

Preface

What this book is – What this book is not – The Kannada language – The linguistic significance of the Kannada language – The literary significance of the Kannada language – The historical significance of the Kannada language – The contemporary social significance of the Kannada language – Some concluding remarks

What this book is

This book is an introductory learner's manual of modern written Kannada: a language of the Dravidian family of languages with a literary history that reaches back at least until the ninth century CE,¹ and the official language of the modern state of Karnataka in southern India.²

The book was designed for classroom use at the University of Munich (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München), Germany, but it can also be used for self-study.

After studying the contents of this book, the learner should be able to read modern non-belletristic texts as well as much modern narrative prose literature with the aid of a dictionary. Some literary authors use bits of regional dialect, and poets, especially, like to use linguistic archaisms to achieve special effects; the discussion of such features belongs to an advanced level, and not all of these may be mentioned and explained in this book.

What this book is not

This book is an introductory manual, not an exhaustive study of the whole of Kannada grammar. Although it will occasionally refer to earlier stages in the historical development of the language in order to explain certain peculiarities, it focusses on the *standard modern written* language.³ Therefore, it does not cover all stages of development of the extremely rich Kannada language in detail, nor does it deal with peculiarities of regional or social spoken dialects in detail (although occasionally brief remarks about widespread colloquialisms and widely known features of prominent dialects will be made). Similarly, the reader should not expect this book to explain each and every detail of idiomatic usage in this old and rich language (although some common idiomatic expressions are treated here), nor is it a phrase book or a manual of conversational Kannada (although a few samples of conversational language are given).

On the other hand it should be noted that modern written Kannada is also a spoken language, and differences between the literary norm and most of the spoken dialects are not great.⁴ The written or literary language is spoken in formal situations and also in all such situations where the target audience is

supra-regional (for instance, in broadcasting). When one has mastered the written language, one can speak it throughout the entire Kannada-speaking region of India and be understood without making an awkward impression.⁵ There is a tendency nowadays to produce teaching manuals (not only for Kannada, but also for other Indian languages) that supposedly teach a generally spoken, colloquial language. These ‘spoken languages’, in my experience, are usually fictions.⁶ – The production of such manuals is not only didactically flawed, but in my opinion also shows a fundamental disrespect towards those languages: as though no serious literature has been produced in those languages that is worth reading by people who have not yet learnt the languages, and as if the only function of those languages can be to prattle a bit with people⁷ who are too uneducated to understand simple everyday statements in English. If a person in the Kannada-speaking part of India cannot understand the minimalistic English that is used for bargaining in the marketplace or in a taxi (if at all such manuals reach that level), that person will be so uneducated that no amount of book-learning by a foreigner will enable the foreigner to understand that person’s backward rural dialect.

The present book explains Kannada according to its generally accepted modern written norm, although it does include a chapter on the more widely spread colloquialisms. The only way to learn how to speak any Indian language is to spend much time with speakers of the language, and then one will have learnt the regional and social variety of the language of those speakers. By learning normative written Kannada, one also gains a deeper understanding of the grammatical structure, which will enable one, if one so wishes, to later learn any spoken variety of the language.

The Kannada language

The linguistic significance of the Kannada language

Kannada belongs to the Dravidian family of languages, almost all of which are spoken in southern India.⁸ Not only is Dravidian one of the largest families of languages in the world as regards its number of speakers, but it is of great interest for the study of general linguistics. Also, the influence of a Dravidian substratum is what has altered the Indo-European languages of northern India (the so-called Indo-Aryan languages) in such a way that they are recognized as a separate sub-family within Indo-European.⁹

There is a persistent belief that among all the Dravidian languages, Tamil is the oldest and most typically Dravidian. This belief is based on the lexical purism of literary Tamil and the apparent fact that the oldest extant works of literature in Tamil are the oldest in any Dravidian language. However, the oldest

fragments of Kannada literature are not very much younger, and there is reason to believe that in certain linguistic respects Kannada is more conservative than Tamil is.

The literary significance of the Kannada language

Because Kannada has been cultivated as a literary language for at least seventeen centuries, it has had the time to reach a very high level of standardization, precision and subtlety. Still today, it is one of the leading literary languages of India. The most prestigious national literary award, the Jnanpith Award, has been won by more Kannada authors than by authors in any other language. For its literary and historical richness, Kannada has been recognized as a 'classical language' by the Government of India in 2008.

