SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT FUNCTIONAL SENTENCE PERSPECTIVE,
EMPATHY, AND REFLEXIVES[*]

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The Prague school, besides the well-known literary structuralism and the
linguistic structuralism (above all the phonology), made an important
contribution to linguistics which has been almost unknown in wider lin-
guistic circles — the theory of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP).[1]
Only during the last decade has this theory been known by other than
Czechoslovak linguists or foreign Slavists. Unfortunately, many of those
who try to use the theory either have only some fragmentary knowledge of
it, or they misunderstand it completely.[2] Others have laboriously 're-
discovered' facts that were described in Prague about half a century ago.
One of the linguists, whose obvious fallacies concerning FSP I have
strongly criticized elsewhere,[3] is S. Kuno. He, however, has found a sub-
jective complement to the FSP structure of a sentence, namely, the way
the speaker can express his attitudes toward the participants of an event
or a state. The concept of empathy, as Kuno says, is not new; it belongs
to what has been called 'point of view' in literary criticism. What is
new in Kuno's evidence that empathy can play an important role in many
phenomena that are often regarded as syntactic ones. Kuno[4] exemplifies
empathy with the following sentences:

(1) John hit Mary.
(2) John hit his wife.
(3) Mary's husband hit her.

These sentences can be used to describe the same event, but the speaker's
attitudes vary. (1) is the neutral sentence where the speaker does not
take sides with any of the participants. In (2), the speaker is taking
sides with 'John' because he is referring to 'Mary' as 'his wife', i.e.
'Mary' is defined by her relation to 'John', and vice versa in (3). In
other words, the speaker is empathizing with 'John' in (2) and with 'Ma-
ry' in (3). (It should be added that this analysis seems to hold for (2)
and (3) pronounced in the 'normal', 'neutral' way only. It is quite dubi-
ous whether, e.g., 'JOHN hit his wife' should be interpreted as (2). Un-
fortunately, Kuno, as is usual in the generative tradition, takes here
into consideration only the written sentences, which are, of course, usu-

ally interpreted as if pronounced in the ´normal´, ´unmarked´ (meaning here ´usual´) way. If not stated otherwise, all the sentences throughout this paper are analyzed as if pronounced in this ´neutral´ way.)

(4) *Mary´s husband hit his wife.

(4) is unacceptable as referring to the same event as (1) — (3), "unless it were used in a context in which hitting one´s own wife has been under discussion", which means, in FSP terms, that "Mary´s husband" is the rheme of the sentence. Kuno claims that there is a Ban on Conflicting Em-pathy Foci, i.e. a single sentence cannot contain two or more foci of the speaker´s empathy. (4) is wrong as the husband is defined by her relation to the husband (= The speaker empathizes with John.).

Another principle that Kuno postulates is the Surface Structure Empathy Hierarchy: "It is easiest for the speaker to empathize with the referent of the subject; it is next easiest to empathize with the referent of the object; . . . It is next to impossible to empathize with the referent of the by-agentive.". This sounds intuitively correct and is in agreement with the tendency, that we believe exists more or less at least in all Indo-European languages, to make the theme proper the subject of the sen-tence.[5]

Finally, it is easiest for the speaker to empathize with himself, then with the addressee, last with third persons. (This hierarchy is called in Kuno and Kaburaki (1975) ´Speech Act Participant Empathy Hierarchy´.) This seems a logical consequence of the FSP theory, if we imagine that degrees of Communicative Dynamism (CD) carried by sentence elements are wider and wider circles departing from ´the centre of the speaker´s universe´, which is ´me and now and here´, without doubt often ´the most given elements in a communication´ (= the most thematic elements), that remain most usually unexpressed in a sentence. Then comes the addressee, who is usually also ´given´ by the very nature of communication, then other pieces of informa-tion. (The performative analysis of various sentence types with deleted performative sentences — or a similar performative interpretation — ´I say to you . . .´, ´I ask you . . . ´ etc., confirms the basically lowest de-gree of ´I´ followed by ´you´ as the performatives are usually deleted and all deleted elements are thematic ones (except for rhematic elements miss-ing in sentence fragments completed with gestures and other non-linguistic means).

