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Ghanshyam Sharma

# The Role of Explanatory Knowledge in Hindi Language Teaching

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**Abstract:** This paper highlights the importance for a Hindi language teacher to possess explanatory knowledge of the linguistic structures of Hindi. This applies regardless of the teaching methods they choose to employ in the classroom. While looking into various topics related to the teaching of Hindi as a second language, the paper contends that many of the findings of recent linguistic research are incorrect, unhelpful, and deceptive. To prevent confusion among students, the Hindi language teacher should strive to clearly define the content to be taught, and identify what should be avoided.

**Keywords:** Hindi teaching, explanatory knowledge, relative clauses, English modals “can” and “may”, definite and indefinite descriptions

## 1 Introduction

No matter what L2 teaching method a language teacher is fond of, a master of, an advocate for, at ease with, or confident will produce good results, there is one requirement that is most essential for the production of L2 teaching materials: an adequate level of explanatory knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of the target language. Anyone who chooses to develop L2 course materials for a target language should possess adequate knowledge of its core lexicon and grammar for explanation purposes. In the case of Hindi, for the teaching and production of comprehensive manuals, the instructor must not only have a firm grasp of the language’s grammatical fundamentals, but also be conversant with the historical and regional influences that the language has been subjected to. A Hindi instructor should be able to recognize, for instance, certain facts about the historical and regional use of Hindi, as well as the nuanced influence that English has had on the language over a long period of time, something pointed to by Snell (1990). This paper examines a few areas of English influence on standard Hindi that every Hindi instructor should be aware of. To limit the scope of the paper, our investigation will focus on three particular instances of English influence on Hindi: (i) relative-correlative constructions in Hindi; (ii) the use of the Hindi verb *saknā* (to be able to carry out an action) to render the English modals “can” and “may”; and (iii) the distinction the Hindi language makes between indefinite descriptions and definite descriptions.

## 2 Hindi relative clause constructions

Even though the historical development of Hindi relative clauses only supports the two types of constructions shown in examples (1a) and (1b) below, a significant amount of linguistic evidence, primarily from written but also from spoken sources, seems to suggest that the third construction, shown in (1c), can also represent a well-formed Hindi sentence. Indeed, in most recent syntactic analyses dealing with the relative-correlative phenomenon in Hindi, there is a prevailing view that Hindi exhibits three, rather than two, distinct types of ordering for relative-correlative clauses. These three types are illustrated by the examples (1a), (1b), and (1c). Here and below, the relative clause is highlighted in bold:

- (1) a. **[jo laṛkī bāhar baiṭhī hai]** vo  
 REL girl outside sit.PFV.F.SG AUX.PRS.SG DEM  
 dillī-mē rahtī hai  
 Delhi-in live.IPFV.F.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 ‘The girl [who is sitting outside] lives in Delhi.’
- b. vo laṛkī dillī-mē rahtī hai  
 DEM girl Delhi-in live.IPFV.F.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
**[jo bāhar baiṭhī hai]**  
 REL outside sit.PFV.F.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 ‘That girl lives in Delhi, [who is sitting outside].’
- c. vah laṛkī **[jo bāhar baiṭhī hai]**  
 DEM girl REL outside sit.PFV.F.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 dillī-mē rahtī hai  
 Delhi-in live.IPFV.F.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 ‘The girl [who is sitting outside] lives in Delhi.’

However, as there is some disagreement among Hindi language teachers regarding the construction found in (1), it is crucial for a Hindi language instructor to ascertain whether it is necessary to teach all three types of relative clauses illustrated in (1a)–(1c) or just the two types (1a) and (1b). One objective of this paper is to show that the initial two constructions should be the sole focus when teaching Hindi as a foreign language. The third type of construction in (1c) may be introduced with a caveat regarding the influence of the English language on Hindi over the last few centuries.

Recently in linguistics, there has been much emphasis on examining the syntactic elements of relative-correlative formulations in Hindi. This syntactic research has led to the conclusion that the relative clause is consistently

observed in three positions across the Hindi language. Although it is not the main objective of this study to extensively explore the impact of these efforts, it is nonetheless useful to quickly review them in order to assess how their discoveries might be utilized in the realm of Hindi language instruction.

In a recent research report, Molina-Muñoz (2021) summarizes the various proposals put forward by syntacticians for describing the phenomenon in question. She cites the examples in (2a), (2b), and (2c), which are adapted from Bhatt (2003: 488), and which she refers to as “left peripheral relative”, “right peripheral relative”, and “adnominal relative”, respectively.

(2) a. *Left peripheral relative*

<sup>RC</sup>[**jo kitab sel-par hai**] (vah) kitab acchī hai.  
 REL book sale-on be.PRS DEM book good be.PRS  
 ‘Which book is on sale, that book is good.’

b. *Right-peripheral relative*

(vah) kitab acchī hai <sup>RC</sup>[**jo sel-par hai**].  
 DEM book good be.PRS REL sale-on be.PRS  
 ‘That book is good, which is on sale.’

c. *Adnominal relative*

(vah) kitab <sup>RC</sup>[**jo sel-par hai**] acchī hai.  
 DEM book REL sale-on be.PRS good be.PRS  
 ‘That book which is on sale is good.’

(Molina-Muñoz 2021: 44; glosses and diacritics adapted for this article.)

Adnominal relatives such as those in (1c) and (2c) are considered as a recent development in Hindi, either due to language contact with Persian or English, as suggested by Chandola (1963), Puri (2011), and Snell (1990), or of internal evolution within Hindi itself, as proposed by Marlow (1994) and alluded to by Masica (1991: 402). It is a well-established fact that Sanskrit and other Middle Indo-Aryan languages lack adnominal constructions. Sanskrit scholars interpret the apparent embeddings attested in (1c) and (2c) as appositives or amplifications, as discussed by Hock (1989) and Davison (2006). In line with this, Kachru (1978) and McGregor (1972) discuss only left and right peripheral relatives in their studies on Hindi grammar. In recent decades, however, researchers specializing in Hindi grammar and language teaching (Hook 1979; McGregor 1972; Snell 1990; Montaut 2004; Kachru 2006, and others) as well as syntax (Subbarao 1974, 2012; Srivastav 1991; Dayal 1999; Bhatt 1997, 2002 2003; Mahajan 2000; McCawley 2004; Cinque 2020, among others) have conducted additional studies on Hindi relative clauses. However, in spite of the extensive research undertaken, we have yet to develop a comprehensive

understanding of the various types and patterns of relative clauses. The difficulty arises from certain theory-based studies of Hindi relative clause syntax, which have provided perplexing explanations of relative-correlative structures, leading to significant confusion.

Srivastav (1991: 642) provides a systematic syntactic treatment of the three forms of relative-correlative joining, which she refers to as left-adjoined, right-adjoined, and embedded relatives, as illustrated, respectively, in (3a), (3b), and (3c).

- (3) a. **[jo laṛkī khaṛī hai]** vo lambī hai. (Left-adjoined)  
REL girl standing is DEM tall is
- b. vo laṛkī lambī hai **[jo khaṛī hai]**. (Right-adjoined)  
DEM girl tall is REL standing is
- c. vo laṛkī **[jo khaṛī hai]** lambī hai. (Embedded)  
DEM girl REL standing is tall is

The girl who is standing is tall.

(Srivastav 1991: 642; glosses and diacritics adapted for this article.)

Although the majority of both Hindi syntacticians and grammarians (Hook 1979; Srivastav 1991; Mahajan 2000, 2018; Bhatt 2003; Montaut 2004; Kachru 2006, among others) agree unequivocally that the embedded or adnominal relative clause – as demonstrated in (1c), (2c) and (3c) – does indeed exist in Hindi, there has been a lack of syntactic research to determine whether this type of relative clause adjoining is a syntactically valid and historically attested construction (with Marlow (1994) and Puri (2011) being two exceptions). Regrettably, most of the syntactic research is theory-oriented and supported by the author’s self-assessed examples. Among the various proposals regarding Hindi relative clauses, Mahajan’s (2000) is the most problematic, since it refers to adnominal relatives as “normal” relatives, as illustrated in (4a).

- (4) a. *Normal*  
mujhe vo ādmī **jo sītā-ko acchā lagtā hai**  
I-DAT DEM man REL Sita.DAT nice seem.IPFV be.PRS  
pasand nahī hai.  
like not be.PRS  
‘I don’t like the man who Sita likes.’
- b. *Postposed*  
mujhe vo ādmī pasand nahī hai  
I-DAT DEM man like not be.PRS

**jo sītā-ko acchā lagtā hai.**  
 REL Sita.DAT nice seem.IPFV be.PRS  
 ‘I don’t like the man who Sita likes.’

c. *Preposed*

**jo sītā-ko acchā lagtā hai**  
 REL Sita.DAT nice seem.IPFV be.PRS  
 mujhe vo ādmī pasand nahī hai.  
 I-DAT DEM man like not be.PRS  
 ‘I don’t like the man who Sita likes.’

