

ENGLISH AND TAGALOG VOCABULARY OF PRESCHOOLERS: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

In Philippine schools, the standard use of English and Tagalog is emphasized; code switching is discouraged. Therefore, parents of children who are exposed to and are trying to learn either of these languages, their L2 mind distinguishes correct usage of its features to avoid confusion and acquisition difficulties. Considerably, the English language acquisition in the Philippines is both influenced by nationwide use of the language in the households and communities, and exposure to information technology; both are deemed necessary in English literacy and prestige. Consequently, this case study contrasted the lexical and contextual features of L1 and L2 learned vocabulary words of pre-schoolers (male and female) to recognize their L2 acquisition difficulty and contextual cues as perceived by the parents of the subjects based on children's personal, cognitive, and cultural attributes. Through qualitative method using the contrastive analysis hypothesis established by Lado (1957), this study supports the interlanguage of English and Tagalog; children can acquire lexical and contextual L1 and L2 prior to their formal schooling.

Keywords: contrastive analysis, English and Tagalog vocabularies, language acquisition of preschoolers

Introduction

It was claimed that the Philippines is 'a nation of fifth graders' because there are approximately 7 million Filipinos who cannot count and 17 million with below par in reading comprehension based on a UNESCO report in 2013 (Alicias, 2015). Recently, a senate inquiry on the decline in English proficiency of Filipino students asserts the need to assess present curricula in elementary and high school and encourage training and other learning approaches in reaction to the MTB-MLE mother tongue-based multilingual education (MB Business, 2021).

Apparently, there is a myth that learning two languages will confuse a child (Johnson, 2021), which may affect his/her English proficiency eventually. For this reason, children should develop a strong foundation in their L1 (either English or

Filipino) and gradually be introduced to their L2 (either English or Filipino) (Alicias, 2015). Studies reveal that the bilingual policy implementation would help develop the communicative competence of students both in English and Filipino languages. To strengthen this, the recent implementation of the Mother Tongue Based – Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) curriculum highlights the cognitive development of the student's L1 to address linguistic discrimination and increase students' achievement through English education (Dumanig, 2019).

Contextually, the technological development has a profound effect on language learning and acquisition. In a number of research delving into the effects of media to language acquisition, it has already been noted several times how improvements in multimedia and information technology have changed the children's learning. For example, a study on the effect of digital platform in English language acquisition is recognized significant (Tridianti, 2017). In the Philippines, the English language acquisition, aside from exposure to information through technology, is also affected by the widespread use of the language especially in parts of the society, where literacy and prestige are present and deemed necessary. These are the usual reasons why parents often feel the need to enrol their children in private schools, as well as teach their children English at an early age (Reyes, 2018).

Apparently, the theory of second language acquisition by Stephen Krashen (1985) posits that language acquisition occurs through the understanding of messages through receiving "comprehensible input." It highlights the importance of literacy skills like listening as the learner's second language acquisition happens, when plain sentences are used and encountered in contexts. Likewise, Krashen further explained that the learner would eventually develop other language skills such as speaking and grammar rules usage provided that the correct type and enough input is provided. This was attested by psycholinguistics professors, that for a child to fully obtain a language, he/she only needs approximately 30 percent of his or her daytime exposed to a language (Reyes, 2018). Moreover, Safitri and Hakim (2018) claimed that children's language acquisition of words or sentences is enhanced by sound. Their claim is supported by several other studies that provide evidence suggesting that devoting literacy skills such as listening can yield significantly higher levels of oral language proficiency (Saunders, 2013). Furthermore, one of the hypotheses in Krashen's theory, i.e., the Acquisition- Learning theory explains that 'learning' is less important than 'acquisition'. L2 acquisition is the product of subconscious process that takes when a child is regularly involved in meaningful interaction or natural communication using the target language.

In connection with Cummins' (1991) interdependence hypothesis, the contextual factors are as equally significant as the cognitive resources and individual factors in the L2 acquisition of children whether at home or in school. The amount of time and kind of exposure to the second language in context define the rapidity and success of their L2 acquisition. In other words, bilingual children carry their cognitive resources, particularly their L1 proficiency, to their L2 acquisition, which involves contextualized (i.e. conversational) and decontextualized (i.e. academic) language. For Cummins (1991), the comparison of languages or crosslinguistic relationship through academic proficiency presents

the cognitive attributes of the learner's LI and L2 proficiencies, while the cross-lingual relationship of interactional style involves his/her personality (p. 84).

