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**RESEARCH PAPERS**

Students' & Teachers' Voices

**VALUES AND CULTURE**

Personal Development and Growth



# The Effectiveness of the Processing Instruction Model

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to verify the efficiency of VanPatten's (1996) Processing Instruction model in the teaching of English relative clauses in two different groups of participants: an intervention group and a traditional group. These two groups of students were enrolled in a BA in ELT. This study was conducted online due to the pandemic of Covid-19, where a pre-test and a post-test were administered to the intervention group, and only the post-test was administered to the traditional group. The statistical analysis shows a significant difference between the intervention group scores on the pre-test and post-test as well as a significant difference between the traditional group and intervention group. For the qualitative part of the study, the intervention group completed a feedback questionnaire, and the results show that most students consider that employing this model for language teaching is an effective approach in the teaching of relative clauses.

## **KEY WORDS:**

PI group, traditional group, relative clauses, processing instruction, structured input activities

## **RESUMEN**

El propósito de este estudio es verificar la eficiencia del modelo de Instrucción de Procesamiento de VanPatten (1996) en la enseñanza de las cláusulas relativas en inglés en un grupo de intervención y un grupo tradicional, los cuales estaban inscritos en una licenciatura en enseñanza del inglés. Este estudio se llevó a cabo en línea durante la pandemia de la Covid-19. El grupo de intervención contestó un pre-test y un post-test y el grupo tradicional contestó sólo el post-test. Los resultados arrojaron una diferencia significativa entre el pre-test y post-test del grupo de intervención y una diferencia significativa entre el grupo de intervención y el grupo tradicional. En el aspecto cualitativo, el grupo de intervención completó un cuestionario de retroalimentación, y

las respuestas de los participantes muestran que la mayoría de ellos consideran que al emplear este modelo de enseñanza es un enfoque efectivo en la enseñanza de cláusulas relativas.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:**

Grupo PI, grupo tradicional, cláusulas relativas, instrucción de procesamiento, actividades de entrada estructuradas

**Introduction**

It is known that some learners who want to learn and use a foreign language either for work, travel, or academic reasons do so by enrolling in face-to-face classes, and other learners who are more autonomous choose to study on their own or register for online classes (Bowles & Montrul, 2008). In relation to the latter, all teachers and students around the world had to give and take classes online when the pandemic Covid-19 started. Similarly, researchers started or continued developing their research projects online. It was during this pandemic crisis that the present descriptive study took place following the Processing Instruction model (PI) designed by VanPatten (1996) for teaching grammatical structures of a foreign language in an offline modality. Two groups of student participants from a BA in ELT in Mexico were recruited: An intervention group and a traditional group.

The purpose of this study was to measure the intervention group performance (henceforth processing instruction (PI) group) on relative clauses and compare their pre-test and post-tests results as well as the post-test results of the PI group and the traditional group. A further purpose was to find out which factors helped the PI group have a better performance on the post-test in comparison to the pre-test.

**Literature review**

The PI model includes both the deductive approach and the inductive approach for the teaching of grammatical structures. VanPatten (1996) designed this teaching model for the instruction of grammatical structures proposing a manipulation to the processing of the input that learners are exposed to in contrast to a traditional approach, that is, by altering the processing of input, learners may be able to make form-meaning connections that could facilitate the acquisition of grammatical structures. He proposed this PI model arguing that “the grammar that has been taught and the manner in which it has been taught do little to affect the processes that underlie acquisition” (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993, p. 45). Figure 1 shows that the emphasis of the traditional approach is in the output practice, which in most cases, after the presentation of the topic and controlled practice, the teacher provides students communicative activities that provides learners real-life language use.

