

**The Contribution of Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Thinking in  
an EFL Context: A Case Study of Economic Texts**

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**Abstract**

Teachers wish their learners not to take all provided information for granted; rather, they expect to enable their learners to develop higher order thinking skills and to be reflective. When applied to academic contexts, critical discourse analysis seems to play an undeniable role in the development of reflective thoughts by students. The current study investigated the effect of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner's critical thinking (CT) ability in economic translation texts classes. To this end, 60 undergraduate English translation students at the intermediate level of proficiency were selected and assigned into two groups of experimental and control. The experimental group received instruction in order to make critical analysis both on articles handed out by teacher as well as follow-up CDA based presentations. The control group learners, on the other hand, received neither instruction nor any practice with respect to critical discourse analysis of texts. The data obtained from the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal were subject to independent samples t-test. The findings revealed that CDA had a positive and significant impact on EFL learners' critical thinking ability with the 'Interpretation' and 'Recognizing Unstated Assumption' sub-tests of critical thinking being most influenced. The significance of this finding in light of critical discourse analysis and implications for educationalists are discussed in detail.

**Keywords:** critical thinking, critical discourse analysis, translation, economic text, EFL learners

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Received: 23/10/2017    Accepted: 29/12/2017

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## 1. Introduction

Recent approaches in language teaching and education in general nowadays are attempting to put critical thinking skills in the spotlight. Fisher (2001) states that in recent years critical thinking has become a key element in educational settings. Fisher goes on to mention that educators have developed interest in teaching different thinking skills in opposition to teaching information and content. However, both educators and stakeholders involved in the act of teaching are concerned about their learners' lack of critical thinking skills. It is presumed that although textbooks and teachers require learners to carry out tasks that encourage critical thinking skills, they are not rich with techniques and methods to help them become more critical thinkers.

The present study attempts to look into the possible role of the use of critical discourse analysis in fostering learners' critical thinking skills. In the following sections, the concept of critical discourse analysis is defined followed by an overview of the significance of critical thinking in light of the existing research and the gaps in these arenas.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Critical Discourse Analysis*

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary field and should not be viewed as a universal or a narrow framework (Wiess & Wodak, 2003). Critical discourse analysis considers the implementation of a variety of strategies for the investigation of textual practice and language use regarded as social and cultural practices (Fairclough, 1989). Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach of exploring discourse that takes into account language as a type of social practice. Scholars in the field of CDA commonly put forward that (non-linguistic) social practice and linguistic practice entail one another and attending to the study of the ways societal power relations are created and strengthened through language use (Fairclough, 1995). Numerous CDA studies have examined sociological, psychological, historical, anthropological, semantic, philosophical and logical issues, each with various hypothetical models and research techniques (e.g., Baker, Gabrielatos, Khosravini, Krzyzanowski, McEnery, & Wodak, 2008).

The practical techniques of critical discourse analysis grew out of numerous disciplinary fields. Research in pragmatics, narratology and speech act theory refers to the fact that texts comprise types of social behaviour that occur in complex social situations. Research and theory in systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1985) signifies the way linguistic forms might be systematically associated with social and ideological functions. Critical discourse analysis employs analytic techniques from these fields to solve problems about larger, systemic connections of class, gender and culture. In educational research, this field has dealt with the study of the ways knowledge and identity are shaped and developed with respect to a number of texts.

One of the most significant and contributing approaches to CDA has been proposed by Fairclough (2003) which is discussed below. Fairclough (2003) has developed a rationalistic theory of discourse which views discourse as partially expressive that is related to language connections with distinct components of social practice (Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough's theory (see Figure 1) investigates the linguistic and textual components of discourse and investigates the invaluable role of CDA in revealing the demolishing attribute of much contemporary social and cultural change and social power relations. These social and power relations can also be considered as underlying features of the discourse presenting the political events in news media. The language of mass media is investigated as destinations of force battles where social changes connected with hybridity, new capitalism, globalization and information based economy are occurring and changing existing or more nearby social elements. Fairclough's approach towards CDA is problem-oriented and attempts to bring issues to light of social concerns, problems and power change through writings (Wodak & Meyers, 2001; Fairclough, 2003; Fairclough et al., 2011). It needs to be noted that this model was adopted as the theoretical support for the present research according to which the editorials were analysed.

