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LEXICO-SEMANTIC FIELD OF
ONOMATOPOEIC VERBS IN
PRESENT ROMANIAN LANGUAGE

- ABSTRACT -

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In the choice of the research theme and in the makeup of the thesis we started from the conviction that structural semantics assumes the tasks of describing the assembly of the relevant semes in the language and of setting their hierarchy depending on their degree of relevance and the means employed by the language to mark their presence.

We believe that the most relevant contribution to the clarification of the issues related to the approach of vocabulary from the perspective of structural semantics belongs to Angela Bidu-Vrănceanu, who, in the book *Lexical fields in Romanian language. Theoretic issues and practical applications* (our transl.) published at the Bucharest University Press in 2008 defines the concept of field, essential for our research about the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs in present Romanian language: „The lexicon or vocabulary of today's Romanian language exhibits a large quantity of constituent units, which obliges to the segmentations of the research object. The need for segmenting the lexical assembly leads to the preference for the concept of field as fragment acceptable from the quantitative point of view. The segmentation of the vocabulary and its distribution into fields should be conducted according to certain principles, with the observance of some common properties by the lexical units grouped together in a field (our transl.)." (Bidu-Vrănceanu 2008: 15).

It is obvious, as Ivan Evseev also remarked in his book *The semantics of the verb* published by the Facla Editions of Timişoara, that the description of all the semes in present Romanian language „is a complex task which will require the efforts of several generations of linguists (our transl.) (Evseev 1974: 16), consequently we reckon too that this goal may be reached gradually, by the successive research of „portions" or „zones" of the semantic space (Evseev 1974: 17), the very segments or fields described by A. Bidu-Vrănceanu in the above quoted work.

This is the idea underlying our decision to approach the study of a lexico-semantic field which has not yet benefited from a description intended to be comprehensive. We refer to the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs, which seems a rich and complex area of the Romanian language vocabulary, with numerous possibilities of approach and description, reuniting a high number of lexemes.

We intend thus to analyse this field from an overall perspective, as „system of signs", in Saussure's words. As any system is characterised by the totality of its elements and a structure ordering them, we also focused our efforts in these two fundamental directions , believing that if we wish to propose a detailed description of this lexico-semantic field we must forward the lexemes composing the field (the elements of the system) and a possible manner of structuring the elements of the system meant to order the studied field, so that the

micro-fields into which the general field is segmented fulfil a fundamental condition in order to be accepted as viable: „no verb without micro-field, no micro-field without verb".

In order to identify the elements of the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs, we followed the principle proposed by Angela Bidu-Vrănceanu in her work elaborated in collaboration with Ion Coteanu, namely *Contemporary Romanian language. The Vocabulary. 2nd volume*, published by the Didactic and Pedagogic Editions of Bucharest in 1975, for the delimitation of (sub)assemblies from the assembly of the Romanian language vocabulary , more precisely „the existence of common meaning properties (our transl.)" and „the specification by enumeration of the elements which meet the first condition and make up an **inventory** (our underl. and transl.) (Coteanu / Bidu-Vrănceanu 1975: 220). In the author's words, the inventory is established based on the dictionaries of Romanian language and it is comprised in the analysis requirements from the beginning.

In order to clarify this primary issues related to the delimitation of a lexical field, of a vocabulary segment, A. Bidu-Vrănceanu uses the term *lexico-semantic paradigm* meaning „the totality of the terms reunited because: (1) they express a continuous lexical content, concretised by (several) common meaning elements (semes) from the composition of the analysed lexical meaning, and (2) they express the meaning differences by diverse combinations of semes, realising thus oppositions, along identities (or quasi) identities (our transl.)" (Coteanu / Bidu-Vrănceanu 1975: 221-222).

We considered thus essential to proceed to the delimitation of the semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs from the ensemble of the Romanian language vocabulary, by proposing the „inventory of this field", in Angela Bidu-Vrănceanu's understanding. We refer in fact to the totality of lexemes constituting the elements of the field, which we identified by consulting the dictionaries „from A to Z" and by retaining the lexemes which simultaneously contain in their sememe the semes /process/, characteristic to all verbs, and /presence of a sound phenomenon/, which individualises onomatopoeic verbs. We present this „inventory" in Annex 1.

