

**Basics of Language Science**  
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**Lecture 15**  
**What Makes a Sentence**

Now we want to move to sentences. And we are trying to look at the underlying patterns as well and now we are moving a little bit ahead of only patterns, we want to see what are those factors responsible for these underlying patterns. And again, you may be familiar with these terms, but when we see how they collectively work together to give us a sentence, this is what we are going to see. So, in our initial discussions, we have talked about sentences a little bit. Remember, what is the most important thing for a sentence?


Student: We should have a verb.

Professor: A verb, right, the most important part of a sentence is a verb. So, that is going to play several kinds of roles in a sentence and we will see that as well.

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## Sentence

- How do we make a sentence?
- Are sentences random collection of words?
- If not, what are the required components of a sentence?



So, these are the things, these are the questions we are going to look at, how do we make a sentence. Of course, sentences are not merely a random collection of words, we put several words together they are not going to become a sentence and then if that is not the case, then what are the things that are responsible for sentences, these are the things that we will look at. When we say things responsible for making sentences clearly, such things are not


categorically visible right away. You can see them but they are not categorically visible right away, some of them are hidden.

Once we are familiar with such elements, then we will move to patterns and more patterns of a sentence and then to principles that govern sentence formation and then eventually language of the world. So, let us look at these two sentences from Hindi in simple terms.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:18)

**Agreement**

1. raajuu ne caay pii  
Raju-**M** erg tea-**F** drank-**F**  
'Raju drank tea.'
  
2. siimaa ne seb khaaye  
Sima-**F** ERG apple-**M-Pl** ate-**M-Pl**  
'Sima ate apples.'

 Features ( $\phi$ )= **Person, Number, and Gender**

They are pretty simple sentences. Do they look simple? You can read them right. One of the points that I want to draw your attention to, which goes without saying as you can see listed here, however, I do want to mention it specifically for you. Anytime we are writing or we are going to talk about a sentence which comes from languages other than English, we are going to have to give a sentence in this particular way.

So, first we write the whole sentence in the writing of a sentence, what we do is we do not write the way we want to. We try to put things in a way so that people can get maximum ideas about it. In earlier days, and the convention is still relevant, people will use symbols of international phonetic association. And those symbols will help you read the sentences the way they are supposed to be read or spoken. Some of those symbols are difficult and some of those symbols have been simplified.

But nonetheless for the simplicity of this class, what the convention that I am using is, at least try to distinguish sounds, few sounds. So, you see how I have written Raju? What does this tell you? The way it is written how does it tell you, what does it tell you? That after the sound

ra the vowel is a long vowel. See that. And then after the sound ja, the vowel, uu is a long vowel. So, it is Raajuu, okay. Similarly, when we say c, right, we are not putting the aspiration mark here, that is, h.

That is because the moment we put that in a phonetic symbol, that becomes what does that become, with less aspiration it is ch, or no aspiration it is c, the aspiration it becomes ch. We do not want to say a sound with more aspiration, therefore, that is not there. But again, there is a long vowel. Therefore, these things are written this way. So, the sentence from a particular language is written with, usually with international phonetic associations symbol.

But, in general, trying to simplify it as close as actual pronunciation. That is number one. Number two, in the second line, you try to give its glosses, that is what we call gloss. Gloss simply means, word by word description of what that is. So, it is not, the gloss does not only include the meaning of the word, it also includes several other things, as you can see here, and relevant information that we want to put forward that we want people's attention to.

Such information we put there. And then finally, in the third line, we give the meaning of the word. If you put sentences from languages other than English this way, then we do not really need to know the language that we are talking about. If we are drawing examples from a particular language, that is not really relevant, what is relevant is the point that we are making through such examples. And you can apply these points to many languages, some of them are applicable to all languages.

And I keep telling you from time to time whether something is language specific or generic or a principle, which is applicable to all the languages. So, I have picked up examples from Hindi, when we talk about this particular aspect of language, which is agreement, then you will see, a lot of it applies to other languages. In exams or in other places, you are free to write examples from any language. You do not have to write examples from Hindi or any particular language, you can write examples from any language provided you give, you present it in this way, so that anybody who is reading the example for making the point does not have a problem seeing the point.

That is all relevant for these kinds of examples. Get my point. Now, let us look at this thing. When we say the agreement, what does this mean to you without discussing it much, the word agreement means?

Student: Mutual consent.