Fairclough (2003) believes that critical discourse analysis looks at the dialectical association between discourse (including language and other forms of semiosis such as body language or visuals) and other components of social practice. Fairclough's definition of CDA as a dialectal relation, between discourse and other elements of social practice, forms an important basis for macro analysis of language. The macro analysis indicates the ways media discourse in different nations shows and forms multi-semioticity, multimodality, intertextuality and socio-cultural hybridity.

Interdiscursive analysis of the text indicates the combination of genres, discourses and styles and the ways combining genres, discourses and styles are produced and joined together in the text. This analysis mediates between language analysis and other types of social processing of social occurrences and practices (Fairclough, 2003). Intertextuality is the presence of elements of other texts within a text or allusions in a text to other texts, genres, or discourses. The most common form of intertextuality is reported speech in which there is the presence of other voices in the text beside the author's own voice. All texts are said to be related to other texts in one way or another (Bakhtin, 1981; Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, 2003). Multi literacies is the concept referring to how language would consider the demands put forward on it by cultural and linguistic diversity, by local diversity and global connectedness. It is concerned with the ways that the language will cope with social change in linguistic boundaries, modes and channels of communication and with changes at work place, social, public and private spheres of life (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

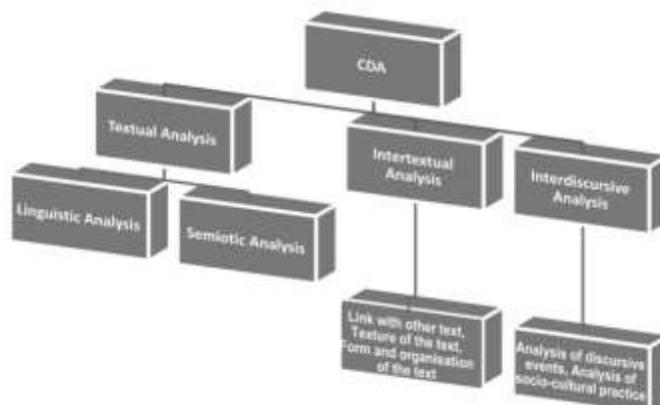


Figure 1. CDA (Fairclough, 2003)

## 2.2. Critical Thinking (CT)

In spite of the much previous work done in CT, there remain inconsistencies regarding the definition of CT and its comprising elements. Dewey (1933) described CT as the dynamic, consistent, and detailed consideration of opinions or assumed type of knowledge with respect to the grounds advocating it and the further conclusions to which it inclines towards. Paul (1988) considers CT as learning how to ask and give answers to questions of analysis, production and evaluation and capability of achieving proper conclusions according to existing knowledge and information. A review of the literature on CT highlights the fact that the suggested definitions of CT include numerous features. In an attempt to provide a more comprehensive definition for CT, the American Philosophical Association carried out a project and conceptualized CT as focused, self-regulatory decisions bringing about interpretation, analysis, appraisal and inference (cited in Giancarlo & Facione, 2001). The substantial impact of this project rests in its focus on disposition toward CT. Facione et al. (1995) asserted that any inclusive conceptualization of CT centering only on skills is improper in nature; instead, it must encompass a dispositional element; i.e., the learners' tendency to use CT when required. Accordingly, the disposition towards CT is considered a component of intrinsic motivation to solve challenges and judge concerns by resorting to thinking. Put differently, a high amount of disposition towards CT is a trustworthy assurance for the use of CT skills. In spite of the fact that the majority of researchers have agreed that CT includes both skills and dispositions, the most agreed-upon measures and frameworks of CT are skill-oriented, characterizing it as a higher-order thinking skill and centering around designing proper learning and teaching processes (Frijters et al., 2007; Khezrlou, 2012). For example, Watson and Glaser (2002), the developers of the most widely-used measure of CT, linked it

to these capabilities: establishing the degrees of accuracy or falseness of inferences; realizing unmentioned assumptions in a number of sentences; interpreting the defensible nature of the justifications; identifying whether conclusions are based upon information in provided statements, and measuring arguments regarding degrees of being strong and related or weak and irrelevant.