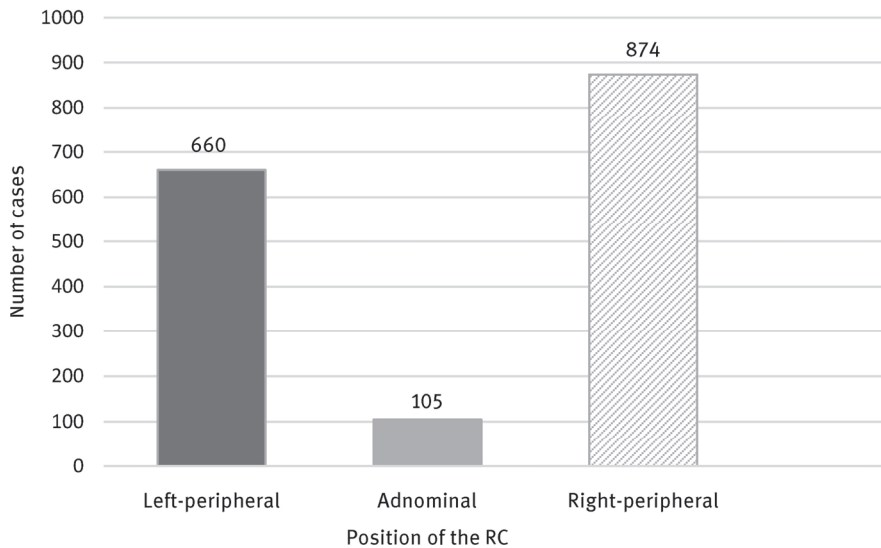
(Mahajan 2000: 203; glosses and diacritics adapted for this article.)

It is important to note that Mahajan (2000) considers the adnominal clause to be a normal clause, more prevalent than the two other types. Mahajan aims to present a unified mechanism that will, he hopes, account for all the relative clause strategies utilized cross-linguistically, and thus offer some generalizations to pave the way towards a universal grammar. However, his self-assessed examples from Hindi lack empirical verification. Although Mahajan’s (2000) rigorous syntactic analysis is beyond the purview of this paper, we will nonetheless endeavour to offer some arguments against it in the subsections below. The following four elements will be the focus of our endeavour: (i) the frequency of adnominal clauses in a corpus study; (ii) an acceptability judgment test (AJT) of adnominal relatives; (iii) evidence from Hindi relative-correlative adverbials; and (iv) the frequency with which adnominal relative clauses occur in some selected written texts.

## 2.1 The frequency of adnominal clauses according to a corpus study

We dispute the conclusions made by Mahajan (2000: 203) regarding the adnominal relative, which he refers to as the “normal” relative construction. Our assertion draws on an extensive analysis of Hindi relative clauses undertaken by Molina-Muñoz (2021). Molina-Muñoz’s research program extracted all sentences with a relative clause from a sample of 353 texts in various genres (1,025,411 words in total) in the EMILLE/CIIL monolingual written Hindi Corpus. This corpus includes news websites, educational and fictional literature, administrative and legislative documents, and science and arts articles. The extraction was conducted using Python. Since the EMILLE/CIIL corpus is not annotated, annotation was performed manually, and verified by three Hindi native speakers. A total of 2,000 sentences were annotated, each containing at least one finite relative clause featuring the relative pronoun *jo* or its oblique

forms *jis* (singular), *jin* (plural), and *jinhōne* (when followed by the ergative case marker *-ne*). Figure 1 illustrates the distribution within the corpus of the various linearization possibilities.



**Figure 1:** Linearization patterns of RCs in the Hindi corpus (adapted from Molina-Muñoz 2021)

Molina-Muñoz’s research reveals that out of the total number of instances of relative clause adjoining, 874 (54%) were located at the right periphery, and 660 (2/5) at the left periphery, while a mere 105 (6%) were adnominal. These results clearly highlight two issues. Firstly, we need to acknowledge the limited appearance of the adnominal relative clause in Hindi. This means that Mahajan’s claim is wrong when he says that the adnominal clause is the “standard” or “normal” construction in Hindi. Secondly, it is notable that the quantity of right-peripheral relative clauses exceeds that of left-peripheral relative clauses. We find this surprising. While an in-depth analysis is necessary to understand Molina-Muñoz’s criteria for defining the right-peripheral relative clause in Hindi, our suspicion is that the author may have failed to differentiate between a true right-peripheral, which fronts the main clause for focus and posts the relative clause as a right-peripheral clause, and a pseudo-right-peripheral, which adds a relative clause to provide additional information about the head noun (see example (13) below). Despite Mahajan’s claim (and Molina-Muñoz’s results), we believe that the left-peripheral relative clause is the “basic”, “typical”, or “natural” relative clause adjoining in Hindi.

## 2.2 The acceptability judgment test (AJT) for adnominal clauses with oblique head nouns

Most of the syntactic studies on the placement of the Hindi relative clause have concentrated on simple sentences in which a relative pronoun is followed by the head noun in the direct or nominative case. We believe that it is not possible to derive syntactic generalizations on the basis of such incomplete Hindi data. To examine the level of acceptability of the third sort of adjoining, known as the adnominal clause, we conducted a survey among 10 native Hindi speakers from different Hindi dialectal regions.<sup>1</sup> Eight carefully prepared samples were used, and the poll was conducted through Zoom meetings. The Hindi speakers were given a written text with the eight linguistic samples and their corresponding variations. We then asked them to assess each sample using the acceptability test, and assign them a numerical ranking ranging from 1 to 5, according to their individual preferences. The samples included relative-correlative pronominals preceding a head-noun in various oblique cases, due to the presence of following postpositions. This contrasts to the direct or nominative case, the main focus of most syntactic studies so far. The study yielded unexpected results: while the native speakers completely supported the inclusion of both left-peripheral and right-peripheral relative clauses, none totally approved of the inclusion of the third type, the adnominal relative clause. Although our native speakers had come across sentences with the adnominal relative clause and deemed it somewhat acceptable or comprehensible, they all saw the third type as an artificial variation of the left-peripheral clause adjoining. Each variation in the following samples is marked at the left with the score from the Acceptability Judgment Test (AJT):

- (5) In the four Hindi renderings of the English Sample 1 below, the Hindi head noun *larkī* ‘girl’ is a grammatical object rather than the agent of the verb *pyār karnā* ‘to love’, which necessitates the postpositional marker *se* ‘from’.

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<sup>1</sup> The online survey was administered in 2023 using the messaging applications Whatsapp, Skype, and ZOOM. Numerous Hindi native speakers, including friends and former coworkers, willingly agreed to take part in the study. For the purpose of this study, replies from ten informants were included. These individuals are: Brijesh Sharma (Gwalior, MP), Mohan Soni (Jaipur), Pushpendra Sharma (Ajmer, Rajasthan), Lalit Kishor Shukla (Pratapgarh, UP), Vrishabha Prasad Jain (Aliganj, UP), Yadunandan Sharma (Agra, UP), Ashwini Kumar Srivastava (Agra, UP), Brijendra Tripathi (New Delhi), Bharat Singh (Delhi), Satvir Singh (Agra, UP).



**Sample 1:** *He is also in love with the girl you love.*


---

**AJT** a. **jis laṛkī-se tum pyār karte ho**  
**5/5** which girl-from you love do.IPFV.M.PL AUX.2PL  
 usī laṛkī-se vah bhī pyār kartā hai.  
 that very girl-from he also love DO.IPFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 Literally: ‘Which girl you love, he also loves that very girl.’

---

**AJT** b. vah bhī usī laṛkī-se pyār kartā hai  
**5/5** he also that very girl-from love do.IPFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
**jis laṛkī-se tum pyār karte ho.**  
 which girl-from you love do.IPFV.M.PL AUX.2PL  
 Literally: ‘He too loves that very girl which (girl) you love.’

---

**AJT** c<sub>1</sub>. usī laṛkī-se **jis-se tum pyār karte**  
**2.5/5** that very girl-from which-from you love do.IPFV.M.PL  
**ho,** vah bhī pyār kartā hai.  
 AUX.2PL he also love do.IPFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 Literally: ‘The same girl whom you love, he too loves.’

---

**AJT** c<sub>2</sub>. vah laṛkī **jis-se tum pyār karte ho**  
**1.5/5** that girl which-from you love do.IPFV.M.PL AUX.2PL  
 usī laṛkī-se vah bhī pyār kartā hai.  
 that very girl-from he also love do.IPFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 Literally: ‘That girl whom you love, he too loves the same girl.’

