

The Dilemma of the Duality of Form and Content of The Holy Qur'an Translation into English in Light of Modern Theories of Meaning

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Abstract

Some of the more difficult texts to translate are sacred texts in general and the scripture of Islam, the Holy Qur'an, specifically. It is crucial to sustain the nuance of the original wording. In the Holy Qur'an, form is also as vital to maintain as content (Sardar, 2017; Alhaj, 2015). Moreover, the extent to which the translator of the Holy Qur'an replicates the form and content of the origin language text will be determined by the translated language system and hinge on the functioning of the rendering (Haroun, 2022; Dakake, 2019). This study aimed to identify the dilemma of the duality of form and content of the Holy Qur'an in translation into English in light of modern theories of meaning. The study adopted a qualitative descriptive method. The findings displayed that one of the greatest dilemmas faced by translators in rendering the Holy Qur'an in English is to sustain the form and content of the initial Qur'anic Arabic text while aiming to transfer its implication appropriately. The study concluded that a good rendering of the Qur'anic text reveals the "dynamics" of both the form and content of the Holy Qur'an.

Keywords: dilemma, form and content, modern Theories, translation, The Holy Qur'an.

Translation is indeed, in the present global context, a requirement of contemporary life. It is a necessary tool of communication for people around the world; it is an inevitable instrument for knowledge sharing and exchange of experiences and skills. Thus, most citizens of the world nowadays need to exchange and obtain information and in comparing the cultures, knowledge, and development unique to them and the cultures, knowledge, and progress of other peoples around the world. Hence, from this perspective, the role of the translator becomes essential and takes on an urgent nature, and machine translation and artificial intelligence

cannot replace it. Thus, we can say, without bridging too far in doubting machine translation. It is the translator's duty when dealing with a complex process such as the translating procedure, must play a significant role and implore all his/ her linguistic and mental capacities, as well as his/her understanding of cultures, to be able to transfer the text that he/she is about to render appropriately and perfectly to the furthest extent.

The first thing is that translation is a difficult process. Moreover, since it is clear that translation is hard work, people have often made accusations about it, and these are indictments

outlined by the old Italian aphorism that the "traduttore, traditore" (Gorlée, 2011; Leroy, 1922): the translator is a traitor. A myriad of prominent, notable translation scholars have claimed that translation is a challenging process and difficult mechanism that cannot be linked to another science, especially if the origins of this science have not yet been established (lexicography and the construction of lexicon).

Translation has long been associated with theories of meaning, and most of its theorists have been activists in this specific area of knowledge. Thus, most theoretic endeavors for translation have concentrated on significance as the key pillar of the translation act (Leavitt, 2014; Gould & Tahmasebian, 2020). This was illustrated by an assertion that meaning is something whose identity can be confirmed and transferred to the translated language. From this perspective, researchers in this sphere of knowledge have always defined translation as "the process of replacing meanings expressed in the source language with equivalent meanings in the target language" (Larson, 1997; Syafryadin, et al., 2020).

Regardless of the assumption encircling this skepticism because of the greater development evidenced by modern linguistic theories in the sphere of semantic research, given that the meaning is no longer single and transparent, the problem has been replaced by explanation and clarity. Meaning is still fundamental in every approach that seeks to surround the translation act.

One of the contemporary theorists of translation, Georges Mounin (1963) points out that translation is the conveyance - and not any transfer - of the meaning of a text from one language to another. What is depended on in translation is the meaning. Regardless of what the interjecting sentence may imply about the specificities in rendering the meaning, such as paying attention to the broader context, position, and nature of the writer's language.

1.1 The Present study

The Holy Qur'an is not poetry, although in its form it coquets with poetry in some of its components. Rather, it is miraculous speech with its arrangement, enchanting in its elocution of eloquence and the strength of its oration (Hoffmann, 2007; Hoffmann, 2004). The Holy Qur'an challenged the Arabs, who were people of eloquence, but they did not take up the challenge, as much as they like, but surrendered and acquiesced to it (Behbudi & Turner, 2013; Aboamro, & Rizapoor, 2023). They acknowledged, in the words of their scholars, that it is plenteous at its bottom and fruitful at its top, and that it rises above it and does not rise above it. What added to the matter of challenge is that it was not completed in an unusual way: the Holy Qur'an is from the words of the Arabs, both unique rhetorically and linguistically, and it was revealed in the guidance of their Arabic language (Al-Smadi, 2022; Alhaj & Alwadai, 2019).

