Language Power and Ideology in Commercial Discourse: A Prologue to Critical Discourse Analysis for Neophyte Analysts

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Abstract

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has increasingly become popular as one of interdisciplinary approach to gain insight into various kinds of discourses. A large number of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in applied linguists and media studies across the world have included various forms of language analysis to familiarise graduates with different dimensions of text analysis. This paper reviews the concept of critical discourse analysis, its various dimensions and tools which can be used for discourse analysis for a critical insight into texts by focusing on an example of commercial discourse. The discussion provides theoretical and practical layers of the approach by illustrating the concepts through sample analyses of the texts. The paper aims to serve as a quick reference note for readers with little or no previous knowledge of CDA, providing rudimentary understanding of the topic.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis, social and discursive practices, ideology, texture, intertextuality*

1. Introduction

Commercial advertisements have assumed a powerful and determining role in the marketing of any object for sale. National and multinational companies use the tool of language to persuade and attract consumers to buy their products. They not use product information in a way as to highlight the superiority of their brand but they have also assumed the power of changing and modifying the general trends in all walks of life. Whether it is fashion, technology, edible products or sports, commercial advertisements have cut throat competition to defeat rival products and set the zeitgeist. The companies make it possible through devising slogans that relate to the dreams and aspirations of public, draw their attention and persuade them to consume the product. Hence the discourse of these commercial advertisements becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the companies who use it to exploit the consumer market for financial benefits. In line with the change and emancipatory agenda of the critical paradigm, this paper intends to provide a review of approaches and techniques critical discourse analysts may use to uncover vested agendas of writers in order to raise awareness among general audience of commercial discourse. Hence, this paper reviews the basic concept of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and illustrates for novice analysts how this analytical tool can be used for critique of ideology in texts.

2. Critical Discourse Analysis

The power of CDA is appreciated in its capacity to look beyond the superficial meaning of discourses and to uncover hidden ideologies behind the superficial meanings of texts. Van Dijk (2001) views CDA 'as type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context' (p. 352). Asghar (2013) adds that CDA is indicative by nature and strives to expose the use of power by social institutions on political, cultural, ethical or gender basis. He maintains that the task of a critical analyst is not only to understand, but also to expose and challenge the social inequality that comes to the surface as a result of critical discourse analysis. In this perspective, the quality of the research is judged on how much the adopted approach is explicit and on the strengths of its arguments rather than on a set of pre-determined criteria. Researchers, like Barker & Galosinski (2001), Fairclough (1992 a; 2003) describe the procedure and aspects an analyst usually follows in the critical analysis. Fairclough (1992 a) asserts that a text analysis should focus on experiential, referential and metaphorical references to vocabulary used in the text. In addition, analysts should also consider experimental, relational and expressive aspects of grammar along with linking sentences should also be considered for reliable and valid interpretation of texts. Bloor & Bloor (2007) list the main objectives of CDA as below:

- To analyse discourse practice that reflect or construct social practice.
- To investigate how ideologies can become frozen in language and find ways to break the ice.
- To increase awareness of how to apply these objectives to specific cases of injustice, prejudice, and misuse of power.
- To demonstrate the significance of language in social relations of power.
- To investigate how meaning is created in context.
- To investigate the role of speaker/writer purpose and authorial stance in the construction of discourse. (pp. 12 – 13)

In this perspective, CDA is viewed as heavily influenced by literary theory and sociolinguistics because it is not simply a method of decoding the meanings hidden in a text; rather it interprets the texts in their specific context by taking into account the historical, present (and in many cases future) circumstances through an attempt to uncover the writer's attitude towards the participants and the circumstances presented in a text. For this, CDA might consider the framing of the text i.e. how the content of text is presented and the sort of angle or perspective the writer, or the speaker, is taking (Paltridge 2006).

Asghar (2013) highlights that critical analysis of texts not only involves the text itself but also closely considers the texture which includes layout, photographs, diagrams, graphics etc. in order to gain insight into the mood of the text as well as that of the text producer. Asghar adds that in addition to providing insight into what is present in a text, a textural analysis also gives information on the absent elements in the text, equally significant to know the text.

