

Language and Mind
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Module – 05
Lecture - 21
Structure of Sentence
Agreement

Today, we will look at another aspect of Sentence and this aspect is called Agreement. It is a technical term which we need to understand with examples. We have been looking at sentences; we have been looking at the process of a sentence and how a sentence is made; we are looking at parts of a sentence and how those parts are combined together. In order to understand how those parts are combined together, today we are going to look at what combines them together.

In short, the answer is agreement. It is an invisible aspect of a sentence which helps us combine the two parts. Once again, I draw your attention to the two sentences that we have discussed before.

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Agreement			
– John	loves	Mary.	
Sub	Verb	Object	
N	V	N	
– John	wrote	a letter	to Mary.
Sub	Verb	D-obj	I-obj
N	V	N	N

In the two sentences that you see on the screen, first one - John loves Mary, and the second sentence is John wrote a letter to Mary. In both the sentences there are two parts. I am sure you are familiar with these two parts by now; these two parts are subjects and predicates. Like we have said, a sentence is not a random collection of words; that is, we

do not put words together randomly. In other words, there is a pattern of the words and there is a reason why words are together, the way they are; and that reason is agreement.

So, what connects the subject John, with the predicate loves Mary, is the agreement; the key to that is agreement. And therefore we said agreement is an invisible aspect of a sentence. It is not easily seen; it needs to be understood. Likewise, when we say John wrote a letter to Mary, this sentence is... also, the two parts of these sentences, this sentence, is put together with agreement. We can say two parts of all the sentences are put together, are combined together, with agreement.

And then, we will try to see the elements which take part in agreement. Agreement is the name of the phenomena and then there are lots of elements which are also part of the invisible domain of the sentence, take part in sentence, in sentence formation in the process of agreement. And we can see what those elements are with examples of the sentences. Today, we will be taking examples from two languages, mainly English and Hindi, to demonstrate the phenomena.

However, you can check these things in the languages that you speak; or for that matter, any language of the world. Now, what is the part that we see here which is taking part in the agreement in the first sentence? John is a subject and loves Mary is the predicate; the verb is loves. Now, I draw your attention to the part that is indicated by the sound sa, sound sa; and that is what makes the word - loves.

So, this element with sa, with the simple s and which in turn sound sa is visible marker of agreement in this sentence. What does this signify? This signifies several things. This signifies that the subject is a singular one, is a singular noun. This also signifies it is third person and then it signifies that the tense on the verb is present tense and the aspect is habitual aspect. So, we are talking about four things; we are talking about number which is singular, we are talking about person, which is third person, we are talking about tense which is present and we are talking about aspect which is indefinite.

These four things are indicated by this one little sound - sa in this sentence and therefore, we said these are invisible parts of the sentence. Some of them are properties of the verb alone. For example, tense and aspects are the properties of verb alone, which surfaces on the verb. However, number, singular and person - third person - are indicative of the subject.

So, the singular and third person property, these two properties of the subject John is also encoded in the verb and therefore, they are connected; and that is what we mean by agreement. You can see similar thing in the second sentence as well. However, the appearance is different on the verb, because of the different tense. And in this case, tense takes priority in manifestation; however, there is still an agreement between the subject and the verb. I want to take a different example from Hindi to show you how it works in Hindi.

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Agreement

raajuu ne caay pii
Raju-**M** erg tea-**F** drank-**F**
'Raju drank tea.'

siimaa ne seb khaaye
Sima-**F** ERG apple-**M-Pl** ate-**M-Pl**
'Sima ate apples.'

Now, see the two sentences again. The first sentence is, Rajuu ne caay pii - means Raju drank tea. The first sentence is the transliteration of a Hindi sentence, in the second layer you see glosses given for the entire sentence; gloss means word by word meaning of every part of the sentence. So you see meaning of the word or the part is given right under that; it is a standard convention of representing a language, transcribing a language in linguistic research so that, speakers of... those who do not speak this language could understand and we could easily indicate the parts where we need people's attention and then finally, we give the meaning of the whole thing in English.

So, Rajuu ne caay pii - means Raju drink tea, where we see Raju is a proper noun, Ne is ergative case marker, caay is tea and pii is drank. Now, also pay attention to the parts that are marked in red. Raju has a masculine gender on it; however, caay has got a feminine gender on it.

