Dzala and Dakpa form a coherent subgroup within East Bodish, and some related thoughts

George van Driem

The problem with too many field notes is that there is never enough time to analyse and systematically present all the accumulated linguistic data. Earlier this month in northeastern Bhutan, during the collection of blood samples for the Bhutanese Genome Project, I was confronted with a sorely neglected portion of my field notes. My purpose here is to present some evidence for a statement written down in my field notes in the early 1990s during the First Linguistic Survey of Bhutan. The claim is that Dzala and Dakpa appear to form a coherent subgroup within East Bodish. The intimate proximity of the relationship is manifestly evident in the form of the large amount of shared or nearly identical core vocabulary and is corroborated by the intuitions of native speakers. East Bodish is part of Bodish, a well-defined branch within the Tibeto-Burman language family. The precise contours of Bodic, a presumably larger and still hypothetical superordinate node within the family encompassing at least Bodish, Tamangic and West Himalayish, remain indeterminate.

Something about Dzala

Dzala is the language of Trashi'yangtse district in the highlands along the upper course of the ཁོ་ལོང་ཆུ་ Kholongchu. Dzala is generally known in eastern Bhutan as ཛ་ལ་ཁ་ *Dzalakha* and known in Dzongkha as ཛ་ལ་བའི་ཁ་ *Dzalabikha*. The language is also called གཡང་རྩེ་བའི་ཁ་ *'Yangtsebikha* 'the language of 'Yangtse'. Dzala speakers refer to their language as *Dzala 'mat*, whereby *'mat* means 'language, talking, conversation'. The Dzala refer to the Tshangla or Shâchop as *Tshengmi* and to their language as *Tshengmi 'mat*. The Tshangla, in turn, make a perennial joke about the Dzala and their language because of the near homophony of the name Dzala and the Tshangla word *zala* 'monkey'. The ḥBrog-pas are called *Brokpa* by the Dzala, and their language is called *Brokpa 'mat*. Dzongkha is called སྒར་སྐད་ *Garke*, which means 'the language of the Garpas'.

The Dzala area extends beyond Trashi'yangtse district to west of the གདོང་ལ་ Dongla and the སྲིབ་སྲིབ་ལ་ Sipsipla as far as the Kurichu. The speakers of Dzala in Kurtö district, however, do not refer to their language as Dzalakha, but as མཁོ་མ་ཁ་ Khomakha. The Dzala dialect of Kurtö district is spoken east of the Kurichu and north of its lateral tributary, the མཁོ་མ་ཆུ་ Khomachu. The villages on the southern slopes overlooking the Khomachu are also Khomakha speaking. The most prominent Khomakha speaking village is the village of Khoma itself, located on the Khomachu about 8 km upstream from its confluence with the Kurichu. According to local lore, the village is named after a མཁོ་མ་ *khoma* 'desirable one' coveted by Pad-masambhava during his legendary peregrinations through Bhutan.

Lù Shàozūn (1986) describes a language which, judging from his description, appears to include a variety of Dzala spoken by the "Mönpas" to the northeast of Bhutan in Tibet. Lù reports that there are more than 40,000 "Mönpas" in the portion of Tibet north of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh who refer to themselves as མོན་པ་ Mönpa, which Lù records as [mønˀ pʌˠ], and whose language is referred to by themselves and by Tibetans as མོན་སྐད་ Mönke or Mönkê, which Lù records as [mønˀ kɛʔˠ]. The symbols in Lù's transcription after each syllable of transcribed segmental phonemes are Chinese tone letters, indicating the contours of the phonological tones which Lù presumes the language to have. These tone letters show a tonal contour attached to a vertical reference line and were first devised by Yuen Ren Chao (Yu and Chao 1930: 27; cf. Chao 1930).

Lù reports that there are two "dialects" of Mönke. What Lù refers to as the "southern dialect" is most certainly Dzala, and is spoken in the area around ལེགས་པོ་ Lekpo in མཚོ་སྣ་ Tsho'na county, just north of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh and northeast of the Dzala area of eastern Bhutan. The language which Lù refers to as the "northern dialect" of Mönke is spoken much further east in the area of སྟོང་མཇུག་ Tongju north of ཉིང་ཁྲི་ Nyingthri and in parts of མེ་ཏོག་ Metok county, for which the spelling མེ་ཏོག་ is also attested, and is not Dzala, but a variety of Tshangla, which is also spoken in a few settlements in the adjacent portion of Arunachal Pradesh and whose speakers are likewise known locally as "Monpa".

