



INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE MODELS AND ASSESSMENT VERSUS AN INTERCULTURAL LATIN AMERICA PATH

Modelos de Evaluación y de Competencia
Comunicativa Intercultural versus un
Camino Intercultural en Latinoamérica

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Modelos de Competência Comunicativa
Intercultural e Avaliação versus um
Caminho Intercultural na América Latina

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Abstract: In this critical reflective article, I conducted a literature review to address the guiding question of what interculturality, language education, intercultural competence, and intercultural communicative competence mean for Latin America in developing its own intercultural models. I reviewed various concepts, discussions, and perspectives on intercultural communicative competence models and assessment types based on European and North American perspectives. Through this review, I identified that intercultural communication requires flexible understanding to respond to contextual linguistic and cultural interactions. I argued that ICC models and assessment approaches are not applicable to Latin American nations. However, these existing models can serve as examples to create our country's unique path based on the understanding of southern scholars and the realities of our territory.

Keywords: Interculturality; Intercultural communication (IC); Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC); ICC models; ICC assessment.

Resumen: En este artículo de reflexión crítica, hice una revisión bibliográfica a la luz de una pregunta orientadora indagando qué implican la interculturalidad, la enseñanza de lenguas, la competencia intercultural y la competencia comunicativa intercultural, con el propósito de aportar a la construcción de un camino propio en términos de modelos educativos interculturales en América Latina. Revisé los conceptos, discusiones y perspectivas de algunos principios teóricos con respecto a los modelos de competencia comunicativa intercultural con la comprensión de diferentes tipos de evaluación basados en perspectivas europeas y norteamericanas. A través del proceso, identifiqué como la comunicación intercultural implica comprensiones flexibles para responder a la interacción contextual lingüística y cultural. Argumenté por qué los modelos y sus formas de evaluación no se adecuan a las naciones latinoamericanas. Sin embargo, los modelos existentes se convierten en una muestra para construir nuestro propio camino si consideramos comprensiones de los académicos y realidades territoriales del sur de América.

Palabras clave: Interculturalidad; Comunicación Intercultural (CI); Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural (CCI); Modelos de Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural; Evaluación de Modelos Interculturales.

Resumo: Neste artigo de reflexão crítica, fiz uma revisão de literatura à luz de uma pergunta orientadora perguntando o que implicam interculturalidade, ensino de línguas, competência intercultural e competência comunicativa intercultural, com o objetivo de contribuir para a construção de um caminho próprio em termos de modelos educacionais interculturais na América Latina. Revi os conceitos, discussões e perspectivas de alguns princípios teóricos relativos a modelos de competência comunicativa intercultural com a compreensão de diferentes tipos de avaliação baseados em perspectivas europeias e norte-americanas. Através deste processo, identifiquei como a comunicação intercultural envolve entendimentos flexíveis para responder à interação contextual linguística e cultural. Argumentei por que os modelos e suas formas de avaliação não são adequados às nações latino-americanas. Entretanto, os modelos existentes se tornam uma amostra para construir nosso próprio caminho se considerarmos os entendimentos dos estudiosos e as realidades territoriais do sul americano.

Palavras-chave: Interculturalidade; Comunicação Intercultural (CI); Competência Comunicativa Intercultural (CCI); Modelos de Competência Comunicativa Intercultural; Avaliação de Modelos Interculturais.



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Introduction

Interculturality, intercultural competence (IC), and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) are critical to effective communication, cultural and linguistic interaction among individuals. These purposes include understanding one's own and other's cultures, developing cultural abilities to communicate successfully, and becoming an intercultural speaker, all of which are important internationally and in the field of language education. This critical reflective paper seeks to answer the guiding question: What do international and national publications in the area of ELT concerning intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and ICC assessment imply for Latin America to build its path in terms of intercultural models for education? To accomplish this, I conducted a systematic review based on specific eligibility criteria. The keywords used for the search included: Intercultural communication (IC), intercultural communicative competence (ICC), ICC assessment, interculturality, and ICC models. I reviewed national and international journals about ICC and intercultural studies and selected a total of 53 publications, including research and non-research articles and book chapters in Spanish and English.

