English Comparative Forms in Iranian Textbooks Compared to Textbooks Developed by Native Material Developers

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Abstract

In the introductory stages of language learning, students are exposed to comparative forms explicitly taught in their textbooks. As Knoch (2004) mentioned, this is accomplished by teaching the comparative form of the adjective generally directly followed by a than clause. This study aimed to compare differences between native and nonnative material developers with regard to the coverage of comparative forms. In doing so, two corpora of high school books and Interchanges were developed and juxtaposed. The data were gathered by scanning the books and converting them into computerized forms. The data were then analyzed by the frequency percentages of the forms and further examined and compared as well. The results revealed that there was a significant difference between the two corpora with regard to the coverage of comparative forms.

***Keywords*: Comparative Forms, Concordancing, Corpus Linguistics**

Introduction

Since the 1980's, linguists have seen increasing attention to the notion of inter language studies. This notion has particularly been assisted by the use of corpus linguistics since it provides the grounds for analyzing various pieces of language produced by native speakers and juxtaposing them with those of learners of different levels in order to gain insights into their language competence. Among the very many aspects that interlanguage has scope on, one may allude to grammar studies. Studying the grammatical structures and scrutinizing the students' competence over those structures aid language teachers in prioritizing what they want to teach and adjust those structures with the learners' language level. Here the teachers can decide what to teach first to consider the actual acquisition level, and what to teach next to be compatible with the previously taught material. The students' progress over the instructed materials can hence be detected by building up the students' corpora of spoken or written language and checking the suitability of the grammatical structures for the students. Exposure

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issue is among numerous problems lying on the way toward acquiring grammatical rules. Exposure basically relates to how often learners view, practice and use a grammatical pattern. The more often a learner encounters a grammatical pattern, the higher the chances for him/her to acquire the structure; therefore, the purpose was to expose the learners to the grammatical patterns as often as possible. This purpose could particularly be achieved by using frequency of the very structure either by the native speakers of the language or by the learners; having a model in hand, one can compare these two and gain an insight into what learners need to learn first and in what order the grammatical rules have to be presented.

Studying the frequency of comparative forms have been an asset to linguists; in one project, Aijmer (2002) studied the different use of the auxiliary verbs in an English native speaker corpus and in a learner corpus of English language students of Swedish, French and German origin. In another study Bedmar and Pedrosa (2006) investigated the differences on the use of prepositions in an English native speakers' corpus and in a learner corpus of students of English literature. Szymanska (2006) conducted a study on the different uses of the first person in an American native speakers' corpus and a learner corpus of Polish students of the English language. Further, the use of the Italian verbs in informal letters by Greek students of Italian language was investigated by Florou (2008). It was concluded that Greek learners overuse or underuse the most frequent verbs in informal letters. Dogan Bulut (2009) explored the place and importance of pragmatics in EFL context and presented a model which can be used to build corpora of speech acts in the target language and how they can be used in language classes.

Within the disciplinary area of language studies, corpora and corpus-based methods are increasingly used outside language learning per se, in areas such as the teaching of literature (see, e.g., Kettemann, 1995; Louw, 1997) and of translation (see, e.g., Bowker, 1998; Zanettin, 1998). Thus, corpus linguistics or 'arm- chair linguistics' (in the sense of Fillmore 1992) can aid language teachers in prioritizing the vocabulary as well as the grammar they are to teach based on the needs of the students. Moreover, they can use the corpora in order to gain further insights into other aspects of the language. Granger (2010) notes the growing lexicalization of teaching materials and the motivational boost it gives to learners based on a corpus approach.

As Knoch (2004) mentioned, students of a foreign language usually go through learning comparative functions via studying lengthy rules about the formation of comparatives by the use of adjectives and adverbs, equative and negative equatives in their textbooks. Comparisons are usually taught by the use of extensive rules about the formation of comparatives using adjectives and adverbs, about when the infectional endinger/-est and the periphrastic forms more/most can be applied. Several authors (Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman, 1999; Quirk, Green baum, Leech and Starvik, 1985; Kennedy, 1996 and Mitchell, 1990) show that native speakers use an array of different forms to compare and contrast in English. Among these are lexical items (e.g. compared with/to, the same as) and sentence connectors (e.g. despite, however). Knoch (2004) showed that native speakers were more inclined toward using connectives and lexical items in order to make comparisons and this can be in sharp contrast with what is almost focused on in textbooks.

