

## Local Language Maintenance Based on the Story of the Mekongga People in Kolaka District Southeast Sulawesi Province

Rahmat Sewa Suraya<sup>1</sup>, Akhmad Marhadi<sup>2</sup>, Alias<sup>3</sup>, Wilma Akihary<sup>4</sup>, Patresia Silvana Apituley<sup>5</sup>, Rita Fransina Maruanaya<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Halu Oleo Kendari, Indonesia

<sup>4,6</sup>Universitas Pattimura, Indonesia

<sup>5</sup>Technische Universität Dresden, German

Email: mhat\_suraya@yahoo.co.id, ajie\_np@yahoo.com, alias\_onechy@yahoo.co.id,

wilamq@yahoo.com, ita\_maruanaya@yahoo.com, treisapituley@yahoo.com

### **Abstract:**

*The socio-cultural condition of the Mekongga community in Kolaka Regency is known to have a lot of oral literature, one of which is folklore. The phenomenon of local language intimidation makes the Mekongga community in Kolaka Regency use the Mekongga folklore as the basis for maintaining their regional languages. Scientific studies on the phenomenon of folklore-based local language defense are still rarely carried out, especially the Mekongga folklore. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze and describe the maintenance of regional language based on the Mekongga folklore in Kolaka Regency. This study uses a qualitative approach with informant determination techniques using purposive sampling technique. Methods of data collection in this study using the method of observation, interviews, and documentation. Meanwhile, the data collected was analyzed using a qualitative descriptive technique. The results of this study indicate that regional language maintenance based on the Mekongga folklore in Kolaka Regency is carried out in several aspects, namely: 1) Regional language preservation through the family environment by presenting the Mekongga folk tales as bedtime stories or telling them as spare time. 2) the preservation of regional languages through the association of children, namely folklore is used as an empty time filler when playing or used to tell each other when gathering before starting a game. 3) the preservation of regional languages through the educational environment, namely becoming a wealth of local wisdom as local content in schools. The publication of folklore in local content is intended to attract students' interest in learning local languages.*

### **Keywords:**

*language maintenance; local languages; folklore*

## I. Introduction

Humans are one of God's creatures who are most perfect compared to other God's creatures. In humans are endowed with various advantages and the main ability is reason. With reason, humans are able to develop properly to form an orderly social order. On the other hand, reason is a great potential in humans which of course is not possessed by other creatures. This reason encourages humans to think proportionally for the sake of their interests and survival. Intellect provides knowledge to humans to be able to distinguish something right and wrong, able to convey messages and information in a good and systematic manner. Intellect indirectly shapes human language skills so that all hopes, aspirations, desires, desires can be actualized according to their place.

Since the beginning, humans have used language as a medium of communication. Social activity domains in their environment require language in order to convey messages well and meaningfully. In solving the affairs of fulfilling the necessities of life, language is used as the main means of solving existing problems. The complexity of human thought patterns is answered by the existence of language which not only acts as a means of verbal communication but also as a means of soul expression. It cannot be denied that every level and field of life is always present with its respective treasures so that it requires an instinctive approach as a form of adaptation and meaning of the real situation. In this context, language becomes a natural human method for developing and surviving any conditions that arise in society.

According to Hidayat (2014: 21), language is something that is essential in human life. Every human being always uses language to accomplish all his interests. From ancient times until now, language has played a vital role in human life. Naturally individual has the typical language characteristics which is influenced by the feeling, idea, emotion, situation and condition, articulation and cognition (Ramlan, 2018). In its development, the language that was first known to humans was the regional language as the mother tongue. This regional language occupies an important position and has even become the identity of community groups. Soekanto (2002: 200) emphasizes that the norms contained in society regulate relationships between humans. Therefore, the position of regional languages as a medium of local communication is useful for creating peace and tranquility in the community.