---

To assess the acceptability of adnominal clause adjoining, we presented two variants of this construction to the native speakers, rather than just one. As we can see, both (5c<sub>1</sub>) and (5c<sub>2</sub>) were ranked very low on the acceptance scale. Both variants open with the demonstrative *vah* ‘that’ (or its oblique form *us* combined with the emphatic particle *hī* = *usī* ‘that very’) and the head noun *laṛkī* ‘girl’ of the correlative clause, followed by the relative clause (in bold). However, in the first version, the construct *vah laṛkī* ‘that girl’ lacks the required postposition, whereas in the second version, the construct *usī laṛkī* ‘that very girl’ is in the oblique case due to the postposition *se*, with the literal meaning ‘from’. The acceptance rates for version c<sub>1</sub> and version c<sub>2</sub> were 2.5/5 and 1.5/5, respectively. The c<sub>2</sub> version was placed lowest on the acceptability scale due to the fact the first part of the sentence lacks the emphatic particle *hī* ‘that very’. In fact, the emphatic particle is displaced from its natural place and is found in the second part of the sentence.

- (6) The head noun in the in Sample 2 is case-marked in the relative clause by the Hindi postposition *par*, which means ‘on’, and in the correlative or main clause by the case marker *ke nīce*, which means ‘beneath’.

**Sample 2:** *The book with the pen on it will have my passport below it.*

---

AJT 5/5 a. **jis kitab-par pen rakhā hai**  
 which book-on pen put.PFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 us-ke-nīce merā pās’port hogā.  
 that-of-under my passport be.FUT.M.SG  
 Literally: ‘On which book my pen is placed, my passport will be underneath that book.’

---

AJT 5/5 b. us kitab-ke-nīce merā pās’port hogā  
 that book-of-under my passport be.FUT.M.SG  
**jis-par pen rakhā hai.**  
 which-on pen put.PFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 Literally: ‘My passport will be underneath that book on which there is a pen.’

---

AJT 0.5/5 c<sub>1</sub>. us kitab-ke-nīce **jis-par pen rakhā hai**  
 that book-of-under which-on pen put.PFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 us-ke nīce merā pās’port hogā.  
 that-underneath my passport be.FUT.M.SG  
 Literally: ‘Underneath the book on which the pen is placed, underneath that book should be my passport.’

---

AJT 0.5/5 c<sub>2</sub>. vah kitāb **jis-par pen rakhā hai**  
 that book which-on pen put.PFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 us-ke-nīce merā pās’port hogā.  
 that-of-under my passport be.FUT.M.SG  
 Literally: ‘The book on which the pen is placed, underneath that (book) there will be my passport.’

---

Both variants in (6), c<sub>1</sub> and c<sub>2</sub>, receive a rating of 0.5/5. There is repetition of the postposition *ke nīce* ‘underneath’ in (6c<sub>1</sub>), while in (6c<sub>2</sub>) it is missing from the first part of the sentence.

- (7) In Sample 3, the head noun *larke* ‘boys’ is marked with a dative case marker *ko* ‘to’. The head noun is thus in the oblique form in both the relative and the correlative clauses.

**Sample 3:** *Those who are afraid of lions should not go to the circus.*

---

**AJT** a. **jin-ko** **śerō-se** **ḍar** **lagtā** **hai**  
**5/5** who-DAT lions-from fear to-be felt.IPFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 un-ko sarkas nahī jānā cāhie.  
 those-DAT circus NEG go should  
 Literally: ‘Who have fear of lions, they shouldn’t go to circus.’

---

**AJT** b. un-ko sarkas nahī jānā cāhie  
**5/5** those-DAT circus NEG go should  
**jin-ko** **śerō-se** **ḍar** **lagtā** **hai.**  
 who-DAT lions-from fear to-be felt.IPFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 Literally: ‘Those shouldn’t go to circus who have fear of lions.’

---

**AJT** c<sub>1</sub>. un-ko **jin-ko** **śerō-se** **ḍar** **lag’tā**  
**1/5** those-DAT who-DAT lions-from fear to-be felt.IPFV.M.SG  
**hai,** sarkas nahī jānā cāhie.  
 AUX.PRS.3SG circus NEG go should  
 Literally: ‘Those who have fear of lions shouldn’t go to circus.’

---

**AJT** c<sub>2</sub>. ve **jin-ko** **śerō-se** **ḍar** **lag’tā**  
**0.5/5** those who-DAT lions-from fear to-be felt.IPFV.M.SG  
**hai,** un-ko sar’kas nahī jānā cāhie.  
 AUX.PRS.3SG those-DAT circus NEG go should  
 Literally: ‘Those who have fear of lions, they shouldn’t go to circus.’

---

- (8) In Sample 4, the pronominal head in both the relative and correlative clauses is followed by the same dative case marker *ko*, albeit for different reasons. In the relative clause, the postposition adds the sense of “to have”, while in the correlative clause the case marker adds the sense the sense of prohibition “should not”:

**Sample 4:** *Those who have a fever should not go out.*

---

AJT 5/5 a. **jīn-ko bukhār ho** un-ko bāhar nahī  
 whom-to fever be.SBJV.3SG they-to outside NEG  
 jānā cāhie.  
 go should  
 Literally: ‘Whoever has a fever, they should not go outside.’

---

AJT 5/5 b. un-ko bāhar nahī jānā cāhie **jīn-ko**  
 them-to outside NEG go should whom-to  
**bukhār ho.**  
 fever be.SBJV.3SG  
 Literally: ‘Those should not go outside who have a fever.’

---

AJT 0.5/5 c<sub>1</sub>. un-ko **jīn-ko bukhār ho,** bāhar nahī  
 they-to whom-to fever be.SBJV.3SG outside NEG  
 jānā cāhie.  
 go should  
 Literally: ‘Those who have a fever, (they) shouldn’t go outside.’

---

AJT 0.5/5 c<sub>2</sub>. ve **jīn-ko bukhār ho** un-ko bāhar nahī  
 they whom-to fever be.SBJV.3SG they-to outside NEG  
 jānā cāhie.  
 go should  
 Literally: ‘Those who have a fever, they should not go outside.’

---

(9) In Sample 5, the oblique head noun *laṛke*, from *laṛkā* ‘boy’, in both the relative and correlative clauses is followed by the same genitive case marker *kā* ‘of’.

**Sample 5:** *The sister of the boy whose name is Gopal studies Hindi.*

---

AJT 5/5 a. [**jis laṛke-kā nām gopāl hai**]  
 which boy’s name Gopal be.PRS.3SG  
 us-kī bahin hindī paṛhtī hai.  
 whose sister Hindi study.IPFV.F.3SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 Literally: ‘Which boy’s name is Gopal, his sister studies Hindi.’

---

**AJT** b. us laṛke-kī bahin hindī paṛhtī hai  
**5/5** that boy's sister Hindi study.IPFV.F.3SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
**jis-kā nām gopāl hai.**  
 whose name Gopal be.PRS.3SG  
 Literally: 'That boy's sister studies Hindi whose name is Gopal.'

---

**AJT** c<sub>1</sub>. us laṛke-kī bahin **jis-kā nām gopāl hai,**  
**1/5** that boy's sister whose name Gopal be.PRS.3SG  
 hindī paṛhtī hai.  
 Hindi study.IPFV.F.3SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 Literally: 'That boy's sister, (that boy) whose name is Gopal, studies Hindi.'

---

**AJT** c<sub>2</sub>. vah laṛkā **jis-kā nām gopāl hai**  
**0.5/5** that boy's whose name Gopal be.PRS.3SG  
 us-kī bahin hindī paṛhtī hai.  
 whose sister Hindi study.IPFV.F.3SG AUX.PRS.3SG  
 Literally: 'That boy, whose name is Gopal, his sister studies Hindi.'

---

(10) In Sample 6, the head noun *thailā* 'bag', in the relative clause, is marked by the postposition *mē* 'in' to indicate the ablative case, while it is marked by the postposition *ko* to indicate the accusative case in the correlative or main clause.

**Sample 6:** *Put the bag containing the books on the table in the big room.*

---

**AJT** a. **jis thailē-mē kitābē hō**  
**5/5** which bag-in books be-SBJV.PL  
 us-ko baṛe kamare-kī mez-par rakh-denā.  
 that-ACC big room-GEN table-on put-give.IMP  
 Literally: 'In which bag there are books, (you will) put that on the table in the big room.'

---

**AJT** b. us thailē-ko baṛe kamre-kī mez-par  
**4/5** that bag-ACC big room-GEN table-on  
 rakh-denā **jis-mē kitābē hō.**  
 put-give.IMP which-in books be-SBJV.PL  
 Literally: '(You will) put that bag on the table in the big room in which (bag) there are books.'