Status of English in Iranian Educational System

Foreign language teaching in the Iranian educational system begins in Guidance Schools with three books and then four

books in high schools. The materials presented are generally taught in GTM method. Hence, the grammatical patterns are juxtaposed with those of Persian by the students in the majority of cases. As Iranian students manage to go to university they have to take English courses both in General Service and in specifc felds as well. What is taught in General courses is mostly a review over what the students have studied before.

Naturally, students are exposed to foreign language in its different forms, one of which is grammatical patterns presented in various ways. But after these long years of exposure to the foreign language, very few students achieve a decent level of language profciency typically because the information was mostly memorized and put into practice in very few cases. The grammatical structures presented in the books were seldom internalized by the students and forgotten soon as they started studying a new book.

Among the students, some attend private language schools and try learning a foreign language in a place different from their schools either as extra curriculum classes or those the students attend voluntarily. One of the textbook series that is mostly used in such private schools is New Interchange (Richards, 2005) containing five books ranging from elementary to advanced. These series can be regarded as the most frequent textbooks taught in private language schools. There is no doubt that students who also practice English outside school will have a better mastery of the language.

Material developers are inclined to instruct the grammatical structures in a conventional order that the previously written texts have already used; moreover, the materials are rarely compared with what is actually used by the native speakers. On the other hand, textbooks are not regularly revised to match the needs of the students and when this happens the grammatical structures that are included in each lesson are seldom changed. What is almost always revised and edited in the new versions is mostly conversations, readings or namely anything but the order of presentation of the grammatical structures. Whether only the non-native writers ignore the compatibility of the grammatical structures with the frequency of the very structures in the everyday use of the form or it is the case with the native writers as well, is what will be further focused on in this study. Hence the question was whether there is a signifcant difference between textbooks developed by native speakers and those developed by non-native Iranian material developers with regard to the coverage of each comparative form.

Comparatives

Adjectives and adverbs are the common structures taught in most EFL/ESL class-rooms. Quirk et al. (1985) mention three types of comparisons for gradable adjectives and adverbs.

1. Lexicon

A. Adjective the same as

e.g. He gets the same pay as me, but he gets his own office.

B. Preposition

unlike, contrary to

e.g. Unlike most people in the office I don't come to work by car.

C. Verbal structures

contrasts with, to be different from

e.g. These results contrast sharply with other medical tests carried out in Australia.

D)Adverbial clauses

although

e.g. Some useful points emerged, although the study was too limited to reach a definitive conclusion.

2. Juxtaposition

_er , more

e.g. Winter is coming and the days are getting shorter.

3.Sentence connectors

despite, however
e.g. Despite all our efforts to save the school, the authorities decided to close it.

A short review of the literature (Kennedy, 1996; Mitchell, 1990) revealed two other ways of comparison (numbers 4 and 5) in addition to the ones mentioned above.

4. Progressive forms of comparison
more and more
e.g. As the disease worsened, he found walking more and more difficult.

5. Other forms of comparison
both … and , neither … nor , either … or
e.g. She can both speak and write Japanese.

As pointed out in Knoch (2004), the structures above can be found in current common ESL textbooks but 2 and 3 appear less often. Furthermore, whilst all students are confronted with comparative forms involving adjectives (e.g. Paul is richer than Anna), not many textbooks show that other parts of speech can also be compared. Celce-Murcia et al. (1999) argued that this should be made clear to students, as not many languages have such a large range of comparative constructions.

Method

This study used two corpora of high school English course books (The Right Path to English); as well as, Interchange books which are the English books most frequently applied in private language schools. While high school English books contain four books, one for each year of education at high school, Interchange books include five books for the levels of elementary to advanced. To investigate the corpora compiled for the purpose of this study, the AntConc 3.2.1w software was applied.

Data Collection

To run this study, which is a corporal analysis of comparison forms in Iranian high schools and English course books as well, the most necessary material was the corpus firstly composed of four versions, 1 to 4, of the series The Right Path to English (Birjandi, 1376). The series is Iranian Educational system›s textbook for students of high school in four successive years. Each one of the three first ones consists of six units including all the major skills but listening. The last version, called Pre-University version, consisted of eight units. Like the other three, this one includes all main skills but listening.

