

Negation and Marking Strategies in the Ozubulu Dialect of Igbo

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Abstract

This research examines negation and marking strategies in the Ozubulu dialect of Igbo. It aims at identifying the negative markers and strategies used by Ozubulu native speakers. The intended meaning and the function of negation are the same. The data were obtained through participant observation, elicitation method and the author's native introspection. The theoretical framework adopted in this research is the Principles and Parameters Theory (PPT) as posited by Chomsky and Lasnik (1993). The results show that Ozubulu dialect realizes negation in six forms which include; 'du,' 'ho,' 'a/e...na/ne,' 'a...du,' 'ha' and 'hapu...i'. The researcher observes that in Ozubulu dialect, the negators 'du' and 'ho' are always suffixed to the verb and the native speakers use the negators interchangeably. Again it reveals that the negators 'du' and 'ho' are used in indicative, progressive, perfective, future simple and future perfective sentences, the 'a/e'...'na/ne' occur in simple imperative and imperative progressive constructions, the 'ha-na' occurs in future progressive constructions, the 'a...du' are used in imperative unfulfilled constructions and function as double negators in the constructions and the 'hapu...i' occur in hortative sentences. It can be concluded that negation is a functional category in language which can also be found in the Ozubulu dialect of the Igbo language.

Keywords: Negation, Dialect, Negators, Strategies, Igbo, Ozubulu

Introduction

Negation is a process in syntax that turns an affirmative sentence or statement into its opposite sentence or denial. Negation is a transformation that involves the contradiction of a propositional content of a sentence. This feature is an important aspect of human communication which connotes denials, refusals and contradiction of truthful statements. Obinna (2019) asserts that it is often achieved through the use of several operational transformation devices such as affixation, tone, melody and independent lexical item or items in different languages. It is also a universal feature realized by phonological and syntactic processes.

The research on negation has attracted attention from scholars from various disciplines especially language and linguistics. Hence, negation has been defined in various ways by different language scholars.

Obinna (2019) opines that every language has its own syntactic, semantic and morphological devices of expressing negation. It is a universal linguistic phenomenon and one of the most basic elements in human mind that makes it an indispensable part of natural languages which are tools for human thoughts. Every language or dialect has some devices at its disposal to reverse the truth value of a sentence. Ozubulu dialect which is a dialect of Igbo language is not an exception to negation in

language.

Uba and Adioha (2021) posit that negation is a concept in linguistics that is basically known to be the denial of an assertion. According to them, every language employs a unique strategy for marking negation. Uba and Adioha (2021) asserts that English use 'not,' German use 'nicht,' Swedish use 'inte' and standard Igbo use '-ghi' in their negation marking strategies. According to Iwuala and Imu (2021), negation is a language universal and it exists in one form or the other in natural languages because at one point or the other, the need to negate, refute, deny, contradict or lie, arises. Iwuala and Imu (2021) opine that negation is used to distinguish positive statement from its negative counterparts. Negation is very important because it affects all natural languages and Ozubulu dialect of Igbo language cannot be an exception. Oko and Ngulube (2022) defined negation as a denial or a way of expressing rejection of a positive proposition. They assert that it is a universal feature of human language in the sense that every language has a way of expressing a denial of fact, action, idea or some such thing.

Onuora (2017) opines that in Igbo, negation marking exhibits rich morpho-syntactic and phonosyntactic process. Igbo is a language spoken in Nigeria. It is classified as a New Benue-Congo language (Williamson and Blench, 2000), spoken in South Eastern geopolitical zone of Nigeria, which comprises of Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi states. Beyond the South East, Igbo is also spoken in parts of Rivers, Delta, Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Edo and Benue states. The different dialects of Igbo have different ways of expressing negation because negation is a universal grammatical phenomenon that is parametrically realized cross-linguistically. The Igbo dialect under study here is Ozubulu. Ozubulu dialect is spoken in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra state. It is one of the dialects of Igbo that is highly under described compared to other dialects like Onicha, Owerre, Ngwa, Ohuhu, Igbouzo, Echie and so on. The dialects of the Igbo language are so many such that they cannot be estimated, although some of the dialects are not mutually intelligible. The speech community, Ozubulu in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra state is drawn from inland west Igbo dialect cluster. Ozubulu speech community has boundaries with Nnewi, Ukpokwu, Ithemboji, Okija, Atani and Oraifite.