---

**AJT** c<sub>2</sub>. us thaile-ko **jis-mē kitābē hō,**  
**1/5** that bag-ACC which-in books be-SBJV.PL  
 baṛe kamre-kī mez-par rakh-denā.  
 big room-GEN table-on put-give.IMP  
 Literally: 'That one bag in which bag there are books, (you will)  
 put (that) on the table in the big room.'

---

**AJT** c<sub>1</sub>. vah thailā **jis-mē kitābē hō,**  
**0.5/5** that bag which-in books be-SBJV.PL  
 us-ko baṛe kamre-kī mez-par rakh-denā.  
 that-ACC big room-GEN table-on put-give.IMP  
 Literally: 'The bag in which there are books, (you will) put that  
 (bag) on the table in the big room.'

---

(11) In the relative clause in Sample 7, the head noun *kār* 'car' is followed by the postposition *se* 'by', which indicates instrumental case. In the correlative or main clause, it is followed by the genitive case marker *kā* 'of'.

**Sample 7:** *The window of the car in which I went to Delhi was broken.*

---

**AJT** a. **jis kār-se maī dillī gayā**  
**5/5** which car-by I Delhi go.PFV.M.SG  
 us-kī khiṛkī ṭūṭī thī.  
 that-of window broken be.PST.F.SG  
 Literally: 'By which car I went to Delhi, that (car)'s window was broken.'

---

**AJT** b. us kār-kī khiṛkī ṭūṭī thī  
**5/5** that car-of window broken be.PST.F.SG  
**jis-se maī dillī gayā.**  
 which-by I Delhi go.PFV.M.SG  
 Literally: 'That car's window was broken by which I went to Delhi.'

---

**AJT** c<sub>1</sub>. us kār-kī **jis-se maī dillī gayā,**  
**1/5** that car-of which-by I Delhi go.PFV.M.SG  
 khiṛkī ṭūṭī thī.  
 window broken be.PST.F.SG  
 Literally: 'That car, by which I went to Delhi, (that car)'s window was broken.'

---

<b>AJT</b>	c <sub>2</sub> .	vah kār jis-se maĩ dillī gayā
<b>0.5/5</b>		that car which-by I Delhi go.PFV.M.SG us-kī khīrkī ṭūṭī thī. that-of window broken be.PST.F.SG Literally: 'That car, by which I went to Delhi, that (car)'s window was broken.'

---

- (12) In the relative clause in Sample 8, the head noun *kuā* 'well' is followed by the genitive case marker *kā* 'of', whereas in the correlative clause, it is followed by the locative case marker *mē* 'in'.

**Sample 8:** *A cat has died in the well whose water is sweet.*

---

<b>AJT</b>	a.	jis kuē-kā pānī mīṭhā hai
<b>5/5</b>		which well-of water sweet be-PRS.3SG us-mē billī mar-gayī hai. that-in cat die-go-PFV.F.SG AUX-PRS.3SG Literally: 'Which well's water is sweet, in that a cat has died.'

---

<b>AJT</b>	b.	us kuē-mē billī mar-gayī hai
<b>5/5</b>		that well-in cat die-go-PFV.F.3SG AUX-PRS.3SG <b>jis-kā pānī mīṭhā hai.</b> which-of water sweet be-PRS.3SG Literally: 'In that well a cat has died whose water is sweet.'

---

<b>AJT</b>	c <sub>1</sub> .	us kuē-mē jis-kā pānī mīṭhā hai
<b>1.5/5</b>		that well-in which-of water sweet be-PRS.3SG billī mar-gayī hai. cat die-go-PFV.F.SG AUX-PRS.3SG Literally: 'In that well, whose water is sweet, a cat has died.'

---

<b>AJT</b>	c <sub>2</sub> .	vah kuā jis-kā pānī mīṭhā hai
<b>0.5/5</b>		that well which-of water sweet be-PRS.3SG us-mē billī mar-gayī hai. that-in cat die-go-PFV.F.SG AUX-PRS.3SG Literally: 'That well, whose water is sweet, a cat has died in that well.'

---

A summary of the acceptability judgment test for relative clause juxtaposition based on the study of the Hindi data above is provided in Table 1 below:

**Table 1:** Summary of acceptability judgment test of relative clause adjoining

Dataset	Sample	Left-adjoined	Right-adjoined	Embedded-1	Embedded-2
(5)	1	5/5	5/5	2.5/5	1.5/5
(6)	2	5/5	5/5	0.5/5	0.5/5
(7)	3	5/5	5/5	1/5	0.5/5
(8)	4	5/5	5/5	0.5/5	0.5/5
(9)	5	5/5	5/5	1/5	0.5/5
(10)	6	5/5	5/5	1/5	0.5/5
(11)	7	5/5	5/5	1/5	0.5/5
(12)	8	5/5	5/5	1.5/5	0.5/5

The survey results presented in Table 1 provide new opportunities for further research. We believe that a more thorough, non-theoretical examination of the data will surely yield unexpected findings. From our first observation, we can derive some fundamental language generalizations. First, repetition of the same case-marked element within a single sentence is against language universals. Secondly, Hindi syntax mandates that the head noun be case-marked consistently in both relative and correlative clauses. Thirdly, where necessary, the head noun should be appropriately case-marked and located on the left periphery.

As the survey results above show, the adnominal relative in samples 1–8 has a very low acceptability rate (between 0.5 and 2.5 for the first type of relative clause embedding and between 0.5 and 1.5/5 for the second type of relative clause embedding). This is different from what Mahajan (2000) said. This is not to say that Hindi does not allow for adnominal relative clause adjoining. Such constructions have emerged as a result of English’s influence on Hindi. In fact, it is not difficult to find examples such as (13) in the Hindi press and elsewhere.

(13) *Post nominal*

pāl-ke paṛosī jo imārat-kī dūsri manjil-par  
 Paul-of neighbor REL building-of second floor-on  
**rahte the ne bhī 2008-se**  
 live.IPFV.M.PL AUX.PST.M.PL ERG also 2008-since  
 basantī-ko kām-par rakhā thā  
 Basanti-ACC work-on keep-PFV.M.SG AUX.PST.M.SG



‘Paul’s neighbour, who lived on the second floor of the building, had also employed Basanti since 2008.’<sup>2</sup>

Such usages present substantial challenges, as they deviate from the inherent grammatical structure of the Hindi language. It is evident that in sentence (13), the ergative case marker is displaced from its original location following the word *parosī*, meaning “neighbour”. Based on our survey data, it may be concluded that, the claim of modern syntacticians notwithstanding, the embedding of relative clauses or adnominal relative clauses is not completely acceptable in Hindi. It certainly cannot be regarded as the “normal” relative clause adjoining, as proposed by Mahajan (2000). Therefore, we fully support the following suggestion made by Hook (1979) to Hindi language teachers about 40 years ago:

The student may feel that putting the relative clause inside the co-relative this way is simpler or more natural than the first two alternatives, possibly because the relative clause is most frequently found there in English. Although relative clause in the middle is a valid option in Hindi, it is best for the learner to consciously avoid it until he is completely accustomed to the other two more common patterns. (Hook 1979: 10).

### 2.3 Hindi relative-correlative adjective and adverbials

Hindi adverbials may also exhibit the three-way relative clause adjoining that we have previously described for Hindi relative-correlative pronominals. This section will look at one pronominal adjective, *jaisā* ‘of such a sort as’, and a few Hindi adverbial structures that show the same relative-correlative pattern as the demonstrative pronominals already discussed. This will enable us to determine whether the third type of adnominal relative clause adjoining is appropriate in sentences containing adverbials. These adverbial constructs can include manner adverbs, place adverbs, time adverbs, direction adverbs, or quantity adverbs, among others.

As in the case of the relative clauses, we conducted a survey using a questionnaire to assess the acceptability judgment test of the three different types of relative clause adjoining. Again, this study involved a sample of 10 Hindi speakers from diverse Hindi-speaking regions, each of whom spoke a distinct dialect of Hindi as their first language. Each speaker was questioned about their criteria for evaluating the three variations of sentences containing

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<sup>2</sup> [https://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/metro/delhi/crime/how-a-house-help-of-24-years-basanti-caused-a-very-painful-death-to-dr-paul-in-delhi/articleshow/110070683.cms?utm\\_source=homepage&utm\\_medium=first-story](https://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/metro/delhi/crime/how-a-house-help-of-24-years-basanti-caused-a-very-painful-death-to-dr-paul-in-delhi/articleshow/110070683.cms?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=first-story)

relative-correlative adverbials. All informants regarded the third variant as conveying a meaning similar to the sentences that included a left-peripheral relative clause with an adverbial. Everyone doubted its grammaticality.

