Designedly incomplete utterances as prompts for co-narration in home literacy events with young multilingual children

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**A R T I C L E   I N F O**

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**A B S T R A C T**

This video-ethnographic study investigates how designedly incomplete utterances (DIUs) are used during home literacy events in three multilingual families with young children in Sweden to prompt collaborative storybook reading in the children’s heritage language, Russian. The multimodal interaction analyses uncover how DIUs, in concert with other semiotic resources, create a sequential environment to prompt children’s speech production in relation to the text at hand, negotiate language choice and alignment with an ongoing literacy project, and to creatively exploit the DIU structure to initiate storytelling. The findings moreover show that recurrent use of DIUs during the reading of well-known to the child texts with rhythm and rhyme allows for ritualized engagement in co-narration, in all contributing to children’s socialization to oral performance in the heritage language.

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1. Introduction

There is a wealth of research conducted in middle-class families and preschools on adults’ strategies to elicit and scaffold young children’s speech production. Prompting specific verbal routines are common and important in language socialization in various communities (Duranti et al., 2011). They range from questions and interpretations of children’s vocalizations and movements in proto-conversations of baby talk (Solomon, 2011) to modeling appropriate speech and social conduct embedded in ongoing interaction (Burdelski, 2011; Demuth, 1986; Moore, 2011). This study shows how a specific type of prompts – designedly incomplete utterances1 (DIU, Koshik, 2002) – is recurrently used in the course of literacy events (Heath, 1982) by mothers in multilingual families in order to engage their children in collaborative reading activities in the heritage language.

While incomplete utterances have been identified as a resource that parents and teachers frequently use in child-directed speech across cultural contexts in monolingual (e.g., Burdelski 2011, Cekaite & Björk-Willén 2018, Oshiro et al. 2019, Radford & Macion 2010) and bilingual settings (e.g., Abreu Fernandes 2019, Filipi 2015), surprisingly, this device is typically mentioned only cursorily, with very little attention to its variations and implications of use. So far, DIUs have mainly been explored in classroom interaction (e.g., Koshik 2002, Margutti 2010, Netz 2016). Of particular interest to our study, preschool teachers have been shown to use DIUs as a strategy to engage children in and scaffold storytelling (Cekaite & Björk-Willén, 2018; Oshiro et al., 2019).

DIU’s principal design feature is that the utterance is withheld before completion, while cues as to what answer is required from the recipient are provided (Margutti, 2010; Netz, 2016). They can be applied to any type of syntactic unit that compounds the turn: words, phrases, clauses, and sentences; and even at the level of phonological composition of the word as in the case of syllable-to-syllable spelling (Koshik, 2002; Margutti, 2010). Their typical prosodical markers are vowel lengthening, rising intonation and emphasis followed by a pause. The invitation to complete the utterance can be reinforced by use of iconic gestures such as turning the body, gaze, signaling movements with the arm, and opening the mouth wide (Koshik, 2002: 282). Although syntactically incomplete, the utterance “conveys a recognizable social action” and therefore is “pragmatically complete and possible to respond to” (Persson, 2017: 228).

As DIUs are loaded with prosodical, grammatical, and syntactical help to complete the utterance they may serve as a distinct invitation for the child to engage in the caregiver’s project.

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1 In some studies, incomplete utterances have also been called “unfinished turns” (Chevalier & Clift, 2008; Park & Klein, 2020), “recognizably invited completions” (Jones & Thornborrow, 2004: 420), “fill-in-the-blank questions” (Persson, 2017), and “empty slot” (Burdelski, 2011: 283). In pedagogical contexts, this practice is often called designedly incomplete utterances (DIUs) (Koshik, 2002), which is also the term that we use.

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Approaching literacy events as “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (Heath, 1982: 50), we aim to analyze the ways in which DIUs are used as prompts for co-narration in mother-child reading interactions. Furthermore, we inquire how children recognize, respond to, and exploit the DIU structure during literacy events. By doing so, we uncover the community’s “rules for socially interacting and sharing knowledge in literacy events” (Heath, 1982: 50). As our study demonstrates, this device allows for the participants’ ritualized, embodied, and dynamic engagements in co-narration in the heritage language. In this way, it helps sustain the activity and facilitates multilingual children’s socialization to oral performance in the heritage language.

2. Language and literacy socialization practices in multilingual middle-class families

Despite a growing interest in understanding emerging bilingual literacy and acknowledging it as a significant factor of heritage language maintenance, studies of interactions with simultaneous bilingual children during literacy events in the home settings are still scarce (but see Bauer 2000, Kabuto 2010, Meyer Pitton 2013b, Said 2021, Song 2016). Previous research has mainly focused on parental discourse strategies in relation to the children’s literacy skills development, thus leaving out the transactional nature of reading interaction and children’s contributions (Baird et al., 2015). As Kabuto (2010: 153) underscores, learning to be bilingual and biliterate goes beyond learning the linguistic aspects of language. It is, for example, important whether and how linguistically diverse parents support their child’s emergent literacy competences through linguistic experience, encouragement and print environment (see also Bauer 2000). Therefore, we adopt a view of literacy as a situated, interactive and socio-cultural practice (Heath, 1982).

Across cultural settings, caregivers in middle-class families engage in child-centered interactions that can be characterized as “heightened communicative labor” (Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2015a: 90). Language practices such as explanations, questions, negotiations, and prompts are common in everyday talk, including in literacy activities. Such practices are used to jointly produce and scaffold children’s conversational storytelling and to elicit narratives around a text. For example, in Filipi’s (2017) study, the family members supported the young bilingual child’s telling by use of questions, elicitation, clarifications and expansions while simultaneously positioning her as a knowledgeable and competent teller. Evaldsson & Abreu Fernandes (2019) highlight the use of embodied animations, affect displays and exploitations of language form when the mother and her young daughter collaboratively performed telling of emotionally compelling experiences.

