

## The Use of *Singlish* Discourse Particle ‘Lah’ in SGAG’s Videos

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### Abstract

This study entitled **The Use of Singlish Discourse Particle ‘lah’ in SGAG’s Videos** is aimed to analyze the types and function of discourse particle in SGAG’s videos. The data were taken from the conversation in SGAG’s video collection. Descriptive qualitative method was applied to analyze the types and functions of discourse particle ‘lah’. The theories used to analyze it are the classification of the type of discourse particle theory by Wong, role of particles theory by Ling and Deterding and Context of Situation by Halliday. The result of analysis shows that there were 62 discourse particle lah in the SGAG’s video collection from May 28<sup>th</sup> 2017 until October 10<sup>th</sup> 2017. The major type of discourse particle lah was Propositional lah (33 occurrences) and the function is more often as a pragmatic role (56 occurrences) rather than a syntactic function (6 occurrences).

**Keywords:** *Singaporean English, Discourse Particle, Lah*

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan Jenis dan fungsi dari discourse partikel lah dalam kumpulan video SGAG. Data diambil dari percakapan dalam kumpulan video SGAG. Metode deskriptif kualitatif diterapkan untuk menemukan jenis dan fungsi dari discourse partikel lah. Teori-teori yang digunakan untuk menganalisis data adalah teori Klasifikasi Jenis Discourse Partikel dari Wong, teori Peranan Partikel dari Ling dan Deterding, teori Konteks Situasi dari Halliday. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa ada 62 discourse partikel lah dalam kumpulan video SGAG dari tanggal 28 Mei 2017 sampai 10 Oktober 2017. Jenis yang paling mencolok adalah Propositional lah (33 kemunculan) dan fungsinya lebih sering digunakan sebagai pragmatic role (56 kemunculan) dibandingkan sebagai syntactic function (6 kemunculan).*

**Kata kunci:** *Singaporean English, Discourse Particle, lah*

### 1. Background of the Study

In Singapore, English is well known as *Singlish*, the abbreviation of Singaporean English. The term *Singlish*

often gets misunderstood by people. *Singlish* is a language variety in Singapore, not a whole Singaporean English. There are two varieties of English in Singapore.

The first one is Singapore Standard English (SSE), which is similar to British English, as the Standard English in Singapore. The second one is Singapore Colloquial English (SCE) or *Singlish*. Harada (2009:70) stated that English is the second language in Singapore, while Mandarin, Chinese Dialects (Hokkien, Teochewan and Cantonese), Malay and Tamil are the first languages in Singapore.

Singapore Standard English is derived from British English. Based on the history according to Langford and Brownsey (1998:176), Singapore was a British colony for nearly 140 years. There were many factors why English spread in Singapore. Based on Brown and Ling (2005:359), those factors are the enhancement factors of English communication in government service, harbors, commercial companies and banks. In addition, English is facilitated by the existence of English-medium schools. All of those factors caused English to gain its own position in Singapore. The high use of English in several important institutions makes the learning and use of English by the population necessary.

One of the unique features in *Singlish* is the discourse particle. In general, discourse particles also known as *tags*, occur at the end of a sentence. Their presence changes the meaning or the tone of the sentence, but not its grammatical meaning. Particles are noted for keeping their tones regardless of the remainder of the sentence.

Ling and Deterding (2003:65) called discourse particle as an utterance final particle or audible comma particle, because discourse particle sometimes occurs at the end of the sentence as utterance final particle, and in some other cases discourse particles occur in the middle of the

sentence as audible comma particle. Lim (2007:469) points out that, discourse particles are the influences of Malay, Hokkien and Cantonese. Malay and Hokkien contributed the particles *lah*, *ah*, and *what*. Cantonese contributed *lor*, *hor*, *leh*, *meh* and *ma*. Those discourse particles have their own meanings and functions.

