

Opportunities for Heritage Language Learners to Attain Literacy Skills in the L2 Classroom

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ABSTRACT

A HL speaker is someone who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken and the individual can to some degree speak that HL, or understand it, making the speakers either passive (e.g. can comprehend the input of the language) or bi-literate (e.g. able to produce the language through writing) in their HL and English. These special types of speakers can get exposed to the HL at home and in their immediate communities, but end up receiving their formal education entirely in English. "They receive no instruction in the heritage language during the elementary or secondary grades and as a result become literate only in English". This means the majority language eventually becomes the dominant one. Furthermore, HL speakers can be categorized into categories, which are "generation 1.0" (e.g. immigrated to the United States after the age of 18), "1.5" (e.g. immigrated into the United States before the age of 18) or "2.0" (e.g. born and raised in the United States, and because they often times find themselves consequently having lower quality proficiency of their HL in comparison to native speakers of the same language, it leads to HL speakers being teased for their lack of proficiency. This can impact the HL speakers' inadequateness to the point that it can hinder their own self-esteem and make them insecure about their HL abilities.

INTRODUCTION

HL Speakers vs. HL Learners

A HL speaker is someone who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken and the individual can to some degree speak that HL, or understand it, making the speakers either passive (e.g. can comprehend the input of the language) or bi-literate (e.g. able to produce the language through writing) in their HL and English. These special types of speakers can get exposed to the HL at home and in their immediate communities, but end up receiving their formal education entirely in English Valdes ^[1]. "They receive no instruction in the heritage language during the elementary or secondary grades and as a result become literate only in English" Valdes ^[1]. This means the majority language eventually becomes the dominant one (Walls, 2013). Furthermore, HL speakers can be categorized into categories, which are "generation 1.0" (e.g. immigrated to the United States after the age of 18), "1.5" (e.g. immigrated into the United States before the age of 18) or "2.0" (e.g. born and raised in the United States) Torres ^[2], and because they often times find themselves consequently having lower quality proficiency of their HL in comparison to native speakers of the same language Valdes ^[3], it leads to HL speakers being teased for their lack of proficiency Villa ^[4]. This can impact the HL speakers' inadequateness to the point that it can hinder their own self-esteem and make them insecure about their HL abilities.

In the other hand, a HL learner is a HL speaker that has stepped into the L2 classroom to learn their HL explicitly (e.g. intentionally) and formally (e.g. in a classroom setting). In such cases, found in her empirical research that HL learners inside the classroom feel inferior, because of their lack of familiarity with linguistic terminology and standard varieties of the language, in addition to feeling uneasy because of what they believed both their instructors and non-HL speaking classmates expect them to know about their own HL. These learners that are enrolled into a schooling system have often expressed negatively in self-evaluations towards their own variety of home their language, while other HL learners have viewed the Corrective Feedback (CF) they receive from their instructors as negative, providing further evidence to them of

having inferior language proficiency Schwarzer and Petron^[5].

Some HL speakers also turn out being simultaneous bilinguals, where they get exposed to the HL and the majority language (e.g. English in the U.S.) since birth, either because one or both parents also speak the majority language, or because the child received childcare in the majority language. Meanwhile, other HL speakers turn out to be sequential bilinguals or HL-dominant at least up to age 5 (e.g. preschool). In these cases, perhaps the two parents speak the minority language and the HL is used almost exclusively in the home. If there are brothers or sisters in the family, the pattern has been suggested to be that the oldest siblings in the family have a stronger command of the home language, than the younger children in the family. This is because by the time the younger siblings have enrolled into a schooling environment, the parents and older siblings have already had an abundance of time to adjust into the more dominant English-language environment and American prominent communities. This is particularly true with older HL speakers who know they must assimilate quickly to attain employment, receive future job advancements, and be able to culturally survive. Therefore, the environment the younger sibling is raised in can vary greatly from their older siblings. Also, in most HL families the siblings themselves tend to speak in the majority language amongst each other and with other HL children in due time given that they begin to have more contact with the majority language (e.g. school, television, music, commercial products, neighbors) as they get older and assimilate into the American culture, while less with the HL input throughout their day. Montrul^[6] managed to show that the extent of incomplete acquisition is greater influenced in HL speakers who are simultaneous bilinguals, rather than HL speakers who are sequential bilinguals and have had a longer period of sustained exposure to the HL before intense exposure to the majority language begins. This could very well be, because the sequential learner has had ample amount of time, without L2 interference, to fully acquire the HL early in their childhood Montrul and Potowski^[7].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Analyzing HL Speakers to the Variances of Other Speakers

