A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS’ SIZE AND LEVEL IN MASTERING VOCABULARY

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by

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I, Rachma Insan Nikmawati Koen Barra, hereby declare that this final project entitled *A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS' SIZE AND LEVEL IN MASTERING VOCABULARY* is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given in the bibliography.

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MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“If you are grateful, I will surely give you more and more”

(QS Al- Ibrahim 14:7)

Special Thanks to:

- Allah SWT & Prophet Muhammad SAW
- My beloved family especially my parents
  - My English Department friends
  - My PPL & KKN friends
- All my friends who always support me
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ABSTRACT


This study was a case study aimed at finding out students’ size and level in mastering vocabulary. The participants of the study were 30 students from the tenth graders in one of the Senior High Schools in Blora. In obtaining the data, the writer conducted three steps. The first, the writer conducted observation. The second the writer administered vocabulary test to measure the size and level of students’ vocabulary. The third, the questionnaire was given to get more detailed data on the students’ perception after they did the test. Based on the result of the analysis, it is shown that the mean score for Vocabulary Size Test is 7146.7. The highest vocabulary size is 9500 and the lowest is 5400. The highest level is in the 10th of 1000 level and the lowest level is in the 6th of 1000 level. The results showed that most of the students were categorized in the range of 6th 1000 level – 10th 1000 level. Based on the questionnaire analysis, most of the students found new vocabulary after doing test. The implication of the result of the test shows that vocabulary size and level provided indication in reading and listening skill of students. About 23.33% students who got 8000-9000 vocabulary assumed to cover 98% words in the text while reading novels and newspaper. About 93.33% of students who obtained 6000-7000 even more vocabulary, assumed to have better understanding in listening skill.

*Keywords: Vocabulary, Vocabulary size, Vocabulary Level, Vocabulary Size Test.*
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with background of the study, reasons for choosing the topic, statements of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, limitation of the study, and outline of the report.

1.1 Background of the Study

In Indonesia, English has been learned by Indonesian learners as a foreign language. In learning a foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role. Wilkins (in Thornburry, 2002) states that “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. This statement means that when somebody only knows about grammar, but he does not know words to say, his idea cannot be expressed. In other words, one of the language elements that has to be mastered by learners in learning a language is vocabulary.

Vocabulary is one element that links the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Vocabulary is divided into two types, receptive and productive. Receptive vocabulary refers to reading and listening skill, while productive vocabulary itself refers to writing and speaking skill. In listening, students’ vocabulary influences their understanding toward teacher’s speech and classroom discussions. The words that they choose in speaking affect how well they deliver a message. In reading, students’ vocabulary affects their ability to understand and comprehend a text. In addition, dealing with writing, students’ vocabulary also
influences how clear they convey their thoughts and ideas to the readers. In conclusion, vocabulary plays an important role in equipping students to be able to communicate in English.

When I joined PPL, a training to be professional teacher in the seventh semester, I found some problems related to vocabulary mastery. When I did teaching practice in a class, some students understood about the material, but some did not even though they seemed to pay attention and listen to me.

The problem is that, there is no requirement dealing with how many words should be mastered by students. According to Schmitt (2000), it is assumed that the first 2000 words in the English language are prerequisite to comprehension, and the academic word level is the level for vocabulary that needs to be learned. Webster (2000) said that criteria for selecting words for teaching should accord to their greatest value to learners, which are frequency and need. This brings the idea to measure the vocabulary size of students.

Measuring students’ vocabulary size can be done in many ways, one of which is by testing. Most students think that test is something scary. In fact, one of the vocabulary test purposes is designed to measure their vocabulary size in English. By measuring the average and range of students’ vocabulary size, one of the advantages is teachers can adjust their materials and methods to more closely match their students’ needs and abilities.

The vocabulary test has proven to be very convenient to use and also provide shorter time spent in completion compared to other types of instrument. Schmitt (1994) indicates that the vocabulary test is a very useful instrument. It can be used in
several possible purposes such as to find out whether or not students have learned the vocabulary that have been taught and be expected to learn (achievement test), to find out where students' vocabulary gaps lie, so the specific attention can be given to them (diagnostic test), and to identify the students’ level of proficiency, so they can be put in the proper level of study (placement test).

