

Application of Reading Strategies: A Comparative Study between Iranian and Indian EFL Students

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Abstract—Reading as an important skill among the other four language skills, received high attention by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century and a large number of researchers devoted their research papers to different aspects of reading. However, one of the important issues, over the last few decades, has been strategic reading. Early research in this field considered native language (L1), but in the last three decades the emphasis was on second language reading (L2). Despite the wealth of the studies in the area of reading strategies, there was a comparative dearth of research in the comparison of L1 and L2 reading strategies. In line with these facts, this paper attempted to examine whether L1 and L2 readers use the same reading strategies while reading. Using a Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, quantitative data were collected from 30 EFL Iranian and Indian students. The obtained results indicated that while "social strategy" was the most prevalent among different strategy types between natives; non-natives applied "memory and cognitive" strategies more. Transfer, learning environment, and knowledge of the two languages were among influential factors in the use of strategies by the two groups of respondents.

Index Terms—strategic reading, second language strategies, transfer, memory and cognitive strategies, social strategy

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, research on reading strategies has become quite sophisticated thanks to the work of a number of researchers (Singhal, 2001; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001; Phakiti, 2003; Kong, 2006; Cromley & Azevedo, 2006). Among the four language skills, the ability to read academic texts is considered as one of the most important skills that students of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) need to acquire. As Sheorey & Mokhtari (2001) stated that reading whether in L1 or L2, is a cognitive phenomenon which is the result of the interaction among the reader, the text, and the context of reading. Moreover, to comprehend the text successfully, the reader must utilize metacognitive knowledge and use conscious and deliberate strategies. Research on effective reading in foreign (FL) or second (SL) language learning located the importance of comprehension problems into two sources. First is the traditional view which emphasizes lack of either specific skills or hard work among poor readers and the second approach emphasizes the reading styles and strategies (Amer & Khoussam, 1993).

Strategy can be explained as a conscious repair. It implies some procedures that are used deliberately to achieve some goals, so it can be used intentionally to help one achieve some ends. In his paper, Singhal (2001) made a distinction between strategies that help learners to acquire the materials more effectively, in contrast to strategies that develop comprehension. The first group referred to a group that learn the learning strategies in the second language literature while comprehension or reading strategies indicate how readers apprehend and comprehend a task, how they understand what they read, and what they do when they don't understand. These strategies help learners increase reading comprehension and overcome comprehension failures. Reading strategies according to Amer and Khoussam (1993) can be explained as decision processes that lead one to carry out reading skills. They can range from bottom-up strategies, like looking up a word in a dictionary to the more comprehensive actions, like relating what is being read to the readers' background knowledge. Birjandi (2001) claims that there are a set of well-established reading strategies used by second/foreign language learners which help them to process a text actively, to monitor their comprehension, and to connect what they are reading to their own knowledge and other parts of the text. According to Hudson (2007) reading strategy can be defined as any interactive process that has the goal of obtaining meaning from connected text. They can help facilitate comprehension processing of a text.

Although more and less proficient readers know the same strategies, they apply strategies differently. Those who are more proficient use different types of strategies in different ways compared to less proficient ones. Hence, strategic reading is a matter of using appropriate strategies not just knowing them. In Kong's terms (2006), reading or understanding written symbols requires readers to be strategic and use their linguistic knowledge and their knowledge of the topic under discussion. In their paper, Cromley and Azevedo (2006) point out two main bodies of evidence that support the importance of strategies for reading comprehension: descriptive research (including correlational questionnaire studies and think-aloud studies) and experimental intervention studies in which students are taught how to enact specific strategies. Following these claims, the present study made an attempt to explore whether L1 and L2 (native and non-native) readers use the same strategies, as well as to determine which reading strategies are used more by native and non-native readers while reading.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Early research in the field of strategic reading considered native language, such as Feng (1998) in a research project examined the strategies used by native speakers of Chinese while reading easy and difficult expository passages in English and Chinese. The result of the study showed that the subjects were aware of some of the reading strategies while they were reading English and Chinese texts. In addition, the use of strategy in their think-aloud reports showed that reading strategies were used more frequently in English than in Chinese and more frequently for difficult texts than for easy texts where there were differences. In a study, Rao (2006) investigated Chinese students' use of language learning strategies, and then interpreted the data from cultural and educational perspectives. The researcher found some similarities in Chinese students in the use of learning strategies. Results revealed that these similarities could be related to three factors as their cultural and educational background: their cultural views and values, their traditional education pattern of Chinese, and English language as Foreign Language (EFL) setting.

