Which Learning Tools Accompanying the Paid Online Version of *LDOCE* Do Advanced Learners of English Find Useful?

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Abstract: The aim of the report is twofold: to (1) briefly describe the learning tools of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDOCE6) which are available to English learners in the paid online version of the dictionary (sixth edition); and (2) present the results of the questionnaire that was conducted on 114 students of English at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. The participants completed a questionnaire in which they were asked to assess the usefulness of the learning tools of the paid online version of LDOCE6. The first section of the paper introduces the reader to the five major British monolingual learners' dictionaries on the market and the most prominent features of LDOCE. The second section is a description of the learning tools available to learners of English in the paid online version of LDOCE6. The following section elaborates on the earliest questionnaire studies conducted in the field of dictionary use, and some of the problematic aspects of this research method are discussed. The report ends with a presentation of the results of the questionnaire and a brief discussion.

Keywords: LONGMAN DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH, ONLINE DIC-TIONARIES, QUESTIONNAIRES, LEARNERS' DICTIONARIES

Opsomming: Watter leerhulpmiddels in die betaalde aanlyn weergawe van die *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* vind gevorderde leerders van Engels nuttig? Die doel van hierdie artikel is tweërlei: om (1) kortliks die leerhulpmiddels van die *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDOCE6) wat tot die beskikking van Engelse leerders in die betaalde aanlyn weergawe van die woordeboek (sesde uitgawe) is, te beskryf; en om (2) die resultate wat verkry is uit die vraelys wat aan 114 studente van Engels aan die Universiteit van Warmia en Mazury in Olsztyn voorgelê is, weer te gee. Die deelnemers het 'n vraelys waarin hulle gevra is om die bruikbaarheid van die leerhulpmiddels van die betaalde aanlyn weergawe van LDOCE6 te beoordeel, voltooi. Die eerste afdeling van hierdie artikel stel die leser bekend aan die vyf belangrikste Britse eentalige aanleerderswoordeboeke wat tans beskikbaar is en ook aan die mees prominente kenmerke van LDOCE. Die tweede afdeling is 'n beskrywing van die leerhulp-

middels wat tot die beskikking van die Engelse leerders in die betaalde aanlyn weergawe van LDOCE6 is. In die volgende afdeling word verder uitgebrei oor die vroegste vraelysstudies wat uitgevoer is in die woordeboekgebruiksveld en 'n paar van die problematiese aspekte rondom hierdie navorsingsmetode word bespreek. Ten slotte word die resultate van die vraelys weergegee met 'n kort bespreking daarvan.

Sleutelwoorde: *LONGMAN DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH*, AANLYN WOORDEBOEKE, VRAELYSTE, AANLEERDERSWOORDEBOEKE

1. Evolution of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

LDOCE is one of the five major British monolingual learners' dictionaries (the others being: *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*) on the market. Having become an instantly recognizable learners' dictionary due to the introduction of a controlled defining vocabulary and its own grammatical system in its first edition (1978), LDOCE has evolved into a remarkably user-friendly dictionary within a span of approximately 36 years. Since its original 1978 publication, the dictionary has undergone several important changes, such as the introduction of frequency information, incorporation of signposts, explicit presentation of grammatical information (Bogaards and van der Kloot 2002), increase in the number of entries and meanings, use of colour, and it has become more corpus-oriented. Most importantly, though, with the advent of the computer era and a profound decline in the importance of print dictionaries in EFL[1] lexicography, LDOCE has not lagged behind the competition and Longman publishers have put considerable effort into meeting the 21st century English learners' needs by making the dictionary available online (free or paid version). Nowadays, online dictionaries have simply more to offer to learners of English than their book-form counterparts — more information (for example, more meanings and examples), faster access to meaning, instant cross-references, native speaker voice recordings, or the inclusion of multimedia content being just a few of the advantages that online dictionaries hold over the paper medium.

2. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (6th edition) paid online learning tools

LDOCE6 offers free and paid online access, however, there is no doubt that the paid version has a lot more to offer to learners and Longman gives learners the opportunity to register for a 30-day free trial. Longman lexicographers have made an effort to adjust to the needs of advanced students of English by adding more information to the fee-based online dictionary. As a result, by accessing the full package, dictionary users can look up over 300,000 words, meanings and phrases, an additional 82,000 collocations (147,000 collocations

altogether) and 30,000 synonyms, antonyms and related words (48,000 altogether), and have access to an additional one million corpus examples. Beyond these core offerings, the following learning tools are available: the Longman Vocabulary Checker, Grammar Centre, Video Library, Study Centre, Culture Dictionary, Thesaurus Dictionary, Exam Practice and the Pronunciation page.

The Longman Vocabulary Checker offers the possibility to find out which words should be learned from a random text and what the difficulty level of vocabulary is. By pasting a selected text in the box provided, one can have the Longman Vocabulary Checker highlight the words from the text based on different vocabulary lists: words from the Academic Word List, or words from the Longman Communication 9000, selecting high frequency, mid frequency, or lower frequency words. To be more precise, one can see which words are and which are not part of the wordlist that was selected, what the total word count is and what the percentage of words from the selected wordlist is. Numbers, symbols and proper names are ignored by the Vocabulary Checker.

The Grammar Centre includes the Grammar Guide and Communication Guide features familiar from the book-form dictionary. Also, the Grammar Centre contains an "Intermediate Practice", "Advanced Practice" and "Scores" page. By and large, the first two pages have video presentations, interactive exercises and practice, diagnostic, progress and exit tests of selected grammar points, while the "Scores" page keeps track of the learner's results from different tests and exercises and measures students' progress. After taking the tests, learners can always get feedback on their performance by checking what the correct answers are. The "Intermediate Practice" and "Advanced Practice" pages deal with the following main grammar topics: "Intermediate Practice" — (1) Adjectives and adverbs, (2) Future forms, (3) Verbs with *-ing* forms and infinitives, (4) Passive forms, (5) Word combinations; "Advanced Practice" — (1) Modal verbs, (2) Conditionals, subjunctives and the "unreal" past, (3) Reported speech, (4) The grammar of formal English, (5) The grammar of spoken English. These grammar topics have been further divided into more specific grammar areas. For example, the part that focuses on adjectives and adverbs on the "Intermediate Practice" page covers the following grammar points: Adjectives and *-ed/-ing* forms; Order of adjectives before nouns; Comparison of adjectives; Big, small, and equal comparisons; Adverbs and adverb phrases; Adverbs and word order; Comparison of adverbs. What seems to be one of the most unique features of the Grammar Centre are the video presentations which contain thorough explanations of various grammar points, grammar patterns, examples, mistakes that should be avoided by learners, etc. Students can find this method of learning appealing, as the more traditional approach based on learning from books has been given priority in many schools, and could be perceived as tedious, or even outdated. Another advantage is exposure to the language of native speakers, which has always been highly valued by learners of English. Learners can listen to native English pronunciation and, at the same time, learn grammar rules. Moreover, if for some reason learners do not manage to keep up with the

pace of the video presentations, they can always replay the videos and listen to them again.

The Video Library is a collection of 44 video presentations containing monologs of native speakers of English and their conversations on various topics. For example, there are video presentations on how to ask for information, describe a sporting event, express ambitions, give directions, make a complaint, order food in a restaurant, report an event, talk about work and computers, summarize events in a film, book a train ticket, etc. It is possible to search the videos by title, topic or keyword. After listening to the conversations, learners can complete the transcript below the video presentations by typing the missing words into the gaps. In this way, students learn various expressions in English that should be used in a particular context. Once the students have done the task, they can next check the correct answers.

The Study Centre is another learning tool of LDOCE6 online. The Study Centre gives learners the opportunity to brush up on their grammar and vocabulary skills, as well as improve their knowledge of synonyms, collocations, register and culture. For example, on the "Register" page, learners can practice phrasal verbs, or they can learn idioms on the "Vocabulary" page. Learners will encounter here different test question types, for example, multiple-choice, or matching tasks. In addition, just like in the Grammar Centre, the system records the learners' scores.

