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Comparative Componential Analysis of Semantic Density of Selected Lexical Items in Surah al Fatiha (the Holy Quran) with Special Reference to Various Translations in English

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Abstract

This study using a qualitative paradigm, investigates certain lexical items of the Holy Quran, employing Newmark's model of Componential Analysis. No two translations of the selected lexical items are the same in the 62 English-translated versions. The Holy Quran, being the language of ALLAH Almighty, has a special semantically loaded vocabulary which is hard for other languages to be completely encompassed, transferred or transmitted. Generally, the Target Language (English) tends to miss the semantic core or only marginally related to these items in a narrow sense, which results in a translation. It is worth noting that the gap between the semantic content of the Source and the Target codes is not due to extra-linguistic factors (e.g., cultural, religious, political); rather, it is due largely to the vast expanse of semantic components encompassed by these items as used in the Holy Quran.

Key Words: Semantically Condensed Vocabulary, Comparative Componential Analysis, Under Translation

Introduction

The basic drive of a translation is often a lack of understanding and comprehension of source Text (ST) for Target Language (TL)readers. Therefore, for the purpose of making the original ST understandable and accessible to TL readers, translation/s of the source text is carried out. Readers of TLgenerally rely on translation, but sometimes the translated version is not authentic and genuine enough to help the target readers to reach what Popvic calls the "invariant core".(Bassnett, Translation Studies, 2002). The problem of the selected words in the present study is not of pragmatic value(intended meaning), but it is part of the very conceptual, literal and componential meaning/s.The Holy Quran has been translated into different world languages all over the world by scholars in order to make its semantic content accessible and understandable to their respective readers and, in this way, gain an insight into its meaning alongside its recitation. Since the language of the Holy Quran has many semantically rich and condensed lexical items, the different translations of such items are virtually unable to impart the deeper, far-reaching and comprehensive semantic contents converged in single lexical items. Many such semantically dense items can be found in the very first sura AL-FATIHA.

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The reason for not coming up with exact or nearly exact equivalence is not necessarily the result of translators' lack of knowledge about the denotative meanings of these lexical items; rather, it may be attributed to the fact that the TL (whatsoever it is) has no such lexical items in the stock of its lexicon to render the essential or maximum possible semantic content of the source language items (in the present study the language of the Holy Quran). We may describe the TL as victims of under lexicalisation in respect of certain lexical choices of the Holy Quran. This under lexicalisation is not the result of cultural, social, economic, or geographic differences between two languages or other factors, as is generally the case in translation issues of two languages. Unlike this, the problem of under lexicalisation in this study is pure of linguistic nature because these words or their near-synonyms are also part of other world languages but with a narrow and limited range of semantic contents covered by them. Resultantly, the translators come up with translated versions in which some translated lexical items convey a very narrow and superficial view of the original source text items. And in some cases, they translate single items with a phrase or multi-descriptive words, but still, only a part or some aspects are only covered rather than a complete sense is conveyed.

Literature Review

The word "Translation" has been variously defined by different translation scholars according to their own perceptions and understanding of the term. There are scores of translation scholars who approach the phenomenon of translation from quite diverse perspectives from one another. For example, it is conceived of as an activity, a process, a product, a practice, a skill, a profession, training, a subject, a discipline, a technology etc. Since translation is such a vast and complex phenomenon, all these scholars are only oriented toward different dimensions of translations, but none can come up with a holistic and perfect definition of it; instead, it can only be described but cannot be defined.

Evidence of conflicting attitudes towards the process or activity of translation can be observed in the description of the term "translation" by scholars such as Theodore Savory, who considers it as an "art", and Eric Jackobson thinks of it as an "art", and Horst Frenz claims that "translation is neither a creative art nor an imitative art, but stands somewhere between the two". SimilarlyJakobson describes it as "interlingual transposition", while Ludskanovcalls itas "a semiotic transformation" (Bassnett, S. 2002).

