THE DIFFICULTIES OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) LEARNERS IN UNDERSTANDING PRAGMATICS

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Abstract

Pragmatics is the study of the relation of signs to interpreters. For English foreign language (EFL) learners, the knowledge and comprehensible input of pragmatics is much needed. This paper is based on research project. The writer did the research survey by giving some respondents questionnaire. The respondent is some students from UAD, which is taken randomly. Besides using open questionnaire, the writer also got the data from in depth interview with some EFL learners, the native speaker who teaches English, and also did literature review from some books. The result of the research then gives some evidences that EFL learners difficulties in understanding the English pragmatics occurs in 1) greeting, 2) apologizing, 3) complimenting, and 4) thanking. The factors that promotes EFL learners' difficulties in understanding because 1) the different culture and values between native speaker and learners; 2) habit that the usually use in their daily life.

Key words: difficulties, EFL, Pragmatics

Abstrak

Pragmatik adalah studi tentang hubungan tanda-tanda untuk penerjemah. Untuk pembelajar bahasa asing yaitu bahasa Inggris, input pengetahuan dan pemahaman tentang pragmatik sangat dibutuhkan. Tulisan ini didasarkan pada proyek penelitian. Penulis melakukan penelitian survei dengan memberikan beberapa responden kuesioner. Responden adalah beberapa mahasiswa dari UAD, yang diambil secara acak. Selain menggunakan kuesioner terbuka, penulis juga mendapat data dari wawancara mendalam dengan beberapa pembelajar bahasa asing, penutur asli bahasa Inggris yang mengajar, dan juga melakukan tinjauan literatur dari beberapa buku. Hasil penelitian kemudian memberikan beberapa bukti bahwa pembelajar bahasa asing kesulitan dalam memahami pragmatik bahasa Inggrispada 1) ucapan salam dan sapaan, 2) permintaan maaf, 3) pujian, dan 4) berterima kasih. Faktor-faktor yang memicu kesulitan pembelajar bahasa asing dalam memahami karena 1) budaya yang berbeda dan nilai-nilai antara penutur asli dan pembelajar bahasa; 2) kebiasaan yang biasanya digunakan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari mereka.

Kata kunci: kesulitan, EFL, Pragmatik

Introduction

Yule (1996: 3) defines pragmatics as the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning. This type of study necessarily involves the interpretation of what people mean in particular context and how the context influences what is said. The advantage of studying language via pragmatics is that one can talk about people's intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions that they are performing when they speak. Due to the importance of understanding pragmatics in learning language as foreign language, many learners learn pattern of language/ grammar along with pragmatics. Pragmatics is distinct from grammar, which is the study of internal structure of language. Pragmatics is the study of how language is used to communicate (Parker in Wijana, 2009:4). The rules of how language is used to communicate may vary across cultures and within cultures. In connection with the previous statement that different cultures create different language to communicate, there are some difficulties faces by English foreign language learners. Those problems appear in some cases such as greeting, apologizing, complimenting, and thanking.

An individual may say words clearly and use long, complex sentences with correct grammar, but still have a communication problem - if he or she has not mastered the rules for social language known as *pragmatics*. Adults may also have difficulty with pragmatics, for example, as a result of a brain injury or stroke. Pragmatics involve three major communication skills as follows:

1. Using language for different purposes, such as a) greeting (e.g., *hello, goodbye*),b) informing (e.g., *I'm going to get a cookie*), c) demanding (e.g., *Give me a cookie*),   d) promising (e.g., *I'm going to get you a cookie*), e) requesting (e.g., *I would like a cookie, please*)
2. Changing language according to the needs of a listener or situation, such as: a) talking differently to a baby than to an adult, b) giving background information to an unfamiliar listener, and c) speaking differently in a classroom than on a playground.

3. Following rules for conversations and storytelling, such as a) taking turns in conversation, b) introducing topics of conversation, c) staying on topic, d) rephrasing when misunderstood, e) how to use verbal and nonverbal signals, f) how close to stand to someone when speaking, g) how to use facial expressions and eye contact.

