

**Hurdles of Terminology Translation: A Case of Vernacular in the Indian  
Multilingual Scenario**

Dr. Mina Dan,  
Department of Linguistics, University of Calcutta

**Abstract**

On the list of various types of translation, literary, non-literary, text, knowledge and so on, the task of terminology translation naturally occupies a place in its own right. However, the inherent uniqueness of the terms, the source materials, and the functionality expected from their translated counterparts in the target language together insist on setting up afresh a methodology of interdisciplinary make-up. The present paper throws light on various aspects of an actual task of terminology translation, especially on its unique hurdles. The paper is based on the ancillary findings of a project titled Defining Key Concepts in Linguistics: A Bilingual Approach with Text-Machine Interface that had the primary objective of selecting and preparing a bilingual glossary of 800 terms in both hard and soft mode. The task involved an interdisciplinary approach – engaging tools and concepts from various disciplines, and two languages, English and Bangla, the source and the target respectively – all of which put forth additional challenge to the task of translation. The hurdles set up by the fields of term formation, standardization, translation and the features of the target tongue Bangla during the policy-framing phase are taken up in this deliberation.

**Key words:** translation; terminology; linguistics; standardization; Bangla.

**1. Introduction**

To translate or not to translate!

The present paper, in relation to terminology translation, instead of exploring both the possibilities of the above dilemma restricts itself to the former as this possibility has already been preferred and actively practised by many and the problems encountered in this activity are a heterogeneous bunch of translation problems. Consequently on the list of various types of translation, literary, non-literary, text, knowledge and so on, the task of terminology translation naturally occupies a place in its own right. On the other hand, the latter possibility, viz. not to translate, too yields problems, but those belong to a higher level of decision-making, rather than to the zone of translation.

As regards the identification of the domain of discussion the present paper is based on the ancillary findings of a project titled Defining Key Concepts in Linguistics: A Bilingual Approach with Text-Machine Interface that had the primary objective of selecting 800 key concepts in linguistics and preparing a bilingual glossary of them in both hard and soft mode. The languages involved are Bangla, an Indian vernacular with a diglossic character as well as one of the twenty-two scheduled languages in the Indian multilingual scenario, and English, the source as well as the vehicular language. The approach followed is of interdisciplinary make-up – engaging tools and concepts from various fields, viz. terminology, translation, standardization, language planning and linguistics. The hurdles set up by the fields of term formation, standardization, translation and the diglossic character of Bangla during the policy-framing phase are taken up in the present article.

A brief description of the current multilingual scenario of the Republic of India with a quasi-federal structure would help to see the motivation behind the project mentioned above as well as the present discussion. The word ‘current’ stands for the seventh decade after the end of the British rules in colonized India. The rules ended but the strong pressure

of the English language continues to prevail in its transformed identity – from the rulers’ tongue into the global tongue. Currently, English has the constitutional status of an official language of the Indian union along with Hindi. Besides, the Indian Constitution gives right to every state to choose its official language/s at the state-level. It also identifies 22 languages as the scheduled languages of the Union. In addition to the above constitutional account there exist the facts and figures of the language Census of India. According to the 2001 Census India has 1365 rationalized mother tongues, 234 identifiable mother tongues and 22 major languages. Of these, 29 languages have more than a million native speakers, 60 have more than 100,000, and 122 have more than 10,000 native speakers. Furthermore, the reality on the ground reveals that a negotiation between the constitutional directives and conventions & practices not only determines the language/s to be used in different domains like judiciary, parliament, administration, education etc. but also gives way to controversial linguistic issues.

With this intricate linguistic backdrop the paper aims to highlight the hurdles of terminology, viz. the hurdles of secondary term formation in a vernacular, Bangla. The section 2 offers a very brief review of literature of the developing discipline terminology, section 3 deals with methodology and other disciplines that feed the field of terminology, section 4 presents the discussions on hurdles and section 5 concludes the paper.

