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1.0 Introduction

This paper presents a genre analysis of an authentic English text, a candidate rejection letter, and offers a general discussion of the challenges and opportunities that generic features present for second language pedagogy.

Job application letters have been described in some details by Bhatia (1993; 2004), who sought to emphasize the connectedness of that genre with other genres, particularly sales promotion. By contrast, candidate rejection letters have received less attention in the literature on genre analysis. The paucity of attention that the candidate rejection letter has received, particularly in linguistics, presents challenges, but also, opportunities for this paper.

To analyze the selected candidate rejection letter, the paper uses contextual analysis and linguistics analysis. In reviewing the literature, the paper will be firstly focusing on three key definitions of genre; secondly looking at approaches to genre analysis; and thirdly defining the candidate rejection letter. Finally, following the framework of analysis and the analysis, the paper will consider the broad pedagogical import of the generic features with a specific focus on the text analyzed.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Definitions

The point of prominence of the many definitions of a genre in linguistics seems to be their varying emphases rather than any polemics that may exist. According to Bhatia, it is the emphasis on conventions and constraints which most significantly characterize a genre. Thus, he asserts:

Genre essentially refers to language use in a conventionalized communicative setting in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution, which give rise to stable structural forms by imposing constraints on the use of lexico-grammatical as well as discoursal resources. (2004: 23)

Focusing on the inherent cultural dimension Martin argues that:

A genre is a staged, goal oriented, purposeful activity, in which the speakers engage as members of our culture...Virtually everything you do involves you participating in one or other genre. Culture seen in these terms can be defined as a set of generically interpretable activities. (Martin 1985: 25)

Pointing to the epistemological and ontological dimensions of genre, John Frow sees it as

...a set of conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning...its structuring effect are productive of meaning; they shape and guide, in the way that a builder's form gives shape to a pour of concrete, or a sculptor's mould shapes and give structures to its materials. Generic structure both enables and restricts meaning, and is a basic condition for meaning to take place. (Frow, 2006: 10)

From the above, Martin (ibid) note the reflexivity embedded in genres respectively as 'staged' and 'interpretable activities', and Frow (ibid), how they 'enable and restrict' meaning. Despite their varying emphases, these definitions essentially converge on the structuring and constraining character of genre. By implication, all three scholars suggest, as with any other discourse, be it spoken or written, the candidate rejection letter has certain communicative purposes (Dudley-Evans, 1987; Swales 1990; Bhatia, ibid); it is bound by certain conventions (Bhatia ibid); and it has certain lexio-grammatical / linguistics features (Swales ibid). Moreover, not dissimilar to this paper, the candidate rejection letter simultaneously belongs to, and is participating in a genre (see especially Derrida 1980, Frow 2006). This observation brings into sharp focus not just the taxonomy and reflexivity, but also the paradox that attend the process of conceptualizing, defining, and analyzing genres.

2.2.0 Approaches to Genre Analysis

2.2.1 Swales and the communicative character of the text

For Swales, genre analysis is a search for "the rationale behind particular genre features." (1990: 7, cited by Alison Johnson, 2001) These linguistic features include the style,

purpose and function of the text. It is important to note that Swales is more concerned with the communicative character of the discourse: the relation between the observed ‘linguistic effects’ and the ‘determinants of those effects’ (ibid). Therefore, to re-read Swales, focusing on the linguistic features is necessary but not sufficient to fully understand and account for the genre.

2.2.2 Bhatia and genre pedagogy

Bhatia, attending to the pedagogic-enhancing function and value of genre embraces a two-step approach to doing genre analysis:

...first is to characterize typical or conventional features of any genre-specific text in attempt to identify ... form-function relations; and second, to explain such characterization in the context of socio-cultural as well as cognitive constraints operating in the relevant area of specialization, whether professional or academic. (Bhatia, 1993: 16 cited by A. Johnson, 2001)

It may be argued that inherent in these two approaches is a dual objective: one, to describe and teach generic features of genres; and two, simultaneously fostering the students’ contextual awareness of genres.

2.2.3 Halliday’s and the context of situation

Halliday’s (1985) theory of language which focuses essentially on the systemic connection between context and the meaning of text has continued to have a profound impact on applied linguistics (Chapelle,1998). The contextual variables set out in Halliday’s (1985) theory are *field* (the nature of the social action), *tenor* (the roles assumed by participants), and the *mode* (the channel of communication- spoken or written).

