

# Person by other means<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Person is required in an account of the syntax and the morphology of many languages, while others lack it. Between these two types are languages where person lacks unique morphological exponents (suggesting it is not a morphosyntactic feature) but interacts systematically with the expression of other features (suggesting it is a feature). In particular in a range of languages, notably in the Nakh-Daghestanian and Tucanoan families, the expression of gender and person are intertwined. The recurring pattern is that a default form in the gender system (inanimate or neuter) also serves for first and second person. After careful examination, possible analyses without a person feature become less attractive. While these genuinely difficult systems may still lead us to posit a morphosyntactic person feature, we must recognize that its status is intriguingly different from that which is normally found.

## 1. Introduction

As Anna Siewierska notes (2004: 8) ‘the universality of person as grammatical category is sometimes called into question.’ And indeed, in some languages, an interesting minority, it is not obvious whether there is a person feature as part of the morphosyntactic system or not. We find conflicting analyses of individual languages, and there are instances of intriguingly similar systems being analysed differently, because of distinct traditions. Cross-linguistically there is a relatively short list of features which are genuinely morphosyntactic; that is, they are referred to by rules of syntax and by rules of inflectional morphology. Person is often such a feature, being referred to by rules of agreement, and being relevant to verbal inflection. Such morphosyntactic features are to be distinguished from purely morphological features, such as inflectional class, which allow generalizations across lexemes but which are not accessible to rules of syntax. While languages in which person is straightforwardly a morphosyntactic feature are numerous and well-known, we are concerned here with languages where its expression is bound up with that of another feature, namely gender, so that its status is far from certain. We consider several such instances, from different linguistic and geographical areas.

Consider first this paradigm, traditionally laid out, of verb agreement forms from Archi, a Daghestanian language of the Lezgi group.

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- (1) Gender-number markers for the verb ‘be’ in the present tense in Archi (Kibrik et al. 1977a: 55, 63)

GENDER	NUMBER	
	SINGULAR	PLURAL
I (male human)	w-i	b-i
II (female human)	d-i	
III (some animates, all insects, some inanimates)	b-i	Ø-i
IV (some animates, some inanimates, abstracts)	Ø-i	

There are four gender values, glossed with the Roman numerals I-IV, with the semantic assignments indicated. For some agreement targets the markers may be prefixal, as in 1), for others infixal, and there are interesting syncretisms. Agreement is always with the absolutive argument but not all verbs show agreement. Here are examples with a verb which has infixal agreement:<sup>2</sup>

- (2) bošor                      a<w>χu  
 man(I)[SG.ABS]      <I.SG>lie.down.PFV  
 ‘the man lay down’

- (3) ktele                      a<b>χu  
 man(I)PL.ABS      <I/II.PL> lie.down.PFV  
 ‘the men lay down’  
 (Marina Chumakina, fieldwork)

*Bošor* ‘man’ in (2) above belongs to gender I, and it has a suppletive plural, *ktele*. Comparable examples can be given for the other gender values. By and large gender agreement is simply a matter of matching the gender of the controller. The traditional paradigm has no mention of person, and in the singular part of the paradigm, it indeed plays no role, since personal pronouns take the expected gender-number agreement:

- (4) zon                      d-irχ<sup>w</sup>in  
 I.SG.ABS                  II.SG-work.IPFV  
 ‘I work’ (woman speaking)  
 (Kibrik et al. 1977b: 117)

In (4) we may label the pronoun as first person singular, but there is no evidence for person on the verb, which is gender II singular. That is, the verb agrees, in gender and number, but shows no evidence of person. The same is found with the second person singular pronoun:

- (5) un                      hanžugur    da-q’a?  
 2SG.ABS    what.way    II.SG-come.PFV  
 ‘How did you get here?’ (to a woman)  
 (Kibrik et al. 1977b: 121)

<sup>2</sup> For examples (2), (3), (6) and (7) we thank Marina Chumakina and our Archi consultants, especially Bulbul Musaeva, Zumzum Magomedova and Dzhilil Samedov.

The third person pronouns, singular and plural, have the expected gender and number agreements (four genders, two numbers). Now consider the first and second person pronouns in the plural:

(6) nen                    aχu  
 1PL.EXCL.ABS [III/IV.PL]lie.down.PFV  
 ‘We lay down.’

