
A Rhetorical Identification Analysis of English Political Public Speaking: John F. Kennedy's *Inaugural Address*

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To cite this article:

Qiang Zhou, Bahram Kazemian. A Rhetorical Identification Analysis of English Political Public Speaking: John F. Kennedy's *Inaugural Address*. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*. Special Issue: Critical Discourse Analysis, Rhetoric, and Grammatical Metaphor in Political and Advertisement Discourses. Vol. 4, No. 1-1, 2015, pp. 10-16. doi: 10.11648/j.ijll.s.2016040101.12

Abstract: Since political discourse reflects the close relation between politics and language, it has attracted many scholars' attention at home and abroad. Therefore, English political public speaking (EPPS for short), the subcategory of political discourse, has been chosen as the subject of the study. Based on the findings of Kenneth Burke's new rhetoric and classical rhetoric, the identification strategies of EPPS in John F. Kennedy's *Inaugural Address* from the perspectives of rhetorical content and rhetorical form were probed. Since EPPS is always well-prepared rather than impromptu, the identification strategies via rhetorical content and form are always employed by the speaker to accomplish their purposes.

Keywords: English Political Public Speaking, New Rhetoric, Identification, Common Values and Beliefs, Antithesis, Emotional Appeal, The Conventional Form, Figurative Form, Parallelism, Kennedy's *Inaugural Address*

1. Introduction

Politics and language are so closely related that, as R. Lakoff (1990: 13) put it, politics is language and, at the same time, language is politics, which are intimately linked at a fundamental level (Chilton, 2004: 4). From the 1980s onward, there has been an increasing interest in the language of politics (political rhetoric, political speech, political style and political discourse) (Landsheer, 1998: 1). Actually, it is hardly something new, which can be traced back to as early as ancient Greek and became a heated topic from that time.

Nowadays, with the expanding globalization and cross-cultural communication, people are more sensitive to political speeches, for they are not only presentations of speaking skills of certain politicians, but also manifestations of reinforcement of policies and political attitudes upon the addressees. Thus, the most prominent features that distinguish political speeches from other types of speeches are their strong association with power and their multiple aims, i.e., explicit or implicit. On one hand, a speaker often tries to present himself as an authority in order to enforce the power upon the hearers; on the other hand, he has to mitigate his power, in one way or another, so as to establish a desirable relationship with the audience. This two-sidedness

often forms a sharp contrast in political speeches. All of the above features make the political speech more complex and deserve our special attention. Due to time and space limit, our present study narrows down to the analysis of English political public speaking (EPPS for short).

From the 1950s on, rhetoric has been reborn and flourished with different ideas and methodologies; however, it has been neglected in the political discourse analysis, to some extent. Therefore, this study attempts to analyze EPPS from the perspective of identification, the key term for Kenneth Burke's new rhetoric. Then, it probes into the identification strategies that politicians have employed to transcend division, gain identification, induce cooperation and realize their motives in EPPS, and discusses the positive effects of these strategies on EPPS. Finally, the researchers propose a rhetorical model of EPPS identification in the hope of providing a new approach to the political discourse analysis.

Two concerns have been involved in our study: Kenneth Burke's key term for new rhetoric — identification, as our theoretical basis; EPPS as the subject of our analysis.

1.1. Research Objective

Based on the theory of new rhetoric, the current study attempts to make a systematic investigation into the

rhetorical process of EPPS, to figure out how the speakers achieve its rhetorical effect, and to discuss how the politicians use the identification strategies to transcend division, gain identification, induce cooperation, and thus, realize their motives. A rhetorical model of EPPS identification will be put forward to help people interpret EPPS in a more effective way.

1.2. Research Methodology

On the basis of introducing identification systematically, several addresses would be analyzed in particular. The data will be collected from the published books and the websites, which possess prominent characteristics of EPPS. The interpretation of the speeches—how speakers employ the identification strategies to transcend division, gain identification, induce cooperation and realize their motives in EPPS, is the focus of the study.

The methodology employed in the research is the combination of qualitative method and quantitative method, in which qualitative method is the primary one. Generally speaking, our study is speculative in nature.

