

SIGNIFIER AND SIGNIFIED MEANING IN *THE SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS MOVIE*: A STUDY OF SEMIOTICS APPROACH

Muhammad Fauzan*¹, Deni Suswanto², R. Myrna Nur Sakinah³

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung

Email: fauzan1306@yahoo.co.id

Abstract

In this study, the researcher analyzes the semiotics study of a movie entitled *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* directed by Stephen Hillenber, in which the scene has been marked in some period that relevant in concrete representation of exact complex scientific idea of Saussure's viewpoint through evidence of semiotic sign to be analyzed that can be used for this method. The research method chosen by the researcher using a qualitative method to describe an important by choosing appropriate mark of sign in various scene of data through movie. The data analysis that has been chosen by the author is *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*; used as the object of analysis. To analyze the study of semiotics, the researcher decided to choose the theory of Ferdinand de Saussure for the appropriate theory of semiotics related to signifier and signified which describe visual image in textual perspective and visual perspective of data evidence. Using the Ferdinand de Saussure's theory, the researcher finds scenes that contain the Semiotics of the signifier-signified in them. In the movie, the researcher can analyze Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of Semiotics visually. In addition, the researcher have an evidence of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics only 7 scenes from the movie.

Keywords: Ferdinand de Saussure, Movie, Semiotics, Signifier-Signified, *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*

A. INTRODUCTION

The study of signs and symbols—a component of language that seeks to communicate—is known as semiotics (Nordquist, 2020). According to the researcher's perspective, one of the language's components for using signs and symbols to communicate with others is semiotics. According to Henry's further definition of semiotics, it is a knowledge-based approach to creating signs or symbols that are utilized in interpersonal communication (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2020). According to the researcher, semiotics is an area of study that focuses on how language functions as a sign or symbol that may be used to communicate with others. Additionally, semiotics is an academic discipline that disseminates or analyzes information often connected to signs (Ibiley, 2021).

"The study of anything that "stands for" something other than what people informally refer to as "signs" is known as semiotics. The field of semiotics has not yet attained great recognition. It's an area of study that combines several theoretical perspectives and research approaches." (Adebola, 2017).

Based on what Otemuyiwa's thoughts above, the researcher thoughts on his opinion that Semiotics is not just a study how to communicate people with the "signs" in ordinary speech, but also the study "stands for" something else. Which means, the Semiotics is the study upon variety theoretical perspectives and research techniques. Since the Semiotics is the field of study, Semiotics is not widely institutionalized. It means that, Semiotics is related to other being to communicate other people not with a "sign", but contain a perspectives.

Semiotics is the study of suggests and the relationships between them. Among other things, these signals may be expressed as words, sounds, or visuals. Signs always have something to do

* Muhammad Fauzan

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with everyday life and also have a message to express. As explained, semiotics is a wide-ranging and multifaceted field that encompasses the study of different kinds of signs that are communicated through different media and channels, socially organized and evolved sign systems, and the circumstances surrounding signification or semiosis (i.e., the processes of deriving meaning from signs) (Putri, 2021). According to her definition, semiotics is the study of linguistics in addition to signs, which implies that it is the study of words, sounds, or pictures.

After citing some citations, the researcher assumes semiotics is a study that studies a sign that can be used as a communication tool. Semiotics does not only study signs, but semiotics also studies the meanings associated with the displayed of images or words, as what Putri had assumed on the previous above – for example, sign, symbols, etc. An example of semiotics is like the words of “no smoking”, which is indicating that people are prohibited to smoking in the area (signifier and signified) – according to Ferdinand de Saussure's theory. Additionally, the researcher is drawn to the semiotics theory of Ferdinand de Saussure discusses signifier and signified.

