How to Stay Accusative in Insular Germanic
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0. Overview

Icelandic and Faroese appear to be exceptional with respect to the distribution of ACC-marked arguments: In spite of the mandatory ACC-to-NOM conversion that is characteristic of NOM-ACC case systems and operative in Icelandic and Faroese, too, there are instances of argumental DPs with ACC case without there being a patent instance of NOM in finite clauses. It will be shown that these instances are just regular options in a regular case system. The impression of exceptionality vanishes as soon as the crucial contributions of independently acknowledged, specific grammatical settings of Icelandic and Faroese are honored.

In section 1, first the ACC-to-NOM dependency is reviewed, with German – an OV-system with a 4-way case system like Icelandic and Faroese – as a frame of reference. Second, the apparently exceptional features are briefly characterized. Section 3 and section 4 present an account of the grammatical causality of stray ACCs in Icelandic and Faroese, respectively.

1. The ACC-on-NOM dependency

This dependency is an instance of a more general licensing constraint, namely the dependency of VP-internal case licensing on external licensing: In a NOM-ACC system, ACC licensing by V° is dependent on a structural case being licensed by a superordinate element. In a finite clause this is nominative, licensed by finiteness features. This was pointed out in Haider (1985a: 72,88; 1985b: 13,30) and later on by Marantz (1991). Burzio’s Generalization² (see Burzio 1986:178) in its original formulation, namely as a dependency between theta assignment to the subject and case assignment to the object, is empirically not fully adequate. It is adequately captured in terms of a licensing dependency between structurally licensed cases (for a detailed argumentation see Haider 1999).

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² Burzio’s Generalization is: $\theta_s \leftrightarrow \text{Acc}$ (Burzio 1986: 185). “All and only the verbs that can assign a $\theta$-role to the subject can assign (accusative) case to an object.” (Burzio 1986:178).
The dependency holds for *structural* case. Structural case is the morphological realization of case on an argument without lexical case specifications in the argument structure. *Lexical* cases are not subject to this dependency simply because their case form is a direct mapping of lexically specified features to morphological forms. In Haider (1999), the dependency is derived as an economy effect between functional and categorical case checking. Functional case checking goes hand in hand with feature checking in the functional feature matrix. Take for instance nominative checking in finite clauses: The finite verb agrees with the nominative DP in systems with morphologically expressed agreement relations.

The dependency of ACC assignment by $V^\circ$ on the application of NOM assignment is just the prevalence of applying one checking relation rather than two. This is easy to see in the standard context of argument reduction, called passive. In the combination of *be* plus past participle, the would-be subject argument fails to be projected (Haider 1984). So, the remaining candidate for structural case could be either checked as Acc (by $V^\circ$ or Agr-O, depending on the theoretical conviction), or checked as Nom by the functional feature matrix. The former option is ruled out, however (see 1e,f).

(1)  
   a. Somehow, someone *has* not found the correct approach  
   b. Irgendwie *hat* einer den$_{\text{Acc}}$ richtigen Ansatz nicht gefunden  
   c. Somehow, the correct approach *was* not found  
   d. Irgendwie *wurde* der$_{\text{Nom}}$ richtige Ansatz nicht gefunden  
   e. *Somehow, (it/there) was not found the correct approach  
   f. *Irgendwie *wurde* den$_{\text{Acc}}$ richtigen Ansatz nicht gefunden

In Haider (1999), it is pointed out that the ungrammatical sentences in (1e,f) would require the application of two independent checking operation whereas the grammatical versions (1c,d) involve just one operation: Case checking by agreement simultaneously satisfies the checking of the DP and the checking of the values of the agreement features of the finite verb. In (1e,f), ACC would be checked independently of the checking of the phi features of agreement, which would have to be set to the default value. Viewed in this perspective, the ACC-on-NOM dependency is but the reflex of an economy restriction implemented in the system of checking relations.