## 2. Problems of the Study

- a) What types of *Singlish* discourse particle *lah* are found in *SGAG's* videos?
- b) What functions of *Singlish* discourse particle *lah* are found in *SGAG's* videos?

## 3. Aims of the Study

- a) To identify the types of discourse particles *lah* found in *SGAG's* videos.
- b) To identify the functions of discourse particles *lah* found in *SGAG's* videos.

## 4. Research Method

In the research method, there are four elements referring to the problems already formulated, namely: data source, method and technique of collecting data, method and technique of analyzing data, and method and technique of presenting analysis. These methods are described as follows:

### 4.1 Data Source

The primary data used in this paper are the conversation from *SGAG's* videos from *SGAG's* Facebook. *SGAG* is a Singaporean social media website and news media company based in Singapore. The company makes some memes and videos with comedy themed uploaded daily to their Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. *SGAG* was founded by Karl Mak and Adrian Ang in February 2012, as a Singaporean spin-off of the popular social media website, 9GAG. Since the website's

incorporation on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013, it has 637.000 likes on Facebook, 397.000 followers on twitter and 325.000 thousand followers on Instagram. The videos were chosen because it has enough data of discourse particle *lah* which is suitable to be analyzed since the main language in this video collection is Singaporean English.

#### **4.2 Method and Technique of Collecting Data**

The data were collected using the documentation method. This method was applied to the conversation in SGAG's video collection. The technique used in this study was note taking through several steps as follows: In collecting the data, the steps used are as follows: Finding the relevant data source, watching and listening to the videos comprehensibly and note taking.

#### **4.3 Method and Technique of Analyzing Data**

The collected data were analyzed by applying descriptive qualitative and qualitative method. The data were analyzed using descriptive technique and the steps of analyzing data are described as follows: understanding the theory, reading the data in order to find the discourse particle *lah* in the dialogue, making some interpretations, classifying the data using Wong's (2004) classification of the type of discourse particle theory and the function using Ling and Deterding's (2003) role of particles theory. Context of situation's theory by Halliday (1985) was also used to analyze the situation, and analyzing the presented data by describing it based on the theory used.

#### **4.4 Method and Technique of Presenting Analysis**

In presenting the analysis of the first and second problema, the formal and informal methods were applied, since the analysis was presented in words and tables. The data started to be analyzed by using a checklist. There is one checklist; it is the types and functions of discourse particle *lah* check list. The data were also analyzed using counting technique. In order to present the result of counting, there are tables presenting the counted data. In order to present the result of counting, there is one table presenting the counted data, which is the types and functions discourse particle *lah*. Checklists and tables are used to assist the study in conducting the narrative analysis. After the analysis was done, the conclusion was written in order.

### **5. Result and Discussion**

#### **5.1 Preliminary**

The data that had been analyzed were the type and function of discourse particle *lah* in the comedy-themed SGAG's video collection. In the data, there were 62 discourse particle *lah* found and analyzed. However, in this chapter, only several dialogues from the video collection contained the discourse particle *lah*. In the discourse particle *lah* in SGAG's video collection, there are 3 types found. They are impositional *lah*, proporsitional *lah*, and persuasive *lah*. There are also 2 functions found in the video collection. Those functions are utterance-final (pragmatic role) and audible comma (syntactic role).

## 5.2 The Analysis of Type and Function Of Discourse Particle *Lah*

### 5.2.1 Impositional *Lah*

Data 1

Title 1 : When You Plan The Perfect Proposal But...

Setting : On the call (Bobby and Kenny)

Kenny : Yo Bobby what's up!

Bobby : *Eh* Bro, do you think she'd want a public proposal or not?

Kenny : For what? So she can reject the proposal in public *meh*?

Cannot *lah*.

Bobby : *Aiya*, then how?

