RENDERING LEXICAL UNITS WITH CULTURAL REFERENCE IN THE NARRATIVE "OBELISK" BY V. BYKOV FROM BELARUSIAN INTO RUSSIAN

Передача лексических единиц с культурным компонентом в повести В. Быкова «Обелиск» с белорусского языка на русский

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ABSTRACT

Rendering lexical units with cultural reference plays an important role in retaining cultural colouring of the original literary work in translation, thus making cross-cultural communication through translating fiction possible in the contemporary global environment. Adequate means of rendering realias as culturally marked lexical units are the focus of attention in this article. The term "realia" is introduced, a categorization system for realias is presented, means of rendering Belarusian realias in the narrative "Obelisk" by Vasil Bykov are analyzed, and correlation between the nature of realia and the means of rendering it in the Russian language is proved. Continuous sampling, as well as statistical, parametric, descriptive-comparative and contextual analysis methods were used to achieve the research goals.

Keywords: cultural reference, realia, categories of realias, means of rendering realias, adequacy of translation, V. Bykov

РЕЗЮМЕ

Передача лексических единиц с культурным компонентом играет важную роль в сохранении национально-культурного колорита оригинального литературного произведения в переводе, что обеспечивает межкультурную коммуникацию посредством художественного перевода в современных условиях глобального мира. В статье рассматриваются вопросы адекватной передачи реалий как культурно маркированных лексических единиц. Вводится термин «реалия», предлагается система категоризации реалий, анализируются приемы передачи белорусских реалий в переводе повести Василя Быкова «Обелиск» на русский язык, доказывается корреляция между характером реалии и приемом ее передачи. Для достижения целей исследования использован комплекс методов, включающий метод сплошной выборки, статистический, параметрический, а также описательно-сравнительный методы и метод контекстуального анализа.

Ключевые слова: культурный компонент, реалия, категории реалий, приемы передачи реалий, адекватность перевода, В. Быков

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary European and global environment, the translator of fiction as a socio-cultural mediator plays a primary role in preserving cultural diversity by ensuring adequate quality of translation of literary works while giving due regard to the socio-cultural context. Rendering lexical units with cultural reference in translation plays a crucial role in solving this problem; and the success of cross-cultural communication through fiction depends on the adequate adaptation of the original text to the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the language into which it is translated. Preserving the socio-cultural background of the original text without damaging the integrity and artistic value of the literary text in translation becomes one of the most important tasks of the translator.

Rendering the lexicon associated with cultural references into another language is one of the essential challenges the translator faces. In many cases, they are references with a high degree of cultural identity, rooted in culture, which cause difficulties for translators regarding the choice of linguistic means in the translation language or conveying adequate cultural coloring. For this goal to be achieved when translating Belarusian literary works into other languages, pre-translation analysis of the original should cover, among other things, lexical units with cultural reference. In the article, we focus on such units from the story "Obelisk" written by the Belarusian writer Vasil Bykov (Быкаў 2006) and its translation into Russian (Быков 2015).

The material under study includes lexical units with a cultural component in semantics. The latter have attracted the attention of many researchers for they reveal the interrelationship of language and culture, and an adequate interpretation of their cultural components may help bridge the gap between cultures in cross-cultural dialogue. Such units have been analyzed within a number of studies, ranging from lexicology and linguacultural studies to translation theory, text linguistics, pragmatics, culture studies, and theory of intercultural communication. They are also the object of research in comparative linguistics, ethno-linguistics and partly even in methods of foreign languages teaching.

The term "cultural reference" has not been defined completely yet for there are various schools dealing with researching the culture related peculiarities of lexicon. In recent literature we may come across such terms as "realia" (Leppihalme 2011), "culture-specific items" (Aixelá 1996), "names of specific cultural referents" (Mayoral 1999/2000), "culture bound words" (Newmark 1988), etc.

In our work, we deal with such research areas as theory of translation and linguacultural studies and we operate with such terms as "realia" (реалия) (Влахов, Флорин 1980) and "non-equivalent lexical units" (безэквивалентная лексика) (Миньяр-Белоручев 1999), "connotative lexical units" (коннотативная лексика), "background lexical units" (фоновая лексика) (Томахин 1980; Верещагин, Костомаров 2005).

