
The Implications of *lah*, *ah*, and *hah* as Used by Some Speakers in Malaysia

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Introduction

The official language of the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural country of Malaysia may be Malay but another language, English, is never lacking in use. Asmah Haji Omar (1994) states that it is the second most important language after Malay and is a language socially embraced by the mass media, as well as by professionals like the medical, dental, hospitality and corporate sectors. Constantly being compared to its predecessor, Queen's English (or Received Pronunciation or Standard English), a language legacy left behind by its colonial masters, Malaysian English (ME) is one spoken variety currently being debated upon by its people. ME may not be what its predecessor was, i.e. appropriately accentuated, grammatically correct, and widely used by the educated group – the elites, but it certainly contains its own characteristics. On a closer look, perhaps, ME should not be considered as a distorted form of English, but instead, be considered as one variety of English such as in the World Englishes proposed by Kachru (1986). This is because it is a language of characteristics that clearly defines the ethnic and cultural background of its

speakers. In addition, ME is only one of the many registers of spoken English readily available in the country, besides other registers like the pidginised variety (Asmah Haji Omar 1982), and the standard variety such as those one hears from the radio or television news. As such, it should not be taken on a trip of reformation or demise. After all, ME is only a spoken variety, a creative variety as well as a national entity that only true Malaysians can understand although it cannot be denied that some Malaysians have even adopted its spoken form into their writings.

What constitutes ME? Briefly, ME is a form of spoken English that is most distinguished by its ungrammatical structures, its monosyllabic tones, its colourful and borrowed expressions created by the influence of local languages as well as its 'accentuated' forms i.e. it is spoken with the accents of locally spoken languages. For instance, a local Malay speaking in English may not be able to place the required emphasis on his spoken words the way native speakers would. Instead, his spoken English carries intonations of Malay, not to mention the fact that it is also very often tinged with his first language (L1) influence in structure. In the same way, a local Chinese who is speaking English may also be likely to impose his L1 intonations and syntax structures on his spoken English thus making his English sound like Chinese being "dubbed" in English while a local Indian speaking English may possibly carry Indian or Tamil intonations as well as his L1 influence on his spoken form. As a result, the three main ethnic groups of Malaysia can be easily identified and distinguished by their spoken accents. However, it must be emphasised here that not all Malaysian Malay, Chinese or Indian speak in this manner.

Further to that, today's spoken Malaysian English cannot be divorced by its adjoining tags which are characteristically made up of the well-known *lah*, *lo*, *ma*, *ah*, *hah*, *is it?* and also *kan* particles. These tags have become more rampant through the years because of the younger generation speakers who are not only creative but are also very influenced by friends and peers who tend to insert L1 markers or tags into their utterances, some of which are typified by the Chinese *ah*, *hah*, *lo*, and *ma*, the Malay *lah* and the Indian *ai yo-yo*. There may, however, be debates over this claim since studies carried out by Richards and Tay (1977), Kwan-Terry (1978) and Goddard (1994) may suggest otherwise. However, since it is not the aim of this paper to make claims and contentions about the origins of these tags, but to merely draw attention to the usage of some of these tags, the researcher reserves her comments.

Aim

This study looks at two groups of ethnic Malaysians, Malays and Chinese, in the way they perform their oral interactions, whether through Chinese (Mandarin or Hokkien) or Malay, particularly in the manner their intentions, desires, or emotions were demonstrated via the use of Malaysian discourse markers or particles. Data collected and analysed in this study suggests that specific Malaysian discourse markers or particles, whether tagged at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of utterances, carry specific connotations as a result of mother tongue or L1 influences. For the purpose of analysing data collected in this study, I will attempt to construct a hypothesis for the use of the Malaysian particles of *lah*(la), and *ah*(aaa) by adopting some of Lee's (ibid.) comments while the analysis of the *hah* particle is my own.

Theoretical Framework

In her discussion on the Malaysian mosaic of languages, Asmah Haji Omar (1982:136-7) illustrated three versions of Pidgin English in Malaysia. According to her, each of these versions had language structures which emulate its base language whether Indian, Malay, or Chinese. She observes that all the three versions illustrated a 'simplification process' which takes on the form of deletions of certain categories and elements of structure like numbers, tense, copula and so on. One particular simplified version which was observed was the Malaysian "is it?" tag which was used. However, Asmah Haji Omar offered no explanation for its occurrence.

