Vocabulary Frequency in University Entrance Examination in Japan

Takane YAMAGUCHI (takaney@fuji.waseda.jp)
Waseda University

Abstract

This paper consists of three corpus-based comparative studies on vocabulary used English tests in university entrance examinations in Japan. The first study is Yamaguchi (2005a), followed by Yamaguchi (2005b) and the newly conducted two, shown at the conference for the first time. All these studies were conducted by comparing *the JACET list of 8000 basic words* (*JACET 8000*), one of the most easily available word frequency lists in Japan, to the corpora made by the author. Each study aims at illuminating the proposition with these corpora, that *JACET 8000* is a word frequency inventory which fairly accurately reflects the reality of entrance examinations for applicants for admission to universities in Japan. In study 1, the corpus in Yamaguchi (2005a, b) covers about 95 % of *JACET 8000*, suggesting that learners knowing the 8000 words will find one unknown word in 20 words in the author's corpus. In study 2, the research question is also whether or not *JACET 8000* is a representative word frequency list in the corpus made by the author, EEC2005, containing about 0.8 million tokens, but the word "representative" in the question means that all of the words in the first half of the JACET list can be found as checked against EEC2005. There were 59 words which are listed in *JACET 8000* but which cannot be found in EEC2005, some of which are culture-life specific words. In the final study, the research question is the same as in the study 2, but a bigger corpus, EEC03-05, containing about 2.5 million tokens, was used for the comparison. 9 words were found, 7 of which can be classified into the culture-life categories. The result seems to show that culture-life words are thought to be unnecessary and even unjustified, because it is unfair for the examination to tap the knowledge of such words.

1. Introduction

1.1 Need for a study on vocabulary used in Japanese university

The need for the present study arises from the fact that Japanese universities' entrance examinations greatly affect the content of education at secondary schools throughout the country.

English being a foreign language in Japan, deliberate teaching is necessary for the Japanese if they are to learn to use it. As in many other non-English-speaking countries, there is an increasing demand in Japan for people who can put their English to practical use. Despite the general awareness of the need for a proficiency in English in Japan, however, vocabulary teaching has not been underpinned by much theoretical consideration. The guidelines for education issued by the Ministry of Education (2002) do suggest that words frequently used be taught but do not clearly mention what types of words should be taught. Hamaoka (1999) says that there were great discrepancies in terms

of vocabulary level and readability between English textbooks and English entrance examinations in Japan.[1] This means that learners are not necessarily tested on what they learn.

This situation calls for research into how vocabulary is treated in the teaching of English in Japan. For teaching any language for communicative purposes, there should ideally be agreement between (a) the words frequently used for real-life communication in the language, (b) those taught in the classroom, and (c) those that appear in language tests intended to measure the effect of the efforts in the classroom. It will thus be worthwhile to find out just what are the words under (a), (b), and (c), and how much agreement there is between the three sets. The present study focuses on (c): university entrance examinations will be analyzed from a lexical point of view.

1.2 JACET 8000

There are some lexical guidelines for Japanese people learning English. One of them is *JACET 8000*, one of the largest word frequency lists for Japanese learners of English. Its 8000 words[2] are presented in eight levels (from 1 to 8) in accordance with the frequency and educational significance of each word. The base corpus is made up of several corpora related to Japanese learners of English. The word frequency is corrected by log-likelihood ratio of the original JACET corpus to British National Corpus, and as such may be to some extent influenced by British culture-based vocabulary.

2. Research Question 1

Research Question 1 (Yamaguchi 2005a and Yamaguchi 2005b) is whether or not JACET 8000 is a representative word frequency list as checked against the English questions and passages of the entrance examination corpus conducted by universities of Japan in 2005 (EEC2005). The word "representative" here means that most of the words in JACET 8000 can be found in this entrance examination corpus.

2.1 EEC2005

EEC2005 covers 470 written examinations of various colleges and universities in Japan, from one of the easiest passages to the hardest in comprehension, including 803,096 tokens, 23,973types, 14,442 lemmatized types. Procedures for lemmatization are: (i) picking up all English words, (ii) decapitalizing them and (iii) sorting and counting them by frequency. Pearl Programs, written by the author, are used. "$j =~ /¥b[A-Za-z]+¥b|[A-Za-z]+/g" is for (i), and "tr/A-Z/a-z/" for (ii).[3] Word

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[1] It can be said that the number of difficult words in the entrance exam corpus made by Hamaoka is disproportionate by many difficult words, as 5 of the 16 exam batteries he collected are from the University of Tokyo, from one faculty at Keio University, and from three faculties at Waseda University.

