

Linguistic Features and Structures in Newspaper Headlines of the ‘*The Standard*’ and ‘*Daily Nation*’ on Banditry, Kenya, 2023

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ABSTRACT: *This article aims to look into the linguistic features and structures used in The Standard and Daily Nation Newspaper Headlines on the subject, banditry and the possible implication that it has to the shaping of public perception, informing government responses and raising awareness about the challenges posed by banditry. The study adopted systemic functional linguistics framework, introduced by Michael Halliday in the 1960s. It also adopted analytical research design. Data collection involved the development of a coding sheet. A coding sheet was developed to guide the systematic categorization and analysis of linguistic features and structures present in the newspaper headlines. Content analysis was employed to examine the functions, themes and the rhetorical devices used in the headlines to portray banditry incidents. The data analysis procedure entailed a systematic analysis of the newspaper headlines, aiming to examine the ways they reflect the realities on reporting of banditry in the study regions. The findings revealed that there is a nuanced interplay of linguistic features that significantly shape the construction of public perception. The headlines employed vivid verbs, descriptive adjectives, and metaphors to convey the actions, attributes, and causes associated with banditry. Rhetorical questions, emotive language, personalization, and attributions to sources engaged readers emotionally and conveyed the stance of news sources. The recommendations from this study suggests that newspapers should use varied linguistic elements to offer readers with a more comprehensive knowledge of banditry, editors and journalists should also be creative and precise in their terminologies, use language appropriately when reporting difficult themes and the media should employ rhetorical questions and emotive language with caution. There should be a balance to ensure that emotions do not overpower accurate reporting.*

KEYWORDS: Linguistic feature, devices, structures, word choices, rhetoric, headlines

INTRODUCTION

Reporting on banditry in Kenyan newspapers has been a crucial aspect of media coverage over the years. Banditry, characterized by acts of violence and theft, has been a persistent issue in these counties, posing threats to security, loss of lives, and displacement of communities and disruption of socio-economic development. In Eastern Africa, there is hardly any major pastoral group that lives entirely within the boundaries of one state. Pastoralists on the border areas like Turkana, Toposa, Merile, Karamojong, Boran have established alliances with their cousins across the border. In some cases, like among the Oromo of Ethiopia and Somali of Kenya, they have joined liberation movement seeking separation or greater autonomy from the centralized states of the Eastern Africa. In other cases, the individual groups have asserted their superiority over neighbors by use of arms through internecine raids. Despite this conflict there are continuous flows of people, arms and livestock across the borders through raids and smuggling and this has escalated raiding leading into bandit activities (Amutabi, 2010).

The media plays a significant role in shaping public perception, informing government responses and raising awareness about the challenges posed by banditry. Newspapers are important sources of information for the general public, policy makers and other stakeholders, making them powerful agents in shaping public discourse and influencing public opinion. Kim and Lee (2019) indicates that headlines play a significant role in capturing attention and shaping memory, ultimately affecting how people perceive banditry.

Newspaper headlines plays a very important role as a primary medium used to disseminate information and shape public perceptions in many issues including societal issues and banditry. The nature of these headlines necessitates careful linguistic choices and rhetorical devices that are aimed at capturing the readers' attention and at the same time conveying the essence of the news story. Looking at the functional aspect of newspaper headlines on issues concerning banditry provided valuable insight on the communicative strategies used by journalists and the discursive representations of this phenomenon within the public sphere.

In the field of linguistics, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) provide a very wide framework that can be used to analyze language used in different context, including media discourse (headlines). By looking at the functional roles that language play in the construction of meanings, representation of societal realities and negotiating power relations, SFL helped in offering a comprehensive lens through which one can explore the linguistic dynamics of newspaper headlines on banditry.

