



## The impact of vocabulary selection ability on EFL students' communication skills

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### ABSTRACT

Managing the flow of language in broader culture-based expressions in standardized communication belongs to one of crucial things to gain proficiency in English. Recent studies focus solely on the phenomenon of language proficiency, without considering the integrative elements of language proficiency as a learning achievement. Therefore, this study aims to investigate a causal-effect relationship between students' ability to choose the right vocabulary and their communication skills. The researcher conducted an afterthought research design whose sole purpose was to accurately see the impact of one variable on another. In this study, 40 tenth grade vocational high school students in Badung, Bali, Indonesia participated using a targeted sampling technique. Data were collected by conducting two types of tests used to measure students' ability in distinguishing vocabulary use in listening activities and to check writing proficiency test. The data were analyzed with SPSS 25.0. The results showed that the ability to distinguish vocabulary statistically affected the clear flow of English communication, such as in building their conversation, lack of confidence, lack of variety, or improper politeness led to misunderstandings. Therefore, this study suggests that teachers use a teaching strategy to integrate all elements of communication for better language skills.

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## Introduction

Ability to communicate in English in daily life context fluently is the main goal of English language learning in Indonesia. However, this goal is mostly considered difficult to achieve by the English as foreign language (EFL) students due to the limited numbers of vocabulary. Though most students think that non-verbal communication in English can help them to express their needs, desires, criteria, emotions, etc. (Hoa, 2011). Comprehension of vocabulary makes all broader communication possible to obtain (Khasanah & Burhan, 2022).

However, Kautz et al. (2017) state that communication is a non-verbal ability to provide feedback, present ideas verbally or in writing, make presentations, negotiate to achieve goals, and receive support or approval.

In contrast to Lilia (2022), communication is an activity to share meaning simultaneously through symbolic interactions that involves four elements; speaker, receiver, communication channel, and feedback. In other words, managing the flow of language in broader culture-based expressions in standardized communication is one of crucial things to gain proficiency in English. In fact, the ability to communicate in English interactively with a wide variety of topics and contexts is an obsession of every EFL student (Khairunnisa et al., 2021). To gain the achievement, the students are required to comprehend and use English vocabulary (Zhonggen, 2018). It means that they have to comprehend the lexical meaning and the appropriate usage of those words in context. Vocabulary selection in this study is the ability to choose appropriate words form, meaning, and function. Therefore, the students should be able to select the use of vocabulary in any language variation contexts; what to say, when to say, and how to say words in social communication.

Through vocabulary selection ability, students are able to express feelings, ideas, or information in various ways without changing the meaning. For example, students may say "fresher" instead of "new graduation" in a job interview context. In addition, in phoneme selection, the sound of "fresher" and "fresh air" refers to different things. Therefore, vocabulary awareness is the basis of all language use. It is like the raw building blocks to build a mix of thoughts and ideas, information, and personal relationships. In the worst situation of learning English, understanding is still possible with little knowledge of grammar. In addition, Agustiwati (2022) also claims that vocabulary is essential in foreign language learning as the meanings of new words are very often emphasized, whether in books or classrooms. To put it simply, the more vocabulary to know, the easier students can improve their language skills. However, communication skills are more complex because they involve the students' soft skills to manage a well-flowing conversation (Wardana et al., 2022). As a result, it will help them to understand words from their context, naturally expanding their vocabulary and improving their language skill without needing to spend more time looking the words up in a dictionary or asking someone for an explanation.

There have been many studies investigating the vocabulary and language skills of EFL students (Soliman, 2014; Alshumaimeri & Alhumud, 2021; Miralpeix & Muñoz, 2018). However, the present study explores whether the tenth-grade students of a private vocational high school in Badung, Bali have great performance in vocabulary selection and whether their ability is statistically correlated with communication skills. This study investigates how English communication skills might be dependent on the student's ability to recognize and use the correct words. A study of He and Godfroid (2019) introduces a step-by-step approach for materials writers, curriculum designers, and teaching professionals to identify word groupings in a potential list of target words, using a combination of objective and subjective data, with the prospect of creating more effective and more efficacious vocabulary learning materials. In addition, another study of Yorkston et al. (1989) reveals that standard vocabulary lists may be considered a necessary but not sufficient aspect of vocabulary selection.

