accordingly – as /deni/ and /geneni/, respectively. This produces a completely regular in-rhyme placed on the penultimate syllable:

[26] /dexu̯i/ rhyming with *Doe*? Or – highly speculative, but providing a much better rhyme – /deoxu̯i/ rhyming with *Doe[u]*, a form possibly preserved in HVann. *duéù* < PBrit **duru̯*. On the Vannetais form, see Ernault ([1905]: 58).

[27] /geneme/ rhyming with *lem*.

[28] /genede/ rhyming with *cuzet*, *queuzet* and *pret*.

[29] /genede/ rhyming with *achapet*, *quet* and *deuet*.

[30] /genexu̯i/ rhyming with *me*?

[31] /genexu̯i/ rhyming with *lech*.

[32] /digenexu̯i/ rhyming with *lech*.

da 'to, for'
Jpass. 90/1855. *Eguyt se ez compse ef* ***de[]ny***

Jres. 209/4263. *En hent plen gueneomp ha* ***de[]ni***

Jres. 219/4467–9. *Na leueret quet en fet se*
Rac mar publiet drouc graet ve
Ha preiudicc cref ve ***de[]ny***

Jres. 220/4478. *Breman plen a certen* ***de[]ny***

gant 'with, by'
Jpass. 155/3187. *Guell eu deomp ren plen* ***guen e[][ny]***

Jpass. 162/3315–7. *Dan lech ha don ty ancien*
Donn em confort en vn ordren
Monet breman plen ***guene[]ny***

The assumption that /-Vmpni/ could be reduced to /-Vni/ in the 1pl. of inflected prepositions – for reasons that will become clear in §9 – is supported by the final example of a 1pl. preposition with enclitic pronoun in obligatory rhyming position, *entrompny*. Based on the preceding line ending in *saluo*, we know that the in-rhyme should be in /o$(C)V/. On the surface, however, *entrompny* cannot participate in this, because the syllable in /omp$n/ is closed and therefore requires a rhyme in /om/ or /omp/. If we read /-oni/ instead of /-ompni/, this line becomes completely regular:

entre 'between, among'
Jpass. 70a/1140–1. *Maestr special doe ro saluo*
Ha roz enoro ***entro[]ny***

We may conclude that in J the rhyming pattern of *all* instances of 1pl. prepositions with an enclitic pronoun either requires or is compatible with forms ending in /-Vni/, rather than the /-Vmpni/ suggested by the spelling.[33]

6. Evidence from other texts

This particular rhyming pattern of the 1pl. prepositions is not unique to J. Unfortunately, examples of 1pl. prepositions with an enclitic pronoun in obligatory rhyming position are much rarer in other texts. The sole attestation from *Buhez sante Barba* (B)[34] appears in a line that, at first glance, seems

[33]If one assumes that the medial /p/ was lost in the heavy cluster /mpn/, it might just be possible to argue for a syllabic division /V$mnV/. This would allow some of the problematic instances to be read with a regular rhyme – for example, Jres. 219/4469 may be read as *Ha preiudicc cref ve de[]m[]ny*, with /kre/ and /ve/ rhyming with /de$mni/. However, there is no evidence that such a syllabic division is valid, and /mn/ is not a permissible initial cluster in Middle Breton. In fact, the one parallel word in the language with <Vm(p)n>, *dam(p)n-* 'to damn' from OFr. *dampner*, consistently rhymes as /am/ (or as /aɰ(n)/, indicating that the variant *daffn-* from Lat. *damnāre* is intended). Moreover, this explanation would not account for those cases which require a rhyme in /en/.

[34]Ed. Ernault (1888) and Le Berre (2018).

defective, lacking any internal rhyme:

B 371/2271. *Tau, Riualen, pe laz* ***dimp ny***
'Be quiet, Riualen, what does it matter to us?'

