

Bilingualism, Trilingualism, Hybrid Language - Reflection on The Conditions for A Successful Plurilingual Education - Presentation and Case Analysis - Life Story, Longitudinal Approach

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to reflect on the optimal conditions necessary for plurilingual education. After a brief theoretical approach to bilingualism and plurilingualism, a practical family case is discussed, based on a longitudinal approach spanning three generations.

The issue of bilingualism and hybrid language is addressed, with the harmful effects of linguistic hybridization due to a lack of a reference language. What do we observe in children living in a bilingual environment, from a language point of view? Is bilingual or trilingual education possible in all circumstances?

What are the best conditions for a successful multilingual education? But what are also the conditions and pitfalls on the long road to a plurilingual education?

We know that bilingualism, for example, can help children to develop their language skills, but we also need to set the course if we are to achieve our educational objective. There are two fundamental aspects to this:

firstly, the assessment of what has been achieved in each language, in terms of bilingualism, throughout the school career, by means of school results;

secondly, the assessment of the mother tongue or father tongue of reference, using the comparative method.

This method has three parameters: vocabulary, semantics and morphosyntax. The Neel test by Chevrier-Müller, 2001 edition, was used for Turkish children aged 8;0 - 8;6, in order to highlight language difficulties.

A longitudinal approach involving four children was used, as it enabled us to step back in time and assess the development of the four children... Is there a cocktail of success when it comes to plurilingual education?

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Bibliography

Chapter 1 - Bilingualism, Hybrid Language, Learning Difficulties

1.1 Bilingualism and Hybrid Language

In Belgium, it has been observed that children of foreign origin have more learning difficulties (Lafontaine, 2002). I have personally noticed that in schools where there is a concentration of newcomer children or where there is a majority of second-generation children whose parents are socioculturally disadvantaged, the learning problems are greater. These difficulties affect both spoken and written language.

For Lucchini (1997), the dialects and languages used are destabilized by contact with the standardized language. Bilingualism is only an enrichment if the child has a reference language. If the child has no reference language, he or she will have difficulty learning a second language.

For Lucchini (1997), the reference language is the language of the parents which has enabled sufficient metalinguistic skills to be acquired. If the mother tongue is not mixed with the school language, language development will be more effective and a hybrid language will not emerge. As a result, each language will be more stable.

In schools where there is a high concentration of children of foreign origin, learning problems may be greater. A stable linguistic environment guarantees the development of the language and its linguistic norms: phonology, semantics and morphosyntax. A well-constructed reference language will facilitate the acquisition and internalization of a standardized language and make it easier to learn other languages.

A strong reference language, whatever it may be, will have a rich vocabulary enabling good metalinguistic skills. In this way, learning another language can be grafted onto the reference language.

In fact, I have noticed that children of foreign origin who have a very good command of their parents' language before the prime reference language have fewer problems learning the school language and have fewer problems learning written language.

According to Lucchini (1997), in the absence of a reference language, pre-school-age children are unable 'to perform tasks that require the acquisition of early metaphonological skills, pre-existing the acquisition of reading, whether their mother tongue is the regional language of their parents, the standard language of the country of origin or French. This may explain why children from a migrant background often present learning difficulties, including in mathematics, when oral or written language is involved.

The negative impact on learning of the lack of a reference language has also been established by Pik (2000), particularly in the case of Roma children.

It should also be remembered that children from immigrant backgrounds obtain results below the international average and the average for French-speaking Belgium (Lafontaine, 2002).

The absence of a reference language, which does not allow for the normal development of metalinguistic skills, is one of the reasons for early school failure (Seböck, 2024).

If there is no reference language in the family environment and literacy is lacking, the child is at a disadvantage from the outset compared with another child who has a strong reference language and whose parents have no literacy problems (Seböck, 2024).

In situations of illiteracy, 'speakers do not have a reference language in which metalinguistic activities have been developed through reading and writing' (Lucchini, 2005).

1.2 Harmful Effects of Language Hybridization in The Case of Bilingualism

Hybrid language is made up of elements borrowed from two different languages. It is the addition of another language to the language used in the family, for example. But hybridization will unfortunately affect both languages, impoverishing them both. In concrete terms, in terms of vocabulary, the child will know the name of an object in the family language, but not in the school language, or vice versa.

