

A UNIFIED ANALYSIS OF THE ẸDO -LV SUFFIX

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Abstract

This study provides a unified reading of the Ẹdo -lv suffix. Previous analyses of the suffix have argued for either an iterative reading on verbs suffixed with the -lv extension or a plural reading on arguments (internal in the case of transitive verbs and external in the case of intransitive verbs). This work accounts for the reading of the Ẹdo -lv suffix as a complex interaction between aktionsart (the features [punctual] and [telic]) and transitivity. Preliminary data available lead us to posit that the basic function of the Ẹdo -lv suffix is to extend events temporally. It achieves this through two strategies; the -lv suffix ‘extends’ [+punctual] verbs by imposing an iterative reading on the verb while [-punctual] verbs are extended by pluralizing verbal arguments. This study thus shows the pertinent role of aktionsart in the grammar of the Ẹdo language.

Keywords: aktionsart, Ẹdo, morphosemantics, -lv suffix, temporal extension

0. Introduction

The Ẹdo -lv suffix is one of two inflectional verbal suffixes in the language (the other being the -rv suffix). It is known as the -lv suffix because of its phonetic shape; it is composed of the voiced alveolar lateral stop /l/ when the nucleus of the last syllable of the verb is an oral vowel and realized as the alveolar nasal /n/ when the nucleus of the last syllable of the verb is a nasal vowel and a vowel which is conditioned by the last vowel of the verb stem to which the suffix is attached. Example 1(a)-(i) below presents an illustration of this phenomenon as described by Oṃṣṣuyi (1986b:70);

	Verb	Verb + Suffix	
1 (a) dè	‘buy’	dè-lé	‘buy repeatedly’
(b) vù	‘uproot’	vù-ló	‘uproot repeatedly’
(c) fì	‘throw’	fì-ló	‘throw repeatedly’
(d) tà	‘say’	tà-ló	‘say repeatedly.’
(e) sùn	‘crawl’	sùn-nó	‘crawl repeatedly’
(f) bún	‘Break’	bùn-nó	‘break repeatedly’
(g) tìn	‘fly’	tìn-nó	‘fly repeatedly’
(h) sàán	‘jump’	sàn-nó	‘jump repeatedly’
(i) mìé	‘squeeze out liquid’	mìé-né	‘squeeze out liquid repeatedly’

Example 1(a)-(d) showcase verbs whose last vowels are oral collocating with an oral vowel in the -lv suffix while examples 1(e) - (i) illustrate verbs whose last vowels are nasal collocating with a nasal vowel in the -lv suffix.

Amayo (1976:117-118) summarizes the suffix vowel selection rules as follows in 2 below;

2(a) if the stem is high, the suffix vowel is /o/ or /ō/, depending on whether the stem vowel is oral or nasal. /ō/ then changes to /õ/

(b) If the stem vowel is low the suffix is /ɔ/ or /ɔ̃/ depending on the nasality of the stem vowel;

(c). If the stem vowel is neither high nor low, all the features are copied in the suffix.

This study adopts the suffix realization rules of Amayo (1976) as our data confirm his claims.

The term ‘aktionsart’ has two different uses. On the one hand it could refer to the inherent (aspectual) meaning of verbs (Comrie 1976) i.e. the lexicalization of certain temporal properties such as telicity, stativity, and punctuality on the verb. On the other hand aktionsart refers to the use of derivational morphology to ‘express’ temporal properties on the verb. The latter use of the term is commonly used in Slavic studies (as Slavic languages are generally considered to be morphologically rich).

Vendler (1957) was the first to classify verbs (in the English language) on the basis of their inherent temporal characteristics. The classification was intended to capture “the most common time schemata implied by the use of English verbs”. He classified English verbs into states, activities, achievements and accomplishments.

