Lesson 4

Palmleaf manuscripts in the library of the National Institute
of Prakrit Studies and Research, Śravaṇabeḷagoḷa (Shravanabelagola)

Grammatical cases: nominative, genitive

Model sentences

ಇದು ಹಸು	*idu hasu*	this is a cow
ಇವು ಹಸುವಿನ ಕೊಂಬುಗಳು	*ivu hasuvina koṃbugaḷu*	these are a cow's horns
ಇದು ಬಣ್ಣ	*idu baṇṇa*	this is a colour
ಇದು ಪುಸ್ತಕದ ಬಣ್ಣ	*idu pustakada baṇṇa*	this is the colour of the book
ಇದು ಹೆಸರು	*idu hesaru*	this is a name
ಇದು ಅವರ ಹೆಸರು	*idu avara hesaru*	this is their name

Grammatical cases: nominative, genitive

Introductory: the rationale behind grammatical cases

Like many other languages of the world, Kannada has a system of so-called **grammatical cases** (from Latin *casus*), which indicate the function of nouns and pronouns in a sentence. It is imperative that the

learner understands what grammatical cases are and how important they are for a proper understanding of Kannada syntax, hence it is necessary to first go through a little bit of theory before the concrete case forms are discussed.

The function which a noun or pronoun has in a sentence can be expressed in different ways. A rather simple method is the placement of a word in a sentence (the **word order**), which is found in a language such as English: a speaker of English will immediately be able to tell from the sentence *The soldier kills the civilian* who kills and who is killed. A language such as German, however, allows greater freedom in its word order: in *Der Soldat tötet den Bürger* it is the soldier who kills the civilian, but in *Den Soldaten tötet der Bürger* it is the civilian who kills the soldier: for a speaker of German this is immediately clear because of the different forms of the definite article (*der* and *den*) and (in the case of a noun belonging to this particular type) because of the **case ending** *-en* after *Soldat,* which marks this word as the grammatical object. This type of grammatical mechanism is found in classical Indo-European languages such as Latin (compare the sentences *miles civem interficit* and *militem civis interficit,* corresponding to the sample sentences in English and German above) and Sanskrit.

Dravidian languages use special markers to indicate the functions of nouns and pronouns in a sentence. The Dravidian system is relatively very simple (in comparison with, for instance, that of many of the Indo-European languages) because of the very consistent implementation of the principle of **suffixation,** where the meaning of each case suffix is unambiguous (for instance, the suffix *-annu* **always** indicates the accusative case, irrespective of a noun's or pronoun's gender or number[1]). Every Dravidian word consists of a semantic core, which is used either independently or in combination with suffixes that modify the basic meaning of this core. The phonetic form of the core remains unchanged.[2] The suffixes have functional meanings and are not used as independent words. In agreement with this general principle, also the grammatical cases of nouns and pronouns in Dravidian languages are indicated by means of specific suffixes.

In these lessons, a grammatical terminology for the various cases in Kannada will be used that has become customary in descriptions of the Dravidian languages, although in recent times serious objections to it have been put forward by leading researchers. Nevertheless, this old terminology is used here simply because the majority of grammars of the Dravidian languages written in Western languages (also written by

Indian authors for Indian readers) have used this terminology; hence it is good for the learner to be familiar with it, so that he can effectively use such older materials as well.[3]

In the following lessons, the actual functions and usage of the various cases will be described in detail, so that the learner will understand what the traditional terms mean when they are used in the Kannada context.

Case terminology in Kannada

Traditional Kannada grammarians speak of seven grammatical cases, which are simply called 'first case', 'second case' (*prathamā vibhakti, dvitīyā vibhakti*) etc., following the Sanskritic model. Because Sanskrit, the Indian 'language of the gods', has seven cases, it was assumed that this must also be so in Kannada. In reality this is not true. Two of these 'cases' are actually derived from what is commonly called the 'sixth' or genitive case, as we shall see.

The nominative case

In modern grammars written in European languages, the ಪ್ರಥಮಾ ವಿಭಕ್ತಿ *prathamā vibhakti* or 'first case' is commonly called the **nominative,** because to a large extent it functions like an Indo-European nominative.[4] It is the case of the **subject** or **agent** of a sentence or phrase.

