

Areal Features of the Anglophone World, Edited by Raymond Hickey. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2012. pp. viii+500.

Like all works devoted to linguistic variation in English, this book quite naturally deals with the minority of linguistic features which varieties of English around the world do not all have in common.¹ However, its particular, original contribution is that it focusses on commonalities within this variation; and that in particular it looks at the role that space plays in shaping these commonalities. The common thread running through the book is, as the editor Raymond Hickey tells us, the concern with features “which cluster geographically across the world”.

The first part of the book consists of chapters—all excellent—dealing with features that are found on an areal basis in particular areas of the anglophone world: England (David Britain), Scotland (Warren Maguire), Ireland (Hickey), USA (Matthew Gordon), the Caribbean (Jeffrey Williams), Africa (Thornton Brato & Magnus Huber), Asia (Umberto Ansaldo & Lisa Lim), and Australia/New Zealand (Pam Peters & Kate Burrige)—plus a chapter on “New Englishes” i.e. indigenized L2 varieties such as Nigerian English (Devyani Sharma).

The second part of the book deals with the analysis of related groups of different linguistic features found in the English-speaking world—all the chapters are helpful and packed with information. There are chapters on global features of English vernaculars (J. K. Chambers), phonological inventories (Daniel Schreier), negation (Lieselotte Anderwald), tense and aspect (Kersti Lunkenheimer), verbal concord (Lukas Pietsch), pronominal systems (Susanne Wagner), and *self*-forms (Peter Siemund, Georg Maier & Martin Schweinberger). The section concludes with chapters on vocabulary (Stephan Gramley) and pragmatics (Klaus Schneider). There is no Conclusion; and we are not given any information about the authors or their affiliations. There is, however, a (very disappointing and user-unfriendly) subject index, a name index, and a language index.

In his Preface, Hickey introduces the two major topics of the book: “common features among varieties of English worldwide” and “areal linguistics”(v.). He reminds us that collective terms for the former include “vernacular universals” and “angloversals”. Indeed, discussions of “universals” of various types appear throughout the book. It might seem a little bit odd to search for universals when Evans & Levinson (2009), in a state-of-the-art piece, indicate that true universals are vanishingly view. And, on the face of it, it would seem to be even odder for a book devoted solely to

English, and written mainly by anglicists, to concern itself with universals—how can we discuss linguistic universals in the context of a single language? But, obviously, the term “angloversals” is intended to refer only to universal features of English—if that is not a contradiction in terms. It is one of the “versal” terms helpfully introduced by Szmrecsanyi & Kortmann (2009), and equally helpfully summarized by Sharma in her chapter here: “angloversals” refers to features which occur in (nearly) all of the vernacular varieties of English.

Of Szmrecsanyi & Kortmann’s “versals”, “vernacular universals” is the one that has an entire chapter to itself here, and—because vernacular universals are much referred to throughout the text—it is entirely correct that this should be the case. It is, too, important and helpful for workers seeking for areality to know which features are not going to be eligible because, being universal, they occur in all areas. So this chapter does belong here even if, as its author J. K. Chambers points out, it stands out in the context of the book because it deals specifically with features which are *not* clustered geographically, as the title “Global features of English vernaculars” indicates.

In his introduction to the book, Hickey suggests that vernacular universals represent a “fruitful avenue of research”. Hickey supports this assertion by noting the potential for further work indicated in the volume by Filppula et al. (2009). That volume, however, actually contains a number of papers that are rather sceptical about this particular avenue of research. And it is once again apparent from the book under review here that there are problems. Indeed, Ansaldo and Lim, in their chapter on English in Asia, specifically say that “the search for vernacular universals is over, since a number of different approaches point to the flaws in the notion” that “has proven somewhat too strong”.

A minor problem is that some of the vernacular features proffered as universal simply are not, or at least not exactly as stated. It is claimed, for example, that levelling to *was*, as in *we was, they was*, is a vernacular universal (or presumably, really, an angloversal, since this phenomenon obviously cannot apply as such to other languages). But it isn’t. What is truly an angloversal is that nonstandard dialects have generally not retained the distribution of *was* and *were* found in Standard English. There has been very widespread levelling to *were* for all persons in large areas of northern England, as discussed in Trudgill (2008); and, as discussed here by Pietsch, there is also increasing levelling in Britain to positive *was* vs. negative *weren’t* for all persons. Of course general *was*-levelling

does also occur very widely elsewhere, but it is by no means “universal”.

