

## शब्द — *word*

---

शब्द, the regular Hindi word for ‘word’, is one of the first linguistic terms that a Hindi learner encounters. Being a Sanskrit loan, शब्द is little used in Urdu, which has instead the Arabic-through-Persian loan لفظ *lafz*; this singular form comes complete with its own plural, formed on the Arabic pattern by a repatterning of the triconsonantal root *l-f-z* as الفاظ *alfāz*, ‘words’.

Though शब्द means ‘word’ to you and me, its primary sense is ‘sound’; and even in the Hindi of today it may still have this meaning in a poetic context — for example in the ‘sound’ of a hammer striking the anvil, or of fingers striking a drum, or of rain falling on leaves. CDIAL hits the semantic nail on the head in glossing Sanskrit शब्द as ‘articulate sound’, and OHED’s first gloss specifies ‘sound, noise (esp. as produced by any action)’; thus the heart of the matter is a sound that *means or indicates* something, or is attributed to a known source. (It can be distinguished semantically from the Hindi word आहट, meaning a sound whose source is unseen, such as footsteps in a neighbouring room). Generally, though, शब्द has come to be equated with the semantic range of English ‘word’.

Just as शब्द has ‘sound’ as its basic meaning, so वाक्य, the usual Hindi word for ‘sentence’ or ‘clause’, literally means ‘vocalable’; in fact ‘vocalable’ is its cognate, as both words derive from the Indo-European root *\*wek-* ‘to say’. Thus वाक्य is literally an ‘utterance’. In the Indian tradition, *speech* rather than writing has long been primary. As for writing, the convention of spacing words out as separate items (rather than *runningthemtogether* as in the old manuscript traditions — and, for that matter, in speech) is a relatively recent one in many languages.

The introduction to शब्दार्थ mentioned tatsama > tadbhava sequences such as कर्म > काम, पुत्र > पूत, सर्प > साँप, and चंद्र > चाँद, in which the reduction of a conjunct is accompanied by the lengthening of a preceding vowel; and if we to extend the same pattern here, we would logically arrive at शब्द > साद (bearing in mind that vernacular languages often replace Sanskritic श with a simple स). The tadbhava word साद does indeed exist, but is now archaic and is only found in old literary sources; tatsama शब्द is the current form of choice. As so often, high-register Sanskrit wins the day, and the poor old vernacular words are left without a मीत (< मित्र) to champion them.

The religious traditions that have nurtured both English and Hindi (separately, of course!) have done much business with the concept of ‘the word’. *In the beginning was the Word*, begins the gospel attributed to John. The original was in Greek, and the word for ‘Word’ was the philosophically charged term λόγος *logos*; for two millennia, the meaning of John’s statement has been the subject of more theological debate that you could shake a stick at. Similarly in the tradition of what we have come to call Hinduism, the pithy compound शब्दब्रह्म equates ‘sound’ or ‘word’ with the universal spirit, and has likewise been given many different meanings by many different interpreters. Meanwhile in the context of Hindi and Panjabi vernacular

devotional poetry, a शब्द (usually spelt and pronounced शब्द, partly as a reflection of Panjabi pronunciation) is a bhajan, a devotional hymn; and in this context, the word comes close in meaning to another key term for (divinely inspired) utterance, वाणी (tadbhava बानी). Here too the primary sense of the spoken word precedes that of a written, literary text.

Hindi words relating to linguistics are of course Sanskritic. We close with OHED's generous list of terms and expressions based on शब्द –

शब्द śabd [S.], m. 1. sound, noise (esp. as produced by any action). \*2. a word (spoken or written). 3. the word of God; the divine being as revealed through the Word. 4. a song, hymn (esp. among Sikhs: = सबद). 5. fig. the power of speech. 6. gram. a word, a term. — ~ करना, to make a noise or sound (with, से), to sound, to blow. दो ~, m. two words: a few words (of conversation); a preface. - शब्दकार, m. composer of the words of a song. शब्द-कोश, m. word-store: dictionary. शब्दगत, adj. put into words, given verbal form. सबद-चोर, m. word-thief: plagiarist. °ई, f. plagiarism. शब्द-ब्रह्म, m. the revealed Word, identified with the ultimate being; a Veda. शब्द-भंडार, m. word-stock, lexicon (of a language). शब्द-भेद, m. a part of speech. °भेदी, adj. sound-piercing: = शब्दवेधी. शब्द-योनि, f. the source or origin of a word; gram. a root. शब्दरचना, f. ling. morphology. °त्मक, adj. शब्द-विधान, m. a partic. form or style of words or speech. शब्द-विन्यास, m. word-arrangement: turn of speech, phraseology. शब्दवेधी, adj. & m. piercing a target detected only by its sound (an arrow, or an archer). शब्दश, adv. word for word. शब्द-संग्रह, m. a vocabulary. शाब्दांत [°da + a°], m. gram. ending of a word. शब्दाडंबर [°da + ā°], m. high-flown language; bombast. शब्दात्मक [°da + ā°], adj. concerning words, lexical. शब्दातीत [°da + a°], adj. beyond the reach of sound: the supreme being; beyond the power of words (to express). शब्दानुशासन [°da + a°], m. instruction in the use of words: a grammar; a guide to language usage. शब्दार्थ [°da + a°], m. meaning of a word, or words; literal sense. शब्दार्थ-विज्ञान, m. ling. semantics. शब्दालंकार [°da + a°], m. rhet. an adornment or figure of speech depending for its effect on sounds (as alliteration, assonance) rather than on meanings. शब्दावली [°da + ā°], f. terminology (of a partic. field); vocabulary (of a writer, or a partic. group). - शब्दाशब्द [P. -ā-], adv. word for word, verbatim.

शाब्दिक śābdik [S.], adj. word for word, literal (sense, translation).