These rules may vary across cultures and within cultures. It is important to understand the rules of your communication partner. However, there are some individual with pragmatic problems that may occurs such as: a) say inappropriate or unrelated things during conversations, b) tell stories in a disorganized way, and c) have little variety in language use.

Review of Related Literature

Politeness

Yule (1996) describes politeness in an interaction as the means employed to show awareness of another person's face. In this sense, politeness can be accomplished in situations of social distance or closeness. Showing awareness for another person's face when that other seems socially distant is often described in terms of respect or deference. Showing the equivalent awareness when the other is socially close is often described in terms of friendliness, camaraderie, or solidarity. The first type might be found in a student's question to his teacher, shown as [Ia.], and a second type in the friend's question to the same individual, as in [Ib.]

[I] *a. Excuse me, Mr. Buckingham, but can I talk to you for a minute?*

b. Hey, Bucky, got a minute?

It follows from this type of approach that there will be different kinds of politeness associated (and marked linguistically) with the assumption of relative social distance or closeness.

Face Wants

Yule (1996) said that face means the public self-image of a person. It refers to that emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize. Within their everyday social interactions, people generally behave as if their expectations concerning their public self-image, or their face wants, will be respected. If a speaker says something that represents a threat to another individual's expectations regarding self-image, it is described as a face

threatening act. Alternatively, given the possibility that some action might be interpreted as a threat to another face, the speaker can say something to lessen the possible threat. This called face saving act. The illustration as follows:

Imagine a late night scene, where a young neighbor is playing his music very loud and an older couple are trying to sleep. One of them, in [2] proposes a face threatening and the other suggests a face saving act.

[2] Him : *I'm going to tell him to stop that awful noise right now!*

Her : *Perhaps you could just ask him if he is going to stop soon because it's getting a bit late and people need to get to sleep.*

Because it is generally expected that each person will attempt to respect the face wants of others, there are many different ways of performing face saving acts.

Negative and Positive Face

Attempting to save another face, it can pay attention to their negative face wants or their positive face wants. Yule (1996) states that negative face is need to be independent, to have freedom of action, and not to be imposed on by others. While positive face is the need to be accepted, even liked, by others, to be treated as a member of the same group, and to know that his or her wants are shared by others.

A face saving ac which is oriented to be person's negative face will tend to show deference, emphasize the importance of the others time or concerns, and even apology for the imposition or interruption. This is also called negative politeness. Positive politeness is a face saving act which is concerned with the person's positive face will tend to show solidarity, emphasize that both speakers want the same thing, and that they have a common goal.

Self and Other: Say Nothing

Yule (1996) states that one way to see the relevance of the relationship between these politeness concepts and language use is to take a single speech event and map out the different interpretations associated with different possible expressions used within that event. Yule gives example when somebody forget to bring a pen. This person then thinks that the person sitting next to him may provide the solution. In this scenario, the speaker is going to be 'Self', and the person next to the speaker is going to be 'Other'.

The first choice is whether the speaker says something or not. If the speaker decides to choose 'say nothing', the 'say nothing' approach may or may not work, but if it does it is because the other offers and not because the self asks, as in [3]

[3] Self : (looks in bag)

 Other: (offers pen) *Here, use this.*

Many people seem to prefer to have their needs recognized by others without having to express those needs in language. When those needs are recognized, as in [3], then clearly more has been communicated than was said.

Say Something: Off and On Record

Regarding to Yule (1996) even if the speaker decide to say something, the speaker does not actually have to ask for anything. Perhaps after search through the bag simply produce a statement in [4a.] or [4b.]

 [4] a. *Uh, I forgot my pen.*

 b. *Hmm, I wonder where I put my pen.*

These statements are not directly addressed to the other. The other can act as if the statements have not even been heard. They are technically described off record. In casual descriptions, they might be referred to as 'hints'.

In contrast, speaker can directly address the other as a means of expressing the needs. These direct address forms are technically described as being on record. The most direct approach, using imperative forms such as those in [5], is known as bald on record. The other person is directly asked for something.