Negation is an interesting topic of research in syntax. It is an area of syntax with very rich literature. Many works have been done on negation in languages and dialects. Much work has been done on negation in standard Igbo, much work has also been done on negation in some dialects of the Igbo language like Amaiyi (Enweonye and Ekwuekwe, 2015), Egbema-Igbo (Okoro, 2016), Ogbahu (Mmaduagwu and Obiamalu, 2016), Nenwe (Onuora, 2017), Owerre (Amaechi, 2017), Ekwulobia (Ezenwafor, 2019), Ehugbo (Obinna, 2019), Orsu (Uba and Adioha, 2021) among others but none to the best knowledge of the researcher, has been done on Ozubulu dialect of Igbo. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no scholarly work has been done on this dialect using the Principles and Parameters Theory.

Hence, this research seeks to address this issue of negation in Ozubulu dialect of Igbo language using the Principles and Parameters Theory. This research gap reflects on the fact that Ozubulu dialect to the best of the researcher's knowledge has not been documented because it is not

represented in the standard Igbo in any form. Many scholars who worked on negation in Igbo, worked on their own dialects. This research on negation in Ozubulu dialect is also a way of documenting Ozubulu dialect and bringing it to the fore that negation is also found in Ozubulu dialect. Without this research not much will be known about Ozubulu dialect and how syntactic features operate in the dialect. It must be noted also that most scholars who worked on negation in their respective Igbo dialects, did it as a way of protesting the non-inclusiveness of their dialects in the standard Igbo. Finally this research on negation in Ozubulu dialect will project the Ozubulu dialect as one of the documented dialects of Igbo language.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research generally is to investigate the negation markers and the negation marking strategies in the Ozubulu dialect of Igbo. To achieve the aim of this study, research is directed towards the following objectives to:

- i. Identify the negation markers in Ozubulu dialect.
- ii. Classify these negation markers.
- iii. Examine the negation marking strategies in different sentence structures.

The tone-marking convention adopted for this research is Green and Igwe's (1963) tone marking system where the high tones are left unmarked and the low (´) and down step tones (-) are fully marked. For example:

isi - 'head'
isi - 'smell'
isi - 'blindness'
isi - 'to cook'

Literature Review

Negation is a process in syntax whereby a sentence in its affirmative, is turned into a negative sentence. It tries to draw opposites between two similar sentences by introducing a negator in the second sentence. Ndimele (2006) reports that negation marking has two main strategies in the Igbo language. The first strategy is to negate the whole sentence (predicate negation) while the second is to negate a particular constituent of a sentence (constituent negation). De Swart (2010) asserts that negation is universal category but its mode of expression differs from language to language. He opines that, each human language has a standard negation marker and other forms of negation markers peculiar to it.

Attempts have been made to classify negation into categories. Biber, Conrad & Reppen (1998) cited in Ofoegbu (2018) classified negation into two categories; the synthetic negation which includes the “no” and “neither... nor” and the analytic negation which include “not.” They further state that nouns and verbs can be grammatically negated in Standard English by the use of the negative adjective “no,” the negative pronoun “nobody” and the negative adverb “never.” For example:

1. a. There is no money (negative adjective)
b. Nobody saw the car (negative pronoun)
c. Peter was never a man (negative adverb)

Adapted from Ofoegbu (2018, pp 4)Kliman (1964) cited in Diaz Cruz and Lopez Mana (2019)

classified negation into constituent (or local) and clausal (or sentential) negation. Miestamo (2005, 2007) as well as Bonds (2006) classified negation into symmetric and asymmetric negation. Dahl (1979) classified negation into morphological and syntactic negation. Kane (2021) classified negation into affixal and sentential negation (non-affix negation). Mgbemena (1982) classified negation into lexical and grammatical negation.

In symmetric negation, the structure of the negative is identical to the structure of the affirmative but for the presence of the negative marker(s) while in the asymmetric negation, structural differences in comparison to the corresponding affirmative are exhibited. (Miestamo, 2007 cited in Ezenwafor, 2019). Bond (2006) defines asymmetric negative as a construction involving the negative marker and other such processes as the reduction of finiteness verbal elements, word order change, modification on TAM (Tense, Aspect, Mood), person and number e.t.c. examples according to him can be found in languages like German, Dutch, Ket, Meithe and some African languages. (symmetric negation) and Korean and some African languages (asymmetric negation).

