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From *I am, with sincere regard, your most obedient servant* to *Yours sincerely*: The simplification of leavetaking formulae in 18th-century Scottish and Irish English letters

Research Article

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Abstract: The study in hand investigates the impact of social status on the use and change of pragmatic formulae in historical varieties of English. The study asks which leavetaking formulae are used between writers of equal social status in varieties of English in the later 18th century. Working on a corpus of letters compiled from two subsets of letters each from 18th-century Scottish and Irish English, the study illustrates pragmatic change on the basis of the investigation of leavetakings involving the *servant* formula. By doing so, the study also helps to widen the hitherto predominating narrow focus on mainly English English.

The study shows that the use of formulae is situationally dependant. It suggests that pragmatic change takes place amongst writers of equal social status in the private domain, which then leads to the use of such formulae in the public domain and to the use between writers of different status groups.

Keywords: *18th century • Scottish English • letter-writing • phraseology • Irish English • subscription formulae*

1 Introduction

Prototypically, letters, however short they may be, consist of at least two routine elements: a form of address such as *Dear Mary* and a leavetaking[1] formula such as *Yours sincerely, Tom*. This text-constitutive function of salutations and leavetakings as well as their text structuring, i.e. opening and closing, function have been stable over centuries (Elspaß 2005: 157–159; Rutten and van der Wal 2012: 177–179).[2] In addition, these routine formulae perform an intersubjective or interpersonal function by foregrounding the relationship between the writer and the addressee (Elspaß 2005: 157–159; Rutten and van der Wal 2012: 180–181). Accordingly, the choice of appropriate address and leavetaking formulae is influenced, among others, by the power relations as well as the social distance between the correspondents. These formulae are prepatterned units with structural slots that can be variably filled from a restricted range of lexical items (Coulmas 1981: 6; Corrigan et al. 2009: xiv). Thus, changes in their formal realisations may reflect changes regarding their interpersonal function, manifesting shifts in the politeness culture of a linguistic community. This has been amply demonstrated by previous

1 The term 'leavetaking', as established in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics for a sub-type within the ritual closing speech act cluster by Edmondson and House (1981: 98) and House and Kádár (2021: 107), is used interchangeably with 'subscription' and 'letter closing' in this article.

2 Although it is the norm to directly address the recipient at the beginning of the letter, not all historical letters contain such a separate address. Sometimes this is subsumed in or substituted by a longer contact establishing opening sequence (see Elspaß 2005: 158). Similarly, although rarely, some letters are not ended by a subscription formula.

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studies on address forms in early English correspondence (e.g. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995; Raumolin-Brunberg 1996; Nevala 2003, 2004a,b).

For Early Modern English, a general trend has been observed from more negatively polite to more positively polite address forms (see Brown and Levinson 1987), as evident for instance in the choice of modifiers. While earlier letters more typically show the use of deferential adjectives as modifiers in address formulae such as *reverent and worshipful sir*, salutations in late 16th- and 17th-century letters often stress the solidarity between the writer and the addressee through the use of affective modifiers, as in *dear sir* (Raumolin-Brunberg 1996: 168–173). This change towards increased positive politeness in salutation formulae is accompanied by a process of structural simplification during the early modern period. Late medieval address forms tended to be complex, typically consisting of a head noun preceded by two or three modifiers, which, in turn, could be intensified through adverbs such as *right* or *most*, e.g. *Right honourable and worshipful Sir*. Even more complex forms are attested, comprising more than one head noun, for instance *Reuerent and worschepfull syr and my speceall ffrende and gossip*, with both a status term and relational nouns as heads (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 559). Such structural complexity offered the writers the option of using negative strategies at the same time as positive strategies, to both acknowledge the addressee's social status and highlight the nature of their relationship (Raumolin-Brunberg 1996: 174). In the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, address forms generally became simplified to just one head noun, which was either unmodified, e.g. *Sir*, or preceded by a solidary rather than a deferential modifier, e.g. *Dear Madam*. By 1700, these reduced forms had become conventionalised and neutralised, i.e. semantically bleached, which Raumolin-Brunberg considers as the result of a pragmaticalisation process (1996: 167, 174).

By contrast, leavetaking formulae in letters of the late 15th and early 16th centuries were generally simpler than the salutations, both in family letters (Nevala 2003), and also for instance in correspondence dealing with business matters, as a spot check in the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler* (*CEECS*) suggests.[3] A complex form of address, like the one in (1), consisting of two coordinated head nouns, with one and two intensified modifiers, respectively, would be matched by a leavetaking formula consisting of a simple noun phrase with an unmodified noun:

(1) *Right honorable Syr and my right synguler good mayster* (address) *Your servant, T. Betson* (subscription)
(Thomas Betson to Sir William Stonor, 16-04-1478, *CEECS*)

Letter closings in fact seemed to increase in complexity during the 16th century and generally remained complex throughout the 17th century. However, a separate study of Scottish and Irish English letters, using correspondence data from the *Helsinki Corpus of Scottish Correspondence, 1540–1750 (ScotsCorr)*, the *Corpus of Modern Scottish Writing (CMSW)*, a digital letter collection held at the National Library of Ireland, the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence visualized (Corviz)* and editions of Scottish correspondence, reveals an ongoing simplification process in the course of the 18th century (Elsweiler and Ronan forthc.) This process seems to have been largely governed by the social distance and relative power between the correspondents. In letters written upwards across status boundaries, complex and mostly negative leavetaking formulae with deferential *servant* noun phrases as in (2) remained the norm:

(2) *I have the honour to be with great respect Sir Your most obt Servt. Jeff O'Connell M. D.* (Jeff O'Connell to the Privy Council of George III, 12-05-1794, NLI)

Simplified closings, e.g. (3) and (4), are mostly attested in letters from the second half of the 18th century exchanged between correspondents of equal social status and often of close relationship:

(3) *Dear Archibald yours Sincerely James Wanchope* (James Wauchope to Archibald Campbell, 16-06-1785, *CMSW* #318)

(4) *sincerely & truely yours etc etc* (Arthur Dunn to Thomas Kemmis, 11-10-1798, NLI)

3 Since some of the business letters in *CEECS* are copies, abbreviated salutation and leavetaking formulae might have been favoured in the copying process.

