

A note on Kannauji, with special reference to lexical influence of its surrounding languages

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Abstract

Kannauji, a language spoken in northern India, presents notable language variation shaped by the region's diverse sociolinguistic landscape. Factors such as geography, social hierarchy, and contact with neighbouring languages significantly influence this variation. A prominent feature of Kannauji is its extensive lexical borrowing from languages like Hindi, Awadhi, and Braj, resulting from historical and contemporary language interaction. These borrowed lexemes play a crucial role in enriching Kannauji's vocabulary, contributing to its dynamic nature and further differentiating its regional dialects. This paper looks at how some of these changes happen in Kannauji and what effects they have on the language.

Keywords: Kannauji, language variation, lexical borrowing.

Introduction

The Kannauji language, a variation of Hindi¹ (Grierson, G.A. 1903-28) primarily spoken in the Kannauj region of Uttar Pradesh, India, is deeply embedded in the cultural and linguistic fabric of the region. It is majorly spoken by residents of 7-8 western districts² of Uttar Pradesh (Grierson, G.A. 1903-28). Grierson and Bholanath have however classified Kannauji as a 'dialect' of Braj Bhasha³ by John and Varghese (2021). The John and Varghese report on 'The Kannauji speaking people of Uttar Pradesh: a Sociolinguistic Profile' mentions how the name 'kannauji' itself might be an exonym provided by scholars of the language and not the people itself. They report a very low percentage of recognition of the name Kannauji or voluntary usage of the word Kannauji to indicate their language by the speakers of the same, a result that is similar to the data collected by the authors of this paper as well. While there can be various reasons for the same, these reasons are beyond the scope of this paper, where we tried to provide a brief introduction of Kannauji based on existing literature, and its relationship to Hindi with reference to its widely shared vocabulary.

¹ In his *Linguistic Survey of India* classifies Kannauji as a dialect of Hindi, providing foundational insights into its linguistic characteristics and geographical distribution.

² Kannauji is primarily spoken in several western districts like *Kannauj, Farrukhabad, Hardoi, Auraiya, Mainpuri, Shajahanpur, Kanpur rural and Pilibhit districts of Uttar Pradesh*

³ Grierson, in his monumental work "Linguistic Survey of India," refers to various dialects and languages of the region, including Kannauji and Braj Bhasha.

Kannauji of Uttar Pradesh

While often overshadowed by more widely studied languages in India, Kannauji carries a rich linguistic heritage shaped by centuries of historical, cultural, and social influences.

The historical roots of Kannauji stretch back to the ancient Prakrit languages⁴, which laid the foundation for its development (Dwivedi, P., & Kar, S. 2021). Over the centuries, Kannauji has been shaped by a variety of linguistic and cultural influences, including Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and Turkish languages⁵ (Cardona G. & Jain D. Eds 2007). These interactions have left a lasting impact on its vocabulary and syntax, making Kannauji a linguistic mosaic that reflects the region's rich history. Historical documents, such as inscriptions and (very limited) literary works, provide valuable insights into this evolution, highlighting how Kannauji contributed to the cultural identity of its speakers and the broader Kannauj region.

Kannauji exhibits distinct linguistic features that support its classification as a separate variation. These differences manifest in phonology, grammar, vocabulary, and sociocultural significance, making Kannauji a unique language variation within the broader Indo-Aryan family, despite its strong resemblance to Hindi.

Phonologically, Kannauji demonstrates distinct pronunciation patterns that set it apart from standard Hindi. One such difference is the nasalization of vowels. For example, in Hindi, the word "हूँ" (hū, meaning "am") has a clear nasalized vowel sound at the end. In Kannauji, this sound may become even more pronounced or, conversely, omitted in favor of a lighter nasalization depending on the regional variation within Kannauji itself. Similarly, certain consonants in Kannauji are softened compared to their Hindi counterparts. For instance, the Hindi word "दूसरा" (dusara, meaning "second" or "other") might be pronounced as "आउरे" (aure) in Kannauji, where the dental sound softens the overall pronunciation. These phonological differences, though subtle, reflect a systematic divergence from Hindi, emphasizing Kannauji's unique phonetic rules.

