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APOLOGY AMONGST IGBO COUPLES: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE APPROACH

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Abstract

Couples make effort to settle differences by verbally or non-verbally asking for forgiveness from spouse after issue in the family. This study investigates how couples of Igbo extraction make apology to their spouses. Critical Discourse Analysis by Djik served as a guide for data analysis. It was observed that in matters of family conflict resolution relating to apology, more wives are amenable to plea for forgiveness than husbands. The stance of husbands on the matter is subtly based on power relations. Their thinking is that, scolding of spouse is evidence of the power they exercise over them, and turning around to apologize is a sign of weakness.On the contrary, few of thehusbands did not see anything degrading in it. On the part of wives, they apologise using both verbal and non-verbal means. The verbal pleas represent an open acknowledgement of offence before their offended husbands. The reason is cultural; it is expected of wives or women in general to make such pleas and even kneel before their husbands on such occasions while it is not expected of men to do so.

Keywords: Apology, power, discourse, couple, language.

1.1 Introduction

Language plays the role of social instrument of communication and without it, human interaction will be impossible. Equally, language can generate crisis when it is not used according to the sociocultural expectations of the interlocutors. Person (N.D) cited in Nelson (2012, p. 25) notes that mutual understanding is the key principle of interaction. Akmajian et al. (2012) relate interaction to a social phenomenon that happens in a defined social situation which requires dependency on each other's knowledge. Consequently, unsuccessful communication leads to conflict and sometimes violence. That is to say that most of the conflict and misunderstanding among couples could be a result of violating conversation rules. Apparently, it is necessary for people to apologize for what they said to others that caused them pain or that threatened their faces. **Buehele (2015) notes that "an apology requires humility and acceptance of the truth". According to Wagner (2000), apology restores "dignity, trust, and a sense of justice". To make an apology implies that the offender recognizes that he erred and then try to correct the wrong doing through an apology. It is important to note that vital aspect of apology is that it involves the use of politeness strategies whether verbal or non-verbal. Wagner further notes that sincere apology can restore a relationship. According to him, "it is useful for healing a broken relationship and may set the groundwork for re-establishing trust and respect". This is a pointer that unresolved marital crisis is the result of lack of apology.** It is on the basis of the foregoing that this study examines the practice of apology amongst Igbo couples.

Although the Igbo are found all over the country, the focus of this study is the Igbo who reside in the eastern part of Nigeria.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis as an approach focuses on the manifestation of power and ideology in human interactions (Holmes 2008; Fairclough, 2003). Holmes (1992: 391) sees it as an approach that unravels how 'powerful persons use verbal means to suppress the powerless'. The term 'critical' is the key word that differentiates CDA from discourse analysis. The critical discourse analysts see discourse as a product of society that is responsible for social practices (Bloor and Bloor 2007; Fairclough, 2003). However, this study adopts Sociocognitive Approach (SCA) by Dijk (1995)as guide. As an approach, SCO theory pays attention to the properties of social power such as local meanings, subtle formal structures, analysis of specific linguistic realizations such as hyperbole, metaphor in addition to context.

1.3 Research Design

The design adopted in the present study is qualitative design. The reason for adopting it is because a qualitative methodology provides avenue that can lead to the discovery of deeper levels of meaning (Osuala, 2007:171). In addition, the design allows for large number of data which enables generalization of findings.

1.4 Sampling size

A total of 8 families comprising of 8 males and females who reside in Anambra were sampled.

1.5 Demographic Information of Respondents

Gender	Characteristics	Frequency	%	Total
Gender	Male	8	50	
	Female	8	50	
	Total	16		100
Age	30-45	6	37.5	
	46-60	10	62.5	
	Total	16		100
Occupation	Business	14	87.5	
	Working	2	12.5	
	Total	16	16	100
State	Anambra	2	25	
	Imo	2	25	
	Enugu	2	25	
	Abia	1	12.5	
	Ebonyi	1	12.5	100

1.7 Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, the data obtained from interview is presented and analyzed. The couples were asked whether they make apology to their spouse at home; *Ị Na-Asị Nwunye Gị Ndo*? "Do You Apologize to Your Wife?"

