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LING 305

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An Introduction to Grammatical Gender

00:00:00

Music: Chorus of singers.

00:00:01 --> 00:00:07

Visual: Tweety Bird, a yellow canary wearing a blue hat, swings on a bird perch. He turns and jumps onto the perch, pointing to the right.

Music: Wind instrument plays while Tweety Bird speaks

TWEETY BIRD: I taw I taw a pussycat! I did! I did taw a pussycat. A pretty little pussycat.

00:00:07 --> 00:00:08

Visual: Tweety Bird looks at Sylvester the Cat. Sylvester looks at him through the open bird cage.

00:00:08 --> 00:00:19

Visual: Tweety Bird sleeps in his nest and wakes up when Sylvester the Cat peers at him through the hole of the birdhouse. He points to the right. Sylvester disappears. Tweety runs to the hole, and Sylvester appears. Tweety jumps up and down while pointing at the hole.

BHAVYA PANT: Remember Tweety from *Looney Tunes*? For the first ten years of my life, I was convinced that Tweety is a female bird. So strong was my conviction that I bet my Pikachu training card on it. And as you might have guessed…

00:00:19 --> 00:00:28

Visual: Tweety Bird swings on the bird perch of the birdcage. His back faces the audience. Sylvester the Cat leans against a brick wall behind Tweety. His right pointer finger mimics the back and forth motion of the swing. When Tweety notices him, Sylvester waves. Tweety flies out of the cage.

PANT: I lost. Tweety is, in fact, a male canary. Now, you might be thinking that it's not the most surprising thing to confuse a small, yellow bird with long eyelashes and a high-pitched voice for a female.

00:00:28 --> 00:00:36

Visual: Sylvester the Cat hides in a box and looks at Tweety Bird who sits on a bird perch. When Tweety points and looks to the left, Sylvester hides his face in the box.

PANT: Maybe. But what's noteworthy is that to my ten-year-old self, this confusion stemmed partly from the fact that Tweety…

00:00:37

Visual: A door opens. Tweety Bird comes from behind it.

PANT: Was a bird.

00:00:37 --> 00:00:51

Visual: Red-breasted bird with off-white belly perches on twig. The bird tweets and looks around.

PANT: You see, the very notion of there existing a bird that was not a female kind of tripped me up. Of course, this makes little sense biologically and, yes, my younger self was well aware that most species including birds have both male and female counterparts.

00:00:52 --> 00:00:53

Visual: Black screen.

PANT: Yet even today…

00:00:53 --> 00:01:04

Visual: Pink female sex symbol in the upper left corner. A blue bird, brown squirrel, orange fish, and orange cat are grouped on the lower left corner. Writing in Hindi to the upper right corner of the screen.

PANT: The concept bird defaults to a female entity in my head. So do fish, squirrels, cats, and even bees. What do all of these have in common? Well, they're all female nouns in my native language…

00:01:04 --> 00:01:05

Visual: Hindi appears in yellow writing.

PANT: Hindi.

00:01:05 --> 00:01:10

Visual: Brown table, red car, blue waves, world, happy face, and red heart appear on screen.

PANT: So are table, car, water, earth, happiness, love, and life.

00:01:11 --> 00:01:14

Visual: Yellow question mark is written on screen.

PANT: But what does it mean for an entire species to be female in a language? And how can objects and emotions be even remotely gendered?

00:01:15 --> 00:01:22

Visual: Gender written in white text.

00:01:23 --> 00:01:26

Visual: Head of woman and man with corresponding sex symbols appear to the left of the screen. To the right of the screen appears a person in a yellow shirt, a person wearing half a pink dress and wearing half a blue shirt, and a person wearing a pink dress. They hold hands. Sex symbols for male and female appear in the upper right corner.

PANT: You see in everyday life when we hear the word "gender," we think of gender identity or biological sex.

00:01:26 --> 00:02:11

Visual: Gender in white text at top of the screen. Two blue arrows point down below gender. Under the arrow to the left are images of a woman's head and a man's head with their corresponding sex symbols. Beside them are a person in a yellow shirt, a person wearing half a link dress and wearing half a blue shirt, and a person wearing a pink dress holding hands. The sex symbols for male and female appear behind these people. Under the arrow to the right is a quadrant. In the upper left quadrant is a snake, a fish in a fishbowl, a taco, a piece of luggage; in the lower left quadrant is a drum, lungs, grapes; in the upper right quadrant is a cat, a wristwatch, an apple; in the lower right quadrant is a zebra, a hotdog, a guitar, a brain.

PANT: When it comes to the study of language, however, gender takes on a slightly different meaning. For the sake of clarity, from here on are the former is social gender and the latter is grammatical gender. Social gender we're all familiar with. Grammatical gender, on the other hand, is one of many ways to classify nouns in a language. This doesn't have to be masculine versus feminine. It could be animate versus inanimate nouns; singular versus plural; or even edible versus inedible if that's what floats your boat. In fact, the English word "gender" itself comes from the Latin word "genus" which means "type or kind," something closer to the modern

English usage of "genre." This system of classifying nouns based on some set of shared features

is often called a noun class system. And grammatical gender is one form of this classification.

00:02:12 --> 00:02:17

Visual: World map with blue, red, and white dots. Locations on map with a white dot

indicate "No Gender," locations on map with a red dot indicate "Semantic;" and locations

on map with a blue dot indicate "Semantic and Formal".

