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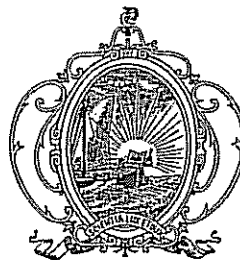
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THE “ENTENTE CORDIALE GRAMMATICALE”, 1885-1915

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1. Introduction

Does history repeat itself? When one considers how scholars throughout history have, at particular periods, become acutely aware of the problems caused by the complexity of linguistic terminology — it is difficult to believe that it does not. Interest in terminology has been growing steadily over the last twenty years and, if the present colloquium is anything to go by, then it would seem that we are currently in such a period.

In the situation we face today it would seem sensible to look at comparable episodes from the past, to see what lessons we can learn from them. In this paper¹, I shall offer a case study of one such episode, a movement which I shall call the “entente cordiale grammaticale”². At a time when the countries of Europe are moving closer together, it is an episode of special interest. Almost exactly a hundred years ago a move towards simplifying and harmonizing grammatical terminology was gathering momentum. It embraced at least four European countries, and the United States. In these countries similar perceptions were registered — namely, that the level of confusion in terminology in the commonly taught languages was no longer supportable. From the common perception, however, flowed different strategies and, conditioned by national political and administrative structures, different paths to implement them. I shall argue that anyone concerned with “propositions pour une terminologie cohérente” would do well to study this movement, its difficulties and its achievements, in some detail.

² At the International Congress of Philologists in Paris in 1909, Brunot commented: “Il est désirable d’établir une entente pour la terminologie grammaticale a) entre les professeurs de même enseignement, b) entre les professeurs enseignant aux mêmes élèves, les uns la langue maternelle, les autres les langues étrangères ...”

Métalangage et terminologie linguistique, Orbis/Supplementa, 17. Louvain: Peeters, 2001.

2. The perception of the problem

In England and France particularly, during the 1880s and 1890s there seems to have been a widespread awareness of the difficulties children in schools found with the complexity and diversity of grammatical terminologies. The greatest difficulties were seen as occurring at points where children were confronted by conflicting terminologies for the same language, and then, having struggled over that hurdle, had to deal with yet a further — also possibly conflicting — terminology for another language.

The problem was exacerbated in France by the mental orientation of the teachers. At the turn of the century teachers of French saw their natural affiliations as being not with the teachers of modern languages, but with the teachers of Latin and Greek. This mental set had its effect on the way in which the teaching of the mother tongue was approached, and it helps to explain Ferdinand Brunot's appeal [to] "Mettre le français parmi les langues vivantes" (Glauser 1911: 452).

In England, in an address given to the Teachers' Association at Mason College, Birmingham, Edward Adolf Sonnenschein drew attention to both the complexity of grammatical terminology, and to the fact that the terminology used for one language took no account of that used for any other: "Why", he asked, "should not the experience acquired in one language be made more real help in the learning of others?" (*Journal of Education*, 1886: 169). The same names, he argued, should be used for the same phenomena, and different names for different phenomena: "That which is grammatically similar must not be put asunder, nor that which is grammatically different joined together ..." (*ibid.*).

But it was the Americans who put the argument most pointedly: "... 'good' in 'John is good' is variously called ... *attribute complement, predicative adjective, subject complement, attribute complement or predicative adjective, subjective complement, complement of intransitive verb, predicate attribute, adjective attribute, and predicate*. The result of such a state of affairs", they continued, "is almost hopeless confusion to the student as he takes up a new text in passing from year to year, or when a new book is adopted, or when he changes his school ... The situation as we now have it is wasteful from the point of view of accomplishment, pitiable from the point of view of the needless inflictions which it puts upon the unfortunate pupil, and absurd from the point of view of linguistic science" (Joint Committee on Grammatical Nomenclature, 1913: 315).