The result is often a language full of words from the other language. But the worst thing is when neologisms appear, or when the two languages are combined to use a word, or when phonological distortions occur.

In the end, the child and the family run the risk of developing a hybrid language which only the restricted or wider family community uses or understands. According to Hamers & Blanc (1983), this is a 'communication strategy in which a speaker mixes elements or rules from the two languages and thereby breaks the rules of the language used'.

Learning a second language would be possible without failure if the metalinguistic skills were acquired in the first language, but this presupposes a good command of the home language if that is to become the reference language.

This is where the parental sociocultural parameter is likely to come into play. It is also at this level that inequalities of opportunity will emerge.

This presupposes the existence of a standardized and stabilized reference language. The problem is that when a hybrid language is used in the family environment, with mixed codes and new elements borrowed from different languages, this hybrid language cannot be a reference language (Seböck, 2024).

Hybridization at the level of language therefore occurs when several languages are mixed together. Not only does this result in a progressive impoverishment of the mixed languages in terms of vocabulary, but the mixing also manifests itself in semantic distortions and phrasal constructions which lead to an often unfortunate codification where the meaning contains alterations, a vocabulary containing neologisms and hybridization leading to phonological alterations.

This generally leads to difficulties in learning to read, in writing and in understanding school language.

1.3 Observations on Turkish Children with Learning Difficulties

Parents who mix languages, in this case Turkish/French, result in a lack of Turkish vocabulary, but also a lack of French vocabulary.

Phonological difficulties arise because parents who do not speak French well insist on speaking French to their children in the belief that they will help them to acquire the language.

They mix languages, because they can't say everything in French. This can result in phonological distortions being passed on to the child, and there is also a danger of developing a hybrid language that is difficult to understand.

By imitation, small children will reproduce what their parents say and adopt this imperfect language containing phonological distortions, deformations of words, deformations of the meaning of words, dysgrammatics and the construction of imperfect sentences.

The construction of this type of language can be difficult to rectify; speech therapists will be able to confirm this.

That's why it's best for parents with a poor command of the French language to continue to speak to their children in their mother tongue, while encouraging the school and the French language.

So, even at home, if you speak in Turkish, you need to create a moment for the French language, for example, by watching a children's film in French rather than Turkish.

Children from a migrant background have to listen to their parents speak their language by necessity, while trying to master the family language if the parents are able, but for integration into society, priority must be given to the lingua franca (French or Dutch or German, depending on the region in Belgium).

Very often, children with a poor command of the school language (French, Dutch or German) very quickly have difficulties with reading and writing.

1.3.1 Neel Test Results, 8 ;0 Years, Form G.

Twenty Turkish children were tested and here are the results for three parameters: phonology - vocabulary - morphosyntax.

Scores ranged from -3V to +2V, the mean being M (Average)

Children	Phonology	Vocabulary	Morphosyntax
1	-2V	-2V	-2V
2	-3V	-2V	-2V
3	-2V	-1V	-1V
4	-1V	-1V	-1V
5	-2V	-1V	-2V
6	-1V	-1V	-2V
7	-2V	-2V	-2V
8	-1V	M	-1V
9	-1V	-1V	-1V
10	-1V	M	M
11	-1V	M	-1V
12	M	-2V	-2V
13	M	-1V	-1V
14	M	-2V	-1V
15	M	-1V	-1V
16	-1V	-1V	-1V
17	M	M	M
18	M	-1V	-1V
19	M	M	M
20	M	-2V	-1V
With language delay	12	15	17
Scores average or above	8	5	3

Analysis of scores on the Neel 8 ;0 form G test (N=20)

Children with phonological difficulties : 12

Children with vocabulary difficulties : 15

Children with morphosyntactic difficulties : 17

No child obtained +1V or +2V

In phonology, only 8 children scored M

In terms of vocabulary and morphosyntax, the results are catastrophic.

Among these children, the parents mix the languages and among the 20 families, 8 have developed a hybrid Turkish/French form.

1.4 Observations on Turkish Children with No Learning Problems.

Very often, these are parents who speak good French or Dutch (depending on the region in Belgium) and who are capable of becoming 'walking dictionaries' for their children. They don't mix languages and know how to set aside time for each language. For example, the father can speak to the child in Dutch and the mother in Turkish... but above all, no mixing!

