

Research Article

A Corpus-Based Study on the Employment of Verb *Keep* between St3 and St4 in CLEC and Brown

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Received 22 June 2022; Revised 3 August 2022; Accepted 23 August 2022; Published 19 September 2022

Academic Editor: Yanyi Rao

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The present paper focuses on the frequently used verb *keep* by Chinese non-English majors and native speakers based on three corpora, namely, Brown, St3, and St4 in CLEC. Brown stands for a corpus of native speakers, whereas St3 and St4 in CLEC stand for Chinese non-English majors who take CET-4 and CET-6 tests, respectively. This paper employs the contrastive analysis theory. The thesis investigates the commonly used *keep* senses by Chinese learners in CLEC compared with those senses in Brown by native speakers. This current research also employs a large amount of computer instruments like SPSS, AntConc, Microsoft Excel, and Wordsmith. Furthermore, the research aims to find out whether Chinese learners' performance on verb *keep* gets improvement with the promotion of their English proficiency. The results of the paper show that Chinese non-English majors do not have a good command of the frequently used senses of *keep* by native speakers. There exists overuse and underuse of some senses. Nevertheless, with the improvement of English proficiency, Chinese learners' employment of *keep* is becoming much closer to that of the native speakers. According to the research, some pedagogical reflections to improve English teaching and learning of verbs like *keep* are also discussed in the paper. Blended teaching can be applied before class, and microlectures can be provided online. *Keep* phrasal verbs, idioms, and collocations can be included in microlectures, while class teachers and students can collaboratively draw mind maps of verb *keep*. After class, more assignments can be provided online, such as multiple choice, blank filling, translation, and so on.

1. Introduction

In the acquisition of second language, vocabulary plays an unquestionably important part. The predicate is indispensable in making up a sentence. Meanwhile, the predicate of a sentence must be a verb. Jiang and Zhong [1] stated that different types of verbs constitute different sentence patterns. The most changeable and active of all parts of speech are exactly verbs in English. Different tenses depend mainly on different kinds of verbs. Therefore, verbs bring great difficulties to language learning, especially with regard to high-frequency verbs.

"*Keep*" is chosen as a representative of verb in this paper. "*Keep*" is considered to be one of the most usually used words in BNC English, as is shown in *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* [2].

1.1. Research Purpose. This thesis aims to research the features of *keep* used by Chinese learners in CLEC compared with those used in Brown. The different meaning distributions of *keep* between Chinese learners and native speakers are compared.

In general, the following four questions are the research questions in this paper: first, in the frequency of *keep* employed between Chinese non-English majors and native speakers, is there any resemblance and diversion? Second, what reasons can account for these similarities and differences? Third, does Chinese non-English majors' *keep* employment become much nearer to the mother-tongue speakers with the promotion of their English proficiency? Finally, are there any pedagogical implications on EFL teaching and learning according to the research?

1.2. Research Significance. The significance of this thesis exists in that it complements previous studies on verbs. This makes a new contribution to the study of verb *keep*. These two aspects are discussed in detail in section 1.3.

1.3. Theoretical Background. The contrastive analysis is a major theory used in linguistic analysis. The contrastive analysis stands for the comparison between the output of native speakers and the output of second-language learners so as to point out the similarities and difficulties between the two languages. Lado [3] puts forward the theoretical basis of the comparative analysis hypothesis (CAH). Lado pointed out that those components that are rather similar to their mother tongue are not quite difficult for second-language learners; however, the components that are distinct from their mother tongue are quite hard for them.

A *corpus-based study of "Keep"* by Wang Ying [4] is a previous study of *keep*. Wang Ying's research is based on corpora LOB and SLESSON. LOB corpus is a British English corpus modeled on the proportion of Brown corpus. SLESSON is a corpus based on a set of English textbooks used in high school in China by He Anping. As a result, Wang's study mainly focuses on the study of textbooks instead of the study of authentic use by Chinese learners. Only twelve senses and three patterns of sense 1 are investigated in Wang Ying's paper.

