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## **Spelling Variations in Kannada**

**B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.**

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## Introduction

Language is primarily spoken and its written form is secondary. While rendering a spoken form into a written form, there can be one to one correspondence between spoken sound and the written grapheme, or such relation need not exist in all contexts. But, the conventions or writing may develop among the users of a language so that in spite of such differences (lack of one to one correspondence) the spoken and written forms are understood and communication is established.

Spelling conventions are an important feature of any language that is written. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines *spelling* as 'forming words with the correct letters in the correct order, or the ability to do this' where variation is 'difference' or 'deviation' in the structure.

## Spelling and Pronunciation Variations in Kannada

Kannada is one of the Scheduled languages of India spoken in the southern part of the country by nearly 5 crore people. It has a history of over two thousand years. So, variation in Kannada is not a new phenomenon. It existed in Kannada for centuries and evidences exist for the same. Keshiraja, the Kannada grammarian who lived during 1260 AD or so, writes about variations in his grammar *Shabdamani Darpana*. According to him 'ಬೆರಲ್' beral 'ಎರಲ್' eral 'ಒರಲ್' oral 'ಕೊರಲ್' koral 'ಸರಲ್' saral 'ಅರಲ್' aral 'ಪರಲ್' paral 'ಮರಲ್' maral and 'ನರಲ್' naral, etc., end in 'ಲ್' 'l'. But some people, without understanding this, pronounce these as 'ಬೆರಲ್' beraL 'ಎರಲ್' eraL 'ಒರಲ್' oraL 'ಕೊರಲ್' koraL 'ಸರಲ್' saraL etc with 'L'. Also according to him, in the words 'ಮರಲ್' maral 'ಅರಲ್' aral etc., the consonants get mutated and both forms 'ಮರಲ್-ಮಲರ್' maral-malar, 'ಅರಲ್-ಅಲರ್' aral-alar are correct. And some times in the word 'ಮರಲ್' maral, instead of 'r' the 'ಣ' 'N' will come - 'ಮರಲ್-ಮಣಲ್' maral-maNal.

Kannada has no technical term for spelling and it identifies spelling variation with a compound word 'akSara samyoojane' with the meaning equivalent 'combination of letters'. Here we can consider spelling variation as - writing of the same word in two or more forms. Sometimes pronunciation of both the forms may be same or may be different, but these may be written using different letters. However, the meaning remains the same for both the forms.

In this paper it is intended to present an analysis of some of the spelling variations that exist in Kannada.

## 1. Concept of Correct Spelling

The existence of the variants does not make much of the difference to the common person who is using the language because it does not come on the way of proper communication of the message. It is essential to learn to write a language in an acceptable form. Only the processes of education and the standard usage demand the use of standard forms.

A brief study of the spelling variations is essential to understand the reasons, processes, issues in standardization, use of the same in the media, text books, reference works and also from the point of technology applications like spell checkers in the word processors.

## 2. Causes of Spelling Variations

There are three major causes for spelling variations in Kannada: (1) Gradually increasing distance between the spoken Kannada and its written form. (2) Changes taking place in the language. (3) Large scale borrowing of vocabulary to meet the linguistic and other perceived, assumed, imposed and/or real needs of the language and its users. Borrowed words are written in the way that is perceived to be correct by the conventions.

## 3. Written and Colloquial

The literacy among the speakers of Kannada is increasing fast. There is substantial difference between both forms of Kannada. Normal tendency among the people is to write/use the script to write the way they speak. This leads to certain differences in the written forms since both the literates and neo-literates simultaneously use different forms.

## 4. Gradual Changes

The historical changes or changes taking place in the language due to various factors affect the language in the long run. But, at one point of time, the form previously used and the one currently in use coexist, thus leading to variations in the spelling. One such important characteristic is the de-aspiration process in Kannada. Many aspirated sounds are gradually used without aspiration. It seems at the first instance, both forms are coexisting and this indicates the transitional phase in the sound change. Gradual changes that take place in the use of words, and the majority of these relates to deaspiration.

jaava jhaava	ಜಾವ-ಝಾವ	'early morning'
kate-kathe	ಕತೆ-ಕಥೆ	'story'
ganTe-ghanTe	ಗಂಟೆ-ಘಂಟೆ	'hour, bell'
haTa -haTha	ಹಟ-ಹಠ	'stubrun'
garjisu-gharjisu	ಗರ್ಜಿಸು-ಘರ್ಜಿಸು	'roar'
kaceeri-kacheeri	ಕಚೇರಿ-ಕಛೇರಿ	'office'
caavaNi-chaavaNi	ಚಾವಣಿ-ಛಾವಣಿ	'roof'