PANT: About a fourth of the world's languages mark grammatical gender and their nouns. This

means their nouns can be a specific prefix or suffix based on their gender…

00:02:18 --> 00:02:28

Visual: Cat in blue bubble to the top left of the screen. From the bubble are three separate

lines that connect to three separate circles. The first circle reads "Determiners" on top;

"El" is written in the circle. The second circle reads "Adjectives" on top; "O" is written in

the circle. The third circle reads "Pronouns" on top, "Él" is written in the circle. Cat in

pink bubble to the bottom left of the screen. From the bubble are three separate lines that

connect to three separate circles. The first circle reads "Determiners" on top; "La" is

written in the circle. The second circle reads "Adjectives" on top; "A" is written in the

circle. The third circle reads "Pronouns" on top, "Ella" is written in the circle.

PANT: Or their articles and adjectives which qualify those nouns in a sentence carry a

corresponding prefix or suffix to match the gender of that noun. In Hindi this looks something

like…

00:02:29 --> 00:02:31

Visual: Yellow house.

PANT: "Mera ghar" (from my house) and…

00:02:32 --> 00:02:43

Visual: Yellow cat.

PANT: "Meree gaadee" (from my car). Your house is a masculine noun and gets the possessive pronoun marker "mera" whereas "gaadee" is a feminine noun and, hence, gets the feminine possessive pronoun marker "meree."

00:02:44 --> 00:02:50

Visual: "Why mark pronouns?" in orange text.

PANT: But why mark nouns at all? For starters, it helps disambiguate meaning which means faster processing.

00:02:51 --> 00:02:56

Visual: Ginny Weasley, a red-haired teenage girl, from *Harry Potter* holds a wand. A yellow house and orange car appear behind her. A blue dialogue bubble reads "That's mine."

PANT: If I pointed in the general direction of a house with a car parked in front of it and said, "That's mine…"

00:02:56 --> 00:03:00

Visual: "Is she talking about the house or the car?" in blue text.

PANT: An English speaker would have no way of knowing what "that" referred to in the sentence. In Hindi, however, I could say…

00:03:01 --> 00:03:10

Visual: "Vah meree hai" in white text appears in an orange dialogue bubble beside Ginny Weasley.

PANT: "Vah meree hai" and it would be clear that I was talking about the car thanks to the feminine marking on the possessive pronoun "mine" (meree). Interestingly, grammatical gender was quite productive in Old English.

00:03:11 --> 00:03:13

Visual: "Keep calm" in white text written on old scroll. Ink and quill pen beside the scroll.

PANT: And we still see traces of that today in pronouns like…

00:03:14 --> 00:03:15

Visual: Green figure of man and woman holding hands. "He/she" in white text appears beside figures.

PANT: He and she and…

00:03:15 --> 00:03:16

Visual: One sad green mask; one happy green mask. "Actor/actress" in white text appears beside masks.

PANT: Nouns like actor versus actress.

00:03:17 --> 00:03:19

Visual: Michael Scott, a middle-aged Caucasian man, from *The Office* holds a black telephone and looks at the camera.

MICHAEL SCOTT*:* La telephona.

00:03:20 --> 00:03:22

Visual: Oscar Martinez, a middle-aged Latino man, stands beside Michael.

OSCAR MARTINEZ: It's *teléfono.*

00:03:22

Visual: Michael Scott put in the telephone back in its receiver.

Sound: Telephone clicks.

00:03:22 --> 00:03:34

Visual: Oscar Martinez from *The Office* speaks to the camera. He holds up two yellow sticky notes. One has a drawing of two balls. The other has a drawing of breasts.

MARTINEZ: Michael's having a hard time with the gender part of Spanish. So, I told him to mark everything with international symbol for gender, and, um… I should have been more specific.

00:03:35 --> 00:03:42

Visual: Watercolour painting of man and woman turned away from each other. The background has hues of yellow, green, and pink.

PANT: As you can see, grammatical gender categories do not always overlap with our social understanding of gender.

00:03:43 --> 00:03:49

Visual: Light blue banner reads: "Oh la la, je parle français".

PANT: Take French for example which has two grammatical genders: masculine and feminine. While some of the grammatically feminine French nouns…

00:03:50 --> 00:03:54

Visual: Group of women appear underneath "Feminine".

PANT: do refer to socially feminine entities (like mother, sister, or daughter), most other feminine nouns…

00:03:55 --> 00:03:59

Visual: A red car, a wristwatch, and a baguette appear under the group of women.

PANT: Like watch, car, or baguette, don't. Similarly, while some of the grammatical…

00:04:00 --> 00:04:03

Visual: Older man holding younger boy on his shoulders appear underneath "Masculine".

PANT: Masculine nouns do refer to socially masculine entities (like brother, father, or son), most

others…

00:04:04 --> 00:04:39

Visual: A yellow cake, red button, and green outline of a smartphone appear under the

man holding the boy on his shoulders.

PANT: Like cake or button or cellphone, don't. So, if not for social cues, what determines the

grammatical gender of seemingly genderless objects? In most gendered languages, this is largely

determined by the similarity in meaning or the similarity in sounds between nouns. This means

that similar sounding nouns tend to be grouped under the same gender category. If you took

French in high school, you might have come across this similarity as a hacky way to decide for

the gender of an object. Something like: if it ends in an "e," chances are it's feminine and if it

ends in an "au," chances are it's masculine. The beauty of human language is…

00:04:40 --> 00:04:44

Visual: Diagram of Bantu noun class system. "Bantu" appears in purple text.

PANT: that even the most complex classification systems, like the 20 plus noun class systems in

the sub-Saharan Bantu languages…

00:04:45 --> 00:04:50

Visual: Angry man wearing light blue shirt and red tie.

PANT: Enough to drive any second-language speaker up the wall, are mere second nature to an

infant speaker of that language…

00:04:51 --> 00:04:54

Visual: Baby sucking orange pacifier and wearing black sunglasses.

PANT: A split-second judgement. Obvious.

00:04:55 --> 00:05:01

Music: Upbeat jazz music.