

**THE USE OF MEDIA AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM:  
A CONTRASTIVE STUDY BETWEEN SPAIN AND MACEDONIA****Ass. Prof. Dr. Carmen Isabel Luján García**

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**Abstract**

This paper is a comparative study which aims to investigate students' and teachers' attitudes towards the use of technology and media in teaching English as a foreign language in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain and Tetove, Macedonia. The main tools used for the analysis have been two questionnaires, one was administered to students and a second one was given to teachers in both countries. In both cases, we have used a representative sample of the general population to be analyzed. The findings show that the use of new technologies is very widespread in the English classes in the aforementioned countries. Based on the study results, both, teacher and student participants offer a positive attitude towards the use of these aids as a good way to teach and learn, whilst they have proven very effective in teaching English. In both cases, where this study was done, it seems that the use of the computer and the DVD in the classes is becoming a necessity.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, English, Information and communication technology, EFL classroom, Las Palmas de Gran Canari, Tetove.

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**Introduction**

Throughout the last decades, there have been dramatic changes in the ways that languages are taught. Traditional methods such as grammar translation method, direct method and audio-lingual method have been replaced with communicative approaches. Nowadays English language teachers measure students' ability in communication and vocabulary knowledge rather than in the use of certain grammatical features. For this reason, teachers struggle hard to find ways to help learners interact in English and practice communication skills. Vygotsky (1978) was amongst the first researchers who said that all human learning is mediated through interaction with others. In interaction with parents, peers, colleagues, and teachers, all learners move, in their speaking and thinking toward stages at which they can function alone. The development of technology has brought media and technological tools in English language teaching. Media such as movies, satellite and cable TV, cassettes, etc, promote communication among students and teachers of English. Brinton (2001: 461) has pointed out that multimedia tools serve as an important motivator in the language teaching process because "media materials can lend authenticity to the classroom situation, reinforcing for students the direct relation between the language classroom and the outside world". What is more important, movies, audio-cassette, satellite and cable TV, have improved the creation of stimulated environments by bringing native speakers in voice and image in the classroom (Muller-Hartmann, 2004).

### Media in teaching

Different kinds of technological tools have become part of the daily routine of many teachers and students in current education. Thus, in this section, we will deal with the advantages that the use of ICT may offer to present-day EFL teachers and students. Films can increase motivation for learning because students usually watch them and are interested in them. One issue the teachers should consider is the film type which should have an educational approach at the same time that entertaining (if possible). A study conducted with Japanese learners in 1998 showed that films increased student motivation because the students involved in the study had Beginner/Elementary English proficiency and were reluctant learners. Videos, on the other hand, are useful because they provide visual stimuli. Videos are useful because they give students models to imitate role-plays, Arthur (1999: 3) claims that "Video can give students realistic models to imitate for role-play; can increase awareness of other cultures by teaching appropriateness and suitability". Realia are also used a lot in English Language Teaching. Heaton is of the opinion that:

*The use of realia is a commonplace in the ESL/EFL classroom and is widely considered to have great value in fostering an active teaching-learning environment. By presenting information through diverse media, realia helps to make English language input as comprehensible as possible and to build an associative bridge between the classroom and the world (Heaton cited in Smith 1997: 18).*

Smith (1997) believes that the Realia items are intended to serve as "raw materials" for teachers designing lessons focusing on American cultural studies, content-based lessons, and skill area units. The sample activities include the use of many items and suggest ideas that teachers can use when designing their own exercises and they can be used with all learners of all ages but they are very useful when used with young learners. Computers provide variety and are used widely for different purposes. First of all, computers provide language input which increases second language acquisition. The input hypothesis is the fourth Krashen's (1985) hypothesis which states that "the learner improves and progresses along the 'natural order' when he/she receives second language 'input' that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence". Another benefit is the use of different resources that teachers can download from the Internet. Osuna and Meskill in 1998 investigated the potential role of Internet resources as a means to gain a deeper sense of the culture of the Spanish-speaking world for college students. They integrated Spanish language and culture using the Internet. Results affirm that the medium is a valuable tool for foreign language and cultural learning. Technology seems to be especially beneficial in promoting cultural learning. According to the participants, advantages of the Internet over other media and instructional tools are numerous: It is informative, it is actual, it offers beautiful pictures from Spain, many visuals, etc. Data presented here also show very high satisfaction when using the Web for foreign language learning, to the point of outweighing technical challenges. This is a signal for all language teachers that the easily accessible and varied resources of the World Wide Web have enormous potential for supporting the integration of culture in the foreign language curriculum. We, as language teachers, know that our students have different learning styles. Some students are visual learners and they prefer learning by seeing, auditory learners prefer learning by listening and tactile learners learn by moving and touching objects. We believe that it is the teachers' responsibility to address all learning styles. Technology has achieved to address all learning styles with different web activities and Dunn (1996: 2) believes that "No single style is better or worse than any other. Everyone can learn, we