The inquiry on the aspect of asking for forgiveness is to evaluate the effect of offence on power relations between couples in the sample. It is expected that the offending spouse should ask for forgiveness from the offended spouse. The ability/inability to engage in this act of settlement has implications for power. The data and analysis are presented below.

HUS 1: *Ee. Ana m asịkwa. O nwere ka anyị ga-esi see okwu e mesịa m chọpụta na ihe ahụ m mere na emetachaghị m ya, m sị ya ndo makana ọ bụrụ na m arịọghịya mgbaghara, ị marana ọ ga-ebuteihu aka*. Yes. I also say it (sorry)". There is a way we will quarrel, later if I realise that I was wrong, I will tell her sorry, because if I don't apologize to her, she will show negative face for a long time.

HUS 2: *Ndokwa? Anaghị m asị ya ndo makana ọnyịkanata ya imepe ọnụ ya a sị mmadụ ndo.* Sorry? I don't tell her sorry because it is very difficult for her to open her mouth and say sorry to anyone.

HUS 3: *Anaghị m asị ogeniile. Mgbeụfọdụ m gbasị yankịtị ka m maraihe ọ ga-eme. Ijimaaatụ, o nwereụbọsị m basịara ya mba wee jebeụka, anyị abata o butere m nri debe yanatebulu ọ sịrọ m bịarienri m gbasị yankịtị baa narumu. Nri ahụ dọkataraebe ahụ ọ batasị m họn, you will not come and eat this food? M sị, I buteere m ne iị kpọghị m bịarienriabụ m nkịta? Ọ na-adị mma ọ dịkata ka nwokejinjaa small (laughs)*. I don't say (sorry) all the time. Sometimes, I keep silent to know what she will do. For instance, there was a day I scolded her before going to church. When I came back, she kept my food on the table but did not tell me to go and eat. I left the food over there. When she came out, she asked, honeyyou won't go and eat? I asked her if I was a dog that she would give food without presentation? It feels good for a man to demonstrate power sometimes.

HUS 4: *Anaghị m asị yandomakana o nweghị iheọjọọ ọbụla m ma m na-emeya*. I don't tell her sorry because I don't know of any way that I mistreat her.

HUS 5:*Ogeụfọdụana m arịọkwaya ma ọ bụrụnọọ m chọrọyaokwu*. Sometimes, I apologise to her if I offend her

HUS 6:*O nweghi ka m basịara ya mba bịakwasị yandon'eluyamakana before m baara mmadụ mba, ana m eteekitaịmụsị yanneèé, emezinaihe a and m ga-agwagị ya like 3 times.* It is not possible for me to scold her and again tell her sorry because before I scold someone, I take my time to warn the person to desist from the act at least three times

HUS 7 *Anaghị m asị kamaọọ yana-asị m ndo*. I don't say (sorry) rather she is the one that says sorry to me.

HUS 8: *Anaghị m asị mana ama m na ọ na-alaịkị isi ewu, o nwere ike m gaazụtayawenatra ya n'ụlọ. Ọ tachaa ya ibu ihu alaa.* I don't say (sorry) but I know that she likes goat head, I may buy it and bring it home for her. After eating it, she will stop showing negative face.

The result indicates that a majority of HUSs were not amenable to making apologies to their wives, while a minority did. In the data, HUS 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8 reported that they apologised to their wives when they offended. HUS 2 was emphatic in his response to the inquiry *Ndokwa? Anaghị m asị yando* "Sorry? I don't tell her sorry". Underlying the interrogative *Ndokwa*? Is a certain surprise about the need for such a question. It is possible that his response was from a patriarchal angle where the men who control the society did no wrong and therefore were not expected to make apologies to the women. The interrogative *Ndokwa?* Was also a reflection of the way he perceived his wife, as one undeserving of any kind of apology, given the character of the woman …*Ọ nyịkanatayaimepeọnụ ya a sị mmadụ ndo*. "…It is very difficult for her to open

her mouth and say sorry to anyone". The point raised by HUS 2 is that his wife was too bad-natured to apologize to him, and therefore he does not make apologies to her in the event of an offence. It is evident that issues of power were in the middle of not making apologies to the partner.