2.2.4 Summary of the approaches

From the above, genre analysis is essentially multi-disciplinary, incorporating methods and principles of linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, cultural anthropology, and cognitive science (Johnson, 2001: 77). Given its cross-disciplinary characteristics,

some of the challenges and opportunities of analyzing genres in general, it seems, are not inconsequential. This suggests reasonable caution in analyzing this commonplace, yet seldom analyzed genre, the candidate rejection letter,

2.3.0 The Candidate Rejection Letter

2.3.1 Definitional Clarification

It is important to make a distinction by clearly stating what exactly is meant by the candidate rejection letter (CRL). It could have a broad meaning relating to informing applicants of their failure in securing a job, in gaining entry into a school or program of study, or persons submitting articles or research papers for publishing in a journal.

However, for this paper, and as the selected text will show, the candidate rejection letter (CRL) was written to an unsuccessful job applicant.

2.3.2 CRL defined

The candidate rejection letter is first and foremost a tool of business communication. It is therefore, a formal discourse, and involves a company, an organization, or an institution communicating to an unsuccessful job applicant the news with a gracious and brief explanation of his / her failure.

2.3.3 Economic, cultural, and socio-psychological dimensions

While some organizations see the CRL as a burdensome and unnecessary task, Heathfield sees it as a "...positive step...to build goodwill with candidates and establish yourself as a employer of choice." (Heathfield, 2000)

Moreover, delivering bad news, which is essentially what the candidate rejection letter does, is usually shaped discursively, by cultural and socio-psychological factors that give

due consideration to the affected. Aamodt and Peggans (1988 cited in Brice, 1995) focused precisely on this theme and:

...found that rejection letters containing friendly statements, information about the individual who was ultimately hired, and a pledge to keep the rejected applicant's resume on the file most positively affected the applicants' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the rejecting organization. (Brice, 1995: Para 3)

Arguably then, the recruitment context, which begins with the self promotional (Bhatia 1993, 2004) job application letter and ends with the candidate rejection letter for the unsuccessful applicant, involves a number of discourses that are influenced not only by good business communication practices, in the case of the employer, and job search best practices, in the case of the applicant, but also, socio-psychological and cultural factors.

Heathfield admonishes:

Remember, the candidate rejection letter is your last opportunity to build relationship with the candidate that will cause him or her to think favorably of your company. Your reputation as an employer is affected by this candidate and the people affected by the candidate's opinions and treatment at your hands. Don't ever believe this is unimportant for your reputation as a potential employer. (ibid, Para 11)

Why, how and to whom the letter was written, as well as its contents; who the writer and the reader(s) are, it seems, are critical questions, simultaneously causing and occasioning the process, procedure and production of the candidate rejection letter. What then constitute a good business communication CRL?

3.0 Framework of Analysis

The text will be analyzed using a combination of approaches. First, will be a contextual analysis, combining Bhatia (1993, 2004), and Halliday (1985). Second, following Bhatia/Swales move analysis used for promotional genres, particularly the job application letter (see Bhatia, especially 20004, p. 57-81), the paper will proposed its own move

schematic structure. This schematic structure will be derived primarily from Joss's (2003) tips on how to write a candidate rejection letter.

3.1 Context Analysis

The adopted diagram below is a combination of Bhatia's and Halliday's approaches focusing on the situation of the text.

Purpose		What are the communicative purposes of the text? How are they achieved?
Context of situation	Field	What subject matter is the text about?
	Tenor	What roles may be required of the writer and it's readers in this genre?
	Mode	What is the channel of communication?

Figure 1- (Situation text analysis model, Adopted from Wang, 2005: 76)

3.2 Linguistic Analysis

3.2.1 An adaptation of Bhatian/Swales schematic structure

Influenced by Swales (1993), Bhatia (1993, 2004) posits a seven-move structure in job application letters. For the purposes of the text I designed a *six-move* structure, based generally on Joss's candidate rejection tips outlined below, sub-section 3.2.2.

3.2.2 Candidate Rejection Letter Tips

Repeating a question mentioned earlier: what constitute a good business communication job rejection letter? According Joss (2003), the following salient points should be given consideration.

