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**Is Spanish here to stay? Contexts for bilingualism among
U.S.-born Hispanics, 1990-2000**

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IS SPANISH HERE TO STAY?

CONTEXTS FOR BILINGUALISM AMONG U.S.-BORN HISPANICS, 1990 and 2000¹

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ABSTRACT

This analysis uses data from the 1990 and 2000 Censuses to explore individual and contextual factors that influence U.S.-born Hispanic adults to maintain Spanish alongside English. Cuban or Puerto Rican ancestry, living with a Spanish-dominant person, having children in one's household, and working in a service- or health-related job all increase the odds of bilingualism.

Contextual incentives – growth in a state's Hispanic population, bilinguals' status, and Hispanics' political influence – also positively influence the odds of bilingualism. By showing a positive relationship between upward mobility, political participation, and bilingualism, my findings suggest that it is possible for Hispanics in the U.S. to maintain selected characteristics of their origin culture while becoming American.

Immigrants to the United States are frequently discouraged from using their native tongue, and/or passing it on to their children. The dominance of English in government, industry, education, and popular culture has made it “the single most important element in construction of national identity, both positively as a communicative instrument shared by members of the nation and as a boundary marker affirming their distinction from others” (Zolberg and Long 1999:22). Not surprisingly therefore, the vast majority of sociologists’ and economists’ research on language in the US focuses on English acquisition and use rather than other-language maintenance. It’s been assumed that bilingualism is a transitional state – if not for an individual, then across generations.

This research challenges that assumption in the case of U.S.-born Hispanics.² For many reasons, Spanish has persisted to a much greater degree than other non-English languages spoken in the United States. Spanish-speakers comprises over half of those who generally speak a language other than English at home. Spanish language institutions and media are well established in many parts of the country, and using Spanish alongside English has become key to Latino political identity and efficacy -

² I use the designations “Hispanic” and “Latino” interchangeably.

both in symbolic and practical terms. Today, Hispanic population growth and a continuous flow of immigrants from Spanish speaking countries could make it more important or desirable to retain Spanish now than it was in the past. A globalizing economy and the emergence of transnational communities that span national borders (Portes 2001) alter the costs and benefits of English monolingualism and bilingualism. It is also easier for immigrants to retain social, economic, and political ties to their home country than it was in the past. Indeed, as stated in a recent paper by Aristide Zolberg and Long Lit Woon (1999), it appears that Spanish is “here to stay” (p. 31). But *for whom* and *where* will Spanish “stay”? What factors influence individuals’ decisions to maintain or learn Spanish, or see to it that one’s children do? This paper explores the circumstances under which bilingualism might become a stable and compatible aspect of becoming and being American – part of an additive process of immigrant assimilation that *incorporates*, rather than replaces, characteristics of the sending country. For Hispanics in the U.S., the additive model of linguistic assimilation is part of a process that Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut (1996, 2001) call “selective acculturation”: upward assimilation into the host culture while retaining significant elements of the origin culture. A deepened understanding of the circumstances that encourage selective acculturation

will contribute to the literature on immigrant assimilation and national identity as well as inform policymakers and educators.

This article is organized as follows: First, I briefly discuss the historical process through which English monolingualism became a mark of American identity, and contemporary reasons why it still might be – especially for recent immigrants and their families. Next I describe what we know about Spanish maintenance in recent times. Then I develop, test, and discuss a model of the micro- and macro-level circumstances that influence Spanish maintenance (as opposed to English monolingualism) among Hispanic adults in the United States.

LANGUAGE AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

The Legacy of English

The United States has never had an official language policy. Bilingualism was relatively common in the nineteenth century, and bilingual education was not unknown. Yet a belief that “American English both reflected and constituted the democratic and rational nature of the country” emerged (Portes and Schauffler 1996:10). For some influential thinkers, this meant far more than establishing a common language for practical reasons. English

came to be seen as a crucial unifying element – uniquely suited to define the nation and its citizens (Fishman 1966).