Now, remember a couple of days ago when we were discussing plural formation of nouns. While talking about the structure of words and underlying patterns of word formation, we mentioned and I repeat that again that assignment of gender to nouns in Hindi is also arbitrary. In some cases like natural genders it makes sense. So, we understand the masculine marker on the proper name Raju, but caay being feminine is an example of arbitrary assignment of gender in a language like Hindi.

So, please pay attention to the two nouns: Raju is masculine noun and caay is a feminine noun. Hindi is a verb final language unlike English. A verb final language means the verb will be the final constituent of the sentence, final thing in a sentence; in the structure of subject, object and verb, we can say Hindi is SOV language, whereas we can say English is SVO. All we are saying is English is a verb medial language and Hindi is verb final language. In English, verbs appear in the middle of a sentence; in Hindi, verbs appear at the end of a sentence.

So, the part pii is the verb in the sentence and we see a feminine marking on the verb as well. This indicates that gender as an element is part of agreement in a language like Hindi. So we have seen, so far in English we saw two parts which were indicated on the verb as features of subjects; the two parts were person and number. They were third person and singular number. If the subject was plural, then we will see a plural marking; we will see an indication of plurality on the verb as well.

So, here in this example, we see Raju - masculine marking, caay - feminine marking and drink - which is the verb, also gets a marker for gender, which is feminine. Now, it is clear here or should be clear for us to understand that in a language like Hindi, we are going to see gender taking part in agreement. And therefore, this type of a situation is also called grammatical gender; that is, when we see a marking of gender on the verb, we indicate that by grammatical gender, because now, gender is playing a role in grammaticality of a sentence; gender is playing a role in agreement. It has taken part in the invisible process of a sentence, in the formation of a sentence. So, the three things... now we have three: number, person and gender. We will look at them again and we will look at them together. The bunch of these three features is called...

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Agreement Features

- Phi Features (ϕ)
 - Person
 - Number
 - Gender

Phi features are indicative of agreements and these things are going to be indicating relationship between subject and the predicate. And depending upon which features are present, they are going to be taking part in agreement in the sense that... and that is pretty simple. If the person is third person on the subject, then it is going to show in one way or the other, third person on the verb as well. If the subject is singular, it is going to find a way to indicate third singular number on the verb as well. And if we see the gender of the subject is masculine, then we will see the whole process finding a way to indicate gender on the verb as well.

So, in a language like Hindi, all three of them are participating. Let us look at these examples again to understand agreement in Hindi and the whole phenomenon of agreement in general.

So, it is easy for us to see that the noun that agrees with the verb in the first sentence in Hindi is caay and not Raju. So, and because caay is feminine and what we find on the verb, marking of the gender is feminine; therefore, we can say caay as the noun agrees with the verb in this sentence. Well, this helps us understand the notion of the subject a step ahead. We have not talked much about the subject as well. We have only been indicating subject as one of the required parts of a sentence.

Subject is an important thing in a sentence, because the features of subject have to match with features of verb within the predicate to get a sentence; to combine two parts

together to come up with a sentence. Therefore, that is a required part; however, we have not said much about what qualifies to be a subject.

Now, at this point with these examples at least, we can say what qualifies to agree with the verb is the subject; or at least we can say, what qualifies to agree with the verb, in other words with the predicates, is the grammatical subject. So, we need to understand the notion of two types of subjects: one, the grammatical subject and the other the logical subject. So, when you see the sentence Raju ne caay pii, you would normally want to believe that the subject of the sentence is Raju, which is the subject of the sentence, but only to the extent that it is a logical subject of the sentence.

We are trying to look at all these aspects and let me underline this thing again. Let me bring this thing at this point. We are trying to look at all these parts, all these discussions, just to see how much has already been figured out by a child in the process of acquisition and at the same time it is fascinating to see the role of human mind in doing all these things; and also, it is important and fascinating for us to see the underlying patterns of sentence formation.

So, a closer look at these patterns and application of these rules... for example here, agreement helps us understand the notion of subjects and verbs as well. So, the grammatical subject is still caay which is tea, and logical subjective is Raju, in this sentence. Similarly, let us look at the second sentence. Second sentence is – Seemaa ne seb khaye. Again it means - Sima ate apples. Sima is a feminine noun in Hindi. It is a proper name. Again, ne is a ergative marker; seb is apple which gets masculine gender in Hindi and ate is khaye.