A more serious problem has to do with the term “vernacular” itself. This is not the fault of Chambers. “Vernacular” has typically been used in sociolinguistic studies—for decades now—in a highly ambiguous manner. Sometimes the ambiguity has been systematic and/or unimportant. In this case, however, it is not clear that it is truly unimportant. Chambers says that vernaculars are “informal colloquial varieties that are not codified”. If we focus on “not codified”, then for English the difference between vernacular and nonvernacular would appear to be the difference between Standard English, the only codified variety of the language, and all the other nonstandard noncodified varieties. But there is a difficulty here to do with the other term, “informal”. Standard English, like all other dialects of English, has native speakers. And native speakers use their dialects in informal as well as formal styles. So Standard English comes in colloquial forms, just as nonstandard, noncodified dialects can be spoken in formal styles. There is no necessary link between “colloquial” and “noncodified”, nor between “noncolloquial” and “codified”. They are independent parameters (Trudgill, 1999)—Gramley gets in a real muddle about this in this book in his chapter on Vocabulary. So the term “vernacular” is ambiguous with respect to whether it is (non)standardness or (in)formality that is being alluded to (see also the discussion on this difficulty in the chapter by Peters & Burridge). And it is not clear that it can be taken for granted that features typical—universally or otherwise—of informal varieties should necessarily also be typical of nonstandardized varieties.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty with the idea of vernacular universals, however, is as follows. The concept is unlikely to be of very much importance at all in the context of world-wide linguistic variety generally. This is because most of the world’s thousands of languages do not have codified standard variants, and so for them the opposition nonvernacular/vernacular, in the sense of nonstandard or noncodified, is irrelevant. Importantly, this was formerly true, for tens of thousand of years, of *all* the world’s languages: standard varieties have emerged only very recently in human history. In the relatively small number of cases where they have developed, they emerged out of a situation in which all speakers spoke noncodified vernaculars, and where then, over time, a single—perhaps mixed and simplified—variety emerged, for ultimately sociolinguistic reasons of various sorts, as a standard. So it is standard varieties that are basically unusual, both diachronically and synchronically, and it is therefore the special characteristics of standards that require special analytical attention.

The fact that nonstandard dialects of English have many similarities, as the theory of vernacular universals rightly claims, is therefore really of no great interest. Nearly all of the many varieties of English spoken around the world have nearly all of their linguistic material in common. We nearly all agree about the function and meaning of thousands of items such as: *and, but, see, go, nose, mouth, laugh, run, five, seven, big, small, if, when ...*; nearly all varieties of English typically place adjectives before nouns; have *me* as a first-person singular pronoun; have canonical SVO order; and lack velaric ingressive consonants. And nearly all varieties of English have multiple negation (vernacular in the sense of nonstandard) and present-participles in *-in* (vernacular in the sense of informal). To suppose that this is interesting is to reveal an unfortunate Standard English-centered mind-set. When students, in describing a particular local dialect of English, perhaps their own, from England or New Zealand or Scotland or wherever, write that their variety has multiple negation, *-in* participles, and *there’s* followed by plural noun phrases, all one can say to them is: *of course* they do—now tell me something interesting that I don’t already know! It is as if Standard English is regarded as normal and all other varieties as deviations. (Writing e.g. *walkin’* with an apostrophe reveals a similar kind of mind-set.) This is a manifestation of what Milroy (2001) has accurately called the *standard language ideology* in linguistics.

So the point is not that “vernacular” varieties have features in common, although that is true, but that they all simply have features that Standard English, as an unusual because standardized variety, lacks. There is nothing remarkable about this; and to attempt to extrapolate universal principles out of the commonality is to credit the similarities with more importance than actually they have. “Vernacular universals of English” means “features which are not found in Standard English”. The interesting question is: why does Standard English lack them? Why is it, for example, that Standard English lacks the distinction between preterite auxiliary and main verb *do* that is found in nonstandard dialects all over the world, as in “You done it, did you?” (not a feature, incidentally, that is much mentioned in the vernacular universals literature).

