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1

INTRODUCTION

In Japan, there is a general acceptance among elites and at government level, of the need among the young citizenry for an increased proficiency in additional languages (hereafter ALs), particularly English, for functional and economic reasons in an ever-globalizing world. In connection with this, most private universities in Japan allocate many resources in terms of staff, time, audiovisual equipment and print materials for the teaching of alternative languages, especially English ‘communication’, to students whose major subjects may or may not include ALs. Given the sheer number and diversity of post-secondary colleges and universities in this society it is not possible to comment in simple and absolute terms about the relative success or failure of this enterprise. However, at least anecdotally, both Japanese and non-Japanese university teachers of English in Japan often comment on the difficulty of engendering English communication among classes of learners except in cases of elite students or those with extensive experience of living in English language communities or sub-communities.

If we understand English ‘communication’ class to mean that learners speak to others in some degree of comprehensible English for much or most of the time (i.e. *performance* by learners, rather than being recipients of instruction concerning a passive, declarative knowledge about rules of *usage* from teachers (Widdowson 1983), the situation described above is hardly surprising. The first complicating fact is that historically, Japan is a relatively monolingual society and until recently, with the ever-increasing reach of English-dominated electronic communication and media systems, and increasing economic and corporate transnational integration, the functional benefits of English communicative proficiency were rather remote for most Japanese citizens. A second difficulty is that most students at the start of their college or university careers in Japan have recently graduated from senior high schools where English language education is mostly geared

towards high stakes university entrance examinations which put greater emphasis on evaluating *knowledge about* the target language rather than speech production in the AL. At the level of class room practices, this tends to translate into a culture where teachers will lecture about rules of correct usage – often in Japanese – and gauge learners' understanding and attentiveness by directing questions at selected students. In this way, many learners who have a basic declarative understanding of the linguistic system of English, sufficient to interact at a basic level with others, enter colleges and universities with a constructed disposition or 'habitus' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) geared towards avoidance of errors in the AL, and a lack of confidence and hesitation about talking extensively with others to achieve some collaborative goal mediated through interaction in the target language.

As a consequence of the (admittedly stereotyped) language education practices in senior high schools outlined above, I have elsewhere recommended (Marshall 2003) a course design for first year students' English communication at Japanese universities (especially for English language major learners) that gives priority to the acquisition of intensive 'interaction' over the acquisition of spoken language itself, where the latter refers to increasingly sophisticated language performance in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity (Skehan 1998). The term 'interactional competence' (Hall et al. 2011) has recently been gaining currency in the literature of second language acquisition and is usually associated with micro-structures of interaction, centering on turn-taking mechanisms in the course of speech between participants. The principles here relate to any form of speech interaction in human sociality, not only class rooms or even AL class rooms; however, the important point is that qualitatively, the discourse of language learning class rooms need not be restricted to a simple pattern of teacher-initiated and controlled exchanges and only some degree of peer interaction in small groups, even with learners of modest proficiency levels.

The purpose of this paper is as follows. It begins with a problematic – how best to engender 'interaction' in an AL among groups of students with little experience of extended interaction with others in that language, and who show a strong degree of reluctance in doing so. This is the 'frame' (Linell 1998: 130) or concrete circumstantial setting; the learners have mostly been acculturated through habitual communicative routines and action types in high school classrooms to become more or less passive subjects. This background sets up expectation structures that carry through to the present and the significant role of institutional processes should not be underestimated in this regard. The principles following in Sections 2 and 3, following, are intended to re-contextualize the interpersonal processes and practices (Linell 1998) from learners' recent experiences, to those of more active signifiers in English interaction. It should be stressed that this is not recommended for learners in all situations and contexts, only for instances where

students have serious dispositional difficulties in communicating in ALs, for reasons not only connected with language proficiency level.

Section 2, following, theorizes ‘interaction’ from a number of perspectives, mostly linguistic, and this provides the conceptual base of the paper. In Section 3, I present descriptions of AL learning activities that can hopefully engender the acquisition of such interaction; I then empirically analyze transcripts and contextual representations of collaborative learner – learner speech to demonstrate the extent to which the principles I have theoretically discussed, can be observed. In this way, Section 2 begins from a theoretical discussion of face-to-face human interaction and applies these concepts to a practical problem in educational linguistics. From recording and analyzing actual class room practices, the educational usefulness of this approach can be usefully discussed in such terms. In total, the paper presents a practical issue or problem, discusses the problem in theoretical terms, creates a syllabus intended to engender different practices and then finally, examines empirical data of interaction to evaluate the extent to which the syllabus achieves its purpose.

