

**Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach**  
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**Lecture - 35**  
**Syntactic Structures**

Hi, hello everyone. Welcome to this session of our course Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach. We are talking about syntax; eventually we will move to syntactic typology. As I discussed in the previous session before really getting to know what syntax is, we need to understand the basics of grammar from a natural language perspective, so that it will be easier for us to understand, what a sentence is, eventually what syntax is.

Syntax, as I mentioned, is the sort of systematic study of sentence structures or the sentence constructions in any given language. So, if you really want to understand syntax and its applications, you must know what are the grammatical categories that comprises a sentence, and how we need to study these categories, so that it will not be difficult for us to understand, the basics of syntax as a part of linguistics.

In this regard, I was talking about the different kinds of parts of speech that we have in English because that is the language that I am focusing on for this course. There are some basic or you can say most fundamental grammatical categories or parts of speech. And, we did get to know how prescriptively or how traditionally you understand what is a noun, what is an article, what is an adjective, what is a verb, what is an adverb, what is a preposition, what is a pronoun and what is a conjunction.

These are some basic ones or as I have just mentioned some fundamental kinds of parts of speech, that languages have, especially in English you will find all of this. And then we did have a discussion on this; how to identify a noun, how to identify a pronoun, how to identify an article and so on. Then all these definitions as I was talking about, they are primarily related to a set of rules that you have been taught; let us say when you were in school. Considering these are the basic definitions, these are definitely useful for identifying most forms in a language. For example, here we have English, but this definition may not be

enough or may not be satisfying to explain languages which do not fall in the category of English.

World has many languages and not all the languages are alike; different languages have different grammatical systems. So, considering this is working for English, it does not really mean that it is going to work for the rest of the languages, not necessary. It might be different for South Asian languages like Odia or Hindi or a Tibeto Burman language like Meiteilon or an Austroasiatic language like Juang or Khadiya. So, it may not work.

However, to begin with, you need to have some basic definitions, and this is until that point. After that we have to think about other methods by which we can actually describe the system of a particular language. This description of a particular language falls in the category of prescriptive grammar. Up until now what we have been talking about or what we have been discussing they are in the domain of prescriptive grammar.

When I say prescriptive, there are certain do's and don'ts. And if the do's and don'ts are there, that means, you generally cannot derail yourself from a set pattern or from a set path. If a particular definition has been x you have to follow it in x way only, you cannot make it x plus 1 or x minus 1. That does not work in prescriptive grammar.

However, in descriptive grammar, when you have a sample dataset in your hand, and you are trying to analyze it or you are trying to describe or explain it, you can tweak your own rules to accommodate the natural language data that you have. So that would be in the category of your descriptive grammar.

So, with this information, let us move to the next parts of speech related grammatical information or information related to grammar that is called agreement. You must have studied agreement when you were in school. Traditionally, in most of the grammar books, it is written as concord. Here primarily I am going to talk about subject-verb agreement. Sometimes the verb also agrees with the object. I will not really talk about subject-verb or object-verb or anything else, primarily I will talk about agreement, agreement as a broader grammatical item or a broader grammatical phenomenon.

Considering we are going to put it in a more umbrella-like term, let us understand what kind of information does the traditional grammatical analysis give us about agreement. Let us say there are certain categories like number or person or tense, voice, gender, these are certain grammatical categories which have been given a lot of attention in linguistics literature.

But what is so special about agreement vis-a-vis the ones that I discussed, number, person, tense, voice, and gender, they can be discussed in isolation. You can simply talk about what is the person, number, gender system in a language let us say Telugu or Hindi or Odia or English. But when you talk about agreement, it cannot be discussed in isolation. I hope I made it clear. The the grammatical categories I discussed before I talked about agreement, all of them can be discussed in isolation, but when the matter comes to agreement, you have to consider it in the form of an agreement between two different grammatical entities.

So, when you say, what role does number play in the grammatical system of a particular language, here you have to talk about agreement, whether the number feature on the subject, changes the verb or not. So that study is going to be considered in the category of agreement.

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I am writing it here. Let us say I am giving you a construction John loves his dog. That is a sentence and we need to analyze it. When you say John loves his dog, what kind of a sentence is this? That will be a declarative sentence or a statement. Whether it is a, what and

then you can talk about which voice has been used here, whether it is active, passive, reflexive or mediopassive, there are different kinds of voice systems.

So, what kind of a voice is used? Maybe you can say this is an active voice. This sentence is a statement, it is a declarative construction, and it is an active voice. And if I ask you which tense has been used here? You can say it is present tense, because it is a habitual aspect, loves. Then I will say what are the features of the subject, subject John is third person. It is singular number, the sentence is in present tense, active voice. And, considering John is biological, it is a male, it assumes to be a male name, so it has the masculine gender.

All these numbers, I am going to write it over here, these are the ones which can be studied in isolation. We have number, then we have person, voice, tense, and let us say gender. Our focus here is to identify what is the number in connection with the sentence given here. What is the number of the subject? The subject is singular number, third person, having an active voice, present tense and masculine gender.

