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PROVERBS AS SMALL NARRATIVES

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to look at the world of “grand narratives” and “little stories” from the perspective of paremiological studies. In an attempt to account for the conceptual, as well as structural, cohesion of proverbs, the analysis draws on the insights of Halliday and Hasan (1976), who advocate the importance of grammatical and lexical alignment that keeps the narration in line, incorporating their insights into the Current Discourse Space model delineated in Langacker (2008). The principles of cohesion, such as substitution, ellipsis, referencing, conjunction, calibrated with conceptual cohesion will be applied in this study with a view to demonstrating the importance of the cohesive elements which substantially contribute to the understanding of the authentic stretches of written and spoken language. This two-pronged approach to narrative appears to be particularly justified in the case of the modified proverb *If money cannot bring happiness, transfer it to my account*. On the one hand, the analysis unravels the proverb’s internal cohesion, while on the other, it accounts for the proverb’s changing structure and conceptualization as a new, emergent category. Above all, this study focuses on the narrative strengths of proverbs in the socio-cultural context, for “narration is the way people understand the world via the community of speakers” (Trzebiński 2002: 17, 43).

Key words: proverb, narrative, current discourse space, cohesion

Introduction to *narration* and *the narrative*

A *narrative* is generally defined as a story of subsequent events, either written or spoken, which is at the disposal of an individual or a community of speakers (*OD*). A proverb is also a narrative: it is a mini-story which consists of words of wisdom and morals of a given culture, which are passed from one generation to another (cf. Mieder 1991, 1999, 2004; Honeck 1997). Proverbs, just like narratives, are universal forms of comprehending and experiencing

reality. Based on the distinction made in narrative literature between macro- and micro-narration, we assume that proverbs, including so-called modified proverbs, belong to the latter category. The aim of this paper is to propose a unitary account of narrative cohesiveness, both from a formal (morphosyntactic), as well as a conceptual, point of view. In doing so, we will attempt to combine a Hallidayan functional approach to linguistic structure with Langacker's (2008, 2016) theory of the Current Discourse Space – CDS.

Macro- and micro-narration

Dryll (2010: 178) distinguishes two types of narrations: micro- and macro-narration. According to him, the proper study of macro-narration is “big narration,” i.e. a type of narration that can be compared to language *in extenso*, colloquially understood as the collective creation of the speaking community. In this type of narration, the author cannot be identified (Dryll 2010: 178). Macro-narration serves as a powerful tool for describing and interpreting reality, communicating ideas, and experiencing and understanding the world. Micro-narration relates to elements of “big narration”. This type of narration, called “folded narration” by Anna Pajdzińska,¹ provides an outline for the event. In this case, as Filar (2014: 27) notes, the conceptualizers actively involved in the meaning negotiation process “unfold the coded narration,” complementing it with the missing elements. It is at this particular moment that the fractured elements of knowledge, coded by “small narratives,” are supplemented with the missing content.

In contemporary linguistics, the concept of narrative has been substantially extended: narratives have become the object of interdisciplinary studies (Filar 2014: 14). They are not only forms of artistic expression, but also part and parcel of our perception and conceptualization of the world. According to Trzebiński (2008: 15), narratives are universal forms of comprehending and experiencing reality. Łebkowska (2004: 228) expands on this insight by pointing out that narratives contain a great amount of cultural knowledge that imbues them with cultural codes that reflect actions and events. From this standpoint, the cultural functions of narratives and proverbs vastly overlap. Thus, proverbs can be analysed as small narratives.

Further, the dynamic and multi-layered mental images coded by traditional and modified proverbs are notoriously difficult to grasp, because the conceptualisations coded by proverbs have their own internal structure. This paper looks at the internal structures of proverbs through the prism of “grammatical” and “lexical cohesion” (cf. Halliday and Hasan 1976), as well as

¹ The term was introduced by Anna Pajdzińska at the conference in Sandomierz (2012), organized by the Department of Polish Studies of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin.

from what one might wish to call an “ideational (or conceptual) cohesion perspective.” The latter perspective is, as we shall claim, suitably offered by Ronald Langacker’s idea of the Current Discourse Space.

