

The listening skill. Its influence upon the English language learning process in the students from the Applied
Linguistics School at PUCESE

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Abstract

A descriptive quantitative-qualitative investigation was carried out to describe the influence that the listening skill has upon the English language learning process in the students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE, using the deductive and inductive methods. A bibliographical research about the listening skill and the English language learning process was done, and the techniques used were the survey and observation. The population was formed by 43 students and the sample by 40. The results showed that the listening skill is not as fully worked as it needs to be, and that the students consider that with its development and practice, they can get better results with the other skills, like reading, writing and speaking, teachers are regularly implementing the listening skill in their lessons, and the students are interested in using it, also the students agreed that teachers sometimes use listening materials for teaching, improving the English language and engaging them to work actively in the lesson, but they need more practice. In conclusion, the general results of this investigation coincided with the results of previous investigations, related to this topic, which supported the application and use of listening materials for improving students' skills and the English language knowledge. The author of this investigation also designed a set of exercises, so that teachers can use them in their lessons for engaging students in listening activities and making them work actively with tasks.

Key words: listening skill; communicative competence; linguistic components

Introduction

For many years, listening has been one of the most important skills for teaching a new language. It has a great influence on the speaking, reading, writing skills and on the English language learning process. So, the lack of its development, brings shortcomings for students, problems upon other skills, linguistic components and in the performance of the target language.

The students who have difficulties in the listening skill also have problems in comprehension and writing. It is because they do not have enough listening practice and therefore, do not know what to write or how to do it. Reading problems are also seen, because students do not know the correct pronunciation of words that interfere in their speaking or understanding as well.

The speaking skill is directly affected by the poor practice of the listening skills. When students do not understand what they are listening to, they cannot express themselves in English, in terms of appropriateness of the language, nor to use all the grammatical structures and vocabulary taught.

This is a frequent problem in the students from early levels at the Applied Linguistics School at the PUCESE. Despite many efforts made trying to improve their development in the English language, it has been

noticed that there is lack of knowledge on the teachers' instruction concerning how the listening skill influences the students' language learning process.

Teachers and students can do more about this problem. The analysis and description of how the listening skill influences the English language learning process may help to solve this issue.

The English language has been for many years the international language of business and education, because of that it is important to investigate how it could be taught and learnt, its linguistic components and the skills needed to learn it.

The Ecuadorian Ministry of education is also giving a great importance to the teaching of English, it has developed the Ecuadorian in-service English Teacher Standards that actually is based on five domains that are related with those stated for the general curriculum of the English language teaching and learning. The standard that is important for this investigation is the number three Implementing and Managing Standards-Based English and Content Instruction, which states that teachers must develop students' listening skills for a variety of academic and social purposes.

In the Applied linguistics school at PUCESE, some teachers show that they do not make use of enough listening materials, and that many students need this to improve their other skills, such as speaking, reading and writing, and the language knowledge. Because of this many of them have problems when they are using the language, they do not know how to pronounce some words, the proper intonation, and many other factors that affect the English language learning process. Although this is a big problem for the students, they actually try to be better and to give their best participation in all the activities.

This previous situation was important to state as a problem of the investigation: What is the influence of the listening skill upon the English language learning process in the students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE? ; What are some of the theories that state the importance of the listening skill for language learning?

What is the real situation that the students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE have in the listening skill and the English language learning process? Which didactic material may be useful for the teaching of the listening skill in the English Language teaching to the students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE?

The general objective was to describe the influence that the listening skill has upon the English language learning process in the students from the Applied Linguistics students at PUCESE. To accomplish it, the specific objectives were: to carry out a bibliographical investigation concerning theories of the listening skill and the English language learning process; to diagnose the real situation that students from the Applied

Linguistics School at PUCESE have in the listening skill and in the English language learning process; and finally, to design some exercises that allow students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE to practice the listening skill for language learning.

The Listening Skill

What is the listening skill? It is when individuals link meanings with particular aural symbols. Morley (1972) stated that it is a human involuntary action that individuals did since they are born, and some other more elaborated definition such as Nunan (2001) pointed out that the listening skill is a six stage process, concerning: of hearing, attending, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding, and that each of those steps that made up listening possible are all related and happen at the same time when the speaker sends the message to the receiver.

