

# Colloquialisms



*Downtown Bangalore: Brigade Road,  
the main shopping street for clothing and electronics*

This manual is basically one of modern literary Kannada, following the modern written standard of the language. But like every living language, also Kannada is dynamic, and even though it is basically a highly conservative language,<sup>1</sup> written Kannada shows a certain tension between the written standard and influences from spoken varieties.

Many modern teaching manuals of Kannada that are being produced in India nowadays profess to teach a ‘practical’ kind of language that is spoken – but the simple fact is that *there is no standard spoken, colloquial Kannada*: it simply does not exist. Just as is the case with practically every other larger language in the world, colloquial language is characterized by regional as well as social peculiarities. This means that every colloquial variety of language is limited in geographic and social spread. There are, however, a few general tendencies that can be encountered in spoken forms of Kannada.

Nowadays many authors enjoy mixing elements from local or social varieties of Kannada into their writing to create literary effects, liveliness and *couleur locale*, just as authors in other literary languages around the world do.<sup>2</sup> Some of these colloquialisms are rather widespread and so well known that they may also enter into writing that is not belletristic. It is useful for the learner to be aware of some of the most common colloquialisms.

The features which will be discussed in this chapter can be categorized as follows:

- case endings
- verb endings
- contracted verb forms
- ‘*aṃta*’
- Anglicisms

## Case endings

As with most other colloquialisms, the changes that may occur in case endings are typically contractions, particularly in the locative and accusative.

In the dative of pronouns the second vowel is often elided: *naṃge* (*nanage*), *avriḡe* (*avarige*), *nimḡe* (*ninage*), *naṃge* (*namage*), *nimḡe* (*nim-age*), *avnige* (*avanige*), *avḡige* (*avalige*).

In certain regions, one often hears the accusative suffix *-annu* become *-anna* or even *-na* or *-a*: *naṃge ā pustakavanna koḡu* ‘give me that book’. (It should be noted, however, that these alternative endings can be found already in classical literature.<sup>3</sup>)

As we have seen, the locative is actually a genitive followed by *-alli* (thus *maneyalli* ‘in the house’ can be analysed as ‘there of the house’). Words that end in *e* or *i* or *ai* will often have this vowel lengthened in pronunciation, and the *a* of the locative suffix will be elided: thus one can hear *manēli* or even *maneli* for written *maneyalli*, *bīḡili* for *bidiyalli*, and the contraction *kāili* for *kaiyalli* (also used as an instrumental post-position: *nānu adannu avana kāili māḡisidenu* ‘I had him do that’) is very common.

The genitive of nouns ending in *u* usually consists of an incremental *in* followed by the actually genitive suffix *a*, as in *bīrina* or *kārina* (from *bīru* ‘closet’ and *kāru* ‘car’). Some speakers omit the increment or, still more commonly, elide the initial *i*: *bīrna*, *kārna*. By extension the locatives *bīrinalli* or *kārinalli* can become contracted to *bīrnalli* / *bīralli* / *bīrli* and *kārnalli* / *kāralli* / *kārli*.

## Verb endings

Especially in urban southern Karnataka, it is quite common to hear the vowel quality of the endings for the first personal singular and plural

changed: *ēne*, *ēve*, *evu* often become *īni*, *īvi*, *īvi*. Examples: *baruttini* (*baruttēne*), *hōdivi* (*hōdevu*), *māḍidivi* / *māḍidvi* (*māḍidevu*).

The short endings in the past and future tense for the first person singular (*e*) and third person masculine singular (*a*) are generally preferred to the long endings (*enu*, *anu*) in the spoken language. Therefore one usually hears *baṁde* (*baṁdenu*), *māḍida* (*māḍidanu*), etc. (Actually these are not modern colloquialisms, because they were already in literary use in the twelfth century.) The same happens with the less common pronouns for the third person singular masculine *īta* (*ītanu*) and *āta* (*ātanu*).

It is very common to hear the endings of conditionals and concessives shortened through elision of the initial *a* of the endings: *māḍidre* (*māḍidare*), *karedrū* (*karedarū*), etc.

### Contracted verb forms

Very common is the contraction of the two syllables *uvu* inside verbal nouns to a single long vowel: *māḍuvudu* thus can become *māḍōdu* or *māḍūdu*, for *iruvudu* one can hear and read *irōdu* or *irūdu*, etc. Further elisions of short vowels can lead to further contractions of entire words, as especially is the case with the ablative forms of verbal nouns: e.g., *iruvudarimda* may be contracted to something that sounds like *irōdrimda*, etc. In central Karnataka, the dative of a verbal noun (typically used to indicate purpose, like an infinitive) is similarly contracted: *māḍuvudakke* can become *māḍuke*. The place of such a curious word, which cannot be found in any dictionary, within the complete sentence will generally clearly enough indicate what kind of contraction has occurred.

Something similar has happened with the ablative of the pronominalized past relative participle of the verb *āgu*: *ādudarimda* literally means ‘because of having taking place’ but is also the common equivalent of the English ‘therefore, hence’. This word is in such frequent use that very often one finds it shortened to *āddarimda*, with the short vowel of the second syllable elided; this is in fact so common that it has found its way into standard written language.

The present tense marker *utt* can also become less visible in contractions where the *u* is elided: *māḍtini* (*māḍuttēne*), *bartāne* (*baruttāne*), *karētivi* (*kareyuttēve*), etc.

