How interpreters tackle with cultural gaps in interpretation process: A descriptive study

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Abstract

The current study sought to determine the solutions by which interpreters and/or mediators handled cultural gaps in translation process. In other words, the current study examined how consecutive interpreters worked as cultural mediators in political contexts. To this end, Dirk Delabastita's model (1993) was exploited to see what strategies Iranian consecutive interpreters adopted to handle cultural gaps in interpretation process. Thus, fifteen interpreters took part in the research and two five-minute audio files were administered in English and Persian followed by a consecutive interpreting task from English into Persian and vice versa. After the interpreting sessions were recorded, the strategies employed by interpreters were analyzed and tabulated according to Delabastita's model and SPSS software. As the data represented, substitution was the dominant strategy used by interpreters in both Persian and English.

Keywords: interpretation; translation; Delabastita's model; consecutive interpretation; interpretation strategies; cultural gap

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1. Introduction

Due to the boom in globalization and communication, the world has witnessed translation and interpreting playing vital roles in communication between nations. In today's multicultural and multilingual world, without interpreters and translators, people will fail to communicate with each other and translation plays a significant role; in a sense that

> In an age when the world is constantly growing smaller, when translations are increasingly drawn closer together and for exchanging information and ideas across borders in both oral and written forms has become a fact of life, communication has become inconceivable without translation. It is essential to develop a general framework that will accommodate the range of standards relevant to specific individual translations (Reiss, 1971, p. xii).

In translation and interpretation, transmission of content is made possible only if the receiver shares the cultural and social knowledge of the issue; otherwise, the utterance will not be received by the listener or the reader (Roy, 1994). In these circumstances, the interpreter is required to intervene, make changes to the original speech, add or remove some parts to make it more comprehensible (Jaradat, 2010) and functions as a cultural interpreter rather than being a neutral transmitter of speech (Kondo,1997).

Interpreting and the role it plays in today's world is one of the most crucial issues which have recently been under the investigation of many scholars. Generally speaking, it is of paramount importance to find out the relationship between interpreting and/or cultural mediator in doing simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. the consummate communicator, whether he is a professional interpreter or not, is a person who can put himself in somebody else's shoes and speaks, so that he would be able to adopt two or more world views and thus imagine how a certain message would be decoded or interpreted by the receiving party (Kondo,1990).

The role of the interpreters is under research and it seems that this era of research is still intact; thus, this study tried to find out how can the interpreter's role differ in interaction process and how interpreters can deal with culturally loaded differences, particularly those in which Persian cultural specific contexts are absent in English.

1.1 Research question

In accordance with the aforementioned issues, the current study tries to address the following research question:

R.Q: How do consecutive interpreters handle cultural gaps in political contexts?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

As for the theoretical and conceptual framework, this study rested on Delabastita's Five-category translational model. Delabastita (1993), who works on the development of this approach to translation interpretation, examines the status of the translation process on three related levels; that is to say, the linguistic, the cultural and the textual codes. He, in his model, compares and contrasts the difference and similarities between the linguistic and cultural words/ expressions with the differences and similarities between the knowledge of language (s) gained by dictionaries and the knowledge of the world gained by encyclopedias.

The typology of Delabastita's proposed model is based on the intermingling of two parameters: codes (on three code levels) and operations of five transformational categories). The latter parameter is interpreted as the

techniques, principles and the models of translation. These components are deemed transformational categories: substitution as finding a matching and close expression; repetition comes from similarity and means direct transferring of word from source text into target text; deletion which means removing some words and expressions; addition as to add something to the original text; and finally permutation which means arranging sentences and structures differently (Delabastita, 1993).

2. Literature Review

2.1 What Is Interpretation

According to Jones (2002), interpreting can be simply defined as "immediate oral translation" (p. 5). However, he claims that this definition does not offer the best definition of what interpreting is all about. Linguistic problems are not the only barriers and pitfalls that an interpreter has to come up with. Cultural difficulties, as Jones (2002) explains, "can manifest themselves both explicitly and implicitly" (p. 5). He (2002) explains that the interpreter's job is a job that requires permanent elucidation. Pochhacker (2004) also defines interpreting as a model of translation which requires a change of form in another language according to on-time delivery of speech in source text. Although not well-defined, such definition is cogent enough to define interpretation.

