

METHODS OF TRANSLATING CULTURE-SPECIFIC LEXICAL ITEMS

МЕТОДИ ПЕРЕКЛАДУ ЛЕКСИЧНИХ ОДИНИЦЬ,
ЩО ВІДОБРАЖАЮТЬ КУЛЬТУРНУ СПЕЦИФІКУ

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Interactions between different cultures can often result in misunderstandings because every linguistic or national group has its own unique customs, value systems, and ways of classifying the world, which may differ greatly. Cultural differences create significant obstacles for individuals who mediate between cultures, particularly translators. Based on this idea, the authors argue that translation is an act of cross-cultural communication that enables engagement between various cultures.

Interlingual translation facilitates communication across linguistic divides, but it also requires overcoming cultural disparities inherent in language. The study investigates the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) selected from the Ukrainian version of the novel "Музей покинутих секретів" by Oksana Zabuzhko and its English translation "The Museum of Abandoned Secrets". Employing a qualitative methodology, the researchers focus on identifying culture-specific items and assessing the translator Nina Shevchuk-Murray's strategies used to convey the cultural essence of the original text to an English-speaking audience. The analysis reveals a range of the employed translation methods, including transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, componential analysis, synonymy, through-translation, shifts, modulation, compensation, recognized translation, and paraphrase.

The research conclusions emphasize that the translator's choices are influenced by various linguistic, contextual, and cultural factors. Key considerations include the nature of the source text, the expectations of the target language recipients, and the necessity of preserving the cultural integrity of the novel while ensuring that the translation remains accessible for the target reader.

The findings suggest that the translation of culture-specific items is a process that requires taking into account fidelity to the original work along with the need for clarity in the target language. The results of comparative analysis of the source and target texts prompt the authors of the article to highlight the complexities inherent in translating culture-specific items and the significance of contextual meanings and social connotations.

Key words: culture-specific item, translation, culture, translation method, source language, target language.

Взаємодія між різними культурами часто призводить до непорозумінь, оскільки кожна мовна чи національна спільнота має свої унікальні звичаї, системи цінностей та способи класифікації світу, які можуть значно відрізнятися. Культурні відмінності становлять суттєві труднощі для тих, хто виступає посередниками між культурами, зокрема для перекладачів. Виходячи з цієї ідеї, автори статті зауважують, що переклад є актом міжкультурної комунікації, який сприяє взаємодії між різними культурами.

Міжмовний переклад сприяє комунікації крізь мовні бар'єри, але він також вимагає подолання культурних відмінностей, притаманних мові. У дослідженні проаналізовано переклад одиниць, що відображають культурну специфіку, відібраних з українського тексту роману Оксани Забужко «Музей покинутих секретів» та його англійського перекладу «The Museum of Abandoned Secrets». Послугуючись методологією якісного аналізу, автори зосереджуються на виявленні культурно-специфічних елементів та оцінці стратегій, вжитих перекладачкою Ніною Шевчук-Мюррей у процесі відтворення культурної сутності оригінального тексту для англійськомовної аудиторії. Аналіз виявив низку використаних перекладачкою методів перекладу, серед яких трансференція, натуралізація, культурний еквівалент, функціональний еквівалент, описовий еквівалент, компонентний аналіз, синонімія, калькування, транспозиція, модуляція, компенсація, визнаний переклад та перефразування.

Висновки дослідження свідчать, що вибір перекладача залежить від різних лінгвістичних, контекстуальних і культурних чинників. Серед основних факторів – характер вихідного тексту, очікування реципієнтів цільової мови, а також необхідність збереження культурної цілісності роману і водночас забезпечення доступності перекладу для цільової аудиторії.

Отримані результати свідчать про те, що переклад культурно-специфічних елементів є процесом, який вимагає врахування вірності оригіналу поряд з необхідністю забезпечення зрозумілості перекладу цільовою мовою. Результати порівняльного аналізу текстів оригіналу та перекладу дали змогу авторам статті звернути увагу на складнощі, притаманні перекладу лексичних одиниць, що відображають культурну специфіку, а також на важливість контекстуальних значень та соціальних конотацій.

Ключові слова: одиниці, що відображають культурну специфіку, переклад, культура, метод перекладу, вихідна мова, цільова мова.

