

Cultural Factors Affecting Bilingualism in North Georgia

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Received October 05, 2022; Revised November 11, 2022; Accepted November 20, 2022

Abstract In the United States of America, only 20 percent of its students take bilingual classes in comparison to countries in the European Union such as Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and Sweden where more than 90 percent of their students participate in bilingual education. The United States is a powerhouse in economy and technology, with these qualities the question is why Americans have such a lower percentage of bilinguals. This research analyzes the impact of cultural identity, social factors, and the effect on the attitude and motivation toward a second language. Utilizing the quantitative exploratory method, which consists of the approval or refusal of hypotheses. Hypotheses were verified using statistical calculations on responses from people, Latins, and Americans older than 21 years old that live in the northern part of the State of Georgia. In the northern part of Georgia, the inhabitants learn a second language by acquiring linguistics skills through a variety of languages offered by the educational system since elementary school. However, besides the variety of languages offered, government incentives, and the time invested in the learning process, the levels of bilingualism are low that even reach extreme levels as a fossilization of the second language skills, marginalizing the linguistic abilities acquired. Identifying the elements that create these conditions is essential to adopt a more efficient and effective learning process resulting in a significant increment in American bilingualism levels. At the same time and to improve the validity of the results obtained via surveys the research will use the PLS-MGA, a second-generation application for statistical analysis applied in multi groups environments. Also, the investigation opens the door to further investigations to modify social behaviors using culture and social distance as factors in the process.

Keywords: *bilingualism, social distance, cultural identity, perception, attitude, and motivation*

Cite This Article: Oscar F. Narváez, "Cultural Factors Affecting Bilingualism in North Georgia." *Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2022): 11-17. doi: 10.12691/jll-5-1-3.

1. Introduction

The process of learning a second language is not only limited to events of memorizing and repeating a series of words that sound and spell differently. It requires an environment that allows language skills to develop. The necessity to create better job opportunities for citizens is a constant in the development of every country. Therefore, bilingual education has become a determining factor in today's society. Bilingual education implies skills in other languages; however, this necessity contrasts with current research that shows new professionals with academic deficiencies in terms of bilingualism, creating the urgency to strengthen these skills in a second language since it provides educational benefits and labor opportunities, [1,2,3,4,5]. For example, in the United States, only 20 percent of students are enrolled in bilingual courses, as opposed to other European Union countries such as Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Sweden, where over 90 percent of their students learn a second language [6,7].

Despite efforts to increase bilingualism levels in the United States, these do not reflect positive results [7,8]. Looney & Lusin [9], point out that universities in the

United States have observed a decrease of more than a quarter of a million students who want to learn a second language. The attitudes of North American young adults to educate themselves and learn a second language see it as a challenging goal to achieve [10,11]. It can affect the attitude toward bilingualism depending on whether students belong to a bilingual environment [12,13] where cultural identity plays a determining role [10,13]. One aspect of interest is that in the United States, unlike other countries, learning a second language is not a priority either in education or society [8,14,15]. The seminal works of Schumann [16] establish that cultural identity is a determining factor in the attitude to bilingualism. The effects of the environment on a person's attitude are determined by a specific social distance which is a variable that precedes and is the force that explains attitude to bilingualism.

The Literature details that cultural identity is a multidimensional variable where the normative factor and the psychosocial factor appear as two important dimensions to explain cultural identity [17,18,19]. In addition, social distance plays a determining role since it implies an imbalance of the native language where the second language is explained by personal, social, and linguistic dimensions [20,21,22]. However, the academic

literature is limited in reflecting findings on how cultural identity and social distance affect attitudes toward bilingual education. This quantitative study, through the Theory of Acculturation and Social Distance, explored whether the cultural identity of residents of the state of Georgia in the United States significantly affects the imbalance of language through social distance. Second, it looked at whether social distance is a factor that may affect attitudes toward bilingualism for residents in the U.S. state of Georgia. The results reflected valuable contributions to the theory of Acculturation and Social Distance. The rest of the document discusses the background of the literature, as well as the method, conclusions, theoretical implications, limitations, and future research. In the same way, it provides relevant recommendations for the educational system. Finally, the study provides valuable information to strengthen educational processes for a second language from an unusual perspective studied in the academic literature.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Cultural Identity