Although Vendler (1957) proposed the aktionsart taxonomy based solely on the analysis of English verbs, the classification system has proved to be of great cross-linguistic validity. Linguistic investigations in the following languages have demonstrated that this classification system is relevant in the organization of verbal systems; Lakhota (Foley and Van Valin 1984), Hausa (Abdoulaye 1992), Sama (Walton 1986), Yatye (Foley and Van Valin 1984), Italian (Centineo 1986), Korean (Yang 1994), Igbo (Agbo 2010) and Esan (Ejele 2000, 2002). Van Valin (2005:32) thus concludes that “it would be reasonable to hypothesize that these distinctions are the universal basis of the organization of verbal systems of human language”. Previous classifications of the Edo verb have been based on the morphology (morpheme structure) and phonology (syllable) structure of the Edo language with the exception of Omoręgbę (2012) which classified Edo verbs on the basis of semantic fields. These classification systems lack the explanatory adequacy to account for a unified reading of the Edo -lv extension. The aktionsart classification system fills this gap as it is observed that only [+ telic] verbs license the -lv suffix and the two related readings which the -lv suffix yields are linked to the feature [punctual].

2. An Overview of Previous Analyses

The Edo -lv suffix has received varied albeit ‘unsynchronized’ analyses in previous studies. Here we present the various analyses of the -lv suffix as well as data presented by the various authors to validate their claims.

Omoruyi (1986:70) asserts that;

There is a class of Edo action verbs which can be inflected or extended for the purpose of number

agreement with the nouns that co-occur with them in sentences, and also to express repetitiveness, interaction, intensity and even a continuing process or activity.

He argues that when plurality¹ is not indicated on the noun (for instance by change of the initial vowel of the noun), the plurality of the nominal can only be inferred from the inflection of the verb. He further argues that since most Edo nouns do not change their forms when pluralized, these verbs perform the syntactic roles of determining their singular or plural forms. He claims that the -lv suffix performs the iterative function by marking the concept of ‘more than one with respect to the action of the verb’.

According to him, ‘plurality underlines all the functions of the verbs’; he thus refers to the verb + suffix combination as ‘verbal plural’. He further claims that grammatical relations such as ‘subject’ and ‘object’ play pertinent roles in the singular or plural interpretation of nouns, which co-occur with the -lv suffixed verb. He summarizes the interpretation between grammatical relations and the singular/plural reading of plural verbs in the rule presented as 3 below;

3. Transitive verbal plurals pluralize object nouns while intransitive verbal plurals can only pluralize subject nouns.

He illustrates the rule in 3 with the example in 4 below, to show the workings of the rule in transitive clauses;

4. **ìkhùò dẹ́lẹ́ èbé**
women buy + PLU book
‘Women bought books’

He contends that the inflection of the verb is intended to pluralize **èbé** ‘book’ which is normally not inflected for plurality. He also proposes an iterative interpretation for example 4 above - i.e. a situation where the act of buying occurs more than once, thus yielding a plural reading on what is bought. To illustrate the workings of the rule stated in 3 above on intransitive clauses, he presents the example in 5 below;

5. **ẹ̀wé wùlọ́ nóđẹ́**
goat die + PLUR yesterday
‘Goats died yesterday’

He claims that plurality moves/shifts backwards to the subject noun **ewe** ‘goat’ which is unmarked for plurality. He argues that **wùlọ́** cannot receive an iterative reading because it is ‘illogical’ to die more than once. He illustrates the iterative function of the -lv suffix with the sentence presented here as example 6;

6 **Èhíhì sàlọ́ mwẹ́**
ant bite + PLUR me
Ant(s) bit me

¹Plurality is marked in Edo by three strategies; suppletion (in a limited number of human related nouns by employing initial vowel substitution), an optional periphrastic indefinite plural marker **ávbé** and by the use of quantifiers (Ọmọ̀rẹ̀gbẹ̀ and Aigbedo 2012). The argument in this paper is that the -lv suffix is an additional (albeit derived) pluralization strategy with respect to [+telic and -punctual] verbs.

He contends that the possible plural interpretation on the subject in example 6 above is not determined by the ‘plural verb’ likewise the object nouns cannot be pluralized as *mwa* ‘us’ without a change of meaning. He thus concludes that the inflection indicates that ‘the object pronoun suffered the action of the verb more than once’.

