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SPANISH AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE IN SWITZERLAND

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Introduction

Switzerland is a country with a multilingual tradition with different linguistic communities. Its multilingual character is evident through the fact that four official languages are spoken, albeit with different levels of prestige and quantity of speakers: German (63% of speakers in the country), French (22.7%), Italian (8.1%) and Romansh (0.5%). Figure 33.1 presents a map detailing the general areas in which each language is spoken.

Furthermore, in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, there is a diglossic relationship between Standard German—*Hoch Deutsch* taught in school—and Swiss German, which is spoken in different contexts. Diglossia in Switzerland has been discussed at length because Swiss German also enjoys prestige (see, for example, Stepkowska, 2012, for a review).

In recent years, the presence of immigrant languages including Spanish has grown at a staggering rate. Today 2.2% of permanent residents in Switzerland declare speaking Spanish as one of their principal languages. Figure 33.2 shows the distribution of immigrant languages in the country in 2015.

Spanish has an important presence in the Swiss education system. It is taught in 70% of High Schools that prepare students for university (*Gymnasium* in German context, *collège* in the French speaking part of Switzerland) (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte. Subdirección General de Cooperación Internacional, 2014). Moreover, the official syllabus for secondary level offers Spanish-teaching guidelines (*Plan d'études cadre pour les écoles de Maturité*, CDIP, 1994; *Plan d'études cadre pour les écoles de culture générale*, CDIP, 2004a). Likewise, it is possible to pursue a program of studies in Spanish at eight Swiss universities. The students who attend these courses at university level are heterogeneous and include Swiss students who have attended Spanish lessons in High School, first-generation immigrants, and Spanish and Portuguese heritage speakers (Sánchez Abchi & Larrús, 2012). The general offering for study-ing Spanish in informal contexts is also very large and, in recent years, the applications for the DELE examination (*Diploma de Español como lengua extranjera*) have increased considerably (Ministerio de Educación, 2014). This information, as a whole, reveals the vitality of Spanish in the Swiss context. Spanish is currently the second most popular foreign language in the Swiss education system after English.









Source: Swiss Federal Statistics Office, 2017a.

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But in Switzerland, Spanish is also spoken by first- and second-generation immigrants. More than a third of these speakers declare Spain as their origin country, but the other two-thirds do not. Table 33.1 shows the origin of speakers with Spanish as one of their principal languages.

Previous studies have shown that first-generation Spanish-speaking immigrants in Switzerland are well integrated in the host society and incorporate the majority languages into their linguistic repertoire. However, they still sustain an important loyalty to their language of origin

Table 33.1 Percentage of speakers with Spanish as a main language according to the country of origin

Spain			33.55
Latin America	Colombia	5.53	
	Dominican Republic	5.00	
	Peru	4.30	
	Argentina	4.02	
	Ecuador	3.32	
	Межісо	3.10	
	Chile	2.97	
	Bolivia	1.84	
	Venezuela	1.83	
	Cuba	1.68	
	Uruguay	0.63	
	Guatemala	0.52	
	Costa Rica	0.47	
	Honduras	0.35	
	Paraguay	0.32	
	El Salvador	0.28	
	Nicaragua	0.21	
	Panama	0.15	
	Total Latin America		36.52
Other countries	Switzerland	18.48	
	Portugal	3.73	
	Italy	1.44	
	France	1.07	
	Brazil	1.03	
	Germany	0.96	
	EEUU	0.46	
	Morocco	0.28	
	Romania	0.19	
	Belgium	0.16	
	Dominica	0.16	
	United Kingdom	0.15	
	Netherlands	0.11	
	Canada	0.08	
	Angola	0.08	
	Russia	0.06	
	Algeria	0.06	
	Other	1.41	
	Total other countries		29.92
	Total		100.00

Source: Swiss Federal Statistics Office 2017b

(Lüdi & Py, 2013). Nevertheless, for heritage Spanish-speaking children, the majority language is clearly stronger. A study that compared Spanish competency of children of the ages of three, four and five growing up in the German-speaking part of Switzerland observed a progressive and substantial influence of the majority language in the children's Spanish discourse. While younger children could speak Spanish fluently at home, at five years of age, when they start kindergarten, they began to introduce Swiss-German vocabulary and syntactic structures into their discourse (Sánchez Abchi, 2015).

