

The Semantics of Weak Imperatives Revisited: Evidence from Free-Choice Item Licensing*

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NELS 48

27-29 October, 2017, University of Iceland, Reykjavík

1 Introduction

- The Problem: are FCIs licensed in imperatives?

- (0) a. *?**Vedd* *fel bármelyik ruhát*
take-IMP-2SG PRT any dress-ACC
'Take any dress.'
- b. *#Most azonnal vedd* *fel bármelyik ruhát*
now at once take-IMP-2SG PRT any dress-ACC
'Take any dress right now.'
- c. *Nyugodtan vedd* *fel bármelyik ruhát*
PERMISSION take-IMP-2SG PRT any dress-ACC
'Just take any dress. (Feel free to take any dress.)'

- Goal: provide an account which makes sense in terms of the data and what we otherwise think/know about imperatives and FCIs
- Background:
 - imperatives: To-Do-List-theory (minimal semantics+strong pragmatics) of Portner (2007), (2012), von Stechow and Iatridou (2017)
 - FCIs: dependent indefinite analysis (Giannakidou 2001)
- New proposal: in weak imperatives, instead of To-Do-List, the List of Actions Under Consideration by the addressee is manipulated (which is a part of the common ground)
- Evidence from:
 - Free-choice item licensing in imperatives (*cualquier* in Spanish, *n'importe quel* in French, *opjiosdhipote* in Greek). Observation: OK in weak imperatives, not OK in strong imperatives. Current theories of imperatives and FCIs can't really accommodate this.

* This research was carried out within the framework of Project 112057 of OTKA, the Hungarian National Scientific Research Foundation.

- Strong imperatives are OK out of the blue, weak imperatives need special context (the shared knowledge that the addressee contemplates the action described in the prejacent).
- Strong imperatives create obligations, weak imperatives do not: TDL account just cannot accommodate this.
- There are languages that encode the strong vs. weak imperative distinction morphosyntactically: Poletto and Zanuttini (2003) on Rhaetoromance.

2 Imperatives and FCIs

- (1) *Pon cualquier excusa.* (Spanish)
 put-IMP-2SG FCI excuse
 ‘Give any excuse.’
- (2) *Dhialekse opjodhipote forema.* (Greek)
 pick-IMP-2SG FCI dress
 ‘Take any dress.’
- (3) *Prends n’importe quelle carte.* (French)
 take-IMP-2SG FCI card
 ‘Take any card.’

The two kinds of imperatives: *Come in!*

- Strong (command) imperative: ‘You must come in.’ (parent to children playing outside) ~ necessity
- weak (permission / acquiescence / indifference) imperative: ‘You can come in.’ (after hearing a knock on the door of your room in the office) ~ possibility
- difference can be encoded by grammaticalized adverbials (German, Hungarian, Italian) or particles (Rhaetoromance)

Divergent views in the literature:

- Aloni 2002, 2007, Kaufmann 2012: both strong and weak imperatives license FCIs, no difference in semantic well-formedness or pragmatic felicitousness
- Giannakidou 2001, Giannakidou and Quer 2013: both strong and weak imperatives license FCIs, but they are pragmatically very infelicitous in (most) strong imperatives
- Strickland 1982, Haspelmath 1997: in strong imperatives, FCIs are unacceptable, in weak imperatives, they are OK
- in much of the FCI literature, imperatives receive little attention, treated in tandem with necessity modals

FCIs in imperatives: some data

- Strickland (1982: 19-20): comparative analysis of English *any* and French *n'importe quel*

(4) #Bring me any chair. (out of the blue)

(5) A: What chair do you want?

B: Oh, bring me any chair. It doesn't matter.

- Hungarian (cf. Halm 2016a):

(6) a. #*Azt parancsolom, hogy vedd fel bármelyik ruhát*
it-ACC command-1SG that take-IMP-2SG PRT any dress-ACC
'I command you to take any dress.'

b. #*Most azonnal vedd fel bármelyik ruhát*
now at once take-IMP-2SG PRT any dress-ACC
'Take any dress right now.'

c. ?*Vedd fel bármelyik ruhát*
take-IMP-2SG PRT any dress-ACC
'Take any dress.'

d. *Nyugodtan vedd fel bármelyik ruhát*
nyugodtan¹ take-IMP-2SG PRT any dress-ACC
'Just take any dress.' (permission/acquiescence reading)

e. *Meg engedem, hogy fel vedd bármelyik ruhát*
PRT allow-1SG that PRT take-SUBJ-2SG any dress-ACC
'I allow you take any dress.'