Grammatical and lexical cohesion

We have just stated that proverbs are “small narratives” through which we experience and conceptualize reality. Because the reality experienced by us forms a unified, coherent picture (the world’s image “does not fall apart”), the narrative, if it is to provide a coherent picture of the world, must also form a coherent and cohesive unit. This means that both the *form* of a narrative, i.e. its morphosyntactic structure, *and* its *meaning/conceptualization* must be coherent and cohesive. To account for the proverb morphosyntactic and conceptual cohesion, we propose a model which combines the Hallidayan principles of cohesion with the Langackerian concept of the Current Discourse Space.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976: 104), cohesion refers to grammatical and lexical ties between language units that hold the text and their semantics together. They write in the Preface:

Cohesive relations are relations between two or more elements in a text that are independent of the structure; for example between a personal pronoun and the antecedent proper name, such as John ... he. A semantic relation of this kind may be set up either within a sentence or between sentences; with the consequence that, when it crosses a sentence boundary, it has the effect of making the two sentences cohere with one another.

In Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) theory, cohesion falls under two categories: *grammatical* and *lexical cohesion*. While the former involves the use of such cohesive devices as *reference*, *ellipsis*, *substitution*, the latter is accomplished by the selection of the vocabulary used in particular strings of language. Further, Halliday and Hasan (ibid.) distinguish two sub-types of lexical cohesion: *reiteration* and *collocation*. The third type of cohesion, *conjunction*, although distinctly grammatical, is placed somewhere between the grammatical and the lexical cohesion. This occurs because conjunction does play an important lexical and semantic role in textual cohesion. Below is a classification of grammatical and lexical means of expression ensuring the cohesion of a text:

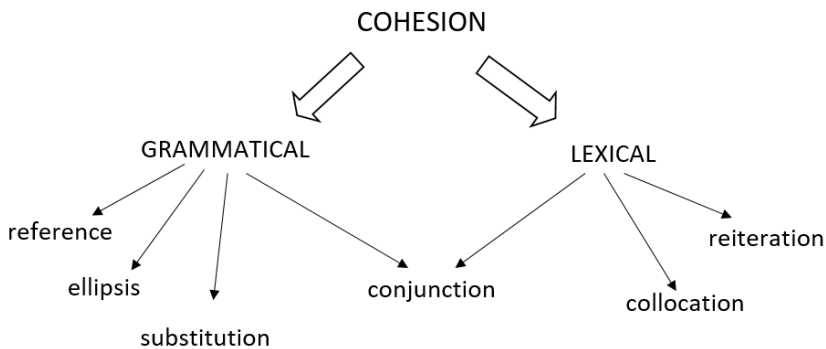


Figure 1. The distribution of grammatical and lexical cohesion based on Halliday and Hasan (1976)

Current Discourse Space (CDS)

In order to account for the cohesion at the conceptual level of a proverb-as-narrative, it is important to introduce the idea of the Current Discourse Space model (CDS). Following Langacker (2008: 457), we claim that any interaction between the speaker and hearer necessarily results in the discourse as involving a series of *usage events*, which, in turn, are defined as “instances of language use in all their complexity and specificity”. Because a given usage even is perceived differently by the participants in a given discourse, it is no wonder that there exists a significant discrepancy between the speaker and hearer’s interpretation of what is said. Nonetheless, a “substantial overlap,” which ensures successful communication between the interlocutors, can be established (cf. Taylor 2002: 108). Langacker’s (2008: 466) theory of the Current Discourse Space has been specifically designed for this purpose – to account for the common “speaker-hearer” ground. Langacker (2008: 466) says what follows:

It [CDS] comprises everything presumed to be shared by the speaker and hearer as the basis for communication at a given moment. Part of the CDS, of course, is the current discourse itself, including both previous usage events and any that might be anticipated. Also part of the CDS are other mutually evident aspects of the transient context, as well as any stable knowledge required for their apprehension or otherwise invoked. All of these may figure in an expression’s full contextual understanding and in those portions that constitute its linguistic meaning.