A good example is multiple negation. This is indeed an angloversal though, as Chambers rightly points out, the exact details of its usage vary from variety to variety; and it is of course useful to have this ubiquity stressed in the context of work of the type reported on in this book, because that means it can be ignored in any further discussion of possible areal features (though Hickey does for some reason take the trouble

to tell us in his chapter on Ireland that it is a characteristic of vernacular Irish English).

English has a number of inherently negative indefinite quantifiers and adverbs such as *nothing, nobody, no one, none, never, nowhere, neither* which, in multiple negation in nonstandard Englishes, co-occur with negation of the verb with *not*, but in Standard English do not. This is often trumpeted as a vernacular universal. But I would suggest that it is absolutely not interesting that all nonstandard dialects of English have this feature in common because of the way in which the situation arose: all dialects of English used to have multiple negation—witness Chaucer’s “He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayd”—but then Standard English lost it. It is the single negation that is found in Standard English which is the diachronic oddity which we need to explain—and there have been a number of interesting attempts to do that, with accounts of precisely when, how and why it came about—see for example Auer & Gonzalez Diaz (2005), Rissanen (2000), Nevalainen (1998), and Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (2003).

This is all, of course, in the context of the anglophone world. In the context of other languages—and the claim for vernacular universals is that they are truly genuinely universal—multiple negation seems even less interesting. It turns out that single negation is a synchronic as well as diachronic oddity. There is no question of multiple vs. single negation being a world-wide vernacular vs. non-vernacular feature. In French, it is single negation that is vernacular—*j’ai pas*—and multiple negation that is standard—*je n’ai pas*. Polish *Nigdy nie mogłem nigdzie żadnego znaleźć* translates as “Never not I-could nowhere none find” i.e. “I couldn’t never find none nowhere”. But this is *non*-vernacular, Standard Polish. In Standard Modern Greek, “I couldn’t ever find any anywhere” is similarly *δεν μπόρεσα ποτέ να βρω τίποτα πουθενά*, where *δεν* is “not”, *πουθενά* is “nowhere”, *ποτέ* “never”, and *τίποτα* “nothing”. Large numbers of codified standard varieties around the world actually require multiple negation, including the standard varieties of all the Slavic languages. (On the other hand, none of the very many nonstandard varieties of Norwegian have multiple negation.)

Haspelmath (2001) confirms that it truly is single negation involving indefinite negatives that is peculiar. Interestingly, in the context of this book, he shows that single negation is actually an areal feature, and one particularly typical of European languages—and then only in a single core geographical area of the continent (see also the discussion in van der Auwera (2011)): single negation is found only in the Germanic languages, Ibero-Romance, Italo-Romance, and Albanian. This central zone is then entirely surrounded by areas that have multiple negation, having both negated verbs

and negative indefinites: Celtic (see Hickey’s confirmation re Gaelic, p. 99), Basque, Finnic, Baltic, Slavic, Hungarian, Rumanian, Greek, and Turkish. As Haspelmath says, outside Europe this is also the case with Iranian and Indic, as well as “a clear majority of the world’s languages”. His figures indicate that only about one-eighth of the languages of the world have single negation. As Anderwald actually says in this volume, in her (very nice) chapter on “Negation in varieties of English”: “multiple negation is the rule rather than the exception worldwide and areas where single negation is dominant are rather rare typologically” (p. 319).

So there is nothing “vernacular” about multiple negation as such. It is not something that developed in nonstandard Englishes because they are vernaculars. It is something that was lost from Standard English because it is a (particular kind of) standard. The reduction of multiple to single negation is a typical example of the sort of simplification, involving loss of grammatical agreement, which occurs in contact situations such as the London dialect mixture that eventually produced Standard English. Multiple negation is indeed an “angloversal” (Szmrecsanyi & Kortmann, 2009), as mentioned above: it occurs in nearly all of the vernacular varieties of English. But there is no deep significance to be attached to this: it used to be a pan-English feature, like SVO order, until it was lost from the standard variety.

