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“*Esto es ligero de fazer*”: Object to Subject Raising in Medieval and Early Modern Spanish

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1. Introduction

During the past two decades, researchers have begun to use data from several large corpora of historical Spanish to study a number of phenomena that had previously received little or no attention. One of these topics of diachronic syntax has been that of the “raising” constructions, which is the movement of either the subject or object of the embedded clause into either the subject or object position of the main clause¹. In terms of the logical possibilities, there are four types of raising constructions. These are shown in the following sentences, along with references to studies during the past two decades that have dealt with the historical development of these constructions in Spanish:

Subject to Object Raising

(Cano Aguilar 1989, Davies 1992, 1994, 1995a, Mendizábal de la Cruz 1995, Alfonso Vega 1998)

- (1) a. para oír [ella cantar]
b. para oírla [___ cantar]

Subject to Subject Raising

(Davies 1997a, 1997b)

- (2) a. ___ parece [María estar enferma]
b. María parece [___ estar enferma]

Object to Object Raising²

(Wanner 1982, Wanner 1987, Davies 1995b, 1998)

- (3) a. quiero [PRO hacerlo]
b. lo quiero [PRO hacer ___]

Object to Subject Raising

- (4) a. es difícil [PRO leer el libro]
b. el libro es difícil [de PRO leer ___]

As can be seen, historical “subject to object” and “object to object” raising have

been the focus of several data-oriented studies during the past two decades, and there has also been limited work on "subject to subject" raising.

The one raising construction in Old Spanish and Early Modern Spanish that has received no attention during this time, and which in fact has never been the focus of special attention, is the historical development of "object to subject" raising (OSR). While the OSR construction in Modern Spanish has been the focus of several recent articles (Montalbetti 1983, González 1988, Reider 1993), this is unfortunately not the case for older stages of Spanish. There are only passing references to the construction in standard historical grammars such as Hanssen (1913:256), Menéndez-Pidal (1954:352), and García de Diego (1961:360).

Aside from these historical grammars, there are only two studies that provide more than a passing reference -- Beardsley (1921:143-50) for Old Spanish, and Keniston (1937:530) for the 1500s. In each case, however, the section of the book dealing with the OSR-like construction is a very small part of a larger work on historical Spanish syntax. In addition, in neither of the two books is there any discussion of the syntax of the construction *per se*, but rather only a simple listing of the adjectives that take [de INF] complements.

One other shortcoming is the fact that in both cases the authors group together all cases of [ADJ de INF], whether the fronted noun phrase is the subject of the embedded clause (5a), or whether it is the object (5b):

- (5) a. enoiados eran de lo tomar (*Crónica general de España*, c1270)
 b. griteuos son de fazer (*Crónica general de España*, c1270)

As even the very earliest generative studies have shown, however, cases like *John is eager to please* [John = lower clause subject] and *John is easy to please* [John = lower clause object] are quite different in their syntactic behavior (cf. Chomsky 1957). In the present study, we will consider these to be two very different constructions, since only cases like (5b) involve cases of OSR.

This study, then, will be the first to look specifically at OSR-like constructions in Old Spanish and Early Modern Spanish. The first task will be to consider the historical shifts in the governing adjectives that allow OSR in different historical periods. We will then focus on syntactic shifts, such as the decrease in clauses with both synthetic and analytic passives: *el libro es fácil de leerse*, *el libro es fácil de ser leído*. Most importantly, we will examine the historical frequency of the "OSR" construction (*el libro es difícil de leer*) and the more basic structure on which it is supposedly based (*es difícil leer el libro*), and suggest what this might indicate about the correct analysis of the construction.

2. Database

The data for this study are taken from three large corpora of Old Spanish and Early Modern Spanish texts, which represent more than 57 million words in

approximately 1100 texts. The composition of these corpora is summarized in Table 1, and a short overview is provided here. The first corpus, which I have created myself, is composed of 3,700,000 words in 74 texts from the 1200s to the 1600s (detailed information can be found online at <http://mdavies.for.lisu.edu/personal/espanol.htm>). The second corpus is composed of nearly 33 million words in approximately 800 texts (mainly from the 1400s to the 1600s) from the Biblioteca Virtual (<http://cervantesvirtual.com>). The third corpus is the ADMYTE collection of medieval Spanish texts (Volumes 0 and 2; <http://www.admyte.com>), which includes 20.8 million words in 260 texts from the 1200s-1400s.

