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### ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN RESTRICTING SOCIAL MOBILITY AND CREATING SOCIO- ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES IN PAKISTAN

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#### Abstract

This paper explores how English Language right from the British colonial times till date, has been used as an instrumental policy tool for social stratification. The analysis of the language policies in education, sets forth the issue of English language used and taught as a dimension of inequality. The paper discusses in detail how undue importance to English has led to complete marginalization of local languages thus diminishing the transformative impact of education in providing opportunities to masses for possible inclusion. Using Amartya Sen's theoretical framework of Capability Approach and Bourdieu's Theory of Social Justice, this paper analyses the existing relevant literature to argue that English language restricts upward social mobility increasing socio-economic inequality in the country.

#### Keywords

Social Stratification, Linguistic Supremacy, Social Immobility



#### 1. Introduction

Pakistan is a multilingual and multiethnic country with a population of approximately 212.2 million which makes it the sixth most populous country in the world. There are 6 major languages and

approximately 58 minor languages spoken in the country. The following table shows the percentage of population using different languages as their mother tongue.

**Table 1.** Percentage of Population using the following languages as their mother tongue

#	Language used as Mother Tongue	Percentage of Population
1.	Punjabi	44.15%
2.	Pashto	15.42%
3.	Sindhi	14.10%
4.	Seraiki	10.53%
5.	Urdu	7.47%
6.	Balochi	3.57%
7.	Other Languages	4.66%

**Source:** Government of Pakistan 2015

In 1947 Urdu was declared the national language of the country and English retained the colonial status as the official language. Although Urdu was the mother tongue of only 7.47% of the entire population, still it was imposed by the state as the national language giving it more importance than any other language. Interestingly, Punjabi is spoken by a huge majority of the population, yet Punjabis were, and remain, the strongest supporters of Urdu. The political economy of the language policy would be discussed briefly in this section. The following statistics would help contextualize the arguments that follow; Pakistan's 128.2 million people form the labor force out of which only 27.9% is skilled labor. 36.7% of the population lives in the urban areas while remaining 62.3% lives in the rural areas.<sup>1</sup> As per statistics a huge majority of the population lives in the rural areas where they speak their indigenous mother tongue. This implies that Urdu and especially English are not used in their day to day communication. 24.3% of the people live below the national income poverty line. 38.3% of the population lives in multi-dimensional

poverty with deprivation in education facilities contributing 41.3% to multidimensional poverty index MPI. Income inequality stands at 17.3% while education inequality is 43.5%. According to the UNDP report 2018, the literacy rate of Pakistan is 57.7 % but (Faisal Bari and Nargis Sultana 2001) in their report present the true picture drawing attention to the poor learning outcomes of the schools particularly the ones run by the state.<sup>2</sup> Income share held by the richest 10% of the population is 28.9% while the income share held by the poorest 40% of the population is 21.1% which results in the Gini index Value (measures of income disparity between the richest and the poorest) at 36.2. Inequality adjusted HDI is 0.386 which is abysmal. 51% of the total population is unemployed. Pakistan's education index is 0.401 which is towards the lower end. Despite the educational backwardness government continues to allocate an insignificant 2.8% of the GDP to education. Only 37.2 % of the total population has at least some secondary education.

*1.1 English Language: The colonial symbol of power and prestige*

Language wields ideological power. It determines how social power is distributed in a society thus shaping the hierarchical structures. It is an important tool of imperialism. Rehman defines linguistic imperialism “as the privileging or domination of one language over others, refers to its use by the elites of power, culture, and money in so many domains as to limit the access of speakers of other languages to positions of power and privilege. It also means that the dominant language is used to produce knowledge, cultural artefacts, and discourses which are privileged in a certain social setup.” Interestingly language was never a marker of identity in the pre-colonial times in South Asia, it was only after the colonial modernity brought in by the advent of British, that language became one of the pivotal elements of social status and influence. The British encouraged and supported the learning and use of vernacular languages so that locals could associate themselves with their indigenous languages. This helped British create and maintain ethno nationalism in the subcontinent. Persian, the cultural ascendancy of the Muslims, was stripped off its official status in courts and other administrative units and replaced by vernaculars initially. Anglesites who were the new imperialists did not just deem India to be an exotic land of mystery and Oriental wisdom, rather for them India was a backward piece of land whose inhabitants were ignorant and superstitious and who could be modernized through reforms. Language was an instrumental tool of reformation. Vernacular which was a British Construct was a

