

Forms and functions of habitual markers

A cross-linguistic survey

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Outline

1 What are habituals?

2 Why and how?

3 Findings so far

4 Conclusions

Two caveats



This presentation is based on joint work with Eva van Lier.

Two caveats



... and our research is still very much work in progress! Comments and ideas are highly appreciated.

Section 1

What are habituals?

Habituals

- Linguistic forms expressing that something typically or usually happens
- Often described under the heading of aspect, specifically as a subtype of imperfective aspect (e.g. Comrie 1976)
- Modify a predicate (like other TMA expressions) and appear in many different guises: affix, clitic, particle, auxiliary, etc.

Example: Yuchi *-ne*

(1) Yuchi (isolate, Oklahoma)

- a. *sahã:de 'i* *hẽ-wa-ne*
 always tobacco 3SG(Yuchi.M).ACT-chew-HAB
 ‘He chews tobacco all the time.’

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 always tobacco 3SG(Yuchi.M).ACT-chew-HAB
 ‘He chews tobacco all the time.’
- b. *'i hõ-wa =:le*
 tobacco 3SG(Yuchi.M).ACT-chew =EMPH
 ‘He’s really chewing (and chewing) that tobacco!’
 (Linn 2001: 263, 77)

Example: (older) Dutch *plegen*

(2) Early Modern Dutch (1637)

Dit mirakel is des_te wonderbaerlicker, om_dat het
 this.N miracle(N) COP.3SG all.the incredible.CMPR because it
in Egypten niet en plagh te regenen, noch te hagelen.
 in Egypt not NEG HAB.PST to rain.INF nor to hail.INF
 ‘This miracle is all the more incredible because it did not
 usually rain or hail in Egypt.’

(*Statenvertaling*, commentary to Ex 9:18; dbnl.org)

Repeated or characteristic situations?

- One tradition views habituals as inherently involving repetition, i.e. a kind of verbal plurality
 - e.g. Bertinetto & Lenci (2012), Brinton (1987), Bybee et al. (1994: 127), and Xrakovskij (1997), among many others

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- According to another school of thought, habituals describe “a characteristic feature of a whole period” (Comrie 1976: 28), not necessarily involving any repetition
 - Why? In some languages, habitual markers may combine with individual-level state predicates (on this term see Carlson 2012)

English *used to* + individual-level state

(3) *Simon **used to** believe in ghosts.*

(Comrie 1976: 27)

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- Solution by some: English *used to* is not a habitual marker!
 - e.g. Binnick (2005; 2006), Hantson (2005), and Boneh & Jędrzejowski (2019: 11)
 - But cf. e.g. Schulz (2010), Neels (2015), or Hengeveld et al. (2021)

Other discussions in the literature

- Differences/similarities between habitual and generic (gnomic) statements (Dahl 1985; Bertinetto 1994; Krifka et al. 1995; Langacker 1997; Carlson 2012)
 - *Beavers build dams* (or *The beaver builds dams*)

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 - *Beavers build dams* (or *The beaver builds dams*)
- Differences/similarities between habituals and ‘attitudinals’ (Bertinetto 1994; Lin 2003; Bertinetto & Lenci 2012)
 - *She teaches Dutch* (cf. *She is a Dutch teacher*)

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- Differences/similarities between habituais and ‘attitudinals’ (Bertinetto 1994; Lin 2003; Bertinetto & Lenci 2012)
 - *She teaches Dutch* (cf. *She is a Dutch teacher*)
- Habituais as the expression of *habits*?
 - Habituais describe habits or propensities of participants (Brinton 1987; Dik 1997: 236)
 - Habituais characterize situations (e.g. Lyons 1977: 716; Comrie 1976: 27–28; Carlson 2012: 831)

Working definition for this study

‘Habitual’ – informal working definition

An overt marker or construction expressing that a situation typically occurs.

Some phenomena not included

- Frequentative or pluractional forms which may receive a habitual interpretation
 - e.g. CVC-reduplication in Squamish/Skw̓xwú7mesh (Salishan; Canada): sometimes translated ‘usually, always’, but used more broadly for situations that happen more than once (Bar-el 2008)
 - *kw’elh*- ‘spill’ → *kw’elh~kw’elh*- ‘always spill’ (bad habit)
 - *7exw*- ‘cough’ → *7exw~7exw*- ‘cough many times’
 - *sak*’- ‘cut’ → *sek*’~*sak*’- ‘slice’

