Grammar as Culture for Effective Communication: The English and Igbo Examples

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Abstract

This study is centred on grammar-culture relations in communication. Many people perceive grammar as only concerned with the entire system of rules that govern a language. Hardly do people notice the latent, combined functions grammar and culture perform in a language to guarantee an effective communication. It is against this backdrop that the topic of this study is "Grammar as Culture for Effective Communication: The English and Igbo Examples". The study is charged with the objectives of finding out how grammar turns out to become culture in communication and how treating grammar as culture would be a determinant of one's linguistic competence. The research method is descriptive. And the researchers' intuition would be engaged. The theories for the study are the Theory of Linguistic Competence and The Use Theory of Meaning. The study discovers that grammar and culture provide the structure for accurate language use and the awareness to navigate cultural nuances that can impact message interpretation, respectively. Also, the study discovers that this knowledge of the rules of grammar, cultural contexts, social rules and norms of language use determines the linguistic competence of the speaker of any language.

1. Introduction

That grammar and culture work together for effective communication is not a common knowledge. It is not many people that are aware of the interplay of grammar and culture to ensure that communication in any language is top-notch. The fact that grammar is intertwined with culture as culture is intertwined with communication is not a public knowledge. Many people do not know that grammar and cultural understanding work together to ensure effective communication in a language. How this unity of purpose is accomplished needs to be explored.

It is against this backdrop that this work is titled "Grammar as Culture for Effective Communication: The English and Igbo Examples". The task of this study, therefore, is to find out how grammar co-functions with culture in communication and how treating grammar as culture would be a determinant of one's linguistic competence.

The research type in this study is descriptive, and will engage the researchers' intuition. The two theories to navigate the investigation are the Theory of Linguistic Competence propounded by Chomsky in 1965 and the Use Theory of Meaning founded by Ludwig Wittgenstein in 1953. The two theories would help to vividly elucidate the key issues of the study and clarify any puzzle-like areas.

In order to ensure an appreciable presentation of the facts of this study, we have sorted it out into five sections: the introduction, the literature review, research method, data presentation and analysis, and the summary of findings and conclusion.

In terms of significance, this study would constitute a source through which students would come to terms with the fact that even though grammar and culture are denotatively different, yet

grammar could be equated with culture in the sense of communicational usage in a given community. They would also understand that culture has some influence on grammar, because vocabulary, grammar, idioms and language structure are all influenced by cultural beliefs, traditions and historical factors.

This study, also, would be the avenue through which students and researchers would add to their knowledge the fact that grammar, just like culture, imbues them and the members of the community with the attitude of always sticking to the rules of the society or group.

Again, this investigation is expected to assist researchers in broadening and tasking their mental repertoires to generate similar research topics in other areas of linguistic study. Not only that, this topic is looked upon to improve reading comprehension in the sense that grammar offers some assistance in identifying the relationships between words and phrases, the situation of the message and the purposed message.

Journalists would also cash in on the similarities between grammar and culture as, through it, they are provided with the structure and rules that shape communication and understanding within a group, with grammar determining language, and culture determining strict adherence to societal norms of language and behaviour.

Through this study, native speakers would appreciate and test the congruence of their constructions with grammar and the culture of their language. From there, the research problem of this study leaves readers to want to ascertain why and how grammar and culture are functionally cooperative and how this cooperation or simultaneity of purpose helps in defining the linguistic competence of speakers in communication.

2.0 Literature Review

In order to provide a sound foundation for knowledge and identify research gaps, our task here is to take a second look into the written works of experts in language as they relate to the subject of our investigation.

2.1 Language

> According to Okolo and Ezikeojiaku (2012:44) "most dictionaries define language as a communication system used by people of a particular community, region or country and consists of a set of symbols used in speech and writing". But as Maduagwu (2008) puts it, Language keeps a people's history alive. Culture is transmitted through language. Consequently, if a language is affected in any way, the people who own the language are affected. The fabric that holds their belief system, custom, traditional proverbs, indeed, everything about them becomes threatened.