These two observations, then, — the unnecessary complexity of terminology within individual languages, and conflict between the terminologies for different languages — led to a sustained call for simplification and harmonization (frequently called *unification*). Since, to those faced with the task of teaching languages, the problem was particularly acute, it is not surprising to find that the call found a loud echo, particularly in Austria and Germany. (The situation in Germany still obtains today — cf. Bruch 1990.) At the conference of the *Neuphilologenverband* (German association of modern language teachers) in Frankfurt, in 1912, Sokoll (Vienna) put forward the view: “Es herrsche gegenwärtig ein schrecklicher wirrwar, und wer deutsch, französisch und englisch an einer anstalt zu unterrichten habe, leide darunter auf das allerempfindlichste. Es kenne sich der lehrer kaum noch aus — was sollten dann die armen schüler tun!” (Ahnert 1912: 359)³. The question was, once the problem had been identified, how could it best be tackled?

3. Implementation

Once the countries concerned had arrived at the perception that something needed to be done, they entered on a phase of shaping goals and strategies to reach their objectives. Of necessity — the legal framework differing from country to country — the strategies differed, too. France possessed a unified, centralised educational administration, and it was decided at an early stage to enlist the help of the ministry. In England, by contrast, achieving agreement on the reforms could only be the first step. Persuading people to adopt the proposals once they had been published, threatened to be an even more demanding task. Sonnenschein clearly envied the French their centralized organization. And he seems to have put out feelers towards the ministry at a comparatively early stage, to see whether they would support a similar kind of initiative to that of the French. He had to report to the Classical Association, however, that “the ... Board of Education ... would never contemplate the laborious and delicate task of framing a grammatical terminology for use in all schools” (*Proceedings of the Classical Association*, 1911: 21).

The Germans saw themselves in a similar predicament: even if agreement were achieved, it would be unlikely to find universal acceptance,

³ “Nous sommes sous l’empire d’un véritable chaos, ce dont souffrent terriblement ceux qui sont obligés d’enseigner, dans les établissements, l’allemand, le français et l’anglais. Si les professeurs ne s’y retrouvent plus — que penser des pauvres élèves!”

which was ultimately its *raison d'être*, without government intervention: "Wie soll die Einführung der einmal festgesetzten Ausdrücke durchgeführt werden? Ist es dem Belieben der Einzelnen überlassen? Dann wären alle Bemühungen umsonst gewesen. Es wird also wohl eine offizielle Regelung erfolgen müssen" (Baumann 1912b: 179)⁴.

Irrespective of the variations in the legal framework, colleagues in the different countries started out with similar goals: the simplification and harmonization of terminology for the main languages taught in schools: Latin, Greek, French, English, German. The work itself, however, soon began to throw up problems of both a theoretical and a practical nature. At the conference of modern language teachers in Frankfurt in May, 1912, Brunot reported: "Die französische kommission hatte ursprünglich die absicht, die terminologie gleich für mehrere sprachen aufzustellen, indem das eine mitglied die deutschen, ein anderes die englischen ausdrücke usw. bearbeiten sollte. Wir sahen aber bald, daß es unmöglich ist, wissenschaftlich und praktisch zu einer terminologie zu kommen, die für alle sprachen paßt. Jede sprache hat ihre eigentümlichen formen, die denen in anderen sprachen nicht genau entsprechen. So scheint es mir das richtige, daß jede nation zunächst wesentlich für ihre eigene sprache arbeitet ..." (Ahnert 1912: 358)⁵. The French thus in the end confined themselves to providing a terminology for one language only, their own.

England, Austria and the United States meanwhile stuck to their original plan to provide a terminology for the classical and modern languages. But the problems raised by Brunot could not be ignored. They were solved (if that is the right word) by emphasizing those aspects which were common to several languages, as opposed to the particular or individual. In 1885 Sonnenschein had asked, "Why should verbal forms, which were employed in a similar fashion, be called by as many different names as there were languages in which they were studied — past indefinite, aorist, passé défini, perfect, imperfect? The usage of these forms was not, of course, identical; but it was sufficiently alike to justify

⁴ "Comment introduire les termes qu'on aura fixés? S'en remettra-t-on au bon vouloir de chacun? On se serait alors efforcé en pure perte. Il faudra donc obtenir un règlement officiel".

