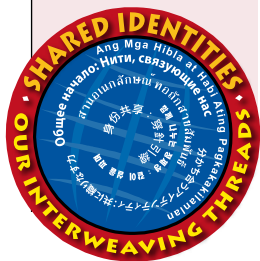


Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads



Shogakko English learning environments: The ALT role

Kaori Nakao
Seinan Gakuin

Reference data:

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In March of 2008 the Monbukagakusho formally notified elementary schools of a new compulsory foreign language course for elementary school fifth/sixth-year curricula. However, 96% of elementary schools had already been teaching English. As a result, new curricula will need to take present teaching-learning realities into consideration, as well as national curriculum changes. However, these teaching-learning environments, particularly teachers' roles, have not been sufficiently explored. Classroom observations (n=16) and interview results (n=36) suggest that different schools are teaching English within at least four different models. Results suggest that although English teaching-learning environments have many instructional similarities (pronunciation-modeling, oral-assessment, etc), in most contexts, the assistant language teacher's (ALT) role in the pre/post teaching components of the language instruction was small. Schools including ALTs in the pre/post teaching components, had teachers who were both observed to and perceived themselves as having clear instructional roles. Clear instructional roles, particularly for ALTs, were observed to promote a positive and interactive teaching-learning environment.

2008年3月に告示された小学校新学習指導要領において、高学年に週1回程度、外国語活動(英語)を実施することが決定した。現在すでに全国約96%の公立小学校が英語活動を実施しており、今後、小学校英語教育を向上させていくためには、現在行われている英語活動の実態を把握したうえで、望ましい学習環境について検討していく必要がある。しかしながら、これまで小学校英語教育、とりわけ教師の役割に焦点を当てた研究はあまりなされていない。本稿は、公立小学校16校の授業分析と現場教師へのインタビューを通して、各小学校の英語活動、特にALTの役割について比較検討した。その結果、ALTの役割は「音声面でのモデル」や「評価」は共通していたが、中でも特徴的な4つの指導方法のタイプによって顕著な違いが見られた。またALTを含めた事前のミーティングと事後のリフレクションを行っている授業では、各教師の役割が明確であり、よりインターアクティブな学習環境が作られていた。

In 2002, the Monbukagakusho (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) informally began a national elementary school English program (Monbusho, 1998). In 2007, a Monbukagakusho survey of public elementary schools suggested that 96% of institutions were holding English classes (Monbukagakusho, 2007a). Finally, in 2007 the Chukyoshin Kyoikukateibukai

(Central Educational Council) came to the preliminary conclusion that fifth and sixth grade students should have English instruction and that this instruction should be carried out once a week throughout the school year, or for 35 weeks (Monbukagakusho, 2007b). They held that this instruction of English should be for all fifth and sixth grade students nation-wide (Monbukagakusho, 2007b).

In March of 2008, the national curriculum guidelines for English in Japanese elementary schools were set: (1) Fifth and sixth grades received a compulsory English component; the course was titled “Foreign Language Class”. (2) Within fifth and sixth year “Foreign Language” classes, students were to be instructed in English. (3) English classes were to be prepared by homeroom teachers (HRT) or Japanese Teachers of English (JTE). (4) Classes were to be taught by HRT, with the aid of locally available native speakers of English (Monbukagakusho, 2008).

Through the experience of a “foreign language” (any foreign language in theory, but almost always English in practice), the Monbukagakusho expected students to learn about language and culture. These classes were also expected to aid students in the development of a positive attitude towards communication. Finally, the students in these classes were expected to develop a grounding for communication skills, while “getting-used-to” and “being immersed in” foreign language phonology and basic expressions

The primary purpose of this study was to describe the present roles of native English teacher in Japanese elementary school English classes. Based on the qualitative analysis of classroom observations and teacher interviews, suggestions for improving the teaching-learning classroom environment will be outlined.

Methods

Sample

During 2006 and 2007, 16 Japanese public elementary schools were visited and 16 English classes (one from each school) were video recorded. In addition, semi-structured interviews with HRTs (n=16), Native Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) (n=16) and JTEs (n=4) were carried out. In some cases, following the classroom observations, informal interviews with the school’s principal were undertaken (n=9).