Chambers also claims that, structurally, the difference between standard acrolects and vernacular basilects “is well defined: acrolects encode fine-grained phonetic distinctions in their phonologies and more inflectional markers in their grammars than do vernaculars” (p. 262). This is a very strong claim, and one that does not seem to be particularly true. As far as phonology is concerned, it is easy to show that the acrolectal accent of British English, RP, has fewer phonetic distinctions than very many vernacular British varieties. It lacks many features and contrasts that can be found in local accents. For example, it has lost the /w/-/ʍ/ distinction as in *witch/which* (mentioned by Hickey in his introduction); it has merged Middle English *ō/ou*, and *ā/ai* as in *nose/knows, daze/days*; it has merged *ur, er, ir*, as in *fur, fern, fir*; and it has merged the vowels of NORTH, FORCE, as in *horse, hoarse*. It has also lost [x], as in *night*; it has lost nonprevocalic /r/ as in *card*; and it has simplified /kn/ > /n/, as in *knee*. It is not vernacularity that counts here but geography: it is not the non-vernacular variety but the geographically peripheral varieties that have retained the phonetic distinctions: *witch/which* in the far north; *nose/knows* in East Anglia; *fur, fern, fir* in Scotland; *horse, hoarse* in the north; [x] in Scotland; nonprevocalic /r/ in the English southwest and northwest, and in Scotland; and /kn/ in Shetland.

The same can be said of inflectional markers, and morphology generally. It is vernacular dialects of the English north and west that retain the second person present-tense singular *-st* ending. It is the vernacular traditional-dialects of the English southwest that mark intransitive infinitives with the suffix *-y*; and it is vernacular varieties that mark present participles with the prefix *a-* as in “Where are you a-go-in?”.

Sharma’s very interesting chapter on shared features of New Englishes also raises important questions to do with “versals”. She employs the term *varioversals* (Szmrecsanyi & Kortmann, 2009:33) to refer to the shared features she investigates, where varioversals are “features recurrent in language varieties with a similar sociohistory, historical depth, and mode of acquisition”. It turns out that many established, focussed Second Language Englishes do have a number of features in common. Sharma wisely argues that this is because of shared substrate commonalities (see further below), and/or to common adult L2 learner strategies.

As far as learner strategies are concerned, Sharma does not appear to like the term “imperfect learning” very much, deeming it “controversial” (p. 227). But it seems to me to be a good characterization of what generally goes on in adult second-language acquisition. Many of her accurately observed commonalities would seem to be because of the non-acquisition of features that Dahl (2004) has insightfully called “L2 difficult”. There are features that can legitimately be called something like “aspects of English structure which are inherently hard for adults to learn”. For this reason, they are absent from, or different in, not only established Second Language Englishes but varieties of non-native English generally. Even distinguished non-native-speaker professors of English linguistics can be heard from time to time to use progressive verb forms in a way that native speakers would not. And many of the features Sharma discusses are also found, for example, in the English that younger Swiss people are increasingly using in intranational communication between francophones, germanophones, and italo-phones (Durham, 2007; Droeschel, 2011).

The loss of such L2 difficult features can often legitimately be described as simplification, a phenomenon common enough in adult language acquisition. A good example would be the presence of invariant tags in New Englishes such as (p. 214) “He loves you, isn’t it” (West Africa) which are also found in, for example, in Welsh English, a shift variety (see below). Simplification is also something that characterizes certain aspects of Standard English, where it results from the dialect contact and dialect mixture that took place in early modern London, as mentioned above. Standard English loss of multiple negation represents a reduction in redundancy typical of pidginisation. And the

failure to distinguish between preterite main verb and auxiliary *did/done*; the absence of a distinction between second person singular and plural pronouns; and the two-way as opposed to three-way system of demonstrative system e.g. *this, that* vs. *this, that, yon* (the last two both elegantly discussed by Susanne Wagner in her chapter here on pronouns), also represent simplification.

The other major theme of the book, geographical clustering, emerges much more happily from Hickey’s volume. There are many in-depth discussions of the relevance of solving problems to do with diffusion vs. migration vs. legacy vs. independent change. We see, for example, well-informed treatments of the transportation of the Northern Subject Rule from England to Ireland and North America (Pietsch); of the links between the pronominal systems of the southwest of England and Newfoundland (Wagner); and of the distribution of rhoticity around the English-speaking world (Schreier).² The issues concerning the latter are well-known enough, but Schreier’s discussion with respect to how rhoticity and non-rhoticity arrived and/or developed in the anglophone world beyond Britain is clear and insightful. He has, however, missed the latest research which has shown that (variable) rhoticity was in fact taken to Australia and New Zealand from the British Isles, and was later lost there as part of the same trend that saw its loss in much of England (Gordon & Trudgill, 2006).

