Relational Grammar and Korean Syntax*

— So-called ‘double-subject’ and ‘double-object’ constructions revisited

Masayoshi Shibatani

In constructing a viable theory of universal grammar, it is becoming increasingly clear that grammatical relations such as subject and direct object must be considered as theoretical primitives and that they play a central role in the formulation of syntactic rules and constraints. This position, recently advocated by the proponents of a syntactic theory known as relational grammar, is motivated in part by the facts such as: 1) Chomsky’s derivative definitions of ‘subject-of’ and ‘object-of’ may not be applicable universally,1 2) the universal properties of certain syntactic processes cannot be adequately captured unless alternations in grammatical relations that accompany transformations are properly expressed,2 and 3) a series of universal constraints on syntactic rules can be stated in terms of possible alternations of grammatical relations.3

Even in a description of syntactic rules of individual languages, the notion of grammatical relations plays an important role in allowing us to capture significant generalizations in a concise format. In Korean syntax the notion of subject, for example, plays an important role in a number of syntactic processes. In Reflexivization it is the subject NP that functions as a trigger. Thus in (1), the only possible interpretation is that the reflexive form caki ‘self’ is coreferential with the subject NP Yonsikhi; the sentence does not allow the reading in which caki is coreferential with the direct object ai ‘child’.

(1) Yonsikhi ka ai lil caki ii pang esæ ttæli-at-ta
    ‘Yonsikhi, hit the child; in self,’s/self,’s room.’

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1 There is a good possibility that in some Malayo-polynesian languages, the basic word order is VSO. Since in these languages one does not obtain a VP node that directly dominates V and O, Chomsky’s definitions of ‘subject-of’ as an NP immediately dominated by S, and of ‘object-of’ as an NP immediately dominated by VP cannot be applied.

2 See, for example, Johnson (1974) for his discussion on capturing the universal aspect of Passivization.

3 See Shibatani (1977) for a relevant discussion.
In other words, if we subscribe to the generative semantic view, then we would formulate the rule of Reflexivization in such a way that the subject NP functions as a trigger for the process which converts an NP which is coreferential with the subject NP to the reflexive form caki. In the interpretive view, we would formulate an interpretive rule in such a way that the reflexive form is interpreted as being coreferential with a subject NP. Thus, in either approach the notion of subject plays a crucial role.

Another phenomenon in which a subject NP plays an important role is what we call 'Subject Honorification'. This is the phenomenon in which the verbal suffix si is inserted so as to render a plain form of a sentence into an honorific form. An important restriction of this phenomenon is that this process can be applied appropriately only when the subject NP refers to someone worthy of expressing the speaker’s deference. If the direct object or any other NP that is not a subject refers to someone respectable, one cannot express his deference to him by the suffix si. Thus, while (2b) is appropriate as the honorific version of (2a), (3b) is not an appropriate honorific form for (3a), where the subject does refer to someone who can be the object of the deference expressed by the speaker.

(2) a. sensaenim i haksap il cap-at-ta
   'The teacher grabbed the student.'
   b. sensaenim i haksap il cap-i-si-at-ta
      (subject honorific version of (a))

(3) a. nae ka sensaenim il cap-at-ta
   'I grabbed the teacher.'
   b. nae ka sensaenim il cap-i-si-at-ta
      (subject honorific version of (a))

While the two phenomena that we have been discussing show the importance of the notion of subject in Korean syntax, they can be, at the same time, considered as expressing important properties of the Korean subject. That is, in order to achieve the generalizations pertaining to the phenomena of Reflexivization and Subject Honorification in terms of the notion subject, all the NPs that trigger Reflexivization and Subject Honorification are to be considered the subject of a sentence. What we are doing here is explicating the grammatical relation 'subject' in Korean syntax in terms of a system of rules which refer to it. This procedure is the same that is taken by Chomsky and others with respect to categories such as N and NP. That is, the reason both the table and that John failed the exam are treated under the category NP is because they share certain syntactic properties that are not shared by the members of other categories such as V and VP. By the same token the reason we group yonshiki in (1) and sensaenim in (2a) under the category subject and distinguish them from ai in (1) and haksap in (2a) is because the former share certain syntactic properties that are not shared by the latter.
One of the problems that Korean grammarians face in working in the framework of relational grammar has to do with the relationship between grammatical relations and surface case such as nominative, expressed by the particle *ka* or *i*, and accusative, expressed by the particle *lit*. Not only in the tradition of Korean grammar but also in that of Japanese grammar as well as in the European tradition, the notions of grammatical relations and cases have been often confused. The confusion is principally caused by the fact that for the most part there is a good correspondence between grammatical relations and surface cases. Normally a subject occurs in the nominative case, a direct object in the accusative, and an indirect object in the dative. This is indeed the situation in Korean, as a typical Korean ditransitive sentence has the following case distribution:

