



Semiotic Analysis of Sundanese Culture Spells: Exploring Its Discursive Level and Cultural Connotation

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Abstract: This paper presents a semiotic analysis focusing on the discursive level. This study investigates the figurative components, syntactical/grammatical features, and enunciative components of the signs embedded in Sundanese cultural spells, specifically *Asihan Leugeut teuerup*. A qualitative descriptive method was implemented to unveil the meanings and interpretations presented in the spells. The study discovered that: (1) the sign reference, known as its figurative components, was divided into five isotopies carrying specific cultural connotations; (2) the spells were also preferably characterized by nominative structure rather than the predicative; its syntactical structures were dominated by imperative moods and *kecap anteuran* (anticipatory verbal inchoative words); and (3) the way the spells were narrated was through the first-person protagonist and diegetic, meaning that the actor was the narrator himself. The findings suggest that the signs presented in the spells provide suggestive insights through components that relate closely to users' daily and iterative activities. These suggestive insights can be interpreted as how users understand the meaning of the signs.

Keywords: Semiotic Analysis, Cultural Connotation, Figurative Components, Sundanese Culture Spell, Signs

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the intricate realm of language practices within a community, specifically focusing on the *Asihan* spells in Sundanese culture. These practices, which occur naturally within the sociocultural interactions of the community, are formed to fulfill specific functions of the expressed spells. The relevance of this research lies in its exploration of the sign systems that carry conveyed meaning in both sentence and utterance meanings of these spells, drawing on Saussure's argument that every means of expression used in society is fundamentally based on collective behavior or convention (1981, p. 68).

The research underscores the importance of recognizing the signs structured in the spell for the expression of a spell to be meaningful. These signs encapsulate messages, information, and representations of the community's sociocultural interactions. The study posits that signs, or language forms, are crucial in accessing the intended meaning as symbols representing or decoding the speaker's utterances (Cruse, 2006, p. 42).

The paper further investigates the discursive, figurative, syntactic, and enunciative components of spoken *Asihan* spells, formulated from units of language interconnected through a system that creates meaning (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 8). The signs in the spell are thus transformed into elements of the structure. These elements are categorized into isotopes defined by lexical and semantic relations and other markers at the figurative level.

The research also examines the syntactic structure of the spells, highlighting verbs' fundamental role in defining the structure's mood and identifying speakers' attitudes. The existence of other language markers in its syntactic structure exposes its cultural richness, representing the unique characteristics of the Sundanese. The final element at the discursive level is the enunciative component, which serves as a guideline for examining the perspectives of spell users. Pronouns and narration become crucial for looking at the spell based on user experience, thereby representing the Sundanese community in general, as it reflects the collective behavior of the community.

In light of these considerations, this research aims to fill a significant gap in the current understanding of how the signs encode the meaning of the spell and how the components of the signs relate to each other. The focus is on describing the discursive

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level of constructing the structure of the Sundanese *Asihan* spell, particularly *Si Leugeut Teureup*. The term *asihan* is used throughout this paper to differentiate it from *pèlèt*, often referred to as a love spell in English. *Asihan* is a spell that aims to evoke love or kindness from others using only words. In contrast, *pèlèt* (love spells) uses words and a magic potion to enchant and win someone's affection (Rigg, 2009, p. 23). *Asihan* is about self-improvement and confidence, hoping others will see the caster positively. It evokes feelings of care and understanding in others (Rigg, 2009, p. 23). On the other hand, *pèlèt* is used to attract someone romantically or sexually, often compelling them to pay attention to the caster.

A qualitative research approach was implemented to qualify and extend the discussion on the meaning-making process. The findings of this research reflect the richness of language principles implemented in one language practice, which can result in the exposition of the sophisticated culture of the Sundanese community. This study, therefore, contributes significantly to the broader understanding of language practices and their cultural implications.

2. Literature Review

Language and culture are intricately linked, with language serving as a conduit for cultural knowledge (Li & Liu, 2012, p. 2178). By prioritizing language-based cultural learning, we can enhance our grasp of vocabulary, leading to more effective vocabulary instruction and ultimately enabling more seamless cross-cultural communication. This method empowers us to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds confidently. Academic scholars demonstrate comparable patterns and commonalities regardless of their cultural background when socialized in a culture and position influenced by extensive formal education, a certain level of affluence, and a connection to modern cultural places (Wijngaarden, 2020, p. 90). These patterns manifest in diverse manifestations worldwide, indicating the practices and commonalities in many cultures regarding how messages are communicated.

