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# Poetry in translation: A comparative study of Silverstein's monolingual and bilingual (English to Persian) poems

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**Bilingual translations are as important as monolingual ones and can have many advantageous in different dimensions of literature, translation, education and other areas of study. But they are more difficult than monolingual translations, particularly in literary work, such as poem, novel, short story and etc. Translating literary text, particularly poetry is a difficult process as it includes different figures of speech and literary devices and conveys metaphorical and figurative concepts beyond its literally meanings. Difficulties of understanding poet's style and message for the translator is in one hand and techniques of translating poetry and figures of speech which are not appropriate for all types of poems is in another hand. In this article, Silverstein's monolingual and bilingual short poems (English to Persian) were studied on the basis of Newmark (1988) poetry's translation techniques to evaluate qualities of translations and answer these two research questions: 1) Was the qualification of Stein's bilingual poems as well as his monolingual poems in Iran? 2) Were the same translation techniques used in both monolingual and bilingual poems of Stein? The cause of selecting Stein's poems was that his poems have many acceptable Persian translations and also have many followers in Iran. Firstly an introduction on bilingual translation was stated which includes poetry in literature and poetry in translation. Next is the methodology used, followed by results and discussion of the acquired data, and finally conclusion.**

**Key words:** Poetry, translation, bilingual poems, monolingual poems, Silverstein.

## INTRODUCTION

In bilingual books, the addressee face with both the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) which gives this chance to him/her to have more studies and researches than monolingual books which just include the TT. Here some of the advantageous and disadvantageous of both bilingual and monolingual books are stated:

First, in bilingual books, the reader by comparison of the ST and the TT with each other can become acquainted with the original syntax, phonology and structure. For instance, in English, as the ST, the syntactical structure is in the form of SVO (subject, verb, object), but in Persian as the TT, its structure is SOV (subject, object, verb).

Secondly, in bilingual books the reader can be acquainted with numerous cultural words and consider differences of the ST and the TT's cultures directly which may cause in becoming interested in other different dimension of cultures and studies more about the source culture. Also, he/she has access to the source lexical word, if he/ she wants to have more knowledge about the root of the translated words.

Thirdly, bilingual books can help the second language learner to learn better the particular language he wants, when he compare the SL with the TT.

The disadvantageous of bilingual books is their translations which most of them are focused on word for

word translations; it means that the translators are forced to have a rendering which be close to the ST which resulted in non beauty and non rhythmical translation of literary works, therefore, most of the bilingual translations in Iran do not have a fluent and natural translations and cultural words do not have an appropriate equivalences to convey the exact meaning of the ST.

In monolingual books, the work of the translator is more easier than bilingual translator, because he/she has more freedom in conveying the concept of the source text and usually offer a clear, fluent and natural translations that is both faithful to the ST and the TT. It must be said that the reader of monolingual text faces with the ST culture too, but not as much as the bilingual reader. The disadvantageous of monolingual is that the reader just deals with the target text structure.

The study and evaluation of the translation are important factors and most of the translation theoreticians believe that an evaluator should pay attention to various parameters during the evaluation.

The present study is based mainly on research into translations of English short poems into Persian, though the practice is not necessarily typical only to Persian literature, but seems to be common to other countries translation systems.

Some of the translations of the books adhered more extensively to the principle of the SL oriented translation approach which resulted in a substantial loss of the real understanding of meanings and natural usages of the richly nuanced English and Persian lines. In some cases, however, where the translators adopted the target oriented strategy to transfer the equivalences of the original terms, they were successful in conveying the more natural meanings intended by the original writers thus helping the target readers develop a similar understanding of the TTs as the original readers would have of the STs. The study raised the need for translators of English-Persian literature to pay close attention to creating acceptable translations on the basis of techniques of translating poetry. Kopp (1998) states "a good translation discovers the "dynamics" of poetry, if not necessarily its 'mechanics' " (Dastjerdi, 2004: 5). The point to be noted here is that as Newmark (1988: 162) states, literary translation is "...the most testing type of translation...."

