Reconstructing post-verbal negation in Kansa: A pedagogical problem

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Abstract

Despite the fact that there are no L1 speakers of Kansa, and the handful of learners are mostly novice-range speakers, the Kaw Nation has been actively engaged in revitalization efforts for many years. The absence of speaker knowledge poses a major problem for curriculum developers insofar as the quality of Kansa pedagogical materials is often limited to what can be uncovered from analysis of documentary materials—mostly those of Dorsey and Rankin. These sources, though essential, are far from complete. For instance, they lack many constructions that potential language learners would want to know, including how to express what in English is captured by the word *wouldn't*. In such cases, syntactic analysis can be used to reconstruct certain areas of Kansa grammar. Kansa is a left-branching, head-marking language with canonical (S)OV word order. Several features of its syntax seem to complicate an X-Bar treatment of Kansa, but the placement of negation (NEG) in the post-verbal complex seems to violate a number of principles all at once. This gives rise to contradictory expectations for its location in different contexts. In this paper, I discuss one way of reconstructing Kansa NEG to fill a pedagogical need. While not arriving at any definite theoretical conclusion, I do arrive at a possible one, and conclude with a set of recommendations for curriculum developers dealing with this and other such problems.

1. Introduction

Among the many problems plaguing the revitalization efforts of languages without L1 speakers is that a large number of the useful, conversational things that learners might want to say are simply unknown. These may include greetings and pleasantries, common expressions for introducing self and others, stating likes and dislikes, making and fulfilling requests for additional information, telling time, and so on—all of which people use with great frequency in their own L1s and expect to be able to say in an L2. In fact, language teachers usually want to teach these sorts of conversational forms early on in classes as stock constructions that can build both competence and confidence in their learners. However, with no speakers around to ask, there may only be the products of linguistic research available as the next best thing. Perhaps there is a dictionary, a text series, or simply a set of field notes. Yet, even the most diligent field worker may not think to elicit very practical expressions such as 'hello, my name is [blank],' 'I did not understand what you said; please repeat it,' or 'how do you say [blank] in the [blank] language?'

The case of the Dhegiha Siouan language Kansa (also known as Kanza or Kaw) is precisely as described above. Dorsey's 1880s-era field work yielded a rather large set of slip files, two dozen texts collected from nine separate consultants, and hundreds of pages of ethnographic notes, all of which Rankin used in his own extensive work with the last Kansa speakers in the 1970s and early 1980s. Following the deaths of his consultants, Rankin continued working on Kansa for the rest of his life. Neither Dorsey nor Rankin intended their work to be used as-is for revitalization and curriculum development purposes, but this is what happened: Such efforts must begin somewhere, and their material was the logical starting point. Fortunately, Rankin was willing to contribute to this enterprise, and he often worked on Siouan language pedagogy side-by-side with other linguists (these included myself and several other contributors to this volume), both in the classroom and behind the scenes. Yet, even with Rankin—himself a lifelong educator—and a team of Siouanists at the head of Kansa language classes, the learner outcomes were often far less than could be expected of other beginning language classes; the source material was simply incomplete. As a consequence, many basic things remain unknown for Kansa and, accordingly, unused among language learners.

Consider a common English expression such as 'She *wouldn't* go,' 'Mike *wouldn't* do that,' 'they *wouldn't* give it to me,' or the like. To my knowledge, there is no recorded translation of this expression in the available Kansa materials. I honestly cannot recall the exact circumstances of how this lacuna was discovered, but I remember that it came up in the Kaw Nation's Thursday night community language class in Kaw City, Oklahoma, in the mid-2000s. Perhaps some thoughtful student simply asked, "How do you say, 'she *wouldn't* go,' in the language?" Surely I knew that the answer to the question would involve post-verbal negation and some use of both the potential and non-continuative enclitics, but I was flummoxed as to how to order these elements. Whatever the circumstances may have been, once it became apparent that I could not immediately provide an answer based on my working knowledge of Kansa syntax, I probably explained that I would have to do more research and return with a definite solution later. Little did I know then that I *wouldn't* have a satisfying answer the next week, month, or even year!