We will see the scale of CD (= the FSP structure of a sentence) as ob-

jectively determined by the consituation (= linguistic context + extra-linguistic situation), lexico-semantic means of FSP, linearity and into-nation, with the possibility for the speaker to make some little subjec-tive (e.g. empathic) modifications of the scale. Thus, while (2) must be used when the existence of 'Mary' and her being John's wife are new in-formation (therefore, according to analyses of Firbas, 'his wife' carries the highest degree of CD, even higher than that of the verb), the speak-er can even use (2) if he/she wants to 'twist' the objective scale a bit, even when both 'Mary' and 'John' are 'given' (= thematic), and to lower the CD carried by the first NP in relation to the second NP in question. As for the Surface Structure Empathy Hierarchy, it makes (together with the Ban on Conflicting Empathy Foci) (5) very strange without a special context:

(5) *John's wife was hit by him.

Kuno marks the sentence as ungrammatical, however, it is possible in a context where 'Who was hit by whom?' and perhaps even 'Who hit John's wife?', 'Who hit JOHN's wife:' or 'Who hit John's WIFE?' is under dis-cussion. Kuno omits the possibility of less usual sentence stresses, but it seems that placing sentence stress in (5) on 'HIM' in the above-men-tioned contexts obviates the interpretation of the speaker's empathy with the referent of 'John' and two conflicting empathy foci are avoided:

(6) John's wife was hit by HIM.

There is a similar phenomenon in (7) and (9):

(7) *John's sister and he went to Paris.
(8) Both John's sister and he went to Paris.
(9) *His sister and John went to Paris.
(10) His sister and even JOHN went to Paris.

(7) is wrong (with respect to the coreferent reading) because the empathy is with 'John' — 'sister' is defined by her relation to 'John' and at the same time another of Kuno's principles is violated: 'Give syntactic pro-minence to the person . . . who you are empathizing with.' (Syntactic pro-minence is said to be realized by command, precedence, and subjecthood.) The pronoun 'he' placed after 'John's sister' does not give 'syntactic prominence' to 'John'. However, our comment on (5) and (6) is true even for (7) and (8). In (8), the person to whom 'John' and 'he' refer is 'disqualified' as the person empathized with by 'both', which increases

the CD carried by 'he', in the way sentence stress did in (6). Similarly, even the linear arrangement of (9) can be saved by increasing the degree of CD carried by the sentence element referring to a person which should have been empathized with otherwise. There is no confict of empathy foci in (10). It is not quite clear if empathy in (6), (8), and (10) is with the person referred to as 'wife' or 'sister' respectively, nor if these sentences, where there is no conflict on empathy foci, are neutral, as Kuno claims (1) is. The same uncertainty exists even for our comments on (2) - (4).

Kuno exemplifies Speech Act Participant Hierarchy with

(11) I hit Mary.

(12) *Mary was hit by me. (The marking is Kuno's own.)

In (11), there is an agreement between Surface Structure Hierarchy and Speech Act Participant Hierarchy, while there is said to be a conflict in (12). Our comment on (6), (8), and (10) is valid even for (13):

(13) Mary was hit by ME.

What is even more important, (12) is quite correct for non-volitional actions, where the speaker describes himself/herself as a sort of 'natural force' without a proper intention. ('Mary happened to be hit by me by mistake.') Thus it seems that there is another hierarchy at play which is formulated in Kuno and Kaburaki (1975) — Humanness Hierarchy that says that the speaker can most easily empathize with a Human, less easily with an Animal, least with a Thing.[6] However, it is true that sentences like (14), where the above-mentioned conflict is claimed to exist, demand a context where the speaker takes (or pretends to take) a detached view of himself/herself, as in a scientific or journalistic report:

(14) The president was interviewed by me for three hours on the lawn in back of the Executive Office Building.

Kuno has also pointed out that there are certain verbs that demand that the speaker's empathy be with the referent of the subject and other verbs that demand empathy with the referent of the object. The verb 'to meet' is one of the subject centred verbs, while 'to strike someone as (something)' is one of the object centred verbs.

(15) ?John's wife met him . . .

(16) *John met me . . .

(17) *An elephant met John . . .

(18) *I strike John as pompous.

