



IIT Madras

ONLINE DEGREE

English I (Basic English)
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Lecture 22
Agreement in English Sentences

Welcome to the class. Today, we are going to look at Agreement in English Sentences. Agreement, is an important component in sentences in general, and we need to pay attention to this particular aspect to learn the language for our accuracy. As you know, it is our confidence in accuracy which helps us bring in fluency. Fluency adds to our confidence and accuracy helps us bring fluency in our speech.

To do that, if we look at patterns of agreement in English sentences and we develop our understanding of this as an underlying pattern, we get these things straight and become more confident in speaking, in writing and in everything that we do with language. So, I invite you to take a look at these patterns that I am going to describe to you. This will raise your curiosity to a completely different level for understanding how these patterns work in language, how these patterns work in English when we speak it. So let us begin and look at that.

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Things to notice ...

- Sentences end with a full stops.
- All sentences will have subjects and predicates.
- Order of words in a sentence
 - [[Subject] (verb) object adverbs]]
- Subject and verb in predicate agree with each other.



A piece of very general information as an overview of this part that sentences end with a full stop. All sentences have subjects and predicates. So, these are the two things; one is very generic information, second, a piece of very specific information and the primary thing for us

to develop our understanding of a sentence. When we ask a question, what is a sentence, there is a lot that we can say about it in response to this question.

But, one thing, if we just need to look at one part, one single thing that is universal about sentences, then we need to say, every sentence must have a subject and every sentence must have a predicate. That is critical information for us to keep in mind. And then when we start looking in a subject, when we start looking in a sentence in English, what we need to keep in mind is that within the predicate, that is this whole thing, verbs are very important, and verbs precede the objects. Therefore, the entire order of words in English sentences is something where the verb is in the middle position not at the final position, unlike the languages that we speak that is in the Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali, Odia, Punjabi, Marathi etcetera.

Why I listed those languages because in all those languages verbs are at the final position in the predicate, therefore, at the final position in the sentence as well and objects precede verbs in our languages, whereas in English, objects follow verbs, that much we know, and these are critical information about English sentences. Today, we are going to add one more specific part, which is very specific, which is required for all sentences, and it definitely requires our attention.

And once we get that right, we get the underlying pattern of all sentences in the language possible. So, I am going to aim at something really critical in the following way, what is that part? The critical word is agree; there we are going to look at the agreement. The two parts, i.e., subjects and predicates; by a predicate, we mean verbs in the predicate. They agree with each other, that is an important part. So what we mean by this agree, let us look at this.

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Please observe ...



* [John] [like] pizza.
* I likes pizza. * I are a doctor.
* We likes pizza. * We is a doctor.
* They likes pizza. * They is teachers.



Let us observe these sentences only for the purpose of observing and let me tell you why I want you to look at this. Is this a good sentence? 'John like pizza.' No, this is an ungrammatical sentence. 'I likes pizza', please read these sentences carefully. I have specifically designed these sentences as ungrammatical sentences, not a good sentence, i.e. ungrammatical sentence.

'We likes pizza'; not a good sentence. 'They likes pizza'; not a good sentence. I am purposely using simple sentences for us to get the point. 'I are a doctor'; not a good sentence ungrammatical sentence. 'We is a doctor'; not a good sentence ungrammatical sentence. 'They is teachers'; not a good sentence ungrammatical, very simple sentences. So right, in the beginning, I want to draw your attention to a very specific point that you can ask for each one of these sentences.

Why are these sentences not good, what is ungrammatical about these sentences. Let us go back to our definition of a sentence that we normally use. A sentence is a meaningful combination of words. This looks like a sentence from that perspective; there are words in this. These words have meaning, and they are combined together. If it meets all the requirement, then why are these sentences not good?

We added that every sentence must have a subject and predicate; each one of these sentences has a subject and predicate both. In the predicate, we have a verb, so the sentence has a subject, the sentence has a predicate, but why is it ungrammatical. The answer is very simple and critical. The answer is, in these sentences, subjects and verbs do not agree with each

other. It is important for the grammaticality of a sentence that the two parts of the sentence subject and verbs, i.e. verbs within the predicate agree with each other.

