

Topic-Comment sentences (“Gadis itu **kakaknya** di kelas saya”, etc)

There is a type of sentence that introduces a topic before you say something about it.

Example: You are walking with a friend, and you see a girl. You say:

“Gadis itu kakaknya di kelas saya.” That girl, her older sister’s in my class

By starting with “Gadis itu” you direct your friend’s attention to the girl. She’s your topic. Then you say your real message: “Kakaknya di kelas saya”. That’s your comment. Sentences of this type are often called “Topic-Comment”.

They are quite common.

We don’t need to use a Topic-Comment sentence; we can just use a “normal” sentence. Compare:

Normal sentence

Kakak gadis itu di kelas saya. OR
That girl’s older sister is in my class.

Topic-Comment sentence

Gadis itu kakaknya di kelas saya.
That girl, her older sister’s in my class.

But a normal sentence would not direct the listener’s attention to “gadis itu” as your topic. And that’s what you wanted to do.

Even when the Topic is plural, we still use ‘NYA’ in Topic-Comment sentences¹. Example:

Anak-anak itu ayah**NYA** sakit. ✓ (not usually: “Anak-anak itu ayah **MEREKA** sakit”).
Those children, **their** father is sick.

Often the order of the words in the Comment can be switched around. So e.g. we can say either:

Kucing itu **matanya biru**. That cat, its eyes are blue. (i.e. “That cat’s eyes are blue”).
OR
Kucing itu **biru matanya**. That cat, blue are its eyes. (i.e. “That cat’s eyes are blue”).

This sentence “Kucing itu biru matanya” sounds fine.

But when a thing is not a part of its owner, this type of sentence can sound strange. Example:

Gadis itu **biru tasnya**. (?) That girl’s bag is blue. (?)

The problem with this sentence above is that the “bag” is not a part of the girl. So, it is safer to say:

Gadis itu **tasnya biru**. ✓

Usually we do not use commas in Topic-Comment sentences.

Kucing itu (,) matanya biru. [= optional comma]	* Kucing itu biru matanya. [no comma]
Pak Nasrul (,) suaranya kecil.	*Pak Nasrul kecil suaranya.

Exercise 1. Change it from a normal sentence to a Topic-Comment (T-C) sentence, or vice-versa.

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| 1. Mobil orang itu baru. | → Orang itu mobilnya baru (= T-C) |
| 2. Rok itu harganya Rp 100.000. | → Harga rok itu Rp 100.000. (= normal) |
| 3. Warna bunga itu putih. | → Bunga itu warnanya putih. (=T-C) |
| 4. Wanita itu pacarnya seorang aktor. | → Pacar wanita itu seorang aktor. (= normal) |
| 5. Anak itu ayahnya polisi. | → Ayah anak itu polisi. (= normal) |
| 6. Atap rumah itu bocor. | → Rumah itu atapnya bocor. (= T-C) |
| 7. Anak Bu Nur lima orang. | → Bu Nur anaknya lima orang. (=T-C) |
| 8. Gaji buruh-buruh itu rendah. | → Buruh-buruh itu gajinya rendah. (= T-C) |
| 9. Guru murid-murid itu siapa? | → Murid-murid itu gurunya siapa? (= T-C) |
| 10. Wanita itu suaminya sudah tua. | → Suami wanita itu sudah tua. (= normal) |
| 11. Orang itu tangannya patah. | → Tangan orang itu patah. (= normal) |
| 12. Kunci pintu ini di mana? | → Pintu ini kuncinya di mana? (=T-C) |

Exercise 2. Say it using Topic-Comment. [Note: the English version does not capture the flavour of the Topic-Comment sentence; it is just a guide]

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| 1. Saman adiknya sudah pergi ke Bali. | Saman's brother has gone to Bali. |
| 2. Bu Nia anaknya belum kawin. | Bu Nia's child isn't married yet. |
| 3. Orang itu namanya siapa? | What's that person's name? |
| 4. Kota itu jalan-jalannya kotor. | The streets of that town are dirty. |
| 5. Hotel itu kamarnya banyak sekali. | That hotel has a lot of rooms. |
| 6. Wanita itu kulitnya sawo matang. | That woman has <i>sawo matang</i> skin. |
| 7. Kemeja ini harganya berapa? | What's the price of this shirt? |
| 8. Pak Tulus rumahnya tidak jauh dari sini. | Pak Tulus' house isn't far from here. |
| 9. Wanita itu roknya bagus , bukan? | That woman's skirt is nice isn't it? |
| 10. Rumah itu kamarnya luas. | The house has large / spacious rooms. |
| 11. Meja ini kakinya rusak. | This table's got a damaged leg. |
| 12. Pak Basri istrinya dari Sulawesi. | Pak Basri's wife is from Sulawesi. |

Exercise 3. This time say it with the “possession”, i.e. the -NYA word, at the *end* of the sentence. (This is a Topic-Comment sentence with switched order of elements within the Comment.)

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| 1. Kucing itu besar matanya . | [That cat's eyes are big] |
| 2. Topi ini Rp 20.000 harganya . | [The price of this hat is Rp 20.000] |
| 3. Yusuf sakit badannya . | [Yusuf's body is sore] |
| 4. Dia sudah tiga puluh tahun umurnya . | [He is already 30 years old.] |
| 5. Makanan ini nasi pecel namanya . | [The name of this food is <i>nasi pecel</i>] |

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| 6. Jakarta panas sekali udaranya. | [Jakarta's air is very hot] |
| 7. Sepatu ini aneh warnanya. | [The colour of these shoes is strange] |
| 8. Bu Tuti halus sekali suaranya. | [Bu Tuti's voice is very refined] |
| 9. Daerah itu sangat subur tanahnya. | [The soil of that region is very fertile] |
| 10. Pemain basket itu cepat tangannya. | [That basketball player's hands are quick] |

Exercise 4. Say it with a normal sentence [NM] or a Topic-Comment sentence [T-C] or a “switched” Topic-Comment sentence [SW], *as directed*.

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| 1. Film itu “Arisan” namanya. | The name of that film is “Arisan”. [SW] |
| 2. Tono ibunya bekerja di bank. | Tono's mother works in a bank. [T-C] |
| 3. Rumah kami hitam warnanya. | Our house is black [use 'warna']. [SW] |
| 4. Pakaian orang itu kotor. | That person's clothes are dirty. [NM] |
| 5. Harimau itu giginya besar. | That tiger's teeth are big. [T-C] |
| 6. Kota itu pusatnya ramai. | The centre of that city is crowded. [T-C] |
| 7. Sepatu Bu Ida mahal. | Bu Ida's shoes are expensive. [NM] |
| 8. Kucing itu indah bulunya. | That cat's fur is beautiful. [SW] |
| 9. Tuti umurnya 18 tahun. | Tuti's age is 18. [T-C] |
| 10. Wanita itu suaminya sudah meninggal. | That woman's husband has died. [T-C] |
| 11. Anak itu orang tuanya di mana? | Where are that child's parents? [T-C] |
| 12. Desa itu kecil penduduknya. | The population of that village is small. [SW] |
| 13. Rini pacarnya siapa? | Who is Rini's boyfriend? [T-C] |