Repair in EFL Talk: A Case of Iranian Intermediate and Advanced EFL Learners

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Abstract—This study reports the ways Iranian intermediate and advanced EFL learners repair their talk while interacting with their teachers and the differences between these two groups. Sixty Iranian EFL learners (30 intermediate and 30 advanced) were divided into four classes and two sessions of each class were recorded. The cases of repair were chosen and categorized based on the position of repair initiation, devices and strategies used to initiate them and type of repair completion (self or other-repair). The results of data analysis revealed that both groups used several devices and strategies to initiate repair in five different positions. Most differences between these two groups were on the frequencies with which they used these devices and strategies and the fact that cases of self-repair happened far more among advanced group.

Index Terms—repair, repair initiation, repair completion, self-repair, other-repair

I. INTRODUCTION

Conversation analysis (CA) emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a sub-discipline of sociology but it has established itself as a separate discipline in its own right (Markee, 2000). CA stemmed from the work of sociologist Harvey Sacks who lectured at the University of California in the 1960s and 1970s. His lectures were recorded by one of his students, Gail Jefferson, and published in 1992 (Sacks, 1992). The ideas in CA were mainly influenced by two theories; the first one was the work of Goffman (1959) who emphasized the importance of face-to-face interaction. He argued that we perform our social selves by managing the ways we appear in everyday situations to affect how others orient to us (Hutchby & Wooffit, 1998). The second and more powerful influence was from the works of Garfinkel (1967) known as ethnomethodology. According to Ten Have (2004):

Ethnomethodology is a special kind of social inquiry, dedicated to explicating the ways in which members collectively create and maintain a sense of order and intelligibility in their social life. It has emerged as a distinctive perspective and style of social research in the teachings and publications of Harold Garfinkel. (p.14)

Being influenced by these two theories, Sacks focused on the methods and procedures used to accomplish everyday conversation; in other words, he focused on how participants understand and are understood by others. For Sacks, ordinary conversation was an orderly, structurally organized phenomenon during which participant accomplish a social order (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Travers, 2001). To sum up, CA argues that conversation has its own dynamics structures and rules, and looks at the methods used by speakers to structure conversation efficiently (Pridham, 2001).

II. BACKGROUND

At first the focus of CA was on casual, mundane conversation between friends and acquaintances, but nowadays it investigates all forms of spoken interaction, including those in institutional contexts such as classrooms, doctor's surgeries, courtrooms, etc. In all contexts, whether casual or institutional, participants take turns usually one by one, order and organize their talk sequentially and repair the problems they face in interaction in order to achieve their goals. The main concern of CA is these interactional arrangements and what participants do to accomplish their goals. Therefore, the main focus of CA analysts is on the organizations of talk in interaction including: turn-taking, sequence organization and repair (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Markee, 2000).

According to Liddicoat (2007), repair, which is relevant to all levels of talk, is itself a mechanism of conversation and refers to the processes available to speakers through which they can handle the problems which occur in talk. Repair is more than just correcting errors in talk by replacing an incorrect form with a correct one, even though such corrections are a part of repair. As a matter of fact, many cases of repair have to deal with situations in which there is no error made by the speaker at all (Jefferson, 1987). Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) believed that the organization of repair can be analyzed based on three different terms: the position of repair in relation to an initial trouble source, the person who initiates repair (self or other) and who completes it (again self or other) and finally whether a repair is successful or unsuccessful.

According to Schegloff et al. (1977), repair may be initiated by the speaker of the trouble (self-initiated repair) or by its recipient (other-initiated repair). Besides, a repair may be made by the speaker of the trouble (self-repair) or by the recipient of the item (other-repair). Liddicoat (2007) believed that repair is designed to resolve the trouble as quickly as possible and locations for repair are locations relative to the trouble source. He enumerates five possible types of repair based on the position of repair initiation: same turn repair, transition space repair, second position repair, third position repair and fourth position repair.

A. Same Turn Repair

Non-lexical perturbations in speech including cut-offs, sound stretches, items such as *uh* and *uhm* and pauses are used by the speaker of the trouble to accomplish repair initiation in the same turn as the trouble source (Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff et al., 1977). In his study, Schegloff (1979) identified three more ways through which speakers may initiate repair in this position. First, a repair initiated to repair a particular trouble may end by changing an earlier part of the talk to avoid a missing element. Second, different types of repair initiations are often found together as a repair segment. Third, in some cases an initial attempt at repair does not succeed, so the speaker initiates an additional repair on the same trouble source.