Crucially, the restriction does not apply to lexically specified case simply because lexical features need to be checked anyway by the verbal head whose argument structure contains their specifications. In German, Dative and Genitive are lexical cases of arguments of verbs or adjectives. These cases are unaffected by the triggers of case alternations:
Quirky subjects in Icelandic and Faroese owe their ‘quirkiness’ just to the same grammatical causality: They are subjects by virtue of being the highest ranked argument, generated in a unique structural position (i.e. the preverbal position in the VP) and moved to the structural subject position, that is, a spec position c-commanding the VP. Nevertheless, a quirky subject DP keeps its object case form that is specified in the lexical entry of the verb whose argument it is.

The four most frequent environments for the ACC-to-NOM conversion in German are: i) the combination of an ergative type auxiliary (werden - become, sein - be, bleiben - remain) with a past participle, conventionally referred to as passive, illustrated in (1); ii) the combination of an ergative type auxiliary (sein - be, bleiben - remain) with the expanded infinitival form of a verb (i.e. zu+V°)\(^3\) exemplified by (3a); iii) the middle formation (manner adverbial + reflexive +V), demonstrated by (3b); iv) the transitive/ergative alternation for a subclass of transitive verbs as in (3c), accompanied by a switch in perfect tense formation from the auxiliary have to the auxiliary with the ergative format, namely be.

Analogous patterns are attested in Icelandic (Sigurðsson 1989)\(^4\) and Faroese. So it comes as a surprise at first sight that there are contexts in which accusative is

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\(^3\) Note that unlike English to, German \textit{zu} is an inseparable prefix of the verb. This contrast has already been noted and analyzed by Bech (1955). It is a morphological marker rather than a separate functional head.

i) to [come out] and [go away]

ii) * heraus-zu-kommen und weg-gehen

iii) heraus-zukommen und weg-zugehen

\(^4\) There is a difference between the German and the Icelandic copula+infinitive construction. The latter is discussed in Sigurðsson (1989: 235 and 163). In Icelandic, this accusative does not change into nominative in this construction:

i) Var Ólaf\textsubscript{Acc} hvergi að finna ?
was Olaf nowhere to find? (Was it not possible to find Olaf anywhere)
licensed in the absence of a candidate for nominative. The data background is briefly sketched in the following section.

2. Stray accusative in Icelandic and Faroese

2.1 Variants of transitive verbs in Icelandic

In Icelandic, transitive verbs allow a variant in which the agent is missing and the remaining argument stays in accusative and appears either pre- or post verbally. A list of these verbs is presented in Jónsson (2001) under the heading ‘verbs with an accusative subject.’ A subset of Jónsson’s (2001) list of motion verbs is listed under (5a). (5b) is a subset of the verb list with experiencer subjects.


The truly exceptional feature of an alleged acc-subject construction like (5a) as a variant of the transitive construction (5b) is not so much the appearance of an ACC subject but the fact that the very same verbs participate in the ACC-to-NOM alternation in the appropriate contexts, for instance in passive (5c). This clearly precludes the possibility that the accusative is a lexically specified case. There is no reason to think that it is anything else than a structural accusative case. But, if it is a structurally determined case, it ought to alternate. So, why is this context for accusative not subject to the dependency that gives priority to the functional checking of verbal agreement, that is, to nominative rather than accusative? The answer will become immediately evident when this construction, namely (5c) is compared with its German counterpart in section 3.

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ii) War erNom nirgends zu finden?
was he nowhere to find? (Was it not possible to find him anywhere)

Sigurðsson proposes a non-referential null-subject for this construction. There is a German counterpart with an overt non-referential subject, limited to the verb ‘gelten’ (be-imperative):

iii) Galt es den FlußAcc zu queren?
was-imperative it the river to cross (Was it imperative to cross the river?)
(5) a. Af húsinu blés strompinn\textsubscript{Acc} \\
\hspace{1em} ‘off the house blew the chimney\textsubscript{Acc}’

b. Stormurinn blés strompinn\textsubscript{Acc} af húsinu \\
\hspace{1em} storm-the blew chimney-the off house-the

c. Strompurinn\textsubscript{Nom} var blásinn af húsinu \\
\hspace{1em} ‘the chimney was blown off the house’

A satisfactory answer should account not only for the grammaticality of the specific construction (5a) but also for the fact that the so-called ACC-subject verbs tend to be shifted to the NOM-subject class in today’s Icelandic.

