SPOKEN LANGUAGE FEATURE DISPLAYED IN THE APPLICATION LETTERS WRITTEN BY YEAR TWELVE STUDENTS OF VOCATIONAL SCHOOL
A Case of SMK NU Ungaran Academic Year 2009/2010

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ABSTRACT


Learning English as a means of communication requires ability to convey ideas correctly, both in spoken and in written forms. Based on that statement, this study was conducted to know what kind of spoken language appears in the written text, especially an application letter.

The data of this study were obtained from the students’ application letters. The data were analyzed with the following steps: reading the letters, counting the lexical density, distinguish words which belong to particular and common use in the spoken language, in this case, I asked an expert judgment from Dwi Rukmini to make it valid. The result shows that in writing application letters the students tend to use many function words. It implies that the letters are less formal and less lexically dense. There were only four students who succeeded to gain higher score than average. It implied that the other students are unable to produce written text in correct form. They might fail to produce written texts because they did not recognize the characteristics of written form.

After doing this research, I realize that studying more about written language characteristic is very important to produce a well written text. As a formal letter, an application letter needs words suitable with the context, not just common words as daily conversation. Teachers need to enhance students’ writing to help them in coping with their life, especially using English as a means of communication.

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**Key words**: spoken language, application letter, writing, lexical density, means of communication

I. **Introduction**

The ability to read and understand English texts is an important skill for students of English as a second language around the world. Success in schools and academic institutions is often measured by performance on standardized examinations that involve the reading materials written in the English language.

Although many people consider that spoken language is primary and written language is secondary, it does not mean that written language is ignored.

Vocational school institutions have roles in preparing skilled workers to fulfill the needs of national development and also preparing professional workers to fulfill the industrial needs and demand either now or in the future as it is stated based in curriculum (KTSP).

Based on KTSP, the objectives of English subject in vocational school are (1) to prepare the labor force and to develop professional attitude, (2) to prepare students in order to be able to choose their career, to compete, and to develop themselves, (3) to prepare middle-class workers to fulfill business and industrial needs and demands now or in the future, (4) to prepare its graduates in order to be productive, adaptive, and creative. (National curriculum, 2006:323).

The curriculum emphasizes learning processes so as to enhance the students’ English language skills; however, it does not mean that teaching the
language components are neglected. Those skills started from reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

It is clear that writing is one of the skills that should be fulfilled, and as a vocational school teacher, I assume that students meet many difficulties to write in general. Errors appear because they have different perceptions and ability to modify spoken into written language. In short, they are unable to distinguish between spoken and written language. The errors are assumed caused by:

- students’ low motivation
- lack of knowledge in English
- interference

The last two causes (lack of knowledge and interference) will be highlighted related to the kind of errors which appear on the application letter. In writing, students are required to express their ideas grammatically and meaningfully. In the application letters, the sentences are obviously different from those in daily conversation.

II. Literature Review

In new literacy views, literacies are mainly acquired through exposure to discourses from a variety of social contexts, and through this exposure, individuals gradually develop theories of genre. In educational contexts, reading and writing are therefore curriculum-wide processes rather than simply” English” activities as each curriculum area requires and offer opportunities for different kinds of writing. Regarding the concept of discourse, Fasold (1994: 65) in

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Schiffrin (1994) defines a discourse as the study of language in use, while according to Crystal (1992:25, in Nunan 1993:5) discourse is a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language rather than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit, such as sermons, arguments, jokes, or narratives. Another expert, Cook (1989:56, in Nunan 1993:3) points out that discourse is stretches of language perceived to be meaningful, unified, and purposive.

