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**CROATIAN RELATIVE CLAUSES AND THEIR ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS
IN EU LEGAL TEXTS**

Abstract

The research and the findings presented here are an overview and summation of a segment of the work carried out by the author as a part of their doctoral thesis research titled „English translation equivalents of Croatian relative clauses in the documents of the European Union“. While both English and Croatian employ comparable finite relative clauses in postmodifying functions in a noun phrase, English can also make use of various non-finite clauses to perform the same function. The difference in the variety of relative constructions that can occur in noun phrases and their frequency has been placed under investigation here. This paper aims to investigate the presence of relative constructions in the above-stated language pair, focusing on the variety of forms occurring in legal texts, and compare the translation equivalents and their frequency in corresponding texts. A parallel corpus of English and Croatian texts was utilized to explore the usage of relative constructions in the specialized genre of legal texts. The corpus assembled for this purpose contains several types of legal documents published by key European Union institutions over the course of several decades. All instances of relative constructions in both languages were extracted and classified by their type and source, while the sentences containing them were assessed for their length and complexity. The preliminary results indicate that there are noticeable differences in the frequencies of occurrence of relative constructions between document types and that non-finite -ed clauses dominate in terms of frequency across all types. In addition, the diachronic interpretation of results shows signs of increased nominalization over the last three decades.

Keywords: *relative clause, non-finite clause, postmodifier, translation equivalents, legal documents, parallel corpus*

RELATIVNE REČENICE U HRVATSKOM JEZIKU I PREVODNI EKVIVALENTI U ENGLISKOM JEZIKU U PRAVNIM TEKSTOVIMA

Sažetak

Istraživanje i rezultati koje ovdje iznosimo predstavljaju pregled i prikaz dijela rada koji je autor poduzeo u sklopu istraživanja za doktorski rad pod naslovom „Engleski prijevodni ekvivalenti relativnih rečenica iz hrvatskog jezika u dokumentima Europske unije“. Engleski i hrvatski jezik koriste finitne relativne rečenice kao postmodifikatore u imeničkim frazama. Engleski jezik, međutim, ima na raspolaganju različite nefinitne rečenice koje također mogu vršiti tu funkciju. U ovom radu ćemo razmotriti razliku u raznovrsnosti relativnih konstrukcija koje se mogu javiti u imeničkoj frazi i njihovu frekvenciju. Cilj ovog rada je utvrditi prisustvo relativnih struktura u gore navedenom paru jezika, a sa fokusom na forme koje se javljaju u pravnim tekstovima, te uporediti prijevodne ekvivalente i njihovu učestalost u tekstovima. Korišten je paralelni korpus engleskih i hrvatskih tekstova kako bi se istražila upotreba relativnih struktura u žanru pravnih tekstova. Korpus koji je sačinjen u ovu namjenu sadrži više tipova pravnih tekstova koje su objavile ključne institucije Europske unije tokom nekoliko desetljeća. Pronađeni su i analizirani svi primjeri relativnih rečenica u tekstovima na engleskom i hrvatskom jeziku te klasificirani po svom izvoru i tipu, a utvrđena je i dužina i složenost rečenica u kojima se javljaju. Preliminarni rezultati ukazuju na znatne razlike u učestalosti kojom se relativne strukture javljaju između različitih tipova dokumenata te da su nefinitne -ed klauze dominantne po svojoj učestalosti u svim tekstovima. Također, kada se rezultati osmotre dijahrono, vidljive su naznake da kroz posljednja tri desetljeća postoji tendencija nominalizacije.

Ključne riječi: *relativna rečenica, nefinitne klauze, postmodifikatori, prijevodni ekvivalenti, pravni dokumenti, paralelni korpus*

