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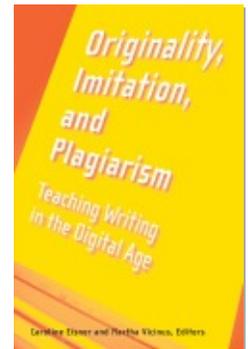
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When Copying Is Not Copying

Plagiarism and French Composition Scholarship

Christiane Donahue

The past fifteen years have seen an explosion of research about higher-education language activity—reading, speaking, and writing—in France. A key focus of this research has been students' interaction with other sources, with the *discours d'autrui* (the discourse of others), in particular through discussion of paraphrase, quoting, citing, and student authority in academic writing. It is clear from this research that fascination with plagiarism is far from universal. French education does not emphasize avoiding plagiarism as we know it; in fact, some French writing and teaching practices can even encourage it. Informal interviews with French teachers and students give a preliminary sense of the French understanding of plagiarism. "What is that?" say students. Secondary-school faculty tell us that discussing plagiarism is not part of the curriculum. A few university faculty mention occasional trouble with students who buy papers, but most are quick to point out that undergraduate grades and diplomas are primarily awarded based on exams—taken in person, handwritten, graded blind.¹ This perspective on plagiarism intrigues, in an era when teachers, administrators, and scholars in the world of U.S. composition studies struggle daily with a wide variety of plagiarism issues, generally lumped together under the one term and evoked with disdain, anger, or even a sense of personal injury.

Composition theories and pedagogies in France have always treated reading and writing as an integral whole; authority and ease in inhabiting others' discourses is valued over "originality" in school writing, at least until advanced postsecondary studies. France's complicated relationship with source use and textual authority begins in the relationship students are invited to develop with source texts early in their schooling. Paraphrase, however, is not a welcomed tool in that textual relationship; secondary and postsecondary students are taught an entrenched aversion to it.

After a brief overview of French teaching practices as related to source use, I will present a few textual movements in French students' writing in order to suggest alternative cultural understandings of the textual authority students might inhabit. I will propose that French students are taught to enter into relationships of equality and play with other texts, and that this leads them to a different understanding of the already-said. This does not necessarily ease their transition into advanced research writing in their fields, but does strikingly shift emphasis away from issues of plagiarism. Finally, I will offer a theoretical linguistic frame for describing this relationship with the term *reprise-modification*, adapted from French linguistic theory. I believe this frame will help to complicate the often reductive U.S. understanding of plagiarism, while encouraging a rethinking of French practices as related to paraphrase.

French Practices: Writing and Source Use Instruction, Secondary and Postsecondary

In French secondary schooling, writing is taught in all disciplines; it is always taught in relationship to reading and speaking; and writing instruction is extensively theorized with a mix of education, linguistics, and literary theory.² This instruction lays the groundwork for both the abilities students acquire and the problems students face in higher education. Practically speaking, the end of French secondary school is considered the beginning of postsecondary education; the final exam, the *baccalauréat*, is *le premier grade universitaire* (the first university degree) and the student who passes it is guaranteed a university seat. That weeklong exam is writing-intensive. University Writing or University Methods has always been a course in postsecondary technical fields such as engineering. Work on writing has equally been an intense part of the curriculum in elite school tracks (*écoles préparatoires* and *grandes écoles*). Since the late 1980s, the government has required one-credit first-year courses in research, thinking, and writing of all entering students in traditional university cycles; these courses have quickly become, in some settings, writing-in-the-disciplines courses, although in other settings the mandate has been ignored.

As students work on writing across their secondary or postsecondary curriculum, paraphrase, citation, quoting, and other explicit text interactions are treated differently at different grade levels, as well as in the study of literature versus the study of nonliterary texts.³ Officially, paraphrase is a secondary and early postsecondary education concern related to writing

about literature, while citing and quoting are more advanced undergraduate or even graduate study concerns, reserved for writing in particular fields.