Figure 2 presents Langacker’s (2016) concept of the *Current Discourse Space Model*:

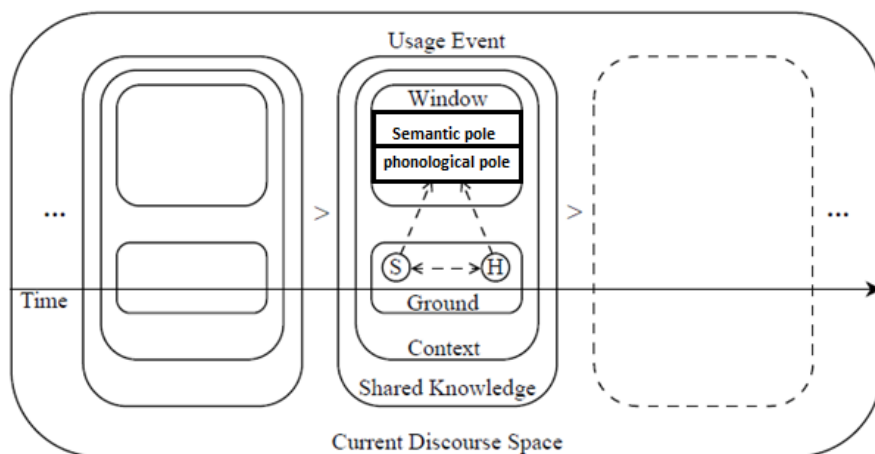


Figure 2. Current Discourse Space Model (adapted from Langacker 2016: 96)

CDS comprises three critical stages: *the current usage event*, *the previous usage event* and *the anticipated usage event*.² Within the CDS model, the negotiation of meaning takes place between the speaker and the hearer. The “mind integration” between the two participants of the discourse allows linguistic meaning to emerge. In Langacker’s parlance, “[the mind integration] involves the speaker (S) and the hearer (H) apprehending (--->) the semantic and phonological content that appears in a “window” of attention, and focusing their attention on a particular facet of it” (Langacker 2016: 69). Since the human scope of viewing is substantially limited, the “zooming” can be likened to “looking at the world through a window”(Langacker 2016: 145). Interestingly, the act of communication between the interlocutors (<--->) may prove futile, unless the interaction constitutes a common ground (G). Meaning, the act of linguistic negotiation, is situated in a specific context, which, in turn, is constructed against the shared background knowledge.

According to Filar (2013:65), the world as understood by the conceptualizers cannot be reduced to “static mental images.” Rather, it accommodates a dynamic, cohesive story about the course of events around and within the conceptualizes, which is located at the intersubjective cultural space. Narratives thus code the meaning, which subsequently is contextualized and negotiated by language speakers. Seen in this light, the conceptualizers become interpreters, experiencers, and, perhaps, most importantly, negotiators of narrative meaning. They adopt the role of “the welding link” between various components of knowledge, worldviews, assumptions, judgements, etc. (Filar 2013: 28).

² See Langacker (2008: 466).

For the conceptualized message to be pertinent and coherent, the context must provide “additional aspects” of narrative meaning (Langacker 2008: 464). Generally, two basic types of context are distinguished: *transient context*, which *accounts* for the nearest environment wherein the usage event develops, and *stable knowledge*, in which “we apprehend the immediate circumstances” (Langacker 2008: 464). Such a context, which directly pertains to the usage event in succession, consists of interrelated dimensions, i.e. *physical, cultural, social, and linguistic*. Finally, and most critically, there are virtually no limitations imposed on the size of the context(s), therefore the sky is the limit.

Integrated Cohesion Analysis

We can now offer an integrated account of the cohesiveness of a proverb, involving its grammatical, lexical and ideational levels of conceptualization. The claim advanced here is that the grammatical and lexical components of the analysis of proverbs should not be interpreted in isolation, but rather in parallel with their cognitive capacities. In particular, as a basis for a unitary account of proverb cohesion, we take Langacker’s (1988b : 49-50) claim that:

1. Lexicon and grammar form a continuum of symbolic structures (form – meaning pairings);
2. Meaning reduces to conceptualization;

The claim made in (1) touches upon the issue of the symbolic nature of linguistic units, which consist of a semantic and a phonological pole.³ For Langacker (2016: 31), “lexicon and grammar consist in assemblies of symbolic structures”.

Thus, if the symbolic structures are held to form a grammar-lexicon continuum, then where exactly should the Hallidayan morphosyntax-based cohesion be located in Langacker’s CDS model? The most likely answer is: this type of cohesion should be placed in the “window” of attention of the Current Discourse Space, both in the phonological and the semantic pole of the linguistic unit (see Fig. 2).