Such a thing is called an agreement, and once they agree, they become grammatical, i.e. once subjects agree with the verbs and the predicate, the sentences become grammatical. All these sentences can become grammatical if you take care of the agreement of these things.

So, I want to give you this part as the practice for this class, but we are going to discuss things further and then having discussed those things, I want you to come back to these sentences and fix them. If you know how to fix them, you would have already fixed these things by now. So, if you do not look at this, come back and fix them.

Even if you do know how to fix these things, please pay attention to the points that I am going to summarize because such points are going to be useful for understanding agreement between the subject and the verb in the predicate for all possible sentences of English and that is the relevance of understating this notion called agreement. In English sentences, agreements are sometimes visible and sometimes not visible. Even when they are not visible, they remain important, and this is what I am going to discuss next.

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Subjects and Predicates in Sentences



• John loves Mary.

• I like pizza. * I like pizza

• We like pizza.

• John likes pizza with his friends.

• John and Mary like pizza.



So, how do we see the agreement in that as we have seen in the previous sentences; all these sentences have just indicated to you that there is no agreement, how do we see that? When we say, 'John loves Mary', we see that there is some marker on the verb which is indicative of

agreement and thus the sentence is grammatical. In the next sentence, 'I like pizza' there is no marker, but I am going to indicate this no marker with zero.

So, zero as the marker which is no marker is important for this. Please hear me out carefully, zero as the marker which is no marker is important. Why? Because by bringing in zero, you are bringing in the idea that nothing else can come because if something else comes here, that will result in ungrammaticality. For example, if I say, 'I likes pizza', this sentence will become ungrammatical because we cannot bring this in.

This is prohibited because this space is already occupied with zero. Now, moving ahead, similarly, when we say, 'we like pizza', the sentence is grammatical because there is a zero marker at the end of the verb 'like.' Again, if we try to put anything else at that position, the sentence will become ungrammatical. So, we can say 'John likes pizza with his friends', you can have all kinds of things in the sentence, but just make sure that the agreement works properly.

So, here there is an agreement between the subject and the verb which is indicated by this element, and when we say John and Mary, there is zero markers on the agreement like John and Mary. Sorry, this zero comes here. So there is a zero marker on the verb, this zero is the marker of the agreement so that we know nothing else comes here. So what is important? Sometimes we see agreement, and sometimes we do not see, i.e. they are zero invisible, and this invisibility is important for understanding agreement. I hope we get this point. Let us move further and see.

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Imperative Sentences

•(You) come here.

come \emptyset

•(You) sit down.

sit \emptyset

•(You) drink a glass of water.

drink \emptyset



The agreement between the subject and the predicate is critical in imperative sentences too. The only difference is, at all imperative sentences in the verb, the agreement marker is zero. So, an agreement marker is zero. It will become clearer why the agreement marker is zero in imperative sentences.

The answer is simple that agreement markers are zero. And, on the verbs, imperative sentences for the same reason why we have an agreement marker as zero in the sentence. We are going to look at that shortly.

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Agreement in English

- Something between the subject and the verb in predicate is obvious.
- This is called agreement.
- How does this work.

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Number		
Person	FIRST	SECOND
	THIRD	

