



IIT Madras

ONLINE DEGREE

English – I (Basic English)
Prof. Rajesh Kumar
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai
Lecture 21
Command or Request?

Welcome to the class. We are going to talk about the use of command and request in English sentences. We continue our discussions with sentences. We have been talking about the essential components of sentences. We will review that, and then we will start our discussion with one specific type of sentence which indicates command or request. Such sentences are called imperative sentences.

I am going to show you how it works, and how we understand this type of information in the process of our understanding of sentences. Again, to underline the part that we need to know this type of information to assimilate them for a better impact on the language, it helps us make our speaking impressive. It makes us sound confident when we speak. So, please pay attention to the two types of information that we are going to discuss today.

One, a little bit more about a sentence, i.e., to continue our discussion on sentences, and then we will talk about one specific type of sentence which is known as imperative sentences in English. They are indicative of command or request, how we understand imperative sentences and how we get the message of command or request.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:57)

Things to notice in a sentence ...

- Only sentences have full stops.
- Imperative sentences have subjects (you).
- All sentences will have subjects and predicates.

- Order of words in an English sentence
 - [[subject] [[verb] object] adverbs]]
- Order of words in a sentence in Hindi or any other Indian languages
 - [[subject] [adverbs] [[object verb]]]



So, a few things that we need to keep in mind when we are talking about sentences, one more time I will repeat that all sentences end with a full stop. This is trivial. Still, we need to keep in mind that we put a full stop only at the end of sentences, not at the end of phrases or the end of a word. We will talk about punctuation markers when we talk about reading at some other time and then probably with other markers like comma, colon, semicolon, etcetera; we will discuss that later.

But at this point, it is important to keep in mind that sentences end with a full stop. And, since we are going to look at imperative sentences, so we need to remind ourselves one more time when we speak or write, we do not write or speak the subject of the imperative sentence. But we know that subject is always embedded, not visible but present in a sentence and the subject is always 'you.' And that helps us complete the understanding of the two required parts of sentences are subjects and predicates.

Without a subject or without a predicate, we do not have a sentence. This is much is important for us to keep in mind. One more time, what is also important is in English, we know the subject, this is the subject, and this whole thing is a predicate. But within the predicate, there are lots of other elements. However, a verb is a critical one. So, to begin with, we need to look at the position of a verb within the predicate.

Within the predicate, the position of the verb is initial. It is at the initial position in the predicate. When we look at the whole sentence, because the subject precedes the verb, the position of the verb in the English sentence is in the middle of the sentence. Therefore, it is called verb medial language. In our languages, namely Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and almost all of them, within the predicate verb, comes at the final position. So, we call our languages as verb final language. So, this helps us understand the order of words in a sentence.

Languages differ from one another in terms of their position of verbs within the predicate. So, what is another critical point for understanding sentences that we need to keep in mind is in English sentences, we have the order of the first verb, then the objects, if there is one. In sentences in our languages like Hindi, we have the verb at the final position, and objects precede the verb. So objects are here, and in this case, objects are here. So, we need to keep this much in mind.

(Refer Slide Time: 5:33)



Order of words (place of a verb) in a sentence:

- English (verb medial):
- Raju likes pizza from the pizza hut.
- Hindi (verb final)
- Raju ko pizza hut meN pizza pasand hai.



For example, when we say (verb) English as verb medial, see, the verb 'likes' is coming before the object 'pizza.' So, in a sentence, 'Raju likes pizza from the pizza hut', 'pizza' is following the verb 'likes.' And when a language like Hindi is known as verb-final, this verb “pasand hai” and 'pizza' precedes “pasand hai”. So, in English, pizza follows the verb, in Hindi, 'pizza' precedes the verb as an object. This is what we wanted you to look at. This information is important to understand imperative sentences or for that matter, any type of sentence.

(Refer Slide Time: 6:39)



Phrases to sentences ...

- [The [student] [of English]] is working in a printing press.
- [Students [from Chennai]] love music.
- [The [student [of English]] [from Chennai]] works hard in the institute.
- The student [of English] [from Chennai] [with long hair] came to meet with me yesterday.



So, how do we move from our understanding of phrases to sentence? We see that you see this whole thing that we have been discussing, 'the student of English is working in a printing press.' This whole thing is a phrase, and in this sentence works as a subject. This is a noun phrase, and this entire noun phrase is the subject of this sentence. The subject of the sentence is not just 'the student.'

