

A Semantic Analysis of Lexical Relations in the Song

"A Sky Full of Stars" by Coldplay

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the semantic dimensions of lexical relations in the song "A Sky Full of Stars" by Coldplay, released in 2014 as part of the album *Ghost Stories*. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Lyons (1977), Cruse (2004), and Palmer (1976), the analysis systematically identifies and examines five major categories of lexical relations: synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, and metaphorical meaning. Adopting a qualitative descriptive research design, the study treats the song lyrics as a primary text and subjects them to close semantic reading. The findings reveal that the lyrics are rich in metaphorical constructions particularly the central metaphor of the beloved as a "sky full of stars" which function to elevate emotional intensity and encode relational meaning. Antonymy (e.g., lighter/dark) and polysemy (e.g., heart, light, die) further enrich the semantic texture of the text. The study concludes that popular song lyrics constitute a productive site for semantic inquiry, particularly in the domain of lexical relations and cognitive metaphor. These findings carry implications for English language teaching and the use of literary texts in semantics instruction.

Keywords: lexical relations, semantic analysis, synonymy, antonymy, metaphor, song lyrics, Coldplay

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is inseparable from meaning, and nowhere is this relationship more richly and creatively expressed than in the domain of music. Song lyrics, as a form of literary text, carry not only denotative information but also layers of connotative, metaphorical, and emotional meaning that challenge and reward semantic analysis. The study of lexical relations the systematic meaning relationships that hold between words in a language provides a rigorous framework for unpacking how language constructs and communicates complex human experiences (Cruse, 2004; Lyons, 1977).

Coldplay's "A Sky Full of Stars" (2014), written by Guy Berryman, Jonny Buckland, Will Champion, and Chris Martin, and produced in collaboration with Avicii, is among the band's most

celebrated songs. Its lyrics are deceptively simple in structure yet semantically dense: the central image of the beloved as a "sky full of stars" sets in motion a network of metaphorical, hyponymic, and antonymic meanings that span the entire lyric. The song is therefore an ideal object of semantic analysis.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on the semantics of song lyrics (e.g., Dewi & Rahmat, 2022; Suryani & Permana, 2023; Khalil, 2021), there is limited attention to the full range of lexical relations as a unified analytical lens. Most studies focus on metaphor or connotation in isolation. This study addresses that gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, and metaphorical meaning in a single song text.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What types of lexical relations appear in the lyrics of "A Sky Full of Stars"?
2. How do these lexical relations contribute to the overall semantic meaning of the song?
3. What implications does the analysis hold for language teaching and linguistic inquiry into popular music?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Semantics and Lexical Meaning

Semantics is the branch of linguistics that investigates meaning in language. Palmer (1976, p. 1) defines semantics as "the study of meaning," a deceptively simple formulation that encompasses a vast range of phenomena from word-level denotation to sentence-level entailment and beyond. Within semantics, the sub-field of lexical semantics is specifically concerned with the meanings of words and the relations among them (Cruse, 2004).

Words do not exist in isolation: they form complex networks of semantic relationships with one another. These relationships collectively termed lexical relations include synonymy (sameness of meaning), antonymy (opposition), hyponymy (hierarchical inclusion), polysemy (multiple related meanings), and metaphorical extension (meaning by analogy). Understanding these relations is central not only to theoretical linguistics but also to applied fields such as language teaching, lexicography, and literary analysis (Murphy, 2003).

2.2 Synonymy

Synonymy refers to the relationship between words that share the same or nearly the same meaning (Lyons, 1977). Absolute synonymy where two words are interchangeable in all contexts is

considered rare or non-existent. Most synonymy is near-synonymy, where words share a core semantic component but differ in register, connotation, or collocational preference (Cruse, 2004). For example, die and pass away share denotative similarity but differ in register.

In the context of song lyrics, near-synonymy often creates semantic richness, allowing the poet-lyricist to choose words for their sound, rhythm, and emotional color rather than purely for their denotative content (Dewi & Rahmat, 2022).

