

## **The Formation and Transformational Rules of Question-Word Questions in Ibibio**

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**Abstract:** This paper aimed at examining the formation and transformational rules of question-word questions in Ibibio. It adopted a descriptive research method which involved both the primary and secondary sources. Data were collected through elicitation from four competent adult native Speakers of Ibibio, between the ages of 50 and 65. This study deployed the X-bar theory as the theoretical framework for data analysis. The analysis revealed that question-word questions in Ibibio are commonly derived from declarative constructions and are formed by the replacement of the subject or object of the declarative constructions with appropriate question-words. Investigation also revealed that the question-word of a subject question-word question requires no fronting. Whereas the question-word of an object question-word question can be fronted to the initial position of the interrogative sentence, thereby occupying the empty position of the complementizer, leaving an empty trace at its original position which triggers the DO-support rule, by inserting the appropriate variant of the verb 'to DO' between the fronted question-word and the subject of the interrogative sentence. This work therefore serves as a tool for further research on Ibibio interrogative constructions.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In language studies, language is seen as a basic tool for communication. The use of language for communication determines how information is transferred from one person to another. In the study of language, the information is structurally arranged and semantically classified based on the meanings they convey which could be in a declarative, imperative or interrogative form. An interrogative construction is the one in which the hearer is requested to provide information about something. In other words, interrogative constructions are expressions which are used in asking questions (cf. Ndimele 2003:183).

A wh-question (WHQ) is a question that contains interrogative pro-form (a pro-form that is used in questions to stand for the item questioned); and it is also known as content question (CQ), question-word question (QWQ) and information question (IQ) (cf. <http://www.glossary.sil.org/term/wh-question>; Crystal 1980: 294, 383). Questions are being asked in different ways in languages. Questions are used for different purposes such as to seek for specific information, to give an order or command, to make a request, to give a conversation, to make a comment on a situation, to check knowledge to find out if someone knows something accurately and to query the entire proposition in context (Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman, 1999:240).

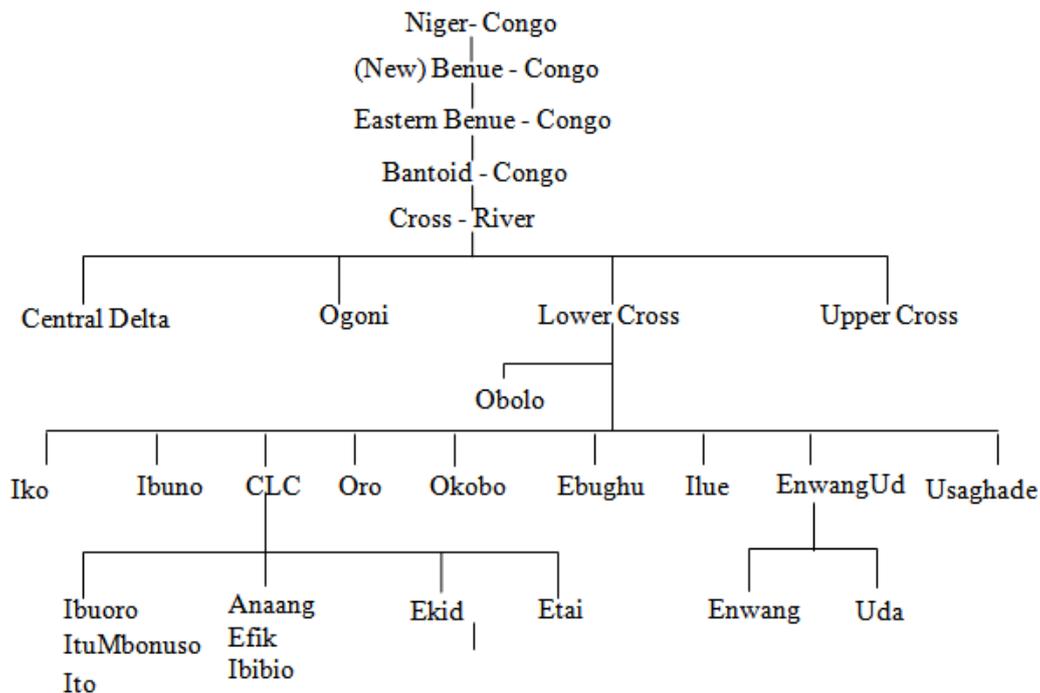
According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-freeman (1999), WHQs are used for seeking specific information from the addressee by the questioner. For instance, the questioner seeks for the missing information in social interaction (e.g. what is your name?), to know the name of his fellow. In other words, WHQs are questions which are used to elicit information, using wh-words (question words) without asking for yes or no response and are often called open questions because they leave room for a description or opinion and are more useful in eliciting information. In English for instance, there are eight wh-words which include: what, when, where, which, who, whom, whose and why and to these eight wh-words, 'how' is being added because it also elicits a particular kind of information without demanding for yes or no response (cf. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999: 240, 241, 248 & 249). The fact that 'how' is also added to the eight wh-words in English, Radford (1981:146) verified the issue by stating that,

