

# CORRELATION OF TENSE, MOOD AND ASPECT IN HINDI

by Dishi Gupta

## Introduction:

The first complete description of the Hindi verb system was made by Kellogg in his Grammar of the Hindi Language, which was a reference grammar of standard Hindi, but also included material on related dialects.

Kellogg recognizes **two voices**, *active and passive*, and **three moods**, *indicative, subjunctive, and imperative*. The basic approach, therefore, is structural; however, semantic considerations are also included; One indication of the structural approach is Kellogg's use of the term "indefinite". Consider the following example to a form like *mai chalaa* 'I went'.

- (a)    *mai chalaa*  
      I      go.PFV.PST  
      'I went'  
(b)    *mai chalaa thaa*  
      I      go.IMPV      is.PST  
      'I went, I had gone'

Since (b) consists of the perfective participle and past tense marker, it is referred to as "perfective past". Comparison of the meanings of (a) and (b) would indicate that *chalaa* in (a) is the same *chalaa* as in (b) with the past tense marker omitted to indicate a more immediate past. Thus, the form (a) would have been given a more accurate name including the term "imperfective".

## Tense, Mood and Aspect:

There are three primary grammatical aspects in Hindi: **habitual aspect**, **perfective aspect** and **progressive aspect**. Periphrastic Hindi verb forms consist of two elements. The first element is the *aspect marker*. The second element is the *tense-mood marker*. Taking the sentence:

*nevlaa saap ko dekh raha hai.*  
mongoose      snake      look.PROG.PRS  
'The mongoose is looking at the snake.'

The form *dekh raha* represents the progressive aspect of the verb *dekhnaa* 'look at, see'. The form *hai* is the present tense marker. All progressive forms of the verb *dekhnaa* contain the element *dekh raha* and all present forms of *dekhnaa* contain the element *hai*.

(a) In addition to *dekh raha hai*, there are four other progressive verb forms of *dekhnaa*, each including a different TM (tense-mood) marker.

<i>dekh raha tha</i>	'was looking at'	(progressive past)
<i>dekh raha hogaa</i>	'must be looking at'	(progressive presumptive)
<i>dekh raha ho</i>	'may be looking at'	(progressive subjunctive)
<i>dekh raha hotaa</i>	'(if he) had been looking at'	(progressive conditional)

(b) In addition to *dekh raha tha*, there are two other present forms of *dekhnaa*, each including a different aspect marker.

<i>dekhtaa hai</i>	'looks at'	(habitual present)
<i>dekhaa hai</i>	'has looked at'	(perfective present)

By combining the forms given in (a)-(b), we can list all the periphrastic verb forms in Hindi for the verb *dekhnaa* in this abbreviated form:

ASPECT	TENSE-MOOD (TM)		
habitual	<i>dekhtaa</i>	<i>hai</i>	present
progressive	<i>dekh raha</i>	<i>tha</i>	past
perfect	<i>dekhaa</i>	<i>hogaa</i>	presumptive
		<i>ho</i>	subjunctive
		<i>hotaa</i>	conditional

Each aspect form can be combined with each tense-mood form for a total of 15 combinations. In addition, the perfective form *dekhaa* can be used without a tense-mood marker, thus making a sixteenth form.

The forms of the verb *dekhnaa* given above can now be given in a more general form to fit all verbs in all gender, number, and person agreement patterns. In each instance in 8, the aspect marker is attached to the form *dekh*, the stem of the verb. The stem is formed by taking the infinitive or dictionary form of any Hindi verb, such as *dekhnaa* and deleting the ending *naa*. The stem will be abbreviated as S.

The ending *aa* is found on all aspect forms and several TM markers:

ASPECTS	TENSE-MOOD	
<i>dekhaa</i>	<i>tha</i>	
<i>dekh raha</i>	<i>hogaa</i>	
<i>dekhaa</i>	<i>hotaa</i>	

In each instance above, the ending *aa* denotes masculine singular agreement. This ending has the following variants:

	masculine	feminine
singular	<i>aa</i>	<i>ii</i>
plural	<i>e</i>	<i>ī</i>

**special rule 1:**  $\bar{i} \rightarrow ii/\_\text{TM}$

The ending  $\bar{i}$  on an aspect marker becomes  $ii$  when a tense-mood marker follows. The tense-mood marker will then indicate the plural agreement, while the aspect marker marks feminine agreement only:

*aurtē aa rahī thī̄*

women come.PST.PRG

'The women were coming'

The form *rahī̄* has become *rahī* by special rule 1, since the past tense marker *thī* follows. When no TM marker follows, the aspect marker retains the *ii* ending:

*yahāā aurtē nahī̄ aatī̄.*

here women don't come

'Women don't come here.'

