AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE ELEMENTS AND FALLACIES IN STUDENTS' DISCUSSION ESSAYS

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Abstrak: *Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk memahami bagaimana mahasiswa jurusan bahasa Inggris UNP menyajikan unsur-unsur argumen, apa saja bentuk kesalahan logika yang umumnya dibuat oleh mahasiswa serta bagaimana kedua aspek diatas dapat menggambarkan kualitas esai "discussion" mahasiswa secara keseluruhan. Penilaian dan penyajian unsur-unsur argumen dalam bentuk grafik, pengidentifikasian kesalahan logika, dan penilaian terhadap kualitas tulisan siswa adalah beberapa prosedur yang dilakukan pada analisis data. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukan bawah tulisan mahasiswa yang memiliki kualitas bagus cenderung merupakan penggabungan antara argumen dan argument kontra dalam pendapat mereka. Berkaitan dengan struktur argumen, argumen majemuk (multiple arguments) memiliki pengaruh yang lebih besar terhadap kualitas tulisan siswa. Selanjutnya ditemukan bahwa kesalahan logika hasty generalization dan post hoc ergo proper hoc adalah dua tipe kesalahan logika yang paling banyak dibuat oleh mahasiswa. Hal ini menunjukan bahwa masih kurangnya kemampuan mahasiswa dalam menyajikan bukti terhadap opini yang mereka kemukakan. Namun demikian, kedua kesalahan logika tersebut tidak dapat menggambarkan kualitas tulisan mahasiswa karena hampir seluruh mahasiswa membuat kesalahan logika tersebut.*

Key words: *unsur-unsur argumen, kesalahan logika, esai "discussion"*

A. INTRODUCTION

Different from verbal communication in which speakers can clarify the meaning uttered, writing is a nonverbal communication which requires its writers to deliver the crystal gist to readers and minimize any errors or mistakes. Thus, for most of language learners, writing seems to cause bigger problem than other language skills. Among all types of genres, argumentative writing especially discussion essay is perceived to pose greater problem for the students. According to an interview conducted to the English students of UNP, it was found out that their obstacles mainly related to their lack of ability to attain and develop persuasive ideas, and also their inadequate comprehension with the issues discussed. In addition, most of the students state that they tend to focus on the accuracy of grammar in their writing, and they still do not know the criteria of good arguments and how to make them convincing.

Base on pragma-dialectical framework, any kind of argumentation given in order to resolve difference of opinion and reach some kinds of reasonable agreement is named argumentative discussion which is also known as critical discussion (Van Eemeren et al., 2002). In this argumentative discussion, there are several elements

of argument that could be identified in order to know the strength of writers' argument. Furthermore, an argument will be considered acceptable and convincing if there is no violation to any critical discussion rules. A statement or speech act which violates these critical discussion rules, and impedes the resolution of a difference of opinion is judged as fallacy. This study was conducted to analyze argumentative elements and types of fallacies which are mostly made by the students in their discussion essays.

Theoretical Review

Discussion essay is one type of writing which requires writers to see and discuss an issue from two opposing points of view. Weigle (2002) elaborates that there are three main points to consider in assessing discussion essays. The first one is ides and arguments which are mostly related to the clarity of arguments, the adequate supports for these arguments, and objectivity. Then, how the students arrange and present their arguments is the part of rhetorical feature as the second point in assessing discussion essay. Language control which deals with grammar and mechanics is the last points in this assessment. Since the argument is the most important factor in evaluating the quality of discussion essay, the argumentative elements need to be elaborated more.

Arguments are delivered in order to defense a standpoint. Thus, the structures of these arguments need to be analyzed in order to evaluate the strength of a defense. Van Eemeren et al. (2002) deliberate that the simplest argument is in the form of single argument which mostly consists of one premise. However, it could be much more complex. The first type of this complex argument is multiple argumentations. It consists of alternative defenses of the same standpoint, presented one after another. These alternative defenses do not depend on each other to support the standpoint, and they are, in principle, of equal weight. Different from multiple argumentation, the second type of complex argument-coordinative argumentation- consists of a combination of arguments taken together to defense a standpoint and constitute a conclusive defense. It indicates that these arguments depend on other arguments as they will be weak if they are separated. The last type of complex argumentation is subordinative argumentation. On this type, arguments are given layer after layer. It means that if a certain argument is not adequate to support an initial standpoint, this argument will be further supported by another argument. This process is done until the defense seems conclusive. Appropriate argumentative elements will strengthen the stand of arguments itself if they do not violate any critical discussion rules.