In modern Kannada, this case has **no distinctive suffix or marker.** Especially in the spoken language, the nominative is exactly the same as the dictionary form of the word. This is the basic form of a noun, from which the plural forms and all other grammatical cases are derived by means of suffixes.

However, in formal, written language, there are alternative forms for the nominative that can be used by a writer in order to very explicitly indicate that a noun is the subject / agent of a sentence (and not, for instance, an attribute or part of a compound word[5]). Basically these alternative forms (which one finds in practically all grammars that are used in schools in Karnataka as the paradigmatically supposedly correct forms) are historically incorrect (more precisely: hypercorrect[6]). The learner is advised not to use them, because they make an unnecessarily heavy, pedantic impression; but he should be aware that they may be used in writing. These bookish alternative forms are created by adding a short *u* to the basic form of the noun, following the usual rules of sandhi.

ಪುಸ್ತಕ ಚೆನ್ನಾಗಿದೆ	*pustaka cennāgide*	the book is nice
ಪುಸ್ತಕವು ಚೆನ್ನಾಗಿದೆ	*pustakavu cennāgide*	(idem)
ಹುಡುಗಿ ಬಂದಳು	*huḍugi baṃdaḷu*	the girl came
ಹುಡುಗಿಯು ಬಂದಳು	*huḍugiyu baṃdaḷu*	(idem)

Masculine nouns ending in short *a* are a special matter:

| ಹುಡುಗ ಬಂದ | *huḍuga baṃda* | the boy came |
| ಹುಡುಗನು ಬಂದನು | *huḍuganu baṃdanu* | (idem) |

The reason for this peculiar *n* is that in Old Kannada, such masculine nouns (and the corresponding verb endings) ended in a consonant (***n***), but since the twelfth century, Kannada speakers consistently let each word end in a vowel. This means, in the case of consonantally ending words, that either (a) a vowel is added (the linguistic term for this is **epenthesis**), or (b) the final consonant is elided (the linguistic term for this is **apocope**).[7] A traditional Kannada school grammar will give the nominative of a word such as *huḍuga* as *huḍuganu,* with the original *n* and an additional *u.* However, the shorter form *huḍuga* is by far more common nowadays, both in written and spoken language. The same also applies (as shown in the table above) for the conjugated verb form *baṃda / baṃdanu* etc.[8]

Very few feminine words end in *a* and have *ḷu* in the nominative: *sēvakaḷu* 'female servant' and *paṃḍitaḷu* 'lady scholar' are words that are mentioned in grammars, as feminine counterparts of *sēvaka(nu)* and *paṃḍita(nu).* More such words can be found in dictionaries, but in modern spoken and written practice these words hardly ever occur. (Nowadays the common feminine words are *sēvaki* and *paṃḍite,* which are declined like other feminine nouns ending in *i* and *e.*)

In the plural, the nominative of a noun is indicated by the simple ending *-ru* or *-gaḷu* (see lesson 3) without any further suffixes.

The genitive case

The case that is usually called 'genitive' (the ಷಷ್ಠೀ ವಿಭಕ್ತಿ *ṣaṣṭhī vibhakti* or 'sixth case') can best be considered a general case of **relationship.** It can indicate possession or appurtenance; but the scope of relationships

that can be expressed by means of the Kannada genitive is greater than that of the genitive which is found in most Indo-European languages.

The rules by which the genitive is formed are a little more complex than those for the other grammatical cases, but it is of the greatest importance that the learner masters them well. (A summarizing table is given below: see p. 56.)

The suffix for the genitive is **-a**, which can be joined to a noun or pronoun in different ways, depending on gender and noun class. The simplest are the nouns ending in *e / i / ai:*

ಹುಡುಗಿಯ ಚೀಲ	*huḍugiya cīla*	a girl's bag
ಕೆರೆಯ ನೀರು	*kereya nīru*	water of (from) the tank[9]

A word in the genitive case is a word that reveals a certain detail about what is denoted by a following word, in other words: it is an **attribute.** In the example *huḍugiya cīla* above, the first word, in the genitive case (*huḍugi-ya*) indicates that what is expressed by the second word (*cīla,* 'bag') is the possession of the first: 'of-girl bag'. This word in the genitive (*huḍugiya*) is an **attribute** or attributive word. In the phrase *huḍugiya cīla* the main focus is on the *cīla* 'bag'; secondarily, it is mentioned that this bag belongs to a *huḍugi* 'girl', which is a description of that particular bag. Such attributes or descriptions **always precede** what is described.

