



A Cross-Gender Analysis of Lexical Hedges in the Animated Film *Tinker Bell* (2008)

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Abstract. *This study investigates the use of lexical hedges by male and female characters in the animated film “Tinker Bell” (2008), focusing on differences in variation and communicative functions based on gender. The analysis employs Lakoff’s theory of women’s language and Holmes’ framework of language functions. A qualitative descriptive method was used, with data collected through documentation and audio-visual observation from the film’s transcript. The results also indicate that although both genders employ lexical hedges, female characters tend to demonstrate a broader range of forms and functions. The findings highlight how hedges not only reflect gendered communication styles but also contribute to character development and narrative flow within the film. This study contributes to understanding gendered communication patterns in animated media and how they reflect broader sociolinguistic dynamics.*

Keywords: *lexical hedges, gender and language, women’s language, animated movie*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a fundamental instrument for communication. In sociolinguistics, it is widely acknowledged that language use reflects social roles, power relations, and identity, particularly those linked to gender (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Thus, analyzing the use of lexical hedges in male and female speech provides insight into the social meanings that emerge within particular discourse communities. The study of gender and language has evolved considerably, particularly following (Lakoff, 1973) Introduction of the theory of women's language in the 1970s, which she later revised in her 2004 work. (Lakoff, 2004) explains that women tend to use specific language features—such as lexical hedges, tag questions, and highly polite expressions, which are shaped by their social roles and expectations. Expanding on Lakoff’s view, (Coates, 2004) argues that women’s language is generally more cooperative and polite, often marked by the use of hedges to express uncertainty, maintain harmony, and avoid confrontation. These linguistic features are thought to be more prevalent among women than men, often serving to uphold politeness, evade confrontation, and seek affirmation during conversations.

Among the various features of women's language, the use of lexical hedges is frequently highlighted. Hedges are expressions or phrases that diminish the strength or certainty of a statement, including terms like *sort of*, *maybe*, *I think*, and *kind of*. Their primary functions are to soften assertions, convey politeness, or express uncertainty. Although Lakoff primarily

associated hedges with female speakers, subsequent studies have shown that both men and women use hedges, though with different frequencies and pragmatic motivations. In support of this, Rosanti & Jaelani (2016) conducted a study on male and female university students in a debate context. They discovered that female students tended to use lexical hedges like "you know" and "maybe" more often to soften their assertions and enhance politeness. Conversely, male students generally employed phrases like "I think" to assert their opinions rather than to soften them, indicating a distinct difference in communication strategies between the genders.

This research analyses the use of lexical hedges by male and female characters in the Disney animated film *Tinker Bell* (2008). While the film features a majority of female characters, it also presents several male figures, including Terence, Bobble, Clank, and Spring Ministry. The film's setting of Pixie Hollow, a fairy society structured by defined roles and collaborative interactions, provides a rich context to explore gendered language use in fictional discourse. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the use of lexical hedges is influenced not only by one's gender identity but also by the context in which communication takes place, such as the character's social role, level of authority, and the nature of the interaction. As explained by (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013) gendered language patterns are shaped by repeated social interactions and cultural norms that assign different expectations to how men and women are expected to speak.

Several earlier studies have investigated lexical hedges and gendered language in different media contexts, providing a foundation for the current research. However, the present study stands out due to its distinct focus, scope, theoretical framework, and analytical depth. The article "*Gender Language Used by Main Characters in Hidden Figures Film*" by (Husain et al., 2022) analyzed the language characteristics of male and female characters in the film *Hidden Figures*. Utilizing Lakoff's theory of women's language, the researchers identified eight features in Katherine's (the female character) speech and six in Al Harrison's (the male character). This qualitative descriptive study highlighted how these gendered speech features reflect societal roles. While it shares a theoretical basis with the current research, it broadly identifies various features without delving into the communicative functions of any single feature. In contrast, the present study specifically focuses on lexical hedges and their pragmatic purposes, allowing for a more in-depth understanding of how hedges function in discourse beyond mere frequency.