In multilingual families, language scaffolding strategies have also been found crucial for creating heritage language and literacy socialization environments (Lanza, 1997; Meyer Pitton, 2013ab; Said & Zhu, 2019). In particular, in a handful of studies of naturally occurring literacy events, parental responses to children’s code-switching have received most attention, as code/language alternation is a central feature of bilingual talk (Filipi, 2015; Musk & Cromdal, 2018). In a nutshell, code-switching occurs when different codes (languages or language varieties) are used in the same stretch of talk (Musk, 2010: 180). It can be seen as a situated activity that allows participants to achieve local conversational goals while performing several functions such as indexing social roles and relationships. In relation to emerging biliteracy, “the connection between code-switching and learning to read means understanding the ways in which multiple languages mediate transactions with text” (Kabuto, 2010: 135). On the one hand, there is evidence that more restricting responses to children’s code-switching promote children’s bilingual and heritage language development (Döpke, 1992; Juan-Garau & Pérez-Vidal, 2001; Lanza, 1997; Mishina-Mori, 2011). On the other hand, child-centered orientations that afford playfulness and engagement are also important to ensure children’s participation in parental heritage language learning projects (Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Juan-Garau & Pérez-Vidal, 2001; Said, 2021; Smith-Christinas, 2018).

Furthermore, studies highlight various factors that influence children’s language use in reading interactions. Among them are the language of the text (e.g., more story-level talk in Spanish and word-focused talk in English in Baird et al. 2015), sequential contrasts in the text (Kabuto, 2010), and traditional heritage patterns of story and rhyme (Gregory et al., 2007). According to Bauer (2000), a focal child at a very early age differentiated between her two languages and used them in varying ways, responding to the structural, phonological, or semantic features of the text. She also found that texts with a highly predictable structure, especially melodic texts, reduced the toddler’s code-switching. In addition, embodied actions accompanying reading (Baird et al., 2015) and the presence of an older sibling (Gregory, 2001) play an important role. In Song’s (2016) study, using both Korean and English allowed for an expansion of children’s linguistic repertoires in both family languages, the development of language negotiation strategies and metalinguistic knowledge, as well as a strengthening of children’s understanding of semantic connections between the two languages and their role in different contexts. Similar to what Kyratzis (2017) found in bilingual peer reading interactions, language choice was a major resource to frame children’s readings when language alternations signal a change in alignment and a move to another communicative project (Kabuto, 2010).

The present study extends previous research on parental discourse strategies for scaffolding children’s speech production and facilitating heritage language maintenance, by focusing on how DIUs are used as prompts for co-narration and a resource for negotiating language choice during the course of literacy activities.

3. Designedly incomplete utterances in learner- and child-directed speech

To our knowledge, there are no studies focusing specifically on the use of DIUs as prompts in literacy events with young children, even though a handful of studies highlight it as an important language and literacy socialization strategy in child-directed speech at home and in preschool in monolingual and bilingual settings (Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Burdelski, 2011; Cekaite & Björk-Willén, 2018; Demuth, 1986; Filipi, 2015; Oshiro et al., 2019).

So far, most studies focus on how DIUs are used in classroom talk. Marked by prosodic and grammatical means, DIUs serve as a teacher’s invitation to the students to complete the utterance and provide the expected response. They can be viewed as “cued elicitions”, in which the teacher provides verbal and non-verbal clues to the requested information (Edwards & Mercer, 2012: 14). In particular, DIUs can be used as a resource to do hinting (Balaman, 2019; Koshik, 2002; Radford, 2010) or prompting (Koshik, 2002; Radford, 2010).

Oftentimes, DIUs are followed by the teacher’s evaluation, thus becoming part of an instructional sequence in the Initiation-Response-Evaluation/Feedback (IRE/IFR)-format. Although serving as a “questioning device” (Margutti, 2010: 316), DIUs differ from interrogatives. While they both project the content and format of the answer, DIUs are doing questioning in a more indirect and ambiguous way. Thus, they weaken the constraint on the recipient and provide the turn’s reversibility in instances of so-called “failed DIUs” (i.e., when the student does not complete the teacher’s utterance, the teacher can do it him/herself) (Margutti, 2010: 331–332).
As Margutti (2010: 318) emphasizes, DIUs are “very flexible in terms of pedagogical functions” as they make a variety of actions relevant, such as to elicit an extension of a student’s prior talk, continue the ongoing activity (see also Koshib 2002), elicit repetitions, highlight important concepts, promote participation, demonstrate evidence that learning has occurred, and many others. However, the pedagogical benefits of using DIUs can be quite contradictory. On the one hand, DIUs may support the child/learner in providing a requested response (Balaman, 2019; Margutti, 2010; Waring, 2015) as teachers’ clues together with prompts and questions scaffold learning and require the students to actively participate “in the creation of the shared knowledge” (Edwards & Mercer, 2012: 143). In contrast, Netz (2016: 65) warns about the “coercive nature” and pressure of DIUs which can cause the students to be reluctant to participate in the activity. Another issue is that not all DIUs are readily recognizable and loaded with adequate information for the students to be able to provide the missing item. In other words, they have various degrees of transparency. For instance, DIUs that elicit completion of an idiom or reveal the missing syllable of a word are easy to calculate while conceptual items may not be obvious. Such non-transparent DIUs often fail to be completed and fail to facilitate students’ participation (Netz, 2016: 71). In a way, elicitation devices such as DIUs force the learners into a guessing game (Edwards & Mercer, 2012). This, according to Netz (2016), may result in procedural and superficial student engagement and inhibits the development of dialog.

In the context of literacy events in preschools, DIUs have been shown to be used by teachers to pursue a topic (Radford & Mahon, 2010), to scaffold retelling (Oshiro et al., 2019), to calibrate the rhythm and pace of a telling, to build up dramatic experience and suspense, and to invite children to co-participate and co-narrate (Cekайте & Björk-Willén, 2018). In bilingual family interactions, with the help of DIUs, mothers can pursue the lexical item in the preferred language of interaction (Filipi, 2015) and in the correct grammatical form (Abreu Fernandes, 2019), thus positioning the child as a competent speaker of the heritage language.

The present study adds to research on literacy socialization more broadly and in bilingual settings in particular, by examining the role of DIUs for organizing co-narration and socializing young bilingual children to oral performance in the context of Russian-speaking mother-led literacy events. The study extends research on DIUs as caregivers’ prompts to engage young children in storytelling and scaffold heritage language use, and moreover demonstrates children’s response to and creative use of DIUs in the context of ritualized and rhythmical storytelling and reading performances.

