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ON COMPARING MULTILINGUAL SOCIETIES: THE LINGUISTIC SITUATION OF THE SLAVIC MINORITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA

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Abstract. This article aims to show that it is only by comparing different multilingual communities that a typologically relevant description of such communities is made possible. An example (Brix, 1982) is presented to demonstrate that a usable description of such regions is implicitly based on comparison and what factors are important in this respect. It is shown that only a model of variables which can comprise the analogous traits of the situations as well as the differences between them enables an adequate comparison to be made.

The examples of the Croats in the Burgenland and of the Slovenes in Carinthia show what the consequences for the description of the situations are and what difficulties arise with such a description. The domains of the semi-official use of language are examined to find out what parallels and differences in the factors which are used for the description of multilingual communities (e.g. economic situation, legislation, historical development, sociolinguistic situation) can be related the peculiarities of language use in the two situations. In this way typological similarities and certain idiosyncratic characteristics of the two regions can be understood.

Comparison as a methodological principle

Some kind of notion of comparison has been part of most studies describing the (socio) linguistic situation of linguistic minorities. Some years ago the editors of the German journal *OBST* (1977) tried to convince scholars to produce a description of various multilingual situations in an explicitly comparative manner, by presenting the authors with a standard list of criteria. However, the results of this attempt were not very convincing, and this was only partly because most of the authors did not stick to the

guidelines laid down in the list of criteria. Indeed, the authors' lack of co-operation may well have been due to the fact that those contributing felt unable to give adequate descriptions using just the criteria given. One conclusion to be drawn from this episode is that comparison of multilingual societies means (something else, and indeed) rather more than just the search for similarities and parallels, for these alone obscure the specific traits of the individual regions to an unbearable extent.

Nonetheless, in spite of unsolved theoretical problems in comparing multilingual societies or linguistic minorities, in practice there is ample reference in the literature to the comparison of minority situations. Structures which are thought to be analogous in different multilingual societies are seen as calling for similar legal solutions. For example, Sobiela-Caanitz (1980) considers the legislative regulations for the French-speaking minority of the Aosta Valley (Italy) to be in a similar – unitarian – way just as inadequate as are the corresponding regulations for the language situation in Alsace (France). To draw this conclusion Sobiela-Caanitz must make the assumption that the two situations are in some way analogous.

An Example

Systematic comparison has to explain what it means when we say that multilingual societies are 'in some way analogous'. Here it is not sufficient to look for similarities and common traits. Even intuitive comparisons make use of procedures much more complicated than this, as can be seen in a study of colloquial languages in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire at the beginning of our century by E. Brix, a study, incidentally, not aimed at explicit comparison. In this book we find the following statement about one of the regions to which we shall be turning our attention in the second part of this paper.

Im Gegensatz zum Kronland Steiermark siedelten die Slowenen in Kärnten nicht geschlossen, sondern die Besiedlung trug den Habitus weit mobilerer gemischt-sprachiger Gebiete. Diese bereits vor dem behandelten Zeitraum ausgebildeten Siedlungsverhältnisse bilden die Prämisse für die folgende Darstellung der Kärntner Umgangssprachenerhebungen. (Brix, 1982: 166)

Without really being aware of it, Brix in this introduction to his chapter on the situation in Carinthia intuitively sets out the conditions for a reasonable and systematic method of comparing different multilingual situations. For in these introductory remarks he distinguishes between at least three aspects:

(1) Merely by studying the different multilingual societies within the Austro-Hungarian Empire and so by treating them as the unified topic of his book, Brix shows that he sees these different cases as a token of one type of multilingual society. It follows from this argument that the *existence of two or more idioms within one society* is just one of the defining elements

of such societies; in addition there must be at least some uniformity as regards their state of socio-political development.

(2) The comparison – in this case implicit – between the different regions takes into account not only similarities between them but also the significant differences. This is possible in a systematic way only if differences in language use are explained as functions of variables valid for both (or several) of the regions compared. For Brix, the variable: 'form of settlement' has a different value for the two regions in question; on the other hand, he claims that a further variable 'Slovene national consciousness', has the same value in both regions.