2.2 Faroese – stray accusative with quirky subjects, but not in passive

As discussed by Barnes (1986), Holmberg (1994), Yip & Maling & Jackendoff (1987), Taraldsen (1996) and Woolford (2001), accusative is found as object case of dative subject verbs in Faroese (6a), but not in Icelandic (6c). However, like in Icelandic, the accusative of a double object verb switches to nominative in Passive (6b).

(6) a. Far.: Siggu\textsubscript{Dat} dámar please bókina\textsubscript{Acc/*Nom} \\
\hspace{1em} (Holmberg 1994:47)

b. Far.: Siggu\textsubscript{Dat} blivu givnar tríggja bøkur\textsubscript{Nom/*Acc} \\
\hspace{1em} (Yip & Maling & Jackendoff 1987:223)

c. Icl.: Barninu batnaði veikin \\
\hspace{1em} child\textsubscript{Dat} recovered-from desease\textsubscript{Nom(*Acc)}

A satisfactory account of this puzzling constellation must cover at least three facts, namely the intra-Faroese contrast between the ACC-to-NOM switch in passive (6b) and the lack thereof in the quirky subject construction (6a), and the minimal contrast between Icelandic and Faroese in the construction (6c), which has obligatory nominative in Icelandic instead of the mandatory accusative in Faroese.

3. A comparative cue for stray accusatives in Icelandic

German, especially the southern German/Austrian vernacular, provides the crucial evidence for identifying the grammatical build-up of the alternation between a transitive format and the format with a stray accusative in Icelandic. In German, these verbs alternate between the regular format with a referential subject argument and the format with a quasi-subject as subject, represented by ‘es’. The latter is an impersonal construction with the interpretation of an unidentified cause of the event. It is different from the passive interpretation in which the implicit argument is interpreted as if bound by an existential quantifier.
(7)  a. Oft treibt es ihn ins Gasthaus  
    Often, it drives him to the bar

    b. Mich überläuft es kalt, ... ergreift es, hält es nicht länger, schüttelt, juckt.
    me overcomes it cold, ... seizes it, keeps it not longer, shakes, itches,
    ... reizt, treibt, lockt, reißt, zieht, drängt es.  
    … irritates, drives, lures, tears, drags, urges it.

Descriptive grammars of German occasionally note examples as in (7a) or tend to overlook the systematic alternation for experiencer and motion verbs completely and list only the alternation for intransitive verbs of sensory perception as in (8). Hermann Paul, however, who wrote his grammar during his time in Munich, had an open ear for the highly frequent impersonal usage of a wide range of motion and experiencer verbs (see 7b) in spoken German.

(8) Jemand/es klopft an der Tür
    someone/it knocks at the door (i.e. there is a knock at the door)

This fact about German is sufficient comparative evidence. The rest can be made to follow from independently established facts of the Icelandic grammar: First, quasi arguments, notably the subjects of weather verbs, and by the same token, the quasi arguments of the impersonal variants of transitive verbs, are not lexically represented in clause internal positions in Icelandic. They are phonetically silent (Sigurðsson (1989 sect. 5.3). Second, Icelandic as a VO language with functional shells requires at least one spec position to be lexically filled, as a consequence of whatever implementation of the EPP (= extended projection principle = obligatory functional spec positions must not be radically empty).

Once this constellation is recognized, the presence of an accusative in the absence of a nominative is not so surprising anymore. It is just a regular case of an accusative argument in a clause with a phonetically empty subject argument. The basic ingredients of the analysis are sketched in (9):

(9) $[C^o [DP_{Acc} [F^o [VP pro [V^o .... .]]]]]$

In (9) there are two arguments. One is the phonetically silent quasi argument that originates in the basic subject position, that is, the preverbal position in the VP, the other one is the accusative DP. The alleged accusative subject is a regular accusative DP that is moved to the clause internal spec-position that hosts the subject (see below).

The different behavior in passive becomes straightforward. Passive is an instance of argument reduction. Hence an object with structural case switches its case because the candidate argument for the external case in the active clause is
syntactically inactive in the passive. In the impersonal construction, on the other hand, all the arguments are present. Hence, only passive triggers the ACC-to-NOM conversion, but not the impersonal construction.