Introduction

Relative clauses (*odnosne rečenice*) in Croatian are finite subordinate clauses with attributive function (Silić, 2005) and they have counterparts, both in form and function, in relative constructions in English (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002), for which these authors note they can be classified into finite or non-finite (-ing, -ed, or infinitive clauses). In a more conventional approach they are described as relative clauses and are subdivided into the defining and non-defining type. In terms of the functional description, non-finite forms listed above that perform the similar function of postmodification are sometimes treated separately (Quirk et al, 1985; Biber et al, 1999). Current research adopts the former approach and focuses on the functional equivalency to justify the unified treatment of both finite and non-finite clauses in postmodifier function as belonging to the same category, especially having in view the cross-linguistic data that supports this view. The frequency of such clauses in English has been statistically surveyed (Biber et al, 1999). The discrepancy in available syntactic constructions in the two languages is fertile ground for contrastive comparisons, very few of which have been carried out, especially using corpora. Arnaut-Karović and Rizvić-Eminović (2016) have ascertained significant negative transfer occurring with relative constructions in texts translated by students of English. According to their findings, between 50-85% of cases involved the transfer of native language structural elements into English when there was little justification for it. This research, however, used learner corpora and did not focus on the genre under consideration here. Considering the growing importance of European integration facing Bosnia and Herzegovina and the necessity to adopt *acquis communautaire*, using corpora to investigate the use of language in legal translations of EU documents seems to be gaining relevance.

Early ventures into the corpus research of relative clauses have noted their increased presence in the non-fiction genre (De Haan, 1989). Legal texts have been selected for this research due to characteristics of legal language (legalese), one of which is that it favors relative clauses. Legalese is characterized by complex noun phrases (Davies, 2006), preference for nominal and relative constructions (Cruz and Parina, 2015; Tiersma, 2016), reduction of relative clauses (Gustafsson, n.d.), complexity of sentence structure (Varo and Hughes, 2002; Cao, 2007; Fanego and Rodriguez-Fuente, 2019), constructions difficult to parse (Haigh, 2021), increased presence of non-finite verbs and other deviations from common language use (Durant, 2016). The research will be guided by the principles and corpus characteristics defined by Davies (2006) and falls under the domain of applied linguistics, and endeavors to produce results relevant to the fields of language instruction and translation studies.

Some of the primary hypotheses for which we could obtain data at this early research stage are:

1. Equivalents of the Croatian relative clause will demonstrate greater variety of structures

We expect that the distribution of relative clause equivalents should confirm the earlier results provided by corpus research (Biber, 1999), which had already been marked by a general, intuitive acceptance in the community of language practitioners even prior to the extensive implementation of corpus research methods, namely that non-finite clauses, as effective ways of reducing finite clauses, boosting language economy, have always been ubiquitous in English language in general, and, unsurprisingly, in the legal register in particular.

2. The types of documents will show differences in the frequency and distribution of the finite and non-finite postmodifier clauses

Bearing in mind that sections in the corpus are formed by sourcing documents published by different institutions functioning within the European Union, each with its own set of formal and functional principles, it may be proposed that the documents which are borne out of their activities will reflect those differences at some language level, in both form and style. The differences in the uses of postmodifying structures in noun phrases, especially the length of sentences and their complexity, expressed in the number of clauses with a single sentence, are to be investigated as markers of the specificities of the style of a particular type of document.

3. The documents published in different periods will show differences in the tendencies of use of postmodifying structures

Having in mind the rise of the Plain English movement, which advocates for the simpler, more understandable language use in legal document (Butt and Castle, 2006), and advises using shorter, less convoluted sentence structure in legalese (Williams, 2004; Garner, 2002), we have postulated that this popular movement could have affected the development of the use of postmodifying clauses as well over the course of three decades, and that the visible effects will surface when documents from different periods are investigated.

Methodology

In this section, we will describe the characteristics of the corpus used in this research, outline the main procedures of its creation, explain the reasoning behind the selection of texts and their sampling, and enumerate the types of documents of which the corpus is comprised.

Following the classification by McEnery (2010), the corpus used in this research is a written language corpus, excluding specialized legal texts and oral sources, such as court transcripts and transcripts of law enforcement interactions with citizens, sometimes included into this genre (Durant, 2016). The specific genre are legislative acts, and in terms of languages represented it is a multilingual, parallel corpus comprising legal texts published by the key EU institutions (Barnard and Peers, 2017), including the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union, The European Commission, and the Court of Justice of the European Union as the only judicial authority represented in the corpus. The findings presented in this paper will be based on one segment of this corpus built on the texts published by the European Parliament. They were published in English and Croatian (official translations) and were accessed at the EUR-lex website.