Therefore, this study addresses the significant impact of English vocabulary selection ability on communication skills. From having correct selection of vocabulary, students are

able to list a group of words either they belong to the core vocabulary or fringe vocabulary. Based on the background of the study, the research problems can be stated whether there is or not significant impact of the students' vocabulary selection ability toward their communication skills in English. Therefore, this study is aimed at exploring the students' vocabulary selection ability. This study also determines whether there is any causal-impact correlation between vocabulary selection ability toward their communication skills in English.

### ***Vocabulary selection ability***

Vocabulary can be roughly defined as the total number of words needed to communicate ideas and express the speakers' meaning. That is the reason why it is important to learn vocabulary in English language learning (Al-Jarf, 2007). Having a wide range of knowledge of vocabulary will help people to manage a conversation on a certain topic with the appropriate subject with the correct word choices (Ozoda et al., 2021). However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than just a single word: for example, post office, and mother-in-law, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea (Alqahtani, 2015).

Vocabulary is crucial to be mastered by EFL learners because vocabulary selection ability is needed to express our ideas and to be able to understand what other people are saying (Elmahdi & Hezam, 2020). It deals with the right and appropriate words recognition and selection. According to Brown and Perry Jr (1991), vocabulary refers to lists or sets of words that individual speakers of language might use, since vocabulary is a list, people may think that the only system involved is that of alphabetical order. In addition, Richards et al. (2002) state that vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how learners speak, listen, read, and write.

Furthermore, Cervetti et al. (2016) elaborate that vocabulary is a list of words as a basic component of language proficiency which has a form or expression and contains aspects, they are meaning, use of the word, and form (pronunciation and spelling). Vocabulary is the knowledge of the meaning of words. It means that vocabulary is the key to mastering communication skills. Mastering vocabulary is essential for students who learn English as a foreign language. The mastery of vocabulary can support them in communicating (Zhang, 2012). Thus, vocabulary becomes the basic component that supports the students in communication to express their ideas.

Vocabulary selection refers to choosing the words or symbols that are present on a communication board or device (Fallon et al., 2001). Appropriate selection and adaptation of vocabulary is strongly correlated with successful use in communication. Personalizing a communicator's vocabulary should be an essential step, not an optional activity. Vocabulary selection depends on the student's interests, communication needs and communication partners. A communication system includes both core and peripheral vocabularies. The core vocabulary relates to the most commonly used words and consists mostly of verbs, pronouns, descriptors, prepositions and few nouns. These words are powerful because they can be used flexibly for environments, topics, and all communication partners. Fringe vocabulary refers to topic-, environment-, or person-specific vocabulary that is unlikely to be used across environments. Rather, with a specific activity, environment, or specific communication partner.

### ***Communication skill***

Communication is a process conducted among humans as they interact with one another, which is an important aspect of them. In relation to this, human communication is a connector for society in the process of relaying information or news and broadcasting important announcements. According to Dale et al. (2013), human communication is a subtle set of processes through which people interact, control one another and gain understanding. Communication in society is basically needed in face-to-face interaction or direct conversation which requires both speaking skill and listening skills.

Communication skills are the abilities you use when giving and receiving different kinds of information. Some examples include communicating new ideas, feelings, or even an update on your project. According to Crichton (2009), students need to actively use the language to give them confidence and to feel its communicative value. As a university student who is getting ready to start their chosen career, he or she should take the opportunity in any activities that develop communication skills in a wider and complete aspect so that communication skills can be fully developed. Iksan et al. (2012) claim that in our globalized world, university students need to master communication skills in different cultural contexts. Communication skills involve listening, speaking, observing, and empathizing. It is also helpful to understand the differences in how to communicate through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations, and digital communications like email and social media. Communication skill also means having the ability to convey information and ideas effectively.