4. Method

4.1. Data, participants, and literacy environment

The present study is part of a larger study of heritage language socialization practices in the home. It draws on video-recordings of naturally occurring interaction and ethnographic observations conducted by the first author in three multilingual families with young children in Sweden. The participant selection reflects a variation of different middle-class, dual-earner (Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2013) family constellations (such as families with one child, with siblings or twins) and socio-linguistic environments. The participating mothers come from different countries of the former Soviet Union, but have Russian as a mother tongue. They all speak at least three foreign languages, including fluent English and Swedish. Due to their educational backgrounds in linguistics and/or education, the mothers have a distinct interest in children’s language development issues and invest much time and resources to support their children in becoming multilingual speakers. At the time of data collection, all children attended a Swedish preschool during the week and usually participated in Russian-speaking educational activities on the weekends. The first author video-recorded interactions in Family Bergman2 (Excerpt 3) and Family Garcia (Excerpts 1 & 5), while Family Andersson self-recorded their reading activities and could control the degree of intimacy they chose to share in the study.

Family Andersson lived in a small town with a rather homogeneous population, with very little contact with Russian and other languages than Swedish. Amanda (2.6) used Swedish in family talk and preschool but was encouraged to speak Russian with her mother.

Family Bergman lived in a predominantly Swedish suburb of a large city. Twins Lisa and Alex (3) mainly spoke Swedish to each other, with occasional switches to Russian. While Lisa usually tried to speak Russian to her mother, Alex preferred using Swedish. However, at the age of four Alex became very interested in learning how to read and write in Russian.

Family Garcia lived in a multicultural urban area. Anton (4.10) spoke Russian, Spanish and Swedish in various degrees. The parents communicated with each other in Spanish, and used their respective mother tongue to talk to the children. In the kindergarten and in school that Anton and his older sister Marina (not present in the analyzed excerpts) attended, many children had another mother tongue or home language than Swedish.

In all families, the parents created print-rich and book-filled environments. While the children did initiate literacy events and actively engaged with reading materials on their own or with their father in his respective native language, the majority of the observed reading episodes were in Russian with the mothers.

The selected data comprise 4 h 46 min of recorded literacy events, a bit more than one hour in each family. It captures children’s encounters with various types of texts, such as story books, picture books, activity books, sets for story dramatization, magazines, audiobooks, and posters. While texts of different genres were read to the children, several classical texts of Russian/Soviet literature were popular across the families. The mothers knew these books very well since the time they grew up in their home countries. Many of the texts are poems or folk tales where rhyme and rhythm are significant text features. As we will demonstrate, these texts and the ways of reading are also well-known to the children.

4.2. Analytical considerations and procedures

The study employs a language socialization approach (Duranti et al., 2011; Ochs, 1986) and focuses on identifying and analyzing specific patterns of language use in situated literacy events (Heath, 1982). We repeatedly viewed the recordings, noting language practices and language features that were made relevant by the participants. We observed that DIUs were recurrently used during storybook reading episodes in all three families. Therefore, we chose to explore the design and functions of this language practice and its possible effects on heritage language and literacy socialization. In the analyses, we showcase five excerpts from storybook reading interactions from all three families. In all the excerpts, DIUs were employed by the mothers as prompts for co-narration in the heritage language. While the extracts were chosen to demonstrate how the device was used in various types of literacy events and with a variation of DIU transparency (cf. Netz, 2016), a common trait is that the device worked to promote children’s engagement in the activity and sustain a monolingual context dealing with code-switching (cf. Lanza, 1997).

2 For ethical reasons, all names of the participants were changed.
The excerpts have been transcribed by combining conventions developed by Jefferson (2004) and Mondada (2018, see Appendix). Line drawings made from video frames are included to visually represent analytically highlighted embodied actions. Talk in Russian (original font) is presented in a Roman transliteration system for the Cyrillic alphabet by the Library of Congress, without diacritics (see Bolden, 2004). Talk in Swedish is in bold, and all translations into English are in italics. The abbreviation DIM in the translation from Russian into English is a gloss for the Russian diminutive form.

Building on multimodal interaction analysis (Goodwin, 2000), we focus on the interactive organization of activities as “a coherent route of collaborative action” that the participants recognize, bring to a peak of mutual involvement and then withdraw from (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992: 79–81). These activities are situated within “historically structured meaningful spaces” (Goodwin & Cekaite, 2018: 3). The notion of embodied participation frameworks is central in interactional approaches to literacy socialization. Participants deploy various verbal and non-verbal resources such as talk, body, spatial formations, and objects to establish and align participation frameworks, share affective stances (Cekaite & Björk-Willén, 2018), and to display themselves as knowledgeable of how to do reading (Kyratzis, 2017). Reading is seen as a complex, jointly accomplished, communicative project that may consist of several subprojects or competing projects (Kyratzis, 2017; Moore, 2017). The approach ensures that DIUs are not analyzed as isolated exchanges (Marguttii, 2010: 318) but in a context of larger sequences of culturally-sensitive talk in concert with other resources. In addition, although our focus is on the oral performance of literate texts, we draw upon work on narratives in everyday contexts in order to highlight storytelling as collaborative production, i.e., co-narration (Ochs & Gapps, 2001; see also Burdelski & Evaldsson, 2019). Consequently, the analysis pays close attention to the contributions from all participants, and to how the tellings emerge sequentially in interaction.

5. Engaging children in oral performance of co-narration with help of DIUs

In the following, we will explore mother-child interaction during literacy events focusing on the multifaceted use of DIUs to engage children in co-narration in the heritage language. The first section features DIUs as part of home language lessons and literacy practices with a focus on naming, and how they are used to prompt children’s talk in Russian and encourage co-narration (Excerpts 1–3). The second section explores DIUs as part of embodied routines of co-narration is further explored in bedtime storytelling, also involving choral production and collaborative completions (Excerpts 4a and 4b). In the final section, we highlight the child’s creative use of DIUs in poetic oral performance (Excerpt 5).

5.1. DIUs as part of home language lessons and literacy practices

In resonance with previous research on caregiver-child interactions across cultures (e.g., Demuth 1986, Duranti et al. 2011), we found that DIUs are frequently deployed by the mothers in all three families to prompt naming. Such elicitations are an integral part of so-called home language lessons in bilingual families (Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2015; Meyer Pitton, 2013b). In this way, the children are expected to demonstrate their knowledge and to practice certain lexical items in the preferred language of interaction, in this case Russian. As we will show, in the literacy events examined in Excerpts 1–3, DIUs are used to perform a similar function but also to prompt co-narration as they are embedded in the reading activity.