In the first part of the 20th century, semiotics research was shaped by Saussure's definition of signs. According to his definition, it is a form made up of two elements: the "signifier," which can be anything from physical sounds to letters to gestures, and the "signified," which is the image or idea that the signifier refers to. The link between the two significations was then referred to as "signification" by him. According to Saussure, People or cultures impose the arbitrary link between the signifier and the signified at will. He reasoned that using the French word "tree" or "arbre" to refer to "an arboreal plant" was not clearly justified. A well-formed signifier, as noted by Sebeok (1994), is congruent with the orthographic, phonological, or other structural features of the code to which it pertains. For instance, "tree" and "tbky" are not adequately formed in English. Any signifier that was well-formed may have been utilized. According to Saussure, which Sebeok cited, signs are composed of two elements: "signifier" and "signified," and these are known as significations. Saussure explained these two kinds as there is no purpose behind the signifier-signified relationship and imposed by individuals or cultures.

As the researcher interest to analyze the signifier and signified, the researcher is interest to analyze the movie because it has the Semiotics meaning of it. Researcher wants to examine the signifier and signified in the film because it has an acceptable message and the content of the movie relate to lives. Researcher intended to choose movie as the object of this research because the researcher curious on storylines creation of author creativity to know the meaning behind a movie. The researcher further study the signifier and signified through the movie.

Movie is one of the works of art created with several elements of art to produce a work with visuals (Larasati, 2020). The researcher assumes that movie is a work of art that in the process of making ideas required for the movie's storyline background. According to Kridalaksana, movie is also defined as a mass media that require audio-visual so that the movie is feasible (Larasati, 2020). Afterwards, Wibowo stated the movie is a story medium that aims to give a message to the audience (Larasati, 2020). From these expert's definitions above, the researcher thoughts that movie is a mass media that produces audio-visuals both spoken words and movement images.

Rikarno (in Mutmainah & Warsana, 2021) defines movie as a program that presents a reality based on facts and objectives that have essential and existential values that are relevant in life, telling facts and reality without engineering. Movies widespread in industry that is expanding around the world. The movie is rapidly expanding as technology advances, causing complex problems in human life on universal scale. The researcher assumed that movie is the program to presents the reality based, since movies popularity with massive movie industry around the world with advanced technology effects on universal scale.

As the researcher is interests to analyze the Semiotics in the movies, the main object which the researcher interested to is *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* because it contain important signs on it. The movie itself contain signs that relate for researcher to find what is the meaning of the signs. In addition, *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* is suitable to use the signifier and signified because it is relevant. Researcher is interested to find the signifier and signified in *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*.

The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie is an American movie released by Paramount Pictures and Nickelodeon Movies on November 19th, 2004. The movie was directed by the creator of the series itself, Stephen Hillenburg, and Mark Osborne. It was based on the Nickelodeon's animated series *SpongeBob SquarePants* and also the first movie for *SpongeBob SquarePants* movie series. The movie tells the story of the protagonist named SpongeBob SquarePants have to retrieve King Neptune's crown, alongside with Patrick Star, in order to save Eugene Krabs from Neptune's execution and Bikini Bottom's resident from Sheldon J. Plankton's rule.

Conceptual Framework

1) Semiotics

Semiotics, the 1990s saw a rise in interest in the study of signs because of its application to the comprehension of literary works. Theoretical models that resolve connections between texts and define general meaning of structures is important to understand semiotics in literary criticism. To the interpreting the sign, a sign is anything that communicates meaning (Matthews, 2017). Researcher assumes that Matthews defined semiotics is the study of signs which is began popularity in 1990s due to used in understanding the literary works and culture. Semiotics is one of the linguistics studies to aim the literary critics to build theoretical model in order to provide the relationship between texts and broader meaning structures.

Ferdinand de Saussure was an expert linguist from Swiss, which was he is one of the founder of the linguistics in the early of 20th century alongside Charles Sanders Pierce. The definition of semiotics according to him is:

"It is possible to have a science that investigates the lives of signs in society. Semiology (from the Greek semeion, "sign") is what I'll refer to it as. Semiology would demonstrate what rules govern signs and what makes them up. No one can predict what the science will be because it doesn't yet exist, but it has a claim to exist and a position that has been predetermined."* (Nöth, 1995).

