Analytical evaluation of aspects of the most common models adopted globally to provide 'bilingual education', including to what extent one can justify using that term in relation to their methodologies and linguistic outcomes

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Introduction

This essay aims to analyse the so-called 'bilingual education' models, typologized by Colin Baker in 1993, and argue that the label is earned only when strong-form methodology is matched by the political and legal status and the population fit; methodology alone can disqualify a model but never confer the label unaided.

This will be done by examining some of the models proposed by Baker and Wright and analysing them against Ruiz's framework (1984), as well as the factors aforementioned that can influence the success or failure of each model.

Firstly, this essay will introduce the analytical frame and discuss the criteria and structure used by Baker and Wright, as well as Ruiz's perceptions of language (language as a problem, right or resource).

Secondly, it will study one monolingual model (or *non-form*, as called by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000)), two weak models, and four strong models and considering their methodology, aim and outcome, it will resolve whether the label "bilingual education" can be applied to them.

Finally, it will propose a counterargument and how it relates to the position this thesis is defending, and close the essay with a conclusion that supports the thesis aforementioned.

Analytical Frame

To answer the question that this essay proposes, it will use Baker's and Wright's models and Ruiz's perceptions of language.

The 10 models of bilingual education were mentioned for the first time in 1993 (Baker, 1993) and have changed since their first appearance. In the 5th edition, the submersion model was split into submersion and submersion with pull-out (Baker & Wright, 2011), and in the 7th the segregationist model was removed (Baker & Wright, 2021).

As mentioned previously, these models are divided into a three-tier structure: monolingual models (or *non-forms*), weak models and strong models. To make this categorization, Baker and Wright follow five main criteria: the aim of the model (assimilation or pluralism, (Bourhis et al., 1997)), the typical student population (majority-language or minority-language speakers), the language of instruction ratio (the time allocated to each language), the societal and individual goals, and, perhaps the most important, the linguistic outcome (monolingualism, limited/transitional bilingualism, additive bilingualism).

The failure of these models can originate at two levels: internally, when the methodology itself is designed with a subtractive or monolingual aim, or externally, when a methodology is designed for additive outcomes but undermined by external conditions such as political and legal status or the population itself.

These models can be analysed using Richard Ruiz's orientations, which were introduced in 1984. According to Ruiz, language can be seen in three ways: as a problem, a right, or a resource. Examples of these three approaches can be seen in the different models and will be presented in this essay. The submersion and transitional models treat the minority language (L1) as a problem, an obstacle to be eliminated. The immersion and the European schools models treat language as a resource: it is an asset that must be cultivated and invested in. Finally, in the heritage model, language is realised as a right, although only where statutory protection exists.

A. Monolingual Models (*non-forms*)

The monolingual models (or *non-forms*) treat language as a problem that must be resolved.

Monolingual and weak forms are more accurately described as *assimilationist assumptions* (Stubbs, 1991) or means by which minority groups are disempowered (Cummins, 1988, cited in Matson, 2019), as they facilitate subtractive bilingualism: the acquisition of a second language at the cost of the first language.

They aim for language attrition and assimilation, where the societal goal is the eventual erasure of minority languages.

A.1. Submersion

The basis of the submersion model's methodology is that the majority language (L2) is the sole medium of instruction. This model is also known as the *sink or swim* approach: "the student is thrown into the deep end of a [mainstream] pool and expected to learn to swim without the help of floats or special swimming lessons" (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 224). Dodson (1995) states that when this approach is applied, most of the students will drown. A variation of this model includes *pull-out* lessons, where the student is given individual support outside of the classroom.

The linguistic outcome is the shift of the student from the L1 to the L2. The end state is monolingualism or subtractive bilingualism, where the student learns the new language but at the cost of the old one.

At an individual level, specifically when applied to immigrants, this shift can happen over a three-generation period. The first generation speaks only the L1, the second generation starts the transition from the L1 to the L2, and by the third generation, the individuals are fully transitioned, and the L1 is forgotten.

