READER-RESPONSE STUDY ON CHARACTERISTICS OF *ARAFO* WOMEN IN NODEKO'S WEB *MANGA DOKUSHIN OL NO TATEMAE TO HONNE*

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to analyzed the responses of readers regarding the characteristics of Arafo women in web manga. In this case, the researchers want to see the responses of the readers regarding occupation, marriage, and the lifestyle of Arafo women. With the reception theory by Hall, it could be seen whether the message from the author of the web manga about Arafo women can be fully understood or interpreted differently by the readers. This research used a qualitative method with the research steps; namely identifying the suitable respondents, planning the instruments in the form of the list of questions for an interview, collecting data through field study (related to interview), and literature review (related to the written data). Data analysis was performed with stages; namely processing the result of the interview, reducing data, grouping data, interpreting data, and concluding data. The research result shows that there are three types of readers based on the theory of Hall; namely dominant/hegemonic position regarding age and occupation of Arafo women, the negotiated position related to issue of independence, and oppositional position related to issues of spouse and marriage. Different feedbacks from the readers on the same text are affected by some factors; namely knowledge about the condition of Japanese society and Arafo women, a difference of experience, and difference of perspective.

Keywords: manga web, reader-response, women characteristics, Arafo women

INTRODUCTION

The role of women in Japan changes from time to time. In the Heian period (794-1185), women had a very high position; it is proven at the beginning of its history, in which Japan had some female emperors, like Genmei, Genshou, and Koken. However, in the Edo period (1600-1868), the role of women in Japan changed, in which their rights and status were lowered. It continued in the Meiji period (1868-1912) and Taisho period (1912-1926) since Japanese women officially lost legal rights personally with the *Ie* (Japanese family system) which was enacted through the Civil Law Year in 1898. Therefore, the married women that were in *Ie* system, she only had a domestic role with the obligation to obey the head of the family (Tadashi, 1988). Women still had the opportunity to work, but it was limited to certain manufacturers.

In this period, the contradiction in the Japanese society existed. The patriarchal culture that legalized by civil law with the *Ie* system required women only to have a domestic role. It violated the role of women that forced to work to meet the family needs. This condition continued in

the World War II (1945) that women had to work to meet the demand of the government. After World War II, women had the equality of right, and it was ensured by the constitution. The civil law of women that previously depended on the Ie system became the individual right of every individual (Sato, Suzuki, & Kawamura, 1987). Besides, along with the development of education and openness in Japan, many Japanese women have a position in the company now.

Iwao & Sugiyama (1990) have described the life pattern of Japanese women and men in 1982 at the age of 25 - over 65 years old which were formed the graphic of M curve. The curve described that at the age of 24 years old, many Japanese men and women had a job, but at the age of 25-34 years old, fewer women worked. At the age of 35-54 years old, more Japanese women worked, whether they were single or married. This curve decreased again when women were at the age of 55 years old. The model of M curve was affected by the life cycle of Japanese women with four phases. The first phase is the phase of becoming adult and studying; the second is the phase of giving birth and raising children, the third is the phase after raising children, the fourth is the old age (Sugimoto, 2003).

Based on the background, the businessmen in Japan categorize the female workers into two categories (full-time). The first is *Sogo Shoku* (all-around employees), female workers that are undergoing the same condition as male corporate soldiers. The female workers have to work overtime and are placed in the office far from home for few years (*tanshin funnin*). The second is *Ippan Shoku* (ordinary employees) that the female workers without an important role in the workplace who are considered the subordinate with a low salary. Thus, the management does not give them an important task, and they do not have career path (Saleha, 2010). One of the terms for female workers in the category of full-time is called OL (Office Lady). This term emerged in 1963 to replace BG (Business Girl).

Office Lady (OL) is the female worker in a company with the task to do the work related to administration and the secretariat. According to Shoji (2002), the descriptions of OL task are ochakumi (making and serving tea), kopii-tori (copying the document), and deeta nyuryoku (inputting data). These types of work allow OL to have a role as dutiful daughter and suitable wives continuously. Carter and Dilatush (in Kelly, 1999) have categorized OL into three categories. The first categories are young, single woman with the plan to get married, the second is married women who work after giving birth or leave from work temporarily after giving birth, and the last is older women who do not yet get married or divorce. OL gets the salary much lower compared with the male workers and does not have an opportunity to get a higher position.

