

Infinitives in transit: The spreading of shortened infinitive forms from Finland Finnish to Finnish spoken in Sweden

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Abstract

The study examines the use of two spoken Finnish features among Sweden Finnish adolescents in a formal education setting. The features in question are the colloquial versions of the A-infinitive lative (e.g., *mä saan pelaa* ‘I’m allowed to play’) and the MA-infinitive illative (e.g., *mä meen pelaa* ‘I’ll go and play’) forms when used with contracting verbs (e.g., *pelata* ‘to play’). These features are most prominent in the spoken Finnish in Helsinki, but the data shows it is also present in the speech of bilingual children in Sweden.

Keywords: Non-finites, minority language, Finnish, spoken language, Finnish in Sweden

1 Introduction

The current squib is a descriptive study of the spoken Finnish of 6th grader pupils attending a bilingual Sweden Finnish independent school (SFS) in the greater Stockholm area. Specifically, I examine to what extent and how a group of Sweden Finnish 6th grader pupils use shortened versions of the A-infinitive lative case e.g., *saan pelata* ‘I’m allowed to play’ and the MA-infinitive illative case e.g., *menen pelaamaan* ‘I’ll go and play’ in conjunction with so-called contracting verbs in spoken Finnish e.g., *minä pelaan* ‘I play’. The shortened versions of the above mentioned examples would be *saan pelaa* and *meen pelaa* respectively.

1.1 Situating the study

Finnish has a centuries-long historical presence in Sweden with an estimated 80,000–450,000 speakers of Finnish today (Lainio 2018: 48). The language

is acquired in schools and partly at home, but this varies due to incomplete language transfer among previous generations (Vuorsola 2022: 2). The modern basis for the minority's formation can be traced to the 1960s and 1970s when large groups of Finnish people emigrated from Finland to Sweden to find work. The resulting large groups of Finnish speaking immigrant children led to changes in the Swedish school system, such as the introduction of bilingual classes in the compulsory school. Eventually the support for Finnish education in Sweden waned and these classes were discontinued and forced assimilation policies emerged (Hyltenstam 1999: 11–13). After this, bilingual formal education in Finnish resumed mostly in so-called bilingual independent schools (Vuorsola 2019: 364). One of the biggest positive developments for the minority was the ratification of the Council of Europe's *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (FCNM) and the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (ECRML) in 2000 and the subsequent classification of Finnish, along with Meänkieli, Yiddish, Romani Chib and Sámi, as a national minority language in Sweden. Despite this status, the Sweden Finnish minority's rights are frequently not met, especially in terms of formal education of Finnish in municipal schools (Lainio 2014; Vuorsola 2019).

1.2 Previous research on Finnish in Sweden

There is a growing body of research on the Sweden Finnish minority and the use of Finnish in Sweden. Studies on Finnish in Sweden often involve translanguaging (Kolu 2017) or code-switching (Muhonen 2014) in formal education settings, error analysis (Valijärvi 2016) and examining of sentence constituents (Nesser 1983) and case endings (Nesser 1986). Juvonen (2000), in turn, has examined the grammaticalisation process of the definite demonstrative pronoun *se* (Eng. a pronoun proximal, near to the interlocutor) into a definitive article. A study closest to the interests of the current squib is Lainio (1993), where he has examined the spoken Finnish in Sweden in the 1980s including the use of the MA-infinitive illative and how different Finnish dialects are present in the speech of Sweden Finnish speakers (Lainio 1993: 36). The current study attempts to add knowledge about the further linguistic development of Finnish in Sweden in an age-group that may be seen as the future language carriers of Finnish in Sweden.

Next, I present the principles for the on-going change affecting the A-infinitive lative and the MA-infinitive illative case of contracting verbs in

spoken Finnish. In Section 3 I discuss the data, followed by the findings in Section 4 as well as the discussion and conclusion in Section 5.