Gender - Mas fem

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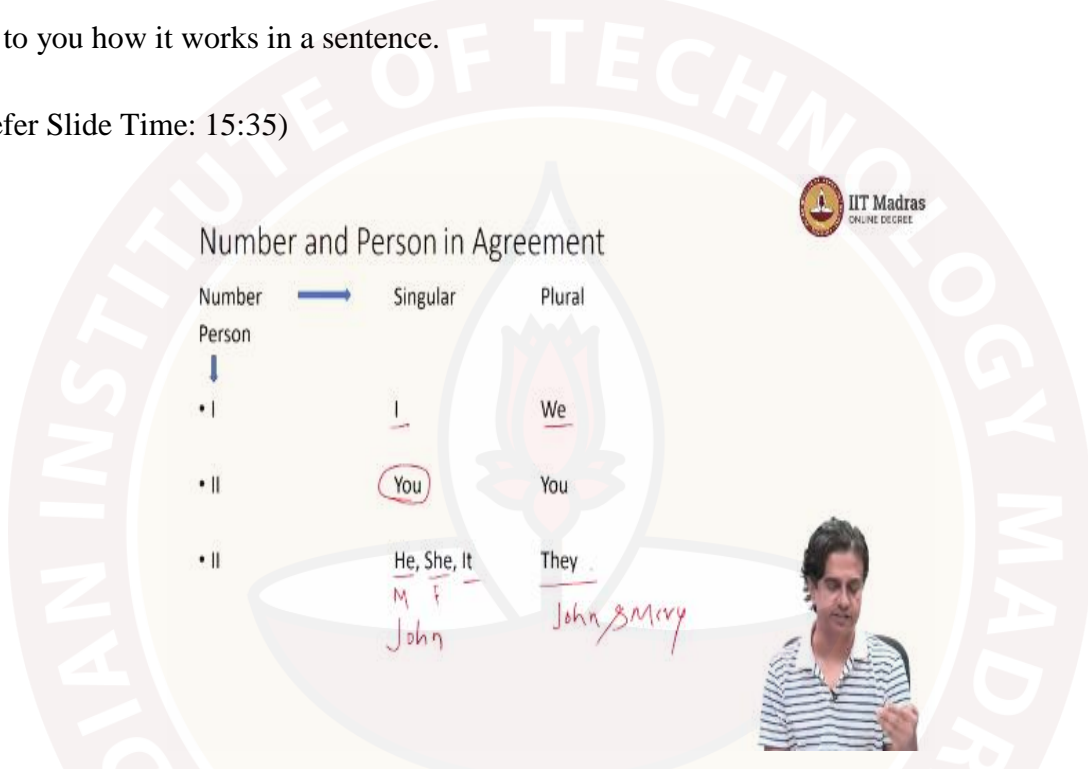
So, what is agreement about? So far, we have observed that there is something between the subject and the verb in the predicate that is becoming obviously critical, which is responsible for the grammaticality of a sentence. So, this something has to be taken care of between the subject and the predicate. It is this thing that is called an agreement, and we are going to look at how it works.

There are two parts that are important to understand agreement, only two things. One is called number and as we know, remember, when we were discussing nouns, we made it clear that nouns are of two types. One can be singular, and the other is plural. So that is called number. So, singular number and plural number and there is something called person which is first person, second person and third person.

Only these two things are important for us to understand the agreement in English sentences. In some languages like ours, there is a third thing which is important to know which is called gender, and it is also of two types that is masculine gender and feminine gender. So, number is of two types singular and plural, gender is of two types masculine and feminine, but only person is important, which has three types; first person, second person and third person.

For the purpose of English, we remember only two, because only two of them become critical in dealing with an agreement, in our understanding of the agreement. I am going to describe this to you how it works in a sentence.

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But, before that, we need to know the different form of numbers and persons and how they apply on different words. Very critically, so, this is person; first person, second person and third person. On this axis here, number; singular number and plural number. So, when we say, 'I', we are going to assume that, 'I' is the first person singular, 'we' is the first-person plural. 'You', has the same form in both, i.e. whether it is a second person, but whether it is singular or plural, it takes the same form.

Third-person singular is he or she, as you know they are the same thing except one is masculine the other is feminine, and 'it' is another third-person singular pronoun. There could be more, but we are just taking these examples. Then, when we have names, when we have proper nouns, i.e. when we have names depending upon whether they are if there is just one like John, that will be third-person singular.

And, if there is something which indicates more than one, two like John and Mary, then 'they' become plural. But, as part of the pronoun, 'they' is third person plural. When I mentioned that there are two things that we need to know for understanding agreement in English sentences, these are the two things. We need to know the distribution of numbers; singular and plural person in terms of their three types; first person, second person and third person. Let us see how they work in a sentence.

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Examples:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I <u>am</u>/was a doctor. • We <u>are</u>/were students. • You <u>are</u>/were a teacher. • He/She <u>is</u>/was a teacher. • They <u>are</u>/were teachers. 	<p>[Sg-sub → Sg verb] [Pl-sub → Pl verb]</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>I</td> <td>like-O</td> <td>pizza.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>We</td> <td>like-O</td> <td>pizza</td> </tr> <tr> <td>You</td> <td>like-O</td> <td>pizza.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>He</td> <td>like-s</td> <td>pizza</td> </tr> <tr> <td>They</td> <td>like-O</td> <td>pizza.</td> </tr> </table>	I	like-O	pizza.	We	like-O	pizza	You	like-O	pizza.	He	like-s	pizza	They	like-O	pizza.
I	like-O	pizza.														
We	like-O	pizza														
You	like-O	pizza.														
He	like-s	pizza														
They	like-O	pizza.														

