SEMANTICS AND SYNTAX OF EXPRESSIVE "SAY" CONSTRUCTIONS IN YUMAN¹

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All Yuman languages exhibit constructions consisting of an uninflected word followed by an inflected form of the verb which normally means 'to say', the latter often reduced in either stress or segmental content. These are semantically and syntactically distinct from other constructions in these languages and this paper will attempt to characterize this distinction for the family as a whole. In other words, I propose not only to reconstruct such a construction for Proto-Yuman, a rather non-controversial proposal in view of its existence throughout the family, but also to assign this reconstruction its unique semantic force, and then to discuss its interaction with other aspects of the syntax of Yuman languages.

Below are listed a number of examples in the various languages, chosen somewhat at random from the wealth of available material, to illustrate its scope and variety. These are arranged in semantic categories which are far from exhaustive, but at least representative. To simplify presentation and facilitate comparison, they are given with the base form of the verb 'to say' in each language, although it should be kept in mind that it must be inflected at least for person.² These examples also illustrate the fact that, although uninflected, the word preceding 'say' may exhibit internal modifications, most typically reduplication, sound symbolism (i.e., consonantal ablaut), and vocalic alternations, all processes of great productivity and affect in Yuman derivational morphology. When available, there is listed next to the example the corresponding inflected verb form, to demonstrate that, in some cases at least, the uninflected word is synchronically related to an ordinary verb in the language.³

Noises:

- Yu: x^welax^wel aʔi· 'to make a popping noise'
 n^yi·xu· aʔi· 'to make a confused noise'
- Mo: qoləqol i 'the sound of tomatoes in the can when one shakes them'
 kel₃kel i 'the sound of dishes, cups hitting together, rattling'
 (note consonantal and vocalic ablaut relating these forms)
 q^weləq^wel i 'the sound of fish plopping in water'
 haθəhaθ i 'the noise of going through brush, stepping on weeds'
 hesəhes i 'the noise of chatter or gossip; refers to ladies laughing and talking behind hands'
 haləhal i 'the hollow sound of pods hitting together in the wind'
- Co: paqpaq i 'to make a popping noise'
 qaw i 'to scream'
- Di: xaləxaʔl i· 'to make a clanking noise' (note length ablaut)
 xalxal i· 'to make a rattling noise'
 ix i· 'to sneeze'

- Wa: pakpak ?i 'to make puffing noises'
 Ya: vqla·qla· ?i 'to scream for help'
 vham ?i 'to pant'
 vhaha ?i 'to pant continuously'
 vcar ?i 'to shout' (cf. inflected vcark 'he shouts')
 vtsi·tsi· ?i 'to squeal'
 Ha: luplup ?i 'to make a snuffling sound'
 qisqis ?i 'to make a squeaking rubbing sound'
 vcqiws ?i 'to make a gulping sound'
 vluθvluθ ?i 'to make a crackling sound (fire, pistol)
 Pa: vkalkal ?i 'to play an instrument'
 Ki: kipkip ?i 'to make hoofbeat sounds'
 qharqhar ?i 'to make a hollow noise'

Motions, including facial motions and expressions:

- Yu: en a?i· 'to shake, shiver'
 eq a?i· 'to stop suddenly'
 vaðom a?i· 'to turn halfway around' (cf. vaðomək 'he faces toward here')
 ma·n a?i· 'to rise up suddenly' (cf. amanək 'he arises')
 vana·lV a?i· 'to step aside' (cf. vanalVk 'he stands off from it')
 Mo: venəven i 'to wiggle around (e.g. before something dies)'
 wi·lV i 'descriptive of the movement of a spider web in the wind, hanging and swaying'
 weṭəweṭ i '(dog) to wag tail'
 icpel i 'to stick out tongue'
 icpel icpel i 'tongue to dart in and out'
 pulVipulV i 'to move up and down (e.g. as sheet or blanket moves up and down as person underneath tries to get out)'
 Co: ʃmaɪV ʃmaɪV i 'to move rapidly'
 murmur i 'to shake head "No"'
 caqʃ i 'to jump'
 caqʃcaqʃ i 'to hop'
 law i 'to turn head quickly'
 la·w i 'to turn head slowly'
 tamk i 'to whirl'
 Di: ?əcwilk?əcwilk i· 'to wiggle'
 ?əxmirkəxmirk i· 'to raise eyebrows'
 ?in i· 'to shake'
 ?in?in i· 'to move around'
 ?ir i· 'to tremble'
 ?əptirk i· 'to kick one's heels'
 liplip i· 'to flutter eyelids'
 Wa: waymac ?i 'to take off running'
 Ya: toctoc ?i 'to drip'
 vcaqcaq ?i 'to drip' (cf. caqi 'to drip')
 vra·r ?i 'to get up (after falling)'
 vck^Wa·r ?i 'to smile' (cf. ck^Wari 'to laugh')
 vmac ?i 'to wink'
 Ha: kolp ?i 'to jerk backwards'
 natnat ?i 'to trot'

