

Using Content and Language Integrated Learning Approach and The Task-Based Language Teaching Approach to Teach Grammar in The English as a Second Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Language is a hallmark and the most enduring artefact of any community, playing a significant role in social interaction and the transmission of social values. Among the various approaches in language teaching, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) have consistently been at the forefront of research, receiving significant attention from practitioners and policymakers in Sri Lanka. This study investigates whether the use of TBLT and CLIL in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms enhances grammar learning. It aims to answer the research questions: a) "How do the CLIL and TBLT approaches enhance grammar teaching in ESL classrooms?" and b) "What are the perspectives of English teachers and learners on the use of CLIL and TBLT approaches in teaching grammar in ESL classrooms?" The study tests the hypothesis that TBLT is more effective than CLIL in teaching English grammar. The study involved sixty participants from one batch and two lecturers. Data were collected using pretest and posttest papers, semi-structured interviews, and open-ended questionnaires. The data were analyzed using SPSS and thematic analysis. The findings indicated that both TBLT and CLIL positively impact grammar learning, with TBLT emerging as the more effective approach. Perceptions of these approaches highlighted learner interest and the challenges of incorporating these methods in the classroom.

Keywords: CLIL, ESL learners, Grammar Teaching, Secondary level, TBLT

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Research

Language is a hallmark and the most enduring artefact of any community. It plays a significant role in social interaction and the transmission of social values. Accordingly, language has been given the most priority and different language methods have been introduced in order to improve the quality of language teaching since across the globe, language is the center of the educational enterprise. Among the approaches in language teaching, two of the approaches that have systematically been at the forefront of language teaching research and that have consistently drawn the attention of both practitioners and policymakers are Content and Language-Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT). According to Ahmadian (2016 as cited in Lopes, 2019) these two approaches emerged in the 1980s in light of the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The theoretical and methodological solutions have proven to be of great importance in terms of finding ways to meet the current needs of contemporary society, as far as the latest technological developments and skill requirements are concerned. TBLT approach assumes that students learn by doing, that is, by engaging in meaningful communication in task completion whereas CLIL is based on the consideration that students will learn a language through the teaching of content. CLIL's multi-faceted approach will motivate students through more diversified teaching methods.

The Statement of the Research Problem

In Sri Lanka, since the introduction of English to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) in the early 1950s, the direct method followed by the grammar-translation method was used. However, many scholars

claimed that these methods have not been successful at improving English proficiency either for school learners or students in higher education. However, teaching approaches, which were introduced later, were more effective in improving both the linguistic and communicative competence of ESL learners. The English educators of Sri Lanka are using many teaching approaches to teach English and some of the traditional methods are being less satisfactory. However, the current English language teaching context in Sri Lanka proves that there are plenty of varied methods to effectively teach English grammar. Accordingly, the main purpose of this study is to investigate whether the use of CLIL and TBLT can enhance grammar teaching for tertiary-level ESL learners. The results of this study would determine whether the CLIL approach or the TBLT approach has good effects in teaching grammar for tertiary-level ESL learners.

Research Objectives

This study was conducted to accomplish the following objectives.

1. To identify how CLIL and TBLT approaches can enhance grammar learning in the tertiary-level ESL classroom
2. To identify the perspectives of both teachers and students towards these approaches in teaching and learning grammar
3. To identify the most effective approach to teaching grammar for tertiary-level ESL learners

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the above-mentioned objectives the present study seeks answers to the following questions;

1. How does the usage of CLIL and TBLT approaches enhance grammar teaching in ESL classrooms?
2. What are the perspectives of English teachers and learners on the use of CLIL and TBLT approaches in teaching grammar in ESL classrooms?

and tests the following hypothesis.

