CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF THE NOMINAL CATEGORIES IN ENGLISH AND BÉTÉ

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Abstracts: This study is a theorical contrastive analysis of the nominal category by means of deductive and inductive methods of the syntactico-semantic values of nouns. It presents the expression of extralinguistic and cognitive realities through the class of noun in two far distant languages namely English and Bete, an Ivorian Niger-congo language[1]. The analysis describes the shaping of lexico-grammatical items within the category of nouns, focusing on the contrast between them. The subclasses of count and non-count, singulare and plurale tantum in English and Bete are partially iconic. Therefore, the cognitive representation of nouns and their shaping tend to be socially and culturally oriented.

Keywords: count, contrastive, noun, singulare tantum, plurale tantum,

ÉTUDE CONTRASTIVE DES CATÉGORIES NOMINALES DE L'ANGLAIS ET DU BÉTÉ

Résumé : Cette étude présente une analyse contrastive de la catégorie nominale en Anglais et en Bété à travers des méthodes déductive et inductive de la valeur syntactico-sémantique des noms. Elle se rapporte à l'expression des réalités extralinguistiques et cognitives à travers la classe des noms dans deux langues fort éloignées telles que l'Anglais et le Bété, une langue ivoirienne du groupe niger-congo-kordofanien en mettant l'accent sur leur contraste. Elle montre que la sous-catégorie des noms comptables et incomptables, des singulare et plurale tantum ne sont que partiellement superposables. Par conséquent, la représentation des noms sur le plan cognitif ainsi que leur mise en forme linguistique a tendance à s'orienter sur des bases sociales et culturelles.

Mots-clés : comptable, contrastive, nom, singulare tantum, plurale tantum

Introduction

The aim of this study is to contrast the category of nouns in two far distant languages: English, an Indo-European language and Bete, a Niger-

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[1] Bete is a tonal Ivorian language spoken in the western part of the country. Its tonal system comprises four punctual tonemes, the high [´], mid-high [˙], mid [‾] and low [`]. In this work, the high and low tonemes only are marked. Consequently, the absence of tone symbol is used for the mid-pitch (mid –high [˙] or mid [‾]).

congocordofanian language. The category of noun is certainly one of the word categories with intensive studies in linguistics. In multi-linguistic environment, speakers and learners tend to regard linguistic categories as totally iconic. The capacity to find out analogies between different languages can cause the superposition of some linguistic categories. However, it is important to avoid the pitfalls of improper correspondences of linguistics concepts between languages. Therefore, is it possible to consider two nominal systems as totally equivalent? Does the concept of noun refer to identical grammatical classes with the same contours and sub-classes? This paper focuses on the noun in two languages, English and Bete. Its aim is to explore the contours of the two nominal categories. The main task addressed in this study is to determine both similarities and contrasts between English and Bete on the particular point of the category of noun with the aim of showing the peculiarities of each nominal system. In this work, the contrastive analysis will be focused on subclasses of nouns namely common noun, proper noun, count and non-count nouns, 400lural400r and 400lural tantum, singular and plural forms of nouns as well as genders in English and bete. These subcategories of nouns will be examined by comparing the contents of each nominal system.

The data analysed is a collection of English and Bete nouns. The Bete corpus is extracted from a dictionary (Zogbo R.G., 2005), grammar and linguistic books (Zogbo R.G., (2004), Werle J-M.& D.J.Gbaléhi.,1976), a brochure (-*A-pʋni-Lagɔˈyukwli,2011*), a syllabary *(Mözɛlı bɔgu, Kïbhe Bhlʋ ,2003)* and utterances recorded from native speakers. All the nouns used are attested by native speakers of each language. This linguistics work will entail comparison. The comparison will be done within the framework of contrastive linguistics as initiated by Laddo. However, this study is a pure theoretical descriptive one with no direct teaching objectives in terms of predicting errors or hypercorrections on the part of learners.

