

The Pragmatic Analysis of Politeness Strategies used by the Character of “Turning Red” Movie Script

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ABSTRACT

Film also brings many things to learn, including politeness. This qualitative descriptive study investigates the politeness strategies employed by the underrated characters in the film *Turning Red*, with a particular focus on the character Jin. The objective of the research is to analyze how assertive and non-assertive politeness strategies are used by Jin and to explore their implications for English language teaching and learning. To identify which characters to analyze, the researchers conducted a document analysis of fan comments gathered from online platforms such as Moviepedia and Looper, ensuring that audience perceptions guided the selection of underrated figures. After identifying the characters, the researchers used the official movie script and examined it through Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness framework, following the steps of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing outlined by Miles et al. (2014). The findings reveal that assertive strategies, especially informative acts, were predominant in Jin’s speech, highlighting his role as a calm, supportive problem solver in the film’s family dynamics. Importantly, this study provides meaningful insights for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, showing how analyzing politeness in authentic media can enhance learners’ pragmatic competence, cultural awareness, and communication skills. By linking media analysis with language education, the study underscores the value of films like *Turning Red* as resources for developing both linguistic and intercultural competence among EFL learners.

Keywords: Assertive, non-assertive, politeness, pragmatic analysis, Turning Red

Received:	Revised:	Accepted:
28-02-2025	25-04-2025	29-04-2025

INTRODUCTION

Politeness is a vital component of character education, promoting respect, responsibility, empathy, social skills, and leadership among students in educational settings (Nahsruddin & Al-Obaydi, 2021; Nurdiansyah, 2023; Sari & Astuti, 2022). For young learners, practising polite behavior

fosters confidence, compassion, and prosocial behavior. For language learners, especially non-native English speakers, mastering politeness is key to navigating real-life conversations and adapting to intercultural contexts (L. Brown, 2010). This process of linguistic reframing can be challenging due to differing cultural norms, but it ultimately enhances adaptability and intercultural competence.

Politeness not only strengthens interpersonal relationships and social harmony across cultures but also deepens students' understanding of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and cross-cultural communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In classrooms, teachers often model and reinforce polite expressions, helping students reduce conflict and foster inclusion (Fatahillah & Agustina, 2024; Pandiangan, 2024). According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal framework, positive politeness emphasizes inclusion and rapport (e.g., showing sympathy, seeking agreement), while negative politeness focuses on minimizing imposition and respecting autonomy. Complementing these, non-assertive politeness relies on indirectness and deference to maintain harmony, while assertive politeness balances clarity with respect, allowing speakers to express opinions without causing offense (Bonvillain, 2020; Hall, 2009; Hastuti & Wijayanto, 2023; Lakoff & Ide, 2005).

Recent animated films like *Turning Red* (2022) offer a rich context for exploring these strategies, as the protagonist Mei navigates between non-assertive and assertive politeness while negotiating cultural expectations, emotional tensions, and identity formation (Laffly, 2022). Prior research has examined politeness and impoliteness in the film using Brown and Levinson's framework, Culpeper's impoliteness model, and Leech's politeness maxims, primarily through content analysis of the characters' dialogues (Dewiyani & Candra, 2023; Marfirah & Ambalegin, 2023; Nurjanah et al., 2024; Septaria & Ambalegin, 2023; Yolasrida, 2023).

However, an important research gap remains: previous studies have largely overlooked the roles of *underrated characters* and have not examined how audience perceptions shape our understanding of politeness in media. Additionally, while much research focuses on positive and negative politeness, little attention has been given to assertive and non-assertive politeness as analytical categories, particularly in relation to audience-centered perspectives.

This study offers several unique contributions. To begin with, it is the first to explore the politeness strategies used by the underrated characters in *Turning Red*, highlighting their often-overlooked yet meaningful roles in shaping the film's communication patterns. Additionally, it introduces a new analytical perspective by applying an assertive versus non-assertive politeness framework, enriching current politeness research. Another key innovation is the incorporation of audience insights drawn from fan comments, which adds depth and contextual relevance to the selection of characters. Beyond its academic value, the study also provides practical benefits for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, showing how examining politeness in films can improve learners' pragmatic awareness and cross-cultural communication abilities.