The roots of the French perspective on student writing, paraphrase, and literary texts are in the French relationship with the aesthetic. In the ancient and medieval rhetorical traditions, the paraphraser was initially considered on par with the original author when providing reformulations of sacred texts (Daunay 72). Bertrand Daunay suggests that a paraphrase was seen as similar to a translation: a reformulation respecting the enunciative system of the source, a form of quasi- or shared authorship through ownership of the language manipulation. The paraphraser changed the expressions but traced his text on the original (73). Paraphrase was also originally a way to teach text production through the heuristic action of reformulating others' texts. By the Renaissance, it had evolved into a commentary and an explanation, not just a rendering (75). It was not until the 1800s that paraphrase became the object of academic criticism and disdain.⁴

Avoiding paraphrase is today the subject of extensive explicit commentary in French textbooks and the *Instructions Officielles*, the state-mandated secondary school curriculum. Any paraphrase of literary texts read for assignments is discouraged, even punished. In a way reminiscent of our admonitions to avoid "just summarizing" (the plot, the story line, the chronology . . .), both faculty and textbooks in France warn students to avoid paraphrasing literary works, generally classified among the least sophisticated or least successful forms of literary commentary. "Run from paraphrase," one textbook says, "which repeats the text while diluting it and transposes its original phrasing into ordinary prose, in order to explain 'what it means'" (Daunay 21).⁵ To explain a literary work's meaning by rephrasing it into "ordinary" language removes its aesthetic value, and thus its true meaning. Daunay cites another textbook that admonishes, "Repeating the text in another form . . . only gives rise to paraphrase, inevitably deforming because the signifier always changes the signified, imperceptibly if one is talented, but generally enough that the text becomes unrecognizable in its paraphrased translation" (13). In this version the challenge for students is even more complicated—either copy outright or develop original thoughts, but do not reformulate, no matter how sophisticated the paraphrase might be. The term *copying* reflects a complex concept that we cannot afford to take for granted in cross-cultural discussion. Both of its most obvious meanings—the actual re-production of objects or signs versus the act of doing the same kind of thing—play out in students' experiences

working with text. French practitioners do not use the word *copying* but in effect encourage it in both forms: reproducing precise phrases and frames on the one hand, and “doing the same” on the other. The latter is not a case of “imitating” in the creative or rhetorical tradition, but of taking on the discursive role and position of academics, without necessarily inhabiting them at first.

Paraphrase is also treated, indirectly, in reference to students’ work with texts that are not strictly “literary” (essays, news articles, memoirs, documents, editorials, and so on). Students are asked to respond to these texts, and are taught to *summarize* nonliterary texts quite radically—they learn to reduce texts to precisely one-quarter their length, maintaining the original message, maintaining key phrases, while shortening and condensing the text overall. This ability is a cornerstone to academic writing activity, and a rigorous way to learn to manipulate (in the positive sense) ideas, words, meanings, and concepts—without citing, quoting borrowed phrases, or recognizing in some other way the author of the original text. Quoting and citing are not even mentioned in most school course manuals and textbooks until late undergraduate or master’s-level documents. In any analysis of nonliterary texts, up until roughly the end of undergraduate studies, students copy many of the ideas and even phrases from assigned texts with no citations or quotation marks. They build on ideas from texts read in class or for an exam, rephrasing them (barely), occasionally mentioning the author, and then providing additional examples or ideas of their own. The kernel of an idea and the actual phrasing are recast but are not credited. Students thus speak with and through the text or texts themselves, inhabiting voices, often appropriating even the style, tone, or voice of the pieces to which they respond (for examples, see appendix). Students also take up the language of assignment prompts. This is qualitatively different. If we can say that normally we would not expect a student to cite the language of the assignment, this is not so much a case of uncited words as a reusing of the assignment language that shadows the reusing of excerpts read in class, and so is considered acceptable in the same way.

When students reach later undergraduate and graduate writing work, they are required to write in a discipline and to authoritatively reflect on what they read, understand it in context, critique it if need be, represent it accurately, and position themselves with respect to it. After a first round of writing that still relies on abilities developed in secondary studies, most students move into researched writing or writing that synthesizes multiple sources read for class or read in addition to class. This is the first time stu-

dents will work with abstract theoretical discourse in the discipline they have chosen. Because writing is often not taught at these later stages, or is taught in optional “methodology of research” writing courses, the references are found primarily in commercial guides sold in bookstores or in locally produced university pamphlets for students working on senior theses and other end-stage academic projects. Students struggle with parts of this new challenge of managing the *discours d'autrui*, but in response French scholarship reflects a nurturing paradigm (or an exasperated one) rather than a punitive one.