What is the source of the present day variation\(^5\) between accusative and nominative for these verb classes? The answer is simple. The construction invites re-analysis: Accusative presupposes the identification of a quasi argument as subject. If the construction is reanalyzed as the ergative variant of the transitive verb, however, nominative will replace the accusative. In German, this variation is unambiguously signaled by the presence or absence of the quasi argument and the switch in auxiliary selection. The transitive verb in (10a) and (10b) combines with \textit{haben} (have), the ergative variant combines with \textit{sein} (be). The Icelandic counterpart of (10b) and (10c) is the construction with accusative and with nominative, respectively. Note that (10b) and (10c) are paraphrases, which is an invitation for switching between the two constructions in Icelandic. This is a reasonable source for the present day tendency to replace the accusative subject construction by the nominative subject construction.

(10) a. Trieben die Wellen den\textsubscript{Acc} Kahn an den Strand? drove the waves the boat to the beach
    b. Trieb \textit{es} den\textsubscript{Acc} Kahn an den Strand? drove it the boat to the beach
    c. Trieb der\textsubscript{Nom} Kahn an den Strand? drove the boat to the beach

The ‘quasi argument analysis’ (see 9) of the accusative subject construction could be implemented in at least two different ways. The preverbal accusative argument could move into the structural subject position or it could be a fronted object in a spec position preceding the subject position, as in (11), since Icelandic allows clause internal topicalization and clause internal V2.

(11) Jón harmar að \textit{pessa bók} skuli ég hafa lesið (Rögnvaldsson & Thráinsson 1990:23)

Jon regrets that this book should I have read

The right place to look for a crucial datum is the control constructions. Quirky dative subjects participate in the alternation between a lexical subject in the finite clause and a PRO subject in the infinitival clause (see 12b). Therefore, if in the quasi argument account, the accusative will appear both in the finite and in the infinitival construction, then it is a fronted object, but if the accusative is an

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\(^5\) This fact was brought to my attention by Höskuldur Thráinsson.
accusative subject, it ought to change into a PRO subject in the infinitival clause. The second prediction is confirmed (see 12c), but not the former (see 12d).  

(12) a. Mér líkár þessi hákari  
   me\textsubscript{dat} pleases this shark\textsubscript{Nom}  
   b. Ég vonast til að [PRO líká þessi hákari]  
      I hope for to [PRO please\textsubscript{inf} this shark]  
      ‘I hope that the shark will please me’  
   c. Þrátt fyrir að blása af húsinu skemmdist strompurinn ekki  
      despite for to blow off the-house damaged the-chimney not  
   d.*Þrátt fyrir að blása strompinn af húsinu skemmdist strompurinn ekki  
      despite for to blow the-chimney off the-house damaged the-chimney not  

This result matches with an observation discussed by Zaenen and Maling (1990). They point out that the accusative does not switch to nominative in a raising construction like (13) either.

(13)  a. Bátna\textsubscript{Acc} hefur brotið í spón  
      boats-the has broken in pieces  
   b. Bátna er talið hafa brotið í spón  
      boats-the are believed to-have broken in pieces  

These data are easy to reconcile with the analysis presented above: First, the accusative cannot be an ECM case, simply because the passivized matrix verb does not assign accusative.  

German does not allow passive for ECM predicates, so the evidence from English shall suffice:  

i) We believed [him to have won]  
ii) He is believed [e to have won]  
iii) *It was believed [him to have won]  

The crucial case is (iii): The subject it is the correlate for the infinitival clause. Since the argument of the matrix verb is not the infinitival clause but the correlate on which the infinitival clause depends, the matrix verb cannot assign case into the non-argument clause. A PRO subject, by the way, is also ruled out. It would end up as controlled by the correlate pronoun. But this denotes a semantic type (= propositional) that is incompatible with the verb’s thematic requirement for the subject.

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\[6\] The example sentences I owe to Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson (personal communication).

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raising out of a bare-infinitival complement is not restricted to potential nominative phrases.

(14)  a. Han taldi [Jóní_{Dat} lífka þessir sokkar]
      he believed John to-like these socks
   b. Jóní_{Dat} virðast [hafa lífkað þessir sokkar]
      John seems to have liked these socks

In (14a), the subject of the infinitival is a quirky dative subject. This shows that the matrix verb is not an obligatory case checker. (14b) illustrates the fact that raising is not restricted to potential nominative subjects.