In (15), there is a conflict between the verb and the person in question. The verb demands (when interpreted as meaning 'happened to come upon, found') that the person the speaker empathizes with be referred to by the subject, and the person, who is defined by her relation to another person, should therefore be empathized with. In (16), a similar conflict comes about between the verb and Speech Act Participant Hierarchy. In (17), there is a conflict between the verb and Kuno's and Kaburaki's last principle — Topic Empathy Hierarchy, which says that it is easier to empathize with discourse-anaphoric 'objects' than with discourse non-anaphoric ones. (To make this Hierarchy more general, we can substitute 'thematic' for the former and 'rhematic' for the latter, because not all thematic elements are necessarily 'discourse-anaphoric'.)

As for (18), which contains an object centred verb, there is a conflict between the demand of the verb and Speech Act Participant Hierarchy. However, the Ban on Conflicting Empathy Foci needs a reformulation as can be seen from the following example:

(19) *I met his sister and John.

(19) should have been correct as the subject centred verb and Speech Act Participant Hierarchy demand that the empathy is with 'me'. As there cannot, according to the Ban be another empathy focus within the simple sentence, 'his sister and John' should have been equivalent to 'John and his sister', which is not true. My opinion is that there can be only one empathy focus per Communicative Field. (See Svoboda 1968.)

My previous remarks on the Ban can be summarized by the following formulation: It is impossible to empathize with somebody/something referred to by a sentence element that is rhematic within its own Communicative Field. Therefore the Ban on Conflicting Empathy Foci is avoided in sentences where a noun or an NP that should be an empathy focus according to some criteria, is coreferential with a sentence element that is rhematic within its own Communicative Field.

Warning for the reader

You are leaving the relatively safe ground of the first part of this pa-
per and entering the linguistic speculations of the Wild West and brave
samurais.

If you happen to be a sober European, stop reading here and say: So
what? Kuno and Kaburaki (1975) claim that a reflexive pronoun in English
is acceptable only when the speaker is empathizing with its referent,
which means that the antecedent of the reflexive must be interpretable
as expressing the speaker's empathy with its referent. Some of Kuno's and
Kaburaki's examples are far from convincing and seem to be an outcome of
their own theoretical principles rather than a true evaluation of accept-
ability degrees,[7] but there are others that look sound. (Some of the ex-
ample sentences are slightly changed for the sake of simplicity.)

(20) John talked to Bill about himself.
(21) *John discussed Mary with herself.
(22) *Bill was talked to by Mary about herself.
(23) *John asked the company about itself.

(20) is primarily interpreted as 'himself + coreferent John' and for some
speakers, there is a secondary interpretation 'himself + coreferent Bill'.
The second interpretation is less natural (or even impossible for some
speakers) because of Surface Structure Empathy Hierarchy. (21) is ex-
plained by Kuno and Kaburaki as follows: 'It seems to us that the sentence
is unacceptable because Mary does not refer to Mary as a person.' (Kuno
and Kaburaki 1975, p. 37). But there is also a difference in the degrees
of CD carried by the indirect object of (20) — 'Bill' and the direct ob-
ject of (21) — 'Mary' (higher CD) that makes it more difficult to place
empathy (as we regard it as a 'subjective decrease in CD') on the referent
of 'Mary'. (22) is against the Surface Structure Hierarchy, too — in our
theory, the FSP structure of the sentence offers, after passivation, only
one candidate for empathy — the surface subject. (23) does not allow
placement of empathy with "the company" because of the Surface Structure
Hierarchy combined with the Humanness Hierarchy.

(24) John said that there was a picture of himself in the post office.
(25) ?Mary told John that there was a picture of himself in the post
      office.
(26) *Mary said of John that there was a picture of himself in the post
      office.

(24) allows the use of reflexives, so does (25) (though Kuno and Kaburaki consider it worse than (24)), but (26) is definitely wrong. The reason is again the difference in degrees of CD inherently carried by the subject, indirect object, and the other oblique noun, as in (20) and (21).

Kuno has always tried to explain many facts concerning pronominaliza-tion and reflexivization with so-called Direct Discourse Analysis, ignor-ing the fact that it was, at least partially, proved to be wrong by Hinds (1975). (Otherwise, Hinds uses the terminology of and praises Prague school theory without really understanding it.) Thus (26) is wrong for Kuno because the structure to start with is something like 'Mary said of John: There was a picture of John/him in the post office.'. Thus John/him cannot become a reflexive. However, our analysis is confirmed in Jacken-doff (1972) who shows the following sentences, where it is not possible to make a sensible Direct Discourse Analysis for (27) in order to explain the difference between (27) and (28), (29).

