

Discourse Analysis of Interaction Engagements on Channels Television's *Politics Today*

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Abstract

Interaction engagements in political communication are the types of activity that politicians engage in, to articulate their ideologies and manifestoes and account for their stewardship. Most of the existing studies on political discourses have focused largely on textual patterns that address forms, content and diction, almost to the exclusion of interaction engagements in television-based political interviews within the Nigerian political space. This study, therefore, investigated interaction engagements in the discourse of Channels Television's Politics Today (CTPT) by identifying different engagements involved in by both the guests and the anchor, to describe the importance of these engagements to sustainable political development in Nigeria. The study adopted Conversation Analysis (CA) and Speech Acts Theory as frameworks. Eleven episodes of Politics Today spanning between the years 2011 and 2015, which featured major political events, were purposively selected and downloaded from the official website of Channels Television Station. The data were transcribed and subjected to content-based qualitative analysis by identifying and describing the interaction engagements in the selected data through the tenets of Conversation Analysis and by tracking the functions of the engagements through the tenets of Speech Acts Theory. Eight interaction engagements characterise the discourse of CTPT. Electioneering manifests primary elections, election campaigns and the general elections; political appointments feature criticisms; parliamentary issues describe the happenings in the National Assembly; political defection illustrates how and why politicians defect to another political party; opposition is about criticism; security covers national security challenges; corruption manifests illegal behaviour of people in authority; while economy features the relationship between production, trade and the supply of money in Nigeria. Dialogic discussion of these identified engagements by politicians and political analysts keeps the public informed of the political happenings in Nigeria. Based on this information as well, the Nigerian populace is equipped with what they need to do to ensure sustainable political development in the country.

Keywords: Political Communication, Interaction Engagements, *Politics Today*

1.0 Introduction

Effective communication is essential in consensus building and the formation of public opinion. Language as the vehicle for thought expression generates feelings which are exploited for political gains, in any political process. It means that deliberate choice of words and their purposes are explored in political communication to secure a berth for asserting justifications in a political context (Ndimele and Owuamalam, 2015). In the opinion of Ndimele and Owuamalam, 2015, it is the functional approach that excites active humans who seek a basis to justify their actions within a political milieu. To investigate the effectiveness of language use and its implication in interaction engagements in political discourse, this study considered a

Television programme with the title – *Politics Today*. The functionality of the use of words especially in oral form, therefore, forms the presentation style as reflected on Channels Television's *Politics Today* (CTPT). Naturally, the language of television is predominantly a spoken one. For meaning consolidation, some para-linguistic actions and written aspects are made use of. Primarily, the discourse in this medium is defined as language use, communication and interaction between people. Therefore, the scope of this present research automatically falls within this realm. Werndly and Marshall (2002) identify two main forms of talk in television:

1. Dialogues, monologues and narrative voice-overs in dramatic forms of television such as one-off dramas, soaps or sitcoms.
2. Scripted or spontaneous 'talk' in non-dramatic forms of television such as news, documentary, 'magazine' programmes and other 'factual' programming.

The kinds of talk highlighted above described as "live talk", are distinguished from the rehearsed type found in drama. Although there are such as news bulletins or studio magazine programming like Saturday morning children's TV or breakfast TV, is a combination of live and pre-recorded features (62). Television is presented to the audience by figures who are, in effect, the 'voices' of the medium. Television presenters fulfil various functions. First, they are the authoritative voices who read the news and anchor the film reports given by journalists outside the studio. In the same vein, presenters also investigate – as journalists on behalf of the audience.

Characteristically, live television is the presence of a person or a group speaking directly to the audience through the camera. This medium makes for compelling viewing because it is as though the presenter is talking directly to the audience. It is usually fine-tuned by the context of the operation. This possibility is referred to as "situational variation" (Werndly and Marshall, 2002:63). To them, 'situational variation' dictates the mode of address, such as formal or informal address, which transforms one kind of television text into another. Different non-dramatic television texts talk to their audience in various ways according to the context. Presenters of a 'magazine' genre programme or chat show, for instance, will use the first person pronominal item, 'I' and address the audience as 'you' (second person pronoun), as though they are directly present or known by the audience as friends. Specifically in interviews involving special guests, one important concept that controls the language of such an event is called Common Ground. According to Werndly and Marshall, the analysis examines the conventions these conversations observe, their direction and purpose and the different roles of the participants in terms of controlling, negotiating and competing in the conversation, as well as the common ground between them. Equally analysed are the intent, purpose and apparent effect of individual contributions to the conversations and the strategies employed by the speakers.