## 5. Borrowings

Since Kannada came into contact with languages of different language families, in order to accommodate the new concepts or new words for old concepts, it has borrowed extensively from Sanskrit, Perso-Arabic, English, etc. When such borrowings took place due to regional variations in the spoken form the people tended to write such borrowed words with the spelling that they perceived as better for representation. Even after passing of decades the spelling of the borrowed words has not got standardized and two or three forms coexist. This group of words is written in accordance with the phonetic/phonemic system of the specific social/regional dialect like:

kunDali-kunDaLi	ಕುಂಡಲಿ-ಕುಂಡಳಿ	‘jataka’
manDali- manDaLi	ಮಂಡಲಿ-ಮಂಡಳಿ	‘board’
alamaari- almeeraa- almaira	ಅಲಮಾರಿ-ಅಲ್ಮೈರಾ-ಅಲ್ಮೈರಾ	‘almairah’

## 6. Free Variations

Free variations are part of any living language and Kannada is not an exception.

Free variation between ‘l’ ಲ and ‘L’ ಳ

jirale- jiraLe	ಜಿರಲೆ-ಜಿರಳೆ	‘cocroach’
maddale- maddaLe	ಮದ್ದಲೆ-ಮದ್ದಳೆ	‘one kind of mucical instrument’
dala-daLa	ದಲ-ದಳ	‘petal’

Free variations between ‘e’ ಎ and ‘i’ ಇ

hoDe-hoDi	ಹೊಡೆ-ಹೊಡಿ	‘to beat’
taDe-taDi	ತಡೆ-ತಡಿ	‘to prevent’
bare-bari	ಬರೆ-ಬರಿ	‘to write’
tere-teri	ತೆರೆ-ತೆರಿ	‘to open’
kaLe-kaLi	ಕಳೆ-ಕಳಿ	‘to substract’

Free variations between ‘i’ ಇ and ‘u’ ಉ

aDige-aDuge	ಅಡಿಗಿ-ಅಡುಗಿ	‘cooking’
kariku-karuku	ಕರಿಕು-ಕರುಕು	‘charcol kind’
tiLivaLike- tiLuvaLike	ತಿಳಿವಳಿಕೆ-ತಿಳುವಳಿಕೆ	‘understanding’

meccige- meccuge	ಮೆಚ್ಚಿಗೆ-ಮೆಚ್ಚುಗೆ	'likeness'
saasive- saasuve	ಸಾಸಿವೆ-ಸಾಸುವೆ	'mustered'
kiricu- kirucu	ಕಿರಿಚು-ಕಿರುಚು	'shout'
usiru- usuru	ಉಸಿರು-ಉಸುರು	'breath'
hasiru- hasuru	ಹಸಿರು-ಹಸುರು	'green'
salige- saluge	ಸಲಿಗೆ-ಸಲುಗೆ	'lenience'
kivicu- kivucu	ಕೆವಿಚು-ಕೆವುಚು	'to squize'
iLikalu- iLukalu	ಇಳಿಕಲು-ಇಳುಕಲು	'slope'

Free variation between 'I' ಇ and 'a' ಅ

iddiluiddalu- iddalu	ಇದ್ದಿಲು-ಇದ್ದಲು	'charcol'
naalige- naalage	ನಾಲಿಗೆ-ನಾಲಗೆ	'tongue'
kaDime- kaDame	ಕಡಿಮೆ-ಕಡಮೆ	'less'
maDike- maDake	ಮಡಿಕೆ-ಮಡಕೆ	'pot'