Now, there is a marker of plurality on this verb; therefore, we understand that the word seb is plural. Remember, seb is the type of noun in Hindi which does not end with a long aa; with a long vowel aa. Therefore, this noun, and if we know about this noun being masculine, then we know that this is not going to change its shape, change its form. But, when we use them in a sentence, there is absolutely no confusion or redundancy for that matter, in the mind of the speakers, or in the mind of learners, to indicate plurality on the verb; to show that this form of the word, this form of the noun seb, is plural.

So, even though there is no obvious change in the word seb, we still have a way to indicate plurality on the verb, to indicate plurality of this noun as well. That is one part.

So, which tells you that number is also taking part in agreement in this sentence and this being masculine, that is this noun *seb* being masculine and the verb getting masculine agreement marker, tells us again that this noun agrees with the verb; that is, *seb* agrees with the verb *khaye*.

Again, *Sima* appears to be a logical subject, where as *seb* is a grammatical subject. Now, we have taken up these two examples only for us to understand the notion of grammatical subject and logical subject. We will talk about these two and also what is logical about a logical subject little later, when we want to understand a different aspect of a sentence. However, at this point, we do understand what is grammatical about the grammatical subject.

What we mean by a grammatical subject should be clear from these two examples. We mean, the subject that agrees with the verb is a grammatical subject. Therefore, agreement only talks about grammatical subject. A small footnote here for speakers of Hindi and also for the speakers of other languages. Please note, the element *ne* which is marked as ergative case marker in both the sentences, we do not have at our disposal to understand Hindi *per se*; but, it will be worth mentioning as a footnote here for you to see that this *ne* is an ergative case marker; and because of the presence of this case marker in an overt way in this two sentences, the logical subjects are prohibited from agreeing with the verb. In general, when subjects are not marked with any case marker, that is when subjects are not marked with any overt case marker, then, subjects tend to agree with verbs.

The cases are always present on a subject. In lot of cases when there is no marker, then the case on the subject is nominative. However, the markers'... overt presence of markers indicate a different case on the subject; that is, on the logical subject. As a matter of additional rule in Hindi, language-specific rule of Hindi, it so happens that a lexical case marker prohibits the subject to agree with the verb. And therefore, this case marker *ne*, which is an ergative case marker, is not letting the noun *Sima* in the second case and *Raju* in the first case, agree with their corresponding verbs.

The other rule which is not language-specific rule, but yet important one, which says agreement must take place. Now, agreement must take place is a more powerful rule for natural language, whereas language-specific rule of Hindi says, agreement must take

place. There is no problem. Hindi does not have a problem with that. But it says, the subjects which are overtly marked by a overt case marker will not participate in the agreement.

To resolve such a situation, Hindi applies another trick and the trick is, it will find another noun to agree with the verb in the linear order; and in the linear order, it finds another noun - *caay* in the first case and *seb* in the second case, which ends up agreeing with verbs. We find features of these nouns appearing on the word as well, which are indicative of agreement, and then we establish that agreement has taken place, and the agreement has taken place which is a universal pattern of sentence formation. However, the language internal rule - a powerful one - that the subjects marked by overt case markers will not be allowed to participate in agreement is also kept intact.

There is another point which is worth mentioning here that ergative cases appear in Hindi only when the verbs are transitive and they are marked with perfective aspects. Now, I have not indicated perfective aspects in these two examples. Because, that is not what we are focusing on. I am telling you this information as an additional piece of information while discussing sentence. We are done with our understanding of different parts and how they come together and what we mean by agreement. However, the footnotes are also crucial and significantly important for understanding of agreement in a language like Hindi. I will repeat this again; the ergative case markers like *ne* surfaces in a sentence only when the verb is transitive and the aspect is perfective.

So, the verb *piina* in Hindi, which is drink, is transitive verb. This verb, the transitive nature of the verb is not language dependent; *piina* or drink or whatever the terms maybe in different languages, this verb is going to be transitive across languages. *Khana* which means to eat is going to be transitive in all languages. Therefore, these two verbs are transitive in these two examples and they also carry perfective aspect marker on them. Therefore, we see the ergative marker appearing. If either of the two requirements are not met, then the ergative case marker does not appear.

We will be looking at some parts of these things as well while understanding the sentence pattern. For the purpose of our understanding of agreement, the sets of examples from Hindi and English help us understand the whole phenomenon of agreement and also help us understand how various rules operate and how they are

organized at different levels; and human mind has absolutely no difficulty either processing them or acquiring them. Another phenomenon about a sentence, which is related to a sentence, we will discuss next time.

Thank you.