HL speakers vs. Native speakers

Similar to how children acquire their native language, HL speakers come into contact with the target language at home since birth and thereon obtain authentic input from their parents Montrul et al.^[8] Infants of both backgrounds, HL and native speakers, have the ability to learn an abundant amount about the phonology of their ambient language by simply hearing it. Both types of speakers are known to form language-specific vowel categories by 6 months of age and have language specific phonetic perceptions by the time they reach 10-12 months^[9-11], and have been suggestive of moving through the same stages of language acquisition Silva-Corvalan^[12,13]. This type of learning is incidental, and implicit, rather than conscious and explicit. Between both languages vocabulary proficiency has also been correlated positively with structural accuracy. This means speakers that know more basic words tend to have better control of grammar, such as agreement, and subordination in spontaneous speech. Moreover, Tees and Werker^[14] found that HL adult speakers who returned to live abroad, back to their native country where they had also been born and raised up to the age of 1 or 2, tended to perceive phonemic contrasts reliably better than those with no prior foreign exposure. Au et al.^[15], and Oh et al.^[16] provide more support for this finding through empirical data that reaffirms the benefits of exposure to the target language as a child, providing better phonological acquisition at a later age that goes well into adulthood.

HL speakers vs. L2 speakers

Based on research, it is evident HL speakers grammatical system in the target language typically suffers in one form or another that can include: incomplete acquisition (e.g. never fully grasped the grammatical frameworks of the language), attrition (e.g. language loss), and contact variation (e.g. language interference by other languages) Potowski^[17]. This is contingent upon (1) the age of onset (e.g. when the HL is introduced), and (2) how (i.e., simultaneously or sequential) it is introduced Rothman^[18]. Furthermore, once the majority language becomes dominant in the HL speakers, their use of their HL seems to decrease significantly Valdes^[3], where this is not the case for L2 learners (e.g. adult monolingual students learning a L2). L2 learners do not successfully attain a L2 and then forget their home language (e.g. L1). Moreover, Polinsky^[19] also found that HL learners in their target language had a better command of verbs (as measured in word recognition and translation accuracy) than of nouns and adjectives. These findings should not come as a surprise, given that verbs can be considered more costly, and damaging if lost (due to the density of containing lexical and structural information) Poplack and Montrul^[20,21]. Likewise, HL speakers overcome these losses of control of nouns and adjectives in the target language by code switching between their HL and the majority language, and using borrowed/loan words from the majority language. Of course, this only aids their attrition even more by abandoning their HL and leaning more towards the usage of the majority language. In the other end of the spectrum, a common problem for L2 learners (learners who get exposed to the L2 after the age of 12) is phonology^[22-26], which makes it difficult to attain a native like pronunciation Knightly et al.^[14] due to perceptual deficits, and the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)^[27,28]. The CPH suggests that the chances of achieving native like fluency in a L2 are greatly diminished each year after the learner has crossed into puberty. Fortunately, for these

L2 learners perceptual training in the identification of L2 sounds has been suggestive to aid pronunciation in the target language Knightly et al. ^[14]. In addition, two separate empirical studies by Wode and Yamada ^[29,30] found that children learning a L2 while studying abroad could help them maintain a target like production and pronunciation well after two years of returning back to their own home country.