Example of symmetric negation from Esan:

(Negation in the past)

- | | | |
|----|-------------------|-----------------|
| 2. | Izèhì lé ébaè | 'Izèhi ate' |
| | ... eat food | |
| 3. | Izèhì bhá lé ébaè | 'Izèhi did not' |
| | ... Neg eat food | |

Adapted from Ezenwafor (2019)

Examples of symmetric negation from German

- | | | |
|----|-------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. | Ich singe | Ich singe nicht |
| | 1sg sing | 1sg sing neg |
| | 'I sing' | 'I don't sing' |
| 5. | Ich sang | Ich sang nicht |
| | 1sg sang | Ich sing + pst neg |
| | 'I sang' | 'I did not sing' |
| 6. | Ich habe gesungen | Ich habe nich + gesungen |
| | 1sg have sung | 1sg have neg sing+ perf |
| | 'I have sung' | 'I have not sung' |

Adapted from Miestamo (2007)

Morphological negation according to Dahl (1979) involves prefixes, suffixes, circumfixes, prosodic and reduplicative features, where prosodic and reduplicative strategies are not very common. In contrast, syntactic negation employs the use of a negative marker which can be uninflected particle, auxiliary verb e.t.c. A major distinction can be made by observing the lexical verb. Dahl (1979) observes that in morphological negation, the lexical verb is modified morphologically. Emenanjo

Onuora (2017) investigates negation in Nenwe dialect of the Igbo language. The researcher called them negative morphemes. The research adopted a descriptive analysis approach where data were gathered from primary sources. Findings show that contrary to what obtains in standard Igbo, the widest distributed negative morpheme in Nenwe *-hu (-hu/hu)* is attached to the root of the lexical verbs only and not on the auxiliaries. The researcher asserts that the implication of this is that Nenwe dialect has not witnessed any negative shift unlike dialects like Echie that had witnessed total negative shift from lexical verbs to auxiliary verbs. The paper also observed that in Nenwe dialect, the difference between the affirmative simple future tense construction and the progressive aspect, lies in the tone of the verb to which the future and progressive marker 'la-' is attached. The study equally showed that tense, aspect and mood markers are neutralized when negated in the dialect in a manner similar to what obtains in standard Swahili, Lamnso and standard Igbo. For examples:

12. O shīhū ede
3sg cook-NEG cocoyam
'He/she did not cook cocoyam'
13. Chinwe alà-èdjehu avjā
Chinwe Vpre-Fut Aux-Vpre-go-NEG market
'Chinwe will not go to the market'
14. Ọ sàbèhù ekwà
3sg wash- Perf-NEG cloth
'He/she has not washed cloth'

Theoretical Framework

The Principles and Parameters Theory (PPT) as posited by Chomsky and Lasnik (1993) was used in this research. According to Chomsky & Lasnik (1993) in the Principles and Parameters Theory, the position of head in phrases is overtly determined by a parameter. Some languages are head-initial while some are head-final. However, the head-initial or head-final are regarded as parameters in the languages which can either be turned on or turned off for some particular languages. The principles are universal while the parameters are language specific and their settings vary across different languages which allow for diversity and variation in grammatical structures across the languages.

Negation is a universal principle in natural languages but the negation strategies in these languages are specific to these languages and they vary according to these languages. This forms their parameters. It is based on this fact that we approach this research from the point of view of negation which is a universal principle for languages and the negation strategies in Ozubulu dialect which are parameters specific to Ozubulu dialect of Igbo.

Methodology

The data for this research was got from Igbo grammar books, seminar papers, articles, journals, competent speakers of Ozubulu dialect sampled from the communities that make up Ozubulu town and the researcher's native introspection was consulted. The researcher identified the negation markers and negation strategies in Ozubulu dialect from the collected data. In this research, twenty participants who are competent native speakers of Ozubulu dialect of the Igbo language and who have spent greater part of their lives in Ozubulu were used to represent the research population. Also,

the researcher's intuitive knowledge of the dialect as a native speaker was applied.

