5 Writing through Viability: Perspectives on Professional Writing Expertise, Conditionality, and Agency

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Abstract: The chapter addresses professional writing expertise in the context of social power relations. It introduces and discusses the concept *writing through viability* which refers to a developmental stage of professional writing in which writers have learnt to build on their expertise as well on their position in the (institutional) field. Based on reflection and expertise the writers are able to take responsibility for their texts and live the choices they have—against the background of various limitations. The concept *writing through viability* is inspired by feminist philosophy, especially Judith Butler who coined the term "viability," and by a study on writing development, legitimation, and agency by M Knappik. The chapter introduces the concept, reveals its background and the discursive dialog that had inspired it, and discusses on several aspects that build the base for it. In doing so, it refers to interrelations between viability, agency, and the development of professional writing expertise; requirements of professional writing; and the field of tension between "submitting" to contexts and developing agency. Thus, *writing through viability* addresses the complex interrelations between social limitations, agency as "having a choice," taking responsibility for text production as a prerequisite for professional writing, and the reflection of all those aspects.

Reflection

In 2016, I took part in the IRC workshop at the CCCC in Houston.[1] My research on strategies and routines for professional multilingual writing was

1 Please read the opening statement for this collection, "Editing in US-Based International Publications: A Position Statement," before reading this chapter.

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funded by the Austrian Science Fund FWF, which allowed me to travel. I remember the lively, constructive discussions at our round table. Some misunderstandings concerning my approach on professional writing turned out useful for pointing out what I still needed to explain more extensively for an international discourse community or to think about more deeply in the first place.

Now, several years later, my research project has been completed; it has led to a new writing process model that considers individual and situational variation (the PROSIMS model; Dengscherz, 2019, 2022) and to a book (Dengscherz, 2019), in which I also discuss professional writing and its product-oriented requirements. During writing, our round table came to my mind every now and then, for example, when I discussed my perspective on professional writing as inspired by my institutional affiliation with the Center for Translation Studies (CTS) at the University of Vienna. In its Bachelor's program Transcultural Communication, professional writing is taught as the production of functional, reader-oriented texts in two or three working languages. Students are expected to acquire an overarching writing expertise that refers to much more than writing as part of one's job or in a particular discipline with specialized terminology.

And my perspectives on professional writing also are at core in this chapter. To some extent, thus, some passages can be read as a late answer to our round-table discussion. For my chapter in this collection, though, I return to the topic of "professional writing," with a specific scope, introducing the concept of *writing through viability*. This connects to an additional dialog with a colleague of mine who has known my research project from the beginning, M Knappik. This colleague did not take part in the IRC workshop but, in another project (Knappik, 2018), developed a framework for thinking about writing development in social contexts. *Writing through viability* adds to M Knappik's model.

With *writing through viability*, I address professional writing development from a social perspective. The concept refers to authorization through social groups, to regulation, limitation, and empowerment. When I was working on my book, the concept of *writing through viability* emerged as a kind of by-product, which I mentioned in passing and described only briefly. This anthology provides the ideal context for elaborating my considerations, as the IRC workshops add to *writing through viability* in several ways. Most fundamentally, they support international interaction among colleagues. Since the texts to be discussed are shared in advance, the exchange of ideas can go into depth and detail.

For me, the on-site discussions in the IRC workshop especially revealed what I might have been taken for granted too easily. This way, it helped me

to clarify what it is I *really* wanted to say and to reflect on how I can make it understood (and accepted?) by the community. This contributes to an important refining of ideas and to a potential emancipation from hegemonic discourse positions. And both are crucial aspects of agency and empowerment in writing—thus, also of the concept of *writing through viability*.

Institutional Context: The CTS at the University of Vienna

With about 85,000 students and 10,000 employees, the University of Vienna is the largest university in Austria (as well as in German speaking countries), one of the largest universities in Europe—and one of the oldest (founded in 1365). The university is subdivided into 20 subunits (15 faculties and 5 centers). One of these centers is the Center for Translation Studies (CTS).

In research and teaching, the CTS focuses on professional multilingual communication and adopts interdisciplinary approaches in the sub-disciplines of translation studies, interpreting studies, terminology studies and transcultural communication. Key research areas at the CTS are *Technologies and socio-cognitive processes in translation and interpreting* and *Translation and interpreting in social, institutional and media context*. The research is conducted by professors, pre- and postdoctoral researchers, senior-lecturers and other staff members and independent (habilitated) researchers. Most of the ca. 120 colleagues are also engaged in teaching.

About 2,000 students enroll in one of the CTS' programs at BA, MA, or doctoral level and choose two or three working languages among the following: Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Rumanian, Russian, and Spanish (in the MA-program additionally Japanese and Chinese). Especially German and English are the "large languages" at the CTS, with accordingly large groups (course groups for professional writing may consist of 30–60 students). The lingua franca for teaching on a cross-language meta-level is mostly German, partly English.

The BA-program focuses in a general way on forms of transcultural communication as professional text production in (two or three) working languages, while the MA-programs offer specializations: *Translation in Literature – Media – Arts*; *Specialized Translation and Language Industry*; *Conference Interpreting* and *Dialogue Interpreting*. In the doctoral program, the CTS cooperates with the faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies, and the CTS-candidates choose their topics, again, from the broad field of Transcultural Communication—which also may include writing research.

Gaining professional writing expertise is a special aim of the BA-program. The students engage with various genres and fulfil a broad range of writing

tasks that simulate order-specific writing in professional text production (for example PR-contexts, international conferences, institutional communication, etc.). When I use the term "writing development" in my chapter, I refer to the development of those skills, concerning professional writing expertise, last but not least in addressing specific genres and discourse communities.

The students' language and writing biographies are quite diverse. Some students have already been raised bi- or multilingually, others have built up their multilingual repertoires later in their lifetimes. Many students have migration biographies and have attended school (also) in other countries than Austria. For several students, their working languages have already been educational languages, others have used them mainly in private contexts and now try to systematically gather academic language proficiency at university. Additionally, their experience with different genres varies according to their writing biographies before university.

A main aim of the BA studies at the CTS is to build up transcultural, multilingual expertise in communication (oral and written) on a meta-level which is meant to be transferred to various contexts and social fields. Individual professionalization in text production and communication (product oriented as well as process oriented) is at core of the BA studies at the CTS. As professional text production is complex and needs competencies at several levels (including language, genre knowledge, cultural knowledge, etc.) which develop over time and need a lot of practice it provides a broad range of challenges for the students—and a broad range of opportunity to develop agency in communication.