The listening skill, according to Harmer (2007) has two main types, intensive listening or listening for studying, carried out at the school in the classroom by the teacher, and extensive listening or listening for pleasure to music, films, etc. On the other hand, Watson, Barker, & Weaver III, (1995) stated before that it contains 5 types which are: discriminative listening, comprehensive listening, appreciative listening, empathetic listening, and critical listening developed by the listener according to the listening purpose, it is important to point out that all of them are important in the students' language learning process.

Active listening is also important when we are talking about listening types because it involves all types of listening with all senses. For describing better active listening, it is necessary to categorize it into verbal signs of active listening, which are Positive reinforcement, Remembering Questioning, Paraphrasing, and non-verbal signs of active listening, that are Smile, Eye contact, Posture, Mirroring , Distraction. Active listening can be acquired or developed through listening practice, not only for listening but also to seem to be listening.

Having clear what the listening skill is and some factors that influences it, now it is possible to go on and describe how the listening skill takes part in the English language teaching-learning process in the Applied Linguistics student. The listening skill is given as a subject in the first levels of the career, beyond this; it is only used as an extra element for giving the lessons. But is it enough for students?

Harmer (2007) stated that the listening skill is important for the English language teaching-learning process, so it is not enough. Students from the Applied Linguistics School need to practice the listening skill

during the whole university studies, because as future teachers, they must have a great management upon the language and its components.

Principles to develop the listening skill

A good way for teachers to develop the students' listening skill is following the listening principles stated by Harmer (2007) and Mahbub (2012) which are:

- 1) Encourage students to listen as often and as much as possible, the more students listen the more they get the language;
- 2) Help students prepare to listen, this is the first step in a listening task, may be to have students look at a picture, predicting the listening task etc;
- 3) Once may not be enough, students need to listen to the listening tract more than once to understand and to get the information;
- 4) Encourage students to respond to the content of a listening text and not only to the language; if teachers are using listening materials students need to work with the materials for developing understanding not only language use;
- 5) Different listening stages demand different listening tasks, it means that when teachers are developing listening activities, they have to take in mind the listening tasks (pre-, while, and post-) and what kind of listening material they are going to use with each of them;
- 6) Good teachers exploit listening texts to the full.

Another principle that is relevant for this investigation is the use of Bottom-up and Top-down listening strategies for processing information. The students need to know, develop and apply different strategies which can help them to improve their language knowledge and use. Gregory (1970) told us on his top- down theory that it deals with the recognition process, it means that it helps the listeners to relate past information with the new one to process the information, making some predictions in general terms about the topic, it means from the general message to the detailed one. Whereas, the bottom-up strategies tell us that listeners process the information by understanding each linguistic element that is in the listening text, give the information in a detailed way, from the specific elements of the language to the general message.

It is also important to take into consideration how good listening activities are designed. According to Rixon (1986) good listening activities are composed by three main tasks, pre-listening task in which the teacher has to engage the students and make them predict the topic, while-listening task that is a controlled practice of activities and post-listening task or free practice in which students are going to put into practice the knowledge learnt, and that it is important to follow them so that by the end of the lesson or the course students will be clear about contents.

But, is it necessary to evaluate the listening skill? Hughes (2012) said that the listening skill, as the other skills, needs to be evaluated, but not alone, the best way to do it is by means of a combination, such as listening- writing, listening- speaking, listening- reading, and that it is also important to have a purpose for the listening assessment, what the teacher want their students to achieve at the end of it, obviously taking into account the length of the audio track or video, the authenticity of the language, and the students' level.

The listening skill has a great influence upon the other skills, and for analyzing it better we need to have as references different authors' investigations. All of them agreed that the listening skill affects the others, for instance, Berninger (2000) discovered that by means of listening practice and aural instruction students improve their spelling abilities; Badian and Bergman (1999) showed that through reading and listening stories students improve reading comprehension, and finally Bayar (2009) had shown that some children had writing problems due to the lack of listening practice, they are not aware about that.