There are only two possible internal rhymes earlier in the line: *Riualen* /-en/ and *laz* /-að/. Remarkably, the line becomes completely regular if the 1pl. preposition *dimp ny* 'to us' is read as /deni/, just as in J, yielding a perfect rhyme between *Riualen* and *d[e]ny*:

B 371/2271. *Tau, Riualen, pe laz* ***d[e]ny***

A single line from the *Tremenuan an Ytron guerches Maria* (Pm. (Trem.))[35] has *guenempny* in an obligatory rhyming position but appears to lack the expected internal rhyme:

Pm. (Trem.) 119/5314. *Ne vyoude quet* ***guenempny***
'You were not with us'

We expect the internal rhymes earlier in the line to be performed by *quet* /-ed/, the syllable before the only caesura in the line. However, this clearly does not lead to an acceptable rhyme. The line might become acceptable if *guenempny* is read as /geneni/, producing an open-syllable rhyme with *vyoude*:

Pm. (Trem.) 119/5314. *Ne vyoude quet* ***guene[ ]ny***

However, we do not expect a caesura after *vyoude*, so the line can probably not be considered completely regular. Moreover, the *Tremenuan an Ytron guerches Maria* is highly irregular in its versification. Therefore, a single possible instance of rhyme in /-eni/ for written *-emp-ny* cannot necessarily be trusted, especially as it involves a simple vowel rhyme, which is more likely to be accidental.

There are lines in other texts that may be improved by assuming a 1pl. form /-Vni/. The first hemistichs of M 1499 *Pez á taluoe dymp ny, hon bout glorifius?* and M 2519 *Pez á taluoe dimp ny, bezaf glorifius* may be understood as *Pez á taluoe* ***d[e]ny***. However, in both cases the lines are not defective in their original form, and the proposed rhyme involving /deni/ could just as well be accidental (there are similar situations in M 119 and B 546/3359).

Remarkably, rhymes indicating /-Vni/ in the 1pl. inflected prepositions with an enclitic pronoun appear to be far more common in Middle Breton than rhymes indicating /-Vm(p)ni/, despite the fact that only the latter is reflected in the spelling. The only instances of obligatory rhyme in /-Vm(p)ni/ known to me occur in Nl.:

[35] Ed. Hemon (1962) and Le Berre (2011).

Nl. 111. *Scriffet prym eo* ***deonny***[36]

Nl. 418. *Da digacc lem eo deuet* ***deompny***

Admittedly, one could also interpret these lines as containing a rhyme *eo* = *deompny*.[37] If this was preferred, there would be no rhyming evidence from Classical Middle Breton in favour of an ending /-Vmpni/. However, the presence of the semantically vague but phonemically distinctive words *prym* and *lem* earlier in the lines strongly suggests that these instances should be interpreted as reflecting /-Vmpni/:

Nl. 111. *Scriffet prym eo* ***d[imp]ny***[38]

Nl. 418. *Da digacc lem eo deuet* ***d[em]pny***

7. Summary of the Classical Middle Breton evidence

The evidence for 1pl. prepositional forms with an enclitic pronoun in obligatory rhyming position may be summarized as follows:

/Vm(C)i/:	2× (Nl. 111, 418)
/Vm(C)i/ or /Vn(C)i/:	2× (Jpass. 155/3187, Jres. 209/4263)
/V$(C)i/:	4× (Jpass. 70/1140–1, Jpass. 90/1855, Jres. 219/4467–9, Pm. 119/5314)
/Vn(C)i/:	3× (Jpass. 162/3315–7, Jres. 220/4478, B 371/2271)

Given that these attestations are expected to contain the enclitic pronoun /-ni/, the material may be interpreted more narrowly as follows: we find two instances of the 1pl. preposition with suffixed pronoun rhyming as /Vm(p)ni/, two instances that may either rhyme as /Vmpni/ or as /Vni/, four instances of open-syllable rhyme /V$(C)i/ – most likely to be read as /Vni/ and certainly incompatible with /Vmpni/ – and three instances of rhyme as /Vni/ (two in J and one in B). It is probably significant that the variation seems to be distributed according to the text, with evidence for the 1pl. /-Vni/ appearing in J, B and possibly Trem., and evidence for /-Vm(p)ni/ being restricted to Nl. Whether this is due to a dialectal, stylistic or chronological difference remains to be determined.

