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The Copula and Existential Verbs in Qiang

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This paper discusses the copula and existential verb constructions in Qiang, a Tibeto-Burman language of northern Sichuan, China. There is only one copula verb in Qiang, which can be used in equational, identificational, attributive, naming, and cleft constructions, as well as one type of possessive construction. There are five existential verbs in Qiang, the use of which depends on the semantics of the referent being predicated as existing and its location. The existential verbs have a number of the characteristics of adjective-like stative verbs, and can be modified by adverbs of degree, but they cannot directly modify nouns. Also, the meaning of reduplication of existential verbs is different from that of adjective-like stative verbs: reduplication of existential verbs results in transitivization, while reduplication of adjective-like stative verbs results in emphasis of degree.

Keywords: Qiang, Tibeto-Burman languages, copula constructions, existential constructions, Sino-Tibetan

1. Introduction

The Qiang language is spoken in Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in northwest Sichuan Province, China; it belongs to the Qiangic branch of Tibeto-Burman. There are two major Qiang dialects, Northern Qiang (spoken in Heishui County, and the Chibusu district of Mao County; roughly seventy thousand speakers) and Southern Qiang (spoken in Li County, Wenchuan County, Mao County, and Songpan County; about sixty thousand speakers) (Sun 1981:177-78). The dialect discussed here is the Northern Qiang variety spoken in Ronghong Village, Yadu Township, Chibusu District, Mao County.

The language is verb final, agglutinative (prefixing and suffixing), and has both head-marking and dependent marking morphology.

Nouns can be defined as underived forms which can take (in)definite marking, numeral-classifier phrases and/or number marking, all of which follow the head. Aside from being the head of an NP, nouns can be used to modify other nouns directly (appearing immediately before the modified noun) or in a genitive phrase (also pre-head,

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with or without a genitive postposition), and an NP can appear as the complement of a copula clause.

Verbs are defined as those forms which can take the directional prefixes, the negative prefix, person marking, and the causative suffix. They are generally clearly transitive or intransitive, though there are some ambitransitive verbs, and intransitive verbs can be made transitive by use of the causative suffix. Reduplication of transitive verbs can result in an intransitive reciprocal predicate. Verbs can modify nouns in NPs, though they must take a nominalizing suffix to do so, forming a pre-head relative clause. Concepts represented by adjectives in English are represented by verbs in Qiang, so those forms do not require a copula when predicative.

2. Verbless and copula clauses

Generally predicates are verbs, adjectives, or noun + copula, but in some equational sentences, most noticeably statements of the date or of human relationships, the copula is optional, and so the NP alone acts as predicate, as in (1) and (2):

- (1) pos xso-ço-tç roday [three-month-GEN five-beginning]
 'Today (is) March fifth.'
- (2) khumtsi akua wutçin-tçə sətsim.

 Khumtsi [uncle-Wutçin-GEN wife]

 'Khumtsi is Uncle Wutçin's wife.'

Clauses (1) and (2) could also take the copula. There is only one copula, /ŋuə/, as in (3) and one of the two possibilities in (4), which is used in equational, identifying (attributive), naming and cleft constructions, in one type of possessive relation, and after nominalized verbs. As it is used only in relational constructions and not in existential constructions, there must be two arguments, that is, there are no clauses of the type *God is*. The verb /zmə/ 'be called' (for naming), as in the other possibility in (4), or the verb /pe/ 'become' (for change of identity), as in (5) and (6), might also be considered relational like the copula.

(3) the: mi ŋuə.

3sg person COP
'He is a person (man).'

| (4) the:-ŋuəni 3sg-TOP | khumtsi | ŋuə/zmə. |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | Khumtsi | COP / be.called |
| 'She is (is cal | led) Khumtsi.' | |

- (5) the: sum-(ke:) pe.

 3sg teacher-INDEF:CL become

 'He became a teacher.'
- (6) butşqha xtşampha-(ke:) pe.
 caterpillar butterfly-INDEF:CL become
 'The caterpillar became a butterfly.'

The formal treatment of the initial NP of an equational or attributive copula clause in Qiang does not differ from that of the direct argument of an intransitive verb. The NP representing this referent must appear in clause-initial position, and no semantically-based postpositions can be used after the NP. Only the topic marker can be used, as in (4) and (7).

