

Stylistic Processes of Meaning-Making: An Analysis of Selected Newspaper Headlines of 20 May 2017 Celebration in Cameroon

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Abstract

Stylists analyse the style of language by looking systematically at the formal features of a text, and determining their functional significance for the interpretation of the text in question. Texts can be classified as either literary or non-literary. In looking at texts, this study has examined the power headlines wield in the discourse of the 20 May 2017 representation in three newspapers in Cameroon. It has presented a coherent system of meanings, historically located, supporting institutions, reproducing power relations and having ideological effects, portraying the relationship between the context and interpretation to make meaning. For the headlines to raise interest and arouse the reader, they must draw power from the common ground which is the shared culture and political context. The study uses as conceptual framework Fairclough's analytical elements in the process of meaning-making, which are production of the text, the text itself and the reception of the text, bringing out the ideologies of contrast, negativity and positivity. The analysis concludes that news makers tilt their use of linguistic choice towards the ideas they want to implant on their audience, and at times manifest exaggeration and therefore misrepresentation in reporting an event.

Keywords: Texts, Meaning-making, Naming, Frames

1. Introduction

Stylisticians analyse the style of language by looking systematically at the formal features of a text and determining their functional significance for the interpretation of the text in question (Jeffries and McIntyre 2010 pp 1). A text in linguistics as defined by Halliday and Hasan (1985 pp.1) is any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole.' They go on to explain that a text may be anything from a single proverb to a whole play, from a momentary cry for help to an all-day discussion on a committee. It is a unit of language use and not a grammatical unit, and it is not defined by its size. It is regarded as a semantic unit: a unit not of form but of meaning. Fairclough (2003, pp. 3) considers texts as written and printed such as shopping lists and newspaper articles and also transcripts of (spoken) conversations and interviews, as well as television programmes and web pages. Fairclough looks at texts as elements of social events that have casual effects, that is, they bring about changes, which can be in people's beliefs, attitudes, actions, and social relations. These are mediated by meaning-making. One of the effects of texts is the ideological effect which can be associated with their representations, enactments and inculcations (Fairclough 2003, pp.9). Considering texts as elements of social events calls for a concern in the interactive processes of meaning-making.

It is clear therefore that meaning-making depends upon not only what is explicit in a text but also what is implicit, that is, what is assumed. Part of the analysis of texts is trying to identify what is assumed thereby bringing text and context into play. Interpretation is therefore a process of both understanding what the producer means in words, sentences or longer stretches of texts and also that of judging and evaluating. The readers try to understand why writers write as they do and sometimes with a view to their social effects.

The analyst in stylistics analysing the meaning-making process examines the text, the context and the interpretation bringing to light the ideological representation of the speaker or the writer. In a situation of a conflict frame, where there is a clash between groups, the naming of events and people is very evident. Naming looks at the ways in which speakers and writers refer to particular referents which can be things or people in the world. These choices reveal the way both the producers and receivers of the text view the referents. Naming is manifested through the use of noun phrases especially with pre-modifiers and post modifiers which add meaning to the referent in that light. Groups or people involved in conflict situations can use naming efficiently to help create a sense of opposition. This is usually expressed in newspaper headlines and the newspaper articles. Headlines are intended to be short, snappy and attention-grabbing. Consequently, they use naming to this effect, so that much information is crammed in a small text. The use of naming therefore helps to package propositions about people, things and events in concrete sounding entities. The naming can be done showing opposition in conflicting camps, bringing out an ideology through contrast and showing polarity. This ideology is expressed in linguistic frames.

A frame is a conceptual structure of inferences linked by linguistic convention to the meanings of linguistic units. Each frame identifies a set of frame elements which are realised in structures headed by the word. Frames are the mental structures that allow human beings to