Consider now the claim made in (2). How are we to understand it? Are we to understand that meaning *is* conceptualization? Certainly not! According to Langacker’s formulation, “meaning *reduces* to conceptualization,” and not “meaning *is* conceptualization.” And this makes a difference. In order to understand this, it is perhaps useful to evoke here another claim made by

³ The notion of symbolic structure consisting of the semantic and phonological pole can be traced back to Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic sign. Notably, linguistic sign comprises two components: the signifier and signified inasmuch as the former accounts for the phonetic pole, and the latter, in contrast, exemplifies the mental concept. Note that it is a mental construction, not a real life representation. The relation between the meaning and sound pattern is arbitrary, i.e. there is no relation between the signifier and the signified, except for onomatopoeic expressions.

Langacker (1988: 50) – the so-called “thesis C” – which says that “semantic structures are characterized relative to “cognitive domains.” For example, this means that the meaning of *mother* is defined relative to a number of domains, such as the birth domain, the marital domain, the nurturance domain, etc. (cf. Taylor 1995: 88). It is in this sense that the expression “meaning reduces to conceptualization” should be understood.

With this in mind, we can now enquire about the localization of ideational (or conceptual) cohesion in the CDS. The answer is fairly straightforward: this type of cohesion holds at the semantic pole of linguistic expression which “is defined relative to a number of domains giving rise to a particular conceptualization.” That is, it holds at the expression’s semantic pole which “grows in size” in accordance with the number of cognitive domains evoked during the meaning negotiation process between the speaker/hearer discursive interaction. Put somewhat differently, as the discourse unfolds, the interlocutors jointly interpret the conceptualization of the scene which is encoded by the symbolic structure for communication purposes.

We can now offer a cognitive unified view of the cohesive devices involved in proverbs-as-narratives. To this end, we combine the principles of grammatical and lexical cohesion proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976) with the ideational CDS-determined (cognitive) structure (cf. Langacker 2001, 2008, 2016). Figure 3 below illustrates the integrated view on cohesion, as exemplified by the traditional proverb *Money can’t bring happiness*:

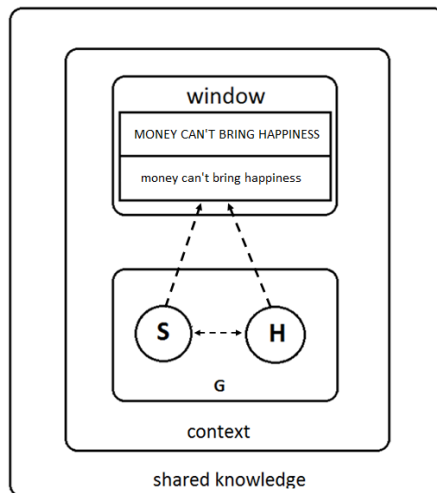


Figure 3. Aspects of a usage event (adapted from Langacker 2016: 30)

The diagram above, which is a modified version of Langacker's (2016) representation of usage event, puts the symbolic structure of the original saying (MONEY CAN'T BRING HAPPINESS / money can't bring happiness) in prominence. The symbolic structure of the profiled narrative consists of two elements: the semantic and phonological pole. Other elements, such as the speaker-hearer interaction in the specific ground, accompanied by the varying context and shared knowledge, remain stable, compared with the Current Discourse Model, as delineated in Figure 2. At this juncture, however, the question arises as to what exactly the unified cohesion refers to? To answer this question, it is important to realize that the three levels of cohesion—grammatical, lexical and conceptual—should be analyzed as self-complementary tools for linguistic analysis. Although treated as distinct notions, they are strongly interrelated for the successful usage event to be plausible.