The supporters of CT skills have fore-grounded that improving thinking skills needs to be considered as a priority for educationalists. The significance attached to reflective thinking abilities mirrored in recent approaches to education grows out of the writings of Dewey (1933) who maintained that developing higher-order thinking must be at the heart of education (as cited in Giancarlo & Facione, 2001). Brookfield (1987) highlighted the need for educational approaches to attempt to rise to consciousness, prompt, cultivate and motivate the process of thinking critically and reflectively. Similarly, Meyers (1986) supported this argument by asserting that teachers need to foster CT by means of the classroom activities and the feedback that they provide. Educationalists maintain that CT is a standard of intellectual superiority demanded for complete and productive contribution to academic, individual and social lives of learners (Scriven & Paul, 2004).

In a similar vein, the guidelines of CT in achieving academic objectives have become a paramount area of research for EFL and ESL researchers and practitioners. The merging theme of these studies is harmonious with the abovementioned argument that CT skills are teachable and can be fostered by means of different strategies and activities used in the classroom context. For example, Dantas-Whitney (2002) displayed that the use of reflective audio-taped journals reinforced ESL University learners' CT. Yeh (2004) looked into the effect of a computer simulation program on enhancing learner teachers' higher-order thinking. The results led to the conclusion that computer simulation is a valuable technique for teaching general CT skills. Similarly, Liaw's (2007) investigation pinpointed the success of the use of a content-based approach in facilitating EFL learner's CT skills.

In summary, the results of these studies approved Davidson and Dunham's (1997) position that CT skills should be subject to teaching as component of EFL instruction. In addition, the abovementioned research studies convincingly exhibit the potential role EFL teachers can play in scaffolding tasks and processes that develop and enhance EFL learners' CT skills. Moreover, as Davidson (1998) observed, since one of English teacher's tasks is to pave the way for learners' successful and effective communication with native speakers who see merit in explicit comment, intellectual criticism, and intellectual assertion, introducing learners to CT is even more important for L2 teachers compared to L1 teachers (Davidson, 1998). Davidson (1998) rightly noted that if teacher do not promote this, learners would flounder when they face the necessity of implementing critical thinking skills particularly in academic contexts.

Due to the prominent role of CT abilities in the teaching and learning processes, it appears that the examination of any strategies or methods that might lead to its flourishing in EFL contexts is highly welcome and essential. The present study viewed CDA as a positive determiner of Iranian EFL learners' development of CT skills for their academic purposes. This hypothesis was based on Wallace (1992) who contends that one way to expedite EFL learners' critical thinking is exposing them to texts consisting of ideological assumptions and whose analysis would call for a consideration of the wider sociocultural and political issues. This study was an endeavor to provide answer to the following research questions:

1. Does CDA have any effect on Iranian EFL learners' CT skills?
2. Does CDA have any effect on Iranian EFL learners' inference making, recognizing unstated assumptions, deduction, interpretation, and evaluation of arguments as components of CT ability?

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1. Participants*

The participants were 60 undergraduate English translation major learners, age 20–24, attending Islamic Azad University, Urmia Branch. They were all enrolled in the 'Economic Text Translation' course which was a requirement course for all undergraduate students at the university. The participants had completed the Preliminary English Test (PET) and it was decided that their level of proficiency was intermediate. This study adopted an intact design where there was an experimental group (N = 32) and a control group (N = 28). PET and the "Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal" (CTA) (Watson & Glaser, 2002) were the pretests in this study. The independent samples t-test indicated a non-significant difference between the experimental and control groups regarding their CT scores [ $t(58) = -.96, p > .05$ ].

