

# Placeholder Demonstratives in Colloquial Indonesian Conversations

Katharina Endriati Sukamto

Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia, Jakarta

The functional uses of demonstratives in spoken Indonesian – both in spatial and non-spatial contexts – have to a greater extent been discussed by a number of linguists (among others Kaswanti Purwo 1984, Sukamto 2003, Wook 2005, Sneddon 2006, and Williams 2009). Of the so many functions being investigated, their uses as placeholders have not been well-explored.

This paper will focus on the use of pronominal demonstratives *itu* ‘that’ and *ini* ‘this’ as placeholders in a corpus of colloquial Indonesian conversations. It particularly expands the scope of Williams’s (2009) observation of the interactional use of demonstratives as placeholders, in that *itu* and *ini* show differing aspects of access to a referent. Following Diessel (2006), I take into account that the Indonesian placeholder demonstratives function as a communicative device to join the interlocutors’ attention towards a linguistic element that is being “searched for.” The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it shows that in the interactive discourse, placeholder demonstratives do not only function as a device in finding a linguistic expression, but they can also be used to stimulate the listener’s attention for a specific referent. Secondly, it attempts to describe that speakers’ choice of the demonstrative form (*itu* or *ini*) are restricted to their stance towards the joint focus of attention.

In the example below, the placeholder *ini* is used to stimulate the listener’s curiosity for “a new joint focus of attention” (Diessel 2006: 470).

## BTJ-010607-ref 160-165

E: Orang mana aja yang suka.  
person which just REL like  
Those who admired you, where are they from?

T: Mmm ada pegawai kantor pos.  
FILL exist employee office mail  
Umm... there was a mail-officer.

T: He-eh.  
Uh-huh  
Aha.

T: Tapi ya karna béda ini ya saya takut.  
but yes because different THIS Yes I mail  
But because of this difference it made me in fear.

E: Béda apa tu?  
different what that  
Not equal in what?

T: Béda       derajat.  
different   degree  
Not equal in social status.

There is a tendency that *ini* is used instead of *itu* – as in example (1) – when the speaker indexes something that is mentally close to him/her. On the other hand, *itu* tends to be used for reference that is “spatially” out of reach from the speaker, as demonstrated in (2):

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E: Trus       crita   dong       Mba       itu   kalo   pengantin   Betawi   biasanya  
continue   story   PART   older sister   that   when   bride       Betawi   usually

gimana   sih   **itunya...**   cara-caranya.  
how       PART   THAT-nya   PL-manner-nya

Please tell me about the Betawi wedding, how is it usually performed?

These findings confirm the universal principle that demonstrative uses in unplanned speech reflect the most basic function of demonstratives in human communication.

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