Michel Guigue and Jacques Crinon tell us that acceptable processes and practices in drafting include

- using explicit quotes in earlier drafts that act as a well of material and ideas to draw from (the later draft still has some quotes as quotes but has other ideas left in the draft in paraphrase or summary form with no reference or citation);
- including earlier short actual cited quotes that later become longer close paraphrase, cited or not;
- borrowing detailed observations from a source without citing them in what scholars consider the later, improved version. This borrowing would typically be considered a form of plagiarism in a U.S. classroom, but here is considered a successfully thorough “appropriation” of the text and the material, showing that the student has become comfortable with his or her status as a member of the disciplinary community in question. (83–86; see examples, appendix)

Copying, Close Paraphrase, and Polyphony: The Scholarly Perspective

While plagiarism has not become the focus of scholarly discussion in France, students’ management of multiple voices in their essays has. Scholarship on the subject is clearly interested in understanding students’ complex relationships with text and supporting students’ integration into the discourse of a field without judging them for overly close work with sources.⁶ French writing research thus extensively explores university students’ work with other texts, with a focus on *la polyphonie énonciative*, literally the “multivoiced uttering” of students’ speaking or writing or even reading at the university, a work with language that is understood in a Bakhtinian frame: “Someone who apprehends the utterances of others is

not mute, silenced; on the contrary, he or she is a being full of interiorized words" (qtd. in Guibert 29).

Scholars study students' actual primary research in many cases, with requisite secondary research (literature reviews, for example) or secondary research that includes use of texts studied for class and use of class notes and professors' lectures. Consistent with practice, most of their explanations point to paraphrase as a "poor reintroduction of the original" rather than an effective interpretation of a source, and explore troubles students have with reformulation or quoting. The aesthetic judgment being made about the effective language of an original source versus the always-other-wise rephrasing of it appears to carry more weight than the judgment about "borrowing/not borrowing" language or crediting a source.

While the French method described earlier for secondary writing education builds students' ability to work in a textual frame and to inhabit academic discourse, it does not produce a uniform ability to work effectively with texts once students arrive at the university. French students clearly have trouble managing polyphonic writing (in 2002 an entire conference was dedicated to the problem). The difference often surfaces when students start working with the discourse of others, in particular the *theoretical discourse* of others in researched writing (Reuter 14). Yves Reuter focuses in particular on the problem of "patchworks," accumulations of quotes and juxtaposition of quoted material that dominate some students' essays. French research identifies students' need to learn how to get their voices into the "academic concert" (9) and to have the opportunity to "feel their way." This "feeling their way" perspective is part of the backdrop for the relative flexibility in university acceptance of forms of plagiarism like missing citations, close paraphrase, word-for-word borrowing, or other forms of "copying," including stylistic copying.

Students' earlier textual work responding to essays has clearly helped to create some of the difficulties identified by scholars. Marie Christine Pollet and Valérie Piette lament students' deference to authority, a deference that appears, to the outside observer, to arise naturally from their earlier years of exactly this kind of writing. They also explore students' trouble with effective quote integration (167), including dropping in quotes without fully understanding them (173), and citing insignificant details (173). Here, Pollet and Piette give the example, with dismay, of a student who quotes and cites a *definition*, and, to boot, one "that the professor surely knew" (173). The professor-as-audience and the context of school-based writing dominate.

Voice is another complication that has attracted French scholars' attention. Françoise Boch and Francis Grossman describe in detail the overlap of voices, the smudged distinctions, the difficulty of telling who is speaking in the student's text, all considered to be signs of a lack of polyphonic mastery (91). Pollet and Piette comment on the erasure of students' authorial voices; Rozenn Guibert describes one aspect of this complication as "voice confusion," the awkward situation of a student writer who literally loses track of a source text and begins to take on the attitude, persona, and perspectives of an author from whom he or she is working (38). This can also lead to mismanagement of meaning: "Certain students . . . generalize excessively, erasing nuances and modalizations present in the source document: 'certain doctors' becomes 'doctors'; 'some historians affirm that . . . ' becomes 'historians agree that . . .'" (Pollet and Piette 175). Boch and Grossman point to other entrenched problems: not recognizing the different value of sources, not knowing why a particular source point is being introduced or cited, and tending to drop in information dogmatically, "not because the student does not know how to cite but because the student does not know how to 'own' the text being cited" (9).