The dialogue occurs when Bobby and Kenny were talking on the phone about how to plan a perfect proposal for Kenny's Girlfriend. There are two participants involved in the conversation; Bobby and Kenny. Bobby is a close friend of Kenny, who is planning to propose his girlfriend. Bobby helps him to make an unforgettable proposal and gives Kenny an idea to make a public proposal, but Kenny does not agree because he is afraid if his girlfriend rejects it in public so he would be so embarrassed. As the result, Kenny said 'cannot' with the additional discourse particle *lah* with a low tone.

The type of discourse particle *lah* in the dialogue performed by Bobby and Kenny can be classified as Impositional *lah*, while the function can be classified as the utterance final particle. The discourse particle *lah* in the dialogue is used as the speaker's (Kenny's) tool to change the addressee's (Bobby's) idea forcefully. Kenny is using the discourse particle *lah* to emphasizing his words to make the addressee understand that he does not want a public proposal. In other words, Kenny presents his emphasis attitude.

### 5.2.2 Propositional *Lah*

Data 2

Title 3 : When You Run Out of Data

Setting : Tifannis's room

Tifannis: He's quite a sweet boyfriend *lah*, but you know, sometimes can

get a bit too much. Like there's this one time, I asked him to check the timing of this movie that we are going to watch, and he just refused!

The conversation occurred when a couple, Charles and Tifannis, are getting an interview by SGAG about *datalackaphobia*, a condition where you have the fear of being deprived of sufficient data. It affects 6 in every 10 Singaporeans. SGAG's interviewer sat down with them to find out more about his battle with the condition. There is nothing serious about the interview. It is made as a representative of Singaporean who are addicted with internet data, as they become frustrated and depressed when their internet data is running out. Charles is used to suffer from *datalackahobia*, which made him become grumpy. When Tifannis is getting interview, she said that actually his boyfriend is quite a sweet person, but sometimes it (the *datalackaphobia*) can get a little bit too much. She asks him to check the timing of a movie when they were hanging out, and he just refused.

The types of discourse particle *lah* in the dialogue performed by Tifanni to the interviewer about his boyfriend who is suffering from *datalackaphobia* can be classified as Propositional *lah*, while the function can be classified as the audible comma particle. She put the additional *lah* in the end of the sentence to strengthen her opinion by emphasizing that her boyfriend

is actually a good boyfriend, but sometimes it (the datalackaphobia) gets too much. In this case, the speaker (Tifannis) is using the discourse particle *lah* to emphasize her utterance to the addressee (the interviewer).

### 5.2.3 Persuasive *Lah*

Data 3

Title 3 : When You Run Out of Data

Setting : At home

Mother : *Eh pei* (accompany)  
mummy go market *lah*

Charles : Don't want *lah*, busy  
streaming my show.

Mother : *Haiya*, watch on the bus  
*lah!*

Charles : Cannot, will use data one  
and data equals money. You always tell  
me to save money. So I'm  
doing this for you, not for me.

Mother : Really *meh?*

Charles : Yeeeeeeeees.

Mother : Oooh ok, ok, mummy go  
market myself *ah*

The conversation occurs between mother and son. The mother is asking his son, Charles, to accompany her to go to the market, but Charles refuses because he is still streaming a show using the house's wifi. The mother keeps persuading Charles and asks him to watch the show on the bus. Charles still refuses by making excuses that if he uses his data, it means that he would be wasting money. As a result, the mother goes to the market by herself.

There is two discourse particle *lah* in the dialogue which can be classified as persuasive *lah*, while utterance final particle is classified as the function. First, the mother puts the additional *lah* in the end of the utterance to strengthen her utterance and uses the persuasive *lah* to

persuade Charles to go to the market with her. There is a friendliness attitude in her utterance since she persuades Charles without an imperative. When Charles refuses, the mother keeps trying to persuade him by saying that he could watch it on a bus with the additional *lah* in the end of the utterance. In this case, the mother presents an impatience attitude which she really wants Charles to accompany her to the market.