Part of the problem lies in just how one would go about trying to find the answer. It would ideally involve reviewing the available texts and field elicitations with an eye toward finding how Dorsey, Rankin, or someone else may have recorded it. Those working on Kansa have, of course, done a great deal of secondary research like this; the lacunae are numerous, the learners are curious, and the available scholarly analysis is of high quality. Nevertheless, the construction does not appear in the materials. Failing that, the next step would involve reconstructing the form from a set of near-matches combined with knowledge of the language's syntax. Yet, syntax is one area where Kansa and the other Dhegiha languages are not always described in the greatest detail. Both Rankin's brief grammatical sketch of Kansa (1989) and his later sketch of Quapaw (2005) discuss a variety of syntax topics, as does Quintero's (2004) book-length grammar of Osage. But all of these works are *overviews* of Dhegiha grammar, and are ultimately too general to offer fine-grained perspective on such a specific question.

In this chapter, I will attempt a basic generative syntactic analysis of Kansa post-verbal negation. Bear in mind that I am ultimately looking for a *pedagogical* solution, not a theoretical one. As such, I do not advocate any particular theory of formal syntax and feel fairly free to borrow liberally from several eras of transformational grammar all at once. I am fully aware that this juxtaposition of concepts may make my analysis problematic for strict syntacticians, and perhaps also for dedicated pedagogues who may find any such analysis tedious to begin with. I do this not to alienate potential readers or to break any new theoretical ground, but simply to predict an unattested enclitic order using the formal means within my disposal. I also hope that my analysis and the discussion that follows will help to shed some light on a few philosophical principles that I consider very important to anyone working in Siouan languages:

- Gaps in the available documentation of languages are not necessarily insurmountable challenges;
- Grammar must occasionally be reconstructed in order for it to be taught;
- Formal analysis is not, by mere virtue of its formality, *better* than other means of acquiring grammatical knowledge; yet
- Formal analysis of some manner or another *can* serve practical pedagogical purposes.

1.1 X-Bar considerations

Kansa, like other Mississippi Valley Siouan languages, particularly those of the Dhegiha branch, is head-marking with a canonical (S)OV word order (see, for example, Quintero, 2004, p. 421, for the Dhegiha language Osage; Rankin, 2005, pp. 488-490, for Quapaw, also Dhegiha;

and Cumberland, 2005, p. 369, for Assiniboine, a Dakotan language). Moreover, it appears to follow the same sort of left-branching syntactic pattern that Boyle (2007) described for Hidatsa (Missouri Valley Siouan). Although this paper is concerned with the syntax of the Kansa post-verbal complex, it is important to point out some grammatical features that complicate an X-Bar analysis of Kansa, including those as follows.

(a) Left-branching: Tree structures for Kansa and the movement of elements within them appear to run counter to the right-branching patterns typical of X-Bar theory.

(b) Radical pro-drop status: For the most part, only nominal subjects and objects appear independently in the sentence, the former presumably in the [SPEC, TP]; all else is handled by verbal inflection.

(c) Concept of word: Just how much of enumeration and derivation is left up to morphology versus syntax is essentially still up for grabs; as a consequence, so, too, are the classifications of enclitics, auxiliaries, affixes.

(d) Abstract tense: The TP in Kansa is at best misnamed given the language's general absence of tense marking, and the projection below the topmost Kansa CP is probably little more than an agreement checking level.

These features are crucial to any full description of Kansa syntax, and they have very interesting implications on syntactic theories as a whole. For example, Kansa's use of a *right* periphery of the topmost complementizer layer (cf. Rizzi, 2002, p. 281) for post-verbal antitopic marking (Gordon, 2008) challenges Kayne's (2011, p. 4) assertion that "Hanging topics occur at the left-hand edge of the sentence. As far as I know, there has never been a claim to the effect that there exists something exactly comparable on the right-hand edge of the sentence, in any language." Nonetheless, while I take these points as fundamental assumptions for the analysis that follows, they are actually not altogether relevant for me to discuss in greater length given the narrow focus of this chapter.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

