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Language Ideologies and Language Criticism in Croatian

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Abstract. In the development of the Croatian language, every modern-era phase has been shaped on a macro-level by ideology. During the Renaissance of the 16th century, in keeping with prevailing ideology, the regional language variants of the coastal regions of Dalmatia were elevated to the status of literary standard languages, thus establishing them as indigenous and equal in status to the other standard languages. The full range of variants was incorporated into the new literary language and were stylistically differentiated through their manner of usage. From the 16th century on, a Kajkavian dialectal literary language also emerged in the northwest. In later centuries, this became supra-dialectal, but remained outside the standard established in the late 19th century, subsequently appearing only sporadically. In the 16th century, a Chakavian literary language with dialectal variants emerged on the Adriatic coast.

In the 17th century, the situation was quite different. At that time, the Chakavian and Shtokavian dialects, and later, also the Kajkavian dialect, including their various expressions, were considered components of a single language and bearers of the same supra-regional identity. Since that time, efforts have been made to unify the dialects, from Chakavian and Shtokavian to even a hybrid language devised by writers (members of the '*Ozalj* Circle') in the west, on the Chakavian-Kajkavian-Shtokavian border. The notion of a common lexical system led to integrative dictionaries and, occasionally, to hybrid grammatical solutions. Moreover, the language was standardised in the 17th century by order of Rome, as part of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. This expedient standard was not exactly inclusive; it was an abstract, historically and literarily reconstructed language standard that allowed variants to be used as equally valid options. This standard was created for the translation of biblical texts and was used to create and substantiate identity. At the beginning of the 19th century, the political and cultural ideology of the national language

emerged as a new factor. Now, the preferred linguistic standard was no longer abstract, but anchored in the cultural history and political ideal of the nation-state. In the 20th century, the common language of the Croats and Serbs (ignoring the Bosnians, Herzegovinians and Montenegrins), which, to an extent, had been forcibly standardised, served the political ideology of the multi-ethnic state that emerged following the First World War. It persisted under communism after the Second World War, until 1991. Since the late 1960s, single-language standardisation revivals, especially in Croatia, laid the groundwork for the national and linguistic ideology that ultimately led to the collapse of the multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia. Post-Yugoslav language ideology can be traced back to the historically recognised roots of language, complementing the historically delineating construction of identity by differentiating it from competing variants.

General

Language connects language-related knowledge about language structures and communicative strategies with the socio-cultural knowledge of a specific language community. In this regard, language is always situational. In my opinion, language ideology goes further, and in addition to addressing language-related knowledge on a meta-level, also considers the existing or desired relationship between language and society in the areas of language standards and choices and conceptualises spheres of action for linguistic negotiations.

The language standards established by nations, societies and individuals reflect the ideological basis for ascription of identity by assigning axiological or political values and differentiation from significant outsiders. This occurs on multiple levels: the national (macro-)level, the societal (meso-)level and the (micro-)level of the individual speaker's self-construction and ascription to the meso- and macro-levels.

In Croatia, as in the other Slavic countries, explicit language ideology has always been conceptualised in terms of societal and cultural categories. Language ideologies of the type described by Silverstein (*inter alia,* 1979) were particularly prominent in the western-influenced (liberal) Slavic cultures (which also subscribed to western religious beliefs). In

particular, Renaissance ideology gave rise to negotiations, as described by Kroskrity (*inter alia,* 2010), in which socio-cultural identity construction and representation were achieved via language use. Even in the first literary texts of the 16th century, we observe an ideological debate on socio-cultural identity in which language is the most salient feature. In Croatia, in an effort to form an explicit delineation from Italian, German-speaking and Hungarian identity, the recognition of the indigeneity, continuity and intrinsic value of the spoken and later, written, native language was demanded. This ideology of language as being representative of socio-cultural values persists today in the areas of language standardisation and spelling reforms at the linguistic macro-level and in the approach to internal language variants in the public mass media on the meso-level.

