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Teachers' and Learners' Attitudes towards Culture and Culture Learning in a Turkish Context*

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Abstract

In the field of ELT, the undeniable relationship between language and culture has always been a focus of attention from a variety of perspectives. Sociologists, anthropologists and naturally applied linguists have tried to understand whether cultural aspects of L2 scaffold or interfere in much the way where other types of contrasting linguistic systems do. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate teachers' and EFL learners' perspectives on understanding of 'culture'; attitudes towards culture teaching; the cultural topics they favour to teach/learn in the classroom; time allocation to culture teaching/learning and finally their attitudes towards intercultural communicative competence. The data were collected through a Likert type questionnaire in which Turkish teachers of English and Turkish university students were asked questions to respond with the purpose of finding the importance of cultural aspects in learning the target language. The analysed results show encouraging signs for changing the perception of cultural teaching by some sound evidence provided by the participants of the study.

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Keywords: culture/intercultural teaching; teacher/learner attitude; intercultural communicative competence; cultural awareness; foreign language education

1. Introduction

Language teacher programs all over the world and naturally in Turkey aim to train and develop prospective language teachers to become well equipped teachers in all aspects of language teaching. However, if such programs have been analysed in depth, the linguistic part of language teaching over shades culture and culture teaching. That is, teacher training programs do not give much emphasize to include culture or culture teaching programs and because of this lack, language teachers mostly struggle to identify cultural resources for their learners although each staff of such education program assert the inevitability of the separation of culture and language (Byrd, 2014, p.77). However, we as educators teach and our students learn about the culture of the L2/FL whether or not we include it overtly in the curriculum. This point was made by McLeod (1976, p. 212) as: "by teaching a language...one is inevitably already teaching culture implicitly".

We all are aware of that knowing a foreign language (FL) does not just mean knowledge of target language syntax, phonetics and phonology, semantics or huge number of vocabulary, but knowing also

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the target language culture as social construct. Therefore, on a general level, culture has been referred to as "the ways of a people" (Lado, 1957) or "…the whole way of life of a people or a group" (Montgomery, M., & Reid-Thomas, H. (1994) which "includes all the social practices that bond a group of people together and distinguish them from others".

We are also aware of that in traditional education programs, language teaching was seen as teaching the forms and usage of the target language and such implications were also seen as representatives of cultural values of the target language. Traditional view of culture has been seen as summarized by Allen (1985): "...prior to the 1960s, the lines between language and culture were carefully drawn. The primary reason for second language (L2) study in the earlier part of this century was access to the great literary masterpieces of civilization" (p. 138). However, in the 1970s, an emphasis on sociolinguistics resulted in greater emphasis on the context and situation where the foreign or second language would be used. Savignon's (1972) early study on communicative competence, for example, suggested the "value of training in communicative skills from the very beginning of the FL program" (p. 9). Culture's role in the FL and L2 curriculum grew, and influential works by Seelye (1974) and Lafayette (1975) appeared. That is, as the use of language is related to social and cultural values, language learning is considered to be a social and cultural phenomena. Canale and Swain (1980) in their 'communicative approach' stated that "a more natural integration" of language and culture takes place "through a more communicative approach than through a more grammatically based approach" (p. 31). Language learners are not only expected to acquire the forms of the target language but also to use these forms appropriately in social situations when they encounter. The notion of communicative competence does not just rely on grammatical competence but includes also sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and finally discourse competence (Canale and Swain, 1980).