Heritage language policies in Switzerland

In Switzerland, the equivalent of the term "heritage language" varies between the linguistic and geographical regions. The French expression "langue d'origine" (language of origin) refers to a speaker's origin language or family language; while the Italian term "lingua dei paesi d'origine" (language of the country of origin) is more specific about the geographical and migrant dimensions of the term. In German, the expression "heimatliche Sprache"—homeland language—emphasizes the identity connotation of the term. However, recently, the expression "Herkunftssprachlicher Unterricht" (teaching in the language of origin), excluding the term "culture," has been preferred (Schader, 2016). All the same, the different expressions refer to the minority language spoken at home.

In a country where a high percentage of the population is bilingual, education policies encourage the maintenance of heritage languages. Indeed, the recommendations of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CDIP in French; EDK in German) point out the importance of integrating children with a foreign language in public school and the respect for the language and the culture of origin (CDIP, 1991). This political will is reflected in different actions, such as the law of languages teaching at school (CDIP, 2004b) and the implementation of programs to promote multilingualism at school and to raise awareness about the diversity and richness of languages (See Giudici & Bühlmann, 2014 for a review). Official support of language and culture of origin (henceforth LCO) courses are part of these political actions.

Language and Culture of Origin (LCO) courses

LCO courses emerged in the 1930s when a group of political refugees organized Italian-language courses for their children (Giudici & Bühlmann, 2014). Later, with the widespread arrival of labor migration, LCO courses aimed to facilitate immigrant children's return to their country of origin and their reintegration into the education system there. In the 1970s and 1980s, immigration policy in Switzerland regarded immigrant students as being enrolled only temporarily in Swiss schools. In the 1990s, when temporary labor migration became more permanent, the population attending LCO courses also changed (for a review, see Marakova, 2014).

LCO courses generally meet for two hours per week and constitute a complementary but not compulsory teaching of minority languages. These courses are aimed at immigrant children/children with an immigrant background whose families wish to maintain their language. In recent years, children from bi-national families—one parent from Switzerland and the other from a different country—also began to attend these courses (Bildungsdirektion des Kantons Zürich, 2011). Changes in the population and immigration policies have also produced a change in the LCO courses. It is no longer just a matter of reintegration into the education system in the country of origin. This change is clearly expressed in the objectives of the LCO curriculum:

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One of the objectives of the LCO courses is the integration of children of first and second-generation immigrants in the host society. Likewise, children from mixed families also attend the LCO courses. In the case of the latter group, it is not about integration or a return to their families' country of origin"

Bildungsdirektion des Kantons Zürich, 2011: 7, our translation

The LCO curriculum aims to promote and develop language and culture competences of children from first to ninth grade. Children learn to improve their communication competences in everyday situations, the development of basic interpersonal communication (BIC) skills, according to Cummins (1979). Children also learn to read and write and develop academic skills (the CALPs) to analyze and reflect on problems in school (Bildungsdirektion des Kantons Zürich, 2011). Moreover, L1 development has been shown to facilitate the learning of the school language (see review of Giudici & Bühlmann, 2014), although the extent and the nature of the influence have also been discussed (see review in Berthele & Lambelet, 2017, and Desgrippes & Lambelet, 2016).

The status of these courses presents very different situations. Broadly speaking, there are three models of LCO organization (Giudici & Bühlmann, 2014):

- 1 Supported by the country of origin. The ministry of education of that country finances the course's implementation via the local embassy.
- 2 No support from the country of origin. These courses are organized by NGOs.
- 3 Support from Swiss charity organizations.

The financial and professional situation of courses can vary widely depending on their organizational models. For example, the courses organized by an embassy can guarantee teachers good working conditions and a monthly wage. This is not always the case for courses organized by private organizations, with more precarious job conditions often with an hourly wage. Furthermore, embassy-supported courses receive pedagogical and professional coordination; as a result, they have a greater reach (Calderón, Fibbi & Truong, 2013).