This present study was motivated by the fact that some senior high school students had a limited number of vocabularies even though they have learned English at schools. However, they need to have the criteria of vocabulary for students in the senior high school. This study would not relate the vocabularies mastered by the students to the English lesson they had, but it aimed at knowing the total receptive of vocabulary size for students in the senior high school level. The research was conducted in one of the Senior High Schools in Blora because for practical reason and there has been no vocabulary size test conducted in this school. The school also has supported facilities to hold vocabulary size test.

Based on the description above, I am interested in doing a research entitled “A Case Study of Students’ Size and Level in Mastering Vocabulary”.

1.2 Reasons for Choosing the Topic

There are three reasons that support to choose vocabulary mastery as the topic of this study. They can be stated as follows:

Firstly, vocabulary is the main basic of a language. In learning a language, students get acquainted with vocabulary, because it is one of the elements of language to communicate with others.
Secondly, to pass a specific test such as Cambridge First Certificate, TOEFL or IELTS, a working vocabulary of 5,000 word families are needed (Thornburry, 2002). Undergraduate non-native speaker of non-European countries could study successfully in English speaking countries by having word families around 5,000-6,000. This study aimed at figuring out the number of vocabularies obtained by Senior High School students in one of schools in Central Java, Indonesia.

Thirdly, most of the previous studies investigate vocabulary size obtained by university students, there is no research dealing with vocabulary size in senior high school. To my knowledge, no empirical research has been conducted on the vocabulary size of English as foreign language in Indonesia. The present study attempts to find out vocabulary size and level obtained by Senior High School students.

1.3 **Statements of the Problem**

Based on the background of the study above, two research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What is the size of English vocabulary obtained by the tenth graders in one of the Senior High Schools in Blora?

2. What does the vocabulary size and level obtained by the tenth graders in one of the Senior High Schools in Blora imply?

1.4 **Objectives of the Study**

Based on the statements of the problems above, the objectives of the study are as follows:
1. to find out the size of vocabulary obtained by the tenth graders in one of the Senior High Schools in Blora,

2. to describe the implication of the vocabulary size test obtained by the tenth graders in one of the Senior High Schools in Blora.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is expected to be able to give some advantages for students, teachers, and other researchers. Firstly, the students can get benefits from the result of this study by knowing their vocabulary size and level, so that they will have motivation to improve their vocabulary.

Secondly, the result of this study can give teachers the idea to estimate their students’ vocabulary sizes quickly and efficiently. It can be an additional information for English teachers in one of the Senior High Schools in Blora to know their students’ vocabulary size and level. Lastly, it is expected that the result of the study gives inspiration to other researchers to conduct research with the similar topic.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

This study has two limitations which have to be pointed out. First, the subject is limited to the students in one of the Senior High Schools in Blora especially in tenth grade because students at this level were assumed to have obtained sufficient number
of vocabularies before they enter the next level of education, i.e. university. Second, the vocabulary size test used in this study is the one created by Paul Nation of Victoria University of Wellington in 2007 which is made by consideration of British National Corpus word family lists. The aim of the vocabulary size test is to measure the receptive vocabulary of the students.

1.7 Outline of the Report

This final project encompasses five chapters. Chapter I is introduction, chapter II covers review of related literature, chapter III presents methods of investigation, chapter IV explains the results and discussions, and chapter V is conclusions and suggestions.

The first chapter deals with introduction. It consists of background of the study, reasons for choosing the topic, statements of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, limitation of the study, and outline of the report.

The second chapter consists of review of related literature which includes review of the previous studies, review of the theoretical background and the theoretical framework of the study.