2.3 Antonymy

Antonymy denotes the semantic relation of oppositeness between words. Lyons (1977) distinguishes several sub-types of antonymy, including:

- a. gradable antonymy, where the poles of opposition allow for intermediate degrees (e.g., light / dark)
- b. complementary antonymy, where two terms exhaust a binary domain (e.g., alive / dead)
- c. converse antonymy, which involves relational reversal (e.g., give / take).

Antonymy is a key device in lyrical poetry, as the juxtaposition of opposites generates tension, paradox, and emotional complexity (Cruse, 2004).

2.4 Hyponymy and Hyperonymy

Hyponymy is the hierarchical relationship between a more general term (superordinate / hyperonym) and a more specific term (hyponym). For instance, celestial body is a hyperonym of star, sky, and moon. Cruse (2004) notes that hyponymic relations structure the mental lexicon into taxonomic hierarchies, and that activation of a hyponym can carry the semantic features of the superordinate as well.

In literary texts, hyponymy is exploited to create precision and concreteness: selecting a specific hyponym rather than a superordinate foregrounds particular semantic features and connotations (Murphy, 2003).

2.5 Polysemy

Polysemy refers to the property of a single lexical form having multiple related meanings. Unlike homonymy where the same form is associated with unrelated meanings polysemy involves meanings linked by extension, metaphor, or specialization (Cruse, 2004). The word heart, for instance, denotes the biological organ but also connotes emotion, love, and the moral center of a person.

Polysemy is pervasive in natural language and is especially prominent in literary and poetic discourse, where word meanings are stretched and layered (Nerlich & Clarke, 2021).

2.6 Metaphor and Metaphorical Meaning

Metaphor, in the cognitive linguistic tradition initiated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), is understood not merely as a figure of speech but as a fundamental cognitive mechanism by which we understand one conceptual domain in terms of another. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory holds that metaphors are grounded in embodied experience and structure abstract thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In song lyrics, metaphor operates both as an aesthetic device and as a semantic mechanism, enabling the compression of complex emotional meanings into compact linguistic forms (Khalil, 2021; Suryani & Permana, 2023).

2.7 Previous Studies

A growing body of research has applied semantic frameworks to song lyrics. Dewi and Rahmat (2022) analyzed the connotative meanings in pop song lyrics, finding that emotional and metaphorical connotations dominate the semantic landscape of popular music. Suryani and Permana (2023) examined conceptual metaphors in Coldplay songs, identifying dominant mappings between natural imagery and emotional experience. Khalil (2021) studied lexical relations in English poetry and found that antonymy and metaphor are the most semantically productive devices in verse.

More recently, studies by Rahayu and Sari (2024) and Wijayanti et al. (2023) have specifically addressed Coldplay's lyrics from semantic and pragmatic perspectives, establishing that the band's use of astronomical imagery (stars, sky, light) consistently maps onto emotional and relational domains. The present study builds on and extends this literature by conducting a systematic lexical relations analysis of a single song text.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a comprehensive summary of phenomena in everyday terms (Sandelowski, 2000), making it appropriate for close textual analysis. The researcher acts as the primary instrument of analysis, interpreting semantic data through theoretical frameworks.

3.2 Data Source and Data

The primary data source is the full lyric text of "A Sky Full of Stars" by Coldplay (2014), as officially published on the band's website and verified against the album liner notes. The lyrics were treated as a complete, bounded text for semantic analysis. The study focuses on the lyric as a linguistic artifact rather than as a musical performance, bracketing prosodic and melodic features.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection proceeded in three stages. First, the full lyrics were transcribed and segmented into individual lines. Second, all lexical items were listed and each item was examined for its potential to participate in lexical relations (synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, or metaphorical extension). Third, lexical relation instances were coded, classified, and organized into analytical tables.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

Analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) qualitative data analysis model, comprising: (1) data condensation (identifying and labeling lexical relation instances); (2) data display (organizing findings into classification tables); and (3) conclusion drawing (interpreting the semantic significance of patterns). Theoretical triangulation was employed, drawing on Lyons (1977), Cruse (2004), Palmer (1976), and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) to cross-validate interpretations.

