THE PRAGMATICS OF INDIGENOUS LOCUTIONS IN KEGITE

DISCOURSE IN SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to the examination of the pragmatics of indigenous locutions (ILs) in Kegite discourse (KD) in selected Southwestern Nigerian Universities. It explores the types of ILs pragmatically engaged in KD, with consideration for the lexical practices they manifest, and the pragmatic roles that indigenous locutionary acts perform in aiding the understanding of communicative encounters among kegites in the study areas. Data for the study were got through tape recordings of kegites’ conversations and participant observation of their interactions during their gyrations. These were subjected to content analysis, using insights from John Austin’s locutionary acts, with considerations for lexical occurrences in the discourse. The findings revealed two categories of indigenous locutions in kegite discourse, namely, Englishised indigenous locutions (EILs), and strictly native locutions (SNLs). The EILs are marked for pragmatically indexing kegite activities, kegite socialising objects, and kegite identity specification, while the SNLs pragmatically index kegite activities, kegite cultural behaviours and kegite symbolic objects. These locutions demonstrate the pragmatic union between English and local lexical choices in kegites’ linguistic initiatives, especially to mark in-group language identity largely intended to be understood by kegites alone, but sometimes intended to be understood by non-kegites too. The paper contributes to the understanding of how the pragmatic engagement of indigenous locutionary choices conveys participants’ locution-constrained meanings in KD. It concludes that kegites’ further demonstration of culture-spurred innovations in locutionary types and their pragmatic engagements will enhance a more effective in-group socialisation for pan African consciousness.

1. Introduction

Communication, which is achieved mainly with verbal language in kegite discourse (KD), takes place among kegite members in a horizontal (between social equals) or vertical (where asymmetrical relationship occurs) manner, especially for pan-African consciousness. It involves participants’ use of language for transactional and interactional purposes (Brown and Yule, 1983). Transactionally, language is engaged to pass on information, while interactionally, it is used to maintain human relationships and ensure social harmony. In Nigeria, studies done on the investigation of kegite language in linguistic research have explored its sociolinguistic, lexico-semantic and pragmatic features. Inputs from the pragmatic perspective have investigated the general pragmatic features of kegite discourse, sandwiching locutionary acts between other pragmatic features (Osunbade, 2004), and contextual features of the discourse (Osunbade and Adeniji 2010), ignoring an in-depth exploration of the role of locutionary acts in aiding the understanding of communicative encounters among kegites.

The present study, therefore, fills that vacuum by studying the indigenous locutions engaged in kegite discourse in selected South-western Nigerian Universities, with emphasis on the vocabulary. Indigenous locutions (ILs) in KD are operationalised in this study as words with morphological structure from Yoruba which are patterned after the morphological structure of English, or words loaned directly from the indigenous Yoruba language and accommodated into kegite argots. This study is thus specifically interested in identifying the types of indigenous locutions that are engaged in the discourse, with considerations for the lexical practices their occurrences manifest, and the pragmatic purposes they serve in kegites’ communicative encounters in the informal second language context in which the discourse is situated.

Data for the study were got through audio-tape recordings of kegites’ conversations and participant observation of their interactions during their gyrations in three selected South-western Nigerian Universities: Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile- Ife, University of Ibadan (U.I.), Ibadan, and Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), Ogbomoso. The choice of OAU and U.I. was informed by their pioneering roles in the foundation and growth of the kegites’ club/society as well as their statuses as the World Headquarters and National headquarters (in kegite terms) of the organisation respectively, while that of LAUTECH, known as Ilya du Kakanfo, was motivated by its vibrancy as a branch located in a standard Oyo-Yoruba speaking environment and its contribution to the pool of indigenous vocabulary initiatives for kegite communication.

The conversations were recorded with the consent of the kegites, having been assured that the participants’ names will be kept anonymous by representing them either with their argotic nomenclatures (such as “songito” (singer), “feather” (secretary), etc.) or with the use of pseudonyms in the analysis. The code used in the conversations was kegite argot – a special communicative code that “results from the symbiosis of English and Nigerian indigenous languages” (Osunbade and Adeniji 2010:193). In the present situation, the symbiosis of English was, however, with Yoruba, since all the universities from which kegites’ conversations were recorded are located in Yoruba communities; and the conversations were translated into English.