“...despite the fact that WHQs involve the use of interrogative words beginning with WH: what, who, etc; 'how' can also be classified as a form of WHQs since it exhibits the same syntactic behaviour as other members of this class”.

In this paper, we examine and analyze the formation and transformational rules of question-word questions (QWQs) in Ibibio. The question-words (QWs) in Ibibio correspond to English wh-words (WHWs). Thus, the question-words are also referred to as wh-words.

### 1.2 Linguistic Classification of Ibibio

Ibibio language geographically, is spoken in several Local Government Areas of AkwaIbom State of Nigeria such as Uyo, IbesikpoAsutan, Ibiono, NsitIbom, Ini, IkotAbasi, Itu, NsitUbiom, NsitAtai, etc. Genetically, the Ibibio language belongs to the (New) Benue-Congo sub-family which in turn belongs to the Niger-Congo family. The Niger-Congo family is a Lower Cross (Greenberg, 1963). Essien (2008) classifies Ibibio under Lower Cross subgroup of the Delta Cross branch of Cross River which is the branch of the (New) Benue Congo language family, which therefore modifies the classification of Greenberg (1963). Essien (2008), Connell (1994) and Urua (1995) is of the opinion that Ibibio is a member of the Lower Cross group as classified in the Niger-Congo language family in figure 1.1 below:



Adapted from Connell (1994, p.13).

### 1.3 Research Methodology/Theoretical Framework

The research design adopted in this research work is the qualitative research design which involves the use of both primary and secondary sources. The primary source involves collection of data by elicitation method from four competent adult native Speakers of Ibibio, between the ages of 50 and 65 who have resided in their speech community for over 50 years. On the other hand, the secondary source involves relevant textbooks, journals and articles from the internet.

The research materials include the research template which contains samples of interrogative constructions in English, the 400 wordlists of Ibadan basic vocabulary, necessary writing materials and an audio recorder.

The theoretical framework adopted in this work is the X-bar theory. The X-bar theory is one of the sub-theories of Government and Binding Theory (GB Syntax). It is a generative theory of language about the internal structure of syntactic constituents, propounded by Noam Chomsky (1970) and was further developed by Jackendoff (1977). It captures the insight that all phrases share some essential structural properties and that they conform to a general phrase.

### 1.4 Wh-Questions (WHQs)

A wh-question is a question that contains interrogative pro-form (a pro-form that is used in questions to stand for the item questioned); and it is also known as content question, question-word question and information question (cf. <http://www.glossary.sil.org/term/wh-question>; Crystal 1980: 294, 383).

WHQs are questions which are used to elicit information, using wh-words (question words) without asking for yes or no response and are often called open questions because they leave room for a description or opinion and are more useful in eliciting information. In English for instance, there are eight wh-words which include: what, when, where, which, who, whom, whose and why and to these eight wh-words, 'how' is being added because it also elicits a particular kind of information without demanding for yes or no response (cf. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999: 240, 241, 248 & 249).

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WHQs focus on particular parts of sentences (not generally on the whole sentence), either on the subject or predicate. WHQs come in two basic varieties: those where the information gap is in the predicate; and those where it is in the subject (e.g. what is that? and who are you?, respectively). With a predicate information gap, the word order becomes Object-Verb-Subject (OVS) whereas in a subject information gap, the Standard English word order, Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) remains intact (cf. <http://www.glossary.sil.org/term/wh-question>; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 240 - 242).