As already stated, grammatical and lexical cohesions are coded by the semantic structures located within the window of attention (see Fig.3), but ideational cohesion is different. Clearly, lexical and grammatical cohesion, as introduced by Halliday and Hasan (1976), is not sufficient in this case. The discursive interaction between the interlocutors engaged in the *intersubjective* meaning negotiation process is missing in Halliday and Hasan's approach. A CDS-based account amends this situation. In this model, the focus of attention (i.e. the profiled piece of narrative) is located on the "objective scene", also known as the "onstage region" (Langacker 2016; 32). With this model, the "coordinated mental reference" (ibid) is arrived at, which guarantees an ideational cohesion as a finite stage in the usage event. Although Figure 3 illustrates the usage event of a traditional proverb, *Money cannot bring happiness*, it is only a randomly chosen example. Indeed, any original saying can be located within the window of attention, to mention just a few: *Once bitten, twice shy*, *Great minds think alike*, *Look before you leap*, *Clothes make the man*, *Crime doesn't pay*, *If at first you don't succeed try, try again*, *It takes two to make quarrel*, *Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get*, *Money doesn't grow on trees*, *Many hands make light work*, etc.

However, it would be too narrow a view to restrict the notion of unified cohesion to the analysis of traditional proverbs. To this end, Figure 4 illustrates the usage event model with the modified proverb *If money can't buy happiness, transfer it to my account* in the focus of attention.

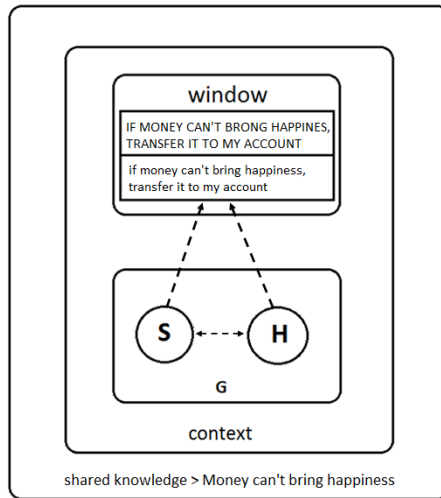


Figure 4. Aspects of the Usage Event on the example of the modified proverb *If money can't bring happiness, transfer it to my account*

Naturally, the novel version, as the profiled narrative, has been situated in the “window” of attention, whereas the traditional proverb becomes a part of the shared knowledge.

Let us take a look now at the proverb/narrative cohesion from the point of view of its lexico-grammatical structure. Consider the pronoun *it*, which requires referencing in the Hallidayan sense. As the name suggests, referencing establishes the reference between some understated linguistic items. This intertextual link may be realized thanks to “the presupposing” as the “refereeing item” and “the presupposed” realized as “the item that it refers to” (see Halliday and Hasan 1976: 3-4). Recalling the author’s instance: “Wash and core six cooking apples. Put them into a fireproof dish”. The linguistic item *them* alludes to the apples, at the same time linking together the two structurally unrelated elements, hence setting up the cohesion. This, in turn, is realized through the mutual dependence of one item on the other in terms of their interpretation. This mode of thinking creates semantic interdependencies between the given utterances. To provide a few more examples, consider such a traditional proverb as *If the shoe fits wear it*. This original proverb infers that whenever some words of blame and criticism refer to you it is usually appropriate to accept them. The word *it*, also known as the presupposing, unmistakably points back to the label *the shoe*, i.e. the presupposed. Other jocular variations of the proverb, which also employ conjunction, are the following: *If the dress no longer fits, peel it fully*, or *If the shoe fits it probably is out of style*.

Besides, Halliday and Hasan (1976) postulate that there are two kinds of semantic ties operating within the boundaries of a given text, as well as outside it. The first is known as *endophora*, whereas the second is called *exophora*. Importantly, endophora heralds yet another core distinction into *anaphora* and *cataphora*, whereby anaphora refers back to the language items, totally unlike cataphora, which points forward to language units. The word *it*, known as the presupposing, unmistakably points back to the label *money*, i.e. the presupposed. This specific kind of referencing, thanks to which the intertextual link can be established, is known as anaphora. As for the conceptualization of the example under discussion, it should be stressed that the notion of money in the traditional proverb, i.e. *Money cannot bring happiness*, is understood as a very general one, whereas the witty modification, i.e. *If money cannot bring happiness, transfer it to my account*, draws one's attention to the very specific finances that somebody yearns for. The witty tag attached to the original saying renders the reverse in the way one conceptualizes the central notion. If not for this conceptual shift, the semantic tie of the narrative under discussion would not be properly accounted for.