(3) Language use itself is not a variable factor in this sense, but the factor 'type of settlement' is seen as the premise, by means of which differences in language use may be explained. Brix's further remarks show that – had comparison of the two situations been his topic – he would have been willing to accept still further factors; thus he reports as follows on the development of the sociolinguistic situation up until the present day:

Für Theodor Veiter ist der in der Republik fortgesetzte Rückgang der Slowenen Kärntens erklärt durch den Bestand von

"... ethnopolitischen Druckzonen mit gehäuften Umvolkungserscheinungen, einem starken Prestigegefälle zu Ungunsten der Minderheit auf dem Gebiete des Sozialprestiges... und Ansätzen zu schwebendem Volkstum, ..."

Dies gilt größten Teil noch nicht für die ethnische Situation Kärntens in Altösterreich, wo der nationalitätenrechtliche Begriff der "Minderheit" nicht auf den kollektiven Status der Slowenen Kärntens applizierbar war. Es bestand noch kaum ein Sozialprestigegefälle, das etwa Slowenen aus opportunistischen Gründen veranlaßt hätte, sich zur deutschen Umgangssprache zu bekennen. (Brix, 1982: 167–68)

It follows from this quotation that he would accept a correlation between language use and the factors: firstly, legal status ascribed to a language, second, 'prestige' (in contrast to the variables mentioned until now, prestige is purely a psychological phenomenon). Whether 'prestige' is an independent factor determining the situation in its own right, or whether it is to be seen merely as a secondary, dependent variable, remains open. Brix seems to prefer the latter interpretation, cf. a footnote to the paragraph cited above:

61) *Zu gegensätzlichen Schlussfolgerungen gelangt Janko Pleterski in seinen Arbeiten, der darin den überproportionalen Anteil slowenischer Bewohner an der Industriearbeiterschaft als wesentlichen Faktor des Germanisierungsprozesses isoliert. Pleterski, Die Slowenen 814–816; ders, Položay Slovencev pred prvo svetovno vojno (Die Lage der Slowenen vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg). In: Jugoslovenski narodi pred prvi svetski rat (Die jugoslawischen Völker vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg), hgg. von Vasa Cubrilović (= Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, posebna izdanja 416, Odeljenje društvenih nauka 61, Beograd 1967) 762ff.; sowie zu den berufsstatistischen Verhältnissen Bogo Grafenauer, Slovenija–Gospodarstvo (Slowenien–Wirtschaft). In: Enciklopedija Jugoslavije (Enzyklopädie Jugoslawiens; hgg. von Miroslav Krleža VII (Zagreb 1968) 357ff. (Brix, 1982: 168)*

Whatever the right explanation in this respect, Brix undoubtedly accepts that the language prestige may here be explained as derivative of various characteristics of the *employment situation*. Further possible factors (which may explain the relative use of the languages) are mentioned in other parts of Brix's treatise. For example, absolute and in particular relative size of the minority, and historical development.

It remains to be noted even within the societies we want to characterise in this way, there is a consciousness of the existence of factors of just the type we have been discussing. Brix reports a complaint by some citizens of Emmersdorf, a village with a Slovene majority in the district of Villach, in connection with the census of 1910.

Ein interessantes Detail bietet eine Beschwerde Grafenauers betreffend die Vornahme der Volkszählung in der mehrheitlich slowenischen Gemeinde Emmersdorf (politischer Bezirk Villach). Die Beschwerde wurde zwar von der Landesregierung als grundlos zurückgewiesen, jedoch erörterte der Bezirkskommissär Dr. Blasius Lahoung in diesem Zusammenhang den bei der Volkszählung von 1910 aufgetretenen Rückgang der Bevölkerung mit slowenischer Umgangssprache. Für den Rückgang verantwortlich waren nach den Ausführungen des betroffenen Gemeindevorstehers von Emmersdorf und der Zählkommissäre sieben Punkte:

"1) Die Gemeinde Emmersdorf grenzt unmittelbar an die ganz deutsche Gemeinde Bleiberg an, in welcher letzterer einerseits viele Bewohner der Gemeinde Emmersdorf als Bergknappen ihr Fortkommen finden, andererseits aber auch die landwirtschaftstreibende Bevölkerung ihre Produkte anbringt, so daß zahlreiche Bewohner der Gemeinde Emmersdorf mit der ganz deutschen Bevölkerung von Bleiberg in konstanter Berührung stehen und sich im Verkehre mit derselben fast ausschließlich der deutschen Sprache bedienen.