Interchange series (Richards, 2005), including 6 books of different levels covering all four skills of learning, which is offered to students who have an interest in learning English as a foreign language, are the second major part of the above mentioned corpus. These series of the books provide the students with 6 books of different levels. Each book consists of 16 units in a variety of topics discussing everyday English subjects covering various language exercises and skills as well as grammatical points presented as Grammar Focus in every unit. Each grammatical point is further followed by some communicative conversations, questions, exercises and readings as well.

Instrumentation

As mentioned earlier, this study was done in three phases. The first phase (here- after called the corpus phase) was to develop the necessary body of text –corpus. In order to develop such a body, one first needed to use a scanner to scan the books on a PC. Then by one of the software known as OCR, the format of the scanned books was converted to text which is the necessary format for Word Smith family of software. Therefore, the data were converted into txt format of text files compatible with the applied software which will be elucidated in the next phase.

In the second phase the software the AntConc 3.2.1w—a highly versatile concordancer that provides support for many advanced concordancing features, including support for non-Latin character sets, as well as additional functionality was used to analyze the body developed in the

corpus phase. AntConc 3.2.1w provides a table to show the occurrence of the coveted grammatical item in all the possible cases. It also has some other functions. It can give a wordlist as well as a list of tokens, collocates an d clusters. The software searched the corpora for the frequency of the occurred cases of comparison. It also provided a list of all the cases in which the desired grammatical points have occurred. The cases were to be counted and analysed one by one in order to be classifed into the right category. Since the comparison forms which are searched by the software might have different meanings and functions, such as various meanings of as, the elicited forms were to be scrutinized very delicately in order to cross out the unwanted structures.

Since the software is not able to elicit the forms that are not complete words such as the comparison former or –est. It has just the ability to search the ex- act given words, the writer was obliged to search the corpus using SCP 4.0.7 i.e. Simple Concordance Program which has the capability of searching suffxes and prefxes. Using this software, one has the ability to choose different options of searching according to ascending or descending alphabetical order. The problem with this software was that it is not as convenient as AntConc to search the words in all corpora selected and also highlight to be searched words. The researcher has just used this software to search the cases which were not exact words including suffixes and prefixes.

Data Analysis

The data collected as specified above was analyzed in two major phases. The first phase included computing the frequency of occurrence for each and every comparative structure via the software both in high school books and Interchanges; followed by phase two which involved calculating the percentage of occurrence for the elicited forms in phaseone.

The obtained figures in phase one were converted into percentages. The percentages were once tabulated according to the total number of comparatives in all four years of high school books as well as four levels of Interchanges. Thereafter, the percentages were counted according to the comparatives used in each and every level and year of education.

After this stage, using the SPSS software the data were used to stimulate the chisquare result of every form in the groups and their subgroups. The data were illustrated through numerous charts and figures.

Results and Discussion

Are there any significant differences between textbooks developed by native speakers of the language and those by Iranian material developers with regard to the coverage of comparative forms?

As mentioned previously, English books taught in high school were scanned and further changed into computerized format in order to be investigated and compared to those not written by Iranian non-native material developers. The results of this are to be juxtaposed with those developed by native textbook writers. What follows are the results obtained from high school books in comparison to the results of Interchange series in order to see the similarities and differences if any?

As can be seen, juxtaposition forms have been used the most specially in the book of the third year (72.73%) which is interestingly more than that of the last year (64.44%). The frequency of the lexical forms has had a fall from the first to the last year. The following table shows the frequency percentage of comparative forms in Interchange series. It is noteworthy to mention that the percentages here have been counted according to the total number of comparative in each year i.e. each comparative form in each year has been counted according to the total number of comparatives in the very year.

This would apply to the coming table about the frequency percentage of comparatives in Interchange books.

