

# LANGKAWI

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## INHIBITION IN SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

**Isna Humaera**

**Faculty of Education and Teaching, IAIN Kendari**

(email)

### **Abstract**

*The most common problem encountered by the learner in the language acquisition process is learner inhibition. Inhibition refers to a temperamental tendency to display wariness, fearfulness, or restrain in response to unfamiliar people, objects, and situations. There are some factors that cause inhibition, such as lack of motivation, shyness, self-confidence, self-esteem, and language ego. There are also levels of inhibition, it refers to kinds of inhibition and caused of inhibition itself. Teacher can support their students to reduce their inhibition effect by many ways, one of them by creating good classroom management including establishing good rapport between teacher and learners.*

*Keywords: Inhibition, Speaking Performance.*

### **Abstrak**

*Masalah yang paling sering ditemui oleh pelajar dalam proses pembelajaran berbahasa adalah inhibisi. Inhibisi berhubungan dengan kecenderungan tekanan perasaan dalam menunjukkan kekhawatiran, ketakutan, mengedalikan responnya terhadap orang-orang, objek, dan situasi yang masih asing baginya. Ada sejumlah faktor yang melatari munculnya inhibisi, misalnya kurang motivasi, keseganan, kepercayaan diri, bangga diri, dan ego berbahasa. Inhibisi memiliki level yang beragam, bergantung pada jenis dan penyebab inhibisi itu sendiri. Pengajar dapat mendukung peserta didiknya untuk meredam inhibisi mereka dengan berbagai cara, salah satunya adalah membuat manajemen kelas yang baik termasuk menciptakan hubungan yang baik antara guru dan peserta didiknya.*

*Kata kunci: Inhibisi, penampilan bertutur.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is about inhibition in speaking performance by students. This explanation will cover a simple explanation in understanding about inhibition, factors that cause inhibition, level of inhibition, strategies to overcome the inhibition causes, and strategies to lower inhibition. The elaboration of each item will be in the following paragraph.

Inhibition is condition which someone or students are losing face, worry about making mistakes and afraid of the attention that their speech attraction (Ur, 1996, p. 121). Others, Kagan et al. (1988), pointed out that inhibition refers to a temperamental tendency to display wariness, fearfulness, or restraint in response to unfamiliar people, objects, and situations. These describe that inhibition affect to students' language learning specifically in performing their language comprehension.

Inhibition is the most crucial in language learning either other physical problems. Speaking activities require a learner to have all eyes on him; exposure to an audience can often give learners stage fright. They may be also be worried about making mistakes, being criticized or losing face in front of the rest of the class. This results in their performance where either they make a lot of mistakes in spite of having a very good knowledge in the area or totally keeping silent.

Those arguments indicate that inhibition is important factor that hinder the students in their language acquisition and should be solved by teachers and students itself. The students with inhibition will be exercising self-control in speaking English. Students with inhibition will protect their ego in language acquisition or produce something (Brown, 2000a, p. 149). Meanwhile, students' language ego is important in students speaking performance especially in taking risk.

According to Kurtus (2001), inhibit to speak come together with fear of mistakes that will become the primary reason that students are afraid of looking unwise in front of other people, then they are disturbed about how other will see them. Inhibition makes students cannot do something. Ur (1996) said that students who are inhibited in their speaking activity generally are afraid of making mistakes, losing face, and fearful in saying or doing something. It really disturbs their personality. It caused by many factors. The following paragraph will explain factors that cause inhibition.

## **INHIBITION IN SPEAKING AND STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME IT**

### **Factors That Cause Inhibition**

Generally, there are two main elements that cause inhibition, cognitive factors and affective factors. Clearly Mohseni and Ameri (2010, p.44) categorize source of attitude problems included of inhibition are the following:

#### ***a. Cognitive Factors***

##### **1. Grammar**

Grammar was an element of language that presents the pattern of language. Thornbury (2006, p. 144) explained that grammatical structure was crucial in language learning but it did not took up that grammar should be the starting point of learning. It means that grammar is not the only one of language component that need to be mastered by the students. In the development of communicative competence, students do not to be worry about grammatical mistakes that are made. Avoiding misconception of students, teachers need to encourage students to think of how language is used in communication without being isolated in the language structure. Additionally, Harmer (2006) points out that grammar is not only eventually focused on syntax but also how to put the language form in the way of communication (p.343).