Thirty (30) conversations of kegite dyads were recorded, ten (10) in each selected university, involving sixty (60) participants (20 in each university); and the indigenous vocabularies used were selected and considered in classifying the indigenous locutions lent to argotic usage in the conversations. These were subjected to content analysis with insights from Austinian account of the locutionary speech acts, which is useful in characterising the kegites’ orientations to lexical choices in their socialisation-motivated conversational encounters. The study is significant for revealing the pragmatic effects of indigenous locutionary usages in their co-existence with other context-constrained lexical choices for communicative purposes in Kegite discourse in South-western universities in Nigeria, especially to provide peculiar meaning in the context of kegites’ in-group socialisation.

2. Locutionary Acts and Kegite Discourse

The Locutionary act, which the present study draws theoretical insights from, is a division within Austins’s three-tier of speech act theory introduced in How to do things with words (1962). Others are illocutionary act and perlocutionary act (see Austin 1962, Searle 1969, etc.). Locution or locutionary act refers to the exact utterance. According to Odebunmi (2006:26), “Locutions are vocabulary items that have certain senses and references when engaged in certain contexts by interactants”. The Locutionary act performed by the speaker could therefore be referred to as the operational meaning of his/her utterance, being “the basic act of producing a meaningful linguistic expression” (Yule, 1996:48; Huang, 2009: 1002). As this study will establish later, this operational meaning is determined by the sense of the sentence uttered, the identity of the objects in the world referred to by the speaker, among other criteria (see Fraser 1986:32).

Within the Austinian account, ‘locutionary acts’ can be further divided into three subtypes: (a) ‘phonetic acts’, (b) ‘phatic acts’, and (c) ‘rheticacts’. A phonetic act involves the act of uttering certain sounds. A phatic act involves the act of uttering certain vocables or words (i.e. sounds of certain types belonging to a certain vocabulary which conforms to a grammar). And a rhetic act is the performance of an act which uses those vocables or words with an appropriate sense and reference, that is, with a certain meaning (Austin 1962, Cruse 2000). Thus, the units of locution that are meaning-related are the phatic and rhetic acts, which account for the production of words and sentences as the performance of the locutionary unit of speech acts. Our idea of locution in this paper will therefore be consistent with these two acts, but with focus on vocabularies, especially as guided by a consideration for the context in which they are used (Halion 2003) in kegite discourse.

Kegite discourse (KD) can be operationally conceived as argot in use by kegite club members. The kegite club is a socio-cultural organisation in Nigerian tertiary institutions founded with the philosophy of aiding socialisation using palmwine, with the philosophy of promoting the African cultural heritage. The name “kegites” is used to refer to members of this club, given that palm-wine accepted as the only drink of socialisation is commonly preserved in the keg from which it is served to members. Notably, the social activities of these kegite members hinge on discursive use of a special language known as argot, which gives the kegite discourse a distinctive characteristic.“This special communicative code results from the symbiosis of English and Nigerian indigenous languages” (Osunbade and Adeniji 2010:193). Essentially, its use is constrained by kegite-socialisation situational context; it is thus an informal instantiation of language use which engages words that have mostly been given peculiar meanings in kegite context to reflect different aspects of the Nigerian worldview (see Osunbade 2004, Bemigho and Olateju 2007). Producing a locutionary act in KD therefore rests on participants’ in-group -motivated creative potential to form words capable of creating meaningful utterances within the kegite domain of language use. So producing “tell me your name”, for instance, will not normally count as a locutionary act in KD, whereas, “fire me your nomenclature” will.

Significantly, the creative dynamism of kegites manifests via the combination of such strategies as re-lexicalisation, lexical borrowing, registerial transfer, metaphorusation, code-mixing and code-switching (Osunbade and Adeniji 2005), especially to generate locutions that characterise the discourse. So, English usage in kegite discourse in Nigerian tertiary institutions accommodates the above linguistic features usually lent to informal and entertaining communicative encounters between kegite members. In most tertiary institutions in Nigeria, especially in Southwestern Nigeria, English is code-switched or code-mixed with the indigenous Yoruba language of the people. And the kegite initiates usually demonstrate their lexical creativity competence in both Yoruba and English as bilinguals in these languages, with distinctive matching of words with kegitepeculiar meanings.