Pelham & Abrams [23] established that in learning a second language, the cultural factor plays a center role in the attitude of an individual. They define "cultural identity" as a historical period in which people assimilate values, practices, concepts, thoughts, beliefs, among others [24,25]. Seidler [19] details that cultural identity is a complex issue since individual experiences derived from social interaction, including educational processes, become part of personal characteristics [22,25,26,27,28]. Schumman [16] states that cultural identity is the first element considered when attempting to gain knowledge of a second language. Then this knowledge has an impact on social distance. However, it clarifies that the study of cultural identity is a multidimensional variable in which the dimensions of normative cultural identity and psychosocial cultural identity stand out [13,22,27]. That is why we propose:

H_1 : Cultural identity is a multidimensional variable that is the willingness to educate oneself toward bilingualism, which is explained by its dimensions:

H_{1a} : normative cultural identity

H_{1b} : psychosocial factor

The normative cultural identity factor refers to the norms or rules established as good or considered altruistic. The normative factor determines the character against the environment and has the power to explain the importance of being educated in a second language [12,17,22,29]. The psychosocial factor analyzes concepts of society through the parameters established in community life, determining which activities are considered good or bad [18,24]. Other studies consulted establish that these two dimensions explain the attitude towards bilingualism [10,24,30,31,32,33]. Using culture is how this study analyzes the normative and psychosocial factors in relation to bilingualism according to a person's disposition toward the second language [12,22,33].

Another group of studies details the cultural identity in the willingness to gain language skills that will be affected

by social distance related factors [2,20,30]. Social distance allows communication and involvement of an individual based on the level of interest or the importance of an event [17,34,35]. Studies through the Schumman model highlight that both personal factors [2,30], social factors [36,37] and linguistic factors [20,24,38,39] significantly affected the attitude of educate yourself toward bilingualism. These antecedents lead us to consider that the mental processes of an individual are not only framed in the individual capacity to learn but also go further to the levels of execution. Leading to the following group of hypotheses:

H_2 : Cultural identity in the willingness to educate toward bilingualism is significantly affected by personal factors.

H_3 : Cultural identity in the willingness to educate toward bilingualism is significantly affected by social factors.

H_4 : The cultural identity in the willingness to be educated toward bilingualism is significantly affected by the linguistic factor.

2.2. Social Distance

Schumman [16] establishes social distance as the second fundamental element in the intention to learn a second language. Mujica et al. [24], highlights that social distance is a figurative term since it implies a level of importance or appreciation of the second language for a person compared to the native language [24]. According to Boxer [35], social distance is the receptivity that can occur in situations where the interlocutors have the same level of interest. Social distance allows communication and involvement of an individual. However, the stimuli of social distance towards bilingualism can be positive or negative. Positive conditions occur through second language stimuli, encouragement, and support reinforcing language skills acquisition. Negative conditions occur when the acquisition of skills towards bilingualism lack importance or social support. In this aspect, not only cultural elements influence the learning process negatively, economic and labor conditions are also detrimental when the second language is seen as an unproductive or a not well compensated activity lacking in merit [2,20,24,30,40]. However, Schumann [16] explains that social, personal, and linguistic factors are determining variables to establish positive or negative factors and how social distance acts toward bilingualism. That is why we propose:

H_4 : Social distance acts toward bilingualism as a multidimensional variable which is explained by:

H_{4a} social factor

H_{4b} personal factor

H_{4c} linguistic factor

The personal factor is the individual psychological, cognitive, relationship and personality characteristics or capacities that determine the behavior and performance of each individual [17,33]. Otherwise, the personal factor is explained by the social sphere and the psychological sphere [16]. The social factor refers to the stimuli that the environment presents towards some individual personality characteristics and training when individual and collective principles have to be negotiated to determine behavior [13,34]. The linguistic factor is the sound or phonetic

characteristics of a language. These characteristics change in the second language acquisition process, causing linguistic changes because of the assimilation process of a second language through the native language [41,42]. Studies highlight that social, personal, and linguistic factor [12,16,43,44] significantly affects the attitude and motivation toward bilingualism. Where social and personal factors receive pressure from the environment [10,13,34,36,44]. At the linguistic level, facts associated with the primary language and how associate pronunciation with the second language that one wishes to learn can be presented [6,10,43,44]. It is for this background that we propose:

H_5 : Social distance significantly affects the attitude and motivation to bilingualism.