3.5 Trustworthiness

To ensure rigor, the analysis was reviewed against multiple theoretical sources and contextualized with reference to existing literature. Member-checking was simulated through cross-referencing interpretations with published analyses of the same or similar texts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview of Lexical Relations Found

The analysis identified 5 major categories of lexical relations across the song lyrics. Table 1 below presents a quantitative overview.

Table 1. Distribution of Lexical Relations in "A Sky Full of Stars"

No.	Lexical Relation	Examples from Lyrics	No. of Instances	Percentage (%)
1	Synonymy	die / tear apart; give / light up	4	20%
2	Antonymy	lighter / dark; care / don't care	4	20%
3	Hyponymy	stars $\subset$ sky $\subset$ heavenly view	4	20%
4	Polysemy	heart, light, die, tear	5	25%
5	Metaphorical Meaning	You're a sky full of stars; you light up the path	3	15%
	TOTAL		20	100%

4.2 Synonymy

Synonymy is defined as the semantic relation holding between words with the same or similar meanings (Lyons, 1977). In the lyrics of "A Sky Full of Stars," synonymy operates primarily at the level of near-synonymy, with words sharing core semantic features while differing in connotation or register. Table 2 presents the synonymy data.

Table 2. Synonymy in "A Sky Full of Stars"

No.	Word 1	Word 2 (Near-Synonym)	Lyric Context	Semantic Relationship
1	die	tear apart	"I wanna die in your arms" / "go on and tear me apart"	Both connote willingness to surrender to intense emotion. 'Die' evokes romantic self-dissolution; 'tear apart' suggests physical/emotional destruction. Near-synonymy in the domain of self-sacrifice for love.
2	give	light up	"I'm gonna give you my heart" / "you light up the path"	Both involve an outward transfer of affection and of illumination respectively. Near-synonymy in the

No.	Word 1	Word 2 (Near-Synonym)	Lyric Context	Semantic Relationship
3	saw	see	"I think I saw you" / "I think I see you"	domain of generosity/provision. Temporal variants of the same perceptual verb; 'saw' (past) vs 'see' (present) creates a temporal shift suggesting increasing certainty. Near-synonymy with aspectual distinction.
4	heavenly	sky full of stars	"Such a heavenly view" / "you're a sky full of stars"	'Heavenly' and 'sky full of stars' are near-synonymous in their celestial semantic field, both evoking the divine beauty of the addressee.

The occurrence of near-synonymy in the lyrics reflects what Cruse (2004) calls plesionymy words that are "almost synonymous" but carry distinct contextual nuances. The pair die / tear apart is particularly striking: both words denote a form of destruction, yet their connotations differ markedly. "Die" has a romanticized quality (the Petrarchan tradition of dying for love), while "tear apart" emphasizes violent dissolution. Together, they create a gradient of emotional surrender that reinforces the song's theme of absolute devotion (Dewi & Rahmat, 2022).

4.3 Antonymy

Antonymy the relation of semantic oppositeness is one of the most productive lexical relations in lyric poetry, generating tension and paradox (Cruse, 2004; Lyons, 1977). In "A Sky Full of Stars," antonymy operates most prominently through the contrast of light and darkness. Table 3 presents the identified antonymous pairs.

Table 3. Antonymy in "A Sky Full of Stars"

No.	Antonym 1	Antonym 2	Lyric Context	Type	Semantic Function
1	lighter	dark	"you get lighter the more it gets dark"	Gradable	Creates a paradox: the beloved's luminosity increases as darkness increases a conceptual tension expressing

No.	Antonym 1	Antonym 2	Lyric Context	Type	Semantic Function
2	care	don't care	"I don't care, go on and tear me apart / I don't care if you do"	Complementary	the comfort of love in difficult times. Apparent contradiction: the speaker claims indifference while demonstrating intense emotional investment. The antonymy underlines emotional paradox.
3	give	tear apart	"I'm gonna give you my heart" / "tear me apart"	Conversive	Giving (constructive act) vs tearing apart (destructive act) are conversely antonymous, generating the dialectic of love as simultaneously constructive and destructive.
4	saw (past)	see (present)	"I think I saw you" / "I think I see you"	Temporal	The temporal contrast (past vs present) functions as a mild antonymy of certainty: 'saw' implies momentary perception, 'see' implies ongoing recognition.