2

DEFINING INTERACTION

The term ‘interactional competence’ (hereafter IC) (Hall et al. 2011) is fairly recent in discussions of AL pedagogy and its parent discipline, the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Essentially, rather than focusing on the cognitive skills of learners in terms of their individual language proficiency, IC is concerned with the *co-constructed* nature of ongoing *interaction* of participants in talk, which is typically evidenced in the mutual coordination of turn-taking, organization of topics and actions (Markee 2007), and is primarily concerned with linguistic resources but may also, depending on the approach used by the analyst, involve prosody and non-verbal resources such as proxemics, gaze and gesture (Young 2007). While we evaluate learners’ ‘speech’ as an individual, monologic phenomenon, interaction is fundamentally social and dialogic – ‘other’-orientated.

The philosophical roots of this ‘other-orientation’ lie in what has been termed dialogism which is usually defined contrastively with monologism: Hegelian vs Cartesian referential frameworks (Markova 1990) respectively. In contrast with monologism, which tends to consider communication as the product of individual cognition, dialogism is concerned with interactional and contextual features of

human discourse and action and focuses on the *complementarity* and mutual dependence of actors jointly engaged in joint activity. Seen in these terms, interactive events should logically be expressed in social-interactional (i.e. jointly constructed) units, rather than in individual or intramental terms, which arise from monologistic perspectives. These epistemological principles of dialogism are evident in the sociological approach of conversation analysis which is radically social in so far as it consists of the study of naturally-occurring spoken interactions, in virtually any sphere of private or public life, to make clear the manner in which participants construct mutual understanding across turns in talk. This online, turn-by-turn co-construction of talk by participants in speech-in-interaction re-specifies cognition for analytical purposes, from an intramental and individual phenomenon to one that is distributed *between* actors. Schegloff (1991) discussed this socially-shared cognition and termed it 'intersubjectivity', stating that this quality exists at the interface between cognition and interaction.

One key construct that needs to be discussed while theorizing interaction in the terms mentioned above, is that of context. This notion, or more correctly, set of notions, is central to studies with speech as discourse (social action) and according to Linell (1998) any theory concerning discourse must be accompanied by a theory of context. While 'context' is notoriously difficult to define since it has been operationalized in many different ways (Duranti and Goodwin 1992) by scholars across a variety of disciplines in linguistics, applied linguistics, and linguistic anthropology, the general idea is that an utterance cannot be well understood unless one looks beyond the isolated speech event to other phenomena within which the event is embedded. These might include such things as the relevance of utterances before and after the focal event, shared assumptions of interactants, cultural situation, and even the changing semantic references within participants' language itself (Halliday 1985).

In Section 3 following, I analyze short episodes from one long text of three young Japanese students who are English majors but interactive novices in the target language, collaborating together in an extended problem-solving activity – or perhaps more accurately, activities. This textual analysis serves to demonstrate in empirical terms how it is that they are 'acquiring interaction' in English. This consists of two parts: first, a micro analysis and secondly, a macro analysis. These are different ways of understanding discourse, or spoken language and both use the term context but in rather different ways. Instead of seeing these two approaches as contradictory or incommensurable, it is more helpful to see them as explanatory heuristics, investigating a broad concept from different but complementary perspectives.

2.1 MICRO APPROACH: Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis (Sacks et al. 1974; Atkinson and Heritage 1984; Boden and Zimmerman 1991) grew out of the field of sociology and typically, examines rather short sequences of speech interaction, each consisting of a few turns only, in great detail. The focus of conversation analysis (CA) is the study of the locally produced organization of social interaction which examines systematic procedures across participants’ turn-taking, generally consisting of initiation, repair, topic switching, opening and closing routines, etc. Context in this approach is something that is dynamically co-constructed by interactants over turns, incrementally developed and transformable at any time; according to Heritage (1984: 259) conversation is a context of publicly displayed and intersubjective understandings, sustained over a number of turns. In this way, context is not an objective environment; it is emergent through the actions of interlocuters, through resources which are actively deployed (Linell 1998). While CA is very suitable for understanding the micro-structures of interaction, a different approach is necessary to describe more macro structural aspects of textual description, for interpreting patterns at a more general level.