I first recorded Dzala language forms from སེང་གེ་རྡོ་རྗེ་ Singge Dôji, a cheerful clerk at the High Court at Thimphu who accompanied me on a journey throughout Bhutan in 1989 and took me to his house in the north-eastern corner of the kingdom, a day's walk from Trashi'yangtse. Later I first compiled a brief Dzala word list in the early 1990s during the First Linguistic Survey of Bhutan with the help of a young bloke, whose name I forgot to jot down, though I recall that he was from Khini village in Tötsho

Geo, formerly known as Jangphu Geo, in Trashi'yangtse district. Then, I checked and augmented this list on the 6th of November 2003 at Trashi'yangtse with the aid of a lad, aged 23 years, named ཀུན་ཁྲབས་ཚེ་རིང་ Künchap Tshering, who hailed from 'Licen village in Dalimang Geo in Trashi'yangtse district. Not all of my early 1990s data have been included in the present study.

Something about Dakpa

Dakpa is spoken in རྟ་ཝང་ Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh and in a few villages in eastern Bhutan abutting Tawang, e.g. ཕོངས་མེད་ Phongmê, སྐུ་ལིང་ Caleng, ཨོ་བི་ནང་ Yob'inang, དང་ཕོ་ལིང་ D'angpholeng and སྐྱིང་མཁར་ 'Lengkhar near རཪྡི་ Râdi. According to Aris (1979: xvi), the Tibetan vassal state of Tawang was known in Tibetan sources as དག་པ་ཚོ་ལྔ་ *D'akpa Tsho'nga* 'The Five Hosts of the Dag-pa', but the spelling དགས་པ་ཚོ་ལྔ་ is more usual in Bhutan. The language is generally known in eastern Bhutan as དགས་པ་ཁ་ *Dakpakha* and called དགས་པའི་ཁ་ *D'abikha* in Dzongkha. The དགས་པ་ Dakpas or – as they are known in Dzongkha, the དགས་པ་ *D'ap* – like the Brokpas, are itinerant yakherds, but Dakpa, unlike the tongue of the Brokpas, is an East Bodish language.

Although Dakpas and Brokpas share the same characteristic hat known as a ཞུ་མོ་ *zhamu* and outer garments, there are some differences between the native costumes of the Brokpas and Dakpas. For example, the Dakpas wear དོར་མ་ *dorma* 'trousers', not the *pishu* 'leather leg guards' and the *kanggo* 'thick white woolen apron covering the loins' worn above the *pishu*, which Brokpas often wear instead of trousers. The Dakpa of Tawang and Kameng in Arunachal Pradesh look and dress like Bhutanese, and so, for that matter, do the Sherdukpen of Kameng. They practise the same mask dances and Tibetan Mahāyāna Buddhist observances. Just as in Bhutan, lay practice is preponderantly རྙིང་མ་པ་ 'Nyingmapa, but because the Dakpa and the Sherdukpen bore allegiance to the reformed དགེ་ལུགས་པ་ Gelup or "Yellow Hat" order of Buddhism which had become victorious in Tibet and not to the བཀའ་རྒྱུད་པ་ Kâjüp or "Red Hat" order which is the official state school of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Bhutan, these areas did not historically come to form part of Bhutan.

Brian Houghton Hodgson was the first to collect "Tákpa" language data (1853). Michael Aris pointed out that Robert Shafer confused Hodgson's "Tákpa" data with the Tibetan district and dialect of དགས་པོ་ Dakpo, which is known in Dzongkha as D'ap, south of the གཙང་པོ་ Tsangpo and west of the

ཀོང་པོ་ Kongbo area. Shafer's comparative work should therefore be read as applying to Dakpa and not to the Tibetan dialect of Dakpo. This poses no problem because Shafer correctly identified the distinct status of the "Tákpa" data and treated the language as the representative of a distinct group which he called "East Bodish" (1954, 1955, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1974), a term which now applies to the subgroup within Bodish which encompasses the Dzala, Dakpa, Mangde, the Black Mountain language and the languages of the Bumthang group, i.e. Bumthang, Kheng, Kurtöp and Nup.

