Lesson 9

A broad pēpar dōse *('paper dōse') on a plate*
with four cups of sauces: a popular kind of fast food

Finite and non-finite verb forms – defective verbs

Finite and non-finite verb forms

Verbs can assume two different categories of forms: **finite** and **non-finite.**

(1) In many, if not most languages, every complete sentence requires at least one **finite** verb form.[1] For instance, in the sentence *I see the tree* the word 'see' is a finite verb form:[2] it expresses the action that is reported in the sentence, and no other verbal expression is required: this sentence is complete in itself. In many languages, finite verb forms are conjugated and include information about, for instance, the tense of the verb and the person. The finite verb form can also, however, be defective (see below), meaning that not all theoretically possible conjugated forms exist.

(2) **Non-finite** verb forms[3] are such forms that express actions or processes but in themselves are not sufficient for creating a complete sentence. Participles are perhaps the best known example: these are verb forms that function as adjectives. For instance, in *that sleeping girl* the word *sleeping* is a verb form, used attributively, which expresses that the girl is asleep; but it is not a finished sentence. It could become a complete sentence if more information is added, e.g., *that sleeping girl is my daughter.* Here *is* is a finite verb form, and the sentence is, so to say, 'finished'.

Examples of non-finite verb forms in Kannada are the gerund, the present participle, the relative participle, the conditional, and the concessional, all of which will be discussed in later lessons.

Defective verbs

In many languages, finite verb forms are conjugated, i.e., they are inflected by means of suffixes, or prefixes, or other means (or combinations of these) that convey additional information (such as tense and person). As we have seen, Kannada has two classes of verbs, that differ slightly from each other by the way in which they are conjugated. But besides these two classes of verbs that are fully conjugated, there are also the so-called **defective verbs.** These are very simple in their use and are among the verbs that are used most in the language. Defective verbs are such verbs of which not all the theoretically possible conjugated forms are in actual use. In several cases it is not immediately apparent what the exact etymology of a defective verb form is.

Like in other Dravidian languages, the number of so-called defective verbs in Kannada is rather large in comparison to modern European languages.[4] It is very important to know them, because most of them are in highly frequent everyday use. Some of the most frequent verbal expressions in Kannada use defective verbs. What is characteristic about these verbs is that (a) there is only one single form that is used for all persons, and (b) this form does not unambiguously indicate grammatical tense.[5]

Two of the most common defective verb forms have already been shown in lesson 1: *illa* and *alla,* by means of which, respectively, (a) the existence or presence, or (b) the identity of something is negated. Compare the following five sentences:

ಆದು ಮರ	*adu mara*	that is a tree
ಅವು ಮರಗಳು	*avu maragaḷu*	those are trees
ನಾನು ರೈತ (ರೈತನು)	*nānu raita (raitanu)*	I am a farmer
ನಾವು ರೈತರು	*nāvu raitaru*	we are farmers
ನೀವು ರೈತರು	*nīvu raitaru*	you are farmers

and the following, in which *alla* is used irrespective of what the subject is:

ಆದು ಮರವಲ್ಲ	*adu maravalla*	that is not a tree
ಅವು ಮರಗಳಲ್ಲ	*avu maragaḷalla*	those are not trees
ನಾನು ರೈತನಲ್ಲ	*nānu raitanalla*	I am not a farmer
ನಾವು ರೈತರಲ್ಲ	*nāvu raitaralla*	we are not farmers
ನೀವು ರೈತರಲ್ಲ	*nīvu raitaralla*	you are not farmers

In the first sentence, two expressions are juxtaposed (*adu* 'that' and *mara* 'tree') and the word *alla* 'is not' is added to indicate non-identity (*mara + v + alla > maravalla)*. Almost always, the final *alla* or *illa* of a sentence is written is written together with the preceding word, following the principles of sandhi that have been introduced in lesson 2 and discussed in the separate appendix to this book.