As a practice that involves language, signs in *asihan* can be studied through semiotics. Saussure argued that sign, in linguistics, combines a signifier (language form) and a signified (meaning) and its relation to the world. Bronwen and Ringham (2000, p. 117) defined semiotic studies as Sign Characteristics, the mind used to understand something or to deliver knowledge to others. One way to analyze signs using a semiotic approach is through its discursive level. Bronwen and Ringham (2000, p. 8) defined this as the surface level of the meaning or story of manifestation. Discourse et al. (2011, p. 117) suggested that the discursive level examines specific words or grammatical items/structures visible on a text's surface, particularly in most textual analyses. Implicit from the statement, the signs in the *asihan* spell serve as a structure that carries meaning through its units of language and relationship. Critical elements at this level include Figurative components, syntactic structures, and enunciative components (see Martin and Ringham, 2000 and Discourse et al., 2011).

In the context of the *Asihan* spell, the discursive level can be seen as a parallel to the macrostructure concept. The macrostructure, as defined, is the global meaning of a text observed from the topic/theme and syntax or can also be acknowledged as explicit meaning (Li J et al., 2023). Similarly, the discursive level in semiotics examines the surface level of meaning or story of manifestation, including examining specific words or grammatical structures visible on a text's surface.

The *asihan* spell, as a semiotic entity, carries its global meaning (macrostructure) through its thematic elements (the topics or themes put forward in the spell) and its syntax (the form and order of sentences). These elements correspond to the figurative components and syntactic structures at the discursive level. The enunciative components, which refer to the context in which the spell is used and the intention behind its use, further contribute to the global meaning of the spell.

Therefore, the discursive level in semiotics and the macrostructure concept in textual analysis can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Both aim to uncover the global meaning of a text (or spell, in this case) by analyzing its thematic and syntactic elements or linguistic features, as mentioned by Sukarno et al. (2020, p.233). This approach allows a deeper understanding of the *Asihan* spell and its cultural significance. It provides a framework for interpreting the spell as a series of words and a complex sign system that conveys meaning within its socio-cultural context. This interpretation aligns with the goal of semiotic studies to deliver knowledge to others by analyzing sign characteristics.

Bronwen and Ringham (2000) and Discourse et al. (2011) agree that figurative components are elements in the text that refer to the external physical world. This means that the signs in the structure of a text relate to the world/environment of the text. Any sign constructing the text is said to originate from or relate to the community and its sociocultural interactions. Martin and Ringham (2000, p. 8) added to the environment; the reference is the reality that the five senses can apprehend, called figurative reality. This suggests that figurative elements can be categorized through the existence of the linguistic, as Hawkes (2003, p. 95) suggests structuring the text: which lexical belongs to a category depends on the meaning relation.

This relationship can be obtained through contrastive meaning or contradiction. Kreidler (2002, p. 10) stated that if one piece of information about something is authentic, the other must be false. For example, Jaka has a bachelor's degree if Jaka is married, but must be mistaken. In contrast, the existence of linguistic information in text/discourse is directly contrasted, sometimes creating an antonym relation. However, those not directly determined are included in other semantic relations, such as synonyms, where words share common sense

(Kreidler, 2002, p. 11), such as streets, lanes, roads, paths, and avenues. Other than a synonym, the relation can include a meronym, the part-whole relation (Malmkjær, 2005, p. 342), such as in the nose, eyes, lips, cheeks, and chin, which are parts of one's face. Meaning can also be discovered through meaning properties (Larson, 1984, p. 66), in which the lexical will be validated through several functions to find which properties/fields are different.

