



Turn-Taking Mechanism in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*

Samaila Yakubu^{1*}, Habila Iranyang Jeremiah¹

¹Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

*Corresponding Author

Samaila Yakubu

Department of English and Literary
Studies, Federal University Wukari,
Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Conversation analysis is an approach which deals with verbal and non-verbal aspects of language in a situation of everyday life. Dialogues in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame* are classified as naturally occurring conversations because they involve two or more interlocutors (characters) who employ turns to deliberate on issues that are related to the roles the gods play in the lives of human beings. So, as pertinent as conversation analysis is in dealing with matters bothering human beings, no enough research has been carried out on it. Therefore, this paper seeks to undertake study on turn-taking mechanism in the above named text so as to see how it is being used by the characters in it. The paper adopts Sacks *et al*, (1974) conversational model as its theoretical framework. The text is analysed and the results show that aspects of turn-taking mechanism such as starting up, taking over, interruption, filled pauses or verbal fillers, silent fillers ellipses, questions, declarative sentences and silence run through the text. Lexical items such as "oh", "well", "no" are also used in the text to take turns. Turns are allocated on the bases of current speaker select next speaker, current speaker self-select and current speaker continuous. The study also found that the use of turn-taking mechanism in the text makes the conversations run smoothly. The study concludes that conversation analysis is an excellent tool for studying naturally occurring conversations.

Keywords: Conversation analysis, taking the floor, turn-taking mechanism, Ola Rotimi, relinquishing the floor.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Conversation analysis is an approach used to study social interaction embracing both verbal and non-verbal aspects in a situation of daily life (Rukanuddin, 2013, p.39). The approach enables interlocutors to organize and manage their conversational behavior such as who is to speak next? when is he going to speak and how is he going to take turn? Turn-taking has been described as the process in which one interlocutor talks, then stops and relinquishes floor to another interlocutor who starts to talk. The ways interlocutors allocate turns to each other or one another is known as turn-taking mechanism (Okata, 2016, p.171). Ismaliyah (2015)

identifies three aspects of turn-taking mechanism used in conversations. They are taking the floor, holding the floor and yielding the floor.

Taking the Floor

A statement by the current speaker to comment on the previous speaker's speech is known as taking the floor (Ismaliyah, 2015). There are three ways in which interlocutors take floor. They are starting up, taking over and interrupting (Ismaliyah, 2015). Starting up simply means to begin a conversation. One can begin a conversation by hesitant start or clean start. If an interlocutor begins a conversation with hesitation, it is said he begins

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conversation with hesitant start. If he begins a conversation without hesitation, it is said he begins conversation with clean start (Ismaliyah, 2015). Taking over means taking the turn to speak. Lexical items such as “yeah”, “oh”, “well”, “oh”, “no”, and “yes” are often used to respond to previous speakers’ turns. Ismaliyah (2015) points out that interruption occurs when an interlocutor does not wait for the current speaker to finish talking before he talks. Further, he asserts that holding the floor simply means to go on talking. An interlocutor who holds the floor controls the conversation (p.25). Furthermore, he says that yielding the floor means relinquishing floor to a prospective next speaker. Turn can be relinquished to the prospective next speaker by asking a question or making a statement (p.26).

Ola Rotimi is preoccupied with play writing, directing and teaching. His writings dwell on the theme of cultural diversity. He also examines Nigerian history and ethnic traditions in his writings. He teaches at the University of Port-Hacourt, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife and Manchester College in Saint Paul Minnesota. He authors plays such as *To Stir God of Iron (1963)*, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad again (1977)*, *The Gods Are Not to Blame (1968)*, *Kurumi and the Prodigal (1969)*, *Ovaranwen Nogbasi (1971)*, *Holding Talks (1979)*, *A Tragedy of the Ruled (1983)*, and *Hopes of the Living Dead (1988)*. His radio play was broadcast in 1987 and a book entitled *African Dramatic Literature*, published in 1991 (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

