

## **Exploring Students' Speaking Anxiety: A Case of High Achiever Students**

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### **Abstract**

Speaking anxiety is significant to make students develop anxious feeling during speaking in the target foreign language, even high achiever students. Therefore, this research aimed to (i) discover the extent of speaking anxiety factors emerging in high achiever students and (ii) perceive high achievers' speaking anxiety to their speaking performance. This qualitative research applied a descriptive phenomenological approach to analyze and elaborate on the data. The research subjects were 8 high achiever students of SMK Negeri 5 Surabaya. All of them were interviewed using focus group discussion to explore their speaking anxiety and its impact on them. The results revealed (i) three factors of speaking anxiety namely, communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety were experienced by high achiever students along with elements of each factor; (ii) several contributions were constructed according to high achievers' perceptions. The example of a positive contribution was the consideration to take speaking fluency as a challenge they required to conquer. While negative contribution was such feeling nervous and uncomfortable to speak in front of their peers, led them to the speaking anxiety symptoms appearance (rapid heartbeat, blank, and stuttered) during conveying their ideas, being reluctant to speak due to weakened bond of students-instructor related, and struggling to recalibrate the memory during performing speaking tests.

### **Keywords**

foreign language anxiety, high achievers, speaking anxiety, speaking performance

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Efficacious English communication competency becomes a global objective in the current year (C. P. Chen, 2018). In English teaching-learning, teachers assist students in developing students' speaking skill. Yet, students require a mass of days and frequent endeavor to conquer speaking skill (Metruk, 2018). Principally, there is the emergence issue faced by students throughout speaking skill. Speaking anxiety mostly emerges in the case of foreign language learning (Bashori, van Hout, Strik, & Cucchiarini, 2022). Gaibani and Elmenfi (2016) claimed, speaking anxiety is a pattern of hesitancy to communicate with people due to fearful feeling. Speaking anxiety primarily occurs during English class when it comes to express real communication. In English foreign language context, students are recognized in experiencing speaking anxiety when they are asked to communicate using English in the classroom (Hanifa, 2018). Speaking anxiety related disposition involves the neglect of obtaining threat as well as susceptibility to abscond from threatening conditions (Knowles & Olatunji, 2020).

Fundamentally, it is rooted from three factors influencing foreign language speaking anxiety claimed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension is a worry-like feeling towards oral communication. Fear of negative evaluation is the discernment of others' judgment, prevention of judgment setting, and the assumption that others would judge negatively. Last, test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety comes from terror of failure.

Many previous studies studied speaking anxiety, but they only focused to general participants of high schools and universities. Intrinsically, vocational schools use English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context for the English subject. It is different from other fundamental education stages such as junior high schools and senior high schools. Bui (2022) stated that ESP focuses on knowledge related majors and is not only prone to knowledge of language. Due to the supported statement, both knowledge of major content and knowledge of language are studied in vocational high school. Furthermore, practical activities are emphasized than theories of each subjects. As a result, the most vocational students' vocal points are to succeed in practical activities. They acquire priority in focusing on English subject not as much as high school students do. For that reason, the researchers of this study believed that speaking is not easy for them.

A study conducted by Wu (2019) related to students' reticence in the English as a foreign language classroom explicating the basis of students' reticence could transpire because of speaking anxiety. Related to the mentioned case, when the researcher of this study was being a teacher and she was accompanied by another English teacher, the vocational students were being less-active than they were formerly to be during speaking activity. Surprisingly, the pioneering students, high achievers, were also reluctant to engage actively. The researcher of this study gave credence to speaking anxiety that must be played a role in this rare moment. Previously, the researcher trusted high achievers would constantly feeling brave to speak English. Yet, pondering high

achiever students are also common and all humans can possibly have anxiety in speaking.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign Language Anxiety is one of the crucial aspects which influences students study a foreign language. Foreign language anxiety is an anxious feeling specified in foreign language classroom (Oruç & Demirci, 2020). Another definition of foreign language anxiety is an enthusiastic psychological response of foreign language learners when using English in an organized society (Dryden, Tankosić, & Dovchin, 2021). Nearly all of the language learners encounter anxiety throughout the process of language learning (Alsowat, 2016). Lofty expectation for students in demanding to speak rises up anxiety (Elaldi, 2016). Nilsson (2019) found in his recent research that students undergo foreign language anxiety in continuous periods.