2) Der Bahn- und der damit zusammenhängende Fremdenverkehr zwingt die einheimische Bevölkerung, immer mehr die deutsche Sprache zu gebrauchen."

Neben diesen wirtschaftlichen Gesichtspunkten nannte der Bericht als weitere Begründung unter Punkt 3 die große Zahl utraqvistischer Schulen sowie viertens die zahlreichen Mischehen zwischen Slowenen und Deutschösterreichern. Einen wichtigen Platz nahm auch die slowenische Auswanderung nach Amerika ein (Punkt 5), die selbst nach in vielen Fällen erfolgter Rückwanderung die Slowenen als deutschsprachig erscheinen ließ:

"6) Die aus Amerika zurückkehrende einheimische Bevölkerung spricht nach ihrer Rückkehr deshalb meistens deutsch, weil die Auswanderung zumeist nach Milwaukee, einer deutschen Kolonie stattfindet."

Komplettiert wurde die Liste durch einen Hinweis auf die Zuwanderung deutschsprachiger Gewerbetreibender aufgrund der immer zahlreicheren "Sommerfrischler" in Kärnten. (Brix, 1982: 173/174)

To judge the points made in this letter as a hotch potch of purely idiosyncratic characteristics would be a very superficial level of analysis. Actually, in a comparative framework, they are to be interpreted as special fillings of variables which may be used for describing other situations in a corresponding fashion. The same is true of the factor mentioned in the following paragraph:

Die Wiedergeburt der zunächst kulturellen Eigenständigkeit im 19. Jahrhundert ging vor allem von dem überwiegend slowenisch bewohnten Krain aus. Im Rahmen der Bewusstseinsbildung der eigenen Nationalität der Slowenen Kärntens, der von größerer ideologischer Bedeutung war als er von einer wirklichen Erfassung der nationalen Idee durch die Mehrheit der slowenischsprachigen Bevölkerung zeugte, bildeten die Umgangssprachenerhebungen als Indikatoren der jeweiligen nationalen Erfolge oder Mißerfolge, einen wichtigen Bestandteil der slowenischnationalen Bemühungen. (Brix, 1982: 169/170)

Gathering together all the strands of Brix's argument as found in his description of the situation of the Slovene language in Carinthia, we may at first sight seem to get a random sample of incoherent phenomena; but, bearing in mind our concept of comparison via relevant variables, it is not at all difficult to arrange these under only a few headings, roughly as can be seen in Table 1.

It is obvious that the entries under the different headings are by no means exhaustive, but they may be sufficient for the point we want to make. In addition to the factors in this table, one could expect the existence of certain cultural factors, which are not represented in Brix's argumentation by chance.

Typology and historical individuality

Now a description on this level is, of course, relatively banal, using as it does none other than the usual general categories one would expect in the description of any social situation. So this type of description has to be modified in such a way that only those factors are represented which, in at least one of the multilingual societies in question, can be correlated with language use. In such a model, the term 'multilingual society' is defined by a social network consisting of interconnected variable factors, which correlate directly with the regularities of language use. But even with this qualification it must be questioned whether a description at this relatively high level of abstraction is of any use in characterising a single instance of the type 'multilingual society'. We have to reduce the abstraction to a level on which the identity of each situation is still discernible, but where we still do not lose the advantages of typological classification. The entries in our table below show how this could be done; for example, we have under the category 'legal factors' entries like *Nationalitätenrechtliche Regelung* or *utraquistische Schulen*; this means that phenomena belonging to a very specific historical situation, such as the legal regulations within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, are interpretable as concrete representations of a certain type of legal principle(s). This reduction to situations of a social and historical nature differing only to a relatively small degree, cuts down the possible fillings for our variables to a finite number of possibilities. It follows from this argument that multilingual societies are comparable in this sense only within a (very) restricted sociopolitically defined framework. If the