just learn differently.” A computer seems versatile enough to be such a medium - if it is driven by well-designed software and properly utilized by well-trained teachers. Warschauer (1996) points out that computers serve as a vehicle for delivering instructional material to the student. He, in fact, distinguishes three phases of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The first phase is when the computer serves only as a vehicle for delivering learning materials to the learner and he calls it behaviouristic; the second phase is when the computer is used for skill practice to stimulate discussion, writing or critical thinking and he calls it communicative, and in the third phase there is an introduction of two important innovations, multimedia and the internet and he calls it integrative. Looking at Warschauer’s definitions, it is clear that computers can be used for different purposes in the classroom and language teachers can integrate computer technology into the task and design web activities to engage students in learning. Herbert and Hanson-Smith (1997: 22) summarize the challenges of Computers. One challenge probably results from the newness of the medium where the students often urge to play with language and display their wit and verbal audacity. Another challenge probably results from the immediacy of the medium. Some teachers and researchers have argued that students have more time to think and compose their thoughts in written than in oral interactions. A third challenge for teachers comes from the sense of community fostered by the medium. Even when students are trying to collaborate, network discussions can seem fragmented, diffuse, and off the topic until students and teachers find ways to establish and follow topic threads. A study conducted by Tzu Huang in 2007 showed that adult L2 learners increased their vocabulary using the online extensive reading program. Sixteen articles from the computer corpus of a local Chinese-English magazine were used to construct this program. A preliminary assessment of the reading program was conducted with 38 college students over twelve weeks based upon vocabulary gains from a pre-test to a post-test. The online extensive reading syllabus demonstrated that such a design for a reading program is technically feasible and pedagogically beneficial and provides value in both vocabulary gains and learner satisfaction.

### **Background of EFL in Spain and Macedonia**

In this paper, we will firstly provide a background of the situation of English in both countries: Spain and Republic of Macedonia in order to understand the important role that English is playing in both places, and obviously in both educational systems. In Spain, English has become part of each Spaniard’s daily life, and the first foreign language studied. The situation has changed a lot over the last 50 years, Rodríguez González quoting Lorenzo, explains that

*In the 1950s, English was taught as an optional first foreign language in secondary schools to no more than 5 per cent of the students, whereas those who studied French exceeded 90 per cent. Today the situation is reversed: English has rapidly pushed French into a modest second place (Lorenzo 2000 cited in Rodríguez González 2002:134).*

Other authors such as Martínez (1994: 22) and Reichelt (2008: 3) state that there seems to be a strong determination by Spanish authorities to improve levels of proficiency. Reichelt (2008: 6-8) considers the importance of English at the different levels of the Spanish education system, with English-language learning being started at a very young age, “even earlier than required by law; some pre-schools begin instruction in English as early as age three.” During secondary education (until age 16), “virtually all students in Spain

study English...typically students at this level receive 120-180 minutes per week of English instruction.”