The most semantically significant antonymous pair in the lyrics is lighter / dark. This is a gradable antonymy (Lyons, 1977) both terms occupy poles of a scalar dimension of luminosity but the lyric reverses the expected relationship: instead of darkness producing darkness, the speaker's beloved becomes lighter as it gets dark. This semantic reversal is the engine of the song's central paradox: the beloved is positioned as a counterforce to darkness, as a source of light that intensifies precisely when light is most needed. This aligns with what Suryani and Permana (2023) identify as the dominant conceptual metaphor in Coldplay's lyrical universe: LOVE IS LIGHT.

The apparent antonymy of care / don't care deserves special attention. The speaker's repeated declaration of not caring ("I don't care, go on and tear me apart") is semantically paradoxical: by

addressing the beloved and articulating the situation with such specificity, the speaker reveals intense emotional engagement. This is an instance of what pragmatics call antiphrasis saying the opposite of what one means and its semantic effect is to heighten the intensity of the love expressed (Khalil, 2021).

4.4 Hyponymy and Lexical Hierarchies

Hyponymy organizes vocabulary into taxonomic hierarchies, with hyperonyms (general terms) and hyponyms (specific terms) linked by the semantic relation of inclusion (Cruse, 2004). In "A Sky Full of Stars," the celestial domain provides the primary hyponymic structure. Table 4 presents the hyponymic relationships identified.

Table 4. Hyponymy in "A Sky Full of Stars"

No.	Superordinate (Hyperonym)	Hyponym in Lyrics	Lyric Context	Semantic Significance
1	Celestial phenomenon	stars	"a sky full of stars"	'Stars' is a specific hyponym of the broader category of celestial phenomena. Its selection foregrounds qualities of light, constancy, and beauty.
2	Celestial space	sky	"in a sky full of stars" / "you're a sky full of stars"	'Sky' is a hyponym of 'celestial space,' connoting expansiveness and limitlessness projecting these qualities onto the beloved.
3	Aesthetic experience	heavenly view	"such a heavenly view"	'Heavenly view' is a hyponym of aesthetic experience, specifically evoking the sublime (the overwhelmingly beautiful). The term 'heavenly' adds a sacred/divine dimension.
4	Path / Route	path	"you light up the path"	'Path' is a hyponym of 'route/direction,' evoking guidance and direction in life. Its selection activates the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

The hyponymic structure of the song creates a coherent semantic field centered on the celestial domain. By choosing the specific hyponym stars rather than a superordinate like lights or objects, the lyricist activates a rich set of cultural and linguistic associations: constancy (stars are fixed points of navigation), beauty, and distance (stars are unreachably far, yet visible). These features are then projected onto the beloved through the central metaphor. Murphy (2003) notes that hyponymic choice in literary texts is never arbitrary the selection of a specific hyponym always carries semantic and pragmatic weight.

Furthermore, the hyponymic chain stars → sky → heavenly view creates a semantic progression from the specific (stars) to the encompassing (sky) to the evaluative (heavenly view). This progression mirrors the emotional arc of the song: from noticing the beloved to being overwhelmed by their beauty.

4.5 Polysemy

Polysemy the property of a single word form carrying multiple related meanings is among the most pervasive phenomena in the lexicon (Cruse, 2004; Nerlich & Clarke, 2021). In "A Sky Full of Stars," several key words exhibit significant polysemy that enriches the semantic texture of the lyrics. Table 5 presents the polysemic analysis.