However, knowledge of grammar rules helps students to form correct sentences. It is useful to determine communication both in written and spoken language. By acknowledging the grammatical rules, students can know the appropriate language use where they are taking part. Other, Cook (1996) views that grammar is the structure knowledge of language that the users possess in their brain (p.33). Students need to understand the implication of language to develop their language awareness and to create meaningful communication.

Most students assume that in taking conversation or speaking English, they have to say in right way with structured. Students' grammatical judgment inhibited them to take a part in a conversation because of afraid to produce some words ungrammatically. In line with Cook (1996), Chomsky (2002) points out, speakers' grammatical consideration not only retains for the sentences that the students have said or heard before, but also retains for those that the students have never said or heard before (p. 103-104). However, Thornbury (2006) pointed out that grammar is language component that should be mastered by students but it doesn't mean that they have to say something grammatically in communication. Consequently, teachers have to bring the students understand and aware that speak grammatically is not an obligation but should be tried as possible as them.

## **2. Vocabulary**

Students will be working with words to produce sentences. Cook (1996) highlights that vocabulary is amount of words that has meaning (p. 49). Students need vocabulary to produce language. It is determining that vocabularies are supporting factors for language users both in receiving and producing language. Thornbury (2006) points out that gradually students are emphasized to activate new vocabulary and structures more freely and to integrate them into the language production. Furthermore,

the knowledge of grammatical structure and vocabulary mastery do not guarantee that students will be good language users. It needs production and implementation in the process of learning. Becker (1997) said that students' lack of vocabulary is the main causes of students academic failure. Lack of vocabulary that faced by the students make them cannot arrange a sentence, share their idea and build communication. Hence, why vocabulary becomes one causes of students' problem in speaking activity.

### **3. Pronunciation**

Pronunciation is the important part in oral communication to produce accurate information and meaningful communication (Kelly, 2000, p.11). Students with mispronounce a range of phonemes can be extremely difficult for the listener to interpret the speaker means. It is determining factors for language users both in receiving and producing language. It is essential for students to possess pronunciation ability as much as possible to support them communicate using target language.

Students' difficulty in pronouncing the words will affect their performance. They could not say something to other people when they afraid in mispronouncing the words. Teachers should familiarize students with pronunciation to enlarge their bravery in oral communication. It could be minimized by supporting students to be aware of some variables that affecting students' speaking (Brown, 2000b, p. 283). The variables of pronunciation that affect students speaking are native language, age, experience, inherent phonetic ability, identity and language ego, and the last is motivation and concern for good pronunciation.

#### **b. *Affective Factors***

##### **1. Lack of Motivation**

Motivation and successful learning are intimately linked. Cook (1996) emphasizes that high motivation is one component that prompts successful in learning

and however, vice versa. Motivation certainly plays a very crucial role in learning and teaching a foreign language. Grabe and Stoller (2003) say that motivation is an important key to learn that has significant contribution associated with interest, self-efficacy, involvement, and self-concept. Motivating means creating the need of the students to learn and become actively involved in the lesson. Every student has their own way to deal with their own knowledge development. If this happens the process of learning and teaching will be much easier and full of fun. The students who are motivated help their teachers in understanding teaching materials and can learn better.

Nunan (1999) stated that motivations concerns to the compounding of hope for reaching the goal of learning the language and affirmative attitudes in the direction of language learning (p. 232-233). The sign of success can be seen from students' own self-motivation to learn and to associate with knowledge. On the other hand, teacher's role is needed to support students on the right track in their learning. Cook (1996) suggests that regarding to the individual differences between students, in teaching, teachers are hoped to recognize the students through allowing for opportunities for each them to gain in their own way. Teachers need to be conscious that they also have a significant impact on students' motivation in learning process. Establishing an effort to cover students' motivation, they should cater for the difference of personality types in the same classroom.