Table 1: Meaning Properties of *Asihan* compared to *Pèlèt*

Lexical	Textual Spell	Addressed different sex	Medium	The user himself casts the spell
<i>Asihan</i>	+	+ -	x	+
<i>Pèlèt</i>	+	+	+ -	+ -

Source: authors' work adopted from Larson (1984) on meaning properties

Another way to examine how a spell provides meaning can be conducted through verb moods (nominative, imperative, and indicative) or other markers within the structure. Halliday and Matthiessen argued that mood has the elements of the subject, which is a nominal group, and the finite operator, which is part of a verbal group (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 398). Subsequently, a finite operator specifies mood. Verb mood in the nominative mood indicates the subject of the finite verb, such as in the spell Peugeot tenure. Imperative moods express commands, prohibitions, requests, or advice, such as in (you) flock and love (me).

The last mood is indicative, saying ordinary statements, such as mountain caves. These are grammatical/syntactic features at a discursive level. At this level, using the active or passive voice or procedures such as nominalisation or cohesive markers sheds light on the organization of a text. It thus reveals textual strategies or manipulation (Bronwen & Ringham, 2000). One way to address the textual approach in the form of mood/other markers can be conducted through propositional analysis, which is included in the state (for nominative) or event (for imperative and indicative) propositions.

State propositions do not have the EVENT concept as their central one (Larson, 1984, p. 194). In the structure of the spell, the occurrence of *kecap anteuran* (Anticipatory Verbal Inchoative-AVI) and passive construction (an adjective derived from a verb) are analyzed using this proposition, resulting in nominative moods. In an event proposition, as suggested by its name, the central concept is an event (Larson, 1984, p. 194) or, in other words, any predicate showing activities/doing of the subject. This proposition applies to imperative and indicative moods within a spell structure.

The final analysis component at the discursive level is the enunciative component. Bronwen Ringham (2000) defined this component as the relation between traces of the text's speaker/author and listener/reader. The analysis of this component involves the presence of pronouns in the structure, leading to narrative voice, forms of speech, and intentionality (Discours et al., 2011). In addition, Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994) argued that meaningful connections between expressions and content are socially created and maintained. Implicitly, this suggests that the connections are shared and collective and, therefore, can serve as a source of ideas, rules, practices, and codes, later known as culture (Culler, 1975, p. 33).

In the discourse of the *asihan* spell, the pronoun *I* is the most common in the structure; it is essential to understand that it serves as the individual self. Therefore, it can be understood that it is an ongoing process of construction throughout an individual's life through participation in narrative and discursive practices in social interactions (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 109). In other words, it is essential to examine the modality of an expression in the structure, especially the word category, since it also exposes the speaker's specific intentionality. This eventually leads to an indication of the particular concept of the narrator's intentionality.

3. Methods

This study conducted qualitative research to disclose the meaning of the signs presented in the *Asihan* spell. Any unique characteristic of the signs shown in the spell is qualified regarding its figurative components, syntactic/grammatical features, and enunciative components so that any specific interpretation of the signs can be discovered. This qualification was performed under the study of Creswell (2014, p. 4), who stated that qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.

The spell used in this study was collected from a primary source published by the Agency of Tourism and Culture of West Java Province in 2012 (Etti et al., 2012). The selection considers that this publication resulted from field research concerning the discovery of spelling practices in West Java. Considering this, the *asihan* spells presented in this paper indicate the representation and existence of *asihan* spells in the Sundanese community.

The selected data were then copy-pasted into a web-based application named Text Analyzer (online utility. org) to discover the frequency of words (signs). The frequent occurrence of signs must represent the signifier (meaning) of the whole concept of the spell. This idea is supported by Jorgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 29), who state that the expression is never merely a repetition of something already established but rather as signs that have become a moment. In addition, the syntactic structure of the spell was analyzed to discover moods/markers in the structure. From both perspectives, the narrator of the spell can easily be discovered.

The four *asihan* spells presented in this paper are spells with specific characteristics at the discursive level; the core concept of isotopes focuses only on two lexical *leugeut* (latex) and *teureup* (breadfruit). Although the

literal meaning quickly suggests it, the use of this lexical generally draws attention to how or why they have something to do with one's compassion for others or the spell user through the surrounding lexical fields.