Another relevant study is "*Analysis of Lexical Hedges: Sociopragmatic of Representative Speech Act of Main Woman Character in Sweet 20 Movie*" by (Sunendar et al., 2020). This research analyzed lexical hedges in the representative speech acts of the main

female character in *Sweet 20*, employing Lakoff's theory and Yule's speech act classification through qualitative document analysis. The researchers identified four out of seven types of lexical hedges, such as modal auxiliaries and if-clauses, emphasizing their politeness function. However, this study was limited to a single female character and one specific speech act category. In contrast, the current research broadens the analysis by comparing both male and female characters and examining hedge functions across various speech contexts. This study addresses the gap by providing a gender-comparative sociopragmatic analysis rather than focusing solely on one gender.

In summary, the uniqueness of the current research lies in its combined application of Lakoff's (2004) theory of women's language and Holmes' (2013) framework of language functions, focusing on both male and female characters in an animated, female-centered narrative. By analyzing lexical hedges in terms of both frequency and function, this study goes beyond surface-level analysis to uncover how hedges contribute to politeness, solidarity, uncertainty, and narrative development. Furthermore, while previous studies often concentrated on real-world speech or live-action films, this research provides insights into how fictional characters in fantasy settings reflect and sometimes challenge real-world gender communication norms. These elements underscore the relevance and importance of this study, making it a valuable contribution to sociolinguistic and pragmatic research in media discourse.

The primary aim of this research is to examine and contrast the utilization of lexical hedges by male and female characters in the animated film *Tinker Bell* (2008), as well as to analyze how these usages either uphold or challenge prevailing gender norms in language. The study addresses the following research question:

- 1) How are lexical hedges used by the female and male characters in the *Tinker Bell* (2008) Movie?
- 2) What are the functions of the lexical hedges used by male and female characters in the *Tinker Bell* (2008) Movie?

By exploring these questions, this study aims to enhance our understanding of gendered language practices in animated media and to investigate the adaptability of linguistic gender norms within fictional contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's Language Features: Lexical Hedges

Lakoff (2004) describes lexical hedges as words or phrases like *maybe*, *I think*, *you know*, and *kind of* that help to soften statements, indicate uncertainty, or lessen assertiveness in discussions. In the context of women's language, these elements are frequently utilized to express politeness, openness, or hesitation, reflecting the socialization of women to avoid conflict and promote harmonious interactions. Lakoff suggests that women are more likely to use hedges than men due to societal norms that encourage them to be non-assertive and deferential. This linguistic tendency is not inherently a sign of weakness; rather, it serves as a strategy to convey modesty and prevent a dominant or confrontational tone. However, an overuse of hedges can result in women's speech being perceived as less authoritative or confident. While Lakoff highlights the connection between hedges and women's language, it is essential to recognize that both men and women can and do use lexical hedges based on context, intent, and social dynamics. The frequency and purpose of these hedges may differ, but they are a prevalent aspect of everyday communication for all genders.

Language Function by Holmes (2013)

Based on Holmes (2013) The functions of language are separated into six functions. Holmes highlights that not all of these functions are always separate, as many utterances serve multiple functions in a sentence.

1) Referential Function

The referential function is centered on delivering information and depicting the world, emphasizing the message's role in representing reality. For instance, when an individual presents facts, offers descriptions, or shares knowledge, they are employing this function. It plays a crucial role in ensuring clear communication by referring to specific details.

2) Directive Function

This function aims to influence the behavior of others by issuing commands, making requests, or proposing actions. It can be used to persuade or guide individuals to act in a specific way.

3) Expressive Function

The expressive function relates to how speakers communicate their emotions, attitudes, and personal experiences. It allows individuals to share feelings such as happiness, frustration, sadness, or excitement. This function is important in personal

interactions because it helps speakers express their emotional state, which can lead to better understanding and stronger connections between people.

4) Phatic Function

The phatic function serves to build or maintain social relationships instead of sharing information. It involves greetings, light conversations, and various social interactions that create a sense of community or belonging. This function is essential in social settings, as it helps strengthen connections and enhance communication.

5) Metalinguistic Function

The metalinguistic function involves using language to discuss or clarify language itself. It centers on the structure and workings of language. For example, when someone defines a word or analyzes grammatical rules, they are engaging in this function. This function is particularly important in educational settings and language learning, as it helps students understand and navigate the complexities of language.