To speakers of Tshangla the Dakpa language is known as བྲམི་ལོ་ Brami-lo 'the Brami language'. To make things a bit confusing, Dakpa is generally called "Monpa" in the context of Arunachal Pradesh, a term which is historically and presently applied with reckless abandon to many often quite distinct groups. The so-called "Northern Monpa" of Arunachal Pradesh are Dakpa. Duarah reported that these "Northern Monpa" are sometimes locally referred to as "Brahmi" (1990: 6), which corroborates their identity because this term, as we have seen, is the Tshangla name for Dakpa.

The Dakpa speaking area is not restricted to Tawang, the northwestern-most wedge of Arunachal Pradesh, but also spills over into the neighbouring contiguous district of Trashigang in northeastern Bhutan, where it is spoken in the villages of ཙ་གླིང་ Ca'ling, མཐོང་རོང་ Thongrong, the སྨད་ *'met* or 'lower' portion of ཏོག་ཤི་མང་ Tokshimang, གོང་ཕུ་ Shongphu and ཡོས་བྱི་ནང་ Yöbinang. Two of the place names in this 2003 list differ in both orthography and pronunciation from the 1989 forms on the preceding page, whereby the 2003 forms provided by Künchap Tshering have a decidedly more Chöke flavour. Over and above the indeterminate orthography of many toponyms and the discrepancy between the pronunciation of a place name by its inhabitants vs. the version used by neighbouring language communities, literate Bhutanese – just like some Western tibetologists – often give into the temptation to transform original toponyms into place names with a good Classical Tibetan etymology even when the localities are originally not linguistically Bodish. In addition, place names in Bhutan now often change under the influence of increased literacy or even the sudden availability of an *ad hoc* romanised spelling. For example, the tiny place རྒྱལ་པོ་ཞིང་ Jepzh'ing on the Kurichu has in recent years grown into a bustling town around the new dam site now more often called རྒྱལ་པོ་ཞིང་ Gelpozh'ing.

Whether the dialect spoken in these enclaves in northeastern Bhutan is the same in all particulars as the dialect of Tawang proper is something which I have not had the opportunity to ascertain. The data included here were collected at Trashigang from a group of Dakpas during a blood col-

lection campaign of the Bhutanese Genome Project on the 5th of November 2003. Not all the Dakpa data which I collected in the 1990s have been included in the present study.

Phonological impressionism

A thorough phonological analysis of Dzala and Dakpa has not yet been completed. The transcription used here is therefore phonetic, and some essential distinctions may have been missed in individual forms. None the less a number of general and specific observations may be made about the phonologies of both languages. Many of the phonemes distinguished by Dzongkha (van Driem and Karma Tshering 1998) and Bumthang (van Driem 1995b) are also found in both Dzala and Dakpa.

There is no evidence yet, however, that either language has the rich inventory of rhotic consonant phonemes peculiar to Bumthang. There may, however, be register tone similar to the binary distinction characteristic of Dzongkha phonology, a distinction not found in all languages of Bhutan. Certainly, preglottalised syllables with continuant initials in high register exist in both Dzala and Dakpa, and these are indicated with an apostrophe preceding the initial, in conformity with the Roman Dzongkha convention.

Many languages of Bhutan lack the hard vs. soft distinction found in Dzongkha initials. Yet Dakpa may have the distinction. An apostrophe following a voiced consonant initial symbol indicates that an articulation was heard similar to Dzongkha devoiced initials in low register breathy syllables. For example, the sound *g'* was heard in Dakpa, according to my field notes. In contrast to Dzongkha, neither Dzala nor Dakpa has an automatic "long" vowel in front of a final velar nasal, e.g. Dzala *chăŋ*, Dakpa *chăŋ* 'beer, spirits'. The acute accent has been used to indicate what was heard as either a creaky vowel or a vowel which might be the tense member of a possible tense vs. lax opposition.