⁵ "La commission française avait d'abord l'intention d'élaborer la terminologie pour plusieurs langues, un de ses membres traitant les termes allemands, l'autre les termes anglais, etc. Mais nous vîmes bientôt qu'il est impossible, aussi bien au regard de la recherche que pour la pratique, d'aboutir à une terminologie qui convienne à toutes les langues. En effet, chaque langue a ses formes propres, qui ne correspondent pas exactement à celles d'autres langues. C'est pourquoi il me semble justifié que chaque nation opère d'abord en principe pour sa propre langue ..."

the same name" (*Journal of Education*, 1886: 169). German colleagues, on the other hand, showed greater reticence: "Man denke nur an den verschiedenen Bau der einzelnen Sprachen, die jede ihre besonderen Erscheinungen und demnach Bedürfnisse hinsichtlich der Bezeichnungen haben" (Baumann 1912b: 177)⁶. Germany and Austria, then, came to restrict their goals somewhat, though not to the same extent as the French did.

The way in which each country went about tackling the problem throws up interesting differences between them. The first step was to set up a committee with a clearly defined task. In some instances, the committees could look back to earlier forerunners. In France, teachers at the Lycée Janson de Sailly had, as early as 1897, produced a brochure of terminology valid from the ninth class. The immediate impulse for the *arrêté* of 1910, however, was a conference organized by the *Musée pédagogique* in 1906. One outcome of this conference was a resolution to ask the ministry to appoint a committee: "Comme cette nouvelle nomenclature n'arrivera jamais à rien si elle n'a pas un caractère officiel, l'assemblée émet le vœu que la Commission de simplification soit nommée par M. le ministre" (Glauser 1911: 456). The ministry adopted the proposal, and a committee was set up consisting of fifteen members representing a cross-section of school-types and languages.

The procedure here consisted of a sort of dialogue between the committee and the ministry. From 1906 to 1910 reports were submitted to the "Section permanente du Conseil supérieur de l'Instruction publique," commented on, re-worked, and re-submitted. The second report, prepared by Maquet and Brunot, was received favourably and passed on to a higher ministerial committee which, after hearing representatives from diverse parties, published its conclusions in 1910.

The committee set up by the English had also had its forerunners. But it was only in 1908 that the movement leading to the committee's written report finally began to gather pace. At the meeting of the Classical Association held that year concrete proposals were put forward which led to the setting up of a Joint Committee comprising 24 members drawn from the three main language associations of the country (representing Classics, Modern (Foreign) Languages, and English), and five of the main associations representing teachers. This committee issued an interim report at the end of 1910 for discussion and comment within the associations, and a revised report in 1911.

⁶ "Pensez simplement aux différences de structure entre les langues particulières, qui apportent chacune leurs formes propres et donc leurs besoins terminologiques propres".

On the continent, the international congress of modern language teachers held in Paris in 1909 helped to focus attention on the problem, and to draw together those colleagues in different countries who were most concerned by it. The French, German and Austrian participants played a prominent role. As one result of the Paris meeting, a committee was formed in Vienna, too, to prepare terminologies for the main languages taught in Austrian schools. An effort was made to draw the classicists into this discussion, as the Joint Committees in England and the United States were doing. But in Austria the modern linguists found co-operation with the classicists impossible, "weil sie [the classicists — J.W.] einfach verlangt hätten, man möge allseitig die terminologie des lateinischen annehmen" (Ahnert 1912: 359)⁷. As in France, then, if for different reasons and to a different degree, the Austrians had to restrict their efforts to the modern languages.

Meanwhile, colleagues in the United States had not been idle, either. A Joint Committee was inaugurated under the chairmanship of William G. Hale, which met, altogether, twenty-nine times between December 1911 and January 1913.

And finally, Germany. Although Germans were most active in the terminological debates, their campaign never really seems to have got off the ground. At the meeting of modern language teachers in Zürich in 1910, Dörr presented a paper "Die Vereinfachung der grammatischen Terminologie" (Baumann 1912b: 175)⁸, and on Brunot's suggestion proposed that, first, committees in Germany, England and France should produce a simplified terminology for the country concerned and, as a second step, that an attempt should be made at international level to harmonize the proposals. Dörr offered to liaise with his colleagues in England and France, and was given the task of reporting on progress at the following meeting in Frankfurt, two years later (Goldschmidt 1910: 234-235).