Based on the recognition of this miracle, the positions of Arab scholars varied concerning the ability of the Holy Qur'an to be rendered in another language. Even though the Arabs were on par with what they are in respect of rhetorical dexterity (Neama, 2022; Alhaj, 2024a), they were unable to produce something like the Holy Qur'an.

One of the greatest challenges encountered by translators in rendering the Holy Qur'an in English is that it is arduous to sustain the form and content of the initial Qur'anic Arabic text while aiming to appropriately transfer its implication and significance (Khamis, et al., 2023; Hidaya & Solihin, 2019). The miracle of the Holy Qur'an raises the issue of Qur'anic rhythm, where Qur'anic Arabic words interlace and harmonize in structural interrelation that gives each word its meaning through its phonetic formation, its position within the structure, and its relationships to its counterparts in the restricted context – the context of the ayah and the amplified context, the context of the surah first, and the whole Holy Qur'an, and if the

translator can understand the meaning-making of the verse (Alhaj, 2024b; Abdelkarim, & Alhaj, 2024). This is a relative question, as it is usually impossible to paraphrase in the form in which it appears in the Holy Qur'an, and with this unavoidable inadequacy, part of the intention of the ayah is lost, not to mention its rhythm and poetics, and therefore its facility to stir up emotions, evoke feelings and soften hearts is lost (Alhaj, 2015; Hashemi, 2023). The Holy Qur'an emanates the mystique of its rhetoric and magniloquence from the integration of its form and content, and the rendering of Chapter 11 *sūrat hūd* (Hud) verse 44 may be sound evidence for what the two researchers aim to explore in this study. To conclude, the Qur'anic Arabic language is wealthier not only in word stock but also in syntax and semantics, such as Qur'anic Arabic form and content (Allaithy, 2013; Allibaih, 2019). Consequently, there is a pragmatic and actual requirement to study the dilemma of form and content of the Holy Qur'an translation into English in light of modern theories of meaning.

It becomes apparent that among translation theorists, there are those who are devoted to the requirement of adhering to the unity of form and content in the translation act, and regard this a criterion for appropriateness of translation, but the dilemma of transferring the form and content by counting on the rules on which it is based appears miraculous. This led one contemporary theorist of translation, Mounin (1963), to say that translation is communication, and the message that the translator aims to convey contains meaning and form, and he/she must communicate the message as it is and transfer the form to its equivalent in his/her language. Translating the structure demands adjustment to the structures of the language to which it is conveyed given that he/she selects the style that fits the text.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- o First, to determine the dilemmas of form and content of the Holy Qur'an translation

into English in light of modern theories of meaning;

- o Second, to investigate the extent to which targeted renderings of the Holy Qur'an appropriately and accurately communicate the Qur'anic text in form and content into English;

- o Third, to explore how the dilemmas of form and content in translation of the Holy Qur'an hinder and obstruct the rendering of Qur'anic text into English.

Commensurate with the three objectives of the present review, the major questions guiding this study are:

- o RQ1: What are the dilemmas of form and content of the Holy Qur'an translation into English in light of modern theories of meaning?

- o RQ2: To what extent do the targeted renderings of the Holy Qur'an appropriately and accurately communicate the Qur'anic text in form and content in English?

- o RQ3: How do the dilemmas of form and content in translation of the Holy Qur'an hinder and obstruct the rendering of Qur'anic text into English?

Literature Review

2.1 The Holy Qur'an Translation and Unity of Form and Content

Linguistically speaking, in rendering any text the translator must cope with both form and content. Regarding the latter, which depicts the sense of the text, the translator endeavors to do his/her best in grasping the text of original wordings text while reading it, so that he/she can transfer the meaning into the translated language appropriately (Robinson, 2001; Albashir Mohammed, 2019). In other respects, this message will be deformed or twisted, as Alhaj (2020) contends that a communication failure occurs between the original language text and translated language text when the translator misapprehends the text of the source language, hence skewing the meaning. The translator cannot do the rendering without first regarding the form of the text of the original language.