Even for parents who don't master the lingua franca of the host country, there are ways of making the most of the lingua franca, for example by enrolling the child in a youth club, cultural association, dance or music school, etc.

Scores ranged from -3V to +2V, with the average being M (Average).

1.4.1 Neel Test Results, 8 ;0 Years Old, Form G.

Children	Phonology	Vocabulary	Morphosyntax
1	M	+1V	+1V
2	-1V	M	M
3	M	+1V	M
4	M	+1V	M
5	M	M	M
6	+1V	+1V	+1V
7	+1V	+2V	+1V
8	-1V	-1V	-1V
9	-2V	M	-1V
10	M	M	M
11	M	+1V	M
12	+1V	-1V	-1V
13	+2V	+2V	+1V
14	+2V	+1V	+1V
15	M	-1V	M
16	-1V	M	M
17	-2V	-1V	-1V
18	-1V	M	M
19	M	+1V	+1V
20	+1V	+2V	+2V
Language delay	6	4	4
Scores average or above	14	16	16

Analysis of Neel test scores 8 ;0 form G

In this category, at least one parent has a good command of the school language. The parents do not mix languages.

In 10 families, one parent speaks most often to the child in Turkish and the other in French or Dutch (according to the language region).

The scores show the following:

- More children scored average or above on the 3 language parameters than in the previous group.
- Phonological difficulties are significantly lower than in the previous group
- A minority of children scored below average compared with the previous group of children
- Some children have articulatory difficulties, but their vocabulary and morphosyntax are correct.

1.5 The Main Indicators of Oral Language

The three main indicators of language are : phonological mastery, development of vocabulary and semantics, and morphosyntactic construction.

A language can develop when there is good phonological mastery of a language and good phonological awareness. To this must be added a rich vocabulary and the capacity for phrasal construction, where dysgrammatism is very low.

Children who have mastered their reference language will be better able to learn another language by comparing vocabulary, phonology and morphosyntax.

1.6 Necessary Conditions for Optimal Learning of Two Languages

Parents may be advised to learn the family language only if they themselves have a good command of the family language in all three aspects : phonological, semantic and morphosyntactic.

We can also advise against mixing languages within the family, in order to preserve and develop vocabulary at the same time, even if it means making an effort to look it up in the dictionary if in doubt. You can also encourage your child not to mix languages.

Children can also be told that they can speak one language in the family and another at school, as long as their parents can support them, particularly with homework.

It is also conceivable that one of the parents who is fluent in the language speaks the language of the school and the other parent speaks the language of the country if he or she is also fluent. Children learn quickly and well if they have the right tools at their disposal.

However, I don't think that all children can be very good bilinguals? In fact, the finesse of hearing plays an important role, as does memory capacity, good coordination of the phonatory organs linked to good phonological control, intelligence and motivation on the part of the parents and the child.

For bilingual education to be successful, it is best for parents to know both languages, so that they can follow and react appropriately.

Once the child has reached a good level of knowledge of both languages, he or she will be able to play with both languages without mixing them, avoiding the hybridization that is the parents' mission in the first place.

Well-managed bilingualism at a pedagogical level becomes a strength that makes it even easier to learn a third or fourth language, because the phonological capacity of the child who has become an adolescent has a rich and wide range, making it musically easier to learn the musicality of the third language, i.e. pronunciation.

Well-managed bilingualism increases the child's cognitive and sensory capacities. Using a language involves coordinating the organs of phonation, hearing and discerning phonological subtleties, and the tactile, thanks to the points of articulation with the movements of the tongue (for example, the English 't' is not the French 't' or the Hungarian 't' or the German 't').

Let's not forget that language is also music. This is undoubtedly why many musicians seem to find it easier to learn a language and to pronounce what they say better.

1.7 Conclusion

It is clear that bilingualism is built on linguistic skills, but also on methodology and pedagogy to motivate children and explain the whys and wherefores of the choices they make when speaking.

It is difficult for a child's lack of mastery of their mother tongue to become a reference language, so it is better to make the language of the school the reference language.

Chapter 2 - Life Story, Life Experience

2.1 Longitudinal Approach to Plurilingual Education

Four children were followed from birth to adulthood.