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004) explain that the critical discussion rules are called as "ten commandments" which only focus on prohibition of moves in argumentative discourse that can hinder the resolution of different opinion on the merits.

Rule 1: Parties must not prevent each other from putting forward standpoints or casting doubt on standpoints (Freedom Rule).

Van Eemeren et al. (2009) explain that standpoints and doubt regarding standpoints should be expressed freely. This freedom rule can be violated in various ways. The first one is by giving any threats which are intended to restrict other party from freely putting forward his standpoint or criticism named fallacy of the stick or *argumentum ad baculum*. The second violation is putting pressure on the opponent by playing on his emotion and taking advantage of the compassionate feeling of the others. It is called appeal to pity or known as *argumentum ad misericordiam*. Next, presenting the other party as stupid, unreliable, or unworthy of credibility is another violation of freedom rule named personal attack or *argumentum ad hominem.*

Rule 2 : A party who puts forward a standpoint is obliged to defend it if asked to do so (obligation-to-defend rule).

One of the classic Roman antiquity rule states "Whoever claims, has to defend". It explains that the one who initiates the topic also has to be the one to present the argumentation first. If the party initiating the topic escapes from this obligation, he has conducted a fallacy named shifting the burden of proof.

As explained by Van Eemeren (2009), the next type of violation is named evading the burden of proof. This type of fallacy is performed in several ways. First, either protagonist or antagonist attempts to introduce standpoint as something which does not require any further defense because it is self-evident. Second, give personal

guarantee to the correctness of a standpoint. The last type of violation is evading the burden of proof by phrasing a standpoint that makes it become immune to criticism.

Rule 3: A Party's attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party (standpoint rule).

Violation of this rule happens when the standpoint attacked is not the standpoint put forward by the protagonist (Van Eemeren et al., 2002). When it occurs, either protagonist or antagonist has conducted a fallacy of straw man.

Rule 4: Party may defend his or her standpoint only by advancing argumentation related to that standpoint (relevance rule).

First is the argument which is not relevant to the standpoint advanced in confrontation stage. It is called irrelevant argumentation. The second type is non-argumentation in which a standpoint is defended with means other than argumentation.

Rule 5 : A party may not falsely present something as a premise that has been left unexpressed by the other party or deny a premise that he or she has left implicit (unexpressed premise rule)

It is possible that some arguments are left unexpressed or implied. If the party exaggerates this unexpressed premise and takes advantage of it, he has produced the fallacy of magnifying what has been left unexpressed (Van Eemeren et al., 2002). On the other hand, if the party proposing unexpressed premise refuse the commitment to defense it,

the fallacy of denying an unexpressed premise has occurred.

Rule 6: No party may falsely present a premise as an accepted starting point, or deny a premise representing an accepted starting point (starting point rule).

If one of the parties violates this rule, he has produced the fallacy of circular reasoning which is also called begging the question or petition principia. Furthermore, Mayberry (2009) also states that this fallacy also occurs when an expression which is the same or synonymous with the standpoint is considered as a common starting point.

Rule 7: The reasoning in the argumentation must be logically valid or must be capable of being made valid by making explicit one or more unexpressed premises.

One type of fallacy occurs as the violation of validity rule is fallacy of composition. Van Eemeren et al. (2002) state that it happens when a discussant treats the whole as a simple sum of the separate parts. Another type of fallacy named as invalid reasoning occurs when reasoning, after making explicit everything that was left unexpressed, is still invalid (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004).

Rule 8: A standpoint may not be regarded as conclusively defended if the defense does not take place by means of an appropriate argument scheme that is correctly applied (argument scheme rule).