8. Understanding the spelling

How can we reconcile the rhyming evidence for /Vn/ with the consistent spelling <mpn> or <mp n>? One possibility is that <mpn>, <mp n> was

[36] Fleuriot (1964a: 263) and Hemon (1975: 89–90) interpret *deonny* 'to us' (Nl. 111) as an instance of reduction of the 1pl. prep. with an enclitic pronoun. However, it is far more likely that this should be treated as a simple printer's error – of which there are many in the Nl. – for intended *deom(p)ny*.

[37] Assuming this type of rhyme is permissible, for the sake of the argument.

[38] This reading is also suggested by Pennaod (1984: 129).

introduced by later copyists, and that the texts in their original form had <n>. The discrepancy could then reflect dialectal differences between the language of composition and that of later scribes or printers. Alternatively, the variation might reflect stylistic differences, assuming that 1pl. /-Vni/ and /-Vmpni/ were distributed according to register. Finally, the difference could be chronological, if we assume that forms in simple /n/ were original and that /mp/ was reintroduced from the inflected prepositions without an enclitic pronoun.

The complete lack of written evidence for reduced forms in /Vn/ is nevertheless a potential cause for concern. Ideally, we would want to accept the spelling as reflecting the original intention, while still allowing the forms to rhyme regularly. In light of this, it is possible that the uniform spelling <mpn> or <mp n> reflects the partially morphophonemic writing system in this particular case – just as it does in several others. The underlying, morphophonemic //-Vmp+ni// may have been chosen as the written form, even if this was phonemically realized and rhymed as /-Vni/ in the language of the writer(s). Put differently, the writer(s) correctly inferred that the 1pl. prep. /-Vni/ consisted underlyingly of the morphemes of the 1pl. prep. ending //-Vmp// and the enclitic pronoun //-ni//. Accordingly, Middle Breton //entromp+ni// – realized phonemically as /entroni/ and rhyming as such – was still spelled <entrompny>. There is nothing particularly remarkable about this in a Middle Breton context. The same principle applies to the general lack of representation of the initial mutations. Even more to the point, the 1sg. inflected prepositions with an enclitic pronoun appear to show the same behaviour. Here we find the underlying 1sg. prepositional ending //-Vμ// + enclitic pronoun //me// represented in writing in J:

> Jpass. 54/1095. *Dre ouz eux guelet lem* ***guenef me***
>
> Jpass. 59/1194. *Disclaeryet, Autrou, prim* ***difme***

However, the rhyme indicates that the 1sg. prepositional ending and the enclitic personal pronoun had been assimilated to phonemic /-Vme/ in the language of the poet,[39] a fact not reflected in the spelling in J.[40]

9. The origin of the first person plural in /-Vni/

Having argued for the existence of /-Vni/ in 1pl. inflected prepositions with an enclitic pronoun, we may now turn to the origin of the form. How can we account for the apparent absence of the 1pl. prepositional ending *-mp* before the enclitic 1pl. pronoun *-ny*? We would expect /-Vmpni/, which is also the form consistently reflected in Middle Breton spelling. At first glance, it may

[39] Other texts provide direct spelling evidence for the assimilation: *dime* (B 768/4721, M 670) and *dyme* (M 694).

[40] J 45/923 *en reprim da credif difme* is formally ambiguous, but it is most parsimonious to assume that it behaves like the unambiguous cases, with the rhyme being between *reprim* and *di[]me*.

appear as if there was a phonemic reduction of *-m(p)n-* to *-n-*. Such a reduction would find a parallel in MBr *ganiuedenn* (Ca. 90), Early ModBr *caneueden*, *queneuen* (SCger. 8)[41] and ModBr *kanevedenn* 'rainbow', corresponding to OCo *camniuet*. This is often interpreted as consisting of **kam* 'crooked' followed by a derivative of **neμ* 'heaven' (Ernault 1888: 294; Henry 1900: 52; Deshayes 2003: 535).[42] If this etymology is accepted, it would show a reduction of **mn* to **n* in Proto- or Common Breton (see *NALBB* map 145 'rainbow', which shows no trace of /m/). This would imply that the 1pl. prepositions in /-Vni/ represent the regular outcome of **-Vm-ni*, and that forms in /-Vmpni/ (as seen in the Nl. and in Modern LTV Breton) arose through influence from the simple 1pl. form /-Vmp/, without an enclitic pronoun.

