Andrea Trovesi
(University of Rome "La Sapienza", Italy)

Slavic Languages in Times of Globalization: Changes and Challenges

Nell'articolo si analizzano gli effetti che la globalizzazione ha avuto negli ultimi decenni sul sistema delle lingue slave. Tre sono i processi indotti dalla globalizzazione che qui verranno presi in speciale considerazione: la democratizzazione, l'internazionalizzazione, la nazionalizzazione. Poiché il lessico è il segmento del sistema linguistico più reattivo e esposto ai cambiamenti esterni, attenzione particolare è rivolta ai prestiti e alla formazione delle parole.

The paper focuses on the effects that globalization has had on the Slavic languages over the last decades. Three globalization-induced development trends in Slavic will be considered: democratization, internationalization and nationalization. As lexis is the part of language most reactive to external changes, particular attention is devoted to loanwords and word formation.

1. *Introduction*

The effects of globalization on the languages spoken in former socialist countries have been considerably shaped by the political, economic and social changes that these countries have gone through over the last 30 years. As a result, despite many similarities, such effects have been somewhat different from those in Western European languages. Most of the languages spoken in Eastern Bloc countries belong to the Slavic group; they are numerous as well as geographically scattered over vast areas of Eastern Europe, from the White Sea in the North down to the Black and Adriatic Sea coasts in the South[1], and therefore Slavic languages present an advantageous point from which to observe globalization-related phenomena on a linguistic level. In this article, the overall effects of globalization on Slavic languages since 1989 will be discussed[2].

[1] Slavic languages are usually classified as follows: West – Czech, Slovak, Polish and Upper and Lower Sorbian (two Slavic minority languages spoken in Eastern Germany); East – Belorussian, Ukrainian and Russian; South – Slovene, Croatian and Serbian as well as Bosnian / Bosniak and Montenegrin (see paragraph 2.), Macedonian and Bulgarian.

[2] Non Slavic languages of former socialist Europe are: Albanian, Romanian/Moldovan, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian.

The development of Slavic languages during the decades after the end of the Cold War can be roughly divided into two stages: the first stretching from the implosion of socialism in Eastern Europe in the late eighties to the beginning of the new millennium, and the second from then until the present.

The idea that the end of socialism in Eastern Europe was a result of incipient globalization is not new. It seems that the development of informatics and new technologies had made it impossible for the Eastern Bloc (CoMEcon) economies to compete with the West and, at the same time, seriously hindered the ability of the states to seal off their populations from the rest of the world. After 1989, the former Soviet satellite states went through approximately a decade of radical and turbulent transformations that would westernize their economies and societies. The media enthusiastically labeled this evolution as a "return to Europe". The radical changes, that were generated, broadly speaking, by the need for freedom and the desire for modernization, produced relevant changes at the linguistic level too. In general, it holds true that radical social and political changes foster linguistic innovation.

The second stage in the evolution of the Slavic languages in the globalizing world started after these "transitions" were more or less successfully completed and the general situation settled: joining the EU and the cessation of the Cold War being possible indicators of the second stage. Since the beginning of the new millennium, Slavic languages have increasingly faced challenges similar to those confronting other European languages, and displayed less specific characteristics in their development. They have undergone a "transition" parallel to that which the society went through and, being now comparatively aligned with other European languages, they are all influenced by processes induced by globalization in quite the same manner.

In the following paragraphs we are going to discuss three main tendencies that have been crucial in the development of Slavic languages over the last decades: democratization, internationalization and nationalization. All three tendencies have been at play, to a different extent, over the entire time range here considered. Therefore they cannot be related strictly to any of the stages in the recent development of the Slavic languages as described above; nor can they be arranged in any chronological order. However, democratization was particularly evident

during the immediate post-socialist years, whereas internationalization seems to have speeded up more recently alongside the widespread use of computer technologies and the revolution in communication. With regard to nationalization, as conceived here, it has been peculiar mostly to a limited number of languages spoken in former federations.

In terms of the linguistic aspects that will be considered in relation to the processes of democratization, internationalization and nationalization, particular attention will be devoted to the lexical level (Ohnheiser 2003). This is because lexis is the part of speech that most easily reacts to external changes. Consequently it is the vocabulary of Slavic languages that has been most significantly affected by the processes brought about by globalization: new words have been created; foreign words have been massively introduced; changes in word formation and semantic shifts have taken place. By comparison, changes at the level of grammar have been less in number and intensity.