What habitually forms the tricky part in the process of rendering is transforming the form of the original version into a new form in the translated language, withholding the same original version content, for example, the message (Pym, 2014; Alhaj, 2024b).

2. 2 The Problems of Preserving the Content and the Form in Translation

It has become apparent from the above discussion that if there is a priority that imposes itself on the translator, then it is without any shadow of a doubt to preserve the content as much as possible since the form is not sternly regarded because of the dissimilarity between languages in the paradigm of structure, rhythm rules, and other conventional matters (Venuti, 2017; Robinson, 1997). Rather, most researchers point out that the translator may often have to sustain the unchangeable content facet to resort to transformations in rendering, such as transposition, substitution, deletion, and addition (Alhaj, 2024a; Abdelkarim, & Alhaj, 2023). Moreover, in one way or another, being concerned with content refers to meanings, because the content in its essence is the meanings expressed in language within contexts constrained by the distribution of words within the verbal sequence (Celce-Murcia, & Olshtain, 2000; Murphy, 2010) according to a specific relational system that considers the speaker's intentions and the context. This value that meanings occupy in the translation act is what impelled most theorists to determine the main purpose of translation in transferring meanings, as mentioned earlier.

If this premise is confirmed, and it becomes evident to us that translation is not a conveying of the form or the real form of the language-based evidence but rather a conveyance of meaning, then we may ask: Are all contents and forms conveyable? The researchers of the current study will try to approach this question by exploring the dilemma of form and content of the Holy Qur'an translation into English in light of modern theories.

2.3 Previous studies

Rakhimboevich (2020) studies the unity of form and content in translation. He found that every supreme magnum opus is the product of a realistic presentation of form and content. The new version of this aspect of literary portrayals in translation is one of the crucial conditions for a translator. After all, in the process of rendering, if attention is focused only on the content, it is removed from the form, and if it is taken to maintain the form, it is unavoidable to diverge from the content. Tanto (2018) found that the form addresses the style or the formation of the translated language, while the meaning engages with the content or the sense of the words. Challenges may arise when it comes to the rendering of both the form and the content, as this very commonly can only just be achieved. In such a case, translators will be confronted with some options to keep: (a) the form or the content; (b) the form and the content; or (c) neither the form nor the content. When the form is not well rendered, the satisfying function will not operate effectively. When the content is not preserved in the translation, the main idea of the story will not be perfect as narrated in the original version.

Jaber (2010) concluded that what translators of the Holy Qur'an are concerned with is conveying the meaning of the Qur'anic text. But content is embedded in the form which is markedly and distinctively eloquent and grandiloquent in the Holy Qur'an. Strictly speaking, such a complicated content-form relationship should make the process of conveying meaning fraught with difficulties, due to the sacredness and sensitiveness of the Holy Qur'anic text. Arberry (1998) contends that the Holy Qur'an is neither prose nor poetry, but a sacred blend of both. So, a translator cannot emulate its form accordingly: a Qur'an-specific form having both the characteristics of prose and poetry and employing the distinctive features of the Arabic language magnificently and gorgeously. Similarly, it is so scrupulously and closely connected with content that neither rendering of form nor content can replace an

equivalent rendering in respect of form or content. In their qualitative research, Yari and Zandian (2022) worked out that the conflict between form and content is not an absurd situation, especially in the rendering of religious texts in general and the Holy Qur'an in particular. The alloy of style and content in the Holy Qur'an, as well as the unique quality of its form, has made its rendition a challenging task for translators.

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current research paper adopts a descriptive method with a qualitative design, as it hinges on vantage points and analyses rather than quantitative information. In this case, the researchers gather, disassemble, and investigate the data and then give an account of them. The data of the current study are the Qur'anic verses and their English renderings. To capture the data, some selected Qur'anic verses are studied carefully to find out the difficulty of the form and content of the Qur'anic renditions into English in light of modern theories of meaning. First, the data are discussed reliant on existing dilemmas of form and content. After that reviewing the extent to which the targeted renderings of the Holy Qur'an adequately and faithfully convey the Qur'anic text in form and content into English. Finally, the dilemmas of form and content of the Holy Qur'an translation that impede and hinder the rendition of Qur'anic text into English are revisited.