#### **1.4.1 Wh-Questions about a Subject (Wh-Subject Questions)**

These are WHQs that ask about the subject of a sentence and are commonly derived from declarative sentences. When the subject of a declarative sentence is questioned, no fronting or inversion rule applies (because it has already been fronted) and the subject is simply converted or replaced with the appropriate wh-word (cf. Crystal, 1987: 143 – 241; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 243 - 245). For example, we have:

- 1 (a) Someone needs a lift (declarative)
- (b) Who needs a lift? (interrogative)

From the above example, it is observed that (1a) is a subject question because it seeks for the subject of the sentence in (1b). It is derived from sentence (1a), and it is formed by replacing the subject "someone" with the appropriate wh-word "who", therefore questioning the subject of the sentence. Other examples of wh-subject questions are:

2. Who killed the dog?
3. Which of the animals was killed in the movie?
4. What occurred in the church yesterday?

#### **1.4.2 Wh-Questions about an Object (Wh-Object Questions)**

These are questions that ask for the object of the verb in a sentence. They are commonly derived from declarative sentences and are formed by replacing the object with appropriate wh-word (cf. Crystal 1987:143-241; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999:243-245). For example we have:

- 5 (a) She gave a bag to John (declarative)
- (b) She gave what to John? (interrogative)
- (c) She gave a bag to who? (interrogative)

From the above example, it is observed that example (5b) is an object question which is derived from example (5a) and the wh-word "what" replaces the object "a bag", occurring internally at the direct object position of the sentence, therefore asking for the object of the verb. Also, in example (5c), the indirect object 'John' is replaced or substituted by an appropriate wh-word 'who', which therefore asks about the indirect object of the sentence 'John'.

According to Radford (1988), "a wh-word which originates internally within a sentence must be moved into the left position of the complementizer". Thus it has to do with the wh-fronting which is discussed in the next sub-heading.

#### **1.4.3 Wh-Fronting (Wh-Movement) In Wh-Questions**

A wh-movement (or wh-fronting) is a syntactic phenomenon found in many languages around the world in which interrogative words (sometimes called wh-words) or phrases show a special word order. Unlike ordinary phrases, such wh-words appear at the beginning of an interrogative clause. The term 'wh-movement' is used because most English interrogative words start with wh-, for example: who, whom, whose, what, which, when, where, why, etc (though 'how' is an exception) (cf. Chomsky, 1977:71 – 132; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 246).

According to Cook (1988:125), the movement in WHQs occurs from one position to the other, that is, the deep structure where the movement has not taken place and the surface structure where the movement has taken place.

For instance, let's reconsider example (5b) 'She gave what to John?', where the movement (of the wh-word) has not taken place, and see its transformation by the wh-movement as the examples below show:

6 (a) She gave what to John? (deep structure).

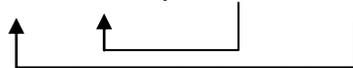
(b) What did she give to John? (surface structure).

From the above examples, in (6a), it is observed that the wh-movement is in operation. That is, the wh-word 'what' which occurred internally in (6a) (the deep structure), has been moved to the front of the sentence in (6b) (the surface structure). Also, it is observed that in the movement process, the DO-support is introduced, which is an obligatory syntactic process which introduces an appropriate form of the auxiliary verb 'to DO (=do, does, did)' into the sentence at the later stage of derivation. This occurs as the result of no overt auxiliary verb in the deep structure of the transformation (Ndimele 1999:220,221).

It is also important to note that the wh-fronting in a wh-question triggers the inversion of the auxiliary verb (modal auxiliary) when the wh-question contains such auxiliary verb (Ndimele, 1999:220, 221 & 222). Radford (1988) argues that, "the inverted auxiliary verb in a wh-question, moves into the complementizer position". Consider the example below:

7 (a) Mary will drink what? (deep structure).

(b) What<sub>i</sub> will<sub>i</sub> Mary t<sub>i</sub> drink t<sub>i</sub> ? (surface structure).