Introduction

Writing is a collective phenomenon. Although, practically, I am sitting at my desk alone while writing these lines, I do not write in solitude. My chapter is inspired by discussions with colleagues and influenced by many other texts. (Academic) discourse is created by "countless people" (Roozen, 2016, p. 18); every text is "full of the voices of others" (Donahue, 2019, p. 50). This applies to discourse positions and the eristic structure of academic discussion (Ehlich, 2018) as well as to genres as social actions (Miller, 1984) and the heteroglossic nature of voices in the sense of Mikhail Bachtin (1979).

These voices affect writing in different ways: Some provide ideas as starting points for one's own reflections or lead to the refinement of those ideas. Others refer to conventions, questions of acceptability, or possible expectations held by readers. Some might sound encouraging, while others might appear as internal or external censors (Keseling, 2004). Against this background,

writing development can be regarded as a socialization process, as a process of learning to deal with voices in the discourse and with communicative practices in social groups (Russell, 2012), last but not least when it comes to the development of professional writing expertise (see below).

This is related to power relations. We can ask which voices dominate and which writers are expected to conform more than others. We can discuss hegemonies of discourse positions or languages (Canagarajah, 2013), for example, English in international academia (Lillis & Curry, 2010) and the issue of "native speakerism" in multilingual contexts (Knappik & Dirim, 2013). Especially in educational institutions, learning is related to a field of tension between "mastery and submission" (Davies, 2006).

Power relations might affect text production and the self-perception of writers. The latter has been explored by Knappik (2018) in a qualitative analysis of writing biographies of (multilingual) students at the university of Vienna. Knappik takes up Judith Butler's idea of "viable subjects," which refers to people who are "legitimized" to participate in societal actions and focuses on writers' perceptions of their agency in writing in the context of German as a second language. Knappik identifies three stages of writing development: *Writing before a requirement for viability*, *writing for viability*, and *writing in viability*. Interestingly, Knappik states that in these stages, mastery leads to increasing submission rather than to more agency. This emphasis on the close relationship between legitimization and submission seems to contradict common arguments for education as means for empowerment (see, e.g., Mandal, 2013; Russell, 2012).

In my approach, I try to bridge the gap between these seemingly contradictory discourse positions in adding a fourth stage of viability-development to Knappik's three: *writing through viability*. This concept can be regarded as a "missing link" between Knappik's work and "empowerment-by-education" discourses. With the concept of *writing through viability,* I refer to (advanced, professional) writing expertise as a way to regain agency in writing. My arguments are rooted in the realm of multilingual professional writing in Transcultural Communication, which includes a broad range of genres (including academic writing). However, the concept is not restricted to this realm; I address professional writing expertise at a meta-level as targeted toward communicative creative writing with a high-quality demand in general.

Writing through viability is a theoretical concept that is based mainly on theoretical considerations. Nevertheless, it is inspired by insights from empirical research, in particular the study of Knappik (2018) and my own research on writing processes of successful multilingual writers (Dengscherz, 2019, 2022) and in my institutional background.

In the following sections, I discuss my ideas regarding *writing through viability* and professional writing expertise as well as some considerations that contribute to my argument. My chapter consists of three main sections: First, I disclose some reflections on viability, agency, and writing development, mainly addressing Butler's thoughts on viability and conditionality as well as Knappik's study on writing development. Second, I clarify my position toward professional writing against the background of other perspectives in academic discourse. Third, I bring these topics together and discuss several aspects of requirements in professional writing that are related to my concept of *writing through viability*. In the conclusion, I summarize the main arguments for *writing through viability* and reflect on some implications for writing didactics.

Viability, Agency, and Writing Development

With the concept of *writing through viability* (Dengscherz, 2019), I add to a travel route of theory (in the sense of Edward Said, 1983) that started with the idea of "viable subjects" (Butler, 1995a, p. 42; cf. Butler, 1997) in societies. As viability addresses the conditions for being considered "possible" as a writing subject, it is closely tied to legitimation. Bronwyn Davies (2006) discussed this idea in relation to educational contexts; Knappik (2018) transferred it to writing development. In an educational institution, a "viable subject" is legitimized to obtain a degree, which is often closely tied to writing performance (Knappik 2018). In the following subsections, I will explain Butler's approach and Knappik's study in more detail and point out at which points of the discussion I step in with my arguments toward *writing through viability*.

Viability, Conditionality, and Agency in Writing

When we enter new social fields and try to act in them, we need to deal with expectations from others and new communication conventions. We may ask ourselves to what extent we want to adjust to these expectations and do what seems to be asked of us. Adjustment can be regarded partly as submission to the conditions of an environment, partly as a learning process that might lead to empowerment and agency. When we address viability in the context of (the development of) professional writing expertise, we address the issues of agency and conditionality.

With "agency," I refer to writers' scopes of action concerning content and positioning in the discourse as well as concerning text design and style, including dealing with genre conventions and communicative aims, which, in turn, are deeply rooted in social practices (Russell, 2012). When writers' texts

enter a given discourse, some of them might become influential for others and, thus, also contribute to or even change the social field to some (small) extent. My focus in this chapter, however, is not the power that texts might enfold in the discourse *after* their publication. Instead, I aim at sounding out the agency of writers that they enfold *in* their texts, in drafting and designing them, and I reflect on the conditions of the field of tension between mastery and submission that defines the space for this agency.

