The Theory of Politeness (or Civility) in Modern Pragmatics and Its Features in the Arabic Linguistic Heritage

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Abstract:

The theory of politeness (or civility) is one of the most important axes of modern pragmatics. It is based on the principle of intention and the principle of cooperation between interlocutors in order to achieve a fruitful dialogue. This is evident in the contributions of Lakoff, Levinson, Grice, and others. This theory has roots in the Arabic linguistic heritage among Arab rhetoricians, in what is known as the "wise style" (uslub al-hakim), which is based on politeness in dialogue and interpreting speech in its best possible meanings.

Keywords: Politeness theory – Levinson – Grice – Arabic linguistic heritage – Wise style (uslub al-hakim).

Introduction:

Pragmatics has long aimed at producing an effect on the listener's behavior rather than merely achieving communication; in this sense, it goes beyond the familiar and conventional treatment of language as simply a tool of communication.

For this purpose, pragmatics mobilizes most of its theories and invokes the speaker's intention or the principle of intentionality (intentionality), with the aim of achieving pragmatic interactions in dialogue. All of this is supported by the principle of cooperation between interlocutors as proposed by Grice (Paul Grice), where the intention to communicate, mutual understanding based on shared knowledge, and convergent intentions between interlocutors are present.

However, this cooperation between interlocutors, which Grice stipulated, may be absent in some dialogic contexts. For example, the speaker may need to cover or conceal their intention when they wish to convey a harsh meaning to their interlocutor but find this embarrassing. In such cases, the speaker is compelled to soften the severity of their speech and convey it in a more polite verbal form without relinquishing the intended meaning. Here, the listener first perceives the polite expression, and then later receives the other (harsher) meaning of the speech.

What the speaker does here conveying a harsh meaning in a polite verbal guise, through which they ensure both the delivery of the meaning to the addressee and the preservation of the addressee's dignity at the same time constitutes the core of the theory of politeness, refinement, or civility (politeness theory) in modern pragmatics.

In fact, maintaining the relational bond between interlocutors so that dialogue remains harmonious through the refinement of expressions, the interpretation of offensive expressions into pleasant ones,

and the interpretation of speech in its best possible meanings are all dialogic phenomena that can be found in the Arabic linguistic heritage. Examples of this include dispraise in the form of praise, allusion, indirect expression, or what was known among the Arabs as the "wise style" (uslub al-hakim).

Based on this similarity between the foundations of politeness or refinement theory in contemporary pragmatics and certain dialogic phenomena in the Arabic linguistic heritage both of which aim at using pleasant expressions to convey meanings that are far from what is explicitly stated this study is entitled: The Theory of Politeness (or Civility) in Modern Pragmatics and Its Features in the Arabic Linguistic Heritage.

Accordingly, the study proceeds from the following research question:

Do the politeness theories in modern pragmatics have features in the Arabic linguistic heritage, particularly in phenomena such as dispraise resembling praise, allusion, or the wise style?

Through this study, we aim to link modern pragmatic politeness theory with some dialogic foundations in the Arabic linguistic heritage, and thus to reveal the extent of similarity between this theory which calls for politeness in dialogue and certain manifestations of politeness in dialogue within our linguistic heritage. Finally, we aim to establish the roots of this modern theory in the Arabic linguistic heritage.

First: The Theory of Politeness or Civility in Modern Pragmatics:

Pragmatic linguistics is considered a modern approach in linguistic studies, primarily concerned with communicative interaction within a discourse situation[01] between interlocutors, with attention to context and the meanings to which an utterance may lead[02].

Therefore, we find that pragmatics, in most of its inquiries, strongly relies on specific concepts such as dialogue, discourse, speakers, and context. These concepts clearly reflect language use, which constitutes the main objective of pragmatics.

From this perspective, dialogue and its agents (the speakers) have become the central focus of successive pragmatic studies, which aim to reveal how interpretive mechanisms operate, how the transition from utterance to meaning occurs, as well as to uncover the social and psychological framework within which dialogue takes place, and the processes of influence and interaction between interlocutors.