Table 1

<i>Geographic/ Demographic Factors</i>	<i>Historical Factors</i>	<i>Economic Factors</i>	<i>Social/ Political Factors</i>	<i>Legal Factors</i>	<i>Socio- Linguistic Factors</i>
Form of settlement	Historical development	Employment structure	National/ethnic consciousness	'Nationality laws'	Prestige of idiom
State membership		Commuting	Political parties/organisations	' <i>Utrajquisische Schulen</i> '	
Size		Tourism	Rivalry between different population groups		
Population stability			Tourism		

historical and political state of multilingual societies outside this framework is considered, the fillings for the 'identical' variables are likely to belong to different band-widths and interconnect purely by chance. For this reason, it seems more promising to deal with situations where the spread of the fillings for the different variables is comparatively narrow. In this respect a restriction to 'linguistic minorities in Central Europe' seems reasonable, since here the sociopolitical conditions vary within quite narrow limits, and, thus, the possible fillings for the set of variables can be described in much more concrete terms. In Brix's example from Central Europe of the early twentieth Century, even emigration to the USA, due to economic factors, can be given a systematic representation, and only untypical features of the type 'emigration from German-speaking Milwaukee' would lie outside the scope of such a description.

So far we have tried to show that it is impossible to compare multilingual societies without aiming at a level of abstraction beyond mere similarity. On the other hand, the level of abstraction required for an adequate description has to be so close to the conditions of the individual regions and situations that the characteristics of each situation can be viewed in correlation with its typological status.

This model for the comparison of multilingual societies, which has only been sketched out roughly here, is being tested in a research project at the University of Bayreuth (W. Germany) with reference to the socio-linguistic situations in the South Tyrol (Italy), Alsace (France), Carinthia and Burgenland (Austria). In the following section of this paper we shall exemplify the use of this model and some of the problems that arise in its use in the Carinthian and Burgenland situations.

The Croats in the Burgenland and the Slovenes in Carinthia

General survey

These two minorities, nearly equal in size, form part of the Republic of Austria. According to the 1981 census data, the Croat minority group in Austria numbers around 18,500, the Slovenes 16,500.

The area inhabited by the Burgenland Croats covers nearly the whole Burgenland, with the exception of the 'Seewinkel' and the Jennersdorf district, the only part of Burgenland directly adjoining Yugoslavia. The Croats immigrated to this region about 450 years ago. There was ample room for them, as the invasion of the Turks in conjunction with a lasting economic crisis had depopulated the region. The land as a whole was owned by Hungarian noble families, who also owned property in Croatia. As Croatia was at this time under threat of invasion by the Osman Empire, the land-owners transferred population from there to their possessions in Western Hungary, as the Burgenland then was. This explains the present-day Croat settlement in pockets, alongside villages of German and Hungarian speakers. The latter can be traced back to the time when the region now called