2 Finnish infinitives in standard and spoken forms

The structures under study are 1) the A-infinitive lative and 2) the MA-infinitive illative in spoken Finnish. The A-infinitive lative acts as a complement to other verbs while the MA-infinitive illative denotes movement (Kuparinen 2018: 30). The two structures are called infinitives in the current squib, but they can also be referred to as non-finites (see Ylikoski 2022). Out of all verb types in Finnish only the 1st verb type, i.e., verbs that end in *AA*, *OA*, *eA*, *UA*, *iA* in the A-infinitive form e.g., *sanoa* ‘to say’ (Mantila 2004: 326–327; Kuparinen 2018: 31) and so-called contracting verbs may occur as shortened versions both in the A-infinitive lative and the MA-infinitive illative structures (Kuparinen 2018: 32). Contracting verbs in Finnish refer to verbs that end in either *-AtA*, *-UtA* or *-OtA* in the A-infinitive form depending on the vowel harmony. Contracting verbs are a productive verb type in Finland Finnish to which recent loaned verbs tend to be accommodated (see Räsänen 1987). It is less common for contracting verbs than verbs belonging to the 1st verb type to occur as shortened infinitives in speech, since the form is mostly used in the Helsinki region and has not yet become an unmarked form of the common spoken variety (Kuparinen 2018: 31).

In Table 1 I exemplify the change with the verb *varata* ‘to reserve’. The examples include the verbs *voida* ‘can, to be able’ and *mennä* ‘to go’. For stylistic consistency, I have used the colloquial version *meen* ‘I’ll go’ with the shortened infinitive of the MA-infinitive illative. There is no such colloquial form for the verb *voida*.

For the A-infinitive lative form, the A-infinitive *varata* ‘to reserve’ is replaced by the 3rd person verb form (*hän*) *varaa* ‘s/he reserves’ and is most likely the product of analogy from how shortened infinitives are constructed with the 1st verb type. Originally the forms in question are most likely the result of Swedish and Finnish speakers being in contact in the southern Tavastian region (Itkonen 1989: 364–365; Kuparinen 2018: 31). Children who are learning to speak are also known to produce the structure (Sorsakivi 1982: 381).

The shortened versions of the infinitives occur in the spoken Finnish among youths in Helsinki (Paunonen 2006: 38) and, as Kuparinen (2018: 38)

Table 1. The standard and shortened versions of A infinitive lative and MA-infinitive illative forms with contracting verbs

	A-infinitive lative	MA-infinitive illative
Standard infinitives	<i>voim varata</i> ‘I can reserve’	<i>menen varaamaan</i> ‘I’ll reserve’, lit. ‘I will go and reserve’
Shortened infinitives	<i>voim varaa</i> ‘I can reserve’	<i>meen varaa</i> ‘I’ll go and reserve’

demonstrates in his recent work, the feature seems to be expanding and becoming more than a youth variant, since more people retain the feature in their speech as adults. Sorsakivi (1982: 390) states already in her article from 1982 that the shortened infinitives are a prestige form in spoken Finnish feature among youths in Helsinki. Next, I will discuss the data and how it was collected.

3 Data and data collection

The data was collected by the author in the spring of 2018 after a completed ethical vetting.¹ The entirety of the data consists of 19 filmed and audio recorded Finnish classes with 6th graders in a bilingual Sweden Finnish school, 15 of which contained uses of the linguistic features that are under study. I implement ethnographic data collection methods such as classroom observations as well as audio and video recordings. In all 12 out of 13 6th graders partook in the study. The composition of the group can be considered as being representative for a class of pupils in a Sweden Finnish bilingual class.

After the recording, the researcher systematically identified the use of A-infinitive lative and MA-infinitive illative constructions of contracting verbs in the data, transcribed the examples and compiled an example list.

The data was gathered for a larger sociolinguistic study and has some limitations. For example, the pupils’ personal histories were not systematically collected. To partly amend this, I have included Appendix B which features some details of the pupils’ possible migration histories that appear during interactional exchanges in the data. In addition to this, I have added information

¹ Project number 2017/2513-31/5, vetting completed by Regionala etikprövningsnämnden i Stockholm in Stockholm 11 January 2018. The permission included data collection for both sociolinguistic studies and linguistic analysis.

on the pupils' Swedish accents. A Sweden Swedish accent in spoken Swedish might indicate that the student in question has lived in Sweden for an extended period and s/he may have had less contact with on-going linguistic development of spoken Finnish in Finland.

In the next section I analyse how and to which extent shortened infinitives are used by Sweden Finnish adolescents in a formal education setting.