Lacking such English-Croatian corpora, a snapshot corpus (McEnery, 2012; O'Keeffe, 2010) was designed and compiled, comprising 16 text fragments, totalling 24 114 words. Using R-based statistical analysis of confidence intervals, this sample size was determined to yield a confidence interval of 0.06 (95% reliability), meaning the obtained quantitative results of the respective structures under analysis should have the accuracy +/- 3%. While the corpus size for the extended research in the next stages will be expanded to offer an even higher degree of accuracy, aiming at +/- 1.5%, the current number was deemed sufficient for the interim results discussed here.

The corpus covers several types of legal documents, including regulations, decisions and directives. The texts were stored digitally and mined for examples of translation equivalents (Baker, 1992; Hatim and Munday, 2004) involving relative constructions. They were selected so as to cover various periods, based on the availability of English-Croatian document pairs published, reaching back to 1994, which will allow for a diachronic analysis and comparison of data. These were classified and compared based on their type, length, and other particular

characteristics established as relevant for the research, attempting to verify the expected frequency and distribution patterns.

Results and discussion

In this section we will present representative examples of the postmodifying clauses in noun phrases that were of interest, arranged in Croatian-English pairs and including finite relative clauses and non-finite clauses of the types encountered. This will be followed by the description of frequency patterns observed in the data tied to the hypotheses outlined above, and a discussion of the findings.

Having in mind the extensive length of sentences encountered in the corpus, short sentences being a deviation from the standard, and desiring to optimize the layout of this paper, all examples will be presented as sentence fragments that cover just the postmodifying structure, which can be understood in all instances shown here to be a part of the N + postmodifying clause structure.

We will start with two straightforward pairs of structures that demonstrate the most structurally aligned translation equivalent in the range of postmodifying clauses appearing in a noun phrase – a Croatian relative clause (*odnosna rečenica*), and the English counterpart:

Example 1.

(...) *koji **čini** sastavni dio Ugovora o osnivanju Svjetske trgovinske organizacije*

(...) which **forms** an integral part of the Agreement establishing the World Trade Organization

Example 2.

(...) *koja **je** članica Svjetske trgovinske organizacije*

(...) which **is** a member of the World Trade Organization

Here, the Croatian relative clause has an English finite relative clause as its counterpart (with the finite main verb of the clause boldfaced). The structural parallelism between the two structures is very much present: both clauses are introduced with relative pronouns, performing the function of the subject in the clause, the verbs are finite, showing tense, person and number (and gender, in the case of Croatian), within the morphological framework of respective languages, and the rest of the clausal elements, as in a lot of cases, will follow suit and exhibit a certain degree of parallelism too.

Other structures that are widely encountered counterparts to the Croatian relative clause are non-finite clauses. The following two pairs are examples of the -ing clauses:

Example 3.

(...) koje **proizlaze** posebno iz članaka 23. i 24. Sporazuma o trgovinskim aspektima prava intelektualnog vlasništva, koji čini sastavni dio Ugovora o osnivanju Svjetske trgovinske organizacije

(...) **arising**, in particular, from Articles 23 and 24 of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, which forms an integral part of the Agreement establishing the World Trade Organization

Example 4.

(...) kojom **se utvrđuje** da je proizvod podrijetlom iz državnog područja treće zemlje koja je članica Svjetske trgovinske organizacije ili iz regije ili lokaliteta tog državnog područja

(...) **identifying** a product as originating in the territory of a third country which is a member of the World Trade Organization, or in a region or locality of that territory

The reduced structure of the -ing clauses is apparent here, with no overt subject and featuring the main verb in a non-finite form.

Here are two examples of -ed clauses:

Example 5.

(...) kojeg **podržavaju** napredni telekomunikacijski sustavi

(...) **supported** by advanced telecommunications systems

Example 6.

(...) koje **se temelje** na zajedničkim standardima

(...) **based on common standards**

The -ed clauses, inherently passive in force, will typically have a Croatian relative clause counterpart in passive voice as well, but not always, as showcased above in Ex. 5. They often have a Croatian participle (glagolski pridjev trpni) as an equivalent as well, but those examples will not be treated in this paper.

And finally, here are two examples of to-infinitive clauses as equivalents of the Croatian relative clause:

Example 7.

(...) koji **se upotrebljava** za priopćavanje iz članka 26. stavka 5. prvog podstavka točke (a)

(...) **to be used** for the notification referred to in Article 26(5), first subparagraph, point (a)

Example 8.