In the words of Prasad (2012:1), "language is the chief source of communication of ideas". Then, according to Halliday (1965:9), as cited by Prasad ((2012:1), "it is an activity basically of

four kinds: speaking, listening, writing and reading". As Umeodinka (2020:5) defines it, "language is the means as well as the source employed by human beings for the communication of ideas, or desires in speech sounds through the instrumentality of the human organs of speech". "Language is a means which human beings have devised for communicating ideas, feelings

emotions, desires, etc, through complex, vocal or written symbols"(Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010:1).

These definitions have opened language up to enumerate what it is all about. Firstly, it originates from human beings. Secondly, the instruments with which language is produced are human organs of speech. Thirdly, the activities through which language is reflected or manifested are speech (or speaking), listening, writing and reading. Fourthly, still, the purpose of language is for communicating ideas, desires, emotions and feelings; which means that language is a means of change or thought.

From these revelations, we can safely infer that language is human beings' discovered cultural medium of thoughtfully using vocal and written symbols peculiar to the community in exchanging ideas, feelings, emotions and desires as an exercise of communication.

2.2 Linguistics

Linguistics is a field whose concern is to study the human language faculty, develop theories to describe language behaviour, supply the most workable medium for describing language and come up with the most accurate and comprehensive descriptions of the available languages (Wilkins, 1972). The two tasks of linguistics, according to Okolo and Ezikeojiaku (1999) are to study some specific languages as ends in themselves and to study languages as a medium or step to further end, so as to be able to obtain information about the nature of language in general. In the view of Umeodinka (2020:10), "a linguist embarks on the study of language with both specific and general purposes. The first is to understand the universal nature of language, whereas the second is to study a specific language in order to offer a holistic and precise description of that language.

The opinion of Umeodinka (2020) is not different from that of Okolo and Ezikeojia ku (1999), as they maintain that linguistics studies language for the universal purpose of understanding the general nature and studying a given language so as to be able to describe such a language in an accurate way and offer an overall description of it using the steps of science.

2.3 Syntax and Semantics Interface

Crystal (1991) is of the view that syntax is about the study of the interrelationships between elements of sentence structure, coupled with the rules that determine how sentences should be arranged in sequences. "Syntax refers to the usual arrangement of words in a language to produce an acceptable statement, while semantics has to do with the meanings attributed to words and sentences in a language" Otagburu, Okwor, Ngonebu, Orabueze and Ogenyi (2012). They also assert that every language has its rules of phonology, syntax, morphology and semantics, which are adhered to in order to generate an acceptable statement or grammatical statement in the said language.

Referring to the interface of syntax and semantics, Ofoedu (2008) says that meaning constitutes the end product in any instance of the use of language. To him, the mandate of syntax is to produce sentences that are grammatical, while the duty of semantics is to ascribe meaning to those sentences.

The import of these views is that syntax and semantics or meaning are interdependent. It also shows that the meaning of the sentence can only be established if the appropriate semantic rules

are applied. And these rules constitute a kind of culture because they are already the known way of combining words to generate words to generate the acceptable meaning in a language.

2.4 Grammar

Tomori (1999:1) presents grammar as "the body of prescriptive statements about usages that are considered acceptable and those that are considered unacceptable in a particular language. He opines that the main purpose of this meaning is to ensure that the vocabulary and grammar do not deviate from agreed norms.

According to Otagburu, Okwor, Ngonebu, Orabueze and Ogenyi (2012). the grammar of each language has its intrinsic and unique patterns and structures. To them, grammar is the principles and rules that underlie or govern the use of language. The knowledge of these rules, principles and processes of language use imbue the language user with the ability to speak and understand the language.

Adding his own view to this, Crystal (2004:1) maintains that grammar "is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way we and others use language.

Relating grammar to syntax, Ofoedu (2008:164) maintains that "syntax is that branch of linguistics that concerns itself with the study of how words are arranged to build up longer expressions". And fundamental to syntax is the sentence, that largest unit in a language that shows grammatical patterning. A sentence made up of a string of words that observe the syntactic patterns of a language is grammatical; otherwise it is an ungrammatical string (Mcgregor, 2009:123).

Still on grammar, Ndimele (2008) as presented by Ofoedu (2008:165), "defines grammar as a body of innate linguistic rules concerning a language which is possessed by a normal native speaker of that language". He goes on to say that grammar is about knowledge about the right pronunciation (phonetics), about word and sentence formation(morphology and syntax), word's individual meaning (semantics), longer expressions and concerning the right context in which to use a specific utterance.