Reflective of this notion, and undoubtedly in reaction to an all-time high level of immigration, Congress enacted an English language requirement for citizenship in 1906. In 1907 it appointed a joint committee, The Dillingham Commission, to study immigration's impact on the country. Guided by the theories of influential nativist scholars, the Commission concluded in 1911 that new immigration consisted mostly of "inferior peoples" who were physically, mentally, and *linguistically* different and would thus not easily adopt "fundamental American ideals" (King 2000:64, italics added). World War I heightened anxieties about national loyalty and immigrant assimilation. During and following the war, several states prohibited the teaching of German. The governors of Iowa and South Dakota issued decrees prohibiting the use of any language other than English in public places or over the telephone (Piatt 1990). Schools in many states required children to take language loyalty oaths. A 1919 Nebraska statute banned teaching any language other than English before the ninth grade (Dillard 1985; Marckwardt 1980). In 1923, an Illinois law even targeted speakers of British English, declaring "American" to be the state's official tongue (Tatalovich 1995:63-69).

Immigration from Europe virtually stopped by the 1930s, due first to the Quota Law of 1921 and then the Depression. The halt in new immigration encouraged linguistic assimilation among those who were already in the U.S., usually leading to English-monolingualism by the third generation. The notion that this pattern is a one that immigrants should follow became powerfully entrenched.

Ethnic Identity in the Post-Civil Rights Era

In the 1960s, immigration reform, the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act provided – collectively – a new basis for minority groups to politically and culturally articulate their ethnic identity. This was a potential window of opportunity for other languages to flourish alongside English. In particular, the position of Spanish in American life became part of the civil rights agenda because the obligation to exclusively use English in the public sphere disadvantaged American citizens who grew up in a Spanish-language environment. Puerto Ricans living in New York, for example, obtained the right to vote in Spanish, obligating the state to provide bilingual ballots.

The Bilingual Education Act (BEA), originally passed by Congress in 1968, also held potential for promoting a greater valuation of Spanish and Spanish-speakers in U.S. society. The BEA aimed to improve the poor school performance of immigrant children by providing funds for 'transitional'

programs to help children of limited English-speaking ability learn English well before transitioning into regular classrooms. These programs often involve instruction in a child's native tongue. Yet even as it signaled intent to help children succeed in school, the language of the original BEA and its limited focus on schools serving large concentrations of poor families served to further associate bilingualism with disadvantage, cultural deprivation, and alienation (Haugen 1972; Schmidt 2000). It also perpetuated *subtractive* bilingualism in which English replaces one's first language.

Revisions of the BEA have greatly extended its application, goals, and the pedagogical strategies it supports. Yet it is still quite common to gauge success at educating the children of immigrants by evaluating how quickly they give up their first language and shift to English (García 1995). Decades after the Civil Rights movement, the United States is still regarded as a graveyard for foreign languages (Rodriguez 2002). Many immigrant parents do not pass their native languages on to their children because English is clearly the most socially and economically valued tongue, and/or because they fear that bilingualism will invite discrimination (Fishman 1996; Lippi-Green 1997).

The above notwithstanding, today it is clearer than ever that immigrants' efforts at linguistic and cultural assimilation do not uniformly translate into structural incorporation (García 1995). Immigrants are

thoroughly aware of this. The respective meanings newcomers attach to living in the U.S. and becoming American are shaped by the opportunities and limitations they perceive (Fernández Kelly and Schauffler 1996). These opportunities and limitations could influence the linguistic choices of members of a particular ethnic group, even if they themselves are not immigrants. And, to the extent that changes in the demographic, political, or cultural situation alter the structure of opportunities and limitations that immigrants perceive, such changes could provoke *new* linguistic choices. The section below describes patterns of linguistic behavior among Hispanics in the U.S. that have indeed changed.

LINGUISTIC TRENDS, 1980-2000

Large-scale data on the usage of non-English languages in the United States is very limited. Censuses before 1980 (except 1920) did not include a language question. Now the Census asks which language a respondent speaks at home. If the reply is not "English," the respondent is asked how well they speak English. This measure by no means encompasses all bilinguals (e.g., Spanish-speakers who are married to English monolinguals and thus do not speak Spanish at home), but it is the best indicator we have at the macro-level, and well-worth using (Bills 1989; Hart-Gonzalez and Feingold 1990; Solé 1990). Speaking Spanish at home reflects a preference for using

the language, and – where applicable – a desire for one's children to know and use it. Another data limitation is that since 1970, the Census doesn't allow us to differentiate between the second and subsequent immigrant generations.