Samuel and Frank (2000) state that the translation of poetry and figurative language is a more delicate matter, requiring that more attention be given to how the forms of the source language are re-cast in the receptor language. Translation of poetry and figurative language must then involve not only an examination of the intended meaning of the author and the formal devices used in the source language, but also an examination of the poetic forms, if they exist, and the figurative devices available in the receptor language.

Each literary translator for translating poetry should

have a high knowledge of the field of poetry. He should know what poetry is, what the structure of poetry is, how poetry is created, what the types of poetry are, what the style and the message of the poet are, what similarities and differences are among poetries of two different languages, what problems he would face during the process of translation, what strategies and techniques he can use for solving these problems and many other knowledge. So, here the researcher would talk about some of these necessity factors each translator should be acquainted with.

### Poetry in literature

Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary (1993: 895) defines *poem* in its traditionally sense that is, "writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm."

Newmark (1988: 163) in definition of poetry says "poetry is the most personal and concentrated of the four forms, no redundancy, no phatic language, where, as a unit, the word has greater importance than in any other type of text."

According to Rezai (2004: 1), "The word poetry, in fact comes from a Greek verb which means 'to make'. Poetry is a language that says more than ordinary language and says it with fewer words and in less space."

The language of poetry differs from the ordinary language as it is used for aesthetic and evocative qualities in addition to its apparent meaning. Ordinary language just makes sense, but poetry must be beauty in sense, sound, and form or structure which includes the line, couplet, strophe and stanza. Poets combine the use of language and a specific structure to create imaginative and expressive work.

Perrine (2002: 735) says "devices such as assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia, and rhythm are sometimes used to achieve musical or incantatory effects. The use of ambiguity, symbolism, irony, and other stylistic elements of poetic diction often leaves a poem open to multiple interpretations." Besides devices of poetry, there are sound systems as rhyme, rhythm, and meter which make the poetry more beautiful and Stein's poems include these three elements.

Rhyme is the repetition of a sound in two or more words or phrases. Like:

Here she lies, a pretty bud,  
Lately made of flesh and blood,  
who as soon fell fast asleep,  
And her little eyes did peep.

Rhythm is the arrangement or pattern of accented and unaccented syllables, like:

Theirs is not to make reply,

Theirs is not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die.

Meter is the pattern of accented and unaccented syllables that form the basis of a poem's rhythm. So it is the rhythmical pattern of a poem and can be determined by the number and types of stress in each line.

"Poetry has a musical quality that may be achieved through the use of rhythm and rhyme or through repetition. A poem is written in lines, which do not always signal the end of sentences, and the lines are arranged in stanzas" (Rezaei 2004: 3).

Prose can be defined as ordinary speech or writing without any metrical structure. The aesthetics of language and the use of different techniques such as repetition, meter and rhyme are used to distinguish poetry from prose. Poets have used a variety of different tropes-metaphor and simile, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole-as well as linguistic devices-rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, assonance-to achieve the effect of generating and expressing intense feeling through language. All types of poetry are often written in several styles. These styles are defined by the number of lines in each stanza, the syllables used in each line or the structures of rhyme used and so on.

Poetry may be written independently, as discrete poems, or may occur in conjunction with other arts, as in poetic drama, hymns, lyrics, or prose poetry. There are different types of poetry, but the three main categories, according to Rezaei (2004) are lyric, dramatic and narrative. A Lyric poem is short and subjective, usually expressing the emotions and thoughts of one person, the speaker of the poem. Hymn, song, sonnet, ode, elegy, pastoral, and haiku are all types of lyrics. Dramatic poetry employs dramatic form or technique and the speaker of it is someone other than the poet. The essential feature in this kind of poem is the person, a character created by the poet and placed in a situation that involves some conflict or action. Narrative poetry is the one that tells a story, recounts a series of events. It has a plot, characters and setting. Most of Stein's poems are dramatic one, but lyrics and narrative poems are included in his collections, too.

### Poetry in translation

Translating literary works is harder than translating other types of text, as literary works should convey something more than the ordinary works to have more beauty, more effect and more emphasis on the reader. Samuel and Frank (2000) believe that a translator of poetic and figurative language would be someone who is skilled in poetry and artistic verbal expression.