Starting from the lexicographic definitions we identified the semes relevant for this lexico-semantic field and we proposed the list of semes with which we approached the field structuring, the second stage of the description of the system of signs constituted by the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs. We identified among these semes a trait (*Emitter*) allowing the building of a tree of oppositions, starting from the primary opposition /animate emitter/ vs /inanimate emitter/. We forward thus a structure based on successive binary oppositions, a „tree" of semes describing the emitter in detail, as well as other

pertinent traits allowing binary oppositions relevant for the sound phenomena, such as harmony, duration, pathology, intention, articulate language. At the basis of the opposition tree sub-assemblies were thus formed, units we called „micro-fields", fundamental units of the field, in our opinion. We operated then the semic analysis of verbs composing each micro-field, with the help of tables containing semes which characterise the sound phenomena, relevant for each micro-field: intensity, duration, height, quality, intention, sensation provoked, purpose etc.

Keeping in mind that the onomatopoeic verbs constitute the object of our research, we think that it is necessary to direct from the beginning a profound look into the verbs (see FIRST SECTION. VERB AND ONOMATOPOEIA. FROM INTERJECTION TO ONOMATOPOEIC VERBS, more precisely CHAPTER 1. THE VERB. DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS) and of onomatopoeia (see CHAPTER 2. INTERJECTION. ONOMATOPOEIA. CHARACTERISTICS AND VALENCES), in order to understand as clearly as possible what the onomatopoeic verbs are, their manner of formation , especially by derivation from onomatopoeia, and to establish the place and characteristics of onomatopoeia within the wider frame of interjections.

We thought it is only natural to start in Chapter One, dedicated to the verb, from the analysis of the definitions given to this part of speech from the lexico-semantic, morphologic, syntactic, pragmatic perspective etc. by prestigious Romanian researches and in collective works of grammar, fundamental for today's Romanian language. We studied these definitions and grammatical descriptions attempting to determine the common elements which characterise them all, as well as the individual contributions specific to each author. We focused then on the classifications proposed in the fundamental literature, as the onomatopoeic verbs, the object of our study, represent in their turn a distinct verbal sub-category that we intend to identify also with the help of the classifications forwarded for the verb so far.

We considered it useful to detail the analysis perspective of Ivan Evseev, in his already mentioned work *The semantics of the verb*. The author shows that the core seme characterising the verbs, according to structural semantics, is the category of **process** (our underl.). We subscribe to I. Evseev's opinion that the processes rendered by verbs may be divided into three categories: **actions, becomings and states** (our underl.). The author claims that the „oppositions between action, becoming and state are realised in varied manners, engaging the vocabulary, the derivation system, the morphology and the syntax (our transl.)" (Evseev 1974:21). In the author's opinion the verb, „linguistic correlate of process

deployment, must contain an item of information referring to the four determinations of ontological processes: time, space, quality and quantity (our transl.)" (Evseev 1974:21)

We consider as extremely relevant the author's observation referring to the fact that the verbs of action render „acts involving **an author, an object, an instrument and a purpose** (our underl.)" and the relations between „**act, subject, object and instrument"** (Evseev 1974:49) are of ontological origin in the author's opinion, which explains the specific „inclination" of verbs to polysemy. We considered it useful to enumerate these micro-fields composing, from the perspective of our analysis, the sub-field of *action verbs* forwarded by I. Evseev: v**erba instrumentalia**, **verba ornandi, verba efficiendi, verba similandi, verba agendi, verba factitiva** and **verba onomatopeica**. This last category is essential for our research , and comprises, in Ivan Evseev's opinion, the verbs „rendering actions of sound production (our transl.)" and the „ semantic structure of onomatopoeic verbs is made of two main semes: 1. "to produce, to emit" +2. „the specific sound indicated in the verb theme (our transl.)" (Evseev 1974: 54).