However, Nunan (1993:6) says that discourse is the interpretation of the communicative event in context. He separates discourse from the term text that refers to any written record of communicative event that involves oral language such as, sermon, a casual conversation, a shopping transaction or written language for example; a poem, newspaper, an advertisement, a wall poster, a shopping list, a novel, and a letter. Some experts argue that “discourse” is language in action while text is written record that communicates the writer and reader. Another expert, Stubbs (1993:1) mentions that discourse is language above the sentence or above the clause that renders an abstract view for the teachers of English. Many interactions that are essentially transactional in nature will also exhibit social function, while essentially social interaction can contain transactional elements. Both modes, spoken and written language serve different communicative purposes, and these different purposes are reflected in the discourse itself. (Markelis, 2003).

Communication takes place when a move made by a participant gets a response from the other participant. In communication, people use language to
convey information and to lead each other toward an interpretation of meaning and intentions (Ventola, 1979:267). A major challenge confronting second and foreign language users is to learn how to manage discourse processes in the target language. Learning another language therefore involves much more than learning the pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, although these things typically make up the bulk of foreign language programs.

Celce Muria et al (1995) propose five notions of communicative competence as follows:

1. Grammatical competence is the aspect of communicative competence that deals with knowledge of lexical item and rule of morphology, syntax, sentence structure, and phonology. Grammar is considered as an important component of communicative competence.

2. Discourse competence is ability of participants to connect sentences in both stretch of spoken and written discourse and form of a meaningful series of utterances; they also have to make use of their own knowledge to express their ideas and opinions in the communication.

3. Sociolinguistic competence covers all the participants’ role requiring an understanding of social context in which language is used, such the role of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction.

4. Strategic competence encompasses the full spectrum of the construct by manipulating the language in order that communicative goals run smoothly without any occurrences of communication breakdowns.
5. Actional competence is a new competence which has the meaning to convey and understand communicative intent by performing and interpreting speech acts, speech act sets, and discourse competence.

In line with the statements above, Celce Muria et al (1995) suggest there are two main components of actional competence domain namely:

1. Language functions cover seven areas such as interpersonal exchange, information, opinions, feelings, suasion, problems, and further scenarios.

2. Knowledge of speech acts sets: most of the patterns of interaction surrounding a particular speech act are conventionalized and many of these larger units have referred to a speech act set, verbal exchange pattern, or speech event. In order that the language learners can use language function in context well, they should be familiar with how individual speech acts are integrated into higher level of communication system. Therefore, actional competence covers knowledge of how speech acts and language functions can be patterned and sequenced in real life situation.

The principles of literacy in the context of academic language teaching which is described by Kern (2000:16-17) are as follows:

1. Literacy involves interpretation. Speakers/writers and listeners/readers take part in double acts of interpretation-the speakers/writers interpret the world, such as experiences, ideas, etc. the listener/reader interprets the speaker/writer interpretation in terms of his or her conception of the world.

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2. Literacy involves collaboration. Writers not only write for the readers but also write for themselves. Their decisions about what he/she wrote and said are based on the need and their understanding of their audience. Readers in turn must contribute their motivation, knowledge, and experience in order to make the writer’s text meaningful.

3. Literacy involves convention. The people read and write text regulated by cultural convention that change through use and are modified for individual purposes.

4. Literacy involves cultural knowledge. Reading and writing function within particular systems of attitude, beliefs, customs, ideals, and values. Readers and writers were operating from outside a given cultural system have risks misunderstanding or to be misunderstood by those operating on the inside of cultural system.

5. Literacy involves problem solving. Words are always embedded in linguistic and situational context; reading and writing involve figuring out relationships between larger units of meaning, and between texts and real or imagined worlds.


7. Literacy involves language use. Literacy is not only about writing system, lexical and grammatical knowledge but also requiring knowledge of how language is used in spoken and written contexts to create discourse.

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The seven principles above can be summarized into the macro principle of literacy that is communication. It has important implication for language teaching, as it provides a bridge to span the gap that so often separates introductory communicative language and advanced’ literacy’ teaching. In this case, the teacher should be able to develop the students’ ability to communicate in English, think and see the world differently.