However, in the last three decades the emphasis changed toward L2 interactive reading, in which readers interact with the text using their prior knowledge and cultural background, and on the strategies used by proficient readers. Bimmel, van den Bergh, and Oostdam (2001) established that a great number of strategic reading activities are valuable and useful for L2 reading comprehension that can be trained: 1. Use of the learners' prior linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge. For this group appropriate strategic reading activities are: predicting the content of the text based on the title, pictures and legends, inferring meaning of words based on the hints and clues in the context, and elaborating. 2. Use of the elements of the text which have high information value. The appropriate practices for this group are: skimming, finding the key fragments in the text, taking notes, questioning, outlining and summarizing. 3. Use of the elements that are as structure-marking elements in the text, such *in summary*, *because*, *in contrast*; furthermore, this is also about connecting words such as *therefore*, *but*, *whereas*, *etc* (p.511).

However, in Sheorey and Mokhtari's (2001) terms, studies on the reading strategies of advanced learners or studies comparing the strategies of such learners with those of native speakers is almost nonexistent. So, some recent studies contributed to a comparison between L1 and L2 reading strategies. Birjandi (2001) investigated the degree of relationship between the reading strategies adopted in the first language and in the foreign language. The results showed that out of 17 strategies classified as positive reading strategies, 6 were used frequently in Persian and English and 10 were used moderately in both languages. However, out of 8 negative strategies, 6 were used moderately in both languages and two other strategies were used relatively infrequently in both languages. Another attempt has been done by Belet and Gursoy in 2008. They explored the possible similarities and differences of strategy use in L1 and L2 reading comprehension by the use of both qualitative and quantitative data. The obtained results from the study showed that although there are similarities in students' strategy use in L1 and L2 reading and strategy groups they involved such as cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive and social strategies, the percentage of the reading strategy they used are different.

A second or foreign adult reader has knowledge and experience of reading and reading strategies in his/her first language which is limited in second language. This issue raises some questions: what strategies a second language learner uses? Does he/she transfer L1 reading strategies into L2? Is a good first language reader also a good second language reader? What is the relation between L1 and L2? (Kong, 2006). Finding answers to these questions can be very helpful in L2 learning and teaching and can help learners in better understanding of L2 texts. According to Upton (1997) transfer from L1 to L2, access to first language (L1) as reading and using it as a strategy to help comprehend an L2 text, can be regarded as an important strategy in reading comprehension. Regarding the relationship between L1 and L2 readings, researchers suggested different hypotheses to explain the process of second language reading. In this regard, Kong (2006) points out two hypotheses. One is the "short circuit hypothesis" proposed by Clarke in 1980. He maintains that limited control over the language 'short circuits', causing readers to use poor strategies while reading a difficult or confusing task in the second language. Clarke (as cited in Kong, 2006) believes that there is a difference between a good reader's system and a poor reader's system when good readers try to use larger chunks of text to fill in cloze test blanks than the poor readers and when they rely more on the semantic clues rather than syntactic ones. On the contrary, another hypothesis proposed by Kong (2006), suggests that higher level L1 strategies can be transferred to a second language reading situation and can act alongside lower processing strategies. Thus the L2 reading process is interactive which takes the readers' background knowledge into consideration (Kong, 2006). To examine the

relationship between L1 and L2 readings, in a study Yamashita (2002) investigated the contribution of first language ability on second language proficiency to L2 reading comprehension. The results of the study confirmed compensation of weak L2 reading strategies by L1 and vice versa.

As mentioned earlier, rarity of studies on the reading strategies of advanced second language learners or that comparing the strategies used by these learners with those used by native speakers (Birjandi, 2001; Sheorey and Mokhtari, 2001) impelled the researchers to find answer to the following questions: (Birjandi, 2001; Sheorey and Mokhtari, 2001) impelled the researchers to find answer to the following questions:

- What reading strategies are used more by native readers?
- What reading strategies are used more by non-native readers?
- Do native and non-native readers use the same strategies?