Negation and Marking Strategies in the Ozubulu dialect of Igbo

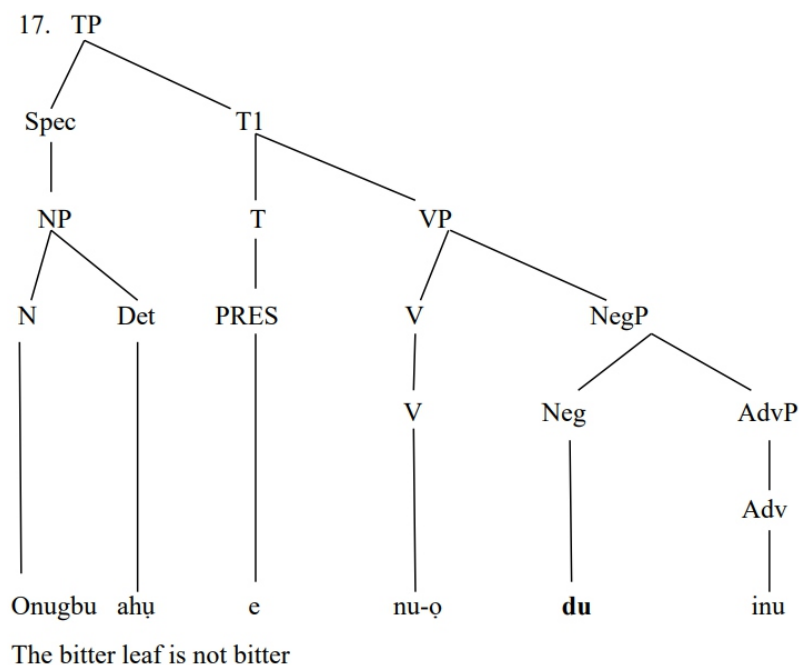
The data analysis for this research is based on negation of such constructions as negation in perfective tense construction, future tense construction, imperative (prohibitive) construction, simple indicative tense construction etc. The aim here is to arrive at some conclusion about negation and marking strategies in Ozubulu dialect as well as any tonal features. The data collected was presented and analyzed stating the different affirmative constructions and their negative variants.

I. The Indicative Negation

This type of construction simply describes a fact. It is marked in standard Igbo with the rV suffix in the affirmative and is replaced in the negative form with the negative marker '-ghi.' However, in Ozubulu dialect, the negative marker or element is '-du' and '-ho' and they occur in a free variation in this type of construction. It is always on a high tone. In some cases the negative element '-du' is borne by an agreement prefix '-o' which comes as a prefix to the verb root or the agreement prefix '-e' attached to an auxiliary verb element 'du' which is prefixed to the negative marker as seen in the examples below:

16. Onugbu ahụ nu lu inu
 NOM det bitter-VAUX-HAB bitter
 The bitter leaf is bitter
 Onugbu ahụ e nu-ọ du inu
 NOM det PRES bitter-V Neg bitter
 The bitter leaf is not bitter

The analysis above and the diagram below point to the fact that Ozubulu dialect replaces the rV with the negative marker 'du' For example:



i. The Progressive Negation

This type of construction describes the present action that is still ongoing or is yet to be completed at the time of speaking. It is marked by an auxiliary low tone in the affirmative, while the negative form is marked by a negative marker 'ho' suffixed to the auxiliary 'na.' Both the auxiliary element and the negation marker prefix the root verb. There is also the introduction of '-a' element in the negative which is not present in the affirmative. The tone is high when it goes with this agreement prefix '-a' which is attached to the auxiliary verb. This behaviour can be seen in the examples below:

16. Chidiomimi na e li nni
NOM is-AUX-PRES-PROG PERF eat-V food
Chidiomimi is eating food
17. Chidiomimi a na hɔ e li nni
NOM 3P-AGR is-AUX-PRES-PROG Neg PERF eat-V food
Chidiomimi is not eating

From the analysis above, it is observed that the negative element '-ho' which tonal feature is high, is dependent on singular subject which is the noun element.

ii. The Perfective Negation

This refers to concluded actions whose impact is still felt in the present. This means that the action has been concluded but the effect is still being felt in the present. The perfective marker 'a/e' bears the auxiliary 'na/ne' which comes after the verb root in the affirmative but bears the negative element of auxiliary particle 'be' with the agreement prefix. For example:

18. Ikenna e gbu-ɔ ne efi
NOM has-AUX-PST kill-V PERF cow
Ikenna has killed a cow
- Ikenna e gbu be du efi
NOM has-AUX-PST kill-V PERF Neg cow
Ikenna has not killed a cow

iii. The Future simple Negation

This construction simply expresses a future occurrence that has not yet begun and it is marked by 'ya' auxiliary verb, suffixed by an agreement marker 'e.' It comes before the verb root in the affirmative but has its negative element 'du' suffixed to the verb root in the negative construction. There is also the introduction of another agreement marker 'a' which is prefixed to the auxiliary in the negative construction. From observations again, we see that in Ozubulu dialect, the negation marking process is distinct, in that the negative element 'du' must co-occur with the verb root in any of its constructions. For example:

19. Ha ya e si agwa
3PPL will-AUX-FUT ASP cook-V beans
They will cook beans
- Ha a ya e si du agwa
3PPL 3P-AGR wiil-AUX-FUT ASP cook-V Neg beans

They will not cook beans'

iv. The Future Perfective Negation

This sub category shows an action that is usually completed always in the future. In the affirmative, it goes with a high tone auxiliary 'ya' with the perfective marker 'a/e' whose tonal feature is high but in its negative variant, it has an agreement prefix 'a' attached to the auxiliary element 'ya' where the future marker 'lili' in the affirmative, is replaced by the negation marker 'du' in the negative construction. The agreement element is prefixed to the auxiliary element whereas the negation marker is suffixed to the verb root in the negative sentences. For example:

20. Nne ya e te-lili ofe
Mother will-AUX-FUT PERF cook-V soup
Mother must cook soup

Nne a ya e te **du** ofe
Mother 3P-AGR will-AUX-FUT PERF cook-V Neg soup
Mother must not cook soup

v. The Future-Progressive Negation

This is a complex type of construction and it is used to express a habitual action. It is a construction where the verb form that expresses action, is repeated. In Ozubulu dialect, this verb root bears two future markers 'ya' and 'na' followed by an auxiliary element in the affirmative. In the negated construction, it bears the agreement prefix 'a' attached to an auxiliary element 'ya' followed by the future negative marker 'ha' and another auxiliary element 'e/a.' Observe also that the auxiliary 'na' is low tone in the affirmative but the tonal feature becomes step in the negative construction. For example:

21. Obika ya na e chu mmili
NOM will-AUX-FUT will-FUT-PROG AFF fetch-V water
Obika will be fetching water

Obika a ya **ha-na** e chu mmili
NOM 3P-AGR will-AUX-FUT Neg AFF fetch-V water
Obika will not be fetching water'

vi. The Simple Imperative Negation

This type of construction expresses a simple order that must be carried out. In Ozubulu dialect, the negative element bears the agreement prefix 'e' or 'a' which are negative indicators or initiators which will in turn trigger off the negative in the constructions. Observe also that 'ne' and 'na' are part of the negative elements in the constructions. For example:

22. Bja ukaa
Come-V here

Come here

A bia na ukaa
Neg come-V Neg here
Do not come here

vii. The Imperative Progressive Negation

This type of construction uses the progressive auxiliary 'na-e' or 'na-a' in complementary distribution, followed by the verb root and then a high tone 'ya' which is also a progressive element in the affirmative, while in the negative construction, it is realized by an agreement prefix 'e/a' before the verb root and the negative imperative marker 'kwa' and then a negative progressive element 'ne/na' as the case maybe. In Ozubulu dialect, the negative markers are 'a/e...na/ne,' the negative imperative marker 'kwa' observe also that there is tonal alternation of the main verbs. The tone in the affirmative is low while it changes to a high tone in the negative constructions. For example:

23. Na a chu ha
Be-AUX-PRES PERF pursue-V 3PPL
Be pursuing them

A chu-kwa na ha
Neg pursue-V Neg 3PPL
Don't pursue them

viii. The Imperative Unfulfilled: Negative (This have only the negative form)