Another statement from Ferdinand de Saussure (in Chandler, 2007) about Semiotics is:

"[...]This will shed light on more than just the language issue. We think that by viewing rituals, customs, etc. as indicators, we can view them from a different angle. It will be felt necessary to view them as semiological phenomena and provide an explanation using the semiological laws."

Based on what Saussure's statement above is the semiotics from the word of "semiology" – as he said it was from Greek *semeion*, means 'sign'. It is possible to have a science that investigates the lives of signals in society was how he put it. Saussure suggests the study of semiotics offers the opportunity to view things from a different angle. He considered them "as semiological phenomena and to elucidate them using semiological laws.

2) Sign

Saussure stated that language is a sign language. An instrument for meaning-making is the linguistic sign, which combines a sound-image and a thought. This suggests that word meaning is determined not by the signifier-signified relationship, but through signifier's relationship with other signifiers in the language system. Saussure also distinguished between abstract language system understanding (*langue*) and actual language system application by speakers (*parole*) (Reda, 2016). Saussure defined the language is the system of sign, which combines a sound-image notion to make meanings. This means that the signifier-signified relationship is not always determined by the word, but the signifier-signified relationship with other language system, such as the sound-image notion. Furthermore, Saussure distinguished it with *langue* and *parole*.

A sign conveys details regarding a subject other than itself. Implicit or explicit, every sign conveys something about itself (such as linguistic identity, origin, and history). The fundamental purpose of a sign is to convey and convey meaning about an external reality (such as an object, an individual, or a situation). A linguistic sign is unique to links

an idea and an auditory representation instead of merely a name and particular reality element (something or someone). The sign also serves as a bridge between "a concept that is signified" and "a form that signifies" (signifiant). "The signifier" and "the signified" are both mental constructs, in Saussure's view (Susen, 2018). The researcher conclude that Susen believed a sign could communicate any information besides just itself. Indicating that the sign conveys meanings it may have, either explicitly or implicitly as it connect external reality of object over mental connection.

3) Signifier and Signified

According to Saussure, a sign is a tangible item that has a meaning; alternatively, a signifier and a signified come together to make a sign. Signifier is a visual representation of a sign containing a picture. Signified is a mental concept known to be sign. This mental concept is shared by people from the same culture who speak the same language (Putri, 2021). The researcher assumes that she defined Semiotics is a sign to composed of the signified and the signifier meaning with a physical object. Signifier means a visual meaning of sign, while the signified is the acknowledgment of a sign by its mental concept, which means the mental concept is shared by people from the same culture and speak the same language.

The word, the pointing finger, or the sound picture is the signifier. All a word is is a string of characters. The pointing finger is not the center of attention. Meaning is formed through the interpretation of the signifier (Nurfatwa, et al. 2018). They defined signifier as the meaning formed through the interpretation of signifier with the pointing finger, word, or sound image.

The idea, meaning, or object that the signifier indicates is known as the signified. It can be any referent that the signifier refers to instead of a "real object." The signified object is internal existence to the perceiver. We use signifiers to convey ideas. The signified varies among situations and people, but the signifier is more reliable. The signified does stable with time as the signifier generates ideas and pictures (Nurfatwa, et al. 2018). Researcher implies as signified is an idea or meaning that is determined from signifier. This implies that since the signified is referent to the signifier, it need not be a "real object." While signifiers are used by individuals to transmit their ideas, a more stable signifier causes the signified to stabilize with time because signifiers elicit thoughts and images, and the signified fluctuates depending on the individual and situation.

Saussure used the the terms signifier and signified allude to two parts of the sign: the signified, in Ahmad's (2020) opinion, was not the immediate burden of a single usage, but rather a meaning complex that was examined via patterns of words contrast built with other words in its language. According to Chomsky (2000), a signifier is a sound structure that is recognized not only immediate sound of a specific utterance but through similarities to other sound structures in the language. Saussure's portrayal of the sign is comprised of two sides: the signifier and the signified, based on Ahmad's earlier explanation. Rather than the immediate weight of a specific usage, the signified is the meaning complex, which is seen through patterns of contrast from its one established word to the other words. Instead focusing on the immediate sound of a certain pronunciation, the signifier is the sound structure, which is identified by looking for characteristics that are comparable to other sound structures.