Means of analysis

Videos of classes were transcribed (aural and visual components). The transcriptions were analyzed qualitatively, and outlines of the observed classes constructed (e.g. Table 1). The teacher interviews were transcribed, analyzed qualitatively and cross-referenced for content.

Results

Class analysis results

As portrayed in Figure 1, the number of teacher speech occurrences from all teachers present during the class, varied within the 16 different classes observed. Classroom A and classroom D, in particular, make it clear that speech quantity variation was observed amongst sampled classrooms. Teacher speech-count quantities, and the instructional methods used, consistently correlated. For this reason, teacher speech count (high, middle, and low) was used as a criterion for dividing the classes into 3 different

Table 1. Class observation qualitative analysis results: Class outline example

D 小学校 第5学年 (HRT+ALT)				2006年10月26日 (木)		
活動過程 (Procedure)	時間配分 (Duration)	ALT(%)	HRT(%)	総数(回) (Total speech count)	主に活動を進めている 教師 (Leading teacher)	活動内容 (教師の役割を中心に) (Teachers' role in the activity)
子どもたちへの働きかけ		76.2	23.8	606		
教師間のやりとり		15	23	38		
開始前	1分30秒					入室すると児童は列ごと(8列)に並び、座って待機。ALTは開始まで入り口に待機し、児童とのインタラクションなし。HRTがALTを入り口まで呼びに行き、授業開始。
Greeting	11分	89.6	10.4	183	ALT	HRTが児童に対してALTに挨拶するよう指示する。しかし、ALTは理由も伝えず児童に何度も挨拶のやり直しをさせる。やり直しさせられている理由が分からない児童にHRTがWith a smileと説明し、再度挨拶して終了。そして、ALTによる1対1の日常的な挨拶の質問へ移る前に、ALTによる質問文の練習。提示された質問文は1) 年齢、2) これは何、3) 好きなスポーツは何、4) 天気、であり、特に発音を意識させる。指名はALTが行っている。HRTはALTがスムーズに進行・説明できない場面においてALTの発話を遮り説明する場面も見られるが、その他はALTの横で見ている。
Warming up	7分	88.3	11.7	154	ALT	HRTがALTに活動内容を耳打ちした後で児童にSimon says gameのルール説明をする。ALTはゲームを想起させ、ゲームを開始、指示を出していく。リハーサルで子どもの反応を確認したHRTはALTに本番開始要請。ゲーム終了後、ALTは前時の復習を1対1で児童に質問・確認していく。What is this?の答え(絵カードが指す単語)では間違いを訂正するなど発音に注意して練習させる。指名もALTが行う。HRTは途中、同じ種類(動物、果物、文具など)の並びになっている単語カードをMixさせようとシャッフルしたり、段々声が小さくなる児童に対し、声を出すように指示したりする。
Main activity	18分	37.2	62.8	121	HRT	HRTがめあてを提示し、復唱させる。ばらばらに復唱する児童に対し、HRTは再度指示。その後、ALTも復唱するよう指示を出す。その後、HRTは次活動予告をし、ゲーム内容の説明をALTに要請する。しかし、ALTはバインダーを取り出さただけで説明せず。教師同士のデモンストレーションもなく、HRTがインタビューする役と答える役の班分けをして、最初と最後の挨拶の仕方を確認し、インタビュー開始合図。活動場面では、HRTは「Rest time is one minute.」進行(時間配分・確認)、「Let's go! Let's go!」など積極的にインタビューをするよう指示・促しなど。ALTにおいては積極的参加というよりも、笑顔で巡回しながらインタビューしていない児童に対し参加するよう促す。ゲーム終了後、インタビュー数の結果報告はHRTが行う。最後に、インタビュー活動の発展としてALTへのインタビューをさせる。HRTは指名を行い、ALTは児童の質問に答える。

categories (high, middle, and low), within which four different instructional methods were found: pattern-practice, communication, stream-teaching and three-teacher.