Meanwhile, the decline in L2 proficiency involves specific age of the language learners upon acquisition. In Lenneberg's (1967) Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), the age of an individual's first exposure to a second language (L2) and his/her ability to attain native-like proficiency in L2 are associated. It was evidential in the subjects (Chinese and Korean native speakers) of Johnson and Newport (1989, cited in Schouten, 2009), who were exposed to English between the ages of 3 and 7 and showed constant performance like native speakers. For this reason, pre-schoolers are observed for the contrastive analysis of the current study.

Undeniably, the acquisition of a language is evidentially a product of dynamic, recurring, and multifaceted learning. In the first six years of a child's life, learning and changing in language acquisition is working to acquire than any other cognitive ability. The language being acquired is the language used for interaction with the child regardless where it is coming from (i.e. adults, playmates, media, etc.). Children, who were surrounded by conversation in the normal households, will acquire the same language that was used around them. Their regular interaction with speakers of more languages is their easy means to acquire two or more languages at the same time (Linguistic Society of America, 2021).

Currently, the nationwide language in the Philippines is Filipino which comprise of many Tagalog words, but since English is also used as the second language in the country, Filipinos mix these two languages. Although it is easy for these languages to merge (Taglish) in the speech of most Filipinos, learned Filipinos know that these languages differ in many ways. In schools, the standard use of these two languages is emphasized; code switching is discouraged. Therefore, parents of children who are exposed to and are trying to learn either of these languages, their L2 mind distinguishes correct usage of its features to avoid confusion and acquisition difficulties.

Likewise, as an Austronesian language, Tagalog, is primarily used as first language in the Philippines by roughly 27 million people (Nationalencyklopedin, 2007). Influences from other languages such as Spanish, English, Malay, Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Persian, and others, are evident in generally used loan words (Baklanova, 2004). Moreover, the language is a syllable-timed language and has a simple phonological system; languages like English, Spanish, and Indonesian have influenced its phonological and lexical features. The vowel inventory of Tagalog is three vowels in native words and five vowels in Spanish words. Meanwhile, Tagalog has either CV or CVC syllabic structure (Potet, 1995). In addition, according to Collins (2014), most Tagalog words are bisyllabic followed by trisyllabic most- common words.

Unlike English, Tagalog is more morphologically complex as it extensively uses particles, prefixes, infixes, suffixes, and circumfixes to determine parts of speech, aspect, and voice. This explains why Tagalog has over 100 prefixes, a few infixes, and only two suffixes. For example, the inflection *ka* is attached to a verb to signal completion. There are also reduplication or repetition of parts of the root word to indicate a verb tense (Ramos, 1971).

As a second language, English it is utilized as a language of instruction in the Philippines. Looking into its morphology and lexical- semantic aspects, most English words are monosyllabic such as *eye, ear, mouth, nose, one, two, three, four, five, six, arm, bell, goat, car, dog, cat, hat, mom, dad, day, night*, etc. Derivations happen through word- formation processes such as affixation. Lexical rules of English are also fluid because instead of strict laws, L2 learners would have to depend on memorization and contextualization to figure out possible systems and structures as the language lexicon has a lot of irregularities (Moscow State Linguistic University, n.d.).

Considerably, media (i.e., films and videos) provide L2 young learners with authentic and varied language used in real- life and relatable situations as they are recreated for scenes; the simulated scenes in films can lead to the emulation and the natural flow of speech that is being demonstrated (Donaghy, 2014). In fact, they are often recommended resources to teach language as they provide symbolic models for language learning. According to most cognition theories, it is believed that humans acquire knowledge through rich physical and social interaction with their environment. The interaction in a context leaves traces of learning through different modalities, i.e., auditory, visual, haptic, etc., and it provides a way for information to be consolidated in the brain through the increasing and strengthening of neural networks which support learning (Vulchanova, et al., 2017).