At this moment of our research we decided how to interpret the syntagm „onomatopoeic verbs", namely in the *comprehensive sense of the above definition (all the verbs containing the seme /presence of a sound phenomenon /)* and not in the restricted sense, so we do not confine to the verbs that may be identified as coming from onomatopoeia, by derivation. Moreover, we also strengthened our decision as regards the lexemes rendering noises, sounds, sound phenomena in general in a way or another, to focus on the verbs rendering sound phenomena and not on onomatopoeia, interjections, nouns, adjectives or adverbs, considering that this lexical assembly is the richest in elements and research directions.

We considered it crucial to identify all that Romanian language grammars have to say about onomatopoeia, to identify the essential elements for the delimitation of the semantic field of noise verbs, closely connected to onomatopoeia (see CHAPTER 2. INTERJECTION. ONOMATOPOEIA. CHARACTERISTICS AND VALENCES).

As all grammars treat onomatopoeia as a sub-class of interjections, we cannot achieve our goal without attempting a deep study of interjections, the definitions proposed for this class of words , and especially on the classifications forwarded by diverse Romanian linguists, where we identify each time the onomatopoeia as specific type of interjection. We granted a special attention to the derivation of onomatopoeia, especially to the mechanism of derivation for forming verbs from onomatopoeia, to identify the manner in which the language forms verbs from onomatopoeia, to identify the manner in which one forms the set of onomatopoeic

verbs we called „proper” , those considered by linguists as being derived from onomatopoeia. In fact, this aspect too made us decide to include all the verbs incorporating the seme /presence of a sound phenomenon/ in the category of onomatopoeic verbs (in other words verbs of *noise, sound, sound phenomenon),* namely the fact that there are still debates and controversies related to some verbs expressing noises or sounds when it comes to their origin (whether they are derived from onomatopoeia or not).

We repeated many a time that this research intends to forward a *detailed* description , from the perspective of structural semantics, of the vocabulary segment reuniting the elements characterised by the production or presence of a sound phenomenon. In order to approach from the practical perspective the structuring of this lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs or noise verbs, we obviously need a theoretical and methodological incursion into structural semantics, to study and compare the methods and to adopt the variant we shall eventually use in the structural analysis of the field studied (see SECOND SECTION. LEXICO-SEMANTIC FIELD OF NOISES, in particular CHAPTER 3. THE LEXICO-SEMANTIC FIELD. SOME ASPECTS). That is why we considered it absolutely necessary to highlight several aspects related to the evolution of semantics in general and of structural semantics in particular. The models of analysis forwarded by the founders of the structural perspective on paradigmatic sub-assemblies are concepts we intend to understand and clarify, in order to operate within this perspective when approaching the vocabulary segmentation.

We believe that the debates on the concept of paradigmatic assembly or lexical field in European and American linguistics, as well as the solid Romanian contributions to the evolution of the theory and practice of structural semantics and notional fields are absolutely fundamental in order to be able to attempt the structuring of such a linguistic field. The knowledge of the methods of the field analysis was then essential, among which we intend to study more profoundly the semic analysis and its practical application in the study of fields or paradigmatic subassemblies proposed by linguists for French or English and developed in detail with much clarity and precision by Romanian linguists.

It was only then that we could try to approach the issues related to the lexico-semantic field of sound phenomena in general (see CHAPTER 4. THE LEXICO-SEMANTIC FIELD OF NOISES, THEORETIC AND METHODOLOGICAL PRELIMINARIES) to establish certain preliminary aspects with theoretic and methodological character, such as the criteria of identification of semes relevant for the structural description of the sound phenomenon field, stage that was extremely laborious requiring the extension of lexicographic definitions with elements from the already mentioned theory and practice of structural semantics. Another

core issue for any lexico-semantic field is, in our case also, the debate related to the archisememe and archilexeme of the field, as well as the establishment of the inventory of lexemes making up the analysed field.

As already underlined, we consider that the starting point for the structural description of the field is the sub-chapter 4.4. entitled „Delimitation of the lexico-semantic filed of onomatopoeic verbs. Criteria. Analysis of lexicographic definitions. The lexemes of the field". We found that the lexicographic definitions may be considered mere starting points in the semic analysis, as they fail to provide all the elements necessary to a full semic analysis, or, according to the issues discussed in the prior chapter, some semes are explicit (the ideal case), but others remain implicit. The lexicographic comment remains the starting point for any analysis which intends to be scientific and rigorous, but has still some limitations: there are *circular definitions* (which explain, for instance, the verb by the afferent noun), *redundant traits*, the data from the definition *cannot be all abstractised and systematised* in order to be reduced to a semantic language. We had to operate a selection among these items of information, retaining only the necessary elements, which must then be completed by the information offered by the comparative analysis.