### Speaking Anxiety

Anxiety emerges in the targeted skill of conquering a foreign language, especially in the speaking skill. Speaking anxiety that is experienced by students begins from facing an obstacle and anxiety when trying to speak English inside the classroom (Palupi, 2021). Bashori et al. (2022) added that speaking is the most anxiety-evoking competence among other competencies. Based on the verification of those previous researchers, it is doubtless that speaking anxiety still exists.

Speaking anxiety is a concept of uneasiness feeling towards expressing thoughts inside an individual's mind. Precisely a category of shyness that can be marked out by frightened feeling when communicating with others (Gaibani & Elmenfi, 2016). Speaking anxiety becomes one of the factors obstructing oral performance in language learners' accomplishment (Ölmezer & Öztürk, 2021). Obstacles in oral performance or speaking could arise because its competencies. Speaking contains supporting competencies such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and content of speaking itself (Pratiwi, Suryani, & Suarnajaya, 2020). Without a doubt, every student may face problems with any of those speaking components.

### Speaking Anxiety Factor

Prior of speaking anxiety major theory from Horwitz et al. (1986) declared three factors inducing foreign language speaking anxiety: (1) communication apprehension, (2) fear of negative evaluation, and (3) test anxiety. First, the definition of communication apprehension is a worry feeling towards oral communication. Demonstration of communication apprehension are such as struggling in speaking in teams or in public, or listening an oral communication (Aeni, Jabu, Rahman, & Strid, 2017). This variety of anxiety factor is able to construct students to communicate inside the society (Manipuspika, 2018).

Second, Horwitz et al. (1986) elucidated that fear of negative evaluation involves discernment of others' judgment, prevention of judgment setting, and the assumption that others would judge negatively. The example fear of negative evaluation dealt by students such as conversation to their groups or avoiding the teacher calling their name in order to express the idea in front of the class when they did not volunteer (Downing, Cooper, Cala, Gin, & Brownell, 2020).

Third, Horwitz et al. (1986) explicated test anxiety as a type of performance anxiety stemming from the terror of failure. Test anxiety is associated with frightened feeling towards tests to estimate students' performances (Manipuspika, 2018). Moreover, test anxiety originated from tension, physiological over-arousal, and somatic symptoms which repeatedly caused low concentration, detrimental cognitive judgments, and unbearable physiological responses (O'Meara, Cassarino, Bolger, & Setti, 2020).

### Speaking Anxiety Symptom

Speaking anxiety is capable of arising symptoms as a form of negative impact influenced by two conditions: both physical and emotional wellbeing (Gallego, Mchugh, Penttonen, & Lappalainen, 2022). Speaking anxiety symptoms are varied, such as:

- quivering or trembling, while presenting suddenly the mind goes empty, stating something absurd or unable to carry on with the saying (Kahlon, Lindner, & Nordgreen, 2019)
- feasible lead up to panic attack (Takac et al., 2019)
- anxious, fast heart-beat, body becomes tense and rigid, and sweating (Kelsen, 2019)
- dry mouth, raised blood-pressure, rapid breathing, blushing cheeks (Wati, Sansuwito, Riyanto, Sustiyono, & Musfirowati, 2022)
- legs shaking, forgetting words, sweaty palms, fast heartbeat, voice stuttering (Song & Liu, 2022)

It is true that many previous studies investigated speaking anxiety. They focused on the relationship among speaking anxiety and other variables such speaking performance, the level of shyness (Aslan & Thompson, 2018; M. R. Chen & Hwang, 2020; Kelsen, 2019; Oflaz, 2019). They claimed shyness could appear because of speaking anxiety that was experienced by the students. Level of shyness could influence students' speaking performance. When students have higher level of shyness, then their speaking performance would not be good enough. Other studies explored closely on the phenomenon of speaking anxiety experienced by the students (Idrus, 2022; Meliyani, Masrupi, & Utomo, 2022; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020; Rosyidah, Anugerahwati, & Wulyani, 2020; Yildiz, 2021). Those studies chose high school and university students as their participants; none of them chose vocational high school students. Another gap was the type of the participants. Previous studies chose general students to be investigated. There was not a specific sampling to filter the students.