In the last decades, nevertheless, language learning objectives shifted their route to a more attractive one. For example, with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – CEFR and the US Standards by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages – ACTFL the place of culture in FL classrooms has been reconsidered. According the new norms of CEFR, language learning is no longer defined in terms of communicative competence but rather in terms of intercultural competence (Council of Europe, 2001) since intercultural competence is defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures being aware of their values, norms and their thinking, feelings and acting. The notion of intercultural competence asserts that as interacting with people from foreign cultures, a person who is interculturally competent understands the culture-specific concepts of perception, thinking, feeling, and acting. However, some specialists consider the conventional model of communicative competence with some reservation and some others even asserting the unnecessity of culture teaching. For example in his prominent article "towards intercultural communicative competence in ELT" Alptekin (2002) uttered that "with its strict adherence to native speaker norms within the target language culture, would appear to be invalid in accounting for learning and using an international language in cross-cultural settings (p.63). In similar thought, Bada (2000) and Genç & Bada (2005) prompt us "that awareness of [native speaker] cultural values and societal characteristics does not necessarily invite the learner to conform to such values" (p.100). Quite in the same manner, Smith (1976) highlighting the international status of English language lists why culture is not needed in teaching of English language: "there is no necessity for L2 speakers to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of that language, [since] the purpose of teaching an international language is to facilitate the communication of learners' ideas and culture in an English medium (qtd. in Genç & Bada, 2005).

1.1. Literature review

Among the studies on the role of culture in language teaching, Lessard-Clouston (1996) focused on 16 Chinese teachers' views on culture in both EFL learning and teaching. Findings revealed that teachers supported the role of culture in their EFL learning, but they suggested the need for a greater understanding of how to focus on culture in their own EFL classes. In a similar study, Sercu (2002) investigated whether and to what extent Flemish, English, French and German teachers support intercultural objectives and are willing to promote the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence through their foreign language teaching. Data analysed showed that Flemish foreign language teachers supported the aim of interculturalizing foreign language and they were willing to be teachers who develop intercultural communicative competence in their students. Moreover, Castro, Sercu and Garcia, (2004) investigated to what extent Spanish teachers of English supported cultural objectives, including the objective to promote the acquisition of intercultural competence. Results of data in general revealed that Spanish foreign language teachers were willing to try and attain culture learning objectives in foreign language education. In an international study with 424 teachers from seven countries, Sercu et al., (2005) aimed at describing an average foreign language-culture teacher in terms of perceptions and attitudes regarding intercultural competence teaching and actual teaching practice, irrespective of the country in which s/he teaches. Findings of the study revealed two distinct teacher profiles, i.e., the favourably disposed foreign language teacher, who believed in the importance of integrating culture into their classroom practices, and the unfavourably disposed foreign language teacher, who did not support this practice. Data further revealed that no clear relationship appeared to exist between teachers' beliefs regarding integration of culture and the way in which they actually shaped their teaching practices. Teachers, similar to those in other studies, seemed to try, with varying degrees of success, to integrate the teaching of culture into the curriculum (Lazar, 2001; Liddicot, 2004). One of the latest studies conducted in the field is conducted with prospective second language (L2) teachers to examine how they are prepared to teach culture by examining methods course syllabi. Results indicated that an indirect approach to the teaching of culture is prevalent and suggested to enable novice teachers to be better prepared to teach culture in the L2 classroom.

A review of literature has shown that there is little research on how Turkish teachers of English envisage intercultural competence teaching and on their general disposition towards it. One of these studies is conducted by Bayyurt (2000). She carried out a study in 25 different EFL classrooms in public and private primary and secondary schools in Istanbul, Turkey to find out the attitudes of non-native EFL teachers towards the cultural norms of the foreign language they are teaching. The result showed that the teachers were concerned with raising the awareness of their students towards the cultural values of the target language but one main problem was a fear that the non-native teachers were not fully aware of the target language cultural values. Similarly, in a study carried out with 65 Turkish prospective teachers of English, Atay (2005) found that participants were aware of the importance of the cultural dimension in language learning, yet they were also aware of their own lack of knowledge related to the target language culture(s) and that the teaching culture actually involved more than what they could do. Genç and Bada (2005) conducted also a study with 38 prospective teachers of English in Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey. They investigated students' thoughts on the effects of culture class they attended in the fall semester. A significant similarity between the students' views and thereof experts in the field was observed. Regarding the benefits of learning about culture, attending the culture class has raised cultural awareness and benefitted learning about culture concerning both native and target societies. Another study by Atay and her colleagues (2009) aimed to investigate the opinions and attitudes of Turkish teachers of English on intercultural competence teaching and to see how and to what extent these opinions and attitudes are reflected in their classroom applications. Data were collected from 503 EFL teachers and the findings revealed that language