3.2 Data Analysis Technique

The data for the present research paper were collected from Al-Modwana Al-Qur'āni Al-'Arabiyya (Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC)) which was laid down by a language research crew at Leeds University, led by scholarly team leader Kais Dukes and counseled by Eric Atwell. Moreover, the QAC provides vocabulary and syntactic explications and translations for researchers and scholars hoping and seeking to gain an understanding of the meaning of the Holy

Qur'an. It is sufficient to say that by dint of a descriptive-analytical method, the three English renditions by the three translators under the study were compared, appraised, and analyzed by the researchers to identify the difficulty of the form and content of the Qur'anic renditions into English in light of modern theories of meaning and pivotal exegesis or meanings of the Qur'anic text.

Results and Discussion

In the following section of this study, the researchers probe in-depth consideration of some examples of Qur'anic verses encompassing the dilemma of form and content of translation of the Holy Qur'an into English. Each example of this Qur'anic verse and its original text and rendered versions are arranged in tandem. The fundamental data upon which this study hinges incorporates some selected Qur'anic verses amassed from three English translations of the Holy Qur'an by Pickthall (1930), Al-Hilali and Khan (1996), and Abdel Haleem (2004).

4.1 Example 1

Source Surah: هود Chapter (11) sūrat hūd (Hud), verse 44.

ST: هود: 44 ((وَقِيلَ يَا أَرْضُ ابْلَعِي مَاءَكَ وَيَا سَمَاءُ عَلَى الْجُودِيِّ وَقِيلَ ۚ أَقْلَعِي وَغِيضَ الْمَاءِ وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ وَاسْتَوَتْ ۖ يُغْذَا لِلْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ))

Target Text:

o Abdel Haleem (2004): "Then it was said, 'Earth, swallow up your water, and sky, hold back,' and the water subsided, the command was fulfilled. The Ark settled on Mount Judi and it was said: A far removal for wrongdoing folk!" (p. 139).

o Al-Hilali and Khan (1996): "And it was said: 'O earth! Swallow up your water, and O sky! Withhold (your rain).' And the water was diminished (made to subside) and the Decree (of Allah) was fulfilled (i.e. the destruction of the people of Nuh (Noah). And it (the ship) rested on Mount Judi, and it was said: 'Away with the people who are Zalimun (polytheists and wrongdoing!)" (p. 292).

o Pickthall (1930): "And it was said: O earth! Swallow thy water and, O sky! Be cleared of clouds! And the water was made to subside. And the commandment was fulfilled. And it (the ship) came to rest upon (the mount) Al-Judi and it was said: A far removal for wrongdoing folk!" (p. 168).

The Analysis

The General Meaning of the Ayah

The meaning of this ayah is: "Allah, the Almighty says that after He drowned all the people of the earth with the exception of those on board the Ship (The Ark), He commanded the earth to swallow up the water that there from it flooded out and thereafter it gathered. He ordered the sky to withhold its rain. 'And the water was made to subside' i.e. the water began to diminish. 'And the Decree (of Allah) was fulfilled' i.e. Allah has destroyed all those who disbelieved among the population of the earth. 'And it (the ship) rested' refers to the ship and those who boarded therein. 'On Mount Judi' which is a mount in Al-Jazirah (Northwest Mesopotamia) where the mountains sought to tower above each other on the day of drowning, when all the mountains of the earth sought to be higher to evade drowning, except for the Mount Judi which humbled itself to Allah, the Mighty and Sublime. This is why it was not exposed to drowning, and thereupon the Ship of Nūh rested" (Ibn Kathir, 2009, vol. 2, p. 909).

The dilemmas of form and content of the translation of Chapter (11) sūrat hūd (Hud), verse 44 into English.