HUS 4 was more categorical in his submission, thus *Anaghị m asị ya ndo makana o nweghị ihe ọjọọ ọbụla m ma m na-emeya* "I don't tell her sorry because I don't know of any way that I offend her". The implication of this response is that, from the perspective of HUS 4, he is free from offence against his wife. The key word in his response is *m ma* "that I know"; in other words, he thinks he is free from offence without considering the feelings and opinion of his wife in any matter. Implicated in this subjective response is also that, even when the wife feels aggrieved, HUS 4 would still maintain and claim innocence, and consequently would not offer any apology. The response of HUS 4 is reflective of the power that he wields in his house; the perception that the *di bi ụlọ* 'master of the house' is not expected to come down to apologize to the wife is the basis for the claim of innocence.

In the estimation of HUS 6, it is not proper to indict someone and later apologise to her; according to him, *O nweghi ka m basịarayambabịakwasị yandon'eluya* "It is not possible for me to scold her and again tell her sorry". The stance of HUS 6 on the matter is subtly based on power relations; his thinking is that, scolding the spouse is evidence of the power he exercises over her, and turning around to apologize to her is a sign of weakness. Therefore, by not turning around to apologize, he maintains power over the wife. However, HUS 6 provided what seems to be a secondary reason for his stance, as follows …*makana before m baarammadụ mba, ana m eteekitaimụsị yanneèé, emezinaihe a and m ga-agwagị ya like 3 times* "…because before I scold somebody, I take my time to warn the person to desist from the act, and I will say it three times". Irrespective of repeated warnings, the inability to apologize is the outcome of perception to sustain the power held by the HUS in the family.

The same attitude was manifested by HUS 7 who confidently responded that he is not given to apologizing to the wife. According to him *Anaghị m asị kamaọọ yana-asị m ndo* "I don't say (sorry) rather she is the one that says sorry to me". The response of HUS 7 is the effect of the same patriarchal attitude exhibited by the HUS's 2, 4, and 6; Put differently, HUS 7 is saying that, it is the wife who should apologise to her HUS and not the HUS apologising to the wife. The idea being presented is that, it is degrading for a man to apologise to his wife, even if he is in the wrong. This attitude is borne out in an Igbo saying that *kamanwunye m ga-emeri m (n'ikpe) m boyaihe o meghi* "Instead of my WF defeating me in a matter, I'll make false allegation against her". Making such false allegation is aimed at putting the WF in a position to ask for forgiveness from the HUS, rather than the other way around.

The same attitude is vividly portrayed by HUS 8 who posited that he cannot verbally apologise to his WF, but would rather do it in another way and manner. According to him *Anaghị m asị mana o nwereụzọm siarịọ yamgbaghara* "I don't say (sorry) but there is a means I use to ask her for forgiveness". Not saying sorry verbally has power implications; saying it by word of mouth means exhibiting weakness and moderating the power the HUS wields in the house. The verbal pronouncement before the wife implies reducing oneself before the very person the man controls. HUS 8 explains the means he employs to apologise rather than using words *...ama m na ọ na-alaịkị isiewu, o nwereike m gaazụtayawenatrayan'ụlọ. Ọ tachaayaibuihualaa*

"I know she like goat head, I may buy it and bring it home to her. After eating it, she will stop showing negative face". Rather than say sorry, HUS 8 woos his WF with the kind of meat she liked – goat head. Although saying sorry verbally does not cost anything tangible, HUS 8 prefers to spend money to pacify his offended WF. Apparently, to him, it is costlier to say sorry in relation to his status in the family, than to buy a piece of meat for his WF. Thus, the opportunity cost of preserving his image and social status is the amount of money he spent buying goat meat for his WF.

In contrast to the five participants who said that they did not verbally apologise to their wives, there were three participants who did. HUSs 1, 3 and 5 reported that they apologised to their wives when they offended them. According to HUS 1, *Ee. Ana m asịkwa* "Yes. I also say it (sorry)". The admission is a total endorsement of the act by HUS 1 which means that he did not see anything degrading in it. He explained the reason for apologizing to his WF thus *O nwere ka anyị ga-esi see okwu e mesịa m chọpụtanaihe ahụ m mere naemetachaghị m ya, m ga-asị yando*"There is a way we will quarrel, later I'll realize that I was wrong, I will tell her sorry". In contrast to the earlier participants who were anti-apology, HUS 1 was more interested in making peace than in exhibiting power in the family. He apologizes to the WF if he finds out that he was wrong in a matter, rather than considering his status.

