

Condolences in English

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Abstract

The main function of language is as communication medium . Language allows people to say things to each other and to express their communicative needs .In the interaction setting , people make use of language variation .This interaction causes them to use certain utterances which are used for specific goals or purposes . A condolence utterance is one of these utterances. Condolences are one of the communicative speech acts. They are expressions which are designed to convey one's sympathy on the occasion of someone's death . Losing someone close is a very painful experience. One can never really underestimate the power that words hold. In times of grief, especially, they provide utmost comfort. It is always comforting for the bereaved to hear kind words from his relatives or friends. So , condolences are very important.

The present study is an attempt to make a linguistic presentation to the concept of condolences in English . This study aims at describing condolences from a semantic and a pragmatic point of view. Moreover, this study is intended to show the grammatical structures of condolences.

The first part of this study is devoted to the theoretical framework of condolences. It involves six sections . Section one deals with the concept of condolences. Section two shows the categories of condolences. Section three tackles the description of condolences from a semantic point of view while section four tackles it from a pragmatic point of view . Section five explains how condolences can be explicit whereas section six shows how they can be implicit. The second part of the study provides the practical analysis of condolences in certain messages sent to offer condolences about the death of different people. Finally, the conclusion sums up the results of the study.

الخلاصة

يعد الاتصال الوظيفية الرئيسية للغة . حيث أنه يمكن الأشخاص من قول الأشياء لبعضهم البعض وكذلك التعبير عن احتياجاتهم الصريحة. في إطار التفاعل (التواصل) , يستفيد الأشخاص من التنوع اللغوي . فالتفاعل يدفعهم إلى استخدام تعابير معينة تستخدم لأهداف أو أغراض محددة مثل التعازي . التعازي هي احد أفعال الكلام التواصلية . وهي تعابير صممت لنقل تعاطف المرء بمناسبة وفاة شخص ما. إن فقدان شخص قريب هي تجربة مؤلمة جدا ولا يمكن للمرء أبدا أن يقلل من قوة الكلمات فهي , خاصة في أوقات الحزن , توفر أقصى درجات الراحة. فمن المريح دائما للمفجوع أن يسمع الكلمات الرقيقة من أقرابه أو أصدقائه لذلك، التعازي مهمة جدا.

الدراسة الحالية عبارة عن محاولة لتقديم عرض لغوي لمفهوم التعازي في اللغة الإنجليزية. فهي تهدف إلى وصف التعازي من وجهة النظر الدلالية و التداولية. وعلاوة على ذلك، يكون الغرض من هذه الدراسة إظهار التراكم النحوية للتعازي.

كرس الجزء الأول من هذه الدراسة إلى الإطار النظري للتعازي. وهو يتألف من ستة أقسام. يعرض القسم الأول مفهوم التعازي. يبين القسم الثاني أنواع التعازي. يتناول القسم الثالث وصف التعازي من وجهة النظر الدلالية بينما يتناول القسم الرابع وصف التعازي من وجهة النظر التداولية . يوضح القسم الخامس الحالة التي تكون فيها التعازي صريحة في حين يوضح القسم السادس الحالة التي تكون فيها التعازي ضمنية. أما الجزء الثاني من هذه الدراسة فيوفر تحليلا عمليا للتعازي في بعض الرسائل المرسله لتقديم التعازي عن وفاة أشخاص مختلفين. وأخيرا، فإن الاستنتاج يلخص نتائج الدراسة.

1. What Are Condolences ?

The origin of the word ' condolence ' conveys a profound message . There are two Latin roots : *com* , meaning " together", and *dolere* , meaning " to grieve "(Zunin and Zunin , 2007: 4).

Condolences are expressions that are " all one can use to tell of one's sympathy."(Broomberg , 2000: 337) . They are formal expressions of regret or sorrow to people who experienced the death of some one (Smith , 2010: 1) .Condolences need not involve an act the hearer is responsible for .

They express the feeling of compassion toward the hearer's sadness (Searle and Vanderveken , 1985: 212).Condolences are not just expressions of sympathy ; they are also acts of active , conscious support and encouragement in the face of adversity . They reduce the pain of those affected (Muihaki , 2004: 3).

