A Task-Based Model of Process Writing for Korean Learners

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This study aims to identify and describe ways in which insights from research and practice in Task-Based Language Teaching can be applied in a process-oriented approach to the teaching of second language writing in a writing course for Korean university students. It was found that the various stages in a process-oriented approach to writing closely mirror steps that can be seen in a classical framework for task-based learning proposed by Jane Willis (1996). It was also found that the multiple episodes of collaborative interaction that are obtained from such an approach, and one which also involves frequent opportunities for both peer and teacher feedback, were well received by Korean learners who appeared to have a natural predisposition and preference for mutually supportive interaction at every stage in the process. It is argued that the value attached to interdependence in Korean culture and a preference for immersion in group activities over isolated and individualistic activity can account for this observation.

Keywords: foreign language writing, task-based language teaching (TBLT), collaborative writing, peer interaction

INTRODUCTION

For those who teach second language writing in Korea as a separate discipline from the other skills, it may at first seem difficult to know how to apply insights from Task-Based Language Teaching (hereinafter, TBLT). A survey of both the popular and scholarly literature might give the impression that TBLT is primarily focused on fostering improvement in students' general language skills with an emphasis on oral/aural skills rather than on written skills.

In large scale treatments on TBLT like Ellis (2003), Nunan (2004),

and Willis and Willis (2007) for example, writing tasks are presented from time to time in example task cycles but most often not where a written text is the ultimate outcome. This, of course, is not to say that any TBLT researcher or language teacher would downplay the value of learning to write well in a second language. It is simply the case that in approaches to second language education after the decline of the grammar-translation method, writing has mostly tended to serve as a facilitative exercise to what has become the more important business of speaking and listening, as communicative language teaching has moved to the center ground.

The application in the language classroom of TBLT in its purest form, with its emphasis on oral interaction, *negotiation of meaning* (Long, 1991), and its potential to assist language acquisition by fostering *noticing* of form (Schmidt, 1994) by way of helpful oral recasts and comprehension checks, makes it understandable that writing has a lower priority among possible tasks from which a teacher can choose when planning a lesson or syllabus.

There are obvious reasons for this. For a time at least, when the actual writing is done, only one person can hold the pen or type on the keyboard! Certainly in the classroom at least, if the extent of the writing runs beyond the production of more than, say, a paragraph, then this can potentially become a non-interactive and time-consuming activity although, as we shall see later, collaborative writing can address this problem. However, when planning task-based lessons in language courses of a general nature, language teachers can be forgiven for initially concluding that with the time available to them, other types of tasks, and ones which promote more oral interaction among students, would be more profitable in the classroom. This would certainly seem to be the case within so-called "four-skill" language courses. Here the production of written texts is often considered best given as a homework assignment, to be done outside the classroom and in a student's own time.

For these reasons, many second language teachers may wonder, if they wish to apply the most effective insights from the kind of interaction that TBLT promotes, just how much progress can be made in written skills within the context of a general language course.

When a written text is produced, students desire, and teachers of course feel obliged to provide, corrective feedback − a response that shows up issues not only of grammar and mechanics but also of style,

presentation, and content. The labor involved in this endeavor for the teacher can be multiplied many times over by individual variation in students' written proficiencies and by large class sizes in a traditional approach to the teaching of writing. The teaching of second language writing skills, therefore, naturally gives rise to a process of cyclical interaction among student writers and the instructor, which tends to involve multiple drafting, revision, and editing. With this in mind, it seems clear that a course of study devoted purely to second language writing best affords the time necessary to make significant progress. In this context (language courses devoted exclusively to writing), does TBLT still have something to offer? In this paper, I intend to argue that it can.

First, I will undertake a brief historical sketch of contemporary approaches to second language writing. Next, I will argue that process-based approaches are optimal for writing improvement since factors beyond linguistic competence often determine the quality of written products. Finally, and for the most part, I will show how insights from research and practice in TBLT can optimize such a process-based approach to second language writing in the South Korean context.