A close glance at three renderings by Abdel Haleem (2004), Pickthall (1930), and Al-Hilali and Khan (1996), shows the lack of the rhythm that produces the beauty of this ayah. This ravishing rhythm arising out of the phonological form of its words, the symmetry of its expressions, their brevity, and their sequence in a chronological pattern and stunning rhythm that implies the contiguity and propinquity of occurrences, and confirms that the order was released by Allah, the Almighty who commanded it be, and it is. Indeed, the nature of

English has resulted in surpassing the beauty of the Qur'anic expression by expressing it obliquely and covertly, as can be seen in the following two expressions :

وَاسْتَوَتْ عَلَى الْجُودِيِّ

And it (the ship) rested on Mount Judi

وَقِيلَ بُعْدًا لِلْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ

Away with the people who are Zalimun (polytheists and wrong-doing)

Here, Abdel Haleem (2004), Al-Hilali and Khan (1996), and Pickthall (1930) were inadequate to fill the request of form, which constructs part of the miraculous trait of this ayah. Hence, they failed to convey the implied meaning of the duality of form and content of this Qur'anic verse into English. To conclude, the main task of rendering is to communicate the meaning, already stated. If this premise is affirmed and verified, it becomes evident to us that translation is not a conveyance of audio content or form, a material genre of text-based evidence, but a conveyance of meaning.

4.2 Example 2

Source Surah: يوسف Chapter (12) sūrat yūsuf (Joseph), verse 82.

يوسف:82 ((وَاسْأَلِ الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِي كُنَّا فِيهَا))
 (وَالْعِيرَ الَّتِي أَقْبَلْنَا فِيهَا وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ

Target Text:

o Abdel Haleem (2004): "Ask in the town where we have been; ask the people of the caravan we travelled with: we are telling the truth" (p. 150).

o Al-Hilali and Khan (1996): "And ask (the people of) the town where we have been, and the caravan in which we returned, and indeed we are telling the truth" (p. 314).

o Pickthall (1930): "Ask the township where we were, and the caravan with which we traveled hither. Lo! we speak the truth" (p. 180).

The Analysis

The General Meaning of the Ayah

The meaning of this ayah is "'And ask (the people of) the town where we have been', about Egypt, or to another town, 'and the caravan in which we returned', i.e. they said to their father, You can ask the caravan in which we came back

about our truthfulness, honesty, and sincere guardianship, ‘and indeed we are telling the truth.’ They proceeded that what they say is the truth that Benjamin stole and was taken as a captive for what he had committed” (Ibn Kathir, 2009, vol. 2, p. 980).

The dilemmas of form and content of the translation of Chapter (12) *sūrat yūsuf* (Joseph), verse 82. into English.

What linguists, grammarians, and translation theorists mean by the structure is the linguistic structure and the techniques that rely on it, such as hysteron proteron or anastrophe, deletion, brevity, redundancy, separation, connection, etc. (Giles, 1973). But the form goes beyond these techniques to include some building of the structure that the literary work includes (Fish, 1970) and the relationships that harmonize its parts and create its rhythms until it is a unique form to the reader (Buzsaki, 2006).

Contextual meaning incorporates all the meanings grasped through the use of the utterance within the context, which considers the rank (anastrophe), word order reversal, deletion, definition, indefiniteness, separation, connection, parsing, etc., which identifies the function of the utterance and its impact on the meaning within the context. The case here is always liable to the nature of the language, which is the nature that opts for the sentence structure and the system of relationships that unites its parts, and the impact of the positioning of the word within the parameters on its meaning.

The linguistic differences between languages in general and Qur’anic Arabic and English in particular may give rise to a lack of adherence to the language form of the sentence in the original wording when it is rendered, so that deletion shows up – for example – or the rank is nullified, or descriptions are used to identify the function of the language within the structure.

As can be seen from Example 2, Abdel Haleem, Al-Hilali and Khan, and Pickthall were obliged to indicate the connotation; hence, they intentionally added words that they regarded necessitous to explicate the connotative