Four key questions shape this research. First, it examines how the underrated characters in *Turning Red* (2022) apply assertive and non-assertive politeness strategies. Second, it looks at how these strategies reveal underlying themes like cultural norms, social harmony, and identity negotiation within the film. Third, it aims to gather insights from audience perspectives on the importance and roles of these lesser-studied characters. Lastly, it investigates how studying politeness strategies in *Turning Red* can help English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners strengthen their pragmatic skills and cross-cultural communication abilities.

METHOD

This qualitative study employs a descriptive research design to explore the politeness strategies used by the underrated characters in the *Turning Red* movie. To identify these characters, the researchers first conducted a document analysis of fan comments, which informed their selection without generating new research questions but instead provided a richer understanding of the topic (Aiche, 2024). This procedure, part of the study's exploratory phase, aimed to uncover fresh insights into character dynamics and audience perceptions (Abushalla, 2023). After identifying the lesser-known characters, the researchers looked closely at how they used direct and indirect ways of being polite, based on (Brown & Levinson's (1987) ideas. The study followed the qualitative analysis procedures outlined by Miles et al. (2014), which included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, ensuring a systematic and rigorous examination of the findings.

FINDINGS

In this section, the researcher presents the findings. The first finding deals with the investigation of the most underrated characters in turning red movie. The second finding deals with the analysis results of assertive and non-assertive politeness strategies found in the movie.

For the first finding, the researcher found that the most underrated character in the movie is the father, the character named Jin (Perez, 2022). Elhenawy (2022) explains that the character, Jin Lee, seems underrated and unseen. For example in the scene where Ming and Mei are engrossed in watching television. Although Ming displays domineering behavior, Jin comprehends the underlying reasons for her actions and provides her with support. Jin helps his wife and daughter discuss each other's experiences. In contrast to Ming, he has consistently supported Mei in pursuing her own happiness, whether it be attending concerts by her favorite band or choosing to permanently incorporate the red panda into her identity.

Based on the first finding, the researcher focused the research on this underrated character, Jin, the father of the main character. The researcher took the transcript from *Turning Red Transcript* (2022). The complete transcript has 9302 words with approximately 388 turns of speeches. Based on the script, Jin, Mei's father, speaks 23 utterances. Table 1 shows the context and the assertive and non-assertive politeness tabulation analyzed with Brown & Levinson (1987).

TABLE 1. The Assertive and Non-Assertive Tabulated Utterances of Jin

No	Context and Utterances	Politeness		Explanation
		Assertive	Non-assertive	
1	<p>ANNOUNCER: You've heard their hits, you've seen their moves. And now, you get to experience them live! The worldwide pop sensation 4-Town will be kicking off their North American tour! Tickets on sale now. (GASPS) Oh, my gosh! Who are these hip-hoppers? And why are they called "4-Town" if there are five of them? Uh... I don't know. Some of the kids at school like them. You mean Miriam? That girl is odd. JIN: Dinner's ready.</p> <p>Context explanation: While Mei and her family are watching a TV commercial about the pop band 4-Town, the parents express confusion and judgment about the group's popularity. Jin interrupts the discussion by announcing that dinner is ready, avoiding giving his own opinion.</p>		Non-assertive	Jin's utterance is a non-assertive politeness because he cuts the other characters' conversation by telling the dinner is ready instead of telling his opinion about the 4-Town.
2-3	<p>(ALARM BEEPING) JIN: Ming? Ming! (SNIFFS) My porridge. (ALARM CONTINUES BEEPING) (JIN YELLING) Jin, open a window! JIN: Somebody call emergency!</p> <p>Context explanation: Early in the morning, Jin realizes his porridge is burning as the alarm goes off. He frantically yells for Ming, complains about his porridge, and calls for help, but avoids dealing with the alarm himself, showing his indirect approach.</p>	(2) Complain (3) Refuse		<p>The first one is a complain because Jin cannot find his porridge.</p> <p>The second one is a refusal because he does not want to turn off the alarm.</p>