1.The category of noun

The noun is generally defined as ''a word or group of words that represents a person (such as *Michael*, *teacher* or *police*), a place such as *France* or *school,* a thing or activity (such as *coffee* or *football*) or a quality or idea (such as *danger* or *happiness*)'' (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2009). This definition is based on the semantic values of nouns, their capacity to refer to '*'a class of entities: persons, objects, places, institutions, actions, abstract ideas, qualities, phenomena, emotions, etc.*'' (A. Downing & P. Locke 2006, p 401). Other definitions focus on syntax. They present nouns as entities that can be head in a nominal group or a noun phrase. At this structural level, the capacity of nouns to cooperate with determiners, pre-modifier, and post-modifiers is presented as the key element. In this framework, nouns can be the subject, the direct object of a verb, the object of a preposition, the object of a verbal (gerund, infinitive, and participle), the indirect object of a verb, the complement of a predicate, and the modifier of another noun (E. Ehrlich & D. Murphy 1991). Whatever the orientation of the definition of the category of noun

may be, it is essential to point out that nouns or nominal notions are closely linked to the human ability of conceptualization and to the reference to extralinguistic realities. In conceptualization processes, nouns are involved in the linguistic expression that encompasses mere perception. This human faculty includes what we can see, hear, feel, etc. Objects such as *bottle*, *pen*, *book*, *bàka* (knife), and things like *tree, síka* (rice) described as representing discrete realities, are extralinguistic elements of our daily life. But perception goes beyond physical items. It comprises things we can feel and hear too. For example, *love, hatred*, *wàwu* (love) and what we can perceive with our ears such as *wɛli* (speech), *music,* are matters of perception.

The second category of nouns involved in conceptualization is closely linked to cognition. What we know, understand, believe, etc., is about the human cognition faculty. Therefore, the linguistic expression of cognition is based on what we get with our brain. Some particular words are used to represent mental activities. Some of them are *fíke* (intelligence),*ɓoɓoɓoɓu* (thought), *idea*, *belief,* etc.

The third class of nouns is closely related to the operations of human symbolic heart. With our hearts, we love, hate, admire, and desire, etc. Nouns referring to our feelings are so widespread that some nations even have special days devoted to a feeling such as love. Mothers' and Valentine's Days are examples of those days and people are supposed to show love on those dates. Beside fondness, we have hopes, desires, wishes etc. They are categorized in the class of desideration. Desideration includes some relations among people on the one hand, between people and other beings or things, on the other hand. In sum, human experiences are described or referred to with a great variety of nouns. These linguistic items are used to express perception, cognition, affection and desideration as it appears in English and Bete. Presented as such, the noun category seems homogeneous. However, it is a complex class that includes many subclasses.

2. Contrastive study of the category of nouns in English and Bete
The objective of this part is to analyse the contours of the two nominal systems with a focus on the similarities and the differences in the conceptualization and lexicalization of extralinguistic as well as the description cognitive realities.

2.1. Proper nouns and common nouns
Nouns are divided into two major groups: Proper Nouns and Common Nouns. Proper nouns are defined as 'referring to a particular unique, place, animal, etc.' (Chalker S., Weiner E.1994, p. 319). This traditional definition is based on both syntactic and semantic criteria. The main idea in this definition is that proper nouns refer to things or people that are so unique and individual that they cannot be quantified with cardinal or ordinal numbers[2]. For example, names like *New York*,

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[2] The subcategories are not watertight. In a context, the speaker can shift the classes and make it possible for a proper noun to function as a common, a non-count as a count and vice-versa. An utterance like: *Kylian M' Bappé: The new pele?* is acceptable. It even serves as the title of a video

Paris, *Himalaya*, *Obama* and *Trump* cannot be counted, given that they are supposed to refer to realities considered as unique and particular. In Bete, names such as *Gbeuly*, Zadi, *Tape* refer to human beings. Like those of English, these anthroponyms cannot accept any quantification unless they undergo a recategorization operation. Moreover, contrary to common nouns, generally, proper nouns do not cover the field of groups or species that includes many entities or a variety. For this reason, there is no room for operators such as *a* or *the* in their determination. Therefore, the proper noun has ''no definable meaning in the language''. (A. Downing & P. Locke 2006, p. 410).