2. *Democratization*

In linguistics, democratization is generally taken to mean a process of weakening of a strongly prescriptive norm and the increase in use of low register elements in contexts where they were previously unacceptable[3]. More specifically, the democratization of Slavic and other languages spoken in the countries of the former socialist block is a complex phenomenon resulting from two strongly intertwined processes. The first is related to a global evolutionary trend brought about by the social and political movements in the Sixties and Seventies in the West, whose goal was to fight conformism and authoritarianism. At the linguistic level, it provoked an upgrading of non-normative linguistic traits, such as slang vocabulary and substandard grammar[4], against prescriptive standard norms. This evolution has taken place in Western languages gradually over many decades, whereas it swept Slavic languages literally as soon as socialism collapsed.

[3] In this meaning, instead of democratization the expression "colloquialization" is sometimes employed.

[4] This is accompanied on academic level by a rise in interest in the social aspects of languages (sociolinguistics, sociology of language etc.).

The second process we can refer to as democratization of language has been peculiar only to Slavic and other Eastern European languages and was triggered by the end of the strict control on language use in public contexts beginning with post-socialism. In order to impose a set of ideological principles, socialist governments exerted a rigid control on public language that ranged from political discourse down to the education system and, most important of all, to the mass media. In doing so, socialist linguistic policies deprived public language of any real communicative force and reduced it to a collection of steadily repeated hollow slogans. Only normative grammar and lexis were allowed. In the end, an alienating fracture between the official language and other varieties was created. Despite the differences due to the intensity of state control (it was stronger in the Soviet Union and Bulgaria) or to changing political developments (e.g. in the Fifties socialist regimes were far more intransigent that in the Eighties), the public language used in socialist countries had been equally sterile. To define it, Polish linguist, Michał Głowiński, borrowed from George Orwell's novel *1984* the word *newspeak* (Polish *nowomowa*, Głowiński 1990).

In a sort of emotional reaction to the ideologically biased clichés of the official language in the previous decades, new devices were sought that could restore communicative power to the language and regain expressiveness and colourness. This attitude was considerably encouraged by the struggle to attract more readers and viewers in the recently liberalized mass media. The need for increased expressiveness in language as well as the desire for more informal communicative patterns of Western inspiration were pursued by allowing less prestigious linguistic varieties and the use of some colloquial or even non-standard elements in public and mass communication. Especially in the language of the mass media, lexical elements and structural traits from a wide range of lower varieties, beginning from urban slang up to local dialects, started being widely employed. Zemskaja / Ermakova / Rudnik-Karwatowa (1999) defined this process as "slangization of the lexis", and provided various examples such as the increase in the usage of some substandard affixes in Polish. In Russian particularly significant has been the upgrading of elements from *prostorečie*, the language spoken by the uncultivated urban population, and *mat*, obscenities from army, criminal and prison slang. It is well known that the skilful use Putin makes of them as rhetorical devices in his

speeches has won him considerable popularity amongst the broad masses of Russian population and voters. Savický (1999) proposes "detabuization" to define this development in Slavic languages. His definition highlights mainly the diffusion of vulgar language or curses in public and everyday communication, but, at the same time, more broadly it refers back to the loosening of strict standard norms. A good example of "detabuization" is the case of the Ottoman linguistic heritage in Bulgarian. Language policies during socialism enforced the purism-based standard norm of the early 20th century and utterly ostracized the considerable number of Turkish, Arabic and Persian loanwords borrowed by Bulgarian during the Ottoman centuries (14th-19th), confining them to very low or vernacular registers. Since the Nineties Turkisms or Orientalisms have experienced a remarkable comeback, being reactivated for their high expressiveness and domestic flavour (e.g. *ilač* < tur. *ilaç* instead of *lekarstvo* 'medicine', *komšija* < tur. *komşu* instead of *săsed* 'neighbour', in Dimitrova 1997: 36).