At the Frankfurt meeting it was in fact not Dörr himself, but his colleague Zeiger who spoke on the topic. He reported that committees had been active in France, in the United States and in England. In Germany, Zeiger had copied the French and English proposals and sent them to the relevant associations for comment. Further, the committee in Vienna had made its proposals known, and these had likewise been circulated. Zeiger concluded, however, that: "die sache [darf] nicht überstürzt werden,

⁷ "parce que ceux-ci [les "classicistes" — J.W.] auraient tout simplement demandé que tout le monde adopte la terminologie propre au latin".

⁸ "La simplification de la terminologie grammaticale".

sondern es muß, ehe man sich festlegt, in allen ländern eine prüfung der im eigenen wie im fremden lande gemachten vorschläge vorangegangen sein ... Es kommt jetzt darauf an, für das deutsche zu einem möglichst allgemein befriedigenden resultat zu kommen, und daran mitzuarbeiten, ist nicht nur aufgabe des deutschen sprachvereins und der germanisten, sondern auch der neuphilologen ..."⁹. The Germans, he said, could take the Austrian proposals as their starting point. Zeiger proposed the setting up of a committee, charged with the task of debating the Viennese proposals, co-ordinating German efforts in this direction, and maintaining contact with movements in other countries (Ahnert 1912: 356-357). Towards the end of the debate, Sokoll (Vienna) reiterated the need for the Germans to agree on a terminology before moving on to the second, international, phase, and proposed that a committee should be set up first within the *Neuphilologenverband*. Dörr, however, chairing the meeting, supported Zeiger's proposal. It was Dörr's motion which was carried.

In Bremen in 1914 it again fell to Zeiger to report on progress. Earlier in the year, he said, a paper by Bojunga had been printed which listed terms of Germanic origin as equivalents to the largely Romance terms of the linguistic metalanguage (Bojunga 1914). Zeiger suggested that the associations should help to improve and disseminate Bojunga's germanic terminology. Findeis (Vienna), however, pointed out that a Germanic terminology was not the point at issue, but — rather — a unified terminology for English, French and German: "... vier jahre nach der ersten anregung (he went on) [sei] die frage kaum vorgeschritten. Es müsse nunmehr ernstlich an die arbeit gegangen werden. Wenn der neuphilologentag ... die führung behalten sollte, dann müsse der in Frankfurt gewählte ausschuß beauftragt werden, die fragen so vorzubereiten, daß auf der nächsten tagung [Halle 1916 — J.W.] abgestimmt werden könne." (Ahnert 1914: 391)¹⁰. Zeiger agreed "noch weiter den mittelpunkt der ganzen bestrebungen zu bilden." (Ahnert 1914: 392)¹¹

⁹ "Il ne faut pas précipiter les choses. Il faut au contraire, avant de prendre position, que tous les pays concernés examinent les propositions faites aussi bien chez eux qu'à l'étranger ... Il s'agit maintenant d'obtenir pour l'allemand un résultat aussi satisfaisant que possible. Concourir à ce résultat est la tâche non seulement du *Deutscher Sprachverein* (Association pour la langue allemande) et des germanistes, mais aussi des philologues modernes ..."

¹⁰ "... que quatre ans après les premières propositions, le problème n'avait guère évolué et qu'il fallait dorénavant se mettre sérieusement au travail. Si le Congrès des Philologies modernes ... devait garder la direction, il fallait demander à la commission élue à Francfort de préparer les questions de façon à ce qu'on puisse décider lors de la prochaine session [Halle, 1916 - J.W.]".

¹¹ "continuer à se placer au centre des tentatives".

Unlike the previous meetings, the 1916 conference in Halle seems not to have been reported on in *Die Neueren Sprachen*. Soon after the Bremen meeting, of course, the Great War had broken out. Altogether, there is little evidence that the Germans ever got as far as constituting their own national committee. And, once the war had started, it was understandable that energies were dissipated elsewhere.

4. The results and their reception

The results of the endeavours in the five countries concerned can be briefly summarized. An *arrêté* was published in France on 25th July 1910 in which those French terms were listed, knowledge of which was required in examinations for "l'enseignement secondaire des garçons et des jeunes filles jusqu'au baccalauréat ou au diplôme de fin d'études inclusivement". In England, the Joint Committee on Grammatical Terminology published its final Report *On the Terminology of Grammar* in 1911. This contained, as planned, recommendations for the grammatical terminology of the five main languages taught in English Schools.