In our first example, we meet Anton (4.10) and his mother (the Garcia family). The focus is on a frequent literacy practice in this family, when the mother initiates the reciting of a canonical, to the child well-known text with a highly predictable structure. The child is invited to participate by “filling in the blanks” (Persson, 2017) at specific places in the text, exploiting its rhythm and parallel structures. In Excerpt 1, Mother tells by heart a popular Russian folktale, The Giant Turnip, while Anton is playing with toy fruits. Mother and Anton are seated by the kitchen table, facing each other. The mother is holding a booklet with pictures depicting the story in front of Anton, whereas the boy has a box of wooden fruits in front of him (fig.1.1). In the middle of the telling, the boy launches a competing activity of showing and naming one of the fruits, which becomes interwoven with the literacy event (see Excerpt 1).

The Giant Turnip’s parallel structures with the name of every character at the end of the utterance (“The grandma called the grandma, the grandma called the granddaughter, etc.”) are exploited to launch a highly recognizable DIU (Netz, 2016) and invite the child to participate in the activity (lines 1, 10, 12, 17). The DIU activity is modelled in line 1, as Mother produces the first part of the utterance posadil ded “grandpa planted” followed by a micro-pause and then the sought for lexical item re:pu: “turnip”. That the child is familiar with the routine is displayed in how he, in overlap with Mother’s turn, produces the correct item (line 3) thus accomplishing a collaborative completion (Lerner, 2004).

The mother continues reciting the story using the pictures as support. In line 8, however, in overlap with Mother’s utterance, Anton initiate a competing activity (Kyratzis, 2017) of showing and naming objects. He places the fruit he is playing with in front of the mother (fig.1.1) and produces a sound “ee”, claiming her attention. When Mother’s utterance ends syntactically, rhythmically and pragmatically, he names the toy apple (iabloko “apple”). Mother does not respond to this initiative and instead continues the literacy activity by producing a DIU: Pozd†val deg “the grandpa called” that requests the naming of a character (grandmother) as a next relevant move. Exploiting this turn-transition point, Anton instead playfully suggests iabloko “apple” as he gets up and walks toward Mother. Demonstrating that the answer was not the expected one, she repeats the DIU in line 12 upon which Anton repeats his previous answer. Anton now stands beside his mother and for the first time she addresses his alternative project. Gazing at the boy and smiling, she completes her DIU with Anton’s lexical item (“The grandpa called an apple”, line 14). In this way, Mother pauses the recital of the story to acknowledge the child’s naming activity. The smiling and laughter add an affective layer to the utterance that treats the boy’s suggestion as playful rather than serious. She also quickly reorients to the literacy activity by turning her gaze to the pictures (line 16) and repeating the DIU (line 17). As she reproduces the DIU, she holds the booklet in front of the boy and with a pointing gesture attempts to direct his attention to the image of the grandmother. Anton, who has moved back to his chair (fig.1.2) looks to where his mother is pointing and finally agrees to complete the repeated DIU by producing the lexical item Babku “grandma” (line 18), which is confirmed as correct by Mother in line 19. Thus, they embark on a joint literacy project. In the remaining part of this episode, Anton successfully completes most of the DIUs designed in a similar way and stays engaged in the storytelling.

As rhythm enables the listener to anticipate what comes next, helps organize joint actions as well as provides an aesthetic experience of oral discourse (Erickson, 2013: 1, 8), parental routinized DIUs exploit rhythm as a resource but also allow for creative exploitation of DIUs (Poveda, 2003). As demonstrated, Anton uses his knowledge of the ritualized telling of the story to engage in a playful and challenging alternative activity. The child’s completion
Excerpt 1. DIUs to pursue naming and to manage competing projects

(O0:11–00:36)

Mother; Anton (4:10).
Excerpt 2. DIUs to progress collaborative storytelling and manage multiactivity (00:39–01:02).

Mother: Amanda (2.6).
Mother, Lisa and Alex (3).

(“apple”) does fill in the blank correctly syntactically and grammatically (lines 11 and 13) but is not accepted as it is outside the literacy activity-in-progress. As we have shown, by briefly merging the two communicative projects, the mother finds a way of engaging the boy in the literacy activity – a collaborative reciting of the Russian folktale.

The skillful coordination of sub-projects or side projects during reading activities is very common in our family data, and also found in interaction in classrooms (Kyratzis, 2017; Moore, 2017; Sterponi, 2007). As shown above, DIUs that exploit rhythm, repetitions, and predictable structures of the text and are accompanied by the mother’s “reading voice” (Kyratzis, 2017), help keep the literacy and language learning activity on track.

In a similar vein, DIUs in the next excerpt facilitate the child’s engagement in the co-narration of a well-known text. Furthermore, this home language lesson involves training correct grammatical forms of the elicited nouns and dealing with the child’s occasional code-switching to Swedish. DIUs help not only sustain the literacy activity but maintain the mother’s preferred language of interaction, Russian.

Amanda and her mother (the Andersson family) are engaged in a literacy activity around the same text that Anton and his mother read in Excerpt 1, *The Giant Turnip*. As we join the interaction, Mother is sitting on the floor with Amanda on her lap, and with the storybook and a box of wooden pieces that represent the story’s characters placed next to them. Again, the mother is reciting the story by heart, but in this case, rather than looking at pictures, the participants orient toward the wooden pieces. This creates another level of the activity, opening for animation and dramatization, and also influences the use of DIUs (see Excerpt 2).

As this is the middle of the literacy event, Mother is in the midst of telling the story and starts engaging the child in the activity with the help of DIUs. In line 1, when she launches a DIU (*pozvala vnuchka “the granddaughter called”*) that grammatically and prosodically invites the child to complete the utterance with the name of the next character in the story, she simultaneously reaches for the wooden dog. Amanda also reaches out in direction of the figure and switching to Swedish produces the attention-seeking Titta, *titta mamma “Look, look Mommy”*, that here seems to be claiming access to the wooden piece, as she leans long over mother’s leg (line 2, fig.2.1). Amanda is eager to participate in the activity of placing the next character in the line and Mother gives her the dog. Exclaiming a 64 “there”, Amanda repositions her body, preparing to place the figure with the others in the line on the floor in front of them. Code-switching signals a change in alignment and frame of the communicative project (Kabuto, 2010; Kyratzis, 2017).