The third chapter discusses the method of investigation. It contains research design, participants of the study, object of the study, data source, instrument, roles of the researcher, procedures of collecting data, and procedures of analyzing data.
The fourth chapter presents and discusses the result of the data analysis. The last chapter in this study is the fifth chapter. It presents the conclusion of the research. Some suggestions are also offered based on the result of the study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter deals with review of the previous studies, review of theoretical background and theoretical framework.

2.1 Review of the Previous Studies

Measuring vocabulary by using a test has become an interest by some researchers. It is proven by the presence of some studies which concern with this topic. Below are some of the previous studies dealing with measuring vocabulary by using some vocabulary tests.

Tang (2007) studied the English vocabulary size of Hongkong primary and junior secondary school students, and evaluate the extent of perceived vocabulary gap among these students with reference to the school levels and types of school. In her research, she used two primary schools and two secondary schools, with a total of 449 students who took part in the L_Lex of the Lingua Vocabulary Tests v2.01 (Meara, Milton & Lorenzo-Dus,2001) and the Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 1990). Results have shown that these ESL learners have small vocabulary size and impoverished vocabulary knowledge.

The second research was conducted by Olmos in 2009. The research is about the assessment of the vocabulary knowledge of students in the secondary education in Spain. The aim of this research project was to assess the receptive vocabulary of Bachillerato 2nd Form students at the end of the academic year to determine whether
there is or is not a correlation between the vocabulary they know and that which they are supposed to know. This test has been validated on successive occasions. A total number of 49 students sat the exam in the case of the first test containing the 1000 and 2000 levels; and 38 sat the second test. The results obtained were poorer than expected. The results in the Vocabulary Levels Test show that the level of English vocabulary that is being taught and learnt in Spanish high schools does not reach the minimum standards established to make these students efficient language users. Olmos suggested, there should be certain changes in the input that is presented to students if teachers want students to enlarge their vocabulary size.

Kusumawati (2010) attempted to examine the use of Multiple-Choice Test and C-Test for measuring the students’ mastery of Vocabulary in Indonesia. The purpose of this study was to explain the reliability of Multiple-Choice Test by using alternate-form method, which paralleled with C-Test for measuring the students’ mastery of Vocabulary by comparing the results of Multiple-Choice test to C-Test. In conducting this research, she collected the data from the result of tests given to the students, which consisted of the try-out test and the real test. The analysis of the data showed that there is a good correlation between both tests and the students have the high average of mastering vocabulary in teaching and learning activity at school.

The fourth, Ibrahim, Othman, Sarudin and Muhamad (2013) measured the vocabulary size of pre-university students at a public university in Malaysia. The receptive and productive vocabulary size tests were administered to 190 students. The results indicate that these pre-university students have yet to achieve the recommended threshold level of vocabulary that is needed to enable them to
successfully acquire vocabulary independently. This study provides the empirical evidence of the importance of guiding students to acquire the threshold level of vocabulary.

Based on the researchers above, the use of vocabulary size test to measure students’ vocabulary level has been used by some researchers. Since the research on vocabulary measurement is relatively new to researchers in Indonesia, to my awareness, no study investigating the size of vocabulary of the senior high school student has been done before. Thus, I am interested in using vocabulary size test as a tool in my study to measure students’ vocabulary in senior high school level. It aims to know the size of vocabulary students have.

2.2 Review of Theoretical Background

In this subchapter I would like to review some theories related to the topic of the study which consists of general concept of vocabulary, vocabulary size, and vocabulary size test.

2.2.1 General Concept of Vocabulary

2.2.1.1 Definition of Vocabulary

Learning a language cannot be separated from learning its vocabulary. It is vocabulary that helps people conveying their messages through the words. Without vocabulary, they cannot express their feelings and ideas well to others.

Vocabulary is one of the language components that has to be mastered by students besides grammar and pronunciation. It is impossible for them to master a language without learning vocabulary. Vocabulary becomes the requirement since it
facilitates the learners to learn the four basic language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Vocabulary is not the only component of a language, but students still have to master it, since it becomes one of the important components in developing a language.