Table 1. Corpora³

	Original corpus		Biblioteca Virtual		ADMYTE	
	# texts	# words	# texts	# words	# texts	# words
1200	14	776,700	22	628,000	55	7,100,000
1300	10	744,200	12	799,000	66	5,500,000
1400	15	765,200	62	2,364,000	139	8,200,000
1500	19	745,300	323	18,245,000		
1600	16	701,100	376	10,936,000		
Total	74	3,732,500	795	32,972,000	260	20,800,000

The large size of these three historical corpora resulted in more than a thousand examples of object to subject raising with nearly 20 separate adjectives (e.g. *el libro es duro / ligero / bueno de leer*). This rich database – far beyond anything previously collected – will allow us to accurately trace several diachronic shifts during the period 1200-1700, and to then use this data to analyze historical shifts in the underlying structure of the clause.

3. Core lexical items and frequency of OSR

The first question that we will consider is whether there has been either an overall increase or decrease in OSR in Old Spanish and Early Modern Spanish. Our initial examination of the historical texts might lead us to believe that OSR was not common in Old Spanish, since there are no examples with either of the two most common adjectives from Modern Spanish (*fácil* or *difícil*) until the second half of the 1400s:

- (6) a. todos principios son graues & difíciles de aver por esta rrazon
 (*Tratado de la música*, c1440-60)
 b. e por tanto es más fácil de elegir e de obrar (*Visión deleitable*, c1460)

The absence of cases with *fácil* and *difícil* is deceiving, however, since neither of these lexical items were common in any context previous to the 1400s, and we would therefore not expect to find any cases with the OSR construction.

The best approach is to expand our search to consider all of the Old Spanish adjectives that are related to the Modern Spanish *fácil* and *difícil*, and perhaps even expand this to the general category of "ease of accomplishment" (*fácil / posible / difícil / imposible*). Once we do this, we find that indeed OSR was common in Old Spanish. In the ADMYTE collection of Old Spanish texts the adjectives that are related to the Modern Spanish *fácil* that appear are *ligero* (112 occurrences), *leue* (1), and *liutano* (45 examples, but 44/45 are from the *Sevillana medicina*, c1380).

- (7) a. et dio en el arbol fue muy **ligero de derribar** (*Conde Lucanor*, 1330)
 b. quien bien quisiere mirar sera **leue de concordar** (*Cura de la piedra*, 1498)
 c. la carne assada esfuerça mucho y es **liuiano de moler** (*Sevillana medicina*, c1380)

Adjectives related to the Modern Spanish *difícil* that take OSR in the ADMYTE corpus are *graue* (112 cases), *fuerte* (36), *duro* (23), *griue* (15), *difícultoso* (12), *pesado* (7), *áspero* (7), *caro* (6) and *trabajoso* (5):

- (8) a. fazen esso mesmo & esto serie **graue de prouar** (*Ordenamiento de Alcalá*, c1350)
 b. [un pan de ordio] que serie muy **fuert de comer** (*General Estoria*, c1270)
 c. e el ovogelo mucho a **duro de vender** (*Engaños*, 1253)
 d. [las despensas] eran grandes a **desmesura & griueos de complir** (*Crónica general de España*, c1270)
 e. pero sus desembulturas eran bien **difícultosas de hurtar** (*Grialte y Gradissa*, 1495)
 f. porque son carteliginosas y **pesadas de moler** (*Sevillana medicina*, c1380)
 g. cuyo comienço es duro & **áspero de soportar** (*Esopete ystoriado*, 1488)
 h. la qual demanda me es muy **cara de fazer** (*Crónica general de España*, c1270)
 i. si quebrare con los dientes cosa **trabajosa de quebrar** (*Lilio de medicina*, 1495)

There are also many cases with *largo* (9), though most of these are with the set phrase *largo de contar* (9b):

- (9) a. Aquesti enperador era muy **largo de dar** sus donos (*Crónica de los emperadores*, tr. 1377)
 b. muchas Razones que ouieron que serian **largas de contar** (*Atalaya de las Crónicas*, c1450))