Moreover, the social interaction with the child's environment involves the sociological factors perceived by the parents which are contributory element to the L2 acquisition of their child. It was recognized in the Sociocultural Theory, expounded as Triangle of Concepts (Larsen- Freeman, 2011), that the teacher, learner, language culture, and context interplay in the language learning and education. Thus, sociological factors were considered in this case study. Consequently, this study contrasted the lexical features of L1 and L2 learned vocabulary words of pre-schoolers. Specifically, it presented qualitative evidence on the *lexical* and *contextual* features of the English and Tagalog vocabulary words of the subjects in terms of form, meaning, and connotation. And it described the *sociological factors* that contribute to the recognized L2 acquisition difficulty and contextual cues as perceived by the parents of the subjects based on children's personal, cognitive, and cultural attributes.

Method

This study was qualitative designed to collect data from a single subject of male and female pre-schooler. In the conduct of this qualitative case study, one-on-one interview with the subjects' parents using open-ended questions relative to their observation on their children's L2 acquisition using their L1. It is known that a qualitative study is a research design intended to collect and analyse human experiences through in-depth interview and naturalistic observation (Çetinavcı & Topkaya, 2012).

The proponents of this research are Filipino English teachers in the higher education. They found interest to look into the vocabulary of pre-schoolers, specifically one Filipino male and female ages 5 years old, who have been exposed to the English language at a very young age. The pre-schoolers' L1 is English and their exposure to the language is assumed to be the cause of their

identified difficulty in acquiring Filipino vocabulary and consideration in understanding, which in their case, is their L2. Both children grew up exposed to English-speaking and code-switching families and they have already acquired knowledge of the language to communicate in English than Tagalog prior to formal schooling. The parents of the subjects attested to have witnessed their children's difficulty in acquiring Filipino vocabulary, which is their L2. Moreover, the proponents also conducted a preliminary observation to name possible sociological factors that have affected the L2 acquisition. Ethical considerations were employed since the parents of the pre-schoolers voluntarily participated in the case study. They were assured of the confidentiality of their and their children's identity and the CA results would be used for reference only.

As mentioned, the study used contrastive analysis on the pre-schoolers vocabularies in English and Filipino. Contrastive analysis (CA) looks into how a learner's first language (L1) influences the acquisition of a second language (L2) in order to find the areas of development in the learning of the target second language. Specifically, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) by Robert Lado (1957) which contrasts two languages to predict the linguistic features that would be encountered as easy or difficult in second language learning. The analysis is simply done by comparing the first language (L1) of a learner with the target language (TL); specific linguistic features should be determined for a more focused analysis. Anchored on CAH, this study utilized the Lado's (1957) suggestion on comparing vocabularies which are the form, meaning distribution, and connotation with the vocabulary of the native language.

Qualitatively, the proponents analysed the vocabularies in two ways for male and female pre-schoolers to understand the specific descriptions of the data. For the female subject, CAH was analysed to identify the L2 acquisition difficulty and for the male subject CAH was analysed to identify the contextual influence of L1 in learning L2. Both vocabulary words were then organized in tables for the analysis of their lexical and contextual features (i.e. form, meaning, and connotation) as suggested by Lado (1957). Qualitative analysis identified similarities and/or differences among the lexical and contextual features of the L1 and L2 vocabulary items.

Findings and Discussion

Subject One (S1) Vocabulary

The first subject (S1) of the case study is a female preschooler who learned English before Tagalog. Her English vocabulary was already functional even before she learned Tagalog in kinder school such as terms used to refer to colors. She uses English to address her family members and to express herself. Figure 2 shows the recurring English words of S1 according to her parent (respondent).

Table 1. *Recurring English Vocabulary Words of S1*

	English Words	Syllabification	Form Letter Sequence	Pronunciation	Meaning	Connotation
1	Mommy	bisyllabic	CVCCC	/mami/	(noun) a female parent;	used to address mother

2	Daddy	bisyllabic	CVCCC	/dædi/	mother (noun) a male parent; father (conjunction)) the origin, reason, or intent; (noun) reason or cause; (interjection)) used to express disapproval, surprise, or irritation	used to address father
3	why	monosyllabic	CCC	/waɪ/	(pronoun) often used to ask for repetition of an utterance; (adjective) used as a question to ask about something; (adverb) used to introduce prepositional phrases in parallel construction (verb) to make someone happy or satisfied; (adverb) used to politely ask for something or to emphasize an appeal	used to express disapproval, surprise, or irritation
4	what	monosyllabic	CCVC	/wʌt/	(noun) endorsement or approval; (adjective or adverb) all	used to ask for repetition of an utterance
5	please	monosyllabic	CCVVC V	/plɪz/	(noun) endorsement or approval; (adjective or adverb) all	used to politely ask for something or to emphasize an appeal
6	okay	bisyllabic	VCVC	/oʊ'keɪ/	(noun) endorsement or approval; (adjective or adverb) all	used to say "all right"