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- Unmarked tense/aspect forms which may occur in semantically habitual contexts
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- ‘Habitual nouns’ meaning ‘someone who usually does X’, etc.
 - e.g. the habitual nominalizer *tala(g)-* in Matigsalug Manobo (Austronesian, Philippines) (Wang et al. 2006: 32)
 - *suggal* ‘gamble’ → *tala(g)suggal* ‘gambler’
 - *bunù* ‘murder’ → *tala(g)bunù* ‘murderer’

Two notes on terminology

- ‘Habitual’ very common in the linguistic literature, but may be used with different extensions (cf. Carlson 2012: 842)

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- ‘Habitual’ very common in the linguistic literature, but may be used with different extensions (cf. Carlson 2012: 842)
- Sometimes other terms are found for expressions of typically occurring situations (especially in older sources)

Alternative terminology

Term	Example references
CONSUETUDINAL	O'Donovan 1845; Bliss 1972
CUSTOMARY	Lipkind 1945; Aikhenvald 2003; Mihas 2015
HABITUATIVE	de Angulo & Freeland 1930; Strange 1973; Hill 1975
NORMAL	Bromley 1981; Louwerse 1988 (alongside other terms)
USITATIVE	Ultan 1967; Parks 1976; Silverstein 1974

Table 1: Some other terms in the literature

Section 2

Why and how?

Habituals in the typological literature

- Much work on habituals in (some) individual languages, but few large-scale cross-linguistic surveys
- No chapter on habituals in the WALS (or the Eurotyp volumes)
 - cf. Boneh & Jędrzejowski (2019: 1–2)
- Habituals generally receive less attention than more ‘central’ TMA categories

Some relevant earlier studies

- Dahl (1985: 95–102) on habitual (and ‘habitual-generic’) markers, part of a larger study of tense and aspect markers
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- Bybee et al. (1994: 151–160) on grammaticalization and lexical sources of TMA markers
 - 94 languages in the sample, data on habituals from 30
- Cristofaro (2004) on the relation between past habituals and irrealis marking
 - Convenience sample of “about two hundred” languages, unfortunately no full list of sources

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- Maurer (2013) on coexpression (or not) of habitual markers in creole languages
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- Maurer (2013) on coexpression (or not) of habitual markers in creole languages
 - 76 languages in the APiCS, habitual marking discussed for 59
- Fortuin (forthcoming) on the relation between habituals and the perfective/imperfective distinction
 - 36 languages investigated

Main research questions

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- 2 What are the (probable) sources of habitual markers? (COEXPRESSION)
- 3 Which contrasts are expressed in languages with multiple habitual markers? (SEMANTIC DISTINCTIONS)

Uses of a cross-linguistic survey

- Can serve as a guide for descriptive linguists – what might one look for in a given language?

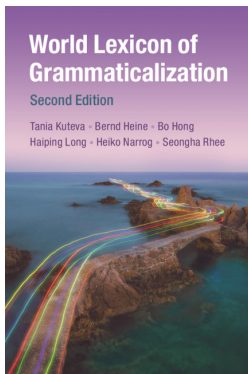
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- Can serve as a guide for descriptive linguists – what might one look for in a given language?
- May help us identify areal patterns in the world's languages
- Tells us about what is common and less common – and hence what may require a special explanation
 - cf. Ziegeler (2020: 274) on Singapore English: “Habitual aspect marked by forms meaning *will* is not a frequent universal pattern of grammaticalization” – but how do we know this?

A note on grammaticalization



- The observed patterns of coexpression can probably often be described as the result of GRAMMATICALIZATION (cf. Kuteva et al. 2019). However:
 - For most languages in the sample we have little or no historical evidence
 - Not always clear that a habitual marker is ‘grammatical’ (however this is defined)
 - Coexpression may arise in various ways, not just through grammaticalization (cf. Haspelmath 1998)

A lexical habitual (and its source)

(4) Danish (Indo-European; Denmark)

a. *Jeg **plej-er** at vær-e heldig på casino.*

I HAB-NPST to COP-INF lucky on casino

‘I’m usually lucky in the casino’

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b. *Han **plej-er** sit forhold til*

he care.for-NPST REFL.POSS.N relationship(N) to

fagbevægelse-n

labour_movement-DEF

‘He is caring for his relationship with the labour unions’

(examples from KorpusDK; cf. Gregersen et al. 2021)

Future–habitual coexpression in Lezgian

- (5) Lezgian (Nakh-Dagestanian; Dagestan/Azerbaijan)