The author concentrates on the authentic Chinese learners' employment of *keep* instead of textbooks' employment. Some new pedagogical reflections, such as blending class, microlecture, and mind map, are provided in EFL learning. In addition, the fourteen senses are more specific than the twelve senses by Wang Ying.

2. Research Methodology

Three corpora are involved in the research. Moreover, this research is carried out with the help of computer instruments, such as AntConc, SPSS, Microsoft Excel, and Wordsmith.

2.1. Corpora. The corpora involved in this study are Brown and CLEC. The Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC) [5] is the first authoritative learner corpus in China with a total of 1.1 million words. CLEC's data are general genre English compositions of Chinese learners at different levels. It consists of five subcorpora, in which St3 represents the compositions of Chinese non-English majors in CET-4 and St4 represents the compositions of Chinese non-English majors in CET-6. St3 and St4 are test compositions written by CET-4 and CET-6 testees. Because they are authentic language users, St3 and St4 are appropriate for studying Chinese learners' second-language development patterns.

Brown corpus is a modern native speakers' universal corpus that is also computer readable and quite authoritative. The corpus is composed of 1 million words of texts in American English in 1961. Therefore, the size of Brown is compatible with CLEC.

2.2. Instruments. The data needed for this study are the sentences in which the verb *keep* appears. In order that the data needed in this paper can be available, the application of computer software is much more convenient and efficient. AntConc, SPSS, Microsoft Excel, and Wordsmith are used in this study [6]. AntConc is used to extract the required tested words. The chi-square value is tested by SPSS software package. Microsoft Excel is employed to calculate and graphically display results. This thesis employs Wordsmith to test the type-token ratio (TTR) of the three corpora [7].

3. Data Collection and Research Procedure

The fourteen *keep* meanings are evidently shown in *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* [8]. According to this dictionary, all *keep* in the three corpora are checked to determine what meaning they belong to, and each meaning's frequency and percentage are calculated. If necessary, the results are shown in tables and figures. The meaning distributions among the three corpora, between native speakers and Chinese learners, and between St3 and St4 learners are compared. The chi-square test is conducted in order to discover whether there is a significant difference in the use of *keep*. This paper analyzes the characteristics of Chinese learners' use of *keep* in detail.

The detailed processing of data collection, research findings, and explanations for the outcome are listed below. The author compared the employment of *keep* in Brown and in CLEC. In this thesis, quantitative and qualitative analyses together with the possible reasons of the results are provided in detail.

3.1. Keep Occurrences in the Three Corpora. Keep frequencies in Brown and in St3 and St4 in CLEC are computed to discuss the use of verb *keep* with regard to overuse and underuse. Table 1 [9] shows the results.

In Table 1, it is quite evident that *keep* frequency in St3 and St4 is 206 and 124, respectively, which are much lower than the *keep* frequency in Brown. Nevertheless, the employment percentage of *keep* in the three corpora shows that the percentage of the employment of *keep* in St3 is remarkably higher than the percentage in Brown. On the contrary, the percentage of the employment of *keep* in St4 is significantly lower than the percentage in St3 and at the same time narrowly higher than the percentage in Brown. The remarkable difference in overall *keep* frequency across the three corpora can be attributed to the difference in the size of the three corpora. As a consequence, we utilize the chi-square test to research whether there is a significant difference between Chinese learner's second-language corpora and mother-tongue corpus. In Table 2 [9], *keep* distributions across the three corpora are provided.

According to Zhou Shijie [6], the critical value of the chi-square test is 3.84. That means one degree of freedom at 5% level. In Table 2, we can see the chi-square value is up to 66.200 between Brown and St3. The chi-square value is remarkably larger than 3.84. As a consequence, it is safe to arrive at the conclusion that the difference in *keep* frequency

TABLE 1: *Keep* in the Brown, St3, and St4.

Corpora	Frequencies	Corpora words	Percent
Brown	518	1015537	0.051
St3	206	209043	0.0985
St4	124	212855	0.0583

TABLE 2: Outcome of *keep* distribution's chi-square test between St3 and Brown.

	Value	df	Asymp. sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	66.200 ^b	1	0.000		
Continuity correction ^a	65.399	1	0.000		
Likelihood ratio	57.500	1	0.000		
Fisher's exact test				0.000	0.000
Linear-by-linear association	66.200	1	0.000		
N of valid cases	1225304				

a. Computed only for a 2×2 table, b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 123.64.