6) Poetic Function

The poetic function highlights the artistic aspects of language, focusing on its structure, style, and creative expression. This function is often found in poetry, literature, and other imaginative uses of language, where the beauty and rhythm of words are essential. For instance, the use of metaphors, similes, and other literary techniques exemplifies the poetic function. This element of language encourages creative expression and can evoke emotions and vivid imagery in the audience.

3. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research design. The primary data consists of utterances that contain lexical hedges spoken by both male and female characters in the animated Tinker Bell (2008) film. The data source is the official transcript of the Tinker Bell (2008) film. The Female characters chosen for analysis are Tinker Bell, Silvermist, Rosetta, Iridessa, Fawn, Vidia, Fairy Mary, and Queen Clarion, and the male characters are Bobble, Clank, Terence, and Spring Ministry. The data were collected using documentation and an audio-visual observation method.

The process for data collection and analysis involves several steps: (1) Reviewing the film and the transcript to pinpoint all utterances that contain lexical hedges. (2) Classifying the hedges into common categories, such as "well," "I think," "maybe," "just," and "sort of." (3) Organizing the data according to the gender of the speaker. (4) Examining the frequency and communicative functions of each hedge. (5) Interpreting the findings in relation to Lakoff's

theoretical framework. The functions of the hedges are analyzed using Holmes's (2013) framework, which includes categories such as descriptive function, metalinguistic function, referential function, poetic function, and phatic function.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part shows the data collected. After analysis, according to Lakoff's (2004) theory regarding women's language, this study observed that female characters in *Tinker Bell* (2008) tend to use lexical hedges such as *well*, *actually*, *maybe*, *I think*, *kind of*, and *and you know*. On the other hand, the male characters frequently used *well*, *maybe*, and *and you know*. The usage and function of hedges can be seen in the following analysis.

1) **I think**

Data 1

Tinker Bell (F) : Hello

Queen (F) : Born of laughter, clothed in cheer, happiness has brought you here.
Welcome to Pixie Hollow. I trust you found your way all right.

Tinker Bell (F) : **I Think** so

In the world of Pixie Hollow, fairies are born every time a human baby laughs for the first time. That laughter creates magical dust (pixie dust) that carries them to Pixie Hollow, the home of the fairies. This dust then forms and gives birth to new fairies, one of whom is Tinker Bell. The pixie dust carries the essence of laughter through the wind to the Pixie Dust Tree, a magical tree that serves as the center of life for the fairies. There, all the fairies gather to welcome the newly born fairy and to see what talent the pixie dust will choose for her. The newly born fairies are unaware of the talents they possess.

This conversation takes place just after Tinker Bell has "arrived" in Pixie Hollow. After her birth, she is welcomed by Queen Clarion, the leader of the fairies, who greets her and asks if Tinker Bell found her way to the place successfully. Tinker Bell's response, "***I think so***," indicates that she still feels foreign and uncertain, as this is her first experience in the fairy world. In other words, her answer reflects her uncertainty.

The phrase "***I think***" in her response functions as a lexical hedge that shows doubt or humility in expressing her opinion. According to Holmes (2013), hedges have several pragmatic functions in conversation. In this context, the phrase "I think" reflects two main functions: the referential function, which conveys information that is not certain. In this case, Tinker Bell does not fully understand her new environment, so she cautiously replies

that she "thinks" she found the right way. This indicates her thought process or personal perception of a situation that is still unfamiliar. Additionally, this conversation also reflects the descriptive function, where hedges demonstrate personal doubt or an effort to maintain politeness in responding to the question posed by Queen Clarion.

2) Well

Data 2

Clank (M) : Sorry about your trinkets, Miss Bell.

Bobble (M) : **Well**, we'd best be getting ready for the review, anyway.

Tinker Bell (F) : What is the Queen's review?

In the film *Tinker Bell* (2008), the context of the following dialogue occurs at a moment when Tinker Bell has just realized that she does not fit in with the various talents she has tried, other than being a tinker fairy. She feels frustrated because she wants to become a seasonal fairy so she can go to the mainland with the other fairies for the Spring Arrival task.

The Queen's Review is an important event where Queen Clarion reviews and assesses the final preparations of the fairies before they head to the mainland to welcome the spring season. This is a significant moment that showcases the hard work of the fairies, especially the tinker fairies who create tools and supplies for the season. The event becomes a turning point for Tinker Bell, as she realizes the importance of the tinker fairy's role, even though she cannot go to the mainland as she initially dreamed.