(...) kojima **se osigurava** da su informacije sadržane u njihovim bazama podataka ažurirane i točne

(...) **to ensure** that information contained in their databases is up-to-date and accurate

The to-infinitive clause appears with the verb in active and passive forms, presented here, and the voice of the Croatian clause does not always correspond to that of the English clause.

Several other structures that were examined for the purpose of the research will not be treated in this paper, but we will mention their presence in the corpus. One such structure is the adjective phrase in verbless clause:

Example 9.

(...) koji joj stoje na raspolaganju u skladu s važećim zakonodavstvom u toj državi članici

(...) available to him under the laws in force in the Member State concerned

Another is an adverb clause (finite and non-finite examples encountered) whose meaning was transposed into a noun + relative clause structure:

Example 10.

(...) čime bi se podupro i njezin gospodarski i društveni razvoj.

(...) thereby supporting its economic and social development.

Often the Croatian relative clause has a prepositional phrase as the translation equivalent:

Example 11.

(...) koji treba uzeti u obzir u pogledu procesa premještanja i rokova

(...) with regard to the porting process and timeframes

or an adjective phrase in a premodifier position within the noun phrase:

Example 12.

(...) čiji je primitak odbijen

refused (...)

or a fully independent clause in the English version, that has been relegated to a subordinate relative clause in Croatian:

Example 13.

(...) koja će, u suradnji sa sustavom osiguranja, poduzeti sve odgovarajuće mjere kako bi se osiguralo poštovanje prethodno spomenutih obveza.

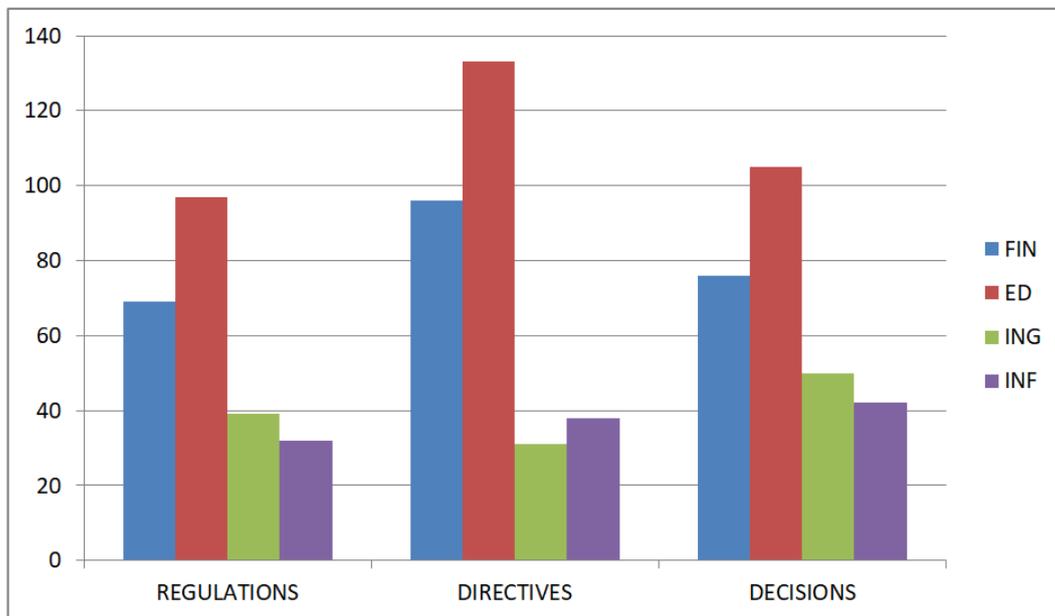
(...) in collaboration with the guarantee scheme, shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the aforementioned obligations are complied with.

We will not include these and other less frequent, albeit interesting examples, of equivalents arising in the translation process in the statistics that follow.

A total of 887 examples of postmodifying structures of various types described above, and some belonging to less represented types and outliers that we have not covered here, were mined from the corpus that consisted of 24 114 words. The total size of the texts that were used to build the snapshot corpus was 189 991 words, and random 2000 word segments from those

texts were sampled and combined into the corpus to undergo detailed analysis. Figure 1. below compares the presence of each type of the main functional equivalents of the Croatian relative clause separated by the document type it appears in.