vleplep 'i 'to flap'
 vyunyun 'i 'to have a tic'
 Pa: 'xyiw 'i 'to fan'
 Ki: hyawi 'i 'to hop'
 s'i·ks'i·k 'i 'to limp'
 twiltwil 'i 'to twirl'

Patterns:

Yu: la·x a'i· 'to flash'
 la·xala·x a'i· 'to flash intermittently'
 seq a'i· 'a thin line on the horizon'
 Mo: karəkar i 'descriptive of lace on the edge or ends of dress'
 varəvar i 'hair cut in different lengths, uneven'
 rəvərav i 'the glitter or shine of a diamond ring'
 θeləθel i 'be perforated, pitted, pockmarked'
 θorəθor i 'descriptive of wrinkles, be all wrinkles'
 nʷikənʷi·k i 'descriptive of tangles (e.g. when a string is pulled)'
 Co: qipqip i 'be ragged, in strips'
 kanʷskanʷ i 'be bumpy'
 Di: cac i· 'are scattered'
 sar i· 'be in streaks'
 sai i· 'be ragged'
 tuɬtuɬ i· 'be bumpy'
 Ya: k^Waθa riθriθ 'i 'have freckles'
 vh^Wirvh^Wirv 'i 'to ripple'
 Ha: vmca·lv 'i 'to be flared'

Consistency:

Yu: alʷqes a'i· 'to be malleable'
 Mo: veləvel i 'to be too done, overcooked'
 repərep i 'to be very thin (e.g. dress)'
 n^yepənʷep i 'descriptive of something rather soft, that can be flattened'
 mun^yəmun^y i 'descriptive of rotten tree that is about to fall'
 qalʷəqalʷ i 'descriptive of something very soft (e.g. bananas)'
 qarəqar i 'soft, becoming watery'
 Ya: vqeqe 'i 'be sticky'
 vək^Wa·mk^Wa·m 'i 'be soft (consistency)'

Shape:

Mo: lʷepəlʷep i 'flat and round'
 qanʷqanʷ i 'be long (e.g. melon)'
 Co: silʷsilʷ i 'be long and thin'
 laplap i 'be flat'
 mirmir i 'be straight'
 Di: mul·mul i· 'be round'
 Ya: poqpoq 'i 'be slender'

Sensation:

Yu: saqasaq a'i· 'to be itchy'

- nʷi.tegateq aʷi. 'to feel prickly'
 Mo: naqənaq i 'the feeling in heart of surprise or of worry and concern over the outcome of something'
 i.matnʷc ʔi. i 'to feel faint, the body feels faint'
 Co: saqsaq i 'be itchy'
 Di: sakəsak i. 'be itchy'
 ʔəiʷnʷac i. 'to get worse'
 Ya: vlah ʷi, tlah ʷi 'be tired'
 Ha: tvʷov ʷi 'be tired out'

Emotion:

- Di: yay xʷatəxʷat i. 'be angry (lit. heart is red all over)'
 yay kʷilʷil.i. 'be weak'
 yay sakəsak i. 'be nervous, anxious (lit. heart itches)'
 Wa: waʷmyi ʷi 'be mad, angry, get mad'
 Ya: vʔri. ʷi 'to be scared'
 tuya ʷi 'to be unsure, hopeless'
 Pa: wa ʷsa.v ʷi 'be happy'

Even the limited sample shown above should be proof enough that this is a very productive pattern and, in fact, some examples point to recent formations. Thus

