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**Rhetoric of L. Sterne's "A  
Sentimental Journey through  
France and Italy"**

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**Abstract**

The key to the rhetoric of L. Sterne's “A Sentimental Journey...” is the rhythm of graphic units of three types: syntagms + phrases, discourse types and paragraphs. These rhythms are built into one another. The rhythm of paragraphs corresponds to the implied author's level of discourse, the rhythm of types of discourse - to the travel accounts of the Reverend Mr. Yorick (this level is mystification), the rhythm of syntagms and phrases – to the inner speech of the Reverend Mr. Yorick. The level of Yorick's inner speech makes it possible to turn this speech, and through it the processes taking place in his consciousness and soul, into the subject of description, i.e. the main theme of the novel. Close reading of the first chapter made it possible to analyze all three levels of discourse and reveal the structural principle of the novel and the author's point of view.

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## Introduction

Laurence Sterne is one of the most enigmatic writers in the world literature as regards his style. The study of his oeuvre and style is a real challenge and can be an end in itself. The analysis presented in this paper was made as a part of the comparative study of the style of six Russian translations of ‘A Sentimental Journey...’ but findings as regards the novel’s style turned out to be interesting as well.

## Methodology

The following aspects of the style are analyzed:

1. discourse structure
2. mind style (the choice of words and syntactic structures)
3. point of view
4. rhythm (graphological mostly)

## Discussion and Results

The paper presents the study of the style of the first tiny chapter (it is quoted below). For the purpose of analysis the chapter is divided into phrases that are numbered.

-----*(1)They order, said I, this matter better in France—  
— (2) You have been in France? said my gentleman, turning quick upon me with the most civil triumph in the world.— (3) Strange! quoth I, debating the matter with myself, That one and twenty miles sailing, for 'tis absolutely no further from Dover to Calais, should give a man these rights— (4) I'll look into them: so giving up the argument— (5) I went straight to my lodgings, put up half a dozen shirts and a black pair of silk breeches— (6) 'the coat I have on, said I, looking at the sleeve, will do'— (7) took a place in the Dover stage; and the packet sailing at nine the next morning— (8) by three I had got sat down to my dinner upon a fricassee'd chicken, so incontestably in France, that had I died that night of an indigestion, the whole world could not have suspended the effects of the Droits d'aubaine — (9) my shirts, and black pair of silk breeches— (10) portmanteau and all must have gone to the King of France— (11) even the little picture which I have so long worn, and so often have told thee, Eliza, I would carry with me into my grave, would have been torn from my neck.— (12) Ungenerous!— (13) to seize upon the wreck of an unwary passenger, whom your subjects had beckon'd to their coast — (14) by heaven! SIRE, it is not well done; and much does it grieve me, 'tis the monarch*

*of a people so civilized and courteous, and so renown'd for sentiment  
and fine feelings, that I have to reason with-----  
(15) But I have scarce set foot in your dominion-----<sup>1</sup>*

*Levels of discourse*

The novel is written in a form of travel notes popular in the 18th century: Yorick as a narrator addresses his reader. However, upon closer examination, it turns out that this form of travel notes is just a mystification. The text of this small chapter is Yorick's spontaneous inner speech. Three following arguments will support the above statement:

1. 1. Text forming. The extract is divided into paragraphs, but this division does not follow the narrative's logic, nor does it distinguish certain types of discourse. It is continuous, interrupted only by dash pauses, stream of inner speech.

2. It seems at first that this stream can be subdivided into a dialogue (phrases 1 and 2), inner monologue (phrase 3 and 1st syntagma of phrase 4), narration (2nd syntagma of phrase 4 - phrase 10), monologue addressed to Eliza (phrase 11), monologue addressed to the King of France (phrases 13-15).

Upon closer examination however we see that the text beginning with phrase 1 and up to the 1st syntagma of phrase 4 inclusive is not direct speech proper: although this part of the text has been meant as direct speech, its graphic presentation (missing inverted commas, but with interrogation and exclamation marks) shows that this is free direct speech. They are scraps of Yorick's and some other gentleman's conversation intertwined into Yorick's reminiscences.

