

A Comparative Linguistic Analysis of the Ethnocultural Specificity of Ironic Phraseological Units in Russian and Uzbek

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the ethnocultural specificity of ironic phraseological units in the Russian and Uzbek languages from a comparative perspective. The study aims to identify the ways in which the formation and functioning of ironic meanings are determined by the national and cultural characteristics of the two linguistic cultures. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between phraseological imagery, evaluative meaning, cultural knowledge, and pragmatic interpretation. The analysis demonstrates that, despite the commonality of the basic pragmatic functions of irony, the ways in which ironic meanings are expressed in Russian and Uzbek differ in their degree of explicitness, evaluative intensity, and cultural conditioning. The study also reveals both universal mechanisms of ironic meaning formation and culturally specific features associated with national traditions, values, historical experience, and conceptualization of social behaviour. The findings may contribute to comparative linguistics, linguoculturology, phraseology, translation studies, and the methodology of teaching Russian and Uzbek as foreign languages.

Keywords: Irony, phraseological unit, ethnocultural specificity, Russian language, Uzbek language, comparative linguistics, linguoculturology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Irony is one of the most complex phenomena of language communication because its interpretation depends not only on the literal meaning of an utterance but also on contextual, pragmatic, cognitive, and cultural factors. In phraseology, ironic meaning acquires particular significance due to the semantic stability, figurativeness, expressive potential, and cultural markedness of phraseological units [2; 11].

A phraseological unit can preserve its conventional meaning while acquiring an additional ironic interpretation in a particular communicative context. Therefore, the study of ironic phraseological units requires consideration of both their linguistic structure and the cultural knowledge underlying their interpretation.

Phraseological units are closely connected with cultural knowledge and collective experience. Their semantic structure reflects not only linguistic conventions but also culturally established ways of interpreting reality [1; 6]. The national-cultural specificity of phraseological meaning has also been emphasized in comparative phraseological research [3]. Previous research by the author has examined the structural organization of ironic phraseological units in Russian and Uzbek, providing a basis for the present analysis of their ethnocultural and pragmatic specificity [9].

The Russian and Uzbek languages provide valuable material for comparative research because they belong to different linguistic and cultural traditions. Despite the existence of universal mechanisms of irony, phraseological expressions in the two languages demonstrate differences in imagery, evaluative orientation, degree of explicitness, and pragmatic functioning. These differences are especially evident when phraseological units are used to express criticism, disapproval, mockery, understatement, exaggeration, or indirect evaluation.

The relevance of the present study is determined by the need to identify the relationship between the national-cultural component of phraseological meaning and the mechanisms of ironic interpretation in Russian and Uzbek. Comparative analysis

makes it possible to distinguish universal features of irony from culturally specific patterns and to clarify the difficulties that may arise in translation and intercultural communication.

The aim of the study is to identify the ethnocultural characteristics of ironic phraseological units in Russian and Uzbek and to determine the similarities and differences in their semantic and pragmatic functioning.

The objectives are to examine the linguistic and cultural foundations of ironic phraseological meaning, identify the main mechanisms of ironic interpretation, compare Russian and Uzbek phraseological units, and determine the role of national-cultural knowledge in their understanding.

The research material consists of Russian and Uzbek phraseological units functioning as means of ironic evaluation. The study employs comparative, contrastive, semantic, contextual, linguocultural, and pragmatic methods. The combination of these methods makes it possible to analyze ironic phraseological units both as stable linguistic expressions and as culturally determined communicative units.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research is based on phraseological units of the Russian and Uzbek languages that are capable of expressing ironic evaluation in different communicative contexts. The material was selected from Russian and Uzbek phraseological dictionaries, linguistic studies on phraseology and irony, as well as examples illustrating the functioning of phraseological units in speech.

The study employs a comparative and contrastive approach aimed at identifying common and language-specific characteristics of ironic phraseological units. The comparative method makes it possible to establish functional and semantic correspondences between Russian and Uzbek expressions, whereas the contrastive method reveals differences in their structural organization, imagery, evaluative potential, and cultural motivation.

The semantic analysis was used to determine the relationship between the conventional meaning of a phraseological unit and

its ironic interpretation. Particular attention was paid to cases in which the contextual meaning contrasts with the literal or conventional meaning of the expression. The contextual method was applied to identify the conditions under which a phraseological unit acquires an ironic meaning and to determine the role of the communicative situation in its interpretation.