The relevance of this research can be illustrated by the fact that Vasil Bykov is one of the most important figures in Belarusian literature and yet is still little known in the rest of the world, mostly due to the lack of translations of literary works from the Belarusian language. The subject matter of his works lies within the spectrum of the problems related to World War II and the postwar period in Belarus, one of the Soviet republics. The characters of his narratives are typically common people, not celebrities

or heroes. Their day-to-day life is outlined by the conditions and circumstances of the epoch and local socio-cultural environment. In order to create the atmosphere of the stories and convey it to the reader, the author makes use of lexical units with cultural reference that always prove problematic when translated into other languages, even into closely-related ones. Moreover, the greater the degree of cultural specificity, the greater the degree of interference of the translator (Sokolova, Guzmán Tirado 2016).

As mentioned above, the narrative we have chosen for our analysis was written by Vasil Bykov as well as its translation from Belarusian into Russian. While translating his own literary works he presumably preserved the peculiarities of his style as well as minimized inevitable losses in conveying historical coloring of the cultural context, thus saving a certain pragmatic effect of the original text for the reader of the translated text.

METHODOLOGY

The research was structured into three main phases. Firstly, we aimed at searching and compiling the lexicon with cultural reference in the text under analysis. Secondly, having studied several classifications of culturally marked lexical units, we adapted the classifications by S. Vlakhov and S. Florin (Влахов, Флорин 1980), G. Tomakhin (Томахин 1980) and E. Vereschagin and V. Kostomarov (Верещагин, Костомаров 2005) to determine the categories, groups and subgroups of the collected material. Thirdly, the means of translation of cultural references from the Belarusian language into Russian were identified.

The research methodology was represented by continuous sampling method, quantitative (statistical, parametric), and analytical methods (contextual, descriptive-comparative). In addition, textual and semantic analysis of the units studied in the original texts with their equivalents in translation was applied.

Based on the results of the research, we have come to a conclusion that choosing the means of translation of lexical units with cultural reference depends on their category as well as on the context within which they function.

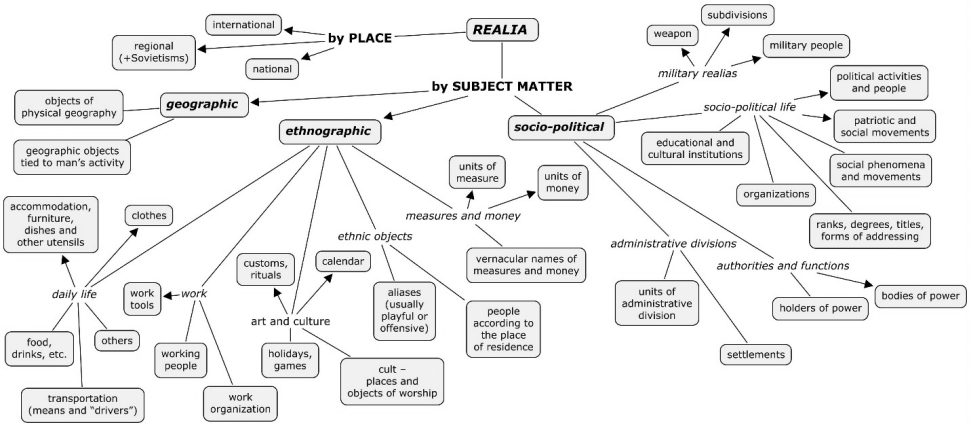
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As has been mentioned above, conveying national cultural colouring in translating fiction is one of the greatest challenges for a translator who serves as a cultural mediator between the author of the original text and the reader of the translated text, both representing different cultures, having different worldviews and varying in attitudes to the subject matter of the narrative. Of special interest to the translator in this respect are culturally marked lexical units, which we predominantly refer to as "realias".