As we can see from the example sets in (14)–(19), although adverbials also exhibit similar patterns of relative-correlative pronouns and adjectives, there is a significant difference between the two cases. For example, while the datasets involving relative-correlative pronominals require the head-noun to be present on the left, the relative-correlative constructions with adverbials do not show any such obligation. However, as with the examples involving relative-correlative pronouns, the relative-correlative constructions involving adverbials also confirm the low rate of acceptance of the third type of construction outlined in previous sections.

- (14) A relative-correlative construction containing the Hindi adjectival adverb *jaisā*, meaning “of such a sort as”:

*I have also bought the same shirt as you did yesterday.*

---

AJT 5/5	a.	<b>jaisī</b>	<b>kamīz</b>	<b>āp-ne</b>	<b>kal</b>	<b>kharidī</b>	
		of-which-sort	shirt.F.SG	you-ERG	yesterday	buy.IPFV.F.SG	
		<b>vaisī</b>	<b>maīne-bhi</b>	<b>kharidī</b>	<b>hai</b>		
		of-that-sort	I.ERG-also	buy.PFV.F.SG	be.PRS.SG		
		Literally: ‘Which type of shirt you bought yesterday, I have also bought the same type.’					

---

AJT 4/5	b.	<b>vaisī</b>	<b>kamīz</b>	<b>maīne-bhi</b>	<b>kharidī</b>	<b>hai</b>	
		of-that-sort	shirt.F.SG	I.ERG-also	buy.PFV.F.SG	be.PRS.SG	
		<b>jaisī</b>	<b>āp-ne</b>	<b>kal</b>	<b>kharidī</b>		
		of-which-sort	you-ERG	yesterday	buy.IPFV.F.SG		
		Literally: ‘I have also bought the same type of shirt (what type) you bought yesterday.’					

---

AJT 1.5/5	c.	<b>vaisī</b>	<b>kamīz</b>	<b>jaisī</b>	<b>āp-ne</b>	<b>kal</b>	
		of-that-sort	shirt.F.SG	of-which-sort	you-ERG	yesterday	
		<b>kharidī</b>	<b>maīne</b>	<b>bhī</b>	<b>kharidī</b>	<b>hai</b>	
		buy.IPFV.F.SG	I.ERG	also	buy.PFV.F.SG	be.PRS.SG	
		Literally: ‘Which type of shirt you bought yesterday, I too have bought (the same type).’					

---

- (15) A relative-correlative construction containing the Hindi adverbial of place *jahā̃*, meaning ‘in/at the place where’:

*Is there a shop where you live?*

---

AJT a. kyā **jahā̃ āp rahte hai** vahā̃ koi dukān hai?  
5/5 QM where you live AUX.PRS there any shop be.PRS  
Literally: ‘Where you live, is there a shop over there?’

---

AJT b. kyā vahā̃ koi dukān hai **jahā̃ āp rahte hai?**  
5/5 QM there any shop be.PRS where you live AUX.PRS  
Literally: ‘Is there a shop over there where you live?’

---

AJT c. kyā vahā̃ **jahā̃ āp rahte hai** koi dukān hai?  
2.5/5 QM there where you live AUX.PRS any shop be.PRS  
Literally: ‘Where there you live is there a shop over there?’

---

- (16) A relative-correlative construction containing the Hindi manner adverbial *jaise*, meaning ‘in the way in which’:

*No one can run like he does.*

---

AJT a. **jaise vo daurṭā hai**  
5/5 in-which-manner he run.IPFV.M.SG AUX  
vaise koi nahī̃ daur pātā  
in-that-manner someone NEG run can.IPFV.M.SG  
Literally: ‘The manner in which he runs, no one can run in that manner.’

---

AJT b. vase koi nahī̃ daur pātā  
4.5/5 in-that-manner someone NEG run can.IPFV.M.SG  
**jaise vo daurṭā hai**  
in-which-manner he run.IPFV.M.SG AUX  
Literally: ‘No one can run in the manner in which he runs.’

---

AJT c. vase **jaise vo daurṭā hai**  
1.5/5 in-that-manner in-which-manner he run.IPFV.M.SG AUX  
koi nahī̃ daur pātā  
someone NEG run can.IPFV.M.SG  
Literally: ‘In the manner in which manner he runs, no one is able to run.’

---

- (17) A relative-correlative construction containing the Hindi time adverbial *jab*, meaning ‘at the time when’:

*When she reached home the children were asleep.*

---

AJT a. **jab vo ghar pahūcī tab**  
 5/5 when she home arrive.PFV then  
 bacce so rahe the  
 children sleep PROG.M.PL AUX.PST.M.PL  
 Literally: ‘At what time she reached home, at that time the children were asleep.’

---

AJT b. tab bacce so rahe the  
 4.5/5 then children sleep PROG.M.PL AUX.PST.M.PL  
**jab vo ghar pahūcī**  
 when she home arrive.PFV  
 Literally: ‘At that time the children were asleep when (at what time) she reached home.’

---

AJT c. tab **jab vo ghar pahūcī**  
 1.5/5 then when she home arrive.PFV  
 bacce so rahe the  
 children sleep PROG.M.PL AUX.PST.M.PL  
 Literally: ‘At that time when (at what time) she reached home, the children were asleep.’

- (18) A relative-correlative construction containing the Hindi adverbials of direction *jidhar* meaning ‘in which(ever) direction’ or “whither(soever):

*Mira is going in the same direction as Gopal.*  
 (In whichever direction Gopal is going, Mira is going in that very direction.)

---

AJT a. **jidhar gopāl jā rahā hai**  
 5/5 which-direction Gopal go PROG.M.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 udhar-hī mirā-bhī jā rahī hai  
 that-direction-EMP Mira-also go PROG.M.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 Literally: ‘In what direction Gopal is going, Mira too is going in that same direction.’

---

**AJT** b. udhar-hī                      mīrā-bhī jā rahī                      hai  
**3.5/5**                      which-direction-EMP Mira-also go PROG.F.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
**jidhar**                                      **gopāl jā rahā**                      **hai**  
 that-direction-EMP Gopal go PROG.M.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 Literally: 'In that very direction Mira too is going, in which direction Gopal is going.'

---

**AJT** c. udhar-hī                                      **jidhar**                                      **gopāl jā rahā**  
**1.5/5**                      which-direction-EMP that-direction-EMP Gopal go PROG.M.SG  
**hai**                      mīrā-bhī jā rahī                      hai  
 AUX.PRS.SG Mira-also go PROG.F.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 Literally: 'In that direction in which direction Gopal is going, Mira too is going.'

---

(19) A relative-correlative construction containing the Hindi quantity adverbial *jītnā*, meaning 'as much as' or 'however much':

*No one can drink as much beer as he does.*

---

**AJT** a. **jītnā**                      **biyar vo pītā**                                      **hai**  
**5/5**                      how-much beer he drink-IPFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 utnā                      koī                      nahī pī                      pātā  
 that-much someone NEG drink can.IPFV.M.SG  
 Literally: 'However much beer he drinks that much beer no one can drink.'

---

**AJT** b. utnā                      biyar koī                      nahī pī                      pātā  
**4.5/5**                      that-much beer someone NEG drink can.IPFV.M.SG  
**jītnā**                      **vo pītā**                                      **hai**  
 how-much he drink-IPFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 Literally: 'That much beer no one can drink how much beer he drinks.'

---

**AJT** c. utnā                      biyar **jītnā**                      **vo pītā**                                      **hai**  
**1/5**                      that-much beer how-much he drink-IPFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.SG  
 koī                      nahī pī                      pātā  
 someone NEG drink can.IPFV.M.SG  
 Literally: 'The quantity of beer he drinks no one can drink that much.'

