

# GLOSSARY OF LINGUISTIC TERMS

Rupert Snell

HINDI URDU FLAGSHIP, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

[rupertsnell@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:rupertsnell@mail.utexas.edu)

The purpose of this short glossary is not to explain grammatical features in detail, but just to clarify the terminology used in grammar books and language courses. Use of SMALL CAPITALS marks some words which are themselves defined in the glossary.

**ABSOLUTEIVE:** see *-kar* CONSTRUCTION.

**ADJECTIVE.** A word that describes a noun, e.g. लाल ‘red’, बड़ा ‘big’, अहम ‘important’. An adjective must AGREE with its noun, but this agreement is visible only in adjectives ending *-ā* in the masculine — बड़ा लड़का ‘big boy’ versus बड़ी लड़की ‘big girl’. An adjective is called *attributive* if it precedes the noun, (पुराना मकान ‘old house’), *predicative* if it follows the noun (मेरा मकान बहुत पुराना है) ‘My house is very old’.

**ADVERB.** A word or phrase that describes an action, e.g. ज़ोर से ‘loudly’ in ज़ोर से बोलो ‘speak loudly’. Whereas an adjective describes a noun, an adverb describes a verb or an adjective, as in the underlined words here: तुम तेज़ चलती हो ‘you walk fast’; तुम बहुत खूबसूरत हो ‘you are very beautiful’. English typically makes adverbs by adding ‘-ly’ to the adjective (loud > loudly), but Hindi tends to prefer short adverbial phrases, often consisting of a noun plus से. (English sometimes does this too, especially with words of three or more syllables: ‘with difficulty’, exactly equivalent to Hindi मुश्किल से.) Other examples of Hindi adverbs are: ज़ल्दी ‘quickly; early’; आम तौर पर ‘usually’; किस तरह ‘how?’; अच्छी तरह से ‘well’, and a more formal type using the noun रूप ‘form, manner’ — स्थायी रूप से ‘permanently’, व्यक्तिगत रूप से ‘personally’.

**AGREE, AGREEMENT.** When words change to match the NUMBER, GENDER or CASE of related words in the sentence, they are said to ‘agree’ with them: the adjective छोटा ‘little’ changes to छोटी to agree with the feminine noun लड़की ‘girl’ in छोटी लड़की ‘little girl’.

**AGGREGATIVE.** Forms of number-words indicating a group of something: दोनों दिन ‘both days’, तीनों बच्चे ‘all three children’, दसों गाड़ियाँ ‘tens of cars’; हजारों लोग ‘thousands of people’.

**ANUSVĀR.** A superscript dot that represents a nasal consonant: the spellings मुंबई ‘Mumbai’ and हिंदी ‘Hindi’ are equivalent to मुम्बई ‘Mumbai’ and हिन्दी respectively. Its phonetic value matches that of the following consonant: thus in मुंबई it is an /m/, in हिंदी it is an /n/, in खंड (also spelt खण्ड) it is an /ŋ/, and so on. In a separate usage, the dot

can show nasality of a vowel, and is commonly used as a substitute for *candrabindu* when the superscript space is cluttered by other superscript signs such as vowel mātṛās; see NASALIZATION.

**ARTICLES.** English has the Definite Article ‘the’, and the Indefinite Article ‘a’. Hindi has neither, though it often uses एक ‘one’ as an Indefinite Article. (This usage is sometimes influenced by the English pattern: मैं एक अध्यापक हूँ ‘I am a teacher’.) The pronoun कोई can also appear in some contexts where English would use ‘a’. Because of the general absence of articles in Hindi, ‘the’ and ‘a’ are a (or ‘the!’) major stumbling block for Hindi-speaking learners of English.

**ASPECT.** The manner in which time is indicated by a verb: not simply ‘past/ present/ future’ (these are TENSES), but distinctions such as ongoing action versus completed action, or habitual action versus continuous or progressive action. मैं चाय पीता हूँ ‘I drink tea’ / मैं चाय पी रहा हूँ ‘I am drinking tea’.

**AUXILIARY VERB.** A verb that ‘helps’ complete the sense of another verb: English uses the auxiliary ‘will’ to form the future tense – ‘he will speak’. Hindi examples from होना ‘to be’ include है and था in वह दिल्ली में रहता है, ‘he lives in Delhi’, वह दिल्ली में रहता था ‘he used to live in Delhi’; in these sentences the auxiliary indicates the time-frame. Other verb usages, such as the inceptive लगना (वह बोलने लगा, ‘he began to say’) and the permissive देना (मुझे बोलने दो, ‘let me say’) can also be described as auxiliary.