Grammatically, Kannauji retains several archaic structures that have disappeared from modern Hindi. Verb conjugation is one such area. For example, the verb "to go" in Hindi is conjugated as "गया" (gaya) in the past tense. In Kannauji, however, older forms like "जाय" (jaya) or "जाई" (jai) are still commonly used, especially in rural areas, reflecting the language's retention of earlier linguistic stages.

Table 1.1 shows examples of sentences showing how Hindi and Kannauji verb endings are different.

Hindi	Kannauji
1. मैं खाना खा रहा हूँ (Main khana kha raha hun.)	हम खाना खाई रहे हेना (Hum khana khai rahe hein.)
2. मुझे दूसरा कपड़ा देखना है (Mujhe dusra kapda dekhna hai)	हमे आउरे कपड़ा दिखावाउ । (Hume aare kapda dikhavau)
3. वह कल अपने घर गया होगा (Voh kal apne ghar gaya hoga)	बे कल अपने घाराई गे हुइहाई । (Be kal apne gharai ge huihai)

⁴Kannauji of Kanpur: A Brief Overview- This paper discusses the historical and cultural context of the Kannauji language, including its roots in ancient Prakrit languages and its current sociolinguistic dynamics.

⁵ Overview of Indo-Aryan languages *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved 8 July 2018, Cardona, G., & Jain, D. (Eds.). (2007). *The Indo-Aryan languages*.

Kannauji possesses a more nuanced system of honorifics and polite forms than modern Hindi. For instance, where Hindi primarily uses "तुम" (tom) for informal "you" and "आप" (ap) for formal "you," Kannauji retains the second-person pronoun "तोहेका (toheka)" that enables speakers to avoid the potential rudeness of the informal "तू" while maintaining an approachable tone. The usage of "तोहेका (toheka)" in Kannauji reflects a nuanced understanding of social relationships and respect among speakers. For example, when addressing a younger sibling or a friend in a respectful manner, one might say: " तोहेका खाना खाइबे हाई?" (Toheka khana khaibe hayi?), meaning "You want to eat?". This term functions as a familiar yet respectful form of address, primarily used to refer to individuals with whom the speaker has a degree of closeness or familiarity, such as friends, younger relatives, or peers. Pronouns such as "तू" (tu), "तोहेका (toheka)" and "तोहार" (tohar) offer multiple layers of formality and politeness, indicating the relative status of the speaker and the person being addressed. This system of honorifics, which has faded in standard Hindi, is still very much alive in Kannauji, marking a key area where the two languages differ.

Vocabulary is another domain where Kannauji differentiates itself from Hindi. While both languages have borrowed extensively from Persian, Arabic, and English, Kannauji has preserved many indigenous terms and phrases that are either no longer used or have evolved in Hindi. For example, Kannauji continues to use words like "बिटिया" (bitija, meaning "daughter") and "दवा" (dawa), meaning "medicine") in ways that reflect its local linguistic heritage ⁶ (Dwivedi, Pankaj & Kar, Somdev 2021, Ramesh Chandra 2020). Additionally, Kannauji has retained many older Sanskrit-derived terms ⁷ that are used in everyday speech. Words like "मोक्ष" (mokṣ, meaning "liberation") and "धर्म" (dharma, meaning "duty" or "righteousness") are commonly used in Kannauji and carry significant cultural weight, especially in religious or philosophical contexts (John & Varghese 2021).