In the case of HUS 3, he apologized to his wife sometimes but not all the time. According to him *Anaghị m asị ogeniile* "I don't say (sorry) all the time". The implication is that he said sorry sometimes to his wife. Saying it verbally is evidence of admitting offence and making moves to make amends without considering his status or power in the relationship. HUS 3 explained that in some cases, he would put his wife to test after a quarrel, thus *Mgbeụfọdụ m gbasị yankịtị ma ọ bụrụgodu m chọrọ yaokwu ka m maraihe ọ ga-eme* "Sometimes, I will keep silent even if I am the offender, so as to know what she will do". Although the silence could be interpreted as a sign of power display, the real intention is to see how the wife reacts. In addition, HUS 3 sometimes intentionally wields control to see it if the status he occupied in the family is still intact *Ọ na-adị mma ọ dịkata ka nwokejinjaasmall (laughs)* "It feels good for a man to demonstrate power sometimes". The implication of demonstration of power even when there is no provocation to HUS 3 is for confirmation that the man still maintains his status in the family hierarchy.

In the same manner as HUS 3, HUS 5 also apologizes to his wife sometimes. According to him *Ogeụfọdụana m arịọkwaya ma ọ bụrụnọọ m chọrọyaokwu* "Sometimes, I apologise to her if I offend her". In this case also, the admission of offence is not affected by status, hence the apology to the wife.

1.8 *Ịna-asị di gị ndo?* Do you apologise to your HUS?

WF 1: *O nwereihena-abụ m mechaa m sị yagbaghara. Mgbeụfọdụ o nwereike ọ gafee m rieyaụtịtịrị, m meeya ọ maralana m chọrọ ka ọ kwụsị iweiwe. Onwereike ọ sị m hapụ ya aka mana m gana-emeya rue mgbe ọ chịrị ọchị. Ogeụfọdụ anyị labaaụran'abalị m jideya aka, ọ dọkpụrụ aka m ahụ dotayanson'obiya. Chi fon'ụtụtụ anyị agaghị ekwutezimakaihe ahụ ọzọ.* There are things I will do and after I will ask him to forgive. "Sometimes, when he passes I will tickle him, if I do it he knows that I am apologising to him. He may tell me to leave him alone but I will hold him until he smiles. Sometimes when we go to bed in the night I will hold him, he will place my hand on his chest. In the morning, we will not visit that matter again.

Wf 2*: Ọọogembụ ka m na-arịọ ya mana ọ bụụzịkịtaa. Kịtaaọọmụnwana-ajiteetidịanga self makadipresiọnnke m etego ọ akumuletibara. Ihe mụ nayabụ̀zịbụ́ rumeeti. O nweghionyega-abụ o kwuoibeyaekwete.* It was before that I plead for forgiveness, not anymore. Presently I am the one igniting the anger because my depression has long been accumulating. What we are now are roommates. No one says what the other accepts.

Wf 3: *Ana m arịọ yamgbaghara. O nwereụdị iwega-abụ m kpasuoyaemesịa m sekpuru ala rịọwayamgbaghara.* I ask him for forgiveness.There is a way I will provoke him, later, I will kneel down and ask him for forgiveness.

Wf 4: *Ana m arịọ ya ma m mejọọ yamakana ọ na-abụ m mejọọ ya ọ gaghịzị erinrin'ụlọ. Ọ bụrụ na o righinri ọ anaghị m adị kọmfọtebụl, so ana m esekpuru anị rịọwayamgbaghara. Dị m anaghị asị m ndokamaọọ mụnwana-asị yando.* I ask him for forgiveness when I offend him because when I offend him, he will stop eating in the house. If he does not eat I become uncomfortable, so I go on my knees to ask him for forgiveness. My HUS does not ask me for forgiveness, rather I'm the one that makes the request.