Moreover, the modified proverb under discussion takes advantage of yet another type of morphosynactic link, i.e. conjunction. The word *per se* means, from Latin, 'to join together'. By analogy, conjunctions, also known as "linking words", aim at joining two or more clauses together into one complex sentence. As previously stated, conjunctions occupy a marginal sphere, somewhere between the grammatical and lexical cohesion. Although it combines both types of cohesion, conjunction does not fully fit into either of the two categories. As Halliday and Hasan (1976: 6) argue "[conjuncture] is on the board line of the two; mainly grammatical, but with a lexical component in it". Under this view, it becomes clear that conjunctions operate as a bridge between the two types of cohesive devices and are predominantly realized through such connectors as: *and, but, or, either, neither, only, so, then, because, since*. On this basis, the modified proverb *If money cannot bring happiness, transfer it to my account* employs the conditional conjunction *if*. This connector not only joins together the two parts of narrative, but also makes a stipulation that happiness can go hand in hand with money. The same is true of such traditional and modified proverbs which make use of the following conjunctions *and, but, or*, to wit: *Spare the rod and spoil the child; Money does not grow on trees, but it grows on many family trees; Life is what you make it, or what it makes you.*

At the conceptual level, the meaning is defined relative to a number of cognitive dimensions, which are acknowledged by the conceptualizer during the speaker/hearer meaning negotiation process. Some of the selected construal operations (cf. Kövecses 2015: 17) that directly pertain to the modified proverb under discussion go as follows: image schemas, figure-ground alignment, profile-base, viewpoint, subjectivity-objectivity, metaphors, metonymies. Figure 5 below represents three levels of cohesion from the point of view of the Current

Discourse Space theory. Note that the graphical representation of grammatical, lexical and ideational cohesion provided here is a greatly simplified draft of the whole meaning construction and comprehension process. Hence, by its very nature, it cannot account for all the specifications embedded in it. However basic the figure may be, it still allows one to envisage how self-complementing the lexical, grammatical and ideational cohesion should be in order to indiscriminately account for the meaning construction processes.

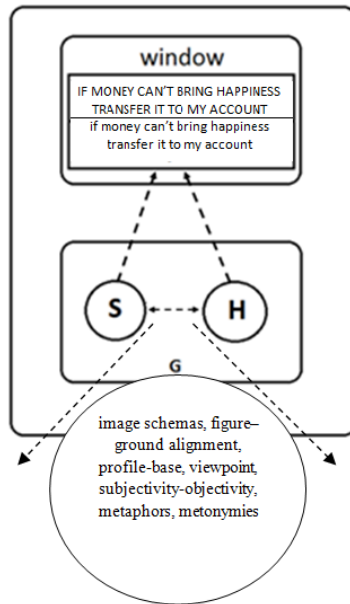


Figure 5. Grammatical, lexical and conceptual cohesion

In short, there are two complementary perspectives for studying the notion of linguistic cohesion: Halliday and Hasan's lexicogrammar system, accounting for the grammatical and lexical cohesion of linguistic structure and Langacker's speaker/hearer meaning negotiation process, centered around ideational cohesion. Thus, the lexical and grammatical cohesion, as developed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), is secured at the objective scene, and the ideational cohesion is the result of the speaker/hearer negotiation of the proverb meaning. Since language is a mental faculty of the human mind, no utterance should be analyzed solely from the lexical and grammatical perspective. This article proposes the concept of unified cohesion: that is to say, grammatical, lexical and conceptual ties working in cooperation for the narratives' meaning to be thoroughly accounted for.

Conclusion

In this study we have argued that proverbs, understood as small narratives, are indispensable components of conceptualization and, thus, we have acknowledged their significant contribution to experiencing and perceiving reality. We have claimed that proverbs, just like narratives, are subject to the principles of cohesion: linguistic (i.e. grammatical) cohesion, lexical and ideational cohesion. To offer a unified account of these three types of cohesion, we have combined Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory with Langacker's (2008) Current Discourse Space model. It has been acknowledged that the lexical and grammatical cohesion holds at the level of the (bipolar) linguistic unit localized in the "window of attention", whereas the ideational cohesion resides in both the semantic pole of a linguistic unit and, crucially, at the level of the speaker-hearer meaning negotiation process.

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