**CALQUE:** see LOAN TRANSLATION.

**CASE.** In the same way that some pronouns governed by prepositions in English change to the objective case (‘for them and us’ instead of \*‘for they and we’), many pronouns, nouns, and adjectives governed by postpositions in Hindi change to the oblique case. Thus Hindi has two main cases: the direct case (like मैं ‘I’), and the oblique or objective case (मुझ ‘me’) which is used before POSTPOSITIONS (as in मुझ को etc.). See also VOCATIVE.

**CAUSATIVE.** A verb which describes the action of ‘causing’ something to be done. In Hindi these very common verbs are usually formed by a vowel extension in the STEM: सुनना ‘to listen’ > सुनाना ‘to make listen, to recite’. Some verbs show other stem changes: खाना ‘to eat’ > खिलाना ‘to make eat, to feed’. A second type of causative, with a -vā- extension in the stem, is found in such verbs as सिखवाना ‘to cause to be taught’, बनवाना ‘to cause to be made’; the purpose here is often to specify the person by whom the action is done, as in मैं पिकी को राजू से हिन्दी पढ़वाऊँगा ‘I’ll get Pinky taught Hindi by Raju’.

**CLAUSE.** A phrase that includes a SUBJECT and a PREDICATE, and usually a main verb. The sentence ‘I told him that the tickets were too expensive’ consists of two clauses linked by the CONJUNCTION ‘that’. See also PHRASE.

**CODE-SWITCHING.** The process or tendency in which speakers ‘switch’ between languages within a single sentence or discourse. हिन्दी बोलते समय बहुत-से लोग बहुत सारे English words use करते हैं।

**COMMANDS.** Forms of the verb that give commands, orders or requests: बोलो ! ‘speak!’, बोलिए ‘please speak’. Also called Imperatives.

**COMPOUND VERB.** A verb consisting of two verbs working together: the first gives the basic meaning, the second ‘colours’ that meaning in some way. Thus बैठो ‘sit!’ can become बैठ जाओ ! ‘sit down!’ (जाओ is from जाना ‘to go’, but in the compound verb it does not carry this literal meaning, and simply adds nuance).

**CONDITIONAL.** An expression involving the sense ‘if...’.

**CONJUNCT CHARACTER.** A Devanagari character in which two consonants join to make a single syllable: in the word प्यार ‘love’, a modified form of प joins य to form the conjunct प्य. The conjunct removes the INHERENT VOWEL from the first character, changing *pa* to *p*. Without the conjunct, the word would have two syllables – ‘payār’. When no conjunct is available, the inherent vowel can be removed by use of the subscript line called *virām*: thus अद्भुत is equivalent (and perhaps stylistically preferable) to the clumsy अद्भुत .

**CONJUNCTIONS.** ‘Joining words’, or words that link clauses in a sentence: और ‘and’, लेकिन ‘but’, कि ‘that’, हालाँकि ‘although’. Thanks to its diversity of source languages, Hindi has many variants, including five for ‘but’ alone — लेकिन, मगर, पर, किन्तु, परन्तु. The appropriate choice of one over the others depends mainly on REGISTER.

**CONTINUOUS TENSE:** See PROGRESSIVE. The name of ‘-ing’ tenses that describe ongoing actions: वह खत लिख रही है / थी ‘she is/was writing a letter’. Also called PROGRESSIVE.

**CORRELATIVE.** See RELATIVE CLAUSES.

**DIRECT CASE:** see CASE.

**ERGATIVE:** see ‘NE’ CONSTRUCTION.

**GENDER.** Nouns involving sexual gender like ‘man’, ‘woman’ are *masculine* and *feminine* respectively; but in Hindi all nouns have gender: पानी ‘water’ and दूध ‘milk’ are masculine, चाय ‘tea’ and चीनी ‘sugar’ are feminine. Sometimes a masculine/feminine pair relates to size — रस्सा <sup>m</sup> ‘rope’ versus रस्सी <sup>f</sup> ‘cord’; but it is often impossible to predict genders on linguistic principles, so the gender of each noun must be learnt. See AGREEMENT.

**GENITIVE:** See POSSESSIVE.

**HABITUAL.** A verb tense which describes an action that is done regularly or as a matter of habit — ग़ालिब शराब पीते थे मगर सूअर नहीं खाते ‘Ghalib drank liquor but didn’t eat pork’. In Hindi this contrasts with CONTINUOUS tenses (‘is/was eating’).