- Factors indicating strong vs. weak status:
 - (6a) main verb of matrix clause
 - (6b) *most azonnal* 'right now'
 - (6c) none
 - (6d) *nyugodtan* 'permission marker'
 - (6e) main verb of matrix clause
- Conclusion: FCIs are fine in weak imperatives, unacceptable in strong imperatives, so-so where both strong and weak reading is accessible.

¹ *nyugodtan* literally translates as 'calmly, peacefully, in a relaxed fashion', but in imperatives it has a grammaticalized function to indicate permission or acquiescence, cf. the very similar use of *ruhig* 'calmly, peacefully' in German (cf. Grosz 2009, von Stechow 2017, 10-11)

3 Free choice items cross-linguistically and in Hungarian

- Intuitively, elements that express free choice (Vendler 1967).
- (Non-)Licensing environments (examples from Giannakidou 1997, 2001):
 - Affirmative episodic (Giannakidou 1997):

(7) **Idha* *opjondhipote*
saw-PERF-1SG FC-person
‘*I saw anybody.’

- Modal:

(8) *Opjosdhipote fititis bori na lisi afto to provlima.*
FC student can SUBJ solve-3SG this the problem
‘Any student can solve this problem.’

- Generic:

(9) *Opjadhipote ghata kinigai pondikia.*
FC cat hunt-3SG mice
‘Any cat hunts mice.’

- Negation²:

(10) **Dhen idha opjondhipote*
not saw-PERF-1SG FC-person
‘*I did not see anybody.’

- Various approaches:
 - FCIs as NPIs (NP-any and FC-any): Kadmon and Landman (1993), Chierchia (2013) vs. Baker (1970), Ladusaw (1979)
 - universal and/or existential quantificational force: Reichenbach (1947), Quine (1960), Horn (1972) ch.3, Lasnik (1972), Kroch 1975 vs. Horn (1972) ch.2, Ladusaw (1979), Carlson (1981), Linebarger (1981), and Dayal (1997)

² Note that English *any* (which *is* licensed under negation) is properly analyzed as a NPI and has a fundamentally different semantics than bona fide FCIs.

- indefinite analysis : Heim (1982), Partee (1986), Kadmon and Landman (1993), Lee and Horn (1994), Farkas (1997), Giannakidou (2001), Kratzer and Shimoyama (2001), Giannakidou and Quer (2013)
- contextual vagueness: Dayal (1997)
- nonveridicality and nonepidodicity: Giannakidou (1997) and (2001)
- scalarity: Fauconnier (1975), Lee and Horn (1994), Rooth (1985), Hoeksema and Rullmann (2000), Krifka (1995), Lahiri (1998), Kadmon and Landman (1993)
- domain widening: Kadmon and Landman (1993), Aloni (2003)

Two dominant schools today:

- universal free choice analysis (involving propositional alternatives and Hamblin sets) (Kratzer and Shimoyama 2002, Aloni 2007, Menéndez-Benito 2010).
- dependent indefinite analysis (Farkas 1997, Giannakidou 1997, 2001, Giannakidou and Quer 2013)
 - FC phrases are represented as intensional indefinites
 - grammatical only in contexts providing alternatives (worlds or situations)
 - licensed in non-veridical and non-episodic contexts (e.g. modals, generics)
 - ungrammatical in extensional veridical contexts (e.g. episodic sentences, negation, interrogatives)
 - [[any student]] = **student**(x)(w) (or: **student**(x)(s)), where world/situation and individual variable(s) are to be bound by an appropriate Q-operator (i.e. generic, habitual, modal, intensional) in order for the FC phrase to be licensed
 - universality is derived from the intensionality and exhaustive variation: the FCI variable is to be assigned a distinct value in each world or situation under consideration (Dayal's (1997) i-alternatives):
 - *You can read any book.* In w₁, you read War and Peace, in w₂, you read The Iliad, in w₃, you read Oedipus Rex etc.
- dependent indefinite analysis seems to work better for Hungarian (Halm (2013, 2015, 2016ab)). Earlier proposals on FCIs in Hungarian include: Hunyadi 1991, 2002, Abrusán 2007 and Szabó 2012).