Given the importance that dialogue acquires in pragmatic analysis since some dialogic structures harbor rich and diverse pragmatic loads that reveal a real and varied functioning of language pragmatic scholars have paid special attention to dialogue as a central element in later studies. Consequently, they have established principles, foundations, and theories for it, among which are:

1-The Principle of Cooperation: by Paul Grice (1957):

Grice argues in this principle that interlocutors or communicators are bound by certain general principles in the process of communication. He states: "... We can then formulate a general approximate principle that we would normally expect all interlocutors to observe, namely: make your contribution to the conversation such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the exchange in which you are engaged. This may be called the Principle of Cooperation[03]", This principle is based on agreement and mutual understanding between

interlocutors, and it sets conditions for such understanding in dialogue. These conditions are as follows:

1.1- The Maxim of Quantity: Here, Grice is concerned with the amount of information that should be provided, which must correspond to what is required in the dialogue.

1.2- The Maxim of Quality: Dialogue here is fundamentally based on truthfulness. Grice formulates this maxim through two rules: do not say what you believe to be false, and do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence[04].

1.3- The Maxim of Relevance (Appropriateness): This maxim regulates and disciplines dialogue in terms of the topic discussed; it links the subject of the dialogue to the context in which it occurs. Grice summarized this by saying: "Say what is relevant.[05]"

1.4- The Maxim of Manner: Also called the maxim of clarity and transparency, it calls for clarity in speech and the avoidance of obscurity. It is based on the following principles:

• Avoid obscurity of expression.

• Avoid ambiguity.

• Be brief, that is, avoid unnecessary verbosity.

• Be orderly, that is, organize your speech[07].

These are the main maxims on which Grice's Principle of Cooperation is based. It is a principle that tends toward the communicative aspect of dialogue and takes into account the quantity and quality of information in order to achieve purposeful communication between the two parties. It also fundamentally considers the issue of relevance, which resembles what is known as muqtada al-hal (appropriateness to context) in the Arabic rhetorical heritage, where the conditions, status, and circumstances of the speakers must be taken into account.

However, the Principle of Cooperation, despite its excessive concern with communication and the delivery of an appropriate amount of information, may overlook and neglect the ethical and normative dimension of dialogue. Therefore, another principle emerged that calls for the consideration of ethics and commitment in dialogue, namely the Principle of Politeness.

2- The Principle of Politeness or the Theory of Politeness and Refinement: by Robin Lakoff (1977).

This principle goes back to the efforts of the scholar Robin Lakoff in her famous article entitled The Logic of Politeness, in which she accused researchers of inadequacy and limitation for confining themselves to the formal linguistic aspect when judging the correctness of sentences. She thus called for the necessity of attending to the context of utterance and what it contains of logical and pragmatic presuppositions[08].

Accordingly, Lakoff's efforts here turn away from the formal aspect of dialogue and go beyond it to the context in which the dialogue takes place. Therefore, the principle she proposed based essentially on the concept of politeness rests on a fundamental proposition, namely: "Be polite; be clear.[09]"

This principle clearly takes into account the social dimension and friendly relations between interlocutors. It is essentially based on the two rules (clarity/politeness). Lakoff pointed out that the relationship between these two rules (clarity/politeness) is sometimes characterized by opposition,

and that politeness prevails when the speaker finds themselves compelled to give precedence to what is more important (politeness) over what is less important (clarity). The speaker's concern not to annoy or inconvenience the addressee during the conversation outweighs their concern for making their contributions clear and fully explicit[10], It thus becomes clear here that politeness predominates in dialogue and that avoiding disturbing the interlocutor is paramount; this is precisely what this principle seeks to achieve, while clarity becomes a secondary matter.

2.1- The Maxim of Restraint:

Its meaning is: do not impose yourself on the addressee; that is, use expressions that maintain a respectful distance between you and them. Do not insist, do not coerce them into doing something, do not interfere in their private affairs without their permission, and do not make a direct request that may embarrass them[11]. This maxim ensures respect for the other party in dialogue and guarantees that they are not disturbed in any way[12].

2.2- The Maxim of Optionality:

Its meaning is to allow the addressee to choose for themselves; that is, to make the addressee free to make their own decision. It aims to make them an active participant in the dialogic process, to take them seriously, and to take into account their will and desire in dialogue[13].

