The Tripartite Function of Imperative Forms in English and Japanese*

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Abstract

The contrastive study in this paper reveals three types of functions of imperative forms in English and Japanese. The tripartite function is to serve（ⅰ）as a typical imperative utterance,（ⅱ）as a subordinate clause and（ⅲ）as an exclamatory utterance that expresses the speaker's epistemic attitude toward what has happened. The difference in function is reflected in other formal features of each type. The proposed three functions of imperative forms, which are underpinned by functional-semantic components of human language, can be found not only in English and Japanese but also Mandarin Chinese and Korean.

Key words

contrastive study, imperatives, English and Japanese, functional-semantic components

1．Introduction

It has been argued that English and Japanese imperative forms differ in form and function. For example, typical English imperatives only use the bare form of verbs, whereas Japanese ones have more various endings（see Takahashi 2004）.

（1）　Open the window!

（2）　ａ．Mado-o　　　akero!
　　　　　window-ACC　open.IMP
　　　　　'Open the window!'
　　　ｂ．Mado-o　　　ake-nasai!
　　　　　window-ACC　open-do.IMP
　　　　　'Open the window!'
　　　ｃ．Mado-o　　　ake-te-（kure/kudasai）!
　　　　　window-ACC　open-TE-give.IMP
　　　　　'Open the window（for me, please）!'

In（1）the bare form of the verb *open* is used as an English imperative form. In Japanese, by contrast, the imperative ending is not restricted to the imperative conjugation of a verb. *Akero* in（2a）is the imperative conjugation of the verb *akeru*（'to open'）, while *ake-nasai* in（2b）is not such a conjugated form of the verb itself. If *-te-kure* or *-te-kudasai* in（2c）is added, the whole imperative form comes to have a wishing meaning. In addition to the morphosyntactic difference, English and Japanese imperative forms are different in the range of use. Although a number of imperatives are used in advertisements in English, they do not always fit

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in well with Japanese advertisements（e. g. Hasegawa, ed. 2006）. Imperatives（3）and（4）are cited from the website of an Australian department store（http://www.myer.com.au/default_mens.asp）.

（3） Focus on dress shoes

（4） Buy online now at the Myer Gift store

The imperative is used in（3）and（4）, neither of which can be translated into Japanese imperatives in the same context. The discussion above, however, does not mean that there is no commonality between English and Japanese as a category of the imperative in human language.

　　The purpose of this paper is to explore how similar English and Japanese imperatives are in terms of function. It will be demonstrated that the imperative form performs a tripartite function. Firstly, the imperative form functions as a normal imperative utterance, which requires the addressee to take some course of action. Secondly, the imperative form can also serve as a subordinate clause, which is followed by a main clause. And finally, the imperative form can reflect the speaker's strong epistemic attitude toward the previous event or utterance.

　　Although the imperative form in English and Japanese has been discussed, no previous studies provide a systematic description of the imperative form and thus fail to draw a cross-linguistically testable generalization about the imperative function. English imperatives have drawn much attention（e.g. Bolinger 1977; Quirk et al. 1985; Davies 1986; Clark 1993; Mori 2006, 2007 b; Takahashi 1994, 2000, 2004; etc.）, but the systematic division of function proposed in this paper is not found in the literature. When it comes to research on Japanese imperatives, Nitta（1991）, Murakami（1993）and Takahashi（2004）present a detailed, comprehensive analysis of Japanese imperatives, but they do not make a cross-linguistically valid generalization. Nagano（1995, 1998）, Shinzato（2001, 2002）and Mori（2007a, 2007b）pay particular attention to cases where the imperative form does not function as a typical imperative utterance, extending the scope of research on imperatives. Nevertheless, they do not go so far as to give the whole picture of the tripartite function of imperative forms. Against this background, reviewing the characteristics of various types of imperative forms in English and Japanese, the present paper attempts to make a generalization of the imperative function from the viewpoint of general linguistics.

　　The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 deals with types of imperative forms, the function of which differs significantly from one another. Relevant features are considered in section 3. Section 4 turns to the imperative form in other languages and proves that the proposed tripartite function is not restricted to English and Japanese imperatives. This paper concludes in section 5 with a summary and a future direction of the present study.