2.2 Interpretation vs. Translation

Most translation scholars define mistakenly translation and interpretation as one practice and the same profession. Interpretation and translation overlap, to some extent; however, they are of two distinct occupations. To show the real difference between the two occupations, it is said that

> *the modes of input and output are visual and written mode in the case of translation and auditory and verbal mode in the case of interpreting* (De Groot, 2005. p. 456).

Unlike translation, which refers to the written output based on a written input, interpretation refers to the oral output based on oral input (impromptu) or written input (sight interpreting). Baker (2001) defines interpreting as "the oral translation of the oral discourse" (p. 40). The person who does interpreting is called "interpreter". Interpretation occurs when two members or more of different languages engage in a communication process, and it is of two main types: simultaneous interpreting and consecutive interpreting. In simultaneous interpreting, the simultaneous interpreter listens to the speaker, through headphones, and at the same time, interprets into a microphone. In consecutive interpretation, the speaker speaks for some time, usually from one to three minutes and stops, the interpreter then interprets. The difference between the interpreter and the translator is explained as follows:

> *The translator's activity is more like that of a writer, while the interpreter's performance is more like that of an actor. A good translator will spend much time searching for the correct technical term or the right choice of words, but a good interpreter must immediately come up with a satisfactory paraphrase or a rough equivalent* (Nolan, 2005 p. 30).

Research on the history of interpretation has begun only recently in different academia. In other words, study and investigation into interpretation is an area of inquiry which has, to some extent, been neglected by the academia mainly due to the "the absence of ideal, reliable records, some blanks will probably never be filled in "(Bowen, 1995, p. 245). Indeed, it is as early as 3000 BC that the Egyptians had a hieroglyphic tool which signified 'interpretation (Bowen, 1995). It is thought that it is much easier for translators to work on written documents or on texts as they do, than it is for interpreters who work on oral speech. It is also proved that the social status of interpreters can also impact on their ranks in the history as culturally poor people; woman and other members of lower class were not accounted for the place they deserved in history (Bowen, 1995).

Gaiba (1998) believes that consecutive translation and interpretation were among the basic techniques exploited, though both proved inefficient, with the rapid interpreting meddling with the role of the speech producer and the consecutive interpretation; thereby delaying the interpretation process. Thus, the need for a more effective method of translation/interpretation at international conferences was quite needed. The first move for simultaneous interpreting equipment was made in 1926 to Gordon Finlay at IBM. His equipment was based on an idea of the founder of Boston's Filene's department store, Edward A. Filene. Conference interpretation is another area of research which has recently been into focus. As a matter of fact, "conference interpreting is the most prestigious form of interpreting and the most financially rewarding" (Phelan, 2001, p. 6), according to Phelan, conference interpreting refers to the two main modes of interpreting: simultaneous and consecutive interpreting.

In conference interpreting, Gile (2001) identified four periods that characterized research: the early writing period; the experimental period; the practitioners' period; and the renewal period. During the early writing period (1950's & 1960's), practicing interpreters and interpreting trainers began to think and write about the field. They were not researchers themselves, so they mainly wrote reflectively about their thoughts and experiences (Herbert, 1987).

During the practitioners' period (1970's), practicing interpreters attempted to do research on interpreting. The results of that research were considered theoretical or conjectural, rather than empirical, and these individuals generally worked in isolation from other scientific communities (Gile, 2001). Kirchhoff (1976) describes simultaneous interpreting as

> *a multi-phase process that takes place sequentially while sender output, except in the case of pauses, is being produced, and must be processed continuously* (p. 111).

In simultaneous interpreting, it is thought that the interpreter expresses in a language what s/he receives in another language. However, Paneth (1957) believes that the interpreter expresses not what he hears; rather he expresses what he has received. In fact, in Translation Studies, scholars have analyzed translation from many various points of view, such as post-colonialism studies, gender studies and ideological considerations. Anderson (1976) was among from the first scholars who highlighted the importance of the social status in which the interpreting job happens. He (1976) claims that interpreting "occurs in social-situations amenable to sociological analysis" (p. 209). Cronin (2013) believes interpreters as

> *those that cross linguistic and cultural boundaries; depending on the identity of the interpreter and the nature of the context, interpreter's cross boundaries of gender, class, nationality, or ethnicity* (p. 391).

