

How to Use This Book



*The Vidhana Soudha, seat of Karnataka's Legislative Assembly,
Bengaluru: the largest legislative building in India*

(In this book, notes are given at the end of every chapter.)

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, because without such respect and interest you will never learn any Indian language properly.

First of all, the reader of this book is hereby encouraged 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).¹ 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 chapter. The learner is advised to learn the script as soon as possible (while realizing that he² cannot learn it in just a day or two; one is advised to keep returning to the chapter on script until it has been mastered). 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). 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, he 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.

A few examples of conversational Kannada have been added in the first lessons, as concrete instances of how the language is put to everyday use. My experience as a teacher is that most of my students are interested in learning Kannada because they have a basic interest in Indian religious studies; therefore short reading pieces of the category 'religions of Karnataka' have been included in a few chapters.



Office of the Kannada Sahitya Parishat, Bangalore

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 the German missionary Ferdinand Kittel, on which many other dictionaries are based, 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. (The *Kannaḍa Sāhitya Pariṣattu* or Kannada Literary Council, a non-profit organization with headquarters in Bangalore, is the foremost organization for the nurture of the Kannada language and its literature.) Once one has acquired a basic vocabulary of one's own, one can use monolingual Kannada dictionaries, such as the excellent *Kannaḍa ratnakōśa*, 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

¹ 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.

² 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 generic, 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.