When Amanda sits upright, Mother code-switches to Russian, returning to storytelling. She repeats the DIU *pozvala vnuchka* “the granddaughter called” as Amanda shifts her body weight, leaning forward toward the line of wood characters (fig.2.2). A verbal silence follows, until Amanda is positioned to be able to successfully begin placing the figure on the floor. As she transfers the figure from her left to her right hand in line 8, Mother produces the correct completion of the DIU: *Zhuchku*. In this way, the DIU becomes reversible, but not because the child does not know the answer (Margutt, 2010). Amanda is still engaged in moving her body to position the figure in line. As she places the dog in the line of characters (fig.2.3), she also produces the correct answer verbally Zhuchku. All her actions between lines 2 and 9 can thus be interpreted as oriented to completing mother’s DIU in line 1. In such a way, Mother and daughter are engaging in a collaborative telling of the story, where Amanda is primarily oriented toward the wooden characters, whereas the mother upholds the oral

Excerpt 3. Various degrees of DIUs transparency to sustain the activity and manage co-de-switching in a multiparty participation framework (24:33 – 25:06) Mother, Lisa and Alex (3).
Excerpt 4a. Embodiment and enactments as resources for DIUs and co-narration (17.34–18.59).
Mother: Amanda (2.6).
Excerpt 4b. Assessment of the child’s language use in DIUs
(18.11–18.37)
Mother: Amanda (2.6).
version of the telling carefully monitoring Amanda’s actions and pacing the telling to the movement of the piece.

In line 10, Mother proceeds to a next step in the story and launches another DIU Zhuchka za: “Zhuchka (pulls)”. At this moment in time, Amanda causes the wooden pieces to fall over and becomes fully engaged in repositioning the characters. The project of completing the DIU is temporarily abandoned, but Mother continues reciting the story (lines 12–13). That Amanda is listening to the telling, is demonstrated in how she, in line 14, produces the correct completion of babka za: “the grandma (pulls)” ($\uparrow$ Dedku: “Grandpa”). In line 15, the mother confirms the reply and launches the next DIU to progress collaborative storytelling. Now Amanda has turned her attention toward the box with more wooden pieces and does not respond until after a 1.1 s silence. This time, her completion is not accurate as she names the wrong character ($\uparrow$ babku: “the grandma”). In line 18, Mother provides a corrected completion of the DIU ($\uparrow$ Re::pju: “The turnip”). It is produced with a smiley voice that treats the wrong answer as unexpected and entertaining as the child followed the recitative pattern of the activity but did not pay enough attention to the sequentiality of the story.

In sum, while DIUs in Excerpt 2 occur at the end of the utterance exploiting the rhythm, repetitions and parallel structures of the text (similar to Excerpt 1), the actual launch, adaptations, and mother’s own completions of DIUs happen as attuned responses.
to the child’s actions. The mother thoroughly monitors not only Amanda’s verbal contributions but also her embodied actions. Ritualized DIUs support the mother’s pedagogical agenda for this home language and literacy lesson, which is to pursue co-narration of the story in Russian (Ewaldsson & Abreu Fernandes, 2019).

In the next excerpt, we meet the Bergman family. Sitting on the couch with her arms around the three-year-old twins Lisa and Alex (fig.3.1), the mother and children are reading an activity book with short rhymes about fruits with corresponding stickers. During the whole literacy event, the participants orient towards repeated sequences of actions: the mother reads short poems and launches DIUs—the children or the mother complete the DIU with the rhyming word—they choose the right sticker—and place it on the right spot in the activity book. In addition, the participants also have to monitor and manage turn-taking and occasional language alternations from Russian to Swedish. Similar to the examples above, DIUs are used to complete the rhyme/rhythm and prompt naming. Yet, in this case, as the texts are not known to the children, the transparency of the DIUs is weaker (see Excerpt 3).

In line 1, Lisa is concerned about her turn to attach the sticker. The mother does not acknowledge this concern, and instead announces the next berry in focus using a “teaching voice” with a slowed tempo, a bit louder and a stretch in the target word smoro: dina “current”. In response, Lisa repeats that it is now her turn (line 3). The mother addresses this by explaining how the activity will proceed, i.e., that they will read first (line 4) and then it is Lisa’s turn to glue the sticker (line 5). Using a diminutive form for Lisa’s name, Mother emotionally aligns with and signals to the girl that her request will be managed. In line 6, the mother starts reading the poem, but is interrupted by Alex requesting his turn with an “I”. In line 8, Mother orients to this request establishing that it is his turn after Lisa (“And then you”) as Alex momentarily gazes at her. In line 9, the mother embarks on the literacy project a third time.

When the mother is able to read the poem she launches a DIU, halting, using prosodic marking inviting a completion of the poem and looking at Lisa (line 10, fig.3.1), thus selecting her as next speaker. Unlike the previous cases in this literacy event, the pursuit word does not concern naming of the berries and it turns out to be difficult for the children to fill in the blank correctly despite the fact that the pursued word varen’e “jam” rhymes with undivilen’e “delight, surprise, wonder”. With no response forthcoming from Lisa and Alex turning the page of the book (line 12), the mother provides more support and hints at the correct answer using the stretched first syllable of the word, with her mouth wide open (fig.3.2). At this time, Alex switches from Russian to Swedish and initiates a side-project inquiring about an object in the book (Vu à de “What’s that”, line 15). Rather than responding to his question, the mother completes her own DIU providing the correct noun and hence drawing attention back to the ongoing poem-reading project in Russian. Simultaneously, with the help of the mother, Lisa picks a sticker and holds it in her hand.

In line 18, Mother orients to Alex and addresses turn-taking. She does it with a restart of Lisa’s name, reinforcing that it is first Lisa’s turn and then Alex. Interestingly, she addresses Alex as “you” and speaks about Lisa in the third person (similar to the previous instances in lines 5, 8). From ethnographic observations, we know that it was usually more difficult for the mother to encourage Alex to stay engaged in mother-initiated teaching-oriented activities and speak Russian than Lisa. The diminutive form of Lisa’s name, conveying attention and affection, indirectly signals to Lisa that she is also an addressee and keeps her onboard.

