



Could more stronger mean strongest?

A pilot study on the meaning of adjectival doubling constructions

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The Phenomenon:

Constructions involving double comparative and double superlative elements are generally assumed to be either ill-formed or a feature of child language in standard variants of Present Day English (Corver 2005).

However, it is still possible to find examples like the following:

1	Im trying to figure out how this could be even <u>more wronger</u> , but I'm coming up empty	COCA
2	Performance overall is far <u>more smoother</u>	GLOW BE
3	World must prepare for disease <u>more deadlier</u> than Covid, WHO chief warns.	The Independent

Here, I present my findings from an early-stage pilot study of the meaning of these doubling constructions. In the literature, you can find researchers arguing for:

- a single meaning despite the double form (Engberg 2001)
- that the doubling results in an emphatic interpretation that expresses a higher degree of comparison than the standard forms (Gonzalez-Diaz 2007)
- that double comparative could license double comparison (Seuren 1973)
- there is no consensus on whether this applies to only one of the degree expressions or both (Włodarczyk 2007)

Method:

Methodology inspired by Christensen (2016)

- participants were asked to paraphrase sentences that contained doubling constructions
- the sentences were created or directly imported based on a corpus study
- participants were asked to provide acceptability and plausibility judgements of the sentences (Scale: 1-7)

Examples of sentences the participants evaluated:

(1) De måtte kun tage det mest nødvendige med på turen

They could only bring the most necessary-est with on the trip

(2) Nogle af de lidt mere vigtigere gæster ankommer først i aften

Some of the little more important-er guests arrive first in evening

By using contexts and sentences from corpora the intention was that the sentences would have more natural contexts than the sentences judged in Katballe-Kristensen (2024).

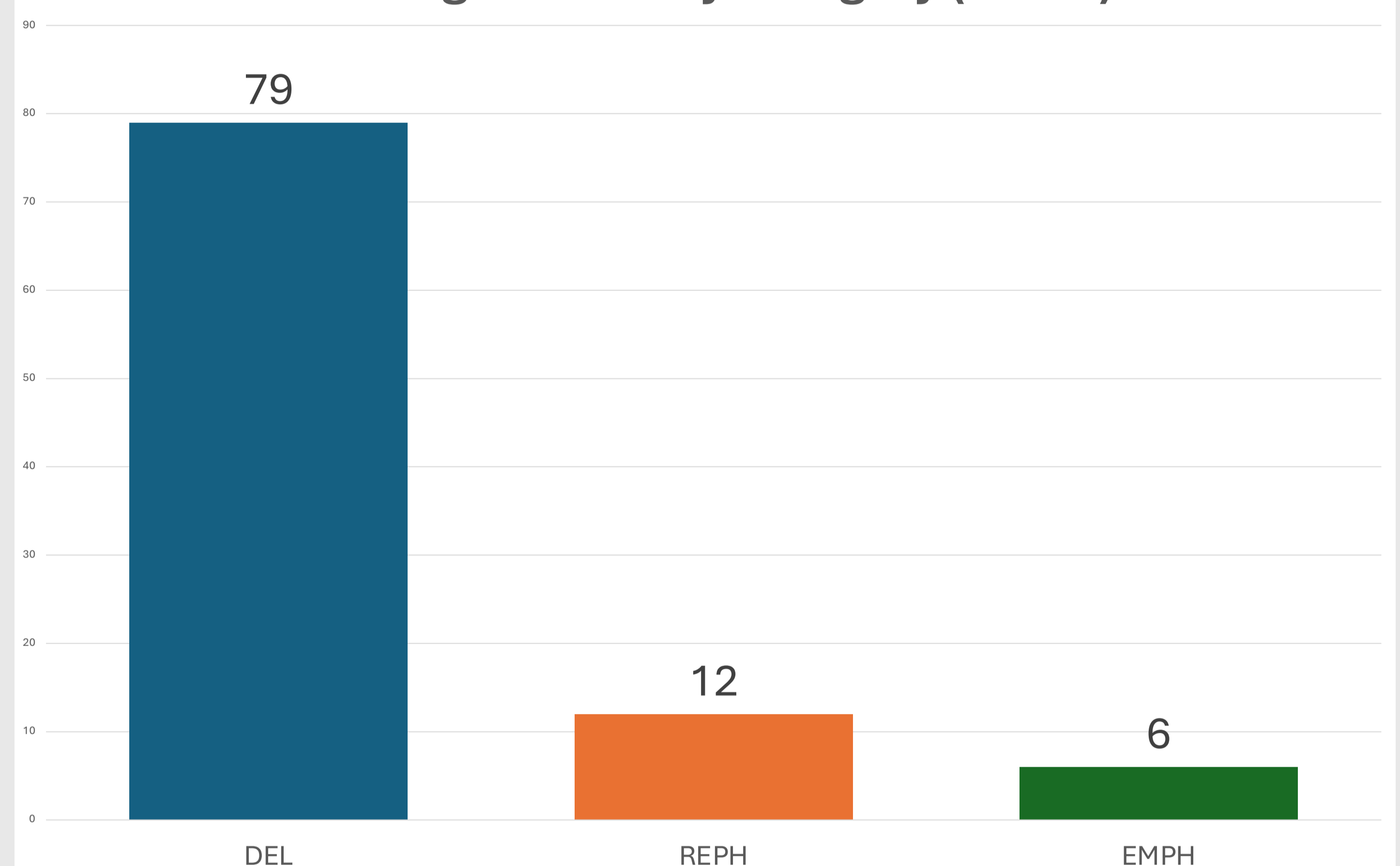
The central questions to be answered were:

- Do the interpretations of doubling constructions fall within distinct categories?
- Can we identify an emphatic force in doubling constructions?
- How are the sentences evaluated in terms of acceptability and plausibility?