4) Movie

Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) (in Manesah & Alfathoni, 2020) defines movie as a thin celluloid film that serves as a container for negative images (which will be made in portraits) and positive images (which will be played in cinemas). In addition, films are interpreted as plays with live images. According to Ibrahim (in Manesah & Alfathoni, 2020), movie have the meaning of being part of economic production in a society as part of the industry, and they must be viewed in relation to other products.

A movie is literally a *cinematographie*. The term *cinematographie* is derived from the word *cinema*, which means "movement." The Greek word for "light" is *tho* or *phytos*. As a result, movie can also be interpreted as a form of light painting. Movie also have meaning as social and cultural documents that help communicate the era in which they were made, even if they were never intended to do so (Manesah & Alfathoni, 2020). According to Javadalasta (in Manesah & Alfathoni, 2020), movie or video is a collection of moving images that tell a story. Movie composed of images assembled into a complete unit capable of capturing socio-cultural reality.

Movie is a collection of moving images that broadcasted on television or in theaters. These images tell a story through animation or special effects to capture the action. film deliver product produce a various art as well as an industry. Film industry exists because it is a product of the cooperation of businesspeople and artists with a view to profit. Movies are also considered forms of art (Chudori, 2022). Researcher emphasize, the movie is a set of moving images that frequently tell a story that recorded using animation techniques or special effects using a thin, flexible plastic strip that has been exposed to light using a light-sensitive emulsion in a camera. Movies can be the product of collaborations between businessman and artists that take commercial considerations into account, they can be both an industry and art form.

5) The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie

The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie is an American animated action-adventure comedy movie which was released on November 19th, 2004. The movie was directed by the creator of the series itself, Stephen Hillenburg, and Mark Osborne. *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* ran for 87 minutes and was produced by Nickelodeon Movies and distributed by Paramount Pictures. On a \$3 million budget, the film earned \$85,417,988 in the United States and \$140,161,792 worldwide (Fitriady, 2019). This means that *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* was the most watched movie on that time, therefore The SpongeBob SquarePants was the most earning animated-movie ever produced from Nickelodeon.

The story of this film begins where SpongeBob wake up and tells Gary that he will become the manager for the Krusty Krab 2. After his preparation, he attended the opening ceremony. Mr. Krabs announced Squidward Tentacles as a Krusty Krab 2 manager, officially. Mr. Krabs says that SpongeBob is immature than Squidward because become the manager have to more responsibility. SpongeBob feels disappointed and leaves the ceremony. At the same time, Plankton considers after his fruitless attempts to discover the Krabby Patty recipe, Karen reminds him about the "Plan Z."

At night, Plankton goes to King Neptune's castle and steal his crown – in order to execute the "Plan Z". SpongeBob and Patrick are going to Goofy Goober for party. In the next day, Neptune arrives to Krusty Krab 2 and tells him that Krabs stole his crown and sole it to Shell City – as matter of fact, Plankton has made a false evidence that Mr. Krabs is the crime. SpongeBob also arrives on scene and he promise that despite Neptune's reminder that he's only a child, he will win the title on Shell City. Mindy, Neptune's daughter, advise his father to gives a chance for SpongeBob and Neptune's order SpongeBob to retrieve the crown on six days and freeze Krabs for guarantee. After the incident, Plankton steals Krabby Patty secret formula and claims that Krabs is willed his recipe to him.

On the next day, Squidward confront Plankton and tells that he knows the truth behind who is the Neptune's crown theft. before Squidward wants to alert, Plankton, using his mind-bending memento pail, forces the people of Bikini Bottom to "work" alongside him in order to capture Squidward as well. During the trip, SpongeBob and Patrick meet Dennis, a hitman who was sent by Plankton, in order to kill them. Before Dennis can kill them, he being stomped by Cyclops. SpongeBob and Patrick try to escape, but Cyclops catch them easily. In imprisoned, SpongeBob realizes that Shell City is the sea-gift shop. After

Cyclops being defeated by the sea creatures, SpongeBob and Patrick retrieve the crown and heading back to Bikini Bottom with David Hasselhoff.