Usually condolences of any form are greatly appreciated by the mourner and his / her family. Recipients of condolences usually aren't looking for sparkling originality, just a sincere expression of emotion (Smith , 2003: 1) .However, not saying the suitable words of condolences , the bereaved might feel hurt or angry . This might even lead to weakening of relationships or loss of friendships (Zunin and Zunin , 2007: 13).

2. Categories of Condolences

With examples, Smith (2003 : 1) proposes the following categories of condolences:

A. classical stock condolence phrases

These condolence phrases are neutral to be appropriate for almost every one , regardless of religious beliefs :

(1) My thoughts are with you. (ibid.)

(2) Please accept my / our deepest sympathy. (ibid.)

B. condolence phrases considering someone's religious beliefs

For people who believe in a concept of heaven and hell, one may express the idea that he / she believes that the diseased is in heaven or looking down from heaven , as in :

(3) May God comfort you.(ibid.)

(4) May his / her soul find peace .(ibid.)

C. condolence phrases as quotes

Poetry can be a source of comfort and can express sympathy. Some people choose meaningful quotes from poems or books they like .They use famous quotes from poems dealing with death and mourning to assist themselves in expressing their condolences .

(5) " To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die ."(ibid.)

(6) " Like a bird singing in the rain , let grateful memories survive in times of sorrow . "
(ibid.)

(7) " May the blessings of love be upon you , may its peace abide with you , may its
essence illuminate your heart , now and forever more . " (ibid.)

D. condolence phrases containing the condition of the diseased

It is convenient to mention the condition of the diseased in a condolence phrase if someone is a close friend to the survivors . Condolence phrases to survivors of someone who died from a lingering illness , for example , might include a note of appreciation that the pain and difficulty are over .

(8) I was sorry to learn of your mother's death , but I am glad to hear that her suffering has
come to an end. (Smith , 2003 : 1)

3. Condolences from a Semantic Point of View

Semantically, condolences have a social meaning which refers to the use of language to preserve social contact rather than to exchange information or ideas . The use of condolences preserves and regulates social relations and it might even lead to strengthening of them. Social meaning is communicated through the ritualistic use of language which is found in condolences. Moreover, the essential function of the social meaning lies in the emotive purpose of the utterance

.The condolence utterance possesses this kind of purpose . Such type of language use is alternatively described as social or phatic communication(Mwhake, 2004:133;Crystal,2003: 346) .

Phatic communication , which is expressed in the form of condolences , is elicited by the occurrences that call for the sharing of experiences or at least a show of empathy . Phatic communication emphasizes experiences of social fellowship and the participation in social linguistic rituals. In phatic communication , condolences (as verbal interaction) have little information value, but instead they have the essential function of "oiling the wheels of social discourse " on certain occasions (Mwhake , 2004 : 133 – 134) .

4.Condolences from a Pragmatic Point of View

Condolences belong to "communicative" speech acts which are different from "conventional" speech acts (e.g. sentencing , bequeathing , and appointing) which are not primarily acts of communication and have the function not of communication but of affecting institutional states of affairs . Communicative speech acts are acts performed with certain communicative intentions whose recognition by the hearer is necessary for the acts to be successful . They express a certain attitude , and the type of speech act being performed correspond to the type of attitude being expressed .For instance, condolences express regret, pain or sorrow (Bach , 2012 :1) .

There are many attempts to classify speech acts , yet only Austin , Searle , and Bach and Harnish are going to be presented here due to their influential work.

Austin (1962 : 151) , in his taxonomy of speech acts , considers condolences as one of the speech acts of " behabitives " . Austin (ibid.) believes that behabitives concern " attitudes and social behaviour " towards someone. Searle (1979 : 15) states that condolences belong to the class of " expressives " . The illocutionary point (or purpose) of this class is to manifest only the speaker's " psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content ." (ibid.) .