4 The Semantics and Pragmatics of Imperatives

- How to get from the denotational semantics to the illocutionary force:
 - *Go home!* denotes something like ‘the addressee goes home’
 - Common ground updated to the effect that the addressee now has the obligation to go home (‘In view of the speaker’s wishes, the addressee must go home.’)

- Division of labour between denotational semantics and dynamic pragmatics.
 - Rich denotational semantics models (e.g. Kaufmann 2012):
 - *Go home!* essentially has same denotation as *Addressee must go home.*
 - Plus presuppositional meaning component to derive performative effects.
 - Thin denotational semantics models (e.g. Portner 2007):
 - *Go home!* denotes a property restricted to the addressee: *Addressee goes home.*
- (12) $[[\text{go home!}]] = \lambda w \lambda x: x \text{ is the addressee. } x \text{ goes home in } w$
- Imperative illocutionary force elicited in the dynamic pragmatics component: task of making this property true of herself is added to addressees To-Do-List. (Similarly to how declaratives update the common ground.)
- Recent overviews: Han (2011), Charlow (2014), von Stechow and Iatridou (2017).

4.1 Permission imperatives

A headache for strong denotational semantics approach (in-built necessity modality).

- Kaufmann 2012, Wilson and Sperber 1988: relativized modality through contextual weakening:

(13) *Go home!*[command] ~ ‘in view of the speaker’s wishes, the addressee must go home’

(14) *Go home!*[permission] ~ ‘in view of the addressee’s wishes, the addressee must go home’

- Issues:
 - #*You must go home!*[permission]
 - FCIs in imperatives have existential reading.
 - *Go left! Go right! Either way is fine with me.* ‘#in view of the addressee’s wishes, the addressee must go left and go right’
 - imperative and declarative constructions (von Stechow and Iatridou 2007)
 - sentence adverbials (Gärtner 2017): *You must (unfortunately/ allegedly/ presumably) stay here.* vs. *Stay here (*unfortunately / *allegedly / *presumably).*

A somewhat milder headache for weak denotational semantics approaches (no in-built necessity modality).

- Idea (mooted in Portner 2007): weak imperatives affect a special segment of the To-Do-List.
 - Segmented TDL (according to nature of obligation, cf. Similar differentiation of modals by ordering source Kratzer 1981):

- (17) *Sit down right now* (order imperative)
 ‘Noah should sit down right now, given that he’s been ordered to do so.’
 (deontic necessity)
- (18) *Have a piece of fruit* (invitation imperative)
 ‘Noah should have a piece of fruit, given that it would make him happy.’
 (bouletic necessity)
- (19) *Talk to your advisor more often* (suggestion imperative)
 ‘Noah should talk to his advisor more often, given that he wants to finish his degree.’ (teleological necessity)

- Imperative particles in Rhaetoromance (Poletto and Zanuttini 2003), overt subject in English imperatives (Potsdam 1996).
- Problem: we do not want weak imperatives to create obligations (however mild):

- (20) *Vegyél egy szendvicset*
 take-IMP-2SG a sandwich-ACC
 ‘Have a sandwich.’ (invitation, host exhorting the guest to avail himself of the buffet)

- (21) *Nyugodtan nyisd ki az ablakot*
 nyugodtan open-IMP-2SG PRT the window-ACC
 ‘Open the window.’ (permission: speaker after noticing that addressee may be inconvenienced by lack of fresh air)

- (22) *#Nyugodtan vegyél egy szendvicset . Engem nem zavar.*
 nyugodtan take-IMP-2SG a sandwich-ACC me NEG disturb-3SG
 ‘Have a sandwich, it is fine with me (literally: it does not disturb me).’
 (invitation, host exhorting the guest to avail himself of the buffet)

- (23) *Nyugodtan nyisd ki az ablakot. Engem nem zavar.*
 nyugodtan open-IMP-2SG PRT the window-ACC me NEG disturb-3SG
 ‘Open the window, it is fine with me (literally: it does not disturb me).’
 (permission: speaker after noticing that addressee may be inconvenienced by lack of fresh air)

- invitation imperatives create obligations (obligation by courtesy), it is OK to assume they affect TDL