2.2 MACRO APPROACH: Contextual/register integration

When interpreting longer texts of spoken interaction with the object of indentifying functional relations between episodes, the notion of genre has a lot of explanatory power. According to Bakhin (1986), while any particular utterance is individual, the spheres in which language is used tend to develop their own relatively stable types of utterance, which we may term ‘genre’. Bakhtin was not a linguist however and his ideas have been taken up more specifically by scholars working within the field of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1985). Ventola’s (1987) research examining service encounters in terms of structures of activity with both obligatory and optional stages was highly influential and is a good example of cooperative sets of behavior that people enter into, in highly conventionalized activities. In educational settings, Christie (2002) has described genres of teaching, mostly in elementary school contexts, within a framework using systemic functional linguistics and this is consistent with describing speech interaction in *institutional* settings where the teacher holds the floor and initiates topic, directs questions to students and has the right to initiate change of topic; in this kind of situation, roles and scripts tend to be tacitly observed and followed by participants. Christie (2002) analyzes the ‘pedagogic’ discourse in such class rooms and this usually consists of two separate but related components. A regulative discourse is concerned with management and usually consists of directives which may be couched as requests, while an instructional discourse deals with explanation. However, in the transcripts of learner activity following in this paper, the quality of learner interaction is more ‘naturalistic’ than usually

occurs in language classrooms; the talk is not directed and orchestrated by a teacher and so the activities do not amount to 'instructional' situations in classrooms. Instead, initiation of topic, change of topic, bidding for the floor, etc., are managed by learners themselves and the challenge for the analyst in this case is how to adequately model such interaction.

Working within the field of systemic functional linguistics, Hasan (1999) discussed the problem of modeling long episodes of dialogical or multi-party speech interaction which lack the predictability of institutional discourse. Essentially, the analyst is looking at not one activity but several, in a fast-switching on-line series of related episodes which are less predictable than in more 'institutional' interactions which adhere more to a tacitly-understood script with a certain degree of obligatory elements, often with a fixed order. Here, the 'context of situation' (Halliday 1985) – a semiotic construct – switches according to the activity that participants are attending to, where the context of situation is understood to consist of three variables:

**field of discourse* (social activity relevant to speaking – what is being talked about)

**tenor of discourse* (social relationships relevant to speaking)

**mode of discourse* (nature of contact for speaking)

[Summarized from Hasan, 1999]

When a change occurs in the flow of talk in one of more the three variables above (field, tenor, or mode), there is a disturbance in the context of situation or *register* (Halliday 1985) as it is sometimes termed, and this can be empirically described. In instances where a text of interaction (such as the macro analysis of learner talk in the following section) is too complex to show contextual consistency throughout, this scheme of contextual/registral *integration* analyzes complex texts into primary texts, which contain the main purpose of the talk, and sub-texts, which do not concern the main purpose but which usually facilitate it. It is these functionally-related episodes of changing goals realized through shifts in field, tenor and mode over stretches of talk, that trace the course of the *context* of the semiotic situation.

In this way, 'context' in the two approaches of Conversation Analysis (micro) and systemic functional linguistics (macro) are very different: the first is an emergent property co-constructed through turns with other participants and has a dynamic, turn-by-turn quality; the second focuses more on a textual analysis of how episodes of talk functionally cohere and relate to each other. Both are important for theorizing interactional competence (IC) in the following section.

3

CAPTURING INTERACTION

The following data come from an innovative language learning syllabus for Japanese students of the English language in their first year of study at a small, private university in Japan. The syllabus has been designed to maximize opportunities for learners to acquire an interactive competence, in the sense described earlier, rather than language itself. Three students, two females (F1 and F2) and one male (M1) are working together as an independent group on a dictogloss (Richards and Schmidt 2009) activity. Dictogloss activities (Ibid) are generally understood to consist of a short passage of text, dictated quickly by a teacher in the manner of a dictation, so that learners do not have enough time to catch every word and can only note down main lexical items, neglecting grammatical words. The main purpose is then that they should re-construct the text, usually collaboratively with other learners, paying particular attention to grammatical forms, especially key structures that have been taught recently in class.