1.2. Aspect

Tense may be absent in Kansa, but verbal aspect is quite developed. Fig. 1 shows the general division of aspect in Kansa. The primary division is between what I have termed *simple* and *augmented* aspect. Simple aspect is obligatory in all clauses while augmented is not. Simple aspect is further divided into *continuative/imperfect* (CONT) and *non-continuative/perfect* (NONC) aspects, which are in complementary distribution. CONT is marked on verbs through a complex series of post-verbal enclitics (Rankin, 2005, pp. 485, argues that these enclitics "are actually conjugated as fully-fledged auxiliary verbs" in the closely related Dhegiha language Quapaw; see also Rankin, 2004, for a much more detailed discussion) that also carry with them a sense of the subject's physical orientation in space. These include such categories as CONT-LIE, CONT-SIT, CONT-STAND, CONT-MOVE, etc. Moreover, these auxiliaries agree with the phi features of the verbal subjects. NONC, on the other hand, is marked in two ways: A null form (-0) is used with 1s, 1d, and 2s subjects; the verbal enclitic *-(a)be*[1,2] is used with 1p, 2p, and 3c subjects. This suggests a person and number configuration as shown in Fig. 2. The augmented division includes *potential* (POT)[3] on the one hand and several *habitual* (HAB) and *durative* (DUR) aspects on the other. HAB and DUR function syntactically in the same way as POT. I classify these as augmented due to the fact that they can be combined as needed with either simple aspect to generate compound aspects such as POT CONT, POT NONC, HAB NONC, etc. POT consists of the

underlying enclitic *ce,* which only surfaces as such when no other post-verbal elements—aspect or mood—follow it; this is very rare, but it does occur. It most often takes the shape of *ta* through a sequence of regular phonological changes.[4] Though the phonology of this variation is understood, the mechanism behind it is not, a fact that raises some interesting questions about its enclitic status. Note that Fig. 2 is concerned with the *post-verbal* arrangement of person and number considerations, and there are pronominal prefixes that are shared between numbers for the same person, including, for instance, for 1d and 1p and for 2s and 2p.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

1.2.1. POT enclitic status. POT, unlike other post-verbal enclitics, is syntactically dependent on what comes before it (it is enclitic to the main verb—presumably as the head of a PotP) but phonologically dependent on what comes after it (its shape is determined by its proximity to the end of the clause). Furthermore, owing perhaps to its consonantal rather than vocalic onset[5], it does not interact phonologically with the main verb. As such, the POT enclitic is somewhat different from that of, say, NONC.[6]

1.2.2. Aspect order. The clauses in Table 1 illustrate some representative combinations of the major aspects and the order in which they typically occur post-verbally.

Table 1. Order of post-verbal aspect elements

		V[7,8]	POT	CONT/NONC
(1)	wipághe tá miⁿkhe[9]	0- wi- p- (g)aghe	ta	miⁿkhe
	I will make them for you (KR, p. 192)	*P3c.P2c-A1s.A1s.make*	*POT*	*1s-CONT-SIT*
(2)	yuzé ta akhá	0- 0- yuze	ta	akha
	s/he was about to take it (KR, p. 200)	*3c. 3c.take*	*POT*	*3c-CONT-REST*
(3)	hne tábe	hn- (y)e	ta	-(a)be
	you (pl.) will have gone (KR, p. 192)	*A2c. go*	*POT*	*NONC*
(4)	ozhú tábe	o- 0- 0- zhu	ta	-(a)be
	s/he would plant it (KR, p. 111)	*in.3c. 3c. pour*	*POT*	*NONC*

Sentences (1-4) suggest the following canonical order of post-verbal aspect elements: V, POT, CONT/NONC. This can be represented in tree form as shown in Fig. 3.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

2. The problem, in formal terms: NEG and aspect

Kansa syntax involves the use of post-verbal *negative* (NEG) enclitics, particularly as used in different aspect combinations. Kansa NEG has two separate forms: It appears either as *-(a)zhi* or *-mazhi*, the latter of which is only used with 1s subjects.

2.1. NEG with POT and CONT

When NEG is used in either CONT or POT CONT aspects, it appears consistently before both, as shown in the clauses of Table 2.

