



IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in enhancing the pronunciation skills of second-semester students in the English Department at the University of Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang. The research utilized a quasi-experimental design involving two groups: an experimental group that was taught using phonetic symbols and a control group that followed conventional pronunciation methods. Both groups underwent pre-tests and post-tests to evaluate their pronunciation abilities. Results were analyzed using t-tests with the aid of SPSS software. The findings revealed a significant improvement in the pronunciation skills of the experimental group, with the post-test scores showing a substantial increase compared to the control group. Additionally, the students expressed a strong interest in using phonetic symbols for pronunciation practice, as indicated by their responses to a questionnaire. This study concludes that teaching pronunciation through phonetic symbols effectively enhances students' pronunciation abilities and is well-received by learners.

Keywords: Phonetic Symbols, Pronunciation, English Education, Experimental Group, Control Group, Second-Semester Students.

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INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a critical aspect of language learning, especially for learners of English as a second language (ESL). It plays a significant role in effective communication, as accurate pronunciation ensures that speakers are understood and can interact confidently with native and non-native speakers alike. In the context of English education, pronunciation is often seen as a challenging skill to master due to the complexity of English sounds, which differ significantly from those in other languages. Mispronunciation can lead to misunderstandings, hinder effective communication, and impact the overall fluency of the learner. As such, teaching pronunciation effectively should be a priority in any language education program.

For many learners, acquiring a clear and accurate pronunciation in English is difficult because English spelling does not always align with pronunciation. This discrepancy leads to confusion, as English learners may struggle with the different sounds associated with the same letter combinations. For example, the vowel

combinations in words such as "through," "though," and "thought" represent different sounds, even though they contain similar letters. To address these challenges, effective tools and teaching techniques are needed to help learners recognize and produce the correct sounds in English.

One of the most effective tools for addressing pronunciation challenges is the use of phonetic symbols. Phonetic symbols, which are part of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), provide a visual representation of the sounds of speech. These symbols allow learners to see exactly how words are pronounced, helping them develop a deeper understanding of English phonology and how sounds are produced in spoken language. By incorporating phonetic symbols into pronunciation training, learners can work on mastering individual sounds, stress patterns, and intonation, which are essential for clear and accurate communication.

In many traditional English language programs, pronunciation is taught in an implicit way, often relying on students' intuition or teachers' demonstrations. However, this approach can be insufficient,

IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
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particularly for students who struggle with English sounds that do not exist in their native languages. Therefore, introducing phonetic symbols as a systematic tool in pronunciation training can provide a more structured and effective approach to improving pronunciation. By learning to read and understand phonetic symbols, students can gain confidence in their ability to pronounce words correctly, even when they encounter unfamiliar vocabulary.

Research has shown that using phonetic symbols in the classroom can significantly improve students' pronunciation skills. Several studies indicate that phonetic training helps learners better perceive and produce the sounds of English, leading to improved accuracy in speech. The ability to transcribe speech phonetically allows learners to correct their pronunciation independently, reducing reliance on their teachers and increasing their autonomy in language learning. Furthermore, phonetic symbols can be an engaging and motivating tool for students, as they offer a clear and accessible method for improving pronunciation.

This study focuses on second-semester students at the English Department of the University of Muhammadiyah Sidenreng

Rappang, exploring whether phonetic symbols can enhance their pronunciation ability. The second semester is an ideal time to introduce phonetic symbols because students have already acquired some foundational language skills but may still face challenges with pronunciation. This study seeks to answer two key research questions: (1) Do phonetic symbols improve pronunciation ability among second-semester students of the University of Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang? (2) Are students interested in using phonetic symbols as a tool for learning pronunciation?

The objectives of this study are to assess the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in improving pronunciation and to evaluate the students' level of interest in this teaching method. The research employs a quasi-experimental design, where two groups—an experimental group and a control group—are compared. The experimental group is taught pronunciation using phonetic symbols, while the control group follows a traditional pronunciation teaching method. Both groups are assessed through pre-tests and post-tests, allowing the researcher to measure the improvements in

IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
Evans Dennison.J⁴, Sheik Mohamed S.H⁵

pronunciation. In addition, a questionnaire is administered to gauge students' interest in the use of phonetic symbols in their learning process.