In Bikini Bottom, Neptune returns to Krusty Krab 2 in order to execute Krabs. SpongeBob and Patrick are arrived on time when Neptune begins his execution. Plankton put another mind-controlling souvenir bucket on Neptune and SpongeBob counter it while sing Goofy Goober Rock and save all of Bikini Bottom residents, as well King Neptune. Plankton is sent to jail and Neptune thank SpongeBob and Patrick bravery. After Neptune unfreeze Krabs, Krabs promotes SpongeBob to become a Krusty Krab 2 manager.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is using the documentation method for researcher to analyze it with the qualitative method. The data which the researcher find derived from alternative source on internet which manifest a concrete result. Further study from previous study is to collect strong idea from other researches. The researcher intend to focus toward the subject to translate its idea that calculate important goal of object for this topic. According to Denzin and Lincoln (in Aspers & Corte, 2019) *"Qualitative research approaches its subject matter via an interpretive, naturalistic lens and utilizes many methodologies. For this reason, qualitative researchers investigate phenomena in their natural environments in order to comprehend or interpret occurrences in terms of the meanings that people attach to them"*.

Based on statement above, the qualitative research is the multimethod in order the researcher to focus to its subject matters. The focuses are contained of involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach. Qualitative research is the research method to study things for the researcher natural settings. In terms of the natural settings, the researcher is intended to trying to comprehend objects in terms of scientific meanings.

Before the researcher analyze this study, it could be difficult to find the exact sources problem in Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotics in *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*. As the result, Researcher intend to collect source from any kind of books, journals, articles, etc. The technique to collecting the data is using Google as a tool to help the researcher to analyze the Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotics in *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*. Taking notes is useful for researcher to analyze Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotics.

Since the researcher intended to analyze the signifier and signified in *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*, the researcher uses the descriptive qualitative research methods in order to analyze *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* with Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotics, which are contain about signifier and signified.

According to Sugiyono, the descriptive qualitative research method is a post-positivist research technique that is frequently used to investigate the state of natural objects. In this method, the researcher serves as a crucial instrument, objectively describing situation on facts examined (Thabroni, 2022). Koentjaraningrat also assumed that qualitative research with descriptive design is research that provides a detailed description of the conditions occur in specific individuals or groups (Thabroni, 2022). Based on explanations above, Researcher assumes that qualitative research is a research design which based on post-positivism philosophy and assess the state of natural objects which guide researcher to provides an unbiased account of a circumstance.

C. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Figure 1. The pirates pulling a chest



Source: *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* (Duration 01:25)

In this scene, the researcher sees the evidence of signifier in subtitle of **"I got it"** which shows the pirates get a chest and one of the pirates says, **"I got it"**. Signified in this scene shows the signifier of **"I got it"** is referred to treasure indicate that the pirates are helping their crews and hurrying to open a treasure in chest, the pirates show excitement from opening a chest. Treasure is valuable for pirates containing rare items. Pirates always wandering around the ocean for them to get any treasure they can find.

Figure 2. The pirate captain raising a tickets



Source: *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* (Duration 01:46)

The researcher find the evidence of signifier in subtitle of **"Tickets to The SpongeBob Movie!"** which shows the pirates are happy when they got the ticket from the chest because the treasure contains tickets for watching the SpongeBob's movie. The signified in this scene emphasize the signifier of **"Tickets to The SpongeBob Movie!"** that show the leader of the pirate, along with his subordinates, are shouting means that their expressions are really joyful when they get to watch *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*.

Figure 3. The sailing ship dock at a pier



Source: *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* (Duration 02:25)

The use of signifier in this scene use the object of **"SURF Theater"** located on the sea that point a place to watch movies as the sailing ship parked in front of the **"SURF Theater"**, as they sing *SpongeBob SquarePants* theme song. The signified of object **"SURF Theater"** comes from the name of theater called **"SURF"** is because the theater is located on the sea. The word **"SURF"** means that the sea wave breaks upon shore and the theatre near the shore. The pirates always circling around the sea and background setting of *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* is deep in the sea. That means, the **"SURF"** name on the theater is related on this scene.

