

Encouraging Incidental English Communication in Japanese English Classes, Part 1: Student Attitudes

Anthony Sellick ^(a)

James Bury ^(b)

Kyoko Yamamoto ^(c)

Ai Watanabe ^(d)

Introduction

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture (MEXT) English curriculum for junior and senior high schools that began to be implemented in the 2012-2013 academic year has a stipulation that English lessons should, in principle, be taught in English (MEXT, 2011). This means that teachers will be required to increase the proportion of English used in their teaching, with the intention that lessons eventually be taught solely in English. This monolingual approach to EFL teaching has traditionally gained much support, suggesting that the language being taught (L2) should be the only means of communication in the classroom as interference from the students' first language (L1) hampers L2 acquisition (Swan, 1985). Krashen (1981) argues that people learning foreign

languages follow the same route as in the acquisition of their L1, and hence that the use of the L1 in the learning process should be minimized. Shimizu (2006) reports that the monolingual approach to language acquisition has received widespread support in Japan, especially in the English conversation classroom.

However, there is also significant research that challenges the monolithic, monolingual approach (Atkinson, 1987; Auerbach, 1993; Cook, 2001), increasingly demonstrating the role the L1 plays in the EFL classroom and criticizing the monolingual approach as pedagogically inflexible and inappropriate. Medgyes (1994, p.66) claims it is “untenable on any grounds, be they psychological, linguistic or pedagogical.” Nation (2003) argues that excluding, and therefore degrading, the students’ L1 has a harmful psychological effect, and that this is especially relevant in culturally homogeneous environments (Cole, 1998).

Students who do not understand can become frustrated and resentful of the various aspects of the language classroom, diminishing the quality of learning for themselves and potentially for other students. Krashen (1981) argues that when a learner is tense, affective filters are raised, which block out the available input, especially in cultures where students have a very high uncertainty avoidance, such as in Japan. Hence, L1 use can help to lower affective filters and reduce students’ stress.

Willis (1981, p.xiv.) emphasizes the teachers’ role in maintaining the L2 as the language of instruction and communication, but also argues that “occasionally the L1 may still be useful.” Turnbull (2001) states that teachers should promote maximum use of the L2, but also acknowledges that the L1 and the L2 can be used together in the language classroom. Shimizu (2006) indicates that while students realize the importance of L2 exposure, they place greater importance on accurate understanding

which in some instances can only be gained through the use of the L1. Consequently, while this paper promotes the use of the L2 when using incidental classroom language, it also recognizes that sole use of the L2 is unrealistic, and can even be counter-productive.

In the foreign language classroom, both learning and acquisition, the conscious and unconscious development of knowledge, occur. Salaberri (1995, p.3) states that “the process of acquisition is particularly important in primary education as young learners do not yet have the levels of cognitive development to analyze the foreign language in a way that secondary and adult learners do.” Thus, greater exposure to the L2 provides learners with an opportunity to understand a higher level of language than they can produce.

Krashen’s (1981) input hypothesis states that a crucial factor for L2 acquisition is comprehensible input. Optimal acquisition occurs when the student can understand most of the input, while being challenged by some new vocabulary, illustrated as “i + 1,” where “i” represents the level of attainment by the student and “1” represents material that is just beyond their current competence. Salaberri (1995, p.3) states that “in the early stages of teaching a foreign language, it is important not to force the learners to give verbal responses which are beyond their productive competence.” However, comprehension of receptive language can be shown non-verbally. This paper proposes that one way to give students a significant amount of comprehensible input is through classroom management and the use of incidental classroom language, as it is receptive and develops comprehension of language in context.

Salaberri (1995) claims that both the L1 and the L2 are learned in context, and that teachers should use classroom language which is highly contextualized and closely linked with routines and everyday classroom

activities. This allows students to use appropriate language that can be learned through repetition and without extensive explanation in a defined context.

Meyer (2008, p.149) states that “using the L2 for classroom management in a planned and consistent way can afford a good opportunity for the students to learn through meaning focused input.” Burden (2001) claims that by using the L2 in this way it is being demonstrated that English is not just a series of activities for language practice, but it can also be an effective tool for communication. It is also meaningful to students as it is used to set up and carry out classroom activities and can be used in everyday contexts.

