

Uses of the Malay particle *lah* in elicited monologues vs. casual conversation

This paper contrasts uses of the Malay particle *lah* in native Malay monologues elicited by a non-Malay speaker with uses in stories in narratives told in casual conversations among native speakers of Malay. The meaning of *lah* has proven difficult to pinpoint because of the diverse effects it can convey, which depend on context and prosody. Studies of *lah* in Singapore English (Bell & Ser 1983, Kwan-Terry 1978) have shown that it serves as more than a code-marker of familiarity and solidarity; it can either have a friendly, "softening" effect or an ill-tempered, "hardening" effect. Therefore, *lah* helps establish social distance, either by conveying a short-tempered effect and distancing the speaker from their audience, or by establishing an atmosphere of light-hearted solidarity that brings the speaker and listener closer. Additionally, Goddard (1994) distinguishes between "illocutionary" *lah* and "word-particle" *lah*: while illocutionary *lah* is used to either strengthen or soften declaratives, imperatives and exclamations in the manner described above, word-particle *lah* indicates contrastive emphasis on the word to which it is attached.

The data for this study will come from 3 audio recordings of native Malay monologues elicited by a non-Malay speaker and approximately 5 video and audio recorded casual conversations between 2 or more Malay native speakers. I will contrast the spontaneous narratives which I find in the conversational data with the monologue narratives which I elicited previously in response to an English prompt. I found that the use of *lah* in the monologue elicitations was rare and restricted to a few instances of what Goddard (1994) refers to as word-particle *lah*. In light of previous research, which holds that speakers use *lah* to establish social distance, I hypothesize that this restricted use of *lah* is driven by social factors - namely, the absence of a Malay-speaking interlocutor. In contrast, I expect that speakers in casual conversation will utilize the illocutionary *lah* much more frequently. I predict that illocutionary *lah* will be used by narrators to evaluate their listeners' interest or involvement, and by listeners/interlocutors in comments and responses to the narrative. Results of this research will contribute to the description of Colloquial Malay by elucidating further the linguistic characteristics that set it apart from Standard Malay. This research will also contribute to the field of sociolinguistics and the study of Malay conversational narrative, by showing how speakers interact with each other in conversation and how the listener and setting affect the telling of the narrative in Malay.