Moreover, Trosborg (1987) states that people frequently fail to communicate effectively because they do not express themselves clearly enough. Indeed, in every conversation, each party needs to express what they talk or discuss about. Mastering communication skills will help them a lot in doing an effective conversation. The effectiveness of communication will be achieved when the person that is involved in communication understands each other. That being said, communication skills are necessary for students to master.

### ***Listening skill***

Listening can be considered the fundamental skill to speaking because without understanding the input at the right level, any learning cannot begin. Along with speaking skill, listening skill also allows people to communicate effectively (Tilwani et al., 2022). Listening is not a passive skill but an active process of constructing meaning from a stream of sounds. Having good listening comprehension makes people able to decipher and interpret the meaning of a certain context while doing communication. Based on Zhang (2012), listening receives little attention in language teaching and learning, because teaching methods emphasize productive skills, and listening was characterized as a passive activity. In the teaching and learning process, the view of listening has changed the role of the listener from someone who was thought to passively receive the spoken message to an active participant in the act.

People are able to hear what the other person says by only focusing their hearing toward the person which is called "hearing", while listening to it, not only about hearing yet people need to understand the context well. Brownell (2002) states that listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or non-verbal

messages. On the other note, hearing is considered a physical, passive, and natural process and listening is a physical and mental, active and learned process and is defined as a skill.

### **Verbal communication**

Verbal communication is the process of interaction that applies vocals that are easy for people to understand. Verbal communication is the message expressed through words or spoken language that conveys meaning (Phutela, 2015). The use of verbal communication is associated with basic skills in learning English. This verbal communication is in the form of oral communication whereas speaking skills and listening skills are needed. The verbal element of communication is all about the words that are chosen.

In the process of verbal communication, the speakers use words or phrases that are understandable to the listeners. Students tend to communicate verbally while interacting with both the teacher and other students. Clear communication through the verbal form is crucial to convey the importance of context in each party's conversation. Verbal communication refers to symbols that have universal meaning for everyone involved in the process; These spoken or written symbols are called language (Rocci & de Saussure, 2016). Both verbal communication and mastery of English vocabulary are related. Good verbal communication skills and a wide vocabulary allow students or other people to understand unfamiliar situations by guessing the meaning of vocabulary.

It is true that verbal and non-verbal communication cannot be separated, but in communication skills, particularly in demonstrating vocabulary selection ability, verbal communication trumps non-verbal communication. For example, people speak to show they have good speaking skills. Bygate (1999) states that failure to establish good communication occurs when people do not want to understand the thoughts or ideas of others, feel annoyed when receiving a message, distance themselves when communicating with others, and consistently fail to do so to encourage others to take action (Domagaa-Zyk & Podlewska, 2019). In addition, to achieve this, people must have good verbal communication. Verbal communication goes a long way in supporting communication skills.

Based on the definition above, it can be summarized that verbal communication plays a fundamental role in the teaching and learning process. Sutiayatno (2018) also states that teachers also have an obligation to understand students' verbal communication and help students to improve their verbal skills. This form of verbal communication requires both speaking and listening skills. A broad vocabulary is also crucial for students. Therefore, students need to have two lines of communication in order to receive information and to ask for information in the communication.

### **Method**

Based on the purpose and characteristics of the research, the researcher used ex post facto research dealing with the relationship between the word selection ability and the communication skills of the tenth-grade students of vocational high school students in Badung, Bali, Indonesia. Ex post facto is a method of uncovering possible antecedents of events that have occurred and therefore cannot be controlled, engineered, or manipulated by the investigator (Cooper & Schindler, 2001). The method was chosen to describe the real

condition of a phenomenon with a correlation research design to compare two or more variables in a single group.

The population of the study was 80 tenth-grade students at vocational high school students in Badung, Bali, Indonesia. However, 40 students were selected as samples of the study. Some steps in selecting the samples included (1) preparing four pieces of paper and writing the name of the class, (2) folding and putting them into a glass, (3) showing the glass, (4) determining the sample of this research from the selected papers, and (5) conducting the research.

