

Virtual Performatives in English – The Outlines of a Syntactic Analysis

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This paper¹ presents a syntactic analysis of the so-called virtual performative construction in English (also known as the bounding asterisk construction). My main findings are the following. Virtual performatives are full, non-truncated clauses, and their special behaviour is due to two factors: i) their subjects are first person singular personal pronouns modified by an adjectival temporal expression and ii) they are unspecified for tense. These two factors conspire and lead to the unique characteristics of the construction: the silent subject and the split agreement phenomena. In order to model virtual performatives, I also conducted an analysis of the syntax of adjectivally modified personal pronouns.

1. Introduction

Many languages seem to have strongly truncated clauses: minimal VPs/vPs that lack all the higher projections: subject and object agreement, tense, aspect, modality, focus etc. Such sentences result from remature spellout in colloquial registers under time pressure.

One example is the so-called radically truncated clauses (RTCs) in Hungarian (Halm 2021):

(1) *számítógép újra-indít*

computer re-start

‘I/you/etc. restart(ed) the computer.’

(2) *szemét le-visz, szoba rendbe-rak, fürdőszoba el-pakol...*

¹ This is very much work in progress, comments are most welcome!

rubbish PRT²-carry room PRT-put bathroom PRT-pack

'I/you/etc. take/took out the rubbish, clear(ed) the room, clear(ed) the bathroom.'

German is also known to have a similar construction (Inflektiv, Bücking & Rau 2013, Gärtner 2017 a.o.):

- (3) **meinen satz direkt wieder streich** (Bücking & Rau 2013, 72)

my-ACC sentence directly again delete

'I am deleting my sentence again on purpose.'

- (4) **hängematte in baum aufspann und mich reinleg** (Bücking & Rau 2013, 72)

hammock in tree PRT.fix and REFL PRT.put

'I am fixing a hammock in the tree and I am lying down into it (right now, as we speak).'

English also has a construction which, at first sight, looks strikingly similar (known as the bounding asterisk construction or the virtual performative construction, cf. Virtanen 2020 and references therein):

- (5) **freaks out over nothing**

'I am freaking out over nothing (right now, as we are speaking)'

- (6) **Gets up from desk, walks out into field, raises arms, waits for meteor.**

'I get up from the desk, walk out into field, raise my arms and wait for the meteor

(?right now, as we are speaking)'

2 Verb modifiers express the result state or location of the theme argument. There are two kinds of verb modifiers: verbal particles (such as *le* 'down' above), and bare adjectival phrases or noun phrases (such as *rendbe* 'into order' above.) For convenience, I will use the term verbal particles and the gloss PRT, but all the claims and statements in the paper are valid for the broader family of verb modifiers as well.

Similar constructions are reported/observable in other languages: French (Dias da Silva 2015), Polish (Lyons 2018), maybe Russian (Irine Burukina p.c.). These constructions seem to share certain characteristics cross linguistically:

- They are used in informal spoken (Hungarian) or electronic (Hungarian, German, English etc.) registers;
- the verb in stem/root form (in Hungarian and German) or the morphologically least marked form³;
- arguments (optionally) lack determiners;
- there is a strict word order (sometimes different from full clauses);
- the external argument (in Hungarian) or the subject (in German and English) is silent
- objects are non-case-marked in Hungarian but case-marked in German in English

RTCs in Hungarian have been analyzed as VPs and the Inflektivs in German as vPs. In this paper, I will examine virtual performatives with the aim of establishing and explaining their syntactic characteristics.

2. Data and descriptive observations

In this section, I discuss the basic descriptive characteristics of virtual performatives. As my mini-corpus, I will use the examples from Virtanen (2015) and Virtanen (2020): two papers that are pragmatically-oriented but also provide a thorough descriptive account of the syntactic properties of the construction. Virtanen (2020) refers to a 600-token dataset compiled by the author (drawn from the microblogging platform Twitter plus a discussion forum). However, I was unable to access that dataset and had to limit myself for the time being to the 62 examples actually

³ If one assumes that 3rd person is a non person (Benveniste 1971) and that number is private, with plural marked with the feature [PLURAL] and singular unmarked, then 3SG is the unmarked form.

reproduced in the two papers⁴. Unless otherwise indicated, all examples discussed in the paper are drawn from this minicorpus, which I also included as an appendix.

Virtual performatives are only used in web-based electronic written communication (instant messaging, text messaging, mobile interactive multimodal platforms such as WhatsApp, discussion boards, social networking sites such as Facebook, microblogging sites such as Twitter or tumbler, see Virtanen 2000:4-5 and references therein); and, to a lesser extent, in comics (print as well as electronic), which, according to Zimmer (2005), were the diachronic origin of this construction.

In terms of typography, virtual performatives are typically surrounded by parenthetical asterisks⁵:

(7) **sobs**

However, as Virtanen (2000: 8) discusses, other means such as <>, {}, :: are also used:

(8) *::nods head::*

Sometimes an opening * suffices, and often no typographical conventions is availed of at all:

(9) **blows smoke rings*

(10) *sees something that would be nice to buy for a gf but doesnt have a gf. positive side is im saving \$\$ 😊*

A striking characteristic of virtual performatives is that the 'silent' (more on this later) subject is obligatorily interpreted as 1SG (that is, it refers to the speaker⁶), the time as the immediate present, and the illocutionary force is performative. Consider the following (from Twitter):

⁴ This limitation has the consequence that, for the time being, I was unable to explore some promising venues such as the word order properties of phrasal verbs in virtual performatives.

⁵ Because of this, in this paper, I consciously diverge from the tradition of using asterisks as a sign of ungrammaticality. If an example is ungrammatical, I will simply indicate this by the phrase 'ungrammatical'.

⁶ Since virtual performatives are restricted to electronic written registers, it might be more accurate to use author instead of speaker and addressee instead of hearer. However, the written registers where virtual performatives are used are also conversational and informal (discussion boards, microblogs): because of this, I think they do mirror a real-life conversational situation and thus the use of speaker and hearer is justified, after all.

(11) **blows smoke rings*

They call me Trouble

The first line is a virtual performative, and the second is a sentence uttered by the speaker. Here, the hearer is invited to imagine that the speaker blows smoke rings simultaneously with uttering the sentence 'They call me Trouble'. The subject is obligatorily the speaker, the time is the immediate present, and the utterance itself is performative: the blowing of smoke rings is performed, as it were, by uttering the virtual performative.