The ideological question of which language form(s) should be accepted as bearers of the perceived socio-cultural identity has been met with a variety of answers over the centuries, depending on the geo-political situation or what was considered to be 'native' in specific regions of the population (e.g. in 16th-century Croatia, it was the Dalmatian language variants, i.e. dialects; in the 17th century, it was the language variants of Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (in terms of the most widely spoken dialect) and, increasingly, also the dialect spoken in northwest Croatia; in the 18th century, it was the language variants of Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with those of the northern and western provinces, which were politically ruled by different Great Powers, but were culturally connected). In the 16th century, the entire range of language variants was seen as belonging to a single language family, while in the 17th century, the search for a single overarching standard began, which, from the 19th century on – with the emergence of the ideology of a national language – was founded on cultural-historical aspects and influenced by purism. The linguistic unity pursued in the 19th century stood as a symbol for the desired unification of the various Croatian regions, which would not be achieved until the 20th century, and then, initially, only to a limited extent. From the 20th century on, the ideology of "one language – one people" has been at the forefront, representing the ideology of (single-ethnicity) nations as opposed to multi-ethnic states, which is what ultimately led to Yugoslavia's downfall.

Historical

Throughout the course of its history, the Croatian language has undergone a number of different transformations. The first of these took place during Christianisation in the 8th and 9th centuries (Roman Catholicism with Latin and the Byzantine-Slavic religion with Old Church Slavonic, respectively). In 879, Pope John VIII pronounced his blessing on Duke Branimir of Croatia and (explicitly) all the people of Croatia. According to archaeological findings this same Branimir, Duke of Croatia (879–892) was named 'Duke of the Croats' *(Branimiro com… dux Chruatorum)* in the Croatian village of Sopot, near Benkovac and 'Duke of the Slavs' *((Bra)nnimero dux Sclavorum)* in the Old Church Slavonic centre in Nin: The Croatian and Slavic identities complemented each other functionally. Since Christianisation, a functionally differentiated trilingualism has existed in the Croatian territories, consisting of the colloquial Croatian dialects Shtokavian (found in the inland regions), Chakavian (found on the Adriatic coast) and Kajkavian (in the western regions), Latin as the language used in High Church and scientific contexts, and the Old Church Slavonic used in Slavic church services.

The next turning point arrived during the Renaissance, as an explicit ideology of language as a conveyor of identity emerged. In his novel *Planine* ('The Mountains', 1569), Croatian author Petar Zoranić praised his proud and virtuous country, expressing his regret that "the language we speak is so ridden with Italian" (translation by C. D. based on the German translation by J. G.). Zoranić was of the opinion that individuals should use the expressions found in their own language. This view, that one's own language should hold a place of honour and be protected from foreign influence, has remained constant throughout the entire modern history of Croatia.[1]

During the Renaissance, a Chakavian literary tradition emerged in Dalmatia (cf. Kapetanović 2011), while a Shtokavian tradition emerged in the inland regions of the country (cf. Gvozdanović / Knezović / Šišak 2015)

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1   In the discussion between Babić (2005) and Brozović (2005), on the basis of Brozović (1970), Brozović was correct that, due to its lack of polyfunctionality, Dubrovnik Renaissance literature does not yet represent the emergence of the standard language.

and a Kajkavian tradition developed in the north-western part of the country (cf. Šojat 2009). Beginning in the late 16th century, and especially during the 17th century, efforts were undertaken to create an overarching standard which became increasingly similar to the Croatian Shtokavian dialect (as spoken in Bosnia and Herzegovina). On the Chakavian-Kajkavian-Shtokavian border in western Croatia, the authors belonging to the '*Ozalj* Circle' devised a hybrid literary language (cf. Lisac 2002). However, due to political events (the uprising against the Viennese rulers and the execution of the leaders), this remained constrained to that time and place.

