Keeping up with technology can be disorienting – no wonder cyber-cafés seem like they are from Prehistoric eras. But not all industries have seen a transformation like the telecommunication industry, and regional Indian language is one such industry. Even if we combine the types of fonts for 11 most spoken Indian languages, it still falls drastically short of the plethora of English fonts. As a result, the playing field for regional content producers is far from level.

Reverie Language Technologies

“Designing Indian language fonts isn’t a problem, but its interaction with existing technology is. The technology or format used for Indian language fonts is OpenType (made by Microsoft and Adobe), which deviated from the previous format and grammar guidelines significantly. Since these rules can’t be customised, it takes time to build Indic fonts,” says Vivekanand Pan, co-founder of Reverie Language Technologies (RLT). According to Vivekanand, it’s crucial for India to build technologies to make it easier for developers to use local language fonts.

When RLT first entered the space of localising content in 2009, the demand for local language fonts was booming, with rapid growth in the smartphone industry. Even if we combine the types of fonts for 11 most spoken Indian languages, it still falls drastically short of the plethora of English fonts. As a result, the playing field for regional content producers is far from level.

Over the last seven years, RLT has managed to work with large clients like Vijaya Bank, UrbanClap, Ola, Government of Karnataka, Government of Rajasthan, Ixigo and others. Currently, RLT supports Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Assamese, Gujarati, Marathi, Odi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. In August, RLT will launch the updated version of Prabandhak, an AI-powered translation market-place with an Indic spell-check feature. Prabandhak can be used by companies or individuals.

In the long run, RLT intends to work with government regulatory bodies to establish Indian language standards that are not only suited for Indian languages but also defined and owned by India.

Vokal app

A little over a year old, Vokal, a knowledge-sharing app, has over a million downloads already – most of the user base coming from the North Indian belt of tier 2 cities. The app, initially available in just Hindi, recently expanded to 11 Indian languages: Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Oriya, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi and Assamese.

You can ask questions related to politics, philosophy, health and beauty, finance, relationships, or even the evergreen: tips to crack the UPSC exam. The answers are given by experts who are curated by Bengaluru-based founders, Mayank Bidawatka and Aparameya Radhakrishna, who were also behind the cab aggregator TaxiForSure.

There are also sections for polls, biographies, general knowledge quizzes, and shareable facts and quotes. So yes, you can expect more of those WhatsApp family group forwards.

“After the boom in internet connectivity in India post Jio, there are 400 million internet subscribers, and that number is expected to rise. Most of these new smartphone users don’t speak in English,” says Mayank. “For entertainment, they have TikTok and YouTube, for news they have local apps, but we are aggregating everything, even generic life lessons, friendly advice, on one platform.”

Think of it as an Indianised version of Quora – as if it could get any more disorienting. However, here’s the key difference: the entire app is clearly audio-video forward. “We have regular Quora users also on our app, and here they are 10 times more active. Why? Because of the ease of use.”

One thing is for sure: there is no better feel for the myriad dreams, aspirations, and concerns of the Indian multitude than an app that promotes discussion in local languages. For this, English just won’t do.