

**SPEECH ACT OF REQUEST STRATEGIES ON SOCIAL DISTANCE BY
ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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APPROVAL

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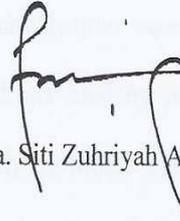
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SPEECH ACT OF REQUEST STRATEGIES ON SOCIAL DISTANCE BY ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study is socio-pragmatic study on Junior High School students in expressing request strategies. This study was conducted to meet the contribution of social distance to the choice of request strategies by using qualitative approach.

Subjects of this study were twenty males and twenty females of Junior High School Students. Data for this study is elicited from the respondents through the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) which consisted of nine situations with different levels of status. The respondents in each group are then asked to write the expression of requests to complete the DCT. Their responses were collected to be analyzed based on the 8-level Trosborg's categories.

The findings of the study showed that most of the respondents utilized Conventionally Indirect (hearer-oriented condition) in the form of ability/willingness/ permission, followed by Direct request in the form of imperatives, Conventionally Indirect (speaker-based condition) in the form of needs/demands, and indirect request. It was also found that the more familiar the interlocutors each other the more direct strategies the respondents applied.

Key words: request strategies, social distance, familiarities, interlocutors

INTRODUCTION

Speech acts are often used in our daily communication especially in the classroom. Request is the most common of speech act used by people to ask someone doing something. It is usually used directly by Indonesian in which it will be more polite if it is expressed indirectly as it is done by native speakers.

The illocutionary act of requests is chosen for the present study for several reasons. First, and most obviously, requests are useful and occur frequently,

especially among learners of a new language. Learners may get along without performing other illocutionary acts, but without requests it is difficult to function efficiently.

Secondly, among the different types of speech acts that have been studied in second language research, the illocutionary act of requests has been studied most. Therefore, there is a firm framework upon which to base further study.

Thirdly, requests occur in particularly useful contexts for the investigation of the development of a learner's pragmatic competence. Because requests are realized by a variety of linguistic forms (e.g. imperatives, declaratives or interrogatives), express a variety of functions or intentions, and encode the relative status of the speaker and the addressee, they create an environment in which there is substantial opportunity to examine how linguistic forms are related to intentions.

As a means to investigate pragmatics, the speech act approach has been used effectively for both in first and second language acquisition research. According to speech act theory, (Searle: 1969), speakers perform illocutionary acts by producing utterances. An illocutionary act is a particular language function performed by an utterance. That is, through their utterances speakers convey communicative intentions, such as requests, apologies, promises, advice, compliments, offers, refusals, complaints and thanking. The study of speech acts provides a useful means of relating linguistic form and communicative intent. An utterance, here, is treated as the realization of a speaker's intention and goal in a particular context.

Speech act is divided into two categories: constative and performative (Levinson, 1983: 229). The first shows the relation of the speaker to the truth of the utterance. It differs from performative utterance. A performative utterance is one that actually describes the act that it performs. It does not deal with proving true or false.

There are many kinds of speech acts such as request, orders, commands, complaints, promises, and refusals. A speech act which is performed directly is known as direct speech act.

Yule (1996:53) classifies five types of general function performed by speech acts as the following; declarations, representatives, expressives, directives and commissives.

SPEECH ACT OF REQUEST

Searle (1976), in his theoretical study, distinguishes five basic speech acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

According to this definition, what Searle (1976) has labeled a 'directive' is called a 'request'. A 'request' is more common and less manipulative when compared with the term 'directive'. For this reason the writer uses the term 'request' instead of 'directive' for such a speech act and define 'requests' as 'attempts by the speakers to get the hearer to do something'.

Requests consist of two parts: the core request or head act and the peripheral elements.

Requests may include alerters. An alerter is an opening element preceding the actual request, of which the function is to alert the hearer's attention to the ensuing speech act (CCSARP Coding Manual 1989).

Alerters may also include supportive moves. They are units external to the core request which modify its impact either by aggravating or mitigating its force. There are various different types of alerters and supportive moves, and some supportive moves may in fact serve as requests themselves.