Kannauji has also borrowed heavily from neighboring languages, such as Braj and Awadhi, further enriching its vocabulary (however there is an understanding that it might have been Kannauji that influenced Braj Bhasha as well, but due to the cultural prominence of Braj and the existence of its relatively larger body of literature, Braj is considered the donor language by the larger majority of scholars). These borrowings include words and expressions that do not exist in Hindi or are used differently in context. For example, the word "बउराना" (baurana, meaning "to wander aimlessly" or "to go mad") comes from Awadhi but is commonly used in Kannauji, demonstrating how Kannauji's geographical position has facilitated linguistic exchange with surrounding languages. Some examples of kannauji words which are borrowing from braj and awadhi – Examples of Awadhi "चिरई" (cirai) – meaning "bird", साँझ (sājh) – meaning "evening. Examples of braj – "डार" (dar) – meaning "Tree branch", चौका" (chauka) meaning "cooking area".

Socio-culturally, Kannauji plays a critical role in defining regional identity. While Hindi serves as the lingua franca for much of northern India, Kannauji is deeply embedded in the cultural practices, folklore, and daily lives of its speakers in the Kannauj region. There is however, little to no linguistic

⁶ 1. Linguistic Features of the Kannauji Language 2021, 2. The Sociolinguistics of Kannauji: A Study of Language Variation 2020. This study discusses the lexical differences between Kannauji and Hindi, emphasizing the influence of local heritage on vocabulary.

⁷ The Sociolinguistics of Kannauji: A Study of Language Variation. Sanskrit-derived terms can be found in many Indo-Aryan languages, as documented in linguistic studies on language evolution in India

pride⁸ (John & Varghese 2021). As stated in the above, even acknowledgement of the name Kannauji as the language's monicker is very limited. The language functions as a medium of communication and has persisted in informal settings, despite the dominance of Hindi in formal education and media.

As a language spoken by a significant population in the Kannauj region, Kannauji continues to play an important role in the linguistic landscape of Uttar Pradesh. It remains a crucial medium for communication and cultural expression, serving as a testament to the region's diverse heritage. In this paper, we aim to highlight the significance and instances of lexical borrowing in Kannauji and its broader implications for understanding language variation and change in the context of India's multilingual environment.

Lexical borrowing in Kannauji

In Kannauji, lexical borrowing refers to the process of integrating words from other languages into the vocabulary. This phenomenon arises from historical, cultural, and social interactions with speakers of different languages, significantly enriching Kannauji by allowing speakers to express new concepts, ideas, and experiences that previously lacked native expressions.

One form of borrowing is direct borrowing, where words are adopted from another language with little or no modification. For instance, terms like "computer," "telephone," and "internet" are borrowed directly from English into Kannauji. In some cases, borrowed words undergo phonological adaptation, where pronunciation is modified to fit the phonological system of Kannauji, ensuring easier usage for native speakers. For example, the English word "bus" may become "bāṣ" in Kannauji. Another form is loan translation (calques), where instead of directly borrowing words, Kannauji translates the meaning of foreign terms into its own vocabulary.

Lexical borrowing plays a pivotal role in language evolution, and Kannauji, like many other languages, has undergone significant linguistic changes due to this process. Historically, Kannauji has been shaped by contact with other cultures, including Persian, Arabic, Turkic, and more recently, English due to colonial influence. This borrowing process has helped expand its lexicon, particularly in areas such as technology, medicine, trade, and commerce.

Technological advancements, in particular, have driven much of the borrowing in recent years. As new inventions and concepts arise, languages often lack native terms to describe them, leading to the borrowing of terms from languages with established vocabulary in those fields. Words related to technology and medicine in Kannauji have been borrowed largely from English and Sanskrit. For example, technological terms like "computer" and "internet" come from English, while medical and philosophical terms have often been borrowed from Sanskrit. Similarly, commercial interactions have led to the borrowing of words related to trade, currency, and economic activities, reflecting the importance of trade in shaping the linguistic landscape.