(7) ž<sup>w</sup>en                  aχu  
 2PL.ABS [III/IV.PL]lie.down.PFV  
 ‘You (plural) lay down.’  
 (Marina Chumakina, fieldwork)

The agreement form is that of the genders III and IV in the plural. Yet the first and second person pronouns are used practically always of humans.<sup>3</sup> This is indeed a curious relation between gender and person. One analysis, that of Kibrik et al. (1977a), treats the pronouns as irregular lexical items; their irregularity is seen in terms of gender. If this were an isolated pattern it might indeed be best to treat it as a lexical peculiarity. But rare though it is, it does turn up in other languages in the world, which suggests that something more systematic is going on. To make comparison clearer, consider the table in (8a) below, in which the paradigm in (1) is reconfigured with person agreement information factored in. Recall that in Archi genders I and II are for nouns with human referents, genders III and IV are for non-humans. In the singular there is only gender agreement (with no indication of person). In the plural, however, first and second person take the same form as the non-human genders. Now compare the Archi paradigm (8a) with one from Ingush (8b). (Archi is from the Daghestanian branch of Nakh-Daghestanian and Ingush from the Nakh branch.) Though the forms and inventory of genders are somewhat different, the pattern is essentially the same, with first and second person plural taking the same agreement form as (one set of) inanimates. (Note that the names that Nichols uses for the non-human genders are simply based on their typical agreement forms in the singular and the plural).

(8) a. Archi ‘be.PRS’

SINGULAR	
I (MASC)	w-i
II (FEM)	d-i
III	b-i
IV	Ø-i

PLURAL	
1	Ø-i
2	
III	
IV	
I (3 MASC)	b-i
II (3 FEM)	

b. Ingush ‘be.PRS’ (Nichols 2011: 143, 431)

SINGULAR	
MASC	v-y
FEM	j-y
J/J	
B/B	b-y
B/D	
D/D	d-y

PLURAL	
J/J	j-y
1	d-y
2	
B/D	
D/D	
B/B	b-y
3 MASC	
3 FEM	

Now consider the paradigms in (9) below, from much further afield: (9a) is from Tucano (Tucanoan, Columbia), and (9b) is from Krongo (Kadugli, Sudan).<sup>4</sup> Again we find

<sup>3</sup> Pronouns may be omitted in Archi, and to date we have no evidence that the pronouns of interest, as in (6) and (7), behave any differently from the others in this respect.

<sup>4</sup> Another possible representative of this sort of system is Andoke, a language isolate of Columbia. Witte (1977: 55) gives the paradigm for the word (or part of speech) he terms the *copulative*, in which third person arguments

first and second person taking the same agreement form as inanimates, though in these cases it is not restricted to the plural: in Tucano number is not distinguished at all for these values, and in Krongo the plural is not sensitive to gender.

(9) a. Tucano ‘do’ (West & Welch 2004: 37)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	wee-ʔe	
2		
3 NEUT		
3 MASC	wee-mí	wee-má
3 FEM	wee-mó	

b. Krongo ‘saw’ (Reh 1985: 186)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	n-àasàlà	
2		
3 NEUT		
3 MASC	àasàlà	k-àasàlà
3 FEM	m-àasàlà	

It seems clear that both gender and person are involved in the paradigms in (8) and (9), but how can we account for the unusual configuration that they share? If we take the Nakh-Daghestanian examples as a point of departure, this suggests a fundamental asymmetry between gender and person in these paradigms. The inflectional markers are primarily gender markers; indeed, in most of the languages of this family they are EXCLUSIVELY gender markers. From that perspective these paradigms are made up of gender markers whose distribution has been perturbed by values of person. We therefore suggest the following possible interpretation of the interaction of gender and person in the Nakh-Daghestanian, Tucano and Krongo paradigms:

- In each paradigm there are only gender-number forms, but no person forms as such.
- In each paradigm there is a default form, which serves for the neuter (or one of the non-human genders).
- Gender agreement is restricted to third person arguments in part of the system (the plural in Archi) or all of the system.
- First and second person, since they lack gender agreement, take the default form.
- Person marking is thus a by-product of this restriction on the distribution of gender agreement.

