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Overview of Bengali

Bengali is spoken in the West Bengal area of India and the country of Bangladesh. Approximately 70 million people in West Bengal speak Bengali and about 120 million people in Bangladesh speak the language. It is among the top five languages in the world in terms of the number of speakers.

Bengali is a part of the Indo-European family of languages. It is descended from Sanskrit, and thus is related to Hindi, one of the official languages of India. Bengali is written in the Devanagari alphabet, with some variations. It began to diverge from the Devanagari alphabet in the 11th century, so you can imagine how much it has changed!

Some languages normally use character sets very different from English. In order to simplify the new learner's task, Languages of the World presents Bengali in a transliterated format, using the Roman alphabet, as in English. Transliterated texts represent the sounds of the foreign language in a way that is more easily recognizable to English speakers.

Transliterated Alphabet and Pronunciation

aa	a as in mat
a	a as in about
b	b as in boy
c	c as in cat
d	d as in done
dh	th as in the
e	a as in cable (a sound in between air and may)
ee	ee as in need
f	f as in fog
g	g as in girl
h	a breathy sound , except when part of the groups ch or sh
i	i as in bit
j	j as in joy
k	k as in skin
l	in the group kh it has a breathy sound
l	l as in low
m	m as in made
n	n as in noodle
o	o as in moan
p	p as in pig
q	q as in quick
r	r as in Spanish perro , a rolled sound
	in the group rh it has a breathy sound
s	s as in sweet
t	t as in toot
u	u as in put
uu	oo as in fool
v	v as in vat
w	w as in water
x	x as in axe
y	y as in yes
z	z as in zoo

Nouns

A noun is a word that names a person, place or thing.

room	room
shakal	morning

Most nouns have a singular and plural form. To make the plural, add "-ra" or "-der". However, indefinite plurals do not have a plural form.

meyera	the girls
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Nouns in Bengali are declined to express possession. When a noun ends in a vowel, usually "-r" is attached. When a nouns ends in a consonant "-er" is generally attached.

shami'r	husband's
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See Also:

Case

Articles

Case

The case of nouns and pronouns gives you an idea of how they are related to other words in the sentence.

The **subject case** is the stem of the noun or pronoun.

The **locative case** in Bengali expresses location or has an instrumental function.

add "-e" to words which end in consonants.

add "-te" to words which end in vowels.

The **object case** is used for direct and indirect objects.

Singular		Plural	
me	amake	us	amader
you	tomake	you	tomader
him/her	eke	them	eder
him/her	oke	them	oder
him/her	take	them	tader

Note: The endings "-ke" and "-der" can be added to nouns or proper nouns to indicate case directly, or can be added to the article.

The verb "ach-" and the **possessive case** of nouns are used to express possession in Bengali. The owner of the item attaches the possessive case ending "-r", and the verb is conjugated in third person informal.

See also:

[Nouns](#)

[Articles](#)

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that stands for a previously mentioned or understood noun. That noun is called the antecedent of the pronoun. The pronoun replaces the noun in a sentence. In Bengali there is no gender distinction in the use of pronouns. However, Bengali does make a distinction between formal and informal in the 2nd and 3rd persons. Distance from the speaker is also expressed in the pronoun.

Subject pronouns:

I				ami	we			amra
you (informal)				tumi	you (informal plural)			tomra
you (formal)				apni	you (formal)			apnara
	here	over there	somewhere else			here	over there	somewhere else
he/she (informal)	e	o	se		he/she (plural informal)	era	ora	tara
he/she (formal)	ini	uni	tini		he/she (plural informal)	era	ora	tara

Possessive pronouns:

my				amar	our			amader
your (informal)				tomar	your (informal plural)			tomader
your (formal)				apnar	your (formal)			apnader
	here	over there	somewhere else			here	over there	somewhere else
he/she (informal)	er	or	tar		he/she (plural informal)	eder	oder	tader
he/she (formal)	er	or	tar		he/she (plural informal)	eder	oder	tader

Demonstrative pronouns

	here	over there	somewhere else
this/that	eta	ota	seta
these/those	egulo	ogulo	segulo

Reflexive pronouns:

The word "nije" is used to denote reflexive pronouns in Bengali. "Nije" can be placed after a noun or a pronoun to indicate that it is a reflexive pronoun.