At a societal level, when the L1 speakers are the indigenous population, this change happens through a four-stage process (Denison, 1977, cited in UWTSD, 2023). During stage 1, there is a dominance of the mother tongue (L1); stages 2 and 3 introduce a level of bilingualism, and at stage 4, a complete adoption of the second language occurs.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) refers to this phenomenon as *linguistic genocide*, as she argues that it is killing minority languages. A similar statement is also made by Rumbaut in 2009 when he affirms that:

> [...] along with the United Kingdom, the United States is a 'graveyard for languages because of its historical ability to absorb immigrants by the millions and extinguish their mother tongues within a few generations' (2009, quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 441)

Given all these reasons, the term *bilingual education* cannot be justified for this model. Even though two languages are involved, the students become monolingual and hence, the model fails to provide a bilingual outcome.

B. Weak Models

For different reasons, neither of the two models analysed in this section produces a full bilingual outcome in most cases. The most common result is a relative monolingualism or limited bilingualism. While the Transitional model fails by its own subtractive intent, the Mainstream with World Language Teaching model fails by deficiency (the amount of contact hours is insufficient to produce proficiency). The language is treated as a resource in theory, but the outcome differs.

B.1. Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE)

In this model, the students are taught in L1 first, and after a few years, they make a transition to L2. This transition can be called an *early exit* when it is done after two or three years, or a *late exit* when it happens after five or more years (Baker, 2001).

Nominally, the TBE treats the L1 as a resource (Ruiz, 1984) because it is given value as an instructional tool. However, this differs from the resource-orientation of strong models, as TBE's

valuation is conditional and time-limited, not intrinsic. Once the transition is completed and its instrumental purpose exhausted, this model has no further use for it, and hence the L1 is treated as a problem again. This reveals a distinction between how the model frames the language and what it does with it: the method is resource-oriented, but the aim remains problem-oriented.

The research that supports the effectiveness of this method compared to others like submersion (discussed in the previous section of this essay), dates back to 1987 (Casanova, 1991). The 1987 GAO (General Accounting Office) report, titled *Bilingual Education: A New Look at the Research Evidence,* found that the majority of experts (8 out of 10) disagreed with the Department of Education's assessment that there was insufficient evidence to support the use of native language to help students learn English.

Despite the GAO's defence of this model, it is considered a weak one, as its aim is still subtractive bilingualism: the L1 is used as a temporary bridge to facilitate assimilation. Baker (2017, p. 206) uses, once again, the swimming pool analogy to talk about this model: "[the TBE] is a brief, temporary swim in one pool until the child is perceived as capable of moving to the mainstream pool".

Even when referring to the L2, the linguistic outcome is still very weak, as there is a significant gap between functional (BICS) and academic (CALP) proficiency, as distinguished by Cummins (1979). The functional everyday conversation fluency (also called BICS, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) can be achieved within two years. However, the high-level language required to handle a complex school curriculum (Named by Cummins, CALP — Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) takes five to seven years to develop. The oral fluency (BICS) can give a misleading impression of the students' cognitive ability (CALP), which can lead to a premature transition and academic failure.

These reasons, among others, are why this model is considered "remedial, compensatory, and segregated" by some scholars like Ovando and Combs, and García and Kleifgen (2018, cited in Wright & Baker, 2025).

B.2. Mainstream with World Language Teaching

The Mainstream with World Language Teaching Model (before 2017 called Mainstream with Foreign Language Teaching) is probably the most widespread model nowadays across European countries. All the education is taught in the first language, and the L2 is taught as a subject, typically for 2.5 hours a week (Wright & Baker, 2025). The *drip-feed* metaphor is sometimes used

for this model, implying that the contact with the language is like a drop dripping from a tap. However, this metaphor is not correct as the drip-feeding is continuous, and contact with L2 in this model is not.

In the UK, this model was presented for the first time after the 1988 Education Reform Act, which introduced a standardised National Curriculum. This curriculum made the study of a second language mandatory for everyone under the age of 16, and classified the included languages in two distinct schedules. *Schedule 1* consisted of the working languages of the European Community, out of which schools were mandated to offer at least one. *Schedule 2* included 11 other optional languages (Stubbs, 1991). According to the 1987 Language Survey conducted by the ILEA (*Inner London Education Authority*) (Stubbs, 1991), 23% of the ILEA population used a language different from English at home, representing a total of 170 languages. These figures indicate that the number of languages offered was insufficient. Additionally, the schedule system was compared by Stubbs to a caste system, where the different categories signalled the status of languages.