**special rule 2:** The ending *aa*, besides indicating masculine singular agreement, also denotes neutral agreement, where the verb cannot agree with either the subject or the object (when they are not present or used with postpositions).

The endings given above will be abbreviated as GN (gender-number agreement).

Three TM markers show person agreement:

<i>hai</i>	present
<i>hogaa</i>	presumptive
<i>ho</i>	subjunctive

The complete personal ending system in Hindi can be indicated as follows:

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
first person	<i>ūū</i>	<i>ē</i>
second person	<i>e</i>	<i>o</i>
third person	<i>e</i>	<i>ē</i>

Only four endings are distinguished, and the personal ending system can therefore be simplified as follows:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
may ('I') form ~ o	<i>ūū</i>	tum ('you') form	<i>o</i>
general singular	<i>e</i>	general plural	<i>ē</i>

These personal endings will be abbreviated as *P*. The present tense marker can now be abbreviated as *hP*. The combination of *h* and the endings *P* produces somewhat irregular forms:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
<i>māī</i> form general singular	<i>h + ūū = hūū</i> <i>h + e = hai</i>	<i>tum</i> form general plural	<i>h + o = ho</i> <i>h + ē = hāī</i>

The tense-mood marker is identical to the verb 'to be' in most forms. In a semantic analysis, the TM marker and the verb 'to be' can however be considered distinct because of their different functions. The form *hogaa* of the verb 'to be' has both presumptive and future meaning, the form *hogaa* of the TM marker, however, only has a presumptive meaning. The verb 'to be' has special general forms for general statements: *hotaa hai*, *hotaa thaa*, etc. The TM marker does not have such forms.

Contractions result when the marker *ho* is combined with P as in the presumptive and subjunctive forms.

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
<i>māī</i> form general singular	<i>ho + ūū = hoūū</i> <i>ho + e = hoe/ho</i>	<i>tum</i> form general plural	<i>ho + o = hoo/ho</i> <i>ho + ē = hoē/hō</i>

The contractions are much more commonly used than the non-contracted forms.

The periphrastic verb forms given for *dekhnaa* before can now be given in a canonical form for all regular verbs:

habitual	<i>t</i>	<i>hP</i>	present
progressive	<i>rah</i>	<i>thGN</i>	past
S	<i>GN +</i>	<i>hoPgGN</i>	presumptive
perfective	<i>y</i>	<i>hoP</i>	subjunctive
		<i>hotGN</i>	conditional

With S: verb stem, GN: gender-number agreement, P: person agreement

### Aspects:

The **perfective aspect** is used to describe completed actions. The perfective aspect has not been consistently distinguished from the past tense.

The perfective aspect marker contains a *y*. Although it is of phonological origin, it is consistently present only in perfective aspect markers; therefore, it is included as the marker of the perfective. The *y* is obligatorily deleted when the verb stem does not end in a vowel, and it is optionally deleted when *GN ≠ aa*.

Example 1: *dekh + y + e = dekhe*

The stem does not end in a vowel and *y* is obligatorily deleted.

Example 2: *aa + y + ii = aayii / aaii*

The stem ends in a vowel and *GN ≠ aa*. Thus, *y* is optionally deleted.

Example 3: *aa + y + aa = aayaa*

The stem ends in a vowel and GN = *aa*. Thus, *y* may not be deleted.

The perfective aspect refers to completed action. Both the habitual and progressive aspects refer to completed action. The **aspects** may therefore more properly be listed in the following manner:

1. imperfective
  - a. habitual
  - b. progressive
2. perfective

Hindi future forms are semantically imperfective, since they indicate incomplete action; however, no overt imperfective aspect marker is included in these forms. The future forms are given as:

future      future subjunctive

imperfective      SPgGN    SP

With P = general singular, GN = feminine singular, we get the following forms for the verb *dekhnaa*:

future: *dekhegii*      future subjunctive: *dekhe*

The subjunctive form usually indicates some degree of doubt semantically.

