



## Insider and Outsider Language in Indonesian Suicide Notes: Forensic Linguistic Study

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**ABSTRACT:** Suicide has been happening quite frequently in Indonesia as news reported that there is an increase in number of suicide cases in 2023. Suicide notes are found on several cases. The notes are expected to be written by the victims. However, an issue is encountered when there are suicide notes that seem to be manipulated; thus, the notes are fake. This situation can be identified and analysed through the perspective of language, particularly from forensic linguistic point of view. Therefore, this study aims to identify linguistic features that show genuineness and fabrication. The data collected were Indonesian suicide notes found on the internet. Data collection was conducted through documentation method. The data were analysed through referential identity and content analysis from descriptive-qualitative approach. The theories applied were Olsson's insider and outsider language of suicide notes. The findings show that genuine and fabricated Indonesian suicide notes have different linguistic features. The genuine notes use insider language that demonstrates the language of the victims. The fabricated notes use outsider language that denotes the language of the general people who have typical view towards suicide.

**KEYWORDS:** forensic linguistics, genuine, insider language, outsider language, suicide note.

### INTRODUCTION

Suicide cases in Indonesia reaches a higher number in 2023 compared to the previous years (Muhamad, 2013). It is recorded that 971 cases happened until October 2023. Several of the victims left a suicide note. The note, essentially, has to be a proof that the suicide is indeed a suicide. However, there is a case that suicide notes were manipulated and fabricated in order to disguise a murder case. The murdered would write a note by using the victim's perspective and try to make the case seems to be a suicide. An example is a case of a murder in in 2018 in Bener Meriah regency (Arsani, 2018). The case was thought to be a suicide because the victim was found hanged on the ceiling. There was also a suicide note found. However, it turned out that the case was a murder. The victim was murdered by her husband. In fact, the note was the murderer's scenario. After hanging his wife to death, he wrote a note as if it had been written by his wife. The example demonstrates that suicide notes can be tricky to identify.

Crime has no limits; thus, suicide notes that should be proof of the truth of suicide cases are instead manipulated by other people to distance the truth. Another example is a case of an online prostitute in Surabaya in 2022 who was thought to have committed suicide because there was a suicide note that said *gue cape hidup*, which translated to 'I am tired of living', but it turned out that after investigation, the case was a murder and the note was written by the killer.

Based on the cases above, suicide notes may be viewed as both a problem and an opportunity. It is seen as a problem when these notes can be deceptive. The notes can be manipulated by other people which can have a negative effect on law enforcement and justice. An opportunity means if the suicide note can be true evidence that the case being investigated is a suicide case.

Analysis of suicide notes is part of the field of forensic linguistics. Pastika (Pastika, 2018) says that forensic linguistics is a science that uses language tools (lexical, grammatical, meaning and language sounds) to assist the process of upholding justice. In discussing suicide notes, Olsson (2012) explains the linguistic features of suicide notes are called as insider language and outsider language. Insider language means the language of the victim, whereas outsider language comes from non-victim or general people. Based on the cases Olsson identified and several corpora of suicide notes, genuine suicide notes have insider language, while fabricated notes have outsider language.

Research on suicide notes has been done before. One of them is from Maharani et al. (2022) entitled The Qualities of Forensic Stylistics Enfolded in Suicide Notes. The object of this research study was eleven English-language suicide notes written by famous



male figures taken from internet sites. The analysis method applied was qualitative content analysis. The theory used was Prokofyeva's (2013) linguistic features of suicide notes consisting of clear reasons, emotional expression, text structure, grammar, and punctuation. The results showed that all five features were present with clear reasons appearing most often as background information material for suicide. The emotions expressed in suicide notes were fear of life and hopelessness.

Masood (2021) wrote his research entitled *The Language of Suicide Notes: A Gender- Based Forensic Linguistic Study*. This thesis analysed 70 English-language suicide notes in Pakistan from a forensic linguistic perspective. Gender-related lexical choices were analysed to trace linguistic patterns in Pakistani suicide notes using the Sketch Engine application. Suicide notes were also analysed to determine aspects of language in male and female suicide notes that illustrate features of interpersonal suicide theory. In addition, a forensic semantic analysis was conducted incorporating relevance theory to extract social issues that led to suicide in Pakistan. Results showed that male suicide notes were more straightforward with less use of conjunctions which made the structure less complicated. On the other hand, female suicide notes were only elaborative with relatively more conjunctions, adjectives, and adverbs. Male suicide notes usually mentioned about 'money', 'work' and 'family', whereas female notes talked about their 'decisions', 'dreams' and 'pain'. The characteristic of considering oneself a burden was mostly found in Pakistani suicide notes.