So, I am going to talk about sentences of two types. One; where we see singular and plural playing a role as a verb in sentences, and they are also indicative of tense. We will discuss tense in English sentences some other time, but to begin with, I wanted to mention the following to you. So please pay attention to these sentences which I have put side by side.

So, we say, 'I am a doctor', remember this is present, and this is past. If I say, 'I was a doctor', then I am talking about past, so, one is the indicator of present tense the other is an indicator of past tense, but we say 'I am a doctor.' 'We are the students'; these sentences are fully grammatical. But I want to draw your attention to grammaticality now that is how the agreement is taken care of.

And then at the end of it, I want you to derive a rule out of it by you, you can do that on your own, and that is what becomes exciting to see and then to see how it applies in an exciting way to all possible sentences in English. So, we say, 'we are students', we say, 'you are a teacher' or 'you were a teacher.' 'She is a teacher', or 'he is a teacher', 'they are teachers.' So,

what is happening here? 'They' is a third-person plural, here we see agreement marker as a plural.

'He' is third-person singular; we see agreement markers as singular. 'You' in both the form singular and plural, it has the same form. Here we see the plural marker. Keep in mind, when it comes to the second person, the agreement always shows as a plural. So, we can also say that maybe this does not even exist. But, to this part, we come some other time. So we see, the second person, we can assume this is plural, and therefore, agreement markers are plural.

In the first person, 'I' is singular, 'we', plural, so, we see agreement marker as singular and in the case of, 'we', we see agreement markers as a plural. So what can be derived from here, just look at this part, what can we derive. A very simple thing that we want to derive from here is that is how is it working between subject and predicate. If the subject is singular, the verb also must be singular; if the subject is plural, then the verb also must be plural.

So it is a very simple and straight forward rule. Singular subject; singularity as a marker on the verb. We do not say singular verb; we say singularity marked on a verb. Plural subject; plurality on the verb. So, this much is the agreement; no sentence violates this rule. You will always see every sentence maintaining this rule as an agreement between subject and verbs within the predicate.

They appear, they get manifested differently, which we need to understand, but, without violating this rule. So we saw the application of this rule in all these sentences when we say, 'I am a doctor', 'we are students', 'you are a teacher', 'she is a teacher', 'they are teachers.' The grammaticality is maintained because, with the singular subject, we have a singular agreement marker, with the plural subject, we have plural agreement markers.

In different types of sentences, let us observe this pattern. So, when we say, 'I like pizza' in this one, the agreement marker is not clear, the agreement marker does not appear, so we treat it as zero. The agreement marker does not appear. So, here we can say, when 'we' is plural, the plural form of agreement marker is zero. We say, 'you' as the plural agreement marker of the plural type is zero.

'They' is also plural. Therefore, the agreement type of plural marker is zero in these types of sentences. However, when it becomes singular, the agreement marker is this indicating singularity on the verb. There is no exception, no contradictions. Plurality on the verb is

indicated by zero here. So plural subject; plurality of the verb, plural subject; plurality of the verb, plural subject, plurality of the verb.

However, singular subjects; singularity of the verb. Now, you would have figured out something different here. You see that we have seen, 'I' as a singular form, but when it comes to agreement marker, we see the singular agreement 'S' is not going there. What is going is zero, which was the marker of the plurality. So, what is going on in the case of 'I', we see 'I' as a first-person singular pronoun, but, an agreement marker is slightly different.

One way to treat this is maybe 'I' as a plural. But we know, this indicates one person, and this is the first person. So, the easiest way to understand that first person singular is always slightly different in English, maybe the emphasis and focus on the first-person singularity in the first person is indicated through this kind of distinction. You will notice this thing in the other type of sentences as well. So, if you see, 'was' is singular 'were' is plural.