The Culture Dictionary, which can be accessed by clicking on the Culture tab, has more than 9,000 encyclopedic entries. The entries in this dictionary provide users with cultural information which refers to people, places and events. As an example, one can find words like *Adidas*, *Daffy Duck*, *Orange Bowl*, *Tagalog*, or *Facebook*. These entries can also be looked up in the main LDOCE6 online section — the Dictionary tab (Dictionary page).

The Thesaurus Dictionary might come in handy when trying to enhance one's production skills which are needed for writing assignments, in-class essays, oral presentations, debates, etc. For example, when trying to find a synonym for *angry*, one can type in the word (concept/heading) *angry* in the search box and discover that the word *angry* has been divided into fifteen more specific meaning categories: (1) feeling angry; (2) feeling extremely angry; (3) angry for a short time; (4) angry because something is unfair or wrong; (5) words for describing an angry meeting, argument etc; (6) to get angry; (7) to make someone angry; (8) to deliberately make someone angry; (9) making you angry; (10) to behave in a very angry way; (11) often behaving in an angry, unfriendly way; (12) unfriendly and quiet because you are angry; (13) easily annoyed; (14) angry feelings; (15) to try to make someone less angry. By clicking, for example, on the fifth meaning category, one not only learns the meanings of words like *furious*, *stormy*, *uproar*, *heated*, etc., but also such entries may contain information about the pronunciation of these words, context in which they should be used (example sentences), part of speech, etc. The Thesaurus Dictionary also provides a list of the concepts related to the concept *angry*, such

as *disappointed*, *violent*, *insult*, *revenge*, etc., or its opposite (*calm*), and by clicking on those words the user will be directed to the appropriate concept.

The Exam Practice page helps potential candidates prepare for the following exams: FCE (First Certificate in English), CAE (Certificate in Advanced English), CPE (Certificate of Proficiency in English), IELTS (International English Language Testing System), TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), PTE Academic (Pearson Test of English Academic). It contains practice materials in the style of particular exams. For example, the exercises for the FCE and CAE exams allow to practice one's reading, listening and use of English skills. Also, the Exam Practice page informs users from which specific books the learning materials have been adapted and it lists other books that could help in preparing for the exams. The "Scores" tab records the learners' scores.

The Pronunciation page (tab) contains exercises in the following areas: stress, syllables, sound recognition, British and American English pronunciation. Also, there are dictation exercises. Learners can listen to words that are played in either British or American English and then type those words in the box to check for correct spelling. Similarly, learners can listen to sentences instead of individual words, type the sentences in the box and check for correct answers.

However, it is the Dictionary[2] page (tab) that is the most basic element of LDOCE6 online and one that users will probably spend most of their time with, searching for meanings of words and phrases. This tab is the online equivalent of the information that can be found in the middle matter of the print dictionary and users can find here the same entries (entries containing the same information, or entries having the same entry structure) which appear in the book-form dictionary. What makes the Dictionary page even more special than the paper dictionary is the fact that learners can listen to the American and British English pronunciation of every word in the dictionary (or the 88,000 example sentences that have been recorded), check the meaning of every word in an entry's definition or example sentence by double clicking on that word, click on "Entry menu" links in polysemous entries that allow to guide users to the part of the entry (specific meaning) learners are interested in, check the etymology of a word ("Word origin" link) or inflections for all irregular and regular verbs in the dictionary ("Verb Table" link). In addition, the "Examples" link at the top of an entry allows users to browse through additional examples from the corpus (1 million example sentences) or other Longman dictionaries (80,000 example sentences), the "Collocations" link provides a list of collocations for the entry one is reading, collocations from other dictionary entries or from the Longman Corpus Network (the "Collocations" link also shows how these collocations are used), the "Thesaurus" link makes it possible to view a Thesaurus box from the entry, see information from the *Longman Language Activator*, or access the word sets option when a word forms part of a word set (definitions and examples of how words are used are also shown), and clicking on the "Phrases" link allows to see the phrases from the entry or other diction-

ary entries (the "Phrases" link also shows how these phrases are used). Last but not least, the Dictionary page has an "Advanced Search" function, which allows to find words that one is looking for, for example, by part of speech, frequency level, or register. Interestingly, it is even possible to search for entries that have pictures, or Collocations boxes, Grammar notes, etc.