2.3. Attitude and Motivation

Attitude and motivation have been considered the keys to success in any human activity [27,29,30,45,46,47]. Attitude is the disposition concerning the psychological aspect of an activity and not a physical behavior [46,48]. On the other hand, motivation is the direction and magnitude of human will in the process of executing a particular action determined by a level of persistence and effort [30,49]. However, subsequent research shows some problems with pedagogical and psychological theories that considered attitude and motivation as the keys to success. For instance, lack of interest cause low performance that may lead to dropout [3,47]. Concerning attitude and motivation in bilingual programs, these were considered the keys to the educational process to acquire a second language [45,50,51].

Recent research shows that there are significance levels positive and negative in the attitude and the perception of being educated in bilingualism [24,30,31,46,51]. Perception can receive information through attitudes since the two are developed based on individual contacts and the environment toward bilingualism. The willingness to learn a second language will be observed through motivation, since motivation implies activity [41,45,49,51]. In this way attitude and motivation toward bilingualism may present both positive and negative effects.

3. Methodology

We tested the conceptual model in Figure 1 using Partial Least Squares Structural Equations (PLS-SEM) on 345 participants from the Latino and American communities residing in upstate Georgia, United States.

This quantitative study is carried out through simple random sampling, through an electronic survey in Spanish or English at the participant's preference, using the simple sampling technique with sampling without replacement. To achieve this goal the survey was protected and encrypted so that it could only be accessed once. If a participant left or took another action, the survey was immediately rejected, and the participant could not access it again. Malhotra et al., [52] explains that sampling without replacement is more significant than other sampling techniques since sampling without replacement does not allow the same population element to enter the sample more than once. The study managed to collect 345 participants. After the initial analysis only 335 were enabled for analysis purposes. The demographic data reflected.

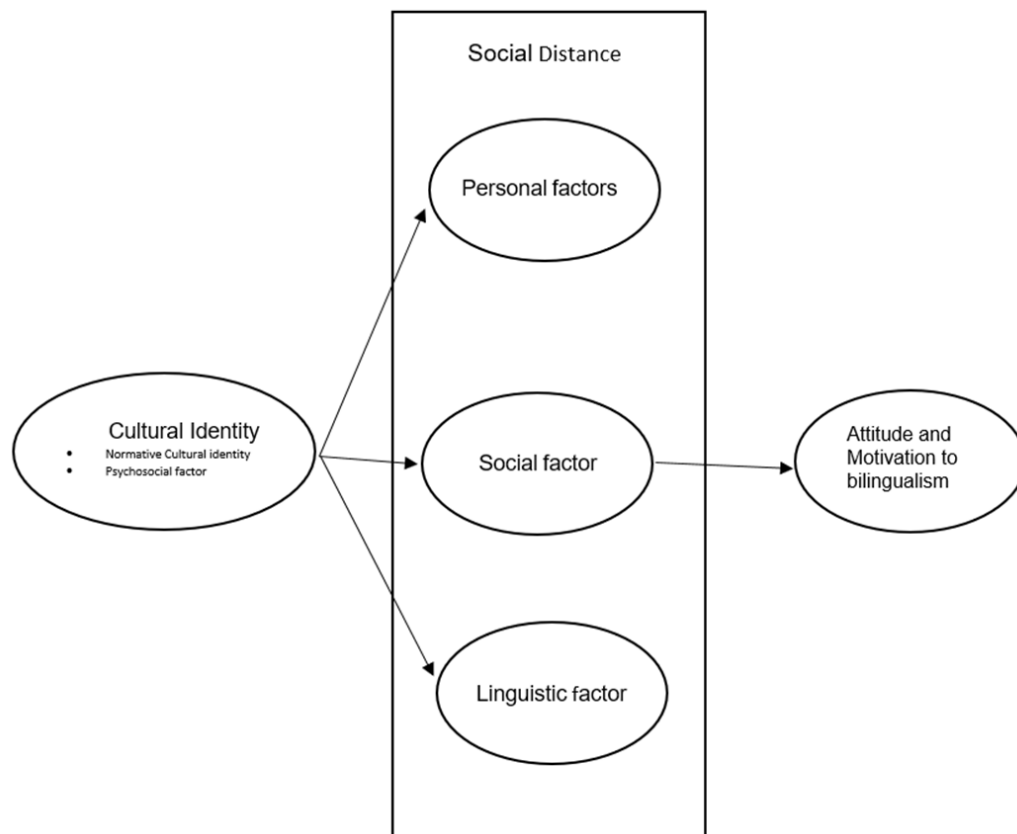


Figure 1. Research model and relationship of variables (Source: self-made)