In the present study, the researcher used a note-taking test that was focused on student vocabulary selection ability and listening skills. In this case, the researcher prepared a voice recording that contained several vocabularies. There was a voice recording of the researcher which stated 10 vocabularies included five groups of words belong to core vocabulary, relates to the most commonly used words and consists mostly of verbs, pronouns, descriptors, prepositions and few nouns and five group of words belong to Fringe vocabulary, refers to topic-, environment-, or person-specific vocabulary that is unlikely to be used across environments. The students needed to listen to the words in the vocabulary carefully and then write down what vocabulary was heard by them in the form of note-taking. To take the vocabulary selection ability test result, the researcher provided a platform which was a *WhatsApp* group. The researcher provided 10 minutes for the students to do their work. Then, the students took a photo of their work and sent it via *WhatsApp* group.

Besides, in the present study, the researcher used oral proficiency scoring categories which are adapted from Brown (2014) consisting of three adapted aspects, i.e., fluency, comprehension, and grammar. However, Brown's oral proficiency criteria score consists of six aspects: vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, grammar, and task. The scoring rubric was adapted in the present study only on the three aspects based on the student's level and condition in the teaching and learning process.

In the present study, the data was collected by administering several topics as a theme for the students' role play as the research instrument. The test was constructed by giving a topic that students need to discuss with their partner to make a dialogue by inserting some vocabulary that was determined before. Then, after the research instrument was constructed, the test had to be considered valid and reliable. The test was constructed based on the crucial terms of validity and reliability. The 40 students were divided into 15 groups which each consisted of 2 students. They were given 20 minutes to construct their dialogue with their partners. They were required to construct a simple conversation by using the determined vocabulary as a theme of their conversation. Finally, students performed their conversation in front of the class and then were scored through a scoring rubric.

In addition, data analysis is the process of modeling the data to obtain specific information that can be applied in formulating the conclusion, prediction results, and scientific and social knowledge. In this present study, the researcher used authentic listening tasks in the form of notes and role-play tests to measure students' English vocabulary selection ability and communication skills.

The normality test aimed to determine whether the sample was from the population and had a normal distribution or not. In the present study, the normality test with Lilliefors' Significance Correction by Kolmogorov Smirnov in (KS-Z) of SPSS 25.0 was analyzed. In

addition, the result of the normality test in this study was shown by the value Kolmogorov Smirnov (KS-Z). The conclusion is that the research data was normal by comparing Sig. Value, with the significance level, if Sig. Value  $>$  (0.05) the data distribution is considered normal. The result of the normality test can be read in Table 1.

Table 1. Normality test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Words selection ability	0.162	40	0.010
Communication Skill	0.132	40	0.076

a. Lilliefors significance correction

Table 1 shows the result of the normality test, while the program showed that the normality test for English vocabulary proficiency was 0.010 and for communication ability was 0.076. This means that the data were normal, while English vocabulary proficiency was  $0.010 > 0.05$  and communication ability was  $0.076 > 0.05$ .

The homogeneity test is performed to test two or more sample data sets derived from the sample population variant. Homogeneity tests are performed to determine whether the data has homogeneous variance or not. In this homogeneity test, the minimum standard of 0.05 is the same as in the normality test. The result of the homogeneity test can be [represented in Table 2.

Table 2. Homogeneity test ANOVA score

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	3235.000	8	404.375	3.086	0.011
Within groups	4062.500	31	131.048		
Total	7297.500	39			

From the calculation in Table 2, the significance of the student's English vocabulary proficiency and communication skills is  $0.011 > 0.05$ , which means that the variances were homogeneous and not different. The hypothesis tests were calculated using the SPSS 25.0 version for Windows. In addition, the hypothesis test consisted of a Pearson product-moment t-test. In summary, these two analyzes were essential. The hypothesis can be formulated as follows.

1. Alternative hypothesis (Ha): There is a positive and significant correlation between proficiency in English vocabulary and the communication of the tenth-grade vocational high school students in Badung, Bali.
2. Null hypothesis (Ho): There is a negative correlation between the mastery of English vocabulary and the communication skills of the tenth-grade vocational high school students in Badung, Bali.