1. The use of TBLT is more effective than CLIL in English teaching grammar.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Brief Introduction to CLIL (Content Language Integrated Learning)

CLIL has as its principles, as cited from Salamanca and Montoya (2018) the scaffolding, the use of different tasks (Beglar, 2002), collaborative learning, the integration of different forms of learning and the common skills for all languages. Such principles are described through 4Cs: Content, that is, the areas of knowledge, Communication which refers to interaction, Cognition, as thinking skills and Culture, regarding the socio-cultural environment taking into account the differences and needs of the academic context (Beglar, 2002). The aspects, which are reinforced with CLIL, could be receptive skills, vocabulary, morphology, creativity, risk, fluency and attitude improvement (Salamanca & Montoya, 2018). Salamanca and Montoya (2018) further explain that this approach helps students to consider themselves more aware of the formal aspects of the language and more efficient in strategic use, getting better in the process of discovering new concepts, and through this strategy, they promote the skills involved in problem-solving, spontaneity and motivation. CLIL came to be seen as “a joint curricular role in the domain of mainstream education, pre-schooling and adult lifelong education” where it does not give emphasis to either language teaching or learning or content teaching and learning but sees both as integral parts of the whole (Marsh, 2007, p. 58). According to the theoretical intentions of CLIL, it represents a student-led approach in which learners are cognitively engaged, with opportunities to think on their own, make choices, or reason (Chen, 2017).

A Brief Introduction on TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching)

Teaching language communicatively was first affected by a notional functional view of language by linguists, and then, the meaning, function, and communication would be encompassed within the study of grammar and linguists should concentrate on the language use rather than on its grammatical rules itself. Consequently,

meaning-based approaches appeared, and Task-Based Language Teaching was generated from these communicative approaches. In TBLT, a task is the focus of instruction as it engages the learners in fulfilling the meaning-focused activities (Elis, 2003). During the last two decades, TBLT received a lot of attention from second language acquisition researchers, teachers, curriculum developers, and teacher trainers (Branden, 2006). According to Tale (2015) in the TB instruction, the aim is to make a requirement to learn and use language. The tasks will create their own language and produce a chance to learn language explicitly. Fotos and Ellis (1991, as cited in Tale, 2015) revealed that the choice of TBLT to communicate about grammar is helpful to both learning and communication. They also revealed that teaching grammar communicatively with Task-Based Instruction (TBI) helped Japanese EFL students improve their understanding of difficult grammatical forms. The study of Tale (2015) reveals that there is a significant influence of TBI on the grammatical proficiency of elementary ESL learners than the other teaching approaches.

Few Previous Research Studies

A considerable number of research attempts have been employed to identify the effectiveness, perceptions and appropriateness of TBLT and CLIL approaches in varied teaching contexts around the world. For instance, Schneider (2021) explored the teachers' belief systems regarding grammar teaching and their teaching practices using CLIL in an English full-immersion private school in Chile. The findings of this study indicate that most CLIL teachers support the communicative approach to teaching grammar, although some reported using a more explicit method. Additionally, it became clear that many teachers were unaware of how their previous experiences as language learners influenced their current teaching practices. Time constraints in planning also hindered the alignment between their beliefs and practices. These results are consistent with those from studies exploring the cognitions of licensed English language teachers.

Moreover, Ali et al. (2023) examine the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on the proficiency, communication skills, and task authenticity of L2 students in comparison to traditional methods. The study's results suggest that TBLT boosts language learning by promoting participation, independence, and cross-cultural awareness. It recommends that teachers design authentic activities, foster interactive classrooms, encourage feedback exchanges, and reconsider language assessment approaches. In conclusion, TBLT is identified as a transformative strategy that enhances language learners' skills, confidence, and cross-cultural perspectives, leading to new, more effective paradigms in language education.

Additionally, several attempts have been made to explore the comparative or combined approaches of TBLT and CLIL. For instance, Chen's (2017) classroom experiment study explored the effectiveness of combining TBLT and CLIL to teach English and Chinese in a foreign language context. Twelve groups, ranging in age from 14 to 22, from five universities and schools, took part in 20 classroom experiments for the two newly proposed TBLT-CLIL combinations. The analysis of all classroom experiments revealed improvements in the two TBLT-CLIL combinations, enhancing language skill competence and increasing foreign language learners' motivation towards the target foreign language and subject content compared to their previously used teaching methods.