Hindi imperative forms may also be categorized as imperfective; the following imperatives occur in Hindi. The request imperative is actually a subjunctive form.

intimate	S	( <i>dekh</i> )
familiar	<i>So</i>	( <i>dekh</i> )
neutral	<i>Snaa</i>	( <i>dekhnaa</i> )
polite	<i>Siye</i>	( <i>dekhhiye</i> )
extra-polite	<i>Siyegaa</i>	( <i>dekhhiyegaa</i> )
request	<i>Se</i>	( <i>dekhe</i> )

The **habitual aspect** is also called the imperfective or general aspect. In some grammars, however, there is no clear distinction between the aspectual function of the habitual participle and the tense function of the TM marker.

Verb forms containing the habitual aspect have three main uses:

**(a) habitual action:**

*chaatr      roz      hindii    klaas    jaate hāī*  
student.PL everyday Hindi class go.PRG.PRS  
'The students go to Hindi class every day.'

**(b) characteristic, general action:**

mocii            juute        thiik karte hāī  
shoemaker.PL shoe.PL repair.NOM  
'Shoemakers repair shoes.'

**(c) immediate future action:**

abhii      laataa hūū.  
now        bring.FUT  
'I'll bring it right away.'

Assuming a standard semantic feature in the base for the habitual aspect in the form, we see that it can underlie both (a) and (b), but not (c). The traditional concept of immediate future action as being one "use" of the habitual aspect marker is based entirely on a structural analysis. Thus, since (c) *abhii laataa hūū*. has the same surface structure as *roz laataa hūū*. (d) (I bring (it) every day.), the form is considered an instance of the habitual present.

The main function of the **progressive aspect** is to refer to an action in progress:

ve        log        phuul        charhaa rahe hāī  
they     people    flower.PL    offer.PRG.PRS  
'Those people are offering flowers.'

There are verbs in Hindi which are not used in the progressive, such as *jaannaa* 'know', or *saknaa* 'can, be able', but some verbs like *lagnaa* 'seem', which cannot be used in the progressive in English are found in this aspect in Hindi:

mujhe aap kii        baatē        burii        lag rahii hāī  
me        your.POSS    word.PL    bad        look/seem.PRG.PRS  
'Your words seem bad to me' (i.e., 'I dislike what you are saying')

In English, the progressive present can be used to indicate future time as in "I'm meeting him tomorrow."

In Hindi this usage is limited to a few verbs of motion such as *aanaa* 'come' and *pahūchnaa* 'arrive'.

siitaa kal        bambaii        jaa rahii hai.  
Sita    tomorrow Mumbai    go.PRG.PRS  
'Sita is going to Bombay tomorrow'.

The progressive aspect is also referred to as "continuous" and "durative". It has been neglected in many traditional grammars of Hindi, since those grammars were based on traditional grammars of English and the Latin tradition, where the progressive aspect did not occur. The progressive aspect in English and Hindi is expressed by unique forms, which must be distinguished in usage from habitual forms.

## **Mood:**

The remaining TM markers used with the aspects indicate moods. Especially when used with imperfective aspect markers, these mood forms are not marked for tense, and the action may occur in the present or the past as the context indicates. The perfective aspect does usually indicate that the action occurred in the past.

The **presumptive mood** indicates that an action is presumed or likely to occur. Since the presumptive marker is a future form, these forms have been referred to as future in some grammars. However, semantically they are not future in standard Hindi usage.

The **subjunctive mood** indicates a degree of doubt and is required in many types of subordinate clauses. This mood may also occur with the future, as well as all three aspect markers.

The **conditional mood** refers to an action contrary to fact and is also referred to as “hypothetical” and “Irrealis”.

## **Citations:**

1. Olphen, H. V. (1975). *Aspect, Tense, And Mood in The Hindi Verb*. Brill.
2. Kellogg, S. H. (1938). *A Grammar of The Hindi Language 1875*. Generic.
3. Wikipedia contributors. (2022, January 10). *Grammatical aspect*. Wikipedia.