

The clitic =*nya* as a Marker of Discourse Identifiability in Colloquial Indonesian

In colloquial Indonesian, the third-person possessive pronominal enclitic =*nya* appears in discourse contexts in which it corresponds to the English definite article in translation (Sneddon et al. 2010: 155). Englebretson (2003) further suggests that this form marks identifiability. Building on these observations, this presentation examines the types of identifiability encoded by =*nya* in discourse. Hawkins (1978) identifies four uses of the English definite article that can be related to identifiability: (i) immediate situational use, where the referent is present in the speech situation; (ii) anaphoric use, where the referent has already been introduced in the preceding discourse; (iii) associative use, in which the referent is identifiable because it can be associated with an entity introduced in a previous utterance; and (iv) larger situational use, in which the referent is identifiable on the basis of shared general knowledge between interlocutors. Adopting this framework, the study addresses the following two research questions.

- (a) Englebretson (2003: 162) argues that the clitic =*nya* tends to cover type (iii), although there are exceptions. He further observes that the use of =*nya* is optional and that it may co-occur with demonstratives, which tend to cover types (i) and (ii). This optionality prompts the following questions: Is this tendency still observed in present-day colloquial Indonesian? What factors determine the selection of =*nya* as a marker of identifiability?
- (b) Has the clitic =*nya* extended to larger situational use (type iv), or does it remain primarily a marker of discourse identifiability?

An investigation of our spoken corpus shows that the clitic =*nya* strongly favors associative use, over the other types. In addition, in narratives where noun phrases referring to the same entity appear repeatedly, =*nya* occurs almost obligatorily. This usage does not correspond directly to any of the four categories (i)–(iv); rather, it functions as a reference-tracking device that helps maintain narrative coherence.

Data elicited through translation tasks show that noun phrases with the clitic =*nya* do not refer to entities identifiable solely on the basis of shared general knowledge. In (1), =*nya* cannot attach to the noun phrase *Presiden Amerika* ('the President of the US') at its first mention.

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| (1) <i>Presiden</i> (* <i>Presiden=nya</i>) | <i>Amerika akan</i> | <i>mengunjungi</i> |
| President | America will | visit |
|
 | | |
| <i>Jakarta</i> | <i>minggu</i> | <i>depan</i> |
| Jakarta | week | next |

'The President of the US will visit Jakarta next week.'

The analysis shows that =*nya* strongly favors associative use (type iii) and does not extend systematically to larger situational contexts, suggesting that its function is primarily discourse-anchored rather than based solely on shared general knowledge.

References

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- Hawkins, John A. 1978. *Definiteness and Indefiniteness: A Study in Reference and Grammaticality Prediction*. London and New York: Academic Press.
- Sneddon, James Neil, Alexander K Adelaar, Dwi N Djenar, and Michael Ewing. 2010. *Indonesian: A Comprehensive Grammar* (Second Edition). London and New York: Routledge.