In an excellent short survey of developments in second language composition since 1945, Tony Silva identifies the four most influential approaches that have dominated second language writing ever since: Controlled Composition, Current-Traditional Rhetoric, the Process Approach, and English for Academic Purposes (Silva, 1990). Silva also notes that these approaches have arisen from L1 composition research and practice, have faded from time to time, but have never really gone away. This can easily be detected when one looks at any classroom text on writing in the ESL/EFL marketplace today.

APPROACHES TO SECOND LANGUAGE COMPOSITION

Controlled Composition

"...the handmaid of the other skills." (Rivers, 1968, p. 241)

Controlled composition was rooted in the audiolingual method of second language teaching and in behaviorist psychology, and conceives

of writing as a mere subservient concern best employed to reinforce speech habits. Writing accurate error-free sentences was the main aim of this approach, and a student writer's style and originality were not deemed of any concern. Learning to write in a second language was not regarded as an end in itself and did not require attention to audience or purpose. Writing, then, was seen as a pragmatic exercise in habit formation. Students wrote sentences as a means of learning vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. In this era, there were some (Erazmus, 1960; Brière, 1966) who believed that extended free composition could serve the dual purpose of assisting language control and developing written fluency; however, such notions were strongly opposed by others like Pincas (1962), who claimed that free composition was "in direct opposition to the ideals of scientific habit-forming teaching methods" (p. 185).

Current-Traditional Rhetoric / Product-Oriented Approach

It was not until the 1960s that a professional consensus began to recognize and appreciate the need for students to be able to produce quality extended writing for themselves and argued for second language writing to be seen as more than just an exercise to reinforce grammar and accuracy. Kaplan (1967) called for training in rhetorical skills above the level of the sentence so that students would be able to write letters, reports, and essays that could avoid violating a native reader's expectations. Here for the first time, consideration for the *reader* of second language writing emerged, and attention shifted from the production of sentences as mere grammar practice to the assembling of paragraphs and essays to serve students' needs to produce written texts for a particular purpose. Classroom procedures, however, remained controlled and focused on form, with extended writing viewed as an exercise in fitting given sentences together to produce model paragraphs for letters, reports, and essays but also involving the identification of appropriate development options such as description, exemplification, comparison, and illustration. This would constitute the traditional approach to teaching second language writing – very much a product-oriented approach. Here a teacher might display for students a model of the kind of text that students were obliged to approximate, and attention would be drawn to certain rhetorical forms and ways of doing introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions, etc. Students would then be

given a different task or title and were asked to write their own text, incorporating as many transferable aspects of the model as possible. Teachers would then take in the written work, evaluate it, and return it to the student with a score and perhaps some useful comments and corrections. The process of writing, then, was undertaken largely in isolation and following a teacher's instruction in a very teacher-fronted lesson with the focus on the product.

The Process-Oriented Approach

From the descriptions given above of the earliest approaches, the reader can guess that it would not be long before both teachers and students would express frustration not only at the lack of provision for individual thought and expression but also at the very narrow view of writing implicit in these approaches. The linear and prescriptivist nature of both came under attack, particularly in the early 1980s from those like Zamel (1983) who drew attention to the *process* that necessarily lies behind the composition of a text. This, he claimed, was a "non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning" (Zamel, 1983, p. 165). This approach encourages teachers to help students generate ideas in a positive, collaborative environment, to have feedback from peers as well as the instructor, to have the chance to revise and edit different drafts, and to enjoy the process of composing. As I will try to show later, this is the context for the development of second language writing that is likely to produce the most desirable results, and it is also an environment that can benefit greatly from insights from TBLT.

English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

Silva (1990) notes that rather than being a new and distinctive approach to teaching second language writing, the EAP movement is more of a reaction to the perceived shortcomings of the process approach in preparing students for academic work. Despite the obvious benefits of process-based writing in addressing the perceived shortcomings of controlled composition and current-traditional rhetoric approaches, its critics tend to come from those in the business of researching and

teaching academic register. Some, like Horowitz (1996) claim that however enjoyable and collaborative these workshop-style classrooms may be in the process approach, they fail to approximate "the situations in which [students' writing] will eventually be exercised" (p. 144). He also points out that process-oriented writing will not prepare students for the way academic writing is usually graded (i.e., product only). The EAP approach by contrast, focuses on academic discourse genres and the true nature of real-world academic assignments. This approach has a clear view of writing as that which would be acceptable at tertiary academic institutions, and therefore, classroom teaching methodology should involve the identification and approximation of common academic discourse genres.