4 Findings

Out of 19 lessons 15 featured one or more either shortened or standard Finnish infinitives and in total the construction appears 62 times in the data. Out of the 62 occurrences 37 appear as the shortened infinitive variant and 25 appear as the standard Finnish variant. All in all, there are 12 participating pupils, 7 of whom use the infinitive forms studied:

- 2 used only the standard forms;
- 2 used only the shortened forms;
- 3 used both.

When looking at the frequency of use, it is indisputable that the shortened infinitives are often present in the spoken Finnish among the 6th graders in the SFS. The verbs used for the infinitive constructions are few and seem to follow the theme of gaming and are mostly loanwords. (See Appendix C for full list of occurrences.)

All of the found occurrences were either the shortened infinitives or standard infinitives. None represented the form of the unmarked MA-infinitive illative *meen pelaan* 'I'll go and play', where the illative is marked with an *-n*. This form is not considered as a shortened infinitive but another spoken Finnish variant of the structure. This variant has spread wider than the shortened infinitive and can be found in the Finnish Ostrobothnia, the Tavastian dialects and even eastern dialects (Mielikäinen 1991: 52–53). This would indicate that the spoken Finnish that is impacting the pupils' use of infinitive forms is specifically from the Helsinki region and not from another part of Finland.

Next, I examine how the pupils use shortened and standard infinitives and whether the construct is used in stylistically consistently in a manner that is expected. I compare this stylistic consistency with the background information presented in Appendix B to try to determine how independently the pupils use the features under study.

4.1 How shortened infinitives are used by Sweden Finnish adolescents

All the following examples are originally in Finnish. The shortened infinitives are in bold typeface in the examples. Examples (1a–b) are from pupil M1 who is discussing a movie.

- (1) a. M1: ku emmä haluu **spoilaa** mitä täs tapahtuu
 ‘because I don’t want to spoil what happens in this’
- b. M1: mut mä en- mä en haluu kir- kirj- **spoilata** mitä siin tapahtuu (.) [teacher’s name] mä en haluu **spoilata** mitä siin tapahtuu (.) se on niin hyvä elokuva (.)
 ‘but I don’t want to write- write- spoil what happens in it (.) I don’t want to spoil what happens in it (.) it’s such a good film’

In Example (1a) above M1 uses the shortened infinitive *spoilaa* ‘to spoil’ and other colloquial forms such as the short 1st person singular pronoun *mä* ‘I’ which is commonly used in the Helsinki region, Tavastian dialects and southern Ostrobothnia (Mielikäinen 1991: 14; Paunonen 2006: 43) in the assimilated form *emmä* (instead of *en minä* ‘not me’), as well as the shortened colloquial forms of words such as *ku* ‘because’ instead of the full *kun* and *täs* ‘in this’ instead of *tässä*. In this regard M1 can be said to use the shortened infinitive in a stylistically consistent context. Later in (1b), M1 switches to the standard Finnish infinitive *spoilata* ‘to spoil’ when giving an answer to his teacher. However, he keeps using similar colloquial Finnish forms such as *mä* ‘I’ instead of *minä* (Mielikäinen 1991: 14; Paunonen 2006: 43). This could signal that M1 regards the shortened infinitives as a form that is too informal to be used in his spoken Finnish when answering the teacher.

This behaviour is not consistent, as exemplified by M2 in Example (2) below.

- (2) M2: tota mun kaveri se halus vaan **pelaa** (.) niin sen vanhemmat teki nii että se sai yhen viikonlopun vain **pelata** siten se (.) se pelas niim paljo (.) se pelas iha niinku kakstoist tuntii molemmat päivät (.) niin se väsy siihen peliin (.) siten se teki kaikkee muuta paitsi pelasi (.) ku se väsy sitten niinku siihen ku se sai **pela** (.) se o ku niinku tekee tosi paljo mieli karkkii (.) saa syödä mitem paljoo karkkii vaan halus sit tulee niin pahana (.) paha olo et ei koskaan enää haluu karkkii tosi paljoo

‘so my friend he just wanted to play (.) so his parents did so that during one weekend he got to only play and then he (.) he played so much (.) he played like twelve hours on both days (.) so he got tired of the game (.) then he did everything else except played (.) because he got tired like because he got to play (.) it’s like when you are really craving candy (.) you get to eat as much candy as he wanted then you feel sick (.) sick that you never want lots of candy’