4. Results and Discussion

Four *leugeut teureup* spells were discovered in the primary source. The text from these four spells is analyzed only at the discursive level to maintain the textual analysis of the lexical field. This level has three key elements, each presenting a different textual analysis. After examining the words and structures constructing the *leugeut teureup* spell from this perspective, several findings are suggested in terms of its (1) figurative, (2) syntactic, and (3) enunciative components:

4.1. Figurative Components and Their Cultural Connotation

Figurative components mean that a particular lexical serves as a sign representing the meaning of the spell. These figurative components may come in lexical fields under specific categories, making them a concept decoding the meaning. The figurative components in Si *Leugeut teureup* can be divided into five figurative isotopies, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Figurative components of Si *Leugeut teureup* Spell

	Figurative Isotopies	English Equivalence	Frequency
Time Marker	<i>beurang</i>	day	1
	<i>peuting</i>	night	1
Distance	<i>jauh</i>	far	1
	<i>Deukeuet</i>	near	1
Natural Substance	<i>leugeut teureup</i>	breadfruit latex	4
	<i>Awak</i>	body	2
Object	<i>gunung</i>	mountain	1
	<i>badan</i>	body	1
	<i>Haténa</i>	[(one's) heart]	1
Body Parts	<i>Bayah</i>	lungs	1
	<i>Awaking</i>	[(my) body]	4
Actors	<i>aing</i>	I	6
	<i>balad</i>	friend	1

Source: author's work

As illustrated in Table 1, the isotope Actor has the highest frequency (6) of all isotopies, suggesting that another Actor affected by the action is the opposition to "I." In addition, it also suggests that the actor is actively doing things with the spell being addressed. *Leugeut teureup* and *awaking* were the second most frequent isotopies (four each). The former indicates that the substance (a natural substance) is used figuratively to replace the sticky and gluey substances used for binding. In contrast, the latter indicates that the actor's body has a binding charm over others. *Awak* is the next higher-frequency isotope (2), indicating that the spell is related to bodily possession. Other isotopes with similar frequencies show environments involved/inspired the creation of this spell.

Time markers and distance isotopies suggest direct opposition to the core concept of the respective meaning. This indicates that spells use lexical opposition to give users suggestive nuances. In addition, this spell also implements synonymy relations in other isotopies, Body Parts, and Objects with *awak*, *badan*, and *awaking*, which refer to the core concept of [BODY]. The lexical *hate* and *bayah* included in the Body Part isotope suggest that this spell refers to the most crucial body part, the heart, which pumps blood throughout the human body. *Hate* (heart) in the Sundanese community also gives a sense of one's feelings. Despite the nuances in the meaning of equivalence, both suggest a psychological and diabolical sense of the human. This refers to the concept of daily activities within individuals to support their daily activities. The last lexical *balad* in the actor isotope suggests the existence of social interaction in which the spell is socially and culturally practised.

Each isotope has intricate cultural connotations that resonate within the linguistic practices of different countries (Discours, 2011, p. 120). In the context of Sundanese cultural spells, the interpretation of Time Markers unveils profound cultural associations with specific times of day, seasons, and cultural festivities. Conversely, in other cultures, time markers assume significance as they map out the temporal landscape of cultural events, practices, and rituals. The lexicon of distance traverses cultural landscapes, reflecting physical separation and intricate social dynamics. In Sundanese culture, as in other societies, distance-related terms resonate with cultural norms, delineating personal space, social hierarchy, and social proximity, offering a nuanced glimpse of the dynamics that shape interpersonal interactions. The concept of distance stretches beyond physical space, resonating with spatial and social dimensions within Sundanese culture and beyond.

The significance of Natural Substances echoed within spells is parallel across cultures, serving as conduits of traditional practices, healing rituals, and cultural symbolism (Culler, 1975, p.13). These substances weave a tapestry that connects humanity with nature, a thread in cultural traditions worldwide. Objects referenced in Sundanese spells hold a cultural mirror, reflecting their intrinsic value within the societal framework. These objects, steeped in tradition, spirituality, or cultural heritage, provide a window into their role in rituals, historical or mythological ties, and shaping cultural identity.