Theorizing the writing and the teaching of writing that works with other texts certainly implies for French researchers an occasional discussion of formal citation work. But this discussion serves to get at questions of identity: what are the relationships between the one voice and the many? Between the writer and the reference? What subject positioning is encouraged, enabled, or prevented? What power structures are at play, how is the self-defined status of the student-subject presented, which utterance modes are used, what is the play of references in interaction with each other? What points of view, what ways of treating others' voices can we identify (distance, modulation, appreciation . . .), and what genres can be analyzed? Much of the focus is on identifying features that might help the novice writer-researcher to understand the stakes, the history, the existing structures and paradigms into which he or she is integrating written work; to resist or further the agenda of a field; and to develop hypotheses that matter and are relevant to these issues. Isabelle Delcambre includes issues of student unfamiliarity with the literature and culture of a particular discipline as part of the problem (personal interview, May 30, 2006).

The problems evoked are rarely considered plagiarism. When they are, it is just disappointing, even described as an immature concern. Plagiarism as such is mentioned only once in the recent special issue of the journal referenced here, *Apprendre à Citer le Discours d'Autrui*. Boch and Grossmann

cite the following two postsecondary textbooks as childish, even infantile in their perspectives on plagiarism: “A principle of scientific work concerns referencing material: when borrowing a text from an author, mention the source. It would be serious to be accused of plagiarism. Someone who copies an author’s work and attributes passages of the work to himself has plagiarized” (95). “It is not only a question of intellectual honesty, you will make yourself guilty of plagiarism, which will be sanctioned by the examination committee” (95). They conclude that plagiarism should be avoided because peers in the scientific community have no respect for plagiarized work and would, in fact, reject an article or a book that provided neither correct citation nor references to the history of preceding publications (96), rather than be treated as an object of moralizing discourse.

Pollet and Piette point to a student sample in which a citation for some specific information appears to be missing and immediately reject the idea that it might be plagiarism, quoting Elisabeth Nonnon:

This kind of trouble is inevitable in an activity in which reading and writing are inextricably linked; one reads to nourish the reflection for one’s essay, one writes to synthesize and integrate borrowings that one has made during the process of developing knowledge. Learning to situate effectively one’s own discourse in relation to different discourses of others, marking out the transitions between sources. . . , all of this plays out partly in a working out of the utterance indicators one chooses. (173)

Effective quoting and citing are treated, in the scholarship, as an art; the goal is working from an author-based world (an author’s text, words, ideas) toward one’s own. “We can distance ourselves from the theme of plagiarism,” insist Boch and Grossman, “and push for the importance instead of understanding “polyphonic management . . . *it does not matter* whether enunciative interference is from bad faith actions or clumsiness. The result, in fact, is the same from the point of view of written communication—and this point of view is the one that we feel should be highlighted” (101; emphasis added).⁷ Scholars and teachers feel that the different forms of quoting, citing, and paraphrasing acceptable for different fields add to the complications for students. The university is not always clear with students about the best approach to take: “The anthropologist who cites his informants, the compiler who uses the ‘method of massive excerpts,’ and the journalist who references sources in passing. None of these approaches seems right to us. But what exactly do we expect of our students?” (Guibert 42).

Recasting the Issues: Paraphrase, Plagiarism, Originality, and the *discours d'autrui*

While the French practices and positions take a more nuanced view of plagiarism, they seem to miss the boat on paraphrase as a necessary language act. Students find themselves in a real bind, as they cannot accomplish the requisite close readings of literary texts without paraphrasing, an unavoidable textual movement that both renders and interprets.⁸ The French understanding of paraphrase is theoretically in a bind as well: in spite of itself, it supports the Bakhtinian understanding of every utterance as simultaneously new and already said: “There can be neither a first nor a last meaning; [anything that can be understood] always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning, which in its totality is the only thing that can be real. In historical life this chain continues infinitely, and therefore each individual link in it is renewed again and again, as though it were being reborn” (Bakhtin 146). Notice that for Bakhtin, this reformulation is not only rich and positive but unavoidable; the language, as Bakhtin argues, has been completely taken over,

shot through with intentions and accents. . . . All words have a “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, a day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life. . . . Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated, overpopulated—with the intentions of others. (273–74)