deliberate policy to create and sustain the proto-elites who opposed Westernized Indian Elites. Anglesites introduced English as the official language which was to be taught to only a selected group of people who would serve as the subordinates of the British imperialists and help them consolidate their rule. The “divide and rule” orientation of British is evident from their policy option of having the Vernacular and English simultaneously. They did not want the masses to be trained in English hence offered it only to the few who later climbed to echelons of the elite class by managing to get employed in high paid jobs for which English proficiency was a pre-requisite such as Civil Service, judiciary and armed forces. The rest of the masses were encouraged to use their indigenous languages. The policy of ‘English for the few’ aimed at creating a narrow elite with money i.e. Indian Aristocracy and Bureaucracy. They invested in a few schools where English was the medium of instruction. Admission in those schools was based on stringent policies and high fee structure. Higher Education was strictly in English. Despite vehement opposition by the Muslims and Hindus, the government did not allow higher education to be carried out in vernacular. The literate Indians supported English because it facilitated upward social and economic mobility. It was considered a symbol of class and elitism. The Indians who were proficient in English associated themselves with power, prestige and colonial modernity. The establishment of the Chiefs Colleges and English schools facilitated the creation of a class who

were well versed in the English culture & customs, English norms & values, English Literature & Science and English Mode of thinking, which made them superior to the others. These Chiefs College (meant for hereditary Aristocrats) patronized eminent members of the ruling elite. They boasted of beautiful campuses with lush facilities in sports and extracurricular activities. These Chief's Colleges educated the

children of the wealthiest thus creating a class of their own. The emerging professionals opted the English medium schools for their children which also were costly and beyond the resources of ordinary citizens. These schools also admitted only 15% of the Indians, the rest were all British students. This policy created class stratification in the Indian Society.

**Table 2.** Overview of the policies in different time periods and their respective implementation

<b>Year</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Recommended Language Policy</b>	<b>Implementation</b>
Pre-1947	British Rule	Urdu and Hindi for the Masses English for the Elite	As per Policy
1947	Independence	Urdu Declared to be the National Language	Urdu Medium for Masses and English Medium for elite
1956-57	Karachi University Enquiry Committee Report	English to continue as the medium of instruction at the university level till Urdu could be developed to replace it.	Urdu Medium for Masses and English Medium for elite
1959	Shariff Commission Report on National Education	English acknowledged as the Gateway to Science and modern knowledge. Medium of Instruction to be the mother tongue at the Primary Level till Class 5. Urdu to be taught as a subject from grade 3 onwards and to be the medium of instruction from 6 till secondary and higher education. English to continue as the Medium of Instruction at the University Level	Urdu Medium for Masses and English Medium for elite
1965	Hamood-Ur Rehman Commission Report	Medium of Instruction at Primary levels to be the vernacular.	Urdu Medium for Masses and English Medium for elite
1969	Nur Khan Report	English continues to be the official language in Elite institutions: Civil and Senior Administration and the	Urdu Medium for Masses and English Medium for elite

		medium of instruction in Colleges and Universities	
1970	Education Policy	Education made compulsory till grade 5. All educational institutions to be decentralized	Urdu Medium for Masses and English Medium for elite
1972	Education Policy	Nationalization of all educational institutes	Urdu Medium for Masses and English Medium for elite
1973	New Constitution	English to be replaced by Urdu within 15 years. Autonomy granted to provinces to develop their respective languages	Urdu Medium for Masses and English Medium for elite
1977	Zia-ul-Haq	Islamization and Urduization	By 1989 all exams to be conducted in Urdu, English taught from Grade 4. Private English Medium institutes start growing
1979	National Education Policy		
1989	Benazir Bhutto	English to be taught from Grade 1	Little effective change
1998	New Education Policy	No statement regarding Education Policy	Private English Medium schools flourish
1999	General Musharraf Takes over	English to be taught from Grade 1 onwards	Little Effective change
2007	White Paper	English to be taught from Grade 1 onwards, Science and Math to be taught in English from Grade 6 onwards	In Punjab, Science taught in English from Grade 10
2009	National Education Policy	Science and Math to be taught in English in Grades 4 and 5. Science and Math to be taught in English in all grades from 2014	Punjab declares Science to be taught in English in Grade 4 in April 2009.
2018	National Education Policy Framework	Agreement on multi-lingual policy. English to be taught as the second language.	