Within embodied communication, Sundanese culture spells bestow cultural meanings on the mosaic of Body Parts. This cultural encoding of body parts, pervasive across cultures, infuses them with specific qualities, emotions, or beliefs. The body's symbolism transcends physical and echoing cultural perceptions and plays a pivotal role in communication and expression. The Actor isotope enshrined within the spells assumes roles beyond mere individuals; they become vessels of cultural archetypes, societal roles, and hierarchies (Discours, 2011, p. 120). These actors' selections and functions serve as mirrors reflecting cultural values, norms, and collective expectations, offering a panoramic view of how Sundanese culture conceptualizes agency and responsibility.

Each element — from time markers to distance, natural substances, objects, body parts, and actors — weaves an intricate tapestry within Sundanese culture spells and beyond. This rich mosaic resonates with cultural traditions and extends the invitation to explore the universality of human experience through the prism of diverse languages and practices.

4.2. Syntactic Feature

In this context, syntactic features refer to how distinct grammatical markers shape spell composition. These markers, such as verb mood and cohesion devices, convey subtle meanings. An exciting discovery comes from the frequent use of "*kecap anteuran*" (Anticipatory Verbal Inchoative word–AVI), which plays a significant role in the spell's structure. The syntactic features of the spells are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Syntactic Feature of Si *Leugeut teureup* Spell

No	Spell	Mood/Marker	English Equivalence
1	<i>Asihan aing si leugeut teureup</i>	Nominative	The spell is <i>Leugeut Teureup</i>
	<i>Ti tetel ti amburatel</i>	AVI + \emptyset	
	<i>Mangka eunteup mangka asih</i>	Imperative	(you) flock and love
	<i>Asih ka awak aing.</i>	Imperative	(you) love my body
	<i>Asihan aing si leugeut teureup</i>	Nominative	The spell is <i>Leugeut Teureup</i>
2	<i>si tetel si amburatel</i>	AVI + \emptyset	
	<i>Sup nyusup kana haténa</i>	AVI + N	Heart
	<i>Sup sumarambah kana bayah</i>	AVI + N	Lungs
	<i>Srep dikeukeup sukmana si ...</i>	AVI + N	Soul
	<i>Mangka welas mangka asih</i>	Imperative	(you) flock and love
3	<i>Beurang peuting ngabayang sukma</i>	Imperative	Days and nights (you) dream of my soul
	<i>Asihan aing si leugeut teureup</i>	Nominative	The spell is <i>Leugeut Teureup</i>
	<i>Sa tetel nu amburatel</i>	AVI + \emptyset	
	<i>Anu jauh amaringkeut</i>	Imperative	(you in distant) become close (to me)
	<i>Rugrug gunung béntar balad</i>	Indicative	Mountain caves in
4	<i>Malik nénéh malik sanéh</i>	Imperative	(you) be pampering and friendly
	<i>Malik asih ka awaking</i>	Imperative	(you) Turn (your) love to me
	<i>Sih asih ka awaking</i>	AVI + V+N	Love my body
	<i>Sih asih ka awak aing.</i>	AVI + V+N	Love my body
	<i>Asihan aing si leugeut teureup</i>	Nominative	The spell is <i>Leugeut Teureup</i>
	<i>Satetel siamuratel</i>	AVI + \emptyset	
	<i>Nu jauh komo kairut</i>	Nominative	(you) in the distance are enchanted
	<i>Nu deukeut komo kaiwat</i>	Nominative	(you) nearby are tempted
	<i>Mangka welas mangka asih</i>	Imperative	(you) flock and love
	<i>Asih ka badan awaking</i>	Imperative	(you) love my body

Source: author's work

As shown in Table 2, verbs play a significant role in defining a spell's mood. Imperative mood (10) is the most frequent mood with a sense of commanding (affected to do/be what the actor wants). The unique case occurs in how the affected person becomes bound to the actor addressing the spell, as in *amaringkeut*—keep memorizing one's attraction. The elliptical subject in the mood suggests that although the spell seems to be addressed to a particular person, there is more expansive coverage for the spell to work. The spell is expected to work on people in general because the *asihan* spell is a spell for oneself to disclose any possible charm of themselves.

Kecap Anteuran (Anticipatory Verbal Inchoative words) is another marker of spell structure with nine occurrences. Simply put, *kecap anteuran* can be said to be repetitive words or expressions preceding particular language units, namely, verbs and adjectives. The *kecap anteuran* in Sundanese, as shown in Table 2, commonly rhymes expressions accompanying verbs or adjectives to strengthen their existence in the structure. Strengthen means that the meaning of the following signs is supported by easy articulation, which indirectly provides more suggestions to users through its rhyming characteristics. In addition, all *kecap anteuran* are in the form of a state proposition.

