

## WRITTEN PIDGIN ENGLISH

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The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the relation between spoken language and writing by examining the changes taking place in New Guinea Pidgin English (Neo-Melanesian) since it has been used in written form in recent years.

### Introductory.

Modern Linguistics begins with an understanding of the distinction between spoken language and writing. An early study of language such as Swift's Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue, 1712, appears naive to us, not because Swift lacks a historical outlook, since the whole theme of this treatise is the problem of change in language, but because he fails to consider speech as the primary form of language with writing a form derived from it. So he can say there was no change in Greek from the time of Homer to that of Plutarch, or that Chinese has remained unchanged for 2,000 years. Attacking the suggestion that we should spell as we speak, he says it would be as wise to shape our bodies to our clothes. So spoken language, with its changes of fashion, is seen as the clothing of the permanent written word. The nineteenth century, with its emphasis on sound change, drew attention beyond documents to speech. Varieties of language, dialects and primitive forms, had equal scientific status with the languages that were written.

Now it is written language, if anything, that is seen as the clothing - often a bygone fashion perpetuated like the habit of a religious order. Jespersen says "Writing is only a substitute for speaking". Bloomfield sees it as "merely a way of recording language". Saussure draws attention to the usefulness, but also the limitations and dangers of the written form for linguists, and centres interest on the spoken form, suggesting that to do otherwise is to think that the best way to get to know someone is to study his photograph. All this is necessary, and at least a retrospective credo for nineteenth century phonology.

But it is not enough. Vendryes discusses the relationships of writing and speech at some length - "One doesn't write as one speaks; one tries to write as others write". He sees that theories of progress in language concern writing. Marcel Cohen notes that written language takes on a certain autonomy, though the gap between it and speech is constantly reduced again by resistance to archaism. C.F. Hockett, though pointing out that writing is not the linguist's primary concern, notes several ways

in which the correspondence between speech and writing is not exact. He points out certain omissions in writing, and, more to our purpose now, certain new features such as communication at a distance through space or time, leading to the use of writing to communicate with oneself, so that it becomes an external memory; the possibility of managing more complex and detailed records, such as seven-figure log. tables and the possibility of new arrangements, like bracketing in maths, the difference between  $(6 \times 7) + 4$  and  $6 \times (7 + 4)$ , and more complicated examples where breath pauses in speech could not replace brackets. This seems to me important. Extending the principle of bracketing and external memory to grammar, we find that, just as one can do more complicated sums on paper than in one's head, so written language can develop more complex and more precise sentence structures than speech, and it becomes a language for recording and developing science, technology and philosophy.

A language develops with use, and giving a language written form allows it to be used in new ways, and the new uses change it. These changes may occur first in writing, but there is a constant interaction between speech and writing in languages that have both.

Writing is the basis of literacy and urban civilization. The development of a written form of their spoken language is a very important event for a people. If writing were merely a substitute for speaking or a way of recording language, then the granting of an alphabet should give the speakers of any language the linguistic equipment for modern technological civilization. But it is not as simple as that. The development of a written language is a complicated process. The chief effects observable in Pidgin English seem to be:

1. The hastening of the development of a standard form of language (the one chosen as the basis for a standard written form).
2. Extension of vocabulary as written sources introduce experience beyond the local and immediate.
3. The introduction of questions of prestige among languages when a "merely vernacular" language begins to be used for purposes associated with a traditional "literary" language. (In the case of Pidgin this merely emphasises attitudes already formed before writing of Pidgin was common).
4. The development of complex sentences for the more extended thought of written composition.

#### Nature and History of Neo-Melanesian.

This has been essentially an oral language. Pidgin languages arise when traders establish communication with speakers of another language by using a reduced and simplified version of their normal

speech. Thus they differ from languages in the strict sense in that they are nobody's first language, at least when they begin. They may remain a small collection of words or grow to full language size as Neo-Melanesian and Haitian Creole have done. They soon develop some regularity of vocabulary and grammar, since, once a form has been used and understood, it is obviously economical to keep to that form. Departures from it will be eliminated in practice by the hearer's failure to comprehend. Newcomers will learn the run of the ropes, the forms that are effective in practice. They may not think they are learning a foreign language, but they are.