[Figures 1 - 3 about here]

Figures 1 through 3 describe trends of English monolingualism, bilingualism, and Spanish-dominance (including Spanish monolingualism) from 1980 to 2000. The figures represent data on U.S.-born or 1.5 generation³ Hispanics in the ten states with the proportionally largest Hispanic populations in 2000: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Texas. Figure 1 – in which the 1.5 and 2-plus generations are grouped together – shows rising and then stable bilingualism, rising English monolingualism, and declining Spanish dominance. Figure 2 leaves out the 1.5 generation and still shows very similar trends. Figure 3 includes only the 1.5 generation. It indicates very stable patterns with, not surprisingly, a higher rate of bilingualism. Given that the population of U.S.-born Hispanic adults increased steadily between 1980 and 2000, stable levels of bilingualism suggest that there is more Spanish retention among later-generation Hispanics than there was in the past. For some people in some

³ The “1.5 generation” consists of persons who immigrated at age 10 or younger.

places, bilingualism is a more valuable part of American identity than it used to be. But for whom? Where?

THEORIZING LINGUISTIC CHOICE: IDENTITY FORMATION AND SELECTIVE ACCULTURATION

Identity formation has been described as a process “by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him” (Erikson 1968: 19, 22-23 – quoted in Laitin 1998:20). Building on this definition, David Laitin (1998) emphasizes the instrumentality of the process. “[I]dentities are constructed and reconstructed as social opportunities change” (p. 20). People adopt identities according to how well these serve individual purposes, and reconstruct them to take advantage of new opportunities. For Hispanic Americans, identity construction clearly involves the choice of language used at home and elsewhere, i.e., the value (net of costs) assigned to intergenerational Spanish maintenance.

In their research on the new second generation in American, Portes and Rumbaut (1996, 2001) develop three typologies of immigrant assimilation. One looks very much like the “melting pot” (Alba 1990, Waters 1990). The second generation adopts mainstream American customs,

speaks mostly or only English, and is upwardly mobile. The second typology applies to children of immigrants who acculturate not to the mainstream, but to inner-city subcultures. While these groups' educational and labor market outcomes are opposite those of the first, their linguistic outcome is the same: English monolingualism (though perhaps not in 'standard' English).

The third course is *selective acculturation*. In this process, ethnic networks and strong communities support children as they learn to deal with prejudice, navigate the education system, and find a place in the labor market. The outcome is upward assimilation combined with bilingualism and biculturalism. "While such a path may appear inimical to successful adaptation in the eyes of conventional assimilationists, in fact it can lead to better psychosocial and achievement outcomes because it preserves bonds across immigrant generations and gives children a clear reference point to guide their future lives" (Portes and Rumbaut 2001:309; cf. Glazer and Moynihan 1963). Selective acculturation offers a scenario in which maintaining a language other than English makes sense for Americans. In terms of contextual factors' influence on Spanish maintenance in the U.S., one would expect that – to the extent that bilingualism among native-born Hispanics is a result of selective acculturation – there will be proportionally more bilinguals in places where Latino populations are relatively

concentrated and dynamic, and where Latinos have economic and political resources at their disposal.

Other theorists offer complementary predictions that include elements of economic rationality and culture as necessary components of the context within which people make decisions about language maintenance and use. After defining four orientations to social action, Max Weber ([1922] 1978) notes, “it would be very unusual to find cases of action, especially of social action, which were oriented only in one or another of these ways” (p. 26). Likewise, in his discussion of language and ethnic identity in the former Soviet republics, Laitin (1998) maintains that it is impossible to separate rationality from culture. Our economic behavior may be driven by habit rather than by rational calculation; culturally derived preferences can be part of a rational utility-maximizing strategy (Becker 1976). Still, if the costs and benefits of a customary cultural behavior are changing, we will likely begin to make new calculations about maintaining that behavior. It is thus fitting that an analysis of language usage – a pivotal aspect of culture – will include rational calculation. “Rational,” however, is not synonymous with “material.” Status and influence are integral to choices about identity. We calculate about status maximization in much the same way that we calculate about wealth maximization (Frank 1985). Accordingly, a comprehensive model of linguistic decisions should include indicators of the status of speakers and speech

communities (Laitin 1988, 1992, 1993, 1998; Ricento 1998, 2000; Tollefson 1989, 1991).