Studies in the Sri Lankan Context

When considering the Sri Lankan context only a limited number of studies have been conducted to explore the effectiveness of either CLIL or TBLT approaches to teach varied disciplines. For instance, Fernando's (n.d) study investigated the impact of TBLT on grammar instruction on second-year undergraduates of the Faculty of Applied Sciences at Wayamba University of Sri Lanka. This study found that both the Planned Focus on Form (PFF) and Incidental Focus on Form (IFF) groups provided positive feedback on the potential of TBLT for learning grammar. However, the planned focus on form achieved through grammar consciousness-raising activities was preferred. When commenting on the best approach to learning grammar, the majority favoured a combined approach of TBLT with a planned focus on form and traditional Presentation, Practice & Production (PPP) over a purely TBLT approach.

The study by Vidanapathirana and Lakshmi (2020) investigated the implementation of CLIL in secondary science classrooms and aimed to support teachers through action research. The study concluded that existing curriculum materials did not adequately address CLIL, and teachers required significant support to integrate content and language in secondary science teaching. It recommended the preparation of instructional manuals for teachers focusing on CLIL and the development of in-service teacher training programs for CLIL lesson planning. Furthermore, Alahakoon's (2017) study examined the impact of implementing CLIL on Sri Lankan ESL students at the tertiary level, with a particular focus on reading skills. The study found notable improvement in the reading skills of the sample and an increase in their metacognitive awareness after exposure to CLIL.

Dilini and Prahalathan's (2021) study explored the effectiveness of the TBLT approach in enhancing students' speaking skills and their perceptions of integrating TBLT. The findings indicated that the post-test mean scores of the Experimental group were higher than those of the Control group, demonstrating that TBLT effectively improved students' speaking abilities compared to traditional teaching methods. The analysis of the students' perceptions revealed high satisfaction with the integration of the TBLT approach. It is recommended that ESL teaching practitioners adopt the TBLT methodology in their classrooms, as it significantly motivates students to learn speaking skills.

Rathnasena (2020) investigated the implications of incorporating a task-based speaking component into the English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum at the tertiary level. The study involved post-Advanced Level students studying General English at a private institute. An identical speaking task was administered twice—first without scaffolding and later with scaffolding—to observe students' performance. The results showed that learners tend to visualize speaking activities in their first language (L1) and then convert them to the second language (L2). When scaffolding aids, such as note cards and strips, were not provided, students tended to memorize their lines or utterances and enact the speaking task, which impeded their discourse as they struggled with vocabulary and sentence construction. Based on the student's needs and feedback, the institute decided to allocate additional weekly time for speaking practice.

Considering the above-mentioned information it is clearly noticeable that most of the studies are done on an individual approach to inquire about their effectiveness in teaching varied skills. Hence, there is a gap to be filled in terms of the comparative study on grammar teaching for ESL learners. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of CLIL and TBLT teaching approaches in grammar teaching and to identify the most effective method and the perceptions regarding those approaches in the Sri Lankan ESL grammar teaching context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopts a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyze data. Initially, the researcher focused on quantitative data collection through the implementation of a pre-test and post-test. To support and validate the quantitative data, additional data were collected in the second phase using both quantitative and qualitative methods by seeking close-ended and open-ended responses to questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Consequently, this study was framed within an explanatory sequential design, where "the researcher first collects and analyzes the quantitative (numeric) data, and the qualitative (text) data are collected and analyzed second in the sequence to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results obtained in the first phase" (Clark, 2011).

Research Context and Participants

The Sri Lankan ESL learning-teaching context was chosen as the research context for this study. The study was conducted at a private higher educational institute which provides basic courses for English Language. Convenience sampling was used to select the participants of the study. Accordingly, 120 students from four batches were selected and 06 lecturers in the English language participated in the main study. However, in the

current study, the focus was given only to the participants from one batch. Therefore, the 60 participants were involved along with two teachers (Assistant lecturers). The mother tongue of all the participants was Sinhala. 60 students were grouped into two groups; the CLIL group and TBLT group for the teaching sessions.