1. Personalize the letter using candidate's name, date of the last interview;
2. Add your name and signature or the name and signature of whomever the candidate would have reported to if hired. Putting the hiring manager's name on the letter makes the letter seem more personal and more professional;
3. Be kind, but clear, about the purpose of the letter; you want the candidate to get the message that this particular job opportunity is now closed to them.
4. Talk about how the candidate and the job are not good fit. Talking about the fit, and not about the person, allows you a graceful way to talk about any deficiencies you may

have found in the candidate.
5. Be specific about why the fit wasn't there if you can do so cleanly and gently.
6. Do not make commitments you can't (or won't) keep. It's hard to say no to people, but don't promise things that you can't deliver in an attempt to soften the blow. Eliminate phrases such as 'we'll keep your name on file' or 'I will forward your resume on to another manager'.

Figure 2- Job rejection tips (An organized summary of Joss, 2003)

3.2.3 Proposed move-structure

Move 1: Greeting formally and politely
Move 2: Expressing thanks for applying and attending interview
<u>Step 2 A:</u> Stating the position applied for
<u>Step 2 B:</u> Stating the date of application / interview
Move 3: Giving the negative results
<u>Step 3 A:</u> Stating reasons for negative results and basing them on objective criteria
Move 4: Pointing to the positive attributes of the applicant / candidate
Move 5: Suggesting options for future actions / Offering incentives (Bhatian)
Move 6: Ending politely

Figure 3 – (Bhatian-influenced schematic structure)

4.0 Genre analysis in action

4.1 Background of the text

This particular CRL is one that I have received. It was received via electronic mail. Personal and confidential information were left out of the text so as to not reveal its source. Judging from the scores I have read for this research, how similar rather than how different they are, in form, style, and content seems to be the point of prominence.

4.2 The selected text

1. Dear Mr. _____,
2. Thank you for taking the time to come in and meet with us last week.
3. You were a knowledgeable and impressive candidate.
4. The class we are most urgently trying to fill is a TOEFL IBT class,
5. but unfortunately your skill set is not an ideal match for this class,
6. and so we will offer the position to another teacher.

7. Your passion for teaching was very evident in the interview,
 8. and we would like to be able to contact you regarding other positions in
 the future.

9. Regards,

Figure 4- (The candidate rejection letter under analysis)

4.3 Genre positioning of the text

The candidate rejection letter may be regarded as a business communication epistolary genre, making it a sub-genre of the professional business communication genre, a super genre or a ‘colony’ of genre, to borrow a Bhatian concept (2004: 57-59). In Bhatia’s view, “...genre colonies represent groupings of closely related genres serving broadly similar communicative purposes...” (2004, 59) Included within the category of the business epistolary sub-genre would be: letter of apology, letter of complaint, job application letter, **candidate rejection letter**, job offer letter, job acceptance letter, letter of dismissal, letter of resignation, reference letter, and introduction letter to name a few. Arguably, the critical point, implying pedagogic currency, is the shared identity within these sub-genres. Therefore a critical question which will be later addressed is how generic features such as similar communicative purposes, and rhetorical moves or what Bhatia (ibid) called “generic values” of the business epistolary sub-genre, can enhance the teaching and learning process, especially in a business English L2 class.

4.4 Context Analysis

4.4.1 Purpose: Joss (2003) and Heathfield (2000) note what Bhatia (1993, 2004) called the communicative purposes that candidate rejection letters (CRLs) seek to fulfill. In the CRL text under analysis the unsuccessful applicant is thanked for submitting applications and or attending the interview(s) in Extract 1.

2. Thank you for taking the time to come in and meet with us last week.

Extract 1. Language thanking the successful candidate

Extract 2 includes the language used to inform unambiguously but graciously, the candidate of their failure.

5. ...but unfortunately your skill set is not an ideal match for this class...

Extract 2. Language informing the candidate of the reason for failure

Extract 3 is optional and includes an offer, [in a Bhatian (2004) promotional sense], and simultaneously hopes that the candidate will accept the bad news and remain favorably disposed towards the employer.

7. Your passion for teaching was very evident in the interview,
8. and we would like to be able to contact you regarding other positions in the future.