Emotionally, this dialogue illustrates Tinker Bell's transition from personal disappointment to an understanding of her value as a tinker fairy. The dialogue also features the use of the lexical hedge "**Well**" by the male character (Bobble), which serves to soften the topic change or redirect attention in a more polite manner. In the dialogue, "**Well, we'd best be getting ready for the review, anyway,**" the word "**well**" functions as a pragmatic particle that indicates a transition in the conversation. Previously, Clank apologized to Tinker Bell, and Bobble gently redirects the attention to the next task, which is preparing for the Queen's Review.

In this situation, Bobble uses the word "**well**" to preserve social connections and promote smooth communication. Rather than diving straight into the main subject ("*getting ready for the review*"), he introduces it with "**well**" to create a more polite and less

intimidating manner. This is an example of the phatic function, which focuses on maintaining interpersonal relationships and enhancing the flow of conversation.

3) Perhaps

Data 3

- Queen (F) : *Perhaps* Tinker Bell was not the only one responsible.
It seems to me that your fast-flying talent is well-suited to chasing down each and every one of the thistles.
- Vidia (F) : Me?
- Queen (F) : Yes. And I expect them all to be returned to Needlepoint Meadow as soon as possible.
- Vidia (F) : But that could take forever!
- Queen (F) : Then I suggest you get started.

The word "*perhaps*" in this context shows uncertainty or consideration—Queen Clarion doesn't directly blame Tinker Bell but suggests that the responsibility might not be entirely hers. This scene takes place after Tinker Bell creates a thistle-catching machine that ends up breaking and causing a big mess in Pixie Hollow. The machine releases hundreds of thistle seeds everywhere, leading to damage and putting the spring preparations at risk. Because of this incident, Tinker Bell is seen as responsible. However, in the conversation, Queen Clarion does not completely blame her. Instead, she uses the word "perhaps" in the statement, "*Perhaps* Tinker Bell was not the only one responsible."

By saying this, the Queen hints that Vidia also has some responsibility for what happened. Vidia's earlier interactions with Tinker Bell were marked by competition, which may have contributed to the incident. As a result, the Queen assigns Vidia the task of gathering all the thistle seeds and returning them to Needlepoint Meadow. The use of hedges in this situation shows a diplomatic and non-confrontational way of communicating, allowing other characters to reflect on the situation. In this scene, Queen Clarion uses "perhaps" to carefully assess the situation and the responsibilities of others. By speaking in a polite and indirect way, the Queen asserts her authority while still maintaining social relationships and fairness, as discussed in the hedge theory by Holmes and Lakoff.

The hedge "*perhaps*" is used to convey possibility or uncertainty, which, according to Lakoff (2004), reflects indirectness and the speaker's attempt to maintain social harmony, especially in authoritative discourse. The speaker does not want to directly blame

another character but rather suggests the existence of other possibilities. In the sentence above, the Queen indicates that there is likely another party besides Tinker Bell who is responsible, without making a direct accusation.

4) **Actually + Kind of**

Data 4

Fairy Mary (F) : Tinker Bell, I'd like a word with you.

Tinker Bell (F) : Fairy Mary! See, I was on my deliveries and it's *actually kind of*.

Fairy Mary (F) : Save it. I know what you've been up to, Missy. And I had such high hopes for you.

In this scene, there is a conflict between Tinker Bell's hopes and reality, along with Fairy Mary's expression of disappointment, as she has always believed in Tinker Bell's great potential as a tinker fairy. This moment reflects the main theme of the film *Tinker Bell* (2008), which emphasizes that every fairy, including tinker fairies, has an important role and should appreciate their unique talents. The dialogue takes place after Tinker Bell feels dissatisfied with her natural talent as a tinker fairy, believing that this role is less prestigious compared to other fairies who have the opportunity to go to the mainland and assist with the changing of the seasons. Due to her dissatisfaction, she attempts to learn and take on the tasks of other talented fairies, such as the light, water, and animal fairies. However, her efforts only lead to chaos.