The translator would then re-express the poetic and figurative language of the source language in the receptor language fluently as though he were creating an

original work of art and so the next best thing is to be aware of the nature of the figures of speech in the source language and to be acquainted with the techniques of translating figurative language. Still, this is best done by a translator who has some degree of skill in terms of verbal expression.

Quijin (2005: 3) says, "The three-beauty principle, evaluates the translation by its beauty in sense, in sound, and in form." Also, Hariyanto (2003) believes that aesthetic values or poetic truth in a poem are conveyed in word order and sounds, as well as in cognitive sense (logic). And these aesthetic values have no independent meaning, but they are correlative with the various types of meaning in the text. Hence, if the translator destroys the word choice, word order, and the sounds, he impairs and distorts the beauty of the original poem.

The difficulty of translating poetry is twofold: the words and meaning on the one hand, the flow and rhythm (or rhyme) on the other. Most translations of poetry are bad. This is mainly because the translator knows the foreign language too well and his or her language too poorly. Khazaeifar (2006) states that if the translator wants to translate poem to poem, he can use two methods, scientific and poetic ones. In the first one, the aim is to transfer the exact message of the poem and in the later, the aim is to transfer the same effect of the poem to the translated text.

Therefore, the translator, first should understand the exact message of a poem, and for this aim, he should read different interpretations and articles of critics to find out the same and uniform concept and convey its meaning of the poem correctly. Then, he should consider the literary figures of speech and devices of the source poem and try to save them in the target poem. In short, the translation of poetry needs 'something more' than translating other genres of literature.

About the problems of translating Stein's poems, it must be said that as his poems have an apparently explicit and denotative meaning, the translator would not face with ambiguity or covert meaning of the poems and could convey the concept to the TT easily. But the rhythm and rhyme of his poems are the main problems, although the style of his poems seems to be like a prose, but with more attention, it is observed that most of his poems have rhythm and meter which Persian translators did not consider these points too much. Among the studied poems in this article, translators just tried to translate the poems into prose or translate them literally which decreased the beauty of the poetries; only Hamlet's collection poem was translated rhythmically.

There are many theories about translating poetry, but some of them are stated here. Some authors believe that it is not possible and some think that it is. According to Jackson (2003), "literary translation is a translational species in itself, but it "differs in many important respects from the kind of translation practiced in a language class"

(Dastjerdi, 2004: 4).

Newmark (1988) about this subject says there are different ways for translating a poem. One is, rendering literally to find equivalence for each word. This work does not have any literary validity and the reader can not feel that this is a poem. Second is, producing rhythm for the poem by increasing or decreasing the length of the poem or changing the structure of it. Third is, translating the poem to the poem which is more difficult, as the rhythmic structure and meaning of the poem must be protest. The last is, to render the poetry into the prose which Newmark believes that it is the best way.

There are two ways of translating poetry: one way is to translate word by word, without caring much about the structure of the poem, which is a literal translation. And the other way would be creating a new poem with the same structure and rhyme although the words would not be the same used in the original poem, but the sense would be the same.

Some authors think that literally translating of a poem is the best method, because it keeps the words that the original author wrote, so it is more closed to the original poem. However, most of times, we cannot translate literally, because they would not make much sense, and that is when the second way of translating is much better; because it keeps sense and, as I see it, that is the most important part in translation. That is why some people say that the translator, who has finished translating a poem in the second way, is not only a translator but also a poet, because many authors believe that that is a poem in another language, a new poem, not the same.

Lafevere (1975) notes seven methods adopted by English translators in translating Catullus's poems as below:

**Phonemic translation:** It recreates the sounds of the SL in the TL and transfers the meaning. According to Lafevere (1975), in general the result sounds awkward and sometimes leaves some parts of the original meaning behind.

**Literal translation:** This method will not be able to transfer the original meaning; while the phrase and sentence structures tend to fall by the wayside in the TL.

**The metrical translation:** It reproduces the original meter into the TL. And because each language has its own specific stressing and pronunciation system, this method will result in the inappropriate translation in terms of meaning and structure.

**Verse-to-prose translation:** It has also some weaknesses. The outstanding weakness is the loss of the beauty of the original poem.

**Rhymed translation:** It emphasizes the transferring of the rhyme of the original poem into the translation in TL. The result will be appropriate physically but tend to be semantically inappropriate.