Extract 3. Language promoting good-will and offering incentives

4.4.2 Field: A CRL is not obligatory, but rather seen as a critical business communication tool used by employers to inform applicants of their failure. Due to the potential social, psychological, and economic discomfort that can result, participants of this discourse, employers in particular, may take special care in their roles.

4.4.3 Tenor: In broad terms, the CRL discourse participants are the employer on the one hand, and the potential employee on the other. This is clearly an un-equal power relationship in favor of the employer. The employer may be a company, corporation, or an institution; in the case of this text, it is the latter.

4.4.4 Mode: The channel of communication is usually direct mail via the post or, the electronic mail as in the case of the text under analysis. The candidate rejection letter would be a sub-genre of business professional genre, and therefore the text is symbolically organized in a formal way. As a formal letter, there are the *salutations* or

greetings: “Dear Mr. _____,” point 1, and the *closing*: “Regards”, point 9, as figure 4 in sub-section 4.2 illustrates.

4.4.5 Concluding the contextual analysis

Further, symbolically organized along rhetorical and persuasive lines, the text underscores not only the linguistic influences in this business communication epistolary sub-genre, but also, its discursive psycho-social, cultural, and economic determinants. This multi-disciplinary and discursive character of genres and by extension genre analysis is a prominent point shared among genre scholars, especially those already quoted in this paper. In the selected text (figure 4), whether it be genuine or superficial, the employer/interviewer in points 3 and 7 refers glowingly to the positive attributes of the applicant. Moreover, these two points of glorification, (3 & 7), sandwich the unpalatable point of the applicant’s failure, (4, 5 & 6). But, there is hope in despair, as the final point, (8), promises: “... we would like to be able to contact you regarding other positions in the future.”

4.5 Linguistic Analysis

4.5.1 Diagrammatic application of Bhatian-influenced schematic structure

Using the proposed schematic structure introduced in the framework of analysis, sub-section 3.2.3 the CRL text is represented below.

1. Dear Mr. _____,	M 1	
2. Thank you for taking the time to come in and meet with us last week.	M 2	
	2B	
3. You were a knowledgeable and impressive candidate.	M 4	
4. The class we are most urgently trying to fill is a TOEFL IBT class,	2A	M 3
5. but unfortunately your skill set is not an ideal match for this class,		
6. and so we will offer the position to another teacher.	3A	
7. Your passion for teaching was very evident in the interview,	M 4	

8. and we would like to be able to contact you regarding other positions in the future.	M 5
9. Regards,	M 6

Figure 5- Job rejection letter schematic structure

4.5.2 Evaluating the linguistic features

4.5.2.1 Greeting formally and politely is a rule, procedure, and practice in business communication. The point of significance here is the writer's personalizing the greeting by using the name of the person and not the impersonal, "candidate" or "applicant" (See Joss's tip 1 fig. 2). In respect to the issue of formality and politeness in business, Gan notes the inherent public relational and promotional character of business letters in general, the purposes of which are for:

Future business relations (it can be used to initiate, maintain or terminate business relations)

Further communications (it can be used to encourage or discourage further communication with regard to a particular matter)

(it can be used to build goodwill...) (1989: 21, cited Bhatia (1993: 55-56)

4.5.2.2 Expressing thanks for applying and attending the interview is another instance of formality and politeness in good business communication culture. Business consultant, Pat Cuchens calls this buffer:

You want to cushion the blow of the bad news, so begin your letter with a neutral idea. As your opening paragraph, this buffer should be short and could offer thanks or praise. For example, "Thank you for applying for the accounting clerk position at our office. We enjoyed meeting you last Friday." (2007: Para 8)

Hence: "Thank you for taking the time to come in and meet with us last week." (Point 2, Fig.5). Present are M1 and S2B, however, there is no step two A (S2A), albeit at this "buffer" point, stating the exact position applied for. Instead, it is at point 4: "The class we are most urgently trying to fill is a TOEFL IBT class," neatly stating the position and simultaneously implying there is at least another position (e.g. a TOEIC class) to be filled,

however, not a priority at this time. Interestingly and perhaps strategically, points 5 and 6 complete this decisive one-sentence, three-point performance; thereby executing M3 and S3A.