From the example above, it is observed that the movement of the wh-word triggers the inversion of the modal auxiliary verb 'will' into the position of the complementizer projection.

#### 1.4.4 Multiple Wh-Questions (MWHQs)

According to Hiz (1978:x), MWHQs, "are questions with more than one interrogative variable in the interrogative operator". Thus, there is a possibility for more than one wh-phrase to occur in a question. For this to happen, it forms what is known as "multiple wh-question".

MWHQs in English are characterized by the presence of two or more wh-phrases where only one appears in clause-initial position, while the other wh-phrase(s) stays or stay in-situ (i.e. within the clause). The wh-phrase that occurs clause-initially is the wh-phrase whose associated constituent gap is closest to its associated gap. This phenomenon was initially explained by Chomsky (1973), as the following examples show:

8 (a) Mary asked who to read what?

(b) Who<sub>i</sub> did John persuade t<sub>i</sub> to read what?

In the above examples, it is observed that there exists more than one wh-phrase; and the clause-initial wh-phrases are closer to their associated gaps.

#### 1.4.5 Embedded Wh-Questions (EWHQs)

Embedded wh-questions are also known as indirect questions, which are part of a larger matrix sentence (possibly a question itself), and are generally used to report about direct questions that are not associated with a special intonation. They are normally formed within a question as the example below shows:

9 (a) What time is it?

(b) Do you know what time it is?

It is important to note that in embedded wh-question, there is a syntactic subordination where a clause is embedded within another. The embedded clause is known as 'lower clause' while the clause that houses the lower clause is known as 'matrix or higher clause'.

In English, the classes of verbs that can take WHQs as complements include: 'ask'. Examples are:

10 (a) How are you?

(b) She asked how I was.

11 (a) Where are you going?

(b) She asked where I was going.

### 2.1 Question-Word Questions in Ibibio

In this section, we analyze the question-word questions in Ibibio, in order to examine their formation and transformation.

**2.1 Question-Word Question**

**2.1.1 Question-Word Questions (QWQs):**

This is also known as WH-questions in English. But in Ibibio, these questions are so called **Question-Word Questions (QWQs)** because, the question words in Ibibio, do not begin with *Wh-* as in English.

In Ibibio, QWQs include QWQs based on the syntactic position, embedded question-word questions (EQWQs), and multiple question-word questions (MQWQs). These comprise different forms of question-word questions which therefore make use of question-words (i.e. wh-words) in their formation. According to Essien (1990), the question-words in Ibibio include the following:

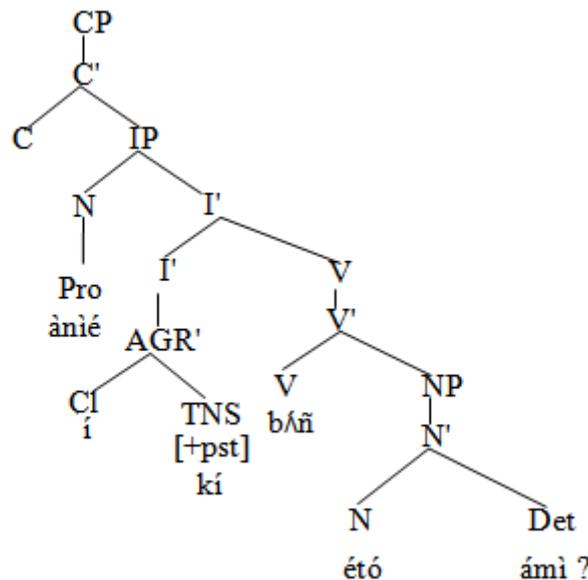
i	ànié	‘who/whose’	} Interrogatives
ii	ńsò	‘what’	
iii	iníákě	‘when’	
iv	úké/ńkéké	‘where’	
v	ákě/àńkéké	‘which’	
vi	ńtáhà	‘why’	
vii	dié	‘how’	

**2.1.2 Question-Word Subject Questions**

These are questions that ask for the subject of a sentence, and are commonly derived from declarative sentences. In Ibibio, these questions are formed by replacing the subject of the declarative sentence with an appropriate question word; thus, no fronting or inversion rule is applied (cf. Crystal 1987). Consider the example below:

- (12) a. Èmèm á- ké- bÁñ étó ámì (declarative)  
 N 3sg.cl pst break stick det  
 ‘Emem broke this stick’.
- b. ànié í- kí- bÁñ étó ámì? (interrogative)  
 who cl pst break stick Det  
 ‘Who broke this chair?’