On the other hand, official support can also vary depending on the canton, ranging from isolated recommendations to cantonal laws. Likewise, regulations regarding LCO courses may address different aspects, such as the availability of local schools or infrastructure for the courses, participant enrollment, articulation with the official school, and conditions for implementation, among others. Articulation with the official school is proposed in the guidelines of some cantons. It refers, for example, to the reporting of HL grades in the official school report or exchanges between LCO teachers and mainstream school teachers. However, articulation is weak or nonexistent in most cases (Calderón, Fibbi & Truong, 2013).

In recent years, some cantons have implemented practices and actions that promote and support LCO courses (see review in Giudici & Bühlmann, 2014). This has resulted in the development of curriculum and didactic materials and in continuing education proposals specifically addressed to LCO course teachers. They have been systematic in a few cantons, occasional in others. For example, in 2011, the Ministry of Education for the Canton of Zurich edited a curriculum specifically conceived for teaching heritage languages. The curriculum outlines the history of LCO courses and provides general guidance for teaching, evaluation, and teaching materials. Furthermore, it describes the objectives and content for the domain of language and the domain of culture. In general terms, the language-related content includes listening comprehension, speaking, reading, text production, writing, and reflection about the language. For the culture domain, some topics are listed to guide the selection of themes in the classroom including "individual and society," "nature and technology," "country of origin and rest of the world," and "present, past and future." This document was later adapted or adopted by other cantons (Erziehungsdirektion des Kantons Bern, 2013).

Similarly, in 2016 a series of materials for the professional development of LCO teachers was published (Schader, 2016). The material, which was drafted based on didactic theories and experiences of LCO teachers, has been introduced in LCO continuing education courses offered by some cantons. Every volume is devoted to one specific topic: writing, reading, orality, intercultural competences, and learning and teaching strategies. Originally written in German, it has been translated to many other immigrant languages (Turkish, Albanian, English, Portuguese, and Balkan languages). However, the material has not yet been translated into Spanish. Furthermore, there is no version available in French, which further hinders the distribution and use of the materials in French-speaking cantons, especially for those minority languages without a translated version.

The official LCO curricula and the teacher support materials make a decisive contribution to LCO teaching in Switzerland. However, it is important to note that they have been conceived for all the minority languages in the country and, in this regard, they do not consider the particularities of each language.

Teaching Spanish as a heritage language in Switzerland

In Switzerland there are two types of Spanish LCO courses that can generally be referred to as "Spanish" or "Spanish/Latin American." They employ different course organization and have access to varying resources. Before describing each type, Table 33.2 lists the different institutions and the number of children enrolled in these courses in 2015.¹

Table 33.2 Spanish LCO students in Switzerland in 2015

Түре	Name	Canton	Number of students
"Spanish"	ALCE	All	4,500
"Spanish/Latin American"	Escuela latinoamericana de Berna (Latin American School in Bern)	Bem	86
	Escuela Latinoamericana de Biel (Latin American School in Biel)	Bern	20
	Escuelita Onex	Geneva	25
	Tierra de Infancia	Geneva	10
	FOLC	Basel-Stadt Basel-Land	90
	ELASUR	Lucerne	28
	ALILEC	Zurich Aargau Thurgau St. Gallen Schaffhausen	176
	Subtotal		435
	Total		4,935

Source: Sánchez Abchi & Calderón, 2016

Type 1: "Spanish"

Since the 1970s, Spain's Ministry of Education has organized Spanish courses in Switzerland. An agreement with Swiss authorities was the beginning of the creation of Spanish-language teaching positions to meet the demands of an immigrant population that wished to maintain their language. Formerly, these courses aimed to help children of Spanish migrants to return to Spanish schools back in their country of origin. Accordingly, the curriculum was inspired by the official school in Spain, with materials used to teach Spanish as an L1. However, since then, the pedagogical framework and the teaching education of teachers has evolved and transformed.

In 1985, the "Agrupaciones de Lengua y Cultura Españolas" (henceforth ALCE) were created (Ministerio de Educación, 2014). Originally, Spanish-speaking children from different countries of origin were accepted on the courses. Later, new regulations (Real Decreto 1027, 1993) specified that the courses were for the children of Spaniards residing in Switzerland.