Linguistic problems have become a linguistic phenomenon that continues to receive serious attention from various parties. The existence of regional languages as the first language or as the mother tongue in society has recently been placed in a dilemma along with the development of modernization and globalization of technology, thought and ideology. The thinking of society is gradually being influenced by a variety of foreign languages which systematically enter the social environment. A new paradigm arises in society that using regional languages is something ancient and outdated and even seems primitive. This paradigm grows in the minds of children as the nation's millennial generation who are required to be able to master foreign languages. This phenenome is also felt by the Mekongga community in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province. Children are faced with a situation in which they are required to be able to master a foreign language. While on the other hand, they must be able to preserve the local language. In dealing with these conditions the community needs a media instrument in order to continue to maintain and preserve the local language. One of the media utilized by the Mekongga community in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province is to use a folklore-based cultural approach.

In various regions in the archipelago, each has a regional language or local language to show its distinctive characteristics with other regions. In daily interactions in the local language community provides an opportunity to be able to convey messages or advice in a friendly and polite manner. This regional language has the power to generate a sense of brotherhood between one another. In that context, local languages are the people's hope to survive and develop in the midst of increasingly modern technological developments. On the other hand, regional languages that have been going on for a long time in society can also maintain the linguistic identity of the community. Language is a space that can be used as a means of communicating in every environment and situation. In this context, local languages get a place to develop together with other languages. Folklore is one of the literary works that can specifically be used as teaching material and helps students to recognize local wisdom and understand its meaning as a source of moral teaching (Junifran and Rosliani, 2020). Folklore provides an opportunity for regional

languages to re-enter the paradigm of society with a new model as a local ideology in the perspective of contemporary language.

Modernization and globalization that have entered into every sector of social activities have an influence on the sustainability of regional languages, especially in the Mekongga region, Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province. The acceleration of the exchange of information and technology, without realizing it, has raised concerns for the sustainability of regional languages. The emergence of foreign languages in the midst of society makes the need for foreign languages to thrive in relationships. In various social domains, society no longer only interacts with other groups, but has lived mingling with outsiders who have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The open access to the social system makes it easier for everyone to determine and find co-workers or life partners. The local language which was originally the only language used in association is now no longer the main language because foreign languages have entered as the second language in society. Indonesian as the official language of the country also influences the use of regional languages, in addition, the development of English as a complementary language in the community also contributes to suppressing the use of regional languages in Kolaka Regency. In the process of using foreign languages and other languages, then regional languages tend to decrease in intensity, especially in government agencies which are mostly filled by people with language backgrounds that are different from the local population. On the other hand, in the educational environment, school children predominantly use Indonesian in their interactions. In addition, the phenomenon of inter-ethnic or regional marriage also shifts the use of regional languages in the family environment, which tends to use Indonesian in communicating. This linguistic phenomenon makes the position of the regional language as a mother tongue increasingly threatened by its existence. This threat has led to the extinction of regional languages that have lost their speakers in society.

Tondo (2009) in his research journal concluded that the extinction of regional languages is leading to something that is real in people's lives. The phenomenon of language oblivion needs serious attention from various parties which must be taken seriously and wisely. There are several factors that cause the extinction of regional languages which are then grouped into two general categories, namely due to natural factors and non-natural factors. Natural factors are a condition that cannot be avoided, which can be in the form of natural disasters, the influence of the majority language, bilingual or multilingual language communities, the effects of globalization, migration, inter-ethnic marriage (intermarriage). Meanwhile, a lack of respect for regional languages, a lack of intensity in the use of regional languages, the influence of economic factors, and the influence of the use of Indonesian are non-natural causal factors. Based on this, the reality is that the process of regional language extinction is something that can occur in any regional language and anywhere, including the Mekongga regional language in Kolaka Regency, Tenggara Sulawesi Province. Therefore, the Mekongga community adopted folklore as the basis for regional languages as an instrument in maintaining their regional language.

The widespread use of second languages in the social life of the people in Kolaka Regency needs serious attention. The importance of maintaining the sustainability of regional languages is an absolute thing to do. The contribution of regional languages in regional development still plays an important role not only as an identity but also as a means of self-actualization in social activities. Efforts to support the sustainability of regional languages in the people of Kolaka Regency then use the Mekongga folklore as a medium for maintaining regional languages. On the other hand, mastery of language can indirectly shape the flow of thinking to

be more systematic and smarter in processing facts and events. In other words, folklore is a cultural product in directing a more rational and competitive paradigm.