> Wf 5: *M na-asị yando ma ọ bawamb*a. I ask her for forgiveness when he is scolding.
> Wf 6: *Ana m arịọkwa ka udo wee dị makana ọ bụrụ na m arịọghị ị maranaụwaniilega-anụ ya. Ana m etuya aha sị yaiweezilagị oo. Gbagharanaamaghị m ụmaeme.* I ask for forgiveness for the sake of peace because if I don't apologise the whole world will hear about it. I praise him and tell him not to be annoyed. Forgive because I don't act intentionally.
> Wf 7: *Ana m arịọ yamgbeụfọdụ maka o nwereụbọsị ọ na-abụ o golieyan'isi ọ tụpụrụ m ibun'ezisị m si be yapụọ.* I ask him for forgiveness because sometimes, there is a day she will be so provoked that he will throw my things out and tell me to leave his house.
> Wf 8: *Anaghị m arịọ makana ọ naghị eme m ka nwokesiemenwaanyị ọ na-alụ alụ.* I don't plead (for forgiveness) because he does not treat me as a man treats his own wife.

The result of the inquiry on verbally asking a spouse for forgiveness, on the part of the WFs shows that a majority were amenable to the act while a minority were not. WFs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 all reported that they asked their HUSs for forgiveness during matters in the family, while WFs 2 and 8 did not. According to WF 1, she deployed both verbal and non-verbal acts to plead for forgiveness, as follows *O nwereihena-abụ m mechaa m sị yagbagharayaewezinaiwe* "There are things I will do and after I will ask him to forgive and not be annoyed". The verbal plea represents an open acknowledgement of offence before the offended partner. The non-verbal means was effected in a jovial manner, as follows *Mgbeụfọdụ o nwereike ọ gafee m rieyaụtịtịrị* "Sometimes, when he passes I will tickle him". According to WF 1, she will continue tickling her HUS until he laughs, thus signalling the end of his bad feelings. A second non-verbal method used by WF 1 is to contact her HUS in bed while asleep *ọ na-abụ anyị lakpuoụran'abalị…m jideya aka…ọ dọkpụrụ aka m ahụ dotayanson'obiya. Chi fon'ụtụtụ anyị agaghị ekwutezimakaihe ahụ ọzọ* "When we go to bed in the night, I will hold him, he will place my hand on his chest. In the morning, we will not visit that matter again". In these varied instances, it is WF 1 that took the initiative for pleas during matters in the family.

In the case of WF 3, she followed up a verbal plea with a non-verbal traditional plea after offence. According to her, *Ana m arịọ yamgbaghara* "I ask him for forgiveness". The verbal plea represents an open admission of offence before the offended spouse and desire to make

amends. However, in some cases, she deployed other non-verbal means to achieve the same end. According to her *O nwereụdị iwega-abụ m kpasuoyaemesịa m sekpuru ala rịọwayamgbaghara*"There is a way I will provoke him, later, I will kneel down and ask him for forgiveness". Even though it is contained in forgiveness, the act of kneeling before her HUS is an open evidence of submission to a higher power. It is an overt sign that she is under him. However, her explanation implies that, it is the weight of offense that determines the way she asks for forgiveness *O nwereụdị iwega-abụ m kpasuoya*, meaning that, she reacts differently going by the degree of offense. Hence, verbal pleas were for light offenses while kneeling is for weightier offenses. It is noteworthy that the act of kneeling to make a plea is a traditional Igbo custom; in traditional Igbo society, women knelt down to make requests from their HUSs or to make presentations to them. It is unheard of that a woman would ask for forgiveness from the HUS on her feet. It is practiced by women to show submission and loyalty to their HUSs, especially during conflict settlement.

The same verbal and non-verbal pleas were also used by WF 4 after conflicts with her HUS. According to her *Ana m arịọ ya ma m mejọọ ya* "I ask him for forgiveness when I offend him". WF 4 added that, asking for forgiveness is lop-sided in favour of her HUS *Dị m anaghị asị m ndokamaọọ mụnwana-asị yando*"My HUS does not ask me for forgiveness, rather I'm the one that make the request". The reason adduced by WF 4 for the plea is her HUS's disposition after a conflict …*makana ọ na-abụ m mejọọ ya ọ gaghịzị erinrin'ụlọ* "…because when I offend him, he does not eat in the house". Food rejection by the HUS is a non-verbal way of expressing hurt which WF 4 understands, hence her plea. Aside the verbal plea she also uses the traditional method to plead for pardon *ana m esekpuru anị rịọwayamgbaghara* "I go on my knees to ask him for forgiveness". As said earlier, kneeling is an act of submission effected by women to show that they are sincere in the plea for forgiveness. It is noteworthy that, in traditional Igbo world, no man ever knelt down before a woman, for any reason. It is the women who are expected to kneel before their HUSs for so many reasons.