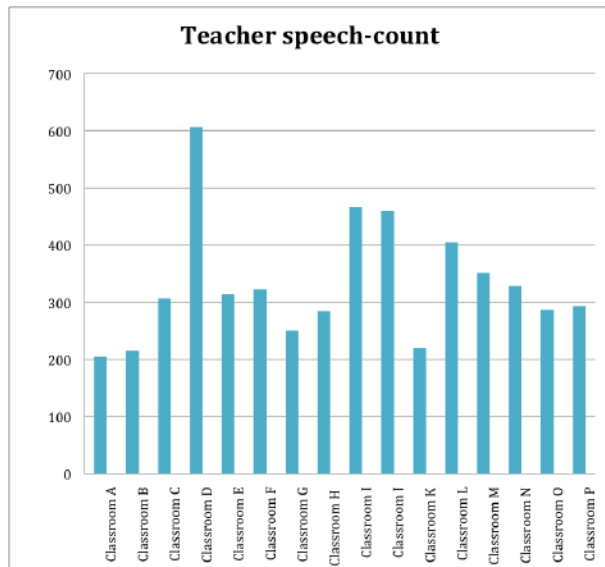


Figure 1. Teacher speech-count within 16 class observations.

Pattern-practice classrooms

Classrooms D and I had a particularly high teacher speech-count. They were found to have pattern-practice or language instruction focused on the repetition of words and phrases as the salient instructional method in the classroom. Generally,

the high teacher speech count was due to a high quantity of teacher-student commands (e.g. repeat after me, louder). Figure 2 contains 2 events from a pattern-practice class, transcribed and coded (included in hard brackets).

Teacher-student language practice:

ALT: How old are you? [Question/Teacher-student exchange]

Student: I ten years old

ALT: No. I am. [correction/assessment]

Student: I am ten years old

ALT: Okay. Very good. [Praise/oral assessment]

Request for repetition:

ALT: Did you listen carefully? [Modeling/content instruction]

Students: Did you listen carefully? (not in unison)

ALT: No! Did you listen carefully? (warning regarding student pronunciation of “carefully”) [Negative/oral assessment, Modeling/content instruction] Now please speak loudly! Once more again! [instruction/instructions]

Figure 2. Pattern practice event

As described in Figure 3, classrooms within which teacher-student interaction such as praise and language correction are high, but instruction regarding content, the why and what of instruction, are low. ALTs were found to be producing most of the oral instructions within this class-type. ALTs had little or no role within the management and other aspects of the classroom.

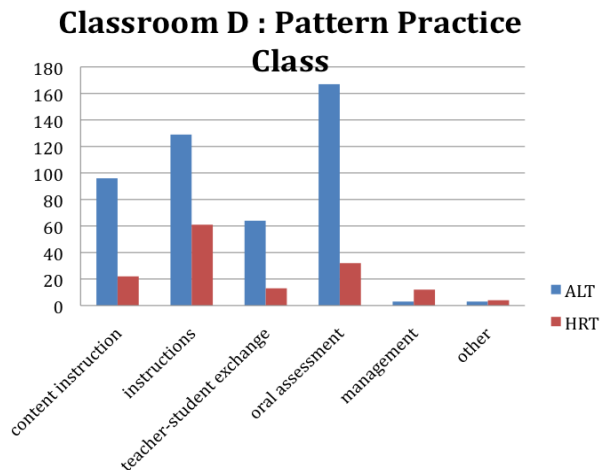


Figure 3. Pattern-practice classroom type

Communication classrooms

Classrooms B and K, had a particularly low teacher speech-count. It was observed that the classroom focus was on communication-activities, or activities focused on getting students to interact with each other. Generally, low teacher speech-count was combined with greater student-student interaction and teacher-student communication, rather than commands. As a result, classes of these types have been labeled communication classes. Figure 4 depicts 2 events from a communication class, transcribed and coded (included in hard brackets).

Student error correction
 Students: It's seven hundred ten yen. (Seven's "v" is mispronounced)
 ALT: emphasis on "v" □ It's seven hundred ten yen. [modeling/content presentation]
 Students: It's seven hundred ten yen.
 ALT: Wow!! Very good! [praise/assessment]

Situation: Buying a hamburger at a restaurant [modeling/content presentation]
 HRT: Hi! May I help you?
 ALT: Hamburger, please. How much is it?
 HRT: It's four dollars.
 ALT: (counts out the money) Price down! (Emphasis)
 Students: (Laugh)
 HRT: (surprised) I'm sorry.
 ALT: Okay.