The historical significance of the Kannada language

Among all the living languages of South Asia, Kannada possesses the second-oldest literature (after Tamil, a neighbouring Dravidian language). The predominant religion of the nobility in the Kannada-speaking part of India was Jainism, and the literature of the first few centuries of Kannada literary history is almost entirely the creation of Jaina authors. Because most medieval literature in other Indian languages is mainly the creation of brahminical Hindus, Kannada literature provides an 'other voice' and gives researchers glimpses of life and thought in other sections of Indian society of the time. From the twelfth century CE onwards, Vīraśaiva authors developed an extraordinary literary productivity, and their work is at least as important for a balanced understanding of medieval Indian religious, social and literary history. The huge volume and diversity of all this valuable material in Kannada has to date remained sadly unrecognized by researchers outside Karnataka.

The contemporary social significance of the Kannada language

Kannada is the sole official language of the south Indian state of Karnataka, which is one of the economically most dynamic and leading regions of India, particularly the area around the capital city of Bengaluru (previously known under the Anglicized name 'Bangalore'¹⁰), the 'Silicon Valley of India'. According to official statistics, Kannada ranks as the eighth-largest language in India according to the number of native speakers;¹¹ however, because of historical reasons and because of its official status in Karnataka, it is also used by many millions of other people with practically native fluency.

Some concluding remarks

A new learner's manual of Kannada for non-Indian learners is not published often. The reasons which persons may have for learning a language can differ widely, and the present author has tried to satisfy a variety of interests and wishes. The result, obviously, is a book that most probably also contains information that is of little interest for a certain specific individual reader or the other. It contains a bit of information about earlier historical stages of the language, about general Dravidian linguistics, about social customs and how these are reflected in the language, about idioms, about colloquialisms and dialects; but all these topics cannot be treated in full detail in a single book. The author hopes that the book will serve as a solid and useful basis for the individual studies of each reader, in whatever direction those studies may lead.

The book has developed out of materials which the author wrote for his own use, teaching Kannada in the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (more commonly known in the English-speaking world as the University of Munich), Germany. He wishes to thank numerous students in Munich who provided valuable suggestions towards the improvement of the book. Special thanks are due to Christoph Honecker, living in far-away Mysuru (formerly written 'Mysore'), who went through the entire text and meticulously pointed out omissions and typing errors through e-mail, and whose questions prompted additional explanations. Further helpful remarks have been made by doyens of Kannada studies Prof. T.V. Venkatachalastry (Mysore) and the late Prof. M.M. Kalaburgi (Dharwad) and Gil Ben-Herut (University of South Florida). The author hopes that all these persons will look upon this book favourably, and he will be grateful for constructive criticism and remarks from discerning readers.

Notes

¹ The earliest completely preserved literary work is from the ninth century. However, the earliest rock inscription, dated approximately 400 CE, shows that Kannada was a refined literary language already by that time.

² For a brief outline of the position and significance of the Kannada language in the world, see p. 2, "The Kannada language".

³ However, because Kannada is a highly conservative language, knowledge of modern written Kannada gives the learner access to roughly 800 years of literature. The written norm has changed only very little since the twelfth century CE.

⁴ One can only broadly generalize about such matters, because very much depends on a number of variables, such as social background of the speakers, their level of education and culturedness, regionality, etc.

⁵ In this respect, Kannada differs strongly from its neighbouring sister-language Tamil, in which the written normative language differs so much from commonly spoken forms that it is a classical example of what in linguistics is termed 'diglossia'.

⁶ For instance, the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) in Mysore, India's leading institute of linguistic study, has brought out a series of manuals that are titled *An Intensive Course*

in . . . (Kannada, Tamil, Bengali, and others). In my opinion, these books are plainly bad. If one has studied the language of *An Intensive Course in Kannada* and then tries to read a Kannada novel, newspaper or any piece of scholarly writing, one is lost, because that book does not teach the grammatical forms of the standard written language. The Kannada of that manual is a language that shows some particular features of colloquial Kannada as spoken in the large cities of southern Karnataka (Mysuru and Bengaluru) but is not really spoken anywhere in that form, and certainly not written.

⁷ It is difficult to imagine that anyone would create a course in beginners' English that teaches a Texan drawl or Cockney slang.