Malini and Tan's (2016) research entitled *Forensic Linguistics Analysis of Virginia Woolf's Suicide Notes* analysed the suicide note of the famous British writer Virginia Woolf. This study aimed to prove the veracity of suicide notes, reveal the intentions and motivations of suicide by using the Linguistics Inquiry and Word Count programme and forensic semantic theory. The results show that Virginia Woolf's suicide note is categorised as true and has positive emotional overtones. The motivation for the suicide was Woolf's bipolar disorder which made her feel guilty and depressed for disrupting her family's life.

Previous research only formulated the characteristics of suicide notes, predominantly looking at the lexicon and punctuation, from the data analyzed without linking these characteristics to genuineness and fabrication of suicide notes. Furthermore, previous research discussed English notes. Therefore, the gap to be filled by current research is to identify linguistic features and to link them with genuine and fabricated suicide notes and also to analyze Indonesian suicide notes.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORY

This research applied a theoretical approach from the perspective of forensic linguistics and Olsson's theory of insider and outsider languages (2012). Forensic linguistics study texts in order to find language evidence that can be useful as legal evidence. Therefore, in determining the language evidences of genuine and fake suicide notes are correct, the data collected were suicide notes from investigated and finished cases. Such cases were proven by the police and court; thus, the relevancy of theory could be known as well. This research used human instrument as its analysis was done in a descriptive-qualitative approach. The research also used Indonesian online news as data source. The analysis applied referential identity method in order to identify the insider and outsider languages of suicide notes.

Olsson (2012) stated that genuine and fabricated suicide notes show different uses of language. These differences are classified into insider and outsider language (Olsson, 2012, p. 107) Insider language is language that emerges from individuals who have suicidal intentions or are actually committing suicide (Olsson, 2012, p. 107). Outsider language is the opposite, namely language that appears similar to people's responses to suicide or language that does not come from individuals who have suicidal intentions (Olsson, 2012, p. 107).

Insider language is said to be the language of suicide victims who are focused on a situation in which they are unable to think of a way out. The problems faced by suicide victims confine them. Olsson (2012, p. 108) says the language of people who commit suicide is as if they were in a war situation, trapped in a bunker completely alone, and unable to communicate about their situation except through suicide notes. Olsson (2012, p. 110) explains that the insider's language in the original suicide note expressed many emotions of love and apology. These two things are rare in outsider language in fake suicide notes. Genuine suicide notes also have expressions praising people who are still alive, especially those who have had and/or still have suicidal thoughts. Apart from that, there are expressions that express the inability to continue living because they are not strong. There are also expressions that claim that the suicide victim in the original suicide note felt bad about something they did or felt, especially their health. They often state that they



have hurt someone, either physically or emotionally. Therefore, the atmosphere that emerges in the original suicide note is one of emotional ambivalence, that is, victims often praise their loved ones, but also blame them. The victim also apologized, but also expressed their intolerance. The victim gave a declaration of love, but also stated that they were not good. Insider language in genuine suicide notes is more likely to provide references to death (Olsson, 2012, p. 110). Genuine suicide notes also often contain expressions of exhaustion and expressions about trying to please a partner or other family members. Genuine suicide notes also have a directive-prescriptive strategy that contains actions the receiver of the message should and should not do.

Outsider language in fabricated suicide notes states that the suicide victim is crazy, weak, a coward, a loser, and other negative names. These terms come from the reactions of relatives and families of suicide victims (Olsson, 2012, p. 106). Fabricated suicide notes very rarely contain expressions of love for the family or relatives of the suicide victim (Olsson, 2012, p. 110). Fabricated suicide notes contain expressions of blaming others (Olsson, 2012, p. 110). It does not come from within the heart of the suicide victim; thus, the language in fabricated suicide notes is usually dominated by external things, be it people or circumstances.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data in the form of suicide notes that have been collected and analyzed are presented in this chapter. The discussion structure is adjusted to the problem formulation. The first analysis is the insider language in proven genuine suicide note. The second analysis is the outsider language in proven fabricated suicide note. The discussion regarding identifying the genuineness of suicide notes aims to formulate a method for investigating linguistic evidences in suicide notes as legal evidences to state that the notes found support the allegation that the case is truthfully a suicide case.

