TRADUCERE ȘI LIMBAJE SPECIALIZATE

ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: EVOLUTION AND PERSPECTIVES

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The domain of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which refers to the communicatory needs and practices of particular professional or occupational groups of learners, has developed apace to become a weighty force in the English language teaching and research. Displaying changing characteristics, the ESP has always been forming itself to meet the specific professional or vocational language necessities of different learners, and thus it is always appropriate and of current importance. This article briefly examines some of the head steps of the evolution of the English for Specific Purposes, which appeared in the second part of the last century as a technical texts-analysis area, and since then has been perceived as an approach or a discipline. It first examines the emergence of the phenomenon of ESP and then goes on to the most important stages of its evolution underlining that, the ESP gains its strength from diverse theoretical foundations and commitment to research-based language education, which tries to reveal the ascendancy of social contexts on language use and the ways learners can gain control over these. The paper also points out the most recent ESP phases and the contribution of important international journals to the development of the field, and gives an overview of recent investigations into genre theory and in the area of corpus linguistics. The final section summarizes the most notable achievements of ESP research practice and discusses its possible future developments.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), history of ESP, ESP definitions, ESP development.

ENGLEZA PENTRU SCOPURI SPECIFICE: EVOLUȚIE ȘI PERSPECTIVE

Domeniul limbii engleze pentru scopuri specifice (ESS), care se referă la necesitățile și practicile comunicative specifice anumitor grupuri profesionale de studenți, s-a dezvoltat rapid și a devenit o forță motrice puternică în procesul de studiere și predare a limbii engleze. ESS se dezvoltă în permanență pentru a satisface necesitățile lingvistice profesio- nale specifice diferitelor categorii de persoane, care studiază limba engleză și, deci, este întotdeauna relevantă și actuală. Acest articol examinează pe scurt principalele etapele ale evoluției limbii engleze pentru scopuri specifice, care a apărut în a doua jumătate a secolului trecut ca un domeniu de analiză a textelor tehnice și care, din acel moment, a fost percepută ca un mod de abordare sau disciplină. Mai întâi este examinată apariția fenomenului ESS, după care se trece la expunerea celor mai importante etape ale evoluției ei menționându-se faptul că la temelia ESS se află diverse fundații teoretice și angajamentul față de educația lingvistică bazată pe cercetare, care încearcă să demonstreze influența contextelor sociale asupra utilizării limbajului și să depisteze modalități eficiente de învățare a limbii engleze. În lucrare sunt menționate, de asemenea, cele mai recente etape distincte ale evoluției ESS și contribuția revistelor internaționale importante la dezvoltarea domeniului, se face o trecere în revistă a investigațiilor recente referitoare la teoria genului și lingvistica corpusului. În secțiunea finală sunt prezentate succint cele mai notabile rezultate ale cercetărilor în domeniul englezei pentru scopuri specifice și expuse posibilele evoluții ale acesteia.

Cuvinte-cheie: engleza pentru scopuri specifice (ESS), istoria ESS, definițiile ESS, dezvoltarea ESS.

Introduction

The most common sector of English is General English (GE) or English as a Second Language (ESL) or even English as a Foreign Language (EFL), but there is also another zone called English for Specific Purposes (ESP). English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a learner-centred approach, and its main aim is to achieve the specific needs of zealous learners to meet either their professional or vocational necessities. The acknowledgement of the English language as the lingua franca of most enterprises internationally has been generally perceived,

because English is not only needed by linguists and grammarians; it is widely applied in almost all fields. Therefore, in the era of globalization, the role of English has widened extremely.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a generic term which comprises a range of various teaching approaches. They are comprehensively delineated as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Professional Purposes (EPP). Since it is traditional to differentiate between general and specific purposes, its main departments are further classified. Consequently, in the EAP, it is possible to differentiate between English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), e.g. English for academic reading, and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), e.g. English for medical studies [1]. It is worth attention that the authorship of the term LSP belongs to T.Hutchinson and A.Waters, who conceived it in their 1987 paper '*English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-Centred Approach*' [2].