There are also some other views on interpretation and translation which could be valid for approaching interpreting as well. Pym (2000), who reflects on the issue with regard to training claims that those who program the training courses should be directed to producing intercultural translators.

2.3 Interpreter as a cultural mediator

As Pöchhacker (2004) mentioned, conceptual concepts are such that they cannot be separated from the overall culturally, socially and politically loaded system of thought and hence the language in which they are uttered. Cultural and social knowledge of people makes sense in communication besides the role of relationships and expectations of people. In other words, culture determines the way people think, act and interact in a society where they live. According to Newmark (2000) culture is

> *the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression* (p. 94).

Thus, culture is a combination of habits, rituals, beliefs, morals, law, religion, customs, and behavior. Likewise,

Faiq (2008) asserts "language and culture represent the two sides of the same coin" (p. 35). In other words, language and culture are such interrelated concepts that cannot be separated from each other.

In translation and interpretation, as well as in communication and interaction, transmission of messages is possible only if the receiver shares that cultural and social knowledge in both languages. If not, the speech does not make any sense to the receivers as it does "not correspond to any reality they had experienced" (Reeves, 1994, p. 42). Aziz (1982) explains this relation as

> *the vocabulary of a language derives its meaning to a large extent from its culture. Meaning is therefore the basic link between culture and language; it is also the central field of translation* (p. 25).

3. Design, Sampling and Material of the Study

The method used in this research was of a qualitative-descriptive and non- experimental in nature to analyze the research question. Dornyei (2007) believes that "qualitative research design works with a wide range of data including recorded interviews, various types of texts and images…during data processing most data are transformed into a textual form because most quantitative data analysis is done with words" (p. 37-38).

Interpreters were competent in English and Persian. Those speakers with at least twice a month experience of consecutive interpreting were chosen. These interpreters work in IRIB (Iranian Broadcasting Corporation) and Foreign Ministry. Some of the subjects were instructors or English teachers who had the experience of interpreting. The number of the subjects for this research was 15 interpreters. The subjects were at different ages and sex. The distribution was tried to be balanced, but since most interpreters were men, male sex had the most contribution in this research.

Table 1

Subject size

Subjects	Number of Subjects
Male	15
Female	13

Table 2

Subjects' Level of Education

Education	Number
B. A.	3
M. A	11
Ph. D	1

The needed data for this study collected from different speeches. One of them was some parts of former Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad and some other Iranian official's cultural related words and the English protocol including some US official's words like George W. Bush, Barak Obama, and Dan Rather; CBS performer. Since interpreters were hard to find and getting them into cooperation was a hard task, only 5 minutes of both Persian and English protocols were taken out.

3.1 Procedure

Subjects were selected and given two consecutive interpreting protocols, one was English interpreted into Persian and another one was Persian interpreted into English. The interpreting protocols were given orally i.e. subjects were to listen to the tests by headphone and their interpreting was recorded on another voice recorder. The subjects listened to speakers one by one and start interpreting the chosen chunk as soon as the pause starts. The pause was exactly as long as the chunk, however if any subject needed more time, it was allowed. The

researcher was present all the time while subjects were doing the tests. Subjects were allowed to take notes in any language and way they desire. They could choose either English protocol or Persian one. None of the subjects were informed about the contest before the test time. It is also need to note that chunks were selected in different formats, some of them were small and some others were longer.

The interview was divided to some chunks. Some chunks were only one sentence; some of them were as long as a paragraph. Further, chunks and the given time were the same for all interpreters. Subjects were supposed to interpret each chunk within the same time that the chunk took, plus five to seven more seconds. However, if any subjects needed more time for any of the chunks, s/he was allowed to take more time. The chosen excerpts were selected as they were given for common people who were not necessarily politicians or familiar with political genre. In addition, protocols were Standard English which were clear. Meanwhile, comprehension of the chosen parts did not need any technical background or special knowledge.