Paralinguistic features such as nodding are likewise greatly employed in the language of television to keep the interviewee sustained in the discourse. Hence, one of the Conversation Analysis (CA) principles like turn-taking coordinates proceedings in the process. Another basic thing is the accent. This is largely controlled by the speech event and situation on the course. The social and regional variation of accents and dialects, speech, therefore, changes according to the speaker's membership of other social groups. For instance, it will change if the speakers

speak English as part of a minority ethnic group, or of a subcultural group, such as school children or youth followers of particular music and styles of dressing. The same constraint plays out in television programme construction. This insight will afford the present study the understanding to track the interaction engagements involved in on Channels Television's *Politics Today*.

1.1 Aim and Objectives

The study investigates the interaction engagements in the discourse of Channels Television's *Politics Today* (CTPT). The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify and describe the interaction engagements in the discourse of Channels Television's *Politics Today*;
2. Discuss the importance and communicative functions of the identified interaction engagements to sustainable political development in Nigeria.

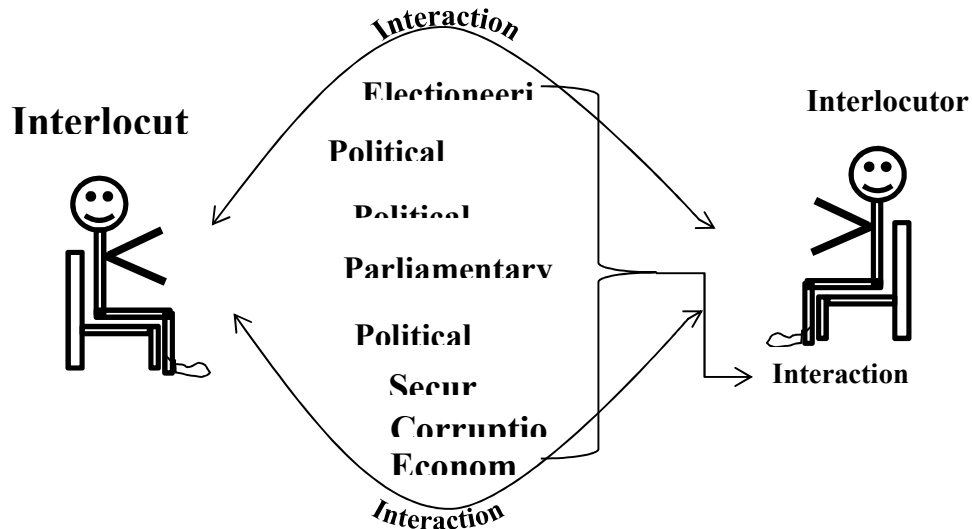
2.0 Literature Review

Extant studies in political discourse in the Nigerian context have focused on print media and textual materials for their analysis (Osisanwo, 2020 and Oparinde et. al., 2021), hate speech and political media discourse (Chiluwa et. al., 2020), online readers' comments on political discourse in Nigeria (Jibril & Mohammed, 2022) and multidimensional interface and Nigerian political discourse (Akinlotan, 2022). While these extant works on political discourse in the Nigerian context drew their data from print and online media, not such attention was given to political discourse drawing the data from interactions on television which has been widely employed by politicians and other political actors to influence Nigerians' thought about elections and governance in Nigeria. To better understand and to react appropriately to the interactions of politicians and other political actors, Nigerians need to be aware of the interaction engagements that characterise political discourse on television programmes. This study therefore investigated the interaction engagements on Channels Television's politics today for the purpose exposing the communicative effects of the engagements for Nigerians to be afforded the opportunity of not being manipulated by Nigerian politicians.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The turn-taking aspect of Conversation Analysis was used to track the interaction engagements in the discourse of Channels Television's *Politics Today* as the interlocutors took turns discussing different issues on the programme. The theory of speech acts which is one of the theories employed in this work, was also significantly engaged because the political interlocutors made use of speech to do things, (to engage themselves in the discussion of politically related issues) which are therefore referred to as interaction engagements in the discourse of Channels Television's *Politics Today*.