- Mo: tik i, tiktik i 'a minute, second' (Munro and Brown 1976)
 mnyaw i 'to mew' " "
 Ya: nʷmi myaʷw ʷi 'cat mews' (Kendall ms)
 ʷaʷaʷa.k ʷi 'cockadoodledoo' " "
 kʔarc hwohwo ʷi 'dogs go bow-wow' " "
 kiŋkiŋ ʷi 'ding-dong'
 mu. ʷi 'to moo'
 tharha.r ʷi 'to work'
 Ha: kiŋkiŋ ʷi 'small bell ringing'
 taptap ʷi 'sound of helicopter'
 vli.t ʷi 'sound of motor humming'

While some of these must be new forms (e.g. 'minute', 'mew', 'work'), others (e.g. the last two items of Ha) are more likely to be semantic extensions of already existing ones.

A curious fact, in view of the great productivity of the construction, is that a search for cognates across subgroups in an attempt to reconstruct not just the existence of the construction but some specific instances of it, gives meager results. The best sets are:

- 'be itchy' sakəsak i. (Di), saqasaq aʷi. (Yu), saqsaq i (Co),
 soqsoq ʷi (Pa)
 'to turn (head)' law aʷi. (Yu), lawx i. (Di), law ʷi (Co)
 'to move, shake' vliw ʷi (Ha), vliwliw ʷi (Ha), vliwliw ʷi (Ya)
 'to move around, shake' ʷiŋ i., ʷiŋʷiŋ i. (Di), vʷiŋʷiŋ (Ya),
 en aʷi. (Yu)
 'to ring, rattle, etc.' qhalqhal ʷi (Ki), vqal ʷi (Ha),
 vkalkal ʷi (Pa), qalqal ʷi (Ya)

but

qalYeqal^Y i 'very soft' (Mo), qarəqar i 'soft' (Mo),
kalYkal^Y ?i 'nod head "Yes"'

Even these present problems. Thus, the sets 'to turn' and 'to move' may be cognate and related by vocalic ablaut or may be totally separate; the set for 'to ring, rattle, etc.' looks phonologically related to the next three items by consonantal ablaut, but the semantic link, if any, is tenuous. Furthermore, a single semantic notion may be conveyed in various languages by totally unrelated forms, as exemplified in the two sets below:

'streaks, stripes, strips, ragged' ʔa·r i (Mo), sar i· (Di),
qipqip ?i (Co)
'rock back and forth' ?atk?atk i· (Di), ka·rkka·rk ?i (Ya),
vkwaska?kwask ?i (Ha)

In fact, there are cases of items in a single language with more than one semantic association, e.g. (Mo) cil^Yacil^Y i means both 'the description of hair standing up, sticking out' and 'the sound of little gourds rattling'. We are obviously dealing with an aspect of language where speakers can give free rein to their imagination and indulge in playfulness and reinterpretation as the situation suggests. In addition, it should be clear by now that appropriate English translations are not easy to arrived at and should be taken as highly tentative.

We can now consider what the underlying meaning of the construction is and why it is felt so apt by speakers of Yuman languages to express the wide variety of meanings exemplified above. Let us first characterize as generally as possible the uninflected part of the construction. We can eliminate as non-criterial the specific notions conveyed by reduplication (i.e. repetition, extension in time or space) and sound symbolism (i.e. size, intensity) since they have their own overt manifestation and are not present in all forms. We must, however, keep in mind the appropriateness of the expression of these notions by 'say' constructions.

Crawford (1966) makes the significant observation for Cocopa that, although a number of forms also attested as ordinary verbs can enter into 'say' constructions, those that do conspicuously lack any of the otherwise prolifically used Yuman "instrumental prefixes". This observation turns out to be valid for other Yuman languages as well and must therefore be important. The semantics of instrumental prefixes are complex and not limited to a specification of the instrument or body part involved in the action, but a large subset of them are simultaneously causative, with the concomitant result that the total verb form tends to be transitive and active. Now when the 'say' constructions are examined in the light of this fact, it becomes evident that overwhelmingly they convey meanings which are most aptly rendered by intransitive phrases, thus making the use of transitivity elements at least inappropriate and accounting for their absence. On the other hand, a characterization as stative is unjustified as