The discussion that follows is based on two premises. First, actors' orientation to action is instrumental. Based on what they know, people choose a particular course when they believe it offers the best means of realizing their goals in a given situation or in an expected future situation (Kiser and Hechter 1998:801; Laitin 1998:216). Second, as discussed above, the context within which people in the United States make language choices has changed. The analysis that follows will specify micro- and macro-level variables that shape the language decisions of Hispanic adults in the U.S. I expect that *bilingualism will be more prevalent among people for whom it has practical or economic rewards, and in places where there is a community of speakers and where bilinguals' status and influence is relatively high.*⁴

⁴ These hypotheses have been refined via a previous analysis of 1990 data at the metro area level. A goal of the present analysis is to see whether they hold in 2000, and the degree to which contextual factors matter at state level.

DATA AND MEASURES

The units of analysis in this study are native-born and 1.5 generation Hispanic adults living in the ten states listed above.⁵ Person who did not report English fluency are excluded.

Individual and state-level data come from the 1990 and 2000 Censuses (file STF3), the 1990 1-percent PUMS (Ruggles and Sobek 1997), and the 2000 PUMS BETA sample (Ruggles and Sobek 2003). Data on Hispanic elected officials comes from the *Directory of Hispanic Elected Officials* published by NALEO (1991, 2001). Tables 1-4 provide descriptive statistics about the variables. Here I discuss how each is relevant to a test of the hypotheses outlined above.

Dependent Variable

The binary dependent variable is Spanish-English bilingualism (as opposed to English monolingualism). Spanish-English bilinguals as those who report that they speak Spanish at home *and* speak English “very well.”

Individual-Level Independent Variables

The first group of variable in the analysis encompasses demographic characteristics of individuals. Since bilingualism is more prevalent among the

1.5 generation (11 percent of the sample in 1990 and 14 percent in 2000), a marker for *1.5 generation membership* is included as a control. Age could have a bearing on individual-level language outcomes in several ways. It could be positively related to bilingualism because older people are more likely to have lived in a Hispanic enclave and/or to work in a Hispanic-dominated occupational sector (Bean and Tienda 1987:22, 34). On the other hand, the Chicano movement may have influenced those who were middle-aged in 1990, and their children, to retain Spanish. These possibilities support the inclusion of age in this analysis – but without a specific prediction attached.

I include national origin markers because the meaning and process of assimilation is not the same for all groups. The possibility and prevalence of regular travel between the U.S. and one's country of origin or heritage will influence the degree to which assimilation is an additive process rather than one in which the ways of the receiving place replace those of the sending place. This reasoning applies especially to *Puerto Ricans*, for whom there are no legal barriers to entering or leaving the fifty states. A group's status may also influence the relative advantage its members find in following the traditional model of assimilation or in taking an alternative path. As Patricia

⁵ A subsequent analysis will include the entire United States. Here the analysis is limited to the ten most heavily Hispanic states in order to ensure adequate state-level samples from the PUMS BETA. At the time this analysis was performed, the 2000 1% PUMS was not available.

Fernández Kelly and Richard Schauffler's (1996) work reveals, low-status group membership could be an incentive to "forget" that group's characteristics. David López's (1999) research lends additional support to this hypothesis. His findings lead to the prediction that, among immigrant youths who follow a pattern of segmented assimilation into inner-city subcultures (in this case becoming part of ethnic gangs), "all these gang members will be banging in English" (p. 218). In contrast, belonging to a group that enjoys high status within the larger community could provide extra incentives for maintaining the characteristics of that group, e.g., bilingualism. This is likely the case for *Cubans*. All of the above leads to the expectation that the probability of bilingualism will differ by national origin, being higher for Puerto Ricans and Cubans than for other groups (cf. Bean and Tienda 1987:33-34).