The linguocultural method was used to establish the connection between phraseological imagery and culturally significant concepts, values, traditions, social practices, and historical experience represented in Russian and Uzbek phraseology. This approach makes it possible to distinguish universal mechanisms of ironic expression from nationally specific ones.

The pragmatic analysis focused on the communicative functions of ironic phraseological units, including criticism, disapproval, mockery, negative evaluation, emotional distancing, and indirect expression of the speaker's attitude. The analysis also considered the relationship between the speaker, the addressee, and the object of evaluation.

For the purposes of the study, particular attention was paid to such mechanisms of ironic meaning formation as semantic inversion, contrast between literal and intended meaning, hyperbolization, understatement, euphemization, anti-phrase, and culturally motivated allusion. Their functioning was examined in Russian and Uzbek phraseological material in order to determine the degree of similarity and difference between the two linguistic cultures.

The combination of semantic, comparative, contrastive, linguocultural, contextual, and pragmatic methods provides a comprehensive basis for identifying the ethnocultural specificity of ironic phraseological units in Russian and Uzbek.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Ethnocultural foundations of ironic phraseological meaning*

Ironic phraseological meaning is formed through the interaction of linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and pragmatic factors. Phraseological units preserve not only information about objects

and situations but also culturally determined ways of evaluating human behaviour [1; 3; 6]. Therefore, their ironic interpretation cannot be adequately explained by their lexical or dictionary meaning alone. The analysis of Russian and Uzbek material demonstrates that the ironic potential of phraseological units is closely connected with national concepts of social norms, moral values, interpersonal relations, and acceptable communicative behaviour.

A particularly important factor is the relationship between the conventional imagery of a phraseological unit and the cultural knowledge shared by members of a linguistic community [3; 6]. National cognitive models influence the choice of objects subjected to ironic evaluation, the forms of criticism, and the degree of expressive intensity. Consequently, the same pragmatic intention may be realized through different phraseological images in Russian and Uzbek, reflecting differences in cultural experience and communicative conventions.

The Russian material demonstrates a comparatively high degree of explicitness and evaluative expressiveness. Ironic phraseological units frequently characterize personal shortcomings, hypocrisy, social injustice, bureaucracy, excessive self-confidence, and other forms of behaviour regarded negatively within the cultural and social context. Expressions such as *сидеть как пень* (“to sit like a stump”), *пальцы вееером* (“with one’s fingers spread out”) and *работать не царское дело* (“working is not a king’s business”) convey negative evaluation through hyperbole, semantic contrast, and figurative lowering.

In the analysed Uzbek material, ironic meaning tends to be realized more indirectly. Hints, figurative expressions, proverbs, and stable combinations make it possible to express criticism while maintaining communicative politeness and avoiding direct confrontation with the addressee. Such a strategy is associated with notions of respect, interpersonal harmony, and appropriate speech behaviour. As a result, ironic evaluation often remains implicit and becomes fully interpretable only within the relevant communicative and cultural context.

For example, the Uzbek expression *Eshakdan iltifot kutmoq* (“to expect respect from a donkey”) is used to characterize a

person who unreasonably expects gratitude or proper treatment from someone incapable of providing it. The expression *Ko'z ko'rib, yurak chidamaydi* ("the eye sees, but the heart cannot endure") may acquire an ironic interpretation in a particular context when referring to excessive emotionality or demonstrative sympathy. In these examples, irony is produced not through direct ridicule but through implicit evaluation, which requires the addressee to recognize the culturally and pragmatically relevant discrepancy between the expression and the situation.

The comparison of the analysed material reveals a difference in the pragmatic orientation of ironic phraseology. Russian ironic phraseological units tend more often toward direct evaluation of personal and social shortcomings, whereas Uzbek units in the analysed material more frequently combine evaluation with a regulatory or didactic function.

This difference becomes particularly significant when the objects of ironic evaluation are considered. In Russian linguistic culture, irony is frequently directed at individual qualities and social phenomena such as arrogance, hypocrisy, bureaucratic behaviour, intellectual limitations, and unjustified claims to superiority. Expressions such as *пальцывеером, носкверху* ("with one's nose in the air"), and *работатънецарскоедело* illustrate the use of phraseological imagery to criticize behaviour that contradicts socially accepted expectations.