2. Literature Review

EPPS has attracted many scholars' attention at home and abroad, which has been approached from a wide range of disciplines, like pragmatics, systemic-functional grammar, stylistics, critical discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and rhetoric. With regard to the political discourse, these studies have all made their great contributions and shed light on the different aspects of the total phenomenon.

2.1. The Pragmatic Approach

The Politeness Principle and Austin's Speech Act theory are two theoretical bases for the studies in this discipline. Chilton (1990: 201-224), Maynard (1994: 233-261), Blas-Arroyo (2003: 395-423), and Li Liwen (2006) have done their studies based on the framework of Brown-Levinson's Politeness Principle and found that the political discourse can be said to use positive and negative face strategies in consensus and predisposition building.

Harris, Grainger, and Mullany (2006: 715-737) have treated the political apology as a research topic in the framework of Austin's Speech Act theory. Having examined the pragmatics of such apologies as a generic type of discourse, they have found that a valid political apology needs to contain the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the illocutionary force.

2.2. The Systemic-Functional Approach

Based on the theories of Halliday's systemic-functional grammar, Wang Xin (2003: 6-10) and Zu He (2005) have investigated EPPS on different levels, and found that modal auxiliaries, pronouns, imperative structures and tense shift are the elements frequently used in the political speeches. Huo Yiqin (2006: 292-293, 297) has analyzed the

interpersonal meaning and its realization in EPPS from the angles of interpersonal role, mood, and modality. In the framework of the Appraisal theory, Zhong Lili (2005: 54-57) and Zhang Shutang (2006), through analyzing the sub-systems of the Appraisal theory, have found out that in order to deliver his/her messages explicitly, a speaker selects his/her vocabulary carefully in political speeches. Liu Lili (2013) has studied how lexical cohesion is applied in the register of English public speaking.

In some other remarkable studies, Behnam and Kazemian (2013), Kazemian et al. (2013), Kazemian and Hashemi (2014a, b), Noor et al. (2015a, b) have adopted Hallidayan SFL to pinpoint and analyze Ideational and Interpersonal Grammatical Metaphor (GM) and the role played by them in political speeches, religious and scientific texts drawn from very influential magazines and addresses. Their analyses indicate that Interpersonal and Ideational GM have dominated political, scientific texts etc. and the prevailing process types in Ideational GM are material and relational types. Consequently, the tone of the writing in analyzed texts is more abstract, ritualistic and formal. In science, instances of Ideational GM enable technicalizing and rationalizing; and in politics they deal with dominance, provocation, persuasion toward intended objectives. Nur (2015: 52-63) made an analysis of interpersonal meta-function in public speeches.

2.3. The Stylistic Approach

Different approaches to modern linguistics give rise to different approaches to stylistics. Halliday's functional stylistics is prevalent in recent years. Xiong Li (2004: 407-410), Ma Jianhe (2004), and Yu Lijia (2014) have based their studies on Halliday's three metafunctions, together with some valuable views in some other famous stylists' theories, such as the Author's Decision by Buffon, the Reader's Reaction by Michael Riffaterre, the Affective Stylistics by Stanley Fish, situational context and the like. Another enlightenment on these studies is coming from Jakobson's theory of multi-dimensional stylistic analysis.

2.4. The Approach of Critical Discourse Analysis

Zhang Lei (2005: 23-25), Xiang Yunhua (2006: 25-28) and Yu Zan (2006) have applied this theory to analyze Bush's speeches on the capture of Saddam Hussein and the War in Iraq. They have also discussed the language features of EPPS, the means to conceal the asymmetry of power, the relationship between language and ideology, and the strategies the speakers have employed to achieve their political goals in EPPS. Kazemian and Hashemi (2014b) have also investigated Barack Obama's 2012 five speeches based on Ideational GM, rhetorical devices and CDA. The results represent that nominalization, parallelism, unification strategies and modality have dominated in Mr. Obama's speeches. There are some antithesis, expletive devices, and passive voices in these texts as well. Ehineni (2014: 109-117) analysed Nigerian political manifestos from the perspective of critical discourse analysis of modals.