- permission (or acquiescence) imperatives do not create obligations, therefore, it is not OK to assume that they affect the addressee's TDL
- von Fintel and Iatridou (2017): speaker endorsement parameter in imperatives
 - speaker endorsement in assertions (Malamud and Stephenson 2015):

- (24) a. *Tom's here.*
 b. *Tom's here, isn't he?* (reverse-polarity tag)
 c. *Tom's here, is he?* (same-polarity tag)
 d. *Tom's here?* (rising intonation)

- speaker endorsement in questions (Farkas and Bruce 2010, Gärtner and Gyuris 2012):

- (25) *Oare Petru a sosit deja?*
 oare Peter has arrived already
 'Has Peter arrived already?'

- von Fintel and Iatridou 2017: weak imperatives are imperatives with weak speaker endorsement: speaker floats the imperative, but it is up to the addressee whether to add it to her TDL
- problematic prediction: if the speaker so decides, weak imperative would create an obligation, in the same vein as a strong imperative does
- solution: strength of obligation varies by TDL section, weak imperatives filed under 'commitments'

5 FCIs in imperatives: previous accounts

Giannakidou 2001: FCIs in imperatives analyzed analogously to FCIs in modals: 'the quantificational force of a permissive imperative can [...] be understood as equivalent to that of permissive modals':

- (29) *Boris na danistis opjodhipote vivlio.*
 may-2SG you borrow-2SG FCI book
 'You may borrow any book.'

- (30) $!\exists w, x [[w \in K \wedge \mathbf{book}(x,w)] \wedge \mathbf{borrow}(you,x,w)]$

- (31) i. $[[\text{You may borrow any book.}]^{w^0, g, K} = 1 \text{ iff } \exists w' \in K, \text{ where } K \text{ is the extended permissive modal base, such that } [[\text{You borrow a book.}]^{w', g} = 1$

- ii. $[[\text{You borrow a book.}]]^{w,g} = 1$ iff there is at least one individual $d \in D$ such that $[[\mathbf{book}(x) \wedge \mathbf{borrow}(\text{you},x)]]^{w,g[d/x]} = 1$.
- iii. Values in i-alternatives:
- (a) i-alt₁: $g(x) = \text{War and Peace}$
 $[[\mathbf{book}(x) \wedge \mathbf{borrow}(\text{you},x)]]^{w_1,g} = 1$
- (b) i-alt₂: $g(x) = \text{The Iliad}$
 $[[\mathbf{book}(x) \wedge \mathbf{borrow}(\text{you},x)]]^{w_2,g} = 1$
- (c) i-alt₃: $g(x) = \text{Oedipus Rex}$
 $[[\mathbf{book}(x) \wedge \mathbf{borrow}(\text{you},x)]]^{w_3,g} = 1$

Intuitively: ‘Consider the books that *any book* can be assigned as its value in each relevant i-alternative; you are free to borrow one of those books’.

- (32) *Dialekse opjodhipote filo; opjo thelis.*
 pick-IMP-2SG FCI card whichever want-2SG
 ‘Pick any card, whichever you want.’

- (33) $!\exists w, x [[w \in K \wedge \mathbf{card}(x,w)] \wedge \mathbf{pick}(\text{you},x,w)]$

- (34) a. i-alt₁: $g(x) = \text{ace of spades}$
 $![\mathbf{pick}(\text{you}, \text{ace of spades})]$
- b. i-alt₂: $g(x) = \text{queen of hearts}$
 $![\mathbf{pick}(\text{you}, \text{queen of hearts})]$
- c. i-alt₃: $g(x) = \text{king of diamonds}$
 $![\mathbf{pick}(\text{you}, \text{king of diamonds})]$

Intuitively: ‘Consider the cards that *any card* can be assigned as its value in each relevant i-alternative; you are free to pick one of those cards’.

Issues:

- what to do with strong imperatives? Split: strong imperatives~necessity modals, weak imperatives~possibility modals
- data question: are FCIs licensed in strong imperatives? Giannakidou argues they should be (nonveridical environment):.

- (35) Context: I am playing a game with a child. I instruct her how to win the game:

Exo kripsi 10 avga se diafora meri. Ja na kerdhisis prepi na vris ena opjodhipote avgo – dhen exi simasia pjo – ke na to valis sto kalathi.

