Ethnolinguistic Vitality, Social Identity and Inter Group Relationship in a Multilingual Contact Situation

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Indian language contact situations are multilingual in nature, due to presence of different cultural and linguistic groups. In majority of the Indian multilingual contact situations, language groups are not clearly divided under dimensions of dominant/ non-dominant, majority/minority, etc. In this backdrop the present paper makes an effort to understand the nature and dynamics of ethnolinguistic identity of three language communities of central Kolkata and their relationships with each other based on a study conducted in a language contact situation. The language groups taken for the study were English speaking Anglo-Indians, native Bengali speakers, and Urdu speaking Muslims of central Kolkata region. The study with help of theoretical principals of cross-cultural and social psychological perspectives tried to explore the dynamics of a multilingual contact situation, where none of the languages in the contact situation clearly fits the dimensions of majority/minority, dominant/non-dominant groups.

Multilingual and multi-cultural contact situations are a practical reality today where various social, cultural and linguistic identities stay in close proximity. Complex relationships between languages and linguistic groups define multilingual societies. Multilingual societies have historically been believed to differ significantly from the dominant culture in a number of sociolinguistic and social psychological aspects in comparison to monolingual societies. Relationships between groups interacting in close proximity are guided by numerous social-psychological processes and interplay of these social-psychological processes has detrimental impact on the outcome of the interactions between the groups. Factors like demography of the contact situation, policies and instrumental actions through the political system, dominant and non-dominant status of the groups interacting, etc. contribute in the outcome affecting the social-psychological processes. Acculturation is one such social-psychological phenomenon, when many ethnic group sharing similar meaning and cultural system are at verge of cultural change or already in the process of change due to the dynamics of the contact situation. Two major acculturation strategies, generally adopted by groups in any contact situation is of integration or assimilation. When intergroup relationships changes due to the process of acculturation, language work as an important reason or force behind such change as it is considered one of the major indicators of social identity. The language identity change is based on two distinct nature of bi/multilingualism, one is called transitional nature of bi/ multilingualism, where minority language (s) shift towards the majority language through assimilation; the other is called the stable nature of bi/multilingualism, where languages interact together without conflict by maintaining them in different domains of communicative use. In other words, individual and group bi- or multilingualism brought about by linguistic contact is regarded as stable in multilingual societies, but bilingualism in predominately monolingual societies is typically of a transitional nature.

Different social-psychological perspectives are employed to understand the nature of the outcomes of intergroup relationships in multilingual contact situations. Tajfel's (1978) theory of social identity suggests that membership in various social or ethnic groups and the values attached to those memberships in positive or negative terms help in constructing social identity. Social identity further helps in the formation of self-concept and self-esteem. Positive social esteem and positive self-concept are basic cognitive requirements for better social adjustment. But many times, it becomes very difficult for any group to maintain that positive adjustment because of competing identities in close proximity carrying relatively more positive

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identities. To rejuvenate positive social identity, individuals or groups adopt various strategies. Tajfel (1978) suggested three such strategies: amalgamation, redefining the previously negatively valued characteristics, and the creation of a new dimension of comparison. Assimilation is a relatively easier strategy to select, in which the culture or language of the dominant group is adopted by overlooking ethnic or core-group identity. However, when core-group values or ethnic identity are more dominant, other alternatives are searched for. With respect to language, it is argued that when a new language identity is preferred over a native language, that process is called speech-convergence, which is equivalent to assimilation, whereas in situations where positive social identity is sought through an actual change in objective social structure (a revolutionary reversal of state relations), the process is called speech-divergence, which is equivalent to the other two strategies suggested by Tajfel (Bourhis, Giles, Leyens, & Tajfel, 1979). Berry's model of acculturation also explains the intergroup relationships in any multicultural contact situation. This model talks about four acculturation outcomes. They are assimilation, integration, separation or segregation, and marginalization. Integration outcome is related to the stable nature of bi/multilingualism, where different languages stay in close proximity with functional allocation to different communicative domains of language use (Mohanty, 2006). Assimilation outcome is related to the transitional nature of bi/multilingualism, where minority group(s) adopt the language of the majority group in a contact situation. Nevertheless, the stable and transitional nature of bi/multilingualism is also affected by the linguistic vitality associated with the native language. The role of language vitality in deciding the nature of intergroup relationships or acculturation strategies adopted can be analyzed with the help of the ethnolinguistic identity model given by Giles et al. (1977). The perception of the vitality of one's language or culture can be of two types: objective vitality and subjective vitality. Political, demographic, economic, historical, etc. factors constitute objective vitality, whereas attitudes, perceptions, individual efforts, use of mind, etc. towards one's native language are factors helpful in the formation of subjective vitality (Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000). Subjective assessment of own-group and out-group vitality by group members is considered as important as objective vitality.