**HONORIFIC.** A usage that indicates the level of formality shown to a person: calling someone तुम (‘you’) implies familiarity, while आप (‘you’) is more formal, and तू is either intimate or abrupt, depending on context. Verbs must AGREE with the honorific level selected, giving तुम बैठो a very different ring from आप बैठिए or तू बैठ. Such a distinction is found in many languages, but in Hindi the system extends grammatical plurality to the third PERSON, indicating respect by using ‘they’ forms for ‘he/she’: पंडित

जी आ रहे हैं 'Pandit ji is coming' is grammatically plural despite referring to a single person. This is called an 'honorific' plural.

**INFINITIVE.** The basic form of the verb as used in lists, dictionaries etc. In English it includes the word 'to', as in 'to think, to write', while in Hindi it ends *-nā*: सोचना 'to think', लिखना, 'to write', समझना 'to understand', कोशिश करना 'to try'. In Hindi the infinitive is often used as a COMMAND (often 'deferred' or with reference to actions not envisaged as being enacted immediately — घर पहुँचने पर फ़ोन करना 'phone when you get home') and as a VERBAL NOUN.

**INHERENT VOWEL.** A Devanagari consonant is a complete syllable that includes the vowel 'a', called the 'inherent' vowel: thus the character न reads as 'na', not just 'n'. The inherent vowel can be replaced by a vowel sign, as in ने *ne*, or cancelled by making a CONJUNCT with a second consonant, as in हिन्दी *hindī*. The inherent vowel is not pronounced at the end of the word in Hindi (though it is in Sanskrit: राम = Ram or Rama), between verb stems and endings (करता = *kartā*, not *karatā*), and in some other medial positions.

**IMPERATIVES:** see COMMANDS.

**IMPERFECTIVE VERB:** see PERFECTIVE VERB.

**INTRANSITIVE VERB:** see TRANSITIVE VERB.

**-kar CONSTRUCTION.** A form of the verb such as पहुँचकर 'having arrived'. It is independent of the grammar of the rest of the sentence, i.e. shows no AGREEMENT: घर पहुँचकर मैं आराम करूँगा 'having arrived home I'll rest' — or less literally, 'I'll rest when I get home'.

**LOAN TRANSLATION** (also called a 'calque'): an expression borrowed from another language through literal word-by-word translation. Hindi has large numbers of them, especially from English: बस सेवा 'bus service', दूसरे शब्दों में the idiom 'in other words', and even the term उधार अनुवाद 'loan translation' itself.

**LOANWORD:** a word that is 'borrowed' from another language. (The term is a little inappropriate since there is rarely any hope of the word being returned!). In Hindi, the category would obviously include such words as स्कूल and स्टेशन from English, but technically speaking it would also include words such as दोस्त from Persian, कमरा from Portuguese, and कक्षा from Sanskrit. Thousands of such words are so deeply assimilated into Hindi that they no longer seem 'foreign' — nobody would question the Indian credentials of Persian-origin words such as चरखा 'spinning-wheel', कि 'that', or हिन्दी 'Hindi'!

**NASALIZATION.** A nasalized vowel is produced with the breath resonating in the nose: pinch your nose and say 'Austin Texas' and you'll hear nasalized sounds. It is shown in Devanagari with the *candrabindu* ('moon-and-dot') as in हँ and आऊँगा; in a syllable having vowel sign or other ligatures above the top line, the moon is usually dropped — as in मैं and नहीं. (The moon is in fact optional everywhere, and, sadly, is going out of fashion these days, perhaps being eclipsed by a desire to cut corners: हँ, आऊँगा is now OK alongside हँ, आऊँगा.)

**'NE' CONSTRUCTION.** The 'ergative' construction used with TRANSITIVE verbs in PERFECTIVE tenses. In मेरे बेटे ने दस चपातियाँ खाई थीं 'my son had eaten ten chapattis', the logical subject 'my son' is in the oblique case with the postposition ने, while the verb खाई थीं agrees with the logical object (here feminine plural). Compare the intransitive मेरा बेटा घर गया 'my son went home.'

**NOUN.** A word that *names* something: 'car', 'sock', 'love', 'pizza', 'difficulty', 'peace', 'Amritsar'. All nouns in Hindi have either masculine or feminine GENDER: नाक f. 'nose', कान m. 'ear'.

**NUMBER.** The status of words describing things as being either 'singular' (one only) or 'plural' (more than one). When Hindi uses plural number to show respect to a singular person, this is called an HONORIFIC plural.

