

English tango glossary - 2025

Abrazo (embrace)

Embrace, dance position. The partners embrace before beginning the tango. This is the very first contact and the basis of the connection that will be used for guidance. Embraces are more or less closed and can be opened. The *abrazo* is essential to control the movement and balance the couple. It varies according to the type of tango practised.

Adorno (ornament)

Ornament, embellishment, made by men or women.

Alteration

Change of direction or rhythm during a figure. Alteration is only possible in the dynamics of a sequence.

Arrastre

The follower's free foot is moved by the guide's pushing movement, which exerts real pressure.

Axis

It is essential for the follower and the guide to control their axis to ensure good balance.

Barrida

A movement in which the guide accompanies the movement of the partner's foot with his foot. Unlike the *arrastre*, the *barrida* gives the illusion that the guide is moving the foot, when in fact all he is doing is accompanying it by placing his foot next to his partner's without putting any pressure on it.

Boleo (*voleo*)

Tango ornament: the *boleo* is a walking step (generally on a forward or backward *ocho*), interrupted by a counter-movement from the guide who speeds up the partner and prevents him from finishing his step. This opposition produces a sort of "fouetté" on the partner's free leg, throwing the leg forwards or backwards. *Boleos* can be performed on the ground or in the air, and can be high, low, circular or compact.

Caminata (walking)

Walking is essential. In Argentine tango, the feet are placed on the strong beats of the music. It is then called 'al compas' (on the beat) but it can include many rhythmic variations: in off-beat (*doble tiempo* or *contratiempo*), or one step on two strong beats (*medio tiempo*) or with differences in synchronisation (the guide in *doble tiempo* while guiding the partner 'al compas').

There are two systems in walking:

- Parallel system, this is the most usual way for two people to walk when the woman's right foot moves at the same time as the man's left foot.
- The crossed system, when the woman's right foot moves at the same time as the man's right foot.

Chacarera

Chacarera is a traditional dance from northern Argentina. The dancers face each other in a line. The dance leads them to pass each other and then to come closer together, as it is a dance of seduction. They move around using small turns (*giros*) and large turns (*vueltas redondas*). In the dance, the women twirl their skirts (*zarandeo*) and the men stamp their feet (*zapateado*).

Colgada

This is a body posture that allows the couple to adopt a V position. The partners share the same axis on the floor, their busts moving outwards away from the axis. This creates a counterweight that keeps the couple in balance. This dynamic is the opposite of the *volcada* (incline), which is presented in a pyramid shape \wedge .

Connection

Embrace, dance position. The partners embrace before beginning the tango. This is the very first contact and the basis of the connection that will be used for guidance. Embraces are more or less closed and can be opened. The *abrazo* is essential to control the movement and balance the couple. It varies according to the type of tango practised.

Contratiempo (offbeat)

Offbeat means putting your foot down on a weak beat, which is offbeat from the ordinary walk, which consists of walking on the strong beats of the music.

Corrida

Tango figure: succession of short, quick steps in offbeat.

Corte

Tango figure: the "*corte*" is a pause in the dance, a halt or suspension of movement. This pause is sometimes imposed by the movement of other dancers. It also allows for variations and minute movements on the spot, in particular a characteristic tango rocking movement, the *quebrada* (break). This movement is present in the *ocho cortado*.

Crossing (*cruce* or *cruzada*)

Crossing: position in which the feet are crossed.

D'Arienzo

Juan d'Arienzo, born 14 December 1900 in Buenos Aires and died 14 January 1976, Argentine tango violinist and conductor known as "*El Rey del Compás*". Designed for dancing, D'Arienzo arrangements feature the piano, giving them a lively tempo and rhythm.

Di Sarli

Carlos Di Sarli, born on 7 January 1903 and died on 12 January 1960 in a province of Buenos Aires, pianist and conductor of a tipica Argentine tango band, composer, known as "*El Señor del Tango*".

Dissociation

One of the main components of Argentine tango. The upper body (shoulders) is placed in a different position to the lower body (pelvis) in relation to the line of the walk. This dissociation of upper and lower body movements lends style and facilitates certain movements.

Embrace (abrazo)

Embrace, dance position. The partners embrace before beginning the tango. This is the very first contact and the basis of the connection that will be used for guidance. Embraces are more or less closed and can be opened. The *abrazo* is essential to control the movement and balance the couple. It varies according to the type of tango practised.

