



# CONEST 9

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*Center for Studies on Language and Culture  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Conference : The Ninth Conference on English Studies  
Place : Yustinus Building 14th Floor, Atma Jaya Catholic University  
Day & Date : Thursday, 29 - Friday, 30 November 2012

No./Nr.	Nama / Name	Judul / Title	Halaman / Page
Pleno			
01	Abigail C. Cohn	THE STRUCTURE AND MEANING OF ENGLISH COMPOUND NOUNS	1 - 8
02	Taufik Mulyadin	THE USE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING SKILL	9 - 23
03	Laily Martin	TRIGGERING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE AWARENESS BY STYLISTIC ANALYSIS	25 - 27
04	Chindy Eka Ariesta	THE USE OF CONJUNCTIONS IN ADVANCED LEARNERS' ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS	29 - 32
05	Ignasia Yuyun	A STUDY OF READING SKILLS IN AN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST	33 - 35
06	Yudi Juniardi, Irmawanty	STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING AND THEIR READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY	37 - 40
07	Ikmi Nur Oktavianti	THE NATURE AND THE EMERGENCE OF COPULA IN ENGLISH	41 - 45
08	Faizah Mohamad Nor, Nurtiyana Ismail, Zaidah Zainal, Zanariah Md Saleh	FACTORS ATTRIBUTING TO LACK OF READING MOTIVATION	47 - 49
09	Juang Rudianto Putra	UNPLANNED TEACHING: HANDLING EFL LEARNERS' UNEXPECTED BEHAVIOR IN CLASS	51 - 53
10	Rasuna Talib	LESSON STUDY MODEL: ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM	55 - 57
11	Asih Wahyuni, Yusti Fargianti, Idi Maulida	A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECH ACT OF REFUSAL STRATEGIES BY INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS	59 - 66
12	Maulidia Rahmi	'SOUNDRENALIN CHART': AN IMPROVED FIDEL CHART MODEL FOR TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION	67 - 72
13	Tara Mustikaning Palupi	REVISITING THE USE OF LEARNING RESOURCES AND MATERIALS IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	73 - 80
14	Nurdiana	THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE (WORLD ENGLISHES) ON ENGLISH COURSE BOOKS FOR INDONESIAN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	81 - 83
15	Cucu Sutarsyah, Seftia Rosalina	CORRELATION BETWEEN MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND ENGLISH VOCABULARY SIZE	85 - 89
16	Putri Mayang Sari	AN ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LEAVING EXAMINATION	91 - 97
17	Yonathan Christian Jaya, Lanny Hidajat	A CASE STUDY OF USING THE CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING TREATMENT FOR TEACHING PHRASAL VERBS	99 - 102
18	Ismet Fanany	NETWORKS OF MEANING: LEARNING HOW NATIVE SPEAKERS THINK AND USE LANGUAGE	103 - 104
19	Noldy Pelenkahu	IMPROVING STUDENT DESCRIPTIVE WRITING ABILITY BY USING THINK-PAIR-SHARE TECHNIQUE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING	105 - 115
20	Bobby Michael	ANALYSIS OF GOTTLIEB'S SUBTITLING STRATEGIES IN TRANS 7'S 'HOME STAY'	117 - 119
21	Siti Sa'diah	MEANING ASSOCIATION OF SUMMER, WINTER, SPRING, AND AUTUMN	121 - 122
22	Ardi Nugroho	HEDGING IN EDITORIALS AND NEWS STORIES IN THE JAKARTA POST AND THE NEW YORK TIMES	123 - 126



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Conference : The Ninth Conference on English Studies  
Place : Yustinus Building 14th Floor, Atma Jaya Catholic University  
Day & Date : Thursday, 29 - Friday, 30 November 2012