teachers seemed to be aware of the role of the culture in foreign language education though they do not often integrate culture into their teaching in order to develop intercultural competence. In the related literature, there are studies whether teacher perceptions or learner perceptions have been analysed separately, however, these studies did not compare both parties' opinions in the same study. One of the latest but not least study in Turkish context was conducted by Sarıçoban and Çalışkan (2011) which aimed at investigating the types of cultural activities Turkish university students wanted to have during their study of the target language and the level at which students preferred to see those cultural components in language classrooms. The data-gathering instrument was implemented on 95 preparatory school intermediate students and the findings of the research clearly showed the types of cultural activities students would enjoy in language classrooms, at which level they would like to do them, their attitudes towards the target culture, the level of importance students attach to the target culture and their understanding of "culture". From the results it can be seen that most of the students who took part in the study had positive attitudes towards the inclusion of cultural components during their study of the English language.

As far as we searched, the literature of the field displays studies whether on language learners' preferences or teachers' but they rarely investigate both parties at the same time. Therefore, this study aims at once to uncover perceptions of teachers and learners with regard to learning culture and figure out how far these views are in line or mismatch.

1.2. Research questions

The aim of this study is not to go into an in-depth analysis of the theories developed to describe the place of culture in the foreign language classrooms. It rather reports the findings of a study which investigates teachers' and language learners' perceptions of culture and culture teaching/ learning in a Turkish context. The study aims to unearth the idiosyncratic (personal) views of teachers and learners with regard to learning culture and figure out how far these views are in line or mismatch. This is important since these perceptions may directly affect their teaching/learning in the long run and additionally teachers current practices in the English classroom can provide a general picture of the current situation in language teaching in Turkey. The following research questions are hence formulated:

-What are Turkish teachers and learners perceptions of culture and culture learning in Turkish ELT classrooms?

-What is the place of culture in Turkish ELT classrooms?

-What are Turkish teachers and learners perceptions for intercultural competence?

-How should the teachers pass cultural aspects of the target language?

-How do the teachers prefer to pass cultural aspects of the target language?

-Is there any gender difference on culture learning beliefs?

2. Method

As seen in the data collection procedure, the form of this research data is quantitative; the manner of data collection is both descriptive and experimental; and the method of analysis is statistical analysis where the SPSS version 22.0 is employed. Participants are selected randomly from the study population in an unbiased manner, and finally, data from the culture questionnaire were analysed statistically.

2.1. Sample / Participants

This study is conducted in the spring term 2014-2015 at two universities in Turkey - Hacettepe University and Dumlupınar University by voluntarily participation of 107 (68 females and 39 males) teachers of the English language and 310 students (258 females and 162 males) studying English Language and Literatures. Teachers' ages vary from 24 to 58 and students from 18 to 36.

2.2. Instrument(s)

The data about teachers' and language learners' perceptions of culture and culture teaching/ learning was collected through a questionnaire to see whether there is a significant difference between the groups. This questionnaire is an attitude scale which was developed by Han, Hui (2010) but it is slightly modified by the researcher to suit the requirements for the writing course. The questionnaire used a 5 point Likert type scale, requiring participants to respond to each item once whether strongly disagree (1 point), disagree (2 points), undecided (3 points), agree (4 points) or strongly agree (5 points).

2.3. Data collection procedures

After some revision, the questionnaire is developed as two parts. The first part contains biographical information about participants such as age, gender, educational background etc. and the second part consists of 43 questionnaire items in three different sections:

1st section consists of 16 questionnaire items asking participants beliefs and perceptions on culture and culture learning (α= .926 and p = .000).

2nd section consists of 15 questionnaire items asking participants perception on the place of culture and perception of intercultural competence (α= .727 and p = .000).

3rd section consists of 12 questionnaire items asking participants perception on how to pass culture (α= .929 and p = .000).

Completion of the scale takes about 15 minutes. The statistical analysis displays a significant correlation among items since the significance level of items vary between 0, 20 – 0, 80.

2.4. Data analysis

As mentioned earlier in the data collection procedure, the method of analysis is statistical analysis. Therefore, the research questions is analysed with help of statistical software package SPSS version 22.0 step by step before drawing objective conclusions.