2．Three Types of Functions

　　This section is concerned with the tripartite function of the imperative form. The proposed three distinct types of functions are to serve（ⅰ）as a typical imperative utterance such as a command, an order, a request, etc.,（ⅱ）as a subordinate clause like a conditional clause and（ⅲ）as an utterance expressing the speaker's strong epistemic attitude toward the event that has occurred at the time of speech. For ease of reference, this paper

divides imperative forms into three subtypes according to the function. The three types of English examples are shown in (5)－(7), respectively.[1]

(5) Function I
     a．Open the window!
     b．Don't smoke here!

(6) Function II
     a．Come closer and I'll shoot.
     b．Say you won one million dollars, what would you do?

(7) Function III
     Talk about luck! I passed all the exams.

While (5a) and (5b) exemplify typical imperative utterances, neither (6) nor (7) expresses the literal meaning of the form. The imperative form in (6a) can be considered to be a conditional clause expressing a threat. Likewise, as seen from the fact that *say* in (6b) can be replaced with *if*, the imperative form can also be regarded as a conditional clause. The imperative form in (7) is used when the situation described by the word after *talk about* has happened. In other words, the word is a typical expression which describes the event concerned. Of great importance here is that the speaker in (7) can show his or her strong mental attitude toward the event that has already been realized.

Exactly the same holds true for Japanese imperative forms. Consider the imperative forms in (8)－(10), for example.[2]

(8) Function I
     a．Mado-o   akero!
        window-ACC open.IMP
        'Open the window!'
     b．Tabako-o   kokode suuna!
        tobacco-ACC here   smoke.NEGIMP
        'Don't smoke here!'

(9) Function II
     a．Chikazui-te-miro,   utsu-zo.
        come closer-TE-see.IMP shoot-SP
        'Come closer and I'll shoot.'
     b．Eigo-ni-shiro,   chuugokugo-ni-shiro,
        English-OBL-choose.IMP Chinese-OBL-choose.IMP
        gaikokugo-wa   muzukashii.
        foreign languages-TOP difficult

'Whether English or Chinese, foreign languages are difficult.'

⑽   Function III

    ａ．Sore miro!

       INT see.IMP

       'Serves you right!'（Lit.）'（You）see.'

    ｂ．Uso   suke!

       something fishy tell.IMP

       'You're a liar!'（Lit.）'Tell a lie!'

It is evident that the imperative forms in（8）function as typical imperative utterances, which urge the addressee to take some course of action. In other words, the speaker wants the addressee to realize what is described in the imperative. Next, consider（9a）and（9b）. In（9a）the content seems to be what the speaker does not want the addressee to realize and it is also expressed as a hypothetical event. The propositional content of（9b）also has nothing to do with the speaker's intention. Rather, the speaker presents the content hypothetically. The imperative forms in⑽function as a kind of exclamatory utterance, which expresses the speaker's critical attitude toward the event or utterance that has already occurred, rather than as an imperative utterance. In actuality, the speaker utters such imperative forms as⑽after a relevant event or utterance has happened. Example（10 a）is considered an utterance in the context where what the speaker expected earlier has been realized. For example, the speaker repeatedly warned the addressee to study harder so that the addressee can pass the examination. The addressee, however, did not listen to the speaker and was always lazy. Then, as expected, the addressee failed the examination and faced much trouble. The speaker is now in a position to utter（10a）and to show that he or she was right. Likewise,（10b）is uttered in the context where the addressee has said something clearly suspicious. It can thus be concluded that while the imperative forms in（8）can serve as an independent sentence, those in（9）generally require a following sentence or context and those in⑽expresses the speaker's strong attitude toward a prior context.

    The observation above strongly suggests the idea of the tripartite function of imperative forms in English and Japanese. Imperative forms, whether English or Japanese, can be divided into three subtypes according to the function. The first is to function as an order, a request and a command, etc., which are all intended to get the addressee to do something. The second is to function as a subordinate conditional clause, by which the speaker presents a given situation hypothetically. The third is to function as an exclamative utterance which reflects the speaker's strong epistemic attitude toward the event or situation that has already occurred.