The proposals put forward by the *Neuphilologischer Verein* in Vienna in the early part of 1912 were, as we have seen, distributed to their sister societies in Germany, in April. And in the United States, the Joint Committee working under Professor Hale published its results in 1913. Although, sadly, the endeavours in Germany led to no immediately practical results, over sixty years later an inventory did appear, containing proposals for the grammatical terminology of French, English, Italian, Latin, Russian and Spanish, as equivalents of the German terms (cf. Raasch 1988).

In the contexts outlined above, even getting proposals on the table constituted an achievement. But the question of how effective the proposals really were, leaves considerable leeway for interpretation. One could argue that the English proposals were effective in material terms, but less effective ideologically or theoretically. They were implemented in grammars written by Sonnenschein himself for English, Latin and French (Sonnenschein 1912). A further report by an Oriental Advisory Committee (chaired by Sonnenschein) was published in 1920, applying the recommendations of the Grammatical Society to Hindostani, Gujurati, Marathi and Bengali. In addition, representations were made to the government committees appointed to inquire into the position of Classics, Modern Languages and English in the Educational System of England;

and Osborne and Jaeger published an excerpt of the terminology (adding Spanish) in 1933.

All this points to some kind of initial success. However, the progress reported by the Oriental Advisory Committee was tempered with restraint: "The terminology recommended has been adopted in several grammars of English, French, and Latin, and also as the basis of teaching in many Secondary Schools, though in only a small fraction of the whole number." (Oriental Advisory Committee, 1920: 37). In fact, from their first appearance, the proposals had elicited criticism from the French side, that they were (among other things) less clear and complete than the French; there appeared to be no definite order; and that no principled distinction had been made between the criteria of form, function and meaning (Baumann 1912a: 139f.). The proposals were criticized in England by Skeat and Nesfield (Nesfield 1900); ignored by Grattan and Gurrey (Grattan – Gurrey 1925) and mentioned deprecatingly by Treble and Vallins, who wrote that the Report on grammatical Terminology "seems to survive only in such prefaces as this." (Treble – Vallins 1936 — Preface). Nevertheless, reference was still being made to the recommendations in Matthews (1981) and Mitchell (1985). The report itself, published by John Murray, only finally went out of print in 1961, and Sonnenschein's *New English Grammar* was last printed in 1962.

In France, the *arrêté* of 25th July 1910 had the force of law, and effectively put an end to further debate. But even here, the proposals do not seem to have been perceived as having met the expectations initially placed in them. At the Frankfurt meeting of modern language teachers in May, 1912, Brunot referred to the work that had led up to the *arrêté*, but added, "... leider ist es nachträglich verstümmelt worden ..." (Ahnert 1912: 358)¹². Glauser concluded that "en effet, la nomenclature de l'arrêté ministériel du 25 juillet 1910 ne ressemble nullement à celle proposée par M. Maquet dans son rapport et encore moins à celle exposée et motivée par MM. Brunot et Maquet dans leur second rapport ..." (Glauser 1911: 458)

Taken together, then, the results of the "entente cordiale grammaticale" present a diverse picture: in France, the proposals were effective, if not in every point desirable; in England, the achievement was impressive from some points of view — but less so, from others; and, by the close of the period under discussion, Germany had produced no concrete results to speak of.

¹² "[la proposition] a, hélas, été défigurée après coup ..."

5. Conclusions

Having reviewed in broad outline the movement we have called the "entente cordiale grammaticale" the time has come — almost exactly a hundred years on — to ask what lessons can be learned from such a case study.

First, we should note that the discussion is based on the premise that some form of international standardization in this area is desirable, and that such a goal is practically achievable. I shall not discuss the point further here, beyond pointing out that not all linguists would necessarily subscribe to this premise, even where they acknowledge a need for periodic reflection on the choice and use of grammatical terminology.

Second, it is not possible even in broad terms to arrive at a clear decision as to whether the movement was successful or unsuccessful. The decision must be made differently for each national context. I have tried to show that there is conflicting evidence: comments on the ineffectiveness of the reforms stand side by side with evidence of influence still being felt seventy-five years later. But this in turn does not mean that the influence has necessarily been uniformly positive.

