Foundations of Sanskrit

Chapter 2 – Introduction to Grammar

This chapter introduces us to GRAMMAR. We learned how to beginning declining nouns and conjugating verbs. Panditji gives us just a little bit at a time, so that it is not too overwhelming.

Nouns

A Sanskrit noun (person, place or thing) is marked/inflected/declined (however you want to say it) to show three things - gender, number and case. An English noun only shows number. We are ignoring pronouns (he, she, it) for now. Because Sanskrit is an ancient language, it preserves many characteristics of Proto-Indo-European. What is Proto-Indo-European? Scholars estimate that PIE may have been spoken as a single language (before divergence began) around 3500 BC, though estimates by different authorities can vary by more than a millennium. PIE had three genders, three numbers and case marking – just like Sanskrit. These grammatical features have died out in most modern Indo-European languages though they are most closely preserved in the Slavic Family.

Gender – Sanskrit has three genders – masculine, feminine and neuter just like German, Latin and Greek. The Romance languages have two – masculine and feminine. English only shows gender in the pronoun system (he, she, it). This is a remnant of our PIE origins. Consider gender a grammatical category. Sometimes it makes sense which nouns belong to which category – for example, man is a masculine noun, woman is a feminine noun, auto is neuter. But, usually, it is hard to understand why nouns are where they are. Right now, we are only learning masculine nouns. Chapters 4 and 5 teach neuter and feminine nouns, but we won't see them until next year. For now, imagine they don't exist. ☺

Number – Sanskrit has three numbers – singular, dual and plural. Dual means two. Scottish Gaelic and Slovenian are two IE languages that have preserved the dual. Arabic is a language outside of the IE language family that marks dual. Right now, we are learning to decline for the three numbers.

Case – Case marking shows the role of a noun in a sentence. English only shows case in the pronoun system (he is a subject, him is an object). Latin and Russian have 6 different cases. Polish, Czech and Croatian have 7. Sanskrit has 8. And Finnish (a non-Indo-European language) has 15!! Important – a Sanskrit noun must be case marked in order to appear in a sentence. The vocabulary list has nouns in their pure, uninflected form. You must do something to them before sticking them into an utterance. You must case mark them by adding the appropriate suffix/ending. In Part A, Panditji teaches us the nominative case and its endings. In Part B, Panditji teaches us the accusative case and its endings. These only apply to the nouns we are learning which are the MASCULINE NOUNS ENDING IN –A. There will be different suffixes for other families of nouns. We will see masculine nouns ending in –i and –u in Part C and learn their rules. Again, a little bit at a time.

If you look at page 29, you will see the list of Sanskrit cases. In Part A, we learned about NOMINATIVE case which marks the subject of a sentence. In Part B, we learned ACCUSATIVE case which marks the direct object of a sentence. We will learn more about the other cases are we go along.

Examples of case in action:

- Dogs-NOM   chase   cats-ACC.
  subject   verb   *direct object*

- Dogs-NOM chase cats-ACC under chairs-LOC with their big teeth-INSTR.

- "Tracy-VOC, get over here!" – direct address

- Cat-GEN Samantha-NOM (Samantha's cat) - ownership

- Charlene-NOM gave Kathy-DAT a book-ACC – dative is the indirect object

- Martha-NOM Conneticut-ABL (Martha *from* Conneticut)

Because all nouns are case marked, Sanskrit has free word order! Moving words around in a sentence is unlimited though the most common structure is subject-object-verb. Sanskrit also has less need of prepositions like with, by, of.

The nouns and their suffixes are all on vocabulary sheet 1. This is all you need for Part A and Part B homework. I will continue to update as we learn more.

Verbs

Right now we are just conjugating verbs for person. Was the action performed by one person (singular), two people (dual) or more than two (plural)? The verb will "agree" in number with the nominative noun, the do-er of the action. Eventually, we will need to express tense as well. We are working in present tense. In chapter five, we will see future tense and in chapter six, past tense. We won't get there this year.

I hesitate to tell you this, but Sanskrit has ten houses of verbs. We are learning the rules for the First Family called Bhū. This is the largest family, and I think the only one dealt with in our textbook.