understand reality and sometimes to create what we take to be reality. These mental structures, or frames, appear in and operate through the words we use to discuss the world around us, and they fundamentally and simultaneously shape our thinking and language at different levels. Wendland (2010, pp.28) defines a frame as ‘a psychological construct that furnishes one with a prevailing point of view that manipulates prominence and relevance in order to influence thinking and, if need be subsequent judgement as well.’ It is a strategy of perception and interpretation which people rely on to understand and respond to the world around them. By inviting others to conceptualise a certain topic from a predetermined point of view, a text ‘framer’ not only supplies an initial orienting mental scenario, but frequently controls their cognitive and emotive alignment as well as their positive or negative response to that particular subject or issue (Wendland 2010, pp. 29). By directing the view to consider certain prominent features and to ignore others, this dominant frame thus organises one’s perception. There is, then, an indispensable connection between framing and reasoning. Carefully chosen terminology helps to frame a given issue. Reiterating a given frame reinforces it upon one’s perception and memory, thus helping to prevent possible cases of unclarity of reference. The interpretation of a text invokes a frame by placing its contents in a pattern known independently of the text. A text evokes a frame when a linguistic form or pattern is conventionally associated with that particular ideology. By framing, messages are encoded with meaning so that they can be efficiently interpreted in relation to existing beliefs or ideas. Frames trigger meaning since they are filled with pictures, images and stories from past encounters with the world, helping the readers and listeners to make sense of the world around them. The concept of frames and framing therefore is a vital aspect of human perception, reasoning and communication via various modes and media of transmission. Beliefs, decisions and values are underlying elements of how facts are framed. This implies that for the writer or the speaker to convey their ideas to the reader or listener, they must have a shared ground which usually comes with the pragmatic aspect of language.

As Jeffries & McIntyre (2010 pg. 8) explain, ‘stylistics, aided by insights from other fields such as pragmatics and discourse analysis, may also provide us with an account of the more implicitly manipulative uses of language.’ This is seen in the resemblance of critical discourse analysis to stylistics, particularly in its positioning of the text at the center of its concerns. The textual analysis examines pertinent lexical and grammatical features that characterise the discourse which aids in bringing out meaning, the contextual analysis examines the event of discourse and its credibility in meaning making and the interpretation provides an explanation of the discourse as it addresses the sociological aspects and brings out the ideologies. Jeffries (2016) describes in the Textual Conceptual Functions, some of the elements of textual meaning such as contrasting and negation. In contrasting she elaborates on constructed opposites and presents the binary opposition as opposed to one another but are necessarily bound together as each other’s condition of possibility. Negation can be realised in English through the negative marker ‘not’, or through nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Halliday & Hasan (1985, pp.176) posit that the category of negation is not very sharply defined but as Hidalgo-Downing (2003) puts it, negation as a linguistic option constitutes a marked choice as it typically defeats expectation. This negation is the marked

term in the polarity system not only for morphological, structural and diachronic reasons, but also for cognitive-pragmatic reasons.

The analyst in search of meaning looks at interpretations of texts as well as the texts themselves and more generally at how texts practically figure in particular areas of social life. This is done by linking the micro analysis of the text to the macro analysis bringing out power relations that work across networks of practices and structures. It is in this light that this research examines the 20 May (National Day) 2017 headlines of selected newspapers in Cameroon, bringing out power relations and conflicts in the ‘Anglophone problem’ in Cameroon. This is brought out through the choice of words in the headlines in conjunction with the social events, the intentions of the writers and the effects on the readers who are the Cameroonians involved in the event. The study aims at unraveling the impact of the choice of words and how the writers pass across their messages framing the ideas of success or failure of the 20 May 2017 celebrations in Cameroon. The research questions of the study examine the discursive features of the news headlines which focus on 20 May 2017 celebration in Cameroon, and the kind of identities of the Anglophone and Francophone coming together, that are being constructed by media practitioners.

2. Sociopolitical Background of Cameroon

2.1 French Cameroon and Southern Cameroons

Before the annexation of Cameroon by the Germans in 1884, Cameroon was one (Ngho pp. 61). And before WW1, Cameroon was a German possession but was sandwiched between French and British colonies. At the break of the war, the French and the English agreed on a common strategy at the Anglo-France conference in London to attack German Cameroon and in August 1914 they formally took possession of Douala at the coast of Cameroon. The French and British agreed to establish a condominium in Cameroon which failed, so Britain ruled her part, the smaller territory, with the name Southern Cameroons and France rule her part, the bigger territory with the name, French Cameroon