In the analysed Uzbek material, ironic evaluation is more closely associated with traditional moral and social values, including respect for elders, family responsibility, modesty, gratitude, and adherence to accepted forms of interpersonal behaviour. Thus, the objects of ironic evaluation frequently include hypocrisy, ingratitude, excessive self-regard, and violations of socially approved behavioural patterns. The expression *Bir og'izda ikki til* ("two tongues in one mouth"), for instance, characterizes a person who changes position depending on circumstances, while *Burni osmonda* ("with the nose in the sky") describes an arrogant or conceited person.

These observations demonstrate that the ethnocultural specificity of irony is not restricted to the choice of individual

phraseological expressions. It is manifested more broadly in the selection of socially significant objects of evaluation and in the communicative strategies used to express criticism. In the analysed material, Russian phraseology more frequently foregrounds individual and social contradictions, whereas Uzbek phraseology tends to relate ironic evaluation to collective moral norms and culturally approved models of behaviour.

3.2. Comparative features of ironic phraseological units in Russian and Uzbek

The comparative analysis of Russian and Uzbek phraseological material demonstrates that irony in both languages is based on the interaction of conventional phraseological meaning, contextual reinterpretation, and evaluative contrast. At the same time, the specific linguistic realization of ironic meaning reflects differences in national-cultural experience, communicative norms, and socially significant value orientations.

A comparison of the analysed units makes it possible to distinguish several recurrent mechanisms of ironic meaning formation: semantic contrast, hyperbole, understatement, euphemization, anti-phrase, and culturally motivated allusion. These mechanisms are not exclusive to either language; however, their frequency, expressive intensity, and cultural motivation may differ.

Mechanism of ironic meaning	Russian language	Uzbek language	Comparative characteristic
Semantic contrast	The conventional meaning of a phraseological unit contrasts with the actual communicative situation and intended evaluation.	The ironic meaning is often revealed through contextual opposition between the expression and the situation.	Universal mechanism of irony in both languages.
Hyperbole	Used to exaggerate a quality or situation and intensify negative or humorous evaluation.	Often combines exaggeration with figurative characterization of a person or situation.	Universal mechanism, with differences in expressive intensity.

Understatement	Allows negative evaluation to be expressed indirectly and with reduced explicitness. Frequently functions as an indirect form of criticism and depends strongly on context.	More closely connected with indirect communication.	Greater reliance on contextual interpretation in the analysed Uzbek material.
Euphemization	Makes critical or negative evaluation less direct through a figurative or softened expression.	Often serves to avoid direct confrontation and preserve interpersonal harmony.	Strongly influenced by communicative and cultural norms.
Anti-phrase	An expression with a positive or neutral conventional meaning may acquire an opposite evaluation in context.	The opposite evaluation is usually reconstructed from the communicative situation and shared cultural knowledge.	Similar semantic mechanism, but interpretation is highly context-dependent.
Cultural allusion	May rely on historical, literary, social, and everyday cultural associations.	Frequently reflects traditional values, customs, social norms, and culturally significant behavioural models.	One of the strongest markers of ethnocultural specificity.

One of the most significant differences concerns the degree of explicitness of evaluation. Russian phraseological units often allow negative assessment to be recognized relatively quickly because of their expressive imagery and semantic contrast. Uzbek phraseological units, while also capable of strong evaluation, more frequently rely on contextual interpretation and culturally shared knowledge. This distinction does not indicate an absolute opposition between the two systems; rather, it reflects different tendencies in the realization of the same pragmatic intention.

The phraseological units *пальцывеером* and *носокверху*, for example, employ figurative representations of physical posture to characterize arrogance and excessive self-confidence. Their ironic potential emerges when the figurative image is applied to a person whose behaviour is evaluated negatively. In Uzbek, the

expression *Burni osmonda* (“with the nose in the sky”) performs a comparable function. The correspondence demonstrates that similar conceptual models can exist in both linguistic cultures, although their phraseological forms differ.