Another significant change in Slavic languages at the beginning of the Nineties induced by the political and social changes was the massive increase in new words, which spread rapidly with the help of the mass media. Moving away from the monotonous and repetitive range of topics covered in socialist newspapers, magazines and television, press freedom gave birth to a bewildering array of subjects: new words were needed to refer to the countless innovations flooding in from the West.

Although changes in the Slavic languages have been far more evident and numerous at the lexical level, the democratization process has affected the grammar too. In the same manner as for the vocabulary, the usage of colloquial forms instead of the standard ones has become acceptable in an increasing number of contexts. In Czech, for example, which is a language that traditionally displays a strong diglossia between the standard (*spisovná čeština* 'literary/standard Czech') and the spoken variety (*obecná čeština* 'common Czech'), morphological elements typical of the Prague spoken variety (e.g. shift of singular adjective ending masculine *-ý* > *-ej* and neutral *-é* > *-ý*: *dobrý* > *dobrej* and *dobré* > *dobrý* 'good') have been used with steadily increasing frequency in radio and TV programmes, mostly by private broadcasters.

In general, the democratization of Slavic languages following the collapse of socialism has determined a substantial change in the reference

model for language use. Catching up at a rapid pace with an evolutionary pattern that had been well established at global level, literature has been replaced with the free mass media as a source deputed with setting examples for language usage.

3. *Internationalization*

Internationalization is the second tendency in the development of Slavic languages in the era of globalization (Koriakowcewa 2009). In the past, internationalisms were traditionally considered to be words with Greek and Latin roots that are shared by unrelated languages, especially Western ones (e.g. *literature* or *telephone*).[5] By contrast, at present international lexis is conceived in a wider sense to include loanwords that have originated from various source languages and that have recently become widespread throughout the world (e.g. Japanese *tsunami*, Italian *pizza*). Due to the considerable significance Western European models have had in the process of social and cultural transformation in the former socialist countries as well as in the recent development of their languages, the internationalization of Slavic languages is sometimes referred to as Europeanization. While it is definitely true that various languages, such as English, French or German, have played an important role from this point of view, as a matter of fact, English being "the dominant medium" in the "transnational linguistic space" (Tonkin 2007: 713), internationalization of Slavic languages has mainly consisted in a process of intensive borrowing from English. The influence of English has been so significant that it has affected even deeper levels of the linguistic system such as word formation patterns or word semantics.

International lexis was not unknown to Slavic languages before 1989, but the number of borrowed lexical items has quantitatively increased during the last 25 years. That has been the case not only because of the predominance of English in the globalizing world, but also as a consequence of the relaxation of some "protectionist approach" that was at play during the previous decades and that ideologically favoured words of Slavic origin over Western borrowings.

[5] Globalization seems to affect the writing systems of Slavic languages too, enhancing the use of Latin letters and transcription at the cost of Cyrillic. This is most visible in countries with digraphic traditions, like Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro (Tomelleri / Kempgen 2015).

Regarding the semantic fields internationalisms belong to, the majority of them are generally linked to scientific, technological or economic sectors. Although there are indeed examples of older loanwords from these semantic fields (e.g. Czech *televize* 'television'), sciences, technologies and economy have recently become central sources of lexical borrowings corresponding to the relevance they have gained in the contemporary world. In addition to this, their diffusion has been fundamentally enhanced by the constant coverage they receive in the mass media, whose language, as already mentioned before, has replaced literature as the linguistic reference model. Consequently, foreign words from professional jargon easily enter the system of Slavic languages and are quickly integrated in everyday speech. At the same time, due to the dramatic revolution that both the end of socialism and the accelerating globalization have triggered at social and cultural levels, the influence of English has been relevant even in domains such as cinema, music and art. In this, young people have been particularly receptive.