[*Ina amuq'-aj-t'a,*] čun *wahši-jr.i* ***ne-da.*** *Zun*

here stay-AOP-CND we:ABS wild-PL(ERG) eat-FUT I:ABS

xür.ü-z ***q^hfi-da.***

village-DAT go.back-FUT

'If we stay here, wild animals will eat us. I'll go back to the village.' (Haspelmath 1993: 141)

Future–habitual coexpression in Lezgian

- (6) Lezgian (Nakh-Dagestanian; Dagestan/Azerbaijan)
 [*Q^hsan xürek-r.i-kaj raxa-da-j-la*] *Mizafer.a-n*
 good meal-PL-SBEL talk-FUT-PTP-TEMP Mizafer-GEN
siw.i-z hamiša c'aran jad ĩwe-da.
 mouth-DAT always salivary water come-FUT
 'Whenever there is talk about good meals, saliva always
 comes to Mizafer's mouth.' (Haspelmath 1993: 141)

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- No development FUT → HAB acc. to Haspelmath (1993: 130; 1998: 38–39) – FUT–HAB suffix *-da* originally meant 'nonpast', but has lost present progressive uses

Method

- Used the “minimal” diversity sample from Audring et al. (2021)
 - so far 82 languages surveyed
 - Checked descriptive grammars (or other relevant literature) for habitual markers
 - Noted expression format, coexpression patterns, and any other relevant information for each marker

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 - Checked descriptive grammars (or other relevant literature) for habitual markers
 - Noted expression format, coexpression patterns, and any other relevant information for each marker
- Supplemented “opportunistically” with information on habituals from c. 50 other languages and dialects
- Languages included in our diversity sample are indicated with **blue** text; additional languages with grey

Section 3

Findings so far

How many relevant languages?

	<i>n</i>
One habitual	40
More than one habitual	11
None reported/unclear	31
Total	82

Table 2: Languages with reports of habituals

How are habitual meanings expressed? (RQ1)

	<i>n</i>
Affix(es)	24
Clitic(s)	2
Particle(s)	5
Auxiliary/catenative verb(s)	4
Serial/compound verb(s)	3
Adnominal construction	1
Multiple strategies	6
Unclear	6
Total	51

Table 3: Expression formats per language

Summary on expression format (RQ1)

- Habitual markers reported for 51 of the 82 surveyed languages
- Many bound morphemes – 26 out of 51 languages have habitual affixes or clitics
- But this may partly be due to descriptive bias
 - Grammars usually have comprehensive coverage of bound morphemes, whereas periphrastic constructions might be overlooked (especially in sketch grammars)

Coexpression patterns (RQ2)

Meaning	Languages
BEFRIEND	Wari'
BELONG	Cornish English
CONTINUE	Lavukaleve
CUSTOM	Yimas , Standard Basque
DO	Kwomtari , Tariana , Gullah, Anamuxra, Palenquero
FOR LONG/STILL	Hup , Pennsylvania Dutch English
KNOW	Mosetén , A'ingae , BCS, Tok Pisin, Vitu, Palenquero, Bizkaian Basque
LIKE/LOVE	Lao , Khmu, Mandarin, Saramaccan, Hualapai
LIVE	A'ingae , Abipon, Dhivehi
SIT/STAY etc.	Mosetén , Tariana , Kanakuru
USE	Swedish, Standard English
WALK/GO etc.	Kokama-Kokamilla , Ute , Yace, Sezo
Copula/existential	Mian , Bora , Dumo/Vanimo, Pnar ('be same')
Future	Purépecha , Kristang, Odia
Indefinite object	Misantla Totonac
Nominalization	Yauyos Quechua

Table 4: Coexpression and possible source meanings

Coexpression: KNOW + habitual

(7) A'ingae (isolate; Colombia/Ecuador)

- a. *Je'nda pûshesû=ndekhû=khe=ti setha'pue-ñe **atesû**='fa.*
 then woman=HUMPL=ADD=INT sing-INF HAB=PLS
 'So the women too used to sing?'

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‘So the women too used to sing?’

- b. *Munda=ma fi'thi-ye atesû=mbi=chu a'i*
 peccary=ACC1 kill-INF know=NEG=SUBORD person

‘There was a man who didn't know how to kill
 white-lipped peccary.’

(Hengeveld 2020)

FYI: white-lipped peccary



White-lipped peccary, © Mike Peel (mikepeel.net)

Coexpression: LIKE + habitual

(8) Khmu (Austroasiatic; Laos)

- a. *kə̀ə kù yə̀h mɛ̀aŋ_théey kùu pîi*
 he HAB go Thailand each year
 ‘He usually goes to Thailand each year’

Coexpression: LIKE + habitual

(8) Khmu (Austroasiatic; Laos)

- a. *kəə kù yəh mian_ théey kùu pīi*
 he HAB go Thailand each year

‘He usually goes to Thailand each year’

- b. *nəə kù ʔwɛak pùuc*
 they HAB/like drink wine.