3. Results

3.1. Statistical Data Analysis for RQ1

In the first research question, the learners' perceptions on the importance of culture and culture learning in Turkish ELT classrooms are questioned to see whether there is a significant difference in teachers and student perceptions. First of all, to describe the relationship between repeated measures the Pearson correlation coefficient is computed and found a statistically relationship between variables (r = .728; p = .000). However, to examine the relationship among variables is not enough; in short, an independent samples t-test is run which does not revealed a significant difference (p = .136). This means that there is no significant difference between the views of teachers and thereof students. Regarding the first research question this result does not need a deeper descriptive analysis to clarify

the participants' perceptions on culture and culture learning, since both parties of the participants have a strong belief on the importance of learning and teaching culture (see Table1 below).

Table 1. Perceptions on the importance of culture and culture learning

Group Statistics

Perceptions on	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Culture learning	"teacher"	107	3,9252	,98689	,09541
	"student"	310	4,0488	,63148	,03587
Culture	"teacher"	107	4,0678	,84505	,08169
	"student"	310	4,0875	,55325	,03142

As seen below in Table 1.1 both group of participants have a highly favourable opinion about the necessity of culture in EFL classrooms.

Table 1.1. Percentages (%) on the importance of culture

Items of section I	participants	%
2. It is important for *me* to teach/learn British culture.	**Teachers**	**82.2**
	Students	**86.5**
3. It is important for me to teach/learn cultures of English speaking countries such as Canada, Australian, New Zeeland.	Teachers	62.2
	Students	88.9
4. It is important to provide/get information about the target culture.	**Teachers**	**87.9**
	Students	**80.6**
5. It is important to provide/get information about daily life & routines of the target (L2) culture.	Teachers	86.9
	Students	87.1
6. It is important to provide/get information about shared values & beliefs of the L2 culture.	**Teachers**	**85.1**
	Students	**86.1**
7. It is important to provide/get experience with a rich of variety of L2 cultural aspect.	Teachers	80.3
	Students	71.9

Table 1.2 Percentages (%) on the importance of culture learning

Items of section I		Agreement %
8. It is important to promote students' sensitivity to different cultures.	**Teachers**	**87.9**
	Students	**81**
12. It is important to widen students' horizons through culture learning.	Teachers	88.8
	Students	70
9. It is also important to promote increased understanding of students' own culture.	**Teachers**	**84.2**
	Students	**83.2**
13. It is important to develop positive attitude & tolerance towards L2 culture.	Teachers	87.8
	Students	80.3
16. It is important to me to spend more time on L2 culture teaching.	**Teachers**	**84.8**
	Students	68.7

In brief, it is noticeable that teachers and students showed a high preference for developing positive attitude and tolerance towards target culture. They also not just preferred promoting sensitivity to

different cultures but also for their own culture. Besides, they favoured widening students' horizons through culture and culture learning. Finally, teachers and learners are aware of cultural aspects and therefore they wish to spend more time on L2 culture in language courses.

3.2. Statistical Data Analysis for RQ2 and RQ3

Considering RQ2 and RQ3, independent samples T-test results show a significant difference between teachers' and learners' perceptions on place of culture and intercultural competence p = .000 (see also below group statistics on Table 2). The perceptions of the participants seem not to correlate, better said, participants have different opinions on the subject matter.

Table 2. Perception on place of culture and intercultural competence

Group Statistics

Perceptions on	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Place of culture	"teacher"	107	3,5296	,79826	,07717
	"student"	310	4,1699	,61606	,03499
Intercultural competence	"teacher"	107	3,4860	,64798	,06264
	"student"	310	3,8032	,62863	,03570