a look at the examples discloses a large set of forms denoting even violently active behavior (e.g. scream, jump, twirl). Additional insight is gained by focusing on the languages of the Pai subgroup, particularly Havasupai and Yavapai, where a large number of forms involved in 'say' constructions have a prefix v-, normally a member of the instrumental prefix set. In a paper dealing specifically with the meaning of this prefix in Havasupai, Hinton (1972) has elegantly demonstrated that it can be glossed as 'to act on one's own, spontaneously, to undergo a change of state motivated by an internal condition', and this in direct contrast to a causative prefix c-, which is appropriate for a change of state induced by an outside agency. As a result, v- forms focus on a patient role, c- forms on an agent role, as shown in the minimal pair v-*ŋu:k-k* 'it bent down' vs c-*ŋu:k-k* 'he bent it down'. And in fact when the range of meanings of 'say' constructions are reviewed in this light, it turns out that even the most violently active behavior described can be interpreted as non-agentive: attributes of inanimate objects are unambiguously within this range, the cries and motions of animals are spontaneous, probably not subject to conscious control, and most of the states attributable to humans are distinctly uncontrolled (sneeze, pant, wiggle, giggle, shiver, etc.). Even such less obvious ones such as 'laughing, talking, stepping aside, etc.' need not necessarily be under active control. In fact, I suspect that the 'say' construction meaning 'talk' specifically contrasts with the ordinary verb 'to talk' precisely in that way, so that, with 'say', it means more 'be engaged in emitting speech sounds' as opposed to 'exchange meaningful information'.

The next question to ask is why these forms are so appropriately coupled with the verb 'to say'. More observations by Yumanists are relevant here. Halpern (1947, 30) characterizes these constructions for Yuma as 'momentaneous'. They are thus particularly appropriate for use in narratives, giving the discourse a special vividness. On the other hand, the momentaneous aspect is not so clearly evident in all examples, but its relevance will become clearer further on. In her survey of sound symbolism in Mojave, Judith Crawford (ms) often distinguishes the 'say' constructions from other instances of sound symbolism by glossing them as 'descriptive of...' as many of the examples given above illustrate. Combining the two observations, we might label the 'say' constructions as 'descriptive of a momentaneous event.'

Various characterizations of the verb 'to say' in Yuman have been attempted since it enters into a wide variety of usages. Relevant here is the suggestion by Harwell (1976) that for Maricopa, uses of 'say' have a sense of immediacy lacking from other expressions, and Kendall (ms) has suggested for Yavapai glosses such as 'manifest, indicate, reveal' rather than 'say' to capture the evidential aspect of some of these uses.

Combining these insights, we might hypothesize that the verb 'to say' in these constructions means something like 'give direct, immediate evidence of...' This is also compatible with the fact that

in the broader context of Yuman structures in general, the verb 'to say' is a member of a set of three contrastive existential auxiliaries⁴ whose basic meanings when used as main verbs are 'be', 'do', and 'say' but whose auxiliary uses classify types of events as follows: 'be' = 'stative-intransitive, behavior',⁵ 'do' = 'active, performance', 'say' = 'verbal or other method of expression'.

Combining all the above observations in a single statement, I propose to characterize the 'say' constructions as follows:

'descriptive of a characteristic configuration of an individual, object, or situation by focusing on the overt immediately verifiable evidence, while disclaiming any active, deliberate, or volitional intent'.

The evidential component accounts nicely for the momentaneous aspect and vividness of the construction. Used in narratives, it brings the scene to life before your very eyes.⁶ It thus provides a particularly useful stylistic device to enliven the discourse within the restrictions imposed by Yuman narrative style and world view which demand that only observable behavior is eligible for description. The internal motivation of actions and the intent of an agent are not directly accessible to observation and therefore are not to be directly expressed. To transgress this prohibition would be not only inappropriate social behavior, but would probably be fraught with danger for the narrator. The assurance of appropriateness for the 'say' construction thus enhances the speaker's delight in using it and helps account for its luxuriant proliferation.

Now some remarks on syntax. At first sight, it would seem that there is little to say, since the internal syntax of the construction is transparent and has already been described. On the other hand, its very simplicity is a problem since there is no other aspect of Yuman syntax which matches it.