More recent empirical data, such as Walls ^[31] suggests that the dyads (e.g. HL learner – HL learner vs. L2 learner – L2 learner vs. HL learner – L2 learner) most conducive to learning are those in which learners share the similar target language backgrounds (e.g. HL learner – HL learner and L2 learner – L2 learner). This is part due to the dyads attending to the target language issues in such a way that each partner contributes for the formulation of the target language. When one partner initiates a LRE, the other partner typically helps in the arrival of the answers. Ultimately, both partners agree and express understanding with regard to their solution, rather than merely correcting each other. Thus, HL learner – L2 learner dyads demonstrated to be less effective, not allowing room for optimal target language acquisition (e.g. negotiation) to take place. Although HL learner- L2 learner dyads attended to the target language, a large portion of these LREs took the form of repair with little to no negotiation. This means that when L2 learners produced erroneous answers, HL learners corrected their partners' utterances with no need for the L2 learner to make further modifications. This is a crucial role left out from the L2 learner who would further benefit from more authentic, spontaneous interaction. L2 learners need to be given that opportunity afterwards to modify, or fix, their incorrect utterances, regardless if a learners' modification is fully or partially repaired McDonough; Swain ^[32-35]. Essentially, these repaired utterances, known as Modified Output (MO), are as important as the interaction itself to move any learner to a more target like answer and up the rate of development, because as de Bot ^[36] mentions, all learners need these opportunities to retrieve and restructure their knowledge. Corrective Feedback (CF) is what allows any learner to become aware of their problematic output in the first place, leading learners to be pushed to conduct an analysis, and eventually modifications ^[34,37,38]. Consequently, "what occurs between the first and second output is part of the process for learning" Lyster ^[37]. Another difference between HL learners and L2 learners is the L2 speakers' ability to reach ultimate attainment and full linguistic competence in the target language. Although in principle it is possible, it is by no means guaranteed, where fossilization can occur at any point in the L2 development, although L2 learners can still become very literate in the target language and have highly developed metalinguistic awareness of the target language. This leads to another difference that deals with how L2 learners acquire the target language, which is in a classroom setting with heavy emphasis on literacy skills (reading and writing), grammatical explanations, practice, CF, and assessments of the developing target language skills, while most HL speakers simply acquire the same target language (e.g. heritage language) at home in a natural setting. It should be reinforced further that the HL speakers, although with efficient aural knowledge, most still remain illiterate or have less developed literacy skills in the HL when compared to their knowledge in the majority language Montrul ^[21].

One bilingual speaker vs. Two monolingual speakers

Unfortunately, even the most advanced bilinguals cannot be seen as being two monolinguals in one. This is because the knowledge of the L2 is typically not identical to that of a native speaker. In phonology, the native language (L1) causes interference in the pronunciation of the L2, while in vocabulary the understanding of words in the L2 is widely influenced by the knowledge and meaning of forms in the native language (L1) ^[39]. Even if a bilingual speaker expresses great performances in more than one language, it is highly unlikely that the speaker will use each language exactly the same way (e.g. count, list items, describe, narrate, debate, persuade, compare and contrast oppositions, postulate theories, elaborate on cause and effect philosophies, etc.). Much language use is task-and-situation specific, meaning competency can vary in each language Cutler et al. ^[40]. Furthermore, for two monolingual speakers to live inside one bilingual speaker, it would mean that the bilingual speaker had: (1) two separate childhoods where they were raised into two different language backgrounds that would then lend itself to having knowledge of two different cultures, (2) have two different schooling systems (k-12 settings) with room for subject-specific-courses (e.g. science, math, business) attained through usage of the two native languages, and (3) two different social class experiences as natives of the same time length (e.g. up until the age of 18) at the linguistic, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic levels, and (4) equal proficiency and literacy skills Montrul ^[21], which we can now assume are very unlikely. Moreover, assessments can also become complicated when it comes time to evaluate HL learners' proficiency of their home language versus the proficiency of the same target language in a L2 learner, and likewise to a native speaker. This is part due to the fact that for true evident bilingualism there is no single uniform criterion against which they can be measured. To complicate things even further, it is common for bilinguals to occasionally tap between languages, quickly turning them from true monolingual modes into bilingual modes in which they begin code-switching Grosjean ^[39].