4.5.2.3 Giving the negative results and with reasons based on some objective criteria involve making a move and related a step. The rejection letter writer must deliver the bad news of the applicant's failure, and in doing so it seeks essentially:

- to be clear so that the candidate get the message that this particular job opportunity is now closed to him or her and;
- to explain logically yet indirectly, in a graceful and kind way how the candidate and the job are not a good fit. (Chuchens, 2007)

Demonstrating generic competence (Bhatia, 2004), points 4, 5 and 6 of the text read:

“The class we are most urgently trying to fill is a TOEFL IBT class, but unfortunately your skill set is not an ideal match for this class, and so we will offer the position to another teacher,” (Fig. 5)

4.5.2.4 Pointing to the positive attributes of the applicant or candidate is move 4. This is seen as basic good social psychology skills. In some sense the rejection letter is like a critique, or discourse in constructive criticism and therefore focusing on weaknesses while ignoring strengths as a CRL may in fact do, would not only be poor business communication practice, but also insensitive. The writer of this candidate rejection letter is clearly cognizant of the conventions, practices, and what's allowable (Bhatia, 1993, 2004) in this epistolary business communication sub-genre of which he / she is a member. This is true lexically, as exemplified by the positive adjectives he uses, namely, 'knowledge', 'impressive', and 'passion'. While the candidate's positive attributes are observed and highlighted, his/her non-selection is being rationalized: “...unfortunately your skill set is not an ideal match for this class...” (Fig.5, Point 5) In spite of the

candidate's strengths, they are not 'ideal', at least, as the writer explicitly states, for this opportunity.

4.5.2.5 Suggesting options for future actions or Offering incentives is a move that is made in only some rejection letter. Importantly the CRL writers, seek among other things, to communicate to the candidates that the job opportunity is now closed to them and therefore they should look in other job directions (Cuchens, 2007). However some writers, make favorable offers and promises, or simply give advice. But in rejection letter tip 6 (Fig.2), Joss warns against making unrealistic promises and commitments. Interestingly though, Heathfield (ibid. Para. 2) notes the value of an organization's "...ongoing ability to attract the best and most skilled talent..." Regarding the text being analyzed, the writer in point 8 (Fig.5) offered the candidate an incentive or made a promise to give his / candidature some consideration for other positions, presumably for which his / her 'skill-set' more closely matched.

4.5.2.6 Ending politely, is the final of this six move schematic structure and the rationale for this act would be similar to the first, greeting formally and politely. In business communication epistolary sub-genre, "sincerely", "yours sincerely", or "sincerely yours", "yours truly" and faithfully, (Joss 2003, Heathfield 2000, Cuchens 2007) appear to be the more popular closing styles. In this candidate rejection letter text, "regards" is what the writer uses. However, it can be argued that in using "regards" the writer tone is more personally polite than being guilty of transgressing any business communication politeness practices. In fact, this seems to give some credence to the fluidity and reflexivity that attend genres: constraining yet enabling thought and action (Frow 2006).

4.6 Conclusion of Analysis

The Candidate rejection letter text has been analyzed as belonging to the business communication epistolary sub-genre. Further the text essentially falls directly in what some scholars (influenced by Halliday's (1985) systemic-functional theory) called, specialized business register. Given that language is a social semiotic resource (Chapelle, 1998, Para 2), this analysis attempts to answer the broad question of how and why the text seeks to accomplish its communicative purposes in the way(s) it does.

If "...by expressing meaning in contexts" (Chapelle, 1998) is the short answer to the foregoing question, then the long answer might be the context and linguistic frames of analysis presented above. Contextually, a CRL is less obligatory, but more a procedural, informational, and pragmatic business communication tool in which employers write to candidates or applicants informing them of their failure in getting the job for which they applied. Invoking the dimensions of field, tenor, and mode of the context, a deeper assessment of how they determine language choice and language usage was attempted. And, linguistically, using a schema, influenced by Bhatia's approach, generic features of moves and structure in the analyzed text were identified and briefly evaluated. In sum, the text essentially made clear its communicative purposes, and taxonomically reflects the sub-genre in which the paper places it.