(4)  
\[ \text{SU-Nom} \text{ IO-Dat} \text{ DO-Acc} \]  
'I gave a book to the child.'  
(SU=subject, DO=direct object, IO=indirect object, Nom=nominative, Acc=accusative, Dat=dative)

From this normal correspondence between grammatical relations and cases, grammarians have tended to identify the grammatical relation of particular NP on the basis of the case that that NP is in. That is, if, for example, an NP is in the nominative (or marked by *ka* or *i*), then it is considered a subject. A manifestation of this tendency in the work of Korean grammarians is their calling sentences such as those in (5) and (6) as 'double-subject' and 'double-object' constructions.\(^4\)

(5)  
a.  
\[ \text{SU-Nom} \text{ DO} \]  
'It is I whose head hurts.'

b.  
\[ \text{SU} \]  
'It is the elephant whose trunk is long.'

c.  
\[ \text{SU-Nom} \text{ DO} \]  
'It is I whose hand is cold.'

(6)  
a.  
\[ \text{SU-Nom} \text{ DO} \]  
'I hit Yonshigi in his head.'

b.  
\[ \text{SU-Nom} \text{ DO} \]  
'I kicked Yonshigi in his leg.'

c.  
\[ \text{SU-Nom} \text{ DO} \]  
'I grabbed a rat by the tail.'

\(^4\) Actually there are two superficially distinct constructions that the term 'double-subject' construction refers to. One of them involves the topic particle *nin* and the nominative particle *ka* or *i*. Since there has been general agreement (at least among the transformational grammarians) as to the status of the topic marked by *nin* as opposed to an NP marked by *ka* or *i*, not many people now perhaps consider a sentence like *na nin moli ka aphi-ta* as a double-subject construction. The construction that are being investigated in this paper is the one in which there are two or more NPs that are marked by the nominative particle *ka* or *i*. 
The purpose of this paper is to show that these sentences in (5) and (6) respectively have only one subject and one object each, contrary to what the terms ‘double-subject’ construction and ‘double-object’ construction imply, and that the notions of grammatical relations and cases must be clearly distinguished, as there are rules that refer to grammatical relations as well as those that need to be specified in terms of cases as opposed to grammatical relations.

To begin with, let us briefly discuss the sources for and some restrictions on the sentences in (5) and (6). The most conservative transformational approach to the types of sentence under discussion is to derive them from the possessive constructions in which the first nominative or accusative NP functions as the possessor and the second the possessed. That is, (5a) and (6a) derive from the structures underlying (7a) and (7b), respectively.

(7) a. na ii mali ka aphi-ta
   ‘My head hurts.’
 b. nae ka Yonshiki ii mali lil ttæli-at-ta
   ‘I hit Yonshigi’s head.’

Sentences (5a) and (6a) derive from the structures underlying (7a) and (7b) via the application of the rules Nominativization and Accusativization. These rules remove the possessor NP from the original possessive construction which is in the nominative or in the accusative, and then mark it with the nominative or with the accusative marker depending on what case the original possessive construction is in. Just like Topicalization, both Nominativization and Accusativization change the meaning of a sentence slightly. Namely, the derived nominative NP and accusative NP are associated with what Kuno (1973) calls ‘exhaustive listing’ reading. That is, (5a), for example, means something like ‘It is I and only I whose head hurts’.

Though their effects on the original structure are similar, Nominativization and Accusativization differ in their applicability. While Nominativization may apply to almost any kind of possessive construction, the applicability of Accusativization is severely restricted, applying only to the construction expressing the inalienable possession, the possessor-body part relationship, in particular. This is shown by the fact that while (8b’) is grammatical, (9b’) is not.