Yuka and Omọ̀rẹ̀gbẹ̀ (2010:13) claim that “... the -lv extension marks a multiplication of the activity designated by the verb. They provide the following data to validate their claim;

Verb		V+Suffix	
7(a) dẹ̀	‘to buy’	dẹ̀-lẹ̀	‘buy repeatedly’
(b) vù	‘to uproot’	vù-lò	‘uproot repeatedly’
(c) fì	‘to throw’	fì-lò	‘throw repeatedly’
(d) sàán	‘to jump’	sàán-nọ̀	‘jump repeatedly’
(e) tìn	‘to fly’	tìn-nọ̀	‘repeatedly fly’

They further proposed that “the -lv extension in Edo can be interpreted as iterative. It designates an action that recurs. The verb in question unfolds unceasingly” (Yuka and Omọ̀rẹ̀gbẹ̀ 2010:13). They put forth the examples in example 8 below to illustrate the transitivity and agreement relations pattern in an -lv construction;

- 8(a) **Úyì dé éwù**
 Uyi buy-past Shirt
 Uyi bought a shirt
- (b) **Úyì dẹ̀lé ávbé éwù**
 Uyi buy-lv plural shirt
 Uyi bought shirts
- (c) ***Úyì dẹ̀lẹ̀rẹ̀ ávbé éwù**

They argue that the -lv suffix selects the plural object argument upon which the verb can act repetitively. The ungrammaticality of example 8(c) is accounted for in terms of the inability of the -rV suffix to partake in transitivity alternation while the verb *dẹ̀* ‘buy’ actively participates in transitivity alternation.

Omọ̀rẹ̀gbẹ̀ (2012:195) argues that “when -lv occurs with a verb, it encodes repetition of the action designated by the verb”. She presents the data in 9(a)-(j) below as evidence;

	Verb	V + -lv	
9 a.	dẹ̀ ‘buy’	dẹ̀-lẹ̀	‘buy repeatedly’
b.	dẹ̀ ‘fall’	dẹ̀-lẹ̀	‘fall repeatedly’
c.	vù ‘uproot’	vù-lò	‘uproot repeatedly’
d.	fì ‘throw’	fì-lò	‘throw repeatedly’
e.	sò ‘weep’	sò-lò	‘weep repeatedly’
f.	bọ̀ ‘build’	bọ̀-lọ̀	‘build repeatedly’

g.	sàá	‘burst’	sà-lò	‘burst repeatedly’
h.	vàn	‘shout’	vàn-nò	‘shout repeatedly’
i.	bún	‘break’	bún-nò	‘break repeatedly’
j.	gbèn	‘write’	gbèn-nè	‘write repeatedly’

She goes on to advance a minimalist explanation for the v + lv collocation

3. Present Analysis

Data available to us suggest that the -lv suffix can only be elucidated when understood as a complex interaction between transitivity, punctuality/durativity and telicity. The function of the suffix is (generally) to extend events i.e. changing telic events to atelic events. [+punctual + telic] verbs are extended by suffixing the -lv extension which yields an iterative reading while events with [-punctual + telic] verbs are extended by pluralizing the direct object (in transitive clauses). [-telic] verbs in Edo do not take the -lv suffix as [-telic] events are unbounded and hence require no extension. One of the implications of the claim stated above is that state verbs and activity verbs will not license the -lv extension as they are [-telic], therefore only achievement verbs and accomplishment verbs license the -lv suffix. The data in example 10 (a)-(e) below, illustrate the iterative reading [+telic, +punctual] receive when the -lv extension is suffixed to them;

10(a) **Ènyé kìn lègàá èrhán**

Snake PST.coil round tree
A snake coiled round a tree

(a') **Ènyé kìn-nò lègàá èrhán**

snake PST.coil-AES² round tree
A snake repeatedly coiled round a tree

(b) **Írámwè sá ómómó**

black ant PST.bite baby
A black ant bit the baby

(b') **Írámwè sà-ló ómómó**

black ant PST.bite-AES baby
A black ant repeatedly bit the child

(c) **Ívìn dé nyà ùhúnmwù òwá**

coconut PST.fall on head house
A coconut fell on the roof top

(c') **Ívìn dè-lé nyà ùhúnmwù òwá**

coconut PST.fall-AES on head house
Coconuts fell repeatedly on the roof top

(d) **Úyì mé nyà mwé**

Uyi PST.hiss on I.SG.OBJ
Uyi hissed at me

² AES = Atelicising Extensional Suffix

(d') **Úyì m̀̀-̀̀nẹ̀ nyà mwé**
 Uyi PST.hiss-AES on ISG.OBJ
 Uyi hissed repeatedly at me

(e) **Èkì bún èrhán**
 Èki PST.break stick
 Èki broke a stick

(e') **Èkì bùún-nọ̀ èrhán**
 Èki PST.break-AES stick
 Èki repeatedly broke a stick

Examples 10(a) - (e) illustrate events with [+telic, +punctual] verbs without the -lv extension suffixed to them while examples 10(a') - (e') illustrate the same sentences as examples 10(a)-(e) but with the -lv extension suffixed to them.