There are numerous definitions of the LSP, all of which examine this phenomenon differently. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) address three of the most widely-recognized definitions in their book '*Developments in ESP: A Multidisciplinary Approach*' [3]. The first is the one provided by Hutchinson and Waters, who regard the ESP as an approach, not an outcome, meaning that it "*does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching material, or methodology*" [3, p.2]. This can be observed as the most comprehensive of the definitions. Strevens defines the ESP by distinguishing both its absolute and variable characteristics [4, p.145-163]. Tony Duddley-Evans and Maggie Jo St John emphasize the ESP's relationship with other disciplinary areas and occupations, because it tries to use their methodologies and activities, and its contrast to General English [3]. Laurence Anthony (1997) stated that, during Japan's Conference on ESP, the above mentioned pundit, namely Tony Dudley-Evans, included another feature within this definition, videlicet "*ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners*" [5, p.115-120]. Furthermore, the two variable features are its restriction in terms of skills to be learned and the absence of a pre-established methodology. Tony Dudley-Evans explains P. C. Robinson's view of the ESP as a goal-directed approach that has a limited time period and is aimed at adults in homogeneous learning environments. He also states that the ESP is usually aimed at professionals or tertiary-level learners with some target language basic knowledge, but it is not restricted to these communities exclusively. All these absolute and variable peculiarities stress the purposeful qualifications of the ESP as an approach that shapes itself according to the necessities of those who learn English. But T. Dudley-Evans and M. J. St John (1998) yet insist on the idea that the ESP should be defined neither as a subject-content directed discipline nor as a distinct area from General English. They define three variables of the ESP, scilicet it has to be related to specific disciplines, use a different methodology from the one used in General English, and be aimed at intermediate to advanced adult learners [3]. Such definition resembles the one provided by Peter Strevens, which might be ranked as the most comprehensible one. In the words of Rebecca Smoak, "*ESP is English instruction based on actual and immediate needs of learners. ESP is needs based and task oriented*" [6, p.22-27]. Finally, Kristen Gatehouse (2001) applies to the very name of the domain in her work "*Key Issues in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Curriculum Development*," where she talks over the sense of the word "*specific*" and elucidates that it is about the specificity of the purpose or aim of this teaching area, not the special registers or vocabulary entailed [7]. All the previous definitions and statements have contributed more or less to better mark off the scope and aim of the ESP and they have all emphasized that "*in ESP . . . the purpose for learning is paramount and related directly to what the learner needs to do in their vocation or job*" [8, p.6]. The ESP has come into the world to meet the learners' needs and purpose to learn a language that will most likely help them to communicate in a globalized society where the sense of immediacy of necessity can best be carried out by the English for Specific Purposes teaching.

What are the factors which have facilitated the birth of the ESP phenomenon? The emergence and development of languages for specific purposes are interconnected with the history of society development. Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters assert that ESP is not a planned and coherent movement [9]. The emergence of the ESP is the result of a series of events and tendencies which have worked in different ways around the world and which have been combined into four main motives:

– the recognition of parity of English and French that was attested by the signing of the Versailles Treaty in both of these languages in 1919. Although at the peace conference that concluded World War I (1914-18), the French were intransigently against the upgrading of English, the presence of the Americans was crucial and eventually led to "*the end of the era of French linguistic supremacy*" [10, p.33];

– the creation and prompt development of science, technology and commerce. The years that followed World War II (1939-45) witnessed unparalleled worldwide expansion of these three global forces, which generated an inquiry for an international language. Owing to the growing economic power of the USA, this role was granted to English. English has now become '*subject to the wishes, needs and demands of people other than language teachers*' [9, p.7]. The post-war changes resulted in the emergence of a new generation of learners who required using English in specific environments, e.g. businessmen to run their businesses, constructors to keep up with recent developments in construction, students to read their study books and international journals only available in English, to name but a few groups [2];

– developments in linguistics which expedited the way for English courses adjusted to learners' specific needs. The conventional linguists sought to describe the features of language, while the thoroughgoing trailblazers focused on studies intended to discover the ways in which language is actually used in communication [11];

– studies in psychology is another significant agent which contributed to the emergence of the ESP [12]. Different learners have different needs and interests which affect their learning inducement and efficiency of learning. In this case teachers have to make use of different teaching strategies and use different teaching aids. Underscoring the importance of learners and their attitudes to learning, studies in psychology gave rise to a learner-centred approach and had their repercussions for the decades to come.