REQUEST STRATEGIES

According to Trosborg (1995: 192), requests, as defined above, can be made at different strategies. Indirect Request, Conventionally Indirect Strategies (hearer-oriented condition), Conventionally Indirect Strategies (speaker-based condition), and Direct request.

SOCIAL DISTANCE

The term 'social distance (Leech, 1983:126) is the opposite of 'solidarity factor' (Brown and Gilman's, 1960). It is the best seen as a composite of psychologically real factors (status, age, sex, degree of intimacy, etc.) which 'together determine the overall degree of respectfulness' within a given speech situation. In other words, if the speaker feels close to someone, because that person is related to him, or he knows him or her well or are similar in term of age, social class, occupation, sex, ethnicity, etc., he feels less need to employ

indirectness in making request than he would if he was making the same request of a complete stranger.

Trosborg (1995:148) stated social distance pertains to the feature of familiarity between the participants. The interactants either each other (- social distance) or they had never met before (+social distance). The situations revealing the feature (+social distance) were structured so that the social status relationship of the two participants was described as equal (or unimportant) so that possible differences observed in the selection of pragmatic patterns could not be ascribed to different in social status. The situations involving the feature (-social distance) relate to interaction between friends, but not to intimate relationships that would demand specific personal knowledge unavailable to the participants.

METHOD

In this study, the writer applies descriptive qualitative approach to explore request strategies used by the Students of Junior High School to determine the types, to know the distance and the power relation between the interlocutors, and to know the relation of familiarities contribute to the choice of request strategies.

There are 40 respondents take part in this study. They are classified into two groups consist of male group (20 male students) and female group (20 female students). They are taken randomly.

The data were collected by using Discourse Completion Test (DCT) as the instrument to collect the data. The DCT outlines nine written situations that the respondents may encounter. They are asked to read a short description for each situation carefully and then write their responses based on the situations.

Category Classification of Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Status</i>		<i>DCT item</i>
<i>Category One</i>	<i>Close</i>	<i>Higher</i> <i>Equal</i> <i>Lower</i>	<i>DCT 1</i> <i>DCT 2</i> <i>DCT 3</i>
<i>Category Two</i>	<i>Familiar</i>	<i>Higher</i> <i>Equal</i> <i>Lower</i>	<i>DCT 4</i> <i>DCT 5</i> <i>DCT 6</i>
<i>Category Three</i>	<i>Unfamiliar</i>	<i>Higher</i> <i>Equal</i> <i>Lower</i>	<i>DCT 7</i> <i>DCT 8</i> <i>DCT 9</i>

All respondents are asked to write expression of requests to respond the situations in a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The situations are as follow:

1. Situation One:
You want your younger sister to tell your parents that you want to go to your friend's house this afternoon. Because your parents are not at home, you ask her to tell them when they go back home. *What would you say to her?*
2. Situation Two:
You want your classmate whom you know very well to accompany you to submit your report book to the teacher. *What would you say to him/her?*
3. Situation Three:
You ask your father to fix your bike when he is reading a newspaper in the living room. *What would you say to him?*
4. Situation Four:
You are the chairman of School Organization (OSIS). You ask your junior as a students' activity section to prepare the presence list and agenda in the reorganization of OSIS. *What would you say?*
5. Situation Five:
You want your schoolmate to give you a lift to the hospital. You want to visit a sick classmate in the hospital. *What would you say?*
6. Situation Six:
Your teacher has explained the lesson twice but you still do not understand it very well. You ask your teacher to explain it once again. *What would you say to your teacher?*
7. Situation Seven:
You are a committee of The Student Orientation Activity in your school. One of the freshmen came late in the first session of the Student Orientation Program. You ask him/her to take the permission form from the counseling office for being late. *What would you say to him/her?*
8. Situation eight:

You join an English Reading competition and you do not know to how to fill in registration form provided by the committee of the competition because you come late and you miss the explanation from the committee. You ask one of the participants next to you who is also filling the same form to help you. *What would you say to him/her?*

9. Situation Nine:

You have graduated from SMP 3 Pati and want to continue studying at SMA 1 Pati. You do not know the requirements you have to meet to study at the school. You go there and meet one of SMA 1 teachers at the front office and you ask him/her a brochure about the requirement. *What would you say to him/her?*