7	no	monosyllabic	CV	/noʊ/	right; (verb) approved or authorized (noun) an act or instance of refusing or denying; (adjective) in no respect or degree — used in comparisons (noun) affirmative reply; (adverb) used as a function word to express approval or understanding (pronoun) that which belongs to me; (noun) a pit or excavation in the earth (pronoun) term used to pertain to persons or an individual person; used to refer to someone being addressed in a conversation	used to refuse something disliked
8	yes	monosyllabic	CVC	/jes/		used to confirm or to agree on something
9	mine	monosyllabic	CVCV	/mam/		used to express ownership
10	you	monosyllabic	CVV	/ju/		used to refer to a person being addressed

It can be deemed from the table 1 that majority, i.e., seven out of the ten recurring English words, are monosyllabic. These monosyllabic vocabulary words are functional words used to express thoughts and feelings. Meanwhile, the bisyllabic words are those used to address or refer to the child's parents.

The recurring vocabulary words have varying vowel sounds that display the apparent reduction of vowel sounds in English such as in the words *what* and *daddy*; there are also words with vowels when spelled but are silent when

pronounced such as in the words *mine*, *please*, and *you*. The diverse sequence of letters also shows the inconsistency between English spelling and pronunciation. It can also be noted that each word at least has one vowel sound though the sound is represented by a consonant such as in the words *Mommy* and *Daddy* when spelled.

Table 2. Recurring Tagalog Vocabulary Words of S1

	Tagalog Words	syllabification	Form letter sequence	pronunciation	Meaning	Connotation
1	lolo	bisyllabic	CVCV	/lələ /	(noun) family member; grandfather	used to address grandmother or elderly woman
2	lola	bisyllabic	CVCV	/lələ/	(noun) family member; grandmother	used to address grandfather or elderly man
3	kuya	bisyllabic	CVCV	/kuja/	(noun) elder brother; polite expression for an older man	used to address unknown, older man
4	"nani"	bisyllabic	CVCV	/nəni/	(noun) godmother	used to address her aunt
5	labas	bisyllabic	CVCVC	/ləbas/	(noun) outside	used to refer to the outside of a house
6	hangin	bisyllabic	CVCVC	/hanjin/	(noun) wind; air	used to refer to wind blowing from fan, outside, or own mouth
7	ayaw	bisyllabic	VCVC	/əjəw/	(verb) to reject or refuse	used to express dislike
8	ha?	bisyllabic	CV	/ha/	(interjection) What is it?	used when something is not understood
9	"dawala" (dalawa)	trisyllabic	CVCVCV	/dəwala/	(adjective) two	used to express two
10	sino	bisyllabic	CVCV	/sino/	(pronoun) who; word used in asking questions about persons	used to ask <i>who</i>

Meanwhile, table 2 illustrates the lexical features of the recurring Tagalog vocabulary words of S1. From the table, it can be seen that all the words are bisyllabic. Four out of the ten words are used to refer to or to address relatives or people while six are used to express the child's feelings and common ideas related to her environment.

The letter sequence reveals the prominent consonant- vowel pattern of Tagalog. Moreover, the pronunciation of the words shows the approximate equal prominence of each syllable in every word as well as the shortage of reduced vowels in Tagalog.

The recurring English and Tagalog vocabulary words of S1 suggest apparent differences between English and Tagalog in terms of lexical feature that is form.

The Behaviouristic Approach to L2 acquisition assume that L2 acquisition is affected by habits learned in the L1. The learned habits interfere with the L2 acquisition. This implies that the learned form of English words by S1 is what is causing the interference in learning Tagalog words. This is apparent, for example, in the confused pronunciation of the only trisyllabic Tagalog word in table 2, *dalawa*. S1 reverses the consonants /l/ and /w/, pronouncing the word as *dawala*.