Another important correspondence is observed in the representation of hypocrisy and inconsistency. The Russian expression *семь пятниц на неделе* characterizes a person who constantly changes decisions or opinions. The Uzbek expression *Bir og'izda ikki til* (“two tongues in one mouth”) similarly conveys the idea of inconsistency and opportunistic behaviour. The images are different, but the underlying evaluative model is comparable: both expressions criticize a discrepancy between a person's statements, decisions, or positions.

The analysis also reveals differences in the cultural background of evaluative imagery. Russian phraseological irony frequently draws on everyday experience, social behaviour, historical associations, and culturally recognizable stereotypes. Uzbek phraseological irony is also based on everyday experience but demonstrates a particularly strong connection with social and moral norms governing interpersonal relations. Consequently, the same negative quality may be represented through different culturally meaningful images.

The pragmatic orientation of the analysed expressions is also significant. In the analysed Russian material, ironic phraseological units can function as a relatively direct means of social criticism. In the analysed Uzbek material, the same type of evaluation may be incorporated into a more indirect communicative strategy, in which criticism is softened by figurative expression, humour, or implication. Such differences become especially important in intercultural communication because a phraseological unit that is immediately perceived as ironic by native speakers may be interpreted literally or incorrectly by speakers of another language.

Thus, the comparative analysis confirms that, in the analysed material, Russian and Uzbek ironic phraseology combines universal mechanisms with national-specific forms of realization. The universal component is represented by the pragmatic intention to express an implicit or indirect evaluation, while the

ethnocultural component is manifested in the choice of imagery, objects of criticism, value orientations, and communicative strategies.

3.3. *Linguocultural factors in the formation of ironic meaning*

The analysis demonstrates that the formation of ironic meaning in Russian and Uzbek phraseological units is closely connected with the national cognitive models through which speakers interpret human behaviour, social relations, and culturally significant situations. Phraseological units accumulate historical experience, cultural traditions, behavioural stereotypes, and value orientations [3; 6]; therefore, their ironic potential cannot be separated from the linguocultural context in which they function.

One of the most important linguocultural factors is the choice of the object of ironic evaluation. In the Russian material, irony is frequently directed toward personal shortcomings and socially disapproved behaviour, including hypocrisy, laziness, excessive self-confidence, stupidity, and boastfulness. Thus, expressions such as *сидеть как пень*, *пальцы в еером*, and *работать не царское дело* construct a negative evaluation through figurative imagery, contrast, hyperbolization, and semantic lowering.

In the analysed Uzbek material, ironic evaluation demonstrates a somewhat different cultural orientation. Ironic evaluation is often connected with established moral and behavioural norms and may perform not only a critical but also a didactic function. The speaker can indirectly indicate that a particular behaviour contradicts socially accepted expectations. This tendency is particularly evident in expressions whose interpretation involves respect, appropriate interpersonal behaviour, emotional restraint, and other culturally significant norms.

A clear example is the Uzbek phraseological unit *Eshakdan iltifot kutmoq* (“to expect respect from a donkey”). Its ironic interpretation is based on the culturally recognizable image of expecting an appropriate response from someone who is incapable of providing it. The expression therefore criticizes unreasonable expectations indirectly rather than through direct

personal condemnation. Similarly, *Ko 'z ko 'rib, yurak chidamaydi* ("the eye sees, but the heart cannot endure") may acquire an ironic interpretation in a particular context when excessive emotionality or demonstrative sympathy is being evaluated.

A particularly important source of ethnocultural information is represented by proverbs and sayings. Their compact form, figurative structure, and connection with collective experience make them an effective means of transmitting culturally established evaluations. In both languages, proverbial expressions can produce an ironic effect by presenting a situation through a familiar image that allows the addressee to infer a negative assessment.

Russian ironic proverbs tend to express criticism through relatively explicit evaluative and comic imagery. The expressions *Наиёлдуракзабаву* ("A fool has found himself some amusement") and *ЗаставьдуракаБогумолиться – онилобрасишьбёт* ("If you make a fool pray to God, he will hurt his forehead") characterize stupidity and inappropriate behaviour through exaggeration and comic effect.

In Uzbek, proverbial irony more frequently incorporates an implicit moral lesson. The proverb *Eshakka atlas yopsang ham eshakligicha qoladi* ("Even if you cover a donkey with atlas, it will remain a donkey") ironically characterizes a person whose essential qualities do not change merely because external circumstances or appearance have changed. The image functions simultaneously as an ironic evaluation and as a generalized moral statement.

