

Response to PRI 263 on Malayalam

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2014-Jan-20

Cibu Johny's PRI 263 doc is IMO merely a rehashing of his earlier L2/13-219, a revised version of his PRI 250 doc. As a result, my document is also a re-summary of my earlier L2/13-222 replying to his L2/13-219. Frankly I do not see the point in these repeated PRI calls for feedback, since the PRI is entirely built upon a hypothetical need (that too, apparently felt by only one person, the author) and since issues raised by feedback submitters to earlier PRIs on the same topic have not been addressed by the author.

The hypothetical need mentioned above is that it is necessary for a single font to be able to perfectly support both old and new Malayalam orthographies in plaintext. No clear evidence has been presented for such a requirement of existing on part of the Malayalam user community at large. One has not heard any complaints on the various mailing lists from multiple native users. People seem to be quite content to simply use different fonts to represent different orthographies. Thus the requirement seems to be hypothetical and only in the mind of the author, in the nature of "it would be good if...". But it is *not* clear that such would indeed be "good" since the community at large has not expressed the need!

The second presumption seems to be that it is advisable for new sequences involving invisible joiners to be defined to differentiate between these orthographies. Again, no demand has been heard from the user community for such sequences. The proposal for such sequences further presumes that users would find it quite convenient to insert such invisible joiners for such purposes, and there is no data or convincing argument to prove that such is the case. On the contrary, as Jonathan Kew said in reply to PRI 250:

From a user's point of view, attempting to control this level of rendering via invisible control characters in the text stream would be extremely cumbersome and difficult to use, especially as the effects, if any, of those control characters will be dependent on the particular font being used.

A third issue is that Cibu claims some written forms would be considered a "spelling mistake". Again, the community at large has not spoken, and though Cibu is a native user, for such claims, it would be better for him to cite rulebooks of orthography, if any do exist.

Further, Cibu has not addressed the points raised in my previous document:

I have pointed out that the ZWJ + VIRAMA sequence was devised to produce uniform representations of conjoining forms whether in connection with other consonants or dotted circles or even a blank (non-breaking) space. Cibu seeks to re-assign this sequence to denote what he calls “connecting C2-conjoining forms”. He has not demonstrated how it is possible to have “connecting C2-conjoining forms” with dotted circles or NBSPs.

Further, it is not clear how the newly proposed definition of ZWJ + VIRAMA to denote “connecting C2-conjoining forms” applies to it apparently being applicable to invoke sub-base KA or sub-base VA as illustrated in p 7 of the PRI 263 doc. How are we supposed to consider these written forms as “connecting C2-conjoining forms”?

I have also pointed out that ZWNJ is normally considered to break Indic clusters, but Cibu requests a new sequence ZWNJ + VIRAMA as *part* of a cluster to select “non-connecting conjoining forms”. In the current situation, ZWNJ merely needs to be mapped to an empty glyph in fonts and all the rest happens naturally. As per Cibu’s request, OTOH, additional logic would have to be programmed into rendering engines to handle $C_A + ZWNJ + VIRAMA + C_B$ as a single cluster (where C_A can also be 25CC or NBSP), and in addition if C_B is RA, the resultant RA-vattu would have to be reordered to the left of the C_A . What is the real magnitude of the benefit that is presumed to result from this additional complication?

To be frank, any without any offence intended to anyone or the good intent of the author, considering the hypothetical nature of the requirement and the fringe nature of the potential benefits, and considering that the community at large does not seem to have a problem in simply using different fonts to cater to different orthographies, this entire exercise seems to be using up too much time and effort on part of the author, the interested observers including me, and the committees.

With all due respect, I submit that everybody has better things to do than define invisible sequences of questionable convenience to obtain intricate control in hypothetical situations...

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