In rapid speech, the expressions *illavā?* and *allavā?* at the ends of sentences may become shortened to *ilvā?* *alvā?*

It is not realistic to expect in an introductory teaching manual such as the present one a detailed description of all the possible elisions and contractions in spoken Kannada (or in any other spoken language). Too much depends on a variety of factors, including the purely personal idiosyncrasies of speakers.

### ‘*aṃta*’

One very common and very wide-spread colloquialism is the use of ಅಂತ *aṃta* instead of ಎಂದು *eṃdu* as a quotative marker; it is used in exactly the same way. It seems that this word is a contraction of an original present participle ಅನ್ನುತ್ತೆ *annutta*, which is derived from the verb root *annu*, an alloform of the usual *ennu*. It may be, as some scholars in Karnataka have assured me, that this is the result of Telugu influence, which would explain why this colloquialism is more frequently encountered in the eastern part of the Kannada speech area than in the western, where occasionally one hears ಎಂತ *eṃta*.

### Anglicisms

The spoken language of especially the big urban centres in southern Karnataka, Mysore and Bangalore, has been flooded with English words (also totally unnecessary ones) in recent decades. When instead of saying ನಾನು ನನ್ನ ಕೆಲಸದಲ್ಲಿ ಹಲವು ಪುಸ್ತಕಗಳನ್ನು ಬಳಸುತ್ತೇನೆ *nānu nanna kelasadalli halavu pustakagaḷannu baḷasuttēne* (or ಅನೇಕ ಗ್ರಂಥಗಳನ್ನು ಉಪಯೋಗಿಸುತ್ತೇನೆ *anēka graṃthagalaṅṅu upayōgisuttēne*) someone says ನಾನು ನನ್ನ ವರ್ಕಿನಲ್ಲಿ ತುಂಬ ಬುಕ್ಸು ಯೂಜು ಮಾಡುತ್ತೇನೆ *nānu nanna varkinalli tumba buksu yūju māḍuttēne*, this is clearly a sign of linguistic decadence, and the speaker either is trying to put up a show of misplaced ‘modernity’ or ‘cosmopolitanism’ or, more probably, that person is only semi-cultured and has never properly learnt the Kannada language. Such pollution of Kannada with totally unnecessary English words does not improve the clarity of communication (esp. when the meaning of the borrowed words is altered too<sup>4</sup>), yet it is fashionable in certain sections of Kannada-speaking society.

All such Anglicisms are lexical. Most of them can immediately be identified in writing<sup>5</sup> by a few curious features that hardly ever occur in Kannada words: (a) consonantal endings of words, marked with a *virāma*, (b) initial retroflex consonants and the general tendency to

replace English alveolar plosives (*t*, *d*) by retroflexes (*ṭ*, *ḍ*), (c) the frequent use of *yā* to represent the English long vowel [æ:] (the vowel that is found in ‘man’, ‘at’, etc.), as in ಪ್ಯಾಂಟು *pyāṁṭu* ‘a pair of pants’. It must also be noted, however, that English words that end in a consonant are often ‘Kannadized’ by adding a final short *u* (such as *bukṣu* and *yūju* in the previous paragraph). Examples: a word such as ಕಂಪ್ಯೂಟರ್ *kampyūṭar* is immediately suspect because it ends in a consonant and contains a *ṭ*; also ಟೆಲಿವಿಜನ್ *ṭelivijhan* immediately stands out as an alien word, with its final consonant, the initial *ṭ* and the very rare aspirated *jh*.

Because a few English phonemes are alien to the Kannada sound system and the two languages are rhythmically very different, many English words are habitually mispronounced in Karnataka, and these mispronunciations are reflected in writing. Thus the word ಕಾಪಿ *kāpi* may mean ‘copy’ or ‘coffee’. English *f* becomes *p* or *ph*, English *z* becomes *j*.

A curious feature of this uncultured language is the use of English verbs: the English verb root is followed by ಮಾಡು *māḍu*. Hence one can hear ಯೂಜು ಮಾಡು *yūju māḍu* ‘to use’, ಕೇರ್ ಮಾಡು *kēr māḍu* ‘to care, to be bothered by’, ಕಾಪಿ ಮಾಡು *kāpi māḍu* ‘to copy’, etc.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> There are very few modern languages of which the native speakers can immediately understand poetry that was written in their language 900 years ago, as is the case with a great deal of the *vacana* literature in Kannada.

<sup>2</sup> For a while it was fashionable to write long dialogues, or even entire books, in regional and social dialects, as did Caduraṅga (Chaduranga, pseudonym of M. Subrahmanyaraje Urs, who used a rural dialect west of Mysore), Mirji Aṅṅārāya (Mirji Annaraya, who used a dialect from the Dharwad area in northern Karnataka) and Dēvanūra Mahādēva (who wrote a novelette mainly in the language of Dalits south of Mysore). It seems that this fashion is on the wane, simply because the potential number of readers who can truly relish such writing is limited to those who are familiar with the dialect.

<sup>3</sup> The original suffix for the accusative was *-an* / *-aṁ*, which was either shortened or extended in later stages of the language through apocope or epenthesis.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, the word *hōṭalu* does not mean ‘hotel’ in Kannada, but ‘restaurant’; a *maiku* is not a mike / microphone, but a public announcement system, etc.

<sup>5</sup> In spoken Kannada, borrowed English words can easily lead to incomprehensibility because their pronunciation is usually distorted.