TABLE 3: Outcome of *keep* distribution's chi-square test between St4 and Brown.

	Value	df	Asymp. sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.768 ^b	1	0.184		
Continuity correction ^a	1.632	1	0.201		
Likelihood ratio	1.718	1	0.190		
Fisher's exact test				0.191	0.101
Linear-by-linear association	1.768	1	0.184		
N of valid cases	1229034				

a. Computed only for a 2×2 table, b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 111.25.

in terms of Brown and St3 is significant. St3 English learners employed the verb *keep* much more frequently than English native speakers. The most evident reason for this result may be that the range of vocabulary grasped by St3 learners is quite limited. Consequently, St3 learners are liable to use *keep* much more frequently when they cannot figure out other appropriate substitutes for *keep*.

Similarly, in Table 3, the chi-square test between St4 and Brown is carried out using exactly the same procedure as Table 2.

In Table 3, it is quite apparent that with regard to St4 and Brown, the chi-square value is 1.768. The number is fewer than the critical value of the chi-square test 3.84. As a result, there is no significant difference in verb *keep* frequency between St4 and Brown. St4 in CLEC represents Chinese learners who have taken CET6, whereas St3 in CLEC represents Chinese learners who have taken CET4. Only those non-English majors who have passed CET4 can have the qualifications of applying for CET6 examinations. Consequently, it is quite obvious that the English proficiency of non-English majors in St4 is higher than non-English majors in St3. As a result, Chinese learners' employment of *keep* is a lot nearer to mother-tongue speakers with the promotion of their English level. Nevertheless, we cannot conclude hastily that there is absolutely no difference between St4 and Brown. St4 non-English majors are still inclined to marginally overuse the verb *keep* compared with English native speakers.

According to the same procedure as Tables 2 and 3, the chi-square test with regard to Chinese learners is conducted in the following Table 4.

In Table 4, it is apparent that the outcome of the chi-square test is 21.869. The number is much larger than the critical value of the chi-square test 3.84. Consequently, it is safe to conclude that the difference is significant among Chinese EFL learners between St3 and St4. It is distinct that compared with St4 learners, St3 learners are inclined to employ *keep* much more frequently.

As we can see from the above three tables, namely, Tables 2–4, Chinese EFL learners have a tendency to employ verb *keep* much more frequently compared with English native speakers, especially when it comes to the St3 corpus. Analysis of TTR (type-token ratio) or we can say lexical density can help to offer some reasonable explanations. With the application of Wordsmith software [7], TTRs of three corpora are given in the following Table 5.

From Table 5, we can safely conclude that among the three corpora, the largest vocabulary range exists in Brown. St3 non-English majors have the lowest TTR of 3.34, which signifies that the vocabulary *keep* used in St3 is rather limited compared with St4 non-English majors and Brown native speakers. Furthermore, the TTR of St4 non-English majors is also remarkably lower than the TTR of Brown, which shows that the range of vocabulary *keep* used in St4 is also quite limited compared with Brown native speakers. Meanwhile, the TTR of St4 is 0.23 higher than the TTR of St3, which

TABLE 4: Outcome of *keep* distribution's chi-square test between St3 and St4.

	Value	Df	Asymp. sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.869 ^b	1	0.000		
Continuity correction ^a	21.357	1	0.000		
Likelihood ratio	22.082	1	0.000		
Fisher's exact test				0.000	0.000
Linear-by-linear association	21.869	1	0.000		
N of valid cases	422228				

a. Computed only for a 2 × 2 table, b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 163.54.

TABLE 5: TTR across the three corpora.

Corpora	St3	St4	Brown
Type	7757	8648	42579
Token	232541	241969	1015537
TTR	3.34	3.57	4.19

exhibits that the range of vocabulary *keep* used in St4 is a little less limited compared with St3 non-English majors. As a result, we can arrive at the conclusion that *keep* takes up a large ratio in overall Chinese learners' English output. Consequently, it results in the overuse of the high-frequency verbs like *keep* in Chinese learners' corpora.

