

Re-evaluating the Status of *rah-* within the Aspectual System of Hindi

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Background: Kellogg (1972:261) classifies *rah-* in the periphrastic form *rah- h-* as an auxiliary verb, suggesting that *rahnā* ‘to stay’ behaves similarly to other auxiliary verbs. Subsequent studies by Masica (1991), Butt (2003), and Deo (2006) also consider *rah-* as an auxiliary verb. However, this paper argues that such a classification is inadequate. Instead, *rah- h-* is better understood as a combination of the progressive marker *rah-* and the auxiliary verb *honā* ‘to be’, rather than functioning as a true auxiliary verb. While Olphen (1975:196) shares the view that *rah- h-* is not an auxiliary verb, his work lacks a detailed discussion on the matter. By re-examining the progressive marker *rah-* derived from *rahnā* (Sharma 1972; Butt 2003; Deo 2006, among others), this study posits that *rah-* does not align with the traditional criteria for auxiliary verbs within the Hindi aspectual system.

A structural representation of auxiliary verbs in Hindi can be framed as [Verb Phrase] ___] Tense.Aux. However, occupying this position alone does not qualify an element as an auxiliary verb. Empirical evidence shows that *rah-* does not conform to the syntactic and morphosyntactic patterns of true auxiliaries. Unlike core auxiliary verbs in Hindi, *rah-* exhibits distinct distributional constraints, particularly its incompatibility with the habitual marker *-t-*. Given these observations, *rah-* should be treated as an independent progressive aspect marker, rather than an auxiliary verb, within the Hindi aspectual system.

Furthermore, this paper contends that the *-ā* in *rahā* is not a past participle marker, as suggested by Sharma (1972), but rather a masculine singular agreement marker. This claim aligns with the observed default usage of masculine participial forms in modern Hindi.

Proposal/Main Claims:

- (1) Reassessment of *rah-* as a Progressive Marker:
 - *rah-* is a progressive aspect marker rather than an auxiliary verb.
 - Unlike typical modal and auxiliary verbs, *rah-* does not integrate with the habitual marker *-t-*, highlighting its unique morphosyntactic behavior.
- (2) Syntactic and Semantic Constraints of *rah-* in Compound Verbs:
 - *rah-* cannot be treated as an auxiliary verb in the same category as other commonly used auxiliary verbs like *jānā* (‘to go’) or *lenā* (‘to take’).
 - The inability of *rah-* to carry markers like *-t-* or align with certain compound verb structures further differentiates it from auxiliary verbs.
- (3) Typological Implications for Hindi Aspectual System:
 - The analysis of *rah-* provides insights into the broader typology of Hindi's aspectual system, reinforcing the need to separate markers of aspect from those of gender and number.

Evidence and Analysis: The claim that *rah-* in *rah- h-* is not an auxiliary verb is substantiated by the following key observations. First, existing studies confirm that *rahnā* is not commonly used as an auxiliary verb. Scholars have offered varying opinions on the number of auxiliary verbs in Hindi. For instance, Guru (1977) identifies 11 auxiliary verbs, Kachru (1966) lists 15, Bahl (1967) notes 16, McGregor (1977) identifies 13, Hook (1974) finds 24, and Nespital (1997) lists 47. Despite these differences, there is general agreement among these scholars regarding the most commonly used auxiliary verbs in Hindi, which include *jānā* (to go), *lenā* (to take/receive), *denā* (to give), *dālnā* (to put), *padnā* (to

fall), *uthnā* (to rise), *baithnā* (to sit), and *ānā* (to come) (Raj Bhat 2001:2). A review of this list clearly shows that *rahnā* is not among the commonly used auxiliary verbs.¹

The second point pertains to syntactic and semantic features. While all auxiliary verbs can attach to the habitual morpheme *-t-* to convey meaning, *rahnā* cannot incorporate the habitual marker *-t-*. This can be demonstrated with the following examples:

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| (1) a. Rām bhūl jā-t-ā hai. (✓)
Ram forget go-Hab-M.Sg be.Pres.3.Sg
'Ram forgets (habitually).' | (2) a. Monu hameshā glass tod de-t-ā hai. (✓)
Monu always glass break give-Hab-M.Sg be.Pres.3.Sg
'Monu always breaks the glass.' |
| b. Rām bhūl rah-t-ā hai. (✗)
Ram forget stay-Hab-M.Sg be.Pres.3.Sg | b. Monu hameshā glass tod rah-t-ā hai. (✗)
Monu always glass break stay-Hab-M.Sg be.Pres.3.Sg |

These examples clearly illustrate that *rahnā* cannot integrate with the habitual marker *-t-*, distinguishing it from other auxiliary verbs. Hook (1973:17) explains that, formally, a compound verb is composed of a main verb that appears as a stem, followed by a second element in its inflected form. This second element is referred to as an explicator, auxiliary, intensive auxiliary, or operator. As demonstrated in the examples above, when the stem of the main verb combines with *rahnā*, *rahnā* cannot take the habitual marker. Thus, it becomes challenging to recognize *rahnā* as an auxiliary verb.