Related to the "synonyms" of the Modern Spanish *fácil* and *difícil* are the adjectives *pos(s)ible* and *impos(s)ible*, both of which also refer to "ease of accomplishment" in the continuum "*fácil / posible / difícil / imposible*". As soon as *pos(s)ible* and *impos(s)ible* enter the language as common lexical items (early 1400s), we find examples with the OSR construction. There are eight examples in the 1400s, and this increases to 16 examples in the 1500s, e.g.:

- (10) a. la mejor orden e manera que a ellas fue **posible de reseçbir** (*Visión deleytable*, c1460)
 b. Lo cuarto, si fuese o **imposible de hacer** o **difícultosisimo** (*Summa de tratos y contratos*, 1571).

Once we consider the full range of adjectives in the "ease of accomplishment" category (*fácil / posible / difícil / imposible*) we find that the overall frequency of OSR has not varied much since at least the 1300s. In the original 3,700,000 word historical corpus, there were 19.3 cases of a synonym of *fácil* and *difícil* per million words in the 1200s, 56.4 in the 1300s, 31.4 in the 1400s, 43.0 in the 1500s, 37.1 in the 1600s, and 38.8 in the 1700s⁴. As these data show, while there have been some fluctuations in the frequency of "core" OSR between 1300 and 1700, there has been no general increase or decrease in use during this time.

4. Shifts in the class of governing adjectives

As we have seen, the frequency of OSR with the "ease of accomplishment" adjectives in Old Spanish and Early Modern Spanish is roughly comparable to the situation in later stages of Spanish. When we examine two other categories of adjectives, however, we find that the situation in Old Spanish and Early Modern Spanish is quite different than it is today.

First, there are a range of adjectives referring to "evaluation" of the action -- such as *agradable*, *interesante*, *importante*, and *divertido* -- which allow (at least limited) OSR in Modern Spanish.

- (11) a. un espacio distendido ... [que] resulte **agradable de ver** (España: Baleares-Mundo)
 b. cuyos efectos sin duda serian muy **interesantes de estudiar** (Guatemala: Prensa Libre)
 c. lo promuevan como un destino **importante de visitar** (Nicaragua: Prensa)
 d. [el libro] resulta ameno y **divertido de leer** (España: Barcelona: Vanguardia)

In Old Spanish and Early Modern Spanish, there are almost no examples of OSR with any of these lexical items. In the more than 57 million words of texts

from the 1200s-1600s, there are only three isolated examples with these four adjectives:

- (12)a. un estrado bien compuesto, **agradable de mirar** (*Poesías* [Rodríguez del Padrón], c1440)
- b. la qual bien es de creer que le fuera más **agradable de mirar** (*Espejo de príncipes y caballeros*, 1555)
- c. cosas todas muy **importantes de saber** (*Predicación del Evangelio en las Indias*, 1588)

This is in spite of the fact that these adjectives were quite common as general lexical items during this period. There are frequent examples of *agradable* from the 1300s, *importante* and *divertido* from the 1400s, and *interesante* from the 1500s. The data clearly show, then, that even by the latter part of Early Modern Spanish, OSR had not yet extended in any meaningful way to the "evaluative" adverbs.

Just as there is a category of adjectives that allow OSR in Modern Spanish but did not in earlier stages, the converse is also true -- there is an important category of adjectives that allowed OSR in Old Spanish and Early Middle Spanish, but which do not in Modern Spanish. This is with the category of *bueno/malo* and related adjectives (*delectoso*, *dulce*, *fermoso/hermoso* and *sabroso* (positive) and *feo* and *horrible* (negative)), e.g.:

- (13)a. estas quemas son **buenas de fazer** enel mes de março (*Animales*, 1250)
- b. era lugar muy sabroso & muy **delectoso de comer** & de beuer (*Primera Crónica General*, c1270)
- c. & son muy fermosos & muy **dulçes de fazer** (*Libro de la caza de las aves*, c1385)
- d. fallaron muchas tiendas bien **fermosas de ber** (*Embajada a Tamorlán*, c1403)
- e. Entra el mal camino, y **malo de construir** por lo pendiente y deleznable del terreno (*Diario* [Jovellanos], c1780)
- f. Los xpistianos non tienen ley & esto es vna cosa **fea de dezir** (*Cancionero castellano de París*, 1444)
- g. moraron gigantes grandes & **horribles de mirar** (*Propiedades de las cosas*, 1494)

