

Language and Mind
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Module - 04
Lecture - 19
Structure of Sentences
Nature of Verbs and Phrases

Sentence in a language is a fascinating unit. It tells us a lot about all kinds of aspects of language. It tells us about all the rules, all kinds of principles that could be either part of the knowledge of language or what we saw little earlier in the course as part of universal grammar. Understand that principles are part of universal grammar; principles make us understand about underlying patterns that are common to languages and evaluating such a thing becomes very easy through the study of, particularly the structure of sentence. In our discussion today, we will continue discussing the structure of sentence with reference to nature of verbs and we will also try to get to phrases.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:46)

Phrase

- What is a phrase?
- What do phrases mean in a sentences?
- Structure of a phrase?

We have looked at phrases. Today we will look at nature of verbs and a phrase. What is a phrase, and what do phrases mean in a sentence and what is the structure of phrase? These are the questions that we need to answer to understand phrase. We come to these questions in a moment. Let us spend some time in understanding nature of language,

nature of verbs, structure of a sentence through nature of verbs with some more examples.

We have looked at subject and predicate as parts of sentences. We have looked at their grammatical relations and the examples that we saw were English sentences like - John loves Mary and John wrote a letter to Mary; both of them have sentences and predicates. In both the sentences we have predicates, and we have...the verbs within the predicates require objects. Therefore, they are both examples of transitive verbs.

Now, let us look at the notion of transitivity and intransitivity as the nature of verb with little bit more examples, and understand how they work and why that is significant for understanding the structure of a sentence.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:30)

- 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

We said verbs decide whether it will need an object or not and verbs get to make such a decision on the basis of it is nature. And then we looked at three types of verbs and we said essentially the three types are: intransitive, transitive and ditransitive. There are common things between ditransitive and transitive and such a common thing is basically, both are transitive, because both need objects. And the internal difference between ditransitive verbs and transitive verbs is such that we have just one object for a transitive verb and two objects for ditransitive verbs.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:30)

- John goes to church every Sunday.
- John slept early last night.

- John loves Mary.
- John wrote a letter to Mary.

- John teaches History to MA students at IIT.
- John brings home beautiful flowers every day.

Let us see some clearer examples. We have three sets of sentences here. First one where we have, John goes to church every Sunday; we have, John slept last night, John slept early last night; or we can also say, John slept last night early - just two different sentences. And then, this story develops like, we have seen the sentences, John loves Mary and John wrote a letter to Mary. And then we have the third set of sentences like - John teaches History to MA students at IIT and John brings home beautiful flowers every day. Here is what we need to understand with the examples of these sentences.

The first two sentences have intransitive verbs; that is, these two verbs do not need objects. Therefore, we do not have any object in these two sentences. In the second set, John loves Mary and John wrote a letter to Mary, the verbs - loves and wrote - require an object. Mary is the object of the verb - love in the first sentence; and a letter is the object of the verb - wrote in the second sentence.

In the third set of sentences, John teaches History to MA students at IIT and John brings home beautiful flowers every day, the two verbs - teaches and brings - are examples of ditransitive verbs. What we mean here is what we have been discussing so far. The verb - teaches needs two objects; and the two objects in these sentences are: in the first sentence, the verb teaches has got two objects. The first one is - History, and the second one is - to MA students. In the second sentence, John brings home beautiful flowers

every day, the first object of the verb brings is – home, and the second object of the verb brings is - beautiful flowers.

Now, I have only described so far two types of transitive verbs: transitive and ditransitive and intransitive. And I have indicated objects, the presence of object in transitive verb, the presence of two objects in ditransitive verbs and presence of no objects for intransitive verbs in these three sets. A curious thing will come to your mind that there are lots of other things in these sentences and I have tried to put those things purposely for you to understand the structure of sentence with the help of nature of verbs.

Let us keep in mind and repeat this thing once again; that the two parts of a sentence that are required are: subjects and predicates. We have a sentence when we have these two parts. So John, as I am keeping this an imaginary character, consistent throughout the sentences, is an example of subject. It is not part of the predicate; it is an external thing. It has the verbs of a sentence or verbs of the predicate; does not control the presence or absence of a subject.

Even though it is a noun and in these examples, these nouns are subjects have got nothing to do with objects; they have their independent status. They have their independent status and they are not dependent on verbs, they are not dependent on predicates. Within the predicate, we have another noun which happens to be, if they are present, then they are objects.

The intransitive verbs will have no objects; transitive verbs will have one object and ditransitive verbs will have two. In the transitive verbs, look at the set of transitive verbs: John loves Mary and John wrote a letter to Mary. In the second example, John wrote a letter to Mary, a letter is the object of the verb, not to Mary; to Mary is something else. Similarly, in the set of ditransitive verbs, John teaches History to MA students at IIT, the phrase - at IIT, is not part of the required elements by the verb in the predicate.

Similarly, everyday in the last sentence, the second sentence of the set of ditransitive verbs is not part of the predicate, is not the required part of the predicate. They are still parts of predicate, but they are not the required parts of the predicate and they are not the required parts of the verb in the predicates they belong to.

So, there is a distinction between required elements and not required elements within the predicate. Required elements are going to be objects and not required elements are going to have different names. We will be talking about those terms little later, but let us understand... let us understand this that objects are decided by verbs and an intransitive verb will not have an object.