There are different numbers of the occurrence of type and function of discourse particle *lah* found in the SGAG's video collection

**Table 3.1 The Number of Type of Discourse Particle *Lah* in SGAG's Videos**

No.	Types of Discourse Particle <i>lah</i>	Occurrence
1.	Impositional <i>lah</i>	17
2.	Propositional <i>lah</i>	33
3.	Persuasive <i>lah</i>	12
	Total	62

There are 62 occurrences of discourse particle *lah* in SGAG's videos based on the analysis. Table 3.1 presents the classification of the types of discourse particle *lah*. The table shows that there are 17 impositional *lah*, 33 propositional *lah*, and 12 persuasive *lah* found in the SGAG's videos. Based on the analysis, discourse particle *lah* which occur the most is Propositional *lah*, which reached 33 occurrences. This tendency indicated that discourse particle *lah* in the video collection tends to be frequently used to state an idea, suggestion or advice. Impositional *lah* took the second position with 17 occurrences, and then persuasive *lah* with 12 occurrences. It signifies that

discourse particle *lah* in SGAG's videos tends to be used to force people and to give a new idea to change people's action than to request or persuade people, which was made using persuasive *lah* in the lowest position.

Based on Wong's (2004) theory, the major occurrence of the type of discourse particle *lah* in SGAG's video collection is propositional *lah*. This happened because the discourse particle *lah* in the video collection tends to be used to state an idea, suggestion or advice. In the video collection, the discourse particle *lah* mostly occurs when the speakers are trying to end the conversation. Thus, the speakers tend to use the discourse particle *lah* to give information or conclude the conversation. On the other hand, the usage of discourse particle *lah* is mostly used to force people to change their action than persuade people. This happens because the speakers in the video collection tend to pronounce the discourse particle *lah* to force people with low tone than persuade people with a mid-rising tone.

**Table 3.2 The Function of Discourse Particle *Lah* in SGAG's Videos**

Function	Occurrence
Utterance-final (Pragmatic Role)	56
Audible Comma (Syntactic Role)	6

Table 3.2 presents the function's classification of the occurrence of discourse particle *lah*. The table shows that there are 48 occurrences of Utterance-final (pragmatic role) and 6 occurrence of Audible Comma (syntactic role) of discourse particle *lah*. Based on the analysis, the functions of discourse particle *lah* found in SGAG's videos emerge more

often as a pragmatic role than a syntactic function. It denotes that discourse particle *lah* in SGAG's videos tend to be rarely occur as a boundary between two clauses. Otherwise, it tends to appear in the end of the utterance, mostly when they are emphasizing something. This happens because in most conversations, the speakers do not need to add more sub clause as the explanation for the main clause

## 6. Conclusion

This last chapter presents the conclusion drawn from the research analysis in the previous chapter. The answer to the research questions have been discovered in the previous chapter. Based on the analysis, it can be signified that discourse particle *lah* which occurs more frequently is Propositional *lah*, which reached 33 occurrences. Then, followed by the occurrences of impositional *lah* which is 17 occurrences and the lowest is persuasive *lah* which is 12 occurrences. It can be concluded that the discourse particle *lah* in SGAG's videos tend to be used to emphasize an idea, suggestion or advice rather than to request the addressee to change their action, while it is rarely used to request or persuade people. This tendency occurs because the discourse particle *lah* is mostly used by the speakers to end or to conclude the conversation.

Meanwhile, from the result obtained, there were 56 occurrences of discourse particle *lah* as utterance-final particle (pragmatic role), while the discourse particle *lah* as an audible comma particle (syntactic function) only reached 6 occurrence. It could be concluded that the function of discourse particle *lah* in this analysis emerged more often as a pragmatic role than a syntactic function.

This tendency occurred, because in the most of the conversation, the sub clause was not needed as the explanation for the main clause. The attitude of the speaker marked in the pragmatic role, such as obviousness, friendliness, impatience, and emphasis are also found in the video collection.

## 7. References

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