Furthermore, Burden (2001) suggests that there is: (1) a tendency for student dissatisfaction over L1 use when giving instructions and explanations, and (2) that there should be an emphasis on language learning through communication. Burden (2001) further states that as students benefit from incidental classroom language, teachers must have more confidence in the students’ ability to comprehend and participate in these communication exchanges. However, Ellis (1994), Cook (2001), Richards and Rodgers (2001) and Widdowson (2003) claim that although exposure to the target language can ensure success, it may not work in every classroom.

Burden (2001) states that Japanese students are accustomed to English courses delivered in their L1 as it is believed that the curriculum can be taught more efficiently in Japanese, with Murphey and Sasaki (1998) reporting that English use decreases as students progress through junior to senior high school. This leads to the belief that students feel they have not fully understood unless a translation in Japanese is given, that is, “using only the target language is a violation of the known classroom culture”

(Murphey & Sasaki, 1998, p.22) .

Students’ previous learning experiences lead them to assume that a particular kind of instruction is best (Lightbrown & Spada, 1999) and Harbord (1992) shows that if students are unfamiliar with a new approach, it may cause considerable stress and demotivation. It is therefore imperative that the students accept the use of the L2 in the classroom as normal and that an L2 is not only a subject to be studied, but also a means of communication from their first lesson.

In view of this, in this paper we propose the introduction of a corpus of classroom English that Japanese teachers of English (hereafter JTEs) will use with first year students. As the students in the first year progress, the same set of language will continue to be used and expanded upon in each successive academic year. For lower level students, it is proposed that the JTEs use the ‘sandwich’ method of code-switching (L2 – L1 – L2) , eventually using only the L2 when basic expressions have been learned. Meyer (2008, p.157) states that the primary role of the L1 “is to supply scaffolding to lower affective filters by making the L2 and the classroom environment comprehensible” , and the ‘sandwich’ method is an effective way of doing this (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009) .

English is the most commonly taught foreign language in Japan. However, despite it being a core subject, the majority of students make slow progress in acquiring English proficiency, especially conversational skills (Shimizu, 2006) . As a result, English education and JTEs have been criticized, and private English conversation schools that operate a monolingual policy and assert that conversational English should be taught by native English speakers only have increased.

However, Medgyes (1994) argues that native speakers often do not have a complete understanding of their students’ backgrounds and

aspirations while the local teacher possesses “gut feelings based on [their] comprehensive familiarity with the students’ linguistic, cultural and personal backgrounds” (p.65). JTEs have succeeded in learning English as a foreign language and thus have experience and direct insight into the learning process.

Phillipson (1992) suggests that the view of the ideal teacher of English as being a native speaker has hindered the development of local resources and reinforced certain inequalities. Furthermore, Phillipson (1992) claims that many of the qualities which are seen to make native speakers better qualified as English teachers can be gained through training and that “non-native speakers possess certain qualifications which native speakers may not as they have gone through the laborious process of acquiring English as a second language and have insight into the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners” (p.195). Hornberger and Hardman’s study (1994) illustrates the importance of a shared background between teachers and learners, suggesting that the reinforcement of cultural identity is critical for language acquisition. In the context of ESL, Auerbach (1993) claims that:

If a central tenet of state-of-the-art second language and literacy theory is the importance of contextualizing instruction around real, meaningful usage centered on content that is significant in learners’ lives, who is better qualified to draw out, understand, and utilize learners’ experiences than those who themselves have had similar experiences?

This study draws on this view and argues that the same is true in the EFL context, with students overcoming barriers such as high uncertainty avoidance and affective filters.

Consequently, recognizing that the sole use of the L2 is unrealistic, and can even be counter-productive, a way that would allow JTEs to promote

the use of the L2 (English) as required, while also allowing them to retain use of the L1 (Japanese) as appropriate was sought. Increasing the use of incidental classroom language by both JTEs and students seemed an ideal initial target.

In this series of two papers, we describe a case study conducted at a private junior high school in the Kanto area of Japan in which the JTEs had agreed to employ, emphasize, and encourage the use of a corpus of lexis for incidental classroom English with their first year students. In this first part, we examine the attitudes towards incidental classroom English use by teachers presented by the students.