Professor: Mutual consent, that is it. So, the word means mutual consent. The moment it is mutual, it has to be between at least two parties or two entities, right. It works exactly this way, in sentences as well. And therefore, most of the time, agreement in a sentence is referred to as subject verb agreement. Have you heard this thing? Subject verb agreement, which simply means, there is going to be an agreement between subject and the verb.

Then agreement of what or in what terms, agreement in what terms? Now things start becoming different. In some languages, agreement depends on just one particular thing. Or in others, it may be two, three, or more. So, from here on, things start becoming different. The agreement is a fundamental principle of language, we cannot have a sentence without agreement between certain elements in a sentence.

And those elements normally are subjects and the verbs. Now, we are not defining what a subject is right now. However, that is a complete discussion by itself. And when we start discussing that, one of these days, we will look at that as a side thing, the more you try to constrain the definition of a subject, the more counter examples you are going to find of that. So right now, all we want to say about a subject is the element of a sentence that agrees with the verb is a subject.

You may have heard different things. And I take you to those things little later, that is some other time. But right now, we are only going to say the subject of a sentence is the element in a sentence, which agrees with the verb. That is a working definition that is a grammatical definition of a subject, there could be different types of definition of a subject depending upon what we want to highlight. Most of the time, they are all going to come to the same element. However, sometimes they could be different.

Now, let me take you through these examples. I am sure many of you understand these two sentences, must have looked at it by now. And this, do you agree that these are simple sentences of Hindi? So, what are the elements that are in agreement with each other? As a matter of fact, when I am asking you. Are they the simple sentences of Hindi? Many of you are nodding your heads? As a matter of fact, they are not simple sentences of Hindi.

How many? I have asked this question several times. How many of you speak Hindi? 1, 2, 3, 4. Each one of you, individually, or collectively, can you tell me the meaning of the second word in this, in the first sentence? What is the second word in the first sentence?

Student: Ne.

Professor: Ne. So, the sentence is raajuu ne chae pii, we understand the meaning. Even those who do not speak Hindi as their first language or second language, they can figure out the meaning and definitely from the screen. But if I ask you, what is the meaning of ne, what does this word mean? Can someone tell me? What I mean is what is the meaning of the word Chae?

Student: Tea.

Professor: Very simple. No problem, no objection. What is the meaning of the word ne?

Student: Its meaning is by Raju.

Professor: What is by Raju? We are saying raajuu ne chae pii, that is rajuu had tea, drank tea, what is by raajuu in that?

Student: Means is a person who drank the tea.

Student: Does not have a true translation.

Professor: It does not have a true translation. So, the question is, you are right. It does not have a true translation. What you are trying to do is trying to put it equivalent to something, which it is not. It is not by Raajuu. It is not anything, which he is saying that it does not have a literal meaning. So right away, this is what I meant when I told you these are not simple sentences of Hindi. You are going to find elements in a sentence which have no meaning.

For example, we can also say, raajuu chae pita hai. Right? What is the meaning of this sentence raajuu chae pita hai? Raajuu drinks tea. Where is the ne in this sentence? Do you see that it is not there? And it still means raajuu drinks tea. It has a slightly different meaning, but where is the word ne? And this question is definitely not for, primarily not for people who do not speak Hindi. And it is not really a question for Hindi speakers also, this is just for everybody to see that there are going to be elements in a sentence, which do not have their literal meanings.

And this is why I am giving you this example. However, it does something in a sentence. The second example that I just gave you, raajuu chae pita hai, do we need that element in that sentence? What do I mean? Do we need that element in that sentence? What I mean is, we do not, if that element is not there in a sentence, the sentence is still grammatical, perfectly good

sentence, therefore, we do not need it. However, if I drop it from sentence number one, it is going to be a good sentence for the speakers, no.

We say Raajuu chae pi, we cannot say that. Or if someone says so, even if meaning does not change, we can say Raajuu chae piya. It is going to be a marked sentence, you understand the meaning of marked, no, the meaning of marked is, it is not going to be the way many Hindi speakers would say. In other words, if you say a sentence like Raajuu chae piya, instead of saying Raajuu ne chae pii, Hindi speakers know that you are not a, you can speak but you are not a Hindi speaker.

There are elements of that type in every language. And on the basis of such things, the moment a person starts saying something, you immediately figure out that this person is not a real or a good speaker of this language. From now onwards, I can spend 15 years learning Telugu or Tamil or Malayalam, even at the end of 15 years, you can tell that you started pretty late. Am I right? You must be meeting with people of that sort every day.