2.2. Common nouns

By definition, a common noun is a noun 'which is not the name of any particular person, place, thing, quality, etc.' (Chalker S. & E.Weiner 1994,p.266). Nouns like *tree*, *book*, *jú*, (child), *budu* (house) are common nouns. They can be determined with articles such as *a*, *the* and be quantified with *one, two, three*, etc. Common nouns are characterized by numbers of morphological entities such as prefixes and suffixes that mark gender, number and cases. They can be categorised on the base of their capacity to be counted.

2.3. Nouns and counting

Sometimes, nouns are discriminated on the semantico-syntactic criterium of the capacity to be counted or not. This feature of distinction can sometimes, be unclear, given that any entity can be quantified in a certain way. For example, a mass noun such as *sugar* can be quantified with an objective quantifier like *kilogram*. So, non-count nouns can be counted in some way but not in terms of discrete entities. They cannot be heads of noun clauses that involve quantifiers such as *one*, *two*, *three*, etc. in a noun phrase. The concept of counting is not absolute. It simply refers to a semantico-syntactic property of nouns. In this respect, counts are opposed to non-count nouns.

2.4. Non-count nouns

Non-counts are mass nouns like *furniture*, *fruit*, *mail,* etc that refer to non-discrete extralinguistic things. In Bete language, nouns like *mɪɔ* (tears),*kpa* (mud),*ɲɛmʉ* (breath) are non-counts. In English, *fish* for example, functions as a mass noun. It is uncountable. However, its bete equivalent *zibiji* functions as a count. The morpheme *ji* in *zibiji* refers to a discrete element, an individual, an entity. Thus, in bete, the equivalent of *fish* is conceived as an individual entity. *Zibiji* is a singular noun that can be determined by numbers such as *one*, *two*, *three* etc. For example, *zibiji ɓlù* means *un poisson* in French, that is, a discrete entity of fish. The forms *a tear, one tear* are attested in English whereas the Bete word *mɪɔ (tears)* does not accept such

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available on youtube at https://youtu.be/vwyjrzasjxg. This linguistic phenomenon is called recategorisation (Groussier M.L.&al. 1975).

determiners. It appears clearly that the subcategories of non-count in the two languages are not iconic. A non-count in one language can function as a count in the another. This illustrates how cultures can shape the human mind and the representation of things around us.

2.5. *Count nouns*

Count-nouns are considered as discrete entities with a particular syntactic behaviour. In fact, they can be counted, that is, they can take cardinal numbers. Moreover, contrary to non-counts, they accept the plural operator *s*. So, forms such as *one chair*, *two chairs* for example, are acceptable. Most of the English and Bete nouns belong to this class.

3.Pluralisation of nouns

Pluralisation is the capacity of nouns to hold the morphemes that indicate a quantity superior to zero and one. The quantity of extralinguistic realities the noun refers to, can be traced with some particular morphemes or operators. When post-posed, operators such as zero (*ø*) or *s* can indicate quantity. For example, *bookø* refers to a single entity whereas *books* sends back to many of them.

In bete, the passage from singular to plural is encoded by means of some morpho-phonological operations. Generally, pluralisation involves some vocal distribution based on the nature of the final vowel or syllable of the noun. This distribution constraint depends on the class of the noun. Accordingly, nouns ending in *–ji* form their plural with the morpho-phoneme *–ja*. Those that end with *ɲɔ* take *wa* like in *gu-ɲɔ* (sorcerer) whose plural form is *guwa* (sorcerers)(werle J-M & D.J. Gbalehi,1976, p151).

ENGLISH			BETE		
SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE	SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE
Book	Books	Addition Of morpheme S	wíŋɔ(thief)	wíwa (thieves)	Addition of morpheme wa
Boy	Boys		cıaŋɔ (teacher)	cıawa (teachers)	
Girl	Girls		-		
Table	Tables		ɓéle (country or city)	ɓíli (countries)	e and u replaced with i
Tree	Trees		Bùdu (house) -	bıdı (houses) -	
Pen	Pens				