Table 2.1 Percentages (%) on place of culture and intercultural competence

Items of section II		Agreement %
1. In a foreign language classroom, teaching culture is as important as language teaching.	Teachers	75.7
	Students	91.9
2. Before teaching L2 culture, students have to possess a sufficiently high level of L2 proficiency.	**Teachers**	**31.7**
	Students	**69.6**
11. Language & culture cannot be taught in an integrated way; you have to separate the two.	Teachers	12.2
	Students	38.7
6. It is impossible to teach L2 culture & L2 language in an integrated way.	**Teachers**	**15.9**
	Students	**44.5**
16. The cultural contents of the textbooks used in the department meet my expectations.	Teachers	18.7
	Students	47.8
3. Intercultural competence cannot be acquired at school.	**Teachers**	**13.1**
	Students	**33.9**
15. L2 Culture teaching does not improve intercultural competence; it is waste of time.	Teachers	14
	Students	15.8

The analysis of the RQ2 and RQ3 which questions the place of culture and perceptions on intercultural competence is highly challenging, since, although both of the participant groups believe that culture teaching is as much important as language teaching (item 1), students think that they have to possess a sufficiently high level of L2 proficiency, before they learn the culture of that language (item 2). Teachers clearly think that culture and language cannot be separated (item 11) and it should be thought in an integrated way (item 6), but students are not much sure about it. Similarly, students are again not fully agree on whether the cultural contents of the textbooks used in the department meet their expectations (item 16), however, nearly all of the participants think that culture teaching improves intercultural competence and is not waste of time (item 15).

3.3. Statistical Data Analysis for RQ4 and RQ5

Similarly independent samples T-test results for RQ4 and RQ5 do not display a significant difference between teachers' and learners' perceptions on how to pass culture p = .000 (see also below group statistics on Table 3). The perceptions of the participants seem not to correlate, better said, participants have different opinions on the subject matter.

Table 3. Perception on how to pass culture

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perception on Pass culture	"teacher"	107	3,2075	,90028	,08703
	"student"	310	3,8503	,60701	,03448

Table 3.1. Perception on how to pass culture

Items of section III		Agreement %
2. I tell my students what I hear and read about the L2 culture.	Teachers	51.4
	Students	79
3. I ask my students to discover the cultural aspects of the target language.	**Teachers**	**42**
	Students	**64.2**
4. I ask my students to participate in role play activities in which people from different cultures meet.	Teachers	43
	Students	72.2
5. I use audio recordings and ask my students to mime according to what they hear.	**Teachers**	**43.9**
	Students	**69.1**
6. I focus my students' attention on culture-loaded vocabulary.	Teachers	38.3
	Students	71
7. I teach my students English songs or poems to let them experience the different cultures.	**Teachers**	**44.8**
	Students	**69**
9. I ask my students to act out what they learn in terms of culture learning.	Teachers	32.7
	Students	60.6
11. I download or bring additional culture-loaded materials to discuss/use in the classroom.	**Teachers**	**29.9**
	Students	**60**

The final part of the questionnaire unearths the question of the way of transmitting the target culture. In this section the participants still have different opinions. To discover the cultural aspects of the target language is not a much preferred activity for teachers but not for the students (item 3). Although the student participants are eager to hear about the target culture, half of the teacher participants are not much willing to transfer heard and read L2 cultural aspects (item 2). In a similar way, students are eager to pay attention on culture-loaded vocabulary (item 6) and to hear English songs or poems to experience different cultures (item 7) but teachers do it rarely. Similarly, student participants are willing to act out or participate in role play activities in terms of culture learning (items 4, 5, 9), but the teachers are not so willing. Finally, teachers rarely bring additional culture-loaded materials to the classroom, however, students prefer much more than that.

3.4. Statistical Data Analysis for RQ6

Finally, independent samples T-test result for RQ6 does not display any gender difference between teachers' and learners' perceptions on culture and culture learning $p > .000$. That is, the perceptions of the participants seem to correlate, better said, male and female participants do have similar opinions on culture and culture learning.

4. Discussion

The present study has aimed to investigate the perceptions of Turkish EFL teachers and students regarding the role of culture and culture teaching in foreign language learning. Therefore, the findings of this study might be very beneficial for the field of foreign language teaching and teacher education.

