

Aspect of Inflectional Morphology of ? d̀

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Abstract

This study explores an aspect of inflectional morphology of È language. ? d̀ is a member of Niger-Congo language family; a North-west Plateau language under the Volta-Congo branch of the Benue-Congo sub-family. The language under study has been classified as one of the minority endangered languages in Nigeria. Although various research works have been carried out on the language, a comprehensive morphological analysis is yet to be established. Against this background, the study explores an aspect of inflectional morphology of È and the major aspect of inflectional morphology explored in this study is noun plural formation. The data for this study were drawn from primary sources and the methods used in gathering the primary data were ethnographic observations and oral interview (face-to-face). A snowball sampling technique was used for data collection, and this strategy involves getting referrals from earlier participants to provide the required information, considering their knowledge of the language under study. Data for the study were presented in prose using orthographic symbols and each data was set off from the text and assigned a number, while the data were analyzed in prose. The findings of the study showed that number marking in ? d̀ nouns is characterized by a great diversity of strategies. However, prefixation (represented by a prosodic feature 'tone') and stem modification (initial-vowel modification) remain the most characteristic processes as the possibilities are numerous. The findings of the study equally revealed that the patterns of prefixation and modification are not fixed as no obvious generalizations hold for number marking on nouns. Further more, the findings of the study showed that the only generalization with some degrees of validity is the one involving prefixation (tone change) which seems to hold across a substantial proportion of nouns. In actual sense, there is no regular way to mark number in ? d̀ nouns. Based on the findings from this study, it is clear that plural marking in ? d̀ nouns is mandatory as there is no case where noun is unmarked or optionally marked when plural is intended. The only exceptional peculiarity in the formation of plural nouns is the strategy which involves deletion of a segment in a stem to form plural of some nouns while the tone of the initial syllable as well as the vowel-initial of the stem remains. The findings from the study also showed that there is no correlation between plural marking and animacy.

Key words: Inflectional Morphology, Plural, Noun, Niger-Congo Languages, North-West Plateau Language, Benue-Congo Language, ? d̀.

	Singular	Plural	Gloss
b.	tswa-ali	tswa-alili	“eye” (partial reduplication)
	sa	sisá	“brain”
	bwong	bubwong	hole
	anyung	anyunyung	tooth
			(<i>Sanni, 2020, p. 29</i>)
c.	man	men	(modification)
d.	person	people	(suppletion)

Similarly, number information can vary in terms of phonological form such as tone change as demonstrated in the following examples:

3.	Singular	Plural	Gloss
	àgá	ágá	lizard
	èdzú	édzú	housefly
	ènú	énú	chicken
			(<i>Nkamigbo, 2011, p. 158</i>)

Number system can also vary in terms of the number of distinctions that are present in a language (singular, plural or dual). In addition, number system can vary in terms of obligatoriness or optional feature of a noun phrase. While number information or system is an obligatory feature of a noun phrase in some languages, number marking is optionally present in other languages.

Number system formation remains one of the inflectional morphology that has received considerable attention in linguistic literature and the relation viz-a-viz distinction between regular and irregular form has been a controversial topic among grammarians. For instance, 'dual route' hypothesis states that there are two separate processing mechanisms, one based on productive application of rules, and the other based on the look-up of stored forms in the mental lexicon (see for details, Pinker, 1999; Pinker & Ullman, 2002a & b; Pinker & Ullman, 2003; Pinker & Prince, 1994). Though, there are stronger and weaker versions of this view but all presuppose that regular forms are normally parsed into, and assembled from their component parts while irregular forms are normally stored whole in the lexicon.

Contrary to the 'dual-route hypothesis', some scholars have argued that all morphological processes are based on the development of associations between morphological related forms and that the strength of the associations depend on a large number of factors, including the frequency of the forms and the frequency of the patterns involved (see Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986; McClelland & Patterson, 2002; Baayen, 2007 to mention just a view). What could be deduced from these scholars' opinions is that regularity is a matter of degree.