Some of the major concrete effects internationalization has had on the Slavic languages will now be considered. Lexical borrowings can be rendered phonetically transcribed (e.g. Serbian *imejl* 'e-mail') or in the original form (e.g. Czech *marketing*); with or without morphological adaptation (e.g. Russian *nou-xau* 'know-how' indeclinable; Polish *globalizacja* 'globalization' with regular change *-tion* > *-cja*). As to verbs, the creation of aspectual pairs falls into a later stage of their morphological adaptation. Generally the perfective form is created through prefixation of an original biaspectual form that, in turn, becomes the imperfective (e.g. Slovene *dokumentirati* 'to document', both imperfective and perfective; Slovak *dokumentovať* imperfective – *zdokumentovať* perfective 'id.'). Loanwords can be productive and themselves give rise to new word families (e.g. Bulgarian *kompjutăr* 'computer' substantive, *kompjutăren* 'computer' adjective). Also semantic calques and semantic widening are frequent (e.g. Ukrainian *nominacija* with the new meaning 'nomination' as 'the act of suggesting or choosing somebody as candidate, especially for an award'). The intensive contact with English and other Western European languages has led as well in the Slavic languages to the reactivation of lexical units of foreign origin whose usage was previously discouraged or less frequent (e.g. Czech *efektivní – účinný* 'effective').

As already mentioned, internationalization affects word formation as well. In a similar process to that just described in the case of lexical roots, affixes of foreign origin are reactivated (e.g. prefixes such as *de-*, *post-*, *pro-*, *re-*, *super-*). Combinations of indigenous and foreign lexical element are possible: 'affix + Slavic root' (e.g. Russian *antideržavnyj* 'antigovernmental') or 'Slavic affix + foreign root' (e.g. Polish *skejciarz* 'skater' < 'to skate' + agentive suffix *-arz*). Some prefixoids, semantically autonomous lexical units used as prefixes, have become very productive (e.g. Bulgarian *Evrosăjuz* 'European Union' lit. Eurounion, *evropătišta* 'Euro(cycle)routes'). Reduction as word formation strategy increases in frequency (e.g. Czech *nealko* 'non alkoholik (drinks)' < *nealkoholické*). This increase, however, may very well be considered as an effect of democratization, shortening being a primary tool for word formation in colloquial speech.

Speaking more generally, internationalization as a globalization-induced evolutionary tendency in Slavic manifests itself in an increase of agglutinative and analytic traits, which contrast with the inflectional nature of Slavic. Examples of this are the more frequent use of compound words instead of 'adjective + noun' with case-number-gender agreement (e.g. Russian *biznes podrazdelenie* 'business department' vs. *investicionnoe podrazdelenie* 'investment department') or the lack of inflection in some otherwise inflectional parts of the speech (e.g. Slovak *v televíznej šou* 'in a TV show' where the adjective displays case-number-gender marking, while the noun *šou* remains uninflected).

4. *Nationalization*

The third aspect of the development of Slavic languages in the era of globalization is nationalization. As contradictory it might sound, globalization actually involves a reaction against it. On the whole, the relaxing of clear borders between states and the consequent weakening of national identities has led over the last decades to an increase in popularity of nationalist parties as well as to the foundation across Europe of several movements defending small regional identities. With regard to languages, the situation is parallel: globalization has in some cases set off or reinforced purism-based policies aiming at keeping the language clean from what is perceived to be alien, therefore, at opposing any kind of borrowing from other languages. For instance, Slovene speakers being

approximately two million in number, language policy in Slovenia is traditionally protectionist. Hence, it is not surprising that since the Nineties several technical dictionaries have been published with the specific goal of creating normative "slovenized" expressions in all kinds of specialized terminology (Humar 2004).

But, apart from being only a reaction to the threats of internationalization, nationalization and purism have also been crucial in the language planning of those Slavic languages that were until recently still spoken in the framework of federal states in close contact with another more prominent language (Slovak with Czech, Croatian with Serbian and Ukrainian with Russian). Although this phenomenon is not a direct effect of globalization, it has been a major feature of the evolution of these languages in the era of globalization, and as such deserves to be discussed in more detail.

The dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union prompted a reaction of distancing of Slovak, Croatian, Ukrainian from Czech, Serbian and Russian respectively, that was directed against those linguistic elements considered to be an outcome of an imposed language contact inside the federation[6]. While it cannot be denied that there have been moments of actual forced imposition or ideological constraints, especially in the Soviet Union (the so called "benefic influence of Russian on Ukrainian and Belorussian"), the more or less explicit predominance of one language over the others inside the common country was predominantly due to a series of reasons, such as demographic superiority, level of economic development and prestige. In other words, the usual conditions triggering contact-induced language change were at play alongside varying degrees of ideological pressure. Furthermore, the significant genetic proximity between these languages enhanced the likelihood of linguistic interference and mixing enormously.