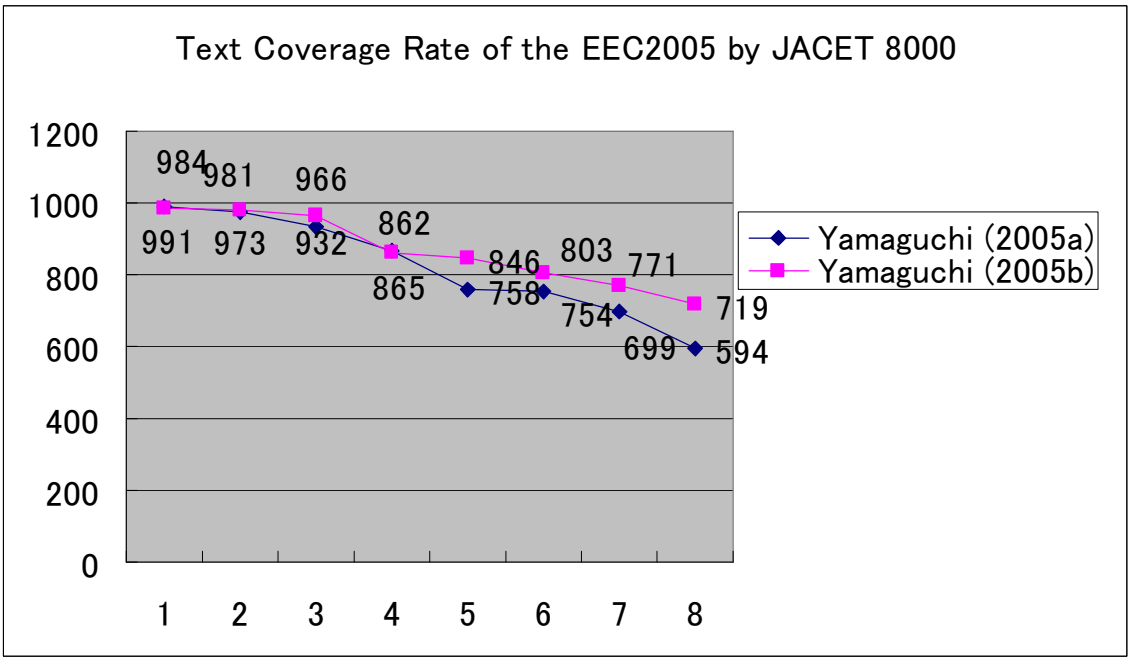
[2] In reality *JACET 8000* has 8000 words plus 250 ones, the latter of which words are basic ones chosen for Japanese novice learners of English.

[3] Lematization means the categorization of some word tokens into the same word family or lemma. The table for lematization is made by Yasumasa Someya.

Frequency List of EEC05 is in the appendix.

2.2 Result

Figure 1



This graph, with word difficulty levels on the horizontal-axis and words covered (the maximum value is 1,000) on the vertical axis, shows the text coverage rate at each level, that is, how many words in EEC2005 are found at each level of *JACET 8000* (from 1 to 8). Words in the level 1 group are thought to be the most frequent and the most important in terms of education in the judgment of Committee of Revising JACET Basic Words. Level 1 includes the words *people*, *like*, *the*, and *country*. This line graph shows a declining trend, as do the text coverage lines in many other studies, one of which is Uemura and Ishikawa (2004).

The coverage rate in total is about 95%: learners knowing the 8000 words find one unknown word in 20 words, and these unknown words include proper nouns. Nation (1990) says that in such a condition learners can guess 80% of unknown words.