According to Liddicoat (2007), the speaker is in a 'marking time' when the repair does not progress after succeeding tries. It refers to a repair in which all attempts at the trouble are alike, in other words, the first repair is like the original and the second like the first. He added that repair initiated in this position may also be resolved by the recipient of the trouble in the next turn.

B. Transition Space Repair

The transition space after the turn containing the trouble source is the second opportunity for self initiation (Schegloff et al., 1977). According to Liddicoat (2007), transition space repair can be done in four different ways. Firstly, it may happen without any explicit repair initiation marker. Secondly, it is sometimes accompanied by a reduced transition space showing the need to get an additional turn. Thirdly, in some cases, speakers may use devices such as *uh, uhm* or *I mean* to indicate that a repair is being initiated in the transition space. Finally, speakers sometimes use a *not X, Y* format to initiate transition space repair.

C. Second Position Repair

Repair in second position which happens in the turn following the trouble source is the first possible opportunity for other-initiated repair (Schegloff, 2000). According to Schegloff et al. (1977), speakers use a range of turn-constructional devices, which are basically different from those employed in self-initiated repair, like *huh?*, *what?* and other question words to initiate repair in second position. These turn-constructional devices can be ranged from the most generic (showing no indication of the trouble) to the more specific forms (showing some indication of the trouble). They mentioned that partial repeats have a similar function as question words and another frequent type of repair initiation found in this position is the use of *you mean* with a possible understanding of the trouble. They have also identified a preference for stronger over weaker forms of repair initiation.

All second position repairs do not involve other-initiated self-repair; they may also be resolved by other-repair produced in the same second position turn. These types of repair are called corrections and have their own sequential properties (Jefferson, 1987). These properties vary according to whether the correction is exposed or embedded. In exposed correction, the correct form is provided in second position by the recipient of a trouble. Embedded correction differs from exposed correction in that it is incorporated (embedded) into the action under way and does not interrupt it (Liddicoat, 2007).

D. Third Position Repair

This position is another opportunity for the producer of the trouble to initiate repair. "Third position, after an interlocutor's response to a previous turn, allows for the possibility of repairing a trouble in understanding of a prior turn demonstrated by the recipient's response to it" (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 196). Schegloff (1992) has proposed a canonical ordered four-component format for third position repair which is the result of speaker's practices in constructing repair turns in third position consisting of: a repair-initiating component, an agreement/acceptance component, a rejection component and the repair proper.

The repair-initiating component usually has the form *no* or possibly repeated as *no no,* in addition, *no* may also happen in combination with *oh* as *oh no* (Liddicoat, 2007). The agreement/acceptance component is usually found when the recipient of the original turn has perceived it as a complaint and responded with an apology or an excuse (Schegloff, 2005).   In the rejection component, the speaker overtly rejects the understanding of the first turn through a small number of possible formats. The most common format is *I don't mean* X in which X identifies the problematic item in the trouble source (Schegloff, 1997). The repair proper is the most frequent component found in this position in which the speaker deals with the problem that the recipient's response has revealed by modifying the prior turn in some way (Schegloff, 1992).

E. Fourth Position Repair

Fourth position repair, which is an opportunity for a recipient of original trouble to repair a problem of understanding evident in the third position, is very rare because most problems are dealt with before this turn (Schegloff, 1992).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Settings and Participants

The participants of this study were 60 Iranian EFL learners (30 males and 30 females) aged between 16 and 27 and studying English in a private institute in Mashhad, Iran. They were divided into four classes (two intermediate and two advanced classes) attending English classes twice a week for 20 sessions. Persian was the first language of all the learners and they were learning English as a foreign language.

