

Web-Browser Extensions for South Asia Language Classrooms

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For language teachers today, the World Wide Web provides unprecedented access to new types of rich media content that can be used in the classroom. The aim of this article is to provide language teachers, as well as students, with a short list of tools that can assist in harnessing this media content. All of these tools function as add-ons to the web browser **Firefox**, a free and open-source web browser used to navigate the World Wide Web. These tools assist in displaying South Asian languages, manipulating digital media, and organizing resources. These and other add-ons for Firefox can be found at the Firefox add-ons webpage: <http://addons.mozilla.org>.

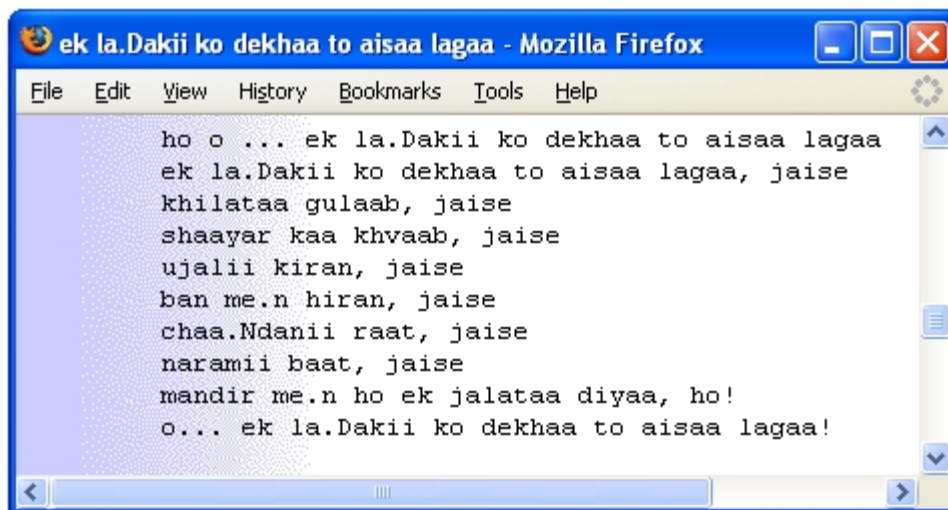
Padma

Padma (<http://padma.mozdev.org/>) is a Firefox add-on, developed by Nagarjuna Venna, that transforms text in Indic scripts on webpages into different formats. Before the development of Unicode, the now universal standard for encoding all scripts, a number of proprietary encodings existed, some of which are still found on the web today. The Padma add-on is able to transform a number of these formats into Unicode, so the user does not need to download a specific font in order to view the text.

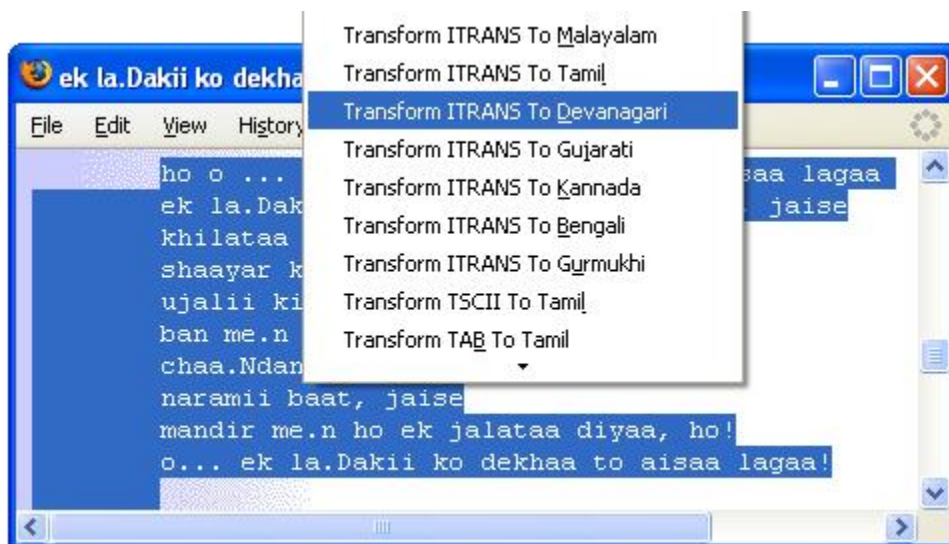
Note for OS X Users: The current release version of Firefox (2.0.0.6 as of 9/17/07) does not properly render Indic characters in Unicode. This problem will be fixed in upcoming and beta releases of the browser. As a result, text transformed by Padma will not display properly in OS X.

The add-on can read text in different formats, including RFS, ISCII, ITRANS, TSCII, TAB & TAM, and output them in Unicode. It can also output Unicode from proprietary fonts, such as: Eenadu, Shree Tel 900/902, Hemalatah, Tikkana, Vaartha, Karthika, Telugu Lipi, Revathi, Kailrali, Manorama, Vikatan, Kumudam, Shree Tam 0802, Elango Panchaḥ, Subak, Bhaskar, Jagran, Ujala, Chankya, ePatrika, Thoolika, Gopika, TCSMith, Nandi, Telugu Font, SuriTin, Shusha, Shivaji, Vakil, HTChankya, Panchami, Matweb, AnandaBazaar, MLBW-TTRevathi, and Kalakaumudi.