That there are non-nominative secondary subjects and that they may be raised can be demonstrated for English as well, with locative PPs as subjects (see 15a). The fact that preverbal locative PPs do not trigger do-support in the absence of an expletive subject (see 15b) follows, if they are in subject position (a), and so does the fact that extraction is sensitive to the that-t effect, as in (16c).

(15)  a. Across my windowsill seemed to walk a whole army of ants (see Bresnan 1982)
   b. Out of which barn (*did) ran a horse  (see Hoekstra & Mulder 1989)
   c. Into which room did you say (*that) walked the child    (see Stowell 1981)

In sum, the ‘accusative subjects’ in Icelandic are structural subjects because of their structural position, but they are case-licensed as objects. This is possible in Icelandic because nominative licensing is not restricted to a unique structural environment, namely the Spec position of the functional head that checks the agreement features, and because there is at least one obligatory functional projection below C° and above the VP. German shares the first property, but not the second (see Haider 1997), whence the absence of quirky subject effects in German.

4. What makes Faroese peculiar?

In the best of all grammatical worlds, the peculiarity of Faroese should only be one in the eye of the beholder. Its behavior with respect to stray accusative should be derivable from the interaction of independently motivated determinants of the Faroese core grammar. This is what I attempt to achieve in the analysis below. For ease of reference, the relevant example sentences are repeated below:
Faroese offers at least two promising clues: The first one is the difference with respect to the base position of the datives in (16). The base position of the Dat in (16a) is VP-internal. It is one of the two objects of a double object verb. In (16b) the base position of the dative argument is the highest argument position in the VP, that is, the single preverbal argument position in the VP. The post verbal base position is in the directionality domain of V°, the preverbal one is not since it precedes the verb.

The second clue is the fact that V-to-I is optional in Faroese, but obligatory in Icelandic.8 As a consequence, the surface structure domain of the finite verb in Faroese is identical with the base domain, that is, the VP. In Icelandic, the finite verb is obligatorily positioned into a higher functional domain. Therefore, the parametric difference can be sought in the size of the minimal complete domain of case licensing, indicated by the boxed sub tree in (17).

(17) a. \[C^° [F^p \rightarrow [F^° [V^p \rightarrow [V^°, V^° \rightarrow \ldots ]]]]] \] Faroese
    b. \[C^° [I^p \rightarrow [V^°, [V^p \rightarrow [V^°, [V^° \rightarrow \ldots ]]]]] \] Icelandic
    c. \[C^° [V^p/I^p \rightarrow V^°/I^°] \] German (Haider 1997)

In all three languages, the minimal domain of case licensing by V° – the domain governed by V° modulo directionality – is different. In German and in Faroese, the minimal complete domain of case licensing is congruent with the VP, but the domain of case licensing by V° is different because of the directionality factor, indicated by an arrow in (17). In German, all argument positions in the VP precede the V° position. So, all argument positions are in the domain of directional licensing. In Faroese, and in Icelandic, the highest argument position in the VP, the preverbal one, crucially is not in the directional licensing domain of the verb.

In Icelandic, the verbal domain of case licensing is expanded by obligatory head-movement into the functional domain. In German and Faroese, the functional features on the verb are checked in situ (see Haider 1997 for details). Since the functional features are instrumental for nominative assignment and the identification of PRO, respectively, the domain of the functionally marked verb is the minimal domain of case licensing.

With this in mind, the condition that is grammatically causal for the dependency of accusative licensing on there being an externally licensed argument yields the desired, minimally different results for each of these settings: In Icelandic, a

8 Woolford (2001) gives credit to Sten Vikner for emphasizing this fact.
quirky dative subject is within the minimal domain of case licensing of the verbal head. Hence \( V^o \) cannot check an accusative unless there is a structurally cased argument that is licensed externally. So, a VP internal argument eligible for structural case is licensed for nominative rather than accusative. In Faroese, the preverbal dative counts as external to the minimal case licensing domain of \( V^o \) though it is VP-internal, because it is not in the directionality domain of \( V^o \). In German, all arguments are in the minimal case-licensing domain of the verb.