Finally, LDOCE6 online gives learners the opportunity to download the Longman dictionary applications to one's iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch.

Given the fact that this paper presents the results of a questionnaire in the final section of the paper, the following section briefly elaborates on the earliest questionnaire studies conducted in the field of dictionary use and some of the problematic aspects of this research method are discussed.

3.   Questionnaires in dictionary use research

The first questionnaires which were concerned with dictionary use research were surveys conducted by Barnhart (1962), Quirk (1974), Tomaszczyk (1979) and Béjoint (1981). In his questionnaire, Barnhart asked teachers of American college students to express their opinions about how they thought their students used dictionaries. In the following surveys, however, starting with Quirk's study in 1974, dictionary users were asked to report on their dictionary use patterns and not their teachers. As far as Tomaszczyk's questionnaire is concerned, it was conducted with a view to learning whether American and Polish college students, who were foreign students, preferred to use monolingual or bilingual dictionaries during dictionary consultation. Tomaszczyk discovered that bilingual dictionaries were superior to monolingual dictionaries, as well as the fact that dictionary users tended to consult dictionaries primarily for the meaning of words and their spelling. Tomaszczyk's study is considered by dictionary use researchers to be the first and one of the most important questionnaire studies. The aim of Béjoint's questionnaire was to learn how monolingual dictionaries are used by French students of English. Béjoint's study gave the following results: (1) dictionaries are consulted mainly for the meaning of unknown words; (2) students very rarely study the information that can be found in the front matter of dictionaries; (3) more than half of Béjoint's participants admitted to not using dictionary codes; (4) approximately 75% of the participants were content with their dictionaries.

Significantly, a few researchers have expressed their concern about questionnaire research in dictionary use studies. One problem lies in the reliability of questionnaire reports. Hatherall (1984: 184) is one researcher who raised doubts about questionnaire studies: "Are subjects saying here what they do, or what they think they do, or what they think they ought to do, or indeed a mixture of all three?". Crystal (1986) is of the opinion that dictionary users who complete questionnaires are not able to remember in detail what exactly happens during dictionary consultation. The second problem deals with the language used in questionnaires. According to Lew (2004: 40-41), questionnaires

which are prepared in the participants' target language, for example the English language for native speakers of Polish, can often lead to misunderstandings of questions and instructions. Hence, they ought to be prepared in the participants' mother tongue because only in this way can questionnaire respondents fully understand the questions they are being asked in questionnaires and avoid vagueness in the foreign language.

Notwithstanding these problematic issues, questionnaires are a source of valuable knowledge for dictionary use researchers. Questionnaires can indicate the direction for further research, they can often be treated as a starting point for researchers and may lead to conclusions on what additional studies need to be conducted in a specific research field. Lew (2002) reaches the conclusion that there is certainly a place for questionnaires in dictionary use research. Whether a questionnaire is successful or not depends on how well it is prepared by researchers. Finally, Lew suggests that it is highly desirable for dictionary use researchers to acquire knowledge about how to design questionnaires even from other fields of study, like sociometry or psychometry (Berdie and Anderson 1974; Bradburn, Sudman and Blair 1979; Oppenheim 1992; Sudman and Bradburn 1982), in which researchers' work is also concerned with the design of questionnaire manuals.

The following section demonstrates the results of the questionnaire which was completed by students of English at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn.

4.   Questionnaire — results and discussion

The questionnaire was carried out on 114 students of English at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. The participants were third and fourth year students. Their English language proficiency level had been assessed by their academic teachers as B2 to C1 by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages standards and the students had considerable experience of dictionary use, as it was necessary for them to use dictionaries throughout their studies, especially in their practical English courses (for example, writing classes) and BA and MA seminars that they were attending. The participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire in paper format in which they were asked to assess the usefulness of the learning tools (Dictionary page, Culture Dictionary, Thesaurus Dictionary, Study Centre, Pronunciation page, Exam Practice, Grammar Centre, Video Library, Longman Vocabulary Checker) of the paid online version of LDOCE6. The research question which the study attempted to answer was the following:

—   Which paid online learning tool of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* do advanced learners of English find useful?