According to Mohanty and Perregaux (1997), Berry's model can be used to understand the nature of bilingualism in various cultural contexts as well as the results of linguistic interaction. An integrative interaction between the linguistic groups in contact can be seen as a reflection of stable bilingualism and language maintenance. Language shift and transitional bilingualism are assimilation consequences of contact, where the minority group permits the replacement of its native tongue by the dominant contact language either voluntarily or as a result of various assimilative forces. Minority linguistic groups reject the language of the majority group when separation orientation is present in a contact situation by exhibiting substantial linguistic differences. However, there are situations when the majority group may promote the segregation and exclusion of the minority language in contact, limiting its role in limited domains of language use. In studies of various contact bilingualisms in multilingual and multicultural societies, Berry's model is particularly helpful. In order to comprehend the interaction between various language communities in Malaysia and Singapore, as revealed in a study by Ward and Hewstone (1985), Triandis (1985) proposed a potential application of the model. Language planning, as well as the processes of language change and the creation of ethnolinguistic identity, benefit from an analysis of the dynamics of intergroup relations in language contact settings. Intergroup conflict, linguistic divergence, and polarized linguistic identities (rejection of out-group language) can all shift in favor of the formation of a multicultural identity with favorable changes in ethnolinguistic vitality, according to studies (Azurimendi & Espi, 1994). In multicultural settings, the social standing and educational use of minority contact languages are significant factors that influence linguistic identification strategies (Camilleri, 1990; Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1997). Thus, it appears that the nature of bilingualism and the social relationships between contact groups are interconnected in settings of language and cultural contact.

In dominant monolingual societies, minority language groups opt for assimilation strategies and, as a result, language shifts. However, in complex multilingual societies like India, groups are difficult to discriminate on the yardstick of dominant and non-dominant. In such complex societies, integration is the most preferred acculturation strategy, resulting in the maintenance of language. Contact between various linguistic communities often results in stable bilingualism in multilingual cultures like India, where minority contact groups keep their native tongues while picking up the language of the dominant contact group. Language contact in India is related to language maintenance rather than change, in contrast to western societies where monolingual rules predominate. According to Mohanty (1994a), contact bilingualism in India is a strategy for maintaining the mother tongue. In such complex societies, there is a preferential language hierarchy (Mohanty, 2006), where languages are functionally allocated to different communicative domains with non-conflicting existences. The above-mentioned social-psychological perspectives thus help us understand the dynamics of intergroup relationships in complex contact situations because it is difficult to understand the uncertainty in relationships just from one perspective.

This paper investigates the association between intergroup relations and bilingualism in various contexts of language and cultural contact in India. It is based on assessments of attitudes towards maintaining one's own language and culture as well as positive intergroup relations in the context of contact between members of linguistic groups residing in close proximity to central Kolkata, India. The results are juxtaposed with those of earlier research that examined the interaction between bilingualism and social integration in the context of contact between various tribal and non-tribal languages in India, especially those from Odisha and Assam. The socio-linguistic characteristics of language contact in the two tribal-nontribal contact situations are considerably distinct in nature, as will be demonstrated later in this work, making such a comparison intriguing. The present paper therefore examines the intergroup relationship and Ethnolinguistic identity of three linguistic groups interacting in a multilingual contact situation in central Kolkata. The major objectives of the study were- to examine the relationship between perception of ethnolinguistic vitality and pattern of social identity of the linguistic groups, because on basis of language none of the groups in the contact situation can be categorized into dimension of majority/minority but language communities vary on demographic equations, it will be interesting to find relationship between the groups on the basis of their perceived vitality and pattern of their social identity; to examine the acculturation strategies adopted by the linguistic groups, because acculturation strategies adopted by the groups as per the pattern of social identity and vitality of their language can help to explore existence of any conflicts between and can also guide in predicting possibility of any future conflicts; to examine the impact of demographic setup of the contact situation on the perception of ethnolinguistic vitality and its influence on pattern of social identity; to explore different domains of language use, identified by the linguistic groups, and to also explore relative shrinkage or expansion of language domains of the groups because Greater domains of use for any language are indication of higher vitality for that particular language by the respective group. But many times, despite possessing higher vitality for one's language, there are institutional factors or other pressures that force one to limit the use of language to particular domains; this reflects the shrinkage of domains and might work as a crucial cause behind the decline in vitality of the language in the future.