The concept of French theorist, Georges Mounin, is somewhat different from the rest as he perceives translation as "a series of operations". His focus is not only on linguistic equivalents, but he stresses more on the functional significance of the translated versions in the target culture. According to him, the starting point and the end product of it are significations and functions within a given culture. So he cites the example of the English lexical item 'pastry'. He says when 'pastry' is translated into a language such as Italian without regard for its signification, it will not be able to carry out its function of meaning within the target culture, despite the fact that there will be a dictionary 'equivalent' of it in Italian. The reason for this gap can be ascribed to the fact that the word 'pasta' has a completely different associative field in English, which is not the case in Italian. According to Mounin, in such cases, the translators need to resort to combining different units so that an approximate equivalent may be found.

The problem of exact equivalence has also been discussed by the famous Russian linguist, Roman Jakobson, who says that in translation a message may provide an adequate interpretation of code units or message of the source text, but there is often no possibility of an ideal and perfect equivalence through translation. Jakobson goes on to say that even apparently most simple synonyms do not yield equivalence, and he has shown through examples how intralingual translation ordinarily resorts to a combination of lexical units for the perfect interpretation of the meaning of a single unit. He says that even a monolingual dictionary of synonyms or thesaurus may provide us with results such as 'perfect' as a synonym for 'ideal' or 'vehicle' as a synonym for 'conveyance' but in neither case, there is complete equivalence, for in either case each lexical item is surrounded within itself by a large set of non-transferable associations and connotations.

Jakobson also gives an example of the Russian word 'syr', a food that is made of fermented pressed

curds, which is translated roughly into English as 'cottage cheese'. According to Jakobson, the translation of Russian 'syr' into English 'cottage cheese' is only a sufficient and satisfactory interpretation of a source code unit into target code units, but equivalence is impossible.

Andre Lefevere (1992) considers "translation" as rewriting of the source text. Nida (1964) (having a scientific and systematic approach) thinks of it as "a scientific activity". Catford (1965,p.1). defines it as "an operation performed on languages: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another." Newmark (2001) conceives of it as "a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language" (p.7). Simon (2006), focusing on its cultural dimensions of it, argues that some translations are "manoeuvres that represent shifts in cultural history or which consciously exploit the limit, raising the temperature of cultural exchange" (p.16). Hatim and Mason (1990), oriented towards the linguistic aspects of it, state that translation is the transfer of grammatical, lexical, and rhetorical meaning, which is implied or inferable meaning for readers.

Methodology

A comparative analysis of specific lexical items
of the source text (the Holy Quran) and the target text (different renditions in English by scores of different scholars) was carried out employing the model Componential Analysis (CA) in translation by Peter Newmark (2001). According to Newmark, Componential Analysis (CA) in translation and in linguistics are not the same. In linguistics, it means splitting up a word into the many various senses of sense components "which may or may not be universal" (2001, p.114). Whereas in translation, the basic process involved is the comparison of an SL item with a TL item which is somewhat similar in meaning but is not necessarily and obviously one-to-one equivalent. It is carried out by pointing first to the common and then the differing sense components of lexical choices in both texts. Normally it is the case that the SL items have a more specific or wider range of meanings covered compared to the TL words, and in such cases, the translator needs to add

one or two TL sense components to the corresponding TL words so that a closer approximation of meaning is gained.

The sense components of words can either be only referential, in which case they are pragmatically neutral or both referential and pragmatic simultaneously. So in a comprehensive sense, an SL item can be distinguished from a TL item on the one hand with respect to structure(features like its composition, shape, size) and function of its referent (referentially); on the other in its cultural context, associations and connotations. Besides, it can also be distinguished on the basis of features like currency, Age (period), social class usage and degree of formality, emotional overtone, generality or technicality and, finally, "in the pragmatic effect of its sound composition, e.g., onomatopoeia or repetitive phonemes or suggestive symbolical consonantal clusters". (Newmark, 2001, 114)

Newmark gives examples of words such as 'chair' and 'jolly'. The former has only referential components and is pragmatically 'neutral'; but the latter(as in 'jolly good') is mainly pragmatic, in which case there is a likelihood of which being over-translated as in French (drdlemem) or under-translated as in German {ganz, vielleichi), so both the languages, in fact, missing the connotation of social class.

