

Examining the Interaction of Knowledge and Preference in Choosing an L2 Speech Act Realization Strategy¹⁾

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The primary purpose of this study is to explore the features of university-level Japanese EFL learners' speech act (request, refusal, and apology) realization strategies, with a focus on the interaction between their understanding of native English speakers' realization strategies and their preference for a native/non-native realization strategy in a specific situation. To this end, the multiple-choice discourse completion test developed by Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1992, 1995) was modified to generate a knowledge test and a preference questionnaire, both of which were administered to the same participant students (N = 425). Results of the item-by-item contingency tests revealed that knowledge and preference were significantly, but only weakly, associated with each other in all items, suggesting the existence of "intentional divergence" from and "unintentional convergence" with native speaker choices in their responses. In addition to a discussion about these substantive findings, the utility of the multiple-choice instrument in the assessment of L2 learners' pragmatic competence is reexamined.

本研究の目的は、外国語として英語を学習している日本語母語話者の言語行為（要求、断り、詫び）で使用するストラテジーの特異性を探求することである。とりわけ、英語母語話者が使用するストラテジーについての彼らの「知識」と、そのストラテジーに対する彼らの「好み」の交互作用に焦点を当てる。この目的のために、Hudson, Detmer, & Brown (1992, 1995) の研究で使用された多肢選択式談話完成テストから「知識測定テスト」と「好みについてのアンケート」を作成し、それらを425人の大学生に実施した。項目ごとに行った統計分析の結果から、知識と好みの関係は、どのテスト・アンケート項目においても有意ではあるが弱い関係でしかないことが明らかになった。これは、日本語母語話者が英語の言語行為にかかわるストラテジーを選択する際に、意図的に英語母語話者と異なるストラテジーを選択したり（意図的乖離）、英語母語話者と異なるストラテジーを選択したつもりが一致していたり（偶然的一致）という事例があったことを示唆している。こうした結果に基づく議論に加えて、本研究では、多肢選択方式を第2言語学習者の語用力評価に用いることの有効性についても再考する。

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of pragmatics has gained a great deal of attention in second language and foreign language education. Some researchers have examined the effect of various teaching approaches (e.g., explicit vs. implicit instruction, deductive vs. inductive instruction) on the development of learners' pragmatic competence (see Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Rose, 2005; Rose & Kasper, 2001 for a collection of studies), whereas others have attempted to design pragmatics-focused instructional materials and/or curriculum (e.g., Clennell, 1999; Cohen, 2005; Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004; Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Ishihara, 2007). Whatever forms the teaching of L2 pragmatics takes, it is essential to assess students' acquisition of pragmatic knowledge and/or progress in their

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pragmatic uses of the L2. In many cases, teachers use tests as assessment devices, as can be extrapolated from the comment that “if pragmatic knowledge is included in the teaching syllabus, it needs to be incorporated into tests” (Liu, 2007, p. 16). A multiple-choice discourse completion test, among other instruments designed to assess the acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge, is one of the most versatile instruments towards this end. This holds true particularly when the test is used in a class in which there are many students, for example, 40 or more, and teachers need to collect data on their levels of pragmatic knowledge at one time and analyze them in a short period of time.

Recent studies of learner subjectivity (e.g., Ishihara, 2006; LoCastro, 2001, 2003; Siegal, 1996), however, suggest a potential problem with the use of a multiple-choice instrument in the assessment of L2 learners’ pragmatic knowledge. Specifically, L2 learners might choose to diverge from native speakers because they do not want to follow target sociocultural norms and instead opt for a non-native response option in a given situation described in the instrument. Given this learner subjectivity, the directions used in many multiple-choice instruments such as “Circle the one that you think is most appropriate in the situation” may complicate L2 learners’ responses, because such directions, depending on the situation described in the item, elicit L2 learners’ preference in one item and their knowledge of native speakers’ behavior in another. Moreover, such ambiguous directions may make it difficult to interpret L2 learners’ responses. That is, answering an item incorrectly may not necessarily mean that they did not know which option was the one that native speakers would use in a given situation. Rather, their incorrect choice could be inferred to mean that they actually knew the native speaker choice, but opted for a distractor as it matched their preferences. Conversely, answering the item correctly may not necessarily mean that they knew the native speaker choice. Rather, it may be that their preference happened to match it, although they did not know which option was the native speaker choice. Given the disparity between knowledge and preference caused by learner subjectivity, it would be questionable to use test scores obtained through the multiple-choice instrument containing such ambiguous directions as valid indicators of L2 learners’ pragmatic knowledge. In other words, it seems critical to designate the multiple-choice instrument as either a knowledge test or a preference questionnaire.