Figure 4. Communication class event

As demonstrated by Figure 5, in communication classrooms, teachers spend a considerable amount of time instructing students in content (the hows and whats of language instruction), relative to assessment, praise and general instructions. In aspects other than content instruction, teaching is evenly divided between ALT and HRT. Teachers spend a large proportion of their instructional time preparing students for student-student communication activities. The ALT is involved in classroom management and other aspects of instruction, but was observed to take a secondary role to the HRT.

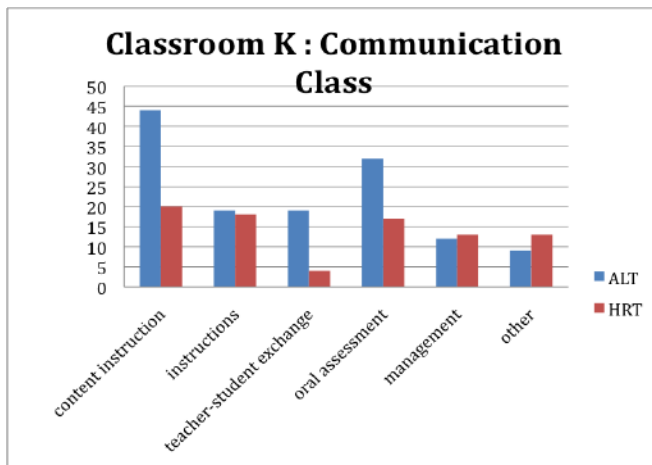


Figure 5. Communication classroom type

All other classrooms, in all other schools sampled, were found to have neither a particularly high or low speech-count; they were found to have classroom instruction that varied. At least two types of instructional arrangements fit this middle speech-count classroom type. The first, were the streamed classrooms and the second were the three-teacher classrooms.

Streamed-teaching classrooms

Within these classrooms, students were divided into two groups, based on their confidence and perceived language competencies. As result of this “streaming” of students into

different competency groups, this class type was labeled “streamed-teaching”. After a brief explanation—as a larger group—regarding the days activities and goals, the students are divided into a high-group and low-group; depending on the day, either group could be taught by either teacher (ALT or HRT). The high-group students are then provided with instruction and activities that challenged them; the low-group was instructed at their confidence and competence level. The high-level group students received reduced teacher-student instruction and engaged in long and challenging pair/group communication activities. The low level group received larger quantities of modeling (teacher, teacher-student and student-student) and sufficient repetition to ensure they gained confidence with the material. Generally, the two groups came back together for the final portion of the class: one final group activity and a review.

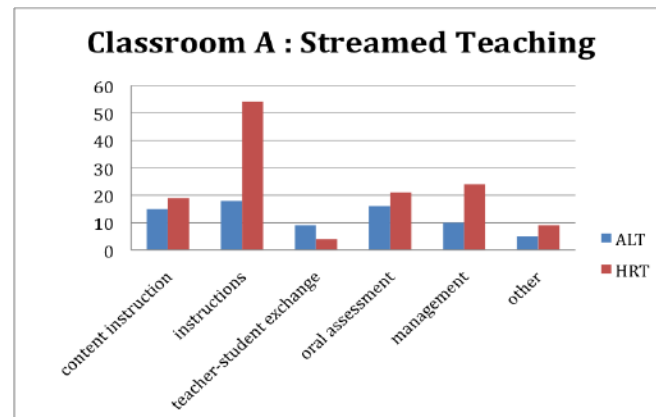


Figure 6. Streamed-teaching class type

The streamed-teaching classroom (see Figure 6) had a—comparatively—low teacher speech-count. One striking difference, when compared to the previous two class types described, communication and pattern-practice, is the quantity of participation on the part of the ALT. ALTs were observed to produce a low number of general instructions compared to the HRT. This may be attributed to the fact that during this observation, the ALT is teaching the high group on his own with a communicative approach, while the HRT is teaching the low group (confidence/proficiency) with a pattern-practice approach.

The following excerpt from a streamed class, displays the two types (HRT/JTE) of instruction predominant in these classroom types. Two transcribed and coded (coding is included in hard brackets) events from a streamed class can be seen below in Figures 7 and 8:

ALT supporting the HRT

HRT: Bag and pencil case under the chair.