This study investigates the simplification process of leavetaking formulae in Scottish and Irish letters between social equals. To this end, we have extended the Scottish corpus material for the second half of the 18th century used in Elsweiler and Ronan (forthc.) by adding more letters written to recipients of equal social status. These comprise letters drawn from the correspondence of landed families and from the correspondence of the prominent Scottish Enlightenment figures Adam Ferguson, Henry Mackenzie and Adam Smith. Correspondingly, we have also extended the Irish corpus material by adding letters among letter writers of equal social status from the *CORIECOR* corpus of Early Irish Correspondence. Specifically, we aim to explore (a) to what extent the structural simplification of closing formulae went hand in hand with functional changes and (b) which sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic factors contributed to the use of simplified closing formulae. To answer the first research question, we analyse a selection of 50 Scottish and 50 Irish letters each, written between 1750 and 1800. The second research question will be addressed by examining a further extended selection of letters from the correspondence of Adam Ferguson, Henry Mackenzie and Adam Smith. These writers offer the advantage of being well-documented, which will make it easier to assess the influence of sociopragmatic factors on their choice of closing formulae.

This paper falls into four parts. After this introduction, Section 2 reviews previous research on epistolary closing formulae in the Late Modern English period. In Section 3, we introduce the correspondence data and our methodology. We then present the results of the analysis (Section 4) and discuss the shortening process accompanied by functional change (Section 4.1); the sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic factors at play in the choice between full and shortened closings are also considered (Section 4.2). The conclusion in Section 5 summarises the main findings and briefly discusses the implications for the study of pragmatic variation in historical regional varieties of English.

2 Epistolary leavetaking formulae

Studies of leavetaking formulae in the late modern period have approached these from different angles, either focusing on the use of the extended *your humble servant* formula, on its variation with other, potentially shorter, forms or on the rise of the short formulae *yours sincerely* and *yours affectionately*. Research on late 18th- and 19th-century business correspondence has found that these letters rely to a large degree on the deferential *servant* formula, which is interpreted as an indicator of the social distance between the correspondents (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2006: 160–161; Dollinger 2008: 268; Morton 2016: 193–199; Shvanyukova 2020). Overall, the *servant* formula seemed relatively fixed regarding its modification patterns. The choice of modifying adjectives was limited to only a few variants of deferential adjectives. In particular these were *faithfull, humble, obedient* and *obliged*. However, it also appeared to be changing to contain fewer superlatives and less intensification over time (Dollinger 2008: 272–273). Dollinger's research moreover revealed differences between British English business letters and those written in colonial varieties of English. While the *servant* formulae account for the clear majority of closings in the British English letters, in Australian business letters, they represent only 25 per cent and Canadian letters witness a considerable drop in use between the late 18th and the middle of the 19th century. Overall, business letters across different varieties of English thus testify to the longevity of the formal *servant* formulae.

However, earlier letter data containing letters to both distant recipients and close friends reveal a split between the extended deferential *servant* formulae (Type 1) and the new short letter closing *yours sincerely/affectionately* (Type 2). Tieken-Boon van Ostade (1999) in her study of John Gay's letters from the early 18th century draws attention to this split in Gay's correspondence and considers his role as potential linguistic innovator. Bijkerk (2007) subsequently builds on Tieken-Boon van Ostade's distinction between Type 1 and 2 formulae to investigate the emergence of the closing formulae *yours sincerely*, *sincerely yours* and *yours affectionately*, *affectionately yours* across the early modern and late modern periods, using data from the Chadwyck-Healey database, the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (*CEEC*) and its 18th-century extension (*CEECE*). Bijkerk's findings show that, apart

from a few isolated instances in the 17th century, the simplified formulae began to spread in the 18th century to become applied more widely in the 19th century. According to Bijkerk, all variants of the Type 2 formulae are mainly found in letters addressed to family members and close friends in *CEECE*, which leads her to characterise them as a new means to express positive politeness. She therefore considers the differentiation between *yours sincerely* as a marker of negative politeness and *yours affectionately* as a marker of positive politeness as a development of the 19th century (Bijkerk 2007: 126–127). Shvanyukova (2020) also investigated *yours sincerely* formulae. Her study of letter closings in Anderson's *Practical Mercantile Correspondence*, a 19th-century business letter-writing manual, is more process oriented since she is interested in the patterns that led to the rise of the adverb *sincerely* in the extended *servant* formula before the shortening to *yours sincerely*. She analyses the realisations of the closing formula as patterns containing up to four slots. The extended formula, e.g. (5), contains an initial slot with a self-referential cluster such as *We remain*, an intermediate slot filled by an adverbial (an adverb such as *truly* or an adverb phrase such as *with much esteem*), a pre-final slot (an address term) and the final slot with the *servant* noun phrase:

(5) *We remain,*| *truly,* | *Sir,* | *your obedient humble servants*
(Letter 127, *Practical Mercantile Correspondence*, cited from Shvanyukova 2020: 92)

The most frequent adverb in the intermediate slot is *truly* followed by *sincerely*. Shvanyukova sees this as a spread of expressions of sincerity, which is indicative of a "new commitment to the genuineness of feeling, with its emphasis on showing consideration for others" (Shvanyukova 2020: 100).

While in 19th-century business letters, the *servant* formula was still widespread, 18th-century Scottish and Irish letters between social equals provide evidence that the simplification of the closing formula to *yours* (+ ADVERB) was under way. This study focuses on the structural simplification of the extended *servant* formula, examining to what extent it reflects a functional change indicative of different politeness norms.