Research Procedures

60 students were grouped into two groups as the CLIL group and the TBLT group for the teaching sessions. Prior to the teaching session both the groups were given the pre-test. After the pretest, the students were taught the selected grammar lessons such as subject-verb agreement, gerund, imperatives, singular-plural and past tense. The teaching sessions were conducted for a one and half-a- month period. On the last day, they were given a posttest and administered the questionnaire. On the same day, semi-structured interviews were conducted according to the feasibility of the participants.

Data Collection

Test papers; pretest and posttest papers, semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires were used to collect the data for this study.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to answer the research questions posed in the study. Qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, and open-ended questionnaire was analyzed through thematic analysis, and the quantitative data obtained from the Test paper were analyzed through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Answering the Research Question 1

The main aim of this study was to investigate whether the use of CLIL and TBLT can enhance grammar teaching for tertiary-level ESL learners.

The first research question of the study is "How does the usage of CLIL and TBLT enhance grammar teaching in ESL classrooms?" To provide an answer to this question, the data obtained from two classes (CLIL group and TBLT group) were analyzed using paired sample T-Test separately. By the analysis of the pretest and posttest marks of the CLIL group as in Table 1, it is found that there is a statistically significant improvement in their performance in the posttest scores.

Table 1:

CLIL Group Pretest vs Posttest Marks

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	clil_SV_pretest clil_SV_posttest	-8.500	9.611	2.149	-12.998	-4.002	-3.955	19	.001
Pair 2	clil_ing_pretest clil_ing_posttest	-12.500	14.645	3.275	-19.354	-5.646	-3.817	19	.001

Pair 3	clil_impara_pretest - clil_impara_posttest	-16.250	15.634	3.496	-23.567	-8.933	-4.648	19	.000
Pair 4	clil_singplu_pretest - clil_singplu_posttest	-9.250	17.341	3.878	-17.366	-1.134	-2.385	19	.028
Pair 5	clil_pastT_pretest - clil_pastT_posttest	-15.000	11.239	2.513	-20.260	-9.740	-5.969	19	.000

This result indicating that CLIL can improve grammar learning is in line with many of the previous research studies. The study by Salamanca and Montoya (2018) found that the use of CLIL to teach grammar has a positive impact by increasing the learners' scores compared to the control group learners.

In the TBLT group as in Figure 1, there is an enhancement in the posttest marks and as an overall finding for the TBLT group, it is ascertained that TBLT methods of grammar teaching could enhance the learner performance in learning grammar in the ESL context.