According to Bach and Harnish (1979: 51) , condolences are related to the speech acts "acknowledgements" .They (ibid. : 51-54) mention certain general criteria of acknowledgements. Condolences satisfy all these criteria . They are as follows :

1. Acknowledgements "express certain feelings toward the hearer."
2. These feelings and their expressions are convenient to particular sort of occasions . For example, condolences "express sympathy for hearer's having suffered some misfortune (not speaker's doing) "
3. Commonly , but not necessarily , when such occasions happen , they are mutually recognized by the speaker and hearer , and then it is expected by the hearer that the speaker will issue the relevant acknowledgement.
4. Because acknowledgements are expected on particular occasions , they are frequently issued not so much to express a genuine feeling as to satisfy the social expectation that such a feeling be expressed . This fact is reflected in the disjunctive definition of condolences :When one condolees, either one sincerely expresses sympathy for the hearer's suffering misfortune or one expresses the intention that one's utterance will meet the social expectation to express sympathy (without actually expressing it) .
5. Although acknowledgements issued perfunctorily do not express sincere feelings , in the society they are commonly considered as acts of courtesy on the part of the speaker .On the other hand , for the hearer to question the speaker's sincerity would be an act of gross discourtesy and social disruptiveness .
6. An acknowledgement may invite an acknowledgement in response which might be construed as a perlocutionary effect . For instance, condolences are accepted with a " Thank you " or the like.

In the field of behabitives or acknowledgements, Austin (1962 : 151) and Bach and Harnish (1979: 39) agree that there is a special scope for lack of genuine feeling , i.e. sincerity . Bach and Harnish (*ibid.*) add that the utterance can be communicatively felicitous despite insincerity on the part of the speaker . The hearer can understand the utterance without regarding it as sincere.

Allan (1986 : 163-164) presents the term ' value ' which is used to mean the value that the hearer places on a particular utterance in relation to its context. Determinable utterances can be classified according to the notion of value . The particular kind of value ascribed to an utterance is judged by the kind of speech acts which it is used to perform. Allan (*ibid.*) identifies six kinds of values. The utterance used to perform the speech act of condoling has one kind of value : appropriacy value . The value of condolences is judged on whether the expression of condolence is warranted or not in the context in which it is uttered , as in :

(9) I'm deeply sorry that your wife has died . (*ibid.*)

This utterance is only appropriate if the hearer's wife has died . If the hearer has no wife ,

(9) is indeterminable but still inappropriate (*ibid.*) .

Vanderveken (1990 : 219) describes the preparatory and sincerity conditions in condolences. The preparatory condition suggests that something bad (generally a bereavement , and certainly a great misfortune) has happened to the hearer. The sincerity condition is to manifest sympathy . Allan (1986 : 192- 198) , who considers condolences as interpersonal acts , states that condolences have two sincerity conditions instead of the usual one. In the first condition, the speaker feels sympathy for the hearer . The second condition is about the social expectation that the speaker should express sympathy for the hearer . In other words , the speaker believes it is polite to show this feeling toward the hearer.

5. Explicit Condolences

Lyons(1995: 238)explains that an explicit performative utterance is one that contains an expression that names its actions .Generally , performative verbs are used in performative speech acts to make explicit the kind of action being performed (Crystal , 2003: 343) . Condolences can be explicitly spelled out by the performative verbs "condole " , "grieve" and "commiserate " .(Austin , 1962 : 159 ; Bach and Harnish , 1979: 52 ; "grammar lesson mk.docx" , 2012 : 1) .

According to Bach and Harnish (1979: 41) , "condole " is the specific verb of condolences. Vanderveken (1990: 166) considers it as an important speech act verb which has an illocutionary point as part of its meaning .

(10) I condole with you . (Austin , 1962 : 159)

(11) I grieve with you. ("grammar lesson mk.docx" , 2012 : 1) .

(12) I commiserate with you.(*ibid.*)

The aforementioned examples suggest that the verbs "condole " , "grieve", and "commiserate" have the characteristics of performative verbs . They describe the action carried out by the speaker , viz. condoling . They are used in the first person singular , simple present , indicative active . Furthermore, they can be combined with the adverb and performative indicator " hereby " (Cruse , 2006: 126) . This is shown in :

(13) I hereby condole with you .

(14) I hereby grieve with you .

(15) I hereby commiserate with you .

According to Paker(1946:9), one might treat nouns derived from performative verbs(e.g. advice from advise) as capable of functioning as explicit performatives .Similarly, the noun " condolence " derived from the performative verb "condole" is capable of functioning as explicit performative. So, the utterance" My condolences " corresponds precisely to the explicit performative " I condole

with you ."and similarly,"We send our commiseration to you and to your family " to " I commiserate with you and your family. "

Moreover, Searle and Vanderveken (1985 : 212) consider the verb "condole " as out of date. They add that this verb has been replaced by the use of the noun " condolence " .