#### Insider Language in Genuine Suicide Note

There are two suicide cases used in this research. Both have proven genuine suicide notes by the police. According to the theory from Olsson (2012), there are specific linguistic features written by genuine suicide victim. Based on the Indonesian suicide note collected, several features are found.

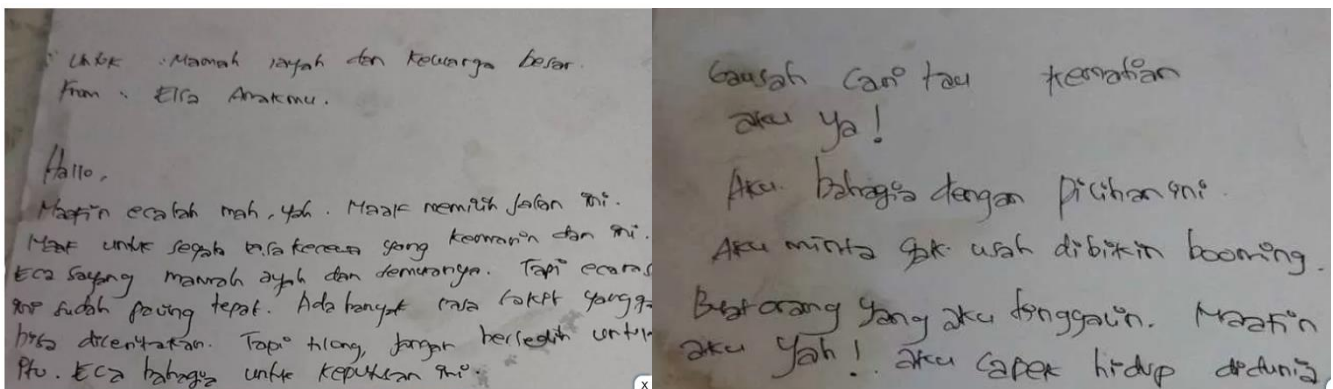


Figure 1. Genuine Indonesian Suicide Note

Source: Meiva (2023)

The writing on the Figure 1 says:

Untuk : Mamah, ayah, dan keluarga besar.

From : Elsa Anakmu.

Hallo,

Maafin ecalah mah, yah. Maaf memilih jalan ini. Maaf untuk segala rasa kecewa yang kemarin dan ini. Eca sayang mamah ayah dan semuanya. Tapi eca rasa ini sudah paling tepat. Ada banyak rasa sakit yang ga bisa diceritakan. Tapi tolong, jangan berseदिh untuk itu. Eca bahagia untuk keputusan ini.



*Gausah cari tau kematian aku ya!  
Aku bahagia dengan pilihan ini.  
Aku minta gak usah dibikin booming.  
Buat orang yang aku tinggalkan, Maafin aku yah! Aku capek hidup didunia.*

The English translation is as follows.

To: Mom, dad, and family.

From: Elsa, your daughter.

Hi,

Please forgive Eca, mom, dad. Sorry for choosing this way. Sorry for all of the disappointment in the past and present. Eca loves mom, dad, and everyone. But, Eca thinks this is the right way. There are a lot of pain that cannot be told. But please, do not grieve. Eca is happy for this decision.

Do not investigate my death!

I am happy with this decision.

I ask not to make this viral.

For the people I left, please forgive me! I am tired living in this world.

The foregoing suicide note has proven to be genuine by the police based on the news source. The victim is a female university student in Indonesia. Looking at the writing, several features of insider language are found. The first feature is the writing that says suicide is the only action to solve the problems of the victim. This is shown by *Tapi eca rasa ini sudah paling tepat*, ada banyak rasa sakit yang ga bisa diceritakan (But, Eca thinks this is the right way. There are a lot of pain that cannot be told.) This line gives information that the victim, Eca, felt a lot of pain caused by problems she experienced. Her problems burdened her until she felt no other solutions can solve them but suicide. The line of *tapi eca rasa ini sudah paling tepat* has the Indonesian reference marker *ini* which is translated as 'this'. The marker refers to the suicide action. Therefore, the victim believed that suicide is the best and right way.