2.5 Grammar as Culture

From https://www.jstor.org, the view is that grammar, as culture, is an exploration into how language structures and rules (grammar) are profoundly intertwined with the values, beliefs, and social norms of a culture, influencing how people think and communicate.

The major point being stressed here is that culture shapes the grammar. This can be noticed occurs when cultural values and social structures have the tendency to affect the way a language develops and evolves, impacting grammar and vocabulary.

Where respectful language exists in a culture, where a culture is characterised with hierarchies, it is possible for there to be specific grammatical forms or pronouns used in according respect to elders or supervisors. There are also cultural values in language. In this case, the way a language expresses emotions, concepts or social interactions can reflect the cultural values of its speakers.

According to Echebima (2015:115):

> Syntax is the cultural way of placing words where they should be, in a language, by its owners. It is the normal way of saying something correctly, and that any

> attempt to dislodge the order or fail to put words in their right position would make the expression sound awkward, clumsy, funny, vague, incomprehensible, incorrect and unacceptable. Syntax is about the people and their culture and how things are said, the positioning of strings of words.

His English and Igbo language examples joined together are as follows:

this man (Det + N). In Igbo, it will be like this: (ii) nwoke a (N + Det). The above syntactic constituents represent the system of rules that allow the English and Igbo speakers to structure sentences (that is, their grammar). The system of rules is also the cultural way of placing words where they should be by the owners of the two languages. This shows that grammar and culture become the same in communication. Both are about the people and about a system of rules. Also, both operate through sets of rules, whether the rules are explicit or implicit. Both of them guide behaviour and communication.

Igbo words cannot be combined in the way of the English, because it is not grammatical and cultural to position words in the same way. Each language's grammar and culture determine how words are arranged to be acceptable.

Also, to say that a sentence is ungrammatical can also mean that it is also 'uncultural' to say things that way in that language. Every grammar is the cultural way of saying things as well as the cultural way of placing words appropriately.

Stressed further, in communication and grammar-culture relations, each language has its specific signs and symbols, which are gotten through convention. These signs and symbols, plus the alphabetical order become the cultural properties of the language, which they employ in writing, grammatical constructions and communication generally. Here, again, grammar and culture are intertwined to facilitate communication.

2.6 Grammaticality, Culture and Acceptability
According to Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010:), grammatical words give meaning by the context in which they exist, whereas lexical words have their nature-endowed denotative meanings. Words being well formed refer to grammaticality.

They maintain and exemplify that a sentence is possible to be well formed, but not acceptable, and that there abound sentences that are not well formed, but are acceptable, thus:

(a) nwaanyị ahụ nwụrụ   *(b) Nwaanyị nwụrụ ahụ

  (woman) (that) (die, past)   (woman) (die, past) (that)

 (That woman died).   (woman died that).

Here, sentence (a), in Igbo, is well formed and acceptable, because it sticks to the grammatical and grammatical sequence that is cultural to the Igbo language. But sentence (b) is not acceptable, because Igbo words do not collocate in that manner, culturally speaking.

Other examples by Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010:206) are as follows:

(c) * Ụlọ riri ewu   *(d) Ute gara akwụkwọ

  (house) (eat, past) (goat)   (Mat) (go,past) (book)

(The house ate a goat).   (The mat went to school).

(e)* Mpio gere nṭi

    (window) (listen, past) (ear)

    (The window listened).

Here, sentences (c-e) are not acceptable in Igbo, because the words used are not collocates with themselves as presented. There is a violation of the supposed syntagmatic relationship common with such words, even though they conform to the syntactic rules of the Igbo language.

What is shown in (c-e) is that a sentence, despite being well formed, can be without meaning and, therefore, out of tune with semantics. It is also shown here that syntax is concerned with grammaticality, while semantics (and culture) is about acceptability.

Again, some figures of speech like idioms and proverbs can violate the characteristic syntagmatic relationship of the Igbo language and yet constitute acceptable and grammatical sentences in Igbo. In this regard, some other examples from them (2010:207) are as follows:

(f) Mpio gere nṭi   (g) Echi dị ime

    (window) (listen, past) (ear)   (Tomorrow) (be) (pregnant)

    (The window listened)   (Tomorrow is pregnant).