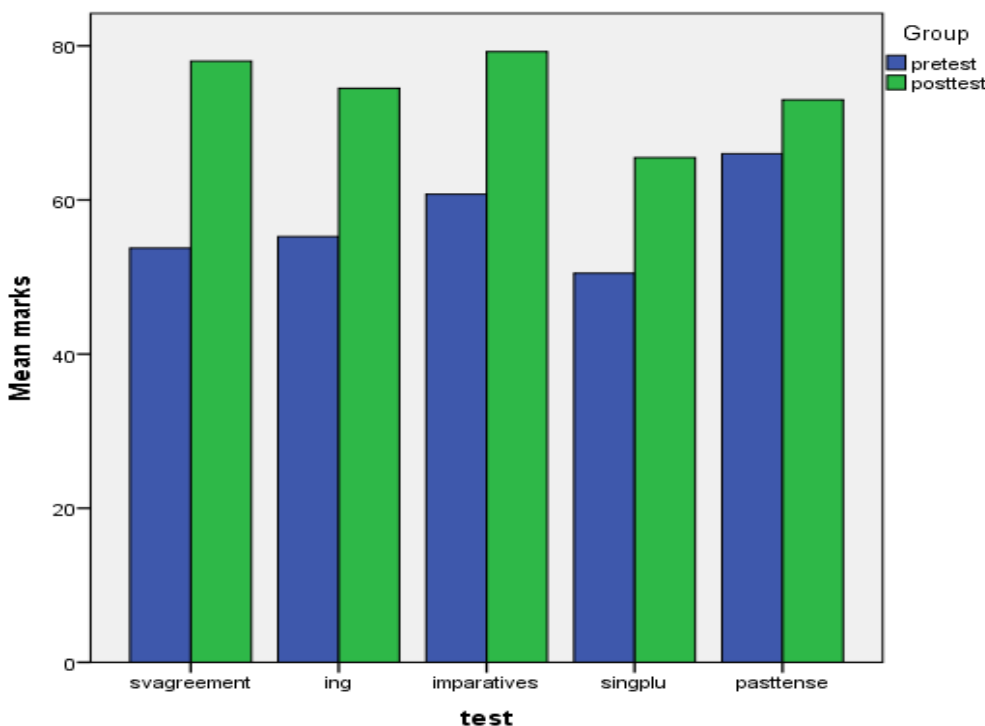


Figure 1: TBLT Group Pretest vs Posttest Marks

These findings are in accordance with the findings of the study of Tale (2015) in which it is found that TBLT had a significant impact on promoting the grammar proficiency as well as learner motivation of Iranian elementary EFL learners.

Supporting Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the present study is "The use of TBLT is more effective than CLIL in teaching grammar for tertiary level ESL learners." and it intends to examine the most effective method of teaching grammar between

the use of TBLT and CLIL in ESL classroom in Sri Lanka. To claim this hypothesis, the data obtained from the posttest from both groups were analyzed using One-Way ANOVA.

The findings of both groups were that there was an increase in mean values in the TBLT posttest than CLIL posttest as in Table 2 and the improvement was statistically significant as shown in Table 3 except for the subject-verb agreement grammar lesson. Overall, these findings indicate that the TBLT method is more effective in teaching grammar than CLIL for tertiary-level ESL learners. Therefore, the Hypothesis was confirmed by the results of this study.

Table 2

TBLT Posttest vs CLIL Posttest Descriptives

Descriptive									
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
svagreement	tblt	20	78.00	16.416	3.671	70.32	85.68	50	100
	clil	20	66.25	24.109	5.391	54.97	77.53	5	100
	Total	40	72.13	21.210	3.354	65.34	78.91	5	100
ing	tblt	20	74.50	14.039	3.139	67.93	81.07	45	100
	clil	20	57.75	12.924	2.890	51.70	63.80	30	85
	Total	40	66.13	15.791	2.497	61.07	71.18	30	100
imparatives	tblt	20	79.25	11.271	2.520	73.97	84.53	65	100
	clil	20	60.75	13.404	2.997	54.48	67.02	35	85
	Total	40	70.00	15.401	2.435	65.07	74.93	35	100
singplu	tblt	20	65.50	16.214	3.626	57.91	73.09	40	100
	clil	20	52.25	15.259	3.412	45.11	59.39	30	80
	Total	40	58.88	16.927	2.676	53.46	64.29	30	100
pastense	tblt	20	73.00	17.502	3.914	64.81	81.19	45	100
	clil	20	56.75	16.325	3.650	49.11	64.39	30	90
	Total	40	64.88	18.622	2.944	58.92	70.83	30	100

Table 3

TBLT Posttest Vs CLIL Posttest ANOVA

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
svagreement	Between Groups	1380.625	1	1380.625	3.246	.080
	Within Groups	16163.750	38	425.362		

	Total	17544.375	39			
ing	Between Groups	2805.625	1	2805.625	15.409	.000
	Within Groups	6918.750	38	182.072		
	Total	9724.375	39			
imparatives	Between Groups	3422.500	1	3422.500	22.317	.000
	Within Groups	5827.500	38	153.355		
	Total	9250.000	39			
singplu	Between Groups	1755.625	1	1755.625	7.083	.011
	Within Groups	9418.750	38	247.862		
	Total	11174.375	39			
pasttense	Between Groups	2640.625	1	2640.625	9.220	.004
	Within Groups	10883.750	38	286.414		
	Total	13524.375	39			

Answering the Research Question 2

The second research question of the present study is “What are the perspectives of teachers and learners on the use of TBLT and CLIL methods in teaching grammar in the ESL classroom?” To answer this question the data gathered from the open-ended questionnaires from the earners and two semi-structured interviews from the teachers were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Several themes can be identified after the data analysis. Knowledge about the methods, views on using the methods and reasons for using or not using those methods are the major themes that are found. These themes can be elaborated as follows.