Research Questions

The following research question will be addressed: Does encouraging JTEs to use more incidental classroom English result in an increase in positive attitudes towards English lessons and using English among the students?

Participants

The school: The participating school is a private junior high school located in the Kanto area of Japan. The school is a boarding school and the students come from families that are classified as A or B according to the NRS Social Classification system (Symbols of Success (A) via MOSAIC), i.e. they are primarily from middle and upper middle class families.

As with many schools, the students are grouped into homerooms, but are then sub-divided and mixed into classes S, MA, MB, MC, GA, GB, and GC, based on ability as assessed from entry test scores obtained for

each subject; class S represents the highest level, and class GC the lowest. After each round of regular testing (mid-term and end of term tests), the students are re-assessed and can be re-assigned to a different class. Consequently, there can be considerable movement of students between classes. For first year students the first re-assignment takes place after the mid-term tests during their first term.

Group 1 consisted of 165 first year junior high school students (103 male, 62 female, modal age 13) from the April 2010 intake.

Group 2 consisted of 157 first year junior high school students (91 male, 66 female, modal age 13) from the April 2011 intake.

The students' experience of English prior to entry into the school ranged from none to considerable.

Methodology

A mixed methods quasi-experimental approach was applied in order to ensure that the data collected was of sufficient breadth and depth.

Ideally, the students would be randomly allocated to different classes, some having the intervention, and others having no change to their teaching style, thus providing a control group. However, given that in the school in question students are regularly re-organized across classes, this was deemed impractical. Instead, data was collected from the 2010-2011 Year One intake in order to provide a comparison group for the intervention group, the 2011-2012 Year One intake.

In order to provide a meaningful basis of comparison, the two groups used the same textbook (Columbus 21, Book 1), followed the same syllabus, and were taught by the same JTEs.

The first stage of the research was to agree a corpus of classroom

English that the Year One JTEs would adopt and encourage the use of with the intervention group through the academic year. An incidental classroom English corpus consisting of 56 classroom English items was jointly developed by the authors and the JTEs, and included a range of receptive items, such as 'Open your books,' and productive items, such as, 'How do you spell dog?' The Group 2 students were issued with a worksheet providing this incidental classroom English corpus with Japanese translations. The necessity for the JTEs to use this corpus during lessons and for them to encourage the intervention group students to use this corpus was stressed.

In order to ascertain students' attitudes to the use of incidental classroom English among students of both groups, a purpose-written questionnaire inspired by Salaberri (1995) was developed (Appendices A and B). The questionnaire consisted of 14 items: 12 five-point Likert-scale items, which were positively and negatively keyed to reduce the central response tendency and acquiescence bias, and two dichotomous (Yes/No) items. All items were written in Japanese, and data collection was conducted anonymously during the students' regular afternoon homeroom classes during the third term of the academic year for both groups.

Ethical Considerations

It should be noted that the students in this school are surveyed each term on many areas of their school life, and that the school has an active policy of encouraging research that might be of benefit to the school and students. Furthermore, it is not unusual for lessons to be recorded or filmed for the purposes of teacher assessment, marketing, and so on.

Consequently, the data collection methods should not have seemed out of place to either students or teachers who have been acculturated to the school.

All data collected was anonymous in nature. That is, the authors had no knowledge of which student produced which data. In order to ensure that consent to participate in the research was fully informed, the following steps were taken:

- i. An initial discussion with the relevant JTEs to explain the purpose of the research and obtain their agreement to participate,
- ii. Approaching the school senior management with the participating JTEs in order to obtain permission to conduct the research,
- iii. Once permission had been obtained, sending letters to the parents of all current and new Year One students to inform them of the purposes of the research, the data to be collected and to provide them with the option of withdrawing their child from the research,
- iii. To remind the students, before distribution of the surveys, that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they need not complete nor return the survey if they did not wish to take part,
- iv. Once the research had been completed, and the data analyzed, a feedback session was held with the participating JTEs to discuss the results and any implications they may have for teaching policy in the school. Subsequent to this, a feedback session was held with the students to feedback the results of their participation.