(8) a. na ii mali ka aphi-ta
   ‘My head hurts.’
 a’. nae ka mali ka aphi-ta
   ‘It is I whose head hurts.’
 b. i sansæpnim ii ceca ka chopmyøŋ ha-ta
   ‘This teacher’s disciple is smart.’
 b’. i sansæpnim i ceca ka chopmyøŋ ha-ta
   ‘It is this teacher whose disciple is smart.’
(9) a. Yŏnshiki ka na i i mali l i l ttaeli-ot-ta
   ‘Yŏnshigi hit my head.’
   
a’. Yŏnshiki ka na l i l mali l i l ttaeli-ot-ta
   ‘Yŏnshigi hit me in my head.’

b. Yŏnshiki ka i sansænim i i ceca l i l ttaeli-ot-ta
   ‘Yŏnshigi hit this teacher’s disciple.’
   
b’. *Yŏnshigi ka i sansænim i l i l ceca l i l ttaeli-ot-ta

Having discussed the basic problems associated with the types of sentences represented in (5) and (6), we are now in a position to discuss the grammatical relations of the nominative NPs and accusative NPs found in them. We will first examine whether the type of sentence in (5) in fact has two subjects.

   Earlier we explicated the notion of subjects in Korean syntax in terms of the rules of Reflexivization and Subject Honorification. By looking at how nominative NPs in a sentence pair such as (8b) and (8b’) behave with respect to the phenomena of Reflexivization and Subject Honorification we can determine the subjecthood of these NPs. Let us first examine the following pair of sentences:

(10) a. i sansænim i i atil i caki l i l cino han-ta
    ‘This teacher’s son hates himself.’

   b. i sansænim i atil i caki l i l cino han-ta
    ‘It is this teacher whose son hates himself.’

   In (10a) the reflexive form caki is coreferential with i sansænim i i atIL, indicating the subjecthood of this phrase. The question is what can be coreferential with caki in (10b). If the two nominative NPs i sansænim i and atil i were both subjects, we would expect both of them to be possible antecedents of the reflexive form. However, the only possible antecedent for caki in (10b) is atil i. That is, the nominative NP i sansænim i, though it is in the nominative case, does not have the property of the Korean subject. Notice that it is possible for caki to have two antecedents in a sentence. (11) below, for example, is ambiguous, caki being coreferential with either sansænim or Yŏnshiki.

(11) sansænim i Yŏnshiki eke caki i i paŋ e sə koppu-ha-ke ha-at-ta
    ‘The teacher made Yonshigi work in selfi’s/selfi’s room.’

   The fact that the derived nominative in (10b) does not function as an antecedent of the reflexive form indicates that it is not a subject. The same conclusion can be drawn with respect to the Subject Honorification phenomenon. Again, let us examine two sentences, one having the original possessive construction, and the other with a derived nominative NP.

(12) a. na i i əmni ka ka-si-at-ta
    ‘My mother went (honorific).’

   b. nəe ka əmni ka ka-si-at-ta
‘It is I whose mother went (honorable).’

We have said earlier that only subjects can trigger the Subject Honorification process, which attaches the suffix \textit{si}. In (12a), the \textit{na i\text{"i} om\text{"i}} refers to an appropriate person to whom the speaker can express his deference, and indeed in (12a) it is the speaker’s mother who is being respected by the speaker. Now the same interpretation still holds in (12b): It is by no means the case that the speaker is expressing his deference to himself. In fact, such a sentence is inappropriate, as (13) shows.

(13) *\textit{n\text{"ae} ka ka-si-at-ta}  
‘I went (honorable).’

The very fact that while (13) is inappropriate, (12b) is perfectly appropriate shows that while the \textit{n\text{"ae} ka} phrase in (13) functions as a subject, the same phrase in (12b) does not.

The situation we have been discussing is in a marked contrast with the situation in which a nominative NP is derived by Passivization. Passivization in Korean makes the direct object of an active sentence the subject of a derived passive sentence. This subject, unless topicalized, occurs in the nominative case, and it possesses the full property of the Korean subject. Thus, as (14c) shows, the derived subject of a passive sentence functions as a trigger for both Reflexivization and Subject Honorification.