These four main factors have always underlined the need for amplified specialization in language teaching [9].

A chronological history and evolution of the ESP as a domain of language can assist better understand the indispensable question of how is the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) distinct from English as a Second Language (ESL), also known as General English.

1. HISTORY

The English language for specific purposes has a quite long history and dates back to the times of the Roman and Greek Empires. Its contemporary origins, however, can be traced back to the early 1960's and are colligated with the *Episodes in ESP* by John Malcolm Swales and the book *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* by Michael Alexander Halliday, Angus McIntosh, and Peter Strevens (1964). During the early phase of the ESP formation, referred to as the register analysis phase, the central focus of research was English for Science and Technology (EST) in academic settings [2]. The approach operated on the principle that language varies and its distinctive varieties depend on different users and their intrinsic speech habits, as well as on language particular uses, i.e. registers, the latter being related to various purposes to which language is put. Thus the goal of analysis was to perceive how the language system manifested itself in different language styles, e.g. in Medical English as opposed to English for Engineering. Early research involved statistical grammatical counts within written discourse [13]. As observed by Swales, this approach was purely descriptive and quantitative in nature and "*had little explanatory force*" [14, p.59]. Despite its potential application, it did not provide guidance as to when one grammatical form is more preferable to another. Neither did it give any information on how a particular form fits into the structure of the text. The early 1970s attested the advent of a new handling associated with a group of authoritative EST investigators, such as Judith A. Lackstrom, Larry Selinker and Louis Preston Trimble. Their "*Grammar and Technical English*" (1972), republished and discussed in Episodes (1988) by John Malcolm Swales, had a considerable impact on further development of the ESP research and ushered in the emerging domain of rhetorical or discourse analysis [2]. Consequently, the concern of research has shifted to "*the relationships between EST grammar and lexicon and the authors' rhetorical purposes*" [13, p.24]. In the late 1970s, an attempt to outline the goals of the ESP rhetorical theory was undertaken, namely that it should attempt to establish a correspondence of purpose with device signifying linguistic means employed by the author to attain the coveted end. A valuable contribution to the development of the rhetorical theory was made by Elaine Tarone et al. (1981) through the work which appeared in the first printing of *The ESP Journal* (ESPJ) and was reprinted in Swales' *Episodes* (1988). In contrast with some of their foregoers, Elaine Tarone and her colleagues did not attempt to generalize the scientific language features by genre. They only cantered on one key characteristic of a limited range of investigation articles in astrophysics, i.e. the passive voice. They formulated their postulates about the functions of the selected grammatical characteristic and its influence on authors' rhetorical specifications. They tested their conclusions by involving an expert, or a "*specialist informant*" in their study strategy [15, p.123-40].

The period between 1981 and 1990 witnessed the introduction of the key ESP concepts. The publication of the monograph *Aspects of Article Introductions* by J. M. Swales marked the beginning of a sequential period [13]. In his work the author presented an approach which also appeared in the expanded form in his *Genre Analysis* (1990). Being broadly recognized, it commenced "*a research boom that has yet to end*" [13, p.26]. At that time the scope of the ESP research was confined to the EST in academic contexts. But, owing to an endeavour made by The ESPJ editors, John Swales and Ann Johns, the scope of ESP study considerably augmented, eventually returning to the original comprehensive definition of ESP proposed by Peter Strevens (1977). The most repeatedly raised topics included **needs analysis (NA), genre and rhetorical moves**. The three issues are still eminently efficient for researchers; that is why they continue to preponderate in the ESP theory and practice.