Problem statement. In today's globalized world with rapidly developing international relations, people are expected to engage not only within their own countries and cultures but also on an international and intercultural level. As a result, such interactions with unfamiliar and foreign cultures have become an inevitable part of modern life. These cultural encounters sometimes lead to misunderstandings since each linguistic or national community possesses its own set of habits, value systems, and classification methods, some of which may differ significantly or occasionally overlap. While cultural similarities rarely cause issues, the differences present considerable challenges for those who bridge these cultural divides, i.e., for translators. From this starting point, the authors of the article infer that translation is a cross-cultural communicative act that facilitates interaction between diverse cultures.

Review of the previous publications on the issue.

Discussing the intertwined nature of language and culture in translation, scholars like Susan Bassnett and Eugene Nida have emphasized that translation is not merely about converting words from one language to another but about transmitting cultural contexts as well. According to Susan Bassnett, language is inherently cultural as it reflects the way people of a particular community perceive and interact with the world around them. Therefore, translation is complicated by the fact that it must bridge not only linguistic gaps but also cultural ones [6].

Having developed the theory of dynamic equivalence, Eugene Nida supports the view that effective translation, especially in cases involving texts with a rich cultural context (like religious or literary texts), depends on the translator's focus not just on the literal meaning but also on achieving equivalence in the cultural understanding of the target audience. According to the scholar, successful translation means rendering the same effect or meaning that the source text would have on its original audience, which is impossible without an awareness of cultural factors [17, 106].

In cross-linguistic communication, as O.S. Palchevska notes, interlingual translation is essential for enabling interactions between speakers of different languages [14, 74]. However, the linguist points out that communication between people from different linguistic backgrounds is not just about translating words, but rather overcoming the cultural disparities rooted in these words. Culture-bound concepts including lexemes, idioms, proverbs, and metaphors are often associated with certain socio-historical and cultural contexts of the source language, which presents significant challenges for translators.

As every language carries its own linguistic "genius", the unique syntactic structures, discourse markers, and word-building capacities of one language are often shaped by the cultural environment from which it emerged. This implies that translators must be aware of both the linguistic features and the cultural focus of the source language in order to ensure that the translation respects these distinct characteristics along with making the text understandable for the target audience. This also means recognizing situations of "cultural overlap" [9, 23] and addressing gaps caused by cultural distance by means of various translation strategies, such as adaptation, cultural substitution, annotation, etc.

Thus, translation is not only an act of linguistic transfer but also one of cultural transmission. The translator should facilitate understanding offering a "cultural lens" that allows the target audience to access and appreciate the cultural elements in the source language. Vermeer's Skopos theory adds that the purpose of the translation (the "skopos") guides the translator's choices, focusing on the need to consider the cultural context of both source and target languages to achieve the intended communicative effect [15, 44].

Cultural translation is widely recognized as one of the most challenging aspects of translation. Without a solid understanding of the source language culture, the translator will inevitably face difficulties while conveying the full meaning of the cultural elements ingrained in the original text. Limon understands cultural translation as a process in which the content is adapted to fit the target culture, introducing information that may not be linguistically explicit in the original text. In other words, the translator should be a cultural mediator and account for cultural differences while preserving the core meaning of the message [11].

According to Larson, it is not merely language that is being translated, but culture itself. He notes that "Language is a part of culture and, therefore, translation from one language to another cannot be done adequately without a knowledge of the two cultures as well as the two languages structure" [16, 1890]. The above-mentioned proves the intricate relationship between language and culture, as well as the complexity of translating between different cultural frameworks, such as English and Ukrainian.

P. Newmark also addresses the translator's role in interpreting cultural elements. The scholar suggests that the challenge lies in deciding how much explanation is needed for the target audience. He believes that the translator's explanation of cultural references can range from minimal hints to full explanations, depending on the level of cultural overlap between

the source and target languages [12]. For instance, the translation of English idiomatic expressions like “raining cats and dogs” into Ukrainian requires adaptation or additional context to convey the intended meaning to Ukrainian recipients.