4. Validity and Reliability

The analysis carried out for the measurement model observed in Table 1 reflects that the values of the loading factor, Alpha coefficients, composite reliability reflected values higher than the .70 criterion in most of the variables [53,54]. It is only observed that the linguistic factor $\alpha = .62$ and the personal factor $\alpha = .65$ maintain a value slightly lower than .70. However, when analyzing the composite reliability, it has values higher than .70. Hair et al. [53] & Henseler, [54] who explain that composite reliability data are more precise than Cronbach's Alpha coefficients since it does not assume that all indicators receive the same weight. Composite reliability varies from 0 to 1, offering better confidence estimates where any value greater than .70 reflects acceptable levels of validity. At the end, in the AVE values, it is observed that all the latent variables reflected values higher than the .50 criterion [53]. In the end, the values for the discriminant validity test of HTMT reflected in Table 2 are according to the criterion of .90 or less [53,54] where these data allow us to conclude that there are no problems between variables that could have the same meaning. In the end, these data reflect that the study

shows high validity and reliability for the result presentation [53].

5. Results

The analysis of the results begins by analyzing whether cultural identity is a multidimensional variable explained by normative cultural identity and a psychosocial factor. To analyze each dimension was tested using the Hierarchical method Component Models (HCM) in PLS-SEM. The HCM analysis within the structural model reduce the number of relationships, providing a detailed understanding of how each dimension acts in relation to the first-order variable [53]. The data for each dimension was analyzed and run using the repeated indicators approach proposed by Ringle et al., [55] where the level of importance is analyzed through significance levels according to Bootstrapping data [53,55]. Where the data reflect that cultural identity is explained in the first place by what is the normative cultural identity ($t=41.979$ $t>1.960$) followed by what is the psychosocial factor ($t=36.087$ $t>1.960$) consequently, the hypothesis is supported see Figure 2.

Table 1. Validity and reliability of the model

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitude & Motivation	0.858	0.894	0.585
Personal factor	0.659	0.854	0.745
Social Factor	0.810	.0875	0.636
Cultural Identity	0.890	0.913	0.569
Linguistic	0624	0.831	0.713
Normative	0.833	0.889	0.667
Psychosocial	0.827	0.885	0.66

Note: own source results obtained from the calculations in the SMART-PLS program.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity Test

	Attitude & Motivation	Personal factor	Social factor	Cultural Identity	Linguistic	Normative	Psychosocial
Attitude & motivation	0.765						
Personal factor	0.647	0.863					
Social factor	0.663	0.594	0.798				
Cultural Identity	0.712	0.695	0.754	0.755			
Linguistic	-0.272	-0.269	-0.057	-0.184	0.844		
Normative	0.629	0.666	0.643	0.926	-0.149	0.817	
Psychosocial	0.682	0.613	0.753	0.928	-0.187	0.719	0.812

Note: own source results obtained from the calculations in the SMART-PLS program.