3. Fairclough's Model of Critical Discourse Analysis

The following section informs on the three dimensional nature of critical discourse analysis as perceived by Fairclough (1992 a). Main components of this modal include text, discourse practice and sociolinguistic practices.

3.1 Text

The first level of the discourse model is text which includes all forms of communication (written, Spoken, visual). Analysis of a text can be made in different perspectives. A linguistic analysis should be sensitive to the representation, categories of participants, construction of their identities and their relation with one another and also with other institutions and groups. Both presence and absence of such elements are significant to give insight into the issues. Fairclough (1992 a) suggests four aspects for linguistic analysis of a text: vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure. These aspects draw heavily upon Halliday's (1985) systemic grammar as well as using concepts from other theories. Fairclough (1992 b) asserts that "the grammar provides different 'process types' and associated 'participants' as options, and systemic selection of a particular type may be ideologically significant" (p 27). He considers it potentially powerful because this analytical dimension with a focus on systemic grammar not only analyses what is in the text but also what is absent. The four aspects suggested by Fairclough (1992 a) are illustrated below.

3.2 Vocabulary

At lexical level, the analysis looks into certain lexical choices reflecting the attitude of writer, for example, the use of freedom fighter vs. terrorist. One way of analysing vocabulary is to focus on the alternative wordings and their political and ideological significance. The analysis can also draw upon the ideological and political importance of particular metaphors and conflicts between alternative metaphors (Fairclough, 1992 b: 77). While comparing two news reports by two different newspapers on the execution of Saddam Hussein, Asghar (2014) observes that a British newspaper *The Sun* referred to him as *Saddam Hussein stood shaking in the dock*, but was reported to have *walked to his customary seat* in the Pakistani newspaper, the Nation. In the same news reports, the lexical choices of non-human participants indicated the level of sympathy of both newspapers with Saddam Hussein, and hence reflect their ideological ties. In the following quote, the way the verbal process "shout" was used by both newspapers is noteworthy where the Sun referred to Saddam Hussein as '…the one-time leader of the country tried to shout him (the judge) down with cries…'and the Nation mentioned Saddam Hussein as *continued to shout, denouncing the court'*. Asghar highlights that the process *shout* was used in the Sun in a negative context whereas in the Nation the same process is more likely to communicate a positive implication while depicting Saddam indulged in a spirited activity even when he was arrested.

In an other example from Figure 1, Text 1 uses three adjectives 'family, delicious and refreshing'. All the three

adjectives are likely in the American society of 1970s when the US was involved in the Vietnam War. In that period Americans were tired of social struggle and financial crises. After working together for mutual interests for a long time, they wanted to focus on personal interests. This change appeared in many parts of American society and influenced culture, education, and politics. One of the most popular TV programmes of that time was 'All in the Family'.

Text 1: 1970s　　　　Text 2: 1988　　　　Text 3: 2010
Figure 1
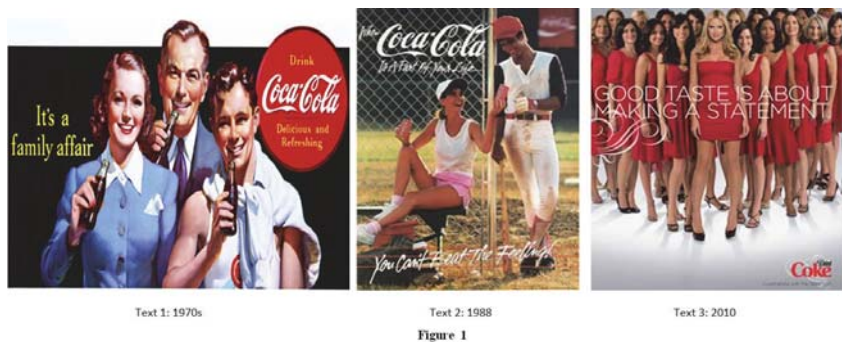
Text 1 in Figure 1 reasonably convinces about the adjectives focusing on personal interests and welfare in the context stated above. The slogan 'It's a family affair' offered a perfect choice of a drink that unites families, refreshes them with a delicious beverage. The verb *drink* is quite emphatic and imperative rather than politely persuasive as expected in today's commercial discourse. It might be due to the establishment of Coca-Cola as a national drink by its 50th anniversary – a status sufficient to be assertive.