The first analysis of the hypothesis tests performed in the present study was done by applying Pearson's product moment. In the present study, the Pearson's product-moment was used to measure the linear relationship. The method was used to find the correlation

between the study variables, students' proficiency in English vocabulary, and their communication skills. The significance of the correlation coefficient was determined by comparing the data when the significance value is less than 0.05. Data are classified as significantly correlated if the correlation coefficient is less than 0.05. On the other hand, the data can be classified as not significantly correlated if the coefficient correlation is greater than 0.05. In summary, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was a simple way to assess the correlation between two variables. The product-moment correlation index can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Product moment correlation index

Interpretation	Product moment (Value of "r")
Considered as having no correlation	0.00 - 0.20
Low correlation	0.20 - 0.40
Moderately correlation	0.40 - 0.60
High correlation	0.60 - 0.80
Very high correlation	0.80 - 1.00

The t-test is performed after the data are normally and homogeneously distributed. The t-test was used to test the hypothesis. The t-test assumes that both groups were normally distributed and had relatively equal variances. Also, the t-statistic is distributed on a curve based on the number of degrees of freedom. An alternative hypothesis is accepted if the significance value is greater than the significance level (0.05). Conversely, if the significance value is less than the significance level (0.05), the hypothesis is rejected. Additionally, in the present study, the investigator used SPSS 25.0 in a computer program to compare the means of two variables to determine if there was statistical evidence that the associated population had significant differences.

### Findings and discussion

Students' proficiency in English vocabulary was an independent variable, referred to as variable X, and student's ability to communicate was a dependent variable, referred to as variable Y. To determine the correlation between these two variables, the researcher conducted a vocabulary test in which an audio recording contained 10 vocabulary words that students had to hear and write down. In addition, the researcher conducted a communication skills test, which was a role play that required students to incorporate the vocabulary they had previously heard into their conversation. A descriptive analysis of students' English vocabulary selection ability and communication skills is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' word selection ability and communication skills  
Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. deviation
Words selection ability	40	50	90	2810	70.25	13.679
Communication skill	40	47	93	2832	70.80	12.237



Table 4 demonstrates the result of the English vocabulary proficiency test and the result of communication ability showed that the mean for communication ability is 70.80. The standard deviation is a numeric index that expresses the average variability of the score, or in other words, it is the distance from the mean. From the table above, the standard deviation for students' proficiency in English vocabulary is 13.679, while for students' ability to communicate is 12.237. The smallest value of the variable is called the passing score, while the passing score for the student's proficiency in English vocabulary is 50 and the passing score for the student's communication ability is 47. On the other hand, the largest value of the score is called the maximum score. The maximum score for proficiency in English vocabulary is 90 and the maximum score for communication ability is 93. Both mean scores of the word selection ability and communication skills were compared by the Pearson's product-moment test presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation test  
Correlations

		English vocabulary selection ability	Communication skill
Words selection ability	Pearson correlation	1	.589**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.000
	N	40	40
Communication skill	Pearson correlation	.589**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000	
	N	40	40

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Informed in Table 5, the correlation value of the coefficient (r) was 0.589, meaning that there was a positive correlation between word selection ability and the ability to communicate. Furthermore, based on Table 3, the correlation between them was moderate correlation while the (r) value was between 0.40 and 0.60. The value of (r) product moment for 40 samples with 5% degrees is 0.312. In addition, the r-count was greater than the r-table, which was  $0.589 > 0.312$ . It means that the correlation between word selection ability and the ability to communicate is significant.

Further, the t-test was the final analysis of the hypothesis test as the last step in the correlative research design. In calculating the t-test, the researcher also used SPSS 25.0 to calculate the correlation r-product moment when testing the study hypothesis. The result of the calculation of the correlation r product moment is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. The statistical findings of the t-test

		Paired samples test				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Paired differences						
		Me an	Std. deviatio n	Std. error mean	95% Confidence interval of the difference			
					Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	English word selection ability	-	11.826	1.870	-4.332	3.232	-2.294	.000
	Communication skill	50						

Table 6 reveals the result of the t-test, whereas the t-counted was -0.294. Furthermore, the df was 39 and the t-table of df 39 at  $\alpha = 0.05$  (5%) was 2.023. The t-counted was bigger than the t-table ( $-2.294 > 2.023$ ). It means that the correlation between students' English vocabulary selection ability and students' communication skills was significant and the hypothesis was accepted. To sum up, the correlation coefficient (r-counted) of 0.589 could be used to represent the whole population of 40 samples.