(14) a. \textit{atil i sans\text{"e}nim il kalichi-at-ta}  
‘The son taught the teacher.’

b. \textit{sans\text{"e}nim i atil eke iih\text{"e}sa kalichi-oci-at-ta}  
‘The teacher was taught by the son.’

c. \textit{sans\text{"e}nim i caki i atil eke iih\text{"e}sa kalichi-oci-si-at-ta}  
‘The teacher was taught by his own son (honorable).’

At this point one may argue that what is involved here is a case of rule cyclicity. That is, the first nominatives in (10b) and (12b) are both subjects, but they are derived post cyclically, while the subject involved in a passive sentence is derived in the cycle. Further, Reflexivization and Subject Honorification are in the cycle; therefore, while both deep and cyclic subjects trigger these processes, post cyclic subjects do not. An argument like this is empty unless one first shows that the nominative NPs in (10b) and (12b) are indeed subjects. If these nominative NPs share certain subject properties but lack certain others, then one may attempt to account for the situation in terms of the notion of post-cyclic rules. However, in our case there is no basic subject property that is shared by the nominatives in question. It is not productive to simply assume that something is a subject, and then go on to argue why it is not like subject. Notice further that the burden of proof rests on those who claim that the nominative NPs in question are subjects. The only property that the nominative NPs under consideration share with \textit{some} subjects is that they are in the nominative case. However, as shown below, the mere fact that a particular NP is in the nominative is not a reliable indication for the conclusion.
Relational Grammar

that is a subject; all NPs that are in the nominative are not necessarily subjects, and all subjects are not necessarily in the nominative case.

One construction in which a nominative NP does not function as a subject is another construction which is also often interpreted as having double subjects. (15) is an example of this type of sentence.

(15) nāe ka sōnsaenim i musāp-ta
   'I am afraid of the teacher.'

Here the second NP is in the nominative, but it does not function as a subject; it fails to trigger Subject Honorification, the only trigger (and subject) being the first NP as shown below:

(16) a. sōnsaenim i kāe ka musāp-i-si-ta
   'The teacher is afraid of the dog.'

b. *kāe ka sōnsaenim i musāp-i-si-ta
   'The dog is afraid of the teacher.'

Though it is difficult to provide purely syntactic evidence showing that the second nominative NP in a sentence like (15) is a direct object, the fact that it does not trigger Subject Honorification at least indicates that it is not a subject.

One construction in which a subject may not occur in the nominative case involves predicates such as iss-ta 'have/possess' and philyo ha-ta 'need'. The following are typical sentences involving this construction:

(17) sōnsaenim eke ton i

   \[
   \{\begin{array}{c}
   \text{iss} \\
   \text{manh} \\
   \text{ap} \\
   \text{cōk} \\
   \text{philyo ha}
   \end{array}\}
   \] -ta

   'The teacher has/has a lot of/has no/has a little/needs money.'

First, the fact that in these sentences subjects occur in the dative case is not unique to Korean. Languages such as Japanese, Latin, and Russian also have dative subjects with some of these verbs in (17). This fact and the consideration that the native speaker feels these sentences with dative subjects to be less marked than with the corresponding forms with nominative subjects lead us to think that the sentences in (17) underlie the corresponding sentences with nominative subjects, e.g. sōnsaenim i ton i iss-ta 'It is the teacher who has money'. So far we have assumed that the dative NPs in the sentences under consideration are subjects without substantiating the assumption. The reason for this assumption comes from the fact that these dative subjects bear the properties of the Korean subject, triggering both Reflexivization and Subject Honorification, as shown

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5 This sentence is grammatical if it is interpreted as a scrambled version of (a), but it is unacceptable in the intended sense given in the translation.

6 Of course with these stative predicates, the most natural forms are the ones with a topic, e.g. sōnsaenim(eke) nin ton i iss-ta
below:

(18) ki salam eke eke ii sœŋkak i philyo ha-ta
    ‘That person needs his own idea.’

(19) sœnsœŋnimm eke ton i iss-i-si-ta
    ‘The teacher has money (honorific).’