⁸ For an excellent brief introduction to the Dravidian linguistic family, see Zvelebil 1990, which is also suited for the seriously interested general reader. Andronov 2003 and Krishnamurti 2003 go into great comparative linguistic detail.

⁹ The Dravidian influence is what unites Indo-Aryan and Dravidian to the possibly best known example of a *Sprachbund* or linguistic area.

¹⁰ The new spelling 'Bengaluru', which more closely reflects the true pronunciation of the name of the city, was proposed by the late, famous Kannada writer U.R. Ananthamurthy.

¹¹ See the 2011 census report: <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language-2011/Statement-4.pdf>. Between 1971 and 2011, the number of persons for whom Kannada was reported to be their mother tongue doubled (<http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language-2011/Statement-7.pdf>).

How to use this book

Learning a new language (any language) is, to some extent, learning a new way of thinking. Each of us experiences a variety of sense impressions, thoughts, feelings, and then we analyse them and code them according to the rules of a language so that they can be communicated through speech or writing. Understanding the speech or writing of another person is a reversal of this process, according to the same rules. Each language has originated and developed within a certain culture, which is a way of experiencing and understanding life. If one wants to be truly successful in learning a new language, one must be curious about alternative ways of experiencing and understanding life and reproducing it in that other language.

Understanding is central to learning any language, and also to this book. There are many tables in the book, and an index, and a glossary, all of which make it easy to quickly look up something. But the bulk of the text is meant to be read through, because it explains: it is meant to create understanding in the reader for this other way of experiencing and understanding life that is reflected in the Kannada language.

Cultural differences are reflected in various kinds of differences between languages: differences in pronunciation, differences in script, differences in grammar, differences in idiomatic usage, differences in the social customs in conversational contexts, and others. If you, dear reader, do not respect and are not interested in cultural differences, then please stop reading this book and go do something else (skateboarding, gossiping about the neighbours, watching football, whatever), because without such respect and interest you will never learn any Indian language properly.

First of all, the reader of this book is urged to read the chapter ‘Preliminary remarks’ attentively. Kannada belongs to the Dravidian family of languages: these languages show certain common characteristics that may appear quite surprising to learners who until now have been familiar mainly with languages of the Indo-European family, to which the great majority of Western languages belong (among them English).¹² The preliminary chapter gives an overview of what the learner is to expect in the following lessons, and it also points out what the aspects of Kannada are to which special attention ought to be given while learning.

Kannada script is dealt with in detail in a separate section. The learner is advised to learn the script as soon as possible. Although the lessons explain the grammar and give sample sentences both in Kannada script and in Latin transliteration, this should not tempt the learner to be lax in learning the script. Kannada is not only a modern, living language spoken by many millions of people, but is also a rich classical literary language with over a thousand years

of uninterrupted literary history, and all its literature is written and printed in that script (just as, for instance, Greek, Russian, and Japanese are also written in their own scripts). From a certain point in this book onwards, exercises will be given in Kannada script only. The script has a beautiful charm of its own and is a joy to write.

Each lesson begins with the explanation of some structural elements of the language, along with examples of what can be expressed by means of those elements. After that, exercises are given, together with glossaries and, in later lessons, short pieces for practising reading comprehension. Notes with additional information are given in the form of endnotes at the end of each chapter, not footnotes, because it was felt that the sometimes lengthy footnotes at the bottom of pages could be visually distracting and disturbing to the learners. The length of the individual chapters is uneven, because it was thought prudent to keep conceptually related material together in single chapters (for instance, all the finite verb forms are discussed in lesson 5. This may appear like very much new material to learn, but this is not really so, because the underlying principles are only few).

Learning a language from a different language family is an intellectual adventure. While learning the language, one learns a new way of analysing one's experiences and coding them into a communicable form. One also learns to re-think many things that until then seemed self-evident, natural and universal, while in fact they are not so at all. As the German poet Goethe said, a person who knows only his mother-tongue cannot know it well: only through the contrasts which one sees between one's own language and other languages, one learns about the particular possibilities (and lack of other possibilities) of one's own language and thereby gets to know it better. The reader is therefore advised not to skip over the cultural notes that are included in some of the lessons, which explain the cultural backgrounds of some of the characteristics of the language.