2.3- The Maxim of Camaraderie:

Its meaning is to show friendliness and respect toward the addressee. In this case, interlocutors should move from a formal mode of dialogue to a more friendly state with stronger bonds. This is achieved through the use of names, titles, nicknames, and pronouns.

These are the maxims upon which the Principle of Politeness, or the Theory of Politeness according to Lakoff, is based. These maxims differ in terms of their degree of strength and weakness: the Maxim of Camaraderie is the strongest in the domain of politeness, while the other two maxims are weaker. As for the relationship between the Principle of Politeness and the earlier Gricean principle, we find that the Maxim of Restraint within the Principle of Politeness is the closest to Grice's Principle of Cooperation, since both aim to produce discourse and dialogue in a formal and clear manner.

3- The Development of the Politeness Theory:

The politeness theory went through stages that constituted major milestones in its development and reflected the efforts of contemporary pragmatists concerned with the etiquette of dialogue and its interactions. Among these efforts and stages, we mention:

3-1- The Leech Stage (Geoffrey Leech), 1983:

The Politeness Principle: Leech presented it in his book Principles of Pragmatics. The essence of this principle lies in examining how to determine the context of dialogue and the purpose of communication, and then searching for the optimal use of language that is sufficient to produce an effect in the listener's mind.

Leech's principle here derives from Grice's Cooperative Principle and complements it; indeed, it relies on the rules presented by Grice within the Cooperative Principle. Therefore, Leech established for his principle rules similar to those of Grice's principle, namely:

• The Generosity Maxim: aims to minimize one's own benefit while maximizing benefit to the listener.

• The Tact Maxim: aims to preserve the listener and what they gain from the dialogue.

• The Approbation Maxim: aims to minimize dispraise of the listener and maximize praise of them.

• The Modesty Maxim: aims to increase self-criticism.

• The Agreement Maxim: aims to highlight points of agreement with the listener.

• The Sympathy Maxim: aims to express sympathy with the listener." [14]

Leech's principle is fundamentally based on two essential elements:

• Increase polite speech.

• Reduce impolite speech." [15]

We observe in this principle its complete reliance on consideration of the listener's feelings; the listener should not be offended or embarrassed in speech, sympathy should be shown toward them, and, conversely, self-criticism and self-deprecation should be practiced. All of this aims at establishing a polite dialogue with the listener.

3-2- The Brown and Levinson Stage (Brown/Levinson), 1987:

The Face Principle: This principle goes back to the efforts of Brown and Levinson in their study entitled Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena, in which the two scholars sought to justify certain general rules for regulating the phenomenon of politeness between interlocutors." [16]

The concept of face constitutes the central axis around which the theory of this principle revolves, as it aims in its entirety to preserve it. By "face" here is meant the listener's face; thus, their dignity should not be compromised in dialogue, but rather the dialogue should ensure the protection of the listener's face from embarrassment. In this respect, this principle approaches Grice's Cooperative Principle in terms of commitment in dialogue and observance of appropriateness.

Since this principle is fundamentally based on preserving face between interlocutors, it relies on several strategies to achieve this, including:

Refraining from uttering a face-threatening act.

Performing a face-threatening act with modification that prevents harm to the listener.

Hinting through indirectness, thereby giving the listener a choice among different possible meanings." [17]

It is observed in this principle that it pays great attention to face in the process of interaction, as it primarily aims to preserve face and avoid its loss through embarrassment or offense, by carefully selecting meanings that ensure this preservation. However, when attempting to convey meanings that threaten face, it may resort to indirectness or modification of expressions.

3-3- The Tahar Abdelrahman Stage: The Principle of Verification:

- Transmission of speech, or the communicative aspect.

- Correspondence between speech and action, or the ethical aspect [18], that is, the speaker's actions should confirm their words.

We note that this principle is essentially based on truthfulness in dialogue, and that it adds another dimension to truthfulness, namely the correspondence between word and deed. Thus, the speaker's actions must verify their speech; it is unreasonable for a speaker to speak about generosity and urge the listener toward it while being among the most miserly, for such actions contradict their words.