Table 1. *shows the frequency percentage of comparative forms in books of high school*

YEAR	JUXTAPOSITION	PROGRESSIVE	LEXICON	SENTENCE CONNCTOR	OTHER
1st	34.04	0	65.96	0	0
2md	50	0	47.73	0	2.27
3rd	72.73	0	9.09	14.29	3.90
4th	64.44	0.42	13.81	20.08	1.26

Table 2.*Frequency Percentage of Comparatives in Interchange books*

GROUPS	JUXTAPOSITION	PROGRESSIVE	LEXICON	SENTENCE CONNCTOR	OTHER
RGB	80.95	0	19.05	0	0
ELM	91.23	0	4.21	3.16	1.4
INTER	81.86	0.64	11.8	5.14	0.48
ADVCD	69.26	0.24	14.47	14.47	1.56

Similar to the high school books, progressive forms, sentence connectors and oth- er forms of comparison have not been covered in the beginning levels. The other similarity is that juxtaposition forms have been used most frequently and they are followed by lexical forms. The distribution of juxtaposition forms is roughly the same among the four groups but what makes the biggest difference is in the distribution of progressive forms and other forms of comparison which have not been distributed fairly among the groups. They have been applied most frequently in the intermediate level and less in advanced level; it is also the case with the high school books. As illustrated in both tables, lexical forms have been utilized the most by the starters.

Both tables illustrate that the distribution of comparatives is not the same in both series of books. As can be seen in the first year of high school lexical forms were the most frequent (65.96%). Thereafter, juxtaposition forms were the second most frequent form (34.04%). The other forms of comparison have not been applied at all. Table 4.2 shows that in the first level i.e. beginner juxtapositions have been used the most (80.95%) and they are followed by lexical forms (19.05%). Similar to high school books the other three forms of comparison have not been applied at all. Likewise, it can be seen in the tables that in the second level that is the second year in high school and the elementary level in Interchange books juxtapositions have been utilized the most, while the difference between the two groups lied in the distribution of the forms. Half of the comparisons made in the second year of high school have been made by the use of juxtapositions while it was noticeably more in Interchange books (92.23%). Lexical forms were the second form that has been

applied in the second year of high school (47.73) then it was followed by other forms of comparison (2.27). In contrast, in Interchange series lexical forms have been used conspicuously less (4.21%) followed by sentence connectors (3.16) and finally (1.4%). Consequently the coverage of lexical forms in Interchange books has been more than that of high schools in the second level. Similar to the first two levels, in the third level juxtapositions have been used the most in both groups i.e. 72.73% in high school and 81.86% in Interchanges. The frequency of progressive forms is 0.64% in Interchanges while it has not been used in high school books at all. Lexical forms have been used roughly the same in both groups 9.09% in high school books and 11.88% in Interchanges. As illustrated, 14.29% of comparative forms in the third level of high school books have been made by sentence connectors while it was only 5.14% in Interchanges. Like- wise other forms of comparison have been used less in Interchange books (0.48%) than in high school books (3.90%). The last level was the only level which has covered all the comparative forms in both groups and the distributions were quite the same.

What has been said so far could be better illustrated in the following pie charts which resembled the coverage of each form in each group.

Figures 1.3 and 1.4 demonstrate the coverage of comparatives in the very first levels of both corpora. As can be seen, while juxtaposition forms were the most frequent form in Interchanges, lexical forms turned out to be the most frequent forms in high school books. Lexical forms have been used as the second most frequent forms in the first level of Interchanges, whereas in Interchanges they came first; which indicated sharp contrast between the coverage of Interchanges and high school in the first levels.