Pennebaker & King (1999) investigated the relationship between the linguistic styles and personality traits like extraversion, neuroticism and openness; they discovered that linguistic features such, such as word choice, pronoun use and sentence structure, are indicatives of different

personality dimensions. These linguistic styles are important in conveying individual differences, emotions and personality traits. The result of this study gives insight into understanding the underlying perspectives, attitudes and emotions conveyed by the news outlets. This study also sheds some light on the psychological implications influencing individuals' perceptions and emotional responses. These linguistic styles employed in newspaper headlines can help in identifying the potential psychological impact on the reader. How specific words have been used, word choice, linguistic structures and framing techniques in the headlines may shape the public perceptions, attitudes and emotional reactions towards the mentioned regions. Investigating the choice of words, the sentence structure and rhetorical devices in newspaper headlines can shed light on how the news outlets engage their audience and convey information about banditry. It will help to assess persuasiveness, effectiveness of communication in terms of clarity and potential biases in the representation of the issue. The choice of word will also provide a deeper understanding of how the media outlets portray and frame the issue of banditry in relation to the cultural and regional context of West Pokot, Baringo and Laikipia counties.

Van Egmond and Wigham (2013) study on 'The Effect of Word Choice on Perceptions of Credibility and Likeability in Online Consumer Reviews' investigated the impact of word choice in online consumer reviews on perception and likeability. They found out that choice of words in online review can have significant influence on how consumers perceive the credibility and likeability of the reviewer. They realized in their study that positive description and descriptive word choices were associated with higher perceptions of credibility and likeability, while negative and aggressive word choices had opposite effect. From their findings and conclusion, we can say that there is a potential impact of specific words and language on credibility and linkage, which could give insight when examining the linguistic features and structure present in the newspaper headlines on banditry in Kenya's West Pokot, Baringo and Laikipia counties. This can contribute to deeper analysis of the persuasive strategies employed in the headlines and their potential effect on the readers' interpretation and attitudes.

Gries (2007) explored the use of rhetorical devices in speech. He discovered that communication and persuasive effects of rhetorical questions contribute to the understanding of their role's speech events. By understanding how rhetorical questions functions as a persuasive tool in engaging the audience and prompt their reasoning, the analysis of newspaper headlines can identify instances where rhetorical questions are used to evoke some reactions and influence public perception. This study is significance because for this research because it gives insight on the communicative strategies employed by headlines writers to capture the readers' attention, provoke thought, and shape their understanding of banditry issues in the specified regions of Kenya. Vipond and Hunt (1990), agree with Gries (2007) that rhetorical devices can be used in public persuasion contexts and can have effect on the persuasiveness and audience response. Vipond & Hunt research could potentially provide a route map into the persuasive power of various rhetorical devices and their effectiveness in influencing public opinion or attitudes.

Although the literature reviewed discussed linguistic features in newspaper headlines broadly, there was need for a more focused analysis of linguistic features specific to banditry headlines. This involved a detailed examination of verb choices, adjectives, metaphors, and other linguistic elements unique to the reporting of banditry incidents.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Systemic Functional Linguistic Theory. This theory was originally developed by the British linguist Michael Halliday in the 1960s. Other proponents of this theory are: Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen, Ruqaiya Hasan, James R. Martin and J.R. Firth. Their contribution has helped shape the theoretical framework, analytical tools and methodologies of SFL, making it a robust and widely used approach in linguistic analysis.

This theory examines language as a social semiotic system. It focuses on the functional aspect of language and how language choices are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which communication occurs. “Systemic” is at the core of SFL which refers to the structured and interconnected nature of language. SFL recognizes that language is composed of various interrelated systems, including systems of grammar, system of semantics and system of lexis.

These systems work together to fulfill communicative functions and express meanings in specific social situations. This theory also emphasizes the functional aspect of language; that language is not just a set of abstract rules but a tool for communication and meaning making. Language choices such as word choice, sentence structures and rhetorical devices are seen as strategic means to achieve specific communicative purpose. In the context of newspaper headlines on banditry, linguistic choices may bring effect to the goal of informing the public, evoking emotions and shaping their opinions on banditry.

SFL also recognizes that language is always used in specific social and cultural context and meaning is shaped by the interaction between language and context. The context involves the social roles of the participants, the cultural norms and values and the situational factors that influence communication. In news headlines, SFL aided in the analysis of how linguistic choices in the headlines are influenced by the social, cultural and political context in which they are produced.

This theory also recognizes the relationship between language and social structures. It recognizes that language both reflects and shapes social realities and investigates how language use is influenced by and contributes to power relations, ideologies and social hierarchies. In this study SLF helped examine how newspaper headlines reflect or perpetuate certain power structures, social biases or political interests related to banditry.