As presented in Appendix B, M2 has never lived in Finland but one of his parents is from Helsinki and his extended family still lives in Helsinki. His Swedish accent is local. In this rather lengthy comment M2 alternates between the shortened and the standard infinitive i.e., *pelaa* and *pelata* ‘to play’ respectively. The third example is partly cut off but can be interpreted as the shortened infinitive. In this sequence, the pupil in question is telling the anecdote for the whole class and indirectly to the teacher. M2 uses common colloquialisms which can be found in e.g., the Helsinki region, such as the apocope in the past tense of contracting verbs *halus* ‘wanted’; as standard *halusi* (Mielikäinen 1991: 46) and the demonstrative pronoun *se* ‘it’ instead of *hän* ‘he/she’ (Paunonen 1995: 165–177). In this regard M2’s use of shortened infinitives as a feature among other spoken Finnish forms is consistent. There seems to be no pattern why the shortened or standard infinitive is used, and these can thus far be considered as interchangeable.

The following example exhibits that the pupil M3 is also able to use short infinitives competently.

- (3) M3: pitää **eimaa** vähän ylöspäin ja silloin pitää **smoukkaa**-
menee heti siihen connecting
‘you have to aim a little up and then you have to smoke- go
directly there connecting’

M3 is a bilingual pupil with a local Sweden Swedish accent who frequently opts for using Swedish in discussions with his peers. Example (3) stems from a discussion on online gaming strategy with M1. M3’s language use is marked by colloquialisms. M3 is using two shortened infinitives, *eimaa* ‘to aim’ and *smoukkaa* ‘to smoke’, instead of the A-infinitive standard infinitives but also a spoken Finnish form of *silloin* ‘then’, where the *-i* of the diphthong *-oi* is omitted and becomes *sillon*. This is a widely spread feature of Spoken Finnish (VISK §24). In other words, M3 use the shortened infinitives in a context that features other colloquialisms.

The next example features M4's language use, who is very competent in Finnish and has lived and received formal education in Finland. Along with M2 who has a confirmed link with Helsinki, M4 could potentially be one of the pupils spreading the feature in the group. M4 uses the shortened infinitives repeatedly. In Example (4) below, M4 showcases his mastery of the structure by alternating between the shortened and standard infinitives to convey different roles in conversation. In the example, the pupils are discussing how much they are allowed to play games at home.

- (4) 01 M4: no emmä haluu **pelaa** mitään marioo
 'I don't want to play any (Super) Mario'
 02 M5: minä voisin **pelaa** sellasta
 'I could play that'
 03 M4: jos mä pelaan ni mä ehin puoltuntii **pelaa** illalla (.) kun
 mä tuun treeneistä (.) enkä ees sitäkään ku "ei saa **pelata**
 viikolla"
 'If I play, then I have time to play half an hour in the evening
 (.) when I get home from training (.) maybe not even that
 because "no playing during the week"' [imitating a nagging
 voice]
 04 M5: [laughter] samat
 'same'

M4 uses the shortened infinitives on lines 01 and 02, but switches to the standard A-infinitive on line 03 when saying *ei saa pelata viikolla* 'no playing during the week' in a nagging voice and presumably takes on the role of his parents. This shift can be seen as an example of *stylisation* which, according to Rampton (2009: 149) "involves reflexive communicative action in which speakers produce specially marked representations of languages, dialects, and styles that lie outside their own habitual repertoire (at least as this is perceived within the situation at hand)". Example (4) indicates that M4 is aware of the difference between the standard Finnish variant and the shortened variant and that the shortened variant is a feature of a youth idiolect.

When examining M4's language use it is apparent that he is competent in using common features of Finnish spoken language. For example, he uses spoken Finnish variant *mä* instead of the full first-person singular pronoun *minä* 'I' (Mielikäinen 1991: 14; Paunonen 2006: 43). The partitive case in the word *tuntii* 'hours' in M4's speech is assimilated, which is common in

Tavastian dialects and in the Helsinki region (Paunonen 2006: 37) and in standard Finnish would be *tuntia*. When combining these common spoken Finnish variants, the rare feature from the Helsinki region *pelaa* ‘to play’ is non-intrusive.