Previous studies

Many previous studies around the world were taken into consideration concerning this theme of investigation, as the mentioned before by Badian and Bergman (1999) who told us that reading could be improved by reading and listening short stories; but in Ecuador there are important investigations too. Tadeo (2010) showed that through dictation exercises students can improve their writing skill, Benavides (2012) told us that the listening skill influences a lot students' communicative competences and that teachers should use listening materials, and finally in Esmeraldas, at PUCESE, Arroyo (2015) designed a ludic methodology to improve the students' listening skill.

Method

Type of investigation

Descriptive: this investigation described the influence of the listening skill upon the English language learning process of the Applied Linguistic School students at PUCESE.

Methods of research

Inductive: it provides the investigator the opportunity to make some observations about the real situation of the influence of the listening skill upon the English language learning process.

Deductive: it gives the opportunity to go deeply in the bibliography research of the listening skill. Thus, the results of this investigation will be real and shared.

Sample and population

Forty three students from the Applied Linguistics School were the participants of this research.

The investigator of this research carried out two weeks of class observations to identify teachers' use and management of listening materials for the development of the English language and the other three skills, speaking, reading and writing, and how the listening skill is influencing them, and also to see how the students are reacting to listening materials application.

The observations were done from June 1st until June 10th 2016, in some lessons at the Applied Linguistics School, where the investigator had considered teachers could make use of listening materials during the two class periods.

For identifying teachers' use and management of listening materials during the English classes, the investigator wrote down six indicators and for analyzing the situation better in the classroom, those indicators have a rubric, being the indicators the following:

1. The teacher uses listening materials for teaching the English language (videos, recordings)
2. The teacher uses the listening materials correctly (level, authentic, interest)
3. The teacher follows the proper stages in listening activities (pre-; while- ; post- listening tasks)
4. The students participate actively in classes after listening engagement activities.
5. The students comprehend the listening tasks.
6. The students integrate at least two skills after listening activities.

Data processing

Manual data processing: all the information was taken manually, it means that the author tabulated the results of the surveys.

Electronic data processing: the processed data of the surveys were introduced in Excel, so that this program automatically showed the percentage in graphics.

Results

The results of the observations were described indicator by indicator.

The first indicator, use of listening materials for teaching the language (videos and recordings), reached the score sometimes, this means that teachers are using listening materials in few lessons and in specific subjects instead of using them in all the subjects and making them be the center of the lesson.

The second indicator, use of listening materials correctly (level, authentic, interest), reached the high score, always, it means that teachers are using the listening materials correctly, they have authentic English language, the materials used are according to the students' levels and needs, moreover they cover students' language interests.

The third indicator, teachers follow the proper stages in listening activities (pre-; while- and post-listening tasks), reached the score sometimes, that means, that teachers are only using or applying two listening tasks of the three they must use. This could bring students some problems in their information processing because they may need more to enclose their new information.

The fourth indicator, active participation of the students after any listening engagement activity, reached the highest score, always, which means that the students are always participating actively all the time, speaking, correcting their classmates in any mistakes, asking and answering to any question after the listening engagement activity.

The fifth indicator, students comprehend the listening tasks, reached the score sometimes, that means, that the students understand the majority of the instructions given in the listening tasks, having only some general mistakes due to the lack of practice. Also, at the end of the listening tasks, they have fair and good results.

The sixth and the last indicator, integration of at least two skills after the listening activities by the students, reached the highest score, always. Which means that the students after each listening activity are

integrating more than one different skill, they used to speak about what they have listened to, or write a summary about the video or the recording, so, this may help them to be better in the English language.

The observation was done twice so those results are a summary of the two observations.

In conclusion, the results of these observations and the results of the survey coincided. Teachers are using (syntax) listening materials in a regular way for improving, developing and engaging students to work and use the English language actively. However, the students need more practice, because according to the survey's result, the students agreed that they always need listening practice because it helps to develop the other skills, writing, reading and speaking.

Results of the survey

Regarding the use of authentic recording for improving students' knowledge of English and engaging them to work actively in the classroom, as shown in figure 1, the majority of the students agreed that their teachers sometimes use authentic recordings in the classroom with the stated purpose.