**Figure 1. Traditional explicit grammar instruction in foreign language teaching**

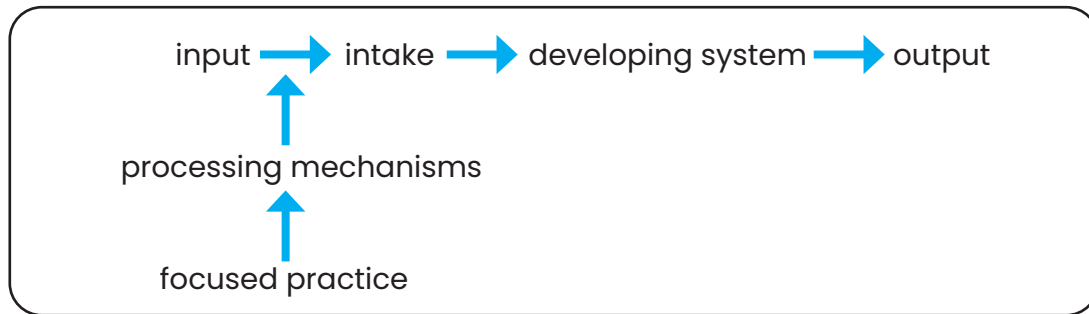


(Adapted from VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993, p. 47)

Unlike the emphasis placed on the type of output that learners are asked to produce in the

traditional approach, the PI model places emphasis on the type of processing mechanisms and focused practice that learners are advised to follow as indicated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Processing instruction in foreign language teaching**



(Adapted from VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993, p. 47)

As posited previously, VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) argue that by manipulating the input learners are exposed to, they make form-meaning connections and these connections may have an effect in the internalization of grammatical structures, or as VanPatten and Cadierno (1993, p. 47) state, “altering input processing should have a significant impact on changing the internalized knowledge”.

The input is altered by making learners aware of the strategy they need to use in order to process the input properly, that is, the PI model comprises explicit information and structured input activities. In the former, all the explicit information on the grammatical structure to be taught is provided to the learners in written form and explained by the teacher. This explicit information not only contains the detailed information and examples of the grammatical structure but also the strategy or strategies that learners are advised to follow to avoid misconstructions while using the grammatical structure in real-life communication. In the latter, the structured input activities contain referential and affective activities. Referential activities, as the name indicates, are activities that involve the use of the grammatical structure in written sentences in which learners are asked to choose the correct grammatical structure or sentence from two or more options. The instructions to complete the activities are given to learners in written and aural form. In contrast to the referential activities, even though the affective activities have the same format as the referential activities, there are no right or wrong answers because the purpose is that the learners focus on meaning and not on the form of the grammatical structure. The structured input activities follow VanPatten’s guidelines (Benati, 2010, p. 37), which do not include writing or speaking activities. These guidelines are listed below.

1. Present one thing at a time.
2. Keep meaning in focus.
3. Move from sentences to connected discourse.
4. Use both oral and written input.
5. Have the learner do something with the input.
6. Keep the learner’s processing strategies in mind.

### Relevance of the study

To date, little research has been conducted on the PI model, particularly in a Mexican context. The purpose of this study is to see the role of explicit instruction as an independent variable in second language instruction (VanPatten, et al., 2013).

**Research questions**

1. How did the PI group perform on the post-test after the instruction of relative clauses?
2. From the students' perspective in the PI group, what factors determined their performance on the post-test?

**Research Methodology**

This cross-sectional research presents a mixed approach and is a conceptual replication of Lee's (2019) study. Unlike experimental designs, the present study follows a comparative design of two groups of participants in which one group is the PI group and the other one the traditional group.

**Participants**

The participants of this study included 71 Spanish-speaking Mexican English language learners who were enrolled in a BA in ELT in a state university in Mexico. This university program, which starts in the month of August each year includes a propaedeutic year (henceforth Prope) for those learners who enter the university with a TOEFL score of less than 480, which is designed to assist the English language learner to obtain a B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) by offering 30 hours per week of English courses in listening and speaking (ten hours per week), writing (five hours per week), reading (five hours per week), grammar (five hours per week), and English culture (five hours per week) for two consecutive semesters to reinforce their language skills, so they can cope with the content courses starting in the first semester of the BA in ELT. On the other hand, those students who enter the university with a TOEFL score of 480 or more points can start taking content courses such as Introduction to Linguistics and Morphology, English Communicative Skills, Classroom Observation, Teaching Approaches, and Lesson Planning in the first semester of the program.