These are the most important stages through which the theory of politeness or etiquette has passed in contemporary pragmatic linguistics. The main principles upon which it was built in each stage corresponded to a specific principle, and each principle was based on a set of rules that collectively aimed to evoke politeness in dialogue in order to achieve positive and fruitful outcomes. They also aimed to ensure the smooth progression of dialogue in calm circumstances that preserve the face of the interlocutors. However, the question that arises is: are there indications of this theory in our linguistic heritage? And did the ancients think about politeness during dialogue?

Second: Features of Politeness in the Arabic Heritage:

The researcher in the Arabic linguistic heritage undoubtedly finds fragments and features that call for politeness in dialogue, in order to reap outcomes at the level aspired to by interlocutors. These features manifested in exhortatory indications calling for politeness and encouraging it, urging adherence to it insistently. They also appeared in manifestations and realizations of politeness in certain forms of dialogue and in the pragmatic interactions of language within our linguistic heritage.

1- Indications Calling for Politeness in Dialogue:

Perhaps independent studies devoted exclusively to the phenomenon of politeness did not emerge in the Arabic heritage; however, this does not negate the existence of calls for politeness and refinement in everyday dialogues, with the aim of achieving better pragmatic interaction of language, characterized by calm calmness, tranquility, and harmony among language users. This is evident in our Arabic heritage, and before it in the Holy Qur'an, revealed by One who is Gentle, All-Aware, and Fully Knowledgeable of the conditions, temperaments, and interactions of His servants. Accordingly, we may point out those indications calling for politeness as follows:

1-1- In the Holy Qur'an:

We find that God Almighty commands His servants to speak good and gentle words, as in His saying:" And say to My servants that they should speak what is best; indeed, Satan sows discord among them"[19]. In this verse, there is a command for a person to speak the best words, in order to avoid discord and enmity brought about by bad speech; "this constitutes a call for politeness in dialogue. We also find His saying: Repel [evil] with what is better; then the one between whom and you there was enmity will become as though he were a close friend" 20 ,which carries a call to good treatment, including kind words in dialogue, which can turn an enemy into a close friend. All of this is influenced by kind speech, which lies at the core of politeness in dialogue among people.

1-2- In the Reports (Athar):

If we turn to what has been transmitted in the reports, we find that politeness in dialogue was abundant. Among this is, for example, the story of our master Umar al-Faruq—may God be pleased with him—with a group of people whom he found lighting a fire and sitting around it. He approached

them and called out: "O people of the light," and did not say: "O people of the fire," for fear that the word might offend them.

It is also reported that a dialogue took place between Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid caliph, and one of his ministers, marked by politeness. Al-Rashid entered upon one of the ministers and found with him a piece of bamboo. He asked his minister: "What is this?" The minister replied: "The veins of spears, O Commander of the Faithful," because spears are made from it. He did not say that it was bamboo, because the name of Harun al-Rashid's mother was <<bamboo>>. It is observed here that the minister displayed politeness and did not mention the name of Harun al-Rashid's mother, as that might have offended him due to what it implied of impropriety. Here we find that the minister (the speaker) took into consideration the dignity of Harun al-Rashid (the listener), preserved it, and did not compromise it.

1-3- In the Works of the Ancients:

The greatest of the classical works that addressed the phenomenon of politeness in speech is the book Adab al-Din wa al-Dunya by Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi, Ali ibn Muhammad (d. 450 AH). In it, the author compiled much etiquette and moral guidance, and focused on speech and the effects it produces at the pragmatic level when the speaker observes refinement and politeness. He says: <<Know that speech has etiquettes; if the speaker neglects them, he removes the luster of his speech and obscures the brilliance of his expression>> [21].

Here, he speaks of the etiquettes of speech that the speaker must be aware of; if the speaker does not grasp them, then silence is incumbent upon him, as it is safer for him. In this regard, al-Mawardi says: <<… adhere to silence, for it earns you the purity of affection, clothes you with the garment of dignity, and spares you the need for apology>> [22].

That is, a person should resort to silence if they do not speak well; this constitutes politeness toward those present. In al-Mawardi's words here are strong indications pointing to politeness in speech. He considers that politeness does not merely achieve benefit from dialogue; rather, it endows speech with beauty, luster, and brilliance. For him, politeness adorns speech in both form and content.