(27) John told Bill a story about himself.

The necessary Direct Discourse Analysis is quite nonsensical: 'John told Bill: A story about yourself.'.

(28) John criticized Bill in a story about himself.
(29) John learned about Bill from a story about himself.

Jackendoff just notes the difference — (27) allows both interpretations, 'John + coreferent himself' or 'Bill + coreferent himself', while (28) and (29) can be interpreted only as 'John + coreferent himself' — without any explanation. For us the difference is the same as between (20) and (21), as well as (24), (25) and (26).

(30) Physicists like myself do not often make mistakes.
(31) Physicists like yourself do not often make mistakes.
(32) *Physicists like himself do not often make mistakes.
(33) Preparing myself for the exam will be impossible.
(34) Preparing yourself for the exam will be impossible.
(35) *Preparing himself for the exam will be impossible.

(30) — (32), which Kuno will explain again with his Direct Discourse Anal-ysis, can be accounted for within our concept with the Speech Act Partici-pant Hierarchy. Similarly we can explain (33) — (35). It is worth notic-ing that (33) — (35) without an expressed antecedent confirm what has been said about the basic 'giveness' (= thematicity) of 'I' and 'you'. That's

why there does exist an ´antecedent´ (though an unexpressed, ´deleted´ one) for ´myself´ and ´yourself´. Reflexives must have antecedents, ex-cept for ´I´, ´you´ (for the reason given above) and ´dummy subjects´ to infinitives meaning ´for any subject in question´ – for example: To shave oneself is boring.

   It is interesting to notice even the lesser degrees of acceptability for ´ourselves´ and ´yourselves´ in (33) and (34). ´Ourselves´ and ´your-selves´ are not a simple multiplication of the ´given´ ´I´ and ´you´, since ´we´ is ´I´ + ´you´ + (´you´) . . . or ´I´ + ´he/she´ + (´he/she´) . . . or ´I´ + ´you´ + ´he/she´ + (´you´) + (´he/she´) . . . etc.

   Other examples confirming our theory:

(36)   John and Bill collaborated on a story about themselves.
(37)   *John collaborated with Bill on a story about themselves.
(38)   John collaborated with Bill on a story about himself.
[(38) is taken from Jackendoff 1972.]

(37), in comparison with (36), makes empathizing possible only for the ´promoted´ antecedent, not the ´demoted´ one. Therefore ´themselves´ be-comes impossible. (38) can be interpreted only as ´John + coreferent him-self´ because the ´demotion´ of ´Bill´ explicitly ´disempathizes´, makes it unsuitable as the antecedent to ´himself´.

(39)   John hates the story about himself that Bill always tells.
(40)   John told the story about himself that Bill likes to hear.
[(39) and (40) are taken from Jackendoff (1972) and slightly changed.]

These sentences are excellent arguments against all attempts to describe reflexivization in syntactic terms. The structure is the same with res-pect to the relevant relationships within the NP_2:
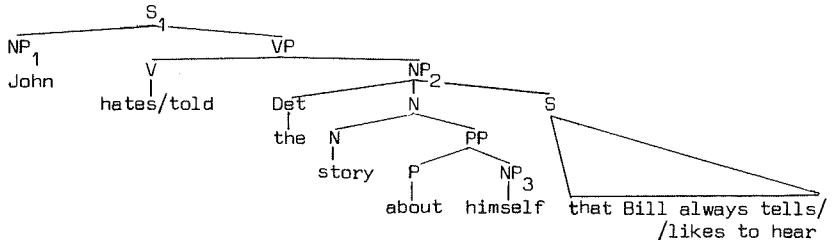
But the semantics of the verbs and the interpretation possibilities are different. (39) is ambiguous, while (40) allows only the interpretation 'John + coreferent himself'. Why? In note 6 we wrote about 'anthropo-centrism in language'. In our opinion, this anthropocentrism comes into action in the Humanness Hierarchy, where the next subdivision of Human — as we have seen in our sentence (12) — is (if the reader excuses the use of a vague and 'cheerfully intuitivistic' term[8]) Agent — Non-Agent. The most naturally empathized-with 'object' is the speaker, subject, human and doer. 'John' in the main clause of (40) is the subject of the main clause, (i.e. he is given syntactic prominence in Kuno's terms: preced-ence, subjecthood, command), and the human doer. As such it is the only suitable antecedent for the reflexive. 'Bill' in the sub-clause is nei-ther an agent nor the person given syntactic prominence within the main clause. In (39), both 'John' and 'Bill' are almost equally strong candi-dates for 'empathizees', i.e., the doer vs the syntactically prominent NP. Both interpretations are possible.