When Fairy Mary states, "*Tinker Bell, I'd like a word with you,*" she shows a firm intention to address Tinker Bell privately. Tinker Bell tries to defend herself by saying, "*It's actually kind of...*," but Fairy Mary quickly interrupts her, expressing her disappointment with the words, "*And I had such high hopes for you.*" This statement highlights the emotional conflict and serves as a crucial turning point for Tinker Bell's character development as she begins to understand the value of her inherent talent. In this dialogue excerpt, when Tinker Bell says, "*It's actually kind of...*," she simultaneously employs two types of lexical hedges: "*actually*" and "*kind of*." Both expressions serve as mitigation strategies to soften potential conflict and indirectly defend herself in front of an authority figure, in this case, Fairy Mary. Additionally, the choice of these words reflects Tinker Bell's uncertainty and hesitation regarding the situation she is facing.

More specifically, the use of "*actually*" can be linked to both the referential function and the metalinguistic function, as discussed by Holmes (2013). From a referential perspective, "*actually*" suggests that Tinker Bell is trying to correct or clarify Fairy Mary's

assumptions about her actions. Meanwhile, from a metalinguistic viewpoint, this expression indicates Tinker Bell's awareness of the gap between her reality and the social expectations placed upon her, as well as her effort to manage meaning during the interaction.

On the other hand, the use of "*kind of*" demonstrates a level of vagueness and doubt regarding the statement she intends to make, which in this context can be analyzed through the descriptive function, as it reflects Tinker Bell's caution in providing an explanation. Furthermore, "kind of" also carries a phatic function, as it represents an attempt to maintain interpersonal relationships in a conducive manner, even in a potentially conflictual situation. Thus, Tinker Bell's use of lexical hedges in this scene illustrates a characteristic of female language that prioritizes caution, social awareness, and a tendency to preserve harmony in communication, as explained in the theories of Lakoff (2004) and Holmes (2013).

5) **Maybe**

Data 5

Tinker Bell (F) : Well, I was thinking. Why do I have to be a tinker?
Just cause some silly hammer glowed? I mean, who's to say it wasn't some big mistake? *Maybe* I can just switch my talent.

Rosetta (F) : Switch your talent? I don't know Tinker Bell....

In this conversation, the word "*maybe*" plays a crucial role in expressing Tinker Bell's doubts and hopes as she searches for a new talent, while also highlighting her internal conflict between her desires and the role assigned to her by the Pixie Dust Tree. This dialogue occurs early in the film when Tinker Bell begins to feel dissatisfied with her natural talent as a tinker fairy. She perceives being a tinker fairy as less prestigious because tinker fairies do not go to the mainland to help with the changing of the seasons like other talented fairies do.

In this scene, Tinker Bell is confiding in Rosetta, the flower fairy. She questions why she must accept the role of a tinker fairy simply because a hammer glowed when she first arrived in Pixie Hollow. An event that, according to tradition, signifies her natural talent. She starts to doubt the validity of this talent assignment and wonders if it might have been a mistake. Therefore, Tinker Bell says, "*Well, I was thinking. Why do I have to be a tinker? Just 'cause some silly hammer glowed? I mean, who's to say it wasn't some big mistake? Maybe I can just switch my talent.*" Rosetta responds hesitantly, expressing that changing talents is not something that is typically done. In the quote "Maybe I can just switch my

talent," Tinker Bell uses the hedge "maybe" to convey a possibility or hypothesis that is not certain.

According to Holmes (2013), the function of the hedge "*maybe*" in this context can be categorized as a referential function, as it serves to communicate uncertain information. Tinker Bell does not assert that she can definitely change her talent; instead, she suggests that it is a possibility. She opens the door to new ideas without confirming their truth. The use of "maybe" also reflects Tinker Bell's cautious attitude in expressing her thoughts, which falls under the descriptive function.

6) I don't think

Data 6

- Spring Ministry (M) : I don't think we can fix this in time. We're going to have to cancel spring, or postpone it at the very least.
- Winter Ministry (F) : What, and put my work snowflake fairies back to work? Oh, no.
- Summer Ministry (M) : But we can't! We can't do that! If the snow isn't melted, the seedlings won't grow, the fruit won't ripen in the summer...
- Autumn Ministry (F) : And the autumn, there will be nothing to harvest. Spring must happen on time, or the balance of nature will be undone!