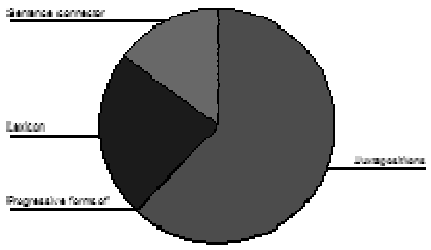

Figure 1. *Coverage of Comparative Forms*

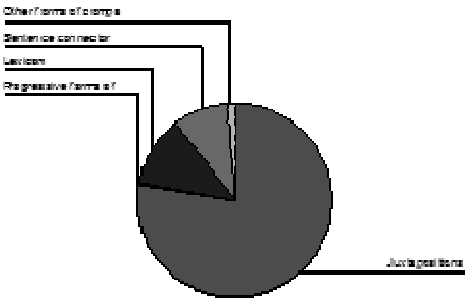

Figure 2. *Coverage of Comparative Forms in Interchanges in High School Books*

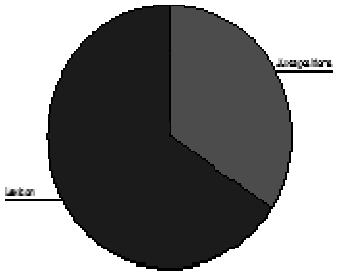

Figure 1.3. *Comparatives in First Year*

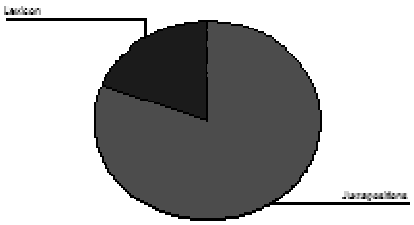

Figure 1.4. *Comparatives in Beginners*

As illustrated in the following figures, high school books have covered juxtaposition and lexical forms roughly the same, and other forms of comparison has also been used to a very little extent (figure 1.3). Figure 1.4 illustrates that the majority of comparisons made in Interchange books have been made by the use of juxtaposition forms and lexical forms; Sentence connectors and other forms of comparison respectively follow them. This can show that in the second year of high school, there are not more than two comparative forms which are covered except for the case of other forms of comparison which are covered to a very few percent. Nevertheless, in Interchanges, one may be encountered by a variety of comparative forms while the focus is on juxtapositions.

Figures 1.5 and 1.6 illustrate the coverage of comparatives in the third year of high school and intermediate level in Interchange books. As can be seen in figure 1.5 lexical forms were applied less and sentence connectors have been added to the previously used forms. In this level the use of juxtaposition forms has increased. In figure 1.6 lexical forms were utilized less and progressive forms were added to the forms that had been applied in the previous level. As illustrated, all comparative forms have been covered in this stage. As indicated by the figures in this level, the coverage of comparative forms was almost the same which could mean, in the third year of high school more comparative forms have been introduced while in Interchanges the forms have been recovered and maybe elaborated.