Figure 1.2: Illustration of an Interrogative Sentence Structure in Ibibio



In example (12), it is observed that sentence (12b) is a question-word subject question which is derived from sentence (12a), and it is formed by replacing the subject *Èmèm* with an appropriate question-word (interrogative) *ànié*. Also, it is obvious that no fronting rule is applied (because the question word has already been fronted), and no inversion rule is applied. Other examples are:

13 *Ànié í kí wǒdébód?* who 3sg.cl pst kill goat 'Who killed the goat?'

14 *Ànié í má ènyéwho* 3sg.cl.love her 'Who loves her?'

15 *ÁKě̀nàmí kí tá bià ádò?* which animal 3sg.cl. pst eat yam that 'Which animal ate that yam?'

### 2.1.3 Question-word Object Questions

These are questions that ask for the object of a sentence. They are commonly derived from declarative sentences. In Ibibio, these questions are formed by replacing appropriate question-words, and then manipulated the word order by moving the question-word to the beginning of the sentence (cf. Crystal 1987). Question-word object questions in Ekiid are of two types:

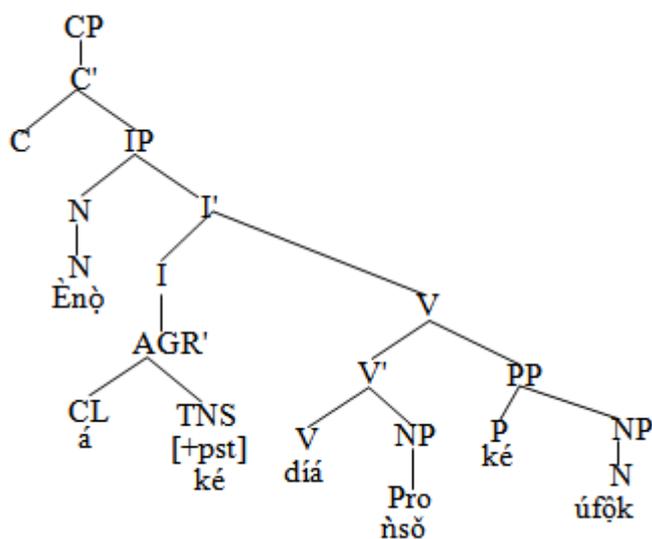
- (i) Question-word object questions which include main verb, and
- (ii) Question-word object questions with copula verbs.

(i) **Question-Word Object Questions with Main Verbs:** Consider the example below:

(16) a. *Ènò á- ké- dià àdèsi ké úfòk* (declarative)  
 N 3sg.cl pst eat rice at home  
 'Eno ate rice at home'

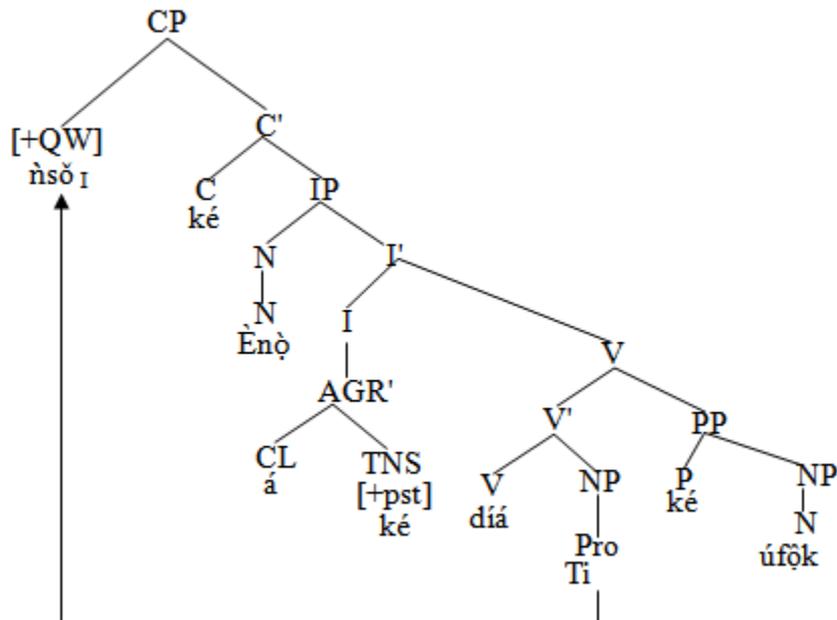
b. *Ènò á- ké- diá òsòké úfòk ?* (interrogative)  
 N 3sg.cl pst eat what at home  
 'Eno ate what at home?'