3.3　Grammar

This level includes transitivity relations, for example material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal and existential processes, the role of participants in certain circumstances, passivization, nominalization etc. Grammatical analysis also includes clause grammar which looks at interpersonal meanings by focusing on the way social relations and social identities are marked in clauses (Fairclough 1992 b; Barker & Galasinki 2001). Asghar and Al-Bargi (2014) analysed a short story to highlight how a critical discourse analysis of the story reveals the hidden ideologies. While discussing to various processes attributed to the main female and male characters, Asghar and Al-Bargi (2014) observed how the writer conspicuously of unconsciously depicted a stereotypical image of both fenders (Figure 2).

Della	Jim
"*She started trying to remove*" – as if she is covering a mistake.	He "*was never late*" – never done something undesirable.
"*A tear ran down*" - sign of weakness	He "*folded his arms*" – a gesture of aggression or at least that of an ability to have self-defence in contrast to showing weakness on Della's part.
"*Moved quickly*" – not prepared	"*Stepped in*" – confident and composed
"*Heard*" – passive action	"*Felt*" – active and independent action
"*Cried*"	"*Smiled*"
"*Sat near the door*" – waiting for Jim	"*Sat down*" – to comfort himself
"*Said*" – more submissive/explanatory	"*Asked*" – interrogatory, more authoritative

Figure 2: Comparison of Jim and Della's attributes/processes (Asghar & Al-Bargi, 2014)

Asghar and Al-Bargi observed how assigning certain processes to certain genders empowered the male character over the female gender behind the veil of love and sacrifice. They pointed out that both characters, out of intense love for each other, sacrificed their most valuable asset to please the other partner but all the processes attributed to the female character depicted her as a weak and sentimental person as compared to those of male character that depicted him as a strong person with a variety of processes human beings may use. The female character might gain sympathy of readers because of her losses but the concealed ideology of the text puts the female character at a disadvantageous position.

Example from Text 2 of Figure 1 illustrate how grammatical constructions influence discourse meanings. Unlike Text 1, Text 2 uses a complex sentence structure to accord the growing complexity in the life of the decade of 1980s. Contrary to the direct reference to a family affair followed by motivational factors and instruction, two sentences in the Text 2 have layers of meaning: first "Coca-Cola is a fact of life"; this fact was emphasized by a background logo of the drink as well as using a prominent logo of the drink in the foreground. The fact sentence was used in a period when the newly emerging fact of the society i.e. non marital relationships and individualism was on the rise and family values were diminishing. This relation of the text with the social reality does not exist in the text but it does exist in consumers' mind which Halliday (1978) calls formulation i.e. something cannot be found in the text but rather exist in people's minds who perceive the text. Readers of Text 2 might not be able to visibly or verbally relate the social change with the text but the text is most likely to influence their understanding in their perception in the wake of prevalent social change in everyday life. The social change is also linked with the second sentence "You can't beat the feeling" denoting that zeal for liberty in the society cannot be hindered and Coca-Cola is there to support consumers in this transition. The active structure of the second sentence with strong emphasis on the inability (You can't …) of beating feelings inherently reinforces the drink which has become a fact of life and is supposedly can't be resisted. In this small commercial discourse, the company took advantage of the spreading social change to sell the beverage at the cost of family values which once the company had supported in the 70s to sell the drink.

3.4 Cohesion

The analysis focuses on the use of synonyms/antonyms/hyponyms etc., repetitions, various kinds of connecting words, referring and substitution devices etc. It looks at how clauses are linked together to form larger units in texts. To Fairclough (1992 b) 'linkage (in texts) is achieved in various ways: through using vocabulary from a common semantic field, repeating words, using near-synonyms, and so forth; through a variety of referring and substituting devices (pronouns, definite articles, demonstratives, ellipses of repeated words; through using conjunctive words' (p. 77).