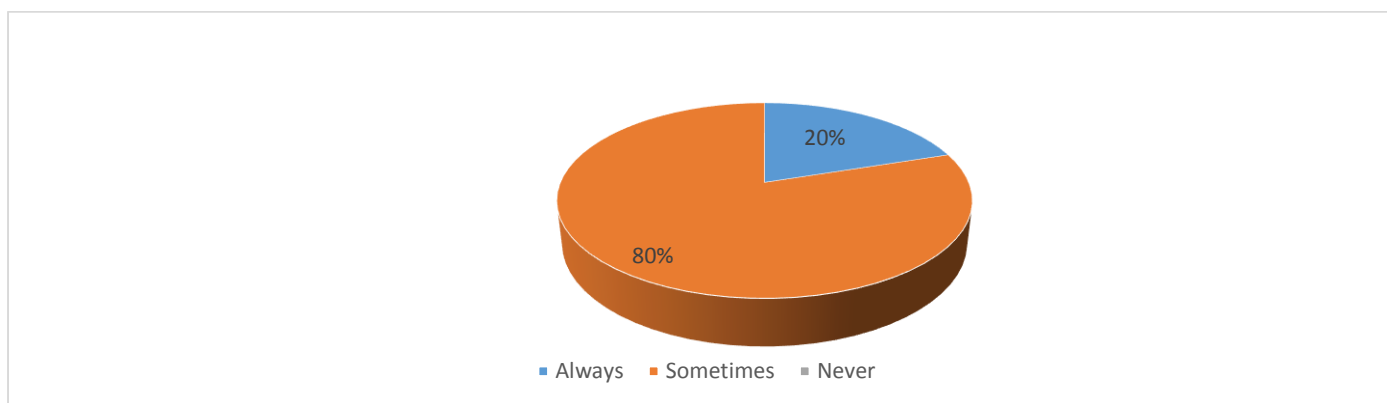


Figure 1. Use of authentic recording for improving students' knowledge of English and engaging them to work actively in the classroom

In relation with the importance of the use of authentic listening material for improving students' English language knowledge, as illustrated in figure 2, the majority of the students agreed that it is always important to use authentic listening material, what means recordings taken from native speakers of the language. This benefits language learning.

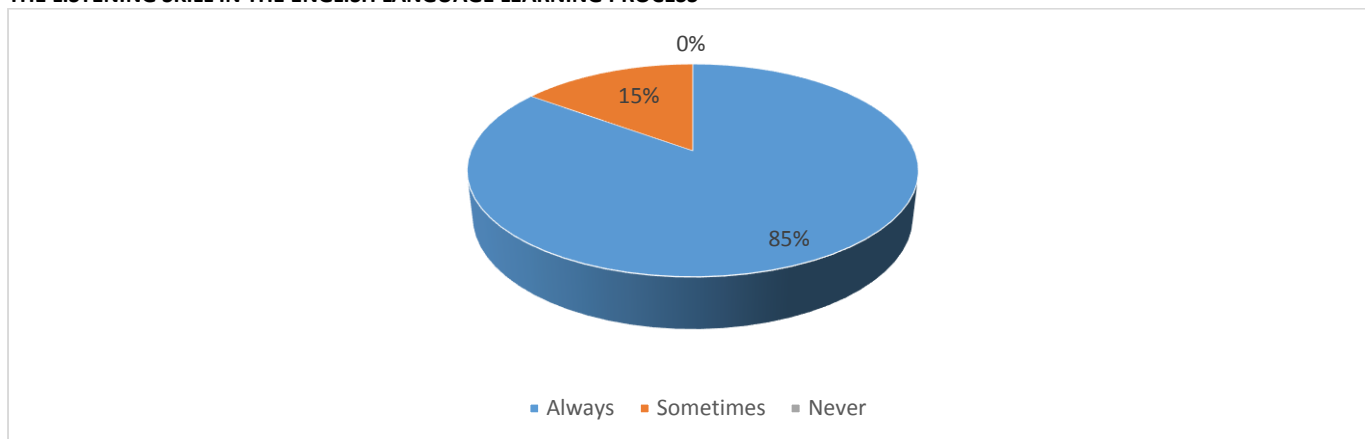


Figure 2: Importance of the use of authentic listening material for improving students' English language knowledge

When analyzing if the development of the listening skill influences students' comprehension of the English language, as it is shown in figure 3, the majority of the students agreed that the development of this skill is influencing very much their comprehension of the English language. It means that teachers should pay close attention to the teaching of this skill.