4	<p>GIRL: Hey, I gotta go! Open up! (WHIMPERS, GRUNTS) (GRUNTS) Mei-Mei! Stop! (ENGINE STARTS) Jin. Jin, get home now. There's been an emergency. JIN: (ON PHONE) Is it the woman thing? No! Another one. It's so good. (SCREAMS) (BOTH SCREAMING) WOMAN: Run! MAN: It's a monster!</p> <p>Context explanation: When Mei's panda transformation begins causing chaos, Jin calls to check in by phone, trying to understand the situation. He hesitantly guesses if it's a "woman thing," indicating his discomfort and indirect approach to the sensitive topic.</p>	Non-assertive	<p>Jin is trying to guess whether the problem deals with woman thing. If the problem was about he woman thing, he would have turned it down. However, the problem is about Mei's turning red.</p>
5	<p>Meilin: <i>[looks at the tapestry of Sun Yee, shocked]</i> Are...you... <i>[with her eyes in red of rage]</i> ...SERIOUS?! <i>[angrily tries to rip it apart as her parents try holding her back]</i> Jin: NO!</p> <p>Context explanation: In a heated moment, Mei tries to destroy a family tapestry out of anger. Jin steps in with a firm but brief "No!" to stop her, without offering a more detailed opinion or explanation.</p>	Non-assertive	<p>Jin says no because he could not express his opinion about the situation but he had to stop Meilin.</p>
6-7	<p>Ming: I thought I had more time! You're just a child. I thought, if I watched you like a hawk, I'd see the signs and be able to prepare. But it's going to be fine. I overcame it and you will too. On the next red moon, you'll undergo a ritual that will seal your red panda spirit into one of these. <i>[holds up her panda necklace]</i> And then you'll be cured. For good. Just like me. But any strong emotion will release the panda. And the more you release it, the more difficult the ritual will be. There is a darkness to the panda, Mei-Mei. You only have <i>one</i> chance to banish it, and you cannot fail. Otherwise, you'll never be free. Jin: <i>[looking through the May 2002 calendar]</i> Let's see, the next red moon will be the 25th (6)</p>	(6) Inform (7) Inform	<p>These utterances show the information about the next red moon and Jin's anticipation against Mei's turning red.</p>

<p>Meilin: That's a whole month away. Ming: We'll wait it out together. And I'll be with you every step of the way. Jin: Not bad. I saved Wilfred (7) Mei: (GASPS) Thanks, Dad.</p> <p>Context explanation: As the family discusses how to manage Mei's red panda transformation, Ming explains the upcoming red moon ritual. Jin looks at the calendar to confirm the date and later makes a lighthearted comment about saving a character named Wilfred, showing his supportive but indirect style.</p>			
8-9	<p>Ming: It's only temporary, Mei-Mei. This way, we won't worry about any more accidents. Hmm? Sleep tight. Jin: Red is a lucky color. (8) MING: This is awful. What are we gonna do? JIN: Don't worry. We'll get through this. (9)</p> <p>Context explanation: After Mei is confined to her room to prevent accidents, Jin reassures her by saying red is a lucky color and later comforts Ming, trying to maintain calm and optimism in a tense family situation.</p>	(8) Inform (9) Inform	Jin attempts to ensure the feeling of security for Mei.
10	<p>Meilin: So, now that that's settled, I just have one teeny-tiny favor to ask. <i>[scene cuts to Ming looking at Mei, not happy later that evening...]</i> Ming: No. Absolutely not. Meilin: What?! But this is once in a lifetime. Ming: Mei-Mei, it's one thing to stay calm at home or school, but a concert? You'll get whipped up into a frenzy and panda all over the place. Meilin: I won't, I won't! I promise! You saw me keep it in! Jin: Ming, maybe we should trust her.</p> <p>Context explanation: Mei begs to attend the 4-Town concert, but Ming strongly objects, fearing Mei will lose control. Jin gently suggests they trust Mei, offering a rare moment of quiet advocacy for his daughter without directly confronting Ming.</p>	Suggest	Instead of criticizing Ming about her attitude toward Mei, the daughter, Jin suggests Ming to trust her daughter.
11	<p>Ming: It's <i>them</i> I don't trust. Look at those glittery delinquents with their... <i>[shudders in disgust]</i> Gyration. Why on earth do you want to go so badly?</p>	Non-assertive	Jin's reaction shows that he has no idea what to answer. He utters 'uh' to express his