At University level, English is important in many subject areas, including engineering, computer science, chemistry, history, medicine and nursery studies, telecommunications, architecture, physical education and so on, not to mention University degrees such as English philology or the “queen of foreign philologies” as González (2002: 134) calls it, or the studies in translating and interpreting, where English is one of the most important subjects. Finally, there are also State Schools of Languages where English, as well as other foreign languages, is basically taught to adult students, and English is the most demanded foreign language. In the case of Macedonia, it is important to point out that this is a multicultural country where foreign languages are learned a lot. Regarding the position of English in primary and secondary schools in Macedonia, English is the most popular foreign language learned by the students. Students regularly take three hours a week (it is 180 minutes of English instruction). This language is learned from the first grade in primary schools throughout all the different levels. In fact, at secondary school, even though there are other foreign languages offered in the syllabuses such as French and German, English is the first most popular foreign language among secondary school students. At University level, all students take English courses at the Language Center. Within the departments the students take ESP courses that it: English for Business, English for Law, English for Public Administration and English for Computing. In terms of availability of new technologies in the classroom, it might be claimed that the situation is gradually improving in both countries. In Spanish classrooms, the use of all kinds of ICT is being extended to most state primary and secondary schools. In Macedonia, all primary and secondary schools in cities are supplied with internet connections and all teachers have their own laptops. This is a very important project financed by the Macedonian Ministry of Education. In this piece of research, we will focus on the Spanish context of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on the one hand, and on the other hand, on the Macedonian context of Tetovo. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Spain) is the city with the highest population in the Canary Islands. It has the ninth position in the range of the most populated cities of all of Spain ([http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Las\\_Palmas\\_de\\_Gran\\_Canaria](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Las_Palmas_de_Gran_Canaria)). It is located in the north east of the island of Gran Canaria, and it is the capital city of this island, being 100.55 km<sup>2</sup> in size and having 377.056 inhabitants ([www.INE.es/2006](http://www.INE.es/2006)). This city counts a state University. While Tetovo is a city in the northwestern part of Macedonia and it has two Universities [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetovo\\_Municipality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetovo_Municipality)). The city covers an area of 1,080 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of 86,580 citizens in the municipality.

### **Objectives of the study**

In this study, we intend to carry out a comparative analysis that shed light on the following issues:

The degree of use of media and technologies in the EFL classroom in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Spain) and in Tetovo (Macedonia) by comparing the results obtained in both cities. The familiarity the teachers of both places have with the use of computers and media in the classroom and the kind of training teachers have received in the use of technology. The students’ attitudes toward the use of media and technology in the classroom.

### **Method**

This paper has a double approach, as it not only focuses on the teachers’ point of view, but it also compiles the students’ opinions. For that reason, it has been necessary to use two different questionnaires for each of the researchers.

**Participants***Students' analysis*

The total number of study participants is 80 students of different educational levels, being a sample of 40 students from Spain and 40 students from Macedonia. They all study English in a compulsory way. Their ages range from 15 to 20 years old. The Spanish students are most of them from Spain, except for a boy who is from Uruguay. However, the Macedonian students have different nationalities, Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish. Their language proficiency ranges from intermediate to advance. Prior to the study they were told the aim of these questionnaires and there was also a discussion about media and technology in the classroom. The students were willing to participate in the study.

*Teachers' analysis*

In addition to students' questionnaires, we distributed 20 questionnaires to English language teachers of different educational levels who teach English as a foreign language in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and in Tetove. The results obtained from both instruments, will be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

**Materials**

The study uses two instruments students' questionnaire and teachers' questionnaire. The questionnaire was taken from TCET Research Center in the USA, and they have been attached in the appendix of this paper.

**Results**

We will first analyze the data taken from the students' questionnaires, and after that, we will look at the teachers' answers.

**The students' opinions**

The first question in the students' questionnaire was whether the English teachers use any kind of audiovisual aid in their lessons, and the figures show that the highest percentage is for the teachers 84.2 who use these aids, whereas the lowest score is for the ones who do not 17.5. Therefore, we can assert that most of the teachers of English in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria use some kind of technological equipment. On the other hand, the situation in Tetove is slightly different and the results show that the highest percentage is for the teachers 68.5 who use these aids, whereas the lowest score is for the ones who do not, 31.5. Question number two asked about the different kinds of new technologies used in the English classes, and the students' replies in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria state that the most common audiovisual aids used are as follows:

*In Spain, the most widely-used form of technology is the DVD, since it is used by a high percentage of teachers 55.2, according to students, whereas 44.7 of the participants say the opposite. The position is quite similar in Macedonia as well because 51.01 of the teachers use DVD and 49.02 claim the opposite.*