2.5. *The Approach of Cognitive Linguistics*

The studies of political discourse from the approach of cognitive linguistics are mainly centralized in the utilization of metaphor. Sun Yanshu (2004: 111-112) has analyzed several political addresses and proposed that political metaphors are utilized to express certain political opinions, awaken the audiences' emotions and pilot the public's political tendencies. Cao Yumei (2006) has also identified, classified and explained the metaphorization in the US presidential inaugural addresses and found that metaphor can make discourse more accessible. In addition, Zinken (2003: 507-523) and Dijk (2006: 159-177) have discussed the role of metaphor in interpreting the ideology of EPPS. Cai-yan (2011: 700-777) has illustrated the functions of modality metaphors in president's radio addresses.

2.6. *The Rhetorical Approach*

Maynard (1994: 233-261), Chen Dongmei, Xin Ke (2006: 68-71) and Kazemian and Hashemi (2014a), analyzing figures of speech in EPPS, have found that the ample uses of figures of speech could make the addresses and the audience more convincing and more agreeable to the suggested political views respectively. Flowerdew (2002: 149-180) expounded the rhetorical and identity strategies in the discourse of colonial withdrawal.

Zhang Yufang (2005), in the instruction of the rhetorical criticism of speech, has analyzed two speeches: one is American President Bill Clinton's speech at Beijing University; the other is Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's speech at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Chen Changheng (2006) has analyzed Bush's addresses from the perspective of rhetorical language, rhetorical techniques, and audience adaptation.

Rex (2011) employed a rhetorical approach to the study of the president's war agenda, suggesting that modern presidents have substantial power to set the agenda with respect to war. That power is enhanced by a more frequent use of presidential rhetoric and the institutional resources aiding it. The research of Schroedel et al. (2013) systematically analyzes the use of charismatic rhetoric in a presidential election campaign for all major candidates running in the primary and general election. Martin (2015) drew upon and developed the insights of "rhetorical political analysis" to account for the way, through the medium of speech, that ideas are themselves instances of action, emphasizing the situated nature of ideas.

3. *Theoretical Framework*

Kenneth Burke defines rhetoric as "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (1969: 41), or "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (1969: 43). That is to say, rhetoric is the inducement to action. Through inducement, people can be brought together and given incentives to act in

suggested ways. Rhetoric deals with language's role in identification, persuasion and inducement of attitudes and actions. It focuses on the exchange of discourse as a central mode through which social orders are constructed and transformed through the addressed symbolic actions. For Burke, rhetoric is far more than a way to help you form arguments, as classical rhetoric does. It is a tool to analyze the world. Rhetoric helps human beings to reveal the rhetorical motive, that is, the urge to persuade. In Burke's view, the key term for his rhetoric theory is identification, instead of mere persuasion, which is a profound shift of emphasis from the Aristotelian rhetoric and enhances the status of rhetoric as a discipline greatly.

Taking the identification theory from Kenneth Burke's new rhetoric as our theoretical basis and part of the presidential addresses as our data, the researchers would try to analyze how the speaker uses a series of identification strategies, consciously or unconsciously, to transcend division, identify with the audience, and, thus, realize their political purposes in EPPS. The authors assume that there is a division between the politicians and the audience in a certain context. If speakers want to transcend it, gain identification, and thus, achieve their speaking purposes, they should employ a series of language strategies and techniques in their speaking.

In Burke's sense, a rhetor "can't possibly make a statement without its falling into some sort of pattern, any consideration of the subject or content of rhetoric also must include a consideration of its form" (Foss, Foss, and Trapp, 1985: 162). Rhetorical content and rhetorical form are equally important to rhetorical acts. In communication, undue emphasis on rhetorical form is not conclusive to identifying with its audience, as David Ogilvy (1963: 96) says, the consumer is not a moron; she is your wife. You insult her intelligence if you assume that a mere slogan and a few vapid adjectives will persuade her to buy anything. She wants all the information you can give her. This is true of any communication, of course no exception to EPPS. What moves the audience is not the pure form but the practical benefit the speaker may bring about. Likewise, undue focus on content is less likely to obtain identification. The noisy surroundings as well as too-much-to-be-processed amount of information render most of them in the periphery of the audiences' attention and interest. Form is the first thing that the audience approaches a discourse. If form cannot attract the audience, EPPS, good as its content may be, has little chance of catching its audiences' attention and arousing their interest, not to mention gaining identification and achieving the communicative purposes.