The comparison therefore indicates that ethnocultural specificity is manifested not only in the lexical form of phraseological units but also in their evaluative orientation and communicative function. In the analysed material, Russian ironic phraseology demonstrates greater expressive explicitness, whereas Uzbek phraseology more often combines irony with indirect evaluation and a didactic or moralizing implication.

Thus, the linguocultural factor determines both what is evaluated ironically and how this evaluation is communicated. The Russian and Uzbek systems share the fundamental mechanism of implicit evaluation, but the cultural norms of

communication influence the degree of directness, the choice of figurative images, and the relationship between irony, criticism, and moral instruction. This confirms that the interpretation of ironic phraseological units requires consideration of both their semantic structure and the cultural knowledge shared by members of the corresponding linguistic community.

3.4. *Pragmatic functions of ironic phraseological units*

The comparative analysis shows that ironic phraseological units in Russian and Uzbek perform a range of pragmatic functions associated with the expression of the speaker's attitude toward a person, action, situation, or social phenomenon. Although the specific linguistic forms differ, the central pragmatic function of irony in both languages is the indirect transmission of evaluation. The speaker does not necessarily formulate criticism explicitly; instead, the phraseological unit creates a semantic discrepancy that enables the addressee to infer the intended attitude.

One of the principal functions of ironic phraseological units is negative evaluation. In both Russian and Uzbek, phraseological expressions can be used to characterize undesirable personal qualities and socially disapproved behaviour. The Russian expressions *сидеть как пень*, *пальцы веером*, and *носкверху*, for example, convey negative assessments of passivity, arrogance, or excessive self-confidence. Their expressive imagery makes the evaluative intention relatively transparent.

In the analysed Uzbek material, negative evaluation is also widely represented, but it is frequently realized through an indirect or figurative form. Expressions such as *Burni osmonda* ("with the nose in the sky") characterize an arrogant person, while *Bir og'izda ikki til* ("two tongues in one mouth") expresses criticism of inconsistency or opportunistic behaviour. In such cases, the phraseological image provides the basis for the negative evaluation without requiring direct verbal condemnation.

A second important function is criticism through indirectness. The use of a phraseological unit allows the speaker to communicate disapproval while reducing the degree of direct confrontation. This function is particularly significant in

intercultural comparison because the degree of communicative directness is influenced by culturally established norms of interpersonal interaction. In the analysed Uzbek material, there is a pronounced tendency toward hints, figurative expressions, and indirect evaluation, which may help maintain communicative politeness and avoid open opposition.

Another pragmatic function is mockery and comic characterization. Irony can transform criticism into a humorous representation of a person or situation. In Russian, this function is particularly evident in proverbial expressions involving exaggeration and comic imagery, such as *Наиёлдуракзабаву* and *ЗаставьдуракаБогумолиться – онилобрасиибёт*. The humorous form does not eliminate the negative evaluation; instead, it intensifies it through comic exaggeration.

In the analysed Uzbek phraseological material, the comic function may be combined with a didactic or moralizing function. The proverb *Eshakka atlas yopsang ham eshakligicha qoladi* does not merely ridicule the discrepancy between external appearance and internal qualities. It also communicates a generalized moral judgment: external changes cannot fundamentally alter a person's essential nature. Thus, irony becomes a means of transmitting a culturally significant behavioural or moral principle.

Ironic phraseological units can also perform a regulatory function. By presenting socially undesirable behaviour in a humorous or critical form, they implicitly indicate the boundaries of acceptable conduct. This function is particularly visible in the analysed Uzbek material, where ironic expressions may contain a moralizing implication and encourage conformity with established social and interpersonal norms. The phraseological unit therefore operates not only as an expressive linguistic device but also as a means of social evaluation.

A further function is emotional expression. Phraseological imagery enables speakers to express irritation, scepticism, dissatisfaction, amusement, or contempt more vividly than neutral lexical expressions. The emotional component is especially strong when the phraseological unit is combined with

contextual contrast. In such cases, the emotional reaction of the speaker becomes part of the ironic interpretation.