The Language Contact Situation of Central Kolkata

The participants of the study belonged to central Kolkata, consisting of areas like Park Circus, Rippon Street, Welesley Street, Taltalla Road, Hudson Lane, Linton Street, etc. In this area, native English speakers, Urdu speakers, and Bengali speakers are in ratios of 30–35%, 40–45%, and 20–25%, respectively.

The Present Study

This paper is based on preliminary data from a large-scale study of ethnolinguistic vitality, social identity, pattern of language use, attitude towards cultural and linguistic maintenance, and intergroup relations in the central Kolkata region of West Bengal (India). The present analysis is based on a study in a multilingual contact situation consisting of three language groups: Bengali, Urdu, and English, spoken by native Bengalis, Muslims, and Anglo-Indians, respectively.

Method

The sample consisted of 150 participants, 50 of whom were from each language group. The age group was between 25 and 50 years, in which the average age group was 29 for Anglo-Indians, 35 for Bengalis, and 33 for Urdu language speakers. The minimum educational qualification for a participant was senior secondary (10+2). The economic status of the three-language group was lower middle class, with little variation in monthly family income. Out of the three linguistic groups, the Urdu-speaking population of the area had the lowest minimum monthly family income, followed by Bengalis and Anglo-Indians. Initially, a few participants were approached with the help of local residents (key contact persons), and the rest of the sample was selected using the snowball sampling technique.

Measure Used in the Study

Five different questionnaires were used for the purpose of data collection and analysis. (a) Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire to assess the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality of the language groups, based on the patterns suggested by Bourhis et al. (1981). It consisted of 19 items to measure demographic factors, status factors, and institutional support factors to be responded to on a seven-point scale. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire at Cronbach's Alpha was 0.8236, and Pearson's coefficient of correlation (test-retest reliability) was 0.80 (p<.01).A similar questionnaire was adopted in a study done on the Bodo and Assames language groups by Saikia (2006). (a) Own group language and Culture Maintenance Attitude Questionnaire to measure attitudes of Bengali, English, and Urdu language speakers towards maintenance of their own group language and culture. This questionnaire was adopted and then developed for the present contact situation from 'Attitude towards Linguistic and Cultural Maintenance (Mohanty, 1987). (b) Out-group relationship attitude questionnaire to assess the attitude towards out-group relationships of each group in the contact situation taken in the study. The questionnaire was adopted from a similar tool of assessment, Attitude towards Linguistic and Cultural Maintenance' (Mohanty 1987) and Intergroup Maintenance and Intergroup Relationship Questionnaire' (Saikia 2004). (c) The Social Identity Questionnaire measures the nature of social identity in all three groups on the basis of a scale developed by J.Phinney (1992) as the Multi-group

Ethnic Identity Measure' (MEIM). (d) Questionnaire to assess the pattern of language use in different domains to measure the pattern of language use by Urdu, Bengali, and English language groups in different domains. The questionnaire followed the pattern of the Language Use Questionnaire (Sreedhar et al., 1984).

Procedure

Areas from which participants were to be taken were shortlisted in a visit prior to the beginning of the study. During the study, the questionnaires were administered in groups of five to ten participants, depending on their availability. Before administering the questionnaires to each lot of participants, the investigator introduced himself to the participants and spent some time in conversation with them. A brief introduction was given each time about the outcome and purpose of the questionnaires, and the participants were requested to follow the instructions given for each tool. They were also requested to ask for any clarifications as and when necessary. Participants spent an average of forty minutes completing each questionnaire.