Lee Su Kim (*The STAR*, October 31, 1995) in her article, *Malaysian Flavours*, looks at the Malaysian way of speaking English and she suggests that the Malaysian 'is it?' is a Malaysian eccentricity which is attached to every statement that has been intended to become a question. An English expatriate living in Malaysia (quoted in Lee's article) identifies this phenomenon as "Malaysianism" and in his letter to Lee (ibid.) posits that the Malaysian tag of "is it?" is a redundancy. For example, in "It's raining, is it?" there was no necessity to tag on "is it?" he argues. However, in her response to this, Lee (ibid.) suggests that the Malaysian "is it?" was employed by Malaysians as a softening strategy. She suggests that this occurrence was a result of the influence of L1 interference which when translated to Malay would sound similar to the *kan* which is an abbreviated form of *bukan?* which means "isn't it?" Similarly, the term, *kan* can be considered as synonymous to the Chinese/

Cantonese *hai-mai?* or the Chinese/Hokkien *see woh?* (another variation of *see boh?*), both of which simply means "isn't it?"

The Malaysian linguistic scenery, according to Asmah Haji Omar (1982), has the most interesting environment and the most conducive atmosphere which can and have contributed to the proliferation of the language shift nation wide. With the influx of immigrants and foreign workers to Malaysia, it may even be possible that the current variety of ME becomes more culturally enriched when the country becomes home to more and more other ethnic groups such as Indonesians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and East Malaysians who speak other ethnic languages. Presently, studies done on ME are currently few and those that are available are limited to studies on code switching, Malay indirectness as well as studies on the use of the *lah/la*.

The discourse patterns of Malaysian utterances have often been identified by its ungrammatical structures, monosyllabic intonations, code switching, simplified forms Asmah (1982), not to mention the ambiguity created by L1 translations. In addition, Malaysian speakers are also well known for their insistence on tagging markers like *is it?* and *lah* onto their utterances. As markers in discourse norms, the use of *lah* has often been associated with persuasion, disapproval, and anger which are depicted by the following examples.

- a. Comela, don't be shy. (Persuasion)
- b. Maybe evening dressla. (Uncertainty)
- c. Where are you now? In my officela. (Anger)

(Lecture notes on Bilingualism)

Seen as an inseparable component of the spoken form of ME, the discourse markers of the typical *lah*, *ah*, and *hah* surely must bear certain functions, for without them, the meanings or true intentions of the speakers may not be conveyed.

In her discussion on the functions performed by English discourse markers, Schiffrin (1987a) listed several items such as *oh*, *well*, *and*, *but*, *or so*, *because*, *now then*, *y'know* and *I mean*. Schiffrin specifically identifies the 'exchange structures', 'ideational structures', and 'action structures' performed by these markers. She argues that it is through these markers that a sense of coherence is achieved when interlocutors transmit their communicative inten-

tions within an integrated framework of interactionally emergent structures, meanings, and actions.

Similarly, in his examination of one particular discourse marker, *yeah*, Drummond (1993) states that it typifies as 'acknowledgement tokens' which occur in ordinary conversations through a range of constructions made up of markers like *uh huh*, *yeah*, or *oh*. He also acknowledges the fact that many languages seem to include these acknowledgement tokens or continuers in their use-lexicon. Drummond (*ibid.*) suggests that these acknowledgement tokens provide avenues for the speakers to perform different functions such as turn taking, continuing, or making a complete change of the topic.

Methodology Data and Subject

Data compiled for the analysis of this paper was collected through a series of recordings of conversations undertaken by three people in three separate settings. The first set of recording comprises a young Chinese family from Petaling Jaya in Selangor, the biggest state in Peninsular Malaysia. The mother, who is in her late thirties, is an academician at a local institution of higher learning. Her recordings are made up of several conversation input provided by her family: a mother (Mom), a twelve year old boy (SH), and a four year old boy (PH). The three respondents speak Mandarin and English interchangeably at home with occasional Hokkien being spoken between Mom and SH. The recordings were done in a relaxed setting, after office hours and in the presence of the two boys and their mother who is also the person recording the conversations.