B. Procedures

Two sessions of each one of these classes were recorded during a term of learning English by a high quality recorder. The recorded material was listened carefully several times and the cases in which learners repair their talk while conversing with their teachers were chosen and transcribed using the system and symbols designed by Gail Jefferson and published by Lerner (2004). At first the cases of repair were categorized based on the position of repair initiations, and then they were further categorized in each position according to the devices and strategies learners used to initiate them. The types of repair completion (self or other-repair) were also taken into account for each type of repair in every position. The purpose was to find out the ways these two groups repair their talk while interacting with their teachers and the differences between them.

IV. RESULTS

A. Same Turn

Both groups used cut-offs to initiate repair in the same turn as the trouble source when the trouble has already been produced. In all cases of repair initiations among intermediate learners and some cases among advanced learners, cut-offs happened in the middle of the words to stop the articulation of next sounds as in extract 1.

(1) [Intermediate]
S: she cleaned hi- her room
    (S=student   T=teacher)

In this extract, the learner interrupted the production of the word "his" and substituted the new word "her". The cut-off was used to postpone the production of the trouble to repair the problematic element. Talk after cut-off was congruent with the turn so far in this case. Unlike intermediate learners, advanced learners used cut-offs also in a different way to interrupt the syntax of the sentences and started new sentences which were not consistent with the turn so far as in extract 2.

(2) [Advanced]
S: my question was out of- I (.) just wanted to know

In this extract, the student's turn before cut-off projected one particular trajectory (*it was out of*) which was cut-off and a new trajectory began (*I just wanted to know*). The talk after cut-off launched a different turn shape and a different possible completion. Talk after cut-off was not consistent with the turn so far in this extract.

Other non-lexical perturbations (*uh & uhm*, pauses and sound stretches) were used by both groups to initiate repair in this position. They used *uh & uhm* and pauses to stop the articulation of next elements in the turn. They happened outside word boundaries to repair a next element. Unlike repair with cut-offs the trouble had not been produced yet with repair through *uh & uhm* and pauses and talks after them were always congruent with the talks so far. Sound stretches were also used by both groups of learners with the same goal as pauses to create some time to search for some unavailable items.

In some cases both groups of learners initiated repair for a particular trouble, but replaced an earlier part to avoid the missing element as in extract 3.

(3) [Advanced]
S: maybe you're right but I've never felt uhm: I've never been a >jealous< person

In this extract *uhm:* indicates a search for a noun which was not carried through by the learner. The learner, instead, replaced an earlier part in the turn to avoid the need to produce the missing element.

There were many cases of repair segment (various types of repair initiations in combination) among intermediate and advanced learners as in extract 4.

(4) [Intermediate]
S: uhm; I read th- gone with the wind uh: the book first then I watched the film fo::r several times

In this extract the student used cut-off to interrupt the ongoing production of *the*, then he used *uhm* and sound stretch on *for* at the end of the sentence to make time to search some unavailable item.

There were also three cases of marking time among intermediate learners which finally ended up being cases of self repair as in extract 5.

(5) [Intermediate]

S: I told him to:- to find- to find the –uhm to FIND the calendar

In this case the student first used sound stretch on the word *to* but repeated it again two more times after a cut-off and *uhm* until she finally finished the sentence.

The extracts discussed so far were all cases of self-initiated self-repair, however some cases of repair initiations in the same turn were repaired by the recipient of the trouble source or in other words they were cases of self-initiated other-repair as in extracts 6 and 7.

(6) [Intermediate]

S: the red one is faster uhm: cause the:: those are bigger //

T: the wheels

S: yeah.

(7) [Advanced]

S: you know all kind of - - this feeling is not bad there is uhm: the:: kind you want something fo::r you and others too

T: envy

S: yeah thanks.

In both these extracts the students initiated repairs in the same turn as the trouble sources which were searching for some unavailable items but they didn't succeed and the words were given by the teachers in the second turn.

Tables at the end of each sections show the frequency of devices and strategies used by the two groups to initiate repair in each position along with the frequency of repair completions. Based on this table, both groups used almost the same devices and strategies except marking time which only happened among intermediate learners. The most obvious differences between these two groups were in the frequency with which they used every devices and strategies and the frequency of repair completions.