The second feature found is reference to death. The line *tapi eca rasa ini sudah paling tepat* is one example of this. Another line is *gausah cari tau kematian aku ya!* (Do not investigate my death!). The reference to death is clearly known because the word *kematian* means 'death'. Another line found on Figure 1 that refers to death is *maaf memilih jalan ini* (sorry for choosing this way). The phrase *jalan ini* (this way) is exophoric marker because there is no in-text referent; thus, the referent should be understood based on the context. In Indonesian, the word *jalan* (way) is paired with *kehidupan* (life) to make a conceptual metaphor *jalan kehidupan*, which means the way of life. Therefore, based on the metaphor, the phrase *jalan ini* is related to life. As the line starts with apology, the phrase means negative as the nature of apology is to feel sorry for something bad. Based on this concept, *jalan ini* refers to the death of the victim.

The third feature is apology and love expressions. There are many expressions found on genuine suicide note above about love and apology. The apology expression is shown by the word *maaf*, which is translated as 'sorry' in English. The apology is intended to the victim's family. The victim was sorry because she chose to commit suicide. She was sorry because she felt like she disappointed people. Love expression is found because there is the word *sayang*, which means 'to love'. The victim showed her love towards her family.

The fourth feature is the expression of inability to continue living. The line that has this feature is *aku capek hidup di dunia* (I am tired living in this world). In Indonesian, the expression of *aku capek* or 'I am tired' denotes a commissive illocutionary act with the function to refuse to do something. Therefore, the line can be understood as the victim's inability to continue being alive because she was tired of living.

The last feature found is directive-prescriptive strategy. This strategy involves the victim's message towards the receiver of the notes regarding actions the latter should and should not do. The line of *tapi tolong jangan bersedih untuk itu* is an utterance with directive illocutionary act. The word *tolong* means 'please' and *jangan* means 'do not'. Both words carry directive information. There are several expressions that ask receivers to do or not do something, such as *Gausah cari tau kematian aku ya!* (Do not investigate my death!) and *Aku minta gak usah dibikin booming* (I ask not to make this viral).

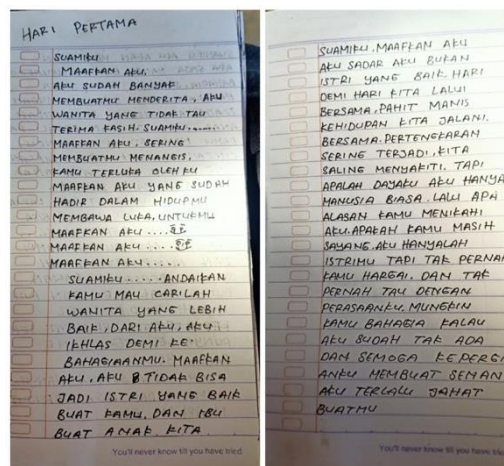


Figure 2. Genuine Indonesian Suicide Note  
Source: Syarief (2020)

The writing on Figure 2 says:

**HARI PERTAMA**

SUAMIKU, MAAFKAN AKU, AKU SUDAH BANYAK MEMBUATMU MENDERITA, AKU WANITA YANG TIDAK TAU TERIMA KASIH. SUAMIKU, MAAFKAN AKU SERING MEMBUATMU MENANGIS, KAMU TERLUKA OLEHKU, MAAFKAN AKU YANG SUDAH HADIR DALAM HIDUPMU MEMBAWA LUKA UNTUKMU, MAAFKAN AKU, MAAFKAN AKU, MAAFKAN AKU. SUAMIKU, ANDAIKAN KAMU MAU CARILAH WANITA YANG LEBIH BAIK DARI AKU, AKU IKHLAS DEMI BAHAGIAANMU. MAAFKAN AKU, AKU TIDAK BISA JADI ISTRI YANG BAIK BUAT KAMU, DAN IBU BUAT ANAK KITA. SUAMIKU MAAFKAN AKU, AKU SADAR AKU BUKAN ISTRI YANG BAIK, HARI DEMI HARI KITA LALUI BERSAMA, PAHIT MANIS KEHIDUPAN KITA JALANI BERSAMA. PERTENGKARAN SERING TERJADI, KITA SALING MENYAKITI. TAPI APALAH DAYAKU AKU HANYA MANUSIA BIASA. LALU APA ALASAN KAMU MENIKAHI AKU, APAKAH KAMU MASIH SAYANG. AKU HANYALAH ISTRIMU TAPI TAK PERNAH KAMU HARGAI. DAN TAK PERNAH TAU DENGAN PERASAANKU. MUNGKIN KAMU BAHAGIA KALAU AKU SUDAH TAK ADA DAN SEMOGA KEPERGIANKU MEMBUAT SENANG. AKU TERLALU JAHAT BUATMU.

