For the millions upon millions of visually impaired people in India, it can be difficult getting hold of the audiobook they want in the language they need it in. A project from Carnegie Mellon University and partners aims to fix that with a free, easily extensible Android app that can be quickly trained to read texts aloud in local languages.

The app, Hear2Read, had its first release today, supporting Tamil, with Hindi, Bengali,
Punjabi, and other languages and dialects coming over the course of the year. A few hours of talking from a native speaker is the raw data, which is then fed into a machine learning system.

"Each language is different and historically TTS systems have been done one at a time. We looked at commonalities of Indian languages and developed tools to apply the same technology to multiple languages," said Suresh Bazaj, founder of the project, in a CMU blog post.

The resulting language database is small enough that it can be stored on the phone, meaning no internet connection is needed to translate texts. It'll run on low-end phones, as well, an important factor in a country where budget devices and spotty connectivity...
are the rule. (You'll need Android 4.1 or higher, though.)

The Hear2Read software also integrates with Android's built-in accessibility functions, letting browsers, email apps, and others integrate text to speech.

More info on Hear2Read, the app, and the partners that helped make it possible can be found at the company's website.

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