

Re: Vocatives

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English does not have a vocative case. Apparently Common Indo-European did and most people know it survived into Classical Latin. (Et tu, Brute). The unnatural English "O" deserves nothing but the ridicule it gets.

My question is: What does it feel like to speak a language with a vocative?

The problem comes up in translating. The specific example I was confronted with is from the Qur'an (that Arabic, at least, has a vocative – a prefix "ya:-"). In the course of a narrative Pharaoh speaks to Moses and starts out (in an unsatisfactory translation) "O Moses .. ". The natural way to translate that would be "Pharaoh said to Moses "... " but this is less literal (and we already have enough trouble with Muslims who think the Qur'an cannot be translated).

Is there any better way to imitate the feeling of a vocative in a language without one?

Some English dialects use "Hey" in much the same way as Arabic "Ya".

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