Based on the statement above the English teachers must work hard to be able to mediate their students to accomplish their literacy level based on their academic development. The students learn English in the classroom from spoken form. On the other hand, spoken and written are different in certain aspects. Spoken language consists of a lot of verbs complicated relation between sentences, various kinds of conversational gambits, fillers, etc; while written language involves lexical density and many complicated noun phrases, nominalization, etc.

In the teaching learning process, providing learning experiences for the students is the most important factor. The more learning experiences the students get the easier for the students to reach the target language. As Wilkinson and Silliman (2000) say that students must be given oral chances to integrate oral and written language in the classroom because these learning experiences will encourage the development of literacy. Therefore, as English teachers, we should be able to give a number of exposures to the students in order to help and support students to accomplish the level of literacy expected in the curriculum. Even if the

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students have different backgrounds, the English teachers should consider their ability in using their language and enrich themselves with basic skills of teaching English.

Spoken language’s role in educational context is to enable students to interact with the teacher and other students to clarify ideas, thoughts and arguments. On the other hand, writings’ role is to consolidate, to record, to pass on information, to summarize known facts, to summarize arguments on particular topics.

Writing also provides opportunities for students to consolidate and then stand back and reflect on what subject they think about. Both play equally important but different roles in education. Literacy programs need to incorporate a focus on the structure and language patterns of written texts so that the students learn how to move from talking to writing. Essentially, writing is seen as a product constructed from the writer’s command of grammatical and lexical knowledge, and writing development is considered to be the result of imitating and manipulating models provided by the teacher. (Hare and Fitzsimmons, 1991).

Spoken language is different from written language. They have different characteristic features. This study focused on the students’ writing, i.e written language, so it is necessary to know the differences between spoken and written language. Spoken and written forms of language differ in a number of ways (Gerot and Wignell, 1995:158).

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Written language is not simply speech written down. Speaking and writing are manifestations of the same linguistic system but in general they encode meaning in different ways because they have evolved to serve different purposes. The linguistic shape of the text will be determined by a range of factors relating to the context and purpose for which it was produced in the first place. (Cumming, 1990).

The term” written language” does not only refer to language which is written down, and spoken language does either. Spoken language does not merely refer to language which is said aloud. For example if someone reads a journal aloud, the features of the language are more like those of written language than spoken language. The same thing is also true; if we transcribe language, the written down version has more in common with spoken language than it does written. The key register here is the mode and the key difference between spoken and written language is the relationship between languages in the context of writing (speaking).

This table shows the characteristic features between spoken and written language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spoken language</th>
<th>Written language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turn taking organization</td>
<td>Monologic organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context dependent</td>
<td>Context independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic structure</td>
<td>Synoptic structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*interactive staging</td>
<td>*rhetorical staging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*open ended</td>
<td>*closed, finite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous phenomena (false start, hesitations, interruptions, overlap, incomplete clauses)</td>
<td>“final draft” (polished)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>indications of earlier drafts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The metaphors of written text should not be transferred uncritically when grammar confronts spoken discourse, and the fact that spoken language is produced in time rather than in space, for a here-and-now listener rather than a temporally displaced reader, becomes paramount in explaining grammatical phenomena. Discourse drives grammar, not the reverse. For example, the structure of be to with a future meaning; in reality this structure is so rare in everyday spoken language, and it has no significant place in a speaking-skills grammar course.

Grammar must become discourse in order to answer questions about differences between spoken and written language. Only by observing actual discourses we can properly describe the distribution of forms in the spoken and written mode. Linguistically, written language tends to consist of clauses that are internally complex, whereas with spoken language the complexity exists in the ways in which clauses are joined together. The crucial point is that a teacher should never assume that if a grammar has been constructed for written texts, it is equally valid for spoken texts, and vice versa. These include the prevalence of

(Eggins, 1994:57)
certain types of ellipsis in spoken language (e.g. of subject pronouns, auxiliary verbs, and article).

