

Brief Comments on UTC register documents (May 2012) on Grantha script encoding

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As the original proposer of Grantha script to be encoded in Unicode SMP, I would like to make the following comments on Grantha script documents in UTC register uploaded for the May 2012 meeting.

(1) Mr. Logasundaram's position that Grantha should be unified with Devanagari will *not* work. Refer to the Govt. of India proposal seeking a separate block for Grantha in TUS. 83 of Grantha characters are in the Unicode pipeline already: <http://unicode.org/alloc/Pipeline.html> Sanskrit and Aryan languages' writing in Grantha is taken care of by these 83 letters in the advanced stage of entry into TUS. However, Gol proposal is incomplete in its repertoire of characters.

(2) As per the original proposal, ISCII chart for Grantha was used & Gol proposal uses it as well. In its region of origin, Tamil country which included Kerala then as Malayalam became a separate language only around 17th century, Grantha was used to write Dravidian languages also in 2 styles using Grantha as well. Refer to the documents by professors of epigraphy and director of archaeology from the State of Tamil Nadu (India) in UTC document register – Dr. R. Nagaswamy, Prof. S. Raasu, Prof. E. Annamalai and Prof. K. Nachimuthu requesting Dravidian letters in Grantha block.

(3) On April 30, 2012, John Hudson wrote in the Unicore list of UTC thus:

“Actually, I think the whole debate about language use, whether the arguments from either side are flawed or sound, should be considered irrelevant, on the grounds that Unicode encodes writing systems not languages, and writing systems are distinguished by a set of criteria, not solely on the basis of whether their character sets are isomorphic or not. As we've seen in the encoding of ancient Semitic scripts, mere visual difference is sufficient grounds for distinct encoding when considered with the preferences of *some* user communities (contra the preference of some other user communities).

The fact that it might be possible to encode texts in a particular language such that they can be displayed in what amounts to a cipher relationship between two different writing systems is not grounds for unifying encoding of those writing systems. And I certainly don't think a case can be made that Grantha -- given its distinctive shapes, its separate cultural evolution, its characteristic writing media, and its variant shaping behaviour -- *is* Devanagari. It seems to me quite evidently a separate writing system, related only in the sense that all the Brāhmī-derived scripts are related. – John”

Precisely, this is the point not only with Nagari, but with Tamil or Malayalam scripts vs. Grantha as well. As explained by experts on Grantha script in (2). Gol proposal recommends using the Tamil block for Dravidian letters, 5 in number. But the problem is their visual shapes (e.g., short e and o. Note that a brand new & unattested Perso-Arabic Nukta is encoded in Grantha!), Virama behavior, conjunct formation vertically differ for them. There are 23 letters common between Grantha and Tamil blocks still disunified, and the same process be followed for Dravidian letters for encoding to be simple and efficient for rendering engines. It will be easier to distinguish between Indo-Aryan non-Tamil word or Tamil word.

(4) As an illustration, we can choose Michael Everson's proposal to encode NNNA and LLLA in Grantha block in SMP (L2/12-039).

<http://std.dkuug.dk/JTC1/SC2/WG2/docs/n4198.pdf>

The NNNA letter occurs in complete Sanskrit sentences, the Dravidic word, "tani" has been borrowed into Sanskrit. The 5 Dravidian letters required in Grantha block are the counterparts of the 5 Sanskrit letters encoded in Tamil block of TUS. More importantly, Dravidian consonants, LLLA, NNNA and RRA have Chillu forms in Grantha which are not available in Tamil script. Sanskrit sentences with NNNA (note the stacked conjuncts).

தனிஷ்டசூகம் — வளஷ்டாநாயணம்.

தனிஷ்டசூகம் — ஷ்டிஷ்டகலிநலி.

In sum, Grantha script needs to be functioning in its own block in SMP, disunified from Devanagari, Tamil and Malayalam blocks. The characters in the Unicode pipeline satisfy majority of letters needed while 5 more to represent Dravidian languages are needed. The problems of using them from Tamil block have been described.

(5) Also, refer to the Request by the leading publisher of Tamil books from Chennai (Madras), India for Grantha to be able to write Tevaram and Saivaite holy hymns in their web resource, <http://thevaaram.org> and they need to publish ancient Tamil texts in Grantha without semantic loss per the orders from the Royal Committee on Thailand priests. Grantha is a historic sacred script and it is important that Hindu holy scriptures of Aryan and Dravidian languages be written in it properly. Note that we have even the new code point for Nukta from Arabic-Persian scripts to represent English z, w, f in Grantha in Unicode block, and the native letters of the people who created Grantha needs to be available also for their personal names to be properly written.