6. Implicit Condolences

Unlike explicit performatives , implicit performatives are utterances that do not contain an expression that names their actions (Palmer ,1976: 162) .Therefore, implicit condolences , unlike explicit condolences , do not contain a performative verb or a noun derived from it. The following are some examples of implicit condolences. They are offered by certain informative articles designed to give examples of words of condolence that people can use as a guide to writing or expressing their own words of condolence :

- (16) Oh , I am so sorry. ("Quick Condolence" , 2013 : 1)
- (17) Just know that my arms are wrapped around you during this time of loss.
("Condolence Phrases" , 2013 : 1)
- (18) His / Her greatest happiness was making others joyful. (Ropchan , 2013 : 1)
- (19) You have my sincere sympathy. (Jadhav , 2013 : 1)
- (20) May you find comfort in loving memories. ("Quick Condolence" , 2013 : 1)
- (21) We hope you find comfort in knowing that someone so special will never be forgotten.
(Jadhav , 2013 : 1)
- (22) Our collective hearts are heavy with sympathy. ("Quick Condolence" , 2013 : 1)
- (23) He / She will always live in our hearts. (ibid.)
- (24) I hope (name of the deceased) finds his/her rightful place in heaven.
(Jadhav , 2013 : 1)
- (25) Never lose your faith in God. It will help you get through these tough times.
(ibid.)

- (26) This planet will not be the same without (name of the deceased).
("Condolence Phrases" ,2013 : 1)
- (27) If my hug was strong enough to take away your pain, I would start now and never stop. (ibid.)
- (28) There are no words to describe how sorry I am for your loss. (ibid.)
- (29) We are thinking of you during this difficult time. ("Words of Sympathy" , 2013 : 1)
- (30) I may understand your sorrow. (ibid.)
- (31) We are always with you. (ibid.)

Like explicit condolences , the aforementioned examples of implicit condolences express sympathy , regret , sorrow , support and encouragement. This is obvious from their general meaning or the presence of certain words like " sympathy " and "sorry".

7. The Syntactic Structure of Condolences

Some condolences have the structure of declarative sentences. In these condolences , the subject is present and generally precedes the verb , as in :

- (32) You have our deepest sympathy. ("Condolence Phrases" , 2013 : 1)
- (33) Words fall short of expressing my sorrow for your loss. (ibid.)

Another syntactic structure of condolences is that of imperative sentences. Here , condolences have no overt grammatical subject, and their verb has the base form , as in :

- (34) Please accept my / our condolences . (Ropchan , 2013 : 1)
- (35) Just remember that my arms are here to embrace you during these difficult moments. (ibid.)

Other condolences have the structure of irregular sentences. According to Quirk et al. (1985: 883). some irregular sentences are characterized as fragmentary , i.e. lacking constituents that are normally obligatory. Some condolences possess this characteristic. The ellipsis can be recoverable from the linguistic form of the sentence , for example the omission of the subject "I" and the verb "am" in , as in :

(36) Sorry about your grandfather. (*ibid.*)

Another example :

(37) Always in our hearts . ("Condolence Phrases" , 2013 : 1)

The obligatory elements which are omitted in the above condolence are the subject which can be *he , she , or they* and the verb which can be *is* or *are* .

Condolences can also have the archaic formula of "may + subject + predication " which has subject-verb inversion . It is considered as an irregular sentence :

(38) May the love of God embrace you in these tough moments. (Ropchan , 2013 : 1)

(39) May your strength prevail to help you through this difficult time.

("Condolence Phrases" , 2013 : 1)

8. Application

This section deals with the application of what has been presented in the previous sections. The application in this study consists of certain messages of condolences .These messages fall into

two groups because they were sent to offer condolences about the death of different people .The first group of messages was sent to the family of Abdullah Mohamed Omar, better known as Dullah Omar, who was a South Africa's anti-Apartheid activist and a minister of transport . He was born in 1934 . His death was in 2004 . He had been fighting cancer for over a year (Boddy-Evans , 2013 : 1).

