

# Finding an Appropriate Translation Equivalent: A Case Study from Bangla to English

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**Abstract:** Linguistic expressions are very deeply rooted in the social, cultural and religious traditions of that linguistic community. It always poses a problem for the translator to find a proper translation equivalent for these expressions. J.C. Catford mentions two types of untranslatability: linguistic untranslatability and cultural untranslatability. This paper will examine these two types of untranslatability with specific reference to some culture-specific expressions of salutations and greetings in the context of Bangla to English translation. It will also try to suggest some strategies to cope with the problem.

**Keywords:** Translation, equivalence, salutations, greetings, honorifics, kinship terms.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every culture has its own expressions of salutations and greetings. Words and phrases of salutations and greetings are very deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and religious traditions of a linguistic community. So finding an appropriate translation equivalent for these words and phrases is rather problematic. In *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965) J.C. Catford mentions two types of untranslatability: linguistic untranslatability and cultural untranslatability. Linguistic untranslatability is the lack of formal correspondence between the SL and the TL. At the same time, cultural untranslatability refers to the absence of a situational feature in the TL culture which is functionally relevant to the SL culture. This paper will try to look into these two types of untranslatability with specific reference to some of the words of salutations and greetings in the context of Bangla to English translation.

## 2. TRANSLATION OF HONORIFICS

Regular use of honorific in Bangla pronouns and their corresponding verb forms and the absence of honorific in English create a very common and recurring problem while translating. The lexical item 'You' being the translation equivalent of all the items 'apni', 'tumi' and 'tui', some translators tend to ignore the difference between these three. As there is no different lexical item available in English, the problem belongs to the category of linguistic untranslatability. However, somewhat acceptable translation is possible through structural adjustment and disambiguation method of lexico-semantic adjustment. Different structures and lexical items are used to indicate the level of relationship: ranging from a formal, courteous and distant relationship to an informal, casual and close relationship. Thus, 'apni asun' could be translated as 'would you please come?' Here structural adjustment is done by substituting imperative structure with an interrogative one and at the same time, the disambiguation or opacity method is applied where a new lexical item, here 'please', which is absent in the SL is added to the TL for better comprehension. Thus, 'tumi eso' could be translated as 'please come' with the same disambiguation or opacity method. Finally, 'tui ay' could be translated as 'come'. Though these methods are to some extent effective for the imperative sentences, the fine distinctive shades of difference in relationship as well as meaning of the usage of 'apni', 'tumi' and 'tui' are very difficult to capture in other kinds of expressions.

### 3. TRANSLATION OF COMMON EXPRESSIONS OF SALUTATIONS AND GREETINGS

'Namaskar', the very common expression of greeting between two Bengalis, has no English translation equivalent. The nearest English equivalent to 'namaskar' is the expression 'how do you do'. But in Bangla 'namaskar' is a multi-purpose word, which is used even when two persons depart. In this case, 'namaskar' has to be translated as 'good bye' or 'see you'. Again 'namaskar' is very often said when two persons are introduced to each other. Here 'namaskar' could be translated as 'glad to meet you'. All these are examples of lexico-semantic adjustment of compensatory replacement where certain lexical items of the SL are deleted but their sense is retained by addition of other lexical items more relevant to the TL. If the hour of the day of greeting 'namaskar' is evident from the SL text, then it could be translated as 'good morning', 'good afternoon', 'good evening' or 'good night' as the case may be. The translator here substitutes an SL cultural item by a different cultural item which belongs to the TL culture. However, 'namaskar' and its Hindi counterpart 'namaste' are just transliterated very frequently with or without footnotes in most of the present day translations. This is an example of borrowing and naturalization when the translator is borrowing certain common SL item and naturalized them in the TL.

A number of Bangla conversations begin with the expression 'kemon achhen?' which could quite obviously be translated as 'how are you?' But more informal expression 'kemon achhen bolun' poses problem as the expression 'tell me, how are you' would have been too literal. The English expression also misses the joy and excitement of the meeting of two persons after a long gap as they exclaim 'kemon achho bolo' or 'kemon achhis bol'. Similarly, the expression 'ki khobor?' could be translated as 'what's up?' But the slight but crucial difference between 'ki khobor bolun' and 'ki khobor bolo' and 'ki khobor bol' challenges the ability of the translator while translating. This problem is due to the use of honorific in Bangla and its absence in English which has been discussed earlier. Again, the casual one-word greeting 'bhalo?' could be translated as 'Are you well?' but even more sincere expression 'bhalo to?' hardly gets any fitting translation equivalent.