Having shown that the so-called ‘double-subject’ construction does not in fact have two subjects and that all the nominative NPs are not necessarily subjects and all the subjects in Korean syntax do not necessarily occur in the nominative case, we will now turn to the so-called ‘double-object’ construction, represented by the sentences in (6). Here we want to investigate whether or not these sentences have two direct objects. A syntactic process that is useful in checking the direct-objecthood of an NP is Passivization. Unlike Japanese and some other languages, Korean allows only direct object to be made subject by Passivization. Thus while (20b), which has the original direct object as the subject, is grammatical, (20c), which has the original indirect object as the subject, is ungrammatical.

(20) a. nœ ka ai eke yœŋa lil kalichi-o-t-ta
    ‘I taught English to the child.’
  b. yœŋa ka ai eke (na eke iihœsœ) kalichi-aci-o-t-ta
    ‘English was taught to the child (by me).’
  c. *ai ka yœŋa lil (na eke iihœsœ) kalichi-aci-o-t-ta
    ‘The child was taught English (by me).’

In the case of a sentence with two accusative NPs like (21b), it turns out that the only possible candidate for becoming a subject via Passivization is the first, original possessor, NP, as while (21c) is grammatical, (21d) is not.

(21) a. nœ ka Yœnshiki ii tali lil cha-o-t-ta
    ‘I kicked Yonshigi’s leg.’
  b. nœ ka Yœnshiki lil tali lil cha-o-t-ta
    ‘I kicked Yonshigi in his leg.’
  c. Yœnshiki ka na eke iihœsœ tali lil cha-i-o-t-ta
    ‘Yonshigi was kicked in his leg by me.’
  d. *tali ka na eke iihœsœ Yœnshik il cha-i-o-t-ta

Thus, it is again not really the case that the so-called ‘double-object’ sentence has two direct objects. We will later touch upon another sentence type which has two accusative NPs but has only one direct object just as (21b).

We have now seen that the so-called ‘double-subject’ and ‘double-object’ constructions in fact have only one subject or object per sentence, contrary to what the terms imply. Perhaps the better terms for these constructions would be the ‘double-nominative’ and ‘double-accusative’ constructions. The erroneous terms such as the ‘double-subject’ and ‘double-object’ constructions arose because grammatical relations and cases were confused;
NPs in the nominative case were thought to be subjects, and NPs in the accusative case direct objects. A confusion of these notions, however, is particularly serious in the framework of relational grammar, as there are not only rules that can be best stated making reference to grammatical relations, but also those that are sensitive to cases (as opposed to grammatical relations). While Reflexivization and Subject Honorificiation are two representative phenomena that are best described in terms of grammatical relations, Quantifier Floating is one of the phenomena in Korean that refer to surface cases. By looking at the phenomena illustrated by sentences such as (10b), (12b), (16), (18), and (20), it is clear that the rules of Reflexivization and Subject Honorificiation should be stated by making reference to the subjecthood of an NP rather than in terms of the nominative case. We will now see that the rule of Quantifier Floating in Korean must be stated in terms of cases rather than grammatical relations.

A superficial observation of the data like the following suggests that Quantifier Floating (QF hereafter) in Korean is a straightforward case that can be described in terms of grammatical relations; namely in terms of a statement like: Only subjects and direct objects float quantifiers.7

(22) a. se ai ka ace wat-ta
   ‘Three children came yesterday.’
   b. ai ka ace ses wat-ta (QF from SU)

(23) a. nae ka se ai lil ace po-ot-ta
   ‘I saw three children yesterday.’
   b. nae ka ai lil ace ses po-ot-ta (QF from DO)

(24) a. nae ka se ai eke ace chaek il cu-ot-ta
   ‘I gave books to three children yesterday.’
   b. *nae ka ai eke ses ace chaek il cu-ot-ta (QF from IO)

(25) a. nae ka se ai ekesa ace chaek il pat-ot-ta
   ‘I received books from three children.’
   b. *nae ka ai ekesa ses ace chaek il pat-ot-ta (QF from a non-term)

In fact, it has been argued by Postal (1976) that a viable account for QF integrated within universal grammatical theory involves reference to grammatical relations. However, it is argued here that in Korean (and also in Japanese)8 the phenomenon of QF must be

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7 There are two additional quantifier-movement rules in Korean that are not treated here. One shifts a quantifier within a noun phrase, and thus the shifted quantifier occurs before a case particle, as in (i). The other one postposes a quantifier and copies the case of the original NP from which the postposed quantifier has come from, as in (ii). These two constructions have restrictions different from those involved in the phenomenon discussed here.

