Assessment in Groupwork Project-Based Learning in Business English Classrooms

Nguyen Thu Hang, Danang University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam
Tran Vu Mai Yen, Danang University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam

Abstract
In the context of global economic integration in which English language competence along with teamwork skills have increasingly been of great significance, it is the responsibilities of educators and teachers of Business English to facilitate groupwork project-based learning. However, assessment of groupwork project-based learning has always been the matter of concern every educator and teacher wrestle with. The purpose of this paper is to deal with issues related to assessment in project-based learning in the teaching of Business English at a university of foreign languages. The research is based on theoretical foundations of project-based learning assessment in English language teaching. The reality of assessing groupwork project-based learning in Business English teaching at a university are investigated and issues encountered in the assessment are under detailed discussion. The research puts forward thoughtful pedagogical implications along with assessment rubrics for gaining further reliability and validity for the assessment. The article aims at equipping teachers with effective tools for implementing groupwork project-based learning assessment in Business English contexts.

Keywords: groupwork project-based learning, assessment, Business English

Introduction

In the context of globalization, the application of project-based learning (PBL), has been supported by a great number of scholars all over the world. Project-based learning (PBL) is a model that organizes learning around projects which are complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems, involving students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities (Thomas, 2000).

PBL, within the context of Danang University of Foreign Language Studies, has been incorporated in the curriculum of Business English, in which students are to carry out group projects as mid-term assessment, along with regular participation/attendance check and end-of-term exams. However, the assessment of students` projects has always been the subject of concern among lecturers of Business English at the university. This study, as a result, aims at investigating the current situations of assessment of group projects in Business English courses and the study's objective is thus to contribute to lecturers' efforts in innovating the assessment systems at Danang university of Foreign Language Studies.

Previous research

Previous research in the field of assessment of group work confirms that teachers face difficulties in assessing students' knowledge and proficiency in a group work (Gillies and Boyle, 2010; Postholm, 2008; Webb, 1997). Teachers (Ross and Rolheiser, 2003) and students (Forslund Frykedal, 2008; Hammar Chiriac and Granström, 2009) are unsure of what should be assessed and how assessment can be carried out, but also of whether the assessments are directed towards the individuals or the groups.

In a study by Gillies and Boyle (2010) teachers revealed that they carried out more informal than formal assessments, which was achieved by walking around and observing the groups, evaluating the groups' presentations of their work and implementing an individual assessment after the completed group work.

However, with a different perspective, Johnson and Johnson (2004) suggested that a collectively produced assignment should not be assessed individually as it creates competition among students, in contrast to group assessment, which creates collaboration among group members.

Theoretical Framework

PBL which can develop students' soft skills, critical thinking and language competence, has been supported by a great number of scholars all over the world. According to Sawamura (2010), in Project-Based Learning (PBL), students will work on a project using the target language for language learning. PBL can motivate the students and create positive environment, communication and cooperation as they develop language, content and thinking skills.

In fact, PBL is an innovative model for teaching and learning which focuses on the central concepts and principles of a discipline, involves students in problem-solving investigations and other meaningful tasks, engages learners in exploring important and meaningful questions through a process of investigation and collaboration, discovering new scientific issues and integrating knowledge from different subjects (Barak & Raz 1998; Barak & Doppelt 2000; J. W. Thomas 2000). In addition, students in PBL need to be educated to be independent thinkers and learners (Bell, 2010).

Assessment in PBL

As growing body of literature has examined assessment in language teaching, assessment is often discussed by the use of concepts such as summative and formative assessment. According to Brown (2004), in summative assessment, the purpose is to establish the student's knowledge and proficiency compared to certain objectives, while formative assessment aims at establishing a student's knowledge and proficiency to give feedback for further development. Additionally, the purpose of formative assessment is to give responses to individuals during the learning process in order to determine the proficiencies and abilities as well as the aspects that need further development (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and William, 2003; Brew, Riley and Walta., 2009).

There is a vast amount of literature on the assessors and assessment format in PBL. Tal, Dori and Lazarowitz (2000), for example, present a multidimensional assessment scheme in a number of ways: Collaborative assessment using external and community experts, teachers, and students. According to Debski (2006), assessment in project classrooms can be done by oneself, peers, and/or the teacher. Through the use of questionnaires, checklists and diaries, students can be directed to increase their awareness of their own language skills.