Of course, it is an important part of that phrase, and therefore this is very important. But in the subject position, we have the entire noun phrase. 'Students from Chennai love music', so, who loves music? 'Students love music.' But this whole thing is in the subject position. 'The student of English from Chennai works hard in the institute', here again, this whole chunk is in the subject position.

'The student of English from Chennai with long hair came to meet with me yesterday', now this whole thing is in the subject position of this sentence. So, we are moving slightly ahead in understanding, in identifying subjects in a sentence. So, whatever comes in the position of a sentence, it is a noun phrase, it looks like a noun phrase and that noun phrase could be very small as one word or too big as the examples that you see here.

In the process of identifying subjects in a sentence, if we know about making of a phrase, it makes our lives much easier, and we can underline, identify subjects so easily. We still need to look at, why something is called a subject? But, we can very comfortably, easily, find out the chunk that is in the subject position of a sentence, and that is what is the idea here. So, we identify the entire chunk as a phrase, which is in the subject position.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:24)

Command or request?

- Please (you) sit down.
- (You) get up.

[you]

- Come home tomorrow. ←
- Please give me a glass of water.
- Please bring a pen for me.



Now, for the other part that we wanted to discuss today, in order to understand sentences is a specific type of sentence, which is called imperative. Now, imperative sentences are pragmatically important for understanding two things. So, when we tell somebody 'sit down' or 'get up', it has the intention of the speaker involved in it as well. So, how does hearer figure out the intention of the speaker, i.e., is it a request or a command for me to do something.

It becomes pretty obvious when these things are spoken to us. Somebody tells us, 'sit down' or 'get up', as you can see here I am trying to isolate these two things with the use of the word 'please.' So, somebody can also tell you, 'please sit down', somebody can also say, 'please get up' or just 'get up.' In either case, whether these things are told to us with the word 'please' or without the word 'please', what is the intention of this, the speaker is important to know. And we want to pay attention to, how we figure it out, and what kind of role it plays.

Can we find it out, and how do we know that? That is what we are going to discuss. So we already know that imperative sentences will have subjects too. It is just not present, it is just not visible, but it is present, it is very much there. Because we know that all imperative sentences have the subject, second person you as the subject of all imperative sentences, since it is so predictable, it is dropped, i.e., it is not pronounced, it is not a spoken, but it occupies the subject position of the sentence. That is a crucial part for us which means it completes the requirement of a sentence. Now, having discussed that, when somebody says these things, how do we know what they intend? So, to read the intention of the speaker, here is what I need to add, the context

of the speech, the conversation or discourse and how someone speaks to you, tells you what they mean, i.e., whether they mean it in a commanding sense or request. Whether they are speaking requestfully, this becomes intuitively clear to us.

The use of the word 'me' and that is merely the use of the word 'please', does not necessarily make the sentence a request sentence. For example, when someone says, 'come home tomorrow.' As a hearer, you can immediately figure out whether in, and that comes from your intuition, which reads the intention of the speaker and your intuition categorically, clearly gives you the intention of the speaker that this is a request. How? It is complex, but it comes from the context, i.e., who speaks that.

So, if a person who can be very informal with you, a person you can be informal with, a person who knows you very well and you share informal linguistic space with that person. In such a situation, if such a sentence comes, it does not have to be preceded by, 'please.' And even if it gets preceded by 'please', it remains the same. If somebody wants to convey rage, somebody wants to convey an unpleasant situation, in such a context, one can still use the word 'please' and not sound requesting.

So we can say, 'give me a glass of water', it can be a request, and we can say 'please give me a glass of water', and still we can indicate some dissatisfaction. And we clarify that 'I did not like something.' So, the point is, the use of the word 'please' in an imperative sentence does not necessarily make it a request or tells you the intention of the speaker.

The intention of the speaker, i.e., whether it is a request or not, only your intuition figures out from the appropriate context. Intuitions, linguistic intuitions are very clear from the context; the hearer's intuitions read the speaker's intention very well. What is conclusive about that, otherwise any imperative sentence is an imperative sentence, the context and the intention makes it command or request, not the structure.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:09)

Subject in imperative sentences

- (You) come here.
- (You) sit down.
- (You) drink a glass of water.