Figure 1. The number of instances of relative clause equivalents (finite, -ing, -ed and infinitive clause) in the three document types



The first hypothesis (H1) appears to be confirmed for this register. The prevalent form of postnominal modification in the form of a finite relative clause in Croatian can be substituted with multiple structures, both finite and non-finite, the latter embodying the language economy that fuels the tendency to reduce the clause and omit non-obligatory elements, the absence of which does not impede the effective and precise conveyance of meaning, key postulates of any communication, but particularly honored in legal texts. The preliminary results have revealed an unexpected dominance of -ed postmodifier clauses compared to other clause types, across all document types. This may be partly accounted by the proclivity of legal texts to recycle and repeat a certain fixed legal construction, as was the case with some of the -ed clauses, thus increasing their numerical advantage without necessarily involving varied structures. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the impact the prevalence of -ed clauses has on the style of the documents surveyed and the way they read.

Table 1. below shows the average size of the documents for each type, as well as the frequency with which the relative clause appears in each, expressed in number of instances per 1000 words of text. The document types vary significantly by size, as the legal intent and the purpose of each differs. The directives are the most voluminous, containing several thousand words on average, while regulations are somewhat smaller, and decisions comparably short. The decisions, however, seem to have the highest frequency of relative clause occurrence, at 43.11 relative clauses per 1000 words, and regulations the lowest, at 36.31 per 1000 words. This numerical discrepancy alone, not even taking into account the subtypes of relative clause counterparts that feature in them, suggests that the documents demonstrate a stylistic difference apparent at the level of syntax and sentence formation. While not sufficient to confirm H2, at this stage at least, should further detailed inspection of the structures found in the documents demonstrate the same trend as the corpus is expanded, the final results may be more conclusive.

Table 1. Frequency of postmodifying structures in noun phrases by document type

Document type	Regulations	Directives	Decisions
Frequency (per 1000 words)	36.31	42.76	43.11
Average document size	12 751	28 234	1 900

In regard to H3, we have termed the two subsets of documents early and recent. The availability of original texts in English and their translation into Croatian was a major limiting factor in choosing the texts from a more distant past, since the steep rise in English-Croatian translation of texts in the EU is attested primarily immediately preceding and following the accession of Croatia to the European Union in 2013, precipitated by the involvement of Croatian representatives in the functioning of the EU institutions. Still, texts from several decades ago are available and have been integrated into the corpus.

Table 2. Age of documents used to compile the corpus by document type

Age of documents (year published)		
	Early	Recent
Regulations	1994 – 1996	2023
Directives	1994	2023
Decisions	1994 - 1997	2023

The sentences that contained relative clauses were measured in terms of their length and complexity. As a metric for length we adopted a simple word count, without regard to the length and complexity of the words themselves, but focusing on the number of words in the sentence. To measure sentence complexity, we identified the number of clauses in the sentence by counting the verbs (finite and non-finite), both in main and subordinate clauses. The results in Table 3 below reveal that over time, the length of sentences that contain at least one noun postmodifier clause has in fact increased by almost 5%, while the number of clauses within the sentence has decreased by 3%. These provide a strong indication of nominalization tendencies, whereby full clauses are getting replaced by other structures, including nominalizations which yield long and complex noun phrases, of which a relative construction can be a common part.

Table 3. Sentence length and complexity by document type

	English sentence length	English sentence clauses
Early	36.65	3.71
Recent	38.45 (+4.9%)	3.60 (-3%)

Conclusion

Considering that corpus research has not dealt with the English-Croatian language pair in the legal register, especially not in the way that would pertain to the analysis of the syntax of the

postmodifiers in the noun phrase, this research endeavors to offer new insights into this linguistically relevant aspect of language use in the field of law. The primary focus of this study is to engage in contrastive analysis of the functionally comparable structures in the two languages and establish quantitatively sound foundation for making comparisons based on findings obtained from a specialized corpus.