After the end of World War II, OL has contributed to Japan's economy that related to the supply of cheap labors (Carter & Dilatush, 1978). Most of OLs do not yet get married. They live in their parent's house, so their money can be used to buy the branded products, eat in the luxurious restaurants, travel abroad, get plastic surgery, pamper themselves in the expensive beauty shop, and so on (Ogasawara & Lewis, 1999). That individualistic lifestyle is one of the reasons to enjoy life by delaying marriage and being single. Many women choose not to get married (*hikon*) or delay their marriage (*bankon*). It is proven by the percentage of unmarried people at the age of early 30s. Ogasawara & Lewis (1999) have seen the relation between OL and the increasing percentage of workers that are delaying their marriage from the current demographic changes among the young Japanese people, particularly in the big cities. Furthermore, OL in the older category has the group called *Arafo*.

In the event of U-CAN Awards 2008, the term *Arafo* was awarded as one of the popular terms in that year. Amami Yuki as the main character in a drama *Around 40* became the representative to receive the award (Japan Today, 2008). In the context of hyper-aged society (a society in which 21% of its population consists of the people at the age of over 65 years old), the life of *Arafo* women reflects the social problem that is faced by Japanese society in the twenty-first century (Freedman & Iwata-Weickgenannt, 2011). The dynamic and problems in the life of *Arafo* women become themes in the works of fiction and movies. One of works of fiction describing the life of *Arafo* women in a web *manga* entitled *Dokushin OL no Tatemae no Honne* by Nodeko.

According to Botz-Bornstein (2008), the *manga* is commonly read by many people of various ages. Therefore, the themes that are shown in the *manga* also various, starting from adventure, mystery, love, sport, history, comedy, science fiction, horror, business, and trade. *Manga*, in general, is printed in black and white, but it is also can be printed in full color. In Japan, the *manga* is usually shown in series on *manga* magazine. If a *manga* successfully attracts many readers, all chapters published in the *manga* magazine will be compiled and published in a *tankobon* (paperback books). In the last few decades, *manga* has been a phenomenon in the international publishing offline and online (Horibuchi & Sugiyama in Bryce, Davis, & Barber, 2008).

The source of data in this research is from web *manga* or a comic that published online on *Mynavi*. It is a site that contains information about the career recognition and job vacancy. Web *manga* is entitled *Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne* that is written by Nodeko. The series had published every Friday starting from 31 January 2014 until 25 September 2015. Based on its title, *dokushin* means single, OL is Office Lady, and *tatemae to honne* is a concept of mindset in Japanese society which means public persona that is shown by someone in public and true self of the real feeling. Since childhood, the Japanese people are indirectly taught to use *honne* and *tatemae* depending on the situation. This concept is very important to save face and prevent conflict. Therefore, this statement of the speaker is not yet suitable for what he/she feels (Davies & Ikeno, 2002).

Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne with 79 chapters tells a story about an Arafo woman named Mariko who is working as an OL in a company in Tokyo. Mariko comes to Tokyo when she is 22 years old with the intention to work seriously and gets married at the age of 30 years old. However, finding a spouse is not that easy, and Mariko does not realize that she is already 30 years old and does not yet get married. In this *manga*, Nodeko tells about the daily life of a single *Arafo* woman that is viewed as a person to be pitied by people around them through Mariko and her friends.

The character's traits in a comic are very important since the personality forms face, act, and dialogue. When creating a character in comic, the comic artist should determine at least three traits and skills in the character. By determining the trait, the comic artist can directly see how a character interacts with other characters. It forms the behavior of character and choice he/she makes (Duggan, 2008). In the preview of a web manga *Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne*, it is shown that one of the traits of *Arafo* women that created by Nodeko is high self-esteem related to the issue of marriage. Besides, *Arafo* women are described as sensitive people related to issue of love. This idea from the creation of female trait in *Arafo* women does not come immediately, but it is captured by the author from the fact about the existence of *Arafo* women in Japanese society.