In the first section of the paper, I provide a conceptualization of interculturality, language education, and the fundamentals of IC and ICC based on scholars' voices. Secondly, I describe a variety of ICC models and assessment approaches based on European and North American models from key scholars in the field of intercultural studies. Thirdly, I review key southern scholars' references to describe interculturality from a Latin American perspective and context. Finally, I present an answer to the guiding question based on the literature review, discussing how established models can serve as a foundation for thinking about our path toward an intercultural perspective instead of being adapted by South American countries. The paper concludes with a summary of the literature review's main findings.

Interculturality, Language Education, IC, and ICC purposes

The relationship between interculturality and language implies flexibility and context-sensitive perspectives to view the world, leading to discussions about the necessity of intercultural and foreign language education in various territories and nations. The connection between language and interculturality recognizes the behavioral diversity of people and allows for multiple ways of acting and accomplishing the same thing (Byram, 2006; Coulby, 2006; Dai & Chen, 2015; Kramersch, 2013; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Byram (2006) asserts

that intercultural language education aims to educate individuals capable of embracing plurality and incorporating otherness in education for democracy. Similarly, Coulby (2006) affirms that interculturality should be integrated at all educational levels and across all subjects in the school curriculum. Kramsch (2013) emphasizes the intertwining of culture and language and argues that language and culture are inseparable, especially when considering the importance of valuing different languages and cultural practices within specific contexts.

Dai and Chen (2015) define interculturality as a concept that encompasses the multiple connections between cultures, where interactive efforts aim to reduce cultural distance, negotiate shared meanings, and foster intercultural harmony in all situations. Additionally, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) assert that a comprehensive approach to culture in language education should encompass various understandings of culture itself. They argue that it is possible to develop different ways of valuing one's own and other cultures, finding personal approaches to engaging in intercultural interactions, constructing personal intercultural identities, and acknowledging the relativity of cultures. In a similar vein, Kramsch (2013) states that intercultural studies are more crucial than ever for ethical and political development, enabling individuals to engage in dialogue with other cultures and languages on their own terms. Interculturality and language thus become interconnected processes that understand intercultural language education not as an isolated subject taught in institutions but as a daily agenda in educational settings, facilitating an understanding of the practices and cultural interactions of other speakers.

Regarding intercultural competence (IC), Fantini (2006) states that IC is a complex set of abilities to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals who are linguistically and culturally different from ourselves. Deardorff (2009) describes IC as the effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations, emphasizing that it is an ongoing process that provides opportunities for individuals to reflect on and assess the development of their own IC. With regard to intercultural communicative competence (ICC), Sinicrope *et al.*, (2007) affirm that initially, the purposes of ICC were centered around international business, exchange programs, cross-cultural training, expatriates living abroad, and immigrant acculturation. Similarly, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) state that ICC is important because it equips people with knowledge and skills related to specific cultures, recognizing and embracing diversity. ICC is described as a need for nations to acknowledge what others contribute politically and socially in cultural interactions. IC contributes to the development of competent citizens who can teach and learn from cultural perspectives and actively participate in a globalized society. One of the purposes of

ICC is to facilitate interactions between individuals from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds while prioritizing the perspective of a competitive cultural speaker to address global and foreign societal issues.

Models of Intercultural Communicative Competence and ICC Tenets

Several models have been developed for conceptualizing ICC with the aim of identifying bases for assessments of ICC. Byram (1997), an ICC expert, offers a five-factor model of ICC, including attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), as well as critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). According to Byram, these factors characterize the criteria required to become a competent intercultural speaker, and they can be integrated into teaching within a philosophy of political education and the development of critical cultural awareness. However, in principle, it is possible to acquire them through experience without the intervention of educational institutions. Byram (2021) updates this definition and describes ICC as the ability of a language user to situate and mediate between two cultures, understanding the culture of both the L1 and the L2 from a new perspective. Byram's ICC model presents the nature of ICC as a function of the skills that a person brings to the interaction. These can be divided into two broad and related categories: skills of interpretation and establishing relationships between aspects of the two countries, and skills of discovery and interaction.