However, the etymology of *kanevedenn* is less secure than often assumed. While it might contain PBrit **kam* 'crooked', it is equally possible that Cornish *camniuet* was remodelled to contain *cam-* under the influence of this adjective. The second part,[43] which is most straightforwardly reconstructed as **-nɪβed* or **-nɪu̯ed*, is usually seen as a derivative of **neμ* 'heaven', but this interpretation poses significant phonological challenges.

That there was no general reduction of **mn* to **n* seems particularly likely given the clear evidence for the preservation of PBrit **mn* in MBr *amneseuc* (Cb., Cc.), *amnesec* (Cms., Ca.), only later reduced to *amesec* (Cb. fol. 21a/s.v. *cõtigu*, M 1003), ModBr *amezeg* 'neighbor', ultimately from PBrit **amnesɔg*.[44] As this example shows, PBrit **mn* was retained in the earliest attested Classical Middle Breton but was later reduced to *m*. In light of this, a regular reduction of *m(p)n* to *n* in Classical Middle Breton would be difficult to justify.[45]

9.1 An analogical explanation

There may be a way to explain the 'endingless' 1pl. forms in /-Vni/ that does not involve any actual sound change and thus does not conflict with the development of **amnesɔg* > MBr *amnese(u)c* > ModBr *amezeg*. Once we consider the system of inflected prepositions with an enclitic pronoun outside the 1pl., it becomes easy to see how forms in /-Vni/ could have arisen analogically. This will be illustrated by a selection of forms of *da* 'to' and *gant* 'with, by':

da 'to, for'	
1sg. /dime/	*difme* (Jpass. 59/1194, rhyme with *prim*), *dime* (B 768/4721, M 670), *dyme* (M 694)

[41]The dictionary sections of Maunoir's *Le sacré college de Iesvs*, ed. Le Menn (1996).

[42]Deshayes (ibid.) even opts for a Modern Breton spelling *kanneñvedenn*, despite the lack of evidence for nasalization of the second vowel. This is presumably due to the assumption that the word contains a derivative of *(n)eñv* 'heaven'.

[43]If that is how the word is to be segmented.

[44]Consisting of PBrit **am-* 'about, around', **nes* 'closer' and the suffix **-ɔg*.

[45]French loanwords with *m(p)n* contribute little to the question. While the cluster is preserved in, e.g., MBr *dampnaff* 'to damn' ← OFr. *dam(p)ner* < Lat. *damnāre*, such loanwords may have entered the language later than a reduction of **mn*, or may have been protected from sound change due to continued French influence.

2sg. /dide/	*dide* (B 380/2327, rhyme with *dellit*, B 30/178, 228/1382, etc.)
2pl. /dixu̯i/	*dihuy* (Jpass. 21/382, rhyme with *hardiz*), *dyhuy* (G 495, 969), *dichuy* (B 53/319, 85/513, etc.)
gant 'with, by'	
1sg. /geneme/	*guenef me* (Jpass. 54/1095, rhyme with *lem*), *guenеme* (Pm. (Trem.) 20/4915, rhyme with *lem*), *gueneme* (G 100, 101)
2sg. /genede/	*guenede* (Jres. 190/3871, B 312/1905), *gue[n]ede* (Nl. 118), *guen ede* (Jres. 216/4407)
2pl. /genexu̯i/	*gueneoch huy* (J 155/3195, rhyme with *lech*), *guynihuy* (Jpass. 104/2169, rhyme with *me*(?)), *guene[ch] huy* (B 511/3148, rhyme with *lech*), *guenechuy* (B 541/3325, rhyme with *lech*, G 57, rhyme with *lech*), *diguenech huy* (Jres. 221/4505, rhyme with *lech*)