The second group of condolences were sent to the Warsaw Voice , which is an English language newspaper printed in Poland, concentrating on news about Poland and its neighbours . They were sent by people around the world following Saturday's air crash in Smolensk , Russia , in which Polish President Lech Kaczynski , his wife , and dozens of Poland's top officials , military commanders and politicians were killed. (condolences , 2012 : 1) . The condolences in these messages will be analyzed according to their grammatical structure , their category , and their being explicit or implicit.

Text 1

My deepest condolences to the Omar family and my thoughts and prayers are with you.

Lindiwe Chiphetha

The above text consists of two condolences . "My deepest condolences to the Omar family " is explicit since it has the noun "condolences" derived from the performative verb "condole" . It corresponds precisely to the explicit performative " We sincerely condole with the Omar family". It has the structure of irregular sentence because it lacks an obligatory constituent which is a verb : My deepest condolences (go out) to the Omar family. "My thoughts and prayers are with you" is another condolence. It is implicit because it lacks a performative verb or a noun derived from it. However, it suggests sympathy . As far as grammatical structure is concerned , it is a declarative sentence : the subject is present and generally precedes the verb. Both condolences are stock condolence phrases since they are neutral to be appropriate for almost every one.

Text 2

My deepest sympathy goes to the Omar family and ANC across the board . Comrade Dullar was the greatest hero of all times and we should learn a lot from him.

May his soul rest in peace.

Regards,

Vincent Mola

Text 3

May the spirit of comrade Dullah Omar rest in peace.

Chris Makgoba

Two condolence phrases are found in text (2) . "My deepest sympathy goes to the Omar family and ANC across the board " is a condolence phrase because it has the word "sympathy" . It is implicit . It has the structure of a declarative sentence . Moreover, it is a stock condolence phrase . The second condolence is " May his soul rest in peace." It is similar to that in text (3) : "May the spirit of comrade Dullah Omar rest in peace". Both of them are implicit condolences. They are religious condolences since they express the wish that Abdulah Mohamed Omar is in heaven. Finally , they are irregular sentences .They have the archaic formula of "may + subject + predication " which has subject-verb inversion.

Text 4

Mrs. Omar & family ,

On behalf of the Tax Policy Department of National Treasury , we wish to extend our heartfelt condolences on your loss . Our thoughts and prayers are with you .

Kind Regards,

Lynette Stephenson

The first condolence , " We wish to extend our heartfelt condolences on your loss" , is explicit because of the presence of the noun condolence . It is a declarative sentence .Finally, it is neutral to be suitable for almost every one. The second condolence , "Our thoughts and prayers are with you", is implicit . It has the structure of a declarative sentence. Moreover, like the first condolence , it is a stock condolence phrase.

Text 5

My family and I extend our condolences during your nation's mourning. Our hearts go out to you all.

Sincerely,

Allison (Lewantowicz) Allain.

Both condolences in this text are declarative sentences. Both are stock condolence phrases. However, the condolence "My family and I extend our condolences during your nation's mourning " is explicit and the condolence "Our hearts go out to you all " is implicit.

Text 6

Our deepest condolences to the Omar family . Our prayers are with them during this difficult moment in their life .

Ntsikelelo Tyeya and family

Text 7

My condolences to the ANC and the Omar family . The company Omar , Abercrombie , Sonn and Mias represented me in 1976/ 7/ 8/ and 1986.

May his soul rest in peace.

Regards

Andy Everston

The condolence phrase "Our deepest condolences to the Omar family " in text (6) and "My condolences to the ANC and the Omar family " in text (7) are irregular sentences because they lack the obligatory constituent which is the verb : "Our deepest condolences go out to the Omar family " or " My condolences go out to the ANC and the Omar family". Both condolences are neutral ."Our prayers are with them during this difficult moment in their life " in text (6) is a declarative , implicit, and neutral condolence . The condolence "May his soul rest in peace." has been used more than once. (See text 2)

Text 8

I am a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. Today I grieve with you over the loss of your President and others in that tragic plane crash. I have a special fondness for your country and I seek to return again in the near future. I did not know about Katyn before this past summer and since then I have mentioned to everyone who would listen what took place there and its implications for your country and the people...

May their [plane crash victims'] souls rest in peace.

Regards,

James Solomon

Text 9

As a fourth generation Polish American, I grieve with the Polish people for their tragic loss. The entire nation is in my prayers.