The crisis of the socialist federations in the late Eighties and the consequent constitution of independent states in the Nineties were accompanied by a marked increase in activities of language planning, that aimed at stressing the distance between the smaller language and the previous (so perceived) dominant language. In other words, Slovak,

[6] Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union were made up respectively by two, six and fifteen republics. The Slavic languages spoken in each country were: Czech and Slovak in Czechoslovakia; Slovene, Serbo-Croatian and Macedonian in Yugoslavia; Russian, Belorussian and Ukrainian in the Soviet Union.

Croatian and Ukrainian reinforced their linguistic "distinctness" (*Abstand*) from Czech, Serbian and Russian, promoting changes in their standard norms (*Ausbau*). The efforts put into the enhancement of differences have been proportional to the intensity of the political or military confrontation that took place during the process of dismantling the former federations.

In 1993 Czechoslovakia split smoothly into two independent countries: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. While, already in the years before the separation, Slovak linguists expressed concerns about the effects that the contact with Czech could have possibly had on Slovak over the previous decades - a new orthographic dictionary of Slovak introducing elements diverging form Czech was published in 1991 - (Trovesi 2013), complaints about the purity of language were raised especially during the Nineties, when the democratization of the language made explicit how many words and expressions of Czech origin were currently in use, most of all in the speech of the capital city, Bratislava. However, the opposition to Czech has never been too dramatic. There are even voices maintaining that Czech has traditionally had a major influence on Slovak and that it should be therefore treated as a natural element of the Slovak linguistic environment. As a matter of fact, thanks to the popularity that Czech television channels and books still have, Czech remains widely present in Slovakia. Here the passive bilingualism, the mutual intelligibility of the two languages inherited from the time of the coexistence inside the common state, is still widespread, whereas in the Czech Republic it is fading away (Nábělková 2008).

The disintegration of Yugoslavia heated up the linguistic nationalism that has always been peculiar to the Serbo-Croatian linguistic area, and bolstered claims of distinctiveness. The dispute about the nature of Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian – whether it is one language or two – went on throughout the entire history of Yugoslavia, but it was the independence of Croatia which brought about unquestioningly the ultimate separation of the two languages. The model "one nation – one language" was followed by other countries that emerged from the ashes of post-war Yugoslavia. Bosnian (or Bosniak[7]), the language of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Muslim

[7] Despite the fact that in Bosnia and Herzegovina the same regional variety of language is spoken, the three ethno-religious groups Serbs - Orthodox Christians, Croats – Catholic Christians and Bosniaks - Muslims use different names to define to it: Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian. Maintaining it applies to the entire Bosnia, Bosnians call it Bosnian, whereas Serbs (and Croats) oppose it, arguing that Bosniak is the correct definition, as it represents the language of the Muslim ethno-religious community only.

population[8] and then Montenegrin, spoken in the homonymous ex-federal republic, became official standard languages.[9]

In Croatia, linguistic purism has always been characteristic of language planning (see, for example, the calque *sveučilište* < *sve* 'all' and *uč-* 'to learn' for 'university'), but during the Nineties it became particularly aggressive and intransigent. A system of heavy censorship was created and great effort was expended to isolate and sieve everything suspected of not being Croatian. The nationalization of Croatian was pursued, purging words that are more commonly used in the Serbian speaking area, by "ethnicization", that is revitalizing dialectal or old words, and finally through the creation of Croatian neologisms. Neither the grammar system was left untouched. One of the main targets of purism has been the structure "*da* + present tense" instead of the infinitive in completive sentences (for example *hoću da idem* vs. *hoću ići* 'I want to go'), as the former is considered a feature of the Balkan language league (*Balkan sprachbund*).

The standardization of Bosnian / Bosniak is based on the rehabilitation of Ottoman language heritage, which has been achieved by upgrading Sarajevo's slang and regional words of Turkish, Arab and Persian origin, whereas the standardization of Montenegrin, the newest language to have arisen from the dissolution of Serbo-Croatian, relies on the codification of some local lexical items and the local pronunciation. For this second purpose, two new letters have been introduced into the alphabet to represent specific Montenegrin sounds (Trovesi 2009).

