GLOSSARY OF LINGUISTIC TERMS

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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.

ABSOLUTIVE: 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 -ा 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 बड़ा है) ‘My house is very big’.

ADVERB. A word or phrase that describes an action, e.g. जोर से ‘loudly’ in जोर 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 तेज चलती हो ‘you walk fast’; तुम बड़े 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 था. (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: बड़ी ‘quickly; early’; आम तौर पर ‘usually’; किस तरह ‘how’?; अफ़सोस ‘well’, and a more formal type using the noun या ‘form, manner’ — स्वयं ‘permanently’, व्यक्तिगत ‘personally’.

AGREE, AGREEMENT. When words change to match the NUMBER, GENDER or CASE of related words I 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’; हज़ारों लोग ‘thousands of people’.

ANUSVĀR. A superscript dot that represents a nasal consonant: the spellings मुंबई ‘Mumbai’ and हिंदी ‘Hindi’ are equivalent to मुंबई ‘Mumbai’ and हिंदी 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 खंड) it is an /n/, 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 mātrās; 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 होना (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 (मुझे ‘me’) which is used before POSTPOSITIONS (as in मुझे 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 सिखाना ‘to cause to be
taught’, भाजाना ‘to cause to be made’; the purpose here is often to specify the person
by whom the action is done, as in मैं सिक्खे को राजे से हिंदी पढ़वाई गई ‘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. हिंदी बोलने 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 य्य. The conjunct removes the inherent vowel from the first character, changing पा to प. 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 अद्ध्वत is equivalent (and perhaps stylistically preferable) to the clumsy अद्वृत.

CONJUNCTIONS. ‘Joining words’, or words that link clauses in a sentence: और । ‘and’, बेकार ‘but’, कि ‘that’, हालाँकि ‘although’. Thanks to its diversity of source languages, Hindi has many variants, including five for ‘but’ alone — बेकार, मगर, पर, कितु, परतु. 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 खट लिख रही है | वही ‘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 — रसा । ‘rope’ versus रसी । ‘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 — गाजिब बराबर पीते थे मगर मुसूर नहीं खाते । ‘Ghalib drank liquor but didn’t east 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’.

पंक्ति
‘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 -ना: सीखना ‘to think’, लिखना, ‘to write’, समझना ‘to understand’, कीर्तिकरना ‘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 फोन 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 है न 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 हिंदी hindi. 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.

-कर CONSTRUCTION. A form of the verb such as पॉटेंटिकर ‘having arrived’. It is independent of the grammar of the rest of the sentence, i.e. shows no AGREEMENT: घर पॉटेंटिकर में आया करेंगा ‘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 याद स्मृत करना ‘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 स्टेजन from English, but technically speaking it would also include words such as दोॊल from Persian, कमः from Portuguese, and क्षेत्र 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 चर्चा ‘spinning-wheel’, कि ‘that’, or हिंदी ‘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 हैं and आँध्रा: 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: हैं, आँध्रा is now OK alongside हैं, आँध्रा.)
‘NE’ CONSTRUCTION. The ‘ergative’ construction used with TRANSITIVE verbs in PERFECTIVE tenses. In भेरा बेटा ने दस चपातियाँ बाँटी थी ‘my son had eaten ten chapattis’, the logical subject ‘my son’ is in the oblique case with the postposition ने, while the verb बाँटी थी agrees with the logical object (here feminine plural). Compare the intransitive भेरा बेटा पर गया ‘my son went home.’


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 में 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 देगा ‘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 -a to the verb STEM. Hindi uses participles in two main ways: firstly, as part of the main or ‘finite’ verb, as in वचने 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 में 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 जंगल में 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’, मेज़ 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 तरफ ‘towards’, के बारे में ‘about’, के चारों ओर ‘all around’.

**Presumptive.** A use of a future verb to make an assumption about the present: वच्चे ठीक होगे ‘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: यह ‘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 -े, as in सीखने ‘to learn’), often with a verb of motion: मैं हिंदी सीखने भारत जाॅगा ‘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 जाॅगा ‘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 मुझे के सारे कुले भौकने 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 / जैसा, 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 जगत jagat ‘world’ in compounds such as जग्गार्थी, जगदीश, जगन्नाथ. Many Sanskrit words used in Hindi show this feature.

**STEM.** The most basic part of the verb: अव is the stem of अव ते ‘to speak’. Its functions include an abrupt command, used with people addressed as तू—अव! ‘Speak!’.

**SUBJECT.** The word or words naming the doer of an action: मेरा भाई गोष्ठ नहीं खाता ‘my brother doesn’t eat meat’, मेरा भाई is the subject and गोष्ठ is the OBJECT.

**SUBJUNCTIVE.** A form of the verb expressing what is imagined, doubtful, suggested, or I some way tentative: in शायद में भी आई ‘Perhaps I may come too’, आई ‘may come’ is a subjunctive form of the verb अना ‘to come’. It may be used as a kind of lightweight command: आप भी आए ‘You (should) come too.’

**TATSAMA AND TADDBHAVA.** 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 कार्म ‘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 ‘doubllets’.) 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 न 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 (वहाँ 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 – भाई बहुनो ‘Oh son!’; In the plural it differs from the oblique in that it its -o ending is not normally nasalized: भाई बहुनो ‘Brothers and sisters’.