2.2 West and East Cameroon

The French used the policy of assimilation to rule French Cameroon, while the British used the policy of indirect rule to administer Southern Cameroons. After the WWII and political maneuvers, French Cameroon, got their independence on 1 January 1960 under the name the Republic of Cameroon with a green-red-yellow flag. At the end of WWII the Southern Cameroons also developed politically. Southern Cameroons was administered by the British as part of Nigeria and had a representative in the Eastern House of Assembly in Nigeria. At the time when Southern Cameroons was to get independence, it was decided that the independence should be gotten by Southern Cameroons integrating with either French Cameroon or Nigeria. After serious campaigns in the plebiscite of 11 February 1961, Southern Cameroons voted to be intergrated with the Republic of Cameroon. A federal government was established which took effect from 1 October 1961, and the country was named, Federal Republic of Cameroon. Southern Cameroons became West Cameroon and

French Cameroon became East Cameroon. So the Federal republic of Cameroon was made up of West Cameroon and East Cameroon

2.3 The Establishment of May 20

The Federal Republic of Cameroon was ruled by President Ahmado Ahidjo, who complained that the Federal system was expensive for Cameroon. According to him, having to maintain four assemblies in which there was unwarranted duplication of services, there was therefore a need to consolidate national unity and integration. He also complained that West Cameroon could not balance its budgets and so a need for constitutional and administrative changes which would lead to an establishment of one government (Ngoh pp. 250-251). With these arguments he called for a Referendum, which was organised on 20 May 1972. As Ngoh explains the merits of the federal system was not given, and no time was given to examine the advantages and disadvantages of a unitary system of government. That notwithstanding, Cameroonians voted on 20 May 1972 in support of a unitary system. The West and East states ceased to exist and 20 May from thence became the National Day of Cameroon.

2.4 Development of the Anglophone Crisis

With the unitary constitution, West Cameroon lost their oneness, a single National assembly replaced the four assemblies, the country was split into seven Provinces with West Cameroon being constituted of the North West and South West Provinces (today, North West and South West Regions). This unitary constitution facilitated marginalisation (Ngoh 2002 pp. 252). Those of the former British colony who moved from Southern Cameroons through West Cameroon to North West and South West regions (Anglophones) started complaining of being marginalised. Anglophones since 1972 have been complaining of the centralisation of power by the Francophone leadership, the violation of the 1961 federal constitution, the economic exploitation of the Anglophone territory, destruction of Anglophone economic institutions and the fear that the Anglophone education will be suppressed. There has been so many different manifestations of these grievances by the Anglophones. There has been, students' strikes, workers' strikes, conferences such as, the All Anglophone conference 1 (Buea declaration) and the All Anglophone conference 11 (Bamenda Proclamation) in which the Anglophones came together to make their complaints known and decide their fate. There are also political parties like their Social Democratic Front and pressure groups like the teachers' Trade Union (TAC, CATTUC) and the Southern Cameroons Nation Congress (SCNC) which have shown their discontentment of Anglophone marginalisation through strikes.

The last serious manifestations of the Anglophone problem (on going) started with the Common Law Lawyers' strike on 11 October 2016, buttressed by the Anglophone Teachers' strike on 21 November 2016. Since October 2016 courts have been shut down and schools joined the strike in November, with schools and courts in both Anglophone Region (NW, SW Regions) shut down. The Lawyers were calling for a redeployment of Francophone magistrates from Anglophone courts while the teachers were calling for a redeployment of Francophone teachers from both secondary schools and universities (Buea and Bamenda) in Anglophone regions. The civil society joined in the strike. The arrest of the leaders of the

strike intensified it and there are ‘ghost towns’ observations every Monday in both Anglophone regions. Even though the government is making promises ensuring equal status of both cultures, the Anglophones have moved from the demand of federalism to total separation. To effect this, the leaders of the strike have called for a boycott of all national events. They have installed a television cable network, Southern Cameroons Broadcasting Cooperation (SCBC) out of the country but widely received and viewed in the country. They have also voted a chair and vice chair for the Southern Cameroons governing body. The 20 May (National Day) is one of the major events celebrated in the country. The 20 May 2017 celebrations that is, of this year marked the 45th and was a celebration amidst a strong call of boycott by groups against the Cameroon government. The major opposition party in the Anglophone Regions, Social Democratic Front (SDF) with its leader, Ni John Fru Ndi also called a party boycott. Meanwhile the government tried to do everything possible for the National day to be celebrated, with the party in power, the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) and the government administrators calling on Cameroonians to exhibit their civic responsibilities by participating massively in the celebrations. The theme for this year’s celebration focused on unity. It reads: Army and the nation in full synergy for a Cameroon United in its diversity and devoted to the ideals of peace, stability and prosperity (Cameroon Tribune Thursday, May 11 2017 pp 35).