Building from Bakhtin, the French linguist Frédéric François offers us the concept of “reprise-modification,” an essential textual movement, the simultaneous appropriation and modification that every new utterance, even direct and credited quoting, involves: an always-dynamic-taking-up-and-modifying, past-present-future in degrees of concert. This dynamic act is not a single act but a broad sweep of sorts of discursive modification: reaccentuations, mixtures, paraphrases, transpositions, forced changes of background, and so on (correspondence, 2006). The concept of reprise-modification might allow both French and U.S. writing specialists to move into new dialogue about paraphrase, plagiarism, and source use in our students’ work. We might begin by reconsidering copying and paraphrasing as forms of reprise-modification. Copying’s long and honored history in

many fields is seen as a mode of learning, an apprenticeship method: art, music, writing, technology.

Considered from the frames of both translation theory and linguistics, copying is multilayered and multinatured. Translation theory encourages us to think about language not only in its “naming” relationship, as it creates equivalents, and “copying” into another language, but also in the way it develops understanding, interprets, through the “this is like this” relationship that reminds us of the very nature of originality in its literary iterations. To learn to speak, or write, is to learn to translate (Paz, cited in Barnstone 23). Some translation theories today pose the translator as author, as original text worker, suggesting that this textual work is no different from other reuses of available language, a perspective that recalls the early understandings of manuscript copying as authorship. If translators are authors and we posit the essential discursive movement in all language use as reprise-modification, then the act of reading is clearly part of the language production relationship. Translators necessarily see the fabric of discourse as heteroglossic, a reprise of the already-said, a complex working through of existing language in perpetually new forms, even when they are copied word for word or rendered equivalent through translation.

In students’ writing, the voices in a draft—the multiple student voices, peers’ voices, teachers’ voices, voices from texts read—are the polyphonic utterances to be managed, inhabited self-consciously, orchestrated. Writers *reprentent-modifient* the thematic, macrostructural, rhetorical, linguistic, syntactic, and microstructural elements of already-existing discourse—copying that is not copying but a complex and culturally defined intellectual action, Bakhtinian to the core. As I have argued elsewhere, we can think about copying as one strategy along a continuum of strategies of reprise-modification: “reproducing, quoting, tracing, imitating, shadowing, miming, paraphrasing, summarizing, referring to, linking outward from a single word, indirectly suggesting, referring to through connection to a cultural commonplace, echoing through association, stylistic allure, or implied assumption, and so on” (Donahue 95). Nothing is ever clearly exact copying or wildly loose translation or paraphrase. Every one of these language acts is intertwined with the others, and all are necessary steps in text construction. What’s more, the *same actions* can exist as different forms along that continuum, functioning in local versions, with differing intents, with differing receptions at different points in time or location. Summary in one instance is read or received as interpretation in another;

an imitation in one era is read as a poor copy in another. Claiming plagiarism, from this point of view, becomes quite difficult.

Concluding Thoughts

In French essays, the nature of the student's relationship with the text he or she has been assigned to read is qualitatively and specifically different. In secondary school writing, literary texts are revered aesthetic objects, and nonliterary texts are objects of appropriation. In school essays, the text's authority is equal to the student's as he or she speaks with and through the original essay. The French strategy of working closely with nonliterary text seems to provide an authority quite different from, for example, the expressive authority provided through narrative writing. Both existential and discursive positions are woven through a student's text. In university students' writing, the nature of this relationship shifts; students are asked to work with theoretical discourse and to more clearly demarcate their own voices and ideas from those they are studying. But the essential understanding of students' work as polyphonic reprise-modification leads both teachers and scholars to focus on the nature of the management and the discursive development of the new members of a discipline, rather than the moralistic, legalistic, or otherwise shame-filled act we like to call plagiarism.