These forms lend themselves to an analysis as combinations of an invariable stem (/di-/ or /gene-/) and the enclitic personal pronouns 1sg. /me/, 2sg. /de/, 2pl. /xu̯i/. In light of this, it is easy to see how new 1pl. forms /dini/ and /geneni/ may have been created by adding the 1pl. pronoun /ni/ to the perceived inflectional stem of the preposition.[46] This applies equally to the stem class in *-o-*, explaining the existence of the 1pl. /entroni/ 'among us', indicated by rhyme in Jpass. 70/1441.[47]

10. The Modern Breton distribution of the first person plural prepositions in /-Vni/

In Modern Breton, 1pl. prepositions in /-Vni/ are found only in Cornouaille,[48] according to the *ALBB* (maps 109,[49] 212[50] and 504[51]). However, this only shows the minimal extent of the distribution. It is generally difficult to use the *ALBB* to rule out the presence of a given form or feature at any particular location. This is especially true here, since prepositional forms with enclitic pronouns typically occur side by side with prepositional forms without enclitic pronouns.

[46] The analysis of these forms as consisting of a bare prepositional stem + independent pronoun has also led to the reverse analogy, whereby a suffixed form like ModBr *genemni* was reinterpreted as *gene-mni*, leading to the creation of a new independent 1pl. pronoun *mni* (as in Berrien, Ploneis 1983: 83). Naturally, some 1pl. verbal forms with a suffixed pronoun may also have played a part in this reanalysis.

[47] Although inflected forms of this particular preposition are restricted to the plural for semantic reasons.

[48] And conversely, forms in [-m(p)ni] are rare in Cornouaille, but usual in the other dialects.

[49] *da*: pt. 36 [ˈdõni], 44 [ˈdini], 49 [ˈdõni], 55 [ˈdini], 56 [ˈdɛni].

[50] *gant*: pt. 44 [gʲeˈneni], 56 [geˈnõnɪ].

[51] *(di)ouzh*: pt. 49 [duɥiˈtõ ni].

In principle, any *ALBB* point that records only 1pl. forms without an enclitic pronoun could also have forms in /-Vni/, which simply happen not to have been documented by Le Roux. Nevertheless, it is probably safe to conclude that 1pl. forms in /-Vni/ are concentrated in Cornouaille[52] and are very rare outside that region.[53]

We should also keep in mind the possibility that forms in /-Vni/ may have been more widespread earlier. Forms in /-Vm(p)ni/ could easily have been restored on the basis of the prepositions without an enclitic, which will always have been /-Vm(p)/ in Middle and Modern Breton.[54] Nevertheless, if the modern distribution of forms in /-Vni/ is projected back onto the Classical Middle Breton period, it would suggest an interesting conclusion: that J presents an *innovation* – the creation of a 1pl. preposition in /-Vni/ – closely associated with Cornouaillais Breton. The same appears to hold for B, although this rests on a single rhyming attestation.

If we understand the rhyming evidence for a 1pl. in /-Vni/ as reflecting a dialectal feature, this would point toward a Cornouaillais origin of the texts using this form. However, this is not the only possible conclusion. Even if /-Vni/ is accepted as a dialectal form, its presence does not necessarily mean that the texts in which it appears consistently represent that dialect. It is conceivable that poets had access to multiple dialectal forms. If so, it would be easy to understand why /-Vni/ might have been preferred over /-Vm(p)ni/ in poetry: rhymes with /-Vni/ are far easier to construct, making it the more attractive option – other things being equal. To argue convincingly for a Cornouaillais origin of any given text, we would need to identify additional features pointing in that direction, and confirm that there is little or no evidence contradicting the hypothesis. That work remains to be done.[55]

[52]This picture is supported by the appearance of reduced forms in dialect descriptions from Cornouaille (sometimes alongside unreduced forms), e.g.:

Berrien: ['dɛni] *deomp-ni*, [gəˈnɛni] *ganeomp-ni* (Ploneis 1983: 155–6).

Plozévet: /doˈhuːniŋ/ *(di)ouzhomp-ni*, /niˈmjuniŋ/ *nemedomp-ni*, /ˈvjuːniŋ/ *evidomp-ni* (Goyat 2012: 256–64).