The similarity of this research towards previous research was speaking anxiety still became the main topic. Pioneering speaking anxiety theory from Horwitz et al. (1986) was used and elaborated. On the other hand, the difference of this research to previous studies was the using of purposive sampling in order to focus on high achievers only. Since, vocational high school students were unnoticeable, this research took the high achiever students from vocational school as the participants. After being explained, this research position intended to develop the uncover findings related to high achiever students, specific students, towards their speaking anxiety factors and its influence to their speaking performance. The researchers of this study believed the result would unlock the new knowledge to complete the information of the science.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study used a qualitative design to study a particular thing in a natural setting and interpret the related subject (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This study intended to elaborate more on the speaking anxiety experienced by high achiever students. For the method, the researchers applied descriptive phenomenology to understand the speaking anxiety specified phenomenon throughout individual participants' occurrences (e.g., apprehensions, beliefs, and assumptions) while struggling to set aside presumptions of the researchers (Bochicchio et al., 2021). One of the vocational high schools located in Surabaya, East Java, was chosen because it was regarded as a qualified school which often wins in various competitions many times. Eight high achievers students were chosen from that vocational high school to gain the data. The English teacher acknowledge those 8 students were high-achievers and often obtained good marks on their English subjects.

The data was collected by using interview guideline. Interview guideline to elucidate the research question number one consisted of twenty questions that were adapted and developed from the theory of Horwitz et al. (1986). The questions were divided into three categories; communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The data was analyzed using stages of descriptive phenomenology proposed by one of the pioneering related methodology methods theory of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009).

### **1. Reading and Re-reading**

The researchers transcribed the focus group discussion recordings using non verbatim style. This transcription type was chosen because it was appropriate for the researcher's necessity, who needed data transcription yet uncluttered by irrelevant details for example, filler, unnecessary repetition, stuttering, and non-verbal communication.

### **2. Initial Noting**

The researchers read and re-read the transcription result while the notes were taking. These two processes were done simultaneously. The researchers examined the similarity and contradiction of participants' utterances, for example, the participants' responses related to their willingness to communicate with English native speakers.

### 3. Developing Emergence Themes

For the speaking anxiety factor, the researchers developed three codes as the main themes; communication apprehension (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FoNE), and test of anxiety (TAn). Five sub-themes for communication apprehension; individual emotions, linguistic factors, personality traits, students-instructor related elements (CA/ SIR), and socio-cultural elements (CA/ SC). Two sub-themes for fear of negative evaluation; teacher (FoNE/ T) and peers (FoNE/ P). Three sub-themes for test anxiety; test preparation (TAn/ PR), test taking-stage (TAn/ TS), and test reaction(TAn/ RN). There were also two micro-themes for communication apprehension in individual emotion; fear (CA/ IE/ Fr) and nervousness (CA/ IE/ Fr), three for linguistic factors; vocabulary meaning (CA/ LF/ Vm), grammar (CA/ LF/ Gr), and pronunciation (CA/ LF/ Pr), and two for personality traits; extroverted (CA/ PT/ Ex) and introverted (CA/ PT/ In).

### 4. Interpretation

The researchers interpreted the findings based on the interpretation result and standpoint of knowledge of the researchers to carry out the meaning and provide the explanation of high achievers' speaking anxiety. Representing the data was done by explaining the result in the context of the related theories and prior studies through a detailed narrative explanation.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Speaking Anxiety Factors Emerging in High Achiever Students**

Horwitz et al. (1986) proposed three significant factors in speaking anxiety, namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Based on the prior theory, the researchers of this study discovered high achiever students experienced in all three factors unexpectedly.