#### *3.2. Instruments*

##### *3.2.1. Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (CTA)*

The W-GCTA is the most widely-used critical reasoning test consisting of 80 items. It includes five sub-tests which are particularly designed in order to discover the respondent's analytic reasoning and logical thinking abilities. These five sub-tests are presented in Table 1. This test was subject to reliability analysis which turned out to be highly acceptable (Cronbach's alpha = .92).

Table 1  
*Critical Thinking Sub-tests and Descriptions*

	<i>Sub-test</i>	<i>Measurement focus</i>
Inference (items 1-16)		Measures the respondents' ability to distinguish between the accuracy and inaccuracy of inference based on given data
Recognizing unstated assumptions		Measures respondents' recognition of the presuppositions in presented statement
Deduction		Measures respondents' drawing conclusions from the presented information
Interpretation		Measures respondent's ability to arrive at conclusions according to presented information
Evaluation of Arguments		Measures respondent's ability to make distinctions between relevant and irrelevant arguments

### *3.3. Material*

The *Economic Text Translation* book written by Jafari Gohar (2010) was used in the present study. Two texts in each session were used for the purpose of critical discourse analysis. The theme of all the texts was based upon economics and the level of book was deemed to be appropriate to the participants of this study.

### *3.4. Data Collection Procedure*

The present study was carried out in classroom setting and lasted for 12 sessions during the second academic semester in 2017. There were two classes in this study where one class (N = 32) acted as the experimental group and the other the control group (N = 28). Prior to the study, both groups received the Preliminary English Test, as a result of which only homogenous intermediate learners were selected. Participants received the CT test afterwards as the pre-test. During the instructional period, although the experimental learners were exposed to implementing a CDA informed analysis of the economic texts, control group learners did not receive any such instruction. CDA was integrated into the course according to Fairclough's (1989) model. This model comprises the following three features (p. 26):

Description is the stage which is concerned with the formal properties of the text. Interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction with seeing the text as a product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation. Explanation is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context with the social

determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and their social effects.

On the whole, teachers intended to raise learners' awareness about the ways that language could be manipulated to present particular ideologies. For this purpose, examples of linguistic and rhetorical devices included in the texts were analyzed and thought upon to provide and familiarize learners with ideologically inclined representations of language regarding the economic issues. This approach was especially useful in the course of the study since learners were encouraged to encode the hidden meanings of the texts and after that they were required to provide the appropriate translation equivalents in their first language, that is Farsi. In other words, since arriving at an acceptable translation of a specific text requires figuring out the ideologies and social manifestations, the CDA approach could prove to be effective exploiting the themes. After the treatment, participants in both groups were administered the CT test once again. They were allowed 40 minutes to complete the test and the answers were rated according to the scoring key with each correct response receiving one point.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

After ensuring the normality of data through Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (see Table 2), the data were analyzed by means of a series of independent samples t-tests to provide answers to the research questions. The alpha level was set to .05.

Table 2

		<i>One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test</i>					
		<i>CT</i>	<i>Inferenc</i>	<i>RUA</i>	<i>Deductio</i>	<i>Interpret</i>	<i>EA</i>
			<i>e</i>		<i>n</i>	<i>ation</i>	
N		60	60	60	60	60	60
Normal	Mean	20.3500	3.5833	4.4000	3.6833	4.9833	3.7000
Parameters <sup>a</sup>	Std.	5.66232	1.59758	2.12491	1.30827	2.09512	1.25279
	Deviation						
Most	Absolute	.094	.142	.128	.166	.120	.161
Extreme	Positive	.094	.142	.128	.166	.114	.145
Differences	Negative	-.072	-.103	-.095	-.129	-.120	-.161
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.730	1.104	.994	1.285	.928	1.249
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.661	.175	.276	.073	.355	.088
a.	Test distribution is						
	Normal.						