(7) the:-nuəni şpe nuə.

3sg-TOP Tibetan COP

'He is a Tibetan.'

If the copula complement (CC) is attributive, it is often followed by the indefinite marker /ke/ plus a classifier (or the classifier is represented as a lengthened vowel on the indefinite marker: /ke:/), as in (5) and (6). If it is identificational, then it can be followed by the definite marker (/le/ or /te/), as in (9). There is no other formal difference between attributive and identifying copula clauses. Compare (8), an attributive clause, with (9), an identificational clause:

- (8) qa sum nua. (< nua)
 1sg teacher COP:1sg
 'I am a teacher.'
- (9) qa sum-le: ŋua. (< ŋuə)

 1sg teacher-DEF:CL COP:1sg

 'I am the teacher.'

If the clause expresses a possessive relation of the type 'This book is mine', then an equational copula clause is used, with the possessor argument taking the genitive postposition, as in (10).

(10) ləyz tse-pen qa-tç ŋuə.

[book this-CL] 1sg-GEN COP

'This book is mine.'

This is generally the only case where a copula complement can take any kind of case marking postposition.

It can be seen from examples (8) and (9) that the copula, like all other verbs, can take person marking. The copula can also take aspect marking, but this is generally only when it is causativized, as in (11). Adding the directional marker does not denote a change of state. Another example of the causative suffix with the copula is given in (12). In (12) we also find direction marking.

(11) teile the: fia-staqə-ni linthau nuə-za: (< zə)

1pl 3sg DIR-choose-ADV leader COP-CAUS:PRS
'We chose him to be leader.'

(12) khuə-le: punu ha-ŋuə-z, dog-DEF:CL cat DIR-COP-CAUS 'Make the dog replace the cat.'

In (11), the verb /staqə/ 'choose' appears in a manner adverbial phrase modifying the main verb of the sentence, the causativized copula, to express how the causee became the leader. In this example it would also be possible to use a directional prefix on the copula (i.e., [ha-ŋůɔ̂-zə]), if the person had already assumed the office, as the directional prefix can mark perfective aspect. As it stands, with no directional prefix and prospective aspect marking on the verb, the sentence assumes the person has been chosen, but has not yet assumed office. That is, the prospective aspect is relative only to the becoming, not to the choosing. In (12) a different function of the directional prefix is involved, that of marking an imperative.

The copula complement can be quite complex, as in (13), from the story "An Orphan" (LaPolla with Huang 2003:256), where the copula subject is understood to be the boy under discussion, and so the whole clause except for the copula is the complement NP.

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(13) ep lə me-zi ew lə me-zi ke:
father also NEG-exist mother also NEG-exist INDEF:CL
nua-kəi-tçu.

COP-NAR-PART
'(He was an orphan), one who didn't have a father or mother.'

Copula clauses can be negated in the same way as other verbs, taking the negative prefix, as in (14), and can also appear in interrogative form using the same interrogative suffixes as other verbs, as in (14) and (15). (The interrogative suffixes differ with person.)

(14) qa zme ma-ŋua-ja?

1sg Qiang NEG-COP:1sg-Q

'Am I not Qiang?' ('Aren't I Qiang?')

(15) qupu niyi bələ-m nuə-nua?
3sg [what do-NOM] COP-Q
'What kind of work does he do?' (Lit.: 'He is a person who does what?')

3. Complement clause constructions

There are two basic complement types in Qiang, one that has no overt nominalization and one that has a clitic nominalizer. The copula can also take a non-nominalized complement. This has an emphatic sense, somewhat similar to a cleft construction, as in (16).

(16) pane-tse: qa-wu ze-p-ji ŋue.

thing-this:CL 1sg-AGT DIR-buy-CSM COP

'This thing was bought by me.'

In some cases, this structure has the sense of an on-going state resulting from a change of state or action, as in (17), similar to one use of middle voice in some languages that have middle voice.

(17) dzy-le: de-zgə-ji ŋuə.
door-DEF:CL DIR-open-CSM COP
'The door is open.'

The non-nominalized clause with the copula is often used for achieving the affect of clefting for highlighting adverbials, as in (18):

(18) the: hama-n.i kue-jy nuə.