Of the 71 participants, 35 students took the Prope course and 36 started in the first semester of the BA in ELT. In the Prope group, 13 were men and 22 were women with an average age of 17.14 ranging from 17-21. In the first semester group, 7 were men and 29 were women with an average age of 20.83 ranging from 17-22. The level of proficiency of all participants taken from their TOEFL scores ranged from A2-C1, according to the CEFR.

In order to select the first group of participants from the Prope course, we administered a pre-test on restrictive relative clauses, and those students who obtained less than 60% on the pre-test were included in the study; only one student obtained more than 60%. Therefore, the students who started the first semester of Prope in August-December, 2021, were classified as the intervention group or PI group while the students who started the first semester with content courses were classified as the traditional group. Here it is important to clarify that from the 50 students who entered the university for the period August-December 2021, 35 went to Prope and 15 went to the first semester. The latter students joined the 26 students who passed the two semesters of Prope in the previous year. All the students signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the present study.

**Grammatical structure (target structure)**

The criteria followed to use restrictive relative clauses as the grammatical structure in the current study were (1) it is a complex structure to learn and use considering that it is inserted as part of an independent clause, (2) Mexican English learners have a tendency to translate this grammatical

structure and, (3) there is an L1-L2 distance concerning the relative pronouns; namely, there is no equivalence in the Spanish language of the relative pronouns whom and whose.

### ***Instrumentation***

All the instruments used in the study were administered online due to the pandemic of Covid-19. A pre-test was administered one day before the intervention. The intervention comprised the explicit instruction and the structured input activities, which are further subdivided into referential and affective activities. This intervention lasted for six days. A post-test was administered one day after the intervention. Both tests included the same content for the purpose of comparing the students' knowledge of relative clauses before and after the intervention. Furthermore, a feedback questionnaire was also administered to find out students' impressions on the type of intervention they received in comparison to the way they were usually taught.

The pre-test and post-test were adopted from Alsadi's (2013) study, which are composed of four sections each: two comprehension sections and two production sections. Each section has five items. The items contain relative pronouns as subjects, as objects of verbs, as objects of prepositions and as possessive pronouns.

The comprehension section of the pre-test and post-test includes two parts with a score of five points each one. In a similar fashion, the production section of both tests involves two parts with a score of five points. The total score for each test is 20 points (10 points for the comprehension section and 10 points for the production section).

With regard to the explicit instruction, we wrote and designed a document containing descriptions and examples of relative clauses; some of the examples were taken from Eastwood (1999) and Murphy (2012). The document was uploaded to the platform of Microsoft Teams and shown to the students in the first day of the intervention.

In relation to the structured input activities, we used Alsadi's (2013) instrument. The referential activities do not require students to produce the grammatical structure in oral or written form; instead, learners performed reading and listening exercises only. On the other hand, the affective activities request students to perform exercises based on their opinions about the topic; the intention of the latter activities is for the students to focus on the meaning of the sentences. The qualitative instrument, namely, the feedback questionnaire was also adapted from Alsadi (2013).

### ***Procedure***

Following Lee's (2019) study, the PI group completed both the pre-test and the post-test, and the traditional group only completed the post-test. Regarding the scoring of the tests, we followed Alsadi's (2013, pp. 130-131) scoring procedure; namely, the raw scores of both tests were calculated by assigning one point for each correct response and zero points for each incorrect response in the sections of comprehension and production; no points were assigned for those responses that were partially correct. Spelling and grammatical errors related to verb tenses were not penalized because these were not part of the purpose of the study. The pre-test was administered to the PI group one day before the intervention with the PI model; the intervention lasted six consecutive days (45 minutes per day) instead of three days as indicated by Alsadi's procedure. The reason for the longest length of time was due to the pandemic Covid-19, which made the process slower for the students to develop the activities, considering that learners had problems with electricity, internet connection, and the devices used to connect to the platform.