Saint-Yvi: /döɥiˈtônék/ *(di)ouzhimp-ni* (Gary German *apud* Heusaff 1996: 82).

Scrignac: [gəˈnɛˑni] *ganeomp-ni*, [dœˈhwɛˑni], [dœˈwɛːni] *(di)ouzhimp-ni*, [(e)vɛlˈdɛˑni] *evel-domp-ni* (Lozac'h [2024]: 104, 240, 605).

[53]There is also limited evidence for a reduced form in the dialect of the western Léonais island of Ouessant; see Loth (1895: 202, fn. 1) and, more recently, Madeg (2023: 157), who gives [gãˌnœˌni] alongside [gãnõmˌni], [ˌganeˌõmni] *ganeomp-ni*.

[54]Goyat (2012: 256–64) records a peculiar distribution in Plozévet (south-west Cornouaille) between reduced and non-reduced 1pl. suffixed forms. Unreduced forms appear in /ˈdõmniŋ/ (*deomp-ni*) 'to us' and /gaˈnõmˌniŋ/ (*ganeomp-ni*) 'with us', while reduced forms are found in /doˈhuːniŋ/ (*(di)ouzhomp-ni*), /niˈmjuniŋ/ (*nemedomp-ni*) and /ˈvjuːniŋ/ (*evidomp-ni*). The distribution may relate to the corresponding 1sg. forms. The suffixed 1sg. /ˈdime/ (*din-me*) and /gaˈniˌme/ (*ganin-me*) differ in the thematic vowel and thus offer little paradigmatic support for a reduced 1pl., making it likely that the 1pl. forms were remodelled after the forms without enclitics, /dõm/ (*deomp*) and /gaˈnõm/ (*ganeomp*). By contrast, the other prepositions show a 1sg. in /-ume/ (/doˈhume/, /niˈmjume/, /ˈvjume/), analysable as /u/ + /me/, which provides paradigmatic support for a corresponding 1pl. plural in /u/ + /niŋ/. These reduced 1pl. forms were therefore retained rather than being remodelled on the 1pl. forms without enclitics, /doˈhuõm/ (*(di)ouzhomp*), /niˈmitõm/ (*nemedomp*) and /ˈvitõm/ (*evidomp*).

[55]As argued in Widmer and Jørgensen (2011: 7–30), there is a case for viewing *An Buhez*

11. Spelling evidence for a first person plural in /-Vni/

It could be argued that the connection between a possible Middle Breton 1pl. ending in /-Vni/, indicated only through rhyme and never in spelling, and modern dialectal forms found at five points in the *ALBB* is tenuous at best. However, we do have direct and relatively early textual evidence for the reduced variant /-Vni/. In the *Cantic spirituel en enor d'an Autrou St. Julian* (CJul.; see Giraudon 2007), a canticle from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century with a pronounced eastern Cornouaillais flavour, we find a 1pl. *dini* 'to us', corresponding to Middle Breton *dimpny*:

CJul. 3.25–6. *Itron mar gousoc'huimedi,*
En han Doué leret dini

'Lady, if you know where he is,
In God's name, tell us'

It is likely that further instances of 1pl. <Vni> can be found in Modern Breton texts with significant Cornouaillais influence. The single attestation in CJul. confirms that the reduced form goes back at least to the Early Modern Breton period, making it entirely plausible that the feature was already present in Classical Middle Breton. The absence of any indication of a 1pl. ending /-Vni/ in Late Middle Breton may be attributed to the emerging northern dialectal bias in that period and/or the morphophonemic nature of the spelling system.

11.1 Old Breton first person plural prepositions in <Vnni>

A few Old Breton 1pl. prepositional forms with enclitic pronouns may be relevant to the discussion. We find OBr *contenni*[56] and *centenni*[57] 'with us', corresponding to MBr *guene(o)mpny* (*gant* 'with'), and *cemintronni* 'between us', corresponding to MBr *entrompny* (*entre* 'between').[58] The consistent spelling with <Vnni>, indicating a 1pl. /-Vnni/, suggests that these forms are not connected to the Middle Breton forms in /-Vni/ and their Modern Breton descendants. Rather, the Old Breton forms directly continue the inherited Proto-Brittonic 1pl. ending **-Vnn*[59] < PCelt **-V-snV-*, and are not the result of a reduction

Sant Gwenôlé (G) as representing the eastern Cornouaillais dialect of the time. This conclusion, however, rests on a broader evaluation of the linguistic features of the text, rather than on any single trait. Moreover, the language of G is probably somewhat later than that of J and B, meaning that more distinctive dialectal features had developed by the time G was composed. This makes a dialectal identification much easier.