KD is also marked for the manifestation of distinctive non-verbal mode of greeting, which involves the interlocking of the index fingers and a simultaneous striking of the thumbs. This interactional behaviour obviously serves to depict the existence of social cooperation as well as friendly relations among kegites, being “a significant aspect of the African culture which they set out to promote” (Osunbade and Adeniji 2010:193).As kegite discourse is situated in a sociosituational context, it takes into consideration the socialising intention of the participants involved in the interaction and the circumstances necessitating the talk. Ultimately, in KD, the communicative goal is to orient to the interactional function of language involving establishing and cementing in-group relationships and transactional function of language regarding discussion of certain topical issues that form the actual purpose or business of participants’ conversational exchange.

1. Analysis and Findings

Two categories of indigenous locutions manifest the pragmatics of language usage in our data; namely: Englishised indigenous locutions (i.e. words with morphological structure from the indigenous language of the host community altered and adapted for use as kegite English words), and strictly native locutions (i.e. words loaned directly from the indigenous (Yoruba) language of the host community and accommodated into kegite locutionary argots). These locutionary features of nativisation and Englishisation indicate how the indigenous Yoruba language and English reciprocally influence each other to impact on the linguistic innovations of the kegites in Kegite English, which is largely intended to be understood by kegite members/initiates only, while sometimes intended to be understood by non-kegite members too. Each of the features shall be discussed in turn.

3.1. Englishised Indigenous Locutions (EILs)

Kegite members engage Englishised indigenous locutions in situations where they mutually mean to operate within each other’s indigenous lexical competence to pragmatically index:

i. Kegite activities ( i.e. what they do) ii. Kegite socialising objects iii. Identity specification

EILs have thus been associated with technical functionality in communicative encounters between kegite members, especially to suit the convention of language usage in kegite social practice.

The data reveal two types of EILs depicting kegite activities: mobility-based kegite activity and entertainment-based kegite activity. Mobility-based kegite activity refers to kegite members’ action of moving from one location to another by a means of transportation, while entertainment-based kegite activity deals with any action suggesting performance meant for members’ enjoyment. The following instance exemplifying EIL pointing to mobility-based kegite activity can be considered:

Example 1

Background: (After gyration, two kegite members engage in a conversation in which the initiator wishes to know the movement of the co-interlocutor)

A: Where are you migrating to? (Where are you going to?)

B: Migrating to my abuna (Going to my hostel)

A: Are you keteketerising yourself? (Are you going in a car?)

B: Two legesis migration remains my case. (I’m trekking)

(From World Headquarters, OAU)

Kegite B’s first conversational contribution prompts A’s locutionary choice “keteketerising” from kegite A, who wishes to know the intended mobility plan of his co-interlocutor (i.e. how the co-interlocutor intends to get to his hostel). Kegite A opts for the EIL, which in KD aptly communicates his intention of finding out B’s possibility of going to his destination by the means of a car. This locution “keteketerising”, which has a morphological root in the Yoruba word “ketekete” (donkey) but rendered in conformity with the morphological structure of an English word ending in the “-ing” suffix, signals the speaker’s indigenous lexical competence which aids the kegite-peculiar locutionary Englishisation. Denotatively, “ketekete” is an animal which primarily serves transportation purpose in the traditional African society. The Englishised indigenous locution “keteketerising” is therefore pragmatically used to capture the activity of “transporting” in the above context of kegite discourse.

Entertainment-based kegite activity also manifests the pragmatic engagement of EIL usually targeted to be mutually intelligible to conversing kegite members. Such locutionary act is therefore expected to draw on lexical items having sense and reference that index entertainment from the pool of indigenous vocabularies in the kegite argot. The following example can be considered:

Example 2

(Background: The number one member of the kigite club usually called Chief declares the social gathering open by calling for singing, drumming and dancing)

Chief: In our father’s house there is fullness of joy. So let all am karid in this kegite temple echo worosis and tanwigilise to the drummitoesponmo.

(In the kegite shrine, joy abounds. So let all kegite members in the shrine sing loudly and dance to the drummers’ drums).

All members: Gyration! Gyration! Gyration!

(Socialisation! Socialisation! Socialisation!

