

Reliable words: Third person pronouns in Indonesian news reports

Dwi Noverini Djenar, author

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Abstrak

This article examines uses of Indonesian third person singular pronouns *ia* and *dia* in news reports. It takes as its departure point the general account of the pronouns which specifies that *ia* can occur only in subject position, while *dia* can occur in subject or object position. The article shows that, although both pronouns can occur in subject position, they differ distributionally and functionally. *Ia* occurs almost three times as frequently as *dia* and predominates in subject position, while *dia* occurs mostly in non-subject position. *Ia* is primarily used to convey the notion that the referent is a reliable and authoritative source of information and to focus on the referent as an agent or protagonist who is initiating or performing some action or a series of actions. By contrast, *dia* tends to be selected for contexts in which the referent is presented as a speaker who is elaborating on what has been said previously rather than introducing a new point. The predominance of *ia* in news report accords with its characterization as a pronoun strongly associated with formal registers.