There is no address of any kind until phrase 11 and it would be quite right to suppose that Yorick as a narrator addresses his reader. In phrase 11 the address 'Eliza' appears. We might state that Eliza is the addressee only of phrase 11. On the other hand however this phrase is not distinguished syntactically, therefore this address may just as well be referred to the whole preceding text beginning with the word 'Strange'. The ambiguity in referring words and expressions, which stand on the conjuncture of different types of discourse, to this or that discourse type, is a stylistic device, which the author employs throughout the extract. The words 'Strange! quoth I...' (phrase 3) would first seem to continue a dialogue, and only afterwards does the reader find out that Yorick is discussing the problem with his own self. Phrases 12 and 13 up to the words 'Your subjects...' are perceived as the address to Eliza or to the reader, and it is only after the words 'your subjects...', and especially 'SIRE' and 'monarch' do we understand that Yorick is actually appealing to the King of France. This kind of ambiguity proves that Yorick's thought has not been structured artificially to meet the expectations of the reader, but has been recorded as a process.

3. The novel begins with the phrase the meaning of which is not expressed explicitly. Yorick does not care to clarify it. It is something else that

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<sup>1</sup>Laurence Sterne. (1917). *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. The Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction. Available at <http://www.bartleby.com/303/1/1.html>

is important for the protagonist: this phrase has caused his humiliation: some gentleman dared to point out to Yorick (and did it in public) that he was speaking of the things he had never seen.

The above makes it possible for us to draw the conclusion that the rhetoric of the extract does not seem to take into account the needs of the speech receiver and that the theme of the novel is not the events described by Yorick, but the events of his soul expressed through the stream of his speech.

The second aspect of analysis is mind style. The novel is written in the first person, so we can talk only about Yorick's mind style.

#### *Yorick's mind style.*

The chapter can easily be divided into two types of "text", the factographic narrative about concrete events (phrases 5-10) and emotional harangue on ethics (phrases 2 (partially), 3, 11-14). The other phrases (1,2 (partially), 4, 15) can be regarded as transitional. Graphically, the transition from one thematic type of text to another is not pointed out anywhere.

Factographic style. Phrases 5-10: Yorick's narrative about his actions, mention of the Droits d'aubaine law and its consequences.

Lexically, this part of the text may be distinguished for its simplicity. The verbs denote concrete actions and are used in the Indefinite – 'went, put up, said, took a place' (on the way to France) and Perfect – 'had got sat down' (arrival in France) forms. It is only in phrases 8 and 9, with the shift to the second type of style there appear modals 'could' and 'must' and the subjunctive.

Nouns denote housing – 'lodgings', clothes – 'shirts', 'pair of... breeches', 'coat', 'sleeve', food – 'fricassee'd chicken', 'dinner', transport – 'Dover stage', 'packet' and physical state of the body – 'indigestion'.

There are five adjectives altogether: 'black', 'silk' and 'fricassee'd' (participle in the attributive function) point out the objects' concrete qualities; 'next' - shows the time sequence. The few adjectives make the text dynamic and enhances the semantic importance of those used. The adjectives 'silk' and 'black' are repeated twice: the quality of the breeches is a very significant detail for Yorick. 'Fricassee'd chicken' is a French dish which means that the protagonist is in France, a fact to be proud of. 'Next' shows that Yorick is satisfied with the swiftness of his actions.

There are two adverbs. 'Straight' describes the protagonist's determination to start off straightaway. 'So incontestably' expresses the fact that he is content with having reached his destination - France.

The two numerals – 'nine' and 'three' - define the time.

Pronouns. Only first-person pronouns 'I' and 'my' are used, which testifies to the protagonist's egocentrism. .

Stylistically, the majority of the words are neutral, there is one colloquialism 'will do' and some bookish vocabulary – 'incontestably', 'suspend', 'effect'.

Only one stylistic device is used: comparison. Yorick's being in France is as indisputable as the inevitability of the law of Droits d'aubaine. This



comparison reiterates Yorick's attachment to material things, his personal belongings.

Thus, the selected vocabulary describes a character of a practical, proactive and egocentric person. This effect is supported by the syntactic organisation of the text.

Most of the syntactic units possess the structure "I+v+n". In phrases 5-8 only two notions perform the role of the subject: 'I' and 'the whole world'. This apposition speaks for itself. In phrases 9 and 10 the agents are Yorick's various personal items: 'My shirts and black pair of silk breeches - portmanteau and all...' They seem to be personified, become as important as 'I'.