However, those who are, those who grew up with language, Tamil, Telugu, or for that matter, Hindi, they do not need to tell you the meaning of this word ne, but they know pretty well where to put it and where not to put it without worrying about it. That is what makes us the speaker of that language. In other words, native speaker of that language and that language becomes our first language. We have already discussed these things at length.

Coming back to this thing, ne does not have a meaning. Do you see I have marked it something, there is something written under it. That is simply a marker for, it simply means ergative. It is the name of a case, which is not very important for, the name is not really very important for you. However, it is important to know. It simply means ergative case marker. Now, I want to draw your attention to agreement, what is going on with the agreement?

Most of the time, the elements that are going to take part in agreement are called phi features. I did not find a better symbol of phi, but this looks pretty much close to that, am I right? So, we call them either with a symbol or we just write them. We call them phi features. It is just a fancy name. It simply means number, person and gender. By the way, have you heard these words, number, person, gender? So quickly reviewing that, number is we were talking about it yesterday, with reference to words, numbers are singular and plural, one, plural more than one, more than one.

In some languages, we have three numbers, singular, dual, and then plural. So, one, two and then more than two. But in a language like Hindi and most of our languages follow just a two-way system singular and plural, one and more than. Gender, only two, either masculine or feminine. However, again some languages namely Sanskrit would follow singular, sorry masculine, feminine and neuter.

In a language like Hindi and many other languages, there is no role of neuter gender, every single noun must be either masculine or feminine. And then person, what does this refer to?

Student: First person, second person.

Professor: Very nice first person, second person and third person this is going to be three of them. Now, Sanskrit, if you look at Sanskrit, it has everything, first person, second person, third person, singular, dual, plural, masculine, feminine, neuter everything three. In languages that we are talking about number and gender to each person three, first, second and third. What do they refer to, first person refers to? Anybody? The one who is speaking. And second?

Student: The person who is listening.

Professor: The person who is being spoken to. Very nice. And third?

Student: Anyone except these two.

Professor: Anyone except these two, yes and specifically the one who is being talked about. It could be, it could also be the person who is not being talked about is yes, anyone other than these two, these things play a very important role in agreement. And what the agreement means, in simple words, we are going to say whatever is the verb, whatever things that you see on the verb, you are going to see similar things on subject.

Or the other way round, whatever things you are going to see on singular subjects, they are going to reflect on verbs. So, languages can decide that we want to retain agreement between only two of these elements, or it can decide we want to keep all three of them. Which two, that also could be language specific, but they are going to show up agreement in these terms only.

Student: Does the agreement also depend on the tense and also whether it is an active voice or passive voice?

Professor: No. Tense and such other things do play a role in a sentence, but that they do not take part in agreement. The reason for that is, see, agreement means, if you have a singular noun, then we are going to have a singular marker on the verb also, see my point. If you are going to see masculine gender, on the subject, you are going to see masculine gender on the verb also. However, tense is not part of that, because tense is only the feature of a verb, tense only shows up on the verb.

It has nothing to do with the subject, therefore, it is not part of agreement. Remember, we started talking about this, agreement means some kind of settlement between two entities, some type of adjustment between two entities. Tense is only related to verbs, it has got nothing to do with the subject, therefore, that is not part of it.

Student: ((??)) (24:24).

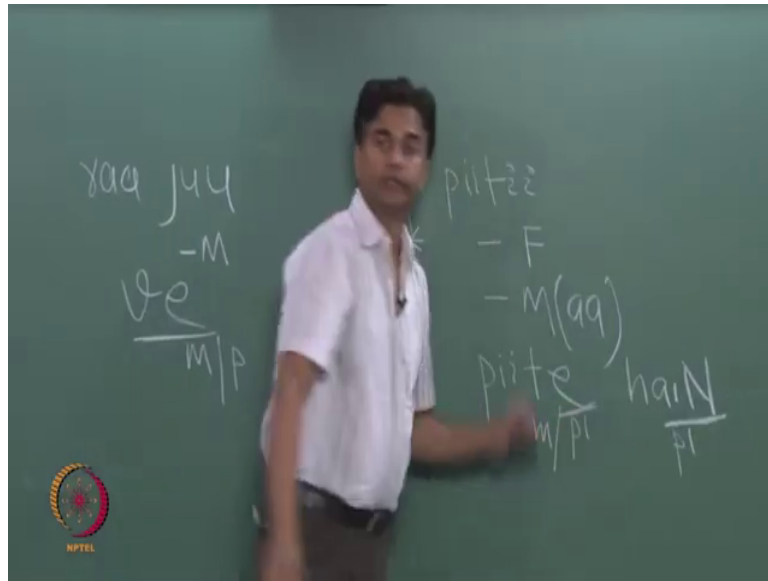
Professor: If gender is playing a role in the language, then they must be the same. I am coming to those things in a moment. Take the sentence. Raajuu chae pita hai, can we say Raajuu chae peeti hai? What is wrong with that sentence? For anybody or for speakers of Hindi in particular, it takes less than fraction of a second to give judgment about it that the sentence is not good. This comes from knowledge of language. The ability to make such a judgment is part of our ability, what we call knowledge of language that every speaker has developed through generative mechanisms. Remember this thing.