[56]Angers, Bibl. Mun. 477, fol. 65a. See Fleuriot (1964b: 117) and Bauer (2008: 45).

[57]Angers, Bibl. Mun. 477, fol. 67a. See Fleuriot (1964b: 102) and Bauer (2008: 45).

[58]Angers, Bibl. Mun. 477, fol. 49a. This interpretation follows Lambert (1984: 188–9), who sees the form as a 1pl. /kəɥntronni/, consisting of **kəɥ-* 'with', **ɪntronn* 'between us' and **ni* 'us'.

[59]This is regularly reflected in the 1pl. prepositional ending in Early Middle Welsh *-n* and Middle Cornish *-n* (see Sims-Williams 2012: 11–14); compare the Old Irish 1pl. prepositional ending *-n(n)* (Thurneysen 1946: 272). The same ending probably survives in the Middle Breton adverb *ahanan(n)* /ahanann/, *ahanen(n)* /ahanenn/ and ModBr *ac'hann* 'from here' < OSWBrit 1pl. **ahanann* 'from us' (cf. MCo *ahanan* 'from us; from here'). The rhyming behaviour of *ahanan(n), ahanenn* and the fronting and raising of unstressed *-ann* > *-enn* clearly demonstrate that we should reconstruct /-nn/ for this morpheme for Proto-Brittonic (see Jørgensen 2024: 147).

of *-*Vmpni*. The Proto-Brittonic 1pl. *-*Vnn* was replaced before the Classical Middle Breton period by *-Vmp*, taken from the verbal system. The Middle Breton 1pl. /-Vni/ and its Modern Breton reflexes most likely derive from the usual MBr /-Vmpni/, by the analogy outlined above in §9.1.

12. The 'thematic' vowel

If we accept that the 1pl. prepositional forms of *da* and *gant* with an enclitic pronoun in J were in fact /deni/ and /geneni/, a few issues remain to be clarified. The proposed forms display a 'thematic' vowel /e/ before the zero ending and the suffixed pronoun, in contrast to the transmitted spelling of J, which consistently shows *deompny*, *gueneompny* with <eo>. However, this discrepancy is not insurmountable. Regardless of whether the development from *-Vm(p)ni* to *-Vni* occurred via sound change (§9) or analogy (§9.1), the forms /deni/ and /geneni/ posited here would likely derive from earlier forms in *-empny*, rather than the *-eompny* we find written. Such forms in *-empny* are in fact directly attested in spelling, though not in rhyme, as in *guenempny* (Jres. 228/4648, Pm. (Trem.) 119/5314). These, in turn, are built on suffixless forms in *-emp*, such as *guenemp*, which appears in a non-obligatory rhyme with *pe̲m̲dez* (G 214). In the case of *gant*, the forms in /-em(p)/ and /-em(p)ni/ are most likely older than those in /-eom(p)/ and /-eom(p)ni/. The preposition *gant* forms its own inflectional class, with a stressed vowel /e/ between the prepositional root allomorph /gen-/ (for expected /gent-/) and the personal endings. Thus, /geneni/ ← **genem(p)-ni* is entirely unremarkable, and the consistent spelling <eo> in J may simply reflect a later modernization.

The situation is more complicated in the case of /deni/, which is consistently spelled <deompny> in J. Neither **demp(ny)* – which appears to be unattested in Classical Middle Breton, at least in the poetic corpus[60] – nor *deomp(ny)* reflects the original form. The inherited 1pl. form of *da* is *dimp(ny)*, whose vocalism corresponds to OIr *dúnn* (< PCelt **dū-snV-*; see Schumacher 2012: 366, n. 9). The attested MBr *deomp(ny)* is therefore most likely analogical, based on *gueneomp(ny)*.[61] This, in turn, suggests that the form **demp(ny)* may have been created on the basis of *guenemp(ny)*.