The course levels and content organization are inspired in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), but they have their own curriculum specifically oriented to heritage speakers, and they have developed their own teaching materials. Currently, classes are given via virtual and presence-based modalities. Furthermore, all ALCEs coordinate their syllabus, materials, and exams. Table 33.2 shows that these programs have ten times more students than the other type, which is discussed next.

Type 2: "Spanish/Latin American"

Spanish courses for Latin Americans first emerged in Switzerland in the 1990s to meet the demand from Latin American families whose children were no longer eligible for the courses organized by the government of Spain, due to the new regulations passed in 1993.

The courses are organized by private institutions, family associations, or Latin American organizations. Due to the challenging economic situations in most Latin American countries, their embassies do not provide financial support for these courses. Consequently, the children's families assume the responsibility of the teaching organization, including the hiring of teachers and pedagogical experts, and finance their implementation.

In 2015, most of these institutions were located in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. In the French cantons, despite the important presence of Spanish-speaking migration in these regions, only two institutions were giving courses in the canton of Geneva. Each institution is organized differently, and the diversity in their characteristics is very important. For example, some of them have developed a curriculum based on the CEFR. Other syllabi are inspired by textbooks. In some institutions, the emphasis is on oral competences and cultural aspects, while for others the development of literacy competencies is critical. Finally, the selection of didactic materials is also diverse. However, most of the teachers use books for Spanish as a foreign language edited in Spain (Sánchez Abchi & Menti, submitted). If we consider that an important percentage of children can already speak Spanish fluently before starting LCO courses (cf. information below), L2 books seem not to be the most suitable option for these students. Moreover, it can also be problematic (see Beaudrie and Valdés & Parra, this volume, for a discussion on this point).

The courses, which face financial and organizational challenges, are often managed by volunteers. Consequently, their reach is considerably more limited than the embassy-supported courses.

To summarize this section, we have seen that without financial support from the governments of the home country of origin, LCOs serving Latin American children face significant

challenges in materials, teacher development, and even merely existing. Several open questions include whether the children of Latin American immigrants can garner greater support from their home governments, whether these families would wish to attend the Spain-sponsored programs if given the chance (as they were pre-1993), and whether the government of Spain would open its programs to Latin American children, creating linguistic and intercultural benefits to all

Spanish-speaking youth in Switzerland.

Characteristics of the population attending Spanish LCO courses It is widely recognized that heterogeneity is a typical feature of heritage speakers (Valdés, 1999). However, the characteristics of the population attending Spanish LCO in Switzerland have not been described. Within the framework of research conducted to study the linguistic competences of Spanish-heritage speakers in French and German-speaking Switzerland, a parent questionnaire was distributed to collect information about the linguistic background of children attending Spanish LCO courses in the eight institutions listed in Table 33.2 (Sánchez Abchi & Calderón, 2016). Only families with children between the ages of 9 and 13 were contacted. The questionnaire was completed by 118 families. Parents were asked to provide information about their country of origin, the different languages spoken in the family, the percentage of Spanish input at home, the early family literacy practices (i.e., the frequency of storybook reading before the children started school), and attendance on Spanish LCO courses. There were also questions about the parents' country of origin and

The results showed high levels of heterogeneity in the population. Some 88% of the children were born in Switzerland and the rest had arrived at an early age (mean age: 5.3 years old).

Likewise, 65% came from bi-national families (one Swiss parent and one parent with a migration background), while only 35% were first-generation migrants or migrants' children born in Switzerland. Figure 33.3 shows the distribution of bi- national families in the sample. This diversity implies consequences for the use of languages in the home. Indeed, the fact that only one parent comes from Spain or Latin America typically reduces the opportunities for

speaking Spanish at home (De Houwer, 2007).