These are the most important indications in the Arabic heritage that call for politeness in dialogue and in speech in general, with the aim of achieving pragmatic interaction that combines the fulfillment of linguistic purposes with gentleness and familiarity in dialogue, thereby ensuring its progression in a suitable and fruitful atmosphere.

2- Manifestations of Politeness in Dialogue in the Heritage:

The ancients did not content themselves with pointing out the necessity of politeness and refinement in dialogue; rather, they applied this politeness in their daily dialogues in various forms, including:

2-1- The Style of the Wise (Aslub al-Hakim):

This is one of the forms of Arabic rhetoric, whose beginnings go back to the indications of Abu Uthman al-Jahiz (d. 255 AH) in his book al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin, although al-Jahiz[23] did not name it as such 23. It later developed and came to be defined as: <<speech departing from what is required by the apparent meaning>> [24].

It was placed within the category of semantic rhetorical embellishments in Arabic rhetoric, a classification attributed to the efforts of Abu Ya'qub al-Sakkaki (d. 626 AH) in his book Miftah al-

'Ulum. There are also those who hold that 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 471 AH) was the first to mention the style of the wise under the designation of "mughalata" (sophistry)." [25]

Regardless of how the style of the wise began in Arabic rhetoric, its aim was to manifest politeness in dialogue, by carrying speech contrary to its intended meaning, steering the meaning toward the positive and the good, and redirecting the speaker's or questioner's words toward what is more deserving of intent. An example of this is the dialogue that took place between al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf and a man, when al-Hajjaj said to him: "I will put you on al-adham," intending thereby to place black iron shackles on him. The man replied: "A prince like you puts people on al-adham and al-ashhab," meaning the black horse and the gray horse. Al-Hajjaj then said to him: "I meant iron." 26

We observe in the style of the wise that it is the listener who displays politeness, interpreting speech in the best possible way and directing it toward what is preferable, even if the speaker did not intend that superior meaning. Thus, the one who applies the rule "Be polite" or "Increase polite speech," according to Leech, is here the listener. This constitutes a feature of Leech's principle in the Arabic heritage.

2-2- Indirectness (Ta'rid):

It is defined as: <<An expression that indicates something through what is understood by its literal and figurative usage; for if you say to someone from whom you expect assistance and favor, without direct request: 'By God, I am in need, and I have nothing in my hand…,' then this and similar expressions constitute an indirect request>> [27].

That is, your saying: <<I have nothing in my hand>> indicates your request for help from the addressee without explicitly asking for it, but only through indirectness. Here, this indirectness preserves the speaker's dignity, ensuring that the request is made without embarrassment, and thus preserves face according to Brown and Levinson and the face principle.

From another perspective, it is reported in the tradition that they said: <<In indirectness there is an escape from lying>>,

meaning that indirectness protects its user from lying, through the use of an implicit meaning deliberately dependent on context rather than explicit wording. It helps conceal what one intends of truth, reproach, or criticism without stating it openly, even if that is one's intent. Here, it may achieve the principle of verification discussed by politeness theory in contemporary pragmatics.

These are the most important styles in the heritage in which the use of politeness in dialogue is manifested. Taken together, they aim to ensure the continuity of dialogue in an atmosphere of understanding, intimacy, and calm, with the purpose of achieving a pragmatic interaction satisfactory to both parties (speaker/listener).

Conclusion:

The theory of politeness or refinement is considered one of the most important achievements of contemporary pragmatics, and it has been reflected in the efforts of Lakoff, Brown, and Levinson, and in various principles such as the Politeness Principle, the Face Principle, and the Principle of Sincerity. Taken together, these principles aim to instill politeness in dialogue in order to achieve better outcomes in interaction. In doing so, they go beyond the traditional and stereotypical approach that is confined to the linguistic (grammatical) aspect and the contextual (extra-linguistic) aspect of dialogue.

However, this call to display politeness in dialogue is not a product of the work of contemporary pragmatists alone; rather, it has features and indications in our Arabic linguistic heritage. These indications go back to the Holy Qur'an, which, in some of its verses, called for adherence to politeness in order to win the hearts of others. Likewise, the transmitted tradition includes manifestations of politeness in dialogue through giving precedence to better and more complete speech over what is unpleasant.