III. METHODOLOGY

Participants

Fifteen students majoring in English literature and teaching were recruited as non-native language learners from Ilam University. Nine students were MA student of teaching and the remaining six students BA students of literature. The other group of learners regarded as native speakers were fifteen students of Jawahr Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi-India. Eight students were females and the rest males.

Instrument

The instrument employed in the current study was adapted from Rebecca Oxford's (1990a) 80-item Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The questionnaire, which is a self-scoring survey, included 80 statements divided into six categories: memory strategies (items 1-15), cognitive strategies (items 16-40), compensation strategies (items 41-48), met cognitive strategies (items 49-65), affective strategies (items 66-71), and social strategies (items 72-80). Subjects asked to report the frequency of the learning strategy they used, in a multiple-choice method through choosing one of the five Likert-scale options for each strategy they applied, the options are: never or almost never true of me, generally not true of me, somewhat true of me, generally true of me, and always or almost always true of me. Besides, the reliability of various forms of SILL was quoted by Oxford as being between 0.93-0.98.

Data collection and analysis

The data upon which the study is based were derived from a questionnaire called strategy inventory for language learning (Appendix 1). The questionnaire consists of eighty items with five alternatives for each item and six main parts. The main parts are remembering more effectively, using all mental processes, compensating for missing knowledge, organizing and evaluating learning, managing emotion, and learning with others. Students asked to read each statement and choose the number that uses for them, representing the frequency of the reading strategy they used in the statement. Thus the higher the number they gain, the more frequent it shows that they perceived how to use the specific strategy.

Following the data collection, the analysis involved frequency analysis and independent *t-test* procedures. Descriptive statistics were used to obtain mean of overall strategy use and mean of each individual strategy. Independent *t-test* was used for each item and category in order to determine significant level of data.

IV. RESULTS

The results of the quantitative data that aims to determine the use of reading comprehension strategies of native and non-native readers of English given in the following tables. First, students' responses in terms of the individual items along with *t-test* results were examined in order to determine if there was any significant difference between two groups of participants. The obtained results shown in table (3.1) in appendix A. After that the mean strategy used in each of the six categories across the entire SILL was shown in table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2.
TOTAL MEANS FOR NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE READERS FOR SIX PARTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE AND OBTAINED RESULTS OF *T-TEST*

Parts	mean natives	mean Non-natives	t-test results
Memory	2.91	3.19	.07*
cognitive	3.19	3.45	.03*
compensation	3.29	3.58	.28
meta-cognitive	3.56	3.80	.31
affective	2.95	3	.90
social	3.62	3.12	.04*
total	3.25	3.34	

*= statistically significant ($p < .05$)

Firstly, total mean for each individual item along with *t-test* results was calculated for two groups of participants. In the first category of the questionnaire, i.e. items 1-15, *t-test* results demonstrated that significant results were not obtained for any individual items. Total mean in this part, i.e. memory strategies, is 2.91 for natives and 3.19 for non-natives (see table 3. 2). The results of *t-test* showed that the discrepancy between the two groups was significant ($p = .07$) in favor of non-natives. By looking at table 3.1, it can be said that from among fifteen items, item twelve was rarely used both for L1 and L2 readers.

In the second part, among the total items of twenty five, significant *t-test* results were obtained for items 31, 35, 36, 38, and 39 (for items, see Appendix B). Total mean was 3.19 for natives and 3.45 for non-natives. Obtained significant *t-test* result in this part ($p=.03$) showed that non-natives outperformed their native counterparts. Evidently, in the second part, item 21 for natives and 35 for non-natives received the lowest mean.

In the third part, i.e. compensating for missing knowledge, *t-test* results were significant for four out of eight items. Total mean for natives was 3.29 and for non-natives 3.58. In this part, unlike the two previous parts, the difference between the obtained total means was not significant. Items 42 and 43 received the lowest mean for natives and non-natives respectively.

In the next part, metacognitive strategies, which consists of seventeen items, significant results were obtained for four items, 49, 62, 63, and 65. Total mean was 3.56 for natives and 3.80 for non-natives which the difference was not significant. In this section, items 58 and 65 were used by less number of students.