In general, applying SFL to the analysis of newspaper headlines on banditry can offer valuable insights into the linguistic choices, meanings and social implications embedded in the headlines.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Linguistic Features and Structures

Brown and Yule (1983) define linguistic features as observable language qualities such as word choice, sentence structure, and speech patterns that influence how meaning is conveyed in a text. Halliday (1994) agrees that linguistic features include all aspects of language use, such as lexical choices, grammatical structures, and discourse patterns, which influence how meaning is conveyed in a text. Chomsky (1965) defines linguistic structures as the patterns and rules that regulate the order and combination of words and phrases in a language. According to Bloomfield (1933), linguistic structures are observable patterns of sound, form, and meaning that make up a language, such as the arrangement of phonemes, morphemes, and sentences. In general, linguistic structures influence how words and elements are ordered to communicate meaning and enable communication. SFL was used to identify linguistic features present in the newspaper headlines. These feature includes the lexical choices, grammatical structures and rhetorical devices used to convey information about banditry.

Punctuation Marks on Headlines

In the headline 'Informers-the enemy within frustrating campaign against bandits in North-Rift' (Daily Nation, 14 March 2023), a hyphen is used to connect the two noun phrases "Informers" and "the enemies within". This hyphen has been used to form compound nouns or to emphasize a close relationship between words or phrases. It has also been used in the headline "Bandits kill five amid KDF-backed security operation" (Daily Nation "Bandits kill five amid KDF-backed security operation") to separate "KDF" from "backed" to suggest that the Kenya Defense Forces support or endorse the security operation.

The headline "The secretive, military-like life bandits in North-Rift" (Daily Nation, 16 February 2023) uses a comma to divide the two words ("secretive" and "military-like") and creates a pause between them. It also distinguishes "life" from the adjectives. "Life" is the key noun in the headline, reflecting the topic of conversation. It was also used in the headline 'Bandits now deploy guerrilla methods to counter military, police' (Daily Nation, 8 March 2023) to distinguish the two elements in the prepositional phrase "military, police". The title "Baringo bandits defy Kindiki's night curfew order, stage fifth attack" refers to a pause between the bandits' violation of the curfew order and their subsequent actions. It clarifies the headline's structure and aids in the organization of information for the reader.

The Standard's (12 February 2023) headline "Bandits stripped police officers in Kainuk, Survivor reveals" uses a comma to separate two components: the action (Bandits stripped police officers in Kainuk) and additional information (Survivors disclose). It signals a halt or separation between these components. It distinguishes between the event and the subsequent information, yielding a

clear structure. In their book 'Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count', Pennebaker, Booth, and Francis (2007) introduce a commonly used text analysis tool in psychology and linguistics. This software allows academics to analyze written or spoken language and identify linguistic features and categories. This tool provides a systematic technique to analyzing and categorizing words in a text based on numerous language characteristics, including emotional tone, cognitive processes, social interactions, and other linguistic structures. This facilitates the psychological and cognitive processes involved in language use. In terms of this research, the insights presented in this book will be a valuable resource for understanding the theoretical framework and practical methodologies of language and word choice analysis.

The principles and methodologies presented in this book can be used to conduct analysis on the language features and structures found in newspaper headlines, as well as their potential ramifications. The headline "Where are the soldiers?" has a question mark. Residents weep as bandits reign terror" (Daily Nation, March 16, 2023), indicating that this is an interrogative sentence, encouraging the reader to think about the topic provided. In the title "KDF versus Police; The supremacy wars derailing banditry security operation" (Daily Nation, March 17, 2023), a semicolon is used to separate and underline the two linked but independent portions of the headline. Pennebaker, Booth, and Francis (2007) introduce a text analysis software for psychology and linguistics, allowing researchers to analyze written or spoken language and extract linguistic features. This tool categorizes words into dimensions like emotional tone, cognitive processes, and social relationships, aiding in understanding psychological and cognitive processes in language use. The semicolon is used to express pause and give a sense of contrast and importance between the two parts of the headline. It has also been used in The Standard (Natembeya, 13 Feb 2023) to divide two connected but autonomous phrases. It suggests that the comment made by (Natembeya, 13 Feb 2023) is relevant and requires distinct attention. It informs readers that what follows is an extension or explanation of the remark made by (Natembeya, 13 Feb 2023).