Pidgin English from the China coast was brought to the Pacific and adapted to become the Neo-Melanesian language, as R.A. Hall of Cornell has called it, to persuade people to regard it as a language, not a 'corruption' of English. The English origin is obvious, some three-quarters of the vocabulary, though frequently with some meaning change. The rest consists of Portuguese via Macao (save, pikinini from Port. pequeninho), German (rausim from heraus), a few Christian Latin borrowings from the missions, like pekato 'sin', and native words like balus 'bird' and kaikai (Polynesian = 'food').

Pidgin was already written by German administrators, who, having failed to suppress the lingua franca that was there before they came, used it officially with a basically sound orthography based on usage at Rabaul, their capital. Then in 1914 a proclamation was read, in Pidgin, informing the people that 'niu-fella masta' had replaced 'arafella masta'. This proclamation is reprinted in Rabaul News, 14th September, 1957, in a spelling not notably different from the spelling recommended by linguists such as R.A. Hall (though Hall might not approve of the grammar). A few unnecessary deviations from phonemic spelling occur, notably double l in fella and the non-phonemic svabharakti vowel in filak bilak (flag, black). There is occasional English spelling, especially Police Master (though masta elsewhere), and at the end is a slogan "No More 'Um Kaiser - God Save 'Um King" where only 'um is non-English. This appendage certainly looks rather odd.

Pidgin seems to have suffered some setback after 1914. In neighbouring Papua the first Governor, Sir Hubert Murray, had succeeded in keeping it out and replacing it with a pidginized form of Motu, called Police Motu. In New Guinea, missions, especially Catholic missions, continued to write it and it was used by the Government in propaganda leaflets during World War II. But, like English after the Norman Conquest, it shows some decline from a standard central written tradition; missions varied in their way of spelling Pidgin and in innovations of vocabulary. Some idea of the variations in written forms and vocabulary of Pidgin can be gained from the three versions of the Lord's Prayer quoted by S.J. Baker in The Australian Language, (p.235). In the Catholic mission at Alexishafen the text begins "Fader bilong mifelo, yu stop long heven". In the Catholic mission at Vunapope it was "Papa bolong mipela i stap antap". At the Methodist mission at Rabaul it went "Papa bilog mi fela, iu stop

an top alog peles bilog iu".

Middle English was equally diverse in its spellings, though Old English had been comparatively consistent. Early Middle English was the language of a subject lower class, not much used for dignified purposes. For political reasons, Henry III issued a proclamation in English in 1258, and English was used early in written religious homilies. It was not used in schools when Higden wrote his Polychronicon in 1327, though Trevisa translating this work about 1385 says all this was changed then. Yet, much later, in Tudor times, Latin was taught in Latin in grammar schools, as English is taught in English now in the Solomon Islands. Lapses into English in the one case, or from it into Pidgin in the other might be punishable offences.

In New Guinea, Pidgin is now used in schools. The official aim is ultimately to promote English. It seems unlikely it will ever be economic to translate into Pidgin all the reference books and encyclopaedias that even a small Public Library would require, let alone enough to be a basis for full equal participation in the modern scientific world. But meanwhile there are few teachers available and, as Margaret Mead has pointed out, the choice for many people is literacy in Pidgin or none at all. Therefore, in places where it is already established as a spoken language, Pidgin is made use of for schooling. The Australian view seems to be this: "It is better, if agreement on this can be reached, to translate into a language which is generally understood some of the books which it is most necessary to know, and bring it about that as many as possible learn to read well in Pidgin. Those who can advance further should learn English". This is a free paraphrase, and since the author was not an Australian, but King Alfred writing his preface to a vernacular translation of Gregory's Pastoral Care, I have substituted the word 'Pidgin' for 'English' and 'English' for 'Latin'.

#### Effects of Writing:

##### 1. Standardization.

The variant spellings of the missions in the years between the wars indicate a first need for the widespread use of written Pidgin throughout the Territory. For more general use, standardization is clearly necessary, just as a standard form of English, French or Italian became desirable for national administration and nation-wide circulation of printed books. In New Guinea this has now been decided by adopting the pronunciation of Madang as a basis for phonemic spelling. There is no point in imitating English spelling, if we regard Pidgin as a separate language: it will not even help those who go on to learn English - their pre-occupation will be with keeping the languages separate. Moreover, some learners of written Pidgin will have learned to write their native languages at mission schools, using a phonemic spelling based on the International Phonetic Alphabet.