3.2 Delabastita's model

The theoretical and conceptual framework of this study rested on Delabastita's Five-category translational model (1993). Delabastita examines the translation process on three interrelated levels – on linguistic, the cultural and the textual codes. He compares and contrasts the differences and similarities between the linguistically and culturally loaded codes with the differences between the knowledge of language gained by dictionaries and that of knowledge of the world gained by encyclopedias. The typology of Delabastita (1993) is based on the combination of two parameters: codes (of three code levels) and operations (of five transformational categories). The latter ones may be interpreted as the techniques and the types of translation. The following components are considered as transformational categories: substitution as the possibility of finding a matching analogue; repetition emerging from homology and representing direct transfer; deletion as renunciation from some elements; addition as the explication of qualities; and permutation as compensation manifesting itself not at the textual but the metatextual level.

Table 3

Delabastiat's model

Code Operation	Protolanguage Metalanguage	Protoculture Metaculture	Prototext Metatext
Substitution	greater or smaller degree of approximate) linguistic equivalenc	Naturalization Modernization Topicalization Nationalization	systemic, acceptable text (potentially conservative) adaptation
Repetition	total: non-translation, copy partial: calque, literal translation, metaphrase, word-by-word, interlinear translation;	Exoticization historization (through the mere intervention of time-place distance)	non-systemic text, not-acceptable(potentially innovative)
Deletion	reductive translation abridged version undertranslation expressive reduction	Universalization dehistorization (through the removal of foreign cultural signs)	the metatext is a more typical specimen of a (target) text-type neutralization of stylistic or generic peculiarities
Addition	paraphrastic translation more explicit text Overslation expressie amplification	Exoticization historization (through the positive addition of foreign cultural signs)	the metatext is a more typical specimen of a (target) text-type introduction of stylistic or genericmarkers
Permutation	compenation (metatextual)	compensation (metatextual)	compensation (metatextual)

3.3 Questionnaire

In order to have a general information of the subjects a questioner was distributed among the interpreters.

This questionnaire involved items as

Table 4

A Questioner on the Basic Information of the Interpreters

Questions	Answers
Age	
Sex	
Profession	
How long have you been working as a consecutive interpreter?	
How often do you interpret?	
What kind of interpreting consecutive or simultaneous- do you do?	

4. Data Analysis

In order to test the research, question a number of statistical analyses were conducted. It is worth mentioning that the data were analyzed by using SPSS software.

Table 5

Frequency of the strategies in first chunk

Strategy		Frequency	Valid percent
Addition		1	6.7
Deletion		1	6.7
Repetition		0	0.00
Substitution		13	86.7
	Total	15	100

Table 5 represents the frequency of strategies used in the first chunk of the test. As it is shown in table 5, Substitution with 86.7% was the most frequent strategy in the first chunk followed by Addition and Deletion with 6.7%, respectively. However, none of the interpreters used repetition.

Table 6

Frequency of Strategies in Second Chunk

Strategy		Frequency	Valid percent
Addition		1	6.7
Deletion		0	0.00
Repetition		0	0.00
Substitution		14	93.3
	Total	15	100

Table 6 demonstrates the Frequency of Strategies used in Second Chunk. As can be seen, Addition and Substitution were the only strategies interpreters used to interpret the chunk with 93.3 and 6.7, respectively. More than 90% of the subjects used substitution and only one of them preferred addition. Also, no interpreter used deletion or repetition in the first chunk.

Table 7

Frequency of the Strategies in Third Chunk

Strategy		Frequency	Valid percent
Addition		2	13.3
Deletion		3	20.0
Repetition		0	0.00
Substitution		10	66.7
	Total	15	100

Table 7 represents the percentage of the strategies. As can be seen, Substitution was the most frequent used

in this chunk with 66.7%. Addition and Deletion were the next strategies with 20% and 13%, respectively. Repetition with 0% was the strategy which was not used by the translators.

Table 8

Frequency of Strategies in Forth Chunk

Strategy		Frequency	Valid percent
Addition		4	26.7
Deletion		0	0.00
Repetition		0	0.00
Substitution		11	73.3
	Total	15	100

Table 8 demonstrates the strategies interpreters used in the 4th chunk of the interpretation. As is shown, Substitution with more than 70% was the dominant strategy followed by Addition, 26.7%. However, with 0%, none of the interpreters used either deletion or repletion.