 [5] a. *Give me a pen*

 b. *Lend me your pen.*

These bald record forms may be followed by expressions like *'please'* and *'would you?'* which serve to soften the demand and are called mitigating devices. However, it is tempting to equate the bald on record approach with all direct command forms (i.e. imperatives). This would be misleading because imperative forms are often used by close familiars without being interpreted as commands. Yule (1996) states about strategy related to politeness as follows:
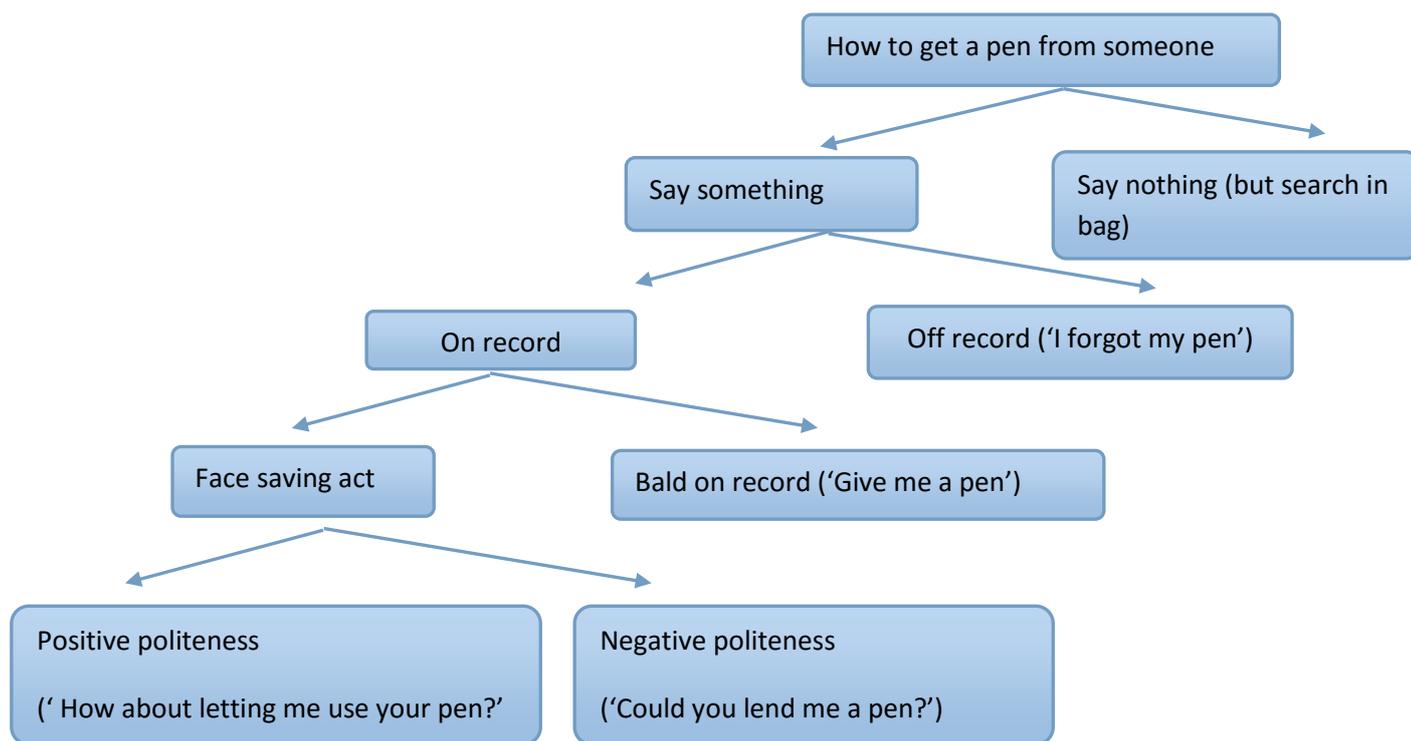
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                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                        │  How to get a pen from someone  │
                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                         ↙                               ↘
        ┌──────────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────────────┐
        │    Say something     │              │ Say nothing (but search  │
        └──────────────────────┘              │          in bag)         │
           ↙              ↘                    └──────────────────────────┘
 ┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
 │   On record  │    │ Off record ('I forgot my pen')│
 └──────────────┘    └──────────────────────────────┘
   ↙          ↘
┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────────┐
│Face saving   │   │Bald on record ('Give me a pen')│
│    act       │   └──────────────────────────────┘
└──────────────┘
  ↙          ↘
┌──────────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────┐
│Positive politeness       │   │Negative politeness       │
│                          │   │                          │
│(' How about letting me   │   │('Could you lend me a     │
│ use your pen?'           │   │ pen?')                   │
└──────────────────────────┘   └──────────────────────────┘
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Diagram 1. How to get a pen from someone else (following Brown and Levinson 1987)

Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics

Putrayasa (2014) outlines that the pragmatic and sociolinguistics have a very close relationship and mutual aid or complement in assessing a conversation or speech. Although the two different disciplines, in some sociolinguistics studies can support the study of pragmatics. According to Leech (1993), the conversation analysis in the study stressed that the social dimension of language is a major dimension. Leech called the pragmatics as a general pragmatics, namely the study of general conditions in communicative language use. If pragmatic examines specific conditions (special), for example the use of language in a specific group of speakers, the study can be termed as socio-pragmatics study. It is a blend of pragmatic and sociology. Socio-pragmatics have in common with the accuracy of content, i.e. the extent to which a particular communication functions, attitudes, and ideas are considered appropriate in the prevailing circumstances.

Putrayasa (2014) illustrates that supports the concept is illustrated conversation between speakers (A) and the addressees (B) using local languages

and then switch the code / code switching into the national language when (C) is present, due to the possibility of (C) does not understand regional languages is used by (A) and (B). In this illustration the study sociolinguistics see social significance in the changes that occur. While reviewing the pragmatics of speech acts in the conversation, for example, students thanked their lecturers with only say *'thanks',* or call the lecturer simply by greeting the *'boss',* can be considered rude. The student should say, at least *'thank you sir / ma'am'* or *'What time, sir / ma'am?'* In other words socio-pragmatics is very concerned with what to say in certain situations, and with how a speaker can say exactly.

From the discussion above it can be concluded that the language is spoken by people so communication becomes smooth called sociolinguistics, while the same knowledge shared by the speakers and dialogue partners so that communication becomes harmonious is called as pragmatic. The closeness of the two makes a harmonious communication.

Research Design

This paper belongs to survey research. Surveys are a systematic way of asking people to volunteer information about their attitudes, behaviors, opinions and beliefs. The success of survey research rests on how closely the answers that people give to survey questions matches reality-that is, how people really think and act. Survey research is one of the most important areas of measurement in applied social research. The broad area of survey research encompasses any measurement procedures that involve asking questions of respondents. Surveys can be divided into two broad categories: the questionnaire and the interview. Questionnaires are usually paper-and-pencil instruments that the respondent completes. Interviews are completed by the interviewer based on what the respondent says (Mahmood, 2010).The writer did the survey research by giving some respondents questionnaire. The respondent is some students from UAD, which is taken randomly. Beside using open questionnaire, the writer also got the data from in depth interview with some EFL learners, the native speaker who teaches English, and also did literature review from some books. The procedure of the research as follows:
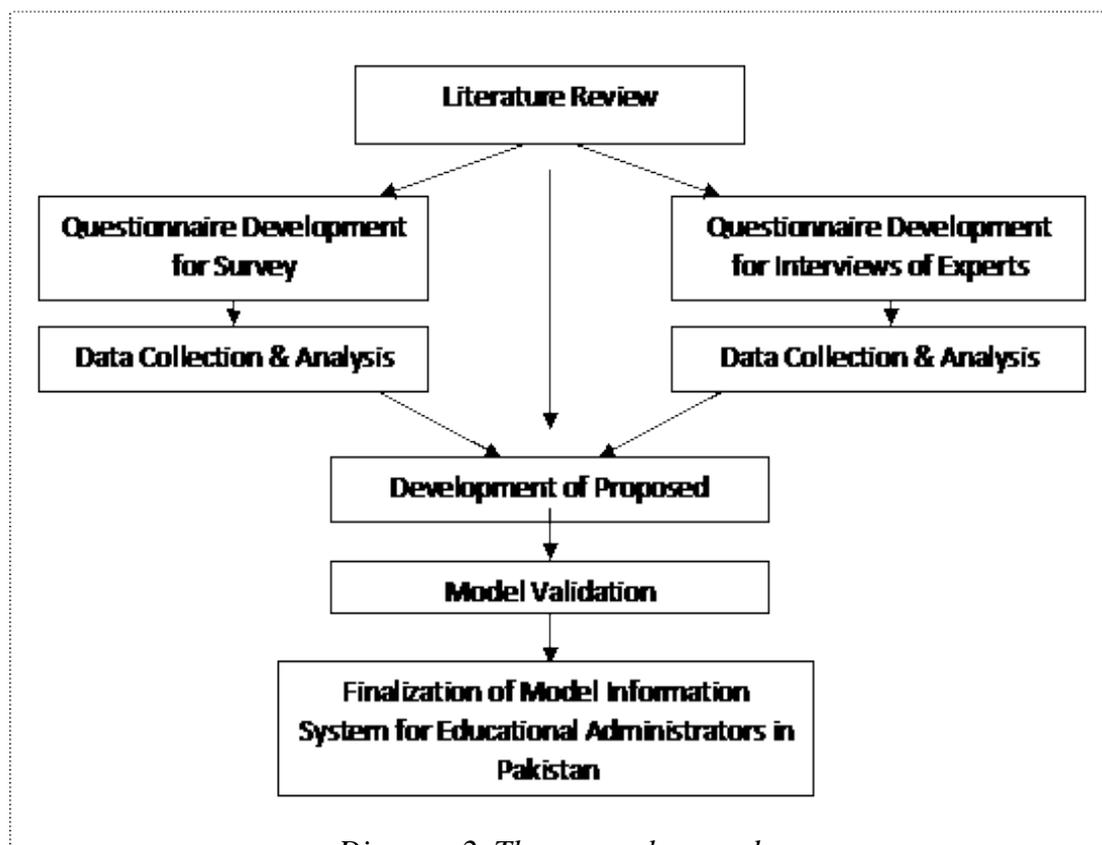
Diagram 2. The research procedure