Example 10(a) encodes a situation in which a snake coils round a tree once while example 10(a') encodes a situation where the event of coiling round the tree is extended by repeating the act of coiling (i.e. multiple coils). The verb coil is both telic (as it has an inherent endpoint) and punctual (it does not encode a process/duration).

Example 10(b) encodes a situation in which an ant stung a child in a one-off event while example 10(b') describes a situation where the biting of the ant is extended by biting repeatedly.

Example 10(c) captures an event where a coconut falls on a roof top. Example 10(c') however differs from examples 10(a') and 10(b') in that the subject of the repeated action is plural as one coconut cannot fall repeatedly from a tree. This does not however detract from the observation that the verb **dè** 'fall' encodes a [+telic, +punctual] event.

Example 10(d) illustrates a 'one-off' hissing event carried out by **Úyì** while example 10(d') extends this one-off event by yielding an iterative reading of the -lv suffixed verb.

In example 10(e), **Èkì** breaks the stick once while in example 10(e') **Èkì** breaks a particular stick repeatedly thus extending the event indicated by 10(e). The data presented in example 10 above thus validates the claim that the -lv suffix extends a [+telic, +punctual] verb by 'imposing' an iterative reading on the verb.

This is contrary to the claim made in Omoruyi (1986) that the -lv suffix 'pluralises' objects in transitive clauses. As observed in examples 10 (a), (b), (d) and (e) all subjects and objects are singular with example 10 (c) constituting an exception. This study validates the claims of Yuka and Omoręgbę (2010) with respect to the iterative/repetitive reading 'supplied' by the -lv suffix. This study however differs from the aforementioned studies in that previous treatments of the -lv extension did not specify the nature of verbs which 'impose' the iterative/repetitive reading when suffixed with the -lv extension. Another respect in which this study differs from earlier treatments of the Edo -lv suffix is that we show that some verbs ([+telic, -punctual] extend events by pluralizing the subject (in intransitive clauses) or the object (in transitive clauses).

Examples 11(a) - (d) and 11(a') - (d') below illustrate the extension of [+telic, -punctual] verbs suffixed with the -lv extension by 'pluralising' the subject in intransitive clauses and the object in transitive clauses.

11(a) **Ekítà wú nódè**
 dog PST.die yesterday
 A dog died yesterday

(a') **Ávbé ekítà wù-ló nódè**
 PL dog PST.die-AES yesterday

Many dogs died yesterday

- (b) **Érhá mwè bọ òwá yè Ekó**
father POSS PST.build house in Lagos
My Father built a house in Lagos
- (b') **Érhá mwè bọ-lọ òwá yè Ekó**
father POSS PST.build-AES house in Lagos
My father built several houses in Lagos
- (c) **Íràn má ọmwá yè ẹguàè**
3.PL.SBJ PST.mould person in palace
They moulded the statute of a person in the palace
- (c') **Íràn mà-nọ ẹmwá yè ẹguàè**
3.PL.SBJ PST.mould-AES people in palace
They moulded statues of people in the palace
- (d) **Òsàyándẹ sẹ ùkpòn nódẹ**
Osayande PST.sew cloth yesterday
Osayande sewed a piece of cloth yesterday
- (d') **Osàyándẹ sẹ-lẹ ùkpòn nódẹ**
Osayande PST.sew-AES cloth yesterday
Osayande sewed some clothes yesterday

In examples 11(a)-(d), sentences are presented without the -lv extension suffixed to verbs with the aim of contrasting them with -lv suffixed verbs presented in 11(a)-(d').

Example 11(a) is an intransitive clause with a bare nominal which yields a singular reading on the subject **Ekita** 'dog'. In example 11(a) however, the 'dying' event is extended by the -lv suffix and it is impossible (based on encyclopedic knowledge) for an animate entity to die more than once, the event can only be extended by describing a state of affairs in which more than one animate entity dies. The plurality of the subject is represented by the plural marker 'avbe'. The verb 'die' is both [+telic] (as the event ends once the life of the animate entity expires) and [-punctual] (as it involves a process and duration).