Overall, each of the nine situations in the DCT can be defined as follows:

DCT	Listener	Pragmatic situation	Power	Distance
1	Younger sister	Asking to tell to parents that you want to go out	+P	-D
2	Classmate	Asking for companion	-P	=D
3	Father	Asking to fix the bike	-P	-D
4	Junior	Asking to prepare the presence list and agenda	+P	+D
5	Schoolmate	Asking to give a lift	-P	=D
6	Teacher	Asking to explain the lesson once more	-P	-D
7	Freshman (new student)	Asking to take the permission form	+P	+D
8	Participant	Asking for help to fill the registration form	-P	+D
9	One of SMA 1 teacher	Asking for a brochure about the requirement	-P	+D

Data for this study is elicited from the respondents through the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The (DCT) is a form of test depicting some natural situations to which the respondents are expected to react making requests. This test was originally designed by Blum-Kulka in 1982 and has been widely used since then in collecting data on speech acts realization both within and across language groups. The researcher adopts

the (DCT) format and the contents but with modification for its high level of practicality and validity.

The discourse completion test (DCT) used in this study involves nine written situation. In each situation there is a brief description that illustrates the relations between the participants (acquaintance or stranger) and their dominance over each other (high, equal or low). Participants in each group are then asked to write the expression of requests to complete the DCT.

There are two steps in collecting data. First of all, the writer distributes DCT of request to the respondents to be completed. The tests consist of nine situations that should be answered by respondents.

Secondly, the writer collects the results to be analyzed based Trosborg's categories (Trosborg 1995: 205), the 8-level scale for analysis of request strategies to get the types of request strategies used by the respondents.

The Level of Directness and Strategy Types

LEVEL OF DIRECTNESS		STRATEGY TYPE
Cat. I	Indirect Request	1. Hints - Mild - Strong
Cat. II	Conventionally Indirect (hearer-oriented condition)	2. - Ability - Willingness - Permission 3. Suggestory Formulae
Cat. III	Conventionally Indirect (speaker-based condition)	4. Wishes/desires 5. Needs/demands
Cat. IV	Direct Request	6. Obligation 7. Performatives - Hedged - Unhedged 8. - Imperatives

		- Elliptical Phrases
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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL DISTANCE ON REQUEST STRATEGIES

This section discusses the impacts of familiarities (Close, Familiar, and Unfamiliar) on the choice of request strategies. This part discusses the impacts of different combinations of familiarities on the ways in which request strategies are chosen by the respondents.

a. Close-Equal/Lower/Higher

Close means that there is no social distance between the interlocutors as they are close friends or close acquaintance. This section examines the patterns shown for the combinations of -D (the interlocutors know each other very much) with three different degrees of power: Lower (-P) in Situation 1, Equal (=P) in Situation 2, and Higher (+P) in Situation 3.

In the first three situations, the respondents used similar strategies, though they were used in different frequencies, see the diagram below:

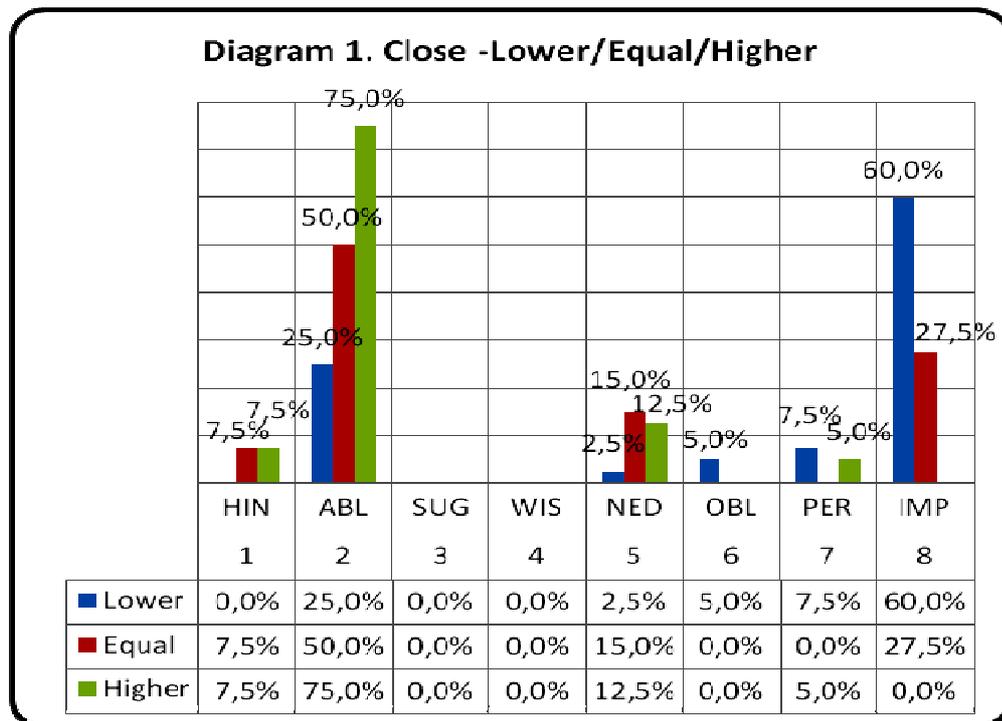


Diagram 1 indicates that in **Close – Lower** situation, most respondents use imperatives strategy. The second most strategy used by the respondents is ability/willingness/permission, and the last three strategies are approximately similar.

Diagram 1 shows that the respondents apply ability/willingness/permission most in **Close – Equal** Situation, and then followed by imperatives strategy in the second. Needs/demands strategy is in the third, and the least strategy used by the respondents in this situation is hints.

Diagram 1 indicates that almost all the respondents employ ability/willingness/permission in **Close – higher** situation, the next three strategies are more or less similar used by the respondents.

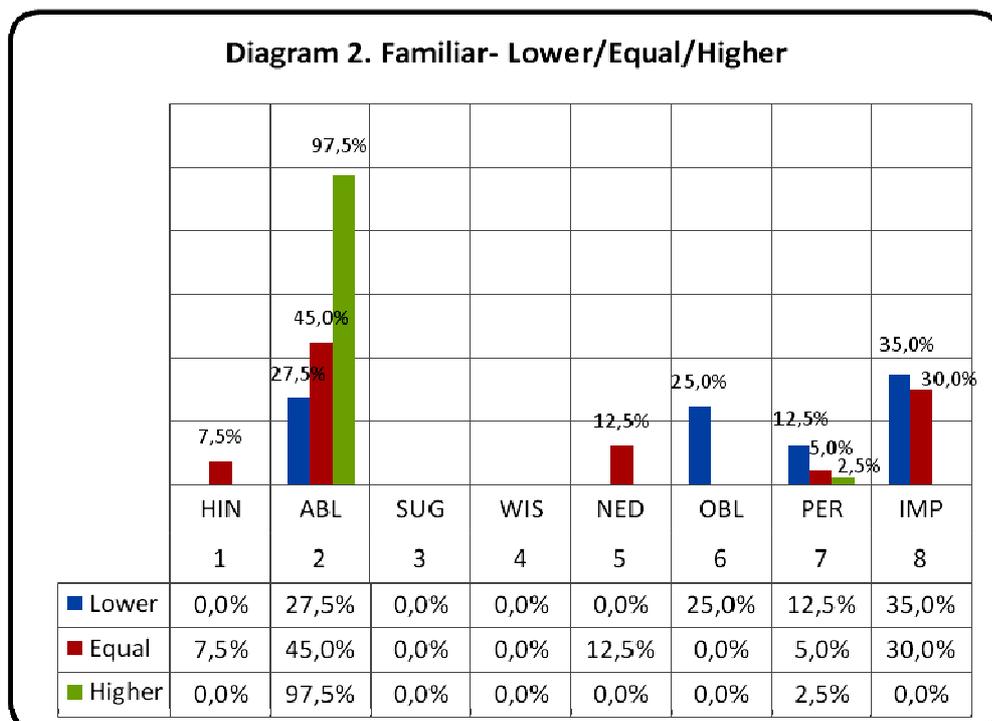
Comparing to strategies in the first three situations, although imperatives strategy is the most used by the respondents in Close–Lower

situation, but Ability/willingness/permission is more frequently used by the respondents in Close – higher situation. It also happens in close-equal situation. Although, ability/willingness/ permission is mostly used in this situation, but it is the least often as compared with the other two situations above.

b. Familiar-Equal/Lower/Higher

Familiar means the requester and requestee are friends or acquaintance but their relation is not too close. This section examines the pattern which is shown the combinations of =D (the interlocutors are acquaintances) with three levels of power status: Lower (-P) in S4, Equal (=P) in S5 and Higher (+P) in S6.