Looking at the core cases *bueno* and *malo*, we find that in the Biblioteca Virtual corpus there are 7 examples of OSR with a form of *bueno* or *malo* in the 1300s (8.8 cases per million words), and the figures for subsequent centuries are 1400s: 6.8 per million words (16 examples), 1500s: 4.9 (90), 1600s: 1.4 (15), and 1700s: 0.8 (7). As can be seen, the frequency of OSR with *bueno* and *malo* decreases slightly from the 1300s through the 1500s, and then decreases markedly after the 1500s. This fits in well with the situation in Modern Spanish, in which OSR with *bueno/malo* is unacceptable for most speakers (## *estas*

manzanas son buenas de comer). Although the data are clear in showing the demise of OSR with *bueno/malo* after the 1500s, it is less clear why this happened. It is doubtful that there is any general cross-linguistic universal tendency away from OSR with these adjectives, as evidenced by the still-acceptable "*these vegetables are good / bad to eat*" in Modern English.

5. Passives

Let us now turn from an analysis of lexical issues to a consideration of the syntactic changes with the OSR construction in earlier stages of the language. The first issue that we will consider concerns sentences like (20)-(21):

- (14)a. el liuro es muy ligero :: de se leer
- b. el liuro es muy ligero :: de **ser leydo**
- (15)a. ?? el libro es muy fácil [[de leerse]
- b. ?? el libro es muy fácil [[de **ser leido**]

What we will show that cases like (20) were much more frequent in older stages of Spanish, and that they are highly marginal in Modern Spanish. We will postpone the discussion of why this might have changed until we discuss the nature of the underlying clauses in Section 6.

As mentioned, most speakers of Modern Spanish reject examples like those in (21) above, and these intuitions are supported by the data from a large corpus of Modern Spanish (see <http://mdavies.for.ilstu.edu/personal/texts.htm>). In this corpus, which comprises 43 million words of text from the 1900s, there are only two cases of *se* with *fácil* and *difícil* (and its "synonyms"), or one in every 21.5 million words of text:

- (16)a. un desorden institucional **difícil de solucionarse** (Venezuela, *Universal*)
- b. la verdad es muy **difícil de aprehenderse** (Chile, *Hoy*)

Likewise, there are only five cases of *ser* + PP with *fácil* and *difícil* (and its "synonyms") in the 43 million word corpus, or one in every 8.6 million words of text; e.g.:

- (17)a. las propiedades eran **difíciles de ser estudiadas** experimentalmente (España, *El País*)
- b. un cúmulo de intuiciones **fáciles de ser intuitas** (Argentina, *Sobre heroes y tumbas*)

In Old Spanish and Early Modern Spanish, however, these constructions are much more common. In the ADMYTE corpus of Old Spanish, for example, there are twelve examples of the *se* construction with synonyms of *fácil* and

difícil, which translates into a frequency nearly eight times that of Modern Spanish:

- (18) a. ay enella algunos passos que por escriptura serian **difíciles de se entender** (*Tratado del dormir y despertar*, c1440)
 b. la teorica del arte de la caça es muy **graue de se saber** verdadera mente (*Libro de la caza*, c1325)
 c. Et las cosas son **ligeras de se desfazer** en el comienzo (*Conde Lucanor*, c1330)

While the analytic passive occurs only six times with synonyms of *fácil* and *difícil* in the ADMYTE corpus, this is still two or three times as common as Modern Spanish:

- (19) a. ay enella algunos passos que por escriptura serian **difíciles de se entender** (*Tratado del dormir y despertar*, c1440)
 b. la teorica del arte de la caça es muy **graue de se saber** verdadera mente (*Libro de la caza*, c1325)
 c. Et las cosas son **ligeras de se desfazer** en el comienzo (*Conde Lucanor*, c1330)

Likewise, the data from the 29 million words of text from the Biblioteca Virtual (1500s-1600s) also show the high degree of acceptability in Early Modern Spanish. The weakest evidence comes from the analytic passives, where the eight examples with *fácil* and *difícil* indicate a frequency only two or three times as high as that of Modern Spanish:

- (20) a. escriptura muy **difícil de ser interpretada** y entendida (*San Mateo*, 1500s)
 b. en un fundamento **fácil de ser combatido** (*Poesías* [Rufo], 1500s)
- With *se*, however, there are 22 cases, which translates into a frequency nearly six times as high as Modern Spanish:
- (21) a. y quanto las cosas son **fáciles de inventarse** (*Recibimiento...* Sevilla, 1500s)
 b. un paladar **difícil de satisfacerse** (*El héroe*, 1659)

As mentioned previously we will discuss in Section 6 a possible motivation for the decrease in passive with OSR during the last 500-600 years.