Figure 1.3: Illustration of QWQ with Main Verb in



c. *òsò,ké Ènòúfòk á- ké- diá t<sub>i</sub>ké úfòk*(interrogative) what<sub>i</sub>did N 3sg.cl pst eat t<sub>i</sub> at home 'What<sub>i</sub> did Eno eat t<sub>i</sub> at home?'

Figure 1.4: Illustration of Question Word Movement in Ibibio



In example (16), it is observed that example (16b) is an object question which is derived from sentence (16a); and example (16c) is the surface structure in which the word order is therefore manipulated by the rule of transformation known as ‘question word movement’, where the question word *nsõ* ‘what’ is moved to the initial position of the sentence and thus triggers the ‘Do support’ rule, i.e. the inversion of the auxiliary verb to **DO***ké* ‘did’ which therefore occupies the C position (cf. Radford, 1981, 1988).

**(ii) Question Word Object Questions with Copula Verb**

These are questions that require the object of a sentence with the use of copula verb to BE in their formation, without the main verb. Examples are:

(17) *áfò à- dó ànié* you 2sg.cl be who ‘You are who?’

(18) *áfò à- bá ké úké/ñké?* you 2sg. cl be at where ‘You are at where?’

In example (17 and 18), it is observed that the questions involve copula verbs to **BE** (is, and are) without a main verb; still using question-word (at the object position) to ask for the object of the verb. They question-word can be moved to the initial position of the sentence as seen in the examples below.

(19) *ànié,ké áfò à- dóṭ?* Who FM you 2sg.cl be ‘Who are you?’

(20) *úké/ñké,ké áfò à- bá ṭ?* where FM you 2sg. cl be ṭ ‘Where; are you ṭ?’

**2.1.4 Embedded Question Word Questions (EQWQs)**

These are also known as indirect questions which are formed within a question. Examples are:

(21) a. *ànié í-kí- bėnńdídía òmì?* who cl.pst take food my ‘Who took my food?’

b. *áfò à- kpàá- ándókómìèniènié í-kí- bėnńdídía òmì?* you 2sg.cl can-. tell me who cl-pst take food my ‘Can you tell me who took my food?’

(22) a. *nsí sí idé ?* What is wrong ‘What is wrong?’

b. *áfè à- kpàá- nńtíí mí nsí sí idé ?* you 2sg.cl can-. tell me What is wrong ‘Can you tell me what is wrong?’

### 2.1.5 Multiple Question Word Questions (MQWQs)

These are questions with more than one interrogative variable in the interrogative operator (cf. Hiz 1978). In Ibibio, we have the following examples:

(23) inĩákèké àfò à- di dí, òmè ànié?when are you 2sg.cl Incpt come, conj. Who'when are you coming, with who?'

(24) àfò à- bá òmè ànié, ké úké?You 2sg.cl be with who, at where'You are with who, at where?'

## II. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, the analysis reveals that question-word questions in Ibibio are commonly derived from declarative constructions and are formed by the replacement of the subject or object of the declarative constructions with appropriate question-words. Investigation also reveals that the question-word of a subject question-word question requires no fronting. Whereas the question-word of an object question-word question can be fronted to the initial position of the interrogative sentence, thereby occupying the empty position of the complementizer, leaving an empty trace at its original position which triggers the DO-support rule by inserting the appropriate variant of the verb 'to DO' between the fronted question-word and the subject of the interrogative sentence. This work serves as a tool for further research on the aspect of syntax in ItuMbonUso.

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