According to (Wibowo, 2016: 242) describes that a cultural intelligence is a series of knowledge and skills that are flexible in viewing and understanding culture, learning more in interaction patterns that are structured to form thinking to be more open and have a sensitivity that directs behavior more polite, sapon, responsible when communicating or interacting with other people's cultures. For the people of Kolaka, especially the Mekongga tribe, they place oral literature in the form of the Mekongga folk tales as a medium for educating children. The Mekongga folklore is told at every moment of togetherness in the family so that it can be said that this Mekongga folk story is the initial stage for children to know their environment and even to know the history of their area. From infancy to childhood, the Mekongga folk tales are often told and heard by parents. The process of conveying it also uses local languages as the main media in storytelling. The impression one gets when using the local language is that the message and the process of telling the story are more effective and easier for children to absorb. Therefore, the method of telling folk tales is still carried out using local languages.

The tradition of telling folk stories within the Mekongga community in the Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province has actually been going on for a long time, even in the past folklore was a space in society to convey messages and information about various events such as warnings, advice, protection, education to about divinity. Folklore as a picture of past life is used as a control tool in behaving and behaving in social and social settings. The human principles contained in the folklore give birth to a way to respect God's fellow creatures. The contents of the folklore are not only related to human life with humans but also humans and their natural surroundings to humans and their God. It cannot be denied that the great potential of a culture in shaping humane behavior. Of course, the attitude and behavior of humans is a natural will of humans as God's creatures so that humans are always looking for the support of their thoughts to be able to express their ideas. In this case, folklore is a human projection medium in conveying ideas politely.

The Mekongga folklore for children in Kolaka Regency is always an interesting story to listen to. A child listens to the folk tale of the Mekongga every time he sleeps or when he is with his parents. The content or message contained in each folklore forms knowledge of a child's local language. Eagleton (2007: 14) states that literature is a work of high value and its meaning has existed eternally and absolutely. At the present time, the function of the Mekongga folklore as a form of oral literature is no longer limited to conveying meaning but has developed into a means of understanding regional languages. Value is something that is real in human life. Herimanto (2015: 128) emphasizes that value is something that is expected by a person or every group of society. This value is something that is considered good and beneficial which human beings aspire to. With this value, human actions in society encourage them to think in accordance with the consequences of existing values. Since the beginning, the Mekongga people believed in the existence of the Mekongga folklore in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province because it contained values which were then used as guidelines in behaving and managing social life in the community.

Through the Mekongga folklore, the people of Kolaka Regency in Southeast Sulawesi Province have the opportunity to acquire and maintain their regional language. Therefore, the strategy of maintaining regional language based on the Mekongga folklore needs to be seriously intensified to encourage the behavior of regional languages consistently in various fields and opportunities. Based on this, this research is deemed necessary. The purpose of this study was to

describe the defense of regional languages based on the Mekongga folklore in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province.

## **II. Research Methods**

This study used descriptive qualitative method. According to Sugiyono (2011: 14) explains that qualitative methods are needed to find data thoroughly and deeply. Maleong (1986: 29) states that qualitative research tries to focus its attention on the accuracy and adequacy of data. To facilitate the process of data collection and data collection, the determination of the informants was carried out by means of the purposive sampling method. While the data collection techniques in this study used observation, interview and documentation techniques. Maleong (1989: 183-184) describes those observations or observations are made to be able to see the existence of the truth of a careful object. Meanwhile, the interview is in order to construct various kinds of events, incidents, feelings, motivations, demands regarding the object and focus of the research. The observation process was carried out to find an initial description of the point of distribution of the stories of the Mekongga people in Kolaka Regency. The interview technique is a technique used to explore the contents of each Mekongga folk tale. In addition, it is also to find the distribution of the Mekongga language vocabulary. Meanwhile, the domination technique is used to document the words or language of the Mekongga as a medium for maintaining regional languages. After the required data has been collected, the next step is to carry out the analysis. The analysis technique used in this study is to use a qualitative description. This analysis technique focuses on data found during the research process that can be presented in accordance with events and circumstances in society.