Free variations between 'a' ಅ and 'u' ಉ

kuppasa-kuppusa	ಕುಪ್ಪಸ-ಕುಪ್ಪುಸ	'blouse'
celavu- celuvu	ಚೆಲವು-ಚೆಲುವು	'beauty'
beLadingaLu- beLudingaLu		ಬೆಳದಿಂಗಳು-ಬೆಳುದಿಂಗಳು
'moonlight'		
kaatara-kaatura	ಕಾತರ-ಕಾತುರ	'eager'
isabu- isubu	ಇಸಬು-ಇಸುಬು	'scabis'
hengasu- hengusu	ಹೆಂಗಸು-ಹೆಂಗುಸು	'woman'
ganDasu- ganDusu	ಗಂಡಸು-ಗಂಡುಸು	'man'
nilaku- niluku	ನಿಲಕು-ನಿಲುಕು	'reach'
alagu- alugu	ಅಲಗು-ಅಲುಗು	'sharp edge'
naDagu- naDugu	ನಡಗು-ನಡುಗು	'to shiver'
basari- basuri	ಬಸರಿ-ಬಸುರಿ	'pregnent woman'
eTaku- eTuku	ಎಟಕು-ಎಟುಕು	'within the reach'

Free variation between 'a' ಅ and 'e' ಎ

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berasu-beresu                      ಬೆರಸು-ಬೆರೆಸು                      'to mix'

### 7. Incorrect Understanding

Due to the proximity in the pronunciation, one or more related sounds get equated to two symbols and both the symbols may be used to write the same word.

shatru                                      ಶತ್ರು-ಶತ್ರು                                      'enemy'  
shruti                                      ಶ್ರುತಿ-ಶ್ರುತಿ                                      'name of a person'

### 8. Misconception

The language users think that in order to emphasize they could lengthen the final vowel of the word, resulting in the use of the same word with both long and short final vowels.

tumba-tumbaa                      ತುಂಬ-ತುಂಬಾ                      'lot off'  
athavaa-athava                      ಅಥವಾ-ಅಥವ                      'or'

### 9. Samaasa/Sandhi Process

Combining two or more words to form a compound word is a well known word formation process. When such combination takes place, the combined word or word formed by the compounding process will get written in two ways and causes spelling variation. There are scholars who argue that one or other such form is not grammatically correct. But what is grammatical is something is different from what is widely accepted and used by the language users.

ಅಂತರ ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರೀಯ-ಅಂತಾರಾಷ್ಟ್ರೀಯ-ಅಂತರ್ ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರೀಯ 'international'  
antara raastreeya-antaaraashtriiya-antar raastriiya

### 10. New/Different Trend in Writing

The users of Kannada when they started to use certain words they wrote in one way. However, in due course of time, after using them for centuries in a particular form which might have been more near to the original, they appear to want to bring their writing near to the way that they speak, leading to spelling variations. Since these trends are transitional in nature even the computer word processing software, etc., are unable to capture these new trends of writing.

vvrya                                      ವೀರ್ಯ                                      'semen'  
suurya                                      ಸೂರ್ಯ                                      'sun'  
artha                                      ಅರ್ಥ                                      'meaning'

karma	ಕರ್ಮ	'fate'
kaarya	ಕಾರ್ಯ	'duty'
sarkaaarasaka	ಸರ್ಕಾರ-ಸರಕಾರ	'government'
nirdeeshaka	ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕ-ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕ	'director'

## 11. Gravity of Spelling Variation

This process is very difficult to count and understand. But an intuitive analysis indicates the following order. The gravity of variations is due to:

- free variations
- de-aspiration
- borrowings
- difference in literary and colloquial style
- new way of writing, etc.,

## 12. Standardization of spelling

Spelling standardization is part of the standardization of the language. This is done through the use of forms already accepted through the text books, compilation of dictionaries, print media and technology like word processors. The style manuals do help in spreading the standards.

The trend in the context of languages like Kannada is to allow for correct variants to be used by the community and leave the retention of one or more forms to the users as a standard form. And only time can decide which form shall prevail.

There are two schools of standardization of spelling. One school intends to follow original and tries to be prescriptive and emphasizes the use of the exact form of the original.

The other school, which accepts the language change as a character of a living language, permits the use of variants and allows one, or more than one, form to get stabilized. The time and frequency of use will be the deciding factors.

Technology is used for standardizing the spelling in different languages. Many times this irons out the variation which is the soul of a living language. Technology too, in this case, the computer technology, should have provision for variations to be used, but, after decades once a form gets stabilized, that can remain and the rest fade into oblivion.

Some of the decisions of the *Kannada Style Manual* relating to the transcription of borrowed words are: if there is no effect on the meaning of the word, the un-aspirated versions may be used. Similarly the sounds like s can be transcribed as sha. In case of free variations, the variation that is more frequent can be retained. This seems to be sound and perceptive suggestion.

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