Text 3 in Figure 1 is another example of analysing texts for cohesion. Unlike Text 1 and 2, Text 3 has a small icon of Coke in the right bottom corner. The typical colour of Coke has been replaced by the visual of red dresses of female participants. In the first instance, viewers see these female participants as representative of the drink because of the identified colour. The drink in Text 3 is no more a family or feeling related drink as it claimed to be in the past; it seems to have entered in an era of competition and has become now *diet Coke*. This time the writers of the Text 3 have not used verbal references to relate to the qualities of the drink; rather they have replaced the effects of the diet drinks in visuals for profound consequence. The writers did not use directly linked slogan, instead they created a statement "Good taste is about making a statement" and left it to the viewers to establish connections among the red dresses, the smartly figured female participants and the small icon of the drink. Power relation between the drink (or the company) and consumers has been made extremely low by representing the actual logo of the drink in the corner and making friendly female participants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds to be related and identified by consumers who are sweetly smiling to the consumers. At the same time, these female participants represent the company, dressed in the "official colour" and giving viewers a warm welcome.

3.5 Text Structure

Texts can be categorised in genres, where some texts may have defined principles of structuring the text such as news stories which usually follow the pattern called inverted pyramid (Bell 1991; Bhatia 1993; Fairclough 1995; Reah 2005). Various genres can be analyzed in various ways such as narrative genres can trace out the correlation between the uses of tenses; texts related to descriptions may have discourse structuring patterns and use of tense and modality. While looking at the structure of a text in educational context, Asghar and Al-Bargi (2014) analyse the text in tabular form to illustrate how a structural analysis of a text not only facilitates to understand the construction and development of thought but also guide readers on how to write texts in a logical sequence.

Such an approach to examine the text critically tends to be analytical by nature, and also scientific, with a focus on linguistic construction and patterns used by the text producer. This approach to CDA involves micro analysis of the text. However, Fairclough (1992 b) believes that critical linguists tend to place too much emphasis upon the text as product than as process "which places a one-sided emphasis upon the effects of discourse in the social reproduction of existing social relations and structures" (p. 28).

Fairclough believes that micro level analysis potentially can expose the hidden ideologies in a text. However, a

simultaneous macro analysis is inevitable in order to gain information on the order of discourse as well as writers' intentions behind specific syntactical, lexical and semiotic preferences. Fairclough (2003) gives a list of questions to be asked while analysing a text following his proposed modal. He emphasized that the analysis should seek information about certain features of texts such as: social events the text is a part of, generic references of texts, inclusion or exclusion of other texts, internationality and interaction of texts, semantic relations, representation of human and non-human participants.

3.6   Discourse Practice

The second level of discourse practice in Fairclough's model is important because it links text and sociocultural practice. Discourse practice involves receiving and producing messages. Fairclough (1992 b) maintains that 'discursive practice is constitutive in both conventional and creative ways: it contributes to reproducing social society (social identity, social relationships, systems of knowledge and belief) as it is, yet also contributes to transforming society' (p. 65). Discourse practice signifies the context which "ultimately means the very shape, meaning, and effect of the social world – the various social roles people play, the socially and culturally situated identities they take on, the social and cultural activities they engage in, as well as the material, cognitive, social, cultural, and political effects of these" (Gee 2005: 1). It is at this level where ideologies and sociocultural patterns are shaped and also shape the sociocultural practices. Discourse types and genres are also produced at this level. Thus the contextual analysis involves "the situational context (questions about time and place) and the intertextual context (looking for additional texts/information about or from producers and their product) as central for the process of interpretation" (Janks 1997: 37).

Fairclough (1992 b) believes that analysis of discursive practice should involve the analysis of text at micro as well as macro level. Micro analysis involves a precise focus on how the text is produced, who are the participants, what are the circumstances and what linguistic devices have been used. In other words, micro analysis mainly focuses on linguistic analysis, using some sort of framing for interpretation. Macro analysis looks at the nature of members' resources that is being drawn upon in order to produce and interpret texts, and to inquire whether it is being drawn upon in normative or creative way. Both of these analyses are interrelated and complement each other to give a more vivid and reliable interpretation.