The second set of recording was compiled by a Malay academician, Faridah, who is teaching in a local university and is in her late twenties. The participants of her recorded conversations are all female Malay adults who share the same house and are teachers at the same university. The recordings were also taken in a relaxed setting, i.e. after office hours. The participants speak Malay and English interchangeably in their daily conversations.

The third set of recording was compiled by the researcher's course mate, Nan, who is also a Malay academician working in an all Malay teaching college in Tanjung Malim, Perak. The recordings were made by the course mate who recorded the conversations of his friends cum teacher trainees who are all male and are currently undergoing teacher's training at the college. Their first

language or mother tongue is Malay and they come from different states of the peninsular. Their conversations were recorded in the college but during an informal discussion.

Analysis

As has been explained earlier, the intention of this paper is to look at the implications of the use of the various particles used by some Malaysian speakers in their daily utterances. In this paper, the term particles refer to the items, *lah*, *ah* and *hah* irrespective of whether or not the items appear in the beginning, middle or end of the utterance. The term tag is used if the items appear at the end of the utterance. For the benefit of discussion, the same items may be referred to as discourse markers.

The use of these markers, particularly in Malaysian utterances, have been described as a Malaysian thing. However, it is also not uncommon to hear these same discourse markers being used by speakers in its neighbouring country, Singapore. Since the sample group of this study comprise only Malay and Chinese speakers, the findings of this study suggest that the implications shown here are therefore, not conclusive. In this paper, it is noted that the differences in spelling for the tags of *lah*, *ah* and *hah* make no impact on the implications.

The “*lah*” particle

It is a Malaysian skill to be able to insert the Malaysian tag, *lah*, into our daily conversations. The skill in using *lah* is second nature to most if not all Malaysians but to a foreigner, it certainly requires some learning which can only be acquired from intent listening and exposure. One must know when to interject *lah* into the conversations because *lah* cannot be placed any where nor any time that one likes. For instance, one can say,

“Eat*lah*” or

“Don’t know why*lah*, or

“This computer refused to work*lah*.”

One, however, does not say, “The dog is *inlah* the house” because then the *lah* after “in” becomes incoherent by nature. In the same line of discussion, one cannot use *lah* as inadvertently as in “*Golah* in you” One can, however,

say, "Go *inlah* you" where the emphasis is on the action of entering". Similarly, one can say, "The dog is in the *houseslah*" or "The *doglah* is in the house" to indicate a certain intention or motive as suggested by Goddard (1994) but one does not say, "The dog *islah* in the house" nor "*Thelah* dog is in the house" simply because in doing so, these two statements have become ambiguous and incoherent in nature.

In most instances, local speakers use the *lah* tag unconsciously, like a natural part of their lives, in their speeches and conversations, especially among their counterparts, and very few of these speakers would make a conscious attempt to erase the use of the *lah* tag from their daily spoken ME because as I will discuss later, the use of *lah* can enable the speaker to perform several intentions or motives without being too direct and abrasive. While the Malaysian tag, *lah* has been adopted by various writers, radio disc jockeys and commercials for various impacts, the ever natural and ubiquitous *lah* has various roles to perform, depending on the aim of the speakers and the settings. For instance, *lah* is tagged at the end of an utterance, particularly towards the end of a dialogue, to mark emphasis, as the following example will show.

Example 1:

M: How was your day today?
SH: *Nicelah.*

M was asking SH of his new experience at staying in a new environment/place. From SH's reply of "*Nicelah*" we can see that it is an emphasis which implies that not only did SH find the experience good, it was "better" than good because he obviously enjoyed the new experience of being in a new place. In order to accentuate the emphasis, "*Nicelah*" has to be said with an increased tone in "Nice" and a gradual drop in *lah*. In this context, there is an accompaniment of positive facial expressions like a smile.

Example 2:

S: The first thing *inilah* yang dia punya.....butiran dia.
(Translation: The first thing, *thislah* is his, his details.)

From example (2), it is apparent that when the speaker switched from English to Malay, *lah* was injected. The expression, “*Inilah*” was said as a reiteration of what was already spoken in English, “The first thing” Serving as an emphasis of the topic, *lah* was said in a faster manner, staccato like, where “*ini*” could have gone unnoticed. Since the speaker’s intention was merely to emphasise his point, “the first thing”, the entire utterance may have been spoken with less noticeable facial expressions.