This classification is not in place anymore, and schools are allowed to teach “any modern or ancient foreign language” at key stage 2 (ages 7 to 11) and “any modern foreign language” at key stage 3 (ages 11 to 14) (Department of Education, 2013). The learning of a second language stopped being mandatory in 2004 for students over the age of 14 (key stages 4 and above). This led to a big decrease in the number of students who continue studying a second language: in 2025, only 6% of the GCSE students and 2.8% of the A-Level students undertook a foreign language exam. Out of those, only 8% of GCSE students and 30% of A-Level students chose a language other than Spanish, French or German (Joint Council for Qualifications, 2025).

These numbers are not surprising considering the ineffectiveness of this model. Despite its political appeal and popularity with parents, the contact with the second language is too infrequent to produce real proficiency. This model tends to work only when motivation is high: English in Scandinavian countries, where it is seen as essential for the job market, is a case in point (Wright & Baker, 2025).

After observing these two models, it can be argued that the use of the label bilingual education is more political tokenism than proof of successful outcome. The Transitional model produces subtractive rather than additive results, and the Mainstream with World Language Teaching model is too weak to create the necessary results.

C. Strong Models

The models found in the strong group treat, for the first time in this analysis, the minority languages as a right or a resource rather than a problem, and their aim is functional bilingualism, concurring with the label mentioned in the title of this essay.

Some of the metaphors used to explain the models of this category and their importance are the mosaic or quilt, and the language garden.

The mosaic (or quilt) metaphor was originally used to talk about multiculturalism in Canada (Foster, 1926, cited in Day, 1989, p.16), and it compares the different cultures or languages to different pieces of ceramics (or fabrics) that are glued (or sewn) together to create a new and beautiful whole. It was especially used to describe Canada's policy of multiculturalism and multilingualism in comparison with the North American melting pot approach, where all the cultures and languages dissolve into a monoculture (Genesee, 1988). This metaphor was applied to languages and popularised in 1984 by Richard Ruiz when he introduced the language-orientation framework and the concept of languages as a resource.

Ofelia García (1992, cited in Wright & Baker, 2025) presents this multiculturalism as a garden: languages, like flowers, are necessary for diversity in different shapes, sizes and colours. García argues that if there were only one type of flower in a garden, it would be "dull and boring". She also affirms that proper maintenance of the garden is important to ensure that the *delicate* minority flowers are not overtaken by the *strong species* (majority languages). As an aside, Nettle and Romaine (2000, quoted in Baker, 2001, p.51) go one step further and argue that cultural diversity and biological diversity are inseparable.

All of the strong models are methodologically designed to produce additive bilingualism. However, their success is fundamentally conditional upon an additive context and an environment that supports such development. According to Brisk (1998, quoted in Baker, 2001, p. 255), five situational factors affect "both the standards reached by bilingual students and the effectiveness of bilingual schools": linguistic, cultural, economic, political and social. This will be observed more clearly when analysing the cases of Macedonia and Wales.

C.1. Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE)

In this model, both languages are used to teach, and it has two variations. In the two-way programs, the language-majority and language-minority students are in the same classroom. Both groups must be roughly equal in number; if not, it should lean toward more minoritised-

language students. In the one-way programs, all the students share the same language background.

The languages can be divided by time. The two most common options in the United States are the 50:50 and the 90:10 methodologies (Wright & Baker, 2025). The 50:50 option uses an equal amount of both languages from the beginning of the students' education and throughout. The 90:10 method starts with immersion in the second language, followed by a gradual transition to a more balanced classroom in later years. This method bases its success on the *Interdependence Theory* (also known as the *Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis*), developed by Cummins in 1978 which suggests that:

> [...] a child's second language competence is partly dependent on the level of competence already achieved in the first language. The more developed the first language, the easier it will be to develop the second language (Cummins, 1978 cited in Baker, 2001, p. 169)

Another way of dividing time is by subjects, with different subjects being taught in different languages. This approach is used in the Gómez and Gómez model (Gómez et al., 2005, cited in Wright & Baker, 2025). This can be an issue because subjects like history, geography, and social studies require more vocabulary and a higher language level than science and technology (UWTSD, 2023).