The aim of this study was to examine whether or not there was a significant impact of students' vocabulary selection ability observed from listening towards their communication skills. To find the causal-impact correlation, the researcher constructed several steps to collect the data. As a first step, the researcher administered the English vocabulary selection ability test and then proceeded to the communication ability test. This test aimed to determine the correlation between students' proficiency in English vocabulary and students' ability to communicate.

In addition, based on the data analysis performed with the SPSS 25.0 program, calculations are made at the 0.05 level. The normality score for proficiency in English vocabulary was 0.10 and the normality test for communication skills was 0.76. Both data were normal as values were greater than 0.05 ( $>0.05$ ). The next is the calculation of the homogeneity test. The significance of students' English vocabulary and communication skills was  $0.11 > 0.05$ . It showed whether the variances were homogeneous and not different, or in short, had the same variant. Based on the results of these analyses, the researcher also performed hypothesis testing using Pearson's product moment. From the data on students' knowledge of English vocabulary and communication skills, it was found that  $r = 0.589$ . There was a positive and moderate association between students' proficiency in English vocabulary and their ability to communicate. In summary, there was a positive correlation between variable X (knowledge of English vocabulary) and variable Y (communicative ability).

After performing the Pearson's product moment test, the researcher used the paired-sample t-test to test the hypothesis. The result of the above calculation data shows that the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) was accepted since the Pearson test shows correlation  $R = 0.589$ . This means that there was a moderate correlation. The result of the t-test was  $-2.294 > 2.023$ . It indicates that the data was clearly accepted. In other words, the correlation between students' proficiency in English vocabulary and students' ability to communicate was moderately accepted and the hypothesis was accepted.

The results supported the study conducted by Franscy (2016) which aimed to determine the English proficiency of the students and to determine whether there is a connection between the mastery of vocabulary and pronunciation. Based on the discussion of the study, there was a significant correlation between vocabulary selection ability and pronunciation ability with the ability to speak English. There was a positive and significant correlation between vocabulary selection ability and pronunciation ability. However, the research did not give clear information about the population and the sample of their research. Also, finding the population and the sample is confusing. Hence, the unequivocal grade of the students for the basic population and sample in the present study.

This study, likewise, is consistent with the findings of research conducted by Agustawati (2022), there is a correlation between vocabulary selection ability and speaking ability when describing people. In addition, the study data analysis showed that there is a significant

association between vocabulary selection ability and speaking ability when describing people. The result showed that the correlation between vocabulary selection ability and speaking ability when describing people is significant. Considering the outcome of the data, these two studies are already good at presenting the data on the importance of English vocabulary proficiency. It also showed the correlation between English vocabulary proficiency and communication skills depending on the hypothesis and the factual condition. Furthermore, the content is well constructed by the authors by including speaking ability as a communication skill in the research. Each statement was supported by many theories of experts. The sources of the material and the resources used were good. However, communication skills also require listening comprehension as verbal communication. To make it more complete, in the present study, the researcher includes the speaking ability to complete verbal communication that requires both speaking and listening ability.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study have answered the questions where the results indicated students' vocabulary selection ability significantly impacted on their communication skills in English. In addition, this result also revealed that students' vocabulary selection ability influences students' confidence to a sufficient level. It means that students' speaking ability was not only influenced by vocabulary selection ability but also by how the students' communicated ideas in the appropriate manner. It was true that mastering English vocabulary helped them a lot in building their conversation, but lack of confidence, reluctance to talk, or improper politeness led to misunderstandings. In addition, students' English proficiency, such as proficiency in English vocabulary, had a significant impact on their ability to communicate. In summary, English vocabulary selection skills are necessary for students to improve their communication skills. The study findings can inspire students to develop their communication skills by recognizing spoken words while listening and using language in social variants. Therefore, vocational high school EFL teachers need to interact more with students and develop students' hard and soft skills in English communication in everyday contexts.

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