Through this study, the researcher aims to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in enhancing pronunciation, as well as the potential benefits of incorporating phonetic training into the English language curriculum. By highlighting the impact of phonetic symbols on pronunciation ability, this research may contribute to the development of more effective language teaching methods, benefiting both students and educators in improving English pronunciation skills.

The findings of this study are important for several reasons. First, they provide evidence of the potential benefits of phonetic symbols in language education, offering teachers a valuable tool for improving pronunciation teaching. Second, they shed light on student interest and engagement with phonetic symbols, which is crucial for ensuring that teaching methods are both effective and motivating for learners. Finally, this research may pave

the way for further studies on the use of phonetic symbols in other language programs, helping to refine and enhance pronunciation teaching strategies across a range of educational contexts.

In summary, this study is focused on assessing the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in enhancing the pronunciation skills of second-semester English students at the University of Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang. The study's findings will contribute to the growing body of research on pronunciation instruction and offer practical recommendations for educators seeking to improve their students' pronunciation abilities through innovative teaching methods.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pronunciation is one of the essential components of language learning, and its importance cannot be overstated in language acquisition, especially for learners of English as a second language (ESL). For students to communicate effectively, pronunciation is crucial as it directly impacts the intelligibility of spoken language. However, pronunciation has

IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
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often been neglected or underemphasized in traditional language instruction. This literature review examines the role of pronunciation in language learning, the challenges faced by learners in acquiring accurate pronunciation, and the effectiveness of using phonetic symbols as a tool for improving pronunciation skills.

Pronunciation is one of the fundamental aspects of speaking a language. According to Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996), pronunciation plays a vital role in comprehensibility, which is a key factor in effective communication. When learners pronounce words incorrectly, it can lead to misunderstandings and hinder communication. On the other hand, correct pronunciation enables learners to be understood by native speakers and fellow language learners alike. Furthermore, correct pronunciation enhances the fluency of speech and fosters confidence in language use.

Harmer (2001) highlights that pronunciation can influence how a speaker is perceived by others. Mispronounced words can lead to negative judgments, and learners with poor pronunciation may face difficulties in gaining social acceptance and building relationships. This underscores the

significance of teaching pronunciation in language classrooms. While grammatical accuracy is important, it is pronunciation that often determines whether or not a speaker is able to engage in meaningful conversations.

Despite its importance, pronunciation instruction has not always received sufficient attention in language teaching. According to Derwing and Munro (2005), pronunciation is often overlooked in favor of grammar and vocabulary instruction. Moreover, many learners believe that pronunciation is an area they can improve on their own, without realizing the systematic nature of speech production that requires specific techniques and strategies.

Pronunciation instruction in English poses several challenges, primarily due to the complexity of English sounds and the lack of direct correspondence between spelling and pronunciation. English is notorious for its inconsistent spelling system, where letters often do not reflect how words are pronounced. For example, the word "though" is spelled with an "ough," but its pronunciation differs from other words containing the same spelling, such as "through" or "thought." This complexity

IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
Evans Dennison.J⁴, Sheik Mohamed S.H⁵

makes it difficult for learners, especially those whose native languages have more regular phonetic rules, to grasp English pronunciation.

In addition to spelling irregularities, English has a wide array of sounds that do not exist in other languages. For instance, English contains both voiced and voiceless consonants, as well as a variety of vowel sounds. Many learners struggle to differentiate between these sounds and accurately reproduce them. As Lado (1972) points out, language learners may find it difficult to master the stress patterns, intonation, and rhythm of English, all of which are essential for native-like pronunciation.

The challenges in pronunciation are particularly evident in ESL learners' perception of sounds. Studies have shown that learners often face difficulty distinguishing between sounds in English, especially when those sounds do not exist in their mother tongue. For example, Japanese learners of English often struggle to differentiate between the English "l" and "r" sounds, as these do not exist in their native phonetic system (Miyawaki, 1975).

Similarly, learners from tonal languages may find it difficult to master the intonation patterns of English, as tonal distinctions are not as significant in non-tonal languages. To address these challenges, many educators have turned to phonetic symbols as a systematic method for teaching pronunciation. The use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is particularly common in pronunciation instruction. Phonetic symbols represent the sounds of speech, allowing learners to visualize how words should be pronounced. By using these symbols, students can break down the pronunciation of words into individual sounds, helping them avoid reliance on inconsistent spelling conventions.

