

# Grammar is Grammar and Usage is Usage: Relative Clauses in Jakarta Indonesian

Peter Cole, Gabriella Hermon, and Yassir Tjung

In a recent article in *Language*, Newmeyer (2003) defends the view that grammars need to be characterized independently of usage. In this presentation we give evidence from the relative clauses in Indonesian to support this claim. We will argue that speakers in the colloquial variety of Jakarta Indonesian mentally represent a grammar in which both subject and object position in this construction are accessible to relativization. Thus object relativization is part of their competence.

The evidence is based on an experimental study using grammaticality judgements conducted in the Jakarta area. Twenty adult speakers were given a GJ task asking them to evaluate the grammaticality of relativization on object position in sentences in which the verb is a bare verb:

- (1) *Tolong dong cariin [barang-barang yang orang udah nggak mau pake lagi].*  
help EXCL find-IN goods COMP person already not want use again  
'Please help us find the goods that people have not wanted to use anymore.'

As a control condition, we also tested relativization of the same position when the verb had a nasal (active) prefix:

- (2) *\*[Bangku yang elu lagi ngedudukin] masih basah.*  
chair COMP 2SG in.progress N-sit-IN still wet  
'The chair that you are sitting on is still wet.'

Results indicate that adults overwhelmingly judge relativization on objects as grammatical if the verb lack the nasal prefix, while rejecting relativization on objects with a nasal prefix. This contrast supports the claim made in the literature that in Indonesian relative clause formation, both objects as well as subjects can be relativized on (see Chung (1976), Musgrave (2001), and Cole and Hermon (to appear)). This seems to indicate that adult speakers of Indonesian have the competence to relativize on objects as well as subjects on Keenan and Comrie's (1977) AH:

- (1) The Accessibility Hierarchy (AH)  
subj > direct obj > indirect obj > oblique > genitive > obj. of comparison

However, when we turn to the naturalistic and experimental data (performance data), we find that adults overwhelmingly use subject gaps and have very few non-subject gaps.

	Subject Gap	Non-subject Gap
Naturalistic Data		
(1) Adult-Adult Speech	427/494 (86.50%)	67/494 (13.50%)
(2) Adult-Child Speech	772/788 (98%)	16/788 (2%)
Experimental Data	473/480 (99.38)	3/480 <sup>1</sup> (0.62%)

<sup>1</sup> The other 4 cases are instances of relative clauses that do not apparently have gaps, as exemplified below:

- (i) *Tikus ngeliat [anak yang di atasnya ada kucingnya].*  
mouse N-see child COMP on above-3SG exist cat-DEF  
'The cat is looking at the child above whom there is the cat.'

We shall argue, however, that this is only an apparent contradiction, specifically a contradiction between competence and performance. The restriction on relativizing only from subjects is a performance preference, due to the fact that relativization on subjects is more accessible (easier to process, see Hawkins 1994) than relativization from lower positions. The preference is also due to the fact that Indonesian (like many Austronesian languages) possesses a system of verbal inflection which allows patients to appear in subject (or topic) position with a change on the verbal voice morphology (i.e., when patients become the surface subjects of the canonical passive in which the verb is morphologically marked with DI-). The latter option thus competes (in performance) with the option of relativizing directly on objects. This was also observed in our data. For example, in a recently-completed experiment, when 8 adult subjects were instructed not to use the verb that is morphologically marked with DI-, 7 of them were able to relativize directly on objects.

Evidence for this view can be adduced from languages like English. As discussed in Fox (1987), even though English allows relativization on all positions, when discourse is examined it turns out that it is not the subjects of transitive verbs, but it is the subjects of intransitives and direct objects, that are the most frequently relativized positions. According to Fox, this follows from the discourse principles involved in the function of using restricting RCs in English. In other words, there is a performance preference on the relativization on subjects of intransitive clauses and direct objects when RCs with indefinite head nouns are used in discourse.

## References

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