While the 1SG subject interpretation seems to be in-built characteristic of virtual performatives, contemporaneity with the utterance and performativity appear to be strong tendencies but not strict requirements. Consider:

(12) a. **studies for 10 minutes* *rests and scrolls on twitter for 3 hours**

b. **alarm clock goes off tomorrow morning* *hisses and buries myself under cover**

In (12a), we have a statement describing events which clearly extend well beyond the time of writing, whereas in (12b), the event described is episodic. The event described is not in either of these cases simultaneously taking place with the utterance. As a consequence, it is also not performative but descriptive in terms of illocutionary force. Virtanen (2020) notices these examples and is aware that prima facie, these data do not fit the overall generalization of performativity and immediate presence. However, she claims that such sentences are instances of linguistic creativity: the speaker "stretch[es] the temporal boundaries of the performative" and "[breaks] the instantaneity of executing a virtual act [...] by stretching or locating a virtual action or state of things into the future", instantiating an „etiolation" of an ordinary performative (Virtanen 2020: 10-11).

While such an analysis is viable, I believe that, especially in light of cross-linguistically attested similar constructions, an alternative analysis might be more plausible. One might assume that

virtual performatives are in fact underspecified in terms of relative time and illocutionary force, and it is up to the hearer to infer what the intended tense and illocutionary force might be. In the absence of any strong contextual clues to the contrary, the default assumption is that the tense is the immediate present and the illocutionary force is performative. However, in the presence of strong enough contextual clues, the hearer can infer that the tense is generic-habitual (12a) or simple future (12b), and the illocutionary force is declarative.

In terms of word order, Virtanen (2020:6) describes it as follows:

(13) (Adv) V^{3SG.PRES} (Dependents)

Put simply, the word order of virtual performatives is not in any way different from the word order of full tensed declarative sentences (other than, of course, the absence of the subject): it is VO, and all the other adjuncts, adverbials and complements are found in the usual places.

More interestingly, objects and other dependents can be complex, even clausal, with full tensed clauses and small clauses amply attested (12 cases out of 62 in the minicorpus have a clausal object or other dependent):

- (14) a. **forgets that I have to be up at 7* *remembers that I don't care and stays up anyway**
 b. **gets mad when people ignore me**
 c. *<----- runs to bathroom to admire my new stunning self!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*
 d. **yawns in your face to show you how much i don't give a fuck**

Strikingly, in tensed clausal complements, the pronoun that refers to the speaker is always, without a single exception, 1SG (I); and it elicits 1SG agreement on the verb. Instances where the pronoun referring to the subject would be 3SG are both unattested and judged ungrammatical by the handful of native informants that I consulted:

- (15) a. ungrammatical: **forgets that she has to be up at 7* *remembers that she doesn't care and stays up anyway**
- b. ungrammatical: **gets mad when people ignore him**

Note that these sentences do not sound terribly bad: in fact, in the Reduced Written Register used in diaries and other registers (see discussion later), where subject ellipsis is rampant, these sentences would be perfectly grammatical (see below). However, they are ungrammatical *qua* virtual performatives.

- (16) a. *Forgets that she has to be up at 7. Remembers that she doesn't care and stays up anyway.*
- b. *Gets mad when people ignore him.*

Another important characteristic is that subordinated clauses are either tensed clauses or small clauses, but they can never be virtual performatives:

- (17) ungrammatical: **forgets that has to be up at 7* *remembers that doesn't care and stays up anyway **

Sentences such as (17) are completely unattested and judged ungrammatical by the handful of native informants that I consulted. Virtual performatives are exclusively a root clause phenomenon.

The fact that the subject of subordinate clause is always an overt 1SG pronoun is a crucial observation. Virtanen (2020) notices this and offers a pragmatic account: whereas the fact that we observe 3SG agreement in the main clause of a virtual performative supposedly reflects an 'externaliz[ation] of the virtual self', the emergence of 1SG in the subordinate clause is an act of 'reassuming the virtual self'. While such a pragmatic shift between perspectives is possible, I feel that it cannot be the whole story or even the main story. If this shift between persons were a mere pragmatic device then surely we would expect it to be optional or at least easily violable. Yet, as we have seen, the overt subject in complement clauses is strictly 1SG. Also, the assumption that we have a 3SG covert subject in virtual performatives is open to challenge, as we

will discuss in more detail later: while the verb does exhibit 3SG agreement morphology (or at least something that looks identical to it), clausemate possessive pronouns and reflexives corefential with the silent subject are 1SG.

Virtanen (2015) points out that determiners (definite and indefinite articles, possessive pronouns) are often dropped in virtual performatives:

(18) **Gets up from ~~the~~/my desk, walks out into ~~the~~ field, raises ~~my~~ arms, waits for ~~the~~ meteor.**

A closer look, however, reveals that this determiner-drop is by no means obligatory. In our mini-corpus, out of 44 determiners, 24 are dropped (such as in (18) above) and 20 are not (such as in (19) below):

(19) **shoves a pencil through my own eyeball**

In fact, both the drop and non-drop strategy may be exhibited in a single utterance:

(20) **backflips into ~~a~~ room full of money* *realizes I can't do backflips* *wakes from a dream on the floor with broken neck**

Also, determiner-drop does not depend on the argumenthood of the DP (unlike, e.g., in the RTCs in Hungarian discussed by Halm 2021). Some object DPs exhibit determiner-drop and others do not:

(21) a. **waves bankie floppishly**

b. **waves a lipgloss hoping to distract you...**

Likewise, some non-predicate-argument DPs exhibit determiner-drop and others do not:

(22) a. **runs to the kitchen**

b. *<----- runs to bathroom to admire my new stunning self!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

The only pattern one can discern is that determiner-drop is more frequent in the virtual performative root clauses themselves (23 out of 40) than in the subordinate clauses (1 out of 5). This is in line with the general observation that the subordinate clauses of virtual performatives appear to be 'normal', non-reduced tensed clauses or small clauses.

In sum, determiner drop happens across the board and it is fully optional. As I will argue later, this favours an analysis similar to that offered by Weir (2017) with regard to optional determiner drop in the English RWR, as opposed to a Sportiche-style (2005) analysis such as the one that Halm (2021) proposed for obligatory determiner-drop in Hungarian RTCs.