The unchangeability of defective verbs

We see this same unchangeability in the case of the word *illa* 'is not', when the **existence** or the **presence** of something or someone is negated. See the following sentences, that contain a finite verb form at the end:

ಮರ ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಇದೆ	*mara alli ide*[6]	a tree is there
ಮರಗಳು ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಇವೆ	*maragaḷu alli ive*[7]	trees are there
ನಾನು ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಇದ್ದೇನೆ	*nānu alli iddēne*[8]	I am there

(Note the typically Dravidian word order: literally, 'tree there is', 'trees there are', 'I there am'. In any normal sentence, the verb in its finite form is at the end of the sentence.) Compare them with the following:

ಮರ ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಇಲ್ಲ	*mara alli illa*[9]	a tree is not there
ಮರಗಳು ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಇಲ್ಲ	*maragaḷu alli illa*	trees are not there
ನಾನು ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಇಲ್ಲ	*nānu alli illa*	I am not there

The word *alli* means 'there'. In the first set of three sentences, we see fully conjugated finite verb forms: *ide* 'it is', *ive* 'they (n.) are', *iddēne* 'I am'. In the second set of sentences we see that irrespective of number or person, the form that negates existence (or in this case: presence – which means existence in a particular place) is the unchangeable *illa*.

Two other extremely useful words that actually are defective verb forms have already briefly been discussed in lesson 7: ಬೇಕು *bēku* 'is wanted / needed' and its negative, ಬೇಡ *bēḍa* 'is not wanted / not needed'.[10] In sentences that express the necessity or desirability of a thing or of a person, a Western learner must re-think the syntax. Because such sentences occur extremely often (in practically every single conversation and every piece of writing), it is crucial that the learner familiarizes himself with this syntax. The person who wants or needs the thing in question is put in the **dative** case, and whatever is wanted or needed is the grammatical subject of the sentence and therefore appears in the **nominative** case.[11] Thus a sentence such as 'we need a book' becomes a sentence which reads like 'to us a book is needed':

ನಮಗೆ ಪುಸ್ತಕ ಬೇಕು	*namage pustaka bēku*	we need a book
ನಮಗೆ ಪುಸ್ತಕಗಳು ಬೇಕು	*namage pustakagaḷu bēku*	we need books
ನಮಗೆ ರೈತರು ಬೇಕು	*namage raitaru bēku*	we need farmers
ನಮಗೆ ಪುಸ್ತಕ ಬೇಡ	*namage pustaka bēḍa*	we do not need a book
ನಮಗೆ ಪುಸ್ತಕಗಳು ಬೇಡ	*namage pustakagaḷu bēḍa*	we do not need books
ನಮಗೆ ರೈತರು ಬೇಡ	*namage raitaru bēḍa*	we do not need farmers

Namage means 'to us'; the words *pustaka* and *raitaru* are already known, and *bēku* means 'is / are / am needed / wanted'. Here too, the words *bēku* and *bēḍa* are used irrespective of the number and the grammatical gender of the word to which they refer.

A few other defective verbs are used only as auxiliary verbs together with infinitives of other verbs. This will be discussed in a later lesson.

Cultural / semantic note about *bēku* and *bēḍa*

It is interesting to note that semantically, the word *bēku* (like the negative *bēḍa*) expresses a need, but it does not indicate

what kind of need it is. The need may be forced by outer circumstances ('is required', 'is necessary') or be prompted by a personal wish ('is wished', 'is desired'). In other words: the question whether the need is an inner or an outer need is not considered of such great importance that different words or expressions are used to indicate the distinction. Usually, the context in which these words are used will suffice to make clear the kind of requirement. There are also ways to make it more explicit whether the need is an inner or outer one, if one feels that this is necessary (which will be discussed later); but in everyday use, these two words *bēku* and *bēḍa* are extremely common and are considered sufficiently unambiguous.