In Spain, the second most widely-used audiovisual aid asked about was the *video*, and only 39.4 of the students say that it is used in their lessons, while a percentage of 52.6 of them state that the video is *never* used. While students in Macedonia claim that 30 of their teachers use video in their classes and 70 claim that their teachers never use them. It seems this is an audiovisual aid that is fast becoming old-fashioned, and new materials are currently released in DVD format rather than video. The third aid was the television, and, in this

case, the results are unequivocal. In Spain, most of the students 71 declare that this resource is *never* used in their lessons, whereas a lower percentage of the teenagers 28.9 state that the television is used *sometimes*. While in Macedonia, most of the students 61 declare that their teachers never use television, another percentage 20.5 declare that their teachers sometimes use television and the other percentage 18.5 declared that their teachers often use television. At this point, we need to clarify that the television is a resource that usually complements the use of the video or the DVD, because it is not frequently used in the classroom as a resource in itself. We guess that the students interpreted that it referred to the use of the television as a unique resource in activities such as watching TV English films or serials. The next audiovisual aid was the *radio or CD player*, and a high score of the Spanish participants (68.4) state that this resource is used in their classes, while only a third of them (31.5) say the opposite. Students in Macedonia on the other hand, declared that their teachers use radio or CD player a lot, (72.0) while 28.0 claimed the opposite. There is an obvious majority of students who report that the radio is a frequently used tool. In fact, most of the materials for English teaching offer CDs to practice pronunciation, and it is true that in most of the educational centres, there are radios and CD players available to be used by the teachers. The last resource asked about was the *computer*; and around a third (39.4) of the teenagers say that they use computers in their English lessons; whereas a percentage of 60.5 state that they do not. The situation is approximately the same in Macedonia where the highest score of the participants (40) use computers in the English lessons, and another percentage (60) do not use it. Domínguez and Fernández (2006:23) state that “the use of computers is very motivating for students since it is traditionally associated with leisure situations.”

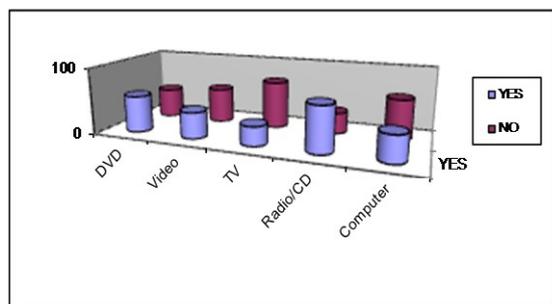


Figure 1. Use of technological resources in the English class in Spain

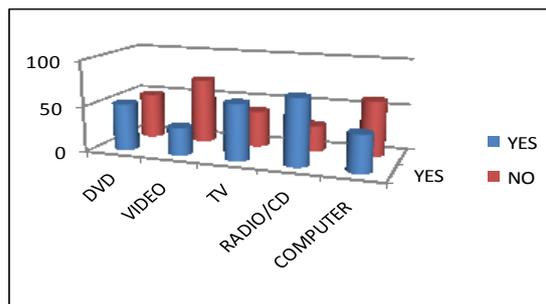


Figure 2. Use of technological resources in the English class in Macedonia

It seems that English language teachers in both environments, Spain and Macedonia, use technology in their teaching but the situation can be improved especially in the use of computers. As we can observe in our results, not many students use computers in their lessons, and this can be explained by taking into account different facts: first, in most state schools in Spain and Macedonia, there are not enough computers available at all times for all the students. There are usually a couple of computer laboratories or none that you need to reserve in advance to use once or twice a week. And, a second fact is that not all the teachers are trained to teach their grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing or listening lessons using computers. When the teachers are asked for this matter, some of them feel a little apprehensive because they have not done it before. It can also be asserted, that there are no important gender differences between boys and girls in terms of preference for any one particular resource. Most of the students regard the computer and the DVD as their favourite tools, followed by other, much less popular, resources. From this, we can infer that both, boys and girls want interactive English lessons. We will deal with this topic in depth in the second part of the research, when we

ask the teachers for these questions. Finally, one last question was open for the students to offer suggestions about how to improve the English classes. Most of these suggestions consider the use of the technological resources on a regular basis. The students emphasize the importance of using computers as a tool to learn vocabulary, practice grammar and carry out interactive activities.