In example 11(b) both arguments of the sentences are singular. The verb **bọ** 'build' is [+telic] (the event ends when the house is completed and [-punctual] (it involves duration and processes such as molding bricks, roofing, painting etc). Example 11(b) extends the events described in example 11(b) by suffixing the -lv extension which bears the form '-lọ' in this instance in conformity with the suffix realization rules described in section 1 of this study. As the building event depicted in example 11(b) ends with the completion of one house, the event in 11(b') is extended by representing an event in which more than one house comes into existence as a result of the extended building event. It is pertinent to note that it is the internal argument of the verb that bears the effect of this extension and never the external argument in transitive clauses with two participants.

Example 11(c) depicts an event in which a group of people collectively mould a statue. Moulding a statue is a [+telic] (the event ends when the statue is completed) and [-punctual] (the moulding of a statue is not instantaneous). Example 11(c) illustrates the extension of the event depicted in example 11(c) by 'multiplying' the number of statues as the only way to continue the moulding of a statue after one has

been completed is to continue moulding more. The pluralisation of the direct object in 11(c) is captured by the plural suppletion rule which changes **omwa** to **emwa**. It is noteworthy that the plurality of the subject does not arise from the presence of the -lv suffix as the construction would still retain its grammaticality if the third person plural (subject) marker was replaced by the third person singular (subject) pronoun ‘o’.

Example 11(d) illustrates an event in which **Osayandę** sewed a cloth the previous day. The verb **se** ‘sew’ is a [+telic] (the event comes to an end when the sewing is completed and the dress is ready to be worn) and [-punctual] (sewing involves several process such as cutting, stitching, hemming etc. and the result of the process is not instantaneous). The sewing event represented in example 11(d) is extended in example 11(d) where **Osayandę’s** sewing of a cloth is replicated thus leading to the creation of several clothes.

Example 11(e) is an illustration of the extension (temporal) of the ‘egg laying’ event represented in example 11(e). The laying of an egg by a hen is a [+telic] (the event is completed when the egg ‘comes’ out of the hen) and [-punctual] (the process is a durative event).

The generalization in respect of [+telic, +punctual] verbs stated above validates Oṃṛuyi’s (1986) claim that the -lv suffix ‘pluralises’ subjects and objects in transitive and intransitive clauses respectively. It however appears that Oṃṛuyi (1986) based his arguments on [+telic, -punctual verbs] without taking into consideration [+telic, +punctual] verbs which have an iterative reading when combined with the -lv extension. The data in 11(a)-(d) raises questions about the claims made by Yuka and Oṃṛęgbę (2010) that the -lv extension supplies a repetitive/iterative reading to verbs which license the -lv suffix. It appears this claim was made taking only [+telic, +punctual] verbs without a consideration of [+telic, -punctual] verbs. This study ‘synchronizes’ the observations made from the data of both sets of verbs and argues that the -lv suffix generally serves to extend events. It achieves this using two strategies - by supplying a repetitive/iterative reading on [+telic, +punctual] verbs and ‘pluralising’ the subject (in intransitive clauses) or object (in transitive clauses) when suffixed to [+telic, -punctual] verbs.

Additional evidence for the claim that the -lv suffix generally serves to extend events stems from the observation that only [+telic] verbs license the suffix. The -lv extension thus serves to ‘untelicise’ verbs by extending them indefinitely thus making them temporally unbounded.

[-telic] verbs such as state verbs and activity verbs do not license the suffix. Consider the data in example 12 below;

12(a) fẹ	‘to be rich’	-	* fẹ-lé
(b) fù	‘to be gentle’	-	* fu-ló
(c) gbìn	‘to be blunt’	-	* gbìnnọ
(d) bàá	‘to shine’	-	* bàá-lọ
(e) khián	‘walk’	-	* khián-nọ
(f) kpẹ	‘wash’	-	* kpẹ-lé
(g) khue	‘swim’	-	* khùé-lé
(h) gbẹ	‘dance’	-	* gbẹ-lé
(i) nwọ	‘drink’	-	* nwò- nọ
(j) dò	‘weave’	-	* do-lo

Examples 12(a)-(d) are state verbs while 12(e)-(j) are activity verbs. The verb forms with the -lv extension are ill formed as they are not attested in the language. Our hypothesis is that these verbs do not license the -lv extension because they are [-telic] (i.e. do not encode an inherent endpoint -they are unbounded) and therefore do not require their events to be extended. Temporal extension of [-telic] verbs will result in grammatical redundancy.