We listed in Annex 1 the full list, in alphabetic order, of the lexemes of the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs retained from the study of lexicographic definitions. It was an extremely difficult endeavour, as it involved an appeal to the subjective capacity of analysis and synthesis related to the seme /presence of sound phenomenon/ which must be taken for each separate meaning of the analysed lexemes. If one of the meaning retained by the lexicographic definitions from dictionaries contains the seme /presence of a sound phenomenon /, the respective lexeme was retained on the list of the inventory of lexemes composing the studied field.

Starting from the contributions brought about by Angela Bidu-Vrănceanu and Ion Coteanu (Coteanu / Bidu-Vrănceanu 1975), we illustrated in this section the manner in which we selected from dictionaries, with the help of lexicographic definitions, the lexemes composing the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs. The lexemes identified from the study of the lexicographic definitions meet that first requirement underlined by Angela Bidu-Vrănceanu, namely „**they constitute an inventory (**our underl. and transl.)" (Coteanu / Bidu-Vrănceanu 1975: 220). This is in fact the delimitation of the semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs from the mass of the vocabulary and thus the first step for its structuring. The system constituting the objective of our research is made of elements (the lexemes of the „inventory")

and the structure we then forwarded for the description of the relations between its constitutive elements (the words retained).

The "inventory" of the onomatopoeic verbs is made of lexemes containing two mandatory semes: **/process/** and **/presence of a sound phenomenon/.** The issue here is however related to polysemy. Ivan Evseev insists on the fact that the verbs have a remarkable „predisposition" for polysemy adding that „the meaning of a polysemantic verb is modified depending on the nature of the *subject, object or instrument* (our underl.), on their presence or absence (our transl.)" (Evseev 1974: 49). It is the conclusion drawn by the author following the discussion we presented *in extenso* related to the relations established between act, subject, object and instrument, exemplified by I. Evseev by the polysemantic verb *a prinde* (Evseev 1974: 49).

As regards the polysemantic verbs and the implication of their existence on the inventory of the field we forward, we may find there are numerous verbs of this type among the lexemes of the delimited field, we considered it necessary to include all the verbs which have **at least one meaning containing the seme /presence of a sound phenomenon/,** either explicit in the lexicographic definition, or implicit.

We called this group of polysemantic verbs, which in certain contexts activate the meaning containing the seme /presence of a sound phenomenon/, and in other contexts activate the meanings which do not contain this seme ± **Noise Verbs**. A special category of such verbs is made of the verbs containing the seme /communication by articulate language / or in short /+ words/, where there are two variants of making this communication: **in writing or verbally**: *accentua, acuza, admite, afirma, aminti, argumenta, atenţiona, avertiza* etc.

Another category of ± Noise Verbs is made of the pairs *factitive* (transitive) *verb* and *eventive verb* (built with the particle *se*) (Evseev 1974: 103), where usually the factitive verb contains the seme /presence of a sound phenomenon/ whereas its pair, the afferent eventive verb, does not: *a adeveri / a se adeveri*.

Furthermore, we found that there are verbs with the **semic nucleus** /presence of a sound phenomenon/, that is they have as *purpose*, in Evseev's conception, the production, emission of a noise or sound, verbs that Ivan Evseev calls **verba onomatopeica** (Evseev 1974: 54). We retained only the first part of the definition forwarded, namely they are „the verbs which, by their sound envelope and the lexical sense, render **actions of sound production** (our underl.)" (Evseev 1974: 54) and we extrapolated this definition in the sense that we retained within the field not only these verbs with the semic core /presence of a sound phenomenon/, but also those which have **a different semic nucleus**, and nevertheless

describe actions *always accompanied by a sound phenomenon* which may be recognised „with the eyes closed", perceiving only through the hearing the realisation of the respective action.