My considerations are inspired by Butler's ideas on the possibilities and limitations of developing discourse positions against the background of societal conditions. In the context of postmodern feminist philosophy, Butler argues for the political necessity of speaking while at the same time discussing the limitations of the socially constituted subject: As "no subject is its own point of departure" (Butler, 1995a, p. 42), we all are part of social fields, their power relations, and complex, interwoven discourses. Agency, then, is possible through positioning in these discourses and the resignification of discourse positions, which, in turn, already have affected the individual:

> My position is mine to the extent that "I"—and I do not shirk from the pronoun—replay and resignify the theoretical positions that have constituted me, working the possibilities of their convergence, and trying to take account of the possibilities that they systematically exclude. [. . .] it is clearly not the case that "I" preside over the positions that have constituted me [. . .]. The "I" who would select between them is always already constituted by them …, and these positions are not merely theoretical products, but fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse that produce me as viable "subject." (Butler, 1995a, p. 42)

Viability, thus, is constituted by power relations in social contexts. However, Butler's "I" is not just a plaything of higher powers; it is a thinking and speaking "I" that takes its agency not least via *opposing* certain positions:

> Indeed, this "I" would not be a thinking, speaking "I" if it were not for the very positions that I oppose, for those positions, the ones that claim that the subject must be given in advance, that discourse is an instrument of reflection of that subject, are already part of what constitutes me. (Butler, 1995a, p. 42)

This simultaneous relationship between conditionality and opposition seems contradictory at first sight, especially since Butler refers to a subject

that opposes the claim of its own autonomy. Individual development is closely tied to social contexts. These contexts provide ideas and perspectives that can be taken for granted—or serve as points of departure for reflections and resignification. They provide support and authorization as well as, at the same time, limitations and sometimes even oppression.

Davies (2006) adapted Butler's considerations to the institutional context of education. She describes "the formation of the subject" as dependent "on powers external to itself" in a field of tension between conditionality and agency and focuses on "the dual process of submission and mastery in the formation of the subject" (Davies, 2006, pp. 426-427). This, in turn, is an important point of departure for Knappik's reflections. In narrowing the scope, she applies the ideas of Butler and Davies to (multilingual) writing development in relation to social and institutional power relations, focusing on writing in (Austrian) schools and universities. In Knappik's study, "writing development" refers to the development of the writing skills required in educational contexts: in school mainly on the text production in typical "school genres" which follow their own, specific rules, at university, then, more focused on academic writing.[2] While Davies (2006) addresses submission and mastery as a field of tension, for the students in Knappik's (2018) study, viability is already closely related to submission, conditionality, and limitations of agency.

This might be astonishing, as individual competence is usually addressed as crucial for agency in social environments (Pany-Habsa, 2020). Especially for writers from disadvantaged social classes, expertise is an important basis for success (Russell, 2012). When writers have proven to be "viable subjects" (Butler, 1995a, p. 42; cf. Butler, 1997) in specific communities, they have the chance to become visible and "legitimized" as successful writers. For students in school or university, this may result in good grades; later, in one's professional life, it might result in published texts, academic or other positions, awards, funding, commendatory reviews, appreciative comments, and so forth.

Such appreciative reactions enfold an "authorizing power" in the sense of Butler (1995a, p. 42) and, thus, socially confirm the *viability* of successful professional writers. Viability, in this sense, partly refers to status (i.e., to one's social position as a writer), partly to writing expertise (i.e., to one's know-how based on writing experience), and partly to a habitus (that is based on status *and* expertise). That writers *know* about their expertise and viability contributes, along with writing experience, to their self-confidence in writing. This

2 A description of these "school genres" in Austria is available under the following link: https://www.matura.gv.at/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=4525&token=950c7f2b86f0ebc3459c5f0aa0e04013ab99c572 (last accessed: May 17th, 2025)

builds the base for "empowered voices" (cf. Bartholomae, 1985) and a wider scope of maneuver in texts—and in the discourse. It leads to agency.

Viability and Writing Development

The concept of "viability" addresses agency and submission as two sides of the same coin. Agency is based on the "authorizing power" of communities, and gaining authorization is interrelated with considering the written and unwritten rules of these communities and, thus, with restrictions. In following conventions, for example, we show that we know them and that we are *capable* of following them. This way, we prove ourselves to be viable subjects (Butler, 1995a). Against this background, writing development in educational or professional contexts seems to be a process that shapes "rough" and diverse individual voices into more conventional ways of writing. Such a perspective on mastery—following the rules and conventions of a social group—emphasizes the submission side of the coin. This is the basis for Knappik's (2018) study, which focuses on multilingual writers and their struggles to become viable subjects in the education system.

Knappik (2018) explores "how writing development is influenced by relations of language and power in migration societies" and conceptualizes writing development "as the production of writer-subjects through discourses and practices" (p. 14). Knappik embedded the research in a seminar context in the Master's program of German as a Second Language at the University of Vienna. One task in the seminar was to write one's own "writing biography." In a qualitative study, which follows a Grounded Theory methodology, Knappik analyses these writing biographies of 58 students and discusses writing development as negotiation of viability. The study is positioned against the background of work by Michel Foucault (1966, among others) and Butler (1995a, 1997) and related to discourses on education in migration contexts in Austria and Germany, especially to the work of Paul Mecheril and of İnci Dirim and their respective engagement for equal opportunities in education and their critical perspectives on racism (see, e.g., Dirim 2010; Mecheril, 2004). The language and writing biographies of Knappik's participants are complex and diverse. They include writing in German as L1 and German as L2, while at the same time problematizing these categories (Knappik, 2018). Referring to Butler (1995a) and Davies (2006), Knappik (2018) analyzes the development of multilingual writing competence as embedded in power relations and identifies three developmental stages in the field of tension between mastery and submission.

The first stage, *writing before a requirement for viability* ("vor einem Viabilitätserfordernis"; Knappik, 2018, p. 135), refers to writing without institutional

restrictions or explicit expectations toward the writers' performance. It applies to children who "write" in a playful way, similar to drawing. It can also apply to adults who write for themselves without addressing (other) readers with expectations. In this stage, writers are free to try out what they want, and writing conventions are not (yet) important (Knappik, 2018).

In the next stage, *writing for viability* ("für Viabilität"; Knappik, 2018, p. 142), writing becomes more regulated and restricted. When starting school or, later, university, writers are confronted with certain expectations toward their texts. First, young writers are confronted with questions of linguistic correctness and orthography; later, they engage with specific genres and their respective requirements. In trying to prove that they are able to meet the requirements of the educational institution, students write *for viability,* aiming at legitimization in the respective context (Knappik, 2018). In this stage, the writers try to adhere to conventions; however, their mastery is still to be developed.

The third stage, *writing in viability* ("in Viabilität"; Knappik, 2018, p. 160), refers to writers who succeeded in achieving the mastery required by educational institutions. These writers are able to follow linguistic and genre conventions and to produce texts as they are expected from them. Thus, they have come to be perceived as viable subjects. However, this comes at a high cost: writers may feel that, in order to adhere to conventions, they had to give up their own voices (Knappik, 2018). In other words, with increasing mastery, young writers' agency becomes "conditioned" (Davies, 2006, p. 426) and, thus, restricted.