On this interpretation, the patterns in (8) and (9) are a result of gender agreement being restricted to third person arguments. This mirrors the familiar restriction of pronominal gender distinctions to third person (Siewierska 2004: 104-5), which is found in these languages as well, so it appears that this pattern is not entirely arbitrary. On the other hand, it is very rare, so that the mere fact that we may have a ready explanation at hand is not enough to show that the pattern itself is more than an accident. A useful next step, therefore, will be to look at comparative evidence, particularly from the Tucanoan family. This evidence suggests that the proposal, based on the restriction of gender agreement, may be on the right track.

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show six gender distinctions. First and second person arguments take the same agreement forms as the third person neuter. However, Landaburu (1979: 112f, 159), who calls this the *assertif*, gives a fuller but at the same time rather different picture. The forms which correspond to those given by Witte are morphologically analyzed as a lexical base plus suffixed demonstrative pronoun, but in addition he gives forms with the first and second person (singular and plural) suffixed too, yielding full person agreement. Unfortunately, none of the examples in Witte’s text would involve first or second person agreement anyway, so it is impossible to know what to make of this discrepancy.

## 2. Tucanoan evidence

The basic elements of the system described above are found through the whole Tucanoan family, but with numerous subtle and not-so-subtle variants. In some cases these provide further support for the analysis proposal above. In other cases, they caution against an overly facile interpretation of the data. Two key elements of our proposal find support in the Tucanoan languages. First, that a person-based restriction on gender agreement is a distinct notion from person agreement. Second, that the characteristic shape of these paradigms is due to the interplay of forms with gender agreement and an underspecified ‘elsewhere’ form.

Evidence that we can treat apparent person marking as the surface manifestation of a person-based restriction on gender agreement comes particularly from Orejón (Western Tucanoan, southern branch). Before highlighting the relevant points, it should be noted that Orejón differs from the languages presented so far, in that there are only two genders, masculine and feminine, and nouns which denote inanimates take masculine agreement. With that in mind, consider first the indicative present-future paradigm in (10a) below. This is in effect the two-gender analogue of the Tucano paradigm, with gender agreement in the third person singular, and one form for the rest of the singular. Contrast this with the corresponding interrogative paradigm in (10b). Each paradigm comprises four suffixes which, while not identical (two of the four differ slightly), are clearly morphologically related. But the striking fact is that their distribution is different: while in the indicative the gender-agreeing suffixes are restricted to the third person singular, in the interrogative their range is extended to the second person singular. This can be seen even more clearly in the past tense paradigms (10c,d), which have only three forms each: two gender-agreeing forms, and a single form for the rest. The indicative and interrogative paradigms thus have different configurations of person syncretism, as a consequence, we would contend, of differing restrictions on gender agreement.

(10) Orejón suffixes (Velie & Velie 1981: 123f)

a. indicative present-future		b. interrogative present-future	
FEM		MASC	
1SG	-yi		
2SG			
3SG	-ko	-hi	
PL	-yo		

  

c. indicative past		d. interrogative past	
FEM		MASC	
PL	-bi		
1SG			
2SG			
3SG	-go	-gi	

Note, however, that the nature of these restrictions is not entirely clear. It is tempting to see them as morphosyntactic, in the way that the restriction on plural agreement to animate arguments, also a characteristic of the Tucanoan languages, surely is. In at least some languages, however, we cannot treat the restriction as morphosyntactic. Consider Tucano again. Many verbal constructions involve a nominal form, termed gerundive in the description. The nominal form marks gender-number using suffixes identical to those found

on nouns, as in (11) below.<sup>5</sup> This gerundive forms a periphrastic construction together with an auxiliary verb (the verb ‘do’ shown above in (9a)). But while the auxiliary displays the apparent person-based restrictions on gender agreement, the gerundive does not. The result is a periphrastic construction, such as that shown in (12) below, whose individual members display different gender agreement patterns. If we treat this as a single agreement domain, then clearly the gender restriction is morphological and not morphosyntactic.