In this research, the researchers are interested in discussing the construction of characteristics in *Arafo* women through the reader's reception on *Arafo* women in a web manga *Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne*. The construction of *Arafo* women is analyzed with the theory of figure characterization in the *manga* by Brenner (2008). Furthermore, the reader's response is analyzed with the theories of encoding and decoding by Hall (1999). Previous researches which applied the theory of encoding and decoding by Hall are (Pavšič, 2007); Fassetta, Pietka-Nykaza, and Smyth (2014); Prayoga, Setiawan, and Aji (2015); and Zaid (2014). The discussed issue is the reader's reception on some aspects, starting from racism and sexism to cultural diversity. The used of media are various, from the novel, advertisement of public service announcement, drama, and television program. From some researchers, it is known that the understanding of readers on a text can be

different depending on their identity, cultural background, and opinion.

The reason for the researchers choosing these problems is to see how the readers of web *manga Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne* assess the characteristic of *Arafo* women. It is considered important because *Arafo* woman is one of the social reality which becomes a phenomenon in Japan. The existence of *Arafo* women is recreated in some works of fiction and contemporary arts, like this web *manga*. The story about *Arafo* women in this *manga* gets several sympathetic responses from readers, particularly related to the life dynamic of the characters with their characteristics and attitudes. Some of the comments from readers of it can be accessed on www.b.hatena.ne.jp.

Based on the comments of online readers, it is an example of how web *manga* successfully attracts and influences readers, so it encourages the readers to assess the comic. In this research, the assessment of the readers on the characteristic of *Arafo* women is analyzed. The readers as informants in this research are not random online readers, but they are the readers with the knowledge background in Japanese language and culture. The readers are selected through the method of purposeful sampling that determined by the abundance of information which can be provided by the selected samples (Creswell, 2012).

METHODS

This research is qualitative research. In the qualitative research, the researcher emphasizes on its proximity with the researched people or object (Neuman in Setiawan, 2013). It refers to the argument of Creswell (2012), specifically, the principles of qualitative research in this research can be elaborated in five steps.

The first step is identifying respondents chosen to read and give reception on the object of research materials which have been determined, web *manga Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne* is obtaining the access to respondents by permission. The permission can be the willingness of target respondents to thoroughly read the web *manga* and give information to answer the research questions. The third step is determining the best type of information which will answer the research questions, the information regarding a characteristic of *Arafo* women described in web *manga*. The fourth step is planning protocol or instrument to collect and record the information. The last step is managing data collection. Data collection and recording are conducted with the principles of field research related to the interview with respondent and observation and library research related to written data and audiovisual.

The subjects of this research are the students and lecturers of Japanese Literature Study Program of Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Brawijaya. The respondents were selected using the purposive sampling. These subject types are chosen according to the several assumptions, that they have adequate knowledge and experience about reading and understanding Japanese texts. The object of this research is web *manga* entitled *Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne* by Nodeko (2015) that released on website *mynavi.co.jp*. The web *manga* tells the life story of a career woman who is still single at the age of 30 - 40 years old. Personal and social life is described expressively through a series of pictures and expressive utterance in *manga* style.

The role of researchers in this research is to interpret the data in the form of text interpretation (research object) by research subject. Referring to the premise of Hall (1999), subjects of this research are the decoder on the encoded message from *mangaka* which can bring three interpretation possibilities, namely dominant reading, negotiated reading, and oppositional reading. Interpretation is based on trustworthiness and authenticity which bring awareness to someone's subjectivity. Interpretation of researchers gives additional perspective and facilitates dialogue among perspectives as stated by the respondents, so it does not focus on the objective truth and linear prediction (Guba, Wallendorf, & Belk in Anney, 2014).

The data in this research are categorized into primary and secondary data. The primary data are obtained from the subjects of research in the form of response and assessment of the respondents on a characteristic of *Arafo* women in web *manga*. Meanwhile, the feasibility of respondent is determined through pilot study to the chosen respondents. A pilot study is conducted to confirm knowledge, experience, and proficiency of respondents in reading and understanding *manga*. Therefore, the respondents will get all the chapters of web *manga Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne* to be read and responded regarding the intrinsic aspect in the read chapter. The secondary data are from the reference sources related to the material and formal objects. The material object is a web *manga Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne* that is taken from a website, mynavi.co.jp, published online starting from 31 January 2014 to 25 September 2015. Furthermore, the formal object is the characteristic of *Arafo* women stated by Goldstein-Gidoni (2012); Tanaka-Naji (2008); and Tanaka and Ng (2012).