The colon has been used to introduce and underline the material that follows, indicating that it will provide specifics or disclosure in the heading "Revealed: The Major-General tasked with flushing out bandits" (Daily Nation, 15 February 2023). Goudarzi and Motallebzadeh (2011) found that language choice in advertising significantly impacts effective communication and engagement. They suggest that headlines should consider cultural context and reader preferences to ensure effective communication and engagement in newspapers. It indicates to the reader that crucial information will be revealed. In the title "Banditry: Families heed directives to leave homes" (The Standard, 14 Mar 2023), a colon is used to introduce and emphasize the topic or subject of the headline, which is 'Banditry'. This indicates to the reader that the next information is relevant to this topic. It also differentiates the topic from the rest of the headline, making it stand out visually and calling attention to the 'Banditry' issue.

To signify a direct quote or a documented assertion, quotation marks are used around the word "mysterious white helicopter" in the title "NIS knows of 'mysterious white helicopter' in Baringo banditry attack: Natembeya" (Daily Nation, 14 Feb 2023). The quote marks are an important and possibly controversial feature of the plot. It indicates that this sentence was used verbatim in a statement or report. The phrase 'mother of all demonstrations' is placed in single quotes, suggesting that it is a direct quote or a reported comment. Lesuuda uses a single quotation to explain himself in a specific and striking way. It implies that this sentence is critical for interpreting her threat.

Phrases in Newspaper Headlines

A phrase is a tiny group of words that form a mental unit and are often used as a component of a clause. The noun phrase "bandits on highway" appears in the Standard's headline "Kithure Kindiki now orders police to flush out bandits on the highway." The noun 'Bandits' refers to the aim or object of the activity. It defines who or what will be removed by the police. "OnTo the highway" adds context by stating where the bandits will be flushed out. It implies that the action is linked to a specific highway. "Banditry: Families heed directives to leave homes" (The Standard, 14 Mar 2023) uses the noun phrase "Banditry: Families heed directives". The word "banditry" refers to both the main issue and the topic of the headline. It is a clear and short topic identifier that informs the reader about the article's subject matter. The term "families" refers to the people who are the subject of the phrase. It shows the story's focus, emphasizing that it is about people and how they respond to a circumstance.

Directives are the instructions or commands issued by authorities. It conveys a sense of urgency and obedience. The noun term "security forces" was used in the headline "Security forces bomb bandit's hideout in Baringo" (Daily Nation, 16 Mar 2023) to designate the primary characters in the headline, stressing the parties responsible for the mentioned action. The possessive noun phrase "Kindiki's night curfew order" is used in "Baringo bandits defy Kindiki's night curfew order, stage fifth attack" (Daily Nation, 27 Feb 2023) to express possession, suggesting that the curfew order was issued by someone called Kindiki. This statement connects the curfew order to a specific government official, providing more information and context to the story.

The verb phrase "orders police to flush out" was employed. "Orders" is the key verb used to describe Kithure Kindiki's actions. It signifies that he is directing or commanding someone to do something. The term "police" identifies the recipients of the directive. It identifies who is being asked to take action. "To flush out" is a verb phrase that refers to the exact activity that the police are told to take. It refers to the forcible removal or expulsion of bandits from a highway. The headline "Historical and contemporary factors that fuel cattle rustling, banditry" (The Standard, 2 Mar 2023) uses the infinitive verb phrase "to fuel cattle rustling, banditry" to describe the aim or impact of these variables that contribute to livestock rustling and banditry. It helps to convey the cause-and-effect link in the headline. The phrase "bomb bandit's hideout in Baringo" conveys the

headline's major event, which is a military or security operation including the use of explosives ("bomb") against a bandit hideout.

The major action verb is "bomb," which indicates the action performed by the security forces, but "bandit's hideout" specifies the target of the action, indicating that it is the site utilized by bandits. ("Security forces bomb bandits' hideout in Baringo," Daily Nation, December 12, 2023). "Security operation" appears in the title "Bandits kill five amid KDF-backed security operation" (Daily Nation, March 25, 2023). This phrase defines the operation indicated in the headline. It explains the nature of the operation, which is security-related, and provides context for the reported occurrences.