This is where Knappik's story ends. Frankly, the findings are quite disenchanting. In school, several of Knappik's participants seemed to have experienced structures of assessment and evaluation that were not supportive. They perceived "typical school genres" as little motivating, the high workload at university was discouraging to many of them, and some experienced "native speakerism" as well (Knappik, 2018, p. 218). Some of the issues reported refer to power relations in the context of migration—for example, the monolingual paradigm (Canagarajah, 2013)—or other forms of discrimination in education (see, e.g., Knappik & Dirim, 2013).

In the stage of *writing in viability*, Knappik's participants had been legitimized by their institution—but not empowered. However, writing development is not necessarily finished at this stage. *Writing in viability* can and should, in the long run, build the basis for empowerment and regaining agency. It can, as I argue, lay the groundwork for a fourth stage of development that I call *writing through viability*.

In this next stage, writers take empowerment out of having been legitimized as "viable subjects" in social fields and of having learned to act as such. Then, mastery is no longer a form of submission but rather a *means*

to overcome submission. For this, other levels of mastery—and/or another approach to mastery—might be needed. These can be ones which are at the core of professional writing, as we will see.

Requirements of Professional Writing

In the following, I briefly explain my approach toward professional writing against the background of other perspectives in academic discourse. First, I outline some discourse lines around professional writing. Second, I sketch my own approach toward professional writing as rooted in Transcultural Communication. This creates the basis for the third subsection, in which I discuss the characteristics of overall professional writing expertise as related to *writing through viability*.

Perspectives on Professional Writing

Professional writing is an ambiguous term. It can refer to writing as part of one's job or to writing expertise—or to both (Russell, 2012). Some approaches are based on dichotomies and refer to professional writing through the lens of what is *not* perceived as such. Françoise Cros et al. (2009), for example, distinguish (reflexive) writing in the profession from writing in the process of professionalization; Brigitte Bouquet (2009, p. 82) distinguishes between "écriture personnelle" and "écriture professionnelle"; and Stefan Trappen (2003, p. 171) distinguishes between "intuitive" and "professional" writing.

Each of these dichotomies foregrounds a different aspect of professional writing: Cros et al. (2009) emphasize writing in the job as writing after having finished the education required for the job. Bouquet (2009) focuses on profession in the sense of writing as part of one's job, with professional writing as writing in the public sphere. Both mainly address the context in which such writing takes place. Trappen (2003), in turn, focuses on exigence and expertise.

"Professional writing" applies to many different forms of writing and encompasses a variety of genres along with their social practices and communicative aims (Sitri, 2015). Possible categories are specific professional situations ("situations professionnelles"; Cros et al., 2009) or specific aspects of exigence that are important across professions and genres. With a focus on professional situations, for example, Bertrand Daunay and Morrisse (2009) analyze writing practices of teachers, and Bouquet (2009) deals with writing in social work. Such approaches toward professional writing as writing in the job include (more or less) spontaneous ways of text production. They include

e-mails, preparation sheets, and teaching protocols or can refer even to filling in forms—for example, by teachers (Daunay & Morisse, 2009) or by farmers on stock markets (Jones, 2000).

In approaches that emphasize expertise, professional writing is often addressed as a sophisticated, demanding form of text production (Trappen, 2003), and writing sometimes is perceived as the profession itself.[3] Céline Beaudet and Véronique Rey (2012) describe "rédaction professionnelle" as a specific expertise that is focused on functional text production oriented toward readers: "le rédacteur professionnel est apparu comme un spécialiste, dont le domaine d'expertise est l'adéquation d'un texte de nature fonctionnelle à son lecteur" (p. 174).

I take a similar approach to professional writing. I am interested in professional writing as reader-oriented text production with high-quality demands, thus in "focused writing" in the sense of Troy Hicks and Daniel Perrin (2014).[4] Professional writers are aware of the functionality of texts in relation to specific situations and audiences (Dengscherz & Cooke, 2020). Professional writing expertise needs to be transferable between different situations; however, each situation is unique, and competencies are not expected to be transferred automatically or easily to new situations (Russell, 2012). Therefore, it can be regarded as a special expertise of professional writers that they are able to transfer their knowledge between various kinds of communication situations and languages (Kaiser-Cooke, 2004). Professional writers are not "answer-filled experts" (Yancey et al., 2016) but, rather, aware of the requirements and potential challenges of writing and prepared to continue to learn and adapt to new situations–or to new techniques that might affect the writing process (like, e.g., Large Language Models and other AI-tools). This approach aligns with the realm of Transcultural Communication and my institutional background at the Center for Translation Studies (CTS).

Professional Writing in Transcultural Communication

At the CTS, the students in the Bachelor's program Transcultural Communication engage (in addition to their academic writing in general) in producing short functional texts for various genres, domains, and communication situations, usually in two or three working languages. This includes a broad variety

3 This expertise can be focused directly on writing or on other aspects of a given job. For this chapter, the writing approach is the relevant one.

4 Hicks and Perrin (2014, p. 237) distinguish between "writing by the way" (spontaneous forms of writing, low requirements) and "focused writing" (demanding forms of writing, high requirements).

of situations and genres. Here, "professional writing" is interpreted as general writing expertise that can be transferred between languages and to many different fields (such as journalism, public relations, and academic writing).

It is in this realm of professional writing (expertise) in Transcultural Communication, my research project (PROSIMS) on strategies, routines, and language practices in writing processes of successful multilingual writers was situated. PROSIMS is an acronym based on the German project title "**Pro**fessionelles **S**chreiben **i**n **m**ehreren **S**prachen" (professional multilingual writing). In this project, I applied a mixed-methods design that included analyses of student discussions, case studies, and a questionnaire (Dengscherz, 2022). At the core of the project were case studies of 17 multilingual writers (13 students and 4 researchers) who recorded writing sessions with the screen-capturing software Snagit (© TechSmith) and, additionally, provided information about their writing habits, framing conditions, and writing and language biographies in interviews.