Table 2. Order of post-verbal NEG, CONT, and POT elements

V			NEG	POT	CONT
0-	0-	goⁿya	-(a)zhi		akha
3c.	3c.	want	NEG		3c-CONT-REST
a-		shkaⁿ	-mazhi	ta	miⁿkhe
A1s.		move-around	1s-NEG	POT	1s-CONT-SIT

(5) góⁿyazhi akhá
   s/he does not want it (CKT, p. 211)
(6) ashkáⁿmazhi tá miⁿkhe
   I will not be stirring (CKT, p. 40)

These examples suggest a canonical order of V, NEG, POT, CONT, as seen in Fig. 4.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

2.2. NEG with NONC
However, when NEG appears with the phonetically realized NONC *-(a)be*, it seems to fall *after* NONC, as seen in the clauses of Table 3.

Table 3. Order of post-verbal NEG and NONC elements

V						NONC	NEG
0-	pi-					-(a)be	-(a)zhi
3c.	be-good					NONC	NEG
0-	shkáⁿ					-(a)be	-(a)zhi
3c.	move-around					NONC	NEG
aⁿ(g)-	i-	0-	ki-	ki-	ye	-(a)be	-(a)zhi
A1p.	to.3c.	REFL.	REFL	.see		NONC	NEG

(7) píbazhi
   s/he was bad (CWK, p. 208)
(8) shkáⁿbazhi
   s/he did not stir (KR, p. 180)
(9) aⁿyáⁿkikiyabazhi[10]
   we did not see each other (KR, p. 263)

Here, the order appears to be V NONC NEG. This contradicts the canonical orders seen above, as demonstrated in Fig. 5.

[FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

In short, the data suggest that NEG appears both before the slots reserved for POT and simple aspect and after the slot reserved for simple aspect. Note that there do not appear to be clearly identifiable examples of NEG with POT NONC, the case that would best clarify the ambiguity of Kansa NEG placement and help me to answer the question I was posed about the Kansa equivalent of *wouldn't*. With no attested form in the corpus, it is difficult to say whether it is an ungrammatical form or simply a gap in what was recorded. How would the combination of NEG, POT, and NONC look with a 3c subject where -(a)be would most certainly surface? Would it appear as *tabázhi, -(a)zhi tábe,-(a)bazhi ce*, or something else entirely? What would such a form tell us of the syntax of Kansa negation? It seems that the Kansa equivalent of the English sentence 's/he would go,' *ayé tábe*, would provide insight into how the equivalent of 's/he would not go,' might look. Yet, the data do not steer us toward any clear solution.

2.3. NEG with person and number
One final consideration must be mentioned before commencing a proper examination of the problem set. Recall that the phonetic realization of NONC is restricted to only 1p, 2p, and 3c subjects. Thus, the remainder of forms, namely those with 1s, 1d, and 2s subjects, will not clarify these issues. This can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Ambiguity involving NEG with null NONC

	V	NONC	NEG	NONC
(10) kóⁿblamazhi	0- k- (g)oⁿ- bl- (y)a	-0?	-mazhi	-0?
I do not wish it (KR, p. 188)	*3c. A1s. want₁. A1s. want₂*	*NONC*	*1s-NEG*	*NONC*
(11) phímàzhi	ph- (h)i	-0?	-mazhi	-0?
I did not reach there (KR, p. 92)	*A1s. arrive-there*	*NONC*	*1s-NEG*	*NONC*

3. Analysis

3.1. Enclitic placement

NONC and NEG resemble one another more than they resemble POT, both syntactically and phonologically. This fact that at least suggests they are members of a common grammatical class. For one, as neither independent words nor simple suffixes, NONC and NEG seem to be subject to more restrictive placement considerations than the CONT auxiliaries in the post-verbal environment. This distinction seems to be reinforced by the fact that NONC and NEG are phonologically dependent on *preceding* material. Secondly, their placement appears to be more restricted than that of POT.

Logically speaking, there are three environments in which NONC or NEG may occur: 1.) after POT; 2.) after one another (e.g., NEG after NONC); or 3.) after the main verb. There have already been examples of the first two, but let us review all three for the purpose of classifying these environments.