The other mind style is the style of ethical discourse (phrases 2,3,11-14). The first that strikes here as compared to the factographic mind style is that Yorick does not do anything, but just reacts emotionally and verbally to somebody's actions. In phrase 3 it is his reaction to some gentleman's words; in phrases 11-14 - to the French law of Droits d'aubaine. In this context evaluative expressions are used 'Strange!', 'Ungenerous'!, 'it is not well done', modal verbs 'should', 'have to', words related to social and moral spheres - 'civilised', 'rights', 'courteous', 'sentiment', 'fine feelings'.

The use of verbs is also emotional. The verbs, the action of which Yorick experiences, notify rapid, almost forcible actions - 'would have been torn from my neck', 'to seize upon the wreck of an unwary passenger'. The verbs that denote actions undertaken by Yorick, however, have the connotation of steadiness and formality: 'debating', 'grieve', 'reason with'.

The metaphor 'wreck of an unwary passenger' and epithet 'the most civil triumph in the world' create the effect of Yorick's "suffering" state.

The syntactic constructions of these parts of the chapter is multifarious, it's mainly hypotaxis. The phrases have different length - from one-word to 30-word ones. Emotional exclamations 'by heaven'!, emphatic ellipse 'Strange'!, Ungenerous! are used. Phrase 14 is a convergence of syntactic stylistic devices: inversion with emphasis 'does': 'and much does it grieve me; attribute in post-position 'people so civilised and courteous, so renown'd for sentiment and fine feelings', the parts of which have parallel structure with repetition of 'so'; inversion.

The analysis of Yorick's mind style allows us to make a conclusion that the protagonist is an emotional even passionate figure, he is well educated, is aware of contemporary philosophical and ethical ideas, and moreover, thinks of himself as a 'moral person', the ideal of the Enlightenment. However, along goes his care for everyday life details, he is not alien to material attachments. His thought always goes with associations and impulses, being at the same time continuous (uninterrupted). It is well developed: he uses sentences of various length and types (simple, complex, with subordination and not).

#### *Point of view and tone.*

As for Yorick's evaluative point of view he demonstrates it twice. Firstly, it is his indignation at the fact that somebody dares to triumph over somebody

else only because he has been to France. His indignation is expressed by the oxymoron epithet 'the most civil triumph in the world', by evaluative exclamation 'Strange!', attribute 'these' (these rights) with derogatory colouring.

Secondly, it is Yorick's indignation at the Law of Droits d'aubaine which is expressed by the evaluative phrases like 'Ungenerous!, it is not well done...', by the expressive verb 'grieve' with intensification and inversion, exclamation 'by heaven', emphatic construction with the infinitive 'to seize upon the wreck of an unwary passenger', as well as by counter-opposition of words with the positive connotation 'civilised', 'courteous', 'sentiment', 'fine feelings' to the Law of Droits d'aubaine.

These examples show that Yorick claims to be a representation of a 'moral man' of the Enlightenment.

Yorick's tone changes depending on the suggested addressee and the subject. The part of the free direct speech where Yorick mimics the gentleman and answers him in his thoughts possesses sarcastic and ironic tone. This effect is created by the epithet '*the most civil triumph in the world*', as well as the foregrounding of 4th syntagma of phrase 3 by the capital letter.

The tone of the narrative is light - the protagonist is satisfied with his actions. The danger of losing his possessions makes Yorick moan addressing Eliza. While addressing the King of France he is accusatory at first, then he takes a patronising and edifying stand.

Yorick's tone overall (especially in the style of his ethical speculations) is characterised by affectation and mannerisms typical of a sentimental character.

The implied author's point of view.

The presupposition for the understanding of "A Sentimental Journey..." is determined by its title. At the moment when the novel came out of print, it was understood as a journey of high morals and connected with the expression of feelings enlightened with reason. But since nowadays the title refers the novel to the literature of sentimentalism, and sentimentalism is closely connected with the Enlightenment ideas of a 'moral man', we may say that the presupposition for interpreting the novel has been preserved in time.