Sense components or semantic features of lexical items are known as semes, whereas a single complete sense of a word is called a sememe. Any SL and TL word pair that is being analysed shows some common, general and distinctive or diagnostic and indicative components. Besides, many lexical items also have ancillary, metaphorical or technical components which become diagnostic and indicative in certain contexts. For example, the word "mule" has the ancillary components of 'stubborn' and 'obstinate' in addition to its sore semantic features or components.

Analyses of the various sememes (single senses) of a lexical item have to be carried out separately, even though such senses are more often than not related. In order to establish the semantic boundary/limits of an SL vocabulary item, an extra-contextual componential analysis may also be carried out if the relevant SL word is more or less context-

free (e.g. the item "fasiueux" can be stretched to "luxurious", perhaps, but not to "lavish"). More commonly, word analyses will be done contextually (dealing only with one sense of the word) so that analysis of TL sense components is restricted to the relevant sense components of SL. Generally, CA only was carried out of only those specific words which could not adequately be translated and which had some particular significance either in the ST or in the TL text. Contrary to this, If the words were not central and significant; they were neglected as they would make do with a TL synonym, e.g. 'kind' and 'gently'.

The central purpose of CA in translation is to achieve the utmost possible accuracy and precision. As a technique, it is more precise and limiting than paraphrasing or defining. In practice, one is picking out distinctive characteristics of semantic components of a lexical item in terms of their order of importance.

CA in translation can be applied to a variety of purposes, such as the analysis of lexical items, cultural and institutional words, synonyms in context, conceptual terms, neologisms etc., but the present study focuses only on general lexical items denoting a combination of qualities, or combinations of actions and qualities.

The first and most obvious use of CA is in the analysis and handling of lexical items, which represent combinations of features and qualities, or combinations of actions and qualities, which, when translated from the source language, appear to show up a lexical gap or under translation in the target language. Such words may be termed as either 'untranslatable' or 'under translated' in the sense that they have no obvious and complete one-to-one correspondence.

Only selected lexical items were picked from 62 English-translated versions procured from an electronic database of translations of the Holy Quran https://www.islamawakened.com/quran/5/30/defaul t.htm in which almost all translations rendered to date are present. The translations are divided into three major categories according to the reliability and validity of their meanings as follows:

1. Generally Accepted Translations of the Meanings 35 in total

2. Controversial, Deprecated, or Status Undetermined Works11 in total

3. Non-Muslims and/ or Orientalists Works 6 in total

4. New and/or Partial Translations and Works in Progress 10 in total

The many different renditions (different choices) for the same source word lexical items were numbered, and then each was discussed in the light of the model of Componential Analysis of lexical items in translation with a view to gain insight as to how much semantic gap was there between the source text and the target text. It is worth noting that the present study does not cover linguistically non-pragmatic values or the range of associative or connotative fields which are linguistically non-transferable; rather, it covers only those choices in which the semantic contents are transferable. Componential Analysis of semantic compositions of lexical items in both texts was done, and missing semantic components in the target text items were traced, discussed and justified. Finally, a logical conclusion in the form of a summary of all the qualitative analyses was presented in conclusion.

Analysis and Discussion

1. As for as the first lexical item ٱلْحَمْدُ AL-HAMDU that properly starts the Holy Quran is concerned, it has been consistently translated with the single word 'praise' or the phrase 'all praise' except for one or two renditions where the word 'praise' is either accompanied by modifiers like "all type of perfect and true praise" (Amatul Rehman Umar & Abdul Mannan Umar, 1991) and "selective praise" (Dr Kamal Umar, n.d.) or combinations of lexical items such as "all praise and gratitude" (Ali Unal, 2008) and "All the praises and thanks" (Muhammad Muhsin Khan & Muhammad Taqid-ud-din Al-Hilali, 2011). But the Arabic word 'HAMD' is more than praise; its semantic components are not related to praise only but also include concepts such as 'thanks', 'honour', 'admiration', 'worship', 'respect' ', highness' etc. This means that the accumulation of such grand qualities cannot be found in an

individual; it is only possible to be found in a being known as ALLAH, which is distinct from gods and goddesses. And who is ALLAH is well explained in the very next words رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ RABBI L-AAALAMEEN.