The data are collected through semi-structured interview. The interview is categorized into two, namely first is the interview for a pilot study to confirm competence of respondent as well as to obtain data regarding background and experience of respondent reading which will be interviewed in the next interview. The second one is the interview to receive the data regarding the response of respondents on a characteristic of *Arafo* women.

The method of content analysis is used in this research related to the processing of primary and secondary data from respondents and documents relevant to study object. The implementation of data analysis is conducted with the stages as follows: processing the result of the interview from the respondent, reducing data, grouping data, interpreting data, and concluding data. The data will be classified based on the interpretation theory of Hall (1999) about three text readings, namely dominant reading, negotiate reading, and oppositional reading. Identification based on these three types is required to determine the reception dimension of reader (Schrøder, 2000).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The decoding process on the characteristics of *Arafo* women is performed by the readers that chosen as respondents in this research. In this case, the readers are individuals actively responding cultural codes conveyed by the encoder. There are five chosen respondents, from now on referred to as Respondent I, Respondent II, Respondent III, Respondent IV, and Respondent V in which their analysis response articulation is analyzed. Respondent I is a woman at the age of 50 years old, she gets married and has experience in Japanese language and culture for around 30 years. Respondent II is a 27 years old single woman with experience in Japanese language and culture for around 12

years. Respondent III is a 30 years old single woman with experience in Japanese language and culture for around 12 years. Respondent IV is a 36 years old single woman with experience in Japanese language and culture for around 15 years. Respondent V is a 21 years old single man with experience in Japanese language and culture for around four years. Respondents I, III, and IV are lecturers in Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Brawijaya, while Respondents II and V are graduate and student of Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Brawijaya, respectively.

In the effort of understanding the cultural text, Hall (1999) has categorized the audiences into three positions, namely dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and the oppositional positions. The difference of the position is caused by the interpreted message which is not always in accordance with the will of text writer. The message can be interpreted as something different by its receiver (Triwardani & Wiendijarti, 2016). Therefore, the analysis of informant interpretation on web *manga* entitled *Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne* is described in three readings; the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position, and the oppositional position.

The dominant-hegemonic position is when the respondents are within the scope of dominant perspective. In this case, the respondents interpret the message in the context of referral code, so the idea of the message sender is understood well. However, it has a problem related to the factor of socio-demographic difference between text writers and readers. In other words, message receiver gets the meaning as required by the message sender.

The dominant reading exists in all respondents related to the characteristics of age and occupation of *Arafo* women. *Arafo* women are career women at the age of before and after 40, who do not yet get married since they are too busy in work. The definition is stated by the *mangaka* of a web *manga* entitled *Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne* in the embodiment of three single women working in a company as an office lady. The main message is in the form of single women as office workers who do not yet get married is understood relatively the same by all respondents. It shows that the respondent perspective is in the hegemony of dominant code. In describing *Arafo* women, Respondent I has said: "About working women at the age of between 30 and 40 years old; since they are busy in the workplace, it is difficult for them to know the opposite sex." (interview on September 12, 2016). Respondent III, by referring to three *Arafo* characters in the manga has stated: "Three women named Mariko, Junko, and Yuuko whose age are 36, 37, 38, or 37. I forget it. All of them are office workers; it is obvious that they are busy at work." (interview on October 1, 2016).

The dominant position taken by the respondents regarding age and occupation of *Arafo* confirms that the message coded by the author is interpreted in the context of the hegemonic definition of *Arafo*. The hegemony of work affects the articulation of respondent's opinion considering that all of them have experience in learning Japanese language and culture for years. There are an agreement and acceptance of information construction about what is called *Arafo* women, so ethnical background, social class, and different culture are not problems. *Arafo* women have a high disposable income (which is ready to spend). Therefore, this group does not mind about spending much money, particularly to support appearance and status (Bruwer & Buller, 2012).