No./Nr.	Nama / Name	Judul / Title	Halaman / Page
23	Bambang Mohamad Kartono	THE REALIZATION OF DISCOURSE-SEMANTIC IN ABSTRACTS OF SKRIPSI	127 - 129
24	Ira Rasikawati	MISCONCEPTIONS ON COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH MEDICAL TEXTS	131 - 135
25	Ni Ketut Dewi Yulianti, Ni Nyoman Tri Sukarsih	ENHANCING ENGLISH MASTERY OF STUDENTS OF ISI DENPASAR THROUGH THE STORY OF RAMAYANA	137 - 139
26	Hasan Basri, Hastini	'TH' CLUSTER; HOW IS IT PRONOUNCED IN ENGLISH?	141 - 143
27	Deny A. Kwary	WHY SHOULD I BUY THIS DICTIONARY?	145 - 146
28	Indrayani, Fauzi Syamsuar	AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' ERRORS IN PRONOUNCING FRICATIVE SOUNDS	147 - 148
29	Ade Mulyanah	MEMORY-LOAD INTERFERENCE IN SYNTACTIC PROCESSING	149 - 157
30	Lusia Martiana Nurani	METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN PRAGMATICS RESEARCH: THE USE OF DISCOURSE COMPLETION TEST IN SPEECH ACTS STUDIES	159 - 160
31	Didi Sukyadi, Muflihah Islamiyah	ELICITATION TECHNIQUES IN QUESTIONING USED BY CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING CLASSROOM TEACHERS	161 - 163
32	Risna Saswati, Todo F. B. Sibuea	YOUTUBE CLASSROOM CHANNEL AS AN ALTERNATIVE MEDIA FOR INDEPENDENT LEARNING	165 - 167
33	Hening Dian Paramita	TEACHING CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND SPEAKING SKILLS WITH KANGGURU WEBSITE	169 - 171
34	Udi Samanhudi, Silvia Widianingsih	SPEAKING WITH CONTENT PROGRAM	173 - 174
35	Gabriel Fajar Sasmita Aji	SEMIOTICS OF OMEROS: FROM 'FATHER TONGUE' TO POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY	175 - 177
36	Japen Sarage	HOW ENGLISH DIFFERS FROM RUSSIAN IN ITS TOPICS	179 - 182
37	Muhammad	DEIXIS ON ENGLISH HOLY QUR'AN	183 - 186
38	Iheanacho George Chidiebere	GLOBAL ISSUES AND ESL/EFL PEDAGOGY	187 - 189
39	Made Frida Yulia	PROMOTING STUDENTS' AUTONOMY IN DEVELOPING PRONUNCIATION ABILITY THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REFLECTIVE PEDAGOGY	191 - 193
40	Nur Arifah Drajadi	THE STRATEGIES OF ENGLISH PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE OF PRE-SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN	195 - 197
41	Kidam	THE EFFECT OF THE RHETORICAL APPROACH ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNERS' RHETORICAL AWARENESS IN WRITING THE ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY: A CASE STUDY	199 - 205
42	Devi Hellystia	THE RECIPROCAL TEACHING FOR READING COMPREHENSION	207 - 213
43	Sisilia S. Halimi, Adi Sutrisno, Ety Bazergan, Bambang Supriyanto, Evi Eliyanah, Baso Jabu	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIKTI-SPONSORED IELTS PREPARATION COURSE IN INDONESIA	215

HOW ENGLISH DIFFERS FROM RUSSIAN IN ITS TOPICS:  
A Functional Analysis

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Abstract

*A topic determines the way a noun functions as a subject of a sentence. The sentence: She has a leather bag differs from A leather bag belongs to her. The two sentences have different subjects but they have the same notion. The real difference is their topics. The topic of the first sentence is the owner while the second is the thing owned. A possible construction of a derived sentence for the above sentences is A leather bag is with her. This less acceptable sentence than the earlier is still grammatical and understandable but it brings a new notion. It is not clear whether the bag belongs to her or not. Another derived sentence A leather bag is hers. truly shows the same notion as the first sentence but it not acceptable because the subject needs a definite article.*