A Likert-type rating scale was adopted for the questionnaire (USEFUL, RATHER USEFUL, DIFFICULT TO SAY, RATHER NOT USEFUL, NOT USEFUL). Also, the partici-

pants were asked to elaborate on the choices they had made in the comments section. Importantly, the whole questionnaire was delivered in the participants' native language, except for the specific names of learning tools which were listed in the table, as providing students with Polish translations of the learning tools in this specific case could have been misleading for the participants. Before the participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire, they received one-hour training on how English learners can use the learning tools for learning English. The results of the questionnaire are given below.

Table 1: Results of the questionnaire

TOOL	USEFUL	RATHER USEFUL	DIFFICULT TO SAY	RATHER NOT USEFUL	NOT USEFUL
Dictionary page	100	14	0	0	0
Culture Dictionary	22	26	42	20	4
Thesaurus Dictionary	100	14	0	0	0
Study Centre	50	44	16	4	0
Pronunciation page	68	38	6	2	0
Exam Practice	44	56	10	4	0
Grammar Centre	62	42	8	2	0
Video Library	4	16	36	44	14
Vocabulary Checker	14	48	36	12	4

The results of the questionnaire could be divided into three groups[3]:

(1)   MOST USEFUL LEARNING TOOLS: Dictionary page, Thesaurus Dictionary;
(2)   USEFUL LEARNING TOOLS: Study Centre, Pronunciation page, Exam Practice, Grammar Centre;
(3)   LEAST USEFUL LEARNING TOOLS: Culture Dictionary, Video Library, Longman Vocabulary Checker.

There is no doubt that the Dictionary page and Thesaurus Dictionary are the most useful learning tools for dictionary users (87.7% of the participants said that the Dictionary page and Thesaurus Dictionary were useful). This finding is not at all surprising. First of all, the Dictionary page is the most basic learning tool of the paid online version of LDOCE6. Whenever dictionary users do not understand a word, it is obvious that the first step lexicographers would normally expect them to take is to consult the meaning of this word in the Dictionary tab. The Dictionary page contains information about meaning, grammar, pronunciation, collocations, example sentences, etc. In other words, the chances are that all the information learners need about a given word can be found in the Dictionary page. In addition, the Dictionary page has its own thesaurus tab from which learners can access useful information about synonyms of words. Second, the Thesaurus Dictionary seems to be invaluable for advanced-level dictionary users who strive to improve their English language production

skills. Learners can definitely benefit from this tool when writing essays, formal and informal letters, or when preparing oral presentations, speeches, etc. One of the main problems that more proficient language learners encounter is that they tend to be repetitive in their word choices, with insufficient recourse to appropriate synonyms. The Thesaurus Dictionary attempts to alleviate this problem by providing dictionary users with a list of concepts, which allow them to discover new words and expressions by presenting them in the form of a word list along with their meanings and even example sentences under those broader concepts mentioned above. For example, one learns that instead of saying *obey the rules* the expressions *comply with the rules* or *abide by the rules* can be used. In this way, the Thesaurus Dictionary encourages more varied word choices when communicating or writing in the target language. This seems to be the Thesaurus Dictionary's biggest advantage.

The Study Centre, Pronunciation page, Exam Practice and Grammar Centre have all been rated rather positively by the participants; however, these tools appear to be less useful for dictionary users than the Dictionary page and Thesaurus Dictionary (43.9% of the respondents rated the Study Centre as useful and 38.6% as rather useful, 59.6% rated the Pronunciation page as useful and 33.3% as rather useful, 38.6% rated the Exam Practice page as useful and 49.1% as rather useful, and 54.4% rated the Grammar Centre as useful and 36.8% as rather useful). Some of the participants made comments in the questionnaire that they would use the Exam Practice page only before taking the CAE or CPE exams, and complained about the small number of tests included under each specific exam page (FCE page, CAE page, CPE page, etc.). Many participants criticized the Grammar Centre for being too theoretical and for containing only basic information about grammar rules. This, indeed, may be a problem, as users of English monolingual learners' dictionaries tend to be more advanced with regard to their linguistic skills and, hence, they endeavor to find new types of information rather than just read about things they already know. Despite dictionaries not being grammar books, it does seem like there is room for more detailed explanations of grammar rules or exceptions to these rules in online dictionaries, as space constraints are not a problem in the case of this specific dictionary medium. As for the Pronunciation page, the participants thought that the exercises devoted to sound recognition and American and British English word pronunciation distinction are extremely useful. However, they also said that they would not really decide to do the exercises devoted to word syllables and stress, as these types of information are not normally the types of information learners want to acquire from dictionaries.