The study also shows, I think, that if such an undertaking were to be successful, attention would need to be paid to securing agreement on the purpose of the undertaking, its goals, its procedures of implementation — including the precise terms of reference — and, not least, the theoretical foundations on which the work was to proceed.

It is a moot point, which source of metalinguistic innovation in the long term has had greater influence — the individual (such as Otto Jespersen, say, or Chomsky) or a committee. The view one takes, however, will be important in deciding the form of organization. England and the United States succeeded in navigating their proposals through a complex structure of committees made up of classicists, teachers of the vernacular and of modern foreign languages. But difficulties in co-operation surfaced — for ideological reasons — in Austria, while Brunot found difficulty for theoretical reasons in the idea of even attempting to find supra-national solutions.

This last point directs our attention to deeper, underlying difficulties.

- 1) Some aspects of the reform foundered on a deep-seated tension between conservatism (in France, the ministry) and innovation (Brunot, Maquet, etc.). One encounters opposition to reform among those who believe that it is more important to retain a terminology because it is

familiar, than to try to improve the system. Proponents of this view frequently appeal to “traditional” grammar on the assumption that their view of so-called “traditional grammar” is the same as everyone else’s.

- 2) I perceive an underlying tension between a universalist tendency (Sonnenschein) and one aspect of structuralism (Brunot). The Joint Committee postulated categories for English because — among other things — they had appeared at earlier stages in the language, or because they were present in some other, related language (*On the Terminology of Grammar Recommendation XXXV*, p. 25). Brunot, on the other hand, had found it difficult to propose a terminology for a language other than French, on the grounds that “jede sprache ihre eigentümlichen formen [hat], die denen in anderen sprachen nicht genau entsprechen” (Ahnert 1912: 358)¹³.
- 3) A further tension may be seen between more theory-specific and less theory-specific terminologies. This tension manifests itself in the desire to exclude terms which are associated with specific schools of linguistics (“die im Bereich der Satzlehre aufgeführten Fachausdrücke [bedeuten] keine Festlegung auf ein bestimmtes Grammatikmodell [gemeint ist -theorie — J.W.]” — Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister ..., 1982, in Raasch 1983: 13)¹⁴, although the implicit assumption of a “theory-free” terminology does not seem plausible (for the French, cf. also Glauser 1911: 459).
- 4) We have seen that tensions exist between form-, function- and meaning-based terminologies.
- 5) Finally, there was tension between an international and a specifically national trend. Bojunga’s (1914) contribution was not concerned with simplification or harmonization, but with finding German equivalents for an otherwise Romance-based terminology.

If we wish to make progress in this area, the following points may prove worthy of consideration:

- the metalanguage of a language is subject to similar pressures and impulses as other areas of natural language and can be studied as such, both objectively and critically (cf. Lyons, Rey-Debove);

¹³ “chaque langue a ses formes propres qui ne correspondent pas exactement à celles d’autres langues”.

¹⁴ “Les termes techniques retenus dans le domaine de la syntaxe ne signifient pas qu’on donne la préférence à un quelconque modèle théorique”.

- linguists develop research terminology uninhibited by the views of other linguists. On the educational level, it may be that some measures of simplification and harmonization are possible;
- there are over sixty grammatical theories currently on the market. These make use of terminology, among other things, to maintain themselves distinct from neighbouring theories. Yet practitioners of these theories (= speakers of these metalanguages) still manage to communicate with colleagues who propagate different theories (speakers of other metalanguages). How do they do this?
- one possible alternative to a unified — but also static — terminology in the educational field might be to draw the problem itself to the forefront of our students' attention. Less attention would be concentrated on the question of which term is actually used than to its motivation and to the implications of any given choice.

This case study was undertaken on the assumption that by studying earlier efforts to identify problems and to find an effective remedy, and by evaluating the success or failure of such projects we can learn — in theory at least — to avoid making similar mistakes. The story of the "entente cordiale grammaticale" at the turn of the twentieth century offers interesting lessons as to how different countries identify problems of this kind, and go about tackling them. By concentrating on perceptions, goals and the mechanisms of implementation we can isolate a number of points at which the movement faltered. What was unique about this movement was its internationally co-operative nature and the degree of rapport actually achieved, even if this was not always set down in formal terms. It remains to be seen whether the Europe of the twenty-first century is capable of emulating this achievement.

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