2. Amongst the 62 different renditions of this very opening statement of the Holy Quran, the word اللَّهِ ALLAH has been translated as 'God' by 22 translators, which is not a good translation of this word. There is a difference between ALLAH and God. God is a general name given to different deities in different world religions; all of them have got their own specific names also. Furthermore, the word God and ALLAH are grammatically distinct in the sense that the former can be inflected for gender and number and has both gender and number counterparts as 'goddess' and 'gods', whereas in the case of ALLAH, no such counterparts exist. Unlike the word God, ALLAH has neither feminine nor plural, not only in the grammatical system but also in the real sense. That is why the translation of the word ALLAH with God does not, in fact, capture the essence and the distinctive features of ALMIGHTY ALLAH, which are not shared by the deities of other religions. In a sense, the word ALLAH reflects a monopoly of some distinctive attributes which are hardly possible for the deity of any other religion to possess or share.

3. The SL item رَبِّ RABB has been consistently rendered as 'the Lord' except for one or two instances of different translations such as "the Sustainer" (Muhammad Asad, 1980, Shabir Ahmad, 2003), " the Cherisher and Sustainer" (Yousaf Ali, 1938, 1985, Syed Vickar Ahmad, 2007), "the Nourisher-Sustainer" (Dr Kamal Umar n.d.), "the Master" (Ali Bakhtiare Nijad, n.d.). The translation of the SL word RABB with the TL item "the Lord" and the few other combinations listed earlier is not sufficient at all. The semantic components of the SL item RABB is the most extensive, wide, dense, compact and rich of all the other attributive names used for ALLAH. The word RABB is generally understood as a collection of 99 core features not shared by anyone else in the same degree and quality possessed by RABB, the ALLAH ALMIGHTY. According to Imaam Shaafi (RA), it is the combination of seventy thousand features which are lexicalised in the form of RABB. The TL renditions with items such as 'the Lord', 'the Sustainer', 'the Cherisher', 'the Nourisher' or their combinations are only some attributes/aspects of RABB rather than being treated as the complete equivalent of RABB. The essence which constitutes the word RABB is a collection of so many features, neither of which can be termed as more representative than others; instead, all of them are equally important, representative and valuable as all else are. Since the word RABB could not be defined or called by a particular name due to so many different attributive names, all of them are finally condensed into one lexical item known as RAbb. For example, RAbb can be described (but not defined) as the one who is the {Creator, Sustainer, Nourisher, Owner, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Omni knowing (having knowledge of the visible and invisible, secret and open, knower of the known and unknown)the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the Giver of Faith, the Almighty, the Utterly remote in His limitless glory the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, the Keeper/ Guardian of Faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb, the Source of Peace (and Perfection), the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in Might, the Irresistible etc.}

4. One of the best descriptions of RABB is done by Al-muntakhabin in his fi tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim by translating as ALLAH is the only إِلَٰهَ LLAH (to be worshipped). HE is AL-Malik (the Sovereign), AL-Qudus (Perfection personified), AL-Salam (the Emblem of peace), AL Mu-min (the Source and Trustee of Faith), AL-Muhaymin (the Paramount Ruler of the Universe), AL- Aziz (the Almighty), AL-Gabbar (the Omnipotent), and AL-Motakbber (the Highest Authority).

Supreme as He is, He is far above those they incorporate with Him.

5. Again the translation of the word ٱلْعَالَمِين ALAA<u>A</u>LAMEEN was found insufficient in semantic components because the word is translated into almost an exact equivalent, but still, it needs to be explained. This word has been generally translated to TL items 'the world', 'the worlds',' the universe' with a few exceptions as "humankind" (Ali Bakhtiare Nijad, n.d.), "the Creation" (Farid ul Haq, n.d.), "mankind, jinns and all that exists" ([Muhammad Muhsin Khan](), [Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali](), 2011), "All Being"(AJ Arberry, 1996). The commonly translated items, 'the world', 'the worlds',' the universe', are also pre-modified by 'all' or 'entire', giving a sense of more than one world. The actual ST itemALAMEEN is plural with the singular counterpart ALAM. So the translation with TL item 'world' denoting singular is an aberration from the TT item. On the other hand, the meaning of the universe is also limited in the sense that it only refers to the apparently known physical world like everything that exists, especially all physical matter, including all the stars, planets, galaxies, etc., in space. But still, it does not cover the entire semantic components condensed in the original ST item, whose field of reference is quite expanded and far-fetched. According to various scholars, there are many different worlds that exist, which are created by the CREATOR, ALLAH. There are worlds of humans, angels, animals, trees, insects, etc. Also, there are worlds of the Earth/s, the Sky/s, the stars, the Air, the Space, the outer space, the inner space etc. And ALLAH is the one who is Creator, Possessor, Owner and Controller of all these worlds in absolute terms.