The English translation is as follows.

**Day One**

My husband, forgive me, I have made you suffer so much, I do not know gratitude. my husband, I'm sorry I often make you cry, you are hurt by me, I'm forgive that I have been present in your life bringing wounds for you, forgive me, forgive me, forgive me. my husband, if you want to find a better woman than me, I'm sincere for your happiness. forgive me, I can't be a good wife for you, and a mother for our children.

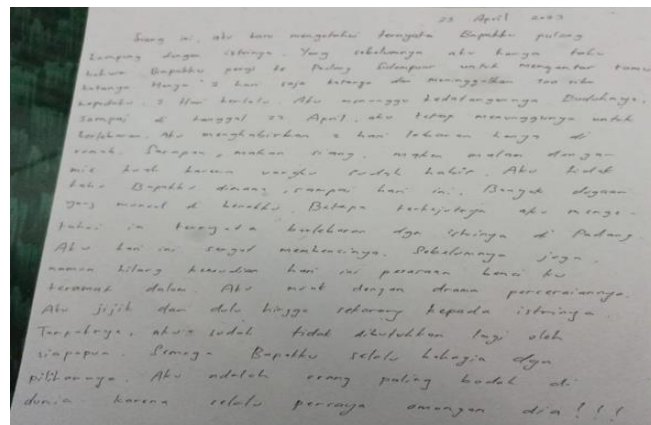
my husband forgives me, I realize I'm not a good wife, day by day we live together, bitter and sweet life we live together. fights often happen, we hurt each other. but what can I do? I'm just an ordinary human. then what's the reason you married me, do you still love me. I'm just your wife but you never respect it. and never know my feelings. maybe you will be happy that I'm gone and I hope my going makes you happy. I'm too bad for you.



Figure 2 is a genuine suicide note proven by police. The victim is a woman, a wife. Several linguistic features of insider language are found. The first one is apology expressions. There are lots of sorry and expressions about their relationship because the victim. Every *maaf*, which translates into ‘sorry’, is an apology expression, The victim apologized because she felt she was not good enough as a wife for her husband. She felt that she kept making her husband suffers. She felt that her presence made her husband unhappy. There are many expressions about saying sorry for feeling bad or not good enough as a wife. Olsson (2012) also stated that the victims say they are not good.

There is emotional ambivalence found in the note. The victim said sorry and gave permission for her husband to be happy with another woman, but the victim also complained about her husband. This is in accordance with the theory from Olsson (2012) that states victims often praise their loved ones, but also blame them. Suicide note in Figure 2 shows that the victim felt that she was not good enough, but she questioned her husband for marrying her. She said she made her husband suffered, but she blamed him for not being understanding to her.

**Outsider Language in Fabricated Suicide Note**



**Figure 3.** Fabricated Indonesian Suicide Note  
Source: Wisely (2023)

The writing on Figure 3 says:

*Siang ini, aku baru mengetahui ternyata Bapakku pulang kampung dengan istrinya. Yang sebelumnya aku hanya tahu bahwa Bapakku pergi ke Padang Sidempuan untuk mengantar tamu katanya. Hanya 2 hari saja katanya dan meninggalkan 100 ribu kepadaku. 2 Hari berlalu. Aku menunggu kedatangannya. Bodohnya, sampai di tanggal 22 April, aku tetap menunggunya untuk berlebaran. Aku menghabiskan 2 hari lebaran hanya di rumah. Sarapan, makan siang, makan malam dengan mie kuah karena uangku sudah habis. Aku tidak tahu Bapakku dimana, sampai hari ini. Banyak dugaan yang muncul di benakku. Betapa terkejutnya aku mengetahui ia ternyata berlebaran dgn istrinya di Padang. Aku hari ini sangat membencinya. Sebelumnya juga, namun hilang kemudian hari ini perasaan benciku teramat dalam. Aku muak dengan drama perceraianya. Aku jijik dari dulu hingga sekarang kepada istrinya. Tampaknya aku sudah tidak dibutuhkan lagi oleh siappaun. Semoga bapakku selalu bahagia dgn pilihannya. Aku adalah orang paling bodoh di dunia karena selalu percaya omongan dia!!!*