'Is', singular, 'are' plural, 'was' singular, 'were' plural, 'is' singular 'are' plural. But, when it comes to 'I', we have a different marker which is called 'am.' We do not say 'I is a doctor', we say, 'I am a doctor.' So, 'am' as a marker, comes only for the first person singular pronoun in English. So, the first person singular pronoun seems to be slightly different. Therefore, we observe this part here.

Otherwise, everywhere else, we follow a very simple rule, the singular subject, i.e., singularity on the subject, singularity on the verb. Plurality on the subject, plurality on the verb. That is all is important, and according to person, it becomes clearer that which form of the pronoun has which person on that, and thus we get agreement taken care of. I invite you to think about this part and look at it carefully.

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Please observe ...



- * John like pizza.
- * I likes pizza.
- * I are a doctor.
- * We likes pizza.
- * We is a doctor.
- * They likes pizza.
- * They is teachers.



And, then when you go back and check the sentences in the beginning, that we discuss that all these sentences are ungrammatical. Now, fix each one of these sentences looking at, explaining why these sentences were ungrammatical. So, first, I want you to look at ungrammaticality. All these sentences are given as ungrammatical. So, what you need to know or write down in the pen and paper and not just think.

Please do this as writing it down, and you will see why these sentences are ungrammatical for each one of these sentences. And then, you will get the picture and then fix them and see whether it is following from the rules that we have just described or not.

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More on agreement in English ...



- 1. Rekha and her brothers (is, are) in Delhi.
- 2. Either my mother or my father (is, are) coming to the meeting.
- 3. The dog or the cats (is, are) outside.
- 4. Either my shoes or my coat (is, are) always on the floor.
- 5. Rekha and Amala (doesn't, don't) want to see that movie.



To continue this further, I want you to do the following exercise. I am going to do a little bit with you, but then I want you to take a note of 10 different sentences for this purpose and do this exercise by checking agreement markers in your sentences. Any set of 10 sentences and check the agreement in the way I am going to lead you through this thing. So, what are we doing here is, read this sentence carefully.

'Rekha and her brothers', we need to pick what do we put here, 'is' or 'are in Delhi.' For the purpose of my exercise, as you see, I have put the correct answer in red and bold. So, this sentence is, 'Rekha and her brothers are in Delhi.' So, clearly, we consider the subject, what is in the subject position, this whole thing. So, we consider this whole thing as a plural. Therefore, we are picking the plural marker.

It seems like we are talking about Rekha, which is singular, but when we say, 'and her brothers', all together is giving us plurality. Therefore, plural agreement marker and we have a different form of plural of this present tense marker. Therefore, we have these things. We have a full stop at the end of the sentence. Look at the second sentence; there are several things in these sentences that we will come back and discuss separately.

But right now, I only need your attention to the agreement part and how we determine singularity or plurality for the purpose of agreement. So, now in the second sentence, either 'my mother or my father is coming to Delhi', so that is the correct sentence. So we have already figured out that the agreement marker is singular. If we check our rules, the subject must be singular. So, how do we determine singularity here?

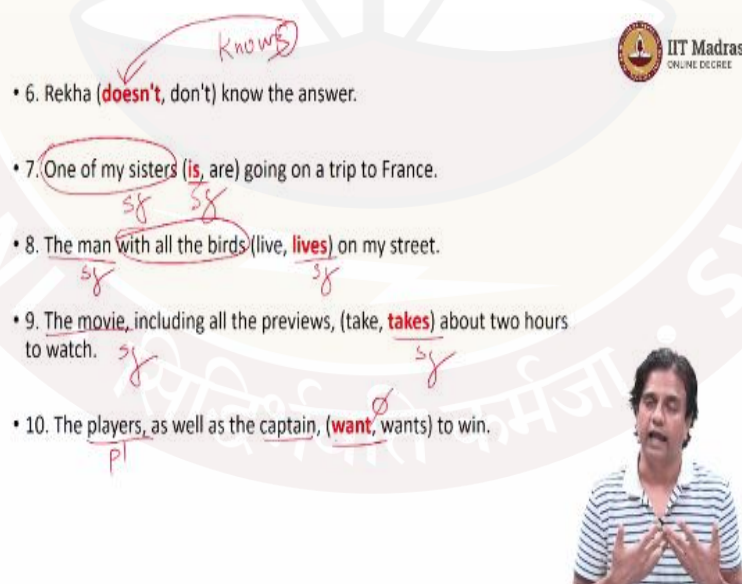
When you read these things, and this is what we have been looking at as part of when you did your exercise of identifying subjects, this is what you would have noticed. I want to revisit your exercise of identifying subjects one more time, and then you will see such a robust underlying pattern become so obviously clear to you. It is becoming so clear to you that such patterns if you practice and pay attention to, will not just make you confident about your understanding of agreement in English, rather, you will be thrilled to see this applying everywhere else in every sentence. So, how is this singular in the second sentence? Read it carefully; it is either my mother or father, so it is talking about one person. So, as long as it is just one person, it is singular. Your sentence will never be wrong according to the agreement if you have just this much in mind. Look at this, 'the dogs or the cats?'