Example (4) also features M5 who has lived in Finland and his history of not being originally from Sweden is corroborated by his non-local Swedish pronunciation. He also speaks one of the Romance languages at home with at least one parent. As the other pupils, M5 uses shortened infinitives competently but his use is marked with some stylistic variations and differences. On line 02 of Example (4) M5 uses the shortened infinitive *pelaa* ‘to play’, but instead of being consistently colloquial he uses the full first-person singular personal pronoun *minä* ‘I’ instead of *mä*. Though this can also be interpreted as an emphasis marking that he would enjoy playing the Mario game and not an inconsistency, M5’s speech features similar inconsistencies in other examples.

- (5) M5: viikonloppuna, koska yleensä kun on viikonpäivät silloin tulee läksyi, pitää mennä suihkuun, syödä ja niinku ei oo niinku aikaa **pelaa**, niin viikonloppuna kun sä tuut kotiin sä voit mennä heti sohval ja sitten (??) koulust koska huomenna on lauantai niin
- ‘During weekends, because normally during weekdays there’s homework, you have to shower, eat and like there’s no time to play, so during weekends, when you come you can go straight to the sofa and then (??) from school because tomorrow is Saturday so’

In Example (5) M5 discusses his gaming habits and uses the form *pelaa* ‘to play’ instead of *pelata* ‘to play’. However, this construction is not a shortened infinitive. Instead, M5 uses the short form *pelaa* in an incomplete clause denoting ownership, which in standard Finnish would be (*sinulla ei ole aikaa pelata* ‘you have no time to play’). In other words, M5 uses the shortened infinitive differently than the other pupils. When it comes to stylistic consistency in Example (5), M5 uses the colloquial 2nd person pronoun *sä* ‘you’ which is found in e. g., the spoken Finnish in Helsinki (Mielikäinen 1991: 14; Paunonen 2006: 43), but simultaneously includes the *i* in the second syllable *-oi* diphthong in the word *silloin* ‘then’, which, as mentioned before, is something that is often omitted in colloquial speech patterns (VISK § 24). A speaker who retains the *-i* in the diphthong may be perceived as foreign or to be using a formal speech pattern (Lehtonen 2015: 116–119). However,

he does omit the *i* from the word *sellasta* ‘that’ in the previous Example (4), which in standard form would be *sellaista*. It is worth noting that there is variation with regards to retaining the *-i* specifically in the words *sellainen* and *semmoinen* (see Mustanoja 2011).

M5’s stylistically uneven production of spoken Finnish suggests that the shortened infinitive feature might not be a completely independent part of M5’s language use and I thus interpret it as an example of accommodation through convergence in the above mentioned speech situation (Gallois et al. 2005: 123; Giles 2016) which is a strategy where speakers modify their linguistic output to resemble the output of their co-interlocutor when “they desire recipients’ approval” (Gallois et al. 2005: 125). Next, I present examples where shortened infinitives are used beyond their set constructions.

4.2 Infinitives used in other structures

The only time M5 does not follow the pattern of using a previously established shortened infinitive is in the example (6), where the pupils are discussing the length of the recess.

- (6) 01 M6: Hei onks meil nytten viidentoista minuutin rasti
 ‘Hey do we have a fifteen-minute recess now’
 02 M5: Joo
 ‘Yes’
 03 M4: [kahdenkymmenen
 ‘twenty’
 04 M5: kahdenkymmenen
 ‘twenty’
 ‘huh’
 05 M5: me ehitään (.) mä voin opettaa teille pokeria **pelata**
 ‘we have time (.) I can teach you poker to play’

Here the use of the shortened infinitive deviates from both the colloquial Finnish model and the standard A-infinitive form. The verb ‘to play’ is a part of a noun phrase that acts as the object to the main predicate ‘to teach’. In this context the verb ‘to play’ in standard Finnish would be nominalized by using the derivative ending *-minen* to *pelaaminen* and, following the inflection rules of Finnish objects, would be in the partitive case, i. e., *mä voin opettaa teille*

pokerin pelaamista ‘I can teach you to play poker’. Admittedly, the example could also be turned into to MA-infinite illative *voin opettaa teitä pelaamaan pokeria* but it would require additional changes.

M2 uses the shortened infinitive similarly in Example (7).