Summary

It is clear from this short historical survey of approaches to second language writing that controlled composition, whilst no doubt useful for the reinforcement of grammatical sentences and other sentence-level features of writing, is insufficient to deal with suprasentential discourse. The approach offered by current-traditional rhetoric was an important step forward in its recognition of the need for students to produce texts for real-world use, not only for academic purposes but also for social interaction (notes, letters) and business (reports). The EAP approach highlighted the need to take account of the expectations of the reader.

Despite the criticisms of the process approach from the EAP community, my own view is that despite the formulaic nature of academic discourse genres, indeed any texts in which students need to approximate stylized modes of discourse, a collaborative process-based approach will be more effective than having students writing largely in isolation. As for the contention that such an approach will not mirror real-life situations faced by students outside the classroom, I would argue that process writing is just as apt to inculcate useful habits of text generation and production (brainstorming, mind-mapping, self-editing skills, awareness of an audience) as the close examination of target texts. These habits can and do remain, and are accessible to the student when obliged to prepare a text on his or her own.

In addition, whilst the process approach may seem to prioritize a writer's composing behavior, it is not inevitable that other important concerns (i.e., accuracy, specific types of discourse, and audience) are

neglected within it. Indeed the most attractive features of the process approach to second language writing are that it can be largely interactive and so have ecological validity (teachers can construct lessons that are not unduly dull and form-focused), and it can incorporate attention to the most salient aspects of the other approaches.

SUPPORT FOR A PROCESS APPROACH

There is a significant body of research that indicates that factors unrelated to language proficiency determine the quality of student writing and that, in fact, effective composing behavior is a more accurate indicator of effective writing.

Jones (1982) studied the writing processes and texts produced by two L2 writers, one described as "poor" and the other described as "good" in a measure of their effectiveness in writing and analyzed the composing strategies of both by recording them as they "composed aloud" to produce a self-generated narrative. Jones found that the writers' composing strategies affected the quality of their writing. The poor writer was found to be bound to the text at the expense of ideas, whereas the good writer allowed her ideas to generate the text. Jones concluded that the poor writer had never learned how to undertake a composition and that this, rather than a lack of language proficiency, was the main reason for her problems with writing in a second language. Jacobs (1982) studied a group of eleven L1 and L2 graduate student writers of English who each produced 13 essays in the research period. In addition to studying the text products, the students were also interviewed on their composing processes. The researcher found that the nature of the academic tasks given resulted in two main problems for all the writers: "integrative thinking" and "phrasing for correctness and readability." The researcher found an inverse relationship between integrative thinking and grammatical accuracy that related to the students' development as writers that she cites as further evidence of composition skills being a more important factor than linguistic competence. Zamel (1982) came to the same conclusion when interviewing eight "proficient" university-level L2 writers and requiring them to give retrospective accounts of their "writing experiences and behaviors" as well as examining several drafts per student of an essay

they had to write. She concluded that the more students had understood and experienced composing as a process, the better their written products were.

Examples of case study research such as these cannot be regarded as conclusive, but they do indicate that practice and experience in composing processes can have a positive effect on second language writing and can at least mitigate the effects of problems from linguistic competence. L2 writing is much more than just a question of surface-level errors, and since these can be attended to in the revision and editing of different drafts in the composing process, coaching in how to generate ideas, how to select and dismiss the fruit of brainstorming activities, how to organize ideas into paragraphs, and how to reflect upon a draft can be seen to be at least equally beneficial in the overall effectiveness of a piece of writing.

TASKS IN SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING

The concept of tasks has come to be recognized as a central concept in L2 curriculum design. Michael H. Long's (1985) definition of target (real-world) tasks is very broad: "The hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between," whilst for Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001), the term can be defined more succinctly when taking about pedagogic (classroom) tasks: "A task is an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective." Crookes (1986) sees the need to posit "a specified objective" to a task, while Prabhu (1987) describes a task as "an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process" (p. 24).