This is an illustration of a very important grammatical principle in the language: in Kannada any attributive word or phrase (i.e., any one which gives additional information about another) always precedes the word about which it gives information.[10] (Other examples of such attributive words are adjectives, numerals, and the relative participle, which will be discussed in a later lesson.) This is similar to the genitive case in English, e.g., *my father's house,* where *father's* says something about the house (is an attribute, namely: whose house it is).[11] What is not possible in Kannada is to have a word order that resembles *the house of my father,* because the phrase 'of my father' is an attribute to 'house' and therefore **must precede it.**

With such nouns such as the above (*huḍugi, kere*), which end in a so-called palatal or front vowel (*e, i* or *ai*), the suffix is added to the word by means of the usual sandhi consonant *y.*

With nouns ending in *a,* the situation is slightly more complex. The suffix is linked to masculine nouns by means of the historical n[12]:

| ಹುಡುಗನ ಆಟಿಕೆ | *huḍugana āṭike* | a boy's toy |

In the epicene plural, the *a* causes the final *u* of the *(a)ru* suffix to be elided:

ಹುಡುಗರ ಆಟಿಕೆಗಳು	*huḍugara āṭikegaḷu*	boys' toys
ಹೆಂಗಸರ ಬಟ್ಟೆಗಳು	*heṃgasara baṭṭegaḷu*	women's clothes
ಜನರ ಆಯ್ಕೆ	*janara āyke*	the choice of the people

The same occurs with the personal pronouns:

ಅವಳ ಕೈ	*avaḷa kai*	her hand
ಅವನ ಕಾಲು	*avana kālu*	his leg
ಅವರ ಕಣ್ಣುಗಳು	*avara kaṇṇugaḷu*	their eyes

But note the irregular form of the third person singular neuter:

| ಅದರ ಪರಿಮಾಣ | *adara parimāṇa* | its size |

There exist two forms of the pronoun for the third person plural neuter: a short form *avu* and a long form *avugaḷu* (which is, actually, a double plural). The genitive is based on the long form:

| ಅವುಗಳ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ | *avugaḷa saṃkhye* | their (neuter) number |

All plurals follow the same pattern, substituting *a* for the final *u:*

| ದೇಶಗಳ ಜನಸಂಖ್ಯೆ | *dēśagaḷa janasaṃkhye* | the population of countries |
| ಮನುಷ್ಯರ ಅನುಭವಗಳು | *manuṣyara anubhavagaḷu* | the experiences of people |

Special attention must be given to the genitive of neuter nouns in the singular that end in *a* and *u,* because of the use of an intermediary suffix which indigenous grammarians call *āgama* 'augment' (and which has also been called 'inflectional increment' by contemporary linguists writing in English).[13] When a neuter noun ends in *a,* the genitive suffix is joined to the noun by means of *d:*

| ಮರದ ಕೊಂಬೆಗಳು | *mara**da** koṃbegaḷu* | the branches of a tree |
| ಪುಸ್ತಕದ ಪುಟಗಳು | *pustaka**da** puṭagaḷu* | pages of a book |

With nouns ending in *u,* the genitive suffix *a* is not added directly to the noun, but by means of an intermediary suffix *in:*

| ಕಾಡಿನ ಮರಗಳು | *kāḍ**ina** maragaḷu* | trees of the forest (from *kāḍu* 'forest') |
| ಕೂಸಿನ ಬಟ್ಟೆಗಳು | *kūs**ina** baṭṭegaḷu* | a baby's clothes (from *kūsu* 'baby') |

However, the learner must note that there are a few instances where the final *u* is **not** elided, namely, when

a. the noun is a Sanskrit loanword ending in *u* (e.g., ಗುರು *guru* 'teacher', ನಿಘಂಟು *nighaṃṭu* 'dictionary', ಜಿಜ್ಞಾಸು *jijñāsu* 'one who is eager to learn', etc.),[14]
b. the word consists of two short syllables (e.g., ಹಸು *hasu* 'cow').