Since identification results from an interaction of form and content (Foss, Foss, and Trapp, 1985: 163), the authors would analyze EPPS from these two aspects: identification strategies via rhetorical content and form, and put forward Fig. 1 as the rhetorical model to analyze EPPS identification, which will be fully justified in the following section.

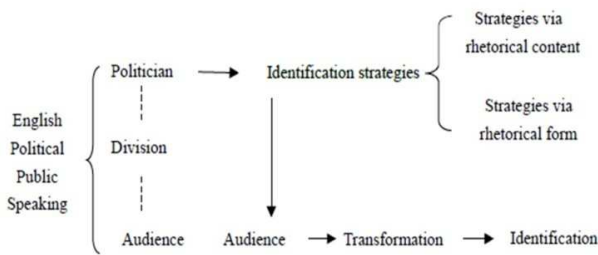


Fig. 1. A rhetorical model of identification: English Political Public Speaking.

4. A Case Study of John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address

Almost every inaugural address is well prepared “to appeal to their countrymen to take pride in their country, to cherish her long-held traditions, and to put behind them the divisiveness of the past campaign and unite for the common good” (Rohler and Cook, 1998: 243). The inaugural address, as the formal debut of the president, would be employed to state political values, and persuade the public to accept and support them. Therefore, the proper use of rhetorical strategies to identify with the audience is the prerequisite to his later successful administration.

The writers would take John F. Kennedy's *Inaugural Address*, which is evaluated highly by critics, and is quoted more often than any other inaugural addresses, as our case analysis. However, in this analysis, we would put our emphasis on the strategies of *emotional appeal*, *antithesis*, *subconscious identification*, *conventional form*, and *figurative form* employed by Kennedy, which are more salient features than other strategies.

The division exists between the speaker and the audience for any rhetorical act. In this address, it is whether to accept and support the political claims made by Kennedy. That is to say, there are rhetorical exigencies for Kennedy to solve. In this process, Kennedy exerted a series of identification strategies to realize his motive, not only via rhetorical content, but also via rhetorical form.

The first strategy is the appeal to *common values and beliefs*. At the very beginning, he states that ‘his election is not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom, which is prescribed by his forebears nearly a century and three quarters ago’. Moreover, this value is stated repeatedly throughout the address by such substitutional words as the *rights of man*, *human rights*, *liberty*, *free society* and so on. The sense of *freedom* is cherished by Americans. By appealing to this common value, Kennedy has achieved the favorable impression from the domestic audience.

Kennedy knew that he would be also addressing the international audience at the same time. Then, he appealed to other common values, such as *progress*, *quest for peace*, *quest for prosperity* and *need of security*. They are common values shared by peoples all over the world, whatever their cultures and social backgrounds. As a result, Kennedy won the appreciation and trust of the people, who are America's old

allies, the newly independent states, the miserable people, the South American states, the United Nations and America's enemy nations.

In addition to the above-mentioned values and beliefs, Kennedy also resorted to the religious power or the adherence to God. For example, in the first paragraph, ‘For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago’. Kennedy put his hands on the Bible and swore. In paragraph 18, he used the command of Isaiah — to ‘undo the heavy burdens... and to let the oppressed go free’, to explain his political policies. In the concluding part, he called on in the name of God by saying ‘let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own’. Insofar as the *emotional appeal*, Kennedy would gain identification with both American people and the other peoples in the whole world.

The second rhetorical strategy used in this address is to gain *identification via antithesis*. As we all know, the address was delivered during the cold war period. Therefore, he referred tactfully to — *those nations who would make themselves our adversary* implying the former U. S. S. R., and asked to *begin anew the quest for peace*, meaning stopping the arms race and nuclear weapons competition. By saying this, Kennedy succeeded in identifying with the American by an outside enemy — the former U. S. S. R. Since there is an outside enemy, the American people are more likely to unite and trust the government. He also won the respect of the international audience, for he wanted peace to the world.