### *1.2. An Overview of the Language Policies after the creation of Pakistan “*

The planning of language policy needs to analyze a country's ethnolinguistic, geo-political, and socio-economic situation before drawing up a language plan for its people. In Pakistan there has always been a gap in understanding these aspects as well as the aspirations and language ideologies of the people through a thorough needs assessment” (Aliya Sikander 2017). The following Table gives an overview of the policies in different time periods and their respective implementation. This overview of policies regarding language reflects absolute ambivalence. Nothing seems to have changed over these 72 years. Despite constant pressure from different ethnic groups, Urdu and English continue to be the dominant languages shaping the market for education in Pakistan thus leading to marginalization of indigenous languages. These subsequent Education Policies in terms of language reek of a massive colonial influence.

### *1.3. English; The Language of the Elite*

Social stratification refers to the ranking of the members of a society into different groups based upon their status. The status is further determined by different factors such as occupation, economic resources, education, caste, power and prestige. Social stratification reflects structured inequality amongst these groups. Slavery, Caste and Class are three distinct systems of stratification. Following is the brief description of classes based upon occupations in Pakistan. The lower class in Pakistan is generally characterized by massive

illiteracy, menial jobs, huge family sizes, limited access to education and health facilities. Majority of them live on subsistence farming in rural areas. Their children generally go to either Madrassahs or Govt schools where medium of instruction is strictly Urdu. (Andrabi 2006). The upper middle-class identities are constructed around a range of occupational identities. Professionals such as doctors, engineers, bankers, Bureaucrats, academics are characterized by high level of educational achievements and greater autonomy in decision making. They follow the rule of deferred gratification, hence invest huge amounts on their children's education thus providing them with social and cultural capital that facilitates their upward social mobility. Their children go to State influenced Elite schools and Private Elite English Medium schools which charge exorbitant fees and restrict admission based on social class (Durre Nayyab 2011, Sabeeha Hafeez 1985) The lower middle-income families are generally employed in low paid white collared jobs. They send their children to Private non-elite English Medium schools. Wright Mills defines "elite" as: “economic, political and military circles which as an intricate set of overlapping small but dominant groups share decisions having at least national consequences. In so far as national events are concerned, elites are those who decide them.” As per Mill's definition of elites, Pakistan has seven types of elites. Landlords, Military Elite, Bureaucratic Elites, Elites in Media, Judicial elite, Religious elites and Industrialists. These elites make the upper class of Pakistan (Fida Ur Rehman

2018). Children of this class strictly go the State influenced Elite schools and Private Elite schools which are characterized by well-equipped campuses, well-trained teachers, emphasis on holistic learning, ICT, etc.

#### *1.4. Theoretical Lens*

This paper uses the theoretical perspective of Bourdieu's Theory of Social Justice Approach and Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. Bourdieu's Social Justice approach suggests that the social position of an individual is not just determined by his/her economic capital but also other forms of capital such as cultural, social and symbolic capital. Economic capital can be inherited wealth or family income. Social Capital is derived from social networks, family contacts and interactions in community. Symbolic capital is represented by power, prestige and authority. According to Bourdieu 'the possessors of strong educational capital who have also inherited strong cultural capital enjoy a dual title to cultural nobility, the self-assurance of legitimate membership and the ease given by familiarity'. The concept of habitus which Bourdieu described as the cultural and familial roots also plays a significant part in determining an individual's life chances. 'The habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions. Amartya Sen in *Development as Freedom* presents education in two guises. First, Education implies a set of arrangements and facilities that enables freedom. Secondly, Sen presents education as a causal factor for capability i.e. it influences

individual freedom and functioning. Education which according to Sen is a social arrangement can play a key role in securing and expanding freedoms of individuals. Sen stresses the need for active empowered capabilities which enhance functioning and the freedom to choose the life that one values.