Example 3:

B. Kalau kita kaitkan alam sekitar dengan PJ, tujuan kita, macam mu kata tadi*lah*. Untuk mewujudkan perasaan cinta kepada alam sekitar kita. Jadi kalau dalam PJ ...ini aku bagi contoh. Ini pendapat aku*lah* ..Aku nak kata apala*h*?

(Translation. If we link the environment with Physical Education (PE), our objective is like you suggested earlier*lah*. To raise awareness of love for our environment. So, in PE. .let me give my own example. This is my opinion*lah*. ...What did I want to say?)

Although this utterance was conducted in Malay, the use of *lah* tagged after the words “*tadi*”, “*aku*” and “*apa*” do not bear the same implications. For instance, “*tadi**lah*” would illustrate emphasis on the topic of discussion - environment. “*Aku**lah*” also focusses emphasis on the speaker, but “*apala**h*” demonstrates the speaker’s attempt in thinking aloud, a strategy in trying to recall what he wanted to say “*apala**h*” would have been interjected in a quieter tone, probably accompanied by body gestures which would suggest a desire to recollect, for e.g. wrinkled eyebrows or a tapping of the finger on the head/temple.

Example 4:

FM. I was just smiling. Hei, berat*lah*.

(Translation. Hei, it’s heavy*lah*!)

In this instance, *lah* was employed by the speaker to convey disapproval. As have been discussed by Asmah Haji Omar (1995), speech acts among the Malay community has often been conducted indirectly as a form of politeness. In this context, FM was displaying displeasure at having to lift an object which

was too heavy for her liking. "Beratlah" was spoken with a stretched emphasis on the *lah*, usually accompanied by facial expressions which would demonstrate displeasure.

Example 5:

FM: Tapi sekarang ni dah jauh, malas*lah* I.
(Translation: But now it's too late, I'm too lazy!)

In example (5), the use of *lah* in "malas*lah*" is identical to example (4). Not only is the motive to display displeasure, *lah* is also employed as a display of rebelliousness, showing the speaker's difference in opinion with her interlocutors! "Berat*lah*" is also spoken accompanied by negative facial expressions, say, a screwed-up looking face.

Example 6:

Z: Lela...because she's the dealer, kalau beli dekat luar memang mahallah, if you buy from other people.
(Translation: Lela...because she's the dealer, if you buy from outside, of course it is expensive if you buy from other people.)

Besides serving as an emphasis of the speaker's encouragement for her interlocutors to acquire their merchandise from the dealer, "mahallah" was said as an admonishment to the rest for not supporting her idea. "Mahallah" was said with a quick emphasis on "mahal" while *lah* would be slightly stretched.

Example 7:

M: Of course*lah* you enjoy staying in other people's house.

The use of *lah* after "of course" is an example of the speaker's (M) desire to belittle her interlocutor. "Of course*lah*" was said with a stretched emphasis on the second syllable, thus demonstrating sheer mockery or insult which was intended by M.

Example 8:

SH: *Yalah*, I record for *youlah*, my

The use of *lah* in this instance, not only shows emphasis on “Yes/Ya” but it also displays irritation. “*Yalah*” is said with a negative display of facial expressions accompanied by a raised tone on the first syllable and the second one being stretched. “*Youlah*” also shows emphasis as well as irritation for the listener who is someone of a higher authority, in this case, SH’s mother. This strategy has been described by Richard (1983) in his discussion of Language Transfer as an avoidance strategy, an attempt to cut the conversation short.

Example 9:

FR. *Ketinggalan zamanlah* you.
(Translation. You are behind timelah.)

The use of *lah* in example (9) was to show mockery and displeasure. As subtlety is common in Malay culture, FR was subtly mocking her listener with regards to being “behind time”. Just as English could place emphasis on “YOU” or “TIME”, the speaker decided to convey her mockery of her listener’s outdatedness by saying “*Ketinggalan zamanlah* you.” This was said with more emphasis on you where the object of mockery was the listener. Usually, mockeries are accompanied by more positive facial expressions such as a smile, in this case. The accompaniment was necessary as it provides a softening impact cushioning the listener who would have been hurt otherwise.