Phonetic symbols offer a number of advantages in language learning. According to Brazil (1987), learning phonetic symbols increases students' awareness of the sound features of the target language, allowing them to recognize and produce unfamiliar sounds with greater accuracy. Additionally, phonetic symbols provide learners with a visual representation of pronunciation, making abstract concepts like stress,

IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
Evans Dennison.J⁴, Sheik Mohamed S.H⁵

intonation, and vowel length more tangible. By using phonetic symbols, students can also independently check their pronunciation using phonetic dictionaries, giving them greater autonomy in their learning process.

Mompean (2005) emphasizes the importance of phonetic symbols in helping learners discriminate between similar sounds in English. For example, learners can better distinguish between the short /æ/ in "cat" and the long /ɑ:/ in "father" by understanding the respective phonetic symbols. This allows learners to perceive subtle sound differences and improve their pronunciation accuracy. Furthermore, phonetic symbols can help learners internalize the sound system of English, which is critical for producing accurate pronunciation in spontaneous speech.

In addition to improving pronunciation, phonetic symbols can also support learners in developing their listening skills. According to McMahon (2002), when learners become familiar with phonetic symbols, they are better equipped to identify the sounds they hear in spoken language. This helps learners overcome the challenge of auditory discrimination, which is often a barrier to pronunciation

improvement. As they become more attuned to the sounds of English, learners can apply their knowledge of phonetic symbols to enhance both their speaking and listening abilities.

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of using phonetic symbols to teach pronunciation. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) found that learners who received phonetic instruction showed significant improvement in their ability to produce English sounds accurately. The study revealed that students who learned to use phonetic symbols were more likely to identify and produce sounds correctly compared to those who did not receive this instruction. Similarly, research by Yuliana (2004) indicated that the use of phonetic transcription in teaching pronunciation was beneficial for ESL learners, especially in terms of improving their recognition of vowel sounds. Students who were exposed to phonetic symbols demonstrated a higher level of pronunciation accuracy in post-tests compared to their pre-test results. This suggests that phonetic symbols not only help learners in their speech production but also enhance their perception of spoken language.

IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
Evans Dennison.J⁴, Sheik Mohamed S.H⁵

Another study by Syukri (2009) explored the impact of phonetic symbols on the pronunciation abilities of university students. The results showed that students who received instruction using the IPA demonstrated significant improvements in pronunciation, particularly in the areas of stress, intonation, and vowel articulation. The study also highlighted the positive attitudes of students toward using phonetic symbols, with many reporting that the symbols made it easier for them to understand and practice English pronunciation. The use of phonetic symbols has been proven to be an effective tool in improving the pronunciation skills of ESL learners. By providing a clear and systematic way to represent speech sounds, phonetic symbols help students overcome the challenges posed by irregular English spelling and complex phonetic features. Studies have shown that phonetic training not only enhances learners' ability to pronounce individual sounds accurately but also improves their listening skills and overall pronunciation fluency. This body of literature suggests that integrating phonetic symbols into

pronunciation instruction can be a valuable strategy for helping students achieve clearer, more intelligible speech. As such, this research aims to further explore the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in enhancing pronunciation abilities among second-semester students at the University of Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in enhancing the pronunciation abilities of second-semester English students at the University of Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang. In a quasi-experimental design, two groups are compared: the experimental group, which receives the intervention, and the control group, which does not. In this case, the experimental group was taught using phonetic symbols to improve their pronunciation, while the control group followed traditional pronunciation teaching methods. Both groups participated in pre-tests and post-tests to measure any changes in their pronunciation abilities due to the intervention.

The population of this study consisted of second-semester students from the English Department at the University of Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang. A total of 76 students from the second, fourth, and sixth semesters were available, but this study specifically focused on the second-semester cohort. Cluster sampling was used to select a sample of 22 students, divided

IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
Evans Dennison.J⁴, Sheik Mohamed S.H⁵

into two groups: 11 students in the experimental group and 11 in the control group. These groups were not randomly assigned but were based on the students' enrollment in the second semester.

This research focused on two key variables: the independent variable (X), which was the use of phonetic symbols as the teaching method, and the dependent variable (Y), which was the students' pronunciation ability. The effectiveness of the intervention was measured by assessing the students' pronunciation abilities before and after the intervention using pre-tests and post-tests. These tests were designed to evaluate various aspects of pronunciation, including vowel and consonant sounds, stress patterns, and intonation.