Results

Table 1 gives the group means of all the four measures used in the study for each language group (Bengali speakers; Urdu speakers; English speakers). The maximum score on a 7-point scale was 7, and the minimum was 1. Each questionnaire used a different number of items, so the total maximum and minimum scores for each measure varied accordingly.

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviation of Total scores

Groups	Ethnolinguistic vitality Scale	Out-group relationship Scale	In-group maintenance Attitude scale	Social identity scale
English speakers N=50	86.48 (13.90)	78.16 (10.58)	86.33 (10.60)	42.30 (3.52)
Urdu speakers N=50	78.06 (16.84)	77.42 (10.90)	76.40 (11.12)	38.64 (5.61)
Bengali Speakers N=50	83.62 (12.99)	79.00 (7.37)	83.66 (7.17)	40.02 (3.32)
Total	82.72 (14.99)	78.19 (9.70)	82.12 (10.59)	40.32 (4.51)

** Standard Deviation in parenthesis

Maximum total score for ethnolinguistic questionnaire was of 133 and a minimum of 19; the maximum and minimum total scores for the out-group relationship attitude measure and the in-group maintenance attitude measure were 105 and 7, respectively; for the social identity measure, the maximum and minimum scores were 48 and 12, respectively. Table 1 shows the Mean and SD values of total scores on each questionnaire obtained by each language group in the contact situation. An interesting thing to note is that Bengali speakers, despite being native speakers of the state, have shown lower subjective vitality for their language. Attitudes towards out-group relationships or contact participation were found to be almost equal for all three language groups. The mean scores for each of the measures were divided by the respective number of items so that the average scale value of the groups could be found. The average scale value gives a more direct indication of the strength and positive or negative direction of each variable on the scales. On the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality measure, English speakers scored comparatively higher (M = 4.59, SD = 0.87), followed by Bengali speakers (M = 4.43, SD = 0.88) and Urdu speakers (M = 4.10, SD = 0.72), respectively. On attitude for out-group relationships, all three language groups were close to the total Mean and SD (M = 5.15, SD =.69) without much variation with each other. The average scale values on the measure of attitude for out-group relationships were (M = 5.14, SD = 0.73); (M = 5.07, SD = 0.82); and (M = 5.25, SD = 0.49) for Anglo-Indians, Urdu, and Bengali groups, respectively. Attitude for in-group language maintenance was observed at its maximum for the English-speaking group (M = 5.76, SD =.71), followed by Bengali speakers (M = 5.57, SD =.48) and Urdu speakers (M = 5.09, SD =.79), respectively. The social identity scale used for the study had a 4-point scale for scoring, where a score of 4 on each item indicates the strongest identity, whereas scores of 3 and 2 reflected degrees of social identity in decreasing order. English-speaking participants (M = 3.52, SD =.29) were closely ahead of their other counterparts in showing a positive pattern of social identity for their group, followed by Bengali speakers (M = 3.33, SD =.27) and Urdu speakers (M = 3.23, SD =.47).
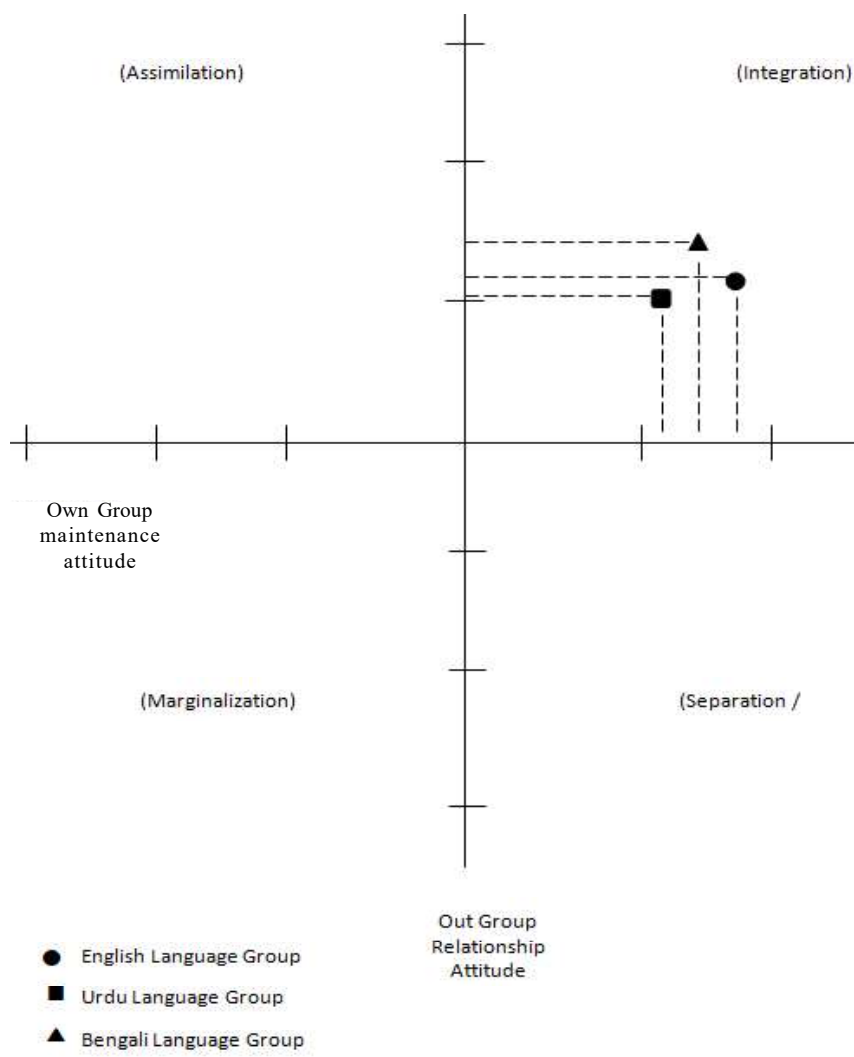
It is important to notice that despite showing higher solidarity for their ethnic identity through their ratings, the standard deviation scores of the English-speaking group on the social identity measure were very close with those of Bengali speakers, who generally had the lowest standard deviation on the other three scales. Overall orientation, as shown in the table for the entire three language groups on the four measures, is positive.