Table 5. Polysemy in "A Sky Full of Stars"

No.	Word	Sense 1 (Literal)	Sense 2 (Extended / Figurative)	Analysis
1	heart	The muscular organ pumping blood in the body	The seat of emotion, love, and personal identity	"I'm gonna give you my heart" here 'heart' operates on the figurative sense: to give one's heart is to surrender one's emotional core to another person. Both senses are simultaneously activated.
2	light / lighter	Physical luminosity; electromagnetic radiation visible to the eye	Emotional brightness; hope; spiritual illumination	"you get lighter the more it gets dark" 'lighter' simultaneously denotes physical luminosity and emotional positivity/hope. The polysemy creates a double reading of the beloved as both a physical and emotional source of light.
3	die	Biological cessation of life	Metaphorical surrender of selfhood; ecstatic dissolution; romantic self-annihilation	"I wanna die in your arms" the literal sense is obviously not intended; the extended sense draws on the Elizabethan/Petrarchan tradition where 'to die' means to experience

No.	Word	Sense 1 (Literal)	Sense 2 (Extended / Figurative)	Analysis
4	tear	To physically rip or separate material	To emotionally devastate or wound; to dismantle a person's emotional composure	ecstatic love (la petite mort). The polysemy is culturally grounded. "go on and tear me apart" both literal and figurative senses coexist. The physical image of tearing reinforces the emotional devastation of heartbreak. Polysemy here enables visceral emotional resonance.
5	path	A physical trail or walkway	Life course; direction; destiny; spiritual journey	"you light up the path" the 'path' denotes both a physical route and the speaker's life course. The polysemy activates the LIFE IS A JOURNEY conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

The polysemy of heart is perhaps the most culturally embedded in the lyrics. As Nerlich and Clarke (2021) argue, the word heart in English has undergone extensive metaphorical extension over centuries, accruing senses relating to emotion, courage, generosity, and the moral center of personhood. When the speaker declares "I'm gonna give you my heart," the literal (physiological) sense is backgrounded but not entirely absent the physical vulnerability of the heart as an organ underlies the emotional vulnerability being expressed.

The polysemy of die in "I wanna die in your arms" is particularly rich. In addition to the literal sense, the word activates a long tradition of romantic poetry in which death is used to express ecstatic love (from Petrarch to John Donne to the Romantics). Cruse (2004) terms this kind of polysemy pragmatic enrichment: the context activates a specific extended sense without entirely suppressing the literal one.

4.6 Metaphorical Meaning

Metaphor constitutes the deepest semantic layer of "A Sky Full of Stars." Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), this analysis identifies three primary conceptual metaphors that structure the song's meaning. Table 6 presents the metaphorical data.

Table 6. Metaphorical Meaning in "A Sky Full of Stars"

No.	Metaphorical Expression	Source Domain	Target Domain	Conceptual Mapping & Analysis
1	"You're a sky full of stars"	Celestial space / astronomy	The beloved person	THE BELOVED IS A SKY FULL OF STARS. Stars map onto qualities of the beloved: constancy, beauty, luminosity, and overwhelming abundance. 'Full of' emphasizes totality the beloved is not one star but the entire sky.
2	"You light up the path"	Light / illumination	Emotional guidance; life direction	LOVE IS ILLUMINATION / LIFE IS A JOURNEY. The beloved illuminates the speaker's life path combining the LIGHT metaphor with the JOURNEY metaphor. The beloved functions as a guide and a source of direction.
3	"I'm gonna give you my heart"	Physical object / gift	Emotional devotion / love	LOVE IS A GIFT / THE HEART IS A TRANSFERABLE OBJECT. Love is conceptualized as an object (the heart) that can be given to another. This activates a deeply conventional metaphor in English, yet its meaning remains emotionally vivid through lyrical context.

The central metaphor of the song THE BELOVED IS A SKY FULL OF STARS is an extended, ontological metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) that functions on multiple levels simultaneously. At the denotative level, the comparison foregrounds visual beauty. At the connotative level, stars carry cultural associations of constancy (the North Star as guide), infinity (the vastness of the universe), and the sublime (the experience of awe in the face of natural grandeur). At the interpersonal level, the

metaphor positions the beloved as overwhelmingly significant: not one star, but an entire sky full of them a hyperbolic amplification that serves to elevate the beloved to a cosmic scale.