(h) Odo bụ mkpume

    (Odo) (be) (stone)

    (Odo is a stone)

Sentences (f-h) above, on the ground of grammaticality, should have been unacceptable. But looking at them from the perspective of cognitive imaging, as opposed to their denotative meanings, the sentences are acceptable in Igbo. Their acceptability is also mainly as a result of the Igbo culture having approved them to be acceptable in the language. The sentences (f-h) are all culturally acceptable constructions in the Igbo language as examples of pathetic fallacy (f), a proverb (g) and as a metaphor (h), respectively.

This brings us to the main point of this study, being that ungrammatical constructions are acceptable in one context, whereas similar constructions are not acceptable in (c, d and e). It shows that, as far as the Igbo language is concerned, what is acceptable belongs to semantics, while grammaticality belongs to syntax.

Another way to say this is that in the same way grammaticality determines acceptability in Igbo syntactic constructions is the way semantics, which is about cultural meaning or cultural acceptability, also determines what an acceptable construction in the Igbo language is. It then means that grammar and culture are working together to determine acceptable sentences in the Igbo language.

2.7 Communication
In the bid to explain language, Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010) mention communication as one of the uses of language; in fact, the most obvious use. To them, communication is about

interacting with human beings verbally in the manner of passing across ideas, feelings, emotions, information and others, either through speech or writing to one another.

Okolo and Ezikeojiaku (2012:12), through Sapir (1921), maintain that communication "refers to the fact that language is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviour. The vocal signs are transmitted from sender (speaker) to the receiver (hearer).

On his part, Ndimele (1999:146) says that communication is a process of sharing information, ideas, feelings, emotions, etc, between people. He mentions Akpan (1987:v) as saying that "communication is very much like money; it functions as a medium of exchange. It is also seen as a social interaction which involves getting one's ideas across. It means making oneself to be understood by the persons being addressed.

Communication occurs when the message is understood the same way by the receiver without distortion. In communication, through Ndimele (1999), elements of behaviour or modes of life are shared by the existence of sets of rules (Cherry, 1957).

Deduced from all these is that communication is one of the key reasons for having language. Communication, like money, is about exchange. But this time, it is the exchange of information through a common or agreed system of symbols, and it occurs between the sender and receiver.

2.8 Empirical Review
The works of E.A. Obiudo (2013) and O. Chukwuma (2020) which are on "The Effects of Igbo Language and Culture on the English Language" and "An Evaluation of the Use of Igbo Language for Communication Amongst Residents of South-East, Nigeria", respectively, are empirically reviewed. The outcome is that they do not constitute any inhibition to this study.

3.0 Research Methodology
Being a descriptive research, the researchers are exposed, fluent speakers of the English language and intuitive speakers of the Igbo language. With these qualities, the focus would be on making observations and describing the characteristics of a group, situation or phenomenon. To complement the description, the two theories for the study would be employed appropriately in the grammar and culture of the language.

3.1 Theoretical Framework
Two theories are being used for this investigation: the theory of linguistic competence and the Use Theory of meaning. We shall explore what the theories are for and how we shall employ them in this research.

3.2 The Use Theory of Meaning
This theory was founded by Ludwig Wittgenstein in 1953 in his effort to clarify what is actually word or sentence meaning. The theory says that meaning is not something that words have, but something that words do. In other words, the meaning of a word or expression is not based on the inherent referent or mental representation of the word, but on the way such a word is used in a language. The theory's major objective is to see language as a tool, that the meaning of a word is dependent on how that word or tool is used to accomplish different tasks or express different ideas, not what that word refers to or means in a mental sense.

For example, the meaning of the word 'key' is not based on a specific object, but rather on the way we employ such a word in sentences like:(a) 'the key is inside the house' or (b) 'please, use the key to open the door'. It is about how words are used in different contexts to convey some known meaning.

The theory's objective is appreciated in such Igbo expressions as these: (a) 'ọ na-eje ụka' (He is going to Church), (b) 'ọ nọ n'ụlọ ụka' (He is in the Church), (c) 'ọ na-aka ụka' (He is taking part in Church service/activity), (d) 'ọ bụ onye ụka'(He is a Church person). In these Igbo examples, the word, church, is used in different contexts as a tool to accomplish the different meanings there.