3 Data and method

3.1 Data

To gather evidence for the various stages of the simplification process from the *servant* formula to *yours* (+ ADVERB), we compiled correspondence data from an equal number of letters from Scottish and Irish sources (cf. also Elsweiler and Ronan, forthc.). These data were classified on the basis of the social classification in Nevala (2004a: 279–280) drawing a tripartite distinction between upper (nobility and gentry), middle (e.g. professionals such as academics, lawyers or publishers) and lower class (e.g. tradesmen), which is itself based on a model developed by Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2003: 136–138). Among middle class writers, we added a further distinction into middle and upper-middle class. The latter applies for instance to writers who have a gentle or noble family background higher up in their family tree but who classify as professionals themselves, and often their fathers too.[4]

On the one hand, the Scottish and Irish data hail from letters to family members and to close friends, and deal with private topics. Such letters we classify as private letters. On the other hand, there are letters that deal with either state or business matters and are often written to persons who have a certain office. These letters are classified as non-private, public letters.

The Scottish data are drawn from a variety of different sources. Ten letters from the *Corpus of Modern Scottish Writing* (*CMSW*) form the basis of the Scottish dataset. These were taken from the 'personal writing' sub-corpus for the period between 1700 and 1750, which only contains a relatively small number of letters. The letters are transcribed from the original letter manuscripts, which are moreover available

4 The Scottish writer Henry Mackenzie is a case in point. His father was a physician and Henry himself trained and practised as a lawyer. However, both Henry's mother and father descended from barons.

as digital images. Metadata on the writers (but not on the addressees) are also provided, including the date and place of writing as well as the writer's occupation and education, where known. The writers of the letters in *CMSW* are generally from an upper and upper-middle class background. To assess the participant relationship between the correspondents, further sources such as the *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (*ODNB*) have been consulted.

The *CMSW* material was extended by adding 40 letters from different editions of Scottish correspondence. These comprise letters from four late 19th- and early 20th-century editions of the correspondence of Scottish landed families, namely from *The Sutherland Book* (Fraser 1892), *The Chiefs of Grant* (Fraser 1882), *The Melvilles, Earls of Melville, and the Leslies, Earls of Leven* (Fraser 1890) and *The Book of the Duffs* (Tayler and Tayler 1914) as well as letters drawn from the correspondence of the three prominent Scottish Enlightenment figures Adam Ferguson, Henry Mackenzie and Adam Smith. From the overall correspondence documented in the editions only letters written in Scotland were chosen. While the correspondence of Scottish landed families generally represents the upper and upper-middle classes, the letter writers in the Enlightenment material are classified as either middle or upper-middle class. The combination of materials from *CMSW* and the editions takes the total count in the category 'equal' to 50 letters.

For the Irish data, 50 letters were selected from two different sources. The first source is a digital collection of 17th- to 20th-century autographed letters held at the National Library of Ireland (NLI). This collection contains 189 letters relevant to Ireland. Not all of these, however, were written by Irish letter writers, others stem from letter writers from England and are directed to Irish readers, and also countries further afield, such as France or Italy. For the current paper, only those letters which are available online and are written by Irish writers are considered, resulting in 123 letters. Further, the collection contains only a smaller number of letters from before 1750, namely 23, the majority are from the second half of the 18th century. Meta-information is given on the letters where it is available and consists of the date of the letters, the name of the letter writer and the addressee. Further information on writers and addressees has then been gathered by the researcher either on the basis of factual information found on and in the letters and from internet searches on writers and addressees. A smaller proportion of these letters is from the family domain, the larger part is from the non-family domain and predominantly deals with state and business matters. Amongst the letters from the second half of the 18th century, 44 letters are written between correspondents of seemingly equal social status ranging from middle and upper-middle to upper class. As the NLI materials contain few letters amongst members of the same family, six further letters have been added from the *CORIECOR* corpus, the *Corpus of Early Irish Correspondence*. This is a corpus that contains both letters of emigrants who have left Ireland and letters between Irish writers resident in Ireland. An online component of these letters is available in the *Corviz* corpus at https://corviz.h.uib.no/index.php. From this corpus source, the first six letters that have been written by writers of comparable social classes, namely middle and upper middle class, have been taken to contribute the 50-letter corpus.

The analysis of the role of functional change in the structural simplification of the *servant* formula in Scottish and Irish letters from the second half of the 18th century (see Section 4.1) is further supported by relevant evidence from the *Helsinki Corpus of Scottish Correspondence*, 1540–1750 (*ScotsCorr*) and the official correspondence sections of the *Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots* (*HCOS*) for the 16th and 17th centuries. *ScotsCorr* contains letters written between 1540 and 1750 by both male and female letter writers, which amount to a total of ca. 400,000 words. The letters were transcribed from original letter manuscripts (Meurman-Solin 2016). The *HCOS* official correspondence data for the sub-periods 1570–1640 and 1640–1700 comprise ca. 15,000 words, respectively, and are based on editions (Meurman-Solin 1995). The letters in both corpora are supplied with metadata on the writers and addressees as well as the date of writing. However, only *ScotsCorr* provides further meta-information on the region of origin of the writers.

To determine which sociopragmatic factors influence the choice of simplified closing formulae (see Section 4.2), we draw on a further extended selection of letters by Adam Ferguson (n=35), Henry Mackenzie (n=37) and Adam Smith (n=50). These correspondence data are particularly well suited for this purpose since metadata and background information on Ferguson, Mackenzie and Smith as well as

their correspondents are generally readily available from the editions of their correspondence (Mossner and Ross 1977; Drescher 1989; Merolle 1995a,b) and sources like the *ODNB* alike. Moreover, as the editions document letter exchanges over extended time periods, ranging from months, via years to decades, it is possible to take factors such as frequency of contact and longer breaks in communication into consideration.

3.2 Method

For the Scottish data set, the letters are already available in transcribed form and demographic information on letter writers and participants is given in the corpus annotation or the editions (see Section 3.1 above). The letters and the relevant meta-information can thus be used for determining the social relationships that impact on the choice of closing formulae. The same holds for the data taken from the *Corviz* Corpus. The Irish data set from the corpus of autographed letters held at the National Library of Ireland, by contrast, is not yet transcribed and had to be transcribed first by the researcher. Meta-information typically contains the name of the letter writer and of the recipient and where relevant their titles. Only in rare cases does the NLI collection provide further information, such as for example in a 1763 letter by Thomas Walton, written on behalf of Richard Durdin, to Benjamin Pike, where it is specified that the recipient is a merchant. Thus, the relative social status of the participants is determined by researching information about letter writer and recipient both in online sources and on the basis of relevant information given in the letters themselves, where available. In case of doubt, where social information could not be found or inferred, the relevant letter was not considered.