The prepositions "in Baringo again" and "in Kainuk" were used in the headlines "Fierce gunfire as bandits attack police convoy in Baringo again" and "Bandits stripped police officers in Kainuk" (The Standard, October 25, 2023). These words refer to the area or place where the action occurred. It says that the activity took place in "Baringo" and "Kainuk" geographical areas, respectively. "Based on the rank of police officers they kill" is a prepositional phrase used in the headline "Natembeya; Bandits are promoted based on rank of police officers they kill" (The Standard, 13 February 2023), to clarify the criteria or justification for bandits' promotions. It states that promotions are based on the rank of the police officers they kill. The terms "out of banditry area" and "in 24hrs" were used in the headline "Interior CS Kindiki orders residents out of banditry areas in 24hrs" (The Standard, March 12, 2023). The former defines the goal or aim of the action, indicating that citizens are being forced to evacuate specific locations connected with banditry, whilst the latter denotes the time limit within which the action is scheduled to take place.

The phrase "in the valley of blood and death" appears in the title "Misery as bandits hold sway in valley of blood and death" (Daily Nation, November 7, 2023). "In" refers to the place, "valley" is a low area of ground between a hill and mountain, and "blood and death" conjures up thoughts of violence and mortality. This term paints a vivid and emotive picture of the region where the agony occurs. The phrase "valley of blood and death" conveys a dramatic and terrifying image, underlining the gravity of the situation. The phrase "over banditry claims" was used in the Daily Nation (17 February 2023) article "Why me? MP Pkosing cries over banditry allegations." This sentence establishes context by identifying the subject of MP Pkosing's emotional response. It clarifies the source of her unhappiness, saying that it is due to "banditry claims." It helps the reader understand the core issue.

Interrogatives in Newspaper Headlines

Interrogatives are terms used in queries. They are structures that carry the weight of a question. Interrogative The pronoun "where" appears in the headline, "Where are the Soldiers?" "Residents cry as bandits reign terror" (Daily Nation, March 16, 2023). "Where" functions as an interrogative pronoun, creating an inquiry. The phrase construction in "How bandits are outsmarting KDF,

Police in hotspots" (Daily Nation, February 19, 2023) was interrogative. The word "how" in the headline indicates that it is asking a question. The interrogative structure draws readers in by encouraging them to seek an explanation. It piques readers' interest and implies that the piece will reveal information about the bandits' tactics. The word "how" was also used in "How injured bandit staged escape from Iten hospital" (Daily Nation, 11 April 2023) to suggest that the headline is asking a question or making an inquiry.

The headline reads "Why me?" "MP Pkosing cries over banditry claims" (Daily Nation, 17 Feb 2023), the interrogative pronoun "Why" quickly piques the reader's curiosity and suggests that the MP, Pkosing, is questioning or asking for an explanation for something connected. It acts as an agent, inviting the reader to investigate the reason or elements underlying the difficult nature of defeating the North Rift robbers. "What government" is a noun phrase that begins an inquiry and expresses interest in the government's actions ("What government must do to end menace of bandit attacks," The Standard, July 2021). The word "What" at the beginning of the headline piques readers' interest in learning more about the answer presented in the text.

Figurative(s) in Newspaper Headlines

Figurative language is the use of words and phrases with a more imaginative meaning in order to achieve a specific impact. They include the use of similes, oxymorons, metaphors, hyperbole, personification, symbolism, alliteration, onomatopoeia, puns, irony, and more. A simile is a figure of speech that compares two separate objects using the words "like" or "as" to make a vivid, dramatic, or forceful contrast. In the title "Kithure Kindiki: Bandits are like AL-Shabaab or ISIS militants" (The Standard, 1 Mar 2023), bandits are compared to AL-Shabaab and ISIS militants, with the term "like" signifying a likeness.

It is noteworthy because it imprints a strong and lasting image on the reader's memory. By comparing the bandits to well-known and deadly extremist groups such as AL-Shabaab and ISIS, the title emphasizes the gravity of the issue and the perceived threat level posed by the bandits. This comparison may imply that decisive action is required to handle the banditry problem, just as forceful actions are made against extremist groups such as AL-Shabaab and ISIS. It could indicate support for more strong and severe measures to dealing with the issue. A metaphor is a phrase that describes something as something other than what it is in actuality. It is used to compare two objects figuratively. "A walk in the park" is a metaphor that has been used in the title "Why fighting North Rift bandits will not be a walk in the park," (The Standard, 21 February 2023). "A walk in the park" is used to describe anything that is simple and lacks considerable challenge.