Mary Cleminson,

Martinsburg, WV, USA.

In text (8) , " I grieve with you over the loss of your President and others in that tragic plane crash." is an explicit condolence because it has the performative verb " grieve " .It has the structure of a declarative sentence. It is a neutral condolence phrase. This condolence is like that in text (9) : " I grieve with the Polish people for their tragic loss." In text (8) "May their [plane crash victims'] souls rest in peace." is another condolence .It is similar to the second condolence in text (2) . Text (9) has another condolence : "The entire nation is in my prayers". It is an implicit stock condolence which has the structure of a declarative sentence.

Text 10

My sympathies and prayers go out to the people of Poland. I am sorry for your loss.

Susan Hayes,

Alabama, USA.

This text has two condolences .Both of them are implicit and stock condolences . Both have the structure of a declarative sentence.

Text 11

Our hearts go out to you over the loss of your president and other beloved countrymen and women. You are in our prayers and thoughts and will remain in them throughout the following months. God bless you, God bless Poland.

Pastor Dave Stewart

Holly Grove United Methodist Church

Anacoco, Louisiana, USA.

Two condolences are written in this text . Both of them are implicit and stock condolences . Both have the structure of a declarative sentence.

Text 12

Our prayers and condolences go out to the Polish citizens and the relatives of President Kaczynski, Mrs. Kaczynska, and all of the good citizens of Poland who lost their lives in the tragic plane crash. The US has lost a great friend.

Harold and Mary Ann Zahner,

San Pedro, CA, USA.

Text 13

On behalf of my family , I wish to convey my condolences to you and your family . I grew up in Athlone (although I now work in Pretoria) and knew Minister Omar as a neighbor and comrade .

Kind Regards

Simone Le Lehane (nee Louw)

Having the noun "condolence", the condolence " Our prayers and condolences go out to the Polish citizens and the relatives of President Kaczynski, Mrs. Kaczynska, and all of the good citizens of Poland who lost their lives in the tragic plane crash" in text (12) and the condolence " I wish to convey my condolences to you and your family" in text (13) are explicit condolences which have a declarative structure . Moreover, they are stock condolence phrases.

Text 14

On behalf of all SA Embassy officials in Athens , Greece , as well as my wife , my deepest sympathy to the ANC leadership as well as Comrade Dulla's family . It was my privilege to work closely with him on the executive of the Westerc Cape of the ANC as well as in Parliament from 1994 – 2001 .

Comrade Jannie Momberg ,
SA Ambassador to Greece

In this text, the condolence " my deepest sympathy to the ANC leadership as well as Comrade Dulla's family ." is a stock condolence phrase . Lacking a performative verb or a noun derived from it, it is an implicit condolence having the structure of an irregular sentence since it does not have the obligatory element which is the verb : " My deepest sympathy goes to the ANC leadership as well as Comrade Dulla's family ." .

Conclusion

Depending on the theoretical and practical part of this study, the researcher has concluded that the speaker (or writer) uses a very kind and smooth language in condolences. Bereavement is a time when people may be particularly vulnerable and weak. So, the bereaved is in need of such a language that helps him to soothe down his sorrow to some extent . As for the categories of condolences, most of condolence phrases are classical and stock phrases because they are suitable for every religion or culture. The speaker can use such kind of condolence phrases when he wants to send condolences to someone who practices a religion the speaker is not familiar with. Some religions have traditional condolence phrases. Moreover , the researcher has noticed that condolence phrases which are famous quotes from poetry or prose are rare. As far as explicit condolences are concerned , explicit condolences having a performative verb , particularly the verb " condole " are rare in comparison with explicit condolences having a noun derived from the performative verb like the noun "condolence" . It is obvious that the performative verb " condole " has become out of date. On the other hand , most condolences are implicit because they express the sympathy indirectly. This would be more delicate and polite. Moreover, it has been noticed that some implicit condolences are elaborated forms e.g. , the condolence " If my hug was strong enough to take away your pain, I would start now and never stop ". Finally, some condolence phrases , especially condolence phrases considering someone's religious beliefs are recursive in nature .For instance, in the practical analysis , the researcher has noticed that the condolence phrase " May his soul rest in peace." has been repeated . It has been used by many people .This makes the phrase sounds slightly clichéd.

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