(i) a. se ai ka ace wat-ta ‘Three children came yesterday.’
   b. ai ses i ace wat-ta

(ii) a. se ai ka ace wat-ta ‘Three children came yesterday.’
    b. ai ka ses i ace wat-ta

accounted for in terms of cases as opposed to grammatical relations; that is, a more adequate account says that quantifiers can be launched off nominative NPs and accusative NPs (rather than subject NPs and direct object NPs). In order to see this, we must investigate those constructions in which grammatical relations and cases do not show the normal correspondences.

We have already seen in (17) one construction in which subjects do not occur in the nominative case. If the dative subjects in this type of construction launched quantifiers, then it would constitute evidence for a relational account. However, as seen below, a dative subject cannot launch quantifiers.

(26) a. i se salam eke ton i manh-ta
   ‘These three persons have a lot of money.’
   b. *i salam eke ses ton i manh-ta

Another construction in which a grammatical relation and a case do not show a normal correspondence is a ditransitive construction involving verbs such as kalichi-ta ‘to teach’ and moki-ta ‘to feed’. In this construction, indirect objects can be accusativized, as shown below:

(28) a. nre ka ai eke yapa lil kalichi-at-ta
   ‘I taught English to the child.’
   b. nre ka ai lil yapa lil kalichi-at-ta

With regard to the grammatical relation of an accusativized indirect object such as the ai lil ‘child-Acc’ phrase in (28b), we can apply Passivization to it to see whether it has become a direct object or still retains the original grammatical relation of indirect object. It is to be recalled from our earlier discussion that only direct objects can be passivized in Korean. So, if an accusativized indirect object could become a passive subject, then it is an indication of its being made a direct object by Accusativization. If, on the other hand, it failed to become a passive subject, then Accusativization affects only cases. (29b) suggests that the accusativized indirect object in (28b) remains an indirect object.9

(29) a. yapa ka ai eke (na eke iihaes) kalichi-oci-at-ta
   ‘English was taught to the child (by me).’
   b. *ai ka yapa lil (na eke iihaes) kalichi-oci-at-ta
   ‘The child was taught English (by me).’

Now, a relational account of the Korean QF phenomenon predicts that the accusativized indirect object NP cannot launch a quantifier, for it is still an indirect object. While our account in terms of cases predicts that the accusativized indirect object can float a quantifier, for although it is still an indirect object its case has been changed to the accusative case. The data given below again shows that our account is correct.

(30) a. nae ka se ai eke yapa lil kalichi-at-ta

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9 Here we see again that a possible candidate for being a ‘double-object’ sentence (e.g. (28b)) in fact has only one direct object.
Relational Grammar

'I taught English to three children.'
b. *næ ka ai eke ses yapa lil kalichi-at-ta (QF from Dat - IO)

(31) a. næ ka se ai lil yapa lil kalichi-at-ta
'I taught English to three children.'
b. næ ka ai lil ses yapa lil kalichi-at-ta (QF from Acc - IO)

As it was the case that accounting for Reflexivization and Subject Honorification in terms of cases is difficult, the above examination of Quantifier Floating in Korean shows that it is equally difficult to account for this phenomenon in terms of grammatical relations. Adequate analyses of all of these phenomena thus require a clear distinction between grammatical relations and cases. Both Korean and Japanese grammarians have had a tendency to determine the grammatical relation of an NP on the basis of a case in which that NP is in. Such a procedure has led to the invention of terms such as ‘double-subject’ and ‘double-object’ constructions. Our systematic investigation of grammatical relations in terms of the system of syntactic processes in Korean has revealed that these constructions, in fact, have no more than one subject or direct object per sentence. Our discussion has also pointed out the need to clearly distinguish grammatical relations and cases, for there are rules that are sensitive to grammatical relations (as opposed to cases) and those that must be stated in terms of cases (as opposed to grammatical relations).

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Department of Linguistics
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, California 90007
U.S.A.
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