Whilst there have been multiple attempts to define "task," there is general agreement that in the classroom it refers to an activity that is accomplished using language and where students are primarily focused on meaning. The definition of "task" that seems most apt for a task in process-oriented second language writing is from Nunan (1989):

> ...a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target

language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right. (p. 10)

Collaborative activities leading to a completed written text would constitute tasks in this definition and also ones that reach completion in a final product that can "stand alone." Furthermore, it will be shown that a process-oriented approach to second language writing can provide ample opportunity for students to interact in the target language with their attention focused primarily on meaning as they move through a task cycle that involves comprehending, manipulating, producing, and of course, interacting in the target language.

To best illustrate how insights from TBLT can be applied to process-oriented writing, it will be useful to present an outline of the stages in a task-based learning framework for writing that might be used.

CONTEXT

The context for the example in Table 1 is a course in "Introductory Academic English Writing for University Freshman" in South Korea that the author has employed now for a number of years. The students are level-tested on both speaking and writing ability at the intermediate level of proficiency in both skills, which has been found to correspond to B1 on the Common European Framework range of descriptors. There are 20–22 students per class in a large room with movable desks, and students are encouraged to make use of tablets and notebook computers in the process of collaboratively constructing texts. The classroom features a whiteboard and a drop-down screen, and the teacher has access to an e-podium. There is also a ceiling-mounted computer-linked projector operated by remote control.

The course objectives are that students should gain experience in composing, writing, and editing simple five-paragraph essays as an introduction to academic writing. The modes of discourse to be practiced include narration, exposition, argumentation, and description. The use of the L1 (Korean) is not permitted in the classroom.

Jane Willis (1996) proposes a framework for task-based learning that

involves three stages: a pre-task phase, a task cycle (task-planning-report) and a final language focus phase. In Table 2, I have provided a scheme of work for collaborative writing that was adapted to follow her model.

TABLE 1. A Task-Based, Process-Oriented Scheme of Work

Lesson 1	**Pre-task 1**: A topic is introduced. Teacher explores the topic with the class and elicits useful words and phrases. In small groups, students discuss a number of questions to form initial ideas.
Homework	Students do some Internet research on the topic, collect images to take notes, and gather more information on the topic in general.
Lesson 2	Students share the additional information they have found. Various writing assignment titles on the topic are provided. Student pairs are permitted to choose which assignment they would like to tackle. **Task 1: Produce a Mind Map or Spidergram**: Students brainstorm ideas for the assignment by designing spidergrams / mind maps in notebooks.
Homework	**Planning**: To add further detail to their mind maps and to create a finished version on an A3-sized sheet to show to other students/groups.
Lesson 3	**Report Stage**: Student pairs circulate, showing their finished mind maps to other groups and getting feedback and further suggestions. **Pre-task 2**: Teacher displays an essay outline to discuss with students and shows how to produce an essay outline from a mind map.
Homework	**Task 2 Planning. Make an Essay Outline**: Students collaborate to use the ideas from the mind map to make an outline in their notebook for their essay. They organize their ideas under paragraph headings such as *introduction, main body para. 1, main body para. 2, conclusion*, etc.
Lesson 4	**Report Stage**: Student pair groups show to and consult with the teacher on their essay outline. Teacher provides suggestions and asks each pair to explain how each paragraph will develop – by explanation, exemplification, reasoning, illustration, etc. **Pre-task 3**: Teacher gives students some advice on the formatting and layout of a five-paragraph essay.
Homework	**Planning & Task 3. Write an Essay**: Student pairs collaborate to write Draft 1 of their essay.
Lesson 5	**Report Stage**: Student pair groups exchange their Draft 1's with other groups and receive feedback and peer editing, and are asked questions on content and comprehensibility. **Pre-task 4**: Teacher and student groups discuss how to incorporate feedback into the next draft.
Homework	**Planning & Task 4. Write a Second Draft**: Student pairs collaborate to write Draft 2 incorporating ideas and suggestions they obtained.