Another relevant model is Bennett's (1986, 2004) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (El Allame *et al.*, 2020), which consists of six stages grouped into two larger stages: ethnocentric and ethnorelative. It presents an ongoing development that progresses from the *ethnocentric* (denial, defensiveness, and minimization) to the *ethnorelative* (acceptance, adaptation, and integration). This model has been used in educational scenarios to help people understand cross-cultural differences and progress through experience, interpretation, and interaction. Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) also describe a culture-generic approach and identify empathy, a positive attitude toward other cultures, and listening as key variables that contribute to an ICC model. Based on interviews with participants in a study they conducted, they propose IC dimensions such as heterogeneity, transmission, other-centered, observant, motivation, sensitivity, respect, relational, investment, and appropriateness. The dimensions complement one another in their overall description of a competent intercultural communicator.

Balboni (2006) presents a model focused on pedagogical and linguistic objectives, with a relationship between the mental realm of individuals and the place where communication occurs. In this model, intercultural communication is governed by competence groups, respectively verbal and non-verbal groups, and is realized in the context of communicative events facilitated by grammar that contains both universal elements and local cultural elements. On the other hand, Borghetti (2013, 2017) integrates two models: The Methodological Model of Intercultural Competence (MetMIC), which refers to intercultural education, and the Teaching Unit Model (TUM), which concerns foreign language teaching. Both are focused on curriculum planning and offer methodological suggestions for teachers. The integrated model involves three levels: general and educational, macro or curricular, and micro or methodological. The main purpose of this model is to propose a coherent implementation of intercultural and communicative objectives through theoretically informed methodological choices that connect curriculum structure and teaching methodologies.

I see more weaknesses than successes in ICC models when considering the culturally diverse contexts of each country. While the main purposes of ICC models include a detailed explanation of the skills and abilities needed to be a competent intercultural speaker, some models focus on adaptation, assimilation, and adjustment to diverse cultures, while others emphasize the empathetic response to different cultures. These models also provide recommendations for application in educational scenarios and for foreign language teachers. However, there may be more challenges that contest the homogenous criteria proposed in ICC models when considering people's perceptions, attitudes, skills, and knowledge. Even though globalization facilitates the existence of these models through the exchange of languages, cultures, immersions, and migration phenomena in some countries, they are limited by the lack of distinction between regions/ nations, communities, disciplines, and teaching contexts.

Assessment understandings based on European and North American models

The diverse models of ICC propose assessment criteria to observe and understand the skills and abilities of an interculturally competent speaker. While some scholars (Borghetti, 2017) question the need for assessing intercultural competence, others (Lombardi, 2010; García Castaño & Muñoz Cruz, 2002; Rahimi, 2019; Scarino, 2010; Sercu, 2004) discuss the appropriate and different instruments used in the study of this competence. I provide a summary (See Table 1) of three types of assessment: indirect, direct, and combination assessment tools.

Table 1. Intercultural Competence Types of Assessment

Intercultural Competence types of assessment	Assessment Tool
Indirect assessment	Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Competence (BASIC) (Olebe & Koester, 1989; Ruben & Kealey, 1979) Cross-cultural adaptability inventory (CCAI) (Kelley & Meyers, 1992) Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ICSI) (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992) Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) (Olson & Kroeger, 2001) Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer <i>et al.</i> , 2003) Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA, 2004)
Direct assessment	Performance assessment (Byram, 1997; Ruben, 1976) Portfolio assessment (Byram, 1997; Jacobson <i>et al.</i> , 1999; Pruegger & Rogers, 1994) Interviews (Fantini, 2006; Straffon, 2003)
Combining direct and indirect assessment tools	Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA, 2004)

Source: Autor.