The first series of articles on Needs Analysis (NA) appeared in the years following the publication of the first issue of The ESPJ in 1981 [3]. Before the 1970s, needs analysis was quite informal and very little research was done to assess learner needs since teaching was based mostly on intuitive or informal analysis of students' needs. In 1970s the NA set foot in the literature of the subject as a formal concept that was largely defined in terms of the target situation analysis. The proposed approach to needs was a radical departure from the prevailing thinking at that time that based learner needs on lexicostatistical analysis of scientific prose and its grammatical structures [16, *p.* 366-88]. However, both the functional and register analysis approaches to needs have been excoriated, especially for providing only blurred empirical data on the target situation and not correlating grammatical findings with different text sections and their respective rhetorical goals [17, p.19-76]. As the concept of the NA broadened over time, it included – in addition to target situation analysis – some extra components, such as subjective needs analysis, present situation analysis, learning needs analysis, discourse/genre analysis and means analysis. In the mid 1980s, the NA looked at the EST discourse and its focus shifted from register to rhetoric. The 1990s the NA became ethnographically oriented, with needs being articulated in terms of genres produced and enacted within appropriate discourse communities. In keeping with the changes, research into learner needs became more complex, increasingly empirical and triangulated. Multiple instruments and sources of data collection were employed by some researchers to ensure that a wide multiplicity of data is collected. Nowadays, it is possible to observe a tendency to employ task-based NAs to acquire quality data, and the transposition of the NA focus from "*the notions and functions supposedly required to satisfy various occupational language*" to expert insider knowledge [17, p.21]. As for the terms like genre and rhetorical movements, they gained considerable importance in the field of the ESP through the publication of the first issue of *The ESPJ and Aspects of Article Introductions* in 1981 as well as the appearance of Genre Analysis [13]. These terms were promoted in Britain in the early 1980s owing to John Swales' monograph, and in other parts of the world shortly after the publication of his *Genre Analysis* (1990) [18]. John Swales' *Creating a Research Space Model* (CARS) "*has had a tremendous influence on genre analysis in the ESP and on the teaching of academic writing, both to international or L1 students, or to professional writers wishing to publish in international journals*" [19, p.3-11].

The researchers who have worked in the field of ESP from 1990 up to now have revealed the importance of international journals and genre studies. Since the first publication of what was then called *The ESP Journal*, founded by Grace Burkhart from the American University of Washington, D.C., in 1981, other weighty international ESP journals have been created. All of them publish articles which are substantial for the understanding of the modern ESP research. In 1992, Ilona Leki from the University of Tennessee and Tony Silva from the Purdue University became the founding editors of *The Journal of Second Language Writing* (*JSLW*). This periodical is devoted to publishing theoretically grounded reports of research and discussions that represent a significant contribution to current understandings of central issues in second and foreign language writing and writing instruction. Though the central focus of articles appearing in The JSLW is second/foreign language writing and writing instruction, the journal also publishes articles on academic argumentation, text analysis, ESP-related issues and genre-based studies. In 2001, Liz Hamp-Lyons and Ken Hyland established *The Journal of English for Academic Purposes* (JEAP). It provides a forum for the dissemination of information and views which enables practitioners of and researchers in EAP to keep current with developments in their field and to contribute to its continued updating. In May 2002, there appeared the first issue of *English for Specific Purposes World*, an international online journal publishing papers on topics related to a wide range of ESP issues. There is also *Ibérica*, the official journal of AELFE, the European

Association of languages for Specific Purposes, which publishes articles pertinent to the field, e.g. on genre analysis, LSP teacher education, metadiscourse research and the like. *The Asian ESP Journal* deals with key issues in the ESP sphere. Some of these journals have experienced a quick increase in international editions, which is due to the fact that in some countries academics are required to publish their articles in international periodicals in order to be allowed to work at higher education institutions. In many cases, this move is the result of efforts made by national educational organizations and individual institutions "*to boost university rankings internationally*" [13, p.30].