## **III. Discussion**

Local languages are valuable traces of civilization. With regard to value, Bartens (2005: 139) states that value is something that is attractive and sought by someone because value is something that is fun, liked and wanted by someone. In that part, if we look closely at this regional language, it shows its role in fostering brotherhood bonds as well as symbolizing the expression and social actualization of the community that owns it. Regional languages that continue to survive in various situations, especially with the entry of foreign languages, are faced with the reality of their shadow of extinction if they are not preserved immediately.

In the socio-cultural life of the people of Kolaka Regency, the local language is used continuously to maintain its existence. This effort can be seen in his social activities that still maintain the local language through the telling of the Mekongga folklore. The situation of maintaining the regional language can be found in their daily environment, starting from the family environment, in the association of children, to the education sector. The following describes each of the roles of the folklore as follows:

### **3.1 Regional Language Preservation through the Family Environment**

The family environment is the beginning for someone to carry out the learning process. In the family environment, a person gets his first lesson about various things ranging from things that are simple to complex. In the family environment, it is the laying of the knowledge base for a child. In particular, local knowledge of the local language of the family is the spearhead of its preservation. Johnson (1992) states that local knowledge is a series of knowledge created by people over a long period of time from generation to generation who live together with nature. The use of regional languages in the family environment also contributes to maintaining the regional language itself. The more often the local language is heard in the family environment,

the potential for survival is very large, on the other hand, if the local language is rarely or not heard enough, the potential for extinction is even greater.

The people of Kolaka Regency realize that their regional language is a valuable thing that should be preserved. In this preservation effort, parents use folklore as knowledge of the Mekongga language to their children. In their understanding they assume that these children will one day inherit and pass on their regional language and pass on to the next generation. If the children are cut off from their knowledge of the local language, they will lose the successor of the Mekongga regional language speakers in the future.

On various occasions, parents in the family environment always tell various kinds of Mekongga folk tales to their children. There are several Mekongga folk tales that are often told to children such as: Konggaaha folk tales, Sangia Ni bandera folk tales, Sanggoleo Mbae folk tales, Koloimba folk tales, La Kupa folk tales, Nanggomba folk tales. For the people of Kolaka Regency, especially the Mekongga tribe, telling the Mekongga folk tales to children is a necessity that must be given to children. This effort is a step taken by the Mekongga community in maintaining the existence of regional languages because in this folklore lies the richness of their regional languages. In the folklore, there is a vocabulary of local words that are almost unknown today, such as the word (*wulaa bubu/otela*) which means gold-plated bronze nana. The virtue of folklore is not only because it contains high value and meaning, but because folklore also lives in the local language. In other words, folklore is the home of the regional languages. Studying the purity of folklore is the same as learning the local language.

The development of children's psychology and linguistic knowledge can be developed through storytelling methods based on folklore. In principle, folklore becomes a fun and effective medium to be conveyed to a child, moreover, that the contents of the story contain many positive values and sides that can support the growth of children's cognitive, affective and motoric development. A child who is basically still in his developmental age develops a considerable curiosity about his surroundings so that in overcoming this folklore plays a role in filling the void in a child's knowledge. Children can learn about various kinds of things, especially everything related to the state of the natural environment and social situations in society. The family as the smallest environment in society is a place for children to first learn about how to adapt, how to speak words, how to deal with problems to how to solve a problem. For the Mekongga community in Kolaka Regency, they provide education to children through a cultural approach, especially in folklore. Why is that because in his view there is a growing understanding that situations, thoughts, circumstances, and even conflicts that exist in folklore are a picture of reality in society so that from an early age the children have been given character education as a basis for their attitudes when mingling with the wider community.

The entry of technology into the family environment is certainly felt to be a challenge in the development of regional languages. It is easier for children to get new information and knowledge and even new friends. This condition makes a child have to be able to master other languages. In addition to the regional language, especially Indonesian when talking to people outside of his ethnicity or using English to communicate with foreigners from abroad. In responding to this, parents must have an effective and fun method to teach their local language so that folklore becomes the main choice because it is more integrated with the child's psychology and its virtues have value. Ranjabar (2008: 103) explains that in essence education is a learning medium that can shape the ability to think and act, provide values that are useful for human life, especially in facing the entry of various new understandings and ideologies. Therefore, it cannot be denied that it is important to teach a child in particular and society in

general to have good knowledge and character. This effort is carried out in the habits of the Mekongga community by always living up to cultural values as local wisdom, especially in folklore as a projection of their life in the past.