Students: (putting away their bags and pencil cases)

ALT: (For students that do not understand, the ALT explains with gestures.) [Modeling/content instruction]

Figure 7. Streamed class event: ALT support

Streamed-teaching

HRT: Next lesson, two group. Okay? Group A is me. (Very slowly). Group B is ~(ALT's name). You choose A or B. (Gives ALT the picture cards) Group A, here.

ALT: Group B. (calls the students and sits them down

(While showing them the cards) What's this? [Instruction/ instructions; Questions/ Teacher student exchange]

Figure 8. Streamed class event: Dividing into groups

Three-teacher classrooms

A second type of classroom that was found to have an intermediate quantity of teacher speech-count was the three-teacher classroom (Figure 9), so labeled because three teachers were present and involved in the observed classroom instruction (ALT, HRT, JTE). Schools with this classroom type, tended to have a strong emphasis on student-student interaction. In these contexts, either the JTE or HRT (or both) had a meeting with the ALT before the class started. Presumably as a result of this, both the quantity and nature of all teachers' roles were perceived to be consistent and clear (see Figure 9). Of the three teachers present, the ALT had the strongest role within each of the categories. While the quantity of the ALT-student speech was generally lower than what was observed in the communication classroom type, ALTs were observed to be involved in all aspects of classroom instruction, management and other categories.

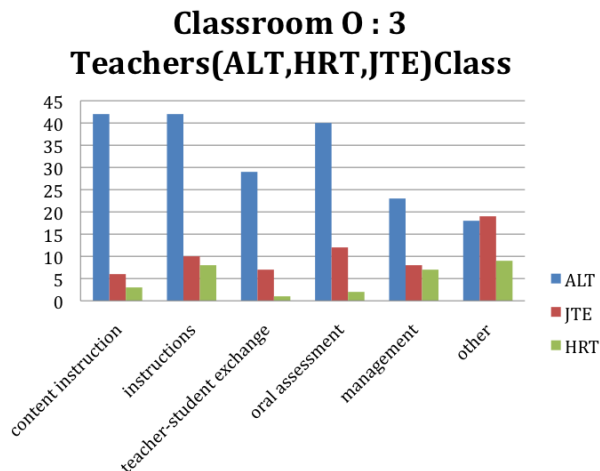


Figure 9. Three-teacher classroom

Figure 10 exemplifies the kind of teacher-student and teacher-teacher interaction observed in this classroom type

Teacher interviews

Teacher interviews (n=36) were an opportunity to ascertain teachers' (ALTs', HRTs', JTEs') perceptions of the ALTs' classroom role and better explain what those perceptions might be related to. Interviews (see Table 2) suggests that if ALTs are involved in class-planning, class-reflection and pre-class meetings, they would be more likely to perceive their instructional role (i.e. what they felt their job within classroom instruction was) as being one of general support

After singing a song

ALT: Do you faster? [question/teacher-teacher exchange]

JTE: Yes? [encouraging answer/teacher-student exchange]

Students: Yes!

ALT: Faster, please! (modeling while putting a hand to his ear and urging) [modeling/content instruction; instruction/instructions]

Ss: Faster, please.

Praise

ALT: (regarding a student demonstration) Good job! [Praise/oral assessment]

(JTE/HRT demonstrate paying attention)

ALT: Watch this! [Instruction/instructions]

JTE/HRT: (preparation for demonstration)

ALT: Light, camera, action! [Atmosphere creation/management]

Figure 10. Three-teacher event: ALT support

for the HRT/JTE, as well as the students. Also, they are less likely to feel their role to be one-dimensional: just HRT support, pronunciation or student entertainment.

During teacher interviews, the researcher asked an ALT who had been working in a three-teacher environment, "What is important for team-teaching?" The ALT A responded, "Listening to each other's ideas and requests, and constructing the class together." In contrast, ALT B who had not been included in meetings and class reflection stated that "I am just receiving money for class time; I don't want to be involved in class reflection and preparation." ALT B's comment may have been related to his personal feelings on the topic, but may also have been related to his teaching environment: one with little support and opportunity for pre/post class input and interaction.