For instance, Albright (2002), while working on Italian verb morphology, indicates that there are islands of reliability within the set of irregular forms in any given system and that speakers are able to make productive use of these sub-regularities. Similarly, Laaha, Ravid, Korecky-Kroll, Laaha & Dressler (2006), using noun plurals in German as a case study and Ravid & Schiff (2009) on noun plurals in Hebrew argue that there is a two-dimensional characterization of regularity, which involve degree of suffix regularity and stem change and show that such a description is consistent with many findings on how inflectional morphology is achieved. The assumption that it is possible to distinguish regular and irregular inflection has also been consistent in previous researchers' findings.

With regards to plural marking distinction attested in languages, Haspelmath (2013) states that there is a correlation between plural marking and animacy, assuming that nouns of varying degrees of animacy such as those denoting humans, animals and objects are marked differently in many languages. All these assumptions viz-a viz the behaviour of pluralization of nominals in languages make the study of noun plural formation an interesting area of research enquiry within morphological analysis. The present study does not only make the exploration of plural formation in ?dà nouns its thrust but also established whether there is correlation between plural marking and animacy in ?dà nouns. The main research questions are:

- i. How is plurality marked in ?dà nouns?
- ii. Is noun plural marking in ?dà mandatory?
- iii. Is there any deviating or exceptional peculiarities in the noun plural marking in ?dà?
- iv. Is there any correlation between plural marking and animacy in ?dà?

Literature Review

Temple (1965) undertook a study of tribes, emirates and states of the Northern Province of Nigeria and the findings identified Kadara (Ada) as one of the tribes in Northern Nigeria. The work creates awareness about the Ada people, the language and the geographical distribution. Although the present work is on the morphological analysis of ?dà language, the insight from the work shapes the present work in the aspect of geographical location of the speakers. The present research also shows that ?dà is not limited to Kaduna State as the highest number of the speakers are now in Niger state.

Smith (1973) was concerned with the cultural and historical studies of Kadara (Ada). As a historical and cultural study, it touched historical background of Kàdàrà, (Àdà) and the areas covered by Ada people, the administration, economy, systems of kinship, marriage, associations, rituals and social structure. The present study, however, does not aim to show either the geographical distribution of Àdà or its culture but to explore an aspect of inflectional morphology of the language.

Maikarfi (2004) document eda preliminary alphabet book of Eɗa language. Though, a preliminary, it has so far been the first to reduce ?dà to writing. As the name implies, it was just a preliminary work that needs further developments. To complement Maikarfi submission, Blench (2006) carried out a linguistic survey and a lexico-statistical studies involving villages and towns within the ?dà geographical areas in order to determine and propose a reference dialect that would be used in ?dà literature. Blench (2006) is very important to the present study in that it defines the standard ?dà language on which the present study is based. In Blench (2009), Eɗa alphabet chart via orthography was launched. The launching of the alphabet chart marks a great development in the standardization of Eɗa language. Though, the work was sketchy, it touched some major components of the phonology of ?dà language. Blench (2009) emphasized that "...northwest plateau languages remain a high priority for further research" (p. 9). This language therefore requires research attention from scholars as its extinction means that the contributions it would have rendered to global linguistic theories and concepts would be lost.

Hon et al. (2012) presented sociolinguistic survey of Adara (Eɗa) of Kaduna and Niger states. Their work showed Eneje as one of the dialects of the language. However, our investigation revealed that there is very low mutual intelligibility among Eneje and Ankwa and other dialects of the language. In his survey of languages in Niger State, Busa (2014) confirmed Kadara (Eɗa) to be one of the languages spoken in Niger State, specifically in Paikoro and Shiroro Local Government Areas. Contrary to Busa, Eɗa is not restricted to Paikoro and Shiroro Local Government Areas but extends to Lapai, Gurara and Muyan Local Government Areas. Busa recommended that linguists should pick an interest in the study of little known languages (p.68). For this reason, the researcher opted to establish an aspect of inflectional morphology of the language by describing the formation plural of nouns in the language.

Mukhtar (2014), in his study of endangered minority languages in Nigeria, identified Adara (Eɗa) to be among them. Following Fishman (1991) Graded Inter-generational Disruption Scale (GIDS) as quoted from Mukhtar, Eɗa belongs to grade 5 (safe) as the inter-generational transmission of the language seems uninterrupted and there is no sign of linguistic threat from any other language.