Another concern, this time relating to the entire model, is the issue Valdés raised in 1997 and revisited in 2018 (Wright & Baker, 2025). She describes how in situations of power imbalance, where middle-high class white English speakers and low-income Spanish-speakers are present, the Latino Spanish speakers can be exploited as a language resource while English speakers, having achieved a Spanish proficiency, gain an advantage in a globalised job market.

Despite these issues, this model is capable of earning the *bilingual education* label. However, the results vary by context, and the methodological soundness does not guarantee the outcome, as observed in Macedonia in 1999. This case is an example of a situation where this program was used as a tool to effect social, cultural, economic or political changes (Wright & Baker, 2025).

This Dual Language program was established in Kumonovo (Macedonia) just before the war in Kosovo in 1999. This program aimed to bring together children from different nationalities and backgrounds to promote the understanding of each other's cultures and languages and build a shared community that could prevent future conflict (Tankersley, 2001). Despite the success of the program in building a community, true bilingualism was not achieved. Many factors played

an important role in that outcome, such as the number of students of both cultures, the lack of Albanian knowledge by the teachers, or the lack of Albanian learning material. However, Tankersley (2001) proposes a different theory:

> Other explanations had to do with the power structure associated with the use of language in society such as Macedonian being the official language of the country and the Albanian children intuitively tried to learn it and the Macedonian teachers were dominant and that may have been the reason that the language was dominant (Tankersley, 2001, p. 119).

Regardless of that lack of bilingualism and biliteracy, which would have been the desired result, the program is considered a success thanks to the psychological effect. In such a transformative context, the individuals developed the ability to build cross-ethnic friendships and the capacity to resolve interpersonal conflicts peacefully.

C.2 Heritage Language Education

The purpose of the Heritage Language Education is the preservation of an endangered and minoritised language. When referring to these languages, it is important to use these expressions, as opposed to *minority* and *in danger* languages. A language has been *minoritised* when something has been done to it by a majority: there is a historical and political dimension that the word *minority* does not capture. Something similar happens to the word *heritage* itself: it is problematic as it refers to the past, which can frame the language as backwards-looking.

The language is seen as a resource to keep and, if it is granted statutory protection, it is also seen as a right. As it was detailed in the previous model, this lack of statutory protection was one of the reasons that prevented bilingualism from being achieved in Macedonia.

The aim of this model can be static maintenance, which maintains the students' knowledge without improving it, or developmental/enrichment maintenance, which aims to improve the students' skills. However, in both cases, both languages (the majority and the minoritised one) are used as media of instruction.

When the methodology and the external factors align, the linguistic outcomes of this model are an additive bilingualism and the protection of a language. At a societal level, it can be observed that the language shift developed by Denison and previously mentioned in the monolingual forms' section can occur in the opposite direction, and go from the complete adoption of a second language to bilingualism and the re-adoption of the mother tongue. Additionally, this could also lead to the preservation of heritage that otherwise could have been lost forever.

The closest example of Heritage Education to the United Kingdom is Wales. The schools in Wales are categorised according to the percentage of use of Welsh, which is the minoritised language. In many schools, Welsh is dominant in the early stages, involving an early immersion for the non-Welsh-speaking students (UWTSD, 2023). After this immersion, the students are mixed, and both languages are used more evenly. According to Hickey (2001, quoted in UWTSD, 2023, p. 40-41), this "presents both an opportunity and a challenge":

While providing L2 speakers with an opportunity to interact with native-speaker peers, it provides a challenge to educators to support and enrich the L1 language skills of the native-speakers.

This is not the only obstacle present in this situation. While the overt policies clearly state a promotion of the Welsh language, the covert situation (how it is handled in practice) is very different, and three other challenges can be observed. Perhaps the most significant is that, although a statutory protection exists, Welsh's legal status is recognised only in Wales, which is the sole instance of language-rights explicit legislation in the UK.

In addition, given the lack of proper methodology and resources, many schools continue teaching Welsh using the Mainstream with World Language Teaching model, which, as stated previously, is not efficient due to the amount of time that students spend with the second language. In those places where Welsh is used in a dual language model, diglossia is one of the main risks: students often see English as the *cooler* and *more modern* language, while Welsh is presented as something old and outdated (Wright & Baker, 2025).