meaning, but then they lost the intended meaning. Also, it was found that these three translators rendered *وَاسْأَلِ الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِي كُنَّا فِيهَا* into “Ask in the town where we have been”, “And ask (the people of) the town where we have been”, and “Ask the township where we were”, respectively. The three translations underscore how the ellipsis on which the ayah was formed disappeared. Indeed, this is the stylistic method that made part of its rhetoric as the question was transitioned from the family, who are more laudable of being asked, to the village, which is an inanimate object unable to speak. In this ellipsis, the matter is spotlighted. The consequences of the matter are that when the brothers of Joseph (peace be upon him) failed to convince their father Jacob (peace be upon him) that they were truthful, they implored for support from lifeless objects to go help them as if their language was saying: If you do not believe us, then ask the village with its stones, trees, and all the motionless objects in it. If you say that you are a prophet with a miracle, they will tell you that we are not saying anything other than what we saw concerning the matter of our brother Benjamin, and that is the ultimate request for help from someone who sees himself vindicated and wants to prove his truth to those who cast doubt on him. This is unveiling evidence of the condition of Joseph’s brothers while they are in the clutches of their old father, who was lamented and saddened – before – by Joseph.

To conclude, this clear, expressive implication of the circumstances of Joseph’s brothers was able to be depicted in an effective form by the Holy Qur’an merely by using an ellipsis, through which the subject-verb was transferred to the genitive, instead of the deleted object.



Chapter (12) <i>sūrat yūsuf</i> (Joseph)		
Translation	Arabic word	Syntax and morphology
(12:82:1) was'ali And ask		CONJ – prefixed conjunction wa (and) V – 2nd person masculine singular imperative verb الذي عاقبنا الذي أمر
(12:82:2) l-qaryata the town		N – accusative feminine noun اسم مفعول



Figure 1. Syntactic Parsing Tree Bank of Verse (12:82) on QAC (Source:

[https://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=12&verse=82#\(12:82:1\)\)](https://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=12&verse=82#(12:82:1)))

4.3 Example 3

Source Surah: يس Chapter (36) sūrat yā sīn, verse 4.

ST: ﴿يَسْأَلُ عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ﴾

Target Text:

o Abdel Haleem (2004): "On a straight path" (p. 281).

o Al-Hilali and Khan (1996): "On a Straight Path (i.e. on Allah's religion of Islamic Monotheism)" (p. 591).

o Pickthall (1930): "On a straight path" (p. 315).

The Analysis

The General Meaning of the Ayah

The meaning of this ayah is "You, O Muhammad following the perfect religion (Islamic Monotheism) and straight path, wherein there is no crookedness" (Ibn Kathir, 2009, vol. 3, p. 1806)

The dilemmas of form and content of the translation of sūrat yā sīn, verse 4 into English:

The degree of difficulty in translation arises from the fact that languages are not lists of words analogous to real facts that repeatedly and already exist. If that is the case, translation would be so much easier and translators would still be able to translate it verbatim and word-for-word. The hindrances to translation result from the fact that every translation is multi-aspect processing, and it is fundamentally the linguistic process that abbreviates corresponding one language to another language. Since every other language is a language that comprises a system of methods, the systems of the origin language (Arabic) vary from the systems of the translated language (English).

There are no problems with the counterpart of عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ. "On a straight path" (36:4). Abdel Haleem, Al-Hilali and Khan, and Pickthall rendered it into "On a straight path", but the dilemmas occur in the content of the translation. The three translators did not pay attention to the connotative meaning that the ayah عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ "On a straight path" carries. Their renderings for the ayah into "on a straight path" may not convey the intended meaning of the Message in translated language, but it may give a better sense of implied meaning if it is translated with lexical extensions as "the right way".

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study indicates that Abdel Haleem, Al-Hilali and Khan, and Pickthall experienced some dilemmas of the duality of form and content of the translation of The Holy Qur'an. Furthermore, it uncovers that the linguistic differences between Arabic and English may lead to a loss of meaning. The recent study has only examined three examples which are studied carefully to find out the difficulty of the form and content of the Qur'anic renditions into English in light of modern theories of meaning.

The study also demonstrates that the form of the Qur'anic text is difficult to cope with inherently for native Arabic speakers themselves, so how about non-native speakers? What increases its difficulty is its sacredness and matchlessness. Since translation competence and performance are two standards that are relevant in level from one translator to another, hinged on the translator's expertise in both the origin language and translated language, then mistakes in translation may be caused because of the dearth of such expertise (Al-Azzam, 2008; Maududi, 1980). This deficiency influences either the translator's capability to grasp the thrust of the original language text or his/her competence to transfer it into the translated language. Both could be factual as well.

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