6. Clause structure

The final issue that we will consider deals with two competing syntactic analyses of the OSR construction. One analysis, which we have assumed to this point, is that there was actually movement from the subordinate clause to the main clause, as seen in the following:

- (22) a. ___ es difícil [PRO leer **el libro**] >>
 b. **el libro** es difícil [de PRO leer ___]

However, an alternative analysis is that cases like (23b) are simply a variant of more common sentences like (23a), in which the subject (*el libro*) is base-generated in the main clause subject position, and there is no raising or movement at all.

- (23) a. **el libro** es fácil
 b. **el libro** es fácil [de leer]

How can we best decide between these two analyses? As Reider (1993) explains, the OSR model (22) suggests that raising (22b) only occurs if the more basic non-OSR structure is also possible (22a). In other words, we will not find cases of "*el libro es fácil de leer*" unless there is an even higher frequency of the more basic "*es fácil leer el libro*". In fact, from the point of view of Modern Spanish (and Modern English as well), we would find it surprising if there was an almost complete absence of basic sentences of the type "*es ADJ leer el libro*".

Yet this strange state of affairs is precisely what we do find in older stages of Spanish, and this suggests that perhaps there was a difference in clause structure at that time. In older stages of Spanish, there were many adjectives that had a high frequency of constructions like "*el libro es difícil de leer*" (hereafter "NP ser ADJ de V"), without having any cases of the more "basic" constructions *es difícil leer el libro* (hereafter "ser ADJ V NP").

For example, there are 25 cases of [NP ser ADJ de V] with *fuerte* from the ADMYTE corpus, but no cases at all of [ser ADJ V NP] (e.g. ***es fuerte matar al rey*)

- (24) a. Et el puero fresco porque es **fuerte de disistir** (*Arte cisoria*, 1423)
 b. serie despues muy cara & muy **fuerte de desfazer** (*Castigos y documentos*, 1293)

With *duro* there are 24 cases of [NP ser ADJ de V], but again no cases of [ser ADJ V NP] (e.g. ***es duro comprar pan*).

- (25) a. porque avn vuestras cartas son tan **duras de auer** (*Claros varones de Castilla*, 1485)

- b. en el comienzo son los omnes **duros de meter** al trabajo (*General estoria*, 1272)

With *ligero* there are 46 cases of [NP ser ADJ de V], but no cases of [ser ADJ V NP] (e.g. ***es ligero leer ese libro*):

- (26) a. quando la yra ha razon sabida es **ligera de fazer** (*Bocados de oro*, c1253)
 b. no es menester de dezir commo se faze; por que es **ligero de fazer** (*Libro del saber de astrología*, 1276)

Finally, with *liviano* there are 24 cases of [NP ser ADJ de V], but once again no cases of [ser ADJ V NP] (e.g. ***es liviano escreuer la carta*):

- (27) a. gallina cozida es de gran esfuerço y mas **liuiana de moler** que la assada (*Sevillana medicina*, c1380)
 b. los que son **liuanos de cozer** son mejores que los otros (*Sevillana medicina*, c1380)

Overall, if we look at all of the "synonyms" of *fácil* and *difícil* in the ADMYTE corpus, we find 276 cases of [NP ser ADJ de V], but only 10 cases of [ser ADJ V NP]. What this suggests is that in Old Spanish, cases like *el libro es ligero* [de leer] are simply a more "elaborate" version of *el libro es ligero*, and that the NP is base-generated in subject position, rather than being derived from something like *es ligero* [leer el libro].