---

As the datasets (14) through (19) demonstrate, the first type of relative clause adjoining is fully acceptable, while the third type of relative clause adjoining has the lowest acceptability: between 1/5 and 2.5/5. In datasets (15), (16) and (18), the fronting correlative adverbial is unnecessary or redundant, making the sentences grammatically unacceptable or odd. We can summarize the acceptability rate of the three types of relative adverbial clause adjoining as in Table 2:

**Table 2:** Summary of acceptability judgment test of relative adverbial clause adjoining

Example Sets	Left-adjoined adverbial clause	Right-adjoined adverbial clause	Embedded adverbial clause
(14)	5/5	4/5	1.5/5
(15)	5/5	5/5	2.5/5
(16)	5/5	4.5/5	1.5/5
(17)	5/5	4.5/5	1.5/5
(18)	5/5	3.5/5	1.5/5
(19)	5/5	4.5/5	1/5

## 2.4 Evidence from some Hindi literary works

As part of our examination of the frequency of adnominal clauses in written literature, we examined two notable Hindi novels, *Godān* by Premchand and *Apne-apne ajanabī* by Agyeya, and the oldest Hindi story, entitled *Rānī Ketkī kī Kahānī*, by Insha Allah Khan (Dalvi 1974). The examination focused on the two contemporary authors, who were selected for their distinctive writing styles, in order to analyse the frequency of adnominal adjoining of relative clauses in their respective novels. The first author exhibits a pronounced preference for creating literary works that are heavily influenced by Urdu writing, while the second author, who is remarkably skilled in English, tends to generate literary works that strongly reflect the style of Sanskritized Hindi. Despite the fact that both authors appear to exhibit the adnominal relative clause adjoining, albeit not frequently, the occurrences of these pseudo-adjoined relative clauses were extremely rare, and were not exclusively the type of constructions we are currently discussing. We consider one such example from Premchand in (20):

- (20) *vah jo khaddara kā kurtā aur cappala pahne hue hāĩ, unkā nām paṇḍit omkārñāth hai.*<sup>3</sup>  
 ‘The one, who is wearing a khadi kurta and slippers, his name is Pandit Omkarnath.’ [Literal translation mine]

We call this example pseudo-adnominal, since the sentence can stand without the correlative pronominal *vah* ‘he’, making it an example of left-peripheral adjoining rather than of an adnominal clause. The same is true of the example from Agyeya in (21):

- (21) *ek anthĩn, parivartanhĩn dhūdhli rośñĩ, jo na dīn kī hai, na rāt kī hai, na sandhyā ke kisĩ kṣaṇ kī hĩ hai – ek apārthiv rośñĩ jo kī śāyad rośñĩ bhĩ nahĩ hai; itñā hĩ kī use andh’kār nahĩ kahā jā sak’tā.*<sup>4</sup>  
 ‘An endless, changeless dim light, which is neither of the day nor of the night nor of any moment of the evening – an unearthly light which perhaps is not even light; only so much so that it cannot be called darkness.’ [Translation mine]

Similarly, we found no occurrence of adnominal or embedded clause adjacency in the oldest Hindi story, *Rāñĩ Ketkĩ kī Kahāñĩ* by Insha Allah Khan. We concur entirely with Puri’s assertion (2011: 266) that there is a lack of historical written evidence in Hindi to substantiate the occurrence of central (or embedded or adnominal) relative clause adjoining in the language. In addition, neither of the major Hindi dialects such as Braj or Awadhi exhibits this structure. Thus, the presence of embedded or adnominal relative clauses in Hindi can evidently be attributed to the impact of English on the Hindi language.

### 3 Influence of the English modal “can” on Hindi

As a prelude to this section of the paper, I would like to provide a brief account of a personal experience of mine from 2009. Oxford University Press commissioned me to evaluate a preliminary version of an English-to-Hindi database prior to the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi. A comprehensive collection of expressions deemed essential for communicating with Hindi-speaking Indians was included in this database. The publisher’s intention was to distribute the database in both printed and online formats. The database was designed to

<sup>3</sup> वह जो खदर का कुरता और चप्पल पहने हुए हैं, उनका नाम पंडित ओंकारनाथ है। Premchand (1988: 53).

<sup>4</sup> एक अन्तहीन, परिवर्तनहीन धुंधली रोशनी, जो न दिन की है, न रात की है, न सन्ध्या के किसी क्षण की ही है – एक अपार्थिव रोशनी जो कि शायद रोशनी भी नहीं है; इतना ही कि उसे अंधकार नहीं कहा जा सकता। Agyeya (1987: 16).

streamline the daily activities of both international athletes and foreign citizens traveling to Delhi to participate in these events. Upon reviewing their database, however, it became apparent to me that its authors did not possess a comprehensive knowledge of Hindi. For example, while the database contained Hindi sentences that were grammatically correct, 90% of them were pragmatically inappropriate. In particular, the database developers were evidently unfamiliar with the various ways of rendering English modals, such as “can” and “may”, into Hindi. They provided straight translations of English sentences containing the “can” and “may” modals using the Hindi verb *saknā* ‘to be able to do X’. In other words, the authors of the aforementioned database lacked the explanatory knowledge of Hindi that is essential for the creation of instructional materials for Hindi language teaching.

As has been widely discussed in the literature, the English modal “can” has many different pragmatic usages that accomplish a range of communicative objectives. For instance, it may be employed to express an individual’s capabilities (e.g., “John can write in Chinese”), to request assistance (e.g., “Could you help me?”), to grant permission (e.g., “You can depart now”), or to articulate potential outcomes (e.g., “He could be Russian”), among other usages. To accomplish certain communicative tasks, such as granting permission, “can” can also substitute for the English modal “may”. Without an adequate explanatory knowledge of Hindi, a non-native Hindi instructor is almost certainly going to rely on the single option available in the standard Hindi dictionaries to translate these usages as *saknā* in the classroom. Unfortunately, this leads to awkward situations in which the addressee is unable to comprehend the speaker’s genuine intentions. Broadly speaking, English sentences containing “can” or “be able to” need to be rendered into Hindi using verbs such as *saknā* ‘to carry out’, *pānā* ‘obtain’, *lenā* ‘take’, *denā* ‘give’, or some other appropriate expression. Without proper explanatory knowledge of the particular form of construction required in each case, a Hindi instructor is liable to misinform their students about the workings modals in Hindi and only teaching them the verb *saknā*. As well as *saknā*, the three widely employed corresponding Hindi verbs can be glossed in the following manner:

- *saknā*: a modal verb meaning ‘be able to carry out an action’;
- *pānā*: an aspect marking Hindi verb meaning ‘manage to bring an action to a conclusion’;
- *lenā*: meaning ‘take’, but employed as a V2 in a complex predicate to denote the accomplishment of an action that benefits the grammatical actor.
- *denā*: meaning ‘give’, but frequently used as a V2 in a complex predicate to denote the accomplishment of an action that benefits the addressee.



The examples (22a)–(22c) aim to demonstrate the situations in which we can use these verbs, or any other type of construction, to translate the English modal “can” into Hindi. For brevity and clarity, we will refrain from glossing them and instead assign acceptability symbols against these verbs.

### 3.1 “Can” as a means to express an agent’s general ability

As we know, the English modal verb “can” is widely employed to express the general ability of the grammatical agent of the sentence. This meaning can be expressed in Hindi through verbs such as *saknā*, *pānā*, *lenā* and some other constructions (OC). Although the Hindi verb *saknā* has gained popularity in Hindi media, we nevertheless deem its application pragmatically unsuitable (#) for expressing the overall ability of the agent.

#### (22) a. Affirmative statements

**Present:** *He can speak good English.*

vo acchī āgrezī bol	{saktā/	pātā/	letā}	OC	hai.
he good English speak	#	#	✓	✓	AUX.PRS

---

**Past:** *Last year, he was able to speak good English.*

pichle sāl vo acchī āgrezī bol  
last year he good English speak

{saktā/	pātā/	letā}	OC	thā
#	#	✓	✓	AUX.PST

---

**Future:** *Next year, he will be able to speak good English.*

agle sāl vo acchī āgrezī bol	{sakegā/	pāegā/	legā}	OC
next year he good English speak	#	#	✓	✓

---

#### b. Negative statements

**Present:** *He can’t speak good English.*

vo acchī āgrezī nahī bol	{saktā/	pātā/	letā}	OC
he good English NEG speak	#	✓	*	✓

---

**Past:** *Last year, he couldn’t (wasn’t able to) speak good English.*

pichle sāl vo acchī āgrezī nahī bol  
last year he good English NEG speak

{saktā/	pātā/	letā}	OC	thā
#	✓	*	✓	AUX.PST

---



Even though many English-trained academics will find it incomprehensible, we maintain that the Hindi verb *saknā* has become increasingly popular due to the influence of the English language on the Hindi language. The Table 3 illustrates the different ways in which it is possible to express the English modal “can” (or its counterparts “be able to” and “may”).

### 3.2 “Can” as a means to seek permission or extend assistance

The usage of the English modals “can” and “may” is a multifaceted matter that necessitates a distinct study contribution focused on its diverse applications in the language. Roughly, the modals “can” and “may” are frequently employed to seek permission from an authority to do a task or as a speech act to extend assistance to the recipient. Both circumstances present an issue with Hindi rendering of “can” or “may” using the single available Hindi verb *saknā*, as demonstrated by the following examples. Neither *pānā* nor *lenā*, which offered alternatives to *saknā* in the previous section, are employed to render English “can” and “may” in Hindi to seek permission or extend assistance. Rather, the subjunctive form of Hindi verb is employed to seek permission or to extend assistance in Hindi.