#### a. Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension is a pattern of shyness indicated by terror of communicating with others (Manipuspika, 2018). In line with the definition, fright or worry was undergone by high achiever students. They proclaimed feeling nervous and afraid when they had to speak in front of their peers during speaking performance.

P1: "Nervous, of course, because whenever I talk to many people."

P2: "Nervous cause people look at me like uncomfortable and afraid of getting mocked if I speak incorrect."

High achiever students claimed, worry arose when they were surrounded by the crowd. First, they started doubting their abilities in the form of less confidence, followed by the terror of making mistakes. Moreover, all of them agreed of worry feeling when they were voluntarily answering questions from the teacher.

P1: "First, my heart beats rapidly because we're shocked. Suddenly were addressed by the questions and yeah nervous in answering the questions."

P3: “For me, I only feel rapid heartbeat when I was given a question directly or plus got pointing out straight. Surely I would feel shocked then I must get the given time to think the answer.”

Students who encountered communication apprehension could have related symptom. Students agonized the symptom such as rapid heartbeat during waiting their turn to convey the answers in the classroom (Sugiyati & Indriani, 2021). High achiever students admitted to feel the speaking anxiety symptom such as shock, leading them to have a rapid heartbeat. Perplexed and unsettled to respond the answer came next. When nervousness already took control, they would prefer to be given some time in order to sort out the answer.

Primarily, communication apprehension originated from several aspects. An abundance of studies already scrutinized the numerous reasons for communication apprehension problems and their significance in speaking anxiety, including shyness, linguistic knowledge, personality traits, and socio-cultural factor, claimed by Asif, Zhiyong, Azhar, and Malik (2019), Soomro, Ahmed, Siming, Rajper, and Malik (2019), Irfan, Abbas, Talib, and Hussain (2020), and Samad, Ali, and Khan (2021).

The researchers of this research discovered aspects mentioned above were significant to communication apprehension in high achiever students. The first aspect was the linguistic factor.

P3: “Personally, I will feel confident once everything is set up. For example, I already know the meaning of the words and the suitable grammar I will convey.”

Asif argued linguistic knowledge is able to promote communication apprehension (Malik, Qin, & Oteir, 2021). High achiever students confirmed that linguistic factors; pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar played a part in making them feel confident. High achiever students who already understood how to use the lexical vocabulary choices based on the appropriate meaning and were familiar with pronouncing the words would believe in their own potential. Students thought that their friends and the English teacher will focus when they talk, for that reason, student sense fearful emotion if they use the inappropriate grammar (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020). Moreover, inadequacy of vocabulary also affected their confidence and speaking anxiety (Bashori et al., 2022).

As in the following, high achiever students feel confident and not anxious about carrying out the information through speaking. The second aspect was personality traits: extroverted and introverted.

P8: “For me. I feel confident when nobody is around me.”

As a matter of fact, each individual is unique. An individual who is introverted like a being alone. Personality traits, especially introversion is examined as forecaster of communication apprehension in speaking anxiety (Malik et al., 2021). That kind of individual confessed when nobody was around them, they felt confident enough to

speak. Thinking about and evaluating related things that have already occurred are activities of an introverted person usually does. A recent study showed that introverted students are having higher speaking anxiety level than extroverted students (Hz, 2022).

The third aspect was student-instructor related.

P4: "It is a matter of knowing and not knowing somebody. I already know you from your teaching and communication styles and probably your characters as well. When you were accompanied by another English teacher that I do not really know, there was no introduction stage and she never taught us."

High achiever students argued they would enjoy engaging the learning process actively by speaking out the ideas when they were taught by the teacher they already knew and had a bond with. Jalleh, Mahfoodh, and Singh (2021) discovered that students were reported to be uneasy about speaking with new acquaintances. Due to no introduction from the extra English teacher, the opportunity to strengthen the bond among the students were missed in order to give such positive emotion to the high achiever students. In fact, positive emotion could promote the willingness to speak and communicate (Dewaele, Witney, Saito, & Dewaele, 2018).

The fourth or last aspect was socio-cultural.

P4: "I still choose Indonesian people because we have the same thoughts in terms of culture and the same language so it is easier to communicate with."

