

Italicisation policing, penning with a colonised mind



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My friend was advised to italicise all the foreign words in her poems. This advice came from a well-meaning woman with NZ poetry on her business card and an English accent in her mouth.

I have been thinking about this advice.

The publishing convention of italicising words from other languages clarifies that some words are imported: it ensures readers can tell the difference between a foreign language and the language of home.

I have been thinking about this advice.

Marking the foreign words is also a kindness:

Every potential reader is reassured that although obviously you're expected to understand the rest of the text, it's fine to consult a dictionary or native speaker for help with the italics.

I have been thinking about this advice...

— Alice Te Punga Somerville, *How to Write while Colonised*

Like many bilingual writers, the world leaps from many places for me; one exists where thought is birthed and forged, another where thought becomes utterance and text. So, I'm thinking in Bangla, but I'm penning the thoughts in English. Often, I find myself between a rock and a hard place while writing/using words (as it is) that we grow up with but are not English. Should we italicise the words our mother and grandmothers raised us with? If these words are foreign, the question then is: to whom, though? As readers, writers

and learners, isn't it our humble responsibility to cross the boundary of literal translations and find joy in learning?

We, the Bangladeshi South Asians who were once a part of the Indian subcontinent, learnt English as part of a colonial legacy and education. This colonial legacy, however, couldn't erase a lot of native terms we learnt from our ancestors, many of whom came from peasant backgrounds. Bhaat, bhorta, ruti, etc are now gaining acknowledgment in the international culinary arena, but with the nudge of italicisation. Often, this reappropriation of native terms is implied with slanting words: italics.

Writer and poet Khairani Barokka and essayist Madhushree Ghosh asked a question, which I

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myself often ask: how normalised is italicising words of our own languages, that it takes us years, if not decades to unlearn?

Native terms from a "foreign" language are the words that are not used in the dominant culture, and the supposed "ethos" of using italicisation is to highlight them and keep the cultural "purity." When a foreign word—one that isn't part of the language in which the



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text is being written—is highlighted in italics in a work of literature, it becomes "other." Etymologically,

gliding over the page, devouring the words that haven't been italicised. Maybe unintentionally, but the notion of Us vs Them crystallises, becomes the standard. Even if the aim is to highlight the uniqueness of the word or signpost it so the reader won't trip over it, such italicisation also implies how hard we try to pass or pass through. Passing is what you have to do because or when your legitimacy is in question. If the word is Other, then it does not belong.

This process also renders a distance between the italicised and unitalicised that doesn't necessarily elevate the former—that, in fact, emphasises the importance of the unitalicised to the dominant language in use. (I always prefer Bhaat-Maach-Bhorta, over pizza

or spaghetti, see?) I've come to understand the practice of italicising such words as a form of linguistic gatekeeping—a demarcation between which words are "exotic" or "not found in the English language," and those that have a rightful place in the text: the non-italicised. Such slanted truth very tactfully pushes you to the "other" box. If you are a person who has eaten bhaat-bhorta millions of times in your life, this aspect of your life will be othered. And subconsciously, if you are one of those people and are italicising bhaat-bhorta, you are othering yourself, your own life, in language.

In the case of us Bangladeshis, there is an extra layer in the gatekeeping process. So many of us say masala, instead of moshla; saree

instead of sharee; roti instead of ruti (when you open a word document and type these words, you will notice that red lines show up only under the latter words; ever wondered why?). Thanks to colonisation, there is a large South Asian population that speaks English, there are many South Asian migrants in English-speaking countries, where curry is a pub staple and ethnic apparel is in vogue, hence "masala" and "saree" being unitalicised and made grammatically correct. However, we the successors of a "peasant" society are left behind with our "peasant" language which never made it to the realm of unitalicised dictionary. Now, the question is: did we try though?

Every colonised people, in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality, always attempts subconsciously to elevate above his/her peasant status at any cost. And sometimes the cost is by agreeing to be alienated in the name of "standing out" just to feel included.

Understanding decolonisation from the linguistic lens and italicisation policing might be hard to grasp for some people, but if you really think about it, you will understand. Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed said we can dislodge a lodge by showing how we are lodged, how we are sealed into the object or thing, not subject, not human, not universal.

In this month of celebrating Bangla language, let's embrace what our ancestors taught us. Let's embrace our native tongue in its true sense; let's unapologetically own the terms sharee, ruti, bhorta, to name a few, even when we are writing them in English (let's practise writing them without italicisation). They might not look/sound trendy, but that's what we are; they represent us and our cons-old culture. Let's embrace our true self.

"Establishment of Research Facilities on Processing of Safe and Healthy Dry Fish and Indoor Farming at BCSIR Centre in Dhaka and Chattogram"
Project, BCSIR
Ministry of Science and Technology

Ref: 39.02.0000.030.05.003.21/46-50/1 Date: 20/02/2024

e-Tender Notice

Tender ID	Description of supply	Tender closing & opening date and time
953538	Online UPS	19-Mar-2024 12:00:00
954173	Office Furniture	19-Mar-2024 12:00:00
954174	Office Furniture	19-Mar-2024 12:00:00
954175	Computer and Accessories	19-Mar-2024 13:00:00
954178	Office Equipment	19-Mar-2024 13:00:00

Md Rezaul Karim
Project Director

GD-290

Office of the Benapole Pourashava
District : Jashore.

Memo No.41.08.02.001.070.00.2024- 41 Date : 08 .02 .2024

CORRIGENDUM e-TENDER NOTICE
Open Tender Method (OTM)

This is to notify for all concerned that the e-Tender Notice No: 03/2023-24 from the office of the undersigned vide Memo No: 41.08.02.001.070.00.2024- 09, Dated: 09.01.2024, the following change have been made due to unavoidable circumstances.

Tender ID No.	Package No.	Tender Document Last Selling (Date and Time)	Tender Closing/ Opening (Date and Time)
933310	LGCRRP/Benapole/2023-24/W-03	18/02/2024 16:00 Instead of 11/02/2024 16:00	12/02/2024 13:00 Instead of 19/02/2024 13:00
933676	LGCRRP/Benapole/2023-24/W-04	18/02/2024 16:00 Instead of 11/02/2024 16:00	12/02/2024 13:00 Instead of 19/02/2024 13:00

All other terms & conditions will remain unchanged.

(Md. Mosharaf Hossain)
Executive Engineer
Benapole Pourashava
District: Jashore.

GD-292

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