The novel "A Sentimental Journey..." is written in the first person. This form allows both a combination and a contradiction of two viewpoints - those of the implied author and the narrator. In our case, when both viewpoints come together, the discourse (implied autor) point of view should coincide with Yorick's self-estimation, whilst in case of their contradiction various kinds of estimation are possible, even as much as irony.

In order to establish the discourse point of view the first phrase of the novel is of extraordinary importance. The meaning of this phrase, as mentioned above, is to show a man who wants to "make appearances". Yorick wanted to produce an impression of a connoisseur, but he suffered humiliation when he was made to understand that he was talking of a subject he knew only from hearsay. This is the reason for the protagonist's annoyance and indignation, not the snobbery of the gentleman who asked the question. The gentleman's words catch the protagonist unawares and this is what exasperates him. Yorick did not

expect the question, which is proved by the adverb 'quick' used to describe the gentleman's actions. The epithet 'the most civil triumph in the world' reveals Yorick's annoyance at his interlocutor's placid confidence. This effect is achieved through oxymoron 'civil triumph'. The listed above stylistic devices of phrase three which are treated from Yorick's viewpoint as a way to express the position of a 'moral man', are for the implied author the way to express the protagonist's hurt pride.

Thus the real reason for Yorick's 'sentimental journey' is his offended pride rather than some lofty motive befitting a 'moral man'.

The qualities Yorick demonstrates in the 'factographic' style of thought seem quite strange for a sentimental character.

It is also significant that two mind styles are compared here: high moral standards set to people and quite petty attachment to one's "treasures".

All this is indicative of non-concurrence of the point of view of the author and that of the narrator. We are made to doubt whether Yorick represents in himself the ideal of the Enlightenment. (Or could such a character exist altogether?) In both cases, the "highly moral" tirades were caused by the egotistic and self-seeking motives: in the first case, it was the injured vanity, in the second - the fear of being deprived of the suitcase with all its contents. In stylistics and aesthetics this manner of expression, when the form is opposed to the expressed idea, is called irony. Thus the discourse point of view is irony towards Yorick as a "moral character".

But on the other hand, the sincerity of Yorick's feelings and words, and show that he hardly realises the deep motives of his conduct (verbal conduct included) and is striving to be worthy of the ideal, all this makes the reader to take a liking to Yorick. The irony with which the author treats Yorick as a "moral hero" turns into his kind attitude towards him as a common man.

### *Rhythm*

The rhythmical composition of the chapter reflects the complex structure of the discourse. Three rhythms can be distinguished here: 1) the rhythm of the paragraphs, 2) the rhythm of the types of discourse 3) the rhythm of the phrases and the syntagmas. These rhythms can be placed so as to correspond to certain levels of the discourse: (1) rhythm of the discourse delivered by the author, (2) rhythm of the discourse delivered by Yorick (mystification), (3) rhythm of Yorick's inner speech.

Rhythm (1) counterpoises the first and the last phrases. The text begins with a long dash and no indentation, in other words, with a meaningful pause or some other paralinguistic manner, which continues (not begins) the conversation. The chapter ends also with a long dash at the end of an unfinished sentence. Thus, the first phrase turns out to be connected with some conversation prior to the beginning of the novel, while the last one - with all the following narrative. The space in between them, i.e. the second paragraph, is the context for the interpretation of these phrases. It reproduces the chain of events (Yorick's actions) which had been caused by the reason pre-conditioned

by the first phrase and were conducive to the consequence expressed in the last one.

Thus, the first and last phrases of the extract form a frame. The first one begins with a long dash - a long pause, the last one ends with it. The phrases contain the same number of words, and their starts are identically non-stressed. The denotata of the rheme in both phrases is France; only in the first phrase it is a prestigious country worth mentioning in small-talk, while in the last one it is real land. The function of the frame in this case is to point out the cause and its consequence.

Thus, the rhythm of the paragraphs makes obvious the real motives of the "sentimental journey" and in this way the point of view of the author.

Rhythm (2) distinguishes the following types of discourse: 1) dialogue, 2) Yorick's description of his thoughts and actions - a reaction to the dialogue, and 3) address to the King of France. The graphic means to decorate this rhythm are two punctuation marks used together - a full stop and a dash.