Table 3  
*Descriptive Statistics Results for Critical Thinking across Groups*

		Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CT	control	28	17.35	4.02	.75
	experimental	32	22.96	5.63	.99
EA	control	28	3.67	1.12	.21
	experimental	32	3.71	1.37	.24
Interpretation	control	28	3.50	1.50	.28
	experimental	32	6.28	1.63	.28
Deduction	control	28	3.71	1.11	.21
	experimental	32	3.65	1.47	.26
RUA	control	28	3.07	1.46	.27
	experimental	32	3.56	1.93	.34
Inference	control	28	3.39	1.31	.24
	experimental	32	3.75	1.81	.32

As the means scores in Table 3 depict, the experimental learners ( $M = 22.96$ ,  $SD = 5.63$ ) achieved a higher mean score in their total CT compared to their control peers ( $M = 17.35$ ,  $SD = 4.02$ ). More specifically, the experimental learners outperformed their control peers in their 'Interpretation' and 'Recognizing Unstated Assumptions'. The results of independent samples t-test are reported in Table 4.

Table 4  
*T-test Results for All Variables*

		<i>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</i>			<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>					
		<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>ig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>		
								<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>	
T	Equal variances assumed	.102	.083	-4.380	58	.000	-5.61161	1.28105	-8.17590	-3.04731
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.478	55.850	.000	-5.61161	1.25308	-8.12197	-3.10125
Inference	Equal variances assumed	.156	.081	-.862	58	.392	-.35714	.41432	-1.18649	.47220
	Equal variances not assumed			-.880	56.159	.382	-.35714	.40567	-1.16974	.45546
UA	Equal variances assumed	.834	.181	-5.562	58	.000	-2.49107	.44787	-3.38757	-1.59457

	Equal										
	variances	not									
	assumed										
	Equal										
edu	variances		.062	.156	.170	58	.866	.05804	.34137	-.62529	.74136
ctio	assumed										
n	Equal										
	variances	not									
	assumed										
	Equal										
nte	variances		.097	.757	-6.834	58	.000	-2.78125	.40699	-3.59593	-1.96657
rpr	assumed										
etat	Equal										
ion	variances	not									
	assumed										
	Equal										
A	variances		.155	.287	-.123	58	.903	-.04018	.32693	-.69460	.61425
	assumed										
	Equal										
	variances	not									
	assumed										

As Table 4 demonstrates, there were statistically significant differences between experimental and control groups regarding the total CT,  $t(58) = -4.38$ ,  $p = .000$ , 'Interpretation',  $t(58) = -6.83$ ,  $p = .000$ , and 'Recognizing Unstated Assumptions' components,  $t(58) = -5.56$ ,  $p = .000$ . Figure 2 clearly exhibits the findings.

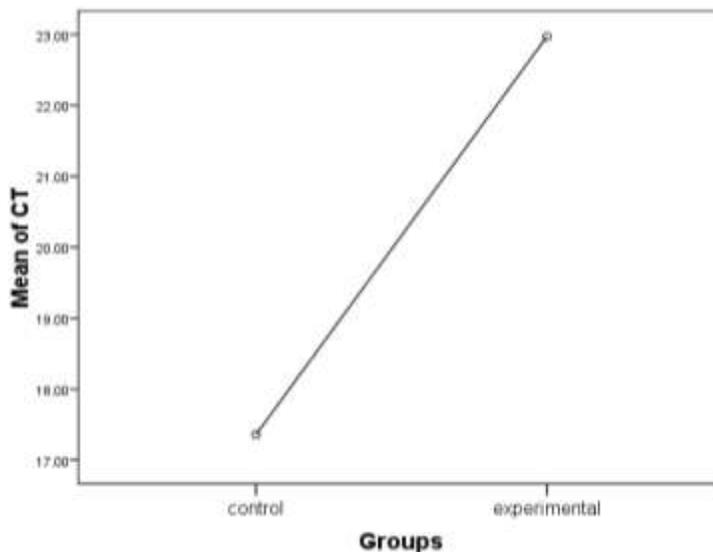


Figure 2. CT across groups

#### 4.2. Discussion

The present study was conducted in an attempt to look into the role of critical discourse analysis practice in the EFL classroom on learners' development of critical thinking skills. As expected, the experimental group learners who were exposed to the principles of CDA could establish a higher record of CT. This result is in line with the established theoretical and empirical origins showing the connection of CT with learners' academic and life achievements (e.g., Lee & Loughran, 2000; Maloof Avendano & Fonseca, 2009; Phan, 2010; Kealey et al., 2005). In particular, Maloof Avendano and Fonseca (2009) concluded that CDA played a crucial role in making learners' aware of the way writers use language to influence media to convey their point of view and this in turn impacted the learners' critical thinking skills.