Although, due to the English influence on Hindi, it has become common to use the verb *saknā* to seek permission, it is nonetheless awkward to use it as a verb in colloquial contexts. Instead, using the subjunctive form of a Hindi verb would be more effective for communication purposes, as demonstrated in Example (23):

(23) *Can I go Now?*

kyā māī ab	ʔjā-saktā-hũ/	✓jāũ
QM I now	go-can.IPFV.M.SG-AUX.1SG	go.SBJV.1SG

Example (24) illustrates the typical use of the modal verb “can” in English, which presents challenges when translating into languages with diverse terminologies. Again, the subjunctive of the main verb in Hindi, rather than the main verb plus *saknā*, conveys the same type of assistance offer. In this context, the use of the Hindi verb *saknā* is pragmatically infelicitous, as demonstrated in the example below:

(24) *Can I help you?*

kyā māī āp-kī madad	*kar-saktā-hũ/	✓karũ
QM I you-of help	do-can.IPFV.M.SG-AUX.1SG	go.SBJV.1SG

### 3.3 “Can” as a means to express an epistemic possibility

The English modals “can” and “may” are also employed to convey epistemic possibility. Similar to other uses, this particular usage has exerted a substantial influence on the Hindi language. As seen by instances (25b) and (26b), In Hindi, we use a distinct formulation that combines the verbal form *ho saktā hai* meaning either “maybe” or “may be”, with the subjunctive form of the verb to express epistemic possibility.

(25) *He could be a Russian.*

- a. ?vo rūṣī ho saktā hai  
 he Russian be can.IPFV.M.SG AUX.PRS.SG
- b. ✓ho saktā-hai vo rūṣī ho  
 be can-AUX.PRS.SG he Russian be.SBJV.3SG

(26) *This car may be too expensive for him.*

- a. ?ye kār uske-lie bahut-mahāgī ho saktī hai  
 he car for him too-expensive be can.IPFV.F.SG AUX.PRS.SG
- b. ✓ho saktā-hai uske lie ye kār bahut-mahāgī ho  
 be can-AUX.PRS.SG for him this car too-expensive be.SBJV.3SG

The divergent viewpoints held by Hindi scholars on this subject are well known, given the prevalence of examples like (25a) and (26a) found in the Hindi media. Nevertheless, a proficient Hindi language teacher must carefully evaluate which concepts to keep and which ones to omit when creating Hindi instructional resources. As a result, explanatory knowledge plays an important role in language teaching because it can help the teacher identify the constructions to be taught in the classroom.

### 3.4 “Can” as a means to make direct or indirect requests

Examples (27) and (28) demonstrate the use of the English modal verb “can” for making various types of requests. The Hindi translations of these examples demonstrate that the *saknā* is not the appropriate verb to fulfill this pragmatic purpose in Hindi. However, as a result of the English language’s influence on Hindi, phrases such as (27a) are becoming increasingly widespread among educated Hindi speakers. When politely asking for help, different linguistic structures that incorporate a future form of the main verb, as in (27b), or a compound verb construct, as in (27b), are considered more authentic phrases for making requests in Hindi.

(27) *Can you help me?*

- a. ?kyā āp merī madad kar-sakte-hai?  
 QM you my help kar-can.IPFV.M.2PL-AUX.PRS.PL
- b. ✓kyā āp merī madad karēge?  
 QM you my help do.FUT.2PL
- c. ✓kyā āp merī madad kar-daīge?  
 QM you my help do-give.FUT.2PL

Likewise, as a result of the impact of English on Hindi, Hindi speakers are increasingly adopting phrases that include the *saknā* verb (28a). However, it is important to note that such requests in Hindi are expressed using entirely distinct types of expression, as shown in examples (28b) and (28c).

(28) *Can I have a glass of water?*

- a. #kyā ek gīlās pānī mil saktā-hai?  
 QM one glass water obtain can.IPFV.M.3SG-AUX.PRS.SG
- b. ✓kyā ek gīlās pānī mil-jāegā?  
 QM one glass water obtain-go.FUT.3SG
- c. ✓kyā ek gīlās pānī de-dēge  
 QM one glass water give-GIVE.FUT.PL

A comparable phenomenon is observed in English sentences, such as (29), which execute an indirect speech act. It is important to acknowledge that the Hindi verb *saknā* is not suited for making such indirect requests, despite the fact that such expressions are frequently encountered in Hindi media. Other forms, such as (29b) and (29c), are more effective in achieving Hindi indirect speech acts.

(29) *Can you pass the salt?*

- a. ?kyā āp zarā namak de sakte hai?  
 QM you just salt give can.IPFV.M.PL AUX.PRS.PL
- b. ✓kyā āp zarā namak de-dēge?  
 QM you just salt give-GIVE.FUT.M.PL
- c. ✓zarā namak denā  
 just salt give.IMP

Similarly, the use of Hindi verb *saknā* in this context is pragmatically infelicitous when used to request the addressee to do carry out an action that benefits the speaker, such as asking someone to open the window, as illustrated in

(30a). The appropriate form to fulfill this function will be an imperative or another grammatical mood:

(30) Can you open the window?

- a. #kyā āp khiṛkī khol sakte-haī?  
 QM you window open ca.IPFV.PL-AUX.PRS.PL
- b. ?kyā zarā khiṛkī khol dēge?  
 QM just window open ca.IPFV.PL-AUX.PRS.PL
- c. ✓zarā khiṛkī kholie  
 just window open.IMP.2PL
- d. ✓zarā khiṛkī khol dījie  
 just window open GIVE.IMP.2PL

#### 4 The distinction between the *hai* and *hotā hai* stative verb forms in Hindi

Another challenging grammatical topic for Hindi instructors is how to effectively explain the differentiation that the Hindi language makes between definite and indefinite descriptions of states, events, or situations. The commonly accepted explanation found in many Hindi grammars (Hook 1979: 2; McGregor 1972: 20; Agnihotri 2007: 163; Shapiro 1989) states that *hai* construct (i.e., “Subject + adjective + be.PRS”) is used to indicate specific and current states, while *hotā hai* construct (or, “Subject + adjective + be.IPFV + AUX.PRS”) is used to express historical facts or long-term states. While partially accurate, this explanation does not effectively assist students in mastering the proper usage of these two constructs. Handling this type of distinction is indeed challenging, and it connects to the intersection of widely debated subjects in the philosophy of language, such as generic generalizations<sup>5</sup> and definite and indefinite descriptions.<sup>6</sup> As it is not the objective of this paper to investigate this complex topic in any philosophical detail, we shall, for the sake of simplicity, present data that has already been discussed elsewhere (Sharma 2017). The phrases “definite description” (DD) and “indefinite description” (INDD) are used to refer to these two types of predication, even though the phenomenon being

<sup>5</sup> For further information on generic generalizations, see <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/generics/>

<sup>6</sup> For further details on definite and indefinite descriptions, see <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descriptions/> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Definite\\_description](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Definite_description)

studied may not perfectly align with the philosophical concepts associated with these terms. In addition, we will refrain from providing morphological glosses for the *hai* and *hotā hai* Hindi forms in the examples discussed in this section, in order to prevent the reader from being distracted by their recurrence.

The construct used to provide a definite description in Hindi can be named as *hai*-construct (“Subject + adjective + be.PRS”), where the be verb can be found in the following conjugations:

- *hai* = be-PRS.SG; and
- *hai* = be-PRS.PL

The construct used to give an indefinite description, can be named as *hotā-hai*-construct (“Subject + adjective + be.IPFV + AUX.PRS”) where the imperfective form of the stative verb *honā* ‘to be’ is followed by the auxiliary verb which can be found in the following conjugations:

- *hotā-hai* = be.IPFV.M.SG-AUX.PRS.SG;
- *hote-hai* = be.IPFV.M.PL-AUX.PRS.PL;
- *hotī-hai* = be.IPFV.F.SG-AUX.PRS.SG; and
- *hotī-hai* = be.IPFV.F.SG-AUX.PRS.PL

In Hindi, definiteness and indefiniteness are not explicitly marked by particular articles such as “the” and “a”, as in English. Instead, the *hai* and *hotā hai* forms in the predicate are employed in such cases to represent the two types of descriptions: definite and indefinite.