The most conspicuous characteristic of virtual performatives is the lack of an overt subject. This happens across the board, that is, there is no difference between verb classes such as transitives (23a), unergatives (23b) or unaccusatives (23c):

- (23) a. **eats cookie smugly**
b. **jumps in excitement**
c. **arrives late from the restroom** (source: Reddit)

Interestingly, and this sets virtual performatives apart from other constructions exhibiting subject-drop (such as the Reduced Written Register), the subject can never be overt. In the Reduced Written Register (Haegeman 1987, Massam & Roberge 1989, Massam 1992 a.o), subject drop is typical but optional:

- (24) a. *I am meeting my solicitor today.*
b. *Am meeting my solicitor today.*

In virtual performatives, the subject is never overt: neither a 1SG or 3SG pronoun, nor a name, nor an imposter is admissible (i.e.: all these strategies are unattested and also deemed ungrammatical by my informants):

- (25) a. **laughs like a hyena**
 b. ungrammatical: **He laughs like a hyena.**
 c. ungrammatical: **I laughs like a hyena.**
 d. ungrammatical: **yours truly laughs like a hyena**
 e. ungrammatical: **my sorry self laughs like a hyena**

There is one apparent exception to this. Consider the following examples discussed by Virtanen (2000):

- (26) *me: *burps really loud**
*me: *whispers* wow*
*me: *realizes I'm alone**
*me: *tries to tweet about it but it really isnt actually that funny**
- (27) *me: omg i'm exhausted i need to go take a quick shower and go to bed*
also me: takes a bath instead and scrolls through twitter for an hour

Virtanen (2020) proposes that the *me* in these cases is sentence-external: it is a typographical device that users deploy in order to "playfully mimick[...] early text-based chat modes where the username appeared on the same line, immediately before the post". This appears to be an accurate description of what is going on in (26) and (27), and in fact, it is easy to find even more illustrative examples of this:

- (28) *Me: arrives late from the restroom* (source: Reddit)
Teacher: why you arrived late?
Me: I'd rather not to tell

Teacher: why what happened?

However, there are also numerous instances where this *me* appears to be more of an integral part of the sentence, especially cases where no turn-taking takes place. Consider:

(29) */me arrives late to thread* (source: Eurogamer discussion board)

/me slaps binky for not telling me about it

The typographical convention of having a slash before *me* is a jocular nod to the syntax of Internet Relay Chat protocol, where the string */me* was automatically converted to the name of the user. For example, if the username was Tom1981, (43) would appear as:

(30) *Tom1981 arrives late to thread* (source: Eurogamer discussion board)

Tom1981 slaps binky for not telling me about it

(31) *6 year old me: falls asleep in the car and wakes up in my bed* (source: Pinterest)

Strikingly, however, *me* is always separated from the rest of the utterance by some typographical device:

(32) a. *me:*

b. */me*

c. *[me]*

Since instances of an overt *me* are always typographically separated, I am inclined to think that they are extra-clausal: either tags which are not part of the utterance (as proposed by Virtanen (2020)) or hanging topics:

(33) a. *Me: arrives late from the restroom = me_i [Ø_i arrives late from the restroom]*

b. *Me, I arrived late from the restroom = me_i [I_i arrived late from the restroom]*

The interesting question is how we can characterise the covert subject. As we have seen, it is obligatorily silent and it elicits 3SG agreement on the verb, hanging topics coreferential with it are obligatorily 1SG (33a), as are the subjects of tensed subordinate clauses coreferential with it (19-20). The same is observed with clausemate possessive pronouns and reflexives: non-1SG cases are both unattested and judged as ungrammatical by my informants (with the exception of the person-neutral *self*):

- (34) a. **sings myself happy birthday**
 b. ungrammatical: **sings herself happy birthday**⁷

- (35) a. **embarrasses self**
 b. ungrammatical: **embarrasses herself**

- (36) a. **retweets my own tweet**
 b. ungrammatical: **retweets his own tweet**

Tenseless subordinate clauses with a PRO subject or object are amply attested in the mini-corpus and judged as grammatical by the informants:

- (37) a. <----- *runs to bathroom to admire my new stunning self!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*
 = \emptyset_i *runs to bathroom PRO_i to admire my new stunning self*
 b. **yawns in your face to show you how much i don't give a fuck**
 = \emptyset_i *yawns in your face PRO_i to show you how much i_i don't give a fuck*

⁷ Note that these sentences do not sound terribly bad: in fact, in the Reduced Written Register used in diaries and other registers (see discussion later), where subject ellipsis is rampant, these sentences would be perfectly grammatical (see below). However, they are ungrammatical qua virtual performatives.

The availability of reflexives and especially of controlled PRO subjects and objects indicates that the virtual performative has a syntactically active subject.⁸ (To some degree, the presence of subject agreement on the verb also points into this direction.)

3. The Outlines of An Analysis

The riddle is this:

- what is this silent subject?
- why is it obligatorily silent?
- why does it have a dual nature: 1SG in terms of (co)reference and 3SG in terms of agreement

My proposal is that this subject is a special type of the following construction:

- (38) a. *the ten-year-old me*
- b. *the younger me*
- c. *the adventurous me*

Sentences with such subjects (which refer to a stage or part of the speaker) have a strikingly similar syntax to virtual performatives (all the sentences below are actually attested and judged as grammatical by native informants):

- (39) a. *The 30 year old me misses the 20 year old me.*
- b. *A younger me would be much more inclined to take the risk and back myself when growing a business*

⁸ The availability of subject depictives could prove a decisive argument here. Due to the limited dataset at hand for the time being, I was unable to find conclusive evidence, but hopefully, if I succeed in obtaining the 600-strong dataset, I will have sufficient data to make a robust generalization.

- c. *Questions A Younger Me Would Ask Myself.*
- d. *A younger me would have seen my past mistakes as unconquerable obstacles when in fact—I now realize—they were so much more.*
- e. *The conservative me dreaded the change, but once again, I am totally in love with this hair & this color.*

The similarities are many. Just like in virtual performatives, there is 3SG agreement on the verb (39a) and yet, clausemate reflexives and possessives coreferential with the subject are 1SG.