**Free verse translation:** With this method the translator may be able to get the accurate equivalents in the TL

with a sound literary value of the result. On the other hand, the rhyme and meter tend to be ignored. So, physically the result is different from the original, but semantically it seems the same.

**Interpretation:** According to him, there are two types: version and imitation. A version of a poem in the TL will semantically be exactly the same with the original, but physically totally different. Further, an imitation is exactly a different poem, but the title, topic, and starting point are the same with the original poem.

Lafevere (1975) says the literal, metrical, and rhymed translation seem to emphasize the "form" or "poetic structure" of the poem; while the rest emphasize on the transferring of the precise meaning into the TL. It seems no methods described above will cater the poetry translators' needs appropriately.

Among these theories, Lafevere's are more comprehensive and more complete than Newmark's, but some of his techniques had not correspondence with Stein's Persian translations, for instance, phonemic translation, interpretation and rhymed translation were not usable in his poems translations. But Newmark's had more correspondence with Stein's translations, so his classification is selected for this article.

## METHOD

Shel Silverstein (1930–1999) was an American poet, singer-songwriter, musician, composer, cartoonist, screenwriter and author of children's books. Best known for his immensely popular children's books including the "giving tree, falling up, and a light in the attic," Silverstein has delighted tens of millions of readers around the world, becoming one of the most popular and best-loved children's authors of all time. He had a very unique and interesting writing style and wrote more for children. His poems are not realistic and he wrote about absurd things that would never happen. He has an interesting diction that often used words that rhyme throughout his poems. This technique captures the reader's attention especially for children. Also, he made up his own words to keep the rhyme scheme going.

Among 69 translated poems' collections in Persian registered in Iranian National Library, only 9 of them were bilingual collections and 60 were monolingual ones and 7 of them, both bilingual and monolingual, includes 249 short poems, were the subject of this analysis. These are as Hamlet as told on the street translated by Saghari (2009), the last morning, the lyrics and the dirty feet translated by Baratharan (2009), a light in the attic translated by Yektaee (2000), an imaginary menagerie, translated by Yasrebi (2000) and the magical eraser translated by Poori (2000).

First, these poems were studied and compared with their Persian translations to find out how much each poem corresponds with Newmark's translation techniques of poetry. For this aim, seven tables were drawn for these seven poems collections, the first row labeled with F, Rf, and P.rf and the left column labeled with four types of translation techniques of Newmark. These tables show the percentage of using each 4 techniques in these 249 poems of Stein. Here is an instance of Stein's short poem with its Persian translation. The underlined words in the English poem shows the rhyme of each couplet, like dyin\_ cryin., loners, owners, but in Persian translation it is not considered:

### بسپارید مرا با عینک آفتابی ام به خاک

در خانه ای بدون گرما ، بالای خیابان سولویان  
 آخرین کسی که شلوار فاق کوتاه می پوشید ،  
 در شرف مردن بود  
 عینک آفتابی به چشم داشت  
 و به همین دلیل کسی نمی توانست تشخیص دهد  
 که او گریه می کرد یا نه  
 همه معتاد ها و همه علاف ها  
 و همین طور همه کافه دار ها  
 دور تختش جمع شده بودند  
 وصیت کرد  
 تا تکلیف اموالش را روشن کند  
 و آخرین حرف هایش را به زبان آورد

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Here, in order to have a comparison between the qualification of bilingual and monolingual poems on the basis of Newmark's techniques, the acquired data are shown. The shortest poem includes 3 lines and the longest includes 200 lines.

According to Tables 2-7, in monolingual poems, T 4 is used more than the other three, but in bilingual poems, T 1 is used more than the other three techniques. Only in Table 1, in bilingual poem of Hamlet, T 4 is used more than the others and in other bilingual poems, T 1 is used more.

The acquired results of studying the condition of bilingual pomes in comparison of monolingual ones are stated below:

### Differences in using techniques of translation

According to the tables, it is observed that in monolingual poems, the translators were more faithful to the reader of the target text and offered a more natural and appropriate translations which also have rhyme and rhythm. The results show that monolingual translations were used translation T 4 of Newmark, means translate poem to prose. On the contrary, translators of bilingual poems were more faithful to the source text and tried to translate word for word, because the translators conveyed the literal translation in front of each line, so they more used translation T 1 of Newmark, that is, translate literally.