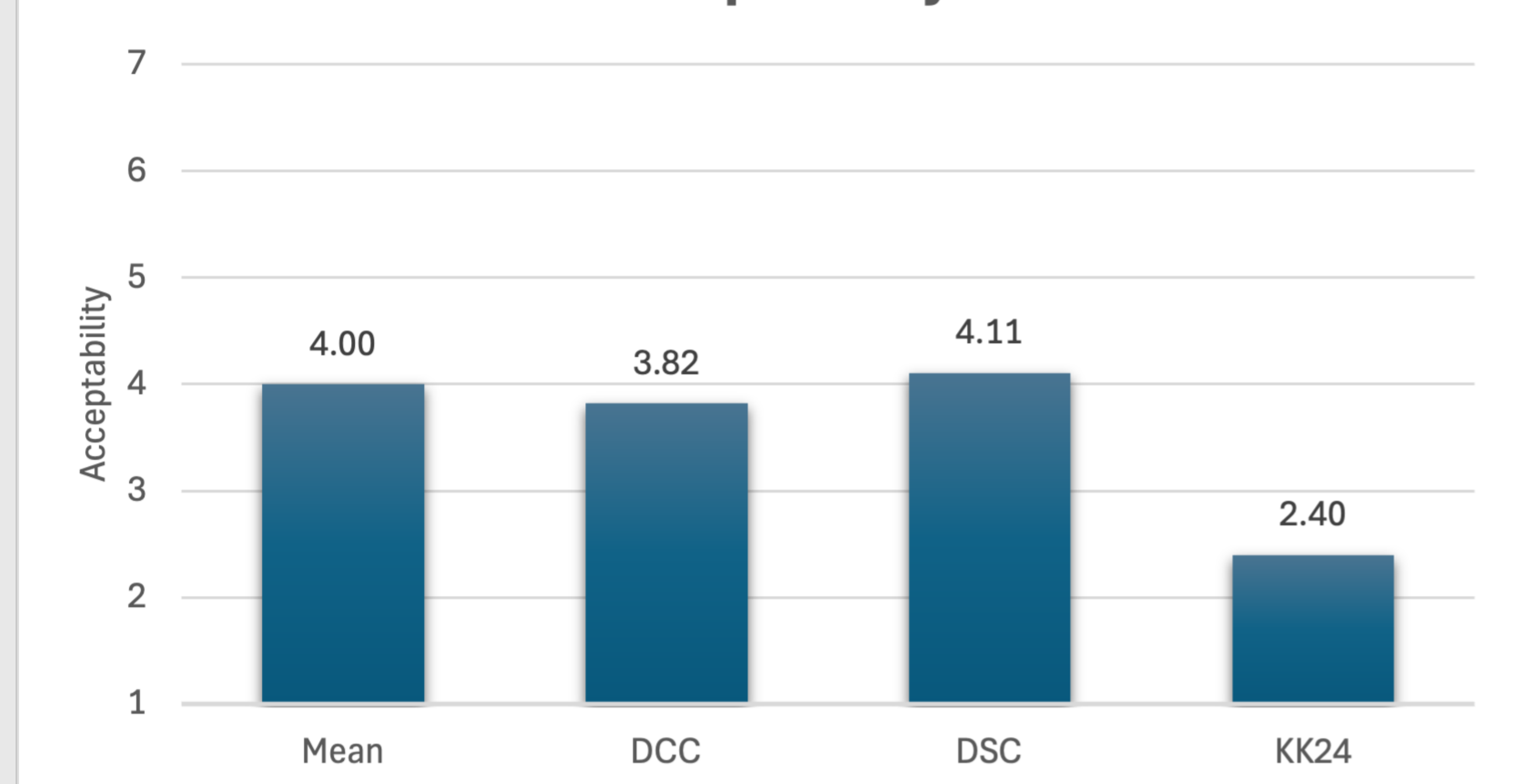
Findings:

- In 81.4% of cases, one part of the degree expression was deleted
- In 12.4% of cases, the sentence was completely rephrased without the degree expressions
- In 6.2% of cases, an emphatic interpretation could be seen
- This would take the shape of *nogle af de lidt mere vigtigere* (some of the little more important-er) being interpreted as meaning "some of the most important"

Findings shown by category (n = 97)



Acceptability



Conclusions and future research

- Possible to identify distinct categories in the paraphrases
- In some sentences, it is possible to identify an emphatic force
- Sentences received intermediate acceptability scores, higher than in Katballe-Kristensen (2024)
- **Next:** Run final study with a few changes to setup, sentences, and more participants.

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