Because the research is related with vocabulary, it is important to know what is meant by vocabulary. There are many definitions of vocabulary according to some experts. Butler et al. (2010) state that “vocabulary is generally defined as the knowledge of words and word meanings”. Vocabulary can also be defined as the words we must know to communicate effectively: words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary) (Neuman and Dwyer, 2009: 385).

According to Hornby (2000) vocabulary is:

1. all the words that a person knows or uses
2. all the words in a particular language
3. all the words that people use when they are talking about a particular subject
4. a list of words with their meanings, especially in a book for learning a foreign language.

Webster (2000) states that vocabulary is:

1. a list of words and, often, phrases, abbreviations, inflectional forms, etc., usually arranged in alphabetical order and defined or otherwise identified, as in dictionary or glossary
2. all words of a language
   a. all the words used by a particular person, socioeconomic group, profession, etc. (in full active vocabulary)
   b. all the words recognized and understood, although not necessarily used, by a particular person (in full passive vocabulary)
   c. an interrelated group of nonverbal symbols, signs, gestures, etc. used for communication or expression in a particular art, skill, etc.
Based on the definition above, it can be inferred that vocabulary is a list of words in a particular language that a person must know and use for effective communication.

2.2.1.2 Types of Vocabulary

Two different types of vocabulary are stated by Harmer (1991) who distinguishes active and passive vocabulary. He stated that active vocabulary refers to vocabulary that students have been taught or learnt and which they are expected to be able to use. Then, passive vocabulary refers to words which the students will recognize when they meet them, but they will probably not be able to produce.

Similarly, Webster (2000) also mentions those two types of vocabulary. According to him, active vocabulary is all the words used by a particular person, socioeconomic group, profession, etc. Then, passive vocabulary is all the words recognized and understood, although not necessary used, by a particular person.

Moreover, Hatch and Brown (1995) indicate two kinds of vocabulary, namely receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. Webb (2005, 2008) defines receptive and productive vocabularies as follows:

“Receptive vocabulary is words that learners recognize and understand when they are used in context, but which they cannot produce. It is vocabulary that learners recognize when they see or meet in reading text but do not use it in speaking and writing” (Webb, 2008).

“Productive Vocabulary Productive vocabulary is the words that the learners understand and can pronounce correctly and use constructively in speaking and writing. It involves what is needed for receptive vocabulary plus the ability to speak or write at the appropriate time. Therefore, productive vocabulary can be addressed as an active process, because the learners can produce the words to express their thoughts to others” (Webb, 2005).
Thus, it can be inferred that active vocabulary (known also as productive vocabulary) is the words that the students are expected to be able to use in the production skill (speaking and writing). This type of vocabulary requires them to understand the words, pronounce them correctly, use, write, and spell them constructively in both speaking and writing. While passive vocabulary (known also as receptive vocabulary) is the words that commonly appear in the receptive skill (listening and reading). This type of vocabulary requires the students to recognize, see, and understand them when they are listening or reading. However, they might not be able to use and produce them in speaking or writing.

\subsection*{2.2.2 Vocabulary size}
\subsubsection*{2.2.2.1 The number of words existing in English}
There are many words in English. It is obviously clear that the number of words that exists in English is remarkably large as the vocabulary of a language is added continually with new words. The facts attracted many researchers to study and to measure the vocabulary items. Unfortunately, the measurement of vocabulary size test is not a simple matter. According to Nation and Waring (1997) “knowing the amount of words in a language can be done by looking at the number of the words in the largest dictionary”. However, what exactly the total numbers of words in English is not mentioned clearly in the dictionary. This becomes the problem in seeing the total words in English.

Dupuy (1974) and Goulden, Nation and Read (1963) have studied about this problem separately by looking at the vocabulary of \textit{Webster’s Third International Dictionary}
Dictionary (1963). That was the largest non-historical dictionary of English when was published. According to the studies, there are around 54,000 word families of vocabulary (Nation and Waring, 1997). However, some researchers suggest vocabulary size is larger than these. So there has not been yet a fixed number of vocabulary items.