Another point Kennedy exploited is the *tyranny*, *poverty*, *disease* and *war*, which are common enemies of all the mankind. He called to the whole world for forging a *grand and global alliance to assure a more fruitful life for all mankind*.

The convincing power of establishing antithesis is so obvious that Kennedy impressed the audiences, home and abroad, as a man who is in pursuit of freedom and intends to free the world from the undesirable situations. This impression is also advantageous to induce the audience to identify with his policies.

The third strategy used in this address is *the abundant uses of the first personal plural pronoun*, which can help the speaker to establish identification with the audience unconsciously or subconsciously. The use of ‘we’ is equal to saying that we belong to the same category or group and share the common interests, which is helpful to shorten the distance between the speaker and the audience. Furthermore, it can incite the community's consciousness and minimize the group difference. For example, *Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty*. The uses of ‘we’ and ‘us’ in this sentence distinguished the Americans from other nations, and provoked the national pride and responsibilities of the Americans as a whole nation, which made the address substantially provocative.

The fourth strategy, classified into the identification

strategies via the rhetorical form, is *the conventional form*. John F. Kennedy's inaugural address accorded with the typical structure of EPPS. The structure of his address is well-organized. It is comprised of the opening part (Para.1), greeting the audience, the introduction part (Para. 2-5), clarifying the background information; the body part (Para. 6-13), discussing his political policies, the conclusion part (Para. 14-24), calling upon the audience to act in the suggested way; the closing remarks (Para. 25-27), calling upon and praying for the audience. The neat and rational organization helped Kennedy to put across his political claims to both the domestic and international audiences. What's more, the neat organization of the address can enhance the reliability of the speaking, thereby, it can enhance the reliability of the speaker. Through the careful arrangement of the address, the audience is inclined to cooperate, and to identify with the speaker unconsciously.

John F. Kennedy's *Inaugural Address* also possesses the typical stylistic features of EPPS. In English discourses, words contained six letters or three syllables are considered as "big words" or formal words, and 20% of the "big words" is the boundary of judging whether the discourse is formal or conversational. In his address, about 26% of the words in the speech contain more than six letters. Therefore, it is formal in style. The variety of the sentence lengths and sentence types also justifies this point effectively. Except the opening greetings, the address contains 1,338 words and 52 sentences. There are 8 sentences containing less than ten words, accounting for 15.69%; 16 sentences containing less than twenty words account for 31.37%; 13 sentences containing less than twenty words account for 25%; 5 sentences containing less than twenty words account for 9.62%; 10 sentences containing less than twenty words account for 19.23%. There are 25 simple sentences in the address, accounting for 48.08%; 4 compound sentences accounting for 7.69%; 23 complex sentences accounting for 44.23%. The proper employment of short and long sentences, and the various sentence types not only contribute to the expressive power of his address, but also help Kennedy to satisfy the audiences' anticipatory expectations of the address's form and pattern. Thus, they can be employed to achieve identification with the audience as far as the conventional form concerned.

The following figures illustrate the proportions in a more explicit manner. In Fig. 2, A represents sentences containing less than ten words; B, sentences containing less than twenty words; C, sentences containing less than thirty words; D, sentences containing less than forty words; E, sentences containing more than forty words.

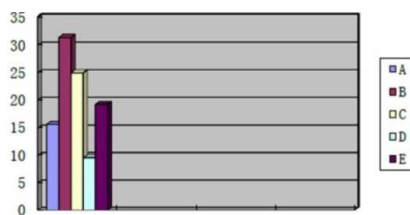


Fig. 2. The percentage of sentence length in John F. Kennedy's *Inaugural Address*.

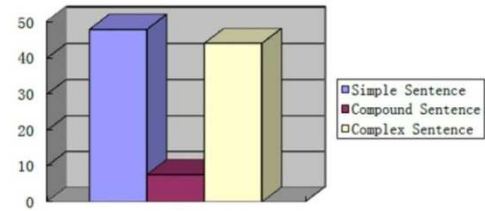


Fig. 3. The percentage of sentence types in John F. Kennedy's *Inaugural Address*.