About the lifestyle of *Arafo* women which is independent and established regarding wealth, the dominant reading is found in Respondent I and Respondent IV. Two respondents agree that regarding financial independence, three *Arafo* women in *manga* could be independent. Respondent I has said: "They are independent regarding finance. If they do not get a spouse, they can live independently (interview on September 12, 2016). Meanwhile, Respondent IV has said "....they have a career and are confident with it. Regarding the economy, their income is sufficient to meet their need (interview on October 6, 2016). It can be observed that assessment of Respondents I and IV about the independence of *Arafo* women is related to their income as office workers. The interpretation is an affirmation from the description of the author of web *manga Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne* about the consumptive activity of *Arafo* women.

The negotiated position is when message receiver successfully interprets the message from a sender in the context of the perspective of society and dominant culture. The message is understood, but differently from a dominant position. It is compromised with the situational and local problems in which personal perspective and bias get involved in the interpretation. In other words, the respondents approve the legitimation of hegemonic codes presented by text senders, but they are not comprehensive since there is an adjustment with the perspective of text receiver. The negotiated position is taken when Respondents I and II interpret the lifestyle of *Arafo* women related to independence; living alone separated from family. Respondent I has commented the traditional lifestyle in Japan in which family members live in the same house for generations and. She/he has understood the individual life of *Arafo* women by stating, "I cannot imagine living for three generations in that house. Yes, that is like Japanese people in the past. So, three generations live there, but we are modern people. We live like that." (interview on September 12, 2016). Respondent I sees the relevance of a choice of individual life with modernity.

Besides Respondent I, Respondent II also takes the negotiated position in responding lifestyle of *Arafo* women. However, it emphasizes more on the activities of keeping a pet, cat, as done by Yuuko. Respondent II has said: "Why is there a cat; it involves a cat. So, I probably feel the same with Yuiko; It is not only me to think." "Oh, actually it is not only me to think that cat is more important over anything..." I am also like that (laughing)." (interview on September 12, 2016). Based on the utterance, it can be said that Respondent II is placed herself in the negotiated reading by comparing the similarity between herself and a character named Yuuko in keeping a cat and. It is giving justification that she and Yuuko think that cat is more important than anything.

The issue around a spouse and marriage attract most of the respondents in the position of negotiated reading. It is particularly in the attitude of *Arafo* women (which seems to be) selective in choosing spouse and honne (conscience) to immediately get married when they find the couple willing to get married. Respondent IV has said: "In Japan, there is a principle not to get married, but still living together. The first reason perhaps is women do not want to do *kaji* (housework). The second is when women are strong regarding the economy, they probably do not want to share it with men as they have pride and ego. They do that because they have work and occupation. After getting married, Japanese people, in general, live separately, so it is not like a married couple." "In my opinion, it is useless to do something which is not based on conscience. There is no need of rushing into marriage since it is the issue of heart."

(interview on October 6, 2016).

There is an impression shown by the author that *Arafo* women compete to get married first. It is understood by Respondent IV as a common condition considering that the *Arafo* women are not young anymore. However, Respondent IV also implies the importance of prioritizing conscience in choosing a spouse over immediately getting married after finding a couple.

The oppositional position can be said as a position in which the message receiver understands the encoding of a dominant type, but he/she refuses it and then encodes it oppositely. The message receiver makes the decoded message as an alternative referral framework. This position is taken by the respondents to state the disagreement or discourse created by the *mangaka*.

The oppositional position exists when Respondents I, II, and III give a response on the issues around spouse and marriage. Respondent I responds the discourse of *Arafo* women who experience restlessness in finding a spouse behind a high standard with the alternative interpretation: "I think that Japanese *Arafo* is 100% career woman all this time. There are many figures in parliament and astronaut too. So, a real career woman does not think about men anymore. They are not wholeheartedly, so career women feel the inner conflict. I know that Japanese people work 100%, not *kekkon*." (Interview on September 12, 2016). Respondent I is based on her knowledge about Japanese women who choose to seriously work and have 100% commitment not to get married. It is different from what is described by Nodeko in which there is an impression that *Arafo* women are busy with the issue of finding a mate.