Following the Renaissance, as the Catholic Counter-Reformation took place, the ideological dimension of the historicity was expanded with the dimension of the sought-after polyfunctionality of the language when the first Grammar of the Croatian language, *Institutiones linguae illyricae libri duo,* was compiled by the priest Bartol Kašić (1604). The language standard he chose was not strictly regional but instead, supra-regional, containing elements of both Chakavian and Shtokavian. In his later work, *Misal Rimski* ('The Roman Missal', 1640), Kašić described the linguistic form he had chosen as supra-regional and comprehensible to all, although pronounced differently in the different regional dialects. The language standard he chose at that time was primarily drawn from the most widespread dialect (Shtokavian) but was not identical to it. This was the first time the standard language was conceived as abstract, overarching and unifying for most of the regions that subscribed to the same Croatian identity (Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slavonia).

The creation of this identity-based unifying standard was an ideological step (cf. Knežević 2007) that, in actuality, equated the language to the cultural territory of the vast majority of speakers, thus indirectly making an ethnic distinction. This linguistic ideology also influenced artists: for example, in 17th century Dubrovnik, Ivan Gundulić did not use the original Dubrovnik dialect in his writings, instead writing (primarily) in Shtokavian, as spoken in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He did this to make his nationally and religiously oriented poetry appealing to the population of those regions. The language academies (cf. Košutar 2019), especially in Dubrovnik, also adopted this ideology, discussing the codification of vocabulary in the context of Pan-Slavism. All of this laid the groundwork for the later standardisation of Croatian in the 19th century.

The next shift took place during the 19ᵗʰ century, as the continuity and polyfunctionality of the language began to be linked to the national cultural identity. Following many internal debates, the language of Dubrovnik was selected as the basis for the standardised language because of its significance for the national culture.

At the end of the 19ᵗʰ century and beginning of the 20ᵗʰ, the creation of a common language for Serbs and Croats became a political aim (the existence of the Bosnians and Montenegrins was not taken into consideration in the language standardisation process). In the early decades of the 20ᵗʰ century, radical proposals arose in Serbia for a unified Serbian-Croat language that would be based on the Shtokavian dialect, which was also widespread in Serbia. The linguistic unification was intended to underpin the ideology of a unified nation of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. In the late 1930s, resistance to this broke out with vehement calls for the rehabilitation of the Croatian language, including the publication of the journal *Hrvatski jezik* (1938). During the period of National Socialism in the Second World War, the German occupation forces established the Independent State of Croatia, in which the language would be radically standardised to conform to earlier periods of the Croatian language. Foreign words and words of an origin other than Croatian were replaced by Croatian terms and new orthographic rules were issued, based on morphophonological principles (as opposed to the previous phonetic/phonological principles). On 1 January 1942, a law was enacted that generally regulated the use of the Croatian language, including its purity and orthography.[2]

Following the collapse of the Independent State of Croatia at the end of the Second World War, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was established, within which the Serbs now imposed on the Croats a significantly Serbian-influenced language to be used as the common Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian language. This was set forth in the Novi Sad Agreement (1954), whereby the common Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian language was often based on Serbian variants. Beginning in the 1960s, sustained protests took place against this linguistic situation.

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2   Cf. Zakonska odredba o hrvatskom jeziku, o njegovoj čistoći i o pravopisu, on the website of the Institute for the Croatian Language and Linguistics *(Institut za hrvatski jezik).* http://ihjj.hr/iz-povijesti/zakonska-odredba-o-hrvatskom-jeziku-o-njegovoj-cistoci-i-o-pravopisu/44 (last accessed on 30/05/2025).

Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the separate national languages continued to develop as individual standard languages with differing characteristics.

Present

To best understand the contemporary discourse surrounding linguistic ideology, it is necessary to take a closer look at the events that have occurred since the mid-20th century. Yugoslavia's totalitarian communist regime was extremely restrictive with regard to nationalistic thinking below the level of the multi-ethnic Yugoslavian state. Within this framework, in 1954, Serbo-Croatian was codified in the Novi Sad Agreement as a strictly standardised language for the Central South Slavic languages of Yugoslavia. The Novi Sad Agreement (in which Croatian philologists and writers could only participate by personal invitation of the Serbian institution organising the agreement, *Matica Srpska*) was published in Serbian. Details reveal that Serbian was selected as the basic variant and Croatian was in many respects a subordinate alternative. This totalitarian standardisation of the language reflected the totalitarian ideology of the state and was aimed at the furtherance of this ideology.