This is another complex construction in Ozubulu dialect. It has all the features of the imperative with the unfulfilled marker. In Ozubulu dialect, it has no comparison with the affirmation. It is realized by 'a...du' which its tonal feature is high. It is also marked by an agreement negative element 'a,' followed by a perfective element 'ka', then an agreement prefix 'e' before the verb root then another negative element 'du.' In Ozubulu dialect, under such sentence types, there is the presence of two negative elements. For example:

24. A ka-e chu na ya
Do PERF fetch-V Neg 2PSG
Do not fetch it

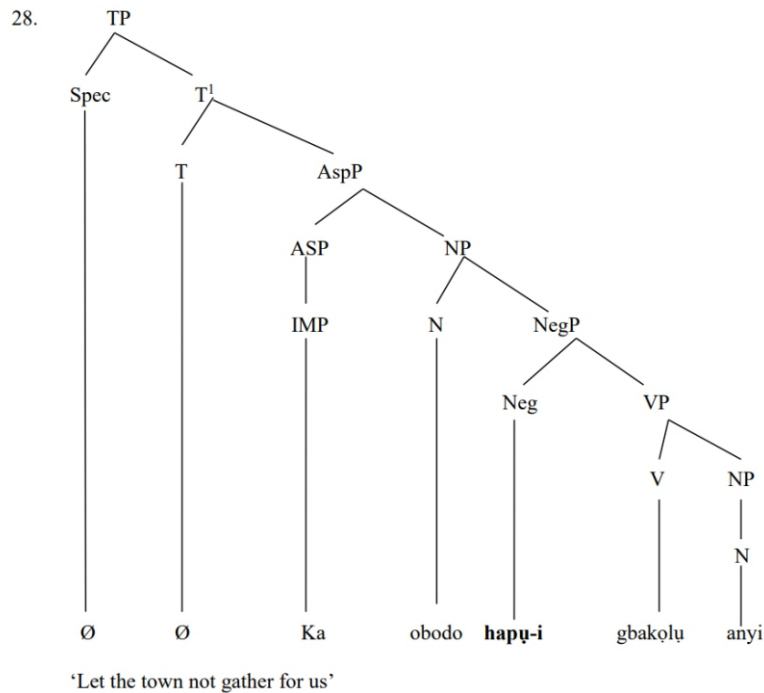
A ka-e chu-**du** ya
Do PERF fetch Neg 2PSG
Do not fetch it

ix. The Hortative Negation

This construction seems to be peculiar to Ozubulu dialect. In the affirmative construction, the verb root bears the perfective elements but in the negative construction, there is the introduction of the negative elements 'hapu...i' which is prefixed to the verb root. Observations in the Ozubulu dialect show that it is the verb root that bears all the negation influences in the construction. For example:

25. Ka obodo gbaqolu anyi
Let-ASP-IMP 1PPL NOM gather-V 1PPL
Let the town gather for us

Ka obodo hapu-i gbaqolu anyi
 Let-ASP-IMP NOM Neg gather-V 1PPL
 Let the town not gather for us



Conclusion

This work investigates the negation strategies employed in the derivation of negative constructions in Ozubulu dialect. The high tone negative markers 'du' and 'ho' have been identified as general negative markers. Other negative strategies have also been identified which are used in the analysis of this work. These negative strategies do not strictly occur in a specific position in the sentence. They can as well vary depending on the type of sentence construction.

The different negative markers identified in this work are analyzed as particles considering the fact that they perform no other function other than the function of negating an affirmative sentence or construction which the research work seeks to address. Another striking thing about Ozubulu dialect is the fact that the different auxiliary verbs used in the analysis influenced the negative markers in the sentences and they vary depending on their various subjects.

It was also discovered that tone constituted an integral part of negation especially as it concerns the dialect under study; therefore, a full description of negation in Ozubulu dialect will entail discussing its tonal pattern. This study finally places Ozubulu dialect among the other dialects of Igbo that exhibit features of syntactic negation by use of particles. The use of particles in the expression of negation observed in the dialect under study agrees with the view of Dahl (1979) that most

languages or dialects of the world exhibit either morphological or syntactic negation. In syntactic negation, particles or auxiliaries are involved. In the case of Ozubulu, particles are used as negation markers. By virtue of this, Ozubulu dialect of Igbo exhibits the syntactic type of negation.

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