In the fifth section, affective strategies, one out of six items (item 68) was significant. Total mean was 2.95 and 3 for natives and non-natives respectively. The lowest means belong to items 68 and 71 for natives and non-natives.

The last part of the questionnaire, social strategies, consists of three significant results (items 69, 72, and 75). Total means was 3.62 for natives and 3.12 for non-natives. As demonstrated, in this part significant result obtained in favor of natives, i.e. natives outperformed non-natives. Based on the results, it can be claimed that natives obtained the lowest mean in item 80 and non-natives in item 73.

Secondly, six parts of the questionnaire examined separately in order to determine which categories used more by two groups and *t-test* results deployed to see whether the differences between two groups of participants were significant. "To distinguish how frequent each learning group uses the reading strategy, Oxford (1990) determines a mean of all participants in the range of 3.5-5.0 as high use of that specific strategy, 2.5-3.4 as medium use and 1.0-2.4 as low use" (Rao, 2006, p. 498). All means for the six strategy categories (table 3.2) fell within the range of 3.25-3.34 for natives and non-natives, which indicated that the subjects used strategy categories at medium frequency. One reason can be ascribed to the issue that the subjects in the study were not exposed to these strategies in classroom teaching and as LLS needs to learn these strategies through continuous practice and reinforcement (Rao, 2006), we cannot expect that these students use the strategies they have not been taught. Thus, it can be concluded that infrequent use of some of the strategies may be due to the infrequent occurring of those strategies in the learning experiences of the learners.

Besides, the findings showed that category F, social strategies, used most frequently by native speakers whereas category D, metacognitive strategies, was the most frequent used strategy by non-native speakers. Another special characteristic in the students' use of strategy categories was that category A, memory strategies, and category E, affective strategies, were the least frequently of all for natives and non-natives, respectively. This result was in opposition to the findings obtained by Rao (2006), where the affective strategies category was reportedly used the most frequently.

Moreover, according to Rao (2006) classification of the least and the most popular strategies was done by three levels suggested by Oxford (1995) in the case of the participants who answered 4 or 5 ('generally true of me' or 'always or almost always true of me'):

- (1) If 50% or more of all participants answered 4 or 5 for a strategy, it was categorized as frequently used at all proficiency levels.
- (2) If 20-49% of all participants answered 4 or 5, it can be concluded that the strategy was categorized as moderately used at all proficiency levels.
- (3) If less than 20% of all participants answered 4 or 5, it can be indicated that the strategy is categorized as infrequently used.

It was found that the least prevalent strategy was item 21 (I use idioms or other routines in the new language) among natives and item 71 (I talk to someone I trust about my attitudes and feelings and concerning the language learning process) for non-native readers.

V. DISCUSSION

In this study, the writers wanted to explore whether there was any significant difference in the use of reading strategies between native and non-native readers of English. When we looked at the research results there were several conclusions that we can draw upon: First of all, non-natives used "memory and cognitive strategies" more than natives.

Secondly, as mentioned in the results section the strategy group that used by more students among the natives was "social strategies". One reason for not using cooperation strategies among Iranian students can be attributed to the lack of cooperation in Iranian culture. Iranian educational system relies more on competition rather than cooperation, hence students prefer individual activities than cooperation strategies.

Thirdly, using more strategies by non-native readers can be attributed to the factor of transfer and knowledge of their native language, i.e. "L2 learners use their L1 as a resource to understand an L2 reading text" (Belet & Gursoy, 2008). Proficient non-natives can use strategies of two languages, their first and second languages, and transfer them from L1 to L2. As a result of transfer, non-natives can use strategies more frequently than natives.

The findings of this study have far-reaching implications for teachers and students of English as a foreign language (EFL). The findings suggest that EFL reading teachers should be made aware of the key role of strategies in EFL

reading instruction and consider ways to incorporate them into their syllabi in order to enhance the efficiency of their teaching. In the case of students, we need to help learners become efficient readers and improve their reading ability. They need to be independent and rely more on certain strategies rather than teacher.