Gomez in Lubis (1988) summarizes the features of spoken English as follows:

a. Contractions, such as “I’m, he’s.”

b. Hesitation pauses, as “huh”.

c. Exclamations and interjections: “of pleasure boy!” of disappointment or frustration “aw!”

d. Afterthought (a comment, response or explanation that occurs after the main idea has been expressed)

e. Assimilation phenomena as represented by ”conversational punctuation” or “eye dialect”, (a term used by some linguists); “Doya wanna go now?”

f. Weak-stressed forms of words: “let’s joint ‘em; Tell ‘im it’s time to go; C’mon, lets go.”

g. Omission of second person singular pronoun: (are you) coming?

h. Omission of such auxiliary verb as Have and Do: (are) you tired?; (do) you want to stay here?

i. Use of “explanatory” or “clarifying phrases” such as “I mean, that is: He got there a little late, I mean, only a couple of minutes after the show had started.”

j. Repetition of words and syllables as in I…..”I thought I saw someone at the door…”

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k. Contrastive stress to signal emphasis (represented in conversational punctuation by underlining or by italics): I didn’t do that….he did it.

l. Short sentences. There seems to be rather high incidence of short sentences in conversation

m. Incomplete or unfinished sentences: “I didn’t mean to…” vocatives or attention-getting items such as: “Hey, Bill, give me a hand”.

n. Use of confirmation or information seeking tags such as: “No money, huh?; At nine o’clock, right?”

o. Informal usage: “Try and do it. She sure is pretty”.

p. A grammatical lapse or a false starts in opening a conversation:” There was…There were several people at the meeting”.

q. Conversational fillers such as the introductory words why, well, oh, now.

The lexical density of a text tries to measure the proportion of the content (lexical) words over the total words. Further, Nunan stated that lexical density is the number of lexical or content words per clause (1993:11). Texts with a lower density are more easily understood. As a guide, lexically dense text has a lexical density of around 60-70% and those which are not dense have a lower lexical density measure of around 40-50%.

In computational linguistics, lexical density constitutes the estimated measure of content per functional (grammatical) and lexical units (lexemes) in total. It is used in discourse analysis as a descriptive parameter which varies with

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register and genre. Spoken texts tend to have a lower lexical density than written ones, for example.

Lexical density may be determined thus:

\[ Ld = \frac{N_{lex}}{N} \times 100 \]

Where:

\[ Ld \]  
the analysed text's lexical density

\[ N_{lex} \]  
the number of lexical word tokens (nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs) in the analysed text

\[ N \]  
the number of all tokens (total number of words) in the analyzed text

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexical_density

A useful measure of the difference between texts (for example, between a person’s written language, and a transcription of conversation) is lexical density. In order to calculate lexical density we need to make a distinction between different types of words: (1) lexical words (the so-called content or information-carrying words) and, (2) function words (those words which bind together a text) within the word classes of English.

Lexical words include:

- nouns (e.g. house, Susan, bread)
- lexical verbs (e.g. run, walk, sit)
- adjectives (e.g. red, happy, cold)

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• adverbs (e.g. very, carefully, yesterday)

Function words therefore include these categories:

• determiners (e.g. the, those, my)
• pronouns (e.g. she, yourself, who)
• prepositions (e.g. in, to, after)
• conjunctions (e.g. and, but, if)
• numerals (e.g. two, three, first)
• auxiliary verbs (e.g. can, will, have)

It can be concluded that a high lexical density indicates a large amount of information-carrying words and a low lexical density indicates relatively few information-carrying words.

It has been known that speech is typified by incomplete clauses. Incomplete clauses are a product of the speaker having to construct his or her utterances in real time. There is limited time to think about, and plan, what one wishes to say and speakers often commence along one trajectory only to pause and move on in another direction. Incomplete clauses are, however, not a common feature of written texts, where the author has a much longer time to plan and shape the units of meaning that he or she wishes to use. There is sufficient time to select the most appropriate lexical word, review the text and replace words before one makes the text available. The time pressures of speaking typically lead to a
lexically simpler text. Lexical density, then, can serve as a useful measure of how much information there is in a particular text.