(12) <u>ahíbe</u>[11]   ← Environment 1: NEG after V
A<u>3c</u>.<u>MOVE</u>.<u>arrive-there</u>.<u>NONC</u>
s/he arrived there (KR, p. 92)

(13) shká<u>ⁿbazhi</u>   ← Environment 2: NEG after NONC
A3c.move-around.<u>NONC</u>.<u>NEG</u>
s/he did not stir (KR, p. 180)

(14) ozhú   <u>tábe</u>   ← Environment 3: NONC after POT
in.3c.3c.pour <u>POT</u>.<u>NONC</u>
s/he would plant it (KR, p. 111)

At this point, it is necessary to distinguish between the distributions of NONC versus NEG. In the data above (as elsewhere in Kansa), at no time does NONC appear *after* NEG. Also, recall the complementary distribution of NONC and CONT, a distribution that is unlike that of NEG and CONT. On the other hand, (7-9) above demonstrate that NEG can appear after the NONC enclitic. If one further stipulates that NEG follows the null realization of NONC in (10-11), it is possible to claim that NEG in Environment 2 is required to attach to NONC whenever possible. Furthermore, while NEG can appear with either POT (7-9) or CONT (5-6), it appears unable to come *after* either of these. Thus, the distribution of NONC and NEG is as follows:

(18) Distribution of NONC: Environments 1 and 3
(19) Distribution of NEG: Environments 1 and 2

NEG presumably arrives in these environments by means of head-to-head incorporation and/or excorporation as described by Roberts (1991). It can either arrive at the verb (Env. 1) in

continuative/imperfect aspect or at the the main verb plus NONC (Env. 2) in non-continuative/perfect aspect. Such *enclitic lowering* derives a new verb. Thus, NEG appears to attach to the lowest verb in the TP as seen in Figs. 6 and 7.

[FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE]
[FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE]

3.2. Feature expansion and prediction

This solution is not particularly satisfying for several reasons. The first is that feature checking does not appear to motivate the enclitic lowering. It is possible, however, to adjust for this simply by adding features that may or may not be checked through movement. We may assume, however, that if an enclitic of any type can move to check a nearby feature, it will do so. Such a process would account for all enclitic lowering. The second drawback is that if NEG lowers before NONC, the order of enclitics will be incorrect. Therefore, NONC *must* somehow lower first. The third is that the status of the enclitics within the tree structures is not as clear as one would like. Are they really V heads, or are they just Neg, Nonc, Pot, Cont heads? If they head their own projections, it would seem that their classifications together or separately would require a great deal of justification. On the other hand, classifying them all as V heads would require perhaps even more justification.

Nevertheless, these are exclusively *theoretical* concerns, and there are mechanisms within formal syntax that can be used to address them. My goal here is not to grind a theoretical axe, but merely to find a *pedagogical* answer to a student's question. Does my model do this? Yes: The predicted order of post-verbal elements in a Kansa sentence equivalent to English 's/he would not go' is as follows: V POT NONC NEG, or *ayé tabázhi*. This consists of an inflected main verb, *ayé* (A3c.MOVE.go), followed by a compound enclitic *tabázi*, consisting of *ta* (POT), *-(a)be* (NONC), and *-(a)zhi* (NEG).

I was happy with this possible solution, but—given the aforementioned theoretical concerns—not entirely so. Thus, when I presented an earlier version of this paper at the 2011 Siouan and Caddoan Languages Conference, I put the question to several Omaha and Ponca Elders in attendance. While they seemed to indicate that such a construction would not be at all common in their respective languages, they agreed that the cognate form of Kansa *tabázhi* would be the preferred option. This does not confirm the Kansa prediction, of course, but it does seem to suggest that the analysis leading to my prediction was at least on the right track.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how syntactic analysis of textual data relating to a question put forth by an eager learner can be used to extend our knowledge of Kansa and fill in gaps in the source material. But numerous big conceptual questions remain, even beyond the theoretical ones mentioned above. For instance, how useful is this this particular analysis and application if, as has been apocryphally suggested for Omaha-Ponca, the English expression may occur at a far higher frequency than the equivalent Kansa expression? With no L1 speech community around to offer guidance, perhaps there is no way to answer this question. On the one hand, the deployment of a form that would not have been used in earlier times is the very nature of language. On the other hand, if it pragmatically separates the L2 speakers of Kansa from L1 and L2 speakers of very closely related languages, its use may work against larger speech community goals privileging the taking of cues from still vital Siouan languages rather than English. On a

different level, is the prediction of an order of post-verbal elements, even one seemingly matching cross-linguistic evidence, a sufficient stopping place for analysis? Perhaps the predicted result offers a false confidence in the approach taken. Put in a slightly more philosophical way, is extensive analysis done on a dormant language of any value on its own terms, or does it derive its true worth from practical application in revitalization efforts? Certainly from the perspective of potential learners, the *language* benefits when it can be put to greater use, regardless of what theoretical or applied linguists may say. As I mentioned earlier, there are many, many problems that plague such situations!