	<p>Ming: It's <i>them</i> I don't trust. Look at those glittery delinquents with their... <i>[shudders in disgust]</i> Gyrations. Why on earth do you want to go so badly?</p> <p>Meilin: <i>[imagines herself and her friends at the concert while chugging soda, and Robaire proposing to her; back to reality]</i> Like I said, I just want to broaden my musical horizons.</p> <p>Ming: This isn't music. This is filth. And it's not worth jeopardizing your life over. Right, Jin?</p> <p>Jin: Uh--</p> <p>Context explanation: As the debate over the concert continues, Ming criticizes the band and seeks Jin's agreement. Jin hesitates and responds with "Uh—," signaling his discomfort and indirect disagreement.</p>		disagreement but he knows what Ming says is true.
12	<p>Ming: What was that? Am I the only one who sees the danger here? There's no way she could keep her panda in. And \$200?! For what?! Who do they think they are? Céline Dion? <i>[the phone rings and Jin gets up to answer it]</i> Hmph. Unbelievable. I saw that look. Where does she get that from? Treating her own mother like that.</p> <p>Jin: Hold on. Ming, it's your mother.</p> <p>Context explanation During Ming's rant about the concert and Mei's behavior, the phone rings. Jin calmly informs Ming that her mother is on the phone, redirecting her attention and de-escalating the situation.</p>	Inform	Jin informs the phone is from Ming's mother and expects Ming directly grabs the phone instead of mumbling.
13	<p>Wouldn't you rather hang with Dad? Oh. Let's get my flashcards. But...</p> <p>JIN: Hmm. I was mathletes champ in grade 8, you know? Uh-huh. They called me the "Uncommon Denominator."</p> <p>Context explanation: Jin invites Mei to spend time with him, mentioning his own success as a math champion to encourage bonding and gently distract her from the family tensions.</p>	Inform	Jin informs that he once was an excellent student in mathematics so that he offers his daughter to play with him.
14	<p>Meilin: Here, I'll erase it. <i>[Jin pulls the camcorder away]</i> What? We were just being stupid. The panda's dangerous, outta control.</p> <p>Jin: Huh. You sound like your mother. What has she told about her panda?</p>	Affirm	Instead of directly blaming his daughter, Jin proposed a question to

	<p>Context explanation: Before the ritual, Jin visits Mei in her room and shows her video footage of her time with friends. Instead of scolding, he asks if she made the video, using a gentle question to open a conversation about her behavior.</p>		affirm what his daughter did is incorrect.
15-19	<p>Meilin: Here, I'll erase it. [Jin pulls the camcorder away] What? We were just being stupid. The panda's dangerous, outta control. Jin: Huh. You sound like your mother. What has she told about her panda? (15) Meilin: [sighs] Nothing. She won't talk about it. Jin: It was quite destructive. [chuckles] And big. She almost took out half the temple. (16) Meilin: You-- You saw it? Jin: Only once. She and your grandma had a terrible fight. (17) Meilin: Over what? Jin: [points to himself] Your grandma didn't approve of me but, you should've seen your mom. She was...incredible. (18) Meilin: But, I'm a monster. Jin: [sighs] People have all kinds of sides to them, Mei, and some sides are messy. The point isn't to push the bad stuff away. It's to...make room for it, live with it. Mei, erase it if you want, but this side of you... (CHUCKLES SOFTLY) ...made me laugh. (19) Context explanation: Jin shares with Mei stories about Ming's own struggles with her panda form, affirming that Mei's experience is normal, recalling past family conflicts, explaining Ming's history, and ultimately suggesting that Mei accept all parts of herself, even the messy ones.</p>	<p>(15) Affirm (16) Affirm (17) Affirm (18) Explain (19) Suggest</p>	<p>For the number (15), Jin affirms that Mei's action is incorrect and seems like her daughter.</p> <p>For the number (16), Jin affirms the negative thing of turning into red panda.</p> <p>Number (17), Jin affirms he ever saw the bad things of the red panda transformation once and the effects of the phenomenon.</p> <p>Number (18), Jin explains what happened between Ming and her mother.</p> <p>Number (19), Jin shares suggestion.</p>
20-21	<p>BOY: It was just getting good! GIRL: This isn't cool. Jin: Mei! (20) Meilin: Dad? Grandma Wu: We have to save your mother! Chen: She's gone <i>loco</i>! Jin: Mei, we have to the ritual again! (21) Meilin: What happened?! She's <i>HUGE</i>!</p>	<p>(20) Suggest (21) Inform</p>	<p>Number (20) show Jin sharing suggestion to do the ritual.</p> <p>Number (21), Jin informs</p>