In overlap, Alex repeats his question in Swedish, as he points in the book (line 21). Picking up on Alex’s project, Mother leans her chin towards the boy, smiles and translates his question into Russian, making relevant the grammatical category of animate nouns (What is it? -> Who is it?). In line 21, Alex quietly repeats his own utterance, consistently code-switching to Swedish. The mother pursues the correct answer in Russian (cf. Filipi, 2015). First, she repeats her previous question, followed by a more transparent DIU that reveals the first syllable of the word pchela “bee”. In the following turns, Alex completes the DIU and Mother acknowledges his correct answer with a repetition. In this way, Alex’s engagement in the literacy event in Russian is upheld. It is only after the inserted sequence of naming the picture, that the mother turns the page back for Lisa to glue her sticker.

As demonstrated, the pedagogical agenda of this literacy event is not only to keep the children engaged in the activity in terms of listening and placing stickers. It is also to prompt speech production in Russian relevant to the text at hand. DIUs thus become a local pedagogical tool and a “last resort” (Netz, 2016) that can help navigate through a child’s resistance (lines 16–22). It is also a device that helps the mother handle undesired code-switching, by exploiting the coercive potential of DIUs. On the other hand, if the transparency of DIUs is low the children can easily get distracted by side projects.

In sum, in our analyses of Excerpts 1–3 we highlighted that DIUs are embedded in the literacy activity in ways that encompass not only prompting naming and speech production in Russian in relation to the text at hand but are also used to sustain collaborative storytelling in the heritage language, manage competing activities and multiactivity as well as to deal with challenges of multiparty interactions, attention distribution and code-switching.

5.2. DIUs as part of embodied routines in storytelling

In the previous section, we showed how DIUs become the driving force for co-narration of rhythmical texts in the context of home language lessons and literacy practices in Russian. We also discussed their reversibility, transparency, and embeddedness in the literacy event and various degrees of transparency. In this section, we will explore the design and functions of DIUs during a bedtime story reading and highlight the role of embodied routines and clues for co-narration.

Amanda and her mother are cuddling in the parents’ bed. This is the second book that they are reading that evening. The book is written in Swedish but the mother tells the story in Russian with the child as co-narrator (see Excerpt 4a).

To begin with, the mother tells a line from the story. In lines 2, 3 and 4 she produces onomatopoeic sounds of closing the door and clicking the latch accompanied by gestures that produce enchantment (Cekaitė & Bjöörk-Willén, 2018, fig.4a.1). After a brief silence (line 5), Mother glances at Amanda monitoring the child’s engagement (fig.4a.2). Her mouth is slightly opened, as if to signal a prompt for speaking (cf. Kosikh, 2002: 282). The child possibly treats the mother’s actions as an invitation to continue the telling and points in the book and contributes the lexical kluch’ “key”. This move is enthusiastically acknowledged by Mother who smiles, repeats Amanda’s contribution in a slightly slowed tempo, puts it in a diminutive form creating intimacy and affection (kli-uchikom “with the key.DIM”), and adds a tag confirmation question da “yes”.

To continue the story, Mother enacts lighting the candle with another onomatopoeic sound “PSCH:::” and a dramatic hand gesture enacting the lighting of a match (line 9). Next, she verbally describes this action of the protagonist in the past tense, while Amanda points in the book and completes the word spichku “match” in chordal with the mother’s production of the same item. This completion points to the fact that the child not only knows the story well but also recognizes the structure of the activity and responds to prompts for co-narration.
In line 13, Mother continues the telling using the rhetorical figure of parallelism with the utterance in line 11 (“lit a match”, “lit a candle”). She first produces 1 zazheg s-: “And lit a c-” as she, during the prolonged s-sound, glance up at Amanda (Fig. 4a.3) and repeats the same utterance, this time adding the full noun svechku “candle”. This move is a restart but resembles a DIU in the context of this activity. Halting and parallelism create a sequential environment for the child to step into the telling (Evaldsson & Abreu Fernandes, 2019). In line 14, she again contributes to the narration through a choral production with Mother’s turn of a significant word in the story. Furthermore, Amanda once again positions herself as a co-narrator as she, in a similar way as before, joins in with mother’s utterance in line 16. Such collaborative completions (Lerner, 2004) or choral productions in the end of the utterances, become an important drive for co-narration. While technically the turns in lines 4, 11, 13, and 15 are not incomplete utterances, they perform like “ghost DIUs” as they carry a ritualized inertia of incompleteness that the child treats as prompts for co-narration.

In contrast, the next excerpt features a sequence of two highly transparent DIUs that, on the one hand, invite the child’s co-narration and, on the other, halt the progression of the telling as the mother takes time to assess and correct the linguistic format used by Amanda in Russian. Both DIUs request a noun that evokes either the story’s character or a significant detail in the course of events (see Excerpt 4b).

As Mother continues the telling, in the middle of the utterance (line 26) she initiates a pointing gesture that accompanies the DIU and visually indicates the correct completion. The DIU is marked grammatically (halts after the preposition requesting the target noun in the prepositional case), prosodically, and by the pointing gesture in the book (fig.4b.1). When halting, she keeps her mouth wide open, further prompting a contribution from the child (cf. Koshik, 2002: 282). In response, Amanda completes this highly transparent DIU using the correct lexical unit mhashina “car” but in the wrong form (nominaive case). The mother confirms Amanda’s response but corrects it into the prepositional case (line 28).

In line 29, the mother continues the story describing the next action and pauses for 1.1 s. Following the established inertia of collaborative and ritualized narration, this pause could have been an invitation for Amanda to contribute with the next move. The child does not come in neither verbally nor non-verbally, and Mother adds a tag question da “yes”, attempting to secure that Amanda is onboard. She renders the story’s events with dramatizing gestures (lines 33–34, fig.4b.2a-b) in a way that amplifies enchantment (Cekaite & Björk-Willén, 2018) and launches a DIU with the help of another pointing gesture in the book (fig.4b.2c), once again halting after the preposition to request the noun. Amanda completes the DIU with the noun lisa “fox” but again makes the same grammatical mistake (nominaive case). This time Mother does not explicitly correct her by placing the noun in the required genitive case. Instead, in line 38 she acknowledges the child’s contribution both verbally da “yes” and with a smile. This is followed by a reverse composition of the sentence (“The duck was running from the fox” -> “The fox was chasing the duck”), thus elaborating the form that the girl used. In this way, while language training is in focus of Mother’s attention, priority is sometimes given to the child’s engagement as co-narrator.