This second rule does **not** apply, however, to the pronouns ending in *du* and *vu* (such as *adu* and *avu*) as well as to pronominalizations that use those endings (to be discussed in a later lesson).

The number of such words where the final *u* is not elided is quite small. In such cases, the *in-a* for the genitive is joined to the noun by means of the sandhi consonant *v:*

| ಹಸುವಿನ ಕೊಂಬುಗಳು | *hasu-v-**in-a** koṃbugaḷu* | a cow's horns |

To put everything together:

Singular:

    a-nouns:

neuter: **d-a**	*mara**da***
masculine: **n-a**	*huḍuga**na***
feminine: **ḷ-a**	*paṃḍita**ḷa***

    e-/i-/ai/nouns:

    (always **y-a**)

neuter: **y-a**	*kere**ya***
	*buṭṭi**ya***
	*kai**ya***
feminine: **y-a**	*huḍugi**ya***
	*vidhave**ya***
masculine: **y-a**	*vidyārthi**ya***

    u-nouns:

in-a	*kāḍ**ina***
(or **vin-a**)	*hasu**vina***
Sanskrit loan words	*nighaṃṭu**vina***

Plural:

always **a**	*maragaḷ**a***
	*manuṣyar**a***
	*huḍugiyar**a***

Genitives of pronouns

The declension of the pronouns does not entirely follow the pattern of the nouns, though there are clear similarities in the third person singular (masculine and feminine) and plural. The learner should note the special intermediary suffix *-ar* in the third person singular neuter:

Person	Nominative		Genitive	
1 sg.	ನಾನು	nānu	ನನ್ನ	**nanna**
2 sg.	ನೀನು	nīnu	ನಿನ್ನ	**ninna**
3 sg. masc.	ಅವನು	avanu	ಅವನ	ava**na**
3 sg. fem.	ಅವಳು	avaḷu	ಅವಳ	ava**ḷa**
3 sg. neu.	ಅದು	adu	ಅದರ	ad**ara**
1 pl.	ನಾವು	nāvu	ನಮ್ಮ	**namma**
2 pl.	ನೀವು	nīvu	ನಿಮ್ಮ	**nimma**
3 pl. epic.	ಅವರು	avaru	ಅವರ	avar**a**
3 pl. neu.	ಆವು(ಗಳು)	avu(gaḷu)	ಆವುಗಳ	avuga**ḷa**

Exercise

Read and translate:

೧. ಇದು ನನ್ನ ಮನೆಯ ಬಾಗಿಲು.

೨. ಆದು ಹಸುವಿನ ಕೊಂಬು.

೩. ಕೊಂಬಿನ ತುದಿ ಚೂಪಲ್ಲ.

೪. ನನ್ನ ಪುಸ್ತಕ ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಇದೆ.

೫. ಪುಸ್ತಕದ ಬಣ್ಣ ಕೆಂಪು.

೬. ನಿಮ್ಮ ಪುಸ್ತಕಗಳ ಬಣ್ಣ ಹಳದಿ.

೭. ಅವುಗಳ ಬಣ್ಣ ಕೆಂಪಲ್ಲ.

೮. ಕೆಂಪು ಬೇರೆ, ಹಳದಿ ಬೇರೆ.

೯. ಅವರ ಪುಸ್ತಕ ಕಪ್ಪು.

೧೦. ಹಸಿರು ಬಣ್ಣದ ಪುಸ್ತಕಗಳು ಇವೆಯಾ?

೧೧. ನಿಮ್ಮ ಬುಟ್ಟಿಯ ಬಣ್ಣ ಚೆನ್ನಾಗಿಲ್ಲ.

೧೨. ನನ್ನ ಹೆಂಡತಿಯ ಸೀರೆಯ ಬಣ್ಣ ಕೆಂಪು.

೧೩. ನನ್ನ ಸ್ನೇಹಿತನ ಅಂಗಡಿ ಬಟ್ಟೆಯ ಅಂಗಡಿ.