Intuitively, the reason for this split behaviour is due to the unique nature of the subject: it is a DP made up of a determiner, an adjectival modifier and the pronoun *me*. The construction is not limited to *me*:

- (40) a. *Tell us the advice that you would give the 16 year old you.*
- b. *There may be an inner conflict (between the adventurous you and the one that is scared of change).⁹*
- c. *Being the adventurous him, he went for the Umami bomb after much consideration.¹⁰*

Intuitively, this construction is rather similar to the better-known construction involving proper names:

- (41) a. *Once again, the transformational Obama has been sold out by the political Obama.*
- b. *the New York that I grew up in*

Syntactically, a crucial parallel is that a modifier is obligatory:

- (42) a. *The *(conservative) me dreaded the change.*

⁹ This is somewhat similar to the 'my adjective self' construction: *the younger me = my younger self, the 16-year-old me = my 16-year-old self*

¹⁰ These examples seem to constitute counterexamples to Cardinaletti & Starke's (1999) claim that strong pronouns cannot be modified by noun-phrase internal modifiers. In truth, though, while such cases are grammatical and naturally attested, they have a feel of coercion to them, probably because of the heavy type-shift involved (see later).

- b. *The *(transformational) Obama has been sold out.*

Semantically, these constructions have a partitive flavour: they either refer to a part of the time continuum (*the 16 year old you, a younger me*), or to a part of the person's personality (*The conservative me dreaded the change. =The conservative part of me dreaded the change*).

As we have discussed, a central feature of virtual performatives is that they describe an event which is strictly cotemporaneous with the utterance time. That is, virtual performatives predicate something about *the utterance-time me*: (43a) is equivalent to (43b):

- (43) a. **retweets my own tweet**
b. *the utterance-time me retweets my own tweet*

While *the utterance-time me* sounds rather stilted, the construction is amply attested with the following variants (all examples are actual utterances from the Internet and are judged as grammatical by my informants):

- (44) a. *I'm proud of the past me, the present me, and I'm excited to see what the future me accomplishes.*
b. *I think the me right now is sort of at the level 50 of tennis, and everything else in my life is at level five or six.*
c. *And as for the splitting time, the me in this very moment doesn't like the idea of it, but I know that is largely situational thinking.*
d. *The current me has continued to develop, to deepen my understanding, and this clouds the memory of the younger me.*

Schematically, the temporal modifier can be represented as a category-neutral temporal argument plus some sort of adjectivizer:

- (45) a. *the present me*

D [t=_{utterance time}+ADJ] 1SG

b. *the past me*

D [t<_{utterance time}+ADJ] 1SG

c. *the future me*

D [t>_{utterance time}+ADJ] 1SG

The general schema is:

(46) *the temporal modifier me*

D [t_x+ADJ] 1SG

Recall that in virtual performatives, the default interpretation is that the event is the immediate present of the utterance time; however, this can be easily overwritten by the context:

(47) a. **jumps in excitement**

b. **hates it when people ignore me**

c. **alarm clock goes off tomorrow morning* *bisses and buries myself under cover**

The event described in (47a) takes place simultaneously with the utterance. (47b) is a generic statement (i.e., it is not strictly anchored to utterance time or indeed any discrete timepoint). (47c) describes an event in the future:

(48) a. **jumps in excitement* = the utterance-time me jumps in excitement*

b. **hates it when people ignore me* = the me these days hates it when people ignore me*

c. **bisses and buries myself under cover* = the me tomorrow bisses and buries myself under cover*

Based on these observations, my proposal is that virtual performatives are syntactically (and semantically) underspecified in terms of tense/time: it is up to the hearer to infer this missing

information either from the particular context or by falling back to the default option of utterance time.

Based on the strong parallels with the *the present me* construction, I propose that virtual performatives have a subject of the same type: D t-ADJ 1SG. The proposed structure is the following:

- (49) a. * \emptyset *jumps in excitement**
 D t_x-ADJ 1SG
- b. * \emptyset *hates it when people ignore me**
 D t_x-ADJ 1SG
- c. * \emptyset *bisses and buries myself under cover**
 D t_x-ADJ 1SG

This subject is a well-formed DP, however, since virtual performatives are underspecified for tense, the category-neutral temporal argument remains free throughout the derivation and as a consequence, the t_x-ADJ adjectival element cannot be spelled out. This makes the whole DP ineffable: as we have seen, *the me*, without any intervening modifier, is ungrammatical:

- (50) a. *The conservative me dreaded the change.*
 b. **The me dreaded the change.*

Therefore, the whole subject DP has to remain silent, even though it is visible for agreement, control and co-reference purposes, and, as we have seen above, its agreement, control and coreference properties are exactly the same as of its overt cousins (*the current me, the past me* etc.)

The temporal argument in the subject of a virtual performative is unspecified: this unsaturated argument slot means that virtual performatives are not, strictly speaking, fully grammatical.

However, hearers can infer the missing temporal information from contextual clues. In the absence of any contextual clues, the default interpretation is that x =utterance time:

(51) a. **jumps in excitement**

[the \emptyset me] jumps in excitement

D t_x -ADJ 1SG

inference: x =utterance time

interpretation: [the utterance-time me] jumps in excitement

b. **hates it when people ignore me**

[the \emptyset me] hates it when people ignore me

D t_x -ADJ 1SG

inference: x =around utterance time, in general

interpretation: [the me these days] hates it when people ignore me

c. **hisses and buries myself under cover**

[the \emptyset me] hisses and buries myself under cover

D t_x -ADJ 1SG

inference: x =tomorrow

interpretation: [the me tomorrow] hisses and buries myself under cover

4. A Detailed Proposal

4.1 Against an Imposter Analysis

At first sight, the construction under discussion here might resemble the so-called imposters discussed by Collins and Postal (2012):

- (52) a. *In this reply, [the present authors]₁ attempt to defend ourselves₁/themselves₁ against the scurrilous charges that have been made.*
- b. *Your₁ Majesty should praise yourself₁/herself₁.*
- c. *Daddy₁ is enjoying *myself₁/himself₁*

A closer look, however, reveals significant differences. In imposters in general, clausemate reflexives exhibit alternation in pronominal feature values. One exception is exemplified in (52c): singular imposters cannot be antecedents of first person reflexive (certainly in English). In the Det+Adj+Pronoun/Proper name construction, however, there is no alternation and the phi-features of the reflexive strictly correspond to that of the embedded pronoun:

- (53) a. *A younger me would have seen my past mistakes as unconquerable obstacles when in fact—I now realize—they were so much more.*
- b. *Y'all, 18 year old me hated my curves, 24 year old me loves them.*
- c. *The 12-year-old me is kicking myself.*
- d. **sings myself happy birthday**

Also, imposters have to refer to either the speaker or the hearer. Indeed, the cornerstone of Collins & Postal's (2012) model is that there are two null DPs in the high left periphery (author and addressee¹¹) which can participate in agreement with the pronouns in question. As we have seen, however, the construction under discussion here is open to non-participants as well:

¹¹ Collins and Postal (2012) consider two options: AUTHOR and ADDRESSEE are either the specifiers of the phrases Prt1P and Prt2P (as in Participant 1 and Participant 2), or they are the arguments of a covert performative clause in the vein of Ross (1970).