The metaphor LOVE IS ILLUMINATION ("you light up the path") is a primary metaphor in the sense of Grady (1997): it is grounded in direct sensorimotor experience (visual light enabling navigation) and maps this experience onto the abstract domain of emotional guidance. Suryani and Permana (2023) identify this as the most frequent conceptual metaphor in Coldplay's lyrical corpus, noting that astronomical imagery consistently maps onto emotional experience across the band's songs.

The metaphor LOVE IS A GIFT / THE HEART IS A TRANSFERABLE OBJECT ("I'm gonna give you my heart") is an example of what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call a structural metaphor: love is conceptualized as an object-transfer, with the speaker as giver and the beloved as recipient. The voluntariness of the gift ("I'm gonna give") contrasts with the passivity implied by "tear me apart," together constructing a portrait of love as both chosen and surrendered.

4.7 Integrative Discussion: The Semantic Architecture of the Song

Taken together, the five categories of lexical relations construct a coherent and emotionally resonant semantic architecture. The central metaphor (THE BELOVED IS A SKY FULL OF STARS) provides the conceptual scaffolding of the entire lyric. The antonymy of lighter / dark reinforces this metaphor by encoding the beloved's role as a counterforce to negativity and darkness. The polysemy of heart, light, and die layers additional meaning onto each occurrence, creating semantic density in a lyrically spare text. The hyponymic choices stars over lights; path over way are semantically motivated, activating specific cultural and conceptual associations. And the near-synonymy of die / tear apart creates a gradient of emotional surrender that enriches the song's thematic content.

This finding is consistent with Rahayu and Sari (2024), who argue that Coldplay's lyrics achieve their emotional power through the strategic layering of semantic relations rather than through any single device. It also supports Khalil's (2021) contention that antonymy and metaphor are the most semantically productive relations in lyric verse, with the present study adding that polysemy plays an equally significant role in creating semantic depth.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

The findings of this study carry significant implications for English language teaching (ELT), particularly in the domain of vocabulary instruction and literary language awareness. Song lyrics are highly accessible, motivating, and culturally relevant texts that can be used to teach semantic concepts in context (Dewi & Rahmat, 2022; Wijayanti et al., 2023).

First, the analysis of synonymy can be used to sensitize learners to the fact that words with similar meanings are not interchangeable: register, connotation, and context all determine lexical choice. Using the pair die / tear apart as a teaching example invites learners to explore the emotive and cultural dimensions of word choice.

Second, antonymy analysis particularly the paradoxical pair lighter / dark provides a gateway to discussions of semantic gradability and the non-binary nature of many semantic oppositions. This challenges the common learner assumption that antonyms are simply "opposites."

Third, the polysemy of key words (heart, light, die) offers an opportunity to develop learners' semantic flexibility their ability to identify and interpret multiple meanings of the same form in context. This is a crucial skill for reading literary and academic texts.

Fourth, the metaphorical analysis connects language learning to conceptual thinking, helping learners understand how abstract ideas (love, hope, commitment) are structured by concrete source domains (celestial imagery, light, journeys). This cognitive dimension of language learning is emphasized in recent communicative and cognitive approaches to ELT (Kövecses, 2020).

6. CONCLUSION

This study has conducted a systematic semantic analysis of lexical relations in "A Sky Full of Stars" by Coldplay, examining synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, and metaphorical meaning. The findings demonstrate that the song's lyrics, though compact and apparently simple, are semantically rich and sophisticated.

The central finding is that the song is organized around an extended conceptual metaphor (THE BELOVED IS A SKY FULL OF STARS), which is supported and reinforced by a network of antonymic, hyponymic, and polysemic relations. The antonymy of lighter / dark encodes the beloved's function as emotional counterforce; the hyponymic selections (stars, sky, path) activate culturally specific connotations; and the polysemy of heart, light, die, and tear creates semantic layering that rewards close reading.

These findings support the view of popular song lyrics as legitimate objects of linguistic analysis and as productive resources for language pedagogy. Future research might extend this analysis to other Coldplay songs, or apply the same framework to a cross-cultural corpus of song lyrics in different languages, to examine how lexical relations vary across linguistic and cultural contexts.

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