Indirect constructions of the type *namage pustaka bēku* are found in many languages of South Asia. (In Urdu / Hindi, this sentence would be translated as *hameṃ kitāb cāhiye,* which is a perfect parallel: *hameṃ* 'to us', *kitāb* 'book', *cāhiye* 'is wanted'. This seems to be an obvious example of Dravidian influence on the Indo-European languages of northern India.)

In a later lesson we will see a number of other expressions in Kannada in which the grammatical subject of a sentence would be translated in English as the object, and the Kannada indirect object as the English grammatical subject. This is commonly found in expressions for inner, mental processes: for thinking, feeling, assuming, hoping, etc.

Exercise

Read and translate the following sentences:

೧. ನಿಮಗೆ ಚಹಾ ಬೇಕಾ ?

೨. ನನಗೆ ಬೇಡ.

೩. ಅವರಿಗೆ ಏನು ಬೇಕು ?

೪. ಅವರಿಗೆ ಕಾಪಿ ಬೇಕು.

೫. ಕಾಪಿ ಇಲ್ಲ.

೬. ಬೇರೆ ಏನಿದೆ? (ಬೇರೆ ಏನು ಇದೆ?)

೭. ಹಾಲೂ ಮಜ್ಜಿಗೆಯೂ ಇವೆ.

೮. ಊಟ ಬೇಡವಾ?

೯. ನನಗೆ ಊಟವೂ ಬೇಕು.

೧೦. ಮೇಜಿನ ಮೇಲೆ ತಟ್ಟೆ ಇದೆ.

೧೧. ಅದು ತಟ್ಟೆಯಲ್ಲ, ಬಾಳೆಯ ಎಲೆ.

೧೨. ಅದು ಬೇರೆ ರೀತಿಯ ತಟ್ಟೆ.

೧೩. ನನಗೆ ಎಲೆ ಬೇಡ, ತಟ್ಟೆ ಕೊಡಿ.

Vocabulary

ಎಲೆ	*ele*	leaf
ಕಾಪಿ	*kāpi*	coffee
ಕೊಡು	*koḍu*	to give
ಚಹಾ	*cahā*	tea
ತಟ್ಟೆ	*taṭṭe*	plate
ಬಾಳೆ	*bāḷe*	banana tree
ಬೇರೆ	*bēre*	other, something else
ಮಜ್ಜಿಗೆ	*majjige*	buttermilk[12]
ರೀತಿ	*rīti*	style, kind
ಹಾಲು	*hālu*	milk

Notes

[1] An exception are those languages which (like Kannada) have nominal sentences that are based on purely appositional constructions (see lesson 1).

[2] A ಪೂರ್ಣಕ್ರಿಯಾಪದ *pūrṇakriyāpada,* Venkatachalasastry 2007: 124.

[3] ಸಾಪೇಕ್ಷಕ್ರಿಯಾರೂಪಗಳು *sāpēkṣakriyārūpagaḷu* or 'dependent verb forms', Venkatachalasastry 2007: 157ff.

[4] Although not many defective verbs are known in modern European languages, some do exist. Cf. e.g. the use of the verb *falloir (il faut)* in French, or можно in Russian.

[5] If the speaker wishes to explicitly and clearly indicate the time in which a reported action takes / took place, he will use other devices, as will be explained in a later lesson.

[6] Or, more commonly, *alli + ide > allide: lōpasaṃdhi* with elision of the final short *i.*

[7] Or *alli + ive > allive: lōpasaṃdhi* with elision of the final short *i.*

[8] Or *alli + iddēne > alliddēne: lōpasaṃdhi.*

[9] Or *mara allilla,* etc.

[10] These forms are derived from the verb *bēḍu* 'to request, to require', which is still used as a normal, fully conjugated verb as well: e.g., *nānu sahāya bēḍuttēne* 'I request help'.

[11] In other words: what for the average Western learner is the 'logical object' becomes the grammatical subject.

[12] This drink is actually made in a different manner, compared to Western buttermilk, but because of its similar taste and consistency it is usually called thus in India.