(11) Tucano nominal forms (West & Welch 2004: 37, 81, 85)

a. gerundive ‘wash’

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
MASC	coe-gu	coe-rã
FEM	coe-go	
NEUT	coe-ro	

b. comparable suffixes on nouns

acaweré-gu	‘male relative’
acaweré-go	‘female relative’
acaweré-rã	‘relatives’
acá-ro	‘box’

(12) Tucano present progressive paradigm (gerundive + auxiliary) ‘is washing’; the non-agreeing default form of the auxiliary is shown in boldface (West & Welch 2004: 37)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1 MASC	coe-gu <b>wee-ʔe</b>	coe-rã wee-má
2 MASC	coe-gu <b>wee-ʔe</b>	
3 MASC	coe-gu wee-mí	
1 FEM	coe-go <b>wee-ʔe</b>	
2 FEM	coe-go <b>wee-ʔe</b>	
3 FEM	coe-go wee-mó	
3 NEUT	coe-ro <b>wee-ʔe</b>	

In most other Eastern Tucanoan languages the auxiliary element is suffixed to the nominal form; this means that the morphological unity of the construction is even more apparent, as in the non-past conjectural paradigm of Carapana in (13) below. Note here that the syncretic auxiliary form is simply zero.

(13) Carapana non-past conjectural ‘work’ (Metzger 2000: 154)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1 MASC	paa-u	paa-rã
2 MASC		
3 MASC	paa-u-mi	
1 FEM	paa-o	
2 FEM		
3 FEM	paa-o-mo	
3 NEUT	paa-ro	

The second key element of our proposal is that the non-gender-agreeing form should be treated as a default form. This of course is an easy way to explain away forms with an eclectic paradigmatic distribution, but there are some positive indications. First, if there is any

<sup>5</sup> The noun system includes a large number of different singular and plural suffixes, but gerundive inflection is limited to this set of four. Note that inanimate count nouns typically have a distinct plural form (e.g. *acá-ri* ‘boxes’), but always take singular agreement.

zero exponence in the paradigm, it realizes the non-gender-agreeing cells. This was already apparent in (13), and can be more clearly seen in Macuna in (14), also from the Eastern Tucanoan branch, where the first person/second person/third person neuter form has no suffix.

(14) Macuna present ‘fall’ (Frank, Smothermon & Smothermon 1995: 48)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	kedia	
2		
3 NEUT		
3 MASC	kedia-bĩ	kedia-bã
3 FEM	kedia-bõ	

Still, in spite of what is often assumed, there is no necessary connection between zero exponence and underspecification. Perhaps more telling then is the evidence from Cubeo (Eastern Tucanoan, as is Tucano). In (15) below, consider first the middle paradigm (15b), illustrating the so-called class I unmarked evidential forms. *Class I* and *class II* refer to tense-aspect distinctions whose actual interpretation depends on the lexical class (stative/dynamic) of the verb. The shape of the paradigm is exactly that of the Tucano paradigm shown above in (9a). In Cubeo, there is a suffix *-wi* found in the first and second person, and the third person neuter. The other two paradigms (15a) and (15c) have a form *-awĩ*, which is similar to *-wi*, and which we speculate is related, though the evidence is uncertain.<sup>6</sup> On the assumption that *-wi* and *-awĩ* can be equated, the differences in their distribution are interesting to consider. In the class II paradigm in (15a), the range of this affix is restricted by dedicated suffixes for first person singular and first person plural (exclusive), while in the assumed remote past (15c), this suffix is used throughout. This pattern can be understood if we think of *-wi/-awĩ* as being unspecified both for person and gender, and so being used as an ‘elsewhere’ form just in case no more specific suffix has been assigned.