Alternatively, it is possible that the form **demp*, with a thematic vowel /e/, derives from an earlier *deomp* (itself replacing *dimp*). A parallel may be found in the development of MBr *deomp*, the 1pl. imperative of *monet* 'to go', which is reduced to *demp* in, for example, B 42/250, 43/258, 369/2252 and 804/4944.

[60] Nl. 418 *Da digacc lem eo deuet deompny* is most likely to be read as having /dem(p)ni/, providing indirect evidence for the form. In addition, the corresponding analogical 2pl. *dech* is directly attested in J 126/2615. *Mar fell dech glan breman en bet*, though this instance is not secured by rhyme.

[61] The origin of the diphthong *-eo-* in *gueneomp* and *gueneoch* remains unclear, along with the irregular final stress in the first- and second-person forms of this preposition. It is possible that the diphthong originates in the 2pl., where both Middle Welsh and Middle Cornish show diphthongization (perhaps *-*Vu̯x* from *-*Vxu̯* < *-*V-su̯V-*?). If so, we would expect *guenemp* (and by extension **demp*) to be the older form, with *gueneomp* arising in analogy with *gueneoch*.

In Modern Breton, the 1pl. imperative form *dem(p)* is found across much of K and T (*ALBB* map 469), while *deomp* is primarly attested in L.

In Modern Breton, forms corresponding to MBr **demp(ny)* 'to us' are fairly widespread, appearing across parts of Cornouaillais, Vannetais and western Trégorrois (*ALBB* map 109). These forms may have been even more common earlier, as large parts of Cornouaillais and Vannetais have generalized the 1pl. ending *-omp* (i.e. *domp* 'to us'), following the productive *o*-thematic class. This shift to the *o*-class is likely to have been a later development and *domp* may have replaced an earlier form **demp* in many places.

There is nothing unusual about an inflected preposition having a thematic vowel that is spelled in one way but rhymes in another. Both *gant*[62] and especially *da* show considerable variation in their thematic vowels in Middle Breton, and mismatches between spelling and rhyme are frequent. For example, J uses <dihuy> for the 2pl. form of *da* with an enclitic pronoun, but this does not appear to have any close correlation with the phonology. In obligatory rhyming position, <dihuy> rhymes as /dixu̯i/ twice (Jpass. 21/382 and Jpass. 49/987), /deoxu̯i/ twice (Jpass. 73/1487 and 118/2442(?)) and /dexu̯i/ once (Jpass. 154/3181). Similarly, B consistently spells the 2pl. form of *da* with an enclitic pronoun as <dihuy>, but in obligatory rhyming position it rhymes as /deoxu̯i/ (B 201/1221 and 217/1316). In light of such variation, the interpretations proposed above – for instance, reading B 371/2271 *Tau, Riualen, pe laz* ***dimp ny*** as *Tau, Riualen, pe laz* ***d[e]ny***, with the thematic vowel /e/ – seem entirely unremarkable.

13. Conclusion

The rhyming evidence for 1pl. prepositions with an enclitic pronoun suggests that, at least in J and B, such forms should not be read as /-Vm(p)ni/, but rather as reduced forms in /-Vni/. These 1pl. forms in /-Vni/ probably arose through analogy, based on the 1sg. /-Vme/, 2sg. /-Vde/ and 2pl. /-Vxu̯i/, being reanalysed as consisting of a bare inflectional stem in /-V-/ followed by enclitic personal pronouns. Following this pattern, a new 1pl. in /-Vni/ was created.

The 1pl. form in /-Vni/ is strongly associated with modern-day Cornouaillais dialects, and its presence in J (and to a lesser extent in B) may reflect a dialectal feature. If interpreted in this way, it would point to a contrast with Nl., which shows rhyming evidence for /-Vm(p)ni/.

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[62] For a collection of the inflected forms of *gant* in Middle Breton and Vannetais, see ar Menn (2009).

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