## **2. Review of literature**

Terminology, a developing discipline began to take shape in the 1930s and currently is shifting from an amateurish approach towards a strictly scientific one. A few key architects and their seminal contribution in the field are E. Wüster (1979), Alain Auger & Caroline Barriere (2010), Guy Rondeau (1984), Juan C Sager (1990), Robert Dubuc & Elaine Kennedy (1997), M. Teresa Cabre (1999) etc.

Though this interdisciplinary field insists on inputs from fields like linguistics, lexicography, lexicology, cognitive science, translation, documentation, communication, technology, language planning and standardization, the same inputs at times, instead of leading to direct solution to problems, may set up hurdles for the task undertaken. The present paper, as has already been mentioned, refers to a terminological study done in Bangla, an Indian vernacular, as a case in point and aims to elaborate a few such hurdles of terminology.

## **3. Methodology and its issues**

The inherent uniqueness of the terms, the source materials in this translation sector, and the functionality expected from their translated counterparts in the target language together insist on setting up afresh a methodology of interdisciplinary make-up. The approach followed in the task engages tools and concepts from various fields, viz. terminology, translation, standardization, language planning and linguistics and encounters a range of issues arising from them. The present section will provide a sketch of the methodology along with a demographic profile of Bangla, the target language, in brief and focus on the relevant concepts taken from other fields.

### ***3.1 The language and Methodology***

Bangla, also known as Bengali, a member of the Eastern branch of the Indic subfamily, is mainly spoken in the Indian sub-continent. It is the national language of Bangladesh and the official (and regional official) language of the states of West Bengal, Tripura and Assam of the Republic of India. At the census in 2001 it had 144 million speakers in Bangladesh (98% of the total population – ranked 1st) and 83 million speakers in India (8.11% of the total population – ranked 2nd), leaving apart the significant number of

diasporic speakers in many other countries for whom systematic figures are unavailable. According to the Wikipedia database and the Daily News Dig (2014) data in terms of the speakers' strength Bangla secures the 7<sup>th</sup> position among the world's languages.

Bangla has a quite rich literary tradition of both creative and knowledge kind, the latter of which includes an ample amount of linguistic literature too. Hence initially a three-step method of study was taken up, viz. (i) pick up the linguistic terms from the available literature, (ii) define them combining the information available in Bangla literature and in Bussmann (1996) and Crystal (1997), the two influential terminological reference works in linguistics, and (iii) explain them using examples from Indian languages. However, the methodology in this simplistic format appeared rather insufficient in the face of two major challenges thrown by the first step of the study itself, viz. (i) multiplicity of choice of terms translated into the vernacular, e.g. the term PHONEME has at least six corresponding Bangla terms in the literature, *dhvanikalpa*, *dhvanitaa*, *dhvanim*, *dhvanimuul*, *muuldhvani*, and *svanim*, and (ii) overlapping of concepts, e.g. the same Bangla term *nirdeshak* is used for at least ten English terms, viz. ARTICLE, DEFINITIVE, DEICTIC, DEMONSTRATIVE, DETERMINATIVE, DETERMINISTIC, ENCLITIC, INDICATIVE, NORMATIVE and REFERENTIAL. Moreover, both the types present complex categories with several sub-categories.

Consequently, the method of the first step of the study was amply modified while that of the other two steps remained more or less unchanged. The first phase needed to be adequately empowered for dealing with the issues of (a) standardization and codification of terms in case of multiple choices and (b) language management, viz. term planning in cases of overlapping and total gaps in Bangla. Subsequently the tools and concepts from the fields of standardization, term formation and translation were duly considered and incorporated assigning an interdisciplinary make-up to the first step methodology. However, at times there appeared mismatches between the modified methodology and the diglossic nature of Bangla on the one hand and the traditional linguistic bond in India on the other.

The next sub-sections will introduce the concepts of terminology, standardization, term formation, translation, the diglossic nature of Bangla and the traditional linguistic bond in India and the mismatches mentioned above.