Additional evidence for the claims stated above comes from the various readings licensed by the polysemous verb **gbe**. This verb could mean hit/beat, kill or dance. The data in example 13 below illustrates two uses with different readings supplied by suffixing the -lv extension to the verb **gbe**

- 13(a) **Ètínósà gbé úzò**
 Ètinosa PST.kill antelope
 Ètinosa killed an antelope
- (a') **Ètínósà gbè-lé úzò**
 Ètinosa PST.kill-AES antelope
 Ètinosa killed several antelopes
- (b) **Èfósà gbé nódè**
 Èfosa PST.dance yesterday
 Èfosa danced yesterday
- (b') ***Èfósà gbè-lé node**

In example 13(a) **gbe** means 'kill' which encodes a [+ telic, -punctual] event and the event is extended by pluralizing the direct object **uzo** 'antelope' in example 13(b'). In example 42(c) **gbe** 'dance' is a [-telic, -punctual] activity verb and hence does not license the -lv extension as demonstrated by the ungrammatical sentence in example 13(c').

Furthermore, data available to us suggests that the Edo -lv extension combines with a progressive aspect reading to yield a habitual reading with [+ telic, -punctual] verbs. Consider the data presented in example 14 below;

- 14(a) **Ighòdàrò sè ùkpòn**
 Ighodaro PROG.sew cloth
 Ighodaro is sewing a cloth'
- (a') **Ighòdàrò sè-lè ùkpòn**
 Ighodaro PRS.sew-AES cloth
 Ighodaro sews clothes
- (b) **Òzó gbé úzò**
 Ozo PROG.kill antelope
 Ozo is killing an antelope
- (b') **Ozó gbè-lè úzò**
 Ozo PRS.kill-AES antelope
 Ozo kills antelopes
- (c) **Áisósà bọ òwá**
 Aisosa PROG.build house
 Aisosa is building a house
- (c') **Áisósà bọ òwá**
 Aisosa PRS.build-AES house
 Aisosa builds a house'

The data presented in example 14 above demonstrates the ‘conversion’ of sentences from a progressive reading in sentences without the -lv extension to a habitual reading in sentence with the -lv suffix. It is also interesting to note that the -lv suffix plus progressive aspect reading also licenses a ‘profession’ reading. In other words 14(a’) could also mean **Ighodaro** is a tailor, 14(b’) could mean **Ozo** is a hunter (of antelopes) and 14(c’) could mean **Aisosa** is a builder (of houses). This observation captures the complex interaction between aktionsart and plurality in Èdo.

4 Conclusion

This study set out to ‘harmonise’ two different readings attributed to the Èdo -lv suffix in the extant literature - one as a ‘pluralising’ verbal morpheme and the other as an iterative extension. We presented the claims as well as evidence proffered by previous studies to validate such claims to serve as a background to situate our argument. Although both analyses were not wrong, they were inadequate in that they both used partial evidence to validate their claims. We argue in this study that the correct reading of the Èdo -lv suffix can only be understood as a complex interaction between aktionsart (the manner of temporal action lexicalized by a verb) and transitivity. The Èdo -lv suffix generally serves to extend events temporally. In other words, it extends the temporal boundary of event i.e. ‘untelicising’ telic events. It does this using two strategies - the particular strategy to be employed depends on the aktionsart of the verb. [+ telic, + punctual] verbs are extended by imposing an iterative reading on the verb while [+ telic, -punctual] verbs are extended by imposing a plural reading on direct objects in transitive clauses and a plural reading on subjects in intransitive clauses. Additional evidence for our argument stems from the observation that [- telic] verbs (such as states and activities) prohibit the -lv extension and particular readings of the polysemous verb *gbe* when it co-occurs with the -lv suffix. We also present evidence to demonstrate that the -lv suffixed verb combines with a progressive aspect reading to yield a habitual reading.

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