When starting our research we immediately came across a difficulty finding an exact and complete definition of this term. There is no consensus among researchers about what "realia" means. For instance, in the broader sense, realia is understood as a specific phenomenon, a feature of a certain culture which is absent in other cultures. In the narrower sense, realia is a linguistic unit reflecting such a phenomenon or a fact

(Бархударов 1975; Томахин 1981). Within cognitive linguistics, three types of realias are distinguished: L-realias (nominative means of a certain language for culture-specific things), R-realias (artifacts and constants of the natural and geographical habitat of the nation), and C-realias (elements of the socio-cultural context of the society and aspects of the national mentality) (Уланович, Вербилович 2017: 210). In our case, we decided it would be useful to refer to the works of S. Vlakhov and S. Florin, who define the term "word-realia" as an element of the lexicon of the language. It is a sign that assists an "object realia" — its referent — to acquire a language form. The term "realia" in the meaning of the "word-realia" is widespread in translation studies, and it is only a lexical or phraseological unit but not an object (a referent) behind it (Влахов, Флорин 1980: 7).

Fig. 1.— Categories of realias in the narrative "Obelisk" by V. Bykov.



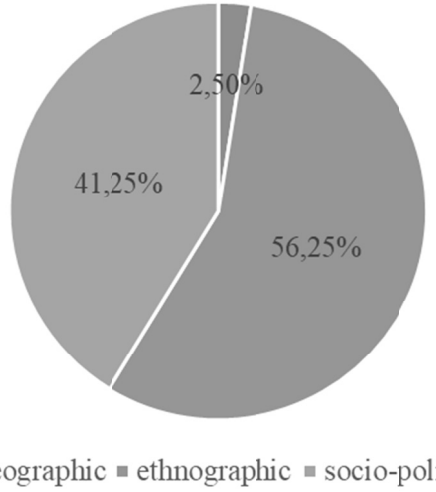
To preserve the national colouring in translation, realias cannot be rendered into the translation language literally. While carrying out the selection of the lexical units with cultural reference from the narrative "Obelisk" by V. Bykov and analyzing their semantics, we came to a conclusion that the degree of the translator's involvement in each case might vary depending on the nature of realias and their cultural "load". This led us to another step in the research. It consisted in building a categorization system for realias. Hypothetically, we supposed that a certain category of realia might correlate with a certain means for rendering it in a translation language, though we presume that the nature of this correlation might vary depending on the translation language being closely related to the original or distant. Further research is required to prove this hypothesis. As for creating a categorization system, we had to figure out the criteria for differentiating and systemizing the lexical units into categories, groups and subgroups. By investigating a number of works related to the translations of lexical units with cultural reference, we concluded that the classification of realias, developed by S. Vlakhov and S. Florin (Влахов, Флорин 1980: 50), would be an adequate model to serve this goal. Being multifold and multi-aspect, it allows for detailed analysis of the semantics of realias, thus making it possible to reveal the peculiarities of their cultural reference.

In accordance with the classification, all the realias can be categorized, depending on such leading criteria as time reference, place, and subject matter.

The total selection of realias we detected by implementing continuous sampling method in the narrative comprises 160 units. Taking into account the specific features of the material, we adapted the above-mentioned classification to organize the realias into several categories (see Fig. 1).

The first thing we noticed about the semantics of the lexical units under analysis was the difference in the subject matter. Therefore, according to the criterion "subject matter" we could single out geographic, ethnographic and socio-political realias in the narrative. These categories make up 2.5%, 56.25% and 41.25% of the total sample correspondingly (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2.— Realias by Subject Matter in "Obelisk" by V. Bykov.



Geographic realias (4 units) include two groups: objects of physical geography ("пушча") and geographic objects tied to man's activity ("выселкі", "брук").

In our research, the group of ethnographic realias (90 units) turned out the most massive and diverse as it contains numerous groups, which in their turn can also be further subdivided into those associated with:

— daily life: food, drinks ("бульбачка", "чарніла"); clothes and footwear ("чуні", "анучы"); accommodation, furniture, dishes and other utensils ("гародчык", "панскі маёнтак", "леснічоўка", "гарлач", "капцюшка", "нары"); transportation means and "drivers" ("фурманка", "газік"); others ("самасейка");
— work: working people ("сельскае настаўніцтва"), work tools ("трактар 'Беларусь'"), work organization ("калгасны статак");
— art and culture: holidays, games ("Кастрычніцкія святы"), customs, rituals ("памінкі"), cult (places and objects of worship) ("касцёл", "ксёнз"); calendar ("бабіна лета");

— ethnic objects: aliases, usually playful or offensive (“фрыц”); people according to the place of residence (“усходнікі”);
— measures and money: units of measure (“боханамі хлеба”); units of money (“медзякі”); vernacular names of measures and money (“два па сто”).