As stated above, the differentiation of the discourse types is not supported by the division into paragraphs. The semantic borders (borders of the mind styles) are in other places as well. The differentiation of the discourse types is artificial, it does not reflect the real speech relationships which exist in the text. From the point of view of the author, this differentiation looks like Yorick's vain effort to control the stream of his inner speech and present it as a logical narrative.

Rhythm (3), the rhythm of syntagmas and phrases, is strikingly uneven. The number of words in a syntagma, syntagmas in a phrase, and words in a phrase keeps changing. The combination of these rhythms gives the picture of the rhythm of Yorick's inner speech.

The first and the second phrases (the "dialogue") have a similar rhythmical structure: the same number of syntagmas, the last syntagmas are much bigger in size than the previous ones.

The first two syntagmas of these phrases are parallel. The first syntagma of phrase 2 echoes the structure of the third syntagma of phrase 1: the same number of words, the same focus, alliteration in the words *better* and *been* placed in the same position. This and the transposition of the affirmative sentence into an interrogative one in the first syntagma of phrase 2 render the irony in the gentleman's question.

Phrases 1 and 2 form a unity in the rhythmical outline: irregular, but still growing of the tempo manifests the growth of emotional tension. This effect is enhanced by the epithet the 'most civil...in the world'.

The abrupt acceleration of the tempo in the last syntagma of phrase 2 is interrupted by not less abrupt halt - the stressed beginning of phrase 3 - the emotional-evaluating exclamation 'Strange!' which turns out to be foregrounded due to such a position.

The first three syntagmas of phrase 3 repeat the structure of phrase 2. Phrase 3 structurally continues the "dialogue" and it is only from the words 'with myself' that the reader understands that the protagonist is talking to himself.

Syntagmas 4, 5, and 6 of phrase 3 are a subordinate clause from the main one 'Strange!'. Syntagma 4 is graphically foregrounded by the capital letter 'T'. The capital 'T' here does not just distinguish the syntagma, but makes it a proper noun. This syntagma is a periphrasis of the word France. The device of litotes is used here: the contents of the word France has been compressed to the distance of 21 miles by sea.

Syntagma 6 has a strong position because of the change in the rhythm tendency of the whole of phrase 3: the gradual acceleration of the tempo during five syntagmas is succeeded by its slight slowdown. Besides, syntagma 6 is placed at the end of the phrase. All this underlines one of the key words of the style of 'ethical speculations' – 'rights', which is placed at the end of syntagma 6 as well as at the end of phrase 3.

Phrase 4 - the abrupt slowing of the tempo expresses Yorick's deliberation to set off immediately. The first syntagm continues and ends the free direct speech and in this way it is connected with three previous phrases. As for its contents, it is connected with the ensuing narrative until phrase 11 included.

This excerpt of the text (syntagm 2 of phrase 4 – phrase 11) comprises two syntactic phrases ('sentences') separated by a semicolon after the first syntagma of phrase 7.

'Sentence' (1) tells of Yorick's actions until his boarding the packet-boat. The grouping of the homogeneous members into separate phrases and their asyndetic linkage singles out these actions and accelerates the tempo of the narrative thus rendering Yorick's hasty actions. In the first syntagma of phrase 7 the tempo slows down: Yorick is close to his destination.

The beginning of 'sentence' (2) is similar to that of the first one, it is a participle construction. This similarity in the 'sentence's' beginnings only underlines the opposition of their other parts. In phrase 8 the tense form changes from Indefinite to Perfect: Yorick has reached his destination. The tempo grows dramatically: it is the longest phrase in the chapter, its first syntagma is also the longest, and it finishes with the word France: Yorick is exulting and triumphing. He is content for having reached France and allows himself a joke. But the joke turns out a clumsy one and it once again brings out of balance the protagonist's state of soul. The tempo shifts dramatically bringing to the fore the syntagm 'my shirts' naming one of Yorick's "valuables".

Phrase 9 and beginning of phrase 10 are parallel. They are built along the model "something should have been confiscated". However the structure of phrase 11 is complicated by the attributive clause it also has parallelism – chiasmus: 'I have so long worn, and so often have told thee...' The abundance of parallel constructions as well as the acceleration of the tempo, the abrupt shift of rhythm (syntagm Eliza) and then again its acceleration, unstressed beginnings and stressed syntagma endings, using of Subjunctive mood, the word 'grave', hyperbole 'would have been torn from my neck', repetitions of the words 'would' and 'my' render this part of the text the form and intonation of moaning.