We included thus in the proposed inventory of the field verbs such as: *abraza, aleza,* belonging to the category called by I. Evseev **verba instrumentalia** (Evseev 1974: 51), verbs rendering mechanical processings always accompanied by a specific recognisable noise.

We selected for the inventory of the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs also some verbs described by the author in the category **verba movendi** (Evseev 1974: 79), which describe motions that take place in a certain manner (suddenly, with high intensity and speed, with significant iteration) **which cannot be imagined without the production of a specific sound or noise**: *a azvârli, a ateriza* etc.

The verbs from these categories required a bigger effort and a longer time of thinking, in the (subjective) attempt to decide which of the verbs with the semic nucleus different from the /presence of a sound phenomenon/ and have no mention of the sounds or noises in the lexicography definition are characterised by a contextual seme /presence of a sound phenomenon/ defining them on all the situations.

After lengthy „inner debates", initial decisions, changes of mind and returns to prior decisions, we considered it important **not to omit any verb for which there is at least one single context in which one may identify within its sememe the seme /presence of a sound phenomenon/.** Considering that it is from this very inventory that we shall start the structuring of the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs, it is important that it is as comprehensive as possible. This is valid also for the decision to comprise, beside the lexemes of the literary language, the lexemes mentioned by the dictionaries as regionalisms (*a aui)* or neologisms (*a abraza*), in other words not to limit our list only to the literary Romanian language.

We decided to offer not only a list of the verbs included in the field „inventory", but to **attach to each lexeme the lexicographic definition we considered the most pertinent** for our purpose after the consultation of dictionaries, as we think that we could bring an important contribution in this manner to the study of this lexico-semantic field in the future. An attempt to delimit the field has not been attempted, as far as we know, and we hope that this „inventory" which intends to be as complete as possible may be a useful starting point for any ulterior researcher of the field.

We tried to forward a detailed description of the vocabulary section reuniting lexemes containing sememes indicating the production or the presence of a sound phenomenon, from

the perspective of structural semantics. The last stage of our research was constituted thus by the attempt to structure the lexico-semantic field studied (see THIRD SECTION. ASPECTS RELATED TO THE STRUCTURING OF THE LEXICO-SEMANTIC FIELD OF ONOMATOPOEIC VERBS, particularly CHAPTER 5. LEXICO-SEMANTIC FIELD OF ONOMATOPOEIC VERBS. STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION).

As we already mentioned, we approached the issue of the semes specific to onomatopoeic verbs, the primary opposition / animate emitter / vs /inanimate emitter/ which allowed us to build a tree of binary oppositions and to propose a possible structuring of the lexico-semantic field of verbs expressing sound phenomenon. We consider that at the basis of the opposition tree we obtained thus the sub-assemblies we called „micro-fields", the fundamental units of the field in our opinion. We then forwarded a method of semic analysis of the verbs composing each micro-field, based on the semes relevant for each such lexical sub-assembly.

We think that the delimitation of the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs and its structuring with the help of the oppositions are major contributions to the description of this lexical sub-assembly. A second stage follows, proposed to all the researchers interested in the subject, of delimiting the micro-field from the proposed „inventory" of lexemes (see Annex 1), and of establishing the „inventory" of each delimited micro-field, stages followed by the filling of the exemplifying tables proposed with these verbs identified and the making of decisions related to the relation of each of them with the semes forwarded for the most relevant description of each micro-field depending on its specific elements.

In order to exemplify how we may continue this analysis inside the micro-field, we forwarded the analysis of such a lexical micro-segment (see CHAPTER 6. MICRO-FIELDS OF DISCOURSE AND COMMUNICATION), namely the micro-field of the verb *to speak (a vorbi)* (more precisely the lexemes which have the seme /articulation/ or in short /+words/. We saw that in its turn this micro-field contains a distinct sub-micro-field, that of the verb *to say/to tell* (*a spune*). Taking into account the multitude of lexemes and the diversity of the semes relevant for this field, we proposed their analysis through circles and sectors of a circle to illustrate as clearly as possible the intersection and confluence of semes.