The English translation is as follows.

This afternoon, I just found out that my father had returned home with his wife. Previously I only knew that my father went to Padang Sidempuan to see off guests, he said. Only 2 days, he said and left 100 thousand to me. 2 Days passed. I awaited his arrival. Foolishly, until April 22nd, I was still waiting for him to celebrate Eid. I spent 2 days of Eid just at home. Breakfast, lunch, dinner with noodle because my money has run out. I don't know where my father is, until today. Many conjectures came to my mind. How surprised I was to find out that he was actually celebrating Eid with his wife in Padang. I really hate him today. Previously too, but it disappeared then today my feelings of hatred are very deep. I'm sick of the divorce drama. I have been disgusted from the past



until now towards his wife. It seems that I am no longer needed by anyone. I hope my father will always be happy with his choice. I am the stupidest person in the world because I always believe what he says!!!

Figure 3 is suspected as a fabricated suicide note. The note was found on the case of female university student. However, police said that the handwriting of the note and the victim's other writings are different. Therefore, this suicide note needs to be investigated linguistically by identifying insider and outsider language. Based on the data in Figure 3, the outsider language dominates the note.

The first feature of outsider language found is the negative labelling of the victim. Olsson (2012) states that such naming is framed by how people call the victim. There is a line in figure 3 that says *aku adalah orang paling bodoh di dunia* (I am the stupidest person in the world). Saying the victim herself as stupid has shown the presence of negative labelling. This feature can imply that the one who wrote the note may see the victim as a stupid girl. Furthermore, the negative labelling does not have apologetic nor sad emotion, instead it has angry feeling shown by three exclamation marks. Therefore, the negative labelling seems not come from the victim.

The second feature is fabricated suicide note usually does not have expressions of love for family. The message of the note in Figure 3 talks about the victim's father and his relationship. Therefore, it can add another proof that the note may be fabricated. Furthermore, fabricated suicide note mostly has external things, rather than the internal condition of the victim. This is found in the note. The main information of the note is about the victim's father. There is no reference to death. There is no expression of being unable to continue living. There is no information about how the victim sees life.

The third feature is fabricated suicide note contains expression of blaming others. The victim said her father made her disgusted because of his relationship with his wife by saying *aku hari ini sangat membencinya* (I really hate him today) dan *aku jijik dari dulu hingga sekarang kepada istrinya* (I have been disgusted from the past until now towards his wife). The victim blamed his father by saying that she was the stupidest person because what father said.

The language in the note in Figure 3 is very different from the one in Figure 1 and 2. Therefore, the genuineness of suicide note in Figure 3 should be seen with skepticism. What can be known from these three notes are insider language emphasizes the feeling of the suicide victim, whereas the outsider language focuses on telling external situations of the victim.

## CONCLUSION

Foregoing discussion has shown the relevancy of insider and outsider language in Indonesian suicide note. The result shows that in genuine Indonesian suicide notes, the victim, who is the author of the notes, use linguistic features that derives from the sorrowful feeling of the victim. The insider language features found are the view of suicide is the only action to solve the victim's problems, reference to death, love and apology expressions, expression of inability to continue living, directive-prescriptive strategy, emotional ambivalence, and expressions of feeling not good enough as a human. The outsider language involves expressions about the external situations of the victim. The outsider features found are negative labelling of the victim, angry emotion, absence of love expression, writing about someone or something else outside of the victim, and expression of blaming others. According to the findings and analysis as well as the data, which have been investigated by Indonesian police, the insider and outsider language features of Indonesian suicide notes can be used to find linguistic evidence that can act as legal evidence to help police and court to investigate and decide the genuineness of suicide cases.

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