Nevertheless, the call to politeness was not organized according to specific methodologies or clear foundations until Arabic rhetoric emerged. Through the efforts of 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani and al-Sakkaki, foundations were laid for the principle of politeness in dialogue, and it began to appear and manifest in branches of rhetoric such as the style of the wise, which calls for interpreting speech in its favorable sense and ignoring its negative aspects. This comes from the side of the listener, who aims to achieve the utmost politeness with the speaker. Likewise, there is the style of indirectness, through which the speaker seeks to display politeness toward the listener with the aim of preserving face.

Footnotes:

01 Ali Hadi, Pragmatics and Semantics, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 2000, p. 177.

02 See: Omar Belkhir, Analysis of Theatrical Discourse in Light of Pragmatic Theory, Ikhtilaf Publications , Algeria, 2003, p. 08.

03 Paul Grice, Logic and Conversation, trans. Muhammad al-Shaibani and Saif al-Din Daghnous, Semiotics Journal, a peer-reviewed periodical issued by the Laboratory of Semiotics and Discourse Analysis, University of Oran, Algeria, no. 1, 2005, p. 188.

04 See: the same source, p. 189.

05 The same source, same page.

06 See: Dhahibiya Hamou al-Hajj, Linguistics of Enunciation and Pragmatics, Dar al-Amal for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, n.p., n.ed., n.d., p. 173.

07 The previous source, p. 189.

08 See: Abdelhadi Ben Dhafer al-Shahri, Discourse Strategies: A Linguistic Pragmatic Approach, Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid al-Muttahida, Beirut, 2004, 1st ed., p. 97.

09 The same reference, same page.

10 Hatem Ubaid, Politeness Theory in Pragmatic Linguistics, Alam al-Fikr Journal, vol. 43, no. 1, 2014 (article).

11 See: Taha Abderrahmane, Al-Lisan wa al-Mizan aw al-Takathur al-'Aqli, Arab Cultural Center, Casablanca, Morocco, 1998, 1st ed., p. 240.

12 See: the same source, p. 241.

13 See: Abdelhadi Ben Dhafer al-Shahri, Discourse Strategies, p. 102.

14 See: Taha Abderrahmane, Al-Lisan wa al-Mizan aw al-Takathur al-'Aqli, p. 246.

15 See: Salah Fadel, Rhetoric of Discourse and Text Linguistics, Alam al-Kutub, Kuwait, 1992, p. 98.

16 See: Abdelhadi Ben Dhafer al-Shahri, Discourse Strategies, p. 103.

17 See: Taha Abderrahmane, Al-Lisan wa al-Mizan aw al-Takathur al-'Aqli, p. 244.

18 See: the same source, pp. 249–257.

19 Surah Al-Isra', verse 53.

20 Surah Fussilat, verse 34.

21 Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi, Adab al-Dunya wa al-Din, Mohammad Ali Beidoun Publications ,Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, Lebanon, 2003, n.ed., p. 208.

22 See: the same source, p. 203.

23 See: Ahmad Abdel-Muttalib, Dictionary of Rhetorical Terms and Their Development, Maktabat Lubnan Nashirun, Beirut, n.d., n.ed., p. 119.

24 Yusuf Abu Ya'qub al-Sakkaki, Miftah al-'Ulum, commentary by Na'im Zarzur, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1987, 2nd ed., p. 327.

25 See: Jalal al-Din al-Qazwini, Al-Idah fi 'Ulum al-Balagha, ed. Muhammad Abdel-Mun'im Khafaji, Dar al-Jil, Beirut, n.d., 3rd ed., vol. 2, p. 95.

26 See: Ahmad al-Hashimi, Jawahir al-Balagha fi al-Ma'ani wa al-Bayan, ed. Najwa Anis, Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut, n.d., n.ed., p. 319.

27 Ibn al-Athir, Al-Mathal al-Sa'ir, ed. Ahmad al-Hufi and Badawi Tabana, Dar Nahdat Misr for Printing and Publishing, Egypt, n.d., 2nd ed., vol. 3, p. 56.

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