The following diagram aims at showing the type of request strategies used by the respondents when they are familiar each other.



In **familiar-lower** situation, the frequencies on using the fourth strategies are more or less similar. Nevertheless, imperatives strategy is the most often applied by the respondents, followed by ability/willingness/permission in the second, and obligations in third. While performatives strategy is the least often employed by the respondents.

Diagram 2 shows that there are most strategies used in **Familiar–Equal** Situation, the respondents apply 5 kinds of the 8 strategies. Ability/willingness/permission strategy is used by the respondents in the highest frequency while the lowest is performatives. The three strategies in the middle are imperatives, hints, and needs/demands.

Diagram 2 indicates that almost all the respondent employs ability/willingness/permission. The respondents hardly use the other eight strategies. Only one respondent apply performatives in **Familiar–Higher** Situation. It also shows the distance between the highest and the lowest frequency in using a kind of strategy is very far.

Diagram 2 also shows comparison among the second three situation. Ability/willingness/permission strategy is used mostly by the respondents in the two situations: familiar-equal and familiar-higher situation. Although the frequencies of the two strategies are very different. Ability/willingness/permission strategy is used in the entire three situations, though it is not the most used by the respondents in familiar-lower situation. In the other hand, performatives strategy is also used by the respondents in the three situations but the frequency of the three situations is lowest.

c. UnFamiliar-Equal/Lower/Higher

It means that there is a social distance (or even great distance) between the interlocutors as they are new acquaintance. This section examines the patterns shown for the combinations of +D (the interlocutors do not know each other) with three different degrees of power: Lower (-P) in S7, Equal (=P) in S8, and Higher (+P) in S9.

Here are some situations and the results contain Unfamiliar-Equal/Lower/Higher. See the diagram below:

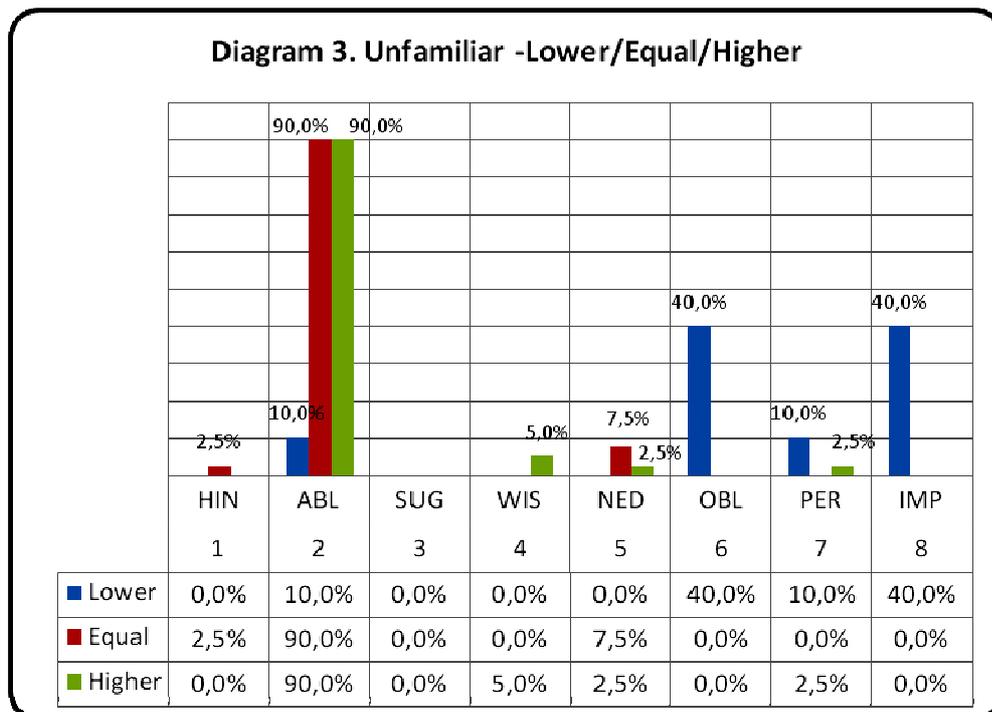


Diagram 3 indicates that in **Unfamiliar – Lower** Situation, the respondents apply two different strategies in the same frequency with the highest frequency (obligation and imperatives) and two different strategies in the least often (ability/willingness/permission and performatives), too.

Diagram 3 shows that ability/willingness/permission is used by almost all of the respondents in **Unfamiliar - Equal** Situation,. The rest two strategies are only used by a few respondents.

Diagram 3 shows that most respondents apply ability/willingness/permission in **Unfamiliar – Higher** Situation. A few respondents apply the rest of the three strategies.

Comparing the third three situation, diagram 3 illustrates that ability/willingness/permission is used by the respondent in all the three situations, moreover it is used by the most respondents in Unfamiliar-equal and lower situation. Respondents apply imperatives and obligations strategy only in unfamiliar-lower situation.

FINDINGS

In situation where the social distance between speakers and hearers as they are close friends or close acquaintance (-D), familiar (=D) and unfamiliar (+D) the respondents showed a tendency to use conventional indirect (hearer-oriented condition). The second mostly used by the respondents was direct strategy in the form of imperatives. Although, they used the same strategies in every level of familiarities, but the frequency of each level was different. The more acquainted between the interlocutors, the less frequency of conventional indirect (hearer-oriented condition) the respondents applied, but the more frequency of direct strategies the respondents employ.

DISCUSSION

In situation where the interlocutors are familiar each other in a lower status the respondents show a great tendency to use Conventionally Indirect (hearer-oriented condition) in the form of ability/willingness/permission. Almost all of the respondents use this strategy. Even though the percentages of using conventionally indirect (hearer-oriented condition) are different, the respondents apply different level of politeness when they are in close equal familiarities. It means that when the familiarities are higher they tend to use more polite request. It is also found that the respondents do not employ some politeness device to request in this category. They also do not utilize any kinds of alerters or supportive moves in their head acts. It seemed that they apply their request regardless the politeness devices although they are part of politeness. They do not apply politeness device mostly in situation 1 (close lower familiarities). If it is being contrasted to the Indonesian language, it seems that the respondents are liable to apply the Indonesian context of politeness to interact with people the lower status. When the interlocutors are equal, they mostly used Conventionally Indirect (hearer-oriented condition) in the form of ability/willingness/permission, the respondents also used imperatives to request a schoolmate to give a lift.

When the respondents request someone in nine different familiarities, they tend to use Ability/willingness/permission. Most students apply politeness device “please” even though they request to someone close. Some respondents used formulaic utterances such as apologizing “*please*” and “*sorry*”. All of them preceded the head act. They employ some politeness devices above in their

request to soften their requests. It is strange to English native to do so, but in the Javanese custom, it is a must to be polite when we need someone to do something. In using politeness device “*please*”, the respondents tended to produce requests that were rated as too polite. Especially they apply it no matter when they request to his/her close friend. It could be influenced by the Javanese custom to be polite when they need someone else to do what we want to.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the request strategies and the impact of distance to the choice request strategies. After analyzing the findings, the researcher finds that in choosing the request strategies, there is a contribution of distance to the choice request strategies. In general it can be conclude that the respondents used the most conventionally indirect, the second choice is direct strategy and then followed by indirect strategy.

The different distances between the interlocutors obviously influence the choice of making request. When they had high distance in which the requesters had high power toward the requestees, the students utilized all conventionally indirect strategies and so did when the interlocutors had equals distance. But when the distance between the interlocutors is too close, the students with their high power utilized three kinds of strategies, not only conventionally indirect but also direct and non-conventionally indirect strategies.

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