Findings and Discussion

Based on the data gathered from questionnaire and also in-depth interview, the researcher then analyzed the data. Regarding to the problems of EFL learners in understanding pragmatics, the results is divided into some problems as follows: First is in greeting, most of respondents address their English lecturer outside of the classroom by saying *Hi*, *Hello*, or *Assalamualaikum*. Rest of respondents answered the question by saying *Hi* or *Hello* added with addressing word such as *Mr, Mrs,* or *Miss + lecturer's name*. However, it also found that respondents address their lecturer by saying *Hello or Hi + addressing wordonly* (*Mr., Mrs, or Miss*). We can say *Hello* or *Hi* or *Assalamualaikum* as greeting in most situations. This is a good greeting to use if someone meet someone outside of the classroom. However, there is a fact here that learners use the form greeting + *Mr. (mister)* to address the lecturer. The learners found difficulties to make abbreviation *Mister* into *Sir.* For example:

A: Hello. Good morning, Mister.

B: Good morning.

From the example, it can be seen that learners do not use appropriate form. Although in our culture, we are able to address our lecturer not only with *Pak* or *Bapak*, but the western tradition addressing lecturer in a full form is not appropriate. They usually address their lecturer with *greeting+Sir* or *greeting+Mr/Mrs/Ms+the last name*.

Moreover, still about greeting, the question is about starting a conversation when learners meet a new person on a shelter bus while waiting a bus. Most respondents answered this question by saying some sentences such as '*Hi, where will you go?', 'How long you've been waiting? Where are you going?', 'Hello, how do you do? What's your name? where will you go'.* By saying this sentence, it seems that learners tend to ask personal information about the person. It is a habit for Indonesian to start a conversation by greeting and asking about the destination of a person in the first meeting they meet. But, for native speaker this question is not commonly used. However, native speaker also use form meaningfulness with informativeness in a narrow sense. It means that while it is true that the sentences do carry information in a straightforward way, it also true that the sentences is used by speakers not to give information at all, but to keep the social wheels turning. Hurford (1983: 5) states that uninformative exchange serves to reassure that a friendly courteous relationship. For example: '*Nice day, but it is a bit warmer than yesterday, right?', 'Hi, it's a nice day, right?', 'Hey, the bus comes too late, right?'.*

In another question that suppose the learners meet his/her native speaker's friend after lunch, some of the respondents replied the questions by using sentences such as '*Have you had your lunch?'* By using this question sentences, it seems that learners want to make sure whether the native speakers have already take the lunch or not. The question is quite strange and considered as impolite questions for native speaker, because it also seems that they want to know about personal information about the activity.