3.7   Sociolinguistic Practice

The third level of Fairclough's discourse modal is sociocultural practice which maintains that discourse has potential to influence social structures and can play an active role in bringing change. It has various dimensions – economic, political, cultural, ideological – and discourse may be implicated in all of these without any of them being reducible to discourse (Fairclough 1992 b: 66). Waller, (2006) observes that the dominant approach to understand and solve old as well as new and emerging problems, faced by many countries, especially the third world countries, has generally focused on systems, resources social action, social practices and forces of structure. He claims that the recent scholarship in the global sphere has suggested that issues of language and discourse might be one of the many other reasons of such problems. The advent of various versions of English on the globe as well as the concept of linguistic imperialism also supports this notion. In this sense, critical discourse analysis has potential in the social domain for critical research for the emancipation of the suppressed classes of a society. Fairclough (1992 b) confirms that discourse has taken a major role in socio-cultural reproduction and change in modern and late modern society. The action of uncovering the hidden ideologies as well as the practices behind the texts logically leads to challenging the status quo for a better change.

It will be helpful to refer back to Figure 1 in order to explore the representation of the institution of family in the commercial discourse of Coke and it's reflection in the changing social practices regarding the same institution. Text 1 in Figure 1 is more family oriented than in 1988 or 2010. The slogan in Text 1 is "It's a family affair" which clearly attracts domestic audience. The participants are three human – a mother, father and a son. Parents are formally dressed up whereas the son is casually dressed as a teenager is likely to be. The logo of the drink contains a direct instruction 'Drink Coca-Cola – Delicious and refreshing'. The audience of this picture and slogan are clearly families in the United States. The picture reflects a simple lifestyle, with clear conjugal and family relationship. The qualities of the drink relate to health taste. However, social norms drastically changed in the 1980s. Whitely (2008) observed:

'The 80s continued the trends of the 60s and 70s - more divorces, more unmarried (people) living together, more single parent families. The two-earner family was even more common than in previous decades, more women earned college and advanced degrees, married, and had fewer children'.

Text 2 in Figure 1 reflects the same trend where the institution of family is somewhat ambiguous. The couple in the picture may not necessarily be a married couple, particularly when they have been placed in a non-domestic environment. The slogans "It's a fact of your life" and "you can't beat the feelings" are also meaningful in the context of the prevalent social norms of that period. The purpose of flexibility in the meanings of discourse in this picture is intentional to attract both audiences i.e. the diminishing institute of family as well the emerging trend of non-married couples. Text 3 is from the advertisement campaign of Coke for diet Coke. The embassy of the United States in Japan, while giving information on the current family situation in America states:

'… over the past several decades, U.S. society has witnessed an evolution in family structure and daily life in many respects, because of myriad factors, running the gamut from advancements in science to the composition of the workplace. Single parenthood, adoptive households, step-parenting, stay-at-home fathers, grandparents raising children are but a few of the newer tiles in the mosaic'.

Text 3 in Figure 1 reflects similar facts. The participants are several young females in red short dresses, representing various nationalities, standing in a group. Text 3 was introduced in a period when women had advanced in all sphere of life and enjoyed equal rights in the society. Unlike the previous two texts, presence of only one gender in Text 3 is significant in the light of the fact that in the United States, 25% of children under age 18 are living with a single parent, and in most circumstances the missing parent is the father. Hence, a short analysis of commercial discourse in Figure 1 reveals how discursive as well as sociocultural practice shape and are shaped by discourses.

3.8 Discourse and ideology

In order to understand the third level, it is essential to view it in the perspectives of ideology and power. Ideologies are produced and reflected within the discourse. The main purpose behind an ideology is to offer change in society. Ideologies are abstract thoughts which can be/are applied to reality. To Fairclough (1992 a) the function of ideology is to construct texts which constantly and cumulatively 'impose assumptions' upon the interpreter and the text producer, typically without being aware of them. Ideological assumptions are beliefs that the text producer unconsciously makes in the perspective of his/her social knowledge and these are decoded by the interpreter. CDA establishes relation between social practices and assumptions which underlie in discourse. Ideology has its roots in the Marxist notion of false consciousness which emphasizes that material and institutional processes in capitalist society mislead the proletariat over the nature of capitalism. The proletariat are not aware that they are under this ideological control. The powerful group tries to impose ideology invisibly. Ideology critique is critiquing, and thus making visible the ideology of the powerful group who use particular values and practices to exercise their power and get control over the proletariat. Fairclough (1992 a) believes that Ideologies are most effective when most invisible. Invisibility is achieved when they are brought to discourse implicitly leading the interpreter to 'textualize' the world in a particular way.