A more general approach of assessment that teachers of in project classrooms can apply is the principle of triangulation in which multiple forms of assessment are used - multiple formats, multiple units, and multiple assessors (Gonella, 2001), as illustrated by Figure 1 below. Within this principle, multiple formats involve group reports, portfolios, observations, media product, and a physical model. Multiple units refer to self-assessment, group (peer) assessment, and whole class assessment whereas multiple assessors involve lecturers, the TA, and the students.

Multiple formats	Multiple units	Mulltiple assessors
• Reports • Portfolios, • Observations • Media • Product • A physical model	• Self-assessment • Group (peer) assessment • Whole class assessment	• lecturers • the TA • the students

Figure 1. Summary of the principle of triangulation by Gonella (2001)

Rubrics in assessment

There is a considerable amount of literature on the benefits that rubrics bring to not only students but also teachers. As marking criteria are concerned, instructional rubrics help teachers teach as well as evaluate student work and rubrics, at their very best, are also teaching tools that support student learning (Andrade 2003).

In addition, according to Schamber & Mahoney (2006), it is the concrete characteristics of rubric criteria that provides information for feedback and makes self-assessment easier. Through the use of questionnaires, checklists and diaries, students can be directed to increase their awareness of their own language skills (Debski, 2006). Generally speaking, it can be seen that rubrics offer various benefits within the assessment process. Therefore, in the assessment process, a teacher might begin by determining the desired outcome and then developing a description of student performance or product that would demonstrate the achievement of this goal (Phillip 2002).

Much work on the potential of rubrics in language teaching has been carried out as there are a surprising number of rubrics recommended by a variety of scholars and academic institutions. According to McDonald (2008), he provides several assessment models and rubric forms which are useful as guidance for the students' work during the projects and for their presentations. As supported by the Buck Institute for Education (2016), the 4C major assessment areas in PBL include: Creative/critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. And the use of rubrics makes assessment on the 4 C's much more simple and objective and can be used for both individual and group grades.

Another typical example of rubrics is VALUE rubrics which were developed for the Essential Learning Outcomes as part of the VALUE initiative in 2010 (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).
Taking a closer look at VALUE rubrics, the rubric cover some specific dimensions including organization, content, delivery under four scales (Below expectation, needs improvement, satisfactory and exceed expectations).

Table 1_VALUE rubrics by Association of American Colleges and Universities (2010)

	Below expectation	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Exceeds expectations
Organization	-No apparent organization. -Evidence is not used to support assertions.	-There is some organization, but the speaker occasionally goes off topic. -Evidence used to support conclusions is weak.	-The presentation has a focus and provides some reasonable evidence to support conclusions.	-The presentation is carefully organized and provides convincing evidence to support conclusions.
Content	-The content is inaccurate or overly general. -Listeners are unlikely to learn anything or may be misled.	-The content is sometimes inaccurate or incomplete. -Listeners may learn some isolated facts, but they are unlikely to gain new insights about the topic.	-The content is generally accurate and reasonably complete. -Listeners may develop a few insights about the topic.	-The content is accurate and comprehensive. -Listeners are likely to gain new insights about the topic.
Delivery	-The speaker appears anxious and uncomfortable and reads notes, rather than speaks. -Listeners are ignored.	-The speaker occasionally appears anxious or uncomfortable, and may occasionally read notes, rather than speak. -Listeners are often ignored or misunderstood.	-The speaker is generally relaxed and comfortable. -Listeners are generally recognized and understood.	-The speaker is professional, relaxed, and comfortable and interacts effectively with listeners.