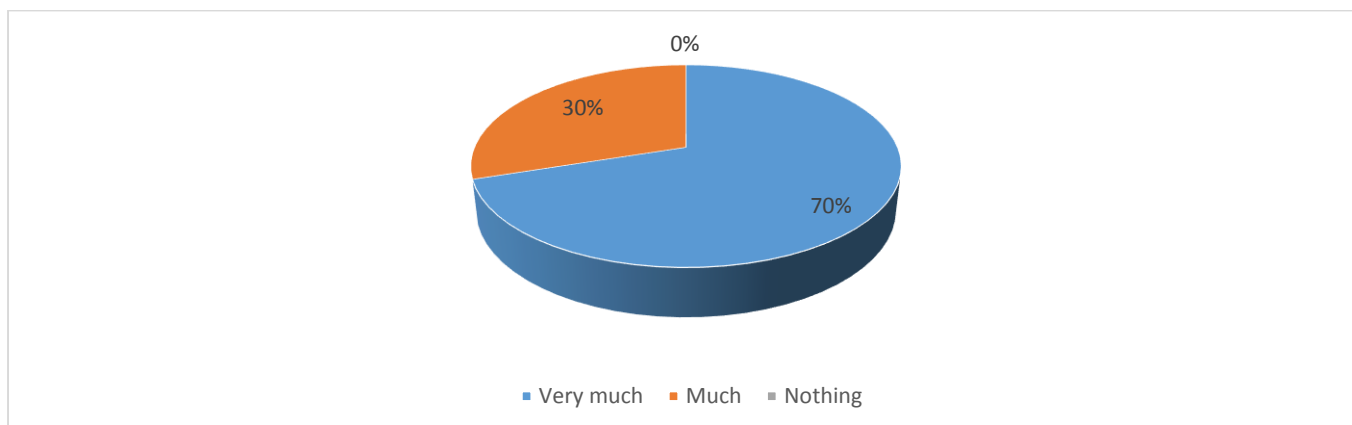


Figure 3: Development of the listening skill influences students' comprehension of the English language

Discussion

The author of this investigation fulfilled the objectives proposed when she decided to describe how the listening skill is influencing the English language learning process in the students from the Applied Linguistics School students at PUCESE, and to design a set of exercises that teachers can use for improving the students' English language knowledge and use.

With the instruments used, the survey to students and the observations to the English classes, an analysis was done to see if teachers are using listening materials for developing the English language and to know if students needed to develop their listening skill. This constituted the second specific objective. The results revealed that teachers are using most of the time listening materials for improving the students' English language; the listening skill is influencing the students' other skills such as speaking, reading and writing; and the students considered that they need to use more listening materials for becoming better in the English language.

After making the analysis of the students' reality with the listening skill and the English language, the third objective was carried out which consisted in designing a set of exercises, based on the listening skill that teachers can use for improving the students' English language knowledge and use. Each exercise has an explanation, step by step, so that the teacher will know what to do and how to do it.

The results obtained coincided with some previous studies done in different schools in Ecuador. Tadeo (2010) and Arroyo (2015) found out that teachers were not making enough use of listening materials for improving the students' English language, also they saw that the students did not have a good level in their writing, speaking and reading skills due to the lack listening practice. They had developed listening exercises and methodologies that can help teachers to work better with the English language.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that the listening skill influences the English language learning and that it is necessary to apply exercises which can help, not only teachers but also students, for developing and improving the English language.

Conclusions

The bibliography checked revealed that the majority of the authors agreed that the listening skill is of paramount importance in the development of the students' communicative competence.

The investigation revealed that teachers are using listening didactic materials partially, for improving, engaging, developing and making students participate in the English language learning process.

Different authors showed up that with the application of a set of listening exercises students can improve their communicative competence.

Recommendations

Teachers should use enough listening materials which can help students to reach their academic goals at the end of their university studies.

Teachers should use or adapt the listening exercises designed by the author of this investigation which can help them and their students to fulfill their academic goals.

The author recommends that there could be more investigations about this topic because of its importance for the development of students' communicative competence in English.

Proposal

Exercises for teachers to work with the listening skill

Exercise 1

Skills: Listening- Speaking

Pre- listening activity

Think about: the teacher presents some pictures to students showing people abilities to make students think about the topic.