Each Bhutanese language sounds quite different. The sound of Dzongkha is utterly different than, say, the sound of Tshangla, also known as Sharchop or Shâchop, spoken in eastern Bhutan. Yet, as might be inferred from the remarks in the preceding paragraphs, there are phonological features and distinctions shared by many languages of Bhutan. The most aberrant phonologies in the Bhutanese context are those of the so-called three gems, i.e. Lhokpu, Black Mountain and Gongduk. The Lhokpu language is in a class by itself in terms of its phonetics and phonology. Black Mountain and Gongduk both exhibit what in my field notes I have been calling "Old

Bhutanese" phonetic features even though no close genetic tie appears to obtain between Gongduk and Black Mountain.

"Old Bhutanese" phonetic features include an abundance of glottal stop finals and prominent central vowels and the phenomenon that the "sibilants", both voiced and unvoiced, are realised as interdental fricatives. Speakers of these two languages often accommodate their pronunciation to the ears of outsiders. This is quite an understandable practice, for if you happen to be a Gongdukpa who hails from a village named Bɤʔlɤ, for example, you will find that other Bhutanese persist in mispronouncing the name of your village as "Bâlâ" or "Baklâ", depending on what their native tongue happens to be. This digression is merely to explain what it means to say that neither Dzala nor Dakpa exhibit "Old Bhutanese" phonetic features, but have a more mainstream sound.

Comparative Dzala and Dakpa word list

A comparison of some common Dzala and Dakpa forms clearly shows the intimate genetic proximity of the two languages. However, often Dakpa has a Central Bodish form where Dzala has a proper East Bodish form, e.g. Dakpa *oma* 'milk' vs. Dzala *yô* 'milk, nipple', although in such cases Dakpa may also preserve the East Bodish root as a bound morpheme, e.g. Dakpa *yotshaŋ* 'nipple'. Dakpa appears to have borrowed more loans and to have undergone more influence from the Central Bodish language spoken by the ḥBrog-pa yakherders with whom they share a similar lifestyle and habitat. Therefore, the nature of the difference is revealing when the same root exists in both Dzala and Dakpa but denotes a different meaning. For example, the Dzala term *chupă* denotes a Bhutanese male garment or g'ô, whereas Dakpa *chuba*, just as in the language of the ḥBrog-pa, denotes the red woolen jacket worn by ḥBrog-pa men and sometimes still also by Dakpa men. By contrast, the Bhutanese male garment or g'ô is known to speakers of Dakpa as a *pé*.

Despite the Central Bodish influence, Dakpa too is obviously an East Bodish language. In fact, a comparison of the personal pronouns, the numeral system and much of the core vocabulary shows that Dakpa is the closest linguistic relative of Dzala within East Bodish, not just one of its closest geographical neighbours. Note that in the Bhutanese dialect of the Dakpa language a single word, *zhɔkpu*, denotes both son and younger brother, and a single word, *zhɔmu*, denotes both younger sister and

daughter, whereas offspring are terminologically differentiated from younger siblings in Dzala. Not surprisingly, the Dakpa word *zhɔmu* therefore also serves as a general term for woman or female.

Dzala	Dakpa	English gloss
'ăbu	*'oukpu*	'elder sister'
'ăci	*'ăce*	'elder brother'
'ama	*'ămă*	'mother'
bă	*b'ă*	'cow'
bou	*blou*	'thigh'
brăŋtóʔ	*braŋtɔŋ*	'chest'
bu	*zhɔkpu*	'son'
burmɪn	*zhɔmu*	'daughter'
chăŋ	*chăŋ*	'spirits, beer'
cuŋmɛn	*cuŋ'met*	'lip'
guŋmo	*khyimduŋ*	'roof'
jăndre	*jăndră*	'facial hair'
ké	*khrâ*	'blood'
kha	*kha*	'mouth'
khâma	*khâ*	'hen'
khem	*khɛm*	'house'
kheru	*khér*	'white'
khi	*khi*	'dog'
khră	*khră*	'hair on scalp'
'lâ	*'lă*	'hand, arm'
'lâbru(ma)	*'lâppru*	'fingers'
'lé	*lé*	'moon'
'lé	*lé*	'tongue'
lă	*lă*	'mountain pass'
lém	*shaŋnaŋ*	'road, way'
lɛmɪn	*lɛmin*	'leg, foot'
lɛmɪn bruma	*lɛminbru*	'toes'
leu	*lyu*	'red'
lhăm	*juttă*	'shoes'
'miloŋ	*meloŋ*	'eye'
mé	*me*	'fire'
mɛnto	*mɛnto*	'flower'
minbă	*meloŋ tsɛmba*	'eyebrow'
mlă	*mlăh*	'arrow'
mle	*mlé*	'penis'
mlɛŋbu	*mlæːŋpu*	'black'
moisă	*zhɔmu*	'woman, female'