3. Newspaper Headlines

Newspaper headlines are usually intended to stimulate the interest of the reader to read the content of the article. It therefore attracts the reader’s attention and indicates the writer’s attitude to the story. It summarizes the content of the article making brevity a dominant characteristic and makes use of short words to save space. The headline language is usually elliptical and compressed, indicating the focus of the article. Generally, the purpose of the news headline is to give the reader or listener information in an interesting way. Headlines are particularly revealing of the social, cultural, and therefore national representations circulating in a society at a given time. Headlines as Devolotte and Rechniewski (2001) reenact, are particularly a rich source of information about the field of cultural references. This is because the titles depend on the reader recognizing instantly the field, allusions, issues and cultural references necessary to identify the content of the articles. They thus rely on a stock of cultural knowledge, representations and models of reality that must be assumed to be widespread in the society if the headlines are to have meaning. The recognition by the reader of various types of puns and play on words also rely on general and cultural knowledge, which helps to create and maintain a sense of shared community and collective identity. Metila (2013pp.72) looks at a discourse analysis of news headlines in the Philippines, and acknowledges that the power that headlines wield comes naturally with discourse, a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories and statements that produce a particular version of events. Metila (pp.73) gives the significance of headline stories according to their impact, prominence, proximity, relevance and human interest values. This, combined with selected linguistic cues allows media to easily influence readers’ interception. Metila concludes that framing in headlines is inevitable, but it should be one that is mainly guided by the quest for the truth in social transformation.

4. The Corpus

The choice of newspapers take into consideration the socio-economic readership and the political orientations in Cameroon. The three newspapers are two daily newspapers, Cameroon Tribune and The Guardian Post, and The Post which is biweekly. Cameroon Tribune is a bilingual (French and English) daily and a government owned newspaper in Cameroon. The Guardian Post is one of the leading national English Language Daily newspapers created since August 2001 (guardianpostonline.blogspot.com) with its head office in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The Post is a biweekly English Language newspaper, privately owned and critical of the government.

These newspapers were chosen because of the prominence they acquire through diffusion, the role they play in orienting the interpretation of the reader and the shared cultural context which they evoke. Both The Guardian Post and The Post are widely read in the two Anglophone Regions (North West and South West). Issues of newspapers considered are those that carry headlines about the 20 May (National Day) 2017 celebrations, before and after the 20 May.

5. Conceptual Framework

Fairclough (2001, pp. 10) gives three analytically elements in processes of meaning-making: the production of the text, the text itself and the reception of the text. The production of the text puts the focus on producers, authors, speakers, writers; the reception of the texts focuses on interpretation, interpreters, readers, and listeners. But it seems clear that meaning is made through the interplay between them. This involves taking into account of the institutional position, interests, values, intensions and desires of producers; the relations between elements at different levels in texts; and the institutional positions, knowledge, purposes, values of receivers. Fairclough's three analytical elements can relate to Ruiz's (2009 pp. 9) three levels of sociological Discourse analysis of textual level, contextual level and an interpretive level. Ruiz considers the levels as a linear process that move from textual analysis to contextual analysis and finally to interpretation. This analysis takes into consideration the text itself, the context in which the text is written, the writer and the reader. All these are important in the meaning-making process and are essential elements in the analysis of the texts in this study.

6. Results and Discussion

Most of the headlines carry a summary that explains the social analysis more explicitly. The 20 May (National Day) consideration is because it is one of the most important days celebrated in Cameroon and it had to go through more mechanisations for it to be celebrated in the two Anglophone regions (NW and SW) of the country this year, 2017. While the opposition parties and the leaders of the on-going Anglophone strike are calling for boycotts of the 20 May celebrations so that it should be a failure, the government and administrators are persuading the citizens in these regions to massively participate in the activities, while threatening those who will not perform their civic duties by taking part. The ideologies of the three newspapers will be examined. The Gaurdian Post uses contrast, The Post uses negative polarity and Cameroon Tribune, positive polarity to show a success of the event.