David Britain’s (brilliant) chapter on English in England is, of all the pieces in the volume, the one which picks out most clearly the major linguistic-geographical issues and problems, both descriptive and theoretical: geography, mobility, levelling, spatial diffusion, and areality. He looks at the different areas and sub-areas that English dialects have been grouped into by different researchers over the decades, starting with Ellis in 1889; and analyses dynamic areality—the extent and nature of changes in these areas over the decades—concluding that mobility-induced linguistic change leads to “complex tensions between convergence and divergence that problematize our vision of areal patterns of dialect diversity” (p. 47).

Gordon’s very nice chapter on the United States does a similar job, comparing Labov’s *Atlas of North American English* with earlier works; and among other things providing a discussion of the development of new areas because of recentish innovations such the Northern Cities Shift. Bearing in mind the dangers of reification, it is still possible to see, in greater detail than in traditional, more static dialect studies, how areas may change their size, their shape, their configuration; how they may merge with one another; separate off from one another; or disappear altogether.

Warren Maguire’s excellent chapter on Scotland illustrates this very well. His chapter includes a vivid

discussion of the dynamics of the twentieth-century shift of the most important dialect boundary in the English-speaking world, from the Humber-Ribble line across the north of England, to the Scottish-English border. And his totally justified assertion that “Scottish varieties are the most divergent in the anglophone world ... characterised by a suite of innovations and retentions rarely found in varieties of English elsewhere” (p. 72) stresses the great significance of this boundary. (This importance, too, means that any study of “angloversals” or “vernacular universals” that does not take Scots and Scottish English into account will be the poorer for it.)

Hickey’s chapter on Ireland also has a dynamic spatial focus, as in his brief discussion of the reconstruction of now lost areal features. He also maps, albeit informally, specifically intonational regions of Ireland, something which it would be interesting to see much more of in linguistic-geographical work on English—it is common enough in treatments of, for example, Norwegian dialects (e.g. Skjekkeland, 1997:252). (Schreier’s discussion of the geography of phonotactic phenomena is equally innovative, and something we could usefully see more of too.)

Hickey’s chapter gets particularly interesting, though, when it comes to his treatment of linguistic areas in Ireland generally. In his Introduction to the book, Hickey writes that the areal concentration of linguistic features in the anglophone world “is a result of language contact” (p. 5) leaving, I suspect, readers of this journal puzzled, as I was, about the absence of any mention of geographical diffusion. Surely, areas come about as a result of innovations beginning in one area, spreading out from there according to patterns and along routes that linguistic geography has come to understand quite well, maybe across language boundaries, and then, for whatever reason, coming to a halt?

Here in this chapter, however, we can see where his assertion comes from: it does actually seem to be true of Ireland, where the pattern of areal concentrations of grammatical features “points to an origin in language shift and/or prolonged contact” (p. 102) between English and Irish Gaelic. In “shift varieties”—varieties of English spoken by communities which have shifted to English from other languages—it makes perfect sense to suppose that, for instance, geographical differences in the substrate can give rise to similar differences in the language shifted to. After all, Siemund et al. in their chapter on Reflexives discuss substrate-induced areal features in the usage of those *self*-forms which are typical of the Celtic Englishes.

This is the same kind of substrate phenomenon that is found in contact varieties where shift has not taken place, the “New Englishes”. Sharma’s concept of “shared substrate commonalities” (see above), leads us

to note that it is no surprise that the Second Language Englishes of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and India all have retroflex consonant series, for example, as briefly noted by Sharma, since this is a shared characteristic of the substrates. And this has the interesting consequence, in the context of a book concerned with areality, that these Englishes are now truly indigenized in the sense that they have become part of the South Asian Sprachbund, which consists otherwise of the Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Munda languages, which also have retroflex consonant series.