Most readers of this book will either be English mother-tongue speakers, or they will have another language of the Indo-European family of languages as their maternal language. Kannada, being a member of the Dravidian family, has certain structural features that do not exist in Indo-European, and if the learner wants to fully understand the implications of those structural differences, he¹³ will have to think about language at a very basic level. Therefore, some of the explanations in the lessons may appear a bit 'slow', but this is because teaching experience has proven that certain basic aspects of the language must be taught in great detail and must be fully understood if the learner is to be successful. Unfortunately, education (also higher education) today is not what it used to be. In earlier generations, one main goal of education was to turn people into cultured persons, whereas nowadays the aim of education increasingly seems to be to turn people into production modules that can be plugged into the economy, so that their lives can be converted into money (either their

own or, perhaps more importantly in the view of educational planners, somebody else's money). This change is seen most clearly in language teaching. The quality of language teaching in schools in the Western world has deteriorated dramatically, and nowadays an author of a language teaching manual cannot expect the same level of understanding about language in general from his readers as was the case a generation ago. Most probably, many readers of this manual will not have had any previous experience of learning another language, or they will have learnt a language that is very comfortably similar to their own. Therefore, this manual explains several theoretical concepts in linguistics, wherever they are relevant. The learner is urged most strongly not to skip over such passages, because an understanding of the theory that is explained there will speed up his learning of Kannada considerably.

Irrespective of which language one learns, or how much knowledge of theoretical linguistics the learner has, there always are features in a language which defy a quick 'rational' or 'scientific' explanation. This is clearly the case, for instance, with idiomatic expressions. Each language has a character of its own, which has grown in the course of centuries of cultural history; aspects of this character can be learnt with time, by occupying oneself regularly and seriously with the language and absorbing something of its spirit. This may sound a little vague, 'unscientific' and mystifying to some readers; but this is the undeniable experience of the entire population of the world while learning to master any language, including (in particular) the mother tongue. The only way in which the teacher, or the author of a teaching manual, can be of help is by pointing the way. The learner is the one who learns and who must go the way.

The serious learner should not hesitate to purchase a good dictionary. The glossaries of the lessons give the meanings of words that are used, but the usefulness of reading complete entries for words in a good dictionary can hardly be underestimated. The most renowned dictionary is the monumental **Kannada-English Dictionary** by Ferdinand Kittel, but this may not be well suited for the beginner on account of its enormous detail and its bulkiness; furthermore, it is over a hundred years old and deals primarily with the older stages of the literary language. Very suited is **Bucher's Kannada-English Dictionary** by J. Bucher, which is essentially a strongly condensed version of the Kittel dictionary; but it appeared in 1923, and since then there have been considerable new developments in Kannada vocabulary, many of which are found in the **IBH Kannada-Kannada-English Dictionary** by G. Venkatasubbiah, L.S. Seshagiri Rao and H.K. Ramachandra Murthy, which, strangely enough, does not contain many older words that are part of common, everyday vocabulary. A recent larger and highly recommendable one-volume dictionary is the **Kannada Sahitya Parishat Abridged Kannada-English Dictionary** under the chief editorship of M.K. Sridhar. Once one has acquired a basic vocabulary of one's own, one

can use monolingual Kannada dictionaries, such as the excellent *Kannada rat-nakōśa*, brought out under the chief editorship of H.M. Nayak by the Kannada Sahitya Parishat in a very economical, pocket-size popular edition, of which several hundred thousand copies are in circulation.

Notes

¹² Although the languages of northern India, such as Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, the classical Sanskrit a.o. are considered to be Indo-European (together they are the 'Indo' of 'Indo-European'), all of them have been very thoroughly influenced by the Dravidian family in their phonemics and grammar, and to some extent also in their vocabulary, in the course of many centuries. This is an ongoing process of mutual influencing of the two great language families of India that still continues today.

¹³ For the sake of convenience and better readability, the present author is not following the fashionable dictates of 'political correctness' and is not writing 'he or she', 's/he', 'his or her', or confusingly alternating 'he' and 'she'. Instead, I am following the time-honoured custom of referring to the general, unknown, anonymous, de-personalized, faceless reader and learner who has no individual identity as 'he'. If any reader thinks that I am thereby implying that only male readers should learn Kannada, then that reader is an idiot, and idiots should not be learning exotic languages and reading this book in the first place.