3.9 Discourse and power

Discourse constructions generate power relations the way we negotiate our relative status through interchange with others (Thomas, Wareing, Singh, Peccei, Thornborrow & Jones 2004). Fairclough (1992 a) and Fairclough & Wodak (1997) view language as having two versions of power: power in discourse and power behind discourse. By the former they mean the power appears in lexical choices and syntactical structures e.g. directive speech acts, imperatives etc. The latter includes power behind discourse where 'the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power e.g. the hidden power of media discourse to influence/change' (Fairclough 1992 a: 46). Thus Fairclough's three dimensional modal denotes that language is a part of society and it can be interpreted in the perspective of the interaction with the context. This also refers to the fact that culture and society are composed of discourse. Wodak (1996) says that every instance of language use makes its own contribution to reproducing or transforming culture and society, including power relations. However, it would be wise to keep in view Van Dijk (1988) and Fairclough (1992 a) who warn that the analysis of discourse practices should not analyse the text artificially isolated from analysis of institutional and discourse practices within which texts are embedded.

The commercial discourses in Figure 1 contain the second version of power i.e. power behind the text. As mentioned earlier, the texts throughout exploited the social practices of American society to influence the on-going change to benefit their sale and the popularity of the drink. They assumed sharply contrasting stances to suit the time and propagated whatever was the popular tendency in particular periods. By using the power of discourse they not only

achieved financial and social advantages in the market but also imposed certain ideologies by influencing people's opinions through the power of commercial discourse.

3.10 Texture Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the texture analysis of texts include everything other than language, and in addition to providing insight into what is present in a text, a textural analysis also gives information on the absent elements in the text, equally significant to know the text. Texts in Figure 2 have different textures giving insight into the social and ideological perspectives. The participants in the text 1 are dressed in colours which link them with one another: the father and the mother are dressed in blue shaded dresses whereas the son is dressed in white. The same colour is also present in father's and mother's dresses. This unification in colour reinforces the impression of family unity that the drink intended to emphasize. However, unlike the formal dressing of parents, the son's casual clothes are also indicative of the coming social change in the next generation. The son's shirt has a red spot similar to the logo of the drink whereas the parents have only held bottles in hands which might be interpreted as the company's targeted future consumers. Though the father is standing behind but they are standing in a position which gives the impression that the father is protecting his family – again a family oriented message that the company intended to give to their consumers. On the other hand in Text 2, male and female participants are in a playground. Both the participants can be a married couple, just friends or civil partners – conclusion is left to viewers' discretion to be made in accordance with their own choice. In the perspective of women's movement for equal rights, the male participant is standing behind the female participant whereas the female participant is sitting in a more relaxed and authoritative posture. The male participant is no more a protector like in Text 1 rather both participants seem to enjoy equal status. The couple is not in four walls but in the open which speaks of emerging liberty and diminishing institution of family and household. The dresses of both participants are more liberal and casual than in the Text 1 denoting the change which was anticipated in the casual dress of the young boy in the text1. Text 3 on the other hand, contains a number of well-groomed female participants dressed in red and standing in a confident posture. The absence of male participants is significant and denotes the social change where women can survive on their own without any support from the male partners. Thus, the texture of the three texts suggests how these texts have been composed in line with the social practices of respective periods in the American society and these texts insinuated certain ideologies in the guise of marketing a drink. Such ideologies cannot be realised unless consumers are aware of how powerful groups in a society use language to manipulate their vested interests.

4. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the way CDA perceives texts and interprets in the context of social practices in order to critique the ideologies behind texts. The discussion established that discourses have the capacity to form and being formed the social practices. Furthermore, discourse may contain hidden ideologies and the task of critical discourse analyst is to expose and critique those ideologies to emancipate the readers of such texts from any vested interest or agendas of various groups and individuals. It is particularly important to expose hidden ideologies because hidden ideologies are more effective and, therefore, readers need to be aware of these before being influenced unknowingly. It is vital for readers and cosnumers to be aware of the marketing strategies used by companies, which have pivotal role in the in teir marketing compaigne. A simultaneous macro analysis of texts along with micro analysis enables readers to understand texts more comprehensively.

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