Table 33.3 Exposure to Spanish through early childhood

Period of exposure	Average exposure to Spanish
0–3 years of age	52% (S.D. 29.4)
3-4 years of age	44% (S.D. 24.4)
From the beginning of primary school	30% (S.D. 15.4)

When we asked the parents to estimate the children's exposure to Spanish, in relation to other languages, it is possible to observe a clear progressive decline over the years. Table 33.3 illustrates the children's exposure to Spanish during three different periods of life, based on the parents' responses to the questionnaire

Within six years, children's exposure to the minority language dropped 20% as a natural consequence of beginning school, where children are necessarily exposed to other languages. However, families estimated that the mean presence of Spanish at home remained stable. At the time of the survey, the mean presence was 42% (S.D. 27.6%) because this estimation involved all the speakers within the household, not specifically the children. In addition to Spanish and the majority language (German or French), families stated that Portuguese, Galician, English, Russian, Catalan, Tamil, and Guarani were also spoken in the home. Furthermore, we asked parents to indicate how many languages they could speak with an advanced or intermediate level. Mothers claimed to speak 2.7 (S.D. 1.3) languages on average and fathers reported 3.3 languages (S.D. 1.3). The data show that children are not only growing up in a multilingual country, but their homes are also highly multilingual.

We also asked about their experiences with language at home, given that the early experiences with language have a decisive influence on language development (Evans, Shaw & Bell, 2000; Hart & Risley, 1995) and on the maintenance of family languages (Eisenchlas, Schalley & Guillemin, 2013). Two questions addressed the presence of literacy practices at home: frequency of storybook reading in Spanish and in the school language before the start of formal schooling. According to the survey responses, the frequency of storybook reading in the school language and in HL was comparable: 44% of families claimed to read storybooks in French or German every day, while 42% did the same in Spanish. The early storybook reading practices at home are of critical importance because they are a predictor of the development of literacy skills (Borzone, 1996; Boudreau & Hedberg, 1999; Duursma et al., 2007; Paul, Hernández, Taylor & Johnson, 1996). In this regard, it can be expected that the children's level of command of Spanish at the start of LCO courses is heterogeneous. Thus, we asked the families whether their children could speak Spanish fluently before taking the LCO courses. Two-thirds of the families (66%) said that their children already spoke Spanish fluently before starting LCO courses, while the rest of the children had not yet developed their BIC skills. The coexistence of such different levels within a single class is the most challenging aspect of the job reported by Spanish LCO teachers in this context (Sánchez Abchi & Menti, submitted). At the same time, it implies that an important percentage of the children (almost 34%) learned to speak the language within the framework of LCO teaching.

The questionnaire also addressed attendance at a Spanish LCO course, which can also be very varied due to the nature of the institutions. Some of them require that children begin at an early age and complete the whole curriculum. This ensures certain continuity in the study of the language. Other institutions allow children to enroll at any time. In these cases, even when a placement test is required, the heterogeneity is broad, notably in relation to reading and writing competences. In our study, the groups were very heterogeneous. For children participating in the study, the average attendance was 3.4 years, but the S.D. was high: 1.8 years

Table 33.4 Socio-educational level of parents of LCO children

Father	Mother
52.63	versity 47.46
32.70	ational 34.00
7.90	ondary 11.00
2.63	ary 2.54
	induity

(ranging from nine months to six years). The amount of time spent attending LCO courses has proved to contribute to the development of literacy skills. In fact, within the framework of the study of linguistic competences in Spanish HL, it was observed that the time attending Spanish LCO courses was positively correlated with the development of syntactic complexity in texts (Sánchez Abchi & De Mier, 2017) and with the production of more complex written narratives (Sánchez Abchi, Bonvin, Lambelet & Pestana, 2017).

Finally, the questionnaire allowed us to determine the parents' level of education as an indicator of socioeconomic status (SES). In this regard, SES is a critical factor in linguistic development. In the case of the families in our study, even when heterogeneous, the educational level was high. Broadly speaking, half of the children's mothers and fathers had a university education (or a higher degree) and about one-third had a vocational education. The rest had completed either primary or secondary school. Table 33.4 summarizes the information about the level education.

The results suggest that most children who attend Spanish LCO courses are already exposed to literacy practices and verbal interactions that may support a positive linguistic development. This could eventually facilitate the literacy process in the heritage language.