Regarding to some examples above, it can be summarized that in the field of greeting, some students find difficulties in address someone and tend to ask about personal information. However, those difficulties do not arise for example when students meet their classmate, a native speaker on the bookstore. Most of

them would greet him by saying such as: '*It's great to meet you here. I will buy a novel, what do you looking for?*', '*Hello Miss/Mr./Mom, what are you looking for here?*', '*Hello, I'm glad to see you here. What book will you buy?*'

Second is in apologizing. When a student comes late in class while the time of the class will be closed in five minutes, then the lecturer said *come in, we just already startthis class or w*hen a student is late to class and then lecturer said the in situation that 'the class has just begun', some students think that the sentence is not a satire sentence with real intent is spoken by the lecturer. The sentence contains the intention that the students had been long enough class hours late from the start. Respond that should be expected is that students should begin with a statement of apology respond first such as '*Sorry Sir / Mom, I'm late*'. But, most of the students are only come to class without saying anything, even apologizing and think that what the lecturer says has no meaning whatsoever. It can be concluded that the ability of pragmatic understanding is still not understood by students. There are also some respondents answered the question by saying that they will say '*Sorry, Sir. I'm late*', but the respondent does not say request to the lecturer whether they are able to come to class or not such as '*May I join the class, Sir/Mom?*' In this case, the rules of politeness are neglectful by the students. Moreover, the social distance between lecturer and students, the expression should be preceding with '*Excuse me, may I join the class, Sir/Mom?*"

In another questions, when a friend accidently bumped in a street, then he/she said *I'm sorry*, some respondents will respond with *That's all my fault* or *It's my fault.* Since that it is not the speaker's fault, but they tend to apologize. Even this is not the speaker's fault, but Indonesian tends to say this sentence. By doing this, he/she (the respondents) tries to give the impressions that he/she is totally responsible with the accidents. Even they know that that is not totally his/her faults.

Next is in complimenting and thanking. The question is about complimenting and the respond of learners for it. The question asks about the EFL learner's reaction and respond when someone compliment in an occasion that she/he is a great writer. Respondents answered this question by saying '*Thank you, do not mention that*' or '*Oh, thanks. But I think this is not good enough*',

*Thank you, but I'm still studying', 'OK. Thanks, but I need study hard/study more','Oh, thanks. But I still have to learn about English'.*By saying those sentences, he/she (EFL learners) tries to give impression that he/she is not really a good writer. This happen because the societies view that it is impolite to praise ourselves. Beside unimportant, this is also not appropriate expressions that commonly used by native speaker in social interaction.

However, those difficulties in responding of complimenting and thanking do not occur when students giving complimenting to their lecturer after his three-hour lecture,the students say to compliment him with some expressions such as: *'Thanks a whole bunch for your lesson. It's very interesting', Thank you, Mr. Brown. This lesson will always useful for us', 'Dr. Brown, thank you very much. I know that your time is very expensive', 'Thank you, Dr. Brown. I get much knowledge from you'.Thank you for your time today. That was really wonderful', 'Thanks a lot for today, Dr. Brown. We need and wait your knowledge for the next opportunity', 'Thanks for give us some lecture. That was outstanding.'*

Conclusion

Based on the result above, it can be summarize that there are some difficulties of EFL learners in understanding pragmatics. The problems occurs in the form 1) greeting, 2) apologizing, 3) complimenting, and 4) thanking. Beside that, the limitation understanding of politeness when using English in context is also still become a problem for EFL learners.

The factors are the differences between the rules and within culture, different values, and point of view. However, although EFL learners found some difficulties in pragmatics, by understanding the rules of pragmatics, it will enrich learner's knowledge and give the learner's opportunity to become a good English language learner.

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