In 1967, the leading institutions published a declaration on the status and state of the Croatian language, which asserted the right of every people to its own language and its own language name as part of the right to self-determination.[3] In language ideology terms, the universality of the meta-level of the (supra-national) multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia was thereby rejected and replaced by the national level. This process of linguistic-ideological transformation sparked a general political shift, out of which arose the Croatian Spring uprising of 1971 (originally within the Communist Party), which called for more autonomy for Croatia. These two events in 1967 and 1971 led to political reprisals, but the new spirit was

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3   Cf. Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika. In: Telegram, jugoslavenske novine za društvena i kulturna pitanja 359/17, on the website of the Institute for the Croatian Language and Linguistics *(Institut za hrvatski jezik).* http://ihjj.hr/iz-povijesti/deklaracija-o-nazivu-i-polozaju-hrvatskog-knjizevnog-jezika/50/ (last accessed on 30/05/2025).

unstoppable. Since 1971, the vast majority of Croats have been striving for linguistic and political independence. During the subsequent decades of political oppression under the totalitarian Yugoslavian regime nothing would be able to change this: The shift in the ideological meta-level from the supra-national state to the national state was now anchored via language ideology in the Croatian mindset.

In 1974, in the aftermath of the Croatian Spring uprising, the revised Yugoslavian Basic Law allowed the principle of secession from Yugoslavia on condition of approval from the other republics. When Croatia attempted to make use of this policy in 1991, it was met with rejection by the central government, leading to the outbreak of war. The onset of this war was the culmination of the irreconcilability of the national ideology with the supra-national (Yugoslav) ideology, which had already controlled language use prior to the war.

Following the war in Yugoslavia, national ideology prompted the return to a national linguistic history as a component of the new standardisation efforts, in Croatia as well as in the other former Yugoslav republics. In each of the former republics, new standards were established based on the historical and regional roots of the language, at times also differentiating their language from those of the other former republics. Opinion polls (cf. Stojanov 2023) show that 87.2% of Croats believe that even during the Yugoslav regime (1945–1990) and after the Yugoslav war (1991–1995), their language differed from Serbo-Croatian or Serbian (which was subsequently proven for all linguistic levels, particularly the lexical level). Conversely, 87.2% of Serbs believe that Serbs, Croats, Bosnians and Montenegrins all spoke the same language during the Yugoslav regime, with 81.4% believing that this still holds true in the post-Yugoslav era. This reveals the extent to which the linguistic and national ideology was mixed in the group that profited from this ideology.

Present-day Croatian reveals itself to be quite uniform with regard to macro-level ideology, which determines linguistic identity. It is also consistently fairly uniform in its grammar, however, its lexis, in contrast, proves to be an interesting, ideologically based variant, both in the spoken language and in written communication on the meso-level. In its ideological expression, this variant appears to be more complex than the cases described by either Mattheier (1997) or Kristiansen/Coupland (2011).

During the course of efforts to newly standardise Croatian, an either complete or partial exchange of key words from the preceding period was carried out. The language was re-standardised according to the old model, reincorporating words from older Croatian written sources. This process involved less than one hundred words; nonetheless, as they were key words, they carried significant identification value. Very few of these words were completely exchanged in the new standard (e.g. *tijekom* in place of *tokom* 'during', *prisega* in place of *zakletva* 'oath or vow'), while some derivational morphemes were restricted in their use (e.g. *-lac* in favour of *-telj* for *nomina agentis,* or *čitalac > čitatelj* 'reader', but *spasitelj* 'the Redeemer' vs. *spasilac* 'Saviour'; *-telj* (m.) vs. *-teljica* (f.) enabled gender differentiation, which is not the case with *-lac*), and semi-identical pairs were partially replaced (e.g. *nazočiti* 'to participate' in combination with an agent, replaced by *prisustvovati* 'to participate, to be present' in formal language; the latter continues to be used for inanimate subjects). In addition, there are pairs that show only a single preference (e.g. *veleposlanik* in place of *ambasador* 'ambassador').