Conclusions

Overall, Spanish enjoys vitality in Switzerland's education system in particular and as a heritage language generally. At the same time, the questionnaire results from Sánchez Abchi and Calderón (2016) reveal some specific challenges for the Spanish LCO in Switzerland. The heterogeneity of the population—a common characteristic of heritage speakers—results in consequences for their command of the language and implies a didactic challenge. The tendency observed in LCO courses in other languages (Calderón, Fibbi & Truong, 2013) is also present in the case of Spanish: because the teaching goals are too general in that they are the same for many heritage languages and/or inspired in L2 materials (Sánchez Abchi & Calderón, 2016), it is difficult to meet the needs of such heterogeneity. In this regard, the final responsibility lies with the teachers who must deal with the differences in the classroom. Consistent curricula that do not address the needs of learners could lead to a lack of motivation to study the language, as some children have already expressed (Sánchez Abchi, 2016).

Furthermore, the description of the LCO population in official documents is not completely adequate to describe Swiss Spanish speakers in this context. First of all, official documents speak about the importance of integrating migrant children in the country, and "integration" becomes one of the objectives of LCO courses. But if we take into consideration the fact that bi-national families represent more than half of the students, we are talking about an important percentage of "local" children attending the courses. In addition, a considerable majority of these children were born in Switzerland or arrived at a very early age. This infers that the children grow up in the host society and are immersed in the Swiss context. This demographic information does not correspond to the stereotype of the immigrant student who historically attended LCO courses.

Even when some official documents note the increasing presence of bi-national families in the courses, the change in the population does not imply a revision of objectives. Indeed, a central goal of the LCO courses remains unchanged: the "integration" of children into the Swiss context. But Swiss children do not require integration; neither do migrant children who have already attended local schools.

Another goal expressed in the official documents is to guide children in their course of studies in the Swiss system of education. Yet studies show that the relationship between the official school and the LCO course is nonexistent or, in the best of the cases, involves only the sharing of school buildings and, in some cases, school facilities (Calderón, Fibbi & Truong, 2013). Once again, it seems that the orientation and integration into the Swiss system of education is not the priority role of the LCO courses.

The main goal of the LCO courses remains the promotion of the language of origin-including literacy skills-and knowledge of the culture of origin. In this regard, previous studies have shown the positive impact of LCO courses on the maintenance of language (Caprez-Krompàk, 2010 for Albanian and Turkish). More specifically, the time spent attending Spanish LCO courses is associated with better Spanish writing skills (Sánchez Abchi & De Mier, 2017; Sánchez Abchi, Bonvin, Lambelet, & Pestana, 2017). In fact, the objectives expressed in the LCO curricula or in the official recommendations of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CDIP, 1991) mostly refer to an official political will to recognize and value the multilingualism of children, to integrate children's linguistic capital in a multicultural society. LCO courses make a decisive contribution to social multilingualism, and in this regard, it is the whole of Swiss society that profits from LCO teaching practices. However, the position of LCO courses in the Swiss education system remains weak (Calderón, Fibbi & Truong, 2013). For example, there is no economic contribution from the government for teachers' salaries. So, for the courses organized by private institutions, funding for the courses is a challenge. Furthermore, continuingeducation proposals are scarce and limited to some cantons. Articulation experiences of heritage language courses with the school system, like in other countries (see for example the case of Sweden in this book) are still scarce or temporal in the Swiss context.

The progressive loss of heritage languages has been extensively documented around the world, and, as we observe in the evolution of the presence of Spanish at home, it is also observed among the families of LCO children. The maintenance of the minority language is hard work, and it is not simply a matter of parents or LCO teachers' efforts, but rather it is an issue that must be addressed by society as a whole. As observed in other contexts (Potowski, 2013), it is ironic to invest time and resources in the teaching of an L2 in the official system, but not to support the early learning of the heritage language that makes a critical contribution to the multilingual development of society. The acknowledgement of languages of origin is a very important step in this direction. However, more often than not, the guidelines for the support of such courses get no further than the drawing board. An explicit implementation of support in the different cantons, as well as more active involvement of official institutions in the organization of LCO courses, could help to reinforce their presence and their status in society, representing a significant step in the maintenance of Spanish in Switzerland.

Note

1 All of the institutions in French-speaking and German-speaking Switzerland were contacted. For the ALCE courses, students from Ticino (an Italian-speaking part of Switzerland) were also considered. Only the courses active in 2015 were included in Table 33.2. Other institutions have the formal cantonal authorization to teach the language, but they had not opened courses in the year that the survey was conducted.

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