- (54) a. *Being the adventurous him, he went for the Umami bomb after much consideration.*
 b. *Once again, the transformational Obama has been sold out by the political Obama.*

Also, imposters refer to the totality of the speaker or hearer, whereas the construction under discussion here refers to a stage or part of speaker or hearer (or non-participant).

A final difference is that whereas in Collins & Postal's (2012) model, an imposter such as the *present author* is supposed to contain a null 1SG indexical pronoun; the construction under discussion contains an overt pronoun (or proper name).

Due to limitations of space, a comparison with other constructions such as camouflage DPs (*your honour, my ass*, cf. Collins, Moody & Postal 2008), pronouns modified by appositive DPs (*we, the authors of this proposal*) and partitive DPs (*every one of us*) has to be left for future work.

4.2 The Semantics of the Det+Adj+Pronoun/Proper name construction

4.2.1 Preliminaries

Proper names are traditionally regarded as rigid designators (Kripke 1980) and pronouns as indexicals: they refer to individuals, they are of type e^{12} . In the construction under discussion, it appears that proper names and pronouns are type-shifted into a set of individuals ($\langle e, t \rangle$).

Consider:

- (55) a. *the past me, the current me, the future me*
 b. *the young Churchill, the mature Churchill, the elderly Churchill*

¹² In addition to direct reference theories such as Kripke (1980), there is also an influential school of thought that regards proper names as definite descriptions (Geurts (1997); Elbourne (2005); Matushansky (2006) a.o.). For reasons of space, I do not pursue that line of inquiry here, except for a brief discussion in Section 4.3. Note, however, that it is difficult to conceive of personal pronouns as definite descriptions. Thus, committing ourselves to a definite description analysis would preclude a unified account for the data under discussion.

c. *the 10-year-old you, the 40-year-old you, the 70-year-old-you*

Instead of conceptualizing the speaker (Churchill or the hearer) qua atomic individual (e), we conceptualize the speaker (Churchill or the hearer) qua the set of her/his temporal stages (in the same way as an interval in mathematics, an interval is the set of the points within that interval). The Det+Adj+ProperName/Pronoun construction itself denotes an element of the appropriate partition of that set.¹³

There are two ways to set up the temporal scale: either as an absolute scale centered on utterance time (*the past me, the current me, the future me*) or as a scale relativised to the individual's lifespan (*the 10-year-old you, the 40-year-old you, the 70-year-old-you*):

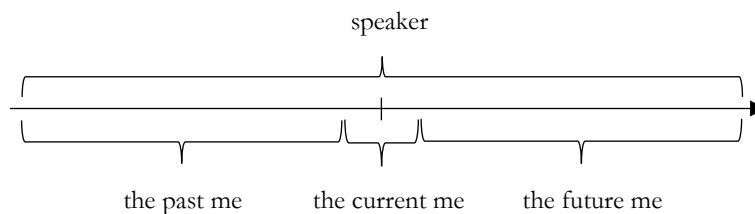


Chart 1

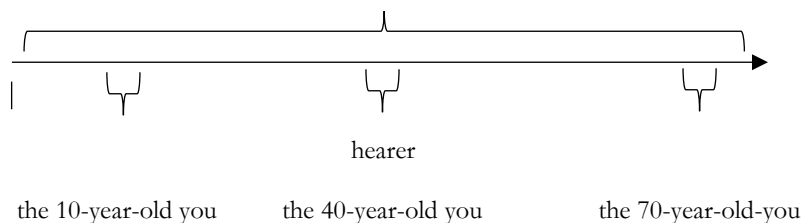


Chart 2

A closely related though not identical strategy is exemplified below:

(56) a. *the adventurous you*¹⁴

¹³ Intuitively, this is akin to referring to a novel as a set of the chapters of that novel, something which the acclaimed Hungarian writer Ádám Bodor does in the title and subtitle of his novel: *The Sinistra Zone: The Chapters of a Novel* – this of course also hints at the fact that each chapter could also be read as a short story in its own right.

¹⁴ As in: *There may be an inner conflict (between the adventurous you and the one that is scared of change).*

b. *the cautious Obama*¹⁵

Instead of conceptualizing the hearer (or Barack Obama) qua atomic individual (e), we conceptualize the hearer (or Barack Obama) qua the set of her/his personality chunks <e,t> (the totality of which gives us the whole individual). The Det+Adj+ProperName/Pronoun construction itself denotes an element of this set.

The parallels between the two cognitive strategies are easy to see:

- thinking of an individual as the sum total of the temporal stages of her/his life:

(57) a. *me = the one-year-old me plus the two-year-old me plus the three-year-old-me etc.*

b. *you = the past you plus the present you plus the future you*

- thinking of an individual as the sum total of their personality traits:

(58) a. *me = the cautious part of me plus the adventurous part of me plus the lazy part of me plus the hard-working part of me etc.*

b. *Obama = the progressive part of Obama plus the cautious part of Obama etc.*

4.2.2 A Formal Proposal

Note first that in the construction discussed above, the adjectival modifier (or a corresponding relative clause) is obligatory.

(59) a. *the *(adventurous) me*

b. *the *(cautious) Obama*

c. *the *(young) Churchill*

¹⁵ As in: *Both aspects of President Obama brought this about: the morally outraged President Obama that moved in the warships, but also the cautious Obama who said I need more time, let me talk to Congress.*

d. *the *(future) you*

This suggests that the type-shift is more radical: from e to $\langle\langle e,t\rangle\langle e,t\rangle\rangle$. Below, we provide the formulae for both types of type shift.