Figure 1: Framework for interaction engagements in the discourse of Channels Television’s *Politics Today*



The above figure designed by the researcher, represents the interaction engagements in political discourse. Anytime political conversers engage in political interaction, their topics of discourse are relatively constant as they are conscious of what they do and do it for a purpose. The two interlocutors represented in the figure, facing each other, stand for the conversers in political discourse. The two arrows between them indicate that the two interlocutors take turns in their dialogue; it is not only one person who talks. Everybody that is involved in the conversation responds to the issue being discussed when need be. When we say politicians or political analysts are involved in conversation, an intelligent question will be 'What do they talk about?' Whatever answer is given to this question is the interaction engagement of the political conversers. Usually, the issues that political discussants engage in are the discourse topics represented in the big circle between the two interlocutors, named 'interaction engagements'. They are the issues of 'Electioneering', 'Political appointments', 'Political defection', 'Political opposition', 'Parliamentary issue', 'Corruption', 'Security' and 'Economy.'

3.0 Methodology

Sixty episodes of *Politics Today*, one episode per month spanning between the years 2011 and 2015, which featured major political events, were purposively selected and downloaded from the official website of Channels Television Station. The choice of the period for data collection was made since the period marked the hight of politics Nigeria in recent time when the opposition political parties merged and defeated the political party in power, especially at the federal level. The data were transcribed and subjected to content-based qualitative analysis, using Conversation Analysis and Speech Acts Theory as a theoretical framework. The tenets of Conversation Analysis such as turn taking, interruption, floor holding, turn allocation and others were deployed to track the interaction engagements and Speech Act Theory was used to unearth the communicative functions of the interaction engagements.

4.0 Results and Discussion of Findings

This paper presents an analysis of the interaction engagements in the discourse of Channels Television's *Politics Today* and their importance to sustainable political development in Nigeria. As stated earlier, the programme under investigation, Channels Television's *Politics Today*, features political gladiators who expectedly explore germane issues in Nigerian politics that characterised Nigerian socio-political phenomena. The data for this study feature the following as interaction engagements in the discourse of Channels Television's *Politics Today* (CTPT): electioneering, political appointments, parliamentary issues, political defection, economy, security, political opposition and corruption. Eight interaction engagements identified as stated above are discussed in turns.

4.1 Electioneering

This captures a series of activities that politicians and their supporters carry out to canvas the votes of the populace in an election. Electioneering is a pre-election process characterised by the primary election, promotion of party candidates, campaign and promises, voters' orientation and election issues. Analysts, politicians and even aspirants are invited to the programme to meaningfully engage the topic to inform the members of the public. Attention is given to the primary election, for space.

Excerpt 1: Preparation for 2015 Elections (2014)

Presenter: Thank you for staying with us (pause)). We are still looking at the Presidential Primaries, the Processes and the Outcome ((Pause)). Let's now flip the page and move on to the process that produced the APC Presidential candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari (pause). Professor Pat Utomi calls the process one that gave him a pleasant surprise.

Guest: I must admit, it was a pleasant surprise ((pause)) the process was open and it was transparent (the video footage of the Presidential Primary Election comes on screen).

From the above, the presenter reports on the APC presidential primary election, commenting on the process and the outcome. To make it look real; he presents a video clip of his interview with his guest, Prof. Pat Utomi, to make his comment. In his view, the guest describes the situation as a 'pleasant surprise'. By this, he meant that the outcome of the election was a shock but a pleasant one for the party. He also commented on the process which he described as being 'democratic'. The guest tries to approve the process that produced General Muhammadu Buhari as the presidential candidate of APC in the 2015 general elections. The guest describes the process of the primary election as open and transparent which he never thought could happen, considering the recent nature of Nigerian Politics. He, Utomi also expresses surprise that other contestants like Alhaji Abubakar peacefully conceded defeat after the election result shows that General Muhammadu Buhari is the winner of the APC

presidential candidate primary election. He then stresses some of the shortcomings of the process which is not yet the decision of the party on the running mate of Buhari.