APPENDIX: EXAMPLES OF STUDENT WORK

I offer here a few specific examples excerpted from studies of French students' essays, representative of what I have found in larger samples. The first text was written in first year of university studies, in a required writing class. It is a response to an assignment that specifically asks students to work with an excerpt of a text by Joël de Rosnay.⁹ The second and third examples come from Guigue and Crinon.

EXAMPLE I

de Rosnay

What a long path to follow . . . as not everyone has the same chances or the same talents.

Signs, also, of a "flight" from a society that has become competitive, aggressive, and violent . . .

Student

This long work of analysis is not permitted to everyone.

This tendency translates the need for renewal and for flight from a system that, more and more, harms individuals.

We also see close paraphrase of the assignment itself.

Assignment

What does the author mean when he writes, “managing one’s life means accessing a certain form of liberty, of autonomy”? Do you think this concept is desirable and possible?

Student

What does this management of our life mean? We will see whether this concept is desirable and possible . . .

EXAMPLE 2

Table 1

Draft 3	Draft 7 (final)
First of all, as P. Meirieu observes in <i>Apprendre, Oui, mais Comment?</i> that children do not know the <u>specificity of the spoken word that resides in the fact that speech is a continuous flow of words not split up</u> into sentences, . . . This is equally underscored by the work document of December 1996 refined by M. A. Morel and L. Danon-Boileau.	We observe first of all that <u>the specificity of speech resides in the fact that it is a continuous flow of words that only vocal pauses split up</u> This property is equally highlighted by M. A. Morel and L. Danon-Boileau.

Source: Guigue and Crinon 83

EXAMPLE 3

Table 2

Draft 2	Final Improved Draft
In conclusion, I will cite Barré de Miniac: “ <u>Becoming the subject of one’s writing, the author of one’s texts</u> , is being able to establish conscious strategies, to <u>analyze the expectations of the reader</u> , the stakes of the situation.”	In addition, as Barré de Miniac points out, <u>becoming the author of one’s texts</u> means being able to take into account the knowledge that one shares with a future reader, <u>analyzing the expectations of the reader</u> .

Source: Guigue and Crinon 86.

Notes

1. This is a problem that is rapidly spreading in French-speaking countries. See, for example, “Plagiat: Les cas augmentent à l’Université,” <http://www.tsr.ch/tsr/index.html?siteSect=200001&sid=6427564>.

2. See, for example, the conference proceedings of the Association Internationale de Recherches en Didactique du Français (International Association of Research in the Theory and Teaching of French) and the publications of multiple research laboratories in France, in particular the Université de Lille III research group, THEODILE, the Université Stendahl-Grenoble research group LIDILEM, and the Université de

Bordeaux II research group Psychologie de l'Éducation et du Développement. More information about these French research groups and activities can be found at <http://comppile.tamucc.edu/wiki/CompFAQsInternational/InternationalWritingStudies>.

3. I will not enter here into the grand debate about arbitrary dichotomies such as literary-nonliterary. I use the distinction here only because that is the distinction that has tended to dominate French education. In recent years, the dichotomy has been melting away as “literary” texts are studied for their construction of arguments, and “nonliterary” texts for their literary style. The category of creative nonfiction has also been introduced.

4. For a full discussion of this complicated process, see Daunay.

5. I find this commentary particularly telling. We often speak with disdain of the old-fashioned perspective that the idea can come before the writing and the writing simply expresses transparently that idea. The French rejection of the possibility of paraphrasing literary work makes me wonder whether we understand the degree of complexity of the act we ask students to perform in their research, reading, and writing.

6. How do we determine at what point something is “owned”? French scholars O. Dezutter and F. Thirion suggest that there is not that much difference at the university between appropriating another’s speech (say, a lecture) and appropriating another’s writing (109). Students come to learn and we want them to appropriate knowledge and be comfortable in the discourse of the field; at what point does something—class discussion, a professor’s discourse—no longer get cited?

7. There is less flexibility for experts. Boch and Grossman say that experts know both the implicit and the explicit rules and are likely using deliberate strategies when they mask quoted material or erase frontiers between source material, paraphrase, and their own words (102). This is a fascinating reversal.

8. Daunay is, to my knowledge, the only French scholar to focus on restoring paraphrase to a recognized and positive place in textual analysis and writing instruction in France.

9. This student’s text is treated in detail in Donahue, “Lycée to University.”

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