The results of this study showed similar outcomes compared with many studies in the field. Among many others, studies by Bada (2000), Sercu (2002), Atay (2005) and Sarıçoban, and Çalışkan (2011) showed in a similar way that teachers and students are highly interested in teaching culture in language teaching and they have positive attitudes towards culture. Furthermore, concerning the possible cultural topics, this study showed that teachers and learners favour to provide/get experience with a rich of variety of L2 culture, i.e. both big C and small c cultural aspects are favoured by participants which is also in the same line with many researches in the field.

The participants had different opinions when they were asked whether culture and language are integrated and therefore should be taught in an integrated way. Teachers supported the literature with their views but the students were not sure about this. Among many others Mc Leod (1976) and Byrd (2014) assert that whether or not teachers include culture overtly, one is inevitably teaching it implicitly. However, students think that they have to possess a sufficient high level language proficiency before learning the culture of the target language.

Additionally, concerning cultural teaching activities, this study showed that the most often used technique to teach culture is through the textbook while teaching English and teachers rarely provide additional materials for culture teaching and they still focus on language teaching more than cultural teaching. From general observations and experience, it can be assumed that teachers have little freedom to choose their teaching materials by their own due the fact of administrative reasons.

Finally, concerning teachers' devotion of time to culture teaching and their willingness to culture teaching are presented, the data showed that teachers' devotion of time is less than the time devoted to language teaching though they express their willingness to teach culture in language classroom. The reasons why teachers cannot devote more time to culture teaching may lie on overloaded curriculum and curriculum restraints, lack of time, being driven by examination, and their own lack of familiarity with foreign cultures.

5. Conclusions

When compared with many studies in the literature, this study displays sometimes similar results and sometimes different results and in short, we can just say that learners learn and teachers teach what they perceive as important and only that much. That is language teachers and students conceive the notion of intercultural competence pretty much. If this reality is perceived by both parties then we are one step close to the reality of the practicality of incorporating cultural elements in our classroom settings. As seen in the study, our learners are intrinsically prepared to receive and take in the cultural knowledge, therefore the next step is in our range and attainable. That is, there are learners awaiting

who are fully aware of their dire need for new cultural knowledge and ready to receive and incorporate this knowledge as a complementary component of their ***"communicative competence"***.

All in all, though culture in ELT is still one of the debatable issues, in the globalized world, language teachers should act as flag-bearers who have to be educated well to be able to meet the requirements of the learners in today's rapid changing world. To educate language teachers who are aware of the necessities of the century, teacher education programs should be revised and may be added courses such as intercultural communication in order to equip prospective teachers with intercultural awareness and intercultural competence. Once language teachers become more knowledgeable and competent regarding this issue, they will eventually be more able to integrate cultural practices in their teaching and meet the requirements of the learners in today's changing world.

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Türkiye'de Kültür ve Kültür Öğrenimine Karşı Öğretmen ve Öğrenci Tutumları

Öz

İngiliz dili eğitimi alanında dil ve kültür arasındaki inkâr edilemez ilişki birçok açıdan her daim ilgi odağı olmuştur. Toplumbilimciler, insanbilimciler ve tabi ki uygulamalı dilbilimciler hedef dil kültürel ögelerinin diğer çelişkili dilbilimsel sistemlerde olduğu gibi dil öğrenimine yardımcı mı yoksa engel mi olduğunu anlamaya çalışmışlardır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmanın amacı öğretmenlerin ve İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenenlerin "kültür" hakkındaki düşüncelerini, kültür öğretimine karşı tutumlarını, öğretmek veya öğrenmek istedikleri kültürel başlıkları, kültür öğretimi/öğrenimine ayrılacak zamanı ve son olarak kültürler arası iletişim yetisi hakkındaki görüşlerini incelemektedir. Veri hedef dilin öğreniminde kültürel ögelerin önemini belirlemek için Türk İngilizce öğretmenlerine ve Türk üniversite öğrencilerine cevaplamaları amacı ile verilen Likert tipi anket ile toplanmıştır. Analiz edilen veriler kültür öğretimi algısını çalışmaya katılan deneklerden elde edilen sağlam deliller ışığında değiştirecek cesaret verici sonuçlar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: kültür/kültürler arası öğretim; öğretmen/öğrenci tutumu; kültürler arası iletişim yetisi; kültürel farkındalık; yabancı dil öğretimi

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