The case studies aimed at real-life writing in academic contexts, and the participants in the project worked on a broad variety of writing tasks and genres (for detailed information, see Dengscherz, 2019, pp. 299-350), including extensive academic texts (term papers, research articles, Master's theses), short academic texts (abstracts, components of project reports), short texts with professional requirements (such as commentaries and glosses), and others texts, mainly with educational aims (such as summaries and reflections).[5] All these genres can be demanding for writers and bring their own restrictions, for example, concerning genre conventions. The target language for the texts produced was either German or English for the academic texts; for the other genres, also French and Hungarian. One of the project's outcomes was the PROSIMS writing process model that explicitly covers situational and individual variation in strategies, routines, and language practices (Dengscherz, 2019, 2022).

All in all, the project was focused mainly on the process level of writing. However, writing processes were analyzed against writers' biographical backgrounds, their writing habits, and their attitudes toward writing. This way, the project also addressed product-oriented aspects and especially individual approaches to professional writing and writing expertise. In the interviews that were part of the case studies, the writers provided information about their previous experience and their (emotional, theoretical, etc.) approaches

5 The writers worked on tasks independent from the project. This provided insights into their real writing worlds in the academic field and in its institutional conditions. The participants of my study were engaged mainly in writing utility texts. In their writing biographies, they sometimes referred to literary forms, too.

to writing. In this, some of the writers referred to normativity and conventions, sometimes explicitly questioning them. As the writers engaged in forms of professional writing, they developed individual writing strategies, routines, ways of organizing their writing processes, and approaches to text design. On several levels (product-oriented as well as process-oriented), the writers showed to have developed agency and to have individually shaped their approaches to writing (Dengscherz, 2019).

Characteristics of an Overarching Professional Writing Expertise

Against the background described above, I address professional writing on a general meta level as a demanding (i.e., sophisticated and possibly challenging) form of writing that explicitly takes communication goals in specific situations, for particular addressees, and contextual factors into account. Professional writers consider conditions of success and failure in their texts, and they make well-thought-out communication offers. Professional text design requires complex, informed decisions concerning the selection and order of information as well as style and wording (Beaudet & Rey, 2012; Dengscherz, 2019).

In order to act responsibly in professional text production, following rules is not enough. Designing texts implies making decisions about *how* to design and which information to use[6] or generate (Risku, 1998). Hans Vermeer (2006) conceptualizes interaction, communication, and translation as "holistic acting" and refers to acting as intentional, conscious behavior. "Consciousness," here, does not refer to the level of the writing *process* but to that of the *product*. Professional writers are supposed to be aware of the effects that the final versions of their texts may have on their audience and be able to explain and argue for the specific design of their texts.[7] From this perspective, an important aspect of professional writing is responsibility (Dengscherz & Cooke, 2020).[8] Professional writing, in my understanding, is a responsible action in the sense that writers are responsible to their readers and take responsibility for their texts and their designs, including the selection of information (from human or AI sources), macrostructural setups, styles, and perspectives.

6 Against the background of recent technology development and campaigns of misinformation, the relevance of this aspect has even increased, also in terms of taking responsibility for texts as an aspect of professional writing (see below).

7 Draft versions, in turn, can have different functions in the writing process and do not need to be audience-oriented at all.

8 Responsibility may refer to professional qualities in a job (Bouquet, 2009) or to the text itself and its design and implications (Dengscherz & Cooke, 2020). For my purposes here, I take the latter perspective.

Further, professional writing is often related to efficacy. This refers to an advantageous relation between the time writers spend on writing and the quality of the texts they produce. While this is an issue of work-life balance, perceptions and interpretations of "advantageous relation" differ individually. Certainly, not every "detour" in a writing process should automatically be regarded as inefficient. On the contrary, efficacy can be a way to follow detours in a fruitful way, for example, general reflection and broadening of one's expertise. Especially in multilingual settings, writers might go on "detours" when they take writing as an exercise with a focus on language proficiency, for example, when they try out expression variants or conduct research on linguistic means. This includes taking responsibility on a writing-process level.

Viability and Agency in Professional Writing Expertise

As we have seen, agency in professional writing is closely tied to responsibility. In the following subsections, I sound out several aspects of the scopes of agency in professional writing. First, I reflect on responsibility in the context of audience awareness. Next, I discuss different levels of situatedness and their impact on conditionality and agency. Further, I tackle the issue of authenticity and "choice" in relation to problem-solving, awareness, and reflection. Finally, I consider text conventions and subversive strategies (in multilingual contexts).

Responsibility in the Context of Audience Awareness

Audience awareness is an important aspect of professional text production (Beaudet & Rey, 2012; Kellogg, 2008; Resch, 1999). Orientating toward readers includes considering their previous knowledge and their expectations as well as the specifics of communication situations and contexts (Pogner, 1997). Professional writers make "informed decisions" (Bachtin, 2011, p. 76), which, in turn, are a prerequisite for responsibility. Without deliberate choices and a certain scope of agency, responsible action is not possible.

At the same time, considering expectations touches questions of acceptability. This points to inclusions and exclusions on institutional, educational, and discursive levels and, again, to restrictions of writers' agency. Individual ideas and texts are shaped by the dialogs into which they enter as well as by power relations, (anticipated) expectations, and conventions in discourse communities. John Swales (2017) describes discourse communities as social groups that broadly agree on a set of goals; have mechanisms of intercommunication

and feedback among their members; foster a certain set of genres, possibly using specific terminology; share some ideas of forms of communication that need not be openly discussed; and, against this background, develop horizons of expectations. *Considering* expectations, however, neither means claiming definite knowledge about them (Spivak, 1993) nor trying to meet them at any cost. Rather, it means *being aware* of them and *reflecting* on them based on one's previous experience.

Discourse communities can be tied to institutions or to professional communities (e.g., in academic disciplines). They may share some ideas about "good" writing and text design (Dengscherz, 2019) with hegemonic views, but, all in all, they should be imagined as heterogeneous. The IRC workshops, for example, can be regarded as a specific, international discourse community that is focused on writing research and interdisciplinary to some extent as the researchers derive from heterogeneous backgrounds (as demonstrated by this collection). Writers/researchers can "test" their positions and texts in this community, against various perspectives and research traditions, language backgrounds, and (sub)disciplines. This leads to a refinement of these positions and, at the same time, to an empowerment of the writers as they gain self-confidence in developing their voices in the context of international discourse (in the lingua franca English).