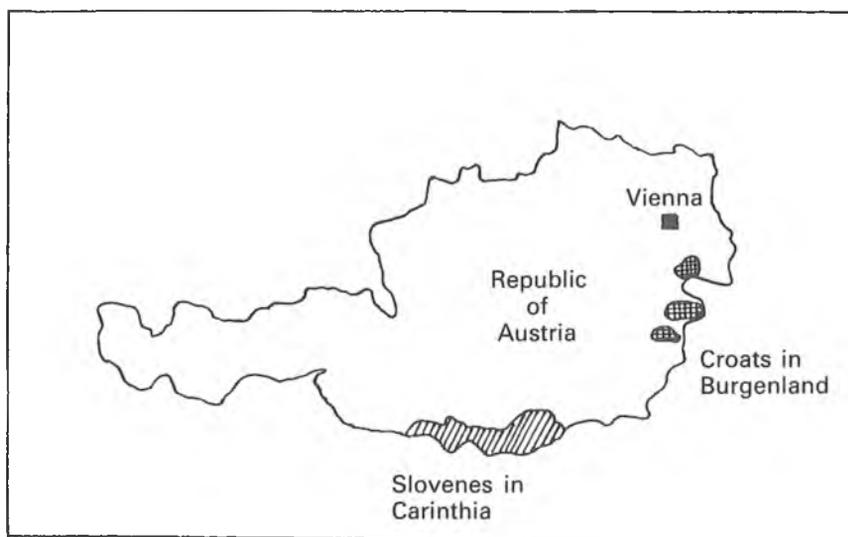


Figure 1

Burgenland was the western border of Hungary towards the expanding Holy Roman Empire, and Hungarians were settled here to protect the border. At present there are three relatively large Croat linguistic enclaves: in the northern Burgenland east of Eisenstadt; in the Central Burgenland east of the village of Oberpullendorf, and in the south between Oberwart, Stadt Schlaining and Rechnitz (see map). In the northern and central parts Čakavic varieties of Croatian are spoken, in the south a Štokavic variety. The Slovene-speaking Carinthians occupy about a third of the southern part of the province. Their ancestors immigrated around the sixth century AD. At that time their area of settlement reached up to the Tauern mountains. As from the eighth century, a wave of German (Bavarian) settlement pushed back the inhabitants of Slavic origin. When the Bavarian immigration stopped, the border between the ethnic groups remained steady for centuries on a line just south of Villach and Klagenfurt. As late as in the nineteenth century, there was a strong process of assimilation toward the German language, which led to disagreement between the ethnic groups about whether there is still a unified area of Slovene settlement (as the Slovenes claim), or whether all that remains is a few enclaves, as is maintained at least by the more nationalistically-inclined members of the German-speaking group. Actually it is probable that there are a few families using Slovene for internal communication in nearly all the villages within the once purely Slovene area, but on the other hand there are only a few villages or towns left in which Slovene is used to any major extent. So the Slovene communities – by and large concentrated in the district of Völkermarkt – more and more take on the character of linguistic islands.

Table 2

		<i>Burgenland</i>	<i>Carinthia</i>
1. Number of Members of the minority questioned		90	114
2. Language mostly used	Dt	10	66
	M	43	19
	Dt+M	37	29
3. Language spoken with parents	Dt	4	22
	M	77	75
	Dt+M	4	16
4. Language spoken with children	Dt	13	45
	M	28	16
	Dt+M	16	8
5. Language spoken with neighbours	Dt	1	39
	M	59	14
	Dt+M	30	61
6. Language spoken with colleagues	Dt	24	37
	M	2	4
	Dt+M	11	16

Until 1921 the Burgenland formed part of the Hungarian half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Through the regulations of the peace-treaty of St. Germain (1921), this area, mostly inhabited by Croat or German speakers, was annexed to the new Republic of Austria and was named 'Burgenland'.

At the same time, Slovenia (formerly Carnia) became a province of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia also laid claim to what is now the southern part of Carinthia, inhabited by Slovenes. The German speaking Carinthians, however, strove to prevent this, and there were several minor military incidents. Finally, a referendum was initiated by the *entente*, in which a 59.4% majority of Carinthians voted to stay with the Republic of Austria. But from this time on, bitter resentment and tension have persisted between the ethnic groups in Carinthia, flaring up to confrontation once again during the Second World War.

On language use

To give some impression of the linguistic situation in the two regions, we shall first present some data based on the results of a survey carried out for our Bayreuth research project.

As is shown in the data in Table 2, the German language plays an important role in both regions, either as the only language used, or as a second language alongside the minority language. The stronghold of the minority lies in the domain 'language spoken with parents', where it must be borne in mind that in many cases this statement refers to the past – the parents of many

Table 3

		<i>Burgenland</i>				<i>Carinthia</i>			
		<i>u. 25</i>	<i>25-40</i>	<i>40-60</i>	<i>o. 60</i>	<i>u. 25</i>	<i>25-40</i>	<i>40-60</i>	<i>o. 60</i>
1. Number of persons questioned		13	17	30	30	19	28	44	23
2. Language mostly used	Dt	4	4	2	1	12	19	20	15
	M	2	3	17	21	1	1	14	3
	M+Dt	7	10	11	9	6	8	10	5
3. Language spoken with neighbours	Dt	1	—	—	—	11	9	9	10
	M	8	8	22	21	1	4	7	2
	M+Dt	4	9	8	9	7	15	28	11

of the older people questioned died long ago. Significant strong use of German is seen in the domain of language used with colleagues, but here there are differences between the two regions, more speakers using the minority language in this domain in the Burgenland than in Carinthia. The same holds for the domain 'language used with neighbours'.

As Table 3 shows, more Croats of all age groups use Croat than Slovenes use Slovene in the respective age groups. Nevertheless, younger people in both regions are less frequent users of the majority language than older people in the same region. This tendency is also indicated by the figures of Table 2 concerning 'language used with children'.