3. Research Question 2

Research Question 2, just as Research Question 1, is whether or not JACET 8000 is a representative word frequency list in EEC2005, but the word "representative" in Question 2 means that all of the words in the first half of the JACET list can be found in EEC2005.[4]

[4] Even if some of the words are not found in the corpus, it does not necessarily mean that such words should not be taught in Japan. It just means that such words are unnecessary for written English questions and passages of the

3.1 Result

59 words were found. Although thorough classification of word meanings is impossible because some word meanings can be sorted into multiple categories, an attempt was made to classify each word into one category to the exclusion of all the others. The categories and the number of the words in them are: general words: 23; culture words: 9; life words: 4; economy and law words: 17; slang words: 6; and others: 2. The categories correspond to figure 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. The number at the right of the word is the frequency and importance judged by Committee of Revising JACET Basic Words. For example, *module* ranks as no.2388, and *offence* does as no.3080, which means that the former is more frequent and more important than the latter.

Figure 2

General Words

module 2388
offence 3080
squad 3413
implementation 3439
turnover 3479
pit 3492
breach 3511
withdrawal 3549
equity 3640
allocation 3684
terrace 3695
chap 3700
specification 3752
portfolio 3778
concede 3781
junction 3863
delegation 3870
appendix 3882
subsidiary 3898
relevance 3966
pensioner 3973

Figure 3

Culture Words

scarecrow 3087
aye 3131
bishop 3233
parish 3256
chancellor 3498
darling 3701
striker 3888
pint 3968
cathedral 3617

Figure 4

Life Words

bloody 3092
shareholder 3234
mortgage 3378
vendor 3592

entrance examinations analyzed.

Figure 5

Economy or Law Words

parliamentary 3403
prosecution 3446
taxation 3541
allegation 3571
statute 3612
audit 3652
tribunal 3658
electoral 3660
trustee 3672
magistrate 3694
legislative 3698
borough 3920
contractor 3955
auditor 3963
referendum 3981
delegate 3759
vat 3978

Figure 6

Slang Words

shit	3031
lad	3275
ass	3462
bastard	3725
fuck	3785
goddamn	3938

Figure 7

Other Words

fig 3772
parameter 3859

There seem to be many culture-or life-specific words, so the calculation was made to ascertain the proportion of such words to all the missing words. Figure 8 shows that EEC2005 avoids words related to British culture or life and that JACET 8000 reflects culture or life more.

Figure 8 Culture-Life Specific Word Rate in EEC2005

0.61 = {36(Culture+Life+Economy or Law+Slang)}/{All genres59(=36+23)}

4. Research Question 3

EEC2005 is one of the biggest examination corpora in Japan, but it is possible that fewer culture-specific words will be found if the size of the corpus is larger. Research Question 3 is the same as Research Question 2, but a new corpus was made for the research.

4.1 EEC03-05

EEC03-05 covers 1,433 of the written examinations of various colleges and universities in Japan, conducted in 2003, 2004, or 2005. The corpus includes 2,529,787 tokens, and 38,960 types.

4.2 Result

There are fewer words which cannot be found in the larger EEC. There are 9 words in all. These words can be applied to the same categories as in the previous research. General words are *equity*3640 and *pensioner*3973. Culture word is *aye*3131. Slang words are *bastard*3725 and *goddamn*3938. Economy or Law words are *statute*3612, *tribunal*3658, *magistrate*3694, and *auditor*3963.

Figure 9 Culture-Life Specific Word Rate in EEC03-05

0.78 = {7(=Culture+Slang+ Economy or Law)}/{ 9(All genres)}

The word *equity* may be used in economic context.[5]

4.3 Discussion

In the previous section, some culture-life specific words were found in *JACET 8000* which cannot be found in the university entrance examination corpora, even when the corpus in the last study has more than 2.5 million tokens. This fact seems to show that the examiners avoided such culture- or life-specific words in the examination. One possible explanation for this fact is that culture-life words are thought to be unnecessary and even unjustified, because it is unfair for the examination to tap the knowledge of such words: there are some students who have been to an English speaking country and who know such words well while there are others who do not know them well merely because they have not been to such a country. Test batteries seem to be influenced by such a consideration.

[5] If the word equity is categorized into economic word, the rate will rise up to .089.

