

Chapter 1 – Pronouns and the Verb “to be” ہونا PART 1

In Urdu there are 7 different pronouns (although, technically there are 9).

Let’s first have a look at the ones we use to talk about one person (singular):

I	میں	Main
You (intimate)	تو	Tu
He, she, it (far)	وہ	Wo
He, she, it (close)	یہ	ye

And here are the pronouns for talking about more than one person (plural):

We	ہم	Ham
You (informal)	تم	Tum
You (formal and plural)	آپ	Ap
They (far)	وہ	Wo
They (close)	یہ	ye

You will already notice several differences to English and other languages. First of all, in Urdu we do not differentiate he, she and it. If you want to know if the person that is being talked about is female or male, you will have to look at the verb (more on that later).

Example:

He is American. وہ امریکی ہے۔ (wo amriki hai)

She is American. وہ امریکی ہے۔ (wo amriki hai)

Instead, Urdu differentiates whether a person or thing is close or far away.

Let’s say there is a person standing close to you and pointing to him/her you will say: یہ امریکی ہے۔ (Ye amriki hai). But if the person is standing further away you would say: وہ امریکی ہے۔ (wo amriki hai) instead.

One last comment: وہ and یہ are also used for plural (they). The same principle applies here. If the things/people are further away you will use وہ (wo) and if they are closer by you will use یہ (ye).

Now, moving on, let’s look at the various version of the English “you”. There are three options: تم, تو آپ (tu, tum and ap).

تو

Tu is used the most “intimate” form and is only used when addressing a small child in one’s own family, one’s beloved, as an insult, or as a reproof for a subordinate. It often occurs in poetry. It is generally used more often in India than in Pakistan.

تُم

Tum is a “non-honorific” term and is used when addressing one or more persons of lower status, children or close family members younger than oneself. You can address people of equal status with this in informal social situations (e.g. close friends). Very important: when addressing small children in another person’s family you should use *tum* and not *tu*.

آپ

Ap is the term used the MOST frequently, especially in Pakistan. It is the term used to express respect, especially to one of more persons of higher status, family members that are elder than oneself. It is also used by young persons to elderly persons (even if the elderly is a servant), to a skilled persons, and by parents to children to teach them good manners. You should also use this when addressing persons of equal status in formal situations (e.g. in an office).

Lastly, a note on the meaning of “plural” and “singular”. آپ *Ap* is in grammatical plural but can be used to address just one person. “Grammatical plural” means that the verb that follows needs to be in plural (more on this later).

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