

Building an online repository of Konkani words

A website aims at building a dictionary with the help of volunteers from across the world

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MANGALORE: In an attempt to preserve the Konkani language for posterity, a website is assimilating Konkani words and creating an online repository with the help of volunteers from across the world.

Konkani is spoken by people along the western coast of India, in Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Roshan Pai Ramesh, founder and chief project coordinator of www.savemylanguage.org, says 13,000 words have been added to the main dictionary. Another 8,000-plus words submitted by volunteers across the world are currently under review.

60 active ones

At the core of the project are 60 active volunteers who spend their spare time populating the dictionary with words. They collaborate with one another on building the

word list using online spreadsheets and emails. The project is a truly global endeavour with volunteers from the U.A.E, India, the U.K., the U.S. and other countries working towards a common goal. They include bankers, homemakers, IT professionals and retired employees. Volunteers also contribute Konkani proverbs, metaphors, idioms, euphemisms and articles to the dictionary.

The project was started in October 2005. Since 2007, there has been a surge in volunteer numbers.

How they work

The contributed words are reviewed before addition. In the first collation stage, volunteers contribute Konkani words and their corresponding English meanings to the project (via email, spreadsheets, or the Facebook page). Then they collaborate with one another to avoid duplication of work. They communi-

cate via the Internet. They are the foundation on which the project is built, Mr. Ramesh says. Next, editors review the words to see if they follow the principles of practical lexicography. Then they are catalogued, semantically categorised and finally added to the online dictionary, he says.

S.M. Tadkodkar, head of the department at Goa University and a mentor in the project, says it is more a vocabulary than a dictionary currently. However, he says, it could turn into a dictionary. "That is ambitious, but not overambitious," he says.

Two years ago, Jayadeva Bhat, a Bangalore-based bank manager, "stumbled upon the website" while browsing through Facebook. Instantly, he added a few Konkani words he knew. Later, he received an Excel sheet from Mr. Ramesh. Mr. Bhat ended up adding 2,000 words with their correct meaning and pronunciation. These includ-

ed names of vessels, birds, animals and fruits

With people migrating to other places, Konkani words

are being replaced by Kannada and Tulu and the language is heading towards extinction, he says. Mr. Ramesh

says the inspiration to document the language came from learning about the revival of Welsh language.

This one has an Android application too

Special Correspondent

MANGALORE: Anyone who wants to get Konkani words in English or vice-versa, while on the move, can now look up the words on their mobile phones.

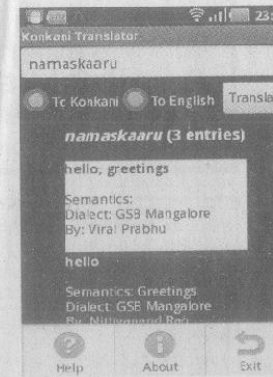
A Konkani-English application has been developed by Roshan Pai Ramesh — who calls himself a Bangalorean, runs an IT consultancy company in the U.K., and is an elected Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society (Great Britain and Ireland) — with inputs from various volunteers for the website savemylanguage.org, which owns the application.

To download the application (it is free) on an Android-enabled mobile phone, go to www.savemylanguage.org.

The application works on any Android phone.

According to Mr. Ramesh, it has been downloaded over 600 times and the user base is growing rapidly. The application has a five-star rating from those who have downloaded it.

The application can translate English words to Konkani equivalents and vice versa on the go. "You no longer need a desktop computer to use our online translation services," said Mr. Ramesh.



The Konkani-English Android application can be downloaded for free.