ENGLISH			BETE		
SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE	SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE
lady	ladies	Replacement of y with i plus Addition Of morpheme es	*bìtε(basket)*	bìtı (baskets)	ε, ɔ,ʊ replaced with ı
city	cities		glɔ̀(village)	gwlì(villages)	
story	stories				
lorry	lorries		tımε (snake)	tıma (snakes)	ε replaced with a
country	countries		nımε (animal)	nıma (animals)	
territory	Territories		nıkpε (man)	nıkpa (men)	
century	centuries		gwέ (gorilla)	gwá (gorillas)	

ENGLISH			BETE		
SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE	SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE
Mango	mangoes	Addition Of morpheme es/ Addition of morpheme s	kple (foot)	kplı(feet)	ë replaced with ï
Hero	heroes		wúkple(head)	wúkplı(heads)	
Potato	potatoes				
cargo	cargos		suko(pounded food)	sukwi(pounded food plural)	o replaced with u
logo	logos		kpáko(mud)	kpákwu (mud)	
piano	pianos		go (buttock)	gu (buttocks)	
photo	photos		bεεko (groundnut paste)	bεεkwi (groundnut pastes)	

ENGLISH			BETE		
SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE	SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE
leave	leaves	f or fe replaced with v+es	dὲda (fishing net)	dέdı(fishing nets)	a is replaced with ö
half	halves		dùva (wood stump)	dùvə (wood stumps)	
self	selves				
calf	calves		taade (pipe)	taadı(pipes)	e and u replaced with i
loaf	loaves		nı́ne (tale)	nı́nı́ (tales)	
knife	knives		kòsu (rifle)	kòsı(rifles)	
-	-	-	-	-	-

ENGLISH			BETE		
SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE	SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE
chief	chiefs				a is replaced with ı
			bȧka (knife)	bàkı (knives)	

staff	staffs	f Plus morphemes	jaꞌ (wound)	ji (wounds)	
gulf	gulfs				
safe	safes		síkako(handful of rice)	síkakwι(handfuls of rice)	Deletion of final vowel plus wι
proof	proofs		dѡdѡko(ball of mud)	dѡdѡkwi(balls of mud)	
stuff	stuffs		lakalιko(paste of local aubergine)	lakalιkwι(pastes of local aubergine)	
handkerchief	handkerchiefs		tɛlιko(paste of eggplant)	tɛlιkwi(pastes of eggplant)	

ENGLISH			BETE		
SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE	SINGULAR	PLURAL	CHANGE
man	men	Middle vowel change	wιleꞌ-ji (finger)	wʉle-ja (fingers)	Replacement of morpheme Ji with ja
foot	feet		le-jɨ (iron)	lɛ-ja (irons)	
tooth	teeth				
mouse	mice		te-ji (drop)	tɛ-ja (drops)	(Vowel change plus) ji replaced with ja
goose	geese		no-ji (flea)	nɔ-ja(fleas)	
man	men		gɨ-ji (egg)	gʉ-ja(eggs)	
person	people		-	-	-

Table1: pluralisation in English and Bete

As different and far distant languages, English and Bete are not expected to have similar morphemes or operators for the formation of plural forms. However, it is important to notice that plural forms are coined widely with an addition of morphemes or operators. Suffixation is, sometimes, used in the process. The plural can clearly be distinguished from the singular thanks to these linguistics operators. However, some count nouns have dual usages. They can be categorized as non-counts too, with a variation in meaning. *Time* and *times*, *paper* and *papers*, *work* and *works*, *light* and *lights*, *hair* and *hairs*, *glass* and *glasses*, *iron* and *irons*, *experience* and *experiences* are some of these words. In bete, we have *bɔgʊ* and *bɔgwι*, *gu* and g*wi*, *lιɓo* and *lιɓwι*. For example, as a mass noun *Time,* means the number of minutes, hours, months, etc. but *times* as a countable noun, (like in *three times)* means the number of instances. In bete, *lιɓo* means *work* while *lιɓwi,* the plural form, refers to *jobs*, *professions*. Some nouns have different meanings in the singular and the plural. Examples are given below:

ENGLISH		BETE	
Meaning of singular noun	Meaning of plural noun	Meaning of singular noun	Meaning of plural noun
Content: state of peaceful happiness	Contents: things included or held in something	klɛ (anger)	kəlie (biles)
Custom : tradition, culture	Customs: official department of administration in charge of duties levied on imported goods	ɡu (fetish) or (illness, witchcraft)	ɡwi (illnesses)
Air : atmosphere	Airs: affected manners	bɔ́gʉ (book or intellect)	bɔ́gwɪ (books or papers,not intellect)
Blind : unable to see	Blinds : a screen for a window, especially one on a roller or made of slats.	zlɪ (sky or heaven)	zlɪa (days)
Character : the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual	Characters: People in a novel, play, or film	cú (the moon)	cwî (months)
Good : having the required qualities; of a high standard.	Goods: merchandise or possessions.	làgɔ (God)	làgwɪ (religions)
Force : strength or energy as an attribute of physical action or movement	Forces : an organized military force equipped for fighting on land, sea or air.	kətra	kətri
Spectacle : a visually striking performance or display or Some visual scene	Spectacles : a pair of glasses	gbu (problem)	gbi (issues,)
Wood : the hard fibrous material that forms the main substance of the trunk or branches of a tree or shrub, used for fuel or timber	Woods: an area of land, smaller than a forest, that is covered with growing trees.	-	-

Table 2: list of nouns whose meaning can change according to their grammatical number

3.6. Singulare tantum

Singularia tantum are nouns that have only singular forms. English mass nouns such as *sand,police,pity, joy, happiness,* etc, belong to this class. Some Bete nouns such as *ɓilanumu (milk)*, *nu(drink)*, *nɛɛ (*urine*)*, *ŋeze, (pity)*, *tʉ,(war)*, *kanɔ, (bravery)* function as singularia tantum. *letrɪkə,* (electricity, borrowed from French), and *jɔ̀ɓɔ̀gə̀ji* (meaning art), are singularia tantum. The opposite of this class is the plurale tantum.

3.7. Plurale tantum

These nouns do not accept singular forms: *clothes*, *trousers*, *news*, *riches*. The final *s* of the words marks the plural forms. However, that morpheme does not appear in irregular nouns such as *cattle*, *people* because the semantic of these words is already enough explicit concerning their numbers. *Cattle* and *people* refer to groups that include many different entities. So, the semantic value overlaps the morpho-syntactic structuring. In Bete, *Kpi,*(stone) *ŋlí* (faecal substance) tɪtɪ(news),gbɪ (palaver, trouble, problem) are some pluralia tantum.

4. Gender

Gender is a concept that can be discriminated under two criteria: a lexical one and the grammatical one.

4.1 Lexical or semantic gender

Many linguistic criteria are used to classify nouns into gender. One of them is in relation with the sex,an extralinguistic reality. In this framework, nouns are categorised according to male and female distinctions. This natural or semantic gender is represented at the linguistic level with morphemes such as *she, cow* or *he*, *bull* like in *bull-elephant* or *she-bear*. Similar distinctions are coded in bete with the morpheme *ɓɛlʉ (male)* and *nɪga, ŋlɔ (female)* that derive respectively from *ɓɛ́lʉ(male)* and *ŋlɔ́ (*woman or female). The Bete language makes the gender difference between *kɔkɔnina* (hen) and *kɔkɔɓɛlʉ* (rooster) for example at the morpho-semantic level. At this level, the English language expresses the sex or gender of the referent with some morphological features. These linguistic transparency is encoded with morphemes such as, *-or,er* for males and *–ess,-ette,-a,-oine,-ester,*etc, for females. Thus, there are opposite pairs such as *waiter/waitress, actor/actress, sultan/sultana, lion/lioness*. The male/ female distinction can be expressed with mere nouns that is words that have no morphological typical prefixes. Nouns such as *stallion, rooster, father, man, husband* refer to male while their counterparts, *mare, hen, man, mother* refer to females. *Horse, chicken, spouse and parent* are neutral. However, all nouns are related to a second kind of gender: the grammatical one.