We hope to have opened the way toward the detailed description of the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs, as we extracted from the general vocabulary of Romanian language the lexemes belonging, in our opinion, to the studied field, with all their meanings provided by the lexicographic definitions, we structured the field with the help of the opposition tree starting from the *Emitter* and the primary opposition /animate emitter/ vs /

inanimate emitter/, tree which has at its basis a sum of micro-fields for which we proposed the *relevant semes* in each case for the *semic analysis under the form of exemplification tables* as possible mechanism of analysis for the future research endeavours.

If one intends to deepen the analysis of this lexico-semantic field, we believe that one may start from the already established frame and from our contributions in this research, in order to approach the analysis of each distinct micro-field based on the models proposed and the inventory made available in the Annexes.

All in all, our research meant to forward a structuring of the lexico-semantic field of **onomatopoeic verbs**, as well as the structural description comprising the entire delimited „inventory" of onomatopoeic verbs, the semes specific to these verbs and the primary opposition of the semes / +animate emitter/ vs / -animate emitter/ led us to the construction of **a tree of oppositions which can structure in detail the field studied.**

With the support of a solid theoretical and methodological approach, we identified the relevant semes for the structural description of the lexico-semantic field of **noises** and presented in detail all the aspects related to the difficulties of identifying the **archisememe** and **archilexeme** of this field.

The structuring of the researched field meant the careful study of the semantic field delimitation, in order to determine the full „inventory" of the onomatopoeic verbs, in view of identifying the verbs we described in detail with the help of semic analysis and elaboration of the field's opposition tree. This inventory constitutes Annex 1, completed by Annex 2, containing a list with the lexicographic definitions of some nouns without verbal correspondent, important for the field of sound phenomena, lexemes identified during the study of dictionaries.

The clarification of the aspects we intended to study in the prior stages of the research led us to the proper structuring of the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs, proposing its comprehensive and detailed description. Approaching the issue of specific semes of onomatopoeic verbs, we identified the primary „opposition" which allowed us the building of a "tree of oppositions" which led us to an exhaustive structuring, we hope, of the lexico-semantic field of the verbs expressing noises.

As we have already underlined, the basis of the tree of oppositions is constituted by the subassemblies we called „micro-fields", the field's fundamental units. We then applied the semic analysis to the verbs composing each micro-field, for a structural description as comprehensive as possible of the lexemes constituting the „inventory" of the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs.

We are persuaded that the inventory of the constitutive elements of the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs together with the pertinent lexicographic definitions, as well as the criterion of including the lexemes into the field inventory, namely that **at least one of the meanings of the lexeme retained should contain the seme /presence of a sound phenomenon /,** are of crucial importance for the study of the analysed field.

Each of these **lexemes** find their place in one of the micro-field identified at the basis of the opposition tree proposed for the structuring of the lexico-semantic field of the onomatopoeic verbs. It is obvious that the endeavour of this thesis can be continued by the analysis of each micro-field, by the selection of the lexemes composing the respective micro-field from the enclosed list, without the need for the study of the entire vocabulary, and their introduction into the tables proposed for each micro-field, according to the examples presented in the thesis.

The semes have already been selected in the work and the description will consist in the analysis of all the lexemes from each micro-field by means of the tables of semes proposed, as well as by detailed discussions related to the particularities of the lexemes and semes of these micro-fields.

Our analysis regarding the structuring of the lexico-semantic field of onomatopoeic verbs can also be followed by the analysis of micro-fields under numerous aspects and from a profusion of perspectives: language registries, figurative and metaphoric uses, verbal phrases, aspects related to origin and etymology, „proper” onomatopoeic verbs and their derivation from onomatopoeia, contrastive approaches and so on and so forth.

We hope that our research constitutes a useful contribution to the description of a segment of the present Romanian language vocabulary, i.e. the verbs rendering sound phenomena, especially by opening a relatively generous spectrum of ulterior developments of the aspects already identified and presented, in the theoretical plane of the contribution of researchers who study semantics and the Romanian language vocabulary and of the contrastive debates, as well as in the practical plane, in the teaching and learning of mother's tongue and foreign languages, and the enhancement of the clarity and pertinence of lexicographic definitions.

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