The defense of a standpoint can be considered successful if the protagonist can properly apply argument scheme (Van Eemeren et al., 2002). If one of those schemes is used in inappropriate way, the protagonist violates rule 8. For example in symptomatic relation, when a protagonist claims that a certain standpoint should be accepted just because so many people agree with it, it signifies that he has conducted populist fallacy or *argumentum ad populum*. Another fallacy happens in symptomatic relation is a fallacy of abuse of authority (*argumentum ad verecundiam*). Here, a discussant presents that an argument defending a standpoint is true because the authority says it is so. Fallacy of hasty generalization which also occurs in symptomatic relation is a fallacy which is caused by generalization of the evidence based on too few observations. Goshgarian et al. (2003) asserts that hasty generalization can also occur when a discussant relies on evidence that is not factual or substantiated.

Quite similar with argument scheme which uses symptomatic relation, inappropriate use of causal relation occurs when protagonist or antagonist mistakenly provides confusing facts with value judgments or personal judgment. This violation is named *argumentum ad consequentiam*. Further, cause and effect relation which cannot be supported by a fact can be categorized as fallacy of *post hoc ergo proper hoc* (after this, therefore, because of this). Furthermore, another type of fallacy happens in causal relation is the fallacy of the slippery slope. When a discussant suggests that a certain circumstance will be getting worse but in fact he fails to come up with evidence that

such effect will occur, he has carried out fallacy of slippery slope.

Basically, a difficult or unfamiliar concept can be clarified by comparing it with something easily understood or by giving analogy. The analogy given must be a sound one (Van Eemeren et al., 2002). It means that two things compared are really comparable. If there is a condition which can invalidate comparison, fallacy of false analogy will happen.

Rule 9: A failed defense of a standpoint must result in the protagonist retracting the standpoint, and a successful defense of a standpoint must result in the antagonist retracting his or her doubts (the closure rule)

Basically, both of the parties should defense their own standpoint in order to resolve the difference of opinion. However, if one of these parties fails to do so, and the opposing party claims that his standpoint is true, it means he has produced the fallacy of *argumentum ad ignorantiam* (Van Eemeren et al., 2002).

Rule 10: Parties must not use any formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous, and they must interpret the formulations of the other party as carefully and accurately possible (the usage rule).

Van Eemeren et al. (2009) explain that a party who makes use of unclear or ambiguous language to improve his or her own position in the discussion has made the fallacy of unclarity or ambiguity. The unclarity can be resulted from implicitness, indefiniteness, unfamiliarity, and vagueness.

B. METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive study in which English Department students of UNP who have completed all writing courses were assigned to write argumentative essays under the topic about Grammar Translation Method. The students' discussion essays were scored and graphed in order to see the argumentative elements used, the fallacies made, and the quality of their discussion essays.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

It was found out that almost all subjects in this analysis provided a standpoint as a point of departure of their argumentation. 8 of them preferred negative standpoints; meanwhile 9 students decided to remain neutral. Only two of these students chose to argue with positive standpoints. It indicates that the students understand the basic element of a discussion essay. Only one of them did not state any position related to the issue discussed.

Furthermore, based on the theory of argumentative elements, the writers who choose either positive or negative standpoint should provide their alternative standpoints. The data collected showed that eight students who proposed negative standpoints provided alternative standpoint in their argument. Meanwhile, from those who preferred positive standpoint, only one of them (student

7) came up with his alternative standpoint. To strengthen the stand of the writers, they need to provide rebuttal for counterarguments given. Thus, among 10 students taking clear stand towards the issue discussed and proposing alternative standpoint, there were only two students (student 11 and 12) who gave rebuttal for counterarguments. It means other eight students just provided counterarguments that likely weakened their stand without attempting to rebut this counterargument in order to strengthen their case.

Regarding these argumentative elements, Van Eemeren et al. (2002) convey that a defense of an argument can be presented in various structures of arguments. The simplest one is a single argument which mostly consists of one premise. Based on the data gathered, there were only six students who delivered single arguments to support the standpoint brought forward.

Besides single argument, eight students advancing negative standpoints elaborated their supports in the form of multiple arguments. It indicates that these students were able to see the issue from both the proposition and opposition points of view. However, there were only two students (student 3, and 16) presenting them in the equal weight. They provided two defending arguments to defend their standpoint, and two counterarguments that can weaken these defenses. Other five students (student 1, 2, 4,11, and 12) tended to give more emphasis on the defense of standpoint, and only provided one counterargument. It indicated that they hardly saw the opposing issue which can weaken their argument and only focus on those which can strengthen their point. Different from other seven students, student 8 only provided one defending argument and one counterargument in order to defend his negative standpoint.