6.1 Contrast

The Guardian Post of Friday May 19 2017 has as headline,

Twists and turns of 20th May 2017!

- Dark clouds hover over celebration as Anglophone ‘agitators’, opposition parties champion boycott calls
- Regime barons expose Fru Ndi’s ‘Can of worms’ for initiating boycott campaign
- Local administrators charge SDF councilors to ensure massive participation or face the strong arm of the law
- CPDM multiplies door-to-door campaign to ensure massive participation in NW, SW regions...

The ‘twists and turns’ insinuate the mechanisations of both the government putting in place everything possible for the 20 May celebrations to take place in the NW and SW Regions, and the opposition parties and leaders of the Anglophone strike calling on boycotts and making sure that the celebrations are a failure. The reports of The Guardian Post elaborating on the ‘twists and turns’ place both parties as opposed to each other, using contrast as a stylistic discourse device to portray their ideology on the on-going strike. The noun phrases are used with emphasis to highlight opposing camps in the fight for and against the 20 May celebrations. On one side they pit the Anglophone ‘agitators’ and the opposition parties, that is, those who oppose the 20 May celebrations against the regime barons and local administrators doing all possible for the celebrations to be a success. While those against send out ‘boycott calls’, those for, call for ‘massive participation’ and multiply ‘door-to-door campaigns.’ The verbs ‘expose’ and ‘initiate’ reinforce the power relations between the two forces in the struggle. The one that exposes the ‘can of worms’ has more power over the one that initiates the boycott. Through the use of contrast The Guardian Post portrays power and dominance.

In its use of language, The Guardian Post shows an unequal encounter between the parties. The ‘regime barons’ insinuate noblemen who expose the ‘can of worms’ of Fru Ndi. The regime barons is made up of militants of the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM), while Fru Ndi is the chairman of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), the main and most influential opposition political party in Cameroon, with its stronghold in Bamenda, NW Region. The barons are placed at an advantageous position exerting power, while Fru Ndi is placed at a disadvantageous position below the barons. The local administrators (obviously of the ruling CPDM) are placed at a position of power, threatening the SDF councillors to participate massively or be penalised. Both at the national and local levels CPDM threatens SDF and is portrayed as more powerful. The use of figurative language also adds meaning to the contrast as shown in the report. The ‘twist and turns’ and ‘dark clouds’ emphasize uncertainty in the celebrations. The ‘can of worms’ helps to belittle the chairman in relation to the regime’s barons and ‘strong arm of the law’ emphasize the power of the local administrators over SDF councilors.

This ideology of contrast in power relations continue in The Guardian Post of the 22 May, that is, after the 20 May 2017 celebrations.

20th May celebrated in NW, SW regions **after all**

- Bamenda II, III, Kumbo, Belo SDF mayors ‘defy’ party’s boycott call
- Kumbo council band a creation of the SDF Mayor, animates march past from start to finish
- Lawan Bako’s UDP makes strong outing in Bamenda, Boyo and Bui

‘After all’ gives an impression of failure on the part of those who opposed the celebrations and carries the notion that in spite of all that was said, that is, the boycott calls from the Anglophone agitators and the opposition parties, the 20 May celebrations still took place. The SDF mayors do not only defy the party’s boycott call, but the SDF band animates the march past from start to finish. In addition, another opposition party UDP participates fully in three major areas of the NW Region. The ideology of The Guardian Post after the celebrations highlights the powerlessness of the opposition parties over their militants and the power possessed by the party in power, the CPDM, over opposition parties. Stylistically, the ideology of The Guardian Post in portraying contrast is to show the power the regime has over its citizen, be they for or against the dictates of the government.

6.2 Negative Polarity

The Post newspaper before 20 May 2017 celebrations, that is, Friday May 19 2017 carries the headline:

MAY 20:

1972 referendum Scam: Nemesis catching Up with Cameroon?