**OBJECT.** A person or thing *to which the action of the verb is done* is called the 'direct object': e.g. गाड़ी 'car' in मैं गाड़ी चला रहा हूँ 'I am driving the car'. A direct object is a noun or pronoun that receives the action of a transitive verb in an active sentence. In मैं तुमको तोहफ़ा दूँगा 'I'll give you a gift', तोहफ़ा 'gift' is the direct object (it is the gift that is actually 'given'), while तुम 'you' is the indirect object. See also SUBJECT.

**OBLIQUE CASE:** see CASE.

**PARTICIPLE.** Part of a verb like देखता 'see, seeing' (imperfective participle) or देखा 'saw' (perfective participle) – the basis of various tenses etc. Participles are formed by adding such endings as *-tā* or *-ā* to the verb STEM. Hindi uses participles in two main ways: firstly, as part of the main or 'finite' verb, as in बच्चे बाहर खेलते हैं '(the) children play outside', and secondly in 'non-finite' contexts where they are simply adding detail to the picture without being the main action described there: वे खेलते (हुए) बच्चे कौन हैं ? 'who are those playing children?', i.e. 'who are those children who are playing?'

**PASSIVE.** A construction focusing on the thing to which an action is done, rather than on the doer of the action: गाड़ी चलाई जाती है 'the car is driven' is passive, while मैं गाड़ी चलाता हूँ 'I drive the car' is active. Passives are most commonly used with TRANSITIVE verbs, though some INTRANSITIVES can also be made passive in idiomatic expressions such as चला जाए? 'Shall we go?' (literally 'should [it] be gone?!').

**PERFECTIVE VERB.** A perfective verb describes an action that is *completed*, i.e. it refers to a one-off action such as मैं घर गया 'I went home' or मैंने किताब पढ़ी 'I read the book'; a HABITUAL or 'imperfective' verb describes an action that is *not* completed, such as मैं अकेले रहता हूँ / था 'I live alone/used to live alone', or मैं केला खा रहा हूँ 'I'm eating a banana'.

**PERSON.** The person speaking ('I' / 'we') is called the 'first person'; the one spoken to ('you') is 'second person'; someone spoken about (e.g. 'he, she') is 'third person'.

**PHRASE.** A group of words forming a conceptual unit within the sentence, such as 'the famous Gettysburg address' or 'colloquial Hindi' in the sentence 'I translated the famous Gettysburg address into colloquial Hindi'.

**POSSESSIVE.** A 'possession' word, like मेरा 'my, mine', उसका 'his, her, hers, its' etc.

**POSTPOSITION.** Unlike English prepositions, which precede the word they qualify ('in this room', 'on the tables') Hindi postpositions (में 'in', पर 'on' etc.) *follow* the words they qualify. They take the oblique CASE: इस कमरे में 'in this room', मेज़ों पर 'on the tables'. Postpositions consisting of more than one word, usually featuring a possessive के / की, are called 'compound' postpositions: के अंदर 'inside', की तरफ़ 'towards', के बारे में 'about', के चारों ओर 'all around'.

**PRESUMPTIVE.** A use of a future verb to make an assumption about the present: बच्चे ठीक होंगे 'I assume the kids are OK?' (lit. 'will be OK?'), उसने अखबार देखा होगा 's/he must have seen the newspaper'.

**PROGRESSIVE TENSE:** see CONTINUOUS TENSE.

**PRONOUN.** A word like वह 'he, she, it' or हम 'we, us', which stands in place of a noun; these examples are called Personal Pronouns. The other main categories are:

Possessive Pronouns, indicating ownership etc. — मेरा 'my/mine', तुम्हारा 'your/yours'.

Demonstrative Pronouns, which point something out: वह 'that', वे 'those'.

Interrogative Pronouns ask questions: कौन 'who?', कौनसा 'which?'.

Relative Pronouns refer to something mentioned nearby: जो '(the one) who'. In English these overlap with the Interrogative set (both beginning with 'w-'), but in Hindi there are two separate sets, beginning ज- (relative) and क- (interrogative) respectively.

**PURPOSE EXPRESSION.** One which expresses purpose or intention by using an oblique infinitive (ending -e, as in सीखने 'to learn'), often with a verb of motion: मैं हिन्दी सीखने भारत जाऊँगा 'I'll go to India to learn Hindi'.

**REFLEXIVE.** A word that refers back to the subject of a clause, like खुद ('myself, himself' etc.) — मैं खुद जाऊँगा 'I'll go myself'.