In *The gods are not to blame*, we become aware of the fact that what gods have destined to happen to someone must come to pass. Odewale is born into the family of king Adetusa and Queen Ojuola. The baby is taken to the fortune teller to foretell his future; the fortune teller says that the baby will kill his father and marry his mother. To prevent this thing from happening, Gbonka is directed to take the baby to Ikpetu forest and sacrifice him to the gods. On reaching there, he sympathizes with the baby and hands him over to Ogundipe. The people of Kutuje are attacked by the people of Ikolu after the death of king Adetusa. A wonderer named Odewale arrives the town, gives the people there courage and leads them to fight the people of Ikolu and they are successful. Odewale is made the king of Kutuje after this feat. He marries Queen Ojuola who gives birth to four children. Pestilence occurs in the land of Kutuje and Aderopo is sent to the oracle of Ifa in Ile-Ife to find out the cause. The oracle reveals that pestilence occurs in the land because the killer of king Adetusa lives in Kutuje peacefully. When Queen Ojuola becomes aware that she is the mother of king Odewale, she stabs herself to death. King Odewale gauges out his

eyes, gathers his children, and directs the oldest one to lead the way for them to wonder as far as possible from the land of Kutuje (Bello, 2012).

Many scholars and academics have studied Rotimi’s work particularly; *The gods are not to blame* both linguistically and literarily. To be specific, some aspects of the text have been studied via pragmatics, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and stylistics but not enough scholarly attention has been given to turn-taking mechanism used in it. Besides, most researchers focus on recorded conversation to carry out studies on conversation analysis than conversation in a literary text. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate how turn-taking mechanism is used in a literary text through the following objectives:

- i. To identify turn-taking mechanism used in the text.
- ii. To discuss the turn-taking mechanism in consonance with the text preoccupation.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Amir and Jakob (2020) carried out study on male and female teachers’ turn-taking strategies in EFL (English as Foreign Language) classroom interaction. The aims of the study were to find out (i) the types of turn-taking strategies used by male and female teachers in EFL classroom interaction, (ii) the reason why male and female teachers take turn in EFL classroom interaction and (iii) the differences between turn-taking by male teachers and turn-taking by female teachers in EFL classroom interactions. There were four teachers involved in the research; they were made up of two males and two females. The researchers used observation and interview methods to collect data for this study. They employed qualitative techniques of data analysis to analyse the data. The result shows that: (i) three types of turn-taking strategies, namely, taking the turn, holding the turn and yielding the turn were used by the male and female teachers in EFL classroom interaction, (ii) male teachers took turns in order to get students’ attention, to give them order, to simplify questions for them and to make them be silence or to motivate them. Female teachers took turns to get students’ attention, to repeat explanations, to give order to students, and to make them be silence or to motivate them (iii) the difference between the turn taking strategy that male and female teachers used is that male teachers used taking the turn strategy to clarify questions and to give order to students while female teachers used it to repeat explanations and give directives. The study concludes that three types of turn-taking strategies, namely, taking the turn, holding the turn and yielding the turn were employed by both male and female teachers in EFL classroom interaction. Male teachers took turns so as to get students’

attentions, give them order, simplify questions for them, and to silence or motivate them. Female teachers took turns to get students' attentions, to repeat explanations, to give the students order and to silence or motivate them. Male teachers used taking the turn strategy to clarify questions and give order to the students while female teachers used it to repeat explanations and give directives to the students.

In a similar vein, Chalak and Karami (2017) undertook a study on turn-taking and repair strategies among male and female Iranian intermediate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. The study aimed at identifying turn-taking system and repair strategies used by Iranian EFL learners in the classrooms. The instrument used for the research was observation approach proposed by Sack, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). Four types of repairs were investigated. They are self-initiated self-completed, self-initiated other completed, other-initiated self-completed and other initiated other completed. Video camera installed in both male and female Iranian EFL classrooms captured how male and female Iranian EFL learners employed turn-taking repair strategies in the classrooms. The participants were a hundred and twenty intermediate EFL learners at Gooyesh Language Institute in Isfahan, Iran. They were all native speakers of the Persian language, and their ages ranged from 17-25 years. Video camera viewed revealed that female students were often selected by the teachers to speak while male students self-selected themselves to take turns in their classroom. The research also revealed that other initiated self-completed was the strategy used to deal with errors in both male and female classrooms. The paper recommends that experimentation be carried out on turn-taking system and repair strategies of mix sex learners from different language backgrounds.