Scholars introduce the concept of cultural untranslatability or even null translatability, which occurs when a culturally significant feature in the source language is entirely absent in the target culture. This notion can be illustrated by the difficulty of translating English cultural references like “Thanksgiving dinner” into Ukrainian, as this concept has no direct cultural equivalent in Ukraine. As Susan Bassnett explains, cultural concepts that are specific to one culture may be alien or awkward when translated into another leading to the impossibility of full cultural transference. The linguist further notes that “a text is produced in one context and is then transposed into another context for another readership with a different history and different expectations. What this means is that there is always going to be a discrepancy between the reception of a text in the source context and its reception in the target system” [6, 85].

Discussing translation loss, Eugene Nida points out that since no two languages are identical in either the meanings assigned to symbols or their syntactic arrangements, complete equivalence in translation is unattainable [16]. The overall impact of a translation may closely mirror the original text, but there will always be some degree of loss in detail. This idea is also supported by many linguists who argue that perfect cross-cultural communication is an elusive goal and some loss is inevitable in the translation process, thus, the translator’s task is to minimize this loss as much as possible.

The objective of the research is to explore and analyze the methods of translating culture-specific items.

Research material and methodology. A qualitative research methodology was employed to examine the translation of culturally bound vocabulary, based on the novel “Музей покинутих секретів” by Oksana Zabuzhko and its English translation “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets” performed by Nina Shevchuk-Murray as the primary material. The methodology followed several key steps, including data collection, text analysis, comparative analysis, and evaluation.

The research commenced with the collection of data from the Ukrainian text in Oksana Zabuzhko’s novel, with a focus on identifying instances of realia. These culturally bound elements were then compared with their corresponding translations in Nina Shevchuk-Murray’s English version. Both the source

and target texts were analyzed in depth to determine and evaluate the translator’s strategies for rendering these culturally specific items. Special attention was given to linguistic and contextual factors influencing the translator’s choices.

Subsequently, a comparative analysis was conducted to assess the degree to which contextual meanings and social connotations were preserved or adapted in the translation. This phase of the research revealed specific cases where controversial translation strategies were employed in realia translation. The evaluation of these approaches shed light onto their impact on the representation of cultural flavour and the overall intelligibility of the target text. In addition, the researchers tried to explore the rationale behind the translator’s decisions, taking into account such factors as the nature of the original text, the target audience’s expectations, the intended effect of the translation, and the cultural aspects saturating the source material.

Results and discussion. Scholarly discussions surrounding the translation of lexical units bearing cultural significance revealed different approaches to the issue. Moreover, linguists use different terms to describe this concept and provide slightly varied definitions. Some scholars prefer the terms “culturemes” [1], “cultural-specific terms” [4], “culturally specific items” [7], while others use “cultural words” [13] or refer to “culture-bound phenomena/concepts” [5]. Additionally, terms such as “realia” [2; 3] and “non-equivalent lexis” [10] are widely recognized. In this study, the term “culture-specific item” and its abbreviation “CSI” will be adopted by the authors as the primary terms although synonyms may be used to avoid tautology.

Turning to the notion of the culture-specific items, it is important to outline their distinctions or similarities, which vary among scholars. For instance, Mona Baker defines CSIs as source-language words that express ideas entirely unfamiliar to the target culture [5, 21]. Such concepts can pertain to religion, social customs, or specific food items. Gudavičius explains that non-equivalent lexis refers to cultural notions that lack counterparts in other languages, primarily because those cultures do not have such concepts or objects in their everyday lives [8, 94]. The linguist states that they are crucial for understanding both material and spiritual culture, thus categorizing them into material and spiritual groups.

Although numerous scholars have explored the translation of CSIs, some have refrained from defining the concept of cultural realia, such as Peter Newmark. He mentions cultural words but does not focus on their essence. Nevertheless, the linguist has

elaborated the taxonomy of CSIs, which can serve as a practical reference for translators. He categorizes cultural items into five groups: 1) ecology; 2) material culture; 3) social culture; 4) organizations, customs, ideas; and 5) gestures and habits [12, 95].