Figure 1 shows the acculturation strategy adopted by the language groups in the given contact situation of the study. There are four dimensions denoting four possible strategies as per Berry's model, which can be adopted by the acculturating group(s) or by groups in contact for the maintenance of or acquisition of positive social identity. The four acculturation strategies are integration, assimilation, separation or segregation, and marginalization.

One-way ANOVA analysis shows significant differences between all three language groups of the study on three out of the four measures used. For subjective ethnolinguistic vitality measure data, one-way ANOVA results show a significant difference between all three language groups of the study in perceiving the vitality of their native language: $F_{(2, 147)} = 4.25$, p.05. Language groups were found to show a non-significant difference in out-group relationship maintenance attitudes. The ANOVA calculation shows that $F_{(2, 147)} = 0.32$ and p.721. A highly significant difference is observed between the language groups on attitudes towards own-group language and culture maintenance. The $F_{(2, 147)} = 13.70$, p.001, suggests that all three language groups were significantly different in their attitudes towards own-group language and culture maintenance. On the pattern of social identity, the difference between three language groups was again found to be highly significant, with $F_{(2,147)} = 9.29$, p.001; this demonstrates the solidarity of language groups for their ethnic identity.

Figure 1: Acculturation Strategies of the Language Groups

(Assimilation)   (Integration)

Own Group
maintenance
attitude

(Marginalization)   (Separation /

Out Group
Relationship
Attitude

● English Language Group
■ Urdu Language Group
▲ Bengali Language Group

Discussion

The present paper makes an effort to study a trilingual contact situation by measuring subjective ethnolinguistic vitality, social identity, and intergroup relationships among the linguistic groups. An important aspect of the study was that all three language groups studied had a relatively dominant status at one time or another in history. The three languages are well developed and enjoy similar demographic status and institutional support in one or another part of the country. But in the present contact situation of the study, one language group enjoyed demographic support (Urdu speakers), the second group enjoyed institutional support (English speakers), and the third group possessed a glorious and rich cultural history of its language (Bengali speakers).