Vocabulary: Review vocabulary with the students

Predict: Predict from the title what will be said

While-listening activity

Listen for details

The teacher plays the recording and the students have to listen to it (do not let students do anything, they only have to listen)

After listening ask if there is any doubt

The teacher gives students the task, a multiple choice activity, and he/she plays the recording again so that the students can listen to it while they are answering the questions.

Listen again to check it.

Peer correction before the teacher corrects it.

Correction on the board with the whole class.

Post-listening activity

The teacher organizes the class in groups of 3. Each student in the group has to write at least 3 questions. Then the students in the group have to ask and answer, like an interview, after that they have to report their partners' answers in front of the class.

Link: <http://www.ello.org/Audio/A0051/070-Jamon-Abilities.mp3>

- Look at the pictures, describe people's abilities and share ideas with the class.



Listen to the dialogue and choose the correct answer.

1. Can Ramon cook?

- a. A lot
- b. Nothing

- c. A little bit
 - d. None of the above

2. What does Ramon love to cook?
 - a. Chicken
 - b. Meat
 - c. Spaghetti
 - d. Salad

3. Where does he sing?
 - a. In the karaoke
 - b. In the shower
 - c. On his job
 - d. All the answers

4. What kind of songs does Ramon sing?
 - a. Reggae
 - b. Bachata
 - c. Pop music
 - d. Rock

5. What is the instrument that Ramon plays?
 - a. Guitar
 - b. Dijuridu
 - c. Piano
 - d. None of the above

- Group work. In groups of three each student has to write at least three questions about classmates' abilities. Discuss about that, then report the answers in front of the class. (Use the questions' structure from the listening passage)

Exercise 2

Skills: Listening- Writing

Pre-listening activity

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Think about: the teacher ask some questions about the topic to make students think what will come.

Vocabulary: Review vocabulary with the students

Predict: Predict from the title what will be said

While-listening activity

Listen for details

The teacher plays the recording and the students have to listen to it (do not let students do anything, they only have to listen)

After listening ask if there is any doubt: how many people are talking? What are they talking about?

The teacher gives students the task, a true/false activity, and he/she plays the recording again so that the students can listen to it while they are choosing if it is true or false.

Listen again to check it.

Peer correction before the teacher corrects it.

Correction on the board with the whole class.

Post-listening activity

The teacher tells students to write a paragraph (80 words) about the kind of books they like the most, why they like them, if they recommend them to their classmates or if they like to read. Then the students have to interchange the piece of paper so that they can correct their partners' work.

Link: <http://www.elllo.org/Audio/A0151/167-Mark-Read.mp3>

Exercise 3

- Questions and answers
Do you like to read?
What kind of book have you read?
What is the name of your favorite book?
Who is your favorite writer?
Recommend a book to your classmates
- Listen to the dialogue and answer T (True) or F (False).

1. Mark does not read a lot _____
2. Mark has a television _____
3. Mark reads three books per week _____
4. Mark thinks that television does not give you imagination _____
5. Mark likes to read comedies _____
6. Mark reads on trains _____
7. Mark likes to read on trains because he can meet people _____

- Write a paragraph (80 words) talking about: do you like to read? What kind of books you like the most? Why do you like it? Will you recommend it to your classmates and why. Then change it with your partner.

Exercise 4

Skills: Listening- Reading

How do I stop students from using their mother tongue?

Pre-listening activity

Think about: the teacher introduces the topic with a question: What do you think about the use of the mother tongue in the classroom?

Vocabulary: Review vocabulary with the students

Predict: Predict from the title what will be said

While-listening activity

Listening comprehension

The teacher plays the video and the students have to listen to it (do not let students do anything, they only have to listen)

After listening ask if there is any doubt

The teacher gives students the task, some comprehension questions, and he/she plays the video again so that the students can listen to it while they are answering the questions.

Listen again to check it.

Peer correction before the teacher corrects it.

Correction on the board with the whole class.

Post-listening activity

The teacher gives students a short reading passage about the topic. The students have to read the reading text, then they have to share ideas with their classmates and in pairs they have to do a conceptual map and look for more information and compare them.

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8yH3U_BDKM

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