2.2.2.2 Vocabulary size known by native speakers

There are large amounts of words in English. Having known the large number of words existing in English, it does not mean that all of those words are known and mastered by native speakers. This condition may be due to the fact that as human, they have limited ability to memorize all the words.

In a study conducted by Goulden, Nation and Read (1963) cited in Nation and Waring (1997). It was found that up to a vocabulary size of around 20,000 words families, it is expected that native speakers will add roughly 1,000 word families a year to their vocabulary size. It means that when they are five year old and begin to study in schools, they have a vocabulary of around 4,000 to 5,000 word families. Then, when they graduate from a university, they will have a vocabulary around 20,000 word families.

2.2.2.3 Vocabulary size needed by a second language learners

A second language learner needs first to concentrate in the high frequency words of the language. It is very urgent for a learner to master them, since the words often occur in normal use of language.

Read (2000) states that measuring the vocabulary size of second language learners may be less problematic in the sense that they generally know a lot fewer
words in the target language than native speakers do. The main point is that it is not only about the students’ vocabulary size they have, but how much they know of the high-frequency words that they are most likely to encounter and need in their use of language.

According to Nation and Waring (1997) with a vocabulary size of 2,000 words, a learner knows 80 percent of the words in a text. It means that one word in every five words is unknown. They said,

“although there are well over 54,000 word families in English, and although educated adult native speakers know around 20,000 of these word families, a much smaller number of words, say between 3-5,000 word families is needed to provide basis for comprehension. It is possible to make use of smaller number, around 2-3,000 for productive use in speaking and writing.” (Nation and Waring, 1997: 9)

According to Richard and Renandy (2002) mastering minimum 3000 word families will support students’ success in academic reading at university level. Besides, to pass a specific test such as Cambridge First Certificate, TOEFL or IELTS, a working vocabulary of 5,000 word families are needed (Thornbury, 2002). Undergraduate non-native speaker of non-European countries could study successfully in English speaking countries by having word families around 5,000-6,000. A non-native speaker can study PhD level well with vocabulary about 9,000.

From this, it can be said that learners should know at least 3,000 word families for comprehension (listening and reading) and at least use 2,000 to 3,000 word families in speaking and writing.

2.2.2.4 Vocabulary size needed by Indonesian learners

Nation & Waring (1997) commented that the need of vocabulary of second language learner depends on what their language learner intends to use English for. Therefore,
there are different number of words for every foreign language learner in countries. It depends on his purpose in studying English.

Furthermore, Kweldju (2002) stated that generally most Indonesian learner have very poor vocabulary. Even students of university have average 15% out of vocabulary which native students have. This condition is very apprehensive, since one needs at least 5,000 words families of high frequency word to read enjoyably. Meanwhile, one needs 7,000 words to read novels, and students at university needs 10,000 words to read their lecture material.

Based on the statement above, we can draw a conclusion that the vocabulary mastery of Indonesia learners is very poor and unsatisfactory. They have not mastered well the number of words that are suggested. That is why they need to learn more words and practice English more.

2.2.3 Vocabulary Size Test

2.2.3.1 Definition of Vocabulary Size Test

The Vocabulary Size Test was developed to “provide a reliable, accurate, and comprehensive measure of a learner’s vocabulary size from the 1st 1000 to the 14th 1000 word families of English” (Nation & Beglar, 2007: 9). It is an assessment in which the form-meaning link is made central without testing for productive ability. The Vocabulary Size Test is a test designed to estimate the size of current vocabulary knowledge, not knowledge of individual words. Because of the importance of words in using a language, vocabulary size has often been found to strongly correlate with
other language proficiency measures such as reading and listening comprehension as well as general language proficiency.

2.2.3.2 The use of MyVocabularySize.com

*MyVocabularySize.com* is a simple tool to measure students’ vocabulary size, ([https://my.vocabularysize.com](https://my.vocabularysize.com) accessed on 8 January 2017). It is a free service designed to assist teachers and researchers in implementing some of the best practice principles derived from the latest research in second language vocabulary acquisition. By using this site, teachers get a free service to help better understand in students’ abilities. Teacher can know vocabulary size of their students by downloading the results after students complete the test. Learners can take the publicly available test by clicking on the button provided. By taking this test, they can get an objective measure of their vocabulary size which they can use to set learning goals and follow their progress. Researchers get a chance to trial or validate their vocabulary-related tests.