(15) Cubeo (Chacon 2012: 270, 272f)

a. class II tense-aspect

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1 MASC	-ka-ki	-ka-rã
1 FEM	-ka-ko	
2	-awĩ	
3 NEUT		
3 MASC	-ãbe	-ibã
3 FEM	-ako	

b. class I tense-aspect

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
	-wi	
	-bi	-bã
	-biko	

c. assumed remote past

-këbã-awĩ
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The Cubeo data also illustrate an additional complication to our account. If we contrast the class II paradigm to the class I paradigm, we see a spreading of gender agreement from the third person to the first person. Superficially we might compare this to the behaviour seen above in the interrogative paradigms in Orejón in (10b), where gender agreement is extended from the third person to the second, but there is an important difference. In Cubeo

<sup>6</sup> Chacon (2012) equates the forms in (15a) and (15c), while Maxwell & Morse (1999: 43f) in their description give the form of the assumed remote past as *-këbã-wi*, and explicitly relate its terminal *-wi* with that found in **Error! Reference source not found.c**, thus equating (15b) and (15c). Combining these views suggests that the idea that there is a diachronic relationship between all three is not implausible.

there is a bona fide first person marker *-ka*, which in turn serves as a host for gender markers, which are in fact distinct from the gender markers found in the third person. The extension of gender marking to the first person thus seems to depend on the 1<sup>st</sup> person suffix *-ka*, and is not an independent phenomenon.

Thus, not all variant gender-person configurations in the Tucanoan languages can be attributed to the same factors. A particularly striking deviation is found in the Wanano (Eastern Tucanoan, northern branch) paradigm shown in (16a) below, which is practically the mirror image of the Tucano paradigm in (9a): it has gender agreement ONLY in the first and second person. But judging by the suffixes, this paradigm has a different origin. The Wanano suffixes correspond not to the verbal suffixes of Tucano, but to the nominal gerundive suffixes in (11a) (shown again in 16b)<sup>7</sup>, which distinguish gender only, not person. The major differences in Wanano with respect to Tucano are that (i) the suffix *-ro*, which is neuter in many of the other Eastern Tucanoan languages, has been generalized as a gender-neutral third person singular suffix (paralleling the gender-neutral use of *-ro* in the noun system; see Stenzel 2004: 128), and (ii) the plural has a parallel first/second versus third person split, mirroring the contrast in the noun system between the plural suffix for higher animates (*-na*) versus general animate *-a*; see Stenzel (2004: 138).

(16) a. Wanano ‘sell.FUT’ (Waltz 1976: 30)      b. Tucano gerundive ‘wash’

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1 MASC	ta- <b>cu</b> -hca	ta- <b>na</b> -hca
2 MASC		
1 FEM	ta- <b>co</b> -hca	
2 FEM		
3	ta- <b>ro</b> -hca	ta- <b>a</b> -hca

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
MASC	coe- <b>gu</b>	coe- <b>rã</b>
FEM	coe- <b>go</b>	
NEUT	coe- <b>ro</b>	

Both the singular and plural forms of Wanano are of particular interest because they manifest person marking through morphology which originally was unconnected with person distinctions, and they do so through means distinct from that seen in the other examples in this article.

### 3. Comparing the data

The similarity of the patterning cross-linguistically and its correspondence with familiar patterns of pronominal gender distribution could suggest that this phenomenon has extra-morphological motivation. We might look for some sort of syntactic or semantic restriction on gender marking in these languages. However, it is not at all clear what level it would operate on, and the Tucano evidence presented in (12) suggests it is after all morphologically stipulated.

In many of the examples given above the only evidence for morphosyntactic person is the asymmetrical distribution of gender marking. This might be taken as a reason not to posit a person feature at all. This claim has been made specifically for Archi (Kibrik et al. 1977a: 55, 63-64). Let us go back to the Archi paradigm in (1), since the data appear clear-cut and have been discussed in the literature. Archi has no marker that is unique to person; all the markers in (1) are part of the gender-number system, and so the claim in Kibrik et al. (1977a),

<sup>7</sup> The resemblance between Wanano *-co*, *-cu* and *-ro* and Tucano *-go*, *-gu* and *-ro* is clear. Wanano *-na* and Tucano *-rã* are also likely to be related (Tucano /r/ is actually realized as a nasalized flap in this environment; Welch & West 1967: 16, 20).