3sg secretly-ADV transport-ASP COP

'S/he was transported secretly.'

Another construction with almost the same structure, but with a nominalized complement clause, is used for making strong assertions. This is in fact pragmatically also like a cleft, in that a particular NP is focused, as in (19).

(19) the:-(nuəni) tçile topu-s nuə.

3sg-TOP 1pl like-NOM COP

'The ones s/he likes are us.' ('We are the ones s/he likes.')

The position of the focused element is variable, that is, the focused NP can precede or follow the nominalized verb. Compare (20a-b):

- (20) a. tçile-(ŋuəni) pə-s pies ŋuə.
 lpl-TOP buy-NOM meat COP
 'What we need (to buy) is meat.'
 - b. tcile-(ŋuən.i) pies pə-s ŋuə. 1pl-TOP meat buy-NOM COP 'What we need (to buy) is meat.'

A variant of this construction has something of an epistemic sense. To make a strong statement of certainty, or of information that was not recently discovered, but known for some time, then a complement clause nominalized by /-s/ is used, as in (21).

(21) pas zmu tsu-s nua. today meeting hold-NOM COP 'There is a meeting today.' (set beforehand)

Another use of this structure is expressing the optative mood. In this structure the complement is nominalized by /-s/ and the copula takes the particle /-ni/ in the positive, as in (22a), or /-tçi/ in the negative, as in (22b) (both particles normally mark ad-

verbial phrases). No aspect or person contrasts are marked in sentences with /ŋuə-ni/ or /mu-nuə-tçi/.

- (22) a. the: tshetsə-le: fid-yə-s nuə-ni.

 3sg car-DEF:CL DIR-bad/broken-NOM COP-ADV

 'I hope his/her car has broken down.'
 - b. təp-ni me: ce-s ma-ŋuə-tçi.
 tomorrow-ADV rain fall-NOM NEG-COP-ADV
 'I hope it won't rain tomorrow.'

A copula construction with a nominalized complement, or in some cases a complement that is a relative clause with [la-han ~ la-hən] (definite marker + 'kind'), [ka-han ~ ka-hən] (indefinite marker + 'kind'), or /tan/ ('appearance') as the head noun, is used to express contingent situations, as in (23) and (24).

- (23) the: tha-zi-m-tan ŋuə.

 3sg there-exist-NOM-appearance COP

 'S/he might be there.'
- (24) me: ci-m-la-hən nuə.
 rain fall-NOM-DEF-kind COP
 'It might rain.'

This then brings us to what might be considered a pseudo-cleft construction, where the sort of relative clause plus noun construction discussed above is used as a complement of a copula clause. The topic marker can optionally be used after this complement, as it is the topic of the construction, while the NP in immediate preverbal (focus) position identifies the referent represented by the head of the relative clause, as in (25)-(27).

- (25) qa zə-pə-tç panə tse: ŋuə.
 [1sg DIR-buy-GEN thing] this:CL COP
 "This is the thing I bought."
- (26) pans tse:-zs ps-m qa-(wu) nua.

 [thing this:CL DIR-buy-NOM] 1sg-AGT COP:1sg
 'I am the one who bought this thing.'

> (27) kerla-m la ni: nuə-kəi. ask-NOM COP-NAR also himself he-zque-m la nuə-kəi. DIR-answer-NOM also himself COP-NAR 'The one who asked was himself, the one who answered was himself.' (LaPolla with Huang 2003:281)

A structure similar to that used in the optative construction, but with the copula followed optionally by /-şa/ in the first person, /-san/ in the second person, or [ŋůð ~ wə] in the third person, is used to express obligation to perform an action (i.e. debitive). These forms are the non-actor person marking suffixes. (The form / ŋůð/ is an alternate form of the third person non-actor marker /-wə/, which by assimilation to /ŋuə/ becomes /ŋůð/.) Person marking on the verb is optional in this construction, but if it appears it is the non-actor marking that is used. Examples are given in (28)-(29).

(28) the: tçiu-la lu-s ŋuə-ŋůå.

3sg home-LOC come-NOM COP-3sgU

'S/he must come home!'