The data of Tables 2 and 3 come from a survey using questionnaires. But these results are supported by data gained by participant observation. In both areas the field-worker observed that younger children of the minority talking to each other or to grown-ups of their own ethnic group consistently used German. Observation further shows that, on the whole, the minority language is used much more naturally and much more frequently in the Burgenland than in Carinthia. The only situation in which Slovene seems to be used virtually without exception is what could be called 'protected communication', i.e. in situations where all participants know each other, and where all accept Slovene as the normal means of communication. For both regions it is true that the minority language is mainly used in private or semi-official situations, if it is used at all.

To sum up: in both regions, the number of speakers of both minority languages is decreasing. For the younger generation there is a strong tendency to assimilate. The minority language is used mainly in private com-

munication, if it is used at all. But there are also significant differences between the two regions: in the Burgenland, the minority language is generally used more frequently and in a more natural way. This is true especially for communication within the villages. This result stands in remarkable contrast to the observation that in Carinthia at least part of the Slovenic community has a much stronger consciousness of its own minority status than have the Burgenland Croats.

Towards a systematic comparison

In the following, we will try to offer an explanation for these characteristics, shared or differing, of the Burgenland and Carinthian situations. In both regions there is a strong pressure toward assimilation, which also leads to the increasing marginalisation of the minority languages. One reason for this surely lies in the fact that members of the minorities only form the population majority at community level in their centres of settlement; this means that all institutions at higher level are dominated by German. Moreover, the centres of minority population are threatened by emigration, as two examples show:

	1971	1981
Großwarasdorf (Burgenland)	2,212	1,933
Zell Pfarre (Carinthia)	845	802

De facto, the minorities can be said to form a string of single linguistic enclaves.

The relatively small size of the minorities, in combination with this scattered type of settlement, makes any form of economic development independent of the surrounding German-speaking areas virtually impossible. The mechanisation of agriculture in particular, has considerably reduced job possibilities in the minority areas. This results in strong pressure to join the German-speaking sector of the economy, which again leads to a good proportion of the working population becoming commuters.

It is difficult to imagine how these developments could possibly be compensated for. As the use of written forms of the minority language is not very common in other areas, there is no strong incentive to improve one's competence and fluency in the minority language. The church as an institution, and especially local priests, make every effort to maintain the use of the minority language, but their commitment affects only language use in church and religious instruction.

The cultural organisations of both minorities are accepted partners of the Austrian government, but both minorities lack representation of any official political status. In the Burgenland, there is no Croat political party, a sure sign of lack of tension between the ethnic groups; in Carinthia, such a party

(*koroška enotno lista*) exists. This party, however, only has representatives on a few community councils, it does not have and is unlikely to get any representation in the Carinthian Provincial Assembly, let alone the Austrian Parliament.

With respect to legal regulations, Article 7 of the Austrian *Staatsvertrag* applies equally in both bilingual areas; the rights granted in this paragraph are freedom from discrimination and provision for the use of the minority language in school and administration, and for bilingual sign-posting. Despite this equivalent legal foundation, the practice is rather different.

With respect to the parallel features of the Burgenland and Carinthian situations we can see few factors which could possibly stop the process of assimilation. But what about the features with different values in the two regions? As stated above, we find a situation which at first sight seems paradoxical, because of the inverse relationship between the minority's self-consciousness on the one side, and naturalness and frequency of use of the minority languages on the other. The self-consciousness of the Slovene minority in Carinthia is at least partially fed by the tensions between (parts of) the ethnic groups, which culminated in a fight about bilingual place-name signs in 1972. These tensions, though they strengthened the self-consciousness of a part of the minority, also made the use of the minority language less natural as an unobtrusive means of communication. The absence of such tensions in the Burgenland, on the other hand, makes it much easier to use the minority language even in a German-speaking environment without causing any offence.

Evaluating all these data, one must conclude that the outlook for both minorities dealt with in this article seems rather gloomy. There are, however, also some signs of hope. Some members of the younger generation are developing a growing consciousness of the value of their mother tongue. At the same time prejudices against minorities in general tend to be on the decline. Let us hope that these changes do not come too late.

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