Example 10:

I. *Assignment, kena buat topiklah*. *Buat topik satu dua dua*.
(Translation. Assignments, got to do topics*lah*. Do topics one two two.)

Among peers, it is not uncommon to display laziness or boredom through the use of *lah*. Like the example above demonstrates, *lah* is used by the speaker to display his resentment as well as his laziness in having to complete an assignment. The tone emphasised in the *lah* on the third syllable – *topiklah*, was stretched. Further, *lah* was said in accompaniment with negative facial expressions.

Example 11

- I. *Apalah* hang!
 (Translation: What*lah* you!)

The use of *lah* in the above example demonstrates a direct verbal collision between two interlocutors to show displeasure and anger as a result of some negative consequence. “*Apalah*” was said very quickly as a way of distancing oneself from one’s reprimand as quickly as possible.

From this analysis, it can be seen that in addition to being employed as a means of displaying emphasis, disapproval, and admonishment, *lah* can be further employed to perform other functions like to show insult or mockery. Asian communities have always avoided the nature of face-to-face confrontations. Just as the Malays are indirect and subtle in their requests for things (see Asmah Haji Omar 1992 and Jamaliah Mohd. Ali 1992), other Malaysian speakers too seem to have acquired this syndrome of conveying their intentions indirectly. Hence, the Malaysian *lah* has become a verbal aid which can help to convey the speaker’s needs such as in displaying the speaker’s reproach of another’s ignorance, naivety, or absurdness, by merely suggesting these intentions to the other participants through the mechanism of using the Malaysian tag, *lah*. This strategy is a more acceptable method of dealing with people especially when it involves something controversial or conflicting in nature. Among Malaysians, by doing so, one is saying that one has the desire to avoid a conflict which may “save the face” of one of both parties. From the above examples, it would seem that this tag, *lah*, has been employed by its speakers more for its effectiveness in conveying a negative remark rather than a positive one.

The “*ah*” particle

Malaysian Chinese speakers, inevitably, seem to carry the *ah* particle more so with them than other ethnic groups, in their verbal conversations. This is most obvious on a telephone conversation when the *ahs* can range in meanings from *ah* meaning “yes?”, *ah* meaning “I agree”, *ah* meaning “Yes, go on” to *ah* which means “what?” Although there is no research to support my hypothesis above, it is clear that such “*ah-tagged*” conversations can be understood by its interactants. A single raised *ah* (aaa) would suggest a question while a subdued *ah* (aaa) would be taken as an answer which means yes. Lee Su Kim (March 5, 1996) suggests that the *aaa* she uses, which is equivalent to my *ah* (I have put these two together in parenthesis to show that both mean the same

thing) connotes specific meanings. She proposes that *aaa (ah)* has various meanings attached to it, depending on how this particle is used. Lee (ibid.) lists two meanings. The *aaa (ah)* tag can be used as a deliberate attempt to promote a softer and friendlier mood or it can be used as a sarcastic remark. However, for both to take effect, the user of the tag would need to impose a certain amount of force on the tag. For the former meaning to occur, the *ah (aaa)* tag would need to be said in a lighter vein while for the latter to be effective, the user would need to raise the emphasis of the *ah*.

Nevertheless, from the data collected, analysis shows that there are more than two functions which can be attached to the *ah (aaa)* particle.

Example 1

M: Keep kei ni *ah* ?
(Translation: Keep for you, is it?)

The above example is a simple illustration of the *ah* tag used by M who was speaking to her son in Mandarin. The *ah* used in example (1) shows that the function of the tag is similar to the function of the “is it?” which is usually tagged after a question. In comparison to Lee’s (ibid.) version that suggests friendliness or sarcasm which would require a raised or subdued pitch of the *ah*, the example here depicts a simple raised *ah* which is just a question form. Other examples of the *ah* functioning as question forms are as follow:

- a. M: Jenny *ah*? (Is that Jenny?)
- b. SH: Not free enough *ah* now?
- c. PH. Ting cher pian *ah* ? (Stop here is it?)
- d. M: Koong kerk *ah* (Homework is it?)

Also, the data analysed above shows that unlike the former *lah* tag, *ah* can only be used at the end of the sentence to maintain its functions whether as question forms or as the affirmative response.

Example 2:

SH: Wait *ah*.