Now, what happens here is how are we going to determine this thing? As I said, I will talk about these things by adding some more things to this, a little later. But, in a sentence like this, when we see, we have this whole thing, and we need to determine the singularity or plurality in this thing. We see the dog, which is a singular element or the cats, which is plural. So, we are talking about either dog or cats.

So, whatever is close to the verb is taking precedence in terms of the agreement. So, we are taking; we are deciding plurality here according to cats and therefore, plural. You see the same thing here, 'either my shoes or my coat is always on the floor.' So, whatever is close to the verb, 'my coat' is singular; therefore, this is singular. Now you see it again, 'Rekha and Amala do not want to see that movie.'

'Rekha and Amala do not want to see that movie', so, which one do we pick here? Clearly, as you see, the answer is, 'do not', i.e. because of Rekha and Amala. Look at this verb, the agreement is indicated by zero, and this is where it is plural and because these two are plural. Yet, one more time, why do we say 'don't' and why we don't say 'doesn't', of course, I will discuss this part, separately with you.

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The slide features a list of five sentences with handwritten annotations in red ink. The annotations include 'knows' with an arrow pointing to 'doesn't' in sentence 6, 'is' and 'are' circled in sentence 7, 'live' and 'lives' circled in sentence 8, 'take' and 'takes' circled in sentence 9, and 'want' and 'wants' circled in sentence 10. Additionally, 'sf' is written under 'movie' in sentence 9, and 'pl' is written under 'players' in sentence 10. A small video inset in the bottom right corner shows a man speaking. The IIT Madras logo is in the top right corner.

- 6. Rekha (~~doesn't~~, don't) know the answer. *knows*
- 7. One of my sisters (is, are) going on a trip to France.
- 8. The man with all the birds (live, lives) on my street.
- 9. The movie, including all the previews, (take, takes) about two hours to watch.
- 10. The players, as well as the captain, (want, wants) to win.

Few more sentences; 'Rekha does not know the answer.' Keep this thing in mind. Here, if this sentence was not a negative sentence, then this sentence would be, 'Rekha knows the answer.' But, in a negative sentence, this singular is appearing here. I will discuss this one more time. This is why I said; when you observe these sentences, they are going to help you think about

more things without violating the principle of agreement between the subject and the verb in the predicate.

'One of my sisters is going on a trip to France', so, when we say one of my sisters is going on a trip to France what we are actually saying is that I may have more than one sisters, but as part of the subject, it is just singular, so in the agreement system it makes a singularity. 'The man with all the birds', so, there is a man who is a bird lover, and he lives on my street who has a lot of birds. So, here we are indicating singularity with this.

What he lives with, is not adding anything to the singularity or plurality, and we pick a singular marker here. 'The movie, including all previews; we take singularity from here and pick the singular verb here. 'The players' now, here 'players' is plural 'as well as the captain', even though this is singular, we take a plural marker, i.e., zero on the verb, and say, 'the players, as well as the captain, want to win.'

These ten sentences are showing you that the principles of the agreement are not violated even once. The simple principle is singularity on the subject, singularity on the verb, plurality on the subject, plurality on the verb. This is the most important part of understanding the agreement. This as an underlying rule and then we see the application of these things. We observe these things and achieve accuracy in our sentences in speaking, and thus it yields to our confidence, and it adds to fluency. Next time, I will come and discuss another aspect of a sentence with you. Meanwhile, please do the practice. Thank you so much.