Lestary *et al*, (2017) conducted a research on interruptions and silences in conversation: A turn-taking analysis. The study aimed to find out the purpose of interruption and meanings of silences in conversations. It employed descriptive qualitative method to analyse the data for the study. The data were casual conversations among friends in three different occasions. They were recorded and transcribed based on Jefferson's glossary of transcription symbols. They were analysed, and the result shows that interlocutors interrupted the conversation in order to complete turns. Silence indicates topic switched, unpleasant situations among participants, and conversation that did not go well. Based on the findings, the study concludes that interlocutors interrupted the conversation so as to complete turns. Silence shows topic switched,

unpleasant situation among the participants and conversation that did not go well.

Radford and Burns (2008, in Yakubu, 2020) carried out research on conversation analysis of parents-child interaction in Nigerian families. The main objectives of the study were to find out how parents and children interact at homes. Sack (1974) conversation analysis model was used as theoretical framework of the study. Video cameras were mounted on the roofs of three different homes to capture parents-children interactions. The video cameras captured all the cultural nuances that were transcribed according to conversation analysis procedure. They were analysed and the results show that parents' children interaction style at home is similar to interaction in the classroom. The interaction is highly instructional; the instructional talk reflects the cultural beliefs of the people about the role of adults within the family. The study further discloses that children learn in an immediate family environment where interaction often takes place. Further, the study reveals that there is difference between the way parents-children interact in Nigerian families and the way parents-children interact in Scotland families. The study concludes that parents-children interaction can be intensified to encourage language development without disorganizing naturally occurring conversations or the purpose of the interaction.

Kpongo and Abrefa (2017, in Yakubu, 2020) conducted research on face-to-face casual conversation among the Akan people. The study aimed at finding out the structure of face-to-face conversation opening and closing among the Akan people. It also makes an attempt to compare the structure of Akan face-to-face conversation with the structure of telephone conversation. Coronel Matina (1998) theory of telephone conversation was adopted as theoretical framework. The study was carried out in Akan society, called Amamoma, Cape Coast Ghana. Twenty dyads naturally occurring conversations were recorded and transcribed and analysed. The result shows that Akan's face-to-face conversational opening is in two forms, namely, presence and absence of interlocutors. Closings are classified into three known as introductory closing, intermediate closing and final closing. Face-to-face and telephone conversation occur in two different situations, but there are attributes that are common to both of them. Telephone conversation opening and closing are not all that different from the ones of face-to-face conversation although there are considerable changes in the closing across the two channels. Based on the findings, Akan people's casual conversational openings have two forms, namely, presence and absence of interlocutors. Closings are categorized into introductory closing, intermediate closing and final closing. Face-to-face

and telephone conversation do occur in two separate situations, but there are features that are common to both of them. There is no significant difference between opening and closing of telephone conversation and opening and closing of face-to-face conversation although there are some alterations in closings of both of them.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts conversation analysis (CA) as its theoretical framework. The theory was propounded by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (Sidnell, 2016). At the initial state of the theory, it was used to analyse casual conversation, afterwards it covers domains such as doctors' offices, courts, mass media, educational settings etc. Conversation analysis comprises of elements such as turn-taking, turn-taking strategies, turn-taking mechanism, turn-taking components, turn-taking cues, and repair and adjacency pairs. However, this study focuses on turn-taking mechanism in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame*.

4. METHODOLOGY

Data for this study comprise of utterances randomly extracted from the text under review. Aspects of turn-taking mechanism used in the extracted dialogues are identified analysed and discussed based on Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) conversation model.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Turn-Taking Mechanism in the Text

The text *The gods are not to blame* by Ola Rotimi is marked by several elements of turn taking mechanism.

Datum No 1: Taking the Floor by Hesitant Start

Hesitant start is scantily used to take floor in the text. Examples:

Odewale: "Well... Well, how are my mother and father" p.58

This start indicates that the interlocutor (character) is not well prepared to take the floor.