Agency and Conditionality on Different Levels of Situatedness

As professional writing requires responsibility, it appears to be, at least on the product level, a relatively controlled practice based on conscious intent (Rolf, 1993). Writers need to be "masters of the situation" in their text production. But how can such a view on professional writing be compatible with (postmodern) approaches that emphasize the conditionality of human behavior and fundamentally question independent intent? If writing, as every other behavior, is socially constructed, how can writers take responsibility for a text and develop agency at all?

Key to these questions could be specific understandings of "situation" and its particular scope. Thus, we must ask which *kinds* of "situations" it is that professional writers are expected to master. "Situation" addresses different aspects of "conditions" that are relevant for writing. From a process-oriented perspective, writing processes can be regarded as sequences of writing situations with specific heuristic and rhetorical requirements and challenges (Dengscherz, 2019, 2022, 2024). From a product-oriented perspective, writing can be regarded as embedded in societal framing conditions and communication situations. In this, different *levels* of situatedness seem to be relevant

for the issue of agency and conditionality and, thus, have different sets of effects on writing. When Butler (1995a) emphasizes the conditionality of all acting and thinking, she is referring to social context on the level of society and educational-intellectual biography. When we focus on communication situations that are relevant for professional writing, however, we do not necessarily respond to an entire society but instead to an interaction that takes place under conditions that refer to a much smaller scope.

Of course, communication situations and writing are embedded in larger contexts—in institutions, discourse communities, society. However, for discussing agency in writing (development), we usually focus on the levels of either the communication situation (product-oriented) or the writing situation (process-oriented). On these levels of situatedness, agency can serve as an accessible and realistic goal related to expertise. Process-oriented agency refers to managing the writing process in a way that meets writers' needs; product-oriented agency conceptualizes professional writing as responsible expertise toward dealing with information and text design.

When we refer to social contexts on a larger scale, as Butler (1995a) does, the issue is more complex, and agency becomes more limited. This does not only apply to situations in which texts (and/or writers) are directly assessed by others (such as the participants in Knappik's study) but also to more subtle or unconscious limitations. One cannot realistically claim to have control over all discursive influences, deeply rooted ideological issues, and other kinds of social influence in one's (educational) biography.[9] Conscious and unconscious social aspects are interwoven, as Pierre Bourdieu (1970) explains with his concept of *habitus*, which he describes as a system of organic or mental dispositions and unconscious thought, perception, and action schemes, an internalization of field conditions.

Roland Barthes (1987) refers to such mental dispositions as *voices* and, additionally, introduces *off-voices*, which have faded and gotten lost in the "hole of the discourse" (Barthes, 1987, p. 46), in the mass of what has already been written. The writer is not (necessarily) aware of them. Writing seems to oscillate between the interconnected ideas of others (what Margarete Jäger and Siegfried Jäger call the "discursive swarm," 2017, p. 25) and one's individual way of making sense of these voices and ideas, at least of those of which we are conscious. In this, the IRC workshops, in their heterogeneity of perspectives and their open discussions, can raise the awareness of researchers

9 This is a delicate issue, since primordial culture concepts operate on this level as well, stressing a kind of programming of the mind, which opens the door to essentialist concepts of culture. To avoid simplistic claims in this concern, it is useful to take discursive complexity and dynamic negotiation processes into account.

toward positions in their specific situatedness. Reflection, then, is an important factor in *writing through viability*, as it supports the sounding out of the specific scope of agency in a communication situation.

Authenticity and "Choice" in the Context of Problem-Solving, Awareness, and Reflection

Agency in writing can refer to taking a position and to developing an authentic voice. David Bartholomae (1985) describes students' writing development at universities as an emancipation process that is directed toward increasing authenticity, which, in turn, is related to agency. Writers need to find "some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other" (Bartholomae, 1985, p. 135). Students, he argues, perceive academic writing as especially difficult in artificial situations, when they are expected to slip into the role of the experts that they have not yet become.

This is compatible with the approach of Helmuth Feilke and Torsten Steinhoff (2003), who, in the context of German higher education, focus on students' language use and distinguish between *habitus adjustment* ("Habitusanpassung") and *problem-solving action* ("problemlösendes Handeln"). Habitus adjustment refers to a (not yet authentic) imitation of (German) "academic language," which often leads to meaningless phrases that appear academic only at first sight. Problem-solving action, on the other hand, refers to a conscious process focused on understanding and learning step by step, while at the same time becoming more and more authentic. While habitus adjustment is ascribed to students who are not (yet) aware of the language and phraseology they use, problem-solving is their successive gaining command of their language resources and using them authentically.[10]

With this distinction, Feilke and Steinhoff (2003) adopt a specific perspective on writing and problem solving. They prefer the conscious over the intuitive, and technique over inspiration. However, even professional writing is intuitive to some extent (Girgensohn, 2007). A broad understanding of "problem" is helpful in this regard: According to Kaiser-Cooke (2004), a problem occurs "when there is a discrepancy between general theory (a priori knowledge) and the actual event" (p. 287). This includes ill-defined problems

10 Feilke and Steinhoff refer to writing in the first language (German). Handling language resources is even more affected by power relations in multilingual contexts. Here, I need to add that the very categorization of language resources as first or second language is an issue of power relations itself, sometimes related to native-speakerism, and does not always describe individual language repertoires sufficiently (Dengscherz, 2019).

and leaves room for experience-based intuition that may serve as a starting point for efficient routines (Kaiser-Cooke, 2004; Ortner, 2000).[11]

Feilke and Steinhoff (2003) conceptualize awareness in problem-solving as a means of emancipation in academic writing and academic language use. This makes sense if we consider that awareness enables reflection and that reflection makes it possible to understand conditions that shape contexts and situations. Reflection is also a precondition of flexibility, of adapting to new situations (and their possible problems) and of evaluation processes concerning information found in other texts (may they be created by humans or AI-tools). Additionally, and this is especially important for the issue of agency, reflection builds the basis for having a choice. As Butler states, a subject (an "I") is not forced to *confirm* (to) existing discourse positions; there is also the possibility of *opposing* them. Resignifying (theoretical) positions and responsible action in social contexts implies having a *choice*. Choice, in turn, is based on awareness and reflection.

