Translating Politeness: Case of Hindi and English

Ritesh Kumar & Girish Nath Jha, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Description
Polite (or polite) behavior has been defined as “socioculturally determined behavior,” which implies that it differs across different societies and cultures, thereby forming a fertile breeding ground for intercultural misunderstanding and conflicts. We present here a corpus-based study of politeness across two languages—English and Hindi. It studies politeness in a translated parallel corpus of Hindi and English and sees how politeness in a Hindi text is translated into English.

Using the framework mentioned below and the taxonomy of speech acts given by Searle, we have studied 4000 sentences till now (2000 in each domain). Since the corpus mainly comprises formal data taken from newspapers, magazines etc, we have found only assertive and directives till now. In between these two, politeness could be attached only to the directives.

On the basis of this small sample, we could conclude that situation 2 is indeed the most common situation. However, contrary to our initial hypothesis, situation 1 is also quite a common situation while situation 4 is quite rare. These conclusions need to be verified with further data.

Our aim is to further systematise the differences in terms of precise grammatical categories so that the differences between the two languages could be generalised in broader grammatical and pragmatic terms which could be later implemented for other purposes like machine translation and language pedagogy.

Applications
In a country like India with 1635 mother tongues, 22 scheduled languages and 2 official languages

- Machine Translation, particularly of official and sensitive documents
- Language Pedagogy, where the students are systematically told about the contrast between the two languages in such speech acts as requesting, commending, questioning, apologising, etc.
- In theoretical politeness studies, a kind politeness typology could be developed

The Framework

Levels of Politeness
- Lexical and Structural Equivalence
- Lexical/Ethical Structure is possible in both but not translated accordingly
- Unusual Politeness Value in the resultant translation
- H: Highly likely in the present corpus

Situation 1: Translated Polite Structures
- Lexical and Structural Equivalence
- Equal Politeness Value in the resultant translation
- H: Quite unlikely

Situation 2: Mistranslated Polite Structures
- Lexical and Structural Equivalence
- Lexical/Ethical Structure is possible in both but not translated accordingly
- Unusual Politeness Value in the resultant translation
- H: Highly likely in the present corpus

Situation 3: Dissimilar Structures
- Lexical and Structural Equivalence is not possible
- Lexical/Ethical Structure is possible in both but not translated accordingly
- Equal Politeness Value in the resultant translation
- H: Highly unlikely

Situation 4: Non-translated Structures
- Lexical and Structural Equivalence is not possible
- Unequal Politeness Value in the resultant translation
- H: Quite likely in the present corpus

Consequence 1: Proper Translation
- Situations 1 and 3
- Politeness Value Preserved
- Desired consequence

Consequence 2: Improper Translation
- Situations 1, 2 and 4
- Polite becomes non-polite
- Impossible, check the situation

Consequence 3: Bad Translation
- Situations 1, 2 and 4
- Polite becomes impolite
- Immediately check the situation and correct it.

The Corpus and the Results

An Example of Different Situations and Consequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Consequence 1</th>
<th>Consequence 2</th>
<th>Consequence 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Suggest that water be supplied</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Situations in the Corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Speech Acts in the Corpus

- Directive: 39%
- Assertive: 84%

Speech Acts and the Domains

- Tourism: 538
- Health: 1892
- Disease: 538

Consequences in Different Situations

- Situation 1: 1, 2, 3, 4
- Situation 2: 1, 2, 3, 4
- Situation 3: 1, 2, 3, 4
- Situation 4: 1, 2, 3, 4