The purpose of this study was to determine the strategy difference between native and non-native readers of English. To this end, obtained information was studied and significant findings were resulted. Although significant, some limitations may intervene. One limitation can be attributed to the limited number of students. Further research in this area should consider this limitation and include more subjects. Another avenue of research can include comparison of reading strategy among students with different cultural background and in different contexts. Further studies can also include students with different proficiency levels. Low proficiency students may act different from high proficient readers.

APPENDIX A

TABLE 3. 1.
RESULTS FOR INDIVIDUAL ITEMS

Items	Native Mean	Non-native Mean	Sig
1	2.60	3.25	.17
2	3.73	3.60	.69
3	3	3.26	.20
4	3.40	3.06	.35
5	2.86	2.66	.46
6	2.20	3.46	.80
7	3.20	3.4	1
8	2.60	3.26	.1
9	2.50	2.8	.66
10	3.40	3.26	.50
11	3.06	2.26	.78
12	2.33	2.26	.20
13	3.26	3.53	1
14	2.7	3.2	.58
15	3.26	3.73	.33
16	3	4	.23
17	3.4	3.1	.50
18	3.53	3.53	1
19	3.26	3.40	.72
20	3.20	3.60	.35
21	2	2.80	.65
22	3.2	3.46	.30
23	2.86	3.20	.68
24	3.86	3.26	.66
25	3.13	3.20	.68
26	4	3.20	.91
27	3.6	3.60	1
28	3.46	3	.88
29	3.4	3.53	.80
30	3.33	3.60	.51
31	3	4.20	.012*
32	2.93	3.73	.27
33	2.36	3.26	.68
34	3.53	3.80	.32
35	3.66	2.73	.042*
36	2.53	3.66	.004*
37	3.53	3.73	.56
38	2.80	3.53	.047*
39	3.40	4	.007*
40	2.93	3.13	.42
41	3.73	3.60	.54
42	2.13	3.33	.02*
43	3.33	3.73	.05*
44	3.26	3.33	.85
45	3.46	3.8	.26
46	3.46	4.06	.05*
47	2.80	3.06	.54
48	4.20	3.53	.08*
49	3.26	3.93	.03*
50	4.1	3.80	.37
51	3.53	3.73	.62
52	3.8	3.46	.35

53	3.20	3.26	.81
54	4.20	3.73	.20
55	4	6.66	.31
56	3.86	3.73	.68
57	3.23	3.46	.36
58	2.60	3.20	.20
59	3.93	3.80	.62
60	3.40	3.62	.44
61	3.60	3.20	.43
62	2.733	3.80	.006*
63	3.13	4.26	.004*
64	3.80	4.04	.48
65	4.26	3	.005*
66	3.53	3.93	.33
67	4.06	3.93	.78
68	1.66	2.73	.021*
69	2.86	2.86	1
70	2.33	2.33	.72
71	3.26	2.26	1
72	4.80	3.66	.001*
73	3.3	3.06	.84
74	3.64	3.33	.40
75	3.60	2.66	.06*
76	3.46	2.33	.02
77	3.73	3.20	.16
78	3.46	3.53	.85
79	3.36	4	.26
80	3.26	3.26	1

*= statistically significant (p<.05)

APPENDIX B

Strategy inventory for language learning

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Generally not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Generally true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

Part A

When learning a new word -----

1. I create association between new material and what I already know.
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.
3. I place the new word in a group with other words that are similar in some way.
4. I associate the sound of new word with the sound of a familiar word
5. I use rhyming to remember it.
6. I remember the word by making a clear mental image of it by drawing a picture.
7. I visualize the spelling of the new word in my mind.
8. I use a combination of sounds and images to remember the new word.
9. I list all the other words I know that are related to the new word and draw lines to show the relationship.
10. I remember where the new word is located on the page or where I first saw or heard it.
11. I use flashcards with the new word on one side and the definition or other information on the other.
12. I physically act out the new word when learning new material.
13. I review often
14. I schedule my reviewing so that the review sessions are initially close together in time and gradually become more widely spread apart.
15. I go back to refresh my memory of things I learned much earlier.