The third group includes socio-political realias (66 units) that is also quite representative and complicated in structure:

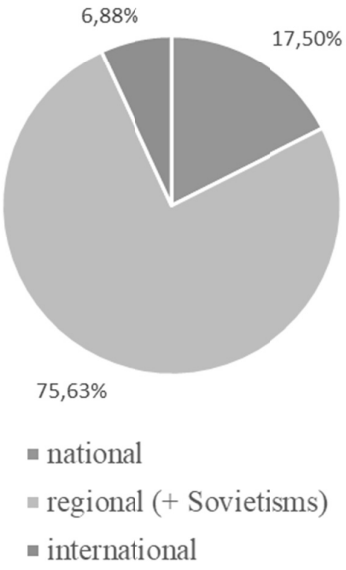
— administrative divisions: units of administrative division (“раён”); settlements (“мястэчка”, “вёска”);
— authorities and functions: bodies of power (“выканкам”, “камендатура”); holders of power (“міліцыянер”, “стараста”);
— socio-political life: political activities and people (“Саветы”, “член партыі”); patriotic and social movements (“піянер”); social phenomena and movements (“самадзейнасць”); ranks, degrees, titles, forms of addressing (“пані”, “таварыш”, “цётка”); organizations (“райком”, “наркамат аветы”); educational and cultural institutions (“піянерскі лагер”, “ВНУ”);
— military realias: subdivisions (“узвод”); weapon (“парабелум”); military people (“камбрыг”, “бальшавіцкі камісар”).

Traditionally, based on the criterion of time reference realias are distributed into two categories: modern and historical. However, we believe that for the units in our selection such categorization is irrelevant because all of them can be treated as historical, in so far as they reveal the historical background of the narrative covering two periods — Soviet and pre-Soviet. Although the story was written in 1971 (Даведнік 1994: 78), i.e. in Soviet times, the realias conveying the historical coloring of that period could be considered contemporary; by making use of such realias in the text, the author re-created the historical atmosphere of Soviet Belarus; still nowadays it is a bygone past. Even if we take into account the fact that a significant number of these realias are represented in the modern Belarusian life as well as the language, they still might differ in the constituents on the denotative or connotative levels and in the lexical background due to the modifications caused by the changes of the epochs, e.g.: “выканкам” is derived from “выканаўчы камітэт” (“executive committee”) that was also shortened from “выканаўчы камітэт Савета народных дэпутатаў” (“executive committee of the Soviet of people’s deputies”). It originates from the Russian “исполком” and is translated into Belarusian by calque. During the Soviet period, it meant a local representation of the Soviet authorities, set up strictly in accordance with the Soviet laws and carrying out the policy also outlined by the Soviet ideology. In the modern Belarus, it is simply the name of a local government, which is formed in accordance with the laws of Belarus and is quite different from its Soviet approximate equivalent in areas of functions, competences and responsibilities. Thus, based on the criterion of time reference, all the units in our selection can be classified as historical realias.

Within the framework of one language, the classification of realias by place, offered by S. Vlakhov and S. Florin, conventionally distinguishes between two categories: “home” and “alien”. The first group includes national, local and micro-realias;

the second one contains international and regional realias. In our selection, the realias from the narrative under analysis could be categorized by place as national, regional and international (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3.— Realias by place in "Obelisk" by V. Bykov.



National realias name the objects, belonging to one nation and perceived as alien by another nation, e.g.: "гамашы", "хатулі", "пан", etc. Their selection from the story includes 28 units, which makes 17.5% of the group. Regional realias are those that crossed the borders of one nation and spread among some other nations, usually together with the referent, being a constituent of the lexicon of several languages, e.g.: "выселкі", "ватоўка", "нары", "капцюшка", "поп", "хутар", etc.; the selection in the story includes 121 units, which equals 75.63%. International realias can be traced in many languages, they are included in national dictionaries but at the same time they retain their national coloring, e.g.: "паліцай", "венецыянскія вокны", "фельдфебель", etc. The selection in the story counts 11 units, which is 6.88%.