Indirect assessment: instruments for IC come in a variety of formats: surveys, inventories, self-report surveys, and interviews, to name a few. The Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Competence (BASIC) created by Olebe and Koester (1989) proposes seven dimensions: display of respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, self-oriented role behavior, interaction management, and tolerance for ambiguity. Ruben and Kealey (1979) divided *self-oriented role behavior* into three distinct dimensions: task-related roles, relational roles, and individualistic roles, resulting in nine dimensions of the BASIC model. Kelley and Meyers (1992) present the cross-cultural adaptability inventory (CCAI) to assess a person’s effectiveness and adaptability in cross-cultural interaction and communication involving foreign experiences. The intercultural sensitivity inventory (ICSI) by Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) was designed to measure an individual’s ability to adopt culturally appropriate behaviors when interacting with diverse cultures, taking into account cultural constructs of individualism and collectivism.

Following a chronological order, Olson and Kroeger (2001) developed the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI), an instrument to measure understanding and awareness of global intercultural competence by using the six stages of the DMIS model (denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, integration)

and adding three dimensions of global competency (substantive knowledge, perceptual understanding, and intercultural communication). Hammer *et al.*, (2003) present the intercultural development inventory (IDI), also based on Bennett DMIS's model. It is an online survey with a 50-item self-assessment and a five-point Likert scale to assess the individual's changes in intercultural competence. The test has been used with several populations, including high school students. The INCA project offers the Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA, 2004), a package with a series of instruments such as portfolios, a biography, and a dossier of evidence of intercultural competence. It diagnoses and keeps records of achievement of the assessment of language competence and subject knowledge competence. This last one is also considered a mixed instrument of assessment.

Direct assessment: is usually announced and directly documents actual learning (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2009). In some cases, this type of assessment includes traditional tests, but also tools such as portfolios, projects, and interviews. Sinicrope *et al.*, (2007) assert that performance assessment reveals an individual's ability to use any acquired IC in real-time situations. Additionally, some scholars (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2006; Jacobson *et al.*, 1999; Pruegger & Rogers, 1994; Ruben, 1976; Straffon, 2003) state that direct assessment can provide detailed and individualized information.

Combining direct and indirect assessment methods: is supported by proponents of intercultural competence assessment (Fantini, 2009; Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Straffon, 2003) with the idea of moving beyond a single assessment format and promoting the use of multi-measure tools to offer more solid results. An example of this is the INCA project, which suggests three types of assessment instruments (questionnaires, scenarios, and role-plays) combining direct and indirect procedures to assess ICC. Similarly, Deardorff (2009, 2011) demonstrates how the American Council on Education has collaborated with numerous institutions within the United States to articulate global intercultural learning outcomes. Through this process, combined assessments were used, including portfolios, self-report instruments, journals, host family observations, supervisor observations, in-class assignments, participant interviews, and focus groups.

It seems that using assessment instruments for ICC presents a challenge. Therefore, the decision of which instrument to use should be an ongoing process, as it should be appropriated and aligned with the goals of each institution or context. In the context of education, teachers and researchers can create their own assessment formats to ensure that the information they provide aligns with their needs. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) affirm that further research is

necessary in diverse contexts to explore possibilities for language and intercultural assessment along sociocultural lines. In contrast to other authors writing about assessing intercultural competences, Borghetti (2017) takes a different position. Borghetti argues that assessing intercultural competences may not be ethical and provides a four-point discussion framework to support this position. The discussion framework highlights the weaknesses of intercultural competence models, the relationship between intercultural competence and actual performance, the contextual and relational nature of intercultural competence, and the affective dimension of intercultural competence.

This critical revision leads me to argue that theoretical principles regarding intercultural communicative competence models are not necessarily appropriate for application in Latin American countries. One reason is that ICC considers North American and some European contextual issues to create ICC models, such as language exchange, migration, understanding of foreign cultures and languages, adaptation to new intercultural exchanges, and the development of a speaker's competence, among others. These issues do not necessarily correspond to common realities in Latin America. Furthermore, ICC assessment procedures aim to measure the development of intercultural competence aligned with the structural criteria of ICC models, which were created from a global perspective, disregarding local linguistic and cultural diversity. For example, most IC models adopt a transnational perspective, ignoring the fact that within a country as diverse as Colombia, different intercultural encounters can take place. Consequently, ICC models and assessment types exclude nations like those in Latin America since there are no ICC models in the South to measure an effective and competent intercultural speaker.