Mukhtar and Kafilat (2016) explore the syntax of wh-questions in ?dà within the framework of Principles and Parameters approach. The work showed the strategies employed in ?dà to form wh-questions and the syntactic parameters peculiar to the language which differentiate it from other Niger-congo languages. Kafilat (2020) focuses on the formation of focus constructions in ?dà and the findings reveal that derivation of focus constructions in ?dà involves movement where focused elements occupy the specifier of FP at S-structure.

It could be noted in the above mentioned literature that attention was not given to the establishment of the morphology of Eḏa as most of them primarily focused on sociolinguistic aspect of the language (Eḏa) while few of them were on the syntactic analysis. This study, therefore, deviates from previous studies as it explores an aspect of inflectional morphology of Eḏa. The description and analysis of the data in this study will not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge on inflectional morphology but also serve as important tools for language documentation and development.

Methodology

The data for this study were drawn from primary sources and the data were elicited from six (6) native speakers. The methods used in gathering primary data were ethnographic observations and oral interview (face-to-face). These methods were considered appropriate with regard to the nature of this research being purely descriptive. A snowball sampling technique was used for data collection, and this strategy involves getting referrals from earlier participants to provide the required information, considering their knowledge of the language under study. Data for the study were presented in prose using orthographic symbols and each data was set off from the text and assigned a number, while the data were analyzed in prose.

Theoretical Framework

This study is purely a descriptive analysis of an aspect of inflectional morphology of ? dā language. The choice of adopting descriptive model was informed by two important reasons. First and foremost, the descriptive analysis is not abstract compared to other linguistic theories which make it suitable for a pioneering work on the morphology of ? dā language. Also, using descriptive analysis will afford both linguistic audience and the speakers of the language accessing the work for reading.

Noun Plural Formations in ? dā

Number marking in ? dā nouns is characterized by a great diversity of strategies. However, prefixation (represented by a prosodic feature 'tone') and stem modification (initial vowel modification) are the most characteristic processes and the possibilities are numerous. Though, the patterns of prefixation and modification are not fixed as no obvious generalizations hold for number marking on nouns. The only generalization with some degrees of consistency is the one involving prefixation (tone change) which seems to hold across a substantial proportion of nouns. These strategies are re-presented as follows:

4. (i) Prefixation
- (ii) Modification

Prefixation is prominent feature of ? dā nominal morphology viz-à-viz nominal pluralization as it is productively employed. The language does not have suffixation and infixation in its

noun plural formation. Prefixation is both derivational and inflectional process in ? dà. As stated earlier, the primary method of noun plural marking in ? dà is prefixation. However, in noun plural formation, prefix is represented, not by a segment like consonant or a vowel but by a prosodic feature 'tone', a process Oyebade (1992) refers to as suprafization. There are some morphemes in ? dà which are simply tones as the application of pitch variations to the initial syllable of certain nouns results in the distinction along the dichotomy of singularity and plurality. Elugbe (1989), refers to these morphemes as tomorphs or tonal morphemes. This instance corresponds to what Akinlabi (1996), describes as featural affixes; the commonly found cases are tonal (emphasis mine). In the formation of plural nouns in ? dà, the High-tone () and mid-tone (unmarked) of some syllable-initial stems (nouns) are replaced by the Low-tone () while the Low-tone () of some vowel-initial (stems) nouns is replaced by the Mid-tone (unmarked). Vowel-initial of plural nouns does not bear high-tone in ? dà. This is exemplified in (5) below:

5. M(id) L(ow)
 L(ow) M(id)
 H(igh) L(ow)

The following are examples of plural forms demonstrating where prefix is represented by tone:

- 6a. M(id) L(ow)

Animate Nouns

Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
ab?n (MH)	'goat'	à-b?n (LH)	'goats'
a-va (MM)	'dog'	à-va (LM)	'dogs'
?-v? (MM)	'mosquito'	?-v? (LM)	'mosquitoes'
?-ya (MM)	'mother'	?-ya (LM)	'mothers'
?-w?n (MM)	'snake'	?-w?n (LM)	'snakes'
i-rre (MM)	'lizard'	ì-rre (LM)	'lizards'
?-y?-rra (MMM)	'tortoise'	?-y?-rrà (LMM)	'tortoises'
igrùn (ML)	'monitor-lizard'	ìgrùn (LL)	'monitor-lizards'
a-yu-rrà-á (MMLM)	'toad'	à-yu-rrà-á (LMLM)	'toads'