The reasons for choosing Madang pronunciation are set out in An Outline of Melanesian Pidgin, a mimeographed study course

manual by T.A. Dietz, 1956. Noting dialect variations of pronunciation, e.g. in the word man pronounced [man] in Rabaul, [mAn] in Sepik, he says: "In such cases the Madang pronunciation will be taught. This is because Madang is central in the Pidgin area, but the Madang pronunciation is not 'better' or 'worse' than any other pronunciation, just as Australian English is not better or worse than New Zealand or Canadian English. However, one pronunciation has to be selected for class purposes, and that of Madang seems the most logical choice. Other dialects will not be regarded as incorrect, or in any way inferior. No attempt should be made by speakers of any area to alter their pronunciation to that of Madang. The Madang dialect is used to determine the standard spelling, but the pronunciation will remain that of the area in question".

It will be interesting to see whether, despite this careful statement, Madang gains some prestige over other varieties of Pidgin.

Early written forms of Pidgin frequently showed indecision as to what was to be considered a separate word. An Englishman hearing the sentence "Dispela man i-ridim buk" recognizes derivatives of the English words "this", "fellow", "man", "he", "read", "him", "book", and such a sentence was often written down in a form approaching a list of its English roots, though in Pidgin -pela, -im and i- are bound morphemes. These bound morphemes are properly written as part of a word or, in the case of i-, attached to the following word by a hyphen.

## 2. Extension of Vocabulary.

Adequate standard spelling, based on a proper grammatical analysis, is, however, only the first problem in setting up a written language. Pidgin, because of its origin, has a fairly limited vocabulary, with a corresponding wide range of meaning for a given word. Thus pikinini means not only 'child', but the young of any animal, or even a tree. Pikinini bilong bulmakau serves instead of calf, pikinini bilong diwai, berry, and so on. It was once believed by some that it is a sign of a primitive language to have, say, six words for different kinds of snow, but no general term 'snow', in which case it would seem that English is more primitive than Neo-Melanesian, in that our words 'hair', 'wool', 'feathers', 'grass' and 'beard' have no generalizing concept to translate the common term in 'giras bilong hed' (hair), 'giras bilong sipsip' (wool), 'giras bilong balus' (feathers) and 'giras bilong maus' (beard).

In Pidgin set phrases eke out the vocabulary and context gives precision to the meaning. It could be argued that this analytical procedure is economical and philosophically commendable, like a biologist's genus and species. But the circumlocutions of Pidgin have provoked the Englishman's laughter more often than his praise. There is a legend as old as Jespersen's Language, Its Nature, Development and Origin that the Pidgin word for piano is "bigfela bokis yu faitim i-krai". This is a description, not a word, comparable with descriptions of things unfamiliar to

ourselves in a Pidgin to English glossary, e.g. John J. Murphy in The Book of Pidgin English defines laplap "Length of cloth worn round the waist like a kilt". If pianos become common in New Guinea, they will borrow the word piano.

Writing brings stories of other countries, new ideas, new demands on the language. Hall, telling the story of Theseus for schools seems to have found no vernacular word for city, the city of Athens. There is nothing new about this problem. Chaucer, writing the 'Treatise on the Astrolabe' found astronomical terms lacking in English. There was always a Latin word to provide the concept for translation, and the easy thing was to use this word, explaining its meaning. "And take keep", Chaucer writes to little Lewis, his son, "for from henceforthward I will call the height of anything that is taken by thy rule the 'altitude' without more words". Hall calls a city siti, putting in brackets (taun, bigfela ples) and thereafter uses siti without more words. As all Latin was potentially English, so all English is potentially Neo-Melanesian. Sometimes the word is adopted with its English spelling. Not always: the Rabaul News 31st August, 1957, spells 'Auxiliary Division' oksilri divisen; but more usually it leaves official names in English spelling e.g. "Legislative Council" in English spelling is a heading on 29th September, 1956 and below 'Budget Session' likewise. In the first sentence "Last Monday, 24 September 1956, Budget Session bilong Legislative Council i-start long Port Moresby", only bilong, i- and long have non-English form. Kaunsil is phonetically spelt kaunsil on 21st September, 1957, but in the heading 'Niupela Members bilong Niupela Legislative Kaunsil', members takes an English plural. This is not like our learned plurals, phenomena, indices or rhinoceroes, where an unfamiliar form occurs: The word members in Pidgin introduces an unfamiliar grammatical concept of plurality in nouns. It is perhaps comparable with the giving of accusative or ablative case to borrowed Latin words in an astronomical text written in English about 1375, where the borrowed word aux ('apogee', roughly) occurs in the phrases by augen, from auge. (See appendix to "Equatorie of the Planetis", Cambridge, 1955.)