Within the group of regional realias, a particular niche is occupied by numerous Sovietisms (61 units), which are naturally perceived by the majority of the Soviet people and are absorbed by many languages of the former Soviet Union: "міліцэйскі вазок", "калгас", "заўмаг", "раён", "перадавы настаўнік", etc.

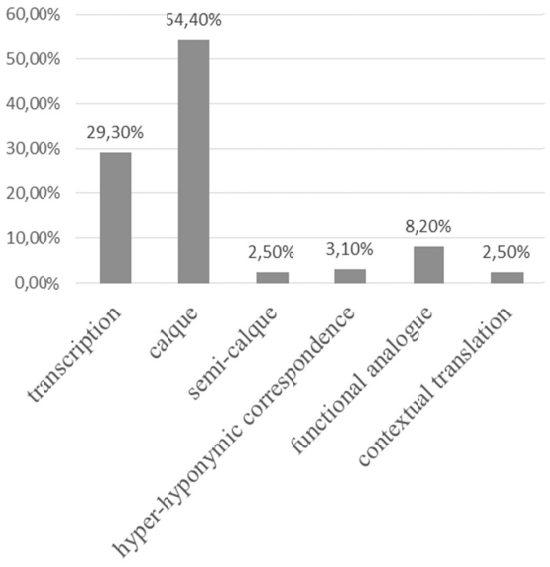
As we can see, the group of regional realias is the most representative. In our opinion, it can be accounted for by the fact that Belarusian and Russian are closely related languages; and these nations have much in common in history. Furthermore, this literary work was created during Soviet times, and the plot of the story develops in the Soviet Belarus of World War II and afterwards. Therefore, it allowed us to conclude that, in the context of translation from Belarusian into Russian, this group is the least problematic.

In general, lexical units with cultural reference in the story under analysis serve two main functions. Firstly, they are used to represent local cultural colouring in narration and secondly they serve as a certain stylistic means in building descriptive dialogue of the characters in the story, thus representing by implication the national character of the local population at the time depicted.

For the translated text to retain these functions, adequate means for rendering realias in the translation language are required. As mentioned above, our hypothesis was that there is correlation between the category of realia and the means of the translation language for its renomination (Уланович 2016), which would make it possible to convey the authentic meaning to the reader with minimal loss in the effect of expression.

We analyzed the means of rendering realias from the narrative "Obelisk" by V. Bykov in its Russian translation. The analysis was carried out in two stages: first, we defined a means of translation for each realia; second, we studied the correlation between the character of realias and the means of their rendering in the subgroups, groups and categories. In each case, we had to pay attention to the context within which the realias function in the text in order to observe the adequacy of the translation. While working over the Russian version, we found out a variety of means of rendering realias based on the classification by S. Vlakhov and S. Florin (Влахов 1980:93), namely: transcription (46 units) and translation; the latter represented by: calque (86 units), semi-calque (4 units), hyper-hyponymic correspondence (5 units), functional analogue (13 units), and contextual translation (4 units) (see Fig. 4).

Fig. 4.— Means of rendering in "Obelisk" by V. Bykov.



Moreover, in our selection there are two realias found in the original text ("вінегрэт", "дэпутат сельсавета") which are omitted in the Russian version, although the author should have had no problem rendering these units into Russian.

Having analyzed the means of rendering realias into the subgroups, we conventionally divided them into those homogeneous, predominantly homogeneous and heterogeneous, based on the criterion of translation means chosen. Homogeneous subgroups are characterized by the choice of only one means of rendering realias by the translator; in predominantly homogenous subgroups there can be more than one means used but there is one that prevails; and heterogeneous groups are those with a number of means of rendering realias used and it is hardly possible to single out one prevailing means. As a result, we figured out 14 homogeneous (43.75%), 4 predominantly homogeneous (12.5%), and 14 heterogeneous (43.75%) thematic subgroups. As it can be seen, homogeneous and predominantly homogenous subgroups prevail (56.25%).