To summarize the above analysis, Chinese learners are liable to employ verb *keep* too frequently compared with mother-tongue learners as a result of their limited range of vocabulary. Nevertheless, in the meantime, with the promotion of non-English majors' English proficiency, St4 learner's employment of *keep* is apt to be narrowly nearer to mother-tongue speakers than St3 learners.

3.2. Distribution of Different *Keep* Senses in the Three Corpora.

This section aims to investigate whether there are differences in the use of different meanings of *keep* across the three corpora and on the employment of verb *keep* if higher-proficiency English learners that are represented by St4 non-English majors are apt to become more native-like than lower proficiency St3 non-English majors. Hornby [8] supplied fourteen senses of *keep* in his dictionary.

- (1) continue to be in the specified condition or position; remain or stay; ~ (on) doing sth; continue to move in the specified direction.
E.g., She has the ability to *keep* calm in an emergency.
- (2) cause sb/sth to remain in the specified condition or position.
E.g., These gloves will *keep* your hands warm.
- (3) detain or delay (sb); ~ sb from sth/doing sth.
E.g., You're an hour late; what *kept* you?
- (4) continue to have (sth); retain; look after sth for sb; retain sth; have (sth) in a particular place; store; retain (sth) for future use or reference.
E.g., Please *keep* me a place in the queue.
- (5) own and manage (a shop, restaurant, etc.)

E.g., Her father *kept* a grocer's shop for a number of years.

- (6) own and look after (animals) for one's use or enjoyment
E.g., She *keeps* dogs in her apartment.
- (7) have (sth) regularly on sale or in stock.
E.g., "Do you sell Turkish cigarettes?" "I'm sorry, we do not *keep* them."
- (8) not reveal (a secret)
E.g., Can you *keep* a secret?
- (9) (of food) in good condition.
E.g., Do finish off the fish pie; it will not *keep*.
- (10) be in the specified state of health.
E.g., "How are you *keeping*?" "I'm *keeping* well, thanks."
- (11) make written entries in (sth); write down (sth) as a record.
E.g., She *kept* a diary for over twenty years.
- (12) provide what is necessary for (sb); support (sb) financially.
E.g., He scarcely earns enough to *keep* himself and his family.
- (13) guard or protect (sth); protect sb from (sth).
E.g., May the Lord bless you and *keep* you.
- (14) be faithful to (sth); respect or observe.
E.g., I have an appointment to *keep* at 3 pm.

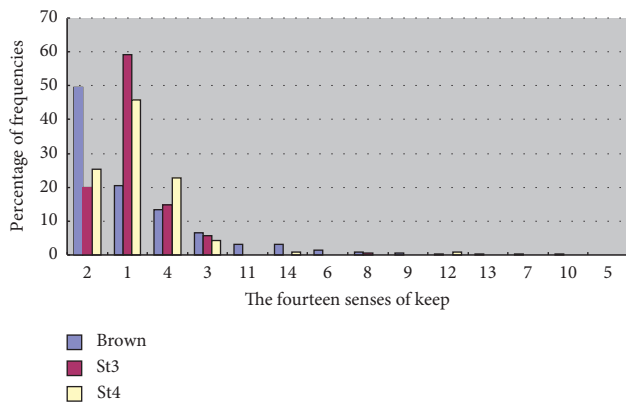
According to the 14 meanings listed above, all verb *keep* occurrences appearing in Brown, St3, and St4 are categorized and calculated, respectively. Then, the author calculates the percentage of each meaning in the three corpora, respectively. The percentages of these fourteen senses distributed in the three corpora are shown in Table 6. The order of the fourteen senses is listed in accordance with the sense frequencies from high to low appeared in Brown [9].

According to Table 6, both Chinese non-English major learners and English native speakers have a tendency to use the first four senses more frequently. It is quite apparent that when it comes to the rest ten senses, Chinese non-English major learners seldom use them. Figure 1 is provided according to Table 6 to offer a much more vivid presentation by means of Microsoft Excel.

As is quite evident in Figure 1 that Chinese non-English major learners and English native speakers are different

TABLE 6: Frequencies of *keep* senses in the three corpora.