There is a way to find it out. And objects are usually marked when we have a question with – what? So, if we question the verb of the sentence with – what?.., and if the verb of a sentence allows us to come up with a question - what, then that verb is going to get an... that question is going to get an answer to. And the answer to that – what? is going to be the object. Therefore, we can use this little trick for identifying transitive verbs; that if we are allowed to question the verb with what?, then they are transitive verbs. Ditransitive verbs will also allow us to question themselves with what?

However, intransitive verbs are not going to allow us to question them by what? Try using this trick in these three verbs, these three sets of sentences, where we have six verbs, two each of intransitive, transitive and ditransitive. And then, you can also apply this trick to a huge set of sentences that comes to your mind.

So, can we question the verb go with what? John goes to the church every Sunday. It is a nice sentence. The verb - goes to church every Sunday - is still part of the predicate, but these are not the required elements, because we cannot question the verb go with what. John goes what - it is not a legitimate question. Therefore, this is going to be an intransitive verb. John slept last night; John slept early last night; John slept what? - is not a legitimate question; therefore the remaining constituents in this sentence are also important. They may give us important information about the subject or the predicate, but they do not become required elements of the sentence.

However, when we say John loves and we question the verb love, John loves what? - sounds like a legitimate question, and then we can get an answer for this question. The answer turns out to be the object of the verb. So, we get John loves what? - John loves Mary; and then Mary is a required element of the sentence. John wrote a letter; John wrote what? - John wrote a letter; therefore the phrase - a letter - becomes the essential part of the sentence, essential part of the predicate.

Similarly, John teaches; John teaches what? - John teaches history; and here, we have two objects: history as the direct object and - to MA students - as an indirect object. The distinction between direct object and indirect object is, the noun or the phrase that becomes answer to the question what? is an example of a direct object and the one that is not is an example of indirect object.

Therefore, with these little tricks, we can understand these complex notions of transitive and intransitive verbs, transitive and ditransitive verbs, direct objects and indirect objects. We merely looked at these notions, these terms, last time. Today, I want you to understand what these things do in a sentence and how we identify them; and there are lots of things in a sentence, but they are not all required elements.

Now, this distinction of required or not required is highly cognitive in nature and they determine, they help us understand the fundamentals of a sentence. We started with phrases; we will look a little bit about phrases as well. We will look at little bit about phrases as well and we will try to understand more about sentences little later again, when we have looked at phrases. So, sentences as a unit is very significant; and a smaller part of a sentence is called a phrase.

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Phrase

- Specifier
- Compliments

The definition of a phrase or the notion of a phrase is such that, it is a smaller part of a sentence; it is not a complete sentence. However, it could be bigger than a word; it could be bigger than a word and sometimes, it could be just a word and still be a phrase. But

ideally, it could be bigger than a word, but still not a sentence because, bigger than a word means, it could have two words, it could have three words, it could have many words. And still, a phrase will not be a sentence. The reasons why a phrase could not be a sentence, helps...is very critical for developing and understanding of what makes a sentence.

So far we have seen sentences and its parts. We need to understand what makes a sentence in order to understand sentence completely. When we start looking at phrases, phrases have got two parts, rather three parts. Besides the lexical term, there are two parts: one is a specifier and the other is a complimentary; and then we will be talking about these specifiers and compliments in details little later.

Let us see the example of a phrase for the time being. Let us use the same sentence for us to see what we mean by a phrase. When we have examples like John goes to church, John - we identify it as a subject, it is a unique thing; it remains out of it. Then, we have rest of the thing as a predicate, and then part of the predicate...the most essential part of the predicate is not an object, but a verb, because, first we have a verb, and then verbs; the nature of verbs determines whether it needs objects or not, and then rest of the things are optional. So, in the first example, we have a predicate; it has got a verb, it has got no objects, but look at the remaining part - to church. This whole thing - to church - is a phrase; every Sunday - is a phrase; John as a subject, as a noun, is also a phrase.

So, phrases have basically certain internal structure; they are going to...the nature of phrase is such that the components of phrase are connected with one another, like the components of a sentence connected with one another. Like the two components of a sentence like subject and predicate are connected with one another in terms of agreement, similarly, parts of a phrase are also connected with one another. So, there is a relationship between - to and church.

Again, John wrote a letter to Mary - look at this example and see, what is an object? Object is not just letter; the object is the whole phrase - a letter. What is not the object in this sentence - to Mary - is also a phrase. So, these are some of the examples of phrases. John teaches history to MA students; John is a phrase; teaches history to MA students - the whole thing, the predicate itself is a different type of phrase.

Then, within this phrase, we have history as one phrase, to MA students is another phrase, and at IIT is another phrase. So, there are three phrases within the whole verb phrase, which is a predicate. And then, again in the next sentence, John brings home beautiful flowers every day - John is a subject, John is a phrase, and brings home beautiful flowers every day - the whole thing, though a predicate, is a phrase, it is called a verb phrase.

Because, the most important part within the predicate is a phrase, within the predicate is a verb. The most important part of the predicate is a verb and therefore, the whole predicate is identified as a verb phrase. And then, when we start looking at this verb phrase, we find several components of the verb phrase as phrases too. So, home is a phrase; beautiful flowers is a phrase; and every day is also a phrase.

This is how we identify smaller units in a sentence and they are not just intuitive; there is an underlying pattern in these phrases, and we will be looking at these patterns of these phrases next time.

Thank you.