Some neologisms in Pidgin disturb the simple rule of initial stress in the spoken language, e.g. association, cooperative. This spreads, so that an old verb 'lukaut is often now luk'aut. Learned borrowings in English similarly disturbed a simple stress rule.

Even grammar is affected by English influence. Hall heard a speaker say in 1954 "Mis~~is~~ she no kam yet" instead of "Misis i-no kam yet". An etymological remodelling: the predicate marker i- was interpreted as English he and replaced by the English feminine she. The introduction of a feminine pronoun is a considerable innovation. There are real dangers here. If such innovations became too common, Pidgin might lose its structural identity, and then it is merely broken English.

Generally, borrowings in Pidgin, as in late Middle English, seem likely to create an official and learned stratum of the language, especially associated with writing.

### 3. Prestige of 'tutor language'.

In the years following Chaucer, there was less concern about the inadequacy of the vocabulary of English - that concern came later - than with its lack of eloquence. It seemed a crude language. "Our natural tonge is rude", Skelton wrote, and complained, through a lady wanting an epitaph for her bird:

If I wolde apply  
To write ornatly  
I wot not where to finde  
Termes to suit my mynde.

An epitaph needs Latin for dignity.

The Translation of the Bible into English aroused many debates, not all of them linguistic, but one objection raised against the Bible in English was that English was not a worthy medium for the Holy Word. Bishop Gardiner in 1546 objects particularly to the translation of Latin panis by 'bread': "for panis in latyn is a general word, and signifieth not only bread wherewith men be fed, but also all other nourriture wherewith man is susteined, which the word (bread) doth not in englysh". Of course, put to its new use, the English word has taken on the meanings of Late Latin panis. Pidgin translates the daily bread with the word kaikai - "yu bringim kaikai tede belong mipela" (Vunapope). This has the required general sense (at least of all food), though to English ears it may lack solemnity, as English did to ears trained to associate holy things with Latin. Similarly we are surprised when we learn that some verses of Sophocles have been rendered in Pidgin blank verse. Where are the ornate terms in Pidgin? Pidgin is often condemned as 'barbarous': the very word frequently used to condemn early Modern English. We look on Pidgin as an ideal scholar reading and thinking in Latin might look on vernacular English or French. This sort of relationship belongs to the external history of the language. Pidgin itself in turn becomes a prestige language when a plantation boy goes home to a village in the New Guinea interior.

The problem extends beyond written Pidgin. English speakers look at Pidgin etymologically. We normally think of etymological questions from the receiving end. We are told perhaps that "aggravate" means 'make worse' because its Latin root determines that meaning (though we don't apply a similar argument to "provoke"). We learn to resist this argument and recognize the limitation of etymology applied to synchronic semantic problems. But in Pidgin it is easy for English speakers to be unaware of this same etymological prejudice. For example, the normal Pidgin word for 'hurt' or 'destroy' is bagarap - a quite colourless word with none of the taboo it has in English. The word as means the bottom of anything, and by extension 'cause'. "Disfela dog i-as bilong kros" - 'This dog is the cause of the argument'. A missionary says, "God i-as bilong ologeta samting" - 'God is the source of all things'. Even a linguist cannot quite suppress a sense of the etymology of these words if he knows colloquial English. Linguists know that the semantic tone of a word in a

parent language may not be transferred in a borrowed word, but many Europeans who have contact with speakers of Pidgin do not think this way. However irrational their views, the linguistic accident that Pidgin derives from the less literary strata of English creates social problems that are quite real. There is something to be said, then, for missionary attempts to alter some words in accordance with English prejudice. Hall, writing in Oceania (December 1955) on innovations in Pidgin notes that bel (from belly) as the seat of the emotions - e.g. belihat, 'anger' - tends to be replaced now by hart. So, boi, a Melanesian of any age, is replaced by netiv, because the Melanesians feel the English connotation of inferiority. Again haus sik is replaced by 'hospital': a new stratum of learned borrowings, prestige words, is added to the language. There is perhaps a danger that, since Europeanisms are likely to spread slowly from centres of contact, there will grow up prestige dialects. A speaker who says hospital will feel a cut above the speaker who says haus sik.