- (7) M2: nii samassa lauseessa ja sitte myös j- m- joka kerta kun vanhemmat sanoo että tule alas syömään mä haluan vaa jatkaa **pela**
 ‘in the same sentence and then also j- m- every time when parents tell me to come down to eat I just want to continue playing’

As in the previous example i.e., the sentence requires the nominalization of the verb with the derivative ending in the partitive case i.e., *pelaamista* ‘playing’, in order to work as the object in the sentence. Instead of this nominalization M2 opts to use the shortened infinitive *pela* ‘to play’. Since M5 is Swedish-Finnish bilingual but has never lived in Finland, this may very well be the result of interference from Swedish, where the sentence would be *jag vill fortsätta spela* ‘I want to continue playing, lit. (to) play’.

Finally, M1 repeats this pattern for a third time in Example (8).

- (8) M1: kyllä mä nyt tuun es:ää jatkaa **pela**
 ‘I will continue playing CS’ [CS refers to the online game Counter Strike]

Again, the sentence would require the nominalisation of the verb, i.e., *pelaamista* ‘playing’. As with Example (7) the shortened infinitive here could be interference from Swedish, since the translation, *jag kommer att fortsätta spela CS* ‘I will continue to play CS’, as the forms are similar.

Examples (6), (7), and (8), then, indicate that the use of the A-infinitive and its shortened colloquial form may be expanding to encompass the *minen-*derivative ending as well.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This squib cannot be construed as indicative of the linguistic development of spoken Finnish in Sweden in a broad sense. A larger corpus is needed in order to be able to conduct such a study. The features under study occur infrequently in speech (Sorsakivi 1982: 381) and the amount of research participants is small. As discussed, the shortened infinitives of contracting verbs can originally be traced back to the Southern Tavastian region in Finland and to

the contact between Swedish and Finnish speakers (Itkonen 1989: 364–365; Kuparinen 2018: 31). Considering that the involved languages in the studied group are the same, it is possible that a similar change is occurring currently within the bilingual school. However, the likelier scenario, based on the findings, is that the development of Finnish in Finland and Sweden is linked, at least to some degree.

The use of the infinitives indicates three tendencies among the pupils. The first is that the pupils who use the shortened infinitives do so quite frequently. Secondly, the pupils who use the feature replicate it competently in the way that it is used in the Helsinki region. Some pupils are even using it to mark a shift from a role to another as was the case in Example (4). Thirdly, despite the pupils' ability to use the feature competently, there are differences suggesting that pupils such as M5 could have adopted shortened infinitives from other pupils in the class. Finally, Examples (6–8) exhibit how pupils seem to replicate Swedish structures in Finnish resulting in the use of shortened infinitives instead of the derivate ending *-minen* that is used for nominalisation (for a similar process involving the demonstrative pronouns *tämä, tuo, se* see Juvonen 1996). This suggests that the use of short infinitives might spread to other grammatical structures.

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Appendix A Transcription key

- (.) pause
- interrupted speech
- [..] extralinguistic information or clarification
- [??] unintelligible speech

Appendix B Pupils' personal histories and Swedish accents

Pupil	Personal history	Swedish accent
M1	Personal history unknown	Not applicable
M2	Has never lived in Finland but has relatives from and in Turku as well as Helsinki	Sweden Swedish
M3	Personal history unknown	Sweden Swedish
M4	Has lived and received formal education in Finland	Not applicable
M5	Has lived in Finland but there is no data on when and where. Speaks one of the Romance languages as a home language with at least one parent	Sweden Swedish but not native

Appendix C Number of occurrences with translations

Contracting verbs in Finnish	English translation	Occurrences with standard inf.	Occurrences with shortened inf.
betata	to bet	0	2
defusata	to defuse	0	3
depositata	to deposit	0	3
eimata	to aim	0	1
fiksata	to fix	0	1
hypätä	to jump	2	1
joinata	to join	2	0
kämpata	to camp	0	1
levätä	to rest	1	0
mess-upata	to mess up	0	1
naiffata	to knife	0	1
pelata	to play	15	19
plantata	to plant	0	1
smoukata	to smoke	0	1
spoilata	to spoil	3	1
tuhota	to destroy	0	1
vastata	to answer	2	0

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