var text = $("#li-test").text()

undefined

text

"1tbsp Vanilla bean paste"

text.split(" ")

(4) ["1tbsp", "Vanilla", "bean", "paste"]

var words = text.split(" ")

undefined

words[0] = '<span class="first">'+ words[0] + '</span>'

"<span class="first">1tbsp</span>"

words

(4) ["<span class="first">1tbsp</span>", "Vanilla", "bean", "paste"]

var text = words.join(" ")

undefined

text

"<span class="first">1tbsp</span> Vanilla bean paste"

$("#li-test").text(text)

[li#li-test]

$("#li-test").html(text)

[li#li-test]