This is a reference to knowledge of language, which also means native speaker or a speaker of that language may not be able to tell you about masculine and feminine mismatch, they do not even need to tell you that much. You can say or I can tell you because we are talking about this thing. You use a sentence to a speaker, judgment is given in a moment, not necessarily the explanation. See my point.

Therefore, it is more the reason that it is part of what we call knowledge of language because this is the characteristic of knowledge of language that we know such kinds of things, but we do not necessarily need to put them in explicit words. All right. Now, Raajuu chae peeti hai is not a good sentence, because there is a mismatch between gender, between subject and the verb, therefore, that is ungrammatical. Get this thing. So, for that sentence to be grammatical, there has to be a proper agreement in terms of what? Do you have that sentence written with you? Can you write this down?



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I see some people are not even carrying notebooks. So, here we know that this is masculine right and this comes also from native intuition. And here we know that this is feminine. Therefore, this is ruled out. What will be important, what will make it grammatical is because this is masculine, if we have this thing also as masculine, which is sometimes marked with this. Then we know that the sentence is going to be grammatical. So, we see clearly that gender is playing a role in languages like Hindi.

Is number playing a role? Yes. Suppose we are saying, two people, let us say, let us use something, which either refers to two people or more than two people. We can put two names here, or we can use a pronoun. What will be the marker on the verb? Can we say *ve chae piita hai*, we have to say *piite* and *hain*. Now, this is going to be a marker of plurality.

And this also carries plurality. Because we cannot even say *ve chae piite hai*, it must be *ve chae piite hain*. Do I have everybody with me? Hope I have not lost people so far. Now, in the second one, we see that both number and gender are at work, right. So far, we know that this is masculine. So plural, masculine and then plural. Therefore, you see masculine and plural. Now, if we take it to English just these two sentences, what are the things out of these that are at work?

Does gender play a role in that? No. Does number play a role in that? No? We can say *Raajuu drinks tea*. If we want to use the plural one, *they*, what do we say?

Student: Drink tea.

Professor: Drink tea. Can we say they drink tea? Why can we not say they drink tea? Because this is violating agreement of number. They, plural and there is no plural marker on the verb, therefore, there is a violation of agreement, thus the sentence is ungrammatical. Now, how a language reflects singular and plural are going to be language specific things. Getting my point. How a language reflects plural is going to be language specific. In a language like Hindi, you see this is the marker of plurality.

Remember, you have seen the same marker on nouns yesterday. Kamaraa is singular, what is the plural of kamaraa? And what is the plural marker? Is this similar to that? So that is the plural mark. Then it does not stop here this also must be plural. And I am not taking you through every single thing and how it works, because we are not working on Hindi, we want to see the role of numbers at work. So, how the number is at work is Hindi specific thing. Same thing number will be reflected in different terms in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and other languages.

English has a completely different system, which is if you put this marker on the verb, then it refers to a singular number. When we put, and for plural so this is going to be singular. And for plurals, it is zero. No marker. Raajuu drinks tea, they drink tea, no marker on the verb. This much making sense, get the point. How a language is representing its markers is a language specific thing. However, these things are going to be surfacing in one way or the other is part of principal.

Again, the agreement is a principal phenomenon in language, we cannot have a sentence without proper agreement. Now, what makes it proper is that which one of these elements is going to take part in the agreement is again parametric, which is language-specific. Making sense? Now, this is why the role of input in learning language is relevant.