The closing formulae of the 100 letters that were collected for analysis were then classified according to the system used in Elsweiler and Ronan (forthc.), described above in Section 2, and changes during the period could be determined accordingly. The results of this analysis are given in the following.

4 Simplified leavetaking formulae in 18th-century letters

In this section, we will take a closer look at the development of the extended *servant* formula in letter closings and its subsequent simplification to *yours* (+ ADVERB) mainly in letters between correspondents of equal social status, and consider how this structural reduction prefigures changes in the interpersonal function of the formula.

4.1 Simplification as indicator of ongoing functional change

As has been pointed out, address and closing formulae undergo renewal as part of cyclical pragmaticalisation processes. After their introduction, they see an increase in frequency and concomitant conventionalisation, which is accompanied by semantic bleaching (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 561; Bijkerk 2007: 127; Shvanyukova 2020: 88). At the beginning of the 18th century, the *servant* formula had only recently been fully conventionalised in letters between distant correspondents and in correspondence directed at more powerful recipients. Evidence from *ScotsCorr* shows that it has its origin at the periphery of the letter closing sequence in 16th-century letters addressed at the Scottish Queen Dowager Mary of Lorraine, as in (6):

(6) *and aye salbe redy to do {del} syk {del} zour grace syk plesuyr and seruice as I ma at all tymes as knawiss god quha mot haue zour grace In keeping eternalye* ***at huntlie ye xvj daye of august be*** *{space} {a wide space vertically}* ***zouris grace humill Seruatrice*** *{a wide space vertically}* ***Elizabt countes of Hwntlye***
(Elizabeth Keith, Countess of Huntly to Mary of Lorraine, 16-08-1543, *ScotsCorr* #111)

The *servant* formula follows a deferential commissive leavetaking (*and aye salbe redy to do {del} syk {del} zour grace syk plesuyr and seruice as I ma at all tymes* 'and shall always be ready to do your Grace such pleasure and service as I may at all times') and is in fact part of a conventionally informative part of the closing sequence in which the writers notify the addressee about the place and date of writing and identify themselves as the authors of the letter. Its deferential nature additionally serves to reinforce

the obedient tone of the preceding commissive leavetaking formula. Only in the 17th century does this humiliative commissive formula move into the core of the leavetaking sequence, but is still restricted to letters addressed to monarchs, as is illustrated in (7):

(7) *I rest {space}{a wide space vertically}* ***Zour ma**tis* *{cancellation}* ***houmbill seruant Mar*** *edinbruch the xvi of Iunie i606.*
(John Erskine, 19th/2nd Earl of Mar to King James I, 16-06-1606, *ScotsCorr* #1401)

A check of correspondence data from a previous research project, consisting of the official correspondence section of the *Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots* (*HCOS*) and of selected additional non-private letters from *ScotsCorr*, shows that in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, closing formulae containing *servant* were still rather rare, only being instantiated in eight out of 25 letters[5] (32 per cent).[6] In the majority of letters other commissive leavetaking formulae are employed.[7] The modifying adjective *humill* 'humble' moreover remains reserved for royal recipients. The prevalent closing formulae in non-private letters thus reflect the politeness culture of the strictly hierarchical early modern society (Jucker 2012: 428), where deference was due to recipients who were socially distant and of higher social status. For Scottish letter-writers, the *servant* formula, in particular when modified by deferential adjectives, seems to have been part of the humiliative discourse required in letters to royal recipients.

The *servant* formula gains frequency in the second half of the 17th century to represent 72 per cent of all letter closings. Nearly 70 per cent of those contain the deferential modifiers *humble*, *obedient* or *obliged*, either on their own or in combination, see (8), often with added intensification through *most*:

(8) *Qch is all needfull from {space}{a wide space vertically} Your Lo (=Your Lordship's)* ***most humble and obedient servant*** *Dug: Campbell.*
(Dougal Campbell to John Campbell of Glenorchy, 1st Earl of Breadalbane, 30-09-1698, *ScotsCorr* #1630)

This indicates that the *servant* formula had been de-institutionalised (Claridge and Arnovick 2010: 184) to become conventionalised across a broader range of letters. As part of this process, it had become more formally fixed. In the early 18th century, it further gained in structural complexity such that in its most extended form it consisted of four slots (Shvanyukova 2020: 92, see also Section 2 above), as is illustrated in Table 1.

In the 18th century, characterised by the increasing upward mobility of the middle classes, it was important for individuals to know how to behave appropriately to their social station (Jucker 2012: 430, 2020: 117). This may account for the continued popularity of the *servant* formula in formal situations or in asymmetrical writer-recipient dyads, as is borne out by both the 18th-century Scottish and Irish letter materials. In some of these letters, writers used abbreviated forms of the modifying adjectives, e.g. *hble* for *humble* or *obt*. for *obedient*, and the noun *servant* itself, e.g. *servt* or *ser^{t}*, examples of this phenomenon are illustrated in (9):

(9) *I have the honour to be Sir your most* ***obdt*** *humble* ***servt***
(General Sir Edward Stopford to unidentified recipient, 03-11-1790, NLI)

These may be taken to be formal signs that the final slot of the formula, the *servant* noun phrase, had turned into a semantically bleached routine for them. By contrast, the addition of adverbials indicating

5 The total selection for the sub-period 1570–1640 includes 26 letters by King James VI, who, due to his social status as monarch, never made use of deferential closing formulae. The selection for the 1640–1700 sub-period comprises 32 letters, of which three had no closing formula.

6 The findings regarding the slow increase of the *servant* formula in the Scottish data are confirmed by a spot check of English writing taken from official correspondence data from the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* and *CEECS*. Among 26 English letters written between 1570 and 1640, none display the *servant* formula before 1600. The only two instances, in letters addressed to Queen Elizabeth I, date from 1628. Instead, other commissive leavetakings are used, e.g. *Yo^{r} Lo: most humble bownden W. Fletewoode*. The English correspondence data written between 1640 and 1710 corroborate the increase manifest in the Scottish data, with 11 out of 19 letters (58 per cent) containing the *servant* formula.