(29) a. qa zme-z na-ji su-s nua-(sa). 1sg Qiang-language well-ADV learn/teach-NOM COP-1sgU b. ?ū zme-z na-ji su-s nuo-san. 2sg Oiang-language well-ADV learn/teach-NOM COP-2sgU c. the: zme-z na-ii nuə-nůå. SII-S 3sg Qiang-language well-ADV learn/teach-NOM COP-3sgU 'I (you, s/he) must learn/teach Qiang well.'

An interesting feature of this construction is that if there is only one human referent referred to in the clause, as in the examples just given, then the person marking on the verb reflects the person and number of that referent, but if there are two human referents referred to in the clause, then the person marking reflects the non-actor argument. The initial NP of this construction is the topic of an identificational structure, and it seems the topic is treated as a non-actor, as it is marked the same as the true non-actor in sentences where two human referents are referred to. In (30)-(31) are examples where two human referents are referred to:

(30) a. the: Yū Bua-S njua-san.

3sg 2sg help-NOM COP-2sgU

'S/he should help you.'

b. tçile the: ʁua-s ŋuɔ-ŋůɔ.

1pl 3sg help-NOM COP-3sgU

'We ought to help him/her.'

(31) teile tey:mi-le:-χuani zbotcu-s ŋuə-(ŋůå).

1pl child-DEF:CL-BEN consider-NOM COP-3sgU

'We must consider the interests of the child.'

In two of the traditional stories that were recorded, the nominalization part of this structure appears in a non-final clause without the copula, but the sense of obligation or determination is the same. In (32), from "The Creation of the World" (LaPolla with Huang 2003:251), the structure appears twice, in the first line with the copula, followed by the particle /xuani/ 'because', and in line four, as simply a nominalization, but with the sense '(they) should (become a family)'. In (33), from "The Story of a Lazy Man" (LaPolla with Huang 2003:295-296) three nominalized clauses seem to be subordinated to one copula.

nuə-γυαπί, ... peza1-s (32) steke-ta mi COP-because raise(child)-NOM people later-LOC fiei-bi-ni. dzuarl e-xse nutcuku DIR-carry.on.back-ADV one-CL each stone.mill qznarj ia-xse e-tsetup-tu, ho-ylu, Bu-q-ta-wu mountain-head-LOC-ABL DIR-roll stone.mill two-CL DIR-bump-LNK

4 nizzi oqpi pə-s, dzuarl jə-xşe fio-ylu-s-ta,
3dl one:family do-NOM stone.mill two-CL DIR-roll-NOM-LOC

5 qhuat e-tşetup-wei, fia-tsəi-nike, as.it.happens DIR-bump.into-HS INT-this.manner-after

6 mə n.a ylu lə-zi oqpi fio-pə-i.
older.brother COM younger.sister DEF-CL one:family DIR-doHS'Later, in order to propagate descendants, (the brother and sister decided that)
each would carry a stone mill on his or her back and roll it down from the mountain peak. If the two stone mills joined together, the two should get married. As it

¹ Cf. ex. (21), which is a similar structure used for statements of fact.

happened, when the two stone mills rolled down (to the river bank) they joined together, and so the brother and sister married.'

- (33) zmətşi-le:-tç tsi-le:-ŋuəni zuan-tçhianme¹-ta emperor-DEF:CL-GEN daughter-DEF:CL-TOP Huang-Qianmen-DAT
- 2 γzə-s, χuan-tchianme¹-ŋuəni zmətşi dzu-s, zmətşi-le: marry-NOM Huang-Qianmen-TOP emperor sit-NOM emperor-DEF:CL
- 3 tsi-le:-nuani fiatha de-la-s, fiaka nua-ku-tu.
 daughter-DEF:CL-TOP INT-there DIR-give-NOM this.manner COP-NAR-LNK

 (Because the emperor had said he would marry his daughter to whoever found the parrot,) the emperor had to marry his daughter to Huang Qianmen, and Huang Qianmen became the emperor, (he had to) give (him) the daughter.'

In (34), from the story "An Orphan" (LaPolla with Huang 2003:262-263), the sense of the nominalization construction is of obligation in terms of the best thing to do in that situation. We can see in the fourth line of this example that even the copula can be nominalized and subordinated to the copula.