## **2. Shyness**

Shyness is an emotional thing that many students feel from at some time when they are required to speak in English class. This indicates that shyness could be a source of problem in students' learning activities in the classroom especially in speaking class. Therefore, Gebhard (2000) points out that paying attention on students' shyness is also

quite important in order to help the students do their best in their speaking performance in the classroom. This is in line with Baldwin (2011) statement that speaking in front of people is one of the more common phobias that students facing and feeling of shyness makes their mind go blank or that they will forget what to say.

This theory is also supported by some research (Nurdin, 2014) in which most students fail to perform the speaking performance at their best. As they said, their inability to show their ability in speaking is also influenced most by their feeling of shyness. In other words, it can be said that shyness plays an important role in speaking performance done by the students.

### **3. Self Confidence**

It is commonly understood that students' lack of confidence usually occurs when students realize that their conversation partners have not understood them, or when they do not understand other speakers. In this situation, they would rather keep silent while others do talking showing that the students are lack of confidence to communicate. In response to this, Tsui cited in Nunan (1999) points out that student who lack of confidence about themselves and their English necessarily suffer from communication apprehension. That shows that building students' confidence is an important part of teachers' focus of attention. This means that the teacher should also learn from both theories and practical experience on how to build the students' confidence.

According to He and Chen (2010) the main cause of students' confidence is their low ability in speaking English. In this case, as they add, many students think that their English is bad and feel that they cannot speak English well. The other cause of students' lack of confidence also deals with the lack of encouragement from the teacher (Brown, 2007, p. 168). In this context, many teachers do not think that convincing

students that they are able to speak English is important. As a result, as Brown adds, students find the demotivating learning rather than motivating. This suggests that encouragement becomes a vital thing in order to build the students' confidence. Therefore, giving students' encouragement and showing that they will be able to communicate well in English plays a role in students' success of learning.

#### **4. Self Esteem**

Self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitude that the individual hold towards himself. Self-esteem is abstract just like it can be felt but it cannot be seen. Self-esteem can make a person judge himself weather is good or not before another person giving opinion on him. Everyone holds their personal opinions about who they are. These opinions are at the heart of self-esteem and affect someone feeling or values. Self-esteem is not static or fixed; someone beliefs about himself can change throughout his life as a result of circumstance and experience. High or low self-esteem that produced by students will influence their feelings and beliefs. Students with lower self-esteem will not know what they have made, meanwhile the higher one will know about their weaknesses and mistakes that they have made (Chamorro, 2013).

In second language acquisition and performing language, self-esteem has important role. Brown (2007, p. 156) points out that second language acquisition is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic affective factors that contribute to the success of language learning. Self-esteem is one of intrinsic personality factors. Afterwards, Brown explains that global self-esteem derives from the accumulation of inter and intrapersonal experiences, and from assessments people make of external world. It is a very significant factor because no successful cognitive or affective activity can be carried out without some degree of it.



Students perform well when they have high global self-esteem, or they may have a high global self-esteem because they perform well.

### **5. Language Ego**

The other personal factors that affect students in second language acquisition and performing their second language is language ego. Brown (2000b, p.16) states that language ego is the way of someone in developing their personal mode of thinking, feeling and acting in second identity. Language ego has positive and negative side in language acquisition. Generally language ego brings negative side in second language acquisition such easy create students sense of fragility, defensiveness, and rising of inhibitions. Students sometimes feel silly when they are learning second language. Students with lack of language ego will be losing face to face communication.

Most importantly, Dornyei (1998, p. 177) stated that without adequate motivation, self-confidence and language ego even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to guarantee students achievement.

#### **c. *Classroom Interaction***

Good relationship of classroom members is important key to create teaching environment. The interaction between learners and the teachers include asking question and answer, guidance in language learning, and solving problem. Interaction between learners and teachers that is not developed well become the cause of inhibition in their speaking activity. Students feel uncomforted to share or asking the teacher's help when they find some difficulties in language learning process. Classroom interaction includes how the teachers provide good opportunity to students performing their language and personality. According to Reeve (2006) when teacher-students interaction go well,

teachers function both as guide to structure students' learning opportunities as well as support system to encourage students' interest and enable students to internalize new values, develop important skills, and develop social responsibility. So, teacher as guide for students should be sensitive in analyzing the learners need.