Intercultural communication can be studied and evaluated within its specific contexts of action. In the Latin American context, for example, intercultural communication has been discussed in a way that goes beyond traditional measures, focusing instead on the concept of "interculturality." This term, found in literature from scholars in the southern hemisphere, offers a broader perspective on intercultural interaction among speakers, which extends beyond the existing ICC theory. However, scholars of ICC acknowledge the needs and realities within their territories. ICC assessment and its models provide criteria, concepts, structures, objectives, and dimensions that can be applied to cultural and linguistic communication issues. This process can serve as a useful example for constructing an intercultural path in Latin America.

Towards our own path: The southern understandings

I return to my guiding question: What does the review of international and national publications in the area of ELT concerning intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and ICC assessment imply for Latin America to build its own path in terms of intercultural models for education? This review reveals that one of the implications of ICC and ICC assessment for Latin America to start creating its own theoretical and practical path in the area of interculturality is the need to value the diversity of cultural practices in specific contexts and the awareness of their relative nature. Another implication is that it is important to recognize the diverse cultural characteristics and language interactions of speakers. The literature reviewed also implies that there is no unique way to act or respond to one's own and other cultures and that North American and European ICC frameworks intend to offer solutions proper to their cultural and linguistic realities. ICC models and their different types of measurement require adaptation to the different teaching contexts and sensitivity to each setting. This is important because, as González Plasencia (2019) asserts, ICC brings with it multiple characteristics related to the role of the context where ICC models were created and a projection of who the potential users could be. It is clear that whatever these models entail needs to be actualized in the particular contexts of implementation.

Latin America is not a scenario to keep trying to adapt the already established ICC frameworks in our educational scenarios, but a good reason to follow the models' criteria to take into account contextual issues as bedrocks to start thinking or even declining the idea of proposing a Latin American model of interculturality. To develop and measure intercultural interaction among speakers from different cultures and languages, we can create conceptual frameworks and use them to build our own path in terms of intercultural models for education. By following the ideas of key southern scholars on interculturality and languages, we can create effective frameworks. Although the South may not be widely recognized for developing models or approaches to assess cultural interaction, it has made progress in studying the cultural roots and realities of interactions among speakers from different cultures within the field of foreign language education. In Latin America, the construct of interculturality is studied and discussed among researchers who contextualize and claim purposes far away from the eurocentric models of ICC.

Interculturality concerning languages is emerging with a strong commitment, but also with contradictions between ELT scholars, researchers, and stakeholders. Unlike Europe, in Latin America, the relationship between ICC,

interculturality, and critical intercultural education started to be a construct mainly since the 1990s, with the new national constitutions (Arbeláez Jiménez & Vélez Posada, 2008); and it started to be discussed among southerner scholars (García & García, 2014; Granados-Beltrán, 2016; Tubino, 2004; Walsh, 2009) in connection to discourses on ethnicity and supporting the idea of giving a voice to minority communities, making them visible in their differences, problems, customs, rights, and ways of living. In addition, more researchers (Álvarez Valencia, 2014; Álvarez Valencia & Bonilla Medina, 2009; de Mejía, 2006; Fandiño Parra, 2014) have joined the discussion concerning cultural studies and interculturality within the foreign language education field. They have suggested that teaching culture is not the same as promoting the hegemony of a language and its culture or adapting ethnocentric practices, but it mainly represents approaching and reflecting upon the beliefs of oneself and others, as well as the attitudes and behaviors, which are intertwined with the language itself. Intercultural issues can create tension by highlighting different positions, ideas, realities, and perspectives among all linguistic communities involved. This tension can be further compounded by power imbalances and linguistic diversity, which may give one cultural group an advantage over another.