7 These include e.g. *and euer rest your lo affectionat friend to serue yow Melrose* (Thomas Hamilton, 1st Earl of Haddington, Lord Binning, to unspecified addressee, 12-08-1600, *ScotsCorr* #1345) and *and to belieue that I will alwayes remaine, your lordships assured to do yow seruice, Hadinton* (Thomas Hamilton, 1st Earl of Haddington, to William, Earl of Menteith, 24-03-1629, *HCOS*).

Table 1. Conventional pattern of the *servant* formula.

Initial slot	Intermediate slot*	Pre-final slot	Final slot
Self-referential cluster	Adverbial indicating respect	Address term	*Servant* noun phrase
I am / I remain *Believe me* *I have the honour to be*	*With sincere regard* *With great / perfect esteem* *With the greatest / utmost respect (and sincerity)*	*(Dear) Sir* *(Dear) Madam* *My Lord*	*Your (most) obedient and humble servant* Other common modifiers: *affectionate, faithful, sincere*

*The adverbial in the intermediate slot and the address term in the pre-final slot sometimes swap position.

respect for the recipient in the intermediate slot, such as *with sincere regard* or *with the greatest respect*, highlights a new aspect, *viz*. the role which the profession of sincere consideration for others played in early 18th-century conceptions of politeness (Fitzmaurice 2016: 174).

While in formal and asymmetrical contexts, the extended *servant* formula continued to be an appropriate letter subscription well into the 19th century (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2006: 161; Morton 2016: 199; Shvanyukova 2020, see also Section 4.2.1), it is especially in the letters exchanged between correspondents of equal social status that a routinisation of this formula can be observed. On the one hand, we can see a conventionalisation of the semantically bleached *servant* slot leading to its structural reduction. On the other hand, there is evidence of the rise of solidary leavetakings used together with the *servant* formula. Concerning structural reduction, both the Scottish and the Irish correspondence data show a gradual simplification process throughout the 18th century, beginning with the trimming of the final slot. In some rare instances, this resulted in the deletion of *servant*, where the adjective(s) came to modify the writer's name, as in (10) and (11):

(10) *and I am, with sincere regard, dear Sir,* ***your faithfull Balgonie***
(Alexander Melville of Balgarvie to Professor Charles Mackay, 03-09-1754, *The Melville Correspondence*)

(11) *I remain D= Sr* ***your aff't & obliged Richard Nagle***
(Richard Nagle to Thomas Kemmis, 18-05-1798, NLI)

More commonly, however, the pre-modified noun *servant* was replaced by the possessive pronoun *yours*, modified in most cases by one or more of the following three adverbs: *affectionately*, *faithfully* and *sincerely*, see (12) and (13):

(12) *I ever am Dear Strahan* ***Most faithfully, Sincerely yours*** *Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to William Strahan, 04-04-1760, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

(13) *I wish you all happiness and am Dear Ben* ***most sincerely yours*** *Ant Malone*
(Anthony Malone to Benjamin Chapman, 15-11-1760, NLI)

Yours retains the commissive character of the *servant* formula without its deferential overtones. Particularly in the Scottish data, which provide a better coverage of the mid-18th century than the Irish corpus materials, this stage in the simplification process shows a transition in the intermediate slot from adverbials expressing respect and consideration for the addressee to *ever*, which stresses the lasting bond between the correspondents. In the 1760s and 1770s, the letters contain a few examples which combine both adverbials, e.g. (14):

(14) *In all situations of my mind, I am* ***ever****, my dear Lady Elgin,* ***with esteem and affection****, yours M. Suth*^{D}
(Mary Maxwell, Countess of Sutherland to Martha, Countess of Elgin and Kincardine, 31–01–1766, *The Sutherland Book*)

A further indication that the bond between recipients becomes increasingly important can be found in examples of closing formulae which merge affective and commissive closing elements, see (15) and (16):

(15) *your* ***faithful & affectionate friend & servant*** *John H. Colclough*
(John H. Colclough to Gerald Fitzgerald, 27-02-1792, NLI)

(16) *I am* ("your" crossed out) *with the utmost respect your* ***affectionate Servant*** *John J. Colclough*
(John H. Colclough to Gerald Fitzgerald, 05-06-1792, NLI)

Colclough, probably born in 1769, was a member of a wealthy, landowning Protestant family in County Wexford, but he had strong nationalist leanings and died in connection with the Wexford Rising in 1798.[8] Who the Gerald Fitzgerald from Athy is, is less easy to determine as the Fitzgeralds, more typically spelt FitzGeralds, are a large and very influential Irish family. The letters are addressed to Gerald FitzGerald Esquire, which suggests that this Gerald FitzGerald did not have a noble title himself and would thus not have been of a formally higher status than Colclough. The use of the *servant* formula thus appears to be routinised rather than literal.

From the late 1770s onwards, *ever* on its own increasingly replaces the adverbials indicating respect. This usage seems to have transferred from letters between spouses. *ScotsCorr* contains a handful of examples from the 17th century such as (17):

(17) *I am my dearest heart* ***yours for ever***
(Anna Wemyss, Countess of Leven to her husband, 1650, *ScotsCorr* #1174)

Ever also features in some examples from the end of the 18th century in both the Scottish and Irish materials which exemplify the last stage of the simplification process with a reduction of the formula to only the final slot, see (18) and (19):

(18) *yrs* ***Ever*** *J Murray*
(J Murray to Campbell, 1785, *CMSW* #313)

(19) ***Ever*** *yours affs E.F.*
(Lord Edward Fitzgerald to Henriette de Sercey, Baronesse de Figuerlin, 02-05-1797, NLI)

There are, however, several instances indicating that the fully simplified *yours* (+ ADVERB) formula, e.g. (20) and (21), whose commissive force is likely reduced to a minimum, may be becoming the norm:

(20) ***Yours in haste*** *Henry Mackenzie*
(Henry Mackenzie to William Creech, 25-05-1787, *Literature and Literati: The Literary Correspondence and Notebooks of Henry Mackenzie*)