A multiple-choice preference questionnaire (henceforth referred to as MCQ) and a multiple-choice knowledge test (henceforth referred to as MCT) can be generated by modifying the “directions” part of the multiple-choice instrument. Specifically, in MCQ, a conventional direction such as “circle the response that you think is the most appropriate for the situation described” might be changed into the expression “circle the response that you would most prefer to use for the situation described.” In MCT, it would be stated as “circle the response that you think native English speakers would use for the situation described.” This differentiation makes it possible for MCQ and MCT to elicit the data about the respondents’ most preferred speech act realization strategies in a given situation and their level of knowledge about natives’ realization strategies in

the same situation, respectively. Therefore, their answers in MCQ would represent the match/mismatch between learners' preferred realization strategies and native speakers' realization strategies in a given situation, whereas those in MCT would be assessed in a "correct/incorrect" format (Kasper & Roever, 2005). On the basis of their answers to each item of the MCQ and the MCT, respondents can be categorized into one of four possible types as follows:

Type A: The respondents have knowledge about native speakers' speech act realization strategy, and show their preferences for the same strategy;

Type B: The respondents have knowledge about native speakers' speech act realization strategy, but show their preferences for a different strategy;

Type C: The respondents do not have knowledge about native speakers' speech act realization strategy, but their preferences converge with it; and

Type D: The respondents do not have knowledge about native speakers' speech act realization strategy, nor do their preferences converge with it.

In previous studies that examined L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge using the traditional multiple-choice instrument, Type C students might have been erroneously regarded as those who had knowledge, and Type B students as those who did not. To date, however, little research has been done to examine, using both the knowledge test and the preference questionnaire, L2 learners' choice of a native/non-native speech act realization strategy. The present study was an attempt to determine the relationship between L2 learners' knowledge about a native realization strategy and their preference for a native/non-native realization strategy in a specific situation, to illustrate features of their strategy choice based on that relationship, and to evaluate the informative value of the combined use of the two instruments in the assessment of L2 learners' pragmatic competence.

METHOD

Setting and Participants

Research was conducted at two private universities in Japan. Four hundred and forty-one students majoring in Intercultural Studies participated in the present study, of whom 43.8% were males. They ranged in age from 18 to 21. They had studied English as a foreign language for at least six years as part of the required subjects in high school.

Instrumentation

Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995) developed three versions of a multiple-choice discourse completion test in order to assess Japanese ESL learners' pragmatic knowledge. This test (Form C) was used in the present study for several reasons: First, the situations, the correct options, and the distractors included had been well tested; second, the participants in the present study were Japanese learners of English; and third, it was thought to be beneficial to compare results with earlier studies (e.g., Enochs & Yoshitake-Strain, 1999; Brown, 2001; Hudson, 2001; Hudson,

Detmer, & Brown, 1995; Yamashita, 1996). The test contained 24 items, each of which asked respondents to read a description of a situation requiring a request, a refusal, or an apology, and select the most appropriate response for the situation from among three options (one correct answer and two distractors per item). All situations were controlled for three major situational variables, namely, the relative power of the speaker and the hearer (P), the social distance between the two (D), and the level of imposition (I), each of which had a binary (+/-) category. As

Table 1. *Configuration of the variables involved and descriptions of the situations in the modified version of the multiple-choice discourse completion test*