**The teachers’ opinions**

Both teachers and students see the value of technology in the classroom and there seems to be great agreement as regards the importance and usefulness of using new technologies in the English language classroom.

**The first question** asked for the frequency of use of new technologies in the English language classroom, and the results show that *sometimes* is the most chosen answer from the following responses *never, sometimes, often, always*. In Spain, a percentage of 70.5 of teachers of English use technology sometimes while 29.5 of teachers often use it. The situation is slightly different in Macedonia where a percentage of 60.0 use new technologies sometimes, 22.0 use it often and a percentage of 9 never use it. We also need to point out that there is a great variety of materials to work each of the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), as well as grammar and vocabulary. Editors usually offer the teachers a pack with extra resources such as CD-ROMS, tests, worksheets, and so on, that complements the textbook used in the classroom. This is not taking into account the number of websites that allow the teacher to work on a specific topic. So, English teachers have lots of options when it comes to classroom resources.

**Question number two** is concerned with the degree of familiarity that teachers have with the most frequent new technologies used at school – *computer and CD-ROMS, digital whiteboard, DVD, the Internet, radio and CD*. In Spain, the highest score was for the *radio and CDs* with 100 per cent of teachers at both levels using them. The situation is almost the same in Macedonia where a percentage of 90 was for the radio and CDs. These resources are available at all schools, and very often every teacher has his/her own machine to use at any time. In Spain, the second most chosen resource was the *computer and CD-ROMS*, a percentage of 100 per cent teachers are familiar with them. In Macedonia, 88 percent of the teachers use them except traditional teachers who still teach English. *The Internet* was third with a percentage of 90 teachers using it in Spain while in Macedonia a percentage of teachers was 85. The reason why the Internet is number three in the list may be because of the shortage of computer laboratories in all primary and secondary schools. If a teacher wants to use the computer laboratory, he/she has to reserve it in advance, and if they are lucky he/she will be able to use it once a week. *Digital whiteboard* got e percentage of 63 and DVD 100 in Spain while in Macedonia digital whiteboard obtained a percentage of 33 and DVD 65.

The results are presented in Figures 3 and 4.

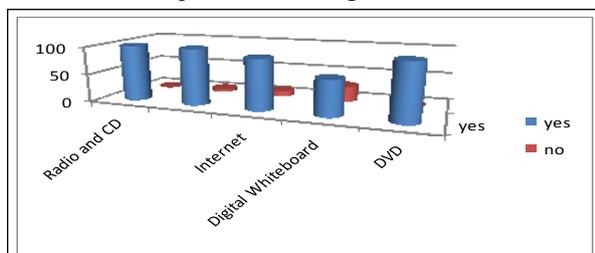


Figure 3: Teachers’ use of media and technology in Spain

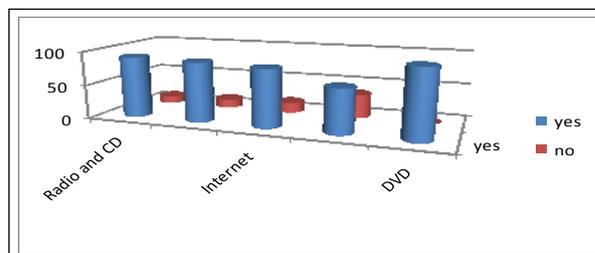


Figure 3: Teachers’ use of media and technology in Macedonia

Question number three was more concerned with the way the teachers feel when they use new technologies in