Results

In order to determine if any differences between the two groups were significant (i.e. that they were unlikely to be the result of chance),

a comparison of means was conducted on the two groups' data for questionnaire items Q1-Q3 and Q5-Q13 using independent two-sample t-tests. For Q4 and Q14, which were dichotomous in nature, t-tests were not suitable, so Fisher' s Exact tests were conducted instead. The null hypothesis for each test was that there were no significant differences between the scores for the Group 1 students and the scores for the Group 2 students. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2, below.

Table 1. Questionnaire item mean scores and p-values for Groups 1 and 2 students (figures primarily rounded to two significant figures)

	Mean Scores Group 1	Standard Deviation Group 1	Mean Scores Group 2	Standard Deviation Group 2	p-value	Effect Size (d)
Q1	3.50	0.95	3.67	0.87	0.12	—
Q3	4.22	1.19	4.63	0.76	0.0004	0.41
Q4	2.46	1.05	2.27	1.00	0.06	—
Q5	3.37	1.19	3.35	1.22	0.91	—
Q6	3.12	1.08	3.38	0.98	0.04	0.25
Q7	3.03	1.23	3.55	1.16	0.0001	0.43
Q8	3.69	1.02	3.92	0.88	0.03	0.23
Q9	3.26	1.16	3.75	1.05	0.0002	0.44
Q10	2.78	0.96	3.16	0.87	0.0012	0.4
Q11	2.92	1.01	3.05	0.89	0.3	—
Q12	3.79	1.26	3.7	1.32	0.37	—
Q13	3.01	1.13	3.38	0.98	0.01	0.34

Notes: p-values represent the probability that the results obtained are due to chance effects. Effect sizes represent the estimated magnitude of the relationship between the variables.

Table 2. Questionnaire item scores and Fisher' s Exact test p-values for Group 1 and 2 students

	Group 1 (Yes)	Group 1 (No)	Group 2 (Yes)	Group (No)	p-value
Q2	72	82	114	39	0.0001
Q14	142	17	135	14	0.85

The statistical analysis showed that there were differences between Groups 1 and 2 which were significant to the 0.05 level (i.e. that the probability of obtaining the same results by chance effects is 5% or less) or better for questionnaire items 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 13.

These results would seem to imply that there were significant differences in the perceptions of and attitudes towards incidental classroom English between Group 1 and Group 2 students.

Specifically, the Group 2 students were significantly more likely to recall their JTEs introducing themselves in English (Q2), to state that their teachers used English to open and close the class (Q3), to state that their teachers used English to set up activities (Q6), to state that their JTEs asked them simple questions in English (Q7), to agree that it is important for JTEs to maximize their communication in English with students (Q8), to agree that it is important for their JTEs to demonstrate their ability in English (Q9), to feel good when their JTEs spoke to them in English (Q10), and to state that the use of incidental classroom English increased their confidence in speaking English (Q13).

However, no significant differences were found between Group 1 and Group 2 students' perceptions of and attitudes towards classroom English for questionnaire items Q1, Q4, Q5, Q11, Q12 and Q14. In other words, there was no significant differentiation between the two groups of students in their perceptions of how much English their JTEs used during class (Q1), on how frequently their JTEs gave simple instructions requiring non-verbal responses (Q4), on how frequently their JTEs gave basic instructions requiring simple verbal responses in English (Q5), to feel good when they speak to their JTEs in English (Q11), to consider the English ability of their JTEs to be high (Q12), and on the proportion of students wanting to be able to speak English as well as their JTEs (Q14).

Discussion

Having analyzed the data collected, it is now possible to return to the research question.

Does encouraging JTEs to use more incidental classroom English result in an increase in positive attitudes towards English lessons and using English among the students?

Similar proportions of both Groups reported wanting to be able to speak English as well as their JTEs, which would seem to indicate that the JTEs are functioning well in their essential motivational roles as English-language role-models. However, the Group 2 students indicated greater recall of English use in the classroom and rated the JTEs' English speaking ability more highly when their teachers used English above and beyond instructional language.