Besides functioning as a mechanism to create a friendly mood or acting as an impetus to arouse questions, the *ah* tag can also be applied by its speakers to portray other needs, depending on the speaker's intentions. Occasionally, the *ah* tag can also perform the function of turn taking. The example below illustrates how this is done whereby the marker, *ah*, acts as a continuer-token (Drummonds, 1993).

Example (2) shows that whilst SH encourages his listener to wait through the *ah* tag, he was also signalling to the other party to hold-on just a little while as he recollects his thoughts. If need be, the other party may also seize this opportune moment to continue the conversation. As the tag, *ah*, is spoken, there will a very brief pause before the next speaker takes his cue.

Example 3:

M: Ni yau tau, *ah*? (You bit it, is it?)
PH: *Ah*.

Example (3) illustrates the two functions of *ah* which I have described above. The *ah* used by M was intended to question PH while the *ah* used by PH was a substitution for "yes". M's *ah* is naturally a raised one while PH's *ah* is subdued, probably accompanied by a nodding of head.

Example 4:

M: *Ah, ah*. ..touchlah.

Example (4) above shows that the duplication of *ah* can be used to perform an admonishment. At the same time too, the reprimand becomes a little more severe when M said "touchlah" which further emphasises her disapproval. However, the duplication is not spoken together but distinctly on its own, one at a time.

Example 5:

SH: Mom, mom, *ah*, let's go Taman Jayalah

Example 6:

SH: No thanks, mom. Thanks mom. After I want to brush.....af ...afterward *ah* you, you time, you time the timer, *ah*? Thanks mom.

While example (5) and (6) contain *ah* tags which were used to perform the role of gap filling, the tag of *ah* at the end of the statement in example (6) serves the function of a question. This shows that even within a speech act, the role of the *ah* particle can be used in various ways to perform various functions which include gap filling, thought recollecting as well as asking.

It has also been observed that between Malay interlocutors, the *ah* tag is used to perform other needs which the interlocutors may desire such as the following will demonstrate.

Example 7:

Z. You ni kira business minded juga *ah*.
(Translation: You are quite business minded too, aren't you?)

The use of *ah* in example (7) illustrates the speaker's desire to confirm her thoughts.

Example 8.

Z. Eh.. you buat 0002 kan?
FM: *Ah, ah!*

Among the Malays, it is found that the duplication of *ah* tags signify agreement. It performs the role of an acknowledgement token (Drummonds 1993) with the effect of "Yes, I agree with you." The pitch in the first *ah* would be slightly raised while the second one would fall like the release of a full balloon.

Example 9:

FM. *Ah!* Meals, baru habis meals. Next week, fourth week,
I'm doing that formal letter kan?

The above, example (9), shows that *ah* is used at the beginning of a statement and it is employed by the speaker to demonstrate an acceptance or agreement which has an effect similar to Drummond's discourse marker of "yeah" The initial *ah* used in example (9) also indicates the speaker's desire to continue the conversation. The way *ah* in this example is produced, is similar to

the release of air in a balloon – gradual and gentle, and it may be accompanied by a nod or few nods of the head.

Example 10:

I. *Ah.* ... about your future, Bob.

This example demonstrates that the initial *ah* is being used as an exclamation, similar to the “Oh” Even though the tag is placed at the beginning of the statement, it was meant as a topic opener, giving the speaker some time to gather his thoughts before commencing the conversation.

Example 11:

Z: Eh, Ustaz Ghani Shamsudin kan?
(Translation. Heh, it's Ustaz Shamsudin, isn't it?)
F: *Ah.*

The function of the initial *ah* marker used by F in Example 11 is to display agreement which is “yes” in this case.

Example 12:

SH: I go in, I wash my hair, I come out.
M. You go in?
SH: I wen. No, I ...s..I mean here..
M: *Ah...*

The use of *ah* as used by M in example (12) illustrates the speaker's intention of showing that she knows exactly what SH was doing. Although it appears to resemble an agreement, nevertheless, there is some sarcasm attached to it, especially when there is a knowing nod from the speaker concerned. It may also be used to end a conversation. This type of *ah* is said in the normal manner but it may also be intentionally lowered and slightly dragged for emphasis probably accompanied by wide-open eyes which may also function as a mechanism to encourage the speaker to say more.