The changes propagated in the new language standard were only partially incorporated in practice. This even applies the use of *tijekom* in place of *tokom* 'during'. The corpus of the Croatian Wikipedia texts, CLASSLA-Wiki-hr 1.0 (accessed on 01/03/2024; the corpus contains 14,044,487 word entries), finds 1,190,212 entries for *tijekom* and yet still 82,519 entries for *tokom* (of these, only 0.5% of the entries for *tokom* mean 'with the course of the river')[4], 21,506 references for *veleposlanik* and 9,671 for *ambasador.*[5] A further example is the use of the suffix *-telj* in place of *-lac* for *nomina agentis.* Upon closer examination, it can be seen that the *-lac > -telj* preference is not universal (e.g. *rukovoditelj* (5,139 entries) vs. *rukovodilac* (742 entries; however, occasionally, Serbian words were entered as Croatian in the corpus) 'leader', but e.g. *ronilac* (2,014 entries) vs. *ronitelj* (21 entries; in descriptions of functions) 'diver').[6] This variation stands in opposition to the official description, according to which *nomina agentis* are to be constructed with the suffix *-telj* while descriptors

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4 Many thanks to the anonymous reviewer for this information.
5 Cf. CLARIN.SI. Corpus: CLASSLAWiki-hr (Croatian Wikipedia). https://www.clarin.si/kontext/query?corpname=classlawiki_hr (last accessed on 01/03/2024).
6 In contrast, e.g. *redatelj* (4,384) vs. *redalac* (0) 'stage director'.

of characteristics should use *-lac* (e.g. *radoznalac* 'likes-to-know', i.e. 'the curious one'; in accordance with *Hrvatska školska gramatika Instituta za jezik i jezikoslovlje*).[7] Since this description is obviously not based on a linguistic analysis of data, it does not indicate the fact that *-telj* has now predominantly become an unmarked expression of *nomina agentis,* but that *-lac* is still used for agents that are directly acting. This illustrates one problem in the current standardisation of the Croatian language, which is partially based on an insufficient linguistic analysis of the spoken language.

The inadequately standardised lexical realm, in particular, offers an opportunity for making a symbolic choice that, in the political spectrum, characterises a person as being opposed to the standardisation of the language (as advanced by the centre-right Croatian Democratic Union, the ruling party). This is reflected in the ideologically influenced language choices of social groups and individuals who have taken a stand in this limited lexical sphere and have created diverse linguistic media profiles (cf. Grčević 2002; Gvozdanović 2010; Peti-Stantić/Langston 2013). For example, while *Hrvatsko slovo* ('The Croatian Word'), a magazine of the centre-right political community, adopted and propagated the new Croatian standard wholesale, *Slobodna Dalmacija* ('Free Dalmatia'), in its journalistic articles, has allowed more variation in terms of regionalisms and older variants. Their respective lexical choices are taken from among the authorised variants (e.g. *nazočiti,* as opposed to *prisustvovati,* 'to be present'), from the older, as opposed to the newer, standard, thereby signalling their affiliation to the radically new vs. the tolerant, open-minded language standard and ideology.[8]

The Croatian School Grammar *(Hrvatska školska gramatika),*[9] published by the Institute for the Croatian Language and Linguistics in Zagreb, defines Croatian as consisting of regional variants, urban languages and

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7   Cf. Tvorba imenica. In: Hrvatska školska gramatika. http://gramatika.hr/pra vilo/tvorba-imenica/68/#pravilo (last accessed on 30/05/2025).

8   This variant is more complex than the cases described by Mattheier (1997) and Kristiansen/Coupland (2011).

9   *Hrvatska školska gramatika* of the Institute for the Croatian Language and Linguistics *(Institut za hrvatski jezik)* online: http://gramatika.hr (last accessed on 30/05/2025).

genres, and the standard language. This definition could be understood as a statement of the equal standing of variants (and dialects). In actual language use, alongside a highly pronounced primary indexicality of the type described by Silverstein (1979) and Woolard (2020), whereby individuals are immediately identified as speakers of a particular variant of Croatian by virtue of their language use, we also find the secondary indexicality of value judgement, based on the economic and cultural level of the speaker's region. This indicates that from a language ideology perspective, the Croatian variants are not all regarded as equal.