Lesson 6	**Report Stage**: Students consult with the teacher on Draft 2, and the teacher gives indirect feedback only (errors just highlighted) on issues of grammar and mechanics. Students then work together to attempt to repair the errors that the teacher has highlighted (indirect corrective feedback).
Homework	Students make corrections and email Draft 3 to the teacher.
Language Focus	After taking in the final drafts, the teacher then composes some projector slides on which are displayed sentences extracted from the essays that evidence what the teacher has found to be some recurring types of errors that are common to most if not all students. The students can then work in small groups on their hard copy of the slide to attempt to repair the errors that have been identified. Often in this context, student pairs will recognize particular sentences as being ones that they themselves composed and therefore are personally motivated to repair the errors. This final stage of the process then constitutes the main *focus on forms* (Long, 1991), although of course during the composing process, the teacher had earlier consulted with students in the Task 4 report stage and given indirect feedback on form. This is then a *focused task* that is designed to "provide opportunities for communicating using some specific linguistic features" (Ellis, 2009).

On the basis of 3 x 50-minute lessons per class per week, this cycle takes place over a two-week period and occurs 5–6 times during a standard 16-week university semester. The students work in collaboration with a partner and in small groups throughout and get practice in generating ideas for writing, presenting their ideas to others, defending their viewpoints, debating, and developing self-editing skills. An important aim of the course is for students to develop good habits and routines that will enable them to deal with the task of producing written essays on their own in the future and eventually become autonomous in the production of written texts that may be required of them later in their university life by their Korean professors in other subjects.

Willis (1996) points out that writing is often done just to be graded, but "to make a change, to give students a real sense of purpose and to raise motivation, it is possible to think of other audiences that might benefit by reading something your students have written" (p. 63).

At the university in Korea, there are other groups taught by other foreign instructors who are following the same course in introductory academic writing. The students' final drafts of essays can be made available to the other classes online in order to receive comments and further feedback after each cycle is completed. In this way, the process is more motivating and meaningful to the students because, in addition

to being read by groups within their own class and also the instructor, they are also writing for a wider population of students who together form a nascent academic discourse community of writers at a similar level of development to themselves.

Ellis (2009) notes that TBLT emphasizes "purposeful and functional" language work and has its origins in Dewey's (1913) views on the importance of "intelligent effort" for effective learning. When contrasted with the earlier product-oriented approach to writing as seen in current-traditional rhetoric, we can see how a collaborative process-oriented approach to writing given in Table 1 is a much better fit with these notions.

In order to further illustrate how TBLT principles can optimize this collaborative process-oriented scheme of work based on Willis' (1996) framework, we can demonstrate by extracting one of the stages how it can be manipulated in order to foster a communicative gap between student pairs and thereby encourage negotiation of meaning (Long, 1991).

In the early stages of the writing course at the Korean university, students are encouraged to challenge each other to explain themselves clearly at each stage, and to this end, they are seeded with target phrases that they must attempt to activate throughout the process in interaction with other pairs and groups. Examples of the types of phrases that are given are

Do you mean...? (Asking for clarification);
What's the reason for that? Why do you want to write about that?
(Asking for explanation);
What I mean is... / Let me put it another way... (Clarifying);
So, what you're trying to say is.../ I think what you mean is...
(Reformulating).

Here we try to extract a double value from the course for the students because a process-oriented approach to writing involves as much talk *about* writing as it does actual writing. We can see here that this is very different from a traditional product-oriented approach, which basically only involves listening to a teacher's instruction, studying models of target texts, and writing in isolation. In encouraging the students to challenge each other in this way, we attempt to turn as many of the phases of the task cycle as possible into episodes of meaningful

interaction that may promote focus on form in spoken exchanges about writing. These constitute *unfocused tasks* defined by Ellis (2009) as those "designed to provide learners with opportunities for using language in general communicatively" (p. 223).

An example will serve to demonstrate this. In the Lesson 3 report stage in Table 1, student pairs exchange the mind maps/spidergrams that they have created for the assignment they will have to write. However, this is no mere reading exercise. When the spidergrams are exchanged, a student pair is asked to try to orally reconstruct from the spidergram the way in which the other group's essay is going to develop. Spidergrams, of course, only contain brief notes written in circles that are graphically linked to other circles with related ideas. This forces one pair to try to imagine what the other pair meant by these short phrases, and of course, they then have to seek confirmation or try again. In this respect, the tasks in the proposed scheme of work incorporate all four skills of speaking, reading, listening, and writing and therefore are integrative tasks and constitute a combination of input-providing tasks (involving listening and reading) and output-prompting tasks (engaging students in speaking and writing). In another example of this, we can see that the Lesson 1 homework is to collect images and further information on the topic from the Internet for sharing with other pair groups in the next lesson. We can exploit this by having students show their images to another pair who then have to guess how this image relates to the topic or what it can tell us about the topic. Here again, a communicative gap is created, which Ellis (2009) sees as essential in his understanding of TBLT.