Interrogative Pronouns

Interrogative pronouns are also used in Bengali:

	singular	plural
who	ke	kara
whose	kar	kader

Bengali uses the particle "ki" to mark a question.

Articles

The definite article is suffixed to the noun. The most common definite article for things in Bengali is "-ta". This article is omitted when it is clear from context that a specific item is named. There is also a plural definite form ,"-gulo".

When referring to people the definite article takes a diminutive form. This form expresses a more friendly tone. It is also used to identify small or cute things. This form is "-ti" in the singular and "-guli" in the plural. In Bangladesh this is used less than in West Bengal.

The indefinite article is generally used only when it is very specific that there is just one of something. "Aek" plus the definite article forms the indefinite article. For the diminutive form, "aek" changes to "ek". There is not an indefinite plural form.

See Also:

Nouns

Case

Adverbs

An adverb is a word that modifies a verb and often serves to answer the question "How?" Adverbs can also modify adjectives giving more information about the adjective, or emphasizing the meaning of the adjective. Adverbs can also indicate time or frequency.

Example:

dhire-dhire (slowly)

Some adverbs are formed by placing the past participle "kore" after the corresponding adjective:

Example:

bhalo kore (well)

Note: The words "bhabe" or "rokom" can also follow adjectives to form adverbs.

Verb Conjugations: Tense and Mood

Verbs in Bengali consist of two parts: the stem and the suffix. They are conjugated by person in the formal or informal. However there is not a separate conjugation for the plural form -- it is the same as in the singular.

In general, Bengali verbs have a regular conjugation pattern, however take note of the spelling changes that occur in the stem.

Infinitive:

Usage of the infinitive in Bengali is not always the same as in English. The infinitive ending of Bengali verbs is "-te". For example, the expression for "want" or "am" uses the infinitive. The infinitive is formed by combining the mutated vowel form of the stem and the ending "-te".

Present Tense:

The present tense is used as in English for actions that are currently happening.

Future Tense:

The future tense is used to express "volition." Consequently, "would like" is expressed in the future tense. The English expression "going to" also uses the future tense.

Past Participle:

The past participle is very important in Bengali. They are used to connect two ideas and form compound verbs, among other things. The formation of the compound verb is probably the most interesting. The literal meaning of each parts is somewhat unrelated to the meaning of the whole. A participle is combined with another verb in the infinitive form to form compound verbs.

The Verb "To Be"

In English the verb "to be" is often used. Bengali does not use this verb, nor any other, in simple subject-complement sentences.

To express the negative, one must use the appropriate form of the verb "no-".

noi
noo
noy
non

However, to express "there is" or "there are", Bengali utilizes the verb "ach-". Remember that Bengali has no separate conjugation for the plural forms.

Present Tense

ami/amra achi
tumi/tomra achoo
se/tara ache
apni/tini/apnara/tara achen

The negative of the verb is "nai" in all persons for the present tense. This is added to the end of the sentence.

Past Tense

ami/amra chilam
tumi/tomra chiles
se/tara chilo
apni/tini/apnara/tara chilen

The negative of the verb in the past tense is "-na" which is suffixed onto the verb

Vowel Mutations

These changes occur in the first person present tense of the stem.

o becomes **oo**

ae becomes **e**

o becomes **u**

e becomes **i**

a becomes **e**

Postpositions

Postpositions are connecting words that show the relationships between words in the sentence. In Bengali, postpositions are the grammatical equivalent of prepositions. They are positioned after the noun in the sentence. Most postpositions use the possessive case.

Other postpositions are actually participles. These do not require the possessive form.

kore	(by)
theke	(from)

See also:

[Nouns](#)