Independently you can discuss them in isolation. That is what these grammatical categories, they can be discussed in isolation. And this is a number, the number can be a singular, plural or dual; person can be first person, second person or third person; voice could be active or passive or mediopassive; tense could be present, past or future; gender could be masculine and feminine. So, in isolation, you can definitely discuss this. But to discuss their role in describing language structure, it becomes clearer when we consider them in terms of agreement. Did I make sense?

So, one is discussing them in isolation as an independent or individual entity. But if you want to test or if you want to check what roles do they play in the language structure, in the grammatical structure of a particular language, then you have to study agreement. Let me write it in a clearer manner. When you want to study these to understand the grammatical structure, or the grammatical construction of a particular language, then you have to target what sort of roles do they play when they are associated with agreement.

When I say agreement, you have to check let us say there is the verb love which is loves here. What kind of agreement does it have with the noun? When you say John loves his dog, then, obviously the first thing that you notice here, loves can also be written as love, depending on

the subject that it agrees with. Since John is third person singular number, the verb is going to be loves. Had it been I, then the the verb would have been love. Had it been the second person singular number you, the verb would be love. Had it been the third person plural number they, it would have been love. Considering this is the third person singular number, the number and the person feature on the subject John is going to make a difference.

In case of English, in such a construction, the agreement is seen between two things, one is the subject John and then the verb loves. That is one side of the agreement story. Do you see any other agreement with anything any of the grammatical categories given over here? For sure, we realize that since it is John, it becomes loves. Had it been they, it would have been love. But do you see any other agreement here? Any other category of agreement which you think would be relevant to understand when you are studying this phenomenon. Think about it.

So, when we are trying to understand how agreement works in different languages, one sort of agreement that we saw now is between the subject and the verb. Now, my question for you was, do you think there are some other instances of agreement? Can you think about it? What is it? The other agreement that you see between John and his. Had it been Mary, it would have been Mary loves her dog. Because John is biologically a kind of a male, that is a male name, or it is a biological gender. So, when you said the man, obviously, it is a biological gender. Then in that case, the pronoun is also masculine. Had it been biologically female or women, then it would have been her which is agreeing with the subject.

So, two different kinds of agreement we saw here, one - the subject and verb agreement, then we saw the noun and pronoun agreement. Here these are the two things that we need to keep a check on. Now, my question is, do you think this is the way all the languages in the world work? I do not think so. Different languages have different patterns, or different languages have different styles. Considering subject-verb agreement is quite strong in English, let us say in a language like Hindi, object-verb agreement also works. When you say let us say it is my brother. Generally as far as Hindi is concerned, sometimes the verb also agrees with the object. We will bring these discussions in a while.

So now, let us finish the discussion on agreement in general taking into consideration English. At least in this given sentence, you saw the verb has to agree with the subject, and the pronoun has to agree with the noun. And the feature of the noun will decide what kind of a pronoun it is going to take. If the noun is singular, the pronoun is also going to be singular; if the noun is plural, the pronoun would be plural. Similar is the case with masculine or feminine.

When I said John, it will be John loves his dog. When it is Mary, Mary loves her dog. If it is John and Mary, John and Mary love their dogs. When it becomes John and Mary, it became plural. When it is singular, it is his or her; and when it is plural, it is going to be their. The pronoun has to agree with its noun and generally in linguistics, we call it antecedent. It must agree with its antecedent which has been given over there. So, this is how most of the languages work as far as the agreement system is concerned.

I think I need to focus a little more on the gender marking. There are two kinds of gender as I discussed a while ago. One is the biological gender; the other one is going to be grammatical gender. The biological gender is generally like the sort whether it is male or female, and that decides the biological distinction between male and female. But when you are talking about grammatical gender, you have to be a little more careful about it.

So, how you are going to decide on the grammatical gender? English is not the right kind of language which we should consider as an example, rather we should consider examples like Spanish or let us say German, because they have certain grammatical markers on the nouns which would help you to understand, whether they are masculine or feminine. So, that is what I said that apart from the biological distinctions which are used in English, we have other languages where they focus a lot on the grammatical gender. And in this case, a neutral gender is used both for male and female. After that, they use a grammatical category or a marker which will tell you whether that is masculine or feminine.

Let us consider a Spanish example. In Spanish, there are two grammatical genders: masculine and feminine. And one would be el sol which means the sun. And the other example is the moon. So, when you say el sol, which is the sun, this would tell you this is the grammatical

el, this is the grammatical gender marker, and this is the masculine marker, and this is the feminine marker.

When you say la, that would be feminine, and when you say el, that is going to be considered as the masculine marker. These masculine and feminine markers are not derived or are not identified biologically, rather these are the grammatical genders. El, which is used for masculine, for example, when you say sun or moon, so that does not mean that these are the neuter genders, for that matter there is absolutely no gender marking. These examples are found in Yule's book, and the language used here is Spanish.