Third, when modal auxiliary verbs combine with a main verb, they can take the habitual marker, whereas *rahnā*, when combined, cannot carry the habitual aspect marker. In Hindi, modal auxiliaries include *saknā* ('can'), *cuknā* ('to have already finished/completed'), and *pānā* ('to barely manage to do something') (Hook 1973: 84~93). This distinction can be observed in the following examples:

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|--|---|
| (3) a. Monu Korean bol sak-t-ā hai. (✓)
Monu Korean speak can-Hab-M.Sg be.Pres.3.Sg
'Monu can speak Korean.' | b. Monu Korean bol rah-t-ā hai. (✗)
Monu Korean speak stay-Hab-M.Sg be.Pres.3.Sg |
|--|---|

These examples clearly show that while modal auxiliaries like *saknā* can incorporate the habitual marker, *rahnā* cannot. This inability to accommodate the habitual aspect marker highlights the challenges in categorizing *rahnā* as an auxiliary verb.

Furthermore, if *rah-* in *rah- h-* were an auxiliary verb, it would, like (3a), be able to take the habitual marker, as shown in (3b). However, Olphen (1975:296) argues that forms such as *jā rahtā hai* are semantically inappropriate because they lack a meaningful connection to the progressive aspect. Building on this, this paper asserts that the issue is not only semantic but also a case of grammatical incompatibility. This dual constraint, both semantic and grammatical, suggests that classifying *rahnā* as an auxiliary verb is problematic.

Consequently, this study proposes that *rah- h-* should be understood as a construction in which the independent progressive marker *rah-* combines with the auxiliary *h-*, rather than treating *rah-* as an auxiliary verb in its own right. In other words, *rah-* is not an auxiliary of the same type as conventional auxiliaries; therefore, it should be recognized as an independent progressive marker within the Hindi aspectual system.

Refuting the Perfective Marker Hypothesis: If *-ā* is regarded as a perfective marker, it creates the misconception that *rahā* in the progressive aspect is a perfective form. Previous studies (e.g., Olphen 1975; Kellogg 1893; Masica 1991) propose *-ā* as a perfective marker, while others argue for *-y-*. This study affirms that in the progressive aspect, *rahā* is not a perfective form. Instead, *rah-* serves as the progressive marker, with *-ā* functioning as the masculine singular agreement marker.

By clarifying the role of *rah-*, this paper challenges existing analyses and proposes a refined understanding of Hindi's aspectual system, distinguishing progressive markers from auxiliary verbs and revisiting long-held assumptions about participial forms.

¹ Debasri (2008:120), in discussing the V1 (stem) + V2 structure, provides a comprehensive list of verbs that can appear as V2 in such combinations. However, *rahnā* is not included in this list.

Conclusion: This study re-evaluates the status of *rah-* in the Hindi aspectual system, providing evidence that it is a progressive aspect marker rather than an auxiliary verb. Through syntactic, semantic, and typological analyses, this paper demonstrates the limitations of categorizing *rah-* alongside conventional auxiliary verbs like *jānā* ‘to go’ or *lenā* ‘to take’, as it exhibits unique morphosyntactic constraints, particularly its incompatibility with habitual markers. Given this, *rah-* should be recognized as an independent grammatical aspect marker, occupying a distinct position within the Hindi aspectual system.

Furthermore, the analysis of *rahā* challenges the conventional interpretation of *-ā* as a perfective marker, instead arguing that it serves as a masculine singular agreement marker within the progressive construction.

By disentangling the roles of *rah-* as a progressive marker and *-ā* as a gender agreement marker, this study underscores the necessity of a more nuanced approach to the Hindi aspectual system. It highlights the importance of separating markers of aspect from those of gender and number, providing deeper insights into the typological structure of Hindi and its aspectual framework. These findings not only contribute to a better understanding of *rah-* but also invite further exploration into the complexities of Hindi verbal morphology and aspectual marking systems in related languages.

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