TABLE 1
SAME TURN REPAIR FOR BOTH GROUPS OF LEARNERS

Group	TR	Cut- offs	Other non-lexical perturbations	Avoiding	Repair segment	Marking time	N
Intermediate	SR	10	17	8	35	3	73
	OR	0	2	0	8	0	10
Advanced	SR	17	24	11	54	0	106
	OR	0	0	0	2	0	2

(TR=type of repair, SR=self-repair, OR=other-repair, N=total number)

B. Transition Space

All cases of repair initiations among intermediate learners and some cases among advanced learners in this position happened with no explicit repair initiation markers as in extract 8.

(8) [Intermediate]

S: it helps me to have a longer live. Life.

In some cases, advanced learners used devices such as *uh & uhm* and *sorry* to indicate repair initiation in the transition space. These devices were used to keep the turn and perform the repair because they indicate a repair on some next level as in extract 9.

(9) [Advanced]

S: the only thing that can help us in difficult days (0.3) is having a little fate. Sorry faith.

TABLE 2
TRANSITION SPACE REPAIR FOR BOTH GROUPS OF LEARNERS

Group	TR	No marker	Uh & uhm	sorry	N
Intermediate	SR	8	0	0	8
	OR	0	0	0	0
Advanced	SR	4	3	2	9
	OR	0	0	0	0

Based on the table above, repair initiation in this position happened with almost the same frequency in both groups. The difference was that intermediate learners always initiated repair in this position with no markers while advanced learners used *uh & uhm* and *sorry* in some cases.

C. Second Position

Repair in this position was the first place for other-initiated repair and a range of devices were used by the teachers to initiate repair in this position. These devices can be ranged from most generic (showing no indication of the trouble like *what?*) to the most specific (pointing out the trouble like other question words and partial repeats). Using of more specific devises is called stronger repair initiation and according to Schegloff et al. (1977) there is a preference for stronger over weaker forms of repair initiation.

(10) [Intermediate]

S: can you say the text again?
T: what?
S: the (0.4) topic of [the text
T: [it was travelling.
(11) [Advanced]
S: I choose them with no: rule
T: how?
S: what was the word (0.2) randomly
T: got it.

In both these extracts, the learners couldn't convey the meaning of their first turn, so the teachers initiated repair in the second position. Finally, the learners repaired the problem in the third turn by clarifying his previous turn. The most specific way through which teachers initiated repair in this position was using partial repeats as in extract12.

(12) [Advanced]
S: what do you think about this part () of the argument?
T: what part?
S: that in every field uhm: the best one is a man
T: I think that's kindda true

In this extract the teacher used partial repeat, which was always the combination of what with the trouble, to initiate repair. Partial repeats were the most specific types of devises used by learners in this position and in all cases learners self repaired the trouble in the third position.

Another way through which teachers initiated repair in this position was by using *you mean* and the correct forms of the problems as the teachers' understanding of the learners' first turn as in extract 13.

(13) [Intermediate]
S: I was busy yesterday and forget to write it
T: you mean forgot it's past
S: yeah

Most of the repair initiations in this position were cases of correction in which the recipients of the troubles (teachers) produced the repair. Some cases of corrections were exposed with the teacher just providing the correct form as in extracts 14.

(14) [Intermediate]
T: why are you learning English?
S: I like understand news and movies
T: to understand

In this extract, the teacher just corrected learner's problem in the second position by providing the alternative with no explanation of it what so ever. There were also cases of embedded correction among both groups as in extracts 15.

(15) [Advanced]
S: I'm usually busy to do that
T: you're usually too busy to do that
S: yeah

In this extract, the teacher repaired trouble in the second position. Unlike exposed correction repair was embedded in a full sentence.

TABLE 3
SECOND POSITION REPAIR FOR BOTH GROUPS OF LEARNERS

Group	TR	What	Other question words	Partial repeats	You mean	Embedded correction	Exposed correction	N
Intermediate	SR	2	5	4	0	0	0	11
	OR	0	0	0	4	6	29	39
Advanced	SR	3	6	6	0	0	0	15
	OR	0	0	0	2	8	8	18

Based on the table above, both groups used the same devices and strategies and again the difference was between the frequencies and repair completion. The most important difference between these two groups was in the number of corrections; exposed correction happened far more in intermediate group. In this position other-repair happened in intermediate group more than twice as much as advanced group.