The activity has been modified in this case. Instead of a lock step class where the teacher directs students about how and when to proceed, the learners are sitting in a circle of three with a tape recorder on the table. There are written instructions on the board and the teacher is moving around the class, answering questions if or when they arise. The important point here is that each group is working independently and they have eighty minutes to arrive at a collaborative version of the tapescript that they have been listening to. The students have been doing a unit of work about celebrities and they have been listening to a short tape recording about the death of Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales, in a car crash in 1997. This activity was one of several which the students were required to accomplish without the supervision of the teacher. This point is far from trivial as effectively this means that there is no regulative discourse (Christie 2002) putting control of class room talk – driving the context of interaction -- in the hands of the teacher and instead, learners hold initiative in negotiation with their peers in small groups, concerning when and how to proceed.

The data of this interaction, together with a brief commentary, is shown following. The first section (3.1) shows some episodes in interactive detail and these are subject to a micro-analysis. Following this, a scheme representing functional episodes over 128 turns (Section 3.2) is shown and this is the macro-analysis.

3.1 MICRO ANALYSIS: Conversation analysis (transcript convention at end of paper)

The three learners have just switched off the tape recorder on their desk after listening to the first part of the activity, completing a gap fill. Following this, they have to play the second part of the tape, in their own time, and then re-construct the text.

001	F1	do we have to do this first at… erm by ourselves,
002	M1	=mmm=
003	F2	=[unintell]=
		[5 mins. They mumble and continue to work on their individual sheets]
004	F1	[to F2] did you.. [looking at F2's paper and pointing]
005	F2	not sure
006	F1	[now to M1] did you finish?
007	M1	mm..i don't have any (ideas) about these details

In turns 001 – 007, the learners orientate to the activity and typically, F1, the most proficient in the group takes a leadership role by nudging the group to start in 001, 004 and 006, where she summons the other two to share their ideas. F1 appears uncertain in 001 as this activity is unfamiliar to them. The key point here is that the learners are directing the context of the talk all the way through. In 'weak' versions of Task Based Learning (Skehan 1996) there is nothing unusual about some *elements* of group work in language learning settings but the important point here is that the teacher is available as an advisor in the classroom but at no time 'directs' the class as a whole. Although the language here is very simple and shows short turns, the activity is incrementally proceeding and the inaudible sounds in 002 and 003 signal engagement while F1 (as she does throughout much of the transcript) initiates much of the interaction. It is not clear who is benefiting the most, F1 by doing most of the talking – she may well be operating well within the limits of her competence – or the other two students, by listening. At any rate, as is often the case with this kind of collaborative activity, it is characterized by *complementarity*, rather than symmetry.

Jumping forward to turns 020 – 033, below, the students are proceeding with their worksheet and this time, F1, probably mostly because of her superior proficiency, takes on the initiating role with the others. In 020 she draws attention towards another item in the gapfill activity, with the other two learners largely in responsive roles and in 030 she explicity instructs the others. After 033 both girls laugh as occurs through much of the full transcript. This is very common in my own experience with young Japanese women in language classrooms; the laughter

serves as an affiliation device and signals goodwill to others. Once again, the episode may appear banal but it illustrates well the principle of ‘sequentiality’; the learners are incrementally moving through an interactional *management* of topic, understandings and misunderstandings in the target language towards some degree of accomplishment of the activity. The management of these topics is not performed by a teacher addressing the whole class and so students must ‘do’ the interaction themselves on a bottom-up basis.

020	F1	==hmm and first..accident.. [reading from handout] “diana spencer, princess of wales died an ah..died in hospital this morning four hours after..” i..i..put crashed..crashed.. =accident is= [apparently F2 has written ‘accident’]
021	F2	-aah=
022	M1	=obeote nai ne= [Engl transl: I don’t remember]
023	F2	crashed
024	F1	I don’t know..[reading again]..after a car
025	F2	[also reading aloud from a handout] ==after a car
026	F1	crashed
027	F2	==crashed
028	F1	in paris/
029	F2	hm
030	F1	I think if we..if you use accident we have to say..erm..h-had an accident..had an
031	F2	had akshident?
032	F1	==had an accident
033	F2	think so...crashed [all laugh] [all look at their own copies of cloze passage again]

This shows how the micro-structures of interaction are achieved collaboratively without the prominence of the teacher in classroom talk, which would assign reactive roles to students and restrict opportunities for interaction. It is this lack of teacher-directed talk which gives the transcript here a participation structure more similar to ‘naturalistic’ interaction, i.e. not as institutionalized as one would usually expect to find in alternative language classrooms. In the following section I turn to a macro analysis to give a different yet complementary interpretation of learner interaction in this syllabus.