‘They usually drink wine./They like to drink wine.’

(Svantesson 1994: 272)

From indefinite object to habitual marker?

(9) *Misantla Totonac* (Totonacan; Mexico)

a. *ut šqaa-nan*

3SG harvest-INDF.OBJ

‘s/he harvests (something)’

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- “When translating verbs with /-nan/ out of context [also transitive verbs, SG], speakers almost invariably qualify the meaning of the verb with ‘always.’” (MacKay 1999: 322)

Multiple habituals (RQ3)

- More than one habitual marker reported for 11 languages in our diversity sample
- Which distinctions are relevant in such cases?

Multiple habituals (RQ3)

	Language	Source
Polarity	A'ingae POS habituals vs. NEG = <i>masia</i> Berbice Dutch POS <i>justu</i> + <i>das</i> vs. NEG <i>dasn</i>	Hengeveld 2020 Kouwenberg 1994
Tense	Ket PST <i>ba</i> /PRS <i>an</i> /FUT <i>as</i> Coastal Marind PST <i>-ma</i> /PRS <i>-made</i> /FUT <i>-motok</i> Berbice Dutch PST <i>justu</i> vs. neutral <i>das/dasn</i>	Georg 2007 Olsson 2021 Kouwenberg 1994
Frequency	Kwaza 'intensive habitual' <i>-tjarjỹ</i> Lao 'tendency' <i>mak1</i> vs. 'regular' <i>lùajø-lùaj4</i>	van der Voort 2004 Enfield 2007
'Modality'	Tariana 'habitual prescribed' = <i>hyuna</i>	Aikhenvald 2003
Unclear	Maidu PST.HAB <i>-ús</i> vs. 'auxiliary' <i>?isá-</i> Pawnee 'habitual' <i>-u:ku</i> vs. 'usitative' <i>ut-</i> Mosetén HAB auxiliaries + clitic A'ingae HAB <i>atesû</i> vs. <i>kanse</i>	Shipley 1964 Parks 1976 Sakel 2004 Hengeveld 2020

Table 5: Distinctions in languages with multiple habituals

Tariana ‘customary’ =*kape*

- Customary form “refers to a usual activity or state repeated many times over, most often in the past” (Aikhenvald 2003: 328)

(10) **Tariana** (Arawakan; Brazil)

a. *di-ni* *di-ni=kape=sina* *diha*

3SG.NF-do 3SG.NF-do=CUST=REMPST.INFR he

‘He used to do it (i.e. talk) like that for a long time’
(during rituals)

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 (during rituals)
- b. *matfa=pu* *nu-ña=kape=na* *nuha*
 be.good=AUG 1SG-live=CUST=REMPST.VIS I
 ‘I used to live very well’
 (Aikhenvald 2003: 329)

Tariana ‘habitual prescribed’ =*hyuna*

- Used for “habitual prescribed activity”, in instructions, and for “what is generally done” (Aikhenvald 2003: 326–328)

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- a. *kare yaphini=nuku pa-sape=hyuna*
 wind thing=TOP.NSBJ IMPERS-say=HAB

‘One says this to describe what wind does’ (lit. “for thing of wind”)

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b. *aseni-ku=ne=mia=na*

pa-sape=hyuna

Tucano-AFF=INS=only=REMPST.VIS IMPERS-say=HAB

‘(we) spoke only Tucano ...’

(Aikhenvald 2003: 326, 307)

Kwaza ‘habitual’ *ĩĩta-*

- Habitual compound verb *ĩĩta-* “can be translated as ‘always’, ‘as usual’ or ‘as a habit’” (van der Voort 2004: 453)

(12) **Kwaza** (isolate, Brazil)

- a. *e'tay-nahere arũi-'wã tswa are-'dy=ĩĩta-tja*
 woman-COLL tapir-AN.O man transform-CAUS=always-cos
 ‘the women always made the tapir turn into man’

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- b. *ỹhỹ'ko a'we=ĩĩĩta-tse*
 here rain=always-DECL
 ‘Here it always rains’
 (van der Voort 2004: 453)

Kwaza ‘intensive habitual’ -*tjarjỹ-*

- Habitual morpheme -*tjarjỹ-* “has an intensive connotation ‘always much’” (van der Voort 2004: 454)

(13) **Kwaza** (isolate, Brazil)