4.2 Political Appointments

This is a post-election process where the emerged political party and gladiators engage in a series of meetings considering certain factors in appointing political actors who will serve in different capacities. As the ruling party tries to do this, the looser, now the opposition party criticizes the process and the appointees. The Excerpt below features the process of appointment and criticism against the appointees.

Excerpt 2: Structure agenda setting for incoming government (2015)

Presenter: Thank you so much Mr Gulak for being part of this programme tonight. Let's start by asking in the coming days, if the President has signified his interest or he said that he will inaugurate its Federal Executive Council of which you were a member of that kind of team under President Goodluck Jonathan. Tell us what you make of the period of which you waited and up till this moment, what you make of the team and the process before now.

Guest: Well, as far as I am concerned. Yes, Mr President has picked his team that is the ministers as stipulated by the constitution. He has complied with the constitutional provision, sent the list to the Senate and the Senate has screened and confirmed the Ministers...

The thrust of the Excerpt above is assessing the incoming federal cabinet. The presenter brought a former member of the federal cabinet now in the opposition party to do the assessment. Because of this, it is expected that the guests criticise the process. The guest commented that the president has picked his team, i.e. federal cabinet as stated in the constitution. He adjudged the process right but criticized the president for dragging the process. According to him "Mr President has delayed too long" By this, he meant that for the president to wait for six months into his administration before appointing ministers to work with him is not acceptable to Nigerians. He questioned what would have made the process to be that slow since the president is not new to the political scene. He also criticized the president for appointing his ministers without assigning portfolios to them. He condemned this by saying it was the first time that would be happening in the presidential system of government.

4.3 Parliamentary Issues

Parliamentary issues describe political events that are related to a law-making body which is an arm of government. In the discourse of CTPT, another interaction engagement is the parliamentary issue which can be at any local government, state government and federal government levels; but in this case, parliament at the federal level is discussed. In the Excerpt below, issues relating to the leadership tussle over the appointment of the committee chairmen are discussed.

Excerpt 3: House of Representatives leadership controversy over composition of committee roles (2015)

Presenter:

Thank you so much for joining us this evening. Tell me, a lot of people seem (pause) some people of the House of Representatives seem not to be happy with it and some members of the APC who were in the ruling majority of the House of Representatives. Some of them are not happy, why?

Guest:

That's because the appointments done by the Speaker do not reflect the aspiration of APC as a party and by extension, the APC government to have such kind of committees. The Speaker was able to shortchange his party in favour of PDP to be able to pay them for what they have done to him during his electioneering or his ascension to the Speakership...

The thrust of the Excerpt above is the House of Representatives leadership controversy over the composition of committee roles. The guest is a member of the House of Representatives; here he condemns the appointment made by the speaker of the House of Representatives, Honourable Yakubu Dogara. He accuses him of not following the APC's position. Being a member of APC, he feels cheated that the appointments made by the speaker favour the opposition party - PDP as against APC. He argues that the Speaker does that as a payback to the PDP for what the PDP members did in his favour during the electioneering process that led to the emergence of Dogara as the speaker. He vehemently frowns at this and says "Because we see this chairman of the committee as important to go with the politics of APC and anything short of that will not be acceptable to us."

4.4 Political Defections

Political defection explains the action of politicians abandoning a political party and moving to another for political reasons. This is also called political decamping. It becomes a very popular situation during electioneering; as such a crucial issue is discussed on the CTPT. The Excerpt below presents an example.

Excerpt 4: Review of major political events in 2014

Presenter:

Welcome back and now to the issue of defections; interesting movements here and there. We saw Chief Tom Ikimi and some other APC chieftains dump the APC for the PDP. In the House of Representatives, the speaker's decision to leave the PDP sparked a lot of controversy. How can you describe how politicians defected this year, Mr Jiti?

Guest:

It is ridiculous and embarrassing and it is a disservice to democracy. I have always maintained the view that Nigerian politicians are power mongers. Em, they have an obsession with power. They are fixated on power; they are power freaks. And so, they would do anything and everything to attain that power.

The guest here criticizes the politicians for cross-carpeting from one political party to another because the politicians are obsessed with power. According to him, Nigerian politicians lack political loyalty, honesty and patriotism and that is why they involve themselves in this act. A claim that "if Nigerian politicians realize that there is a political party called 'armed robbers party' as a surer route to attain power and position, they will dump their political parties and join', relates to lack of political morality. Another instance is expressed in the Excerpt below.