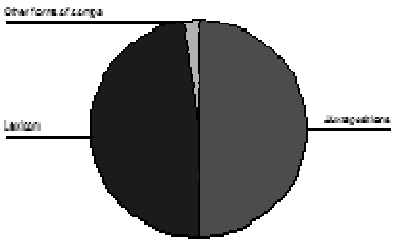

Figure 1.5. *Comparatives in Second Year*

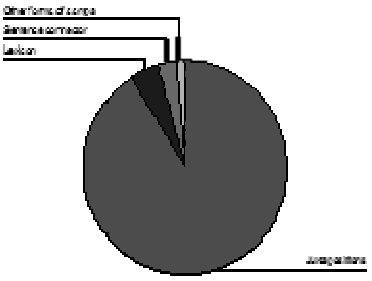

Figure 1.6. *Comparatives in Elementary*

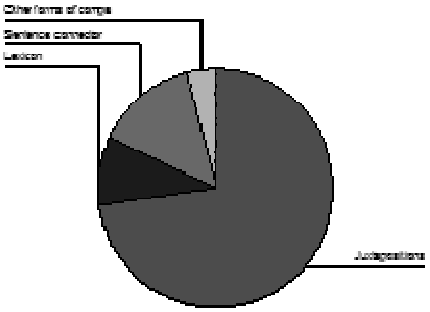

Figure 1.7. *Comparatives in Third Year*

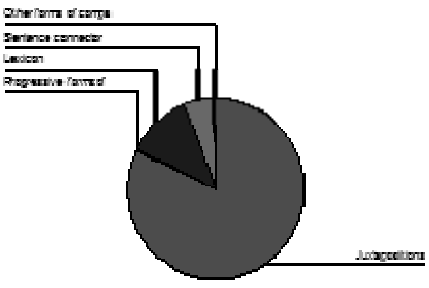

Figure 1.8. *Comparatives in Intermediate*

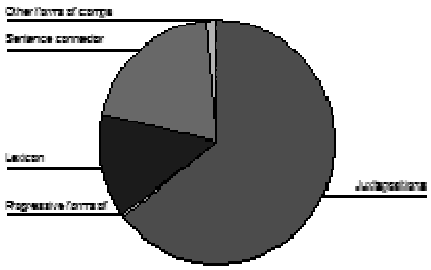

Figure 1.9. *Comparatives in Fourth Year*

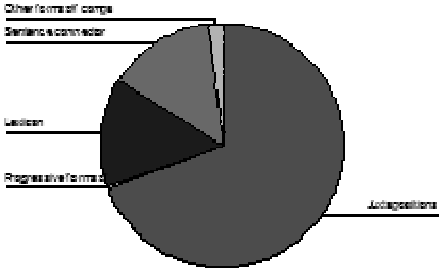

Figure 1.10. *Comparatives in Advanced*

Almost all comparative forms have been covered in the last year of both corpora. The following figures reveal that comparatives of all forms have been applied. This is in compatibility with what was shown about the coverage of comparative forms in the third year and the intermediate level of Interchanges. Both corpora have continued recovering the forms. While in high school most of the forms had been introduced in the third year, in Interchanges one may encounter all forms from the second level.

By the same token, there were differences in the coverage of comparative forms between the books developed by Iranian nonnative material developers and native textbook writers. Thus, research hypothesis was rejected and the answer to the related question was a big YES.

Conclusion

This study tried to find if there was any similarity between the books developed by Iranian material developers and those written by native textbook writers. A brief look at some current ESL/EFL textbooks (Knoch, 2004) evidently showed that textbooks mostly concentrate on presenting comparisons directly followed by the explicit basis of comparison than. Few are the ones to teach sentence connectors or lexical items for making comparisons. To one's surprise, many are the textbooks overlooking the comparisons of any form.

Refering to the third question of this study about the difference between books developed by native versus nonnative writers in the case of coverage, Figures 1.1-1.10 presented previously are to be compared. As could be seen in the figures, there was a gradual coverage of all the comparative forms in Interchange books, the case of native material developers, from the very beginning level to the end. And from the first level to the last the coverage of juxtaposition form decreases and gives its place to the other four forms of comparison so that in the advanced group all comparative forms have been covered satisfactorily. On the other hand, in high school books the coverage of forms is not gradual and students are ex- posed to certain forms in the first year and to certain others in sequent years. As could be seen in Figure 1.3, and 1.4, the coverage of lexical forms was more than juxtapositions in the first stage of high school books, while in Interchange books juxtapositions were covered more than lexical forms. Seen in Figure 1.5 and 1.6 in high school books other forms of comparison were added whereas in Interchanges sentence connectors and other forms of comparison follow lexical forms and juxtapositions. Figures 1.7 and 1.8 demonstrated that in the third year of high school juxtapositions, lexical forms, sentence connectors, and other forms of comparison were covered in a respective manner. In contrast, in Interchanges there is no change except for progressive form which was covered (0.64%). As in Figures 1.9 and 1.10 in the last level of both corpora all comparative forms were covered.

It can be concluded that high school books might follow a structural syllabus in which the materials were to be presented in specifc order one after another. Nonetheless, in Interchange books the syllabus was spiral; that is, the materials were presented and reviewed several times during different stages of learning.

Implications for ESL/EFL Teachers

This study helps second language teachers and material developers find out about the most frequent comparative forms covered in the textbooks and further develop their teaching syllabus as well. The study can also aid textbook writers to compare their books with those of others with regard to the coverage of comparative forms.

It is recommended to both material developers and teachers to consider firstly their awareness of full range of comparatives. They are further suggested to pro- vide their learners with the chance to be exposed to the thorough range of comparative forms rather than mere focus on the rules of forming adjective comparisons. This could be done by applying awareness-raising techniques including collecting small learner corpora of learners' output (see Seidlhofer, 2002). Teachers are also recommended to apply the corpora available online as a classroom technique to supply students with opportunities of exposure to the full range of comparisons utilized by native speakers.

Suggestions for Further Research

Corpus linguistics is a very broad field by means of which one can gain interesting results in all fields of language related studies. But doing corpus studies, one should not forget the proverb: "Give a child a hammer, he'll find everything in need of pounding." Corpus linguistic studies should be done very meticulously and delicately in order to show the desired results. Corpus linguistics researcher should be cautious not to go to extravagance for finding answer to any kind of research question. This study has focused on one of the frequently used grammatical structures using limited sized corpora; further studies can be done on other grammatical structures using the same corpora or even the same or other grammatical, lexical, syntactic, etc studies. The same can be done using other larger corpora of textbooks in order to gain more reliable results.

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