In the case of WF 5, she admitted making only verbal pleas to her HUS. According to her *M na-asị yando*"I ask her for forgiveness". WF 6 provided reason for asking for forgiveness *Ana m arịọkwa ka udo wee dị* "I ask for forgiveness for the sake of peace". Apart from the usual verbal pleas, she also used another verbal strategy to achieve the same result *Ana m etuya aha sị yaiweewezilagị oo* "I praise him and tell him not to be annoyed please". Eulogy is a common practice among the Igbo; as a matter of fact, every adult Igbo has a nickname, either given or chosen by the bearer, which is used to refer to him in the community. Such nicknames are praise names based on philosophy, achievement, physical strength, personal attributes, etc. In the report by WF 6, she uses it as a means of asking for forgiveness. WF 7 also admitted asking for forgiveness from her HUS *Ana m arịọkwayamgbeụfọdụ* "I also ask him for forgiveness sometimes". In her account, it is not all the time she offended that she asked for forgiveness but sometimes. The fact that she asked implies that she admitted her offence and also submitted by the verbal plea. The reason advanced by WF 7 for initiating the plea is fear and her own marital interest *maka o nwereụbọsị ọ na-abụ o golieyan'isi ọ tụpụrụ m ibun'ezisị m si be yapụọ* "There is a day she will be so provoked she will throw my things out and tell me to leave his house". The consequences of not making the plea drove her to make it and save her marriage.

The data also contains reports by two wives (WF 2 and WF 8) who posited that they did not plead for forgiveness from their HUSs after conflict. According to WF 2 *Ọọgembụ ka m na-arịọ ya mana ọ bụụzịkịtaa* "It was before that I plead for forgiveness, not any longer". Evidently, the inability of the wife to plead for forgiveness after a conflict is a subtle show of power. The implication is that she has not done any wrong for which to make a plea for forgiveness. She even admitted initiating the struggle for dominance which she blamed on accumulated anger*Kịtaaọọmụnwana-ajiteetidị the anga self makadipresiọnnke m etego ọ akumuletibara* "Presently I am the one igniting the anger because my depression has long been accumulating." The reason advanced by WF 2 has a lot to do with power relations between the spouses *o nweghionyega-abụ o kwuoibeyaekwete* "No one says what the other accepts". In other words, the HUS does not respect the wife's position and the wife does not respect the HUS's position. This place them on another level of relationship *ihe mụ nayabụ̀zịbụ́ rumeeti* "What we are now are roommates" The implication of defining the status of their marriage as roommates is that the spouses are at par, or share the same power status in the family. The consequence is that, in terms of conflict resolution, no one takes the initiative to make a plea for forgiveness *Ọ naghị asị m ndoanakwaghị m asị yando* "He does not plead for forgiveness and I do not plead for forgiveness". In the case of WF 8, she hinged her reason for not making pleas for forgiveness on the grounds of maltreatment from her HUS*Anaghị m arịọ makana ọ naghị eme m ka nwokesiemenwaanyị ọ na-alụ alụ* "I don't plead (for forgiveness) because he does not treat me as a man treats his own wife". Although she did not explain how a man treats his own WF, it is obvious that she is referring to being maltreated by her HUS. Therefore, her inability to make pleas of forgiveness is a protest against her HUS's maltreatment in the house.

1.9 Conclusion

In sum, in matters of family conflict resolution in relation to pleading for forgiveness, the data shows that more HUSs considered their position or status in the family above the need for verbal acts that lead to reconciliation during conflict, than those who did not consider status. The effect is that, in these families, conflicts and feelings of wrong may linger and sometimes be compounded all to the detriment of the family. In relation to WFs, the result shows that more wives were amenable to pleas for forgiveness than HUSs. The reason is cultural; it is expected of wives or women in general in Igbo culture to make such pleas and even kneel before their HUSs on such occasions while it is not expected of men to do so. The underlying rationale is the power that the male holds and wields in the family over the wife.

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