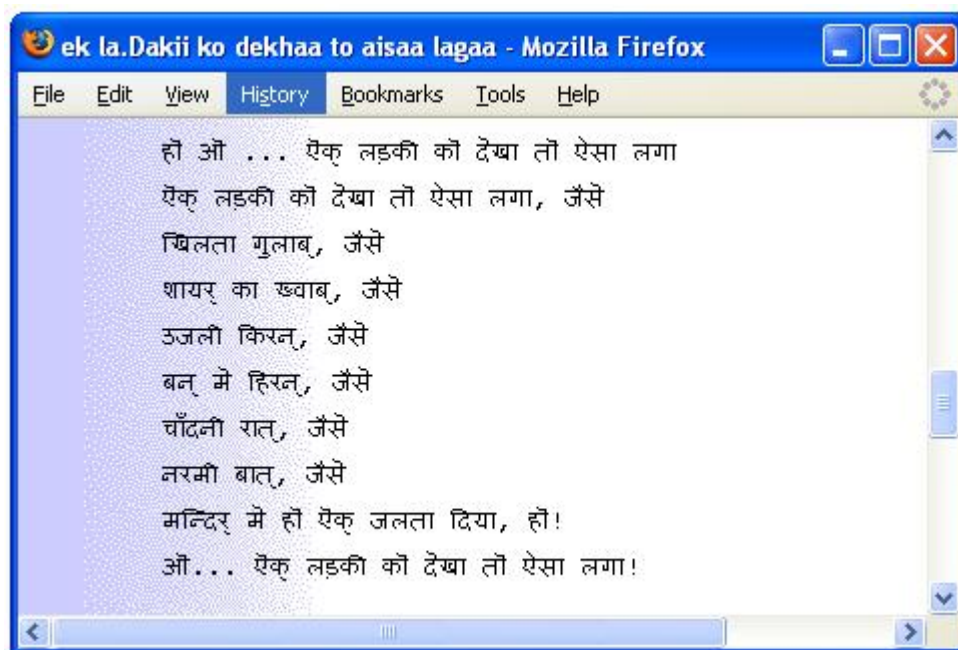
Here is an example showing the conversion of ITRANS, a popular format especially for song lyrics, to Unicode. The original webpage appears transliterated as follows:



Highlighting the text and right-dicking it shows the following menu:



Selecting 'ITRANS to Devanagari' then modifies the web page to produce the following fairly accurate devangari:



This add-on has other features, such as the ability to display text in different scripts. It can also be used in the [Thunderbird](#) e-mail program. This add-on may be of use to language teachers and students who are trying to read text produced in non-Unicode formats, especially older materials.

DownloadHelper

Internet video sites such, as YouTube and Google Video, provide an especially fruitful source of media for today's language classes. In certain circumstances, a teacher or student may want to download a video from such sources in order to view it while not connected to the internet. DownloadHelper is a Firefox add-on that can assist in that process.

DownloadHelper (<http://www.downloadhelper.net>) allows you to capture the video files from a number of internet sites, include YouTube and Google Video. Both of these sites currently serve video in the FLV (Flash Video) format, which is displayed in a web browser usually using the **Adobe Flash Player** plugin.

DownloadHelper adds an icon to the navigation bar in Firefox. If you click the icon, a drop-down list of video files on the webpage will appear. By clicking on these links, you can download the video. The video can then be saved to disk for use while not connected to the internet.

There are a number of programs that can play FLV (Flash Video) files. An excellent option is the free and open-source VideoLan VLC media player (<http://www.videolan.org/vlc/>), which works in Linux, Windows, and OS X. VLC can also be used to convert the FLV video into other formats and into video streams. Another option for converting the video to another format is the Media-Convert website (<http://media-convert.com>). This free website will convert media files between a number of different formats as you wait (often for several minutes). A third option is the free and open-source video player Miro (<http://getmiro.com>), which can also play FLV and virtually any type of video files. It, too, can assist with downloading videos from YouTube and Google Video, and it can also display free internet TV.

Zotero

With all of the content available on the internet, it has become more and more of a challenge to keep track of it all. The Zotero extension (<http://zotero.org>) was developed to aid in that task. Designed as a tool for researchers, Zotero can also be used by language teachers to organize digital media and to distribute bibliographies to students.

With Zotero, one can generate a personal library of webpages. For websites with proper bibliographic metadata (citation information for digital sources), adding a resource is just a matter of clicking a button. For other kinds of sites, the user can enter their bibliographic information to the record of the webpage. Zotero also supports the use of "tags" (descriptive phrases) allowing for easy searching for materials.

Zotero also has a number of features allowing the teacher or student to share their list of resources. Collections can be saved as RTF, HTML, printed, copied to Clipboard, and also imported into Microsoft Word and OpenOffice.