It happens the same way. So, one more time I will tell you, how a person says 'sit down.' You walk in somebody's office, and somebody says, 'sit down', it is very clear whether the person is respectful or not. Even if somebody says 'get up', you can read the intention that, this is a request, not anything otherwise.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:36)

Hindi Imperative Sentences

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| • (aap) <u>baith-iyē</u> | (You) please sit. |
| • (aap) andar <u>aa-iyē</u> | (You) please come in. |
| • (tum) <u>baith-o</u> | (You) sit. |
| • (tum) andar <u>aa-o</u> | (You) come in. |



It is this particular aspect that requires a little bit of attention in some of the languages that we speak. Most of us, when we speak English or when we learn English, we do not all the time use the word 'please' in our speech, which could be offensive to many people. I want you to

understand why some of us ignore the use of, 'please.' Though, bringing the use of the word 'please' is always safe and good.

Using an imperative sentence without 'please' is not really good. So, as the rule of thumb, please try to embed, include the word 'please' when you speak an imperative sentence even though our intuitions help us understand the intention. It is always safe to use the word, 'please.' I want to just underline the point that speakers of different languages in the Indian subcontinent, in India particularly, do not tend to use this word 'please' for a very simple reason that there is no scope for this word in the languages that they speak.

What 'please' does in English is taken care of by the structure of the sentence in languages other than English; particularly languages of India. So, when we say, “aap baithiye”, this is very requestful. The speaker becomes very respectful, as well. So, even if we do not say “aap” and we say “baithiye”, we intend to use “aap” as the subject of my sentence. We drop it. There are two different types of second-person pronoun in Hindi. One is “aap”, the other is “tum.”

So when we say, “baithiye”, “aayiye”, these things have “aap” embedded in it and when we say “baitho”, “aao”, these things have “tum” embedded in that. So, when somebody says “baithiye”, the use of the word 'please' from English as a borrowed word or use of anything, any Hindi equivalent of 'please' is redundant. Therefore, the speakers do not use that in a normal, regular speech, in their conversations.

So, if you say "please baithiye", the word 'please' sounds redundant and please look at this, languages do not like to use redundant elements. We know that everywhere in an imperative sentence, the subject is second-person pronoun. So we drop that pronoun everywhere in all languages. So, in one place we are trying to remove redundancy, and by bringing in the word please, we are bringing in redundancy. Therefore, a lot of speakers do not tend to use the word, 'please.'

So, when we bring this in our learning of English, we tend to drop please from there as well, which may not be a very attractive thing to do when you speak English. So for the purpose of speaking English, one single point information that I want to give you with this example is please use the word 'please' every time you use the imperative sentence. Without that, it does not

look good, even though your intuition helps you read the intention, that is the intention of command or request. That is very critical.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:19)



Tamil Imperative Sentences

- ningaa pongaa (You) please go.
- nii po (You) go.
- ningaa waangaa (You) please come.
- nii waa (You) come.



Since I mentioned in our languages it happens, I can show you that it works the same way in Tamil. So, when we say “ningaa pongaa”, we mean the respect is embedded. We do not need to say "please ningaa pongaa." And when we say “nii po”, we know this is not same as “ningaa pongaa.” So, the way it works in Hindi, the same way it is working in Tamil.

We can make this one optional and when we say “pongaa” or “po”, we understand that when we say "pongaa", the intention of being respectful is embedded in the structure. When we say, “waangaa” the same thing is embedded in that. So "please waangaa" is something redundant. Therefore the speakers do not do that.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:25)

Malayalam Imperative Sentences

- ni-ngal poiikollu. (You) please go.
- ni po (You) go.
- ningal wannukollu (You) please come.
- nii waa (You) come.



When we speak Malayalam, we simply say, “poiikollu”, it means “ni-ngal” not “ni.” So much so that “ni poiikollu” will not be a warranted sequence. The moment we say “poiikollu”, even when we drop the subject “ni-ngal” we know the subject was “ni-ngal.” Therefore, the speakers of Indian subcontinents have this issue of the use of the word, 'please.' I am only talking about those who may have this issue.

If, if it becomes apparent in your language, add the word 'please' with imperative sentences. So, the entire discussion about imperative sentences, command and request rests on just two points that I want to underline again as a takeaway. Use the word 'please' all the time in imperative sentences because your intention of what you say will be very clearly and categorically read by the intuition of the hearer.

We need to know why we do not use the word 'please' because it will help us do it. But, we know very well that it is not a problem and if we do not then, we just need to add it. This much information will help you improve your imperative sentences, your understanding of imperative sentences and the structure of imperative sentences.

As a part of the exercise, I would request you to pay attention to people when they speak imperative sentences. You write down 20 imperative sentences using 20 different verbs for this purpose and add 'please' in front of each one of those sentence and speak that. See how it sounds to you. This exercise will help you include the word 'please' in your speech and will make you sound more appropriate. Thank you.