Empujada

Pushing the partner's leg.

Enganche

Hooking the partner's foot or leg.

Enrosque

During a partner's turn, the guide wraps his foot free of weight in front of or behind the foot on which he is leaning and pivots. This movement is generally used in turns, but can be performed as soon as there is a pivot.

Gancho

One-legged hook (bending the knee) around the partner's leg. There are many ganchos, high, low, outside, inside and simultaneous (man and woman at the same time).

Gato

A musical style and folk dance typical of northern Argentina. It is also a dance similar to the chacarera but with a different order of steps, an elegant dance of seduction, danced in couples to a lively, cheerful rhythm.

Giro (turn)

This is a sequence of 4 steps that the partner executes around the axis of the guide: a front cross step - [pivot] - a side step - [pivot] - a back cross step - [pivot] - a side step - [pivot] - a front step... and so on. The turns can be performed to the right or to the left, from the woman around the man, from the man around the woman, and so on.

Intention

Intention, in Tango as in Tai Chi, precedes gesture or movement. It's the act of projecting thought into the body, with an objective, and it's very important to the success of a tango. To achieve this, you need to encourage relaxation while remaining tonic without brute force.

Lápiz

Ornament which consists of drawing a circle or a semi-circle on the floor with the tip of the foot of the free leg.

Lisa

This is essentially said about the milonga, but it is characteristic of a simple dance, i.e. one with no offbeat.

Llevado

This is especially true of scenery tango: it consists of carrying the other partner.

Mordida (sanguchito)

The foot of one partner is trapped between the feet of the other.

Ocho

Basic tango figure: a succession of steps crossing forward or backward to forming a figure as an 8.

Ocho cortado

Starts like an *ocho*, but is stopped and shortened on the return to the original position, very useful in small spaces or to avoid bumping into someone.

Offbeat (contratiempo)

Offbeat means putting your foot down on a weak beat, which is offbeat from the ordinary walk, which consists of walking on the strong beats of the music.

Ornament (adorno)

Ornament, embellishment, made by men or women.

Parada or pausa

A stop often executed during an *ocho* or a turn, the guide uses his body weight to immobilise his partner, so as to keep him between his two legs.

Pasada

Step executed by the partner, passing over the other's foot. Often executed by the follower, after a *parada* or a *mordida*.

Péndulo

Backward movement corresponding to body rocking.

Pivot

Rotation performed on the axis of one of the two partners. For example, the pivot of the follower's *ocho*, or that of the guide's *enrosque* during a turn performed around him by his partner.

Planeo

Man's or woman's free leg glides across the floor in a wide circle, with the other leg on its pivot.

Proprioception

Proprioception is the perception, usually unconscious, that we have of our body's position in space. Proprioception ensures balance and movement control, and provides us with information about our body's activity.

Working on proprioception allows us to be aware of the exact position of our body in space, thanks to the information transmitted to the brain about the position of our various limbs, but also about the movement of each part of our limbs in relation to the others.

Pugliese

Osvaldo Pedro Pugliese, born on 2 December 1905 in Buenos Aires and died on 25 July 1995, aged almost 90. His father gave him a violin at the age of 9, on which he began to play, but he soon switched to the piano. In 1924, he wrote his first tango, "*Recuerdo*". In 1939 he formed his own orchestra. His talent was confirmed with the title "*La Yumba*". His style was powerful and very distinctive. His music is full of contrasts, with accelerations and pauses.

Quebrada

A tango figure in which the partner's knees bend when the walk stops (see *corte*). This slight alternating bending of one knee, then the other, results in a rocking movement that is characteristic of tango.

Rebote

This is a step forward by the leader and a simultaneous step backwards by the follower. The bounce on the floor is used as an impulse to link up another figure or return to the initial position. This gives rhythm to the dance. It's also particularly useful in tight spaces.

Sacada

The concept of the *sacada* is to cut the trajectory. It is said when one of the two partners places his foot between the feet of the other, and then transfers his body weight as in a walking step. It is the entry of one partner into the space of the other, chasing the free leg.

Sanguchito (mordida)

The foot of one partner is trapped between the feet of the other.

Social dancing

Social dancing is dancing at a ball. An evening of dancing is more or less enjoyable depending on the skill of the participants. You have to respect the dance line that goes around the room. You have to know how to dance in a room full of people without disturbing the other couples. A good dancer manages the space and guides his partner, making sure that she does not risk hurting herself or anyone else. He must anticipate the space needed for the figure. And they both have to adapt their dance, and therefore their tricks, to the space available. The more people there are, the more it is necessary to dance small, reducing the size of the steps and the amplitude of the figures. It's important to know patterns for different spaces.