*In Russian: Мне нужна книга./Mnje nuzna kniga/ (Lit. A book is necessary for me./ can be translated into A book is necessary for me or exactly I need a book.) the word a book takes the subject. In such a sentence the person rarely takes the subject of the sentence as found in English. The same case happens in the sentence: /U mnjakniga./ (Lit. A book is with me. which is translated into I have a book.) It seems that Russian shows an indirect ways of conduct, which are very common practice in non-western world.*

*This paper tries to exhibit the different topics of English from Russian. It tries to find which English sentence patterns differ from those of Russian.*

Keywords: Topicalization, subject, sentence pattern, core sentence, derived sentence.

INTRODUCTION

Among the clause elements (Quirk, 1985:12), a subject and a verb are the principal elements. If we adopt Lambrecht's theory on information category, we can classify a sentence into a Predicate Focus, Argument Focus, and a Sentence Focus. This theory categorizes the predicate, the subject, and the subject and predicate as new information respectively. Chafe's semantic aspects determine the verb-subject relation. He classifies verbs as an ambient, a state, a process, and an action. His argument is based on the failure of the structural linguistics to explain the subject-verb formula such as S V O as this formula permits the sentence formation of *The fly killed the man* which is not acceptable.

THE VERB-SUBJECT RELATION

In relation to the semantic verb-subject relation, Chafe proposes a classification of verbs into an ambient, a state, a process, and an action. The verb-subject relation, furthermore, results in the classification of Inchoative, resultative, absolutive, relative, causative, deprocessive, antonymy, experiencer, beneficiary, instrument, complement, locative, agent, patient

A verb of ambient, which shows nothingness but the predication itself, is either a state or an action. The followings are the examples in sentences.

- (1) It is hot.  
Form. Vbe.PRES.3.SG. ADJ.Sta.
- (2) It rains.  
FORM. Vf. PRES.3.SG.Act.

The nothingness of subject in Russian is not expressed as seen in a formal *it* like in English. The following sentences are the examples:



- (3) *Kholodo.*  
cold. ADJ.PRES.Sta.  
'It is cold.'

The only predicate is the adjective together with the absence of a state verb of *be*. The present tense marker is expressed by the absence of the verb *be* itself. In the past tense, the tense marker is expressed by the verb *be*:

- (4) *Bylo* *kholodno.*  
Vbe.PAST.3.SG.NET.Sta. cold.NOM.ADJ.3.SG.NET.  
'It was cold.'

The action verb of ambient in Russian is seen in the following

- (5) *Idjot* *dozd.*  
go.Vf.PRES.3.SG.NET. rain.NOM.N.3.SG.NET.  
'It rains.'
- (6) *Dozdit*  
rain.Vf. PRES.3.SG.MASC.  
'It Rains.'

The sentences involve nothing but the predication of state *hot* and *rains*, which are verbs of ambient. The sentences show different action verbs of ambient. (5) expresses a verb and a predicative complement, while (6) expresses a single sentence verb.

The above sentences show no subject element in the sentence. The followings exhibit a subject-verb relation. The sentence:

- (7) He is tired.  
PRON.3.SG.POT.ANI.MASC.PAT. Vbe.PRES.3.SG. ADJ.Sta.Incho  
The predicate *tired* is a derivational verb expressing the beginning of a process.
- (8) The watch is broken.  
N.COUNT.3.SG.INANI.POT. Vbe.PRES.3.SG. ADJ.Sta.Resul.

The above sentences show a verb-subject relation. The predicate *is tired* show a different relation to the predicate *is broken*. The first is a patient-inchoative while the second is a potent-resultative.

In Russian such a relation is expressed in a different way.

- (9) *On* *ustal*  
he. PRON.NOM.3.SG.POT.ANI.MASC.PAT. ADJ.PAST.MASC.Sta.Incho.  
'He was tired.'
- (10) *Chasy spamalis'*  
watch.N.NOM.COUNT.3.SG.INANI.POT. break.Vf.PAST.3.SG.REFL.  
'The watch was broken.'