As to the translation of CSIs, Peter Newmark outlines several procedures that address different linguistic and cultural challenges, each offering distinct methods to handle specific translation tasks [12, 82–91]. Having analyzed the material under study, the following translation methods have been singled out:

Transference is a method of transferring a word from the source language (SL) directly into the target language (TL), often through transliteration or transcription. This method is usually employed to translate personal names (Kostyantyn Ostroz'ky, Vlada, Daryna Goshchynska), names of geographic notions (Kyiv, Poltava, Khreshchatyk), historical and political events (Holodomor), which do not have a recognized or fixed international nomination. In addition, transference is applied to the CSIs denoting dishes of national cuisine, etc.: “...на геть безпотрібний особистий спогад, от так собі, навмання переказаний дітям мамою-дядиною-тіткою (жінки пам'ятливіші!) за в'язанням рукавичок чи ліпленням **вареників**” [18] – “... a shred of an utterly irrelevant personal memory, something that Mom, or an aunt, or an uncle's sister-in-law (women are better memory keepers) mentioned while knitting mittens or stuffing **varenyki** [19]”. The CSI “varenyki” is specific to Ukrainian cuisine and carries cultural significance; therefore, the translator has chosen to use its transcribed form in the target text.

Naturalization is used to adapt a SL word to fit the pronunciation and morphology of the TL, which makes it more natural within the language, for instance: “Такі однакові, як уніформа, хутряні куби-вушанки? **“Пижиків”**, еге ж, ось як це звалось, – по-армійському вишикувані лави мовчазно чорніючих **“пижиків”** на трибуні Мавзолею 7-го листопада ...” [18] – “Those identical furry cubes with earflaps, same for all, like a uniform. **Pyzhyk**. That's what the fur was called, that's right, herds of silently black **pyzhyks** lined up in military precision on the terrace of Lenin's Mausoleum on the 7th of November” [19]. Since the ST contains the author's explanation of the culturally-bound unit, the translator's choice to use naturalization in this instance serves to maintain the cultural specificity and significance of the term while making it grammatically compatible with the TL (plural inflexion -s). Thus, the translator uses this method to enhance the text authenticity and connection to the source culture.

Cultural equivalent replaces a cultural term from the SL with a similar one from the TL, for instance: «...новоспечений **кандидат наук** із дисертацією на потрібну тему, властиво, скромна собі шістьорка». [18] – “...a newly-minted **PhD** with a suitably themed dissertation, a humble nut in a great machine really...” [19]. In this case, “кандидат наук” is a scholarly degree in the Ukrainian education system, which is roughly equivalent to the Western “PhD”. However, as Newmark points out, cultural equivalents are not always completely accurate, since there can be differences in the qualifications or cultural perceptions of these terms.

The **functional equivalent** method uses a TL vocabulary unit with a similar function but without cultural connotations, focusing on its neutral meaning, for example: “І навіть те, що цей хлопець назвався внуком **упівської боївкарки**, жінки, чий образ не відпускав мене, відколи я вперше вгледіла її на паршивенькому архівному знімку...” [18] – “Nor did it matter much that this boy introduced himself as the grandnephew of the **Insurgent Army warrior**, the woman who has gripped my imagination from the instant I saw her image on a faded archival shot” [19]. “Упівська боївкарка” refers to a female fighter in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), a group with strong cultural and historical significance in Ukraine. However, this item carries cultural connotations tied to Ukraine's history and identity, which may not be clear to readers of the target language. In the target text, the phrase “Insurgent Army warrior” is used as a functional equivalent. It neutralizes the political or cultural associations focusing on the function (i.e., being part of a military or combat force) without embedding it in its original cultural or historical context.

Descriptive equivalent avoids direct translation and explains the meaning of a culture-specific item from the SL using a more detailed description in the TL, for example: “...між дядьків на **Бессарабці**, і тільки очі, незворушно-темні, набрякли все знаттям, тяжіли на ньому, немов не вмщаючись, і здавалось, він от-от знову зверне їх на мене” [18]. – “... in the faces of the men at the **Besarabsky Market** – was already looking at something else” [19]. Thus, “Бессарабка” denotes the Besarabsky Market in Kyiv, which carries specific local imagery and cultural significance. Using a descriptive equivalent with the added lexeme “market”, the translator ensures that the meaning of the cultural term is accessible to the TL reader, though some of the specific local flavor may be lost.