During the first two days of the intervention, the document containing the explicit information on relative clauses was shown to the students. The document contains the explanation of types of relative clauses, the definitions of dependent and independent clauses, examples of complex sentences with the relative pronouns *who* and *which* as subjects, *whom* and *which* as objects, *whom* as object of a preposition and the possessive pronoun *whose* as well as the explanations of typical errors in the use of each type of relative pronoun that the students need to avoid along with their corresponding sentence example.

The following two days, the students completed five referential activities, and on the last two days of the intervention, they completed the three affective activities. The main researcher was always available to clarify any doubts about any of the activities.

Once the results of the PI group on the post-test were analyzed, there was a focus group with nine students who obtained the same score (two students) or lower score (seven students) on the pre-test. In this feedback session, the students expressed their reasons for not obtaining a higher score after the intervention.

### Quantitative analysis

The results of the students' performance on the two tests were analyzed statistically. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of relative clauses on the pre-test and post-test for the PI group, and the same descriptives for the traditional group.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the performance of the two groups on the pre-test and post-test.**

	PI group (intervention group)		Traditional group
	Pre-test	Post-test	Post-test
<b>Mean</b>	29	48	58
<b>Standard deviation</b>	15.67	23.49	18.34

The PI group had a mean of 29 points on the pre-test and 48 on the post-test, which shows a difference between the two tests. Table 1 also shows a mean of 58 points on the post-test for the traditional group. These last scores might be an indication that when students dedicate more time to studying and using the English language, that is, when students have greater experience in learning and using the language, the means tend to be higher (48% and 58% respectively) and the standard deviations smaller (23.49% and 18.34%, respectively).

A parametric paired-samples t-test was used for the pre-test and the post-test scores of the PI group. Meanwhile, an independent-samples t-test was used for the traditional group as well as the PI group. These t-tests were used to check whether the differences were significant between the PI group pre-test and post-test scores, as well as to compare the outcomes of the post-tests of the traditional group to the PI group. The results indicate that there was a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test as well as a significant difference between the post-tests as can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2. Students’ performance on the pre-test and post-tests**

Pre-test and post-tests	t	df	Sig.
PI pretest vs PI posttest	-3.826	58	0.000323
PI posttest vs Traditional	-2.0765	62	0.04197

**Qualitative analysis**

Regarding the results of the background questionnaire, what follows are the students’ responses in section two and three of the instrument because the information in these two sections answers the second research question.

**Section two**

The second section of the questionnaire includes only question six and asks students about the importance of several English activities that the teacher may use in class. Students were requested to complete a table by using a 5-point scale to rate the different English activities; students’ responses are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Students’ ratings about the importance of class English activities**

	Class activities	Extremely important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not important at all
1	Explicit explanation	27	6			1
2	Explanation of difficulties	14	11	8		1
3	Examples after instruction	27	6			1
4	Practice after instruction	20	9	4		1
5	Oral practice	29	3			2
6	Written feedback	25	5	2		2
7	Feedback	28	4			2

It can be seen in Table 3 that most students responded that all the class English activities were extremely important, followed by the second option. What we found surprising in these results were some of the students’ responses disregarding the value of the class English activities. In these ratings, although the activities 1 to 4 were rated only by one student and the activities 5 to 7 by two students, these results were not expected taking into account that all the students were motivated to learn English according to their responses in the first question of this questionnaire. Therefore, most of the students’ responses were positive, that is, they considered the class activities during the intervention important for their learning of the English language. Only one or two students considered the class activities not important at all.



**Section three**

The third section of the questionnaire comprises questions 7 to 18. We concentrated on questions 8, 10, 14, and 17 to answer the second research question. The results and analysis for these questions are included in the Discussion section.

**Discussion****Research question 1**

The first research question, "How did the PI group perform on the post-test after the instruction of relative clauses?" is answered by looking at the low average of the PI on the pre-test (29 points) and the score on the post-test (48). This low score was expected taking into account that relative clauses is a difficult structure to learn and use.