As demonstrated, co-narration can be prompted in various ways that signal an invitation for the child to complete and develop the mother’s moves, such as DIUs, prosodic markers, pointing gestures in the book, and orientation to the chronological rendering of the events. In this way, DIUs in concert with other resources that evoke incompleteness, punctuate the storytelling and provide a recognizable scaffolding for co-narration in Russian.

5.3. Child-initiated exploitation of the DIU design in poetic oral performance

In the previous sections, we discussed not only how the mothers use DIUs to prompt naming and co-narration, but also how the children recognize and respond to these devices during the course of literacy events. Excerpt 5 highlights how the child launches a recitation of a well-known poetic text and designs his own DIUs as invitations for his mother to collaboratively continue the activity. We return to Garcia family (see Excerpt 5).

Concluding the story about The Giant Turnip (see Excerpt 1), Mother points to the picture of the turnip in the booklet (line 1), summarizing that it was pulled up and then closes the booklet (line 2). The pause becomes a transition place to a next literacy activity, this time launched by Anton. Possibly inspired by the rhythmical collaborative storytelling, he starts reciting the poem by Kornei Chukovsky about the kind-hearted children’s doctor Aibolit (doctor Ouch), a classic of the Soviet children’s literature.

In line 3, with a distinct reading voice (Kyratzis, 2017), Anton recites the first line of the poem and leaves it syntactically incomplete (“A kind doctor Aibolit …”). The rhythm creates a trajectory to continue the recitation and complete the sentence (“He is sitting under the tree”). To some extent, the boy’s utterance can be qualified as a DIU. While the mother does treat Anton’s opening line as an invitation to embark on the recitation project, she does not complete the sentence but instead repeats Anton’s DIU (line 4). Reversing the speakers’ hierarchy, she invites Anton to complete the sentence. By this move, she approves his choice of the next literacy activity but does not orient to this project as led by the child. After a brief pause, the boy quietly and not very clearly continues the sentence but leaves out the last word (“sid“sitting“) (line 7). In this way, his utterance becomes yet another DIU. Rather than completing Anton’s DIU, the mother recites the whole sentence (line 8), thus introducing a new manner of recitation that resembles an embedded correction with format tying (Goodwin, 2007). Rhythmically and syntactically the utterance is now complete, but the trajectory to continue the literacy activity has become ambivalent.

During a 3 s silence, Anton, who briefly stopped playing with his toy fruits during lines 4–7, returned to “cutting” the fruits. In line 12, the mother picks up the recitation with a distinct reciting voice. She halts in the middle of the utterance and pauses for 3 s, leaving room for Anton to complete the DIU (“Come to him to get a treatment…”). As Anton does not respond, she continues the poem in lines 14–15 with brief pauses inside and between the utterances that punctuate the telling and indicate the possible places for co-narration. However, Anton does not join her in this activity. After a 1.1 silence (line 16), the mother recites the next line of the story and then pauses again. Anton keeps playing with his toy fruits, and at this stage displays reluctance to participate in Mother’s literacy project. In line 18, the mother pursues the telling, this time with a somewhat increased volume and a slowed tempo, halting before the name of the character at the end of the utterance. This DIU is highly transparent, and Anton completes it with lisa “fox”, thus participating in the literacy project again. The mother acknowledges his completion by repeating the word “fox”, which resembles the classroom-like IRE sequence where the knowing participant assesses the answer in a third turn. However, while the DIU is complete, the line from the poem is not. At this point, Anton enthusiastically picks up the recitation, loudly produces the first three words of the next utterance, and stops, thus, creating yet another incomplete utterance (line 23). In the next turn, Mother restarts the utterance with format tying ( OI MENA: MENIA: “Ouch me” -> OI menia uka:la as: “Ouch a wasp bit me”, lines 23–24) and completes the line. By this move, another type of pattern is potentially being reinforced, where the sentences (stanzas) should be produced in full.
The analysis of Excerpt 5, shows that structures and rhythms of poetry enable the child to exploit DIUs as a resource for co-narration. The way in which Anton skillfully launches and completes the DIUs demonstrates that he knows this text by heart and masters the activity-in-progress. In this way, home literacy lessons not only feature school-like demonstration of knowledge, training of language competencies and recitation skills, but may also position the child as the activity’s initiator and co-narrator who is engaged in recitation. The poetic power of a well-known text makes a high reversibility of turns and narrators possible. Yet, the mother does not engage in Anton’s literacy project by completing his incomplete utterances but instead uses format tying and repetition to recite the whole utterance (lines 5, 8, 22). While this move acknowledges the child’s contribution, the mother models recitation of the whole stanza from the poem. Even if a ritualized use of DIUs to engage participants as co-narrators can help progress the literacy event, the analysis shows that modeling participation in oral performance by use of DIUs, may result in interrupted recitation of the story and literary text.

5. Concluding discussion

In this study, we have explored the situated use of DIUs in naturally occurring home literacy events involving young bilingual children. In line with previous research on DIUs in classrooms (Balaman, 2019; Edwards & Mercer, 2012; Margutti, 2010; Waring, 2015) and preschools (Cekaite & Bjork-Willén, 2018; Oshiro et al., 2019; Radford & Mahon, 2010), our analyses show that DIUs help the caregivers engage the children in the literacy activity. In particular, this device was found to be effective in prompting naming and scaffolding co-narration in the heritage language. The multimodal interaction analyses highlight how DIUs are embedded in an ongoing literacy activity in relation to: (i) text features (rhythm, rhyme, parallel structures); (ii) materiality (pictures, stickers, wooden characters); (iii) embodied participation frameworks (gestures, spatial arrangements, managing turn-taking: coordination of multiple projects); (iv) hierarchy of speakers and its reversibility; (v) other language practices such as corrections, repetitions, questions, IRES, and code-switching. In other words, prompting for co-narration with help of DIUs encompasses many other dimensions of heritage language use besides lexical. Even in the case of naming procedures, as in Excerpts 1–3, the naming of various objects becomes not so much a matter of home language lessons testing lexical knowledge and speech production (cf. Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Meyer Pitton, 2013b), but a powerful tool for promoting children’s active participation in collaborative oral performance of literate texts in the heritage language. Embedded in the story reading interactions, DIUs make relevant various linguistic features such as syntax (completing utterances in all excerpts; parallelism in Excerpt 4), grammar (animate/non-animate categories of nouns in Excerpt 3; cases of nouns in Excerpt 4), prosody (Excerpt 4), rhythm (Excerpts 1, 3 and 5), and the text’s esthetic qualities.