D. Third Position

This position was another opportunity for the producer of the trouble to initiate repair and all cases of repair initiations in this position can be categorized based on Schegloff's (1992) four component format (repair initiating component, the agreement/acceptance component, the rejection component and the repair proper). In the repair initiating component both group of learners used *no* to initiate repair in third position as in extract 16.

(16) [Intermediate]

S: I like the: first role
T: so you like Marlon Brando
S: no the other Godfather
T: oh Al Pacino

The agreement/acceptance component didn't happen between these two groups of learners. The rejection component happened twice among advanced learners as in extract 17.

(17) [Advanced]
S: you can't be faithful and be happy in this world
T: so the world is a mess to you
S: I don't mean that I mean you can't be uhm: faithful and () happy at the same time

In this extract the learner initiated repair in the third position by rejecting the teacher's understanding of his first turn and repaired it in the third position by using *I don't mean that*.

The repair proper component was the most likely type of repair initiation in third position and happened more frequently among both group. All cases of repair proper component happened by repeating the prior turn with some modifications, such as prosodic marking, to display that the prior turn is being made clear as in extracts 18.

(18) [Advanced]
S: have you seen unfaithful
T: yes we had uhm: a neighbor (.) their marriage ended
S: no I mean unfaithful the movie
T: oh no.

In this extract, the learner initiated repair in the third position. She modified her talk by stressing the word "movie" to resolve the source of misunderstanding. All cases of repair proper ended up by being cases of self repair.

TABLE 4
THIRD POSITION REPAIR FOR BOTH GROUPS OF LEARNERS

Group	TR	Repair initiating component	Rejection component	Repair proper	N
Intermediate	SR	2	0	5	7
	OR	0	0	0	0
Advanced	SR	4	2	7	13
	OR	0	0	0	0

Based on the table above, third position repair happened among advanced group almost twice as much as intermediate group. Another difference was that the rejection component happened just among advanced learners.

E. Fourth Position

In this position the troubles that had not been resolved in the previous turns with the speaker and the recipient were dealt with. Fourth position repair was very rare among both groups of learners and most of the problems were resolved before this turn. It happened once among intermediate and once among advance learners which were both cases of other-repair as in extract 19.

(19) [Intermediate]
T: is this film familiar?
S: this one is pretty easy
T: do you know the name of the film, Sahar?
S: yeah
(0.3)
T: we're waiting for you to say it
S: oh, Gone with [the wind
T: [thanks

Here teacher's original turn can be understood as a pre-request to name the film. Student's action following teacher's turn indicates that she is acting on turn as asking her whether she knows the name or not. Teacher then produces another form of the request designed to follow up her original turn.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Both groups used many similar and some different devices and strategies to initiate repair in different positions. Cut-offs, other non-lexical perturbations, avoiding, repair segment and marking time were the devices and strategies used by intermediate learners for repair initiation in the same turn position. Advanced learners used the same devices and strategies in this position except for marking time which didn't happen among this group. The difference between these two groups in this position was the number of times they used each devices and strategies e.g. advanced learners used cut-offs, other non lexical perturbations, avoiding and repair segment far more than intermediate learners. Another important difference between these two groups in this position was the fact that just two cases of repair initiations in this position wounded up to be cases of other-repair among advanced learners but this number for intermediate learners

was 10. Repair initiation in the same turn happened far more among advanced learners due to their stronger ability to keep the turn by the use of different devices and strategies. Teachers can help learners in lower levels by teaching them several devices and strategies for keeping the turn. The more devices and strategies learners know, the more they can keep their turns. This ability helps learners to repair their problems by themselves and move forward during the process of learning.

In the transition space, the big difference between the two groups was the fact that intermediate learners initiate repairs in this position with no repair initiation markers but advanced learners use devices like *uh* & *uhm* and *sorry* more than half of the times. All cases of repair initiations in this position were cases of self-repair. Results in this position also showed the intermediate group's lack of ability to use devices showing a repair in the transition space following the first turn.

There were two big differences between these two groups of learners in the second position repair. The first one was that exposed correction was used far more among intermediate group than advanced group. The second one was the fact that the cases of other-repair among intermediate learners were more than twice as much as advanced learners. Other differences were all about the number of times each group used every devices and strategies. One of the most important implications of this study is drawn from the repair initiation in the second position. Corrections happened far more in intermediate group and most of them were exposed corrections. Corrections avoid learners from the opportunity to repair their talk and just provide the correct forms. It's better if teachers provide opportunities for learners to repair their talk by themselves.