#### **d. *Fear of Language Evaluation***

Inhibition can appear form language testing. In language testing, the greater the degree of students' evaluation and the more unfamiliar the test tasks and formats, the more the learner inhibited produced. Students also experienced inhibition when they spend hours studying the material emphasized in class only to find that their test assess different material or utilize question-types with which they have no experience. Further, teacher and peer corrections are horrible thing that produce students' inhibition in language learning activity. However, for some students believe that assessment can improve them. It is similar to what pointed out by Cohen in Celce (2001, p. 515) that students face language assessment as a threat to their competence, because they are afraid about lack of English performance. For this reason, teacher and other students should pay attention fully to feedback or assessment that they provide for the students.

#### **Level Of Inhibition**

Nigg (2000) explained that level of inhibition affected by kinds of inhibition and caused if inhibition itself. Kinds of inhibition are inhibition that related to cognition such as executive inhibition, automatic inhibition of attention, and motivational inhibition more influence language learners than psychopathological inhibition (p. 220). Meanwhile, Brown (2000a) points out that inhibition level are affected by students' language ego and self-esteem. Hence, students with weaker self-esteem will maintain walls of inhibition to protect their selves and neither language ego.

High or low inhibition that faced by students will influence their language performance. Inhibition comes together with psychological factors more influential to students in learning process than skill factors. The mental inhibition such as lack of self-confidence, learning motivation, anxiety, losing face of correction and shyness more inhibit students in show off their personality even though they have comprehension in language skills such as vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar.

Brown (2007, p. 155) state that learners with a weak self-esteem will feel more inhibition to perform, and will put up barriers to protect themselves against failure. They might not be prepared to take risk, such as making intelligent guesses or experimenting with the language they already know for fear of making mistakes and subsequently feeling embarrassed. This uneasiness is anxiety, the fear of not being able to perform to expectation, expectation which may often be imposed by the learner himself. The negative effect of low self-confidence, inhibition and anxiety on language learning may lead to non performance, the denial to carry out certain task, as learners fear portraying an image of incompetence when dealing in social and professional situation.

### **Strategies To Overcome The Inhibition Causes**

To overcoming inhibition that perceived by students, they have to have personal ways to do it. Some experts have proposed several strategies to overcome inhibition causes that can be tried by students to lower their inhibition problem. In the following ways, the students can try to solve their personal inhibition based on the causal factors.

#### **a. Inhibition that caused by language capability**

In order to increase their box of vocabularies, grammar comprehension and pronunciation ability, the students can follow some tips as advised by experts. Porter (2003, p. 1-3) proposed some ways to improve students box vocabularies. Firstly is

using dictionary. Dictionary can be used by students to decide the words categorical, in order to help them to understand the words, to remember them more easily, and to use them correctly. Moreover, the students also can find the way how to pronounce the words itself. Next, reading more. Through reading activity, the students can find the new words in the text. Reading not only help the students to find new words, but also how the words use in the sentence. The, write down the new words in different example of sentence to help students remember its meaning and finally, note down any dependent prepositions or collocations to help students use the words correctly. Meanwhile, Green (2004) suggested listening to radio and television programs and use a words three times by heard them frequently, read them frequently, teach them to others and use them in speaking and writing practices.

**b. Inhibition that caused by psychology**

Kondo and Ling (2003) proposed five strategies to reduce psychological factors that perceived by students. They are preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking and resignation.

The first category, preparation, refers to attempts at controlling the impending threat by improving learning strategies ( e.g. studying hard, trying to obtain good summaries of lecture notes). Using these strategies would be expected to increase students subjectively estimated mastery of the subject matter, and hence reduce the inhibition associated with the language class.

The second category, Relaxation, involves tactics that aim at reducing unconfidence. Typical items are “I take a deep breath” and I try to calm down”.

The third strategy set, positive thinking, is characterized by its palliative function of suppressing problematic cognitive processes that underlie students’ self-

reluctant (e.g. imagining oneself giving a great performance, trying to enjoy the tension). These strategies are intended to divert attention from the stressful situation to positive and pleasant cues, and bring relief to the inhibition students.