- b. M(id) L(ow)

Inanimate Nouns

Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
a-bàn (ML)	'stick'	à-bàn (LL)	'sticks'
a-bàn-án (MLH)	'house'	à-bàn-án (LLH)	'houses'
e-kí (MH)	'tree'	è-kí (LH)	'trees'
i-no (MM)	'tongue'	ì-no (LM)	'tongues'

u-kpo (MM)	'hole'	ù-kpo (LM)	'holes'
un-zén (MH)	'wrapper'	ùn-zén (LH)	'wrappers'
a-y? (MM)	'side'	à-y? (LM)	'sides'
?-f? (MM)	'axe'	?-f? (LM)	'axes'
un-zen (MM)	'wrapper'	ùn-zen (LM)	'wrappers'
?-sa (MM)	'oath'	?-sa (LM)	'oaths'

7. L(ow) (M)id

a. **Animate Nouns**

Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
à-r?n (LH)	'child'	a-r?n (MH)	'children'
à-vwa (LM)	'teacher'	a-vwa (MM)	'teachers'
è-gbèn (LL)	'hunter'	e-gbèn (ML)	'hunters'
?-kaw (LM)	'horse'	?-kaw (MM)	'horses'
à-n?-? (LLM)	'fowl/chick'	a-n?-? (MLM)	'fowls/chicken'
?-na (LM)	'scorpion'	?-ná (MM)	'scorpions'
?-v?n (LM)	'fish'	?-v?n (MM)	'fish'
?-dran (LM)	'frog'	?-dran (MM)	'frogs'
?-law (LM)	'cow'	?-law (MM)	'cows'
?-ján (LH)	'bush rat'	?-ján (MH)	'bush rats'
è-é-dri (LHM)	'distant cousin'	e-é-dri (MHM)	'distant cousins'

b. L(ow) (M)id

Inanimate Nouns

Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
à-gà-t? (LLL)	'hat'	a-gà-t? (MLL)	'hats'
à-zá (LH)	'bathroom'	a-zá (MH)	'bathrooms'
à-tghà (LL)	'door'	a-tghà (ML)	'doors'
?-trá (LH)	'groundnut'	?-trá (MH)	'groundnuts'
?-f? (LM)	'hill'	?-f? (MM)	'hills'
?-fàn (LL)	'key'	?-fàn (ML)	'keys'
?-mà (LL)	'ring'	?-mà (ML)	'rings'
?-fa (LM)	'finger'	?-fa (MM)	'fingers'
?-na (LM)	'scorpion'	?-ná (MM)	'scorpions'
à-t? (LL)	'tendon'	a-t? (ML)	'tendons'

8. H(igh) L(ow)

a. **Inanimate Nouns**

Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
á-m? (HL)	'year'	à-m? (LL)	'years'

á-sá (HH)	'basket'	à-sá (LH)	'basket'
?-krà (HL)	'hoe-handle'	?-krà (LL)	'hoe-handles'
ú-krun (HM)	'mountain'	ù-krun (LM)	'mountains'
?-m-b?n (HMM)	'clump of grass'	?-m-b?n (LMM)	'clumps of grass'

b. **Animate Nouns**

Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
?-krá-a (HHM)	'termite'	?-krá-a (LHM)	'termites'

The processes involved in the formation of plural nouns in the above examples are:

9. (i) Insertion of the relevant tonal affix, low (as shown in 6&8) or mid (as illustrated in 7) at prefixal position;
- (ii) Displacement/ deletion of the tone of V1 of the root morpheme and;
- (iii) Replacement of the displaced/deleted tone with the inserted low tone (i.e. 6&8) or mid tone (i.e. 7) in that order.

It could be observed that plural nouns do not begin with high tone as shown in the examples above. It could also be noted from the examples (6-8) that the patterns of tone change are quite not fixed as no single tone (mid or low) can be generalized as the plural marker. While this is so, the fact that there are no clear grammatical rules determining which tone: mid, low or high should go with a singular noun is a pointer to the tendency of having both the singular and plural forms of nouns in (6-8) stored complete in the lexicon.