- Faulty Steps In Transition From Federation to Unitary State
- UN voted for Southern Cameroons Independence; Who Overturned verdict?
- Anglophone Problem Requires Prompt Solution

The headline x-rays the origin of the problem causing the present crisis. It goes back to the history of the country to portray the injustices and shady deals at reunification, in a way supporting the ‘Anglophone crisis.’ The words and phrases used, carry negation against the government, the 20 May celebrations. The noun phrases, ‘referendum scam, nemesis, faulty steps, overturned verdict’ all connote negation. Back in the history of Cameroon, the scam is the unfounded arguments against federalism, the referendum was against the constitution, the participation of both East and West Cameroon, with the East having about 3/5 of the population. According to The Post therefore the on-going crisis is a ‘nemesis’ for the abolition of federalism. These negative indicators bring out the point of view of The Post newspaper. The conclusion it draws is that of calling on the government to react ‘promptly’ to the problem.

After the 20 May celebrations the Monday, 22 May edition of the paper carries the highlights: Ghost Towns, Tight Security Mar May 20 celebrations In Bamenda

The Post continues in negation to portray the failure of the 20 May celebrations. According to The Post the people respect the Ghost towns and do not go out for the celebrations. Even those who think of going cannot because of the tight security. “Tight security” indicates that the military presence, and it worked against the celebrations. From the view of 20 May celebrations, The Post blames the government for not being transparent in its dealings with Anglophones, which leads to the boycotts.

6.3 Positive Polarity

Cameroon Tribune on its part reports on success of the 20 May 2017 celebrations. Before the celebrations, the headlines are: ‘National Celebration: A meeting point’ (Friday May 10), and ‘Living together: 20 May tells us’ (Thursday, May 11). Cameroon Tribune focuses on the participation at the 20 May celebration nationwide, without a mention of the North West and South West Regions which are the crisis zones. Before the celebration the newspaper headlines report about the united aspect of the celebration as a meeting point and a show of togetherness as against those who are calling for a separation of the country. The noun phrases ‘a meeting point, and ‘living together’ succinctly describe the upcoming event in a positive manner, giving the impression there are no issues at stake, thereby downplaying the ‘Anglophone crisis.’ In the issue after the celebration, Cameroon Tribune uses the same kind of grammatical structures to refer to the event at the headlines. It reports thus ‘20 May: A demonstration of Unity’ (Monday May 22) and ‘May 20 Festivities; Living together exalted National’ (Monday May 22). It portrays a very successful demonstration of unity through the participation at the celebration, nationwide. Focusing on ‘nationwide’ ignores reporting the participation in the crisis zones, thereby downplaying the situation in the Anglophone regions and not giving a clear view of the event.

The three newspapers all portray different views about the 20 May 2017 celebrations. The Guardian Post newspaper views the celebration through the lens of opposing camps. The camp of the government calling for massive participation and the camp against celebrations calling for boycott. It portrays the camp against as powerless and unsuccessful in their calls. The Post newspaper portrays its ideology of dishonesty, negativity of the government, by highlighting the fraudulent dealings of the government since the inception of 20 May. Cameroon Tribune is adamant to the mechanisations going on. Consequently, it focuses on national participation and concludes that the celebration is successful. All these newspapers successful passed their ideologies through the way they present their views. This is done through the careful packaging of linguistic items in the headlines that draw the readers’ attention to selected information through maneuvering and manipulation of these readers, thereby creating frames that make known the ideology in the report. The framed presentation of events makes it difficult for the audience to draw a balanced assessment of the 20 May 2017 celebrations in Cameroon. The Guardian Post presents it as successful, The Post presents it as unsuccessful and Cameroon Tribune presents it as very successful.

7. Conclusion

The study has examined the power headlines wield in the discourse of the 20 May 2017 representation in three newspapers in Cameroon. It has presented a coherent system of meanings, historically located, supporting institutions, and reproducing power relations and having ideological effects, portraying the relationship between the context and interpretation to make meaning. For the headlines to raise interest and arouse the reader they draw power from the common ground which is the shared culture and political context. The analysis concludes that news makers manifest exaggeration and therefore misrepresentation in reporting an event. The newspaper tilt their use of language towards the ideas they want to implant on their audience. If three newspapers report an event with three different ideologies, this means newspaper reports in Cameroon focus on their ideologies rather than truth of the event. They do not carry out a comprehensive coverage of the different sides of the story but focus on conflict framings.

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