Yet, importantly, we cannot claim to be aware of all discursive influences on our writing. However, we can try to *become* aware of more and more of them, step by step. When we enter a discourse, we "come late" to an "unending conversation" that began before us and will continue after us, and we need to find out what the discussion is all about and catch "the tenor of the argument" (Burke, 1973, p. 110). The IRC workshops provide several starting points for catching this tenor and the underlying arguments in an international dialog. The exchange with colleagues is extremely helpful in raising awareness concerning the choices writers might have. Through exchanging papers and via round-table discussions, the workshops provide a space in which perspectives and discourse positions can be negotiated and refined in an open, explicit dialog with others. Individual agency develops when we work with the material that we find around us—and *change* this material, "replay and resignify" (Butler, 1995a, p. 42) it. In reflecting on different perspectives, we can reflect on options—our choice. This creates the basis for emancipation—from discourse positions and source texts but also from conventions and questions of style. In some cases, this might lead to subversive strategies for text production.

Text Conventions and Subversive Strategies

Communication situations are characterized by specific relationships between communication partners, their ideas about each other, their

11 An alternative to problem-solving approaches is, for example, the concepts of "reflection-in-action" (in situ, during a process) and "reflection-on-action" (with distance, for example, after a process) as described by Donald Schön (1983).

expectations, intentions, and attitudes, as well as by framing conditions such as spatial or temporal proximity or distance (Dengscherz & Cooke, 2020).[12] Although every situation is unique (in a material sense), from an intersubjective perspective, we can reflect the recurrence of situational parameters. In similar situations, "rhetors respond in similar ways, having learned from precedent what is appropriate and what effects their actions are likely to have on other people" (Miller, 1984, p. 152). From this perspective, genres can be addressed as social actions, as a "situation-based fusion of form and substance" (Miller, 1984, p. 153). Knowledge of genres can serve as reference points that restrict text production and, in this way, facilitate writing by freeing writers from the need to newly "invent everything" (Beaudet & Rey, 2012, p. 177). Similarly, "sedimented language acts" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 138) provide orientation through sample solutions for text design that have proven to be successful in past communication situations (Resch, 2006).[13]

To some extent, genres are provisional (Sitri, 2015); they change with their social contexts and especially with their functions (Russell, 2012). Through repetition and habituation effects, however, (genre) conventions affect expectations and enfold a certain normative power (Russell, 2012) that is related to submission and/or conditionality. While submission mainly refers to hegemonic expectations and norms, conditionality covers influence from the social field in its heterogeneity and complexity. To some extent, it is exactly the heterogeneity of discourse positions, genres, and style that opens a certain space for agency, since writers choose *among* possibilities.

Texts do not necessarily need to follow conventions to be functional (Engberg, 2001), and communication is influenced by norms but not entirely determined by them (Busch, 2012). Conventions and expectations contribute to the possibilities in the social field, which, at large, is rich in variety. The more writers know about the variety of expectations, conventions, positions, and so forth, the more clearly they can see the choices they have.

In this context, it is revealing to look at some considerations by Steinhoff (2007) and Thorsten Pohl (2007). Focusing on linguistic aspects of text production, especially phraseology, Steinhoff (2007) analyzed and compared academic texts of students and experts and, on this basis, derived a developmental model for language use in German academic writing. The model

12 The *communication* situation should not be confused with the immediate *speech* situation. In linguistics, it is often emphasized that written texts are liberated from the speech situation, since their production and their reception may occur far apart in time (Linke, 2010; Ehlich, 2018). However, this does not release a text from its *communication* situation.

13 Sample solutions have also proven useful for Large Language Models.

contains three stages: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional.[14] In the *preconventional* stage, students transpose well-known language material from essay writing and journalism into their academic texts and imitate complex syntax; similar to habitus adjustment (Feilke & Steinhoff, 2003), this does not lead to good academic style. In the next stage, the student writers elaborate and transform their linguistic repertoires until they produce *conventional* academic texts. Steinhoff does not stop here but continues to the possibility of *postconventional* language use, which applies to writers whose texts are communicative and functional even when they do not follow the conventions (in this case, of academic writing). While Steinhoff's understanding of "postconventional" includes breaking the rules to some extent, Pohl (2007) uses the term in a slightly different way, referring to writers who have a wide repertoire of conventional alternatives that they can apply selectively and with a high degree of variation. Nevertheless, both understandings have in common that they refer to writers who make *deliberate choices*. This view matches approaches to professional writing that highlight personal responsibility and decision-making against the background of the functionality of texts (Beaudet & Rey, 2012).

Being able to understand the function of conventions and to know under which circumstances unconventional solutions might be adequate is part of professional writing (Dengscherz, 2019). In their conceptions of "postconventional," both Steinhoff and Pohl focus on one's command of academic language. In comparison, *writing through viability* refers to a wider scope; it focuses on agency, self-perception, and power-relations but also on the interrelation between writing expertise and social contexts.

Text patterns, genres, and conventions are not just pragmatic but also related to ideological positions. The reproduction of genres can be regarded as a reification of hegemonic structures. When we question power relations in text production, we might discuss which kinds of influences and voices are dominant and which are marginalized (Dengscherz & Cooke, 2020). Against this background, a targeted breaking of conventions can be a subversive strategy for addressing or undermining power relations. One example for such a strategy is

14 Phraseology in writing has been addressed extensively concerning the application of discursive linguistic routines. In German discourse, such phraseological analysis has a broad tradition at the intersection between writing didactics and linguistics, especially in relation to the teaching of writing in school. At the core of this discourse is the work of Feilke (e.g., 2012, 2015) who discussed the relevance of phraseological knowledge in writing and education under the label of "Textroutinen" (textual routines) and "Textprozeduren" (textual procedures). In French, Emilie Née, Frédérique Sitri, and Marie Veniard (2014) addressed this phenomenon of "l'articulation entre des déterminations discursives, des phenomènes de figement et le processus rédactionnel" (p. 2113) as "routines discursives."

codemeshing. Vershawn Young (2004) describes codemeshing as "allowing black students to mix a black English style with an academic register" (p. 713). Suresh Canagarajah (2013) conceptualizes it as a subversive double-strategy in (academic) texts: large parts of the text follow the usual norms and conventions, while other parts contain targeted deviations from the expected (e.g., through the application of marginalized varieties of English). Codemeshing refers not only to the hegemonic role of academic English (cf. Lillis & Curry, 2010) but also to postcolonial power relations, the uneven prestige of different language varieties, and discrimination against World Englishes.[15]

Subversive strategies can take many forms, including playing with language(s) or varieties, genres, ideologies, or other conventions.[16] They all, however, contribute to discourse through performative acts. Performativity can become a strategy for change. It "brings into being or enacts that which it names" (Butler, 1995b, p. 134). Butler emphasizes the relation of performative acts to conventions: "For a performative to work, it must draw upon and recite a set of linguistic conventions which have traditionally worked to bind or engage certain kinds of effects" (1995b, p. 134). Following conventions for large parts of a text can serve as an authorization strategy that allows the breaking of conventions in other parts of the text. Having proven themselves to be viable subjects in the (academic) discourse community authorizes writers to develop forms of agency that might not be entirely conventional. Subjects take their agency from the power they oppose (Butler, 1997). This is *writing through viability* in its clearest form.