Unlike English, Tagalog is a syllable-timed language and has a simple phonological system; languages like English, Spanish, and Indonesian have influenced its phonological and lexical features. The vowel inventory of Tagalog is three vowels in native words and five vowels in Spanish words. Meanwhile, Tagalog has either CV or CVC syllabic structure (Potet, 1995). In addition, according to Collins (2014), most Tagalog words are bisyllabic followed by trisyllabic most- common words.

As for English, looking into its morphology and lexical- semantic aspects, most English words are monosyllabic such as *eye, ear, mouth, nose, one, two, three, four, five, six, arm, bell, goat, car, dog, cat, hat, mom, dad, day, night*, etc. Derivations happen through word- formation processes such as affixation. Lexical rules of English are also fluid because instead of strict laws, L2 learners would have to depend on memorization and contextualization to figure out possible systems and structures as the language lexicon has a lot of irregularities (Moscow State Linguistic University, n.d.).

The Hierarchy of Difficulty by Stockwell, Bowen, and Martin claims that when the features of the contrasted languages are similar, positive transfer occurs; while in cases of different features, negative transfer shows, causing difficulty of acquisition. And in cases of no relation between features, zero transfer takes place.

For the case of bilingual S1, the identified L2 acquisition difficulty demonstrates negative transfer, and this is caused by the differing features of the L1 (English) and L2 (Tagalog) in terms of form.

Subject Two (S2) Vocabulary

The second set of vocabularies is from a male preschooler whose L1 is English with minimal L2 (Filipino) vocabularies. The L1 vocabularies were identified and grouped into true and false cognates to understand how L1 proficiency is brought in L2 acquisition. According to Dangan (2006), true cognates words are described to be similar in form, pronunciation and meaning. While false cognates words have similar form and pronunciation, but

with completely different meaning. Linguistically, cognates are words with the same derivation as another or from the same original word or root.

Table 3 presents the true cognates vocabularies of the male subject. The English vocabularies are arranged alphabetically and contrastively analyzed with their similar Filipino counterparts in reference to Google Translate and English dictionary.

Table 3. True Cognates Vocabularies of a Male Subject

English	Tagalog	Dictionary Meaning
Biscuit	Biscuit	a small round bread with baking powder, baking soda, or sometimes yeast
Bus	Bus	a large, motored vehicle usually as public transport carrying many passengers on a fixed route
Driver	Driver	a person who drives a vehicle
iPod	iPod	a lightweight electronic gadget for playing and storing digital files.
Laptop	Laptop	a portable computer that can be used while traveling
Papaya	Papaya	an elongated tropical fruit with edible orange flesh (ripe) or green (unripe) and small black seeds
Pizza	Pizza	a flat round or square dough baked with tomato sauce, cheese, meat, etc. as toppings which originated in Italy
Sticker	Sticker	an adhesive label or notice, generally printed or illustrated
Tilapia	Tilapia	a freshwater fish living in many areas usually grown in ponds for food
Tricycle	Tricycle	a vehicle similar to a bicycle, but with three wheels: two at the back and one at the front.

It is evident in table 3, that the male subject's specific vocabularies in L1 technically share the same form and meaning in L2. The CA vocabularies were acquired by the male pre-schooler through his professional parents who hardly speak Filipino with the male subject even in challenging situations (i.e., scolding, advising, and instructing) on a daily basis. This finding supports the claim of Magno (2009) that parents greatly influence the teaching of the child in speaking English. Undeniably, the early years of the child spent with the parents plays a crucial role in the English language acquisition of the child. A child ages 1.5 years old can naturally form a language as he/she communicates with the parents in different ways (p. 138).

Furthermore, the male subject's masculinity and preferences are evident on vocabularies relative to vehicle (e.g., bus, driver, and tricycle), food (e.g. papaya, pizza, and tilapia), and playing items (e.g. sticker, laptop, and iPod). And it is very noticeable that the specific vocabularies were all nouns. Based on the similar finding of Lucas and Bernardo (2008), the noun bias in English was associated with the noun prevalence in the caregivers/parents' utterances and its initial position in the caregivers/parents' utterances. Moreover, different associations between salient positions in the adult utterances and children's vocabularies in English and Tagalog were highlighted.