Knowledge about the Methods

Among the two teachers, only one teacher mentioned that she has an idea about both TBLT and CLIL methods but does not have any proper training to implement these methods in the actual classroom.

Interviewee 02: “I have some knowledge about both TBLT and CLIL teaching methods yet, I didn’t get any proper training on how to use them in grammar teaching”.

Views on the Usage

After analyzing the collected data from the learner open-ended questionnaire it is found that many of the learners in both batches have mentioned that both methods are not used in grammar teaching in the classroom.

Script 16: “We learn grammar after the teacher’s explanations and we didn’t use this method earlier to learn grammar”

Script 25: “Doing a task and then learning grammar points is new for me and I like this way of learning grammar”

Thus, both the use of TBLT and CLIL in grammar teaching and learning have positive attitudes.

Reasons for Using/ Not Using These Methods

According to the thematic data analysis, it is found that the lack of experience, insufficient knowledge, time allocation, lack of resources, heavy syllabus to cover etc as some of the major reasons that limit the usage of TBLT and CLIL in grammar teaching in ESL classroom.

Interviewee 1: “Due to the heavy syllabus that we have to cover during the term we are not able to incorporate various teaching methods as time allocation is so limited”

Furthermore, from the two teacher interviews, it is found that if they are given proper training on how to use these teaching methods in language classrooms they are willing to incorporate them into their teaching.

Limitations of the Study

The present study has several limitations. The data collection time duration is limited and more time duration can be employed to collect data to have more generalizable findings. Moreover, the study was carried out only in one private higher educational institute and as well as only with randomly selected 60 students. Therefore, the results of the study cannot generalize the findings to the general population of all tertiary-level ESL learners in Sri Lanka.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implications of the Present Study

The results of the present study indicate that both TBLT and CLIL methods can be used to teach grammar to tertiary-level ESL learners. However, the TBLT method is the most effective method to teach grammar in the ESL classroom for tertiary-level learners. These findings from the present study have implications for the use of TBLT and CLIL in the language classroom. Firstly, the overall findings of the study are indicative of the necessity of using varied teaching approaches to teach grammar in the ESL classroom. In that case, both TBLT and CLIL are effective methods to be implemented in the classroom as they can motivate learners to learn in an interesting classroom context. Another implication of this study is that the teachers need to have sufficient knowledge on how to utilize those approaches effectively in grammar teaching making the lessons more interesting for the learners. Moreover, teachers should be able to manage the time when using those approaches in the classroom.

Recommendations for Future Research Studies

Considering the implications and limitations of the present study, in future studies, it would be effective to incorporate different teaching approaches to teach grammar in the ESL classroom not just limiting the same and usual ways of grammar teaching and extending the duration of collecting data and conducting the teaching sessions. Moreover, future research can be conducted to examine how TBLT and CLIL methods can facilitate other language skills learning. Furthermore, the sample size, in future studies, should be increased to gain generalizable findings on the use of TBLT and CLIL methods to teach grammar in the ESL classroom in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

Based on the research and its findings it can be concluded that the use of both TBLT and CLIL are effective in the enhancement of grammar learning at the tertiary level and yet, the TBLT method is the most effective method for the tertiary level students. Moreover, both teachers and learners are willing to be exposed to those teaching and learning methods and they have a positive attitude toward its usage. Furthermore, finding ways to eliminate the limitations of this study could make directions for future studies related to this field. In conclusion, although the study has several limitations it is expected that the results of the present study will make the teachers aware of the value and effectiveness of using TBLT and CLIL as a strategy to overcome the challenges that both teachers and learners encounter in grammar learning in ESL context of Sri Lanka.

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