### **3.2 Regional Language Preservation through Child Intercourse**

The people of Mekongga strongly believe that the folklore that grows and develops in their social system is a state of reality in the past. Each folklore that was born represented an event which the local community later perpetuated the incident in an oral story from time to time and from generation to generation to the present day. Not only the integrity of events is inherited, but there is a purity of values as a cultural ideology. As stated by Ranjabar (2008: 103) that ideology is a hierarchy of values that grows in society over a long period of time until living together with it functions in regulating the behavior of its owner community members. This value system is an important part of survival because it contains instructions and guidance. Therefore, the trust given by the Mekongga community to cultural works of folklore is placed in a special position of value and meaning.

Children are the main pillar in continuing the legacy of their families and communities. In a child, there is a big responsibility that must be passed on to the next generation in the future. One of the most valuable and valuable assets in social life is local languages. A child becomes a part that cannot be underestimated in the survival of the local language. Their role in preserving the local language is indispensable considering that they are at the stage of development of knowledge and analysis.

The habit of children in Kolaka Regency always plays activities in groups. When they play the game, it is always preceded by various kinds of discussions related to the game, both how to play it and other rules needed in their game. For Mekongga children who still often listen to the local language, they know and can pronounce the local language in their interactions during the game. Meanwhile, children who rarely listen to local languages are sometimes only able to understand the meaning or meaning of the word but are unable to pronounce it. On that occasion, it was not uncommon for the children to then retell the Mekongga folk tale which was heard from their parents or older siblings so that it attracted other children to listen to them. This phase is very useful in efforts to maintain regional languages because children can learn directly from their playmates.

The use of folklore in social situations is not always instes done by children. In their habit they always tell the new things they get. For those who have mastered the regional language of the Mekongga, the language used is the regional language of the Mekongga. However, if there is a child who has not mastered the Mekongga regional language well, what will happen to them is trying to communicate by means of code switching following other people's conversations in the regional language. However, the frequency of listening to words or reading in the regional language gradually makes a person who is initially limited to interpreting it changes to being able to communicate using the local language.

### **3.3 Regional Language Preservation through the Educational Environment**

Education plays an important role in forming children's language mastery institutionally. Language skills among an early age, even though they have started in their family environment, are considered insufficient in imparting their children's language knowledge. Even though the family environment is an arena for children's first language learning, but along with the introduction of modern technology, the intensity of the use of regional languages is decreasing.

Therefore, the formal education environment becomes the right space to teach and develop local language skills for children or early childhood.

The environment of the Mekongga community, which has undergone changes from time to time, indirectly also gradually affects children's knowledge, especially in acquiring children's language. Even though this change has significantly changed the child's linguistic behavior, it is starting to feel the acuteness of the local language. The existence of formal education is a new hope for the people of Mekongga to be able to maintain the existence of regional languages in the present or in the future. The Mekongga folklore which is owned by the people of Kolaka Regency gives access to every child to be able to get to know the local language more closely. So the importance of folklore as one of the cultural expressions of society is a form of civilization in the language of society. As stated by Sztompka (2010: 121) that basically human history follows three stages of development which have different characteristics, starting from the phase of savagery, barbarism, and the phase of civilization which overlaps with the development of technology. More specifically, the phase of civilization was marked by the emergence of the discovery of letters and works of writing. To be able to produce a writing which of course needs to be supported by good language skills and abilities. In this case, it starts from structuring thinking to form a systematic language pattern.

In an educational environment, of course, it contains Indonesian and foreign language subjects to study. This allows a child to know a language other than the local language that he has acquired since he was in childhood education. As the development of the era is increasingly advanced and complex, mastery of foreign languages is important for a child to master. The needs of the industrial sector require someone who has competence, one of which is mastery of technology to be able to speak a foreign language (English) so that many children are competing to learn English. These children even learn in courses to be able to speak English, while not infrequently they forget that learning local languages is no less important than foreign languages or other languages. The principle is that mastering a foreign language is necessary and appropriate, but on the other hand, regional languages should also be preserved and preserved so that they do not become extinct.