Over the past several years, it has proven problematic that two independent institutions were tasked with formulating the language standard: the Croatian Academy of Sciences and the Institute for Croatian Language and Linguistics. It was actually intended that the Academy would formulate the guidelines and that the Institute would subsequently work these out in detail and incorporate them in textbooks. Currently, however, the Institute functions relatively independently and has been making its own proposals, which have not always met with acceptance by the public. This ambiguous question of ultimate institutional authority has led, among other things, to the publication of five partially differing spelling reform proposals between 2001 and 2013 (Babić/Ham/Moguš 2005; Babić/Moguš 2011 – and, on the other hand, Anić/Silić 2001; Badurina/Marković/Mićanović 2007; and *Hrvatski pravopis* of the Institute for the Croatian Language and Linguistics, Jozić 2013[10]), which are ascribed to two different ideological camps. In written language, Croats will choose the spelling model or preference of either the first camp or the second (and write, for instance, either *ne ću* or *neću* '(I) don't want'; cf. Volenec 2015; Stojanov 2023), thereby revealing their ideological stance. Partially in response to this and partially to secure the long-term status of the Croatian language,[11] a law on the public use of the Croatian language was enacted

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10 *Hrvatski pravopis* of the Institute for the Croatian Language and Linguistics *(Institut za hrvatski jezik)* online: http://pravopis.hr (last accessed on 30/05/2025).
11 Novokmet et al. (2021; cf. Stojanov 2023) write in the Serbian textbook for eighth-grade primary school pupils that the South Slavic languages are Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian and Slovenian; Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin are not mentioned.

in Croatia on 15 February 2024. This law established a commission with representatives from all language institutions and universities and is intended to ensure the preservation of the Croatian language in public use.[12]

As previously mentioned, the Croatian language has been influenced by purism from the 16th century on. In the early centuries, this purism was directed at lexical borrowings from the languages of the rulers of the different regions of Croatia (Latin never posed a problem). Since the move toward language standardisation in the late 19th century, purism has taken aim at any deviation from the standard at any level. What in the past had been a cultural medium of self-preservation, has today been 'corrected' into a compulsory standard that comes at the cost of linguistic creativity. Protests against this are certainly justified, but they sometimes lead to a generalised refutation (along the lines of *Jeziku je svejedno* 'the language doesn't care'; Starčević/Kapović/Sarić 2019), which tends to make the standardisation discourse even more difficult.

More recently, there have been individual attempts to identify language ideology on the basis of language metaphors found in texts. Two methodological problems have arisen in this context: 1) the issue of representativeness and discursive dissemination and 2) the difficulty inherent in interpreting metaphorical meaning. To date, no standardised procedure for addressing these two problems has yet been developed. Čičin-Šain (2019) found (in authoritative Croatian texts, based on Google searches) the use of the central metaphor of dirt for borrowed words (in contrast to the purity of the native language). She attributed this to Croatian purism in the construction of the present-day national language. It should be mentioned here that this metaphor is almost never found in any other genre or used in the blogs of language practitioners – and in the context of purism, would be rejected (data provided by Iva Petrak, doctoral thesis forthcoming). In view of these differing results and against the backdrop of the developments in language ideology outlined here, it can be assumed that purism plays a very complex role in the construction of today's standardised Croatian, which is almost impossible to capture in metaphors.

In conclusion, it can be said that throughout the entire modern history of the Croatian language, its linguistic variants possessed both primary

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12 Cf. Zakon o hrvatskom jeziku, NN 14/24. In force as of 15/02/2024. https://www.zakon.hr/z/3712/Zakon-o-hrvatskom-jeziku (last accessed on 30/05/2025).

and secondary ideological signalling features. Language served to both construct and ascribe identity, and the transformational shifts in language development revealed close links between external and intra-language ideologies.

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