However, the number of defending argument and counterargument is not the only consideration in understanding the students' argumentative elements. Another essential one is how they structured the supports for these elements. Regarding the structure of the supports, these 20 students used subordinative arguments. It shows that the students were able to provide evidences for the claim he made. These evidences came in different levels, and these levels indicated the elaboration of arguments proposed.

Different from the students advancing negative standpoints, those who inclined to remain neutral were expected to present positive and negative standpoints regarding the issue discussed. These arguments are regarded as argument level 1. Of nine students who did not clearly state their stand, three students (student 5, 10, and 19) presented more arguments on positive standpoint rather than the negative one. On the other hand, more arguments on negative standpoint were provided by other four students (student 6, 14, 17 and 20). Two students (student 9 and 18) preferred to give the equal number of arguments for both the positive and the negative standpoints.

For the students presented more arguments for the positive standpoint, they used subordinative argument in various level. However,

they were mainly dominated by arguments level 3, and some of them were in coordinative form. There were merely two arguments level 1 which were supported by other multiple arguments. Furthermore, the data gathered from the students proposing more negative standpoint than the positive one indicate quite similar result. Though the various levels of subordinative arguments were employed in order to defend the argument level 1, they were mainly dominated by arguments level 2 and 3. Meanwhile, two arguments were supported by multiple arguments which were then also elaborated in subordinative arguments.

Of 20 writing tasks analyzed, it was revealed that there were 8 types of fallacies which were most commonly made by the students in their argumentative essays.

1. Hasty generalization

From the data gathered, almost all students made the fallacy of hasty generalization though it appeared in different number. Actually, there were about 20 occurrences in total. They mostly happened when the students did not provide adequate evidence for the reason given, so that they were considered inconclusive defense. Exaggerating a conclusion and using inappropriate word choice were other factors which made the students' arguments categorized as the fallacy of hasty generalization. Some examples of this fallacy were elaborated below.

Data 1.

a. GTM can create frustration for student because they have no interest to learn since they only memorize and translate the language (Student 10)

b. This approach also provides students the translation session and the use of words in the literacy which can be concluded the student translation and understanding or knowledge about the words cannot be questioned (Student 3)

The statements above were identified as the fallacy of hasty generalization because the students jump to a conclusion without giving adequate evidence to support it. Principally, all the points presented above could be good supports for the standpoint proposed if the writers were able to come up with convincing evidences which can strengthen their points. Unfortunately, they failed to do so, and tended to only support their point by giving their own personal opinion.

2. Fallacy of post hoc ergo proper hoc

Basically, it has quite similar concept with the fallacy of hasty generalization since both of them see whether the writers have presented adequate evidence or not. However, the fallacy of post hoc ergo proper hoc emphasizes more on the writer's failure to show cause and effect relations. It can be seen in one of the students' arguments below:

"If the students always pay attention to grammar structural, they will be awkward to use the target language in interaction with others" (Student 11)

No evidence or further explanation was given to show that

paying attention on grammar will make the students difficult to interact with others. Moreover, paying attention on grammar does not mean the students do not pay attention to other required skills to interact with others.

3. Populist fallacy (the argumentum ad populum)

Some of the arguments presented by the students to support their standpoint were based on public opinion towards the issue discussed. It would be acceptable if this public opinion referred to study result, interview, or questionnaire, and it is named as populist argumentation. However, if the writers tried to make their arguments acceptable by claiming so many people agree with it, they have produced the populist fallacy (the argumentum ad populum). It was proven in the following statements produced by the students.

Data 2.

a. *Million of people* have successfully learnt foreign languages to high degree of proficiency and in numerous cases, without any contact with native speakers of the language. (student 1)
b. *Like what we have know* that the objectives or goal of this method is to teach translation. (student 12)

The above argument shows that the writer tried to make the argument accepted as a public opinion without explaining in more detail who this "million of people" are, and the evidence that it is so. Furthermore, the arguments which were categorized as populist fallacies

could be related to the diction used by the writers, as seen in the above examples.