In the third position, advanced learners used repair initiating component, rejection component and repair proper to initiate repair but intermediate learners just used the first and the third strategies and rejection component didn't happen among this group. Another difference was again in the number of times each group used these strategies. The small number of repair initiations in the third position can be an indicator of teachers' intolerance toward problems in learners' talk. Sometimes it is better to give learners opportunities to figure out the problems by themselves. Teachers can give them this opportunity from time to time and if they did not correct their problems, teachers can repair their talk in the next turn which is the fourth position. Finally, fourth position repair happened once among each group and there was no difference between the way the initiate repair in this position.

To sum up, it can be said that learners in more advanced level repaired their talk more so we can say that using repair is a sign of growth in learners' knowledge of the language they are learning. But the most important implication of this study is the fact that more advanced learners repair their talk more by themselves than less advanced ones. Based on the findings of this study, the ability to self-repair is a sign of development in foreign language learning, so if teachers let learners self-repair their talk, they facilitate the process of learning. Teachers can initiate repair and let learners self-repair their talk instead of providing the correct forms.

APPENDIX. TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

// double obliques indicate the point at which a current speaker's talk is overlapped by the talk of the another.

[a left bracket indicates the point of overlap onset.

] a right bracket indicates the point at which two overlapping utterances end. If they end simultaneously, or the point at which one of them ends in the course of the other. It also is used to parse out segments of overlapping utterances.

= equal signs indicate no break or gap.

 A pair of equals, one at the end of one line and one at the beginning of the next, indicate no break between the lines.

 The pair is also used as a transcript convenience when a single speaker's talk is broken up in the transcript, but is actually through-produced by the speaker.

 A single equal sign indicates no break in an ongoing piece of talk, where one might otherwise expect it, e.g., after a completed   sentence.

(0.0) numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time by tenth of seconds.

- - double dashes indicate a short, untimed interval without talk, e.g., a 'beat'.

(.) a dot in parentheses indicates a brief interval (a tenth of a second) within or between utterances.

__ underscoring indicates some sort of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude.

 A short underscore indicates lighter stress than does a longer underscore.

:: colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound. The longer the colon row, the longer the prolongation.

:_ combinations of underscore and colon indicate intonation contours. Basically, the underscore punches up the sound it occurs beneath.

.,?? punctuation markers are used to indicate the usual intonation.

WORD upper case indicates especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk.

<word a pre-positioned left carat is a left push, indicating a hurried start; in effect, an utterance trying to have started a bit sooner than it actually did. This can be heard, for example, as a compressed onset of the utterance-part in question. A common locus of this phenomenon is self repair.

Word< a post positioned left carat indicates that while a word is fully completed, it seems to stop suddenly.

- a dash indicates a cut-off.

　　>< 　right/left carats bracketing an utterance or utterance-part indicate that the bracketed material is speeded up, compared to the 　surrounding talk.

　　<> 　left/right carats bracketing an utterance or utterance-part indicate that the bracketed material is slowed down, compared to the 　surrounding talk.

　　.hhh 　a dot-prefixed row of h's within a word indicates an inbreath. Without the dot, the h's indicate an outbreath.

　　Wohhrd 　A row of h's within a word indicates breathiness. In some transcripts the h's are italicized, in some not.

　　(h) 　paranthesized h indicates plosiveness. This can be associated with laughter, crying, breathlessness, etc.

　　£ 　the pound-sterling sign indicates a certain quality of voice conveys supressed laughter.

　　Wghord 　a gh stuck into a word indicates gutteralness. In some transcripts the gh is italicized, in others, not.

　　() 　empty parentheses indicate that the transcriber was unable to get what was said. The length of the parenthesized space reflects the length of the ungotten talk.

　　(word) 　parenthesized words and speaker designations are especially dubious.

　　(blerf) 　nonsense syllables are sometimes provided, to give at least an indication of various features of the ungotten material.

　　(( )) 　doubled parentheses contain transcriber's descriptions.

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