The fourth category, peer seeking, is distinguished by students' willingness to look for other students who seem to have trouble understanding the class and/ or controlling their lack of confidence. For the anxious student, the realization that others are having the same problem may serve as a source of emotional regulation by social comparison. The last but not least is resignation strategy. This category is characterized by students' reluctance to do anything to alleviate their language anxiety (e.g. giving up, sleeping in class).

In the same way, Premuzic (2013) advised that to overcome the low self-esteem that felt by someone, they can use; believe in one's own, letting go on past hurts and forgiving others, loving and accepting someone unconditionally, planning and setting achievable goals in life, visualizing someone achieving and succeeding in life and internalizing positive affirmations that help someone believe in everyone.

### **c. Inhibition that caused by classroom interaction**

Scrivener (2005) suggests a number of things that can do to create a positive learning atmosphere, and by extension, to establish rapport. These include: showing respect, being fair, really listening to the students, giving clear, positive feedback and the last be being oneself. Scrivener believes that those activities can stimulate the students to build good relationship with other classroom members, and those also create a positive classroom climate.

Brown (2001) proposed that there are three tools for creating a classroom climate that is positive, stimulating, and energizing. Positive can be build through establishing rapport. Rapport is a somewhat slippery but important concept in creating positive energy in the classroom. Rapport is the relationship or connection between

teacher and students, a relationship built on trust and respect that leads to students' feeling capable, competent, and creative. Teachers can set up such connection to the students by showing interest in each student as a person, giving feedback on each person's progress, openly soliciting students' idea and feelings, valuing and respecting what students think and say, laughing with them and not at them, working with them as a team, and not against them, and developing a genuine sense of vicarious joy when they learn something or otherwise succeed.

Stimulating means balancing praise and criticism. Part of good classroom management is creating rapport based on delicate balance between praise and criticism. Genuine praise, appropriately delivered, enables students to welcome criticism and to put it to use (Brown, 2001). The last is generating energy. Energy is the electricity of many minds caught up in a circuit of thinking, talking and writing. Energy is an aura of creativity sparked by the interaction of students. Energy drives students toward higher attainment. Students and teachers take energy with them when they leave the classroom and bring it back the next day (p. 203).

#### **d. Inhibition that caused by language evaluation**

Negative evaluation sometimes makes students personality shy, un-confidence, and demotivated. To overcome fear of negative evaluation students have to; try and take an objective more wise in viewing of what happened, recall what happened, then making reflection (Scrivener, 1994, p. 196-197). Moreover, Scrivener says that through those ways the students will face negative assessment as something positive and values for their capability.

#### **Strategies To Lower Inhibition**

Strategies are plan that is used by teachers or learners in teaching-learning process. Strategies can be categorized as teaching and learning strategies. Stones and

Morris (1972) define teaching strategy a a generalized plan for a lesson which includes structure, desired learner behavior in terms of goals of instruction and an outline of planned tactics necessary to implement the strategy. Meanwhile, Oxford (2003) defines language learning strategies are specific attitude or thought processes that students use to expand their own language learning. This definition is further expanded to include “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations”(p. 8).

Learning strategies are defined as “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task used by the students to enhance their own learning (Oxford, 2003, p. 2). Learning strategies can be classified into six groups, namely cognitive, Meta cognitive, memory related, compensatory, affective and social. These six strategies are divided by Oxford in direct and indirect categories. Those three groups that belong to the direct strategies are memory, cognitive, and compensation. While Meta cognitive, affective and social strategy includes indirect strategies (Oxford, 2003).

### **Strategies To Reduce The Inhibition Effects**

Teachers as the problem solver and as the researcher in the classroom have to be creative in identify the students’ problem and find the way to solve those problems. Related to inhibition in speaking performance, Ur (1996) proposes several activities to lower inhibition in speaking activity, they are group work and discussion activities. Further, Ur explains that through grouping activity, the students or learners who feel inhibited can express their though or feeling to other. Moreover, in grouping activity the students will get more chance to speak than they learn individually. In this activity the teacher cannot dominate the class and it means that the students will be doing more

activity particularly speak to their friends. Hence, Ur stated that discussion as the other ways to decrease inhibition effect. Then, as defined by Lazaraton (2001) discussion is identically designed to solve problems about related topics that students are facing with. Linked to that opinion, under discussion, students can share their thought and ideas to other without depressed. In this activity, the students who inhibit can ask their friends about their problems' solution.