So, in this case, if you and you compare it with English for both sun and the moon, you have the same marker. Here, this is called a definiteness marker. It does not have any gender difference. When the language is Spanish, you would actually see a lot of gender difference in this. This is one way by which we can understand how the gender works in other languages like German or Spanish. Find out some more German data. French is also very sensitive as far as grammatical gender is concerned.

You can explore other languages from South Asia, especially Hindi, where the gender marking is extremely strong. In Hindi we would see almost all the nouns will have either a masculine or a feminine gender, there is nothing like a neuter gender. It is the native speaker's intuition which helps the Hindi speakers to mark gender on a new noun that they encounter for the first time. If you are a native speaker of Hindi, if I show you a new object, you can automatically mark either the masculine or the feminine gender. I always tell like asking my students considering I am not a native speaker of Hindi, though I speak it pretty fluently, almost like a native speaker, but still I do not get that intuition.

And the language that I speak does not have gender difference. It is very fluid, it is not that rigid. We have masculine and feminine, which are primarily biological. We do not really have any grammatical gender marking, unlike Hindi which has the [FL] and the [FL] marker. So [FL] and [FL] something like that. Or John [FL] Mary [FL], when you say John that is a masculine name, so it will be John [FL] or when you say Mary, it will be Mary [FL] or something like that, I also I do not have a strong intuition about Hindi. So, I do not want to mark gender depending on my non-native speaker's intuition.

But all that I wanted to tell you is that since in my language this is also another Indo-Aryan language which is Odia, it does not have this rigid or this kind of a strict gender marking, I find it very difficult when I encounter a new noun or new object. My gender system is super clumsy. So, this is a question I generally ask my students. In Hindi we say and a lot of linguistics teachers actually use this example. Why is it that in Hindi we say [FL], but truck [FL]. As if truck is not a [FL] what is the meaning of [FL], any moving vehicle. So, when you say [FL], then you are saying [FL].

Let us see the subject, verb and then the pronominal agreement here. This is just a simple Hindi example I am giving. So, [FL] would be any vehicle. This would be [FL] is it will be basically run, it will be progressive stay [FL] would be something stay in progressive aspect and this is be, be progressive. I am just giving you a very basic gloss. The vehicle is running, whereas, when you say truck, it will be [FL]. Compare this with this. So, when it is this, so this and this. The concern here is that as if truck is not a [FL], truck is also a vehicle. If for any vehicle you are using [FL], what is the problem to use the same kind of a gender marking in case of a truck.

If you ask me the question, I do not know why it works in this way, even the native Hindi speakers would also be clueless, because language is random. You cannot bind language with rules all the time. There would be exceptions. There would be variations, and there would be limitations. These are the three things you would encounter in the world's languages. Considering we have limitations, we have exceptions and we have variations. So, we are not going to be rigid about why it should be like this, why truck cannot be [FL]. This is how the native speakers speak.

When you say a truck [FL], obviously, the agreement is between the subject truck and then the verb [FL]. So, when it is [FL], that would be stay. I am going to erase this. So, this is going to be, this is feminine, and this is also progressive. And in case of [FL], this is masculine, the rest of the things are remaining same. So, when you say this is masculine, the concern is to identify how it is going to work as far as agreement is concerned in a language like Hindi.



Truck [FL] and [FL] is a weird example that we always give. These are the instances of other kinds of gender marking which we find in languages like Hindi for that matter, the Indo-Aryan languages like Marathi or Gujarati or Rajasthani or Marwadi. However, in the eastern Indo-Aryan languages like Odia and Bangla, we do not really see much of gender rigidity; gender is rather fluid here. We do not have a rigid gender system unlike Hindi.

So, just remember, when you talk about agreement, you have to see what are the possible combinations of the agreements, that you encounter in a construction. I have discussed subject-verb agreement, I have also discussed noun and pronoun agreement. Do you think there are other kinds of agreement possible in a given language? That is a question for you, think about it. Here is a box that I am drawing. What are the other forms of agreement found in the structure of a given language? That is a question for you to think about it.

When I say this, I always ask you to think how it works in your own language, or how it works in the languages that you know. It is not necessary that everything has to follow the English way, not really. You might find languages which do not follow the English pattern. So, with this, we will move over to another very important thing that you need to understand to have a better idea about syntax and that is called constituent analysis.

Now, I will move on to constituent analysis. When I say constituent analysis, we will go to it a little later. I would not just to give an idea that these are the discussions which we just had about agreement. These are the traditional analysis or the or the prescriptive grammar system or the prescriptive approach. So, let us discuss first the prescriptive approach, and why we need a descriptive study of languages and eventually I will move on to constituent analysis, and we will stop there.

Thank you.

Keywords: agreement, gender, number, person, tense, voice, antecedent, biological gender, grammatical gender, definiteness marker, pronominal agreement, constituent analysis