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Appendix

Word Frequency List of EEC05 (up to the frequency value of 180)

Frequency	Word	Category	Rank or Type
44203	the	JACET8000	1
30864	a	JACET8000	5
24451	to	JACET8000	3
21691	of	JACET8000	4
17460	and	JACET8000	2
16011	in	JACET8000	6
11097	that	JACET8000	8
10287	is	Plus250	活用形
10089	have	JACET8000	15
9429	i		
8504	it	JACET8000	9
8324	b		
7558	c		
7170	for	JACET8000	11
7089	be	JACET8000	13
7082	you	JACET8000	10
6242	d		
5888	was	Plus250	活用形
5707	are	Plus250	活用形
5676	s		
5398	as	JACET8000	22
4797	on	JACET8000	16
4713	with	JACET8000	19
4504	this	JACET8000	25
4371	they	JACET8000	17
4361	not	JACET8000	14
4061	he	JACET8000	12
3725	at	JACET8000	26
3724	do	JACET8000	20
3621	by	JACET8000	34
3557	we	JACET8000	18
3447	but	JACET8000	21
3428	from	JACET8000	27
3363	or	JACET8000	37
3212	people	JACET8000	46
3208	t		
3111	their	JACET8000	44
2904	can	JACET8000	36
2880	one	Plus250	数詞
2808	what	JACET8000	29
2747	more	JACET8000	48
2604	when	JACET8000	39
2585	about	JACET8000	38
2470	make	JACET8000	64
2452	his	JACET8000	24
2393	my	JACET8000	31
2353	time	JACET8000	49
2323	were	Plus250	活用形
2315	she	JACET8000	23
2277	all	JACET8000	32
2266	e		
2257	there	JACET8000	30
2231	say	JACET8000	47
2191	so	JACET8000	45
2162	if	JACET8000	41
2118	other	JACET8000	52
2098	will	JACET8000	33
2076	her	JACET8000	28
2063	which	JACET8000	79
2048	use	JACET8000	78
1981	than	JACET8000	82
1962	who	JACET8000	59
1894	your	JACET8000	60
1867	year	JACET8000	68
1864	get	JACET8000	57
1814	go	JACET8000	40
1779	take	JACET8000	80
1772	would	JACET8000	42

1766	no	JACET8000 58
1734	like	JACET8000 51
1712	because	JACET8000 97
1703	me	JACET8000 35
1683	know	JACET8000 56
1660	how	JACET8000 73
1644	think	JACET8000 61
1632	up	JACET8000 50
1618	them	JACET8000 54
1602	many	JACET8000 90
1587	some	JACET8000 62
1529	out	JACET8000 55
1468	our	JACET8000 77
1432	see	JACET8000 67
1418	child	JACET8000 210
1411	most	JACET8000 100
1366	new	JACET8000 111
1324	very	JACET8000 66
1320	world	JACET8000 99
1299	way	JACET8000 85
1274	only	JACET8000 72
1247	could	JACET8000 63
1245	live	JACET8000 128
1214	f	
1209	come	JACET8000 71
1198	into	JACET8000 70
1183	day	JACET8000 81
1181	first	Plus250 数詞
1175	good	JACET8000 83
1174	much	JACET8000 101
1170	become	JACET8000 144
1121	even	JACET8000 107
1111	find	JACET8000 122
1062	give	JACET8000 117
1054	just	JACET8000 74
1043	man	JACET8000 88
1042	look	JACET8000 65
1020	don	
1016	life	JACET8000 98
1016	well	JACET8000 93
1006	may	JACET8000 127
1000	language	JACET8000 268
992	now	JACET8000 75
990	after	JACET8000 89
987	its	JACET8000 116
980	should	JACET8000 120
971	also	JACET8000 95
965	work	JACET8000 87
958	thing	JACET8000 84
952	long	JACET8000 103
950	such	JACET8000 171
947	two	Plus250 数詞
946	need	JACET8000 132
926	country	JACET8000 139
926	over	JACET8000 86
921	want	JACET8000 76
916	him	JACET8000 53
916	us	JACET8000 94
902	then	JACET8000 69
888	change	JACET8000 141
880	m	
871	tell	JACET8000 113
860	too	JACET8000 110
858	feel	JACET8000 152
855	help	JACET8000 140
855	word	JACET8000 151
849	study	JACET8000 212
847	american	Plus250 固有名詞等
827	english	Plus250 固有名詞等
824	where	JACET8000 112
821	any	JACET8000 119
818	right	JACET8000 106
807	call	JACET8000 118
807	mean	JACET8000 149