    Finally, it should be mentioned that the proposed tripartite function of imperative forms can be discussed in terms of functional-semantic components of human language: the propositional, the textual, and the expressive（see Halliday and Hasan 1976, 1985; Traugott 1982; Halliday 1994［1985］; among others）. According to Traugott（1982: 247−248）, the propositional component concerns the subject matter, or what is talked about; the textual component creates cohesion in the text; the expressive component expresses personal attitudes to the subject matter, the text itself, or other elements in the speech situation. The first type of imperative form expresses the subject matter that is to be realized by the addressee. The second type is used to establish a textual relation（i. e. cause-effect）with a following clause. The third type reflects the speaker's epis-

temic attitude to the addressee's previous utterance. In this way, the functions of imperative forms discussed in this section correspond to the three functions of human language.

３．Characteristics of Each Type

The difference in function is reflected in other characteristics of each type of imperative form. The semantic/pragmatic features observed in the preceding section correlate with formal features of each type of imperative form. To begin with, because the first type of imperative form is intended to get the addressee to take some course of action, it follows that a phrase highlighting the function can be added. As such an example, Takahashi（2004）considers whether a given imperative is compatible with *please* in English and *-t（/d）e-kudasai*（'please'）in Japanese, both of which are added to a typical imperative to urge the addressee's action. Since the first type can be regarded as a typical imperative utterance, it can be predicted easily that the phrase in question is compatible with the first type, not with the two other types. Consider English examples in (11)－(13) and Japanese ones in (14)－(16).

(11)   Function I

　　　　ａ．Please open the window!

　　　　ｂ．Please don't smoke here!

(12)   Function II

　　　　ａ．*Please come closer and I'll shoot.

　　　　ｂ．*Please say you won one million dollars, what would you do?

(13)   Function III

　　　　　*Please talk about luck! I passed all the exams.

(14)   Function I

　　　　ａ．Mado-o ake-te-kudasai!

　　　　ｂ．Tabako-o kokode suwanai-de-kudasai!

(15)   Function II

　　　　ａ．*Chikazui-te-mi-te-kudasai, utsu-zo.

　　　　ｂ．*Eigo-ni-shi-te-kudasai, chuugokugo-ni-shi-te-kudasai, gaikokugo-wa muzukashii.

(16)   Function III

　　　　ａ．*Sore mi-te-kudasai!

　　　　ｂ．*Uso tsui-te-kudasai!

As expected, only the first type of both English and Japanese, which is intended to get the addressee to take some action, can co-occur with *please* or *-t（/d）e-kudasai*.

Next, the co-occurrence of the conditional interpretation in English imperatives and that of *moshi*（'if'）

and *tatoe*（'even if'）in Japanese imperatives have been discussed in Bolinger（1977）, Davies（1986）, Clark
（1993）, Nagano（1995, 1998）, Shinzato（2001, 2002）, Mori（2006, 2007 a, 2007 b）, etc. Among the three
types above, only the form with the second type of function should be compatible with such conditional mark-
ers, because the form in question functions as a subordinate clause. Only the second type of English impera-
tive form is paraphrased as an *if*-clause; only the second type of Japanese imperative form is compatible with
moshi or *tatoe*, as shown below.

⒄　Function I
　　ａ．If you open the window, ...（not as 5 a）
　　ｂ．If you don't smoke here, ...（not as 5 b）

⒅　Function II
　　ａ．If you come closer, I'll shoot.
　　ｂ．If you won one million dollars, what would you do?

⒆　Function III
　　　　If you talk about luck, ...（not as 7 ）

⒇　Function I
　　ａ．*{Moshi / Tatoe} mado-o akero!
　　ｂ．*{Moshi / Tatoe} tabako-o kokode suuna!

(21)　Function II
　　ａ．Moshi chikazui-te-miro, utsu-zo.
　　ｂ．Tatoe eigo-ni-shiro, chuugokugo-ni-shiro, gaikokugo-wa muzukashii.

(22)　Function III
　　ａ．*{Moshi / Tatoe} sore miro!
　　ｂ．*{Moshi / Tatoe} uso tsuke!

⒄, ⒆, ⒇ and (22) indicate that the first and third types of English and Japanese imperative forms have no con-
ditional implication, whereas ⒅ and (21) strongly suggest that the second type in English and Japanese can
serve as a subordinate conditional clause.