Descriptions similar to those presented here concerning Japanese are reported to be in Kuno (1975)   and (1976), while Thrainsson (1975) is said to corroborate them in a study of reflexivization in Icelandic and Nilsson (1978) corroborates them in Turkish. At the first look, there seems to be a relatively good correspondence between English and Swedish, as well. English is not exactly the best language to analyze with regard to reflexives as the use of reflexives is restricted to personal reflex-ives (there are no possessive reflexives) minus some language-specific extra constraints (personal pronouns are used in locative constructions). A remarkable theory of Russian reflexives (Russian has both personal and possessive reflexives) has been presented in Yokoyama (1975) and Yokoyama and Klenin (1975). Their claim is that in the first and second person, the possessive reflexives are marked [+Distance] (= [+Non-Empathy]), while in the third person, where it is traditionally said that reflexivization is obligatory, it is the possessive pronoun that is marked [+Distance]. 'Dis-tance' is exemplified as a 'psychological distance' — the speaker keeps a distance to the referent he/she dislikes, a 'social distance' between the speaker and the referent of the antecedent of the reflexive, or as a time distance — the speaker will differentiate between the referent now and in the past, or the speaker will differentiate between the speaker's way of seeing the referent and reporting other peoples' opinions, etc. All these cases would have in common that they increase resp. decrease the distance

in degrees of Communicative Dynamism between the speaker ('I') and the NP referring to the referent in question, i.e. Distance in Russian would be just the opposite of and function as such for English Empathy. These findings would suit very well our concept of Empathy and Distance as subjective complement to the objective FSP structure of a sentence.

Unfortunately, our Russian informants question the grammaticality of many of Yokoyama's examples and doubt her being a native speaker of Russian. (Some suggest that she may be a Russian émigrée of second or third generation.) The severe limitation of space does not allow us to start examining Russian reflexivization, however, I will claim that there exist clear proofs that the traditional 'optional rule' of reflexivization in first and second person is unsatisfactory and there even exist examples of reflexivization resp. non-reflexivization in all grammatical persons that cannot be accounted for syntactically.[9]

Notes

*   This is the first part of a paper the second part of which will be published as Bílý (1978).

1. It seems useless to start every paper concerning the Prague school's theory of FSP with a 'course for beginners', as, for example, J. Firbas does. Those who do not know what it is are advised to read some papers by Firbas. There are some reading suggestions in the bibliography. Prospective readers are warned not to start with, say, Halliday or Kuno, as they would get a wrong impression of what the theory of FSP is about.

2. For example, Halliday (1967-8) identifies the theme with the first constituent of a sentence, i.e., he bases his concept on sentence linearity only, thus making it separate from discourse functions. Similarly, Chomsky in 'Aspects', p. 221, in blessed ignorance of the theory of FSP defines the topic of a sentence (= roughly the theme proper) "as the leftmost NP that is immediately dominated by S in the surface structure and that is, furthermore, a major category . . . . ". Thus, for him, 'John' in "It was John who I saw." is the topic, when, in fact, with the most natural way of pronunciation (i.e. with sentence stress on 'John'), 'John' is the rheme of the sentence! (The part about 'a major category' is to avoid an even more ridiculous claim that 'It' in the sentence above is the topic.) Jackendoff (1972, p. 262), influenced by the peculiarity of English, which does tend to make the theme proper to the subject of a sentence oftener than many other languages, identifies the topic with the subject. If he had read Firbas' paper on non-thematic subjects in English (Firbas 1966) or if he had known something about FSP at all, he could not have made such a claim. Some of the most outrageous deeds of Kuno are criticized in Bílý (1977 a).