Concerning the mode of application of the theory, what the theory does is to specify the conditions under which we use such a word as a tool to achieve the targeted meanings. The strength of the theory is the focus on how words are used in providing a practical and context-dependent understanding, instead of depending on abstract or internal representations.

3.3 The Theory of Linguistic Competence
Propounded by Chomsky in 1965 through his book, "Aspects of the Theory of Syntax", the theory holds the view that speakers possess an innate, unconscious knowledge of language rules (grammar) that allows them to produce and understand an infinite number of grammatically correct sentences.

One cardinal objective of the theory is to define the rules and structures of language. Another one is to help distinguish grammatical and ungrammatical sentences. It also explores the way and manner language is acquired and used.

In helping to describe language structure, the theory identifies the key components or shapes of language (which includes phonology, morphology, syntax (sentence structure) and semantics. Additionally and operationally, the theory helps to craft out a system that can identify sentences that stick to the rules of a language and the ones that violate them. It is also used to explain language acquisition.

To sum it up, the theory serves as a key tool for understanding how language works, how they are structured and how they are acquired.

In applying this theory, what is done is that the person has to focus on comprehending and using language rules (grammar, vocabulary, syntax) effectively. The person has to try to recognize when the rules are violated; to find out whether the language is used appropriately in various contexts. The theory also distinguishes linguistic competence (knowledge) from performance (actual use).

3.4 Why the Two Theories are Used
As already explained above, while the Use Theory of Meaning specifies the conditions under which we use some words or sentences, the Theory of Linguistic Competence has the duty to check whether the communicative competence is achieved.

4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis
In arts and humanities, the data for analysis are often sourced from the literature review. Our discussions about grammar as culture, grammaticality, culture and acceptability, etc., have to be

called up in addressing, here, the two objectives of the study: how grammar becomes culture in communication and how treating grammar as culture is a determinant of linguistic competence.

4.1 How Grammar Becomes Culture in Communication

The application of the Use Theory of Mean in shows the sentences that are not well formed, because they fail to conform to the rules of grammar. Then, culture comes in to declare those sentences acceptable, because they conform to the rules of acceptable idioms, pathetic fallacy, metaphoric expressions and proverbs in the language. This is a case of culture, working as grammar, by using its own rules to determine what is acceptable in communication. Here, it is understood that culture, as a custodian of the rules of acceptability, is also playing a similar role with grammar. Culture and grammar are, therefore, users of rules to dictate acceptable and unacceptable constructions in a language's communication.

Let us consider the following proverbs and idioms:

Proverbs: (i) 'Isi kote ebu, ọ gbaa ya' (If the head draws wasp to itself, the wasp will sting the

head).

(ii) Aka aja aja na-ebute ọnụ mmanụ mmanụ (A sandy hand causes an oily mouth).

Idioms: (i) Ọ tara isi mbe (He chewed a tortoise head).

(ii) Afọ tara ya mmiri (He has a dried up stomach).

(iii) O nwere ire abụọ (He has two tongues).

In the above examples, Igbo words that do not ordinarily collocate (which means ungrammaticality) are put together to form proverbs and idioms, which are acceptable sentences in Igbo language constructions. Culturally speaking as long as every intuitive speaker of the Igbo language would understand the above proverbs and idioms the same way, the rules of culture and grammar have been complied with. This is because grammar, the rules governing a language's structure, structured the cultural context in which it is applied. Words are employed in grammar according to the people's culture of the people. Grammar is about rules just as culture is about rules.

Here, we consider the English figures of speech that are also culturally accepted, and, therefore, grammatical. The first is Pathetic fallacy. Grammatically expressed by using personification and other figures of speech, pathetic fallacy is a literary creation where human emotions or qualities are attributed to inanimate objects or natural phenomena.

Pathetic Fallacy and What it Communicates

(i) The stormy skies wept, mirroring the boy's despair.

This is a kind of personification used to convey the boy's sadness.

(i)   The sun smiled down on the happy lovers ===This is also a kind of personification making a suggestion of a joyful atmosphere.