- a. *tomã-kore-tja'rjỹ-da-ki*
 bathe-DIR:matutinal-much-1SG-DECL
 ‘I always take a morning bath’

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bathe-DIR:matutinal-much-1SG-DECL
‘I always take a morning bath’
- awe-tja'rjỹ-ki*
rain-much-DECL
‘it is raining too much [every day]’
(van der Voort 2004: 454)

Future habituals

- Dedicated FUT.HAB markers reported for two languages in the sample, [Ket](#) (Yeniseian) and [Coastal Marind](#) (Anim)
 - Ket FUT.HAB said to be rare (Georg 2007: 286); for Coastal Marind, Olsson (2021: 384–385) also notes non-habitual uses
- Beyond our sample, a future habitual is also reported in Chichewa (Kiso 2012)

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- Beyond our sample, a future habitual is also reported in Chichewa (Kiso 2012)
- Combinability of separate HAB + FUT markers in several languages, e.g. Isekiri (Omamor 1982), Gungbe (Aboh 2000: 23–24), and Southern Kiwai (Wurm 1977)

Future habitual in Coastal Marind

- (14) **Coastal Marind** (Anim; South Papua)

nok ka-mo-na-yad<e>wn,

1 DIR-FUT:2SG.A-1.DAT-leave<III.U>

mano-poto-motok yah

FUT:1.A-take.picture-FUT.HAB PTCL

‘You should leave it [a camera] for me, [then] I will be taking pictures.’

(Olsson 2021: 384)

Future + habitual in Isekiri

(15) Isekiri (Atlantic-Congo; Nigeria)

a. *Mó **ká** rè.*

1SG HAB go

‘I (usually) go’ or ‘I used to go’

b. *Mó **waá** rè.*

1SG FUT go

‘I will go’

c. *Mó **waá** **ká** rè.*

1SG FUT HAB go

‘I will make a habit of going’

(Omamor 1982: 119)

Future + habitual in Southern Kiwai

- (16) Southern Kiwai (Kiwaian; PNG)

wi-du-m-a-ri-iarug-uti-ri-go

2/3-FUT-PL.A-HAB-FUT-say[PL.OBJ]-DISTR-FUT-HAB?

‘They will habitually speak (many things on many occasions)’

(Wurm 1977: 899)

Section 4

Conclusions

Summing up

- Habitual markers are cross-linguistically very common
 - Identified in 51 out of 82 languages in the diversity sample
 - HAB affix(es) in half of these; other strategies include clitics, particles, auxiliaries, and serial verbs (RQ1)

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- Great variety of attested coexpression patterns
 - e.g. KNOW, LIKE, DO, GO, and copulas/existentials; less common meanings include BEFRIEND, BELONG, and INDF.OBJ (RQ2)

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- Great variety of attested coexpression patterns
 - e.g. KNOW, LIKE, DO, GO, and copulas/existentials; less common meanings include BEFRIEND, BELONG, and INDF.OBJ (RQ2)
- More than one HAB marker in several languages
 - Relevant parameters include polarity, tense, frequency/intensity, ‘modality’ – in addition to unclear cases (RQ3)

Conclusions in light of earlier work

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 - Our results do not contradict this – Dahl has a quite specific (frequency-based) definition of “major TMA category”

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 - Of course, some of these reflect tense or polarity distinctions, not different subtypes of habituality – but not all

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- Kuteva et al. (2019) identify nine sources of habitual markers, e.g. KNOW, SIT, GO, and USE
 - To these we may add at least ten additional possible sources, some of them well attested across languages (e.g. DO and LIKE)

Plans for the future

- Closer investigation of semantic distinctions in individual languages (in the context of the 'Habituals' research group)

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 - If anyone in the audience has examples from other languages/dialects, please don’t hesitate to get in touch!

Habitual *belong* in Cornish English

(17) Cornish English (Cornwall)

- a. *I am not so ill as I **belong** to be*
 ‘I am not so ill as I usually am’
- b. *I don't **belong** going to Church, but I will this once.*
 ‘I don't usually go to church, but I will this once’
 (Wright 1898–1905: s.v. *belong*)

Habitual *still* in Pennsylvania Dutch English

(18) Pennsylvania Dutch English (Southern Pennsylvania)

a. *I go to that church **still**.*

‘It is my habit to attend that church.’

b. *He liked pepperoni pizza **still**.*

‘He used to like/always did like pepperoni pizza.’

(Anderson 2014: 35–36)

Thank you!



South American tapir, © Johan Spaedtke

Comments and questions are always welcome:
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