5.0 Pedagogic implications of generic features

5.1 Theory and Practice

Scholars, (chiefly, Swales, 1990, Bhatia, 1993, 2004) have recognized the pedagogic enhancing-value of genre theory in general, and the genre analysis in particular,

especially for EAP/ESP. This recognition also includes the constraints that are inherent in genre pedagogy. Paradoxically, EAP/ESP is itself a genre or sub-genre. It seems however, that the benefit generic features hold for language teaching and learning lies in the pragmatic search for patterns. Bhatia observes theoretically, "...the notion of pure genres is very attractive and extremely useful for a number of pedagogical applications..." Pragmatically, however, "...the complex communicative realities of present-day professional and academic world..." (2004:80) requires a more pattern-seeking approach to genre.

5.1.1 ESP Business Communication Class

The notion of pure genres would be analogous to a mix of taxonomic, epistemological, and ontological views. Thus, regarding generic features Miller (1984 cited in Breure, 2001)

As meaningful action, genre is interpretable by means of rules; genre rules occur at a relatively high level on a hierarchy of rules for symbolic interaction... as the substance of forms at higher levels; as recurrent patterns of language use, genres help constitute the substance of our cultural life.

Teaching an ESP business communication class how to write a candidate rejection letter by explaining the background, the purpose, the rules, and criteria of the sub-genre would seem to be a meaningful action. However, getting the students to understand what Swales (1990) called the communicative character of the discourse would require understanding of the symbiotic relationship between the determinants of, and the linguistics effects that characterize the text. Therefore, invoking situational / contextual realities of business communication, and the formality and politeness that underpin its precepts, procedures, and practices are necessary but not sufficient in achieving the pedagogical objective of communicative competence.

On the other hand however, using the schematic model, showing the moves and steps, and explaining their reasons can provide a pragmatic and effective approach to achieving pedagogic objectives. From greeting formally and politely to informing the candidate of his/her failure, based on objective criteria, then pointing to some future actions for the candidate before ending politely, these typified moves or generic patterns of a candidate rejection letter can enhance the effective teaching and learning of the sub-genre.

More practically, since the candidate rejection letter would be one of the many professional business communication epistolary sub-genres, a lesson could be organized along the lines of simply classification for an L2 business class. This could be done by pooling the body text of other business letters together, for example, complaint letter, apology letter, job acceptance letter, resignation letter, and employment termination letter with the candidate rejection letter, and students ask to classify them accordingly. Their common business epistolary features could be identified and taught as one lesson objective/task. Another lesson or activity could be on the title or letter categories which could lead into an exploration of the field, tenor, and mode of Halliday's (1985) contextual variables. Then a Bhatian (1993, 2004) influenced move structure analysis could be used to teach the process and production of the candidate rejection letter, informed by the proposed analysis introduced by the paper. Therefore generic features of text can enhance genre pedagogy.

5.1.2 Challenges of teaching generic features

From what has been said throughout this discourse, it would seem that a significant challenge to genre pedagogy would lie in getting students to understand, practice, and appreciate not just the constraining, but also the creative agency that genre and its generic features present. L2, particularly lower level students, would be more inclined to be

content with merely following the rules of the genre. The teacher too would perhaps find it more convenient to encourage and expect L2 students to simply mimic the genre. This of course would be a safe and perhaps more pragmatic approach for beginners especially. However, genres, and by extension generic features as pointed out earlier are multi-disciplinary and therefore boundary-diffusing. As such, Paltridge (1994) research abstract observed:

There are non-linguistic, rather than linguistic, reasons for staging in texts, and that the search for structural divisions in texts should be seen as a search for cognitive boundaries in terms of convention, appropriacy, and content rather than a search for linguistically defined boundaries. (1994:288-299)

6.0 Conclusion

This contribution to discourse analysis in general and genre analysis in particular, looked at a text, the candidate rejection letter, belonging to the business communication epistolary sub-genre. While much attention has been given to the candidate application letter, this has not been so for candidate rejection letter, itself an important business communication tool in keeping people remaining favorably disposed towards their organizations or institutions. The situational / contextual analysis and the Bhatian (1993, 2004) influenced linguistic schematic model revealed key generic features of the job rejection letter. Also, the pedagogic implications of generic features indicate both challenges and opportunities. In spite of the foregoing, the effort recognizes that there is scope for further analysis particularly as genre analysis of this genre is at a developmental stage. It is therefore an area worth revisiting.

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