Sense	Brown (Freq)	Brown (%)	St3 (Freq)	St3 (%)	St4 (Freq)	St4 (%)
2	256	49.42	39	19.90	30	25.42
1	106	20.46	116	59.18	54	45.76
4	69	13.32	29	14.80	27	22.88
3	34	6.56	11	5.61	5	4.24
11	16	3.09	0	0	0	0
14	16	3.09	0	0	1	0.85
6	7	1.35	0	0	0	0
8	5	0.97	1	0.51	0	0
9	3	0.58	0	0	0	0
12	2	0.39	0	0	1	0.85
13	2	0.39	0	0	0	0
7	1	0.19	0	0	0	0
10	1	0.19	0	0	0	0
5	0	0	0	0	0	0

FIGURE 1: Comparison of *keep* senses across the corpora.

from one another with regard to the proportion of each verb *keep* sense. Compared with English native speakers, Chinese non-English major learners' use of *keep* is excessive with regard to sense 1 and sense 4. On the contrary, Chinese non-English major learners are inclined to underuse sense 2 and sense 3 significantly, especially when it comes to sense 2. According to Table 6 and Figure 1, the following two subsections offer a detailed analysis of the data and results.

3.2.1. Respective Analysis of the Data across the Three Corpora. At first glance, compared with the first four senses of *keep*, the other ten senses account for merely a small proportion of all the senses among the three corpora. Among the last ten senses, two outstanding senses that are sense 11 and sense 14 merely appear in Brown. In the last ten senses, Chinese learners only use three senses once, which are sense 8, sense 12, and sense 14. With respect to sense 5, nobody in the three corpora has ever used it.

St3 non-English major learners only use five senses of the verb *keep*, which are sense 2, sense 1, sense 4, sense 3, and sense 8 ranging according to the use frequency. Sense 8 of *keep* only appears once in St3. The percentage of sense 1 in St3 is remarkably higher than that of Brown, which is nearly triple of Brown. However, the percentage of sense 4 in St3 is

slightly higher than that of Brown, which is about 1.5% more than Brown. The percentage of sense 2 in St3 is significantly lower than that of Brown, which is about 30% lower compared with Brown. The percentages of sense 3 in St3 and St4 are slightly lower than that of Brown.

The top four senses most commonly used by St3 learners are sense 1, sense 2, sense 4, and sense 3, which account for 99% of all *keep* occurrences in St3. From the data, St3 learners seem to use these four senses more frequently than the other ten senses, especially sense 1. Similarly, these four senses also rank the top four in St4 and Brown, but in quite different order. The order in Brown is sense 2, sense 1, sense 4, and sense 3 in terms of frequency. The most prominent sense in St3 is sense 1, the percentage of which is almost three times of Brown.

Although the overall verb *keep* percentage in St4, which is 0.0583, is not much different from that in Brown, which is 0.51, as is shown above in Table 1, and the frequency of each *keep* sense in St4 and Brown is quite distinct. St4 non-English major learners mainly use the first four senses, which are sense 1, sense 2, sense 4, and sense 3 ranging according to frequency, whereas sense 12 and sense 14 only appear once in St4. In the first four senses, the percentage of sense 1 in St4 is more than twice of that in Brown. With regard to the percentage of sense 4, it is about 10% higher in St4 than in Brown. Nevertheless, the percentage of sense 2 in Brown almost doubles that in St4. Furthermore, sense 3 in Brown was 2.4% higher than the frequency in St4. All in all, the top four most commonly used senses in St4 are sense 1, sense 2, sense 4, and sense 3 according to frequency, which account for 98% of all *keep* occurrences in St4.

With regard to the two learner corpora St3 and St4, the first four senses in St3 and St4 and their order are consistent, which are sense 1, sense 2, sense 4, and sense 3. When it comes to the other ten senses, St3 and St4 non-English major learners seldom use them. However, compared with St3, the percentage of sense 1 and sense 2 in St4 was closer to that of Brown. This may signify that Chinese learners' English level gets improvement with the advancement of their English learning. Nevertheless, no matter how high their English

level is, Chinese learners are still likely to become closer to native speakers, whereas it is quite difficult for them to be exactly the same as English native speakers.