Importantly, the participants rated as least useful: the Culture Dictionary (19.3% of the participants said it was useful, 22.8% said it was rather useful, 36.8% said it was difficult to say and 17.5% said it was rather not useful), Video Library (3.5% of the participants said it was useful, 14% said it was rather useful, 31.6% said it was difficult to say and 38.6% said it was rather not useful) and Longman Vocabulary Checker (12.3% of the participants said it was useful,

42.1% said it was rather useful, 31.6% said it was difficult to say and 10.5% said it was rather not useful). These are some of the more important comments that the participants made:

— all the information (dictionary entries) in the Culture Dictionary can also be found in the Dictionary page
— the Video Library is a compilation of English dialogs which could be useful, but only for much less advanced students of English
— the Culture Dictionary could be useful for translating texts devoted to the topic of culture
— the Longman Vocabulary Checker is not useful as more advanced students of English are aware of which words belong to academic language and which do not
— the Culture Dictionary is similar to an encyclopedia, however, more useful information about the terms that have been defined in the Culture Dictionary could be found in other types of reference books
— the Culture Dictionary contains only additional information about the words that have been defined in the Culture Dictionary, more information about these words can be found on the Internet rather than in the Culture Dictionary
— the Longman Vocabulary Checker could be helpful when writing an academic essay

By and large, the lexicographic data in the Culture Dictionary has also been incorporated into the Dictionary page. This means that LDOCE6 users will most likely prefer to open the Dictionary tab and search for pertinent information there, rather than access it from the Culture Dictionary. In addition, some participants complained that the Culture Dictionary might not contain enough information about cultural terms and concepts, and that they would rather consult other resources for such information. However, some students acknowledged that the Culture Dictionary could be used during translation tasks or exercises. As far as the Longman Vocabulary Checker is concerned, it seems that its purpose remains unclear to dictionary users. Most participants did not really understand why they would want to use this tool, as the vast majority of users who decide to use LDOCE6 are more proficient in the target language, which at the same time means that a more proficient user is able to distinguish academic words from general ones in a text. Only a handful of participants perceived the Longman Vocabulary Checker as an advantage of LDOCE6 by saying that they would use it when writing an essay. As for the Video Library, most participants commented that some dictionary users could perhaps benefit from this learning tool, however, only those representing a much less advanced level of English.

Endnotes

1.   English as a Foreign Language.
2.   The Dictionary page has been treated as a learning tool as it provides information about word meanings, the context in which words are used (example sentences), collocations, grammar patterns, idioms, phrasal verbs, etc.
3.   The learning tools which appear in specific groups (MOST USEFUL LEARNING TOOLS, USEFUL LEARNING TOOLS, LEAST USEFUL LEARNING TOOLS) have been listed in random order in their respective groups.

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APPENDIX

Oceń pożyteczność podanych narzędzi do nauki języka angielskiego słownika *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. Wstaw "X" w odpowiednim miejscu tylko jeden raz dla każdego z podanych narzędzi do nauki języka angielskiego.

NARZĘDZIE DO NAUKI JĘZYKA ANGIELSKIEGO	POŻYTECZNE	RACZEJ POŻYTECZNE	TRUDNO POWIEDZIEĆ	RACZEJ NIEPOŻYTECZNE	NIEPOŻYTECZNE
Dictionary page					
Culture Dictionary					
Thesaurus Dictionary					
Study Centre					
Pronunciation page					
Exam Practice					
Grammar Centre					
Video Library					
Vocabulary Checker					

KOMENTARZE

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