Figure 4. SpongeBob SquarePants holding a cheese



Source: *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* (Duration: 04:03)

Signifier represented in this scene show the portrayal of Spongebob say the words **"Say cheese"** while holding a cheese with his tongs. Signified of this scene describe Spongebob's dream becoming a manager. His dream shows that The Krusty Krabs had an emergency situation and Mr. Krabs told SpongeBob that there is a customer who wants to eat a Krabby Patty without a cheese. Once he gets inside The Krusty Krabs, he finds a customer scared of eating a Krabby Patty because there is no cheese on top of the patty. SpongeBob tries to help a customer to eat a Krabby Patty with a cheese.

After putting his tongs, he picked up a cheese with a serious expression, means that SpongeBob helps an emergency customer.

Figure 5. Mr. Krabs advise SpongeBob SquarePants



Source: *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* (Duration: 12:40)

Signifier that shown on this scene portrayed Mr. Krabs giving advice to **“And to be a manager, you have to be a man”**. Signified idea behind the advice of Mr. Krabs in the words **“And to be a manager, you have to be a man”** emphasize Mr. Krabs advise to SpongeBob about maturity. SpongeBob characteristics are always childish alike, although despite his adult age. Mr. Krabs decided to choose Squidward to be manager of Krusty Krabs 2 instead of SpongeBob because Squidward is more mature than SpongeBob – although SpongeBob is great for the fry cook – which is required to be a manager, since being a manager must take all of responsibilities.

Figure 6. SpongeBob SquarePants protect Mr. Krabs from fiery trident



Source: *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* (Duration: 24:18)

Signifier object is shown in this scene through the dialogue **“No! I won't let you”** as SpongeBob is protecting Mr. Krabs from King Neptune's execution from fiery trident although it cost his life, by shouting **“No! I won't let you”**. Signified idea behind the dialogue **“No! I won't let you”** emphasize Spongebob concern to protect Mr. Krabs even though he felt disappointed in him previously no matter Mr. Krabs do after not promoting Spongebob to Krusty Krabs 2 manager.

Figure 7. The billboard of Shell City



Source: *The SpongeBob SquarePants* Movie (Duration: 33:14)

Signifier that shown in this scene portrayed through the sign object of Shell City sign board. Signified idea of this scene is indicated through the wooden sign says "**Shell City Only Five Days Away By Car**" indicating that SpongeBob & Patrick's trip to Shell City is only 5 days if they want to get there with a car. The sign warned them to drive a car to get there, but they still have long way to go there because it is already late evening and they still don't find their car, which was already taken by one of the thugs on the border. Therefore, they had to find their car in order to continue their journey to Shell City.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the evidence, In this film, the writer finds 7 scenes that can be represent Semiotics based on the theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. The first scene when the pirate get the treasure by saying, "I got it" and all of the pirates cheering for treasure. Second scene, the pirates are happy because, a leader of the pirate shouts "Tickets to The SpongeBob Movie" so the pirates are happy because of it. The third scene shows the theater's name called "SURF" because it's located on the sea - due to "surf" is sea wave breaks upon the shore - the pirates and background theme of *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* are related to the sea. The fourth scene shows SpongeBob says "Say cheese" with a serious expression when he pulls out a cheese with a tongs, due to emergency situation for the Krusty Krabs customer. The fifth scene shows Mr. Krabs gives an advice to SpongeBob about the maturity. The sixth scene shows SpongeBob protects Mr. Krabs from King Neptune's execution on Krabs and the seventh scene shows the sign warned SpongeBob and Patrick must have find their car in order to Shell City.

Researcher hopes this research is understandable for anyone who reads it, especially for college students and Semiotics civities. Researcher also hopes that this research will provide benefits for others hoping to understand Semiotics about signifier and signified. Given researcher as ordinary human, there must be mistakes or weakness in this study. Researcher also realized with it and ready to accept criticism from anyone who has read it aims to tell the validity.

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