First of all, it should be pointed out that the construction as a whole can of course be used in a larger syntactic context in which case it functions as the equivalent of an ordinary verb. It can be the main verb of a sentence and thus be equipped with the normal array of syntactic morphemes, and may even take the auxiliary verb appropriate for the meaning of the construction as a whole rather than for the meaning of the verb 'say'. Thus

Ya: karet-c ya-m-k tu yo-k galqal ?i-km (wagon-subj go-same= subj just move same=subj rattle-incompl) 'The wagon just went creaking along.' (Kendall, ms)

Yu: av'aw a'e-t-k (stand say-emph-indic) 'He stood up.'

Di: a-win k-i? (behave imperative-say) 'You'd better behave.'
lɣap lɣap w-i. tawam (flicker 3-say is=around[auxiliary])
 'It went flickering around.'

It can be embedded by the normal mechanisms of syntactic suffixation as well as by prefixation of the morpheme nYa- 'when':

Di: kurak-və-c wal w-i.-k nYəkəcəxa.p-x (old=man-def-subj hurry
3-say-dep.fut 3=2-catch=up=with=pl-fut) 'The old man will
hurry and catch up with you people.'

n^ya'pum puwk yar nYa-w-i.-c kətu.1-m w-a.m (then return round
when-3-say-same=subj north-to 3-go=away) 'Then he went back,
and when he had made a circle, he went off to the north.'

It can also be nominalized by the use of the nominalizing suffix
-c to produce some complex lexical items:

Mo: gayəqay i-c 'jello'

Ha: kwe vhu. 'i-ca 'zipper'

yo vkal 'i-ca 'false teeth'

iwaya vkwaska'kwask 'i-ca 'rocking chair'

Ya: tu. lullul 'ica 'flute'

vray 'ica 'lightning'

Wa: capaya hu.hu. 'ica 'owl'

All this should amply demonstrate the verbal status of the construction as a whole. The oddness has to do with the internal structure. First of all, what is the syntactic role of the uninflected word? There is no doubt that it is derived from verbal forms, but ordinary verbs behave quite differently. One possible line of argumentation would suggest a very literal interpretation, where the uninflected form could be seen to act as a direct quotation, i.e. 'it says "bow-wow"' or whatever. And in languages such as Diegueño this might have some appeal since a common form of the declarative sentence has no overt syntactic suffix and, at least in some third person forms, often has no overt person marker either. Compare for example the two sentences below:

Di: wal w-i.-s (hurry 3-say-emph) 'He hurried'
"na.m" w-i.-s (leave=pl 3-say-emp) 'They've gone' he said.'

This line of reasoning is totally precluded for other Yuman languages where an obligatory syntactic suffix is the norm for declarative sentences, both in direct quotations and in complements of the verb 'to say':

Mo: hova-c homi:-k 'i-m (that-subj tall-tns 1-say-tns) 'I said
that she was tall.' (Munro, 1976, p.108)

hova-c i'i:-m "inYec 'i-humi:-k"i-m (that-subj say-tns I
1-tall-k say-tns) 'She said this: "I am tall" she said.'
(Munro, 1976, p.43)

Conversely, languages like Mojave have 'say' constructions where the complement is unmarked, but where the lack of marking denotes unrealized events. In just these cases, languages like Diegueño have the unrealized suffix -x.

Di: 'əwa. 'i-cuw-x 'i-i-s (house 1-make-irr 1-say-emp) 'I intend
to build a house.'

Mo: 'i-cu:toh 'i-i-m (1-play=cards=pl 1-say-tns) 'We're going to
play cards.' (Munro, 1976, 108)

Alternately, we could consider the possibility that the uninflected form is a noun functioning as the object of the verb 'say'. This is not impossible since nouns can be derived from verbs without overt modification and tend to be more often uninflected than verbs. In this view, our construction could even be interpreted as a specific instance of a process not unknown in Yuman verb stem formation, i.e. nominal incorporation, which has the typical structure nominal + person marker + verb, an exact parallel to the 'say' construction:

Yu: do-m-alaw-k (eye-2-turn-indic) 'You turned your head.'

Where the parallelism fails is that in true cases of nominal incorporation, the nominal element is reduced and destressed, whereas in the 'say' constructions it is the verb that undergoes this process. And while this seems to be a natural consequence of the fact that the least meaningful part is reduced, it makes the comparison less attractive. The component of reduction, however, suggests yet another parallel, namely with auxiliary verbs, which tend indeed to be reduced and destressed and which, in fact, include the verb 'to say' in their ranks as noted above. Once more the comparison fails in that most languages require a syntactic suffix on the verb preceding the auxiliary.