796	school	JACET8000	135
784	japanese	Plus250	固有名詞等
781	great	JACET8000	123
781	problem	JACET8000	179
771	why	JACET8000	104
766	human	JACET8000	275
761	before	JACET8000	109
759	leave	JACET8000	175
755	food	JACET8000	287
751	learn	JACET8000	240
735	home	JACET8000	133
735	student	JACET8000	277
731	old	JACET8000	114
721	read	JACET8000	233
718	same	JACET8000	142
709	ask	JACET8000	115
672	different	JACET8000	158
667	place	JACET8000	129
663	each	JACET8000	200
662	important	JACET8000	194
660	never	JACET8000	108
660	something	JACET8000	130
652	begin	JACET8000	289
652	late	JACET8000	193
650	number	JACET8000	204
647	show	JACET8000	143
645	back	JACET8000	92
637	start	JACET8000	157
634	own	JACET8000	126
632	family	JACET8000	174
631	another	JACET8000	145
627	while	JACET8000	165
622	part	JACET8000	150
619	high	JACET8000	169
612	try	JACET8000	124
610	japan	Plus250	固有名詞等
609	however	JACET8000	177
605	women	Plus250	活用形
605	always	JACET8000	155
602	often	JACET8000	199
594	must	JACET8000	125
593	through	JACET8000	136
591	does		
586	better	JACET8000	337
582	book	JACET8000	215
577	every	JACET8000	162
577	person	JACET8000	243
572	between	JACET8000	183
572	large	JACET8000	190
572	little	JACET8000	96
570	hand	JACET8000	138
570	state	JACET8000	389
569	seem	JACET8000	148
568	city	JACET8000	239
567	still	JACET8000	121
566	question	JACET8000	209
563	speak	JACET8000	269
561	few	JACET8000	191
560	really	JACET8000	154
556	follow	JACET8000	309
553	less	JACET8000	295
551	animal	JACET8000	315
551	friend	JACET8000	168
550	water	JACET8000	197
549	parent	JACET8000	365
545	down	JACET8000	102
545	money	JACET8000	223
540	around	JACET8000	153
540	mother	JACET8000	178
539	eat	JACET8000	312
532	play	JACET8000	156
528	last	JACET8000	164
528	system	JACET8000	359
525	both	JACET8000	195

525	talk	JACET8000 134
524	ll	Plus250 活用形
524	group	JACET8000 220
519	best	JACET8000 567
519	small	JACET8000 160
514	without	JACET8000 207
513	idea	JACET8000 242
513	today	JACET8000 226
512	keep	JACET8000 189
508	three	Plus250 数詞
508	believe	JACET8000 208
502	g	
502	answer	JACET8000 236
499	interest	JACET8000 436
498	cause	JACET8000 317
496	grow	JACET8000 324
494	since	JACET8000 232
493	increase	JACET8000 447
484	re	Plus250 活用形
481	kind	JACET8000 219
480	develop	JACET8000 396
477	example	JACET8000 625
469	here	JACET8000 105
465	lot	JACET8000 229
465	might	JACET8000 192
464	off	JACET8000 159
463	car	JACET8000 241
462	didn	
456	put	JACET8000 131
456	young	JACET8000 172
451	house	JACET8000 163
447	accord	JACET8000 1731
447	name	JACET8000 166
446	move	JACET8000 184
444	age	JACET8000 293
440	early	JACET8000 214
440	hear	JACET8000 203
439	yes	JACET8000 147
436	fact	JACET8000 238
431	hour	JACET8000 262
426	buy	JACET8000 362
424	job	JACET8000 273
423	during	JACET8000 221
422	reason	JACET8000 304
414	turn	JACET8000 161
413	next	JACET8000 180
409	form	JACET8000 264
409	university	JACET8000 655
406	computer	JACET8000 416
405	class	JACET8000 340
404	experience	JACET8000 291
403	away	JACET8000 176
403	century	JACET8000 335
403	understand	JACET8000 272
402	happen	JACET8000 205
401	story	JACET8000 188
396	let	JACET8000 187
394	business	JACET8000 373
393	order	JACET8000 341
391	am	Plus250 活用形
389	bring	JACET8000 281
389	culture	JACET8000 509
385	enough	JACET8000 250
384	hard	JACET8000 252
383	lose	JACET8000 435
382	body	JACET8000 255
382	result	JACET8000 343
382	scientist	JACET8000 776
381	far	JACET8000 247
380	able	JACET8000 263
376	once	JACET8000 213
375	father	JACET8000 227
374	went	Plus250 活用形
371	company	JACET8000 294