What is interesting is that it appears that in the 1500s-1600s, there was a shift from the "base-generated" structure to the "raising" construction. Again, the evidence for this comes from a comparison of the frequency of the [ser ADJ V NP] construction with the frequency of the [NP ser ADJ de V] construction during this period. Looking at the aggregate total for all of the "synonyms" of *fácil* and *difícil*, as well as (*im*)*possible*, in the 3,700,000 word corpus, we find that in the 1400s, 78% (25/32 cases) were the [NP ser ADJ de V] construction (*el libro es fácil de leer*), as opposed to the much less common [ser ADJ V NP] (*es fácil leer el libro*). In the 1500s this had decreased to 51% (32/63 cases), and finally to 25% (26/102 cases) in the 1600s.

What all of this indicates is that cases like "*es fácil leer el libro*", which are so common in Modern Spanish (and Modern English) were relatively uncommon in Old Spanish, and apparently had little to do with constructions like *el libro es fácil de leer*. Over time, however, the relative importance of the [ser ADJ V NP] construction increases, to the point in the 1600s where it accounts for 75% of all cases. The prominence of the [ser ADJ V NP] construction (*es fácil leer el libro*) suggests that this construction became more tightly linked to and probably influenced the existing [NP ser ADJ de V] "raising" construction in Early Modern Spanish. It can easily be imagined that this would translate into a scenario in which it makes sense to talk of "raising"

(*el libro es difícil de leer*) being a derivation of the more basic *es difícil leer el libro*, at least after the 1500s or 1600s.

One other piece of evidence to support this scenario is the data from Section 5, in which we saw that passives like "*el libro es difícil de leers / ser leído*" were quite common in older stages of the languages, but very rare in Modern Spanish. In this section we have proposed that Old and Middle Spanish "*el libro es fácil de leer*" derives from the simple "*el libro es fácil*". Just as it would be common to have a prepositional phrase with a passive in cases of base-generation like:

- (28) a. **ella** estaba cansada \implies
 b. **ella** estaba cansada [de **ser castigada**]
 (29) a. **las joyas** son muy caras \implies
 b. **las joyas** son muy caras [como para **verse tan feas**]

it would also be common to have a passive with the base-generated NP in cases like:

- (30) a. **el libro** es fácil \implies
 b. **el libro** es fácil [de **leerse / ser leído**]

However, once the construction ceases to be seen as a case of base-generation, as we have suggested is this case in this section, then the frequency of passivized modification would decrease somewhat, as in fact has occurred.

7. Conclusion

To summarize, this is the first study to provide extensive data on the "object to subject raising" construction in Old Spanish and Early Modern Spanish, and is based on more than one thousand examples in more than 57 million words of text from the 1200s to the 1700s. We have shown that the frequency of "OSR" with the "ease of accomplishment" adjectives (*fácil, posible, difícil, imposible*) has remained fairly constant over time, but it has decreased significantly with the *bueno/malo* adjectives, and only began to increase with the "evaluative" adjectives (e.g. *interesante/importante*) in the latter part of the Early Modern Spanish period.

In terms of syntactic change, we have seen that there was a marked decrease in passives during the past 400-500 years. We have also suggested that the Old Spanish construction is best seen as a variant of simple adjectival clauses in Old Spanish (*el libro es fácil* [*de leer*]), although this began to change towards true OSR in Early Modern Spanish. Hopefully, all of these findings help to show how a study that relies both on an extensive database, as well as a simple model of clause structure, can shed light on what was previously a very poorly understood aspect of historical Spanish syntax.

Notes

1. In the GB model of syntax (as well as later derivations of this model), "raising" as a specific syntactic rule has been phased out, in large part to satisfy theory-internal constructs such as the "theta criterion" (see Reider 1993 and Montalbetti 1983 for a discussion of this applied to Spanish). However, in several other models of syntax, such as functional, typological, and relational grammar, these constructions continue to be analyzed as "raising".
2. It may seem strange to analyze "clitic climbing" sentences such as these as a type of "raising". However, it does share important similarities with the other raising constructions. The object of the embedded infinitive clearly moves into the object position of the main clause, and it obeys many of the semantic and pragmatic constraints of a base-generated main clause object.
3. There is some overlap between the texts in the three different corpora. In subsequent discussions of the data from the corpus, however, I make it clear which of the three corpora provided the data under discussion.
4. Although these frequencies are based on just the smaller 3,700,000 word corpus, the overall frequency holds true for the larger Biblioteca Virtual and ADMYTE corpora as well.

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