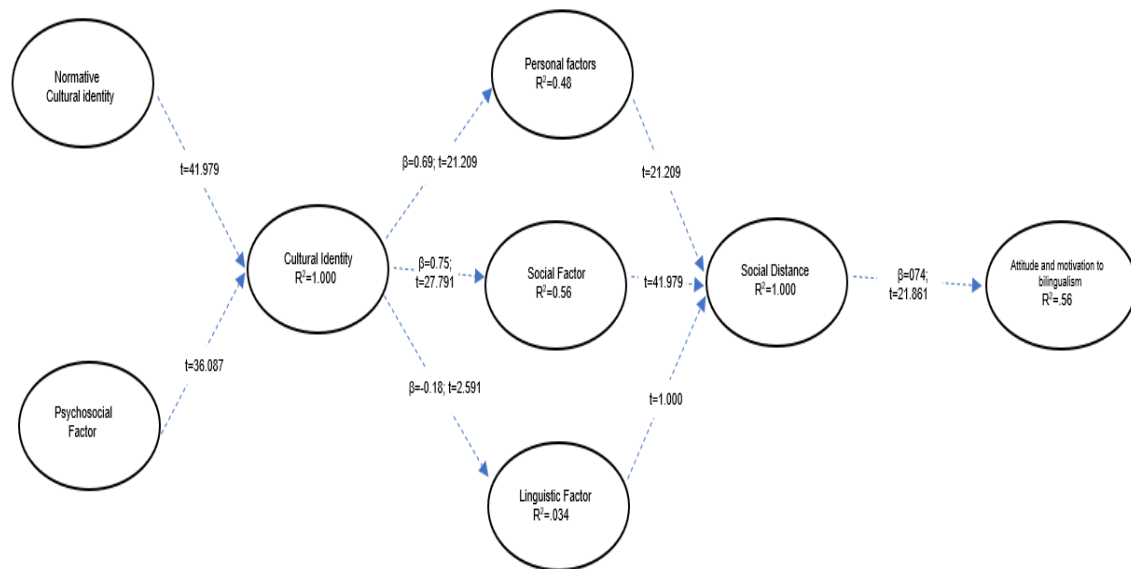


Figure 2. Dimension test. Source own creation on SMART-PLS

The study continued to analyze whether cultural identity in the willingness to be educated towards bilingualism is significantly affected by personal factors ($\beta = 0.69$; $p < 0.01$; $t = 21.209$ $t > 1.960$), social factors ($\beta = 0.75$; $p < 0.01$; $t = 27.791$ $t > 1.960$) and the linguistic factor ($\beta = -0.18$; $p < 0.01$; $t = 2.591$ $t > 1.960$). Wherein the data for this group of hypotheses were also supported. Then it was analyzed whether social distance, which is considered a multidimensional variable and the data analyzed through HCM, supports the hypothesis where social distance is explained first by the social factor ($t = 41.979$ $t > 1.960$), followed by the personal factor ($t = 21.209$ $t > 1.960$) and finally by the linguistic factor ($t = 2.911$ $t > 1.960$). In the end, the hypothesis is supported because analyzed whether social distance significantly affects ($\beta = 0.74$; $p < 0.01$; $t = 21.861$ $t > 1.960$) the attitude and motivation to bilingualism.

6. Conclusions

6.1. General Discussion

To present the novelty of this research, current processes to develop a second language are the canvas for reference. These processes base the development of language skills in cognitive processes to develop bilingualism. Knowing a second language is fundamental in the global economy we live in; however, specifically in the northern part of the state of Georgia and in general in the United States, there are not high levels of bilingualism. The results of this research offer valuable information to explain this phenomenon since it presents a model to determine the effect of cultural identity and social distance on attitude and motivation towards bilingualism. Based on the theory Kastanakis & Voger, [31]; Mujica et al, [24] VanPatten & Williams, [11] the first contribution of this study is to highlight the essentiality of culture in the process of acquiring a second language. This contrasts with the generalized concept that relates the success of the learning process to elements of cognitive origin, neglecting fundamental cultural elements as cultural

identity and the social environment. Also, it supports the concept of integrated learning that involves cognitive and cultural elements in the learning process. Another contribution of this research is the presentation of a behavior model to explain the elements that explain the attitude and motivation towards bilingualism. In this aspect, the research established that cultural identity explains 100% the attitude and motivation for bilingualism, an important achievement understanding influential factors in second language acquisition processes. Lastly, the research projects bilingualism current levels and the long-term implications affecting not only students but also faculty based on current levels of students enrolled in higher education language courses [9].

6.2. Theoretical Implications

Traditional processes of acquisition of a second language develop cognitive techniques Abarca [11]; Ekman et al, [27]; Pelham & Abrams, [23], marginalizing environmental conditions in individual characteristics such as educational levels, work, and socially. In the same way, the cognitive approach minimizes social elements that can be cloistered in an environment that we call culture [36,44]. These social and cultural conditions pressure current and future cognitive abilities since they will depend on current conditions and individual perspectives, affecting training processes and bilingualism. This research establishes that cultural factors are as important as cognitive factors, and in some cases, specifically in North Georgia and generally in the United States, cultural factors are more significant than cognitive factors.