4.5 Economy

The issue of economy discussed on the programme illustrates the relationship between production, trade, and the supply of money in Nigeria in particular. This area also discusses how the Nigerian populace is affected by the economic situation in Nigeria and the need for possible improvement in the nation's economy. All these are linked to the political situation of the country.

Excerpt 5: Fuel Subsidy Removal - Implications (2012)

Presenter: There is a strong ovation on the petroleum industry bill; is it likely to see the light of the day?

Guest 1: Well, I think at some point, it will see the light of the day but I think the question will be, is it the panacea of the ills of that industry? One important aspect of that bill is the local content (.2) em aspect which I think as a patriotic Nigerian, we must (.). Again em, some aspects are worrisome. You know em, be that as it may, it is a good thing that em we are having a bill that is going to have, at its central fulcrum (*Interruption*).

Presenter: Em, you are the deputy president of the Nigeria Labour Congress, is the NLC merely playing to the gallery in pursuit of the populace agenda, talk about the planned removal of the fuel subsidy. Do you really have a fact to agitate against this planned removal?

Guest 1: Oh definitely, you don't need to play to the gallery. We have never had to play to the galley. Em first and foremost, we represent the very downtrodden... the workers. We know exactly how it feels... and we know where it pinches. In removing subsidy without putting a palliative in place, you further impoverish... the downtrodden Nigerians.

To discuss the same issue of economy in the second adjacency pair of the Excerpt, the presenter starts with the use of acknowledgement as he introduces the guest he wants to ask the question. He puts it as "... you are the deputy president of the Nigeria Labour Congress..." He then follows it up with the use of directive as he asks a question from the first guest; saying "...is the NLC merely playing to the gallery in pursuit of the populace agenda, taking about the planned removal of the fuel subsidy?" In his response, he says "Oh definitely, you don't need to play to the gallery. We have never had to play to the gallery..." He then concludes his comment also with the use of constative as he insists that if fuel subsidy is removed and there is no palliative put in place, the removal will further impoverish the downtrodden Nigerians.

4.6 Security

The issue of security concerns the safety of lives and properties in Nigeria as far as this work is concerned. It brings to the fore, the security challenges confronting the nation and the need to tackle those challenges to ensure the safety of lives and properties in Nigeria. This is also the responsibility of political officeholders.

Excerpt 6: National Security (2012)

Presenter: ...in looking at this topic which will form our first talking point on today's edition of *politics today* (.) em we have as our discussant all the way from the North, Alhaji Hammed, the Secretary General of the Arewa Youths Consultative Forum, you are welcome on *politics today*.

Guest 1: Thank you very much.

Presenter: And we also have on politics today the Deputy President of the Nigerian Labour Congress, Comrade Promise Adéwùsì (MNI), you are welcome.

Guest 2: Thank you so very much, Gbenga.

To start the real discussion on the issue of security for the day on the programme, the presenter again employs constative as he announces and states specifically what the issue to be discussed is and after that, he follows it up with the use of directive by asking guest 1 to give his opinion on the issue for the day. He says "Alhaji Hammed, what do you have to say to this?" The response of the first guest opens with the use of acknowledgements as he first greets before discussing the topic. He says "...I would like to start; I will say good evening to everybody..." He (guest 1) then continues with the use of constative as he discloses what he feels about the topic of the discussion for the day. The presenter takes the following turn through the use of directives as he requests guest 2 to corroborate or refute the opinion of guest 1. Guest 2 in his response employs directives by suggesting the necessary steps to be taken to tackle the challenges of insecurity in the country.

4.7 Political Opposition

The interaction engagement of opposition on *politics today* is about the criticism received by the party in power from the opposition party (the party that is not in power at the time of the interaction). In some cases, the sampled programme becomes a platform for two opposing political parties to argue on certain political ideas by inviting members of either party as guests on the programme. It also comes in the form of inviting a member of the opposition party to the programme and fields him with questions about the ruling party's achievement. The Excerpt below expatiates this further.