(21) ***Yrs sincerely*** *Jhone*
(J. Hone to Joseph Farrington, 31-12-1796, NLI)

The structural simplification of the *servant* formula during the 18th century then goes hand in hand with a gradual functional change and a rise of increasingly solidary leavetaking strategies. While it keeps the text-constitutive and text-structuring function (see Elspaß 2005; Rutten and van der Wal 2012 and Section 1) it had in the 16th century, its interpersonal function changes in the process. In the 16th and 17th centuries, it is a clearly commissive formula marking deference towards the recipients first of royal status and then more generally. In a next step, the conventionalisation of the *servant* formula by the beginning of the 18th century is accompanied by the semantic bleaching of its deferential overtones. During its further reduction to the possessive pronoun *yours* in the final slot, it keeps its commissive nature, on several occasions reinforced by the adverb *ever*, stressing the loyal bond between the correspondents. In the fully simplified *yours* (+ ADVERB) formula, its commissive nature seems further reduced. The occasional abbreviated spelling *yrs* suggests that such a further bleaching is under way (see Figure 1). Dictionary definitions of *yours* (e.g. *OED*, s.v. *yours*, pron. and adj., 4. and *OALD*, s.v.

8 See https://www.libraryireland.com/biography/JohnHenryColclough.php.

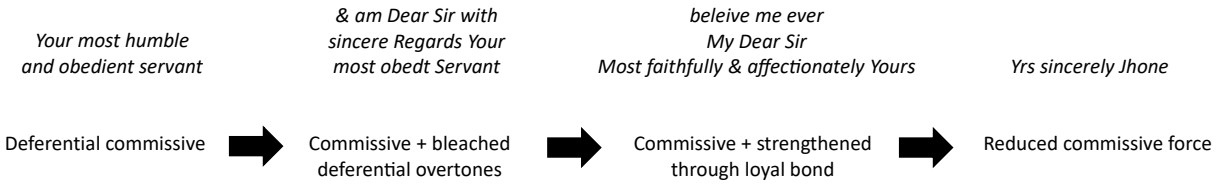

Figure 1. Functional change accompanying the simplification of *servant* formula.

yours, pronoun, 2.) do not include any commissive force but only point out its letter-closing function. The relationship between the correspondents would then purely be marked by the choice of adverb.

While Bijkerk's (2007) findings indicate that both *affectionately* and *sincerely* were markers of positive politeness used in letters to close friends and family members, she hypothesises that the 19th century saw a split between *yours affectionately* as a positively polite marker in informal settings and *yours sincerely* as a negatively polite marker in formal settings (Bijkerk 2007: 127). This seems to be confirmed by Morton's findings indicating a rise of *yours sincerely* in business correspondence only from the late 19th century onwards (2016: 199).

4.2 Sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic factors in the choice of closing formulae

4.2.1 Sociolinguistic factors

The dataset investigated for this project shows the importance of the factors public letters, including business letters, versus private letters. As noted in Section 2 above, non-private letters are more likely to use the *servant* formula. As it has also been observed that class-distinctions play an important role, the social class membership of the letter writers may be a considerable factor in the choice of closing formula. For the current study we have focussed on letters between letter writers of equal status, but even when writing within class boundaries, it can be seen in the Irish materials that writers of a higher class use the formula more frequently than middle-class writers: with two exceptions all the *servant* formulae in the Irish letters are used by upper-middle and upper class writers (see Table 2). However, class membership is not an important factor in the Scottish correspondence data, where middle-class writers in fact seem to be equally likely to choose the *servant* formulae as upper- and upper-middle-class writers.

As regards public versus privateness of the letters, the data in Table 2 show that there is a bias for the use of the *servant* formula in non-private letters. This tendency is, however, stronger in the Irish letters, where 73 per cent of non-private letters contain a *servant* formula, than in the Scottish data with 44 per cent.

Overall, while class membership seems to be an important factor in the choice of closing formula for Irish writers, it is not so for the writers in the Scottish data. By contrast, in both the Scottish and the Irish data, the *servant* formula is more frequently chosen in public letters than in private ones.

Table 2. Public versus private letters and social classes* of their writers.

Materials	Number of letters	*Servant* formulae	*Servt.* form. in private letters	*Servt.* form. in non-priv. letters	*Servt.* form. U class	*Servt.* form. UM class	*Servt.* form. M Class
Irish data	50	16 (32% of letters between equals)	5/35 pr. letters (14%)	11/15 non priv. letters (73%)	6/9 (67%)	8/23 (35%)	2/22 (9%)
Scottish data	50**	17 (33% of letters between equals)	10/35 pr. letters (29%)	7/16 non-priv. letters (44%)	8/22 (36%)	2/10 (20%)	7/17 (41%)
Total	100	33	15	18	14	10	9

*For two of the 50 Scottish letters in the category 'equal' (*CMSW* #313 and #330), the social class of the writer, who signed as *J Murray*, could not be determined.
**The 50 Scottish letters comprise a total of 51 leavetaking formulae because one letter contains a second leavetaking in the postscript.

4.2.2 Sociopragmatic factors

This section considers the impact of sociopragmatic factors on the choice of closing formulae in the correspondence of three representatives of the Scottish Enlightenment: Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and Henry Mackenzie. For all three, editions of their correspondence document their epistolary interactions with various correspondents both within the circle of Enlightenment thinkers and outside of it, often over prolonged time periods.

Smith, a moral philosopher and political economist best known for *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), was born in 1723 in Kirkaldy. In the late 1740s, he made his entry to Edinburgh with a series of public lectures on rhetoric and *belles-lettres*. In 1751, he took up a position as professor of logic at the University of Glasgow (Winch 2004). Adam Ferguson, a philosopher and historian, was born in the same year as Adam Smith in Logierait, Perthshire. During the 1740s, he studied divinity at Edinburgh University, where he met other students who were to become leading figures of the Scottish Enlightenment such as Hugh Blair and John Hume, the brother of David Hume. After a spell in the military, Ferguson returned to Edinburgh in 1756, where he joined the Select Society, a debating club whose members comprised Adam Smith and David Hume, among others. In 1764, he obtained the chair of pneumatics and moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh (Oz-Salzberger 2004). Henry Mackenzie, the author of *The Man of Feeling* (1771), born in Edinburgh in 1745, was over 20 years younger than Smith and Ferguson. He co-edited the first two Scottish weekly periodicals, *The Mirror* (1779–80) and *The Lounger* (1785–87), which were modelled on the English *Spectator*. Due to his eminent position in Edinburgh literary and cultural circles, he acted as a link between the Enlightenment movement around David Hume and Adam Smith and the literary landscape shaped by Robert Burns and Walter Scott (Drescher 2004).