English Proverbs and Idioms

These are ungrammatical because they don't stick to standard grammatical rules, yet they are acceptable. They are fixed expressions, with meanings not directly derived from individual words. Their structures are standardized through usage. And being "standardized through usage" means that they are culturally established ways of speaking. And if they are culturally accepted, it also implies that they constitute "the cultural way of placing words where they should be, in a language, by the owners of the language; that is, syntax or grammar.

Proverbs and Idioms

(i)"You good?"=== This is a colloquial way of asking "Are you okay?'

(ii) "It is raining cats and dogs"=== This is an idiom for heavy rain, not an actual event.

(iii) "The more, the merrier".=== This is a proverb suggesting that a larger group of people is better.

(iv) Let sleeping dogs lie === Stop discussing an issue.

(v) Like two peas in a pod ===They are always together.

(vi) A stitch in time saves nine === emphasizing the importance of timely action.

In summary, it is clear to see that grammar helps to ensure clarity and eschew miscommunication, while cultural sensitivity gives room for appropriate interpretation as well as reduces the risk of unintentional offence. Grammar helps in seeing that language is tailored to suit different contexts and audiences, making sure that messages are relevant and appropriate. On its own part, culture plays the role of the lens for message interpretation. We can also see that there is interplay between grammar and culture. Effective communication needs as much as grammatical accuracy as it needs cultural awareness. Grammar and culture are intertwined, especially in their insistence on rules, conformity and acceptability.

4.2 Treating Grammar as Culture is a Determinant of Linguistic Competence

Both grammar and culture are crucial aspects of linguistic competence. Linguistic competence consists of not only knowing the rules of grammar, but also understanding how language is used in different cultural contexts. While grammar is the foundation for producing grammatically correct sentences, the comprehension of cultural norms is essential for using language effectively and appropriately in different cultural situations. It is only when one has treated grammar as culture that he would be in a position to know when to use formal or informal language, the appropriate level of politeness and be aware of taboos and political correctness within a given culture.

Different cultures possess different ways of expressing ideas, using specific grammatical structures, and interpreting language, and it is only through seeing grammar as culture that one would be able to acquire linguistic competence.

When a child is born into a language and into a culture, Chomsky (1965) posits that the child has an innate ability, LAD (language acquisition device) which allows the child to rapidly learn and understand language. The LAD is in the brain of the child as a mechanism that facilitates language acquisition. Immediately a child is born into a community that uses language, it is the culture that enhances the linguistic competence of that child. The cultural understanding helps learners to grasp the nuances of the language within its cultural context. It is the culture that

supplies the basis for interpreting language, allowing the learners to understand the meaning behind words and phrases within a specific cultural context.

5.0 Summary of Findings and Conclusion
Our research work is to come to an end here with an overall look into what we have done with the view to bringing it to an end.

5.1 Summary of Findings
The purpose of this study has been double-barrelled. One is to explain the way grammar works as culture to facilitate communication. Two is to establish how linguistic competence is determined by regarding grammar as culture.

Realizing through our analysis that grammar is about people and their culture and saying things the way they are said, it became clear that the marriage of grammar and culture is not a separable one, especially as both of them are strongly concerned about rules.

We also found out that once we begin to regard grammar and culture as one, the issue of acquiring the linguistic competence in that language becomes a foregone conclusion. This is basically so because understanding the culture and grammar constitutes a framework that helps the language learner to quickly acquire the intuitive knowledge of the language and interpret it.

5.2 Conclusion
The journey of this study has been that of using English and Igbo examples to indicate how grammar and culture cooperate in their functions to facilitate effective communication. Set on a drive by the objectives of the study, we succeeded in using the data in 2.5, 2.6 and 4.1 in establishing how grammar and culture use their rule-inclined stance to guarantee effective communication in the English and Igbo languages and how, impliedly, the gaining of linguistic competence is dependent on this marriage of culture and grammar.

This study, with its explorations into various aspects of language, is poised to dish out some significance in linguistics. From this research, it would not be enough for translators to know word meanings, but also the grammatical, proverbial, metaphorical and idiomatic ways of saying things in the target language. It would enable scholars appreciate how to easily improve their linguistic competence. Not only that, they would comprehend why idioms, proverbs and metaphorical expressions do not obey the rules of grammar and yet constitute very acceptable constructions in language use.

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