Our findings also suggest that DIUs as prompts for co-narration are important for heritage language and literacy socialization as they (i) help manage competing projects and multiactivity; (ii) create a routinized and therefore recognizable format of the activity that the children creatively appropriate; (iii) promote oral performance in relation to the text at hand; and (iv) are used by the mothers to sustain a preferred-by-the mother language of interaction.

Similar to Netz’s (2016) observations in classrooms, we found that some DIUs were more challenging than others because of their lack of transparency (i.e., in Excerpt 3 where the rhyme was not an obvious enough hint for the children to complete the DIU). In this way, a DIU that is too challenging fails, which also inhibits the child’s active participation in the activity. However, we found that DIUs were consistently used in the first place to ensure the children’s engagement in the literacy activity in the heritage language facing a number of potential competitive projects and distractions. Across the analyzed episodes, the design and functions of DIUs were responsive to the demands of the activity format and the children’s own interests as displayed in interaction.

In Excerpt 2, Amanda provided the wrong completion of a DIU as her focus of attention did not only go to collaborative storytelling but to manipulating the wooden pieces. Similarly, in Excerpt 3, Alex and Lisa were focused on gluing the stickers rather than on the verbal/literacy side of the project, and the mother’s recitation and turn-taking regulation slowed down the process. In Excerpt 1, Anton was playing with his toy fruits when the mother launched the literacy project. As managing the multiple layers and participants’ agendas during the literacy activity poses a challenge in itself, DIUs become a powerful means of dealing with the complexity of the literacy activity – a situation that is typical for parent-child interaction in Western middle-class families. The analyses specifically show how the mothers make use of DIUs to launch and uphold the literacy project in Russian as a competitor to other things that the children are interested in.

Previous research on literacy events in bilingual families has mainly attended to code-switching during caregiver-child reading interactions, with a concern about factors that influence language choice such as the text’s structural, phonological, or semantic features (Bauer, 2000; Gregory et al., 2007), or change in alignment (Kabuto, 2010; Kyratzis, 2017). We found that while the language of the text influences language choice of the literacy event in most cases, enchanted and embodied co-narration is another way to establish the preferred (by the mother) language of interaction as the language of literacy events (Excerpt 4). Our results also demonstrate that DIUs become a resource to negotiate language choice (Excerpts 2, 3) and to sustain a literacy event in the heritage language without code-switching (Excerpts 1, 4, 5). While DIUs are common in literacy events in monolingual settings (both in families and preschools), our analyses show how they function as an important resource to prioritize the heritage language by soliciting participation and responses in that language. The analyzed literacy events are initiated by the mothers as heritage-language events where instances of language alternations are treated as outside the proposed framework. In this way, our analyses demonstrate how DIUs work efficiently to sustain a monolingual context of interaction (Lanza, 1997).

In the present setting, DIUs played an important role not only for speech production in Russian but also for socializing the children into an oral mode of interacting around written texts, and in particular, recitation of folk tales and poetry (cf. Stavans, 2012). In this way, DIUs figure in the learning of specific literary conventions and genres (Poveda, 2003). The ritualized way of launching DIUs that exploit repetitions, rhythm and parallel structures of the text allows the children to recognize and use this language practice on their own (Excerpts 1, 4, 5). Yet, DIUs may also result in an interrupted recitation that the mother treats as undesirable and thus chooses to recite the complete utterance instead of completing the child’s DIU (Excerpt 5).

In all, we witnessed not only how the next generation of Russian speakers living abroad is socialized in situ to interact with written text (Heath, 1982; Poveda, 2003) in their heritage language, but also the endeavors of multilingual middle-class parents to carry out pedagogical agendas. The ways in which DIUs are used by the mothers and children in this study, exemplified cultural ambiguity of contemporary pedagogy (Koshik, 2005) and family life (Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2015a; 2015b; Sirotu, 2006) applied to aspirations of raising bilingual and biliterate children. The literacy event is a ritualized collaborative activity that creates an
environment for learning, entertainment, and bonding. On the one hand, DILs serve as a designed invitation and assistance for children to actively co-narrate and enhance their language and literacy competencies. On the other hand, when the children wander off the parental track of a literacy project in Russian, their coercive (Netz, 2016) potential comes into play to negotiate language choice and alignment. Yet, our analyses show how children learn to recognize and creatively appropriate this device for their own purposes, and thus co-create an interactional environment for socialization into the world of Russian language and literature.

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Appendix


| []   | Overlapping talk  |
| —    | Equal signs indicate no break or gap between the words or lines  |
| (0.8)(.) | Numbers in parenthesis indicate silence. A dot indicates a micropause less than 5/10 of a second  |
| „, ? | The punctuation marks indicate intonation. The period indicates falling intonation, the comma continuing and the question mark rising intonation  |
| :: | Colons are used to indicate prolongation or stretching of the immediately prior sound  |
| _word_ | Underlining indicates some form of stress or emphasis  |
| Word | Especially loud talk is indicated by upper case  |
| ££ | The degree signs indicate that the talk between them is quieter than surrounding talk  |
| ↑↑ | The up and down arrow indicate a sharp rise/drop in pitch  |
| < > | Left/right carats indicate that talk is slowed down  |
| > < | Right/left carats indicate that talk is speeded up  |
| () | Double parentheses mark transcriber's comments  |
| —— | Empty parentheses indicate that something is being said but that no hearing can be achieved  |
| e.g. & & ++ | Gestures and action descriptions are delimited between two identical symbols (one symbol per participant) and are synchronized with corresponding stretches of talk  |
| & => —— & | The action described continues across subsequent lines until the same symbol is reached  |
| >> | The action described begins before the excerpt's beginning  |
| —— —— | The action described continues after the excerpt's end  |

References


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