When investigating the use of the *servant* formula in more detail, we find that in terms of the leavetaking formulae employed in letters addressed to social equals, the three Enlightenment figures Smith, Ferguson and Mackenzie display different patterns. Adam Ferguson, who uses the *servant* formula in 63 per cent of the letters under analysis, seems the most conservative of the three. Smith overall prefers shortened forms such as *I am ever Dear Sir Most Sincerely yours* and only applies the *servant* formula in around one fifth of the letters analysed in this study. Mackenzie, the youngest of the three, uses the *servant* formula in around a quarter of his letters, but generally clearly tends towards the fully shortened closing form *yours* + ADVERB. However, over and above these patterns, across all three writers, there are factors that generally favour either the use of the longer deferential *servant* formula or of a shortened formula with *yours*. For instance, prospective patronage or the connections a recipient may have favoured the choice of a more humiliative tone using the *servant* formula with potential patrons. This is illustrated in the letters by both Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson to Gilbert Elliot, 3rd baronet Minto, a lawyer and politician whose "London connections offered Edinburgh associates an important source of patronage, contacts, and publicity" (Carter 2004), see (22):

(22) *I heartily beg your Pardon for my forwardness in making this application and am notwithstanding with the greatest respect as well as affection your most Obedient humble Servant Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 3rd baronet, 07-09-1757, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

In the letter subscribed by the formula in (22), Adam Smith asks Minto for help on behalf of John Currie, a member of the clergy who is in dire financial straits. He beseeches Minto to put in a word for Currie to be appointed minister of Mankinch parish church. The overall subservient tone of this petition explains the choice of the fully extended deferential *servant* formula.

Factors inclining the writers towards a shortened formula include intimacy with the addressee, which, for example, is seen in Ferguson's letters to John Hume, his closest friend from his youth days (Merolle 1995a: xii), e.g. in (23), and in Henry Mackenzie's correspondence with his brother-in-law, e,g. in (24):

(23) *I am Dear John most affectionately yours Adam Ferguson*
(Adam Ferguson to John Hume of Ninewells, esquire, 27-01-1776, *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson*, Vol. 1)

(24) *Your truly affectionate, Henry Mackenzie*
(Henry Mackenzie to Sir James Grant of Grant, 24-12-1787, *The Chiefs of Grant*)

A further factor is engagement in a common cause, which is exemplified in Adam Smith's letters to his university colleagues, e.g. in (25), and to members of the Select Society as well as in Henry Mackenzie's letters to William Craig, co-editor and co-publisher of *The Mirror*, e.g. in (26):

(25) *I am with great esteem dear Sir most faithfully yours A Smith*
(Adam Smith to Robert Simson, Professor of Mathematics, Glasgow University, 10-01-1751, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

(26) *Yrs ever most affectly Henry Mackenzie*
(Henry Mackenzie to William Craig, 18-05-1779, *Literature and Literati: The Literary Correspondence and Notebooks of Henry Mackenzie*)

In the examples given above, the writers remained consistent in their choice of closing formulae. All three writers, however, also wrote letters to particular recipients where their choice of closing formula varied. In the remainder of this section, we will take a closer look at five sample cases to consider why the writers did not employ the same type of leavetaking formula consistently.

In the first case, the first establishment of contact and the frequency thereafter may play a role in the choice of letter closing. Adam Smith, for instance, wrote three letters to the lawyer Archibald Campbell, writer to the Signet and agent of the Buccleuch family. While it is theoretically possible that they exchanged further letters which have not been traced, it may be safe to assume that the first letter dating from October 1759 established their contact. In it Smith writes of an account due for books intended for the Duke of Buccleuch and takes leave of Campbell with the formal and deferential formula in (27):

(27) *I am with great regard Your most obedient humble Servant Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to Archibald Campbell, writer to the Signet, 24-10-1759, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

In a second letter written less than three months afterwards, Smith reminds Campbell of the account owed to the bookseller and opts for a shortened closing formula, see (28):

(28) *and ever am with great esteem and regard Most sincerely yours Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to Archibald Campbell, writer to the Signet, 09-01-1760, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

After this, contact between the two seems to break off for several years only to be re-established by Smith in 1768. After this long break, Smith closes his letter once more with the *servant* formula, which however this time contains the positively polite modifier *affectionate*, see (29):

(29) *I ever [am], dear Sir, Your most affectionate humble servant, Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to Archibald Campbell, writer to the Signet, 09-01-1760, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

A long silence also seems to have preceded a letter by Smith to Dr. James Menteath, former Rector of Barrowby, an old friend with whom he studied at Balliol College in Oxford. Apparently, Menteath planned to move to Scotland to set up his son at the University of Edinburgh. Despite their longstanding friendship, Smith ends this letter with the *servant* formula, as is illustrated in (30):

(30) *I ever am My Dearest friend, your most affectionate and most faithful humble Servant Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to Dr. James Menteath, 22-02-1785, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

A second and third letter to Menteath, who was by then well established at Closeburn Castle in Dumfriesshire, are closed by intimate shortened formulae involving *yours*, see (31) and (32):

(31) *and believe me to be with the greatest love and regard My Dear James ever yours, Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to Dr. James Menteath, 16-09-1788, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

(32) *and believe me to be My Dearest James, most faithfully yours Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to Dr. James Menteath, 02-02-1789, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

In another case, this time from the correspondence of Henry Mackenzie, the age difference between the correspondents may have initially led Mackenzie to use the deferential *servant* formula in his letters to James Elphinston, an educationist and spelling reformer, who was 24 years older than Mackenzie (Beal 2004). In his first five letters sent between 1768 and 1771, Henry Mackenzie writes about a poem by Elphinston and about his own novel *The Man of Feeling*. These letters are all subscribed by extended *servant* formulae with exclusively deferential modifiers, e.g. (31):

(31) *I am dear Sir with great esteem, your very humble servant, Henry Mackenzie*
(Henry Mackenzie to James Elphinston, 16-12-1768)

Only in his last two letters, in which he reports on Dr Samuel Johnson, a friend of Elphinston, and his trip around Scotland, does Mackenzie use shortened formulae, e.g. (32):

(32) *I am, dear Sir, most faithfully yours, Henry Mackenzie*
(Henry Mackenzie to James Elphinston, 28-12-1773)

It is thus possible that the frequency of contact over time allowed the younger Mackenzie to employ a slightly less formal and shorter closing formula.

