

Minding my language

Bangalore's Roshan Pai wants to do for Konkani what enthusiasts in the UK did for Welsh. The result is a volunteer-driven project that has compiled 6,000 Konkani words so far



Roshan Pai felt the need to document Konkani since it is colloquial and constantly evolving



Veena Shanbhogue, a housewife from Dubai, has added 1,800 words to the dictionary



Jayadeva Bhat, a top contributor, wants to preserve the language for the next generation

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It's one thing to lament the decline of a language and quite another to start a campaign and get people to contribute to their mother tongue. UK-based IT consultant Roshan Pai is showing the world that it takes only a genuine love for the language rather than expertise to give a project wings.

"The idea behind starting this project was to scientifically document the language spoken by the Konkani of Dakshina Kannada. The language is constantly evolving. As it is essentially colloquial in nature and used mostly in Konkani homes, it is always moulding and changing due to local influences. So I felt there was a need to capture the essence of the language as it is spoken today," says Roshan.

COLLECTIVE EFFORT

When Roshan launched the Konkani Dictionary Project in 2005, he hardly had any help. It was only a couple of years ago that an email sent through a Yahoo! group brought in a surge of volunteers and marked the turning point for the project, says the 29-year-old, whose family is based in Bangalore.

There are now 60 volunteers across India, Dubai, the UK, USA and other countries trying to preserve words, old and new. They collaborate with each other on building the word list using online spreadsheets and emails. The result: the group has managed to compile 6,000 words in Konkani for the dictionary and their target is 15,000. Roshan says they will achieve that soon and then get it published.

Since Konkani is evolving all the time, new words need to be documented

TOP CONTRIBUTORS

Veena Shanbhogue, a housewife from Dubai who has added 1,800 words to the dictionary, says, "The project is an opportunity to contribute to my mother tongue. The vocabulary of a Konkani speaker is limited as most of them prefer to communicate in English or Hindi these days. We needed to do something to preserve the beautiful words, the phrases and the funny idioms."

For Bangalorean Jayadeva Bhat, banker and a top contributor, it's also about preserving the

language. "I contribute to the dictionary as it takes me back to my childhood years, when our parents spoke a purer form of Konkani. I want to preserve these words for the younger generation as the language is essentially a part of our culture."

INSPIRED BY WELSH

It's a daunting task no doubt "But I was inspired by the revival of Welsh, a language spoken in Wales, UK. The language was slowly dying but was revived and brought back to the mainstream. Of course, Konkani is not in danger of dying but since it is evolving all the time, a lot of new words have crept in and need to be documented for the future," says Roshan, who got his BE degree from MIT, Manipal.

BACKED BY TECHNOLOGY

The project is hosted online at savemylanguage.org. In fact, users can go to the website and get English words translated to

HOW IT WORKS

VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTE Konkani words and their corresponding English meanings to the project via email and spreadsheets. They also collaborate with each other, targeting specific topics. At the review stage, editors step in. This is a painstaking and meticulous process, following the principles of practical lexicography. The words are rigorously reviewed, catalogued, semantically categorised and then added to the online dictionary. Dr S M Tadkodkar, a professor and HoD at Goa University is a mentor, giving direction in technical matters.

Konkani and vice-versa and also get the meanings of words. This is done through an application called ITRANS.

"The process is done in a very systematic manner. Volunteers are given a list of English words and asked to find corresponding Konkani words for them. This way, there is no duplication of efforts. The whole thing is very fascinating," says 26-year-old software engineer Kavita Kamath, one of the contributors.

NETWORKING

Moreover, a lot of the work on the dictionary is done online – the group is on Facebook, Google Groups, Google home page (word of the day), Twitter (recently) and so on. "This way, interested people who stumble on the project can contribute. Volunteers also contribute with Konkani proverbs, metaphors, idioms, euphemisms and articles which are uploaded on the website," he adds.

FIVE FACTS ABOUT KONKANI

»The earliest inscriptions in Konkani are said to date back to the 2nd century AD though there is no concrete proof of this.

»The language is spoken in the Konkani belt on the Arabian Sea coast.

»South Canara Konkani include people with surnames like Kamath, Pai, Mallya, Shenoy, Bhat, Nayak and Prabhu.

»There are approximately 300,000 Konkani-speaking people, with the bulk of them (around 50,000-100,000) living

in Bangalore. This is different from the Konkani spoken by Catholics in Mangalore and Goa. Officially, the Konkani language is written in the Devanagari script, as it doesn't have a separate script. The Konkani Dictionary Project uses this script for all its documentation.

»In informal usage, the language is written by the Konkani in Kannada, Malayalam, Roman and other scripts depending on where they stay. Konkani adopt local scripts to communicate in their mother tongue.

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SONG OF THE DAY

GIN SOAKED BOY

Fusing classical music with pop-rock, the melodious *Gin Soaked Boy* by The Divine Comedy is a song with mass appeal. The light-hearted lyrics swing like a pendulum between soul-searching and self-deprecating, but never lose sight of the humour of life. Don't be surprised to find this tune stuck in your head for days.

5m5.in/Jul26Song



TIP OF THE DAY

OFFICE EXERCISES

Given the rigorous office hours, it can be difficult to find the time to hit the gym. AskMen.com came up with five simple and quick exercises that can be done while at your work desk, which promise to strengthen your core muscles and postural position, as well as address common ailments like lower back pain.

5m5.in/Jul26Tip



VIDEO OF THE DAY

THE BUBBLE MAGICIAN

Tom Noddy has spent over 30 years of his life playing around with soap bubbles in a performance art piece he calls 'Bubble Magic'. The act has to be seen to be believed as Noddy pushes the boundaries of science, including taking up the challenge by his physicist friend to make a cube-shaped bubble!

5m5.in/Jul26Video



ARTICLE OF THE DAY

AU REVOIR, MURALI

When someone asked cricket correspondent Venkat Ananth what made Muttiah Muralitharan one of the most respected and loved players around, his answer must have been surprising: "Watch him bat." The best way to truly understand Murali's tremendous career is through the eyes of this passionate fan.

5m5.in/Jul26Article



ALBUM OF THE DAY

AGING ROCK STARS

The Who captured the thoughts of all their peers with the immortal line, "I hope I die before I get old." But time takes its toll on every rock star, which has inspired this wonderful gallery of comparative pictures of rockers in their youth and now, from Mick Jagger and Steven Tyler to James Hetfield and Bono.

5m5.in/Jul26Album