In this site, there are 140 items of multiple choice which consist of a, b, c, and d options. Each of word in the test represents 100 words. Therefore, by testing just 140 words, we can estimate how many word families are known up to a maximum of 14,000 word families. The goal of the test is to measure total vocabulary size, the test measure frequency levels beyond the test-takers'. The test uses frequency levels based on the British National Corpus word family lists for the sampling. The following are sample items from the Vocabulary Size Test (from the first, fifth, tenth and fourteenth 1,000 word level of the test):
First 1,000
1. SEE: They saw it.
a. cut
b. waited for
c. looked at
d. started

Fifth 1,000
1. DEFICIT: The company had a large deficit.
a. spent more money than it earned
b. went down in value
c. had a plan for spending that used a lot of money
d. had a lot of money in the bank

Tenth 1,000
1. AWE: They looked at the mountain with awe.
a. worry
b. interest
c. wonder
d. respect

Fourteenth 1,000
1. CANONICAL: These are canonical examples.
a. examples which break the usual rules
b. examples taken from a religious book
c. examples that are regular and widely accepted
d. examples discovered very recently

Figure 2.1: VST sample items
(source: vocabulary size test)
2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study aims to find out the vocabulary size and level obtained by the tenth graders in one of Senior High School in Blora and to describe the implication of the vocabulary size and level obtained by those students. The theoretical framework of this study is as follows:

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TYPES OF VOCABULARY
(Hatch and Brown, 1995)

RECEPTIVE
(Webb, 2008)

PRODUCTIVE
(Webb, 2005)

VOCABULARY SIZE

STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION

VOCABULARY SIZE TEST
(Nation and Beglar, 2007)

QUESTIONNAIRE
(Nation, 2007)

QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENTS’ VOCABULARY SIZE AND LEVEL
IN MASTERING VOCABULARY
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Diagram 2.1 Framework of the Study
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the analysis and interpretation discussed in chapter IV, I am going to go further on the next discussion which covers two main parts. Those are: conclusions and suggestions. The more elaborations about those will be discussed as follows:

5.1 Conclusions

From the data obtained in the previous chapter, the conclusion could be drawn as the result of the study. Firstly, the mean score of students in the tenth grade in one of Senior High School in Blora for Vocabulary Size Test is 7146.7. The highest vocabulary size is 9500 and the lowest is 5400. The highest level is in the 10th 1000 level and the lowest level is in the 6th 1000 level. The results showed that most of the students were categorized in the range of 6th 1000 level – 10th 1000 level. Based on the questionnaire analysis, most of the students found new vocabulary after doing test. It was proved by the students’ responses to the questionnaire. It also made them feel motivated in increasing their vocabulary by knowing the result of their vocabulary size test.

Secondly, there was indication from the result of the test. Vocabulary size test provided indication in reading and listening skill of students. It could be concluded that about 23.33% participants in one of the Senior High Schools in Blora who got 8000-9000 vocabulary assumed to coverage 98% words in the text while reading novels and newspaper. About 93.33% of
students who could obtain 6000-7000 even more vocabulary, they assumed to have better understanding in listening skill.

5.2 Suggestions

Based on the conclusions of the research, some suggestions are offered. Firstly, the students should have motivation to improve their mastery of vocabulary in order to enrich their knowledge of vocabulary. It can be done by reading passages a lot especially which are related to the material taught at school. Secondly, teachers should give more vocabulary exercises to increase their students’ vocabulary knowledge. It can be done by giving particular task related to vocabulary in order to gain students’ motivation to enlarge their vocabulary. Lastly, for the next researcher, I expect there will be follow up studies which can support this study by doing test to prove the assumption about the indication of the vocabulary size test result.
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