It is the Faroese evidence that motivates a reformulation of the condition responsible for the ACC-NOM dependency in terms of the minimal domain of licensing. In Haider (1985, 1993:110f.) the condition was formulated as a priority condition that gives priority to external licensing over internal licensing: \( V^o \) cannot license a structural case in its licensing domain (= internal licensing) unless external licensing has been exploited. For a finite clause this entails that ACC cannot be assigned unless NOM has been assigned. As a consequence, an accusative object switches into nominative once the privileged nominative candidate is syntactically inactive, as e.g. in passive.

(18) \( V^o \) licenses structural case for a non-lexically case-marked argument in its domain of case licensing only if there is a relationally licensed co-argument in the minimal complete domain of case licensing.

Structural licensing is licensing in the directionality domain by a lexical category. Relational licensing is licensing by other grammatical means. One possibility is licensing under *locality* in a Spec-head configuration. This applies both to functional projections as well as to lexical projections. Both, the spec-position of a function head as well as the preverbal argument position in a head-initial V-projection is a position uniquely identified by locality. The other possibility is licensing by agreement.

With these clarifications in mind, the differences between Icelandic and Faroese can be derived immediately. In Faroese, the preverbal dative is a relationally licensed co-argument of the VP-internal argument and the dative is outside the structural licensing domain of the verb if it is a quirky subject. In Icelandic, on the other hand, the preverbal position is an argument position *within* the licensing domain of the verb as the carrier of functional features. So the dative in the preverbal position does not count as a relationally licensed position because it is in the directionality domain of the verb. Hence the dative can be canonically licensed by \( V^o \) in its domain. So the remaining option for the VP-internal lexically not case-marked argument is relational licensing under agreement.9

9 Note that the same considerations apply to the complements of a raising verb like in i):
In German, eventually, every argument of the verb is in the directionality domain of V°, that is, in the VP. Hence, accusative licensing is always dependent on relational licensing. Moreover, German does not provide a context that could give rise to a quirky subject, simply because there is no uniquely identified structural position in the VP in need of relational licensing, because of its head-final VP. In a head-initial VP, there is a unique position in a VP, namely the preverbal one: It is the only VP-internal position that is local to the head but not within the directional licensing domain of the head. This is the candidate for movement to a higher spec position. The result is a functional subject, with or without nominative, depending on the language-specific properties of case licensing.

Let us summarize: The result we derived is that the ACC-NOM dependency holds for the domain of case licensing of the lexical V° head and that this domain is not cross-linguistically invariant. The corollary is that in Icelandic and German, the dependency holds for the complete VP, for different reasons though. In Faroese, however, the dependency holds only in the VP sub tree that is to the right of V° (directional licensing domain). Spec-VP in Faroese counts as external to the licensing domain. So, an external dative is sufficient for turning V° into a licensing head for accusative case on an argument without lexical case features in Faroese, but not in Icelandic.10

i) Mariú fannst hún vera gáfuð - MaryDat thought sheNom be gifted

10 The final footnote is reserved for admitting a remaining puzzle, namely the existence of a double accusative construction as in i):

   i) DreginaAcc vantar matAcc (Andrews 1982:462)
   the boys lacks food

   In the present account, the licensing of the second accusative presupposes a relationally licensed argument in the minimal case domain; otherwise the accusative would have to be replaced by nominative. An analysis that simply takes the first accusative to be a lexically specified case would not help since then the construction would be analogous to a quirky subject construction with dative. Along the lines of the account presented above, the following possibility needs to be investigated. The double accusative construction could be a double object construction with a silent quasi argument. In this case, the first accusative is the lexically specified accusative and the second one is the regular structural case. A comparative look at German does not help in this case because double object verbs with two accusatives are exceptional and very rare and tend to be changed into a dative accusative format (example: lehren – teach, as in “Ich lehre dichAcc SchachAcc” – I teach you chess). But there is an impersonal, translationally equivalent verb in German (gebrechen), with an accusative object a prepositional object, and a referentially empty subject:

   ii) Den KnabenAcc gebrach esNom an Nahrung - the boys lacked it on food
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