Alves (2008, p. 8) and Brown (2001, 2007, p. 146) state that to lower the effect of inhibition in students' speaking performance, teachers can build by playing guessing games, communicative games, do role play activity, simulations, sing songs, group work, laugh together other students, and have the students share their fears in small groups. Thornbury (2006) defines role play as an activity where the students pretend to be someone else (p.98). Role play is a technique which involves fantasy or imagination to be someone else in a specific situation for a while, improvising dialogue and creating a real world in a scenario.

Based on definition above and related to Alves and Brown points of view, in role play activity the students are expected to be more responsible in their duty. Further, Alves explains that by using role play the students will be more active by sharing ideas to other group members. Further, Brown (2001) explained that role play minimally involves (a) giving a role to one or more members of a group and (b) assigning an objective or purpose that participants must accomplish. For example: similar dual roles could be assumed with assignments to others in the group to watch for certain grammatical or discourse elements as the roles are acted out. Or a group role play might involve a discussion of a political issue, with each person assigned to represent a particular political point of view. Others, simulations usually involve a more complex structure and often larger groups where the



entire group is working through an imaginary situation as a social unit, the object of which is to solve some specific problem.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL SPEAKING ACTIVITY**

Providing students' exercise and opportunity are important to give the students challenge and reinforce their comprehension in language particularly speaking. Brown (2000a) states that opportunity should be given by teachers that enable students speak English. The teachers have to think beyond in designing speaking assignment that covers the students' proficiency level. If teachers give them time to do task that are higher or lower than their level, they will simply become frustrated and demotivated. Conversely, it is good to provide the students task at time that challenge them, because if speaking tasks are always easy, they can also become demotivated, beside the task, the teachers also have to think about opportunity for students to speak. If teachers give them little opportunity, they will be inhibited and less practicing. Those are several other factors that should be considered when designing speaking activities.

Even though the success of speaking tasks depend on many factors, the following characteristics are common in successful speaking tasks (Ur, 1996, p.120)

#### **a. Maximum Foreign talk**

In successful speaking, the students talk a lot in the target language. One common problem in speaking activities is that the students often reduce one or two simple utterances in the foreign language and spend the rest of the time chatting in their mother tongue. Other common problem is that the teachers talk too much of the time, thus taking away valuable practice time from the students.

**b. Even participation**

Given the students equal opportunity in showing their personal ability should be done by teacher. Even the students put in whole class or small groups, a successful task should encourage speaking from as many different students as possible. The task should be designed in a way so that the outspoken students do not dominate discussions. When necessary, the teachers may interfere to guarantee equal opportunities for students of different level.

**c. High motivation**

Motivation is one of the most important variables in successful language learning. Teachers can do a lot to increase and maintain the motivation of students by the types of tasks that they organize in classroom. Students are enthusiastic to speak, when they realize that the topic is interesting or there is a clear objective that must be reached. Again, great care should be taken to make sure that the task is in line with the students' ability to deal with the tasks. If the tasks are too easy, the students may think that it is childish and thus will lose interest.

**d. Right Language Level**

In a successful speaking task, the language is at the right level. The task must be designed so that students can complete the task successfully with the language that they have. If the students lack too much vocabulary the task will become frustrating and the students are likely to give up or take a step back to the native language. Hence, teachers should take into consideration about language level that they will provide in teaching and learning process.

## CONCLUSION

Inhibition is one the most crucial aspects in language learning either other physical problems. Inhibition refers to a temperamental tendency to display wariness, fearfulness, or restrain in response to unfamiliar people, objects, and situation. It is also related to condition which someone or students are losing face, worry about making mistakes and afraid of the attention that their speech attraction will be loose. There are some factors that cause inhibition, such as lack of motivation, shyness, self-confidence, self-esteem, and language ego. There are also levels of inhibition, it refers to kinds of inhibition and caused of inhibition itself. Teacher can support their students to reduce their inhibition effect by many ways, one of them by creating good classroom management including establishing good rapport between teacher and learners.

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