moŋ	*moŋ*	'pubic hair'
mukpă	*săji*	'cloud'
ʼnă	*ʼnă*	'nose'
ʼnelap	*ʼnyɛplăp*	'ear'
nămdruŋ	*namdruŋ*	'sky'
néŋ	*niŋ*	'heart'
nɛpshimă	*ʼnep*	'snot, mucus'
ŋin	*ŋin*	'shit, faeces'
phoisă	*phuitsa*	'man, male'
plăŋ	*plaŋ*	'sun'
pu	*puh*	'body hair'
ra	*li-nyi*	'goat'
să	*să*	'earth, soil'
shɛŋ	*shɛŋ*	'tree, wood'
té	*té*	'horse'
tshi	*tshi*	'water'
tsinpo	*tsinpu*	'liver'
ʼwă	*wă*	'tooth'
yeŋ	*shisha*	'sheep'
yô	*oma*	'milk'
yô	*yotshaŋ*	'nipple'
zhimbula	*zhim*	'cat'
zhokpo	*zhɔkpu*	'younger brother'
zhomo	*zhɔmu*	'younger sister'
zhumo	*zhum*	'intestines'

The numeral systems compared

Dzala numerals

1	*thi*	11	*cithi*	21	*khăli thi*
2	*nöi*	12	*cinöi*	30	*khe phedang nöi*
3	*sum*	13	*ciksum*	35	*khăli cilăŋa*
4	*bli*	14	*cibli*	40	*khɛnöi*
5	*lăŋă*	15	*cilăŋă*	50	*khe phedang sum*
6	*gro*	16	*cigro*	60	*khɛsum*
7	*ʼni*	17	*ciʼni*		etc.
8	*gɛt*	18	*cipget*		
9	*dugu*	19	*cidugu*		
10	*ci*	20	*khăli*		

Dakpa numerals

1	*thi*	11	*cithe*	40	*khăiniyi*
2	*lɛyi*	12	*ciŋleyi*	50	*khăiniyi cih*
3	*sum*	13	*ciksum*	60	*khăisum*
4	*bli*	14	*cibli*	70	*khăisum cih*
5	*lɛŋa*	15	*cilɨŋ*	80	*khăibli*
6	*gro*	16	*cigro*		etc.
7	*'nis*	17	*ci'nis*		
8	*gɛt*	18	*cipgɛt*		
9	*dugu*	19	*cidugu*		
10	*cih*	20	*khăli*		

Personal pronouns compared

Dakpa possessive forms marked "–" are missing in the portion of my fieldnotes available to me in Thimphu.

Table 1.   Dzala personal pronouns

	free pronouns		possessive pronouns	
	singular	plural	singular	plural
1	*ŋe*	*ŋără*	*ŋăk*	*ŋătoŋ*
2	*'i*	*'iră năŋ*	*'ik*	*'irok*
3	*be*	*beră*	*be ko*	*beră ko*

Table 2.   Dakpa personal pronouns

	free pronouns		possessive pronouns	
	singular	plural	singular	plural
1	*ŋe*	*ŋarba*	*ŋɔk*	–
2	*'i*	*irbănă*	*'ik*	–
3	*bi*	*berbă*	–	–

Some additional Dzala forms

bâdi	'bull'	*meloŋ*	'mirror'
blă	'dust'	*mré*	'snake'
blé	'work'	*mrin*	'next year'