following Kibrik (1972), appears reasonable. Nevertheless this point of view has been contested; Chumakina, Kibort & Corbett (2007), following Corbett (1991: 127-128, 272) suggest that a morphosyntactic feature person is required for Archi. There are two main arguments. The first is the additional complexity required in the gender system. Kibrik postulates two extra values of the gender feature to allow for the agreement of the first and second person pronouns (these take, as we saw, gender I (masculine) or gender II (feminine) according to the speaker or hearer, and in the plural they take the form of interest here, equivalent to the non-human plural). Since these are combinations of gender across the singular-plural divide which are not otherwise found in the gender system, two additional gender values are required by Kibrik. However, it is possible if unusual for the personal pronouns to be used of non-humans, in which case genders III and IV are found in the singular, which means that there are two further possible featural specifications for the first and second person pronouns. In other words, an analysis which avoids postulating a person feature in Archi proves relatively costly in terms of the gender system. The stronger argument concerns resolution – the rules determining the agreements with conjoined noun phrases. If we treat Archi as having a gender feature but no person feature in Archi, the resolution rules need to be complex and are typologically rather strange. They involve ranking the gender values into a hierarchy which has no motivation except to allow the necessary reference to the personal pronouns. If we allow a person feature the resolution rules are straightforward and typologically normal (see Corbett 2012: 239-251 for more detail). Hence, taking these points into account, it is arguable that the Archi forms given in (1) realize a morphosyntactic system which includes a person feature, in addition to gender and number.

There is an interesting comparison in Dargi, another member of the Daghestanian family, as shown in (17).

(17) Akusha Dargi (Daghestanian: van den Berg 1999: 154, 157)<sup>8</sup>

a. ‘gender’ markers      b. intransitive imperfect endings      c. ‘come’ (imperfect)

SINGULAR			FEM      MASC      NEUT		
MASC	w-	+	1SG	-asi	
FEM	r-		2SG	-adi	
NEUT	d-, <r>, -r		3	-i	
PLURAL			1PL	-eheri	
1	d-, <r>, -r		2PL	-adari	
2					d-aš-i
NEUT					
3 MASC	b-				
3 FEM					

  

	→	1SG	r-aš-asi	w-aš-asi	d-aš-i
		2SG	r-aš-adi	w-aš-adi	
		3SG	r-aš-i	w-aš-i	
		1PL		d-aš-eheri	
		2PL		d-aš-adari	
		3PL		b-aš-i	

If we look just at (17a), the situation is comparable to that in Archi, except that Akusha Dargi has three genders rather than four. We might hesitate to propose a person feature perhaps. On the other hand, the inflections given in (17b) clearly justify a person feature. When the two are found together, as in (17c), it would surely be perverse to have a person feature to account for the distribution of the suffixes but not for that of the prefixes. These data in turn may make us rethink our view of Archi.

There are indeed difficult issues here. If for Archi we accept a morphosyntactic person feature, we have done so in the absence of any unique form. Now non-autonomous

<sup>8</sup> For simplicity we give paradigms for agreement with a single argument. For the complexity of the transitive paradigm, where the two markers behave differently, see van den Berg (1999).

*values* of features are well-known. For instance, Zaliznjak (1973: 69-74) discusses values of the case feature which have no unique form, but where excluding a given value would create odd rules of government (verbs would have to govern different cases in the singular and plural). Non-autonomous *features* are a bigger step; and yet the syntax of Archi does appear to require a morphosyntactic feature person, for which the morphology has no unique form.

## 4. Conclusion

An obvious but no less important conclusion is that all of these systems need careful analysis. We should not assume that a person feature comes for free, merely because it is widespread; we should justify its use for each language. Equally the lack of a unique person form should not make us immediately jump to the opposite conclusion.

We have seen instances of a strange pattern, where a default form in the gender system also serves within the person system. The fact that a similar pattern recurs in languages very distant both geographically and genealogically suggests that it is a significant one. There is even a possible explanation for it, based on common patterns found in personal pronouns. And yet when we compare carefully within each family the apparently simple pattern becomes less simple, and the analyses without a person feature become less attractive. The issues are genuinely difficult, since proposing a non-autonomous feature is normally something we would wish to avoid. Thus even on the fringe of the person system there remain some intriguing issues.

## Abbreviations

ABS absolutive, EXCL exclusive, FEM feminine, IPFV imperfective, MASC masculine, NEUT neuter, PL plural, PFV perfective, PRS present, SG singular

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