Table 9

Frequency of Strategies in Fifth Chunk

Strategy		Frequency	Valid percent
Addition		1	7.14
Deletion		0	0.00
Repetition		0	0.00
Substitution		13	92.86
	Total	14	100

Table 9 represents the percentage of the strategies used in the 5th chunk of the interpretation process. As is demonstrated, Substation with 92.86% was the most frequently strategy followed by Addition with only 7.14%. Deletion and Repetition with 0% were the strategies which were not used by the interpreters.

Table 10

Frequency of the Strategies in Sixth Chunk

Strategy		Frequency	Valid percent
Addition		1	7.14
Deletion		1	7.14
Repetition		6	42.86
Substitution		6	42.86
	Total	14	100

Table 10 represents the percentage of the strategies used in the sixth chunk of the interpretation process. As can be understood, Repletion and Substitution were among the mostly-used strategies with both 42 items. While, 68% followed by addition and deletion both with 7% only.

Table 11

Frequency of the Strategies in Seventh Chunk

Strategy		Frequency	Valid percent
Addition		3	20.0
Deletion		0	00.0
Repetition		3	21.0
Substitution		9	59.0
	Total	15	100

Table 11 reveals the percentage of the strategies used in the interpretation process in the 9th chunk. As can be inferred, Substitution and Repetition were the dominant strategies with 59% and 21%, respectively. Addition with 20% was the third strategy used by the interpreters. Deletion with 0% was the least used strategy.

Table 12

Frequency of the Strategies in Eighth Chunk

Strategy	Frequency	Valid percent
Addition	0	0.00
Deletion	7	53.85
Repetition	3	23.08
Substitution	3	23.08
Total	13	100

Table 12 represents the frequency of the strategies used in the 9th chunk of the interpretation process. As can be understood from data, Deletion with 53.85% was the most frequent strategy followed by Repetition and Substitution with both 23.08%, respectively. Addition with 0% was the least used strategy used by the interpreters.

Table 13

Frequency of the Strategies in Ninth Chunk

Strategy	Frequency	Valid percent
Addition	0	0.00
Deletion	5	38.46
Repetition	7	53.85
Substitution	1	7.69
Total	13	100

Table 13 represents the frequency of strategies used in the 9th chunk of the interpretation process. As is seen, Repetition and Deletion were the most frequent strategies with 53.85% and 38.46%, respectively. Substitution and Addition were the next strategies used by the interpreters with 7 and 0%, respectively.

4.1 Total Frequency in English protocol

In the English protocol of the test, Twenty-four English chunks categorized separately in accordance with Delabastita's model. Table 14 shows the total amount of strategies used in English protocol of the research.

Table 14

Total Frequency of Strategies in English Protocol

Strategy	Frequency	Valid percent
Addition	29	8.84
Deletion	62	18.90
Repetition	57	17.38
Substitution	180	54.88
Total	328	100

Table 14 shows the total frequency of strategies in English protocol. As it is shown, substitution (54.88%) was the most frequent strategy used by interpreters in English protocol. Deletion with 18.90% was the second most prevalent strategy. Repetition gained 17.38% of the strategies and placed in the third rank. Only 8.84% of the interpreters used addition in order to interpret the English chunks.

4.2 Frequency in Persian protocol

There were around 34 Persian chunks categorized in accordance with Delabastita's model. Each of the chunks was measured separately. Table 15 represents the Frequency of strategies in twenty fifth chunks. Accordingly, Addition with 40% was the most frequent strategy interpreters used in the first Persian chunk. Repetition with 33.3% and deletion with 26% were the next frequent strategies. None of the interpreters has used the strategy of substitution in this chart.

Table 15

Frequency of strategies in twenty fifth chunk

Strategy	Frequency	Valid percent
Addition	6	40.0
Deletion	4	26.
Repetition	5	33.3
Substitution	0	0.00
Total	15	100

4.3 Total strategies used in both Persian and English protocols

Table 16

Total Strategies Used in both Persian and English Protocol

Strategy	Frequency	Valid percent
Addition	93	11.86
Deletion	98	12.50
Repetition	135	17.22
Substitution	458	58.42
Total	784	100

Table 16 demonstrates total strategies used in both Persian and English Protocol. According to table 16, there were totally 784 strategies interpreters used in this research among which Substitution with 58.42% by a big margin was the most frequent strategy interpreters used in the interpretation process. Other strategies gained below 20% of the interpretations. Repetition was the second leading strategy with 17.22%. Also, 12.50% of the interpreters used deletion as their strategy. Addition with 11.86 % was the last and the least favorite strategy in interpretation process.