It is clear that education (operationalized here as being a *high school graduate*) contributes to the English proficiency (a constant here), either directly or by providing skills that make it easier to learn English as a second language (Carliner 2000). Lieberman (1970) found that educational attainment and bilingualism are positively associated among Canadians whose mother tongue is French, but bilingualism did not vary at all by education among native English-speakers. "Indeed, bilingualism among the least educated French is more frequent than bilingualism among the college-educated component of the English-mother-tongue group" (page

26). Applied to Hispanics in the United States, this suggests that American schooling will promote English fluency and literacy for Spanish-speaking children, but will not necessarily promote Spanish proficiency for them or the English-speaking counterparts. I expect to find a negative relationship, or no relationship, between education and bilingualism. Whatever results ensue here should be viewed with caution due to the way that bilingualism is measured. Highly educated Hispanics may be more likely to speak both Spanish and English fluently, but less likely to speak Spanish at home.

Overall, Spanish-English bilinguals in the United States earn less than English monolinguals do. Based on the 1990 Census, Chiswick and Miller (1997:7, 23) report a disadvantage of around 12 percent for the native-born and 20 percent for the foreign-born. In a study of intergenerational transmission of Spanish, López (1982) shows evidence of the same pattern, but also discusses a secondary pattern in which high educational and economic achievement, Spanish maintenance, and English competence are all positively associated. This trend tended to be “submerged” in the broader association between low socio-economic status and the continued use of Spanish (Solé 1990:49). Including *income* in a multivariate analysis could uncover such a trend as well as clarify the importance of education and occupation.

Given that the measure of bilingualism employed here only captures bilinguals who speak Spanish at home, the second group of variables marks characteristics of others in one's household. I control for the *presence of one or more Spanish-dominant adults* in order to assess the degree to which Spanish usage is explained by a necessity to communicate at home. I also mark households where *children are present*. Rumbaut's (2002) recent article based on very comprehensive data about the "new second generation" of Americans as they enter adulthood shows that the Hispanics among them express an almost universal desire for their children (or future children) to know Spanish. April Linton's (forthcoming) work on dual-language programs in U.S. public schools also reports that Hispanic parents are quite interested in bilingualism and biliteracy for their children. These studies suggest a positive relationship between the presence of children and odds that a bilingual adult will use Spanish at home.

The third group of variables tests the possibility that the type of work a person does will influence the probability of bilingualism. Stanley Lieberman (1970) found that, in Canada, different occupations generated different degrees of pressure to "meet the customer in his own language," and thus different levels of bilingualism (p.127). Native speakers of French whose work required them to deal directly with customers were more bilingual than those working in non-consumer industries, regardless of where they lived. For native

English-speakers, however, the association between occupation and bilingualism was dependent on the size of a city's French-speaking population. I expect the same to be true in regard to the relationship between certain occupational categories, *service workers* and *health workers* in particular, and Spanish-English bilingualism (as opposed to English monolingualism) among Hispanic Americans, and thus for this relationship to be positive in the high-Hispanic states encompassed by this study.⁶

State-Level Independent Variables

Three variables represent area-specific incentives for bilingualism: 1990-2000 change in a state's Hispanic population, bilinguals' socio-economic status relative to that of English monolinguals', and Hispanic political representation.

The most obvious factor to influence Spanish retention is the presence of other speakers in one's area of residence (Scrauf 1999; Stevens 1992). Lacking a community of speakers – or at least of people for whom the Spanish language constitutes a part of a shared cultural heritage – it is improbable that many people who are fluent in English will actively maintain Spanish. We would thus expect to find more bilingualism in states where the

⁶ In places where many construction, cleaning, restaurant, and factory workers are Spanish-speaking immigrants, one might expect to find more bilingualism among U.S.-born Hispanics who work with or supervise them. A marker for such supervisory occupations, however, was non-significant, as was a marker for people employed as preschool, primary, or middle school teachers. Another noteworthy point from previous analyses is that adding occupational variables to the models erased what seemed to be a positive relationship between being female and being bilingual, suggesting that women are more bilingual because of the work they do, not because they are “keepers of the culture” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1993; Peña and Frehill 1998; Rodríguez 1999), or simply tend to be more adept at languages.