The “*hah*” particle

Besides the two tags of *lah* and *ah* mentioned above, another common Malaysian tag often employed by its speakers is the *hah* marker. Unlike the *lah* and *ah* markers which may be used in myriad ways to convey different intentions, motives and moods of the speakers, my study was not able to place the *hah* marker under many functions. The following analysis seems to show that the *hah* marker is mainly employed to illustrate two main functions, whether used by the Chinese or Malay interlocutors.

A. “*hah*” functioning as a form of agreement.

Example 1:

- M: Keep kei ni ah?
 (Translation: Keep for you?)
 PH: *Hah*.
 M. Keep se mok kei ni?
 (Translation. Keep what for you?)
 PH. *Hah*, ta sou kei woh.
 (Translation: Yes, she kept it for me.)

Example 2:

- SH. ...Jeanie?
 M: *Hah*, Jeanie

Example 3:

- B: Secara tidak langsung?
 (Translation: Indirectly?)
 I. *Hah*, secara tidak langsung.
 (Translation: Yes, indirectly.)

Example 4:

- D: Sebab apa nak oksigen banyak?
 (Translation: Why do we need so much oxygen?)

Sebab proses apresiasi pokok.

(Translation: Because of the plant process.)

S: *Hah!* Itulah lebih kurangnya.

(Translation: Yes, that's more like it.)

In all the four examples above, it appears that using the *hah* particle only enables the speaker to perform one sole intention which is to show agreement.

B: "*hah*" functioning as a question to probe further

Example 5:

SH: I don't know, I...

M: She said she'll pay you...?

SH: I a..asked her..

M: *Hah*.....

SH:But you buy first lah, manila card.

Example 6:

M: You did? What did you read?

How long did you read?

SH: (coughs)

M: *Hah?*

Examples (5) and (6) provide us with the insight of how the *hah* particle can be monopolised to function as a question which can be used to probe further into a subject which was not clearly stated. The *hah* particle shown in these two examples also seem to carry a tinge of sarcasm which implies disbelief. However, since M is also the mother, a person of authority, the finding above is only indicative that the particle, *hah*, when used by a person of authority such as a mother, functions as a mechanism device to question, or to probe further.

Conclusion

Findings of the above study indicates that some Malaysian speakers employ the use of certain discourse markers such as *lah*, *ah* and *hah* in their daily

conversations to perform specific intentions. It seems that these markers may appear in the beginning, middle or end of an utterance. Wherever their positions may be, these particles do bear significant implications which may range from being positive, showing agreement, approval, stressing emphasis to questioning, continuing, recollecting trains of thoughts to being negative such as in showing sarcasm, and as a means of interrogating a person of lower authority. Analysis of the data collected shows that the various tags are used for different purposes. Hence, these tags can and should be considered as useful as well as being powerful speaking 'tools' or 'aids' which can be aptly and amply utilised by local English speakers in their daily conversations. As the findings in the above data have shown, Chinese and Malay speakers do not withhold from using discourse markers or tags like the *lah*, *ah*, and *hah* in their daily interactions simply because these tags carry various functions which may meet the intentions of the speakers. While speakers must invariably be adept at knowing when to raise and when to down play the tones of these markers or tags, it is comforting to know that these discourse markers, or particles can be used in myriad ways to relay our real intentions without fear of being too direct, too brusque, too intimidating or too aggressive. Speakers of other cultures may dismiss the use of these discourse markers or particles as being ungrammatical, and 'polluted' by its L1, nevertheless, it cannot be denied that they are useful devices which help to display moods and emotions of the speaker in an appropriate manner, thereby, avoiding the conflictual situations much frowned upon by Malaysians. My findings suggest that these tags, while employed as a tool or aid for performing functions, are similar to Schiffrin's (1987a) useful discourse markers which link thoughts and strike "a balance between the need to attend to one's interlocutors' needs for appreciation with the desire to provide information that may conflict with their expectations"

The current focus on Malaysian English (ME) is an important milestone. Not only should there be more investigations dealing with the peculiarities of ME, there should also be a certain amount of understanding attached to these peculiarities as there is so much underlying messages being communicated by

these discourse markers. With that illumination in sight, there will then, perhaps, be less misunderstanding and more respect for Malaysian English as she is spoken.

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