blo	'bamboo mat for drying grain or flour in the sun'	*'ŋău*	'green, blue'
		nyɛmă	'sleep'
brâʔ	'cliff'	*phe*	'flour'
cher	'bamboo mat for fencing'	*pla*	'mind'
chupă	'g'ô, Bhutanese dress'	*pɔrké*	'stomach'
debzi	'uncooked rice'	*pră*	'monkey'
dep	'standing rice, paddy'	*shatma*	'speak'
giŋ	'Tibetan'	*sotmă*	'kill'
jăp	'back'	*témă*	'see'
jăwă	'chin'	*thoŋmă*	'drink'
kau	'difficult'	*to*	'cooked rice'
khâtpo	'cockerel'	*toka*	'bull'
khut	'sperm'	*tshɛŋmi*	'Shâchop'
ko'lókpa	'knee'	*wa*	'wooden tub'
'lâ grumcuŋla	'elbow'	*wăm*	'bear'
lăŋbe	'forehead'	*yăk*	'yak'
lipó	'body'	*yi*	'village'
'mă	'wound'	*z'ămă*	'eat'
'măt	'talking, conversation'	*zhă*	'bird'

be ko châro	'his friend'
be răudɛ	'He is coming.'
beră ko châro	'their friend'
chin tăŋgo puné	'I must go pee.'
i gâ bodu	'Where are you going?'
i gâké	'Whence art thou?'
i gâké nyu	'Where (whence) did you buy this?'
i nyɛn thoŋuwă	'Are you married?'
i phobzăŋ ne	'You are handsome.'
i su lo	'Who are you?'
i thimphu ké gairău	'When are you coming to Thimphu?'
ik châro	'your (sg.) friend'
iku meŋ dzi lo	'What is your name?'
irok châro	'your (pl.) friend'
minăŋ răudɛ	'He is coming.'
ŋa ile shinde	'I love you.'
ŋăk châro	'my friend'
ŋătoŋ châro	'our friend'
nyɛtibro, nyɛtbro	'go to sleep'
nyeila	'Sleep!'
shata	'Speak!'
sota	'Kill!'
telo, tete	'See!'
thoŋa	'Drink!'

to ză		'Eat food!'	
ula dzi lo		'What is this?'	

Some additional Dakpa forms

'ăpă	'father'	*'lih*	'bow'
chin	'piss, urine'	*'likpa*	'scrotum'
chobula	'straight knife carried in belt'	*'likpa khâlum*	'testicles'
		lɛmin tshɛ	'ankle'
chuba	'red woolen ḥBrog-pa jacket'	*muip*	'wife'
		myɛktshi	'tears'
g'ôt	'head'	*nɛːyu*	'turquoise'
gelenti	'duck, goose'	*niktəŋ*	'buttocks'
gôn	'termite, ant'	*pălip*	'leaf'
gôn khâlum	'termite egg, ant egg'	*pé*	'g'ô, Bhutanese garb'
		puzhom	'yak-hair hat'
hrôt	'wind'	*ruspa*	'bone'
kăptsă	'calf of the leg'	*ser*	'gold'
karma	'star'	*shă*	'meat'
keipă	'belly, stomach'	*shugu*	'paper'
khâlum	'egg'	*simpu*	'nail of finger or toe'
khrɛt	'waist'	*thăn*	'target'
ko	'door'	*tiː*	'spit'
kor	'stone, rock'	*tshithemo*	'river'
'lă tshɛ	'wrist'	*tuh*	'vagina'
'lătpă	'brain'		

da ŋe gaidoro 'ī	'I am going now.'
da ŋe gaigẽkê	'I am going now.'
da ŋe gaitayi	'I am going now.'
gâloi	'where?'
hrôt hrôdu	'The wind is blowing.'
'ik gâ g'i gloi	'Where are you going?'
'ik khɛm g'âce lo	'Where is your house?'
'ik mɛŋ zi lo	'What is your name?'
'ito mrit gɔgailo	'How old are you?'
krik	'It's OK.'
ŋɔk muip	'my wife'
plaŋ hoŋ	'The sun is shining.'

In conclusion, Dzala and Dakpa appear together to form a coherent cluster within East Bodish, just as Bumthang, Kurtöp, Kheng and Nup too form

a coherent cluster within East Bodish (Michailovsky and Mazaudon 1994). The precise position of Mangde within East Bodish is to be determined by future research. Meanwhile, a better idea is emerging of the precise genetic position of the Black Mountain language. Black Mountain has been classified as an East Bodish language (van Driem 1994, 1995a, 2001), but its precise phylogenetic propinquity will become clearer with the publication of the Black Mountain grammar, a first draft of which was submitted to the Royal Government of Bhutan earlier this year.

མགར་ས་ Gâsa
19 November 2003

Map 1.   The linguistic map of Bhutan

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