In the world of education in Kolaka District, local content education has been promoted in schools. The program is expected to absorb elements of local wisdom from the local community to be included in the learning section. On that occasion, oral literature in the form of Mekongga folk tales had the opportunity to be taught to students. This will indirectly revive the existence of regional languages in the educational environment. This local content learning has a wider reach because it can be taught to anyone in the learning environment. The presence of folklore in formal education is a big leap in the effort to maintain regional languages. The Mekongga community in Kolaka Regency has the opportunity to explore regional languages to become a language education medium that is structurally original in the cultural journey of the community's language.

Herimanto (2015: 68) explains that civilization does not only refer to the works of human culture that are physical in nature or can be seen and touched by the human senses such as goods, artifacts, and various forms of various types of buildings. In other words, that civilization is not only related to the form of objects of cultural work, but more than that that the form of civilization can also be in the form of human ideas and behavior. The essence of civilization is actually part of culture that is meaningful, valuable and beautiful. Likewise, the position of the Mekongga folklore is the result of the creation of the Mekongga society regarding their socio-cultural journey which is seen as having meaning, value and leading to the progress of

civilization. Regional languages are the basis for laying down civilization so that the Mekongga community in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province pays attention to the sustainability of this cultural wealth.

The potential for preservation and preservation of regional languages to stay alive has space in the educational environment. Widiyanto (2018) states that local language learning activities in the school environment have a positive impact on the preservation of local languages. School children then get additional time to deepen their mastery of the regional language while they are in the local language learning room. The richness of the Mekongga folklore can be used to attract children to speak the local language with the task of telling stories about the Mekongga folk tales. Thus, learning local content in schools can trigger children's local language knowledge to grow better.

The regional language developed through the media of the Mekongga folklore becomes a model and introduction of knowledge for the community in realizing a sense of love for the language that has been created by the ancestors. In the Mekongga folklore, it has a philosophical meaning about politeness, obedience, solidarity and love for the country. Each ethnic group has its own local language. The language that becomes their identity for them to feel proud of, is often used as an introduction in social activities. Language can also be used as a symbol of unity when the Mekongga people are overseas so that by listening to the language used, they assume that they are a family or sibling. In addition, government support for regional language defense has programmed community cultural activities through the Mekongga folklore festival on an ongoing basis in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi. Cultural activities are a medium to foster community enthusiasm for the growth of a sense of love for their regional languages which is the wealth of the people in Kolaka Regency. In addition, it can commemorate the services of ancestors who have had high knowledge of being able to create a language that has been passed down from generation to generation. The noble values of regional languages contained in the Mekongga folklore in Kolaka Regency can be used as education in maintaining the unity and integrity of society, nation and state.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The phenomenon of regional language defense is an aspect that continues to be the subject of discussion in linguistic studies. Regional languages that grow together with society or in other words, grow together with a child today are faced with advances in technology and information. After this phase, everyone can learn any language openly, especially by using internet access. On the other hand, the industrial world produces more competencies such as mastery of technology and foreign language skills (English) so that many people are competing to learn English. In overcoming the regional language problems, the people of Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province, made use of the Mekongga folklore to protect and preserve their regional languages.

The people in Kolaka Regency use the Mekongga folklore as a medium for understanding regional languages. This is done because the people are considered to have high meaning and value and have an element of entertainment so that someone is easily attracted to listening when the story is told. The preservation of the Mekongga regional language is carried out in various environments ranging from the family environment, the social environment of children, to the educational environment. Efforts to understand the language of the Mekongga

area in the three environments are carried out based on the Mekongga folklore, which is considered to contain historical value and educational value for children.

The existence of the Mekongga folklore provides an opportunity for the millennial generation of the Mekongga community to continue to know their regional language. The regional language that is stored in a folklore is a cultural wealth of the language of the Mekongga community which forms the mastery of regional language skills. It cannot be denied that the power of language is a universality of thinking and knowledge in a socio-cultural system. Therefore, it is important in applying the principles of life the role of regional languages as the root of national culture should be maintained. Folklore that lives in the midst of the Mekongga community in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province is a field of regional languages. There are various kinds of local vocabulary that are preserved and also preserved along with folklore because from the very beginning the community used local languages to express their thoughts and feelings.

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