The Group 2 students also agreed that JTEs should maximize their use of English in the classroom and demonstrate their English ability. In addition, the Group 2 students asserted that it is important for JTEs to communicate with them in English and that the students felt good when communicating with their JTEs in this way. Finally, the students reported a clear increase in their confidence in speaking English when their JTEs used more English in class themselves. These results would seem to indicate that the encouragement of incidental classroom English use by JTEs can result in a general increased level of motivation for, and expectation of, English use among students during English lessons. These results are in line with the work by Matsumoto (1998, 2006a, 2006b, 2010), who investigated attitudes towards incidental classroom Japanese among American learners of Japanese.

Conclusion

This study collected data from and compared the use of incidental classroom English among two first year junior high school intake groups. The results indicate that the implementation of a program to encourage JTEs to increase their use of incidental classroom English resulted in an overall general and persistent small to moderate improvement in the students' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, both their JTEs and to the importance of using English in the classroom.

The purpose of this project was to address the introduction of a new government national curriculum which requires Japanese teachers of English to increase the amount of English used in their classes relative to the amount of Japanese used. Such a change to teaching practice can be viewed as a potential threat to the 'key meanings' of teachers' lives, such as their perceptions of their status and their group allegiances (Blacker & Shimmin, 1984). It is therefore not unusual in such situations for teachers to feel that new requirements are an implicit criticism of their existing approach (e.g. Craig, 2012). Consequently, any intervention must be approached sensitively and needs the affected teachers to be involved at all stages if it is to be successful. Furthermore, considerable research has been conducted on identifying the factors that lie behind the various responses and attitudes towards change, and one key element that has been identified is the perceived degree of effort required for success where the higher the perceived effort required is, the less likely the change in behavior will be successfully achieved (Sparks, Guthrie & Shepherd, 1997). This project targeted increasing incidental classroom English because it would not be interpreted as being critical of the JTEs approach to teaching but

rather could be viewed as encouraging (and providing justification for) the expansion of an already existing behavior, and so the perceived degree of effort required would be low.

Developing the classroom English corpus in collaboration with the JTEs was essential. By doing so, it could be ensured that the corpus was relevant to the English classroom, that the project was not seen as being imposed from outside but rather as being developed internally by the English department, and that the JTEs were psychologically committed to seeing the implementation of the materials they had helped to prepare (e.g. Norton, 2009). In other words, for success to be achieved, it was essential that teachers felt valued, that they were supported, that they had an influence on the changes taking place, and that there was shared ownership of the changes. As Hutchinson (1991) made clear, "In any social activity, such as education, there will be differing perceptions of the need for and the nature of any change...[and these views] indicate the need to develop sensitive and supportive environments in which people can adjust to changes that affect their working lives". The 'collegial' approach (Bush, 2011) adopted sought to create this environment, which would in turn motivate "others to do more than they intended or thought possible" (Bass & Riggio, cited in Hickman, 2010, p.75) and make a positive contribution to the school's program of "people building" (Greenleaf, cited in Hickman, 2010, p.77).

How successful was the project? From the results presented above, it can be seen that the students reported greater satisfaction with their lessons and with their JTEs in the classes that encouraged greater use of incidental classroom English. These data would imply that the project was successful; it achieved its key aims. However, the data presented so far apply only to the students' attitudes, and cannot tell us whether there

were real changes in classroom behavior resulting from the introduction of greater incidental classroom English. In the concluding part of this series of papers, we will address this by reporting on language use in the classroom before and after the introduction of the new classroom language corpus.

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Appendix A: Student Questionnaire

これはあなたとあなたのクラスの日本人の英語の先生が授業中英語をどのくらい使うかを調べるアンケートです。そして英語を話すときの意識を調査するアンケートでもあります。ご協力をお願いします。

1. あなたの日本人の英語の先生は英語の授業中に説明や会話をする時、英語をどのくらい使いますか？

(1 = 全く使わない、5 = いつも使う)

1 2 3 4 5

2. 初めての英語の授業を考えてください。日本人の英語の先生が英語で自己紹介をしましたか？

 しました。 しませんでした。

3. 日本人の英語の先生が英語の授業中英語で挨拶しますか？

(1 = ほとんどやりません、5 = よくやります)