#### 4. Syntax

With all these changes, these additions of vocabulary for usefulness or dignity, are the apologists of Pidgin right in saying that Pidgin is capable of expressing anything that can be written in learned English? The same sort of optimism marked early 16th century justifications of English, but written English underwent many changes before it became a precise instrument for modern science. We believe, of course, that decay of inflections was no bad thing: we count it an advantage. Pidgin, having dispensed with tense in verbs and number in nouns has become even more analytical. But an oral language lacks some philosophical instruments. There are general words in Pidgin but few abstract words. The growth of Greek philosophy depended on such constructions as neuter adjective and article. Write τὸ καλόν, the beautiful, beauty and τὸ ἀγαθόν, the good, and you have initiated aesthetics and ethics as studies. The Platonic universals are at hand. But Pidgin is much more concrete. "Lead us not into temptation" in Vunapope became "Yu no bringim mipela klostu long rot i-nogut" - metaphorical but not abstract. Murphy gives a demonstration rendering of Antony's speech in Julius Caesar: in it "The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones" becomes "Sapos sampela wok bilong wanpela man i-stret; sampela i-no stret; na man i-dai; ol i wailis long wok i-no stret tasol" (If some actions of a man are right, some are not right, and the man dies, people talk about the actions that are not right only).

Adjectives can be used as nouns. In Alexishafen "Forgive us our trespasses" became "Forgivim rong bilong mifelo" which is neater than the Rabaul "I qud yu no mekim koros alog mi fela alog ol a fasin no qud mi fela mekim".

A language which prefers concrete vocabulary may still become a literary language. Classical Latin was such a language, yet it gained a prestige in Renaissance Europe equal to that of Australian English in New Guinea now. A more essential feature of writing is organized sentence structure. Fries suggests that



the sentence, like the paragraph, belongs to writing rather than speech. T.B.L. Webster has compared the development of Greek thought with the simultaneous evolution of the periodic sentence. One can organize more complex thought in complex written expression. Most real education is teaching people to do this.

Early written languages are usually simple in sentence structure. They use and as a general conjunction, the construction parataxis. Hypotaxis develops later. In Pidgin the materials for developing tighter sentence construction are still nascent. Sipos (for if) still seems to carry something of the imperative verb force of its origin: its clause is more independent than a conditional clause in English. The main clause may be introduced by orait: Thus Hall "Minos i-tokim em 'Spos yu no laik mi kisim siti bilong yu, bagarimapim haus, pulim meri, kukim olgeda samting, orait, yu mas mekim olsem mi tok nau . . .'"

Murphy, incidentally, says that the correlatives sipos . . . orait translate 'whenever', though Hall is clearly not using it this way. Grammarians disagree, and we are tempted to ask "Who is right?" Once we do this, Pidgin will be on its way to the experience of English: two or three centuries of grammarians making rules about the force of conjunctions and sentence structures. It may be unavoidable if Pidgin is to grow into a full literary language for science, philosophy and the sophisticated pursuits of urban civilised life. A literary language is to some extent artificial, but it is a limited artificiality, not a free creation like the grammar of Esperanto. It must work with living speech material, giving precise form to elements already in speech.

If we read the verbatim report of an oral eyewitness account of the cargo cult in Manus, printed in Pidgin in Margaret Mead's New Worlds for Old, (p.493), we find that, though it lacks the organization of written language, it nevertheless shows the beginnings of complex sentences. It starts off: "Orait, na lonk tajm mipela stap lonk Nropwa, Najs i kisim pinis Peri" (Now, when we were at Ndropwa the 'Noise' reached Peri). "Lonk tajm" ("at the time") serves as a temporal conjunction.