### Differences in the qualifications of translation

Based on the findings of the present study, it is observed that among these 7 collection poems, all the monolingual ones used T 4, which shows that this is the common and maybe the best method of translating poetry, according to Newmark. In bilingual poems, 5 poem collections out of 7, are used T1 which caused in the loss of the poem's beauty, and 2 poem collections out of 7, as Hamlet and

### Bury Me In My Shades

In a pad with no heat, up on Sullivan Street,  
 The last of the hipsters lay dyin,'  
 Wearin' his shades, so like no one could tell  
 Like whether or not he was cryin.'  
 All the junkies and loners  
 An' coffee shop owners  
 Were all gathered 'round his bed.  
 He took one last puff  
 Of some imported stuff  
 And this are the last words he said.

the lyrics are used T 4. 4 poem collections out of 7, used T 2 and 3 poem collections out of 7, used T 3 which both of them consider the rhythmical side of the poems in translation.

### Differences in the number of published translations

According to the registered Stein's translated poem collections in Iranian National Library, 60 collections were monolingual and just 9 of them were bilingual. Although the number of followers of bilingual poems is a lot, but publication of these poems are little, and one of the causes of this little publication of bilingual poems is the low qualification and low naturalness of his Persian translations.

### Differences in the amount of selling the translated books

Searching 10 bookshop of Mashhad, Iran and questioning of the bookseller, it is determined that bilingual poem books are sold more than monolingual books, because first, the cost of them are more appropriate than monolingual ones. Secondly, most of them are picturesque, but monolingual are not picturesque at all, and thirdly, children and adults in different ages are more interested in buying bilingual poems to increase their knowledge.

### Differences in the number of followers

Asking 30 English B.A. Literature and translation students of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran who were studied Silverstein's poem and knew him completely, it is observed that about 25 of them were interested in his bilingual poems, although they did not accept the qualification of his Persian translations. Also, among 30 Persian B.A. Literature students of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran, it is observed that only 3 to 5 of them

**Table 1.** Hamlet as told on the street, Total poems: 1 (includes 200 lines).

Tech	Monolingual poems			Bilingual poems		
	f	Rf	Prf (%)	f	Rf	Prf (%)
Literal translation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Translate poem to unrhythmic poem	0	0	0	0	0	0
Translate poem to poem	0	0	0	0	0	0
Translate poem to prose	1	1	100	1	1	100

**Table 2.** The last morning, Total poems: 14.

Tech	Monolingual poems			Bilingual poems		
	f	Rf	Prf (%)	f	Rf	Prf (%)
Literal translation	3	0.2142	21.42	10	0.7142	71.42
Translate poem to unrhythmic poem	2	0.1428	14.28	0	0	0
Translate poem to poem	0	0	0	0	0	0
Translate poem to prose	9	0.6228	62.28	4	0.2857	28.57

**Table 3.** The lyrics, Total English poems: 14.

Tech	Monolingual poems			Bilingual poems		
	f	Rf	Prf (%)	f	Rf	Prf (%)
Literal translation	1	0.0714	7.14	6	0.4285	42.85
Translate poem to unrhythmic poem	0	0	0	1	0.0714	7.14
Translate poem to poem	0	0	0	0	0	0
Translate poem to prose	13	0.9285	92.85	7	0.5	50

**Table 4.** The dirty feet, Total English poems: 8.

Tech	Monolingual poems			Bilingual poems		
	f	Rf	Prf (%)	f	Rf	Prf (%)
Literal translation	0	0	0	7	0.875	87.5
Translate poem to unrhythmic poem	0	0	0	0	0	0
Translate poem to poem	0	0	0	0	0	0
Translate poem to prose	8	1	100	1	0.125	12.5