Excerpt 7: Opposition versus Presidency - APC Eyes Aso-Rock (2014)

Presenter: Tonight..., I really want us to start with the development of the issue of today. Am, the presidency came out today, Dr. Doyin Okuype, the Special Assistant,

Senior Special Assistant to the President, on Public Affairs came out and said, he made some categorical statements as regards the role of the opposition, he said that the oppositions are not being fair in their judgement.

Guest: Now, yes, I have read the press release attributed to Dr. Doyin Okupe and I see it as the cry, the cry of despair, of a very terrified sinking political party that is the PDP.

To start the discussion on the issue raised by the presenter, the guest uses a commissive act by agreeing that Dr. Doyin Okupe made a press release and that he has even read it. After that, the guest makes use of the constatives act by attributing the presidency's claims to the fairness of the merger that if the merger becomes a reality, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) will lose power. The participant continues in the use of constatives by alleging Dr. Doyin Okupe of making personal attacks in the press release which is uncalled for. Still, in the act of constatives, the participant denies each of the allegations in the press release and states the justification for each. In sum, the Excerpt entails attack and counter attack showing a display of opposition in the political system.

4.8 Corruption

Although the thrust of the sampled programme is politics, some of the political events discussed on the programme also reflect the immoral behaviour of the political office holders. In this context, corruption relates to the dishonesty and illegal behaviour of the people in positions of authority or power. Some of the corruption issues engaged on the programme involve money politicking, inducement for the electorate to buy their votes, breach of public trust and hijacking of election materials, party corruption and financial corruption. The Excerpts below explain this further.

Excerpt 8: PDP, APC analysts assess Buhari (2015)

Guest: I think the biggest achievement of this government is the fight against corruption. For the first time in a long time, Nigerians are now getting to understand that corruption is a vice....

The Excerpt discusses allegations of financial and party corruption. The then spokesperson of the opposition party and the Information Minister for President Buhari, alleges PDP of corruption, through which they have mismanaged the wealth of the nation. He gives an instance of 3.8 trillion naira missing which the PDP government under President Goodluck Jonathan could not account for. He praises President Buhari's administration for exposing and fighting corruption well in the nation. Commissives and directive illocutionary acts are predominantly deployed in the Excerpts that manifest corruption as discussed on the programme.

5.0 Discussion of Findings

The interaction engagements of the discourses of Channels Television's *Politics Today* identified in this paper are in line with the activities of political conversers discussed under the components of interaction engagements on the previous pages of this paper. The theory of

speech acts which is one of the theories employed in this work, was also significantly engaged because the political interlocutors made use of speech to do things, (to engage themselves in the discussion of politically related issues) which are therefore referred to as interaction engagements in the discourse of Channels Television's *Politics Today*. The political interactants during their involvement in the engagements, also unavoidably take turns; the practice of which is one of the tenets of Conversation Analysis. To connect it to this study, Conversation Analysis is one of the theories that this work benefitted from. Considering the durability of the interaction, it is recorded and archived and that is what assisted the researcher to have access to the data, even after the programmes have been aired months back. This issue of durability is the same as what O'Keeffe (2006) uses to differentiate between Everyday interaction and Media interaction where he opines that the durability of Everyday interaction is ephemeral while that of Medial interaction is recorded and archived for future use. Consequently, because Channels Television's *Politics Today* falls under Medial interaction, the interaction engagements on it are recorded and archived for future use.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper identified eight interaction engagements that characterized Channels Television's *Politics Today* - CTPT: electioneering, political appointments, parliamentary issues, political defections, economy, security, political opposition and corruption. Electioneering has to do with the issues of primary elections, election campaigns and the general elections; political appointments feature criticisms; parliamentary issues describe the happenings in the National Assembly; political defection illustrates how and why politicians defect to another political party; political opposition is about criticism; security covers national security challenges; corruption manifests illegal behaviour of people in authority; while economy features foreign exchange, productivity and money circulation in Nigeria. Dialogic discussion of these identified engagements by politicians and political analysts keeps the public informed of the political happenings in Nigeria. Based on this information as well, the Nigerian populace is equipped with what they need to do to ensure sustainable political development in the country. The work has added to the body of knowledge in the areas of political discourse and media discourse by discoursing how electronic media (television) has been explored by Nigerian politicians to air the issues of politics and governance aimed at influencing Nigerians' thought about politics and governance. The report of this work will be useful for Nigerians who want to take relatively wise decisions about politics and governance.

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