3.2 MACRO ANALYSIS

In Section 2.2 earlier, I argued for the usefulness of employing Hasan's (1999) model of contextual/registral integration to demonstrate empirically how the context of talk (here meaning the 'context of situation' with three variables of field, tenor, and mode) can be tracked across longer stretches of text showing what language activities are in progress. For reasons of space, the entire micro transcript of interaction cannot be shown but the table below shows how the contextual configuration (field, tenor, and mode) varies over turn 001 to 128 of the total transcript. Put simply, the headings at the top of the table have the following meanings: (left to right) 1) 'segment' simply gives the numbers of turns where the contextual configuration is stable – - in other words, there is one general language activity in progress. Where this changes into a different contextual configuration, e.g. at turns 008, 019, 034, 069 etc., this means that there is a change in one or more of field, tenor, mode and a different language activity is now taking place. 2) 'Status of text' refers to either 'primary' (meaning the main activity of re-constructing a dictogloss text) or 'sub-text' which refers to a different activity to negotiation of the content of a new text, but which indirectly, facilitates the main activity in progress. 3) 'Functional value' refers to the direct process of re-constructing a text in the case of 'central' and in the case of 'facilitation', the description shows in what way the segment facilitates the central function. 4) Finally, 'context construed' indicates whether the textual segment concerns the main activity, that of negotiating the lexico-grammar of the re-constructed text (main) or a different, 'side' activity that aids the re-construction of the text (dependent).

The table below shows the changes in the contextual configuration over 128 turns. This is useful as it demonstrates how different episodes of talk functionally relate to each other. This fast-switching of topic and relationship between speaker (for example, instruction and then joking between members) is typical of speech and rather less so in written texts. In turns 001 – 007, the learners initiate the subject of the dictogloss and begin to discuss the procedure (how to go about the re-construction of the text that they have just listened to). There is a shift in 008 as F1 raises the meaning of the word 'instantly'; this is a side- segment as the students' main activity is to check together their answers to the gapfill worksheet, from the tape recording that they have just listened to. In turn 019 F1 again initiates a change in topic by instructing the other two young people (F1 has the highest proficiency in the group) in the correct answers to the gapfill and this continues until turn 033. This is not the main activity but facilitates the main activity. In 085 the learners finally orientate to the main activity of comparing answers to the gapfill. Earlier episodes of speech were necessary in order to check mutual agreement on how to proceed and also, check the meaning of unknown

words. The main context has to be temporarily abandoned in 083 and 084 as F1 again instructs the others about word meaning; if this is not done, the main activity cannot proceed smoothly. The learners briefly return to the main activity in 085 and 086 but this is again suspended in 087 when F1 shifts topic by explaining that she does not know much about Diana's death in a car accident in Paris and so she lacks background knowledge which is helpful to the activity. The other two learners explain, until 098, that the car crash was apparently caused by the car driver being drunk at the time. They return (again it is F1 who shifts topic) to their comparison of answers in 099 but in 101 F1 finds it necessary to again abort this and explain the meaning of some of the words. The activity is not going smoothly due to lack of background knowledge so in 104, the talk again goes back to students' knowledge of events that are the subject of the listening exercise and this continues until 112. In 113 they return to the main activity of comparing answers together – this is the main activity and central purpose of the class – and this continues as far as 126. The final exchange in 127 and 128 is interesting; the two females decide they do not know the final item on the gapfill and so they decide to ignore and stop there (followed by laughter). This is a procedural episode, i.e. concerned with what/how to proceed, and this is facilitating to the overall purpose of the entire interaction, not the main purpose (agreeing on gapfill items) itself.