their English lessons. In this case, we asked about the use of the computing laboratory for an EFL class. A variety of answers was offered ranging from *self-confident, calm, and nervous* to *not confident*. The results reveal that the highest score of teachers was 55 and that is for the teachers who feel *confident*. The second most chosen was *calm*, with 45 of English language teachers. In Macedonia, on the other hand, the highest score of teachers was 45 who reported that they feel confident. 40 percent of the teachers are calm when they use technology in their classes and 15 of the teachers choose nervous. Question number four asked for the kind of board that the teachers choose *regular* or *digital*, to work in their English classes. In this case, we noticed some differences between the teachers in Spain and Macedonia, the highest score (56.2) was for the teachers in Spain who prefer a *digital* board, 43.8 was for the *regular* board. In Macedonia a percentage of 15 teachers choose digital board while 85 percent a regular one. At this point, we need to clarify that in most state schools in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Tetovë, there are not digital boards in all the classrooms. The amount is increasing every year, but there are not enough yet. Most of the teachers who did not choose the digital board stated that this was their reason for their choice. Question number five asked the teachers whether the use of new technologies is useful for learning foreign languages. This was an open question that allowed any kind of answer, but most participants 93 replied affirmatively in Spain and about the same, 90 of the participants in Macedonia replied affirmatively. It shows that there is a latent awareness of teachers of the usefulness of these resources in the English language classroom at this time. The goal of question number six was to find out whether teachers think that students like using new technologies in their English classes. The results are categorical, because all English language teachers in Spain, 100, stated that students enjoy learning with the use of new technologies. The same situation is in Macedonia where a percentage of 98 of the English language teachers believe that their students like to learn with technology while a very small percentage of 2 claimed the opposite. The last question, seven, asked the teachers if they believe that their students can learn better with new technologies. The answers of the teachers in Spain were quite unequivocal, since 85 of the teachers believe that students can learn better with the application of these methods. Similarly, a percentage of 82 of the English language teachers in Macedonia claim that their students can learn better with technology.

### Conclusions

This paper offers an important and novel angle, since it analyses the attitudes and viewpoints of the main agents involved in education; the students and the teachers. It reveals very useful information in terms of the use of the new technology and media in the English language classroom in two contexts: Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Tetova which possibly would not differ much from the results that we could obtain in any other area of Spain or Macedonia. As a consequence, our capacity to know what the students and the teachers think about these issues can help to improve the quality of the English language teaching/learning process. After the analysis of the data, this paper provides some conclusions: First, according to both, the students and the teachers, most of the teachers of English in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Tetova *sometimes* use technological resources in their classes. However, it seems expectable to think that this use will increase more and more, as long as there is a wider availability of them at the education centres, and as long as teachers become more familiar and more confident with the use of these aids. Focusing on the degree of familiarity of the teachers with the technological resources, they state that they are very familiar with the most common forms of ICT, especially the *DVD, radio* and *CD*, as well as the *computer*, and they also assert that these tools

are the most frequently used by them in their classes. However, according to the student participants, the most common resource is the *radio* or *CD player*. It is quite logical, since it is cheap, easy-to-use, and quite easily available at any school. Moreover, there is a huge number of materials to teach English using this method. The second one used by the teacher participants is the *DVD*, which is also quite accessible for students. *Computers* seem not to be so much used by the teachers, and the reason can be, as explained before, the lack of equipment in primary and secondary schools. In analyzing the way the teachers feel when they use some of these methods, we found that most of them seem to feel quite confident, especially when they use *DVDs*, rather than *computers*. In the case of their training and mastery of the use of new technologies, most of the teachers regard it as acceptable. They are also very aware that the students' learning English is enhanced through these resources, in addition to increasing their enjoyment. Most of the teachers find the audiovisual aids useful in their classes. All in all, we may consider that students' and teachers' attitudes toward the use of ICT in the English language classroom are quite positive in both countries. There seems to be considerable motivation and interest in ICT as very useful strategies to make the English teaching/learning process more pleasant. The technological resources currently have, and will also have in the future, a vital role in the teaching/learning process of any subject. Finally, students' and teachers' positive attitude toward the employment of ICT implies a great step forward in its gradual integration in the classroom in Spain and Macedonia. Future recommendation is the importance and need to carry out some comparative research that examines and analyses in depth the use of new technologies in the EFL classroom of these two countries. We strongly believe that English language teachers in all levels of education starting from the primary school should include media and technology in teaching English because in this way they will help students to become more successful learners and also increase learner autonomy.

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