As stated earlier, another strategy employed in the formation of plural nouns in ? dà is modification where there is an alternation of the initial vowel of some singular nouns. The initial vowels are usually replaced by high, closed vowel 'i/u/un' or low vowel '?/a' while the tone of the stem is maintained. This is demonstrated in the examples below:

10. Singular	Plural	Vowel Changed Involved		Gloss
inlosu	unlosu	in	un	'gun'
ulo	ilo	u	i	'disease'
ìdrè	èdrè	i	e	'eye'
?vr?	?vr?	?	?	'unripe tuber'
?tan	àtan	i	u	'unripe fruit'
?kpa	akpa	?	a	'egg'
?kplà	akplà	?	a	'shoe'
?mràn	ámrà̀n	?	a	'cocoyam'
?b?n	ab?n	?	a	'breast'
?bugh?	àbugh?	?	a	'shoulder'

From the examples above, we hypothesize that the vowel the initial-vowel of a singular noun changes to is guided by the Advanced Tongue Root (henceforth ATR) feature of the V1 of the root: +ATR initial-vowel of a noun root changes to (i/e/u/un) while -ATR initial vowel of a noun root changes to (a/?). It could be observed from the examples above that there is no overlapping (i.e there is no data where +ATR vowel changes to -ATR). These and few others that behave this way might be said to have both singular and plural forms stored in the lexicon.

The formation of plural of certain nouns in ? dà involves modification of the initial vowel of the stem (similar to examples 10) as well as tone change of the initial-syllable of the stem (the tone of the vowel-initial stems follows the format in 9). This implies that two processes are involved: initial-vowel modification and tone change as demonstrated in the following examples:

11.	Singular	Plural	Vowel	Changed	Involved	Gloss
	?-sha-a(MMM)	à-sha-a(LMM)	?	a		'bamboo'
	i-m-bòn(MML)	ù-m-bòn(LML)	iu			'gouard'
	?-n-kan-an(LMMM)	a-n-kan-an(MMMM)	?a	remains of		
				cooked food'		
	?-n-tr?-trá(MMMH)	?-n-tr?-trá(LMMH)	?	?		'stone'
	?-n-tr?-tr?(MMMH)	?-n-tr?-tr?(LMMH)	??			'chair'
	?-n-drà(MML)	?-n-drà(LMH)	?	?		'bridge'

It could be observed from the examples above that neither tone change nor initial-vowel modification can be attributed to be the morpheme responsible for the change in meaning of the nouns in question since both of them are jointly used unlike in the examples (6-8&10).

Apart from the above-mentioned strategies, another strategy employed in the plural formation of some nouns in ? dà is somehow similar to (11) above (where both tone change and initial-vowel modification are employed) but differs in that a segment is inserted within the stem (a process similar to infixation). However, if infixation is defined as being "...properly applied to the insertion of an affix within some other morpheme" (Spencer, 2001, p. 129) and not , for instance, by first change the initial vowel of the singular noun, then, ? dà cannot be correctly shown to exploit infixation and therefore not be presented as infixation. Consider the following examples for illustration:

12.	Singular	Plural	Vowel	Changed	involved	Segment	Inserted	Gloss
	?b?n	?mb?n	??	-n-				'earth'
	?lghà	?nlghà	?	?	-n-			'salt'
	?shà	?nshà	?	?	-n-			'bush
	'spirit'							
	?shan	?nshan	?	?	-n-			'city'

?ta	?nta	?	?	-n-	'buttock'
?vr?	?nvr?	?	?	-n-	'unripe tuber'
ìbin	umbin	i	u	-n-	'unripe fruit'

From the examples above, it could be observed that the vowel the initial-vowel of a singular noun changes to, is guided by the ATR feature of the changing vowel of the root: -ATR initial -vowel '?' of a noun root changes to 'i'. It could also be observed from the examples above that the voiced alveolar nasal 'n' or -n- is inserted between the first syllable and the second syllable. The segment 'n' cannot be attributed to a morpheme (an infix) since it is not the only element that brings about changes in the meaning of the grammatical structures. This implies that three parameters are involved in the derivation of the above plural nouns: tone change, vowel modification and insertion. It is important to add that the the underline representations of ?mb?n “earth” is ?nb?n while umbin is unbin but the voiced alveolar nasal “n” changes to voiced bilabial nasal “m” due to homo-organic assimilation.