Part B

16. I say or write new expressions repeatedly to practice them.
17. I imitate the way native speakers talk.
18. I read a story or dialogue several times until I can understand it.
19. I revise what I write in the new language to improve my writing.
20. I practice the sounds or alphabets of the new language.
21. I use idioms or other routines in the new language.
22. I use familiar words in different combinations to make new language.
23. I initiate conversations in the new language.
24. I watch TV shows or movies or listen to the radio in the new language.

25. I try to think in the new language.
26. I attend or participate in out of class events where the new language is spoken.
27. I read for pleasure in new language.
28. I write personal notes, messages, letters, or reports in the new language.
29. I skim the reading passages first to get the main idea, then I go back and read it more carefully.
30. I seek specific details in what I hear or read.
31. I use reference materials such as glossaries or dictionaries to help me use the new language.
32. I take notes in class in the new language.
33. I make summaries of new language material.
34. I apply general rules to new situations when using the language.
35. I find the meaning of a word by dividing the word in to parts which I understand.
36. I look for similarities and contrasts between the new language and my own.
37. I try to understand what I have heard or read without translating it word for word into my own language.
38. I am cautious about transferring words or concepts directly from my language to the new language.
39. I look for patterns in the new language.
40. I develop my own understanding of how the language works, even if someone I have to revise my understanding based on new information.

Part C

41. When I do not understand all words I read or hear, I guess the general meaning by using any clue I can find.
42. I read without looking up every new word.
43. In a conversation I anticipate what the other person is going to say based on what has been said so far.
44. If I am speaking and cannot think of the right expression, I use gestures or switch back to my language momentarily.
45. I ask the other person to tell me the right word if I can't think of it in a conversation.
46. When I can't think of the correct expression to say or write, I find a different way to express the idea.
47. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones.
48. I direct the conversations to a topic for which I know the words.

Part D

49. I preview the language lesson to get a general idea of what it is about, how it is organized, and how it relates to what I already know.
 50. When someone is speaking the new language, I try to concentrate on what the person is saying and put unrelated topics out of my mind.
 51. I decide in advance to pay special attention to specific language aspects; for example, I focus on the way native speakers pronounce certain sounds.
 52. I try to find all I can about how to be a better language learner by reading books or articles, or by talking to others about how to learn.
 53. I arrange my schedule to study and practice the new language consistently, not just when there is the pressure of a test.
 54. I arrange my physical environment to promote learning; for instance, I find a quite comfortable place to review.
 55. I organize my language notebook to record important language information.
 56. I plan my goals for language learning; for instance, how proficient I want to become or how I might want to use the language in the long run.
 57. I plan what I want to accomplish in language learning each day or each week.
 58. I prepare for an upcoming language task (such as giving talk in the new language) by considering the nature of the task, what I have to know, and my current language skills.
 59. I clearly identify the purpose of the language activity; for instance, in a listening task I might need to listen for a general idea or for specific facts.
 60. I take responsibility for finding opportunities to practice the new language.
 61. I actively look for people with whom I can speak the new language.
 62. I try to notice my language errors and find out the reasons for them.
 63. I learn from my mistake in using the new language.
 64. I evaluate the general progress I have made in learning the language.
- ### **Part E**
65. I try to relax whenever I feel anxious about using the new language.
 66. I make encouraging statements to myself so that I will continue to try hard and do my best in language learning.
 67. I actively encourage myself to make wise risks in language learning such as guessing meaning or trying to speak even though I might make some mistakes.
 68. I give myself a tangible reward when I have done something well in my language learning.
 69. I pay attention to physical signs of stress that might affect my language learning.
 70. I keep a private diary or journal where I write my feelings about language learning.

71. I talk to someone I trust about my attitudes and feelings and concerning the language learning process.

Part F

72. If I do not understand, I ask the speaker to slow down, repeat or clarify what was said.

73. I ask other people to verify that I have understood or said something correctly.

74. I ask other people to correct my pronunciation.

75. I work with other language learners to practice or share information.

76. I have a regular language learning partner.

77. When I am talking with a native speaker, I try to let him or her know when I need help.

78. In conversations with others in the new language, I ask questions in order to be as involved as possible and to show I am interested.

79. I try to learn about the culture of the place where the new language is spoken.

80. I pay close attention to the thoughts and feelings of other people with whom I interact in the new language.

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