(From National Headquarters, UI)

The choice of the EIL “tanwigilise” in example 2 above signals the chief’s directive for members to dance to the rhythm of the drummers’ beat as all members sing along in traditional oral performance style. The locutionary choice obviously indicates entertainment-based kegite activity which draws its morphological root from the indigenous Yoruba word “tanwiji” (mosquito larva). The root morpheme “tanwíjí” thus refers to an insect whose movement is associated with dance in Yoruba cultural context and it is pragmatically adapted to express the sense of “dance” in kegite parlance as depicted in the above instance. The English“- ing” suffix affixed to the end of the word “tanwíjí” thus serves to Englishise the indigenous locution and derive an action-depicting lexical innovation which gives the impression of the centrality of dance to entertainment in kegite socialisation as an espousal of the pragmatics of Englished indigenous locution in kegite discourse. The pragmatic success of his lexical choice is evident in the members’ mutual access to the sense of the emergent EIL which results in their repetitive exclamatory echo of gyration (i.e. socialisation) in compliance with the chief’s directive for the activity of dance-inclusive entertainment to be activated to aid their socialisation.

EILs associated with kegite socialising objects are also found in our data. Where such locutions occur, lexical selection by the kegite members conversing is usually in favour of indigenous vocabularies adapted to be rendered structurally like English words. Such Englishised indigenous locutions are usually marked for mutually determinate sense and reference within the kegite argotic base, especially to acknowledge the awareness of the impact of different socialising objects in kegite merry-making contexts. The example below would make this point clearer:

Example 3

Background: (Preparatory to the gyration, the chief blesses the palmwine and the ground, being a necessary pre-condition for kegite gyration)

Chiefe : As I, AB “X” Ilya du Kakanfo, blesmatua the holywater and gyration ground, I hereby close the gyration by the way of reverse. HOD drummy to marry the ponmons for gyration and imbibementation.

(As I, the incumbent chief “X” of Kakanfo [Ladoke Akinola] branch, bless the palmwine and the gyration ground, I hereby declare the socialisation open. The band leader to beat the drums for socialisation and drinking)

HOD Drunny: You are karid, chiefe.

(You are recognized, Chief)

(From Ilya du Kakanfo, LAUTECH)

As obvious from the above example, the context of socialisation and merry-making serves as an avenue for friendly relations and cultural consciousness among kegite members. And certain culture specific symbolic objects play a role in these practices. The realisation of the practices essentially requires lexical selections whose meanings can be mutually reached by the kegite participants at the gyration. Hence, EILs are opted for. For example, the locution “ponmons” in the chief’s conversational input refers to a socialising object. The word obviously picks its morphological root from the Yoruba indigenous vocabulary “pònmó” (cowhide), usually processed into a leather which is commonly used to make such objects as drum, bag etc. for human use. The word is therefore selected for kegite argotic use in example 3 to pragmatically refer to drum, being an object which aids socialisation, thereby narrowing down the scope of the word. The addition of the “s” inflectional suffix to denote plural sense of the word in conformity with English morphological structure however serves to turn the word into an Englishised locution referring to drums as objects of socialisation by the kegites.

Identity-specification discourse also attracts EILs in kegite conversational interactions. The manifestation of lexical choices in such discursive situations is notably to index non-kegite members through Englishised indigenous locutions whose pragmatic senses are mutually intelligible to the kegite participants in the communicative encounters in question. Example 4 illustrates this point:

Example 4

Background: (During gyration (socialisation) at the world headquarters, two male non-members are seen in the gyration ground and the chief directs his commissioner of defence to find out their mission)

Cheife: World Marshal, what remains the case of those two babases (pointing to them)?

(The commissioner for defence of the world headquarters [i.e. OAU], what is the mission of those two non-kegite initiates (pointing to them)?

Marshal: My cheife, they want to yokopio comrade Ajilete.

(My chief, they want to see kegiteAjilete)

(From World Headquarters, OAU)

The conversation in example 4 opens with the chief’s question necessitated by the kegite principle of in-group identity, which excludes non-members from salient kegite activities. To demonstrate orientation to this principle, he engages a Yoruba lexicon which has been adapted for use as an English word by coinage with consideration for the suffixation process of English to realise a peculiar argotic usage. The locutionary choice “babases” therefore reflects the morphological pluralisation of singular words in English by the addition of the “-s” bound morpheme. The pragmatics of the locution “babases” as an argotic usage however is in its reference to the referents as non-kegite members/initiates rather than “fathers”, which the indigenous root “bàbá” indicates in Yoruba. The Englishised indigenous locution is thus realised with a kegite-peculiar meaning that has implication for specifying the identities of the referents as non-kegite men.