- (34) the-maha-ŋuəni tçiu şəşe:¹-wu niontçi that-night-TOP †(then) exist:REDUP-all together
- 2 ganphai tu-pů-kəi-stu, χα-le:-ŋuəni tçα-lə je-s arrange DIR-do-NAR-PART needle-DEF:CL-TOP where-LOC stay-NOM
- 3 nua, tça-la tça-la na-s nua, tça-la tça-la
 COP where-LOC where-LOC sleep-NOM COP where-LOC where-LOC
- 4 niyi nua-s nua, fia-tsai ganphai tu-pû-kai-tçu.

 What COP-NOM COP INT-this:manner arrange DIR-do-NAR-PART

 'That night everybody made a plan together, where the needle should stay, where (each of them) should sleep and what not and it was all settled.'

Although we find the copula nominalized in this sort of situation, we do not find the copula nominalized in relative clauses, as usually some other verb would be nominalized. For example, in English we could relativize an equational clause such as *He is the teacher*, which would become *The one who is the teacher*, but in Qiang 'teacher' [su-m] is already an agentive nominalization of the word for 'teach', and so there is no need to relativize using the copula.

4. Possession and existence

In a clause in which the predication expresses possession, the form that the elements of the clause take depends on the type of relationship involved, that is, temporary possession or ownership, and on the nature of the possessed referent. The verb involved in all cases is one of the five existential verbs, the use of which depends on the semantics of the referent being located or shown to exist, or on the nature of its location: 2/sp/ and /xu/ for inanimate referents that are not in containers or immovable or inalienably connected to some larger entity, /le/ for a referent located in a containment of some type, including the age of a person or thing and certain internal abstract concepts such as 'strength' or a tendency to do something often; /zji/ for animate referents, and /we/ for immovable referents, referents inalienably connected to a larger entity, and happenings. The form /we/ is also used to express the possession of qualities seen as less internal, such as being blessed.

If the relationship is inalienable possession and the referent is something that does not normally exist apart from the possessor, such as a body part, then the clause takes the form of a simple existential clause, and the possessor appears as a genitive possessor of the body part in a single NP with the body part, and the verb is intransitive (with that one NP as its sole argument), as in (35a). The person marking on the verb reflects the person and number of the possessor, not the possessed.

If instead the relationship is one of temporary physical possession, and not ownership, and the referent is able to exist independently of the possessor, then the NP representing the (temporary) possessor takes the locative/dative marker /-ta/, as in (35b). Here again the verb is intransitive, with the NP representing the possessed referent as the single direct argument in an existential clause, but with the NP representing the possessor appearing as an oblique argument and the person marking reflecting the person and number of the possessed referent rather than those of the possessor (inanimates are unmarked).

- (35) a. qu-dzoqu ji-tuu wa. (< we) (connected to main entity)
 [1sg-leg two-CL] have/exist:1sg
 'I have two legs.'
 - b. ?u-dzoкu le: qa-ta şə. (inanimate) [2sg-key DEF:CL] 1sg-LOC have/exist 'Your key is at my place.' / 'I have your key.'

² See also Huang (2000), LaPolla (2003), and LaPolla with Huang (2003:133-136).

If the situation involves ownership of an object which is not part of the person (i.e. is not physically inalienable, including other people, such as in kinship relations), then the causative suffix is used with the verb of possession to make it transitive. The NPs representing the possessor and the possessed referent then are both direct arguments of the verb, and so the possessor does not take any semantic case marking, as in (36)-(38).

- (36) khumtsi dzəgů kən a-ha şə-z, (inanimate) Khumtsi money much/many one-pl have/exist-CAUS 'Khumtsi has a lot of money.'
- (37) khumtsi tutş-үzə-zi zɨ- zɨ (animate)
 Khumtsi younger.brother-four-CL have/exist-CAUS
 'Khumtsi has four younger brothers.'
- (38) the: səf-a-ha we-z, (connected to main entity)

 3sg tree-one-pl have/exist-CAUS

 'He has some trees.'