The above sentences show that the verb-subject relation differs from that of the relation in English. The first case is just the same with a little difference in the adjective predicate. In English there is no concord between a subject and an adjective while in Russian the adjective *ustal* agrees with the masculine subject. The second case shows that the verb *spamalis'* indicates a reflexive form *breaks itself*.

The following sentence may have a different pattern in Russian.

- (11) I am cold.  
PRON.NOM.1.SG.ANI.MASC.HUM.EXP. Vbe.PRES.3.SG. ADJ.Sta.Exp

The sentence above shows a verb-subject relation as experientative and experiencer. The Russian equivalence is expressed in an ambient state, which shows no subject presence.

- (12) *Mnje* *kholodno.*  
me.PRON.DAT.1.SG.ANI.HUM.EXP cold.ADJ.NOM.Amb.NET.Sta.  
'I am cold.'

No subject is found in the above sentence as the verb is ambient. The sentence literally means “It is hot for me.” This form really expresses an experience.

Another verb-subject relation is a causative-agent-patient relation and a benefactive-. The relation is shown below.

- (13) He broke the dish.

PRON.3.SG.ANI.HUM.MASC.AGT. Vf.PAST.Act.Caus. N.COUNT.3.SG.POT.PAT.

The verb *broke* in above sentence has the relationship with the subject as an agent-causative relation. The subject causes the noun *the dish* to break. Therefore, *the dish* is the patient. In Russian, such a sentence is expressed in the following:

- (14) *On* *razbil* *tarelku*  
he.NOM.3.SG.MASC.AGT. breakVf.PAST.Act.Caus. plate.N.ACC.3.SG.FEM.POT.PAT.  
‘He broke the plate.’

The difference between the patients in the two languages is that in Russian it is in the accusative case.

Still, another verb subject relation is shown in the following sentences. It is in English and in Russian.

- (15) The teacher gave me a book.  
N.COUNT.3.SG.ANI.AGT. Vf.PAST.Act.Ben. PRON.3.SG.BEN. N.COUNT.3SG.PAT

The verb *gave* in the above sentence is a benefactive verb having an agent, a beneficiary noun and a patient. The Russian equivalence is shown below:

- (16) *Uchitel* *dal* *mnje* *knigu.*  
teacher.NOM.3.SG.AGT. give.Vf.PAST.Ben. me.DAT.1.SG.BEN. book.ACC.3SG.PAT  
‘The teacher gave me a book.’

Here, the beneficiary noun *mnje* is in the dative case. The possessive verb in English, which beneficiary as shown below

- (17) He has a book.  
PRON.3.SG.ANI.HUM.MASC.BEN. Vf.PRES.3.SG.Ben. N.COUNT.3.SG.

is not that case in Russian. In Russian it has the following relation:

- (18). *U menja* *est* *kniga.*  
with me. PREP.ACC.PAT is.Vbe.PRES.INF book.NOM.3.SG  
‘I have a book.’

## CONCLUDING SUMMARY

To close the discussion, it is necessary to put the sentences in an easy version in a table as found in the following:

No	English	Russian	Note
1.	It is hot.	‘hot.’	Ambient
2.	It rains.	‘Goes the rain.’/ ‘Rains.’	Ambient
3.	It is cold.	‘Cold.’	Ambient
4.	It was cold.	‘Was cold.’	Ambient
6.	He is tired.	‘He tired.’	Patient
7.	The watch is broken.	‘The watch breaks.’	Potent
8.	I am cold.	‘For me cold.’	Experiencer
9.	He broke the dish.	‘He broke the plate.’	Causative
10.	The teacher gave me a book.	‘The teacher gave for me a book.’	Benefactive
11.	He has a book.	‘With him a book.’	Benefactive

From the table, we can see that verb-subject relations vary. They vary in types and they vary in their function in the two languages.

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# CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that

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