Phrases 12 and 13 are parts of one syntactic sentence: 'It is ungenerous to seize...' Here the emotional tension remains strong, which is proved by the division of this sentence into separate phrases, usage of exclamation mark, transformation of phrase 13 into an emphatic construction with an Infinitive, the rhythmical outline (abrupt shift of rhythm by phrase 12, considerable acceleration of the tempo in phrase 13, then again abrupt shift in phrase 14), and by the vocabulary (evaluative words and expressions, expressive verbs 'seize' and 'beckon', the metaphor 'wreck of an unwary passenger'). But the tone is changed: Yorick accuses the King of France of the absence of mercifulness.

In phrase 14 the tempo gradually grows until the last syntagma. Yorick sermonizes. Two attributive structures in postposition (parallel forms with the repetition of the adverb so, inversion (word order typical of reproach and pity), expressive verbs ('grieve', 'reason with' in combination with the modal 'have to') make Yorick's tone tragically patronizing.

In phrase 15, the last phrase in the extract, the tension completely disappears. Yorick is back to the reality. The rhythm of the unfinished sentence introduces the whole of the ensuing narrative.

Thus, the protagonist's speech is characterized by the impossibility of decomposition: it is not subdivided into paragraphs, but is represented as an uninterrupted stream of consciousness: in this stream the graphic, syntactic, semantic and stylistic boundaries do not coincide, hence the impression that it is impossible to disintegrate this speech into logical parts.

Within this uninterrupted stream one can see constant shifts of rhythm: the tendency to establish a certain norm appears and then is dramatically violated.

Yorick's interior speech reflects his unbalanced nature and associative character of his thought.

## **Conclusion**

The discourse structure is based on the three-level principle: the novel has three levels of the discourse which are built into each other:

- Implied author – implied reader,
- Yorick as the author of the travel notes – his reader,
- Yorick's inner speech (its addressee is each time different).

The third level of the discourse – Yorick's inner speech - is the theme.

The analysis of Yorick's mind style gives the idea about his range of interests. The character takes interest in the problems of moral and social life of man and society. On the other hand, he is quite particular and concrete in the matters of everyday life, he does not disregard "down-to-earth" issues and takes pride in expensive things.

The analysis of Yorick's evaluative position reveals his pretence to embody the ethical ideal of the Enlightenment - the man of "high morals".

The analysis of the rhythm of the protagonist's inner speech reveals his unbalanced and impulsive nature, his inability to control his feelings and speech.

The role of the second level of the discourse is not monosemantic. On the part of the author it is wiles, an attempt to pass for a popular genre of travel notes something that is in reality a stream of consciousness. On the part of Yorick it is an earnest attempt to create a travel novel. But he is unable to cope with his task: he cannot control his feelings and therefore, being misled by his moment's mood, deviates this way or other, losing the track of the logical narrative.

As for the first level of the discourse we can make inferences about discursal point of view on the basis of the principle of evaluative conclusion; the rhythm of the narrative being of great importance here.

Yorick claims to be a man of "high morals" - the ideal of the Enlightenment. But his unstable moods, self-esteem, his peevish and sarcastic tone, mercantilism while demanding disinterestedness of others, do not go along too well with the image of man of "high morals", moreover, they are contradictory to it. The disparity between Yorick's behaviour and his claims shows him in the ironic light. I.e., the author's point of view of Yorick as the embodiment of the moral ideal of the Enlightenment is irony.

However, the object of the author's irony is not just (or not so much) Yorick himself as the embodiment of the Enlightenment's ideas, but the ideas per se. The protagonist's mannerist tone seems to be mimicking various kinds of printed matter popular at that time, parodying them. This is on the one hand. On the other, Yorick's frankness, his real wish to live up to the ideal make one simply like him as a person. L. Sterne, a priest, was above the philosophy of his time. He knew how to love man in his weakness, mocking at it. This trait of the writer was imprinted in the image of the author of the *Sentimental Journey*. And this is the discourse point of view in the novel.

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