3.2 . Strictly Native Locutions (SNLs)

Kegites’ argotic use of strictly native locutions in our data favours words loaned directly from the native (Yoruba) language of the host communities of the sampled universities. While some of these locutions accommodated into kegite locutionary argots express their native senses, others manifest change of meanings constrained by the peculiarity of their usages by the kegites. Essentially, the engagement of such locutions presupposes linguistic competence in lexical usage, with the expectation that the sense of the lexical choice would be understood by both kegites and non-kegites alike. Thus SNLs are predominantly lent to sub-technical usages in KD and they are pragmatically marked for indexing:

i. Kegite activities (especially those reflecting aspects of the cultural orientations of the kegites to certain institutional activity types, e.g.

adjudication, etc). ii. Kegite cultural behaviours iii. Kegite symbolic objects

From the data, evidence shows that kegite activities usually indexed by the use of native locutions largely reflect aspects of the cultural orientations of the kegites. In line with the hierarchical structure of the club and normative system of orderliness held in high esteem by kegites, locutions reflecting kegite orientation to legal discourse are opted for in situations demanding adjudication for unacceptable behaviours. An example can be cited:

Example 5

Background: (A kegite official fails to wear his uniform to the gyration ground for a formal gyration. Being an offensive act, he is summoned before other members for trial, presided over by the chief of the club)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Chief: | National feather to sanko to the centre of centre.    (The secretary of the national headquarters (i.e. UI) to report to the centre.) |
| National |  |
| Feather: | (He moves to the centre) |
| Chief: | Fire me, why are you not regaliated? Gànífáwèhìnmí yourself. |
|  | (Tell me, why are you not in your uniform? Defend yourself. |
| National |  |
| Feather: | Chiefe, I dof. The odusremains that I was already late for gyration....er...I could not get to my abuna for my regalia. |
|  | (Chief, I’m sorry. What happened was that I was already late for the socialisation....er....I could not get to my hostel for my uniform.) |
| Chief: | Seek caution and apply terribly... |
|  | (Be warned and adjust seriously...) |
|  | (From National Headquarters, UI) |

An adjudication context is suggested above, with the chief interrogating a kegite official “national feather” (i.e. the secretary of the national headquarters of the kegite club) with respect to his failure to put on his regalia. This interrogation is premised on the knowledge of the cultural practice among kegites that during gyration, especially formal one, all kegite members are expected to appear in their full regalia (uniform) which distinguishes them from the non- members who might be allowed to be present as viewers. This regalia, which is usually white is made from calico and is decorated with images of palmtree and gourd at the front and back. The choice of the white colour is symbolic – it stands for unity and peace in kegite context. It is therefore offensive not to put on this regalia during gyration. Given kegites’ orientation to fairness, the chief calls for the affected member’s self defence, using the words “Gànífáwèhìnmíyourself”. The use of “Gànífwáhìnmí” here is premised on the exo-textual knowledge of the referent, Chief Abdul-Ganiyu Oyesola Fawehinmi, popularly called Gani Fawehinmi in his life-time, was a seasoned human and civil rights lawyer of Yoruba extraction in Nigeria. The choice of the locution signals the chief’s expectation that the member on trial should defend himself on the professional analogy of the bearer of the name locutionarily engaged. So, rather than naming an individual, the loaned native (Yoruba) locution “Gànífwáhìnmí” pragmatically depicts an action, an activity of defending, in the argotic usage, which is accessible by the kegite members as well as the non-kegite members at the scene, on the basis of the encyclopaedic knowledge of Gani Fawehinmi’s professional practice.

SNLs indexing kegite cultural behaviours also feature in the context of kegite gyration (socialisation) in our data. Lexical choices in this category are those loaned directly from native (Yoruba) language of the host community into kegite discourse and accommodated into kegite locutionary argots with their native meanings retained. An instance is provided below:

Example 6:

(Speaker A is assigned to tutor speaker B, a new member, on some ethics of the kegite club, but B fails to keep the appointment)

A: Before I exercise the power vested on me, I want you to fire me why you decided not to romance with me yesterday for tutorialisation.