Type-shift from individual to set of personality chunks:

(60) o: Barack Obama (type e) $\rightarrow \lambda P.P(x) \wedge \text{OBAMA}_{\text{PCH}}(x)$: the personality chunk of Obama
of which it is true that P (type $\langle\langle e,t\rangle\langle e,t\rangle\rangle$)

Applications:

(61) a. *the cautious Obama*

= $\iota x.[\text{CAUTIOUS}(x) \wedge \text{OBAMA}_{\text{PCH}}(x)]$: the personality chunk which is cautious and is a
personality chunk of Obama

b. *The progressive Obama liked Bill 719, but the cautious Obama did not support Bill 719.*

= $\text{LIKED}(\iota x.[\text{PROGRESSIVE}(x) \wedge \text{OBAMA}_{\text{PCH}}(x)], \text{bill719}) \wedge$
 $\neg \text{SUPPORTED}(\iota x.[\text{CAUTIOUS}(x) \wedge \text{OBAMA}_{\text{PCH}}(x)], \text{bill719})$

Type-shift from individual to set of stages of individual:

(62) ch: Winston Churchill (type e) $\rightarrow \lambda t.\text{CHURCHILL}_t(x)$: the stage of Churchill which holds
at the time interval t (type $\langle s, \langle e,t \rangle \rangle$)

Applications:

(63) a. *the 25-year-old Churchill*

= $\iota x.\text{CHURCHILL}_{25\text{-}y\text{-}o}(x)$: the stage of Churchill that holds at his age of 25 years

b. *the 25-year-old Churchill opposed Home Rule, but the 39-year-old Churchill supported Home Rule*

= $\text{OPPOSED}(\iota x.\text{CHURCHILL}_{25\text{-}y\text{-}o}(x), \text{hr}) \wedge \text{SUPPORTED}(\iota x.\text{CHURCHILL}_{39\text{-}y\text{-}o}(x), \text{hr})$

This means that we have to admit two new types of individuals to our ontology: temporal chunks of individuals (or temporal stages of individuals) and personality traits chunks of individuals. That such a step is empirically necessary is demonstrated by sentences such as:

- (64) a. *A part of me hates formal semantics, and another part of me is fascinated by it.*¹⁶
- b. *The eight-year-old version of me wanted to be a teacher or a scientist.*
- c. *A part of me hates myself for posting this but I feel like it has to be said.*
- d. *A part of me refused to accept that I wasn't going to be allowed to play cricket again.*
- e. *The cruelty of depression is that a part of you knows that you have the disease.*
- f. *A part of her suspected that it was all a farce.*

It is difficult to see how such sentences could be analysed if not by having recourse to temporal chunks and personality trait chunks of individuals. Note also that the behaviour of these constructions is also strikingly similar to what we have been discussing (coreferring pronouns and reflexives agree with the embedded pronoun whereas the verb displays 3SG agreement).

The idea that the meaning of proper names can be analyzed by appealing to a spatio-temporal part/stage ontology is of course not new. The concept itself goes back at least to Quine (1960), and recent formalizations of the idea include Paul (1994) and Gärtner (2006). However, to the best of our knowledge, the idea that in addition to proper names, pronouns can also be analysed in terms of part/stage ontology has not yet been explored. It is important to note that not all Det+Adj+Proper name / Pronoun sequences belong to the construction discussed above.

Consider:

- (65) a. *The brash Biden supported Bill 719, but the cautious Obama did not support Bill 719.*¹⁷

¹⁶ Example constructed by the author.

¹⁷ Example constructed by the author.

= 'Biden, being brash, supported Bill 719, but Obama, being cautious, did not support Bill 719'

=/= 'The brash part of Biden supported Bill 719, but the cautious part of Obama did not support Bill 719'

b. *An exhausted me has felt that I'm not doing a good enough job...*

= 'I, being exhausted, felt that I am not doing a good enough job.'

=/= 'The exhausted part of me felt that I am not doing a very good job.'¹⁸

c. *Responding combatively to repeated questions about the plans, a visibly irritated Mr Andrews defended the trade agreement*

= 'Mr Andrews, being visibly irritated, defended the trade agreement.'

=/= 'The visibly irritated part of Mr Andrews defended the trade agreement'

For simplicity, I assume that in such sentences, the proper names are predicates (of type <e,t>):

(66) a. Joe Biden: $\lambda x.BIDEN(x)$

b. *The brash Biden supported Bill 719, but the cautious Obama did not support Bill 719.*

$SUPPORTED(ix.[BRASH(x)\wedge BIDEN(x)],b719) \wedge$

$\neg SUPPORTED(ix.[CAUTIOUS(x)\wedge OBAMA(x)],b719)$

Interestingly, it seems that this operation can apply to pronouns (1, 2 and 3) as well:

(67) a. *An exhausted me has felt that I'm not doing a good enough job...*

b. *When I walked into the room, I saw a visibly tired you.*

c. *Burned food coming from a frustrated him can only mean one thing: [...].*

¹⁸ Contrast this with: *The exhausted me wanted to fall into bed, but the excited me wanted to keep writing this paper.*

While the view that proper names can be regarded as predicates has been around for a long time (cf. Geurts (1997), Elbourne (2005), Matushansky (2006), Fara (2015) and references therein), the idea that pronouns can also be regarded as predicates in a similar blanket fashion¹⁹ seems to be new to best of our knowledge. The viability of such a proposal should be assessed in further work.

A further descriptive observation is that in the construction, there is a strong tendency toward the use of the indefinite article; in fact, it appears that with pronouns, only the indefinite article is used. Further research is need into this aspect as well.

4.3. The Syntax of the Det+Adj+Pronoun/Proper name construction

The main facts that need to be accounted for in terms of syntax are the following:

- the obligatoriness of the determiner and the modifying AdjP;
- the agreement phenomena (pronominal and verbal)

The semantics of the construction above explains, to some extent, the syntax observed. Consider:

- (68) a. **(the) adventurous me*
b. **(the) cautious Obama*
c. **(the) young Churchill*
d. **(the) future you*

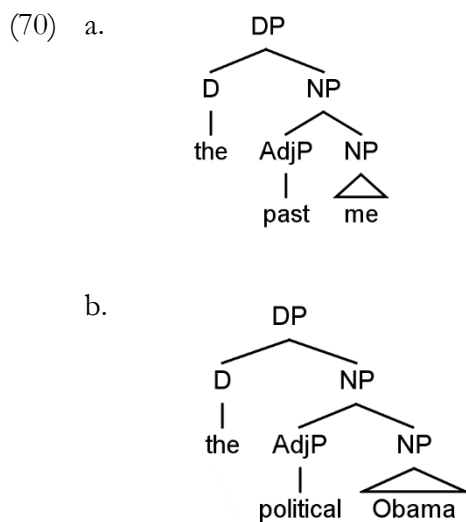
Since the adj+pronoun/proper name construction is of type $\langle e, t \rangle$, an iota operator is need to get to type e , and this operator is spelled out, as usual, as a definite determiner.