The analysis therefore makes it possible to distinguish the following major pragmatic functions of ironic phraseological units in the two languages:

Pragmatic function	Russian language	Uzbek language
Negative evaluation	Expressive criticism of personal and social shortcomings	Indirect evaluation of behaviour that contradicts accepted norms
Criticism	Often relatively explicit and expressive	Frequently indirect and context-dependent
Mockery	Strongly associated with comic exaggeration and expressive imagery	Often combined with figurative characterization
Emotional expression	Irony conveys irritation, contempt, scepticism, or amusement	Emotional evaluation is frequently softened by indirectness
Didactic function	Present, especially in proverbial expressions	Particularly prominent in proverbial and culturally marked expressions

The comparison confirms that the pragmatic functions themselves are largely universal, whereas the manner of their realization is culturally conditioned. Russian and Uzbek ironic phraseological units can perform the same basic communicative tasks, but they differ in the degree of explicitness, expressive intensity, contextual dependence, and the relationship between criticism and moral instruction.

Consequently, an adequate interpretation of ironic phraseological units requires attention to three interconnected levels: semantic meaning, pragmatic intention, and ethnocultural context. Ignoring any of these levels may result in an incomplete interpretation, particularly in translation and intercultural communication.

4. CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of ironic phraseological units in Russian and Uzbek demonstrates that irony represents a complex

linguistic and pragmatic phenomenon whose realization is determined by the interaction of semantic, communicative, and ethnocultural factors. Phraseological units are particularly effective in expressing ironic meaning because their semantic stability, figurative character, and expressive potential allow speakers to convey an implicit evaluation through culturally recognizable images.

The study has shown that Russian and Uzbek ironic phraseological units share a number of universal mechanisms of meaning formation. These include semantic contrast, hyperbolization, understatement, euphemization, anti-phraseological use, and contextual reinterpretation. In both languages, the ironic effect arises from the discrepancy between the conventional meaning of a phraseological expression and the speaker's actual communicative intention.

At the same time, the comparative analysis reveals significant ethnocultural differences. In the analysed material, Russian ironic phraseological units tend to demonstrate a higher degree of explicitness and evaluative expressiveness. They are frequently used to characterize personal shortcomings, arrogance, hypocrisy, stupidity, laziness, and socially undesirable behaviour. Uzbek ironic phraseological units more often rely on indirectness, figurative implication, culturally shared knowledge, and moral or didactic evaluation.

A particularly important finding concerns the role of national cognitive models in determining the objects and forms of ironic evaluation. Russian and Uzbek phraseological systems may express similar pragmatic intentions through different cultural images. For example, Russian *семьятница* and Uzbek *Bir og'izda ikki til* represent different figurative models but share a comparable evaluative orientation toward inconsistency and changeability. Similarly, the Russian *носкеверху* and Uzbek *Burni osmonda* demonstrate the possibility of conceptual correspondence based on the image of arrogance.

The analysis of proverbs and sayings has further confirmed the close relationship between irony and collective cultural experience. Russian ironic proverbs tend to emphasize expressive and comic criticism, whereas Uzbek proverbial expressions more

frequently combine ironic evaluation with a moralizing or didactic implication.

The research also establishes that the pragmatic functions of irony are largely universal in the two languages. Ironic phraseological units perform functions of negative evaluation, criticism, mockery, emotional expression, and social regulation. However, the manner in which these functions are realized differs according to culturally established communicative norms. In Uzbek, indirectness and the preservation of interpersonal harmony play a particularly significant role, while Russian material more often demonstrates direct expressive evaluation.

Thus, the ethnocultural specificity of ironic phraseological units is manifested not only in their lexical and figurative composition but also in their semantic interpretation, evaluative orientation, pragmatic functions, and communicative context. The findings confirm that a comparative study of Russian and Uzbek phraseology makes it possible to distinguish universal mechanisms of irony from nationally specific forms of their linguistic realization.

The results of the research may be applied in comparative linguistics, linguoculturology, phraseology, translation studies, intercultural communication, and the methodology of teaching Russian and Uzbek. Particular practical significance can be attributed to the findings for translation, since the adequate transmission of an ironic phraseological unit requires consideration not only of its dictionary meaning but also of its cultural associations and pragmatic function.

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