P7: "From what I experienced, I prefer Indonesian people because the English native speakers like to raise themselves."

The researchers asked high achiever students a question related willingness to befriend and communicate with English native speakers and the answers were all about the socio-cultural they usually apply in their daily life. Youthful claimed socio-cultural is one of the reasons for speaking anxiety (Taly & Paramasivam, 2020). The socio-cultural paradigm of stereotypes in which citizens have similar ideas, easily communicate in the same language, and the character culture of keeping a low profile as much as possible, created a barrier to befriend with English native speakers. Socio-cultural element has firm influence that can induce speaking anxiety in students. While the basic purpose of having friends is to communicate, the access to communicating through speaking was restricted.

#### b. Fear of Negative Evaluation

Horwitz et al. (1986), the pioneering researchers of speaking anxiety factors, interpreted fear of negative evaluation as an uneasiness about others' judgment, prevention of evaluative situations, and the assumption of others would judge oneself negatively. Through this case, high achiever students confirmed in feeling terror if they delivered the wrong answer.



P2: "At the same time, I am confused and uncertain about how to elaborate on the answer"

High achiever students created the assumption that they would receive evaluations coming from teachers and peers due to their incorrect responses. Fraenza (2016) mentioned students are afraid if they convey wrong answers then their teacher and their friends will uncover the thought that they are less clever than they used to be. Fear of negative evaluation can also negatively influence students' discernment of their own intellectuality, in other words students could doubt their intelligence or ability (Downing et al., 2020). Rafada and Madini (2017) agreed fear of negative evaluation coming from students is able to teacher put a stop to them in delivering answers without preparation. High achiever students also acknowledged they ever discerned fearful during speaking due to assumption of peers' negative evaluations.

P2: "Yes, I ever feel afraid."

The researchers asked high achiever students whether or not they felt fearful if their friends laughed at them while speaking. Their responses agreed to it. Fear of negative of evaluation made students feel afraid of being laughed (Dansieh, Owusu, & Seidu, 2021). They were afraid if they made mistakes, such as the wrong pronunciation or wrong answer in front of their peers then their peers would make fun of them.

### c. Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is associated with frightened feeling towards tests to estimate students' performances (Manipuspika, 2018). Test anxiety are including test preparation, test-taking stage, and test reaction. Apparently, high achiever students experienced in these three cycles. The first was test preparation.

P6: "Well, I could say I feel a bit panicked if there is a test tomorrow. Since the teacher already announced it the day before, I can prepare myself especially in the grammar section."

Test anxiety of high achiever students was unveiled during preparation time which was the days before they attended the oral test. In this cycle, students will begin to prepare and discover the way to achieve the effectiveness towards their upcoming test (Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018). High achiever students were confirmed to feel slightly panicked because they understood the existing of given time to prepare for the test. They were aware of what aspects they required to boost in order to obtain good scores.

The second was test-taking stage. High achiever students also admitted worry and their concentration sometimes decreased during the test.

P2: "I ever, when I am confused to choose the correct vocabulary in a sentence I studied, but I forgot somehow."

High achiever students experienced a blank effect during the oral test due to their nervousness. The nervousness feeling of students are able to create blank effect during

the test (Bata & Castro, 2021). They were preparing for the test by studying, yet, they faced difficulty remembering what they had already learnt in the midst of test.

The third was test reaction. After completing the test, they still felt worried about the result and the reaction they might encounter.

P8: "What am I afraid of, I am afraid of staying in the same grade."

Future concern about test reaction in the form of worry or anxiety which underwent by high achiever students was stemmed from awareness of their future lives. They were worried about their marks on the oral test. Their minds generated the worst possibility if they received bad scores. A test situation provokes the concern about the test performance, for example failing on the test (Núñez-Peña, Suárez-Pellicioni, & Bonoa, 2016).

## **2. High Achiever Students' Perception on Speaking Anxiety to their Speaking Performance**

The researchers discovered speaking anxiety of high achiever students affected their speaking performance, clustered their perception into two divisions; positive and negative contributions. The positive contribution of speaking anxiety was defined as a contribution that could deliver positive ideas to high achiever students in expanding their speaking skill, while the negative contribution of speaking anxiety worked as a contribution that could deliver negative sides to high achiever students. Concerning positive contribution, this was rooted only from communication apprehension factor.