In spite of these challenges, work like this can be useful both to linguistic theory and for practical purposes. For starters, it can be used to show that even deep holes in the available documentation can be filled with a little theoretical elbow grease. This is comforting to know, and I hope that my analysis can show one way that it can be done. There are, of course, others. My speaking with the tribal Elders at the conference was what ultimately gave me confidence in my solution. I was lacking this confidence after just looking at the problem from a theoretical point of view. Nevertheless, in order to frame the question properly so that it could even be asked (and later taught), I did require some preliminary reconstructive work. The mere formality of the theory underpinning that reconstructive work did not make my solution somehow correct, but neither did it make it unattainable. At the risk of closing this chapter perched atop a linguist's soap box, I would add that language teachers should not fear formal syntax; it is just one more arrow in their quiver, and I hope I have shown here that it can be put to service in solving practical pedagogical problems.

Notes

1   I have written the initial vowel in parentheses to avoid a digression into what is occasionally known as ablaut in Siouan. Suffice it to say, this initial vowel surfaces only when the final vowel of the element to which it attaches ends in -*e*, presumably due to a $V_1+V_2=V_2$ rule involving Kansa *e* and *a*. For a more detailed treatment of this phenomenon throughout Siouan, see Rankin (1995).

2   Both to save space and to preserve consistency with source material where appropriate, all Kansa words in this chapter are written only in the practical orthography. This system is phonological in nature, but uses fewer special characters, allows digraphs and trigraphs, and makes use of English-based capitalization and punctuation standards that potential language learners may regard as normal.

3   Note that POT is occasionally regarded in the Siouan literature as an *irrealis* (IRR) marker (see Quintero, 2004; 2009).

4   The so-called ablaut considerations mentioned in n. 1 are presumably responsible for two allomorphs of the POT enclitic surfacing in different post-verbal phonetic environments. These forms include *ce* and *ta*, the former of which further exhibits routine spirantization of the initial stop before a front vowel.

5   The other augmented aspect enclitics, HAB and DUR, also feature consonantal onsets, a fact that may strengthen the notion of augmented aspect as a natural class in Kansa.

6   The fact is represented in the Kansa practical orthography by a space between the main verb and POT where no such space is left between the main verb and NONC.

7   In this paper, I mark pronouns using 'A' for agent and 'P' for patient, without regard to the various inflectional realizations found throughout Dhegiha. I mark person using '1,' '2,' or '3,' for first, second, or third person, respectively, though the use of null pronouns in third person makes the classification as agent or patient irrelevant. I mark number using 's' for singular, 'd' for inclusive dual, and 'p' for plural. I also use 'c,' after Kelly's (1992) Hebrew gender convention, to represent so-called *common* number in third person where singular and plural have collapsed in Kansa.

8   The analysis of pronominals here differs from that presented either in Quintero (2004) or Rankin (2005), where all A1s and A2s pronominals are represented by archiphonemic WA- and YA-, respectively, and phonological rules are needed to explain their phonetic realization. To simplify things, I have simply shown final realizations in the analysis.

9   All clausal examples in this paper come from sentences in McBride and Cumberland (2009), *Compiled Kanza texts,* or McBride and Cumberland (2010), *Kanza reader,* abbreviated 'CKT' and 'KR,' respectively. Corresponding page numbers appear after the English glosses.

10   This verb undergoes a complex phonological process that turns the pronominal $a^n(g)$- + the instrumental *i*- into a^nya^n-.

11   Kansa has a class of motion verbs including *go*, *come*, etc. that include a motion prefix *a*- on certain forms. I have termed this MOVE in the gloss. Note that the semantics of these verbs does not preclude use of them in either continuative/imperfect or non-continuative/perfect aspect; both are completely grammatical.

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