Now, do you see the patches of these rules? We have here the rules of English too, we have here rules of Hindi too, we have here rules of all the languages that we speak. Now, if input is not there, then which rule is this going to activate? Therefore, the role of input in speaking what we speak. Am I making the point? You are still with me. Very nice. So that is all I have said so far.

All I have said, I have told you what we mean by phi features, that is number, person and gender and how they work. Agreement, as a word, as a phenomenon is very simple. It is between two elements and both must match. There must not be a mismatch. If gender is part

of the agreement then both of them must match, mismatch results into ungrammaticality. So, matching is part of the agreement.

If a language does not allow agreement in terms of let us say gender, then there is no role of gender in the grammar of that language. Remember this thing, in the grammar of that language. For example, in a language like English, we cannot say there is no role of gender. There is a role of gender, we can say, john drinks tea, girls drink tea, there is a role of gender. However, the role of gender is not in the agreement.

The role of that is to say the role of the gender is not in the grammar of that language, in the agreement of that language. Now we come to these sentences. What do you see here in these sentences? First of all, at least the speakers of Hindi agree that both the sentences are good. Are they good? What do you see about agreement? Which noun agrees with the verb in sentence one?

Student: Chae.

Professor: Chae agrees with the verb. And what is not agreeing with the verb is what we think is the subject. In the second one, we see the same phenomena. What can we say about this?

Student: The subject must be chae ((???) (36:53)).

Professor: In that case, the one of the conclusions that we can draw is, if this is true, and if what we know about agreement is true, then Raju and Sima are not subjects of these sentences. So, what we want to say through those sentences is true. That is to say, Raju and Sima in sentence one and two respectively are not subjects.

You may see or you may think is that really true? Should I really, completely believe it? Well, we must, on the basis of what we see, so far.


Student: What happens if Raju and Sima are interchanged from the two sentences?

Professor: Try doing that. And I have purposely picked these two names in these two sentences to make my point. For the purpose of the sentence, nothing changes. Do you understand his question? What he is saying, a very smart move.

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**Agreement**

1. raajuu ne caay pii  
Raju-**M** erg tea-**F** drank-**F**  
'Raju drank tea.'
  
2. siimaa ne seb khaaye  
Sima-**F** ERG apple-**M-Pl** ate-**M-Pl**  
'Sima ate apples.'

 Features ( $\phi$ )= **Person, Number, and Gender**

That if we put Sima, in the first one that is going to be feminine noun, and we have the feminine gender on the verb also, therefore we can very conveniently show that there is an agreement between the two. That will be kind of cheating. And, by cheating, I do not mean real cheating, but that will be a kind of cheating. Because we know that that is not the case. Even if you do that, though, it will be harder to see, but the fact is that that does not agree with the verb. What agrees with the verb is the other noun.

And this is why this kind of mismatch. And that is the only way to show that the two nouns that we think are going to be subjects are not really subjects in these sentences. So, according to the grammatical definition of subject, these are not the subjects. According to semantic description of subject, the semantic description of subject is, that is meaning wise, some you must have been told or you must have read the noun that does something is the subject. Am I right?

Have you heard this thing or have you been told? So, in that case, who is drinking tea, therefore that is going to be the subject. So semantically speaking, these things are the subjects. But when we say subjects in languages, we mean grammatical subjects. And that is not the case. What we mean by subjects is the element that agrees with the verb and what agrees with the verb you can see here.

And you can categorically see that these are two pretty simple Hindi sentences. And I could not possibly be making things up. Am I right?

Student: ((??)) (40:15).

Professor: Sorry?

Student: ((??)) (40:18).

Professor: No, I do not know. We will need to check. Are all liquids considered feminine? I do not know. I will need to think, at least on the basis of the 10 examples. And still, that is not going to be an exhaustive list. For the simple reason, that gender to a noun is not assigned in that particular way. The assignment of gender to a noun is completely arbitrary, which is even if that is the case, it is arbitrary. There is no reason why chae should be feminine.

Student: Water is masculine.

Professor: Water is masculine, thanks. Water is masculine.

Student: Suppose for panii de, panii pee is wrong.

Professor: That will not be good. Am I right? That will not be a good sentence Raju ne panii, what will be the sentence, piya. That way you categorically know that what agrees with the word is the noun in that slot. Now why and how these are questions of further discussions. Very briefly, I can tell you every time you get something like ne, or any other post position. If I say the word post position, does it make sense to you? Yes, no.