**Table 5.** A light in the attic, Total English poems: 67.

Tech	Monolingual poems			Bilingual poems		
	f	Rf	Prf (%)	f	Rf	Prf (%)
Literal translation	5	0.0746	7.46	52	0.7761	77.61
Translate poem to unrhythmic poem	2	0.029	2.98	5	0.0746	7.46
Translate poem to poem	2	0.029	2.98	4	0.0597	5.97
Translate poem to prose	58	0.8656	86.56	6	0.0895	8.95

**Table 6.** An imaginary menagerie, Total English poems: 73.

Tech	Monolingual poems			Bilingual poems		
	f	Rf	Prf (%)	f	Rf	Prf (%)
Literal translation	20	0.2739	27.39	38	0.5205	52.05
Translate poem to unrhythmic poem	8	0.1095	10.95	4	0.0547	5.47
Translate poem to poem	5	0.0684	6.84	11	0.1506	15.06
Translate poem to prose	40	0.5479	54.79	20	0.2739	27.39

**Table 7.** The magical eraser, Total English poems: 73.

Tech	Monolingual poems			Bilingual poems		
	f	Rf	Prf (%)	f	Rf	Prf (%)
Literal translation	10	0.1369	13.69	45	0.6164	61.64
Translate poem to unrhythmic poem	15	0.2054	20.54	2	0.0273	2.73
Translate poem to poem	13	0.1780	17.80	5	0.0684	6.84
Translate poem to prose	35	0.4794	47.94	21	0.2876	28.76

have studied his monolingual poems and have not read his bilingual poems at all.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, Silverstein's monolingual and bilingual short poems (English to Persian) were studied on the basis of Newmark (1988) poetry's translation techniques to evaluate qualities of translations and to answer these two research questions:

Was the qualification of Stein's bilingual poems as well as his monolingual poems in Iran? Were the same translation techniques used in both monolingual and bilingual poems of Stein?

It is concluded that the translators did not do their best in bilingual poem collections, only bilingual Hamlet's poem collection translated by Saghari (2009) was faithful to both the source text and the target text, that is, transferring the exact concept of the poem and having the same effect of the poem on the reader by saving the rhythm and rhyme of it. Other translators of bilingual poems only tried to translate poems literally or some to prose to keep the message of each poem, not its beauty. It means that when the addressee reads them, he does not feel that it is a poem, but a prose like a very short story. In monolingual poems, on the other hand, the translators tried to translate a poem to prose which was better than literal translations and some of them kept the rhythm of the poems, too. So, the qualification of monolingual poem collections of Stein is more appropriate and acceptable than his bilingual poems.

About the techniques of translating poetry, as it is observed T 4 is used more in monolingual translations and T 1 used more in bilingual translations. Although Newmark has said that T 4 is more appropriate than the other three, but it is not acceptable in some of monolingual translations which used this technique a lot, because most of monolingual and bilingual translations which translate poem into prose, T 4, did not consider other figurative factors and literary features, such as rhythm and rhymes. Newmark did not mean that the translator should use only one of these methods and can not use two or three types of these methods synchronically. Also, he has not stated that the translator must not consider the rhythmical factors in T 4 and only translate poem into prose, because even a prose can have the rhythm, as it is seen in Hamlet's collection poem. In this collection, the translator has presented a rhythmical prose, a kind of correspondence between the lines and couplets to be more faithful to the source text. On the other hand, Newmark believed that the translator should not care to the rhythmical side of the poem to much that the concept of the poem would be lost, but if the translation of poem to poem destroys or hurts the structure of a poem, it is better not to consider the rhythmical factors and translate it into prose. So, our translators can use these 4 translation techniques synchronically in both bilingual and monolingual poems to keep the source text and the target text faithfulness.

Reading bilingual books have many advantageous than reading monolingual poems, for instance, they make people familiar with original languages and cultures of other countries accompanying with Persian language and culture. Also, they can be a rich source of education in schools and universities. But there are some implications

in studying or using these books:

First, the number of bilingual poems or other books was little that limited the domain of the researcher's work, too.

Secondly, most of the translators have not translated poem collections on the basis of a specific and defined translation techniques and methods in their works. This is the main problem of most Iranian translators who did not care this subject.

Thirdly, unnaturalness and inequality of bilingual poems or even some monolingual poems is another problem of the process of translation. This shows that most of the translated books in Iran are published without any investigation or controlling of the government's systems.

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