3.2.2. General Analysis of the Results. The above results show that although the verb *keep* has been learned in a comparatively early stage of English learning, Chinese non-English majors still do not comprehensively master the fourteen meanings of the verb *keep* as English native speakers do. Some senses like sense 1, sense 2, sense 4, and sense 3 are quite frequently used, while others are rarely used. The fact that Chinese teachers and learners have always emphasized the first four senses, especially with regard to the first meaning, probably may be exactly the reason. In St3 and St4, the first four meanings account for 99% and 98% of all *keep* occurrences, respectively. Furthermore, sense 1 accounts for almost half of all *keep* events in St3 and St4, while sense 2 has the highest frequency in Brown, accounting for almost half of all *keep* occurrences in Brown.

The following reasons may account for the higher frequency of the first four senses. First of all, these four meanings are basic meanings of the verb *keep*, especially sense 1. Chinese teachers tend to overemphasize these four senses. Second, Chinese learners are taught and have been familiar with these four senses since they began to learn English. Therefore, they are inclined to use *keep* with regard to the first four senses. Third, even after being admitted into college, students are likely to use words that they are quite familiar with and reluctant to memorize and employ unfamiliar and difficult vocabulary. As a result, they can save energy and reduce the burden of memorizing new words. Fourth, with regard to the last ten senses that Chinese learners seldom use, Chinese learners may be lacking in adequate input. However, it does not necessarily mean that Chinese learners do not know these senses. The reason is likely to be that Chinese learners do not attach great importance to these ten senses. On the contrary, they prefer to use words or expressions other than *keep*. Finally, the overuse of sense 1 in St3 may be correlated with the corpus to some extent. Many St3 learners use “*so in order to keep fit*” repeatedly in one composition. The materials in St3 are all CET-4 compositions or compositions of similar levels, and one of them is “health.” The title of the composition may contribute to limit learners’ vocabulary output and expression. There are as much as 40 “*keep fit*” in St3 in all.

4. Conclusions and Pedagogical Reflections

To sum up, there is difference in the frequency of *keep* employed between Chinese non-English majors and native speakers. Chinese learners do not comprehensively master the fourteen meanings of the verb *keep*. Compared with native speakers in Brown, Chinese learners are inclined to mainly use the first four senses whereas ignore the other ten senses. However, in general, St4 Chinese learners’ employment is a lot nearer to Brown compared with St3 learners.

The overemphasis on the first four senses, the unfamiliarity of the other ten senses, the limited range of vocabulary grasped by Chinese learners, the reluctance to memorize new vocabulary, and the limitations of the topics of compositions in St3 and St4 corpora can be attributed to the difference in the employment of *keep* senses across the three corpora.

Generally speaking, with the improvement of English proficiency, Chinese learners’ use of *keep* is much closer to that of native speakers.

The present corpus-based study of verb *keep* can provide some implications for EFL teaching and learning in China, especially for the teaching and learning of English verbs. English verbs deserve more attention during vocabulary teaching and learning. Students should try to enlarge the depth and breadth of their understanding of vocabulary. Remembering as many words as possible can greatly help students to express themselves accurately and appropriately. At the same time, because the choice of words and sentences can demonstrate students’ English level to a great extent, teachers are also supposed to direct the students to differentiate various similar terms, enrich their wording and phrasing, and offer profound example illustrations so as to expand students’ words and phrases. Employing high-frequency words as much as possible is bound to get low grades and does not deserve excellence.

Blended teaching can be applied in verb teaching. Before class, microlectures on verb *keep* can be provided online. The sequence of the different senses of *keep* can be shown in accordance with the frequency of different senses in Brown from high to low. *Keep* phrasal verbs, idioms, and collocations can be included in microlectures. Students ought to learn these materials before class and know the different senses of *keep*, phrasal verbs, idioms, and collocations. In class, teachers and students can draw mind maps of verb *keep* collaboratively. After class, more assignments can be provided online, such as multiple choice, blank filling, translation, and so on.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study can be obtained from the author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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