Many policies and documents that set high expectations have been developed over the years, like the Welsh Language Act 1967, which asserted the equal validity of English and Welsh, or the *Iaith Pawb*, *A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales*, developed in 2003, whose goal is to achieve a:

> [...] truly bilingual nation [...] where people can choose to live their lives through the medium of either Welsh or English and where the presence of the two languages is a visible and audible source of pride and strength (Welsh Assembly Government, 2003).

However, despite the existence of these statements and the fact that Welsh-medium education is cited as a "major engineer of attempted language reversal" (Baker, 1990, quoted in UWTSD, 2023, p. 42), the necessary systemic changes that would support this in practice have not yet been implemented.

C.3. Immersion Bilingual Education

The word *immersion*, referring to languages, was used for the first time during WWII. It alluded to the intensive language programs that the US troops received before going abroad (Wright and Baker, 2025). The Immersion Education model was developed in Canada in the 1960s. The separate coexistence of French and English Canadians (as Hugh MacLennan termed it in his novel of the same name: *Two Solitudes* (MacLennan, 1945)) led to an informal meeting between a group of parents concerned about their children's limited competence in French (Genesee, 1988). The existing method was Mainstream Education with Foreign Language Teaching, and despite 12 years of L2 instruction, students were still inadequately prepared to use the language outside of an educational environment. The parents sought assistance from experts, including Dr Wallace Lambert at McGill University. In September 1965, the school district agreed to set up an experimental kindergarten immersion class for one year only. The quota of 26 children was filled in 5 minutes, and the experiment was deemed a success.

Nowadays, the methodology of the immersion model can vary depending on the age at which the students start and the amount of time spent in immersion. Because the children were immersed at kindergarten age, the Canadian model was termed early immersion. When the students start at 9-10 years old, it is referred to as delayed or middle immersion, and late immersion when starting in secondary school.

Total immersion happens when the students receive 100% immersion in the second language (reducing to 80% after 2 or 3 years and to 50% at the end of junior schooling), and partial immersion when the immersion stays at 50% during the infant and junior schooling (Wright & Baker, 2025). When more than one non-native language is used, it is referred to as double immersion. This is an effective and feasible model for groups interested in revitalising heritage languages while acquiring an additional L2. Some examples of this model are the French and Hebrew programs in Canada, and the Ukrainian Canadians.

The success of this program can be seen in things like the attitudes of the immersion students toward French Canadians (which tend to be more positive than those of non-immersion students), or the greater willingness of the immersion students to use French when called upon, even though in general, they do not actively seek out contact with French Canadians or opportunities to use French (Genesee, 1988).

The expected linguistic outcomes of this model are bilingualism and biliteracy. The proficiency of the immersion students is non-native-like, but they achieve very high levels of communicative

ability. Even the below-average students achieve the same levels of proficiency in English reading, spelling, vocabulary and writing as their below-average counterparts in English-only programs (Genesee, 1976, cited in Genesee, 1988).

C.4. European Schools Model

The European Schools model is not a single model, but a combination of maintenance, transitional and enrichment programs. The European Schools are multicultural establishments where more than two languages function as the medium of instruction. In this case, the label *bilingual education* understates what these institutions actually achieve.

Founded in 1953 for the children of civil servants working for one of the supranational European institutions (while also admitting non-civil-servant children if space is available), the schools aim to integrate children from different backgrounds into a new identity, and to make them aware of their common European heritage (Baetens-Beardsmore, 1993).

According to the website of the *Ecole Européenne Luxembourg I* (2025), the first official European School, their objectives are:

> Educated side by side, untroubled from infancy by divisive prejudices, acquainted with all that is great and good in the different cultures, it will be borne in upon them as they mature that they belong together. Without ceasing to look to their own lands with love and pride, they will become in mind Europeans, schooled and ready to complete and consolidate the work of their fathers before them, to bring into being a united and thriving Europe (Decombis, 1953-1960, quoted in *Ecole Européenne Luxembourg I*, 2025).

In these establishments, the L1 provides the foundations and is maintained throughout, though its relative significance decreases over time. In the meantime, L2 is introduced as a subject from the beginning and gradually takes over. An L3 is added as a compulsory subject in the 8th grade (Baetens-Beardsmore, 1993).