2.2 Introducing The Parents

Origins - the transmission project

The mother is of Belgian origin, a speech therapist and educational psychologist with a good command of the Hungarian language.

The father is Belgian, of Hungarian origin, a speech therapist and educational psychologist, and a sworn translator, French/Hungarian and Hungarian/French.

2.2.1 Assessing the Feasibility of the Multilingual Education Project

Before the children were born, the parents agreed to teach them French and Hungarian. Given that in Belgium Dutch is of major importance in terms of employment opportunities, and that in Wallonia (Belgium) people speak very little Dutch, the parents decided that the children would attend school in Flanders. So the challenge was to stimulate the children in a trilingual environment.

Many people had advised against the project because it was too risky, but the parents persisted, knowing that they would have to invest a great deal of knowledge, teaching skills and methods in order to succeed, with the invaluable help of the grandparents. Finally, they were aware that in this adventure, relations with the school had to be optimal.

The parents had also decided to offer their children a musical education, this time at a French-speaking academy. This project had been envisaged insofar as the father had also received high-level musical training, particularly in musical composition.

2.3 Introduction to The Family's Four Children

Thomas, born on 09 January 1986

Catherine, born on 09 January 1987

Rebeka, born on 23 December 1989

Sàra, born on 30 July 1993

2.4 Life Story

Developments in Learning The Family Language as A Reference Language.

The reference language chosen was Hungarian from the outset. The father was totally committed, putting aside his artistic activities to devote himself as much as possible to the children's language development, largely assisted by his mother, who is of Hungarian origin and has a perfect command of the language.

The proximity of the home meant that the necessary forces could be brought together to try and make the project a success. Up until the age of 3 or 6, the children only heard Hungarian spoken. Even the mother took part.

However, the two eldest children attended the Flemish school in S'Gravenvoeren, and the other two followed. The older two began to learn music with their father, and at the 'Baby club' of the André Modeste Grétry music academy in Liège, where they began to be immersed in the French language.

In short, at home, their parents didn't mix languages: it was the Hungarian language. At the Academy of Music, it was French, and there the children knew that their parents spoke French very well. At the Flemish school, they learned in Dutch.

Later, the children continued to speak Hungarian to their father and they also spoke Hungarian to their mother, who only replied in French. Now, as adults, they speak to their mother in Hungarian for everyday matters and in French for more professional matters.

As they were young, the children quickly understood the language boundaries and their parents ensured that there was no mixing of languages. Around the age of 4–5, if there was a vocabulary deficit, parents ensured that vocabulary levels were levelled in both languages, with the Dutch being left to the school.

It was possible to gauge their language level by comparing them with children of the same age in Hungary, but also by listening to the opinions of native speakers.

2.5. Method of Assessing the Family Language and Its Development

When assessing language acquisition and development, parents always took care to separate the different languages and avoid hybridization, while playing comparison games. Sometimes the children would start saying words in Dutch, but they were gently told that at school it was important to speak only Dutch, but that at home they should make an effort to preserve the Hungarian language and that at music school, the language to be used was French, even for the parents. The children got used to this and found it fun. They would say, 'We have a secret language in Belgium (Hungarian).'

2.6. Trilingual Learning: Life Story, Strategies Used to Learn Two Other Languages

In order to develop the Hungarian language as much as possible, the father, with the help of his mother, began teaching the children to read and write.

Around the age of five, the children began reading short books in Hungarian.

The biggest investment was starting this work with the two eldest children, as the other two, Rebeka and Sàra, followed suit without any problems, motivated to do what the older ones were doing. It was the same with music education.

All of them took piano lessons, music theory, music history, harmony, and played in a musical ensemble, as well as learning the piano and violin.

2.6.1. The Place of Music Education in The Family

It is important to note that in Hungary, music education and dance are very important in the upbringing and education of children, on a par with sport. Hungarian tradition is largely based on music, which is passed on to younger generations.

As for the four children, passing on this tradition was a conscious choice from the outset, and the children were able to get involved, motivated by their parents, grandparents and, above all, their piano teachers, Mrs O. and Mrs B., as well as their violin teachers.