And so it is clear that while some potentially ambiguous constructions can be found, not only are none of them common to all Yuman languages, so that what is potentially ambiguous in one is disambiguated in the other, but the potentially ambiguous cases are restricted to non-overlapping situations. We thus conclude that while the 'say' constructions described here partake of some of the characteristics of other Yuman syntactic structures, their stark simplicity keeps them distinct from the rest of the syntax and helps maintain their independence. On the other hand, this does not preclude the possibility that the existence of these constructions may have provided the model for the development of a number of specialized uses of the verb 'to say' in several Yuman languages. Thus, Mojave has uses of 'say' ranging from 'progressive' to 'obligation', Diegueño includes 'try, think', Diegueño and Yavapai have 'become' and Yavapai, adding a directional suffix to 'say' has it describe the movements of celestial bodies and the changes in season and time. It might even underlie a special Mojave construction of complements of the verb 'to teach' (itself undoubtedly derived from 'say') where the embedded verb form is uninflected. Munro (1976, p.298) does in fact suggest the notion of incorporated verbs for this construction, a type of structure otherwise very unusual in Yuman.

A final observation will place the above remarks in a broader context and suggest that there might be areal pressures at work which reinforce and support these constructions (not to mention universal tendencies). Note, for example, the following, in another Hokan language:

Downriver Achumawi : ⁸poq^hpoq^h w'is'í 'it's boiling'

saksak ʔuʃi 'bubbling'
 johjoh ʔuwi 'it's dripping'
 qayqay suwi 'I'm itching'

The formal and semantic parallels are indeed obvious. More startling yet are the facts of Yawelmani Yokuts (Newman, 1946, 236-238), totally unrelated to Yuman, where an uninflected element is followed by an inflected form of a verb meaning 'to say, do' to form constructions which cover uncannily similar semantic areas. Reduplication and vocalic ablaut abound. Furthermore, this type of construction is unique in Yawelmani where proclitics and compounds are otherwise nonexistent. Some examples will illustrate this:

Yawelmani: 'uh-wiyi 'cough'
 sim-wiyi 'drizzle'
 simimim-wiyi 'keep drizzling'
 t'ap-wiyi 'slap'
 t'apt'ap-wiyi 'clap the hands'
 hik'-wiyi 'make a hiccuping sound'

Obviously, an areal survey of California, the Southwest, or the Northwest Coast investigating the occurrence of similar constructions should prove fruitful. But that is another paper.

Footnotes

¹ The notion of a paper on this topic was suggested by Pamela Munro whose repeated proddings have not been in vain. The paper could not have been written without the generosity of fellow Yumanists in sharing unpublished material. My research on comparative Yuman syntax has been supported by NSF grant GSOC-7418043.

² The verb 'to say' can be reconstructed for Proto-Yuman as *i.

³ Yuman languages still spoken and their probable subgrouping are as follows. The abbreviations in parentheses are used throughout this paper to identify the languages:

River group: Yuma(Kwtsaan) (Yu), Mojave (Mo), Maricopa (Ma)
 California-Delta group: Cocopa (Co), Diegueño (Di)
 Pai group: Upland: Walapai (Wa), Yavapai (Ya), Havasupai (Ha)
 Baja California: Paipai (Pa)

Kiliwa (Ki)

Unless otherwise identified, the data reproduced in this paper are from the following sources: Yu (Halpern 1946-47), Mo (Judith Crawford, ms), Co (James Crawford, 1966), Di (Courto and Hutcheson 1973 for lexical information, my own fieldnotes for sentences), Wa (Winter, 1966), Ya (Shaterian 1971), Ha (Crook et al 1976), Pa (Kaufman and Shaterian 1974), Ki (Mixco, 1971).

⁴ I have reconstructed the system of Proto-Yuman auxiliary phrases in Langdon (1974).

⁵ The labels 'behavior, performance, and method of expression' are Halpern's (1976).

⁶ This feature is particularly appropriate to account for the inclusion in 'say' constructions of the otherwise puzzling Diegueño item 'uy wi' 'there is nothing there'.

⁷ Kendall (ms)

⁸ Shirley Silver, personal communication.

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