Datum No 2: Taking Turn with Clean Start

Some characters in the text take turns with a clean start. Examples:

Fourth citizen. "We have suffered long in silence" p.10

Aderopo: "I am not making light of them, mother..." p.20

First chief: "These are heavy words, your highness" p.23

Aderopo: "In time! You will know you accuse me falsely" p.34

First chief: "It is the custom of our land to find out how our kings die" p.53

The above dialogues show that the characters take floors without hesitation.

Datum No 3: Using "Oh" to Take Turn

The interjection "oh" is sparingly used to take turns in the text. Examples:

Odewale: "Oh, you wait, I have sent for him to come" p. 29

Odewale: "Oh, no the road likes water, but First chief: "Oh, Ogun... it is all over" p.69

Here, the characters used the lexical item "oh" to take floor.

Datum No 4: Using the Lexical Item "No" to Take Turn.

"No" is widely used to take turns in the text. Examples:

Odewale: "No, no do not thank me..." P.12

Odewale: "No, no you must boil it longer, woman, longer so that the medicines in the herbs can

Come out in full spirit..." p.13

Odewale: "No arguing, I pray..." p.19

Odewale: "No, no, Sango, the thunder lion taught me that one!" p.44

Odewale: "No, no food yet. I must carry on my search for murderer of king Adetusa..." p.50

Ojuola: "No, old one. Food is ready now." P.56

Odewale "No, no I do not ask for pity..." p.59

Ojuola: "No, you did not kill him, he passed away in peace. Old man Alaka himself said so." P.61

Odewale: "No! You called me bastard in the face of whole world; prove before their eyes that I

am indeed without a father and mother, or give me back my pride!" p.62

Alaka: "No, no, he said he came from this very land of Kutuje" p.64

Odewale: "No, no. do not blame the gods. Let no one blame the powers..." p.71

Priest and chief: "No more shall life make a mockery of her womanhood." P.71

Odewale: "No, not your left hand." p.72

Aderopo: "No, he gave no name" p.21

Characters used the lexical item "no" to take floor in the text.

Datum No 5: Taking Turn By Interrupting Others

Some characters take turns by interrupting others in the text. Examples:

Odewale: "No, no, do not thank me. I am only doing my duty." P.12

Odewale: "Yes I know but what have you done about it, I ask?" P.12

Body guard: "My lord, Aderopo has come back from Ile-Ife." P.14

Odewale: "No arguing. I pray..." p.19

Odewale: "Forget courtesies, woman. Go and cure your son, he has been stricken with dumbness in Ile-Ife." P. 19-20

First chief: "Then speak." P.20

Odewale: "No, no... that is no punishment for the killer of king and bringer of so much suffering to our people." P.21

Baba Fakunle: "Go and touch me. Call up your raw hunger and in the blindness of it, strike me dead?" p.27-28

Odewale: "Does he think because he is old and blind he can use words freely on me?" p.29

Odewale: "If you think you can drum for my downfall and hope that the drum will sound, then your head is not good." P.32

Odewale: "Go back." P.33

Odewale: "I have changed my mind, woman; leave us alone." P.33

Odewale: "Answer "yes" or "no", young man..." p.33

Priest; "Don't swear!" p.33

Odewale: "No!" p.39

Odewale: "At where?" p.54

Odewale: "When was he killed" p.54

Odewale: "Enough! Will you give me time to think? What's the matter with you all, anyway?" p.54

Odewale: "You are wasting time! Where is Gbonka now?"

Odewale: "What type of clothes was king Adetusa wearing when he was killed?" p.57

Odewale: "Who ordered you to kill me?" p.68

Character in each of the dialogues above takes turn by interrupting others.