In terms of musical education, the four children achieved good results, scoring between 80-85% in general classes and between 85-95% for both instruments. It should be noted that at the time, the children had around two hours of piano lessons per week with their instrument teacher, which is unfortunately no longer possible today. Due to cultural budget cuts, children now only receive 20-25 minutes of instrument lessons once a week. What a cultural loss!

At the time, children had an average of one hour twice a week, not counting the number of times their teachers offered them an extra hour and the small concerts that took place about three or four times a year!

It is clear that all leisure activities and extracurricular time have been absorbed by music education. This has been made possible by the dedication of the grandparents, especially the one they called 'nagymi', the paternal grandmother.

Music competitions have certainly helped the children to develop their abilities.

For example, the four children won several regional and national prizes for piano and violin. At first, before they had a piano teacher, their father introduced them to the piano, having also received musical training himself.

For example, at the age of 10, Thomas studied J.S. Bach's two-part inventions and played W.A. Mozart's 'Sonata Facile' and Debussy's 'Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum', which earned him first prize in piano at the Rotary Club, whose president was Georges Octors. Catherine, meanwhile, played Schubert's Impromptu Op. 90, No. 4 and a two-part invention at the age of nine, winning a national piano prize in Spa.

Rebeka also won second prize in piano and violin at the age of 10-11. Sàra also won several prizes in piano and violin, showing excellent aptitude for both instruments, but with a preference for the violin.

Later, as adults, Thomas and Catherine won an 'Arts-Sciences-Lettres' medal in Paris, the former for music and the latter for painting.

Rebeka and Sàra also flourished as adults, winning several painting prizes, notably in Italy and Monaco for Rebeka.

I believe that music has sharpened their senses, but has also given them a method of working, perseverance and satisfaction, even though learning an instrument requires daily practice in order to progress in the art of music. The same is true of painting and writing.

Deep gratitude goes to the children's mother and wife, because without her sensitivity and support for the project, nothing could have been achieved. She is an admirable, loving, attentive mother who is always ready to do anything for the good of her children.

She has also always supported the educational project, music, language learning, helping the children with their homework, taking care of all the logistics: cleaning, the children's homework, driving the children to school, always at her post at the Music Academy for the good of the children, etc.

She is a discreet person who knows how to give without wanting or expecting anything in return... a real gem! Ultimately, the whole structure rested on her support.

This journey therefore required a great deal of self-sacrifice on the part of both parents, as this educational project required a lot of presence, help, listening and availability against all odds.

2.7. Results Concerning Academic Learning

Thomas, Catherine and Sàra never had any problems at school in Flanders, either in nursery, primary or secondary school. Rebeka, however, had a little more difficulty and was supported by a speech therapist for a year, as she was left-handed and had mild dyslexia; however, she progressed without any problems.

After secondary school, Catherine went to the Conservatory to study piano and Thomas went to the Conservatory to study the violin.

The other two girls also pursued their interests in the visual arts, as mentioned above, without neglecting their musical skills.

Their father, a composer and painter, had a great influence on motivating the children to continue on their chosen paths.

2.8. Results Concerning Academic Learning

In music, all the children without exception were considered gifted at learning instruments.

The two eldest obtained master's degrees at the Conservatoire: Thomas at the Maastricht Conservatoire, in the violin, and Catherine at the Royal Conservatoire of Liège, in the piano.

The other two girls also achieved an impressive level of proficiency in an instrument, with Sara focusing on the violin and Rebeka on the piano.

Now as adults, their musical knowledge remains a way for them to relax and enjoy themselves.

2.9. A Winning Formula for Successful Multilingual Education

We already discussed this in the previous chapter.

I could add the following:

- Parents must be proficient in the languages they wish to pass on
- Do not embark on such a project, which requires teaching skills and methodology, if the parents are not receptive or available
- A project like this requires the support of the family
- Both parents must agree to the project, be involved and be sensitive to the objectives
- Enrich vocabulary, semantics and morphosyntax equally.
- Ensure the development of phonological awareness and phonological mastery of the language
- Avoid mixing languages, which often leads to hybridization
- Clearly define where and when each language is spoken
- Encourage the discovery of different cultures
- Meet people and children who speak the same language to create a network of relationships. For example, language courses, family gatherings, returning to the country of origin during holidays, etc.
- Encourage not only speaking, but also learning to read and write
- Parents must pass on to their children a love of languages and the importance of knowing several languages