The other departing expressions except 'namaskar' like 'achchha choli', and 'choli tahole' could be translated as 'well, good bye' and 'good bye then' respectively. These are example of compensatory replacement. Similarly 'abar dekha hobe' could be very effectively translated as 'see you again'. But in this case, there is a difference between 'choli' and 'asi', literally 'I go' and 'I come', in the sense that the later one is preferred as it tells about the hope and wish of coming back. This fine shade of difference is really difficult to be distinguished in English translation. This is an example of cultural untranslatability.

Translation of salutation to totally unknown person in the street poses some difficulty to the translator. 'Mosai' or 'mohasoy' can very easily translated as 'sir'. But as it is very much within Indian tradition and practice to accept everyone in the fold of a family Bengalis often address unknown males as 'bhai', 'dada', 'kaku', 'dadu' etc. and unknown females as 'bon', 'didi/ boudi', 'ma/ kakima/ masima', 'thakuma/ dida' etc. These salutations are not only informal but also indicative of the age difference between the speaker and the person spoken to. This is another example of cultural untranslatability. It sounds very odd to translate these salutations literally. Transliteration, with or without a footnote, in the sense of borrowing and naturalization is a much better option.

Adding 'babu' to the name of a person is a very common practice in Bangla to address or to refer someone known. Addressing by surname preceded by a Mister, the method of compensatory replacement, sounds much formal and inappropriate. Retaining the salutation as it is, the method of borrowing and naturalization, somewhat solves the problem.

However, salutations for someone junior are somewhat less problematic from translational point of view. For example, the rude way to address like 'ei chhokra' could be translated almost literally as 'hey, chap', a little softer expression 'ei chheleta' as 'hey, boy'. Similarly, very affectionate 'khoka' is almost equivalent to the expressions 'my son' or 'my child'.

The very intimate salutation in Bangla 'go' as in the expressions like 'han go', 'ki go', 'na go' is very difficult to find a perfect equivalent. The English lexical item 'darling' seems to have almost the same feel of closeness and sincerity and so it could be accepted as the nearest translation equivalent.

Salutations for teachers like 'mastermasai' or 'panditmasai' are translated as simple 'sir'. However, the profession of the person addressed cannot be apprehended from this lexical item, which would be understood, hopefully, from the context.

This is a type of lexico-semantic adjustment called redundancy or lack of equivalence. In this case, certain lexical items of the SL text are left untranslated when the translator feels that in the context of lack of proper equivalent, this deletion will not affect the actual sense of the salutation.

Different seasonal greetings like 'shuvo nababarsho' or 'shuvo bijaya' are accepted to be translated as 'happy new year' and 'happy Vijaya' respectively. Though literally 'shuvo' means 'good' which is different from 'happy'. This is an example of compensatory replacement. Retaining the religio-social lexical item 'vijaya' as it is in the TL text with or without a footnote is a clear example of cultural borrowing and naturalization.

Different stock personal greetings which are more frequent in postal correspondence like 'pronam', 'subhechha', 'sneho', 'ashirbaad' are quite accepted in translations as 'best regards', 'best wishes', 'affection' and 'blessing' respectively. These are examples of literal translation which in this case serve the purpose. However, there are some instances where 'pronam' is retained in the translated text as an example of borrowing and naturalisation.

Another quite funny but at the same time very common way of Bangla salutation, to person both known and unknown, is 'ei je'. This expression could very effectively be translated as a simple 'hello'. This is another example of compensatory replacement method.

#### 4. TRANSLATION OF KINSHIP TERMS

Joint family structure in Indian social system has given rise to a very elaborate range of salutations for different relations. This phenomenon is absent in the Western social system and so is the variety of salutations in English language. For example, 'kaka', 'jetha', 'mama', 'mesomasai', 'pismasai' i.e. all the male members of the family in the generation of father except father himself have only one translation equivalent in English which is 'uncle'. Again the whole range of 'khurtuto', 'jertuto', 'mamato', 'pistuto', 'mastuto' brothers and sisters has only one lexical item in English: 'cousin'. There are plenty of similar examples like 'aunt', 'nephew', 'niece' and different 'in-laws'. Now while translating from Bangla to English this example of cultural untranslatability causes a major problem, particularly when the SL text deals with some very complex joint family issues involving different members of the family. The only possible solution could be a separate family tree in the glossary or detailed footnotes. But, while translating other kinds of texts, if the translator feels that these complex relational terms are redundant and inconsequential to understand the development of the text, he may ignore these details for lack of equivalence.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Thus, translating Bangla salutations and greetings into English is almost always a very challenging task for a translator. He needs to analyze the type of untranslatability and attempt a possible methodology to secure a solution to the problem. The translator here, like in all the other spheres of translation, must not be too literal. The three techniques of modification viz. addition, subtraction and alteration as suggested by Eugene A. Nida in his *Towards a Science of Translation* (1964) are acceptable here too to translate greetings and salutations.

#### REFERENCES

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