¹⁹ Pronouns in sentences such as *It is me*. have been analyzed by some authors as predicate nominals (e.g. Sigurdsson 2006), but we know of no such analysis of pronouns in subject position.

The obligatoriness of an intervening adjective can be explained in a similar vein:

- (69) a. *the *(adventurous) me*
 b. *the *(cautious) Obama*
 c. *the *(young) Churchill*
 d. *the *(future) you*

Without an adjective, we have a type clash between the iota operator (type $\langle\langle e,t\rangle, e\rangle$) and the type-shifted proper name (type $\langle\langle e,t\rangle, \langle e,t\rangle\rangle$). Based on these observations, we propose the following structure:



That pronouns and proper names are DPs is hardly controversial (cf. Longobardi (1994), Cardinaletti & Starke (1999), Weerman & Evers-Vermeul (2002), Neeleman & Szendrői (2007)).

What exactly happens within the DP is more contested:

- Is the pronoun base generated in D (Longobardi (1994)) or in N? Does the pronoun occupy D (Postal (1966) and subsequent work), or is the pronoun the spellout of the whole DP (or even KP subsuming the DP, cf. Weerman & Evers-Vermeul (2002) and Neeleman & Szendrői (2007))?

- How are the referential features and phi-features of the pronoun 'distributed' within the DP?
 - Is there a NumP as well, as Dékány (2011, 2021) proposed for pronouns in Hungarian, with D carrying person and Num carrying number?
 - Should we follow a Cardinaletti-Starke (1999) split-DP approach, where the features traditionally "attributed to D⁰ are realised in two distinct functional projections: one containing phi-features, Y⁰, and spelled out as such, and the other containing referential features, X⁰, and spelled out as a dummy marker, if at all"?
- Do proper names move to D (as proposed by Longobardi (1994) with regard to Romance)?
- Or is it the case that all proper names (being definite descriptions) have a definite article, which can be dropped under certain conditions (e.g. Matushansky 2006)?

It will be interesting to see to what extent the various proposal can account for the facts discussed in this paper. For reasons of space, a full evaluation has to be left for further work. Here, we have to confine ourselves to a couple of preliminary remarks.

The fact that adjectivally modified proper names require an overt article has been well-known for a long time. One proposal, due to Matushansky (2006), in the vein of the definite description theory of names, is that all names in English are DPs with a definite article, however, under certain conditions (i.e., most of the time), the determiner (D⁰) and the proper name (M⁰) are merged and thus, the determiner is not spelled out separately. If an adjectival modifier intervenes, such merger is impossible and the D⁰ is spelled out separately. It is easy to see that this proposal would account for the data discussed in this paper without any difficulties.

Turning to the pronouns, the pattern in (68-69) can be explained in a similar fashion. Assuming that pronouns spell out the whole DP (Weerman & Evers-Vermeul (2002), Neeleman &

Szendrői (2007) a.o.), an AdjP intervening between D⁰ and N⁰ might block this merger and result in D⁰ being spelled out separately.

On the other hand, models that assume the pronoun being base-generated in D⁰ would have trouble explaining the patterns observed. In (68-69), the pronoun is clearly spelled out lower than D⁰, however, an operation that would move the pronoun down in order to make space for an overt determiner sounds rather exotic.

A final remark: it is interesting to note that while strong pronouns in English exhibit this pattern, strong pronouns in Hungarian do not:

(71) **a húszéves én nosztalgiával gondol vissza a tízéves énré/rám*

the 20-y-o I nostalgia.with thinks back.to the 10-y-o I.onto

‘The twenty-year-old me remembers the 10-year-old me with nostalgia.’

Apparently, a more fine-grained typology of pronoun strength is needed.

In addition to the pattern in (68-69), we also need to account for the split agreement pattern, or rather, the split between pronominal agreement and verbal agreement. Consider the picture that emerged:

<u>subject</u>	<u>verbal agreement</u>	<u>pronominal agreement</u>
the+adj+ <i>me</i>	3SG	1SG
the+adj+ <i>you</i>	3SG	2SG
the+adj+ <i>him/her</i>	3SG	3SG
the+adj+proper name	3SG	3SG

Table 1

Recall at this point Cardinaletti & Starke's (1999) proposal, where phi-features on the one hand and referential features on the other are realised in two distinct functional projections. Building upon the spirit of this proposal, we can stipulate that verbal agreement is sensitive to the phi-feature content of D⁰, while pronominal agreement is sensitive to the phi-feature content on N⁰. Normally, these two are spelled out together and as a consequence, their phi-feature content has to be identical. However, in the case of adjectival modification, they have to be spelled out separately. The only definite determiner (*the*) is lexically specified as third person. This is not a problem when the N⁰ is also third person (him/her or a proper name). In case N⁰ is first person (*me*) or second person (*you*), there is a discrepancy, resulting in the agreement pattern observed and summarized in Table 1.

4.3.1 Excursus

Table 1 above accurately describes what happens when there is no contrasting of different temporal stages (this includes virtual performatives). If, however, there is a temporal contrasting of different stages, a different pattern emerges. Consider:

(72) *The 17 year-old me was was pretty fucking awesome and I owe her a lot for who I am today.*

'The 17-year-old stage of me was pretty fucking awesome and the current stage of me owes the 17-year-old stage of me a lot for who the current stage of me is'

The sentence expresses the beliefs of the current stage of the speaker, and there is a contrast between two stages. As a result, in the sentence where pronouns referring to both stages are present, the one referring to the less prominent stage is realized as third person. A similar pattern is observable below:

(73) *While it isn't for everybody, I am so glad senior-year me trusted her instincts and took the leap.*

'the current stage of me is glad that the senior-year me trusted the senior-year me's instincts and took the leap'

Contrast this with the following:

(74) *(The) 10 year old me was lonely. I sat on my own most lunchtimes.*

'The 10-year-old stage of me was lonely. The 10-year-old stage of me was sitting on his own most lunchtimes.'