**REGISTER.** A level or style of language use, defined by such variables as formality, social setting, cultural context, and the use of LOANWORDS from particular source-languages. 'Ask him to the party' has a less formal register than 'Invite him to the reception'. In Hindi, the use of Sanskrit loanwords often brings a formal register (which can sound very stuffy when used inappropriately), whereas Persian and English loanwords appear in a more informal or casual register.

**RELATIVE-CORRELATIVE.** In जब मैं गाना गाता हूँ तब मुहल्ले के सारे कुत्ते भौंकने लगते हैं 'when I sing, (then) all the dogs in the neighborhood start barking', जब 'when' introduces a relative clause that relates to the correlative clause beginning तब 'then'. Hindi has many such relative-correlative pairs: जो / वह, जैसा / वैसा, जहाँ / वहाँ, ज्योंही / त्योंही etc.

**SANDHI.** In all languages, the pronunciation of words and sounds tends to be affected by adjacent sounds: in English, for example, the pluralising suffix '-s' is pronounced as /s/ in 'cats' (following the voiceless consonant 't') but as /z/ in 'dogs' (following the voiced consonant 'd'). This tendency was formalized in Sanskrit phonology, leading to complex rules in the spelling of words and compounds. An example is the range of

changes occurring at the end of the word जगत् *jagat* 'world' in compounds such as जगत्तारणी, जगदीश, जगन्नाथ. Many Sanskrit words used in Hindi show this feature.

**STEM.** The most basic part of the verb: बोल is the stem of बोलना 'to speak'. Its functions include an abrupt command, used with people addressed as *tū* – बोल! 'Speak!'.  
**SUBJECT.** The word or words naming the doer of an action: in मेरा भाई गोश्त नहीं खाता 'my brother doesn't eat meat', मेरा भाई is the subject and गोश्त is the OBJECT.

**SUBJUNCTIVE.** A form of the verb expressing what is imagined, doubtful, suggested, or in some way tentative: in शायद मैं भी आऊँ 'Perhaps I may come too', आऊँ 'may come' is a subjunctive form of the verb *ānā* 'to come'. It may be used as a kind of lightweight command: आप भी आएँ 'You (should) come too.'

**TATSAMA AND TADBHAVĀ.** A 'tatsama' word is a Sanskrit word used in its unchanged form in a vernacular language such as Hindi. The words क्षेत्र 'area, field' and कर्म 'action, karma' are examples of tatsamas, and have the tadbhava equivalents खेत 'field, agricultural land' and काम 'work' respectively – with some change of meaning in these particular examples. (Pairs of words having the same source but different meanings are called 'doublets'.) *Tatsama* and *tadbhava* are themselves Sanskrit (*tatsama*!) words meaning 'same as that' and 'derived from that' respectively.

**TENSE.** The form that a verb takes to express the time-frame of an action.

**TRANSITIVE VERB.** One which can take a direct object, such as खाना 'to eat', देखना 'to see'. Verbs that cannot take a direct object are *intransitive*: examples include verbs of motion such as जाना 'to go' (you can *eat* something or *see* something but you cannot *go* or *arrive* something). In Hindi, the two types behave very differently in PERFECTIVE (past) tenses, so the distinction is an important one: see 'NE' CONSTRUCTION.

**VERB.** A word telling us about an action or occurrence or state: 'swim', 'sink', 'think', 'eat', 'be'. Verbs in English are usually quoted in the INFINITIVE — 'to swim' etc., the Hindi equivalent has a -ना ending as in तैरना 'to swim'. Verbs are used in various different TENSES, and may consist of more than one word, as in the English future tense ('I will go') and the Hindi imperfective (मैं जाता हूँ 'I go'); see AUXILIARY VERB.

**VERBAL NOUN.** A verb which functions as a noun, as in 'staying' in the sentence 'My father doesn't approve of your staying here'; in Hindi it is usually an INFINITIVE (तुम्हारा यहाँ रहना पिताजी को ठीक नहीं लगता).

**VOCATIVE.** The CASE of words used in addressing someone. In the singular it is the same as the oblique – अरे बेटे ! 'Oh son!'. In the plural it differs from the oblique in that its -o ending is not normally nasalized: भाइओ बहनो ! 'Brothers and sisters!'.  
**STEM.** The most basic part of the verb: बोल is the stem of बोलना 'to speak'. Its functions include an abrupt command, used with people addressed as *tū* – बोल! 'Speak!'.  
**SUBJECT.** The word or words naming the doer of an action: in मेरा भाई गोश्त नहीं खाता 'my brother doesn't eat meat', मेरा भाई is the subject and गोश्त is the OBJECT.