A reasonably complex sentence, taken at random from the Rabaul News, 3rd August, 1957, will show how far colloquial elements supplement borrowings to form conjunctions and other 'empty words' and how a form of language for the demands of journalism is developing. A successful blood transfusion has saved a life and an appeal is made for donors (Givim blut - i-sevim laif). The recovery of the sick woman is described: "Dispela meri i moa orait nau na sapos i orait bek tru nau na i no dai, despela i bikos em i kamap kwik long Haus Sik, tokim ol Dokta long sik bilong em na long wonem tu - em opresen (operation) or wok bilong katim i bin nambawan na i kisim niupela blut i kam long ol arapela" (This woman is better now, and if she has really recovered now and does not die, this is because she came quickly to the hospital and told the doctors about her sickness, and also because the operation was successful and she received new blood which came from the others).

In this sentence the third person plural pronoun ol is used twice as a plural definite article, the singular em as a singular article. Wonem "why" provides a complex conjunction "and for a second reason that . . ." "Opresen" has the English spelling in brackets and an explanatory phrase which illustrates a common use of the borrowed conjunction or. Bin is Rabaul usage rather than 'standard' for indicating perfective aspect.

The uses writing makes possible are changing Pidgin. That a traders' jargon should develop into an instrument as precise and complex as this sentence, illustrates impressively the idea of negentropy (or ectropy) - increasing organization in language. Conjunctions like bikos or long wonem (from wonem = why?) are being borrowed from English or made from colloquial elements. New words like opresen extend vocabulary or replace phrases. Articles are developing, as they did in Romance languages, and distinctions of tense and aspect can be made if thought necessary. The need for articles and tense is perhaps felt most strongly by English users of Pidgin - who do much of the writing of it - as classically trained writers of English felt the need of, say an inflected relative pronoun. Such influences of an older literary language are common in developing a new written language. The language of modern science, as well as science itself, is a tradition going back to the Greeks.

The direction of change can be illustrated simply, by recalling that about 1940 Schebesta and Meiser reported that a sentence such as "Mi no kam skul bikos mi sik" was heard only in school and was not good Pidgin. The idiom was "Mi sik na mi no kam skul" (na = 'and'). But in 1954 Hall found bikos widespread. This change with its emphasis on causality and its conscious control over the relative importance given to facts and its indication of the relations between facts, brings Pidgin a step nearer to the rational language of science. We cannot assume that such change in their second language represents a change in thinking among the New Guinea people, but we can see exemplified in Pidgin the kind of changes that take place when writing extends the uses of a vernacular language.

### Summary of Discussion.

There was a general feeling that the importance of one single factor, writing, was overemphasized or oversimplified in this paper. Dr Biggs suggested that distinctions between more and less formal levels of language might be more basic and apply equally to languages without writing. In Maori the introduction of writing does not appear to have led to new structural features, except perhaps in legal language, and it is doubtful that this special language is always comprehensible to Maori speakers any way. (This doubt could extend to anglicized Pidgin and even Latinized English.)

D.R. Simmons instanced the example of Modern Breton, only recently written. Punctuation is developing to reflect intonation and other devices of the spoken language in writing.

The question was raised whether Pidgin is essentially different from the European vernaculars in the early modern period in having no real literary tradition to record. Mr Bulmer mentioned cargo cult myths and simple spontaneous songs of workmen, e.g.:

Ha ha Ham,  
Dispela i-kam;  
Ha Ha Ho,  
Dispela i-go.

Dr Hollyman drew attention to the great complexity of spoken language, its ability to use pause and intonation to convey subtle effects. These must be balanced against anything writing as an 'instrument of thought' adds. The speaker admits that speech has subtleties that writing cannot capture. Yet, if an unfair exercise of esprit d'escalier be permitted, the argument is analogous to pointing out that machinery extends the uses of the human hand without equalling its subtlety.

#### Bibliographical Note.

It will be evident that this paper was prepared without access to the best compendium on Pidgin, viz. "Dictionary and Grammar of Neo-Melanesian" by Rev. Francis Mihalic (Wewak and Techny Ill., 1957). The sections in this book on conjunctions and clause structures will provide much material for those interested in the development of Pidgin grammatical constructions out of English elements. Mihalic's dictionary may be accepted as 'standard' for orthography. I have not attempted to normalize my quotations but have preserved the spelling of the originals in each case.

The chief sources I used were:

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