Type of speech act	Item #	I	P	D	Brief descriptions of situations
Request	23	+	+	+	Asking a shop clerk to stay late at work
	14	+	+	-	Asking your floor-mate to move furniture in the room
	3	+	-	+	Asking a landlord to make a decision faster
	22	+	-	-	Asking your department head to reschedule an important meeting
	8	-	+	+	Asking a salesclerk about the location of envelopes
	16	-	+	-	Borrowing a paper clip from your co-worker
	12	-	-	+	Asking a customer to move out of your path
	5	-	-	-	Borrowing sun screen lotion from the club president
Refusal	10	+	+	+	Telling the clerk that you cannot spare more time to finish work
	9	+	+	-	Telling your floor-mate not to hold a party on your floor
	15	+	-	+	Telling the interviewer that you cannot go on a company tour
	17	+	-	-	Telling the lease holder that you cannot do extra chores
	21	-	+	+	Refusing an offer of coupons from a salesperson
	20	-	+	-	Refusing an offer of mosquito repellent from a club member
	24	-	-	+	Refusing an offer of bubble gum from your customer
	4	-	-	-	Refusing an offer of water from the club president
Apology	6	+	+	+	Knocking over a cup of coffee and ruining a salesperson's clothing
	13	+	+	-	Losing information stored in your co-worker's computer
	2	+	-	+	Failing to keep a promise to a customer
	7	+	-	-	Failing to keep a promise to the president
	18	-	+	+	Making a ticket clerk wait for a few minutes
	1	-	+	-	Making your floor-mate wait for a few minutes
	11	-	-	+	Knocking over but not damaging a loan officer's desk calendar
	19	-	-	-	Knocking over but not damaging your project leader's umbrella

Note. I = Level of imposition, P = Relative power, and D = Social distance. The plus and minus signs in the 'I' column indicate that the degree of potential expenditure of goods and/or services by the hearer, or the obligation of the speaker to perform the act is relatively large and small, respectively. The plus and minus signs in the 'P' column indicate that the power of the speaker is higher than that of the hearer and the vice-versa, respectively. The plus and minus signs in the 'D' column indicate that the speaker and the hearer do and do not know each other, respectively.

summarized in Hudson, et al. (1995, pp. 3-7) and Hudson (2001, p. 284), examples of +P would be a supervisor, manager, president, or customer, whereas those of -P would be a worker of lesser status, member of an organization with lesser status, or a salesperson serving a customer. Examples of +D would be a customer speaking to a service person or a law enforcement officer to a citizen, whereas those of -D would be co-workers or people who belong to the same social or professional organization or club. The level of imposition “has to do with the extent to which the expenditure of goods, services, or energy is involved in carrying out a request or a refusal, or how severe the offense was that requires an apology” (Hudson, 2001, p. 284).

Since the Hudson et al.’s test was targeted at Japanese ESL learners in general who varied in age, educational background, and work experience, several situations included in the test were not familiar or appropriate for university-level Japanese EFL learners (Sasaki, 1998). Thus, several modifications were made to the descriptions of the situations while maintaining the original configurations of the three situational variables assigned to each item. Table 1 summarizes the descriptions of the situations used in the present study and the configuration of the three variables attached to each situation (cf., Hudson, et al. 1995, for the original version of the multiple-choice discourse completion test).

In order to generate a knowledge test and a preference questionnaire, the directions of the multiple-choice discourse completion test were also modified in the ways noted above. Furthermore, all directions and situations in both MCQ and MCT were written in both English and Japanese in order to avoid misunderstanding caused by students’ varying levels of English reading comprehension, but all choices were offered only in English in order to prevent students from making decisions about the choice of strategy on the basis of the Japanese translations.

Data Collection Procedure

All participants took the MCQ and MCT in classroom conditions over two consecutive weeks on the same day and at the same time each week.²⁾ In the first week, background information about their age and study abroad experience was collected, and then the MCQ was administered. All students were read a set of instructions about the MCQ by their class teachers. It was emphasized in the instructions that it was a questionnaire, not a test, and that they were required to choose the response that they would most prefer to use for each situation described. The teachers were asked to use as much class time as possible until they confirmed that all students had at least attempted to complete all items. According to the teachers’ reports, it took 40 minutes, on average, to complete the questionnaire.

In the second week, the class teachers informed the students that the MCT they would work on was a test designed to examine whether they obtained knowledge about native speech act behavior, and that they were required to choose, regardless of their preferences, the response that they thought native English speakers would use in a given situation. All items and responses in the MCQ were randomly reordered in the MCT in order to reduce a memory effect. The students were

allowed 40 minutes to complete the MCT.