In defining the ultimate criterion of an assessment procedure, there are micro and macro skills of writing. The micro skills apply more appropriately to imitative and intensive category, while macro skills are essential for successful mastery of responsive and extensive category. Here are micro skills and macro skills of writing based on Brown (2004:221)

Micro skill
a. Produce graphemes and orthographic patterns of English
b. Produce writing at an efficient rate of speed to suit the purpose.
c. Produce an acceptable core of words and use appropriate word order patterns.
d. Use acceptable grammatical system (e.g. tense, agreement, pluralization), patterns and rules.
e. Express a particular meaning in different grammatical forms
f. Use cohesive devices in written discourse

Macro skills
a. Use the rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse
b. Appropriately accomplish the communicative functions of written texts according to form and purpose

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c. Convey links and connections between events, and communicative such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification

d. Distinguish between literal and implied meaning when writing

e. Correctly convey culturally specific references in the context of the written text

f. Develop and use a battery of writing strategies, such as accurately assessing the audience’s interpretation, using prewriting devices, writing with fluency in the first draft, using paraphrases and synonyms, soliciting peer and instructor feedback, and using feedback for revising and editing.

Those skills cannot be achieved simultaneously by every learner because of the different competencies, backgrounds, and environment. It is important to remember that the most effective language practice is not presented in isolation from the ways they are used in specific kinds of texts and domain, but relate closely to how to help students create meanings for particular readers and contexts. However, vocational school students need stimulations to make them aware of the field will they cope to in real situation as it is aimed in the syllabus.

One of the exercises that can be considered to represent the real situation is writing application letter. The job application letter’s purpose is to get the recipient to read the CV. It should be clear, concise and straight to the point. Here, the writers are simply telling the employer that they are worth having to look at. The application letter should be brief, no more than one page in length. It

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should be easy to read and flow through. It should include only the absolute necessary information and like most other things, there is a formula that works extremely well for preparing job application letters.

An important principle here is to relate structure to meanings, making language form perform certain communicative functions and that the students can be taught the functions most relevant to their needs. Functions are the means for achieving the purpose of writing. While every act of writing is in a sense both personal and individual, it is also interactional and social, expressing a culturally recognized purpose, reflecting a particular kind of relationship, and acknowledging an engagement in a given community. This means that writing cannot be separated with a set of cognitive or technical abilities or a system of rules, and that learning to write in a second language is not simply a matter of opportunities to compose and revise.

It should be known that writers in second language bring five kinds of knowledge to create effective texts and these should be acknowledged in teaching writing; those are:

- Content knowledge; the ideas and concepts in the topic area the text will address.
- System knowledge; the syntax, lexis, and appropriate formal conventions needed.
- Process knowledge; how to prepare and carry out writing task.
• Genre knowledge; communicative purposes of the genre and its value in particular contexts.
• Context knowledge; reader’s expectations, cultural preferences, and related texts. (Adapted from Hyland, 2003).

This knowledge will influence how learners of English as a second language go through. From beginning level and during the process of learning there might be many improper forms, structure, and other mistakes because of those different backgrounds of the learners and also the language itself.

III. Research Method

Spoken language might appear in the written language, and it might cause a different meaning or misunderstanding in the writing result. In this research, words that belong to spoken form and written form will be classified using expert judgment to distinguish spoken language and written language on the application letters. Elements that belong to spoken language, particularly non standard grammatical sentences and improper sentences in formal usage will be analyzed by counting the score of lexical density and other inappropriate forms that reduce the strength of written text especially the application letters written by the students of third grade in SMK NU Ungaran.