4.2 *Grammatical gender*

Grammatical gender of nouns is one that is based on their agreement or indexation system. In the framework of the notion of agreement, grammatical gender is defined as '' classes of nouns reflected in the behaviour of associated words;'(Corbett 1991, p.1). In modern English, the grammatical gender is not overtly expressed. Nevertheless, it is encoded through some pronouns, especially the third person ones. There are three different subclasses: *he/him/his/himself* for masculine, *she/ her/ hers/ herself* for feminine and *it/its*, *itself* for non-person or neutral. The English gender agreement is thus a pronoun-based one that traces three features: feminine, masculine and neutral. The agreement or indexation between the noun and its pronoun is constructed on the ground of a semantic item, the sex. Beyond that extralinguistic reality, the English gender system exposes the partition of extralinguistic realities into three exclusive classes. Contrary to English, Bete distinguishes between humans and animals. The Bete pronoun ɔ retakes both masculine and feminine nouns. The membership of bete nouns in a specific noun class seems to be based on phonological aspects. The semantic criterium in the formation of noun gender or noun classes appear as not enough explicit. Therefore, the final phoneme of the noun appears as a prominent 'trigger' is the formation of the pronoun.

Noun	Pronoun	Noun	Pronoun
[sɪka] *rice*	a	[sluku] *lion*	⍵
[loaji] *money*	ɛ	[nɪkpɛ] *man*)	ɔ
[bɔgⵡ] *book*	⍵	[leji] (*iron*)	ɛ
[budu] *house*	⍵	[lⵡɛ](elephant)	ɛ

Table 3: Noun and Pronoun distribution in Bete

The nature of pronoun as a close relation with the final sound of the noun it retakes. Nouns ending in [ⵡ] and [u] for example, use the pronoun [ⵡ] whereas those ending in [i] are retaken with the pronoun [ɛ]. As for nominal entities ending in [a], they are referred to with pronoun [a], contrary to human entities (man and woman) that function with [ɔ]. Therefore, there is a distribution of pronoun forms based on the phonological nature of the source, the final vowel or the syllable of the noun. This functions as an agreement system between the final vowel or syllable of the noun and the pronoun that retakes it. Werle J-M.& Gbaléhi, D.J. (1976, p.14) describe the possessive pronouns of Bete as following:

Possessive pronouns	1st person Sing.	2nd person Sing.	3rd Person Sing.		1st person Pl.	2nd Person Pl.	3rd person Pl.	
			human	Non human			human	Non human
indefinite	ná	nà	ó/ɔ́	é-ɛ́ á wɔ́	à-á	á	wá	jɩ
definite	na	nà-a	ó/ɔ	e/ɛ a wɔ	á–a	a	wa	jɩ

Table 4: Possessive pronouns in Bete

As noted above, the main distinction in possessive pronouns for example, is the discrimination between human and non-human entities. Contrary to sexist languages such as English and French, the Bete linguistic imaginary is oriented towards human and non-human differentiation.

In sum, the subcategories of nouns in English and Bete studied above have many similar features. Nevertheless, there is no systematic correspondence between the individual nouns in the subclasses. Each language has its own cultural background that favours the linguistic and cognitive formation of the class of nouns. The following remark of A. Downing and P. Locke can summarise the contrast:

> English obliges us to make a distinction with regards to how a referent is cognitively perceived: whether as a discrete countable entity, such as cow, or an indivisible non countable" mass entity such beef […] Other languages make a count mass distinction, but we must never assume particular items are conceptualized and lexicalised in the same way in different languages
>
> A. Downing & P. Locke (2006, p.405)

The study of English and Bete nouns provides a good example of how conceptualisation and representation of cognitive and extralinguistic realities can vary from one language to the other.

Conclusion

English and Bete nouns are used in the representation of extralinguistic and cognitive realities. Their subcategories are proper nouns, common nouns, counts and non-counts, singulare tantum, plurale tantum, male and female genders.

However, the subclasses of countable and uncountable, singulare tantum and plurale tantum in the two languages are not iconic. Moreover, the concept of grammatical gender includes three realities, the masculine, the feminine and the neutral in English whereas the Bete discriminates between human and non-human. Moreover, Bete pronouns are constructed on the base of the phonological features of the noun they retake or refer to. Therefore, it is obvious that each language shapes the classes of countable, singulare tantum, plurale tantum and pronouns according to its own cultural background and its linguistic imaginary. The category of noun is thus obvious in the two languages studied. However, the contents of its sub-classes are not iconic.

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