On the level of thematic groups in each of the three categories, we could observe the following correlation. In the category of geographic realias, 2 out of the two groups are homogeneous (100%). Out of the five groups in the category of ethnographic realias 1 group is homogeneous, 2 groups are predominantly homogeneous and 2 groups are heterogeneous. As we see, homogeneous and predominantly homogeneous groups total 60%. Out of the four groups in the category of socio-political realias, 3 groups are predominantly homogeneous (75%) and 1 group is heterogeneous (25%). Thus, we can conclude that based on the data obtained in relation to the homogeneity of the thematic subgroups and groups in our selection the correlation between the nature of the realia and the means of rendering it in the translation language is quite noticeable. Moreover, as a result of the analysis we could observe the predominant means of rendering realias, which is calque. It is used in 75% of cases of rendering geographical realias, in 63% — socio-political realias, and 42% — ethnographic realias. It allows us to make a conclusion about the prevailing role of this means in the entire narrative. We consider it to be accounted for by the close relation between the language of the original and the translation language. Another observation we could make during the analysis is that there is a direct correlation between the volume of the group and its heterogeneity in the choice of translation means — the higher the volume, the more heterogeneous the group is; and vice versa — the lower the volume, the more homogeneous the group is. At the same time, there are groups that can be regarded as exceptions. Despite the large volume of the group denoting socio-political life, it is predominantly homogeneous with calque prevailing (66%), which equals 25 usages out of 38.

On the other hand, the low-volume groups, denoting ethnographic objects and units of administrative division, are characterized by a rather wide variety of translation means. It can be explained by the absence of the realias from the original text in the translation language and the necessity to render them in order to retain their cultural coloring.

We consider it important to pay attention to some peculiar aspects related to the realias we came across while analyzing the original text and the translated version. The story in Belarusian contains several realias that are conveyed by foreign lexical units, e.g.: "матка боска" (Polish), "веласіпед" (Russian), "дзетдом" (Russian), "паліцай" (German), etc. The reason why the writer included them into the speech of the characters is to make the narrative sound more authentic as it was quite natural for people living in Western Belarus at that time to use foreign words from the above-mentioned languages due to the historical events the region went through. Understanding the meaning of these lexical units causes no problem to the Belarusian reader.

In addition, in the Russian version we came across a lot of Belarusian lexical units such as “ровар”, “татка”, “местечко”, “бульбочки”, etc. Although the Russian reader might misunderstand the meaning of some units of this kind, the author left them untranslated in some places in order to create the images of the characters and the atmosphere of that period, having rendered in Russian just a few of them in a limited number of contexts.

Of special interest related to the field of translating lexical units with cultural reference is a subgroup of Sovietisms within the group of regional realias (“райана”, “таварыш”, “Саўінфармбюро”, etc.). They belong to the cultural space shared by all the peoples of the ex-Soviet Union and, thus, are absolutely clear to the reader. As a rule, the author could hardly face any problem rendering them into the translated language. In this case, we deal with reverse translation because the majority of Sovietisms presumably came into Belarusian from Russian.

In our selection, some units might not be regarded as realias at first glance. However, we included them into our list due to the certain context within which they are used. In this case, their meanings are expanded or specified on the denotative or connotative levels and they acquire features of realias, e.g.: the lexical unit “Волга” is a Soviet car make. At the same time, in the narrative “райкомаўская ‘Волга’” means a vehicle that indicates the high social status of its user who is most probably a representative of the authorities.

CONCLUSION

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned facts, we can conclude the following.

Conveying cultural colouring in a literary work is done through lexical units with cultural reference, also known as realias. Translating fiction presupposes retaining national cultural colouring with minimal losses, which means a great degree of involvement on behalf of the translator in adequate rendering of realias in the translation language.

The cultural “load” of realias varies depending on their subject matter, place and time reference, which has made it possible to build up a categorization system of realias based on the selection of 160 lexical units with cultural reference completed with continuous sampling method from the narrative “Obelisk” by V. Bykov. The system includes three categories of realias, which are correspondingly divided by subject matter into two, five and four thematic groups, further broken into 32 sub-groups overall.

The analysis of the translation of the story into Russian, made by the author himself, let us single out the means of rendering realias and reveal correlation between them and the character of the realias. As for the means, transcription, calque, semi-calque, hyper-hyponymic correspondence, functional analogue, and contextual translation are used; transcription and calque being the most frequent. The dominance of these means can be accounted for by the close relationship between the languages of the original and the translation; in so far as the expressive function of the translation is retained.

Further research of the issue can consist in the analysis of the translation of the literary work into distant languages, which would presumably require a more substantial involvement of the translator as a cross-cultural mediator.

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