#### **2. Literature Review**

Tamim, (2014) in her paper has used the theoretical lens of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Bourdieu's Critical Theory to explain how the politics of language in Pakistan's education system has resulted in creating social injustice. In her multidisciplinary study which spanned three years, Tamim used qualitative methodology of multiple-case study accounts of 32 participants from Secondary Level students of Private and Government schools. She conducted structured interviews. Her findings revealed that the language policy adopted and implemented by the educational institutes has granted the hegemonic status to English language which has resulted in the devaluation of local languages. This hegemonic status of English impedes the transformative impact of education in expanding opportunities for widening participation thus creating social and economic inequalities. Her paper highlights that there is a serious dearth of research on the political economy of languages chosen to be taught in educational institutes which is one of the major causes of lack of social mobility in Pakistan. (Tariq Rehman 2006) in his book titled "Language and Politics in Pakistan" has discussed in detail the inextricable link

between politics and language. The book presents a sequential narrative of the events that have made the language movements in Pakistan which helps one understand the intricate relation of identity-formation, ethnicity and Language to power. Rehman repeatedly highlights the rift between the Nationalists (advocates of Urdu as National Language and English as the official language) and the ethno-nationalists (advocates of regional languages) who lack a common means of communication because of linguistic differences. Rehman in his book maintains that in Pakistan the language of all domains of power (administration, Judiciary, Military, education, media) continues to be English. He clearly states that Urdu continues to be used in the lower levels of administration, in the media as well as the state schools. He states that the ruling elite of Pakistan which occupies all the important positions of power in the state continue to endorse the status of English as the official language by supporting and using it. Elites are the people who possess power. According to the Classical Theorists, elites are a small minority that take the major decisions of the large majority. Rehman uses the theoretical lens of conflict theories based on the ideas of Marx that language is a strong tool adopted by the powerful elite to maintain their status quo. Rehman highlights that English is the marker of high status, efficiency and intellectual ability. The author uses the term "Linguistic imperialism" for the domination of one language over others. He refers to its use by the elites of power, culture and money in so many domains as to limit the access of speakers of other

languages to positions of power and privilege. This dominant language is then employed to produce knowledge and discourses. (Haroon Jamal and Amir Jaan Khan 2005) highlight an interesting aspect regarding the inequitable distribution of educational opportunities which limit the life chances and hinder upward mobility. The authors posit that with the increasing emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge disparities in the educational opportunities play a pivotal role in widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Large scale exclusion from educational opportunities results in sluggish economic growth and income inequality. The paper has undertaken the appraisal of educational inequalities in Pakistan at the district level. District Education Index (DEI), a composite index comprising of enrollments at various levels and adult literacy rates, has been prepared to measure and summarize the district performance in terms of education. The DEI is linked with the level of districts' economic development to assess the impact of inequitable distribution of educational opportunities. For this purpose, a composite index of economic development (IED) is constructed with various welfare indicators. The authors opine that since the educated workers capture the benefits of economic growth, the poor who lack the resources to avail the educational facilities face the brunt of income inequalities. Education here is used as the intervening variable. It is the returns associated with education that determine the final impact. The findings of the paper show a positive and strong association between economic



development with female literacy rate, a negative relation between education inequality and economic development. (Hywel Coleman 2010) in his article titled “Teaching and Learning in Pakistan: The Role of Language in Education” has undertaken an in-depth analysis of the complex context in which teaching and learning of English language in Pakistan takes place. The author after comparing the characteristics of the different schools in Pakistan, their respective facilities and their learning outcomes, suggests that it is impossible to consider teaching of English Language in vacuum. There are many social, political and economic implications attached. He mentions that by depriving the children the right to learn in their indigenous language, the system is creating a dearth of skilled labor. By emphasizing the learning and teaching of English in schools that are not equipped with the trained teachers, is creating an unnecessary burden on the students, teachers as well as the parents. Teachers who are not trained fail to develop the fondness for learning. They teach English in a ritualized way that promotes a culture of rote learning which does no favor to the students. Parents who themselves lack the knowledge and training of the language find it hard to help and guide their children. Shamaas Gul Khattak 2014 in her paper titled “A Comparative Analysis of the Elite-English Medium Schools, State Urdu-Medium Schools, and Dini-Madaris in Pakistan” explains how multiple streams of schools have created a multiple socio-economic classis. The author explains how the unequal distribution of

educational facilities, differences in social classes, the prevalent cultural norms augment the power hierarchy. The upper class ensures to pass on the cultural and social capital to their children by buying them the services of Elite English Medium Schools. Whereas the economic conditions of the lower middle-income group and poor classes leave them with little choice but to send their children to the Urdu Medium and private low-cost schools where the learning outcomes are deplorable. This apartheid system of Education aggravates the problem of inequality in Pakistan.