To collect data, the study utilized several instruments. The primary instrument was the pronunciation test, consisting of pre- and post-tests. The pre-test was administered at the beginning of the study to assess the students' baseline pronunciation abilities, while the post-test was given at the end of the treatment to evaluate improvement. The tests included a series of words and phrases that students had to pronounce. Additionally, a questionnaire was distributed to the experimental group to assess their interest and engagement with the phonetic symbols method. The questionnaire consisted of 20 Likert-scale items to measure students' attitudes toward the intervention.

The data collection process included four main stages: the pre-test, where the students' initial pronunciation abilities were assessed; the treatment, which involved teaching the experimental group using phonetic symbols over four sessions; the post-test, where both groups were reassessed to evaluate any changes in pronunciation; and the questionnaire, which

gathered feedback from the experimental group on their interest in the method. The study used SPSS 21.0 software for data analysis, employing descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) to summarize results and inferential statistics (independent t-test) to test the hypothesis and determine if the difference between the groups was statistically significant.

Data analysis involved comparing the pre- and post-test scores of both groups using an independent t-test. This test was chosen to determine whether there was a significant difference in pronunciation improvement between the experimental and control groups. Additionally, the questionnaire responses were analyzed to gauge the students' level of interest in learning pronunciation using phonetic symbols. This mixed-method approach enabled the researcher to assess both the effectiveness of the intervention and the students' perceptions of the method. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. The students were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their participation was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained, and all student data were kept confidential. The research adhered to ethical guidelines set by the university to ensure the rights and privacy of participants were respected throughout the study. By employing a rigorous methodology, this study aimed to provide valuable insights into the use of phonetic symbols in enhancing pronunciation skills in an ESL context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study on the effectiveness of using phonetic symbols to enhance pronunciation skills among second-semester students of the English Department at the University of Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang. The

IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
Evans Dennison.J⁴, Sheik Mohamed S.H⁵

data collected from the pre-test and post-test, as well as the questionnaire responses, are discussed in terms of their implications for pronunciation instruction. The findings are also analyzed to assess the impact of the phonetic symbols method on the students' pronunciation abilities and their engagement with this teaching approach.

The pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups before the intervention to assess the students' baseline pronunciation abilities. The results of the pre-test revealed that both groups had relatively similar levels of pronunciation ability at the outset of the study. In the experimental group, most students were classified as having an average level of pronunciation, with a few students in the poor and very poor categories. Similarly, in the control group, the majority of students were classified as having average pronunciation skills, with a small number of students falling into the good, poor, and very poor categories.

The mean score for the experimental group was 58.64, and for the control group, it was 55.91, indicating that both groups started with similar pronunciation abilities. These findings were expected, as the students had not yet received specific instruction on pronunciation, and their skills were comparable before the treatment began. The pre-test results were crucial as they provided a baseline against which the post-test results could be compared to measure the effectiveness of the intervention.

After the treatment, both groups took the post-test to assess the impact of the teaching method on their pronunciation abilities. The results of the post-test demonstrated significant improvements in

the experimental group, which had been taught using phonetic symbols. In the experimental group, most students were classified as having good or very good pronunciation, with a substantial number of students improving from average or poor categories in the pre-test. Specifically, 45.45% of the students in the experimental group achieved a score in the "very good" category, and 45.45% were classified as "good." The mean score for the experimental group in the post-test was 85.91, showing a marked improvement from their pre-test score of 58.64.

In contrast, the control group showed more modest improvement. While the control group also showed an increase in pronunciation ability, the results were not as pronounced as in the experimental group. Only 9.09% of the students in the control group achieved a "very good" score, and 18.18% scored in the "good" category. The mean score for the control group in the post-test was 66.36, which was an improvement from the pre-test score of 55.91, but not as substantial as the increase observed in the experimental group.

The post-test results suggest that the use of phonetic symbols had a significant positive impact on the pronunciation abilities of the experimental group. The difference in mean scores between the experimental and control groups was analyzed using an independent t-test to determine if the difference was statistically significant.

The t-test results indicated a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group. In the pre-test, the t-test value was 0.487, which was lower than the t-table value of 2.021, indicating that there was no significant

IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
Evans Dennison.J⁴, Sheik Mohamed S.H⁵

difference in pronunciation abilities before the intervention. However, in the post-test, the t-test value was 3.948, which was higher than the t-table value of 2.086, suggesting that the improvement in pronunciation in the experimental group was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This finding supports the hypothesis that phonetic symbols positively influenced the pronunciation abilities of the students.