Data Analysis

As noted above, the purposes of the study were to explore, using the knowledge test and the preference questionnaire, L2 learners' levels of pragmatic competence, and to determine the informative value of the combined use of the two instruments. With the participants, instruments, and procedure identified, specific research questions were set as follows:

1. Is there a significant relationship between the students' knowledge about native speech act realization strategies and their preferred strategies?
2. Is the distribution of Types A, B, C, and D students similar across all three speech acts?

Given the aforementioned categorization based on respondents' answers on the MCT and MCQ, Research Question 1 was examined using contingency tests, whereas Research Question 2 was assessed by the distribution characteristic of Types A, B, C, and D students for each item, each speech act, and across the three speech acts.

Since the data were collected separately over two weeks, there was an attrition problem with the students, resulting in the data being available from a total of 425 students for further analysis.

RESULTS

Table 2 summarizes the results of the cross-classifications (i.e., the frequency of occurrence of Types A, B, C, and D students) and the contingency tests for 24 items representing the speech act of request, refusal, or apology. For example, request item 23 representing all plus categories in the three situational variables had 136 (out of 425) Type A students whose choice was the same as the native speaker choice in both MCT and MCQ, and the phi coefficient for that item was .303. Inspection of the coefficients shown in Table 2 revealed that knowledge and preference were significantly associated with each other in all items (for item 13, phi coefficient is $p < .05$, and for all the other items, phi coefficients are $p < .01$, $N = 425$ for each item), that the magnitude of association was 'small' to 'medium' (i.e., .132 - .303 for the request items, .127 - .284 for the refusal items, and .111 - .280 for the apology items), and that the proportion of variance shared by the two dimensions of classification was, at best, about 9.2% in the request item 23.³⁾ Given these findings, it appears that knowledge and preference were significantly, but only weakly, associated in all three speech acts, signifying an affirmative answer to Research Question 1.

With respect to the distribution of the four types of students (Research Question 2), several patterns were found to be shared between the speech acts of request and refusal, but not between apology and either of the other two. In the request items taken as a whole, the percentages of the four types of students were as follows: A = 45.9, B = 14.5, C = 18.4 and D = 21.3. As shown in Table 2, Type A students who had knowledge about the native speech act realization strategy and whose preferences converged with it dominated in all but item 12. Moreover, in the request items, the proportion of Type B students who had knowledge but whose preferences did not converge

Table 2. *Summary of the cross-classifications and the contingency tests for 24 items*

Type of speech act	Item #	I	P	D	Type A	Type B	Type C	Type D	Phi (Φ)*
Request	23	+	+	+	136	39	119	131	.303
	14	+	+	-	204	77	67	77	.257
	3	+	-	+	198	81	74	72	.201
	22	+	-	-	162	46	121	96	.234
	8	-	+	+	223	71	66	65	.252
	16	-	+	-	296	52	51	26	.187
	12	-	-	+	60	68	67	230	.244
	5	-	-	-	281	59	59	26	.132
Refusal	10	+	+	+	196	91	53	85	.284
	9	+	+	-	131	94	68	132	.242
	15	+	-	+	147	108	76	94	.127
	17	+	-	-	232	70	79	44	.129
	21	-	+	+	148	103	63	111	.224
	20	-	+	-	295	30	69	31	.263
	24	-	-	+	72	125	42	186	.204
	4	-	-	-	166	98	74	84	.166
Apology	6	+	+	+	63	31	124	207	.247
	13	+	+	-	8	12	77	328	.111
	2	+	-	+	91	20	159	155	.280
	7	+	-	-	61	37	120	207	.218
	18	-	+	+	101	26	166	132	.226
	1	-	+	-	52	29	127	217	.217
	11	-	-	+	119	26	169	111	.220
	19	-	-	-	156	18	177	74	.228

Note. I = Level of imposition, P = Relative power, and D = Social distance. The congruence and incongruence between students' choice of strategy and native realization strategy were denoted as 1 and 0, respectively. Type A = Those coded as 1 in both MCT and MCQ, Type B = Those coded as 1 in MCT and 0 in MCQ, Type C = Those coded as 0 in MCT and 1 in MCQ, and Type D = Those coded as 0 in both MCT and MCQ. *For item 13, $p < .05$, and for all the other items, $p < .01$. N = 425 for each item.

ranged from about 9-19%. The largest number of Type B students was observed in item 3, whereas Type C students who did not have knowledge but whose preference converged ranged from about 12-28%. The largest number of Type C was observed in item 22.