Let us examine the example in (31a), where the adverbial of quantity *bahut sāre* ‘a lot of’ makes the generic head noun *śabd* ‘words’ definite. Therefore, the sentence becomes an instance of a definite description. (31b), instead, is an instance of indefinite expression even though it has an adverbial of quantity, namely *bahut* ‘abundant’. So, the different interpretations in (31a) and (32b) are due to *bahut sāre* ‘a lot of’ and *bahut* ‘abundant’, respectively. In fact, in the absence of a definiteness marker *sārā*, the statement will be ambiguous and, by default, will be interpreted as having an indefinite description. Examples of indefinite description are (31b), (31c), and (31d). While (31b) has the adverbial “bahut”, it does not have a definite marker such as *sārā* meaning ‘entire’ in (31a). The presence of the generic expression “Hindi poems” in (31c) categorizes it as an instance of indefinite expression. In (31d), the phrase “poems” changes from indefinite to definite because of the inclusion of the specific Hindi author, Jaishankar Prasad:

- (31) a. hindī-mē bahut-sāre saṃskṛt-ke śabd 

{√haī/	*hote-haī}.
{√DD/	*INDD}

  
Hindi-in a lot of Sanskrit-of words  
'There are many Sanskrit words in Hindi.' (Hindi has lots of Sanskrit words.)
- b. sāhityik hindī-mē bahut saṃskṛt-ke śabd  
literary Hindi-in abundant Sanskrit-of words  

{*haī/	√hote-haī}.
{*DD/	√INDD}

  
'Literary Hindi has many Sanskrit words.'
- c. hindī kavitaō-mē saṃskṛt-ke śabd 

{*haī/	√hote-haī}.
{*DD/	√INDD}

  
Hindi poems-in Sanskrit-of words  
'Hindi poems contain Sanskrit words.'
- d. prasād-kī kavitaō-mē saṃskṛt-ke śabd 

{*haī/	√hote-haī}.
{*DD/	√INDD}

  
Prasad-of poems-in Sanskrit-of words  
'Prasad's poems contain Sanskrit words.'
- e. prasād-kī is-kavita-mē saṃskṛt-ke śabd 

{√haī/	*hote-haī}.
{√DD/	*INDD}

  
Prasad-of this-poem-in Sanskrit-of words  
'This poem by Prasad contains Sanskrit words.' (In this poem by Prasad, there are Sanskrit words.)

In contrast to a general term like "Sanskrit words", which was susceptible to both definite and indefinite interpretations in different instances in (31), let us examine a definite term: the Sanskrit language. It can be seen that a definite term requires a definite interpretation in (32a) and (32c) and an indefinite interpretation in (32b):

- (32) a. saṃskṛt bhāṣā mahatv'pūrṇ 

{√hai/	*hotī-hai}.
{√DD/	*INDD}

  
Sanskrit language important  
'Sanskrit language is important.'
- b. hindū śādī-mē saṃskṛt bhāṣā mahatv'pūrṇ  
Hindu marriage-in Sanskrit language important  

{*hai/	√hotī-hai}.
{*DD/	√INDD}

  
'Sanskrit language is important in Hindu weddings (has prominence in a Hindu wedding).'
- c. paṇḍit-ji-kī śādī-mē saṃskṛt bhāṣā mahatv'pūrṇ  
Pandit-HON-of marriage-in Sanskrit language important



{√hai/	*hotī hai}.
{√DD/	*INDD}

‘Sanskrit language is important (has prominence) in Mr. Pandit’s wedding.’

Likewise, the expression “Indian mangos” may get both definite and indefinite interpretations depending on the presence of an adverbial or other element which adds definiteness, as the examples in (33a)–(33e) demonstrate. In fact, the term “Indian mangos” receives a definite interpretation due to the presence of *is sāl* ‘this year’ in (33a) while an indefinite interpretation in (33b) due to absence of any indefiniteness marker. (33c), on the other hand, is ambiguous and thus it may have both definite and indefinite interpretations, even though it has a definite adverbial “is bāg ke” meaning “of this orchard”.

- (33) a. *is sāl bhārtīy ām miṭhe*

{√haī/	*hote-haī}.
{√DD/	*INDD}

  
 this year Indian mangoes sweet  
 ‘Indian mangoes are sweet this year.’

- b. *bhārtīy ām miṭhe*

{*haī/	√hote-haī}.
{*DD/	√INDD}

  
 Indian mangoes sweet  
 ‘The Indian mangoes are sweet.’/ ‘Indian mangoes are sweet.’

- c. *is bāg-ke ām bahut miṭhe*

{haī/	hote-haī}.
{DD/	INDD}

  
 this orchard-of mangoes very sweet  
 ‘Indian mangoes of this orchard are very sweet.’/ ‘Indian mangoes of this orchard are (generally) very sweet.’

Observe how the same term *paise* ‘money’ can have either an indefinite or definite connotation in examples (34a)–(34c) depending on the presence or absence of an adverbial. The presence of the indefiniteness marker *hameśā* ‘always’ in (34a) categorizes this statement as an example of indefinite description. On the other hand, the definite adverbial *āj* ‘today’ in (34b) adds definiteness to the statement. The adverbial *ājkal* ‘nowadays’ introduces an element of indefiniteness in example (34c).

- (34) a. *rāmū-kī jeb-mē hameśā paise*

{*haī/	√hote-haī}.
{*DD/	√INDD}

  
 Ramu-of pocket-in always money  
 ‘Ramu always has money in his pocket.’

- b. *rāmū-kī jeb-mē āj bahut paise*

{√haī/	*hote-haī}.
{√DD/	*INDD}

  
 Ramu-of pocket-in today enough money  
 ‘Ramu has a lot of money in his pocket today.’

- c. rāmū-kī jeb-mē ājkal bahut paise  
 Ramu-of pocket-in nowadays abundant money

{*haī/	✓hote-haī}.
{*DD/	✓INDD}

‘Ramu has a lot of money in his pocket these days.’

To sum up the discussion in the section, the varying interpretations of the *hai* and *hotā hai* structures can be attributed to the inclusion or exclusion of adverbials or other factors. As can be seen from the various examples in (33)–(34), effectively communicating this issue to students is of great importance, although highly challenging. The majority of Hindi grammar manuals either ignore this issue or offer vague explanations that are of little assistance to language learners. A proficient Hindi language instructor, therefore, should have a comprehensive understanding of this subject matter and be capable of creating appropriate instructional materials that effectively address the issues involved, rather than introducing vague concepts and leaving it to the learner to figure out which of the two constructs suits better in which context.

## 5 Concluding remarks

Based on the discussion in the preceding three sections (2, 3 and 4), we may draw some conclusions regarding the three topics in Hindi grammar that we have examined to illustrate the importance of having a comprehensive understanding of Hindi grammar in producing teaching materials. When we emphasize the importance of explanatory knowledge for Hindi instructors, we are not suggesting that they need formal training in Hindi linguistics. Our intention is to underscore the importance of a Hindi teacher’s ability to provide explanations to students of the reasons behind certain Hindi constructions. Simply put, they should be able to explain to their students why particular Hindi constructions or usages are the way that they are. Regarding the issue of relative clause adjoining in Hindi, we can draw the following conclusion: according to the Acceptability Judgment Test (AJT) and an analysis of two Hindi novels, the standard Hindi register allows the relative clause to precede the correlative or main clause. It is also possible to reverse clauses, meaning that the correlative clause comes before the relative clause. However, it is the context of the utterance alone that determines this reversal, as a way of putting emphasis on the correlative or main clause according to different pragmatic constraints. The so-called adnominal clause, which is a sort of embedded relative clause, is a recent addition to Hindi grammar, influenced by English. While written and spoken records provide evidence of its existence, the internal structure of Hindi does

not fully support it. It faces acceptability problems, for example, when the head noun or pronoun is in the oblique case, due to the presence of divergent postpositions or case markers in the relative and correlative clauses. We should, therefore, be cautious in introducing this type of relative clause embedding in the classroom, emphasizing its presence only in simple sentences. When it comes to inappropriate uses of the Hindi verb *saknā*, meaning ‘can’, which are due mainly to the influence of the English modal verb “can”, the paper concludes that the Hindi instructor needs to be fully familiar with the many different pragmatic usages that “can” as a modal verb can have in English. In other words, the English modal verb “can” should not always be translated by the Hindi verb *saknā*. An explanatory knowledge of the phenomenon will undoubtedly enhance Hindi classroom teaching and enable the instructor to produce useful teaching materials. Regarding the issue of definite and indefinite descriptions in Hindi, the paper reiterates the importance of having sufficient explanatory knowledge about the topic. The preceding section has demonstrated that the traditional account of the *hai-hota hai* distinction, while useful to some extent, fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

## Symbols and abbreviations

✓ = acceptable; \* = unacceptable; ? = odd; # = pragmatically infelicitous; ACC = accusative; AJT = Acceptability Judgment Test; DAT = dative; DEM = demonstrative; DD = definite descriptions; EMP = emphatic particle; ERG = ergative; F = feminine; FUT = future; GEN = genitive; IMP = imperative; INDD = indefinite description; NEG = negative; OC = other constructions; QM = interrogative; PRS = present; PROG = progressive; PTCP = participle; PST = past; RC = relative clause; REL = relative; SBJV = subjunctive.

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