

होना to be

होना या न होना — *that* is the question.

This verb is too common to need examples; it occurs (either independently, meaning ‘to be, to exist’, or as auxiliary, as in बंदर नाचता है ‘the monkey dances’) in so many types of Hindi sentence.

The most intriguing thing here is that although no vowels or consonants are shared by the words होना and ‘be’, they are in fact cognates. They both derive ultimately from the PIE root *bheue ‘to exist, to be’ which is also the source of the Sanskrit root भू and of भवति, the present tense third-person of ‘to be’ in Sanskrit. The reason that हो and ‘be’ look so different is that ‘be’ has retained the ‘b’ consonant in bheue but lost the aspiration, while हो has kept the aspiration and lost the consonant quality!

In Braj Bhasha and some other dialects, the ‘bh’ root is visible in perfective participles: भयौ, भई are the equivalents of Hindi हुआ, हुई.

Here are some examples of common Sanskritic words based on भू –

भू	f. the earth
भूकंप	m. earthquake
भूगोल	m. geography
भूत	past (as in भूतकाल past tense); m. ghost, spirit
भूदान	m. land-donation (a 20th-century reform movement led by Vinoba Bhave)
भूमंडल	m. the globe; भूमंडलीकरण m. globalization (calqued from English)
भूमिका	f. role
भूधर	m. mountain
भूमि	f. earth, land, ground; रंगभूमि f. battleground
भूमिहार	m. name of a cultivating caste in northern India
भूप, भूपति, भूपाल	m. king
स्वयंभू	self-manifest (said of temple images etc.)

Other forms of the verb ‘to be’ also share historical parentage. English ‘is’ relates to Sanskrit अस्ति, a connection that is also seen in French ‘est’, Italian qq

For English ‘was’ see the separate entry on बसना.