	Jin: I told you, she was big!		that the panda should be big.
	Context explanation: As Mei's mother loses control in panda form, Jin calls out to Mei in concern. He suggests they repeat the sealing ritual and explains how large Ming's panda form can be, helping Mei grasp the urgency of the situation.		
22	GRANDMA: Mei-Mei! Jin: Mei, are you okay? (22)	Affirm	Number (22), Jin attempts to ensure that his daughter is fine.
	Context explanation: In the aftermath of the chaos, Jin checks on Mei, asking if she's okay and trying to reassure her during the family's tense moment.		
23	Grandma Wu: The ritual. [claps her hands] Everyone in position! Mei, keep her busy. Mei: Oh, I'll keep her busy Where's Jin? Jin! Jin: (PANTING) Mei! Keep her in the circle! (23)	Suggest	Number (23), Jin suggests Mei to keep the individual in the circle.
	Context explanation: During the final ritual, Jin encourages Mei to keep Ming within the circle so the ritual can work, offering practical support in a high-stakes moment.		

DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the analysis of assertive and non-assertive politeness strategies found on the character named Jin, Mei's father. From these 23 utterances of Jin, the researchers found 4 non-assertive strategies. On the other hand, the remaining utterances, 18 utterances, are assertive strategies. Of these 18 assertive strategies, the researchers found 1 strategy of complaining, 1 refusal, 7 informing efforts, 4 suggestions, 5 affirmations, and 1 explanation.

The frequency of informing efforts as the assertive strategies is the highest one. Assertiveness is the ability to be confident and self-assured while avoiding aggression in order to defend a valid perspective or assertion (O'Donohue et al., 2003). Assertiveness is a cognitive approach in which an individual confidently expresses their opinions or corrects false information (Cruz, 2020). Furthermore, assertive individuals have the ability to confidently express their opinions and critically evaluate material, identifying any deficiencies in terms of substance, details, or evidence (Jacob, 2024). Therefore, it is evident that assertiveness facilitates both innovative thought and efficient communication.

This finding indicates that the character has an informative feature as a father in the movie. Therefore, the character, in most scenes he appears, attempts to seek problem resolution instead of making the problem complicated. In a real life, this politeness strategy is useful for individuals as

problem-solvers. An individual or a character with frequent implementation of informative function within his assertive strategy indicates that he reads, listens, and seeks many information before sharing to other individuals. Parhamnia & Farahian (2023) explains that this informative character and information-seeking mechanism are strongly correlated to problem-solving skills.

The second position is the affirmation function of assertive strategy. In the movie, the father applies the assertive strategy with affirmative function five times. The affirmative form is employed to convey the validity or truth of a fundamental proposition, whereas the negative form conveys its untruth (Liu et al., 2019). Affirmations, also known as positive polarity items (PPIs), are expressions that are negated and typically avoid being affected by the negation. The positive is the default form from which the negative is derived, but this claim might be disputed when considering a pragmatic perspective. In the movie, Jin affirms the truth about the red panda transformation and the incorrect actions committed by his daughter. The affirmative utterances are not only statements but also questions, found in the movie.

The third function of the assertive strategy is suggesting. A suggestion is a proposed idea that one recommends or deems beneficial for another (or others) to adopt (Riley, 2015). Opinions on the matter may vary, with some individuals expressing agreement and others expressing disagreement. In the event of disagreement or other suggestions, the one who initially proposed the concept will typically engage in a discussion with the others involved, aiming to reach a mutually agreeable and satisfactory solution. A suggestion is an individual's viewpoint on the approach to undertaking a task, yet there is no inherent obligation for the person to follow it. In the movie, Jin uses suggestive functions of assertive strategies to express his disagreement in a positive manner.