The similarity between the speech acts of request and refusal in the distribution of the four types of students lies in the fact that Type A students were the most frequently observed type, followed by Type D students. In the refusal items taken as a whole, Type A and Type D students accounted for 40.8% and 22.6%, respectively. Unlike the speech act of request, however, there were more Type B students (21.1%) than Type C students (15.4%) in the speech act of refusal. Item-by-item comparisons in refusal revealed that Type A students outnumbered the other three types in all but items 24 and 9. As for Types B and C, the largest number of Type B students was

observed in item 24, whereas Type C students were the least frequently observed in all the refusal items except for items 17 and 20.

The distribution of the four types of students in the overall apology items showed quite a different pattern from that observed in the other two speech acts. The most to least frequently observed types were as follows: D (42.1%), C (32.9%), A (19.1%), and B (5.9%). Item-by-item comparisons in the speech act of apology revealed that Type D students were observed more often than the other three types of students in items 6, 13, 7, and 1, whereas in the other four items, Type C students were the most frequently observed type. It was also revealed that, unlike the speech acts of request and refusal, there was no apology item in which Type A students outnumbered the other three types. Moreover, Type B students were the least frequently observed type in all but item 13, whereas the largest number of Type C students was observed in item 19.

DISCUSSION

The first purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Japanese EFL learners' knowledge about native English speakers' speech act realization strategies and their preferred strategy in a given situation. The results of the item-by-item contingency tests indicated that knowledge and preference were significantly associated with each other, but the degree of association was not high enough to conclude that L2 learners' preferred strategies were dependent upon whether or not they knew native realization strategies. In fact, in all three speech acts, there were a number of students who did have knowledge about native realization strategies but opted for different strategies (i.e., Type B students), suggesting that L2 learners do not always want to behave like native speakers of the L2, even though they know how to do so. Such intentional divergence may be because they want to preserve and assert their own cultural identity (e.g., Ishihara, 2006; LoCastro, 2001, 2003; Siegal, 1996; Washburn, 2001).

The question then arises as to under what situational conditions Japanese EFL learners tend to diverge from native speakers when performing the speech act. Compared across the speech acts, the intentional divergence represented by Type B students was more frequently observed in refusal than in request and apology. Item 24, among other refusal items, was the one in which more than half of the students who knew the native realization strategy declared the use of different strategies (see Table 2). Further analysis of their preferences revealed that about 96% of Type B students in item 24 chose the option saying 'Thank you, but I'm not allowed to have anything while on duty' in response to an offer of bubble gum from a customer. The excessive use of 'gratitude' and 'grounders' when making a refusal in such a clerk-customer interaction as in item 24 was consistent with the characteristic observed among the Japanese ESL learners in Hudson, Detmer, and Brown's (1995) study.

Looking into the intentional divergence rate in each item, it was found that in one of the request items, namely, item 12 in which respondents playing a salesperson ask a customer to move out of his/her path, more than half of those who knew the native realization strategy in this

situation opted for different strategies. Further analysis of their preferences revealed that about 88% of those diverging students opted for the non-native realization strategy including a supportive move of 'grounders' (I have to get things out of the display case). The use of grounders when making a request was also identified as the high-use strategy for the Japanese ESL learners in Hudson, et al.'s study and for other L2 learners as well (e.g., Hassall, 2001).

With respect to the speech act of apology, the intentional divergence rate as measured by the percentage of Type B students was much lower than that observed in the other two speech acts. Although there was an item in which more than half of the students who knew the native realization strategy opted for different strategies (i.e., item 13), due to the small number of Type A and Type B students observed in the item, it is unclear whether this is evidence of divergence or not.