However, agency should not be reduced to subversion and breaking conventions alone. Having a choice also includes the possibility of following conventions fully. Additionally, conventions themselves have many faces and variations. Having a choice is the basis for decision making and, therefore, for responsible action.

Conclusion: Writing through Viability

As I have shown, professional writing implies responsible action that is based on having a choice. Some aspects of having this choice are immanent in text

15 Language variety, however, is only one aspect of hegemonic power relations in academia. Academic discourse is dominated by international journals, and contributing to these journals is expected of academics all over the world. Through citing texts from theses journals, academics show that they are familiar with the relevant discourse, reproducing hegemonic structures. For this anthology, one strategy for counterbalancing hegemonic discourse was asking contributors to give preference to non-US references where possible.

16 A relatively recent example of playing with academic genres is a collection edited by Michael En (2020). Its expansion of conventions already manifests in its subtitle, "A festschrift, love letter and thank you to Michèle Cooke."

and writing; they refer to expertise and the ability to understand the effects that a text might have on readers. Other aspects are external to the text and the writing; they refer to a position in the field, presupposing writers that are already accepted as viable subjects. This way, agency can be regarded as a question of "power and finesse" (Bartholomae, 1985, p. 140). With *writing through viability*, I refer to precisely this interrelation.

On the one hand, *writing through viability* is related to social contexts and positions in discourse communities that enfold an "authorizing power" in the sense of Butler. This widens writers' scopes of action, which can result in deliberate performative acts and, sometimes, in postconventional writing like described by Steinhoff (2007) and Pohl (2007). On the other hand, *writing through viability* is based on expertise. To be able to choose, writers need to know what the options are. Not *knowing* about discourse positions, conventions, expectations, and potential resulting restrictions (as in Knappik's *writing before a requirement for viability*) would not provide a suitable basis for agency and self-determined action. *Considering* expectations, in turn, does not necessarily mean *following* them or *wanting to meet* them in any case; *knowing* conventions does not equal *submitting* to them.

Knappik's (2018) participants, writing *in viability*, did not feel they had a choice, yet. They were glad to have mastered the conventions but still lacked the power and finesse for potential further steps. However, now, years after their accounts in the original study, one might expect some of them to have started expanding the scope of their individual agency. This does not mean that they necessarily break or expand writing conventions (although they might).

Writing through viability does not imply that writers overcome all limitations and restrictions or that they are set free from the complexity of social contexts and their power relations. The concept acknowledges that autonomy and agency are limited. However, it emphasizes that agency is, nevertheless, possible and a goal that, if desired, anyone can reach. How can we support writers, then, to increase their agency?

As having a choice is based on awareness, fostering this awareness in particular is crucial. This needs reflection: on text design in the context of the functionality of genres as social actions, on writing processes, and on positions in the field. The more that writers have understood patterns, interrelations, and the nature of power relations in hegemonic discourse, the sooner they will be able to choose between *following* the rules and *challenging* them in functional ways. Professional writing is not just "restricted" writing, it is responsible action. Professional writing expertise can be a means to regain agency, through viability and beyond.

Writing development is a life-long process, last but not least in professional writing. We all refine our expertise through new challenges, technologies, ideas, and dialogs with others. Our position in the field is dynamic, too. To some extent, we change it when we question the power relations around us, when we engage in fruitful exchanges, and when we try to emancipate ourselves. Of course, our acting is not independent from social conditions and influences. However, admitting conditionality does not necessarily imply negating agency. Although autonomy remains socially restricted, it is a part of viability (Davies, 2006).

Writing through viability refers to having choices on several levels, such as topic and information selection, developing (theoretical, political, ideological) positions, and ways of designing texts according to these positions and the audiences we want to address. We can develop our own positions by replaying and resignifying "the theoretical positions that have constituted [them]" (Butler, 1995a, p. 42), and we can also encourage our students to do so.

To some extent, academic writing is always resignifying, since we consciously, deliberately, and explicitly reflect on the influences that the ideas of others have had on our own. We enter discourses (and the complex, interwoven dialogs in them), learn from others, oppose opinions, borrow arguments, develop them further, and so forth. Writing oscillates between reproduction and creation. We work with existing material, change it, adapt it to new contexts, and develop new positions by resignifying existing ones. The IRC workshops contribute to these dialogs and discussions in many ways. The exchange that they foster influences us, our ideas, our writing. And it empowers us at the same time.

Glossary

Agency: Agency refers to opportunities for acting. In the context of writing, it can refer to developing an individual voice, one's own position, to represent concerns and intentions in a text and to choose between different forms of text design (and organization of the writing process).

Communication situation: Communication is always situated. A communication situation is constituted through several dimensions: framing conditions (such as time, space, closeness, or distance), media, socio-political power relations, contexts, intentions, and communication roles. Communication partners act based on their expectations and previous experience.

Conventions: I address conventions on a product level. Conventions can refer to language use (varieties, correctness, etc.), genres, and other ways of established forms of text design and linguistic matters. Conventions are related to discourse communities, institutions, and other contexts.

Professional writing: Professional writing is an ambiguous term that can refer to writing as part of one's job or to writing expertise—or to both. I address professional writing expertise on a meta-level as targeted toward communicative writing with a high-quality demand.
Viability: According to Butler (1995a, 1997), viability refers to being legitimized in a certain context. Butler does not refer to writing expertise but to social communities in general. Davies (2006) and Knappik (2018) transpose the concept to writing expertise, especially in education. Here, I adapt it for professional writing.

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