A fourth case will consider the role the topic and nature of the letter possibly played in the choice of subscription. Adam Smith corresponded on a regular basis with his printer William Strahan in London. The two maintained a friendly business relation and Smith seems to have considered Strahan a business friend. Generally, he closed his letters with shortened formulae such as (33) or (34):

(33) *I ever am my Dear friend Yours Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to William Strahan, 30-12-1760, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

(34) *I ever am Dear Sir Most affectionately yours Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to William Strahan, 02-12-1776, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

However, on a couple of occasions, he employed *servant* formulae, as in (35):

(35) *I ever am Dear Sir, Your much obliged, and most obedient humble Servant Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to William Strahan, 05-02-1778, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

This highly deferential formula may have been triggered by the overall subservient tone of the letter. Example (35) is a subscription to a letter of thank you for the quick payment of commission fees that Smith seemed to be in desperate financial need of (Mossner and Ross 1977: 233). The closing formula is preceded by the commitment expressed in (36):

(36) *I can only assure you that I shall always retain the most lively sense of your very great kindness*
(Adam Smith to William Strahan, 05-02-1778, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

A further possibility regarding the choice of formal subscription is that this letter was not only intended for Strahan's eyes but for (an)other reader(s) as well. In fact, the edition of Adam Smith's correspondence contains two letters on the topic of the commission fees dated to the same day. The recipient of the first letter is addressed as *My Dear Strahan* and identified as William Strahan's son Andrew by the editors since, as noted by Mossner and Ross, "even the absent-minded Smith could hardly have written two letters on the same day covering the same ground to William Strahan" (Mossner and Ross 1977: 232).

It might, however, be possible that both letters were indeed written to William Strahan, one in a more familiar tone and subscribed with the usual shortened *yours* formula and the other in the subservient tone pointed out above and closed by the deferential *servant* formula. If that was indeed the case, it might be conjectured that Smith expected the second letter to be read by further readers. A similar situation might have occurred in Adam Smith's correspondence with the bookseller and publisher Thomas Cadell with whom he also entertained a friendly business relationship. Accordingly, his letters to Cadell are generally subscribed by variations of the *yours* + ADVERB formula. One letter, however, is closed by the *servant* formula, see (37):

(37) *I ever am your most affectionate humble Servant Adam Smith*
(Adam Smith to Thomas Cadell, 21-04-1785, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*)

This letter was written in response to a confirmation by Cadell that new editions for Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* are required. The letter reads like an official acceptance of the request for new editions. These would entail some alterations, as Smith specifies. In view of the nature of this letter, it may as well have been intended for more readers than just Cadell.

The five cases discussed above illustrate that despite a general trend towards the simplification of the *servant* formula in letters between social equals in the course of the 18th century, certain factors such as initial contact or longer breaks in communication still favoured the use of the more formal and longer *servant* subscription. In addition, writers may have felt inclined to close letters of a truly subservient nature, which, in addition, might have been intended for further readers than the addressee, by this deferential formula as well.

5 Conclusion

The current study has set out to investigate the use of pragmatic formulae in later 18th-century Scottish and Irish English. Specifically, it has investigated pragmatic and sociolinguistic factors leading to the structural simplification of the *servant* formula in letters between social equals. It could be shown that this simplification process was accompanied by a functional change from a commissive formula marking deference towards the recipients to the simple *yours* formula with reduced commissive force. The loss of the *servant* noun phrase followed semantic bleaching as part of the conventionalisation of the formula. After the reduction to *yours* in the final slot of the formula, our data indicate that adverbs such as *ever* still served to stress the loyal bond between the correspondents.

As regards sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic factors influencing the choice of closing formulae, our study has found that leavetaking formulae involving the *servant* formula predominate in formal, typically non-family letters, thus confirming findings from previous studies. In addition, the formula can also be found in contexts where a closer connection between writer and recipient needs to be re-established. This suggests that the pragmatic shortening of subscription formulae takes place predominantly in the private domain. The resulting change can then pave the way for the use of these shortened formulae in semi-public and public domains and after that they can spread to the use by writers of different status groups. In the Irish materials, the *servant* formula is used especially by the arguably more conservative upper and upper-middle class writers, while it is less in evidence in letters written by apparently middle class writers. By contrast, in the Scottish letters, middle class writers also make extensive use of it. As this observation is based on a small data set, it awaits further evidence from larger data sets to determine whether different usage patterns of the *servant* formula are indeed observable between Irish and Scottish middle class writers and to see whether variety specific differences in the use of this pragmatic formula can be determined.

So far, this preliminary study is based on a relatively small data set of 100 letters amongst writers of equal status from Scotland and Ireland. Initial comparisons with extant English English data have not pointed to any major differences between the data from the two lesser researched varieties, but a more formal study will be carried out in further stages of this project. Yet we believe it is particularly important

to not only investigate the more central English English varieties, but to remain open to the possibility that other varieties of 18th English may evince different linguistic features in general, and pragmatic features in particular. As the issue of variationist pragmatics has been pursued only in recent decades for contemporary English, it is appropriate to also acknowledge the possibility of pragmatic variation in earlier varieties of English and to investigate both their extent and their conditioning features. In further work, we will investigate such pragmatic differences between 18th century Scottish, Irish and English English in more detail within our envisaged project.

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