Datum No 6: Holding Turn via Filled Pause or Verbal Fillers

Filled pauses or verbal fillers are used by some characters to hold floor in the text. Examples:

Odewale: "Ah, yes. Now my people look at them..." p.11

Odewale: "Ah, I thank you..." p.34

Akilapa: "Aha! But my lord, I already have seven wives!" p.40

Alaka: "Aha! Now I know that I have reached the home of an Ijekun man!" P.42

Odewale: "Aah! Alaka, son of Odediran!" p.43

Akilapa: "Aah, the man left Ilorin a long time ago." P.56

Alaka: "Aha! That's correct Gbonka! I remember now." p.64

Alaka: "Aha! Old one Gbonka!" p.66

Gbonka: "....Aah! why must I say I know you when I do not know you?" p.67

Filled pauses or verbal fillers used above show the points where the characters pause to organize their thoughts before relating them to others.

Datum No 7: Holding Floor by Using Silent Fillers

Kharismawan (2017) asserts that fillers are commonly used by the interlocutors to hold floor and think of what to say next. Characters employed silent fillers in this text to hold floor and think of what to say next. Examples:

Odewale: "Hmm my people. I fear and tremble." P.27

Odewale: "Hm! Great woman indeed...." P.38

Odewale: Mmm...mmm...The monkey and gorilla may claim oness but the monkey is monkey and the gorilla, gorilla." P.51

Alaka: "Hmm old age indeed does cruel things to the mind!" P.66

Silent fillers used in the above dialogues show the points where the characters pause to think of what to say next.

Datum No 8: Using Ellipses to Pause and Think of what to Say Next

Guide to grammar and writing (n.d) states that ellipsis can be used to indicate a pause in a sentence. Here, they are used by the characters to pause and think of what to say while engaging in conversations. Examples:

Iya Aburo: "He will come your highness. I... I told him, the gods bear me witness...." P.15

Ogun Priest: "Come... follow me..." p.36

Odewale: "Man, man, man.... look at him! Everything gira, gira, gira.... Power, power, force, force... action, action..." p.40

Alaka: "Let the king come out and you will all know me! Look... all of you... see... see the mark..." p.41

Alaka: "Funny words. But...too late. I had sworn." P.45

Odewale's voice: "Ogun ... ogun... I have used your weapon and I have killed a man.

Ogun...I with my own hands...with my own hands..." p.49

Ojuola: "He made me... kill my son." P.52

Ojuola: 1... I cannot remember, my lord." P.57

Ogun priest: "Come... follow me..." p.36

Odewale: "Thank you... where is he?" p.65

Odewale: "Make way, I pray you... make way." P.65

Ogun priest: "Hurry... get Aderopo." P.65

Aderopo: "Abero... Abero... come take them away..." p.70

Odewale: "Pray, give her... my wife my mother... pray give her a burial of honour" p.71

Second woman: "Your highness... I have tried in my own house, I have tried... I boil some herbs, drank them, yet sickness remains." P.13

Alaka: "It is well, I will tell you... but... I beg you let us go inside..." p.62

Ellipses used in each of the above dialogues indicate the point where the characters pause to breath before continuing with their talks.

Datum No 9: Relinquishing Turns by Asking Questions

Questions are used by some characters in the text to relinquish floors to others. Examples:

First citizen: "What use are greetings to a dying body?" p.9

First chief: "Do you think we have no thoughts for your gods?" p.9

Odewale: "...What god have we not called upon to help us?" p.11

Odewale: "... What have you done to help yourselves?" p.12

Odewale: "Who is your neighbour?" p.14

Ojuola: "what did the oracle say?" p.20

Odewale: "Do you feel better now?" p.28

Odewale: "Have you anything to say?..." p.28

Aderopo: "What wrong have I done to you?" p.33

Aderopo: "What type of question is that?" p.33

Odewale: "Did you love your father or did you not?" p.33

Ojuola: "My lord, will you eat something now?" p.38

Ojuola: "How do you know he is a mad man?" p.41

Ojuola: "Who among you doesn't know Gbonka?" p.55

Alaka: "Is there something troubling his heart besides the illness in the land?" p.56

Gbonka: "Did he say he was the man who killed king Adetusa? P.66

Ojuola: "Who are we to trust, then? p.21

Here, some characters relinquish floors to others through interrogations.