　　In addition, the subordinate nature is also reflected in the impossibility of ellipsis of a following part.
Another clause is needed for a given imperative form to be subordinate. The imperative form with the second
type of function must therefore be followed by a resultant clause.

(23)　Function I
　　ａ．Open the window!
　　ｂ．Don't smoke here!

⑵⑷　Function II

　　ａ．Come closer.（not as 6a）

　　ｂ．Say you won one million dollars.（not as 6b）

㉕　Function III

　　　　Talk about luck!

㉖　Function I

　　ａ．Mado-o akero!

　　ｂ．Tabako-o kokode suuna!

㉗　Function II

　　ａ．Chikazui-te-miro.（not as 9a）

　　ｂ．Eigo-ni-shiro, chuugokugo-ni-shiro.（not as 9b）

㉘　Function III

　　ａ．Sore miro!

　　ｂ．Uso tsuke!

⑵⑷ and ㉗ show that main clauses cannot be omitted.[3]　In other words, whether overt or covert, only the second type of imperative form never fails to be followed by a main clause.　It means that the imperative form of this type serves as a subordinate clause.

　　When it comes to the third type, the imperative form is used in the context where an event or utterance has already occurred and the form expresses the speaker's strong attitude toward what has happened to the speaker.

㉙　　　　[Before the speaker knows that he or she passed all the exams]

　　　　　*Talk about luck! I passed all the exams.

㉚　ａ．[Before the speaker's expectation is borne out]

　　　　*Sore miro!

　　ｂ．[Before the addressee says something fishy]

　　　　*Uso tsuke!

In the case of Japanese, the imperative endings can functionally be replaced with the perfective marker-*ta* as long as the imperative form performs the third type of function in question.

㉛　Function I

　　ａ．*Mado-o ake-ta!

　　ｂ．*Tabako-o kokode suwanakat-ta!

⑶ Function II

a. *Chikazui-te-mi-ta, utsu-zo.

b. *Eigo-ni-shi-ta, chuugokugo-ni-shi-ta, gaikokugo-wa muzukashii.

⑶ Function III

a. Sore mi-ta-kotoka!

b. Uso tsui-ta-na!

Thus, the incompatibility of -*ta* in ⑶ and ⑶ and the compatibility of -*ta* in ⑶ clearly show that only the imperative form with the third type of function can describe the event which has already occurred.[4]

In connection with the above observation it should also be mentioned that the imperative form exhibits varying degrees of idiosyncrasy according to the type of function: the more functionally deviant an imperative form is from a normal imperative utterance, the more idiosyncratic it is. Given this, it follows that the imperative form with the second and/or third function seems to be more idiomatic. The idiomatic nature is reflected in the lexical constraint on and the lexical integrity of the propositional content of each imperative form. The second type in English, which has a conditional interpretation, is limited to a coordinate construction ('an imperative form + a coordinate conjunction + a declarative') or the clause using the imperative verb of speech *say*. More constraints are imposed on the third type. Consider the following.

⑶ a. *{Think / Care} about luck!

b. *{Tell about / Say / Discuss} luck!

c. *Talk {on / over / concerning / regarding} luck!

d. *Talk about luck {to him / with him}!

e. *Talk {earnestly / knowingly / happily} about luck!

The verb used in this type is restricted to the verb of speech *talk*, as shown by (34a). Synonyms of the verb *talk* are not acceptable, as in (34b). Likewise, (34c) shows that the preposition *about* cannot be replaced with any other similar words. The resulting unit *talk about* is so fixed that no other argument can appear, as in (34d) and (34e). In Japanese, similarly, the imperative form with the first function imposes no lexical constraint on the propositional content, while the propositional content of the second never fails to be followed by -*te-miro* or -*ni-shiro*. Without them an intended meaning could not emerge. When it comes to the third type, as reveled in Mori (2006), the propositional content available is quite limited: *uso-o ie* ('(you) tell a lie'), *baka-o ie* ('(you) say something stupid'), *sore/zama miro* (Lit.'(you) see'), etc.[5] To examine the lexical integrity, consider *uso tsuke*, for example.

⑶ (*Miesuita)   uso-o   (*umaku)   (*kareni)   {ie /*hanase}!
        blatant   lie-ACC   tactfully   him   tell.IMP tell.IMP
     (Lit.) 'Tell (him) a (blatant) lie (tactfully) !'