Segment	Status of text	Functional value of text	Context construed
001-007	Sub-text	Facilitation: procedural/initiating	Dependent
008-018	Sub-text	Facilitation: negotiation of meaning	Dependent
019-033	Sub-text	Facilitation: instruction	Dependent
034-082	Primary	Central: negotiation of lexis	Main
083-084	Sub-text	Facilitation: instruction	Dependent
085-086	Primary	Central: negotiation of lexis	Main
087-098	Sub-text	Facilitation: discussion of background knowledge	Dependent
099-100	Primary	Central: negotiation of lexis	Main
101-103	Sub-text	Facilitation: instruction	Dependent
104-112	Sub-text	Discussion of background knowledge	Dependent
113-126	Primary	Central: negotiation of lexis	Main
127-128	Sub-text	Facilitation: procedural	Dependent

A naïve observation about the minutiae of detail in the analysis above might be "So what?" Three students are putting together their answers about a gapfill exercise and there are different short episodes of talk. However, this misses the point; in the absence of monitoring and control by the teacher, the students need to collaboratively 'make sense' of the activity together. It is not simply a case of exchanging words for a gapfill exercise and that is enough. Probably the most important point in the table is the junctures where there is a shift in the status of the text, e.g at turns 008, 019, 034, etc. Expressed in terms of contextual configuration (Hassan 1999) the chart may make the text appear very reified. However, these junctures are actually pragmatic in nature and show where learners are actively *re-contextualizing* the flow of the talk for functional purposes, and it is in this re-contextualization that the interactive achievement lies.

The tapescript in its entirety is notable for what is not there, rather than for what is. Returning to Christie's (2002) earlier discussion on pedagogic discourse, she operationalizes this with two components: instructional discourse (instruction by the teacher) and regulative discourse (management by the teacher). There is no pedagogic discourse on this tape recording, nor in others connected with this project. In this way, learners take initiative in the classroom discourse and have to negotiate and co-construct speech activities with each other, on a bottom-up basis. This occurs for longer and more extended periods than occasional episodes of group work in an otherwise teacher-directed class and we can say that in this respect, the quality of talk is more 'naturalistic' and less 'institutionalized' than generic language classrooms.

4

CONCLUSION

The paper began with identifying a practical problem in language education and provided a theoretical description of this with several constructs from linguistics, applied linguistics and psychology. The remainder of the paper describes an innovation in terms of participation structures in classroom language learning, and evaluates data of interaction in these conditions through a micro lens of conversation analysis and a broader, macro analysis using the theory of contextual/registral integration from systemic functional linguistics. In this way, the paper is relevant to communication theory, applied linguistics and educational linguistics. This may be of interest to those working in language teacher development projects, alternative language curriculum design and planning, and perhaps to those working generally in humanities departments whose roles are also connected with

alternative language learning. It is important to re-iterate that the ideas put forward here do not amount to recommendations for a universal method in language learning. Lincoln (1993), speaking about a crisis of representation of the ‘other’ in qualitative research, predicted that the search for grand narratives would be replaced by more local, small-scale theories fitted to particular problems and situations. This small study is one such local response to a specific problem in language education and draws attention to the usefulness of applying discourse analysis to instances of human communication, to better understand how different participation structures differentially construct social interaction.

Transcription Scheme

(adapted from Gumperz, 1992)

Symbol	Significance
//	Final fall
/	Slight fall indicating “more is to come”
?	Final rise
,	Slight rise as in listing intonation
-	Truncation (e.g. what ti- time is it/)
..	Pauses of less than 0.5 seconds
…	Pauses greater than 0.5 seconds (unless precisely timed)
<2>	Precise units of time (2 second pause)
=	indicates overlap and latching of speaker’s utterances, e.g.
	R: so you understand =the requirements=
	B: =yeah, I under=Stand them/
	R: so you understand the requirements?
	B: ==yeah, I understand them/
	R: ==and the schedule?
	B: yeah/
	With spacing and single “=” before and after the appropriate portions of the text indicating overlap, and turn-initial double “==” indicating latching of the utterance to the preceding one.
[ ]	Nonlexical phenomena, such as laughter, and author’s interpretive comments
( )	Unintelligible speech
di(d)	A good guess at an unclear segment
(did)	A good guess at an unclear word.

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