4. Circular reasoning/Begging the question/Petition principia

An argument is categorized as the fallacy of circular reasoning when the argument used is only the restatement of the standpoint under discussion. This was proven by the following arguments produced by the students.

"Sentence 7 as the topic sentence of paragraph 2 states, 'This method is not effective because just focus on reading and writing skill'. The following sentence as the supporting sentence is supposed to explain the bad effect of a method which only focuses on reading and writing skill, and why it is considered ineffective. In fact, the writer only states "I think if education practitioner still use this method, it will give the bad effect for students because this method just focus on reading and writing skills". There is no elaboration or explanation of the argument since it only states something similar with the previous one.

5. Ethical fallacy of abuse of authority (argumentum ad verecurdiam)

Some students preferred to support their arguments by quoting an opinion from someone considered has an expert on the issue discussed and from related sources. Unfortunately, most of them defend their stand by quoting from Wikipedia. Since Wikipedia is a site in which any visitors can add or edit the posted text, nobody can guarantee those who have posted it

are the ones who have expertise on that issue. In short, supporting arguments by referring to opinion stated in Wikipedia is considered unacceptable and categorized as ethical fallacy of abuse of authority.

6. Irrelevant Argumentation (ignoratio elenchi)

In nutshell, this fallacy occurred when the writers provide unrelated arguments in order to defend the standpoint. For example:

"Student 13 states that the implementation of GTM means less class activities and games, and students just translate one text to another language. This explanation is followed by a statement from the writer "So, this method does not need a teacher who fluent in target language." This statement was categorized as the fallacy of irrelevant argumentation (ignoratio elenchi) since there is no relation between the argument and the standpoint brought forward.

7. Evading the burden of proof.

From three aspects which can cause the fallacy of evading the burden of proof, making the argument as if it is self-evident was the strategy used by the writers to support their standpoint. One of them wrote, "…many people are sure that this method can increase students' ability in reading and writing." (Student 11)

Since the writer began the argument by saying "many people are sure", it indicated that this opinion does not to be proven anymore because it is self-evident. In fact, nobody can guarantee whether it is true or not.

8. Slippery Slope

The writers produced this fallacy when they present argument from consequences, but they failed to come up with evidence to show that the effect will occur. One of the wrote, "By using GTM, students will not master the language for long time, they just try hard to make sense about structure of word and the pattern, just like when they are studying math or physics which is full of rules." (student 11)

The arguments above showed that the implementation of GTM will only hinder the students in mastering the language. Moreover, it was getting worse since the students only focused on sentence pattern and structure. These arguments would have been acceptable if the writer could have elaborated the reasons why GTM had no contribution in helping the students to master the language, and in what way making sense of sentence structure was unable to help students mastering the language.

Discussion

The main objectives of this study are to analyze how students represent their argumentative elements and what fallacies they mostly made. These findings are aimed at understanding the students' strengths and weaknesses in composing discussion essays. Concerning the result shown in the findings, there are several issues that need to be discussed further: The number of supports for both standpoints and counterarguments influence the quality of the students' argument; the students composing the developed essays mostly presented their defenses

in multiple arguments; the students have less ability in providing convincing evidences for the support given.

The findings indicate that the students wrote discussion essays that were on average partially developed. This finding is consistent with the previous research conducted on academically underprepared college students (Chase, 2011) which showed that 69% of these students did not develop their arguments well. Furthermore, it was found that the number of arguments to support either the standpoint or the counterargument contribute to the quality of their discussion essays. The developed essays were mainly produced by the students who presented the equal number of supports for the standpoints and the counterargument. This confirms a meta-analysis previously conducted by O'Kefe (1999) who conveys that texts consisted of the balance number of arguments and counterarguments were more persuasive than those that did not.

In contrast, the disappointing quality is shown by the students proposing more supports on the standpoints rather than the counterarguments. They tended to pose partially developed essays. The previous research conducted by Chase (2011) clarifies this finding in which these students were not able to provide proper elaboration for the counterargument. Furthermore, Nussbaum & Kardash (2005) state that students often do not realize that considering and rebutting the opposing views often increases the persuasiveness of their own arguments. That is why they tended

to focus more on arguments defending their stand.