⑶ indicates that neither additional phrases nor the alternative verb is possible for the third type of imperative

form. Thus, it can reasonably be concluded that the first type of imperative form does not exemplify an idiosyncratic imperative utterance; the second type is regarded as a partially fixed expression; the third is a highly established pattern. There is a proportional increase in the degree of idiosyncrasy from the first type via the second to the third.

In summary, the function of the imperative form is of three kinds. In addition to the basic function as a normal imperative utterance, the imperative form performs the function as a subordinate clause and as an utterance expressing the speaker's strong epistemic attitude toward the event which has occurred. These three functions correlate not only with formal features（e. g. the compatibility of *please, -t（/d）e-kudasai*, the conditional meaning, the conditional marker *moshi* or *tatoe* and the perfective marker *-ta*）but also with the cline of idiosyncrasy of each type of imperative form. The distinct features reviewed in this section support the main claim in the present study, i. e. three types of functions.

4．The Tripartite Function of Imperative Forms in Other Languages

It has been maintained so far that the imperative form has a tripartite function in English and Japanese. If the present approach is restricted to those two languages, however, it is simply an ad-hoc stipulation. This section will demonstrate that the imperative form can be analyzed in terms of the tripartite function in other languages as well. In what follows, the imperative form in Mandarin Chinese and Korean will be considered with reference to the proposed three-way division of function.[6]

First, Li and Thompson（1981: 451–462）give a comprehensive description of Mandarin Chinese imperatives. In the same way as English, Chinese imperatives in general lack the subject *you* and consist of just a verb phrase. Consider（36）−（38）in the light of the tripartite function.

（36） Dǎkāi chuānghu!
open window
'Open the window!'

（37） Zài shuō nà jiàn shì wǒ jiù huì shāle nǐ.
again say that thing I will kill you
'Say that again（and）I'll kill you.'

（38） a ． Piàn rén!
cheat person
'You're lying!'
b ． Piàn qián!
cheat money
'You've cheated me out of my money!'

The imperative form in（36）can be regarded as a normal imperative utterance which requires the addressee to open the window. This is an example of the first function of the imperative form. In（37）, by contrast, the speaker does not get the addressee to say that again; rather, the speaker simply presents the propositional con-

tent of the imperative form hypothetically. In this sense, this form performs the second function as a subordinate conditional clause. (38a) corresponds with the Japanese example in (10b). The use of (38b) shows that Mandarin Chinese imposes less lexical restriction on the propositional content of this type of imperative form. (38b) is used after the addressee has cheated the speaker. Both (38a) and (38b) are an expression which can reflect the speaker's strong epistemic attitude toward the utterance or event that has already occurred. In short, the Mandarin Chinese imperative forms in (36) − (38) exemplify the three-way division of function.

Next, consider the Korean language. Although a detailed description of Korean imperatives is provided in Sohn (1994: 40–44), they have not been considered from the perspective of the proposed tripartite function. This view, however, is in accord with the data of Korean imperative forms as well. In this language, the addition of -*la* to a given verb makes it the imperative form. Keeping this in mind, compare the following examples.

(39)　Changmoon　yeulə-la!
　　　window　　open-IMP
　　　'Open the window!'

(40)　Hanbun də　　malhae-la　　nae-ga　　nu-lul　　jukyəbəlilkkeyo.
　　　again　　　　say-IMP　　　I-NOM　　you-ACC　　will kill
　　　'Say that again (and) I'll kill you.'

(41)　a．Ba-la!
　　　　　see-IMP
　　　　　'Serves you right!'
　　　b．Kujitmal hae-la!
　　　　　lie　　　tell-IMP
　　　　　'You're a liar!'

The imperative form in (39) is a typical imperative utterance by which the speaker orders the addressee to open the window. Obviously, this exemplifies the first function of the imperative form. The forms in (40) and (41), on the other hand, serve as a conditional clause and an utterance expressing the speaker's critical attitude toward the previous event or utterance, respectively, although they must be uttered with a unique intonation. Interestingly enough, (41a) and (41b) correspond with the Japanese data in (10a) and (10b), respectively. Thus, the examples in (39) − (41) clearly show that the imperative form performs the tripartite function in Korean.