4.4 Discussions, suggestions and some implications

The main purpose of this research was to find out how the interpreter's role may differ from the way it is defined by different parties in the communication and also to find out how interpreters/ mediators can tackle cultural differences. According to the results, most consecutive interpreters in this research preferred the closest equivalence in TT. They chose substitutions as their favorite strategy. According to Delabastita (1993), substitution is the mostly used category which occurs in interpretation processes. Substitution is discussed as the analogical principle. In restrict recoding all relationships between TT and ST counterparts fall under this category, moreover, owing to the structural symmetry between the code involved, they full meet the criteria of mathematical equivalence, but in interpretation between non-artificial expressions, strict equivalence is the category which happens only in a very limited number of cases. Operational universal semantic theories, which act as a tertium-copmarationist and unequivocally select the closest near equivalent for each ST item, do not exist.

The point was that repetition and deletion were the next two strategies. This means that interpreters were not eager to intervene as a cultural mediator. Addition was the least favorable strategy they preferred to use. In addition, comparing English and Persian versions of interpreting done in the current research, interpreters made more mistakes in English to Persian items; meaning that interpreters were not familiar with English cultural-specific items (idioms, metaphors and…).

Regarding the cultural role and significance of the interpreters and mediators, Pistillo (2004) in his doctoral thesis project examined the cultural interpretation in business contexts by an interpreter. He did the study in order to show how the interpreter's intercultural knowledge can bring about a better communication between the two parties. Pistillo found out that bridging the intercultural gap between communicators who use a mediator just because they do not speak one common language is considered as a very delicate job. Also, impartiality is

considered as one of the most important ethical preconditions for interpreters; meaning that the interpreter or mediator is not permitted to give his/her personal thought or change in any way what a speaker utters of his mouth.

However, Taft (1981) states that the interaction between two or more cultures necessitates the transferring of ideas, thoughts and information from one cultural to the other one. This interaction is similar to the process required in linguistic translation, though it requires more mediation and interaction than mere translation. Due to the fact that literal translation is generally not considered as an advisable approach in interpretation (Schäffner, 1996 & Katan, 1999), it is important to find out the way and the extent to which the interpreter could 'mediate' the speech rather than merely 'translate' in order to make the communication possible.

4.5 Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Further Studies

This research itself does not offer finalized findings and outcomes on the subject of interpreter's strategies and roles in political context. However, this study can be used as a point of departure for further studies on the subject and some implications can be drawn. As Faiq (2004) states

> *the misunderstandings of translator are not only the products of linguistic incompatibilities, but of cultural ones as well* (p. 1).

One implication of the findings and conclusions of this research is for training interpreters and their teachers. This study highlights the importance of culture knowledge for interpreters. Not only interpreters must consider linguistics part, but also cultural issues. They need to be aware of both parties' cultures.

Another implication for interpretation is that the interpreters are required to be well acquainted with political discourse. Indeed, the findings of the current research show that political speech interpretation as a specific genre requires more attention, since it plays an important role in increasing mutual understanding and communication between two cultures. The findings also propose the claim that interpreters work better in their mother tongue rather than in their second language. However, it seems that more studies are needed on this subject and issues like the speed of interpreting, interpreters' short memory, note taking, and some other points can be suggested for more studies by other researchers.

Also, the findings of the current study can be very useful for students of Translation Studies. In fact, the students will learn how to operationalize Delabastita's model as theoretical framework for studies to be. Also, the researchers will be acquainted with doing research in the field of interpretation as an ongoing filed of inquiry. Moreover, the researchers in the field of interpretation can learn how to compare and contrast the different methods interpreters apply in interpretation process. In addition, further studies have to be made to come up with the question on how to train interpreters and cultural mediators and how to prepare them to become good speakers. As Lederer (1978) points out, the interpreter "is not only a listener, he is also a speaker" (p. 327). The last, but not the least the finding of this study is to shed light on the significance of the interpreters' background knowledge and to suggest the need for further researches in this growing area.

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