P5: "I often notice that friends or other people could present smoothly. They speak fluently and it makes me feel like I get the challenge if they can nail it why can't I? I want to compete into it".

They acknowledged their peers were better at speaking, later on they considered it as a challenge. This perception influenced them to grow the motivation in order to compete in performing speaking more fluently. They determined to level up their speaking skill. Legault (2017) enlightened that people who feel motivated obviously struggle towards growth to gather new knowledge, and fulfill needs and interests in.

While the negative contribution of speaking anxiety worked as a contribution that could deliver negative sides to high achiever students. The negative contribution of this study was rooted from three factors; communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

This negative contribution came from communication apprehension. Communication apprehension factor of speaking anxiety provoked reluctant attitude to speak due to the students-instructor related.

P1: "It is because I think I do not know her like I already know you. Then I felt nervous only back then. I can only enjoy it if is you who teach me."

High achievers' speaking anxiety perception of unwilling to talk to unfamiliar people influenced the reserved condition during speaking performance. High achiever

students would willingly engage actively if they already knew and had a bond with the teacher. They would develop trust and an established feeling to speak out their ideas later on. Naturally, people are unwilling to talk to somebody they do not know (Sandstrom & Boothby, 2021). Since the English teacher did not deliver an introduction at first, then the high achiever students restricted their behavior by being reserved.

The negative contribution in performing speaking also derived from fear of negative evaluation.

P2: "I am confused to answer, but if I answer I feel afraid if my answer is incorrect. So that I feel doubted to answer."

High achiever students perceived the influence of speaking anxiety was able to create a doubtful feeling towards their abilities to perform speaking. They were afraid if their answer would be incorrect. Fear of negative evaluation can also negatively influence students' discernment of their own intellectuality, in other words students could doubt their intelligence or ability (Downing et al., 2020). As in result, high achiever students felt doubtful to convey the answers.

The last one, a negative contribution in performing speaking was uncovered from test anxiety.

P2: "Yes, I ever. It happened when I was confused to choose the suitable vocabulary. I already learnt before but I feel like forgot."

High achiever students perceived the influence of speaking anxiety could create struggle in remembering memory whilst performing speaking test. They mentioned feeling nervous to less-concentrated during speaking tests. Less-concentration made them forget about the linguistic knowledge they had already learnt before. The nervousness feeling of students are able to create blank effect during the test (Bata & Castro, 2021).

The novelty of this research appears to fill in the gaps of speaking anxiety phenomenology. First, the previous researchers were only investigating speaking anxiety in university, high school, and middle school students. Second, the participants of the previous studies were not limited into specific case. While this research took vocational high school students to be examined, especially high achiever students. The contribution of this research that has been done is such as: (1) to open the knowledge that all students could experience in speaking anxiety, even the high achievers (2) to enlighten that appearing speaking anxiety factors could have particular impacts on high achievers' speaking performance.

Supplementary, this research position succeeded in established the findings related to high achiever students towards their speaking anxiety factors and its influence to their speaking performance. The researcher of this study suggests the English teachers to be trained be more aware about the speaking anxiety factors and their impact to the students. While for the future researchers, investigating suitable strategies and intervention to cease speaking anxiety in students is necessary.

## CONCLUSION

The result of this research revealed that high achiever students experienced in all three speaking anxiety factors, namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The communication apprehension appears because of several elements: linguistic factors, personality trait, student-instructor related, and socio-cultural. Fear of negative evaluation comes from teacher and peers aspects. Finally, high achiever students undergo test anxiety factor in its every stage.

The influence of speaking anxiety to high achiever students' speaking performance creates two kinds of contribution; positive contribution and negative contribution. Positive contribution develops good motivation in order to perform speaking more fluently. On the other hand, the negative contribution influences them to be less active to remain reserved in performing speaking, could doubt their intelligence in conveying the ideas during speaking performance, and could make them struggling in remembering memory during performing speaking test.

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