The reader will not fail to have noticed that the actual writing that the students produce in this model is collaborative writing undertaken in pairs. This is something that is possible in the given context since, at the Korean university, the students are all required to live on campus in their first year and mostly do homework together, such is the nature of their Confucian cultural values where individualism is not encouraged. However, were it to be otherwise, the practice of requiring students to collaborate in the production of written texts would still be attempted.

Whilst Storch (2005) notes that this is still a "novel strategy," she finds, as I have done, that collaborative writing produces texts with greater grammatical accuracy and linguistic complexity than those produced individually and those in which the assignment is more successfully completed. Crucially, task-based, process-oriented

collaborative writing promotes the kind of interaction in the classroom and outside that enables students not only to learn how to produce good writing in a more intrinsically motivating and enjoyable way but also to improve oral and aural skills in the target language due to the sheer amount of speaking and listening to others that is required along the way. Certainly, for first-year Korean students coming from a high school educational system that requires them to undertake extensive reading and grammar practice only, this is a welcome change.

CONCLUSIONS

A process-oriented approach to second language writing has a natural requirement for a pre-writing/pre-task phase, a planning stage involving interaction with a focus primarily on meaning (with the potential for focus on *form*), completion of a main task (the production of a text), and a post-task phase in which focus on *forms* is undertaken. This means that it naturally and easily mirrors a task-based framework such as the one proposed by Jane Willis. It is possible to exploit this process still further to create information gaps in the frequent episodes of interaction between multiple periods of drafting in the process to derive all the benefits of a task-based approach to second language teaching that have been demonstrated in the scholarly literature on the subject.

Korean learners were found to be particularly well-suited for tasks requiring interaction at each stage in this model of process-based writing. Kim (2014) refers to "affectionate relationality in ordinary social interaction among Koreans" (p. 216), and this can be seen to assist collaborative interaction in tasks. Ahn (2011) asserts that great value is given to interdependence in Korean culture, whilst Han and Ahn (1994) describe the Korean preference for immersion in group activities in order to achieve consensus. Kim and Choi (1998) refer to the unique concept of "we-ness" in their study of "Shim-cheong" psychology, and these observations demonstrate the reasons why Korean learners of English may find more fulfillment and derive greater benefit from the collaborative interaction that obtains from a task-based approach to process writing than a traditional individualistic style of composing texts.

Collaborative interaction through the various stages of process-based

writing also allows for scaffolding. The term "scaffolding" comes from sociocultural theory and is defined by Ellis (2008) in the following way:

> Scaffolding is an inter-psychological process through which learners internalize knowledge dialogically. That is, it is the process by which one speaker (an expert or a novice) assists another speaker (a novice) to perform a skill that they are unable to perform independently. (p. 234)

Kim and Kim (2005) claim that a scaffolding learning strategy is ideal for Korean learners as it "helps create active interactions between a teacher and students and also between students themselves" (p. 8). Scaffolding allows for the kind of mutual assistance that can lead to the co-construction of knowledge and the acquisition of new skills occurring in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) − "the area between what [learners] can do independently and what they can do with assistance" (p. 8).

Kim and Kim (2005) also argue that teachers of writing to Korean learners "need to apply alternative forms of feedback such as teacher-to-student conferencing, peer feedback, in-class grammar instruction...and maintenance of error charts or logs" (p. 10). All these forms of response to student writing are featured in the task-based model of process writing described herein.

An approach to the teaching of writing in English that involves collaborative interaction at every stage in a multi-draft process − a process that incorporates both teacher and peer feedback − is one that may be of more benefit to Korean learners than ones that require an isolated and individualistic approach.

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