Language has become a crucial element in the construction of Ukraine's identity, after its usage was severely discouraged during the Soviet era. Since the independence, a lot of effort has been invested in a wider diffusion of Ukrainian all over the country, as well as in a far neater distinctive physiognomy of Ukrainian. More precisely, the main targets of Ukraine's official language policies are: the widespread use of Russian and that of a Ukrainian-Russian language mixture, *surzhyk*.

[8] Occasionally Bosnian / Bosniak is the name given to the language of all the Muslims in the Serbo-Croatian speaking area.

[9] There are still disputes whether all these languages are not merely variants of one single linguistic system. For instance, some linguists refer to them as to a "pluricentric language" (amongst others Kordić 2010), a single linguistic system with various standard varieties (such as British English and American English or German from Germany and German from Switzerland). According to this view, the languages originated from former Serbo-Croatian / Croato-Serbian are referred to as with the acronym BCMS, which stands for Bosnian - Croatian - Montenegrin - Serbian. Nowadays for each of these "languages" there exist grammar books, dictionaries and other reference tools with prescriptive value.

With regard to Russian, in the beginning, measures were applied to restrict the use of Russian in public use, such administration and education systems, even in those vast areas in the East and the South of the country with a huge majority of Russian speaking population. Later, as these approaches drew criticism from the international institutions, some concessions were granted (for details see Bowring 2014). Despite these efforts, Russian still holds a prominent place in the linguistic repertoire even of many ethnical Ukrainians, and it carries on being widely used in media and everyday communication, especially in bigger cities. How the on-going military conflict will affect the use of Ukrainian and Russian in the country is still to be assessed.

Surzhyk is not a codified language and does not have any written norms. It is spoken mainly in the central and the northern regions of the Ukraine and it varies greatly depending on origin of the speakers, the environment they live in (rural vs. urban), their degree of education as well as their professional status. Serben'ska, the author of a famous pamphlet against *surzhyk*[10], wrote that it is a virus that has infected the organism of the Ukrainian language as a result of a Soviet plan aimed at the deliberate destruction of the Ukrainian language (Serben'ska 1994: 5-6).

The nationalization or, in other words, the de-russification of Ukrainian has been carried out mainly through "ethnicization". The upgrading and reinforcing of regional and dialectal elements have always been somewhat peculiar to the standardization of Ukrainian, which is based on a dialect variety from the Central-East Ukraine and relies much less upon the elevated linguistic tradition of Church Slavonic than Russian. Still, over recent decades, the anti-Russian attitude in defining standard norms has led to an intensive fostering of dialectal elements. In addition to that, at present, new words are taken from the dialects of the westernmost regions, such as Galicia, where the Ukrainian speaking community is traditionally intact and the usage of Ukrainian extremely widespread. Some "ethnicizing" elements are backed, too, by the influent community of Ukrainian immigrants in the United States.

While the linguistic nationalization of Ukrainian is carried out mainly at lexical level, there are some grammar issues as well that, being different or lacking in Russian, have been selected to best represent the separation

[10] Originally the word means a flour made of different kinds of grain.

of Ukrainian from Russian. For instance, the vocative case, which is increasingly rare in today's Ukraine and barely met in everyday speech in most parts of the country, keeps being strongly recommended by grammar books as an essential trait of Ukrainian.

5. *Conclusion*

Over the last decades globalization has deeply influenced the development of the Slavic languages. In the beginning, the effects of globalization were the cause for bitter complaint. Many feared that the democratization of the language would end up in a dramatic collapse of standard norms and language culture, and that internationalization could lead to the loss of the national character of the language. Later, it is has been partially recognized that, on the contrary, globalization has contributed to make Slavic languages more flexible and effective as communication devices in the modern globalized world. The trends generated by the globalization of Slavic languages are going to have permanent effects. As the lexical and stylistic preferences of their users have already changed considerably and the attitude towards prescriptive grammar has become more relaxed, in some Slavic languages a modification of standard norms might be in sight in the near future. Indeed, weaker or stronger nationalizing language policies, which are directed against the predominance of English and other languages perceived as threats to linguistic integrity belong also to the evolutionary trends brought about by globalization. At present, after the post-socialist transition, Slavic languages and Western European languages display very similar evolutionary patterns.

Andrea Trovesi
University of Rome "La Sapienza"
andrea.trovesi@uniroma1.it

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