### **3. Analysis and Discussion**

The educational system in Pakistan is highly stratified. Categories of schools differ from each other in terms of their physical conditions, curricula, pedagogical methods, and their inherent ethos. On one side there are State and Private elite English Medium schools that are equipped to enable their students to learn western forms of knowledge, improve their language and competency skills which helps them in the competitive examinations such as SATs, GRE’s, TOEFL. These schools fortify Western culture thus giving further legitimacy to the hegemonic status of Western knowledge. Modern knowledge with huge emphasis on communication skills and proficiency in English Language attract premium in the job market. The organizational policies of the state and private English Medium Elite schools are ingrained in dominant class interests and job market. The students who are brought up with a certain class-consciousness are trained to keep pace with the changing trends and needs of

globalization and capitalism. The graduates of these schools generally qualify for admissions in the best higher educational institutes and ultimately secure strong positions in the job market. Income disparities in the society are furthered because of these elite schools (Malik 2012). The cultural cocoons established according to the lines of class are preserved in the career sphere as well, the students from elite schools being accepted in elite work spaces which are exclusionary to other social classes via eligibility criteria that informally and implicitly includes Western demeanor, cultural capital and forms of social expression; this is usually secured via making spoken English a prerequisite for eligibility, which swiftly filters out majority of the other social classes. Private high-end companies, especially local branches of multinational companies MNCs are widely known to have this cultural environment, where for example even an engineer is primarily required to have an articulate English expression; in addition to these companies sanctifying and creating an extended culture of Western celebrations, jargon, and social interaction. Even if non-elites make it to these workspaces on the basis of merit, they quickly fall prey to the Westernized culture spaces that alienate them on the basis of class and disposition, a primary indicator of which is spoken English. Here it is also important to mention English language and spoken English as different forms of cultural capital, as it is the latter that is usually fortified in the upper-end schools and is a major barrier to social mobility for talented middle-class

or lower-class students. This is one reason why spoken English is religiously emphasized on in high-end schools, with even parents shifting to English while speaking with children, breeding a confounding mix of young elite Pakistanis with American accents, broken Urdu and minimal understanding of their respective regional language. Financially able parents can read English bedtime stories to their children, being from better economic classes and thus having greater time to devote to their children than working-class parents who neither have the time, English language comprehension, or even money to buy their children additional books in English language to enhance their language skills (even if they can somehow afford an English medium education). If a lower-class student learns good English on his/her own despite having teachers not qualified in spoken English, he/she would still have unreasonable barriers in perfecting spoken English, one factor of which is continued exposure to a different language at home which constitutes all of his/her primary socialization. This gives rise to an unaddressed identity dilemma as well, where they are now beyond the social or intellectual comprehensive ability of their (formally) largely uneducated parents, or in other words, are too educated for their own parents, but are still much less educated in the eyes of the world. They also remain unable to acquire the cultural capital that stems from spoken English, that includes English songs, movies, television series and so on that are so often the gateway to career “networking” and elite social spaces. A very profound yet saddening

account by a NOP scholar at LUMS sums up this dilemma of being toppers in their former schools and yet “not [being] able to sit in a group (at LUMS) if you haven’t watched a particular English series.” Ahmad Riaz Lodhi writes, “in order to gain entry into the elite gangs, you have to become what you are not and this mostly ends up badly for the aspirants since they lack the means to sustain their charades for long and even if they arrange the finances, where are they going to get the cultural capital from?” This particular scholar got so disillusioned by the alienating culture of his university, that he dropped out despite being fully sponsored, and took admission in a low-end engineering college instead just to exist in a more egalitarian space. The reason mentioning this cultural capital is necessary because a lot of it is propped up on spoken English and Western culture as its foundation. These differences are also seen in a Matriculation versus Cambridge education, the latter being preferred by parents of financial means not just for education quality, but also for the emphasis on English language. These differences are again cemented in career spaces, where two students from (for example) engineering background with same technical expertise will be treated differently according to their English acumen. The one from a better school with majority Cambridge education background students will on average have a higher chance at managerial positions. Similarly, the strong English background consolidates the competence of high-end schooled students in the arena of foreign education, where most scholarships decide in large