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Thonis ^[41] warns that for HL learners, a hasty premature introduction to the major language writing system may result in a weak set of not only reading skills, but also writing skills in the majority language. Garcia et al. ^[42] notes that the major-

ity language's orthography can penetrate HL learners' home language writing system in multiple ways. Researchers also found that structural patterns of the majority language are present in the HL learners' home language writing system. This means in Spanish, a rather high frequency of definite articles in generic contexts has been missing in the ring of HL learners' writing. Therefore, instead of writing in Spanish *Los inmigrantes necesitan apoyo* (Translation - "The immigrants needs support") HL learners tend to write *Inmigrantes necesitan apoyo* (Translation - Immigrants needs support). The former is the correct grammatical structure, given that definitely articles in Spanish emphasize general, overall ideas. In this case, this sentence makes a reference to immigrants in general, where it's not tied down to a certain specific type of immigrants Potowski^[43]. Furthermore, there is a high frequency for the use of the passive voice, which Garcia et al.^[42] attributes to the influence of the English writing techniques that HL learners acquire in school inside the U.S. There is also presence of "backwards bi-literacy" in HL learners' target language, where they keep tapping into the majority language. Scholars further characterize it as a literacy that infuses dominant language mechanics, structure and rhetorical patterns into the writing texts of HL learner's target language. This infusion between the HL and majority language, or dominant language, results from HL learners lacking functional literacy in the home language that could eventually help them attain a wide variety of linguistic and sociolinguistic benefits Rothman^[18]. To make matters even worse, schools face a number of challenges given that they do not know how to appropriately assess HL learners in the first place and cater to their target language needs in order to place them into appropriate classes Campbell and Peyton^[44]. Another concern is how to develop appropriate instruction that targets a wide range of the individuals' needs of HL learners who happen to fit into a wide scope of proficiencies inside their home languages. The challenges also include the necessity to provide literacy instruction to those HL learners that are already orally fluent, but non-literate in their HL. This includes the task of adding formal instruction in the standard form of the HL for those HL learners that speak a nonstandard dialect of the target language. It is a demanding task for faculty to accomplish, and as in the words of Campbell and Peyton^[44], this simply adds pressure into schools, and when schools do oblige, they are forced to add special courses for HL learners into their foreign language offerings. This eventually leads to seeking a supplement of instructors to teach these additional courses by which administrators are then forced to tap into the institutions' short funding.

The Dilemma in Perspective

One of the biggest questions research is still not too familiar in answering is how HL learners currently react to classroom instruction that is directed at their home language. Do HL learners continue to learn the HL inside the classroom implicitly as L1 acquiring children? Or will they rely on explicit learning similar to L2 learners? Most importantly, a question begging to be answered is, can HL learners catch-up with their HL literacy skills not possibly attained as a child Montrul?^[21] Lastly, should HL learners essentially learn the conventional approaches to literacy in their HL through the LTW approach, or should they go into an approach that keeps developing their HL, such as the WTL (language) approach?

METHODOLOGY

Second Language Acquisition (SLA), HL, and Literacy Expert: Dr. Julio Torres

The writer for this theoretical and conceptual paper communicated with Julio Ruben Torres, who is currently an Assistant Professor in SLA and the Director of the Language Program at the University of California at Irvine. He has done tremendous work and research with HL learners in regards to finding pedagogical interventions, analyzing cognitive outcomes associated with the bilingual experience, ways for HL learners to maintain their HL, and examined HL learners' inhibitory control systems, among others. He obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Georgetown, where he, himself, took classes from the best scholars in the field of SLA. I got to know Dr. Torres through some graduate level courses I took with him in the years of 2012-2014, and actually got the opportunity to be Dr. Torres' research assistant during that same time. We have remained in contact ever since through periodical phone calls and e-mails. For this particular case, he advised me towards an article he wrote and got published not too long ago in 2016 that covers the historical research of HL learners, and discusses ways in which he dealt with the same dilemma of fostering HL learners' literacy skills. Dr. Torres' methods can be used in class and are influenced by the research he has obtained firsthand. He consequently provides sound and robust scholarly advise. His article, "Flipping the classroom: A pedagogical model for promoting heritage language writing skills" is a revolutionary peer-reviewed article, in addition to an empirical study all combined into one. In it he mentions how and what type of activities to do inside the foreign language classroom that work for HL learners, and most importantly, he makes suggestions supported by research as to what are the best pedagogical literacy approaches for instructors who find themselves currently, or will be in the future, teaching to HL learners. In the following section, much of the information included comes from Dr. Julio's article, which is able to answers many of the lingering questions postulated earlier.