Componential analysis involves comparing an SL word with a TL word that carries a related meaning, highlighting both shared and differing semantic components to achieve a more precise translation. According to Newmark, this approach presupposes analyzing a SL word alongside its TL counterpart that shares a similar meaning, even if they are not direct equivalents. This process begins by identifying their shared semantic features and then highlighting their differences. Typically, the SL word conveys a more precise meaning than the TL term, necessitating the addition of one or two sense components from the TL to achieve a more accurate representation of the original meaning, for example: "...ні на що не придатна, ні до чого не дотична, приміром, згадка, що славетний небіжчик незадовго до смерті прохав **грушевого узвару**" [18]. – "A useless, random recollection that, say, shortly before his death the now-famous ancestor asked for **pear compote**" [19]. The first components "грушевий" and "pear" share semantic features in both SL and TL texts. However, the component "узвар" in the given CSI refers to a traditional Ukrainian beverage, a sweet liquid dish made from dried fruits and berries cooked in water, which bears cultural connotations related to Ukrainian cuisine and traditions. In the TL, the component "compote" does not carry the same cultural significance as "узвар", which leads to a certain loss of cultural context.

Synonymy involves choosing a near-equivalent term in the TL, where conciseness is prioritized over complete accuracy, for instance: "...ніби не з підземної **криївки** вилізла на світ, а вбралася панночка для виїзду на полювання в родовому маєтку і десь за спиною ховала англійського стека" [18] – "it wasn't as if she had just climbed out of an underground **lair** but was simply dressed for a hunt across her family's lands..." [19]. The unit "криївка" denotes an underground hideout, often associated with concealment and secrecy. It has specific historical and cultural connotations, particularly relating to Ukrainian history. The translator prefers brevity and fluidity in the TL, opting for "lair" rather than a more descriptive translation correspondence. It evokes a similar aspect of secrecy but avoids explicit historical reference.

Through-translation, also known as calque or loan translation, refers to the literal translation of common collocations, names of organizations, or compound terms, for example: "– правдива канадська посилка, і навіть не квітчаста хустка, якими чомусь діаспора тоді **"Старий Край"** непомірно щедро затарювала, а – джинси, мамцю ріднесенька..." [18] – "A real Canadian

*box containing no flower-rimmed, square shawl that the diaspora insisted on supplying in great numbers to the **Old Country** but jeans – sweet Jesus!* [19].

Shifts or transpositions entail altering the grammatical structure from the SL to the TL, such as converting singular to plural, adapting to the absence of certain structures in the TL, changing SL verbs into TL nouns, or transforming SL noun groups into TL nouns, etc. In the following context, the transposition of elements has been applied in rendering the CSI: "я мимрила, шулячись і ховаючи очі: **"Інвалід І-ї групи"**, – і коли сідала на місце, мені довго це здавалося, буцімто клас перешиптується й перехихикується за моєю спиною" [18]. – "I would squirm and mutter, eyes down, **"Group-one disability,"** and sit down, hearing, I thought, the class whisper and giggle behind my back" [19].

Modulation involves rephrasing the original message in a way that aligns with TL norms, especially when the SL and TL differ in terms of viewpoint, for example: "Це мій **стриєчний дід**, представляєш ти з ноткою мимовільної врочистості, чи то мені тільки вчувається, я подумки перекладаю: **стриєчний** – значить, брат діда по батькові..." [18] – "Here's my **paternal great-uncle**," you introduce with a note of involuntary solemnity, or perhaps it just sounds solemn to me, and I define silently: **Paternal great-uncle** means the brother of your paternal grandfather" [19]. Here, modulation is applied to adapt the explanation of the familial relationship in a way so that English readers would understand the concept.

Compensation involves balancing the loss of meaning in one segment of a sentence by enhancing meaning in another part, for example: "...і так воно все пухло й пухло роками, як снігова, чи паперова, лавина, наче в дитячій фольклорній пісеньці, де приспів нарощує рядок за рядком, поступово роздуваючись до грізної, космічної слави, непід'ємності, а та **кура-щебетура**, а та **гуся-сюся-сюся**, а той **індик-диндик-диндик**, а те **теля-хвостомеля**, – з кожним рядком звір прибавляє на тілі, мультиплікаційно збільшуючись, **до вола, до коня**, і так можна дійти й до тиранозавра, і тиранозаври приїзять – на машині з червоним хрестом, у білих халатах, якого хріна, що він хотів довести? [18] – The case dragged on for years, gathering speed and mass like a paper avalanche, like the nursery rhyme in which every chorus adds a line, growing into a menacing, galactic force – **the rat ate the malt, the cat killed the rat, the dog chased the cat, the cow tossed the dog** – and the creatures grow new crumpled horns at every turn, and new ones pop up, cartoon-like,