Aside from multilingualism and multiliteracy, other outcomes can also be observed. Interviews reveal that all pupils are willing to try out a weaker language and that no one mocks linguistic shortcomings. Additionally, 90% of all students attending European Schools have obtained certification leading to higher education (Baetens-Beardsmore, 1993). The efficiency of this model, compared with the Canadian immersion model, is considerable: comparable French proficiency scores are reached by European School children after approximately 1,300 classroom contact hours, versus the approximately 4,500 contact hours for Canadian immersion children (Baetens-Beardsmore, 1993).

The European Schools model works as a prestigious *linguistic market* specifically designed to create institutionalised *linguistic capital* (terms coined by Bourdieu in 1991). By mastering high-status languages and earning the European Baccalaureate, students gain a distinction that acts as a profitable commodity in the global economy. This positions them as a supranational elite capable of operating in a globalised, multilingual marketplace.

Bilingual Education as an Institutional Category

A counterargument to this essay might state that *bilingual education* is a legitimate label that works regardless of the linguistic outcome: a model qualifies because it is institutionally funded, staffed, and administered as such, not because of what it linguistically produces. The taxonomy of the term itself does not distinguish a program that succeeds from one that does not. It can be observed that even Wright & Baker themselves support this argument by cataloguing their 10 models under this label despite their different outcomes, as it can be seen in their book *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (Wright & Baker, 2025).

If it is accepted that the label is assigned on administrative grounds and not the linguistic outcome, then the label ceases to function as an analytically meaningful term and becomes a mere bureaucratic convention. In that paradigm, the classification discussed could be applied to all the situations mentioned in this essay, despite the result, the societal context or any other external factors:

- In Macedonia's dual-language model, despite a 50:50 input, Macedonian became the preferred language for all children because it was the official language of power. The outcome contradicts the model itself, and the label is still applied.
- In the Welsh Heritage Education model, there is a discrepancy between the overt rhetoric (policy documents that praise diversity) and the covert expectations (actual classroom practices that prioritise the majority language), yet the institution retains the *bilingual education* label regardless of this gap.
- The success of the Canadian program depends on four factors: the status of the children, the institutional support, the parental and students' values and an additive bilingual environment (Genesee, 1988). Because of the lack of that additive context, the English immersion for French-speaking Canadians has not been recommended. When the population is *flipped*, the context becomes subtractive: introducing too much English too soon risks overwhelming the native language, producing a language shift, and an eventual erasure of French, rather than balanced bilingualism. The same

methodology with the population flipped would produce a completely different outcome.

- The European Schools model cannot be fully analysed because the population attending these institutions is atypically homogeneous in socioeconomic status. This complicates any attempts to attribute its success solely to pedagogical methodology.

These examples and counterarguments show that the term *bilingual education* can be used in different ways: either as an umbrella term for any program involving more than one language, or as an evaluative term applied only when outcomes match the methodology's aim. This essay argues that it should be used for the second purpose.

Conclusion

The label *bilingual education* is applied uniformly across all three model categories despite them resting on structurally different methodologies and producing different outcomes, which is why the term functions more as a policy shorthand rather than as a methodological description.

Across Baker's and Wright's typology, the term *bilingual education* only survives when other criteria like methodology, population, or political/legal status align. In all other cases, it is closer to an aspirational description than to the real outcome. This raises the question of why a term with no consistent methodological referent persists in policy and institutional use. It is politics, and not methodology, that decides what gets called *bilingual education*. Casanova's account of US bilingual policy demonstrates this pattern directly: "From its conception then, bilingual education was a political artifact; born not of knowledge, or even of expressed need, but of political maneuvering" (Casanova, 1991, p. 16).

This critique applies mostly to weak forms, where the label functions as political cover for a subtractive aim. Strong forms do not usually fail from political misdirection, but because of the absence of the conditions that their methodologies require. Even the success of strong models that justify their name depends on external factors.

After all the models and arguments presented in this essay, the best closure is the statement often attributed to Cazden & Snow (1990, quoted in UWTSD, 2023, p. 7) that describes "bilingual education" as "a simplistic label for a complex phenomenon".

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