RESULTS

Recognizing Non-Native Like Literacy from HL Learners

According to Dr. Torres, one of the first notions that can be looked into is how HL learners have great difficulty with phonemes (e.g. /s/) that can be erroneously written and read by more than one letter (e.g. -s, z, c -). Another error is the use of orthographic accents, which HL learners in their home language tend to find more challenging than spelling errors alone. Moreover, Dr. Torres emphasizes that it has been known for advanced HL learners to exhibit more lexical selection errors (e.g. recognizing appropriate parts-of-speech) in their HL, while lower level HL learners are victims of errors dealing with verb tenses (e.g. past, present, future) in their home language. Furthermore, in HL learners' formal home language writing, there has been evidence of an overuse for subject names (e.g. John, Marie, Sarah) and pronouns (e.g. he, she, they) in descriptive narrative writing tasks. Simultaneously, the opposite findings have been discovered in non-formal, free-writing assignments of HL learners. This means, "HL learners tap into English processes and resources associated with writing formal academic texts, which is a reflection of their (almost) exclusively English academic experience" Torres [2]. This leads us to assume that HL learners behave more native like when they write informally, in their home language. Nonetheless, the last finding overtly stated in research has also been the notion that HL learners spend significantly more time on planning between sentences in their home language, when compared to native speakers of the target language, and of course, L2 learners.

Other data results in the article by Dr. Torres lead the reader into the length of how much (or how little) HL learners produce in the writing of the target language. According to Dr. Torres, when HL learners are compared to L2 learners and native speakers, the native speakers in the target language produce great quantities of main and subordinate sentences (e.g. longer and complex sentences) than the HL learners and L2 learners. Although, it should be noted that HL learners can produce similar qualities of categorical subordinates as natives, and similar high percentages of nominal clauses (e.g. typically begin with "how", "that", "what", "who", "why" that contains its own subject and verb, and takes the place of a noun in a sentence) as L2 learners. This demonstrates that HL learners' written discourse shares characteristics of both native and L2 learners. When it comes time to writing performance in dyads of HLs - L2 learners, the HL learners tend to depend on their L2 partner for orthography and accent placement in the target language, while the L2 learner benefits from the HL learners' lexical knowledge of the target language. Yet, these findings have to be taken with enough caution to not overgeneralize given that not all topics exposed for students to learn get acquired all at the same time. For example, when learners took part in a course for HL learners that focused on (1) orthography, (2) verbal morphology, and (3) syntactic complexity of their home language, the only language development that was found, occurred in the initial results, which was discovered to be the most basic one of the three structures: orthography.

Pathway to Possible Solutions

Dr. Torres also looks into the publishing's of other HL scholars [5,45-56] to interpret and compare his own data, and consequently provide sound advice. One of the immediate findings he acknowledges is how instructors are indeed able to recognize learner differences between HL and L2 learners, but yet continue to apply the same L2 learner methodologies toward HL learners when it comes to developing the target language. This includes: an over flow of explicit instruction, and too much CF towards grammatical errors that halts fluency. Moreover, according to Dr. Torres inside the traditional foreign language classrooms, HL students have tended to remain passive recipients of the information, resulting in them never feeling challenged by the content of the writing assignments. This is in part due to the instructors who seem to express difficulty trying to fix the gap between HL learners' speaking and writing skills. In other words, they don't seem to have the knowledge to construct tasks and approaches to aid their HL student's home language. Expectations from both ends, the instructor and HL learner, eventually begin to clash due to the mismatch of goals, when the HL learner was simply hoping to achieve good enough writing to do translation at work and with the family. Similar to the instructors, HL learners are actually also aware of their need to develop a more standard use of the HL in the written mode, since they know there can be discrepancies. Regardless of which options instructors choose to take inside the classroom, "both researchers and pedagogues of HL learners are well aware that most HL learners benefit from a focus on developing formal literacy skills (reading and writing) in the HL due to little or no access to early formal education in the HL in primary schools" Torres [21]. The scarcity of resources for HL learners to maintain or develop their HL ultimately results in only having Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), also known as the language needed to perform ordinary, everyday oral tasks. This means that for HL learners to maximize their proficiency in literacy, the courses they undertake need to be focused in Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which are meant to help HLs become aware of the differences between the spoken and written aspects of the HL.