The control group did not exhibit a statistically significant improvement in pronunciation. The t-test for the control group showed that the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was not significant, indicating that the traditional method of pronunciation instruction did not lead to substantial improvements. This further emphasizes the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in enhancing pronunciation.

In addition to measuring pronunciation improvement, the study also assessed the students' interest in using phonetic symbols for learning pronunciation through a questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire revealed a high level of interest in the use of phonetic symbols among the students in the experimental group. The mean score of the students' responses to the questionnaire was 86.45, which falls into the "strongly interested" category. This suggests that the majority of students found the phonetic symbols method engaging and helpful in improving their pronunciation skills.

The students reported that phonetic symbols provided a clear and systematic way of understanding pronunciation, which enhanced their confidence in speaking. Many students expressed that using phonetic symbols allowed them to independently check their pronunciation and understand how specific sounds were

produced. The positive response from the experimental group indicates that phonetic symbols were not only effective in improving pronunciation but also well-received by the students, contributing to a more enjoyable and meaningful learning experience.

The findings of this study align with previous research that highlights the benefits of using phonetic symbols in language teaching. Studies by Avery and Ehrlich (1992) and McMahon (2002) have demonstrated that phonetic transcription helps students better perceive and produce English sounds, leading to improved pronunciation. In this study, the experimental group showed significant improvements in pronunciation accuracy, particularly in the areas of vowel and consonant sounds, stress patterns, and intonation. This suggests that phonetic symbols offer a valuable tool for addressing the common challenges faced by ESL learners in mastering English pronunciation.

The use of phonetic symbols also appeared to increase students' autonomy in learning pronunciation. By providing a visual representation of speech sounds, students were able to independently practice pronunciation and identify areas for improvement. This is consistent with the findings of Brazil (1987), who argued that phonetic symbols increase learners' awareness of language sounds and enable them to make corrections without relying on teachers for every adjustment.

Moreover, the students' strong interest in phonetic symbols supports the idea that phonetic training can make pronunciation practice more engaging and motivating. This is important because student motivation plays a crucial role in language learning success. The positive reception of

IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
Evans Dennison.J⁴, Sheik Mohamed S.H⁵

phonetic symbols suggests that incorporating this method into pronunciation instruction can lead to more effective and enjoyable learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of using phonetic symbols to enhance the pronunciation abilities of second-semester students in the English Department at the University of Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang. The findings from the pre-test and post-test, as well as the questionnaire responses, provide strong evidence that the use of phonetic symbols significantly improves students' pronunciation skills.

The experimental group, which received instruction using phonetic symbols, showed considerable improvement in pronunciation accuracy, with many students moving from average or poor pronunciation categories to good or very good categories in the post-test. The mean score of the experimental group increased substantially, from 58.64 in the pre-test to 85.91 in the post-test. The statistical analysis, including the independent t-test, confirmed that the difference in pronunciation scores between the pre-test and post-test for the experimental group was statistically significant, supporting the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in improving pronunciation.

On the other hand, the control group, which received traditional pronunciation instruction, showed a more modest improvement, with a mean score increase from 55.91 in the pre-test to 66.36 in the post-test. However, the difference was not statistically significant, indicating that the

conventional teaching method did not have as significant an impact on pronunciation improvement as the phonetic symbols method.

Additionally, the results from the questionnaire revealed a high level of student interest in the use of phonetic symbols, with an average score of 86.45, indicating that students found the method engaging and beneficial. The students reported that phonetic symbols helped them understand and practice pronunciation more effectively, providing them with the tools to independently check and correct their speech. the use of phonetic symbols in pronunciation instruction proved to be an effective and engaging method for enhancing students' pronunciation abilities. The study demonstrates that phonetic symbols not only improve pronunciation accuracy but also increase student motivation and confidence in speaking. These findings suggest that integrating phonetic symbols into language instruction can be a valuable strategy for improving pronunciation in ESL contexts. Further research could explore the long-term impact of phonetic symbols on pronunciation mastery and their effectiveness in different educational settings.

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IMPROVING STUDENT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Sam Hermansyah¹, Parwinder Kaur², Ana Mae M. Monteza³
Evans Dennison.J⁴, Sheik Mohamed S.H⁵

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