Assessment of rubrics

To deal with the evaluation of rubrics in our teaching and learning context, Arter and McTighe (2000, p. 45) describe a "rubric for evaluating the quality of rubrics", which they call a metarubric. This metarubric includes four traits— **content, clarity, practicality, and technical soundness.** Rubrics are evaluated from the perspective of each of these traits using a three-point scale: *3=ready to roll, 2=on its way but needs revision, 1=not ready for prime time.*

Table 2_ Metarubric by Arter and McTighe (2000)

	3=ready to roll	2=on its way but needs revision	1=not ready for prime time
content			
clarity			
practicality			
technical soundness			

The Student Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ)

According to Cavanagh, Waldrip, Romanoski, and Dorman (2005), student views of classroom assessment comprises five characteristic elements: congruence with planned learning, authenticity, student consultation, transparency, and accommodation of student diversity. As a result, Cavanagh et al. (2005) developed the Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) to inquire about students' perceptions in five dimensions (scales). The validity and reliability of SPAQ were confirmed statically through their study and some other ones. The questionnaire consists of 24 items and the 5 scales of the SPAQ include: **Congruence with Planned Learning, Authenticity of assessment, Student Consultation, Transparency of assessment and Accommodation of Student Diversity.**

Research design

As a mixed methods methodology of qualitative and quantitative data was chosen to achieve the research purpose, two phases of research were carried out from October 2017 to January 2018 at Danang University of Foreign Languages. First, with a view to inquiring students' perceptions of assessment of group projects in BE courses, Students' Perception of Assessment Questionnaire SPAQ by Cavanagh et al. (2005) was adapted and carried out . Since SPAQ was originally designed to measure student perceptions of classroom assessments in science, this researcher has adapted the SPAQ by replacing the word science with Business English projects where appropriate. The questionnaire consists of 24 items under the 5 scales of the SPAQ including: **Congruence with Planned Learning, Authenticity of assessment, Student Consultation, Transparency of assessment and Accommodation of Student Diversity.**

In the first part of the questionnaire, SPAQ questionnaires were carried out among 160 third-year students of Business English in ESP department. Students were provided a thorough explanation on how to rate the questions in the instrument ranging around several five-points Likert scales from 1—5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). In the second part of the questionnaire, students showed their evaluation of the application of VALUE rubrics into the assessment of BE groups projects.

Then interviews were implemented among 20 lecturers of Business English in the ESP Department. The average teaching experience of the participating teachers range from over 5 years to 22 years of teaching Business English. The interviews focus on the main

themes of assessments including what to assess, how to assess, when to assess, student consultation, transparency of assessment, accommodation of student diversity and recommendations for assessment with a view to gaining a deeper insight into teachers' practices of the assessment of Business English projects.

Reliability and validity

The SPAQ was selected because the validity and reliability of SPAQ were confirmed statically through their study and some others. To be more specific, SPAQ was developed and applied to a sample of 1,000 participants from 40 science classes. Afterwards, Dhindsa, Omar, and Waldrip (2007) carried out SPAQ with 1,028 upper secondary science students in Bruneian upper secondary and found that SPAQ was suitable for assessing students' perceptions on five assessment dimensions as mentioned above.

The data were analyzed in SPSS by counting the frequencies and calculating the percentages of the responses of each item. Scores for each of 24 items for SPAQ questionnaire and the follow-up question were recorded by means of descriptive statistics for each of the five elements.

In terms of the lecturers' interviews, the themes of the interviews along with the correspondingly designed questions were based on the five dimensions in The Student Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire SPAQ and a systematic review of literature related to project-based learning and groupwork assessment with an aim to gaining various teachers' perceptions of the assessment of Business English projects and their current practices of assessment.

Results and discussion

Questionnaire for students

Reliability Statistics

In order to determine the reliability of the SPAQ in Business English projects as used in this study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated and the reliability coefficient for each item is high ($\alpha \geq .988$), which suggests that the SPAQ in Business English projects is reliable.

Table 3. Cronbach 's Alpha of SPAQ questionnaires in Business English projects

Cronbach 's Alpha	Number of items
0.988	24

Based on data analysis, some research findings were then drawn out. Table 4 illustrates the average mean scores of overall students' responses of 5 dimensions on SPAQ and Table 5 demonstrates average mean scores of students' responses of 24 items on SPAQ.