The grammar of ?dà also employs deletion of a segment in a stem to form plural of some nouns. However, tone change and initial-vowel modification are not employed in this case. The segment involved is an alveolar nasal -n- as demonstrated in the following examples:

13.	Singular	Plural	Morpheme Deleted	Gloss
	à?dà	àdà	-n-	'person'
	àñsh??	àsh??	-n-	'woman'

From the examples above, it could be observed that the plural of the above nouns are formed by deleting a segment '-n-' in the singular nouns. It is important to emphasize that this is the only strategy where the vowel initial of the stem as well as the tone of the initial syllable of the stem remain the same. That is, tone change and initial-vowel modification are not employed. It could also be noticed that while the segment '-n-' is inserted into the singular nouns in (12) to form the plural nouns, reverse is the case in (13) as the singular form of the nouns already contains the morpheme -n- and has to be deleted to form the plural. Though, nouns having this pattern are very few but these few examples reveal that this strategy is employed to form plural nouns which suggest human [+human]. From this it is revealed that ?dà originally had an -n- noun class pair for humans. While this is so, the fact that there are nouns which share similar features [+human] but employ different strategy in their plural formations is a pointer to the tendency of having both the singular and plural form of nouns stored complete in the lexicon. Examples of nouns which share similar features [+human] but employ different strategy in their plural formations are àr?n 'child', ar?n 'children', àvwa 'teacher', avwa 'teachers', ègbèn 'hunter', egbèn 'hunters'. This does not only show a clear indication that ?dà has both singular and plural forms stored in the lexicon, but also invalidates Haspelmath (2013) assumption that there is a correlation between plural marking and animacy.

It is important to emphasize that the examples in this study are not isolated exceptions, but are typical of the ?dà language. This suggests that there is no regular way to mark number in ?dà. In other words, no group of nouns can be treated as 'regular'.

This study was centered on four research questions, viz (a) how is plurality marked in ?dà nouns? (b) Is noun plural marking in ?dà mandatory? (c) Is there any deviating or exceptional peculiarities in the noun plural marking in ?dà?and (d) Is there any correlation between plural marking and animacy in ?dà?With regard to the first question, we presented detailed analysis on the formation of plural of nouns in 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13 respectively which help us to identify the strategies which ?dà grammar employs in the noun plural formations.

A close examination of our data revealed that ?dà employs two major strategies in the formation of plural of nouns which are prefixation (represented by a prosodic feature 'tone') and stem modification (initial-vowel modification) as the possibilities are numerous. As stated earlier, the patterns of prefixationand modification are quite not fixed as no obvious generalizations hold for number marking on nouns. The only generalization with some degrees of validity is the one involving prefixation (tone change) which seems to hold across a substantial proportion of nouns.This suggests that there is no regular way to mark number in ?dà.

With regard to the second research question, it could be observed, from our analysis and discussions so far, that plural marking in ?dà nouns is mandatory as there is no case where noun is unmarked or optionally marked when plural is intended.

As to the third question, our findings revealed that the only exceptional peculiarity in the formation of plural nouns is the strategy which involves deletion of a segment in a stem to form plural of some nouns while the tone of the initial syllable as well as the vowel-initial of the stem remains. That is, tone change and initial-vowel modification are not employed. In reference to the fourth research question of this study, the plural of both animate and inanimate nouns were presented and our findings showed that both animate and inanimate nouns employ similar strategy in their plural formations. This shows that there is no correlation between plural marking and animacy in ?dà.

Conclusion

The most notable morphological parameter specific to ?dà is that there is no regular way to mark number in ?dà nouns as no group of nouns can be treated as 'regular'.This is a pointer to the tendency of having both the singular and plural forms of nouns stored completely in the lexicon.This is due to the fact that there are nouns which share similar features but employ different strategies and cases of nouns which have different features [+animate] but employ

similar strategy in their plural formations. It is important to state that ?dà no longer has functioning noun class systems. However, ?dà has developed a highly idiosyncratic system of vowel-initial modification and tone change of the stem to mark plurality in nouns, apparently under the influence of neighbouring Chadic languages.

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