part on a well-articulated statement of purpose, written creatively in English language and interviews conducted in English language; a skill largely untaught to students from average schools with matriculation backgrounds. Additionally, even standardized tests like SAT, GRE place disproportionate importance on English comprehension, which again gives edge to high-end schooled students. It is commonly said in a rather ironic vein that students from average schools and matriculation background preparing for MCAT have to additionally rote-learn the word lists required for the verbal section, something they are not taught in their respective schools. These barriers are twice cemented for students from other provinces in Pakistan, as they not only have to learn English for higher-level competition, but also have to learn Urdu (being a mandatory subject, and also means of inter-regional communication) as it is equally foreign to them. Private Non elite English Medium schools that have mushroomed in a huge number to meet the excess demand for English medium education are not fully equipped with trained teachers, modern curricula and physical conditions to compete with their elite counterparts. State schools and Dini Madrassahs are underequipped in every respect. Their organizational habitus reinforces the student’s beliefs that they are lower in class as compared to the elite English medium counterparts. The teachers consider themselves incompetent and hold the students in low esteem as well that establishes a so-called meritocratic façade to cover for socio-economic injustices.

Like capitalistic generational wealth, it is rather a cyclical trap of almost a deliberate hoarding of educational and cultural capital that is inter-generationally inherited and passed on by families of financial means, with no intent or incentive to democratize it across social classes- being the primary means of their own positive distinction and social mobility. Fraser highlighted three dimensions of Social Justice i.e. redistribution, recognition and participation. The last dimension would lead the argument from here onwards. Does education enhance the ability of participation of the marginalized segment in Pakistan? In participatory interaction, language plays a pivotal role. As is already mentioned that the school system in Pakistan is highly stratified. These hierarchically structured social spaces which are meant to educate the masses are loaded with the issue of power capital. These spaces create hierarchies of knowledge and values that lead to further exclusion of the dominated lot. Students of the State Urdu Medium schools and madrassahs are handicapped because the language that they learn i.e. Urdu is devalued when they are compared to their counterparts from Elite and Non-Elite English Medium schools. Usage of Urdu is equated with incivility and backwardness in elite and high-end social spaces. Even for low-end or average jobs in service sector, English has come to play a huge role. So for example in jobs like communication or average jobs like call representative, receptionist etc. increasingly require candidates to have English proficiency to increase their brand name, which gives an edge to

students from middle/lower-end English medium schools and doubly disadvantages the Urdu medium students. Since the low-income families send their children to the state schools and madrassahs, they cannot afford to pay for extra tuitions and training in language proficiency. Ambitious lower-class families at most can afford vocational training or technical education like that in computers, but even that consolidates their distance from elite spaces and high-end career opportunities.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The inequitable distribution of the access to teaching and learning of English language has led to the creation of differential distribution of this linguistic capital, which in turn has given birth to language based discriminatory practices in educational institutes especially primary and secondary schools. This discrimination limits the access of higher education to a limited segment of the population thus ostracizing and silencing the rest. Language hierarchy further limits the access of careers of choice leading to further marginalization. These conclusions are rooted in economic capital and play a significant role in the process of generating social inequalities. The highly polarized educational structure of Pakistan with unnecessary reliance on English language breeds and perpetuates capitalism. The situation cannot be fixed unless there is a serious realization to overhaul the existing education system and policies with the aim to provide the opportunities for a larger segment of population for social mobility. This, however, cannot happen without

political will existing unifiedly at the highest levels. Natural opposition to this by societal elites would instinctively exist, as it would introduce greater prospective competition for their children in the educational and career realm and take away a major indicator of distinctive social superiority that has been existing since British colonialism.

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