Vocabulary

ಅಂಗಡಿ	*aṃgaḍi*	store, shop
ಅನುಭವ	*anubhava*	experience
ಆಟಿಕೆ	*āṭike*	toy
ಆಯ್ಕೆ	*āyke*	choice
ಕೆಂಪು	*keṃpu*	red
ಕೊಂಬು	*koṃbu*	horn
ಕೊಂಬೆ	*koṃbe*	branch
ಚೂಪು	*cūpu*	sharp
ಜನ	*jana*	person, people
ಜನಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	*janasaṃkhye*	population
ಜಿಜ್ಞಾಸು	*jijñāsu*	eager to learn
ತುದಿ	*tudi*	tip
ಪಂಡಿತೆ	*paṃḍite*	learned woman
ಪರಿಮಾಣ	*parimāṇa*	size
ಬಟ್ಟೆ	*baṭṭe*	cloth
ಬಣ್ಣ	*baṇṇa*	colour
ಬೇರೆ	*bēre*	different
ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	*saṃkhye*	number

ಹಸಿರು	*hasiru*	green
ಹಳದಿ	*haḷadi*	yellow
ಹೆಂಡತಿ	*heṃḍati*	wife

Notes

[1] Compare this to the potentially confusing state of affairs in a language such as Latin, where, for instance, the word *mensae* means nothing outside a given context: it could be a nominative plural, 'tables', a genitive singular, 'of the table', or a dative singular, 'to the table'. Only the context (a sentence, or at least a phrase) tells us what is meant by the word *mensae*.

[2] Only in a few extremely rare cases does one find such a modification, such as a lengthening of the vowel in *kēḍu* 'loss, ruin', derived from the verb root *keḍu* 'to be spoilt'.

[3] The basic problem with this older terminology is that it was used by Christian missionaries from the West who assumed that the classical European, Latin-based terminology could be used for an accurate description of Dravidian grammar. In India, indigenous Kannada grammarians in earlier centuries made a similar mistake by assuming that the traditional grammar of Sanskrit (which, like Latin, is also an Indo-European language), could serve as a model for describing the grammar of any language.

[4] Some researchers have argued that this case could better be called an 'ergative'; but this Dravidian case does not in all respects seem to behave like ergatives in other language families. A term such as 'agentive' would be more fitting.

[5] Unfortunately, there are no fixed rules in the modern language for determining whether compound words should be written as continuous wholes or as separate elements. Although in earlier times words were written without separating spaces between them (as seems to have been the practice in all classical literary languages of the world), the modern tendency is to follow the example of English, where groups of separately written words actually function as compound words. See lesson 1, 'Writing compound words conjointly or separately', p 13.

[6] "In Middle Kannada, the euphonic addition of /u/ to words ending in consonants seems to have confirmed the notion that /u/ must be a nominative case suffix. This erroneous notion is still persisting (in literary language, of course) to such an extent that the ungrammatical monstrosity of affixing /u/ as a nominative case ending to roots ending in /i/, /u/ and /e/ [...] would be shocking to the grammatical sense of a linguist." Seetharamaiah 1966: 10.

[7] This is what happened in English when the original indefinite article *an* (which is still used under certain circumstances, e.g., when the following word begins with a vowel, as in *an apple*) became shortened to *a.*

[8] The short forms also occur, but much less frequently, in the case of the pronoun *avanu / ivanu* and the derived pronominalized adjectives and verb forms, which will be discussed later in lesson 11.

[9] A *kere* or 'tank' is an artificial pond or water reservoir, as is found in or just outside any village. In larger towns, there will be several tanks.

[10] This is just one illustration of how the Dravidian languages are examples of what in linguistics are termed extremely 'left-branching' languages.

[11] This may seem normal to speakers of English, in which no other word order is possible (**house my father's* is ungrammatical), but other languages have other possible word orders: cf. expressions such as *horror vacui* and *gloria mundi* in Latin, where the attribute in the genitive case follows the word to which it is an attribute.

[12] The historical for reason for this is that such nouns (as has been mentioned above) originally ended not in *a,* but in *n* in Old Kannada.

[13] Seetharamaiah 1966: 8.

[14] Many, esp. less educated, speakers do not know this grammatical rule.