Significant differences on the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality measure among the three language groups suggest that each language group has specific positive regard for their language with respect to the perceived vitality of their mother tongue, which is also reflective of the language maintenance norm in India (Mohanty 2006). English speakers showed the most positive vitality perception, followed by Bengali and Urdu language speakers. Theoretical perspectives, along with research findings, support the above conclusions. The Ethnolinguistic vitality model of Giles et al. (1977) suggests that the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality of any language has three elements: the status factor (economic status, social status, and socio-historic status of the language of the ethnic groups), the demographic factor (referring to the number of speakers or population of the ethnolinguistic group), and the institutional support factor (use of the group's language in different formal and informal settings). In any minority/majority setup, the ethnolinguistic groups differ in their perception of the relative strength of these factors. Bengali language speakers were expected to show the highest subjective ethnolinguistic vitality as Bengali is the major language of the state and the city of Kolkata. The reasons for variation in the form of low subjective ethnolinguistic vitality among the natives of that state (Bengali) can be attributed to factors like relative demographic minority status and low socio-economic status in the area. The Anglo-Indian group showed better subjective ethnolinguistic vitality for English because of the prestige associated with it and its dominant language status, or 'language of power, status in India, although they themselves have minority

group status and belong to a low socio-economic category. The subjective ethnolinguistic vitality of the Urdu speakers was only slightly above average and was lowest among the groups; this was so because Urdu is now not a language of power in India and use of Urdu as a language has been restricted to religious and personal domains. Urdu speakers, despite enjoying majority status in the immediate locality, belonged to a low socio-economic category and had their say in the use of their language in limited domains like market places and other in-formal interactions (communication use) with other language groups in the area. But it is important to notice that the relative subjective ethnolinguistic vitality of the languages is not very high. Of the three languages in contact, Bengali may be the dominant language in the state, but English has a higher status in India (Mohanty 2006, 2008) and is also perceived as a 'language of Power' internationally. Thus, in terms of the status factor in the ethnolinguistic vitality model, English has a clear edge. It is a language of higher economic significance and socio-economic status, and as a language, it enjoys a higher national and international status compared to Bengali and Urdu. Institutional support for English is also very high compared to other contact languages. In macro-structural levels of social, educational, and economic institutions in India, English, as the most significant language of choice in education and as a language of law and governance, enjoys a place of supremacy in Indian society. India may have less than 2% of its population as native speakers of English, but at a broader international level, the demographic factors are also supportive of the greater vitality of English. Thus, the Anglo-Indian native speakers of English in central Kolkata have a perception of the high vitality of their ethnolinguistic group and language. It seems subjective ethnolinguistic vitality is affected more by macro-structural factors than micro-structural ones. A study done by Saikia (2006) on subjective ethnolinguistic vitality and intergroup relationships among Bodo students in Assam comes to similar conclusions, explaining that significant intergroup differences were found between Assamese and Bodo students in subjective own-group and out-group ethnolinguistic vitality. The present findings show that subjective ethnolinguistic vitality is not simply determined by immediate micro-structural factors; macro-level social-psychological factors are quite important.

Patterns of language use are clearly related to the maintenance or shift of language. A favorable attitude toward own-group language maintenance is related to the use of the language in all possible domains of language use in monolingual contact situations. But in multilingual contact situations where many languages coexist, domains of social contact are shared between languages, although sometimes one or two languages may dominate. In the present study, the linguistic communities reported complete use of their native language at home, while interacting with friends of the same language community, on social occasions (where members of the same language community generally gather), at religious functions, etc. Language communities reported the use of some common language(s), for example, Hindi and Bengali, in some domains of contact, such as the market place. The contact situation is characterized by the majority presence of Muslims who speak Urdu. In the contact situation, this leads to the use of Hindi rather than Bengali, contrary to what one would expect since Bengali is the dominant language of the state. Linguistically, Hindi and Urdu are characterized by fluid boundaries. Khubachandani (1983) speaks of such fluid boundaries across languages in the Hindi-Urdu-Punjabi region of India. Given this fluidity, Hindi assumes a superior category. Besides being a national language, Hindi is also the most preferred language for entertainment, and evidently, it is a language that all adults in a contact situation have an understanding of. Thus, its proximity to Urdu, the language of the majority in market place interactions, and its communicative advantage make Hindi a preferred language of communication in market place interactions.

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