‘I have hidden 10 eggs in various places. Here is how you win: you must find any egg – it doesn’t really matter which one – and put it in the basket.’

(36) Context: The hotel manager to a candidate cleaning lady who has just asked him which room to clean in order to get the job:

Dhen exi simasia, to mono pu thelo na dho ine an kseris na katharizis. Pijene tora, ke katharise opjodhipote dhomatío!

‘It doesn’t really matter, all I want to see is whether you know how to clean. Go now and clean any room (= some room, it doesn’t matter which one)!’

- I think these are prototypical weak imperatives: that the addressee considers carrying out these actions is common knowledge; speaker expresses indifference/acquiescence to certain specifics.
- FCIs interpreted existentially in (35-36): tricky to derive from necessity modal starting point.
- does the dependent indefinite analysis really predict that strong imperatives license FCIs?

6 FCIs in imperatives: a new account

Two major shortcomings of existing accounts:

- how to explain the contrast between strong imperatives and permission imperatives
- how to derive the modality and/or illocutionary force of imperatives containing FCIs

New approach, couching the analysis of FCIs in imperatives in the general theory of the semantics and pragmatics of imperatives.

- Observation 1: FCIs are OK in weak imperatives, not OK in strong imperatives.
 - Strong denotational semantics approaches: struggle with weak imperatives in general, with FCIs in weak imperatives in particular.
 - To-Do-List approach: in fact, these predict FCIs to be uninterpretable in imperatives:

- (38) a. *Nyugodtan vedd fel a kék ruhát*
nyugodtan take-IMP -2SG PRT the blue dress-ACC
 ‘Just take the blue dress.’
- b. *Nyugodtan vegyél fel egy ruhát*
nyugodtan take-IMP-2SG PRT a dress-ACC
 ‘Just take a dress.’
- c. *Nyugodtan vedd fel bármelyik ruhát*
nyugodtan take-IMP -2SG PRT any dress-ACC
 ‘Just take any dress.’

○ What is the property-to-be-made-true in (38c)?

- Observation 2: weak imperatives (with or without FCIs) are not OK out of the blue, it needs to be common knowledge that the action described by the prejacent is being considered by the addressee (recall also: (4), (5), (21), (35), (36)):

- (41) a. *Állj meg*
 stop-IMP-2SG PRT
 ‘Stop.’ (felicitous out of the blue)
- b. *Nyugodtan állj meg*
nyugodtan stop-IMP-2SG PRT
 ‘Stop (if you wish).’ (felicitous if the addressee is visibly tired, needs a rest etc.)

○ Difficult to explain in the To-Do-List framework, where strong and weak imperatives differ only in speaker endorsement level (and TDL section).

- My proposal: weak imperative do not manipulate the To-Do-List, but a separate addressee-oriented list which is part of the common ground.
 - List of Actions Under Consideration by the addressee: those actions of which it is part of common knowledge that the addressee is considering them.
 - Pragmatic effect of uttering a permission imperative: lifting of prohibition (ascribed to the speaker by the addressee) on a course of action already known to be contemplated by the addressee. (cf. Kamp 1972 on permission statements)

- (38) *Nyugodtan vedd fel a kék ruhát*
nyugodtan take-IMP -2SG PRT the blue dress-ACC

‘Just take the blue dress.’

- speaker presupposes that addressee is considering the action denoted by the prejacent
- speaker assumes that addressee may believe that the course of action denoted by the prejacent is prohibited (discouraged etc.) by the speaker
- ‘as far as I am concerned, you are free to take the blue dress, you are free to delete any prohibition that you may have ascribed to me against your taking the blue dress.’
- weak imperatives have nothing to do with the TDL
- several issues are solved by new account:
 - why are strong imperatives fine out of the blue, whereas weak imperatives not?
 - weak imperatives ‘live on’ a component of the common ground: prejacent needs to be on LAUC
 - why the contrast in FCI-licensing?
 - set of possible world-value pairs needed by FCI are provided by LAUC

(46) *Nyugodtan vedd fel bármelyik ruhát*
nyugodtan take-IMP-2SG PRT any dress-ACC
‘Just take any dress.’ (permission/acquiescence reading)

- the List of Actions Under Consideration includes, among others, the following items:

(47) ‘Take the blue dress.’
‘Take the lilac dress.’
‘Take the pink dress.’
Etc.