Hispanic population is growing – via natural increase, new immigration, or migration within the U.S.

As discussed above, people make linguistic decisions within particular demographic, economic, and political contexts. At the state level I am interested in bilinguals' relative socioeconomic status (SES) because even though bilinguals generally earn less than English monolinguals do, bilingualism should be higher in places where Hispanic immigrants assimilate via a process of selective acculturation, which would lead to higher SES *and* more bilingualism. To explore this possibility, I employ a ratio that compares the Duncan SEI score of bilingual and English monolingual Hispanics in a state, and then (to ease interpretation) mark states where the ratio is above 1. The visibility and influence of Hispanics *in general* should also have some bearing on the desire to maintain a distinct identity by retaining Spanish. The measure I employ here is Hispanic elected officials per 1000 Hispanics in a state.

[Tables 4 and 5 about here]

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Tables 4 and 5 report the results of a logistic regression analysis of the variables described above, in 1990 and 2000. The results are discussed together, with differences noted. The factor that is most strongly associated with bilingualism is 1.5 generation membership. This relationship is stronger in

2000 than in 1990, perhaps indicating an increased desire to maintain Spanish among members of the 1.5 generation who came of age between 1990 and 2000. The rest of Model 1 shows virtually no age or income effects, and the predicted negative relationship between education and bilingualism.⁷ There is a positive relationship between Puerto Rican or Cuban and bilingualism. Puerto Ricans are especially apt to retain strong ties to their country of origin or heritage because of geographic proximity and a tradition of return migration. In the case of U.S.-born Cubans, very high geographic concentration combined with positive group identification and relatively abundant community resources (such as bilingual schools) is likely the most salient explanation of Spanish retention. Nelson and Tienda (1986) also present some evidence that native-born Cuban Americans are more likely than other Latino groups to “lose” their ethnicity by not identifying as Hispanic on the Census. To the extent that English monolinguals are choosing not to call themselves Hispanic, we would expect a higher concentration of bilinguals among those who do.

Model 2 adds the household and occupation variables. The results show that fluent English-speakers are more than twice as likely to use Spanish in a home where one or more Spanish-dominant adults also live. The

⁷ The same effect was evident when a marker for college education was substituted for the one used here. It should also be noted that older people in the sample are less likely to have finished high school and more likely to be bilingual. Without controlling for education, the age effect is positive. Further, there is an interaction

presence of children is positively related to bilingualism as well, but with lesser magnitude. Health and service workers are slightly more likely to be bilingual than Hispanic adults in other occupations. The relationship between working in these occupations and being bilingual is stronger – though still modest – in 2000, suggesting that workplace demand for Spanish has increased.⁸

Adding state-level variables shows that individual- and household-level predictors are still important, but context contributes quite a bit to the models. In the states included here, bilingualism among the native-born and 1.5 generation is much more prevalent in places where the Latino population is growing, where bilinguals' status relative to English monolinguals is high, and where Hispanics are well-represented in government. These findings are strong and consistent across years. In an earlier analysis using similar variables at the metro-area level, Linton (2002) also reported very similar results. It appears that a visible concentration of bilingual professionals in an area contributes to Spanish maintenance there – even when the “area” is a state rather than a city. The robust, positive relationship between Hispanics' political representation and bilingualism could indicate that positive group representation encourages the preservation of traits that distinguish the group in a way that individual group members' achievements do not.

between SEI (Model 4) and education. The SEI effect is almost twice as strong for high school grads as for others.

⁸ It may be that there is actually more occupationally related bilingualism than my findings show, since people who regularly speak Spanish at work may not do so at home.

CONCLUSION

Though it does not allow us to make firm conclusions about intergenerational patterns of language usage, this study has specified individual and contextual circumstances under which bilingualism is most likely to be a stable feature of Hispanic American identity rather than a step along the way to English monolingualism. In doing so, it has demonstrated a strong relationship between macro-level incentives and individual choices. The U.S. is probably not moving toward a bilingual norm, but my findings provide evidence that, where the context is favorable, selective acculturation could persist beyond the second generation. It also shows a positive relationship between upward mobility, political participation, and bilingualism, suggesting that it is possible to maintain selected characteristics of one's origin culture while becoming American.

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