As for the most productive topic which has been discussed during the modern period of the ESP' development, genre studies, launched by Swales in his *Genre Analysis* (1990), can be underlined. The research that followed its publication reflects developments in the theory of genre, both "*in its move towards a more interdisciplinary perspective and diverse range of methods*" [20, p.145-73]. Adopting a corpus-based approach to the study of academic genres, Ken Hyland (2000) makes a comparison of lexico-grammatical features and arranges structures within eight academic disciplines, ranging from the so-called "*hard sciences*" (i.e. the sciences) to the "*soft sciences*" (i.e. social sciences and humanities) [21]. Following the example set by Elaine Tarone et al. (1981), interviews with specialist informants have become central to this kind of studies. The analysis of discourse frames did not ignore professional genres, e.g. corporate disclosure documents, letters of application, newspaper law reports or popularized medical texts [22, p.389-409]. The work of other researchers (e.g. Douglas Biber et al. 1994; Douglas Biber et al. 2004) has proved that the application of language varies across disciplines and genres and that these differences have to be accounted for in genre studies. In 1998 the term "*textography*" was introduced into the ESP lexicon via the work *Other Floors, Other Voic*es written by J.M. Swales. As defined by Swales, textography refers to a method of text analysis that is "*something more than a disembodied textual or discourse analysis, but something less than a full ethnographic account*" [23, p.1]. Using this methodology, John Swales studied the interactions of texts and contexts in three different discourse communities. He employed interviews, observations, broad analysis of textual histories and close analysis of key texts. An attempt to expand analysis is also reflected in the studies carried out by Berkenkotter and Tardy that adopted an intertextual approach to genre analysis, and integrated multiple modes, i.e. visual images or oral texts into generic communication used by Elizabeth Rowley-Jolive. Vijay Kumar Bhatia (2008) presented a structure for critical genre analysis (CGA), which combines analysis of text, genre, professional practice and culture. Research in this direction explores genre users and their engagement with texts through the use of interviews, surveys and/or ethnographic approaches [24, p.579-605]. Apart from context-driven genre analysis, recent ESP research has also paid increased attention to exploring how individuals use and shape genre within larger communities. Genre studies have had their pedagogical implications. A common strategy adapted to teaching and learning specific purpose genres is referred to as "*metacommunication*" [25, p.105-19]. It involves the explicit analysis of examples of selected genres in the ESP classroom with a view to heightening learners' awareness of the genre-specific language characteristics, rhetorical organization, and communicative goals [26, p.44-72]. Ann Johns' ethnographic treatment of genre-based ESP pedagogy, which aims at developing learners' academic literary skills, best illustrates the point [27]. Looking outside of the text to the social context, she claims that for the goal of genre acquisition, learners need not only textual knowledge, but also the knowledge of social practice, and the latter can only be obtained if they become engaged in research of literary activity, including genres. Similar conclusions have been drawn by other researchers of the time.

This period is also characterized by the increased use of corpus studies. Although important studies have been conducted on oral language, the majority of work done in the area concerned analyses of written academic genres. Ken Hyland's *Metadiscourse* is one of the most influential in the ESP corpus studies [28]. Speaking of the ways in which writers relate to their readers, Ken Hyland focused on "*those aspects of text which explicitly refer to the organization of the discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or the reader*" and on "*textual voice or community recognized personality*" [29, p.173-192]. Exploring differences between the "*hard*" and "*soft*" disciplines, he complemented his text-based research carrying out interviews with specialist informants. Attention has also been paid to "*evaluative language*" defined as the writer's position towards propositions discussed. Respectively, a special issue of *The JEAP* (Vol. 2/4, 2003) was devoted to examining and critiquing evaluative language and its goals within and among academic discourses. In contrast to the wealth of corpus-based research on student and professional writing in the academy, there has been little exploration into English for Occupational Purposes EOP written texts [30, p.222-51]. Corpus-

based studies most frequently studied the fastest growing branches of the EOP, i.e. those associated with constantly expanding professions, like English for Business Purposes (EBP), English for Medical Purposes (EMP) or English for Legal Purposes (ELP). It is expected that future corpus-based studies will reflect "*the increasing interdisciplinary in the field*" and the attendant "*hybridization of genres*" [30, p.222-51]. The use of corpora in ESP teaching and learning seems to be justified by the fact that ESP learners are rarely well-grounded in highly specific language use. Neither do fluent ESP practitioners have much intuitive understanding of the way language is used in certain professional domains. There are studies that provide information on the differences between corpus evidence and language use in academic writing textbooks, and thus point to an important link between corpus data and ESP teaching. Such findings have led to revisions in ESP syllabus content, and greater use of corpus data in English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) textbooks. They have also begun *to influence the ESP materials in many areas* [31, p.451-73]. The use of corpora in ESP teaching and learning can range from providing examples that illustrate accepted language use to adopting a treatment referred to as data-driven learning (DDL). The term has been created by Johns (1989) to describe one-to-one writing consultations, during which the learner and advisor explore online corpus data to solve language problems encountered by the learner. Approaches to corpus work in relation to ESP teaching are changing in response to advances in technology [31, p.451-73].