This section has given a short sketch of the tripartite function of imperative forms in Mandarin Chinese and Korean, thereby proving that the proposed three-way distinction is cross-linguistically valid to some extent. A profound insight into the imperative form and function is thus provided from a cross-linguistic point of view, but it still remains to be shown that the same observation applies to many other languages. To examine this, much more data from other languages are necessary, although further investigation lies beyond the scope of this brief paper. The present study is not claiming that the tripartite function of the imperative form can universally be observed in all the languages; some languages do exemplify all three types in the impera-

tive form, such as English, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese and Korean, whereas others may exemplify only one or two of them. No less important is that the idea of the three-way classification of function opens up the possibility of a further cross-linguistic inquiry into the imperative form.

5. **Concluding Remarks**

The contrastive study in this paper has shown that the imperative form cross-linguistically performs three types of functions: as a typical imperative utterance, as a subordinate clause and as an utterance expressing the speaker's epistemic attitude toward the event or utterance that has already been realized. As far as English and Japanese are concerned, the tripartite function correlates with formal features of each type of imperative form: the form with the first function is compatible with please and *-t(/d)e-kudasai* ('please'), the form with the second function has a conditional meaning in English and co-occurs with the conditional marker *moshi* ('if') or *tatoe* ('even if') in Japanese. The third type is used when a related event or utterance has happened at the time of utterance. In fact, the imperative ending can be replaced with the perfective marker *-ta* in Japanese. These significantly different characteristics point to three distinct functions. From the perspective of the tripartite function, the extent to which a given imperative form serves a typical imperative utterance was also discussed in this paper. While the imperative form with the first function is considered typical as an imperative sentence, the imperative form with the second or third function is not. This is supported by the fact that the second and third forms impose more lexical restrictions on the propositional content, and that the form with the third function is too lexically integrated for additional phrases to intervene. Finally, the tripartite function of the imperative form was considered from the viewpoint of general linguistics. It was demonstrated that imperative forms in Mandarin Chinese and Korean display a remarkably similar pattern to English and Japanese, that is, the three-way distinction of function. This cross-linguistic finding strongly supports the claim in this paper. Now that such a cross-linguistically testable generalization has been made, the next step is to examine it with as many other languages as possible.

Notes

＊ This paper is an extended version of section 7.3 of Mori（2007 b）.

1 Mori（2006）divides imperatives into three types, arguing that English has only two types of imperatives. His claim is not that English lacks Function III itself, but that English simply lacks the word-for-word version of the Japanese imperative form with Function III such as（10b）. Therefore, *Tell a lie!* does not function as in（10b）.

2 The abbreviations used in this paper are as follows. ACC（Accusative）, IMP（Imperative）, INT（Interjection）, NEGIMP （Negative imperative）, NOML（Nominalizer）, OBL（Oblique）, PFT（Perfect）, PST（Past）, SP（Sentence-final particle）, TE（Japanese clause-linking marker）and TOP（Topic）. The asterisk'＊'in examples means that a given expression is grammatically incorrect or inappropriate.

3 （24 a）and（27a）may sound more grammatical than（24b）and（27b）in appropriate contexts. In such cases, however, a resultant clause is implicitly assumed.

4 The form in（31a）is acceptable in the context where the speaker requests the addressee's action urgently, but this issue is irrelevant to whether or not the event concerned is realized. About（33b）, the following test also supports the fact that the third function involves the event which has already happened.

（i） Uso-o   it-ta   no-o   tashiname-ta.
       lie-ACC   tell-PFT   NOML-ACC   warn-PST
       'I warned that you've told a lie.'

As already discussed in Mori（2006）, the quotation form in（i）reveals that the cited part of propositional content（i. e. *uso -o iu*）concerns the matter which has been realized.

5　Because of this strict restriction on the third type, Ono（1990）, Kubozono and Nishimitsu, eds.（1999）, Shinzato（2002）, etc. claim that this type of imperative form turns out to be simply an idiom, not an imperative sentence. Mori（2006）, on the contrary, claims that the imperative form with the third function still displays several syntactic behavior characteristic of imperative sentences. It remains to be proven whether the imperative form with the third function should be considered an idiom or an imperative utterance.

6　I owe the Mandarin Chinese and Korean data in this section to Wei Zhang and In-kyoung Ko, respectively.

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