Another possible explanation of such low score on the pre-test is that not all students have the same explicit knowledge of relative clauses in order to use this grammatical structure in a fluent way during a conversation. In addition to this, the learners' developmental stage may have also influenced in their performance, that is, learners at this early stage may have contributed to the difficulty learners had in completing the exercises on the pre-test. On the other hand, learners had an average of 48 points on the post-test, which shows a better performance than on the pre-test possibly due to the referential and affective activities of the PI model, which might have helped learners internalize the relative clauses.

By comparing the results of the PI group with the traditional group on the post-test, the traditional group had a better performance. A possible explanation of the lower performance on the post-test of the PI group was probably due to the technical problems learners had during the intervention and the completion of the test considering that everything took place online because of the pandemic Covid-19. Some of the technical problems that the students reported during the focus group were poor internet connection, the use of old hardware, power cuts, a lot of noise in the house, among other distractions.

**Research question 2**

The second research question, "From the students' perspective in the PI group, what factors determined their performance on the post-test?" is answered by the students' responses in section 2 (Students' ratings about the importance of certain activities in an English lesson) and section 3 (Students' feedback about the lessons they had on relative clauses) of the feedback questionnaire. The former comprises one question which asked learners to what extent they thought the seven items in Table 3 in the qualitative analysis section were important in an English lesson. The first four items are more related to the PI model and the responses indicate that all items are considered by the students to be the most important and useful activities of an English lesson.

With regard to the third section of the feedback questionnaire on the students' feedback about the lessons they had on relative clauses, we selected questions 8, 10, 14 and 17. Question 8 asked the students to explain the differences between the PI model and the way they were usually taught. The students posited the following differences:

1. Relative clauses were explained more clearly this time in contrast to previous classes with other teachers

2. Relative clauses were explained with many examples and each doubt had a concrete answer
3. We had a more explicit explanation and we were motivated to participate but we were also afraid of making mistakes
4. We worked on more passive skills
5. We are not used to this way of learning English which makes it a bit difficult to learn

It is interesting to note that despite the online teaching modality and language proficiency in the PI group, most of the students coincide that the PI model is an effective model for language learning.

Question 10 asked students whether they thought that the production practice they were used to was more useful for them; 21 students in the present study responded negatively while in Alsadi's (2013) study all responses were negative. Alsadi argues that this negative response is related to students' anxiety. The negative responses in the present study might also be connected to this same factor, but they might also be connected to the different teaching approaches they were exposed to in the past.

Question 14 asked students whether they thought that the teacher's explanation of the problematic strategies used normally by them in processing English relative clauses was helpful. Seventeen students in the present study responded positively, while in Alsadi's group, all students responded positively. As Alsadi (2013, p. 154) stated, "anxiety is not a main point in Processing Instruction, but it seems that it has a significant role for some students", in this case, younger students. In contrast to Alsadi's students' responses, the students in the present study may have in mind other factors besides anxiety that somehow hinder their linguistic behaviour.

As can be seen in the Mexican learners' responses, there is a positive attitude toward the Processing Instruction model. Moreover, the significant difference in scores between the pre-test and the post-test in the present study indicates that this teaching model is an effective approach to language teaching.

## Conclusions

According to the results of the PI group, even though the average of the post-test (48 points) is lower than the average of post-tests of other studies (VanPatten & Cadierno (1993), 85 points; Alsadi (2013), 65 points; Lee (2019), 85 points;), a significant difference was found between the pre-test and post-test score as discussed in the previous paragraph. This means that the PI intervention, even when conducted online, shows a learning progress in relation to relative clauses. In VanPatten's (1996) claim, this progress is possible because when learners alter the input they receive, it is processed in their working memory, and this processing of information is an action that is probably not exploited sufficiently in a traditional model, and this input processing allows learners to be selective in the information they want to internalize and later retrieve and use to communicate with others. The superiority of the PI group over the traditional group is somewhat surprising considering that the PI model does not have oral nor written activities.