System (parallel or crossed)

Walking is essential. In Argentine tango, the feet are placed on the strong beats of the music. It is then called "*al compas*" (on the beat) but it can include many rhythmic variations: in off-beat (*doble tiempo* or *contratiempo*), or one step on two strong beats (*medio tiempo*) or with differences in synchronisation (the guide in *doble tiempo* while guiding the partner "*al compas*").

There are two systems in walking:

- Parallel system, this is the most usual way for two people to walk when the woman's right foot moves at the same time as the man's left foot.
- The crossed system, when the woman's right foot moves at the same time as the man's right foot.

Soltada

Dropping or changing the *abrazo*. The couple leave their usual closed position and dance either holding each other with both hands, with one hand, or not at all. One of the particularities of traditional tango is that it offers a stable and permanent *abrazo*. The *soltadas* are all those moments when you decide to open this *abrazo*, to do what it is impossible to do by keeping the *abrazo* closed.

Taconeo

This is the clicking sound produced by the heels of the feet to create a sonic effect on the music. "*Taconeando*" (heel-tapping) is a famous tango.

Scenery tango

Scenery tango is an extrapolation of traditional tango that explores the scenic side of Argentine tango. Tools inspired by other disciplines, other dances, are used to bring tango to the stage, particularly for the lifts, from the simplest to the most complex. Entirely choreographed, or partly improvised, it features one or more couples.

Tenda or tanda

A *tenda* is a series of 3 or 4 dances that follow one another. A *tenda* usually groups together pieces in the same style (tango, milonga or waltz), often performed by the same orchestra (same period, same singer or same energy) to form a harmonious, homogeneous whole.

A *tenda* is usually danced with the same partner. The *tendas* are separated by a musical interlude: the *cortina*, a piece of music other than tango, which indicates that it is time to change partners.

Turn (giro)

This is a sequence of 4 steps that the partner executes around the axis of the guide: a front cross step - [pivot] - a side step - [pivot] - a back cross step - [pivot] - a side step - [pivot] - a front step... and so on. The turns can be performed to the right or to the left, from the woman around the man, from the man around the woman, and so on.

Traspié

Typical of the milonga, as opposed to the milonga *lisa*, the *traspié* is a way of playing with double time and rhythm. It is marked, for example, by three very small steps with the free foot without changing axis on two beats of music.

Volcada

It comes from "*volcar*", which means to incline, to overturn. It is the opposite of the *colgada*. It is the movement by which the guide inclines the partner's axis towards him, the partner's free leg "hanging" without muscular tension and following the movement generated by the guide's movement in a supple and wide manner. This pyramid-like dynamic Λ is the opposite of the V-shaped *colgada*, in which the partners share the same axis on the floor.

Voleo (boleo)

Tango ornament: the *voleo* is a walking step (generally on a forward or backward *ocho*), interrupted by a counter-movement from the guide who speeds up the partner and prevents him from finishing his step. This opposition produces a sort of "fouetté" on the partner's free leg, throwing the leg forwards or backwards. *Voleos* can be performed on the ground or in the air, and can be high, low, circular or compact.

Walking (caminata)

Walking is essential. In Argentine tango, the feet are placed on the strong beats of the music. It is then called 'al compas' (on the beat) but it can include many rhythmic variations: in off-beat (*doble tiempo* or *contratiempo*), or one step on two strong beats (*medio tiempo*) or with differences in synchronisation (the guide in *doble tiempo* while guiding the partner 'al compas').

There are two systems in walking:

- Parallel system, this is the most usual way for two people to walk when the woman's right foot moves at the same time as the man's left foot.
- The crossed system, when the woman's right foot moves at the same time as the man's right foot.

Yeites milongueros

Tips for dancing tango milonguero, a tango in which the dancers dance bust to bust in a closed *abrazo*.

Zamba

The zamba, a gallant and sensual dance, is one of Argentina's best-known folk dances, a couple dance in which men and women face each other. It is a dance of slow seduction, where contact is made solely through the use of white scarves or handkerchiefs (*pañuelos*). The lyrics often evoke the everyday life of Argentines, with the dominant themes being love and the dramas of life.