### **3.2 Terminology**

Terminology, more specifically technical terminology, refers to the specialized vocabulary of a particular domain of knowledge. These terms have specific definitions within that particular domain, which is not necessarily the same as their meaning in common use. In other words, some domain-specific knowledge is capsulated in each technical term which has its validity within that particular domain. For example, a medical term is a type of technical term that has a particular meaning within the specific domain of medicine, e.g. antenatal, geriatrics, stress, ophthalmology, incision, carcinoma etc. Likewise a linguistic technical term is a term that is meaningful in a particular way only within the domain of linguistics, e.g. phonology, morphology, stress, semiotics, zero, contour, first language etc. Though both the domains, medicine and linguistics, employ the technical term *stress* the definitions differ. According to the e-journal *Science Daily* - "*Stress* is a medical term for a wide range of strong external stimuli, both physiological and psychological, which can cause a physiological response called the general adaptation syndrome." While in linguistics, *stress* is defined as "A term used in phonetics to refer to the degree of force used in producing a syllable" (Crystal 1997: 363).

In addition, technical terms are components of metalanguage and as tools of communication at all times they play a dual role - on the one hand, they enable experts in a

field to communicate with precision and brevity, and on the other hand, they exclude those who are unfamiliar with the specialized expressions of a particular domain.

With these general characteristics of technical terms let us now look at them in the lights of term formation, translation and standardization.

### ***3.3 Term formation***

Term formation involves two types of activity, viz. primary term formation, i.e. naming a newly created concept, and secondary term formation, i.e. interlingual transfer of a name from the source language to the target language. Motivationally, the activities differ from each other. Moreover, the secondary one is always guided by some linguistic precedent, some model source term, whereas the primary type lacks linguistic precedent of any sort. Thus in order to engineer the target term the process of secondary term formation exploits the methods of borrowing and different techniques of translation. Since language is such a tool that it always permits variation, and the use of parallel techniques too gives rise to competing alternatives, the very task of secondary term formation is directly connected to the field of translation on the one hand, and to that of standardization on the other.

### ***3.4 Translation***

The fields of translation and secondary term formation, in spite of being connected directly, differ from each other in their approach. Translation is a dynamic process involving manipulation of textual material in one language to create textual material in another language, while secondary term formation is a static process involving identification, isolation and description of terminological units.

Translation involves culture-matching and matching between two textual units. Translators work with concepts and terms in context. They target the largest possible units of meaning as they arise in a specific text. Terminologists are not interested in temporary and casual collocations of terms created by different writers. They isolate terms from context, match between term and concept, and fit them into an abstract system of contexts. Terminologists are more analytical in their approach than translators who perform synthesis. In the field of translation studies terminology translating is considered a category under the rank-restricted partial translation theory and may be identified as a word-rank-restricted translational activity following Holmes (1987: 17).

Moreover, the field of translation offers more than one technique of translation for secondary term formation, e.g. total or partial translation of phrases and compound terms; loan translation; parallel translation, paraphrase and so on, that are equally applicable and thus result in multiplicity of choice. In brief, translation techniques amply feed the issue of multiplicity of choice rather than solving it.

### ***3.5 Standardization***

Since technical terms are one of the tools for achieving precision and brevity in communication they need to be consistent in every respect, reflecting 1:1 relationship between the term and the concept consistently. This very need calls upon the process of standardization.

The classical four-fold model of language planning, involving selection, codification, implementation and elaboration, as proposed by Haugen (1966), was beneficial for language standardization. However, this model fails to meet the demands of terminological standardization.

In reality, standardization is a frequently used term in the current global market and the industrial standardization motivates the process of standardization in various sectors including the sector of terminology. Besides, terminological standardization takes place when it is called for, especially in cases of conflicting coexisting names.

The standardization of terminology employs a two-step process:

- a) Unifying and fixing each referent, i.e. fixing the content, and
- b) Unifying and standardizing its designation, i.e. choosing between options.

Standardized terms with their unique reference, the end products of the two-step process, occupy a unique point in a continuum between individualized proper names and multifunctional general words.