Table 4. False Cognates Vocabularies of a Male Subject

English	Filipino pronunciation	Dictionary Meaning	Connotation
Blocks	/blaks/	a hard solid material with flat surfaces on each side, commonly rock, stone, or wood	a sensory construction toy made of colourful rectangular plastics
Brief	/brip/	of short duration	male's underwear
Cowboy	/koboy/	a man, typically riding horse who kettle group of mammals (i.e. sheep, goats, etc.) as a livelihood in the western US and as represented in novels and the west	not picky or choosy in any matter such as place, food, fashion, etc.
Double-deck	/dobol-dek/	something, especially a bus, that has two floors or levels	a reference to a bunk bed
Gummy	/gami/	viscous; sticky	a small, sweet, fruit-flavoured candy made from gelatine and shaped like a bear.
Jeep	/dyip/	a small four-wheel drive vehicle used by the military	a public transport for smaller number of passengers which represents a part of Philippine culture
Space	/speys/	an vacant or unoccupied area or lot available for use	the outer space, also called as "kalawakan", where the solar system is found
Traffic	/trapik/	vehicles moving on a road or public highway	Slow or immovable line of vehicles on a road

On the other hand, table 4 alphabetically presents the false cognates vocabularies of the male pre-schooler where L1 (English) has influenced L2 (Filipino) because they share similar form and pronunciation, but the male subject uses the vocabularies in completely different meaning because of their connotations. As observed and validated by parents, the male subject uses the following L1 vocabularies in the connotative context of L2 as associated by his environment. This substantiates the significant findings of Dita (2009) that the explanation of the subject in the vocabulary measure revolved around the functions of the word over general appearance.

In relation to interdependence hypothesis (Cummins, 1991), the false cognates of the male subject were based on contextual meaning dependent on the immediate communicative context (i.e., interaction with the languages in the environment). It is interpreted that male subject's proficiency in L1 (English) is carried in learning and acquiring L2 based on the connotation or contextual cues.

According to the male subject's parents, most of the English vocabularies (i.e., blocks, cowboy, double deck, gummy, jeep, traffic, and space) are usually uttered by playmates in the neighborhood and people in the household; and/or present in the children shows he watches on television and videos on YouTube. Therefore, this validates that English language acquisition is formed through socialization process which is a combined involvement of the child, the members of the household (specifically the parents), multimedia (i.e. television, Internet, etc.) others (i.e. peers), environmental cues, and seeking assistance (Magno, 2009).

Sociologically, children nowadays today grow up surrounded with media that provide them instant gratification. Instead of waiting for something that requires time and patience, such as communicating with parents or adults, media accessibility is often instant, and options are immediately available through a few clicks. Through the tracked codes, apps and websites like YouTube can instantly provide recommendations for viewing. This means that they reflect the interest of the viewer using their app (LaFrance, 2020).

Conclusion

The observations and contrastive analysis on the case of the pre-schoolers present significant evidence and interpretations of the lexical and contextual features of their L1 and L2 vocabularies.

First, the observed L2 acquisition difficulty of female S1 is explained through the analysis of her recurring English and Tagalog vocabulary words. Results suggest the apparent differences between the English and Tagalog in terms of form. Thus, it is recommended that future researchers look into how L1 morpho-lexical specifically phonemic awareness among pre-schoolers relate to their L2 acquisition in order to determine specific factors that contribute to either ease or challenge their L2 acquisition.

Second, the observed L1 proficiency of male S2 is clearly utilized in acquiring L2 vocabularies in context. The male pre-schooler's early exposure to L1 gives him a better position to identify sound variety of English and Tagalog in Philippine context. The Tagalog connotation of the male S2's L1 vocabularies carries the culture and uniqueness of Philippine English. Hence, the interplay of the code choice and current sociolinguistic environment with the existence of the parents, peers, media, and others is the unique language acquisition context strategic for strengthening the English proficiency and Tagalog variety.

Indeed, this study supports the interlanguage of English and Tagalog; children can acquire L1 and L2 prior to their formal schooling. In fact, the result and discussion of this study provide remarkable areas to examine other aspects of language acquisition of a larger sample size of pre-schoolers in the presence of their guardians and caretakers, aside from their parents.

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