Everyone involved in linguistic geography feels sorry for Australasian dialectologists, but in their chapter on Australia and New Zealand English, Pam Peters and Kate Burridge manage very cheerfully and successfully to focus on the topic of areality by concentrating on features which distinguish Australia and New Zealand collectively from the rest of the anglophone world; and they helpfully discuss the implications of this. One of the interesting questions for them is to what extent the commonalities between the two varieties result from the similarities in the polydialectal British Isles input (as argued in Trudgill, 2004) and/or to geographical diffusion—“contact across the Tasman” (p. 233), i.e. the Tasman Sea which lies between the two countries. Lexico-morphological innovations common to the two countries, such as the expansion of hypocoristic suffixes like the *-o* in *arvo* “afternoon”, are presumably because of the latter. (This is the sort of areality that could have been mentioned by Gramley in his chapter on Vocabulary—he actually seems unnecessarily, and surprisingly in view of the hundreds of lexical differences between North American English and the rest, pessimistic about finding many areal lexical features at all.)

Other Australasian innovations, as Peters and Burridge say, may be due to drift, i.e. independent but common developments which result from inherited structural tendencies, especially in the case of phonology, as with the continuing Diphthong Shift of the original Middle English long vowels (Wells, 1982). And then there are also of course differences across the Tasman which have arisen as a result of innovations in the one place which have not diffused to the other, such as the New Zealand merger of the lexical sets of NEAR and SQUARE.

Jeff Williams’ fascinating chapter discusses the Caribbean as a linguistic entity—there are “significant traits that serve to delimit it as a linguistic area” (p. 156), although it is not yet altogether clear what all the commonalities are, Williams says. Of the distinctive pan-Caribbean features listed by Williams, those that strike me as being uncontroversial include “nasal backing” i.e. word-final velar nasals in items such as *ground*, *town*; the *v/w* merger; and “schwa-avoidance”.

In her very interesting chapter on Tense and Aspect, Kerstin Lunkenheimer also helpfully confirms that there are “comparatively large numbers of fairly strong areal features” (p. 347) in the Caribbean.

Spatially, of course, the anglophone Caribbean is characterized by the fact that it is predominantly an insular environment, which has led to a great deal more internal differentiation than might be supposed by those unfamiliar with the area. But the insularity is not just topographical. One of Williams’ main personal contributions to the study of areal features in the Caribbean has been his series of intensive studies of the English of Euro-Caribbean enclave communities—groups of white people, often rather isolated geographically as well as socially, who are descended from speakers of lower-class origin who arrived in the 1600s and 1700s from the British Isles.

This is an important book, so it is a pity that there are a number of elementary mistakes in the text, which the series editors might have spotted. Hickey thinks that Fijian is a Polynesian language (p. 3), when in fact Fijian and Polynesian form separate branches of the Austronesian Central Pacific Oceanic language family. Schreier thinks that Welsh English is rhotic (p. 288). There are, it is true, a small number of varieties of Welsh English which are rhotic, with an areal distribution which is of linguistic-geographical interest: some eastern Welsh dialects just across the border from rhotic areas of England are rhotic; as is the peripheral dialect spoken in the far southwest of Wales, where the rhoticity results from the fact that the English is many centuries old because of mediaeval migration from England. But the overwhelming majority of Welsh varieties are entirely non-rhotic. And Chambers thinks that “virtually all rural accents in the United Kingdom delete /h/ in words like *hand*” (p. 262), when in fact no accents at all in Scotland or Northern Ireland have h-dropping; and, in the small number of places in England where the urban-rural parameter is at all relevant, it is the urban rather than the rural accents which have the h-dropping, as a result of its diffusion as an innovation down the urban hierarchy, as in East Anglia. Hickey also uses the term *anglophone* in a somewhat unusual way. “Anglophone” means “English-speaking”, so his “anglophone linguistics” (v.) is perhaps a rather odd usage.

But I find the book useful and significant. It is as a whole extremely helpful, informative, thought provoking, and innovative; and it is written by some of the leading scholars in the field. Readers of this journal will find that there is a great deal here to interest them. This is linguistic geography.

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Notes

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² It is surprising that Hickey has decided on the title “Phonological Inventories” for Schreier’s chapter, because that is not in fact what it is about. It is about the phonotactic restrictions placed, in different types of English, on the consonants present in their shared phoneme inventories.

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