Pragmatic criteria for term standardization include (1) economy (shorter and easier terms, so easy to remember), (2) precision (more transparent, less ambiguous terms), and (3) appropriateness (more widely used, more established terms). Linguistic guidelines for the standardization of terms have been provided by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO, 1988) as follows:

1. Terms should consistently reflect some key features of the concepts they are linked to in order to facilitate precise reference. At the same time they should be as economical as possible without giving rise to homonymy.
2. Terms should be lexically systematic and should conform to the phonological and morphological rules of the language.
3. Terms must conform to the general rules of word-formation of the language, i.e. they should allow composition and derivation where appropriate.
4. The meaning of a term should be recognizable independently of any specific context.

As regards secondary term formation the step two of the standardization process is more relevant than the step one. But the second step, i.e. choosing between options, could hardly be followed because of the following reasons.

- a) A vernacular being a totally unorganized linguistic sector each contributor took the liberty of creating his/her own set of terms.
- b) Since the guidelines are not ordered according to their importance each of the terminological options picked up from the linguistic literature in Bangla seems to comply with them more or less in a similar way.

### ***3.6 Bangla and the traditional linguistic bond in India***

Like Bangla most of the Indian vernaculars share two common linguistic bonds – the English-bond, a colonial outcome, and the Sanskrit-bond, an indigenous heritage, especially at the level of vocabulary. As regards the secondary term formation the Sanskrit bond plays a crucial role.

The term vernacular too has a restricted connotation and it indicates the regional languages that have some considerable amount of written texts on various subjects and/or are offered either as subjects or as mediums of instruction in schools. The existence of common English words in the speech of vernacular speakers and Sanskrit words in both written and spoken modes of language are normal linguistic traits.

As regards Bangla Dasgupta (2003) notes that “speakers perceive Bangla as divided both horizontally, into geographical dialects, and vertically, into “codes”, or varieties classifiable in terms of a moribund High vs living Low dichotomy usefully called a ‘diglossia’.” The current paper leaves aside the issues of geographical dialects and considers those arising from the H(igh)-L(ow) dichotomy only. In Bangla H and L codes differ from each other in terms of two grammatical categories, viz. the inflectional system and the pronominal system and they yield two style variations. The H-L dichotomy also applies to Bangla lexicon dividing it between the erudite words coming from Sanskrit with least change and the casual /informal words coming from other sources. This too yields lexical style variations as collocational restrictions are observed in the language. The basic difference between the grammatical H-L and the lexical H-L is that the former indicates two absolute points whereas the latter indicates two opposite ends of a continuum.

The existence of the H-L dichotomy in lexis, indeed affects the process of term standardization. It involves the issue of the identity of target-users of terminology. The choice of high lexis, exploiting the Sanskrit bond crucially, would facilitate erudite communication India-wide, but exclude the common folk. While the choice of low lexis would facilitate the vernacular-dominated teaching-learning and research domains, but create interlingual barriers for the Indian multilingualism.

#### **4. Hurdles of terminology**

The above discussion is a brief clarification of the root causes behind the hurdles of secondary term formation in an Indian vernacular. Hurdles chiefly concern multiplicity of choice. Linguists who write in Bangla execute the task of secondary term formation in accordance with their private set of norms and burden the terminological corpus with endless choices. Subsequently the terminologists face the hurdles a few types of which are mentioned below:

i) Hurdle of synonymy: Bangla literature offers various synonymous terms against one English linguistic technical term. For example, available Bangla terms for syntax are: *baakyagatxhanriiti* (sentence formation method)/ *padatattva* (part of speech theory)/ *anvaya* (prose order)/ *padakram* (part of speech order).

ii) Hurdle of homophony: At times the corpus presents homophonous terms against two or more English technical terms, e.g. English borrowed the term **SANDHI** for euphonic combination from the Sanskrit grammatical tradition. Hence its Bangla equivalent term is *sandhi*. At the same time **JUNCTURE** too is designated as *sandhi* as *sandhi* also means juncture.

iii) Hurdle of traditional vs. Modern: the corpus often shows a term from the existing grammatical tradition side by side a newly created one in Bangla, e.g. for **PERSON** the term *purusx* (a male person) comes from the existing grammatical tradition, while *paksxa* (party) is a modern creation.