In regard to the students remaining neutral, developed essays were mostly performed by the students presenting more support for negative standpoints. It might be caused by the tendency of the students to choose a certain stand, but they did not state it explicitly. It is inconsistent with study carried out by Nussbaum and Kardash (2005) who found out that the students with extreme attitude about the controversial issue (those who clearly state their stand) generated fewer alternative standpoint than those with less extreme attitude (remain neutral).

In the other side, the student who did not discuss the issue from both perspectives demonstrates minimally-developed discussion essays. It is possible to happen because they did not compose them based on the concept of discussion essays in which they have to see the issue from two opposing points of view.

Second, Van Eemeren et al. (2002) convey that the defenses for the standpoint can be presented in the form of single or complex arguments. The finding of this study shows that developed arguments were mostly presented in the form of multiple arguments. It is in line with the theory proposed by Van Eemeren et al. (2002) which explains that the multiple arguments are the defenses which do not depend on each other to support the standpoint. Hence, if the students give one weak chain of support for the standpoint, it will not affect or weaken other supports since

they theoretically stand alone and do not influence each other.

In contrast, the subordinative arguments are the arguments presented layer after layer. It means one support is the support for the initial one. In the matter of fact, the students are less able to give convincing evidence for the support given. Apparently, they are able to give the reason for their claim, but they fail to prove why it is so. Thus, the arguments which were supported by subordinative arguments only produce less qualified writing since one weak support will affect the strength of the whole defense.

Third, among nine types of fallacies made by the students in their discussion essays, the fallacy of hasty generalization and post hoc ergo proper hoc occurred the most. Both of them related to the lack of evidence given for the support. However, the fallacy of post hoc ergo proper hoc focuses more on cause and effect relations.

The findings of this study suggest that providing convincing evidence for the claim stated is one of the students' problems in composing the discussion essays. This confirms the theory stated by Van Eemeren and Grootendurst (2004) that the students commonly violates the argument scheme rule in giving arguments for their support, so that their argument cannot be conclusively defended. However, based on Boyesian approach in identifying fallacies, Oaksford and Hahn (2004) argue that lack of knowledge or evidence is not sufficient to consider that an argument is fallacious. Therefore, it can be stated that the arguments with lack of evidence are only fallacious

if they are analyzed based on pragma-dialectical framework.

Furthermore, another interesting factor which influences the strengths of the students' defense is how the students defend their claim. Most of them conveyed their personal opinion, and use it as their support. Based on the concept of pragma-dialectical framework, supporting a claim by presenting personal opinion and making it as public opinion is considered as the violation of the discussion rules, and it is named as populist fallacy. It can be supported by the prior research done by Coffin and Hewings (2005) which explained that using personal opinion and make it publicly accepted are better to be avoided in the academic writing.

The lack of students' ability in providing of convincing evidence made them produce either the fallacy of hasty generalization or the fallacy of post hoc ergo proper hoc. In this present study, both of these fallacies occurred in all quality if the students' essays from well developed to minimally developed. It indicates that all student, no matter how qualified their arguments are, had difficulty in defending their standpoint with adequate evidence, In addition it was found at that one thing that differentiate those with developed argument and others who performed minimally developed essays is the fallacy of irrelevant argumentation, Here the minimally developed essays consisted of arguments which had no contribution to strengthen the students' claim.

Hence, it can be concluded that the fallacy of hasty generalization and post hoc ergo cannot be used as the consideration in distinguishing the quality of the

students' argument since all of the students made this fallacy.

D. CONCLUSION

Through this present study, it was found at that the students presented all argumentative elements in their discussion essays, and represented them in various structures of argument: simple, multiple, subordinative, and coordinative argument. Furthermore, it was also found out that the generation of counterargument can increase the persuasiveness of the students' arguments. Since it indicated that the students defended his stand not only by concerning his supporting views but also the opposing views which potentially able to weaken his stand.

In addition, among 22 types of fallacies, the students made 9 common types of fallacies in their discussion essays. It was previously assumed that the types of fallacy were going to be much different for every different quality of their writing. However, the findings show that there were the same fallacies appeared in various qualities.

Overall, the students produced partially developed essays in all criteria: ideas and arguments, rhetorical features, and language control. However, they did better in language control.

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