The alternative interpretation in opposition to dominate the discourse is also articulated by Respondents I and II. It is related to the choice of Junko, one of *Arafo* characters in *manga*, who decides to live independently, separated from her husband, and raise children herself as a single parent. Respondent I has said: "That is an example, it is not like okay, we divorce, I will raise children myself. When they have children, they will not be stubborn like that. I will forgive first while seeing whether or not he will change. Since I have children." Meanwhile, Respondent II has said: "If for Junko, …her husband said that he would pay education and so on, but the child does not need them, but compassion from father and mother. They probably should think again." (interview on September 12, 2016). Thus, they bring another possibility which can be chosen by Junko, living together with her husband by considering child and avoiding *Arafo* status who is difficult to find a spouse.

Related to the preference not to get married immediately and urgency shown by the characters of *Arafo* women in manga, Respondent III argues that the web *manga Dokushin OL no Tatemae to Honne* implicitly gives people a message about the complex live in marriage for career women. What the reader should perceive is not the message about the role of *Arafo* women who still desire to have a husband, but it is about the message that not having the husband is not a problem. Respondent III has said, "The mission is probably to show that marriage has consequence, marriage is living together, though, as said By Junko or Mariko."…"I will not help the financial problem of your mother, so all financial problems are solved together, but someone says, 'your problem is not mine' ". It shows that at the age of *Arafo*, the problem in love is more or less like that. However, I feel that the author wants to say, "If you reach that age, being alone is not a problem if you can do this yourself. I feel that the author wants to show that woman without a man is not a problem since there will always be other women to support her. Besides, I also see that the author has the mission that women should not get married, and it will not be any problem since getting married brings the problem." (interview on October 1, 2016).

The opinion of Respondent III which is different from the dominant message presented by the text is based on her family background. Respondent III has said: "I know that there is always a person from a family who does not have any relation with a man until she was 40 years old. That is because they are devoted to their work and enjoy their life." (interview on October 1, 2016).

Every person will have different view and interpretation on the news in a media, including in interpreting the case of drug-using celebrities. This difference if it is affected by their personal experience. The media offers an interpretation (preferred reading). However, it does not influence the respondents in interpreting the news. The respondents interpret it based on their own experience. It is based on the statement of Hall (1999) that every same text will produce different meaning based on the social background of its readers. It can be viewed from the interpretation themes presented by the respondents.

The result of this research is expected to expand the research repertoire, particularly in the study of reader response. Through the study of reader response, the understanding of readers on text and the way readers interpret a work related to social reality in the Japanese society can be known. Besides, this research also gives information regarding the characteristics of *Arafo* women that are formed by Japanese society in the web *manga*.

CONCLUSIONS

The characteristic of *Arafo* women is identical with single women with the established finance. However, *Arafo* women face psychological problem in the form of restlessness in finding spouse represented by *honne* (conscience) in the camouflage of *tatemae* (persona). Three reading types from the result of an interview with respondents related to a characteristic of *Arafo* women are a dominant/hegemonic position (dominant position), the negotiated position, and oppositional position.

The dominant position is when message receiver perceives the meaning as required by the message sender. This reading type exists in all respondents related to characteristics of age and occupation of *Arafo* women. Besides, it is also found Respondents I and IV related to the problem of financial independence of *Arafo* women. Respondents can understand message presented by text producers since their background of knowledge is related to Japanese society, particularly *Arafo* women.

Negotiated position happens when readers approve the hegemonic codes presented by text sender, but it is not comprehensive. This reading type is found in Respondents I and II related to the independence issue, living separated from family. Besides, it is also found in Respondent IV related to issues in choosing spouse and marriage. The negotiated position happens since experience and perspective of every respondent is different with the message presented by text producers.

Oppositional position happens when message receiver understands message presented by the message sender, but he/she oppositely refuses it and elaborates codes. This reading type is found in Respondents I, II, and

III related to the issue of spouse and marriage. It is also found in Respondents I and II related to the choice made by Junko to live independently (separated from husband) and raise the child herself. It is also found in Respondent III related to the urgency to get married immediately in *Arafo* women. Oppositional position happened when respondents disagreed with the message stated by text producer.

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