Table 4_Average mean score of overall students' responses on SP

Items on SPAQ Questionnaires	Mean	Std. Deviation
Congruence with planned learning	3.90	0.48384
Authenticity/Real-life application	3.82	0.08218
Student Consultation	2.92	1.16763
Transparency	3.72	0.22210
Students Capabilities	3.16	0.12971

Table 5_Average mean score of students' responses of 24 items on SPAQ

Items on SPAQ Questionnaires	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Congruence/Relationship with planned learning				
1. My projects in Business English (BE) tests what I memorize.	1	5	3.06	0.56440
2. My assessment in BE projects test what I understand.	1	5	4.28	0.7288
3. My projects are about what I have done in class.	1	5	4.03	0.77707
4. How I am assessed is similar to what I do in class.	1	5	3.93	0.71561
5. I am assessed on what the teacher has taught me.	1	5	4.12	0.65991
Authenticity/Real-life application				
6. I am asked to apply my learning to real life situations.	1	5	3.93	0.71561
7. My BE projects are useful for everyday life.	1	5	3.81	1.0298
8. I find projects are relevant to what I do outside of school.	1	5	3.78	1.23744
9. Assessment in BE projects tests my ability to apply what I know to real-life problems.	1	5	3.75	1.21814
10. Assessment in BE projects examines my ability to answer every day questions	1	5	3.43	0.71561
11. I can show others that my learning has helped me do things.	1	5	4.15	0.72332
Student Consultation/Information provision				
12. I am clear about types of assessment being used.	1	5	3.18	0.93109
13. I am aware how my assessment will be marked.	1	5	3.56	0.66901
14. My teacher has explained to me how each type of assessment is to be used.	1	5	3.75	1.13592
15. I can have a say in how I will be assessed in ESP department.	1	5	1.21	0.42001
Transparency/Making things clear				
16. I understand what is needed in in BE projects.	1	5	3.93	0.91361

17. I am told in advance when I am being assessed.	1	5	3.68	0.96512
18. I am told in advance on what I am being assessed.	1	5	3.62	0.65991
19. I am clear about what my teacher wants in my Business English projects	1	5	3.96	0.73985
20. I know how BE projects will be marked.	1	5	3.43	0.87759
Students Capabilities				
21. I can complete assessment tasks by the given time.	1	5	3.31	0.93109
22. I am given a choice of BE projects.	1	5	3.15	1.05063
23. I am given BE projects that suit my ability.	1	5	3.00	0.84242
24. When I am confused about BE projects, I am given another way to answer it.	1	5	3.21	0.90641

Regarding **Congruence with Planned Learning**, it is perceived the highest (M = 3.90, SD = 0.48384), which demonstrates the correlation between group project assessment with the teaching content. However, the value for item 1 that indicates assessment is used to test what students memorize is the lowest M = 3.0, SD = 0.56440 compared to the item 2, item 3 and item 5 with a mean score of over 4. It can be implied fromthe differences that students perceived that group projects test their understanding of Business English rather than rote memorization of knowledge.

In terms of **authenticity** or hands-on application, students perceived the authenticity of group projects the second highest among the four scales (with a mean score of 3.82, SD = 0.08218). This suggests that students see a connection between their assessment of Business English projects and their daily life activities.

What's more, the data reveals that students have marked **Transparency of assessment** the third highest among the five scales M = 3.72, SD = 0.22210 with the less variance among mean score of the 5 items of **Transparency of assessment** (M of just over 3.4 for all items). This suggests that students somehow acknowledged the assessment information given in advance together with the clarity of assessment criteria.

Taking the scale **Accommodation of Student Diversity** into consideration, the students perceived this scale with a mean of 3.16, SD = 0.12971. The most striking result to emerge from the chart is that **Student Consultation** is perceived the lowest mean score (M=2.92, SD = 1.16763) in comparison with the other four scales. Responses from students for item 15 (M=1.21, SD = 0.42001) show that students are fairly negative about whether they can have a say in how they will be assessed in their group projects.