I will describe that. In all our languages, do you know what a preposition is? Can you give me one some examples of prepositions?

Student: On, at, in, upon.

Professor: On, at, in, upon, these are prepositions. Why are they prepositions?

Student: Considered by the relative position.

Professor: Relative to what?

Student: Our next object.

Professor: Both of you are right. Relative positions to their objects. Their objects are, the object of a preposition is definitely a noun. Or you can say the same thing in other words. Bear with me, I am talking about pretty simple things. But probably, I do not intend to make this claim, but probably you are looking at this description for the first time. There is nothing

new about the definition of this preposition. Such elements are called prepositions, because their relative position is prior to their objects.

In the languages where such elements are going to come after the object, they are called post positions. How do we say on the table in a language like Hindi or Telugu for that matter?

Student: Table ke upar.

Professor: See that. So, the same thing is going to follow the noun, which happens to be the object of the same element. Now, in Hindi, it is called par, in English it is in. See this thing. Now, availability of post positions is a universal feature of language, is part of principle. Whether it is going to be a preposition in some languages like English and French or whether it is going to be a preposition in English, French, and others, or post positions in languages like Hindi, Italian, Japanese, and rest of our languages, is language specific rule, is parametric. All right.

So, every time you see a post position in a language like Hindi, after a noun, that noun is not going to agree with the verb. Every time there is a noun and you see a post position after that, that noun is not going to agree with the verb. Many times, such nouns may not need to agree. But if they are supposed to agree with the verb, then also it is not going to agree. It is a very robust and a strict rule, strict language specific rule that the moment you have a post position, out of agreement.

What agrees with the verb but the other rule, so this is language a specific rule, the moment you have a post position, that noun is out of the race of agreement. But then there is another robust rule, which is more robust in nature, that is part of a principle that there must be agreement. You see the tension? Do you see the contradiction? In a sentence number one and two, what we think is the subject is out of the agreement, because they have post positions.

The other rule is, there must be an agreement, because without agreement, you do not have a sentence. Am I at least able to show you the contradiction between these two rules?

Student: Is that the reason why Raju chae piya hai.

Professor: Exactly. Raju chae piya makes sense, because the moment some speakers drop ne, then there is nothing that blocks Raju from agreeing with the verb, however not a good day may sound. For Hindi speakers, they may tell you no, no, this is not really a very good sentence.

Student: Is it wrong?

Professor: It is hard to say wrong or right. For that I need to start Hindi to tell you all the rules of this. I know it is very fascinating.

Student: But grammatically it is still consistent.

Professor: Grammatically there is nothing wrong with it. It is simply that the speakers of that language will not accept it. And we respect the speakers of the language. If they do not accept then we do not accept that also, fine, but there is nothing wrong grammatically. And now you also know why. They are just dropping ne. And see when you look at the interface of psychology and learning and grammar, then you can explain why people drop that.

Because this does not mean anything, I started by telling you, this does not have a literal meaning. If at all, it does anything, it complicates the whole situation. So, from the perspective of a learner, it becomes a lot easier to drop it and then work in a nice way, Raju and pina and everything is fine. That is just an explanation with the interface of learning, grammar and psychology. All right. So, ungrammaticality can also be explained in a nice way. However, speakers of Hindi will tell you, no, no, no, no, that is not the right way.

You have to say raajuu ne chae pii, even though it does not mean anything, by when I say it does not mean anything, even though ne does not have a meaning. What it does is, and there are more reasons why ne can come and why ne in some cases cannot come? What are the conditions on that? That is a matter of another discussion. Here all I am trying to show you through these examples is there is a contradiction.

The language specific rule says, these subjects by the virtue of post position following them cannot agree with the subject. They obey that rule as you can see, they are obeying that rule. However, they also must obey the rule that there must be an agreement. So, the compromise formula that they arrive at is the next available noun, which does not have a post position will and agree with the verb. Thus, they follow both the rules, because without following these things, you do not have a sentence. All these things make no additional burden on the human mind.

So, we have discussed these two things today. We need to go to other things, and we will try to go a little faster. We have discussed only two things agreement and phi features and the role of phi features in agreement. I am sure while discussing, while we are talking about these

things, you are also looking at the languages that you speak and see how these things are working in these languages. We continue with this, with more examples, and more discussion on such other stuff tomorrow. All right, we meet tomorrow at our time. Thank you.