bigger and bigger – the cow, the milkmaid, the man, the priest, all the way to a dinosaur, a T. rex – a whole crew of them that one day comes rolling in an ambulance, wearing white coats, what the fuck, what did you want to prove? [19]. The source text reveals a rich cultural reference to a Ukrainian children's folk song with playful, repetitive imagery and rhyme. It creates a whimsical, folk-like atmosphere with a gradual buildup of surreal creatures, reaching a comically grandiose scale. Since the English audience may not fully grasp the specific cultural aspects of the Ukrainian folk song, the translator compensates by replacing the specific folk references with a similar English nursery rhyme, "The rat ate the malt, the cat killed the rat...", which represents the same cumulative, escalating rhythm and whimsicality preserving the intended humor and absurdity.

Recognized translation uses an established or generally accepted translation of institutional terms, for example, "хрущовська реабілітація" (a period in the Soviet Union following Stalin's death, during which repression was eased, and political prisoners were released or posthumously rehabilitated) has an established international equivalent "Khrushchev thaw": "Під час **хрущовської реабілітації** розстріляним у тюрмах НКВД ліпили були в довідках для родичів, у графі "Причина смерті", найвигадливіші медичні діагнози – серцево-судинні, ниркові та всілякі інші недостатності, – власне на те, щоб не зосталося розстрільної цифри" [18]. – "During the **Khrushchev thaw**, officials who issued belated death certificates to the families of those executed in the NKVD prisons came up with all kinds of diseases to fill in the "cause of death" field – thus erasing zeros from the number of executions" [19]. The use of the calque "Khrushchev rehabilitation" in translation would lead to the loss of cultural resonance and accuracy.

"Chernobyl" is the internationally recognized name of the site associated with the 1986 nuclear disaster since it has been transcribed from its Russian version. It is widely used in English-language media, literature, and academic discussions, for example: "...в **чорнобильську** передачу малюнок не пішов, не вписався, я хотіла витримати там максимально лаконічний стиль, жорсткий і суворий, без слинення, без розвезькування шмарклів" [18]. –

"The picture didn't make it into the **Chernobyl** show (I remember I wanted to keep the program austere, somber, inexorable, no sentiments, no snivels)" [19]. The use of this TL unit instead of the transcribed or transliterated Ukrainian equivalent helps the reader to identify the subject matter without any additional context, as this spelling has become the epitome of the disaster. Thus, in this case, the translator aimed for accessibility and understanding for an English-speaking audience, who may be more accustomed to the recognized anglicized form of the proper name, sacrificing its contemporary transcribed correspondence "Chornobyl".

Paraphrase provides a more detailed explanation of culture-bound terms, expanding beyond the brief description offered by the descriptive equivalent method, for example: "...перші твої лівайси, й до них джинсова-таки сорочка, а в **чековому магазині** батьки купили тобі справжні адідасівські кросовки й адідасівську сумку-черезплічника, і ти в такому вигляді ходив до школи" [18] – "...your very first Levi's, and a denim shirt to go along, and then in the **foreign-currency-only Beryozka store** your parents bought you real Adidas sneakers and an Adidas backpack, and that's how you arrived at school, every day" [19]. The literal translation "check store" would not make sense to an audience unfamiliar with Soviet history and its economic practices. Therefore, the translator expands on the meaning, describing it as a "foreign-currency-only Beryozka store".

Conclusion. Translating CSIs between English and Ukrainian involves the translator's dealing with a complex interplay of linguistic and cultural differences. A detailed analysis of the text has revealed the diverse strategies employed by the translator to convey the cultural essence of the original work to English-speaking recipients. The study identifies several key translation techniques used for rendering CSIs, including transference, naturalization, cultural equivalence, functional equivalence, descriptive equivalence, compensation, modulation, recognized translation, paraphrase, etc. The researchers come to the conclusion that in many cases, the translator's choices were influenced by linguistic, contextual, and cultural factors. The translator also aimed at preserving cultural identity of the SL text along with meeting the expectations of the target audience.

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