Concerning the students' responses on the feedback questionnaire, most students considered that this teaching model has the elements they need for a more effective way to learn the language (i.e. grammatical structures). The age, gender, teaching modality and language proficiency of the participants may have influenced in the students' positive impressions of the effectiveness of the PI intervention. This conclusion was possible once the students' opinions were compared to

the opinions of the students in Alsadi's (2013) study. The results of these two studies are in line with Modirksamene, Poyan, and Alavinia's (2018) results. In this study, learners were asked about the effectiveness of the PI model through an attitude questionnaire, and they positively responded that the model contains clear and easy instruction, effectiveness of strategy explanation, and effectiveness of PI activities. To sum up, students in the present study seem to embrace this teaching model as a model that can help them learn explicitly and implicitly.

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- a) Introduction:** This section describes the context where the research was carried out, the reason why the research was carried out, and the importance of the study.
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- e) Conclusion:** This section presents the main conclusions, the importance of the findings, considering the contribution to the theory, the research area, or professional practice, and suggesting practical uses of the results, as well as possible applications for further research.

**3. Body of the article:**

- a) Key words.** Five, in English and Spanish.
- b) Introduction:** It presents the research topic area, and the research topic, mentioning if it is descriptive, explanatory, evaluative, correlational, interpretative, etc. Also, it emphasizes the research problem.
- c) Literature review:** It presents the main terms, concepts, theoretical claims or principles, models, etc. analyzing and discussing the ideas presented by the main authors who have studied the topics related to the research or study presented. The references should not be more than 10 years after their publication, except from those classical research works.
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  - **Context** (describe the geographic and institutional context where the research was carried out).
  - **Instruments** (describe the research instruments used to collect information and data).
  - **Data analysis** (explain the way the data was systematized and analyzed).
- f) Main findings.** Synthesize, present, interpret, and argue the most significant results found and the proposal, if the case of developing one.

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- g) Conclusions.** Describe the main conclusions generated from the answers to the research questions.
- h) Main limitations of the study** (related to the geographical or institutional context, or knowledge area and the research process).
- i) Main implications and impact of the research.** Describe the main benefits of the research and the possible applications of the proposal.

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12. Educational technology in languages

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- Margins: top 2.5, bottom 2.5, left 2.5, right 2.5.
- Spaces: 1.5
- No indented paragraphs

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## **El Centro de Idiomas Extranjeros "Ignacio Manuel Altamirano"**

### **CONVOCA**

A los aspirantes interesados en cursar la **Licenciatura en Letras Inglesas** (Modalidades: Presencial y/o en línea) o la **Maestría en la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés y Lingüística Aplicada** a participar en el Concurso de Selección para el ingreso al Ciclo Escolar 2024-2025, presentando el examen de admisión que se realizará mediante previa cita hasta el 30 de agosto de 2024, conforme a los siguientes:

### **REQUISITOS**

Los interesados en participar deben realizar todos los trámites y procedimientos institucionales, además de cumplir con los requisitos descritos en el cronograma y el instructivo correspondiente a esta Convocatoria, los cuales son:

- » Leer y aceptar los términos y condiciones de la convocatoria y su instructivo.
- » Realizar el registro en las fechas establecidas en esta Convocatoria.
- » Comunicarse a la institución para realizar una cita para el examen de admisión.
- » Pagar el derecho de examen de selección.
- » Presentar el examen de selección y una evaluación de valores y actitudes en el lugar, día y hora señalados, mediante previa cita.
- » Ser aceptados mediante un concurso de selección, dentro de los periodos que al efecto se señalen.
- » Recibir una carta de aceptación por parte del Comité Evaluador de la institución.
- » En caso de ser seleccionado en la **Licenciatura en Letras Inglesas**, contar con Certificado de Bachillerato con un promedio mínimo de ocho (8.0) o su equivalente y entregarlo con la demás documentación solicitada el día y en el lugar establecidos, de acuerdo con los términos señalados en la institución.
- » En caso de ser seleccionado en la **Maestría en la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés y Lingüística Aplicada**, contar con Título de Licenciatura, Cédula Profesional, Carta de motivos, Certificación TOEFL (500 puntos mínimo).

### **Informes:**

**Teléfono:** 747 49 4 79 73

**WhatsApp:** 747 108 1203

**Página web:** [www.ciex.edu.mx](http://www.ciex.edu.mx)

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