3. Bílý (1976) and, above all, Bílý (1977 a).

4. Kuno (1975) and (1976).

5. Of course, this tendency is much weaker in languages with free word-order, for example, in Slavic languages, where it is possible to get the basic distribution of Communicative Dynamism (as progressively increasing with sentence linearity) via permutations of sentence partswithout changing the grammatical relations within a sentence, but the tendency can be observed even in, say, Czech. (Cf Bílý 1977 b.)

6. The next subdivision would be probably Concrete and/or Individualized Person, Animal, Thing vs. Abstract and/or Non-Individualized Person, Animal, Thing – at least so findings about Czech neutral word-order referred to in Bílý (1977 b) can be interpreted. Even the Humanness Hierarchy is something that can be traced back in the Czech linguistic tradition, where an 'anthropocentrism in language' is talked about.

7. For example, the following dubious scale of acceptability:

   a) (?) John showed Mary a picture of herself.

   b) ? You showed Mary a picture of herself, didn't you.

   c) ?(?) I showed Mary a picture of herself, didn't you.

   d) ?? John received from Mary a picture of herself.

   e) ?* You received from Mary a picture of herself, didn't you.

   f) * I received from Mary a picture of herself.

   (All the marks are Kuno's and Kaburaki's own.)

   a) to f) are meant to show the accumulating and aggravating deviations from the principles named in the first part of this paper: a) shows a slight deviation from Surface Structure Empathy Hierarchy only and is okay for many speakers. b) should be worse as even the hierarchy of grammatical persons is violated. In c), the violation is more severe. The same gradation is to be found in d) – f), accompanied by the fact that 'to receive' is a subject centred verb, which should make the subjects of d) – f) even more empathy-prone and therefore disqualify 'Mary' as the antecedent of 'herself'. There is hardly any substance in these evaluations. Apart from the difficulties connected with establishing such detailed scale of acceptability, the scale seems completely wrong. Let us take one of the 'unacceptable' sentences, say, d) sentence: It would be much worse, perhaps unacceptable, if the semantics of the reflexive made it possible to interpret the reflexive as coreferent with the subject, i.e., 'John received from Bill a picture of himself.'. In this sentence, the previously named hierarchies do seen to block any interpretation other than 'John coreferent himself'. However, in the original d) 'Mary coreferent herself' is the only possible interpretation because of the semantics and d) seems correct. Thus, as for reflexives, the hierarchies just help to clarify some of potentially ambiguous sentences.

8. See Cruse (1973).

9. Kuno does not take into account the substantial difference between 'real reflexives' and the more or less amphatic English reflexives, which become personal pronouns or words of emphasis when translated into many other languages. (Cf., for example, the Swedish reflexive

´sig´ and the empathic word ´själv´ [´self´, alone].) It is also not yet certain whether some restrictions must be formulated syntactically or in FSP terms: for example, reflexives cannot stand as subjects in English. (There may be some syntactically defined boundary beyond which reflexivization is absolutely impossible, too.) Is this a syntactic restriction or an FSP restriction similar to that claimed for personal pronouns in Bílý (1977 a)? There is some evidence for the latter in Czech: Svoje děti se mu vychovávají nejhůř. (Literally: "His (refl.) children (nominative) ´refl. particle of verb´ for him (dative) raise worst.", i.e. ´It is most difficult for him to raise his (own) children.´.) The enclitic pronoun ´nu´ carries such a low degree of CD that it can function as the ´antecedent´ of the reflexive, which does not carry the lowest degree of CD since it is the determination and not the head-word of the subject.

Kuno´s empathy is also insufficient for cases like ´*Peter´s wife shaved himself.´, where according to Kuno´s own analysis, ´Peter´ is empathized with and should be suitable as the antecedent of the reflexive. A possible solution can be stated in FSP terms: The determination is an essential amplification of the semantics of ´wife´ and therefore it carries a higher degree of CD than is allowed for the antecedents of reflexives, i.e. it can be explained as the Czech sentence quoted above. (A similar conclusion can be obtained via the popular notion of ´topic´ defined as ´what the sentence is about´ - the sentence in question is about the wife, not about Peter.)

Nevertheless, Kuno´s articles which recognize the necessity to describe various rules in other terms than syntactic ones (and, above all, as we see it, the necessity to use the theory of FSP), are valuable contributions to the linguistic theory, regardless of their quite numerous shortcomings.

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