1 2 3 4 5

4. 日本人の英語の先生が英語の授業中どのくらい英語で答えなくてもよい指示を

与えますか？

(1 = よくやります、5 = ほとんどやりません)

1 2 3 4 5

5. 日本人の英語の先生が英語の授業中どのぐらい英語で答える必要のある指示を与えますか？

(1 = よくやります、5 = ほとんどやりません)

1 2 3 4 5

6. 日本人の英語の先生が英語の授業中どのぐらい英語でアクティビティーを指示しますか？

(1 = ほとんどやりません、5 = よくやります)

1 2 3 4 5

7. 日本人の英語先生が英語の授業中あなたにどのぐらい英語で答える必要のある質問をしますか？例えば：「How do you spell it?」

(1 = ほとんどききません、5 = よくききます)

1 2 3 4 5

8. 次の内容ではどのぐらいが賛成ですか？「日本人の英語の先生と生徒の英語コミュニケーションが最大になることが大切だと思います。」

(1 = 全く反対です、5 = 全く賛成です)

1 2 3 4 5

9. 「日本人の英語の先生が手本となって英語を話す必要はない」に賛成ですか、それとも反対ですか。

(1 = 大賛成する、5 = 大反対する)

1 2 3 4 5

10. 日本人の英語の先生があなたに英語で話すとき、どんな気持ちですか？

(1 = とてもうれしい、5 = 全然うれしくない)

1 2 3 4 5

11. あなたが日本人の英語の先生に英語で話すとき、どんな気持ちですか？

(1 = 全然うれしくない、5 = とてもうれしい)

1 2 3 4 5

12. 日本人の英語の先生の英語はどうですか？

(1 = 上手、5 = 下手)

1 2 3 4 5

13. 英語の授業中に使う英語が、授業外で英語を使う時、どのぐらい自信になりますか？

(1 = 全く自信にならない、5 = 大いに自信になる)

1 2 3 4 5

14. 将来日本人の英語の先生と英語を同じレベルで話せるようになりたいですか？

なりたい。 なりたくない。

Appendix B: Student Questionnaire – English Translation

The purpose of this survey is to investigate how much English your Japanese teacher of English uses in class. It also asks you questions about your opinions and feelings about English. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents almost no use of English and 5 represents a high use of English, how much English does your teacher use in class in

general?

1 2 3 4 5

2. Did your teacher introduce him/herself to the class in English in the first lesson?

Yes No

3. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents almost never and 5 represents almost always, how often does your teacher open and/or close the class in English?

1 2 3 4 5

4. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents almost always and 5 represents almost never, how often does your teacher give basic instructions in English that require non-verbal responses?

1 2 3 4 5

5. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents almost always and 5 represents almost never, how often does your teacher give basic instructions in English that require simple verbal responses in English?

1 2 3 4 5

6. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents almost never and 5 represents almost always, how often does your teacher give instructions in English to set up activities or class work?

1 2 3 4 5

7. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents almost never and 5 represents almost always, how often does your teacher insist that you ask him/her basic questions

in English (such as, "How do you spell it?") ?

1 2 3 4 5

8. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree, how much do you agree with the statement, "It is important for Japanese English teachers to maximize their communication in English with the students." ?

1 2 3 4 5

9. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree, how much do you agree with the statement, "It is not necessary for Japanese English teachers to show students that they can use English well." ?

1 2 3 4 5

10. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents very happy and 5 represents very unhappy, how do you do you feel when your Japanese teacher of English talks to you in English?

1 2 3 4 5

11. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents very unhappy and 5 represents very happy, how do you do you feel when you talk to your Japanese teacher of English in English?

1 2 3 4 5

12. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents excellent and 5 represents very poor, how would you rate your Japanese teacher of English' s English speaking ability?

1 2 3 4 5

13. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 represents very little and 5 represents very much, how much would you say using classroom English has increased your confidence in using English in general?

1 2 3 4 5

14. Would you like to be able to speak English as well as your Japanese teacher of English?

Yes No

Authors's Affiliations

- (a) & (b) Shumei University
- (c) & (d) Shumei Kawagoe High School

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