Here, the narrative is focused exclusively on the 10-year old me, there is no contrasting of the various stages. Consider also:

(75) *this year i took risks and chances that 12 year old me only dreamed of, 17 year old me doubted i could do, & 22 year old me thought was too late to even try.*

'This year the current stage of me took risks and chances that the 12-year-old stage of me only dreamed of, the 17 year-old stage of me doubted that the the totality (all stages) of me could do, and the 22-year-old stage of me thought was too late to even try'

To sum up, in cases where two different chunks of the speaker are directly contrasted, one of them switches to 3SG. While the details need to be worked out, I think this can be analyzed as a kind of switch reference phenomenon.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I conducted a syntactic analysis of the so-called virtual performative construction, which is the closest phenomenon that English has to Radically Truncated Clauses (RTCs) in Hungarian. I found that in contrast to RTCs, virtual performatives are full, non-truncated clauses. Their special behaviour is due to two factors: i) their subjects are first person singular personal pronouns modified by an adjectival temporal expression and ii) they are unspecified for tense. These two factors conspire and lead to the unique characteristics of the construction: the silent

subject and the split agreement phenomena. In order to model virtual performatives, I also conducted an in-depth analysis of the syntax of adjectivally modified personal pronouns.

6. Appendix

	item	source	possessive	reflexive	complement clause	determiner drop	other remarks
1	*runs to the kitchen*	Virtanen (2000)					
2	*screams like a fan girl*	Virtanen (2000)					
3	*cries*	Virtanen (2000)					
4	*sobs*	Virtanen (2000)					
5	*freaks out over nothing*	Virtanen (2000)					
6	*intentionally dates emotionally unavailable man*	Virtanen (2000)					
7	*embarrasses self* *tells best friend about it* *then tells internet*	Virtanen (2000)		self			
8	*Gets up from desk, walks out into field, raises arms, waits for meteor.*	Virtanen (2000)				dropped def articles	
9	*forgets that I have to be up at 7* *remembers that I don't care and stays up anyway*	Virtanen (2000)			1SG subject		
10	*blows smoke rings	Virtanen (2000)					
11	sees something that would be nice to buy for a gf but doesnt have a gf. positive side is im saving \$\$ 😊	Virtanen (2000)				undropped indefinite article	

12	I'm highly respected by the locals. Laughs out loud.	Virtanen (2000)					
13	*steals [username]'s note (and the houndstooth coat)*	Virtanen (2000)				undropped def article in object	
14	*backflips into room full of money* *realizes I can't do backflips* *wakes from a dream on the floor with broken neck*	Virtanen (2000)			1SG subject	undropped indefinite article	
15	*is sad because i am the fat one in the family*	Virtanen (2000)			1SG subject		
16	*feels optimistic about future for once*	Virtanen (2000)					
17	*studies for 10 minutes* *rests and scrolls on twitter for 3 hours*	Virtanen (2000)					not so real-time after all
18	*alarm clock goes off tomorrow morning* *hisses and buries myself under covers*	Virtanen (2000)		myself			not so real-time after all
19	*Sends risky text to crush*	Virtanen (2000)					
20	*feels happy* Seems fake but OK	Virtanen (2000)					
21	*forgets that I have to be up at 7* *remembers that I don't care and stays up anyway*	Virtanen (2000)			1SG subject of complement clause		
22	*burps really loud*	Virtanen (2000)					V OBJ ADV
23	*whispers* wow	Virtanen (2000)					
24	*realizes I'm alone*	Virtanen (2000)			1SG subject of complement clause		
25	*tries to tweet about it but it really isnt actually that funny*	Virtanen (2000)					
26	takes a bath instead and scrolls through twitter for an hour	Virtanen (2000)					
27	*hugs [username]*	Virtanen (2000)					
28	*pouts with you*	Virtanen (2000)					

29	*pouts*	Virtanen (2000)					
30	*waves at y'all madly*	Virtanen (2000)					V OBJ ADV
31	*talks to myself on twitter*	Virtanen (2000)		myself			
32	*retweets my own tweet*	Virtanen (2000)	my				
33	*sings myself happy birthday*	Virtanen (2000)		myself			
34	*waves hankie floppishly*	Virtanen (2000)					
35	*waves*	Virtanen (2015)					
36	*is sad*	Virtanen (2015)					
37	**jumps in excitement**	Virtanen (2015)					
38	*waves madly*	Virtanen (2015)					
39	::nods head::	Virtanen (2015)				determiner drop	
40	*waves hand*	Virtanen (2015)				determiner drop	
41	*rolls eyes*	Virtanen (2015)				determiner drop	
42	*pulls phone out of bag*	Virtanen (2015)				determiner drop	
43	*kicks rocks*	Virtanen (2015)					
44	*is confused*	Virtanen (2015)					
45	*is so happy*	Virtanen (2015)					
46	*eats cookie smugly*	Virtanen (2015)					
47	*laughs like a hyena*	Virtanen (2015)				undropped indef determiner	
48	*waves phone around, sends tweet*	Virtanen (2015)					series
49	*pulls phone out of bag and hides under desk*	Virtanen (2015)				object-drop known from RWR	series
50	*starts saving*	Virtanen (2015)			PRO subject		
51	*waves a lipgloss hoping to distract you...*	Virtanen (2015)			PRO subject		
52	*runs back to updating savings on excel weekly*	Virtanen (2015)			PRO subject		

53	*gets mad when people ignore me*	Virtanen (2015)			1SG object		
54	*dramatically dances with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in my hand while listening to lana del rey*	Virtanen (2015)	my		PRO subject		
55	*makes suggestive gestures with my hands and my jackhammer*	Virtanen (2015)	my				
56	aaaaahhh yes homework *shoves a pencil through my own eyeball*	Virtanen (2015)	my			undropped indef determiner in object!	
57	<----- runs to bathroom to admire my new stunning self!!!!!!!!!!!!!!	Virtanen (2015)	my		PRO subject		
58	*ignores everyone*	Virtanen (2015)					
59	*yawns in your face to show you how much i don't give a fuck*	Virtanen (2015)			1SG subject & PRO subject		
60	*sends laundry to Pal's mom*	Virtanen (2015)					
61	*hugs Tania*	Virtanen (2015)					
62	*hugs you*	Virtanen (2015)					

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