As the picture of postmodifying clauses increased in format and focus with the work on the corpus, certain conclusions became more and more tenable. The non-finite structures appear to deserve their dominance when it comes to the focus they are given when treating the finer points of English sentence structure. Yet, some interim findings, for example the overall presence of -ed clauses, partially subvert what has been assumed about the specific subtypes of postmodifying structures. Many instances of translation pairs involving similar (or identical) structures appeared to demonstrate free variation unaccounted for contextually, which may require a deeper analysis of the underlying logic. The increased trend of nominalization may receive more substantial confirmation as the corpus investigation continues, and more peculiarities and subtle or prominent differences between the document types encountered in the legal sphere – decisions, regulations, directives, and judicial decisions when analyzed in the expanded corpus - should come to light.

The research results at this stage suggest that the conventional wisdom about the syntactic differences between Croatian and English, mostly established by relying on strong intuitions by professionals engaged in linguistic research, teaching and translation work for many decades, is supported by factual data. The variation in postmodifying forms used in English and Croatian to perform a very similar, if we are to hedge away from saying identical, functions in the noun phrase is rich. This variation, having investigated a segment of the corpus, has already yielded a plethora of examples to support the traditionally considered types of clauses appearing in this slot, but also many cases of structures that are not easily classified and are not readily expected to appear there. The investigation of these translation equivalents can offer much to be learned about the structural differences between these languages, but also about the practical application of that knowledge, which can benefit the language professionals, as well as legal experts involved in creating and interpreting legal documents and dealing with them in general.

Zaključak

Imajući u vidu da se korpusna istraživanja nisu bavila englesko-hrvatskim jezičkim parom u pravnom registru, a naročito ne analizom sintakse postmodifikatora u imeničkoj frazi, ovo istraživanje je pokušalo dati novi uvid u ovaj bitan aspekt jezika i njegove upotrebe u polju prava. Glavni cilj je da se kontrastivno analiziraju strukture koje se mogu porediti na funkcionalnom nivou u hrvatskom i engleskom jeziku te da se postave osnove utemeljene na kvantitativnim podacima za poređenje rezultata dobijenih iz korpusa.

Kako je slika postmodifikatorskih klauza i njihovog prisustva postajala sve jasnija sa radom na korpusu, određeni zaključci su dobijali na snazi. Nefinite strukture su opravdale pažnju koja im se posvećuje kada se raspravlja o strukturi engleske rečenice. Međutim, određeni nepotpuni rezultati, ponajprije ukupno prisustvo *-ed* klauza, djelomično ne podržavaju pretpostavke o različitim podtipovima postmodifikacijskih struktura. Mnogi primjeri rečenica i njihovih prijevodnih ekvivalenata su pokazali da postoji velika količina slobodne varijacije, pa i kada su u pitanju istovjetne ili vrlo slične strukture, a koja se ne može obrazložiti kontekstualno. Trend nominalizacije bi mogao dobiti jasniji potvrdu kako se nastavi analiza korpusa, te bi mogle biti uočene dodatne zasebnosti i vidljive razlike između tipova dokumenata koje

nalazimo u pravnim tekstovima – odluka, uredbi, direktiva, i sudskih odluka – koji će biti analizirani u proširenom korpusu.

Prema trenutnim rezultatima istraživanja, viđenje sintaksičkih razlika između hrvatskog i engleskog jezika koje su se izrodilo iz jakih intuicija profesionalaca koji se bave jezičkim istraživanjima, podučavanjem i prevođenjem desetljećima, ima uporište u konkretnim podacima do kojih smo došli. Varijacija podtmodifikacijskih struktura koje se, u vrlo sličnoj funkciji, koriste u engleskom i hrvatskom jeziku je znatna. Sa okončanim tek dijelom analize korpusa, već je prikupljeno mnoštvo primjera koji potvrđuju prisustvo struktura koje su u tradicionalnoj analizi imale svoje mjesto u imeničkoj frazi, no i struktura koje ne potpadaju lako pod postojeću klasifikaciju i za koje se ne bi očekivalo da se javljaju na tim pozicijama. Daljim proučavanjem ovih prijevodnih ekvivalenata može se dosta naučiti o strukturalnim razlikama između ova dva jezika, ali i o praktičnoj primjeni tog znanja od kojeg bi koristili mogli imati stručnjaci koji se bave jezikom, ali i pravni eksperti koji sastavljaju i tumače pravne dokumente ili se općenito bave njima u svojoj praksi.

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