Table 4: Propositional Structure of *Kecap Anteuran*

Kecap Anteuran	Propositional Structure	Meaning in English
<i>Ti tetel ti amburatel</i>	<i>Ti tetel is ti amburatel</i>	<i>tetel</i> : press gently on something,
<i>si tetel si amburatel</i>	<i>si tetel is si amburatel</i>	<i>Amburatel</i> : remain stuck (fast) all
<i>Sa tetel nu amburatel</i>	<i>Sa tetel that is nu amburatel</i>	over sticky substance
<i>Satetel siamuratel</i>	<i>Satetel is siamuratel</i>	<i>eunteup</i> : flock
<i>Sup nyusup</i>	<i>Sup is nyusup</i>	<i>nyusup</i> : enter
<i>Sup sumarambah</i>	<i>Sup is sumarambah</i>	<i>sumarambah</i> : penetrate
<i>Srep dikeukeup</i>	<i>Srep is dikeukeup</i>	
<i>Sih asih</i>	<i>Sih is asih</i>	

Source: author's work

Nominative mood occurs in six occurrences, serving as a form for complements (four nouns with similar signs) in the structure and complements (two adjectives) *kairut*-enchanted and *kaiwat*-tempted. This suggests that the formation of the spell was mainly constructed from [THINGS] and [ATTRIBUTE] to create specific characteristics of the spell. The last mood is indicative, represented by the verb *rug rug*-caves, to show the spell's power to make something collapse; in this sense, it is related to the will for the surrender of the affected.

4.3. Enunciative Components

The presence of the pronoun I in the spell structure with six frequencies suggests that this spell demands the actor to practice it. Although he may have learned it from someone else, he must have memorized it first to practice it. This indicates that one must strive to obtain what he/she wants. Indirectly, this spell suggests the concept of independence in its practice. The enunciative component of the *asih* spell presented in this study is narrated by a first-person protagonist, and is diegetic, meaning that the actor is the narrator. Looking at the independence of the narrator in the discourse, it is evident that the actor/narrator has the autonomy to cast a spell whenever intended. This means that intentionality is created solely by the users for their privileges.

From this description, the discourse created in the spell suggests that the spell is socially practiced in the community. Therefore, any repetition in the text indicates habitual action over spell-casting practice within the community. The occurrence of the pronoun I in many discourses also demonstrates that this spell-casting activity was performed individually and privately. This suggests that the people in the community are determined and independent since they have to strive to achieve what they desire.

5. Conclusion

The Sundanese "*asih*" spell is a significant part of the community's culture and social fabric. It plays a multifaceted role in various aspects of Sundanese life, reflecting the community's historical and spiritual identity. Passed down through generations, the spell embodies Sundanese people's wisdom, values, and worldviews, fostering a sense of continuity and connection with their ancestors. Additionally, spell fosters positive interpersonal relationships and promotes harmony among individuals, contributing to smoother interactions and cohesion. In love and romance, a spell is often employed to attract potential partners or strengthen romantic relationships, affecting the formation and maintenance of partnerships.

Moreover, it is sometimes used in traditional healing practices to address emotional and psychological issues, thus contributing to overall well-being. Participating in the spell's rituals and practices fosters a sense of unity and a common purpose, reinforcing cultural bonds and social cohesion. The spell empowers individuals by offering a means to influence aspects of their lives, instilling confidence and a belief in their ability to shape their circumstances. Finally, the continued belief in the "*asih*" spell contributes to preserving traditional knowledge and practices, reinforcing a connection to the past amidst a rapidly changing world.

Asihan spell, as a language practice, carries meaning through its signs structured in expression. Through a semiotic approach, signs in the spell become meaningful through their interaction and relation within the structure, particularly at the discursive level. The analysis concludes that the signs in the spell structure at the discursive level came into categorical isotopies, moods, anticipatory verbal inchoative words or *kecap anteuran*, and first-person narrator independence showing intentionality.

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