Datum No 10: Relinquishing Floor through Declarative Sentences

Some characters in the text relinquished floor to others through declarative sentences. Examples:

Baba Fakunle: "This boy, he will kill his own father and marry his own mother!" p.3

Second Woman: "Sickness has been killing us all these days..." p.10

Iya Aburo: "He will come your highness..." p.15

Second Bodyguard: "He says he wants to see the king." p.41

Ojuola: "I shall go and get warm water ready for his bath." p.44

Odeiwale: "I ran away from it just as the yam harvest was coming." p.45

Odeiwale: "He is seeking my downfall because he wants to be king of his own tribe." P.51

First chief: "My lord, we meant no evil against you." p.53

Alaka: "The man did not say he was born here, he said he was working here." p.64

Some characters used declarative sentences to relinquish floors to others in the text.

Datum No 11: Relinquishing Turn by Mentioning the Name or Title of the Prospective Next Speaker

Turn can be relinquished by mentioning the name or title of the prospective next speaker (Agbedo, 2015). Examples:

Town people: "We are suffering my lord..." p.12

Bodyguard: "My lord. Aderopo has come back from Ile-Ife." p.14

Aderopo. "Here I am, my lord." p.15

Aderopo. "Your highness. He was slain in violence." p.21

Second chief: "They ran away after killing your highness" p.22

Baba Fakunle: "Rage all you can, king, I will speak no more." p.27

Baba Fakunle: "King Odeiwale, king of Kutuje go sit down in private and think deep before darkness covers you up..." p.29

Odeiwale: "Ehn! Ojuola! O-j-u-o-l-a! come and listen to your son!" p.32

Ojuola: "My lord, pray, cool your anger." p.35

Odeiwale: Alaka, son of Ijekun, Yemoja you have come well to my house..." p.44

First chief: "My lord, we have all come." p.51

Agidi. "Gbonka, Gbonka?" p.65

Alaka: "He-eh! Old man Gbonka." p.65

Here, floors are relinquished by mentioning the names or title of the prospective next speakers.

Datum No 12: Turn Allocation on the Bases of Current Speaker Self-Select

Some turns are allocated on the bases of current speaker self-select. Examples

Second citizen: "When the head of a house hold dies, the house becomes an empty shell..." p.9

First citizen: "Let us sacrifice rams to the gods..." p.11

First chief: "Speak openly son." p.19

Priest: "He did not mention the name of this murderer?" p.21

Ojuola: "What is happening?" p.35

Ojuola: "Father has come..." p.36

In the above dialogues, the characters self-select themselves to take-turns; they are not selected by others.

Data No 13: Turn Allocation on the Bases of Current Speaker Continues

Some characters in the text allocate turn to themselves when others failed to take it. Examples:

Odeiwale: "The news from Orunmila, is it good or bad?" [Aderopo is Silent] p.19

Odeiwale; "They say you were with king Adetuba when he was killed." [No answer] p.65-66

Odewale: "Leave us alone, I pray you"

[Chiefs and Bodyguards withdraw into sitting room of the palace in stunned silence] p.69.

Silence observed by the people after king Adewale's utterances on pages 19, 65-66, and 69 makes the king to continue to hold the floor since the people fail to take it.

5. FINDINGS

The researchers noticed that elements of turn-taking mechanism such as taking the floor, taking over, interruptions, holding the floor, silent fillers, ellipses, filled pauses or verbal fillers, yielding the floor, silences, questions and declarative sentences run through the text. Turn allocation in the text is on the bases of current speaker select next speaker, current speaker self-select and current speaker continues. The research has validated the fact that conversation is more orderly when interlocutors observe turn-taking mechanism.

6. CONCLUSION

The research reveals that different aspects of turn-taking mechanism are used to take, hold, and relinquish turns in conversations about pestilence that occurred in the land of Kutuje on one hand, and the roles that the gods play on the lives of human beings on the other hand. The research concludes that different aspects of turn-taking mechanism used in the text allocate a variety of functions to the conversations.

6.1 Suggestion for Further Studies

The paper recommends that further studies be carried out on turn – taking mechanism on some poetry and prose works of other prominent African writers.

About the Authors

Samaila Yakubu and Habila, Iranyang Jeremiah are lecturers in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria. Their research interests include Semantics, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis (DA), Phonetics, and Phonology and Creative writings.

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