Another important point to note regarding the speech act of apology is that there were many more Type C students present than in the other two speech acts. Type C students were those who did not know the native realization strategy but whose preferences converged with it, signifying the unintentional convergence. The high rate of Type C students in the apology items suggests that a number of Japanese EFL students misunderstood what strategies native English speakers would use when apologizing. Further analysis of their choices on the knowledge test (i.e., MCT) revealed that in the four items in which Type C students were more frequently observed than the other three types, the majority of the students thought that native English speakers would use the options including an 'offer of repair' strategy in item 2, a 'concern for hearer' strategy in item 11, a 'distract with a task-oriented remark' strategy in item 18, and a 'grounder' strategy in item 19. Given that these four options were all the longest responses in the respective items, students might have thought that native English speakers would provide more information than they themselves would. Japanese learners' perception about the amount of speech and information provided by native English speakers in the course of an apology remains a matter of speculation, but worthy of further investigation.

Turning to the methodological issues, the results suggest the utility of a multiple-choice instrument as an assessment method of L2 pragmatic competence. As pointed out in previous studies (Brown, 2001; Hudson, 2001; Hudson, et al., 1995; Yamashita, 1996), there are several problems inherent in the multiple-choice discourse completion test. Nonetheless, it appears that the multiple-choice discourse completion test can play a role in identifying learners' levels of knowledge about native speech act realization strategies, when it is clearly designed as a knowledge test as in the present study. From an educational perspective, the use of a multiple-choice knowledge test in combination with a multiple-choice preference questionnaire would make it possible to identify the situational conditions under which learners adhere to their preferred choice of strategy (by looking at Type B students) and also the native speech act realization strategies of which L2 learners have a misunderstanding (by looking at Type C students). Thus, the combined use of the two multiple-choice instruments as in the present study

would help teachers pinpoint the nature of the difficulty students might have when performing L2 speech acts.

Finally, the usual caution regarding generalizability and several methodological limitations should be noted. First, since the Japanese students were not randomly selected, the present findings should not be extended to other Japanese learners beyond the participant students. A second limitation lies in the fact that the present study used only one form of the multiple-choice discourse completion tests developed by Hudson, et al. It is necessary to collect data using other forms and cross-validate the interpretation of the results concerning Japanese EFL learners' choices of strategies in the specific configuration of the three situational variables. Third, although native English speakers' choices in the previous study were employed as the correct options in the knowledge test in the present study, given the varieties of native English speakers, it might have been necessary to administer the test to a wider variety of native speakers to ensure the consistency of the appropriateness of the correct options. Fourth, students' choices in the preference questionnaire should be considered temporal in the developmental process. Given the shifting nature of preference with age and experience, preference for new strategies is likely to emerge. In order to fully describe features of their strategy choice, it may be necessary to interpret the present findings from both the synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Fifth, the study only examined learners' generalized perception about what they think they would do and what native English speakers would do, but did not investigate their ability to actually produce those speech acts. Therefore, the present findings only suggest a potential for their performance in real-world interactions.

CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to account for Japanese EFL learners' intentional divergence from, and unintentional convergence with, native English speakers' speech act realization strategies as a function of the disparity between knowledge and preference. This analysis was made possible by converting the traditional multiple-choice discourse completion test into both a knowledge test and a preference questionnaire. The study also illustrated several characteristics of Japanese EFL learners' strategy choices in the light of the three situational variables of position of power, degree of distance, and level of imposition. All features of their speech act realization strategies reported in this article can be used as food for thought not only in the construction of a new instrument but also in the teaching of L2 speech acts. Moreover, the classification made on the basis of the interaction between knowledge and preference would help teachers identify potential problems students might face when performing the speech acts in real-world interactions. Since this study was of an exploratory nature, however, it has engendered many more questions than it has answered. Indeed, further examination of the present findings would enable a deepening of our understanding of L2 learners' speech act realization strategies and a further advancement of methods to assess them.

NOTES

- 1) Part of the present study was supported financially by Ryukoku University Research Grant in 2007.
- 2) The data in the present study were collected as part of on-going assignments for the class focusing on intercultural communication. After the data entry, discussion was held in the class under the topic 'cross-cultural misunderstanding', and feedback was given to individual students on the basis of the data collected.
- 3) Such qualitative adjectives as "small", "medium", and "large" are used to refer to effect sizes of about .10, .30, and .50, respectively. However, as Cohen (1988) cautions, these definitions should only be taken as a general frame of reference for effect size.

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