There is no difference between present and past possession, and there are no nouns that are obligatorily possessed. There is also no difference in the construction based on whether the possessor is represented by a pronoun, a proper noun or common noun. These verbs have many of the definitional properties of adjectives (see LaPolla and Huang 2004 on adjectives), in that they are intransitive stative verbs that can be nominalized by the (in)definite markers, as in example (13), and can take the intensifying adverbs [gən ~ kən], /wa/, and /qusu/, and in the negative can take the adverb /tsan/ 'too', as in examples (39a-b), but differ from adjectives in that they cannot directly modify a noun and the meaning of reduplication is different. With adjectives, reduplication has the sense of intensification, but with existential verbs, reduplication can transitivize the verb, at least in some cases, as in (40).

- (39) a. tsq mi zi-wa. here person exist-very 'There are many people here.'
 - b. tsa mi tsan me-zi.

 here person too NEG-exist

 'There are not too many people here.'

(40) a. le 'exist (inside)' > ləle 'put inside'
b. sə 'exist (inanimate)' > səsə 'put (someplace)'

These transitive forms can then take the directional prefixes, with the sense of direction of action, as in (41a), or perfective action, as in (41b).

(41) a. ləle 'put inside' > de-le / ze-le / i-le 'give / take / insert' b. şəşə 'put (someplace)' > ə-şə 'put (perfective)'

Aside from the verbs given above, which are inherently intransitive and have both existential and possessive uses, there is one verb, /qəqe/, which is inherently transitive (and inherently reduplicated--cannot be separated) and used only for possession, and particularly for personal ownership of some important or valuable entity, as in (42a-c). With this verb the NP representing the possessor always is a direct argument, and so does not take any semantic case marking.

- .(42) a. ?ū ṣqu qusu qəqe-n.
 2sg gold much have-2sg
 'You have a lot of gold.'
 - b. qupu tçymi ʁuɑ-tş qəqe.
 3sg child five-CL have
 'S/he has five children.'
 - c. qq tshe a-wů qəqa. (< qəqe)
 1sg sheep one-flock have:1sg
 'I have a flock of sheep.'

There is no preposition that can be used with the possessive sense of English 'with', as in 'The man with the knife', or 'the man without the knife'; instead a relative clause using a possessive verb must be used, as in (43a-b).

(43) a. xtşepi şə-zə-m knife have/exist-CAUS-NOM '(The) person with (the) knife'

> b. xtşepi ma-ş-zə-m knife NEG-have-CAUS-NOM '(The) person without (the) knife'

Possession of a quality involves the same structure as possession of an object, as in (44a-b).

(44) a. the: qhu-s we. (connected to main entity)
3sg hate-NOM have/exist
'S/he is very mischievous.'

b. the: qapats le. (inside vessel)

3sg head have

'S/he is very brainy.' (cf. English She's got a head on her shoulders.)

The use of a relative clause structure is also possible, as in (45).

(45) the: ctcimi na-tc mi ŋuə.

3sg heart good-GEN person COP

'S/he is (a) good hearted person.'

5. Summary

In this paper, we have discussed the various uses of the copula and existential verbs in Qiang. The copula is used in attributive, identifying, naming, and cleft constructions, in one type of possessive relation, and after nominalized verbs. The copula can take causative marking, person marking, negation, and be interrogated using the same markers as for other verbs.

In a clause in which the predication expresses possession, the form that the elements of the clause take depends on the type of relationship involved, that is, temporary possession or ownership, and on the nature of the possessed referent. The verb involved in all cases is one of the five existential verbs, the use of which depends on the semantics of the referent being located or shown to exist, or on the nature of its location. Possession of a quality involves the same structure as possession of an object.

Abbreviations

| 1 | first person | HS | hearsay evidential marker |
|--|--|--|---|
| 2 3 ABL ADV AGT | second person third person ablative marker adverbial marker agentive marker | INDEF INT LNK LOC NAR | indefinite marker interjection clause linker locative marker narrative (hearsay) form made up of the inferential and hearsay particles |
| ASP BEN CAUS CL COM COP CSM DAT DEF DIR dl | aspect marker benefactive marker causative marker classifier comitative marker copula change of state marker dative marker definite marker directional prefix dual | NEG NOM PART pl PRS Q REDUP sg TOP U †() | negative prefix nominalizer clause/sentence final particle plural prospective aspect suffix question marker reduplication singular topic marker bound non-actor marker Chinese code-mixed stretch of text |
| GEN | genitive marker | | |

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