Texts from different sources and genre authorize some and unauthorize others. This might not be obvious for the readers unless they have developed certain level of critical thinking. This authority and ideology are established by implementing language in certain ways. Learners can shape their critical thinking skills to uncover the hidden meanings of a text in different ways. The assumption is that strategizing learners to carry out this kind of analysis so that they are enabled to approach the texts critically. This study indicated that Critical Discourse Analysis equipped learners with some helpful strategies to determine when texts have their bias. A component of Critical Thinking that was particularly relevant to this issue was 'Recognizing Unstated Assumptions' which we believe that is an excellent tool when the purpose is to unravel the intention hidden behind language. It helps learners figure out when the use of specific language properties to manipulate the thoughts and dispositions would authorize some and unauthorize others. Based on the findings of this study, it is deduced that learners' ability to interrogate about the validity of ideas and premises existing in the texts, together with their ability to move beyond the surface of texts and discover hidden meanings, can be generalized from texts to wider educational contexts in which determining and evaluating different assumptions and interacting with multiple perspectives are inevitable.

The second element of CT that the critical discourse analysis had impact upon was 'Interpretation'. This finding seems to be expected since interpretation is a fundamental element in the majority of CDA models. Fairclough's (1989) model that was talked about in the previous sections considers interpretation as the association between text and interaction and embeds it as a stage in critical discourse analysis. The interpretive nature of CDA emphasizes the importance of existing differential opinions and positions in texts (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

This awareness lies in the role of CDA in highlighting language, ideology, and power in shaping the presentation of information in different texts. The critical discourse analysis of economic texts is an investigation of language and ideology. Moreover, both Fairclough (2001) and Gee (2008)

view language as contextualized “meanings of words” and ideology as a system or cultural model comprised of beliefs, values, and “common-sense assumptions” that shapes the way people see and experience the world (Fairclough, 2001, p. 2; Gee, 2008, p. 29). Therefore, it is important that educators recognize the potential impact the information presented in economic texts can have on students, teachers, institutions, and society (Giroux, 2005, p. 116).

In conclusion, teachers need to envision learners to become better and critical readers and translators by giving them assistance in finding a clearer understanding of how individuals use language to gain certain goals and the effects that the way language is used might lead to.

## **5. Conclusion and Implications**

Critical awareness can be an empowering and enlightening tool when used to inform instructional practices and related educational policies in higher education. Teacher-researchers interested in investigating curriculum, instructional practices, and/or educational policies are encouraged to consider employing critical discourse analysis as a means of textual analysis. This type of critical discourse analysis might be able to provide insight into the relationship between text analysis and educational policy and also provide a clearer understanding of the constructive role language plays in the development of knowledge and power relationships between developers of knowledge and its users (Sleeter & Grant, 1991; Apple, 2004).

Critical awareness, therefore, can be fostered by means of the use of critical pedagogy in the classroom. Discourse analysis performed within a framework of critical pedagogy is capable of revealing complex levels of meaning, such as ideologies, assumptions, and power struggles embedded in texts.

Another key feature of critical pedagogy is the belief that education can and should help students develop the ability to critically question, think, and evaluate all forms of information in order to promote social justice, language and cultural awareness, tolerance, and a better understanding of one’s role in the local community and society at large.

In an attempt to bring about modifications for students and teachers, however, educators need to preliminary consider current practices, assumptions, and curriculum choices; admitting that an individual’s accepted ways of perceiving and functioning within institutional and global contexts might demand rethinking and re-evaluation (Hooks, 1994). This type of teacher self-reflection includes the critical examination of how language, ideology, and power are constructed in texts.

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