In this case, it has been employed humorously to convey the opposite message, highlighting the difficulty of combating the robbers. "Fierce gunfire" appears in the headline "Fierce gunfire as bandits attack police convoy in Baringo again." (The Standard, 17 March 2017). This metaphor creates a clear mental image of the ferocity of the attack. It emphasizes the danger and violence of

the situation, making it more fascinating and frightening for the reader. "Flush out" in "Kithure Kindiki now orders police to flush out bandits on the highway" (The Standard, February 21, 2023). This concept is frequently connected with removing something undesirable or hazardous. The headline implies that Kindiki is taking decisive steps to clear the bandits from the route, highlighting the need for force. The term "fuel" is used metaphorically in the article "Historical and contemporary factors that fuel cattle rustling, banditry." It appears that a variety of variables contribute to the persistence of cattle rustling and banditry. It expresses the idea that these variables serve as a source of energy or nourishment for illegal activity.

Metonymy is a figure of speech that includes replacing one term with another that is closely related with it. Metonymy is used with "the people" in "Government should listen to the people on how to end the banditry menace" to symbolize the population's collective aspirations and opinions. It underlines the necessity of the government's response to popular concerns about banditry. "Survivor" has also appeared in the title "Bandits stripped police officers in Kainuk, Survivor reveals." Metonymy has been utilized, with the term "Survivor" referring to the person who survived the bandit onslaught. This serves to draw emphasis to the individual's experience and testimony, making the story more personal and relatable. Hyperbole is defined as extreme exaggeration or overstatement. In the headline "Kithure Kindiki now orders police to flush out bandits on the highway," the potential effects of new technologies are overblown. Technology can be useful, but this phrase exaggerates its success in eradicating banditry, thereby highlighting the relevance of technological remedies.

FINDINGS

The purpose was to investigate how linguistic elements and structures in newspaper headlines contribute to the formation of public perception on the topic of banditry. To understand how these variables shape the story and influence public perception, the analysis took into account numerous linguistic factors such as verb choices, adjectives, metaphors, etc.

The findings showed that the headlines used active verbs to highlight agency and action, showing security agents as proactive and bandits as assertive in their operations. Adjectives and figurative language were employed to vividly characterize bandits and their activities, influencing public perceptions of their cunning and danger. The headlines often incorporated geographic information to create context and assist readers relate to the places of banditry episodes. The use of causal links (cause-and-effect) was developed to link banditry to other pertinent issues, highlighting the core causes of the problem and explaining why things are the way they are.

The headlines also make use of quote marks and credit. This increased the trustworthiness of the assertions and sources, altering how readers perceived the information's reliability. Comparative rhetoric was also utilized to draw connections between entities, such as bandits and well-known

extremist groups, thereby molding the public's opinion of bandits. Overall, the headline analysis revealed that linguistic elements and structures in newspaper headlines play an important role in framing and creating public perceptions of banditry. These qualities help to emphasize the seriousness, complexity, and human effect of the issue, and they frequently ascribe claims to authoritative sources, impacting how readers perceive and react to banditry-related news.

CONCLUSION

The study embarked on a comprehensive exploration of the functional analysis of newspaper headlines (Daily Nation and The Standard) on banditry in the West Pokot, Baringo, and Laikipia regions of Kenya. The study focused on the linguistic elements of newspaper headlines, demonstrating a rich tapestry of language used to transmit information, interest readers, and frame narratives about banditry. The headlines combined verbs, adjectives, metaphors, and geographical context to paint a vivid picture of the situation. The headlines used active verbs to highlight agency and action, showing security agents as proactive and bandits as assertive in their operations. Adjectives and figurative language were employed to vividly characterize bandits and their activities, influencing public perceptions. The headline analysis revealed that linguistic elements and structures in newspaper headlines play an important role in framing and creating public perceptions of banditry. These qualities help to emphasize the seriousness, complexity, and human effect of the issue, and they frequently ascribe claims to authoritative sources, impacting how readers perceive and react to banditry-related news.

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