This scene takes place during an urgent meeting among the seasonal ministries in Pixie Hollow, where a recent disruption has put the arrival of spring at risk. The Spring Minister, a male character, voices his concern by saying, "I don't think we can fix this in time." Although the line is spoken by a male figure, it demonstrates a linguistic strategy that Lakoff (2004) identifies as a common hedge in women's language. His statement reflects uncertainty and opens space for discussion, which encourages input from the other ministers about the possible consequences of the delay.

The expression "I don't think we can" reflects a lexical hedge, a linguistic feature that reduces the force of a statement to make it sound less direct or absolute. Instead of making a strong claim or issuing a firm declaration, the speaker uses a more tentative phrasing to express doubt. This approach signals caution and a willingness to engage in a more cooperative exchange. Though the speaker is not female, his language reflects the kind of relational communication often associated with women's language, one that emphasizes sensitivity, inclusiveness, and maintaining group dynamics.

Based on Holmes's (2013) classification of language functions, this utterance contains both referential and expressive elements. It is referential because it presents the speaker's view on the likelihood of completing the task on time, which conveys information. At the same time, it serves an expressive function by revealing the speaker's emotional response, his worry and uncertainty about the situation. The choice of a hedge instead of a firm statement helps reduce tension in the conversation and supports a respectful, group-centered approach to solving problems. This shows how language is used not only to deliver facts, but also to preserve social harmony, especially in situations that require shared decision-making.

7) **You know**

Data 7

Silvermist (F) : Never seen one glow that much before, even for Vidia.

Rosetta (F) : **You know**, I do believe you're right. Little daisy top might be a very rare talent indeed.

This scene takes place when the fairies are welcoming Tinker Bell, who has just discovered her talent as a tinker fairy. At that moment, the talent detector, a small hammer, lights up very brightly, indicating that Tinker Bell possesses a special talent. The light produced is even brighter than when used by other fairies, such as Vidia, who is known for her extraordinary abilities. This surprises the fairies who are watching. After Silvermist shares her thoughts on this phenomenon, Rosetta responds by saying, "**You know**, I do believe you're right. Little Daisy Top might be a very rare talent indeed."

Rosetta's comment acknowledges that Tinker Bell may have remarkable potential in her role as a tinker fairy, even though this talent is often seen as less impressive compared to other fairy abilities. In the phrase "*You know, I do believe you're right,*" the words "**you know**" act as a way to encourage agreement and create a connection with the listener. According to Holmes (2013), this phrase serves a social purpose by strengthening relationships and suggesting that the speaker and listener share a common understanding. Additionally, it softens the tone and makes the speaker's opinion feel less dominant, which also aligns with the idea of metalinguistic function.

CONSLUSION

This study investigated the use of lexical hedges by male and female characters in the animated film *Tinker Bell* (2008), employing Lakoff (2004) theories of women's language and Holmes' (2013) framework of language functions. Through a detailed qualitative analysis of the film's script, this study identified 42 instances of lexical hedges: 34 utterances by female characters and 8 utterances by male characters. The findings suggest that female characters not only used lexical hedges more frequently but also displayed a wider range of hedging strategies compared to their male counterparts.

The lexical hedges used by female characters, particularly *Tinker Bell*, served multiple communicative purposes, including expressing uncertainty, maintaining politeness, fostering interpersonal solidarity, and softening potential conflict. Conversely, male characters used hedges less frequently and with more limited variation, typically in contexts involving emotional support, humor, or to reduce the assertiveness of their statements.

Overall, the results reflect gendered language tendencies as proposed by Lakoff (2004), while also illustrating how narrative roles and context shape linguistic behavior. The frequent use of hedges by female characters aligns with their central positions in the storyline and their emphasis on sustaining harmonious social dynamics in the community of *Pixie Hollow*. These findings suggest that while lexical hedges in fictional media can reinforce gendered linguistic patterns, they are also shaped by character function and discourse context.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the broader understanding of gendered language use in animated media by showing that lexical hedges serve not only to reflect gender identity but also to support the storyline and relationships between characters. It underscores the flexibility of gendered communication strategies and provides insight into the intersection between sociolinguistic theory and fictional discourse.

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