To establish the relationship between culture and cognition, the researcher designed a model that combines three large groups: cultural identity, social distance, and attitude and motivation towards bilingualism. Dorcasberro [38], explains the relationships between culture and second language development, while Scheapers & Ellemers, [13] focus on cultural identity and social interactions. A predictive model was proposed to determine the incidence of individual factors such as normative culture, psychosocial, social, personal, and

linguistic factors concerning perception and motivation towards bilingualism and the relationship between them. The results of this model showed that, although cultural identity predicts the attitude and motivation to bilingualism by 100%. The model explains that the attitude and motivation of being bilingual is fully explained by personal identity. However, social, personal, and linguistic factors explain the attitude and motivation towards bilingualism in lower percentages. These levels are an important achievement since it allows establishing a solid base on how individual characteristics and the environment affect second language acquisition processes.

The study contributes the inclusion of cultural factors in the process of acquiring a foreign language, which is a subject with limited documentation since most of the research deals with the subject based on cognitive, didactic, or motivational approaches [1,4,27,28,56]. However, the model identified negative social cultural factors against bilingualism, such as the American social culture where the acquisition of a second language is not valued and that, culturally, it is not considered an achievement to speak a second language because there is no immediate remuneration. Another negative factor is the economic aspect in American culture. The American culture is mainly economic results since achievements and efforts must bring significant economic rewards. Unfortunately for languages, they do not have substantial economic recognition compared to traditional educational processes such as engineering or accounting. Graduates of bilingual programs can acquire bonuses or incentives for speaking a second language, but they are not significant. This reason makes Americans minimize the academic achievements of speaking a second language, lose interest in bilingual programs and even forget the language skills acquired at different levels of education. Additionally, the model assimilates the inclusion of variables such as the social factor and the linguistic factor that are decisive in determining the social and perception influences on a second language [24,26]. Cognitive processes will depend on social, cultural and perception interactions in the second language [20,31].

The contributions of this research explain that the low levels of bilingualism in the United States affect not only the student population but also the teaching population, since it limits the number of people who speak a second language. According to Looney & Lusin [9], universities have lost more than a quarter of a million students in second language programs. This implies that in the future, there will not be enough North American teachers of second languages due to low enrollment levels for these programs, affecting the teaching part of education. One solution to this problem is to import teachers from countries where a second language is spoken. However, local teachers have better levels of acceptance and performance since they assimilate and reduce cultural factors in the educational process [27,57].

6.3. Implications for Education

In the educational part, it shows that culture is a factor as important as the cognitive one and therefore, it is necessary to implement cultural programs that change the existing cultural idiosyncrasies to minimize cultural

barriers in educational processes [2,20,38,41]. Additionally, another contribution of this research is to encourage to maintain the educational process in continuous processes not only of curriculum, but of implementation since actually middle school students are instructed in bilingual programs that resume in high school one or two years later losing previously acquired language skills [7,8,15].

6.4. Limitations and Future Research

One of the limitations was obtaining documentation on the theoretical part around the culture as an active agent in second language learning processes. Due to the vast influx of studies that assume bilingualism as a cognitive process and pedagogical strategies, fundamental aspects such as society and its influences misguide results. For this reason, it is essential to recognize culture as a primary factor in the development of bilingualism. Future studies on the cultural influence and its impact on bilingualism can use different types of sampling so that the impact is measurable to design corrective methods.

Another limitation was variable classification. The classification was broad and not specific. In social and linguistic factors elements lack definition. For example, economic, family, regional, or labor factors are too broad, and due to the amplitude of the variable, it is difficult to have an accurate significance level if it does not have a specific condition represented.

One of the causes of the lack of growth of the bilingual population in the United States is the loss of language skills. Another limitation was the lack of data collection in the adult population of North Georgia who had bilingual skills that due to social and cultural frictions lost their language skills. A subsequent study that identifies the causes of this problem will quantify the size of the population experiencing these conditions presenting initiatives to avoid this trend or delay the effects of missing language skills.

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