As languages are dynamic and continuously evolving, lexical borrowing allows them to adapt to new circumstances and express increasingly complex ideas. In the case of Kannauji, this adaptability is particularly important given its cultural and historical context. The history of Kannauj as a major center

⁸ SIL International, 2021. This document discusses the sociolinguistic identity of Kannauji speakers, highlighting their cultural practices and the perception of their language in relation to Hindi and neighboring languages.

of political and commercial activity has facilitated contact with numerous linguistic groups over the centuries, leading to a significant influx of borrowed vocabulary from various languages.

Kannauji has borrowed several words from diverse languages, reflecting its rich historical and cultural interactions.

Language (Sanskrit)	English	Meaning	Kannauji	IPA
ध्यान	Attention	Meditation	ध्यान	d ^h jan
धर्म	Religion	Duty or righteousness	धर्म	d ^h ərm
मोक्ष	Salvation	Liberation	मोक्ष	mokʃ
गुरु	Master	Teacher	गुरु	goru

Table 1.2 These words highlight the influence of Sanskrit on Kannauji's spiritual and philosophical vocabulary.

Language (Persian)	English	Meaning	Kannauji	IPA
सलामत	Safe	Free from danger	सलामत	səlamət
मज़ा	Fun	Pleasure and Enjoyment	मज़ा	məʒɑ
बख़शीश	Tip	A small piece of useful advice	बख़शीश	bək ^h ʃiʃ
दीवार	Wall	Solid barrier that encloses or divides spaces,	दीवार	dīwar

Table 1.3 These words show the Persian influence on everyday vocabulary and commerce.

Language (Arabic)	English	Meaning	Kannauji	IPA
ज़िक्र	Mention	Say something about somebody	ज़िक्र	ʒiːkrə
नमाज़	Prayer	The act of speaking to god	नमाज़	nəmaq̃
इमाम	Religious leader	Who holds a position of authority	इमाम	imam
मस्जिद	mosque	A place of worship	मस्जिद	məsɟɪd

Table 1.4 These terms reflect the integration of Islamic religious practices into the language.

Language (English)	English	Meaning	Kannauji	IPA
कंप्यूटर	Computer	An electronic device	कंप्यूटर	kəpuṭər
टेलीफोन	Telephone	Voice communication between people	टेलीफोन	ṭelipʰon
टिकट	Ticket	Serving as proof of payment	टिकट	ṭikət
रेस्टोरां	Restaurant	A place where you can buy and eat a meal	रेस्टोरां	reṣṭorā

Table 1.5 These borrowings illustrate the influence of English on technology and communication.

Language (Bangla)	English	Meaning	Kannauji	IPA
भात	Rice	Type of grain	भात	bʰat
बगिया	Garden	Piece of land	बगिया	bəgija

Table 1.6 Words borrowed from Bangla.

Language (Bhojpuri)	English	Meaning	Kannauji	IPA
चाय	Tea	Beverage	चाय	caj
लुच्चा	Mischievous	Playful or Cheeky	लुच्चा	lucca

Table 1.7 Words borrowed from Bhojpuri.

The impact of lexical borrowing on Kannauji is profound. It has significantly enriched the language's vocabulary by introducing words from a variety of linguistic sources, allowing speakers to articulate a broader range of concepts. This borrowing not only reflects historical cultural exchanges but also helps maintain the language's relevance in a rapidly changing world. For example, the adoption of English terms has been essential for Kannauji speakers to engage with modern technology and science.

Furthermore, lexical borrowing showcases the region's multicultural heritage. The use of Sanskrit borrowings often signals an alignment with Hindu traditions, while the presence of Persian and Arabic vocabulary reflects Islamic cultural influences. This dynamic illustrates how borrowed words contribute to the expression of both individual and collective identities among Kannauji speakers.

In conclusion, lexical borrowing in Kannauji has been instrumental in shaping its linguistic diversity and cultural identity. By examining the sources and impacts of these borrowed words, we gain insights into the historical, social, and cultural forces that have influenced Kannauji over time. This process of linguistic adaptation demonstrates Kannauji's resilience and capacity for growth, ensuring its continued evolution in response to changing linguistic and cultural landscapes.