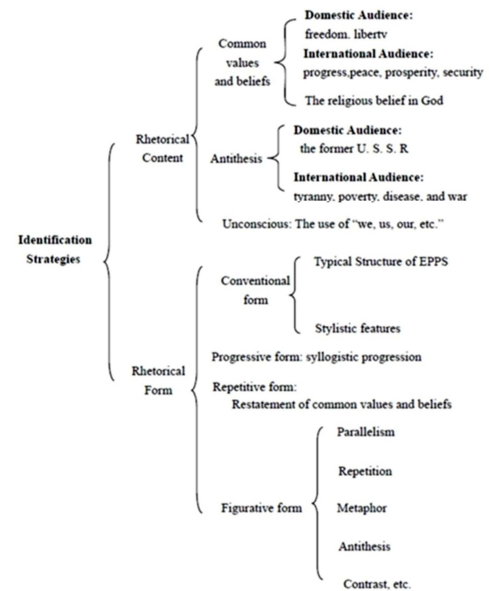


Fig. 4. Identification strategies of John F. Kennedy's *Inaugural Address*

The use of *figurative form* can be termed as the fifth strategy used in this address. If the speaker attempts to make his address more forceful and persuasive, he would resort to the figurative use of language. John F. Kennedy is no exception. In his address, he employed many figures of speech, such as *parallelism*, *metaphor*, *alliteration*, *reversal*, *antithesis*, *climax*, etc. For example, at the beginning of Para. 6-11, *to those...* and Para. 15-19, *Let both sides ...*, these *parallel* and *repetitive* structures are not only helpful to explain the speakers' ideas in a forceful way, but more importantly, beneficial to impress the audience. The use of antithesis in his *'United, there is little we cannot do.... Divided, there is little we can do...'*; and the uses of reversal *Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.*, *Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country*, and *ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man'* put all his propositions in two different situations. By this contrast, the audience would be more responsive to his suggestions, thus, much more likely to agree with him.

The uses of *figurative form* in this address are too many for us to enumerate here. What we can do is just list a few of them, not all. However, all the figurative or minor forms as the identification strategies contribute greatly to the appreciation and understanding of this address. So do the identification strategies via rhetorical content and form. One

strategy always implies another one. For example, the well-knit organization of the address means the employment of *rational appeal* and *progressive form*, and the repetition of the common values and beliefs implies the uses of *repetitive form*. Although these aspects are not discussed in this section, it does not mean Kennedy has not exploited them.

Thanks to the rhetorical strategies employed by John F. Kennedy, his *Inaugural Address* has achieved historical significance and ranked highly by the later generations. Fig. 4 summarizes Kennedy's major identification strategies

5. Conclusion

Having analyzed the speech, we can draw the following conclusions. Firstly, the rhetoric of EPPS is a process of identification in which both the speaker and the audience try to commune with each other, verbally and non-verbally, in content and in form. The identification between them could be achieved via rhetorical content and rhetorical form. Rhetorical content is likely to bring about identification, for it appeals to people's faculties and meets their needs. Rhetorical form makes identification possible, because the audience first get involved in the form and then in the content. Secondly, some identification strategies are used more frequently than others in EPPS, according to different circumstances under which EPPS has been delivered and various purposes the speakers intend to achieve. For example, if the address was given in a war time or in an urgent situation, the speaker would be more likely to resort to emotional appeal than rational appeal. Thirdly, as EPPS is always well-prepared rather than impromptu, the subconscious or unconscious identification strategies are always employed by the speaker to accomplish their purposes, that is, to transcend division, gain identification and induce cooperation. Fourthly, EPPS always has clear and logical reasoning, emotional expressions, that is to say, in EPPS, the speaker tends to exploit rational appeal, emotional appeal, conventional form, progressive form and figurative form. Moreover, the speaker always employs repetitive form to help the audience remember the theme of EPPS. The problems or exigencies from the outside that need solving, i.e. gaining identification via antithesis, also frequently appear in EPPS.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Social Science Project of Shandong province (13DWXJ07), the Social Science Project of Ludong University (WY2012004) and Unique Language Center, Tabriz, Iran.

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