6. The various translations of the word ٱلرَّحْمٰن ALRRAHMAN include meanings such as 'the Gracious', 'the Most Gracious', 'the Beneficent', 'the Most Beneficent', 'the Merciful', 'the Most Merciful' 'the All Merciful', 'the Mercygiving', 'the Compassionate', 'the Most Compassionate', 'the Merciful to all', 'the Almighty', 'the Instant and Sustaining Source of all Mercy and Kindness', 'the Entirely Merciful', 'the Bestower of unlimited mercy', 'the Most Forgiving', 'The Most Affectionate' etc. These different renditions of the ST same lexical item into almost 17 different TT words are indicative of the fact that the ST item is semantically quite dense and rich, and the TT has no single lexical item to encompass all the essence (invariant core of meaning as Popvic calls it) contained in ALRRAHMAN. The use of the same word by different translation scholars with different modifiers/intensifiers such as 'most', 'all', 'entirely' etc. is also evidence that the translators feel some sort of discrepancy when they use the bare noun without using intensifiers to convey the full meanings of the SL word. However, the fact of the matter is that in SL, this word has all these meanings rendered by translators are condensed into one lexical item ofALRRAHMAN. So all these meanings of TL versions are only part of the meaning of the SL item rather than conveying complete and full meaning by using one word or phrase in the translated text.

7. The translation of the next ST item الرَّحِيم ALRRAHEEMis treated as a synonym to the preceding word. The same choices as used for ALRRAHMAN are also used for ALRRAHEEM or, in some cases, different modifiers attached in addition to very few different choices such as 'The Dispenser of Grace', 'the Merciful Redeemer'. This means that the two words are treated as almost synonyms in the context of the TL lexicon, whereas the two words in the SL lexicon, no doubt, have related or nearly related meanings but cannot be treated as synonyms. They are both semantically as well as stylistically quite different in the sense that ALRRAHMAN has a larger, massive, all-pervading and more intensive sense of blessings compared to ALRRAHEEM, where the scope, intensity, and application of blessings are limited both with respect to

creatures and time. Both words share the meaning of SPECIAL BLESSINGS and GRACE of ALLAH ALMIGHTY but with different sense components. ALLAH is ALRRAHMAN in this world; HIS BLESSINGS and GRACE are extended to all: both believers and non-believers, innocent and sinful, just and unjust etc. But in the world hereafter, ALLAH will only be ALRRAHEEM. HIS SPECIAL BLESSINGS and GRACE will also be limited only to believers; even within believers, it will be showered according to their good and bad deeds, as HE HIMSELF has mentioned in Surah 99 Ayahs 7-8. "So whoever does (equal to the) weight (of) an atom good, will see it, And whoever does (equal to the) weight (of) an atom evil, will see it". But in this world, being ALRRAHMAN, HE does not inflict instant punishment, nor does HE intervene in the affairs of HIS creatures if they do transgress (until they do transgress till the last, such as openly challenging HIM as was done by Pharaoh, Qaroon etc. who were annihilated in this world). He describes HIMSELF says in Surah 89 ayah 15. "For thy Lord is surely in a watch-tower, whence He observeth the actions of men. (George Sale, The Koran, 2009)". So HE is overseeing each, everyone and all from a watch tower and is ever on the watch! And knowing the actions and intents of all.