In the second part after SPAQ the questionnaire, the students showed their positive evaluation of the application of VALUE rubrics by ACC&U (2010) in the assessment of BE group projects with 72%, 71%, 78% and 83% of the students supporting that its content, clarity, practicality and technical soundness respectively are Ready to roll. In contrast, only over 20% of the students require further improvement in the four traits and only 0.05% hold the view that the content of VALUE rubric is not ready for use (as shown in figure 2)
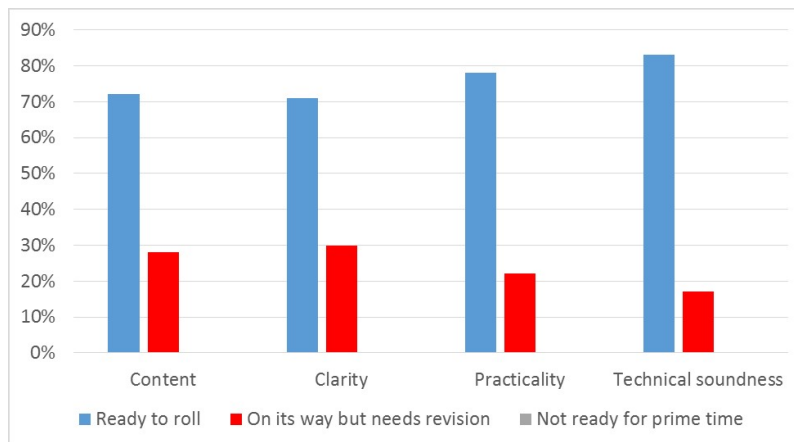
Figure 2_ Students' evaluation of the application of VALUE rubric

Interviews for teachers

What to assess

All of the interviewed lectures reported that the assessment in Business English projects are relevant to the students' learning content as the projects are under the Business English themes that are covered in their Business English textbooks. Moreover, the training of presentation skills are also integrated in the syllabus.

(D) "*The various themes of Business English in the textbooks are brought into detailed discussion, through which students can get an insight into the themes. It is under these themes that students are to carry out various projects to find out solutions to some hands-on business situations.*"

According to findings of interviews, most of the lecturers agreed that the Business English projects require a variety of knowledge and skills. They maintained that apart from background knowledge and language competence, a set of various skills including presentation skills, teamwork skills and critical thinking skills are of great importance,

These points are consistent with lecturers' reveals which indicated that the assessment methods of Business English projects are in line with the requirements of contemporary companies as the university carries out regular surveys among these companies to investigate the real-life application of the teaching and learning objectives at the universities. Students' awareness of what they are learning in class will enhance their willingness in investing time and energy in the learning process (Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003; McMillan, 2000).

Regarding assessmen formats, the lectures reported their different options from their experience. A large number of the interviewed lecturers base on group performance of oral presentations whereas only two lecturers rely on group performance of oral presentations, their portfolios and their written reports.
One teacher maintained:

(B)   "*In my Business English classes, besides oral group presentations in classes and students' portfolios, each group has to hand in their written reports, in which they cover theoretical foundation and their solutions to the problems within the projects. Additionally, an overview of the contributions of each member into the project is also demonstrated in the reports, which also influence the final marks of these group members.*"

However, one female lecturer was in favor of the assessment of five multiple sources, stating that:

"G" "*In order to gain a comprehensive picture of assessment, I base my assessment on multiple sources including physical model, group presentation, meetings with the course staff, group reports, and personal (reflective) reports, each of which account for 20% of the total marks.*

It can be seen that this practice is supported by the principle of triangulation by Gonella (2001) which is in favor of assessment of multiple formats.

How to assess

In the interviews, the majority of lectures revealed that the alternative forms they utilized included teachers' assessment and peer-assessment while only five lecturers reported their use of a combination of teachers' assessment, peer-assessment and self-assessment .However, some lecturers pointed out some drawbacks concerning those methods of assessment including subjectivity in assessment, lack of assessment competence and some interferences such as students' biases and students' relationship. A female lecturer revealed:

(C)   "*Peer-assessment can be subjective as it can be affected by students emotions and biases. Moreover, students may not have sufficient capabilities for assessment*"

This remark correlate favorably with the points by Brew et al. (2009) who stated that peer assessment could create strain among students. However, peer assessment, in their opinions, can enhance self-confidence and independence among students.