South American scholars (López & Sichra, 2008; Mejía Jiménez, 2015) support the idea that interculturality is connected with indigenous languages, their rights, and education. This coincides with an understanding of culture leading to the recognition and relocation of the linguistic and cultural diversity of speakers within countries, beyond the typical area of IC involving international business, study abroad, cross-cultural training, or immigration. Along the same line, and supporting the idea of recognizing different realities of the South for including intercultural encounters in our educational scenarios, researchers such as Tubino (2004), Walsh (2009), Zárate Pérez (2014), and Granados-Beltrán (2016) agree that critical interculturality is a tool for decolonial pedagogy and beyond, leading to the peaceful interaction and interrelation among speakers of different languages engaged in different cultural practices. This way, the authors reinforce the idea that critical interculturality may cause tensions regarding differences in opinion about ways of life, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes without any cultural group assuming a dominant role over the other.

This critical review has informed the efforts of scholars from Europe and North America to simplify the conceptualization and assessment frameworks for ICC. The relationship between language and culture has been defined within Western contexts, such as migration, international student exchange programs, cross-cultural training, and living abroad. However, there is a need

to contextualize ICC within the field of language education in Latin American countries and other regions around the world, beyond those predominantly from the West or North. This represents an implicit academic debt that must be addressed.

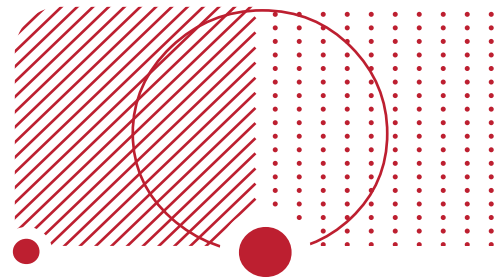
The diverse models for assessing intercultural communicative competence confirm that Latin America has the opportunity to develop its own path in terms of intercultural interaction and communication among speakers within educational settings. Studies presented in this paper prove that intercultural frameworks are not unique since there are plenty of them depending on contextual realities. That is, new proposals may emerge from different contexts around the world by considering the proposals of experts from those territories such as Latin America. These proposals suggest that we should begin creating criteria for intercultural communication models or acknowledge that not every nation needs to confine intercultural interactions and the development of intercultural speakers within a set of predetermined procedures to be followed or measured.

Conclusions

I began by presenting perspectives on intercultural communication (IC) from Europe and North America. Then, I focused on the field of English Language Teaching/Foreign Language (ELT/FL) and mentioned some scholars from Latin America who discussed intercultural communication and the contextual reality of the South. I identified why ICC models are not appropriate to be applied in Latin American contexts. I argued that while the ICC models produced in other contexts do not necessarily apply to our contexts, the assessment criteria developed serve as a foundation for Latin Americans to start building their own path by creating criteria or rejecting the idea of drawing on intercultural models for intercultural education. As mentioned above, perspectives on IC correspond to other epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies that differ from the Latin American ethos in many ways and may not fully address the complexities of Latin America.

Although some aspects of the ICC and its assessment frameworks emphasize the importance of language exchange programs and individuals who can effectively teach others about their cultural perspectives within the context of intercultural studies, scholars from Latin America advocate for intercultural interaction and studies that do not rely solely on Eurocentric theories. They argue that such theories perpetuate patterns of academic colonialism in the field of foreign language education in the Southern Hemisphere. Unlike North America and some European countries, the South has adopted interculturality as a perspective to

study the interaction of cultures and languages, emphasizing indigenous movements and the interaction among speakers of different languages and cultures within the same territory. Recently, through the lens of critical interculturality as a political project, the field has moved beyond effective communication or cross-culture adaptation. Instead, it has sought to problematize hierarchical structures anchored in the colonial past that still inhabit Latin American pluricultural and multilingual communities. The critical intercultural perspective has also supported local struggles and historically excluded groups. Even though the intercultural perspective is making inroads in foreign/language education, there is still a long way to go in constructing an intercultural perspective that speaks to the diversity of Latin American communities.



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