- this is, in fact, the list of *i*-alternatives:

(48) in w_1 , the addressee takes the blue dress
in w_2 , the addressee takes the lilac dress
in w_3 , the addressee takes the pink dress
in w_n , ...

- with strong imperative, the LAUC with its alternatives is not relevant, therefore, no *i*-alternatives are provided; also, there is no well-defined task to be added to TDL:

- (49) a. *Most azonnal vedd fel a kék ruhát*
 now at once take-IMP-2SG PRT the blue dress-ACC
 ‘Take the blue dress right now.’
- b. *#Most azonnal vedd fel bármelyik ruhát*
 now at once take-IMP-2SG PRT any dress-ACC
 ‘Take any dress right now.’

- ‘weak imperatives creating obligations’ paradox: this is solved by clarifying the difference between:
 - bona fide weak imperatives (permission / acquiescence / indifference)
 - weakly endorsed strong imperatives (advices / invitations / etc.)

(50) *Most azonnal hagyd abba*
 now at once leave-IMP-2SG PRT
 ‘Stop it right now.’

(51) *Kérlek, vegyél egy szendvicset*
 ask-1SG take-IMP-2SG a sandwich-ACC
 ‘Please have a sandwich.’ (host to guest)

(52) *Szerintem beszélj egy orvossal*
 according-to-me speak-IMP-2SG a doctor-INS
 ‘Talk to a doctor (if you ask me.)’ (~‘I think you should talk to a doctor.’)

(53) *Nyugodtan vedd fel a kék ruhát*
 nyugodtan take-IMP-2SG PRT the blue dress-ACC
 ‘Just take the blue dress (if you wish).’ (permissive)

- (50), (51), (52): strong imperatives, with varying speaker endorsement, varying latitude for addressee to decide whether to add the task to her TDL
- (53): weak imperative, affecting the LAUC
- of course, speaker endorsement can vary with weak imperatives, too (this is reflected in the terminological variation: permission / acquiescence / indifference imperatives):

(54) *Nyugodtan vedd fel a kék ruhát, meg engedem*
 nyugodtan take-IMP-2SG PRT the blue dress-ACC PRT allow-1SG

‘Just take the blue dress (if you wish), you have my permission.’

- (55) *Nyugodtan vedd fel a kék ruhát, engem nem zavar*
 nyugodtan take-IMP-2SG PRT the blue dress-ACC me NEG
 disturb-3SG

‘Just take the blue dress (if you wish), it is fine with me.’

- (56) *Nyugodtan vedd fel a kék ruhát, nekem mindegy*
 nyugodtan take-IMP-2SG PRT the blue dress-ACC me all-the-same
 ‘Just take the blue dress (if you wish), I do not care.’

- RVIs (referentially vague items, e.g. *some or other*) are close cousins of FCIs: they are referentially vague, but do not need i-alternatives to be licensed (Giannakidou and Quer 2013). As expected, they are fine in strong imperatives:

- (57) a. *#Most azonnal vedd fel bármelyik ruhát*
 now at once take-IMP-2SG PRT any dress-ACC
 ‘Take any dress right now.’
- b. *Most azonnal vedd fel valamelyik ruhát*
 now at once take-IMP-2SG PRT RVI dress-ACC
 ‘Take some dress or other right now.’

- Facts from Rhaetoromance revisited (Poletto and Zanuttini 2003):
 - *ma/pö*: ‘advice and permission’
 - *mo/pa*: ‘order’
 - based on data provided (appearance in IaDs, speaker oriented-addressee oriented distinction, translation with Italian sentences containing *pure*, presuppositionality), it appears these particles encode exactly the strong imperative vs. weak imperative distinction
 - this distinction is grammaticalized in many languages either through discourse markers (*nyugodtan, rubig, pure*) or imperative particles (*ma/pö, mo/pa*)
 - obligatory binary encoding on morphosyntactic level supports a binary model (no shades) of weak-strong distinction over a graded model (such as von Stechow and Iatridou 2017’s speaker endorsement based model)

7 Conclusions

- FCIs are licensed in weak imperatives, not licensed in strong imperatives
- This (and a lot more) can be accounted for using a modified model of the semantics and pragmatics of imperatives.

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