iv) Hurdle of translation: Outputs of more than one translation process result in options, e.g. for **SPOONERISM** Bangla equivalents are: *duuragata dhvanir biparyaaas* (non-contiguous sounds' metathesis)/ *duurastha dhvanir biparyaaas* (non-contiguous sounds' metathesis)/ *spunaar-abhyaas* (Spooner-habit). The first two are free translation while the last one is loan translation or a mixture of borrowing and loan translation of the English source.

v) Hurdle of style variation: This type is the result of the H-L dichotomy existing in the language, e.g. for **CLIPPED WORD** Bangla equivalents are: *khanxdxita shabda* (clipped word)/ *chaaMtxaai shabda* (clipped word), the former representing the H/erudite style while the latter the L/casual style.

vi) Hurdle of collocation: The corpus often offers terminological equivalents, each of which is appropriate in its specific syntagmatic context, for the same English term. For example, Bangla equivalents for **PRIMARY** are: *praathamik/ moula* but for **PRIMARY ROOT** is: *siddha dhaatu*, and for **PRIMARY AFFIX/ PRIMARY DERIVATIVES** is: *krt-pratyaya*. Here options are provided by the Sanskrit grammatical tradition.

vi) Hurdle of polysemy: As opposed to the types mentioned above this type concerns the cases where the same Bangla term is used for more than one English technical term and thus assigning a polysemic nature as well as an overlapping functional load on the term under consideration. For example, **STRUCTURE**, **CONSTRUCTION** and **RECONSTRUCTION** – all three share the term *gatxhan* in their Bangla equivalents, both **COMPONENT** and **CONSTITUENT** are designated as *upaadaan*.

Needless to state that in each type the question is: which one to choose?

## **5. Conclusion**

In our project we could resolve the issues mostly in terms of subjective decisions, rather than objective ones. The inputs coming from the fields of term formation, translation and standardization helped us to comprehend the complex nature and requirements of the task and identify the hurdles thereof. However, the guidelines coming from these fields were too general to settle the issues. Moreover, we can neither create a new set of terms ignoring the existing linguistic literature in Bangla, nor do we have the authority to implement them. Maybe many other vernaculars share the same state of affairs in and outside India.

Secondary term formation in various subject domains in vernaculars is of immense importance in developing countries like India for the growth of research as well as education. Hence, in closing, we like to put up a few questions: what is the scope of application of the principles of the scientific field of terminology? Have they been designed only for (i) scientific domains, (ii) primary term formation and (iii) well organized language sectors?

## **References**

- Auger, A. & Barriere, C. (Eds.) (2010). *Probing Semantic Relations: Exploration and identification in specialized texts*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Bussmann, H. (1996). *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*. Translated and edited by Trauth, Gregory and Kerstin Kazzazi. London & New York: Routledge.
- Cabre, M. T. (1999). *Terminology: Theory, Methods, and Applications*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Census of Bangladesh. (2001). Bangladesh: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.
- Census of India. (2001). Govt. of India: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner,
- Crystal, D. (1997). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1980). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Dasgupta, P. (2003). Bangla. In G. Cardona & D. Jain (Eds). *The Indo-Aryan Languages* (pp. 351-390). London/New York: Routledge..
- Dubuc, R. & Kennedy, E. (1997). *Terminology: A Practical Approach*. Brossard, Québec: Linguattech.
- Haugen, E. (1966a). *Language conflict and Language Planning: the case of modern Norwegian*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Holmes, J. (1987). The Name and Nature of Translation Studies. In G. Toury (Ed). *Translation Across Cultures* (pp. 9-24). New Delhi: Bahri Publications Pvt Ltd.
- Rondeau, G. (1984). *Introduction a la terminologie*. Canada: G. Morin.
- Sager, J. C. (1990). *A Practical Course in Terminology Processing*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Wüster, E. (1979). *International Bibliography of Standardized Vocabularies*. Munchen, New York: K. G. Saur.
- [http://www.sciencedaily.com/articles/s/stress\\_\(medicine\).htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/articles/s/stress_(medicine).htm) (13.12.2019)