Data are any information of all cases related to the purpose of a research. According to Arikunto (1996:14) source of data means a subject from where data can be obtained. In this research the data are in the form of written ones. Those were taken from a vocational school students’ writing especially the application

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letter. The students are those in year twelve, because the curriculum stated that the students in that year are expected to write application letter meaningfully.

Technique of data collection covers what technique is used to collect data in a research. Arikunto (1996:224-234) says that there are several techniques in collecting data i.e. test, questionnaire, interview, observation, and documentation. In this research the data are collected using documentation technique in the form of the students’ writing especially application letter. The students’ application letters were obtained from the writing task that was given to them. For the sake of the research, I took 30% from the population, or about 52 letters, this number was taken from the minimum requirement for taking sample as stated by Saleh (2008:39-41) because the population was 178 students.

After the data were collected then they were analyzed. Creswell (1994) notes that there are four basic types of data collection procedures in qualitative research, they are: observations, interviews, documents, and visual images. As it was presented earlier, the data of this study were the application letters and the data were collected through documents.

IV. Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the findings and discussion in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the product of written form-in this case the application letters showed many spoken language styles in form. The results of the research can be drawn as follows:

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1. The students of the third grade of SMK NU Ungaran displayed many spoken language styles on their application letters. Those styles are represented by non standard grammatical sentences, short clauses, like in a conversation, and non formal usage of the words; especially rules in writing that are not fulfilled in writing the application letters.

2. The lexical density of the application letters in average is low, showed by the lowest score is eight percent and the highest is seventy four percent. There were only four students who got score more than forty percent. The score is low because the students write more function words than lexical words, and it shows that the letters contain less information.

3. Some letters showed higher score of lexical density but the meaning of the letter is difficult to be understood, or can be said meaningless because there was no coherence.

4. The many spoken language styles that appeared are actually an indication of disability of the students in adjusting themselves to write a good application letter.

5. The level of literacy achievement of the students that is in the performative level where the students are considered to be able to distinguish written form from spoken form is not represented in this study. In fact, the application letters contained many improper written forms of sentences.

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6. There were many words that are not suitable with the context, and as the result the letters seemed to contain many sophisticated words but meaningless.

7. The quality of the application letters could not be said well because those letters could not represent the writers’ idea to the readers. The purpose of writing application letters could not be fulfilled, as it is used to promote the writer’s capability and skill through written expression.

After knowing the result of the study, I would like to propose the following suggestions which hopefully will be useful for those who are concerned about English learning, especially teaching English as a means of communication.

1. The curriculum states that the purpose of learning English as a means of communication shows texts as part of genre have different characteristics, so the teachers should facilitate and help students to understand and produce meaningful written text. Teachers can give more attention or chances for the students to learn genres, especially texts which are different in features so the students do not pay attention only to diction, grammar, but also to the function and use of English as a means of communication.

2. Learning English should be beneficial for those who learn, not only for academic privilege, but also in the daily life. Human as social being needs language to interact with others since they have to fulfill their needs; those needs will be fulfilled properly if the students are able to face whatever comes to them. Literacy can be used by the students to cope with the

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situation and environment. However, teachers have responsibility to help their students to be illiterate as part of teachers’ duties. Thereby, the knowledge and other skills of language should be mastered in school by learning process.

3. To create a well-formed and effective text, students need to know how such texts are organized and lexicogrammatical patterns that are typically used to express meanings. On other words, they also need to know the social purposes of the text type, the kinds of situation, etc.

4. Writing should be embedded in familiar context of real life and the relevance of task/future needs is presented, so the students are likely to find learning more motivating.

5. By fostering and understanding of how texts are effectively shaped to meet the goals of writer in particular context, a teacher is in a better position to reflect on their own writing and that of their students.

6. In pedagogical view point, texts are not simply produced by individuals expressing meanings only but also influenced by communities or cultures. Therefore, the language of texts should always be taught together with the function of the texts in specific contexts.

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