8. The translation of the first word of the next ayah مَالِكِ MALIKI has been done with a variety of choices, including the words 'Lord', 'Master', 'Owner', 'Possessor', 'Ruler', 'Sovereign', 'King', 'Sole Judge' etc. However, the choice "Master" is the most frequently repeated of all, with "Possessor" and "Lord" almost in an equal distribution. But the meaning of this word is quite limited and narrow as its use, in general, is concerned. It means "a person who has control over or responsibility for someone or something, or who is the most important or influential (having most influence) person in a situation or organisation". The last part of the definition (in a situation or organisation) shows its limited sense. Contrary to this,

ALMIGHTY ALLAH has control, importance, and influence always, everywhere, anywhere, all the time, in every situation, with everyone. Nothing, nobody, none is out of HIS control. It refers to the absolute power and control of ALLAH. He is not a controller whose control may get loose or weakened or lost. Rather it remains as firm and as safe as it was from day first.

9. The renditions of the ST items يَوْمِ الدِّين YAWMI L-DĪNare also many and varied, and as usual no consistency among them. The TL translation includes the most frequently occurring choice of 'Day of Judgment' with other variations in choices such as 'Day' of 'Repayment', ' Requital', 'Retribution', 'Doom', 'Recompense', 'Reckoning' etc. The only reasonable TL choice seems to be the most frequently employed item, "the Day of Judgement", with all others completely missing the original concept of the ST item. The word "Reckoning" is somewhat relevant, but a better choice is also possible if it is translated as the day of both "Punishment and Reward"; punishment for the Sinners and reward for the good deeds of the Virtuous. It is due to these dual aspects of the semantic components of this word that choices such as 'Repayment', ' Requital', 'Retribution', 'Doom', 'Recompense' are not appropriate because they give only partial meanings of the said ST items.

10. In the Holy Quran, ALLAH has explained HIS own unique being in Surah112. ayah 1 by using the word "ahad" not "wahid". Both words have the meaning of one but with quite different connotations and associations. The word "ahad" has very rich semantic features and pragmatic value. So the word has been translated as ' the one', 'the one and only', 'unique', 'one and indivisible, 'uniquely singular', 'the one and the most unique', 'Absolute Oneness', 'the Unique One of Absolute Unity', 'the only one', 'the One and Alone in His Being'. The word has the basic semantic core of "oneness", but many other attributes such as both HIS origin and end are not known to any other creatures. HE has

neither come from any apparent source nor has something sprung directly from HIS being.

Conclusion

Detailed Componential Analyses and Assessments of specific items in both SL items in the Holy Quran and TL choices in the various English-translated versions were carried out. SL items were found quite rich and dense in semantic components compared to the SL choices, which only referred to a particular aspect of the SL items rather than covering the whole of semantic components. It resulted in a huge semantic gap between the SL items and their respective translated versions. Generally, the TL was found to be a deficit in single lexical items that could completely reflect the spirit or essence conveyed by the SL item. That is why some translators employed a combination of words or phrases, and in exceptional cases, even one or two complete sentences, but still, the whole meanings could not be covered. The most explicit instance is the word RABB which was highly under-translated. There was hardly any instance of over-translation due to the marked polarity between the semantic components of SL and TL items; the former being too rich and dense, the latter could not completely capture the spirit but only touched marginally one or other semantic component of SL item.

The SL items were found to be collections of many different individual items, in some cases as many as ninety-nine or seventy thousand (as in the case of RABB), whereas TL choices only reflect one or, in some cases, two or three aspects of the source language items. That is why none of the translations can be called faulty, but all of them can be termed as incomplete or flawed with respect to semantic components (meaning) conveyed by them. Furthermore, the attributes of ALMIGHTY ALLAH are only translated in simple terms ignoring the limits and implications of these terms when used in the Holy Quran. These attributes, when used with the name of ALLAH, show the respective qualities and features in their highest and ideal sense, not in the ordinary sense of the word as used in the human context. For example, the word "praise" has quite wide and large semantic components when used in the context of ALMIGHTY ALLAH, as discussed in the analysis section.

The different words or senses have been lexicalised as single items, which can then be expanded into many different items in the ST (the Holy Quran), but the target language had no single lexical items or combinations of words or even, in some cases complete sentences that could sufficiently cover all the semantic content condensed in the source language items which finally results in under a translation. Finally, it is recommended that every semantically dense item of the ST should be annotated or explained in detail separately in Glossary in any translated version. A better strategy will be to annotate such words so that the target readers gain a holistic insight instead of partial and fragmentary meanings of such items. Otherwise, semantic loss of source text items is unavoidable.

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