- A certain degree of self-sacrifice on the part of parents, so that the focus is on the child and their multilingual development
- Parents' love and openness to culture, which children need to feel
- Consistency and perseverance on the part of parents; qualities to be passed on to children
- Creating a desire to learn and limiting the amount of time children spend playing video games that have no linguistic or educational value
- Developing creativity so that children develop their 'being' and do not take refuge solely in 'doing'
- Talking a lot with children about what they like and dislike and going beyond everyday life by trying to raise their childlike spirit to a spirit of questioning, critical thinking, comparison and analysis through observation and experimentation
- For young children, parents should use puppet theatre and tell stories rather than sitting them in front of the television
- Play with your child, whether they are young or older, and share your opinions and feelings with them. The playful aspect of language is more motivating and can make language development more enjoyable.
- The cohesion of the couple as perceived by the children is a key factor.

2.9.1. The Fun and Practical Side of Learning a Language

I think a language is easier to learn if the method is fun, especially for young kids. They'll feel like they're playing while they work. A fun example is the daily puppet theatre that kids loved and little ones still love.

Far from the video games and tablets that many children use to the point of exhaustion, puppet theatre is a lively activity that involves sharing and creative actions, in that children will also want to use the puppets and tell stories. The period of childhood imitation is a very precious time when language can be passed on naturally, not to mention the fun.

In my professional experience, I have found that too many video games stifle creativity, verbal communication, socialization and, ultimately, the development of oral language. The principle of wisdom dictates that we should limit the amount of time spent on video games, social media and other activities so as not to create dependency and to be able to do other things that are more shared and creative.

2.9.2. Support And Relationships with The School and The Music Academy

Opting for a bilingual or trilingual education also requires academic support. Parents should discuss their plans with teachers so that they can be more vigilant in assessing oral language skills in nursery school and the first cycle of primary education (known as "fundamental").

This is a way of not taking the school by surprise and also of raising awareness among teachers by keeping them informed, with the aim of creating a space of trust and sharing.

2.10. What Has Become of Trilingual Children as Adults?

All four children are trilingual and speak all three languages as native speakers. They speak Hungarian among themselves, French with their mother and Hungarian with their father (their mother speaks Hungarian well).

After further studies, Catherine and her sister Rebeka became Dutch teachers in secondary education. Sàra, who is multilingual, has a management position at Mercedes in Maastricht and Thomas has a management position at Randstadt.

2.11. The Choice to Continue the Family Tradition

Catherine has two children (Tom, 9, and Olivia, 10) whom she is teaching Hungarian. They attend a Flemish school in Tongeren and speak French well. They have no problems learning at school.

The children's father is monolingual and not very motivated for them to learn Hungarian. He is unable to support their education adequately as he does not speak Dutch either. It is therefore the mother who is single-handedly responsible for passing on the language, which may reduce the children's opportunities.

The children also attend the Music Academy (music theory and piano) at the Tongeren Music Academy. Both children learn Hungarian with their mother and grandparents. Thomas has two children (Alexander, 3;6 and Leah, 2;6) and has decided to pass on the Hungarian language to them with his wife's consent.

The children attend a Flemish nursery school in Lanaken. For the time being, French is not used. They are following the advice they have been given: to build a strong reference language (Hungarian) on which to graft Dutch, which will become the dominant language in the future.

Both parents are motivated to pass on the language, which gives the children a better chance. According to their nursery school teacher, Alexander has already made great progress in Dutch. The children's mother is of Hungarian origin from Romania. They also plan to give them a musical education.

Rebeka and Sàra do not have any children at present.

An anecdote to share!

At first, learning Dutch in nursery school was a little difficult, according to the nursery school teacher, who thought that the children were speaking 'in code' and had a problem. Following a meeting with the Flemish school, everything was clarified with the parents, who reassured the teacher that they were speaking Hungarian. The parents supported the teacher and asked her to kindly encourage the children to use Dutch at school.

2.12. Final Conclusion

This life story shows that trilingualism is possible at a high level; however, certain conditions are necessary to optimize trilingual education. My wish is that parents have a lot of patience, perseverance and love so that their children can progress and create a bright future.

I also hope that parents continue to progress according to their life choices, in harmony, so that they can develop the knowledge they wish to pass on using good teaching methods.

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