Within the assertive strategy, the lowest observed functions are complaining, refusal, and explanation. Complaining is a mode of communication that conveys discontent, regardless of whether the person genuinely feels dissatisfied or not (Thøgersen et al., 2003). It can fulfil several psychological and social functions, such as establishing connections with like-minded individuals, strengthening one's sense of identity, or providing a release for personal emotions.

The next lowest function of assertive strategy is refusal. This function is a realized feeling of having no intention to accept certain matters. In this movie, Jin refuses to turn off the alarm because he is doing his personal business. However, he is assertive by saying 'call 911.' Therefore, this action does not offend anyone around him.

The last assertive function is to explain. An explanation is a collection of assertions typically made to elucidate a set of facts, providing insight into their causes, context, and repercussions (Drake, 2018). This assertiveness sets regulations or legislation and provides clear explanations of the current regulations or legislation with regard to any objects or phenomena under scrutiny. In conversation, explanations help listeners understand not only what is happening but also why it is happening, which can clarify misunderstandings and guide appropriate responses. For example, when a character explains the rules of a ritual or the reason behind a decision, it reduces ambiguity and helps maintain social order. As such, explanations play a critical role in managing expectations and promoting mutual understanding in both everyday interactions and more formal contexts.

Assertiveness, as a function of assertive strategy, is distinct from aggression and passivity. The way the character manages personal boundaries distinguishes these three concepts. In real life, passive communicators typically refrain from trying to exert influence on others because they feel anxious about engaging in social conflicts (Cruz, 2020). Passive communicators, due to their

nervousness, abstain from declaring their boundaries or thoughts, therefore allowing aggressive others to exploit or manipulate them. Moreover, they often repress negative feelings like anger as they allow this dominance to take place. Individuals who exhibit aggressive behavior disregard others' boundaries, making them more likely to harm by exerting influence through personal attacks, which often leads to feelings of embarrassment. Assertive communication entails the forthright and non-aggressive expression of one's thoughts and emotions to influence others (Jacob, 2024). It is critical to respect others' boundaries and refrain from participating in disagreeable confrontations. In a real life, assertive people are also prone to defending themselves against individuals who exhibit hostility.

Besides assertive strategy, the researchers also found the implementation of non-assertive strategy. In the movie, Jin's speech can be considered a non-assertive, as he interrupts the other characters' conversation to inform them that supper is ready rather than directly addressing his daughter. Jin also tries to avoid any woman thing issue but he finds out the problem is about his daughter turning red. Jin also keeps silent because he cannot articulate his viewpoint on the matter. Jin's response indicates his lack of comprehension and inability to provide a suitable solution. Non-assertive politeness refers to the act of refraining from expressing opinions or making comments during a conversation in order to maintain a sense of civility towards others who are present (Bonvillain, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the politeness strategies employed by the underrated character Jin in *Turning Red*, using an assertive and non-assertive politeness framework. The results showed that assertive strategies were used more often, with 18 examples like informing, affirming, suggesting, complaining, refusing, and explaining, while non-assertive strategies were used less, with just four examples. The high frequency of informative acts underscores Jin's role as a supportive, problem-solving figure who helps maintain family harmony without escalating conflict. His use of affirmation, suggestion, and explanation further highlights his open-mindedness and emotional intelligence, contrasting with other characters' more authoritative or reactive styles.

These findings have several meaningful implications. First, they enrich character analysis by showing how politeness strategies shape perceptions of underrated figures in media. Jin's communication style positions him as a quiet but steady influence in the family dynamic, demonstrating how understated characters can play pivotal roles in conflict resolution. Second, the study provides pedagogical insights for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. By exposing learners to authentic examples of assertive and non-assertive politeness in context, the film offers a valuable resource for developing pragmatic competence and cross-cultural communication skills. EFL learners can benefit not only from linguistic input but also from understanding how cultural norms influence speech and interaction, making their language use more socially appropriate and effective.

Overall, this research broadens the scope of politeness studies by focusing on lesser-studied characters and combining linguistic analysis with audience perspectives. It also emphasizes the importance of integrating media-based materials into language education to foster both linguistic and intercultural skills. Future research might expand on this work by exploring how audience perceptions align with or challenge theoretical models of politeness, offering more profound insight into the intersection of media, language, and social behavior .

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