2. ESP – PERSPECTIVES (CONCLUSIONS)

A comprehensive exploration of the history and development of the ESP permit us to better understand this area of English language. The ESP has developed into a divers theoretical and research ground. In many countries, the study of the ESP is carried out within the framework of the scientific style. Researchers view the ESP as one of the varieties of a language. In addition to the analysis of the morphological composition and features, syntactic structure and multi-genre are all taken into consideration when examining the ESP within the framework of the scientific style.

Currently, the ESP is developing in two directions: linguistic (a functional approach to the study of language as a systematic and structural education) and didactic (methods of teaching the ESP). While in the 1960s the ESP was contrasted to the language for general purposes, it is now viewed as the sum of all the linguistic resources used in oral and written texts. The definitions of the ESP have also evolved; each of them has evidenced the changes in theoreticians', researchers' and practitioners' views. However, all the definitions have common elements that embrace the ESP's aim at meeting the very specific needs of a very specific group of learners. It could be said that the English for Specific Purposes has developed out of the need to provide specific courses for students who had to learn English more as a means to an end rather than for the sake of learning English itself. The guiding principle proposed for the ESP by Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters "*Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you what English you need*" is in perfect accord with the above statement along with the history and development of ESP [9, p.8].

In his envoi to New Directions in English for Specific Research, John Swales states that over the last 50 years, the field has not only become deeper, but also broader. The formerly narrow field that could be defined "*as having a few expert specialists at the top, followed by a large number of relatively unadventurous and underprepared practitioners*" [32, p.271-74] has expanded. These developments can be attributed to the fact that many of the topics, which have been around in the field for some time, like the needs assessment, have been revisited and thus enriched with new insights and perspectives. Some of the research topics are and will undoubtedly be revisited and explored anew. It is likely that in the future, more attention and resources will be devoted to genres unexplored so far, like poster discussions, conference presentations or research group meetings. Genre analysis might be considerably assisted by corpus linguistic techniques employed to collect and analyse mega-databanks of authentic spoken and written discourse. When complemented with genre analysis and ethnographic approach to data interpretation, corpus linguistics will undoubtedly make important contribution to ESP research in the years to come. One might as well expect that the use of corpora in the ESP classroom will become more popular in the future. Future developments in software will not only move corpus analysis forward, but will also provide researchers with access to larger corpora, allowing them to support their statistical claims about language use in specific settings. Also, as pointed out by Swales, one would expect that "*the currently insecure relationship between corpus linguistics and ESP practice*" might "*clarify what the corpus is most good for and what it is less good for*" [32, p.274]. Future research investigations will undoubtedly

witness further interest in need analysis (NA) and a further move away from the objective, hard kind of assessment pioneered by John Munby to "*softer*" analysis, more open to the subjective needs of the learners themselves and other relevant parties involved in the process of the ESP teaching, i.e. the ESP teachers, consultants, administrators. Concern with the ESP teacher development, given the specificity and demanding nature of ESP teaching and the fact that there is not enough literature on ESP teacher education, will certainly lead to research initiatives focusing on ESP teacher needs which constitute a basis for determining the content of the ESP teacher education programmes. Researchers will probably also continue to be interested in what actually happens in an ESP classroom, especially given the fact that there has been "*all too little careful research*" conducted in this area [32, p.273]. They might as well focus their attention on less popular academic locales, such as vocational and secondary schools, different businesses, online media, to name but a few. As concluded by A.M. Johns, future ESP research agenda might be characterized by a variety of topics under investigation and methodologies adapted to research specific issues. Owing to further diversification of investigation locales, it may also bring forward more specific contexts as well as greater research complexity realized through methodological triangulation. Doubtless, the future ESP research might also introduce and explore topics different from the ones that have been considered so far. Taking into account that change is a constant in our globalized world, the ESP will continue to build on its history by tracing its path in the years to come.

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