Table 2. Teacher interview results

	Classroom D	Classroom K	Classroom A	Classroom O
ALT included in class planning	×	○	×	○
Meeting	△	○	○	○
Class reflection	×	△	×	○
ALTs' Perceptions of their role	Teaching pronunciation and English	Entertain and communicate with students	HRT support	Be friendly with the students; support the JTE & HRT
Legend	○-Does	△-Sometimes	×-Doesn't	

During teacher interviews, JTE A suggested that meetings with ALTs were helpful "... to ensure that the ALT feels included, it is important for them [JTEs] to be open to their [ALTs] ideas and requests" and that meetings were where this happened. JTE B said that "We bring our reflections regarding the previous class to the meeting for the next class, this way the quality of classes improves.... We share our ideas and experiences."

Conclusion

Within the four types of classroom instruction observed, ALTs tended to have consistent roles:

1. Pattern-practice: Pronunciation modeling and language instruction

2. Communication: Communication with students and some classroom management
3. Streamed-teaching: Communicate with students and large amounts of classroom management.
4. Three-teacher: Pronunciation modeling, affective regulation of students and language instruction.

Within most of the Japanese elementary school English classrooms observed, ALTs were found to be primarily responsible for language modeling and secondarily language instruction. For the main class activity, depending on the instructional method being applied, ALTs instruction role was found to vary considerably. In some contexts ALTs were found to be just observing and others actively participating by modeling with the HRT/JTE or students, interacting with the students during the activity and aiding in classroom and affective management.

Interviews and classroom observations suggested that ALTs within the 3-teacher classroom appeared to be better prepared for class as a result of their involvement in all teaching components, pre and post. Teacher-roles within the 3-teacher classroom were observed to be very clear and consistent; again, interviews suggested that this may be the result of regular meetings with the ALT and appropriate preparation.

The Monbukagakusho has determined that classroom plans are to be constructed by the HRT or JTE. However, the actual English class is taught through "team-teaching" and ALTs are to be employed in classroom instruction. Based on the analysis presented here, for the creation of a positive and coherent teaching-learning environments to

arise within Japanese elementary school English classrooms, ALTs need to be a part of all aspects of the teaching learning environment: pre/post meetings, lesson planning, and reflection.

Future directions

If elementary school classrooms are to meet the demands of the Monbukagakusho, they will need greater participation on the part of ALTs. The results of this research suggest that this might be accomplished by increasing the participation of ALTs in the planning, meeting and reflection components of the classroom.

The current focus on the instruction of fifth and sixth year elementary school students has prevented teachers from taking students' development into consideration when organizing curricula. Some schools, contrary to the Monbukagakusho's guidelines for elementary school instruction, were observed to be teaching all years, first through sixth grade. This was evident in the developmental approach taken in the design of their respective curricula. The general expansion of the Monbukagakusho's guidelines to include the instruction of all grades within elementary schools, would allow teachers to consider such matters when developing future curricula.

Presently, the Monbukagakusho primary expectation of ALTs in elementary school English instruction is to provide students with pronunciation practice, model common expressions and interact with students in their foreign language. However, the results of the study suggests that in most schools, ALTs spend the majority or entirety of

their classroom instruction focused upon pronunciation and common expression modeling, and rarely have much opportunity for teacher-student interaction. This may be, in part, due to the reality that most ALTs are unsure about how the class will proceed, often having very little opportunity to interact with the HRT/JTE before and after class. As already suggested, this situation may be improved by greater inclusion of the ALT in all aspects of the elementary school English classroom.

Currently, training seminars for teachers are held separately: HRT/JTE have training together; JET (Japanese Exchange Teaching) ALTs at the elementary, junior high and high school level often each have separate seminars; and finally local-hire ALTs often have no formal training seminars. If the quality of elementary school English instruction is to improve, such seminars must include ALTs and HRT/JTEs. The inclusion of ALTs will both improve their understanding of the teaching-learning context and increase the necessary understanding between HRTs/JTEs and ALTs. After such training schemes were in place, providing money was available, the Monbukagakusho should eventually seek to expand the number of ALTs who work at one elementary school as their primary position, rather than the one-day ALT who has little connection to the elementary school, its teachers and curriculum. ALTs working permanently at one elementary school will be able to be apart of the institution, and take part in a wider variety of classes and school activities, bringing the role of the ALT as a "daily guest" at elementary schools to an end.

Kaori Nakao has recently graduated from Seinan University with a Master's in Education. Her primary research interest is language teaching methodology. <kaorinewyork@hotmail.com>

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