Learning-To-Write (LTW) vs. Writing-To-Learn (WTL)

Two major dimensions of explicit writing within the foreign language field that Dr. Torres mentions can be divided into 1) LTW and 2) WTL. The former, LTW, is the typical approach to college level composition courses, which is the art of writing for a purpose (e.g. convince, argue, narrate) that includes writing strategies (e.g. brainstorming, drafting, editing) to analyze texts or chosen topics. The latter, WTL, makes reference to the production of language development through metalinguistic

processes and structures that include restructuring and consolidation. In essence, it can be seen as WTL language. Both categorizations of writing are beneficial to the home language of the HL learner given that both provide opportunities for them to learn content, features of the HL, and achieve writing competence. It is through both dimensions of writing that HL learners receive crucial and vital development of the home language to finally start thinking of themselves as writers. Think-aloud protocols, in addition, have also been known to significantly enhance HL learners' accuracy scores and facilitate the learning process for them to notice mistakes in their writing. Therefore, it is further important to inform that HL learners in comparison to L2 learners do in fact react differently inside the dimension of LTW. This is, because "...HL learners have had little to no exposure of written input in Spanish (by the time they get into formal academic classes), (and since) they (tend to) develop more advanced oral conversational skills.... they rely more on their conversational skills to produce written text, which can lead to non-target like conventions" Torres ^[2]. Albeit, both HL learners and L2 learners share the same characteristic when it comes to language transfer in their writing, going from the majority language to the home language.

DISCUSSION

Once the appropriate teaching approaches have been put in place for HL learners such as the ones mentioned above, suitable measures that gauge at their acquisition need to be put into place, and frequently, to see if learning has occurred. In this case, assessments play an important role. Research has found one type of assessment to be successful at measuring explicit and written knowledge in HL learners, along with other linguistic structures that are vulnerable for them. These assessments come in the form of self-ratings that are completed by the HL learners themselves, which have been suggested to have a very large and significant correlation. Contrarily, no correlation has been found between self-ratings and oral aural knowledge of Spanish. "This preliminary finding suggests that self-ratings only correlate with certain types of experimental tasks, and in this case, one that is more explicit and written" Torres ^[2]. As another measurement of proficiency, some HL researchers have used a modified version of the DELE (Diploma de Español como Lengua Extranjera) test as a measurement of proficiency. The test requires literacy skills from the HL learner since it measures vocabulary production and more explicit (metalinguistic) knowledge of Spanish grammatical structures. Therefore, it may be a good idea to combine different types of measurements to evaluate HL learners' proficiency.

CONCLUSION

Encompassing the similarities and differences HL learners have with other speakers (e.g. HL, native, and L2 speakers) it provides a continuum for them to be placed into in regards to their heritage proficiencies. The time frame in which the HL speaker comes into contact with the majority language can determine how successful they will continue to be with the HL, and the possibility of losing it. Therefore, by following recommendations postulated by the HL expert Dr. Torres, it is safe to conclude that literacy can involve more than learning grammar. Rather, it's a process that needs to include different writing methods that analyzing text genres. In the instructors' end, they need to be aware of the HL learners' learning outcomes when creating a course and even more in lesson planning. In the words of Dr. Torres, there needs there needs to be reconceptualization of genre by creating a more complex and self-motivated context considering social practices related to writing, which leads to adaptations of "genre chains". This is where learners explore a topic through different texts, promoting the use of various communicative discourses to develop HL learners' writing. This impact of engagement with different writing genres will result in a gradual increase of synonyms, and writing characteristics geared towards formal lettering. Instructors want to make sure HL learners are spending quality classroom time by completing tasks that encourage them to: predict, rank, choose (select), sort, estimate, recommend, assess (evaluate), produce, construct, argue, devise, draw, graph, among others. Teachers need to make sure their students are doing higher order thinking skills, such as synthesizing and applying new knowledge to different scenarios rather than merely regurgitating information. Most importantly, HL learners' actions need to be done in class so that the instructor can observe their thinking and provide appropriate CF immediately. The impact of instructor training and beliefs on HL writing should also be considered, as writing scholars have argued that oftentimes instructors lack the necessary writing skills or training to teach writing. Nonetheless, us instructors must perform and act in the immediate present time while also implementing new technologies and methodologies that emerge from the education field, as instructors cannot pause their teaching until more and better research emerges.

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