(Before I exercise the power vested on me, I want you to tell me why you decided not to come for tutorial yesterday.)

B: I doftòwòtòwò. I jam malaria and went by the way ofjaja to romance injection.

(I am respectfully sorry. I was down with malaria and went to jaja (health centre) to take injection)

A: Seek caution. I have vibrated!

(Be careful. I have spoken!)

(From National Headquarters, UI)

The locutionary choice “tòwòtòwò” (respectfully) in speaker B’s conversational input aptly fits with the Yoruba cultural behaviour of respect denoted by the word. Its loan into the kegite argot thus pragmatically indexes the culture of respect being espoused by the kegites in the club’s promotion of the cultural heritage of Africans. The choice is obviously felicitous, as it suggests admittance of an unacceptable act to a superior, who deserves appropriate respect. The locution’s preservation of its native meaning therefore stamps its sub-technical functionality, making it easily understood not only by the kigites at the scene, but also by the non-kegites in attendance.

Sometimes, SNLs indexing kegite symbolic objects are opted for to signal the pragmatic input of native locutions in kegite argot. The occurrence of such native locutions indicating symbolic objects is basically associated with merrymaking context and has implication for the preservation of indigenous words that have symbolic adaptations within kegite argot. This point is instantiated below:

Example 7: (During gyration, a kegite member requests for palm-wine from the wine-serving officer called Tapper and the officer advises him to drink responsibly as he serves him).

A: Any drink not blesmatua inside akèrègbèI cannot decode. Tapper, fill my emblem with holywater and let me imbible lavishly.

(Any drink not blessed inside the keg I don’t recognise. Tapper, fill my cup with palmwine and let me drink merrily.)

B: (Filling the cup) Imbibe and seek caution.

(Drink responsibly.)

(From Ilya du Kakanfo, LAUTECH)

The above instantiates the engagement of native locution to index a kegite symbolic object in the context of merry-making. This context creates an image of African socialisation practice, with palmwinebeing served from “akèrègbè” (the traditional keg). It is this practice of serving palmwine from the keg that results in the derivation of the name “kegite club”. The choice of the locution “akèrègbè” can therefore be pragmatically marked as a symbolic representation of holy container, from which palmwine (known as “holywater” in kegite argot) is served after being blessed. Though the sense of the locutionary choice “akèrègbè” is intelligible to the kegites and non-kegites within the Yoruba community, the pragmatics of the usage in kegite discourse, with the sense of “holy container” of palm-wine for socialisation, is of significant value to the kegites.

4. Conclusions

Our investigation of indigenous locutions in kegite discourse has revealed two categories of locution in the discourse in Southwestern Nigerian universities, namely, Englishised indigenous locutions, and strictly native locutions, which demonstrate the pragmatic union between English and local lexical choices in kegites’ linguistic initiatives, especially to mark in-group language identity mostly intended to be understood by kegites alone, but sometimes intended to be understood by non-kegites too. We established that these locutionary features have their roots in the symbiosis of English and Yoruba to produce the kegite English for facilitating in-group conversational interactions among the kegites. The study further revealed that kegites’ choices of indigenous locutions from the pool of the argotic locutions are constrained by their communicative goals and orientations to the promotion of African cultural as well as linguistic heritage. Thus, the performance of locutionary acts in kegite discourse hinges on tactical use of language for aiding communication success in the context of socialisation.

The study contends that the socio-linguistic ways of life of the kegites’ host community have implications on adaptation to the pragmatics of indigenous locutionary usages in kegite discourse. The two categories of locution that emerged in our data therefore manifest adaptation to the pragmatics of local interactions in kegite discourse to achieve either technical or sub-technical meanings intended by conversational participants in different situations. The paper ultimately contributes to the understanding of how the pragmatic engagement of indigenous locutionary choices conveys participants’ locution-constrained meanings in kegite discourse; and concludes that kegites’ further demonstration of culture-spurred innovations in locutionary types and their pragmatic engagements will enhance a more effective in-group socialisation for pan-African consciousness.

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