371	end	JACET8000 173
369	though	JACET8000 244
368	train	JACET8000 391
365	author	JACET8000 1147
364	course	JACET8000 201
364	spend	JACET8000 483
363	pay	JACET8000 344
361	lead	JACET8000 424
361	society	JACET8000 387
359	percent	JACET8000 398
357	mr	Plus250 敬称
357	love	JACET8000 170
356	information	JACET8000 318
356	until	JACET8000 235
354	area	JACET8000 284
353	almost	JACET8000 248
353	close	JACET8000 231
353	run	JACET8000 211
353	social	JACET8000 466
353	unite	JACET8000 2805
350	mind	JACET8000 259
345	stop	JACET8000 228
344	night	JACET8000 185
344	possible	JACET8000 352
342	working	JACET8000 3042
339	science	JACET8000 697
338	america	Plus250 固有名詞等
338	ago	JACET8000 329
338	big	JACET8000 167
336	h	
336	fall	JACET8000 328
336	open	JACET8000 198
332	point	JACET8000 237
332	together	JACET8000 260
329	produce	JACET8000 385
328	ever	JACET8000 222
328	sure	JACET8000 254
325	include	JACET8000 494
325	set	JACET8000 246
323	cannot	
323	teacher	JACET8000 364
323	ve	
323	yet	JACET8000 279
322	choose	JACET8000 598
322	control	JACET8000 338
322	history	JACET8000 397
322	matter	JACET8000 354
321	meet	JACET8000 347
318	easy	JACET8000 379
318	power	JACET8000 292
316	government	JACET8000 308
315	consider	JACET8000 453
313	create	JACET8000 458
313	difference	JACET8000 438
313	drive	JACET8000 537
313	someone	JACET8000 366
312	face	JACET8000 182
311	soon	JACET8000 310
311	technology	JACET8000 788
310	second	Plus250 数詞
310	test	JACET8000 429
309	hold	JACET8000 256
307	nothing	JACET8000 249
306	game	JACET8000 286
305	die	JACET8000 271
304	again	JACET8000 137
303	health	JACET8000 604
302	research	JACET8000 765
301	passage	JACET8000 1953
300	build	JACET8000 556
300	thank	JACET8000 434
299	drink	JACET8000 518
298	product	JACET8000 615
297	difficult	JACET8000 345

297	earth	JACET8000 331
297	phone	JACET8000 816
297	room	JACET8000 218
296	month	JACET8000 270
296	usually	JACET8000 407
295	although	JACET8000 334
295	provide	JACET8000 507
295	rather	JACET8000 468
294	case	JACET8000 322
292	five	Plus250 数詞
292	million	Plus250 数詞
292	against	JACET8000 230
291	eye	JACET8000 186
290	public	JACET8000 503
290	teach	JACET8000 643
289	stay	JACET8000 300
289	true	JACET8000 375
288	whether	JACET8000 360
286	decide	JACET8000 296
285	care	JACET8000 330
284	air	JACET8000 346
282	land	JACET8000 298
282	write	JACET8000 216
281	themselves	JACET8000 372
280	allow	JACET8000 388
280	already	JACET8000 325
280	expect	JACET8000 405
279	television	JACET8000 661
278	john	
278	please	JACET8000 423
278	value	JACET8000 569
277	sleep	JACET8000 516
276	modern	JACET8000 596
275	anything	JACET8000 288
274	u	
274	continue	JACET8000 297
274	sense	JACET8000 350
273	likely	JACET8000 695
270	disease	JACET8000 739
270	morning	JACET8000 321
269	rule	JACET8000 495
268	effect	JACET8000 417
268	plant	JACET8000 403
267	everyone	JACET8000 449
267	low	JACET8000 462
267	plan	JACET8000 392
266	tree	JACET8000 307
265	cost	JACET8000 618
265	process	JACET8000 687
265	program	JACET8000 443
264	common	JACET8000 520
263	four	Plus250 数詞
263	among	JACET8000 409
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