 In terms of the distribution of marks among group members, the findings from teachers' interviews indicated that the distribution of marks can be decided upon many criteria, which paves the way for a variety of possibilities. Some teachers shared the experience of how Business English projects are marked:

(F)   "*All group members can enjoy the same basic marks for their presentations and these marks can then be modified in the way that is agreed upon by all group members. According to group consensus, all group members can enjoy the same marks for their projects. Alternatively, their marks can be varied with some more percentages added to members with higher degree of contribution and participation in the projects, as agreed by the groups.*"

All of interviewed lecturers supported the application of VALUE rubrics into the assessment. However, adaptions were recommended by lecturers for tailoring the rubrics including adding the criteria of "accuracy" to the dimensions because of the requirements of accuracy among third-year students of Business English. This finding is in line with students' positive evaluation of the application of VALUE rubrics in the assessment of BE group projects. One lecturer added:

"E" "*As our students are English-majored, there requires high degree of language competence. As a result, "accuracy" should be added to the dimensions owing to its utmost importance in students' academic world and future career*"

When to assess

Most of the lectures reported that they carry out on-going assessment by means of keeping track of the formation, the collaboration and the performance of the groups from the beginning to the end of the courses whereas three lectures supported that they only counted on the assessment at the end of the course. One female lecturer shared his idea that:

"K" "*Ongoing assessment can keep students motivated and committed to the requirements of Business English courses from the beginning to the end. Students can be required to submit minutes of group meetings so that teachers can keep track of the collaboration among group members during the implementation of their projects.*"

Regular assessment in project-based learning has been supported by Barron & Darling-Hammond, (2007) claiming that PBL is regarded most effective when regular opportunities for assessment are provided in addition to reflection and reminder of project benchmarks.

How to consult students on assessment

All lectures revealed that their teachers provided basic information about Business English projects at the beginning of the course. It is in this way that students can be highly aware of the assessment methods so that they can make thorough preparation for their Business English projects. This idea is consistent with the points by Ross and Rolheiser (2003) who emphasize the importance of transparent assessments, which means that students have to know what will be assessed and also how it will be carried out.

However, the lectures claimed that students don't have a say in how they will be assessed in their Business English projects. This could be justified by the fact that the forms of assessment are laid out in the teaching syllabus and any changes, therefore, must go through decision-making process of the faculty.

Recommendations for assessment

It can be seen the findings of the interview of lecturers that they provided various responses on recommendations for assessment of Business English projects. Concerning students' consultation, two lecturers shared their ideas that technology can act as an effective tool in the assessment of Business English projects. One student commented:

"E" "*With the numerous social networking sites, we teachers can take advantage of Facebook or Twitter by making them into effective discussion boards through which teachers can provide a lot support and guidance on Business English projects. Simultaneously, students can share lots of ideas and thoughts about many Business English themes.*"

In the interviews, three teachers made suggestions for the announcement of the constituent marks that make up their final marks for Business English projects or the percentages of these components, which can maintain the transparency within the assessment system. One female teacher showed her idea of using softwares in support of assessment:

"G" "*Teachers should be encouraged to utilize Microsoft Excel in calculating the constituents of the final marks, in which the functions can be based on the ratio of the constituent marks. It is in this way that the accuracy and the effectiveness of the calculations can be enhanced.*"

Conclusion and implications

In conclusion, the findings offer an overall picture of students' and teachers' perceptions of assessment of group projects in BE courses. To be more specific, the results of the study reveal that teachers and students strongly advocate that there is a strong correlation between group project assessment, the learning content and real-life application with a level of transparency of assessments and their relevance to students' abilities and diversity.

However, lecturers responses indicated that they have little say in the assessment planning process. As a result, there exits many things to be fulfilled in this field such as involving students in the assessment decision-making process apart from enhancing authenticity of assessment tasks.

Each methods of assessment has its own advantages and disadvantages. Teachers are those who master these methods and can then utilize and combine them in the most flexible and effective ways. In other words, the choice of the assessment methods for Business English group projects should be modified depending on the teaching and learning contexts. Besides, rubrics in general can be an effective tool in the assessment of group projects and the recommended VALUE rubrics by AAC&U (2010) in particular proves to be applicable with positive feedback from lecturers and students in our study.

Last but not least, our study findings show that PBL environment enables universities to help students develop skills and competencies in real-life "authentic situation" and to enable them to demonstrate a wide range of skills and knowledge with their project-based learning. Above all, perceptions and valuable ideas from students and teachers in our study can equip teachers with effective tools for implementing group project assessment in Business English contexts.

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Contact email: cloverimy@yahoo.com