

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 ayahNYA 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 sentence, or vice-versa.

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. _____.
4. Wanita itu pacarnya seorang aktor. _____.
5. Anak itu ayahnya polisi. _____.
6. Atap rumah itu bocor (leaky). _____.
7. Anak Bur Nur lima orang. _____.
8. Gaji buruh-buruh itu rendah. _____.
9. Guru murid-murid itu siapa? _____.
10. Wanita itu suaminya sudah tua. _____.
11. Orang itu tangannya patah. _____.
12. Kunci pintu ini di mana? _____.

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. <u>Saman adiknya sudah pergi ke Bali</u> . | Saman's brother has gone to Bali. |
| 2. _____. | Bu Nia's child isn't married yet. |
| 3. _____. | What's that person's name? |
| 4. _____. | The streets of that town are dirty. |
| 5. _____ banyak sekali. | That hotel has a lot of rooms. |
| 6. _____. | That woman has <i>sawo matang</i> skin. |
| 7. _____ ? | What's the price of this shirt? |
| 8. _____. | Pak Tulus' house isn't far from here. |
| 9. _____, bukan? | That woman's skirt is nice isn't it? |
| 10. _____ tiga buah. | The house has only three rooms. |
| 11. _____ rusak. | This table's got a damaged leg. |
| 12. _____. | Pak Basri's wife is from Sulawesi. |

Exercise 3. This time say it with the "possession" at the *end* of the sentence.

1. Kucing itu **besar MATANYA**. [its eyes are big]
2. Topi ini _____ . [its price is Rp 20.000]
3. Yusuf _____ . [his body is sore]
4. Dia _____ . [is already 30 years old]
5. Makanan ini _____ . [its name is *nasi pecel*]

6. Jakarta _____ . [the air is very hot]
7. Sepatu ini _____ . [the colour is strange]
8. Bu Tuti _____ . [her voice is very refined]
9. Daerah itu _____ . [the soil is very fertile: *subur*]
10. Pemain basket itu _____ . [his 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.

1. **Film itu “Arisan” namanya** . The name of that film is “Arisan”. [SW]
2. _____ Tono’s mother works in a bank. [T-C]
3. _____ . Our house is black (use *warna*). [SW]
4. _____ . That person’s clothes are dirty. [NM]
5. _____ . That tiger’s teeth are big. [T-C]
6. _____ . The centre of that city is crowded. [T-C]
7. _____ . Bu Ida’s shoes are expensive. [NM]
8. _____ . That cat’s fur is beautiful. [SW]
9. _____ .. Tuti’s age is 18. [T-C]
10. _____ . That woman’s husband has died. [T-C]
11. _____ di mana? Where are that child’s parents? [T-C]
12. _____ . The population of that village is small. [SW]
13. _____ siapa? Who is Rini’s boyfriend? [T-C]

Answer Key

Exercise 1. 3) Bunga itu warnanya putih 4) Pacar Gina orang bule 5) Ayah anak itu polisi 6) Rumah itu atapnya bocor 7) Bu Nur anaknya lima orang 8) Buruh-buruh itu gajinya rendah 9) Murid-murid itu gurunya siapa? 10) Suami wanita itu sudah tua. 11) Tangan orang itu patah. 12) Pintu itu kuncinya di mana?

Exercise 2. 2) Bu Nia anaknya belum kawin. 3) Orang itu namanya siapa? 4) Kota itu jalan-jalannya kotor. 5) Hotel itu kamarnya banyak sekali. 6) Wanita itu kulitnya sawo matang. 7) Kemeja ini harganya berapa? 8) Pak Tulus rumahnya tidak jauh dari sini. 9) Wanita itu roknya bagus, bukan? 10) Rumah kami kamarnya lima buah. 11) Meja ini kakinya rusak. 12) Pak Basri isterinya dari Sulawesi.

Exercise 3. 2) Topi ini Rp 20.000 harganya. 3) Yusuf sakit badannya. 4) Dia sudah 30 tahun umurnya. 5) Makanan ini ‘nasi pecel’ namanya. 6) Jakarta panas sekali udaranya. 7) Sepatu ini aneh warnanya. 8) Bu Tuti halus sekali suaranya. 9) Daerah itu subur sekali tanahnya. 10) Pemain basket itu cepat tangannya.

Exercise 4. 2) Tono ibunya bekerja di bank. 3) Rumah kami hitam warnanya. 4) Pakaian orang itu kotor. 5) Harimau itu giginya besar. 6) Kota itu pusatnya ramai. 7) Sepatu Bu Ida itu mahal. 8) Kucing itu indah bulunya. 9) Tuti umurnya 18 tahun. 10) Wanita itu suaminya sudah meninggal. 11) Anak itu orang tuanya di mana? 12) Desa itu kecil penduduknya. 13) Rini pacarnya siapa?